

Gérald Alexis

MARIE-THERESE DUPOUX: MARITHOU*

Two important factors influenced the world of the arts in Haiti when Marithou began her artistic career in the early nineteen eighties and her evolution must be considered in light of these prevailing factors. First, Haiti in the mid-nineteen seventies experience noticeable political, social and economic changes that brought about the development of the construction industry and resulted in the creation of new jobs and more money circulating. Second, during the same time period an unprecedented interest in the fine arts developed, and owning art became a major status symbol. With the economic changes and the interest in fine art, the number of collectors increased, as did the number of art galleries that, for the most part, were dedicated to “modern” art. In Haiti, the term “modern” in art is seen as the opposite of “primitive” and includes everything from classical figuration to the most extreme form of expressionism, although abstraction was not very much in demand since naturalistic renderings were more popular,

Another consequence of the expanding art market¹ was the fact that the position of women in the arts changed. Women artists were getting recognition more for their accomplishments than for their gender and were less pressured by traditions. Indeed, women artists were until then confined to particular subjects that they had to deal with in very particular styles. As these changes occurred, emerging artists like Luce Turnier painted portraits of humble men and women and still-lives of coconut shells as a mean of studying harmonies of forms and colour. Another celebrated woman artist was Rose Marie Desruisseau who, in styles ranging from cubism to images reduced to bare essentials, dealt with voodoo,

sex and history. There was also Hilda Williams who kept a distance from fashions and ideologies, and never took on social issues, or the purely formal research with which her contemporaries were concerned.

In 1948, Marithou was born Marie-Thérèse Latortue, in Port-au-Prince. She grew up in an environment where art was thought to be “one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration.” Her father was a professional guitarist and a music teacher who held classes on the porch of the family house. He demanded discipline, assiduity and hard work from his pupils and from his children, he demanded much more. Her aunt was an art teacher who defended that fact that talent was essential but not sufficient for someone to take on an artistic career. Marithou's older sister, who incidentally was her godmother, developed an interest in the visual arts as part of a generation of girls who were offered art classes at school, along with embroidery, home economics and other skills required for a young woman to become a good housewife and mother. These art classes consisted mainly of copying images from imported art books and reproductions, a practice disliked by Haitian artists of the nineteen fifties and sixties when issues of what constituted Haitian identity was still strongly debated. Within that context, landscapes with snow capped mountains and still-lives with fruits, such as apples and pears, foreign to tropical climates were said to encourage “a taste from slavish imitations.” When Marithou's older sister began painting in the late nineteen fifties, she made it a point to hang around artists whose focus was on "authenticity" while insisting strongly on formal qualities.

In Haitian art history of the late nineteen forties and early fifties, technical know-how never had much importance. Furthermore, there was enormous publicity given to “primitive” or “naïve” artists who had brought world attention to Haiti, which was considered as “the only country in the world whose entire artistic output was represented by works of naive painters, primitive, not only in their approach, but also in their complete lack of academic training.”² When Haitian artists began to insist on talent as well as formal training, it was a way to re-position Haitian art as more than just “primitive” or art of the untrained. This was particularly so at “Calfou,”³ which was in the nineteen sixties, the forum of “modern” art. In this turn of the century house, one could encounter and talk about art with people involved in various disciplines such as painting, poetry, music and theatre.

While Marithou was much too young to hang out in “Calfou” her older sister did and often, these conversations were carried on over at the Latortue's house. Marithou, then in her

early teens, witnessed some passionate discussions about the situation of Haitian art and its development among many fiery and talented young painters such as Bernard Wah, one of the founders of Calfou. Marithou may have been too young to understand and appreciate the extent of the debates about formalism in art, but those discussions would later influence her when she eventually chose to follow a path that would take her from the predominance of objectivity to that of subjectivity, from formal exercises to the expression of her inner self.

Her first painting was done in oil on paper, using her sister's leftover materials, during the mid-nineteen sixties, just before her sister left to study in Paris, just before Calfou closed for political reasons and before many of its artists left the country willingly or by being forced into exile. In 1969 she married Roland Dupoux, a man involved in radio communication. As her wifely responsibilities became less overwhelming, Marithou's interest in her artistic career manifested itself. At the time there were no art schools and very few choices were offered for training so Marithou worked on her own, sketching anything that caught her eye. Since the Indigenist movement of the nineteen thirties⁴ and the opening of Foyer des Arts Plastiques⁵ a few years later, there existed no manifestos or documents about art and its meaning for Haitian culture. This was also the time of the Duvalier government, which regarded any gathering of artists and intellectuals as dangerous. Thus, Haitian painters began to work isolated from one another and the growth of art could no longer be seen in terms of movement but rather in terms of individual style. Marithou was thus exposed to a multitude of individual artists, the variety of which created a certain stylistic inconsistency evident in the first years of her career.

Marithou's first role model was Lois Mailou Jones, a most renowned African-American painter trained in the US and in Paris in the nineteen twenties and thirties. In nineteen fifty-three, she married Verniaud Pierre-Noël, a Haitian graphic artist, a distant relative of the Latortue family. Ms. Jones had since gone to Haiti every year, for lengthy visits during which she painted and also held workshops. She made enormous contributions to the promotion of women artists in Haiti and arranged for their works to be exhibited in various American universities. In doing so, she was instrumental in building women's confidence in a society where, not so long before, "serious art" was considered a domain reserved exclusively to men. Among the advice she unsparingly gave her colleagues, the most important may have been their need for proper training, constant practice, and the devotion and discipline they had to bring to their careers.

There was landscape painted by Lois Mailou Jones in the house where Marithou grew up. It was her favourite. In the summer of nineteen seventy-six, during a visit to update research on contemporary art in Haiti, Ms Jones met Marithou and that was a thrilling moment for the young artist; soon after, she began visiting Ms. Jones in her Port-au-Prince studio. Marithou admired Jones' technique, the straightforward and naturalistic approach of her subjects. Jones' landscapes were said to be impressionistic because her instructors at the Academie Julian, in Paris, had given her a taste for "plein-air" paintings in which she could capture first impressions of nature. Jones' colours had the intensity that the Impressionists were known for, yet her brushstrokes were much less visible. Furthermore she paid careful attention to structure and to the clarity of form.

Marithou later incorporated many of Jones' qualities in her own work; she adopted her fluid application of bright colours and gradually developed an interest in figure painting. Marithou was not interested at first in conventional portraits. Her representation of people was more generic but she borrowed Ms. Jones freer style and worked from photographs taken by her husband Roland. The figure itself was then defined by strong contours, and fluid transparent colours were applied independently of these contours. Thus Marithou's sketched figures appeared against, yet enclosed in, an abstractly painted surface. Such paintings were essentially decorative and very much in tune with the new taste that favoured an art easy to read and free of the harshness of social themes put forth by the Foyer des Arts Plastiques.

Marithou then turned to a more classical art and began a series of still-life studies. The still-life was not only a good learning tool, but also a means of finding order in the chaos that she was sensing on the artistic scene. Her approach thus became very "academic" and she paid particular attention to formal elements such as linear structure and composition. In nineteen eighty, Marithou approached Nehemy Jean, a notorious Haitian painter, for advice. He had studied at the Art Student League of New York and at Columbia University and had gone through various stylistic changes. By the time Marithou sought his guidance he had completely discarded his previous concern for light, volume and space and thus, encouraged Marithou to stick to simple harmonies of pastel tones. Marithou's paintings then took on a golden yellow overtone to which a few elements of soft red, green and blue are added, as seen in *La Grenadine*, painted in nineteen eighty two.

In *La Grenadine* An underlying drawing is meticulously executed. The various elements, mostly household objects and flowers, are well proportioned and arranged as to suggest the third dimension. Light is given the essential function of creating the illusion of mass and the various elements are perfectly rendered in their solidity, in the defined space. The effects of light on the copper vase and on the glass are prodigious. Unfortunately, the folds in the tablecloth seem unnecessary and appear to have been added just to demonstrate some kind of virtuosity. Although, at the time, she was not really interested in selling her paintings, she wanted them to be pleasant, free from any literary association and more in compliance with the indigenist idea of representing items that are typically Haitian. This is why, to her locally grown flowers, she added a couple of eucalyptus branches, commonly found in Haitian homes as a mean of chasing away mosquitoes. Further, as the title of the work indicates, we are not presented with a glass of red wine but with a water-based drink whose sweet taste can be overcome by the juice of limes placed on the plate near the glass.

In the same year that *La Grenadine* was produced Marithou began working with Jean-Pierre Théard, a young follower of Achille Scordilis, a Greek painter who lived in Haiti in and around nineteen 1973-1974. Scordilis was a trained artist who insisted on precision, details, academic notions of colour and the illusion of space through aerial perspective. After Scordilis' departure from Haiti, the young artists who worked under his guidance went on two separate paths: one that led to the so-called Neo-Primitives, very popular on the international market, the other to a trend that a local critic coined the "School of Beauty", very popular with a growing local clientele. Jean Pierre Théard had chosen the latter.

Although Marithou's contact with the "School of Beauty" was through Jean-Pierre Théard, she showed a strong influence of Bernard Séjourné's style in her *Danse* (The Dance) also produced in nineteen eighty two. In this painting one can sense the delicate harmonies of colours, a rigorous attention paid to the underlying drawing. Curved lines dominate the composition and there is the presence of a circle⁷, to the right of the painting in which the body of the female dancer is bent to fit. More in line with the atmosphere of Jean-Pierre Theard's work is Marithou's *La Ronde* (Children's Dance) of 1982 where, detached from a plain background, three girls, with typical Haitian features, are shown dancing in a circle so happily that their bodies become airy, in defiance of gravity.

One can hardly speak of school, movement or even partnership when talking about the art of the key figures of the “School of Beauty”: Bernard Séjourné, Jean-René Jérôme and Amilcar Simil were individuals who shared a similar experience of having gone through the Haitian Academy of Fine Arts.⁶ Although they worked independently from one another, they shared the same aesthetic concerns and raised the same questions to which, however, they each found individual answers. Their art, dealing generally with images of women, is characterized essentially by technical perfection, poetic forms and beautiful harmonies; thus the label the “School of Beauty.” However, such were qualities already sought after by artists of “Calfou” and by Bernard Wah in particular, therefore, it’s no surprise that they were carried on by Bernard Séjourné who had been a young but active member of that group.

Marithou exhibited for the first time among a group of artists associated with the so-called School of Beauty. She was less concerned with sales than with the public reaction to her art. As a matter of fact, the opinion of Roland Dorcelly, who attended the opening, was determinative. Dorcelly was a most celebrated Haitian artist and one of the founders of the Foyer des Arts Plastiques. He later spent several years in Paris and traveled extensively throughout Europe where he often exhibited. He also exhibited in the United States and eventually The Museum of Modern Art in New York acquired one of his paintings. When Dorcelly returned permanently to Haiti in 1965, he became a recluse and his presence at the gallery that evening of the opening was a surprise to most, to Marithou most of all. He then invited her to join a very small group of students he had working with him.

Despite her admiration for the master, there is little or no trace of Dorcelly's direct influence in Marithou's work. This is because at the time Marithou joined his workshop he was involved in a most unusual project creating a museum for young Haitians to learn to appreciate the works of great masters of European art. The particularity of this project was that all the works were copies made by Dorcelly himself and copying the works of great masters was part of Dorcelly's teaching method. In doing so, Marithou came in contact with a domain that she was unfamiliar with: art history with its variety of period and personal styles, which opened up her art to newer forms. Marithou's assignment in Dorcelly's classes was to copy a portrait of the *Infanta of Spain* by Velasquez. She finished one version in pastel crayons but Dorcelly insisted that she worked with oil paints simply because, as he said, it allows time to think. The oil version however remained unfinished because the size of the canvas required the use of a ladder and also because she became pregnant and unable to work with oil paint

and organic solvents. The experience, however short, was profitable since Marithou developed an interest in highly formal painting and learned to master the effects of light and shadows. Most importantly the experience moved away from the influence of the School of Beauty.

After a period during which her occupation as a young mother took most of her time, Marithou felt the need return to her passion and looked to work with someone just as passionate. Luce Turnier then was the perfect mentor. At that time, Haiti was placed under an embargo, following a military coup. Madame Turnier had a strong personality and was very demanding as an instructor. Luce was considered the "Grande dame" of Haitian art and was often jealous of other painters' success. At first Madame Turnier regarded Marithou as a threat and undermined her abilities; for daily assignments, Madame Turnier would literally throw odd objects on a table and yell at Marithou with authority: "paint that!" Marithou used this challenge to surpass herself and began to differentiate between imitations of objects and interpretations of visual sensations.

It is interesting to consider one of Marithou's pieces produced during this time, like her *Nature Morte aux Verres* (Still-life with glasses) of 1992, in comparison with the aforementioned, *La Grenadine*. In *Nature* there is a definite change in her approach of the genre. The work is definitely bolder. Marithou's mastery turned this commonplace subject into a true painting with a strong emphasis on the painterly. Every part of the surface is equally worked with thick brushstrokes and that gives unity as well as a rich consistency to the work. The directions of her energetic applications of paint define the folds in the cloth on the table and the one over the back of the chair, which creates a lack of precision and some distortions that in no way affect the overall quality of the work. The focal point of the artist's observation being the two glasses, she has given them form and solidity through their transparency and through the reflective properties of the water contained in the one on the left. Because Luce Turnier had placed the objects at random, their position in relation to one another does not allow for one of the traditional means of suggesting space (one object hiding part of another). Besides, the illusion of space is not of primary concern here, Marithou is more interested in dealing with pictorial space and does so by creating an interesting relation between the "near" and the "far" that is basically the relation between the real world (three dimensions) and the illusory world (two dimensions) of the support. It is also interesting to compare this same painting with *Le Pot de Confiture* (The Jam pot) of that same period and

where the various elements were arranged as to respect a strict pictorial order. It is still painterly, has a more calculated composition and is much less spontaneous, less vigorous.

Life throughout the country was so slow that people had little to do besides accomplishing their essential daily chores. Marithou thus had ample time to organize daily sessions with Madame Turnier. Marithou had then reached a point where she had come close to doing “trompe l'œil” paintings. Her still-lives took on the nobility that is customarily given to portraits, as in *Le Violon*. (The Violin) of 1991. In this still life however, she seems to go beyond the mere representation of the objects themselves to capture the sensitivity and the intelligence of the viewer. In spite of the fact that this painting had enormous appeal, Marithou felt unsatisfied because she felt that it failed to reflect her own personality. Having matured as a woman, and moving closer to maturity as an artist, Marithou needed to develop a more specific visual language through which would express her own feelings.

As the friendship grew stronger and stronger between the two women, Luce Turnier and Marithou began working together on the same live models. Stylistically, her paintings were very close to that of Madame Turnier, yet, unlike Madame Turnier who was more concerned with attitudes to express her model's personality, Marithou insisted on both physical and psychological resemblance. The complicity and the friendship that developed between came to an unfortunate end when Turnier departed to France due to illness and died shortly thereafter. It was then, in a tribute to her deceased friend and tutor that Marithou showed her most extraordinary portrait of Luce Turnier.⁸

No longer able to rely on Madame Turnier for support or encouragement, and unable to work by herself in her studio, in nineteen ninety three Marithou joined a group of students at a class given by Jean Claude Garoute, better known as Tiga. Tiga is a major figure of modernism in Haitian art. His training as an artist was very much like that of Marithou, in the sense that he never went to a formal art school and relied on the advice of older artists for instructions. One of those older artists was Lucien Price, an important figure of Haiti's avant-garde art circle. Although Price never ceased to stress the importance of drawing techniques, he was the first abstract artist in Haiti and in all of the Caribbean and his works, mainly on paper, always relied on the precision of his drawings.

Marithou's paintings of that time then close to abstractions and her *Accouplement* (Coupling) of 1993 illustrates how her style changed through her contact with Tiga. At a

young age, TIGA traveled throughout the inner country and came in close contact with popular culture. In the early nineteen sixties, at the time precisely when his contemporaries were seeking originality in what he called a "modern language borrowed from elsewhere," TIGA suggested other cultural and technical references drawn from within the popular culture. Together with Patrick Vilaire, a now renowned sculptor, TIGA created "Poto-Mitan"⁹ a name chosen obviously to indicate that the true values of Haitian art had to come from popular culture. Years later, having retired to the mountains above Port-au-Prince, TIGA initiated a most interesting experiment with local peasants; an experiment referred to as "St. Soleil". Evaluating its results TIGA was convinced that the true meaning of art had to be found outside art schools and academies and therefore could be "accessible to anyone who cared to look deeper into his roots."¹⁰ Throughout his career, TIGA had experienced several techniques, and at the time Marithou joined his classes, he was teaching the use of sponges instead of traditional brushes. While offering the possibility of creating patterns, this technique only allowed approximate forms.

By nineteen ninety-five, Marithou began working alone. Her figures, like her *Nu* (Nude) of 1995 are well-defined by lines of contours, yet they tend to blend almost entirely with various surrounding forms and motifs covering the entire surface. That period is marked by Marithou's often-successful attempts to reconcile formal and spontaneous elements. Indeed, one finds, on the one hand, straight lines, designed shapes, levelled colours, and on the other, soft lines, obscured forms and sets of abstract motifs incised in the paint. The use of the sponge had further forced her to reconsider the notion of space and deal more with surface. Her works, liberated from oppressively academic concerns, appeared to be conscious and unconscious at the same time while being neither one nor the other. Along with the sense of freedom came a different way of seeing the world. The expression of her phantasms became unhindered.

While evolving stylistically, Marithou discovered the expressive force of colours. Although she had never shown any interest for the Haitian "primitive" or "naïve" painters, she always had a bent for their often audacious use of colour and the time had come when she felt comfortable with the idea of painting a woman's body red like in her *Femme Oiseau* (Woman Bird) of 1995. Her interest in colour, the joy she had in playing with them had to lead her

inevitably to abstraction so that her *L'Air Rouge* (the Red Atmosphere) a landscape of 1996 incorporated abstract forms.

Landscapes are very rare in Marithou's oeuvre. She is not an outdoor person although she does enjoy gardening because she likes to be active. Considering this painting as an “improvised” landscape we must realise that no spatial depth in the visual sense of the word, no illusion of space, which indicates that the artist was concerned with keeping the whole picture in relation with the flat surface of the canvas. Yet there is, in some of the simple basic forms, a clear sense of solidity and structure for they appear to be seen from above, from the side and also face front. This means that the viewer must deal a notion of space much like the one explored by the Cubists. Their ochre and white colours, contrasting with the red background, further participate in creating this different space. There is no rigid order in the way the forms, mostly geometric, are placed on the canvas. The way that there are placed seem to create a certain inner tensions conveying a feeling of non-naturalistic energies. Five elements bring rhythm to the surface while enforcing the verticality of the composition. These elements, which are not immediately identifiable, carry the only more or less referential images of very small green leaves. This could lead the viewer to believe that these vertical shapes would be that of lianas. Such an assumption would in turn suggest that they are images of degrading vegetation placed against a chaotic arrangement of cubicles and other odd shapes, bathing in a red coloured atmosphere.

Undoubtedly, such an image, although avoiding strict representational means, does more than suggest a mood defined by the dominance of red, a colour that, associated with the sky, is seen as an ill omen. The painting, therefore, most certainly says that can be revealed by considering the artist's own environment, the community she lives in. The industrial age was essentially responsible for the migration into urban areas, and social issues it brought about have had a serious impact on realism in French art of the late nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century, American artists developed a kind of “democratic art” that moved away from contemporary academism to better deal with issues linked with the life of people living in large cities. Migration toward urban centres began in Haiti in the nineteen sixties and reached its peak during the years of the embargo (1991-1994). The two most visible and most devastating impacts of that migration were the inconsiderate destruction of trees to be turned into cooking fuel and the uncontrollable development of shantytowns. Marithou and her husband had built their home in a remote area, a few miles outside of Petionville.¹¹ The road

leading to that house passed through what was literally a forest. Day after day, months after months, year after year, she could see trees being cut down to make room for an ever increasing number of seedy houses of cement blocs left unpainted. The dazzling population growth in the cities and its effect on the environment was, in Haiti as well, influential in the arts. *L'Air Rouge* as well and works by contemporary artists like Carlo Jean-Jacques and Michèle Manuel are testimony to this historical change.

During her brief abstract period Marithou worked mostly with three colours: red, black and white. In these paintings, areas painted in black are not shadows of forms; they are distinct entities as are the fields of red. In these compositions of rather small format, the areas of colours are well defined and are highlighted by traces of white, restrained gestures that activate the surface. Further, the interrelations between the three colours are orderly, meaning that, although apparently spontaneous, these small paintings may have developed from preliminary sketches. Ultimately, Marithou would also depart from abstraction in her work. When asked why she abandoned abstraction Marithou's answered: "The milieu is too narrow minded. People see abstraction as an easy way out of formal training, as a way to compensate for a lack of draftsmanship, or even worse as something that is purely decorative."¹²

During the two years Marithou worked with Tiga, she shared his interest African aesthetics. The African mask, the most common at form, had been incorporated in the formal and symbolic language of Haitian artists since the mid-nineteen forties following the visit in Haiti of Cuban artists like Wifredo Lam and Carlos Henriquez.¹³ Contemporary Haitians artists like Lucien Price and Roland Dorcelly among others could then begin to relate to African art on the basis of race, but also from the point of view of its importance in the development of modern art. The relation of African art and modernism of course led Marithou to the work of Picasso, and so appeared in her works female figures whose facial features are seen simultaneously from different points of view next to precise renderings of African masks. Marithou's rendition of the beauty of motherhood comes then to be associated with the intrinsic beauty of the mask, seen as a work of art. This method of stressing the expressive strength of the work matched well the images of "mother and child" with which she was working. At this stage, in Marithou's art, subjectivity was definitely taking the lead over objectivity.

The colour red was so important and so meaningful that we could refer to the time span from nineteen ninety six to nineteen ninety-eight as Marithou's "red period" when the

dominant red colour in *L'Air Rouge* is associated with an ill omen. Red takes on a very different meaning in this *Accouplement* of 1998 and is associated with passion and creating an atmosphere that brings us back further into the realm of figure painting, filled with familiar shapes. The work is dominated by the outlines of two bodies, one of a man, one of a woman, embracing in a posture that could have been taken from the kama sutra or any other source of erotic images. The well-proportioned bodies and body parts are in the midst of decorative forms: fishes and leaves and against a black field, toward the left, white lines criss-cross as to suggest a fish net. Three vignettes containing calligraphic designs are placed at random on the surface. Referring to the symbolic meaning of the fish, the viewer deducts that its presence can be seen as reinforcing the idea of coupling, for fish is the symbol of fruitfulness and life as suggested here. The interpretation of this painting is not really the point here. It is just meant to illustrate the fact that she needed figures in order for her preoccupations and inner feelings to sound forth more clearly. More and more she was going to return to the figure and to the draftsmanship she had acquired over the years.

In the year two thousand, her figures moved from flat forms to more modeled bodies. In her *Age of Aquarius* of that year, the mass of the angel's body, central to the composition, is treated with precision contrasting with the flatness of the abstract surrounding motifs. Its shapeliness is well rendered. She even created a see-through rectangle to allow the subject's musculature to be seen. The foreshortening is also well rendered. The ample white pants are dealt with in a fashion that recalls the cloths in her earlier *Nature Morte aux Verres*. The stool the model is sitting on is barely visible yet, one cannot avoid seeing the blue fish suspended by a thread to the subject's little finger. It may then be a phallus symbol inscribed into the innocent picture of an angel who, according to century old legends, has no sexual identity.

Of the same period, in identical style, is *Male Bleu*, the sculptured torso of a man, once again placed in generally abstract surroundings showing however, here and there, some human silhouettes and a man's head separated from the torso. A fragment of an antique statue undeniably was her source of inspiration. While it shows physical strength, the figure's swaying posture provides it with a sense of elegance. The notion of beauty referred to here is no longer African but that established by antique Greek standards. Inspired by the antique idea of beauty, the sexual organs of the figure had to play little or no role in the representation. Respecting this iconographic tradition, Marithou has discretely, elegantly even, omitted the

male organs. Drawn from the past, it appears as a dream, a vision indicating the fruitfulness of Marithou's art.

More examples of her more recent work include *Danse de Paitin* (The dancing puppet) of 2000, which illustrated well the dominant idea of a series she created. It shows her intellectual and technical maturity. And yet there is another painting titled *Le Rêve* (The Dream) of 2000 based on a boxwood mannequin that she purchased for study because the mannequin can take a variety of postures and may be looked at from different points of view. For Marithou, then, the boxwood mannequin is a means of using posture to express different situations. The object, or in this case the subject, is meticulously rendered. Its mass is shown against a flat background made of tile-like elements, some of which contain images that could well be that of the subject or sequences of his dreams. Traditionally, the dreamer is someone of whom no effective action can be expected. Yet, dreams, since Freud, have taken on an unprecedented importance. It has become the process by which we are awakened to another world, a world where we are truly ourselves.

Haiti is not a place with an uninterrupted tradition of great art. It is a place where few infrastructures were ever put in place for the development of the arts. There is therefore much to be said about artists who, like Marithou, have struggled against all odds. Her sensibility as an artist emerged at a time when formal concern dominated and it evolved toward maturity in the midst of total confusion and uncertainty. As a mature woman, she was affected by changes in the world around her and refused to remain emotionally neutral, seeking after visual means to express herself, borrowing from whatever source was available. Her art has become centered on issues like the falling of heroes, the questioning of masculinity in the debate on gender roles, the developing fear in a less and less secure environment. If the evolution of her career as an artist is not particularly original it is however the perfect illustration of an artist's relation to her art, to her environment (physical and human). It is also indicative of the relation of community with the arts produced within it.

* All images referenced in this essay may be found in the Gallery of Images.

¹Just as it happened in the late 1940's and early 1950's, art became a lucrative activity linked to the development of tourism. In the seventies its appeal was due to an expanding local market.

² *Native Art of Haiti*, Press release, The Carol Reese Museum of East Tennessee State University at Johnson City, 1967.

³ "Calfou" is a Creole word meaning "crossroads."

⁴ In the early part of the twentieth century, like that of most other Caribbean islands, Haitian art was concerned with the expression of a feeling of nationalism, a quest for national identity. In Cuba the movement was called "Criolismo" and in Puerto-Rico "Jibarismo".

⁵ The "Foyer" was created in Port-au-Prince, in 1950, following conflicts that developed within the "Centre d'Art" created six years earlier. At the heart of the conflict was the accusation that the "Centre" was exploiting commercially the works of the so-called "primitive" or "naive" Haitian painters and thus hindering their development.

⁶ An Italian artist named Marco Amarigo Montagutelli had convinced the political authorities of the necessity of an art school in Haiti. The Academy of Fine Arts was thus inaugurated in 1959 by President François Duvalier (Papa Doc). The "Professor", as he was called, directed the institution for approximately fifteen years.

⁷ The circle, along with rhythmic organization and linear structure are some of the elements that 'modern' Haitian artists borrowed from their 'primitive' contemporaries. Artists like Lucien Price, Pétion Savain and later Bernard Wah and Bernard Séjourné would often use the circle in the construction of their works and adjusted stylized figures to fit within these circles.

⁸ Unfortunately, this portrait has been lost.

⁹ "Poto Mitan" or, Central Pole, refers to the pole that is central in voodoo temples. Considered the junction between the spiritual and the material world, it is believed that it is through it that spirits descend upon the living when called upon during ceremonies.

¹⁰ Quoted by the author in "Tiga - Agenda 1995," Production Promo Plus, Port-au-Prince, 1994.

¹¹ Petionville is located five miles above Port-au-Prince. It was built in 1831 to become the new Capital of Haïti. But has in time been the summer vacation place and later the "sleeping quarters" of the capital city. In recent years, family homes and country homes have made way for businesses of all kind, and residential areas have since been built in the outskirts of this former mountain village.

¹² In conversation with the artist.

¹³ During his stay in Haiti, Carlos Henriquez sketched African masks that he had found in the collection of the Museum of Ethnology in Port-au-Prince.