

Haitian Sailing Project Exhibition Calls Attention to Ongoing Exodus

At first glance, the Sipriz, a seemingly simple wooden sailboat, conjures up images of carefree, sundrenched days spent gently bobbing up and down on a tropical sea. Its hull resembles a rainbow, boasting stripes of yellow, green, red, and blue paint. A Sankofa, a mythological bird, adorns the sail, splaying its vibrant plumage across the canvas.

But the boat's festive exterior belies its true purpose—to tell the story of the Haitian “boat people,” refugees who nearly 40 years ago began fleeing the conflict-ridden country of Haiti for the shores of Florida and the promise of freedom.

The boat is the central element of **Sipriz: The Haitian Sailing Project**, an exhibition opening at the American University Museum At the Katzen Arts Center on Saturday, June 27.

“The Haitian sailing project underlines our mission to bring contemporary art with a humanitarian message to the Washington, D.C., area,” said Jack Rasmussen, director of the museum. “It shows the important role art plays in bringing issues of oppression and injustice into the public eye.”

The exhibition calls attention to the political, social, and economic problems leading to the ongoing exodus from Haiti and creates an understanding of refugees' experience on the arduous—and often fatal—800-mile passage to Florida.

The Sipriz, built on Ile a Vache in Haiti last summer by crew member Oblit Laguerre, left for the United States on March 16, 2009. The boat will be on view along with text and images depicting its voyage, providing an exploration of Haitian boatbuilding traditions and art. The sail was painted by artists from the Foundation Art Center of Jacmel in Haiti.

Two additional exhibitions will open with Sipriz: The Haitian Sailing Project on June 27:

Margaret Boozer: Dirt Drawings involves installations of unfired local clays. Boozer's graphic compositions of color, pattern, and texture create small geologic events—manifestations of cause and effect celebrating clay's physical properties. Colors change, shapes warp, cracks emerge in these fragile and mutable works that cross genres between painting and sculpture, abstraction, and representation.

My Fellow Americans ... : 40 Years of Political Cartoons by Jules Feiffer displays the Pulitzer Prize–winning New York cartoonist's sharp wit and piercing criticism. Feiffer's cartoons ran for more than 40 years in the Village Voice, were syndicated nationally, and are a testament to his unique insight into our nation's social and political upheavals. His messages maintain relevancy in contemporary society. His often text-heavy panels are balanced by simple but whimsically drawn figures. While his punch lines are often caustic, he still frequently manages to imbue political figures with humanity.

All three exhibitions close on Sunday, August 16.