Haiti and the Art of Paul-Henri Bourguignon

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In the Spring of 1947, the Belgian artist Paul-Henri Bourguignon (1906-1988) arrived in Haiti for a brief stay. He remained for fifteen months. What he found there affected his work deeply, and did so for the rest of his life. He had traveled widely before the war, exploring, beyond his own region, what were then far away and exotic places: Spain, Corsica, Yugoslavia, North Africa. He had felt deprived of the freedom to wander—among other freedoms—during the time of the German occupation. Now he craved the skies and the colors of the South, and the pleasure of dépaysement that he had found in alien lands.

When the invitation to visit Haiti had come, he had been eager to accept. Given post-war conditions it took a year or more to find transport, in this case a French luxury liner, converted into a hospital ship, and not yet returned to its previous glory. As the narrator of Bourguignon's posthumous novel, *The Greener Grass* (1993) tells it, this is how it had happened:

[I]t was Richard who had urged me to come here. Blue skies, green mountains, no threat of war, he said. "And it's a French-speaking country. You'll find plenty to write about. And to paint, too." He did not tell me about the squalor and the misery (3).

In the present age of a globalized and shrinking world, it is difficult to remember how large the world was more than fifty years ago. Even though he had gotten to know Richard in the 1930s, living in Belgium, Bourguignon had learned little about Haiti. And in spite of the long involvement of the United States with Haiti, in this country too, few
people knew much about what seemed to be a very faraway place, indeed. When I came to Columbus from Haiti, where I had spent the year of 1947-1948, to teach anthropology at the Ohio State University, some people thought I had been to Tahiti.

As the narrator further explains:

I had come to know Richard in Europe, before the war, when he was on one of his diplomatic missions--as a crony of the president in power then, as it turned out--and had been eager to explore all that was lacking in his country (6).

Indeed, the real Richard had been a childhood friend of Stenio Vincent, then the president of Haiti, and, he claimed, he could never forgive Vincent for having recalled him. As he said to Bourguignon in Haiti, perhaps in a moment of expansiveness: "ah, mon cher, ici c'est la république des petits copains" (Ah, my friend, this is the crony republic!).

The narrator's--and, indeed the author's--motives are also sketched:

...Europe lay in shambles, although it had been three years since the end of the war. There seemed to be no future there, except for the prospect of another war, maybe with the Russians, this time. So Richard's invitation to Haiti seemed a fine idea. Besides, I had felt deprived, for some time, of one of my greatest pleasures, the pleasure of travel (8).

When the author speaks of 1947 as three years after the end of the war, he is indeed thinking in terms of his own country: Belgium was liberated in the Fall of 1944. The Marshall Plan for the reconstruction of Europe had not yet been implemented, and a bit later, in the Spring of 1948, the Berlin Blockade seemed indeed to be the first step toward a new war.
The narrator-- and the author-- did not strike out simply on the basis of "Richard's" optimistic reports:

Oh, I had taken my precautions. Before leaving for Port-au-Prince, I persuaded my paper to support the trip; they would print my travel accounts. Of course, people wanted to hear about far-away-places in those days; lots of our readers imagined leaving and starting again at the other end of the world (8).

Indeed, prior to leaving Europe, Bourguignon had been the art critic of the Brussels daily Le Phare and its companion weekly, Le Phare Dimache. He had also had his own gallery at Knokke-Le Zoute, on the Belgian coast. Before his departure, Le Phare alerted its readers to the forthcoming articles. The notice was highlighted by a sketch portrait of the writer by "Ann" (Lucien de Roeck), the paper's illustrator [Fig. 1]. A series of articles, under the title Nous faisons un beau voyage, began to appear in the course of the following months.

The Haiti to which Bourguignon came was that of the presidency of Dumarsais Estimé. The clique into which "Richard" introduced his Belgian friend was politically on the outs. They were hoping for a change in the situation, to have again access to assorted appointments. The group included, among others, the poet and former diplomat Léon Laleau. In the meantime they remembered fondly the years of the recent war, when Jouvet and his actors were, for a time, stranded in Haiti, and the philosopher Jacques Maritain, in temporary exile in New York, had come to lecture. The surrealist theoretician André Breton had also visited. For the time being, waiting for what we might now call "regime change," the men seemed to pass much of their time in talk at the Café
Rex on the Champ-de-Mars, some having, it seemed little else to do. As the narrator puts it:

I hadn't said a word. I was tired of the whole bunch of them. I had enough of their habitual jokes, their endless questions, and their long quotations from the best French authors: "Descartes says...Yes, but don't forget that Diderot wrote...(2).

Books were, in some sense, their life line to France, or at least to French culture, which they viewed as their rightful heritage. Except for politics, they had little to say about Haiti. They spoke with nostalgia of the time they had spent in France. The next generation, in similar fashion, spoke of Chicago or New York, where some had studied for a while during the war years, at a time when France was not accessible. Under the current circumstances, they felt themselves to be victims, victims of discrimination and second class citizen. As the writer Philippe Thoby-Marcelin said rather self-pityingly, in a conversation I remember vividly: "Nous autres mulâtres, nous sommes les juifs d'Haiti." (We mulattos are the Jews of Haiti). Or, as Laleau put it, more cynically and without self-pity, looking at a crowd on the Champ-de-Mars: "La masse puante et l'élite parfumé." (The stinking masses and the perfumed elite.)

In spite of what seemed unpropitious circumstances, "Richard" did later receive a diplomatic appointment under Estimé. He spent a number of years living in various European capitals and eventually retired in Europe.

Bourguignon had been active as a painter since his teenage years; following the liberation of Belgium in the fall of 1944 he had worked as a journalist for Agence Belga, the Belgian Telegraph Agency, and then, as noted, as art critic for Le Phare. Having also
published several books in limited editions at the end of the war, he had began to see himself largely as a writer. In Haiti, he recorded what he saw as a writer and photographer. He came back to painting only in 1950, when the vivid memories of what he had seen and experienced came to the fore.

Of Bourguignon's novel, *The Greener Grass*, only the first chapter deals with Haiti, the remainder with the narrator's subsequent adventures in Peru. It was written in English, in 1960, but published posthumously in 1993. The passages cited clearly place events in their time. And so do some of the physical observations, as does Bourguignon's photographic record. As the narrator prepares to leave the country, he thinks of Kenscoff and Furey, where it was so exquisitely cool in the mountains, and I thought of myself a few months ago, walking through the sugar cane in Brache. And when his plane takes off:

In the last flash, I saw the city again. All the streets, the markets, the houses. The Champ-de-Mars and the presidential palace, all white, like a newly painted toy. And now the bay, as blue and deep as a Norwegian fjord, and all around the mounts covered with an exuberant vegetation of the most sumptuous green. The entire island seemed of the most delicate emerald green with a few yellow stripes for the roads and some white dots for the buildings. Slowly, the colors faded away...(18).

Given Haiti's current state of erosion and pollution, this is, indeed, an image of the past! And yet, Bourguignon's own photographs show the erosion and deforestation of hillsides and mountain slopes. The cane fields of the Haitian American Sugar Company (HASCO) along the road to Léogane also are no more. More than half a century later,
Haiti is surely a different place and Bourguignon's work is, in some respects, its memorial. Later, when he himself looked back at Haiti, and perhaps more generally at the past, he wrote in *Arrière-Pensées*, his unpublished collection of aphorisms: "De loin, toutes les îles sont bleus" (From afar, all islands are blue). The implication, a bit disabused, must be that, seen close up, the magical island are not quite so delightful. Experience did not live up to expectation.

As noted earlier, the narrator— and author's alter ego— says that he had been deprived of travel. Again, we read, "I secretly believed in the promised land." And he goes on to explain at some length how travel had come to be so important to him:

I was brought up in an atmosphere of respect for remote places. My father who had never traveled, had a passion for imaginary voyages....He told me stories about people he had known, who had spent years in Djibouti and La Paz. According to him, people who travel are different from other people. They are more perceptive, more sophisticated in their tastes. One of his friends who had served in the Foreign Legion, still wore silver buckles on his shows, and another, an engineer who had spent ten years in Rio Grande do Sul, had his watch attached by a heavy chain made of pure gold. ...

....[My mother] didn't know better. But my father knew and I knew, that there are places in this world where chains are made of nothing but gold, and where people wear silver buckles, even on their shoes.

The names of some cities, for me, are like music...They awake in me an irresistible desire for travel. I immediately see stunning blue seas, and I hear the
sound of surf rolling on a beach covered with coral. For all these reasons, I have traveled a lot in my life (20-21).

With its use of the past tense throughout, this poetic and romantic passage surely must be read as nothing if not ironic! Reality risks making the search for the promised land a sobering, if memorable experience. Bourguignon's Haitian photographs registered experience unapologetically, as did his paintings many years later. Joan Dayan speaks of Bourguignon's chilling photo *The slum and the palace*, taken in 1948. The brooding monumentality of the palace looked down upon from above by a boy standing in insouciant grace between too shacks, unsettles our notions of high and low, and questions our assumptions of beauty (1996:3).

To understand the encounter between the artist and the country, we need to consider not only the artist but also the Haiti he found in that memorable year. What, then, do we know of Haiti in 1947-48, the year of Bourguignon's stay in the country? Less than a year before his arrival, Estimé had come to power, as the result of a bloodless revolution. His government was widely seen as representing a rejection of the previous regime, under Elie Lescot, who had fled to Canada. The scene in the café, among the men who felt themselves displaced by the political situation, is rendered in a painting Bourguignon entitled *Le Petit Café* or *The artist and his friends*, a painting in which, says Dayan,

he takes us back to a Haiti that is no longer. A Haiti of style, status and faded aristocracy.... The four men, including the artist are distinguished by their color, from black to clair (light) to brown to pale saffron (4).
It was Laleau, with his familiarity with European societies, who had revealed Haiti's complex system of color classifications to Bourguignon. Shortly after his arrival in Haiti, Richard, his host, had invited him to meet a number of his friends. Laleau, looking around the room, explained the scene to the newcomer, noting that the guest was white but Richard was an octoroon. (His father had been a white Frenchman and Bourguignon had been unaware of any African ancestry.) And he went on to explain that he himself was a mulatto, while another man was black. There was still another man, of another intermediary category.

The discovery of a society ordered by such fine color distinctions came as a surprise to Bourguignon. In his country, the divisions ran along linguistic lines, between French-speaking Walloons and Dutch-speaking Flemings. He himself, born in Brussels, had a Walloon father and a Flemish mother. Heir to both linguistic and cultural traditions, in his work he also sought to integrate diverse artistic traditions.

It was Richard who settled Bourguignon at the Hotel Excelsior, on the Champ-de-Mars, a long established family-run hotel-pension, frequented mostly by Haitian guests. There were then few tourists in Haiti and no international hotels. When I arrived in Port-au-Prince in August 1947, as a graduate student in Anthropology, I too settled at the Excelsior. I did so at the suggestion of my advisor, Professor Melville Herskovits. He and his wife had stayed there in the summer of 1934. They, I believe, were introduced to the Excelsior by Dr. Jean Price-Mars, who then also suggested the village of Mirebalais as the site of their research (Herkovits 1937). On her first visit to Haiti, in 1936, Catherine Duham, too, had stayed at the Excelsior at the recommendation of Professor Herskovits (Dunham 1969). And so it was that Paul Bourguignon and I met.
There were few tourists, but there were some, as well as some Americans and Europeans who had not come as tourists. Among the tourists I remember a very young Truman Capote. On the strength of the excitement generated by the publication of his first novel, he arrived to write for Harper's Bazaar, chaperoned by that magazine's photographer. Capote did his best to attract attention, scandalizing the resident Americans. Margaret Sanger came too, trying to promote family planning, but she had little visibility. Few people heard her or understood her when she spoke on the radio in Port-au-Prince. Maya Deren came on the first of her extended visits. Her experience in Haiti is reported in articles (e.g., 1948), her 1953 book *The Divine Horsemen*, and in her films.

In spite of the poverty and squalor Bourguignon noted and the depressive mood of Richard's crowd, this was a hopeful time. Above all, it was a peaceful time, a time without the violence that has characterized life in Haiti to such a great extent in the intervening years. When I proposed to find a place in the countryside, to carry out my ethnographic work, I was advised by a Haitian physician who had lived in the United States that Haiti was safer than Chicago. The peasants, he said, were peaceful and childlike. It is true that, at the time, *tonton macout* meant nothing more sinister than a "bogey man," to frighten children, and *macout* a straw bag. Just a few years previously, the Catholic church had conducted an active "anti-superstition" campaign, destroying vodou shrines and their contents. Now the ban against vodou had been lifted, and the sound of drums could be heard on many evenings. There was an active literacy campaign, with a new phonetic Creole orthography, the beginnings of a cooperative movement, and there were other innovations. And in hope of the development of tourism, there was a
new night club in Pétionville, Cabane Choucoune (named for the girl in the popular song), and others at Carrefour, then at some distance from Port-au-Prince. A major international exhibition was being planned for 1949. The Centre d'Art, still new, was flourishing.

Bourguignon quickly discovered the new popular art and, enchanted by it, began to write about it, both in Le Phare and also in Port-au-Prince in Le Nouvelliste. He became acquainted with people at the Centre d'Art and was named to a jury for a competitive show. Soon, however, the deep divisions in Haitian society revealed their presence in this small art world as well. An exhibition in the summer of 1947, which he reviewed, had two sections: the avancés and the populaires. Although he praised the work, among the first group, of Luce Turnier—who later went on to a significant career in Europe—his enthusiasm for the color, originality and untutored spontaneity of the popular artists was received with some anger, as shown in the following excerpt from an anonymous letter to Le Nouvelliste (1947:4). The author, who styles himself "Amateur de Peinture," writes:

...la passion de monsieur Bourguignon pour notre peinture primitive lui avait mit une oillère, ce que ne lui a pas permis de se rendre compte que notre pays est habité par deux catégories bien distinctes--trop distinctes--d'individus: une majorité de primitifs et une minorité peut-être aussi cultivée que bien des élites européennes, et que ce petit groupe a aussi ses peintres et que ces peintres, incapable de faire de la peinture primitive, sont, à tord ou à raison, parti à la recherche de leur moi sur des chemins autres que ceux qui leur traçaient les primitifs haïtiens.
...the passion of Monsieur Bourguignon for our primitive painting has blinkered him, so that he was unable to realize that our country is inhabited by two very distinct--too distinct--categories of individuals: a majority of primitives and a minority as cultivated as many a European élite, and that this small group also has its painters, and that these painters, rightly or wrongly, have gone in search of their self, along paths that differ from those the Haitian primitives had traced for them.

This, as it turned out, was a harbinger of things to come. In 1950, the Centre d'Art split in two: the "moderns," as they liked to call themselves, founded their own center, Le Foyer des Arts Plastiques. But I am getting ahead of my story.

Created by the American artist DeWitt Peters in 1944, and supported modestly by both the U.S. Department of State and the Haitian government, the Centre d'Art was an exciting new enterprise of discovery and development. Arriving in Haiti to teach English under U.S. Government auspices, Peters puzzled at the apparent absence of art. As he wrote in a 1947 article in Harper's Bazaar (cited in Rodman 1958:9):

[W]hy, in a country of such hypnotic beauty, with a climate as lucent as Southern Italy's and a people favored with leisure, is the art of painting practically moribund? Why, in this haunting city of 150,000, rich in history, literally shimmering with color, is there no single art gallery...

Reading these lines written more than half a century ago, it is difficult not to be astonished by their seeming naïveté. What Haitians did Peters know that he could speak of "a people favored with leisure"? Does the "leisure" of unemployment produce art?
When and where did a lucent climate and beauty of landscape ever produce art? What of the "poverty and squalor" Bourguignon notes?

Seldon Rodman, a vigorous supporter of the Centre, in his 1948 book *Renaissance in Haiti: Popular Painters in the Black Republic,* tells the Centre's brief history and describes the state of Haitian art at the time. He puzzles over how a flourishing art movement had come into being, where, apparently, there had been no art whatsoever. He notes Herskovits' observation of a total absence of plastic and graphic arts. There was music and dance, indeed a great deal of it, but the rich art traditions of the Haitians' African ancestors had not survived. As Rodman puts it (4): "The fine Dahomean art of appliqué had yielded to the stenciled burlap altar cloth and the two-color Pillsbury flour sack." Bourguignon bought two pieces of burlap in a Port-au-Prince market place. They are decorated with non-representational geometric patterns. LeGrace Benson (2001:117), who has investigated Islamic influences in vodou, has identified these patterns as "magic squares and hatumere designs." That is, they had meaning beyond the decorative for those in the know. She finds such magic squares-- widespread in Islamic West Africa, described and analyzed by Prussin (1986)-- in the designs of ritual elements of vodou.iii

With Peters' efforts and the interest and assistance of a handful of others, among them the writer Thoby-Marcelin and the architect and sculptor Albert Mangonès, there were, in just a few years dozens of original and creative artists where there had been none. How could that be? Rodman seeks out bits of examples that could be seen as the sources from which this art sprang. Notable among these are the various graphic and plastic elements of vodou ritual, including those elements of Catholic ritual that that have
been incorporated. There are the vèvè, ground drawings of white, or yellow flour, even of coffee grounds, depending on the spirits invoked. While such drawings exist in West Africa, the content and structure of the Haitian drawings include Catholic elements as well as specifically French patterns of design and calligraphy. Their complex symbolic meanings reflect the nature of the universe and the individual spirits. We now know a great deal more about this thanks to the work of the anthropologist Karen McCarthy Brown (1995). There were the Catholic lithographs, imported from Germany, later from Cuba, representing the Catholic saints together with element of their legends, there were Catholic churches with their statuary and ritual objects: crucifixes, altars, censers, baptismal fonts, monstrances. There were cemeteries. There were the houses of the wealthy with their wrought iron or gingerbread decorations. Most obvious to visitors were occasional paintings on the white washed sides of rural dwellings (kay in present spelling, then rendered as caille). As Bourguignon's photographs show, few, if any kay in Furey or of those of the part-time workers on the HASCO sugar plantation were white washed. The reason? White-wash was an unaffordable expense. Rodman describes these paintings as colorful and decorative.

I recall that we were shown a set of handprints on an internal wall of a vodou shrine in the sugar area, and being told by the owner of the shrine that they had been made by a lwa, a vodou spirit, that is to say, by a person in a state of trance, possessed by this lwa. These prints were not spoken of as "art" or "decorations" or as "beautiful." I do not recall such a reference elsewhere--these marks were not on public view. The identification of geometric designs on burlap as Islamic magic squares, mention earlier, also comes to mind here. For a later period, Dayan (1997) photographed a number of
paintings with vodou subjects on house walls. Political murals appeared in 1984 after the
departure of the dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier, as well as at several subsequent major
political events: the 1991 inauguration of President Aristide and most extensively, at
Aristide's return in 1994 (Brown 1995). By that time, Haitian art and Haitian society had
undergone a number of transformations.

In 1947-48, Port-au-Prince was a city with a population estimated at about
200,000, the majority people of rural origins. Living in the city, regardless of their
poverty, people acquired some urban ways, were exposed to unfamiliar sights and
sounds, to new types of experiences and interactions. Many people moved about very
widely in the country and even abroad; women traders constantly moved from rural to
urban areas, on foot, with donkeys, or ranging further afield, on trucks. Their presence in
the city, on roads, in markets, in rural areas was striking and is reflected in Bourguignon's
photographs and later in his paintings and drawings. Some men had worked in the sugar
fields in Cuba or the Dominican Republic. Some reported having been to the United
States.

At the same time, others, particularly in rural areas, knew virtually nothing of the
outside world. In the city, people saw advertisements. Here is one memorable example:
On a road high above Port-au-Prince there was a large colorful billboard, showing a
blond American family, with a green bottle. The text read: We are a 7-UP family. (I did
wonder what people made of that!) In the city, and also in rural areas, some children went
to school. Even child-servants, known as ti moun or restavec, were supposed to be sent
to school. Examples of a pervasive inventiveness could be seen, for example, in Mardi
Gras costumes and masks, often produced with a minimum of means. Bourguignon
photographed one teenager who had fashioned a yellow and orange mask out of grapefruit and orange rinds. The result was a striking presence. His thin legs and what was visible of clothing showed his poverty.

How, given such an apparent lack of art, the Centre d'Art and the art movement associated with it came to be has been told several times, in somewhat different ways.

As DeWitt Peters told the story on Jamaican Radio in 1952 (Nadal-Gardère 1986), it was Philippe Thoby-Marcelin who was intrigued by the decorative paintings on a café, hardly more than a shack, in Mont-Rouis. The painter was Hector Hyppolite, an ougan (vodou priest). He became the first and most famous of the Centre d'Art's "popular" painters. (Rodman uses the word "popular," but that is surely not an adequate translation of the French populaire. "Folk" might be a better rendering, but that gives the misleading impression of an art tradition, which, in fact, did not exist; some have referred to this art as "naive" or "primitive.")

There are three points to be noted in this tale of absence and origins: one has to do with the question: what is art? The other concerns the sudden appearance--and disappearance--of art and artists, in relation to an art market. And, the further question: is this an astonishing, unique situation? The answer to that one, we now know, is that it is indeed not unique, that other examples can be cited. iv

Thoby-Marcelin, as one closer to Haitian realities, offers an account (1959) that differs markedly from those of Peters and Rodman, and is highly critical of their talk of the childlike unselfconscious approach to painting of the primitives. Also, he speaks of the presence, in 1930 of one William Scott, an American artist from Chicago and of various opportunities for some individuals to receive exposure and training in painting;
these people then became the "moderns," or "advanced," mentioned earlier. Most interesting are his comments about the approach to painting of Hector Hyppolite, Wilson Bigaud and the others of their cohort. Much has been made of the religious contents of their work, whether Christian or vodou. Yet, says Thoby-Marcelin (22):

Hyppolite himself, who filled the role of houngan and had a highly developed taste for dramatic presentation, never thought of decorating his temple with religious paintings....[W]en they [Hyppolite and the others] spontaneously treat a Christian motif or one taken from Vodou mythology, it is always in the hope of selling their work to a rich art lover.

An interview of Hyppolite by Edith Efron Bogart, cited by Rodman (1948:67), should be read in light of Thoby-Marcelin's remark about the artist's "highly developed sense of dramatic presentation": "...St John the Baptist. He inspires me. He is always with me, always stimulating me." In an unsigned 1947 article in LIFE magazine, this becomes: "Hector Hyppolite, a voodoo priest, paints in a state of religious ecstasy, firm in the belief that his brush is being guided by the hand of John the Baptist" (58). Hyppolite claimed no such thing.

The rapid development of the art of the primitive, i.e., untutored, painters reflects a response to a market that had not existed, and that, with the help of Rodman, André Breton and others, was found not in Haiti but in New York and Paris.

Concerning the 1950 departure of the "moderns" from the Centre d'Arts, Thoby-Marcelin notes, the "moderns " reproached Peters not only for favoring the "naive" or "primitives" over the moderns, but also for keeping them "naive", that is for failing to teach them so that they too could become moderns. There is more to this argument than
may at first appear. It reflects the structure of Haitian society and also a conception of that society or of what that society should be, and it also reflects a conception of art. Whether one is avancé and modern or naive, popular and primitive, is a matter of education and artistic training, that is, ultimately a matter of class. In Haiti such education and training was not—and to a great extent still is not—available to the broad masses of the poor and illiterate. As to a conception of art: the educated and trained moderns could think of art as a search for a self, as the Amateur de Peinture had put it, a way to discover one's true identity. For the "naive," being given paints, a place to work and a small stipend as well as recognition and appreciation, was, at least at the beginning, often a valuable means of surviving. It lasted as long as there was a market for their work.

Hyppolite died in the summer of 1948. The American sculptor Jason Seley, then in residence at the Centre d'Art, was permitted to take his death mask, after the vodou death ritual (dessounin) had been completed. This dramatic ritual serves to remove the dead person's principal lwa, the one for whom he had been initiated. Seley made several copies of the mask and presented one to Bourguignon.

In the foregoing I have discussed the inception and early development of the Haitian art movement in some detail. The work and the people involved were of interest both to Bourguignon and to myself. Discussion centering about the development of a Haitian "primitive" art highlighted, among other things, aspects of the central conflict in Haitian society. Through their content the paintings by Hyppolite, Bigaud and some of the others also shed light on the role of vodou in Haitian life and thus to legitimize it. On the one hand, this was something of an embarrassment to the elite, who liked to deny or decry the existence of that religious tradition. At the same time, the positive reception
of this art in New York and Paris, sponsored, among others by Bréton as well as Rodman, gave Haiti a more positive image than had generally been the case. It helped to overshadow the image of Haiti as the country of magic, zombis, cannibalism, political instability and the rest, and so, for a few years, it contributed to the development of tourism, and thus to the economy.

The Centre brought together a variety of local and foreign people, both residents and visitors. Among the visitors that year was the French photographer Pierre Verger. Bourguignon and Verger quickly became fast friends, even working together in developing their photographs. Verger arrived at the invitation of his long time friend, the anthropologist Alfred Métraux (1957/60, 1958 /1959). Métraux himself came as director of a UNESCO pilot project of development and literacy in the Marbial valley, in the South of Haiti. The project team included a number of international specialists and Haitian researchers, among them Rémy Bastien and Jeanne Sylvain. It was welcomed by the local people, yet was terminated after several years without fully completing its mission. The researchers did however produce a number of publications (e.g., Sylvain 1949, Métraux 1951, Bastien, 1951).

Bourguignon appreciated the work of the Haitian "primitive" painters for the expression of their lived experience and their imaginal world. His own art drew on other sources, on his experience and on the art traditions he knew. His earliest exposure and explorations had been with impressionist approaches landscape painting; he quickly moved on to an interest in faces and their individuality. Influenced both by Flemish expressionism and by the Fauves, he drew a concern with form and structure from the
from the first and joy in pure color from the second. In time he worked through these and other influences to develop a strong style of his own.

The critic Jacqueline Hall, on the occasion of a posthumous retrospective, speaks of Bourguignon's "re-thinking' a style, a technique or an approach to a given subject, which gives freshness to the work." And she writes of his works as "strongly distilled in his personal vision." Concerning a Haitian painting, a 1972 acrylic entitled Tropical Sun, she writes: "the scene is bathed in an explosion of rich yellow. It is a remarkable work...there is a joyousness about Tropical Sun that makes it a pleasure to behold." But she quickly notes:

When Bourguignon concentrates on faces, the pathos of the human condition stands out. The sadness, sorrow, fear on those faces takes the viewer far away from the cheerful luminous world of Tropical Sun (Hall 1989).

This, indeed, is the duality of Bourguignon's vision: the "cheerful luminosity" of the Haitian scene, showing women going market, is, on closer inspection, inhabited by real people, people who experience the pathos of the human condition.

Bourguignon's Haitian works, executed in different mediums in the course of many years, show changes in style and manner over time. Yet, as has been noted, the same hand continues to be recognizable at work. With reference to a later exhibition, the same critic singles out a drawing titled Village People, by writing: "the two sketchy figures among the barely suggested houses have a superb expressiveness and life"[Fig.2]. She goes on to write of the "greatest subtlety of color shown when he paints women's heads....[He] achieves memorable visions of dignity and humanity." Indeed,
Bourguignon's "vivid memory of a people endowed with quiet dignity" seems to be the theme of this review.

Reflecting on another exhibition, and entitling her essay *The Craft of Memory: Bourguignon's Haitian Paintings*, Joan Dayan (1996) writes:

...Bourguignon's women are embodied as if grounded in the most ordinary, unadorned aspects of their lives. They are not sentimentalized or appropriated as objects of the painter's vision. Instead, these representations have everything to do with how the women see themselves. The *Fishmonger* looks out to us with assurance, arms folded and her eyes sharp (3).

Dayan here points to Bourguignon's strikingly realistic vision of Haiti and Haitians. He has a clear sense of who these people are and how they survive under difficult circumstances. He does not romanticize or prettify them. Moreover, Bourguignon's Haitian paintings and drawings reflect and reveal forcefully the acuity of his memory as well as his imagination. His mastery of the visual elements of the Haitian scene allowed him to create and recreate people and places with authority and authenticity.

Variations on the theme of women going to market, in groups [Fig.3] or singly [Fig.4], appear and reappear in his work. There are crowds of people, often women and children. As another critic writes:

In *Haitian Crowd (1979)*, Bourguignon depicts a group of dark-skinned people dressed in white, swarming across a neutral space: the figures and ground dissolve into a dance of colored marks...(Fryer-Kohles, 2001,4).
Bourguignon did not write about his work and he did not talk about it at length. The work needed to speak for itself. To read the critics, it seems that it did. For Dayan, "The craft revels in the lineaments of memory." Moreover, she comments, "[w]hat is remarkable about Bourguignon's paintings is how unique they are, how distinct they are from the European modernists or the Haitian 'primitive' painters" (1996,4).

Interestingly, the poet John M. Bennett, in his review of *The Greener Grass* (1994) first notes,

the tightly controlled, evocative descriptions of places and settings...in
which particular situations are evoked in full sensual detail....[T] artist is revealed in [these] passages....(2).

He then concludes, in words strikingly similar to Dayan's, "This is a fascinating and unique work that does not derive either from the confessional or experimental trends in current fiction" (3).

These critics agree on the uniqueness of the work, be it a series of drawings and paintings or a novel. The work speaks for itself, as Bourguignon meant it to.

Haiti and its people remained with Bourguignon throughout his life, vividly, with all its color. That he returned to Haiti in his work again and again, over many years, reflects the hold this luminous and troubled country had on his imagination.

Freyer-Kohles concludes: "Bourguignon's art shows clearly what he carried in his heart, and allows us to believe, if only momentarily, in a world that regarded art as a calling and a passion rather than an enterprise" (5).

Bourguignon's Haitian works remain as part of his legacy and as a testimony to what he saw in Haiti more than half a century ago.
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