

Caves of Haiti, Between Imaginary and Reality

From March 23 to May 8, 2016

Montreal, March 14, 2016 – Linked directly with Haitian culture and filled with colourful legends, the grottoes of this beautiful country—nicknamed “The pearl of the Antilles”—can be found at the heart of an exhibit produced by the *Association Hommes des Cavernes*, on at TOHU from March 23 to May 8.



In response to a request by the *Commission nationale haïtienne* to preserve the country's subterranean heritage, and in cooperation with UNESCO, spelunkers Olivier Testa and Jean-François Fabriol and photographer Carole Devillers led a team of French spelunkers on expeditions aimed to inventory, study, protect, and highlight Haiti's grottoes.

Although locals have always had a deep attachment to the grottoes across the country—indeed, associating them with numerous ceremonies and voodoo rites—the rest of the world has only begun to discover their cultural, esthetic, archeological, and geological value.

After its much-acclaimed launch at UNESCO House in Paris, the “Caves of Haiti, Between Imaginary and Reality” exhibit is headed to North America for the first time. With support from the *Centre International de Documentation et d'Information Haïtienne, Caraïbienne et Afro-canadienne* (CIDIHCA), this project is shining a light on Haiti's geological riches as well as their importance to the country's culture and history.

Visitors will have the opportunity to travel to six of the Caribbean country's departments thanks to 45 photos and a selection of multimedia. Brimming with beauty, these works of art will help people better understand how fragile these caves are and the vital need to protect them. A series of informative panels will also enable visitors to link Haiti's past to its present and discover new nuances of its history, beliefs and riches.

“This exhibit has the extraordinary ability to show Haiti in all its finest, through a lens other than a country that's been ripped apart, wounded and at war with itself.” – Nélío Joseph, Le Nouvelliste (Haiti), January 26, 2015

Although it reveals the past, this exhibit is anchored firmly in the present thanks to its use of technology. To enjoy the full effect of the exhibit, visitors are invited to bring along their smartphone or tablet in order to access additional information by way of QR codes: stories, book excerpts, complementary images, and more. Back home, they can continue their exploration thanks to a website dedicated to the spelunking team's expeditions.

Sculpted by water running through limestone, these treasures were discovered—or rediscovered—during exploratory missions organized in the departments of Nippes, Sud, Grand'Anse, Plateau Central, Nord-Ouest, and Sud-Est, with the help of many Haitian partners, including the *Bureau Nationale d'Ethnologie*.

The exhibit is led by the *Association Hommes des Cavernes* and commissioned by Stéphanie Jagou and Olivier Testa. The association's mission is to promote the richness of the subterranean world as well as its potential—both economical and social.

Because of our commitment to preservation and sustainable development, it is only natural that TOHU helps highlight Haiti's rich natural heritage, history and culture through these grottoes—especially since the site also provides access to the Saint-Michel Environmental Complex (SMEC), which used to be a limestone quarry and is now a communal space located near St-Michel's bustling Haitian community.

Key dates:

- **The vernissage, free and open to everyone, will be held March 24, 2016, at 5 p.m.**
- **A free guided visit by Stéphanie Jagou, co-curator of the exhibit, will take place March 26 at 3:30 p.m., providing an inside look at the exhibit and expeditions.**
- **A conference-workshop, free and open to everyone, will be presented by the Société Québécoise de Spéléologie on April 23 at 11 a.m., providing an introduction to Speleology.**
- **During these activities, guests are invited to try a rope descent from the rafters of the TOHU hall accompanied by a professional speleologist.**

To get to TOHU: 2345 Jarry street east (corner of d'Iberville)

Métro Jarry (bus 193 - east)/Métro d'Iberville or Frontenac (bus 94 - north)

Information & Box Office: Tel.: 514-376-TOHU (8648) or 1-888-376-TOHU (8648)

Full programming: www.tohu.ca

For more information about the exhibit: www.exposition.grottesdhaiti.org

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TOHU IS FINANCED IN PART BY THE GOVERNMENT OF QUEBEC, THE CONSEIL DES ARTS ET DES LETTRES DU QUÉBEC, THE CITY OF MONTREAL, CANADIAN HERITAGE, AND THE CONSEIL DES ARTS DE MONTRÉAL. TOHU ACKNOWLEDGES THE VALUABLE CONTRIBUTIONS OF RADIO-CANADA AND THE CIRQUE DU SOLEIL, OUR MAJOR PARTNERS, AND AIR FRANCE, OUR OFFICIAL CARRIER. WE ALSO THANK UNIBROUE, KEURIG CANADA, TD FRIENDS OF THE ENVIRONMENT FOUNDATION, CASCADES, THE CAISSES DES JARDINS MOVEMENT, AS WELL AS THE STM, BCF S.E.N.C.R.L., UNIVINS, AND OUR MEDIA PARTNERS, LA PRESSE AND COGÉCO MÉTROMÉDIA.

Source: TOHU

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