

# PRESS RELEASE

## HAITI: CHAOS AND DAILY LIFE BY PHOTOGRAPHER BENOIT AQUIN AT THE McCORD MUSEUM – A SNAPSHOT OF THE HAITIAN PEOPLE SINCE THE JANUARY 2010 EARTHQUAKE

**Montreal, February 12, 2013** – From February 28 to May 12, 2013, the McCord Museum presents *Haiti: Chaos and Daily Life*, by photographer Benoit Aquin. In his 40 oversized colour photos, Aquin offers a vision of Haiti today and takes an honest look at the day-to-day lives of Haitians as they cope with the chaos caused by the January 2010 earthquake.

The photographs, taken by the artist over a number of visits, cover the three year period since the earthquake that left 220,000 dead, 300,000 injured and a million homeless.

A number of excerpts taken from works by Haitian-born Montreal novelist Dany Laferrière, including quotes from his 2010 memoir, *The World is Moving Around Me*, complement the exhibition and bring an added perspective to Aquin's photographs. A brief history of Haiti is also presented at the entry to the exhibition.

### A social legacy and personal perspective

Benoit Aquin was just four years old when he visited Haiti for the first time. He has since returned to the island often, each time forging deeper links and strengthening his friendships with its people. This feeling of belonging is evident in his observations of Haitian life, his choice of subjects—which display unique aspects of the country's culture, such as voodoo and the carnival—and his forthright photographic style, at once empathetic and uncompromising.

*"The Museum strives to exhibit Montreal photographers who stand apart through both the originality of their work and their social consciousness,"* states Hélène Samson, Curator, Notman Photographic Archives. *"Benoit Aquin has turned his lens on a subject that will touch Quebecers, who have shown exceptional solidarity and generosity to Haitian-born Montrealers and indeed all Haitians since the earthquake."*

Aquin's photos are spellbinding. He has departed from the conventional documentary approach, choosing instead to focus on formal image composition: framing, colour and forceful lines. *"I create large canvases whose details are sometimes slow to emerge,"* says Aquin. His art is a testimony to both the vitality of the Haitian people and their cultural heritage.

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*Master of the Impossible*, Port-au-Prince, 2010  
© Benoit Aquin



*In flight*, Port-au-Prince, 2010  
© Benoit Aquin



*Carnival I*, Les Cayes, 2011  
© Benoit Aquin

## **About Benoit Aquin**

Benoit Aquin is a Montreal photojournalist whose ambitious documentary projects take years of preparation and reflect the social and economic implications of our relationship with the environment. In 2008, he received the prestigious Prix Pictet, which recognizes photography dedicated to environmental sustainability, for his series *The Chinese Dust Bowl*. For more than 20 years, he has contributed to a number of magazines and newspapers, including *Voir*, *Time*, *Maclean's*, *La Presse* and *The Guardian*. His works can also be found in the collections of the National Gallery of Canada and the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec.

## **Activities accompanying this exhibition:**

### **Conference**

#### ***Picturing Haiti circa 2013***

**Wednesday, March 13, 2013, 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.**

A discussion on Haiti's cultural property, art, and cinema.

Speakers: Marie-Lucie Vendryes, museologist and Frantz Voltaire, political scientist and filmmaker.

### **Screenings**

A series of documentary short films on Haiti, before and after the earthquake, by Haitian director Arnold Antonin.

Short Films on Haiti Part 1

#### ***Before the Earthquake***

**Saturday, March 2, 2013, 11 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m.**

Short Films on Haiti Part 2

#### ***After the Earthquake***

**Saturday, April 6, 2013, 11 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m.**

## **About the McCord Museum**

The McCord Museum is dedicated to the preservation, study and appreciation of Montreal's history, as recounted by its people, artists and communities living in the city's past and present. The McCord Museum is home to one of the largest historical collections in North America, consisting of First Peoples objects, costumes and textiles, photographs, decorative and visual artworks, and textual archives, totalling more than 1.4 million artefacts. The McCord Museum produces exciting exhibitions that engage visitors from Montreal, Canada, and beyond by offering them a contemporary look at the world. The McCord Museum also offers educational and cultural activities, as well as innovative projects on the Internet. ***McCord Museum: Our People, Our Stories.***

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Photographs available on request. Interviews can be arranged with Benoit Aquin, photographer, Hélène Samson, Curator, Notman Photographic Archives and Suzanne Sauvage, President and Chief Executive Officer of the McCord Museum.

## **Source and information:**

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