

The Ties that Bind:

Haiti, the United States, & the Art of Ulrick Jean-Pierre in Comparative Perspective

The Ties that Bind takes us on a cultural journey that exposes the deep connections between Haiti and the United States through the eyes of contemporary artists. These two countries are bound by shared historical trajectories: both were impacted by complex encounters among Indigenous populations, European colonizers, and enslaved people; both were transformed by revolutions for independence and violent but ultimately successful attempts to abolish slavery. The ongoing migration of citizens between Haiti (formerly Saint-Domingue) and the United States has led to hybrid forms of architecture, language, food, music, and religion.

Haitian art in all its forms embodies the rich and complex aesthetics of Indigenous Caribbean, African, and European traditions, making it an ideal vehicle for exploring some of the major topics that define the nation. These topics include the Haitian Revolution and the fight for freedom, the role of women as leaders, the migration of people between Haiti and the United States, and the role of religious expression in the everyday lives of Haitians. These themes are exemplified in the work of featured artist Ulrick Jean-Pierre, widely considered one of the most important Haitian-born painters working today. Jean-Pierre is also a storyteller and social commentator whose work serves to bring about political and social change. In conversation with works by 20th-century masters of Haitian art represented in the Spencer's collection—most of which were generously donated by Mary Lou Vansant Hughes in 2011—Jean-Pierre's paintings serve as a catalyst for telling complex stories about Haiti's past, present, and future.

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