

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH ANDRE PIERRE

BY MICHEL MONIN

Translated from French by Boadiba

...I am too close to Port-Au-Prince. Port-Au-Prince is enraged. More enraged than a jealous woman. You can hear her now, climbing up the other side of the bridge while tearing off her clothes. I was made to live outside the city, over there in the depths of the plain. Then those who wish to see me would have to walk a long time across the fields. The do-nothings would get discouraged...

...Young people today no longer know the names of trees, or recognize the healing plants but they know the names of all the pop bands in the country and elsewhere, they can dance all the dances, always running to pleasures downtown or traveling to New-York. They show contempt for their elders, contempt for the peasants, the mystics and the simple folk.

...If our country were a serious country, the minister of agriculture would be the most important state official; more important than the president of the republic or the minister of finance...Do you know the name of our minister of agriculture? Can he be reached? Mister minister is at a conference wearing an expensive suit and tie as if potatoes, plantains and yams could speak French.

...Thunder burn me, it's the truth. We are living in contempt, pride, mediocrity, selfishness; everyone for himself yet the earth is thirsty, the earth can't go on. Oh my earth! She lets herself be carried off by flashfloods, slips in the ravines, goes to hide her sorrow at the bottom of the sea. Danmbala is angry, he closes the sky and all becomes dust and desolation.

...I don't know if you realize it but rainbows are almost extinct, springs are dying, trees are falling, birds are hunted down. With all those imported religions swarming the country, the peasants abandon their crops, sing the gospel, eat disaster victims' food. Well I say no! And something I am proud of, something of which I'm prouder than all of my paintings is that I bought some land I planted in sugar cane and made gardens of manioc and tobacco and yesterday I went and put in two measures of red beans.

... Let's say you put three seeds in each hole, one shoot will come through. Each plant can give up to twenty-five pods. If you realize what one measure represents in terms of beans after you deduct the rats' portion, the share of the neighbors and of the drought, the evil-doer's share and that of the section chief's; well you see what's left...

...This hen, you are looking at is a local hen who has artistic pretensions; I just repainted my door for a party, with her feathers.

...Imagine I read my name in the paper: "Five Vodou Painters at the French Institute" and Andre Pierre this and Andre Pierre that and to think I'd never even received an invitation. Good manners like good soil are disappearing. I almost wrote them a letter to ask for an explanation...

...Cocks, fighting cocks... I know everything about training a cock: dreams, moon phases, personalized care, unfeathering of the juking points. Look at me. I'm sixty years old and ever since 1931 I haven't put one foot at a cockfight.

One morning my mother had sent me to get oil and tomato paste... on the way I hear the crowing of cocks. It was a fight. Croix des Bouquets against Croix des Missions. One fight after another, the last to win is champ. Time passes, passes, repasses, all of a sudden I feel eyes boring into the nape of my neck, a hand on my shoulder, my father! He says nothing, only, he looks at me. He looks at me two more times, then he leaves. Nothing more. I think I would still be there, on the bench in that pit, if a friend hadn't taken my arm and walked me home.

I hear André's nuanced voice within me I see his chameleon's smile again and my eyes want to water but my mouth keeps smiling. I called him from here and he gave me consent on the phone to translate and publish this interview in American when I got a chance. That was in the early nineties. Could not find that text for at least twenty years but I found it now, as beautiful as I remember it. This is the totality of what André said in that interview, I skipped the interviewer's questions. One afternoon when I told him I didn't really know the Vodou minister of agriculture, Azaka Médé, he smiled one of those patient smiles and said but you inspire and you translate and you transmit. You plant seeds too and you see them grow.

André's responses to the interviewer were excerpted from the book Haiti: Art Naif Art Vodou, Paris 1988, Galleries Nationales du Grand Palais.

## SEEDS FOR HAITI

We urge all the friends of Haiti and lovers of Haitian people and culture to join this seed drive and help the Haitians who have lost their crops to hurricane Matthew replace them during the next planting season by buying organic seeds from one of the on-line seed catalogs listed below and having them send the seeds directly to one of the organizations listed below which will carry and distribute the seeds to the appropriate groups in Haiti. All the vegetables need to be replaced every day stuff like: CARROTS BELL PEPPERS OF EVERY COLOR LEAFY GREENS CABBAGES BROCCOLI EGGPLANT ZUCCHINI TOMATOES VARIOUS BEANS AND PEAS GREEN BEANS ONIONS PARSLEY CHIVES GREEN ONIONS CILANTRO OKRA EVERY FAMILIAR ORDINARY FOOD THAT CAN BE GROWN.

### ON-LINE ORGANIC SEED SELLERS:

1. Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds (rareseeds.com)
2. mypatriotssupply.com (866) 229-0927
3. edenbrothers.com
4. burpee.com/heirlooms
5. Warm climate seeds:  
Anniesheirloomseeds.com/veggies:  
800-313-9140
6. SEED SAVERS EXCHANGE (Non-profit):  
SEEDSAVERS.ORG
7. mariesheirloomseeds.com
8. highmowingseeds.com/organic

### HAITIAN ORGANIZATIONS:

1. CODEM/SEEDS FOR HAITI:  
388 Reitler St, Stratford Connecticut 06614
2. FRATERNITE VALLEENNE/SEEDS FOR HAITI:  
179-33 Grand Central Parkway Jamaica Estates,  
New York 11432
3. LAMBI FUND/SEEDS FOR HAITI:  
77 Jackson Ave, Huntington New York 11743
4. ZANMI LAKAY/SEEDS FOR HAITI  
153 Montecito Ave, Pacifica Ca 94044
5. ART MATENWA/SEEDS FOR HAITI:  
1807 E 24<sup>th</sup> St., Oakland Ca 94606
6. TEMPLE OF YEWEH/SEEDS FOR HAITI  
28 Santa Barbara Drive, Plainview NY 11803

