

National Gallery To Open Natural Histories Exhibition

The National Gallery of Jamaica is mounting its Natural Histories exhibition, the first in a new series, Explorations, in which various thematic issues relevant to Jamaican art and culture will be explored.

Natural Histories will open to the public on Sunday and will continue until the end of June. Natural history is a significant theme in Caribbean life and was an integral part of the colonial project, which sought to categorise and exploit the natural and human resources in some regions. This is portrayed in most of the art produced in the Caribbean during the plantation period, which included natural history illustrations, estate views, and ethnographic images that reflected colonial conceptions of race and ethnicity. Marston Bates (1954) defined natural history as "the study of animals and plants - of organisms ... the study of life at the level of the individual - of what plants and animals do, how they react to each other and their environment, how they are organised into larger groupings like populations and communities". Modern and contemporary artists use natural history to explore the relationship between power and knowledge as well as to articulate post-colonial critiques of enlightenment, humanism, and the systematic violence of slavery and colonialism. The Natural Histories exhibition builds on work such as African-American artist Fred Wilson's installation *An Account of a Voyage to Jamaica with the Unnatural History of That Place* in the 2007, *Materialising Slavery*, exhibition. This was shown at the Institute of Jamaica and recontextualised some of the Institute's natural history and ethnographic collections. **NEW CRITICAL FRAME** "The exhibition queries how natural history has operated in Jamaican art throughout the island's history as a subject and a concept. It also provides a new critical frame for viewing works from the National Gallery's permanent collection - representing a wide variety of historical periods, media, and styles - in conversation with recent work, some of which was held over from the National Biennial," said Nicole Smythe-Johnson, senior curator. The opening function of Natural Histories will coincide with the National Gallery's Last Sundays programme and will open at 11:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. As is now customary, there is free admission, free tours, and children's activities on the day. At 11:30 a.m., the Natural Histories exhibition will be introduced by its curators, Smythe-Johnson and O'Neil Lawrence, and this will be followed by a performance by the Skygrass band.