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By Maribeth Conway

**You are currently living in Port-au-Prince. Can you describe life as an artist and person living in Haiti after the earthquake?**

Life right now started after it had stopped that terrible day at 4:55 in the evening. We will never forget what happened to us. Our stories go on of what we went through. I’m trying to get back to work and have routine. Everywhere people are focused on the reconstruction of Haiti. I’m happy to see some people are helping in the arts. Music and art shows are being organized to raise money. Life has to come back. It was literally taken away.

**Has the recent tragedy affected your work in any way?**

I don’t know yet. I think in some way it will. I’ll find out when I start to work, which will be soon I hope. For a long time I’ve been wanting to work in black and white only, so now I think is a good time to start. After this terrible event I felt the pain Pablo Picasso must have felt when he painted his famous mural called “Guernica.”

**I heard you were salvaging your paintings after the earthquake. Were any ruined?**

My studio on 17 Rue M, Ambiance Studio Design, was badly damaged. I think I will be able to repair it. The house needs a lot of work. I was able to save many paintings, but I lost about 10 percent of my work.

**How were you first inspired to become an artist?**

When I was young my mother always took me to Le Centre d’Art in downtown Port-au- Prince. I became friends with well-known Haitian artists like Jasmine Joseph, Murat Brieere and Rigaud Benoit, who painted at Le Centre d’Art in those days.

The smell of oil paint and having all the cola I could drink during their shows was something in my childhood I’ll never forget. These early experiences, in fact, were the foundation of what I like to do, how I live, and the art world I create. It was 1969, the summer of love in Haiti, and I was 10 years old.

Later in my teens, I was influenced by artists that were very close to me, Lorraine and James Perigord. They were my mother’s cousins, but I always like to call them aunt and uncle. Lorraine lived in Manhattan. She had a townhouse on Lexington Avenue. I remember her abstract paintings looked very much like Mark Rothko’s work, but different. She had a series of paintings that were inspired by a vacation in New England. James had studied art in Europe and later lived and painted in Haiti, where I worked with him making metal sculptures, bird cages and iron-rod furniture.

**Tell us about your early memories of picking up a paint brush.**

I was sixteen years old and just entered Trinity Pawling School in New York. I went to my first art class, where we started to study Abstract Expressionism. I got into the studio, grabbed a big paint brush and went wild!

**How do you describe your style?**

I like to think that I have developed my own personal style that is typical of me. Being Haitian-American I dealt with Haitian cultural influences mixed with modern masters in New York. My fine arts training from the School of Visual Arts is one factor. The other is my life in Haiti, where I found a rich artistic environment of native art masters. I got my inspiration from these artists.

**How do you determine that a piece is a success?**

I think there are many factors. Happiness and sales are important. And I look at the time I worked on it. Was it productive time? In short, I always have a feeling about a certain piece, which is, ”I really like this one.“ For me that piece is a success.

**What do you hope a person walks away with after seeing your work?**

That’s a good question. I like that one! I just hope that the person has an honest opinion. It’s

really up to him or her what they think about my work. I’ve had both negative and positive reactions, especially during a show. Once, I was told that a painting of several birds flying around looks like a “notorious person’s mouth.” Like I said, they have to have an honest opinion.

**How does your work reflect Haiti today and Haiti of the past?**

My work looks very tropical. It’s warm, sunny and bright and I love to paint birds. I’m mostly inspired by popular art that deals with folklore stories. Mardi Gras, the big three-day celebration of dancing, drinking and music, is a huge manifestation of art. In my painting “Indian” I pay respect to and honor the first ones to live on this land.