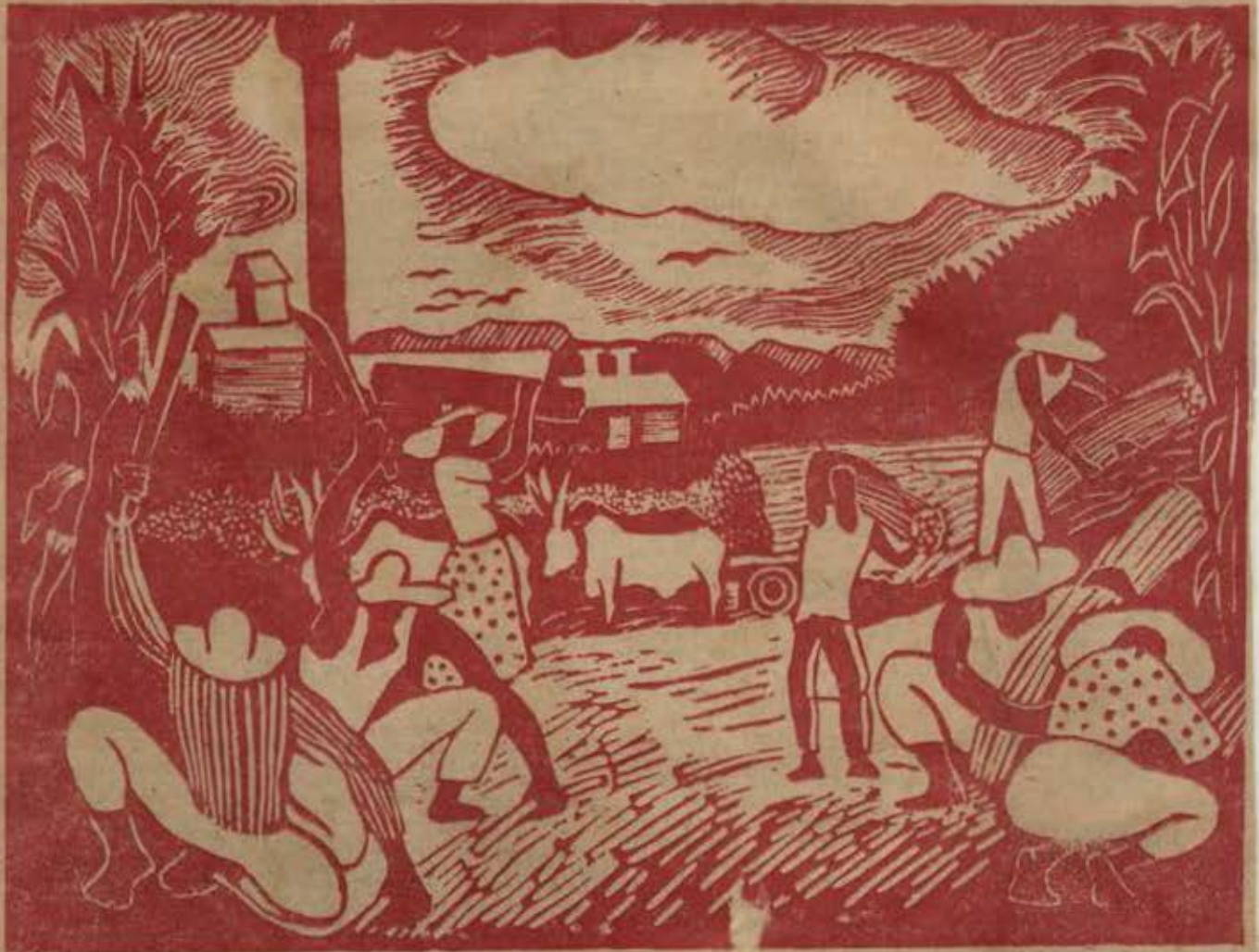


Pioneer of Jamaican Christmas cards

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THE CANECUTTERS, a Huie card that captures a typical Jamaican scene and brings back memories of home for those away from the island and its scenery, at Christmas time.

THE deep urbane voice rolls out and all I can see from under his easel are his powerful legs in their heavy brogues, moving back and forth in occasional steps, as he criticizes the canvas he is working on. In the little library of the Arts & Crafts School back of the DuCosta Studio, Albert Huie at work. And I got him to tell me about how he launched into Christmas Card production, for he is the first Jamaican painter to enter that field.

"It started in a very odd way, you know," he says, cradling his palette in his arms and rocking back on his thick rubber soles. "It was in 1939, during the war... I did some war effort posters and wanted to reproduce them, but printing costs were too high. They wanted to charge four shillings apiece. It was Mrs Edna Wanley who gave me the idea to reproduce them myself. She said that she had a piece of linoleum which I could cut up to make linocuts. During the war when everything was short I did a great business in Christmas cards... and I've been thinking of developing it into a small industry, since there is such a big

response from business houses."

This was news, for several local artists had said that they find it difficult to sell them. Huie produces and sells over 2,000 per year and feels that a large part of the market comes from Jamaicans wanting to send them abroad — even more so with the growing Jamaican population abroad — and the tourists who

"must send home a little bit of Jamaica!

Huie's cards range from one and six to two and six and are mainly to be found at the Victoria Crafts Market, Hills Galleries and the newly opened City Home and arts Centre on King Street.

He went on talking: Although they are expensive to produce and relatively expensive to buy, I think it's their peculiar sort of originality... which stimulates this interest and

gives them such a wide appeal. Not only in Christmas Cards but in all our work, Jamaican painters have a duty to express themselves. We have all the material around us. We can REFRESH THE WORLD WHICH IS BANKRUPT FOR NEW WAYS! The European influence is a thing of the past, they've reached saturation point!

"In our plastic arts in the



ALBERT HUIE

world there is emotional bankruptcy; especially in big cities where people are slow to concrete and steel. I use to cry when I was in Brooklyn, longing to see a little bit of earth! One can understand why people in that environment can't produce anything... but what I cannot understand is why so many who aren't born into it succumb!

"I am a Nationalist... in the best sense of the word. I hope I believe in what we have: sunlight, colour, beautiful people, for whom it is nature to do graceful things with

themselves!"

All I can see now are the delicate movements of his wrist as he works at his portrait modelled for by Chloris Muschette.

While his model rests, he rummages through a box and shows me how the Christmas Cards are made.

There is the "artist's hardboard" with the design carved out on it. This etching, this gouging out of the pattern is intricate and painstaking work. Every curve must be calculated before the knife, every arc clear for the inking. Then comes the super-imposition, the registration which means careful fitting, the rolling and the printing. Hard work even with an artist behind it.

The result of the hard work are creations of incomparable grace, with that special Huie touch which endears his work to audiences here and in places far from Jamaica.

M.M.

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