

Cedric George and Organometrix: A New Way of Looking at the World

By Anderson Reynolds and Jacques Compton

“I paint my feelings of the things of the world: its problems, its chaos, its politics, its religion, its love and its races. Art is an open book to life’s mysteries, which I use to find answers. Once touched by that inspirational light, one is forever and holistically dedicated to the cause.”

Artist, Cedric George, said he has discovered a new method of painting and a new philosophy of art. So much so, he has come up with his own name for this innovation—Organometrix. Few artists can be credited with inventing a completely new concept of painting equipped with its own philosophy, and most of those who have been so credited or who have initiated art movements have originated from Europe and North America, not St. Lucia, a 238 square mile island of 160 thousand people, where Cedric George is from. Should we now add Cedric George to the list that includes Sir Arthur Lewis and the Honorable Derek Walcott, St. Lucians who have led the world in their fields of endeavor? Understandably, *The Jako* looked forward with great anticipation to meeting the artist and finding out what Organometrix was all about.

A Portrait of An Artist

On first appearance, Cedric George didn’t give the impression of an artist about to make a break through in the world of art. He is a quiet, soft spoken man of average built, and unlike many artists, he didn’t dress or style his hair in a manner that pronounced him an artist. He is the type of man who would



I'm Woman I'm Invincible

easily get lost in a crowd. The modesty of the artist was further revealed when he requested that we made mention of his wife, Mathilda, a teacher at the Bocage Secondary School; and that he was the fourth of eight children, four boys and four girls. The third child, a boy, had sadly passed away at the early age of four.

But this impression of the artist quickly vanished when in a voice filled with the passion, confidence and conviction of a man who has found his calling, he proceeded to explain his new artistic vision. Organometrix, he said, is a method of painting that combines geometric and organic shapes to present a different yet holistic view point. Straight lines are used to depict the geometric dimensions of the painting, while traditional shapes are used

to represent the organic features. In Cedric George’s world, the geometric represents culture, man made, and the organic is a manifestation of nature, God’s creation. Therefore, by combining the geometric and the organic, he is bringing together nature and culture, God and man, to give rise to a new creation. As the artist explained the philosophy behind his art, I had the distinct impression that he was playing God. But with this thought came another. Are not all artists gods? After all, didn’t God obtain his legitimacy as God through an act of

creation, an act of creativity, when He created the heaven and the earth, and everything therein?

Cedric George’s Organometrix paintings are prominently displayed at the Inner Gallery at Rodney Bay and on the gallery’s web-site. If the artist is modest in appearance, his creations are anything but nondescript, and would stand out among any art collection. The colors are bold, the geometric lines are straight and clean, the images well defined. In fact, the paintings, acrylic on canvas, are so finely and cleanly drawn that though they are no doubt the product of a very imaginative and creative mind, they give the impression that they were drawn not by human hands but by machine. Moreover, the artist uses variation in line color, and the angles at which the lines meet or intersect to create



Cedric George at Work

the illusion of three dimensional worlds and multiple planes of existence.

Many of Cedric George's subjects are placed in tightly restrictive or constrained spaces that remind one of imprisonment (for example, *The burden*). But, as if resigned to their fate, the subjects display no intention or desire to escape. Some appear to be under one test or the other, or at the very least they seem to be aware that they are being watched and judged. Still, though they are unhappy, they do nothing to change their circumstances, nor do they plead for help, or seek sympathy. When the subjects appear in twos or threes they are in close proximity, sometimes hugging or enmeshed (for example, *For Your Eyes Only*) in each other, as if giving and receiving comfort. Other times they are holding hands and dancing round a circle (for example, *Long Time No See*), or they are seated around a table playing cards, keeping each other company.

The subject matter of the paintings is as varied as it is colorful. *I'm Invincible I'm Woman* depicts three women (a brown, a black and a white woman) with bold, confident, and unapologetic stares. *M.A.N.* portrays the plight of the working man. In it a man with a pickaxe and a shovel is shown working morning, afternoon and night (MAN), notwithstanding a cast on his leg. *Forking the Blues*, a painting with a man digging into deep blue soil, further illustrates the plight of the working man. *Mystery Woman*, depicts eve in the Garden of Eden, complete with the serpent, a bitten apple, and of course

the man who couldn't do without the woman. Then lest we forget that art can be serious business, Cedric George gives us *Down But Not Out*, a portrayal of the 9/11 destruction of New York's twin towers.

The Making of An Artist

Cedric George's journey to the world of Organometrix began at the age of four, when he drew his first picture. At that age, Cedric was terrified of the *Papa Jabs* (devil) that inhabited the "Devil at Christmas," a play by St. Lucian playwright, Roderick Walcott. Young Cedric



Down But Not Out

George was not the only victim of these *Papa Jabs*; dressed in rags and painted with livid colours they petrified most children. Luckily, having learnt a thing or two about drawing from his father, Edwin McDonald Stephenson 'Yankie' George, a graphic artist who painted billboards for a living (and whom Cedric often accompanied on his jobs), Cedric decided to do something about his fear of the *Papa Jabs*. He drew them, and in the process his fear dissipated. "Since then," said Cedric, "anything I didn't understand, I put on canvas and by doing so I gain a better understanding of the subject."

Cedric may have learned the rudiments of drawing from his father, but the habit of memorizing, which is a form of visualizing, a process that is indispensable to the creation of any work of art, had to do with his mother, Marie Madeline Edward. She would send him to the store to purchase a list of sometimes fifteen or twenty items. She never wrote out the list, and she rarely went over it twice, yet he was expected to bring back all that she had requested. Cedric had no choice but to memorize the list of items. On that score, he never once disappointed his mother. That was his first training in the art of memorizing and visualizing. Emphasizing the importance of this early experience to his art, Cedric said, "One has to have that vision of the object. We all have that capacity. What needs to be done is to train it, to develop it. That power to retain information is in all of us."

When asked about the early influences on his art, Cedric George related the story of his first and only encounter with Harry Simmons, the man who inspired a whole generation of St. Lucian artists, including Derek Walcott and Dustan St. Omer. Cedric said he was six years old and walking out of the Castries Central Library when he saw this man, standing outside, dressed all in white like a safari hunter. He approached the man, and asked, "mister, are you a sailor?"

"No," said Harry Simmons, "I am an artist. Would you like to be an artist?"

Poor Cedric didn't know what an artist was, much less what they did. He answered, "I don't know."

That encounter with Harry Simmons would remain with Cedric for a long time, and it didn't take him long to discover what being an artist was all about. In fact, he went out of his way to seek information on Harry Simmons and in the process got to view several of the artist's paintings. Cedric was impressed, but several years after meeting the one who called himself an artist, he was shocked to learn that he had committed suicide.

Nonetheless, equipped with the knowledge of what being an artist was all about, Cedric's interest in painting deepened. He visited the Central Library regularly to pour over art and pictorial books. He took a keen interest in the works of Dustan St. Omer, St. Lucia's most renowned painter, and whom many see as being to painting what Derek Walcott is to poetry. He attended all of Dustan St. Omer's art exhibitions, and visited the artist's home to view more of his work. Dustan St. Omer had a series of portraits at the High Court in Castries from which Cedric said he drew great inspiration and determination to be a painter. The first time he saw the paintings, he got so lost marveling at them that he was locked inside.

Cedric George may be modest in demeanor, but even back then there was nothing modest about his ambition and his need to be the best. He said that all this time he was marveling at and admiring the works of Harry Simmons, Dustan St. Omer, and others, he kept telling himself that he had to paint even better than that.

In 1986, Cedric received a U.N.E.S.C.O. scholarship to study at the Jamaica School of Art, from which he graduated with distinctions. He said that in St. Lucia he had studied the works of the masters and had applied himself so zealously to his craft that attending the school of art had not added much in terms of improving his technical ability. However, the program helped broaden his knowledge and understanding of art. There he studied art history, became acquainted with the various art movements, and was exposed to new methods of expression and a wider range of techniques.



Fork in the Blues



Mystery Woman

An Artist's Search for Meaning

Ten years after his graduation, Cedric began getting restless with the Realism or Impressionism art that he had been practicing. These methods attempted to paint the world as it existed or as seen through the eyes of a camera. But armed with a profound understanding of art and a sure technique acquired through years of dedication and practice, Cedric was ready to move on. He said that by then he had "an urge to concentrate deeply on philosophic art where the subject matter along with the content becomes more important than the details in the painting." Cedric's muse was leading him away from the representational to the abstract, from the realism world to the expressionism and modernism world where the emphasis is on

one's own subjective reality rather than on visual objective reality. In that regard, Cedric had no lesser teachers than Matisse and Picasso. He said that these two artists were the ones who led the way in conceptual art, and "it is because of their relentless vision that the art of today has rivaled the period of the high renaissance that included Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Titian and Raphael."

Picasso was one of the principal founders of the Cubist art movement (1908-1914), a method of painting that broke from centuries of tradition by rejecting the single view point, using instead an analytical system in which three-dimensional subjects are fragmented and redefined from several different points of view simultaneously. For this and other innovations and artistic endeavors, Picasso was considered the most versatile and influential artist of the 20th century. In recognition of the influence of Picasso and Matisse in his Organometrix paintings, Cedric has honored them with two of his creations—*Matisse and Picasso Dance* and *The Last Picasso*.

Cedric said that besides being naturally drawn to conceptual art, another reason why he was tried to depart from the past was because he had realized that the only way to make a dent in the world of painting was to break from tradition, to come up with something that was all his own. Western art, he said, has produced so many major works that there wasn't much value in continuing in the traditional way, recreating what has already been done. In his mind, the only way a modern painter could get on par with these great Western artists was not by imitating them but by clearing his own path. To emphasize his point, Cedric said that Picasso left an indelible mark on the world of



M.A.N. (Morning Afternoon & Night)



The Arrow and the Shadow

painting because he dared to break with tradition and introduce a whole new way of conceptualizing the world. Similarly, from a more modern era, he made mention of Jean Michel Basquiat, who, born of Haitian and Puerto Rican parents, was one of the most successful figures of Graffiti Art (1980s), named after the spray-can vandalism common in most US cities. Cedric observed that out of a total of 305,000 famous artists, Jean Michel Basquiat (1960-1988) was the only black person to make the list. And in Cedric's mind that was because Basquiat had helped pioneer a new way of painting.

Fortunately for Cedric, just when these notions of breaking with tradition and of making an impression on the art world were floating around in his head, he came across the works of Georges Seurat, one of the leading exponents of the Pointilism art movement (late 1890s to early 1900s). Pointilism is a method of painting that uses many small dots of color to give a painting a greater sense of vibrancy, especially when seen from a distance. Cedric said that upon studying Georges Seurat dotted paintings, it came to him that if the painter could use dots to create a work of art, why couldn't he, Cedric, use lines. In his mind, lines had never been used in that manner. Soon, Cedric was populating his paintings with lines. But there was a difference between the Pointilism use of dots and Cedric's use of lines. In Pointilism the colored dots seemed merely a method of applying oil on canvas to enhance color and light perceptions, but in Cedric's case the patterns of colored lines produce the more profound Cubist effect of three dimensional worlds and multiple planes of reality.

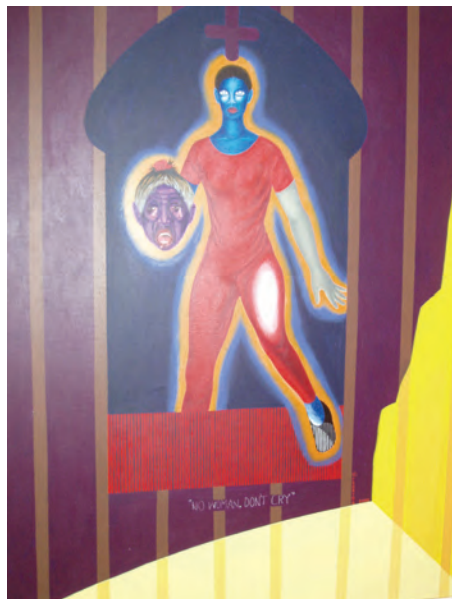
At first, Cedric saw his use of lines merely as a style of painting. But then the lines started suggesting things to him. Looking at them, he started seeing texture, space, geometry, human concepts, culture.

It was then that Cedric said, "Ah! If God created organic shapes, organic life, and man made geometric shapes, why not amalgamate the two and give it a name, Organometrix, a combination of the organic and the geometric." Cedric said that in so doing, he would simply be helping God to continue His works. "He made me, He made us." Therefore, Cedric decided to introduce this new philosophy of painting in all his works. He said, "So there we have God and man working hand in hand."

In further explaining his new art philosophy, Cedric said that Organometrix is a vision and a statement of his values, preferences, and personality. "It is not only about St. Lucia, but universal in its theme, that at times leans towards the abstract. I paint my feelings of the things of the world, its problems, its chaos, its politics, its religion, its love and its races. Art is an open book to life's mysteries, which I use to find answers. Once touched by that inspirational light, one is forever and holistically dedicated to the cause."

The Triumph of an Artist

Cedric's dedication and hard work have not gone unnoticed. In 1981, and again in 1994 he won St. Lucia's M&C main Visual Arts Award. In between these M&C prizes, he made it to the finals of the 1986 Benson and Hedges Caribbean World of Art Competition held in Barbados. Then in 1996 he competed in the Artist Magazine Studio Competition in the United



No Woman Don't Cry

States, where he placed 32nd out of a field of 2,500 artists, making him the highest placed Caribbean artist in the competition. However, it was after Cedric George invented Organometrix that he really started to soar. For example, he won the 2000 Caribbean and Latin American Art Competition, held in the Dominican Republic, with his Organometrix piece, *The Arrows and the Shadow*. Two years later, the St. Lucia Nobel Laureate Committee honored him with an exhibition of his work during the Nobel Laureate week celebrations. In 2003, Cable & Wireless UK and the Royal Commonwealth Society held an exhibition of twenty-two of his paintings in London. At the conclusion of the exhibition, the Royal Society pronounced his paintings "bold, timeless, and immutable."

Now for the big question. Is Cedric George the first artist to make use of colored lines in the manner described above? Is Organometrix, the notion of combining organic and geometric forms as a manifestation of culture working with creation, man working with God, to produce a new specie of artwork, truly a new, never before conceived philosophy of art?

A search uncovered Bridget Riley, a leading exponent of the 1960s Optical Art Movement, as another artist who used colored lines and other similar patterns of painting. But unlike their use in Organometrix, her use of lines was not meant to necessarily capture geometric shapes but to achieve a disorienting optical effect. And most certainly, her art was not infused with the notion of culture and nature working hand in hand. In fact, a study of art movements from the Ancient and Classical worlds to the present (see for a survey), found not one movement that suggested a philosophy of art in which nature and culture were explicitly or philosophically being brought together to create art.

The importance of having a philosophy behind one's art cannot be overstated. A conceptual framework helps one avoid getting stymied in the details and techniques of the craft, but helps in the search for the best means of capturing the philosophy which the art is meant to embody. Today Cedric George uses colored lines to capture culture, and traditional forms to capture nature. But it may well be that ten years from now he will invent a completely new and different approach to expressing Organometrix. So Cedric George may yet claim his seat next to Sir Arthur Lewis and the Honorable Derek Walcott as St. Lucians who have attained the apex of world achievement. 🌍