



History of the organization

Jacmel is the cultural heart of Haiti, symbolic home to Haiti's poets, painters, musicians, and artists. But Jacmel is truly synonymous with one thing: artisans. Jacmel's narrow streets are full of small artisan workshops, where everything from ironwork, to painted kalbas, to hand-made jewelry are sold. Jacmel's artisans are most famous for their paper-maché work, and its Carnival every year is a parade of giant paper-maché figures. But because there are so many artisans in Jacmel, many times they struggle to make their works visible, to sell them for good prices, or to get a treasured space in the Carnival.

Summary of the work

The very difficulty of having too many small independent shops struggling to get by is what inspired two artisans cooperatives to form: both of them realized that by working together, they could create a space which was more visible, more professional, and profitable for all the artists involved. The first cooperative of note is G27: it stands for "group of 27", because initially it was a collection of 27 different artisans workshops from across Jacmel (the cooperative now has many more members) that was founded in 2009. They each have their individual workshops, but they share a common space where the paintings are sold by a member of the cooperative. The cooperative does quality-control on what goes into the shop to ensure that everything being sold is high quality. They say this is both good for the cooperative's sales, but also is protecting and promoting Jacmel's culture.

As a group they can also better advocate for their needs, such as getting subsidies for or prominent places in Jacmel's famous Carnival. G27 also had a small project with UNESCO recently, where they used the upstairs part of their building to teach youth from across Jacmel how to carry on the artisan tradition of the city.

AFAJ is the Association of Women Artisans of Jacmel, and it formed for a similar reason: many women trying to get by in the competitive world of artisan work in Jacmel decided it would be best if they worked together, and they formed the cooperative in 2003. The cooperative has survived and thrived for almost a decade now; the women see it as a success, and they recognized as a force in Jacmel artisan culture. They also operate similarly to G27: each artist has her own workshop, but they have a common boutique where their work is sold. 30% of the price of whatever is sold goes back to the building, but the women feel it is worth it to give themselves the visibility.





What can other communities learn from Cap Wouj?

These two cooperatives clearly represent some of the most professional and talented of Jacmel's artisans, and have a history of teaching and mentoring other young artists. A lot can be learned as well from how they are able to manage such large and diverse and long-standing artists' cooperatives in the competitive scene of Jacmel artisans. Overall, they represent an important piece of Haitian culture and are keeping it both alive and thriving in the 21st century.

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