

A *Riflemaker* Exhibition

VOODOO

"Hoochie Coochie and the Creative Spirit"
from Monday 19 January 2009

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"WHEN I WAK'D, I CRIED TO DREAM AGAIN"

'The Tempest', by William Shakespeare, Caliban's speech.
First performance before the court of King James, Whitehall Palace,
the feast of Hallowmas, November 1, 1611

"I PUT A SPELL ON YOU... BECAUSE YOU'RE MINE"

Screamin' Jay Hawkins. First performance, DJ Alan Freed's
Halloween show, 1955

Which artist said "*I often employ elements of... Voodoo to make my work*"? Who declared, "*I really need to whip myself up into a kind of Hoodoo state to summon up the spirits*"?

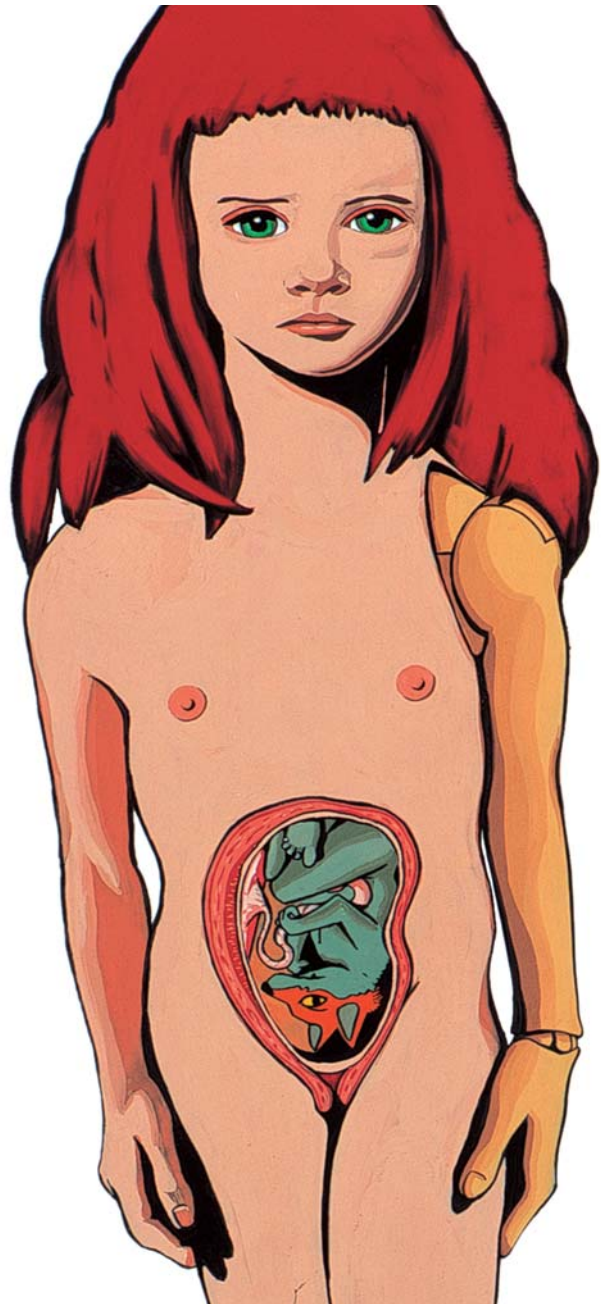
The exhibition features those artists, writers and musicians who acknowledge the need to reach a heightened or altered state in order to create their work. We look at the mystery of the creative act; not the inexplicable 'spark', aka inspiration, but the *fire*; the non-doing before the doing, the summoning up of elemental spirits from within – or without – during the preparation of some visual or musical work, some theory or idea. This welling-up or 'possession', this 'fever in the heart of man', this spirit, this *spell*, might sometimes be referred to as *Voodoo*.

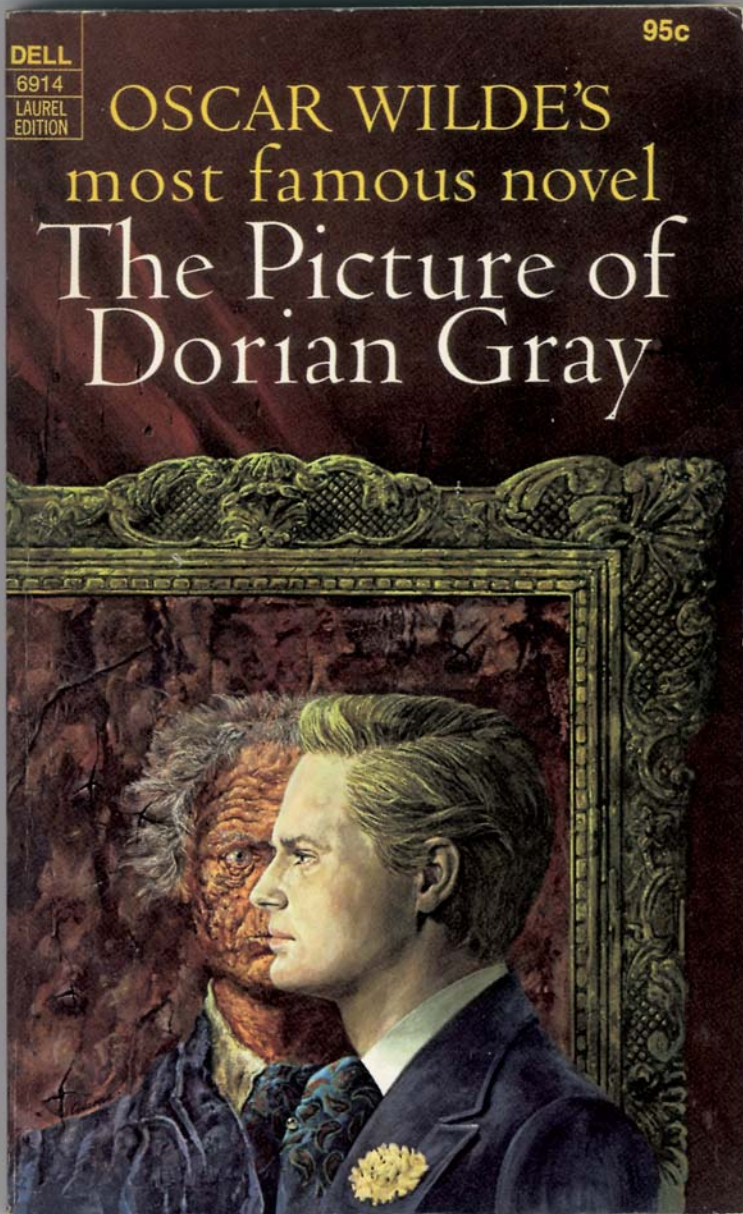
When slaves from West Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, the Ivory Coast and the Gambia were taken by Europeans to the West Indies, many were destined for Haiti (Hispaniola). As they mingled on the tiny island, no groups' influence was greater than that of the Yoruba and Fon people who ruled the kingdom of Dahomey which sprawled across most of the countries today known as Benin, Togo and Nigeria. The majority of the Haitian slaves were taken from Dahomey.

The core function of Vodoun – the Fon-Ewe word for *spirit* – is to attempt to explain the forces of the universe, influence those forces, and thereby influence human behaviour. Permitted by Haiti's 1987 constitution, books and films published in that country have sensationalized the practice as black magic based on animal and human sacrifices. Today in West Africa, the religion is estimated to be practised by over 30 million people. *Vodoun* became the official religion of Benin in 1996.

We look at the rituals of Haiti, its high priests referenced by Jean-Michel Basquiat and Mati Klarwein, the Santaria and Lukumi of Cuba and Puerto Rico, its Catholic icons depicted in the religious/sacrilegious art of Andres Serrano and Kendall Geers along with the Magus-like hybrids of Ansel Krut and Henrik Delehag. We witness David Lewiston's *Ketjak* rites and the tower-block visions of Sister Marie Gabriel. Wax effigies

Opposite **SIMON HENWOOD LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD**
Gouache on paper 84 x 59cms.1997





emanate from Alice Anderson and José Maria Cano. There are semen-glued collages by Dash Snow, 'dolls' by Adrian di Duca, Richard Niman, Simon Henwood and Chosil Kil, *wasp people* by Christopher Bucklow, *iguana women* by Graciela Iturbide.

From the alcoholic stupors which fuelled Francis Bacon and F. Scott Fitzgerald to the 'art of natural forces' of Maria Novella Del Signore and Annabelle Moreau, we consider the 'self-obliteration' of Yayoi Kusama, the psychic automatism of André Masson, André Breton and Hans Hartung and the Freudian relapse of Max Ernst and Paul Delvaux. Rachmaninov's chromatic hysteria, Max Reger's spiralling fugues and the supposed 'atonal' otherness of Stockhausen and Scriabin.

From Messiaen's profound 'Transfiguration' to Muddy Waters' equally profound 'Hoochie Coochie Man', the exhibition is a consideration of the act of creation as ritual and as sacrament, possession and loss of self in the process of invention. Sacred cows are photographed by Sebastião Salgado, Leah Gordon and Dennis Morris, rites celebrated by Igor Stravinsky and Darius Milhaud. From *Moon River* to *Moondog* what good, or bad, may come when we walk on gilded splinters? Out of our minds – and bodies. Literally 'possessed', *"like a leaf that's caught in the tide"*?

"Voodoo is a religion of stature, rare poetic vision and artistic expression", Maya Deren, experimental filmmaker and Voodoo initiate.

"Every Loa has his own drumbeat, his costume, his manner of behaviour, his own domain of spiritual revelation" Professor Joseph Campbell.

The creative act does not always deliver us unto the Garden of Eden, or even the secret garden. When the muse misleads it sometimes takes us to the dark side, where we may enter a world of the unseen, the unspoken and therefore the un-exhibited. This 'other' art, sometimes visually or morally questionable, still has to be dealt with. It is not only the act of the black sheep or the bad seed, not merely a nightmarish, internalised surreality, but often naked reality itself. An art created or *synthesised*, by the normal, rational mind, but a mind temporarily dislodged, an imagination psychologically or chemically derailed or altered – a body literally 'possessed'.

Among the Africans transported to the New World there would have been a number of hounsans, or 'spirit-masters', who would have continued with Vodou's esoteric doctrine. The role of the mystere named Legba corresponds to that of Hermès in the Hellenistic mysteries. The rituals of the Voodoo religion are based on a possession or 'mounting' of the physical self by the *Loa*, an elemental spirit or divinity. The act is instigated and presided over by a *Houngan* or minister, in order that the soul may achieve the status of a God. In terms of the creative work, what is then delivered may be either some kind of 'un-art' or else an absolute,

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authentic true art. A kind of 'seeing' or vision which would not be possible within a logical, rational state of mind. Through some meditation or thought, self-hypnosis or through artificial means, drugs or alcohol, the original personality may be (temporarily) banished as the new spirit takes over. This is when the original self feels 'vibed up', tuned in or tuned up, taken over by a new inner mounting flame. The artist able to arrive at a place he or she might not be able to reach otherwise. If life is really about thesis, antithesis and synthesis, what happens when the thesis is derailed? The equivalent of 'blind faith' to the committed Christian, a 'bullseye' for the knife-thrower or a 'lucky streak' for the addicted gambler.

So what does it mean exactly, to have the voodoo? The 'hoochie-coochie'? The 'rock' and the 'roll'? To get your mojo working? Stoking the fire in preparing the ground? Where does it come from, the fire within? And where does it rest? Many questions, and a consideration of the way in which the artist, the composer, the author, the architect, the athlete, the actor, lets the spirits take over in order to 'let it come'.

Without literally sticking pins in dolls (though there may be some of that too), we investigate the forces of the spirit involved in the sometimes devilish, but nonetheless sacrosanct, act of creation.

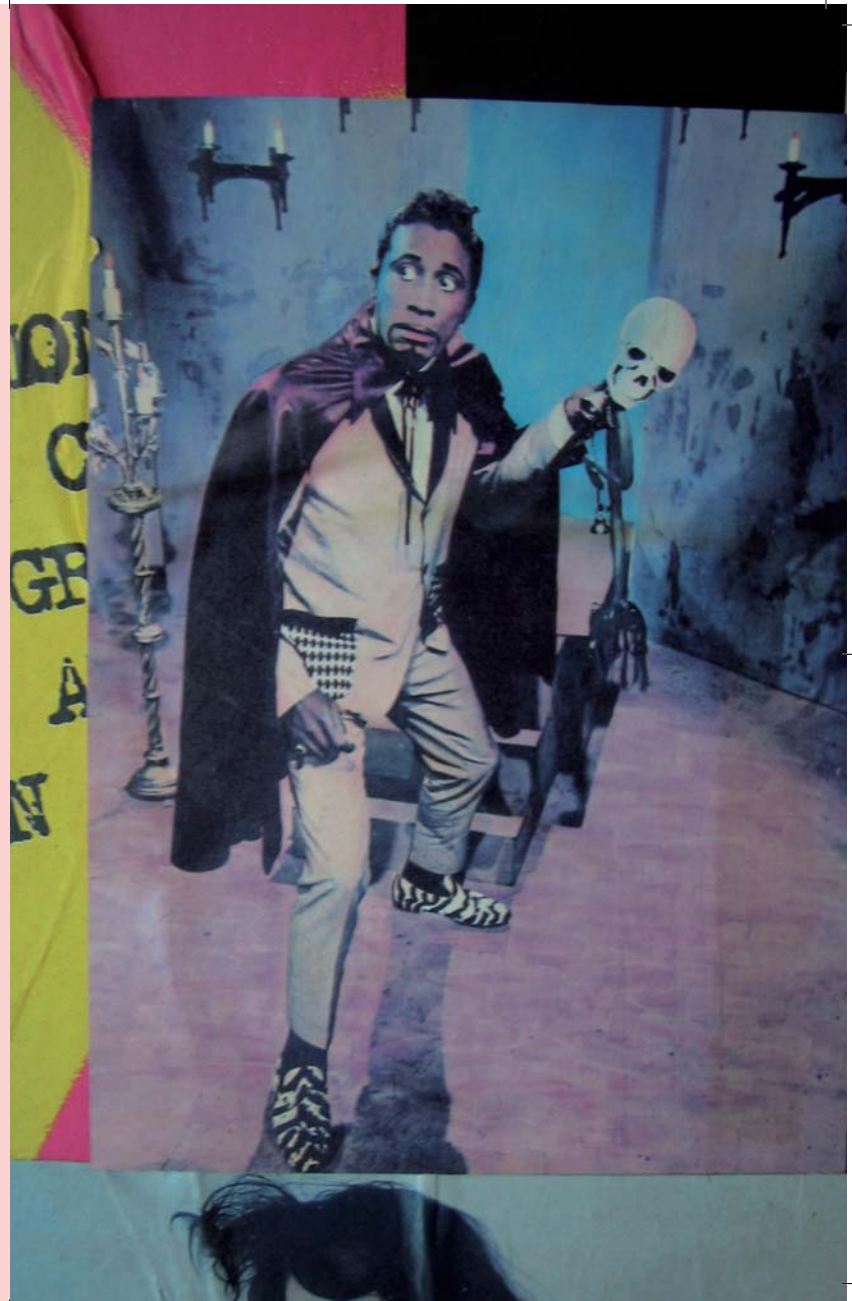
The 'spark' and the 'fire'. Just two of several explanations employed by artists to try to describe the inexplicable act or birth of creation itself, if they have attempted to describe it at all, for it is the longheld view among most that this 'spell' should never be explained or tampered with, dwelt upon, considered, or even spoken of, lest that speaking might lead to a bout of non-creation, bad luck or dry 'spell', particularly if the creator is within that most eminent group referred to by others as 'genius', i.e. possibly untrained and therefore overly superstitious regarding his own magical ability. He who may be the grateful owner of what 'standard' men and women might conveniently refer to as *Voodoo*.

"My art originates from hallucinations only I can see. I translate the hallucinations and obsessional images that plague me into sculptures and paintings. I think only of myself when I make my artwork." Yayoi Kusama*

"Other people write fugues, I live in them..." Max Reger

"The act of putting brush to canvas is an act of lyrical intuition, and in that act, in that instant, the personality and indeed the spirituality of the artist is revealed." Francis Bacon, quoted in Herbert Read 'Art Now' (1933)

"The artist is the creator of beautiful things. To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim" Oscar Wilde, 'A Picture of Dorian Gray', (1891)



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"If the Vatican is smart, someday they'll collect my work." Andres Serrano**

Films at the Curzon Mayfair will accompany this exhibition. Go to www.curzoncinemas.com
Voodoo, the original soundtrack is available online at www.riflemaker.org

* ('Bomb' magazine, Winter 1999 issue)

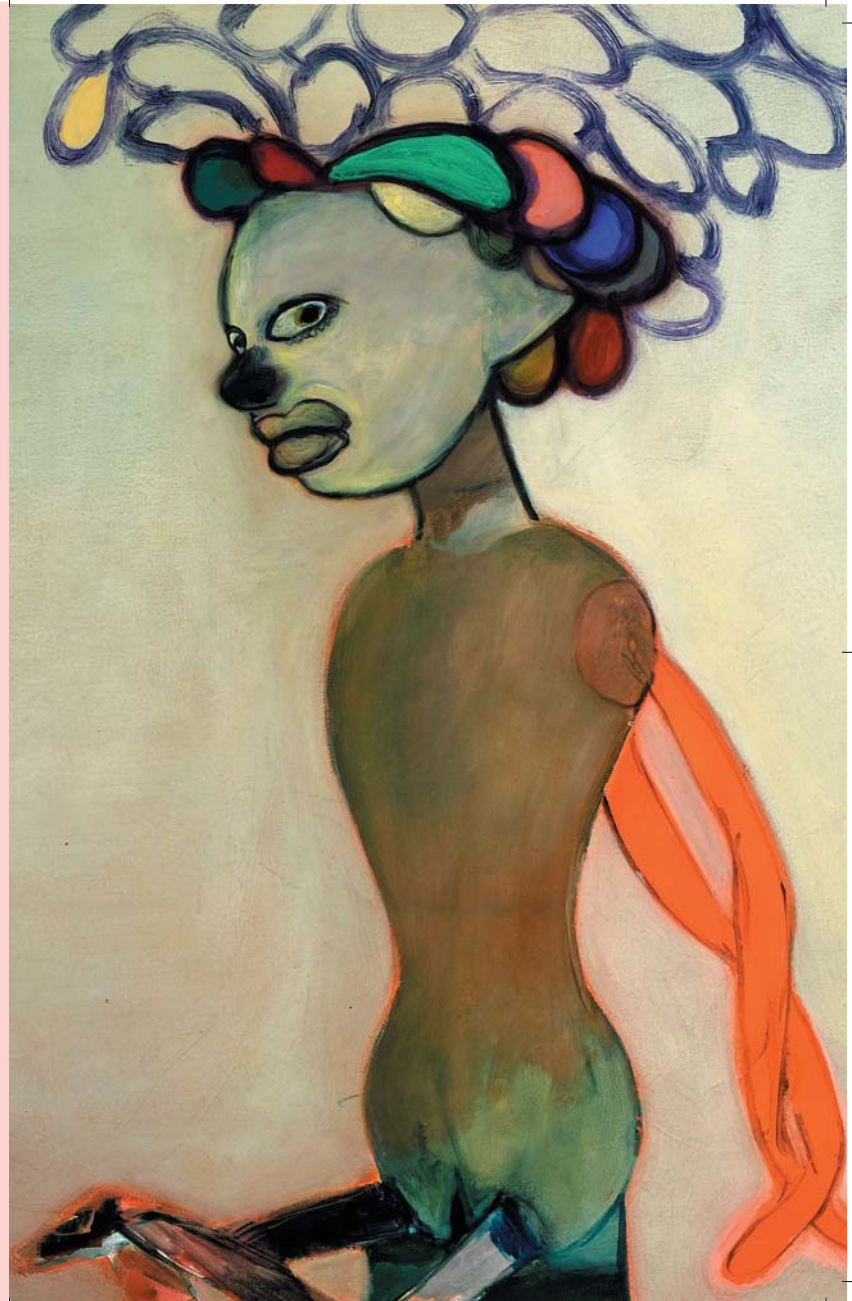
** In conversation with Coco Fusco *Shooting the Klan* High Performance magazine, Fall 1991.

Artists

ALICE ANDERSON	YAYOI KUSAMA
MAURIZIO ANZERI	FRANCESCA LOWE
FRANCIS BACON	JUSTIN LOWE
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT	KARL LUTCHMAYER
HARDY BLECHMAN	MAHAVISHNU ORCHESTRA
KARL BODMER	MOONDOG
CHRISTOPHER BUCKLOW	ANNABELLE MOREAU
WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS	DENNIS MORRIS
JOSE MARIA CANO	THE NEW YORK CITY BALLET
SIR ARTHUR CONAN-DOYLE	VASLAV NIJINSKY
LE CORBUSIER	RICHARD NIMAN
MARIA NOVELLA DEL SIGNORE	GERARD QUENUM
HENRIK DELEHAG	SERGEI RACHMANINOV
MAYA DEREN	ZINA SARO-WIWA
ADRIAN DI DUCA	SEBASTIAO SALGADO
JOHN FOWLES	ARTHUR SCHNITZLER
DIAMANDA GALAS	ANDRES SERRANO
LEAH GORDON	FRANCIS ALBERT SINATRA
DORIAN GRAY	DASH SNOW
HANS HARTUNG	KARLHEINZ STOCKHAUSEN
ROMUALD HAZOUME	IGOR STRAVINSKY
SIMON HENWOOD	GAVIN TURK
GRACIELA ITURBIDE	SAGE VAUGHN
CHOSIL KIL	JULIE VERHOEVEN
MATI KLARWEIN	MARINA WARNER
JULIUS KOLLER	MUDDY WATERS
ANSEL KRUT	

We also rejoice in the musical and verbal participation on disc of Ms Nina Simone, Mnr Francois Poulenc, Mr Francis Albert Sinatra, the Fon-Ewe people of Benin, curators at the Brooklyn Museum, New York, Mr Bobby Darin and... President Barack Obama.

Opposite **ANSEL KRUT** 308 IN DOG YEARS. Oil on canvas, 60 x 76 cms, 2004



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ANSEL KRUT (b.1959 Cape Town)

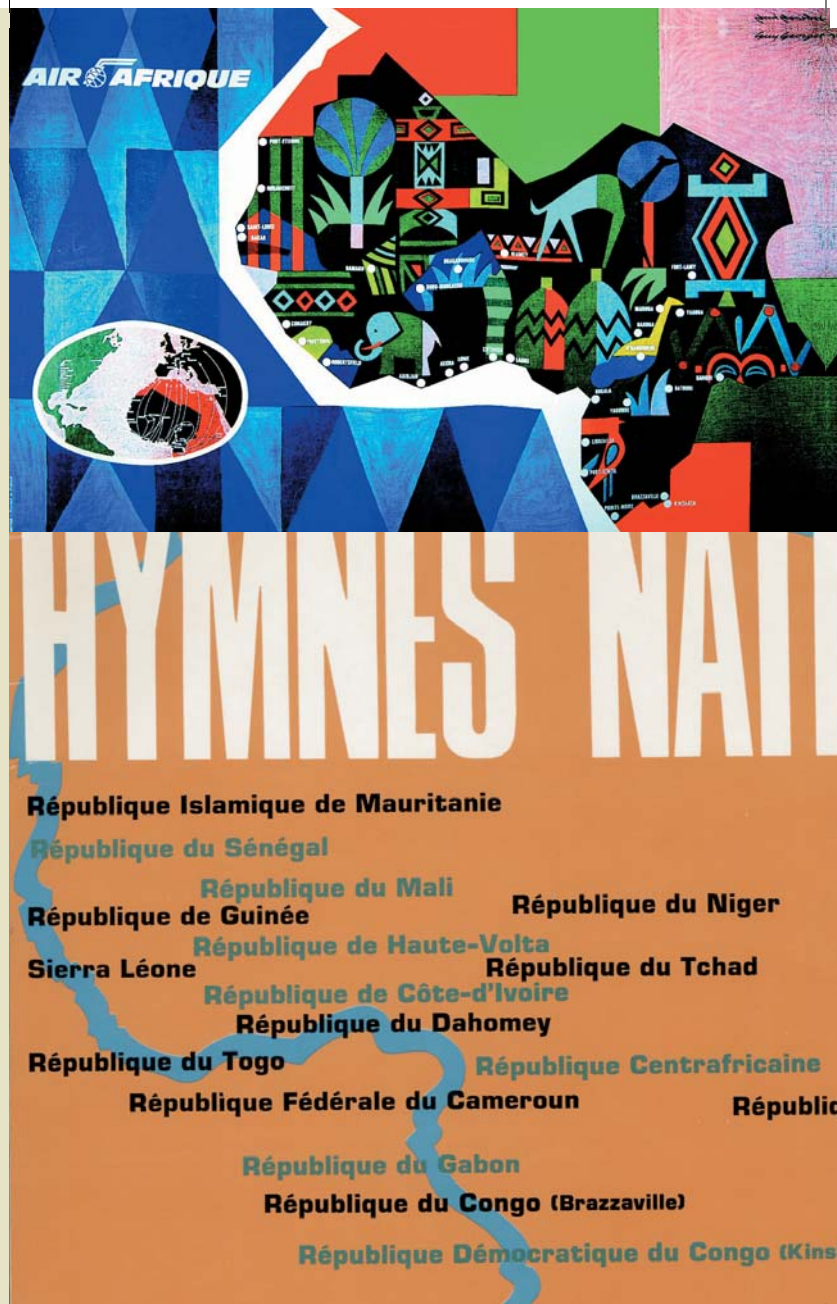
Ansel Krut studied at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (1979-1982). He lived and worked in Paris at the Cite Internationale des Arts, Paris (1982-1983) then studied at the Royal College of Art, London (1983-1986). He was awarded the Abbey Major Scholarship in Painting to Rome before travelling and working in the USA (1991-1992). His solo exhibitions include *Ansel Krut: New Paintings*, George Adams Gallery, New York (2002) and *The Life of Casanova: Twenty Etchings*, Jason and Rhodes Gallery, London (1996). His selected group exhibitions include *Gallery Artists*, George Adams Gallery, New York (2002) and *British Figurative Art, Part One: Painting*, Flowers East Gallery, London (1997). His work is held in collections at The Arts Council of Great Britain, The British Council, The Contemporary Art Society, The Johannesburg Art Gallery, South Africa and the Maclaren Art Centre, Canada.

Initiation

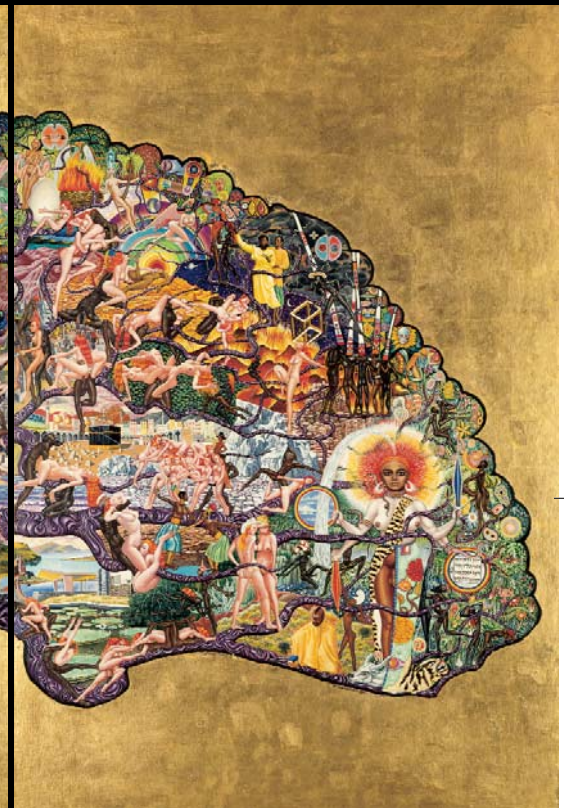
Visitors 'check-in' to the exhibition via a small booth inside the entrance to the gallery to be greeted by a replica of William Burrough's *Wishing-Machine* – the box which the famously superstitious Burroughs had installed inside the front door of his house in Lawrence, Kansas.

A lounge-styled *Witchcraft* on endless repeat leaks from a speaker in the corner. An instruction plate explains that when a coin is inserted into the slot a small card will pop out onto which the visitor is asked to write a wish before placing it beneath a flickering desk lamp in order to illuminate it before dropping it into the slot. Admittance to the exhibition itself is through a dusty curtain. We catch sight of an *African Airways* poster (design by Guy Georget, 1970) promoting the Airline which flies people from West Africa; Togo, Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, to the West Indies. An EXIT sign can be glimpsed through the curtain, except it reads EVIL (by Vincent Mazeau). Hanging above this is a fancy Cuban pendant *God Light Our Way*. We are now more or less 'initiated'. After checking out at the far end of the show each initiate will be presented with a tea-packet of zombie-powder to speed them on their way. This substance should either be consumed before they leave the premises or kept by their bedside table for good luck.

Opposite top GUY GEORGET (b.1911 – d.1992) *AIR AFRIQUE*. Offset lithograph in colours, printed by Cerman, backed on linen, 36 x 57ins.1970



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MATI KLARWEIN (b.1932 Hamburg – d.2002 Majorca) *CRUCIFIXION*
(*FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION*) oil on canvas, 300 x 150cms, 1963-65

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Spirits

*The Isle is full of noises,
Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not;
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears, and sometimes voices,
That if I then had wak'd after long sleep
Will make me sleep again, and then in dreaming,
The clouds methought would open, and show riches
Ready to drop upon me, that when I wak'd
I cried to dream again*

'The Tempest' by William Shakespeare, 1611. Caliban's speech.

In Shakespeare's final play, the action is motivated by supernatural forces. James I composed his own Treatise on Magic in 1603, the Jacobean believing in both 'white', *God-given*, and 'black', *devil-derived* magic. The outcome of the Tempest is governed entirely by its main character Prospero's supernatural powers.

CALIFORNIA MISSIONS

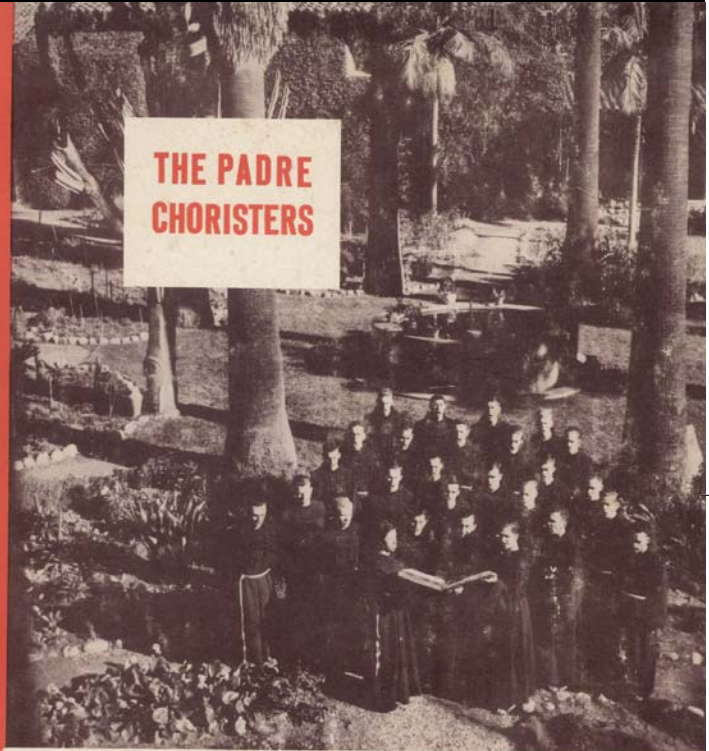
Many elements and aspects of Vodou practise became inextricably linked with Catholic teachings and saintly icons courtesy of Italian and Spanish priests and missionaries who settled in the missions of California and Mexico in the late 1700s. The first President of the California Missions, Fray Junipero Serra (1713 – 1784), was a pioneer of the Golden State who established nine sentinels along El Camino Real during the fifteen year tenure of his office. The Padre Choristers' *Songs of the California Missions* was recorded by the RCA/Victor label in 1950 to commemorate the expected glorification and sanctification of this first citizen of the Pacific Coast. The featured hymn is *Santo, Santo, Santo*, a Spanish version of the Sanctus. The rolling, accumulative movement interpreting the majesty and power of the Thrice-Holy God.

MATI KLARWEIN

(b.1932 Hamburg – d.2002 Majorca)

The hyper-realist fantasies of Mati Klarwien are known to everyone for delivering the stylistic visual punch of Miles Davis' *Bitches Brew* and Santana's *Abraxas* albums. Born of Jewish parentage in pre-war Germany, Klarwein escaped with his parents to Palestine. Absorbing influences from

PRODUCED BY THE
RCA - VICTOR DIVISION
FOR THE PADRE CHORISTERS



SONGS OF THE
CALIFORNIA
MISSIONS



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his friend Salvador Dali, Klarwein mirrors and mixes abstraction and figuration within a floating perspective. Although on record as Andy Warhol's "favourite painter" his tribal, erotic 'inscapes' were at odds with the fine art tendencies of the times. Working in Morocco, Niger, Haiti, Jamaica, Indonesia, Brazil, Mexico, Bahamas, Kenya, Senegal, Gambia, Cuba and Guatemala, the artist drew widely on these travels in his art.

"Abdul Mati Klarwein is a visionary poet of the sublime. He is an artist of amazing technical virtuosity. He is also an enigma that an ever widening audience is trying to solve." Ronald A. Kuchta, director, Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York

ANNABELLE MOREAU

Spirit of Togo – my memories

I lived in Togo 1989 to 1993... "Lomé la jolie, Lomé la coquette". Clean and pretty, Lomé was called the 'little Switzerland of Africa'.

...at eight o'clock the news presentation would begin, "*Gnassimbe Eyadema, Apotre de la paix, Colombe venue du ciel.*" President Eyadema was compared to an Apostle of Peace, a dove who came from heaven. Togo was an example to its neighboring countries, on the surface an extraordinary place: the economy, social scheme at its height in the 80's... spirit of Togo...

...the evenings were soft, warm and humid. The villages in the countryside became quieter and prepared. Man and woman dressed in white gathered in the centre of their village, circling around the sacrificial altar.

...the double-headed snake was one of the mostly feared creatures to encounter. It usually lay in the high grass. If you saw it, it could swallow you in one go. Only a few people could escape its spell.

...Heads, bodies, limbs; tapping, shaking and swirling, to the extent of a loss of themselves. Their bodies became weightless, uncontrolled by the drumming music... spirit of Togo...

Spirit of Togo 1990

...one of the gatherings for the opposition was a small church in a remote area of Lomé. A missionary who worked in the north part of the country reported one day that leprosies and handicapped people had been captured into a net and dropped into a nearby lake... spirit of Togo...

Opposite **ANNABELLE MOREAU** (b.1976 Cape Town, SA) *FORMATIONE ZIG-ZAG*. Copper, brass, oil paint, polish, 240 x 75 x 30cms. 2009



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Spirit of Togo 1991

The democratic approach instigated by internal discontent and external pressure for development led the President to legalize a 'multiparty' within his constitution and agree to hold "Forums of Dialogue", withdrawing from the Head of State his principal prerogatives. The country fell into chaos. The army, sustained and led by the President, began to carry out a series of massacres. Riots, strikes, curfew followed.

Spirit of Togo 1992

...one morning the lake in Lomé was found with pregnant women floating dead... spirit of Togo...

Spirit of Togo 1993

...on a Friday evening in January 1993 the city was strangely quiet. The army was circulating, scrutinizing every face it encountered. Some scooters had been unloaded from a truck and hidden away. Later that night men were drinking the palm alcohol – *Sodabi* – and were taking drugs. They were acting as if they were into a trance, out of themselves – frightening looks in their eyes. At noon the next morning the African horn was blown. It called for gathering; it called for war. The scooters had been taken out; the army men got on them, one man driving at the front, the second on the back with his rifle shooting everywhere. It lasted until 6 am the next morning – 18 hours. We were hiding indoors, in our basement and corridors, praying that nothing would happen to us, that no one would come through the door. 230,000 Togolese escaped to Benin and Ghana shortly after, including my parents and I. *Spirit of Togo*.

These years for me were the most terrifying years of my life. The work I make is rooted in my childhood memories, what I saw, and have been witness of. Experiencing revolutions and riots, which turned for me as visions of hell, I became aware at a very young age that there were uncontrollable forces possessing the human kind, which were driven by eagerness of power and domination culminating into committing atrocities. Nature for me retains what is most powerful than man. The inner natural force that causes cataclysm, earthquakes, eruptions, reminds me of the insignificance of "human power".

Time and time again I find these memories of atrocities and fright coming to my mind reminding me of the inferno.

Exhibitions: *Detour*, Galerie de Suede, Paris 2007, *Dunkelheit*, St Pancras Church, London 2007, *Centrifugal*, Royal Academy Schools, London 2008, *Concrete & Glass*, Shoreditch, London 2008

