



Maison de la culture
Janine-Sutto

2550, rue Ontario Est
Métro Frontenac
514 872-7882
mcjsutto@montreal.ca

Photo: Michael Patton

WELCOME TO THE GARDEN

AN EXHIBITION BY ESTHER CALIXTE-BÉA

November 14, 2024 → January 12, 2025

FREE ENTRY

The Exhibition

Welcome to the Garden presents recent works by artist and body hair activist Esther Calixte-Béa aka Queen Esie. She shapes and reintroduces her artistic universe and her imaginary tribe Fyète-Souhou to narrate the adventures of distant descendants in search of their roots. The exhibition is an introspective journey into the artist's mixed heritage, questioning her ancestors' paths and the influence of colonisation on the construction of her family history and identity.

The Fyète-Souhou Tribe's Origin Story

The story told orally by the elders narrates that the tribe originally called Tcheybê-Zouhou changed its name after an encounter with a pregnant Caribbean woman. She had travelled the seas by boat and landed on the shores of Côte d'Ivoire. Looking for a place to give birth, she accidentally found the tribe in a secluded part of the forest. She gave birth to a son who grew up to marry a woman of the tribe. The woman was barren and prayed to the God creator El Elyon for a child. Her womb was opened and she bore a baby girl so hairy that it alarmed the tribe members. Though the women of the community were known to be hairy across the land, they had never bore a child with lanugo. The woman, afraid of what might happen to her child, convinced the elders that the baby was given to her by the creator and not the gods they had served. The elders concluded that they would watch the child grow up while keeping a close eye on her. The young girl was gifted, strong and beautiful. Her exploits impressed the elders so much so that they appointed her as the first female chief. Due to her Caribbean heritage, the tribe's name was changed to Fyète-Souhou. In her rule, various traditions were abandoned such as pubic hair rituals and public nudity. New traditions were introduced and a new way of life began. That's when God broke off the land, creating an island of its own and named it Tè. The island can only be found by a direct descendant of a Fyète, often through dreams and visions.

In addition, the chief created the group called Kea-nin (goldy in guéré), teaching women knowledge she had learned from El Elyon. The Kea-nin, keepers of knowledge, were tasked to document the history of the tribe, traditions, exploits and some were chosen to travel outside of the island to acquire new knowledge, languages, meals, dyes and more.

The artist

Esther Calixte-Béa is a multidisciplinary artist of Ivorian and Haitian origin born in 1996 in Longueuil. She is also a body hair activist known as "Queen Esie". Calixte-Bea completed a bachelor's degree in painting and drawing at Concordia University (2020). Her work has been presented in *Vie des Arts* as well as in several media outlets, notably on CBC radio, La Fabrique Culturelle and TVA Nouvelles. Her photographic series entitled "Lavender Project" has been featured in *Fashion Canada* and *Glamour UK*, among others.

Curatorial statement

Esther Calixte-Béa's artistic and activist universe is both luminous and deeply therapeutic. Having explored the themes of self-love and self-acceptance in her first solo exhibition, *Creation of an Ethereal World*, the artist is now directing us towards a new reflection, that of community and reconciliation with your origins.

In *Welcome to the Garden*, Esther Calixte-Béa creates a narrative where the intimate and the collective meet. The fictional ethnic group of Fyète-Souhou sends a group of women overseas from the island of Tè to bring back knowledge from the outside world. Some of these women choose never to return and become the 'lost ones'. Their descendants, growing up in societies influenced by Western norms, are cut off from their roots and find themselves searching for part of their history and identity.

With a series of recent works, the multidisciplinary Canadian artist, of Haitian and Ivorian origin, presents these young women in white T-shirts, symbols of their quest for self and their desire to return to the mother island. This initiation journey reveals profound themes such as beauty, shame, freedom, along with the complex relationship with the community and oneself, oscillating between love and rejection. In this symbolic quest to reconnect with their roots, the young women return to the island of Tè. They find a spirituality and a culture that fully accepts them, initiating a healing process that is both individual and collective. As they retrace their steps back to their origins, they rediscover their identity and rejoin the tribe, illustrating the search for harmony between past and present.

In the exhibition, the garden becomes a symbolic space where the characters rediscover their origins, reconcile with their past and their culture, and begin a collective healing process. It embodies a return to harmony, both internally and within the community. The garden, in its natural symbolism, also embodies a space for transformation and renewal. Through the cycles of nature, it is a reminder of the resilience and capacity of the earth to regenerate itself, in the image of the path traveled by these young women in their quest for healing.

The exhibition is also an introspective journey into the artist's mixed heritage, questioning the choices made by her ancestors and the impact of those decisions on her identity today. Inviting the public to wander through this garden, Calixte-Béa encourages everyone to embark on their own journey, to reflect on the stories that have shaped their identity, and to understand the indelible influence of colonization in this construction.

Cécilia Bracmort, curator.

Complementary activities

Thursday, November 14, 5pm to 7pm

Join the artist at the Maison de la culture Janine-Sutto to celebrate the launch of the exhibition.

Saturday, November 30, 1:30 pm

Join us in Studio 1 for a bilingual discussion where the artist will answer the question Who am I, while sharing her journey as a female hair activist and multidisciplinary artist. In search of what shapes one's identity and a definition of freedom, she'll discuss, among other things, the creation of the fictitious Fyète-Souhou ethnic group, her Haitian-Ivorian heritage, spirituality and her Christian upbringing.

Maison de la culture Janine-Sutto
2550, rue Ontario Est
Montréal (Qc) H2K 1W7
514 872-7882
mcjsutto@montreal.ca

Mardi et mercredi de 13 h à 19 h 30
Jeudi et vendredi de 13 h à 18 h
Samedi de 10 h à 17 h
Dimanche de 13 h à 17 h
Lundi FERMÉ

ENTRÉE LIBRE

Horaire sujet à changement sans préavis



She has also been part of several group exhibitions, including *MAADI* by Stanley Février, presented at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (2022). *Imaginaires souverains* at the Maison de la Culture Janine-Sutto and Galerie Hugues Charbonneau (2022). Calixte-Béa presented her first solo exhibition *Creation of an Ethereal World* at La Centrale Gallery Powerhouse (2021) and her second in Chiguer Art Contemporain gallery (2023). The Musée National des Beaux-Arts du Québec has recently acquired one of her artworks (2024). Esther Calixte-Béa's practice develops through different art forms such as painting, drawing, photography, textiles, installation and writing. Through her work, she challenges eurocentric beauty standards by addressing the taboo of female body hair.

In her visual compositions, black female figures wear their body hair proudly rather than with shame. The hair becoming glorified on their bodies pays homage to her Ivorian tribe named Wè. The artist addresses themes of identity by inventing a fictional tribe called Fyète-Souhou taking the word pride in Haitian Creole and the word divine in Guéré (Ivorian dialect). Calixte-Béa also addresses the theme of individuality by giving each figure a unique appearance through their elaborate hairstyles inspired by various pre-colonial African hairstyles, as well as the issue of vulnerability by creating a space for healing in her work. Calixte-Béa builds an inventive and color-filled world, often inspired by nature, her personal life and her cultural heritage. She paints female characters with acrylic paint and oil pastels, creating a world with a royal and futuristic appearance. Navigating through various mediums, she can also bring her figures to life by creating clothing, wigs and accessories that are displayed on mannequins in the exhibition space. In her self-photography work, the artist wears her own creations while highlighting her body hair. Finally, it is through writing and poetry that she tells the story of this tribe, illustrating their way of life.

The curator

Cécilia Bracmort is a French born, Montreal based curator and artist. Her Caribbean heritage (from Martinique and Guadeloupe) influences her artistic and curatorial practices, that are focused on the notions of identity – individual or collective –, memory and history. In her practice, Cécilia considers herself as an art-listener and [art] matchmaker. Curious and full of ideas, her artistic and curatorial projects are made to connect worlds, social environments and concepts that don't usually mix.

Through her multi-focal vision linked to the different layers of her identity, Cécilia Bracmort's projects seek to form bridges between far reaching themes she connects with such as sports, ecology, trauma, and mythology. Through her work, Cécilia aims to open doors to make visible new ideas and identities, and to encourage people to think outside the 'white' box and to invite them to see anew the world under a different lens.

