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Rémy de Haenen, A Painter Traces His Roots

©Magdalena Ruiz Sidders



Art In The Time Of Covid

There's no point in belaboring the fact that Covid-19 continues to plague the island, and now that the UK variant has been detected here, who knows that the future will bring? When will the borders re-open and will the tourists respect whatever restrictions remain in place, from self-imposed quarantine to extra testing? The economic success of the island depends on tourism, so let's hope for the best.

In the meantime, one bright spot on the island is the continued presence of art and artists. As last week's issue of The Weekly announced, French painter Alain Le Chatelier is back for his annual winter visit at Les Artisans. His work is glorious, with bright colors and delightful compositions that invite us to visit his homes in France and Guadeloupe, as well as share his love for the light and landscapes of St Barth.

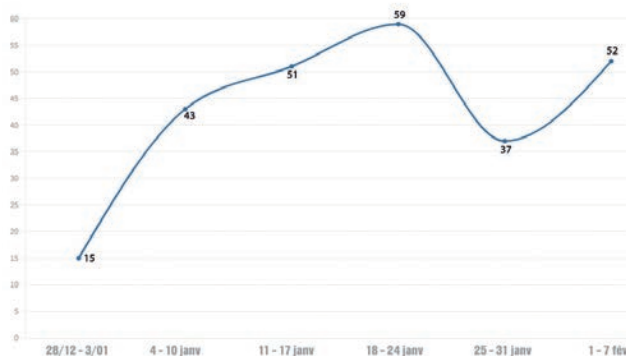
Another artist sharing his memories of the island is Remy de Haenen, son of the famed adventurer and airplane pilot who built the Eden Rock and opened the island toward the outside world. Half a century later, his son takes us on a trip down memory lane to the reimagined landscapes of his childhood. Currently on display at the Wall House Museum, his work recalls a very different era in St Barth, a time when 800 people lived in rather rudimentary conditions. A far cry from the reality of today.

These artists paint a picture of the St Barth in our mind's eye, unspoiled landscapes surrounded by the kaleidoscopic colors of the sea and the sky.

The island of our dreams!

Ellen Lampert-Gréaux

Covid-19: UK Variant Present In Saint Barthélemy



Evolution of the number of cases on the island since the beginning of the year.

Two people in St Barth have tested positive for the UK variant of Covid-19, as announced by the Prefecture last Saturday. The day before, five cases were reported in Guadeloupe and four in Saint Martin.

“Most of these cases are young people,” points out the Prefecture in Guadeloupe concerning the cases in Guadeloupe and Saint Martin. The announcement continues: “Reinforced contact tracing is underway and investigations seeking those at risk have been expanded around those who tested positive.

Considered more contagious, the UK and South African

variants are the reason evoked by the French government to justify the closing of the borders: “We fear an explosion of cases all at the same time, and are trying at all costs to avoid that on our islands, as hospital facilities are limited,” explained the Prefecture of Saint Barthélemy and Saint Martin last week.

Covid-19 Cases Rising

The number of Covid-19 cases in St Barth is on the rise, with 52 cases for the week of February 1-7, compared to 37 the week before. Since the beginning of the pandemic, there have been a total of 455 cases of Covid-19 on the island.

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Tourism Suspended For Now

Will the French Overseas Minister announce a date when the island can reopen? That's what the tourism industry in Saint Barth has requested in their letter to him. While waiting, they are left in the dark and wondering how to proceed.

“We are waiting.” That’s all that tourism professionals can say about the current situation. On Sunday, January 31, they were informed that all travel to Saint Barthélemy was prohibited, as of midnight on February 2, except for those with an imperative reason. The result: 100% cancellation of trips the week of February 8-14—what tourist could justify an imperative reason for coming to the island? Anne Dentel, director of Eden Rock Villa Rental, estimates that about a dozen villas under her aegis are still rented by those who arrived before the new regulations were put into place. At the hotel, 10 rooms are still occupied out of a total of 37.

“The travel restrictions imposed on February 2 not only caused us to lose all villa reservations for the month, but also caused a number of clients to cancel their reservations for March, April, and May,” explains Stiles Bennet, president and CMO at WIMCO, which handles 385 villas in Saint Barthélemy. And the Port of Gustavia saw at least 10 mega-yachts cancel their visits in February.

For restaurants, which depend quite a bit on the presence of tourists, the situation is complicated. Not only have their clients cancelled, but new restrictions require a distance of two meters between tables. “In most places, we have gone to a capacity of 25-30% compared to the period pre-Covid,” explains Nicolas Gicquel, of the Saint Barth Restaurant Association. “The smaller ones are more penalized by these new rules.”

As he sees it, “We rationalize it by



saving at least we are open, and that the situation is worse in France and in other countries.” And yet the post-confinement season had gotten off to a good start: “The season from November to January was one of the best in the past 10 years in terms of number of rooms occupied,” relates Nils Dufau, president of the Territorial Tourism Committee (CTTSB).

Vanessa Panza, director for the Saint Barthélemy Hotels and Villas Association, insists: “We are not in the kind of industry where we can tell our partners or our clients “we don’t know.” Due to our insularity, our situation is unusual in terms of the management of stock, the hiring of seasonal workers, etc.”

Stay open or close? A few days or longer? Faced with the decrease in business, everyone is asking a lot of questions.

On February 5, the island’s tourism associations, real estate agents, and restaurateurs sent a joint letter to Overseas Minister Sébastien Lecornu. “We are aware of the complexity of the situation and the precautionary principles applied to protect the overseas territories,” they wrote. Underlining the role of tourism in the local economy, they continued:

“We can put our business on hold for the next two weeks. But we would really like to know what will happen in the short and long term.” Support from the French government does not cover certain costs, such as rent, which can be very high on this island, for the businesses themselves as well as for the seasonal workers they house. Bonito, for example, pays the rent for 30 of its employees.

Seasonal workers whose housing is not paid by their employers are beginning to get worried. “I work for the tips,” explains Paulinha, a waitress in a beach restaurant. “My salary only covers my living expenses.”

While waiting for a response by the Overseas Minister, the tourist industry has its fingers crossed that the reopening will be soon: “If the island can reopen by the end of February, there is a chance we can recover some of the reservations we lost for March and April, which would be good news for local businesses,” adds Stiles Bennett. But in March and April, a lot of the reservations are those already postponed once by the lockdown in 2020. How long will the tourists be patient?

Rémy de Haenen, A Painter Traces His Roots

Raised in Saint Barthélemy, artist Rémy de Haenen, son of the former mayor by the same name, finds inspiration for his paintings in his childhood memories on the island. His exhibit, *St. Barth An Tan Lontan*, opened on February 17 at the Wall House Museum in Gustavia.

The artist invites us on a journey within the closed space of a museum. Painter, father, engineer, and airplane pilot, Rémy de Haenen created his exhibit while under Covid-19 lockdown in Argentina (where he lives), a time during which the only means of travel was visiting his memories and his imagination.



Following an itinerary of 13 paintings, the artist leads us from Saint Jean to Saline, at the time of his childhood, when he walked from one side of the island to the other to get food for the Eden Rock (his father's hotel). It was the late 50s, there was not yet electricity in Saint Barth, and it fell to the young Rémy de Haenen to start the generator every morning to provide light for the guests. He was also in charge of dumping the trash into the sea; luckily at that time most trash was biodegradable. His work embodies these cherished memories of his youth; memories he does not trivialize as he recreates the landscapes he remembers.

The artist does not seek realism, just as he does not avoid it. The memories of his promenades

are full of trees in bloom, especially the flamboyant. He removes the leaves, blackens the trunk and the branches, which take on the allure of meandering paths, and allows the colors of the flowers to explode against the variegated tints of the sky. And so, his memories are selected and transformed to evoke primarily his impressions, making the memory of his wanderings the object as well as the subject of his canvases. "I decided to work with the smallest anecdotes, the littlest of things that mark your life, and to turn them into something big," says Rémy de Haenen. By big, he means literally. The flowering trees he paints inundate the room with their colors, occupy the sky that surrounds them, and fill the space of their imposing frames.

In following the painter

on the path of his past, we meet various residents, from fishermen and a priest to farmers, all surrounded by the blue shades of the sea. "There were about 800 of us on the island," he recalls. There may well have been more flamboyant trees than there were people.

With the same first name, this Rémy de Haenen calls to mind another emblematic resident of the island: his father.

Adventurer, hotel owner, former mayor, a presence felt between the lines of the exhibit. "The link is the painting of the Eden Rock as I knew it, when it was built by my father," explains the artist, who evokes a sentiment of nostalgia in his work. Not sad or melancholy, but in full bloom.

St. Barth An Tan Lontan, Thru April 15, 2021. Wall House Museum, Gustavia. Free entry.

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More Than 100 People Help Clean Up Gustavia

Who would have thought there was so much trash in Gustavia? On Saturday, February 6, in just four hours, the volunteers at the Big Clean Up collected nine truckloads of trash. The event was organized by the island's environmental associations.

The volunteers gathered at 8am by the Capitainerie. Ernest Brin, director of the port, addressed the divers that would be cleaning up the harbor. "This is a port zone, so we have to be careful," he warned. "There must be one supervisor for each group of three divers. Stay together as the port does not stop working." With four boats scheduled to leave during the Clean Up, Brin also advised the divers to "watch out for the tenders that move quickly between the boats. And pay attention to the buoys."

Close by, Marie-Angèle Aubin, president of the Territorial Environmental Agency (ATE), gave instructions to those who would remain on dry land: to set out in small groups, and to separate the trash before it went off to the incinerator, as not all of the volunteers were members of associations experienced in trash collection. Accompanied by their kids, a group of parents set off in the direction of the schools with two goals in mind: fill the bags with trash and teach the kids about environmental issues.

The rugby school, which was meant to go to Saint Martin that day, could not go due to sanitary restrictions, so most of the adults and kids on the teams helped collect debris along the sides of the road. They had so much trash they asked the truck used by the associations to come pick up their bags. When asked what they thought of their morning, the young rugby players replied in unison, "It was great!" Really? "Yes," said one of the kids, "we found a lot of things we didn't expect, such as three empty cham-



pagne bottles, a cat's skull, and five euros." Those were the exceptions, because most of the participants reported finding an endless number of cigarette butts, which can take more than 10 years for their toxic ingredients to decompose.

As embedded reporters, it would have been difficult for *Le Journal de Saint-Barth* to not participate. Our team headed toward the entrance of town, along the rocks. Cigarette butts, and more cigarette butts. Hidden amongst leaves, stuck in the rocks, recently tossed away or partially decomposing. We felt, rightly so, as if we would never be able to get them all. And then there were larger items, washed up by the sea. Buoys, nets, electric cables, hoses, and debris from boats. We wavered between a sense of satisfaction at having collected so much trash, certainly a useful task, and the frustration at seeing so much plastic and Styrofoam crumbling in our hands. In spite of ourselves, we were creating new particles of trash that will become invisible, yet continue to exist. In 90 minutes, we found more than 10 kilos of trash,

and we were not the only ones to find so much in so little time: By 9:30am, a first full truck was ready to head to the incinerator.

From the dock, we could see the divers from the associations Apnea and Coral Restoration pull a large piece of wood, at least two meters long, from the sea, weighted down by water and sand. A total of three boats and two kayaks had 24 snorkelers and five scuba divers aboard, who crisscrossed the waters of the Petits Saints, the port, and the marine zone between Public and Corossol. These teams-at-sea collected enough debris for six of the nine trucks filled during the clean-up effort.

According to Fred Questel, director of Ouanalao Environnement, which handled the trash at no charge, each truck transported an average of 300 kg. "The operation ended at noon, but there was so much trash to collect, we could have continued like that all day," concluded one of the participants.

An Island Native Conquers Two Of The World's Highest Peaks

Saint Barth-born Dominique Gréaux loves mountaineering. In mid-January, he summited two of the highest volcanoes in the world. And never forgets to take a Saint Barth flag with him for souvenir photos.

In less than one week, Dominique Gréaux, an osteopath in Saint Barth, scaled not one, but two soaring volcanoes in The Andes Mountains. "I adore hiking at high altitudes and Ecuador is a country I already know very well. So, I was able to concentrate 100% on my ascension," says Gréaux. He started with Ecuador's Cotopaxi, which rises to 5,897 meters (19,347 ft). Its name signifies "crescent moon" in Quechua, the ancestral dialect spoken by the indigenous natives of the region. The ascent is very dangerous as the site is subject to earthquakes, and it is not rare to experience avalanches that can lead to tragedy.



The Covid-19 pandemic is more dangerous than ever with new, stronger variants of the virus, but even that does not dampen this athlete's ambitions: "I already have an idea about other mountains I would like to conquer. I hope that a few of these climbs will inspire others to do the same."

Antoine C.R.

nuclear core is located at 6,384.4 km from the summit. Mount Everest, much higher at 8,848 meters, is a bit closer due to its latitude in Nepal. Chimborazo also represents the point closest to the moon for the same reason.

The second volcano tamed by Dominique Gréaux, Chimborazo, culminates at 6,263 meters (20,548 ft). Also situated in Ecuador, it lies just one degree south of the symbolic demarcation line between the two hemispheres, and is exceptional in more than one way. It sits at the farthest point on the Earth's surface from the Earth's center, the

As oxygen is thin at such high altitudes, scaling this volcano requires intense training and specialized equipment: "The key is making sure your body is acclimated. Even if you are the best athlete in the world and in great shape, it is necessary to make the climb in stages and let the body get used to it. Otherwise, you will soon find yourself being evacuated," explains the alpinist.



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