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Rescued Haitian Art on View at Hell's Kitchen Exhibit

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New exhibit highlights Haitian art, some pulled from the wreckage of last winter's earthquake, others inspired by its aftermath.

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By Tara Kyle

DNAinfo Reporter/Producer

HELL'S KITCHEN — Haitian sculpture and paintings, some pulled from the wreckage of last winter's earthquake, others inspired by its aftermath, are now in the spotlight at a new West side exhibit.

"Saving Grace: A Celebration of Haitian Art," traces the island country's cultural lineage from the folk art renaissance of the 1940s through to the present day. The majority of the nearly 50 works on view, at the [Affirmation Arts](#) gallery on W. 37th Street, have never before been seen outside of Haiti.

"Haitian art is something very spiritual," said Haitian collector Franck Ciné, explaining that most artists in the exhibit lack even an elementary school level education.

Pointing to a painting of the inside of a home by 1940s master Hector Hyppolite, Ciné explained, "There is no knowledge of straight lines, they paint it as they see it...they are painting from their dreams."

Two pieces in the exhibit, including "Vase et Fleurs" by Hyppolite, were broken apart by the earthquake and later restored by the Smithsonian Institute's [Haiti Cultural Recovery Project](#), which received nearly \$300,000 in start-up funding from Manhattan's Broadway League.

"It's a jigsaw puzzle," said Richard Kunn, under secretary for history, art and culture at the Smithsonian, of the restoration process. "People ask me, how do you do that stuff? It's magic."

The exhibit also highlights what Kurin called the "magnificent range" and diversity of Haitian art.

One of the modern artists with paintings on view, Philippe Dodard, helped [transform 20 buses](#) from the Dominican Republic into temporary art classrooms for children traumatized by the earthquake.

Another, Préfète Duffaut, painted a star rising above the ocean and island, with many flags of the world hanging below. The work, according to Georges Nader, owner of a gallery in Haiti, depicts how in the wake of the earthquake's trauma, Haiti has becoming a star on the global stage.

Before the earthquake, Nader and his family owned some 15,000 artworks at their gallery and museum. Three thousand of these, and the museum itself, were destroyed in the earthquake.

"There is joy in these paintings," Nader said, looking around the Hell's Kitchen exhibit. "Haitian art has something it in that is nowhere else in the world."

"Saving Grace: A Celebration of Haitian Art" is on view through Nov. 24 at the Affirmation Arts gallery, 523 W. 37th Street.