

Cultural Entrepreneurship in the Caribbean Art Market: Exploring Viable Business Model Frameworks for the Commercial Advancement of Jamaican Artists

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Abstract

This paper will present a summary up to date of the doctoral research being undertaken by the candidate. The ongoing research examines how Jamaican visual artists navigate visibility, cultural identity, and commercial sustainability within the global art market. While Caribbean art has gained increased international attention through exhibitions, institutions, and digital platforms, this heightened visibility has not consistently translated into sustainable livelihoods for artists based in, or connected to, the region. Historically shaped by colonial legacies, limited institutional infrastructure, and reliance on external validation, Caribbean art markets continue to produce uneven conditions of access and reward. This study asks how Jamaican visual artists build viable careers while operating within persistent inequalities related to geography, institutional access, and cultural recognition. Grounded in cultural entrepreneurship theory, the research positions artists as strategic actors who combine creative practice with entrepreneurial decision making to translate cultural value into economic sustainability.

At this stage, year one of the study, the research is informed by critical engagement with existing literature, alongside practice-based insights, exploratory ethnographic observation, and comparative case studies drawn from Jamaican and Caribbean diasporic art contexts. Early analysis highlights a clear gap between visibility and sustainability, showing that institutional recognition alone is insufficient without access to business infrastructure, long term representation, and strategic support. The study contributes to Caribbean Studies by bridging visual culture and development and lays the foundation for future qualitative research that will inform culturally grounded business model frameworks for sustainable artistic livelihoods.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Aims and Objectives

The aim of this research is to examine how culturally grounded, and context sensitive business model frameworks can support the commercial development, visibility, and long-term sustainability of Jamaican visual artists within the global art market.

To achieve this aim, the research seeks to:

1. Examine how Jamaican visual artists navigate visibility, institutional recognition, and market access across local and transnational art systems.
2. Analyse the relationship between Caribbean visual aesthetics, cultural identity, and commercial positioning within global art markets.

3. Identify the structural, institutional, and market-based challenges that limit sustainable artistic livelihoods despite increased visibility.
4. Explore existing entrepreneurial practices and business strategies used by artists, galleries, and cultural organisations working with Jamaican art.
5. Develop a set of culturally grounded business model principles that support long term career sustainability without compromising cultural integrity.

1.2 Research Context: Caribbean Art in the Global Market

The global art market has expanded in recent decades through the growth of international art fairs, commercial galleries, museums, and digital platforms. While these developments have created new opportunities for artists, they have also reinforced structural inequalities in access, representation, and economic reward. Caribbean visual artists, including those from Jamaica, have historically been marginalised within these systems, with participation shaped by colonial histories, fragile regional infrastructure, and dependence on Global North institutions. In recent years, Jamaican and wider Caribbean art has experienced increased global exposure. Major exhibitions, diasporic networks, and online platforms have amplified Caribbean visual culture, particularly within Global North art centres. However, this rise in visibility has not reliably translated into sustained income, long term representation, or career stability for many artists.

1.3 Research Gap and Question

This research responds to a growing disconnect between cultural recognition and economic sustainability within the Caribbean visual arts sector. While artistic excellence and visibility are increasingly recognised, the business frameworks required to support long term careers remain underdeveloped. Jamaica's visual arts sector, in particular, has not achieved the same level of global commercial integration as other creative industries, despite its cultural significance.

There remains a clear gap in existing research on business models and commercial strategies tailored to Caribbean visual artists operating across local and transnational markets. This study addresses this gap by asking: How can Jamaican artists achieve commercial success while navigating institutional and market barriers?

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations

The research is grounded in cultural entrepreneurship theory, which frames artists as active agents who combine creative practice with strategic engagement in markets, networks, and institutions. This perspective challenges the assumption that artistic production alone is sufficient for professional sustainability and instead highlights the importance of value creation, distribution, and positioning.

3. Methodology and Practice Based Insights

The research adopts an interpretivist qualitative approach appropriate for exploring lived experience, meaning making, and context specific realities. At this stage, the study is informed by critical engagement with academic literature, alongside practice-based insights drawn from the researcher's professional immersion within the Caribbean and diasporic art worlds as a curator and gallerist.

Exploratory ethnographic observation and comparative case studies have been undertaken as primary research across Jamaican and Caribbean diasporic contexts, particularly within London as a key Global North art hub. These insights support early analysis of how artists navigate visibility, representation, and market access.

The next phase of the research will involve semi structured interviews with Jamaican visual artists, gallerists, and cultural organisations. This will enable the collection of first-hand accounts relating to business strategies, decision making processes, and the challenges shaping long term sustainability.

4. Results and Discussion

Emerging insights indicate that visibility functions as an important but unstable form of value within the global art market. Artists frequently gain recognition through exhibitions and institutions without securing consistent income or long-term representation. Jamaican visual aesthetics, rooted in history, place, identity, and material culture, circulate within systems that prioritise curatorial narratives and institutional validation over sustained investment.

By placing visual culture alongside questions of market access, representation, and business infrastructure, the research highlights a persistent gap between cultural recognition and sustainable commercial outcomes. Artists who achieve greater stability tend to operate within supportive ecosystems that include long term representation, strategic partnerships, and business knowledge; conditions that remain unevenly distributed.

5. Conclusion and Future Work

This research demonstrates that increased visibility does not automatically lead to sustainable artistic careers. For Jamaican visual artists, long term success depends on access to business infrastructure, representation, and culturally grounded entrepreneurial strategies. Future work will advance the empirical phase through interviews and deeper thematic analysis, leading to the articulation of hybrid business model frameworks that support artistic livelihoods while preserving cultural integrity. The study contributes to Caribbean Studies by bridging visual culture and development and by offering practical and theoretical insight into strengthening Caribbean creative ecosystems in transformative times.

6. References

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