

## Kesler Pierre

Haiti: visual artist, designer, and percussionist

Object: stained glass lamp

*Kenbe fèm pa moli!*  
(Kreyol)

*[Stay strong, don't get weak!]*

I was born in 1955 in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. I got into glass in 1975, making Tiffany-style lamp shades in a sweatshop. We were working for peanuts. When I came to the U.S. in 1983, I found work in that same field in a place where they also made lamps. It was like a factory with an assembly line. They used a different technique with copper foil. Then I looked for a new job in glass work and found Greenland Studio. They were restoring stained glass windows. So, now I am still there restoring 100-year-old windows that are from landmarked buildings.

In my art, I draw from Vodou symbols. In Haiti, Vodou is the broth. It's there all across the island, and it is in the people. It's an influence that is always there. I grew up in Port-au-Prince, but my mother is from east of Port-au-Prince, from the mountain. So sometimes she took me to my aunt's. We went up there where they did Vodou

[ceremonies] for days. As a kid I was watching them, and I had no idea what was going on. But now I'm attracted to it. When I see them doing vèvè [symbols] on the floor, I find that the lines are beautiful.

I made this candle holder in 1981 when I was in Haiti. I was running the glass shop and one day, I started playing with that. I had a room full of glass, and that was my idea. So when I came here, I took it with me. When I look at it now, I say that I have come a long way. This wasn't something I would sell. I would not do that now. Man, that's ugly! Now I'm looking at that thing, and I remember all those years. Now I have my drawings and glasswork and other artwork going on.



### Bio:

Kesler Pierre was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. He is a self-trained artist and worked for a stained glass studio in Haiti. Since migrating to the United States, he has compiled an extensive dossier of work. In 1997, he began to study the Haitian drum with Master Drummer Frisner Augustin of La Troupe Makandal and played third drum and percussion with the group. Mr. Pierre has created clothing and props for musicians and stage sets, most notably the sacred bottles using elaborate vèvè designs derived from symbols traced on temple floors for Vodou rites. In 2012, the New York Foundation for the Arts awarded Kesler an artist fellowship in the category of Folk and Traditional Arts. In recognition of the important role his work has in the preservation of Haitian traditions and culture in the U.S., Kesler also contributed to the book *Saving Haiti's Heritage* for the Smithsonian Institution. For more information, visit: [keslerpierre.com](http://keslerpierre.com)