

# Revolution

Performance by Joëlle Ferly



Photo: Josue AZOR [www.revayiti.com](http://www.revayiti.com)

**“Revolution”: motion of a body on its axis or around another body...**

**Institut Français and AfricAmerica**

**Present**

**A conversation with artist Joëlle Ferly**

**On Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> July 2011**

**at the French Institute / Institut Français**

**From 18h00**

**(With the participation of Base Art-Culture of Port-au-Prince)**

The artist is to present her video pieces as well as the work performed on Champ de Mars  
During which the artist stood up on a pedestal for 24 hours, rotating just like a planet...

**With Collaborators & Art Mediators:**

**Base Art-Culture - Port-au-Prince**

**Edlyne  
Dieulene  
Etzer**

**Ronal  
Kebyessou  
Dessources**

**Special Thanks to:**

**Tessa Mars**

**Jean-Aurel Maurice**

**& the Xaragua school of Dance in Jacmel**

**Christine Stephenson & Bernard from AfricAmerica**

**Michel et Adline**

**Barbara Prezeau**

Project coordinated by

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© Joëlle Ferly – 2011 L'Artocarpe [www.artocarpe.net](http://www.artocarpe.net) (Guadeloupe)

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The 21st century started with humanity questioning worldwide inequalities, seeking explanations and solutions in fate rather than our own human tendency to being reluctant to share resources.

Adding to this, there's been a growing interest in the prediction that 2012 is to be the end of the world, in the sense that the planet Earth has entered a period of seeing its axis shifting gradually.

Some have argued that the shift is precisely expressed in the higher number of natural catastrophes around the globe, within which the Earthquake that stroke Haiti in 2010 is part of.

Artist Joëlle Ferly was like many others, following the news on that 12<sup>th</sup> January 2010. She however categorically refused the voyeuristic type of gaze, avoiding press photographs and TV or Internet images, keeping it just to radio comments.

Her decision to visit Haiti for the second time grew even greater from that moment. But instead of coming to Port-au-Prince as a mere visitor or as an international aid program member of staff, she insisted on developing projects that would enrich her art practice by engaging with Haitian artists, some of whom she had exhibited previously.

Deciding to give up art video to embark on "an art form that would no longer require a medium to express (herself)", she wrote this piece "Revolution" in Guadeloupe, where she resides, as the first performance that she was to do on her arrival in Haiti.

The Foundation AfricAmericaA advised Joëlle Ferly to apply for a 3 months art residency with CulturesFrance, which she did and obtained. That residency is a real opportunity to focus on her research and artwork practice.

On arrival to Haiti, she first sought out artists educated in the arts to act as collaborators, mediators, advisers and security guards during the first performance. The piece was to be held on Champ-de-Mars, in the heart of the Capital, in front of the main square where a huge amount of homeless people still live under tents.

Ferly had instructed the artists who masterly coordinated the logistic of the piece, to find a venue allowing to bring contemporary art to the people living in those camps. The team created a pedestal and arranged for a 24-hour-assistance with the artist.

The performance started at 16h00 on the Saturday, so as to leave the hottest hours for the end of the piece, on the following day.

Taking after Joseph Beuys, Ferly arrived blindfolded to the pedestal, assisted by the artists, and started the performance discovering the state of Champ-de-Mars for the first time, since the Earthquake. She stood still for 24 hours rotated of a quarter of a tour on each hour. « *The idea was to take an entire day to observe the place and most importantly the people, whom have all lost relatives in the catastrophe and no doubt went through enormous trauma themselves. It was also crucial to get this on my arrival as when I left Guadeloupe, I was very disappointed by the amount of so-called-recommendations I received, to take care of myself while being in Haiti, as if the only things people from this country were doing was to kidnap, rape or kill foreigners... This first approach was my way of putting all my trust in a people who is constantly being portrayed through stereotypes and clichés* », said Joëlle Ferly who was inspired throughout the performance by the number of men, women and youngsters who stood with her to accompany her as if she was a Saint. « *I was not to speak to remain focused. But I saw and heard many comments. A man started to pray in front of me. Some children*

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*threw me stones and got scared not to see me moving. People were arguing that I was a spirit, or a zombie or “a mistik”, others left objects on the pedestal as if I was a statue of a God to be venerated. I saw children and adults sleeping on the street next to me to ensure that I was not cheating (by drinking water or stepping out of my platform), others were fighting over a lost property as the crowd got enormous as some point and thieves took advantage of the event...*

*The artists working with me did a great job in mediating with the public, which by the way, was surely the biggest public that any of my artwork ever got ! The estimate over the entire piece is over 15 000 people who stood in front of me for at least one minute and another 10 000+ who were driving past in public or private transport, which were all slowing down as they passed-by, creating a severe traffic jam. »*

*While up standing, Ferly first observed what was around her and then got to be interested in what her body was going through, physically. « I, of course, prepared myself for this performance, with regular exercise and a 9-day-fast the previous month (during which I drunk only water).*

*I stopped eating two days before the performance and stopped drinking water at 10AM on the day on D-day so as not to be tempted to go to the loo. That played the trick as I never felt in need for food or going to the bathroom during the entire piece !*

*However on the 22nd hour I was in real need for water as the sun was strong. I then asked art mediators who were watering my face on each hour prior to make me rotate, to water my head every fifteen minutes instead, to ensure I could complete the piece. »*

*« Security is an issue in every big city. For the piece, which was conducted without prior notice given to the Police as required when occupying a public place in Haiti, I had the support of the art mediators who were invigilating day and night. The nearby police station was a reassuring thing in case things went wrong, as officers oversee the area regularly. Apparently someone reported me to the French Embassy, which sent over extra security in civil clothes, knowing that I was a French national from Guadeloupe. »*

One of the intriguing aspects for Ferly was to be photographed by the general public, police officers included, when passing by doing their round.

*« It was a reverse situation whereby I was not the foreigner taking pictures of a country that I visit, but became myself an interest, an artwork, worth keeping a record of... I really liked the concept of bringing contemporary art to the street, overtaking a public space with artwork and having the public understanding the piece to the best they can, with the assistance of art professionals. »*

Ferly further comments on the physicality of the piece: *« Pain came into the equation as staying for such a long time is not an easy task. But apart from some unbearable sensation that I got from the second hour in my arms, as if my blood was boiling, I only had feet ache, which I got over by doing gentle stretching exercises throughout the piece. I ended up meditating on the present moment passing by, being able to anticipate the precise moment when I was due to rotate.»*

*« I am very pleased of the contact I had with the public, who treated me like a football hero touching me as if I could bring them luck...*

*I heard later about the story of a woman who lives on the edge of the city, who had heard about “a person standing up on Champ-de-Mars” . She decided to pay her trip into town to come and see the “zombi”! An experience that I am not to forget! »*

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