

# FORT GANSEVOORT



## Myrlande Constant

### *The Spiritual World of Haiti*

Fort Gansevoort, 5 Ninth Avenue, New York, NY

Opening: Thursday, February 27, 2025, 6-8 PM

On View: February 28, 2025 – April 26, 2025

New York...Beginning February 27, 2025, Fort Gansevoort will present *The Spiritual World of Haiti*, its second solo exhibition with internationally renowned Haitian artist Myrlande Constant.

Since the 1990s, Constant's hand-beaded and sequin-embroidered textiles have reshaped the traditionally male-dominated vernacular art form known as *drapo* Vodou. As a teenager in Port-au-Prince, Constant worked alongside her mother at a commercial wedding dress factory, mastering the *tambour* embroidery technique of threading beads and sequins through fabric. By foregrounding her specialized skills honed in the fashion industry, Constant's approach to *drapo* has broken gender barriers and elevated the overlooked creative labor of Haitian female factory workers to the realm of fine art. Her pieces are immediately recognizable through their dynamic variety of materials and distinctive interplays of texture and colors that coalesce into resplendent painterly compositions.

Though she considers her artmaking to be rooted in spirituality, Constant does not create her works for the purpose of display in Vodou temples, preferring instead to exhibit them in museums and galleries internationally. Though the current extreme political instability and humanitarian crises of Haiti have slowed her production in recent years, she continues to work amidst the chaos: for Constant, the act of artmaking is a statement of resistance and a gesture toward perseverance.

#### Exhibition Details

The works at Fort Gansevoort have been selected to celebrate the evolution of Constant's personal aesthetic and highlight the technical and formal transformation by which her oeuvre has expanded in intricacy and optical impact.

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The earliest work on view, a 1990s flag titled *Marinette Bois Chèche*, epitomizes a graphic approach to image-making that characterized Constant's early engagement with *drapo*. The title, which references an unpredictable Haitian Vodou spirit, roughly translates to "Marinette of the dry wood." According to folklore, *Marinette* was burned alive for fighting against slavery and taking part in the apocryphal *Bwa Kayiman* ceremony that initiated the Haitian revolution. Today, Vodou ceremonies honoring the martyrdom of *Marinette Bwa Chech* (correct Haitian Creole orthography) typically take place around a large bonfire. Here, Constant's visual economy is notable; her simplistically rendered subjects, placed on a white background, gather around a solid red fire at the base of a linear palm. Large *vèvè* symbols, which represent each spirit in the Haitian Vodou religion, flank the left and right side of the flag in an arrangement of balance and symmetry. Composed only with seed and bugle beads—a departure from traditional *drapo* use of sequins—*Marinette Bois Chèche* highlights Constant's technical ingenuity and her formal divergence. This flag additionally establishes the artist's natural inclination toward narrative—a hallmark of her work since the beginning of her career.

While Constant has revisited the same spiritual themes over a nearly 35-year period of artmaking, her narratives have evolved dramatically in their sensuality, sophistication, complexity, and scale. The most recently completed work on view in the exhibition, *Devosyon Makaya*, is a nearly 12-foot-wide masterwork roughly three years in the making and represents the apex of Constant's unbridled maximalism and bravura. With its kaleidoscope of colors and textures rendered in an array of beads and sequins applied with the artist's signature precision, this enormous work depicts the annual Haitian ritual celebration of *Makaya* as a profound mingling of terrestrial and spiritual worlds. Taking its name from a native tree that sheds its leaves and initiates a period of revitalization, *Makaya* is regarded as a time for introspection and spiritual cleansing. Thus, Constant's flag tells the story of an important period of preparation, renewal, and rebirth, as Vodou practitioners embrace new beginnings and a new year by engaging in acts of natural healing. Incorporated into this work's decorative border of symbolic objects, a single eye inscribed in a heart with wings sits at the top of the composition. This powerful image represents *Gran Mèt*—the supreme God of the Haitian Vodou religion—looking down upon the scene. Mystical and omniscient, Constant's evocation of *Gran Mèt* is a reminder to the viewer that the terrestrial plane is ever connected to something greater and more powerful.

## About the Artist

*Myrlande Constant was born 1968 in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Following the critical acclaim of her first solo museum exhibition at the Fowler Museum at UCLA in 2023, "Myrlande Constant: The Work of Radiance," Constant has experienced a meteoric rise in institutional attention. Her flags have since been included in numerous museum exhibitions including "Unravel: The Power and Politics of Textiles in Art," at the Barbican Art Gallery in London and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam; "Surrealism and Us: Caribbean and African Diasporic Artists since 1940," at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas, and "Unruly Navigations" at the Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco. On view through March 2025, Constant's work can be seen at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC in the exhibition "Spirit and Strength: Modern Art from Haiti." Three substantial works by the artist were most recently exhibited at the Contemporary Arts Center in New Orleans as part of the city-wide triennial exhibition "Prospect 6." Constant's work is currently on view in France: at Centre Pompidou in Metz and was recently exhibited at the Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac in Paris. On the 1st of February, The Figge Art Museum in Davenport, Iowa opened the solo Myrlande Constant exhibition "Drapo," which will remain on view through May 2025. At the end of last year, Constant was honored with the 2024 Prince Claus Impact Award in Amsterdam. In 2023, Fort Gansevoort presented "Drapo," the artist's first solo exhibition in New York. In 2022 her work was featured in "The Milk of Dreams, La Biennale di Venezia, 59th International Art Exhibition" in Venice, Italy.*

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*Constant's work has been featured in important group exhibitions at renowned museums and institutions including the Barbican Art Gallery, London, UK; Grand Palais, Paris, FR; Nottingham Contemporary Gallery, Nottingham, UK; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, NL; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth, TX; Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco, CA; Tampa Museum of Art, Tampa, FL; Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, FL; and Brown University, Providence, RI among others. Constant's work is included in numerous museum collections including American Folk Art Museum, New York, NY; Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL; Alford Collection of Contemporary Art, Rollins Museum of Art, Winter Park, FL; Baruch College Art Collection, New York, NY; de Young Museum, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA; Figge Art Museum, Davenport, IA; Fowler Museum, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA; Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, FL; Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami, Miami, FL; Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN; Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, Paris, France; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago, IL; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA; Pérez Art Museum, Miami, FL; RISD; Museum, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI; Selden Rodman Gallery, Ramapo College, Mahwah, NJ; Tampa Museum of Art, Tampa, FL; Waterloo Center for the Arts, Waterloo, IA; and Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, MA. Myrlande Constant is represented by Fort Gansevoort, New York.*

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**Caption and courtesy information:**

Myrlande Constant

*Par pou voir torit les saints torit les morts torit armes ou purgatoir bó manman  
ak bo papa maternal et paternal en non digr cela mizerricorde*

Date unknown

Beads, sequins, and tassels on fabric

76.5 x 96 inches

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