

Magenta Plains | EXPO Chicago**Paul Gardère****April 9–12, 2026 | Booth 127**

For the 2026 edition of EXPO Chicago, Magenta Plains is proud to present rarely exhibited, historical works by Haitian-born, American artist Paul Gardère. The booth will showcase two mixed media assemblages from Gardère's pivotal *Mud & Rope* series, as well as eight standout works on paper from Gardère's related *Heads* series. Both bodies of work were made in conjunction with Gardère's 1989-90 residency at the Studio Museum in Harlem, where he was the institution's first Haitian Artist-in Residence, a critical time in the artist's career.

In the years preceding his Studio Museum residency, Gardère's practice expanded beyond a previously established focus on allegorical painting to a broader, mixed media sculptural methodology. This shift in his work came on the heels of his return to New York from a six-year period living in Port-au-Prince, and it continued the lifelong reckoning at the core of his practice. Moving back and forth between Haiti and New York throughout his life, Gardère's evolving sense of identity amidst feelings of displacement and cultural alienation were mirrored in work which sought to illuminate the multiple worlds he inhabited.

The *Heads* works served as foundational inspiration for the figurative focus of the *Mud & Rope* series, sketching out compositions for use in the larger works while also functioning as independently articulate works. In them, Gardère explored the technical facets of portraiture, while also beginning the engagement with material which would characterize the dynamism of this period in his career. Watercolor was the primary medium for the *Heads*, its unpredictability anticipating the organic nature of the mud he would deploy later. In rare instances, he would apply mud directly to the surfaces of the paper, connecting earth and water elements on the delicate substrate. Rope imagery recurs throughout these works—sometimes as inky renderings, and in some cases with stand-in materials like shoelaces. In Gardère's visual lexicon, the rope evokes both bondage and bonding—that which physically ties objects together and spiritually ties—uniting cultural touchpoints in the diaspora across time and space. Gardère also utilizes collaged elements to layer images within these portraits, an anticipation of his increasingly complex compositional strategy. The *Heads* demonstrate Gardère's skill as a draughtsman while translating his thematic interests across varied media.

For the *Mud & Rope* series, Gardère began to directly incorporate soil, water, and sisal rope into his layered assemblages, using these materials as vehicles for symbolic meaning. In the works included in this presentation, Gardère applied a compound of potting soil and acrylic fluid medium onto thick plexiglass, sculpting life-size figures in mud relief informed by remembered features from his *Heads* studies. As the water in the soil evaporated, it produced unpredictable fissures that altered the surfaces of these figures, sometimes with what he described as "violent" effects. As a material, Gardère intended for mud to evoke aspects of Vodou which designate the land as sacred. In his own words: "Mud is the very wetness that [the spirit of] Damballa is about. It evoked the ground we live on, the earth we eat from. It has a sense of place, and ultimately, landscape." Meanwhile, the inclusion of rope into these works introduces a binding force, linking these figures to their cultural context—represented by the background images Gardère placed behind plexi. Rendering recognizable figures from these substances is a way for Gardère to show an embodied example of the diasporic experience; his figures are literally composed of the sacred matter which makes up the physical and spiritual landscape of his homeland.

Paul Claude Gardère (b. 1994, Port-au-Prince, HT, d. 2011, New York, NY) was a Haitian and American mixed-media artist who received artistic training at The Art Student's League of New York ('60-'63), Cooper Union (BFA '67) and Hunter College (MFA '72). He holds the distinction of being the first Haitian Artist-in-Residence at The Studio Museum in Harlem ('89-90), was awarded a residency at Fondation Claude Monet ('93) and received the Joan Mitchell Foundation Award for Painting in 1998, among other notable achievements. During his 40+ year career, he worked and exhibited in both the United States and Haiti, but maintained his primary residence in Brooklyn, NY.

Exhibiting vast technical and stylistic range, Gardère's painting and mixed-media discipline realized diverse works and series, all of which investigate the phenomenology of racial and cultural relations (both conflict and syncretism) produced by Western imperialism and transnational migration in his native and adoptive countries. Drawing on history and symbology from Haitian, French, and US American cultures, Gardère's work unites the national histories that informed his cultural experience and conveys the complex, often paradoxical multiplicities implicit in Afro-Caribbean diaspora identity and the post-colonial immigrant experience. His works simultaneously reflect his own inner tensions as well as the dynamics of power and cultural identity at play in global populations reckoning with histories of exploitation and forced acculturation to Eurocentric systems and values.

Recent years have seen increased attention to Paul Gardère, with exhibitions such as *Paul Gardère: Second Nature*, Magenta Plains, New York, NY (2025); *Paul Gardère: Vantage Points*, The Cooper Union Stuyvesant Fish House, New York, NY (2024-25); inclusion in *Surrealism and US: Caribbean and African Diasporic Artists Since 1940*, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth, TX (2024); *Repossession: Didier William and Paul Gardère*, Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ (2024); and *Paul Gardère & Didier William*, Soft Network, New York, NY (2022). Gardère's work is included in public collections such as the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, DC; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY; the St. Louis Art Museum, MO; the New Orleans Museum of Art, LA; the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University, Ithaca, NY; the Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis, TN; the Milwaukee Art Museum, WI; and many others.

Despite institutional and curatorial acclaim, his career largely escaped recognition in the for-profit gallery economy of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. His sudden death in 2011 at age 66 left behind a formidable estate of un-exhibited works. He remains a well-respected, but lesser known American artist of Caribbean descent in the canons of global contemporary art. The estate of Paul Gardère is directed by the artist's daughter, Catherine to protect the artist's extensive remaining body of work and promote his artistic legacy. Operating as Paul Gardère Studio out of the artist's original studio in Cobble Hill, Brooklyn, the estate employs a mission to preserve the artist's archive and studio space, to protect and share the artist's legacy through facilitation of exhibition and scholarship of the artist's life and art, to encourage curatorial and audience challenge of hegemonic paradigms, revisionist histories and imperialist futures, and to enhance dialogue in, about and between the Haitian and Caribbean communities and their diaspora.