

Abject Saint



Caption

This black clad figure, painted on the wall of a popular prayer house and Voodoo pilgrimage site, is a depiction of Grand St. Anne, a Voodoo saint who is known throughout Haiti for her miraculous healing powers. However, Grand St. Anne is a controversial idol. Her dark skin, lack of arms and legs, and oversized dress have made her subject to criticism for being satanic. And though her counterpart to the left, Saint Jacque, demonstrates the appreciable syncretism of Catholicism and Voodoo in Haiti, many Catholics and Christians have singled out St. Anne as a monster—"djab". This demonization of the famous saint speaks to the long history of anti-Voodoo campaigning carried out by the Catholic Church, which, in turn, cannot be understood apart from a colonial legacy of anti-blackness (Ramsey 2011, Trouillot 1990).

Design Statement

Hybridized forms often point to the power dynamics of cultural contact, exchange, and domination. This image captures unequal forms of cultural hybridity in Haiti produced from entangled histories of religious and political domination, by slavery, toxic assets, dark finance, and resistance. The artist's juxtaposition of a venerated catholic saint with a demonized Voodoo saint speaks to the unequal positions of influence held by the Catholic Church and Voodoo.

Project Statement

Haiti has been imagined as "already dead" within the Western visual regime (Philogene 2015). The nation is oversaturated by representations of environmental problems, health disparities, and political upheaval. Most of the health issues that the population faces can be linked to environmental degradation, slavery, and imperialist processes that have altered the landscape, producing mass precarity. After the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, both Voodoo priests/believers and sexual minorities were indicted by the masses for the earthquake (Ulysses 2010). The religion was also blamed for the cholera epidemic that took thousands of lives in the Artibonite region. Historically, Voodoo has functioned as a tool of biopolitics while also being portrayed as a "social hygiene" problem by both Haitian elites and Western powers (Ramsey 2011). The toxicity in this project is in the way blame for Haiti's ills is passed back to local sources, discounting the lasting impact of colonialism and the plantation economy in contemporary Haitian health politics.



Louissaint, Guilberly. 2019. "Abject Saint."

In "Visualizing Haiti's Health Regime: Voodoo as Toxic Subject." In Visualizing Toxic Subjects, curated by James Adams and Kim Fortun. The Center for Ethnography. May.

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