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Together for Haiti



On January 12, 2010, an earthquake struck Haiti. More than 300,000 lay dead and, from the survivors, hundreds of thousands were displaced. **Charlotte Lombard**, the owner and manager of Lazuli Art, speaks to **Iggy Fenech** about an art exhibition in Gozo that seeks to help Haitian artists rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

"The aftermath of the devastating 2010 earthquake was a very difficult time for Haiti and reconstruction really had to start from the bottom up," says Charlotte Lombard, whose gallery is currently hosting *Banging the Drum*, an exhibition of art in metal from Haiti and Gozo.

The title of the exhibition is reminiscent of the steel oil drums and techniques used by Haitian artists. It is also a show of solidarity, as this gallery in Victoria, is banging the drum to promote fair trade principles.

As Charlotte says: "Fair trade is more than just trading, it demonstrates that greater justice in world trade is possible. It highlights the need for a change in the rules and practices of conventional trade and profit-led – and often exploitative – economic development, while showing how a successful business can also put people before profit."

This ethos is shared by Charlotte's other businesses, Lazuli and Organika, both of which are boutiques stocking ethically-traded designer clothing in the summer months. In winter, Lazuli becomes an exhibition space and that is where Banging the Drum comes in.

"There has been a strong tradition of artisan metalwork in Haiti since the 1950s," Charlotte says.

"That's why Anne Mucci, a Parisian gallerist, decided to actively promote Haitian art and craft and its export to contribute to the economic revival of Haiti. She thought this was the best way to help people there to help themselves.

Anna travels there regularly to meet and encourage the artists, select pieces for overseas export, discuss projects and also to help them become more organised and professional."

Charlotte met Anna while in Paris looking for new suppliers for her shop, Organika, some two years ago. First, Charlotte fell in love with the metalwork, but at closer inspection, she discovered similarities between Gozo and the themes Gozitan artists often make use of, and Haiti.

"Anna's involvement with the Haitian artists inspired me and we decided to collaborate on this exhibition to promote their work on the Maltese Islands for the first time," she says.

"Now, by featuring the work of a local artist alongside the work of the Haitian artists we can explore the themes of creative and economic sustainability in developed and developing countries... promoting traditional art and skills in an independent business environment."

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Moreover, Charlotte hopes that by supporting the Haitian metal artists, these will be given the key to international recognition and well-deserved success.

"It also encourages youngsters to learn skills, take up art as a viable career and it is also a way of paying tribute to the Haitian people's courage and positivity," she says.

The final list of artists taking part in Banging the Drum includes seven Haitian artists, including Rony Jacques, who was in Gozo for the opening of the exhibition, where he met people and demonstrated some of his many artistic skills.

Jackie Roberts, a metal artist from the UK (who lives in Gozo and works part-time with Charlotte) will also be showcasing a selection of work in copper and steel.

The most fascinating part is that all the artists used recycled materials: steel oil drums by the Haitians and copper water boilers by Jackie. Techniques and tools are also similar, despite the vastly different geographical and cultural backgrounds.

“There are around 40 pieces being showcased in this pop-up gallery – from small, stylised figures to large, intricate wall-mounted friezes, sculptures and mirrors,” says Charlotte.

“The sources of inspiration for the artworks are very diverse: nature, the sea, myths and legends, mythological figures, Christianity, daily life and work all make a cameo. The artwork is very poetic, skilfully crafted and reflects the passions, dreams, sensitivity, history and strength of the Haitian people.”

Aided by events management team Jimmy Vella and Simon Portelli from Gentlemen Who Lunch, the exhibition aims to be one that keeps on giving. All artwork is for sale and aims to provide economic, cultural and artistic development opportunities for the artists and to generate and promote new markets. Moreover, part of the income generated will be ploughed back into Lazuli Art “to make the idea sustainable and to support a programme of regular opportunities for showcasing art by foreign and local artists,” she says.

It may not be the first or last of its kind, but Banging the Drums is an exhibition that has sent ripples around the art scene in Malta. It has united two countries that seem to be worlds apart. And, while 2010 may seem like a lifetime ago, it has created a sense of solidarity with Haiti and Haitians among the many who have visited.

Banging the Drums runs until next Sunday at Lazuli, Victoria.