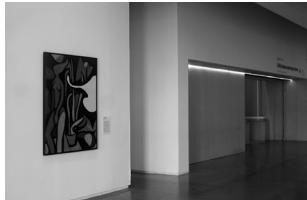


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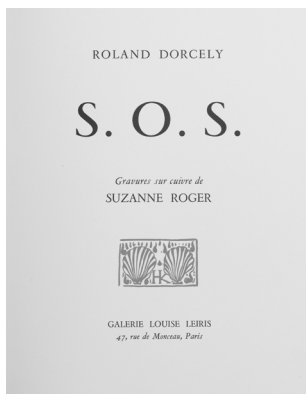
# Roland Dorcély

## S.O.S., 1961

**03.13-08.04.26.2025**



Roland Dorcély, *Léda et le cygne*, in the collections of Musée national d'Art moderne, Centre Pompidou



Roland Dorcély, *S.O.S.*, 1961  
Galerie Louise Leiris,  
illustration Suzanne Roger.

Alongside Luckner Lazard, Max Pinchinat, or his sister-in-law Luce Turnier, the painter and poet Roland Dorcély (1930-2017) was one of the key pioneers of modern Haitian art. As early as the late 1940s, these artists advocated for a specifically Caribbean contemporary creation, leaving the Centre d'Art in Port-au-Prince, which was dominated by proponents of naïve painting, to establish the Foyer des Arts Plastiques, followed by the Galerie Brochette..

By the late 1950s, Dorcély was pursuing a dual career as both a painter and a poet in Europe and the United States. Between 1958 and 1962, he resided in Paris and Venice, where his friendships with Michel Leiris and poet-critic Alain Jouffroy helped him integrate into the artistic community. Jouffroy included him in his exhibition *9 Peintres Neufs* at the Galerie du Cercle in Paris, praising his painting in these terms: «*Reality, imagination, and the surreal thus collaborate in Dorcély's work towards a convulsive reconstruction of painting. All futures are close to him.*»

However, the reception in galleries was not always welcoming. In a letter dated May 3, 1961, Dorcély wrote to his American patron, Edna Warner: «I am a foreigner and Black. These are two absurd conditions. I never think about these things, but people think for me. For example, I tried to visit galleries, and I must admit that one in three dealers refused even to look at my paintings. They expected me to wear a loincloth, a quiver, and arrows—but not to love Winslow Homer or Seurat.»

Yet in 1961, Galerie Louise Leiris published one of the fine bibliophile editions for which it was renowned. This quarto-format book, released in 110 copies, featured a long three-part poem with the chilling title *S.O.S.*, a reference to the Morse code distress signal reserved for ships in an irrecoverable disaster.

While having his collection published by the prestigious gallery founded by Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler might be considered a form of recognition, it was nonetheless perplexing—or even cruel—that for its illustrations, the gallery chose not the author himself, despite his dominant activity as a painter at the time, but rather one of its own artists, Suzanne Roger, whose restrained cubism diluted the impact of the text.

Poignant in its beauty, Roland Dorcély's *S.O.S.* thus remained unheard—except as a call for escape, a literal plea to save his life. Returning to Haiti in 1962, the artist lived henceforth in isolation, surviving through odd jobs, cutting himself off from all social life, and even refusing to reconnect with his former artist friends.

It was not until the 2000s that the rediscovery of a collection of paintings from his Paris years brought renewed attention to the work of this pioneer of Caribbean modernity. Subtitled *Artistic Circulations and Anti-Colonial Struggles 1950-2000*, the *Paris Noir* exhibition at the Centre Pompidou (March 19 – June 30) highlights Roland Dorcély, showcasing one of his masterpieces, *Léda et le Cygne* (from the collection of the Musée National d'Art Moderne), alongside seven other paintings, loaned by collectors and the gallery.

**Stéphane Corréard & Hervé Loevenbruck**

**Roland Dorcély**

*Untitled (Street Scene and Silhouette)*  
1957  
Oil on canvas  
60 × 81 cm



**Roland Dorcély**

*Untitled*  
Circa 1958  
Oil on canvas  
53.5 × 43.5 cm



**Roland Dorcély**

*The Mill from the Path*  
Circa 1958  
Oil on canvas  
61 × 50 cm



**Roland Dorcély**

*Untitled*  
Circa 1958  
Oil on canvas  
54 × 65 cm

