

## Rock legend Mick Jagger purchases Brian Ashing painting

*Tevin Gall*

Trinbagonian painter placed second in the inaugural [Mustique Caribbean Contemporary Art Show and Prize](#) late last month, with Barbadians [Akilah Watts](#) and [Anna Gibson](#) taking home the first and third prizes, respectively.

The brainchild of well-known Venezuelan author, philanthropist and art collector Tiqui Atencio Demirdjian, the competition aims to raise the visibility of Caribbean art and to increase its economic viability through creating opportunities for artists from the region. Tiqui and Ago Demirdjian are its main sponsors with Trinidad-born art curator and dealer Anjeni Ramtahal as event organiser.

Following a three-day exhibition of the 20 longlisted winners' work, the first, second and third prizes were announced during a ceremony at the Mustique Community Center, Mustique Island, St Vincent and the Grenadines on December 28. Ashing and the other two shortlisted finalists were given the opportunity to network with high-profile art curators, collectors and educators at the gala event.

But after receiving his award, Ashing was in for another treat, as he received news that competition judge and legendary rock musician, Mick Jagger had expressed strong interest in purchasing one of his two entries, "Paradise of Scorched Earth."

Ashing took to social media to gush about the honour: "It's not often that I share things of this nature," the [post](#) said, "but when a living legend and global icon acquires your work it's news worth sharing. Thank you @mickjagger."

"It's humbling to be recognised in this capacity and in a room like that," he said, "a room that people may consider to be occupied by global tastemakers and household names," adding that it was an excellent networking opportunity. "[With this] celebrity recognition, hopefully that increases the marketability of my work."

### Caribbean past and present

The enigmatic piece features a woman of African descent—modelled after Genesia Mulrain—in a crouched position, surrounded by egrets against the backdrop of a field in flames, the sky behind her darkened by thick smoke. The ominous sky and burning landscape make for an interesting contrast with the perceived lightness of these birds and the innocence of the woman.

Ashing was clear that the landscape, like in most of his depictions of nature, drew inspiration from the local environment—"this tropical landscape...largely pulls from Trinidad's East coast", he specified.

"When I paint a landscape and a figure within the landscape, I'm making a statement of humans in relation to the land," he said, explaining that here, the landscape is "symbolic of the inner turmoil that's happening within humans" as it relates to the meeting of the Caribbean's past with its present,

our inherited issues from a turbulent past and the ongoing work of undoing, unlearning, repairing and overcoming these issues that run centuries deep.

Ashing said that another dimension of the piece communicates the notion of escape, the “idea of wanting to leave where you’re from”, a sense of being “earthbound”, an experience that many young Caribbean people may feel in the face of much uncertainty. The artist added that this state also represents a recognition of responsibility by the younger generations to “deal with the fallout of the past.” “We’re making the most of what we have.”

Egrets, virtually harmless and often seen in local landscapes, serve as an interesting device in the piece. “Egrets can...be opportunistic,” Ashing said. “You often see egrets in droves when the land is cleared; it’s easier to find the prey.” The fact that it is unclear whether the woman is being protected by the creatures or whether she, too, will end up being their prey, is completely intentional.

One would imagine that whether the woman will be consumed by her violent surroundings or triumph in spite of them will depend on her resilience or lack thereof. “I suppose we find [her] before she makes the most of things,” Ashing concluded.

Some viewers, the artist said, spoke of the painting evoking feelings of an “ongoing revolt”, given the violent environment, unquenchable fire and the subject’s ethnicity, an interpretation that he saw as valid and relevant.

### **A “growing spotlight” on Caribbean artists**

Ashing, who is mainly self-taught, travelled to Italy in 2023, where he took part in a workshop taught by Florence Art Academy graduate Troy Argyros held at Art Studio 10, his first set of professional training after beginning to exhibit in 2016.

Outside of painting, Ashing is also the co-curator of the LOFTT Gallery along with business partner and owner Dale Ramirez, a role that he said “offers a nice respite from myself” and from the discipline and routine that come with creative work.

“I’m really passionate about helping to create a platform that bolsters our local talent and creativity,” he said, adding that while it isn’t its only area, the gallery “definitely has a focus on emerging artists.”

He and Ramirez are currently planning the gallery’s 2025 programme, which will include a joint exhibition with Ashing and fellow Trinbagonian artists Aurora Honeywell and Bianca Peake in June.

Ashing expressed optimism about the future of Caribbean art and the interest and attention it is capable of commanding on the international market.

“Caribbean artists have a growing spotlight on them,” he said. “This show was a great example of this and hopefully broadens that spotlight as well as the perspective of international collectors and practitioners.”

Implying that Caribbean artists have a singular voice due to their unique historical and cultural background, Ashing urged his fellow artists to keep working at their craft and to see the opportunity to contribute to the regional body of work as both a “privilege” and a “responsibility.” He also highlighted the inherent value of Caribbean art and appealed to artists not to lose sight of it.

“We exist globally and we must treat our art as such,” he said. “If we respect our talents as artists and as a general public, greater opportunities will follow.”

On the heels of the landmark sale and with the sense of accomplishment that one of his originals is now part of an icon’s collection, Ashing is more motivated than ever and doesn’t see himself slowing down anytime soon. “More work,” he said, is what’s on the agenda. “Work begets work,” he laughed.

Check out Brian Ashing’s [official site](#) and follow him on [Instagram](#).