"Mas in the museum?" This query succinctly framed the ambivalences of the experiment that resulted in *Up Hill Down Hall: An indoor carnival* on 23 August 2014 in response to Catherine Wood’s invitation to present Carnival at Tate Modern, in the Turbine Hall, as part of the BMW Tate Live 2014 series.

The question began reframing the debate, if unintentionally, by using the Caribbean colloquium mas, short for masquerade, rather than the European appellation carnival, the name of one of the seasons during which masquerades take place in the Caribbean – as a more adequate description of the new cultural phenomenon that evolved in the Americas. In doing so, it began pulling at a first layer of historical ambivalence by pointing to the colonial dominance of an allegedly emancipatory practice. The implied skepticism of the question’s formulation also unravelled a second layer of institutional ambivalence: bringing such a historically anti-institutional cultural practice as carnival within the context of a premier cultural institution like the museum. Finally, the possible punning of mas and the masses revealed a third layer of ideological ambivalence: leading the masses, historically construed as unruly and mob-like, to become pacified as ‘the general public’ within the museum’s normalising framework.
Mas' in the Museum

Contrasting each of the three terms, mas’, Carnival and the masses on the one hand with another set of terms, Museum, Turbine Hall and Tate Modern on the other, I will attempt to provide retrospectively, alongside the collaborating artists, students and participants, a critical analysis of what emerged, or was instituted, with Up Hill Down Hall.

As a performance art form, mas’ was as unlikely to enter the purview of art historians and the reals of museum galleries as western performance art itself until the second half of the twentieth century. As mass performance staged in the streets stemming from African diasporic aesthetics, mas’ was even less likely to cross the threshold of the museum space. The Brooklyn Museum continues to remain mostly insulated from and oblivious to the West Indian American Day Parade, the official day of the Caribbean Labor Day Carnival Parade even as it rolls past its doorsteps on Eastern Parkway.3

The colloquium mas’, most frequently used in Caribbean English and attributed to the artistic component of the Trinidad Carnival, influenced both my curatorial process and the artistic practices of Marlon Griffith and Hew Locke, two of the artists in Up Hill Down Hall. The practice of mas’, which includes costumed bands competing to live and recorded musical accompaniment, has become the template from which most diasporic Caribbean carnivals have evolved in the US and the UK. Brooklyn’s Labor Day Parade and London’s Notting Hill Carnival are the most notable examples.

The Trinidadian carnival traditions and mas’ artistic practices played a significant part in the formative events that culminated in the Notting Hill Carnival – with the indoor town hall balls of Claudia Jones of the mid 1950s; the steel pan processions of Russ Henderson in Rhaune Laslett’s Notting Hill Fayre of the mid 1960s and the first costumed bands designed by masmen Peter Minshall and Lawrence Noel in the early 1970s.4 This process attests to the successful cultural dissemination and metropolitan appropriation of both an artistic process and a festival model and, as such, a measure of institutionalisation of what has now become a full-fledged multicultural event, Europe’s largest street festival.

In Trinidad, whether following emancipation in the nineteenth century or leading up to Independence in the twentieth century, Carnival became as much an oppositional instrument for the affirmation of freedom by the formerly enslaved as an integrative tool in the formation of a modern multi-ethnic nation.

The tensions between the resistant and accommodationist tendencies of the complex socio-cultural phenomenon that is Carnival keep playing out, though the former continue to be the privileged anti-colonial narrative while the later is dismissed as counter-emancipatory.5

The location of Tate Modern across the river from the City brought to my mind the long history of carnival in London to which two recent upheavals bear witness: Reclaim the Streets waged its Carnival against Capital in 1999 and Occupy London staged its own carnivaleque protests in 2011–12 in front of St Paul’s Cathedral. Like most other historic European carnivals, London’s dates back to the medieval era; the Notting Hill Carnival presents its latter-day colonial legacy.
Carnival in the Turbine Hall

Once within the Turbine Hall, it appeared as though all the colours of the visible spectrum had been assembled and were being disrupted by a sea of black, making black undoubtedly one of the colours lining up the fabric of the British flag. Choreographed as a charging army of masqueraders bearing costumes designed as angular black and metal-coloured shields in reflective material reminiscent of anti-riot police gear, No Black in the Union Jack was a reminder of the perils of being black in the streets and of the power yielded through fighting back. Blending visual and tactical references from the traditionally opposing forces of the police and black youth in the streets, it during riots or at the Notting Hill Carnival from which riots have also historically sparked, Griffith put the public into an equivocal position.

If the public, coerced back against the wall and away from the entrance with the relay of red ropes handheld by volunteers at the ground level in a mirroring of Gia Wolf’s Canopy above, had been corralled into taking sides, spatially speaking, there was no easy side to be on. The powers blended together as one in Griffith’s darkly futuristic masquerade. (figs.2.3.3 & 2.3.4). The handling of red ropes – taught by Wolff to volunteers – provided insights into one of the ways some Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs in New Orleans (the city where I have lived since 2007) channel the crowd away and funnel performers within the space cleared for the street parades, known locally as ‘second lines.’

Although too large in scope to be encompassed by the BMW Tate Live programme, both the carnivalesque protests of anti-capitalist activists and the anti-racist demonstrations out of which Claudia Jones’s 1959 Caribbean Carnival grew informed the making of Up Hill Down Hall. In keeping with BMW Tate Live’s stated interest in concentrating on the Notting Hill Carnival, I chose to focus on its historical origins in order to draw out the underlying social and political function of Carnival and expose Tate Modern and its audience to the deeper currents that convey its substance beneath the seductive sea of masks.

Starting across the Millennium Bridge on the other side of the Thames from Tate Modern, Marlon Griffith’s No Black in the Union Jack established the connection between London’s carnivalesque protests and its current Caribbean-inspired multicultural carnival no less powerfully for being essentially visual. Documentary photographs provide the striking sight of his army of masqueraders marching down the bridge, their wings framing the dome of the cathedral in the background (figs 2.3.2). Though the performance began at the foot of St Paul’s as the artist requested, it was not advertised in the official announcement of the project. Reading official Up Hill Down Hall announcements, you would only expect the performance to be within the Turbine Hall. Were the street masses potentially uneducated in musem manners, too untamed to risk being allowed to enter Tate Modern? Or was this institutional distanciation from ‘behind-the-bridge’ popular audiences a re-territorialisation symbolic of cultural power instead? Was the spectre of Liberate Tate activism too menacing to risk inadvertently advertising a carnival performance as an invitation to a carnivalesque protest?

Fig.2.3.2 Marlon Griffith, No Black in the Union Jack (detail) 2014. As part of Up Hill Down Hall curated by Claire Tancons. Photo © Akiko Ota

Fig.2.3.3 Gia Wolf, Canopy, 2014. As part of Up Hill Down Hall curated by Claire Tancons. Photo © Oliver Dowling for Tate Photography

Fig.2.3.4 Marlon Griffith, No Black in the Union Jack under Gia Wolf’s, Canopy, 2014. As part of Up Hill Down Hall curated by Claire Tancons. Photo © Oliver Dowling for Tate Photography
In the Turbine Hall, Canopy further outlined the architectural monumentality of the largest indoor public space in a museum. It also provided a spatial frame of its own within which the mass performance could be amplified. A space so large, it is referred to as The Street and indeed treated as such by health and safety standards; for Wolô and me, the Turbine Hall was also reminiscent of an actual street in Rio de Janeiro, Avenida Marquês de Sapucaí, around which Brazil’s national carnival stadium was built: the Sambadrome. Both the stadium and the museum share in the institutionalisation of culture and pleasure of entertainment. Both their monumentality conveys into concrete a sense of authority and functions as a safeguard: where the Sambadrome regiments the parades until they exit through Oscar Niemeyer’s iconic triumphant arch, Herzog & de Meuron’s Turbine Hall contains the general public before accessing the museum’s collection and exhibitions.

Another carnival space of reference was that of the Notting Hill Carnival itself. The Notting Hill neighbourhood provided a topographical blueprint against which to reimagine Carnival in and outside the Turbine Hall: the canal by Harrow Road was substituted by the River Thames; Ladbrooke Grove extended into The Street and the Westway flyover downsized to fit under the Turbine Hall. The setting of Dubmorphology’s sound-system above the Level 2 bridge was the most direct reference to similar musical arrangements under the Westway flyover at Carnival time (fig.2.3.6).

The Level 4 bridge, as of yet inaccessible to the public, enjoyed a soft opening: throws of helicopter-shaped paper ticker-tape descended towards the crowd dispersing the cloud of The Sky is Dancing, a project developed in collaboration with the XD Pathway BA students from Central Saint Martins. Beyond the atmospheric effect, the falling helicopters harkened back to the hovering threat of police surveillance (fig.2.3.5).

In response to Griffith’s foam-board armada of masqueraders and Central Saint Martins’s paper helicopters, Gary Stewart and Trevor Mathison’s Sonar soundscape mixed up sounds of police sirens – harrowing enough to briefly alarm, yet sufficiently playful to dispel any long-lasting feeling of threat – and the voices of Notting Hill Carnival participants to provide a historical background. Yet, with such spatially embedded carnival memories, the punning title Up Hill Down Hall left the literary register of the carnivalesque to emphasise the embodied experience of its staged carnival.
Give and Take

Bookending *Up Hill Down Hall*, which started with the charge from Marlon Griffith’s *No Black in the Union Jack* armoured masqueraders descending from the tip of the Turbine Hall, was the sweeping motion of Hew Locke’s *Give and Take* masked devils giving impulse from the deep end of the hall (fig. 2.3.8). Under the curtain falls of *Canopy*’s uncut excess rope, lined up in military formation, the performers festive drumming, colourful attire and playful demeanour belied far less benign motives than the carnival cover up seemed to suggest (figs. 2.3.9).

Using kettling crowd-control techniques perfected by anti-riot police to break up demonstrations, Locke and his collaborators from the Bataла Samba Reggae ensemble pushed both the audience assembled for the performance in the Turbine Hall and unsuspecting visitors to Tate Modern caught in the fray outside the museum’s premises (figs. 2.3.10). Photographs of façades of the Notting Hill neighbourhood printed onto the performers’ cardboard shields brought home the experience of the physical displacement the artist intended to provoke. Older Notting Hill residents have been priced out or evicted from their homes – including the artist himself whose residence in Notting Hill was commemorated by a blue plaque on one of the buildings featured on the shields – and Notting Hill Carnival revellers have regularly been intimidated to take the festivities out of their historic neighbourhood. Unlike street masqueraders and even much less so protesters in demonstrations, museum goers and performance participants were protected by health and safety legislation, ensuring that the push and pull of *Give and Take* remained within balance.

My immediate perception following the end of the performance was not widely dissimilar from what I had anticipated: the public’s reception made clear that no amount of curatorial framing and artistic cunning could easily overturn the institutional safeguards cast within the museum’s superstructure and encoded within the public’s acquired behaviour. *With every attempt to break through into the museum’s core, the inner sanctum of its gallery spaces was quietly but assuredly preserved.* Sound had to be kept low so as not to distract Matisse exhibition goers from the silent admiration of masterpieces. The meandering of performers through the upper level gallery spaces was discouraged to protect artwork from inadvertent damage.
Fig. 2.3.9 Marlon Griffith, No Black in the Union Jack under Gia Wolff’s Canopy, 2014. As part of Up Hill Down Hall curated by Claire Tancons. Photo © Akiko Ota.
Preemptive security measures became prescriptive of any engagement with the museum outside its dedicated space for public performance. Even so, the margins of manoeuvre were slim and overstepping boundaries seemed worthless. Respecting the institutional framework of the invitation I had accepted, honouring the vision of BMW Tate Live curators Catherine Wood and Capucine Perrot and ultimately complying with museum rules seemed the better course of action. Not because of the pointlessness of an exercise in power imbalance, but rather out of the belief that putting into Foucauldian perspective the relationships between institutions of order and institutions of culture – the police mimicked by the masqueraders, the museum play-acting itself through its rules and regulation, the stadium materialised in a temporary mise-en-scène – would point to the expanded horizon needed for a public to be instituted beyond the institution.

Hardly an act of radical curatorship, owing to the paradoxical premise of mas’ in the museum, Up Hill Down Hall nevertheless offered an example of the intentions of radical museology harnessed by the BMW Tate Live series by bringing Carnival within the constellation of the art historically challenging, curatorially critical and artistically risk-taking.

Claire Tancons
December 2015
Up Hill Down Hall Artists Q&A

Marlon Griffith, *No Black in the Union Jack (NBUJ)*

I knew from the beginning of the project that I did not want to be confined to the space of the Turbine Hall. The streets of Notting Hill and ‘The Street’ of the Turbine Hall have very clear rules and boundaries: the Turbine Hall does not allow the same amount of flexibility or spontaneity, or the same public for that matter. What first came to me when thinking about what happens in the Hall, compared to the carnival procession route, was that while the carnival has basically one (ground) level of viewing, the Turbine Hall has several. So I felt in a way that the work had to function on those planes as well. This is where Dubmorphology came in creating several spaces within the Turbine Hall using sound, with different tracks playing different levels and frequencies to create different environments, so wherever you were in the hall, you had a different feeling or interpretation.

For many generations, Carnival was a major social and political platform. In recent years we know there has been a shift and that voice is almost absent. I feel at times as if society has become numb to what is going on, it has become normal so that the public that once expressed a certain spirit and challenged the status quo has disappeared among the glamour and deafening thumping of music trucks. Bringing a renewed interest to Carnival as a social and political platform is no easy task. I have discovered that such a goal requires a very intimate connection with and presence within communities. The action, however, cannot just be limited to Carnival. Its presence and socio-political presence must extend beyond the carnival period. My activity as an artist working outside of the space but using the process has/is creating a new kind of dialogue around the role of mas’ as a socio-political platform. What I have been attempting with my practice is to re-think the way things are done as well as challenging tradition.

Through the process of working with Elimu Paddington Arts from 2006 to 2008, I have learnt that the mas’ camp or any site has and needs to be more than just a space of production but also one of discourse and engagement. Likewise every space is different, that is why when creating a project, especially when it relates to an event or a community, it is important that everyone involved is part of the process from the beginning. There will always be a desire for self-representation. Carnival allows this for many but, through a pedagogical approach, it creates the necessary exchange that both need.
Ansel Wong, Founder
Elimu Paddington Arts Mas’ Band

The traditional performance framework enables the mas’ player to engage in an ostentatious parading of costumes and movement - wukking up, jumping, waving and wining. For many, the essence of this performance is self-enjoyment and any engagement with the audience is usually to take a selfie or encourage the spectator to join in. For others, this ostentatious parading is to “display the mas’ in character, and to elicit any reactions of appreciation, fear or avoidance.

The costumes made such a parading very difficult for the seven hours of the Notting Hill show. The brilliance of Marlon’s designs is the use of the masque and for many Londoners such a costume restricts their enjoyment as they require recognition. It is only a few who can appreciate the anonymity of the masque and the importance of being in character for such an extended period of time on the road.

But for the performers at the Tate, there was no such concern or restriction. In fact, the performers revelled in the shield, using it as protector, aggressor and a symbol of foreboding and as a mirror of the self. There was uncritical co-operation from our performers as they immediately understood what Marlon intended.

Marlon’s theme – No Black in the Union Jack – was not universally embraced by the band, its members and corporate sponsors. For a start, the use of the word and colour black posed difficulties for many people. Some members were unhappy with having to don any costume that was all black. The association of Carnival with glamour, colour and bacchanalia also influenced this attitude.

Marlon’s involvement with the band through this project challenged the orthodoxy and cultural ecology of Carnival. London’s Notting Hill Carnival, as both an event and an art form, continues to be shaped by society. Over its forty-nine years, the carnival in London has seen women’s liberation; the popularity of soca, bashment and Zouk; the runaway cost of living and a credit crunch; computer-aided design; the social network and digital marketing of mas’ bands; the production-line manufacture of costumes being overtaken by the Chinese and their made-to-order costumes; the popularity of synthetic fabrics, fishing rods, beads and feathers; the emergence of the entrepreneurial producers and performers as band leaders; the dominance of T-shirts and “fun” and ‘Dutty’ mas’ and the fitness craze with Zumba and aerobics.

Fig. 2.3.13 Marlon Griffith
No Black in the Union Jack, 2014,
under Gia Wolff’s Canopy, 2014.
As part of Up Hill Down Hall curated by Claire Tancons.
Photo © Oliver Cowling for Tate Photography
Applied concurrently, these deceptively unrelated components had the capacity to irretrievably alter the form and content of the Notting Hill Carnival. The danger we are facing is that carnival in the Grove is changing from a carnival with a cutting-edge creative crucible to a market-driven, manufactured commodity.

Cleo Lake, an organiser of St Paul’s Carnival in Bristol, participant in workshops at Elieu Paddington Arts Mas’ Band and in Marlon Griffith’s No Black in the Union Jack project.

**Gia Wolff. Canopy**

My fascination for Carnival came out of a convergence of interests in performance, theatre and music as mediums outside the field of architecture that I turned to for inspiration. I realised that Carnival was a unique medium that encompassed all these elements, but at the scale of architecture. The parade float transforms the city. Its scale makes the streets into interior rooms of a street theatre.

The monumental scale of Oscar Niemeyer’s Sambadrome and the Turbine Hall was a serendipitous commonality. Yet each space has its own personality. I wanted to figure out how to play with and enhance some of the inherent spatial qualities of the Turbine Hall. The grand length and height of the Turbine Hall is that of an exterior street, and the challenge was how to bring the scale down to that of a person.

The natural catenary-curve shape of the canopy of rope both framed the space and drew viewers through it. Suspended lengthwise, 168 metres long and seemingly hairline-thin pieces of rope physically connected to the building’s roof truss on the east and west ends of the hall, and visually connected the vast space with ten catenary curves. At the lowest point in the curve, the ropes split paths and wove above and below the bridge to bring viewers inside the space of Canopy. Up close, but just out of arm’s reach, the ropes revealed their massive size and rough twisted texture.

What surprised me most about Canopy was how powerful such a simple element could be. We were concerned that there weren’t as many ropes as we’d hoped for, or that they were not thick enough, or that the colour was not saturated enough – but as soon as they were in the air, there were just enough of each of those elements to transform the Turbine Hall into a carnival space.

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**Fig. 2.3.14 Marlon Griffith, No Black in the Union Jack, technical drawing 2014. As part of Up Hill Down Hall curated by Claire Tancons. Courtesy of the artist**

**Fig. 2.3.15 Gia Wolff, Canopy, technical drawing 2014. As part of Up Hill Down Hall curated by Claire Tancons. Courtesy of the artist**
Anne Eggebert: This was an opportunity to critically examine what Carnival, mass protest and celebration might offer as practice per se, and, in this regard, the street and the public as sites for practice. We began the whole process with an investigation into the subversive power of mass pageant, procession and the carnivalesque as an apparatus of suppressed or diasporic communities, and an inversion of dominant discourses and hierarchies. We looked at public events that sit outside dominant power structures (the ‘Other’ of religious, regal, military, commercial pageants): historic carnival in relation to the Church with its blasphemous extravagances, the boy bishop, the Feast of Fools, London Borough Fairs (Southwark and Bartholomew) which were ‘devoted to everything loose and irregular’, the Tyburn procession and carnival from Newgate Prison to the Tyburn hanging tree with its desire emanating from the crowd for the victim to rail against the State before execution, the Suffragette marches and contemporary political rallies, Reclaim the Streets, Lewes’s bonfire night, football parades, Notting Hill Carnival (Claudia Jones and its history at St Pancras Town Hall) and the political and social provocations for this (1958 Race Riots). We looked too at contemporary practices that reflect on Carnival, such as artist Sonia Boyce’s Crop Over.

All of these elements provoked a richer sense of what the street might offer, how this offer might be exploited – can these events only take place (and perhaps this has always been the case) at structured moments, so that they are, after all, under control?

The diversity of participants included students from Korea, Spain, Singapore, France, Barbados, USA, Portugal, UK regions (Newcastle), UK London with roots in the Notting Hill Carnival and Erasmus students from Cluj-Napoca, Romania, witnesses, among others, by Progression into HE (Higher Education) students and invited guests, including Age UK Islington. It has been immensely helpful for the students to think of the public as a site for the potential of art’s plurality of approaches to contribute to new forms of subjectivity.

There is something else too – how these public ceremonial practices that invoke participation, performance, social and community engagement offer a moment of synchronisation – dance especially offers the potential of being in sync with the other.
Hew Locke, *Give and Take*

I felt the important debate around the Notting Hill Carnival was about control, and so I decided to use the opportunity of this enclosed space to explore the idea of control. Carnival in London has become about security issues and crowd control. These issues have intensified, so I feel much more controlled and coerced attending The Notting Hill Carnival today than I did in the 1980s.

What was interesting about doing it in the Tate Modern was that it was contained. If this had been done on the street, as some might imagine I would have preferred, it would not have had as much impact.

It was the first time I produced a piece of work where I was not in complete control. I am usually very hands on with every element, even when I involve assistants and fabricators. This was the first case in which success or failure depended very much on other people, not just on myself.

The time-based element was new for me – the idea that something was going to exist for a very short time; I hoped it would stay in people’s memories for a long time.

Being at the Tate brought new audiences to my work and also I could present a work that the audience probably expected to be pretty-prettily masquerade, with decorative and detailed costumes, but then I gave them something starker and more political.
Liam Emerson, former Musical Director of Batala Samba Reggae, who worked closely with Hew Locke on *Give and Take*.

Batala has thirty bands all over the globe that wear the same costumes and play an identical repertoire and the Notting Hill Carnival is an annual event that over 250 of us attend. It brings the Batala family together. In the run-up to the event, we attended every meeting and rehearsal and made sure that as many of the Batala family, who had come to London specifically for the carnival weekend, were included in this very important artistic statement. With the six drummers and the many others who held the shields, it created a powerful image that moved many of the people who took part.

We had strict noise controls put in place for us. We play on the Monday of Carnival and in 2014 we had 258 drummers. Our smallest possible sized band is six players, and even that was too loud for the Turbine Hall as it would have disturbed other exhibitions. What we were left with was the six players playing quietly and developing a strange drone-like sound that filled the hall with the thwacking of the shields around them creating an intimidating look and sound that doesn’t usually sit with what is upbeat carnival music. Our normal carnival experience is an eight-hour rehearsal on the Sunday and a five-hour procession on the Monday, filling the streets up with sound and colour as 250 drummers bring the music of Salvador to London.

It was a unique experience, with the shields acting as riot police, kettling members of the public into corners of the Turbine Hall, coupled with the sounds of a vibrant, if quiet, samba-reggae band drifting in the background. The piece finished with us lining up as two huge lines of shields and forcing the public out of the hall. I hope the public understood what the message was and were aware of the point Hew and Indra were trying to make.
Notes


6 ‘Behind the bridge’ is a reference to a popular neighbourhood in Port of Spain considered disreputable according to class. It is also where some of the most notable carnival characters come from.

7 Claire Bishop, Radical Museology or, What’s ‘Contemporary’ in Museums of Contemporary Art?, London 2013, pp.55-6.