

Arturo Lindsay

Artist Statement

My interest in African retentions in the Americas has brought me to an important personal and professional crossroad where the paths of my spiritual, scholarly, and aesthetic journeys meet. As an artist, I use ethnographic research methods to uncover information people use to order their lives, construct identity, and create culture. My research findings are presented in works of art, scholarly articles, essays, and lectures. I am particularly interested in observing the African spiritual and aesthetic presence grounded in the concept of cultural *mestizaje*--cross-cultural mixing in Latin America.

My three paths were fused in 1994 when I established a studio in Portobelo, a 16th century Spanish colonial village on the Caribbean coast of the Republic of Panama steeped in magic, myth, mystery, and miracles. This experience has given me an opportunity to observe anew the ways Panamanians tell their stories through art, folklore, and ritual. In Portobelo, I became interested in telling the stories of the *cimarrones*—Africans who escaped from slavery, and their descendants, the Congos. I have also become interested in the *Cristo Negro de Portobelo* - the Black Christ of Portobelo, a large wooden statue of a black Christ bearing a cross that mysteriously arrived in the village three centuries ago. Devotees of the *Cristo Negro* believe the statue possesses miraculous healing powers, and as many as 60,000 pilgrims annually visit Portobelo for the feast day of the *Cristo Negro de Portobelo*.

I return to Portobelo each year where I am now an integral part of *Taller Portobelo*, an artist cooperative dedicated to preserving local traditions, while developing new ones. My residency in Portobelo has completely changed the direction of my life and the way I now create and produce works of art. Recently, I began pouring libations in my installations in veneration of my ancestors and benevolent spirit beings. With this act, my installations cease to exist solely as works of art in a Western European aesthetic frame and emerge as creolized sacro-secular art objects.

In order to provide my students with an opportunity to participate in the growth and development of Congo culture, I established the Spelman College Summer Art Colony in 1997. I have since purchased 13 acres of land on the Bay of Portobelo where we are building *Taller Arturo Lindsay*, a permanent artist colony in which artists and students from the United States, Europe and Latin America can live and work along with the artists of *Taller Portobelo*, as well as emerging and internationally recognized artists, scientists, and scholars.

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Biographical Sketch

Arturo Lindsay is an artist-scholar who conducts ethnographic research on African spiritual and aesthetic retentions in contemporary American cultures. His research findings are manifested in works of art, as well as scholarly lectures, essays, and articles. Lindsay is a native of Colon, a seaport city on the Caribbean coast of the Republic of Panama. At age 12, along with his parents, he migrated to New York City and settled in Brooklyn.

Lindsay's work is represented in important private and public collections nationwide and abroad. He has exhibited in major solo and group exhibitions throughout the United States, Panama, Mexico, Germany, Peru, and Italy. Recent solo exhibitions include *Retorno de las ánimas Africanas*, at the Segunda Bienal Iberoamericana de Lima, Salones de los Artistas Invitados in Lima, Perú. In 1994 Lindsay received a Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest International Artist Award to establish a studio in Portobelo, a 16th century Spanish colonial village in Panama. This residency resulted in a major solo exhibition at the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo in Panama City entitled *Canto a la libertad de Africa a América*. The exhibition traveled to Atlanta, was expanded, and opened in January 1996 under the title *Animas, arcángeles y antepasados - Recent Work by Arturo Lindsay* at Nexus Contemporary Art Center. Between 1996 and 1998 the exhibition traveled to Intermedia Arts in Minneapolis and Diggs Gallery at Winston-Salem State University. Recent group exhibitions include *The Shape of the Spirit*, at Centro Culturale Man Ray in Cagliari, Italy; *In Search of Balance: The ArtistScholar*, Smithsonian Institution, Arts and Industries Building, South Gallery; *The Ark of the Well Being*, Plexus International, the Roof Garden at the Palazzo del Esposizioni in Rome during the World Food Summit; and *Reaffirming Spirituality*, El Museo del Barrio.

In recent years Lindsay has participated in a number of traveling exhibitions including *Ceremony of Spirit: Nature and Memory in Contemporary Latino Art*, organized by the Mexican Museum in San Francisco; and *Art in Atlanta*, organized by Artists-in-Residence International. The latter traveled to various cities in Germany and England between 1996 and 1997. His work also appeared in *ES97 Tijuana*, a major exhibition of Latin American art organized by the Centro Cultural Tijuana and shown in two other venues including El Museo Rufino Tamayo in Mexico City.

As a scholar, Lindsay has lectured and published several essays on New World African religious, spiritual, and aesthetic retentions. In 1996 he edited *Santería Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art* which was published by the Smithsonian Institution Press. In 1997 he won the Spelman College Presidential Award for Scholarship. In 1998, he participated in the panel discussion *Contemporary Artists: Issues of Individuality and Tradition* at the *Perspective on African Art: Dialogue with "Tradition,"* a colloquium at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1999 he won a Fulbright Senior Scholar award to conduct research on the manifestations of black Christ figures in the Americas, teach a course on experimental art at the University of Panama, and to work with emerging self-taught artists of the village of Portobelo.

Dr. Lindsay is an Associate Professor of Art and Art History in the Department of Art at Spelman College in Atlanta. He received a Doctor of Arts (D.A.) degree from New York University (1990). The title of his dissertation is *Performance Art Ritual as Postmodern Thought: An Aesthetic Investigation*. He holds a Master of Fine Arts degree in Painting from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (1975); and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Spanish and Theater from Central Connecticut State University (1970).

Lindsay maintains studios in Atlanta, Georgia and Portobelo, Panama. He has recently purchased thirteen acres of land on the Bay of Portobelo where he is now building *Taller Arturo Lindsay*, an artist colony for students, emerging and internationally recognized artists, scientists, and scholars from Portobelo, the United States, Latin America, Europe and Africa.