

"My hope is the exhibit will show a different side of Haiti, that it will counter the negative narratives people hear that Haiti is ugly, polluted, dirty and unsafe."
— Peter Wampler



Top left: Peter Wampler, artist Romel Jean-Pierre and Ellen Adams at the exhibition's opening.

Above: Untitled (carved wooden mask) by Andre Eugene

Top right: Untitled (Day of the Dead) by Joanne Celestin

Page 23: "Metal Mermaid" by Eugene Jacques

For the love of Haiti

Gallery at GVSU showcases Haitian art and experiences gathered by study abroad group.

One professor's love for Haiti has blossomed into community engagement and service learning opportunities for students, a quest for Haitian art, and an exhibit that features all three and more.

"Wandering Seeds: Experiencing and Engaging Haiti Through Study Abroad" features photos, narratives and reflections of the faculty and staff who visited Haiti, as well as six pieces of colorful, vibrant art

produced by Haitian artists. The exhibit is on display through Dec. 14 at the Red Wall Gallery in Lake Ontario Hall on Grand Valley State University's Allendale campus.

Peter Wampler, professor of geology at the Frederik Meijer Honors College at GVSU, has been visiting Haiti since 2007 and recognized the need for water expertise in the country. He's been taking students there since 2011, showing them the beauty of the country as they research water quality in the mountains, collect water samples in rivers and help families set up biosand filters for clean water. He also collected a number of pieces of Haitian art.

By 2016, Wampler had set up the study abroad program, allowing students from all disciplines to earn credit for the trip. He wanted to include an art component this year "because so much art and cre-



Leather & pearl bracelets by Vincent Peach,
pearl & diamond earrings by Scott Carey.



activity in Haiti hasn't been seen abroad," he said. So, he contacted Ellen Adams, assistant professor of art history at GVSU, to see if she'd be interested.

This year, 11 students, Wampler and GVSU academic adviser Kelly McDonell made the trip from May 20 to June 19. Adams joined them for the first week with the specific goal of purchasing art for the Wandering Seeds exhibit and the GVSU art collection.

"Haiti is an amazing country that is a study in contrasts and surprises," Adams said. "I wanted to find objects that really represented what Haiti is, that were specifically Haitian in materials and influences."

Among the objects she collected are Vodou flags, metalwork pieces and pieces made from recycled or upcycled material. Adams was especially impressed with Croix-des-Bouquets, an artist colony near Port-au-Prince. While there, she added a unique mermaid metalwork with a marble eye and bottle cap earrings. She purchased nine pieces of art, with six displayed as part of "Wandering Seeds."

Students spent the trip using their expertise. Engineering students built water rockets to entertain kids; a dance major helped Haitian youngsters create a dance program; exercise science major Kayleigh Thomas, a junior, organized fine motor activities with preschoolers.

"I think the art is a beautiful representation of the country," said Thomas, who was with Adams when she purchased the art. "Haitians have a way and a tradition of creating beautiful pieces of art that tell a story deeper than the art alone."

Wampler said he is planning additional trips to the country. "My hope is the exhibit will show a different side of Haiti, that it will counter the negative narratives people hear that Haiti is ugly, polluted, dirty and unsafe," he said. "We want to share the beauty of Haiti, the complex Haitian people."

— ANN BYLE



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