

CURAÇAO HAS MANY THINGS IN COMMON WITH HOLLAND, MICHIGAN

Curaçao, with its sun-drenched beaches and 17th-century Dutch Colonial architecture, would seem to have little in common with Holland, Michigan. Sure, both are on the water, but one is a Caribbean island just 37 miles from Venezuela, the other a quaint and charming city near Lake Michigan.

But Susan Wilczak, an independent art consultant from Benton Harbor and an art lecturer at Hope College in Holland, saw the similarities between the two. Both were proud of their Dutch heritage and both recognize how art can transform a community.

Wilczak first traveled to the island to explore the art and culture at the invitation of Marilyn Schanze, a friend and former resident of St. Joseph, Michigan. Wilczak returned to Curaçao as a part of Hope's commitment to broaden the awareness of Curaçao's art history.

"The colors, the sophistication, the inspirations of the island and how it all comes into play in the artists' works were amazing," Wilczak says. "Curaçao is a melting pot of international cultures as well as their own island culture, and it is reflected in the art of the island."

So Wilczak suggested that the college create an exhibit to showcase the art of Curaçao. That show, *Island Reflections—The Contemporary Art of Curaçao*, runs August 19 to October 1 of this year with an opening reception on September 9th. Some of the ten artists whose works were selected are attending the reception, which is open to the public. Accompanying them are representatives from Mon Art Gallery, Gallery Alma Blou and Landhuis Bloemhof.

These artists include metal sculptor Yubi Kirindongo, winner of Curaçao's prestigious Cola Debrot Prize. Kirindongo creates "found" art using scraps of metal, iron, driftwood and more. Also known for using unique media is Herman van Bergen and his Sumpiña (thorn) art. The thorns are found in abundance around the island and van Bergen transforms them into sculptures. Hortence Brouwn brings to the fore feelings and expressions through her sculptures, many of which are on display at prominent island locations.

To make all this happen, Wilczak flies down to Curaçao almost every month (file this under a hard job but someone has to do it), meeting with artists and organizing their works to ship back. It involves reading documents written in Dutch and Papiamentu (Curaçao's official language) along with learning to measure in centimeters. Helping her in this endeavor is Schanze, who, with her husband Richard, moved to Curaçao about a decade ago and is very active in the island's art scene.

But it's all worth it, Wilczak says.

"It's a great way to connect Holland and Curaçao," Wilczak says. "And the show is unique. I can guarantee people have not seen this art unless they've traveled to Curaçao." - JANE AMMESON

