

Kevin Greenidge: Creativity and culture are not luxuries - they are necessities

Remarks by Dr Kevin Greenidge, Governor of the Central Bank of Barbados, at the Annual Crop Over Visual Arts Festival, Bridgetown, 26 May 2025.

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Good evening.

It is a pleasure to join you once again to open the Season of Emancipation Visual Arts Exhibition Series. This annual tradition remains one of the most meaningful ways we celebrate our cultural identity as a nation, offering a space to reflect on who we are, how far we've come, and where we aspire to go.

This year's exhibition is especially significant. It opens on African Liberation Day, unfolds during the Season of Emancipation, and sets the stage for Barbados' hosting of CARIFESTA 15. Each of these milestones is important in its own right. But together, they form a powerful moment for us to examine ourselves, not just as a nation, but as part of the wider Caribbean and African Diaspora family.

The theme, Inner Visions, is both introspective and provocative. It invites us to pause, look inward, and ask: What do we see when we examine ourselves through the lens of freedom? What shapes our desires and dreams? And how do our current realities align with the promises made at Independence and the aspirations of the 1937 generation?

The two exhibitions – Self-Reflections and Diasporic Connections – challenge us to confront difficult truths even as we celebrate the richness of our culture. They ask: What does it mean to be truly free – mentally, socially, creatively? How do we balance tradition and transformation? Are we fulfilling our potential?

These are not rhetorical questions. They are deeply personal, and also profoundly national. Because freedom is not just about breaking chains. It's about building the conditions for self-actualization.

At the Central Bank of Barbados, we are proud to once again sponsor this initiative, continuing a commitment we first made more than three decades ago. For the third consecutive year, we are investing \$80,000 to support this exhibition and to help strengthen Barbados' visual arts sector. But our investment goes beyond funding. It is an affirmation that creativity and culture are not luxuries, they are necessities. They help us name our experiences, understand our histories, and imagine our futures.

The Bank itself reflects this philosophy. We've curated a remarkable art collection over the years, much of it acquired through this very exhibition. These works document Barbadian life in all its beauty, struggle, complexity, and joy. They now form part of our national heritage, reminding us that art is not just something to observe, it is something to live.

This year's inclusion of animation, digital sculpting, and interactive installations is a welcome evolution. It reflects the ingenuity of our artists and mirrors the Bank's own digital transformation journey. More importantly, it underscores our ability as a people to stay rooted while embracing change.

Art also creates tangible economic value. It fuels creative industries, supports livelihoods, attracts global attention, and offers opportunities for youth. As we prepare to host CARIFESTA once again, this exhibition stands as an early and powerful showcase of the creative excellence Barbados brings, not just to the region, but to the world.

But perhaps most powerfully, this exhibition reminds us that the deepest revolutions begin within. Before we change systems, we must first shift mindsets. Before we build the future, we must confront the truths of the past.

In the spirit of Bussa, Nanny Grigg, and the countless unnamed whose inner visions gave rise to bold action, we are called to do the same. To reflect. To be courageous. To reimagine.

To the National Cultural Foundation and the Queen's Park Gallery, thank you for your vision and your leadership.

To the artists, thank you for holding up a mirror to this nation. Thank you for showing us who we are, and who we might yet become. Your work is invaluable.

I encourage everyone here to fully engage with this exhibition, not just with your eyes, but with your heart. Because in every brushstroke, frame, and installation, there is a question being asked:

What do you see when you look within?

Thank you and enjoy the exhibition.