

Sète unveils the creation of young Caribbean artists

The International Museum of Modest Arts of the Languedocian city confronts works with a series of so-called popular objects and images.

By [Philippe Dagen](#) and Philippe Dagen

In Sète, the International Museum of Modest Arts (MIAM) likes to ask unexpected questions. *"Is there an art related to the world of drug traffickers?"*, he wondered a few years ago, before wondering about the mythologies of surfing. And this summer: what is happening in the Caribbean? The answer is in an exhibit - actually two in one - that was once shown at the Little Haiti Cultural Center in Miami last winter.

We write two in one because the curator of "Global Caraïbes", the Haitian artist Edouard Duval-Carrié, has added, to a selection of current artists born in these islands, part of the collection he has devoted to objects and images said to be popular and mostly related to voodoo. There are close links with cultural or magical instruments and works which bear witness to the knowledge that their authors have of contemporary anonymous creations.

The gaze is on the windows where Duval-Carrié has arranged bottles and calabashes adorned with fabrics, small reliquaries adorned with pearls and dolls transformed into divinities by the addition of sequins. When he gets up, he sees, a floor below, the three gigantic figures that Hew Locke, from British Guyana, has made by accumulating toys and plastic flowers.

Up close, we admire Locke's dexterity: he places scale models of dinosaurs so that their tails become the horns of his statues. From afar, we perceive the abundance of colors, and what these fantastic creatures have of protective geniuses.

A little earlier, entering the exhibition, we walked along the wall that the Haitian André Eugène lined with figures cut out of tires. Retorts, forked, clawed, howling, they are the sisters of those that blacksmiths cut up and welded in iron to be used for ceremonies.

MARTOS GALLERY

DIY RELIQUARIES

It is one of the strengths of the exhibition to allow us to perceive these proximities between learned art and popular art. Both Martinique, David Damoison photography religious murals that have the simplicity and the presence of Romanesque frescoes and Alex Burke aligns dolls made from reclaimed fabrics, close to what ethnologists of the XIXth century called it contemptuously fetishes.

Jamaican Arthur Simms assembles debris of all kinds - skateboards, bicycles, jerry cans, glass jars - by weaving a net of crossed and knotted strings around them. So he in turn obtains DIY reliquaries, reliquaries for the present time made in an archaic way. The match between the process, the materials and the references is perfect.

However, it would be oversimplifying to define Caribbean creation by relics or religious references. The exhibition does not fall into this trap. If she opens up on André Eugène's black demons, she juxtaposes them the sweet and icy acrylics of the Haitian American painter Vickie Pierre, who, under a false air of floral decorations, develops to nausea and on a pink background the ambiguities of a sinuous line which can draw organs, islands, plants or draperies as well.

From a pop culture, the combinations of images of Nicole Awai or Gustavo Peña remind us that neither Trinidad nor Dominica - their native islands - were spared by the flow of advertising, comics and televisions north -american. More cruelly, -Joscelyn Gardner lithographs the diagrams of the instruments of torture in use in the plantations - snares, shackles, chains. They served in the XVIIth century in a property in Jamaica, Egypt Estate. However, the artist's Creole family has been living in Barbados since that same century - and we assume the autobiographical implications of such drawings, printed on a white plastic material which accentuates their coldness.

Unexpectedly and in a completely different form - assemblies of cut, painted, glued or nailed wood - we find this same memory of pain and this same irony which arouse unease in the four high polychrome reliefs of Hervé Télémaque, which were aptly added to the original version of the exhibition. Télémaque, born in Haiti, has never failed to recall the first relations between Europe and the Caribbean: trafficking and slavery.