



## Haitian Metal Art

The art of Haiti is known worldwide. One of the unique forms of art is the Haitian steel drum art. Metal drums, once used for transporting oil or other products are purchased near the port in the capitol city of Port au Prince. They are brought to the neighbouring town of Croix-des-Bouquets by hand cart or on top of a taxi to the metal artists' workshop. Croix-des-Bouquets is the centre of the Haitian metalwork movement. When driving through the primitive streets, one hears the sounds coming from the homes of various artists as they pound on the drums, expressing their art. As in any art form, some metal work is far superior to others. We have committed ourselves to seeking out the very best metal artists.

Using these recycled 55-gallon oil drums, the artist first removes both round ends of the drum and places these inside the cylinder along with dried banana or sugar cane leaves. He sets this on fire, to burn off any paint or residue. When cooled down, the artist then cuts the round drum from top to bottom. The flattening process is a sight to behold, as one of the artists' helpers will climb inside the drum and using all his weight, push with feet, legs, arms and shoulders to open it up. It is then pounded into a flattened "metal canvas" of approximately 3' x 6". With chalk, the design is drawn onto the metal sheet. Now, the real art work begins. Using hammer, chisel and various primitive tools, the shape is cut and the various decorative patterns are pounded into the metal, creating a unique and treasured piece of primitive art. The finished design is signed by the artist and coated with a protective finish.

Each metal art sculpture is very labour intense and unique. Because of the intricate designs within each piece no two pieces are exactly alike. This makes your piece a special treasure that you and your friends will appreciate for years to come.

This particular art form was born in Haiti in the early 1950's by a simple blacksmith, Georges Liautaud. In his small shop, he made and repaired tools and created primitive metal crosses, for the graves in the Croix-des-Bouquets cemetery. It was at the encouragement of an American teacher, DeWitt Peters, who in 1944 opened the Le Centre d'Art in Port-au-Prince that Georges Liautaud expanded into the creation of decorative metal sculptures. A few talented men apprenticed under him, and this tradition has continued.

