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Three Moko Jumbies 13 Feet Tall Now Reside in Christiansted Town

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The Guardians Moko Jumbies at the old Armory Building on Hospital Street, across from Savant Restaurant. By. STEPHANIE CHALANA BROWN

After two years of tireless work, the unveiling of The Guardians — three 13-foot tall moko jumbies sculpted out of clay and cast in bronze —took place on Sunday at the old Armory Building on Hospital Street, across from the Savant Restaurant. They were created by artist Ward Tomlinson Elicker.

The Guardians were first sculpted in oil clay over a wire framework armature. When the pieces were finished in the clay, rubber mold and plaster casting were added to them. From there, the pieces were scanned digitally and cast in bronze in a foundry and brought back to St. Croix.

Mr. Elicker was in awe of his own creation during the unveiling Sunday. "It's a wonderful feeling to have the pieces finally settled on St. Croix soil," he told the Consortium. "It's been a long journey. This has been a two-year project, however I really began my work with the Mocko Jumbies before the hurricanes in 2017. To have them come to fruition in a real-life form has been amazing."

Honored guests present at the unveiling were Legendary Moko Jumbies Willard John, Johnny McCleverty, and Allen Yisrael Petersen.

Mr. John is also the founder of the Guardians of Culture Moko Jumbies. "I was called about the project and they invited me to come and be a part of it since I am a major figure as it relates to Mocko Jumbies on St. Croix," he said. "I realized the vision that they had and the fact that they see our Virgin Islands culture as an important part of what they are doing."

Peter Zielke, owner of the property where the moko jumbies now reside permanently, was praised for his contribution to the project. "I own the property and I commissioned the artwork. Then it all sort of sorted five years ago when we walked Hospital Street and saw how it was all dilapidated and falling down. We thought it would be great if we could take this street and introduce some art and start renovating," he said. "So we bought our first property right across the street. Every time we were doing work, I looked across the street and saw the beautiful staircase and thought it would be a dream project for me. We ended up buying the property. I would love nothing more than to be able to mix this amazing architecture and this amazing historical restoration project with something so cultural and iconic of the Virgin Islands."

Of the many guests that were present, one in particular, Margaret Bernhardt, saw the long-term positive benefit. "We received an invitation and I am a friend of the artist. We were very excited to come and support him and to see our friends. This piece of culture is going to be around for decades if not centuries and it's in a nice, safe place," she said.

A moko jumbie is a stilts walker or dancer. "Moko" means healer in Central Africa and "jumbi", a West Indian term for a ghost or spirit that may have been derived from the Kongo language word zumbi. The Moko Jumbies are thought to originate from West African tradition brought to the Caribbean.

Community members and tourists can visit the establishment during business hours to take photos with The Guardians.