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ARTnews

Myrlande Constant, Maker of Mesmerizing Voudou Flags, Has Joined Fort Gansevoort

By Tessa Solomon – November 24, 2021



Myrlande Constant, *Bal Kontredans*, 2021, Mixed media, 60 x 57.5 inches. Courtesy: Fort Gansevoort.

Haitian textile artist Myrlande Constant, known for her extravagantly embellished drapo Vodou, or Vodou flags, has joined the roster of Fort Gansevoort gallery in New York. The gallery will present its first exhibition of Constant's work in New York in 2022.

Constant's large-scale textile tableaux—"paintings with beads," according to the artist—draw on Vodou myths and Haitian visual traditions. Her works contain intricate beadwork and alternative interpretations of the Haitian religion's myths: amid her vibrant landscapes, figures of different races, sects, and nationalities engage in mundane rituals together. Religion, in particular human relationships with loas, representatives of God in the physical world in the Vodou, deeply informs her work.

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Adam Shopkorn, founder of Fort Gansevoort, told ARTnews, “At this stage in my career, I’m pretty confident with my gut instincts. When I saw imagery of Myrlande’s work I knew that she was making work completely above the rest of the pack. We approached her during the pandemic, when 100 percent of our discoveries were made online, so we had to trust our judgment. But here, she was obviously, immediately special.”

Constant, now in her 50s, is among the first female Haitians to gain international acclaim for working in a traditionally male-dominated medium. In 1986, the factory she worked for closed following the anti-government protests, which eventually led to the ousting of Haitian president Jean-Claude Duvalier, and Constant needed a new means to support herself. She sold delicate embroideries of flowers at street markets until a friend and Vodou practitioner encouraged Constant to seek out more profound inspirations.

“Beads were the medium that I knew and I realized I could try and make paintings,” she told Artnet News in 2019.

The daughter of a seamstress, Constant dedicates months to each monumental piece, weaving and stitching complex histories of her community. She often works alongside her children to complete the elaborate embroidery on the large pieces. A line drawing in pencil on cloth is stretched taut over a wood frame from four angles. Utilizing a tambour beading technique, the team applies sequins and beads over what becomes the backside of the work. It’s an intuitive practice, as the final composition is only revealed at the end of the process.

Her work was exhibited at the 2018 exhibition “Pòtoprens: The Urban Artists of Port-au-Prince” at Pioneer Works in New York, which traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami the following year. A survey of her work will be presented at the Fowler Museum at UCLA in 2023.