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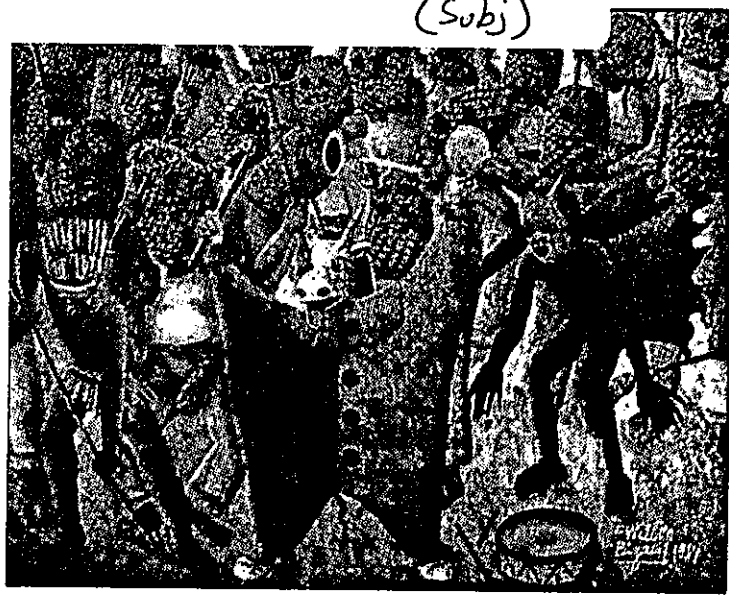
MILWAUKEE JOURNAL

MAM HAITI SHOW

Art - Haitian

...and so is Haitian art.

(Subj)



"CARNIVAL DANCERS," by Haitian artist Wilson Bigaud.

VIEWED FROM a distance, Haiti is simply a small, political-ly torn, economically troubled Caribbean nation that shares the once-lush island known as Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic. But seen closer up, at least by the education staffers at the Milwaukee Art Museum, it's a subject for exultation.

No fewer than 13,500 visitors — an all-time record for the lakefront facility — saw "A Haitian Celebration: Art and Culture" during March, an average of more than 3,000 persons per week.

Please see Haiti page 8

Haiti/Show is a great drawing card

From page 1

The exhibition of 120 paintings and works of sculpture, drawn mainly from the spectacular Richard and Erna Flagg Collection of Haitian Art, is open free to the public next Friday, Saturday and Sunday in conjunction with the Lakefront Festival of Arts.

That fact, plus intensive tour scheduling through the show's closing date, Aug. 16, raises the possibility that "A Haitian Celebration" will end up the art museum's most popular exhibit ever.

All of which is highly pleasing to Barbara Brown Lee, the 30-year art-museum veteran who has supervised the effort to bring tens of thousands of schoolchildren — and adults, too — to this cavalcade of Haitian history, religion and everyday life.

"I've never seen anything like it," says Lee, who as curator of education heads the art museum's community-outreach program.

"We're pleased with the behavior of the children. They're prepared. The teachers have made the most of materials we've provided. If all goes well, we'll establish a new record of attendance with this show."

"A Haitian Celebration" has a particular relevancy to the African-American community.

LOGICAL SUCCESSOR

In this, says Lee, it is the logical successor to an earlier art-museum attraction, "The African-American Tradition in the Decorative Arts," presented in 1978 in conjunction with the Milwaukee chapter, The Links, Inc.

Still, the mere fact that all of the artists represented in the ongoing exhibition are of African descent doesn't guarantee student interest or involvement. That's the job of their teachers — and of the art museum's education staff and volunteer docents.

"The youngsters attending this show aren't Haitians," she observes. "They're Americans. We're



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Barbara Brown Lee

all learning about Haiti through art."

Despite the large number of tour groups, says Lee, there has been a consistently high level of conduct on the part of visitors. Indeed, the interest in the show on the part of young people, trained through the use of materials provided by the art museum, has been impressive.

"We can teach so many different things with these paintings," Lee points out, "history and politics, art and religion. We've had no problems with behavior."

Over the last five years, she adds, the tour guides have noticed "a big change. Youngsters and teenagers are far more interested. We get more challenging questions. Many are about the nature of primitive art, and now it relates to the art produced by natives and outsiders."

For its part, the museum has

made a definite effort to make the exhibition accessible to everybody. It has opened the show free of charge to schools, so that nobody is turned away. And the entry fee has been reduced to \$1 per person for community centers and recreation programs.

ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS

Several upcoming programs augment the school/community outreach program:

■ Psychologist Vivian Nicolas, a Haitian exile living in Montreal, will discuss "The Haitian Palm Tree of Liberty: The Road to Universal Light" at 6:15 p.m. Thursday in the Vogel-Helffer Galleries.

■ Fred Stonehouse, a Milwaukee painter who concedes that he has been heavily influenced by Haitian art and medieval Christian iconography, will give a gallery talk at 2 p.m. next Sunday, June 21.

■ Evelyne St. Poma, a native of Haiti now living in Wisconsin, will talk about the exhibition at 2 p.m. Sunday, July 19. Both presentations will take place in the Journal-Lubar Galleries, site of the exhibition.

The Flagg Collection of Haitian Art, assembled over two decades by Milwaukee philanthropists Richard and Erna Flagg, became the property of the Milwaukee Art Museum last year.

The current exhibition, emphasizing the rich blend of cultures that makes up the New World, focuses on Haitian history, genre paintings of rural family life, celebrations and festivals and Haitian religions, including Vodun and Christianity.

Works being shown touch upon the dichotomy between rich and poor in Haiti, the most densely populated country in the Western Hemisphere; the Haitian struggle to achieve independence in 1804; the brief but brilliant ascent of Haitian art, and picturesque Haitian landmarks such as the Citadel.

For information about tours call 224-3200.

—James Auer