

# ART.

## Brand Nubian

Addressing the oft-taboo subjects of religion and politics, Haitian émigré Edouard Duval-Carrie enlivens his brightly colored paintings, sculptures and multimedia installations with a turbulent history of his homeland

Text **ILENE ROIZMAN / COURTESY OF BERNICE STEINBAUM GALLERY**

**POLITICS, RELIGION AND ART ARE A** heady mix, and when it comes to the work of Edouard Duval-Carrie, the three are inextricably linked. A Haitian émigré living in Miami, Florida, Duval-Carrie boldly and passionately addresses the issues surrounding cultural migration, displacement of social groups and their subsequent uprootedness, and the underground Voodoo traditions of his native country in paintings, sculptures and multimedia installations.

Of his creative impulse as a displaced Haitian, Duval-Carrie wrote in 1995, "Our memories are fragmented recollections that do not follow the rigorous linear readings of history. Our reality is a reconstruction made of such disparate elements and materials that we are in a perpetual state of wonder, pondering about the collapse. But, there is a strong dose of poetry in this, which I try to capture in my work."

Bright colors and complex, evocative images dominate his work, and true to the turbulent history of his homeland, he does not shy away from depictions of violence and death. While the effects of Haiti's political regimes on its people figure prominently, spirituality is at the heart of everything Duval-Carrie creates. "People tell me sometimes that my work is very charged in a sacred way," he remarked in a January 2001 newspaper interview. "For me, this is the role of art. If there isn't sanctity or magic within it, it doesn't have value."

For the past few years, Voodoo deities have taken a central role in Duval-Carrie's work. Historically, they had existed primarily through an oral tradition, drawn only fleetingly on temple floors. "Because Voodoo is of

black origin, it has been very difficult for the sons of slaves, even when they were freed, to pursue it," he explained recently. "The deities had never been personalized in a visual way, so I've given them a face, finally."

A series of paintings led to a project for the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia, for

It is a very plebian material. It places the work firmly in this century. One of the heads was placed quite strategically at the tip of Miami Beach, the entrance to the harbor, by a developer and art collector who chose it for a new building simply because it appealed to him. As fate would have it, and much to the artist's delight, the figure is a water spirit.

A similarly appropriate figure appears on a Miami Beach shuttle bus designed by Duval-Carrie in 2000. *Diamond Sirens* has been described as "dedicated to the myth of lovelorn sirens and their seductive ways, often associated with sailors off the Florida coast who believed in them." Also among his recent work is a series of paintings, *Le Temps des Pleurs* (or *The Time for Tears*) created last year in response to the emotional turmoil of recent times. In a pantheon of a different sort, eight 33x33-inch images show a multiracial array of male and female faces crying in the darkness. Eyes and mouths are seen with the facial outlines suggested, some more distinctly than



*Pleureurs*, 2001 © Edouard Duval-Carrie (Acrylic and resin in artist frame) 33 x 33 in.

which the artist created 30 bronze statues, each 30 inches high, depicting a specific Voodoo spirit. Taking the theme further, he has been fabricating eight to ten-foot-high heads of those deities in colored translucent acrylic, to be lit from within. He compared them to the Statue of Liberty, saying they could be transported from place to place. "Very few people go to Haiti, so we'll send the spirits out!"

Duval-Carrie feels that the material suits the subject and the times. Bronze is expensive and hard to manipulate, but plastic is very new, very contemporary, not very noble.

others. Some appear amidst colored dots or bubbles, others are completely in the dark, and all of them are surrounded by swirls of white, like mist, coming in from the frame.

Despite the seriousness of his subject matter, Duval-Carrie gives the impression of someone with an abundance of positive energy and enthusiasm, imagination and creativity. He is a fast, articulate talker who seems always busy, always ready for the next possibility. And in Miami, where there is a vibrant art scene that he praised for its inclusiveness, this artist is sure to continue thriving. ●



La Población Voluptuosa, 2001. © Edward Goreau. All rights reserved on paper, 70 x 51.5 cm.