

Haitians Celebrate 200 Years Of Independence With New Exhibition

By: NY1 News

Haitians in the city are celebrating their homeland's 200 years of independence.

The American Museum of Natural History is showcasing the rich history of the island nation with "The Haitian Experience," an exhibit featuring contemporary art, film, music and dancing. On Wednesday, there was also the chance to try some Haitian culinary delicacies.

"This was another opportunity to introduce people to the Haitian community, but also have the Haitian community themselves present some other aspects of their culture that they would like to express and share," said Roberto Borrero of the American Museum of Natural History.

Renowned Haitian artist Yolene Legrand is displaying many of her paintings depicting everyday life in the island country.

"I'm so excited and I'm so honored to be about to participate in and contribute something to the celebrations, because it's a very important date for all of us, Haitian and non-Haitian alike," said Legrand. "I think it opened the door for the black Diaspora, whether it be in Haiti, in Africa, the islands and the U.S."

After years of revolution by ex-slaves, Haiti became the first black republic when the country won independence in 1804. Haitian independence then fueled a widespread movement for freedom throughout Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa.

But these days, Haiti is in turmoil again. Dozens of people have died in outbursts of violence between government supporters and opponents over the last four months.

Some Haitian immigrants say the current strife doesn't dampen the celebration.

"It's a terrific time for the country in itself and it shows that we were the first independent country even though Haiti is currently mired with adversity, it shows that we can still overcome it, and we are still surviving and we are still here," said Gregory Abellard of Paolo Restaurant.

But other immigrants say it is difficult to celebrate the country's independence at such a time.

"We've been led by so many bad people," said one immigrant. "Guys come in and take our money, take all the money, then leave not doing anything, and it's still going on. But as far as proudness: we are proud to be independent."

For more information on "The Haitian Experience," call (212) 769-5100.