



# VEVE

## HAITIAN ART SOCIETY

## NEWSLETTER

### LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

BY ED GESSEN

Welcome to the latest edition of VEVE, the Haitian Art Society newsletter, and the final issue of 2022. I would like to share our latest news and bring you up to date on several of our recent and future initiatives.

#### Membership Drive for 2023

The Haitian Art Society is launching its 2023 membership campaign. We welcome all past members to renew their memberships to support our organization. We need to add members to our official HAS community and have grown our Facebook group to over 8500 total members. As a newly formed 501(c)(3) non-profit charitable organization, we depend entirely on paid memberships to fund our organization. We have no full-time employees, and we are a 100% volunteer organization. We exist entirely through the generosity of our paying members. You can help us continue our work. Please support our Society with your paid membership by [joining today](https://haitianartsociety.org/how-to-join). (<https://haitianartsociety.org/how-to-join>)

#### New Board Member Elected

Glenn Stokes of New Iberia, Louisiana has joined our Board. Glenn is the proprietor of [stokeshaitianart.com](http://stokeshaitianart.com). Glenn became interested in Haitian Art through his former landscaping and pest control businesses. Glenn had contracts for mosquito eradication which brought him to Haiti hundreds of times over many years. After so many visits, Glenn fell in love with the Haitian people and their incredible art. Welcome Glenn!

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## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

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### New Officer and Board Member Elected

HAS will be expanding its Board of Directors to include a new Officer. We appointed Natasha Tauber as our new Secretary. Natasha volunteered to apprentice under the guidance of Magdalah Racine-Silva, our Vice President and current Secretary. Natasha resides in NYC and spent her childhood in the Miami area traveling with her family to Haiti on dozens of occasions. Her family are collectors of contemporary art and enjoy a large collection of Haitian Vodou flags and bottles. Natasha's mother was a fashion designer and has utilized Haitian beadwork and veve designs in her high fashion gowns, one of which is in the permanent collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Welcome Natasha!

### Annual Conference Planned for 2023

Our Annual Conference in San Diego and Los Angeles had to be cancelled in 2021 due to the health situation. We intend to resume this extremely popular conference in 2023. Although no firm date or itinerary has been finalized, we intend to hold this meeting to coincide with the UCLA Fowler Museum planned Myrlande Constant Vodou Flag exhibition entitled "The Work of Radiance". We will also visit LACMA to view the renowned Afro-Atlantic Histories exhibition. In addition, we will visit several Southern California private collections. We will keep you posted as plans emerge and dates are finalized. We are tentatively looking at late June 2023. Only paid members will be invited to participate in this event.

### Partnership with Vassar Haiti Project

We have formed an informal partnership with The Vassar Haiti Project (VHP). Founded in 2001, the Vassar Haiti Project (VHP) is a collaborative, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that engages Vassar students in a life-changing experiential education in global citizenship, promoting Haitian art and fostering sustainable development in Haiti. Vassar students organize art auctions and sales throughout the year, which support the welfare of hundreds of Haitian artists and artisans and provide means for funding the six initiatives: Art, Education, Healthcare, Water Access and Purification, Reforestation, and Women's Co-Operative in the mountain village of Chermaitre, Haiti. We plan to support each other's organizations as we have such similar missions.

### Website Expansion

Our [website](#) continues to be updated with new information on a regular basis and has become a widely used and highly acclaimed research tool for scholars, museum professionals, gallerists, and collectors. You will be able to view lots of public and private collections, many never before seen by the general public. We have added a new [virtual tour](#) feature, found under Collections/Virtual Tours. Our [blog section](#) will be updated more frequently in 2023.

## TAMPA MUSEUM OF ART ACQUIRES ARTHUR R. ALBRECHT HAITIAN ART COLLECTION

BY MATT DUNN

The Tampa Museum of Art announced in October that it has closed on a gift of 88 pieces of Haitian art and a \$1 million gift in support of the Arthur R. Albrecht collection. Thanks to the advocacy efforts of Haitian Art Society board members Ed Gessen, Larry Kent and Kay Heller for brokering the acquisition of this significant Haitian art collection.

The paintings, sculptures, and framed maps, along with the cash gift, were bequeathed to the Tampa Museum of Art by the Arthur R. Albrecht Revocable Trust. Albrecht was a devoted collector of Haitian art and was also active in philanthropy on behalf of the country. Arthur Albrecht was a friend to HAS and graciously hosted several collection visits during past Haitian Art Society conferences.

The Albrecht Collection includes artworks from Haiti's most prominent painters, including Rigaud Benoit, Wilson Bigaud, Prefete Duffaut, and Philome Obin. The paintings, rarely seen by the public until now, present an overview of the major developments in Haitian painting from the 1960s-80s. The holdings of the Albrecht Collection further augment the Tampa Museum of Art's collection of Haitian art which includes one of the largest American museum collections of *drapo vodou* or Haitian vodou flags.



**Rigaud Benoit (Haitian, 1911-1986)**

*Les Oiseaux*, 1973.

Oil on Masonite, 37 x 25 inches.

Tampa Museum of Art

Gift of the Arthur Albrecht Revocable Trust

## HAITIAN CREATIVITY FEATURED IN MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM

BY LEGRACE BENSON, PH. D.

The chatter over a Cinq étoile in Hotel Splendid said Haitian art was the number 3 export after sugar and coffee. Jackie Kennedy had bought a Philomé Obin and there was a museum quality private collection in Germany. It was 1981. Haitian art was still running high on André Breton's famous declaration that if Hector Hyppolite's works had been seen in Europe it would have changed the course of art. He was not entirely wrong. Artists from the US sent to Haiti to teach at the Centre d'Art returned with their own art forever changed. Polish dramatist Jerzy Grotowski paid a long visit to the Saint-Soleil artists up in Soissons-la-Montagne and gained new insights into drama. Saint-Soleil artists created a special pageant in honor of visitor Andre Malraux who instantly recognized the community's deep history and insight. Breton's writing about Haitian art and his selection of works reveal that he had recognized in the works the elusive goals Surrealist had pursued. This was art that "...sings from the marrow bone", to use the apt phrase of W.B. Yates, the Irish poet engaged half a generation earlier in the quest for liberation from academy dictates.

Richard Flagg, a businessman from Milwaukee, had always wanted to be an artist. His successful entrepreneurial father had other plans. Instead of serving Milwaukee's famous beer in the evening to support producing paintings in daytime, son Richard would learn the business and become the director of a leather goods production and export unit in Port-au-Prince. With a would-be artist's inspired eye, Flagg assembled a collection. He and his wife Erna would eventually donate the selective collection to the Milwaukee Art Museum. Still deeply attached to the works, he would visit the museum so often that then-curator Barbara Brown Lee arranged for him to have his own desk.

The catalogue for the exhibition in 1974 had the title, the naïve tradition: HAITI; The Flagg Tanning Corporation Collection [now called The Richard and Erna Flagg Collection].

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**Andre Pierre (Haitian, 1916-2005),  
Damballah, 1963  
Oil on Masonite, 24 × 16 in.  
Milwaukee Art Museum  
Gift of Richard and Erna Flagg**

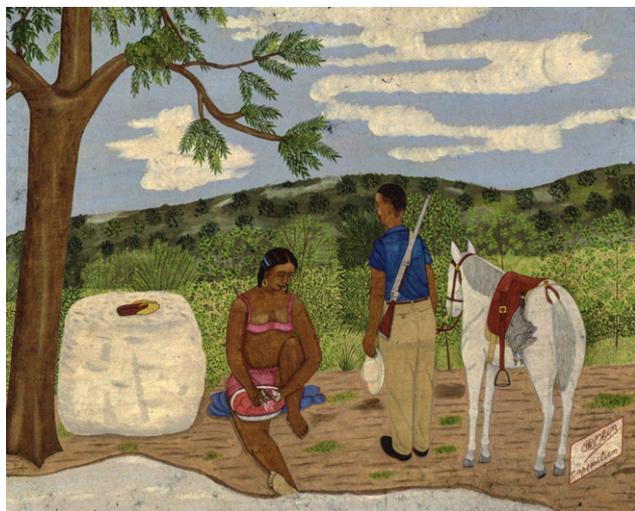
## HAITIAN CREATIVITY FEATURED IN MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM

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It included a statement by Flagg and essays by then-Director Tracy Atkinson and Haitian art expert, Selden Rodman. Both Atkinson and Rodman were Ivy League graduates, North Americans looking at the works from the background and point of view of Western understandings of that mystery called “art”. In Europe and European North America, a perennial question was, “What is art?”. There was much emphasis on determining degrees of quality together with a search for what was presumed to be a resident meaning in each work. It was a contentious game, played out on a designated field with common rules, some of them continuing from the time of Plato and Aristotle. In 2022 when creative works from the entire world are on view on the borderless internet, the rules of the past are mooted. New questions closer to that marrow bone arise. To whom do these works with special meanings belong? What are the special meanings? Where, if anywhere, should the works be on view? And even, who has the right to discuss them.

In 1989, at his desk in the museum Flagg spoke of how and why he began collecting the Haitian paintings and metal sculptures. In speaking at length with him in 1989, both the old and new questions in the game of art history and criticism were absent. He spoke of seeing, as soon as he arrived, that every stage of leather goods production from washing the hides to the finished leather goods required experienced skill. Once the leathers were ready, creative Haitian designers and crafters fashioned them into finely crafted market products. Ricard Flagg also discovered the thriving Centre d’Art where Breton had seen the Hyppolite work, and where urban workers were inspired to bring in the art works they did on the side. Philomé Obin had made his trek down from Cap Haïtien and had set up his own Centre d’Art, Cap Division. By the time Flagg arrived artists were creating in the studio Dewitt Peters set up at the Centre. Flagg made his selections with an artist’s eye and spirit. Thus, the works now in the Milwaukee Art Museum are in accord. Together they present visitors with visual evidence of a vigorously creative Haiti that sharply contrasts that of international news.

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**Philome Obin (Haitian, 1892-1986)**  
**Hélène n'est pas un gibier (Helen is not fair game), 1958**  
**Milwaukee Art Museum**  
**Gift of Richard and Erna Flagg**

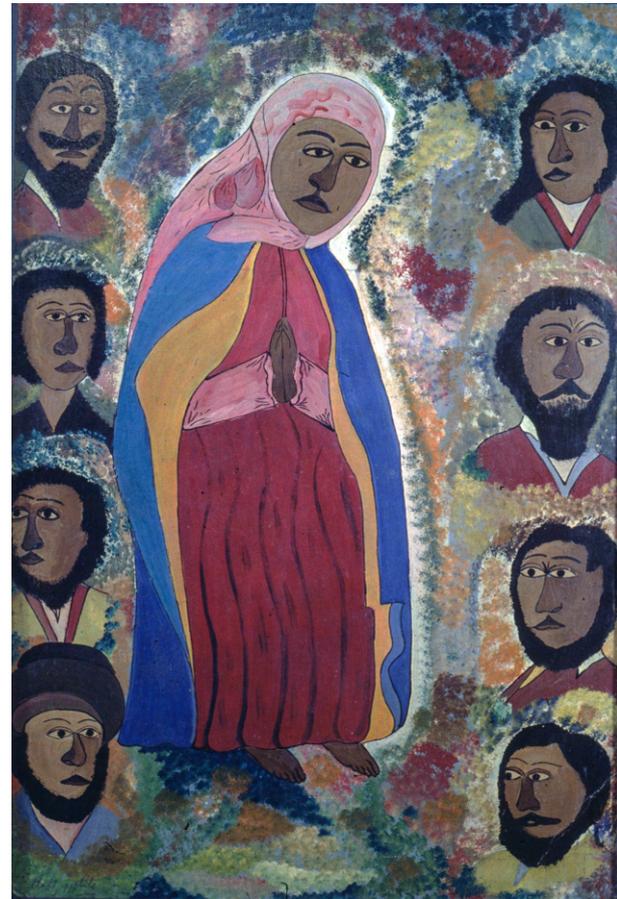
## HAITIAN CREATIVITY FEATURED IN MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM

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Curated by Haitian scholar and art expert, Kantara Souffrant, the exhibition now on view at the Milwaukee is a properly stunning presentation of works that are in no sense naïve or untaught, much less primitive. Those words can only be used by people who only see any creative production through the lens of traditional European academies: the European games and European rules. It is not that simple or restricted. From early in the French occupation and then colonization of the western side of Hispaniola, there was European art, especially in the Christian churches, but also in the homes of planters. Those genres were there to be seen by most of the population, whether planter or enslaved. Out in the countryside there were Taino objects and drawings, some of them still in place today. Crucially, wisely kept out of view of the French, were those secular and sacred objects formed and painted in several African traditions older than David or Leonardo or Praxiteles, learned from lessons taught over generations. Artists and their companions in the enslaved communities would have assessed each protectively hidden piece with constantly refined judgements on skill and the presence of spirit. This may not be directly documentable, but it is what communities of human beings have observably done for millennia.

Every artist represented in Flagg's modern collection was working as the next moment in the long conversation, the long habits of attention, from homelands, into which they garnered anything useful and appropriate from the colonials and from the Taino remnant that was in cultural and sometimes physical marronage with them. Every evidence supports an assertion that after independence that gathering-in continued. It is fully evident in the language emerging from the many converging in Ayiti/ Saint Domingue/ Haiti. It was, like English, a creole, and continues to develop into the present.

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**Hector Hyppolite (Haitian, 1894-1948)**  
**La Vierge (The Virgin), 1946**  
**Milwaukee Art Museum**  
**Gift of Richard and Erna Flagg**

## HAITIAN CREATIVITY FEATURED IN MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM

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The art that Richard Flagg saw was a creole art, Kreyòl, to use the Haitian spelling. Those of us who proposed this name in the 1980's to no avail can in 2022 have a moment of rejoicing. Scholar Peter Haffner's recent paper, "At the Crossroads of Many Worlds, Marilyn Houlberg and Arts Patronage in Haiti", states that the art should be called Kreyòl. Indeed so. The point is worth expanding, as the designations "naïve", "primitive", and "untaught" are blinding visions held over from colonial era disdainful designations of the non-European peoples and lands. A textbook in use in universities throughout the twentieth century, reprinted from 1871, by Cambridge University Press speaks of "...lower tribes of mankind..." and "...uncultured races." That instruction from exactly the time of the Jim Crow laws enacted in the United States remains alive and well, an invasive weed covering the insightful surfaces of Haitian Kreyòl art.

In this new installation in the Milwaukee Art Museum those surfaces yield their revelations into our human condition as it is encountered in the Caribbean historical, social, religious, and material environment. Curator Kantara Souffrant, herself a Haitian, brought her personal knowledge together with robust scholarship to create a presentation of the collection that Richard Flagg would surely rejoice to see. There are many more works on view than there were when Haitian Art Society made a visit several years ago. Moreover, her organization of the works brings them together so that they resonate with each other. Visitors in Milwaukee receive an aperçu into Haitian lives lived. In the several rooms Souffrant placed tables that provide additional information, much of it interactive. Children and adults engage with these, often going back and forth between the information positions and the art. Teaching and learning take place as communications in a pleasant, thus memorable, setting.

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THE ART THAT RICHARD  
FLAGG SAW WAS A CREOLE  
ART, KREYÒL, TO USE THE  
HAITIAN SPELLING.



**Castera Bazile (Haitian, 1923-1966)**  
**Coubite (Konbite Communal Fieldwork), 1953**  
**Milwaukee Art Museum**  
**Gift of Richard and Erna Flagg**

## HAITIAN CREATIVITY FEATURED IN MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM

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Visitors from the small Haitian population in this far northern city will recognize their homeland. Others will have a revealing visit that enlarges understanding of Haitian's ways of being here on a certain piece of planet Earth, dealing with its dangers and delights. It is excellent to have a Haitian as curator of the exhibit, able to discern aspects that are unique to living there. Visitors who are not Haitian bring their own personal knowledge, personal history and unique viewpoint. The result is the expansion of understanding so essential to our collective survival. Earlier writers about Haitian art saw it from a trajectory informed by education in what even in the mid- and late twentieth century was articulated by the colonial framing of non-European people and their cultures. Those views can now be of historical value, rather than instruction on actualities and how to view them.

A telling feature at the Milwaukee is that docents for the museum participate in the development of their presentations to visitors, not simply taught a spiel that is parroted with each new cohort of onlookers. Their experience as lovers of art and from interacting with visitors is folded into the continuing development of the education program informed by knowledge from the sites and from scholarship. Such linkages are one of the positive contributions museums, galleries and open collections make to keeping us not just alive, but sanely informed enough that we are happy to continue the species.

Amy Kirschke, Barbarba Brown Lee Director of Adult, Docent and School Programs, describes current efforts by the museum to establish everyday continuing interrelationships with Milwaukee and its environs. The museum in this vision is more than a locale to visit, to walk by fascinating objects passively, perhaps having lunch or tea in pleasant surroundings, buying a souvenir on the way out. The childrens' programs that many museums have had for some decades are there of course. These are now joined with docent programs that are observably more inclusive and collaborative. Museum staff are strongly encouraged to engage actively with other Milwaukee public and private organizations, exemplified by Dr. Souffrant's attendance at a house concert organized by a local music group, on that occasion featuring two vocalists from South Africa.

Even on a short visit it was evident that the museum and many organizations in the area are both mutually beneficially supportive and knitting together the disparate and potentially disputatious folks of this Middle western city. Milwaukee is an international hub of business and industry as well as arts and scholarly research. Some spokes reach out three thousand kilometers from Lake Michigan to where the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea flow into each other at Haiti. The Haitian exhibit is in a section of the stunning international architectures of Milwaukee's David Kohler, Finnish Eero Saarinen, and Spanish Santiago Calatrava. Milwaukee is famous for its beers, a tradition begun so many decades ago by Germans seeking an open society and a good place to grow hops.

Yes, Waiter, we will have a Cinq étoile and a local draft at this table, please.

## A TALK ABOUT HAITIAN ART AND CONSERVATION WITH ROSA LOWINGER OF RLA CONSERVATION ART & ARCHITECTURE (MIAMI AND LOS ANGELES)

BY DONNA THOMPSON RAY, ATFA - FINE ART APPRAISAL AND ADVISORY SERVICES

**DTR: Why did you enter the art conservation field?**

**RL:** When I was in college, I was an artist. I had good hand skills, but didn't know what I wanted to say. One of my professors' wife was a paper conservator and he pointed me in that direction. It felt like a safe harbor; a place where I could use my technical skills and still be able to serve a creative purpose. Conservation is the marriage between science, the visual arts, and a degree of hand skill. But it's fundamentally a practice in understanding how things get damaged, and what does repair mean; and repair can mean so many things.

**DTR: What is the significance of the Caribbean in your work?**

**RL:** I am Cuban; born in Havana and grew up in Miami. I've always traveled to the Caribbean but I started going back to Cuba on a regular basis in the mid-1990s. I discovered an extraordinary quality of creative output there being done by artists who were responding to that moment in Cuba when the Soviet Union collapsed and there was a great need to find a way to work using materials that were available locally. I saw a great symbiosis between material production and content of works. I found that really quite unique and contemporary.

In 2010, I traveled to Haiti right after the earthquake. I was sent there through a Smithsonian Initiative called the Haiti Cultural Recovery Project. I went to work on the murals at Holy Trinity Episcopal Cathedral [in Port-au-Prince] that were done by the major painters of Haiti[i]. They were amazing. The building had mostly collapsed. There were fourteen extraordinary Life of Christ murals that were done in a completely vernacular style, using places within Haiti. They're the most exquisite works of art, many of which were lost, and we were there to salvage with our Haitian partners [the remaining three murals]. What I really understood is that there was deep sophistication in the work, but also a kind of vibrating heart that was not contemporary [in] that cool detached way. And it resonated with me because of the Cuban traditions I'd seen as well. And as someone who lives in Miami at least half the time it's the work of our home.

**DTR: Will you explain the difference between conservation, preservation, and restoration?**

**RL:** Preservation is the broadest of these categories. It speaks to the idea of retaining the historic fabric and cultural material, which can mean many things, including ordinances that protect historic buildings - zoning and historic districting, or managing preventive conservation of collections where you take care of making sure things don't get damaged in advance.

Conservation is the act of preserving things on a physical level, so that can mean everything from maintaining certain artworks, making sure that they don't deteriorate; doing preventive conservation, managing light issues, humidity issues or pest control.

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## A TALK ABOUT HAITIAN ART AND CONSERVATION WITH ROSA LOWINGER OF RLA CONSERVATION ART & ARCHITECTURE (MIAMI AND LOS ANGELES)

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It can mean for example, salvaging collections after a disaster, like a hurricane, or an earthquake.

Conservation also speaks to a professional field that has rules and guidelines and ethics and standards of practice. Restoration I think of as aesthetic intervention. You're trying to improve the appearance in an area of a painting or sculpture or building that is damaged.

### **DTR: What is the difference between having an artist versus a conservator work on conserving an art piece?**

**RL:** Artists aren't usually called in to do the kind of technical scientific conservator type of repairs that we are, they're usually called in if something doesn't look right, and needs to be fixed so that it looks better. Typically, artists restore only their own work. They do not, or should not, restore other people's work.

The conservator is not a protagonist, we are in the background. We are helping figures. We are not the artist. Our profession draws a careful line between what is original to a work and what is part of its conservation. We document everything we do, photograph our processes, so that the story of what happened during our work will always be evident. And more importantly, conservators never change the artist's original intent. We don't add anything to it that could be misconstrued as being original. If the artist is alive, we always talk to them and include them in the decision making. Sometimes they will say, for better or worse, "I'm the only one that can repair my work." That is usually not true, but an artist has the right to do that because of the Visual Artists Rights Act of 1990 (VARA). Non-conservators, whether they are artists or fabricators or gallery owners, should not be conserving the work of art of another artist. Our field employs science as well as art to make careful decisions. Also, we always document what we do with photographs and a written report.

Also, conservators are trained to manage problems that seem unmanageable. At Holy Trinity Cathedral in Port au Prince, my colleague, a paintings conservator, and I brainstormed solutions to impossible seeming problems with our local partners. The problems were massive and there were so few materials and such human need. But conservators are trained to be flexible and creative under such circumstances. We worked with local Haitian artists, who then trained in conservation, and two of them now work for our firm in Miami.

### **DTR: What do collectors need to be mindful of when they're holding artworks from the Caribbean?**

**RL:** The most important aspect of collecting and care is having your work not get to the point where it needs conservation. That is all about management and care. That's true about Caribbean works as much as any others.

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## A TALK ABOUT HAITIAN ART AND CONSERVATION WITH ROSA LOWINGER OF RLA CONSERVATION ART & ARCHITECTURE (MIAMI AND LOS ANGELES)

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If you have a collection of any sort of value, make sure things are properly appraised and insured. Then get a maintenance plan in place. I often say to clients, “your coffee table gets dust on it, your paintings do also.” Dust holds humidity; it holds salt in coastal climates that corrodes metals, and organic bits of skin and dirt that are tasty for insects. But be careful how things are maintained. You never want to have someone who isn’t professionally trained determine how to clean things, or you can have a surface that’s intended to be there accidentally removed.

If you collect outdoor sculpture, you do have to maintain it every year, and often several times a year, depending on where you live. If you live next to the coast, this is a critical aspect of care. Think of your car, and how often it’s cleaned. Sculpture gets just as much dirt and grime on it as an automobile.

Anything that is made out of organic materials, that is wood, paper, bone, paints, textiles are susceptible to light levels, humidity, and to UV. Light and UV are different. You can have the best UV filters on your house and if you are blasting your artworks with direct sunlight, it’s not enough. If you’ve got a beautiful house with gorgeous windows and you want to display this fantastic Haitian painting right across from it, then you’re going to have to either frame it in something that has extraordinary covers -- you’re going to have a curtain that keeps the light from blasting it directly. Many people don’t live in their homes all year round. Some collectors put their stuff up and then leave. I understand people not wanting a curtain on their large picture windows that look out over the ocean. But if you’re only going to be there three months of the year, have a conservator design covers for the works.

Inspecting for insects is another major part of ongoing care. Insects are voracious and especially when you import things from the Caribbean. That’s another reason why it’s important to dust things. Inspection allows you catch a possible infestation by seeing granular or powdery insect residue, called frass. In short – have insurance in place, set things in a good location away from light and excessive humidity, make sure they are stably installed, and get a maintenance plan in place. Conservation should be a last resort for any collection.

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**Jasmin Joseph (Haitian, 1924-2005)**  
**Lions, 1977**  
**Private Collection**

## A TALK ABOUT HAITIAN ART AND CONSERVATION WITH ROSA LOWINGER OF RLA CONSERVATION ART & ARCHITECTURE (MIAMI AND LOS ANGELES)

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**DTR: Then I'm calling a conservator. And when I call you, what's the process? What do I need to share with you?**

**RL:** When you call a conservator, we will ask a series of questions to find out what do you think is wrong. I will ask you to take a picture and send it to me. If I cannot understand it from the photo, I'll recommend an in-person assessment. Most conservators charge to come out to your house to do the assessment. If I can identify it right away, I will give you a ballpark cost over the phone then ask you to bring it in. In our studio we inspect works free of charge. If we have to travel to see it, we charge for our time, and in most cases credit a part of the fee toward the cost of treatment. Our current 2022 rates range from \$170 - \$220 per hour, and we have minimums for site visits.

**DTR: RLA is the largest woman-owned sculpture and objects conservation firm in the country. What does that mean for you? And what are other passions and interests that occupy your time?**

**RL:** That has been true for a long time, but this varies, so let's just say we are one of the largest. When I entered the field of conservation in the late 1970s, early 1980s, it was pretty much a white person's profession, 100%. I'm an immigrant and felt very much like an outsider. The profession demanded many free hours of internship, which closes doors for people who are not wealthy. Recently, the field started looking at itself and saying, this is wrong and we need to make a change. I recently passed the ownership of our firm on to the next generation. This feels like a huge success, because our firm now has new life, new attitudes. We have successfully always hired an incredibly diverse group of people without even trying. Well over fifty-percent of our staff are women. Forty percent of our team are people of color from a diverse range of backgrounds. I believe very much in mentoring the next generation and learning from people.

What's next for me is writing, teaching and continuing to mentor the staff at RLA. I wrote a book *Tropicana Nights* about the night club in Havana, Cuba. Now I'm writing a memoir about conservation that is being published by Row House Publishing and it will come out in October of 2023. The book is crafted after *The Periodic Table*, by the Jewish-Italian chemist, Primo Levi (1919-1987). My main goal with the book is to present the field of conservation to a general public in a way that really lets people know what we do.

RLA Conservation of Art & Architecture (Los Angeles|Miami), <https://rlaconservation.com/>  
Rosa Lowinger, <https://rosalowinger.com/>

Donna Thompson Ray, ATFA Appraisals, <https://atfaappraisals.com/>

## HAITIAN ARTIST STEVEN BABOUN REINVENTS THE STEP AND REPEAT.

BY NATASHA TAUBER

Steven Baboun's installations are emerging as a sought-after alternative to the step-and-repeat. The interdisciplinary artist creates dimensional activations, beginning with textile elements. Partygoers merge into sinuous and mutable environments, and Baboun captures revelers on film as they interact with the scene.

Baboun's installations have, for the past several years, been part of Riva Nyri Prècil/Bohio Music's fêts, seasonal cultural celebrations held in Brooklyn, Miami, and Montreal at which the spirit of the party— is always a group of Lwa. Described as “photo booths” by participants, the immersive installations are, in the artist's eye, “world making.” Baboun's environments evoke the deities of Haitian Vodou, archetypes, and energies through color, pattern, and texture. The artist never directs his photographic subjects; wonderland tableaux of embellished material cajole performance.

“Textiles,” the artist suggests, “create a space “both familiar and domestic.” The artist's ancestor, Baboun's grandmother, an immigrant from Syria who fled to Haiti in the 1950s, inspired the practice. Throughout his childhood, Baboun watched her sew pillows and curtains, transforming the family's Port-au-Prince home “through an eccentricity of pattern.” Baboun, who left Haiti to attend university, earning a stateside MFA, cites the influence of artist Sebastian Jean's performances as part of his artistic lineage.

In Baboun's practice, textiles' transparent, reflective, and ephemeral qualities become lingering spirits. The artist sees the textiles, chosen with deference to Vodou Lwa, “as entities interacting kindly with the subject,” Conceptualizing “textiles as paint,” both in camera and post-production, the artist elongates forms, creating eddies of abstraction. Baboun's lens blurs the divide between the two-dimensional images and the observer's world, his hope that viewers will “want to reach out and touch the photograph.”

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**Steven Baboun**  
**Photograph from the series**  
**Syria and Haiti Holding Hearts (Realm I,**  
**2019)**

HAITIAN ARTIST STEVEN BABOUN REINVENTS THE STEP AND REPEAT.

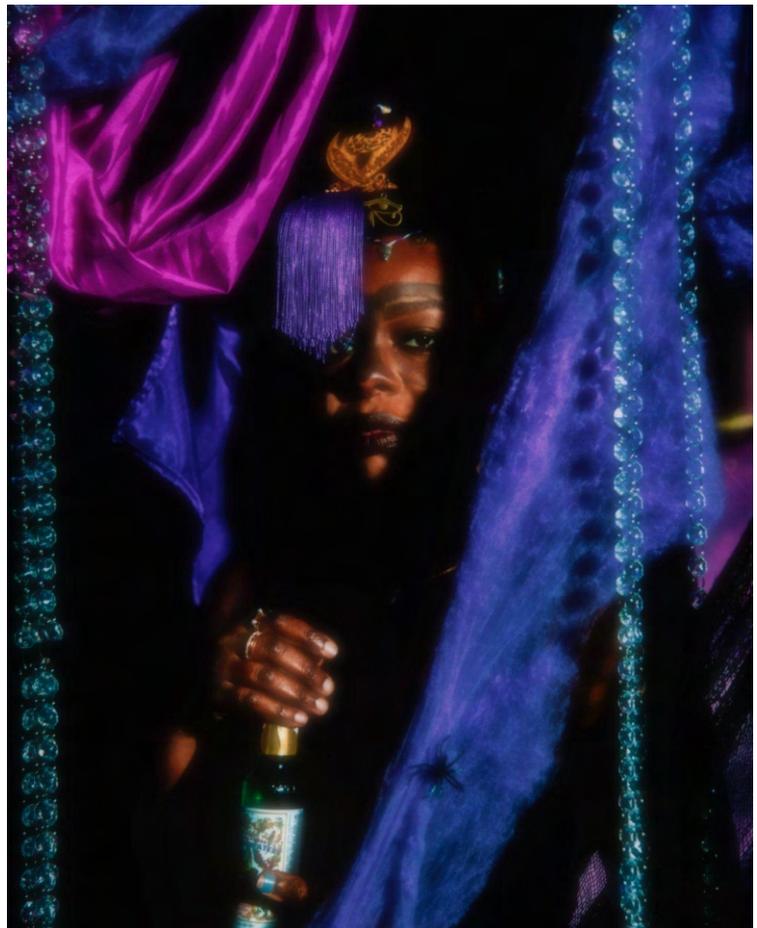
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The artist, whose family remains in Haiti, is never far from the subjects of immigration, Haitian queerness, and drive to elevate otherwise ordinary material, rendering it ephemeral.

Inquiries: <http://stevenbaboun.com/>



Steven Baboun  
Portrait from the series FÈT GEDE  
(2022)



Steven Baboun  
Portrait from the series FÈT GEDE  
(2022)

## FRANTZ ZEPHIRIN'S HEROIC PORTRAITS

BY AMY WILENTZ

One day in 2009, before the earthquake hit Haiti, the artist Frantz Zephirin called his gallery in Petionville to say that he'd just met U.S. Ambassador Janet Sanderson at Toussaint l'Ouverture airport. He told the gallery owner that he'd mentioned to the ambassador a portrait of her that he'd done, and he'd told her, too, that that very portrait was on view at his gallery. He was calling now to tell the gallery owner that he would be rushing this portrait over shortly, and could they hang it right away?

Indeed very soon after, Zephirin arrives at Galerie Monnin carrying a large painting. At its center is a heroic portrait, uncannily photographic, of the blond diplomat, framed in a presidential manner by the American and Haitian flags, and surrounded -- less presidentially -- by Zephirin's surrealistic world of animal-like spirits, birds, horses, elephants, and crocodiles.

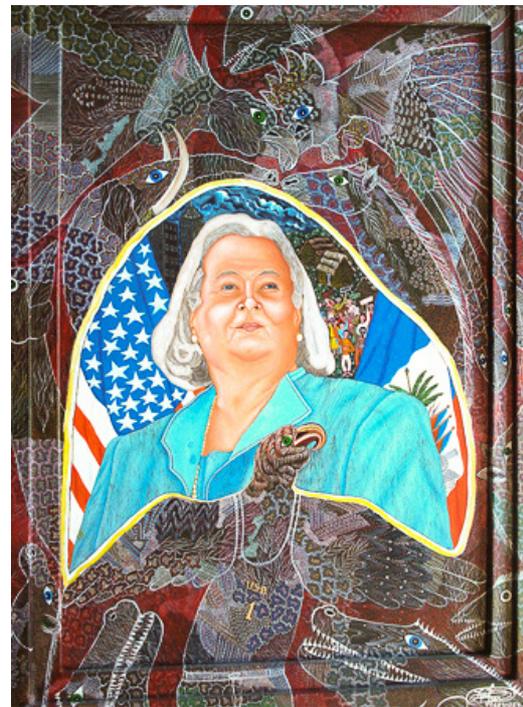
So the ambassador does stop by the gallery. She likes the painting very much (she is its target demographic, after all), and she says that she wants it. In the end, however, she leaves the country without the painting.

Then the earthquake shatters Port-au-Prince. Since Sanderson has not shown much further interest in the painting, the gallery is stuck with it. They have little faith that they will be able to sell a painting of a U.S. ambassador -- regardless of Zephirin's world-class status as an artist -- to anyone except that very same U.S. ambassador.

They decide to take the problem directly to Zephirin, who'd just done the dark, post-earthquake cover for *The New Yorker*. Please, they ask, is there some way he can modify his actually quite impressive painting -- modify, say, his artistic vision -- to make it more widely attractive.

Meanwhile, Zephirin's been watching the television in the aftermath of the quake, and has noticed that Michael Jackson's "We Are the World" has been re-released to raise money for victims of the Haitian earthquake.

*(continued on next page)*



**Frantz Zephirin (Haitian, b. 1968)  
Portrait of U.S. Ambassador Janet  
Sanderson, 2009**

## FRANTZ ZEPHIRIN'S HEROIC PORTRAITS

(continued from previous page)

So Zephirin, always quick to see a business opportunity, takes Ambassador Sanderson, and with a few quick swipes of his magic paintbrush, says goodbye Mme. Ambassador, Hello, King of Pop.

This King of Pop, it must be said, is the Haitian version, with an even more skull-like physiognomy than MJ's and a felt chapeau worthy of the Baron Samedi, voodoo's Lord of the Graveyard. The same crowd of minuscule and excited Haitians who had been cheering for the ambassador in the earlier portrait can be seen behind the shoulder of Jackson, but now they seem to be engaged in a ritual Haitian carnival parade.

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<https://amywilentz.com/>*



Frantz Zephirin (Haitian, b. 1968)  
Before and after heroic portraits (2009-2010)

## READING A PAINTING: EDGER JEAN-BAPTISTE'S LA BELLE NUIT DE NOEL, 1974

BY MATT DUNN

One easy way to enhance one's understanding of this painting is by translating the inscription in the lower right corner. The inscription reads "La belle nuit de Noel bain de chance chez houngan pour les jeunes fille. Edger Jn-Baptiste, Baintet, Haiti, 1974" or "The beautiful Christmas Eve Bain de Chance (Luck bath) at the houngan's for the young girls. The Bain de chance (Luck bath) in the vodou religion is a ritual bath taken for the purpose of attracting the protection of the lwas. Devotees are anointed by a houngan with perfumes, oils, or orgeat syrup before submerging themselves in water which they have filled with healing herbs and red flowers. More detail about the ritual ceremony is contained in the essay *The Coolness of Cleansing*: by Kyrah Malika Daniels, Ph.D., and Assistant Professor of Art History, African & African Diaspora Studies, and Theology at Boston College.



La belle nuit de Noel bain de chance chez houngan pour les jeunes fille, 1974  
Edger Jean-Baptiste (Haitian, 1917-1992)

## RECORD BREAKING HYPOLITE PAINTING, AYIDA WEDO (SNAKE GODDESS) SOLD FOR \$365,400

At September 28th Latin American auction at the Christies NY, the Hyppolite painting, Ayida Wedo, Lot 67 sold for \$365,400, which was 46% more than the high estimate of \$250,000. The author, art historian and HAS member, Gerald Alexis wrote the [lot essay](#), quoted below.

*"Hyppolite's representation of a serpent, for instance, is derived from his own personal religious tradition—his devotion to Damballah who is venerated and depicted in the form of a serpent. (Many years ago, the lwa was present in hounfours (voodoo temples) in the form of a living snake kept in an earthenware container and taken out on days of ceremonies. Today, the lwa is represented most often by wrought iron snakes, sometimes by two intertwined serpents around the Poto-mitan (the central pole), and by their vèvè, drawn during ceremonies.) Damballah has a dual nature; he is male, Damballah Wèdo, and female, as Aida Wèdo (see Planson, Un initié parle, Ed J'ai Lu (Aventure mystérieuse), Paris, 1974, p.125). And, they both are part of the Rada family where generous and benevolent deities are found."*



Hector Hyppolite - Damballah La Flambeau (also known as Ayida Wedo or the Snake Goddess)

## NEWS BRIEFS AND EXHIBITIONS

**Didier William: Nou Kite Tout Sa Dèyè at MOCA-NOMI, Miami, FL**

**Nov 2, 2022 - April 16, 2023**

<https://mocanomi.org/2022/12/didier-william-nou-kite-tout-sa-deye/>

The largest solo exhibition of Didier William's career. Translated as "We've Left That All Behind," the show presents an in-depth look at the North Miami-raised artist's career and memory among the very neighborhood where he once grew up. Curated by Erica Moiah James, Ph.D, the exhibition will feature over forty works spanning multiple mediums, and including some of his newest paintings. Complementing the painted work, and speaking to the close relationship of painting and printmaking in William's practice, are new drawings and artist books. The show also includes William's first monumental sculpture: a 12-ft.-tall wooden body emblematic of a religious column present in Haitian worship rituals.

**Hervé Télémaque: 1959-1964 at ICA, Miami, FL**

**Nov 28, 2022 - Apr 30, 2023**

<https://icamiami.org/exhibition/herve-telemaque/>

ICA Miami is proud to present "Hervé Télémaque: 1959-1964," which brings together over a dozen paintings from the artist's first five years of production. Relying on an established exhibition and research practice of delving into significant periods in artists' careers, ICA Miami takes a deep and definitive look at the earliest works in Télémaque's oeuvre.

**Edouard Duval Carrié - THE WORLD AS I KNOW IT**

**November 4, 2022 - April 16, 2023 | Gallery 109**

<https://coralgablesmuseum.org/portfolio-item/the-world-as-i-know-it/>

This exhibition gathers nineteen mixed-media engravings and one large-format sculpture by Haitian-American artist Edouard Duval-Carrié. Works are filled with references to Caribbean history and literature, as well as to its popular religions and culture. Recurrent themes are the Haitian Revolution and other historical passages; the popular stories of the Loas or deities in the Vodou belief system; slavery and the life and myths of symbolic literary characters.



**Hervé Télémaque (Haitian, 1937 - 2022) - Toussaint Louverture in New York, 1960**

## VEVE CREDITS

VEVE is the newsletter of the Haitian Art Society. It is a benefit of membership and is published quarterly. It contains no advertising and features articles on Haitian Art, artists, collectors, members, current events, interviews, exhibitions and much more. Thank you to all our VEVE contributors.

Matt Dunn - Editor-in-Chief

Ed Gessen - Editor

VEVE logo by [Chawne Paige](#)

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To join and become a HAS member visit <https://haitianartsociety.org/how-to-join>

Mission Statement: The Haitian Art Society, formed in 2003, is an international, non-profit public charity designed to strengthen and expand interest in, and understanding of, Haitian Art and Artists. The HAS is a thriving community comprised of art collectors, gallerists, museum professionals, scholars, and researchers all connected by a mutual appreciation and affection for Haitian Art. We also produce an Annual Conference for members with symposia, private home collection tours, special exhibitions, and social events. We are an all-volunteer organization. Support us by [JOINING TODAY!](#)



Didier William - Mosaic Pool, Miami, 2021 Acrylic, collage, ink, wood carving on panel, 68 x 104 inches