

Surinam Discovered by M. de Nood and Toon Fey, Scriptum 2005 ISBN10: 9055944025

intercultures Netherlands expert **Hilly van Swol** participated in the production of a photographic essay about the former Dutch colony, Surinam. A friend of authors M. de Nood and Toon Fey, she accompanied them to the sparsely populated South American country, and made a contribution to the book by bringing them into contact with local artist Marcel Pinas.

"I am fascinated by art and artists, and often make an attempt to meet some personally when I travel", Hilly reports. Before her trip to Surinam, she had discovered Pinas on the Internet, and arranged a meeting with him electronically prior to her arrival in Paramaribo. At the time, she had no inkling of how renowned he actually was.

Her offer to introduce Fey to Pinas was met with initial astonishment.

"You mean *the* Marcel Pinas?", he responded. Pinas has made a name for himself by producing work that incorporates the colors, signs and symbols of Surinam's multi-ethnic population, including that of his native Ndjuka culture. Photos of Marcel's work were subsequently taken, some of which appear in the book.

Asked what most struck her about Surinam, Hilly replied that it was the matter of course manner in which people of such diverse cultures and creeds live side by side. "As your eyes wander down a single street, you are likely to find a synagogue, mosque and Hindi temple standing side by side", she marvels. Hindi, Javanese and English are only some of many languages spoken by the local population, in addition to the official language, Dutch. Though the country's development has been arrested by the economic isolation that followed a military coup shortly after independence in 1976, the boycott has had an unexpected benefit. "The spectacular natural environment has remained remarkably intact, and Surinam's unspoiled tropical forests are a magnetic draw for an increasing number of European eco-tourists", she observes. She will always carry with her memories of a unique and moving interpersonal experience.

Gladys Abankwa-Meier-Klodt