

Something **RICH & STRANGE**

Jason de Caires Taylor's works of art suffered a sea change when he installed them in the world's first underwater sculpture park, in Grenada. **Melody Wren** took the plunge and paid a visit

Photography courtesy Jason de Caires Taylor & the Grenada Board of Tourism





Previous page Part of Grace Reef, a group of 16 figures based on one woman.
This page Vicissitudes, life-sized moulds of 30 children that symbolise the circle of life

Known for its spices, stunning beaches and relaxed Caribbean vibe, Grenada is also becoming famous as the site of the world's first underwater sculpture park.

After Hurricane Ivan damaged coral reefs in Moliniere Bay in 2004, British artist Jason de Caires Taylor had the extraordinary idea of replacing the depleted reef with an art installation intended to act as a synthetic reef.

It has become one of the must-see attractions of the island since it opened in 2006, captivating the imaginations of an increasing number of visitors from around the world, and garnering international acclaim and awards. The artificial reef attracts the amazing diversity of marine life found on natural reefs. For the snorkeller and diver, it offers surprising artistic and perhaps even spiritual encounters as the variable ocean floor and the artworks interact and change from moment to moment.



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De Caires Taylor originally moved to Grenada to open a dive centre, but the damage to the reef and his background in sculpting inspired the concept of the Sculpture Park. He originally funded the idea, then teamed up with Phil Saye, president of the Grenada Scuba Diving Association, to develop the concept. Members of the Scuba Diving Association volunteered their boats and their staff, though tugs and cranes had to be used if the sculptures were too big for the boats. Sponsorship now has to be found for each individual sculpture. Saye now manages the development of the Sculpture Park, as de Caires Taylor has moved onto other projects elsewhere.

Right *The Lost Correspondent* sums up the dwindling importance of the traditional writer

Below Local sculptor Troy Lewis (right), with sponsor Howard Clarke

The installation is a ten-minute boat ride from the capital, St George's, and 15 minutes from the famous beach at Grand Anse. A group of us travelled to the site on a small motorboat with Dive Grenada, and snorkelled with our driver and guide, Tommy, who regaled us with the history of the sculptures.

The water above the sculpture park lies four to eight metres deep. The figures hidden below the surface are eerily beautiful and verge on the bizarre. We took our time, snorkelling around each one, examining the detailed work. The statues are of cement or metal, and are intended to encourage the formation of coral and to attract marine life.



My favourite, *The Lost Correspondent*, captures the posture and mood of a writer sitting at a desk, fingers poised over the keys of a typewriter. Scattered over the desk are laminated original newspaper articles about Grenada's relationship with Cuba after the Grenadian revolution of 1979. De Caires Taylor says: "It explores how the role of the traditional writer has become a relic, perceived to be lost at sea." The male figure is a life cast of a local dive master, Ricardo.

Peaceful and elegant, *Sienna* is a character from the story "A Different Ocean" by Grenadian author Jacob Ross, the tale of a young girl who was a gifted diver, but who was exploited in a search for lost treasure. The structure of this metal sculpture allows water to pass through *Sienna*. I was captivated by this haunting piece and found myself going back to it time and time again.

Grace Reef comprises 16 figures scattered over a wide area of sand, but all of one strong-featured Grenadian woman. Each figure is positioned facing in a different direction, many lying in the sand, partially covered.

I spent little time looking at *Vicissitudes*, a group of life-sized children, for which de Caires Taylor used 30 moulds of children aged between ten and 14. Symbolising the cycle of life, the absolute stillness and ghostliness of the ring of figures spooked me, and I moved on quickly.

New sculptures are continually being added by local artists, and now total approximately 50. The latest installation adds to the park's focus on Grenada's vibrant history, folklore and culture. Fourteen new sculptures, by local craftsman Troy Lewis, are based on the art, culture and spiritual worship of early Amerindian tribes, with representations of intricate petroglyphs and ceremonial carvings. One of the largest pieces takes the form of a *Zemi*, a stone-carved idol pointing to the sky and *Yaya the Creator*, to the underworld

and *Hupa* the spirit of the dead, and to the world of the living and their spirit, *Goiz*.

"Surreal" summed up the gallery for one snorkeller. It was described as "spiritual" by one woman in our group – but as "satanic" by a local I spoke to. It's up to you to dive in and evaluate it for yourself. ■

For more information:

www.underwatersculpture.com

www.grenadagrenadines.com

Dive Grenada, www.divegrenada.com

Melody Wren's trip was sponsored by the Grenada Board of Tourism

Caribbean Airlines now flies return services from Port of Spain to Grenada and New York on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Customers can book online at www.caribbean-airlines.com, call the airline toll-free at + 800 744 2225 or contact their travel agent to make bookings.