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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Float

May 17 – June 21, 2014

Opening Reception:

Saturday, May 17, 6-8pm

FRAMEWORK PANEL #20:

Contemporary Art in the Caribbean

Wednesday, May 14, noon – 1:30pm

Art Museum of the Americas of the OAS

Gallery 5, 2nd floor

201 18th Street, NW

Washington, DC 20006



Float presents the photography, sculpture and mixed media work of four dynamic emerging Jamaican and Trinidadian artists - **Deborah Anzinger**, **Rodell Warner**, **Leasho Johnson**, and **Marlon James**. Working in collaboration with Jamaican based non-profit NLS Kingston, these works presented at Transformer redefine the physical and social boundaries assigned to them, positing a renegotiation of identity, and insistent on the recognition of the invisible but central role that “margins” play in the making of our cosmopolitan present and future.

Float curator **Nicole Smythe-Johnson** states: “The works presented at Transformer redefine the physical and social boundaries assigned to them. Though all four artists live in the Caribbean and all of the work was created there, the works perform a renegotiation of identity, and insist on the recognition of the invisible but central role that “margins” play in the making of our cosmopolitan present and future. *Float* sidesteps hegemonic conceptions of social and national identity (and the status of ‘margin’ itself), declaring them compromised and inadequate. These artists propose a Caribbean identity untethered by the limits normally placed on the concept, and insist on recognition of their place in contemporary global culture.”

In *Float*, striking and curious objects (and subjects) are freed from the societies and environments in which they apparently function. These floating objects claim an agency – a subject-hood – through a rejection of any anchor or context. This move indexes the increasing extent to which life in (and of) the economic and cultural periphery escapes the easy binaries posited by post-colonial struggles of earlier generations. The works included in the exhibition are floating spectacles and signifiers that illustrate these artists' alternative modes of engaging their spaces. Through the un-rootedness of their work, they redefine the physical and social boundaries assigned them and their environments and assert their presence in a cosmopolitan future. Mounting the exhibition at Transformer in Washington, DC (often itself constructed as a node and icon of metropolitan centered-ness) further contributes to the project's aims by physically un-mooring the work and re-positioning them into a transnational space. *Float* asks the questions: What are these object-subjects? Where do they belong? The answer it offers is: everywhere and nowhere.

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ARTIST & CURATOR BIOS:

Deborah Anzinger (Jamaica) uses paint, quotidian imagery and objects as well as living plants to create spaces that playfully co-opt the audience in the deconstruction and reimagining of the social and physical environments we occupy. Her work uses an almost psychedelic palette and a hand-painted digital aesthetic to reference primal concepts and instinctual recognition, especially those prehistorically required for sustenance and survival. Taking these symbols and displacing them in new contexts, Anzinger highlights the evolution of particular imagery into symbols that carry meanings of abundance, mystery and knowledge. Anzinger's art juxtaposes banality and wildness through automated abstraction in which digital media, text and physical experience with material all collide. Her work examines psychical fragility as well as a desire for transcendence and existential freedom. Anzinger has exhibited her work in Jamaica at the National Gallery of Jamaica, in the Caribbean at the Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival and Liquid Courage Gallery (Nassau, Bahamas), and in the DC area at Arlington Art Center, George Mason University, Civilian Art Projects, Hillyer Art Space, Delicious Spectacle, Porch Projects, Corcoran Gallery of Art with Transformer, and the District of Columbia Arts Center. She is founding director of the Kingston-based non-profit contemporary art organization New Local Space (NLS) in Jamaica. Through NLS she has organized and curated exhibitions of work by other artists, written for ARC Magazine and sat on panels for San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and hosted artist studio visits for the Pérez Art Museum Miami and Thyssen Bornemisza Art Foundation. Anzinger received her PhD in immunology and microbiology in 2005 at Rush Medical Center, Chicago.

Marlon James (Jamaica) works in digital photography, primarily portraiture. James captures subjects that defy hegemonic conceptions of Jamaican-ness and/or are deemed unsuitable subjects for fine art. His works exhibited, *Vogue* – a portrait of a transvestite male, *Storm* – a portrait of a young, precocious filmmaker, Storm Saulter, *Blackout Kingston* – a portrait of a teen who has disfigured her skin with bleaching cream, and *Kerry Ann*, a domestic laborer, reposition these subjects, framing them as icons and stars. James has shown at the National Gallery of Jamaica, The Art Gallery of Mississauga in Ontario, Museum of the Americas in Washington DC and the Bargehouse in London. In 2013, he had his first solo exhibition *Intimate Encounters* at New Local Space (NLS) in Kingston Jamaica. James studied photography and illustration at the Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts in Kingston, Jamaica (2003).

Leasho Johnson (Jamaica) works in painting, ceramics, as well as graphic and fashion design. Johnson has shown locally at the Mutual Gallery and National Gallery of Jamaica, and internationally at Kadé Gallery in the Netherlands, and Real Art Ways in Connecticut. He is also a founding member of the Dirty Crayons collective, and has organized exhibitions in non-traditional spaces as part of that group. Johnson renders the raw and rejected of contemporary Jamaican culture using techniques traditionally esteemed in Jamaica. His work included in the show is *Ghetto Mother and Children*, a ceramic avatar that adopts the Kawaii aesthetic from Japanese art to depict an inner-city woman surrounded by her bawling babies. Leasho received his BFA in Visual Communication at the Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts in Jamaica.

Rodell Warner (Trinidad) is a largely, but not exclusively, a digital artist. The works included in this exhibition are drawn from his most prolific body of work- gif images. Warner captures or appropriates photos of nature then digitally manipulates them— fragmenting, reflecting and animating them— until they become fluttering object-creatures navigating digital environments. These works question the relevance of authenticity and authorship in contemporary culture. They also traverse and blur the lines between the natural and digital worlds. Warner has exhibited work in Trinidad at Alice Yard and the Art Society of Trinidad and Tobago, in Jamaica at the CAG[e] Gallery and at New Local Space, in Barbados at Projects and Space and Fresh Milk, in Aruba at Atelier'89, and in Maracaibo Venezuela at Territorio Desdibujado 2.0 (Blurred Territory 2.0). He has also exhibited work at The Beaver in Toronto Canada, the Joy Wai Gallery in New York, the Bargehouse in London and at the Widget

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Gallery online. In 2011, he was awarded the Commonwealth Connections International Arts Residency, which he pursued at the Market Photo Workshop in Johannesburg, South Africa. Warner is self-taught.

Nicole Smythe-Johnson is a curator and writer living in Jamaica and working across the Caribbean region. In 2013, she completed her tenure as Senior Curator with the National Gallery of Jamaica where she worked on the 2012 *National Biennial, Natural Histories* (2013) and *New Roots* (2013) exhibitions. Since then, she has worked with contemporary Caribbean art and culture magazine *ARC* as an editor and writer, as well as providing programming and curatorial support on the Trinidad + Tobago Film Festival's *NewMedia* exhibition, and the *Caribbean Linked II* residency project (a collaboration between *ARC*, the Fresh Milk Platform in Barbados and the hosting organisation- Atelier'89) in Aruba. Nicole also works with Jamaica-based contemporary art organization New Local Space (NLS) as outreach coordinator and host of NLS' online art conversation series *IN*. Most recently, she was invited to the Bahamas to curate an exhibition at the Hillside House gallery as part of the 10th anniversary of the *Transforming Spaces* art tour. Nicole studied Cultural Studies at Macalester College in St Paul, Minnesota (2007) and wrote her MA in Postcolonial Literary and Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds in England (2011). Her interests are broad, but all informed by an interest in the mediation of meaning. Contemporary art excites her because it is the frontier of meaning-making.

Additional *Float* programming:

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Wednesday, May 14, 12 – 1:30pm

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Transformer continues our ongoing *FRAMEWORK Panel Series* with ***Contemporary Art in the Caribbean***. This panel highlights emerging Jamaican & Trinidadian artists' perspectives on current trends and best practices by Caribbean based artists & arts organizations, with additional insight from scholars and curators specializing in the contemporary art work of the region. Panelists include: **Deborah Anzinger**, NLS Kingston (Kingston, Jamaica); **Marlon James**, artist, (Trinidad); **Leasho Johnson**, artist (Jamaica); **Nicole Smythe-Johnson**, *Float* curator & former Senior Curator of the National Gallery of Jamaica (Jamaica). The panel will be moderated by **Erica James**, Professor of Art History and Africana Studies, Yale (New Haven, CT). This Panel is presented in collaboration with AMA | Art Museum of the Americas of the OAS.



Organization of
American States

***FLOAT* Exhibition Hours: Wednesday – Saturday, noon – 6pm, and by appointment.**

Image: Marlon James, *Vogue*, digital print, 2011

t r a n s f o r m e r is a Washington, DC based 501 (c) 3 artist-centered non-profit visual arts organization, providing a consistent, supportive, and professional platform for emerging artists to explore and present experimental artistic concepts, build audiences for their work, and advance their careers. A catalyst and advocate for contemporary artists and emergent expression in the visual arts, Transformer connects and promotes emerging visual artists within regional, national and international contexts through exhibition and programs partnerships with artists, curators, commercial galleries, museums and other cultural institutions.

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