

Yasmine Espert

# Doubout, Kanpe

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Abstract

*Doubout, Kanpe* is a visual essay that stages a conversation between Karukera and Ayiti – more commonly known as Guadeloupe and Haiti. It demonstrates that these Caribbean places share a language that is visual, textual, and verbal.

Historical evidence shows that Guadeloupe and Haiti resisted the French Empire. However, as is often cited in scholarship about the African diaspora, their contemporary statuses are different. Guadeloupe is now an Overseas French Department while Haiti is an independent nation. This narrative (dependence vs. independence) presents a binary that stems from the western definitions of autonomy. *Doubout, Kanpe* explores being, knowing and belonging from another point of departure. With images and text spanning the 18th and 21st centuries, it assumes that other relationships and constellations can be excavated from archival evidence.

I created this visual essay after a residency at the William L. Clements Library – an archive dedicated to the history of the Americas. With white gloves and a magnifying glass, I pored over their 18th and 19th century cartography, graphics, and books. I wondered if there were other ways of approaching, and knowing, what connected Guadeloupe and Haiti. I questioned whether the archive could assist in this reframing. I also embraced the idea that the gaps and silences (the invisible and incomplete archive) could be generative.

There was visual rhyming in the maps, landscapes and figural representations that I studied in the archive. First there was an illustration of a Haitian soldier (a *dragon*). I was intrigued by his confident posture, his tattered linen pants, and slippers. Standing resolute, so close to the foreground, he appears taller than the palm tree and the colonial building in the distance. Later, I studied a map of Basse Terre, Guadeloupe – a military base of great value to the French and British Empires. This map detailed a volcano called La Soufrière (a natural line of defense). Similar to the *dragon*, this rugged formation emerges like a tall spine from the picture plane.

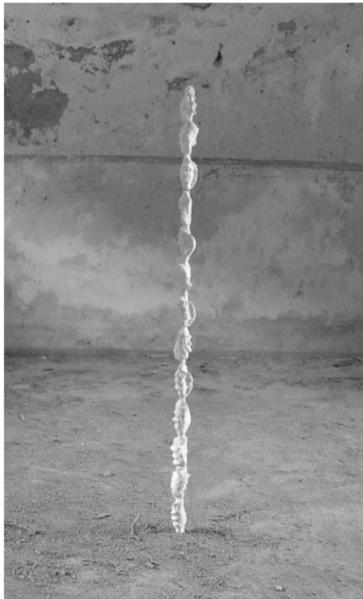
In *Doubout, Kanpe*, the confident soldier and the spine-like rendering of La Soufrière appear next to images by Minia Biabiany, a contemporary artist from Basse Terre. Her sculpture and films feature organic materials like cotton and smoke to narrate stories of resistance in Guadeloupe. All of these images – the map, the cotton sculpture, the soldier – stand side-by-side in this visual essay.

In addition to this suite of images, *Doubout, Kanpe* includes a poem. I wrote it to explore what sovereignty means in the native language that Haiti and Guadeloupe share: Creole. The poem is first presented in its original (a mix of French, Creole, and English). I follow that with the English translation. There are some words that I chose not to translate from the original version: *doubout* and *kanpe*. In Guadeloupean creole, *doubout* means to stand tall, to rise up into consciousness. In the language I grew up speaking (Haitian Creole), a synonym is *kanpe*. In this way, the archive that I draw from goes beyond the systems and records of physical institutions.

Acknowledgements

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DOUBOUT, KANPE



SOUF-

Doubout  
 Yo ka dit doubout  
 En Ayiti li te di'm kanpe  
 Kanpe, li te di'm

Can we do that?

Par terre  
 Il y a des traces  
 Cadeaux et des souvenirs  
 Lis, écoute  
 Médite en silence

Carry them, that burden is light

Douce comme l'eau de la rivière  
 Malléable comme le coton  
 Un révélation qui tremble  
 Comme un volcan

Souf, souf  
 respire, respire  
 Comme le volcan  
 Souf,  
 comme notre Soufrière



SOUF-

Doubout  
 They say doubout  
 In Haiti they told me kanpe  
 Kanpe, they told me  
 Can we do that?

On the ground  
 Are traces  
 Gifts and memories  
 Read and listen  
 Meditate in silence  
 Carry them, that burden is light

Sweet like the river waters  
 Soft like cotton  
 A revelation that trembles  
 Like the volcano

Blow, explode  
 Release again  
 Like the volcano  
 Blow,  
 like our Soufrière



## Image Credits

Detail of "La Guadeloupe," 1850.  
A.M. Perrot  
Property of William L. Clements Library  
Image by Yasmine Espert

Installation view of "Doubout," 2014.  
Minia Biabiany  
Image Courtesy of Minia Biabiany

"Dragon. (Haiti)," early 19th century.  
Thomas Moebs  
Property of William L. Clements Library  
Image by Yasmine Espert

Film still of "Toli, Toli," 2018.  
Minia Biabiany  
Image Courtesy of Minia Biabiany

Detail of "Guadeloupe," 2017.  
Yasmine Espert

"Guadeloupe," 2017.  
Yasmine Espert

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