

# Africa Fleet Mercy 2018 Cameroon



## 3 Mar 2018 Postcard 6 Douala Art Tour

Spotting a Citroën sinking into the pavement in prime parking territory told me these folks have their priorities right when it comes to art.



Took me right back to the Late 80's Hamden CT. Emily, Laura, do you remember these?

<https://www.roadsideamerica.com/story/4491>.

Unfortunately I was on a group run, and not able to "turn the corner"

Seeing the Citroën and the associated Chrysler Belvidere sitting out front like hood ornaments screamed "Come Back!"



What brought me back was seeing this dude on the drive to the Mount Cameroon hiking trip last weekend. I saw

this guy on the approach to a busy traffic circle in a car with 7 other people who regularly took a vehicle out to go into town. "WOW WHAT'S THAT" I said while dragging my camera out and frantically trying to get a picture while driving by I asked where we were and I was told "Daydo". Got back to ship and found "Daydo" is Diedo Rond Point, and the man is the signature piece of the city.

Thank you Google for your effort to 'organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful.' A couple of clicks and I was off and running, learning that the sparkplug for public art in Douala – the museum known as Doual'art. Doual'art appears to this visitor to be the *force majeure* against visual apathy in this city.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doual'art>

Founded (yes they call them founders here too) by Marilyn Douala Bell and her husband Didier Schaub in 1991, Doual'art is a delightful contribution to the city. They also founded the Salon Urbain de Douala, a triennial public art festival in Douala, which is documented in the wiki page

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_public\\_art\\_in\\_Douala](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_public_art_in_Douala)



With Saturday being a free day before going to the airport, I endeavored to round up a crowd to go see art

with me. For the permanent Mercy Ship staff, they can use one of the Land Rovers by signing it out and paying for kilometers driven. I went back to my dinner friends Therese and Saul, and Larina and Jean-Francois to see if they would go see some art with me. A little dubious, they committed a firm yes when I through an offer of lunch in. I really wanted to see art with them and hear their impressions, especially as diverse as they are. Saul is a photographer from Congo. Jean-Francois is a translator from Benin. Larina is a ophthalmic tech - farm girl from Indiana, and Therese is an optometrist from Norway. None had been to Burning Man and all sort of had blinders on when driving in the city – it is an “all hands on the lookout” environment given the traffic situation in the city. All were eager to give it a go.

Fortunately, the web site for public art listed GPS coordinates for many of the pieces. We printed out some guide material to see a few pieces that were outside Bonandjo, and were off.

I hoped that I could do my best “Art Discovery Guide” ad-libbing to get them into seeing the art collectively. I was not disappointed!

### Stop 1 – La Nouvelle Liberté

4.064222°N 9.706936°E

Joseph-Francis Sumégné, 1996

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La\\_Nouvelle\\_Liberté](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Nouvelle_Liberté)



Photo by Saul Loubassa

Saul and I started early to Deido Man, as he seems to be locally called. Doual’art sponsored the construction in 1996, with the municipality donating the base.



It was my second “up close” look at the man – the first time was a couple of days before when I hired a scooter driver to take me up to see him up close and personal at my own pace. I fell in love immediately. I know nothing about the history of Cameroon other than what I learned at the Maritime museum. I knew that Cameroon became liberated from France in 1960, and the country known today as Cameroon was formed by the union of two former colonies – one French speaking, and one English speaking. The division persists to this day, and the hike up Mount Cameroon was in the English area, while the ship is berthed in the Francophile portion of the country.

I could only compare this 12 meter tall, 5 meter wide man to our Statue of Liberty. Can’t help it, it’s who I am and where I am from. This guy is having fun – doing Tree pose with a big smile on his face. He is built of recycled material as was the country when it became independent. Having welded up an art installation for Burning Man last year, I had some appreciation for the skill level required to get something that big to balance and not blow over in high wind, and how much fun it would be to find bits of this and that and make it all fit together. And, I really appreciated the fractal nature of the piece – at every scale there is something to see. From far away, your eyes jump to him. Up close you see the belt is made from a chain belt. There is fabric in him. He has a flag in his belly button.

Saul was unimpressed with the man till he parked the car and took shots with his massive Nikon from across the road. He really got into the recycling and the smile on the man’s face. Coming from Congo, he saw making the Man from recycled materials as a necessity, not a statement. I’ll include one close up from Saul’s photos that give you an idea of the intricacy of the work:



Reminded me of “Lord Snort” in terms of scale and fun. Unlike Lord Snort, where the danger was physical, apparently the danger of this piece was political, indicative of an ethnic struggle. A must see, even if only during a drive-by in a cab.

The crowd grew at 10:00. We made a quick stop at the eye clinic to see a patient (Therese was on call and we all tagged along) and then left clinic to search out:



## Stop 2 – La Passerelle

4.05532°N 9.707129°E

Alioum Moussa, 2005

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passerelle\\_de\\_Bessengu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passerelle_de_Bessengu)

“La Passerelle” is a footbridge that connects a neighborhood to a main street. Prior to the bridge, the neighborhood was both physically and culturally isolated. The roadway is wooden, the rails are welded pipe, and the figures are painted different colors to

represent different ethnic groups.



Detail of rails:



Jean-Francois really liked that the road base was wood. This is rarely seen in Douala, although there are trucks everywhere bringing wood for export. Cameroon is proud of the wood that is produced, and use of the wood in the bridge seemed important.



**Stop 3**  
**La Colonne Pascal**  
**4.026144°N 9.706345°E**  
**Pascale Marthine Tayou, 2010**



Getting to see this piece was an adventure in itself. We were driving through the Congo neighborhood on Saturday Noon, the busiest time of the week.



Crowded beyond belief, lots of little streets too narrow for one car and motor bikes and parked cars and the roadside stands. One circle seemed to be the pharmacological distribution center for the city – or at least the distribution of boxes that used to hold drugs and medical supplies. I am glad that Jean-Francois was driving. We were looking for the GPS coordinates, none of the streets have names, and it was a section that was not normally driven by our team. There was a picture, but “art hides in the background” was at play.

After at least a half-hour of “right- no left- look out for that bike” we came upon the piece and Jean-Francois said “Now I know where I am – I drive by this all the time”. The problem of scale. The picture was so little, and the piece so big.

It is a totem made of about 80 enamel bowls that are alternately inverted to form near-spheres. I’d estimate that it is at least 40 feet tall, and there are no guy wires. I’d love to see what happens in a high wind. I’d also like to know how it does with kids climbing on it.



Three pieces in three hours in a tour where people were reluctant to leave the car unattended. Time for Lunch! Our earlier success with Congolaise food led to trying

Senegalaise.



We were running out of time. Everyone had stuff to do. The tour was now going on four hours. Time to wrap it up. The ad-libber said, "ok, one more stop, this one near Doual'art so you can all come back later. It's right near the ship".

**Stop 4**  
**Arbre à Palabres**  
**4.043768°N 9.687152°E**  
**Frédéric Keiff, 2007**

I really wanted to see this piece for two reasons: the picture reminded me so of "Tree of Ténére" from Burning Man 2017, and like the story of Ténére, a "magic tree" way above the treeline of Mount Cameroon died after some yahoo cut it down for firewood. Seeing all the giant logs on the dock leaving Cameroon forever made me worry for the future.



One of the entrees was chicken, the other Cow Kidney. I don't eat beef so was excused. Larina, the farm girl from Indiana, passed on the kidney, making a face that said "it smells like a barnyard"! Everyone else enjoyed it. Seconds on plantain. Saul enjoys ordering the food.



The tree is a little hard to see. It is made of welded rebar, welded steel wire, and the leaves are colored glass

bottle bottoms.



Finding it was a challenge as the courtyard it is located in is under renovation. That didn't stop the tour participants – they were really getting into finding the art around them. Whoopee! Success!

**Stop 5**  
**Sud Obelisk**  
4.043187°N 9.687281°E  
Faouzi Laatiris, 2007

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sud\\_Obelisk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sud_Obelisk)



A beautiful obelisk covered in dark marble with lettering in Brass. It is located in front of Doual'art museum, near the cars. The web site indicates the writing in Arabic references other cities with obelisks and burial, an important part of Cameroon culture.

**Stop 6**  
**Doual'art Courtyard**  
4.043187°N 9.687281°E  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doual%27art>

The group had to get back to the ship. A quick trip in to the courtyard and coffee shop convinced me, the ad-libber, that they would come back and linger after I leave. Happy Art Discovery Guide frees the crowd.

**Space Available**  
**Picture your Installation Here**



**Final Stop – Gift for Bride**  
**Handcraft store one block from Pullman**

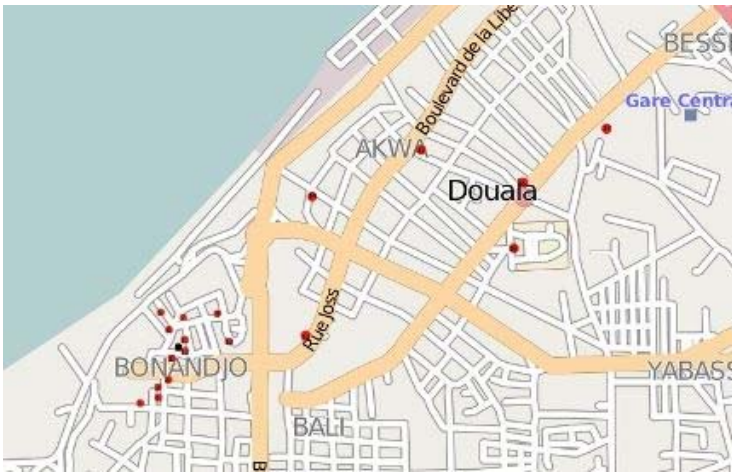


My bride Sarah is a hand fan collector. Here is my gift for her – signed by the artisan, and reminiscent of the trip. Love you Sarah, and please find room for one more fan!

**Parting Shots**

I've run out of both steam and wakefulness, so the rest will have to be pictures that you can puzzle over and

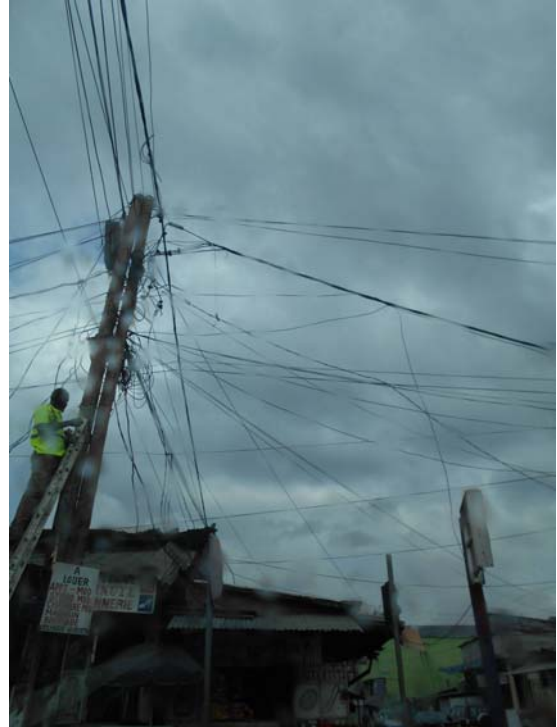
hopefully intrigue you. A second trip on my own took me inside Doual'art for a delightful interactive display of contemporary art.



I had glimpses that art was a big part of life here. But a lot of it appeared to be behind walls.



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Art is all around us – what a dreary place it would be without it, yet how often we do not appreciate it and the effort that went into it.

Thanks to Douala for making me feel welcome and safe to explore the art.

Thanks to Burning Man Art Discovery and my friends at ARTery for teaching me to see or at least look.

And so many times over, thanks to Marilyn Douala Bell and Didier Schaub for your leadership in nurturing of the art of Douala!

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ARTery Ad-Libber

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