

# Creative Living

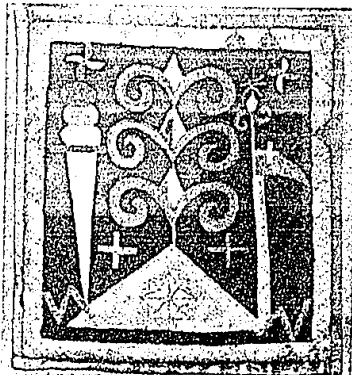
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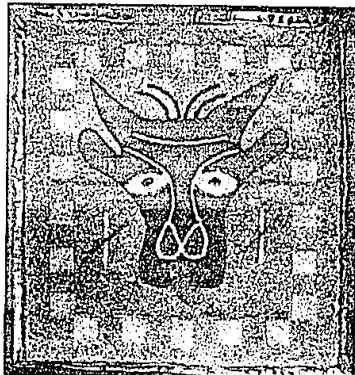


Thursday, February 23, 1984 O&E

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Among the Haitian banners at Yaw Gallery is the abstract design of swords and flags at left which honors "Ogou," warrior god whose symbol is a saber or mas-



chote. The one at right with the bull symbolizes "Bosou," a fierce and unfriendly spirit.

## Haitian art — puzzling, naive, sophisticated

By Corinne Abatt  
staff writer

Pure coincidence brings two shows of Haitian art to this area simultaneously. "The Voodoo Banners of Haiti" are at Yaw Gallery of Birmingham through Thursday, March 8, and "Master Painters of Haiti" in the collection of Siri von Reis at Meadow Brook Art Gallery, on the Oakland University campus, continues through March.

In purely aesthetic terms, both shows are exciting and fulfilling to be enjoyed with or without background understanding of the country and its people.



"Coubite: The Haitian Work-Feet" is a complicated painting whose every line seems to have a double function, even the lower tree branch which becomes a path for water carriers.

As intriguing as anything in both art forms, the beaded banners and the paintings, is the combination of naive and sophistication. Inherent in many of these people, descendants of slaves brought to Haiti from Africa in the 16th and 17th centuries, is a wonderful sense of design and color and a sensitivity of expression. Couple these with what we think of as strange, sometimes, but not always, primitive ritualistic symbolism and the result is highly compelling art.

The banners at Yaw Gallery (there are several in the Meadow Brook Gallery show, also) are made of sequins and glass beads sewn in patterns on cloth, bound and used at the head of religious processions, then put away.

Yaw Gallery owner, William Zolowski, said, "They were used like signs — announcements to signify the spirit or spirits to which a particular group or society was aligned."

Since many of the Haitians are descendants of the Fon and Yoruba people from Dahomey and Nigeria, known for fine beadwork, this heritage is reflected in the craftsmanship in the banners. This is exquisite, precision work, full of symbols and pictures, glitter and drama.

THE PAINTINGS tell so much about the life of the Haitians that it becomes a lesson in understanding. But, aside from that, the works are strong, full of imagination and excitement.

The symmetry and balance in "Coubite" by Gerard Valcin creates a feeling of movement and unity that immediately draws the viewer into the work. The lines of workers and their tools, even the veins in the tree leaves, direct the eye to the center of the work.

Kichi Usui, curator of the Meadow Brook Art Gallery, said it took this collection to convince him to show Haitian art.

"I was strictly responding on the basis of quality and from that point of view, I'm very proud to present this collection."

If nothing else could completely convince him of the collection's merit, the paintings by Rigaud Benoit did, specifically Benoit's "Fruits of the Earth," oil on masonite. This handsome work, exacting in its detail and plan, seems rooted in mythology and, like many in the exhibition, has a surreal quality. "Adam and Eve," another work by Benoit, is equally impressive.

"Visit to the Departed," by Valcin, is a veritable tour de force. The custom of visiting the site where the caskets are kept (above ground) isn't particularly depressing because the large crowd of visitors is so fascinating. Each person in the crowd has an identity, and in spite of the number of elements, composition and unity are strong.

"MANIFESTATION" des Chats a Noel, oil on masonite by Joseph Jamin, is one of many with a strong folklore theme. In this one, all the cats have gathered in a kind of frenzy, dreading the holiday when they are likely to end up in the soup pot.

Hector Hypolite, a Voodoo priest, is the best known painter in the group. And his works substantiate his reputation.

There is much to look at in this show. The details of the paintings are interesting. Bits and pieces of other cultures are present, even snatches of American quilt designs. These are even more apparent in the banners at Yaw Gallery.

What about that Masonic funeral pictured in one of the paintings? And why are there Masonic symbols on many of the banners? What does the cross-hatch design on the banners mean?

Since the Centre d'Art was founded in 1944 in Port-au-Prince, painting has become a mainstay of the Haitian life.

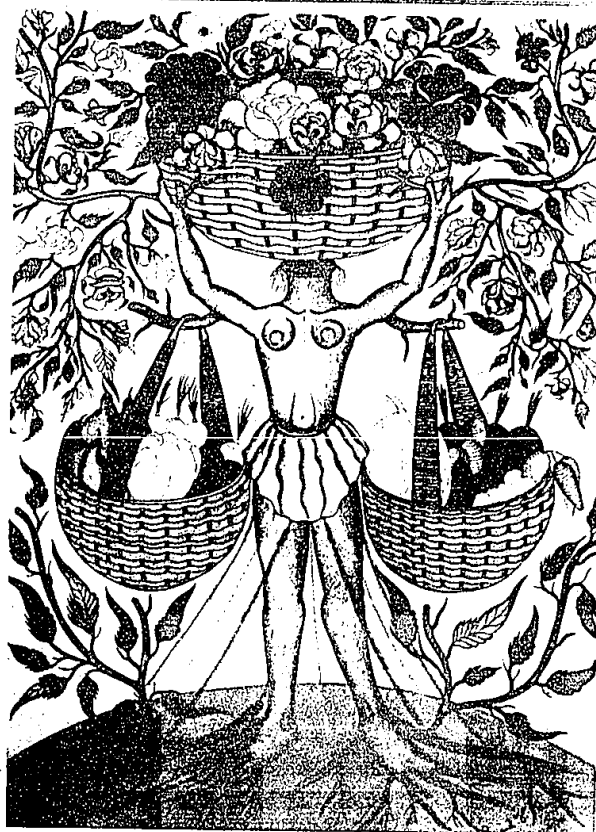
Still, the Haitian artist who has been exposed to great Western art and who has had training is not necessarily the most effective. Training or not, it goes back to that inherent sense of color and design.

Without ever having visited Haiti, Siri von Reis, now of New York City, formerly of Grosse Pointe and Rochester, collected this art because she felt it was quality. And she's right.

From 3-5 p.m. Tuesday, March 6, Ute Stebbich will give a program along with a film, "Divine Horseman" and 3-5 p.m. on Tuesday, March 13, Charlotte Stokes, professor of art, Oakland University, will speak in conjunction with the showing of a film, "Haitian Song." Both of these programs will be at Meadow Brook Art Gallery.

Meadow Brook Art Gallery, Oakland University campus, Rochester, is open 1-5 p.m. Tuesday-Friday and 1-5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

Yaw Gallery, 550 N. Woodward, Birmingham, is open 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday.



"Fruits of the Earth," above, by Rigaud Benoit, is oil on masonite, done in 1970. The colors of this 34-by-24-inch piece are brilliant. At left is "Mystic Marriage," by Hector Hypolite, a Voodoo priest. It is based on the story of the spirit that took the form of a woman to marry a mortal. In the painting her dress is lavender and white. Her face brings Gauguin to mind.



## Trio's program highlights week

If we find ourselves overwhelmed with musical events this time of the year, part of the blame lies with the Renaissance Concerts series. There are 16 at Orchestra Hall in the current season.

The founder of the series, violinist Misha Rachlevsky, is a busy man, indeed. Next season, upon his resignation from the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, he will devote more of his energies toward this rewarding series. But, even now, with all his other obligations, Rachlevsky's achievements are impressive.

When a person of his ability combines his talent with those of principal cellist, Italy Babini and prominent pianist Jonathan Shames, the result is a most formidable trio. This trio has appeared regularly in programs on this series for a couple of years.

Their recent concert in the Orchestra Hall series turned out to be the most significant musical event of that week.

THE FIRST portion of the program consisted of Trio's Beethoven and Brahms. The Beethoven trio, a set of variations on the theme "Ich bin der Schneider Kakadu," brought forth the delightful

passages in a way that put this composition in its proper perspective.

BASED on a theme from a comic opera by the obscure composer, Wenzel Muller, this work is frequently lightly regarded in comparison to his other trios. This performance made its masterful qualities abundantly clear.

The Brahms trio projected the lavish harmonies with force and authority. There was constant unity in the instruments with each of them shining in its turn. The building intensifies in the first and final movements soared to ecstatic heights. In the Scherzo, the seductive piano passages combined with the singing strings for sublime sounds.

The second part of the program included a rarely performed Sonata for Cello and Piano by Debussy. The deep, richly endowed cello sound isn't often associated with Debussy's music.

This was followed by some Chopin selections for solo piano played by Shames. The two etudes from Opus 10 consisted of the familiar "Black Key" etude and a less familiar one in E flat minor. The latter, very subdued in nature, was presented in a way that brought out its subtle qualities.

THE BALLADE in G minor, which followed, turned out to be one of the least satisfying items on the program. The performance was occasionally fragmented with some evidence of technical struggle. I have heard Shames perform it better which proves again that nobody can be at his peak all of the time.

Tchaikovsky's "Melody" for piano and violin is one of Rachlevsky's favorite short pieces. Here, he enhanced this small scale piece with large scale artistic significance and refined sound.

As a conclusion, Shames and Rachlevsky dazzled the audience with another favorite, the Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso by Saint Saens.

Rachlevsky displayed supreme artistic and technical skill almost to the last note. The exception was the penultimate high note which was a miss. But, this was overshadowed by the resounding applause which was well deserved.

For those who missed this exciting program, there will be another chance to hear this talented trio on March 20. This is in addition to several other rewarding programs in the remainder of the season.



Avigdor  
Zaromp