

LAURENA FINÉUS

Ottawa, ON/New York, NY

BIOGRAPHY

Laurena Finéus is a Haitian visual artist, educator and art administrator specializing in painting. She was born and raised in Gatineau, Québec, and is currently based between Ottawa, ON and New York, NY, where she is an MFA candidate at Columbia University. In her practice, Finéus has been concerned with representations of Haiti, relationality within its *dyaspora*, and its growing archives across the globe through an array of figurative and painterly imagined landscapes. These elements are juxtaposed with personal memories of her life in so-called Canada. Finéus' strategies include the collapsing of history in order to question history production and its mechanisms. The teachings of Haitian scholar Michel Rolph-Trouillot in 'Silencing the past' informs her understanding of visual narration in her practice.

Finéus' work has been exhibited at *the Ottawa Art Gallery (2021)*, *Karsh-Masson Gallery (2021)*, *the Ottawa school of Art (2021)*, *Art mûr (2019)* and *Galerie 115 (2019-2020)*, among others. Her work is held in a range of private collections internationally and is a graduate from the University of Ottawa with a Bachelor of Fine Arts. She was the recipient of the Ontario Arts Council Exhibition Assistance Grant (2021), exhibited as a finalist for the *Salt Spring National Art Prize (2021)* chosen from a pool of 2756 applications, the Edmund and Isobel Ryan Visual Art Scholarship (2020) and the Ineke Harmina Standish Memorial Scholarship (2019). Passionate about black Canadian history and empowering her community through art, Finéus has previously facilitated a range of bilingual workshops for the Ottawa Art Gallery, Arts Network Ottawa, la Majeur Haute Spécialisation en Arts and l'Association Canadienne-française de l'Ontario .

ARTIST STATEMENT

I am a Haitian visual artist specializing in painting. My mediums of choice are acrylic and oil. My work explores representations of Haiti and its archives and is informed by my black, female identity. I present a reconstruction of the fragmented history of Haiti to demonstrate the complexity of its people. My lived experiences are centered in each of my works in order to create safe spaces that engage and empower my key

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audience — the Haitian diaspora. As Joanne Hyppolite describes in her essay 'Diaspora' (2011), we have always been disconnected from the physical landscape of our homeland as diasporas and this means that we do not grow up with *Mapou* trees in our yards, unlike our elders or parents. This collision of cultures and uprooting makes our sense of identity fragile and intangible - we are constantly in a state of becoming. Being a Haitian painter born and raised in Canada, I always felt a gap between first and second generation immigrants in my family and I acknowledged the wake of this discomfort with the act of creation. It is through constant challenging of self that I discerned the inherent 'politics of comfort' shaping the diasporic experience. I felt more comfortable with the 'unknown' and frank assimilation, than unraveling the past and present of Haitianhood. Canadian identity is based itself on the violent erasure of indigenous presence and thus that of any other group standing outside of its canon.

My technical approach involves a gradual layering of paint that emulates texture and brings the works to interact directly with its viewers. I realize that with an array of noisy, rippling and dense landscapes. I choose to work on substantially large surfaces to better translate the multilayered narratives that emerge from my research. I also use painting as a tool for storage and memory. I absorb a great number of media and archives because of the figurative nature of my work and they tend to deal with Haiti's historical trauma. So, I learn to let go of this trauma through my process and mark making. I often collapse multiple sequences of Haiti's history together as a way to investigate the intergenerational links that could emerge from their connection.

I aim to develop a visual dialogue of resistance against the dominant western representation structures of the black Caribbean body. Historically, Haitians have too often been presented as fractures or wandering spirits. I could simply not associate my surroundings with what was shown in the media and felt a strong dissonance to these ideas. I collage moments of joy, tenderness and community to regain agency over these modes of representations. As a result, collecting images from a wide range of sources and archives is an essential part of my artistic research. Following in the steps of the Haitian art canon, my paintings are not constricted by the violent reality of the past but by the dreams of tomorrow. The spiritual guides my brush and allows my process to constantly evolve into new imaginations to create multiple tangible worlds, like my ancestors who first dreamed of a black republic and built it from the ashes.

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ORIGINS & FUTURES – CURATORIAL STATEMENT

Wall Space Gallery is thrilled to close our 2022 year with *Origins & Futures*, a group exhibition featuring Laurena Finéus, Yomi Orimoloye, and Ranajit Sinha. Each artist, through their respective language of painting, question structures of the self - how we form, preserve, and reinvent our identities. All three artists express the ways in which their lived experiences as part of Haitian, Nigerian, and Indian diasporic/*dyasporic* communities has shaped their personal development.

Laurena Finéus' vibrant worlds draw from her Haitian-Canadian family roots. Her canvases collapse historical timelines, combining familial archives with the broader turbulence of Haiti's political and social history. Finéus champions tales of resilience in order to restructure the lens through which Haiti is viewed. Deep research into historical figures and rich Haitian culture, processed through the act of painting, becomes a means for Finéus to reconcile her connections to multiple origins.

Finéus' construction of imagined spaces draws from a distinctly non-Western approach, linked to a tradition of Haitian artworks such as those of Georges Auguste (b. 1933). Finéus credits her understanding of visual narration to Haitian scholar Michel Rolph-Trouillot (1949-2012) and his writing in 'Silencing the past' (1995). She departs from the colonialist perspective of art-making taught in Western institutions, and instead embraces the bold freedom to invent using patterned, multiplicitous, and fragmented planes of spaces - untethered from reliance on classical perspective. Finéus seamlessly intertwines layered narratives of constructed memories of a homeland twice removed, colonial exploitation, and civil unrest. Finéus' depictions of familial and community resilience are much needed reminders that our anchoring roots traverse space and time.

- Tiffany April
Curator

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CV

EDUCATION

- 2022-2024 Master's of Fine Arts Candidate, Columbia University, New York
2016-2020 Bachelor of Fine Arts with minor in Communication (BFA), University of Ottawa

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2022 *Origins & Futures*, Wall Space Gallery, Ottawa, ON
2022 *Horses stood like men*, Jenkins Johnson, New York, NY
2022 *Imaginaires souverains*, Galerie Janine-Sutto, Montréal, QC
2022 *Le dernier des touristes*, Galerie 101, Ottawa, ON
2022 *Diaspora Reframed: Locating Identities* (EAHR Virtual exhibition), Montreal, QC
2022 *Being Scene*, Workman arts, Toronto, ON
2022 *Dos à Dos, Face à Face*, Institut National d'art contemporain, Montréal, QC
2021 *Salt Spring National Art Prize*, Finalist Exhibition 2021/22, British Columbia
2021 *Marble strikes moon*, Wallack's Gallery, Ottawa, ON
2021 *Filtered*, Ottawa Art Gallery, Ottawa, ON
2020 *Art Auction*, Ottawa Art Gallery, Ottawa, ON
2020 *Hindsight: 2020 Recent acquisitions*, City of Ottawa, ON
2020 *Lalande + Doyle*, Shenkman Arts Centre, Orléans, ON
2020 *People + Place*, Annexe Ottawa Art Gallery, Ottawa, ON
2020 *Feathers, Confetti and Underbrush*, Galerie Annexe Ottawa Art Gallery, Ottawa, ON
2020 *Eunoia* BFA Graduate exhibition, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON
2019 *Limitless*, Paradigme gallery, Ottawa, ON
2019 *Peinture fraîche et nouvelle construction*, Art Mur Gallery, Montreal, QC
2019 *OPAL*, Annexe Ottawa Art Gallery, Ottawa, ON
2019 *Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?*, Galerie 115, Ottawa, ON

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2021 *Déchoukaj*, Ottawa School of Art Gallery, Ottawa, ON
2020 *Mise à nue forcée*, Galerie 115, Ottawa, ON

RESIDENCIES

- 2020 Gathered Gallery, digital residency, August
2020-2021 Artist-in-residence at E.S.C Béatrices-Desloges for the programme spécialisée en Arts Visuel

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PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

- 2021 Artist talk - Démanteler l'imaginaire de la peinture, University of Ottawa
- 2020 Microcosm Public Art installation in Place d'Orléans Shopping Mall, City of Ottawa
- 2020 Black People x Future Exhibition- FullFemme Collective, Video interview
- 2020 28 Moments of Black Canadian History, Unilearn Video interview
- 2020 Mural Carleton University , January
- 2019 GTC Bang Bang Set design
- 2016 Vision'Art : Live Art Performance with the band "Le Paysagiste"

GRANTS

- 2021 Exhibition Assistance, Ontario Arts council
- 2021 PIVOT: Black artist resource fund , Nia Centre
- 2021 Youth in Culture , City of Ottawa

COLLECTIONS

- 2022 Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa, ON
- 2020 City of Ottawa Art Collection, Ottawa, ON
- 2016-present Various Private collections across Canada

AWARDS

- 2022 Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation, Recipient
- 2022 IBPOC Emerging artist award
- 2021 The Salt Spring National Art Prize, Finalist
- 2021 Critic's Choice Winner, Ottawa Art Gallery
- 2020 Critic's Choice Winner, Ottawa Art Gallery
- 2020 Edmund and Isobel Ryan Visual Arts Scholarship (May 2020)
- 2020 Visual Arts member's association Scholarship, University of Ottawa (March 2020)
- 2020 Dean's Honour list Scholarship, University of Ottawa (February 2020)
- 2019 Awarded the Ineke Harmina Standish Memorial Scholarship (March 2019)

TEXT/PUBLICATIONS

- 2021 Figure-ing it Out: Laurena Finéus' Depictions of The Complexity of Identity and Haitian History
- 2021 CHUO, COVID-19 creativity: Ottawa Black artists reflect on their work in the pandemic
- 2021 Le Pressoir, Artiste en vedette - Laurena Finéus
- 2021 The Gazette, Célébrer l'histoire et la culture haïtiennes à travers l'art de Laurena Finéus
- 2019 Kaur Space , Front and Center Magazine interview

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2018 Krowd Magazine interview
2018 Ottawa Beat Cover , July 2017 The Feminist Word Cover
2017 Mina Gilligan, *Bad girl Painter Interview*, Rookie Magazine, Online Issue.68
2017 Grounders magazine, Cover, Vol. 4, August

WORK/JURY EXPERIENCE

2021 Institutional membership coordinator, Indigenous curatorial collective
2021 Art Juror, Creation and production fund for professional artists - City of Ottawa
2020 Program Assistant - Arts Network Ottawa
2020 Art Juror – Young at Art, City of Ottawa

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