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CULTURE

With more than 90 nationalities on island, Aruba is at the epicenter of a cultural melting pot, offering Amerindian, Latin and European influences found in every aspect of life – on the faces of people, in names of streets and attractions, in the four languages (Papiamentu, English, Spanish and Dutch) that are spoken daily, on restaurant menus, in architectural details, in local art and music, in medicinal remedies and during holidays and celebrations.

Language

Papiamentu

Papiamentu, first used on the island in the 18th century, is a direct reflection of the island's diverse history and culture. A Creole language derived from African dialects and blended with English, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese, it is spoken by native Arubans and is a point of pride for the nearly 108,000 island residents.

Events and Festivals

Carnival

Commencing days after the New Year with the Torch Parade and culminating on the eve of Ash Wednesday, Carnival is Aruba's biggest annual party consisting of festive "jump ups" (street parties), spectacular parades and creative costumes. Music and dazzling costumes play a central role in events ranging from the Queen elections to the Grand Parades, which wind their way down the streets of San Nicolas and Oranjestad to the delight of thousands of spectators. One of the most famous Caribbean events, Carnival is celebrating its 60th anniversary in 2014.

Caribbean Festival

Locals and tourists alike are invited to attend the weekly Carnival-style Caribbean Festival in downtown San Nicolas every Thursday from 6 to 10 p.m. Festival-goers enjoy live entertainment, authentic local cuisine, marketplace-style shopping and the chance to dance down the streets alongside Carnival performers, donning festive face masks.

Bon Bini Festival

The weekly Bon Bini Festival is the perfect introduction to the warmth and hospitality of Aruba's people. Meaning "Welcome" in the native language Papiamentu, Bon Bini is a folkloric music and dance festival which captures the island's flavor, history and cuisine every Tuesday from 6:30-8:30 p.m. in downtown Oranjestad at Fort Zoutman, Aruba's oldest building.

Notable Artists

Ciro and Marian Abath

Husband and wife **Ciro and Marian Abath** are major figures in the Aruba art community and were the first to offer art classes to the public with kiln casting, ceramics, glassblowing and glass bead making. **Ciro** is a sculptor who works with various materials and techniques and has participated in several international exhibitions. He trained as an art teacher in the Netherlands and taught art for 30 years at Colegio Arubano; he continues to teach lessons inside his yellow house near Arashi Beach. Education scientist **Marian** started working with glass out of curiosity and to support **Ciro** in his activities. Today, a large community of glass bead makers has been formed in Aruba.

Eefje Van Twillert

An Aruban native, **Eefje Van Twillert** is most famous for her eccentric style that translates to her drawing, painting and sculpting. Drawing her main inspiration from the nature of the Dutch Antilles, the greatness of God's creation, from the tiny grain of sand to the vast Caribbean Sea, **Eefje** captures these impressions, which are reflected in all of her pieces.

Elisa Lejuez Peters

Originally from the Netherlands, **Elisa Lejuez Peters** has established herself as one of Aruba's best-known artists and fashion designers. After several years of successfully submitting her artwork to expositions worldwide, **Lejuez** took her artwork "off the canvas" and put it into clothing, her other passion. In 2013, **Elisa** held her first solo U.S. exhibit, titled **Connections**, at S Artspace Gallery, in New York City's Lower East Side. The **Elisa Lejuez** clothing collection is now sold in three shops in Aruba and was recently launched in the Netherlands.

Elvis Tromp

Self-taught, Aruban-born painter and graphic designer **Elvis Tromp** is the curator of a developing artist colony in Aruba as he leads the art movement on the island. Working mostly in oil and acryl, **Elvis** has been painting Aruban landscapes since he was a child and enjoys making each scene a personal interpretation. With the developing art colony, **Elvis** is discovering new horizons with his exhibits including "The Impact of Tourism on Architecture and Vice Versa," where the human figure is central – a new level in his art.

Ivan Jansen

As a classical guitarist, **Ivan Jansen** regularly performs at various locations in Aruba and has performed solo concerts for Queen Beatrix and Prince Willem Alexander of the Netherlands. He has also performed as a solo guitarist in orchestras, such as the Amsterdam Symphony Orchestra and the Symphony of the Americas. In 1988, **Ivan** published a book, "Aruban Folkloric Music for the Classical Guitar."

Jonathan Vieira

Born and raised in Aruba, Jonathan Vieira is a well-known music and producer on island. As a composer, his work has been featured on MTV, Discovery Channel and Bravo Network. He has also composed for royalty and performed piano concerts for prime ministers and governors. Jonathan is the proud founder and executive producer of the Aruba International Film Festival.

Osaira Muyale

Local Aruban and contemporary artist Osaira Muyale founded a studio gallery “Eterno” and a foundation “Fundacion Eterno.” Osaira’s work has exhibited in Europe, the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean, including the 6th International Biennale of Havana, Cuba, Arte 99 of Curacao and Acro Art Fair in Madrid, Spain. Osaira’s Aruba art studio is part of her ongoing dedication and promise to interact with the community, serving as a beacon of light to intellectuals and artists on the island. Her work includes conceptual artwork installations with a multi cultural background, paintings, film, photography, poetry, sculpture and drawings all based on biographic dialogues, social narratives and cultural perspectives with the human body as a mid point.

Padu Lampe

Now 92 years old, Padu Lampe is a true icon of Aruban culture. As a child, his artwork was featured at the 1939 World’s Fair in NYC. He later wrote a love song to Aruba that would become the national anthem. He has been making music since his father taught him to play the piano, as well as the clarinet and violin, in the 1920’s.

Rosabelle Illes

A lover and writer of poetry at an early age, Rosabelle Illes developed her spiritual side through her writings and later published a book of poems titled "Beyond Insanity." Next to her poems, Rosabelle is working on her second book that philosophizes on what's left after erasing layers from emotions.

Stan Kuiperi

Apart from being a form of artistic expression, Stan Kuiperi’s art has also become an instrument for social commentary in Aruba. One of the most important messages in his art for the last 10 years was the call to preserve nature. Stan doesn't just create loud, visible art but he also invites government representatives to his art shows to have an open dialogue that addresses these issues. Founder of the non-profit, Aruba International Arts Foundation, Stan and his wife strive to engage the international art community by organizing local art shows. Stan is also committed to painting and teaching art in hopes to continue awareness and appreciation for the unique Aruban landscape and culture that have to be preserved.

Maritza Erasmus

Maritza is known for the reliefs, statues and busts created for public areas as well as for private collections. “The Thinking Indian of Aruba”, appears in the garden of the Central Bank of Aruba. She studied art and sculpture at the Escuela de Bellas Artes in Puerto Rico and later in Spain and The Netherlands. Another notable work, “Casa Andante” (Walking House), is made of very hard fossilized stone, even harder than marble. While in Puerto Rico, Maritza always used to walk around with her backpack, not only containing her tools but also all kinds of objects she collected. One day a person told her that this backpack was just like her house; hence the title.

Ephraim Britten

Ephraim Britten started painting as a child. Painting is his way of life, hobby and business. He is a self-taught Aruban artist who enjoys painting the Aruban landscape. Ephraim has participated at different exhibitions; he won the first prize in Popular Arts from the Aruban Institute for Culture in the 1980s. One of his paintings was presented as a gift to the President of Venezuela. He also designed and painted four series of the Aruban stamp collection. This artist’s preferred medium is oil paint. Originally painting realistic and surrealistic Aruban landscapes, nowadays he combines them with abstract elements.

Ludwig (Luti) de L’Isle

Luti’s works incorporate bold strokes, use of primary colors and harmonious unity. “I seek opposites...dark and light, white and black, past and present. These opposites form the foundation of a painting,” he reveals. He loves to work with white, red and blue backgrounds, not in solids but with swirls, shading and shapes that make them come alive. He finds inspiration in nature and prefers to work with acrylic but combines and interacts with pencil, charcoal and watercolor. His works are full of surprises. Born in Aruba in 1949, Luti attended the Academie voor Beeldende Vorming in Tilburg, Netherlands. His works have appeared in various international and local expositions and are found at hotels and restaurants on Aruba.

Alida Martinez

“To stand opposite to the work of Alida Martinez is a complex experience. Her work is full of a strong emotive and existential load before which it is impossible to remain indifferent,” states Susan Quintaro, art critic. Born in 1964, Alida took classes at Atelier 89 in Aruba from 1989 – 93. She opened Insight Gallery in 2000, part of Insight Foundation for the Arts. This accomplished artist also curates expositions and organizes workshops. She has had eight solo exposition in Aruba and Curacao from 1989 – 2008. Her works have appeared in scores of group expositions in Aruba, Venezuela, Bonaire, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Germany and Ecuador

Giolina Henriquez

Born in Aruba in 1981, Giolina Henriquez graduated from Rhode Island School of Design (USA) and returned to Aruba. Since then, she has been illustrating books and national postage stamps; painting commissioned works for corporations and for the government; participating in local and international art-exhibitions. She has been profiled in local and international television and radio shows, commercials, and film-documentaries. She has appeared at numerous local and international exhibitions and her works appear in collections locally and internationally. Recipients of her artwork commissioned by the Aruba government include Dutch Prime Minister and the Dutch Royal Family. Her works are a colorful flow of profound creativity combined with the highest quality standards. This poet, painter, illustrator and designer is also an outspoken environmentalist and founder of Aruba Mammal Foundation.

Sounds of Aruba

Carnival

Carnival in Aruba is filled with the beat of steel drums, brass bands, calypso-inspired tunes, drum-driven tumba and road marches. The Carnival season is filled with frenetic weeks of queen elections; road march, tumba and calypso contests; parties and “jump-ups”, leading up to the Lighting Parade and the Grand Parades in San Nicolas and Oranjestad. Thousands of tireless carnivalistas parade for hours under the tropical sun and starlit skies, adorned in the sequins, feathers, glitter and beads of ostentatious and creative costumes and headpieces.

Calypso music is a highlight of Carnival, employing a variety of poetic devices in its humorous lyrics on life and love, and delivered by jokers such as Mighty, Lord and King. Each road march has catchy lyrics, melodies and marching dances performed in unison. Other wildly popular Carnival music known as Tumba has also been described as an irresistible rhythmic dance influenced by the swaying Caribbean palm trees and the hypnotic beat of jungle drums.

Cah'i orgel

The cah'i orgel, affectionately called the “ting-a-lingy box”, is originally from Europe and first made on Aruba in 1938. It is a popular instrument played at national holiday celebrations and private parties. The first three cylinder pianos arrived in Aruba in the beginning of the 19th century. In the beginning, the melodies were Spanish or Italian but later Aruban music was recorded on the cylinder. Rufo Wever, composer of the Aruba national anthem Dushi Tera, learned to make and repair the instrument himself. Soon every district in Aruba had its own *cah'i orgel*, decorated with distinctive paintings, personal objects and hand written text. The music is played by the person who turns the handle, accompanied by a person playing the wiri, a metal rasp. The types of Aruban music played on the *cah'i orgel* include the waltz, polka, mazurka, danza and tumba.

Gaita

A type of Venezuelan folk music descended from Indian rhythms and hailing from Maracaibo, Gaita found its way to Aruba in the 1960s and has been popular ever since. As December approaches, the harmonious voices of the 18-20 member Gaita groups signal the start of the holiday season in Aruba. Since its origins, Gaita has been influenced by other musical genres such as salsa and merengue, and the original instruments of cuarta, tambour and wiri have been joined by piano, bass and trumpets.

Pagara & Dande

Between Christmas and New Year's Day, local businesses and residences fire up pagaras—long strings of Chinese firecrackers—to cast away bad spirits and bring luck for the coming year. Strolling musicians celebrate New Year's Eve and New Year's Day with the Dande music tradition by playing music at homes of friends and families to wish loved ones success and happiness through song. The traditional Aruban instruments, such as the tambu, wiri and raspa, produce a festive upbeat African rhythm, the same as the tumba.

Steel Pan

Perhaps nothing captures the island mood more than the music of the steel pan, which is made from a 55-gallon oil drum. Leonard Turner, a Trinidadian immigrant who worked at the Lago Oil Refinery, was the first to introduce steel bands in Aruba, making instruments from oil drums collected from Lago Oil Refinery. Steel pans reached the height of their popularity in the 1960s and 1970s, providing music for carnival. Today, only a few remain. Known as the father of steel pan, the late Edgar Connor mastered the craft of tuning and building steel pan; his sons continue the tradition and are accomplished steel pan players.

Museums

Archaeological Museum of Aruba

Originally an old family home to well-known anti-slavery activist Boy Ecury, the Archaeological Museum of Aruba opened its doors in 1981 and has been dedicated to educating guests on the island's rich culture and history ever since. Extensively renovated in 2009, the museum's interactive activities and attractions bring Aruba's culture to life in a way that resonates with children and adults alike.

Aruba Historical Museum

Housed in Oranjestad's oldest structure of Fort Zoutman, the Aruba Historical Museum invites visitors to discover how Aruba's first settlers lived and worked during the Pre-Historical and Early-Historical time periods. Depending on the day, guests can catch a lecture, explore educational projects and temporary exhibits, sign up for a workshop or simply gather with others at the museum's open-air courtyard. All events are free of charge and open to the public.

Aruba Aloe Museum and Factory

Nestled on 150 acres of Aloe fields, the Aruba Aloe Museum and Factory offers personally guided tours through the factory grounds, providing insightful cultural and scientific anthropologies behind this prosperous, life-giving green plant. Visitors are invited to watch chemists and Aruba Aloe bottlers in-action to see how the product turns from plant to potion.

San Nicolas Community Museum

The late historian Mario Odor's remarkable collection has permanently made its home in San Nicolas. It is open to visitors during the weekly Carubbian Festival that takes place on the main street of San Nicolas every Thursday evening. The eclectic collection includes countless treasures such as fossils from the period when Aruba was still underwater to the European pipe collection that dates back to the first encounters between European settlers and Indians.

Art Galleries & Exhibits

Art Studio Insight

Located in Paradera Park, the studio offers a generous array of visual and theatre arts, including individual and group exhibitions that showcase local and international contemporary artists. Local artist Osaira Muyale also features her art at the Osaira Muyale Contemporary Art Studio. The exhibit is a reflection of biographic dialogues and social narratives, based on cultural perspectives and the human body. By appointment only.

Ateliers '89

Ateliers '89 is a quiet mecca for the arts housed in a turn-of-the-century school in the suburbs of downtown Oranjestad. The exhibition hall has both permanent displays and changing expositions showcasing local and regional artists. Workshops are taught by established foreign and local artists in various disciplines, each culminating in an exposition open to the public. Ateliers '89 works in close cooperation with a number of art academies in the Netherlands, helping young artists in their transition to a Dutch Academy. Many talented local artists who today represent Aruba abroad attended these workshops.

UNOCA

Aruba's first public national art collection now has a permanent home, a few blocks from the Cas di Cultura in downtown Oranjestad. The walls of the sparkling new exposition halls are graced with wonderful works by local and international artists, some who have lived on Aruba for a part of their life. Many of them have local themes depicting Aruba's culture, history and landscape. The STICUSA Aruban Collection dates from 1950 – 1986. The UNOCA collection was born in 1986 with the establishment of the foundation aimed at stimulating cultural development of Aruba. It continues to grow over the years with contributions by local artists and private collectors. Books, CDs and DVDs written and produced by Arubans are also on sale. Special events such as courtyard concerts and film screenings are on the horizon.

Cas di Cultura

To discover Aruba's present-day culture and community life, guests visit the Cas di Cultura, or "house of culture." Also known as The National Theatre of Aruba, Cas di Cultura is acclaimed for its piercing acoustics and unobstructed views of the stage – and is host to numerous theatre performances, musical concerts and international creative arts collaborations throughout the year.

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