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Maybe I was more interested in the fact that the programme was in Venice, and whenever I thought of that city, romantic ideas of gondolas sprung to mind. By then I was living in Brooklyn and had a tiny easel set up in my dark damp kitchen where I kept incessantly painting flowers. No way would these strange looking flowers get me into art school. But I did get into art school and the summer of 2003 saw me in Venice, Italy, trying to understand what these flowers meant to me and why I kept painting and drawing them. One of the instructors mentioned something about women's stories but that seemed too easy to me, although my mother bending over and tending a big white unfolding night-blooming cereus on her verandah in Constant Spring, my grandmother going to bush swinging a cutlass and clearing the way, and my great-grandmother walking through the district of Nonsuch with a heavy metal jug on her head and tin measuring cups in her hand

selling fresh cow's milk, did come to mind. Bits and pieces of the story would wend its way into a 2007 publication, *Writers Who Paint/Painters Who Write*, in which I presented a series of small blue and white evanescent flower paintings. I remember the painter, writer, and philosopher Earl McKenzie, with whom I shared the publication, saying to me, "Looking at [the paintings], I can just tell a woman did them. They are saying something about femininity and womanhood." I would give art school an eight-year break, whilst I tried to sort out my feelings both about it and about what these flowers were saying. During that time, I followed in the footsteps of my great-grandmother and grandmother, making patchworks, two of which would go on to represent the United States abroad. Here again flowers were bursting out all over the place. I returned to art school in 2011 with a renewed energy and focus and started centring the flower more in my work. By then I'd decided to embrace instead of running from the female associations with the flower. For my 2012 thesis show I ended up merging the floral and the female images to recall a time long gone in Jamaica for a series called "Childhood Memories". Works from this thesis would eventually be curated into successive biennials at the National Gallery of Jamaica. Having interrupted my master's degree at NYU, I decided to go for an MFA at Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) from 2012 to 2016. MICA allowed for much experimentation and here I started looking at the various tropes developed of Caribbean women. In 2015, I did four patchwork quilts, where each patchwork had an image of a woman in my family — my great-grandmother, my grandmother, my mother, myself. All these patchworks were set against the Jamaican landscape and had lush floral images. Soon I did a quilt titled "Flamboyant" in reds and oranges based on the tree of the same



Bishop, 2011 (Photos: Jacqueline Bishop)



Bishop, 2015