

Altars of the African Diaspora in South America and Cuba

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Oficina del Historiador



Peter Kloehn
Documentary Photography

LIZA RENIA PAPI

Liza Renia Papi nació en Brasil. Vive en Nueva York desde 1977. Trabajó como corresponsal internacional de dos de las principales revistas brasileñas. Papi ha estado trabajando como curadora, coordinadora, artista visual y profesora asociada en la Universidad de St. John.

Papi tiene un B.A. en Historia del Arte de la Universidad Estatal de Río de Janeiro, Brasil; y un M.F.A. de la City College University de Nueva York, 1992, en pintura y grabado; así como un programa en curso de Master of Art History / Museum Studies. Papi estudió danza contemporánea con Ivy Epstein en June Lewis Co. También ha impartido clases e impartido cursos en El Museo del Barrio, el Museo de Arte de Queens y en el Museo Salomon Guggenheim.

Papi es una autora publicada para *Aesthetic of Art - Understanding What We See*, editores de Cognella de University Press, publicado en agosto de 2018, primera edición. Libro de preguntas de la edición en línea, lanzamiento en octubre de 2018. Ensayo para Dinah Guimaraens, Ph.D Libro: Transculturalidad y museos: Arte público en la ciudad de Nueva York, Perspectiva de la educación en las escuelas públicas de Nueva York, 2014-2015.

Papi es una autora e ilustradora publicado *Carnavalia*, African Brazilian Folklore por Rizzoli International Publishers, 1994; y el libro de arte, "The Vanishing Beetles", edición limitada de 25 impresos en serigrafía por The City College, 1996.

Ella tiene un manuscrito hecho sobre mitos africanos, que se publicará, ilustrado con un grabado en color.

Papi recibió una beca de residencia del Instituto de Arte Santa Fé en Nuevo México, para la exposición / investigación de una serie de etnias: Foodscape en las Américas. También recibió el Consejo de las Artes de Brooklyn - BACA, Premio Primer Premio en ilustración.

Influencias africanas en los altares contemporáneos en las Américas fue compuesta por catorce artistas principales. Esta exposición curatorial le dio la oportunidad de dar una conferencia en la VI Galería Internacional de Arte M. T. Geoffrey Yet, en La VI Internacional de Ritual y Representación, La Habana, Cuba. <http://www.stjohns.edu/yehgallery>.

Algunos otros trabajos curatoriales realizados: Woodcuts del nordeste de Brasil, Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning, NY 2001/02. Brasil 500, Buenos Aires, Argentina; Perspectiva / Perspectiva, Olinda, Brasil y Nueva York, Europa, Lisboa, Portugal; Arte contemporáneo para la paz global ", Jerusalén, Israel.

Actualmente, Papi también trabaja en la Fundación Brasileña para las Artes, y es candidata a un doctorado en Filosofía y Estética en el Instituto de Doctorado en Artes Visuales de IDVA.

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Casa Africana, Museu de la Ciudad
Director: Alberto Granado Duque

La Habana, Cuba
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Dr. Yana Elsa Brugal Ph.D

Dra. Yana Elsa Brugal (La Habana, Cuba) Cursó estudios de grado y postgrado en el Instituto Estatal de Teatro, Música y Cine de San Petersburgo (1984) donde obtuvo el doctorado en Ciencias del Arte.

Estudió actuación en la Escuela Nacional de Artes de Cuba (1966-1970). Tiene numerosos ensayos en revistas especializadas y compilaciones teatrales. Coeditó junto a Beatriz Rizk el libro 'Rito y Representación.' Los sistemas mágico-religiosos en la cultura cubana contemporánea. (Compendio de ensayos críticos) Fue directora de la revista de teatro 'Tablas' (1991-2000) y de los Seminarios Internacionales 'Rito y Representación' (1996-2014) y 'Stanislavski siempre' (2004-2014). Ha impartido cursos y talleres de teatro en diversas instituciones de arte. Actualmente es investigadora, profesora y directora del 'Laboratorio Stanislavski' y 'Registro de la memoria de rituales sagrados y profanos'. Pertenece a las organizaciones internacionales LASA (Latin American Studies Association) y CARIBNET (Red de Presentadores del Arte del Caribe).

Dr. Yana Elsa Brugal (Havana, Cuba) She studied undergraduate and postgraduate studies at the State Institute of Theater, Music and Cinema of St. Petersburg (1984) where she obtained a PhD in Art Sciences.

She studied acting at the National School of Arts of Cuba (1966-1970). She has numerous essays in specialized magazines and theatrical compilations. She co-published the book 'Rite and Representation' with Beatriz Rizk. The magic-religious systems in contemporary Cuban culture (Compendium of critical essays) She was the director of the theater magazine 'Tables' (1991-2000) and the International Seminars "Rite and Representation" (1996-2014) and 'Stanislavski' always (2004-2014)".

She has taught courses and theater workshops in various art institutions. She is currently a researcher, professor and director of the 'Stanislavski Laboratory' and record of the memory of sacred and profane rituals'. She belongs to the international organizations LASA (Latin American Studies Association) and CARIBNET (Network of Presenters of the Art of the Caribbean).

FOREWORD

EXPRESIONES de GRATITUD

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Atos de Fe - Acts of Faith

Essay by Yana Elsa Brugal, Ph.D.

Altars de Cuba y Sudamerica

*Altars from South America and Cuba,
by Liza Renia Papi*

Images

Artist Biographies

Credits

PETER KLOEHN THE PROJECT-JOURNEY

This is an original project that began in 1986, in Bahia, Brazil. An "alteration" occurred both intellectually and figuratively, within a tiny room, in a small residential "temple" house, nearly identical to adjacent houses.

In the corner was a blue sea goddess (Yemanjá) under a cardboard shooting star, to her side a two-tiered platform with statues of Christ and the Saints (syncretism) above the Afro-Brazilian slave deities (Preto velhos), and directly in front were 3 three-foot blond, blue-eyed dolls in white pinafores waving at the camera (criança) [refer to photo: "Altar -Preto velhos, dolls, Yemanjá, S. Bahia, BR"]. That "first impression" of complete "otherness" cannot be overstated: it was an experience at once intimidating yet exhilarating before an "awe-full" presence of profound power and beauty. It set the stage that for the following years would result in a unique visual record of over three hundred altars throughout Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay.

The Altars

Information funneled-in from many sources to expand the journey. Anthropologists having done field work elsewhere, religious members having moved from one city or temple to another relate stories of distant altars with elaborate iconography. Each geographical region has its own cultural, racial, and economic pressures directly affecting the "look of the altar".

In the poorer, more Afro-Brazilian North, as in the favelas within and without Recife, many of the altars are within homes, not temples, with religion woven into the quotidian. They are simpler—a few figures in the corner of a bedroom or on a table in the family living room sharing the sacred space with a television, a stereo or children's toys.

These temple/homes are smaller, more numerous and in some sense "more African" than their counterparts in Rio, Sao Paulo and further south. Also, in Recife, the iconography reflects the Cult of Xango peculiar only to that region.

I have always worked with anthropologists, primarily, with Dr. Rita Segato of the University of Brazilia, but also with Dr. Diana Brown of Bard College, and Dr. Alejandro Frigerio of the Catholic University, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

I have exhibited my photographs widely in the U.S.A. and also in Brazil and Argentina and I am part of the collection and have shown at the Brooklyn Museum, New York. Publications include: Encyclopedia of African Art. Henry Louise Gates, 2005; Microsoft African Encarta, 1998; Face of the Gods, Robert Thompson, 1993; and others.

This near twenty-year documentary photographic altar project is in addition to my work, from graduate school forward, which is highly manipulated and aestheticized photography involving color, pattern, and design influenced by Matisse and Bonnard.

This latter work has also been extensively exhibited and is in the Davidson College collection and the Sam Wagstaff/Getty Museum collection, and others.

Reconocimiento

Ha sido un placer trabajar con Peter Kloehn en su proyecto Los altares religiosos de La Habana. Estoy agradecida por el apoyo de la Dra. Yana Elsa Brugal, quien abrió las vías para la realización de esta exposición, como el Director de la Casa de África, Alberto Granado Duque, el Museo de la Ciudad y José Fernández, curador del Centro Wifredo Lam y museógrafo de la exposición. Asimismo estoy en deuda con Helene Kloehn por sus comentarios sobre nuestros manuscritos. Mi agradecimiento también para el fotógrafo Fernando Natalici por su diseño gráfico. Quiero agradecer especialmente a Adam Axel, que nos ha apoyado con las imágenes, a Michael Tharp por estar con nosotros y nuevamente a la Dra. Yana Elsa Brugal y Professor Daniel C. Dawson, quienes enriquecieron nuestra investigación histórica sobre el Palo Monte Cubano y los Altares de Santaria. Un agradecimiento especial a la School of Visual Arts, NYC por su apoyo.

Acknowledgment

It has been a pleasure to work with Peter Kloehn on his project La Habana Religious Altars. I am grateful for the support of Yana Elsa Brugal who opened avenues to many important people including the Director of Casa Africa, Alberto Granado Duque, Museo de La Cidade, and our prezado Pepe Fernandez. I am also indebted to Helene Kloehn for her feedback on our manuscripts. My thanks also to photographer Fernando Natalici for his design. I particularly want to thank Adam Axel who supported us with the images, to Michael Tharp who was there for us and again Yana Elsa Brugal and Professor Daniel C. Dawson, who enriched our historical research on Cuban Palo and Santeria Altars. Especial thanks to the School of Visual Arts, NYC for their support.

ACTS OF FAITH

Yana Elsa Brugal

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And in this kind of intertextual installations, the fascinating world of the altar is shaped, focused by the artist's optical expertise, objectified with contrasting images and the superposition of colors dictated by the shape and theme of each photograph. The compositions vary according to the order and hierarchies established by the magic deconstructionists since the position determines its function within the aesthetics of popular imagery.



Peter Kloehn, *Umbanda*, Cibachrome color photograph, Recife.

Here are *Umbanda* altars from different regions of Brazil, also, of character of African deities syncretized under Catholic saints; they are complex in composition because *Umbanda* is a philosophical or religious system that tries to reconcile dissimilar doctrines.

Some have a pyramidal organization, others are landscape, sometimes centered by the statue organizations LASA (Latin American Studies Association) and CARIBNET (Network of Presenters of the Art of the Caribbean).of the majestic figure of the old black sage, and where the elements of spiritualism carry a primordial energy to feel the door of the intangible, because, as we know, they rotate around the altars propitiating the mediums or spiritists to establish contact with the spirit world or fall into a trance. But if we refer to the ritual recurrence in Cuba, we see altars dominated by *Regla de Ocha* or *Santería*, and the *Regla de Palo Monte*.

To worship their Gods, *Orishas* and Spirits, they often include represented saints, such as Copper Charity syncretized with *Ochún*, and *San Lázaro*, syncretized with *Babalú Ayé*, both of *Yoruba* origin, which stood out for their significance and repercussion popular.

The venerated Charity of the Copper, beautiful woman, is precisely the Patron Saint of Cuba, an emblem of Caribbean hybridity. Very frequent in our Cuban altars is *San Lazaro*, revered for his miraculous cures, and the repository of numerous offerings and sacrificed promises.

Also coexist in the same altar both rules, *Santería* and *Palo Monte*, the latter is symbolized by the *Nganga*, (conga garment), synonymous with the center of magical forces. It is not difficult to feel the vigor that springs from the *Nganga*, materialized by an iron cauldron or clay pot made up of sticks, herbs, bird bones and other elements to summon the powers of nature. I see Kloehn's exhibition as the *Itá* dictated by the *babalao Yoruba* in his warning about destiny, in his act of reading the past, the present and the future.

The clarification of processes that take place in the so-called magic-religious sphere of African descent through iconographic studies such as altars, invite us not to forget our diverse origin. It is true that in the reconstruction of the present imaginary many impelled doubts are generated before the vibrant altar-pieces, which offer the opportunity, with deep faith, to regenerate us, exorcise physical and mental inhibitory charges of expressions of autonomy through prayers, offerings, dances and songs, or spoils, all of them aimed at bringing in the good.

Declaración

He estado compilando fotografías a color de religiones basadas en África desde la década de 1980 con el propósito de conocimiento intercultural, educación, publicación y exhibición. El proceso incluye contribuciones, ensayos, de muchos antropólogos, artistas, filósofos e historiadores del arte. El proyecto me llevó a Brasil, Argentina, Uruguay y Cuba; las religiones incluyen Umbanda, Candomblé, Santería, Palo Monte, entre otros.

Encuentro belleza y diversidad en los altares que trascienden la religión y apelan a la cultura y la estética. Muchos murales indígenas en América del Sur y Cuba son bellas obras de arte en sí mismas y me interesan especialmente como historiador del arte.

Peter Kloehn

Statement

I have been compiling color photographs of African-based religions since the 1980s for the purpose of cross-cultural knowledge education, publication and exhibition. The process includes contribution, essays, from many anthropologists, artists and art historians.

The project has taken me to Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and, Cuba; the religions include Umbanda, Candomblé, Santería, Palo Monte, amongst others.

I find beauty and diversity in the altars that transcend religion and appeal to culture and aesthetics. Many indigenous murals in South America and Cuba are beautiful works of art in themselves and are of particular interest to me as an art historian.

Peter Kloehn



Peter Kloehn, *Cave-Exú*, Cibachrome color photograph, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1989.

La venerada Caridad del Cobre, bella mujer, es precisamente la Patrona de Cuba, emblema de hibridez caribeña. Muy recurrente en nuestros altares cubanos es San Lázaro, venerado por sus milagrosas curas, y depositario de cuantiosas ofrendas y sacrificadas promesas.

También coexisten en un mismo altar ambas reglas, Santería y Palo Monte, este último es simbolizado por la Nganga, (prenda conga), sinónimo de centro de las fuerzas mágicas. No es difícil sentir el vigor que brota de la Nganga, materializada por un caldero de hierro o cazuela de barro compuesto por palos, hierbas, huesos de aves y otros elementos para convocar a las potencias de la naturaleza.

Veo la exposición de Kloehn como el Itá que dicta el babalao yoruba en su alerta acerca del destino, en su acto de lectura del pasado, el presente y el futuro.

El esclarecimiento de procesos que ocurren en la esfera denominada mágico-religiosa afrodescendiente a través de estudios iconográficos como los altares, nos invitan a que no olvidemos nuestro origen diverso. Es cierto que en la reconstrucción del presente imaginario se generan muchas dudas impelidas ante los vibrantes retablos, que ofrecen la oportunidad, con profunda fe, de regenerarnos, exorcizar cargas físicas y mentales inhibitorias de expresiones de autonomía mediante oraciones, ofrendas, bailes y cantos, o despojos, todas ellas encaminadas a que entre lo bueno. Diciembre 2018

ACTS OF FAITH Yana Elsa Brugal

The exhibition by Peter Kloehn constitutes an intercultural setting trapped in images: photographs of altars—registers of memory capable of reliving plots and traditions that are far from any ecstatic interpretation because placing ourselves in front of them creates an act of rereading history and of the ritual diversity from the contemporaneity.

The artist, with his keen eye, brings us closer to Brazil and Cuba, countries that store in their collective memory and considerable evocations points in common.

The two nations are depositories of the mixture of different traditions, which make up a sui-generis cultural identity; fundamentally, the European Christian and Catholic, with the Afro-descendant tradition, mark a lot the traditions exercised by an interesting clash of cultures, without forgetting the indigenous presence and others that are inserted in the constant journey of transculturation and juxtaposition, as pointed out the Cuban wise man and ethnologist Fernando Ortiz; that is the origin of various magical-religious syncretic cults, the most significant being Candomblé and Umbanda in Brazil and Yoruba and Palo Monte in Cuba.

Kloehn's successful selection of works is the result of an anthropological study of the tireless researcher, entrepreneur of a journey in search of the truths of human behavior, which have nurtured him culturally during long years of inquiry that precede this exhibition, in various countries like Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil or Cuba.

As partners of the artist's experience, in the multiple connections with society and time we pay attention to various types of altars interpreted by their creators, creators of metaphors, who model their authentic representation conventions to pay tribute to African deities and the spirits.

The altars are real dramatizations in the form of visual-sensory rites; scenography of ritual icons derived in performances of acts of faith. Through the visual vocabulary, we perceive that there are patakies or afrodescendientes legends that mark routes to the devotee of this religion.

Thus, to achieve communication between the earthly world and the spiritual-transcendental through the altar, we observe indistinctly an amalgam of attributes such as flags, photos or murals of animals, ceramic statues of Catholic saints, human figures, the African woman, glasses of spiritual water, flowers, herbs and garments or symbols belonging to the mythological universe.

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Peter Kloehn, *Preto Velho, Pai Victor*, Cibachrome color photograph, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1989.

cont.

Decididamente, observando las fotografías hechas por Kloehn de La Habana, podemos sentir el ritmo de las canciones del Congo o de Angola, y también podemos sentir el poder de los espíritus africanos clamando por justicia.

Vemos en altares de La Habana que el sacerdote sanador se presenta en ellos con una configuración especial: uno, el curandero Mokulu, usa hierbas que defienden a los hombres de las enfermedades. Otros altares muestran el poderoso cosmograma del Congo que representa la ruta simple del mundo o la naturaleza de la existencia.

Observamos la mezcla del Palo: trazos y pontos riscados de la brasileña umbanda con lucumí. En el Palo, trazos o firmas, o patipembas / patimpembas, son dibujos ornamentales que generalmente se dibujan en el suelo con tiza, actuando como instrucciones para el nfumbe o espíritu que vive dentro de la olla, prenda del palero, para llevar a cabo ciertos actos mágicos; estos se caracterizan por el uso de flechas, círculos y cruces.

En la Santería o Regla de Ocha no utilizan a los orichas como firmas. El único tipo de símbolo dibujado que se utiliza es el del Ozun (u Osun), el que se asemeja a una diana formada por círculos concéntricos pintados con colores blanco, amarillo, rojo y azul, en una combinación apropiada para la iniciación de esa orisha.

Existe un momento en el que las personas usan símbolos que pueden parecerse a los palos, trazos que están relacionados específicamente en el trabajo del orisha Osain frente a su caldero. Es obvio que alguien perpetuaba la práctica ilegítima. Se evidencia que la mayoría estos trazos o dibujos valen para orientar y proteger a las personas; son fuerzas mayores, por lo que transmiten la energía del universo, la vida terrestre y la reencarnación.

También se aprecia la bendición de Dios u Obatalá en símbolos escritos en el piso en medio de la reunión espiritual. Además de los signos o cosmogramas, podemos ver en los altares figurillas o esculturas. La mayoría de esos símbolos antiguos son intensos; ellos representan a Simbi, espíritu congo, al igual que a los antepasados, que constituyen la fuerza de los pueblos.

Cuando conocí al profesor Robert F. Thompson hace ya muchos años en su presentación en CUNY, el erudito, bailando rumba, concluyó su discurso diciendo:

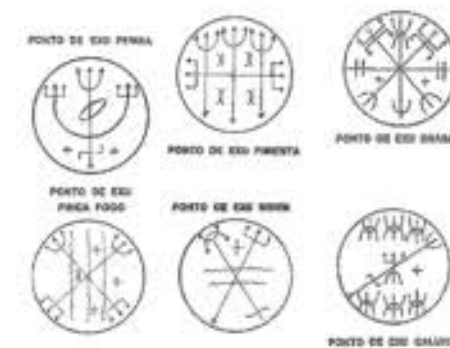
“¡Mu kala kintwadi ya tube, mu zinga!”

*¡Estar en contacto con nuestros orígenes
es vivir para siempre!”*

Liza Renia Papi, curadora invitada



Peter Kloehn, *Crianças*, Cibachrome color photograph, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil 1986-87.



Kloehn altars in Brazil show especially the Afro-Brazilian *Candomblé*, *Umbanda*, and *Macumba* cultures. Now in Habana, Cuba, the altars are organic *Congo-Angola* culture, one of the most profound spiritual energy in this world.

It has influenced religious beliefs such as *Palo* in Cuba, *Umbanda* in Brazil, and African Christianity in the USA. Also, it has influenced the most important form of expression for our Natives, the dance! *Rumba* dance rhythm, is the one that the *Cubanos* can't live without...It moves the body and touches the soul. Looking at Kloehn's photographs from Habana we can feel the rhythm of the songs from *Congo/Angola*; we can feel the power of the African spirits and the cry for justice.

The healer-priest is presented in the Habana's altars with a different configuration. One of them, *Mokulu* the healer, uses herbs defending men from diseases. Other altars show the secret powerful *Congo* cosmogram presenting the simple route of the world or the nature of existence. The mixing of *Palo trazos* and *pontos riscados* from Brazilian *Umbanda* with *Lucumí*.

In *Palo*, *trazos* or *firmas*, or *patipembas* / *patimpembas*, are ornate drawings usually drawn on the ground with chalk that act as instructions for the *nfumbe* or spirit that lives within the *palero's prenda* pot, to go accomplish certain magical acts.

These are characterized by their use of arrows, circles and crosses. Within *Santeria/Lucumi* we do not utilize such *orichas* as signatures. The only type of drawn symbol used is the *ozun* (or *Osun*) which resembles a bullseye made up of concentric circles painted in the colors white, yellow, red and blue (in an appropriate combination for that *orisha's* initiation.)

There is one instance where people use symbols that may resemble *palo trazos*, and those are specifically related to working with the *Orishas Osain* in front of his cauldron. The instance we observed regarding *orishas* signatures was not this situation.

It was clearly someone who was perpetuating illegitimate practice. Most of *trazos* or drawings are to orient and protect people - they are forces from the universe.¹ They transmit the energy between Universe and Earth, life and reincarnation.

With the blessing of God or *Obatala*, those symbols are written on the floor, in the middle of the spiritual meeting. Besides the signs or cosmogram, we can see on the altars, the figurines or sculptures. Most of them represent *Simbi*, *Congo* spirit, the ancestors. Those ancient symbols are intense. They are people's force.

The first time I met Professor Robert F. Thompson, many years ago, at a Conference at CUNY, Prof. Thompson ended his presentation dancing the *Rumba*, saying:

~ *Mu kala kintwadi ya tube I mu zinga!* to be in contact with our origins is to live forever!

¹Vega, Marta M., Ph. D. ; Professor C. Daniel Dawson. *Dancing Between Two Worlds*, Caribbean Cultural Center, African Diaspora Institute, catalog exhibition, New York City, 1991.



Peter Kloehn, *Altar with Red Table Cloth*, Digital print, Havana - Cuba, 2017.



Peter Kloehn, *Virgen de Regla Altar*, Regla, Cuba - Color Print, 2017.



Peter Kloehn, *Doll*, digital print 20" x 24" Havana, Cuba 2017



Peter Kloehn, *Sailboat Mural*, digital print, 20" x 24," Havana, Cuba 2017.