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Art review: 'Bondye: Beyond and Between'  
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In the 1960s, Tina Girouard was part of an influential group of New York avant-garde artists from Louisiana that included Lynda Benglis, Dickie Landry, Keith Sonnier and Robert Rauschenberg. She eventually returned to Acadiana, where she immersed herself not only in her native Cajun culture but also in the Afro-Caribbean-rooted cultures that influenced so much of Louisiana's Creole heritage. During extended visits to her studio in Haiti, where she worked with legendary Voodoo flag makers such as Edgar Jean-Louis and Georges Valris, Girouard fashioned the large beaded and sequined "Vodou drapos" in this expo at the New Orleans Museum of Art. While mostly remaining true to traditional Haitian symbolism, they reveal Louisiana influences as well. That influence is obvious in one of her most aesthetically compelling works, "La Sirene" (pictured), the metaphysical mermaid and goddess of sea currents and creatures, as well as magic and the psyche. Here she is a Creole sea siren who, in a nod to Louisiana, wields a saxophone, an instrument with serpentine lines that complements the Medusa-like eels comprising her tightly coiled hairdo.

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If the saxophone seems unexpected, it really reflects Voodoo's syncretic ability to incorporate African, indigenous American, Roman Catholic and global influences across time and space. That sensibility is exemplified in "Legba," depicting Voodoo's guardian of time and the crossroads — a reminder that the African notion of the crossroads infuses American music legends, most notably blues great Robert Johnson's famous pact with the devil. One of the most imposing images here is the serpent "Damballah," whose knowledge and creativity gave birth to the universe and all things in it. "Erzulie" is the deity of love, a flirtatious goddess who embodies the spirit of both Venus and the Virgin Mary. Ogou is the Afro-Haitian version of Mars, the spirit of iron, fireworks and warfare who enabled Haitians armed with machetes to defeat Napoleon Bonaparte's powerful army and create the first Caribbean island nation. In these works, Girouard celebrates Haiti's profound influence on Louisiana's deep international roots.