

ALEJANDRA GLEZ

[Filha do Mar]



Solo Exhibition

Opening May 24, 2024, from 6 to 9 pm

Performance in Madeira Island

in collaboration with Quinta de São João/Galeria Lourdes

« one person has the character of dust
another has an arrow for a soul
but their stories all end

somewhere

in the sea »
Alice Oswald

Filha do Mar. Some notes on ancient and contemporary aquatic myths.

Daniela Fernández Rodríguez

The sea, source of wonder, loss and memory, in turn entails the possibility of a spiritual hold, of a theophanic essence. According to Knotkova-Capkova in reference to Yoruba culture, “the water-symbol of mysteriousness and elusiveness appears... what is elusive here is the very concept of female identity which is disappearing in the womb of water, connoting a return to (unification with) the female divine principle”. Accordingly, *Filha do Mar* explores an axiom: the sea represents the space and place to which women inevitably belong; a place of belonging and encounter. On the other hand, two cosmologies of Afro-Caribbean religiosity, the Yoruba and the Taino, are interwoven in the exhibition’s narrative. More than a physical substance, water is the lifeblood of the Yoruba identity, occupying a cardinal place in their myths for its healing and sacred properties. This spiritual connection functions as a leitmotiv for Alejandra Glez, who seeks to unfold her religious practice and her vital experience in her creative repertory: generating a mutable and sublime symbology of the oceans as a tangible manifestation of multiple divinities.

The artworks in this exhibition are part of a long-term project that the artist has been developing around hydro-anthropological and eco-sustainability discourses. Being her first solo show in Portugal, the gallery has decided to bring to the public her most recent productions, which include a video art, an installation and seven black and white photographs. Derived from an organic collection of works, we could consider the video art *Oyalokun, a story from sea to land* as the conceptual and experimental root from which the remaining pieces emanate. From the performativity found at the intersection of contemporary and folkloric dance, the video seeks to emphasize the promise of freedom and spiritual fulfillment hidden in the depths of the sea. Source of life and destruction, calm and violence, the unfathomable mysteries of Olókun² are complexified in the possibility and permissibility of being penetrated by other spiritual and natural elements.

At the heart of the Yoruba cosmovision, there is a foundational myth that narrates the genesis of the world. In the beginning, there were only two vast domains: the sky, governed by the supreme deity Olódùmarè, and a vast swamp under the dominion of Olókun, goddess of the waters. Olódùmarè, desiring to populate the wetland, entrusts

Obbatalá with the mission of creating solid ground and living beings. Obbatalá, descend with materials such as sand, a chameleon and a white rooster, molds human figures and asks Olódùmarè for permission to give them life. The general joy among the orishas contrasts with the anger of Olókun, who sees her domain altered. This myth, which functions as one of the conceptual foundations of the video art, captures the relevance of water in Yoruba culture and the potential discord that arises when intervening in the natural balance. On the other hand, the Taino goddess Guabancex, personification of the hurricane, is manifested in the rotating and undulating movements performed by the performers in *Oyalokun*. Like the Yoruba myth, this representation highlights the interaction between earth and sea forces. In the natural cycle of expansion and contraction of warm and humid air, we find a reflection of the growth, weakening and transformation that the earth undergoes. Destruction and creation, life and rebirth emerge from these feminine forces, reminding us of the impermanence of all that exists and the constant change that rules the universe. Hence, the morphologies of the glass waves identifiable in the installation, and the visual narratives of the photographs that make up this exhibition, evoke a sense of obedience and rebellion, of corporeal fluidity and formless momentum, of rootedness and anomie.

We find in Alejandra’s artistic practice a tangible animist conception, which allows us to understand the symbiosis she establishes between these divinities. In the background of this syncretic gesture we find the search for a personal and intimate faith that has crossed several stages of her work. Communication with the spiritual world (in this case with her ancestors, and other beings and elements of the natural world), as well as the principles of universal life (all beings, objects and places possess an essence or spirit that animates and gives them agency), interconnectedness (all elements of the universe are interconnected and share the same essence or life force) and respect of nature (nature is seen as a living being with its own rights and needs, and should be treated with respect), make up *Filha do Mar*’s metafiction. The exhibition could be read, in this sense, as: an ode to the transforming forces that shape the universal space of human experiences, an (other) contemporary history intertwined and situated on ancestral wisdoms, a return to the unfathomable essences of the spirit, and of course, a reminder of the urgency of the *art of living on a damaged planet*.

¹ Knotkova-Capkova, Blanka. *Symbols of water and Woman on Selected Examples of Modern Bengali Literature in the Context of Mythological Tradition*. Wagadu (No.3), 2006, pp. 155-169.

² Olókun is venerated as the governor of all bodies of water and for authority over other water authorities.