SEASHELL

The reflection begins with fragments.

Seashells

rum

These fragments are autobiographical: the writer's recollection of artworks.

The seashells unfurl

to become rum

They intend to be a faithful reproduction of what it means to stand between two moving image works. On the gallery map, they are numbers two and five, to the left and right, on opposite sides. You, the viewer, and I, the writer, are the fixed pointed arrow at the entrance. We enter this space together, the space formed by the map and within the fits and starts of these words on a page or a screen, now muddled by my recollection.

The seashells unfurl in kaleidoscopic formation,

to become rum, superimposed over

cupping open palms.

Within Katherine Kennedy's "Biorhythms" (the seashells) and Ada M. Patterson's "Yuh Too Sweet" (the rum), the flattening swoop and churn of these island productions swig at the paper parasol-topped escapisms that pack a Rum Punch.

Alongside works by Irene de Andrés and Joiri Minaya, *Here Comes the Sun* — an Art Gallery of Burlington (AGB) group exhibition curated by Noor Alé — pokes at the jump-in-the-line colonial trappings tourist, developers, and its diaspora continues to buy and sell.

Likenesses.

From my Trini-2-De-Bone point of view, those cheap, made-in-China tourist products were beloved family heirlooms in my mixed Canadian-Trinidadian home. Growing up, the brightly coloured clothes and jewelry came in care packages. Smuggled undeclared with jars of homemade green seasoning and bottles of channa, they were sacred.

Photographic likenesses.

Irene de Andrés's *El Segundo Viaje* scavenge sepia toned Archivo General de Puerto Rico photographs to map out the monuments and apparitions of conquest. Meanwhile, in the tropical print bodysuits found in Joiri Manaya's *Containers* photographic series alongside her *Redecode* wallpaper project, monocultural colonialization sensually surface.

Portraits, views, faithful and correct.

The Dominican woman. A banana leaf, now christened "Martinique" v. "Brazilliance". There is one body, but it has many parts. The virgin, the muse, our mother. We were all given the same Spirit to drink.

The conquest that was Christopher Columbus's Second Voyage to America; now, a Royal Caribbean cruise line.

The seashells unfurl in kaleidoscopic formation, a beaded-for-every-ridge Esther Williams routine.

I am transmitting how it felt to walk into this exhibition on a Saturday afternoon after driving west from the Gardiner to the 403 W to exit 97.

I am a writer, and these are autobiographical fragments, a recollection filtered through the fault lines of my Caribbean paradise.

I know these souvenirs weren't made for me, per se, but for the wealthy white North American and European tourists passing through Piarco duty-free.

But my closet hasn't let go of neon vintage Brian Lara, Maracas sunset, Carnival yard tee-shirts; my jewelry box still holds a single string of broken seashell.

Where-we-came-from talismans. Personal archival material. Nostalgia belonging to me, but anyone else passing through Piarco duty-free.

Molasses gurgles with water and yeast to become rum, superimposed over cupping open palms.

A subtitle floats upwards:

"it still smiles a sickly sweetness."

Rea McNamara is a writer, curator, and public programmer based in Toronto. Her writing on art, culture and the internet has been published in frieze, Art in America, The Globe and Mail, and more. From 2020-2021, she was the Emily H. Tremaine Journalism Fellow for Curators with Hyperallergic.

Here Comes the Sun
Art Gallery of Burlington
April 22 - August 20, 2022

agb