

When you enter the **Délia-Tétreault Museum**, you find yourself surrounded by about a hundred objects and images that have crossed time and oceans. In this issue of the magazine *MIC Mission News*, the Museum introduces you to the history of this small “gridap” lamp and its key role in the missionary adventure in Quebec from the 19th century to today.



The Secret Life of Objects



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When the sun sets over the Haitian countryside, you don't have to believe in magic to see will-o'-the-wisps. Used in market stalls, voodoo ceremonies, theatres or simply to light one's way, the *gridap* lamp (also known as a *tèt gridap* lamp or *bobèche lamp*) illuminates with its small flickering flame the villages that the Haitian electricity network struggles to supply.

Made from recycled tin cans or soft drink cans, these small, improvised lamps consist of a tank with handle for kerosene (or white gas) topped by a chimney made up of two sections of metal tube of different diameters into which a cotton wick is inserted. While they are not masterpieces of ingenuity, *gridap* lamps are masterpieces in their own right, real little cylindrical paintings, with all kinds of motifs, slogans and sayings in eye-catching colors.

Today, while the nationalization of electricity across the country still faces many obstacles, the often vital importance of this small kerosene lamp highlights the more complex problem of economic inequality. While a small amount of kerosene, burned in the evening air along a country road, is of little environmental concern, the consequences of using this fossil fuel in poorly

ventilated spaces can be disastrous for the health of people living in areas without electricity.

The *Musée de la civilisation* in Quebec City chose the *gridap* lamp as the featured item in the exhibition *With Hopefilled Luggage*, commissioned for the centennial of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception community in 2002. In the eyes of the museologists, the humble construction, the portable aspect and the shimmering colors of this small lamp from elsewhere made it an ideal metaphor for both the inner light, with which the missionaries illuminated their own path in an unknown land, and the outer light, offered in return by the communities that welcomed them. In fact, the *gridap* lamp by its use is synonymous with sharing. More fire? One crosses one's wick with that of one's neighbour. No more gas? You can always borrow some from your cousin. Colored links in a chain of mutual aid, we can well imagine these little lamps multiplying their light from house to house to grow, as if by magic, into little strings of flames that illuminate whole villages, then the world.



Photos : Artisanal gridap lamps
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