

The painting of life



January 12th 7.52 p.m. “A powerful earthquake has struck Haiti ... There are countless dead and even more wounded ...” It was with these simple, but terrible, words that our planet found out about the catastrophe that had hit a poor, tiny country far away from Europe. Non-stop pictures would fill all the TV networks. The world was shocked. Help began to be organised for these poor people. But who are they? Who lives on this beautiful Caribbean island which has been so badly struck?

Christopher Columbus

2. Haiti is part of an island called “Hispaniola”. It was the second American island discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1492. The same year, European colonization started: first by the Spanish and then by the French. The island’s inhabitants were Indians. They were massacred. The Europeans needed people to help to develop Hispaniola, in particular working on the sugar cane plantations.



Christopher Columbus



Hispaniola island

Slaves

3. So they went to Africa, captured people from there and sent them to America as slaves. This “human trade” continued for over two centuries! But over the next two hundred years, the situation would change.

Haiti

4. During the 17th century, the island was split into two parts. To the East were the Spanish, who called their zone “Santo Domingo”, and to the West were the French. In the 18th century the French Revolution liberated the black slaves in the French West zone of the island. Soon, the former slaves took up arms and became independent. Their new country would be called by the old Indian name “ayí” spelled “Haiti”.



Africa

5. So a black nation, made up of former slaves, was born on January 1st, 1804. It was the first free black republic in the world. People were poor but proud and happy. They belonged to the new American continent but they did not forget their African origins.

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In particular, they invented a new religion which is a mix of the Christian religion of their former masters, and the religion of their African ancestors: this new religion is called Voodoo.

Voodoo

6. In the voodoo religion, nature is inhabited by spirits. Some are good and some are evil. What's important is to make contact with the spirits. One can do it through prayer. One can do it through dance or music. But, especially, one can do it through Art. "*Haitians are artists*" said André Malraux, the great French writer, as he discovered the beautiful treasures of Haitian painting during a trip.



Make life more beautiful

7. Among all the people of the Caribbean (Cuba, Jamaica, West Indies...) the Haitians are the only ones who have so many painters. This is because of their very special religion in which painting represents more than just a way to express oneself, have fun or make life more beautiful. It's even more important than Art. For the Haitian people, painting is life: life of the body, the five senses, but above all that, of the spirit.

Spirits

8. Voodoo is about communicating with spirits. Painting is a good way to communicate with them, of course, but it's also a good way of finding out more about your own spirit. Haitian painting is about spirituality.

Painting everywhere

9. One can find paintings everywhere in Haiti, even in museums... There are some in the streets like frescoes. There are some at people's homes, in the gardens, in public buildings, at bus stops, in waiting rooms. Everywhere, everywhere, everywhere one can see and admire this colourful, joyful and lively painting that makes you want to dance and sing.

Naïve style

10. The style is naïve - which means a painting with many little details, but which doesn't bother with the academic rules taught in European art schools. Colours are bright and unmixed. In France the naïf painter who is the closest to the Haitian painting is Henri Rousseau. Yes, Haitian painting has not finished pleasing us and making us happy.

Thank you Haiti!



The market

