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McCarthy with her handmade dolls. She's been making them since she was a girl.

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## Being Brianna

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It is mere hours before her second solo exhibition at the Medulla Art Gallery on Fitt Street, Woodbrook and multimedia artist Brianna McCarthy is casually hanging up more pieces. Most of the art that make up her current collection "Saints and Jumbies" are on the walls. Already, anxious art lovers who have heard of the exhibit, are popping by for a sneak peak.

McCarthy's cellphone rings and she is discussing with the caller— her older sister and jeweller Jeneile Mc Carthy-Sinanan— her dress code for later that evening. She comes of the phone and that little sister

rebellion kicks in.

"My sister wants me to wear a dress tonight. Left up to me I'd wear shorts and converse."

Indeed the younger McCarthy has a style all her own — one that is not dictated by style really but what she likes to wear.

On this day she is wearing red jeans, purple flats and a denim shirt.

On her left forearm are bands of multicoloured bracelets taken from her expansive collection, she says.

McCarthy's latest body of work mirrors her own style — full of colour.

It's hard to conceive that Saints and Jumbies was born out of a dark period in McCarthy's life, given the vibrant colours that feature throughout the work.

"This is a very personal show. At the time I was working on it I was in a dark place exploring light versus darkness.

"When we go through stuff we can either choose to see the saints or the jumbies in it."

McCarthy's saints are clearly identified by rings of light over their heads. She does not identify the jumbies however, preferring to let the art lover pick out their own jumbies from the set.

The former St George's College pupil who taught herself art from random doodling in notebooks, admits that she connected to some of her pieces more than others during the process. Like

"Rebirth of Kimpa Vita", McCarthy's take on the Congolese prophetess and saint Kimpa Vita (Dona Beatriz) who was burnt to death for heresy.

"She is very special to me," she says, her gaze fixed on the brown face of her "Rebirth of Kimpa Vita", which seemed to jump out from its red background, her headdress like a crown in white. A lot of healing came when I started painting her. She is my personal protector."

The "Saint of Needful Things", her nappy hair strong and thick like the roots of a tree, was also one that was close to her.

"She is all about sprouting things."

Though McCarthy's exhibition is called Saints and Jumbies, it has nothing to do with religion nor is she wrestling with her spirituality.

"Religion has nothing to do with this show. I am not religious but I am spiritual and I believe in balancing energy."

The female face features prominently in Saints and Jumbies and they all look alike — defiant eyes, flared nostrils, sitting on long-stemmed necks.

"The defiance that you see in their eyes was not planned. It just happened that way."

The coloured leaves too (as seen in Anima Botanica I and II for instance) were also not planned by the artist but they're everywhere.

"Keeping Company with Jaguars" is another striking piece. A colourful fabric collage on cotton, it not only stands out because the rest of McCarthy's work is ink, watercolour and charcoal, but because of its details.

The artwork which incidentally has no jaguars in sight, was McCarthy's response to Gardening in the Tropics by Olive Senior, she said.

McCarthy has also added her colourful masks and a lone coloured plaster hand to the show. She has been told that her masks transform people and make them feel more powerful, she says.

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"Behind a mask you can become someone else."

At her last exhibit "After Colour", which looked at skin colour and value, she showed her handmade dolls for the first time. Since they were the first to sell out at the last show, McCarthy brought three to this current exhibit. The face-less dolls are made of fabric with hair of lace and floppy skinny legs. She's been making dolls since she was a little girl. Her goal with this exhibit was to give people a lot to choose from.

Even though this is her second outing, she still has to deal with the jitters of going public with her work.

"I am always nervous about how people would react to it —I'm nervous now— but I have been told by people who have seen it that they are beautiful. Beautiful things attract people."

Saints and Jumbies is a collection of work that spans a little over a year.

"I want this exhibition to comfort people," says McCarthy. "And I want it to disturb them too. . .

Some people need disturbing."

Saints and Jumbies, which opened on May 22 at the Medulla Art Gallery, 37 Fitt Street, Woodbrook will run until June 13.

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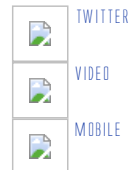
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