# *AYITI TOMA II: FAITH, FAMILY, AND RESISTANCE*


November 2, 2024 –
January 11, 2025

Organized by
Tomm El-Saieh

LUHRING
AUGUSTINE

Cover:
Philome Obin
*Le cèlébre Artiste Peintre*
*Ph. Obin & Issa El-Saieh*

"Haitian painting will drink the blood of the phoenix. And, with the epaulets of Dessalines, it will ventilate the world."

– André Breton

# Dedication

To Issa El-Saieh, my grandfather, who first championed André Pierre's divine visions and whose legacy affirms the unbroken lineage of family, faith, and creative resistance that defines *Ayiti Toma II*. To my family, whose steadfast support mirrors the strength and continuity of kinship within Haitian culture; to the Lwa, the Zansèt, and the Guédé spirits—among them Baron Samedi and Gran Brigitte, who, as André Pierre reminds us, are the final judges, the keepers of wit and wisdom, waiting for us all.

In continuing Issa's tradition, I am privileged to stand with artists who shape and preserve the Haitian artistic canon. To Myrlande Constant and her family, including her son, Feret Charles, whose intricately beaded *drapo* have transformed Vodou cosmology into living, breathing art. Together, we broke new ground, with Myrlande's first solo exhibitions both in Haiti at El-Saieh Gallery and later in the United States at CENTRAL FINE.

To Frantz Zéphirin, a dear friend, mentor, and light in the shadowed hours, whose boundless humor and wisdom have guided me through my darkest and most challenging times—even as he carried his own. With wit and artistry, he confronts despair, transmuting sorrow into light, and resistance into laughter.

To Jean Hérard Celeur, a friend and collaborator, whose resilience and unbreakable spirit inspire me. His approach to art is nothing short of fearless—taking discarded materials and transforming them into divine expressions of protection and defiance. In a world that often imposes limits, his work is a declaration of freedom and possibility.





On this Fèt Gede, November 1—a day to honor the spirits and the departed—a day that also marks the anniversary of the murder of Charlemagne Péralte. His presence in this exhibition, through his portrait and a depiction of his crucifixion, stands as a lasting symbol of Haitian resistance and defiance.

To the late artists in this exhibition—each a guardian of Haitian memory and innovation:

- To André Pierre and Hector Hyppolite, whose portrayals of the divine transcend mere image, conjuring worlds between the earthly and the spiritual.
- To Georges Liautaud and his student Murat Brierre, metalwork pioneers who saw in discarded iron the potential for reverence and resistance.
- To the Obin Family—Philomé and Sénèque Obin—whose scenes of daily life and resistance evoke the heartbeat of Haitian identity.
- To Luce Turnier, whose intimate portraits of family and neighbors capture the elegance and resilience woven through the Caribbean soul.

And, above all, to the people of Haiti, especially those who create dangerously, enduring and expressing amidst struggle. To the Taíno people, whose name *Ayiti*—the land of high mountains—continues to inspire, and whose spirit lives on in this dedication to resilience, reverence, and renewal.

Ayibobo,
Tomm El-Saieh

# Hector Hyppolite (1894 –1948)


Hector Hyppolite
*New Year's Day*, 1947

Hector Hyppolite
*La Sirène*

# Obin's Cacos

Philomé Obin's Cacos are moving across time, riding across a river in 1911, ambushing a troop of U.S. Marines during the wars of 1918-1919, their leader Charlemagne Péralte martyred and mourned. By bringing together these images, this exhibit invites us to see Obin as a visual historian of the story of war and resistance in the north of Haiti during the first decades of the twentieth century.

Though they are best known for their resistance to the U.S. occupation of Haiti, Caco armies were a feature of Haitian political life starting in the late nineteenth century. Formed in different parts of the country, they sometimes marched on the capital of Port-au-Prince to oppose the central government, or to put one of their own leaders in the presidential palace. The *Rebels of Leconte* portrayed by Obin crossing over a bridge in 1911 were one such Caco army.

When the U.S. occupied Haiti in 1915, the tactics that had been used in internal struggles were turned to new uses. The army officer Charlemagne Péralte was one of a small number of Haitian military figures who refused to surrender to the U.S. and began to plot resistance to the occupation. Though isolated and largely outnumbered at first, the Cacos gained new recruits once the U.S. began using forced labor in the countryside to build roads. Haitians had long worried that foreigners would invade their country seeking to re-establish some form of slavery, and the actions of the U.S. seemed like the realization of those fears. Using their knowledge of the terrain and the support of the population, the Cacos began attacking U.S. Marines in ambushes like the one depicted by Obin.


Philomé Obin
*Les Cacos de Leconte*

Laurent Dubois

The U.S. responded with counter-insurgency tactics, including one of the first bombing campaigns aimed at civilian populations in history, and an infiltrator was able to sneak into a Caco camp and kill Péralte. His body, naked but for a loin cloth, was put on display in Le Cap and a photograph of the corpse was reproduced and distributed by the Marines, including through airdrops, to frighten the Cacos and the supporters into submission. Perhaps unintentionally, the Marine photographer had created an image that was immediately interpreted in the way that Obin explicitly describes it in his painting, as *Crucifixion*, with Péralte mourned by his weeping mother. Though the U.S. ultimately was able to largely overcome Caco resistance, Péralte became an icon of resistance then and since.

In Obin's works we see this story come to life, the Cacos as individuals mobilizing to defend their communities and country, fighting and dying, dreaming too of a different future. ■

Portrait of Charlemagne Péralte

Photograph of Charlemagne Péralte's Crucifixion, 1919
Photographer unknown

Philomé Obin
*Skirmish between the men of Gal Valev St. Amour*

# Philomé Obin (1892 – 1986)


Philomé Obin
*Charlemagne Péralte*

Philomé Obin
*The Crucifixion of Charlemagne Péralte*

Philomé Obin
*Deguises du Carnaval 1952*
*Au Cap Haitian*

# Sénèque Obin
# (1893 – 1977)

Sénèque Obin
*Masonic Funeral*

# André Pierre (1914 – 2005)

“I started school at 10 and left at 13, at 14 I started working. I worked on the land, at 46 I started painting. I represent the spirits, who bring vodou, who control voudou and the world. Because vodou is a kind of cultural label which people give my country

– André Pierre

André Pierre, Haiti
Photo: Stuart Rome

Andre Pierre
*Traitement Mystiquel de Erzuly par Agouè*

André Pierre
*Ceremony with Issa and Suz*

“God and Legba, it’s all the same.”

– André Pierre

André Pierre, Haiti
Photo: Stuart Rome


André Pierre
*Dambala*



# Alpha & Omega: Mystic Twins & the Lord & The Lady of Death

Kyrah Malika Daniels, Ph.D. Emory University

Haitian Vodou is, first and foremost, an ancestral tradition. As a religion, a philosophy, and a worldview, Vodou is grounded primarily in tenets of sacred healing that work to maintain balance and rhythm within the cosmos. Vodou emerged from the religious collisions and cohesions between spiritual traditions of Fon/Dahomey nations (current day Benin and Togo), Nago/Anago nations (Yorùbáland, Nigeria), and Kongo nations (Angola, Congo-Brazzaville, and Congo-Kinshasa), Indigenous beliefs of the Taíno (the original inhabitants of Hispaniola), and Catholic and European mysticism of the French and Spanish. A pantheon of 101 or 401 spirits (*lwa*) and ancestors (*zansèt*) in Vodou are deeply valued as mediators between humans and the Creator spirit, known as Bondye or Olowoum. In exchange for devotees' ritual tributes, the spirits and ancestors act on behalf of the community in the mortal world.

Africans in the Americas were not permitted to practice their ancestral traditions for fear it would lead to insurrection, as was the case in Haiti's successful slave revolt of 1804. As a result of this religious oppression, many enslaved citizens of the French and Spanish colonies masked their spirits in the guise of Catholic saints, who similarly took charge of different components of everyday life. On Vodou altars and in sacred art today, one sees Catholic saints depicted, each denoting a *lwa* with whom he or she shares physical attributes or character traits. Haiti has a complex historical relationship with Vodou, which has experienced tremendous persecution in its 200-year history. Historically and today, many Haitians deny any affiliation with Vodou because of their adherence to Catholicism or Protestantism and the stigma associated with the ancestral tradition. However, even these Haitians have grown up

André Pierre
*Baron Samedi*

well-versed in a nation "socialized" by Vodou, much in the same way that U.S. Americans, regardless of personal creed, remain socialized as Judeo-Christian. For Haitians raised in a nation of ritual carnival rhythms, sacred proverbs, and powerful visual arts featuring religious themes, we can assert that everyone has been indoctrinated into the social (if not spiritual) aspects of Vodou.

André Pierre's portraits of the *lwa* always bring Vodou's spirits great depth and dimension. Featured here are Grann Brijit, Queen of the Gede spiritual nation, and her husband, the boisterous Lord of the Dead, Bawon Samdi. They are dressed regally in their signature colors of black, white and purple. Bawon Samdi wears a sharp black tuxedo and tall top hat adorned with the motif of a skull and crossbones. A thin bamboo cane hangs elegantly over his right arm, and a black rooster sits proudly in his left hand. He sports a flowered brooch and several pins that signal his induction as a Black Free Mason, as many male Vodou devotees carry ties to the fraternal lodges. Behind Bawon is a raised tombstone with a large crucifix, covered at the base with ample offerings for the dead. Grann Brijit appears as a queen, with luxurious purple robes kissing her bejeweled feet and textured fabrics crowning her head. An elder matriarch in the realm of the dead, Grann Brijit is known as a gifted clairvoyant with a wicked sense of humor, as Gede's children are always playing pranks on their elders. Her royal dress takes on quilt-like qualities, as both her and her husband's names appear inscribed in the folds of her long garb. Pierre's portraits humanize the Queen and Lord of the Dead rather than creating the fearsome imagery of Hollywood. Indeed, these paintings suggest that the dead are never far from the mortal world, and cannot be forgotten in an ancestral African tradition.

Vodou's ritual flags, known as *drapo*, are danced in ceremonies to honor the spirits who protect the spiritual community. Historically, they were simply sewn together as different colored cloths, but devotees began decorating them more elaborately with sequins and seed beads in the twentieth

André Pierre
*Gran Brigitte Lo Croix*

century. Myrlande Constant emerged as a trailblazer in ritual flag making in the 1980s and 1990s, drawing from her skills as a wedding dress seamstress. Her *drapo* included new beads—bugle beads, pearl beads, and primarily seed beads—which allowed for greater precision in rendering detailed portraits.

In Constant's *Marasa 3*, we encounter the sacred principle of multiplicity. Marasa means twins in Haiti but can also refer to mystically powerful and "uncanny" children, including babies born with a caul, the umbilical cord around their necks, albinos, and breech babies—all children understood to have supernatural powers. *Marasa 3* refers to triplets and also the child who follows twins known as *Dosou* (if male) and *Dosa* (if female), regarded as equally powerful. In this portrait, we encounter a pair of identical twins on the far left and right, and another figure in the center. The twins framing the flag can be identified in their parallel asymmetry with similar brown skin tones, jet black hair falling to their shoulders, long blue or gold gowns, and colorful *vèvè* (sacred symbols) that dance above their heads. The center figure stands out for several reasons: she is crowned with a floral wreath around her head and noticeably, she is light-skinned with blonde hair. Unlike her adjoining sisters, her upper body is rendered with distinct beadwork, including seed beads and brightly reflective bugle beads, giving her an otherworldly aura. Could this third figure be an albino *Dosa* or a lighter-skinned sister with a different parent? Or recognizing her central position, could she be a deceased triplet or *Dosa* who now resides in *Afrik-Ginen*, the ancestral realm of spirits? In their conjoined heart center, several symbols bring the sisters together: an anchor, a leafy vine, a crucifix, and a flaming heart. In particular, the cross and flaming heart remind us of the Catholic imagery present even today in Vodou *drapo*. Gazing in multiple directions, the *Marasa 3* sisters encourage us to remember that in the midst of twins, triplets, and other mystic children, we all walk in the presence of angels and spirits. ■


Myrlande Constant
*Marasa 3*

# Myrlande Constant

"Without a flag, a shrine is useless. With a flag, a shrine has power and strength."

– André Pierre


Myrlande Constant
*Danbalah Eaidahwedo*

Myrlande Constant and Family, Haiti
Photo: Maggie Steber

Myrlande Constant, Haiti
Photo: Maggie Steber

Myrlande Constant
*Gueoearous Soumazaca*


Myrlande Constant
*Santa Marta La Dominadora*


Myrlande Constant
*Marinet Tebois ChéChé*

Myrlande Constant
*La Sirène*

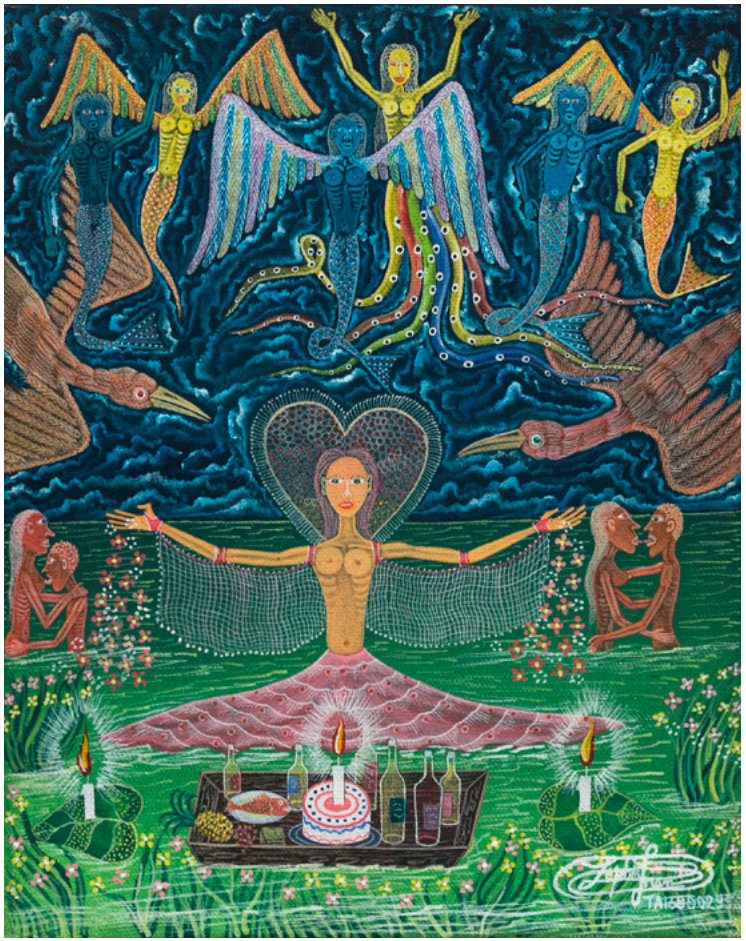
# Frantz Zéphirin

Frantz Zéphirin
*The 7th Dimension*

"Look closely in every person, there is an animal: a monkey, an elephant, a crocodile, a giraffe... I see them in gesture, an attitude, a character trait, and immediatley fix them on the canvas."

– Frantz Zéphirin

Frantz Zéphirin
*La Descente de L'esprit de la Resurrection*



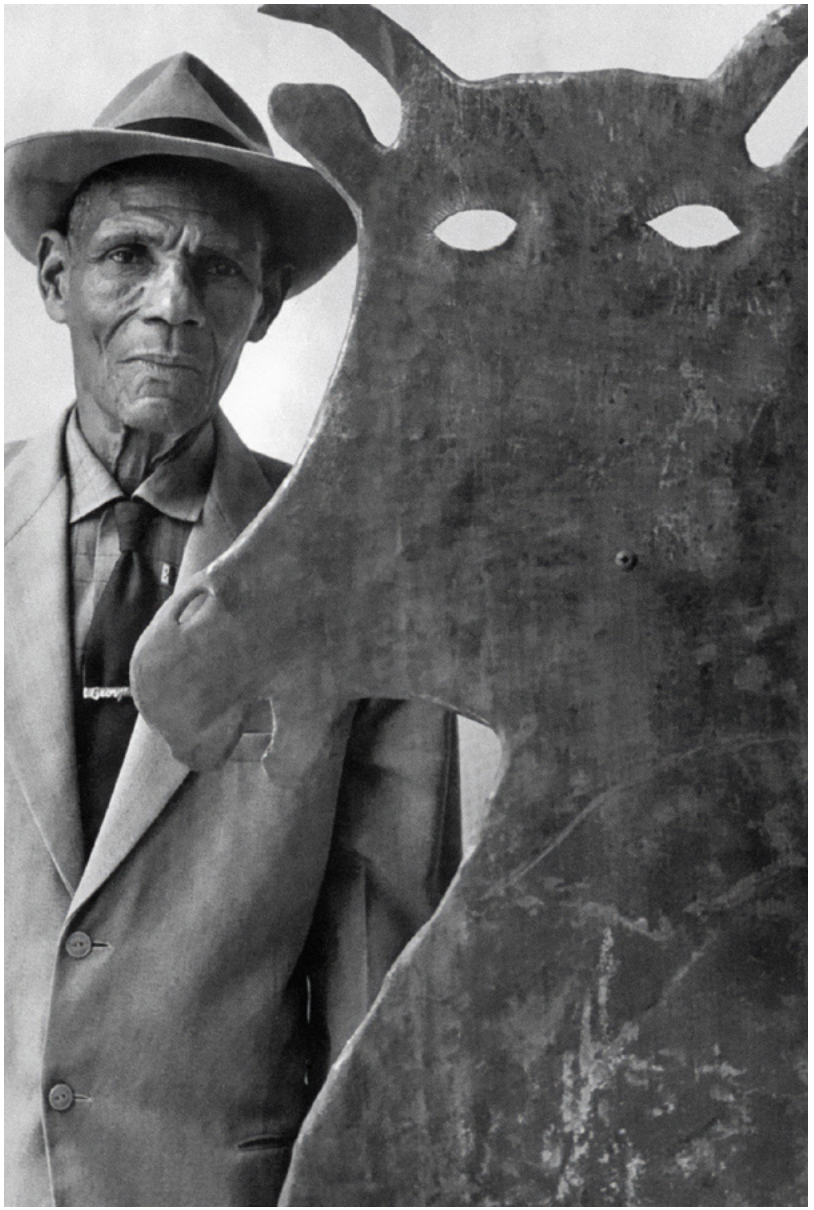
Frantz Zéphirin
*Offering to Erzulie*

# Luce Turnier
# (1924 – 1994)

Luce Turnier
*Portrait of a man*

Luce Turnier
*Femme Assie*

# Georges Liautaud (1899 – 1991)



Portrait of Georges Liautaud
Photo by William Grigsby
Courtesy of Randall Morris












# Murat Brierre
# (1938 – 1988)

# Jean Hérard Celeur

Jean Hérard Celeur
*Zwazo*

"My *Zwazo* travel beyond borders. I give them wings so they can fly, as a Haitian we are denied acces to travel"

– Jean Hérard Celeur

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