

**T.F. RIGELHOF, EDITOR**

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# Philip Surrey, Artist: A Newsletter for Collectors

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Surrey and Martinique

**December 2015**

**Issue No.2**

PHILIP SURREY, ARTIST: A NEWSLETTER  
FOR COLLECTORS  
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This newsletter is a *work in progress* and actively solicits both corrections and additions to the information it provides. Its contents are not meant for citation or further publication without the explicit consent of the editor.

Illustrations of Surrey works are low resolution compression of photographs and are included only to provide guidance and avoid confusion between works of similar subject matter and/or title.

Surrey was among the subtlest of 20<sup>th</sup> century painters, a master of techniques as ancient as egg tempura and as contemporary as acrylics. Assistance in locating high resolution digital images that more accurately capture the nuances of his *purisme* is available on-line from gallery and museum sites except in the case of recent rediscoveries.

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**1. RESPONSE TO ISSUE NO. 1**

The first newsletter is encouraging a couple of Vancouver galleries to see if they can track down more of Surrey's portraits of young woman and his *en plein air* oil sketches in the mountains and I'm trying to track down two Surrey sketches of John Vanderpant that were previously unknown to me. Not unexpectedly, it's my announcement of the cataloguing project that has attracted the most comment and offers of help. It has, among other things, turned up enough new information about Surrey's nudes that this topic is held over to a later Newsletter. In its place this month is an investigation of Surrey's

Martinique paintings. At first glance, his three weeks on Martinique spread over two years (1963,1964) seem a minor episode. Examined closely, his non-painting holiday of 1963 led to a return in 1964 to paint *en plein air* with great concentration in an effort to capture an ease and comfort in racial relations that he'd not found elsewhere.

## 2 SURREY AND MARTINIQUE

Joyner Canadian Fine Art by Waddington's catalogue of May 27, 2011 lists Lot 167 as

### PHILIP HENRY HOWARD SURREY, R.C.A., MARTINIQUE, 1964,



oil on canvas, 32 ins x 48 ins; 80 cms x 120 cms

Estimated Price: CAD15,000 - CAD20,000

and provides the following “Description” [edited for length]

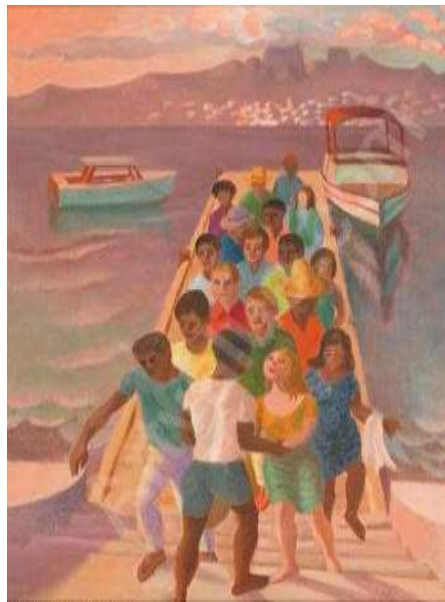
PHILIP HENRY HOWARD SURREY, R.C.A., MARTINIQUE, 1964, oil on canvas. 32 ins x 48 ins; 80 cms x 120 cms.  
Provenance: Private Collection, Montreal. Exhibited: Philip Surrey Retrospective Exhibition, Galerie Walter Klinkhoff

Inc., Montreal, 18 September - 2 October, 2004, no.46. Literature: Galerie Walter Klinkhoff Inc., Philip Surrey Retrospective Exhibition Catalogue, Montreal, 2004.

. . . . The exhibition catalogue for the 2004 retrospective of Surrey's work at the Walter Klinkhoff Gallery . . . included the citation from Surrey's induction into the Order of Canada in 1982: "Ever since settling in Montreal in 1937, and becoming a founding member of the Contemporary Arts Society, he has been the leading exponent of urban landscape painting in Canada. His Montreal street scenes convey an emotive vision of the modern city, with its anonymous crowds and individual solitudes. His expressive style and a poetic humanitarianism constitute a unique contribution to Canadian art." Although *Martinique*, 1964 is set thousands of kilometers from the urban venue of Surrey's Montreal street scenes, there is a familiarity in the artist's representation of the individuals . . . . While the couples in the immediate foreground embrace at the conclusion of an expedition, the line of disembarking individuals making their way along the dock and up to the island are typical "passengers" within the artist's work . . . the depiction of denouement . . . as potentially compelling as the concluded journey itself. It is believed that Surrey only visited the Caribbean island of Martinique on one occasion, likely on holiday. While the artist is known to have executed three smaller works depicting the area, *Martinique*, 1964 is believed to be the only significant canvas to result from the visit.

Are there good reasons to know anything more about Surrey's *Martinique 1964*? Well, yes, there are and go beyond correcting inaccuracies in the underlined sentences. The inaccuracies are understandable. Unless it's by happy accident, no Canadian auction house employs a Surrey specialist. His works are consigned too infrequently to support that luxury and paintings expected to sell in the price range Joyner anticipated for this one in 2011 cannot possibly be researched to the degree I've taken. Even knowing where to look and precisely what I hoped to find, it was still the work of two days among materials from the National Archives to determine that Surrey painted *two* versions of *Martinique 1964* of identical dimensions – one in March 1967; the other in January 1968 – and this is the later one (the two trees are absent from the March 1967 iteration). His studio title for both in his worklog was *Vedette* and *Martinique 1964* reflects Surrey's admiration of the racial tolerance he experienced there and then and does not indicate the date of composition: this 1968 version (through the narrowing of perspective introduced by the trees) also reflects sobering second thoughts induced by the change in American racial relations between 1967 and 1968 – the arrests of the leadership of the Black Panther Party, in particular. Both versions were painted in quick, all-consuming bursts of energy over uninterrupted 5 day periods that broke with Surrey's normal pattern of working on several paintings simultaneously.

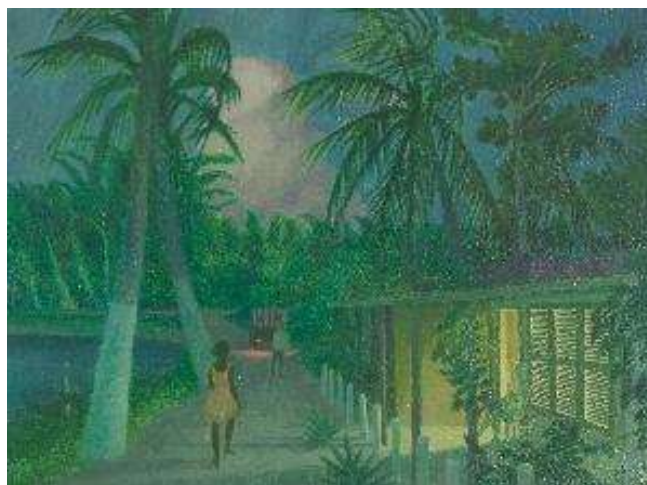
Surrey was able to work so quickly in 1967 and 1968 because in March 1965 when he painted the preliminary version, also titled *Vedette* in his worklog but auctioned as *Port de France, Martinique, 1964* oil on canvas 16x12 (40 cms x 30 cms) in Lot 160 by Canadian Fine Art in Toronto on Tuesday, May 27, 2008. He also sketched and coloured two variations of it.



None of the Martinique works originated from the March 1963 Caribbean vacation when the Surreys spent a night in Antigua, a week in Martinique and the second week of their holiday in Trinidad, Tobago and Grenada. It's because Surrey became so aware so quickly in 1963 that interracial relationships were more casual and matter-of-fact on Martinique than other islands and the American mainland and found people-watching from Room 9 at *L'auberge de Anse Mitan* such a good vantage point for sketching and painting that he and Margaret returned in 1964 and stayed in that room for two weeks. From it, Surrey could observe the dock where the *vedette* (ferry) landed and loaded passengers every hour for the 20-minute trip across the bay to Fort-de-France. The room also provided a view of the volcanoes Montagne Pelée and Pitons du carbet, fascinating cloud formations and unusual evening light.

On this second visit, Surrey brought with him the smaller of his two *en plein air* paint kits and 14 pre-prepared 6x8 (15 cms x 20 cms) panels. Between 28 Feb and 15 March, 1964 Surrey painted one oil sketch each day and numbered them consecutively on the backing: roughly executed, they emphasize basic compositional elements -- the relationship of the *vedette* to the passenger landing and the colours of sea and sky at varying times of day. The oil panels were supplemented by graphite drawings and extensive notes.

After his return from Martinique, in the first week of April 1964, Surrey created three more fully developed 6x8 panels – *Martinique Clouds*, *Martinique Clouds with Boats and Dock #1*, *Martinique Clouds with Boats and Dock #2*. (Surrey's notes are rushed and imprecise: was he reworking existing panels or creating new ones?) That same week, he completed 7 or 8 mixed media studies on paper for *L'Anse Mitan at Night* aka *Martinique at Night #1*, an 18x24 oil on canvas painting (begun April 19 and varnished on May 3). As he worked on this painting, he also made drawings and mixed media studies for *L'Anse Mitan Dock* and quickly produced both a new 6x8 and the 16x12 reproduced above. In June, he made drawings for a *Martinique at Night #2* another 18x24 (45 cms x 60 cms) oil on canvas that he began on June 20 and varnished July 7. He pushed aside any further work on Martinique pictures for the next nine months. Thus, the two versions of *Martinique 1964* of 1967 and 1968 were preceded by two 12x16 panels, many mixed media studies and several drawings. *Martinique at Night* painted twice in 18x24 oil on canvas is a “tropical paradise” variation on his recurrent theme of women walking alone at night.



Surrey would have been pleased by the Joyner catalogue writer's observation that in *Martinique 1964* "the line of disembarking individuals making their way along the dock . . . are typical 'passengers' within the artist's work . . . as they simply pass through the scenery, the depiction of denouement of their travels as potentially compelling as the concluded journey itself" but he'd be gob-smacked that his "embracing couples in the foreground" were accepted so matter-of-factly in 2011. In 1964, the racial crossovers – white woman with black man, black man with white woman – were transgressive and provocative. *Martinique 1964* is situated weeks prior to President Lyndon Johnson's Civil Rights Act of July 2 of that year, prohibiting discrimination of all kinds based on race, color, religion, or national origin – a cause that Surrey had supported through his membership in the Socialist Party of America as early as 1932 and revived in earnest in 1952. The narrowing of perspective in the second version produced by the introduction of the two trees reflects his growing unease about narrowing of racial empathy both on Martinique and in America between 1967 and 1968. Surrey's civil rights activism was rooted in and responsive to the mixed bloodline his mother's *ardent belief* that he'd inherited elements of the savagery transmitted to him by his father whose ancestors included octoroon woman from Martinique. Surrey likely found *carbet* similar enough in sound to *courbette* to give his painting Gustave Courbet's characteristic political force. He painted *Martinique 64* after his two great works in the manner of Courbet of the summer of 1966 – the better known being *The Young Ladies of the Village (after Courbet)* in our National Gallery – but while *Martinique 64* is equivalent in its commitment to realism, rejection of Romanticism, innovation, it's a bolder political and personal comment.

Philip Henry Howard is an abbreviation of Surrey's full name: at birth, his parents registered him as *Philip Henry Howard Eugene de Warenne de Guerin Surrey*. He was the first and only child of Henry (Harry) Philip Surrey, who represented himself as a hero in the Boer wars, a soldier of fortune and adventurer and Kate de Guerin, a globe-trotting English governess. On receiving news of Philip's birth in Calgary General Hospital on October 8, 1910, Kate's brother the Reverend Joseph Guerin, Vicar of Pawlett, Somerset immediately put Philip down for a place at Marlborough, the de Guerin family's old school (and later, Winston Churchill's). When Philip was six months and fit to travel, Harry and Kate abandoned cattle ranching in Alberta and went off to Australia. When Philip was nearly a year old, his parents sailed

for England and Kate introduced husband and son to her brother and her sister Maude as well as various cousins. Baby Philip was admired but Harry was not: *their* Kitty had married a social and racial inferior – a *savage*.

In Bombay, as Civil Magistrate, Surrey's maternal grandfather had rigorously enforced anti-miscegenation legislation (that criminalized interracial marriage and sex between members of different races) imposed by the British in the aftermath of the Indian Mutiny of 1857. This newer legislation was more onerous than the 1813 law under which integrated couples and their offspring were "merely" excluded from recourse to the British judicial system. It was also more extensive: influenced by George Fitzhugh's *Cannibals All! or Slaves Without Masters* (1857), an American book "arguing" that the enslavement of African Americans was a positive blessing *for them* – their one sure way to salvation from savagery. The British in India adopted the "one drop rule" Fitzhugh proposed. Before the Indian Mutiny, before the American Civil War, people of mixed race in European *and* American empires were legally "white" and "civilized" even if individuals had up to one- eighth "coloured" and "savage" ancestry. Fitzhugh had a problem with this – no matter how diluted people's "native" ancestry, he preached that all had an unusual capacity for "violence and terror" and required "segregation." Fitzhugh's "not one drop" was not adopted as law anywhere in America until the 20th century: in Tennessee in 1910 and in Virginia in 1924. It was not even imposed by the Nazis but it was adopted in British India in 1857. Lineages, *authentic* family ties untainted by a single drop of inferiority, were so important to Kate's family that they inbred: Kate's parents were first cousins.

Kate's marriage was shocking, unexpected and transgressive. She was 29 and had been expected to return home as a spinster who would be caregiver to the aged of the family. Her choice of husband was incomprehensible. Harry found Kitty's family outrageously rude to him and reacted aristocratically rather than savagely. Forty years later, Philip's aunt Maude didn't remember what was said to Harry but she remembered Harry's response word for word, "When your ancestors were simple country folk, mine were at the court of the king." Harry reveled in his mixed bloodlines: his putative royal British cousin, the Duke of Norfolk was entitled to the Earldoms of Arundel and Surrey. The "de Warrenne" that exists within a quarter of the Duke of Norfolk's coat of arms was a nod to the original Norman titleholder to the



earldom of Surrey. Harry was not in the least shamed by slightly non-Caucasian features and swarthy skin. He claimed that his paternal grandfather was one in the long line of Philip Surrys of the famous Eagle's Nest plantation near Port Royal, Caroline County, Virginia. That Philip Surry was such an unabashed admirer of Napoleon III's maternal grandmother, the Empress Joséphine de Beauharnais who was born in Martinique of mixed race, that he'd married one of her childhood companions. But Harry was not believed. For Kate's family, Harry was the mongrel son of an American-bred house slave, the self-styled Henry Howard Eugene de Warrenne Surry, a recently deceased radical London journalist who agitated on behalf of any and all popular movements favoring the creation of a national political party that would represent workers in parliament. Henry Howard was also an activist on behalf of women's rights and died from pneumonia while organizing female textile workers, an incident widely reported at the time. And Harry's older sister, Philip's aunt Imogene York, was a London stage actress and suffragette who participated in Mrs. Pankhurst's Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). Some people forget adult principles along with grown-up manners in the presence of a robust and delightful infant. Philip was pink where a baby ought to be pink and creamy white elsewhere. His father's swarthinness seemed not to have been transmitted to him. Even if that alien complexion began to emerge later, *their* Philip would not be the first Englishman to have been toasted in Malaysia and roasted in India. Harry was not a gentleman but his son could be made into one: Philip's name need not be stricken from Marlborough's enrollment list, an act that could only create rumors and spread scandal. And it was unlikely that they'd see Harry again: he was taking their Kitty and her son to Java where there was a job awaiting him as manager of a coffee plantation on the slopes of Mount Smeru. Philip would be returned to them when it was time to prep him for Marlborough where the inherent violence in his nature would be terrorized out of him by brute force on the rugby field and cricket pitch.

These intricacies of Surrey's family history are worth noting. Thirty-six years later, in 1948, when Surrey took a weekend off from his special assignment working in Sir Winston Churchill's private archives to choose illustrations for the first volume of Churchill's memoirs of WWII and visited his Aunt Maude, she asked him straight out if he'd come to terms with his "negritude." He said he had but shook his

head in wonderment that such a question would have occupied her mind one tittle after the utter savagery visited on England's and Europe's civilian populations by "civilized" men .

*Negritude?* The word is Aunt Maude's and I'd thought about substituting a euphemism until I realized that the simple insertion of a diacritical *accent aigu* on the initial *é* yields not only the literal *négritude* but important connections among three of Martinique's greatest twentieth century intellectuals – Aime Césaire (1913—2008), Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) and Léon Damas (1912—1978) who employed the term extensively in their analysis of the encounter between Africa and the French Caribbean – and the rise of the Black Panther Party in 1966 in the wake of the Watts Riots. I'm not convinced that the explanation offered by Margaret Surrey that Martinique was a vacation destination for them in 1963 simply because she had always wanted to visit so French a tropical paradise. One must always remember that even when he was away from *The Standard* , he remained a lifelong reader of multiple newspapers. Damas and Césaire were Surrey's almost exact contemporaries and I find myself wondering to what extent he wanted to visit Martinique because of them and their perspectives on the psychopathology of colonialization that so afflicted his mother's family

In the last decade of his life, Surrey reread Charles Dickens for as long as his eyesight held out. He found much in his own life reflected back to him by Dickens' novels, including improbable coincidences. On their 1964 trip o Martinique, the Surreys met Dr. Edwin Cole, a psychiatrist attached to the Massachusetts General Hospital, and his wife. Friendship blossomed and they visited the Coles in Boston on numerous occasions. It was through the Coles that Philip was introduced to Lela Surrey, his father's third wife (who the Coles met in 1972 on a holiday in Persia). She too was a wealthy American. The Surreys made three trips to visit her in her mansion on 137 acres in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania and Philip finally learned much about the father he'd not seen since the age of ten. [A fuller account of what I've managed to verify about the life and ancestry of Harry will be posted on the Life and Times pages of my website later this winter.]

### 3. LIST OF SURREY' S CARIBBEAN WORKS

**14 pre-prepared 6x8 (15 cms x 20 cms) panels**, numbered them consecutively on the backs, painted *en plein air* while residing at Auberge l'Anse Mitan: *no. 1* (29 Feb 1964); *no. 2* (1 Mar 1964); *no. 3* (2 Mar 1964); *no. 4* (3 Mar 1964); *no. 5* (4 Mar 1964); *no. 6* (5 Mar 1964); *no. 7* (6 Mar 1964); *no. 8* (7 Mar 1964); *no. 9* (8 Mar 1964); *no. 10* (9 Mar 1964); *no. 11* (10 Mar 1964); *no. 12* (11 Mar 1964); *no. 13* (12 Mar 1964); *no.14* (13 Mar 1964).

**Graphite sketches and notes:** February 29—March 13, 1964

**4 Grosvenor Avenue studio 6x8 (15 cms x 20 cms) panels:** ( It's unclear if Surrey repainted three existing panels or created entirely new ones. I'm assuming the latter was the case.): *Martinique Clouds* (2 April 1964); *Martinique Clouds, Boats and Dock #1* (3 April 1964); *Martinique Clouds, Boats and Dock #2* (4 April 1964); untitled (9 May 1964)

**8 mixed media studies for an oil painting** known as either *L'Anse Mitan at Night* or *Martinique at Night #1* :April 5—11, 1964

**18x24 (45 cms x 60 cms) oil on canvas Martinique at Night #1** (19 April; 30 April; May 3 varnished 1964)

**Graphite sketches, notes and mixed media studies for L'Anse Mitan Dock :** April 20—28, 1965

**12x16 (30 cms x 40cms) oil on canvas L'Anse Mitan Dock aka Vedette aka Port de France, Martinique aka Martinique 1964 #1** (Mar 21,22 1965; Mar 6-10, 1967;3-7,10-12 Jan 3-7,10-12, 1968; Dec 1976)

**12x16 (30 cms x 40cms) oil on canvas L'Anse Mitan Dock aka Vedette aka Port de France, Martinique #2 :** April 28--May 17)

**New graphite drawings and mixed media studies for Martinique at Night #2** (May—June)

**18x24 (45 cms x 60 cms) oil on canvas Martinique at Night # 2** (July 2,4,5, varnished July 7)

**12x16 (30 cms x 40cms) oil on canvas L'Anse Mitan Dock aka Vedette aka Port de France, Martinique aka Martinique 1964** (21,22 Mar 1965;6-10 Mar 1967;3-7,10-12 Jan 1968;26 Dec 1976)

**Colour sketch** (23 Mar 1965), **Wash sketch** (23 Mar 1965), **Colour sketch #2** (25 Mar 1965) for *Vedette*

**32 ins x 48 ins (80 cms x 120 cms) oil on canvas Vedette aka Martinique 1964 #1, (March 6—11,1967)**

**32 ins x 48 ins (80 cms x 120 cms) oil on canvas, Vedette aka Martinique 1964 #2** (January 3—10, --with a two day break --1968)

On their return journey, Surrey painted 3 additional 6x8 oils on panel of unspecified subjects/locales on Tobago and Granada

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