

U.S. COMMITTEE OF THE BLUE SHIELD

Committed to the Protection of Cultural Property Worldwide During Armed Conflict

Smithsonian Delegation to Haiti Report, March 6-8, 2010
Prepared by Corine Wegener, U.S. Committee of the Blue Shield

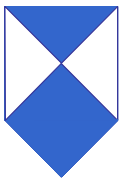


Last Supper mural at Sainte-Trinité Church, photo by Corine Wegener, 6 March 2010

Background

On February 5th, 2010, USCBS (U.S. Committee of the Blue Shield) convened a meeting of cultural property professional organizations and government agencies to discuss post-earthquake assistance for cultural heritage in Haiti. The American Association of Museums hosted the meeting at their headquarters in Washington, D.C. Attendees included:

Cori Wegener, President, USCBS; ANCBS board; ICOM-DRTF; Minneapolis Institute of Arts
Erik Ledbetter, Director, International Programs and Ethics, American Association of Museums
Ford Bell, Director, American Association of Museums
Eric Pourchot, Institutional Advancement Director, American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works
Eryl Wentworth, Executive Director, American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works
Barbara Roberts, Independent Conservator
Paul Wegener, U.S. Committee of the Blue Shield
Anita Canovas, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Lawyers Committee for Cultural Heritage Preservation
Paul Edmondson, National Trust for Historic Preservation
Jane Long, Vice President, Emergency Programs, Heritage Preservation
Maygene Daniels, Archives, National Gallery of Art, Society of American Archivists
Katherine Slick, Executive Director, US/International Council on Monuments and Sites



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Greg Borgstede, Senior Researcher, Cultural Heritage Center, U.S. Department of State
Andrew Cohen, Cultural Heritage Center, U.S. Department of State
Robert Mearkle, Office of UNESCO Affairs, U.S. Department of State
Blakeney Vasquez, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, U.S. Department of State
Serena Bellew, Deputy Federal Preservation Officer, Department of Defense
William Tompkins, National Collections Coordinator, Smithsonian Institution
Richard Kurin, Under Secretary for History, Art, and Culture, Smithsonian Institution
Larry Wohlers, Senior Advisor for International Activities, Smithsonian Institution
Doris Hamburg, Director, Preservation Programs, National Archives and Records Administration

The group shared information about the current situation in Haiti and discussed pooling resources for a joint US team to assist Haitian colleagues with cultural heritage salvage and conservation. The American Institute for Conservation agreed to recruit volunteer conservators from their AIC- CERT (Cultural Emergency Response Team) to go to Haiti. The US Committee of the Blue Shield pledged to provide logistical support and coordinate with other Blue Shield organizations internationally as well as with military organizations like MINUSTAH (UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti) and U.S. Southern Command in Haiti. The National Trust for Historic Preservation and US/ICOMOS offered to look for volunteers among their membership as well. All the organizations present agreed on the need for funding and the need for a formal request from the Haitian authorities before deploying a conservation team.

Dr. Richard Kurin (Smithsonian) pledged to highlight the plight of Haiti's cultural heritage in Smithsonian programming and to seek funding from public and private sources for a joint U.S. assistance mission to Haiti.

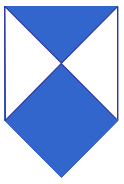
March 6-8, 2010 Visit to Port-au-Prince, Haiti

After the February 5th meeting, Dr. Kurin organized a visit to Port-au-Prince, Haiti for March 6-8, 2010. Dr. Kurin invited three individuals to travel with him:

Dr. Diana N'Diaye, Curator, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, Smithsonian Institution
Dr. Gregory Borgstede, Senior Researcher, Cultural Heritage Center, U.S. Department of State
Corine Wegener, President, U.S. Committee of the Blue Shield and Associate Curator, Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

The purpose of the brief visit was to 1) meet with Haitian colleagues and officials to discuss establishing a joint cultural heritage recovery center in cooperation with the Haitian Ministry of Culture and Communication, FOKAL (Fondation Connaissance et Liberte/Open Society Institute), the Smithsonian Institution, the Blue Shield network, and various other interested GOs and NGOs; 2) To request assistance of U.S. government entities working in Haiti in establishing and equipping such a site; and 3) to discuss Smithsonian programs to support Haitian arts and culture.

Wegener, a board member of ANCBS (Association of National Committees of the Blue Shield) based in The Hague, informed the group of Blue Shield plans already underway for a recovery base near



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the airport with a site provided by FOKAL (La Fondation Connaissance et Liberté or Open Society Institute) in Haiti. (**Note:** “Blue Shield” refers to the various national committees as well as ICOM, ICA, IFLA, ICOMOS, and CCAAA.) The contacts for this plan are Christophe Jacobs from Blue Shield France and ICA (International Council on Archives) and Danielle Mincio of IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations). The delegation decided to add their support to this already existing plan. Dr. Kurin and Dr. N’Diaye have long associations with several Haitian cultural heritage professionals, artists, and collectors, many of whom they arranged to meet with during our three-day visit. We were fortunate to have the assistance of Ms. Shaila Manyam, U.S. Embassy, Haiti, for the duration of the visit. Because of her efforts we were able to accomplish a great deal in a short time.

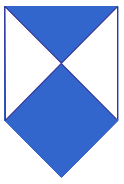
Saturday, March 6th, 2010

Ms. Manyam met our group at the airport accompanied by Daniel Elie and Monique Rocourt of ISPAN (Institut de Sauvegarde du Patrimoine National/Institute to Safeguard National Patrimony). ISPAN is the Haitian government department responsible for buildings and sites. We immediately departed on a windshield tour of Port-au-Prince.



Cathedrale de Nôtre-Dame, photo by Corine Wegener, March 6, 2010

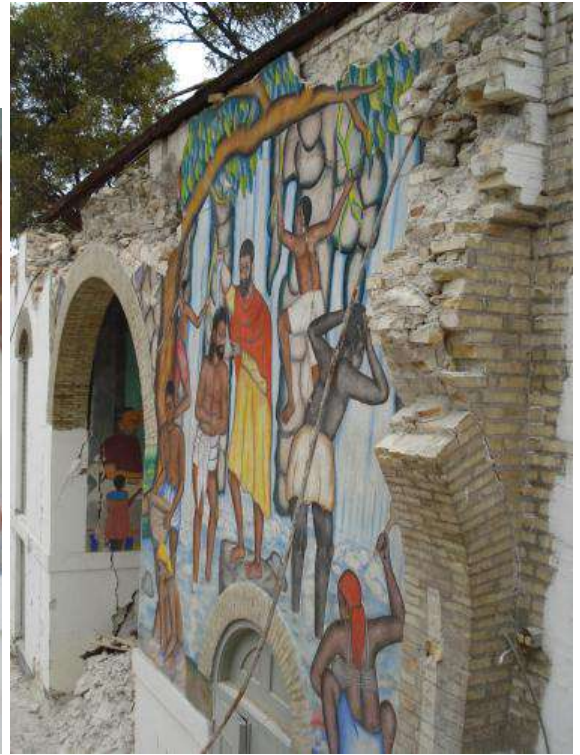
Our first stop was the heavily damaged National Cathedrale de Nôtre-Dame. The site remains unfenced and unguarded. Many of the stained glass rose windows in the upper portion of



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the remaining walls and front façade are intact. Some early architectural reports stated that the standing portions of the structure (façade, some walls and the supporting arches and columns) are sound, and that the cathedral can be rebuilt, but only if work is begun before major deterioration from the elements begins. The group discussed the technical difficulties of salvaging the remaining windows if the building were not salvageable and that such work would require heavy equipment such as a hydraulic lift.



Surviving murals at Sainte-Trinité Episcopal Cathedral in Port-au-Prince. The Last Supper, left, and Christ with St. John the Baptist, right. Photos by Corine Wegener, March 6, 2010

The next stop was Sainte-Trinité Episcopal Cathedral of the Episcopal Diocese of Haiti. The cathedral was heavily damaged in the earthquake and the remaining exterior walls have been marked by ISPAN to protect it from demolition. Some Cash for Work teams were working onsite clearing rubble by hand. There is currently no fencing or security on the site, though some staff are working in the area. The cathedral housed a series of murals featuring biblical scenes, many of which are lost or heavily damaged. Two significant murals remain mostly intact, though they are damaged and at risk: a Last Supper scene, which is somewhat protected by its position and semi-intact roof, and a scene of Christ with St. John the Baptist, which is exposed to the elements.

In addition to the Cathedral, the Episcopal Diocese has a building containing an art collection. The building appeared somewhat damaged but intact – we did not go inside. Our ISPAC colleagues understood that the building was stable; however, discussions with Patrick Vilaire and FOKAL on Sunday indicated the collection may need to be evacuated.



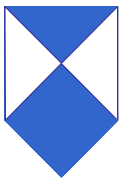
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The team stopped briefly to view the damaged Presidential Palace. The site has been evaluated in conjunction with the government of France and the U.S. Navy and 75% is considered restorable. We drove by the nearby National Gallery. The building is mostly underground, but those parts that are visible looked undamaged. Our ISPAN colleagues indicated the structure was not compromised by the earthquake. We did not visit this collection, but we hope to learn more about its condition to determine its safety and stability.

That evening the group met with Patrick Delatour, Haitian Minister of Tourism and President Preval's appointee to head Haiti's post-earthquake reconstruction. Minister Delatour is also a former Smithsonian Fellow and curator. We were joined by Henry Joubois, Special Advisor to the Minister for reconstruction; Olson Jean Julien, former Haitian Minister of Culture and former Smithsonian coordinator; and Ms. Kathryn Abate, U.S. Embassy Economic Officer.

We discussed the need for a joint cultural recovery site as well as funding from U.S. organizations for cultural reconstruction. We explain that FOKAL and the ANCBS (Association of National Committees of the Blue Shield) had identified a site for the proposed joint cultural recovery center and that plans for further development were underway in cooperation with the International Council on Archives, the International Federation of Library Associations, and Libraries without Borders. Dr. Kurin outlined the Smithsonian's proposal to contribute support this effort under the auspices of the Haitian Ministry of Culture and Communication. He also discussed the possibility of bringing works by contemporary Haitian artists to the U.S. for sale, possibly in Smithsonian Institution museum shops, in order to help foster economic development through an international market for Haitian art. Minister Delatour explained the Haitian Reconstruction Commission's work and its efforts to include a cultural component to the reconstruction effort.



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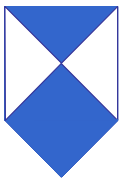


Galerie Nader, damaged paintings on cardboard dating c. 1930s and '40s, (left). Other damaged paintings (right). Photos by Corine Wegener, March 7, 2010.

Sunday, March 7, 2010

A number of very important private collections in Haiti were affected by the earthquake and one cannot discuss the preservation of Haitian cultural heritage without taking these into consideration. The Nader Collection, said to be the largest and one of the most important collections of Haitian art in the world, is just one of many examples. We visited Mr. George Nader, Jr. at Galerie d'Art Nader in Petion-Ville on Sunday morning. His father, George Nader, Sr., began collecting Haitian art in the 1960s and opened a gallery. His holdings include important early Haitian artists of the 1930s and '40s such as Hector Hyppolite, as well as many important contemporary artists. The satellite gallery in Petion-Ville and its contents suffered no damage from the earthquake; however, the Musee Galerie d'Art at 18 Rue Bouvreuil, which also served as the Nader residence, was completely destroyed. This location contained approximately 12,000 paintings when it collapsed. The family has managed to salvage about 3,000 of these, evacuating them to the Petion-Ville gallery. The salvaged paintings vary widely in condition from relatively unscathed to those requiring extensive conservation. The site is guarded by private security to deter looting.

While some minor conservation work has been done on about ten paintings, they lack basic art supplies and equipment. Most of the paintings seem relatively stable, though some show evidence of mold. Dr. Kurin discussed possible conservation assistance from Smithsonian and other sources with Mr. Nader. Mr. Nader outlined the family's plan to establish a foundation to give important works of art to the nation and requested the donation of specific art supplies to distribute free of charge to Haitian artists. The Smithsonian is working on this request and the idea of an exhibition.



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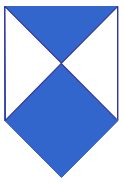
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At lunch we met again with Daniel Elie and Monique Rocourt of ISPAN. We discussed some of the medium and long term issues for Haiti's cultural heritage and sites, such as cultural resource management for archaeological sites and important built environments like The Citadel, a World Heritage Site, and the city of Jacmel.

After lunch we met with Ms. Gisele Flourant, Committee of Haitian Artists and Henry Joubois, Special Advisor to the Minister for Reconstruction. Ms. Flourant has partnered with the Smithsonian in the past to provide works of art and craft by Haitian artists for the Smithsonian's Folklife Festival. She and Dr. Kurin discussed the possibility of exporting works of art to the U.S. for sale in Smithsonian Institution museum shops and those of their Smithsonian affiliate members in order to provide income for artists and their families and to develop an international market for Haitian art. They agreed that Ms. Flourant would begin to assemble works of art for such a project.

The group then drove to the home of Madam Magalie Comeau-Denys, Special Advisor to Marie-Laurence Jocelyn Lassegue, Haitian Minister of Culture and Communication (the Minister was out of the country.) Dr. Kurin and Madam Comeau-Denys met in February during the UNESCO ICC Haiti meeting in Paris. Mme Comeau-Denys stressed the importance of preserving Haiti's cultural heritage and identity and said that organizations who want to help need to coordinate with the Ministry of Culture. We explained the current Blue Shield plans for a joint cultural heritage recovery center to be shared among the various organizations working under the auspices of the Ministry and that we supported this plan. Dr. Kurin offered to draft a formal agreement between the Ministry of Culture and Communication, FOKAL, the Smithsonian, the Blue Shield, ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage) and various other organizations involved in the efforts at the proposed joint cultural recovery site. Madam Comeau-Denys agreed to review a draft agreement and share it with the Minister.

Next the team went to the Olofsson Hotel to meet with Patrick Vilaire, sculptor and cultural heritage worker, Lorraine Mangones, Executive Director of FOKAL, and Michele Pierre-Louis, Chair of FOKAL. Mr. Vilaire shared his drawings and plans for setting up the cultural recovery center on land offered by Haiti Habitat and FOKAL near Port-au-Prince airport. The group had already been in cooperation with Blue Shield, ICA, IFLA and a number of other NGOs. The FOKAL group is looking forward to the arrival of Blue Shield colleagues Christophe Jacobs and Danielle Mincio later in March to continue planning for the cultural recovery site. Our delegation pledged its support for the plan, to include requests for equipment such as tents and containers from US sources, volunteer conservation help, and funding.



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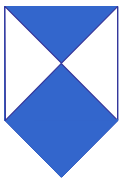


Front gate to the joint cultural recovery center near the Port-au-Prince Airport (left). Dr. Richard Kurin, Smithsonian Institution and Corine Wegener, U.S. Committee of the Blue Shield, at the proposed cultural recovery site with containers purchased by FOKAL in the background (right). Photos by Corine Wegener and Diana N'Diaye, March 7, 2010.

Monday, March 8, 2010

The delegation traveled to the U.S. Embassy for a series of appointments with U.S. government officials. We met with Chargé d'Affaires David Lindwall to discuss the possibility of State Department funding or participation in the recovery center or the proposed economic development projects for the arts. Lindwall responded by saying that while cultural projects were certainly important, particularly those to save irreplaceable heritage at risk, the U.S. government's resources were still very focused on humanitarian efforts. He also said that Haitian artists were benefitting from a larger market than they had prior to the earthquake because of the influx of military and humanitarian aid personnel. Dr. Kurin noted that this is probably more of a temporary market and does not rise to a level of quality that will lead to real economic development through exports of contemporary art.

We also met with Jerry Oetgen, Head of Public Affairs at the U.S. Embassy, to discuss possible cultural exchange projects and exhibitions to promote Haiti's rich cultural heritage in coordination with the Smithsonian. Then we met with Marvyn Farroe of USAID to discuss the possibility of directing the USAID Cash for Work program for rubble clearing to some of the cultural sites in need of this work. He agreed these sites would be eligible and to look into the possibility of paying workers for this special need.



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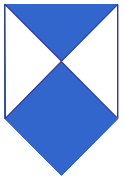
Views of the cultural recovery site near Port-au-Prince Airport. The site already has some NGO activity and some security personnel but will need additional fencing and security. Photos by Corine Wegener, March 8, 2010.

The team then visited the site selected by FOKAL for the joint cultural recovery center. Owned by Haiti Habitat, the site is being offered free of charge to FOKAL. FOKAL is already coordinating closely with ANCBS (Association of National Committees of the Blue Shield), Blue Shield France, and Libraries Without Borders to develop the site with tents, electricity and secure storage. They have already purchased and placed nine 40 ft. containers on site. MINUSTAH has agreed to provide security for the site and UNESCO has agreed to provide funds for fencing. The site is very promising and our delegation agreed that the various groups should all work together to raise funds to develop this site rather than duplicate efforts.

The delegation next went to Camp Dragon to meet with Lieutenant General P.K. Keen, Deputy Commander of U.S. Southern Command and Commander of Joint Task Force Haiti. Dr. Kurin and Corine Wegener requested DoD assistance in setting up the proposed joint cultural recovery center, to include the loan or transfer of tents, containers, and other equipment. Because these items are already on the ground it would save valuable time in getting the center operational before the rainy season. LTG Keen agreed on the importance of protecting vulnerable cultural heritage prior to the rainy season and was open to the idea of transferring equipment, particularly since Smithsonian is a U.S. government organization. He also offered military engineering expertise for structural assessments. He asked that we coordinate through USAID for a formal request for equipment. Our U.S. Embassy liaison, Shaila Manyam, is working on this issue with LTG Keen's staff. The delegation then went to the airport and flew back to Miami that afternoon.

Conclusion

Our visit was very brief and could obviously not include all the sites or visits to colleagues we might have wanted, but it allowed a good snapshot of conditions on the ground, enabling the group to move forward with coordination and fundraising. Dr. Borgstede will continue to coordinate efforts of the U.S. Department of State Cultural Heritage Center to keep culture on the agenda during discussions



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about U.S. aid to Haiti. Dr. Kurin will continue his efforts to raise money and lobby for U.S. government support for a U.S. joint cultural mission to Haiti, which will include Blue Shield, AIC-CERT conservation professionals, ICCROM and many other organizations to work alongside Haitian professionals in salvage, treatment and storage of cultural property. He will also work with Dr. N'Diaye to coordinate Smithsonian programs to raise public awareness about the plight of Haitian cultural heritage and to help provide economic opportunities for Haitian artists. Corine Wegener will work with ANCBS, AIC and other NGOs to develop the plan for the recovery site and to deploy conservation personnel to assist Haitian colleagues. She hopes to rendezvous with Blue Shield colleagues in Port-au-Prince later this month or in April to help set up the joint cultural recovery site and prepare for the arrival of the AIC-CERT team and other volunteers from the U.S.

USCBS would like to thank the Smithsonian Institution and to Dr. Richard Kurin for making this trip possible and to the U.S. Embassy for its support during the visit.

For more information, contact:

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