

Didac Caparros, a brother disappears

by Pierre Loos

Didac Caparros was raised in France, his Catalanian parents having found refuge there after fleeing Franco's Spain in the early 1960s. After obtaining an advanced degree in economics in Paris in 1975, he married and fathered two children, Marjorie and Rémy. He discovered Africa with his second wife, Edith, a Cameroonian with an avid interest in traditional art and culture. They married in 1990 and began to travel in Africa and frequent galleries in Paris and elsewhere.

Spain had changed and his roots beckoned him, and he returned to Barcelona with his wife in 1996. They opened Galerie Oba in 1998 and trips to Africa, which combined visits to his in-laws with a search for objects, became increasingly frequent. Didac first walked into my gallery in Brussels in 2000 and within a few minutes I recognized honesty, courage, humility, and a desire to learn and to define new directions. We quickly became friends and he also befriended many others in the family of tribal art dealers. I was amazed at the speed with which he assimilated key aspects of our trade and it was incredible to see the rapid succession of quality exhibitions and catalogues his gallery produced, as well as

the positive results they garnered. An important name was establishing itself in Spain, and Didac and Edith were moving full steam ahead, realizing a series of dynamic projects.

One trip to Cameroon in December of 2003 was different from the others. A fire in their home had caused it to be postponed from its initial July itinerary. The trip had been typically well prepared for, including anti-malaria treatment. After a long delay, they decided to go for a quick five-day visit to Douala.

When they returned to Europe in December, flu and colds were widespread. Didac felt ill and his doctor failed to diagnose acute malaria. Fourteen days later Didac was in intensive care. He fought it for nearly two months, but on Monday, February 2, the mosquito bite took his life. He had just turned 45. I feel cheated and crushed, deprived of a brother and of a future that I sensed would be brilliant. But my sorrow pales in comparison to that of his wife, his children, and his mother. Oba remains open and his wife Edith and son Rémy will continue on with the strength I know them to possess. We have lost one of ours, and not a day goes by that I do not feel the pain.

Father Joseph Cornet, priest and humanist

by Jo de Buck

I first met Father Cornet about five years ago in his pleasant country house near Liège, where he was enjoying the autumn of his life. It immediately struck me that a man in his late seventies could be so dedicated to a new machine—his computer—with which he could do almost everything that he valued. He used it to study, archive, and write, and he could talk for hours about this great invention that made his life so much easier.

This shouldn't have been so surprising, since his life was devoted to study, teaching, and art. He authored a number of books about African art that today are classics for every professional and collector. As an academic, he was suspicious of art dealers and, as one, I found it difficult to win his trust. But since I had been introduced by a mutual friend who was an art teacher from the Saint Lucas Institute in Liège, a school where he had taught in the past, we were able to find common ground.

As our friendship developed, he told me he didn't like to consult as an art expert because his interest lay in teaching and conveying information rather than assessing objects for their market value. It was funny to see how proud he was that he didn't possess a single piece of African art, except for a small, fake Lega

maskette that had been a gift from somebody special.

He loved to talk about his life in the Congo, where he had worked as a teacher and later as director of the Institut des Musées Nationaux du Zaïre, as well as about his profound connection with the people there. They had opened so many doors for him and his eyes twinkled when he told me about his own Kuba initiation ritual. He could tell thousands of stories about the culture and people of the Congo, and each one expressed his respect and warm feelings. He was thankful to his Catholic order and university, and even to former President Mobutu, for having provided him a career that allowed for such wonderful revelations. It was this passion that inspired him to write his great books, and he would have written more if he hadn't been restrained in the last year of his life by a heart condition that was to be the cause of his death.

I remember Father Cornet as a great scholar but also as a very modest person who didn't even keep copies of his own books. He was a priest and a humanist whose spirituality fueled his desire to learn and to pass through his knowledge. I am forever thankful I had the opportunity to know him.

TRIBAL will publish an account of Father Cornet's life and work in an upcoming issue.

