

# Caribbean Life

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## Haitian art at Affirmation Arts gallery

By Tequila Minsky  
The Brooklyn Paper

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Photo by Tequila Minsky

Father and son, Georges Nader Sr. and Jr. in front of "Pot de Fleurs c. 1946," the gem of the show--(only 20" square) by master Hector Hyppolite.

In a sun-drenched art gallery overlooking railroad tracks on Manhattan's very far west side, a celebration of Haitian art "Saving Grace" is exhibiting the work of 45 Haitian artists and reflects the history and diversity of Haitian art.

Two paintings damaged in the January earthquake and restored are on exhibit; some paintings have never been shown before and most are from the collection of the Nader family, in Haiti. The earthquake destroyed Musee d'Art Nader, Georges Nader's museum of Haitian art with most of its thousands of paintings collected over decades. "Saving Grace" is Affirmation Arts gallery way of responding to the earthquake.

Curator Gerald Alexis continuously disabuses the public of the notion that Haitian art is primitive. "Haitian art did not evolve in isolation," writes Alexis in the booklet that accompanies the show. Many painters were trained abroad and traveled. There were influences and exchanges between indigenous popular painters ("self-taught") and those trained. Haitian culture's deep core in music and storytelling-- and myths and legends and vodou roots greatly impacts its visual arts' expressions.

Alexis was on-hand on Oct. 16 when Haiti Cultural Exchange organized what best could be called a Haitian happening -- a full afternoon of Haitian arts for children and adults in the three-floor gallery. On the ground floor, children painted amidst the masters' works on display while other children were enthralled by long-told stories in a storytelling corner on the second floor. A printmaking workshop and Tiga's Artistic Rotation for kids engaged others.

Meanwhile, a full schedule of performances captivated adults with many parents holding their children on their laps. KaNU Dance Theater's portrayal in movement, slavery and the evolution to freedom, captivated the audience. Goussy Celestin danced to Markus Schwartz's drumming. Schwartz later performed with the band Lakou Brooklyn.

Tiga Jean-Baptiste led off his segment with mastery of the didgeridoo followed by his talented drumming, playing with an amplified thumb piano, and singing. When children danced to his hypnotic rhythms, Tiga often encouraged and moved with them.

No one in the performance space gave up their seats and the crowd became more and more standing room to watch the dancing of Nadia Dieudonne & Feet of Rhythm. Buyu Ambroise & The Blues in Red Band featuring jazz singer Melanie Charles wrapped up the afternoon extravaganza of performances.

This event was unique in its appeal to adults and many parents with all ages of children who could and did feast on an afternoon of Haitian culture.

The Haiti Cultural Exchange was launched just a year ago. "There has been a lot of interest in Haitian culture, especially since the earthquake," says Regine Roumain one of the founders of this organization.

The Haiti Cultural Exchange sponsors art workshops for children, writing workshops for youth and salons for adults. They're called upon frequently for artist referrals. For more information on their work, visit <http://haiticulturalx.org>.

"Saving Grace" is on exhibit at Affirmation Arts gallery, 525 W 37th St. until Nov. 24. Hours: Tuesday - Friday-10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.; Saturday 11:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. ©2010 Community Newspaper Group