

# MSQRD

## *Hey You – By Kenza Fourati*

by Caterina Minthe, Deputy Editor



Tunisian supermodel and humanitarian, KENZA FOURATI talks to MSQRD about Haiti, Sean Penn, and Maman Maude...

“When I first landed in Port-au-Prince, I felt home. Was it because of the heat, the mess, the smells, the noise? I can’t explain why, but Haiti felt closer than ever to my native Tunisia. Women and men introduce themselves with a direct ‘Hey You’ instead of the usual hello, joining their thumbs together, palms opened. This heartfelt and straightforward way to salute is typically Haitian.

I came to Haiti with my friend Unik Ernest. In New York, he is one of the most prominent event promoters. His parties for the Emmys and Amfar are famous around the world and his ‘buddies’ are Rihanna and Diddy. But back in his homeland, he is just one of the prodigal sons that Haiti is proud of.

With his mother, and members of the Haitian Diaspora, Unik created the small foundation EDEYO which means ‘help them’ in Creole. Firm believers in the salvation of education, Edeyo supports a school in one of the biggest and most dangerous slums of Port-au-Prince, Bel Air. I decided to spend Christmas with them, distributing presents to those children who have nothing. Never have I experienced such nakedness of soul and such dignity of mind and heart.

No matter what is going on at home, pupils always show up carefully dressed for class in bright yellow uniforms, the hair is neatly combed and their used little shoes, polished. The 2010 earthquake ripped Bel Air apart, leaving its inhabitants with patched tents for roofs and burst roads.

Maud, Unik’s mother and the director of Edeyo’s school, is the heart, soul, and authority of the whole slum. Her influence actually extends all the way to the surrounding major ghetto, Cité Soleil.

Maud Saab raised her three sons alone. When they were teenagers, she understood that there was no future for them under Baby Doc’s dictatorship. They all immigrated to America and the three turbulent teenagers grew up to be successful young men. Maud then decided to go back to her home and dedicate her life to help others, ‘Edeyo’.

I decided to accompany Maman Maud everywhere. The combination was unexpected, almost comic: a frail Haitian woman in her sixties and a white, young 5'11" foreigner. Bel Air is a United Nations red zone meaning that it is too dangerous for them to enter. Yet, I have never felt safer.

From early morning to sunset there is no electricity – Maman Maud sits on her throne, a little stool outside her school and from there, she calmly goes through every drama to find ways to solve it. A beggar approaches crying: his four year old daughter is left dying of cholera at the hospital and there is no clean water there. She will be saved. One of the schoolteachers is about to give birth. A collection is organized. Sean Penn is bringing his engineers to help rebuild the neighborhood. He will hire Bel Air 'good mobster' kids.

Each day brings a whole new world of problems. Haiti is bleeding and its wounds are gaping. But Maman Maud never loses faith, she is always found at the same spot, with the same energy and ardor.

And like every amazing soul, she is humble. Maman Maude was recently in New York to receive an award. She shyly stood on the stage, thanked the crowd in a word and left. Fame and recognition are foreign words to her. Her heart is already back with 'her kids' in Bel Air, where she is considered a saint.  
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