

LISTS OF WORKS

All works are on loan from the artists.

Khadejha

It's All Relative 1993
copyart, silkscreen, hand-printing, painting on unstretched canvas
396.2 x 111.8 cm

Grand Orisha 1993
copyart, silkscreen, hand-painting, printing on unstretched canvas
152.4 x 637.5 cm

Father Orisha 1996
mixed media
40.6 x 81.3 cm

Cerebral (All My Relations) 1993
mixed media
22.9 x 35.6 cm

Libation Bowl and Orisha Bell 1997
crystal bowl: 22.9 cm (diameter)
glass bell: 7.6 x 2.5 cm water

Kofi Kayiga

Rev'd Anansi 1989
acrylic on felt paper
152.4 x 91.4 cm

Spirit of Kundalini 1992
acrylic on felt paper
91.4 x 152.4 cm

Concept of Fertility 1992
acrylic on felt paper
167.6 x 91.4 cm

Twin Light Beings 1992
acrylic on felt paper
182.8 x 91.4 cm

Rasta Force 1992-93
acrylic on felt paper
121.9 x 91.4 cm

All Powerful 1993
acrylic on felt paper
91.4 x 61 cm

Katonda 1994
acrylic on felt paper
243.8 x 91.4 cm

The High Kingdom 1995
acrylic on felt paper
243.8 x 91.4 cm
The Nurturer and Protector 1995-96
acrylic on felt paper
243.8 x 91.4 cm

Jan Wade

Soul Kitchen 1996
wood, acrylic paint, miracles
88.9 x 76.8 x 3.8 cm

Worship 1996
triptych: wood, acrylic paint, miracles
each: 74.9 x 47 x 7.6 cm

Epiphany 1997
wood, acrylic paint, miracles
60 crosses: varying dimensions

Oh Canada 1997
triptych: wood, acrylic paint, miracles
each: 121.9 x 96.5 x 3.8 cm

Roland Jean

Sans Titre 1986
oil on plywood chest
91.4 x 61 x 61 cm

Musée à Vendre 1992
oil, collage on plywood
134.6 x 243.8 cm

Reconstruction des écoles d'art 1992
oil, collage on plywood
175.3 x 175.3 cm

Sans Titre 1992-93
oil, collage on plywood
175.3 x 175.3 cm

Virgil 1993-94
oil, collage on plywood
182.9 x 243.8 cm

Sans Titre 1994
oil, collage on plywood
167.6 x 213.4 cm

Winsom

Divination 1997
oil on canvas
127 x 121.9 cm
Sacrifice 1997
oil on canvas, blood
127 x 121.9 cm

Spirit 1997
oil on canvas, spiritual three metal ring
127 x 121.9 cm

Gold Pyramid 1997
canvas, wood frame, fabric, wood carvings, St. Barbara statue, candles, Akan unity stool, Zemi (Arawak clay talisman)
198.1 x 198.1 x 144.8 cm

Red Pyramid 1997
canvas, wood frame, cowrie shells, conch shells, candle, aluminum basin, water, bible, stones, sweet grass, sage, tobacco leaves, snake, eggs, corn meal, vèvè
162 x 162 x 127 cm

White Pyramid 1997
canvas, wood frame, sand, crystal bowl, stones, skeletons, blood, water, collage, sea salt, candles, paint
50.8 x 50.8 x 91.4 cm

Keith Agard

Awakened Lion 1996
acrylic on canvas
91.4 x 121.9 cm

Compassionate Devil 1996
acrylic on canvas
76.2 x 61 cm

Disciple 1996
acrylic on canvas
91.4 x 121.9 cm

Earthly Desires 1996
acrylic on canvas
76.2 x 61 cm

Instinctive Wisdom 1996
acrylic on canvas
76.2 x 61 cm

Self-Reformation 1996
acrylic on canvas
91.4 x 121.9 cm

BIOGRAPHIES

Khadejha

Born in Philadelphia, Irva Mae "Khadejha" McCall lived extensively in Montreal before moving to her present residence in Coquitlam, B.C. She studied textile art in 1958, and since 1967 she has exhibited regularly both in Canada and in the United States.

Kofi Kayiga

Kofi Kayiga lives and works in Boston, Massachusetts, where he is a full professor of art in painting and drawing at the Department of Fine Arts, Massachusetts College of Art, Boston, U.S.A. He has exhibited extensively in the last thirty years on four continents in over thirty solo shows and three hundred group shows.

Jan Wade

Of mixed racial heritage, Jan Wade was born and raised in the African Canadian community in Hamilton, Ontario. Today, she lives and works in Vancouver. She has exhibited in England, the United States, South Africa and Canada.

Roland Jean

Roland Jean lives and works in Toronto. He specializes in painting, and since 1979 he has exhibited in Canada, Italy, U.S.A. and France.

Winsom

Winsom lives and works in Toronto. A painter, textile and installation artist, she studied spiritual concepts, symbols and symbolism in Mali and Ghana. She has exhibited in Canada, Jamaica and the United States.

Keith Agard

A painter, Keith Agard now lives and works in Toronto. He has exhibited in Canada, Jamaica and Guyana.

Nkiru Nzegwu

Nkiru Nzegwu is Associate Professor of Philosophy, Art History, Africana and Women's Studies at State University of New York at Binghamton. She is the author of numerous articles on gender, and African, African-American, and African-Canadian art and culture. She has organized exhibitions in the United States, Canada and Nigeria, including *The Creation...of the African-Canadian Odyssey* at The Power Plant and *Celebrating African Identity: Politics and Icons of Representation* at A Space.



Art Gallery of Ontario

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ENTERING THE MILLENNIUM: A SPIRITUAL DIALOGUE

Guest curator:
Nkiru Nzegwu



Ancestors – grandmothers, grandfathers, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers. Spiritual systems – Santería, Abakwa, Candomblé, Umbanda, Pukuminia, Catholicism, Hoodoo and Vodun. Ritual specialists – *babalawo*, *papaloi*, *iyalorixa*, *obeah*, *houngan*, *mambo*. Divination systems – *ifa*, *boco*. Divinities (*Orisha/orixás/loa*) – Oya, Sango/Xangó, Oshun, Ogun/Ogoun, Oshosi/Oshossi, Obatala/Oxalá, Obaluaye/Omolu, Yemoja/Yemanjá, Orumila, Olorun/Olofin, Nzambi, Damballa, Gede, Arada, Congo, Agwé, Eshu-Legba-Eleggua. Life-force – *Asé/axé*. In the diasporic African world, these names, concepts and categories mark the terrain of the syncretized Afro-spiritual practices in the Americas. Naming a reality once hidden from view, they rend the veil of erasure and silence that was imposed on African spirituality. They mark the spaces of African cultural survival in the Americas, and the institutions utilized in the transformations of personal experience into spiritual energy.

Spirituality in ancestral African life is an everyday phenomenon. Diffused throughout all facets of life, it restructures the European view of the world, making the *meta* (beyond or behind) reality a permeable extension of everyday life. Death becomes an extension of life, not its cessation. Ancestors, possessing *asé*, live in a transformed state, periodically journeying to visit, and when called upon, to work on behalf of their progenitors. *Asé*, the life-force, the vital energy that animates and activates power, imbues all things with life. Within the identified spiritual systems of Orisha-worship, Santería, Candomblé, Abakwa, Umbanda, Hoodoo, and Vodun, *asé* facilitates creation and, under conditions of *mounted* (spirit-possessed) or altered consciousness, art becomes a prayer that controls physical conditions and transforms human experience. As embodied spirits, artists are channellers of *asé* and cosmic ideas.

Spirituality, in the African diaspora, defines an interconnected reality in which the world of the living and the world of the departed are intertwined. The past is connected to the future through the present. We are all extensions of our ancestors in the way our progenitors are/will be of ourselves. Naming herself "child-elder of many visible and invisible ancestors," **Khadejha** engages the ancestors in a critical dialogue of lineage history. Delicately suspended, *Grand Orisha*, the silkscreened, painted textile mobile, speaks together with the moss-covered, fruit-laden *Father Orishas* about gender, cultural and racial experiences in the family nexus. Conceived as a medium for remembering specific family histories, for validating currently invalidated ancestors, and for resolving long-standing family tensions, Khadejha's installation demands an answer to the questions: "Whom am I?" and "How came I to be?" Solidifying personal experiences in the fretwork of identity, the installation re-presents Khadejha's "self" and history and the "selves" and histories of other diasporic Africans as sites of complex convergences of multiple ethnicities and races: African, Chickasaw, Seminole, Iroquois, Cherokee and European.

An artist-mystic on a path to higher knowledge, **Kofi Kayiga** seeks a balance between spirituality and materiality as he touches "the deep energy that makes the heart beat and the sun set." His high-energy colours, semi-abstract expressionist forms in *Spirit of Kundalini*, *Katonda*, and *The Nurturer and Protector* radiate a consciousness that is both meditative and an intuitive reflection of the forms and structures he apprehends in his mystical journeys. Working multi-compositionally, on many paintings at the same time, Kayiga injects a free-flowing quality to his paintings, and in the process he creates an underlying visual unity of patterns and themes. The spontaneous nature of his creative process reduces the probability of compositional error from his spiritualized Afro-expressionist work since, in his view, "all destruction is new creation in an endless cycle of creativity." Kayiga's conception of spirituality is all encompassing: a hybrid blend of Eastern mysticism fused with Masonic principles, Rastafarian ideas, and strengthened with African esoteric principles he learned in Uganda. Given Kayiga's preoccupation with the invisible, his brilliantly colourful paintings such as *The High Kingdom*, *Concept of Fertility*, and the *Twin Light Beings* emit intense primeval energies of immense visual force. As well, they depict primordial mystical ideas and concepts that speak of an expanded reality and of a wisdom that lies beyond tomorrow.

An African Canadian of mixed racial heritage, **Jan Wade** brings to her conception of the spiritual, the complex experiences of life in a racialized society. Cohabiting within her in uneasy relations, the

White side of her cultural heritage negates the existence of her Black history and heritage, while the latter castigates the White side for its brutality and denials. Turning to AfroCuban Santería, Wade develops a calibrated visual language of religious symbols to suture the rift in her bi-cultured identity. She deploys the dissembling vision of her Southern Ontario Black heritage, and subversively turns the Christian cross, a former symbol of oppression imposed on her enslaved ancestors by her slave-owning ancestors, into a liberating icon of the oppressed. In *Epiphany*, a mammoth collection of totemic Christian crucifixes of diverse formations, Wade forces to attention the strange symbiotic relationship of her two ancestral cultures. The cross is partitioned into separate narrative sections, and transformed with colours, patterns, and miniature objects that relocates it into the sphere of diasporic African aesthetics. Moreover, as symbolic crossroads or intersections of two contesting cultures, these elaborately decorated Christian symbols of salvation provide a multi-purpose background against which a plethora of contemporary pop culture icons are fixed: guns, KKK-lettering, skulls, hearts, horseshoes, little men in suits, crowns, fists, records, nails and ladders. This unsettling convergence of the sacred and the profane draws attention to the prevailing poverty of mainstream spiritual life, and interrogates the spiritual aridity of pop culture.

A *houngan* translating deep esoteric beliefs, **Roland Jean** travels the path of uprooted experiences and uprooted existence giving physical form to abstraction. Pulled by the uncontrollable creative power of his *loa*, he scripts numerological signs that simulate the logic and formulae of higher mathematics. Under "mounted" consciousness, he intuitively chooses the white colour for the mathematical symbols and letterings, implicitly evoking the ritual *vèvè*s, or white cornmeal flour markings, of Vodun liturgical rites. Random, yet controlled, the intellectualizing order of *Sans Titre* (1992-93), *Reconstruction des écoles d'art*, *Musée à Vendre* invokes both the emotional/disciplined quality of a Vodun ritual and the ordered clutter of the *pé* (altar) in the *hounfor* (sanctuary). Jean assumes a discursive tone as he deploys red, the colour of the warrior *loa*, Ogoun, to reshape and reinvent reality. In a classic counter-hegemonic move, the apocalyptic vision of his paintings unsettles the canonical status of Renaissance art, and the aesthetic order and permanence we normally expect from it. Contesting cultural dominance, Jean appropriates the human faces and forms in the fetishized paintings of Michelangelo, cuts them up, defaces some, and subjects the cut-up pieces to his own interpretive logic. In this atavistic struggle against Europe's imperialism, Jean reenacts the subversive strategies of the *houngan*, cleverly masking his artistic intentions with postmodernist rhetoric in the way Catholicism was once used to conceal Vodun as it consolidated its power prior to the 1776 revolutionary uprising that paved the way for Haitian independence.

Fusing her African and Arawak identities in a spiritual rite of validation, **Winsom** brings an intensity of faith to art that reflects her own spiritual development. Within her conceptual scheme, art is no longer a physicalist creation of forms and shapes, but a prayer, a ritual, a sacrifice, or an incantation. Though constructed to narrate the different facets of the histories of peoples of African and Arawak (First People of Jamaica) descent, the three – gold, red and white – pyramids are altars for spiritual communion and for the validation of ancestral memory. Creating spiritually, Winsom initiates a fusion of the magical and the ritualistic, resulting in her transformation into an *obeah* woman, the manipulator of the invisible. She brings to creativity this *obeah*-clarified vision that both identifies the power of creation as spiritual and transforms the work produced into sacred objects. Firmly rooted in hybridized African rituals and ceremonies, the shrine-installations she creates become special spaces for spiritual communication and communion. The candles, *ilekes* (sacred collars), rooster, wooden mortar, skeletons, salt, cowrie shells, and gourds establish the requisite ground for calling on the *Orishas* in the spirit world to direct and channel their regenerative forces on this world. This life-affirming ritual honours the ancestors even as it celebrates the power of the *Orishas* that journey between the worlds.

Keith Agard follows the Buddhist path towards spiritual advancement of which there are ten stages. For him, Buddhism provides the pivotal basis for the elaboration of his spiritual development, and constitutes the most significant influence in his art. According to him, "Unity is the centre of our being.... The dominant force that holds the universe together as a single unit is life itself, and at the very core of this life is 'Myoho-renge-kyo' [devotion to the mystic law of causal effect]." Agard's paintings reflect the life conditions specified under some of the ten stages. *Compassionate Devil* grapples with the suffering one undergoes when trapped by rage and the impulse to destroy. In another stage, defined as *Earthly Desires*, an individual is preoccupied by insatiable desires for food, sex, power, wealth, fame and pleasure; while in the animalistic stage of *Instinctive Wisdom*, the individual lacks the relevant sense of reason or morality that must be developed. Very much like the Catholic devotional ritual, *Stations of the Cross*, the ten stages of the Buddhist path lead to greater enlightenment and to an integrated personality. Agard's ultimate goal in art is to produce out of the totality of his life experience. For this reason, he places a great premium in developing a "Myohocentric" consciousness and intelligence.

Nkiru Nzegwu