

FORT GANSEVOORT



MYRLANDE CONSTANT

Myrlande Constant: Drapo

Opening: Wednesday, January 11, 6 – 8 PM

On View: January 12 – March 11, 2023

New York...Beginning January 11, 2023, Fort Gansevoort will present *Drapo*, its first solo exhibition with Haitian artist Myrlande Constant, who has attracted international attention for dazzling hand-beaded and sequin-embroidered textile works in which heritage techniques are used to mingle contemporary and traditional themes. The evolution of Constant's personal aesthetic and mastery of her medium will be evident in ten new pieces on view to the public for the first time.

Constant's work was recently showcased in the Venice Biennale exhibition *The Milk of Dreams*, curated by Cecilia Alemani (April 23— November 27, 2022). The artist's upcoming survey exhibition, *Myrlande Constant: The Work of Radiance*, will open at the Fowler Museum in Los Angeles on March 26, 2023 – the first U.S. museum exhibition devoted to a female Haitian artist.

Based in Port-Au-Prince, Myrlande Constant is known for sophisticated figurative compositions composed with beads and sequins on cloth. While drawing upon the vernacular of traditional Vodou flags (known as *drapo* Vodou), which often adorn temples and are used in ceremonial practices, her oeuvre is characterized by a distinctively sensual, painterly quality. Intricate details and sumptuous colors coalesce in elaborate narrative scenes. Many of

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Constant's flags depict *lwa* spirits and illustrate folklore central to the Vodou religion. Expanding into a secular context, Constant's art also incorporates imagery taken from Haitian history and civic life. Although commercial flag making is a craft traditionally dominated by men, Constant is the first female Haitian textile artist to gain international acclaim for her innovation in the longstanding *drapo* Vodou practice. In depicting her unique versions of the Haitian religion's myths, she has harnessed a fresh and contemporary spiritual force that elevates her work above the realm of folk art and craft.

Measuring nearly ten feet in length and height, the monumental artwork *Reincarnation Des Morts*, 2022—one of the largest pieces Constant has made to date—portrays the family of Haitian Vodou spirits associated with death. At the center of the composition, the figure of *Bawon Samdi*, the guardian of cemeteries, appears wearing his typical suit and sunglasses. He links arms with his wife *Grann Brijit*, who confronts the viewer with a half-flesh-covered face. Together the couple holds court in the surrounding graveyard while the resurrected dead and the spirits commingle. Ominously hovering behind *Bawon Samdi* and *Grann Brijit*, a skeleton with wings assumes the role of lead drummer flanked by two percussionists in human form. The inflection of music into the scene adds to the work's sensorial quality and dramatic tone. In Constant's artistic practice—which she considers to be intrinsically connected to her spiritual life—the worlds of the dead and the living, the spiritual and terrestrial, are fluid. Rather than something to be feared, she views death as a natural part of the cycle of life. Although specific in its religious references, Constant's masterpiece can be read as a collective homage to all the deceased across time and geography.

In another large-scale new work, *Apres Gran Met La Fey Nan Bwa Se Tretmant Yo Viy*, 2022, Constant depicts a lively scene featuring a grouping of the *lwa* from the pantheon of Haitian Vodou. On the right side of the panel, the single eye peering out from a tree trunk represents the all-seeing eye of *Gran Met*—the supreme being of the Haitian Vodou religion. At the center, Constant depicts snakes coiled around a tree. These reptilian figures are the artist's interpretation of the spirits of *Danbala* and *Ayida Wèdo* who are traditionally represented as serpentine forms. *Danbala* is known as the creator of the cosmos who shaped the hills and valleys on earth with his slithering movement. As a serpent, he moves between land and water, generating life. In the background of her composition, Constant illustrates this origin story with a landscape of lush, rolling hills. Even while including numerous figures, Constant articulates the facial features, expressive gestures, and patterned garments of each form with meticulous detail. Here the artist plays with depth of field, depicting dwellings nestled in the pastoral landscape at a specifically small scale in order to establish the illusion of receding space. As seen in the verdant hills and objects surrounding the central composition, the artist also creates shading and volume by combining different chromatic variations of the same color of beads or sequins.

The borders of Constant's artworks are often just as important as the central compositions. Around the perimeter of *Apres Gran Met La Fey Nan Bwa Se Tretmant Yo Viy*, baskets containing fruits and vegetables symbolize the bounty of the harvest. The motif of a wooden mortar and pestle is also repeated. As an essential tool used in Haitian kitchens, the *pilon* is synonymous with daily food preparation in a secular context while also signifying ceremonial offerings.

With her deft craftsmanship and visual sophistication, Constant melds the secular and the spiritual as she seamlessly integrates traditional art practices with a bold contemporary aesthetic. The tactility and luminescence of her works activate their surroundings with sumptuous, provocative presence.

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About the artist

Myrlande Constant's work is included in museum collections throughout the United States including Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL; American Folk Art Museum, New York, NY; Lowe Art Museum, Miami, FL; Waterloo Center for the Arts, Waterloo, IA; and the Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles, CA. The survey exhibition Myrlande Constant: The Work of Radiance will open at the Fowler Museum in Los Angeles in March of 2023. Constant's flags are featured in the expanded exhibition The New Bend, curated by Legacy Russell, at Hauser & Wirth, Los Angeles (2022). The exhibition will travel to Hauser & Wirth, Somerset in 2023. Constant's works were included in the Venice Biennale exhibition The Milk of Dreams curated by Cecilia Alemani (2022). The solo exhibition entitled The Last Supper was exhibited at the Faena Hotel in Miami on the occasion of Art Basel, Miami Beach (2019). Her work has also been featured in various group exhibitions including Reframing Haiti: Art, History and Performativity at Brown University (2011), Kafou: Haiti, Art and Vodou at Nottingham Contemporary (2012-2013), and Pòtoprens: The Urban Artists of Port-au-Prince at Pioneer Works in Brooklyn, NY (2018) which traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami (2019).

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Caption and courtesy information:

Myrlande Constant

Après Gran Met La Fey Nan Bwa Se Tretmant Yo Viy

2022

Beads, sequins and tassels on fabric

80 x 111.5 inches

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