



INFLUENCERS

OLIVIER SOUFFRANT

OLIVIER SOUFFRANT ON ART, HERITAGE, AND EXPRESSION

EN Olivier Souffrant was born in the heart of Haiti, but circumstances led him to the United States, where he was introduced to the works of Basquiat and other historical talents who have shaped the international art scene. This exposure to diverse cultural influences, combined with his Caribbean heritage, awakened his passion for the arts—a passion that continues to define his artistic practice today. As we speak, he is unveiling his latest exhibition in Luxembourg, *Echoes of the Unseen*, a deeply personal exploration of his inner world, brought to life through vivid compositions and bold colors.

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FLASHING LIGHTS, 2025.
ACRYLIC AND ARCHIVAL CMYK INK ON CANVAS, 152.4x101.6 CM (60x40 IN)
COURTESY ZIDOUN-BOSSUYT GALLERY.

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His art, rooted in painting, printmaking, and collage, weaves together social and personal narratives, creating a dynamic interplay of texture and meaning. At the core of his work lies an emotional depth that emerges through layered imagery and an eclectic fusion of styles. Drawing inspiration from masters such as Jacob Lawrence, Botticelli, Van Gogh, and Picasso, Souffrant not only pays homage to those who came before him but also paves the way for emerging voices in contemporary art. Through his distinct visual language, he seeks to democratize art—making it accessible to all, especially those striving to carve out a space in the industry.

We spoke with Olivier Souffrant about his creative journey, the inspirations behind his latest work, and his vision of art.

CAROLINA BENJUMEA – Growing up in Haiti, was art something you were close to?

OLIVIER SOUFFRANT – Haiti, it's a very cultural place. Art is literally everywhere you go, from my house to my friends' houses, all over the streets. It's a very artful, very colorful place. Even the buses—everything is super colorful. Yeah, we have carnivals there too. So, it's a very colorful place, and that really impacted my way of making art. If you look at my art, it's very colorful, with a lot of deep, vibrant colors.

C.B. – So, your work is reminiscent of your Haitian background?

O.S. – Sometimes, you know, I paint a mix of everyday Haitian life and American life. I blend the two together and make sure they come out cohesive for the public to understand. Haiti is considered a third-world country, and America is a first-world country, but if I were only painting one of them, people in America might not relate to it. By mixing both, they can connect with it more. So, I'd definitely say that blending the two makes a lot more sense—not just for me, since I grew up in both places, but also for the viewer and for the people enjoying the art.

C.B. – That's interesting, but with that being said, do you think your work is aimed at an international audience, or does it speak more directly to Haitians?

O.S. – It's kind of painful because I've never been able to have a show in Haiti. It's something I really want to do one day, but given the crisis there right now, it's literally impossible. Even I was surprised—growing up in Haiti, I had never heard of Basquiat. I only learned about him when I got to the States because, in Haiti, they don't prioritize artists at all. Artists are considered lowlives, people who don't make money, who live on the streets. And that's weird because Haiti is such a cultural place. One of my dreams is to have a show in Haiti and prove that you can be Haitian and make art—not just for a global audience, but also for the place you come from. And that's a fact, at least for me, in Haiti.

C.B. – *Echoes of the Unseen* revolves around themes such as visibility, transparency, and the celebration of appearance. Why are these topics important to you?

O.S. – You know, there are a lot of forces at play when artists create, and in life, there are many things you have no control over. They usually say it's part of a journey into the shadow of what you can and cannot grasp. It's something that comes from within, and when it comes from within, it's something you can't see—an echo of the unseen. It's an echo that comes from the shadow, meaning it's something deep inside. It speaks from within. That's why I chose this theme. When I was creating the show, I was in a very dark place. Even though the work looks great—it's colorful, engaging—it comes from a place of challenge, sacrifice, and things people wouldn't necessarily understand. That's why I called it *Echoes of the Unseen*, because you haven't seen what I've gone through or what had to happen to make this show a reality.

C.B. – And, do you think art can truly make historically invisible communities more visible?

O.S. – Yeah, yeah, of course. That's why I make the art that I make—because it's different from most artists' work. I went to art school in the United States, and just making a canvas itself costs a lot of money, even before buying the paint. But the way I create art is much more attainable. For example, I make it on my computer and then print it on canvas. By doing that, I reduce the cost of making the canvas—priming it and all that—by about 50 to 60 percent. Say an artist gets a canvas made, and it costs around a thousand dollars. For me, it might cost what I spent on Photoshop, maybe 600 or even 400 bucks. So, it cuts the price down by about 60 percent. It's also better for the environment. I make art for the future, for the environment, and for people who aren't fortunate enough to go to art school or have access to things like canvas, which costs an enormous amount of money.



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C.B. – So, take me through the process of creating *Echoes of the Unseen*. How did you begin creating this series?

O.S. – So it's a lot of work—five months of really looking at the pieces and trying to understand how to make them cohesive with the theme. I came up with the theme way before the actual artwork was done, so it was about figuring out how to bring everything together. Working on a computer also allows me to change the work multiple times. If you look at one piece in the show, for example, it's not what it was supposed to be at first—it changed multiple times throughout the process. I mean, it's hard, it's like asking Da Vinci or Michelangelo, "Why did you paint the Sistine Chapel the way you did?" It's just something that comes from within—those hidden forces that pull at you, shaping and guiding you without your knowing. Each painting is a reflection of the spaces between what's visible and what's not, of what's felt—the unseen currents beneath our identities. Everyone has an identity, but who are you, really? And who are you not? The whispers of history, the ghosts lingering at the edge of perception—these works invite you to look beyond the obvious, to uncover what remains hidden in the noise of everyday life, to confront the unseen echoes that leave their marks on our souls. What shapes us without ever being seen? Because right now, as I'm talking to you, I barely know you. And yet, certain forces shaped you into who you are, just as they shaped me. We don't always know what those forces are. Those are the echoes of silence, the echoes of the unseen. This collection is an invitation to listen to the quiet hum of what's invisible but never truly absent. You are who you are, and I am who I am—but something had to happen for us to be here, at this moment. And here we are.

C.B. – How do you achieve creating from a personal perspective to a global audience?

O.S. – By incorporating certain things in my art. Gucci, for example, which is a global brand, you see recognizable elements, also like the Empire State Building, you know what the Empire State Building looks like, the Bible, and other images, and iconographies that everyone can understand and relate to. I also make a lot of paintings based on history. For example, one of the paintings in the show is called Caracalla, and a lot of people don't know who Caracalla is, but he was a Roman Emperor. That's part of history. So, in a way, it creates this connection between history, people, the past, the present, and the future. I say future because my art is trying to create accessibility for a lot of people, especially people of my color. Black people weren't always able to create certain aspects of art. We've been subjected to create a certain type of art—art of suffering and reminders of slavery. But if you look at my art, it's not really about that at all. It's mainly about mixing history with contemporary happiness, with everyday things people do. Personally, I put Black people in my artwork, but I don't really want to limit myself to that. I want to put everybody in my artwork.

C.B. – There's a strong sense of storytelling in your compositions. How do you come up with your ideas? Do you allow yourself to create freely, or do you start with a narrative and then translate it into visual representations?

O.S. – I do the latter. I always start with a blank canvas in Photoshop. I put one character in the frame, then I sit there for a second, wondering what that character could be doing. The world we live in is saturated with images, so that's why I don't try to create everything from scratch. I do create new paintings, but they're made out of other paintings and other things. I place one character in the frame, then I add another, and now I have two figures on the canvas. I start to think, what could those two people be doing? I add a bench—maybe they're sitting down. Then I look around the internet, watch TV, listen to music, watch cartoons, or scroll through TikTok. One of my favorite TikToks is of a pigeon getting on a train, and I think, "How did that pigeon even get on the train?" That stays in my mind, and I feel like I have to put the pigeon on the canvas. So now, I add the pigeon. Now I have two people on a bench and a pigeon. I ask myself, "Where are they right now?" They're in a park. So now, there's a park in the foreground. That gives me time to think about the background. Now I add trees. To make it more contemporary, I add buildings in the background. I can then change the characters—maybe now they're throwing corn or bread at the pigeons on the ground. The ground itself is made from actual ground images that I manipulate through Photoshop to make them look like cartoons or paintings. Now, I have a whole image of people in a park feeding pigeons in Central Park, New York City.

C.B. – That's interesting, why do you think all these different materials express your ideas well?

O.S. – To be honest, I could have just printed out the canvas and left it like that, but given the fact that we live in a world where people need to see something they can relate to in order for them to accept it, I have to paint the canvas. So, the whole canvas gets repainted again. It's a very arduous process because I create the whole image, which takes a long time, then I print the image, which takes even more time. After that, I paint the whole image. The reason I go through all of this is for people to relate to it. I also incorporate actual collage, which adds a different dimension to the work.



"CERTAIN FORCES ⚡ SHAPED YOU INTO WHO YOU ARE, JUST AS THEY SHAPED ME. WE DON'T ALWAYS KNOW WHAT THOSE FORCES ARE. THOSE ARE THE ECHOES «» OF SILENCE, THE ECHOES OF THE UNSEEN ☁️."



C.B. – You source images that already exist online to include in your work, which, in my opinion, gives a sense of community and collaboration to your practice. What is your goal when incorporating other visual sources into your art?

O.S. – Well, I mostly source images from the masters because I read somewhere that you stand on the shoulders of giants, and I definitely find inspiration in their stories and what they've achieved. Some of them didn't achieve success until after their death. For me, it's like an homage to them, as well as an opportunity to educate people about them. I'm giving an homage to the past and to the greats because they deserve it, considering the countless hours they put into their work. Back then, it wasn't as free to paint—you were commissioned by kings and queens and subjected to being a court painter. When you're a court painter, you paint whatever the king and queen want you to paint. If you don't do that, then you're not accepted. For me, this process is a way to liberate them, and also to educate people on the influences I use in my paintings.

C.B. – What conversations do you hope your work sparks among viewers?

O.S. – I hope, I really hope, that my work starts a conversation about what art truly is. I want people to realize that art is accessible. A lot of people feel neglected because they can't make art, and to create art, it's often expensive. Plus, it's detrimental to the environment because you have to find the metals to make the paint, and it's bad for your health too. Breathing in those chemicals can be harmful; it can literally kill you over time, and it can drive you crazy. With my art, I hope to spark a conversation about making art more accessible for the next generation. I want people to not be afraid to do whatever they want, to believe that whatever they want to achieve, they can, as long as they put their mind to it. In art school, nobody took my art seriously. The professors, I mean, they acknowledged it, but it wasn't taken seriously. But look at me now—I'm in Luxembourg, and my show is sold out.

Written by Carolina Benjumea.
Translated by Camille Framery.



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RESTAURANT SHADOWS, 2023
ACRYLIC, OIL, COLLAGE ON CMYK INK ON CANVAS, 177.8x177.8 CM (70x70 IN)
COURTESY ZIDOUN-BOSSUYT GALLERY.

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POLLO LOCO, 2025
ACRYLIC AND ARCHIVAL CMYK INK ON CANVAS, 177.8x127 CM (70x50 IN)
COURTESY ZIDOUN-BOSSUYT GALLERY.