



## HAITIAN ART SOCIETY

## NEWSLETTER

### LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

**BY ED GESSEN**

Welcome Fellow Haitian Art Enthusiasts! I am pleased to introduce the inaugural issue of VEVE, the newly launched newsletter of The Haitian Art Society. We plan to deliver it as a digital publication, to bring you up to date information on exciting Haitian Art subjects. You can also view these same subjects, and much more, on our newly revitalized website at <https://haitianartsociety.org>.

Our new website features high value content never before published anywhere, for the purpose of expanding interest in and the appreciation of Haitian Art. We are providing resources such as featuring the major collections around the world, both public as well as private. We also have gallery and museum listings, artist biographies, and even a "Trading Post" where members and friends can buy and sell their own personal art to fellow members. In order to build a following and additional participation, the Trading Post will be free to all (with a limit of ten listings per person) until further notice. List your art today.

Due to the present health situation, we have postponed our Annual Conference. We have held 16 previous Conferences since our founding in 2003.

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## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

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This year, we intend to host a virtual meeting and seminar in early to mid-2021. We also plan to host an “in person” Conference in San Diego in late 2021, conditions permitting. We will keep you posted!

Our Facebook page continues to provide a forum where art enthusiasts can share and converse about current Haitian Art interests, and membership has exploded on that site. However, we need everyone to join the official Haitian Art Society itself, since that is our only source of revenue to continue our work. The Society provides the following benefits to paying members:

- Inclusion on our mailing list to receive current news and events via our e-newsletter, VEVE.
- Invitation to attend our Annual Conferences
- Access to our future “Members Only” area (login required)
- Recognition as a Supporting Member

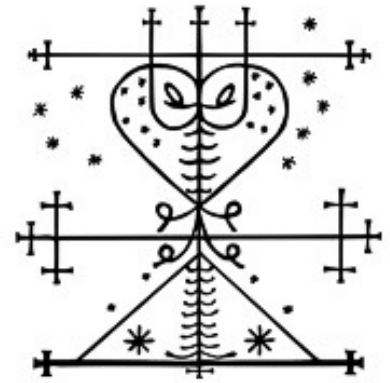
If you have not renewed and paid your dues in 2020 or 2021, you are not currently a member. Please join The Haitian Art Society by logging on to <https://haitianartsociety.org/how-to-join>

I would like to personally thank the many contributors to this first issue, especially Mr. Larry Kent and Matt Dunn for spearheading the effort to launch and publish VEVE. We also encourage you to submit articles and input to future newsletters as well as the website by contacting Matt Dunn at [mattdunndc@gmail.com](mailto:mattdunndc@gmail.com)

I hope you will enjoy VEVE and we look forward to your support of The Haitian Art Society!

Best Regards,

Ed Gessen, President



THE NEXT HAITIAN  
ART SOCIETY  
CONFERENCE WILL  
BE HELD IN SAN  
DIEGO, CA IN LATE  
2021.



La Sirene, 1955 - Rigaud Benoit

## HAITIAN MASTERWORKS AT THE FIGGE - CURATORIAL STATEMENT

**BY VANESSA SAGE AND ANDREW WALLACE**

“The power of the image! You know, the whole world is not verbal; we Haitians are a very visual group....These people are projecting into these works what they think life is all about — their concept of morality, their concept of equality, their concept of everything!”

**Edouard Duval-Carrié on Haitian art, 1995**

Haitian Masterworks celebrates the dynamic vision of Haitian artists while exploring the cultural and societal contexts that connect their work. Curated from the museum’s collection, the exhibition is organized thematically into sections on history, everyday life, spirituality, and the natural world. Ranging in medium, style and date (1945-2019), the works in the exhibition offer a stunning look at Haitian art and its evolution over the past 70 years.

Haiti’s turbulent and remarkable past features prominently in the nation’s artwork. Revolutionary figures who fought to establish an independent Haiti are portrayed as heroes, while other artists highlight the continuing struggle for self-determination amid oppressive social conditions. Images of everyday life, including market scenes and family gatherings are also popular subjects amongst Haitian artists and communicate universal themes of community and family.



Bataille de Vertieres, n.d. by Jacques Richard Chery



## HAITIAN MASTERWORKS AT THE FIGGE REVIEW

BY GERALD ALEXIS

The collection of Haitian art at the Figge Art Museum does not seem to have changed much since its 1995 Tracing the spirit traveling exhibition. However, in a very elegant presentation, the selection currently on display at the museum focuses on some remarkable pieces: paintings, metal cut outs and wooden sculptures created by mostly self-taught Haitian artists.

Some might wonder why, in the title of this exhibition the term "master" is used, implying that these self-taught artists are Masters. The truth is that, if indeed the term "master" generally applies to an individual who perfectly masters the techniques of his art to the point that he can teach it, such a definition is very limiting since it implies the practice of Western techniques. But unlike the "isms" often poorly suited to the works of Haitian artists, the title of "master" can perfectly apply to an Hyppolite, an Obin, a Benoit a Bigaud, a Liautaud, a Briere, a Joseph... because they have shown great talent and mastered a visual expression by which they achieved fame. It would be useful to add that most of them have had many followers.

The Masters whose works are featured in this exhibition have constantly sought a structuring and visual harmony in their creations. From the first pieces presented to the Centre d'art, their technical progress has been remarkable, and we have come to realize that the choice of their subjects is guided at times by a desire to tell a story, but often because of their symbolic aspect. The result is that the coexistence of the image (naturalism, the outside world) with symbolism (imagination, fantasy, inner world) has introduced complexity and diversity to their art. This is why, less and less, do we refer to these art works as being naïve or primitive.

The Figge deserves to be congratulated for having created this opportunity to reflect on this specific aspect of Haitian art. It would be great if future exhibitions could show more of its extraordinary diversity.



## INTERVIEW WITH JAMES BRETT, FOUNDER OF THE MUSEUM OF EVERYTHING

BY LARRY KENT

### Why did you start the Museum of Everything?

There wasn't another one like it. Also it is "The" Museum of Everything. The "The" is an essential component. Did one of your pop up exhibitions feature Haitian art? Yes: this was Art + Revolution in Haiti, presented by The Gallery of Everything in 2018. The gallery is a commercial platform which supports the non-profit museum with sales.

### Wasn't the show during Art Basel week?

Close, it was presented at Frieze Masters in London.

### Were there two live lectures?

Not quite. We had photographer Leah Gordon, she gave an illustrated talk; and as for me, I never stop chatting, so you can call that a lecture if you like.

### What was the response from the press and public attending show?

Overwhelming adoration and fear. The press kept trying to write about famine and earthquakes; but those in the know understood the importance of an Haitian presentation in an international art fair context.

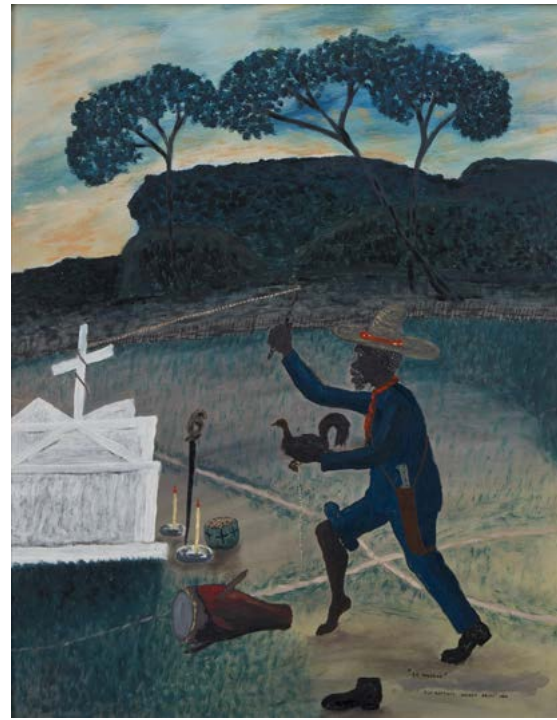
### Where do you find strongest interest in Haitian Art on the European continent?

France.

### Your fascination with Haitian art centers around first and second generation masters. What dynamic are you looking for?

What fascinates me is that initial impulse, the one which inspired the more esoteric Haitian artists, like Georges Liautaud, Hector Hyppolite and Robert St Brice. I am also fascinated by the enablement of DeWitt Peters and the subsequent conversion of André Breton and Wifredo Lam. Those last two characters were essential for the engagement of the formal (and conservative) art community.

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Cemetery, n.d. by Edger Jean-Baptiste

ART + REVOLUTION  
IN HAITI,  
PRESENTED BY THE  
GALLERY OF  
EVERYTHING IN  
2018.

## INTERVIEW WITH JAMES BRETT, FOUNDER OF THE MUSEUM OF EVERYTHING

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**Terri Geis from Pomona college wrote an article on the connection between Hyppolite and Breton. How much did it influence your idea to promote Hyppolite to museum curators?**

I reached out to Terri, her article was one of the most insightful into the Haitian story. I was able to continue her excellent investigations and shared findings with her and other museum professionals. As a result, more Haitian artists have been now embraced by the mainstream - Hyppolite in particular - and I am confident we will see them curated in very significant shows in the years to come.

**Delving deeper into the connection between Hyppolite and Andre Breton, do you believe the connection is even stronger today than it was in 1945?**

No, because both of them are dead! That said, there is much to discover. Not only was Breton obsessed with Hyppolite, he was fearful of the power of the material. He guarded it fiercely and did not allow Dubuffet to include Hyppolite in his art brut collection for fear of contamination. In Breton's view, Haiti itself embodied the essentialities of Surrealism; and there was no greater proponent than Hector Hyppolite.

**Where do you see Haitian art in ten years?**

In a better place. More respected for its importance as a cross-cultural, African diaspora, post-Surrealism, 20th century art movement.

**Who is your favorite non Haitian artist?**

Larry Kent, performance artist.

**Despite the turbulent days of the 1960's in Haiti, Haitian art reached its zenith in Europe. The Kurt Bachman collection traveled widely. There was a surge in self-taught art and naive art remained strong throughout Europe. Do you think Haitian art can return to prominence?**

No - nor do you want it to, certainly not in the same way. The so-called naïve and Haitian art movements were a "thing", but the success of these labels ended up cheapening and commercializing the high caliber artists within their perimeters. It subsequently allowed curators to look down on the radical Blackness of this original post-Africa aesthetic; and so they excluded even the finest artists. So no, no more ghettos!

**Many individuals were important to the rise of Haitian art. Who comes first to your mind?**

Larry Kent. Oh, and DeWitt Peters, for me he is absolutely the spark who lit the fire. The Marcelin family were vitally important to the story, along with other key figures from the Negritude movement, as well as intellectuals Jose Gomez Sicre and Aimé Césaire. Of course, most important were the artists themselves.

**As a promoter and collector. How would you promote Haitian art to a wider audience?**

Acquire the best quality works, then donate to museums and make them promise a minimum (or rather, a maximum) amount of visibility. Lobby small museums to do shows of specific Haitian artists, with promises of gifts if they do. Hold open houses to non-Haitian art aficionados. Or do what I do: travel the world, put on enormous shows, operate a museum and a gallery, and bankrupt your wallet and your brain!

The Museum of Everything // [www.musevery.com](http://www.musevery.com) // @musevery

The Gallery of Everything // [www.gallevery.com](http://www.gallevery.com) // @gallevery

## INTERVIEW WITH LEON SEVILLA, ART CONSERVATOR AND GALLERIST

BY LARRY KENT

**Some of us know you as an excellent art restorer. We both know Fahimie Marks. She was your introduction to Haitian art. How did you two meet? She asked you to go to Haiti to buy art for her? Later you were buying and selling Haitian art for a short period. Did you get to know any of the artists?**

I was renting a space on the 3rd floor of a brownstone building at 790 Lexington Ave. It was my second year in NY, I believe it was circa 1963. Slightly later Fahimie rented the space below mine and opened a Gallery she called Haitian Art Gallery. I was impressed by the paintings. It was the first time I saw Haitian Art. I had arrived in the US not long before after studying Art in Europe. I found Haitian Art fascinating. Fahimie could not go to Haiti because of political reasons so she offered to send me there. I did go and came back with about 30 paintings. I was helping in her Gallery part time and then she offered me a partnership which I accepted.

Then a space became available on 741 Madison Ave. through a friend of mine who was primarily an antiques dealer and his wife was running an antique shop at the same location, she owned the building and I was on the second floor doing restoration of paintings. Then Fahimie joined me and we set up a Gallery of Haitian Art, which we called Naïve Art Gallery. I was going to Haiti and purchasing paintings and Fahimie was in the Gallery when I wasn't in NY and also mostly when I was. At some point she didn't want to devote that much time to business and maybe some other reasons and we split. Then Gigi came and rented half my space and also sold Haitian Art. I rented a larger space on 17 E. 67 St. and continued with my restoration work and also handled Haitian Art, Old Master and 19th century paintings primarily. I had met most of the known artists at the time. Many of them became close friends, I visited them in their homes and sent them things such as artists materials from NY. I once sent a stereo set to Gerard Valcin.

I never stopped dealing in Haitian Art as long as I lived in NY and even later through Jose Zelaya, who sold many paintings for me while in NY and later, Haitian and European art.

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Blue Lodge, 1972 by Gerard Valcin

I HAD MET MOST  
OF THE KNOWN  
ARTISTS AT THE  
TIME. MANY OF  
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CLOSE FRIENDS...

## INTERVIEW WITH LEON SEVILLA, ART CONSERVATOR AND GALLERIST

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**Who were some of your favorite characters in the Haitian art world? Why? Any particular story stands out?**

I was very much a friend of Gerard Valcin and I even stayed in his house on occasion. I also knew Pauleus Vital, Salnave Philippe-Auguste, Andre Pierre, The Obin family and many others. Andre Normil and others worked out of Issa El-Saieh's basement and I knew them because I was buying from Issa a lot, for Fahimie and myself. At the time when I was going to Haiti, very few Americans did so, especially not art dealers. I used to order paintings primarily through Valcin and also directly from the artists, telling them when I will be in Haiti next and they will paint pictures for me to see when I arrived there. It was an interesting time and lots of fun.

**How do you feel Haitian art has changed from bygone days? How do you see the future of Haitian art?**

Haiti and Mexico have developed a unique type of Art peculiar to them. The earlier paintings were fresher most of the time and carried something original about them. Later of course there were many copies made which cheapened them and took out the freshness and originality. The artists and especially the dealers are at fault. They were only thinking of the quick profit and did not handle this art movement which was unique and had great promises, well. I am sure that there are talented and capable artists in Haiti, today and in the future but it is not the same. They will paint fine pictures, probably technically superior but they won't be the original Haitian Art created in the 40s 50s and beginning of the 60s.

**You worked with some of the most famous Haitian art collectors, such as Richard & Erna Flagg, Otis & Tommie Thompson, Jonathan Demme, Angela Gross, and Fahime Marks. Did they have anything in common collecting art?**

The most important thing I believe that they had in common was the enthusiasm about the art and not the profit that they could make selling it. They bought paintings, not names.

**During the 60's & 70's, Parke Bernet dabbled in annual Haitian sales. What effect, if any, did it help promoting Haitian art?**

What also helped a lot was the literature such as Selden Rodman's books and Andre Breton and other publications and exhibitions in the US and Europe. By the way let us not forget Kurt Bachmann, a good friend of mine, who promoted and exhibited Haitian Art most of his life. I was charged with selling his collection when he retired and moved to Costa Rica where I visited him and afterwards sold some paintings for him. What makes me feel very sad is that he died before I was able to pay him for an Andre Pierre. He needed the money then.

**What is your advice for Haitian Art collectors today?**

My advice is buy what you love and forget the profit, that may or may not come later.

**In the past couple of weeks. We lost three important individuals. (Michel Monnin, Bill Bollendorf, and Ned Hopkins) All left their mark on Haitian art and culture. During your trips to Haiti, which galleries did you work closely with? Who did you learn the most from?**

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## INTERVIEW WITH LEON SEVILLA, ART CONSERVATOR AND GALLERIST

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Generally you couldn't learn much from dealers in Haiti. They were in it for the profit and there was also a great deal of jealousy between them even though many of them were related. Also they knew what could sell (from experience) not because of merit. Of course there were exceptions. Some of them were wonderful people and good friends. For some reason I didn't rely on their knowledge when buying art. I had my own ideas and worked with that. I worked with all the galleries I could find and also with Le Centre d'Art.

**We're trying to restore camaraderie between collectors today. What was it like during the 60's & 70s at auctions, galleries and museum exhibitions.**

This is a very good idea. Haitian Art is somewhat neglected but this is not entirely the fault of the collectors. During the 60s and 70s I believe there was more enthusiasm but of course I can't judge this for sure since I am away from it for quite a while.

**How has Haitian art enriched your life?**

Haitian Art has enormously enriched my life and outlook on art in general.



Dessounin, ou remise du secret du Houngan, 1981 by Gerard Valcin

## THE ART WORLD IN HAITI NOW

BY PAUL CORBANESE, TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE  
CULTURAL FOUNDATION, DECEMBER 2020

The socioeconomic conditions in Haiti have become increasingly difficult this year and an outbreak of violence across the country has made things worse. Armed gangs terrorize the population, and crimes and kidnappings have increased. And there has been no serious response from the government to remedy the situation. Art and artists are directly affected. Several galleries have closed their doors for lack of customers both local and foreign. Tourists no longer dare set foot in Haiti. There is a Culture Ministry, but it has a paltry budget that is mainly used for carnival festivities. No meaningful support is given to artistic institutions or to artists and artisans. The consequences are tragic for the entire artistic sector. We can see the impact, for example, on the Musée d'Art Haïtien du Collège St Pierre and the artists and artisans from the Bel-Air neighborhood.

The Musée d'Art Haïtien du Collège St Pierre was built in 1972 in the historic center of the city of Port-au-Prince on the southeast outskirts of the Heroes of Independence Square. It is the expression of the dream of Dewitt Peters, an American painter, who, seduced by the extraordinary richness and quality of Haitian painting, created the Centre d'Art in 1944. He was then instrumental in the building of the museum with the help of Alfred Voegeli, Bishop of the Episcopal Church of Haiti.

The Fondation Musée d'Art Haïtien is independent and is recognized as not-for-profit for its contribution to the public good. It's generally referred to by its pseudonym Musée d'Art Haïtien and owns the art collection. It is the only museum of art in Haiti and remains one of the few institutions that preserves the Haitian paintings of the twentieth century. Its collection includes irreplaceable work from what is considered the renewal of Haitian painting in 1944-1945 to today. Its location used to be the main venue for public cultural events of the Haitian capital and the museum was a major point of attraction for tourists and art connoisseurs. For decades, it organized conferences and exhibits. For example, in 2008 it held a retrospective of famed Haitian artist Hector Hyppolite's artwork. It also played an important role in the education of the next generation in the knowledge and appreciation of its artistic heritage.

Since the 2010 earthquake, the museum had been under repair and, as of a couple of years ago, only a minimum of work needed to be completed for its full reopening. However, because of the present socio-political circumstances, there are severe security concerns that limit people movements and hinder the rehabilitation work. The situation was made more difficult because, after the earthquake, the Episcopal University of Haiti opened a location in the back of the museum. This interferes with its functioning and creates security problems for its collection. Therefore, the steering committee and its president, Mr. Louis Dubois, decided to close the museum until the situation improves.

The Bel-Air neighborhood sits not far from the National Palace. Its artists and artisans play an important role in the country's culture. They work in many fields: wood, canvas paintings, sculpture, sewing, leather goods, ceramics, vodou flags and glitter. They participate in major cultural events in the country and they represent Haiti in many activities abroad.

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## THE ART WORLD IN HAITI NOW

(continued from Page 10)

The Bel-Air neighborhood occupies a large place in Port-au-Prince's history. It is the bearer of traditions. The world-famous voodoo flags are one of the important productions from this area, many of those created by well-known artists Clotaire Bazile, Sylva Joseph, and Edgar Jean Louis.

The residents of Bel-Air are now desperate because of criminal attacks perpetrated by heavily armed gangs in their neighborhood for more than two months. Workshops were looted and burned down, and more than fifty mothers and fathers have lost their jobs. Several hundred residents have been forced to flee and are in a very precarious situation, deprived of their habitat and of their means of subsistence. Support to alleviate the suffering of the most severely affected and efforts for improvements are being organized. To escape the violence in Bel-Air, hundreds of people have found refuge in Solino in the facilities of the Spiritan Fathers. The Coordination Artistes Artisans Bel-Air (CAABEL) got in touch with the Toussaint Louverture Cultural Foundation to coordinate fundraising efforts for Bel-Air. CAABEL, located in Haiti, is a cultural group of the Bel-Air artists and artisans. The Toussaint Louverture Cultural Foundation is a US based not-for-profit organization whose main purpose is to preserve Haiti's cultural heritage. The funds raised will allow artists and artisans to reacquire destroyed materials and supplies so that they can regain their livelihood. And the Foundation continues to raise funds for the Musée d'Art Haitien through the sale of artwork from its Save A Museum Art collection.

[www.ToussaintLouvertureFoundation.org](http://www.ToussaintLouvertureFoundation.org)

All artists and artistic institutions are under severe pressure in Haiti right now, but they are not defeated. Although some adjustments often had to be made, such as a move to a more secure location, numerous activities have occurred throughout the year. Fokal (Foundation for Knowledge and Liberty) and the Centre d'Art have continued to organize classes, exhibits, conferences and book signings. Many other activities illustrate the determination to persevere: Livres en Folie occurred in June. It was a great success and hundreds of books were sold. Artisanat en Fête held its 14th edition on December 6 with the participation of numerous artisans and an enthusiastic public. The exhibit "Nway Kanpe" (Noailles is Standing Up) was held on December 19-20 in the Village of Noailles. The work of 20 cut metal artists was displayed including Serge Jolimeau's. In the present challenging situation, the art world of Haiti is still alive but is suffering a great deal. Creativity, resilience, despair, and assistance are in daily coexistence. Hard work and solidarity by artists and art lovers are paramount to maintain hope, but only a peaceful and organized society will ensure a prosperous and thriving artistic life in Haiti.





## ART MARKET BRIEF

BY MATT DUNN

A new record was realized for Haitian art on November 12, 2020. A painting by Hector Hyppolite called *La Dame en Vert*, 1947 from the estate of Jamaican collector Wallace Ransford Campbell was sold for \$100,000 against an estimate of \$70,000. This painting, *La Dame en Vert* was last sold at Sotheby's NY on November 18, 1991, lot 40.



*La Dame en Vert*, 1947 by Hector Hyppolite

The \$100,00 record breaking hammer price surpassed the last record of \$75,000 paid for Hector Hyppolite's *Portrait of Jean-Jacques Dessalines* in 2017 at Christie's New York.

The Material Culture Fine, Folk, Outsider auction on November 23, 2020 contained some outstanding Haitian art work. The top hammer prices were for work by Jasmin Joseph, Bernard Sejourne, Jacques Enguerrand Gourgue, Prefete Duffaut, Andre Pierre and Frantz Zephirin. The median hammer price for the top twenty-five Haitian lots was \$1200.



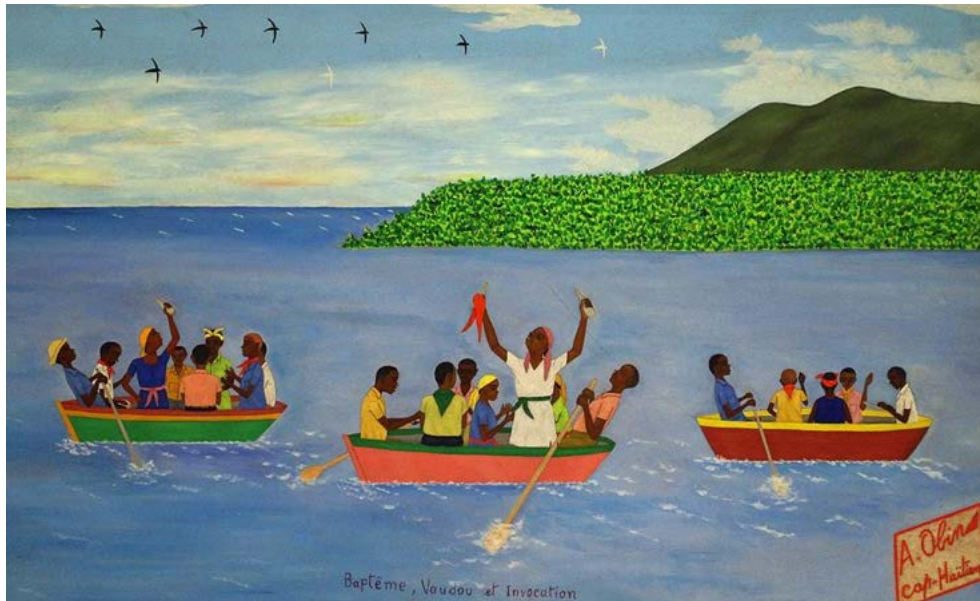
*Portrait of J.J. Dessalines*, 1946-48 by Hector Hyppolite



## ART MARKET BRIEF

(continued from Page 12)

Here are a few favorites recently sold on the auction market.



Bapteme, Vaudou et Invocation, n.d. by Antoine Obin

Bapteme, Vaudou et Invocation by Antoine Obin.

Illustrated in Selden Rodman's Where Art Is Joy: Haitian Art: The First Forty Years, 1994.

Oil on Masonite, 23.75 x 14 inches  
Hammer price: \$1400.

Vero Beach Auction  
Jan 16, 2021  
Vero Beach, FL



Le Conquistador, n.d. by Frantz Zephirin

Le Conquistador, n.d. by Frantz Zephirin

Oil on board, 24 x 24 inches  
Hammer price: \$1800.

Material Culture Auction  
Nov 23, 2020  
Philadelphia, PA