

# NEWS RELEASE

**CLARK  
ART  
INSTITUTE**

Williamstown  
Massachusetts 01267  
413 458 2303  
clarkart.edu

April 1, 2024

[Download Images](#)

**Press Preview:**

Thursday, May 9, 10 am

RSVP to Carolynn McCormack

[cmccormack@clarkart.edu](mailto:cmccormack@clarkart.edu)

**CLARK ART INSTITUTE PRESENTS WORKS BY KATHIA ST. HILAIRE  
IN LATEST CONTEMPORARY EXHIBITION**

*Artist explores Haitian history and culture through mixed media, tapestry-like works*

(Williamstown, Massachusetts)—Featuring nearly twenty new and recent works that combine printmaking, painting, collage, and weaving, the Clark Art Institute presents Haitian-American artist Kathia St. Hilaire in its latest contemporary exhibition. *Kathia St. Hilaire: Invisible Empires* is on view May 11 through September 22, 2024 in the galleries of the Lunder Center at Stone Hill. A version of the exhibition will go on view at the Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Kentucky from October 25, 2024 through February 9, 2025.

"Kathia St. Hilaire is a remarkable young artist who creates captivating works that combine a wide range of media," said Olivier Meslay, Hardyman Director of the Clark. "She interweaves Haiti's history and her own personal biography into images that are beautiful, sometimes difficult, and utterly original."

Informed by her experience growing up in Caribbean and African American neighborhoods in South Florida, St. Hilaire seeks to memorialize the communities that she has been a part of through her innovative printmaking techniques. Her work draws inspiration from Haitian Vodou flags, which are used to tell stories of the country's history and honor ancestral spirits. Using nontraditional materials such as beauty products, industrial metal, fabric, and tires, she creates complex works that seek to honor Haitian history and Vodou religious traditions.

"Kathia St. Hilaire makes works that are richly layered, densely detailed, and ingeniously crafted," said Robert Wiesenberger, the Clark's curator of contemporary projects and co-curator of the exhibition. "They abound with narrative throughlines that span Haiti's proud past and tumultuous present, exposing, in surprising and lyrical ways, a history of destabilizing foreign interventions that continues to this day."

## ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Kathia St. Hilaire (b. 1995, West Palm Beach, Florida; lives and works in New York) combines printmaking, painting, collage, and weaving to create complex works that cross traditional artistic boundaries. By building up as many as forty or fifty layers of ink using carved linoleum blocks, St. Hilaire creates striking surface textures. The substance of her work is equally layered: the artist, whose parents immigrated to the United States from Haiti, tells stories of the island nation's history and the long shadows it casts, from French colonialism to independence, from U.S. occupation to the diasporic communities in which she was raised. The exhibition subtitle, "Invisible Empires," refers to the legacy of foreign interventions in the Caribbean and the persistence of subtler forms of imperialism today.

St. Hilaire grapples with histories that have been forgotten or actively suppressed. In recounting them, she blends established facts with the larger-than-life legends of Haiti's leaders in a manner that she describes as "magical realist." To represent Creolized cultures, St. Hilaire uses a collage of nontraditional materials, from banknotes and banana stickers to product packaging and car tires. Like the open weaving at the edges of her work, the artist suggests, the Haitian revolution is itself an unfinished project. Contained within these vibrant, dreamlike pictures are past, present, and the suggestion of possible futures.

*La Sirene* (2020) is named for a mermaid-like water spirit in the Haitian Vodou tradition who is known as a guardian of the seas. Quilting together pieces of canvas and aluminum, St. Hilaire suggests undulating waves, a reference to the transatlantic journey of enslaved people from West Africa to what is now Haiti. Imprinting these pieces with botanical illustrations, St. Hilaire commemorates the traditional practice of those forced from their homes and into bondage to braid okra and rice seeds into their hair, thereby carrying both sustenance and culture with them.

After the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), France imposed a staggering debt for the plantations it had lost. In the early twentieth century, at a moment of instability in the island nation, the US invaded Haiti to enforce its own loan payments and would occupy the country for the next two decades.

A series of works, *Cacos* (2023), depicts Haitian guerilla fighters who resisted the United States' invasion and subsequent occupation of the country, portraying three key leaders in the conflict: Rosalvo Bobo, Benoît Batrville, and Charlemagne Péralte. While the Cacos' efforts were at first successful, they were eventually defeated and Batrville and Péralte were killed by occupying U.S. Marines. In these compositions, St. Hilaire takes inspiration from *drapo*, ornate beaded or sequined flags used in Vodou ceremonies. She also includes the

banknotes of several Latin American countries, highlighting the region's history of foreign debt.

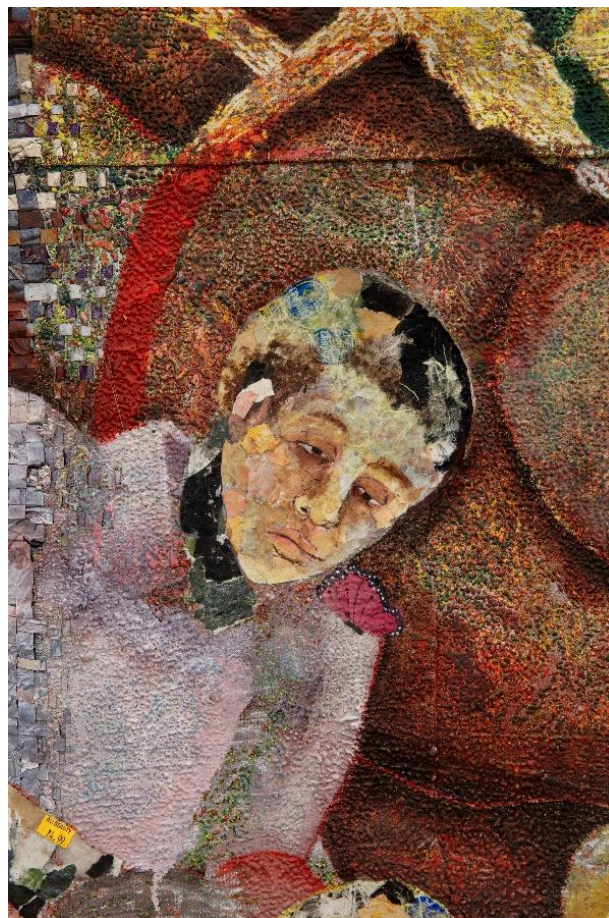


Kathia St. Hilaire, *Caco: Rosalvo Bobo*, 2023, Reduction linocut in oil-based ink on canvas with skin-lightening cream packaging, steel, aluminum, banknotes, banana stickers, paper, and tires. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin. Photo by Guillaume Ziccarelli

Kathia St. Hilaire grew up hearing her mother's stories of Hurricane David, which struck Haiti in 1979. In *David* (2022), she connects this storm with the one in Gabriel García Márquez's magical realist novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which wipes away all memory, including that of a brutally suppressed workers' strike on a plantation, similar to the one St. Hilaire commemorates in *Mamita Yunai* (2023). Like the centripetal pull of a storm, *David* combines scraps from St. Hilaire's studio floor. For the artist, each material has its own significance: banana leaves, for example, refer to United Fruit Company's interventions across Latin America, while car tires are reminiscent of those often burned during protests.



In 1928, workers on a United Fruit Company banana plantation near Ciénaga, Colombia went on strike to protest inhumane working conditions. In *Mamita Yunai*, St. Hilaire depicts the aftermath of the brutal scene that ensued when Colombian soldiers opened fire, killing scores of people. The leaflets falling from the sky memorialize those killed, and Chiquita banana stickers, with their iconic, cheery logo, stand in contrast to the brutal realities of plantation life. The title, *Mamita Yunai*, refers to a novel of the same name by Carlos Luis Fallas, a labor leader on a United Fruit Company plantation in Costa Rica who described the perils of working for “Momma United,” as the company was known to some workers.



Kathia St. Hilaire, *Mamita Yunai* (detail), 2023. Reduction linocut in oil-based ink on canvas with skin-lightening cream packaging, steel, aluminum, banknotes, price tags, banana stickers, silkscreen, and tires. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin. Photo by Guillaume Ziccarelli

The earliest work in the exhibition, *Skin Lightening \$2.49* (2018) shows St. Hilaire developing her signature block printing technique and incorporating product packaging for the first time. She references skin-lightening products and their association with *colorism*, or the privileging of lighter skin tones among people of color. The artist has long used these products herself, and here collages their packaging along with advertisements for the creams.



Kathia St. Hilaire, *Skin Lightening \$2.49*, 2018, Reduction linocut in oil-based ink on canvas with skin-lightening cream packaging and paper. The Lumpkin-Bocuzzi Family Collection, courtesy of the artist and Perrotin. Photo by Guillaume Ziccarelli

### **ABOUT THE ARTIST**

Kathia St. Hilaire received her MFA in Painting and Printmaking at the Yale School of Art and her BFA in Printmaking at the Rhode Island School of Design. Her work has

recently been featured in exhibitions at the NSU Art Museum, Fort Lauderdale; Perrotin, New York; the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs; Half Gallery, New York; Blum & Poe, New York; and James Fuentes, New York.

This exhibition is organized by the Clark Art Institute and curated by Robert Wiesenberger, curator of contemporary projects at the Clark, with Tyler Blackwell, curator of contemporary art at the Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky. Generous support for this exhibition is provided by Thomas and Lily Beischer, Richard and Margaret Kronenberg, and Denise Littlefield Sobel.

#### **ABOUT THE CLARK**

The Clark Art Institute, located in the Berkshires of western Massachusetts, is one of a small number of institutions globally that is both an art museum and a center for research, critical discussion, and higher education in the visual arts. Opened in 1955, the Clark houses exceptional European and American paintings and sculpture, extensive collections of master prints and drawings, English silver, and early photography. Acting as convener through its Research and Academic Program, the Clark gathers an international community of scholars to participate in a lively program of conferences, colloquia, and workshops on topics of vital importance to the visual arts. The Clark library, consisting of some 300,000 volumes, is one of the nation's premier art history libraries. The Clark also houses and co-sponsors the Williams College Graduate Program in the History of Art.

The Clark, which has a three-star rating in the Michelin Green Guide, is located at 225 South Street in Williamstown, Massachusetts. Its 140-acre campus includes miles of hiking and walking trails through woodlands and meadows, providing an exceptional experience of art in nature. Galleries are open 10 am to 5 pm Tuesday through Sunday, from September through June, and daily in July and August. Admission is free January through March and is \$20 from April through December; admission is free year-round for Clark members, all visitors age 21 and under, and students with a valid student ID. Free admission is also available through several programs, including First Sundays Free; a local library pass program; and the EBT Card to Culture. For information on these programs and more, visit [clarkart.edu](http://clarkart.edu) or call 413 458 2303.

#### **Press contact:**

Carolynn McCormack  
[cmccormack@clarkart.edu](mailto:cmccormack@clarkart.edu)  
413 458 0588