

TERRITORIES

These are African-Caribbean visions - portraits of people, cities and landscapes, social and religious groups, holy places on the islands - this is photography as a process of approaching the life worlds of the Diaspora on three continents. Each image is particular, individual or collective; each story that is told is different, but, at the same time, it is always one's own human story.

"Growing up in Paris, I have been dreaming the Caribbean through the Creole of my father. For several years now, my journeys have been inscribed in the quest of my personal history, the rediscovery of cultural roots. For me this project is not about ideology. Rather, my work is a way of defining the universality of the human condition. The discovery of roots and relations forms the parts and pieces of the texture of the presence. My travels are tools for reflecting on photography as an artistic medium, where sensual impressions, *esprit* and aesthetic emotions collide. Photography is writing with light: in my images, I can scribble down the traces of experience and fleeting appearance, and thus materialize moments of my memory."

VISUAL MEMORY
TESTIMONY ON
DAVID DAMOISON

Journey of the Senses

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ULRIKE DAVIS-SULIKOWSKI
& MARJUS MITTRINGER

"For what we are dealing with is man in all his human presence, and with extending our vision to the highest interior seas.

Let us make haste! Let us testify to man!"

Saint-John Perse, "Vents"

As a means of questioning and researching origins and identity, memory and experience, the expressive possibilities of documentary photography are the focus of this artistic exploration. Sometimes the proper

representation is out-of-focus movement, working with speed, to "chase the impossible light of the night," to push for an aesthetic that leads into vertigo, thereby dissolving all signs of reality, eliminating everything conclusive. Nothing can be taken for granted, least of all the visible. Sometimes it is important to strive for absolute realism: then the photo is a carefully chosen slice of reality, composed to confront, to force the onlooker into an encounter with the person that is looking out from the image.

This interest has led to a corpus of portraits in stark black and white - poetic documents, encounters with faces and atmospheres, glimpses of daily realities. At the same time, the images function as doors to the realm beyond the physical and the visible. They incorporate modes of thought, emotions, expectations, the cultural specificities that constitute landscapes, as well as human faces. Gentle and precise portraits have emerged: each image breathes the self-possessed dignity of the person it portrays: a boy selling fruit quickly turns his head toward a noise on



David Damoison. *Carrefour*, Haití. 1994. 40 x 40 cm.



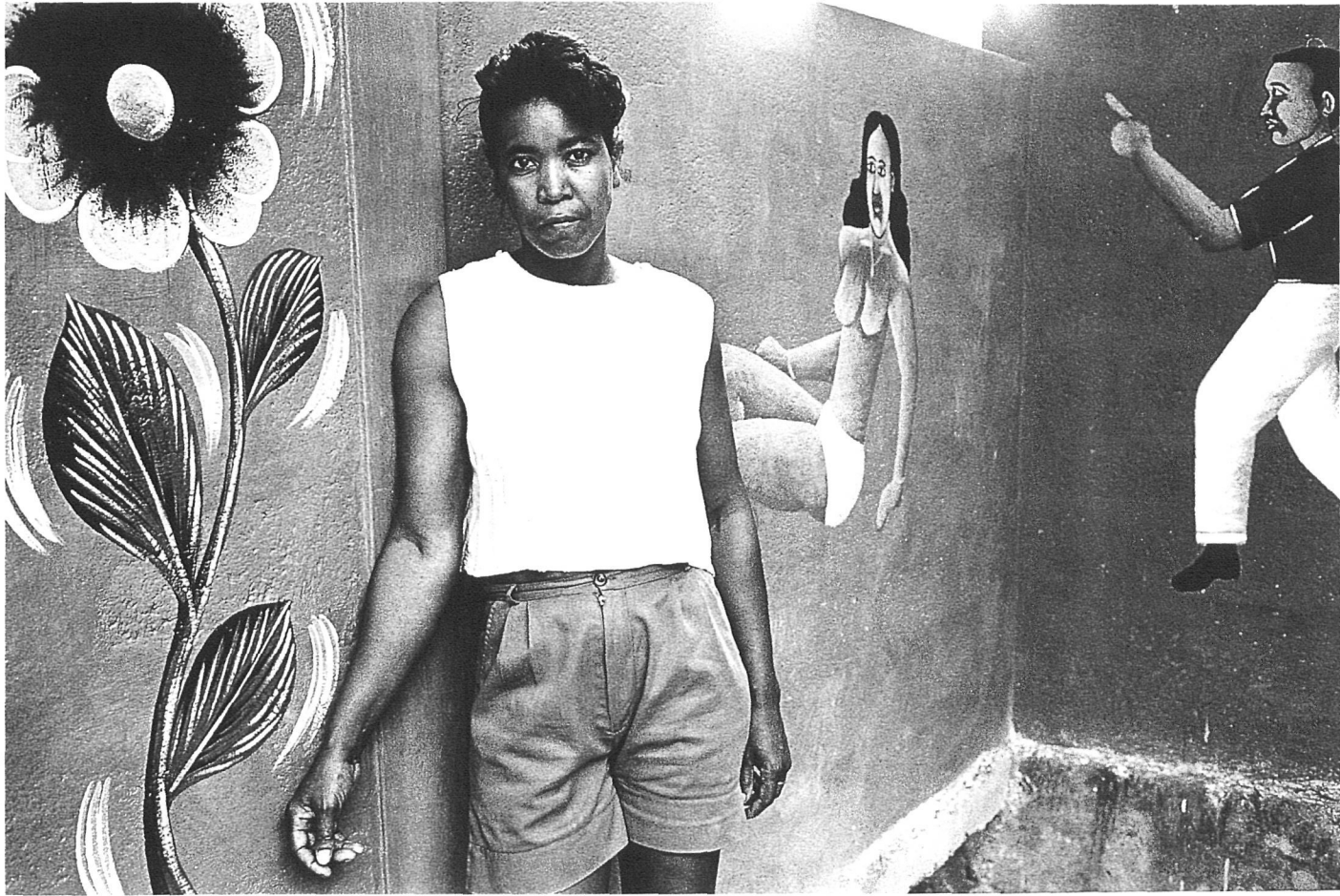
David Damoison, *Carrefour*, Haití, 1992. 30 x 40 cm.

the street, a girl caresses the wall as if it were her secret dream, an old man sits on his doorstep memorizing the lines of a story his father had once told him, a group of boys chatting about cars and girls grow silent in consensus, girls pose together like goddesses of the Caribbean, a metal ring forms a halo around a child's head.

“The Caribbean is my field of creative reflection and I am appropriating my origins beyond cliché. I am motivated by the desire to give a



David Damoison, *Babe One King*, Port au Prince, Haití, 1995, 150 x 196 cm.



David Damoison. Port au Prince, Haití. 1995. 30 x 40 cm.

name to its inner world - the burning, the bruised, the sense of an inexplicable rupture... and the beauty. I am approaching this whole reality with the vision of spirituality by means of which these people define themselves, and which is also a part of me."

Through the artistic endeavor, Damoison (as a member of the Diaspora) is searching for a space beyond the borders of language, politics and locality. He yearns for a position which is defined by being inside and

outside at the same time, thus allowing the creation of a new humanist vision. Documenting is like bearing witness. Damoison bears witness to his family from Martinique, to his growing up in France: he is neither a participant in decision-making, nor an intruding voyeur. An observing distance remains, and yet there is a connection between the people in the photographs and the photographer - a respectful distance, which does not signify indifference, but sincere affection.

"Of delicate spirit is he who finds his home sweet, but strong is he, who finds himself at home on any ground, only the one for whom the whole world is an alien country achieves real perfection." Hugo St. Victor, 12 th century.

Marjus Mittringer: free-lance writer and curator, teaches at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna; **Ulrike Davis-Sulikowski:** anthropologist and curator.