



Ghetto Biennale (2009), entrance. Photo: C. Renault.

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Curatorial Studies on the Edge: The *Ghetto Biennale*, a Junkyard, and the Performance of Possibility

Abstract

'What happens when First World art rubs up against Third World art? Does it bleed?' These were the questions posed in the prospectus for the Ghetto Biennale, an invitation to international artists to converge and work alongside the artists of the Grand Rue neighbourhood of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. This article situates the Biennale within the context of cultural and critical theory that firstly unravels the dialogical discourses involved in the curatorial praxis of this event, and secondly contemplates the concept of curation against the backdrop of the contemporary international politics of Haiti, national disaster and trauma.

Keywords

performance
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Grand Rue
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The twenty-first century curator is a catalyst – a bridge between the local and the global. A bridge has two points, two ends. This is a metaphor for how one crosses the border of self. One position, that of the original personality, will always be more stable, but the other, which is floating, is less stable; therefore the bridge can be dangerous.

Hans Ulrich Obrist (2009: 4)

The Grand Rue is a junkyard located in the centre of the city of Port-au-Prince, and in November 2009 a 'happening' occurred in this most unlikely place. A group of international artists converged to work alongside Haitian artists of the Grand Rue neighbourhood for the *Ghetto Biennale*. For some it marked a beginning of a movement; for others, it

was an event that introduced a brutal glimpse into the reality of international policy and promoted conversations about the global politics of the art world. It also created a new image of the country of Haiti, as participants were able to witness everyday life not represented in mainstream media.

As an event that propels discourses of hope against a backdrop of political and economic instability, as well as the exclusionary politics of the western art world, the *Ghetto Biennale* constitutes what I term a 'performance of possibility' (Beasley 2010a, 2012). The prospectus of this event posed the questions, 'What happens when First World art rubs up against Third World art? Does it bleed?' The call invited artists and scholars interested in the tenuous and sometimes dangerous domain of intercultural dialogue. Discussion was not limited to the international and local politics of Haiti but, more germanely, critically reflected upon the circularity of the western art world. As a co-curator of this event, I better understand Hans Ulrich Obrist's charge to the curator to be a 'catalyst – a bridge between the local and the global' (Obrist 2009: 5), and so I am acutely aware of the danger and the fear attendant to embarking on such an endeavour. In this article, I will discuss the purpose and intent of the *Ghetto Biennale* within the purview of the performance of possibility as a viable way of engaging in intercultural dialogue. In addition, I situate the *Ghetto Biennale* as a critical response to debates concerning the role of the curator in social and political discourse. Moreover, I provide a descriptive account of the *Made in Haiti* project to demonstrate the dialogic intercultural exchange aspired to through this event. Finally, I return to how the performance of possibility was sustained by a spirit of creativity and resolve among the artists of the Grand Rue even amidst the remains and traces of the devastating earthquake that occurred only weeks after the opening.

Biennial, Grand Rue, Red Zones

[T]he curator can have the power to manipulate any kind of situation, he or she should be able to invent the spaces, whether it's inside a museum, trying to open up the museum, [or] creating a special gallery [...] making certain elements of that city or that community come together to discuss a particular issue that may pertain to art, but may also pertain to how that art functions within that particular urban context.

Mari-Carmen Ramirez (2001: 35)

The topic of the 'biennial' has recently garnered much discussion, particularly in reference to questions of justification in the current economic climate and defining or re-defining the term 'globalization'. The large format contemporary exhibition in the ever-shifting world context warrants discussions among contemporary curators (Filipovic, Van Hal and Øvstebø 2010). Considering the debates regarding the rationale of large-scale exhibitions and the re-examination of the premise of such projects within the recent world economic conditions, it becomes clear that the logic of the spectacle is *not* the primary function of such

events. Rather, an increasing number of biennials, particularly those that operate outside of the western hemisphere or in 'developing' or 'Third World' countries (i.e. South and Central America, Africa, and Southeast Asia), engage with contemporary cultural politics including those of the art world. For example, in their formative years the Havana, Gwangju and Dakar biennials proposed direct responses to the exclusionary practices of the western art community, highlighting such issues as human rights, social transitions and claims for democracy. By addressing practices that marginalize artists from outside of the western corridor under the auspices of globalization, such biennials perform the critique of the western art canon and its dominance. The *Ghetto Biennale* was one such event; its impetus was rooted in a response to both local and international politics.

The Grand Rue, literally the 'Red Zone', nestled in the epicentre of the great metropolis of Port-au-Prince, is a vibrant and rambunctious place. Referring to both the neighbourhood and the collective of artists who live there, The Grand Rue is a palimpsest, with each layer of history very much alive and seeping through the daily fiber of the community. Historically, the neighbourhood was a place of woodcarving and the production of souvenirs exported to various neighbouring Caribbean islands. Post-Duvalier, the area increasingly became known for automobile repair and parts. Today it is a junkyard, a dumping site, and at the same time, a self-contained city where people live and work. There are bars, a printer, restaurants and markets, and even a *houngfour* (Vodou temple) for worship. It is a tight, narrow labyrinthine enclave pinned in by four major streets, its main corridor Boulevard Jean-Jacques Dessalines, a massive thoroughfare. I have described the area previously in the perspective of the event as:

The true width of the street is disguised for the spillage of people and cars pushing their way through the bustling boulevard. The narrow sidewalks are claimed by the street vendors selling everything from lumber and automobile fragments, to fresh fruits and freshly fried goat, but only steps away, peering through the hustle and clamor and movement of bodies, the entrance of the Grand Rue neighborhood could easily be passed if it were not for the tall sculpture figure of Gede with an extended penis dangling at its entrance. The sculpture serves as an invitation to a performance space.

(Beasley 2010b: 6)

The Grand Rue sculptors, a collective led by André Eugène, have perfected the art of refashioning rubbish, which has been dumped into the city from industrialized countries, into statuesque markers of beauty. Their work has been exported and is desired internationally (for example, one serves as the main sculpture at the Museum of Slavery in Liverpool, and another was featured at the 2010 'Men's Fashion Week' in Venice), but the artists themselves, in many instances, are unable to attend their own art openings, mainly because of discriminatory international travel policies, particularly against Haiti. It is striking that their work can be exported but their bodies cannot! In addition, the lack of disposable income (if any income exists)



André Eugène, Gede (2009). Photo: Myron Beasley.

contributes to this challenge. The lives of Grand Rue artists are drastically different from those of the wealthy Haitian artists who, usually trained and educated abroad, have entre to participate in the mainstream global art world.

The Ghetto Biennale

After three weeks of collaborative preparations, the opening occurred on 16 December. The cement portico bore the words 'Ghetto Biennale' painted with images by two of the Grand Rue Artists – Louko and André Eugène – atop the columns that supported the roof. The portico both announced the event and served as the entrance to the Grand Rue. The

morning was a flurry of activity akin to a happening, as artists from all over Haiti, even those who did not 'officially' participate in the *Biennale*, arrived to present their work. Inside the small cramped yard of the Grand Rue, just beyond the portico, stood *Trash Church* (2009), a structure fabricated out of plastic water bags and other debris that pollute the streets of Port-au-Prince. UK artist Jesse Darling coordinated this project with the youth of the neighbourhood. The trash church was used for performances and video screenings throughout the day and into the evening. The right side of the church rested against a wall, a public bathing area where water flows down a small ravine. US-based Cuban artist Hugo Moro and the group Ti Moun Rezistans (young artists in the Grand Rue who participated in an apprenticeship) placed small Plexiglas mirrors in stencil-painted frames on the outside wall of *Trash Church* where members of the community could view themselves. At the foot of the ravine, Moro planted trees. Inspired by Joseph Beuys' *7000 Oaks* (1982–87), Moro had desired to plant 7,000 trees across the island. Other environmentally-based works included Seitu Jones and his collaboration with APROSIFA (Association for the Promotion of Integral Family Healthcare), a community center in Port-au-Prince. The group created more than 1,000 balls that mixed floral and grass seeds with native soil that were then dispersed onto exposed areas throughout the city as a means to 'greenline' the city. They used earth from Cité Soleil, considered one of the worst slums in the western hemisphere that nevertheless possesses the most fertile soil in the region. A wheelbarrow of seed bombs on display with the sign 'help us save our earth' sat at the entrance of the small yard. Through a narrow hallway, the bedroom of a home became an installation by Jamaican artist Ebony Patterson. Known for juxtapositions which cast known Jamaican drug kings in female drag, she worked with two Haitian flag makers, Myrlande Constant and Roudy Azor, to produce five large sequined flags. While each was dedicated to a feminine spirit within the Vodou tradition, the icon was in fact depicted as a Haitian man. Altars at the base of each emblem presented offerings of food and artifacts associated with these spiritual beings.

The cement exterior walls of the partially dilapidated homes were adorned with the art of Ti Moun Rezistans, and the large sculptures in the Grand Rue situated throughout the only open space served as the background for the newly produced work. Painted on one wall was a futuristic, brightly-coloured mural from the Jacmel-based artists' collective FOSAJ (Fanal Otantik Sant D'A Jacmel), which was collocated throughout the week with tags by noted Haitian graffiti artist Jerry. Around another winding corridor was the *houmfour*, the Vodou temple. Inside, in the centre of the circle used for ritual performances, sat a screen showing a film adaptation of Kathy Ackers' novel, *Kathy Goes to Haiti* (1988), which was shot in Port-au-Prince and Jacmel. Directed by Flo McGarrell, it featured actors from the United States, FOSAJ and from the Grand Rue community (with the Vodou priest as the lead). This project also marked a collaboration with the Ciné Institute, a film school based in Jacmel. With the RaRa band (a traditional Haitian folk group) marching only a few steps away, and the crowd of observers mingling with artists and neighbourhood members, the already cramped open space of the Grand Rue became smaller and more intense.

The idea of the *Ghetto Biennale* came from André Eugène, who was interested in inviting artists from around the world to come to work with and alongside Haitian artists in the Grand Rue neighbourhood. His intention was to circumvent prohibitive laws, to engage in meaningful discussions with other artists, and to positively impact the local community. Leah Gordon and I were invited to curate the event. Gordon is an international photo-journalist and political activist, and we both have collaborated on projects in Haiti. As curators of the *Ghetto Biennale*, we adopted the critical discussion of globalization and capitalism initiated by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2001). We wanted this event to participate in this conversation – a conversation, according to Okwui Enwezor, that is lacking in the art world:

If globalization has opened up new axes of contestation in which a number of antinomies have become apparent, antiglobalization discourses, unlike the old debates of postmodernist critique of grand narratives, have supplemented a discourse that was always about the negotiation of knowledge and power with a radical rethinking of the deleterious effects of global capitalism's lack of recognition of such negotiations, especially within the field of art.

(Enwezor 2010: 428)

As curators, we sought to negotiate the implicit power of globalization and create a space where it could be interrogated and challenged. Recalling Mari-Carmen Ramirez's thoughts about inventing spaces to curate, Haiti, and the Grand Rue in particular, are spaces where the sad brute realities of globalizations coalesce, where international policies have crippled a small island nation. How, then, might we use the invitation to encourage artists and scholars to engage in a critical conversation and invest in some small way in the community of the Grand Rue? As curators we had to negotiate locally with magistrates and the Minister of Culture, who insisted that there be armed UN security and promised to provide electricity for 24 hours. We wondered what impact the presence of the soldiers might have. At midday during the opening, UN guards streamed through, most stopping and gazing upon the art work as they mingled in the crowd. They too were engaged in this happening. Others in the local government, while ostensibly happy that something was occurring in this neighbourhood, were at times discouraging in their conviction that viable art galleries could only be found up the hill in Petionville, the community of the elite. Our attention was diverted from supporting the visiting artists as we became preoccupied with the mundane tasks of seeking equipment or items (which were mostly not available), translating, and tending to the practical demands of the art projects and presentations. Our role as curators thus extended to cultural diplomats, translators and mediators.

By 'performances of possibility', I mean events that evoke feelings of hope – a belief in the promise of what could be, even given an undercurrent of evident despair. The concept is derived from a critical stance for cross-cultural dialogue that is reflexive, sincere, pedagogical and aesthetic, particularly in areas marked by national disaster or fragile political systems. Such performances proclaim more than idyllic sentimentalism, and instead embody practical components of the here and now that informs



Wall of TI MOUN REZISTANS Artworks at the Ghetto Biennale (2009).
Photo: Myron Beasley.

and envisions a promise of what can or will come. As I ventured into this process, some fellow curators asked how this endeavour was different from *Prospect 1*, the show held in New Orleans immediately after the Katrina catastrophe. Others wondered whether this venture was an attempt to capitalize on disaster and poverty chic. From the preliminary conversations about the *Ghetto Biennale*, the goals were straightforward: to bring artists together *for* in-depth, cross-cultural communication and collaboration. The expectation was that international artists would come to the Grand Rue to create art *in situ*, *not* to bring art to be displayed in the junkyard. Further, we sought proposals that could be receptive to the vulnerability and sensitivity of sincere dialogue and collaboration – dangerous work.

Louko, one of the artists in the Grand Rue, summarized the philosophy of the community as a space of endless possibility:

There are no limits here, there are so many things here. No limits to what I can do. Anything you find – just give it to me. Everything they throw in the garbage, I use it. This is the thing you see: old stuff. And then the transformation of objects into new things.

(Fischer 2010: 164)

Louko's refection recalls Michel de Certeau's (1984) concept of the 'art of making do', in which he explains the creative energy characterized by those forced to live with a lack of resources caused by economic or political



Ghetto Biennale (2009), opening. Photo: Myron Beasley.

reasons. Often overlooked by theorists who write about marginality are discussions about what the marginalized actually have at their disposal.

The trash in the Grand Rue and other parts of Haiti derives from the West. Charles W. Mills' article 'Black Trash' (1995), which charts and reveals environmental injustices in non-white populations, in particular, traces how the dumping of trash in the non-western and western black world is aligned with a faulty logic of giving; it is a giving that is ethnocentric in nature, that reflects the disposal of unwanted goods without thought of its usefulness to the recipients. For example, Celeur, one of the Grand Rue artists, constructed a sculpture out of used shoes that were exported to the island. He asked, 'Why do people send us shoes like these? We have no use for them here' (Gordon 2008). The trash in most instances is not deposited because it is bad or inoperative, but rather, is rendered abject – and therefore debased and discarded – because of the West's desire for the 'new'. Celeur's sculpture, like many made by Grand Rue artists, is a political statement that critiques both western consumption and environmental injustice. In turn, as a collaboration between artists from radically different backgrounds, the *Ghetto Biennale* suggests the 'third space' formulated by Homi Bhabha (1994), as an open area that allows for distinct narratives to co-exist and critically reflect the terrains of power. Bhabha does not present a romanticized conception, but rather a challenge to fully honour the complexities and the challenges of building a space beyond binary logics. In these ways, the *Ghetto Biennale*, forged a radical rethinking of cross-cultural exchange in the art world.

1. La Fondation Connaissance et Liberté/Fondasyon Konesans Ak Libète (FOKAL) and the Soros Foundation supported housing for the curators, transportation for the artists within Port-au-Prince, and a reception.

Does It Bleed?: 'Plan B'

More than forty artists and scholars from around the world worked alongside Haitians on projects that culminated in an opening held 16 December 2009. Artists from Norway, the United Kingdom, Germany, Jamaica, Tasmania and the United States collaborated with a host of local artists in a variety of ways. For example, Bill Drummond's community performance 17 (2009), its first location in the Americas, paired elementary schools in Port-au-Prince with schools in London. The performance culminated with lining the young children from the Grand Rue around the entire perimeter, each uttering a sound to create music. Photographer Laura Heyman, whose roaming formal portrait studio occupied the middle of the neighbourhood, invited families and individuals from the community to sit for a free portrait as they, the subjects of the images, decided how they wanted to be photographed. Reminiscent of the L'Age d'Or movement of African photography, where the subjects took control over how they wanted to be represented, the stunning images produced were given to the subjects. The academic conference was supported with a small amount of funds by the US State Department, who would only contribute if it were held outside the Grand Rue. Otherwise, all artists had to seek their own financial support for their projects.¹

As curators, we selected proposals that took into account the contemporary political and geographical landscape of Haiti and that were sensitive to cross-cultural issues. Some submissions tended toward the

2. A complete list of projects and artists can be found at <http://www.ghettobiennale.com>.

aesthetic, such as placing a beautiful sculpture of an ear in the middle of the junkyard, or dressing the 'natives' in eighteenth-century costumes and photographing them at an elaborately staged dinner. Others, while theoretically sophisticated, were nonviable for other reasons. A proposed cricket match featuring the words of Caribbean philosopher C. L. R. James, posed a provocative project, except that playing cricket in the middle of the neighbourhood was impossible (not to mention the fact that there is no history of cricket in Haiti as it was never a British colony). The curatorial task, then, was to select projects that struck a balance between form and content with the area's social and cultural politics. Proposed projects included *RadioGhetto* by two audio artists from Berlin who would produce a daily live show from the Grand Rue and broadcast it to Berlin and the United States. An architect from Great Britain submitted a design for a gallery space for the children's art in the neighbourhood. The students would function as her clients and she would work with them to design a space in the Grand Rue.² However, upon arrival, in most instances, the invited artists had to reconsider their original projects to align with the Grand Rue's cultural and physical landscape, and hence 'Plan B', a situation where artists had to rethink and sometimes reconfigure their projects based on the local realities of Haiti. Jesse Darling explained, 'I had to sit and pause for a moment. What I had proposed I had to toss out the window' (Darling 2009). Some felt the frustration of not having the materials they needed, and had to make do with that they brought or what was available. Ebony Patterson reflected:

When I first went to the Grand Rue, I cried. I thought 'what is the world doing to this place?' Then I began working with two local flag makers, who taught me that I could proceed in such circumstances. My work will never be the same.

(Patterson 2009)

Reconfiguration was a consistent theme, which extended to the academic conference presented the day after the opening. Scholars from an array of disciplines had come to witness and discuss the challenges, the process, and the work created during the *Biennale*. The conference served as a moment of reflexivity about the 'Third World' rubbing against the 'developed' nations. In addition to the visiting academics and artists, the entire Grand Rue neighbourhood attended the event. After the first panel, when a fluent translator could not quite interpret the academic jargon used by some of the panelists, it became clear that the program had to change. I re-jigged the panels, replacing scholars with young people and community members of the Grand Rue who could share their experiences about what it meant to have artists from around the world come to work and dwell among them, along with a panel of invited artists to reflect on what it meant to be in Haiti producing this work. Poignant and at times emotional, the conference moved from 'high theory' to honouring more grounded knowledge. The academics became the audience, and the Grand Rue residents became the theorists, reflecting upon their lived experience. The friction in the liminal space between the negotiations,



3. The source of Beuys's quote is Newman and Furlong (1983).

André Eugène, Untitled (2009). Photo: Myron Beasley.

contradictions and vulnerabilities, presented a place of potential danger. A danger ensues after a shifting of power when those, who might be perceived in positions of power, are asked to release their tightly held reins and are forced to be situated in 'other' positions. It is a precarious moment, to be sure, one wrought with discomfort and the ambiguity of the unexpected.

Made in Haiti

Frau Fiber's (aka Carole Frances Lung) proposal was inscribed with a notable quote by Joseph Beuys: 'To make people free is the aim of art, therefore art for me is the science of freedom.'³ Frau Fiber, known internationally for her sewing rebellions, came to Haiti to attempt to revitalize the defunct textile



Frau Fiber, Made in Haiti (2009), opening of a bale of pepe. Photo: Myron Beasley.

industry. Overwhelmed by international aid programs that flooded the Haitian markets with international goods, this industry has substantially decreased and in many instances devastated local business. Recognizing that Haiti could be the next site of labour exploitation by multinational apparel companies, Frau Fiber created an alternative. *Made in Haiti* (2009) was developed with two local tailors to refashion *pepe* (secondhand clothing sent to Haiti) in order to subvert exploitive practices and initiate an ongoing collaboration. The project paid the tailors a living wage, allowed the workers to have equal voice in decision-making, created desirable goods out of discarded materials, and then imported the remade clothing back to the United States. In this way, Fiber used the United States' purchasing power to support sustainable pay for textile workers.

Negotiation was a key aspect of this performative work. Landing in Haiti, Frau Fiber asked the tailors to place a value on their worth in order to establish a fair salary. Then she and the tailors set out to the Marche de la Croix des Bossales, one of the largest outdoor markets located at the port of Port-au-Prince and at the door of Cité Soleil, the major entre of commerce. She and the tailors bartered for a bundle of *pepe*, then returned to the Grand Rue to open the massive heap of cloth. A crowd surrounded the tailors as they unravelled the contents of the bundle. Their goal was to assess what



Frau Fiber, Made in Haiti (2009), garment workshop and market stall. Photo: Myron Beasley.

articles would be remade. Then the discarded fabric was sewn into a canopy under which to set up shop. Another point of negotiation pertained to the design and development of the clothing. Tailors in Haiti are trained in a formal and somewhat traditional style. Frau Fiber, though trained similarly, played with structure to push the creativity of the designs. She recalls how one of the tailors scoffed at her work, then began to imitate it, thereby learning a new way of reworking used clothing. The outdoor manufacturing centre consisted of a table, two manual peddle sewing machines, and a coal-heated iron. The crew worked from nine to five for two weeks and produced a line of clothing with the 'Made in Haiti' label, which was displayed on the opening day. All of the garments sold. Even the shopping bags were made from the same materials. The project remains ongoing as the tailors continue to refashion garments sent to Haiti, which are then returned to the States and sold.⁴

4. For an up-to-date record of *Made in Haiti*, see <http://madeinhaiti09.wordpress.com/>. See also my analysis of Frau Fiber in Beasley (2008).

Traces, Performances of Possibilities

As the darkness descends on the opening day, the humidity lingers and a thick haziness settles in. We have no electricity (though it was promised by the minister of culture). The space, still crowded, is lit by candles or small Christmas lights connected to jerry-rigged electrical wires to

a distant generator. Seven 50-gallon oil canisters are transformed into jack-o'-lanterns with faces chiseled into the metal by André Eugène. They are filled with borrowed lights and candles as they set atop Eugène's one-bedroom abode. People walk around with handheld candles. The temperature reached over 95 degrees Fahrenheit, but the crowd is still excited and continues to engage with the artworks and each other. In the centre of the Grand Rue, Norwegian video artist Roberto Peyre and his collaborators Steevens, Romel Perrier and Alex Louis (members of TeleGhetto) huddle around a projector and a laptop balanced on an old chair powered by extension cords stretching half a block to a generator. The images flashing on the wall are black-and-white scenes of celebrations from around the Caribbean with a constant reference to the images of the carnival performances of Jacmal, Haiti. The larger-than-life costumed performers with papier mâché masks are cut randomly in a montage of everyday life of Haiti recorded during the *Biennale*. Live drummers incite the crowd to chant Vodou songs to accompany the video projection. The clips of carnival – an event that personifies the concept of liminality – capture a moment when individuals perform identities that both recall a past and fantasize towards a future. This moment, this night, the final evening of the *Biennale*, exemplified the communal nature of the three weeks. The chants were requests for a possibility of a different future, a different life in Haiti. The *Ghetto Biennale* signalled a moment of looking forward, a moment of endless possibility, a moment when anything could happen in the lives of those in the Grand Rue.

The ethos of the *Ghetto Biennale* alerted the world that artists – both known and unknown – can function outside of a system of exclusionary practices to create change. The significance of the completed work must be valued not for its monetary worth but rather its ability to speak to contemporary political issues and functionality based on community needs. The event was open, free and centrally located, making it accessible to many Haitians. A Haitian gallery owner attending the opening described the event as 'ugly, badly curated, like a street fair'. Such a statement reiterates a class-based perspective that is all too prevalent in the art world. Yet, as Michel de Certeau (1984) has suggested, even something as simple as a walk in the city can be a liberatory act. The artists who participated in the *Ghetto Biennale* deliberately engaged with discomfort. In so doing, they may have changed the lives of many, as well as even their own. They worked with the understanding that art is and always was political; its politics can be as constraining as they can be liberating. As a curator, I realized that such an event can, in effect, constitute a performance of social critique.

Three weeks after the opening, at 4:53 p.m. on 12 January 2010, the earth's surface shifted. A 7.0 magnitude earthquake shook Haiti and radically changed the lives of our collaborators, and claiming the life of one of the Grand Rue artists, Louko. The international artists mobilized to establish a fund for the Grand Rue community. Roderigue, a translator for the international artists, claimed 'I wouldn't have been able to make it,' and that their support was more generous than his own family and friends who live off the island. Several weeks later, I returned to the



Grand Rue after the earthquake (2010). Photo: Leah Gordon.

Grand Rue. The sculpture garden had morphed into something different. The tall figures comprised of used objects were now covered with thick layers of soot and interspersed with hunks of crumbled cement from the wreckage of nearby buildings. As the debris from the quake mingled with the effigies to Gede, the Vodou energy of death, themselves made from debris and wreckage, it created a landscape where the boundaries of art and reality were hardly discernable. The portico that marked the rear entrance of the Grand Rue suddenly arose in front of the yard. Yet even against the abrupt reconfiguration of the Grand Rue, I witnessed people making art, eking out space wherever possible. I saw Romel huddled against the back of a tent, painting a portrait on the rubber of a recycled tire, and Claude placing the final touches on his selection of used pint-sized tin cans, each chiseled with faces and strung together with wire, then encased in a wood frame. The *Ghetto Biennale* critically engaged and inspired international artists, local artists and the community of the Grand Rue. More succinctly, this endeavour was a response to both the political and lived realities of Haitians against the backdrop of a fragile government system and recent natural disasters. In addition, the *Biennale* exposed exclusionary practices endemic to the international art scene by introducing artists from around the world to a junkyard in the 'poorest' nation where producing art can be dangerous. Yet, despite the dire living conditions – the bare ruins of buildings from the earthquake, no electricity and no water – André Eugène, Romel and Claude continue to produce and create art.

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