



HAITIAN ART SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

BY ED GESSEN

A lot has been happening at the Haitian Art Society, and I would like to bring you up to date on several of our key initiatives and our progress.

- **Annual Conference Announced for 2021.** Our Annual Conference schedule will be resumed, and the next Conference will be held in San Diego on October 14th, 15th and 16th, 2021. We will be staying at the Bay Club and Marina on Shelter Island, with excursions to San Diego, Orange County and Los Angeles by chartered motorcoach. The trip will include visits to museums, galleries, and private collections. Space is limited, so make your reservations early. Complete details can be found on subsequent pages of VEVE.
- **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, and collectors. Be sure to visit often!
- **VEVE, our newsletter.** Since you are reading this letter, you have obviously discovered VEVE, the official newsletter of the Haitian Art Society. This is our third issue, and we welcome your comments, suggestions, and ideas. If you would like to contribute an article, please contact Matt Dunn, our Editor-in-Chief at mattdunndc@gmail.com.

(continued on next page)

IN THIS ISSUE

Haiti Cherie by
Carole Cleaver
Rodman - Page 3

Interview with
Randall Morris by
Larry Kent - Page 6

Art: The Lure of
Gain by Gerald
Alexis - Page 9

Myrlande Constant
by Candice Russell -
Page 11

Woman Artists of
Haiti by LeGrace
Benson - Page 15

Self Portraits in
Haitian Art by Matt
Dunn - Page 18

2021 Annual
Conference in San
Diego - Page 22

VEVE Credits
Page 23

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

(continued from Page 1)

- **New Organizational Structure.** The Haitian Art Society has been “under the sponsorship” of the Waterloo Center for the Arts since our inception in 2003. The WCA has graciously provided its 501 c 3 non-profit status to us, as well as administrative support and financial management responsibilities. And we thank WCA for its continued support. Our Board of Directors has embarked on the process of incorporating our own legal entity and have filed for our own 501 (c)(3) status. This will give us more autonomy and visibility in the world of non-profit organizations. As a condition of this reorganization, we will be establishing additional internal controls, create bylaws, write an administrative handbook, and put financial controls in place. We will also create an expanded Board of Directors including new Officers. We are extremely excited about these changes and hope you will be as well. Our goal is to complete this task by year end
- **Opportunities for Volunteerism.** The Haitian Art Society is in the process of forming several Committees within our group that would welcome additional participation by members. If you are a member interested in volunteering your time, please let us know if you would be interested in participating in any of the following areas, Administration, Events, Marketing, Communications, or Finance. If so, please contact Matt Dunn at mattdunndc@gmail.com.
- **Regional Chapters.** Since our members are widely dispersed, we are re-establishing geographically based satellite groups to help keep our members connected. The idea is to have local groups get together on an informal basis to foster local activities. We plan to form regional groups in the following areas. If you would like to join a regional satellite, please contact your local Chairperson.

North-Eastern area (NY, NJ, PA, MA) Tony Fisher (indigofamily@indigoarts.com)
Mid-Atlantic area (DC,MD,VA) Magdalah Racine-Silva (magdalah.silva@dmsinetwork.com)
Southern area (FL, GA, LA) Ed Gessen (edgessen@gmail.com)
Western area (So Cal, NorCal) Larry Kent (larryknt@yahoo.com)
- **Organizational Growth.** The Haitian Art Society has welcomed many new paid supporting members to our official HAS group and has grown our Facebook group to over 4000 members. We continue to move forward to achieve our new status.

Thank you for your continued interest in Haitian Art and especially for your support in becoming a member by [joining The Haitian Art Society](#). I hope to see many of you in San Diego in October.

Best regards,
Ed Gessen, President

HAITI CHERIE

BY CAROLE CLEAVER RODMAN

In 1962 Selden Rodman introduced me to Haiti. It was a scary time. Papa Doc was wielding power, and the Ton-Ton Macoutes were killing people. I was warned not to discuss politics as spies were everywhere. Since there was a shortage of electricity each night we experienced Le Blackout.

Francine Murat was gallantly running Le Centre d'Art although there were no tourists and very few sales. Issa, George Nader, and the Monnin family had well- stocked galleries but no visitors. Although I knew very little about Haitian Art, I instantly fell in love with Hyppolite's Three Eyed King [also known as Le Grand Maitre] and wanted to buy it. Selden talked me out of it. Bad advice! Years later, however, when our New Jersey home burned down, I was glad I had not purchased it. It would have been destroyed.



Grand Maitre, 1947 by Hector Hyppolite

We visited the Cathedrale St. Trinite to see the famous murals. With the blessing of Bishop Alfred Voegeli, Selden had raised the money for them and supervised the artists' work. In the early 50s he had been concerned that all the paintings were leaving the country, and there would be nothing left. Walls, he thought, were less fragile than canvas. Ironically the murals were destroyed in the 2010 earthquake while the paintings abroad survive.

We wanted to drive to Cap Haitian, but Selden was concerned about the condition of the road. "Is it much worse?" he asked. This was a new concept for me. Didn't things usually get better? In Creole the answer to How are you? is Pa pi mal. (Not worse) Things are fine as long as they don't deteriorate. In Haiti things get worse. We made the trip, stopping at Croix de Bouquets to buy sculpture from Georges Liautaud and at St.Marc for a swim. At the Cape I met the Obins, photographing Philome and Seneque and buying a painting from Antoine.

(continued on next page)

IN CREOLE THE
ANSWER TO
"HOW ARE YOU?"
IS PA PI MAL
(NOT WORSE).

HAITI CHERIE

(continued from Page 3)

The following year we returned to Haiti and decided to visit Jacmel. The mountain highway had not yet been built, and it was necessary to drive through the river bed, an arduous, bone-rattling event. It was decided that I shouldn't risk it as I was pregnant. I flew in while Selden drove with friends. Arriving in Jacmel, I secured a room at the Pensione Vitale and realized that Selden would not arrive for many hours. I decided to go for a walk. Local children tagged along and tugged at my hair. Never before had they seen a redhead. We navigated the staircase streets and arrived at the market in the Cathedral Square. It was amazing. At that moment I fell in love with Jacmel.

Ten years later, when Baby Doc was in power and it was again safe to live in Haiti, we bought a house in Jacmel, with our partners, Tom and Caroline Crawford and Dick and Sande Schwarzstein, and opened a gallery. At first there were no tourists, but living in Jacmel was wonderful. We had no telephone or television. Our children read books, played cards, went swimming, and cavorted with the local kids. They were happy. And they learned a lot. We drank chadak juice and rum-citron and feasted on banana bread, lobster, and leg of goat. We danced at Mardi Gras and went to voodoo ceremonies.

Prefete Duffaut, who was born there, had moved on, but Pauleus Vital and Wilmino Domond lived in the nearby hills. Selden also championed the work of Lafortune Felix, Nacius Joseph, and Andre Pierre. In those years we sold paintings from our New Jersey home, hosting two openings each year.

In 1983 Selden donated a group of paintings to Yale University, his alma mater. They were received without enthusiasm and were immediately locked away in storage. Masterpieces like Philome Obin's Portrait of Mme Antenor Firmin, and Edger Jean-Baptiste's Demon are rarely seen.

(continued on next page)



Mambo with Telephone Poles, 1980 by Lafortune Felix



Demon, 1980 by Edger Jean-Baptiste

HAITI CHERIE

(continued from Page 4)

Determined to find a home for the collection, where it would be appreciated and made available to the public, Selden conferred with George Potter, who was then president of Ramapo College. An agreement was signed. Each year we donated works of art, and in 2001 a gallery was constructed to display them. Sydney Jenkins, who was named curator, hung the initial show with sensitivity and tact.

Selden continued his life-long mission to publicize Haitian art by producing WHERE ART IS JOY:Haitian Art, the first forty years. I still have a few copies, while his earlier works, HAITI, THE BLACK REPUBLIC, RENAISSANCE IN HAITI and THE MIRACLE OF HAITIAN ART are all out of print.

Although most of the Rodman collection has been donated to Ramapo, I still retain a few favorites. Among them are a very large Gerard, The Celestial Tart, which is as good as a Rousseau, Jh J. Laurent's Daniel in the Lion's Den, Prosper Pierre-Louis' World Egg, Telemaque Obin's The Hunter, and The Lovers by Salnave Philippe-Auguste.

Although I will always love Haiti, I cannot live there now. At age 87 I can no longer cope with the daily emergencies which are endemic. For the past six years I have lived in Belize, a beautiful, English-speaking country with a tropical climate, friendly people, and a stable government. Unlike Haiti, we have dependable electricity, running water, air conditioning, cable TV and Internet, but there's not much art.



On the Beach, n.d. by Philome Obin

INTERVIEW WITH RANDALL MORRIS OF THE CAVIN-MORRIS GALLERY, NYC

BY LARRY KENT

When you started Cavin Morris gallery, did you offer Haitian Art right away? Who were some of the artists that you showed?

When Shari and I first opened our collection and business we were almost totally a Haitian Gallery. We showed anyone we loved. We were pretty much focused on Vodou and art by and about Vodouists. We didn't care so much about names as we did subject and originality. At that time we did offer mostly second generation artists and kept any first generation artists for ourselves. Over time that list included St. Brice, Liautaud, Andre Pierre, Toussant Auguste, Wesner Laforest, Michel Sinvil, Lafortune Felix, Hector Hyppolite, Jasmine Joseph, The Obins, Gerard Fortune, and many unknowns who never caught the bus to fame but whose work impressed us regardless.

Please give us some insight into how you got involved with Haitian art?

I grew up with Hyppolites and Liautauds and other Haitian artists on the walls. I read Haitian literature from the time i was a teen. I was fully aware of Selden Rodman and read all his books. Haitian music was an important influence. I went to Haiti numerous times and that was the real influence. I also at that time began to see how aspects of vernacular Haitian Art fit into what was beginning to take place in a new field that was going global, that of the Afro-Atlantic Diaspora. I was profoundly influenced by the writings of Robert Farris Thompson and we became friends; he lectured for us two or three times and I lectured in his class at Yale. Selden Rodman's daughter Carla worked for us for a while. Rodman and I debated a lot but enjoyed the discourse. In fact on our honeymoon, which was in Haiti, we spent every penny we had on a group of paintings we found, intending to sell them at Sotheby's Parke Bernet and use the funds to buy first generation works. One day after getting off the plane back in NY Sothebys discontinued the Haitian auctions and we were forced to go public with the paintings we had and that was really how we got started...

When someone writes about art, what clarity are you searching for their ideas?

I look for thought based on knowledge and experience. I look for their sources. I look for originality and a global point of view.

(continued on next page)



The Goat with Two Heads, 1961 by Georges Liautaud

I WAS
PROFOUNDLY
INFLUENCED BY
THE WRITINGS OF
ROBERT FARRIS
THOMPSON

INTERVIEW WITH RANDALL MORRIS OF THE CAVIN-MORRIS GALLERY, NYC

(continued from Page 6)

Cavin-Morris gallery handled some impressive estate collections. How did you become involved with the Tommie & Otis Thompson collection? Were you offered the Demme collection?

Tommy and Otis knew of our standing in the Art Brut field and of our work with self-taught artists. We placed many important paintings for them. Demme has worked with Jose Zelaya from the beginning. I accompanied him to Haiti on one wonderful trip. We did do some important shows on the whole Diaspora and Jonathan lent to them very generously. I would not have wanted all of his collection. I think he probably knew that. We had and have a very specific taste in what we want to show. We sold a very large amount amount to Jonathan and Geoffrey Holder, among others. But it was never a goal to be only a Haitian gallery. We have a more scholarly and curatorial interest in Haiti now. I am presently building an exhibition at Halle St. Pierre in Paris that will include African diaspora artists from the entire Atlantic seaboard including Central and South America. Brazil, Trinidad, Jamaica, United states, Haiti and Cuba.

Cavin-Morris gallery doesn't carry too much Haitian art. I have one of Guyodo's sculptures. Noticed you offer some of his drawings or paintings. Are there other Haitian artists you would consider selling today, and why?

As I said above our tastes are very specific. We have a larger agenda and you are not correct, we do frequently sell Haitian vernacular work but it is usually sold privately. It doesn't show up on our site or the web because it is often gone on the day it comes in.... I now think the Grand Rue artists are the most important art in my field coming from Haiti right now. That recent show curated by Lean Gordon and Eduard Duval-Carrie that showed at Pioneer works in Brooklyn was one of the most important Haitian exhibitions in decades! It is rough stuff, it often isn't pretty, but it is meaningful and so very integral to Haitian culture. It is a reaction to the devastating natural events and debilitating politics in Haiti and it fits right in with global Art Brut and global vernacular art. I have lately come to desire also the work in Haiti that is more Brut but also work that is by Houngans and believers rather than artists who make work ABOUT Vodou. I accompanied a well known collector to Haiti on one trip and made the naive mistake of showing him all my sources. There was an economic downturn in the US around then and I couldn't go back to Haiti. When i did return my sources had been stripped. It did a lot for turning us away from the scene for a while.

Do you recall some of the important Haitian sales at Sotheby's Parke Bernet and Christies? Why do you think Haitian Art peaked and fell off the map?

I touched on that above. I think it did not have the sheer numbers to sustain it. There are many problems. I think Brazilian and Jamaican have suffered from the same problems. They all should have been integrated with the world art brut and vernacular art movements that are so successful today. It got shunted to Latin American Art and disappeared again when that bubble popped. The best of it has a chance now but the term Haitian Art is too amorphous and all inclusive. There is incredible Contemporary Art from Haiti and there is incredible Vernacular Art in Haiti which includes the Grand Rue artists. New and aesthetically critical histories need to be written.

How would you describe the late Jonathan Demme and his important collection?

We were good friends. He was enthusiastic, visionary and generous. He was attempting to put together what I call an encyclopedic collection which means some of everything, top to bottom. His gifting and the best of his pieces have had a lasting influence.

(continued on next page)

INTERVIEW WITH RANDALL MORRIS OF THE CAVIN-MORRIS GALLERY, NYC (continued from Page 7)

What would you like to see in future issues of the VEVE newsletter?

I think the time to answer that is after a few more issues. Newsletters tend to be more about soundbites. I would love to see a place where collectors, scholars and critics can pool resources and talk about the problems unafraid to probe questions that might be a bit painful for some. I'm not sure that's possible. I would love to see it though.

Who are some of your favorite Haitian artists and why? We both admire sculpture by Liautaud. Would you consider writing a book?

My favorite artists are the ones who make their work from the culture rather than about the culture. I had a long correspondence with William Grigsby, who documented Liautaud. I spent a lot of time with Georges. He stayed with my family when he came to New York. Grigsby gave me all his negatives which I used in my first article on Liautaud in Black Arts Magazine. I used some of his photos also in the Sacred Arts of Haiti chapter I wrote on Liautaud. Liautaud was a genius in my mind. And writing about him is almost ceremonial for me. He influenced the way I see all art. Would love to do a Liautaud book but it would be about giving him his place in art history, world art history.

Recently you wrote a chapter for an important publication L'Art Brut. How would you summarize your ideas in this publication?

It was the first article that shows the potential of seeing this art on a global level. It was a gentle nudge to Dubuffet about what culture actually is and how the inclusion of some of these artists does not in anyway misrepresent the tenets of Art Brut but it also called for an updating and expansion of the concepts of Art Brut which is already in process with collections like Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne and the ABCD collection in Paris. The time of segregating this work in folk art museum collections without literature on how it all (religion, economics, racism) comes from the cultural resistance against slavery. Haitian work must be shown with other artists of the Americas who came from the same roots and did not remain stagnant but changed and developed the work from slavery onward.



La Sirene, 1962 by Andre Pierre

ART: THE LURE OF GAIN?

BY GERALD ALEXIS

How can we explain the flowering of Haitian art since the creation of the Centre d'art in 1944? Selden Rodman said that painting became, since 1947, a more lucrative activity than that of a planter or shopkeeper⁽¹⁾. Later, according to Salnave Philippe Auguste, a painter himself, many people in Haiti embark on an artistic career because "there is not enough work to occupy all the hands"⁽²⁾.

Considering the fact that, since the late 1940s, a developing art market had changed the lives of many people, one may wonder if Rodman was right, if in Haiti one becomes an artist just to make money?

Banksy⁽³⁾, by destroying one of his newly auctioned works, was asserting that art does not have to be paired with money. He felt that art should be done for fun and not for profit. This is very much what was happening in Haiti, before 1940. We know through old photographs that many individuals from rural communities painted on walls and ritual objects as a way of expressing their faith. They did not consider themselves to be artists and demanded nothing other than the protection of their divinities. In the elites and middle classes, artists like Edouard Goldman, Lucien Price, Germaine Cassagnol Chenet, Alice Elie, Pierre Paillere, Yvonne Sylvain, Jean Parisot, among others, hardly ever sold their works. They gave them to family and friends. In a newspaper critique of Andrée Malbranche's exhibition, held in 1943 at the Haitian American Institute, one could read: "The paintings were not sold in large numbers, but as small as the sales were, they were encouraging"⁽⁴⁾. The encouragement, however, was rarely there.

The most revealing case was that of Pétion Savain. Having gotten some international recognition by being the recipient of the IBM Medal at the 1939 New York World Fair⁽⁵⁾, he wanted to travel to improve his skills. He asked the government for a paid leave from his teaching position at a vocational school run by the Ministry of Education. The answer he got was: "The Republic does not need painters"⁽⁶⁾.

The reality is that the Republic of Haiti, priding itself on its literature, only accessible to few, failed to support the plastic arts, still a fundamental component of its culture. Support, although sporadic, came with, and following the creation of the Centre d'Art and the determination of individuals and private institutions. Just as important was the possibilities for artists to open themselves to the world finding new strength, an enhanced faith in progress, and the option to emerge from miserable clichés. The result is that, throughout the last seventy or so years, we have seen a remarkable display of creativity.

(continued on next page)

ART: THE LURE OF GAIN?

(continued from previous page)

It is especially interesting to note that this creativity persisted in difficult social, economic, political, and environmental circumstances, leading us to believe that, if money is an undeniable necessity, it is not the only motivation behind all this creativity.

Footnotes:

- 1.RODMAN, Selden, quoted by Philippe Thoby-Marcelin in *Latin American Art today*, Pan American Union, Washington D.C., 1959, p.18
- 2.PHILIPPE-AUGUSTE, Salnave, quoted by Jean-Marie Drot in *Journal de voyage chez les peintres de la fête et du vaudou en Haïti*, Skira, Genève, 1974, p. 38.
- 3.Banksy is the fictitious name of an anonymous British artist, active around the 1990's
- 4.Comment by Dewitt Peters, curator of the exhibition, in *Il y a quarante ans, s'ouvrait pour l'épanouissement de l'art haïtien*, **Le Nouvelliste**, may 3 1984.
- 5.The painting exhibited: *Market on the Hill* is now in the collection of the Art Museum of the Americas (AMA) in Washington DC.
- 6.THOBY MARCELIN, Philippe, *Panorama de L'Art Haïtien*, Imprimerie de l'Etat, Port-au-Prince, Haïti, 1956, p.26



Market on the Hill, 1938 by Petion Savain

MYRLANDE CONSTANT

BY CANDICE RUSSELL

This story was first published in City Life Magazine in Fort Lauderdale, Florida on September 6, 2000.

Myrlande Constant says nothing as she unpacks ten of her latest treasures in the upstairs gallery of Tap-Tap Haitian Restaurant in Miami Beach and lays them on the hardwood floor. Called Vodou flags or drapeaux, these exceptionally beautiful squares of cloth contain thousands of sequins and beads that picture or signify the Vodou spirits. They shimmer with an otherworldly glow in their depictions of Catholic saints, spirit governing death, sacred virgins and joyful celebrations.

Though Constant is no actress, she has a flair for the dramatic. It is no accident that the last piece she unfolds is her masterpiece, a Haitian Vodou version of the Last Supper. Measuring six feet by nine feet, it dwarfs all her other flags and portrays a nighttime banquet of gods and mortals set on a large table draped with a white-embroidered tablecloth. The diners partake of bananas, avocados, beans and rice, and various drinks under the watchful eye of God who is above the spreading branches of a large tree. Even La Sirene, the mermaid who rules the oceans and anyone concerned with it, has a seat, her red fish tail curving skyward.

Outside of Haiti and the Vodou temples in which their sacred function is put to use, Haitian Vodou flags may look purely decorative. Yet they are much more than pretty images on a non-canvas surface. In figural or symbolic line drawings known as veves, the Vodou gods are given form that worshipers recognize. This is no hands-off pantheon of spiritual beings. The Haitians have imbued them with distinctly human foibles, quirks, temperaments, and preferences, from favorite tree to favorite drink. Because the flag is the physical manifestation of the faithful trying to get in touch with their gods, or loa, flags are made as expensively as the resources of any Vodou society permit.

Their function is simple. Held by two women known as co-drapeaux, flags are tied to poles and held high on both sides of the temple entrance to honor special guests as they pass through the door. Used at the start of a ceremony to speak directly to the world of the loa, flags are thus returned to the sanctity of the shrine room, where they renew their spiritual powers.

(continued on next page)

MYRLANDE CONSTANT

(continued from previous page)

For Constant, 32, a believer who makes a living from flags, it's surprising how many foreigners appreciate and buy her handiwork without knowledge of the religion that inspired their existence. Newly arrived this afternoon from a flight from her birthplace of Port-au-Prince, the young woman in gold jewelry and a jungle print outfit talks about her life's purpose with the help of Gary Sanon-Jules, manager of Tap-Tap.

At age sixteen, Constant went to work in a wedding factory sewing dresses. Leaving after six years, she began doing floral designs on clothing. Constant made her first flag in 1990 and her first sale was to Richard Morse, manager of the Oloffson Hotel and leader of the musical group RAM. It was an auspicious beginning. Her husband Charles, who worked at the Oloffson, befriended hotel guests and sold Constant's flags to them for most of the past decade. Soon, the flags found their way into the tony galleries of Petionville, a wealthy suburb of Port-au-Prince.

For Constant, the process of flag making begins by sketching the cloth in pencil with designs based on Milo Rigaud's book of "veves" (ground drawings made on the floor of a Vodou temple with cornmeal, ash or flour). She incorporates her memories of Vodou ceremonies and knowledge of the spirits. If she can't find the appropriate color, such as blue for Erzulie Danthor, the fiery dark-skinned Virgin Mary, she won't use a substitute. Besides a needle and thread, she employs different types of needles for the beadwork and border, working carefully to cover every centimeter of the central design so that no cloth shows through.

"I don't know where I developed the inspiration," she says. "My father, Alfred Sanon, is a Vodou priest and also a Christian. My mother served the spirits but she wasn't a mambo (Vodou priestess). I have no one to thank except the spirits and God before the spirits."

The process seems to be mystical in all respects, including why her flags are so different from other makers. "They just come out," Constant says simply. "Everything I put on a flag is supposed to be there. I never went to school. Still, the spirit keeps me working. I may not have the knowledge but when I make a flag, the symbolism of it grows within me."

(continued on next page)

MYRLANDE CONSTANT

(continued from previous page)

Because she's creating sacred textiles with a ceremonial function, does Constant feel like a guardian of this unseen world? "I spoke with my father and he says an ancient spirit works with me," Constant says. "He understands more than I do. I haven't claimed any particular spirit as my own. Because my father is still alive, it keeps me from taking care of the spirits. He'll tell me how to serve Erzulie Freda. I don't feel ready to take on these rules and responsibilities. But there are times I'll go to the ogatwa (altar), drop a little water and make my demands."

To Constant, all the spirits are equal because she doesn't know which one is guiding her. She's a church going Catholic, praying and paying her respects to the saints in the company of her four children. But Vodou is her heritage. However, she no longer depicts a certain spirit on her flags -- Damballah, the ancient respected father and source of fertility symbolized by a snake or serpent. "Damballah has a lot of power," she says "He's a very good spirit but not one I work with. I had dreams about him and it really affected me, so I'm not working with Damballah anymore."

Some loa are rarely portrayed, in part because others are popular and sure sellers. For Constant, getting to all the spirits on her flags is just a matter of time. Eventually, she also wants to make Vodou bottles, which have cloth sewn with sequins and beads stretched over them.

Converting the roof of her house into a makeshift studio with plywood panels to protect against rain, Constant says she can work anytime. "I have family support. My husband takes care of the children. It's very hard work, but I don't want to leave it to someone else, though I did take on the three students to help me out," she says. As for how many flags she has made in the past ten years, Constant says, "It's too late, there are so many to count."

(continued on next page)



Exorcism, 2019 by Myrlande Constant

MYRLANDE CONSTANT

(continued from previous page)

But she does know that it took twenty-two days by herself to make a flag honoring Erzulie Freda, the Haitian Virgin Mary and goddess of love. With the three students, she can make two and a half flags in eight days. “It helps if one person begins and someone else continues,” she says, adding that she gives the act of creation plenty of respect. ‘Basically, I find it easy because it’s a labor of love and not work for me. It wouldn’t be easy to do anything else.’”

Finding materials in the poorest country in the Western hemisphere can be taxing. “It’s very hard to find sequins and beads in Haiti,” Constant says. “When I find them in the U.S., they’re more expensive, though I did get some beads in Chicago.” The flags are so costly that most Vodou temples cannot afford to own a Constant flag. But she does mention two Vodou priests who have them, even though they couldn’t afford them. “I was guided to do the work for them regardless,” Constant says.

Katherine Kean, owner of Tap-Tap and a documentary filmmaker, shows off the guest book with comments from people admiring Constant’s artwork. “People can’t believe what they see,” Kean says, “Especially Haitians who are so proud to see an expression of the spirits.”

Few women take up this art form, though sewing is a female pursuit. Constant has no explanation why. She and Marie Balan, Monique Colin, painter Betty Veillard and her former sewing assistant, Amena Simeon, are less well-known than their male counterparts. The late Antoine Oleyant, whose imaginative flags sell for \$4000 and more in the U.S. Yves Telemaque, Georges Valris and Clotaire Bazile, who maintain studios in Port-au-Prince and Miami, are the medium’s stars. But a shift is coming.

There’s no limit as to how far Constant can take the flags, in a literal sense. She’s their best ambassador, traveling to major U.S. cities, meeting with media representatives and always carrying a new round of flags for display and sale. Even the most famous male flag makers have never received a nod from Oprah Winfrey, as the modest Constant does (she’s on Winfrey’s website [www. www.oxygen.com](http://www.oxygen.com), under ‘women’s hands’).

As for her imagination, it is without bounds. Constant is known for the more painterly direction of this textile medium and her free-handed interpretation of the spirits. In a flag called ‘la Sirene’ at Tap-Tap, the sea goddess holds a bouquet in one hand while her blue comb and white hand mirror float in the black sky above her. Another flag depicting a Haitian warrior on a red horse is an homage to Haitian painter Edouard Duval-Carrie, who lives in Miami. Constant Constant decorates the border of the flag with snakes and lizards, as Duval-Carrie often does in his paintings. A third flag, showing a woman screaming in a sea of fire, is adapted from a popular Mexican religious image.

Constant is also on a mission. She’s working on a five-part series of six-feet-by-seven-feet flags, depicting the history of ceremonies which represent another quantum leap forward for Vodou flags, soon to be in the business of cultural preservation.

WOMEN ARTISTS OF HAITI

BY LEGRACE BENSON

Seeing Haitian art for the first time in 1981 was a late arrival, a generation after the famous visit of André Breton and Wifredo Lam. Their visit had been at a time when there was what E.H. Gombrich would examine as “a preference of the primitive” in his book of that title. What they recognized, especially in the works of Hector Hyppolite, was painting proceeding directly from the painter’s complex empathetic conjunction of self and world. Breton and Lam recognized the differences of delineation, of any interest in creating convincing illusions of three-dimensional settings, and attention to handling of pigments and brushes from the attitudes and rules Europeans had devised. Those two artists were leaders among those who had struggled to escape the constrictions that had once been advances but had become ruling impediments. I had been invited to see Haitian art exactly because I had been teaching about such artists as Breton and Lam, Picasso, Duchamp, and Jackson Pollock –all those who in any way had sought to ignore the ruliness of Western art and breach the borders into new territory.

As soon as I descended from the plane in Port-au-Prince, I recognized that I was in an ecosystem in which only gravity below my feet was familiar. Painting and sculpture done in this place would surely be different from that of the antique cities northward across an ocean. When I began to look at the paintings and sculptures the next day, I saw that it was, and it wasn’t.

Not long after its opening exhibition in 1944 some of the initiating artists at the Centre d’Art began to turn their attention to the works of Krèyol speaking visual artists out in the countryside with the works of Hector Hyppolite the first to be brought to the Centre. I was in 1945 that Breton saw his work, purchased several of the paintings and called attention to their aesthetic value. By 1946 the works of the Krèyol artists had become an international phenomenon and that of the Avancés –those trained in the European modes were receiving less attention. The Musée d’Art Haitien, founded in 1972 with the energetic efforts of many of the Centre d’Art members, exhibited works by the whole range of artists.

(continued on next page)



Luce Turnier, Oakland, NJ, 1957 by Selden Rodman



Fishermen, 1945 by Luce Turnier

WOMEN ARTISTS OF HAITI

(continued from previous page)

In the early spring of 1981, The works of Hector Hyppolite on scraps of wall board, housepaint left over from his day job, brushed on with chicken feathers tied to a stick, were displayed side by side with those of Avancés like Lucien Price or Roland Dorcelly. At my first time visit to the Musée the range of distinctive works from two different traditions developed in the same nation –the Krèyol traditions of the countryside and the Francophilic traditions (the “Avancés”) of the urban élites, were there to be viewed, puzzled over and, above all, enjoyed.

Among the works that day was an exhibition of a dozen graphics on paper by one of the Avancé founders of the Centre d’Art, Luce Turnier. I had walked to the Musée from St. Trinité Episcopal Cathedral with its astonishing murals by Krèyol artists, taking a long way around simply to get a sense of this city so different from any I had ever experienced in Europe or North America. Turnier’s graphics informed me about those streets and walls, the clothing for sale tacked to the walls, the vegetables and fruits displayed in woven panniers beside women seated on chairs scarcely higher than the piles of tomatoes or mangoes. In monochromes on paper no larger 22 X 31 cm. she had captured the structures, the textures and even an evocation of the sounds and aromas.

Later that day my hosts told me that Luce Turnier was one of the Haitian artists who had worked so earnestly to bring the Centre d’Art into being. On a subsequent visit to Haiti, I was finally able to arrange a conversation with Turnier in her studio. She talked about her art, and also what it was like to be an artist for whom the lines, the drawing was a high value, how it mattered how the tones and the shapes could be related, but how that was now devalored in favor of works that exactly did not display those values. When she spoke about being a woman artist in a male-dominated society. There was an edge to her voice.

That edge, only slightly softened, was in the words of another artist with whom I had a conversation several years later. Marie-José Nadal-Gardère with Gérald Bloncourt, her co-author for *La Peinture Haïtienne/Haitian Arts* [Nathan, 1986], had detailed the story of the founding of the Centre d’Art. Bloncourt, like Turnier, had been participants, and their book illustrated and described the works and lives of the wide range of Haitian artists. Unlike most books on Haitian art of that period, Nadal-Gardère had included photographs, illustrations of the works and biographies of the women who were the first artists to exhibit at the Centre: Turnier, Tamara Baussan, Andrée Naudé, Hilda Williams, Andrée Malebranche and the U.S. painter in residence at the Centre, Lois Maillou-Jones. Marie-José, then Nadal, was not yet fourteen when she first exhibited at the Centre d’Art. She would go on to study in France and Canada. Upon returning to Haiti, she opened the *Gallerie Marassa* that included the whole range of Haitian art. She encouraged the works of other women artists with the founding of such groups as “Onze femmes peintres” and “Treize femmes peintres”.

In addition to differences of gender and of aesthetic valorization active in Haitian arts were contentions that had existed from the time when Haiti had been the Saint Domingue colony. The Roman Catholic church was European in doctrine and its high authorities and congregational leaders strongly Europeanized, Francophonic in language and imagery. Prior to the founding of the Center d’Art the writings of Jean Price-Mars had urged a revalorization of the African heritage and the founding members were much influenced by this scholar.

(continued on next page)

WOMEN ARTISTS OF HAITI

(continued from previous page)

The change of mind and heart and focus Price-Mars elicited would be a factor in the acceptance of the art of the Krèyol speaking artists first in the Centre d'Art and subsequently for the murals of the Episcopal cathedral. Sadly, as Nadal-Gardère reported, not all such murals were accepted. Andrée Malebranch did a Black Madonna mural for a Catholic church in Pétionville, thus presenting the double heritage. The so-called Black Madonna had a long history in Europe, beginning with an early painting of the Virgin Mary that had become dark with age. Colour lithographs of the image were widely circulated in Haiti and had been incorporated into the African heritage religion. Malebranche's dark Virgin Mary was unacceptable to the priest in charge, and the mural was obliterated with a heavy coat of flat white. The painting was more than a picture. Like all works of art, it was a gathered life, skill and devotion of an individual person, communicating with the social milieu in which she was situated. To obliterate it was a form of radical ostracization. Nadal-Gardère knew such an act of denial of a person's work and worth could not go unmentioned in the story of Haitian art. Surviving works of Malebranche are nearly all in private collections, perhaps one day to be on view in museums or online.

Although Lois Maillou-Jones came to Haiti and the Centre d'Art from the United States, she so deeply connected with the artists and the art of Haiti that she has from early on been included in lists of Haitian artists. I was able to speak with her on two occasions, each time hearing the words and insights of a North American whose heritage conjoined with the Haitian heritage that Price-Mars had so vigorously sought to value. She spoke of how Haitian artists had opened up paths to both past and future. She was also aware of the special struggles encountered by women artists of any artistic persuasion and set about locating them, interviewing, and photographing their works. I was able to acquire copies of the collection of photo slides she made of the works of women artists in Haiti and other Caribbean countries. Old slides even of the best quality deteriorate, and the images also came under a strict copyright after the passing of Maillou-Jones so we cannot use them for this article. Fortunately, Professor Mark Taylor of Berry College is studying her works, including her collection of the works of other women. The Haitian Art Society will be following that development and looking forward to making it known.

In more recent times women artists from the range of Haitian traditions have begun to be more prominently noticed and are effective supporters of other Haitian artists. That is for another story.



Lois Mailou Jones, Self Portrait, 1940



Lois Mailou Jones in her studio

SELF PORTRAITS IN HAITIAN ART

BY MATT DUNN

The 2013 word of the year according to the Oxford Dictionaries was “Selfie”. Cell phone producers started to include front facing cameras and the age of the selfie was born. In the seminal book “On Photography”, Susan Sontag wrote “ The painter constructs, the photographer discloses” (Sontag, 92). A self portrait reveals how the artist sees themselves and how they wish to be represented. Art history has a long tradition of self-portraiture, including well known works by Albrecht Dürer, Frida Kahlo, Vincent van Gogh and Pablo Picasso. Below are self portraits from some of the Haitian artists associated with Le Centre d’Art, including Hector Hyppolite, Philome Obin, Jasmin Joseph, Wilson Bigaud, Castera Bazile and G.E. Ducasse.

(continues on next page)



Auto Portrait, 1946 by Hector Hyppolite



Self Portrait as Henri Christophe, 1958 by Castera Bazile.

SELF PORTRAITS IN HAITIAN ART

(continued from previous page)



Self Portrait with family, n.d. by Philome Obin.

From the left, Antoine's wife, his son Antoine, Philome, Telemaque, Telemaque's wife



Philome Obin dans son salon, n.d. by Philome Obin



Auto portrait by Philome Obin

SELF PORTRAITS IN HAITIAN ART

(continued from previous page)



The Poet (Self - Portrait), 1972 by Jasmin Joseph



Self Portrait in Carnival Costume, 1958 by Wilson Bigaud

SELF PORTRAITS IN HAITIAN ART

(continued from previous page)



En son studio: peinture par lui-même à Port-au-Prince, 1978 by G.E. Ducasse



Son autoportrait, 1975 by G.E. Ducasse

IN THIS SELF PORTRAIT,
G.E. DUCASSE IS
SHINING A GOLDEN
LIGHT ON HIS
HISTORICAL PORTRAIT
OF JEAN-JACQUES
DESSALINES, ONE OF
THE HEROS OF THE
HAITIAN REVOLUTION.
A PORTRAIT WITHIN A
PORTRAIT.

THIS G.E. DUCASSE SELF
PORTRAIT WAS
ILLUSTRATED IN SELDEN
RODMAN'S SEMINAL BOOK
"WHERE ART IS JOY: HAITIAN
ART, THE FIRST 40 YEARS,
(RUGGLES DE LATOUR,
1998).

2021 ANNUAL CONFERENCE OCTOBER 14TH, 15TH AND 16TH SAN DIEGO, CA

Paving the Road towards a Haitian Cultural Renaissance

Continuing with our 2019 conference theme, please join us on visits and conversation as we marvel together on the beauty that is Haitian Art.

We are pleased to announce the return of the HAS Annual Conference program. Since the 2020 Conference was put on hold last year, we are resuming this tradition with an in person visit to Southern California in mid-October.

Our guests will be staying at the Bay Club and Marina Hotel in Shelter Island in San Diego. Our schedule calls for luxury motorcoach visits to private home collections, museums and galleries in San Diego, Orange County, and Los Angeles. All lunches and most other meals, and all visits, are included in the conference fee of \$375/per person.

We encourage you to make your airline reservations early and to book your hotel rooms early at our special conference rates of \$129 per double room. Airline and hotel costs are not included in the Conference fee.

Only HAS paid members are invited to this exclusive event, so if you want to attend, please join the Haitian Art Society and register for the conference. We expect the conference to be sold out, so if you plan on attending, please reserve your spot now.

Thursday October 14th

- Cannon Art Gallery, Carlsbad, CA
Frida's Garden Exhibit
- Private Collection Visit
Vista, CA
- Catered Lunch at Residence
- KENTS Bromeliad Nursery Tour
Vista, CA
- California Center for the Arts
Escondido, CA
José Guadalupe Posada Exhibit
- Glenn Stokes Evening Art Talk

Friday October 15th

- Forest & Ocean Gallery, Laguna Beach, CA
- Lunch at Slapfish
Laguna Beach, CA
- Private Collection Visit
Corona del Mar, CA

Saturday October 16th

- Private Collection Visit
Beverly Park, CA
- Fowler Museum
UCLA
- Galerie Lakaye
Hollywood, CA
Buffet Dinner
Mark Taylor - Art Talk on the
Saint Soleil Artists



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 VEEVE contributors.

Matt Dunn - Editor-in-Chief

Larry Kent - Editor, Interviews

Ed Gessen - Editor

VEVE logo by Chawne Paige

Please send your article submissions for review and consideration to Matt Dunn at matt dunndc@gmail.com

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 membership organization 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!



Agoueh, 1980 by Myrlande Constant