

Central Fine presents an exhibition of paintings by Andre Pierre, curated by Tomm El-Saieh and Diego Singh. On view there will be a selection of historical works that aims to further the conversation on the place where The Symbolic, The Imaginary and The Real, meet.

Andre Pierre was born in Port Au Prince in 1916. An anecdote told by Emmanuel El-Saieh narrates a traumatic moment, or perhaps an epiphany: Pierre wrestled from a pig a piece of sugarcane to feed himself. This moment underlines an engagement with his own drive and the animal's, and perhaps could be thought of as the Lacanian "Lightning", where things become clear and actualized in consciousness, as if by lightning; ultimately modifying one's life. Shortly after, Pierre became a farmer, a painter and a voodoo priest, and perhaps understood the site where the human, hunger, and the divine merge; through libidinal sublimation.

His first steps into painting took place within the voodoo temples as his early works were painted in the gourds used to contain the offerings/feedings/sacrifices to the Loa[1]. These works were seen by Maya Deren [2] who introduced him to the Centre d'Art in the late 40's, and following her advice Pierre began painting on canvas and board, which perhaps indicates a passage from the devotional nature of his practice to a market conscious output.

When approaching Pierre's works we encounter the narratives that are embodied by deities, for a lack of better word, or what is brought forward as they cut through the threshold of 'The Real'. In one work, a mermaid-like figure (La Sirene) is seen as a sign announcing a flood, a political scene and a fight. The painting acts as an incantation where the artist conjures a spell, piercing a veil; presenting a work that acts as a rite and a representation. (This twofold aspect indicates the shared nature of representation and the ritual: Both invoke and re-attach, through form and language, the real and the symbolic.) When considering these works, one wonders if Pierre saw the religious and the political as the same.

Going back to the Loas, it's important to understand that the Loa aren't deities per-se, but rather can be understood as shadows, or projections broadcasting their qualities onto this plane. These projections interact with humans, embodying virtues, tasks, and desire. The priest, like the painter, is perhaps the manager of both realms, re-linking them. This is key to understand Andre Pierre's work: Through Painting he brought forward the avatars of the divine into the reality of Haiti and its political landscape, confusing them and populating the shrine and the battlefield with metaphors and spells.

Andre Pierre's life was informed and formed by Voodoo, and what we see in his paintings is an

interaction between “The Symbolic” and “The Imaginary” (Representation and language) through re-presentations that shape his painting practice and his work as a priest. The ‘Passage to Act’, and to the act of painting, in Pierre’s work evolves into a moment where the symbolic realm is that which informs, while becoming an image, a reality. This circular relationship is often addressed when talking about magical thinking. And it is this tendency towards a trafficking of signs, towards repetition and codification what is present in Haitian painting and on Pierre's works, and what seems to address not only formal tactics and pictorial traditions, but also the tempo that defines a trance and a rite, and it is such rhythm, the very site where narratives become acts.

What is of interest to me, is that the focus in Pierre’s work appears to reside on Intention, and this is what defines the magician. Pierre, perhaps, experienced intention as a site, and in that 'place' a color will invoke an effect, a spell, or point to a political structure. In the works presented in this exhibition, Andre Pierre’s language and gaze, seem to be delivering a living script that is defined by the very same threshold that this enactment is constantly crossing.

Diego Singh, Miami, October 25, 2016.

Andre Pierre was born in Port Au Prince in 1916, he died in 2005 at his house in Croix-des-Missions. His works focus on the representation of Loa, or deities in the voodoo pantheon. He painted at the Issa El-Saieh Gallery in Port Au Prince for over 21 years, eventually becoming a Houngan (A male voodoo priest) and dedicating his life to painting and to the presentation of Voodoo as a legitimate religion. He is considered one of Haiti’s most significant painters, and a successor of Hector Hippolite, as a major painter of The Loa. His work was exhibited internationally in a number of Museums, most recently at the Fowler Museum at UCLA and the El-Saieh Gallery in Port Au Prince.

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