

Sleights of Hand: Virginia Overton at the Kitchen and 'Haitian Masters' at Edward Thorp Gallery

The quietly delightful exhibition *Haitian Masters* at Edward Thorp Gallery brings together the paintings of four recognizably related but wildly different 20th-century, self-taught Haitian artists. Wesner La Forest used raw but often muddy colors and intermingled depths of plane to create strangely but delicately composed small paintings on cardboard or panel. In *Village Scene*, a few flat green houses with orange roofs sit under an undulating deep blue that could be sky or sea; a homely Madonna's bow-curved, red-sleeved arm in *Mother and Child and Flowers* both protects her baby and pushes him forward, like an offering. Peterson Laurent combined meticulously accurate proportions with tropical colors and compressed perspective to make exuberantly fantastical tableaux of grimacing ruby fish sporting in front of American battleships, or, as in *Carnivals*, black-outlined sailors and civilians marching happily past the tin-roofed pink houses of St. Marc. Bourmond Byron's heavily varnished scenes have the sentimental comfort of Chagall and the uncanny lean of Soutine. And Odilon Pierre's more sharply vertical constructions tend almost toward abstraction in their profuse floral colors, but he also produced powerful, concrete symbols like *Red Radiant Hand #1*—a single palm covered in either paint or blood—and his lovely *Crowd Scene*, which uses black dots and red, yellow, blue and green stripes to conjure a group of women in long dresses with their arms raised.