



**PHILOMÉ OBIN**

Haitian, 1892-1986

*Self-portrait*, circa 1980

Oil and graphite on Masonite

Gift; Dedicated in Memory of George S. Nader, 2014.1

## Self-portrait



**PHILOMÉ OBIN** (1892-1986) Philomé Obin is one of the best known Haitian artists to date. He was born into a large family near the Haitian city of Cap-Haïtien in 1892 and worked many jobs until he became recognized for his artistry. Despite having little-to-no formal education, Obin demonstrated an aptitude for painting and was one of the first self-taught artists to approach the Centre d'Art (which remains an important creative center today). The Centre immediately acknowledged his talent, sending Obin on a new trajectory in his artistic career. He went on to found and direct a satellite branch of the Centre in Cap-Haïtien and grew to be considered the “father of the ‘Cap-Haïtien Style’” of painting.

### A product of its time

It took a while for Obin to gain popularity as an artist in Haiti. He veered away from French influences in art, which dominated the day, and because of this he received criticism for painting common street scenes and his visions of Haitian history. The majority of his works from the 1920s and 1930s were created on cardboard or other inexpensive boards; few people purchased these and many have been lost. He did paint large-scale murals in shops and churches, which included themes like the Last Supper and the Crucifixion of Christ. Obin was a devout Baptist and avoided Vodou (a religion more commonly connected with Haitian art).

### Take a closer look

The Centre d'Art encouraged self-taught artists to develop a style unique to Haiti by providing them with resources and promoting their work to the outside world. Obin's *Self-portrait* features the trademark Haitian style of bright, bold colors, simple forms, and flat, distorted perspective. Haitian art is often called “primitive” and “naïve,” terms that falsely suggest a lack of sophistication in style and content.

### Did you know?

Obin might have remained an unknown artist if it weren't for Dewitt Peters opening the Centre d'Art in Port-au-Prince in 1944. Peters was an American painter who came to teach English in Haiti and realized that the country was filled with talented artists such as Obin. Peters used his own money and then received help from the Haitian and US governments to open the Centre, which continues to provide studio space, tuition, and materials for Haitian artists.

### On your own

[www.chigoha.com/artist-galleries/philome-obin](http://www.chigoha.com/artist-galleries/philome-obin)

<https://sites.google.com/site/haitianartsociety/home>