

Interview with Jean Senat Fleury,

Director of Art for Change



Tell me your immigration story. When did you come? Why did you come?

I came to the United States in 2007. Before that, I was a judge in Haiti for 18 years.

I came to the United States because my wife is from here.

My goal was to build a museum. In my gallery, I want to promote art and Caribbean culture, to hold open art classes, to offer immigration classes, and to be able teach people in the community.

How do you feel living here?

I'm very comfortable here. I live in a diverse place. You can get a good education.

What are some challenges you have faced?

I came here when I was 44, and it was hard to learn the language. It was also challenging to go back to school.

In Haiti, most people are Haitian. When I moved here, most of the people in my community were white. That was hard to get used to, but my wife helped me a lot.

What does it mean to you to be Haitian in the United States?

When I see so many Haitian people working in healthcare and education, I feel proud.

It's important to me to help Haitian people here. For example, Haitian people who came here after the earthquake need help to stay in the United States. For this reason, we will open immigration classes at the gallery to keep the people connected, and to teach them.

What are some differences between life here and life in Haiti?

Here in the U.S. we have all we need to live well. Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world. Life in Haiti is more difficult than life here.

How do you stay connected to Haiti?

With the Internet and social media, it's easy to stay connected.

How do Haitian immigrants contribute to the richness of the United States?

People come here looking for a good school and good healthcare. When they are here, they do important jobs.

How do you feel your experience living in Haiti impacts your life now?

My body is in the U.S., but my heart is always in Haiti. Having so many beautiful paintings around me in the gallery makes me feel like I'm in Haiti. I want to give back to the U.S. because the U.S. has given me so much. Now I have two countries – the United States and Haiti.

But I'm very happy here and proud to be here, too. Everyone I meet here is very kind.

What is important to you about this gallery?

The first place I visited was the Courthouse. I saw some young people getting into trouble. I thought: What can I do? How can I connect Caribbean children to their culture? Maybe I can use art.

I was so proud because in 2017 the Mayor selected the gallery as the best business in the area.

What would you want to tell the young people?

Don't take things for granted. In the U.S., we have free water and free school. In some countries, like Haiti, some people are in need of these basic things. Education in the U.S. can open all doors. Young people can use this opportunity to change their life and the lives of others.

Interview by Fay Ferency and Nicole St.Victor

<http://art-for-change.com/the-gallery/>