



## Afterword

By Tina Sauerländer

“Seriously? Is that the best you’ve got?” answered Barb Edole to the scam emailer Fergal O’Connor who had written that she had won \$50,000 in the Brathwaite Art Foundation’s lottery in Barbados. At that time in April 2013, Ditte Ejlerskov was finishing The Rihanna Paintings. As Rihanna was born in Barbados, the artist created the alter ego Barb, director of Edole Cozenage and Consulting, Inc. and the Sincere Scandinavian Rihanna Fan Club who involved O’Connor in a bizarre email dialog. The scammer tried to meet Barb’s need for information about Rihanna and sent “personal” photographs to create trust. At the same time, he kept asking for money. A complex system of disbelief and belief along with the verification of facts for confidence unrolls between the two individuals and their alter egos. Sometimes the reader almost falls for Fergal, such as when he says “Please do not give up on me. I am not just in it for the money.” But at some point the scammer becomes angry, “Why do you keep emailing me with small taking if you do not want to invest in our foundation?”. He stops giving personal information. The first book of “My Bajan Letters” ends with Fergal sending the same auto text with an invoice over and over.

In November 2014 Fergal wrote again and the second book of “My Bajan Letters” begins. The two resume their exchange until Barb says that she has booked a flight to Barbados and wants to meet him. Fergal does not reply. And soon Barb receives notice that her emails can no longer be delivered. “This cant be true! I cannot reach you!” she wrote disappointedly, knowing that her messages will not come through, but hoping they will. During her stay in





Barbados, she sends several almost poetic emails that are all automatically answered by a postmaster. She keeps writing and even reveals her real identity and shares her experiences in Barbados following Rihanna's traces. She reflects on individual life in a globalized and hyper-connected world. "I wonder where on the planet you are really...I mean IRL. In reality. I am here for sure. But am I real? But is this place real?" The artist wonders whether Barb was more real than Ditte, because Barb "spoke the truth" and "wasn't worried about any expectations." However, communicating online detaches from the physical self. The conversation changes and self-awareness increases, because not being face-to-face takes away crucial parts of a talk like the visual appearance of "the other," body language, eye or physical contact, voice and intonation. Merely the sender's own "viewpoint" remains. Does this lead to an abandonment of human abilities as a social being such as honesty, empathy or sympathy online?

The third book contains stills of the film "I Splurge Myself" (2016) that Ditte Ejlerskov shot at home and during her stay in Barbados. Her desk with a grey and rainy window view changes into cyan-bright beach settings with huge cruise ships passing close by. The artist visits Rihanna's house and verifies the information given by Fergal. She discovers the ruin of Paradise Beach Club, a former holiday resort, which reminds her of Vermilion Sands by J.G. Ballard. Text lines of the email conversation silently appear below throughout the film. Apart from the cinematic visuals and audio effects—both inspired by 80s and 90s aesthetics—most of the sound seems to come from the places themselves: falling raindrops, noisy quietness, sound of the sea, music in a beach bar, birds twittering, wind.

The scammer's Spanish Prisoner confidence trick is not a new one, but it takes on dramatic scale in the age of the Internet. "My Bajan Letters" show how diversified the target groups in the digital era are, dealing with fraud especially made for the art scene. In the desire for belief, people still want to trust the scammer and even the artist had hope; she wrote back because she wished to gain deeper knowledge of Rihanna's life. Scams usually





comes from poor countries to address the white West. The inequality or significant difference between the two parties is reminiscent of colonial history. In her book “My African Letters” (2011), the artist already addresses the phenomenon of her tie to the role of the white privileged consumer entering the world of “the other.” The huge cruise ships represent this role in “My Bajan Letters” as well as the artist’s reference to Vermilion Sands, both of which can be seen as a symbol for white tourists conquering and colonizing paradise.

A huge cruise ship landing on a small picturesque island resembles a collage ignoring any scale or proportion. It looks unreal and the observer can hardly believe his own eyes. This feeling of disbelief haunts the reader of “My Bajan Letters” and leads to his wish to verify the information given. He googles. Nowadays anything you can't find there does not exist. There is no need to visit any place physically, because when you can google it, it is there—and you could just photoshop yourself into the image. The artist sitting on Rihanna’s beach almost looks too good to be true. Was she really there? Was Fergal ever there? At the end of the film, Peter Doig’s Red Canoe melts into a googled image of Rihanna on a surfboard at a beach in Barbados... at least Rihanna was really there.

