



***Roots and More: Journey of the Spirits***

***Scheduled to run from April 2009 to November 2009.***

***Venue: Afrika Museum, Postweg 6, 6571 CS Berg en Dal, The Netherlands.***

***Curator: Wouter Welling***

The *Roots and More: Journey of the Spirits* exhibition is a thematic exhibition on spirituality in the work of contemporary artists from the African diaspora (specifically Brazil, Britain, Cuba, Curaçao, Haiti, Suriname and the United States): different countries and different generations. The art is spectacular: suspended boats with luminous spirit beings, singing sculptures, a spirit being that squeaks and groans as it rows a huge boat, the macabre sculptures of Haiti's mysterious Bizango society, spirits in bottles, paintings with magic signs and strange apparitions. In many cases the artists are priests, famous in their homeland but often unknown in Europe.

For all their variety, they display one particularly striking similarity: they are all rooted in a spiritual world that is thoroughly African. Some are remote descendants of slaves who were deported to the Caribbean and America. The slaves took their traditional religions with them – religions originating in various regions of West and Central Africa (Benin, Nigeria, Congo, Angola). In the parts of the world where they were set to work, their ancestor spirits and the spirits of natural forces became allied in various ways with the dominant Christian religion – a forced amalgamation, for the slaves were not allowed to continue their own traditions. They were to prove spiritually very flexible. The Africans and their descendants recognised features of their own spirit beings in Catholic saints, and so were able to appropriate the saints and incorporate them into their own pantheon. New religions arose, such as Candomblé and Umbanda in Brazil, Winti in Suriname, Santería, Abakuá and Palo in Cuba, Voodoo in Haiti and derivatives of it such as Hoodoo in the United States, and Obeah in places including Jamaica and Trinidad (although the latter are really forms of traditional 'healing arts' rather than religions). Other denominations sprang up in turn around them. This highly complex spirit world, with its own rituals, songs, music, symbols and images, is an inexhaustible source of inspiration for artists.

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There are constantly recurring themes: the journey of the spirits (boats), the relationship between the world of humans and the world of spirit beings and death (the domain, in voodoo, of Baron Samedi). People can have a relationship with both the world of the dead and the spirit world.

18 artists have been selected for *Roots and More: Journey of the Spirits*.

Among others they are Belkis Ayón, Barra, José Bedia, Société Secrète Bizango (a group), María Magdalena Campos-Pons, Sokari Douglas Camp, Edouard Duval-Carrié, Félix Farfan, Stivenson Magloire, Pascale Monnin, Santiago Rodríguez Olazábal, Gerald Pinedo, Alison Saar, Eneida Sanches, Renée Stout, Patrick Vilaire and Frantz Augustin Zéphirin, Rosana Paulino

Their work provides an opportunity to establish links with traditional African art from the Afrika Museum collection. However, unlike in the case of functional objects (i.e. objects that have 'operated' in a religious setting), these contemporary artists have clearly interpreted things in their own way.

*Roots and More: Journey of the Spirits* is the first of its kind in the Netherlands and in Europe. Never before has there been an exhibition with such a topical focus on the spiritual wealth that Africa has offered and continues to offer the world. It marks a magical crossroads where sacrifices are made to Elegua/Eshu/Lucero, on the threshold between two worlds, where everything – humans, spirits, animals and things – comes together.

A richly illustrated bilingual catalogue with an introduction to the various religions of the African diaspora and descriptions of the participating artists will be published to mark the exhibition.