

The Georges Liautaud Community Museum in Noailles Art Village

Barbara Prézeau

The Georges Liautaud Community Museum opened on Sunday 25 January 2009 in Noailles art village in the commune of Croix-des-Bouquets, Haiti. It was launched with funding from UNESCO in Haiti as part of an initiative from the AfricAmerica Foundation, in partnership with the Croix-des-Bouquets Artists and Artisans Association (ADAAC). The project is the culmination of their dream of creating a collective, independent venue to exhibit and conserve contemporary visual art from Haiti.

Since then, the museum has been managed by a team of volunteers. Entry is free, as are most of the activities. Events are organised at the museum with support from private patrons and international cooperation programmes, many of which are European Union initiatives.

For the last 22 years, the AfricAmerica Foundation has made a key contribution to promoting innovation in Haitian contemporary art on a national, regional and international level. The foundation has also been supporting the development of Noailles art village for the last 16 years. The initiative has led to a significant number of exhibitions, workshops and cultural exchanges within the Caribbean and with other countries around the world.

As the owner of the venue, the AfricAmerica Foundation chose to name the museum after the legendary Haitian artist, sculptor and blacksmith, Georges Liautaud, who was born in Croix-des-Bouquets on 26 January 1899 and spent his whole life there until he died in August 1992.¹

From its first opening and up to 2020, the Georges Liautaud Community Museum has organised a number of exhibitions:

- January 2009, inaugural exhibition, curated by visual artist and film director Maksaens Denis. Twenty sculptors were invited to pay tribute to Liautaud with an exhibition including works by renowned masters such as Serge Jolimeau, Jose Delpé, Falaise Péralte and Eddy Jean Rémy, along with works by less well-known artists including Charnel, Wilbert, Rony, Jean Baptiste, Jacques, Georges and Baptiste, all from Noailles in Croix-des-Bouquets. They were joined by a number of guest artists including Mario Benjamin, Karim Bléus, Casséus, Céleur, Philippe Dodard, Eugène, Gyodo, Maksaens Denis, Barbara Prézeau and Zaka, who also exhibited sculptures as well as paintings, engravings and drawings. The exhibition was completed with a special 'Georges Liautaud' room featuring a painting of the artist by Luce Turnier, family photos and objects from private collections.
- October 2009, exhibition of sculptures by Jacques Eugène, mixed techniques on paper by Barbara Prézeau and sculptures by David Boyer.

¹ Georges Liautaud: <http://www.oas.org/artsoftheamericas/georges-liautaud>

- Exhibition held as part of the Noailles arts and crafts fair organised by the ADA-AC and the AfricAmerica Foundation.
- October 2012, exhibition of Jean-Baptiste Bienaimé's Voodoo flags and beaded, sequined objects.
- October 2013, retrospective exhibition of Serge Jolimeau's work.
- November 2013, group exhibition of the work of the village's master artists, organised for the delegation to the Grand Palais exhibition in 2014.
- July 2014, group exhibition on the occasion of a visit from the President of the European Council.
- April 2015, assemblages by Etzer Pierre and cut iron sculptures by Gabriel Bien-Aimé as part of the 7th Transcultural Forum of Contemporary Art.²
- May 2016, Fuji Mukuna, a Belgian-Congolese artist.
- May 2016, closing exhibition for Europe Week in Haiti.
- December 2017, exhibition by village artists to mark a visit by European members of parliament.
- December 2020, 'Nway Kanpe!' (Rise up, Noailles!). This major exhibition of works from the Georges Liautaud Community Museum collection presented 20 artists covering several generations, ranging from the great cut iron masters (Serge Jolimeau and Gabriel Bien-Aimé) to the young winners of the Georges Liautaud Art Award, the youngest of these being Wood-Kerley Derat, who had only just turned 18.

From 2017 to 2020, the museum programme was suspended for security reasons. Since then, the community in Noailles has been living in the shadow of armed groups controlling the Cul-de-Sac Plain and the main roads leading to the border with the Dominican Republic. Amid this situation, visits to the village have ceased, the community has become isolated and the artists have experienced a loss of income. In order to cope with this, a strategy based around a series of complementing, one-off events designed to reinvigorate the museum programme has been implemented with support from partners including the Prince Claus Fund from the Netherlands, the Open Society – via the Foundation for Knowledge and Liberty (FOKAL) – and the European Union.

From 2019, the serious multidimensional crisis that brought insecurity, inflation, poor governance and mass migration of under-35s to Haiti turned attentions towards finding a more appropriate response to fight the impoverishment of the Noailles art village community. With this in mind, the creation of the contemporary art collection at the Noailles Community Museum was supplemented by a programme designed to encourage training, creation and dissemination. The project to upgrade the museum and village by establishing a contemporary art collection and related awareness-raising activities was the starting point for a campaign to protect the village and its Vodou cultural heritage. Equally, the creation of the museum's contemporary art collection may be viewed as a lasting measure that will facilitate the showcasing of works from the main Noailles village workshops.

² Organisation of the Transcultural Forum of Contemporary Art: https://www.africamerica.org/Forum-Transcultural-d-Art-Contemporain-7e-edition-2-au-12-avril-2015_a285.html

Despite the difficulties facing the museum, the programme was relaunched with a focus on three key themes:

- Training: cultural mediation, welcoming visitors, protecting and storing artworks, organising up exhibitions. Visual and digital art workshops: photography, digital, design, multimedia creation.
- Support for artistic creation: expansion of the community museum contemporary art collection and conservation activities, such as organising the storeroom, protecting artworks and completing an inventory; acquisition of works by master artists, especially works by women; creation of the Georges Liautaud Award,³ which has been awarded to ten sculptors aged under 25, whose artworks have consequently been purchased for the museum.
- Dissemination: organisation of a series of exhibitions at the Georges Liautaud Community Museum; updating of the workshop survey; organisation of open weekends; guided tours of the studios, the traditional forge and the Vodou sanctuaries.

The Georges Liautaud Community Museum collection features artworks from the latest generation of sculptors, including Falaise Péralte, Jean Eddy Rémy, Jose Delpé and Anderson Bellony.



Fig. 1 Gabriel Bien-Aimé, *Bull and Bird*, cut-out iron, 2005. 34 x17 inches. Georges Liautaud Community Museum collection. Photo Josué Azor.

³ The first activity on the programme to upgrade the Georges Liautaud Community Museum and Noailles art village – the Georges Liautaud Art Award – was a great success. From the first week in September, there was an information campaign aimed at village residents. The selection committee was made up of the following: Serge Jalimeau, Vice-President of the ADAAC and President of the committee; Gabriel Bien-Aimé, master sculptor, member of the committee; Lorraine Mangones, Director of FOKAL, member of the committee; Professor Sterlin Ulysses, Dean of IERAH/ISERSS, member of the committee; Jean Mathiot, Director of the art centre, member of the committee

Falaise Péralte was born in Noailles on 20 November 1965. For six consecutive years, he worked under the watchful eye of master sculptor Gabriel Bien-Aimé. He began to create his own artworks at the age of 21. Falaise Péralte developed a unique style as he desperately sought to develop his own personal language that would differentiate his work from the thousands of, sometimes mass-produced, pieces around. At first glance, his angular, highlighted anthropomorphic forms stand out physically with their broken, contrasting contours, bringing to mind the engraved decorations on Mesoamerican stone monuments.

Jean Eddy Rémy was born in Noailles in 1976. As a self-taught artist, he developed his own increasingly personal graphic language. Drawing on his contact with the Togolese master sculptor and designer Kossi Assou⁴ (Transcultural Forum 2006, 2011, 2015, Haiti; Ewolé 2008, Togo), Rémy began to challenge traditional cut iron techniques. His liberated style side-steps the outline stage to focus on enhancing recycled sheet metal in its raw state.

Jose Delpé was born in Croix-des-Bouquets in 1976 and died in 2014. After being introduced to the cut metal technique at a very young age by two uncles on his mother's side, he abandoned his studies in Classics after the second year and began to manufacture traditional Croix-des-Bouquets style objects to provide for himself and contribute to household expenses. Following in the footsteps of the master Gabriel Bien-Aimé, Jose Delpé's sculptures are phantasmagorical constructions on feet, representing a rupture that is both spatial and historical. Jose Delpé has also taken his quest further still, pioneering exploration of the possibilities of assemblages.

Jean Anderson Bellony was born on 13 March 1970 and grew up in Noailles. At the age of 15, he was introduced to sculpture by Michel Brutus. Bellony inherited a Vodou sanctuary that was restored in 2009 by the AfricAmerica Foundation as part of the Prince Claus Fund's Cultural Emergency Response Programme (CER). He has worked more with assemblages than cut iron, salvaging items used from everyday life – toilet bowls, basins, chamber pots and cutlery – and combining them with cut iron and natural elements, such as bones and wood. His work is characterised by the use of abandoned enamelled objects, which he restores with a certain sense of humour.

The Village of Noailles: an Open-Air Museum

Noailles is unique in the Caribbean context. The village community plays an active role in preserving its own distinctive cultural heritage. In 2008, the community founded the Croix-des-Bouquets Artists and Artisans Association (ADAAC) to work towards the village's sustainable development. The art of hand-cut iron is Noailles's main economic resource and attracts large numbers of visitors. The community is proud of this heritage, to which it attributes a great deal of value and significance.

The Croix-des-Bouquets Artists and Artisans Association (ADAAC) has 60 members, including a committee of women from Noailles. The association works to encourage social

⁴ <https://ina-contemporary.art/fr/art/contemporary-art/kossi-assou-pioneer-of-african-design/?amp>

and economic development in the village, as well as representing the artisans in Haiti and overseas. From 2008 onwards, a number of initiatives have been launched in Noailles, including 'Kore Atis ak Atizan',⁵ which aims to promote the village as a cultural tourism destination. Until 2017, the village welcomed visitors and buyers on a daily basis.

A pilot committee has been set up, as part of the project to improve the village. In addition to the Croix-des-Bouquets Artists and Artisans Association (ADAAC), the committee also includes village leaders, oungan,⁶ pastors, youth associations and local authorities. The ADAAC and the pilot committee work together on activities promoting Noailles art village and its hand-cut iron artwork. It also takes care of procedures such as registration on the Intangible Cultural Heritage List (ICH).



Fig. 2. Georges Liautaud Community Museum. Photo Maksuens Denis

Hand-cut iron is closely linked to the magical and religious world of Vodou and brings together original techniques, know-how, methods and procedures that have been developed in Noailles. This has led to it being included on the National Land Use Plan (SNAT). The document states:

The village of Noailles, located to the east of Port-au-Prince in the commune of Croix-des-Bouquets, is a true 'cluster' of small and medium-sized enterprises working in the hand-cut iron arts and crafts sector and developing unique techniques for producing iron objects, it is recognised as the birthplace of the art of cut iron. Noailles has produced almost eight generations of artists and artisans known as 'blacksmith-sculptors' and is currently home to around 75 artists' and artisans' studios. This unique skill has given rise to numerous other activities and associated small workshops, including ironware workshops (small factories making beds, gates, furniture, etc.), carpentry workshops, sewing workshops and workshops belonging to 'beaders' who make the Vodou flags that are now known around the world. (SNAT 2015: 115).⁷

5 Translation from Haitian Creole: support for artists and artisans.

6 Haitian Vodou priest.

7 Ministry of Planning and External Cooperation of the Republic of Haiti (2015). National Land Use Plan.

The art of cut iron in Noailles is also part of Haiti's intangible cultural heritage, appearing on the Inventory of Intangible Heritage of Haiti (IPIMH) produced as part of an ad hoc partnership between the Haitian government and Laval University in Quebec.⁸ In addition, it is featured on the list of 60 traditional products drawn up by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).



Fig. 3 Jose Delpe, *Tree*, 2005, sculpture recycled metal, 79 x 42 x 42 inches, detail. Georges Liautaud Community Museum Collection. Photo Josué Azor.

Launched in 2020, the Noailles Art Village and Georges Liautaud Community Enhancement Project falls under the Haitian government's cultural policy and is based on a public-private partnership between the Ministry of Culture, the artist and artisan community in Noailles and the AfricAmerica Foundation.

The 80 workshops in Noailles produce works that are generally monochrome, made from carefully buffed and varnished metal. The scenes and motifs used are drawn from a fantastical iconography, where plants, people and mythical animals metamorphose into each other, echoing a rich oral tradition made up of beliefs, stories, songs and proverbs. In this way, the system of representation employed in this type of art reflects this rural community's entire worldview, philosophy and relationship with the sacred and their environment. Noailles is an important site for Vodou, a practice inherited from the Atlantic slave trade. The origin of cut iron artwork dates back to the 18th century when the first sugarcane plantation was founded in Noailles in the commune of Croix-des-Bouquets; blacksmiths played an essential role in the plantation's operations. Until the mid-20th century, they produced funeral decorations and crosses with motifs made from wrought and cut iron. From the 1950s onwards, the master sculptors in Noailles developed a unique style and artistic language, which shaped both the form and content of their work. Some artists won international

8 <http://www.ipimh.org/fiche-fer-decoupe-villagenoailles-croix-des-34.html>

renown and their work is featured in prestigious museum collections. The first internationally recognised sculptor, Georges Liautaud, was a product of this tradition which is at once historical, utilitarian and decorative. Carried by his momentum, the three Louisjuste brothers and the sculptor Murat Brierre helped open new workshops and create a third generation of artists, including Serge Jolimeau and Gabriel Bien-Aimé. Liautaud and Bien-Aimé participated in the exhibition *Magicians of the Earth* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 1989. The number of workshops continued to grow and new talents emerged. Their artistic language has given rise to a genuine folk art.



Fig. 4 Workshop Serge Jolimeau. Photo Maksuens Denis



Fig. 5 Workshop Ajoupa. Photo Maksuens Denis

The tradition continues to be passed down through a system of apprenticeships; in recent years young people from different regions of the country have been able to learn the technique. The absence of mechanical processes and industrial power tools makes every cut iron object produced in Noailles unique. The rudimentary technique provides a guarantee against mass production and a criterion for judging

the quality of its execution. It is closely intertwined with the blacksmith profession, which not only gave rise to the technique but also supplies the tools used by the sculptors. The Maîtres Bruno use their forge to make the agricultural tools and instruments prized by cut iron sculptors. According to the family's oral tradition, this valuable cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, has belonged to them since 1802. It stands as a witness to a unique past, the only forge in the village of Noailles in Croix-des-Bouquets is among the last of its kind still operating in the Caribbean.



Fig. 6 Artisans working. Photo Maksuens Denis



Fig. 7 Artisans at work. Photo Maksuens Denis

The Bruno brothers learned their trade from their father, Providence Bruno. With its anvil, ancient tools, tongs and hammers, the forge symbolically unites the West African blacksmith guilds with the 'machorquet'⁹ workshops of the Cul-de-Sac Plain

⁹ On the role of the machorquet: Cauna, Jacques de (1987). *Au temps des Isles à Sucre*. Paris, Karthala.

sugar plantations and thence present-day Haiti. The blacksmith profession and the physical presence of the forge are associated with the Haitian Vodou god Ogou Feray, who is also linked to warlike exploits. Ricoeur Bruno is also a sculptor, following in the footsteps of Georges Lioutaud to transform iron into mythical or anthropomorphic creatures or animals.

Present and Future Challenges

Cut iron sculptors in Noailles have been savvy enough to diversify and adapt to different markets. Their work can be classified on a wide spectrum ranging from unique art object with incalculable intrinsic value to utilitarian craftsmanship, with arts and crafts somewhere in the middle.¹⁰ It combines a series of art and craft practices, from design to iron cutting and painting. Iron is not an abundant resource in Haiti, so the artisans in Noailles have developed an original technique for recycling the barrels used to transport flammable oil products by sea. There is a small but significant risk that the raw material will become still rarer in the future. Meanwhile, the fame and success of cut ironwork from Noailles make it a target for counterfeit production. Creations designed in Noailles are copied elsewhere in Haiti, as well as in Southeast Asia. In order to address the issue, the Haitian government and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in particular are putting the finishing touches to a plan to list 'Noailles art village' as a Controlled Designation of Origin (AOC).

Moreover, growing demand for mass-produced crafts meeting the standards of American department stores, such as the Macy's chain, pose a risk to the originality of the creations in favour of more decorative, less distinctive products.

Since 2004 the workshops of Noailles have been inventoried, classified and mapped in the Inventory of Art and Craft Projects (RPAA) established by the AfricaAmerica Foundation on behalf of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Three successive surveys conducted in 2008, 2011 and 2016 have updated the data. An additional survey is currently underway (2022) with support from the Prince Claus Fund, but a lack of interest from the government in obtaining sectoral statistics is hindering analytical considerations. Despite this, in 2011, the Haitian government's Ministry of Planning and External Cooperation approved the project to develop and enhance the village. A 4.5-million dollar investment by the Haitian government covered works to install basic infrastructure and provide social support for residents.

While the measures currently in place help safeguard the cut iron technique, it is its potential in terms of job creation and economic development that mobilises the local and national authorities, who have been alerted to the situation by the crisis raging in the region. The village's heritage value merits enhancement and improved promotion. The dialogue between the public authorities and members of the ADAAC and the community in Noailles must move up a notch, with more frequent

¹⁰ Arts and crafts differ from utilitarian craftsmanship, producing objects intended for decorative purposes. See 'Diagnostic stratégique des filières entrepreneuriales à fort potentiel de croissance', a study by SSSF Artisanat d'Art. Final report by Danielle SAINT-LOT, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, January 2007.

meetings where the purpose, challenges and consequences of registering the village on the Intangible Cultural Heritage List are clearly explained. Registration on the list is feasible, as long as the Haitian government provides the necessary resources to reinforce this action at different levels:

- Firstly, security in the region and a return to normal life must be guaranteed. Since 2019, the threat level has soared. The community has become a target for violence by armed groups;¹¹
- The village's heritage value should be enhanced;
- Dialogue between the public authorities responsible for the village's registration on the list and the ADAAC beneficiaries and Noailles community must be strengthened;
- The risk of overbidding on the price of raw materials must be minimised;
- 'Noailles art village' should be registered as a Controlled Designation of Origin (AOC) by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Finally, the National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO must provide effective coordination with a strengthened mandate and additional resources, especially material resources.

Bibliography

Cauna, Jacques de, *Au temps des Isles à Sucre*. Paris : Kartala, 1987.

Debien, Gabriel, *L'esclavage aux Antilles Françaises (XVIIème-XIIIème siècles)*. Fort-de-France, Basse-Terre : Société d'histoire de la Martinique et Société d'histoire de La Guadeloupe, 1974.

Desquiron, Lilas, *Les racines du vodou*. Port-au-Prince : Éditions Henry Deschamps, 1990.

Fondation AfricAmérica, *Actualisation du Répertoire des Projets Artistiques et Artisanaux (RPAA)*. Croix-des-Bouquets : Fondation AfricAmérica, 2020 (Catálogo da exposição Nway Kanpé I, 2016).

Fouchard, Jean, *Langue et littérature des Aborigènes d'Ayiti*. Port-au-Prince : Henri Deschamps, 1988.

Fouchard, Jean, *Les marrons du Syllabaire*. Port-au-Prince : Henry Deschamps, 1988.

Fouchard, Jean, *Plaisirs de Saint Domingue*. Port-au-Prince : Henry Deschamps, 1988.

Girod, François, *La vie quotidienne de la Société Créole (Saint Domingue XVIIIème, siècle)*. Paris : Hachette, 1972.

Haitian Art. New York : The Brooklyn Museum, 1972.

Hurbon, Laennec. *Dieu dans le vodou haïtien*. Paris : Maisonneuve et Larose, 1972.

11 https://www.change.org/p/gouvernement-haitien-appel-aux-autorit%C3%A9s-ha%C3%AFiennes-pour-mettre-fin-%C3%A0-la-violence-des-gangs-arm%C3%A9s?recruiter=1171616163&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=facebook&utm_campaign=psf_combo_share_initial&recruited_by_id=a49e3020-4cc9-11eb-b261-cf-3ce99aa5f9&utm_content=fht-31027047-fr-fr%3A0

Moreau de Saint-Mery, Médéric-Louis, *Description Topologique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la partie Française de l'Isle de Saint-Domingue*. Paris : Société de l'Histoire des Colonies Françaises, 1956.

Ministère de la Planification et de la Coopération Internationale de la République d'Haïti. *Schéma National d'Aménagement du Territoire*. Port-au-Prince, 2015.

Ministère du Commerce et de l'Industrie de la République d'Haïti, Programme des Nations Unies pour le développement en Haïti (PNUD Haïti). *Produits typiques d'Haïti. Les potentialités économiques*. Port-au-Prince : MCI/PNUD Haïti, 2014.

Stephenson, Barbara. *Amélioration de la capacité du secteur de l'artisanat en Haïti pour répondre à la demande du marché mondial. Etablissement de la ligne de base*. Port-au-Prince : Banque Interaméricaine de Développement (BID), 2014.

List of URLs

<http://www.ipimh.org/fiche-fer-decoupe-villagenoailles-croix-des-34.html>

<https://www.icihaiti.com/article-27799-icihaiti-noailles-les-oeuvres-en-fer-decoupe-protégées-par-la-loi.html>

https://www.africamerica.org/Forum-Transculturel-d-Art-Contemporain-7e-edition-2-au-12-avril-2015_a285.html

<https://www.icihaiti.com/article-27799-icihaiti-noailles-les-oeuvres-en-fer-decoupe-protégées-par-la-loi.html>

<https://www.lecentredart.org/portail-de-lart-haitien/les-artistes/serge-jolimeau>

https://www.change.org/p/gouvernement-haitien-appel-aux-autorit%C3%A9s-ha%C3%AFtiennes-pour-mettre-fin-%C3%A0-la-violence-des-gangs-arm%C3%A9s?recruiter=1171616163&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=facebook&utm_campaign=psf_combo_share_initial&recruited_by_id=a49e3020-4cc9-11eb-b261-cf3ce99aa-5f9&utm_content=fht-31027047-fr-fr%3A0

https://www.croixdesbouquets.net/Un-conte-revolutionnaire_a24.html

<https://www.croixdesbouquets.net/attachment/139224>

https://www.africamerica.org/Valorisation-du-Musee-Communautaire-Georges-Liautaud-et-du-Village-Artistique-de-Noailles_a327.html

<https://lenouvelliste.com/article/224548/ricoeur-et-saint-louis-bruno-du-village-de-noailles-deux-des-derniers-forgerons-de-la-caraiibe>

<http://www.oas.org/artsoftheamericas/georges-liautaud>

Call for Solidarity

The Association of Artists and Artisans of Croix-des-Bouquets (ADAAC), the Odette Roy Fombrun Foundation (FORF), Kay Atizan and the AfricAmerica Foundation denounce once again the acts of atrocities suffered by the inhabitants and artisans of the Noailles Village of Croix-des-Bouquets because of the gang war.

The invasion of the Torcel gang led by Vitelhomme Innocent in order to confront his rival "400 mawozo", caused at least 15 deaths in the artistic village of Noailles, located in Croix-des-Bouquets, in the western department of Haiti. In addition, a dozen houses were burned by the invading gang, causing the flight of a hundred families from the said Village. Loss of life and material damage were revealed by the organizations Africamérica and ADAAC, flying to the aid of the survivors (*Le Facteur Haïti*, 20/10/2022).

<https://laquestionnews.com/plus-dune-douzaine-de-personnes-tuees-par-des-gangs-armes-a-noailles/>

The last news was that the village elder, Serge Jolimeau, was hospitalized. His home was visited by two different gangs who held them for ransom and looted them. He barely escaped and was not kidnapped. Three vodou shrines were also damaged.

The Bel-Air neighborhood and the Village of Noailles in Haiti are important places of Haitian art. Their disappearance would have disastrous human and economic consequences. Help them repair and rebuild by making a donation. Any amount will make a difference. Thank you in advance for your solidarity.

We are launching an emergency appeal for donations to accompany these families who have been victims since October 12, 2022. Your help in cash or in kind is essential: bank transfer, tools for the artists victims, food support to the families, rent or repair of housing or the funeral of the victims.

We count on your solidarity, generosity and benevolence.

https://www.gofundme.com/f/solidarity-with-belair-noailles-artists-haiti?utm_campaign=p_cf+share-flow-1&utm_medium=copy_link&utm_source=customer