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“No Word for ‘Art’ in Kreyòl”: Haitian Contemporary Art in Transit

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by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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The dissertation that follows is an inter-disciplinary study of the ways in which a range of individuals with varying stakes and motivations have constructed a category called “Haitian Art” during a period beginning prior to World War II and extending to the present day. Haitian Art, like any cultural product ascribed to a group of people, is a taxonomic construction that subsumes a diverse and complex set of artistic and cultural practices under a limited and often questionable rubric. Over decades, international connections between Haiti and the US have consistently influenced and directed visual arts production in Haiti. Historically, tourism has played an outsized role in facilitating these cross-cultural contacts and exchanges between Haitian artists and expatriate visitors to Haiti. More recently, “traditional” forms of tourism have given way to visitors who travel to Haiti, not for purposes of leisure, but in response to the myriad crises that have afflicted the country. For this thesis, I argue that movements of people, ideas, and art objects have contributed to narratives of “Haiti” that have circulated throughout the United States vis-à-vis the production, acquisition, and exhibition of works made by Haitian

artists. While the geographic focus of this dissertation is primarily on Haiti and the United States, I argue that entangled international networks of circulation and exchange rooted in deeper historical models reveal broad, globalized iniquities and imbalances in which individuals with varying degrees of agency and input interact cross-culturally within the realm of visual arts.

The dissertation of Peter Lockwood Haffner is approved.

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This dissertation is dedicated to the hope, humor, and resilience of the Haitian people.

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Introduction

“Haitian painting challenges the magical notion of ‘authenticity’ in art. It is a community endeavour. An entire people’s discourse. The measure of its dynamism.” Édouard Glissant¹

“The particular value of the object, its exchange value, is a function of cultural and social determinants. Its absolute singularity, on the other hand, arises from the fact of being possessed by me – and this allows me, in turn, to recognize myself in the object as an absolutely singular being.” Jean Baudrillard²

Haiti occupies the western third of *Hispaniola*, an island in the archipelago that forms the northern region of the Caribbean known as the Greater Antilles. The island was so-named by its original Spanish colonizers who “discovered” it during Christopher Columbus’ first trans-Atlantic voyage, but the original Arawak-Taino inhabitants knew the island as *Kiskeya*.³ The indigenous population was nearly exterminated after being forced to work under brutal conditions in Spanish gold and silver mines and exposed to European pathogens. Spain eventually re-focused their search for mineral wealth on Mexico, ceding Santo Domingo to the French under the Treaty of Ryswick (1697). The French colonizers called the western third of Hispaniola *Saint Domingue* what would later be renamed “Haiti.” Known as the “Pearl of

¹ Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, 1989: 157. In his writings on Caribbean history and identity, Glissant proposes “creolization” as a process “expressed in moments of identifiable irrationality [...] structured in comprehensive attempts at liberation” that occurs among the diverse cultures, languages, and peoples of the Caribbean (3). For Glissant, Haitian painting was a prime example of this linguistic “schizophrenia” that challenged notions of a static universality, a monolithic search for “origins,” characteristic of attempts to define a sense of “Caribbean-ness” (155). Born in Martinique and educated in France, Glissant was a major figure within a movement of post-colonial philosophy that accounted for the de-centered qualities of Caribbean societies and cultures using a Post-Structuralist approach. For more theoretical inquiries and discursive explorations into the constructions of the “Caribbean” and notions of the “Black Atlantic, see: Benítez Rojo 1996; Gilroy 1993; Glover 2010; Mintz 1974; Palmié 2002; and Roach 1996.

² Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, 2005: 96. Baudrillard’s work on the structures of meaning in which objects circulate, especially regarding the activity of collecting, is foundational to my analysis of collections of Haitian art in the United States.

³ Here, as throughout this dissertation, I privilege contemporary Haitian Kreyòl orthography, but readers will find the alternative spelling, “Quisqueya” prevalent in other literature. For more on Kreyòl language, history of its development, and orthography, see: DeGraff 1999; Spears and Joseph 2010.

Antilles,” the colony was celebrated for the extraordinary wealth it generated for the French Empire through its most lucrative and abundant agricultural product: sugar. Sugar and other crops were cultivated under a vicious system of plantation slavery in which hundreds of thousands of enslaved Africans worked fields and tended homes of wealthy planters before a large-scale uprising sent the colony into a thirteen-year conflagration of revolutionary struggle that would lead to Haitian Independence in 1804.⁴

Haiti’s extraordinarily violent pre-independence history and the resultant stories that traveled abroad set the stage for corresponding “images” of Haiti that have circulated in North America and Europe in the intervening two centuries, despite the often flimsy and culturally subjective qualities of such reported “facts.” In contemporary print articles in the United States, some variation of the phrase “poorest country in the Western Hemisphere” typically prepares readers for language describing Haiti as inundated by hardship, its people suffering in the nadir of Third World disaster zones.⁵ Stories presented to international audiences have illustrated Haiti’s soaring poverty levels, food insecurity, environmental devastation, and unstable national politics in which autocratic “strong men” direct policy. In 2010, the devastating effects of a massive earthquake revealed the depths of Haiti’s problems and threw the country, yet again, into a state of catastrophe. While rooted in factual reportage, narratives of Haiti’s hardship tend to feed into debasing stereotypes about Haiti and Haitians that have circulated abroad. Such a tableau of endless, and often senseless, struggle yields a portrait of Haiti as “exceptional,” replete with severe descriptions of the country’s problems. There also remains a sense of historical inevitability that Haiti has been doomed from the nation’s outset - a view that was crystallized by

⁴ By the time the Atlantic slave trade ceased in the 1800s, the total number of humans imported to St. Domingue reached over 900,000; Girard 2016: 12.

⁵ Such framing is part of what Lindsey Twa (2014) calls Haiti’s “image problem” abroad.

Rev. Pat Robertson's post-earthquake assertion that Haiti's history of hardships was due to the "pact with the devil" that the Haitian people made to free themselves of French rule (James 2010).

Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1990a) warns against the deleterious effects wrought by proclamations of Haiti's "exceptional" qualities, both negative and positive. Those who declare Haiti as a place "unlike any other" resort to harmfully complacent narratives, according to Trouillot, masking dominant ideological and political discourses underneath such facile assertions, even in cases where Haiti's exceptional qualities are positively framed. For Trouillot, the ultimate result of Haitian exceptionalism is a resigned notion on the part of writers that "Haiti is so special that modes of investigation applicable to other societies are not relevant here" (*ibid*: 6). In other words, scholars have passed over interrogations into the structures, operations, and consequences of oppressive discourses, such as globalized capitalism and neo-liberal economics, for the sake of underscoring Haiti's perceived unique characteristics. As I will demonstrate, we can extend Trouillot's critiques to histories of the visual arts in Haiti and the ways that Haitian art and artists have been presented to audiences abroad.

When one wishes to explore Haiti through its visual arts and related material culture, the results often present a starkly different picture of life in Haiti at first glance: verdant landscapes and busy market scenes, depictions of idyllic rural life in Haiti's mountains, illustrations of Vodou ceremonies, and quaintly rendered genre paintings of the country's bustling street culture. Such images proliferate in tourist markets throughout the Caribbean region and correspond to a generalized notion of "Caribbean-ness" portrayed as tropical and exotic. Krista A. Thompson identifies a process of "tropicalization" in which leaders in Anglophone Caribbean countries have circulated and promoted a pastoral and picturesque version of "the Caribbean" for

consumption in markets abroad (2006: 5). Paradisiacal portrayals made by Haitian artists have served a similar function in fulfilling narratives of the Caribbean that typically, and ironically, exclude Haiti.

Haitian Art, like any cultural product ascribed to a nation, is a categorical construction that subsumes a diverse and complex set of artistic and cultural practices under a limited rubric.⁶ The category of “Haitian Art” is of recent vintage, arising in the early 1940s in coincidence with an explosive period of creative output from Haitian artists referred to as the “Haitian Renaissance.” In this mid-century period, Haiti was marketed within a larger constellation of Caribbean tourist destinations presented to North American consumers in travel advertisements and cruise packages after World War II. International visitors provided demand for work produced by artists affiliated with *Le Centre d’art* (Art Center), an arts organization in Port-au-Prince that opened in 1944 under the direction of US artist, DeWitt Peters who in reflection remarked, “as far as the eye could see, there was no art in Haiti.”⁷ He spearheaded the foundation of a multi-functional organization through which Haiti’s visual artists could gather, learn from each other, and ultimately display and sell their work.

The predominant literature on Haitian Art presents the opening of the Centre d’Art as the beginning of the Haitian Renaissance. Marked by a creative explosion, auto-didacts hailing from Haiti’s popular majority rose to prominence in this period. Framed as a “discovery” of hidden artistic talent, the Haitian Renaissance was fueled by international visitors to the Centre d’Art who showed great interest in the work of artists they viewed and classified as “primitive”

⁶ Benedict Anderson (2006) underscores the constructed nature of nations as “imagined communities” in great historical detail.

⁷ Peters 35. As a teacher as well as an artist himself, Peters’ lament was over Haiti’s lack of institutional arts infrastructure, although later critics have interpreted his hyperbolic phrasing as a declaration of an absolute non-existence of art in Haiti. See: Castañeda 2014; Lerebours 1989; Stebich 1978; Thoby-Marcellin 1959.

(Rodman 1988). These visitors - artists, journalists, intellectuals, and leisurely tourists alike - expressed their appreciation through praise and pocketbooks, often becoming avid collectors whose concerted efforts helped bring the work of Haitian artists to international audiences. In turn, creation of a thriving visual arts industry allowed many Haitians associated with the Centre to gain a comfortable living for the first time, and enticed many others to create work themselves.

Art-historical discussions of tourism's effect on Haitian art often gloss over or dismiss works by certain artists, Haitian or otherwise, for their "inauthentic" qualities. In this latter view, art made to appeal to the tastes of visiting tourists (as opposed to art deemed as "authentic" and not produced to satisfy perceived whims of the market), and the commercialism inherent in its production, distribution, and exchange, has been de-valued, both culturally and economically.⁸ To dismiss tourism as either a negative influence that "cheapens" Haitian art, or as ancillary to an object-focused discussion of the work of Haitian artists, is to deny tourism's role as a vital component in the circulation of Haitian Art internationally. Indeed, expatriate (and sometimes local) notions of the "authenticity" of certain Haitian art forms, and the lack of this quality ascribed to other works from Haiti, are central to establishing a dynamic sense of what "Haitian Art" is, and whose purposes it may serve.

The following study fills a gap in the literature by accounting for the movement of people, art objects, and culturally constructed notions of "Haiti" in the United States. My interdisciplinary approach uses Tourism Studies as an entry point.⁹ The fact that Haiti was once a

⁸ For challenges and interrogations of such axiomatic positions, see: Glissant 1989; Graburn 1976; Jules-Rosette 1984; and Steiner 1999.

⁹ I rely on the insights of the following authors to support my own findings on tourism: Erik Cohen (1979); A.B. Goldberg; Dean MacCannell (1989); Karen Richman (2008); Krista Thompson (2006); Mimi Sheller (2014); and Valene Smith and Maryann Brent (2001).

popular destination on the itineraries of many international travelers may come as a surprise to those of us conditioned to see Haiti usually portrayed through the twin tropes of disaster and crisis. While Haiti's version of beachfront Caribbean paradise peaked during a few brief periods, international travelers have continued to visit Haiti for other reasons up to the present day. Aid workers, volunteers, contractors, artists, journalists, and missionaries compose a network of humanitarian beneficence that engages in interpersonal, cross-cultural interactions, including the buying and selling of work by Haitian artists. Although not "tourists" in the classic sense, these international visitors nevertheless interact with Haitians and their culture in ways that researchers of tourism will find familiar.

Tourism is often motivated by a search for cultural "authenticity" within an unfamiliar geography – a means of locating a "self" through an exploration of "others," whether achieved by assisting construction projects in the Haitian countryside or, as in an earlier period, through witnessing "voodoo shows" performed at one of Port-au-Prince's many hotels and resorts. While in recent times, the ostensible reasons for travel have merged with a sense of greater purpose, the motivation to "find oneself" remains embedded within this new dynamic. Indeed, this discursive quest for an authentic "original" on the part of travelers frames many facets of this dissertation and extends to the acts of collecting,¹⁰ interpreting,¹¹ and displaying¹² works by Haitian artists. The quest for authenticity in the realm of the "other" has been a key feature of Western discourse, the roots of which I explore in the following chapters. Perhaps most prominent to this discussion is how anthropologists have acted to relegate the "other" into what Trouillot terms the

¹⁰ See: Baudrillard 2005; Stewart 1993.

¹¹ See: Fermor 1950; Rodman 1948, 1974, 1988.

¹² See: Price 1991; M. Roberts 2008; Vogel 1988.

“Savage slot,” a discursive space in which “the Savage can be noble, wise, barbaric, victim or aggressor, depending on the debate and on the aims of the interlocutors” (2003: 23). In constructing itself, “the West” projects its fears and desires onto that which it claims is its diametric opposite.¹³ As the following exploration of Haitian art in US collections will show, visitors have often located “themselves” in their collections of the work of Haiti’s artists, much in the way that Baudrillard asserts in the above epigraph.

What follows is an inter-disciplinary study of Haitian art and “Haitian Art.”¹⁴ I shall discuss the production, circulation, and exhibition of works by Haitian artists by utilizing approaches found in History, Art History, Ethnography, Museum Studies, and the nascent field of Tourism Studies. The pages below are the culmination of ethnographic and archival research conducted as a graduate student between 2011 and 2016. My connections to Haiti, however, are both personal and familial and extend back farther in time. I first visited Haiti in 1995 as an eleven-year-old boy with my mother and step-father, two Episcopal priests who have been committed to working with Haiti and its people for over a span of forty years. As an undergraduate in art history at Bard College, I wrote my senior thesis on contemporary histories of Haitian art, which led me to the publication for the exhibition, *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* (Cosentino et al 1995) at the Fowler Museum at UCLA. I found that, by accounting for the religious, socio-economic, historical, and political complexities informing the work of Haitian artists and avoiding the overly sentimental language of a prior generation of critics, writers of

¹³ Other critics have located this discursive operation in other areas, namely Said’s (1994) exegesis on orientalism.

¹⁴ I will refer to the constructed category of “Haitian Art” in capitals. “Haitian art” – no capital “a” - refers to work made by Haitian artists, rather than a catch-all term. Additionally, throughout this dissertation I use the words “Western” or the “West” with the same critical detachment as others who have illuminated the problematic nature of these terms’ deployment. When the reader encounters the words “Western” and “West” in quotations, this is meant to bring attention to their constructed nature. As Trouillot (2003) asserts, “‘the West’ is always a fiction, an exercise in global legitimation;” 1.

that volume's essays, especially those of the exhibition's curator, Donald J. Cosentino, struck a stark contrast to earlier studies of Haitian art. Because of my encounters with the scholarship in *Sacred Arts* and my familiarity with Cosentino's work with Haitian artists, I decided to pursue a doctoral degree focusing on Haitian art at UCLA, and even more so after watching news images of the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake and hearing stories from Haitian friends who experienced the horror firsthand. I soon realized, however, like so many others from abroad who have wanted to "help" Haiti, that unexamined beneficence comes with its own fraught histories of physical and discursive violence that stem from a variety of historical, cross-cultural interactions between Haitians and US Americans like me.

Thesis Statement

Collection and exhibition histories of Haitian art in US museums provide ample evidence that demonstrates the extent of tourism's role in the circulation of Haitian art abroad. As especially illustrative examples, two of the largest public collections of Haitian art in the US are found in the state of Iowa, not in one of the large coastal cities that most Haitian-Americans call home. Why is there so much Haitian art in Iowa? What can acquisition histories tell us about the nature of tourism in Haiti and how the work of Haitian artists has appealed to US collectors? How have networks of circulation and exchange shifted in response to, or because of, Haiti's contemporary era of crisis? What are museums' roles in constructing an image of Haitian culture through the exhibition and display of visual art? To answer these questions, this project examines how tourism and other factors have facilitated cross-cultural contacts and exchanges between Haitian artists and visiting US Americans, and established international connections between Haiti and

the US that, despite the nearly unrecognizable face of tourism in Haiti today, continue to influence and direct visual arts production in Haiti.

This project takes a similar position to the one illustrated in our epigraph from Édouard Glissant concerning tourism's influence on Haitian art production (1989: 147). Glissant addresses a phenomenon in the Haitian-art market through which the work of countless apprentices, understudies, and imitators have created highly schematic works derived from the styles and techniques of the so-called "Haitian Masters." These examples of "tourist art" highlight a cross-cultural disjuncture that stems from prevailing discourses of authenticity in Western cultures. The title of this dissertation speaks directly to this rupture. In Haitian Kreyòl, there exists no word for "art" – no linguistic equivalent that encapsulates that vaunted, precious, and contested term in English, which delineates an upper echelon of cultural value. Kreyòl has words that refer to artistic occupations (*atis*-artist; *pent*-painter; *atizan*-artisan) and actions (*pent*-to paint; *fè desen*-to draw), but none that distinguishes between a work of "art" and another category that describes objects of lesser value (e.g. "craft," or "artifact"). This linguistic reality is evidence of an epistemological one: that Haitian artists do not necessarily operate under the same discourses and regimes of value as those held by their patrons in the West. Susan Vogel makes this same assertion about African arts in her introduction to the catalogue for the landmark exhibition, *Art/artifact* in which she states: "African cultures do not isolate the category of objects we call art, but they do associate an aesthetic experience with objects having certain qualities. The aesthetic experience is universal – with or without a word that describes it" (1988: 17). Similarly, works of Haitian art are subject to the systems and structures in which they circulate and have diverse and culturally informed resonances and meanings dependent on the context in which audiences encounter them.

In this dissertation, I examine the routes through which Haitian art has circulated between Haiti and the US since the late 1930s. I take a humanistic approach by drawing from case studies that focus on specific people in equal measure to art objects themselves. Like all art, works made by Haitian artists neither exist in isolation, nor have they emerged from a cultural vacuum as DeWitt Peters once misleadingly claimed. Rather, a category called “Haitian Art” has been constructed through a collection of individual efforts that has steered the ways in which US audiences have engaged with Haitian visual culture. This project underscores the work of artists, poets, journalists, curators, gallerists, researchers, academics, collectors, and intermediaries from within Haiti and without, many of whose fluid roles defy easy categorization. I base many of the claims made here on data collected from unstructured, first-person interviews conducted over the course of my research. For those individuals with whom I was unable to speak - either for reasons of inaccessibility or departure to the next life - I have relied on an array of archival materials as a means to analyze their relationships to Haitian Art.

In discussing the human contributions to Haitian Art, we cannot ignore the specific paintings, sculptures, Vodou banners (known as *drapo*), and other works that have garnered intense admiration and interest from a relatively small coterie of individuals and institutions. I discuss specific works of art that have made the voyage from an artist’s studio in Haiti to collections in the US, less to engage in a strict visual analysis than to illustrate how certain works have come to represent Haitian Art for US audiences. As such, many of the works discussed in this project have appeared in multiple exhibitions and their accompanying publications, catalogues, and printed ephemera. I have included examples of paintings and sculptures by artists such as Myrlande Constant, André Eugène, Hector Hyppolite, Jasmin Joseph, Philomé Obin, André Pierre, and other major “names” whose work likely will be known to those familiar with

Haitian Art. I also discuss artists whose names are less well known outside their own circles, and whose work has been exhibited with less frequency, such as Luckner Lazard, André Normil, and Charles Obas, to show the ways in which artists have adapted, or not, in the face of Haiti's myriad crises.

Chapter Outline

Chapter one discusses mid-twentieth century Haiti in the early/post-war Good Neighbor period and the circumstances that led to the opening of the Centre d'Art in 1944 and the establishment of the international market for Haitian Art.¹⁵ I use Philomé Obin's painting *Battle Between the Cacos and the American Marines* (1949) as an entry point into an examination of the cross-cultural relationships between Haitian artists and visiting US Americans made possible by the tourism industry established in the wake of the US Marine occupation (1915-34). In order to analyze how Haitian Art was presented to audiences abroad, I look at the writing of several authors whose observations, interpretations, and encounters with the work of Haitian artists established some of the earliest and most influential narratives on the subject. Travel writing, examined in conjunction with examples of more conventional art historical literature, provides a perspective that illustrates how international visitors interacted with and contributed to Haitian art and culture in this period. Throughout this chapter, I discuss the conflicts and negotiations that occurred between various stakeholders in the so-called "Haitian Renaissance" period (roughly 1944-60), including artists, authors, collectors, curators, gallerists, and state officials, in

¹⁵ Sections of the first chapter were taken from my M.A. thesis, *Inventing Haitian Art: How Visitors Shaped Cultural Production from Occupation to Renaissance* I would like to note that several sections of this dissertation have been published elsewhere and edited for the specific arguments and claims I make in these pages. I indicate such instances in footnotes.

order to demonstrate the contested agendas and viewpoints through which the category, “Haitian Art,” was constructed and defined.

In chapter two, I demonstrate the extent of tourism’s role in the production of Haitian Art during the period of the Duvalier presidencies. The radical decline of tourists during the political violence of Francois “Papa Doc” Duvalier’s administration (1957-1971) had a deleterious effect on the local art market, as illustrated by the examples of Haitian artists and art dealers forced to adapt to the challenging and treacherous circumstances of life under an oppressive government. Tourism rebounded significantly during the presidency of Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier (1971-86). I argue that this “Second Golden Age” of tourism provided the conditions necessary for the activities of international “collector-tourists” that gave rise to prominent museum exhibitions and the establishment of permanent collections of Haitian Art throughout the US. I also illustrate how consumer demand led to material transformations in Haitian art, including the transition of beaded flags from their ritual purposes within Vodou ceremonies to their status as art commodities eagerly acquired by international collectors in the US.

The third chapter examines the dramatic shifts that occurred in Haiti’s contemporary period of sustained crisis beginning with the HIV/AIDS pandemic and continuing to the present day. As the result of a decimated tourism industry and the increasingly precarious circumstances of daily life, the market for Haitian art underwent significant transformations. Haitian artists and US collectors alike began engaging with and responding to Haiti’s contemporary narratives of catastrophe and disaster. A new generation of artists began to explore themes of crisis and hardship while museum curators addressed Haiti’s worsening situation through comprehensive exhibitions presenting Haitian Art to US audiences within a larger context of the country’s religious and material culture. I discuss the major exhibition, *Sacred Arts of Vodou* (1995) at

UCLA's Fowler Museum as a key example of a broader curatorial shift. Also in this period of crisis, a new group of international visitors began to emerge who engaged with and participated in the production and circulation of visual arts in Haiti. The presence of "humanitarian tourists" working for a wide variety of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Haiti reached new heights after the devastation of the 2010 earthquake. The chapter concludes by looking at the "Ghetto Biennial" first held in Port-au-Prince in 2009 as a crystallization of issues surrounding the circulation of Haitian culture within a contemporary globalized context.

As a conclusion, I consider the future of Haitian Art as it relates to interactions between Haitians and US Americans more broadly. The 2010 earthquake brought Haiti's devastation to new depths, yet hope thrives as Haitians continue to confront cycles of cataclysm and hardship, drawing from historical narratives of resilience to assert independence and agency in the most trying of present circumstances. For their part, US Americans continue to express interest in and dedication to both Haiti as a physical place where people live and work, and "Haiti," as an idea formed from ingrained cultural discourses through which visitors often construct a vision of themselves. In addition, I will discuss those pragmatic developments in the arts, as well as recent curatorial forays into Haitian Art that indicate where these cross-cultural interactions and communications might lead.

CHAPTER 1

Narratives of Discovery: The Haitian Renaissance and the First Golden Age of Tourism

Picture this painting by Philomé Obin: along a narrow, dusty road running through a dense forest, with a distant mountaintop fortress peeking through an opening in the trees, we are faced with a painted depiction of a pitched gun battle [fig.1]. Two armed groups of men fire on each other, surrounded by the bodies of their newly dead and wounded comrades. We can distinguish two contingents – on one side a well-ordered line of soldiers, prone on the road, fires volleys at their enemies, maintaining a firm position. Their khaki uniforms are composed of fatigues, knee-high gaiters, and drab, wide-brimmed hats. Most have their backs to us, remaining faceless as their rifles burst toward the line of their enemy. The few soldiers whose faces we can discern – the splayed and injured or those retreating behind the line – have light skin and barely distinguishable features. They are United States Marines, wearing standard-issue uniforms of the early twentieth century. The formation of their adversaries strikes a stark contrast: standing further down the road and facing us as viewers, their commander raises his cutlass amid a pile of bloody bodies. His troops are scattered around various positions along the road. Some return fire just behind their exposed leader, using the tall tree abutting the road as cover. Others emerge from behind the ivy-covered walls lining the road, firing down upon the line of Marines. A few of these men are wearing military regalia of an ornate, yet piecemeal variety, and most are barefoot. Their skin color is considerably darker than that of the opposing Marines, but of differing shades of brown that, along with their varied battle attire, accent each soldier's individuality. These are *cacos*, a Haitian guerilla faction armed against the U.S. military forces who, in the chronology of the painting, had recently invaded and occupied their country. The year of this scene is probably 1917 or '18 and the confrontation takes place in northern Haiti.

Philomé Obin painted the scene in question, *Battle Between the Cacos and the American Marines* (1949), almost four decades after the *Caco* forces were slaughtered by the Marines. The scene does not depict a specific skirmish in history but instead offers an apocryphal take on events that happened when the artist was a young man. Obin was born in northern Haiti in 1892 and witnessed the *Cacos* and their leader, Charlemagne Peralte, make their way through northern cities. He was likely also present as Marines gave pursuit, eventually crushing the uprising. The Marines left Haiti in 1934, fifteen years before Obin composed this picture. By the late 1940s, Obin was involved with the newly opened Centre d'Art, and was beginning to enjoy international recognition for his paintings among audiences in the US and Europe. He was a central figure in this "Haitian Renaissance," which marked the emergence of a market for the work of Haitian artists.

Obin's work became emblematic of "Haitian art," a category that arose thanks to an international interest in new developments in Haitian visual culture, as propelled by a coterie of foreign visitors. *Battle*, despite its martial and confrontational subject matter (especially in contrast to other works in Obin's oeuvre) presents a vivid example of the complexities, contradictions, and challenges present in the history of Haitian visual arts. Obin executed three versions of this painting in the late 1940s and early 1950s, indicating its popularity among collectors. The one discussed above is in the permanent collections of the Figge Art Museum in Davenport, Iowa, and all others are in public and private collections in the United States. A confluence of inter-cultural factors in the mid-twentieth century accounts for the circulation of Haitian art in the US. Post-World War II tourism, post-Occupation intellectual developments, Haitian cultural politics, and the fascination with representations of "Black" cultures in the US and Europe, all factor into Haitian art's mid-century rise.

Examining the physical and discursive routes traveled by works like *Battle*, from an artist's studio or workshop to a far-away institution in the United States like the Figge Museum, entails a shift in understanding how movements of people and objects within increasingly globalized cultural circuits have influenced and sustained a widely accepted notion of "Haitian Art." Igor Kopytoff (1986) provides an apt interpretive lens for this discussion by describing how commodities, including art objects, have biographies, or different "lives" as determined by geographic and cultural contexts. As objects move between and among epistemologies and spheres of value, the varied cultural responses "reveal a tangled mass of aesthetic, historical, and even political judgments, and of convictions and values that shape our attitudes to objects labeled 'art'" (*ibid*: 67). Taking Kopytoff's thesis further, Mary Nooter Roberts specifically addresses how Western museums ascribe value to objects in these circuits of movement and exchange: "The ways in which artworks are collected, catalogued, conserved, and displayed express a culture's ideas of the ontology of objects, and of selves" and that "display of foreign objects always ultimately reflects the exhibitors as much as or more than the producers" (1994: 37). An object's presence in a museum collection, however, does not signify the end of its "life." In order to account for the ever-changing lives of objects, curators and exhibition organizers must consider the entanglements within the various stages of an object's life. By focusing on the modes of engagement through which individuals involve themselves in the production, circulation, and reception of Haitian art, we can gain a better cross-cultural understanding of its consumers and producers.

The opening of *Le Centre d'art* (Art Center) in Port-au-Prince in 1944 marked the establishment of an important nexus through which Haitian art circulated. It was also a singular moment in the development of contemporary Haitian art, and sparked the beginning of what

became known as the “Haitian Renaissance.” The aptness of a term like “renaissance” remains a point of contention for some observers because it suggests a rebirth of the visual arts in Haiti when there were several, if scattered and piecemeal, instances of active Haitian artists at the time. Nevertheless, the center filled an institutional void in Haiti where arts organizations were largely absent. The center served as artists’ studios, exhibition spaces, and gallery. Artists from all social strata mingled and learned from each other while taking classes taught by the US American founding member and director, DeWitt Peters, and other visiting artists. It also acted as a gallery where clientele, often foreign tourists, could purchase works by affiliated artists. The institution was founded by a group of Haitian intellectuals, including artists and writers, and DeWitt Peters was a primary motivating force in realizing the project.

Peters receives the bulk of the credit in the Centre d’Art’s establishment, but it was a collaborative effort that included Haitian cognoscenti active in a nascent cultural movement organized around articulating a Haitian national and cultural discourse in the wake of the U.S. occupation from the earlier part of the century (Lerebours 1989: 220). Many individuals contributed to the Centre d’Art’s early success, and their participation deserves consideration along with that of Peters. This group included local artists who joined the center; visiting critics, scholars, and curators who shaped the reception of Haitian art domestically and abroad; international artists who taught classes and served in other mentorship roles; government officials who saw the benefits of an emerging visual-art scene; and foreign visitors whose purchases helped sustain the Centre d’Art and its artists. Everyone in these groups participated in the entangled network within which Haitian art circulated.

The Centre d’Art’s most important contribution to histories of Haitian visual culture may have been the establishment of an art market in Haiti, that specialized in promoting and

circulating a particular vision of what constituted “Haitian” art. Such a designation implies a homogeneous national expression in which certain works of art were deemed to fit within its parameters while others were excluded. As a blanket term, “Haitian Art” is an inadequate descriptor for a variety of political, social, and cultural reasons. For international collectors, the category signified certain characteristics: brightly painted colors, themes related to Vodou and other religious traditions, and techniques that invited the use of other problematic and pejorative terms, such as “untrained,” “spontaneous,” “naïve,” “popular,” and “primitive.” Not only were foreign collectors drawn to this particular style of art, their roles as consumers in the marketplace helped codify what constituted “Haitian Art.”

Another important contributor to the development of Haitian art, especially regarding its reception in the US and elsewhere, was Selden Rodman, a US writer, art dealer and critic who briefly served as co-director of the Centre d’ Art in 1947. Rodman became a ceaseless advocate for a particular type of "self-taught" or "folk" art, both in Haiti and elsewhere, until his death in 2002.¹⁶ His *New York Times* obituary described him as "a polymathic poet, an iconoclastic critic of modern culture, the author of more than 40 books and a tireless promoter of Haitian and other folk art" (Martin 2002). His work as an art dealer and author of three major books on Haitian Art contributed enormously to the establishment of the market and informed the ways in which many collectors and audiences understood the creative explosion in Haiti. Rodman is among those who credit Peters primarily (while also foregrounding his own role) in the "discovery" of Haitian artists, particularly Philomé Obin and Hector Hyppolite. The latter received foremost recognition as a painter who, as Rodman states, started “a revolution of the plastic arts in Haiti, which virtually didn’t exist until he appeared on the scene in 1945” (Rodman 1988: 47). These words,

¹⁶ In addition to his books on Haiti, Rodman also published on the folk art of Mexico, Brazil and the Southern United States, including the first major work on Horace Pippin (1947).

written almost forty years after Hyppolite's death, indicate how the discovery narrative endured, as well as Rodman's role in its persistence. Other figures from outside Haiti also helped shape narratives that praised the role of Peters in “discovering” and organizing self-taught artists who came to be labeled as the “naïves” or “primitives.”

By focusing on the contributions of select figures and downplaying economic, social, and cultural factors, writers like Rodman have framed the Haitian Renaissance in terms of individual accomplishment and discovery. The Centre d'Art largely owes its existence to the persistent efforts of Peters but other factors in Haiti deserve consideration and recognition in any discussion of the period, especially if we are to account for the lives and movements of particular works of art. The intermix of favorable economic conditions and prevailing Western discourses on "Other" cultures prevalent at this time play a role in the establishment of “Haitian Art” as a defining category that sets the stage for the efforts of a handful of people. Additionally, diplomatic and cultural relations between people in Haiti and the US facilitated the Haitian Renaissance. When taken together, the actions of key individuals and broader social, political, and economic conditions created an “entangled” atmosphere that highlights imbalanced globalized power dynamics through which participants shaped narratives that have presented Haitian Art.¹⁷

The contributions of "polymathic" characters like Peters, Rodman, and others, show the extent to which a small group of individuals shaped the ways in which Haitian Art circulated on an international scale. I will discuss the contributions of these individuals, as well those of a selection of artists, art dealers, collectors, curators, and various other intermediaries. This chapter

¹⁷ See: Thomas 1991, for a discussion of the “entanglements” that go into cross-cultural interactions and exchanges. If, as Thomas suggests, we focus on social processes of exchange both in a local context of production and within larger networks of consumption, we can approach cultural objects not as singular and inalienable, but as entangled objects within the dynamics of negotiation and transformation that occur between people of different cultures.

examines the ways in which these individuals established narratives surrounding the visual arts in Haiti and, in turn, the ways in which ideas about the country and the cultural expression of its people coalesced.

Post-Occupation Atmosphere in Haiti

The first US military occupation of Haiti (1915-1934) ended almost ten years before the Centre d'Art opened but it still had a profound impact on many Haitians. The experiences of foreign subjugation provided subject matter for Haiti's artists, galvanized the country's intelligentsia, contributed to Haitian nationalism, exposed US Americans to a country in their “backyard” of which most had very little awareness of, introduced Haitians to imperialist US foreign policy, and set the stage for the development of a tourist industry that brought Americans to Haiti well after the occupation ended. The occupation itself was the beginning of a new relationship between the two countries that, despite their huge contrasts in geography, culture, history, military power, and language, remains closely intertwined.¹⁸

After its founding in 1804, Haiti was largely isolated from the international stage in its first century of existence. With growing US influence in the Western Hemisphere, the country became the focus of US military ambitions. According to the architects and organizers of the US Marine invasion and occupation, Haiti was exceptionally “backwards” – a population of ignorant peasants ruled by an unstable and venal government (Plummer 1992). US hegemony in the Western Hemisphere depended on stable, cooperative regional governments that aligned with US interests. With the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914, US officials felt compelled to act

¹⁸ For more on the political and military histories of the US invasion, see: Healey 1976; and Schmidt 1971. For a discussion of the relationships and power imbalances between the Marines and the Haitian population, see: Renda 2001.

forcefully on Haiti's seemingly constant political instability.¹⁹ Additionally, the US sought to minimize the influence of other European powers in the Caribbean. Like many of its Caribbean neighbors, Haiti was in debt to European powers and subject to foreign creditors – a growing concern for the US in the lead-up to the First World War.²⁰ Military and political intervention, therefore, was sold to the American public as an action on behalf of the hapless Haitians and in the greater global interests of the US (Renda 2001: 10-14).

Expanding US economic and business ventures in the region also greatly influenced the decision to invade Haiti. After the Marines established military control, US administrators took over the Haitian national bank, censored the press, and installed acquiescent politicians in national offices (Plummer 1992). For Haitians at the time, the invasion and its accompanying indignities were severe blows to a nationalist pride that extended from the country's revolutionary struggles. The period of the Haitian Revolution began with uprisings in 1791 by the enslaved African population forced to work on the plantations of *St. Domingue*, Haiti's name during its French colonization. After thirteen years of violence enacted within a byzantine series of shifting alliances and competing interests, Haiti achieved its independence in 1804. Haitians have taken great pride in this history of self-determination gained from victories over dominant European powers.²¹ The indignities of US occupation were augmented in this historical context.

¹⁹ Such punitive, imperialistic acts were highly characteristic of US "Gunboat Diplomacy" in the early twentieth century. In addition to Haiti, the US occupied Cuba in 1898, Panama in 1903, Nicaragua in 1909, and the Dominican Republic in 1916; Schmidt 1971: 5.

²⁰ Schmidt 1971: 43. Haiti's debt to France resulted from the indemnity forcefully imposed in the years after independence. Under threat of invasion and in exchange for recognition as a legitimate state, Haiti was obliged to compensate for French claims lost during the Haitian Revolution, including enslaved human beings. For more on early Haitian foreign relations and the effects of the indemnity, see: Dubois 2012, Plummer 1988.

²¹ For more on the Haitian Revolution and its vast complexities, see: Dubois 2004; Ferrer 2014; Girard 2016; and C.L.R. James 1989.

As an added insult, the US administrators in Haiti re-instituted the *corvée* system of unpaid labor, effectively re-establishing a form of slavery in the country.²² For many Haitians, this situation proved intolerable.

As the US occupation wore on into the 1920s, Haitian intellectuals turned self-reflexive in their assessment of their circumstances. Studying, celebrating, and recording Haiti's "folk culture" and other "indigenous" expressions were key to the efforts of upper-class intellectuals to restore national dignity. Before occupation, folk culture that was deemed too "African" was cause for embarrassment for the Eurocentric elite minority. This group saw Haiti's African roots as a hindrance to establishing the country's legitimacy on an international stage – in order for Haiti to be accepted as a "legitimate" and "civilized" state, according to this attitude, it had to shed its "backwards" and "primitive" image. Many Haitian thinkers began to ask how a country that held independence and autonomy from foreign powers as cornerstones of patriotic virtue allowed invasion and occupation by the United States. In light of numerous offenses committed by the foreign occupiers – handing over domestic business and banking interests to U.S. firms, rewriting the constitution to allow foreign land ownership, and, perhaps most egregiously, the institution of *corvée* - Haitian intellectuals, led by Dr. Jean Price-Mars (1983), began to strongly decry fractures in Haitian society by calling for a new "Haitian nationalism" (Shannon 1996: 38). Struggles between Haiti's elite minority and peasant majority had reached a peak in the decades

²² Schmidt 1971: 100. Maj. Smedley Butler discovered and revived the 1864 Haitian law instituting the *corvée* and used it to allow US officers to conscript Haitian male labor without pay. After reports of harsh abuse and exploitation by commanders and growing dissatisfaction with the system among Haitians, the *corvée* was abolished in 1918; however, U.S. American *Gendarmerie* commanders continued to use it illegally in the Haitian countryside; *ibid*: 102. The system has antecedents in feudal France, but it also has a more contemporary colonial history: the British used it to build canals in Egypt in the 1880s, for example. Many of the abuses suffered by Haitians were shared by other occupied peoples in this period of emergent US imperialism, which arose in the wake of the Spanish American War (1898). As the site of one of the earliest imperialist forays, the Philippines was a crucible for the development of US occupation techniques that later played out in Haiti and elsewhere. See: Karnow 1990; and San Juan 2007.

before the occupation, leading to a divisive political and economic atmosphere and making the country vulnerable to foreign meddling. In Price-Mars' view, this societal strife effectively invited intervention by their North American neighbors, a situation that Haiti's intellectual leaders felt they had a duty to rectify.

Jean Price-Mars, a dark-skinned writer, journalist, and member of Parliament born into the country's upper class, sought to bridge Haiti's social divisions. In her analysis of Price-Mars' contribution to the anti-occupation movement, Shannon (1996) demonstrates how he galvanized resistance to the occupation by venerating Haiti's folk culture – a product of the country's African heritage. In lectures, articles, and essays, Price-Mars called for Continentally minded Haitian elites to embrace African aspects of their ancestry, such as the Kreyòl language and Vodou practices - both unique to Haiti but with roots that extend to West and Central Africa. Throughout Haiti's history, Kreyòl was considered a bastardization of French and the practice of Vodou was a frequent target of repressive campaigns by the government and Catholic Church in Haiti.²³ Importantly, Haiti's agrarian majority speaks only Kreyòl and makes up the majority of practitioners of Vodou, in conjunction with Christian rites.²⁴ With the publication of his major work, *Ainsi parla l'oncle* in 1928, Price-Mars evaluated Haiti's folkloric past while addressing a reticent elite audience. He phrased the problem facing Haiti as such:

As we gradually forced ourselves to believe we were “colored” Frenchmen, we forgot we were simply Haitians, that is, men born of determined historic conditions, having collected in their minds, just as all other human groups, a psychological complex which gives to the Haitian society its specific physiognomy (1983: 8).

²³ Shannon 1996 xii; Several authors have traced the Haitian elite's wariness of Vodou to the religion's connection to a history of uprising and revolt “from below” in the country. According to the lore, the Haitian Revolution began with a Vodou ceremony in the woods of *Bwa Kayiman* in the North in 1791. Since the beginning of the Haitian Republic, the ruling classes have tried to regulate and mitigate the practice of Vodou. See: Hurbon 1995: 190; Ramsey 1995.

²⁴ For discussion of language politics surrounding Haitian Kreyòl, see: DeGraff 1999; Spears and Joseph 2010.

He encouraged political participation by the lower-class Haitian majority and called for revisions to a tax code that heavily favored the wealthy Haitian minority (Shannon 42). Price-Mars' call, therefore, was both political and social.

After the publication of *Ainsi Parla l'Oncle*, many Haitian intellectuals heeded Price-Mars' call for a new nationalism, including the contributors to the short-lived literary magazine, *La Revue Indigène*, which ran from 1927-28, during the height of US Marine occupation. As suggested by its name, the magazine published poems and articles venerating Haitian folk culture, while making broader overtures to concurrent Indigenist movements in Latin America (Dash 1981). Writers for the publications included future collaborators and founding members of the Centre d'Art, such as Geo Remponeau and Philippe Thoby-Marcelin. Price-Mars' work also found recognition and praise outside of Haiti with the international Négritude movement. Leading figures like Léopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire credited Price-Mars for contributing to the advancement and articulation of Pan-African ideals that celebrated a unified, yet globally dispersed, vision of African culture (Shannon 1995: 177). In Haiti today, his foundational work inflects the political, social, and ethnographic discourse.²⁵

Such veneration of folk culture, specifically Vodou, was a defiant act in Haiti at this time, one that could have proven politically dangerous. American authors writing during the US occupation published sensational, exaggerated accounts of Vodou that reinforced a sense of Haiti's "backwardness" in the US and abroad.²⁶ Reacting to such literature and seeking to

²⁵ Dr. Price-Mars also left a legacy in Haitian academia, founding the Institute of Ethnology in 1941 in Port-au-Prince, which is today part of the *Université d'Etat d'Haiti*.

²⁶ Such declarations of Haiti's "backwardness" is alive and well among commentators abroad. After the country's devastating 2010 earthquake, Rev. Pat Robertson attributed Haiti's suffering to its "deal with the devil," a twisted reading of the apocryphal Vodou ceremony in 1791 that began Haiti's revolutionary uprisings; F. James 2010. Writing for *National Review*, Mark Krikorian of the Center for Immigration Studies suggested that, "Haiti's so screwed up because it wasn't colonized *long enough*," a rather odious suggestion in light of the abject violence enacted upon the enslaved African population by French colonizers; 2010.

proclaim Haiti as a “civilized” nation to the outside world, post-occupation leaders like President Sténio Vincent (1930-41) passed legislation outlawing Vodou practices (Ramsey 2002: 12). Vincent’s successor, Élie Lescot (1941-46), in tandem with the Catholic Church of Haiti, began “anti-superstition” campaigns in the early 1940s (Lerebours 1989: 206). At the same time, however, officials saw the potential for controlled representations of Vodou to act as a promotional tool for the country’s interests, especially in encouraging tourism to the country. Haitian “folkloric” dance troupes who derived their movements from Vodou ceremonies performed for increasing numbers of tourists staying in Port-au-Prince hotels. They also toured internationally to great acclaim. This performative turn marked a shift in Vodou-based choreography from its ritual purposes among adherents to that of a spectacle constructed for unfamiliar audiences. In accordance with Guy Debord’s arguments about “spectacle,” such “folkloric” Haitian dance “at once a faithful mirror held up to the production of things and a distorting objectification of the producers” (1994: 16). Haiti’s political leadership recognized the value in representations of folk culture as Haitian troupes gave well-received performances on North American and European stages. Such contradictions point to the conflicts that emerged as proponents for Haiti’s peasant culture met the resistance and disapproval of the country’s political elite and religious institutions. Thus, Haitian leaders were caught in a position of contending with the history of negative conceptions and legislated prohibitions against Vodou, while acknowledging the contribution of Haitian folk culture to the promotion of Haiti's image internationally.

After the Marines left in 1934, Haiti began its transformation from occupied foreign nation to potential vacation getaway, a process that Krista A. Thompson identifies as

“tropicalization” (2006). Thompson examines how tourism promoters in Jamaica and other Anglophone Caribbean countries shaped representations of the Caribbean through “tropicalization,” a term that “describes the complex visual systems through which the islands were imagined for tourist consumption and the social and political implications of these representations on the actual physical space of the islands and their inhabitants” (*ibid*: 5). In Haiti’s case, touring performances were part of a larger national project of “folklorization” that occurred in the wake of the occupation (Ramsey 1997: 356). Vodou dance was also used as a tool to change perceptions in the US and promote an exoticized vision of the country for potential foreign travelers. Folkloric dance troupes capitalized on trending interest in “Black” cultural expressions by touring internationally and performing for mostly white audiences. Those performances were part of the “tropicalization” complex that constructed an appealing image of Haiti abroad.²⁷

The popularity of choreographer and ethnographer Katherine Dunham’s dance company in the 1940s and ‘50s ameliorated foreign perceptions of Haiti (Ramsey 1995; Kraut 2003). More generally, concert dance and folklore performances that derived from African choreographic traditions helped change North American and European attitudes towards “authentic” Black culture. As a de facto requirement for appealing to mostly white audiences, performances maintained a certain primitive “essence.” Despite stereotypes and misinformation within these representations, choreographers and performers were able to find ways to use exoticism as a means to introduce ideas of a dynamic African diaspora to audiences. Kraut considers Zora Neal Hurston and Katherine Dunham as two major contributors to these efforts to shift the

²⁷ See also: Sheller 2014, for a discussion of other instances of “tropicalization.” Sheller discusses how US-based Alcoa Shipping Company promoted its Caribbean cruises, including those to Haiti, through illustrated advertisements and recordings of “Caribbean” music in the Post-War period.

representational paradigm of Black bodies on stage away from crude primitivism towards one that strategically incorporated movements and ideas from the African diaspora (*ibid*: 435). As anthropologists, Hurston and Dunham both conducted ethnographic fieldwork among African-descended cultures in the Western Hemisphere and incorporated their field observations into their work.²⁸ The incorporation of anthropological “social science” legitimated the authenticity of stage depictions of Blacks in rural Southern US (Hurston 2009) and Caribbean (Dunham 1994) settings, despite the inclusion of European-derived dance techniques and technical modifications that occurred through translation to the stage. Ironically, as Kraut posits, while extensive academic scholarship girded Hurston and Dunham’s respective stage work, the mostly white audiences were drawn to the “exotic” and “primitive” qualities of the performances and not to any rigorously researched cultural aspects.²⁹

The Indigenist movement in Haiti continued in the years after the Marines’ occupation as Haitian intellectuals prioritized the study of rural culture, especially as it manifested through Vodou, despite official resistance from the government and the Catholic Church. The work of visiting scholars like Hurston, Dunham and others also shaped positive impressions of Haiti held by international audiences, especially when their research was reinterpreted for the stage in the form of dance and theater. Such representations helped frame ideas about Haitian culture for international audiences that would be articulated further in the work of visual artists involved in the Haitian Renaissance. An increase in tourist travel to Haiti was the final major factor that led to the emergence of a dynamic Haitian visual arts scene.

²⁸ Kraut 2003: 447. See: Dunham 1994; Hurston 2009.

²⁹ While Hurston was better known for her work as a writer, Kraut brings our attention to her significant contributions to dance. In *The Great Day* (1932), Hurston assembled a group of Bahamian dancers to perform choreography that intermixed movements witnessed during Hurston’s field work in the Bahamas and the US South. Kraut 2003: 443.

Haitian Visual Arts Pre-Centre d'Art

In the wake of US occupation, literature, dance, and music advanced significantly in Haiti. A nascent visual arts scene was also taking shape. Despite a lack of arts institutions in the country, notable individuals working before the creative explosion of the mid-1940s contributed significantly to the Centre d'Art in its early years. Many of these artists were painters and sculptors trained and practiced in aesthetic movements occurring in Western Europe and the US, in contrast to the wave of Haitian Renaissance artists whose “outsider” status, as I will discuss, bolstered their popularity among expatriate collectors. Pre-Renaissance artists in Haiti often learned under visiting US American painters and received their educations abroad in North America or Europe. The output of visual arts in Haiti as a result of the Centre d'Art dwarfs earlier instances; however, the efforts of several individuals in the decades prior laid the groundwork for the Haitian Renaissance, despite less widespread recognition of their work.

The Centre d'Art's lineage in Haiti prior to the arrival of DeWitt Peters, begins with Geo Remponeau. In addition to writing for the occupation-era publication *La Revue indigène*, Remponeau was a painter who began his artistic career apprenticing under Pétion Savain, a Haitian lawyer, novelist, and artist who began painting in the 1930s. Five years before the Centre d'Art opened, the work of both artists represented Haiti at the Golden Gate International Exhibition in San Francisco in 1939 where they won prizes at the IBM-sponsored competition.³⁰ Savain published the novel, *La Case de Damballah* that same year, illustrated with his woodcut representations of Vodou ceremonies and scenes of rural life in Haiti. As a product of Haiti's Indigenist movement, Savain's book celebrates Vodou and its influence on the Haitian Revolution, representing it in a positive light for readers, rather than as a source of lurid mystery

³⁰ See: Alexis 2012: 117; Christensen 1975: 44; Thoby-Marcelin 1959: 7.

and fear as many American writers had done during the occupation.³¹ His woodcuts offered expressionistic representations of Vodou practice and Haitian rural life, two themes that would become motifs used in the work of many Haitian artists to follow.³²

Savain's art career began after meeting William Edouard Scott, an African-American artist who lived in Haiti between 1931 and 1932. In his paintings and drawings, Scott depicted everyday peasant culture and other picturesque subjects like market scenes and rural life. He also made a series of "ethnographic" portraits, part of a project he outlined in his application for the Rosenwald Fellowship that supported his year in Haiti. Scott wrote that he wanted to create a visual record of Haiti's "representative types" through portraiture, to capture what he and others saw as disappearing (Twa 2014: 109). He made hundreds of paintings and drawings, many of which were portraits of rural Haitians (*ibid*: 102). Lindsey J. Twa characterizes Scott as one of many "creative ethnographers" to visit Haiti in the early twentieth century who helped shape the way Haitian culture was perceived in the US (*ibid*: 101). His portrait project followed dominant social-scientific methodologies in which researchers categorized humans according to taxonomic schema related to measurable physical characteristics. Ironic to Scott's more benevolent project, such methodologies had a long history of supporting institutionalized racism through pseudo-sciences like phrenology and physiognomy, which used bodily measurements to justify the racial "inferiority" of non-Europeans.³³ Scott, however, framed his project within the ideals of the Negritude movement. By classifying Haitians according to an identifiable racial "type," Scott

³¹ For a thorough discussion of sensationalist literature by American authors that emerged during the US Marine Occupation, see: Dash 1981.

³² Alexis 2012: 114; Poupeye 1998: 65.

³³ For case-studies on the intersections of racist nineteenth century scientific discourses, especially through photographic technology, see: Poole 1997, discussed below; and A. Roberts 2013, in which the author provides a case study of the skull of Lusinga, a Tabwa chief, and the routes through which it traveled European systems of colonial subjugation.

sought to venerate a universal "Black" culture under specific threat from US occupation and to counter sensationalist and racist depictions of Haitian people and culture that circulated in the early years of the occupation. Scott believed that historical misrepresentations of Haiti could be countered empirically through depictions made by eyewitnesses like himself.

As a result of the taxonomic approach to his portraiture, however, Scott ended up objectifying his subjects, which may have undercut his altruistic intentions.³⁴ Indeed, we can connect his project in the early twentieth-century to discourses developed in prior centuries. Deborah Poole analyzes the "visual economy" in which images circulated between Europe and South America and helped constitute an idea of "The Andes" based on typologically organized differences between "natives" and their European counterparts (1997: 8). With the emergence of photographic technology, *cartes de visite* (calling cards), which were widely distributed and easily produced, depicted unnamed indigenous South Americans for largely European audiences. Such images, as Poole demonstrates, were deployed within the pseudo-scientific discourse of physiognomy, in which "specific facial features and postures were read as signs of the innate moral or ethical qualities of an individual" (*ibid*: 110). While physiognomy's popularity and acceptance reached a peak in the mid-nineteenth century, the legacies of such visual means of classification carried well into the next century, to which Scott's portraits of "Haitian types" testify.

Krista A. Thompson (2006) locates William Scott and his painting of "Haitian types" within the broader framework of tourism being promoted elsewhere in the Caribbean during the early twentieth century. Cruise ship companies circulated images in North America and the United Kingdom that depicted a version of the Caribbean, and Jamaica in particular, in which the

³⁴ For a deeper discussion of the cultural exchanges between American and Haitian artists in the early to mid-twentieth century, see: K. Thompson 2007; & Twa 2014.

natives were “tamed” and natural splendor was abundant. Thompson determines that the makers of these images “employed certain presentational techniques that often heightened the strangeness of nature in Jamaica: they projected this select vision as typical of nature on the island” by focusing on predetermined “peculiar” aspects of the country (*ibid*: 44). Similarly, Scott’s portraits have the potential to reimagine his Haitian subjects for audiences eager to consume an exotic “tropicalized” version of Haiti, operating within similar “visual economies” through which *cartes de visite* circulated in an earlier period (Poole 1997).

Scott had a direct influence on the work of Petion Savain who, with his student Geo Remponeau, later helped found the Centre d’Art (Twa 2014: 229). Those two artists also emulated the seemingly “naturalistic” qualities in Scott’s paintings and his choice of subject matter, most notably in the artists’ prize-winning submissions to the Golden Gate International Exhibition. Chosen as representations of “Haiti” for an international audience, Savain’s *Market on the Hill* (1939) [fig.2] and Remponeau’s *Coconut Vendor* (1939) [fig.3] operate within tropical-picturesque discourse, featuring Haitians in quotidian scenarios framed by lush Caribbean landscapes. Like ethnographic portraits, landscape painting factored heavily in European imperialism and helped articulate justifying scientific discourses developed in the mid-nineteenth century. As W.J.T. Mitchell proposes, artists project colonial desire and a fascination with the “exotic” through landscape, depicting a “dreamscape” of both “utopian fantasies of the perfected imperial prospect and fractured images of unresolved ambivalence and unsuppressed resistance” (2002: 10). The link between Scott, Savain, Remponeau, and the Centre d’Art establishes a direct line of influence in contemporary Haitian art history. It also raises questions about the ways in which their work employed a visual vocabulary that presented an idealized, pastorally exotic vision of Haiti and “the tropics” as stuck in a pre-industrial past. Their work can

be seen as art historical crystallizations of disciplinary precedents identified in nineteenth century European discourses.

As Twa argues, Scott's work as a "creative ethnographer" was part of a concurrent interest in Haiti among anthropologists (2014: 101). In the first half of the twentieth century, waves of researchers came to Haiti. Both "traditional" and "creative" ethnographers in this period were attracted to ways of life perceived to be disappearing, under threat from the encroachment of modern culture. Their approach to Haiti falls within the "salvage paradigm" that Clifford identifies as prominent in Western discourse in which ethnographers observed "disruptive changes associated with the influence of trade, media, missionaries, the exotic art market, the 'world system, etc.'" (1989: 74). In the case of Haiti during this period, the US occupation itself was perceived as a considerable threat to traditional Haitian life.

During the time of US occupation of Haiti, social anthropology was moving away from diffusionist theories in the discipline, which sought to identify cross-cultural influences among societies, towards the study of "isolated" communities (Mudimbe 1994: 1). With the new attention from the outside world that Haiti received during the US occupation, rural Haitian peasant culture came to the attention of many ethnographers as a surviving vestige of "Africa" in the New World. Ethnographers like Harold Courlander, Maya Deren, Melville Herskovits, and Alfred Métraux were among the prominent names to have worked researching and documenting Haitian peasant culture in this period.³⁵ Such ethnographers linked the practice of Vodou to its African religious source material. The prevailing theory held that Haiti's long period of post-revolutionary isolation allowed Haitians to build on traditions carried over from Africa without the "corruption" of "foreign" elements, especially as it related to the development of Vodou as a

³⁵ See: Courlander 1973 a&b; Deren 1983; Herskovits 1937; Métraux 1972.

religion.³⁶ Operating from this point of view, visiting researchers rushed to Haiti to bear witness to a vestigial product of a quickly vanishing “past.” Subsequent scholarship has offered a more dynamic perspective on Vodou practice that underscores how Vodou is adaptive, a product of the present articulated in response to the immanent needs and wishes of its practitioners.³⁷ By approaching Vodou as coeval, practiced in the same time and space as those writing about it, such research pushes back against the salvage paradigm enacted in earlier research.³⁸

Early Years of the Centre d'Art and the Politics of Terminology

The richness of “folk” traditions that many visitors found in Haiti did not readily extend to the realm of visual arts until the Centre d'Art was established in 1944. DeWitt Peters wrote of a perceived creative absence when he reflected on his arrival in Haiti. “Indeed,” he wrote, “as far as I could see there was no art in Haiti. And this seemed to me extraordinary in a country of very great natural beauty, with a clarity of atmosphere comparable to that of southern Italy inhabited by a charming people rich in folklore and tradition” (1985: 35). While a greater number of visual artists began to emerge in the 1940s, arts production was neither absent nor nonexistent to the extent that writers like DeWitt Peters suggested. Subsequent authors have attempted to complicate or refute this idea of “no art in Haiti” by considering the record of arts production in Haiti pre-1940s.³⁹ This includes the works of indigenous, Pre-Columbian Taino art; art schools

³⁶ The period of isolation included the Catholic Church’s withdrawal from Haiti after the Revolution until 1860. Métraux, for one, saw increasing tourism as an existential threat to Vodou with the proliferation of “performances” in hotels specifically altered for the entertainment of expatriate guests and their dollars; 1972: 56.

³⁷ See: Brown 2001; Cosentino 1995; Michel 2002; K. Smith 2010.

³⁸ For a thorough interrogation of the deployment and use of time in anthropological discourse and the cultural power dynamics therein, see: Fabian 2002; Latour 1991. For the role of time in the discursive marginalization of Caribbean art, see: Wainwright 2011.

³⁹ See: Alexis 2012; Christensen; Stebich 1978; Thoby-Marcelin 1959.

established by King Henri Christophe in the first decades of the nineteenth century and managed by British painter Richard Evans; and a short-lived national school of painting founded in 1865 under President Gefrard. More importantly, the careers of artists like Savain and Remponeau, who were painting and exhibiting internationally prior to Peters' arrival, points to the existence of the visual culture that Peters saw as missing. Granted, lack of evidence for arts institutions and few local patrons for the work produced by a small but cohesive community of Haitian artists certainly contributed to Peters' observation; however, his words belie an existing, if fledgling, visual arts scene in Haiti. Despite such criticisms of Peters, the opening of the Centre d'Art marks a major development in Haitian art history.

DeWitt Clinton Peters came to Haiti in 1943 during World War II working under the US Federal Security Administration (Bettelheim 2008: 17). He was assigned to be an English instructor at the *Lycée Alexandre Pétion* in Port-au-Prince (Diederich 2008: 18). Born and raised in Monterey, California, Peters came from a prominent family of artists. He learned to paint from his father, Charles, at a young age and later established a career as a watercolorist, studying under Fernand Léger in Paris and as a member of the Art Students' League in New York (Christensen 1975: 43). In the war years, Peters came to Haiti as part of Roosevelt's so-called Good Neighbor Policy. The diplomatic program of the previous generation, known as Gunboat Diplomacy, brought US Marine forces to occupy Haiti and other countries in order to enact US power and protect its interests in the Western Hemisphere. By contrast, Good Neighbor offered a "softer" approach, a less bellicose way of spreading US interest around the world by using diplomatic and cultural channels.⁴⁰ In Haiti, this included the State Department-sponsored teaching programs that brought DeWitt Peters to the country (Dash 1988: 76-77).

⁴⁰ For more on Gunboat Diplomacy, see: Healy; Schmidt. For a discussion of some of the "softer" Good Neighbor tactics as employed in Latin America, see: Haines 1977.

Peters encountered a lively intellectual atmosphere replete with the work of Haitian authors, poets, dancers, and musicians; but only a handful of visual artists. He began to frequent intellectual circles and make friends, including the painter Geo Remponeau. The two had a shared history as members of the Art Students' League in New York and often painted together around Port-au-Prince. With Remponeau and his other new friends, Peters shared his earlier-stated observation about the dearth of Haitian arts institutions and began articulating his plans for an arts center. Remponeau, and the group of other former contributors to *La Revue Indigène*, enthusiastically supported the idea.⁴¹

The Centre d'Art project took off after it received backing from the Haitian government. Through an introduction made by the U.S. Cultural Attaché in Haiti, Peters met with President Élie Lescot who became an enthusiastic supporter of the idea. Lescot secured a former residence for the Centre d'Art's use, agreed to have the government pay the rent on the building, and even cut the ribbon at the opening ceremony (Christensen 1975: 45). As discussed in the example of touring dance troupes, Haitian officials had begun to see the potential benefits of promoting "indigenous" cultural expressions while negotiating ambivalent attitudes of the ruling elite class. Lescot's assistance of the Centre d'Art came without any official directive regarding the work its artists, despite the fact that many engaged with Vodou themes and imagery (*ibid*). Likely, the Centre's contribution to the tourist atmosphere and the positive representations of Haitian culture it garnered in the foreign press allowed it to operate without government interference. The Centre d'Art enjoyed modest government support in the form of a monthly stipend, which allowed the institution to find its footing before establishing other revenue sources (Thoby-Marcellin 1959: 9).

⁴¹ Christensen 44. Other founding members who were part of *La Revue Indigène* include Gerald Bloncourt, Maurice Borno, Raymond Coupeau, and Albert Mangones; Bloncourt and Nadal' *ibid* 23.

The Centre d'Art gathered all the typical components of an arts infrastructure under one roof, serving as studio, classroom, and gallery – formal arts spaces that Haiti had been missing. In the center's first year of operation, Peters had no stated agenda other than to encourage the production of the visual arts through institutional support, and no particular ideology or aesthetic program. The Centre d'Art's doors were open to whoever wanted to work there. Artists came from all classes of Haitian society and with varying degrees of experience with, academic training in, or exposure to the arts. Peters sought to bring together Haitian artists in a collaborative spirit of artistic exchange. He had no intention of imposing his own stylistic conventions (Peters 1989: 36). Despite the democratic outlook in these early days, Peters preferred to work with artists who had at least some measure of arts education (i.e. familiarity with Western conventions of proportion, perspective, and color theory).

Reflecting on the Centre d'Art's opening exhibition, Peters wrote, "as I look back on it now, it was a pretty pale affair. Not a single popular painting was shown, for none had been offered" (Stebich 1978: 15). Here, Peters uses "popular" to refer to the group of painters who would come to represent "Haitian art." Many terms have been used to categorize the work of these artists – naïve, primitive, self-taught, popular, folk – all of which are potentially fraught, often pejorative, and largely inadequate in describing their diverse spectrum of creative output. Such terminology often suggests an artist's lack of familiarity and experience working with dominant aesthetic modes. More crucially, such words encode the social status of these artists as members of Haiti's black "peasant majority." Those labels established a wedge between "naïve" or "primitive" artists and those "sophisticated" or "non-primitive" ones who were academically trained, the latter group mostly hailed from middle and upper class social contexts (Thoby-Marcellin 1959: 11).

While the politics of language continues to be debated in Haitian art scholarship, art historian LeGrace Benson has found a useful alternative by advocating for the term, “Kreyól,” rather than “primitive” or “naïve,” to describe the work of these artists (1992). “Kreyòl” accounts for class, social status, economics and education levels specific to a Haitian context. While Kreyòl is spoken across the socio-economic spectrum in Haiti, the popular majority speak it almost exclusively.⁴² Kreyòl artists were known for bright, unmixed colors and employed subject matter that spanned a range including pastoral, tropical landscapes to quotidian genre scenes, to pictures that employed themes and motifs from Vodou. Their work received praise for being “pure,” “untainted,” and “spontaneous” in the eyes of fascinated European and American audiences.⁴³ For these reasons (the roots of which will be explored below), tourists and other expatriate purchasers greatly preferred the work of Kreyòl artists.

The first Kreyòl artist to join the ranks of the Centre d’Art was Philomé Obin. Obin, a middle-aged tailor and sporadically producing artist living in the northern city of Cap Haïtien, sent Peters two paintings, one depicting Franklin Roosevelt’s official visit to Cap Haïtien on July 5, 1934 - an event which began the end of US occupation. Peters responded with a letter of thanks, some art supplies, and a small amount of money as payment for the work (Hoffman 1989: 37). Several months after that, Obin sent two more paintings on cardboard, one of which featured the then-newly-deceased Franklin D. Roosevelt, draped in an American flag, welcoming alms from two angels descending from heaven (Rodman 1988: 71) [fig.4]. In this work, the President is rendered small on a flattened background of sky and ocean. He receives a laurel

⁴² For more extended analyses of Haitian Kreyòl’s relationship to class, politics, and socio-economic status in Haiti and abroad, see: Cerat 2011; DeGraff 1999; Spears & Joseph 2010.

⁴³ See discussions below of expatriate who write about Haitian artists within the same discourse that employs these terms: Breton 2002; Fermor 1950; Franciscus 1980; Rodman 1948, 1974, 1988.

wreath from two winged angels emerging from the clouds under the all-seeing eye of *Gran Met*, the Masonic representation of God. Obin, himself a Freemason, was familiar with these signifiers and often included them in his work. While initially unimpressed, Peters later described Obin's submission as: "the opening gun of what subsequently and rapidly developed into one of the most extraordinary artistic phenomena of modern times – the discovery of the Haitian primitives" (Peters 1989: 36). At the time, however, Peters treated the painting as an afterthought and placed it in storage.

Jose Gómez-Sicre, visiting Haiti from Cuba, would extoll the Kreyòl artists to Peters after encountering Obin's work at the Centre d'Art. Gómez-Sicre, a Cuban art critic, curator, and future head of the Visual Arts Division of the Organization of the American States, arrived in Port-au-Prince in 1945.⁴⁴ He accompanied the exhibition, "Cuba's Modern Painters," which traveled to the newly opened Centre d'Art for two weeks in 1945 after its run at MoMA in New York (Bettelheim 2008: 17). As Gómez-Sicre recalls, the academically-trained artists exhibiting and working at the Centre d'Art "were eager to find new guidelines, and the Cuban show, made up of Cuba's vanguard, provided an appropriate example, since Haitians could identify geographically with the Cuban artists and respond with no difficulty to the tropical boldness of their works" (Christensen 1975: 10). "Cuba's Modern Painters" provided Haitian artists an introduction to modernist painting and influenced the styles and techniques of many working at the Centre d'Art.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ For more on the work of Gómez-Sicre, his work at the OAS, and his influence in the realm of Latin-American Art, see: Wellen 2012.

⁴⁵ Alexis 2012: 120; Sullivan 2012: 356. The exhibition ran from January 18 to February 4, 1945. I would add nuance to Alexis's assertion that this was the "first time that Haitian artists were exposed to modernism" seeing as William-Edouard Scott, Petion Savain, and Geo Remponeau all showed awareness of trends in European Modernism in both form and subject matter (*ibid*). The presumption that we can identify such a "first" at all indicates a similar declarative hubris evident in Peters' and Rodman's narratives.

Gómez-Sicre's greatest influence on the development of Haitian art occurred with his encounter of Obin's work. After Peters showed him the artist's paintings, then in storage at the Centre, the Cuban critic encouraged Peters to devote more energies to similar self-taught artists, recalling that "it was this kind of expression [Peters] should be looking for" (*ibid*). Peters, Geo Remponeau, and Gómez-Sicre traveled to the northern city of Cap Haïtien in 1945 to seek out Philomé Obin and meet him in person (Robinson 1983: 68). Peters and his entourage asked around the city and finally found their man working, not as a painter, but a tailor. Obin found sporadic work as an artist throughout his life and he showed Peters and Gómez-Sicre examples of his paintings in the interior of a Masonic lodge in nearby Limonade, of which Obin was a member.⁴⁶ Gómez-Sicre claims this encounter "marked the Centre's initial entry into the work of the primitives" (Christensen 1975: 10). Obin would prove to be a key contributor to the Centre d'Art's success as one of its most celebrated associated artists, but Peters and the other administrators needed Gómez-Sicre's prodding to reconsider him as an "artist," let alone one worth supporting.

Gómez-Sicre's positive reaction to and enthusiasm for Haiti's self-taught artists stemmed from contemporaneous developments in Cuban visual arts in the early twentieth century. Art historian Gerald Alexis claims Gómez-Sicre drew parallels between the "originality" and "intuition" of Haiti's self-taught painters and the modern artists in Cuba's *Escuela Libre de Artes Plásticas* (Free School of Visual Arts), established in 1937 as an "attempt to discover if free expression could lead to an essentially Cuban art" (2012: 118). While only open for a year, *La Escuela Libre* celebrated modern art and the art of "primitive" peoples, since both groups

⁴⁶ Robinson 1983: 66. In addition to the example of the all-seeing eye in Obin's *Roosevelt* painting, one can find many examples of Masonic influence in his work, including his mural contribution to the now-destroyed apse of *Ste. Trinité* Cathedral in Port-au-Prince.

eschewed Western academic dogma (Wellen 2012: 109). Open for less than a year, the Free School linked these themes to nationalist causes in a similar fashion to the occupation-borne Haitian movement in which the Jean Price-Mars, Petion Savain, Geo Remponeau, and members of the *Revue Indigène* emerged.

Gómez-Sicre's advocacy for the Kreyòl artists raised Peters' awareness of them and caused Peters to reconsider the direction and focus of the Centre d'Art. The influence of André Breton's visit to Haiti in 1945 pushed Peters firmly into the Kreyòl camp and cemented the reputations of several artists on an international level. Breton, a poet and leading figure in the French Surrealist movement came to Haiti in 1945. During his months-long visits, Breton actively traveled the country, met with students and government officials, and offered opinions on domestic politics. In 1945, he delivered a series of lectures on Surrealism and international relations at the Rex Theater in Port-au-Prince, organized by Pierre Mabilille, the French cultural attaché to Haiti, and attended by Élie Lescot, Haiti's president.⁴⁷ In his first lecture, "Surrealism and Haiti," Breton praised the fortitude of the Haitian people while criticizing a local government that he saw as a client of US interests (Bettelheim 2008: 18). Political unrest ensued as student-led strikes and demonstrations began soon thereafter. President Lescot was overthrown within a month.⁴⁸ After delivering a lecture that the subsequent provisional military leadership deemed subversive, Breton and Mabilille were expelled from Haiti.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Geis 2015: 56. See also: Bettelheim, who discusses Breton's visit to Haiti in the context of his travels with Cuban painter Wifredo Lam.

⁴⁸ While Breton later downplayed the inflammatory effect of his lectures, Bettelheim and others have suggested that Breton's lecture indirectly led to the ouster of Élie Lescot. The transcript of the lecture was reproduced in *La Ruche*, a student newspaper in Haiti whose editors were jailed. This resulted in student strikes and the later general strikes that led to Lescot stepping down. Bettelheim 2008: 18; Geis 2015: 56; Nicholls 1979: 184.

⁴⁹ Geis 2015: 57. In the lecture, Breton stated the idea of "freedom" as one that "must exclude all ideas of comfortable balance and instead be conceived as continuous rebellion." Breton 1946, quoted in Geis 2015.

Breton made several visits to the Centre d'Art over two trips and became fascinated with the work of Hector Hyppolite, a Kreyòl painter who identified himself as an *oungan*, or Vodou priest. In his book *Surrealism and Painting*, Breton dedicates a chapter to Hyppolite in which he describes the impact of his first encounter with the artist's work at the Centre d'Art:

The picture which brought me to a halt as I was walking past pervaded through me as though it were the first exhilarating breath of spring. Even before I had become conscious of its subject matter it struck me immediately as possessing the pure gift of happiness... [Hyppolite's paintings] carried the stamp of total authenticity, and were the only ones to convey the unmistakable impression that the artist who had created them had an important message to communicate, that he was the guardian of a secret (2002: 308).

Breton was especially fascinated by Hyppolite's connection with the spiritual realm through his oungan status. Breton writes: "it became perfectly clear to me that his whole artistic output manifested a limitless faith in the revelations and practices of the 'voodoo' cult, as well as a quite remarkable aptitude for evoking concrete images of the cult's presiding deities" (*ibid*: 310). For Breton, Hyppolite's Vodou practice raised the aesthetic value of the artist's work by acting as a stamp of the artist's expressive authenticity, suggesting that Hyppolite had special access to an otherworldly source of inspiration that set his work apart. When Breton returned to Haiti in 1948, he bought five of Hyppolite's paintings at eight dollars each, which was the Centre d'Art's largest sale at the time (Robinson 1983: 40).

In 1947, Breton helped organize "An Exhibition of Modern Art from Ecuador, Haiti, and Peru" in Paris with the support of UNESCO (Monosiet 1978: 16). Hyppolite's work in particular drew enthusiastic responses among visitors to the exhibition. Breton championed and supported the work of Kreyòl artists, thereby helping to establish their reputations for North American and European collecting audiences. Additionally, with the poet's first purchase of Hyppolite's work, Breton was a harbinger of the future market for Haitian art in which, over the course of several years, paintings went from selling for several dollars to several hundred (Robinson 1983: 41). In

the decades after Breton's visits to Haiti, the popularity of Kreyòl painters and sculptors surpassed that of artists with academic training, and the former's work came to stand for "Haitian Art" among international audiences.

Breton's place in Haitian art history provides a model for those who came after him and engaged with Haitian art and culture. He played a variety of roles. As a visitor drawn to popular expressions of Haitian culture, he found his way to the Centre d'Art. As a critic, he argued the validity of Haitian art by discussing its "liberated" qualities and finding ways to incorporate Vodou into current tenets of the French surrealist movement.⁵⁰ As a curator, he brought the work of Haitian artists into a familiar context of exhibition and display for European audiences. As a collector, his acquisition of works of Haitian art elevated its status for many outside of Haiti. This is not to suggest that subsequent collectors conscientiously imitated Breton and his actions, but that Breton, together with fellow enthusiasts (to put it broadly) of Haitian art, such as Peters and Gómez-Sicre, also had multivalent engagements with Haitian culture, and used similarly effusive and doting language in describing their attitudes toward it to further their own interests. Importantly, like many collectors who would go on to establish major collections of Haitian art in the United States, Bréton preferred art made by Kreyòl artists as "authentic" examples of Haitian visual culture according to his own idiosyncratic sense of what that term might connote. That is, he constructed "Haitian Art" in his own ways to suit his own purposes, as had and would many other expatriate enthusiasts.

Those artists working at the Centre d'Art whose work reflected education in Western visual traditions became increasingly dissatisfied with the commercialization of the work of self-

⁵⁰ See: Geis 2015, for an examination of Vodou and Haiti's roles in developing Breton's interests in myth, esotericism, and ideas of utopia. Geis notes, that while "Breton generally demonstrated a reluctance to write or speak directly about Haiti and Vodou," they were "central" to Breton's later surrealist concepts 56. For an exploration of Surrealism's broader connections to the arts of the Caribbean, see: Sims 2012.

taught Kreyòl artists, and especially the use of the "primitive" label to describe their work. As the visibility and popularity of Haitian art grew abroad, its characterization as “primitive art” increased. For example, Selden Rodman helped found the Haitian Arts Center in New York’s Upper East Side in 1950, which was open for about a year. The Center was a gallery space that showcased the work of self-taught artists and helped solidify the perception that such artists represented the whole of arts production in Haiti for US audiences (Sullivan 2012: 362). The *Indigéniste* novelist and advocate of Haitian folk culture, Philippe Thoby-Marcelin, reflected on this situation using the word “popular” to describe Kreyòl artists:

Until the closing of [Rodman's] gallery in early 1951, the whole attention of the public in the United States was drawn toward Haitian popular painting. And what is more, during this period the 'non-Primitives' had not a single exhibit in [the U.S.], not even at the center in New York, which owed its existence to them (1959: 15).

Artists engaging with the type of European Modernist aesthetic prevailing in New York and Paris (the "non-primitives" that the author describes) felt that self-taught artists were being exploited as the popularity and demand for "primitive" painting increased.⁵¹ Dissatisfied, the “moderns” formed a break-away arts institution in Port-au-Prince, the *Foyer des Beaux Arts Plastiques*. The Foyer was a gallery and arts space in which artists explored contemporary Western trends in painting and sculpture, freed of the pressures of the “primitive” label. Notably, Luce Turnier and Lucien Price, two of the earliest members of the Centre d'Art, helped found the Foyer in 1950.⁵² Turnier and Price received international praise and the attention of curators and collectors alike, exhibiting and receiving accolades for their work. The work of the Foyer's

⁵¹ Thoby-Marcelin 1959: 11; Christensen 1975: 55.

⁵² Sullivan 2012: 362. Other artists who left the Centre d'Art for the *Foyer* include Diedonne Cédor, Roland Dorcelly, Rene Exume, Luckner Lazard, and Max Pinchinat; see: Thoby-Marcelin: 1959.

artists, however, generally did not receive the same unrestrained outpouring of acclaim as the Kreyòl artists at the Centre d'Art.

Despite agreeing with their assessment that Rodman and Peters were intentionally holding back the Kreyòl group, Thoby-Marcellin was nonetheless circumspect about the artists who pursued more "sophisticated" styles and techniques:

I am rather inclined to think that they became perverted by this sophistication and would have done better not to have stepped over the boundaries of the primitive universe which they formerly painted with such authority, freshness, and poetry. If it is true, as is claimed that children are all artists, there are very few who remain so as they become adolescent (1959: 12).

While Thoby-Marcelin disagrees with the "primitive" and "spontaneous" characterizations of the Kreyòl artists ("[They] know very well what they are doing...they expect payment for their work, whether by becoming known or by financial gain"), his comparison of them to "children" is no less problematic (*ibid*). Additionally, Thoby-Marcelin wrestled with the same dilemma that Peters had: that the qualities that made the work of Kreyòl artists so appealing diminished as those artists developed their own Western-influenced skills and techniques.

The examples of Thoby-Marcellin and Peters underscore a paradox that Haitian artists are continuously forced to confront: in the context of a market that equates "Haitian art" with spontaneity, beauty, and freedom, and locates its value in a perceived *difference* from the alienating discourse of contemporary art in the West and the rarefied "insider" status it values, how do artists navigate the need to sell their work with market expectations of "authenticity"? In the opinions of Peters, Rodman, Thoby-Marcelin, and so many others, authenticity diminishes as artists participate in market capitalism. How have collectors, critics, and artists interpreted "authentic" artistic production? What makes the work of certain artists more "authentic" than that of others? In the next section, I will interrogate authenticity as a primary

determining factor of value and explore the ways in which it is employed in the history of criticism and reception of Haitian art.

Hector Hyppolite and the Politics of Authenticity

From the outset, Peters and other organizers at the Centre d'Art made a point of permitting artists to work as independently as possible, without overt interference or by steering artists toward certain styles or motifs over others. Once the Kreyòl artists rose to prominence and became the primary focus of the Centre's activities, even greater efforts were made to preserve the "unrefined" and "spontaneous" qualities of their work. Summarizing this dilemma in the Centre d'Art's early years, Eleanor Christensen writes:

Unique also was the purity of the work first produced. To retain this pristine quality, this freshness and the freedom from pressure to produce solely for commercial gain, was the constant concern of the Centre. Primitive painting having become an "instant" tourist attraction in Haiti, it was a real struggle for DeWitt to help his artists remain true to their own creative vision, and not eternal repeaters of their last picture that had sold well. He knew how poor they were. But he drew upon his own deep conviction that there must be integrity in art, and as with all great teachers, the atmosphere this strong feeling created at the Centre gave incentive and direction to those who were big enough to be themselves (1975: 56).

Thus, the Centre d'Art's mission was faced with a balancing act: encouraging the creative output of its artists while dampening the devaluing effects, as the organizer's saw it, of over-commercialization. The work of the Kreyòl artists became the institution's signature offering - what tourists were buying in largest quantity and in what they were expressing the most interest. What was the best way to help maintain this level of creativity and originality (as determined by persons other than the Haitian artists themselves) without compromising art's newfound status in Haiti as a means to a livelihood? Conversely, how could artists build upon their talent and retain labels like "primitive" or "naïve" that appealed to the sensibilities of certain collectors at this

time? Such problems and challenges stem from the measure of how “authentic” both an artist and his or her work were. What qualified as “authentic” was often determined by those buying art, even as they defined what “art” was in the first place. To get a sense of how the Centre d’Art approached these issues, we must look at its methodology in working with its affiliated artists.

In the publication for the exhibition, *Haitian Art*,⁵³ at the Brooklyn Museum, curator Ute Stebich summarizes the Centre d’Art’s attitudes towards the artists with whom it worked:

The role of the Centre d’Art in Haiti is not primarily that of a school. From the beginning, its organizers have agreed that there are two kinds of artists in Haiti: those who merely need encouragement and technical assistance in order to express themselves creatively; and those who need definite training in order to develop their talents (1978: 14).

"Technical assistance" came in the form of material support like canvas, paint, brushes, etc. The center would also buy individual paintings or send stipends and promised commissions for future works to artists, the above anecdote about Philomé Obin’s early involvement being the most prominent example of this approach in action (Robinson 1983: 33). In a 1950 film produced by the United States Information Service (USIS), Peters himself is shown hand delivering such supplies in the Centre d'Art's Jeep to Ferdinand Pierre and Toussaint Auguste, painters who, according to the French-speaking voice-over, "would [lose] their simplicity and [spontaneity] if they study at the center" (*ibid*). How can we reconcile these comments with the Centre's mission to support artists and bring them together in a collaborative, symbiotic atmosphere? Would certain painters be too tempted to copy the styles and techniques of other artists? If this was the case, then we have to question the purposes of having an arts center at all. What implications arise when we see evidence of certain artists encouraged to work where they live in order to limit their contact with others who frequented the Centre d’Art more regularly? Certainly, the

⁵³ For a more in-depth discussion of *Haitian Art*'s importance to the history of exhibiting work by Haitian artists in the United States, see: Chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation.

“discovery” of so much creativity in Haiti presented Peters and the rest of the Centre d’Art’s directors with a new, delicate challenge of encouraging Kreyòl artists to make work, but in such a way as to retain the “authentic” qualities that made their work so appealing, however disputed and contentious word like “authentic” might be.

The literature on the work of Hector Hyppolite and his “discovery” typifies how authenticity has come into play regarding the valuation of Haitian art. Peters first became aware of Hyppolite's work in 1943, when he saw the painted doors of a bar in the town of Mont Ruis, north of Port-au-Prince. Unable to stop and identify Hyppolite as the artist, Peters' made a mental note of the floral designs on the door as he passed by on the road (1989: 39). Over a year passed after that initial sighting before Peters finally met Hyppolite. Philippe Thoby-Marcellin, Peters’ friend, early collaborator with the Centre d’Art, and contributor to the *Revue Indigene*, tracked down the artist in Saint Marc, a town near Mont Ruis (Christensen 46). According to Peters, his friend reported back that the artist was, “a strange, mystic person with a head of great dignity and beauty, a voodoo [sic] priest.” On Thoby-Marcelin's recommendation, Peters went to visit the artist himself. He recounts his impressions:

We finally found the miserable little hut that [Hyppolite] lived in with his young mistress and two little orphan girls he had adopted...greeting us with a poised and ceremonial curtsey he told us our visit was no surprise. He had known of it long before from a vision he had had in a dream. Later on we were to have many other examples of this visionary second sight (1989: 39).

Here, Peters’ quote contains two outstanding qualities shared by other descriptions of Hyppolite and his work. For one, the artist’s role as oungan seems to legitimize his claim to speak for Vodou’s spiritual realm; his “visionary second sight” comes through his Vodou practice and provides evidence for his artistic abilities. Secondly, focusing on the artist’s humble dwelling place - and using such a rankly disparaging phrase to describe it - and modest means reinforces a

“savior” narrative in his discovery. For example, Peters’ use of particular phrasings (“miserable little hut”) and emphasis on certain details (that the artist used chicken feathers for paint brushes) give the sense that Hyppolite’s genius transcends his living conditions (*ibid*). It was only through his fortuitous meeting with Thoby-Marcellin and subsequent involvement with the Centre d’Art, according to this narrative, that the artist was given the opportunity to reach his potential.

Hyppolite moved to Port-au-Prince in 1945, joined the Centre d’Art’s roster, and, thanks in part to Breton’s endorsement, quickly became the center’s most famous artist. His work struck a different tone than Obin’s orderly, dioramic canvasses.⁵⁴ His figures dominate the composition. He applies atmospheric layers of color at the service of enriching the presentation of his subjects, whether human, *lwa* (spirits or deities in Vodou), or something in between. Obin’s work is more meticulous and orderly, with precise attention paid to the geometric details of buildings and features in the landscape that orient the viewer in a particular location. Take the scene that begins this chapter: *Battle Between the Cacos and the American Marines*. Here, Obin pays as much attention to the details of the flora - the leaves, branches, flowers, etc. - as he does to his rendering of the individual soldiers. In contrast, Hyppolite’s use of paint is more dynamic and, to use a Western-art historical term, painterly (meaning the viewer can easily determine the paint’s depth, thickness, and mode of application on the canvas). In terms of subject matter, Obin’s work contains very few explicit references to Vodou. Obin was a devout Protestant, whose beliefs may have contributed to the avoidance of such themes and imagery from his work (Rodman 1988: 71). While Obin renders architectural details with precision as the figures placed within, Hyppolite’s paintings take on a composition similar to Catholic chromolithographs, in which the

⁵⁴ Obin and Hyppolite are the two most famous artists to emerge from the Haitian Renaissance and are often mentioned in the same breath, which is why I compare and contrast the two here. Additionally, their work, unlike that of many of their colleagues, has retained its high market value to this day.

central figure occupies most of the picture plane and surrounding pictorial elements are relegated to the margins, relegated to the edges of the picture to embellish, emphasize, and co-mingle with the primary subject.⁵⁵ Hyppolite's brushwork is loose, giving his paintings an energetic, almost frantic quality [fig.5]; Obin's precise, regimented use of paint, on the other hand, corresponds to the man's own reported fastidiousness.

Selden Rodman, the prolific author on Haitian art, also wrote of Hyppolite's "discovery" and shared Peters' enthusiasm for the artist and forefronts his work as a pinnacle example of the creative potential of Haitian artists. In his own written account, he mentions that the bar Peters spotted from the road in Mont Ruis had an apt name, *Ici La Renaissance* (Here is the Renaissance) [fig.6] (Rodman 1948: 60). For Rodman, such a name foreshadowed the movement in Haiti in which Hyppolite became a central figure. Rodman heightens the dramatic serendipity of the event and, like Peters, makes special note of Hyppolite's eccentricity and poverty: "[He] made a precarious living by painting houses and occasionally decorating furniture with a brush of chicken feathers" (*ibid*). Rodman also foregrounds certain details of the discovery (an event for which the author was not present), while omitting others. Making no mention of Thoby-Marcellin's role in finding the artist, he elaborates on Hyppolite's "vision" of Peters, writing that, "he had been apprised by the gods that a man would come from over the seas to buy five of his pictures and that his life would change for the better."⁵⁶ Such stories of mystical visions and divine providence certainly only serve to inflate Hyppolite's aura and bolster claims regarding his authenticity as a Haitian artist.

⁵⁵ For a discussion of the relationship between mechanically mass-reproduced images like Catholic chromolithographs and Vodou practice, see: Cosentino 2005.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*. Rodman presented this as a vision in which Hyppolite anticipated the arrival of Breton. He later reworked the narrative of Hyppolite's "discovery" in *Where Art is Joy* (1988), where he said of the meeting between Peters and the artist: "it had been ordained by the *loas* [sic] anyways," 49.

Karen E. Richman (2008) proposes that Hyppolite was likely aware of his own reputation in the eyes of foreigners. Recognizing his appeal as a mystic, Richman argues, Hyppolite likely exaggerated his own relationship to Vodou for the benefit of figures like Peters and Rodman in a “mimetic interplay,” that included “European and North American tourists, ethnographers, local cultural entrepreneurs, and artists in Port-au-Prince” (204). In discussing the Hyppolite’s work, she writes:

In Rodman’s prose, Hyppolite becomes a passive receptor of spiritual expression, a shaman possessed by a spirit who is the actual creative power, as opposed to an artist consciously choosing how to use spiritual inspiration (not to mention how to use mimesis of the foreigner’s notion of Haitian authenticity) (2008: 213).

For Richman, Rodman’s fascination with the artist, much like Breton’s, was reinforced by his status as an oungan, or Vodou priest. Rodman’s narrative supplanted Hyppolite’s individual agency and pigeonholed the painter within a Primitivist discourse that portrayed him as a child of nature, one who had special access to a level of spirituality absent from Western culture, despite Richman’s argument that Hyppolite was playing to the perceived expectations of Rodman and others. As evidence for her claim, Richman points out Hyppolite’s contradictory statements in his interviews with Rodman, in which the artist simultaneously espouses the inspiration of the *lwa* (Vodou deities/spirits) in his paintings while stating: “I haven’t practiced vaudou [sic] for a while...now I’m more an artist than a priest” (Rodman 1948: 68). For Richman, such evidence suggests that Hyppolite’s relationship to Vodou was overblown by those with an investment in his work (213). Regardless of Hyppolite’s level of spiritual zeal towards the end of his life (something impossible to quantify), Richman re-establishes the artist’s agency and supplants narratives proposed by Rodman and others.

Taking Michael Taussig’s (1993) assertions regarding mimetic processes occurring among colonial encounters, Richman proposes that Haitian artists and North American/European

collectors were engaged in a mimetic feedback loop around what constituted “authentic” Haitian culture occurring between Haitian artists and expatriate visitors:

Haitian art was inspired by a market for Americans “looking for Strange,” who readily performed the psycho-symbolic liaison between a North American “self” and an “other” Caribbean nation-state. The artists complied by using creative mimeses of what they thought the North Americans wanted to see. The North Americans consumed the objects, *mistaking them for the real thing* [my emphasis] (2014: 223).

Here Richman locates the problems behind assertions that a “real thing,” in terms of Vodou arts, exists in the first place. Such assertions do not account for the creative diversity of these artists, who likely modified and adapted Vodou symbols to accommodate the cross-cultural exchanges of the art marketplace.

Mary-Louise Pratt’s (1992) concept of the “contact zone” helps us re-contextualize Haiti in this period and consider further Richman’s proposal of mimetic interplay. Pratt employs the term “contact zone” to describe the space in which complex interactions and exchanges occur between individuals from different cultures. She writes, “‘contact zone’ is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence [sic] of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect” (*ibid*: 7). Pratt’s definition provides a framework for us to interrogate critically art-historical approaches that confine Haitian visual arts to the marginalized end of a dichotomous relationship between two monolithic groups: artists and collectors. By understanding Haiti during its artistic renaissance as a temporal and spatial contact zone, we can contextualize the intricacies within individual motivation and circumstance. Pratt’s theory gives space for a humanistic approach by focusing on how culture is produced and negotiated through interactions between stakeholders.

Haiti itself has a long history of serving as the geographic location where individuals gathered and interacted under a variety of circumstances; some traveled there by choice (French

colonials, African-American artists, tourists) and others not (enslaved Africans, U.S. soldiers on deployment), embodying a variety of unequal power relationships. Part of Pratt's assertion maintains that people in a contact zone experience the effects of colonization, yet find subtle means of resisting and redeploying the means of power under which they are held by using the "idioms of the conqueror" to constitute themselves (*ibid*: 7). A contact perspective allows interpretation of Haitian Renaissance art that recognizes the possibility that artists were both creating "authentic" cultural expressions, as well as modifying those expressions by using the cultural idioms of the collectors. The two are not mutually exclusive.

Michele-Philippe Lerebours, art historian and director of the *Musée d'Art Haïtien ne du College St. Pierre* (Museum of Haitian Art of the College of St. Peter) in Port-au-Prince, has staked territory within the gray middle ground. He provides evidence that while Hyppolite was likely not an oungan, the artist certainly maintained a close spiritual relationship with the *lwa*, which he represents in his work (Lerebours 2011: 36). While the extent and fervor of Hyppolite's Vodou practice remains a contested matter, his role as Vodou priest remains a biographical detail that legitimizes his work and reinforces his status as the most famous Haitian artist of this period. By contrast, Philomé Obin declared himself Baptist – a fact that gets rare mention and one that might lessen his appeal in the eyes of foreign collectors in search of something "typically Haitian" (Diederich 2008: 36).

Hector Hyppolite died in 1948 of a heart attack, just as his work was reaching high levels of international acclaim. His celebrated career lasted a little over three years. Despite such a brief window, estimates of Hyppolite's total production put the number of his paintings somewhere

between 400 and 1000.⁵⁷ The artist's output within his short lifespan, in addition to his strong oeuvre overall, has certainly contributed to the market value of his work, which remains relatively strong as compared to other artists of Hyppolite's generation. His importance to the development of Haitian art and its reputation abroad cannot be overstated, especially as it relates to the Haitian Renaissance. Philomé Obin, by contrast, sustained a steady artistic output until his death in 1986. Let us return to *Battle Between the Cacos and the American Marines*. A deeper analysis of its "biography," including its subject matter, execution, and residence in a prominent US collection, will shed light on how Obin navigated another contact zone: the Haitian art market.

Philomé Obin and Haitian History

During the time of US occupation, the majority of Haiti's population (that is, those who primarily spoke Kreyòl), were perhaps the most vulnerable to abuse and exploitation by the US military. Soldiers and administrators alike imported binary US racial attitudes that designated all Haitians as ethnically and culturally inferior, leading to many instances of discrimination, humiliation, and abuse, with implementation of *corvée* as the most egregious example.⁵⁸ Additionally, most Haitians did not possess the education or skills required to obtain any of the administrative positions developed as part of the US policy to foster a Haitian middle class, leaving them further disenfranchised as a result of occupation.

⁵⁷ Robinson 1983: 53. These numbers come from data collected by Robinson in interviews with Jason Seley, who served as an early collaborator and administrator of the Centre d'Art, and Pierre Monosiet, the first director of the Musée du Collège St. Pierre in Port-au-Prince; Robinson 1983.

⁵⁸For more detailed accounts of relations between US forces and the Haitian people during the occupation, see: Healy 1976; Renda 2001; and Schmidt 1971.

Philomé Obin's *Battle Between the Cacos and the American Marines* (1949) [fig.1]

indicates how anti-occupation sentiment lingered in the memory of the Haitian majority long after the Marines withdrew. Obin often turned to the battles between US forces and Haitian rebels during occupation as his subject matter. In fact, the artist painted several other versions of this scene.⁵⁹ This particular iteration features Obin's distinctly flattened perspective employed to portray the large groups of fighters skirmishing along a road lined with dense foliage. The fortress in the background is the *Sitadel Anri*, also known as *Citadelle LaFerriere*, commissioned by King Henri Christophe and completed in 1824. Christophe built this imposing structure on a steep mountaintop in the decades after the Haitian Independence. Conceived as a state-of-the-art defense against potential foreign invaders, the fortress was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1982 and it endures as a symbol of Haitian resilience (as well as Christophe's purported largesse).⁶⁰ As a pictorial metonym, the citadel often shows up in Obin's work as a reminder of Northern Haiti's significant contributions to the country's national mythos. Most significantly, the revolution began in the north: the legendary Vodou ceremony at *Bwa Kayiman* catalyzed the uprisings of enslaved Africans, which spread across the northern plantations and to the rest of *St. Domingue*, the French colonial name for Haiti.⁶¹ This inheritance remains a strong piece of Northern Haitian identity, one that carries over into Obin's work.

⁵⁹ See: Equitable Gallery 1997: 38, 59; Hoffman 1985: 99; Rodman 1988: 38, for photographic reproductions of some of Obin's other *Caco* paintings.

⁶⁰ The Citadel was built as a state-of-the-art redoubt against potential foreign invasion by, it was assumed at the time, one of the pre-eminent early nineteenth-century naval powers, such as England or France. When US forces invaded Haiti in 1915, the citadel had been abandoned as a military fort, and its strategic value had long been rendered obsolete. Today the fortress is a popular tourist attraction.

⁶¹ I use the word "legendary" as a suggestion to the historical accuracy of this event, the occurrence of which may only exist in retellings. Whether or not such a ceremony ever occurred is of little importance to this paper. I agree with Cosentino who writes of *Bois Caiman*, "that these conjectures may not be historical is a matter of indifference to those who retell the legends. Their narratives are created out of the dialectic between what did happen, and what ought to have happened," 1995: 416. See also: Popkin 2012: 37.

Fittingly then, the *cacos*, armed Haitian resistance fighters opposing the US occupation, made their final stand against the Marines in the northern plains of Haiti. Led by Charlemagne Peralte, caco forces withheld US soldiers for several years, having retreated to the mountains in the north. Marine forces pursued, captured, and finally killed Peralte in 1919 (Plummer 1992: 105). His popular support made Peralte's death or capture a priority for the American military. In order to quell rumors of his survival and prove the insurgent leader's death to the Haitian population (as well as serve as a warning to others), the Marines photographed his corpse propped up against a door [fig.7]. Published in Haitian newspapers of the day, the circulation of this image had an effect contrary to American expectations; instead of being soothed, many Haitians now believed that the Americans had crucified Peralte on a door, an indignity that cemented his folk status as a type of "outlaw hero."⁶²

The photograph fueled anti-occupation sentiment in Haiti and was recast as a symbol of popular resistance (Heinl 2005: 463). As a young man during the occupation, Obin likely observed the movements of both *cacos* and Marines in the area of Cap Haïtien (Rodman 1988: 76). In a painting based on the Marine photograph, Obin memorializes Peralte's death in *The Crucifixion of Charlemagne Peralte for Freedom* (1970) [fig.8]. Here, Obin reinterprets the image by emphasizing both biblical and nationalist elements within a present-day setting to heighten Peralte's martyr status. Obin often uses a strategy of incorporating Christian pictorial idioms in order to heighten more topical elements of his work. In the case of this painting, the door supporting Peralte's corpse now stands isolated on a blue background. In a version now in

⁶² Peralte also falls under Hobsbawm's (2000) characterization of "social bandits" who "are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped and supported" 1981: 17. For a list of characteristics that define "outlaw heroes" within the realm of folklore studies, see: Seal 2009.

the Flagg Collection at the Milwaukee Art Museum, the flagpole tucked under his lifeless arm has the shape of a cross and clearly bears the blue and red Haitian flag. The original black and white photo lacks these two features, as well as the Magdalene-like female mourner to the right of Peralte. The additions of the flag, cross, and weeping woman solidify the artist's nationalist sentiments. Whereas the Marine's intended the photograph to be a proof of death, Obin turns it into an elegy.⁶³

Obin saw himself filling an important role in Haitian society. Peters phrases Obin's ambition as his desire to be "the historian of his country in paint" (Hoffman 66). Rodman quotes a letter he received from Obin: "As I see it, painting should be considered in part like the Holy Book, in this way: by means of painting, that is, a picture, one is able to learn something about the past in every part of the world...and with paint one can leave documents for future generations that writing alone would not provide" (Rodman 1948: 28). In both *Crucifixion* and *Battle*, Obin establishes a lineage from the Haitian Revolution to the US Marine occupation for a viewer cognizant of the visual vocabulary: the flag, the Citadel, and others are recognizable symbols to Haitians. Obin's use of coded imagery would have didactic potential among domestic audiences. Market realities and the state of visual arts in Haiti have hampered the efficacy of Obin's intention to be Haiti's pictorial historian. Similar to much of Haiti's patrimony, most of his paintings reside in collections in Europe and North America, where the historical narratives are highly unlikely to resonate in such a way. One notable exception was Obin's mural of

⁶³ At least two versions of this work exist. The earliest, painted in 1948 and now a part of the collection of Musée d'Art du Collège St. Pierre in Haiti, lacks the mourning woman present in the Milwaukee's version, painted in 1970. In *Where Art is Joy* (1988), Rodman prints a version nearly identical to Milwaukee's and attributes the date as 1955. Its location is unknown.

Christ's crucifixion in the apse of the Holy Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Port-au-Prince, destroyed during the 2010 earthquake.⁶⁴

We can locate a cross-cultural corollary to Obin and his work, especially how it relates to social and historical memory, half a world away in the Congo. The work of painter Tshibumba Kanda Matulu is particularly resonant. Like Obin, Tshibumba saw himself as a “historian and educator of his people,” whose work could serve, as he saw it, a larger social purpose (Fabian 1996: ix).⁶⁵ Tshibumba was a “genre” painter working in Shaba, Zaire (as the Democratic Republic of Congo was named at the time), who made work for sale within the local market. As such, his output was limited by the demands of buying audiences who sought work that corresponded to ideals of *ukumbusho*, a type of “meaningful shared memory” (*ibid*: 213). According to Fabian, genre painters were limited to depictions of generalized figures placed in scenes familiar to local audiences that “serve as ‘reminders’ of past experiences and present predicaments” without indexing specific individuals (*ibid*: 195). Fabian, conducting fieldwork in Zaire when he met Tshibumba, served as patron to the artist, underwriting the production of a series of paintings known as, “The History of Zaire” (1996). Fabian’s support gave Tshibumba the creative flexibility to transcend the stylistic strictures of Shaba genre painting in order to give the artist license to depict a vision of his country that included idealized pre-colonial life, the cruelty and exploitation at the hands of Belgian colonists, indigenous resistance to colonialism,

⁶⁴ The murals were largely destroyed in the 2010 earthquake but several large portions still survive. Soon after the earthquake, the Smithsonian Institution organized the Haitian Cultural Recovery Project, which directed conservation on the Ste. Trinité murals. The HCRP trained Haitian conservators and fostered art-conservation programs run through Haitian institutions – a major step in providing much-needed arts infrastructure in the country. The surviving murals remain in storage in Port-au-Prince with no immediate plans for their future exhibition or re-installation. See: Kurin 2011.

⁶⁵ Tshibumba provides just one of many examples of a “popular” artist confronting and interrogating histories of foreign domination. See: Roberts & Roberts 2002, in which the authors discuss depictions of the Sufi Senegalese saint, Amadou Bamba, and their significance to artists and audiences in Senegal who interact with them.

and the fractious political and military struggles in the wake of independence.⁶⁶ While Tshibumba's "History" was the direct product of his relationship with Fabian, Obin participated within a more diffuse network of patronage facilitated by the Centre d'Art. Nevertheless, both artists took advantage of economic circumstances that allowed them to visualize didactic, localized histories.⁶⁷

We find the most direct comparison to Obin's *Crucifixion* in Tshibumba's paintings of Patrice Lumumba, a leader in Congo's independence from Belgium and the country's first democratically elected prime minister. Lumumba's leadership was short-lived – he was deposed from power after serving only a few months in office, arrested, and later executed. President Joseph-Désiré Mobutu (1965-1997), complicit in Lumumba's assassination, systematically and legislatively co-opted Lumumbist ideology while letting Lumumba's legacy otherwise deteriorate through official neglect (Rubango 1999: 55). Nevertheless, Lumumba remained popular after his death and, after Mobutu gained power in 1965, Lumumba became a symbol of resistance and "a conception emerged of Lumumba as incarnating opposition to Mobutu – of Lumumba as the father of true independence, the independence that Mobutu had confiscated" (Jewsiewicki 1999b: 27). In this context, an image of Lumumba was constructed by Congolese painters that depicts the leader within a pictorial vocabulary similar to the one found in Obin's painting of the martyred Peralte. In *La mort historique de Lumumba, Mpolo et Okoto le 17 Janv. 1961* (n.d.) [fig.9], for example, Tshibumba portrays the deceased figure lying prone, eyes

⁶⁶ For an extensive overview and reproduction of key works in "The History of Zaire," as well as Tshibumba's own interpretations as offered to Fabian, see: Fabian 1996.

⁶⁷ We find other, more ephemeral examples of this picto-historical impulse elsewhere. See: Brown 1995, for a discussion and photographed examples of public works by Haitian muralists, since painted over or lost, made during a tumultuous yet hopeful period in the political career of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Like Fabian, Brown takes care to allow artists an opportunity to speak about their own work by including interview transcripts with local mural artists Charlemagne Celéstin and Vladimir Ronald Molière.

closed. In the background are three crosses, just as Calvary. Furthering the symbolic linkages to Christ, Lumumba has a bloody wound on his side, as if his tormentors desecrated his body in the same fashion as the Roman guard who pierced Jesus' side during the Crucifixion. Such an image, according to Jewsiewicki:

communicates to the viewer a virtual experience of a just world; the works make him or her feel as a tangible presence the political values to which the Congolese aspire. The artist, who enables us to see the icons by painting them, lives in close union with the memory that constitutes his material (1999b: 73).

Here, we can draw parallels to Congolese popular painters and Haitian ones like Obin, whose work was part of a larger social agenda. Using idioms familiar to their audiences (in this instance, ones derived from the New Testament), artists like Obin and Tshibumba consolidated social memory in the service of communicating collectively held values and ideals, a strategy present in both artists' work despite their geographic separation.⁶⁸

Obin often based his work upon photographs, especially in his early involvement with the Centre d'Art. Indeed, his very first submission depicting FDR in Cap Haïtien was derived from a newspaper photo (Robinson 1983: 66). DeWitt Peters steered Obin towards painting "from life," rather than photographs, since Peters thought it was a stronger demonstration of Obin's talent (*ibid*). Obin's reliance on photos in his work can be understood as a particular manifestation seen elsewhere in Haitian visual culture, in which mechanically reproduced images play a prominent role.⁶⁹ In Vodou practice, for example, saints depicted in Catholic chromolithographs have a "perceived iconic correspondence" with the *lwa* (Cosentino 2005: 234). In this context, an image of St. Patrick can also be *Danbala*, a *lwa* who often manifests as a

⁶⁸ We find other instances of Christian themes used to venerate political heroes closer to Haiti as well. For a discussion of Christ-like depictions of Che Guevara by artists throughout Latin America, see: Kunzle 1997.

⁶⁹ The active appropriation and re-contextualization of mechanically reproduced images is not exclusive to Haiti, and vibrantly evident in many other Afro-Atlantic religious practices. See: Cosentino 2005; Rush 1999.

snake, at the same time.⁷⁰ The process of borrowing and appropriating visual idioms is not unique to Catholic imagery, and extends to Asian religious symbols from practices unfamiliar to many *Vodouisants*, such as Hinduism and Buddhism (Cosentino 1998: 19). Vodou practitioners incorporate any type of image or object that might symbolize or compose the identity of the deity. Hollywood and American rap stars become manifestations of *lwa*; detritus left over from humanitarian forays in Haiti is incorporated into Vodou altars. Donald J. Cosentino argues that this *mélange* of divergent ideas and materials reflects the dynamic continuum of Haitian culture as manifested in Vodou, in which participants reassemble readily available materials (1995: 47). By appropriating a widely disseminated image into his visual historical project, Obin recasts the photo into a new role, different from its original one. The example of *Crucifixion* shows how any image can have efficacy towards different purposes – in this case, for a project centered on national historical memory.⁷¹

In one important sense, Obin was able to extend his vision of Haiti's history to his fellow country-people. In the wake of his success, Obin taught and collaborated with many artists, a number of whom are family and share his last name. Early in their relationship, DeWitt Peters tasked Obin with creating a Centre d'Art branch in Obin's hometown, the northern city of Cap Haïtien . The School of Cap Haïtien , as the style developed under his guidance was soon known, included historical scenes (many from the time of revolution) in addition to depictions of street life, religious celebrations, funerals, weddings, commemorations, and Carnival festivities, all featuring iconographic markers for northern Haiti. Several of the artists – including family members such as Obin's brother Sénèque Obin and sons Antoine and Télémaque Obin, among others – became prominent painters in their own right.

⁷¹ For a further discussion of the fluidity of this image in a contemporary context, see: Chapter 3.

The ubiquity of paintings resembling Philomé Obin's style, and the sheer number of artists with whom he worked, may also account for the reception of his work versus that of Hector Hyppolite. We cannot know how Hyppolite would have continued his practice if he had lived longer. Would he have taken on students and taught his technique to other artists? Would he have continued painting, producing a body of work rivaling that of Obin's? Hyppolite's limited window of production and untimely death contributed to the perception, regularly assigned to other artists who fulfill the "tragic genius" trope, that he was a "true original." Obin, on the other hand, receives a brand of criticism directed at other Haitian artists: once he experienced success, he responded to demand by simply creating more work of similar scenes.

Obin's penchant for making several versions of one painting may be an example of his response to market demand. The choice of pictures reproduced might also indicate certain sensibilities on the part of collectors reflecting which paintings they preferred over others. For example, as mentioned before, several versions of *Battle Between the Cacos and the American Marines* exist, all painted within a ten-year period. Could the subject matter in this painting – American soldiers engaged in a little-known battle, in which they are not portrayed as victorious and heroic, but as robotic and nameless – have affected its appeal for a collector in the US? Could Obin have been trying to directly engage with American audiences? If we return to Obin's early submission to DeWitt Peters, *Franklin D. Roosevelt Interceding in the Beyond for the Peace of the Americas* (1946) [fig.4] featuring FDR awaiting the descent of laurel-bearing angels from the heavens, we see the subject matter as a nod to Peters' US citizenship. With its fantastic elements and celestial subject matter, the painting transcends Obin's role of historian that he plays in other parts of his oeuvre in order to communicate sensibilities rooted in national pride across cultural lines. Similarly, *Battle* depicts another

moment of intersection between Haitians and Americans, although a less elegiac one than the portrayal of FDR. Presumably, this scene's existence as a multiple indicates its appeal to many collectors, as well as the possibility of his own desire to keep painting the image for personal reasons. In a practical sense, if collectors wanted to commission a new version of a pre-existing work, why should Obin not accommodate them? Such instances of repetition may dilute the value of Obin's artistry for more unforgiving audiences, but they also reinforce Richman's arguments about mimesis and repetition, wherein collectors and artists engage in a cycle of tacit negotiations surrounding expectations.

When accounting for Obin's multiple versions, Richman strikes an important point about writers like Rodman who have shaped the reception of Haitian art: "the role of mimetic interplay in folk-art reproduction was concealed by loftier claims of authenticity" (2008: 203). In other words, in order to legitimize Haitian painting, it had to be aligned with Western standards of originality that collectors most often sought. As a result, promoters of Haitian art, according to Richman's analysis, emphasized the "artist-as-genius" narrative and glossed over mimetic interplay, which involved the repetition and reuse of styles, techniques, and themes aligning with perceived market preferences.⁷² In order to preserve the aura of authenticity, and thus legitimize value as "fine art," such commercial and cultural realities had to be downplayed.

Richman (2008) portrays a scenario in which artists tailored work to the perceived desires of foreign collectors in search of the authentic. Artists like Hyppolite "understood the rules of interaction with consumers of the essence of primitive" (*ibid*: 222). Luis M. Castañeda (2014) takes a similar view, casting Obin in the role of trickster playing to market

⁷² See: Pollock 1988, for a Marxist/psychoanalytical discussion of this trope in Western Art History.

expectations. Castañeda suggests that Obin chose his subject matter to appeal directly to the sensibilities of the American consumers. As a particular example, Castañeda describes Obin's portrayal of the spectral Roosevelt as containing, "humorous, cynical detachment, poking fun at the self-aggrandizing, often sanctimonious rhetoric that accompanied these demonstrations of presumed benevolence" (*ibid*: 63). Not only does such a reading gloss over the decades of camaraderie and collaboration between Obin and his promoters, which makes such an assumption questionable, it also diminishes Obin's pride in featuring Northern Haiti in his work. Reasonably, the artist continued to be taken by the historical intersection between his hometown and Roosevelt's visit, which made him the first sitting US president to ever visit Haiti. Another cultural overlap between Haiti and the US was taking place in the collaborative environment of the Centre d'Art. Certainly, as Castañeda and Richman both point out, the balance of cultural power dynamics tilted unavoidably in favor of the Americans (despite the efforts of the directors to be "hands-off"), which may explain Obin's choice of subject matter and its appeal to US American patriotism. Lastly, considering Obin's penchant for decorum and formality in his personal and business lives, it is difficult to imagine him approaching a work meant to encourage an artistic business relationship in such a cynical manner.

Castañeda gives a questionable interpretation of Obin's intentions, although his points about the imbalanced cultural exchanges that occurred vis-à-vis the Centre d'Art are warranted. Taken together with Richman's evaluation, his readings of Haitian Renaissance narratives represent a movement in contemporary scholarship to reevaluate entrenched narratives on Haitian art by reconsidering the roles of those who had a stake in the work of Haitian artists. Rather than identifying instance of nefariousness, perhaps a more valid question is, taken in light of unequal power dynamics, how does Obin enact agency as an

artist? How might Obin shape a work like *Battle Between the Cacos and the American Marines* so that it would appeal to American collectors while putting forth a narrative of resistance? The existence of several versions of the same scene is evidence of the work's appeal to collectors. For one, the formal composition shows Obin settling into his technique as a painter. Within the timeline of his oeuvre, the work represents an early example of the "signature" style that led celebrities like Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis to seek out Obin's work. The painting's historical context, for many US Americans, remains a footnote in the greater history of Gunboat Diplomacy and US imperialism in the Western Hemisphere. For Obin, however, his memories of Haiti on the receiving end of such policies are manifest in his vision of Haitian resistance.

Tourism's Effect on Haitian Visual Art

Castañeda (2014) argues that DeWitt Peters and Selden Rodman's involvement in the Haitian Renaissance resulted from US interventionism in the Caribbean under the aegis of Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy.⁷³ The extent to which their individual contributions were prescribed by some targeted diplomatic agenda, Castaneda never fully demonstrates. Nevertheless, both Rodman and Peters had some of their activities in Haiti underwritten by the US government (*ibid*: 57). The writings of Peters and Rodman were also "part of a broad horizon of mid-twentieth century attempts to find 'purer' alternatives to predominant Euro-American modernism by exploring its margins, which included non-Western traditions as well as the work of 'untrained' artists" (*ibid*: 64).

⁷³ For more on the scope and types of US Good Neighbor initiatives in Latin America, see: Haines 1977.

US aid and the development of Haiti's economy through tourism factored heavily into the Good Neighbor Policy's initiatives in the country. One part of this strategy involved surveying potential tourist attractions and sites for hotel construction (Plummer 1992: 132). In addition, tourism would be economically beneficial to the US by opening markets to US firms, and would help incorporate Haiti into the Good Neighbor program's Pan-American ideals. The US-backed occupation administration had pursued plans to build tourism infrastructure while Marines still occupied the country. The Ministry of Tourism was established in 1928 during the height of the occupation (Ramsey 1995: 16). The development of tourism and other non-militaristic means of influence received greater emphasis under the US Good Neighbor Policy, and after US troops had withdrawn.

Internationally, perceptions of Haiti began to change favorably in the 1930s. In order to appeal to foreign travelers, President Stenio Vincent (1930-41) had hoped to attract visitors of "the better class" by using Haitian folk culture as a component of tourism promotion (Plummer 1992: 133). As Plummer states, "international opinion was moving away from crude racism and," aided by official promotion of tourism in Haiti, "Western visitors might now enjoy what previously repelled them" (*ibid*: 129). President Vincent capitalized on the perceptive shift and recognized the arts as a tool to promote a unified presentation of Haitian culture abroad. Typically, these representations relied on elements of folk culture to "sell" Haiti. Vincent supported folkloric dance and music troupes who derived their repertoires from Vodou ceremonies, despite official opposition to such forms of worship. Vincent also supported the visual arts with a similar outcome in mind. Recognizing William Edouard Scott's contribution to the development of Haitian visual arts, Vincent bought several of Scott's canvasses at the painter's 1931 solo show in Port-au-Prince. The president also presented Scott with official

honors (Alexis 2012: 114). Folkloric troupes were deployed abroad to promote a positive image of Haiti, but Vincent's administration was engaged in repressing forms of Vodou practice domestically, which underscored the ambivalent relationship between Haiti's ruling elite and the peasantry.⁷⁴ Vincent's successor as president, Élie Lescot (1941-46), directly assisted the Centre d'Art financially in its early years, and also secured the empty residence that would become its home (Christensen 1975: 45). With such gestures of support, Lescot incorporated the visual arts in a larger official program of cultural promotion.

The Centre d'Art itself was a major feature in the tourism landscape in Haiti in the late 1940s. The tourism industry was gaining momentum and the government's support of the center coincided with a project to attract "refined" visitors willing to spend their money in the country. Similar to government-sponsored tourism programs in other Caribbean countries, those in Haiti approached tourism as a potential economic panacea (K. Thompson 2006: 23). US travelers brought steady currency in dollars. After World War II, more Americans began to travel abroad for leisure purposes and, because of the devastation of Western Europe and the glorious weather, the Caribbean became an ever more popular destination (Averill 1997: 63). Additionally, a few-hour plane ride from Miami to Port-au-Prince and the Haiti's development of port accommodations for cruise ships made travel between the US and Haiti relatively easy for those seeking an "exotic" vacation locale relatively close to contributions to the Haitian economy at this time, citing its trickle-down effects to everyone from local food

⁷⁴ Kate Ramsey highlights the extent of Vincent's ambivalence and waffling on the subject of Haitian folk culture in an anecdote about the National Folk Festival, Washington DC, May 1941. André Janvier, the lead drummer of a performing Haitian folkloric troupe, addressed Vincent, who was in the audience. Janvier "asked Lescot for a memento or souvenir to prove on his return to Haiti that drummers who were 'so unappreciated in our country, were recognized as great artists abroad.'" Vincent obliged yet began the Anti-Superstition Campaign several months later nonetheless; Ramsey 2002: 24.

suppliers, Haitian hotel owners, as well as the artists at the Centre d'Art. Diederich recalls the dynamic tourist experience in Port-au-Prince in the early 1950s:

During a typical day, hundreds of tourists streamed ashore at Columbus Pier from the Ocean Monarch of the Furness line, or the Massdam and the Nieuw Amsterdam – among other cruise ships to be welcomed by a kneeling Christophe [sic] Columbus [statue], Haiti's first tourist, a gift from Italy (2008: 84).

After disembarking, cruise passengers would head into downtown Port-au-Prince to the bustling *Mache Fe* (Iron Market) or the *Cham Mas* (Main Square), the latter to which the Centre d'Art was adjacent. Tourists looking for a memento or local handicraft commemorating their visit were directed to the Centre d'Art where paintings and sculptures were relatively cheap. The street vendors selling stacks of painted canvasses or carved wooden souvenirs seen then in Haiti would only become a ubiquitous presence in later decades.

The Haitian tourism industry soared in the post-war years under the administration of President Dumarsais Estimé (1946-1950), whom journalist Bernard Diederich calls "the father of tourism" in Haiti (2008: 22). The 1949 Bicentennial Exposition, which commemorated the founding of Port-au-Prince, was the pinnacle of Estimé's efforts to reform Haiti's image on a global stage, and present itself as a "modern" nation. Tourism development was closely linked to this grand project. The exposition provided the incentive to renovate both the downtown and waterfront of the capital by razing "slums" and displacing the residents, and building new theaters and exhibition spaces (Ramsey 1995: 201). The waterfront was especially important, since it offered the very first impression of Haiti to disembarking travelers. Larger infrastructure projects also piggybacked on the renovation efforts in Port-au-Prince (Averill 1997: 64).

Haitian "folk" culture was a useful tool in presenting a favorable image of Haiti for foreign visitors. Organizers of the bicentennial, however, were cautious about representations that suggested Haiti was stuck in the past. Concerned individual and government overseers

intervened to make sure the most “modern,” least “primitive” impressions of Haiti were on display. For instance, performances by Carnival bands, or *rara* groups, were scrubbed of what might be interpreted by expatriates as sexually suggestive material, and gleaming white modernist architecture comprised the new buildings erected on the capital’s waterfront (Ramsey 1997: 202). Several American artists, including Eldzier Cortor and Jason Seley, had their work prominently featured in the exposition, and were commissioned for publically displayed paintings and sculptures.⁷⁵ Such a reliance on foreign artists at a time when successful Haitian ones were making names for themselves at the Centre d’Art indicates the Haitian ruling elite’s reticence towards expressions of popular culture, including those of Kreyòl artists (Twa 2014: 231). Perhaps the most telling official effort to present Haiti as thoroughly modern was a law passed in anticipation of the exposition requiring all citizens to wear shoes in the capital (Ramsey 1995: 202). In the past, foreign commentators often cited people’s bare feet as evidence for claims about Haiti’s supposed “backwardness.” In his writing on the US Marine occupation, Langston Hughes reframed such pejorative narratives, turning the expression for Haitians as “people without shoes” into a critique of the imperialist project undertaken by the U.S. military: “All the work that kept Haiti alive, paid the interest on American loans, and enriched foreign traders, was done by people without shoes” (Renda 262). While Hughes’ point is both biting and poignant, the embarrassed attitudes of Haiti’s leaders toward the majority population continued to be enacted through such legislation.

The International Exposition was an overall failure, likely as a result of the relatively small time-frame given to its organization and preparation (Twa 2014: 210). According to official counts, it brought in only 4,000 more tourists than the previous year (for a total of 9,000)

⁷⁵ During this time, both Seley and Cortor were in residence at the Centre d’Art making work and teaching classes; Twa 2014: 232.

at the cost of six million dollars (Averill 1997: 66). However, reports in the international press were rather positive, despite the low turnout. Such favorable reviews further promoted Haiti as a tourist destination. Additionally, hotel and casino development projects provided an entertainment infrastructure to sustain Haiti's popularity with foreign visitors into the next decade.

Concurrent with the Centre's success, and in the wake of the Bicentennial Exposition, many art galleries opened in the Haitian capital riding the artistic explosion of the period. Privately owned art institutions like Galerie Monnin opened on Boulevard Jean-Jacques Dessalines as the Grand Rue of Port-au-Prince. A Swiss businessman named Roger Monnin emigrated to Haiti in 1947 and joined several other downtown art dealers who opened galleries catering to the sophisticated tastes of tourists at the time. Gaël Monnin, third-generation director of Galerie Monnin has suggested that Haiti during the Renaissance "attracted that elite that wanted adventure mixed with rawness of the culture of Vodou and dance and things like that in a tropical island basically...it just attracted, again, that sophisticated tourism with money power" (Monnin 2013). These "sophisticated" tourists encountered and consumed "the rawness" of Haitian culture in establishments like Galerie Monnin and at the upscale department store, *La Belle Creole*, which opened in 1948 and to cater to international visitors, it included Haitian art among its wares.⁷⁶

For visitors to the country in this period, posh gatherings at the many hotels and clubs that had sprung up in the wake of the Bicentennial Exposition would be nothing without Vodou "demonstrations," or quasi-ceremonies staged for the benefit of tourists. These showcases presented condensed performances of ritual ceremonies found in the complex spiritual system of

⁷⁶ The next chapter includes more on *La Belle Creole* and the other important venues in which Haitian Art was bought and sold.

Vodou, re-formatted for expatriate audiences. The performers themselves were not necessarily Vodou practitioners and were often part of folkloric troupes that arranged shows with the hotel's proprietors (Ramsey 1995: 205). For foreign travelers, the constant negotiation between performed, constructed, "exotic" Haitian culture and the "real thing" (meaning Vodou ceremonies performed in actual *houmfors*, or Vodou temples), was constantly on display in Port-au-Prince in this period. For many of these "adventurous" travelers, as that term was proposed through exoticist advertising, the Centre d'Art also provided an easily accessible venue in which to experience "authentic" Haitian culture. The degree to which such "adventure" and "authenticity" were invented for their benefit was not made manifest, for obvious purposes of promoting business.

Travel Writing as Art History

The writings of travelers to Haiti in the 1940s and 50s provide individual insight into the ways in which foreigners experienced the country. Since the majority of clients and patrons of the Centre d'Art arrived from overseas, the observations and interactions recorded by travel writers provide insight into the ways they perceived Haitian culture, and especially via the visual arts.

Additionally, contemporary travelogues show evidence of dominant discourses that informed writers' notions of Caribbean cultures, and especially that of Haiti.

In his book *The Traveller's Tree: A Journey Through the Caribbean Islands* (1950), British author Patrick Leigh Fermor presents Haiti as a country with dual, opposing identities rooted in Africa and Europe. He engages his readers with observations along the road from the airport into downtown Port-au-Prince:

Old women, puffing at their pipes, jogged along side-saddle. They had scarlet and blue kerchiefs tied round their heads in fortuitous, rather piratical fashion, half-covered by

broad-brimmed straw hats against the sun. The sides of the road pullulated with country people chattering, drinking rum, playing cards and throwing dice under the trees. The air was thick with dust, and ringing incomprehensible and deafening Créole (245).

This initial, leisurely encounter of semi-rural yet chaotic Haitian street life sets up a contrast that Fermor explores later. The author describes an elegant Christmas Eve dinner at the *Cabane Choucouné*, one of Haiti's most popular jazz nightclubs at the time. For Fermor, nothing about this event was "remotely primitive," unlike the rustic atmosphere he encountered along the road:

Men in beautifully made white suits and dinner jackets danced with women dressed in the height of fashion. They were superb, far the best-looking we had seen in any of the islands: tall, broad-shouldered, narrow-waisted and long-legged, with a fine carriage of the head and great elegance of movement and gesture. What a relief to see this colour and splendour and extravagance after the shapeless dresses of the colonies! Many of our neighbours were pale in complexion, but the majority were of an imposing ebony. A woman sitting at the next table was perhaps the most beautiful in a room full of sable Venuses (*ibid*).

These two passages indicate the dichotomous nature of the foreign tourist's experience in Haiti. Fermor's enjoyment of the country vacillates between decrying the "primitive" African culture of the peasantry, in which the traveler could immerse him or herself in a sense of the exotic, and more upscale Continental charm provided by Haiti's wealthy, mixed-race elite. Fermor's writing exudes a sense of charm he feels towards Haiti's "otherworldliness," and he devotes three chapters to the country, more than any of the other locales he visits in the book.

Fermor's third chapter on Haiti is devoted to "primitive" painters and the Centre d'Art. Fermor nuances the presumption that art in Haiti was non-existent before Peters' arrival by stating that art was "not dead, but sleeping," and cites the existence of painted embellishments on houses and shop signs as evidence of this nascent state (*ibid*: 303). Fermor's descriptions of Haitian art, within the rubric of travel writing, resemble those of contemporary art-historical literature. Fermor celebrated the Centre d'Art's self-taught painters taking an adulatory tone, especially regarding certain painters' allegedly "innate" expressive capabilities: "The pictures

that emerge from this maelstrom of currents prove once more the overwhelming primacy in the Haitian mind of the imaginary world over the real" (*ibid*: 305). For Fermor, artists like Philomé Obin (whom he calls "literary" for his attempts to depict actual events and not imaginary ones) garner comparisons with children:

Once the subject is chosen, nothing – absolutely nothing – daunts these artists, and the paint is applied with the strength, conscientiousness and diligence of a grown man, and all the intrepidity of a child; and, with regard to any academic rule of thumb, with a flair for the combination of colours and a pristine and almost miraculous heterodoxy that make the observer gasp (*ibid*: 305).

Fermor breathlessly extols the power of the work of the artists he encountered at the Centre d'Art. The immediate impact of the self-taught artists resided in their spontaneous-seeming, "childish" execution. We can rely on Fermor to arrive at the same conclusions as Peters, Rodman, and even Thoby-Marcelin: how to preserve the immediacy and "purity" of these artists that they perceived? In other words, how might one keep them "unspoiled"?:

How can the fatal apple of knowledge be withheld? If their experimental curiosity or their mimetism impel them to new departures, it would plainly be impossible and wrong to expect them to pass the rest of their painting careers as stuffed *naifs*. Yet what should their future developments be (*ibid*: 309)?

Here, Fermor forecasts the future patterns of Haitian art, in which many artists would rely on mimesis, repeating pictorial idioms for commercial purposes in decades to come, which contributed heavily to the de-valuation and transformation of the Haitian art market by the end of the Duvalier dictatorships in the mid-1980s among expatriates looking for those ignorant of "the fatal apple of knowledge." Despite his shockingly demeaning phrasing, Fermor shares the anxieties wrought by these potential changes, and questions the future of artists whose talents he felt must be directly correlated to their separation or removal from contemporary society and its capitalist modes.

Selden Rodman's work blurs the line between art criticism and travel writing. Because of his numerous visits and extended affairs in Haiti, his observations come from a more embedded perspective than Fermor's. Rodman first came to Haiti in 1938. He returned in 1942 to see the staging of his play, "The Revolutionists: A Tragedy in Three Acts," as a theatrical account of the Haitian Revolution that he wrote after his first visit. Rodman attended the opening at the Rex Theater in Port-au-Prince as a cultural ambassador and was seated next to President Élie Lescot. Jean Price-Mars, the forbearer for Haiti's "New Nationalism" and father of the Indigenist movement, was also in attendance. As Rodman recalls:

[Price-Mars] presented me with the Order of Commander of the Haitian Order of Merit and Honor. In my prepared speech of acceptance I interpolated the line, 'The United States has much to learn from Haiti in the way of race relations.' There was thunderous applause from the 1500 spectators, especially in the galleries (1943: 103).

After military service during World War II, Rodman returned to Haiti often, traveling from his home in New Jersey to Port-au-Prince, where he became closely involved in the operations of the Centre d'Art, serving as its co-director for a short tenure beginning in 1947.

Rodman's disdain for prevailing aesthetic trends occurring in the capitals of international art provides a particularly revealing glimpse into his attitudes. Specifically, he saw Abstract Expressionism as evidence of a general malaise among contemporary artists in New York and Paris who were turning away from traditional Western notions of aesthetic beauty, which, for Rodman, were intrinsic qualifiers of "great" art.⁷⁷ In his role as Haitian-art advocate in the US, Rodman convinced Albert Barr Jr., the director of the Museum of Modern Art at the time, to purchase Jacques-Enguérand Gourgue's painting, *The Magic Table* (1947) [fig.10] for the museum's permanent collection. The acquisition was an important moment in the collection of

⁷⁷ According to Rodman's widow, Carole, he "hated" Abstract Expressionism, which affected his relationship with Barr; C. Rodman 2015.

Haitian art in the US. Beyond this example and a few others, however, the directors of MoMA did not sustain their intake of work by Haitian artists. Instead, the museum devoted its considerable resources to supporting the work of artists working in a European Modernist vein. “Folk art,” “primitive” painting, work made by artists who were, in Rodman’s view, attuned to a sublime internalized beauty, all factored into Rodman's idea of what art "should" be. As a counter-example, Rodman considered Mexican muralism too political, and Abstract Expressionists too "cold" (1988: 7). Rodman revealingly titled his last book dedicated to Haitian art, *Where Art is Joy* (1988).

Throughout his life, Rodman wrote on Haitian art and culture, publishing travel guides and works of art history focused on Kreyòl artists. Among his activities, he helped persuade Alfred Voegeli, Episcopal Bishop of Haiti, to allow a group of artists affiliated with the Centre d’Art in 1949 to paint monumental murals in the interior of the Holy Trinity Cathedral in Port-au-Prince. Bishop Voegeli agreed to the project after the Catholic Bishop refused Rodman's initial proposal (Rodman 1988: 103). Rodman acted as coordinator, organizing the artists and providing them with materials and supplies. The bishop raised money for the project from various sources, and the murals, which were a culmination of work by eight different artists on a monumental scale, were finally completed in 1954.

Diederich points out that the paintings drew the ire of upper-class Haitians wary of Vodou expressions so prominently displayed. He elaborates on the class-based ambivalence he observed in the domestic reception of Kreyòl artists:

It was of no interest to [the élite] that Haiti's truly indigenous art permeated openly or subtly (like so many things in Haiti) by the spirit of *Vodou* could be creative and even brilliant. The only Haitians to attend the art exhibition at the *centre* were those who were friendly with foreign expatriates residing in Haiti. Only years later, when Haitian indigenous art won recognition and commanded high prices, were the artists accepted by their country's own elite. Some opened successful art shops (2008: 39).

For the “elite” Haitians that Diederich characterized, Christianity and Vodou were incongruous and incompatible within the same space. They saw juxtaposition where the artists who made the murals drew no such distinction, but as Cosentino points out, such symbols can and do coexist (1995). Diederich’s observation of upper-class attitudes shows the slow pace of change in Haiti. Such wariness on the part of Haiti’s “colored Frenchman,” to use Price-Mars’ term, was applied to a range of Africa-derived expressions that included both “naive” painting and Vodou. Even decades after the publication of Price-Mars’ *Ainsi Parla l’Oncle*, which advocated for an embrace of Haiti’s indigenous cultural forms, apprehension remained well entrenched among the powerful, mostly mixed-race, segments of Haiti’s population.⁷⁸ As Diederich points out, once US Americans and French people showed lasting interest in the work of Haiti’s Kreyòl artists, attitudes among upper-class Haitians gradually followed suit. In spite of conflicts surrounding the project, the Cathedral’s murals proved to be a huge tourist draw. Until their near-destruction in 2010, they remained one of the few examples of Haiti’s visual patrimony to remain in the country.⁷⁹

In the examples of Fermor and Rodman, we see the extent to which the literature on Haitian art in the Renaissance period straddled the categories of art history and travel writing. For the purposes of this thesis, rather than making a distinction between two literary genres, it is important to examine the ways in which both modes were mutually non-exclusive and how

⁷⁸ The relationship between race and class in Haiti is much less binary than in the US, and complex political and cultural issues in Haiti are not easily understood through racial and color distinctions, although they do play a significant role. The appropriation of Haiti’s revolutionary narratives for political purposes abroad, however, relied on a simplified, mythic narrative of Black self-determination. For a thorough historical investigation into the deployment of “color” and “race” as tools of political power in Haiti, see: Nicholls 1979.

⁷⁹ About seventy percent of the murals were tragically destroyed in the 2010 earthquake. For an account of the Smithsonian Institution’s post-quake recovery efforts, see: Kurin 2011.

each informed the other. Indeed, beyond the realm of literature, this blurring of boundaries speaks to the greater symbiosis of Haitian Art and tourism. As vital components to the establishment and development of Haitian Art, art history and travel writing were inextricably linked.

Primitivist Discourse Informing Haitian Art and Tourism

As we can see in the writings discussed above, the source of the Kreyòl artists' appeal to foreign collectors and critics was based in European Primitivist discourse. Rodman compares the work of Haitian Renaissance artists to that of "Sunday painters" like Henri Rousseau, who were untrained in mainstream Western visual arts traditions and who developed their styles and techniques independently of the Academy (Rodman 1948: 8). The mid-twentieth century celebration of Haitian art also closely resembles the attention paid to art from African and indigenous cultures in Europe at the turn of the century. French Modern artists and intellectuals were drawn to the formal and representational qualities of "tribal" and "primitive" art objects as a means to challenge accepted aesthetic modes in the "West." In describing Pablo Picasso's relationship to such cultural "artifacts," William Rubin, curator of MoMA's still-controversial exhibition, *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (1984) writes:

What Picasso recognized in those sculptures was ultimately a part of himself, of his own psyche, and therefore a witness to the humanity he shared with their carvers. He also realized that the Western artistic tradition had lost much of the power either to address or to change the inner man revealed in those sculptures (1984: 73).

Here, Rubin's language is closely reminiscent of Rodman's. Both writers take a mournful and nostalgic view of the state of representational aesthetics in "Western" art. For Rodman, the work of artists like Hyppolite encapsulated qualities lost in industrialized, capitalistic societies. In Picasso's case, those objects made by mostly-unnamed artists had largely the same liberating

effects. We also see how such artists were often compared to children, possessing qualities of innocence and purity, which required paternalistic intervention and stewardship by Rodman, Peters, and others.

Primitivist discourse pervades much of the writing on Haitian art. Sigelinde Lemke (1998) identifies four major types: Chronological, in which the past is valued higher than the present; Cultural, which romanticizes and venerates non-Western cultures, especially their perceived sexual liberty and closeness to nature; Spiritual, which relates to "dark-irrational mystic powers and the Dionysian ecstasy"; and Aesthetic in which "Western" artists draw influence from "non-Western" art forms (1998: 26). The fascination with Haitian art and culture in the mid-twentieth century, especially as manifested in the writings on Hyppolite, discussed above, often touches on all four of these categories and the Social Darwinism implicit to them. While Hyppolite made work that was produced in his own times, it was associated in expatriate imaginings with a mythical, pre-industrial past (Chronological). Hyppolite's paintings were and are also considered closely aligned with Vodou traditions originating in Africa and, therefore, are distanced as non-Western (Cultural). In the eyes of those encountering Vodou from an outside perspective, the religion also lends Haitian art a mysterious, other-worldly quality, especially as it is understood via misconceptions pervading US and European popular representations of the religion (Spiritual).⁸⁰ Lastly, Haitian Art generally, and Hyppolite's work specifically, offers a cultural antidote, a repository for Edenic "otherness" for people who hailed from industrialized capitalist, "civilized" societies (Aesthetic). While it would be a reductive assessment to say that every person from the US or Europe who encountered the work of Haitian artists resorted to such default readings, the writings discussed earlier in this chapter show how Haitian art's expatriate

⁸⁰ For discussions on misrepresentations of Haitian culture and "voodoo" that have fed stereotypes in the US, see: Cosentino 1995; Dash 1988; Hurbon 1995.

champions presented it to their audiences within the rubric of Lemke's four strains of Primitivism. Because proponents like Breton, Fermor, and Rodman had such an impact on the greater reception of Haitian art, we must consider the types of discourses they have deployed in their writings.

Tourism often traffics in similarly nostalgic and laudatory modes regarding people from "other" cultures. Dean MacCannell (1989) writes about a pervasive desire for "authenticity" in late capitalist societies that informs and perpetuates the cross-cultural engagements of tourism. According to MacCannell, by engaging with unfamiliar peoples and cultures, a tourist seeks to connect with concepts and ideas deemed lost to modern industrial societies, namely a familiar order of social relationships based upon a connection between individuals and the products of their labor. The tourist searches for cultural origins and experiences a sense of nostalgia based upon the desire for an imagined past (*ibid*: 2-6). The writings of Rodman and Fermor in particular tap into this sense of longing that MacCannell identifies.

Susan Stewart (1993) demonstrates how the concepts of longing and nostalgia are expressed through the act of collecting, and are motivating factors in the Western search for authenticity in other cultures. Like MacCannell, Stewart theorizes the operations of tourism as an alienating consequence of capitalist, industrial modernity. The collection of souvenirs in particular embodies tourism's relationship to time and space: "The double function of the souvenir is to authenticate a past or otherwise remote experience and, at the same time, to discredit the present" (*ibid*: 139). Stewart successfully demonstrates here how the souvenir depends on spatial distance (the object has been removed from the geographic location of its production and therefore attains its significance by being far away) and temporal distance (the object signifies the past, either in the journey that has now concluded, or by its association with a

“primitive” culture that exists in the past). In both cases, this distance serves as a qualifier for a souvenir’s authenticity. Similar to travel writing, the collection of souvenirs, including Haitian art (whether or not it was viewed as such by those who acquired it), helped expatriate visitors articulate a sense of longing that they sought in the encounters with their host cultures.

Conclusion

In terms of the Haitian Renaissance and the mid-century rise of the market, Haitian art history and tourism have been closely linked and have shared a discursive language inherited from Primitivist discourse. Writings on the work of Hector Hyppolite provide especially resonant examples for how these discourses have been employed. The art of Philomé Obin, on the other hand, seems to attract less pronounced Primitivist language, perhaps because Vodou subject matter was less identifiable in his work. Threads of Spiritual Primitivism that pervaded writing on Haitian visual culture were muted in discussions of Obin’s work. Obin’s historical scenes, however, align with Lemke’s conception of Chronological Primitivism, in that their backwards-looking qualities suggest a proud nostalgia for both Revolutionary and Occupation eras of Haiti’s past. Additionally, the “otherness” of Obin’s paintings, while not necessarily “non-Western,” qualifies his work for readings within the vein of Cultural Primitivism depending on whose eyes were and are beholding them.

The Centre d’Art’s foundation signaled the beginning of a market for the work of Haitian artists. The works of Hyppolite and Obin constitute two major bodies of artistic production that underscore the shortcomings of Primitivist language. Nevertheless, the work of Haitian artists rose to such prominence during the mid-twentieth century that it created an entire industry of visual-arts production for which Haiti became and is still known. In addition, the aptness of a

term like “renaissance” to describe the market’s rise belies a fertile cultural atmosphere in Haiti in which dynamic cultural expressions were taking shape. Even if visual artists were working in a scattershot, unorganized environment at the time that DeWitt Peters arrived in Haiti, they were still engaged, active participants in cultural politics in their own ways. When examining complexities and nuances of Haitian art at mid-century as understood by its contributors and supporters, producers and consumers, a different picture emerges. Narratives and tropes that put forth a “discovery” scenario, or simplify the dynamic atmosphere of Post-Occupation Haiti into a “renaissance” framework, ignore a constellation of influential factors whose reach extended beyond visual-arts production. The next chapter will address the connections between tourism and collecting in relation to Haitian art in greater depth, especially with regard to the establishment of major collections of Haitian art in the US. A great deal of writing exists on the subject of Haitian art in the context of the mid-twentieth century, especially regarding the actions of Rodman and Peters; less has considered developments in subsequent decades when major transformations occurred in the nature of Haitian art’s production and reception. Discussions about Haiti from 1960 to today tend to focus on the myriad crises the country experienced, rather than the state of the country’s visual arts; however, a study of the changes in Haitian art during this time, and the narratives surrounding Haiti itself, lend ever-changing perspectives on the country’s social, political, and environmental tumult, and the ways in which visual culture has responded and intervened.

CHAPTER 2: High Highs and Low Lows: Fluctuations in the Haitian Art Market and The Rise of Institutionalized Collecting in the United States

Political shifts toward autocratic rule in Haiti enacted by President Francois “Papa Doc” Duvalier in the late 1950s began to inhibit the circulation of art and threaten the creative fervor of the previous decades. By the mid-1960s, political repression enacted at the behest of the president and his supporters had reached peak levels. Many Haitians and their families fled the country as Duvalier consolidated power through increasingly violent means. The once-thriving market that emerged in the Haitian Renaissance period became dormant as expatriate tourists virtually stopped visiting Haiti, cutting off a critical source of financial support for the Haitian arts community. International interest in the work of Haitian artists, however, continued during the lean years of Papa Doc’s regime. After Duvalier’s death in the early 1970s, Haiti saw a rejuvenation of the art market that accompanied the country’s “Second Golden Age” of tourism. Haitian visual artists once again made work to satisfy the demands and interests of an even larger number of tourists than those who visited in the previous peak period of the late 50s. In several instances discussed below, those expatriate visitors and their interactions with Haitian visual artists led to the establishment of prominent public collections of Haitian art in the United States, specifically in the Midwest. The curatorial programming that accompanied these collections, as well as the displayed art objects themselves, helped shape ideas of Haiti for US American audiences.

The 1970s also saw an increase in the overall production of visual arts in Haiti. Many artists, especially those from the Kreyòl group, adhered to themes of Haitian rural life, market scenes, and depictions of Vodou imagery in their work, which were proven to be easy sellers. Others began to explore possibilities in using new techniques, subject matter, and media in the

ways they approached their subject matter. As a result of the active market, this period also saw a rise in inexpensive, quickly made, mass-produced arts and handicrafts. Sold on the streets, in hotels, and at small souvenir shops, these works were produced by a cottage industry of collective production and distribution, in which artists relied on recognizable motifs that added a new dimension to the term “Haitian art.” This mimetic trend in mass-produced arts helped garner the pejorative label, “tourist art,” a term that served to muddle distinctions between value regimes for “high” and “low” forms of creative expression.

The Haitian tourism boom of the 70s coincided with an increased investment in and engagement with Haitian art abroad by curators and collectors in the United States. By the end of the decade, several museums in the US put on major exhibitions of Haitian art and began acquiring works for their permanent collections. Initial gifts of art acquired in Haiti often came from private collectors who first experienced Haiti as tourists. These collectors and their bequests tell us much about the market for Haitian art at this time and the proliferating modes in which foreign audiences understood ideas of “Haiti.” Additionally, the fact that two of the largest collections of Haitian art in the US were established in the state of Iowa during this period reveals the extent of the cross-cultural entanglements of people and objects evident in the collection histories of Haitian art in the US. By tracing the routes through which art objects found their way to such far-flung Midwestern cities as Davenport and Waterloo, we can better understand how people have participated in the circulation of Haitian art. This period of such vigorous collecting also speaks to the resilience of the domestic visual arts scene established during the Haitian Renaissance, despite the interrupted decade of the 60s. Most important, this examination of the period of the Second Golden Age demonstrates a co-dependent relationship between a particular form of leisure tourism and Haitian visual art production – one that was

largely informed and influenced by the cross-cultural interactions between Haitians and international visitors.

During the Haitian Renaissance, various individuals were involved in the circulation and reception of Haitian visual culture. Figures like Selden Rodman and DeWitt Peters had standardized a set of apocryphal narratives concerning the “discovery” of artists from the Haitian Renaissance. In the 1970s, this mythos became institutionalized in museum contexts. The landmark exhibition *Haitian Art* serves as a primary example, which ran for two months at the Brooklyn Museum in 1978. The exhibition coincided with a high point in the art market. The museum show and its eponymous accompanying book (1978) presented a more comprehensive picture of Haitian art for foreign audiences than the ones put forth in the previous decades and the exhibition’s major venue gave Haitian artists a type of legitimacy for US audiences. Meanwhile, small regional art museums in the Midwest were building collections of Haitian art through the donations of local collectors, and building partnerships with Haitian institutions like the Centre d’Art, as well as with individual artists. As a result, more people in the US were gaining a certain understanding of Haitian visual culture shaped by these works of art and, with that, an idea of Haiti itself.

Papa Doc and the Nadir of the 1960s

Dr. Francois Duvalier was elected president of Haiti in 1957. He earned his nickname, “Papa Doc,” from his time as a doctor in the Haitian countryside treating people afflicted with yaws, a highly contagious skin disease (Abbot 2011: 70). He began his political career serving in mid-level cabinet posts for Dumarsais Estimé (1946-50), the Haitian president who oversaw the flawed Bicentennial Exposition (1949). The *Indigéniste* intellectual movement that arose after

the US Occupation provided ideological underpinning to the political wave that lifted Estimé to power. In Haiti, *Indigénisme* mixed with global *Négritude* movements and manifested politically in *Noirisme*. According to historian and anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1990: 134), the *Noirisme* that led to Estimé's presidency began as a response to the indignities of US occupation, including the skin color-based racism in which government administration posts were awarded to lighter-skinned Haitians, most of whom hailed from the country's wealthy upper classes. In addition to repeating this class and color-based favoritism Estimé's predecessor, Élie Lescot, led the "anti-superstition" campaigns whose attacks on Vodou practice were equated with an attack on Haitian national identity (*ibid*). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the anti-Lescot speeches that André Breton gave during his visit to Haiti in 1945 were reprinted in a student journal *La Ruche*, a student newspaper in Haiti whose editors were jailed. Some scholars have suggested that this resulted in student strikes and the later general strikes that led to Lescot stepping down.⁸¹ While Estimé did not fully live up to his *Noiriste* mandate, his supporters provided a political base that would eventually lift Francois Duvalier to power. General Paul Magloire (1950-56) became president after overthrowing Estimé in a military coup but left office amid political and economic turmoil on the national stage. As a presidential candidate, Duvalier vowed to continue Estimé's political legacy. With the support of the US-military trained army, growing more repressive and violent in its tactics, he won the 1957 presidential election (Trouillot 1990: 152).

Despite steadily increasing political turbulence, tourists continued to stream into Haiti in the 1950s. Port-au-Prince served as a hub for arriving visitors, and the new buildings constructed for the 1949 Bicentennial Exposition provided a gleaming infrastructure. Such cosmetic features

⁸¹ Nicholls 1979:184. See also: Bettelheim 2008.

of the capital, however, glossed over severely diminished economic conditions in the Haitian countryside. As Trouillot states, "Port-au-Prince's new kiosks and plazas hid the debris of a country in which agricultural yields had slowly regressed to nineteenth-century levels" (1990: 141). Journalist and author Bernard Diederich, who published the English-language newspaper *Haiti Sun* at the time, considers 1959 a turning point. That year began peacefully, as Diederich recalls: "Tourists still came. American singer Harry Belafonte and his family divided their ten-day vacation between Cap-Haïtien and Pétionville, where they stayed at the El Rancho hotel; Belafonte boned up on Haitian songs to add to his popular repertoire" (*ibid*: 50). As famous entertainers were leisurely taking in Haiti's tourist offerings, however, Duvalier was beginning to consolidate power. The restrictions on Haiti's press that were tightened under Magloire greatly increased under the new president. Additionally, the president's exiled political rivals took up residence in newly Communist Cuba where they broadcast Kreyòl and French-language anti-Duvalier programming back to Haiti over shortwave radio. A Haitian listener of such programs could face jail time (*ibid*). After the Cuban Revolution, the Caribbean became a focal point for US-led Cold War policy. In fact, Duvalier solidified his political position by eliminating his opponents under the justification that he was fighting the rise of Leftism in Haiti; an excuse that gave him reprieve from punitive US diplomatic actions for many years, despite reports of escalating brutality and persecution at his hands (*ibid*: 203).

As political violence and oppression rose during the elder Duvalier's autocratic rule, tourism in the country declined. The "sophisticated tourists" visiting the Centre d'Art in the 1940s and 50s mostly avoided Haiti in the 60s. Oppressive political conditions also led to large-scale emigration that began in earnest in 1957 after Duvalier's election. Political refugees joined many of the upper classes who had fled Duvalier's oppression in those early years. Duvalier

cracked down on any potential source of dissent through imprisonment, torture, and forced exile, so that thousands of middle class professionals like teachers, merchants, civil servants, as well as students and artists, joined the elites in their exodus (Trouillot 1990: 155). In the decades after Duvalier's election, about one million Haitians fled the country with about half of those settling in Brooklyn, New York (Averill 1997: 111). A devastating result of this mass exile was a "brain drain" of administrators and professionals. In addition to Brooklyn, Haitian diasporic enclaves sprung up in North American cities like Miami, Boston, and Montreal.

In Haiti itself, many members of the intelligentsia who nurtured and participated in the vibrant cultural mid-century developments in visual art, dance, and literature, found themselves among the exiled. The painter Luckner Lazard was one of them. Lazard, an early member of the Centre d'Art, joined at the age of sixteen and was considered one of the "sophisticated" painters, or those who already had a measure of arts education (Lerebours 1988: 9). After five years at the Centre d'Art, Lazard later helped found two of its offshoots, the *Foyer des Arts Plastiques* in 1950 and *Galerie Brochette* in 1956.⁸² The former institution was founded by a number of Centre d'Art-affiliated artists who acrimoniously split with the institution, feeling resentful of the "commercialization" of Haiti's artists and with what they saw as exploitative behavior on the part of the Centre d'Art's directors towards Kreyòl artists (Thoby-Marcellin 1959: 11). Even more, they objected to the implications of the term "primitive," which they outlined in their manifesto:

Haitian art like any art for that matter, cannot develop in isolation. It should aim to provide original character but it would be presumptuous to think that to achieve this goal, it must deny all the genius and experience from the best of all time, that all races were able to offer as helpful ferments for art (Lerebours 1988: 11).⁸³

⁸² Those affiliated with Brochette include such major figures in Haitian painting as Diedonné Cédor, Antonio Joseph, Tiga, Néhem Jean, Rose-Marie Desruisseau; Bloncourt 1989: 203.

⁸³ Author's translation from the original French.

This statement shows unambiguously how many artists opposed the attitudes of Peters and others to keep Kreyòl painters in isolation of outside influences, including the categorization of artists into groups who were either “primitive” or “sophisticated.”

Under the leadership of the painter Lucien Price, the Foyer artists engaged in *Indigeniste* social realism in their work that focused on the social struggles of underprivileged Haitians (Alexis 2000: 114). Lazard depicted scenes of Haitian daily life in a tropical-pastoral motif. His two paintings, *Paysage I & II* (n.d.) [fig.11], now in the collection of Bryant University in Rhode Island, show the influence of the Modern art that he observed during his travels. Not long after the Foyer had its first exhibition, Lazard traveled to Paris on a Fine Arts scholarship in 1951, where he studied for two years (Bloncourt 1989: 61). His layering of color and use of line show an awareness of techniques used by Modernist painters, and Lazard’s skill in incorporating Expressionism and its abstraction/exaggeration of natural forms in these canvasses differentiates his work from that of Kreyòl artists, despite similarities in subject matter. Lazard’s work was included in many international exhibitions, including one at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C. making him one of the few “non-primitive” painters to exhibit in the US (Thoby-Marcellin 1959: 15).

Both the Foyer and Galerie Brochette were gathering places for Haitians concerned with social change and engaged in political mobilization. Even before Duvalier came to power, attendance at such gatherings was politically risky. After the election of 1957, members of any organized group, including trade unions, neighborhood organizations, and even the army, increasingly became targets of political oppression. Lazard left Haiti for New York City in 1956 in the early waves of Haitian mass emigration, not long after Galerie Brochette was formed

(Bloncourt 1989: 203). He finally returned after the fall of Jean-Claude Duvalier in 1986 and continued to paint until his death in 1998 (Antonin 2010).

Some artists who stayed in the country experienced the brutality of the Duvalier regime firsthand. Like Lazard, Charles Obas was a painter who left the Centre d'Art in 1950 to join the Foyer. The National Bureau of Tourism awarded him first prize for his work in 1958 and the Duvalier family owned several of his paintings. As the 1960s wore on, however, his work became more brooding as his palette turned from bright, bold, lively colors to dark blues and grays. His motif also changed as he continued to visit the theme of rainstorms and nighttime scenes, which art historian Gerald Alexis (2000: 53) attributes to Obas' growing dissatisfaction of life under Duvalier. After Duvalier executed the painter's cousin in 1968, Obas' anger literally drove him to the gates of the National Palace in protest. He disappeared shortly after that (*ibid*).

Exile and death, the respective consequences of both Lazard and Obas' political involvement, indicate the precarious and indiscriminate levels of oppression that occurred under Duvalier's regime. Many Haitian artists tended to avoid contemporary political subject matter, whether or not fear of political retaliation factored into such a decision. Philomé Obin's early work provides several counter examples by an artist interested in political themes. As discussed in the previous chapter, Obin's paintings tended to comment on Haitian politics through a nationalist lens focused on US Occupation and the Haitian insurgency, or on scenes from the Haitian Revolution. One notable exception in Obin's body of work is *Democracy at Full Speed: Élie Lescot Fleeing Quickly from the Angel of Democracy* (1946) [fig.12], which features an angel escorting the deeply unpopular president Élie Lescot (1941-46) and his allies (represented as sharks) from power. This painting has a very similar theme of divine intervention into the

realm of the political as seen in Obin's portrayal of Franklin Roosevelt's ascension to heaven from the same period [fig.4].

For the most part, however, artists chose to confront contemporary social and political subjects through a less-direct political approach. Artists like those who formed the Foyer des Arts Plastiques wanted to address problems in Haiti by celebrating rural folk life in Haiti. Genre paintings that depicted home life, religious ceremonies, carnival celebrations, landscapes, market scenes, or other subjects couched in a pastoral rubric allowed artists working in such themes to address and acknowledge social realities while avoiding provocative content that might endanger themselves, their friends, or their family members. Often, however, deeper meanings in such "tropicalized" scenes were lost on foreign audiences who were drawn to imagery perceived to correspond to an essentialized notion of "Caribbean-ness": palm trees, thatched-roof dwellings, abundant flora, and so on. Such notions aligned with images put forth by promoters of Caribbean tourism and eventually became part of the visual vocabularies of "tourist art."⁸⁴

LeGrace Benson (1992) gives a more complex reading of idealized Haitian landscapes. For decades, Haitian painters have depicted their country's landscape as verdant, lush, and pastoral, often in stark contrast to the increased urbanization of Haiti and the accompanying crises of deforestation and desertification. Benson makes the claim that such subject matter, while easily dismissed as kitschy or sentimental, in reality speaks to broader environmental, historical, and social conditions in Haiti. These kinds of paintings proliferate in collections of

⁸⁴ For more in-depth analyses of the production, distribution, and significance of "tourist art" as made by African peoples, see: Graburn 1976; Jules-Rosette 1984; Steiner 1994. As Steiner points out in his discussion of art made for expatriate buyers found throughout Africa, collectors in the West tend to situate "good" art as that which hails from an "authentic" original cultural context fixed in a seemingly remote, irretrievable past. In Steiner's assessment, such collectors "would prefer to read about the uses of African art in a putatively unchanging pre-colonial milieu than about the commoditization of African art in a post-colonial trans-national economy," 1994: 9. As I will discuss, this perspective also extends to collectors of Haitian art in the US.

Haitian art and can be found today both in private art galleries and among the roadside kiosks in Haiti and elsewhere in the Caribbean.⁸⁵ A typical landscape of this variety features depictions of abundance: flowing rivers, fertile hillsides, bountiful rows of crops, and fruit trees burdened by the weight of their own yields. Often, artists include a variety of exotic, non-native fauna, like zebras, lions, tigers, and giraffes, which only heightens their paintings' otherworldly qualities. Benson claims paintings in this style are rooted in Vodou-inspired cosmology that draws from various sources. Artists are keenly aware of how their paintings reference *Kiskeya*, the Arawak-Taino name for pre-contact Haiti, a land unspoiled and undefiled by the European colonial presence; and *Ginen*, the African ancestral homeland to which all Haitians return after death. Haitians have drawn spiritual, ethnic, and cultural lineage from these two spatio-temporal concepts. Artistic re-imaginings are rooted in "longing" for an imagined Haitian past among present-day environmental degradation.⁸⁶ As such, landscape paintings should be read as aspirational images, "not simply as depictions, but as oblations and invocations" of a Haiti that once was and could be yet again (Benson 1992: 730). The painters of scenes like these rely on polyvocal tropes that allow for a range of interpretations and readings. Thus, Haitian landscape painters employ visual idioms with fluid meanings that speak inter-culturally, both to the artist and foreign buyers.

For some artists quaint, often playful imagery masks biting political critique. In the work of Kreyòl artist Jasmin Joseph, for example, animals stand in for human actors as part of fabulist representations illustrating political and social power dynamics in Haiti. Joseph came from

⁸⁵ See E. Taylor 2014, for a discussion of Haitian art sold by vendors in the Dominican Republic and how networks of exchange speak to histories of Haitian-Dominican relations.

⁸⁶ For discussions of conceptions of *Kiskeya*, *Ginen*, and the degree to which Arawak-Taino and West African cultures manifest in Vodou practice, see: Beauvoir-Dominique 1995; Cosentino 1995.

poverty and was unable to afford the costs of education until later in life, after he was making a relatively decent living as an artist. He began his art career as a sculptor under the guidance and tutelage of Jason Seley, a US American sculptor heavily involved in the Centre d'Art in the 1940s and 50s.⁸⁷ After several years of creating terracotta sculptures, Joseph began painting on masonite (Stebich 1978: 162). One of his first forays into painting, *Green Loa* (1950) [fig.13], demonstrated “rough” and “spontaneous” qualities assigned to many Kreyòl artists. The scene depicts a Vodou ceremony in which *Ayizan*, the *lwa* who protects women selling their goods in the Haitian market, appears as the largest figure within the flattened composition. Joseph’s subject matter intertwines Vodou religion with a direct reference to the marketplace. For the artist himself, painting proved a more lucrative medium. The work was acquired by Richard and Erna Flagg, a couple from Milwaukee whose significant collection of Haitian art was later given to the Milwaukee Art Museum (Stebich 1978: 63).

Compared to Joseph’s later work, *Green Loa* remains an unrepresentative example. More characteristic of his oeuvre, a painting like *Les Comediens* (1980) [fig.14] offers allegorical commentary in fabulist scenes featuring anthropomorphized animals. In it, a large creature who appears to be a cross between an ape and a cat is standing upright, dressed in a well-fitting suit and tie complete with a pocket square. On either side of him are two similarly anthropomorphic primates depicted smaller than the first animal, a device typical of Joseph’s use of hieratic proportions indicating wealth and status. Over-fed and exhibiting a lax ennui in their frumpy gray suits, they hold out their hands to the larger animal who clenches a wad of bills in his paw.

⁸⁷ Seley and his wife, Clara, came to Haiti in 1946 at the invitation of Haitian artist and architect Albert Mangones, founding member of the Centre d'Art and fellow Cornell University alumnus. Seley led sculpture courses at the Centre and had his first solo show there. He taught and exhibited in Haiti until 1949, and remained an active proponent of Haitian art throughout his life. Seley later served as dean of the Cornell University College of Architecture, Art and Planning. Twa 2014: 245. Lindsey J. Twa (2014) provides a more detailed overview of Seley and other visiting artists from the US, as well as their contributions to “good Pan-Americanism.”

The title refers to the Graham Greene novel, *The Comedians* (1966), written and set in Papa Doc's Haiti. Greene depicted the farcical, yet tragic, mechanics of life within a venal dictatorship in which favors and payments are blithely exchanged to increase individual material wealth, often at the expense of human lives caught in the way. In Joseph's scene, a similar system of exchange occurs between the wealthy upper classes (represented here by the tight-fisted, larger animal) and corrupt, mid-level bureaucrats (the smaller simians on the dole) elevated to positions of power under both Duvaliers as a bulwark for their autocratic regimes. Even though Joseph painted *Les Comediens* almost a decade after Papa Doc's death, the artist presents the legacy of Duvalierist clientelism in this and other similar works. Joseph upends banal, "tropicalized," tropes used in works of "tourist" art by having exotic, non-native animals serve satirical roles that lament the state of affairs in Haiti. This is a decidedly grimmer, more cynical take on yearning qualities that Benson recognizes, yet both Joseph's employment of exotic creatures and the ones that Benson mentions are rooted in commentary on contemporary life in Haiti.

While many artists suffered either bodily through exile, torture, and death, or because of a loss of buyers, others simply found more lucrative work in other venues of visual expression in the 1960s. For instance, André Normil, who had worked with the Centre d'Art beginning in the early 1950s, dedicated his skills as a full-time painter to the paid decoration of *tap-taps*, or privately owned pick-up and larger trucks that serve as Haiti's equivalent to public transportation. Tap-taps are brightly painted with solid colors, adorned with cut metal work, and feature religious and pop cultural images. Robert Farris Thompson (2011) links tap-taps with a larger Afro-Atlantic aesthetic tradition, drawing comparisons of Haiti's brightly painted busses with those seen in Sub-Saharan Africa. Like Benson's argument for deeper cultural readings of Haitian landscape painting, Thompson demonstrates how certain decorative elements of tap-taps

have connections to West Africa that go beyond mere adornment. Many of the enslaved Africans shipped to Haiti when it was the French colony of *St. Domingue* were Igbo people from Nigeria. Thompson identifies two typical phrases of worship and praise that often adorn a tap-tap chassis (usually just above the driver's windshield on the front, and in the upper register of the rear-side tableau): "*Ibo Lele*" and "*Ibo Soi-Man*." These phrases are often sung or chanted during Vodou ceremonies as a practitioner draws *vévé* – intricate, geometric designs in corn-flour on a temple floor used to invite the presence and participation of a particular *lwa* (*ibid*: 119). As part of a tap-tap's overall visual composition (which also include Roman Catholic and pop-cultural images), such phrases invoke protection in safety in a traveler's journey, as well as provide an identifying feature for the vehicle's owner.

André Normil was a highly sought-after tap-tap painter who, for several years between the late 1950s and early 60s, devoted his full attention to painting vehicles rather than canvasses (El-Saieh 2014). Normil's easy transition from painting on canvas to truck-painter and back is testament to the backgrounds of many Kreyòl artists. Hector Hyppolite, as discussed in the previous chapter, provides a notable example of how, before the Centre d'Art opened, artists found work in vernacular, decorative arenas, whether painting bar doors or, like Philomé Obin, receiving small, sporadic commissions like the one he executed for a Cap Haïtien Masonic lodge. Similarly, before Préfète Duffaut launched his prolific career creating seaside cityscapes defined by their impossible, aerial geography, called *lavil imajiné* (imaginary cities), he painted fishing boats, church interiors, houses – wherever work was available (Duffaut 2012). Even some contemporary sculptors and painters who follow in this decorative tradition find secondary work painting houses, signs, advertisements, etc.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ We find many notable international examples of artists coming from commercial backgrounds or "moonlighting" when circumstances dictate, especially in places where artists have less access to the globalized, rarefied circuits of

Such multi-faceted roles for artists that span the spectrum between “high” and “low,” are not uncommon in spheres of art production in developing countries. In her study of tourist art in three African countries, Bennetta Jules-Rosette (1984) discusses how local artists would negotiate regimes of value often imposed by collectors in Europe and North America. The market for art objects in Africa has depended upon such objects’ uses in ritual and religious contexts – their use values in previous cultural contexts would determine their market value among collectors of “fine” arts. Such value depends upon the idea of an “untouched” past before the supposedly corruptive influence of European outsiders influenced those cultures from which those objects came. Objects made specifically for sale in the market were mostly deemed “inauthentic” or labelled as cheap derivatives by the collectors for whom they were geared. The “image makers” in Jules-Rosette’s study are constantly updating styles and techniques to keep pace with ever elusive market demands from which they were economically and culturally isolated (*ibid*: 28). Thus, artists are put at a distinct disadvantage. As a means of hedging these demands, artists often make work for specific markets on the spectrum. Some made works for sale in tourist markets, which artists would not sign, while others with markers identifying the artist were geared towards sale in galleries and upscale shops (*ibid*: 141).

Like those artists discussed by Jules-Rosette, André Normil provides an example of how Haitian artists have negotiated and gauged demands of the market from which they have been separated, as was the case in the 60s. However, the isolation that Jules-Rosette speaks of that put her case studies of African artists at such distinct disadvantage was less pronounced in Haiti,

“contemporary art.” For examples of artists in Kumasi, Ghana, specializing in sign-painting, such as Kwame “Almighty God” Akoto and his fellow “city master” painters, see: Kwami 2011; Ross 2014. In Senegal, Moussa Tine began as a sign painter before becoming a celebrated multi-media artist, Roberts & Roberts 2002. Perhaps the most prominent example of this type of “dual-threat” artist is Cheri Samba, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Jewsiewicki, et al. 1995.

perhaps because of its smaller geographic size, which facilitated centralized arts production, and proximity to the North American market, which facilitated access to knowledge about changes in market demand. A third, not unrelated factor also distinguishes Haitian art: the high number of intermediaries living in Haiti including art dealers, who provided counsel, guidance, and access to the markets. DeWitt Peters and Selden Rodman are major examples of those who came from abroad, but there are other, less-examined examples who have also wielded great influence.

Issa El-Saieh, a private dealer who owned the well-known Galerie Issa in Port-au-Prince, knew Normil well and convinced him to return to painting canvases full-time by providing him materials, his own studio space in the gallery, and a direct sales outlet through Issa's patronage and clientele (El-Saieh 2014). Normil's circumstances indicate how the viability of the market often dictates art production, especially in leaner times. His fortuitous situation with Galerie Issa was a likely outlier to the circumstances of many other artists who remained in Haiti during the Duvalier years and did not have the good fortune to land all-inclusive arrangements with dealers. Likely, many painters and sculptors found similar work doing design and decoration for small businesses, much as they did before the Haitian Renaissance.⁸⁹

While no hard employment data exist for artists in the 1960s, evidence provided by Hector Hyppolite's near-apocryphal "discovery" supports the idea of artists working in more commercial veins. Before becoming the Centre d'Art's resident celebrity, Hyppolite painted bar exteriors and signs. If a market for the kinds of "fine art" that Hyppolite excelled in never developed, he likely would have continued painting as he had before Philippe Thoby-Marcelin

⁸⁹ Such entrepreneurial fluidity among artists in Haiti corresponds to "System D," derived from the French term *débrouillard*. According to A. Roberts (1996a), an artist working in this mode is a "clever soul who, with little at hand, gets along against the odds," 83. Allen F. Roberts found the term used by artists in Dakar, Senegal who worked with recycled material, and identified its use in various Afro-Atlantic locales. We find material expression of System D with *Atis Rezistans* in the next chapter.

spotted the now-legendary and oft-referenced signboard in St. Marc stating "*Ici La Renaissance*" (Peters 1985) [fig.6]. We can say the same for any number of Haitian artists who converted their existing talents into profitable enterprises in the mid-twentieth century, creating livelihoods out of full-time art creation. Had a market for their work not emerged, they would have likely continued creating in a such a fashion in which circumstances of employment allowed. The fallow decade of the 60s provides a glimpse of how intertwined Haitian visual arts production was with the presence of international tourists, especially in light of the latter's absence.

With increased difficulties in the 1960s, the market for Haitian art remained barely viable for gallerists and dealers who began in the 40s and 50s, as Mats Lundahl demonstrates in his biography of Issa El-Saieh (2014). Issa, as he was known best, was a Haitian former band leader of Syrio-Lebanese ancestry. Christians from the former Ottoman Empire emigrated to the Caribbean in the late nineteenth century, a majority of them settling in Haiti. Many of these Lebanese-Haitians were involved in commerce and became part of Haiti's fledgling middle class. In 1948, El-Saieh's brother-in-law opened *La Belle Creole*, a department store that flourished in Port-au-Prince's lively downtown near the harbor. The store catered largely to North American tourists disembarking from the cruise ships docked in the capital's harbor. El-Saieh was a partner, as well as the president of the business. In addition to his role of businessman he was the leader of a popular jazz orchestra, Super Orchestre Issa El Saieh, which played at many of the upscale hotels and nightclubs in Port-au-Prince (*ibid*: 96). He started collecting art in the mid-1940s to decorate his family's home on Rue du Chili in the Haitian capital, which is where the gallery moved in the 1960s when the cruise ships ceased coming to the waterfront (*ibid*: 227). El-Saieh's brother-in-law, the proprietor of the department store, left Haiti for Canada in 1958 as political oppression and discrimination against the Syrio-Lebanese minority increased. *La Belle*

Creole closed shortly thereafter but not before Issa had started to sell art out of the store, which he then spun into his own art business.

Issa's other business ventures probably allowed the gallery to remain open at its Rue du Chili location throughout the 1960s. With art sales no longer facilitated by proximity to the docks, Galerie Issa continued to thrive from the non-central location of the *Pacot* neighborhood (although the gallery, which is still in operation as of this writing, is a five-minute walk from the famed Hotel Oloffson). His strategy as an art dealer also proved effective in this difficult period. By the end of the 1960s, he employed fifty to sixty artists, with several working in studios within the gallery itself. Along with André Normil were Jacques Chéry, Sisson Blanchard, Seymour Bottex, Abner Dubic, and Dieudonné Pluviose – Haitian artists with relatively successful careers (Lundahl 2012: 231).

According to Selden Rodman, André Pierre, a major painter in this post-Renaissance period, sold the bulk of his output through Issa El-Saieh, who would buy works directly from the artist and then sell them to hotels, restaurants, and other art dealers around the world (Rodman 1974: 80). Like the case of Normil, El-Saieh gave Pierre studio space adjacent to his gallery and gave him a monthly retainer, which sustained the artist's income during the 1960s. As Lundahl describes, "Issa's regular business worked on the basis of what in Haiti is called *pratik* [practice] and *moun pou m* [shall I] – regular connections with painters and customers, where the important thing is not to make a fast buck, but to build up volume and repeated sales" (2012: 230). In El-Saieh's example we see the importance of local dealers in the circulation of Haitian art and their integral role as facilitators and fixers in the marketplace. For the waves of tourists that returned to Haiti in the early 70s, art galleries provided an entree to local culture in which clients could visit artists' studios directly and immerse themselves in networks of creative production and

distribution. Gallerists such as Issa's, who sustained their business models despite a dearth of clientele, were well-positioned to take advantage of the influx of visitors in the 1970s. When those tourists returned, however, artists like Pierre were less dependent on such close arrangements with local dealers and resumed making their work for non-exclusive sale through various outlets.

The 1970s and the Second Golden Age of Tourism in Haiti

Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier died on April 21, 1971. The following day, his son, the nineteen-year-old Jean-Claude, labeled "Baby Doc" by the foreign press, was sworn in as the new "President-for-Life," claiming that mantle from his deceased father. To smoothly accommodate this transfer of power, Duvalier revised the constitution of 1964 shortly before his death eliminating the minimum age requirement of forty years for the presidency (Abbott 163). After being sworn in, Jean-Claude received the benefits of his father's political and military alliances, including the cooperation and allegiance of the National Security Volunteers (VSN), more widely and infamously known as the *Tonton Makout*. Francois founded the VSN in 1962 (with the U.S. Marines providing training) as a parallel institution to fill the void left after he drastically cut the power and influence of the army (Trouillot 1990: 160). The name "Tonton Makout" refers to the Haitian version of a bogeyman. Members served as Duvalier's personal security service and a tool of terror and intimidation against the president's enemies.⁹⁰ The

⁹⁰ Here, I use the Kreyòl orthography, but the term also appears in other literature using the French construction, *Tontons Macoutes*. In Haitian Kreyòl, *tonton* mean "uncle" and *makout* or *djakout* refers to handmade sacks woven with sisal leaves ubiquitous in rural Haiti. The unofficial uniform of the Makouts - denim shirt and trousers, red bandana worn around the neck, and wide-brimmed hat – takes after conceptions of the Vodou deity of agriculture, *Azaka*. Duvalier purposefully deployed Vodou symbols as tools of power, and often presented himself as *Bawon Samdi*, wearing sunglasses and speaking in a nasal pitch, K. Smith 2012: 95. See also: Hurbon 1995; Mintz & Trouillot 1995; Laguerre 1989. It should also be noted that, prior to becoming president, Francois Duvalier was a prominent member of the *Bureau* and researcher of Haitian "folk" culture; see: Nicholls 1979.

Makouts became synonymous with Papa Doc's reign: brutal, unrelenting, and dedicated to maintaining power. They acted as a buffer that protected the president from the army, the elite, the greater population, and any and all other groups that might threaten Duvalier's autocratic regime. Their violent reputation came from blatant human rights abuses carried out at the behest of Duvalier, which exacerbated Haiti's diplomatic and regional isolation in the 1960s.⁹¹

Despite maintaining the structure of his father's autocracy, Baby Doc and his advisors sought to repair Haiti's image abroad after the brutal political oppression and resulting isolation of the 1960s. The program that became known as *Jeanclaudeisme* had several facets. One involved marketing Haiti's large pool of cheap labor to foreign corporations specializing in manufacturing and light industry in the mid-1970s.⁹² In order to attract international investment, the Haitian government had to improve Haiti's "image" abroad. This makeover would also assist the revival of the tourism industry. through advertising in international publications, improving infrastructure like hotels, and limiting the public visibility of the Makouts' violent tactics, Jeanclaudisme could attract both the wealthy factory owner and the leisurely tourist, all while convincing foreign governments to grant loans and provide aid money. Baby Doc's administration was relatively successful in these efforts if however, they were largely cosmetic concerning the rights and freedoms of the majority of Haitians. Indeed, any economic windfalls provided by foreign industry and tourism largely went into the pockets of the Duvaliers and a handful of allies, and did not trickle down to the majority of Haitians (A. Dupuy 1997: 48).

Nonetheless, Haiti's improved reputation abroad attracted far greater numbers of foreign visitors

⁹¹ For more on oppressive tactics carried out by the Duvaliers and the Tonton Makouts, see: Abbott 2011; Danner 1989; Ferguson 1988; and Laguerre 1989.

⁹² Trouillot 1990: 200. As Trouillot points out, the elder Duvalier proposed this idea in 1969 on a state visit by then-Vice President Nelson Rockefeller. The US folded this approach in to realtions with other countries in the region as part of Ronald Reagan's Caribbean Basin Initiative.

than those seen in the 1940s and 50s. For example, in 1976, four years after Baby Doc came to power, the country welcomed about 86,000 foreign tourists, a majority of whom were from the United States. In contrast, approximately 10,000 tourists came to Haiti in 1956.⁹³ Such a dramatic increase in the number of visitors earned the 1970s the nickname “Second Golden Age” of tourism in Haiti. As a consequence of the influx of foreign capital, the Haitian art market peaked in this period and resulted in renewed activity among artists, dealers, collectors, and everyone else involved in Haitian art.

Coincident with the rise of tourism in the in the 70s, in Haiti and more globally, theorists in anthropology and sociology began contributing to the nascent field of Tourism Studies, in which scholars attempted to define and locate the attitudes, motivations, and conditions that gave rise to a culture of tourism. As such, it would benefit this discussion to expand upon the theoretical textures of tourism, especially as they manifested in 1970s Haiti. As noted in the previous chapter, Dean MacCannell’s *The Tourist* (1989) provides an especially resonant framework when discussing the foreign travelers who influenced the Haitian Renaissance, and what drew international audiences to the work of Kreyòl artists. MacCannell locates the desire to travel and experience cultures different from one’s own as a consequence of the “alienation” wrought by industrialized “Western” society. Such motivations also correspond with a fascination with “primitive” art, as seen in the narratives that accompanied the Haitian Renaissance. Several other factors informed tourism in the 70s that help explain the directions that Haitian art took in this decade.

⁹³ Goldberg 1981: 175. This number excludes the daily cruise ship visitors disembarking for short periods of time in order to buy souvenirs or briefly walk into downtown Port-au-Prince. Goldberg identifies this category of tourist as “excursionist.”

Like the previous era in which tourism thrived, Haiti in the 70s attracted adventurous, cosmopolitan tourists, mostly from North America. However, many changes had occurred in international travel and communications, as well as more general social, political, and cultural shifts between the 1950s and 70s. While many travelers in this period were cruise ship-bound day-trippers whose brief experiences of Haiti were tied into all-inclusive vacation packages, others were of the more adventurous set and followed Patrick Leigh Fermor's approach to travel in Haiti, also discussed in the previous chapter. Sociologist Erik Cohen (1979: 186) defines these types of visitors as "experiential tourists," or those who immerse themselves in the lives of "other" cultures experienced during travel by getting close with people in their host countries. Similar to MacCannell, Cohen identifies the alienating effects of late-industrial capitalism as a major motivator for travel. As a tourist destination, Haiti has appealed to this type of traveler's desire for cultural otherness.

Practical considerations like convenience of travel and economics also factored into the rise in tourists travelling to Haiti. The plane ride from Miami to Port-au-Prince lasts a little over an hour and, as A.B. Goldberg discovered conducting fieldwork on tourism in Haiti in the late-1970s, travelers to Haiti cited package tours, cheap airline deals, and tips from travel agents as reasons for their visit (1971: 128). The tourism-driven facets of Jeanclaudeisme capitalized on these favorable economic conditions for traveling consumers. Smith and Brent define tourism through an equation: "tourism = leisure time + discretionary income + positive social sanctions" (2001: 14). The authors make the case that a new consumerism emerged in the 1970s that she identifies as "consumptive travel," which typified globalized flows of people, goods, and culture emerging from "the social revolution and the commercial shift from manufacturing to service industries" (2001: 27). Smith's assessment regarding "consumptive" travelers helps contextualize

the modes in which international tourists engaged with Haitian art and culture, and also may help explain the uptick in Haiti's tourist numbers in the 70s, which were facilitated by an increase in international air travel in the period. Consumptive tourist behavior had positive effects on the Haitian art market.

If we take Cohen's definition of experiential tourists, add the sense of alienation that spurred travelers to visit far-flung cultures, and consider Smith's formula for consumptive travel, we gain a clearer picture of what tourism in Haiti looked like in the 1970s. Goldberg combines Cohen with Smith and Brent's analysis when he identifies the "explorer" category of traveler (1981: 178). The "explorer" designation goes a long way in describing visitors to Haiti in the 1970s who were likely to participate in the country's art market. Like experiential tourists, explorers tended to immerse themselves in host cultures and seek "deeper connections" with local people. They often avoided cultural offerings that seemed staged or inauthentic like the popular "voodoo show" at the *La Tonelle* nightclub in Port-au-Prince, a key example of folkloric and deliberately titillating performances that proliferated in Haitian hotels and resorts in the period. Goldberg discusses the illustrative example of a 22-year-old American woman, "Ms. Corleone," who fits this category:

[She] came to Haiti for a four week vacation to learn more about Haitian painting, with which she had become familiar in New York City. A painter herself, she was well traveled in Italy, Greece, and France, and used her knowledge of French to get along in Haiti, meanwhile attempting to learn some Creole. Most of her activities revolved around her interest in art; she visited galleries, met Haitian painters, and went to art openings and private parties at the homes of art patrons and gallery owners. She spent much time at the Hotel Oloffson, using its pool during the day and meeting other art world people there at night. She also visited the voodoo show, attended ceremonies in several urban *hunfò* [sic], and began a series of dance lessons at a cultural center patronized by Haitians and residents of the foreign community (1981: 187).

While in Haiti, Ms. Corleone actively engaged with and participated in visual and performing arts. Her example illustrates how explorer tourists in Haiti often devoted their time and energies.

Additionally, in Ms. Corleone's case, her familiarity with Haitian art prior to traveling to Haiti shows the extent to which art often promoted tourism in the country. One can further subdivide the "explorer" category into that of "collector-tourist." Such a label applies to those whose immersion and interest in different cultures (in this case Haitian) manifests in the consumptive, capitalistic behavior of collecting visual art. To the collector-tourist, cheap souvenirs and paintings by anonymous artists are as inauthentic as staged hotel performances - they are examples of superficial engagements with Haitian culture. The value distinction that a tourist-collector might draw between him or herself and someone who, for example, visits Haiti as a cruise ship-borne excursionist, manifests as connoisseurship, a sometimes-supercilious trope that finds expression in the act of collecting. The following discussion looks at two publications that functionally served as guidebooks for collector-tourists, but were written with the same categorical distinction between both groups of tourists, and the types of objects they collected, in mind.

Two Case Studies in Art/Travel Literature

Two particular books, written in the 1970s, combined art and travel literature and today serve as useful guideposts for how collector-tourists engaged with Haitian culture in this period. These books, Selden Rodman's *The Miracle of Haitian Art* (1974) and John Allen Franciscus' *Haiti: Voodoo Kingdom to Modern Riviera* (1980), foreground themes inherent to both tourism and art collecting in Haiti. Rodman builds upon narratives about Haitian art that he helped fashion beginning with the Haitian Renaissance period and the "discovery" of Haiti's Kreyòl artists. He emphasizes a plucky, entrepreneurial spirit among Haitian artists and celebrates their various modes of visual expression that arose out of the establishment of the Centre d'Art. Franciscus

provides a volume written in a style more typical of travel guidebooks, in which he highlights practical considerations for travelers to Haiti like lists of accommodations, restaurants, sights to see, galleries to visit, etc. Within the text, however, the author writes from a clearly capitalistic position of an international businessman who sees economic opportunity in Baby Doc's Haiti. This theme extends to his discussions of art in which he assigns a system of market value to the work of individual Haitian artists, steering the visitor towards opportunities in the collecting market. Both publications take advantage of the resurgence of tourism in Haiti in the 1970s as a means to introduce readers to different modes of engagement with local Haitian culture. The ways in which each author addresses visual arts offers a spectrum in which to analyze the state of the Haitian art market in tourism's Second Golden Age.

Collector-tourists who began acquiring work in the 1970s often cite the influence of Selden Rodman's "little red book," *The Miracle of Haitian Art* (Gessen 2015). Only ninety-five pages, this volume provided neophytes a succinct summary of the developments in Haitian art since the opening of the Centre d'Art. The first two chapters, devoted to Hector Hyppolite and Philomé Obin, present the work of those artists as prime examples of how visual arts culture in Haiti lay dormant until the intervention of DeWitt Peters and the opening of the Centre d'Art. In the third chapter, Rodman includes a discussion of the murals at Ste. Trinité Episcopal Cathedral in Port-au-Prince (and his significant involvement in their creation) as a pinnacle of artistic achievement in Haiti.

Rodman's book diverges from his previous publications in the fifth chapter where he discusses the work of André Pierre as evidence of a "second renaissance" that emerged from the bleak Duvalier years (1974: 73). Rodman cites Pierre's relationship with Issa El-Saieh as an

example of how artists and gallerists made the most of those fallow years and suggests that other artists were able to enrich their own creative practices due to the absence of tourism:

Only the real collectors continued to collect; they and the museums abroad wanted only the best, with the result that the second-rate, deprived of the indiscriminating tourist trade, found few buyers. Artists like Benoit, Bazile and Micius Stephane of Baint painted their best pictures. The Obins, and their school in Cap Haïtien, found few distractions and an increasing number of lucrative commissions from abroad (*ibid*:73).

Here we see Rodman's ambivalence towards tourism's influence on Haitian art production.

Mass-produced paintings of generic pastoral scenes were fare for "undiscriminating" tourists, excursionists spending a few hours of leave in Port-au-Prince before returning to their docked cruise ships. Those visitors willing to dedicate time and energy to a deeper appreciation of local Haitian culture would find Rodman's book a useful introduction. *The Miracle of Haitian Art*, despite Rodman's distaste for tourism, acted a guidebook for more "sophisticated" collector-tourists who began to build their collections of Haitian art in the 1970s.

Rodman's own activities in Haiti at this time correspond to the dismissiveness towards casual tourists he expresses in *Miracle*. He bought property in the southern city of Jacmel in 1973 and opened a gallery the following year. According to his widow, Carole, the clientele consisted primarily of "adventurous" tourists willing to embark on the day's journey over the rough mountain roads from Port-au-Prince (Rodman 2015, pers. comm.). Jacmel itself has a dynamic environment of cultural production revolving around its Carnival celebrations. As much of art production was centralized in Haiti's capital during this period, the relative remoteness of Rodman's gallery would add cachet for a privileged sort of international clientele – those willing to *really* experience Haitian art and culture would make the effort to leave the conveniences of Port-au-Prince's tourist infrastructure and come all the way to Jacmel, where accommodations were more rustic but the city less crowded and overwhelming.

Haiti: Voodoo Kingdom to Modern Riviera provided a more practical resource for the same set of engaged visitors to Haiti that Rodman addresses. Franciscus' guide served as a primer on what to expect upon arrival in Port-au-Prince, with an overview of Haitian history and a cursory introduction to Vodou. Franciscus spent almost the entire decade of the 1970s making trips to Haiti to conduct both research and business (two activities not mutually exclusive). A Yale graduate (1954) and former fighter pilot (according to the biographical information in the book), Franciscus got his start in business working with the International Basic Economy Corporation, a company started by Nelson Rockefeller to stimulate business in underdeveloped economies in Latin America. As Franciscus relates it (2015), he soon set out on his own and started a real estate firm based in Puerto Rico, where he still lives today.

Franciscus pays particular attention to Haitian art in his guidebook. He dedicates an entire section to rating artists based on a "star" system. The more stars next to an artist's name, the higher the "price range, quality, fame, output, and general importance of collection" (*ibid*: 48). The author provides the reader with three separate lists, artists before 1970, after 1970, and those "who appeared in the 1980s" (*ibid*: 135). Sometimes there is accompanying biographical information, but often we see only an artist's name. Those artists from the pre-1970 period (many of whom had died) earn more stars on average than those listed more recently; thus, age and scarcity contribute to the "commodity fetishism" that Franciscus attempts to quantify (Marx 1990: 165).

Franciscus' reconnaissance on behalf of the newcomer to Haiti consists of exhaustively listing almost eight hundred artists. With his star system, he attempts to apply a rational metric onto Haiti's artists, with the emphasis on their works' market value that he determined with the help of local galleries, such as Monnin, Issa, and Nader, and "upon advice of their curators and

various collectors,” whom he does not name (1980: 47). By foregrounding such meticulous research in major sections of his guidebook, Franciscus reveals an overarching capitalist discourse in which the value and modes of consumption of Haitian art are inextricably linked with the tourism industry and the foreign visitors who participated as consumers in the market. If we examine the author and his publications more closely, we see traces of a larger imperialist discourse at play.

We begin to see the role of transnational capital that marked the younger Duvalier's presidency as the author delves into conducting business in Haiti. In addition to laying out an employer's requirements regarding pay, sick leave, and maternity leave, Franciscus includes a section of "Do's and Don'ts" for the ambitious US businessman. He mixes the sexist/paternalistic language of a bygone era ("Latin America is a woman...She gives herself only to those who know how to take her...One cannot win without attacking) with practical advice that urges patience, understanding, and respect for local customs ("Don't rush in...Although prosperous and expanding, the Caribbean is no pushover") (*ibid*: 207-208).

In an advertising section in the book's back pages, we see an intersection of themes that characterize how Duvalier and his cohort marketed Haiti in this period – ads for art galleries, hotels, rental cars, and, curiously, a full-page, text-only spread for General Assembly & Co. The ad copy reads:

John Jacob Astor became one of the richest men in the United States because he was one of the first to set up triangular trade between the U.S., Canada and China. The same possibility exists today between the U.S. (shipping the raw materials), Haiti (assembling the components) and either back to the U.S. or via Puerto Rico (both now tax exempt...How much does it cost? \$1.25 per hour per man working on your product (*ibid*: 276).

The ad also lists the types of goods this company assembles ranging from electronic components to stuffed animals and boasts of its ability to perform these services at "roughly two thirds less

than your present cost." The contact at the bottom of the page is listed as "J. Franciscus," the author of the book himself (*ibid*). He started the General Assembly as a light manufacturing company housed near the Port-au-Prince airport that, like many other American businesses, took advantage of the younger Duvalier's economic policies favorable to foreign capital and assembled products to be shipped back to North American markets. The company left in the mid-1980s due to the "incompetence" of Jean-Claude (Franciscus 2015).

Haiti: Voodoo Kingdom to Modern Riviera is emblematic of the goals and priorities of Jeanclaudeisme, in which foreign investment, light manufacturing, and tourism worked in tandem while art provided a cultural gloss, a diversion within the matrix of multinational dynamics. John Franciscus with his roles of travel author, art collector, and international businessman embodies this global nexus as well, and we can see him as an example of how North Americans engaged with Haiti in this period: through tourism, art, and business. We find evidence of his relationship with the Haitian government in the portion of his abridged history where he writes about both Francois and Jean-Claude Duvalier. He reassures his reader (who, we must keep in mind, remains in the abstract) of the country's stability: "From a tourist point of view, there is today absolute law and order – probably more than any other Caribbean island. One can find in Haiti today an old-fashioned courtliness reminiscent of the Old American South" (*ibid*: 37). Such a remark reflects prevailing racist narratives in the US that nostalgically look back on plantation-era "courtliness" predicated on the submission of black bodies in a docile, subservient role. The analogs in Franciscus' example cast Duvalier as master and the "renowned" *Makouts* as overseers keeping the unruly population in check (*ibid*). Practically speaking, however, since Franciscus had business interests in the country beyond art collecting, as the previously quoted advertisement would suggest, then flattering Haiti's executive branch in print

would prove a diplomatically savvy gesture. It should be mentioned that Franciscus' opinion of the Duvaliers, however, has become decidedly less positive in recent years (2015, pers. comm.).

The examples provided by Rodman and Franciscus indicate an increasing co-dependency between tourism, art, and commerce in the 1970s. Each author illustrates modes of engagement available to tourists in Haiti in this period, and their writings encapsulate a set of attitudes that likely extended to those who never took the opportunity to travel to Haiti yet who remained interested in facets of the country's culture, especially the visual arts. Yet the visions of Haiti proposed by Rodman and Franciscus, while helpful to our understanding of narratives about Haiti circulating in the US in this period, cannot necessarily account for the actions and positions of every expatriate traveler to Haiti in the 1970s, and how they might have framed their individual interactions and engagements in the country. The following section explores the origins of two major museum collections of Haitian art that were established in two communities in Iowa during this peak period of Haitian tourism. The individual collectors who provided the initial gifts of Haitian art expressed their interests in ways that correspond to the previously discussed authors' narratives, yet add complexity in ways that disrupt tidy, simple readings of their actions in Haiti and attitudes towards Haitians.

Origins of Museum Collections of Haitian Art in Iowa: Davenport⁹⁴

Iowa is home to two of the largest public collections of Haitian art in the United States, one at the Figge Museum of Art in Davenport and the other at the Waterloo Center for the Arts in Waterloo. Both Haitian collections were established within a short period between the late 1960s and early 1970s. Similarities between the two collections and their formations highlight

⁹⁴ Large parts of the following two sections appear in: Haffner 2017.

dynamics of visual art production in Haiti and cross-cultural interactions that resulted in museum collections abroad. These collection histories of Midwestern US museums also demonstrate shifting cultural narratives that accompanied and contributed to the generalized term, "Haitian art."

Considering the absence of Haitian-American communities in Iowa and its far-flung locale, the fact that so many works by Haitian artists reside in the state initially seems to be a curious occurrence. Almost 2,000 miles separate Haiti from Iowa and the largest enclaves of the Haitian diaspora in North America reside in distant urban centers like Miami, New York, Boston, Montreal, and Chicago. However, holdings of Haitian art in the Iowa museums arose from bequests made by individual local collectors whose familiarity with Haitian art and culture resulted from travels to Haiti as tourist-collectors. The shared histories of these collections and their developments speak to the cross-cultural intersections between US Americans and Haitians in this period. They also indicate the extent to which tourism and international travel have affected the production, circulation, and reception of Haitian art. In order to better understand the cultural linkages between Haiti and this section of the American Midwest, we must examine the routes and circuits through which art objects in these collections have traveled, the individuals who facilitated such movements, and the distances, both physical and conceptual, between artists' studios in Haiti and museum contexts in the American Midwest.

The Figge Art Museum sits on the banks of the Mississippi River in downtown Davenport. It opened as the Davenport Municipal Art Gallery in 1925, and in 1987, changed its name to the Davenport Art Museum. In 2005, after receiving a multi-million-dollar gift for an expansive new building designed by David Chipperfield, it became known as the Figge Art Museum, named for the local banker whose bequest helped finance its construction. Holdings of

American art represent the museum's strongest area of collecting, and specifically the Midwest Regional Collection, built around important works by Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, and John Steuart Curry. The Figge is also home to the Grant Wood Archive, consisting of materials and personal effects donated by his sister, who was made famous by her brother's iconic rendering of her in *American Gothic* (1930). Since the move into its new building, the Figge has devoted more attention to the American collections. Yet its collection of Haitian art remains substantial in terms of quantity and scope as the result of previous directors' direct involvement with Haitian artists and institutions.

The origin of the Figge's Haitian art collection dates back to a local man's vacation to the Caribbean. In the winter of 1961, Dr. Walter E. Neiswanger, a Davenport pathologist, embarked on an ocean cruise. The itinerary included stops in Trinidad, Martinique, St. Thomas, and, finally, Haiti. Once the cruise liner reached Haiti, Dr. Neiswanger disembarked and made the typical tourist pilgrimage to the Centre d'Art, which had been open for almost fifteen years. There he met DeWitt Peters and recognized a painting by an artist named Fernand Pierre, whose work the doctor had seen previously in Martinique (Hoffman 1985: 83). Taking this as an auspicious coincidence, Neiswanger made his debut as a collector of Haitian art by purchasing two of Pierre's paintings and bringing them home to Davenport.

A few more years passed before Dr. Neiswanger developed his new-found interest in Haitian art into the bequest that established the Davenport's collection. During the intervening years in Haiti, people were experiencing the most extreme brutality of the Duvalier presidency and coping with the effects of a collapsed tourism industry (among many other and likely more pressing issues). In 1967, the Centre d'Art itself was on the verge of bankruptcy. That same year in Iowa, Dr. Neiswanger's interest in Haitian art was renewed after receiving a mailed catalogue

from a dealer in New York. Neiswanger used his status as a trustee and patron of the museum to stoke interest among board members and directors of The Davenport Art Gallery in acquiring Haitian art for the permanent collection. Word of the museum's interest reached the Centre d'Art (Hoffman 1985: 85). Lawrence Peabody, a US based designer of mid-century modern furniture who spent half of the year living in Haiti served as the Centre d'Art's Vice-President at this time. Peabody traveled as the Centre d'Art's representative to Davenport to make his pitch. His slide presentation introduced the museum's directors to the work of artists at the center. Neiswanger, who attended Peabody's presentation, subsequently bought many of the works Peabody had presented, giving nineteen of them to the Davenport Art Gallery and establishing the first permanent and public collection of Haitian art in the United States (*ibid*). In January of 1969, Davenport opened its first exhibition of Haitian art, an event attended by the city's leaders, as well as Dr. Neiswanger and Francine Murat, who had replaced DeWitt Peters as director of the Centre d'Art after his death in 1966 held that position until she passed away in 2010. This initial exhibition commemorated the beginning of a decades-long long collaboration between Davenport and the Centre d'Art.

Larry Hoffman, the Davenport's director at the time, fostered a rich and continuing relationship with Francine Murat and the Centre d'Art. A culture of exchange and mutual benefit was established between the two institutions. Davenport would host Haitian artists whose work was included in group exhibitions. As letters between Murat and Hoffman indicate, works of Haitian art were often made available for sale at prices determined by the artists. The museum took no commission from these sales and, instead, all profits were returned to the Centre d'Art "for the benefit of the artists."⁹⁵ The museum also sent a delegation to Haiti to acquire new art,

⁹⁵ Centre d'Art Papers. Although the author is unknown, this statement was found in correspondence between Francine Murat and Larry Hoffman archived at the Centre d'Art's rebuilt facilities. The 2010 earthquake destroyed

visit artists' studios, and work on long-term projects with the Centre d'Art, including assisting in the organization's relocation to a new building in 1979 after an eviction from the original site. Through its relationship with the Centre d'Art, the Figge continued to expand its collection far beyond Dr. Neiswanger's initial gift, building a significant number of works by major Haitian artists at various stages in their careers.⁹⁶ The mutually beneficial nature of the relationship between the two institutions also went beyond display and acquisitions. Davenport was able to build its collection and programming as it aimed to expand the purview of its holdings beyond its collection of work by American artists. In turn, the Centre d'Art was able to find a reliable partner and outlet to foreign buying audiences during the lean years of the late 1960s.

In a 1985 publication commemorating Davenport's productive years as an active partner in Haitian visual culture, Larry Hoffman, the museum's then director, addressed the implications of certain terms associated with Haitian art, discussing why the museum avoided words like "primitive" and "popular." He and Francine Murat agreed that they were problematic but they chose the usage of "naïve" as a descriptor:

Naïve art, like all art, is a reflection of a culture, a place, and a time. Unlike trained artists, most naïve artists have little interest in formal art values or the literature of art from an historical point of view. They are concerned with individual expressions that communicate their message through specific subject matter drawn from their immediate environment (*ibid*: 136).

The expressions to which Hoffman is referring are, according to this statement, the result of an innate, spontaneous source of creativity, yet he also acknowledges that the resulting art objects are not divorced from artists' everyday realities and experiences. While a term like "naïve" may

the previous building and damaged much of the collection. Thanks, in part, to efforts begun by the Smithsonian's Haitian Cultural Recovery Project, the surviving collection and archival materials are being conserved, although much work remains. I extend special gratitude to the Centre d'Art's director, Louis Perrichon, and archivist, Florence Conan, who generously facilitated this research in June 2016.

⁹⁶ Among notable examples of Haitian art in the Figge's collection include a diverse range of sculptural ironwork by Gabriel Bien-Aimé, Murat Briere, Georges Liautaud, Joseph Louis Juste, and Damien Paul.

be inadequate or disagreeable in contemporary parlance, Hoffman's statement shows his active awareness of the fraught linguistic politics that accompanied a term like "Haitian art." While he never explicitly suggests it, he acknowledges that museums and others were still contending with the legacies of Western Primitivist discourse.

Origins of Museum Collections of Haitian Art in Iowa: Waterloo

While the Figge is the oldest public Haitian collection in the US, the Waterloo Center for the Arts (WCA), formerly known as the Waterloo Municipal Galleries), lays claim to having the largest with over 1,100 works by Haitian artists. Like the Figge's collection, the WCA's was formed through one collector's initial donation. Harold Reuling, an optometrist from Waterloo and his wife, Peg, traveled to Haiti in the early 1970s, about a decade after Dr. Neiswanger took his cruise. According to their daughter, the Reulings preferred to engage deeply with local culture as much as possible during their travels, meeting people in areas outside the curated confines of hotels and resorts (Reuling 2015, pers. comm.). The two were no strangers to far-flung locales and, in addition to their travels to Haiti, made frequent trips to Southeast Asia and North Africa in their lifetimes. The Reulings' approach to travel corresponds with sociologist Cohen's characterization of experiential tourists, discussed earlier, in that they sought deeper cultural connections among the places and peoples they visited. Not only did the couple buy from galleries and dealers in Port-au-Prince, they made a concerted effort to visit artist's studios and travel outside the capital as part of making their rounds (*ibid*). Their interest in Haitian art, like other collector-tourists to Haiti at this time, was enmeshed with their experiences in Haiti as a whole, where they enjoyed meeting people and getting a full range of cultural experiences on their visits, in addition to adding to their art collections. These characteristics also could apply in

the case of a collector like Dr. Neiswanger, who engaged with Haitian culture in a deep way through his involvement with the Davenport Art Museum.

While the Reulings may have taken a more “adventurous” approach when travelling abroad, forsaking such conveniences as provided in a cruise package, the atmosphere encountered by tourists visiting Haiti in the early 1970s was markedly less tenuous than the one encountered by Dr. Neiswanger in 1961, who arrived at the cusp of the most politically violent period of Papa Doc’s regime. When the Reulings arrived in the early part of the decade, however, the circumstances in Haiti at the time facilitated their foray into collecting Haitian art. We must keep in mind that attracting tourists like the Reulings and presenting a “friendly” Haitian face to visitors from abroad was a major goal of *Jeanclaudeisme*.

As their daughter Polly recalls, the Reulings “fell in love” with Haiti on that initial trip and they bought their first works of Haitian art as souvenirs (2015). Through frequent, subsequent visits to the Haiti, their collection grew. As a result, the couple began to consider how they might share it with the greater Waterloo community. The Reulings made their initial gift of about seventeen paintings and cut metal sculptures to the Waterloo Municipal Galleries in 1977 (Shankle 2015). Many of the paintings in the original gift are verdant, pastoral landscapes, featuring peasants working the fields or carrying goods on their heads. Two works, by Alexandre Gregoire and Yves Michel represent the Garden of Eden itself. Another work typifies the style and quotidian subject matter of the School of Cap Haïtien that arose in the wake of Philomé Obin’s success. The painting, by Rony Léonidas, shows a bustling market scene in which the artist carefully depicts individual details, despite the crowded composition. The most renowned

artist from this original gift is George Liautaud, who became famous through his metal works made from re-purposed materials like oil drums and railroad spikes.⁹⁷

While modest in comparison to the Davenport's Haitian collection, which boasted the names of some of the most prominent Haitian artists at the time, Waterloo would build upon the Reuling's original gift through a relationship with the Haitian visual arts community that remains active today. Consequently, Waterloo, Iowa's fifth largest city, became home to one of the country's most significant Haitian art collections. WCA's collection, although started by the Reuling gift, was developed through its then-director, Clarence Alling, who made efforts to be included in some of Davenport's Haitian art programming. In fact, collaborative exhibitions between Davenport and the Centre d'Art sometimes traveled to Waterloo. In 1982, for example, a group show featuring Nacius Joseph, Serge Jolimeau, Jasmin Joseph, and Edouard Duval-Carrié originated in Davenport and was then transported to the WCA.⁹⁸

The WCA mimicked some of Davenport's exhibition programming to an extent, but Alling and the Reulings intended Haitian art at their institution to have local significance. Waterloo is located on the Cedar River in the geographic middle of Iowa. Considerably more working class than its wealthy neighbor Cedar Falls, Waterloo is also one of the most diverse cities in the state with African-Americans comprising almost twenty percent of the city's population (United States Census Bureau 2016). Class and racial issues between Waterloo and Cedar Falls, as well as their respective major sources of employment, may have resulted in a

⁹⁷ Like the example of Philomé Obin and the School of Cap Haïtien, Liautaud's success gave rise to many followers. His home town of Croix-des-Bouquets is home to a thriving artisan industry making works of cut metal. See: Morris 1995.

⁹⁸ Centre d'Art Papers. This was Duval-Carrié's first exhibition in the United States. While all the artists' work was for sale, Duval-Carrié sold none of his pieces in this instance. Ironically, he is one of the most successful living Haitian artists today.

rivalry between the two cities. The John Deere Corporation has factories in Waterloo; the University of Northern Iowa is in Cedar Falls. While Waterloo suffered high levels of unemployment in the late 70s and early 80s as John Deere closed several of its plants and manufacturing began to move overseas more generally, Cedar Falls maintained relative affluence.

These disparities between the two cities were not lost on the Reulings, who incorporated their Haitian art collection into their activities as civic boosters. With their gift to the WCA, the couple also strove for community engagement, hoping to both increase Waterloo's cultural offerings and, more specifically, build a program that resonated with the city's African-American residents (Shankle 2015). In collaboration with director Clarence Alling, the Reulings recognized the Haitian collection's potential appeal for the city's disenfranchised black community through a shared cultural heritage with Haitian artists.⁹⁹ In addition, the Reulings also hoped that their bequest would stimulate and inspire local artists and offer them inspiration (*ibid*). While Davenport's involvement with Haitian art was entrenched in visual arts production in Haiti itself, Waterloo's engagement was directed to local community activism.

Because Haitian art was relatively affordable, and with local patrons acting as cultural ambassadors, small municipalities with monetary limitations like Davenport and Waterloo could amass significant collections of art that did not exhaust their acquisition budgets. Yet, of complementary significance is how Haitian art appealed to collectors, who often valued work by Haitian artists whose work was routinely labeled "primitive" or "naïve." As such, collectors

⁹⁹ The history of people connecting Haiti-derived themes of self-determination with the struggles of black people in the U.S. goes back at least to the Harlem Renaissance. See: Dash: 1988; and Twa 2014.

located the “aura” of Haitian art, to borrow Walter Benjamin’s usage of the term,¹⁰⁰ in several aspects: the artists’ perceived detachment from aesthetic movements and trends coming from New York and Paris; the art’s seeming cultural “difference,” as well as, ironically, the belief that creative potential was at the same time universal, regardless of one’s position. For collectors like the Reulings, this final aspect seems to have played a larger role, as their collecting activities coincided with their altruistic community involvements. According to their daughter Polly, Harold was active with the local Rotary Club and were members of the Episcopal Church (2015). For the Reulings, it seems the “difference” of Haitian art was less significant than the universal messages about human creativity that they read within it.

Theories and Practices in the Collection, Acquisition, and Display of Haitian Art in Iowa

Some scholars have posited that perceived “primitive” qualities in cultures like Haiti’s have played a motivating role in the collection of “exotic” objects and the travel to “far-away” places. Regarding the collection of objects divorced from their “primitive” ritual contexts Baudrillard proposes that ““civilized’ people, for their part, fetishize birth and authenticity by means of the mythological object,” which, in this case, is an object from peoples living in a “primitive” state before “modern” time (2005: 88). He links collecting with tourism by stating, “travelling as a tourist always involves going in search of lost time” (*ibid*: 85). This search is for authenticity within the realm of the “other,” however constructed or invented the latter category might be. McCannell (1989) goes further: “tourist attractions are analogous to the religious symbolisms of primitive peoples,” although, of course, certainly not as understood by the so-called “primitive”

¹⁰⁰ 2007: 221. According to Benjamin, a work of art’s “aura” is located in its “authentic” qualities, which he describes as “the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced” *ibid*. It is this quality, he writes, that gets diminished by mechanical reproduction.

peoples themselves.¹⁰¹ That Haitian art seemed so defiantly removed from art historical traditions in the “West,” may have also undergirded its appeal for collectors. Sally Price (1991) outlines a Western cultural symptom in which, “primitive artists are imagined to express their feelings free from the intrusive overlay of learned behavior and conscious constraints that mold the work of the Civilized artist” (*ibid*: 32). What these scholars identify is that “civilized” people are attracted to qualities ascribed to an “other,” which manifests in ways that intersect with both international tourism in “Haiti” and the acquisition and display of “Haitian art.”¹⁰²

In her study of the acquisition and institutionalization of “Primitive” art, Sally Price (1991) goes further by identifying a principle of universality held by collectors of objects from non-Western cultures that may account for the motivations of the Iowa collectors. Price contends that within such attitudes, the assumption exists that all human beings are part of one “Family of Man” (*ibid*: 23). Museums have displayed the work of “primitive” artists, usually from subaltern indigenous cultures, as part of this inclusive ideology that aligns with such an institution’s encyclopedic, rationalist agenda. In an attempt to be stewards to all the world’s cultures and peoples through physical display, “Western” museums often fail to examine entrenched, globalized power dynamics and contentious histories that brought the objects to the museum in the first place.

¹⁰¹ MacCannell 1989: 10. Dennis O’Rourke’s documentary film *Cannibal Tours* (1989) captures the imbalanced power dynamics of tourism by following a group of European tourists on a boat tour of the Sepik River in Papua New Guinea. The tourists stop at villages along the river where they visit “Spirit Houses” and haggle with locals over the price of carved handicrafts, one of the few sources of local income. Interviews with the tourists reveal stale Western assumptions about “primitive” peoples living close to nature, while the “natives” lament over a situation that forces them to be dependent on the meager income provided by selling carved figures to fickle tourists.

¹⁰² We can find parallels in Edward Said’s exegesis on Orientalism (1994). Said locates such processes in Western Orientalist discourse that constructs a Western Self in opposition to an Oriental Other. As Said demonstrates, the “West” has defined itself by projecting fantasies and desires onto the “Orient,” as its exact opposite in every possible way, including culture, values, ethnicity, and religion; 210.

Price's assertions are part of a larger movement of institutional critique that crystallized around the Museum of Modern Art's controversial exhibition, *Primitivism in the 20th Century: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, (1984). Such critiques, including Price's, most often focused on the history of museums' curatorial treatment of art from indigenous cultures of Africa, Asia, North America, and Oceania. Historically speaking, such art objects were relegated to a lower register of value as cultural "artifacts," and not works of "fine art" that adhered to generalized Western aesthetic standards and cultural assumptions.¹⁰³ "Tribal" or "Primitive" art was most often displayed in natural history museums, which organized their collections according to criteria that placed objects within scientifically ordered taxonomies based on hierarchies of measurable value. This kind of discourse assigned objects from indigenous cultures to lower hierarchies of value.

Writing before the movement of institutional museum critique gained momentum, Jean Baudrillard attempted to locate the motivations for collecting a wide array of objects from other cultures. He asks:

What lies behind the persistent search for old things – for antique furniture, authenticity, period style, rusticity, craftsmanship, hand-made products, native pottery, folklore, and so on? What is the reason for the strange acculturation phenomenon whereby advanced peoples seek out signs extrinsic to their own time and space, and increasingly remote relative to their own cultural system (2005: 79)?

He answers his own question by attributing this desire to a search for origins, however mythical they may be. For her part, Susan Stewart extends this analysis by identifying a significant factor motivating activities like collecting: nostalgia, a phenomenon that she declares as a “social disease” (1993: ix). Like Baudrillard, she also attributes the collections themselves as more than

¹⁰³Among the vast literature of critiques on the ways in which museums have constructed and ascribed cultural value within the art/artifact binary, see: Clifford 1988; Karp and Lavine, eds. 1991; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; and Vogel 1988.

the sum of their individual parts: “The collection is not constructed by its elements; rather, it comes to exist by means of its principle of organization” (*ibid*: 155). Through such a principle, the collection is an extension of the self of the individual collector.

William Rubin, the lead curator of the *Primitivism* exhibition at MoMA (1984), intended to counter the conceptual violence enacted by eighteenth century museum discourses by elevating “tribal” artifacts out of the dusty realm of natural history and ethnographic museums to the level of art:

I want to understand the Primitive sculptures in terms of the Western context in which modern artists ‘discovered’ them. The ethnologists’ primary concern – the specific function and significance of each of these objects – is irrelevant to my topic, insofar as these facts might have been known to the modern artists in question (1984: 1).

By establishing an affinity with the European Modernist avant-garde, with Pablo Picasso as the chief example, the exhibition historicized the included “tribal” objects into the story of Western “progress” – they were assigned value based on their contributions to European modern art but without deep consideration of their cultural contexts prior to their inclusion in twentieth century art historical narratives. As art historian and critic Hal Foster points out in his critique of the show, the exhibition failed “to question what is at stake ideologically when the ‘magical’ character of tribal work is read...into modern art, or when modern values of intentionality, originality and aesthetic feeling are bestowed upon tribal objects” (1985: 186). By placing works by unnamed artists under a universalizing umbrella of Western Art, the exhibition's curators effectively erased a violent history of colonialism through which “tribal” objects were obtained and reaffirmed post-Enlightenment ideals. According to critics, Primitivist discourses were not challenged by Rubin, rather they were updated and re-contextualized. MoMA's exhibition and the subsequent controversy came at a time when artists, museum curators, critics, and museum-going audiences were questioning the label of “Primitive” art and interrogating the terms of

engagement between dominant “Western” culture and the subordinated “Other.” The alternatives did not always provide an effective counter-discourse, no matter how well-intentioned efforts like the “Primitivism” exhibition may have been.

Within this critical context, Dr. Neiswanger and the Reulings’ gifts to their respective local arts institutions become part of larger discussions regarding the functions and histories of “Western” museums. The Reulings' assumptions about the reception of their Haitian art collection by Waterloo's disenfranchised black residents enacts a version of the universality principle that Price identifies. Because of shared ancestry, the assumption was that African-Americans in Waterloo would find inspiration from Haitian art.¹⁰⁴ But we must be cautious about reducing the role of WCA's Haitian art collection to an example of Primitivist discourse. While commonalities may exist, the work of Haitian artists often challenges such discourses. While histories of Haitian art and its reception in North America shares some characteristics with histories of "Primitive" art in European museums, the case of Haiti defies such a simple attribution. One major difference lies in contexts in which interactions between artists and buyers took place. The degrees of separation between collectors like the Reulings and artists whose work they collected were far fewer than those between major European collectors and the often-anonymous producers of "tribal artifacts." For the latter case, major dealers often never set foot in an object's country of origin, much less the collectors themselves and, therefore, provenance was often murky or unknown. As we know of the Reulings, they made a point of having direct interactions and relationships with the artists themselves.

¹⁰⁴ The Reulings’ assumptions echo claimed affinities by African-Americans who viewed the Haitian Revolution as an aspirational example of Black empowerment and the subsequent mistreatment of Haiti by the US government and military as manifestations of racist policies abroad. For a deeper discussion of Haiti’s relationship to the US African-American community, see: Polyné 2010; and Twa 2014.

In the case of Haitian-art collectors, we have many examples of people who bought their first works in Haiti itself, often meeting the artists and visiting their ateliers. The anonymity of artists and their exclusion from individual recognition is one of the defining characteristics of "Primitive" art as outlined by Price, but one that collecting histories of Haitian art resist.¹⁰⁵ For the most part, the opposite is true: we know who the artists are, their backgrounds, upbringings, and levels of education. Often, writers have utilized such details in order to bolster the value of a particular work and the "miraculous" confluence of circumstances behind its creation (to borrow Rodman's overwrought assessment). For collectors, it seems their personal experiences with artists, as connected to the collected art object, are better understood as part of the identity formation that Baudrillard theorizes: The collector recognizes his or herself within the constructed totality of the objects that comprise a collection (2005: 97). An object of Haitian art embodies and replaces the shared experience between the expatriate collector and the Haitian artist instead of serving as a nostalgic construction of an imagined past. In this way, Haitian art collections in the Midwest counter interpretations from scholars like Price and Baudrillard that describe the potential of collecting to be a neo-imperial venture, in which "primitive" peoples are subjugated (physically and discursively) through the acquisition and display of their art.¹⁰⁶ Baudrillard, perhaps reductively, describes a dichotomous situation between "civilized" peoples and those from "under-developed" cultures: "The 'underdeveloped' fetishize power by means of

¹⁰⁵ Price 1991: 23. In addition to anonymity, the other defining characteristics of "primitive" art that Price identifies are: art that invokes paganism or ritualism; art excluded from Western museums before World War I; art by people whose languages are not taught in universities; and "any artistic tradition for which the market value of an object automatically inflates by a factor of ten or more upon export from its original cultural setting" (3).

¹⁰⁶ Baudrillard writes: "Fundamentally, the imperialism that subjugates nature with technical objects and the one that domesticates cultures with antiques are one and the same. This same private imperialism is the organizing principle of a functionally domesticated environment made up of domesticated signs of the past – of ancestral objects, sacred in essence but desacralized, which are called upon to exude their sacredness (or historicalness) into a history-less domesticity" 2005: 90.

the technical object; technically advanced, ‘civilized’ people, for their part, fetishize birth and authenticity by means of the mythological object” (2005: 88). The personal relationships established between artist and collector, I argue, adds a complex set of dimensions to this assessment.

In considering a collection that “belongs” to a group, such as the citizens of Waterloo, and not to an individual, we encounter further complexities. The interests, motivations, and desires of the “collector” cannot be ascribed to one singular person; rather, they are subject to diverse and often discordant agendas within the group. Relating the Haitian collection to the local population has posed a challenge to the WCA’s staff and directors. When it first opened, the WCA was intended to be less a local art museum and more a municipal center in which a range of activities from sports to theater to art could be organized under one roof. Today, the center primarily functions as a museum but the exhibition and programming continue to reflect a focus towards broader community engagement, especially with its vast Children’s Museum, which accounts for a large portion of the museum’s attendance numbers. Within the institution’s outreach goals, questions arise: how can it make Haitian art relevant to residents of a small Midwestern American city? Can common African ancestry be a strong enough link for one segment of the population? What ideas are communicated or lost as a work moves between Haiti and Iowa?

When presented with these questions, Kent Shankle, the center's director, admitted the difficulties in establishing resonance with Waterloo's residents (2015). Many of the Haitian works have strong relationships with Vodou either through their previous ceremonial uses or as depicted subject matter. Sensationalized misrepresentations of Vodou that proliferate outside Haiti have presented a particular challenge. Many area residents, including African-Americans to

whom the Reulings originally directed their good intentions, hold conservative Christian religious beliefs through which Vodou is deemed anathema. Additionally, the museum's collection of Haitian material culture can prove remote and unfamiliar to many visitors, adding an extra obstacle for the WCA's staff in developing didactic materials for the gallery walls and instructional regimens for gallery educators and docents. Although instances of the collection's acceptance among local community members was tentative, the WCA makes concerted efforts to dispel misconceptions surrounding Haitian culture and religious practices while continuing to foster resonant links between the Haitian art in its collection and the community of Waterloo.

Despite the great physical and cultural distance between Haiti and Iowa, the WCA's curators have managed a successful museum program in spite of pockets of local resistance.¹⁰⁷ To express the dilemma in operative museological terms, the Haitian collection at WCA constantly negotiates the balance between resonance and wonder, characteristics that Stephen Greenblatt (1991) identifies as key considerations to any curatorial approach. Greenblatt asserts that resonance is a displayed object's ability to reach outside of its formal unity to a broader cultural condition, or its metonymic function as a referent standing for a larger whole. Wonder, conversely, depends upon an object's ability to grab the viewer and "convey an arresting sense of uniqueness" (*ibid*: 42). Within this rubric, an effective and relevant exhibition is one that balances the two traits by attracting an audience with elements of wonder and then employing strategies to convey resonance. The bright colors, non-traditional materials, and unfamiliar subject matter of the paintings, sculptures, and mixed media works in WCA's Haitian collection effectively draw in an audience with little or no prior knowledge of Haitian culture, thus

¹⁰⁷ In 2015, the museum was on the defensive from a handful of local, tax-minded politicians who saw the museum's activities as a misuse of public funds. According to Shankle, many of the loudest opposing voices expressed dismay at the museum's continued dedication to Haitian art, which was deemed by some to be a waste of resources (2015).

establishing wonder. Resonance is achieved by highlighting difference, underscoring culturally strange or foreign aspects, which potentially exoticizes Haitian culture for unfamiliar audiences. Misconceptions arise in museum exhibitions when there is a lack of contextual material to orient viewers. When dealing with subject matter like Vodou, which carries a history of fraught representations and stereotypes, especially by non-practitioners, the potential for re-inscribing and perpetuating negative stereotypes increases.

Themes and imagery directly associated with Vodou present a particular source of contention among historians of Haitian art. Selden Rodman (1988), for one, has cited artists' involvement with Vodou as a major inspiration for their unfettered expressions. Karen Richman (2008), as discussed in the previous chapter, proposes that the inclusion of the Vodou pantheon is an example of gamesmanship in which artists catered to the tastes for the “exotic” expressed by many foreign buyers. Art historians like Gerald Alexis (2000) see Vodou's influence in the formal qualities of arrangement and composition in paintings, not necessarily in artists' choices of subject matter of pictorial content. He writes that the symmetry in many works harkens to the practice of using flour or cornmeal to draw *veve*, or designs associated with particular *lwa*, on the floor during Vodou ceremonies as a means for inviting the participation of those deities. These designs share the axial symmetry found in the work of many Haitian artists. In addition, Alexis cites the *poto mitan*, or peristyle poles at the center of Vodou temples, as having an influence on the compositional centrality of many paintings (*ibid*: 176). In the case of Waterloo's collection of Haitian art, there is a large number of Vodou-themed works, a fact which corresponds to the argument presented by Alexis and others that artists depicted more explicit scenes of Vodou ceremonies and portraits of the *lwa* in order to cater to the market of foreigners in search of the exotic (*ibid*: 208).

One way to interpret Iowa's status as home to two major public collections of Haitian art is to analyze collectors like the Reulings and Dr. Neiswanger as tourist-collectors acting as nodes within a greater cultural circuit. Sociologist Mimi Sheller defines such circuits through the movement they facilitate, calling them "complex mobilities" that consist of people, consumer goods, technologies, images, and texts that circulate within a globalized network (2014: 74). The production and circulation of Haitian art in the twentieth century illustrates how this idea works. Tourists and travelers like the Reulings form an important component of these mobilities. Through their travels, collector-tourists bring art objects and other cultural ephemera back home, which in turn communicate an array of messages over the long physical and cultural distances between Haiti and Iowa. The types of messages transferred are determined through an exchange between an artist and a collector. Through Jules-Rosette's (1984) discussion of tourist art in Africa earlier in this chapter, we see how, in the dynamics of this exchange, the collector tends to reside in a more powerful position and the artist (or anyone dependent on tourism capital) constantly tries to track his or her changing tastes, attitudes, and behaviors.

Collections of Haitian art in Davenport and Waterloo are less expressions of a distinct "Haitian" character, than manifestations of a collector's tastes and altruistic attitudes given form in individual art objects. The path through which Iowa's Haitian art traveled also resulted from favorable global conditions that facilitated the movement of people via tourism. As air travel increased in the 1970s, US Americans more frequently engaged with foreign cultures. Travelers like the Reulings might find themselves in a country like Haiti for no other reason than its conveniently close distance and warm-weather appeal. As residents from smaller North American communities began to engage more with ideas and cultures from other countries,

regional cultural institutions like the Figge and WCA began exploring the world outside the confines of the Midwest.

Today, the Figge and WCA have diverged in their approaches to their Haitian collections. The directors and curators at the Figge continue to prominently display work by Haitian artists and create exhibition programming with their existing collections, but the collaborative involvement with contemporary art production in Haiti itself, as manifested in the strong relationship it had with the Centre d'Art from the 1960s through 80s, is no longer current. Therefore, the chronology of the Figge's collection coincides with the two major periods of tourism in Haiti, although not exclusively.¹⁰⁸ The WCA, on the other hand, has continued to actively acquire work by contemporary Haitian artists, especially the new generation of sculptors and flag makers. The museum also takes a leading role in the annual conferences of the Haitian Art Society, a small group of collectors and enthusiasts who meet every year under the guiding theme of visiting collections and Haitian art in cities around the world.¹⁰⁹ The WCA continues to receive donations from individual collectors and make purchases from galleries and artists, which accounts for the institutions sizable collection. The directors and curators of both the Figge and WCA acknowledge, however, the challenges in continuing to find innovative ways to involve their Haitian collections in their overall exhibition programming and acquisition budgets. For reasons to be explained in the next chapter, the market for Haitian art has declined since the early 80s, and the Iowa institutions have had to respond in their own ways, either by de-emphasizing their focus on Haitian work, as is the case with the Figge, or taking advantage of low prices to acquire relatively inexpensive work.

¹⁰⁸ One exception is the Figge's continued relationship with artist Edouard Duval-Carrié. In recent decades, the museum has hosted solo exhibitions and acquired the artist's work for its permanent collection.

¹⁰⁹ See: Chapter Three for further discussions of WCA's current programming and its role in the Haitian Art Society.

The Brooklyn Museum and *Haitian Art* (1978)

The Reuling's initial visits as tourists to Haiti in the early 70s led directly to the establishment of the WCA's Haitian art collection. The resurgence of foreign visitors to Haiti in the same period had a direct effect on other museum institutions in the United States. The most prominent example of this was the exhibition *Haitian Art* at the Brooklyn Museum in 1978, a landmark show in the history of Haitian art in the US. The exhibition's organizer, Ute Stebich, was a graduate student studying for her Master's degree at the Institute of Fine Arts at the time. She and her husband first visited Haiti in 1972 at the recommendation of friends (Stebich 2015). Like the Reulings, Stebich and her husband were experienced and adventurous travelers who made Haiti one of their destinations during the country's improved tourist climate in the early 70s. Also like the couple from Iowa, the Stebichs bought works of Haitian art during their initial visit – about a dozen paintings. After subsequent visits and the acquisition of more art, they built a substantial private collection featuring works by such artists as Philomé Obin, Rigaud Benoit, and Salnave Philippe-Auguste (*ibid*). According to Stebich (2015), she generally followed Selden Rodman's tastes as he outlines them in *Miracle of Haitian Art* (1974), which establishes a defined circuit of cultural influence in which we see the extent of Rodman's role in directing the tastes and attitudes of collectors. For her part, Ute Stebich's contribution to the history of Haitian art in the US lies in her role as curator and exhibition organizer of the Brooklyn Museum show, and as editor of its accompanying exhibition book (1978).

Stebich describes how she and her husband immediately fell in love with Haiti on their first trip, which happened to be during the pre-Lenten carnival season. Here, we find parallels with the other visitors' accounts discussed previously:

As we landed and the door opened and you come from the cold there comes the wonderful warm air and music. A band played at the airport and we were treated as if we

were important political visitors. Our hands were shaken; we were all given a rum punch and I had never experienced anything like this. We took a driver into the city to the hotel and we got stuck in the middle of one of those carnival parades with the music and everything. The only thing we could do – my husband said let's get out, sent the luggage to the hotel, we got out and were dancing along with the people. It was the only thing we could do. So, it was an incredible first experience and impression and I think that's what guided me. Here we were, probably the only white faces in a sea of black people, and everyone was fabulous and wonderful and laughing and joking and welcoming us and that's all I have experienced in Haiti. I've never had a bad experience at all (2015, pers. comm.).

Over the next several decades, Stebich built connections with the Haitian art world including gallerists like George Nader, who facilitated the couple's introduction to artists and curators like Pierre Monosiet who ran the Musée d'Art du Collège St. Pierre, which opened in 1974, and Francine Murat, director of the Centre d'Art after DeWitt Peters. Eventually, Stebich visited Haiti so often and became so entrenched in the local cultural scene that she was bringing down interested friends and even her children to visit galleries and make studio visits to the artists she knew (*ibid*). Each trip to Haiti resulted in an increase in her art collection. Fittingly, she turned her interest in Haitian art as a collector into the focus of her graduate studies.

Through contacts at the IFA, Ute Stebich met with Michael Botwinick, then-Director of the Brooklyn Museum, and other curators who expressed interest in putting on a show of Haitian art (Stebich 2015). Like the WCA, the Brooklyn Museum was interested in putting on exhibitions with a focus towards community engagement. Two decades of political oppression by the Duvaliers led to increasing numbers of Haitian exiles, a great many of whom settled in neighborhoods surrounding the Brooklyn Museum, such as Prospect Heights and the Flatbush area. The museum's curators recognized the significance of an exhibition of Haitian art for Brooklyn's large Haitian diaspora community. For her part, Stebich envisioned the exhibition not so much for the benefit of local Haitians who were familiar with their own culture, but for the US audience who may have carried stereotypes and gross misunderstandings. She stated, "I was

more interested to bring that culture to people who had no idea and who had a negative idea of Haiti...Also I wanted to show that Haitian art wasn't what most people perceived – just commercial kitsch" (*ibid*). A newspaper strike in New York at the time hindered the exhibition's promotional efforts yet opening night drew huge crowds. As Stebich recalls, "we sent out, let's say, 2,000 invitations – well, we had over 3,000 people show up... people lined up outside the doors to get into the show and then they let people in by groups. It was just an amazing event. So many people from Haiti came. Most of the artists came" (*ibid*). With the publication of an eponymous exhibition book with essays exploring the cultural roots and significance of works in the show, *Haitian Art* contributed to scholarship on Haitian visual culture, as well brought the work of Haitian artists to the attention of US audiences.

The year after *Haitian Art* opened at the Brooklyn Museum, the Milwaukee Art Museum had a large showing of the Haitian collection of Richard and Irma Flagg, a local couple who donated their substantial collection to the museum that same year. The New Orleans Museum of Art also held a large showing of Haitian art in 1979. Additionally, Christie's and Sotheby's auction houses began having sales of Haitian art; adequate press and a sufficient number of dedicated buyers warranted such developments (Pierre-Pierre 1998). Such a confluence of events in the US and the large number of visitors pouring into Haiti itself provide justification for collectors' claims that the late 1970s and early 1980s saw the peak of the market for Haitian art.

Collectors of Emerging Visual Media in Haitian Art

Just as US audiences were becoming more familiar with the work of Haitian artists, more first-time collectors were entering the market. One such collector was Ed Gessen, a businessman from Southern California. In similar terms used by Stebich related to racial and cultural difference, he

described his first time in Haiti in 1982 as one of initial shock. Having traveled to the country on a last-minute whim, he described his astonishment as he got off the plane, stating, "I was the only white guy in the whole place. First of all, I had never been in a situation like that so I was a little shocked. I wasn't afraid or anything but it was the first time that it was like race reversal for me, so it was pretty impactful" (2015). Gessen spent a week in Haiti on his first visit. He procured an English-speaking guide and, armed with a sense of adventure to make up for his lack of knowledge about Haiti and Haitian art, proceeded to "buy whatever I could carry" (*ibid*). After that trip, he continued to sporadically visit the country and educated himself on Haitian art, as we have seen in previous examples, through books like Selden Rodman's *Miracle of Haitian Art* (1978).

Gessen built a substantial collection of Haitian paintings and cut metal pieces. In the 1990s he began acquiring beaded and sequined banners or flags known as *drapo*, which he did not start collecting until 1998 when he found his first flag in a garage sale in Northern California, not on one of his visits to Haiti (2015, pers. comm.). While he owned no other flags at that point, he recognized the medium, which had become popular among collectors around the time he first started going to Haiti. After some research, he learned that the Fowler Museum at UCLA had a significant collection of *drapo* and several exhibitions that included the medium. He contacted Patrick A. Polk, a leading scholar of Haitian art and future curator at the Fowler who helped identify the artist of Gessen's garage sale banner (*ibid*). Gessen soon became transfixed to the point that flags singularly occupied his collecting interests. Shortly thereafter, he began looking for opportunities to return to Haiti to seek out the flag makers themselves.

The history of *drapo* production is deeply enmeshed with that of Haiti's tourism industry. Vodou was a large part of a tourist's experience in Haiti. Many hotels in and around Port-au-

Prince, such as El Rancho, had nightly “Vodou performances” for their guests. While many visitors would buy paintings or handicrafts to commemorate their visit to Haiti, others sought out more “authentic” examples of Haitian material culture, including ritual objects from Vodou ceremonies like drums and ceremonial flags known as *drapo sèvis* (service flags). Seeing rising market demand for drapo among foreign visitors, many practitioners in Vodou “societies,” or local groups organized around specific *ounfò* (temples), sold the banners used by the congregation (there were almost always at least two). While it was customary to keep the flags as pairs, certain situations called for their separation: “If, for example, a foreign art collector comes to the *ounfò* looking for flags but is interested in acquiring only one of a pair, the owner's need for the money the collector is willing to pay may outweigh his desire to keep the set intact” (Polk 1997: 16). Coinciding with the rise in demand from collectors, drapo makers began creating flags for sale, not expressly ceremonial use, with the proceeds used to support the *ounfò* (*ibid*). To appeal to the perceived tastes of expatriate collectors, flag makers added heavy sequins and beading with the resulting forms too heavy and cumbersome to accommodate ritual use, yet still small enough to fit into carry-on luggage. Thus, drapo transitioned from a strictly religious art object to a collectible one that retained its spiritual antecedents in visual subject matter but whose forms designs were modified to satisfy perceived market demands.

The drapo maker Clotaire Bazile was one artist who took advantage of the emerging market for flags. Bazile began making drapo for temples in the early 1970s but, after encountering a pair of visiting French collector-tourists who persuaded him to part with two of his ceremonial flags, his work became more geared towards sale to international visitors. He set up a workshop in Miami and worked closely with US-American collector Virgil Young who

often commissioned drapo with specific subjects in mind.¹¹⁰ Bazile was one of several important drapo makers who came out of the Bel Air neighborhood of Port-au-Prince, an area with a concentration of artists making ceremonial objects for local *ounfò* (Girouard 1994: 57). Drapo artists working prior to the 1970s remain largely anonymous – they only started making sequin “signatures” when they needed to distinguish their work for international collectors.¹¹¹

Haitian flag-making traditions extend far back in Haiti’s history. Patrick A. Polk (1997) has written extensively on drapo and their significance to Vodou practitioners, as well as their relatively newfound emergence on the international art scene. Polk identifies two major types of banners: drapo *sèvis*, made for specific ritual use, and “art flags” produced primarily for the foreign collecting market and for sale to tourists (1997: 22). The two types of flags differ stylistically. In adherence to the practical necessities of their ritual use, drapo *sèvis* typically have sparser adornment than art flags. They are usually attached to poles as they enter a ceremony, carried by *ounsi* (Vodou initiates, often women, clad in white), into the temple where Vodou rites are performed. As such, they are furled when not in use and must be light enough to be easily paraded, requiring fewer of the embellishments of sequins and beads that adorn most art flags. While evidence of ritual use characterizes many collectors’ approaches to the acquisition of traditional art forms, the value of drapo in foreign markets is not strictly dependent on stylistic adherence to the particular traits of drapo *sèvis*. In fact, art flags are characterized by intricate central design motifs that usually feature *lwa*, represented in the form of chromolithographs, or ritual drawings known as *vèvè*. The more elaborate the artist makes the central design, borders,

¹¹⁰ Wexler 1997: 61. Many examples of drapo in the Fowler Museum’s collection were acquired were from Young, as well as other collectors and researchers, including Marilyn Houlberg. The museum’s continued involvement with Haitian art, to be explored in the next chapter, has led to further acquisitions and commissions.

¹¹¹ There are many instances in which the appearance of artists’ signatures coincides with the rise of a market, whereas prior to the demands of the collectors, proof of individual creation did not factor into the milieu of local visual arts production. See: Graburn 1976; Jules-Rosette 1984; Phillips & Steiner 1999; Steiner 1994.

and field or background (the three stylistic components of drapo), the more appealing such flags are to foreign collectors. Indeed, the prevalence today of art flags over drapo sèvis corresponds to Polk's observation that banners "are more likely destined for art galleries, museums, or Ebay than the sacred confines of a Vodou temple" (2012: 120).

Evidence exists of an extensive role of flags among Black Atlantic cultures long before Haitian flags emerged as a commodity on international art markets.¹¹² Polk also identifies European influences, possibly from the Napoleonic French military, that both contribute to how celebrants deploy drapo in Vodou ceremonies, as well as their stylistic characteristics (1995: 338). Vodou practitioners use banners as a means to identify, salute, and invoke sources of power. A group of ounsì march with the drapo in circular formations led by a master of ceremonies, or *laplas*. In these cases, the sources of power receiving obeisance are the *lwa*, but this performative context resembles those used by the French military from the era of the Haitian Revolution (*ibid*). Typically, Vodou societies keep a minimum of two banners for the most important *lwa* for ceremonies, *Ogou* and *Danbala* (Polk 1997: 16). Perhaps not coincidental to Polk's historical analysis, *Ogou* is the *lwa* associated with military power.

New developments in drapo production coincided with the failures of *Jeanclaudisme*. As US-based light manufacturing and production companies fled Haiti in the midst of the political troubles of the 1980s (which I will elaborate on in the following chapter), many skilled Haitian workers found themselves unemployed. Among those was Myrlande Constant, who worked in a wedding dress factory in Port-au-Prince until she was laid off in the early 1990s (Smith 2010: 23). She subsequently opened a drapo workshop where she incorporated solid-beading techniques learned as a dressmaker into her flag designs. Constant encrusted her resulting drapo

¹¹² Polk 1997. See also: Ross 1979, on the flags of Asafo military companies among the Fante peoples of southern Ghana – a likely cultural antecedent for Haitian drapo traditions.

with bright beadwork and increasingly ornate designs that, through complex renderings, delved further into the narrative possibilities of the medium. Constant's drapo (as well as those made in the ateliers of fellow flag-makers, such as Roudy Azour and Ronald Edmond) went beyond the more traditional ceremonial format by conveying highly illustrative scenes in terms that hewed closer to the work of Haitian painters. This new generation of flag-makers also began to extend the dimensions of their tableaux so that, with the increased number and weight of the beads, many became impossible for use within a ceremonial context.¹¹³

Examples of Constant's work have found their way into individual collections like Ed Gessen's, and also garnered the attention of museums like the Waterloo Center of the Arts, which has built a large collection of drapo.¹¹⁴ Following in its role as a major supporter of the arts of Haiti, the Fowler Museum at UCLA commissioned a monumental work from Myrlande Constant, *Haiti madi 12 janvye 2010* (Haiti, Tuesday January 12, 2010) for the exhibition *In Extremis: Death and Life in 21st Century* (2012) adding to its already-extensive holdings of drapo. Gessen also lent several banners to the Fowler Museum for *In Extremis*, and hosted Constant at his home in Southern California to see his collection while she was in town for the opening. As Gessen recalls, "I wanted her to see where her flags had ended up" (2015). Under typical circumstances of a museum opening, such a convergence between an artist and someone who collects her work would be considered *de rigeur*, but, as the case of *Atis Rezistans* will show us in the following chapter, travel by Haitians to the US had become increasingly restricted. Additionally, *In Extremis* marked an "arrival," of sorts, for drapo as an art form within a US-

¹¹³ Such elaborate contemporary drapo are not entirely made for secular use, as some have observed them on display in Vodou temples in Port-au-Prince; however, larger examples are merely too heavy to handle by the laplas.

¹¹⁴ Gessen has lent many of his Constants, as well as other works from his collection, to major museum exhibitions including *In Extremis: Death and Life in 21st Century Haiti* at the Fowler Museum at UCLA (2012), and *Kafou: Haiti, Art and Vodou* at the Nottingham Contemporary (2012).

museum context. With ceremonial origins as an “artifact” of Vodou worship and subsequent “downward” transition to a commodity on the tourist market, drapo had entered a new phase of legitimacy in the form of Constant’s commissioned work for *In Extremis*.¹¹⁵

Drapo have given audiences an example of Haitian material culture par excellence, and follows other accumulative characteristics of Vodou. Just as Vodou altars reconstitute objects gathered from a wide range of cultural sources, so too do drapo makers employ images and stylistic elements from Catholicism, Freemasonry, North American popular culture, Arawak Taino culture, and West and Central African sources. As Donald Cosentino writes, all of Vodou’s disparate elements came together in the context of colonial slavery to create a dynamic cultural *mélange* whose powers of appropriation and re-contextualization continue to shape and influence the way *Vodouisants* serve the spirits (1995: 25). In fact, the word “Vodou” itself is a slippery term that often serves to contextualize an incredibly complex array of spiritual practices. By following several lines of consideration, including Vodou’s social role, its African inheritance, and its incorporated French-colonial symbols, Cosentino successfully demonstrates how Vodou is not static, rather it is constantly re-envisioned according to the needs of those use it (*ibid*: 53). In the case of the drapo, artists adapted traditional forms and materials to align with the realities of the market and as a response to increasingly perilous daily circumstances in Haiti.

Conclusion

The return of tourists to Haiti during Baby Doc’s presidency fueled the art market’s resurgence in the 1970s. The decade also marked a time when museums had major exhibitions of Haitian art in the US and permanent collections were established. The activities of collector-tourists ensured

¹¹⁵ For more on the drapo featured in *In Extremis*, see: Polk 2012.

market viability to the point where artists in Haiti could once again ensure a livelihood from their work. With collectors' increased interest in drapo, artists of visual art forms previously exclusive to the realm of Vodou practice began to adapt their work to satisfy this new demand.

The 1970s were halcyon days for Haitian art, but they would not last. This peak period came to an end after a succession of crises beginning in the early 1980s. By studying shifts in the art market between times of boom and bust, this chapter provides a means to analyze how relationships between Haitians and US Americans also changed between the end of Francois Duvalier's rule and when the HIV/AIDS epidemic that began in the early 1980s. The general impact of the AIDS crisis on Haiti and its specific relation to art production will be examined in more detail in the following chapter. In combination with the political unrest that would oust the younger Duvalier, Jean-Claude, in 1986, the income from tourism that helped support artists and galleries in Haiti once again dwindled precipitously. The next chapter will discuss the extent to which an array of complicating factors affected the Haitian art market and broader narratives through which US Americans and Haitians engaged with each other. As we saw during the crisis of Papa Doc's reign, the suffering and devastation of HIV/AIDS and the litany of disasters that followed upended the flow of circulation for both art and people between Haiti and the US. Those crises also shaped the narratives under which art from Haiti was produced and received.

CHAPTER 3: Marketplace Transformations and Aesthetic Adaptions in Haiti's Era of Crisis

In Haiti at the end of the 1970s, expectations ran high that tourism and foreign investment in the country would continue to grow and thrive into the next decade. Expatriate visitors were expected to keep booking vacation packages at Haiti's hotels and beach-side resorts, and multinational corporations would continue to take advantage of Haiti's supply of cheap labor and proximity to North American markets. The decade's optimistic complacency was abruptly shaken, however, by a series of catastrophes that began in the early 80s, which would devastate much more than the international flow of goods and people through Haiti. This era of crisis not only amplified Haiti's existing structural difficulties but transformed how people and institutions abroad engaged with "Haiti" as a cultural, economic, and political concept. Significant changes occurred in the production of Haitian visual arts and their reception internationally as both a result of, and in response to, these crises.

The first disaster to hit Haiti in this period was the global HIV/AIDS epidemic, which had a wide-ranging negative impact in the country. Early on in the crisis, international news agencies, together with published findings in prominent medical journals, identified individuals in Haitian diaspora communities in the US as among the earliest known carriers of the disease.¹¹⁶ Soon after, the country's political situation worsened when Jean-Claude Duvalier's presidency collapsed. Widespread popular unrest in the face of federal corruption, profiteering, and political oppression eventually led to Baby Doc's ouster in 1986. The succession of Haitian leaders that replaced him differed little in how they clung to power structures and continued a practice of

¹¹⁶ For more on resulting discrimination against Haitians in the US, see: Lambert 1988. For more on HIV/AIDS and Haiti, as well as a thorough account of cross-cultural socio-political factors that magnified the crisis, see: Farmer 2006.

“kleptocracy”¹¹⁷ that had sustained the Duvalier presidencies. Political violence and oppression reached new heights in the latter half of the decade, leading to the democratic election of Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1991. As a former Catholic priest, whose denunciations of Haiti’s leaders won him both broad popular support and the office of the presidency, Aristide provided hope to a country racked by decades of autocratic leadership.

The optimism was short-lived, however, as the new president was forced into exile by a military coup a few months after taking office. The US enacted an international shipping embargo on Haiti as a punitive measure, which only strained the country further and put more stress on the overwhelming majority of Haitians living in poverty. News helicopters broadcast near-daily footage of US Coast Guard vessels intercepting an increasing number of boats overloaded with Haitian refugees on the treacherous sea journey to the US and other Caribbean safe havens. The deepening political and migrant crises eventually led to the US invasion of Haiti in 1994, the second in the twentieth century. The Marine invasion restored Aristide to power but also forced changes to the Haitian constitution that, among other concessions, eliminated tariffs on foreign agricultural goods.¹¹⁸ The results were damaging for farmers and contributed to the rapid urbanization of the country as rural Haitians poured into an already overcrowded Port-au-Prince in search of employment, schooling, and other opportunities. The most devastating crisis, however, occurred on January 12, 2010 when a massive earthquake

¹¹⁷ Meaning, “a ruling body or order of thieves. Also, government by thieves; a nation ruled by this kind of government.” The word was first used in 1819 as a description Spain’s ruling class; Oxford English Dictionary. The term has often been extended to ruling governments during the Cold War era whose corruption and mistreatment of their people were tolerated by foreign “super powers.”

¹¹⁸ The tariff removal proved to be a boon for US agricultural interests, who could unload their products in a new foreign market, but utterly devastating to Haitian farmers, who now had to compete with inexpensive American goods like “Miami rice.” See: Gros 2010. After the 2010 earthquake, Bill Clinton publically apologized for these policies that undercut Haitian agribusiness; Farmer 2011: 35.

struck near the capital killing tens, possibly hundreds, of thousands of people.¹¹⁹ The disaster's aftermath and the subsequent bungled international aid efforts provide a grim bookend to this period of catastrophe.

In this chapter, I shall discuss the major shifts that occurred in Haitian visual arts production and the international market during a period characterized by disaster and hardship. Not only did the enthusiasm of many collectors and dealers wane over these decades, but the meaning and relevance of the blanket term "Haitian art" underwent a serious challenge. A new generation of Haitian artists whose work did not fit neatly into previously dominant narratives of "Primitive" art began to explore the contours of Haitian visual culture in ways that embodied and addressed the mounting series of challenges facing Haitians on a daily basis. Additionally, narratives about Haiti that accompanied print articles and television broadcasts abroad focused on the omnipresent state of misery to a point where the country became notorious for its oft-repeated characterization in the foreign press: "the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere." This chapter finds that, beginning in the 1980s, new narratives about Haiti coalesced within this context of disaster. In turn, the production, exhibition, and display of Haitian art underwent broad and significant transformations.

Overview of the Crises and their Effects

In addition to suffering that resulted from disease, stigma, and death, one disastrous consequence of the AIDS epidemic in Haiti was that it marked the beginning of the end of tourism's Second Golden Age. When Solange Eliodor, a Haitian refugee detained by Immigration and Naturalization Services in Miami, died in June 1982 of mysterious causes later identified as an

¹¹⁹ For more on the Haitian earthquake and its aftermath, see: Farmer 2011; Katz 2013; Peck 2013; and Schuller 2013.

immune-deficient consequence of the AIDS virus, tourism was still thriving in Haiti (Farmer 2006: 1). The international medical community soon identified four population groups at high risk of infection from this newly discovered, most perilous auto-immune disease. As one of the Centers of Disease Control's so-called "Four-H Club" that included homosexuals, heroin users, and hemophiliacs, Haitian nationals and members of Haitian diaspora communities in North American were among the initial groups pegged as primary carriers and perhaps even the originators of HIV/AIDS (Abbot 2011: 208). Haitians at home and abroad were largely stigmatized as a result, and within a short time, fear of the disease led to a steep dropoff in international tourists to Haiti. The emergence of HIV/AIDS revealed the fickle, tenuous nature of foreign tourism in Haiti and resulted in the near-cessation of a once-lucrative industry.¹²⁰

Several ironies surround HIV/AIDS and its relationship to Haiti. First, initial reports that labeled communities of Haitian immigrants in the US and Canada as primary carrier populations led to narratives that labeled Haiti as the virus' source. Scientific data analyzed by Paul Farmer, however, supported the theory that virus's spread was actually the side-effect of "sex tourists" from North America who solicited Haitian prostitutes (Farmer 2006: 145). This assertion is, perhaps, not surprising considering that the attractions offered to foreign visitors to Haiti and other Caribbean countries in this period included "sun, sea, and sex." Farmer poignantly notes that "as Haiti became poorer, both men's and women's bodies became cheaper" (*ibid*: 146). And indeed, political turmoil and unfavorable economic conditions for the majority of Haitians, along with increasing urbanization of Port-au-Prince, spurred a rise in prostitution during this period.

As a second irony, the same "exotic" qualities that attracted tourists to Haiti in the first place fueled misconstrued narratives about the country as a source for HIV/AIDS. As discussed

¹²⁰ 75,000 foreign tourists visited Haiti in the winter of 1981-82, a number that dropped to 10,000 the following year; Farmer 2006: 146.

in the previous chapters, the perception of Haiti as exceptionally exotic set it apart from other Caribbean neighbors competing for tourist dollars. Farmer (2006) points to these types of narratives, which reinforced Haiti's sense of "otherness," as informing the perception abroad that Haiti was a lurid place where HIV proliferated among its citizens. Popular news sources fueled the perception by erroneously linking HIV transmission to "voodoo" ritual, and that human sacrifices and bloodletting contributed to its spread.¹²¹ Despite subsequent debunking of such news stories that were largely embedded within cultural stereotypes of Haiti, the stigma that accompanied the country's early link with HIV/AIDS had lasting negative effects, not only for Haiti's tourism industry but for narratives about Haiti that circulated abroad.¹²²

As a result of the CDC's designation and perpetuation of racist myths in the North American media, Haitian immigrant communities were especially vulnerable to discrimination, isolation, and worse. People had been fleeing Haiti since Papa Doc's political terrorism in the late 1950s. In the earliest years of this exodus, mostly Haitians of the intellectual and political class were forced into exile. As the totalitarian regime wore on and the targets of Duvalier's wrath grew increasingly random, middle class professionals joined those communities established abroad. In North America, the Haitian diaspora settled in Brooklyn, Boston, Miami, and Montreal. According to Gage Averill, nearly half of the approximately one million Haitians to flee the country in the thirty years following Papa Doc's 1957 election settled in Brooklyn

¹²¹ Farmer 2006: 129. Farmer links the perpetuation of such tales to broader histories of misinformed narratives about Haiti that have spread as folklore throughout the US beginning in Haiti's revolutionary period. Other scholars also have examined the histories of Haiti's "image" abroad vis-à-vis literature (Dash 1988), art (Twa 2014), diplomacy (Plummer 1992), and religion (Cosentino 1995 & 1998).

¹²² A 2016 *New York Times* article reporting on genetic research into the geographic origins of HIV/AIDS highlights how the disease circulated within ever-increasing global networks. The story states that the virus "was carried from Kinshasa to Haiti in the 1960s — most likely by one of the thousands of Haitian civil servants recruited by the United Nations to work in the former Belgian Congo after colonial rule collapsed;" McNeil Jr. 2016.

(1997: 111). Basic survival conditions worsened in the 1960s and 70s and poorer Haitians joined the growing diasporic communities. The same author brings attention to the contradictions of the 1970s, which saw increased foreign investment simultaneously accompany a decline in living standards for people living in the Haitian countryside, and cruise ships coming to Port-au-Prince while waves of so-called boat people tried to flee the country (*ibid*: 109). By the 1980s, the Haitian diaspora had been well established and was comprised of all economic classes of Haitian society. The AIDS crisis exacerbated negative stigmas and entrenched stereotypes that already accompanied Haitians in foreign lands, especially those that pegged them as “dirty” and “diseased” (Farmer 2006: 236). Members of those expatriate communities reported a new kind of exclusion and harassment once the cases of Solange Eliodor and other Haitians became linked with HIV/AIDS.

After coordinated actions by Haitian immigrant groups in the US, the CDC finally removed Haitians from its list of at-risk groups in April 1985 (Farmer 2006: 217). The damage to Haiti’s “image” was done, however, as evidenced by the near-absence of tourists traveling to the country. The same networks of international mobility that fueled the Haitian art market also helped circulate the virus, and it was along those same routes that new narratives about Haiti began to take shape. The HIV/AIDS epidemic was only the first in a series of successive crises that would befall Haiti but it would set the stage for those that would follow.

In the early 1980s, as Haiti’s tourism industry was beginning to collapse, the US government pressured the Haitian government destroy the entirety of the country’s native “creole” pig population as a preventative measure against the H1N1 virus, commonly known as “swine flu” (Sepinwall 2013: 221). An outbreak of swine flu had originated in the Dominican Republic and spread throughout the Caribbean region. The disease traveled across the mountains

of the island to Haiti in 1979, but the damage was minimal as compared to other countries and was quickly contained (Schuller 2012: 22). Despite the disease's measured impact in Haiti, US officials feared that the swine flu epidemic would eventually spread to the US and decimate its factory-scale pork industry. USAID replaced the creole pigs with ones purchased from Iowa hog farmers only to discover that these pigs were unsuited for Haiti's climate and did not survive.¹²³

The eradication of the Haitian pig population on the orders of US agencies had far-reaching negative consequences. The slaughter of the country's pigs, which had provided a relatively secure, if modest, economic asset, was devastating for the rural population. Once deprived of this resource, many Haitians living in the provinces turned to the production of charcoal for sale in local markets as an alternative income source (*ibid*).¹²⁴ This resulted in large scale deforestation from the clear-cutting of trees. The massive erosion that followed compounded already tenuous environmental conditions.¹²⁵ For Iowa's farmers, this program was a boon in the form of \$23 million dollars provided by the US government (Sepinwall 2013: 221). The fact that pigs from Iowa were being shipped to Haiti during a time when local Iowa museums were building significant collections of Haitian art points to the peculiar manifestations of power imbalances inherent in systems of global commodity and how they affect local populations on each side of the equation. These international economic circuits show how dominant powers like the United States set the terms for exchange when dealing with products from subordinate countries like Haiti, be they cultural or agricultural.

¹²³ For Schuller (2012), this disastrous policy had ironic racial overtones as the creole pigs had black hides, while the Iowa pigs were pink. For a policy-oriented look at how foreign aid has contributed to Haiti challenges, rather than relieve them, see: Buss and Gardner 2008.

¹²⁵ For the consequences of the slaughter of the creole pig and its significance to Haitians, see: Parisio 1997.

The creole pig fiasco marked the beginning of the end for the Duvalier government, whose popular support had begun to drastically wane by that time. As the 80s wore on and politico-economic conditions for the majority of Haitians worsened, Jean-Claude Duvalier and his wife, Michèle Bennett, continued to spend lavishly and publicly. Those in Duvalier's inner circle of families grew wealthier as well, through private enterprise and their participation in trafficking drugs produced in South America for sale in North American markets, among their oligarchic business practices (Abbot 2011: 278-280). After a series of anti-government protests in the city of Gonaives in the fall of 1985, a group of *Tonton Makout* opened fire on a group of young students, killing two and sparking demonstrations across the country (*ibid*: 292-294). On February 7, 1986, after protests had finally reached Port-au-Prince and it became apparent that the last vestiges of Duvalier's support in Haiti and abroad had finally collapsed, Jean-Claude, his wife, and their entourage boarded a US Air Force plane bound for France, thus ending the almost thirty-year period of Haiti's rule under the Duvaliers (Ferguson 1988: 120).

Immediately after Duvalier's removal from office, known in Kreyòl as *dechoukaj*, or "the uprooting," celebrations broke out nationwide. Of the country-wide jubilation, Elizabeth Abbott describes a scene of intense release full of nationalist, revolutionary-era symbolism: "millions spilled onto the nation's streets, waving victorious palm leaves, blowing conch shells, banging pots and metal lampposts, singing and chanting and shouting, improvised frenzied dances, inexhaustible in their joy" (2011: 325). James Ferguson adds: "The crowds cheered and shook hands with the soldiers whom they encountered and overflowing cars, lorries and *tap-taps* drove around the city's central streets" (1988: 122). Such elated outpourings and heightened optimism for Haiti's future did not always take the path of pacifism. Much looting occurred and hundreds of known *Macoutes* and prominent Duvalierists were killed by those seeking retribution for years

of abusive power (*ibid*). Additionally, the power structures that supported Duvalier and the increasingly desperate circumstances that most Haitians were experiencing did not leave with Baby Doc. The changes that accompanied the young autocrat's flight were either cosmetic or fleeting. General Henri Namphy, who succeeded Baby Doc as head of state and leader of the ruling military junta, presided over a period perhaps even more violent and oppressive than that of the Duvaliers. The Tonton Makout remained a tool of the state and continued to terrorize anyone even mildly opposed to those in power.

Amidst this political crisis, a network of small, local churches, known as the *Ti Legliz* (little churches), took on an increasing role in organizing a viable political opposition. One of the most outspoken critics of the junta was a Catholic priest named Jean-Bertrand Aristide who presided over the congregation at St. John Bosco church in one of the poorer areas of Port-au-Prince. From the pulpit, Aristide denounced the ruling regime, the foreign diplomatic policies that propped up its leaders, and how Haiti's poor bore the brunt of imbalanced global and domestic power dynamics/economic structures. Aristide gained the trust, admiration, and approval of the majority of Haitians, and drew the ire of those against whom he railed. After a series of violently repressive actions against the priest, he decided to enter presidential politics and won the 1990 general election in a landslide.¹²⁶

The exuberant street celebrations in honor of Aristide's victory were short-lived. After seven months in office, a military coup forced him and his family to seek exile in the United States. Life for Haiti's poor urban majority soon reverted to misery as those in power reinstated the systemically violent and oppressive power structures inherited from the Duvalier and

¹²⁶ Abbott 2011: 358. As evidence of Aristide's popularity among the poorer majority of Haitians, see the political murals depicting Aristide and symbols associated with his political part *Lavalas* (the flood), discussed in: Brown 1995. Such murals are reminiscent of Philomé Obin's *Battle Between the Cacos and the American Marines* (1949) discussed again later in this chapter and in Chapter 1.

Namphy regimes. As a result of the putsch, the international diplomatic community, with the United States at the helm, approved a punitive naval embargo on Haiti that sent the country deeper into economic isolation, resulting in dire scarcity of food, gasoline, and other imported material resources (Abbott 2011: 364). Not coincidentally, the numbers of Haitians fleeing the country by sea in search of opportunity in the Bahamas, Florida, or elsewhere, shot up significantly. North American news outlets frequently broadcast images of flimsy, barely seaworthy boats attempting the dangerous journey as Coast Guard vessels intercepted Haitians and subsequently, due to US policy, returned them back to Haiti. Countless numbers of so-called “boat people” drowned or starved in this process. For US American viewers watching on the evening news, they became symbols of the country’s suffering and also, in the minds of some, the lurking threat of “infection” from Haitians following their stigmatization via the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Aristide was reinstated in 1994 after the US landed a military invasion in order to return the deposed Haitian president to power. Once again, celebration gave way to hardship. Due to the realities of Haiti’s boom-and-bust political cycle, improved living conditions and economic opportunities promised to the majority of Haitians never materialized in any sustained way. Aristide’s populist rhetoric as a Catholic priest did not translate well to the office of the Haitian presidency, and his tenure was marred by the same corruption of other Haitian presidents. This see-saw between high aspirations and crushing defeat only further reinforced the impression abroad, however reductive and misinformed, that Haiti was hopeless: a place of nothing but suffering and catastrophe, and a country incapable of taking necessary steps to improve the lot of its population.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ For more on the life of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, his hopeful rise, and his disappointing (to say the least for some observers) political career, see: Abbott 2011; Aristide and Wargny 1993; A. Dupuy 2007; Hallward 2007.

More political and environmental crises ensued as the 1990s became the 2000s. In 2004, before completing his second term, Aristide was forced into exile for a second time at the hands of US-backed militias.¹²⁸ In 2008, a succession of powerful hurricanes and tropical storms led to severe mudslides and flooding. As an even greater cataclysm, the scope of the 2010 earthquake surpassed any single natural disaster in Haiti's history. While none of these tragedies by themselves signaled the transformation of Haiti's projected image abroad, the parade of indignities that befell the country, beginning with the HIV/AIDS epidemic and ending with the 2010 temblor, secured Haiti's contemporary reputation - however distorted or misunderstood - as a country in near-constant catastrophe.

Changes in the consumption and production sides of the international art market would correspondingly reflect, embody, reify, and challenge shifting circumstances in Haiti, as well as dominant narratives circulating in North America. Prior to the succession of crises beginning in the early 80s, a glut formed in the market for Haitian art resulting from new waves of artists attempting to re-create the successes of a previous generation of artists affiliated with the Centre d'Art. Many artists' collectives arose as well, making easily reproducible works of "tourist art" that featured styles, themes, and subject matter that consciously borrowed from the examples of more established artists, yet offered at lower prices that appealed to less-particular buyers looking for souvenirs to bring home from their travels.¹²⁹ Work made in these ateliers proliferated both in Haiti and in other tourist destinations throughout the Caribbean, a situation that still holds true today.¹³⁰ From this saturation of art and handicrafts came a generalized

¹²⁸ For detailed reporting of the Bush State Department's role in ousting Aristide, see: Bogdanich and Nordberg 2006.

¹²⁹ Goldberg 1981: 161. Many "serious" collectors dismiss such mass-produced art objects as commercial kitsch.

¹³⁰ For a case study of contemporary street vendors who offer mass-produced paintings made in Haiti for sale in the Dominican Republic's tourist markets, and the trans-national cultural politics of this trade, see: E. Taylor 2014.

conception amongst observers abroad that Haitian art largely consisted of “cheap souvenirs,” foisted on undiscerning buying audiences.¹³¹ This type of large-scale production, distribution, and mimesis may have also diluted the market for the work of more established Haitian artists by raising questions of authenticity and provenance.¹³² Together with the series of internal crises in Haiti, these factors led to major shifts in what the term "Haitian art" signified to foreign audiences, and how objects designated as such circulated and moved in the world. Furthermore, as conditions in Haiti have worsened into the twenty-first century, the traditional "fine art" market for Haitian art in the United States has continued its decline, leading many to fear a permanent shift.

The anxieties of complex and seemingly insurmountable crises that have befallen Haiti are reflected in the work of a new generation of Haitian artists who developed their styles within a context of near-constant calamity. Additionally, artists, curators, and gallerists alike have been compelled to find new ways to display, promote, and sell work, which has become an increasingly difficult endeavor in Haiti. With such significant changes in the marketplace, enthusiasts and collectors of Haitian art also have had to find new ways to engage with Haitian artists by remaining important participants in cross-cultural networks of exchange between the US and Haiti, however those interactions manifest.

¹³¹ Stebich 2015. See also Eva Pataki’s curiously titled *Haitian Painting: Art and Kitsch*, 1986.

¹³² Many of the artists, gallerists, curators, and collectors interviewed for this project expressed concern over the proliferation of “fakes,” and named it as a major reason for the current state of the Haitian-art market. I would often hear unsubstantiated rumors, related to me in confidence, that certain dealers or collectors trafficked in fakes and that I was to be wary in my relations with them. In one instance, two individuals privately and separately accused each other of engaging in such chicanery. Whatever those rumors’ veracity, duplicitous dealings are by no means exclusive to the world of Haitian art, as recent news from New York reminds us. See: Blumenthal and Mashberg 2017; Moynihan 2017.

Eye Care Inc. and Other Transitions in the Haitian Art Market

The case of Eye Care, Inc. presents a vector in the art market that responded to more general narrative shifts regarding Haiti. Timothy Carroll, a former US Peace Corps Volunteer who had been stationed in Nigeria, founded Eye Care Inc. in 1977 with a friend and ophthalmologist, Dr. David Newsome. The organization was established in the US as a non-profit healthcare group running clinics in rural and urban areas of Haiti that provided, as the name indicates, free ophthalmological services to Haitians who could not otherwise afford to visit a physician or travel the required long distances. The foundation held periodic fundraisers in US cities in which works of art were put up for auction. Eye Care raised about ten percent of its budget through sales and auctions of Haitian art (“Washington Talk” 1986). Participants paid twenty-five dollars for tickets and were given the opportunity to buy art ranging from souvenirs and handicrafts to paintings and sculptures with more substantial market value, all donated by major collectors and dealers of Haitian art (Kent 2015, pers. comm.). These fundraisers, held throughout the US and sometimes in coordination with the Haitian embassy in Washington, D.C. attracted well-heeled collectors and enthusiasts, as well as more casual participants drawn to the event's social cachet. Attendees could obtain relatively inexpensive art from well-known artists and visit with other collectors and enthusiasts, all on behalf of a "good cause." As a bonus, events often featured celebrities, such as Geoffrey Holder, the actor, choreographer, and dancer famous for his role personifying the Vodou deity “Baron Samedi” in the 1973 James Bond film "Live and Let Die."¹³³ He and actress Patricia Neal co-hosted one such sale in New York City in April, 1984 (“Other Events” 1984).

¹³³ Holder himself was an avid collector of arts from across the African diaspora. His collection included works by Haitian artists, such as Edouard Duval-Carrié, Hector Hyppolite, Georges Liautaud, Salnave Philippe-Auguste, and André Pierre. Selections from his collection were featured at the Katonah Art Museum (NY) in 1991. See: Beardsley 1991.

Eye Care's benefit auctions were not the first examples of organizations abroad to utilize Haitian art to support benevolent purposes. The Sotheby Parke-Bernet auction house in New York held a sale of Haitian paintings in January, 1975 of which a portion of the net proceeds went to benefit Albert Schweitzer Hospital (HAS) in the rural town of Deschapelles, Haiti (*Haitian Paintings* 1975). HAS was founded by Larimer and Gwen Mellon in 1956 and named after a French-German physician who opened a mission hospital and a leprosy colony in Gabon in the early twentieth century (Nicholas 2003). The Mellons modeled their work in Haiti after Schweitzer's and lived and worked at the hospital until their deaths. The hospital serves hundreds of thousands of residents of the Artibonite Valley and relies on a network of international donors. In the Sotheby Parke Bernet auction catalogue, Issa El-Saieh, the proprietor of Galerie Issa in Port-au-Prince (discussed in the previous chapter, is credited as one of two individuals who "assembled" the sale (*Haitian Paintings* 1975). The array of offered paintings reflected the market preference for "primitive" painters associated with the Centre d'Art held by many international collectors at the time. Perhaps not coincidentally, many of the artists whose work was included in the auction had close working relationships with El-Saieh. Among the notable lots listed in the sale: a jungle scene featuring giraffes and zebras by Fernand Pierre, a lush landscape of a Haitian village by Abner Dubic, one of André Normil's bustling street scenes, and a historical depiction by Philomé Obin of Toussaint L'Ouverture's arrest at the hands of French soldiers.¹³⁴ The Sotheby's auction was a precursor to the type of benefit model employed by Eye Care. In the latter case, however, the living conditions for Haitians were arguably worse in the 1980s or, at least, those who participated in such charity auctions were

¹³⁴ All of the lots listed in the sale received modest price estimates with many in the range of several hundred dollars. The highest listed estimate was for a historical Cap Haitien scene by J.B. Bottex at \$3-4,000 with paintings by André Pierre, André Normil, and Philomé Obin in the \$2-3,000 range (*Haitian Painting* 1975). Actual hammer prices were unavailable during this writing.

likely more aware of them from increased attention given by North American media outlets at the time.

Larry Kent, a horticulturalist living in Southern California, credits Eye Care for its role in nurturing his activities as a Haitian-art collector. He began collecting during a resort vacation to Haiti in 1982 (Kent 2015, pers. comm.). There, he visited Galerie Monnin at their downtown Port-au-Prince location while on a tour of major art galleries organized by the resort. After extensively conversing with Michel Monnin, the gallery's second-generation proprietor, and his Texas-born wife, Toni, about the history of Haitian art, Kent's interest was piqued. He bought three small paintings by Camy Rocher from the gallery and, as he related decades later, "thought I'd never come back to Haiti again or hear about Haiti" (*ibid*). The following year, after seeing a notice in the *Washington Post*, Kent attended an Eye Care event at the Haitian Embassy in Washington, D.C. Kent soon became a regular attendee, using these events to network with other collectors and learn about the intricacies of the collecting market (*ibid*). He immersed himself in the collecting culture, attending Haitian art auctions held at Christie's and Sotheby's and acting as a liaison for Eye Care during visits to Haiti. Kent also became close with many major collectors and role players in Haitian art, a virtual "who's who" that included Dr. Walter Neiswanger, Richard and Irma Flagg, Selden and Carol Rodman, Francine Murat, and others.¹³⁵

For Kent, Eye Care's charity events provided a structure that facilitated and maintained a community of collectors. Of course, many attendees likely viewed such benefit auctions as part of what Jason Haber describes as the "charity circuit," and nothing more than another event to add to the social calendar (2016: 56). In the case of collectors of Haitian art, however, these sales provided a stateside venue to acquire art in lieu of traveling to Haiti itself, since visits to the

¹³⁵ As discussed in Chapter 2, these collectors established some of the most significant collections of Haitian art in the US.

country had become increasingly precarious in light of Haiti's political and economic crises. While Eye Care Inc. was not the first or only international organization to fold the circulation of Haitian art into broader humanitarian concerns, its status among devoted collectors and relative successes in heralding Haitian art makes its activities worthy of attention in discussions of the development of contemporary Haitian art.

The Haitian Art Society

Eye Care folded in the early 1990s, and in the intervening decade or so Larry Kent sought to reclaim the camaraderie and common interest in Haitian visual art since lost. He observed first-hand how interest in Haitian art had waned and that cohesion among collectors was lacking (2015, pers. comm.). Reaching out to the network of contacts he built through his involvement with Eye Care, Kent helped found the Haitian Art Society in 2003 as a loosely-knit group of collectors and enthusiasts that held its first conference that same year in Washington, D.C. The Waterloo Center of the Arts, through the efforts of its then-director Cammie Scully, became closely associated with the Haitian Art Society. WCA lent its non-profit status and organizational resources to subsequent Haitian Art Society events.¹³⁶ To this day, the organization maintains a group of governing board members but otherwise, overall participation and membership is open to all who pay the modest dues. Many members are retirees whose interest in Haitian art, like that of Larry Kent's, can be traced to initial encounters during travel to Haiti. A few are Haitians who re-settled in the US. Others, however, have never visited the country but have encountered Haitian art in other venues. While there are some ethnic, national, and economic commonalities

¹³⁶ It should be mentioned that such events remained modest affairs in contrast to the Eye Care fundraisers.

between members, group cohesion is maintained by a general interest in the work of Haitian artists.

The Haitian Art Society itself provides a relevant contemporary case study in the ways that tourism continues to merge with the collection of Haitian art, even in the absence of a flourishing Haitian tourism industry. The HAS holds annual conferences in cities around the world and organized according to the interests of attendees, which often include elements of consumerism.¹³⁷ With a common interest in Haitian visual culture coupled with both a means and a desire to travel to other countries, members of the Haitian Art Society tend to fall into the category of “collector-tourist” described in the previous chapter.¹³⁸ For example, the agenda for the Haitian Art Society’s week-long 2015 conference held in Paris, France was planned to coincide with the exhibition of Haitian art at the Grand Palais, *Haïti: Deux siècles de création artistique* (2014-15),¹³⁹ but other scheduled group activities included visits to the studio of French-Haitian artist Elodie Bathélemy, the newly-opened, Frank Gehry designed Fondation Louis Vuitton, as well as a day trip to the Musée d’Art Naïf du Vieux Château in Laval, which houses a significant collection of so-called “naïve” art. Visits to various galleries and outdoor curio markets in the Paris vicinity were also arranged. Haitian art remains the unifying theme for these gatherings but, as evidenced in the previous list, members’ interests in a wide range of art,

¹³⁷ Typical conferences attract between fifteen and twenty-five members. I should also note that, as part of this research, I attended the 2015 HAS Conference in Paris and the 2016 iteration in San Francisco, the latter for which I also helped organize logistics.

¹³⁸ In Chapter 2, I define collector-tourists as “tourists or travelers whose immersion and interest in different cultures manifests in the consumptive, capitalistic behavior of collecting visual art.”

¹³⁹ See: Cuzin et al 2014. This exhibition provides an example of an innovative, if disputed, curatorial strategy for the exhibition and display of work by Haitian artists. The curators presented a dense selection of work by artists living in Haiti and abroad that attempted to highlight major themes in a comprehensive, and at times contradictory, manner. As in the case of *In Extremis*, discussed below, the curators of *Haïti: Deux siècles* included the work of the late painter Jean-Michel Basquiat, whose Haitian ancestry contemporary curators have emphasized, despite the artist’s resistance to reductive cultural ascriptions within readings of his work. See: Thompson et al 2014.

including contemporary and “folk,” often inform the itinerary.¹⁴⁰ The schedule for the Haitian Art Society trip to Haiti in 2014 (the only one to Haiti so far) more pointedly illustrates how consumerist tendencies of collector-tourists have merged with interest in Haitian art. Attendees used the opportunity to buy paintings, sculptures, and Vodou flags from the various galleries, workshops, and artists’ studios they visited, thus expanding individual collections and allowing collectors to participate in the Haitian art market in a direct, local way.

The examples of Eye Care Inc. and the Haitian Art Society illustrate the ways in which collectors of Haitian art in the US adapted their interests in response to, and as a result of, Haiti’s crisis situations. For collector-tourists like Larry Kent, the seeds planted during Haiti’s Second Golden Age of tourism took new shape once travel to Haiti was no longer viable or feasible (for whatever reasons, personal or otherwise). As a general category circulating within the networks of the international art market, Haitian art had lost its previous cachet. On the production side, without the economic benefits provided by a steady presence of international tourists, many Haitian artists began to explore aesthetic terrain beyond the established “Primitive” modes that gained prominence in the Haitian Renaissance. Additionally, Haitian artists living and making work in the diaspora challenged the term “Haitian art” itself. Since such a designation was no longer determined by an artist’s geography, necessarily, then organizing artists under the banner of “Haitian art” became a moot affair. As Haiti’s situation changed precariously, curators began to explore ways to tap into the more complicated aspects of Haiti’s visual culture as part of their exhibition programs. The mystique of the Centre d’Art had been exhausted as a curatorial

¹⁴⁰ Discursive connections between interest in the work of Haitian artists and those variously labeled “folk,” “naïve,” “primitive,” “intuitive,” “outsider,” or “visionary,” while touched upon in this thesis, deserve deeper exploration and unpacking of the cultural politics therein. For a brief discussion of Haitian art’s connection to “outsider” art, see: Wojcik 2016.

organizing principle. Exhibitions that focused on Haitian aesthetic culture through the lens of Vodou provided a richer and more comprehensive approach.

New Curatorial Explorations and Dynamics in *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*

In 1995, the *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* exhibition opened at the Fowler Museum of Cultural History at the University of California, Los Angeles. The exhibition offered a comprehensive overview of the range of diverse spiritual practices and aesthetic expressions related to, or enacted as part of, Haiti's homegrown religion. While not an exhibition of "Haitian Art" per se, *Sacred Arts* included many works by well-known artists from the Haitian Renaissance. These works played a complementary role to other objects that addressed the exhibition's overarching theme. Speaking to the significance of the Centre d'Art and its emergent mid-century artists, the exhibition's chief organizer and Professor of African and Diaspora Literature and Folklore at UCLA, Donald J. Cosentino wrote, "These new artists were not making Vodou art, they were making art about Vodou," which, he adds, did not preclude their status as "pivotal figures in the art history of Haiti" (2012: 28). Through several significant curatorial and organizational strategies, *Sacred Arts* and its densely thorough accompanying book presented a new, more interdisciplinary direction in curatorial and scholarly approaches to Haiti and its aesthetic culture.

In the Preface of *Sacred Arts'* exhibition book, Cosentino recounts how Doran H. Ross, Deputy Director of the UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History at the time, proposed the idea for a "Vodou show" to Cosentino, then a professor and Marilyn Houlberg (1995: x).¹⁴¹ Both had worked extensively among Black Atlantic cultures, and those of Haiti in particular. Their

¹⁴¹ The museum was renamed the Fowler Museum at UCLA in 2006.

research and deep ethnographic engagements among Vodou practitioners made them prominent figures within a new generation of scholarship on Haitian Vodou. Houlberg herself was a co-curator of *Spirit and Image: The Art of Voodoo*, a precursor to *Sacred Arts* whose opening at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (where she taught), which Ross and Cosentino attended in 1987 (*ibid*: viii). Cosentino and Houlberg were well-positioned to co-curate the first major museum show to tackle the subject of Vodou. With its large holdings of African art from the Wellcome Collection and extensive exhibition history of contemporary art from the African diaspora, the Fowler made for a highly appropriate host institution.¹⁴²

The earliest preparations and planning meetings for *Sacred Arts* occurred in the late 1980s when scholars and museum professionals in North America and Europe were challenging “traditional” roles of museums in the “Western” world. Since the early nineteenth century, monolithic categories distinguished the two types of museums: “art museums,” which operated in synergy with the discipline of art history, and “natural history” museums which participated in the disciplines of anthropology and natural sciences. Interrogation of the prescribed roles of both “art” and “natural history” museums coalesced after the 1984 exhibition *Primitivism in the 20th Century: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, opened at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, as discussed in the previous chapter. As critics of the exhibition pointed out, *Primitivism* went too far in its corrective agenda. Histories of colonialism and cultural subordination could not be erased or ignored simply by “elevating” an art object from cultural “artifact” to “work of

¹⁴² After debuting at the Fowler, *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* traveled to Miami, Chicago, Washington D.C., New Orleans, and New York. For reviews of the exhibition and its major publication, see: Cotter 1998; and A. Roberts 1996b.

art.”¹⁴³ In the following section I examine how the curators of *Sacred Arts* addressed and challenged prior exhibition discourses in the display of Haitian visual art.

Traditionally, exhibitions that explored “other” cultures and peoples (“indigenous,” “tribal,” “non-Western,” etc.), had employed a wealth of didactic materials. In order to provide context for the museum-goer, curators would include wall text or videos explaining an object’s pre-museum cultural context. In contrast to natural history museums, art museums tended to present their contents as autonomous and self-contained, displayed with little to no extraneous media that would take away from a work’s unique qualities. The latter curatorial approach facilitates what Svetlana Alpers refers to as the “museum effect” (1991). Alpers puts forth the idea that Western museums have the potential to turn any object into a work of art by the way in which museums encourage “seeing.” Through a process of display that allows nuanced visual information to come forward within a museum context, such an idea opens the possibility that any object can be transformed into “art” (*ibid*: 25). For Alpers, a dedication to this “museum effect” and its emphasis on vision and ways of “seeing” a work of art is the key to an art museum’s display program (*ibid*: 26). She considers too much curatorial mediation, such as textual signage and audio-visual aids, as distractions to museum-goers. A surplus of text creates barriers between the art on display and its viewers, thus distracting from the visual primacy of the museum experience (1991: 30). As it stands, textual didactic materials of this sort most often proliferate in relation to objects from “non-Western” cultures. Historically, cultural “artifacts” have been relegated to natural history museums, a contextual circumstance with potential to bias the museum-goer’s conceptions of what qualifies as “art.”

¹⁴³ For more critiques of the MoMA *Primitivism* exhibition, see: Clifford, 1988; Danto, et al 1989; Foster 1985. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991; Price 1989.

Ethnographic and natural history museums have depended on those curatorial approaches that Alpers finds extraneous. Traditionally, such museums heavily employ didactic materials, such as explanatory wall texts, related ritual objects and “artifacts,” in-situ re-creations of familial dwellings and domestic environments, and multimedia installations informing museum-goers of the lives and interpreted world-views of the cultures or peoples on display. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991) considers such modes of display used to represent non-Western cultures for museum audiences as fraught with potential cultural misunderstanding. In order to exhibit the lives and cultures of non-Western societies, museums have either constructed “in-situ” displays that mimic an imagined original cultural setting, or have placed individual cultural objects “in-context” with accompanying didactic material, while otherwise letting such objects stand by themselves (*ibid*: 388-391). Various deployed, and depending upon what viewers bring to the experiences, these display strategies can hinder or enhance cross-cultural translation. When exhibition designers create in-situ displays, they perpetuate the myth of an “original” context. Fragmentary objects are authenticated as valid indicators of an entire culture when placed in constructed, in-situ, cultural environments, such as dioramas or the seemingly “ethnological” villages at World’s Fairs.¹⁴⁴ The criteria of success for in-situ displays are based on the assumption of scientific impartiality on the museum’s part - that the museum has the authority to determine an object’s “authenticity.”

As Mary Nooter Roberts explains, the failures that Kirshenblatt-Gimblett described with “in situ” displays result from what Walter Benjamin would term a “bad translation” (2008: 172). In effect, a curator of non-Western objects attempts to translate one “language” belonging to the

¹⁴⁴ For more on the cultural/political power dynamics found in World’s Fair display paradigms, see: Rydell 1980. See also the performance work, *Couple in a Cage* (1992), in which artists Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña pointedly engaged in an institutional critique of “ethnographic” museum displays, as discussed in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, and D. Taylor 1998.

culture of an object's origin into a new one: the curator's. Failure occurs when curators attempt too "literal" a translation by re-creating a prior cultural setting through dioramas, reconstructed villages, and other mimetic re-creations. By making insufficient considerations to the original language, or previous cultural understandings of the object, the curator/translator falls short of harmonizing with the original, according to Benjamin (2007: 77). A successful translation, however, occurs when an exhibition "becomes an *active space of epistemological performance* wherein the original episteme is not merely replicated in another language, but significantly changed by the other" (M. Roberts 2008: 173). Roberts puts the curatorial challenge in semiotic terms - ethnographic objects serve as "double signifiers" that need to speak to the previous owners and cultural settings, as well as the expectations of museum audiences who have been conditioned to the exhibition discourses of Western museums (*ibid*: 172).

In a curatorial context, these issues of cultural translation within museum were addressed and articulated in a direct way with the exhibition, *Art/artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections* (1988) at the Center for African Art in New York. Susan Vogel, the Center's Executive Director, frames *Art/artifact* as an institutional critique by asking the following questions:

How do art museums deal with art made by peoples who do not call it art? How do we decide what types of objects to select, and how do we determine quality among objects of a similar type? How should our museums present art made for purposes unfamiliar to the audience and remote from the museum's own purposes? How can an American public relate to objects that express ideas, values, and complex belief systems that remain unknown (*ibid*: 10)?

Here, Vogel acknowledges the epistemological ruptures that have occurred when "African art" is displayed within Western museum paradigms. In order to address these ruptures, *Art/artifact* employed various display tactics to underscore the role museums have in shaping audience interpretations of African art objects, especially over the prior century. The exhibition featured

an array of objects made by peoples across the African continent, each within its own display format derived from natural history and art museum settings. Through its self-conscious reflexivity, *Art/artifact* was an exhibition about exhibitions, one with lasting influence among curators working to present complexities within cross-cultural artistic traditions and belief systems.

With such conversations and debates at the forefront of museological and curatorial discourse during the nascent phase of *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, the curators embarked on creating an exhibition that attempted to convey Vodou's breadth and cultural import of US American audiences, while dispelling many of the prevailing myths and stereotypes surrounding the religion.¹⁴⁵ The challenge resided in putting the show's objects within a gallery context informative to a largely unfamiliar (or misinformed) viewership, which did not detract from the included objects' more arresting visual qualities. In effect, the curators were inclined to follow Benjamin's call to "translate" the epistemologies of Vodou practitioners (2007).

As a result, the exhibition's organizers adapted strategies from both fine art museums and natural history ones in an attempt to balance aesthetic considerations with cultural context.¹⁴⁶ For

¹⁴⁵ The exhibition's organizers encountered the extent of popular misinformation about Vodou when applying for funding from the National Endowment of the Humanities. Several grant proposals were submitted and subsequently rejected. Cosentino suggests that opposition to the project resulted from a conservative administration and NEH review board under Lynne Cheney, the NEH director at the time. He quotes one reviewer's questionable commentary that the organizers had not evaluated Vodou on a "comparative humanistic scale of religions," Cosentino 1995: x. The rejections partly account for the nine-year gap between the conception and execution of *Sacred Arts*.

¹⁴⁶ The Fowler had been developing a more balanced curatorial strategy prior to *Sacred Arts* under the guidance of curator Doran H. Ross with exhibitions such as *Fante Warrior Flags: Applique Banners from West Africa* (1994), *Santos de Palo: The Household Saints of Puerto Rico* (1994), and *Warpped in Pride: Ghanaian Kente and African American Identity* (1998). Under director Marla C. Berns (2001-present) and Deputy Director and Chief Curator Mary (Polly) Nooter Roberts (1999-2008), the Fowler has continued to operate within this dynamic museum paradigm with such examples as *A Saint in the City: Sufi Arts of Urban Senegal* (2003), curated by Mary N. Roberts and Allen F. Roberts, *Botánica Los Angeles: Latino Popular Religious Art in the City of Angels* (2004), curated by Patrick A. Polk, and *Mami Wata: Arts for Water Spirits in Africa and Its Diasporas* (2008), curated by Henry John Drewal. It should also be mentioned that *Art/artifact* traveled to the Fowler in 1990.

instance, in order to foreground the material qualities of Vodou banners, rows of *drapo* were framed and hung salon-style along one wall [fig.15]. This method of display used for drapo recalls art-museum exhibitions in which works are displayed with minimal textual information beyond basic label copy. This display strategy foregrounded the aesthetic and visual qualities of the banners and also served a narrative function by illustrating stylistic and material changes over time. Older examples of ceremonial flags with minimal adornments, worn with age and use, were hung next to newer ones encrusted with sequins and beads - a stylistic shift incorporated by flag-makers as a response to the tastes and demands of contemporary collectors.¹⁴⁷ Judging from installation photographs from the Fowler, drapo were hung opposite a wall featuring photographs taken during Vodou ceremonies in Haiti, which served to orient museum-going audiences culturally, as well as provide a ritual context.¹⁴⁸

Other display strategies were derived from natural history sources. The first was a gallery in which the exhibition designers re-created an in situ Vodou temple based on research in Haiti. In the center of the room was a painted concrete *poto mitan* (center post) surrounded by small wooden ladder-back chairs (the type of which are ubiquitous in Haiti), ceremonial drums, decorative elements hanging from the walls and ceiling, and murals re-created from research photos taken in actual temples in Port-au-Prince. Stereo speakers in the galleries played recorded audio of Vodou ceremonies, and a video monitor displayed accompanying footage. Such devices

¹⁴⁷ Curators have played with several display strategies for *drapo* in subsequent exhibitions. For example, the organizers of *Kafou: Haiti, Art, and Vodou* at the Nottingham Contemporary (2012), chose to suspend their featured banners from the middle of the gallery, outside of a frame and unencumbered (or, unprotected, depending on your point of view) by a sheet of glass, in order to replicate the flags' features in three dimensions, as well as emulate how the flags were employed during ceremonies. See the previous chapter's discussion of the emergence of drapo as collectible art objects.

¹⁴⁸ My thanks to the Fowler Museum at UCLA, and specially to Gassia Armenian, Curatorial and Research Associate at the museum, for their assistance and generosity in providing me with installation photographs. As I was unable to visit *Sacred Arts* in person during its run, these images were crucial to my assessment of the curators' design strategies.

created an environment in which the audience's experience of Vodou was not limited to the visual representation provided by, say, a painting, but included audio-visual components in which visitors could engage with facets of Vodou phenomenologically and spatially. While the act of re-creating a Vodou temple in a museum gallery owes a debt to design strategies often found in ethnographic museums, the audio-visual components in *Sacred Arts* lent a dynamism and vitality often lacking in reconstructed "village" scenes, or dioramas, that present "other" cultures or environments as static, physically or temporally removed from the lives of museum-goers, and frozen in a distant, irretrievable past.

The portion of the exhibition dedicated to Vodou altars effectively balanced curatorial methodologies borrowed from both the "fine arts" and "natural history" models. Cosentino highlights a guiding principle for the exhibition: "This was to be a show of contexts. It would be essential to follow Vodou *regleman* [rules] in the exposition of its ritual arts" (1995: xi). As such, altarpieces from several Port-au-Prince temples were meticulously re-assembled in the Fowler's galleries, with each element arranged according to extensive field photographs taken within the altars' original contexts. The curators enlisted the services of several *oungan* (Vodou priests) as consultants regarding the sacred objects, especially the altars, going so far as to enlist Wilfred Ignace, *oungan* and artist from Port-au-Prince, to travel to Los Angeles as a consultant for the exhibition's installation (*ibid*: xii).¹⁴⁹

Sacred Arts featured three separate altars that each embodied a distinct branch of Vodou practice.¹⁵⁰ The first was a *Rada* altar dedicated to a group of *lwa* whose ancestry can be traced

¹⁴⁹ The exhibition included re-created "Petwo altars from Silva Joseph and Edner Pierre, a Rada altar from Sauveur St. Cyr, and element of a Bisango altar from Sauveur St. Cyr and Cesar Lang" (Cosentino 1995: xii). As testament to the curators' efforts, many Haitians, and perhaps other visitors to the exhibition, interacted with the altars by leaving offerings and even rearranging the composing objects to better serve the spirits, A. Roberts 2013: 265.

¹⁵⁰ A thorough analysis of the specific objects that comprise each altar, their particular placement, and their spiritual significance, is beyond the scope of this thesis. To name just a handful of numerous key sources on the cultural

back to West Africa and whose consequent “purity” merits a distinct correspondence with a particular Catholic icon (St. Peter for *Legba*, St. Patrick for *Danbala*, Our Lady of Lourdes for *Ezili Freda*, etc.), hence the proliferation of chromolithographs and painted images on this altar [fig.16]. Other requisite offerings intermingled with the icons, such as bars of soap, perfumes, bottles of liquor, silk scarves (Cosentino 1995: 58). Since practitioners refer to Rada rites as “cool,” emanating from the right hand, the walls were painted blue. Conversely, the *Petwo* altar, whose “hot” rites draw from *Kongo* religious traditions of Central Africa but take on new shape within a New World context, featured a red background. The “hot” designation refers to the volatility and efficaciousness attributed to *Petwo lwa*, whose adherents know the spirits will “work” for them (*ibid*: 202). Fewer Catholic icons adorn this altar than the Rada one. More objects with connections to Central Africa, such as *pake kongo*, and Haiti’s indigenous Arawak-Taino culture in the form “thunder stones” are present. The third and final altar was assembled in accordance with *Bizango* rites [fig.17]. *Bizango* practitioners form a “secret” society in Vodou that developed among bands of Maroons, as the generic term for people who managed to escape enslavement and hid out in the mountains of St. Domingue.¹⁵¹ The objects that adorn the *Bizango* altar are testament to the society’s deference to the forces of life and death, the confluence of whose power connects at the crossroads, both symbolic and actual.

As the *lwa* who presides over crossroads, *Bawon Samdi* is well-represented among the altar’s objects and images. The main altarpiece features a human skull wearing a bowler cap and placed atop a wooden crucifix – motifs typically ascribed to *Samdi*. The formal relationship

dynamism and symbolic complexity of Vodou practice, see: Cosentino 1995, Courlander 1973, Dayan 1998, Métraux 1972, Michel and Bellegarde-Smith 2006

¹⁵¹ For a discussion of *marronage* and its influence on the development of Vodou practice, see: Laguerre 1989. For a pertinent recent case study at the Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, in which recent curatorial fascination with objects associated with *Bizango* rites was confronted by issues of authenticity proliferating in Western museum paradigms, see: Benoît and Delpuech 2015.

between the two axes of the cross create a symbolic crossroads and the skull provides an obvious iconographic reference to death and mortality. Several wooden canes with phallic tips are also included in the altar's arrangement. Representations of the phallus refer to biological human reproduction, for Samdi's domains include sex and death, and they signify Samdi's penchant for crude ribaldry.

The re-created Bizango altar in *Sacred Arts* and Bawon Samdi's strong presence therein is evidence of Gede's rising importance among Vodou practitioners at the time. Katherine E. Smith (2010) demonstrates a strong correlation between such popularity and the crises that befell Haiti in the late twentieth century. She argues that Gede is "the spirit who best embodies the current zeitgeist," which for the majority of Haitians included rapid urbanization, political instability, and other factors contributing to the increasing precariousness of life (*ibid*: 3). I will discuss more concrete manifestations below, but the Bizango altar in "Sacred Arts" shows how the exhibition's curators were attuned to the emergence of Gede as a motif employed by a new generation of Haitian artists and Vodou practitioners.

While these meticulously re-created in-situ displays of Vodou altars adopt a chief curatorial strategy more akin to ethnographic museums than to fine arts exhibitions. They resist some of the more pronounced pitfalls of their use in such institutional contexts. The altars proclaim themselves as part of a constantly-adapting, "living" set of religious practices, rather than a hermetically sealed example of a vanished form of worship for which the museum is a caretaker. The curators took good care to convey a sense of Vodou's "present-ness," but they also included examples of work by Haitian artists whose reputations had been established in the international art market. In contrast to their prior exhibition contexts, paintings by such "big names" as Hector Hyppolite, Philomé Obin, André Pierre, and Rigaud Benoit were included to

show the aesthetic breadth of Vodou practice. In several instances, individual works were placed in niches next to related ceremonial objects, photographs, video displays, and wall texts. One area of the exhibition featured separate niches that focused on major religious and cultural streams, sources from which Vodou has drawn ceremonial, aesthetic, and ritual elements. These displays focused on Freemasonry, West and Central African religions, and European mysticism.

One niche focused on Vodou's Roman Catholic roots and featured Hector Hyppolite's *The Adoration of Love* (1946-48) [fig.18], a key work from the artist's oeuvre on loan from the Flagg Collection at the Milwaukee Museum of Art. *Adoration* features a dark-skinned Christ on the cross surrounded by five female figures who could be identified as mourners or, as suggested by their all-white clothing, *ounsi* – Vodou initiates who play a prominent ritual role by drawing on the repertoire of singing and dancing required at various stages of any given ritual.

Hector Hyppolite's oft-discussed connections to Vodou practice make his work especially relevant within the context of *Sacred Arts*. The artist frequently relied on Judeo-Christian images and themes in his own interpretations of Vodou, which reinforces Cosentino's observation that one of Vodou's most salient features is its cumulative quality of *assemblage* or *mélange*. He states: "In Creole *mélange*, taxonomies slip, roles reverse, ends become means" (1995: 39). In the example of *Adoration*, Hyppolite utilizes traditionally Catholic symbols in order to transition between, and within, those of Vodou practice: the central figure is the crucified Christian Savior but, at the same time, he is Bawon La Croix, the *lwa* associated with death to whom the gathered devotees at his feet are paying obeisance. For Hyppolite, as well as other *Vodouisants*, this aspect of *mélange*, in which a particular Christian signifier can *also* be a Vodou one, is not solely a tactic rooted in plantation-era subterfuge; rather it is evidence of Vodou's allowance for semiotic fluidity to include any images or objects deemed effective for

“serving the spirits” (as Vodou is often characterized by its practitioners).¹⁵² Cosentino goes further in his declaration that chromolithographs are “a primary source for the elaboration of Vodou hagiography” (2012: 27). That is, images of saints provide an iconographic template upon which devotees find their own ways to represent and invoke the lwa. Any number of likenesses borrowed from Hollywood, foreign print media, action figures, or whatever materials are available, can stand in for Vodou divinities.

Surrounding *Adoration* are a variety of objects: crucifixes, a *drapo* from the workshop of Silva Joseph featuring the image of St. Peter,¹⁵³ sequined bottles adorned with chromolithographs of Catholic saints, a papier maché piece by Michel Sinvil that stylistically echoes Hyppolite’s painting next to it [fig.18]. Such a method of display not only replicates Vodou’s recombinant qualities, but suggests the number of directions in which practitioners can take certain aesthetic motifs. Perhaps most importantly, especially regarding the translation of Vodou objects and imagery for unfamiliar audiences, the curators gave the voice of cultural authority back to the practitioners themselves by surrounding the Hyppolite painting with objects made by fellow Vodouisants. In addition to reinforcing the connections between Vodou and Catholicism, this strategy aimed to show how the expressive range of Vodou’s sacred arts is not limited to the work of a handful of well-known artists; rather, it is pervasive.

For the curators of *Sacred Arts*, a painting like Hyppolite’s could provide a firm visual anchor around which audiences might engage in Vodou’s polyvocal tendencies. Here, striking aesthetic qualities like the painterly brushwork and compositional energy that garnered so many

¹⁵² Such cumulative practice can be found throughout the arts of Afro-Atlantic cultures. For example, see: Blier 1995; A. Rubin 1974; Rush 2013; R. Thompson 1995.

¹⁵³ Because of his celestial gatekeeper status, St. Peter and his image are associated with the Vodou *lwa* Legba. Devotees implore Legba to “open the gates” of access between earthly and spiritual realms at the beginning of every Vodou ceremony, thereby inviting the participation of the lwas. Métraux 1972: 101.

plaudits in decades past, were employed at the service of elaborating on Vodou imagery. The curators' reduced attention to the Centre d'Art's mythology marks a departure from previous exhibition contexts. By giving only passing mention to figures like DeWitt Peters and only briefly acknowledging the role of the Centre d'Art, *Sacred Arts* allowed for more opportunity to include the voices of artists and practitioners themselves. The didactic museum practices enacted throughout the exhibition departed from those used in the so-called "Haitian Masters" model, in which individual paintings by "big name" Haitian artists acted as authoritative resources on Haitian culture, including Vodou practices and belief structures. In *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, paintings by prominent Haitian artists were relieved of the onus of acting as sole arbiters of Haitian culture and religion for foreign audiences.

US museum-goers may already have been familiar with a painting like *The Adoration of Love* because of its extensive exhibition record. Not only has it been prominently featured in the Haitian galleries of the Milwaukee Art Museum, but *Adoration* was included in *Haitian Art* at the 1979 Brooklyn Museum exhibition and reproduced in the accompanying book of the same name (Stebich 1978). For that exhibition, Hyppolite's *Adoration* reprised its authoritative role. Despite efforts to cast a broad disciplinary net, the curators of *Haitian Art* mostly held to a prior exhibition model that foregrounded the role of the Centre d'Art. In terms of giving museum audiences a comprehensive image of Haitian culture, exhibitions that took the *Haitian Masters* approach often re-inscribed the narratives of DeWitt Peters' "discovery." In the case of *Haitian Art*, its exhibition book literally reprinted a transcript of Peters' interview featured on Jamaican radio titled "Haitian Art...How It All Began" (*ibid*). Additionally, an over-reliance on artists' biographical details helped to reinforce notions of the "miraculous" nature of Haitian visual art

production.¹⁵⁴ Despite shortcomings identified with the clear vision of hindsight, *Haitian Art* marked a turning point in which curators in the US began to explore ways in which to discuss Haitian visual culture.

While *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* differs from previous North American museum shows of Haitian art in key areas, it owes a debt to *Haitian Art* in several ways worth noting. The first lies in its attempt to employ the writing of scholars who reach outside the traditionally limiting confines of art historical research. As discussed in the previous chapter, Ute Stebich, the curator of *Haitian Art*, intended for the exhibition to have a more comprehensive outlook on Haitian visual culture than previous examples offered to international audiences. Additionally, she wanted to disabuse culturally held preconceptions and “help tell the story of Haiti – how it became an impoverished country and its astonishing history and the isolation that the country suffered, which didn't give them a chance to develop” (Stebich 2015, pers. comm.). In the exhibition book, Stebich and the volume’s editors include short essays accompanied by photographic reproductions of illustrative examples from the show. In their essays, art historian Robert Farris Thompson and anthropologist Irving Rouse explore cultural influences that pre-date the Haitian Renaissance, such as African and Arawak-Taino sources. The *Sacred Arts* publication attempted a more comprehensive and wide-ranging analysis than that of *Haitian Art*, but the curators of both exhibitions identified a similar issue at stake: a scope of analysis that reached outside the conservative disciplinary limitations of art history was necessary to illustrate the complexities of Haitian aesthetic culture.

¹⁵⁴ I am referring here to the title of Selden Rodman’s “little red book,” *The Miracle of Haitian Art* (1974). I would like to thank Sydney Jenkins, Gallery Director at Ramapo College, for helping me recognize the “Haitian Masters” curatorial trope.

Another similarity between the two exhibitions is the collaborative effort undertaken by the curators to include Haitian interlocutors in the research and development phases of each. Over many visits to Haiti beginning in 1972, Stebich collected interview data from a variety of people involved in the creation and circulation of Haitian visual art, including many of the artists whose work would be included in the Brooklyn Museum show. In the exhibition publication, Stebich credits the participation of the artists as one of the show's strengths and provided a list of those she interviewed (Stebich 1978: 9).¹⁵⁵ Within the contextualizing information printed alongside the book's reproduced images, however, specifically quoted sources are few, leaving Stebich, the main curator, as the primary authorial voice on aspects of Haitian culture.

One direct quote comes from artist André Pierre who provides insight into Hyppolite's *Adoration*. Pierre encourages a multivalent reading of the painting:

Christ on the cross represents Baron [sic] La Croix, lord of death. Since death follows life he is connected with both. The white of his loincloth and the snake eyes recall Damballah, *loa* [sic] of life, who governs the positive and pure spirits. The black background, the flames, and the blood symbolize the dark, demonic side of the spiritual world (Stebich 1978: 73).

Here, André Pierre reaffirms the co-presence of Vodou symbolism and Christian imagery in Hyppolite's work. Pierre's activities as an artist and oungan made him a fitting interlocutor for Stebich and other scholars of Haitian visual culture, including the organizers of *Sacred Arts*.

While the inclusion of such local perspectives lends depth to research on Haitian art and culture, Richman (2008) brings our attention to a potential over-reliance among scholars on a select network of interlocutors. She identifies André Pierre's voice in particular as contributing

¹⁵⁵ It remains unclear if any direct artist input guided the exhibition's planning and execution beyond the research stage, but the fact that "most" of the artists attended the opening, according to Stebich, speaks to the awareness of cultural politics that she and the other organizers had regarding a museum show curated by non-Haitians; 2015, pers. comm.

to a number of key scholarly exegeses of Vodou subject matter. Pierre's role as interlocutor began with filmmaker and ethnographer Maya Deren, who relied heavily on his testimonials for her own seminal work, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1953). She first met the artist in 1947 while he was working as an oungan's assistant in a temple in Croix-des-Missions (Richman 2008: 220).¹⁵⁶ In 1949, he joined the Centre d'Art and steadily built a reputation as both an accomplished artist and a generous source of information on Vodou. As an artist, he received Rodman's endorsement as the successor to Hector Hyppolite and went on to work with filmmakers, art collectors, and tourists, as well as scholars.¹⁵⁷ Richman frames Pierre's long-held role as one of Vodou's primary cultural ambassadors as evidence of a complex network of mimetic interplay between the expectations and desires of expatriate visitors and Haitian artists versed in representations of Vodou subjects (*ibid.*: 215). As Richman argues, artists and interlocutors like Pierre often reflected the desires of consuming audiences back onto them, rewarding tourist-collectors in search of the exotic with that which they had been seeking all along. In this light, Pierre's above description to Stebich of "the dark, demonic side of the spirit world" could be read as mimetic interplay in action between researcher and interlocutor.

Pierre also played a prominent role for the *Sacred Arts* exhibition, as evidenced by the conversation between him and Cosentino from 1986 printed alongside a gate-fold of his monumental painting, *Vodou Pantheon* (n.d.) [fig.19], at the beginning pages of the exhibition publication (1995). He is allowed ample space to elaborate on Vodou's immanence in grand terms: "All is on earth. Nothing is in the sky. Nothing was made in the sky [...] God does

¹⁵⁶ Deren was introduced to Pierre's temple by Odette Mennesson-Rigaud, a French ethnologist and member of the *Bureau d'Ethnologie* (Bureau of Ethnology) in Port-au-Prince who acted as a local fixer for expatriate researchers of Vodou, including Maya Deren, Alfred Métraux, and Erika Bourguignon; *ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ As evidence of his high regard for the artist, Rodman titles a chapter in his *Miracle of Haitian Art*, "Hyppolite Reborn: The Spirit World of André Pierre;" 1974.

nothing in the celestial. Even to create the sun and the moon he put his foot on earth, all was created on Earth” (*ibid*: xxiii). Here, we have a clearer sense of the extent of Pierre’s role as spokesman for the practice of Vodou. This approach to the publication speaks to that of the exhibition more generally. Pierre’s *Vodou Pantheon* is not the center of the conversation, necessarily, but a buttress to a larger discussion of Vodou, just as the objects included in “Sacred Arts” complemented the exhibition’s broader goals. Pierre acted as a consultant for *Sacred Arts*, along with other artists, scholars, and collectors from within Haiti and without. This heterogeneity of perspectives is meant to testify to Vodou’s fluidity. By including the findings and viewpoints of other many others, the organizers of *Sacred Arts* allow for Pierre’s words to intermingle with the contributions of the other consultants.

The organizers of *Sacred Arts* facilitated polyvocality in terms of exhibition design, as well. Assembled arrays of exhibited objects could serve an expository role that, in previous exhibitions, had been relegated to individual “master” works. Curators in the latter mode have presented a work like *Adoration* as representative of Vodou aesthetic practices and cosmology, rather than one artist’s expression within a panoply of others. By offering audiences a wide range of objects that illustrated the stylistic range and malleability found in visual expressions of Vodou, the curators of *Sacred Arts* effectively positioned the museum as a “contact zone,” in which entangled ideas of identity and culture co-mingle (Clifford 1997).¹⁵⁸ With this approach, curators allow authorial voices besides their own to illustrate Vodou’s complexities and intricacies.

¹⁵⁸ Clifford deploys Pratt’s (1992) conception of “contact zones” as part of his proposal that museums can act of places of contestation that are “decentered and traversed by cultural and political negotiations that are out of any imagined community’s control,” 1997: 213.

Haitian Art's inclusion of the voices and perspectives of Haitian artists themselves was a model that *Sacred Art's* curators later emulated and augmented. Through immersive exhibition design, inclusive display strategies, and an extensive object list, *Sacred Arts* offered a new direction for curators of Haitian art. The exhibition's organizers, mindful of the ongoing critical debates that questioned the historical practices of museums in the Western world, deployed a display strategy that borrowed from precedents established in both art and natural history museums, while offering new alternatives and progressive approaches to translation for those engaged in culturally based curatorial practices.

For some collector-tourists who started building their art collections during a period of relative security in Haiti, *Sacred Arts* engendered a measure of optimism that, perhaps, such a comprehensive museum exhibition focused on Haiti might reignite the international market for Haitian art.¹⁵⁹ While *Sacred Arts* presented an innovative approach to the discussion of Haitian visual culture, it did not resurrect the market as many collectors had hoped. Economic issues like market saturation, problems with authentication or establishing provenance, and challenges regarding Haitian infrastructure factor into any assessment of the state of Haitian art in the mid-1990s.

After the reinstatement of the exiled president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a brief period of optimism coincided with the museum tour of *Sacred Arts* in the US. Haiti's deeper issues, however, would again reveal themselves to the American public in the form of printed and broadcasted images of Haitians struggling to survive. The narrative shift surrounding Haiti persisted in its negativity and pessimism. The country's "image problem" that Lindsey Twa (2014) characterizes had taken on more desperate and catastrophic overtones. Viewed in this

¹⁵⁹ This opinion has been related to me anecdotally on several occasions by collectors of Haitian art and re-iterated by Kent Shankle, director of the Waterloo Center for the Arts; 2015, pers. comm.

context, lushly colored, playful works of “primitive” Haitian art simply did not mesh with narratives of Haitian calamity. Developments among artists working in Haiti, however, began to speak to the grim realities of everyday experience in ever new and pronounced ways.

In Extremis (2012)

Sacred Arts was considered a success by its organizers and the exhibition was mostly well-received in the US museum venues where it traveled. Because of the show’s positive reception and wide exposure, we must consider its potential effects on Haiti’s visual artists. The Bizango altar in *Sacred Arts*, mentioned briefly, was evidence of themes emerging in urban Vodou practice that focused on the Bizango rites and the family of spirits known as the *Gedes*. Roughly concurrent with *Sacred Arts*’ run, members of an artist collective from downtown Port-au-Prince called *Atis Rezistans* (Resistance Artists) were in the midst of exploring new materials and themes that directly confronted realities on the ground in Haiti vis-à-vis the invocation of Gede in their work. While the rise of themes directly addressing and embodying Gede was perhaps coincidental, we must also consider the roles of figures like Marilyn Houlberg. As a co-curator of *Sacred Arts* with Katherine M. Smith and Donald J. Cosentino, and an ethnographer with deep connections among those within Port-au-Prince’s network of Vodou temples, Houlberg occupied a position in which she could collaborate in the production and circulation of the work of artists with whom she associated, most notably those in *Atis Rezistans*. Undoubtedly, the extent of this influence deserves deeper examination and analysis than this thesis can accommodate. Whether new creative expressions in Haiti arose in response to, or as a result of, *Sacred Arts* and its organizers is beyond the present point; however, the exhibition played a significant role in shifting how North American audiences encountered and understood Haitian visual culture.

The work of Atis Rezistans corresponds to the recombinant ethos of “System D,” which Allen F. Roberts identifies as a type of “making-do” with whatever materials or opportunities are at hand because “the majority of people are *obliged* to ‘manage’ because salaries are not paid on time or at all, supplies run out, parts cannot be found, credit is unavailable, politics prove unstable, the weather goes haywire, and calamity strikes” (1996a: 83). While Roberts here considers these circumstances as applied to artists in African countries, Haitian artists have had to confront the same struggles through ever creative means as well. For members of Atis Rezistans, that meant assembling discarded automotive oil filters, rubber from used tires, and broken shocks to give form to figures that embodied all that Gede encompasses, including sex, re-generation, death, and a grim sense of humor. Consider the work, *Military Glory* (2010) [fig.20], by Atis Rezistans founding member Andre Eugène. The artist makes a mockery out of boasting, triumphant military figures that have littered Haiti’s history and taken most recent form in the foreign soldiers present in Haiti as part of the seemingly interminable mandate of the United Nations’ Haiti mission (MINUSTAH). In *Military Glory*, Eugène makes a body out of a truck axle, a weapon that the figure holds out of a crankshaft, and a halo from a hub cap. On top of the figure’s head, in the form of a human skull, is the signature UN-style white helmet. Around his “neck,” is a faded-red bandana, a signature element of the de facto *Tonton Makout* uniform. Finally, as evidence of tumescent militaristic egomania, the soldier carries a huge erection given form in a broken shock coil, attached to the figure as testament to his “glory” that Eugène so wryly satirizes.

Military Glory and other works by members of Atis Rezistans featured prominently among the art objects in the exhibition *In Extremis: Death and Life in 21st Century Haiti* (2012) at the Fowler Museum, which was conceived as a follow-up to *Sacred Arts*. The curators first

proposed the idea for *In Extremis* in 2008 as a response to rapid shifts in the visual culture of Haitian Vodou in the years since *Sacred Arts*. At the forefront of the changes that Katherine E. Smith, Donald J. Cosentino, and other scholars observed, was the mounting prominence of Bawon Samdi and his family of Gedes in expressions made in response to the daily degradations that Haiti's popular class was experiencing.¹⁶⁰ The modern period of crises that had befallen Haiti began with the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Although somewhat of an arbitrary designation, considering Haiti's long history of hardships, the disease was harbinger of a catastrophic wave of disasters to follow. The 2010 Haitian earthquake and all of its destruction accelerated the urgency of *In Extremis* and, as a result, the exhibition proved grimly topical, as Haiti was still reeling from the effects of that disaster. Much of the exhibition featured expressions of Bawon Samdi, the Gedes, and how that family of Vodou lwa were reacting to such intense social, political, and environmental pressure. As sculptural forms animated by the spirit of Gede, the work of the Haitian art collective Atis Rezistans features prominently in the exhibition.

While still dedicated to indigenous Haitian art, *In Extremis* featured more work by studio artists from the Haitian diaspora whose work was connected to circuits of the international art market.¹⁶¹ In addition, rather than attempting an encyclopedic overview in the manner of *Sacred Arts*, the curators chose a more focused theme: how Haitian artists confronted disaster and crisis during a time frame defined by a crescendo of catastrophes. Lastly, as discussed in the previous chapter, the Fowler's commission of Myrlande Constant's exceptionally large *Haiti madi 12 janvye 2010* (2012) [fig.21] allowed drapo a more authoritative and representative role for

¹⁶⁰ For a comprehensive analysis of Gede's rise among devotees of urban Haitian temples, see: Cosentino 2012; Gordon 2012; Michel and Bellegarde-Smith 2012; and K. Smith 2010 & 2012.

¹⁶¹ Such artists included Jean-Michel Basquiat, Mario Benjamin, Maksens Denis, and Eduoard Duval-Carrié.

Haitian visual culture. In order to illustrate shifts in the production, reception, and circulation of Haitian art in this contemporary period of extremes, I will pivot from the Fowler Museum at UCLA, despite its crucial role in exhibiting the work of Haitian artists in the United States, to assess the situation within Haiti itself. The following discussion will focus on the Ghetto Biennale held in Port-au-Prince in the neighborhood in which members of *Atis Rezistans* live and work.¹⁶²

The Ghetto Biennale and *Atis Rezistans*: New Modes in the Production and Display of Visual Culture in Haiti¹⁶³

The Ghetto Biennale debuted in December 2009 in the downtown Port-au-Prince neighborhood of Leanne, adjacent to Boulevard Jean-Jacques Dessalines, as the major avenue colloquially known as the *Gran Rue* (big street). From the beginning, the event's participants, organizers, and attendees were presented with logistical, conceptual, and political challenges. Specifically, participating Haitian artists and their foreign counterparts found themselves grappling with dynamics of cross-cultural power and privilege particularly manifest in entrenched histories of crisis and catastrophe in Haiti, issues of top-down tourism, and the broader context of how Haitian Art has been received and interpreted in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Several projects at the Fourth Ghetto Biennale (2015) addressed and interrogated these issues. Compared to previous iterations, the 2015 biennial most successfully enacted the aims laid out at the event's inception.

¹⁶² Much of the research on the Ghetto Biennale included here is based on field research. I attended two iterations of the event in 2011 and 2015 as an observer. This research was supported by two grants from the UCLA Institute of American Cultures Ethnic Studies Research Center at the Bunche Center for African-American Studies and the UCLA Latin American Institute.

¹⁶³ A version of the following section will be published in a forthcoming issue of the journal, *Art in the Public Sphere*, Intellect Publishing.

The Ghetto Biennale was originally conceived as a response to the discourses and structures of the globalized contemporary art market, specifically within the context of international art biennials. Since the 1980s, biennials have become key nodes within international art circuits. Prestigious curators serve as gatekeepers for biennials like Venice, Manifesta, Documenta, Dak'Art, and Gwangju, to name only a few (and there are many). In the mid-2000s, the work of *Atis Rezistans*, also referred to as the Gran Rue sculptors, was beginning to receive an increasing amount of international attention. The Gran Rue sculptors were part of an audacious new generation of Haitian artists, and their work attracted the attention of international audiences facilitated by a handful of contemporary art galleries in Haiti. Their sculptural work also earned them a degree of notoriety in Haiti and abroad as human bones, and particularly skulls, were included in their repertoire of found materials.¹⁶⁴ With heightened recognition came invitations to participate in international art exhibitions and events like biennials. Visa restrictions, however, often prevented the artists themselves from traveling with their work and participating in important nodes within the international contemporary arts circuit. As a result of such hindrances to travel, the artists were also excluded from participating in activities accompanying exhibition openings such as symposia and colloquia, key situations for artists to cultivate important art world connections.

National groups in the Global South such as Haitians who are not of economic means, and often own no property, commonly find the barriers to international travel especially high.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ The use of appropriated human remains for use in art objects remains a highly fraught, volatile issue, rife with political and socio-economic significance that demands further scholarship. For a thorough reading on Atis Rezistans' use of bones in their work, and the relationship between the dead and living in urban Haiti, see: Smith 2010.

¹⁶⁵ For the US State Department, property ownership and other indicators of wealth can be deciding factors in whether to award travel visas to Haitians and other "aliens" entering the country. Wealth and property ownership, it is believed, increases the likelihood of returning home. See: "Ineligibilities and Waivers: Laws."

This reality is often lost on “First World” curators accustomed to the jet-setting globalized standards of the contemporary art world. For instance, when André Eugène, Jean-Heard Celeur, and Guyodo, as the three founding members of Atis Rezistans, were informed that their work would be included in the group show, *Lespri Endependan: Discovering Haitian Sculpture* (2005), at the Frost Museum at Florida International University, the exhibition’s curator invited the artists to the vernissage without realizing the difficulties of traveling to the US (Eugène & Gordon 2016). Like many Haitians struggling to acquire international travel visas, the three artists were denied access to major components of the globalized, contemporary art world by virtue of nationality and socio-economic status.

The Ghetto Biennale was designed to be a collaborative effort that provided a radically progressive alternative to the biennial model: if artists could not leave Haiti to participate in exhibitions and biennials, those events would come to Haiti instead (Gordon 2016). The event’s conception was also a collaborative affair. British artist and curator Leah Gordon has been integral to the biennial as one of its primary organizers. She first worked with Atis Rezistans in 2006, as part of a project for the International Museum of Slavery in Liverpool, for which Eugène, Celeur, and Guyodo were commissioned to make *Freedom!*, a large sculpture commemorating the 200th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in the UK. She became close with the artists and witnessed their frustrations in negotiating visa politics just as their art was receiving international attention. It was Gordon who first conceived of the title for the event. While visiting with a friend in London, Gordon put two seemingly incongruous, opposed words together: “ghetto” and “biennale” (Eugene & Gordon 2016). The word “ghetto,” a potentially problematic designation, was one that members of Atis Rezistans used themselves in Gordon’s film, *The Sculptors of Grand Rue* (2008), to describe their own living situations and subaltern

statuses. “Biennale” described an event of wealth, privilege and status – one from which the Gran Rue artists had been excluded. The irony that the human remains within their sculptures were allowed unhindered access to these networks as part of exhibitions, while the living bodies responsible for their creation remained stuck at home because of geo-political bureaucratic complexities, was not lost on members of Atis Rezistans. Hosting the Ghetto Biennale in Haiti provided an opportunity to challenge and invert narratives of marginalization and bring the global contemporary art network to Haiti.

For the first Ghetto Biennale in 2009, Gordon put out an international open call asking artists to submit proposals for projects to be realized in Haiti during the weeks prior to the event’s opening. Accepted projects would be executed in the Leanne neighborhood in partnership with local artists. International artists were required to arrange their own travel and to purchase materials and supplies in Haiti. André Eugène’s atelier and *lakou* (family courtyard) served as the central site for the event. As one of the original members of Atis Rezistans and a de facto neighborhood leader, he has worked closely with Gordon in the organizing and logistics of each biennial.

The Gran Rue proved an especially resonant location for the event. It runs roughly north-south through some of the busiest sections of Haiti’s capital and, in decades past, was home to casinos, department stores, and art galleries that catered to foreign tourists disembarking from cruise ships.¹⁶⁶ The length of the Gran Rue, and Leanne in particular where the Atis Rezistans live and work, is now a hectic epicenter of commercial and transportation activity, while the tourism industry has long since shifted away from Haiti’s capital to other Caribbean destinations. Rows of school busses and *tap-taps*, the brightly adorned vans and trucks that serve as Haiti’s

¹⁶⁶ Before moving to Pétienville, many prominent Haitian galleries were located on Rue Dessalines, including Galerie Monnin.

public transit, line up towards the southern end of the road bound for destinations both near and far within the country. All along the Gran Rue, these vehicles are stationed for maintenance at various intervals, creating the atmosphere of a sprawling outdoor automotive garage.

Stepping off the road and into narrow corridors leading through tightly packed clusters of dwellings, one finds oneself among small wood-working ateliers of (mostly) men maintaining a cottage industry of easily transportable, carved wooden objects – figures playing drums, dancing couples, animals - for distribution and sale in Haiti and other Caribbean countries. This context of production helped shaped the aesthetic sensibilities of the sculptors of the Atis Rezistans. Many of the group’s members developed skills as woodworkers, making figures for the erstwhile tourist market. In response to Haitian tourism’s fluctuations, the artists began exploring new artistic directions by incorporating new materials and themes. The proliferation of outdoor garages near Leanne provided automotive scrap and the National Cemetery nearby provided a source for re-purposed human bones. The Gran Rue artists intertwined more traditional woodworking techniques learned through their apprenticeships in neighborhood ateliers with locally found objects, many of which were the detritus from globalized supply networks that had trickled down to urban Haiti in more recent decades. The artists assembled these forms into a pastiche of materials that deployed more traditional symbols and manifestations of the Vodou pantheon, especially the family of cemetery-dwelling *Gede*, into re-imaginings in which the lwa responded to contemporary challenges of urban Haitian life.

Gordon underscores how the exclusion felt by the Gran Rue artists in Haiti also applies to many of those working in the peripheries of a globalized society: “Artists in the contemporary Caribbean art world, especially but not exclusively, are obliged to become organizers, as well as producers, due to the lack of viable institutions to support education, networks, visibility and

distribution” (2016, pers. comm.). Such vertical integration among artists comes out of necessity as they seek to control the means of production, sale, and exhibition of their work. Cultural infrastructure that may exist in more industrialized nations is either non-existent or under-resourced in countries like Haiti, thereby adding layers to the already crowded set of barriers preventing access to global capital and resources, particularly when it comes to contemporary art markets. By hosting the Ghetto Biennale, Atis Rezistans not only hoped to bring the attendant resources, benefits, and networking opportunities provided by other biennales to Haiti, but to interrogate the systematic discrimination that necessitated such an event in the first place.

The agendas and ideologies underpinning the Ghetto Biennale were, and remain, loosely defined, often contradictory, and contested. When the concept of the Ghetto Biennale meets praxis, however, complexities and contestations arise. Such has been the case with every Ghetto Biennale, but in a most pronounced way during the first two occurrences.¹⁶⁷ The debut, in 2009, served as a sort of trial run, in which the results of cross-cultural collaborations and partnerships could be used to gauge the Biennale’s success and reveal points of contestation and rupture that might arise. Such was suggested by the first event’s “strap line,” or guiding theme, provided to guide international artists submitting project proposals: “What happens when First World art rubs up against Third World art? Does it bleed?” The question is an inversion of one placed by Gloria Anzaldúa in which she describes the US-Mexican border as an “open wound” where “the Third World grates against the First and bleeds” (1987: 3). Such a provocative theme aligns with

¹⁶⁷ Such challenges as shipping, logistics, financing, and organizing are often sorted out in an improvisational manner because of realities on the ground in Haiti. One can find parallels between the Ghetto Biennale and Senegal’s Dak’Art: *Biennale de l’art africain contemporain* (The Biennial of African Contemporary Art), which began in 1992. Reviewing the 2006 iteration, Polly Nooter Roberts et al, praised the organizers and participating artists for their flexibility and resourcefulness in “what be the most trying of circumstances;” (2006: 56).

the disruptive agenda conceived at the Biennale's outset, and sets a tone in which socio-economic and nation-based power are forefronted so as to be (re)examined.

The participants and organizers soon learned of the event's potential to re-inscribe and reinforce existing, unequal cross-cultural power dynamics that they had intended to confront. For instance, visiting artists and their Haitian counterparts often differed in their respective agendas. Situations arose in which expectations clashed, often as a result of culturally held ideas about the roles of artists and their places within a community. Many of the artists living and working on the Gran Rue have developed their practice in marked contrast to those who have graduated from Masters in Fine Arts university programs, for instance. Grand Rue artists often learned their skills through apprenticeships, working under senior artists and craftsmen in a workshop atmosphere. In those circumstances, the act of making art explicitly for sale does not carry the stigma of overt capitalism that such a practice would have among artists in Europe or the US, for example (although there are plenty based in those latter countries whose entire careers have been built on critiquing capitalistic paradigms).¹⁶⁸

As Gordon frames the pragmatics of the Atis Rezistans' situation, "There is an excess of artwork in this neighborhood ...so the difficulty is not to make it, but for the artists here the difficulty is in getting the work seen and to sell it" (Eugène & Gordon 2016). Such commercial intentions often ran counter to the expectations of visiting artists. Many of the Gran Rue artists who participated in the Ghetto Biennale intended to sell their pieces at the event and, often, Haitian artists would pitch their work to the visiting foreign participants - a gesture that seemed to the latter as inappropriate to the spirit of collaborative art-making. Furthermore, the nature of the joint collaborations was called into question by some of the Haitian participants, who often

¹⁶⁸ Here I am thinking of artists such as Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst, and Andy Warhol, although examples proliferate in the contemporary art world.

felt less as partners and more like apprentices at the service of the visiting artists' visions – a situation that called labor ethics into question. If certain artists were being treated as employees should they not be paid as such? And, conversely, if partnerships between visiting and Haitian artist were truly collaborative, one should not expect something financial or material in return, necessarily. Preconceived, culturally held ideas about the role, status, and sanctity of art clashed in these circumstances, a situation heightened by the general depth of need felt across Haiti.

The biennial format of the contemporary international art world tends to resist commercializing forces in order to differentiate itself from market-driven art fairs, like Art Basel, The Armory Show, or Frieze, which attract dealers and collectors in a more commercial environment. The organizers of the Ghetto Biennial, however have taken care not to police the sale of artworks at the biennale by favoring an approach in which collaborating artists are encouraged to manage and negotiate potentially conflicting commercial dynamics and expectations themselves (Gordon 2016). Not every project at the Ghetto Biennale has faced issues related to art and commoditization, but several instances have arisen that have challenged the organizers and participating artists.

A month after the inaugural Ghetto Biennale, disaster struck Haiti in the form of 7.0-magnitude earthquake whose epicenter was only a few miles outside of Port-au-Prince. The devastation came in two main forms: a huge death toll (estimates range from 20,000 to over 300,000 killed) and massive property destruction. The earthquake also exposed a lack of resources and infrastructure in Haiti to deal with catastrophes on such a scale. As a consequence, Haiti saw a huge humanitarian outpouring of monetary pledges from international countries and a steady stream of foreign volunteers arriving in the hopes of assisting Haiti's recovery. This dual context of disaster and beneficence provided a stark backdrop for the Second Ghetto

Biennale in December 2011, and presented the organizers and participants with a new set of challenges.

Leah Gordon writes that the economic disparities made apparent in the first biennial were heightened within the context of post-earthquake Haiti. The expectations that local artists held regarding their visiting counterparts were informed by the proliferation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the country at the time. As a consequence, many of the younger Haitian artists anticipated an organizational model from the Ghetto Biennale that delivered direct support for their efforts (Gordon 2016, pers. comm.). Having deliberately chosen to move forward with a theme that did not directly engage in the recent disaster or its aftermath, Gordon, Eugène, and Celeur, the lead curators of the second biennale, hoped to avoid an atmosphere that set up clear donor/recipient dynamics, one that could put the aims of the visiting artists into opposition with those of the Grand Rue locals. Some visitors also revised their projects when confronted with the situation on the ground. As Gordon states: “At times seemingly critically strong projects, on paper at least, were transforming into charitable gestures and artists were complacently self-judging on the local benefits of their projects to the community” (2016). In the face of the extreme destruction that the earthquake wrought, such concerns from both sides seem unavoidable in hindsight. The larger, problematic history of humanitarian assistance in Haiti, however, undergirded the organizers’ resistance towards efforts to steer the Ghetto Biennale in the direction of direct social action.

Within Haiti’s contemporary period of crisis, tourists in the classic sense largely disappeared while a new type of international visitor began to appear in waves. These visitors embodied new modes of interaction between Haitians and foreign-born visitors. Increasing numbers of humanitarian aid workers affiliated with non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

have informed the most recent narratives about Haiti, which designate it an “NGO Republic.”¹⁶⁹ Additionally, a flow of Protestant Christian missionaries attached to US churches arrive in Haiti on a steady basis, a situation magnified in the wake of the 2010 earthquake’s devastation. In many ways, these visitors could be characterized as “humanitarian tourists.” Such “tourists” come to Haiti to help address the country’s needs through institutions like churches or NGOs. Their experiences in Haiti are often limited to localized projects that focus on healthcare, infrastructure, and education. The movements of such visitors are mostly dictated by a parent organization. Humanitarian tourists may take day trips outside of their walled compounds or similarly “secured” bases to visit Haitian beaches, markets, or tourist attractions like the Citadel, but their time in the country tends to be highly choreographed and delimited.¹⁷⁰ While these visitors likely would balk at a characterization that links their altruistic work to the leisurely pursuits of tourism, we can nonetheless analyze their presence in the country and the role they play in the production of Haitian visual art through a Tourism Studies-derivative approach.

The earthquake brought into stark relief a situation that had been growing for many years. After the quake, a litany of misguided, and often harmful, international efforts to alleviate the challenges facing the Haitian population preceded those that followed the earthquake.¹⁷¹ The disjointed, uncoordinated, and often redundant efforts of competing NGOs in Haiti only augmented local wariness and mistrust. The unequal power relationships that have historically arisen within a foreign-aid atmosphere, and the neo-colonial performances of both donors and

¹⁶⁹ Klarreich and Polma 2012. Low estimates put the pre-quake number of NGOs operating in Haiti at 3,000.

¹⁷⁰ Churches and NGOs often limit the movements of their workers and volunteers because of “security concerns.” According to an anecdotal conversation with a project worker for the World Health Organization in 2013, and confirmed by others, workers and volunteers are usually not allowed to travel to areas outside of “red zones” in the capital as defined, seemingly arbitrarily, by the UN peacekeeping forces in Haiti, known as MINUSTAH.

¹⁷¹ See: Farmer 2013; Katz 2013; Peck 2013; and Schuller 2012.

recipients, specifically challenged the curatorial mission of the Second Ghetto Biennale and heightened existing hierarchical structures.

The organizers of the Ghetto Biennale have grappled with issues of disaster in Haiti on a broad, historical scale, but were forced to address the immediate crisis of the earthquake. In December 2011, those living in the capital were still digging out of rubble and thousands were living in makeshift tent cities and, as a result, many Haitians were particularly sensitive to the event's scope and outlook. Did the organizers of the 2011 event fully acknowledge the disaster? What obligations did foreign participants have to the welfare of their Haitian counterparts? Was the act itself of holding an event with "ghetto" in the title re-inscribing foreign-based assumptions of Haitian destitution? Because of the post-quake proliferation of NGOs and waves of arriving altruistic *blan* (literally "whites" in Kreyòl, but a catch-all for expatriates), many Haitians were wary of their presence. Indeed, some have criticized these humanitarian forays in Haiti after the earthquake, and the cross-cultural voyeurism of suffering it can potentially encourage, as a form of "disaster tourism" (I. Dupuy 2014). Do the organizers of the Ghetto Biennale also participate in this type of touristic discourse?¹⁷² The scope of these questions extends to deeper histories of tourism in Haiti and their intersections with local art production.

The viability of Haiti's tourism industry has been sporadic and, at times, fraught. Ever since US Marines ended their occupation in 1934, Haiti's business and political leaders have seen tourism as a potential economic panacea to replace agriculture as the dominant industry in the country, a strategy successfully deployed in Jamaica (K. Thompson 2006). Haiti's Ministry of Tourism opened in 1928 and the National Tourism Office in 1939. With the support of US Good Neighbor Policies promoting America's interest through diplomatic and economic means,

¹⁷² For analyses and criticisms of the efficacy of aid efforts in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake, see: Van Hoving et al 2010; Farmer 2012; and Schuller 2012.

both offices were active in promoting the local tourism industry. The first “Golden Age” of tourism in Haiti came on the heels of the 1949 Bicentennial Exposition (Plummer 1990). While sparsely attended by foreign visitors, promoters of the event advertised a vision of Haiti in international publications as both pastorally pre-industrial in the countryside and vibrantly modern in the capital (Ramsey 1995: 201). The Haitian government also built a tourism infrastructure designed to extend past the exposition. Cruise ships departing the US stopped in Port-au-Prince and the northern city of Cap-Haïtien, where hotels, nightclubs, and casinos awaited travelers. At the time, a number of these amenities were situated on the Gran Rue, not far from where the Ghetto Biennale is held today – a resonant fact for residents of Leanne and the event’s organizers.

In addition to grappling with histories of inequality and imbalance born out through tourism and humanitarian aid, the Second Biennale exposed disparate gender dynamics. According to Gordon (2016), some of the visiting women artists felt threatened by overt flirtations and sexual advances by some younger male artists, to a degree that many visiting women artists chose to make their work at their hotels, rather than on site at the Grand Rue where they felt they were subject to unwanted advances. While exaggerated phallic representations had been present in some Atis Rezistans members’ sculptural work long before the first Ghetto Biennale, their proliferation, in conjunction with chauvinist behavior by some of the younger men, threatened to alienate visiting women participants.¹⁷³ The uncomfortable

¹⁷³ For a discussion on the significance of the motif of erect penises (known in Haiti by the Kreyòl slang term, *zozo*) in both Vodou and the work by members of Atis Rezistans, see: K. Smith: 2010. In his review of *In Extremis*, Allen F. Roberts underscores the heightened masculine qualities of André Eugene’s *Military Glory* (2010), which may speak to the feelings of expatriate women participants: “if the Gedes once dramatized sex as playful recreation, there is nothing humorous in such lubricious display, which instead bespeaks reckless violence,” 2013: 266. He goes on to note Cosentino’s caveat that such works “must be juxtaposed with the modesty of ordinary Haitian behavior,” *ibid.* Such juxtapositions demand further exploration into the ways that those in *Atis Rezistans* developed their phallic motif.

sexual and gender dynamics and the disparities within the partnerships between artistic collaborators were issues of contention addressed during the scheduled conference on the final day of the second biennial (*ibid*). The organizers planned for the closing conference to be a forum where any of the participants could give feedback and raise concerns among the collected group. Passionate contributions to these matters came from all sides but the format allowed for grievances to be aired in a constructive manner and that were taken into consideration for the next Ghetto Biennale.

The issues related to labor and gender provide specific articulation to the challenges experienced during the biennial, ones that, had they gone unaddressed, could have threatened the event's continuation. The organizers' willingness to adapt the format, structure, and exhibition site of the Ghetto Biennale likely allowed the event to reach its fourth, and most recent, iteration in 2015. Many visiting women artists with whom I informally spoke did not express the same concerns I witnessed in 2011, and were actively working on-site at the Gran Rue in 2015. Additionally, the donor-recipient dynamic of 2011 was no longer so pronounced due to changes and organizational interventions implemented following the congress.¹⁷⁴

The Ghetto Biennale's organizers encouraged participating artists to explore political and socio-economic dimensions of the international art market in their project proposals, but 2015's theme, "Kreyòl, Vodou, and the Lakou: Forms of Resistance," engaged with more localized issues of history, culture, and language within a Haitian context. The open call asked for artists to consider projects that explored how Haitian Kreyòl language, the religious practices of Vodou, and the land-management traditions of the lakou were utilized by Haitians to counteract and push

¹⁷⁴ One such change was the organizers' prohibition on the use of film and photography equipment, except by official documentarians. This rule was intended to diminish what John Urry (2011) has termed the "tourist gaze," in which photography is an essential means by which tourism facilitates cross-cultural power imbalances.

back against imposed economic and agricultural systems that resembled the indignities of a plantation model.¹⁷⁵ The theme of 2015 asked artists to examine issues related to disaster, tourism, and the history of contemporary Haitian Art more closely. Several key examples from 2015 show how artists approached disaster, tourism, and Haitian art history from different angles. These projects offer insight into the Ghetto Biennale's role in addressing entrenched histories as identified by the event's organizers in the open call.

The Ghetto Biennale has acted as a nexus in which participating artists can confront a range of intermingling discourses, into which tourism consistently factors. As proposed in Chapter One, expatriate visitors in the post-war era were in search of cultural authenticity, which they found articulated in Haiti's "otherness"—a quality they felt had been lost in their industrialized home countries. Perhaps the alienation felt by tourists in the 1950s parallels the disillusionment that visiting Ghetto Biennale participants have experienced in the globalized art world.¹⁷⁶ Those within the expatriate group of artists often have shown a keen awareness of the structural imbalances that proliferate in the international art market, which are dictated by commercial and economic forces. As a country relegated to the periphery of globalized art circuits, Haiti can provide an apt venue in which to address and call attention to such iniquities.

Many project proposals for the first two Ghetto Biennales in 2009 and 2011 critiqued and challenged institutional mechanisms of the contemporary art world. The desire of visiting artists to upend capitalistic art-market practices was sometimes at odds with the members of the Atis Rezistans' desire to sell their own work. Furthermore, the potential for the Ghetto Biennale to

¹⁷⁵ For more on the historical and cultural significance of the *lakou* as a social organizational model in Haiti and its relationship to power and politics, see: Larose 1977; Richman 2014; Schneider forthcoming.

¹⁷⁶ I am here referring to Dean MacCannell's assertion that tourists respond to the alienation of modern Western society through a nostalgic search for authenticity in other cultures: 1989: 10.

become a quasi-touristic spectacle looms over the proceedings. At what point does the viability of the event depend on the desire and willingness of foreign artists to travel to and work in “ghettos,” both the actual one of Leanne and the conceptualized ghetto of the Haitian art world itself? Can some of the visiting artists be the focus of the same scrutiny applied to the NGO-affiliated humanitarian tourists? Several projects in the 2015 biennial confronted the factors of disaster, tourism, and Haitian art history in ways that add complexity and nuance to these issues. The varying success of these projects provide insight into a way forward for future Ghetto Biennales, but also some of the difficulties that face Haitian artists today. The following projects highlight how participants challenge potential imbalances of agency, power, and intention between Haitian and international artists.

Visiting artist Radhika Khimji’s sculptural work *Still Standing* reflects the flexibility of the biennial’s organizers in accommodating shifting project goals. Khimji built three monoliths out of cinderblocks on the property of Twoket, a Grand Rue artist whose home collapsed during the earthquake [fig.22]. Cleared of rubble and largely empty, a raised foundation still exists where the house once stood. Upon arrival in Haiti, Khimji encountered the now-exposed multi-colored mosaic tile work that once served as the interior floor, one of the remaining physical indicators of the house, and changed her project. An Omani artist living in London, Khimji’s original concept was based on 19th century paintings in India where Calcutta residents were commissioned to represent themselves for consumption by British audiences, a project that Khimji says “made a subject look at themselves as an object” (2015). Upon arrival in Port-au-Prince, however, Khimji felt increasingly apprehensive about her original proposal, which she feared would exoticize Haitians with whom she participated. Instead, she purchased construction materials and erected three cinderblock walls at angles to each other, each about eight feet high.

She then affixed shards of broken glass to their tops in the same manner that many homes in the Haitian capital are protected from thieves – a type of makeshift barbed wire. *Still Standing*, in contrast, protects against nothing and has none of a wall’s functionality. According to Khimji, when she asked Twoket if he preferred her making the work into something more “practical,” like shade or shelter, he responded negatively, preferring the walls as monuments (*ibid*). Through the artist’s use of construction materials deployed within an architectural idiom familiar to most Haitians, Khimji’s work embodies the improvisatory nature of both life and art-making in contemporary Haiti. The works were also incorporated by other participating artists and used in several performance pieces. Dasha Chapman, Yonel Charles, Jean-Sebastien Duvilaire and Ann Mazzocca performed their piece, *Activating Petwo’s Kinesthetic Imagination: Dancing Revolution and Forging Lakou in the Gran Rue*, within and around the monuments, adding layers of meaning and resonance to both Khimji’s work and Twoket’s lakou.

For his project, *The Story of Institutions* [fig.23], Edgar Endress, a Chilean artist living in the US, worked with local rubber-stamp makers in Port-au-Prince. With the help of Pierre Adler, a Haitian collaborator, Endress observed these tradesmen making precisely carved stamps in rubber, which were then printed on materials specific to each of their customer’s needs. Endress directly commissioned Calicien Banel, a local stamp-maker and one of three brothers trained in the family business, to make a series of images to then be deployed as part of a finished work on paper. Both the “official-ness” of stamps and the slippery semiotics of the resulting printed image attracted Endress. The image of an airplane, for example, could signify several types of mobilities, depending on the client. A Haitian immigration lawyer or a businessman who works in imports/exports might request such an image to indicate their services. The airplane could also be an icon of social mobility, used in the materials for an English-language institute in the

capital, for example. The point being, according to Endress, that “an image of an airplane is not just an airplane,” but functions like language in its deployment, taking on meaning according to context and other factors (2015, pers. comm.).

Many examples of this linguistic fluidity were present in the stamp-maker’s inventory, which Endress foregrounded and repurposed. The colonial history of rubber stamps also inflected *The Story of Institutions*. Stamps, while rendered obsolete in more digitally advanced countries of the world, still have relevance and usefulness in a country like Haiti that relies on more analog technologies. Business people and entrepreneurs expect stamps to legitimize and validate their enterprises and make them “official.” This legacy of official stamps stems from colonial bureaucracies. Their hand-made quality also highlights the conceptual divide between “art” and “craft.” What types of images are privileged enough to be considered “art,” and which of those are relegated to the sphere of craft? This debate has informed the history of art from indigenous and “Other” cultures in Western arts institutions, and applies to Haitian visual culture in particular.¹⁷⁷ The derisive label of “tourist art” has been applied to the work of many Haitian artists who work anonymously and on a mass scale. Such a label is subject to the same valuation as “craft,” in which an object or artwork is judged on its use value or ritual context, rather than its aesthetic values. By employing the imagery of a rubber-stamp maker in his project, Endress engaged with these same regimes of value in his project for the Ghetto Biennale.

Once he amassed a final inventory of rubber-engraved images from the stamp maker Banel, Endress then used the stamps to create a larger work on paper based on an important image from twentieth-century Haitian history. As discussed in the first chapter, the photograph

¹⁷⁷ For more on the ways in which artists have negotiated or taken advantage of the tricky category of tourist art and all its implications, see: Graburn 1976; Jules-Rosette 1984; and Steiner 1994.

of the corpse of Charlemagne Peralte was widely distributed in Haiti after his death in 1919 at the hands of US Marine forces [fig.7]. Peralte was the leader of the *caco* guerilla soldiers who violently resisted the US military in the occupation's early years. The cacos themselves took on the role of folk heroes, their efforts garnering widespread local support, especially in light of the abuses and atrocities enacted by the Marines.¹⁷⁸ When US forces finally killed Peralte in a gun battle, his half-naked body was propped up and posed for a photograph which was then circulated in newspapers across Haiti as proof of the insurgent leader's death.¹⁷⁹ The grim photo became part of Haitian national folklore as both a symbol of Haitian resistance and the wounded pride of a country occupied by a foreign power.

The Story of Institutions engages with this important image from Haitian history and builds from other artistic deployments of this image. Here, reference is specifically made to the painting by Philomé Obin discussed in the first chapter. Obin relays his memories of when he likely witnessed the comings and goings of Peralte and his followers in Northern Haiti. Obin recasts the image in *The Crucifixion of Charlemagne Peralte for Freedom* (1970) as an allegory of Haitian nationalism and, perhaps, a symbol of his own longing for which he constructs a mythic past [fig.8]. In Obin's version, Peralte has the Haitian flag propped under his lifeless arm, and his weeping mother mourns her son whose desecrated body, held upright by the door, takes on new significance. Just as the Romans in Judea crucified the body of Jesus to dissuade others who might challenge their authority, the Marines disseminated the photo of the fallen rebel leader as a warning; in both cases, it seems, such a gesture became opposite of its original intention. This parallel was certainly not lost on Obin and Endress taps into the image's fluidity.

¹⁷⁸ For more on the Occupation, see: Healy 1976; Renda 2001; Schmidt 1971.

¹⁷⁹ For a poignant parallel in which images of Che Guevara, including that of his corpse, have generated in and circulated throughout Latin America, see: Kunzle 1997.

Endress also used the image of Peralte for a work on four panels “drawn” entirely out of the commissioned stamp images. The panels were then assembled and hung on the exterior of a small dwelling next to the site of the biennial [fig.23]. *The Story of Institutions* speaks to how histories of disaster and foreign occupation are remembered and reproduced in Haiti. This image addressed the various forms of US occupation of Haiti since the invasion in 1915, whether through its direct military presence or factors related to economics, diplomacy, and culture. Endress engages with discourses through which tools like rubber stamps have been employed as “disciplinary mechanisms” in systems of power and control (Foucault 1995). As an added linguistic layer, Endress states, “the image of Charlemagne Peralte forms part of the images that semiotically surface subconscious thoughts of classic representations of suffering anchored in the Judeo-Christian tradition” – in this case, that image is of Christ’s crucifixion (2016, pers. comm.). Here, Endress is attuned to what W.J.T. Mitchell would say images like the one Peralte’s corpse “want,” and that is “neither to be leveled into a ‘history of images’ nor elevated into a ‘history of art,’ but to be seen as complex individuals occupying multiple subject positions and identities” (2005: 47). The Marines may have intended for the image to be symbol of power and domination but, instead, artists like Obin and Endress have deployed it within larger discourses of agency, power, and subjugation.

Ways Forward/Future Strategies

Over six years have passed since the earthquake and, while many Haitians are still dealing with the effects of disaster, the most visible, immediate sets of challenges have been addressed to varying degrees of success. People living in tent camps have been relocated and dispersed, new government buildings are replacing those destroyed in the capital, and the flow of NGO workers

to the country has slowed. Despite a measure of cosmetic improvements, Haitians continue to deal with those deeper issues related to disaster. In terms of Haitian visual arts, tourism and historical patterns of the art market remain resonant factors. The 2015 Ghetto Biennale demonstrated the event's potential to make important contributions and interventions in all of these areas. As the examples of projects discussed have illustrated, a focus on more performative and socially engaged work broadens the conceptual possibilities and modes of discursive engagements. With each successive iteration, the international participants and their local collaborators continue to negotiate thorny cultural and political hurdles in order to interrogate the systems of cultural production in which artists participate cross-culturally.

Challenges still remain, however. Six months after the final ceremonies and the last international artists boarded planes home, I re-visited the artist Twoket's lakou in Leanne, the site on which Radhika Khimji erected *Still Standing*. Parked in the courtyard, which had been emptied for the biennale, sat two tap-taps being repaired by several mechanics. The monument itself had been reduced from three structures to two. The glass that Khimji had affixed atop the walls had been removed, mostly, presumably to accommodate the laundry draped over the monoliths, drying in the sun. When asked about what happened to the third wall, Twoket shrugged, nodded, and said, pointing out the obvious to his questioner: "it fell." Twoket's reaction and the presence of the workers on his property was evidence of the daily life that had been put on hold for the event. *Standing Still*, which seemed like a relatively permanent monument by its material nature, composed of concrete and cinder blocks, revealed itself as more ephemeral than originally conceived, its structure incorporated into the practical daily necessities of life in Leanne.

Certain precious myths in the “First World” about art’s singular, vaunted status are shattered when faced with the necessities of survival and well-being, which seems to align with the point the biennial’s organizers were trying to make all along. Projects proposed for future Ghetto Biennales could take the examples of Radhika Khimji, Edgar Endress, and other participating artists not mentioned here as guide-points for how to propose and execute successful works moving forward, ones that acknowledge the fatuous qualities of post-industrial capitalism in the international art world while recognizing the realities of life in downtown Port-au-Prince.

Conclusion

Through the examples discussed above, I have demonstrated how collectors, curators, and artists have adapted and responded to the contemporary period of catastrophe in Haiti, and the effects those crises have wrought on the international market for the work of Haitian artists. While the interactions and interplay between Haitian artists and expatriate visitors have significantly shifted since Haiti’s two “Golden Ages” of tourism, the unequal dynamics present in such exchanges remain part of a contested landscape through which participants in the production and circulation of Haitian art continue to negotiate. The example of Eye Care shows us an important case study in the shift towards humanitarian concerns among Haitian-art collectors that nevertheless has helped sustain interactions between participants in a community of North American collectors and enthusiasts. On an institutional level, museum curators in the United States, such as the organizers of *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, have examined new methods of exhibition programming and display that challenge, interrogate, and possibly re-inscribe assumptions and preconceived notions about Haitian visual culture, especially as it relates to

Vodou. With the example of *Atis Rezistans*, we see how artists have responded to ever-increasing conditions of hardship by incorporating and engaging with materials and subject matter in their work that address iniquities on local and global scales. As the dynamics of exchange among participants in the Ghetto Biennale have shown us, Haiti continues to be a place where cross-cultural dynamics inherited from colonial encounters, imperialist forays, and tourism activities continue to play out, and where simple solutions to these legacies of subjugation and exploitation often remain elusive.

CONCLUSION

In this examination of the operations, negotiations, and discourses through which Haitian Art has been defined, and for whom such a term holds value, I hope to have uncovered the slippery and contested nature of such a category. As I have demonstrated, groups and individuals from within Haiti and without have constructed Haitian Art in ways that align with myriad needs, desires, and agendas that often conflict with culturally held expectations of what “art” is or should be. Since the emergence of Haitian Art as a category in the mid-twentieth century, artists in Haiti have had to navigate a marketplace dependent on the fickle presence of expatriate visitors while contending with political, economic, and environmental factors that make daily life in Haiti astonishingly difficult. The same fodder for news stories of Haiti’s struggles – oppressive or seemingly indifferent governments, structurally magnified natural catastrophes, waves of migrants in treacherous search of opportunity abroad – has framed the entangled ways in which individuals from Haiti and the United States have understood each other.

As I have also shown in the previous chapters, Haitian Art has been constructed through intricate histories of cross-cultural power imbalances. While Haiti may seem like an obscure case study, the intersections and encounters outlined in this dissertation provide evidence of more pervasive discourses that inform cross-cultural interactions between various groups of people that extend beyond those shared between Haitians and US Americans. Many of these exchanges are rooted in colonial histories, but sources of disparate power dynamics are deeper and far more complex, dispersed among a wide range of disciplinary apparatuses and institutions that can be frustratingly difficult to locate. This study of Haitian visual arts has provided interdisciplinary

avenues through which to address and interrogate these rhizomatic structures in which ideas about “Haiti” and Haitians circulate.¹⁸⁰

One question that demands further exploration is, who has been excluded when such a term as Haitian Art has been deployed? We saw how the group of “sophisticated” artists that broke off from the Centre d’Art was marginalized because the creative visions of its members diverged from the mid-century Primitivist narratives that accompanied the work of Kreyòl artists. Conversely, the work of artists creating for the tourist market has been subject to similar regimes of value that privilege individualistic, “innate” expressions of artistic creativity as more culturally “authentic” than those mass-produced works found on the streets of Port-au-Prince and elsewhere in the Caribbean. Important critical research into the political and socio-economic dimensions of these areas, especially as they have played out in the years since the earthquake, remains the potential subject for future studies.

Contemporary circumstances of diaspora, exile, and migration have given rise to new areas of consideration. Who determines an artist’s “Haitian-ness” in conditions of geographic dislocation? In an example that underscores this dilemma, the curators of two recent exhibitions, *In Extremis: Death and Life in 21st Century Haiti* (2012) and *Haïti: Deux siècles de création artistique* (2014), included the work of artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, who was born in Brooklyn and whose father was Haitian, to illustrate themes related to Haiti. Despite Basquiat “disclaiming any knowledge of Vodou” in interviews, those curators saw his use of Afro-Caribbean imagery and technique of *assemblage* as evidence of Haiti’s cultural influence on his work (Cosentino

¹⁸⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) conceptualize the structure of the rhizome, whose roots are dispersed and dislocated, as a model for knowledge production that destabilizes structuralist positions. A “rhizomatic” approach also problematizes historicist discourses through which origins are sought and absolutes are established. This model of an entangled, overlapping network helps account for the seeming chaos in which humans interact and create knowledge, and also can be applied to studies of Haitian art histories.

2012: 37). Haitian-American novelist Edwidge Danticat finds critical parallels between Basquiat and Hector Hyppolite, two artists who, during their brief yet prolific careers, fulfilled a projection as “the primitive in the mirror, the anonymous inventor, who was plucked from obscurity and turned into a god only to be continually called crude, naïve, savage” (2010: 135). Perhaps Basquiat took a similar view of his cultural inheritance as that of Gina Ulysse (2015), whose Haitian-American identity “was not reducible to its point of origin,” but instead was comprised of dissonant yet mutually constitutive parts (xvii). In their exhibition programming, curators share Danticat’s perception of Hyppolite as Basquiat’s “spiritual forebear,” and that Basquiat’s own admitted “cultural memory” was not necessarily fixed to geography (128). By recognizing the significance of “routes” over “roots,” as Stuart Hall (1999) has instructed us, writers and curators are exploring dimensions in those artists’ work that go beyond mere ancestral correlations, and in so doing challenge compartmentalization of Basquiat, Hyppolite, and others into the “Savage slot” (Trouillot 2003).

Since the 2010 earthquake, those with a vested interest have worked tirelessly to rebuild Haitian arts infrastructure. As with other challenges in Haiti related to stable government, affordable housing, food security, living wages, and environmental sustainability, the progress of building back the visual arts has been slow and scattered, yet optimism remains high. After its building was destroyed by the temblor, the Centre d’Art has rebuilt its facilities, re-opened its doors to local students, and taken measures to preserve, maintain, and conserve its surviving collections of art and archival material. *Ste. Trinité* Episcopal Cathedral in Port-au-Prince has been raising funds and taking practical steps towards rebuilding its edifice that include weighing options to re-install the remaining murals. *Université Quisqueya*, a private Haitian institution, has been developing a degree program to train a future generation of professionals in methods of

conservation and restoration of art and cultural patrimony. The directors and staff of the *Musée d'Art du Collège St. Pierre*, adjacent to the capital's main square and home to an important private collection of work from the Haitian Renaissance, have been raising funds and making plans to restore its original building, protect its collection, and expand its programming. In December 2017, the Ghetto Biennale will have its fifth iteration in which Haitian and expatriate artists will continue to collaborate, negotiate, and navigate through contested cultural terrain.

While these signs of progress provide a potential base from which local institutions may thrive and grow, questions related to governance and long-term financial sustainability remain. Ulysse (2015) effectively argues that Haitians find themselves at a point in which they must again take control of their own narratives in order to create new ones that go beyond the vacillating tropes of catastrophe and “exceptionality,” to again use Trouillot's term (1990a). Building and maintaining infrastructure in Haiti outside the cultural realm also remains crucial to ensure lasting local change. Without supportive institutions and people equipped to run them, Haiti will continue to attract NGOs and foreign contractors as stop-gap measures for more structurally engrained problems.

Haitians are accustomed to challenges – historical instances beyond those discussed in these pages are testament to the resiliency of Haitian people. Yet to dilute or dismiss Haiti's current levels of need under the assurance that Haitians will continue to “cope” or “make-do” as they have in the past is a complacent attitude that leads down the same discursive corridors in which ideas of “Haiti” have been historically constructed and articulated in the circulation of Haitian visual art. The visual arts can help us understand complex issues that Haitians have long grappled with and, perhaps, continue to provide a means for Haitian artists to express themselves

and enact personal agency within trying and difficult circumstances, even when the levers of power and control remain in the hands of those from distant places.

APPENDIX A: Figures



[Fig.1] Philomé Obin, *Battle Between the Cacos and the American Marines* (1949)



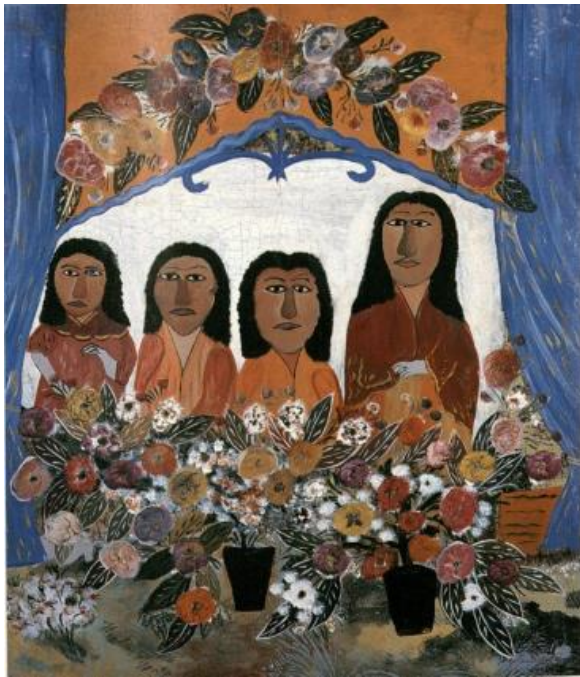
[Fig.2] Petion Savain, *Market on the Hill* (1939)



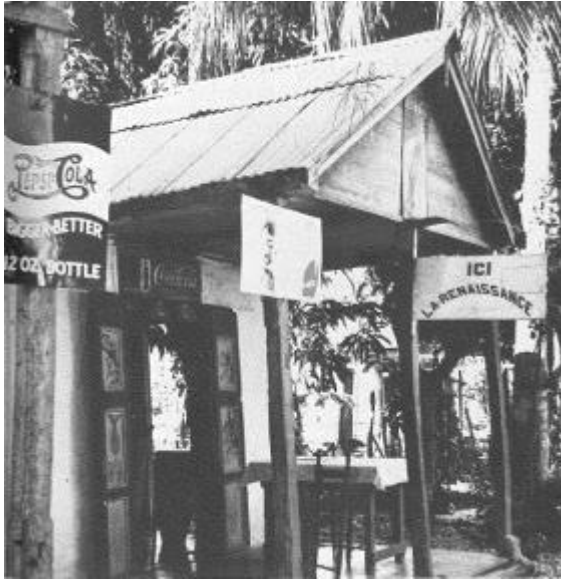
[Fig.3] Geo Remponeau, *Coconut Vendor* (1939)



[Fig.4] Philomé Obin, *Franklin D. Roosevelt Interceding in the Beyond for the Peace of the Americas* (1946)



[Fig.5] Hyppolite, *Ezili Freda and Her Sisters* (ca. 1947)



[Fig.6] Photograph of the *resto* in Mont Ruis with Hyppolite's painted doors underneath a sign announcing *Ici la Renaissance*.



[Fig.7] US Marine photo of *caco* leader Charlemagne Peralte's corpse



[Fig.8] Philomé Obin, *The Crucifixion of Charlemagne Peralte for Freedom* (1970)



[Fig.9] Tshibumba *La mort historique de Lumumba, Mpolo et Okoto le 17 Janv. 1961* (n.d.)



[Fig.10] Jacques-Enguerrand Gourgue, *The Magic Table* (1947)



[Fig.11] Luckner Lazard, *Paysage I & II* (n.d.)



[Fig. 12] Philomé Obin *Democracy at Full Speed: Élie Lescot Fleeing Quickly from the Angel of Democracy* (1946)



[Fig.13] Jasmin Joseph *Green Loa* (1950)



[Fig.14] Jasmin Joseph *Les Comediens* (1980)



[Fig.15] Installation photo of *Drapo* in *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* at UCLA Fowler Museum, 1995.



[Fig.16] *Rada* altar in in *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* at UCLA Fowler Museum, 1995.



[Fig.17] *Bizango* altar in in *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* at UCLA Fowler Museum, 1995.



[Fig.18] Installation shot of Hector Hyppolite, *The Adoration of Love* (1946-48)



[Fig.19] André Pierre, *Vodou Pantheon* (ca. 1980)



[Fig.20] André Eugène, *Military Glory* (2010)



[Fig.21] Myrlande Constant, *Haiti madi 12 janvye 2010* (2012)



[Fig.22] Radhika Khimji *Still Standing* (2015)



[Fig.23] Edgar Endress *The Story of Institutions* (2015)

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