

Linda Khachadurian

***Il Pagliaccio***

2015

Mixed media: sugar paste, wafer paper, edible luster dust, edible markers, and gelatin gemstones.

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**Cause/topic of show:** The importance of education in developing nations: Haiti edition.

Haiti has a literacy rate of 61%. A significant contributing factor to this problem is that a mere 10% of primary and secondary schools are public and free, leaving the majority of children’s families scrambling to find money for tuitions they cannot afford.

I first started volunteering in Haiti in 2008; by 2015 I had my own 501 (c) 3 educational nonprofit, called Charitable Confections, that was operating in the destitute and gang-ridden slum of Cite Soleil through a partnership with Haiti Scholarship Association, which is run by my Haitian friend, Marcel Jean. We both shared the belief that the best way to lift children out of poverty was through the power of education.

The situation, which was difficult from the beginning, deteriorated when the nation shut down in February of 2019 during the riots regarding the government’s past misuse of PetroCaribe fuel subsidies. Shortly thereafter, we gave up the lease on our tutoring center because gang members and other non-affiliated violent criminals were threatening the lives of any of the tutors, teachers, or children who dared try to continue to attend classes. Schools had just started to re-open in December 2019/January 2020, when they were closed again in March of 2020 with the onset of the pandemic.

For this piece, I worked backwards, finding a cause to accompany the art, rather than the other way around. The sugar paste mask was crafted in 2015 as part of a larger isomalt sculpture for an event in Los Angeles with renowned tenor and conductor, Placido Domingo, that revolved around the opera *Pagliacci*. I wanted

to include the mask to showcase the longevity of edible art, so I was trying to think if it could fit as a pair for any of the causes I knew I wanted to address in this exhibition. One might not initially make the connection between a clown mask and the dire educational situation in Haiti. However, the more I gazed at the expression on the mask, with its sadness and weariness infused with hope, the more it reminded me of the expression on my face as I was confronted with the seemingly never-ending problems that came our way.



A gathering in Cite Soleil in July 2017 heralding our new portfolio of tutoring programs.



Placido Domingo holding the mask at an event in Los Angeles in 2015.