



# SAINT LUCIA NATIONAL TRUST

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*Patron: Dame Pearlette Louisy*

August 15, 2020

## **Museums Association of the Caribbean (MAC)** **“In Conversation Series”**

**By Germaine Joseph**  
**SLNT Programme Officer- Built Heritage**

The Museums Association of the Caribbean was established in 1987 and works to strengthen links among Caribbean museums and heritage sites so that they may foster and promote an appreciation and understanding of our heritage through education and professional standards of practice.

“A regional survey undertaken by the Museums Association of the Caribbean in April 2020 showed that almost all museums had temporarily shut their doors, with over 90% of respondents reporting that they were in a lockdown situation. Almost three-quarters of respondents, the majority of whom are in leadership positions in their institutions, stated that they were concerned or very concerned about the situations in their countries. Most museums reported that they had already lost or are at risk of losing funding with 13% of museums fearing that they may have to close permanently– in keeping with ICOM’s global survey results. The majority indicated that they did not have access to COVID-19 relief funding but were receiving regular communication about national guidelines and updates.”

While nobody wanted a global pandemic, COVID-19 has allowed museum organizations to do things differently and come up with creative ways of engaging their audience. The MAC “In Conversation Series” was a direct response to the issues identified in the MAC 2020 COVID-19 survey of the cultural heritage community. The series was introduced to help shed light on the challenges and uncertainty that museums faced by sharing their experiences. The major linguistic regions of the Caribbean represented in the survey were Spanish, English, French and Dutch. As such the Conversation Series centered around four panels addressing the linguistic regions.

In the first part of the series, four panelists including Dr. Shani Roper from the University of the West Indies Museum (UWIM), Mrs. Nima Muwakil from Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago Museum (CBTTM), Mrs. Amanda Coulson from the National Art Gallery of the Bahamas (NAGB) and Mrs. Natalie Urquhart from the National Gallery of Cayman Islands (NGCI) started

the discussion for the English-speaking series. The panel was moderated by the SLNT's very own Ms. Germaine Joseph, Programme Officer for Built Heritage.

The panelists discussed the direct impacts of the pandemic on their organizations and explained that they were forced to do things differently. Mrs. Coulson noted that her museum shared lesson plans and virtual tours in an effort to reach out to their audience during their lockdown. Virtual tours were done by in house staff who are currently working on improving the tours. Reiterating that every crisis is an opportunity, Mrs. Coulson explained that the museum was forced to speed up strategies to engage the NAGB communities virtually.

The various museums were all at different stages in their adaptation to the pandemic. Some museums remain closed such as the CBTTM. Mrs. Muwakil explained that they had just introduced a photo competition centered on "museums for equality" and had the challenge of curating the competition into a suitable format on their website.

Dr. Roper shared her experience with the value of Intellectual Property and the ways in which it affects navigating the virtual sharing of archival information for research and interpretation online.

She also touched on the fact that exhibitions have to be fundable and there is always a challenge in making the life of the information viable beyond it being in that space. It was interesting to note that there is a new Data Protection Act which addresses protecting archival information online. Hosting online content also posed a challenge as the UWI Museum needed to ensure that the website bandwidth was able to house major collections. Mrs. Coulson made mention of the Economy Recovery Committee which is advocating for copyright issues because it is currently one of the biggest challenges in the region.

In closing, Mrs. Natalie Urquhart suggested that the pandemic is an opportunity to "democratize" their space through future programming and creating community space where people can gather with social distancing. The Cayman Islands Museum's challenges were centered on continuing their classes and upholding responsibilities to corporate partners and public-private partnerships. The museum has a very big education component and their immediate strategy was to look at information currently in their collections and adapt it for online viewing.

Most of the museums were funded or free prior to lock down and due to dwindled funding and attendance, cultural heritage agents were looking to see how they could improve revenue around online programming. They also expressed that though the future of the role of Museums is uncertain there is room for creative ways of engaging their audience and making the experience of museums better.

## MAC Virtual Program Part 1: "In Conversation" English Series

Join MAC on ZOOM in conversation with Museum leaders across the Caribbean as they discuss the impact of COVID-19 on their museums.



Amanda Coulson –  
Director, National  
Art Gallery of the  
Bahamas (Bahamas)



Natalie Urquhart –  
Director, National  
Gallery of the  
Cayman Islands  
(Cayman Islands)



Moderator: Germaine Joseph, Programme Officer – Built  
Heritage Conservation, St Lucia National Trust (St Lucia)



Shani Roper –  
Curator,  
University of the  
West Indies  
Museum (Jamaica)



Nimah Muwakil-  
Zakuri – Director,  
Central Bank  
Museum of  
Trinidad & Tobago  
(Trinidad &  
Tobago)

August 13 - 6 PM EDT  
ZOOM details will be sent via email upon  
registration.

