



Media only: Linda St.Thomas (202) 633-5188; stthomasl@si.edu
LeShawn Burrell-Jones (202) 633-5240; burrelll@si.edu

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Media website: <http://newsdesk.si.edu>

The Stiller Foundation to Support the Smithsonian's Haiti Cultural Recovery Project

The Smithsonian has received a grant of \$250,000 from the Stiller Foundation to support the Haiti Cultural Recovery Project. The project is working to preserve and restore Haiti's rich cultural heritage in the wake of the 2010 earthquake, and it has already saved some 35,000 artworks, artifacts, rare books and historical documents, trained 150 Haitians in basic conservation and built safe and secure storage facilities for Haitian collections.

The Stiller Foundation grant, made with support from Artists for Haiti, will aid in the revitalization of a severely damaged historic building that the Haitian government has designated for the project. The building, located near the Presidential Palace in Port-au-Prince and known as the Maison du Tourisme, will become the headquarters of the Haiti Cultural Recovery Center and host conservation studios, staff, classes, workshops and storage space. The new center, shared with the government's preservation agency, will provide the base for conserving artistically rich and historically important Haitian collections.

"Rebuilding this historic structure so that it can house our effort to preserve our heritage is an uplifting dream in the wake of disaster," said Henry-Robert Jolibois, the director-general of the agency.

"We are grateful to the Stiller Foundation and Artists for Haiti because their support will enable Haiti's children to learn from the accomplishments and creativity of previous generations," said Richard Kurin, Smithsonian Under Secretary for History, Art and Culture and the project's founder.

The Stiller Foundation began working in Haiti before the 2010 earthquake and has expanded its support for projects there in partnership with Artists for Haiti, an organization actor Ben Stiller co-founded with gallery owner and art dealer David Zwirner. The nonprofit's funds came from a September 2011 record-breaking charity art auction at Christie's in New York, which featured 27 works by 26 of today's most prominent artists, including Cecily Brown, Marlene Dumas, Jeff Koons, Jasper Johns, Raymond Pettibon, Neo Rauch and Luc Tuymans.

“The Smithsonian is undoubtedly one of our country’s greatest national treasures,” said Stiller. “With this grant, we hope to bring its essence—conservation—to a country that has lost so much in the wake of the 2010 earthquake. The Haiti Cultural Recovery Project will allow the people of Haiti to preserve an extensive collection of art and artifacts reflective of their rich culture and history.”

Saving Haiti’s Heritage, a book written by Kurin and published by the Smithsonian, provides an illustrated account of the project to date. It is also available online at www.haiti.si.edu.

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