MESTRE DIDI

EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO

ubu

SIRE DIDI

Spiritual Form

Edited by
Rodrigo Moura
Ayrson Heráclito
Chloë Courtney

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[1] Mestre Didi at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, 1967.

[2] Mestre Didi in Ifé, Nigeria, February, 1967.

DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

With the opening of *Mestre Didi: Spiritual Form* at El Museo del Barrio, the Afro-Brazilian artist, curator, and priest makes a symbolic return to New York. In 1986, Mestre Didi (1917–2013) visited the city for the Third International Congress on Orisha Tradition and Culture. At the same time, the solo exhibition *Mestre Didi: An Afro-Brazilian Artist* presented his striking works at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem, exemplifying his dual commitment to art and cultural advocacy. Despite the extensive recognition Didi's work garnered both during and after his lifetime, the Schomburg presentation has been his only solo exhibition at a New York City cultural institution until now.

Under the leadership and expertise of Rodrigo Moura, chief curator, and guest curator Ayrson Heráclito, *Spiritual Form* heralds the return of the master's work to New York with his first major solo exhibition to take place in the United States in twenty-five years. Working closely with partners in Brazil, the curatorial team reviewed hundreds of works to choose the sculptures presented here, which collectively span Didi's decades-long practice from the 1960s to the 2010s. The exhibition's focus on Afro-Brazilian religious tradition continues El Museo's longstanding investment in Afro-diasporic histories and culture. Key works by Didi's artistic peers reveal a shared interest in African spirituality and visual languages, tendencies which indelibly shaped twentieth-century Brazilian art. Recent works by contemporary artists in sculpture, design, and video further demonstrate how these legacies continue to resonate today.

This catalogue, the first English-language monograph on Didi, provides valuable resources for understanding the artist's life and work, including new scholarship by the curators and invited contributors. Heráclito, working together with his brother Beto, a historian, discusses Didi's deep religious roots. Roberto Conduru tracks Didi's aesthetic evolution over decades, while Joselia Aguiar chronicles his biography against the sociohistorical conditions of race in twentieth-century Brazil. Importantly for this presentation in New York, Abigail Lapin Dardashti traces Didi's international exhibitions and curatorial work abroad. Finally, selected excerpts of Didi's own writings allow readers to engage directly with his scholarly research and personal narratives. By making these sources available in English, we hope to foster deep engagement with Didi's multifaceted and prolific body of work.

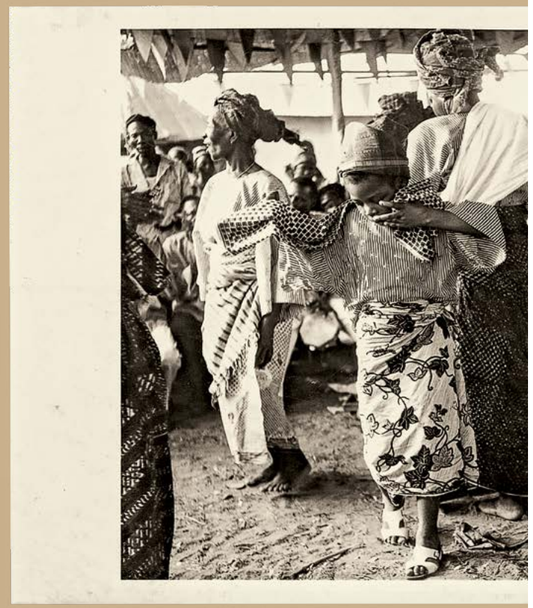
Spiritual Form results from a collaborative international network of support, including Inaicyra Falcão, Mestre Didi's daughter. Many of the exhibition's lenders kindly shared research, including Almeida & Dale Galeria de Arte, Bernardo de Mello Paz, Guilherme Simões de Assis, Paulo Darzé Galeria, and Rafael Moraes. We are grateful for the participation of all the lenders, both in Brazil and the United States.

This historic exhibition would not have come to fruition without the generosity of foundations, corporate donors, and patrons. I am grateful to the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Ministério da Cultura of Brazil, and Itaú for their leading sponsorship of *Mestre Didi: Spiritual Form*. We also acknowledge the support of the Diane & Bruce Halle Foundation, The Edward W. Rose III Family Fund at The Dallas Foundation, and the Consulate General of Brazil in New York/ Instituto Guimarães Rosa, as well as the contributions of Guilherme Simões de Assis, Graham Steele, Flavia & Guilherme Teixeira, Allan Schwartzman, Fernanda Feitosa and Heitor Martins, Almeida & Dale Galeria de Arte, São Paulo, and James Cohan Gallery. Thanks to these acts of support, El Museo is able to illuminate both Mestre Didi's landmark career and the wider legacy of Afro-Brazilian art, which has only lately—and deservedly—begun to receive full acknowledgment amid the turn toward global modernisms.

PATRICK CHARPENEL
Executive Director

Essays

By contextualizing Mestre Didi's life and work in relation to the sociohistorical conditions of race in twentieth-century Brazil and Brazilian modernism, the following critical texts bring together valuable new scholarship. They offer thorough analyses of Didi's early artistic training and aesthetic evolution over decades, the spiritual and political ethos of his sculptures, and his participation in hemispheric Afro-diasporic networks connecting the United States, Brazil, West Africa, and the Caribbean.



All photographs by Juana Elbein dos Santos and Mestre Didi from an album documenting their UNESCO-funded fieldwork in Nigeria and Dahomey (now the Republic of Benin), 1967. Collection Rafael Moraes.

RODRIGO MOURA

Spiritual Form: Mestre Didi at El Museo del Barrio

Mestre Didi: Spiritual Form is the artist's first monographic exhibition in a museum outside Brazil in the twenty-first century. It aims to reposition Mestre Didi's artwork in the hemispheric context of Afro-diasporic narratives, a longstanding institutional priority at El Museo, and to underscore his status as one of the foremost Brazilian artists of the second half of the twentieth century.[1] Didi developed a prolific and radical body of sculpture between the decades of 1960 and 2010. His work was widely shown and lauded during his lifetime, but its circulation and reception were often circumscribed by the hierarchies and preconceptions of the art system. Now, as decolonial approaches to artistic modernisms expand the reach and relevance of the Global South, and the far-reaching influence of African art gains broader recognition, Didi's work finally receives new readings and interpretations. What is largely at stake in his striking forms is a marked disavowal of the hegemonic discourse that mythologizes abstraction as an invention of European "high modernism." Instead, his sculpture connects directly with West African sources, illuminating them as an alternate wellspring of formal and conceptual innovation.

It is impossible to separate Didi's art practice from the fact that he was a Candomblé spiritual leader as well as a researcher and activist for Afro-Brazilian culture and religion. *Spiritual Form* encompasses the different activities to which Mestre Didi was devoted and which are singularly interwoven in his practice, honoring his decisive contributions as a writer, researcher, priest (*assogbá* in the cult of Obaluaiye, *alapini* in the cult of the Egunguns), sculptor, and a pioneer artist in conceiving a distinctive mode of expression based on the sacred forms of Candomblé. In the exhibition and this accompanying publication, Didi is presented as a major

public figure of the global African diaspora whose work is indispensable for understanding past, present, and future art. His work builds connections between different spheres of culture, negating the categorical separations imposed by Western thought, inherited under the framework of coloniality. With its visual vivacity and profound capacity to disrupt the art system, Didi's work offers the possibility of transcending the inherited trauma of centuries of enslavement and its enduring, pernicious effects on Brazilian society. The legacy featured here is, therefore, fertile, with a scope of influence that has only begun to unfold, and a growing aesthetic relevance that is ultimately inseparable from its reparative power.

Born in 1917, Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos was raised in a prominent Candomblé family in Salvador, in Brazil's northeastern state of Bahia. A result of the strong African influx stemming from the transatlantic traffic of enslaved people, Candomblé evolved in Bahia as a Brazilian expression of the cult of orishas, garnering millions of practitioners who found it to be one of the most powerful forms of spiritual and cultural connection to their African roots. Encouraged by his mother, the Iyalorisha Mãe Senhora (Maria Bibiana do Espírito Santo), Didi was first initiated in the *terreiros* dedicated to the cult of the Egunguns on Itaparica island near Salvador (Ilê Babá Olukotun, in 1925, and Ilê Agboulá, in 1934). He then found his spiritual path in the Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá, which had been founded in 1910 and was led by Senhora beginning in 1938.[2] He learned from adolescence how to build the ritual instruments used in the worship of the orishas, a specialized craft that laid the groundwork for his eventual artistic language. At a relatively young age, he also dedicated himself to other aspects of Yoruba culture and its influence in Bahia, publishing in 1950 the booklet *Iorubá tal qual se fala*, which promoted the use and comprehension of the Yoruba language.[3] Other important publications followed, including a history of Ilê Afonjá first issued in 1962.[4] Excerpts from these works and other examples of Didi's writings are republished in English for the first time in this catalogue.

During those years, the legendary, still-active *terreiro* of Ilê Afonjá played a decisive role in easing racial divides by fostering relationships with the artists who have been characterized as the first generation of Bahian modernism. It brought white artists and writers into dialogue with Candomblé, therefore combating the state-sanctioned repression of Afro-Brazilian religious expression. These connections define the cultural context in which Mestre Didi's work emerged. The novelist Jorge Amado, a key figure in this scene, wrote the introductory text to one of Didi's earliest exhibition catalogues and the preface to one of his books, gestures of legitimization and political alliance that contributed to the artist's work being recognized outside religious circles. Although Didi never fully broke with this generation of Bahian modernists, he eventually distanced himself from them in the 1970s. In doing so, he drew closer to African cultures, forgoing validation from white intellectuals and turning his back on premature celebrations of Brazil's cultural hybridity as a sign of racial equity—a fallacy known as the myth of "racial democracy." Didi's work and life story provide powerful alternatives to such delusory models. His strategic actions in the realms of art and advocacy can be seen as early instances of the processes that might be described as the "re-Africanization" of various cultural practices, which were critical for the renewal of Black movements in Brazil in the late 1970s.

As a result of this process, in the intervening years Didi deepened his vocation in the cult of Egunguns, which venerates the spirits of the ancestors, in contrast to the cult of orishas, the deities from the sacred pantheon that represent the vital forces of nature. Unlike the worship of orishas, which is supervised by woman-led Candomblé societies, the cult of Egunguns is practiced exclusively by men. Expanding on this tradition, in 1980 Didi founded the Sociedade Cultural e Religiosa Ilê Asipá of which he was the supreme priest, in Salvador's Piatã neighborhood.[5] The Asipá is one of Didi's major enduring legacies, and its inception followed that of the Sociedade de Estudos da Cultura Negra no Brasil (SECNEB) in 1974, which established a community to foster new studies and new generations of spiritual practitioners, intellectuals and artists who, like Didi, and inspired by his example, would broaden the reach of Candomblé, its cosmovision, and its African ancestry.[6]

Mestre Didi only began showing his sculptures in mainstream art spaces when he was nearly fifty years old, with his first solo exhibitions at Galeria Ralf in Salvador and Galeria Bonino in Rio de Janeiro in 1964. Following this debut, he quickly garnered prestige within the fledgling Latin American art market, showing at São Paulo's Atrium and at El Altillo in Buenos Aires in 1965. This rapid rise in the art scene was also fueled by his appearance in the first Bienal da Bahia, as the Primeira Bienal Nacional de Artes Plásticas was commonly known. While the event aimed to invigorate Salvador's art scene, just as important was its role in connecting the mainstream Rio-São Paulo axis to the cultural fervor then unfolding in Bahia's capital. In those days, intellectuals such as the Italian architect Lina Bo Bardi and the Swiss composer Walter Smetak were breathing new life into institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art of Bahia and the Music School of the Federal University of Bahia, influencing a new generation of artists and researchers.

In addition to this growing success as an artist, Didi also continued to maintain a complex, multivalent professional life, creating new models for his cultural advocacy. This included proposing frameworks for circulating Afro-Bahian culture and building transatlantic networks that connected African diasporas at a global level. In 1967, alongside his wife, the anthropologist Juana Elbein dos Santos, who studied Nagô (Brazilian Yoruba) culture in Bahia and was one of the principal promoters of his work, Didi embarked on a months-long research trip funded by UNESCO to study religious practice among Yoruba and Fon communities in

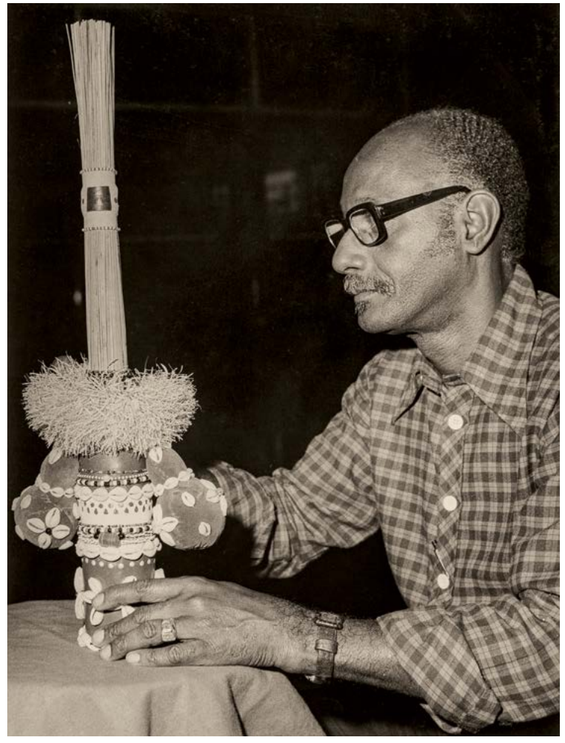

A SOCIEDADE CRUZ SANTA DO AXÉ OPÔ AFONJÁ

Tem a honra de convidar V. Excia. e Exma. Família para as cerimônias de encerramento do Odun Xangô, Cofó Xya-Massé a realizar-se às 19 horas do dia 11 de Julho de 1976 em suas dependencias da rua São Gonçalo do Retiro s/n.

A IYALAXÉ

O PRESIDENTE

[3] Invitation to the Sociedade Cruz Santa do Axé Opô Afonjá, 1976.



[4] Mestre Didi with *Xaxará Ado Meji*. Photograph undated. See Pl. 62.

[5] Mestre Didi, Camafeu de Oxóssi, and Dorival Caymmi in the house of Jorge Amado, 1964.

Nigeria and the Republic of Benin.[7] Building on this work and the connections it yielded, in 1968 they began a long-term project funded by the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs titled *Arte Afro-Brasileira*.[8] As Abigail Lapin Dardashti explains in her essay commissioned for this publication, this initiative included a research phase focused on popular sources of Afro-Bahian material culture and Candomblé, with visits to cities of the Recôncavo Baiano region south of Salvador. The result was a traveling exhibition with a long itinerary of venues in African, European, and Latin American countries. Working in a hybrid role as both exhibition maker and featured artist, Didi executed several sculptures for different iterations of this show, which, according to Lapin Dardashti's analysis, led to a maturing and diversification of his sculptural practice.

By maintaining ties with official Bahian modernism, publishing books about Candomblé, showing his work in commercial galleries, and organizing *Arte Afro-Brasileira*, Didi crafted a strategic method for balancing his presence in mainstream cultural circles and private religious life. These twin concerns mirror what the co-curator of this exhibition, Ayrson Heráclito, and the co-author of his essay in this volume, Beto Heráclito, describe as an alternation between actions for visibility and for the preservation of sacred secrets ("Da porteira pra fora / da porteira pra dentro").[9] On the other hand, by the end of the traveling exhibition's tour in 1974, his ties with Africa were stronger, which enabled a maturing of his spiritual credentials as well as a deepening of his community activism, as shown through the founding of Ilê Asipá, where both trends indeed converge. This shift mirrors changing discourses on race in Brazil from the mid-197Os to the early 198Os, when a wide swath of cultural producers embraced African origins: musician Gilberto Gil joined Festac '77 (the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture) in Nigeria, and released his most African-oriented album to date, *Refavela* (1977); the Bahian artist Rubem Valentim exhibited his *Templo de Oxalá* series dedicated to the orishas at the São Paulo Biennial (1977); and the Movimento Negro Unificado (United Black Movement) was founded in São Paulo (1978).[10]

By including sculptures ranging across the artist's decades-long career, not only does *Mestre Didi: Spiritual Form* set out to provide enlightening connections between his work and biography, but it also enables a deep formal immersion in his oeuvre. The exhibition's framework traces the transformation of Didi's sculpture over the course of more than five decades, proposing a set of loosely chronological themes. This division, which is inherently flexible and porous, begins with two generative elements of Didi's early work, which he endlessly remade in later sculptures: the shashara and ibiri. The shashara is the primary emblem of Obaluaiye, an orisha associated with healing and disease as well as earth, wisdom, and age. Crafted out of palm fiber and adorned with cowrie shells, leather straps, straw, gourds, and strings of beads, this instrument is used for ritualistic purposes as a sort of broom that wards off undesired evils. In Didi's work, the shashara is often combined with the ibiri, a kind of staff that is an attribute of the orisha Nana Buruku, a maternal female spiritual force and one of the oldest orishas in the pantheon, linked to earth, inland waters, and fertility. Its curved shape is associated with the womb and has ritualistic uses. The intersection of fibers bound into moldable, ornamented bundles and the curvature of the ibiri constitutes a sort of formal matrix that enabled Didi to create endless variations throughout his career, incorporating the iconographies of other orishas from the sacred pantheon.

Towards the final years of his output, Didi's mastery of these techniques also brought his work closer to figurative expression, including anthropo-zoomorphic representations that enrich his imagery. Another core element developed by Didi is the scepter, in a potential allusion to the *opaxorô*, the staff of the orisha Oshala (which is indeed featured in one of his works, Pl. 23), associated with the creation of the universe. In evoking this shape, Didi introduces a central vertical axis from which repeating shapes emanate rhythmically, increasing the tension between the empty spaces and linear propensity of his sculptural language. Importantly, attention has also been paid to Didi's experimentation with the different materials that characterize his sculptural work, including terracotta, various plant-based materials, as well as fabrics and mirrors that evoke the traditional garments used by the cult of Egunguns.

One approach to interpreting Mestre Didi's oeuvre, though experimental and yet to be further explored, is to view it in light of the Brazilian counterculture's societal changes and emergent liberation of the body during the 197Os. With its visual exuberance and organic materials, which diametrically oppose the normative visual codes enforced by white supremacy and the colonized tastes of the elites of Southeast Brazil, Didi's work leans toward a free body fabricated through spiritual connections, empowering that which is historically marginalized and deemed vulgar by racist perspectives. To quote the words of the Bahian singer-songwriter Caetano Veloso, in his eponymous song from the album *Cinema Transcendental* (1979), Didi's oeuvre is "Beleza Pura" (Pure beauty). It can be understood through the celebration of African aesthetics described by Veloso's song, which adopts the perspective of a Black woman styling her hair. The lyrics specify "All along the lines of her braided hairstyle/ Seashells." And then, in what sounds almost like a direct description of Didi's work, "It's all so fancy it's all so elegant / Have them weave

[6] Mestre Didi (Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos). *Contos negros da Bahia* [Black stories of Bahia], 1961.Edições GRD, Rio de Janeiro. Cover and illustrations by Carybé.

in / Fine raffia / And let it all be braided / All the cowrie shells." We must not forget that Didi engaged in the craft of making wearable sculptures, necklaces of organic matter that speak to the rich tradition of Afro-Brazilian jewelry in Bahia. These were entirely "odara," to use a groovy insider term from those days, borrowed from Pajubá, the Yoruba-inflected language of the LGBTQIA+ community—and, incidentally, the title of another 1970s song by Caetano.[11]

Tapping into other ontological veins, Mestre Didi's work essentially challenges imposed boundaries between sacred art and autonomous art meant for aesthetic consumption as per the Western model. Though entirely developed out of sacred Yoruba religious forms from both Brazil and Africa, it departs from those forms, comprising a distinct formal vocabulary of Didi's own authorship—effectively transcending the formal and spiritual circumscription of ritual objects in the religious realm. Moreover, this development occurred in parallel with Didi's trajectory in the art system, which of course, has its own tacit rituals and sacred precepts. A glance at Mestre Didi's entry in Enciclopédia Itaú reveals that he participated in over a hundred solo and group exhibitions. In other words, his trajectory in the art world seems not only calculated, but also consequential.

I first experienced Mestre Didi's work in 1996 in the individual gallery devoted to him at the XXIII Bienal de São Paulo, which that year dealt with questions concerning the dematerialization of the work of art, overseen by curator Nelson Aguilar. Alongside European modernists such as Paul Klee and Edvard Munch, New York staples like Jean-Michel Basquiat, Cy Twombly, and Andy Warhol, and Brazilian artists that truly seemed to converse with his work like Tomie Ohtake and Rubem Valentim, Didi's art seemed to defy whatever logic may have attempted to reduce him to primitivism or exoticism. Being very young and not entirely certain as to the formal base for his language, I immediately associated it with an experimental formalist strain of Brazilian art, in a sort of super-modern aesthetic with organic materials and expansive "drawing-in-space" gestures. His work contains a desire for clarity and synthesis that is not surprising to encounter in a country deeply marked by the constructivist legacy, but which, in Didi's case, hails from elsewhere.

Since then, it has remained imperative to communicate the impact of this work upon Brazilian and global art. This project at El Museo del Barrio, with its new interpretative frameworks and historical readings, has the potential to set that in motion. Within this effort, it seemed crucial to me to contextualize Didi in dialogue with some of his peers. Agnaldo Manoel dos Santos and Aurelino dos Santos emerged in Salvador amid the context of popular art, yet defied its boundaries—the former with sculpture connecting multiple African influences in Brazilian art, and the latter with a fantastic and geometrical take on the city's architecture. Artists such as Jorge dos Anjos, Emanoel Araújo, Abdias Nascimento, and Rubem Valentim, like Didi, tapped into the symbolic realm of the orishas to renew the language of abstraction. A parallel case with Didi's is José Adário dos Santos who has been creating Candomblé sculptures/tools for the last sixty years. Younger artists include Ayrson Heráclito (who has co-curated this project with me), Antonio Oloxedê (Didi's grandson), and Nádia Taquary (a major female voice within this lineage). We also invited the master textile designer Goya Lopes to create an immersive installation featuring patterns inspired by Didi's work, and the master photographer Arlete Soares to provide images of Candomblé *terreiros* in Salvador and of the cult of Egunguns in Benin. Rather than being a cohesive, definitive collection, these dialogues provide a context of complementarities and tensions, where Didi's voice joins a landscape of multiple artistic riches.

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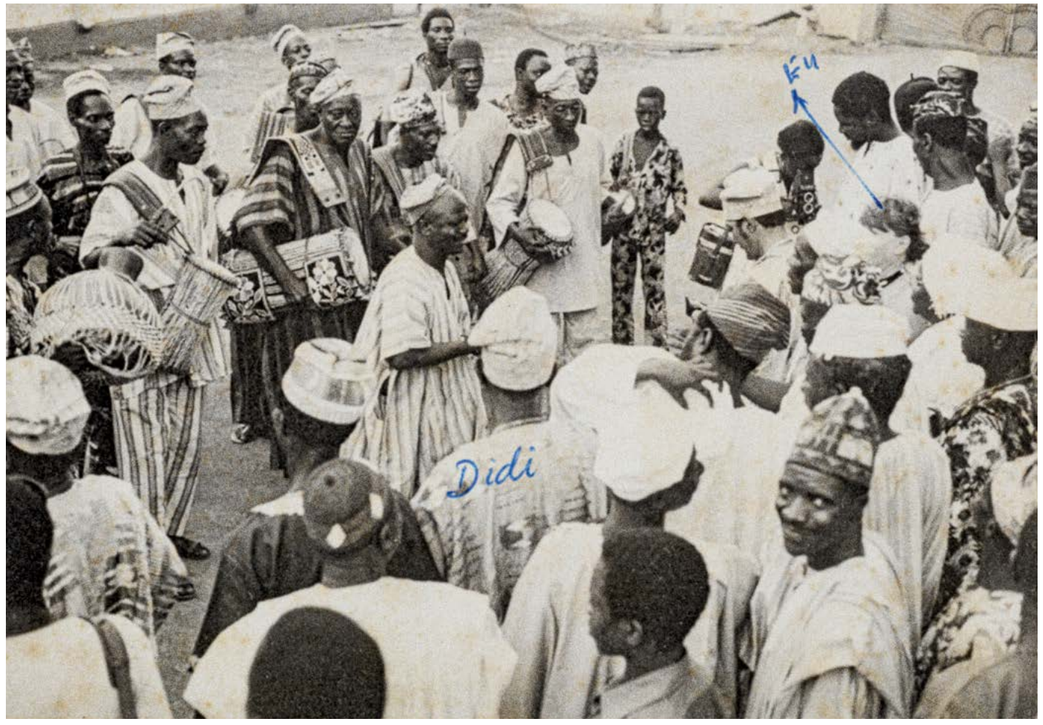
A project as important as this has many beginnings, landmarks, and genealogies within the institutional history it is affiliated with. In Mestre Didi's case, the fact that his oeuvre had only been shown in a New York venue once, at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in 1986, rendered the task of bringing it here urgent, rather than simply opportune. Part of the Third International Congress on Orisha Tradition and Culture, this earlier exhibition intersects significantly with the history of El Museo, which was directed from 1971 to 1975 by Marta Moreno Vega, Puerto Rican artist, curator, activist, and Didi's interlocutor in New York as a co-organizer of the Congress. Moreno Vega envisioned the community-oriented El Museo as a sanctuary of antiracism and a premier institution for celebrating the African diaspora, invoking the "quilombo spirit"—a reference to Brazilian communities formed by those who escaped slavery. This legacy has inspired us to work on a series of projects centered around the contribution of art inspired by African diasporic religions. Here, we must mention *Popular Painters and Other Visionaries* (2021), an exhibition that showcased the work of Vodun-inspired Haitian school artists like Rigaud Benoît, Jean-Richard Chery, and Gerard Valcin in dialogue with Brazilian counterparts such as Chico Tabibuia and Rafael Borjes de Oliveira. This dialogue was broadened through the "Afro-Diasporic Modernities" section of our groundbreaking permanent collection exhibition *Something Beautiful – Reframing La Colección* (2023). In this room, the work of sculptor José Adário, a remarkable metalsmith of Candomblé iron tools from Salvador, sparked a dialogue not only with art made in Brazil and Haiti, but also in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Latinx diaspora in New York. With this expansive scope, we sought to highlight these artists' contributions toward a concept of modernity underpinned by shared sensibilities external to the Eurocentric values and structural



[7] Postcard of Mestre Didi and Juana Elbein dos Santos, likely in West Africa, undated.

[8] Juana Elbein dos Santos, Mestre Didi, Marco Aurélio Luz, and unidentified person at the *terreiro* Ilê Asipá, Piatã, Salvador, Brazil, undated.

racisms of Latin American societies, including the art world.

Another key step along the path that brought us here was the generous 2021 donation by the gallerists Antônio Almeida, Carlos Dale Jr., Paulo Darzé, and Thais Darzé, of an undated sculpture by Mestre Didi to our permanent collection. This addition allowed us to delve deeper into Didi's work, and for that we are grateful. Our sincere thanks also go to the lenders to the exhibition, including the Dallas Museum of Art, all the private collections in Brazil and in the United States, as well as the archives of the New York Public Library and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and of Rafael Moraes, São Paulo, which supplied us with documents for the exhibition and this book. Inaicyra Falcão, the daughter of Mestre Didi and an artist in her own right, was a crucial supporter of the project and shared treasures with us. All of the book's contributors have been interlocutors with the curators, in their generous and thorough sharing of evidence, outlooks, and perspectives, and without whom this project would not have achieved the relevance it has. Thank you, Ayrson Heráclito, guest curator, and Chloë Courtney, curatorial fellow, for your partnership and all your invaluable input.

On August 3, 2024, as the year of the exhibition drew nearer, I paid a visit to Ilê Asipá, where I was welcomed by Alàgbá Bàbá Màriwó Genaldo Novaes. The spiritual guidance received that morning was decisive for this project to remain on the right track so as to keep alive the flame, the beauty, and the wisdom that emanate from the life and work of Mestre Didi. Axé.

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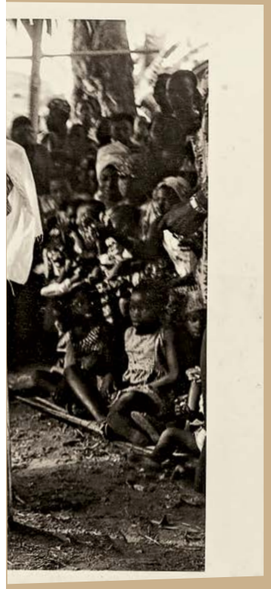
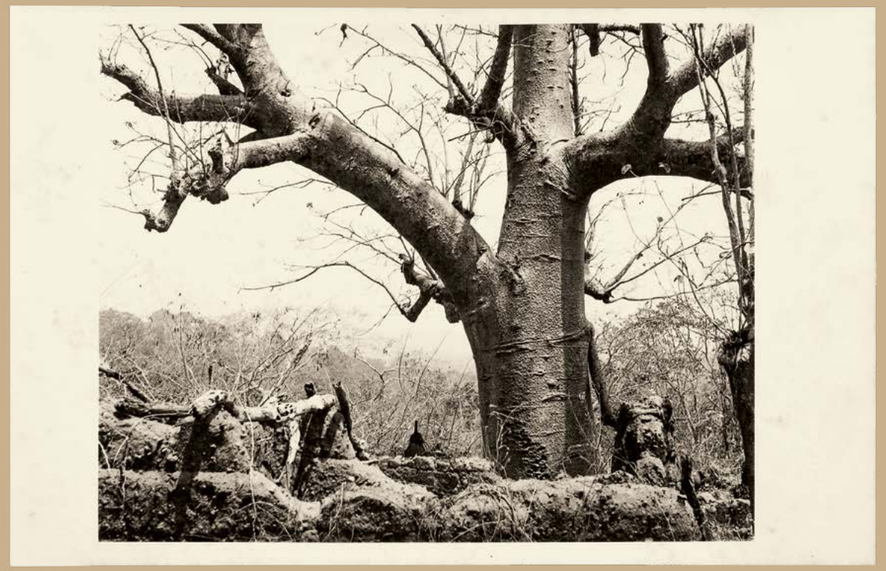
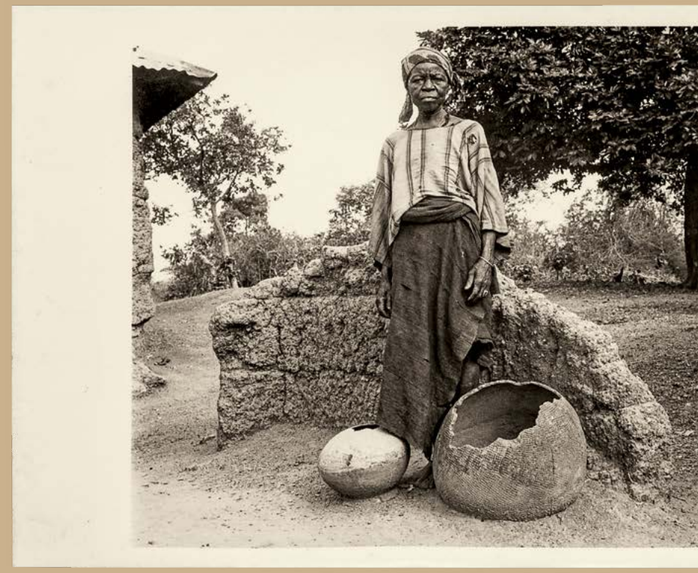
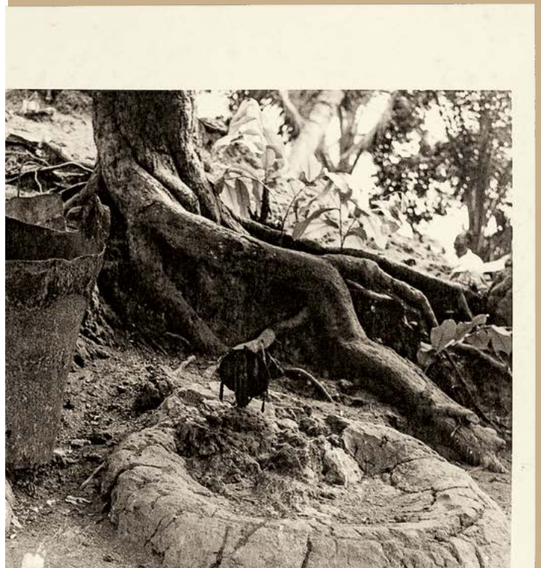








AYRSON HERÁCLITO & BETO HERÁCLITO

Mestre Didi: Creator of Visual Oriki

In this essay we will reflect on the contributions of Mestre Didi as an artist-priest who was guided by Nagô/Yoruba philosophical and aesthetic principles. Didi's polysemic set of interventions in the world, his varied strategies and tactics, define a way of life dedicated to combating racist violence, preserving and disseminating the cultural heritage of Afro-Brazilian populations. It is only through an expanded concept of art that we are able to understand his work, given that Western concepts fail to encompass the full scope of his artistic endeavors.[1] Therefore, we will be led by the Yoruba concepts and teachings from the Candomblé *terreiro*s, the centers of community worship that guided the practice of Mestre Didi. Our usage of the term visual oriki manifests the genre of Yoruba praise poem known as "oriki" through visual, and particularly sculptural, artworks that are not only aesthetic, but also vessels of spiritual and cultural expression.

The Black Rome

Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos (1917–2013), Mestre Didi, was a renowned *alapini*—a high priest of the Egungun cult in Africa and Brazil—writer, visual artist, curator, educator, playwright and activist whose life was dedicated to a complex and multifaceted decolonial project. This project's multiple fronts included social, educational, religious, and artistic acts of resistance and re-existence of the African diasporic culture.

Didi was descended from a line of Nagô/Yoruba priests and priestesses originating from Asipá royalty, and was an important figure in Brazilian society.[2] His ancestors were associated with the first Candomblé communities, and his biological mother was the revered Iyalorisha Mãe Senhora (Oxum Muiuá), the great-granddaughter of Marcelina da Silva (Obá Tossi), one of the founders of the first Candomblé temple in

[9] Early portrait of Mãe Senhora (Maria Bibiana do Espírito Santo), undated.

Brazil, Ilê Axé Airá Intilé, the legendary Candomblé of Barroquinha.[3]

He was initiated into Candomblé as a teenager by Mãe Aninha (Obá Biyi), an influential figure among the matriarchs of orisha worship in Brazil. Beyond her spiritual significance, she was also one of the first Black female intellectuals to write and debate about Blackness and racism in the context of modernity/coloniality in Brazil and Africa.[4] Obá Biyi wrote several influential articles on Candomblé, and had a high-profile role in the 1935 Afro-Brazilian Congress, which took place in Salvador, Bahia.[5] She is credited with the concept of "Black Rome" which was used to conceptualize the reality of Black people in Bahia.[6] In the first half of the twentieth century, a period when the idea of a racially-mixed democratic Brazilian nation was hegemonic, Aninha perceived a Bahia divided by the color of its inhabitants. Among the elites and in the halls of power, the white domain reigned, evident in the Eurocentric institutions and values that dictated the aims of society, which were indifferent to the African social norms of the majority of the population. When it was not transformed into a tourist commodity, the cultural heritage of Black people was reduced to the picturesque.[7] For Aninha, no matter how hard the elite and the people in public office tried to "de-Africanize" the culture and traditions of the former capital of Brazil, Salvador remained Black in its day-to-day practical life.[8] Mãe Aninha created the image of Salvador as a "Black Rome" to position it as a powerful African capital within the space of the Black Atlantic (the Ilê-Ifé of the Americas),[9] and a true empire of people of color, lost in the racist modern colonial project. To this racial singularity, she attributed the intense vitality (Axé) that emanated from Bahian society and made the capital of Bahia a major cultural and artistic hub.

It is essential to understand that life in Candomblé, in which Didi was raised, often exceeded the religious dimension, impacting everyday matters of social and cultural bonds. It was in these spaces that new bonds of survival and kinship would have been forged as a way to counteract the tragedy of slavery. In the space of the

[10] Arlete Soares. *Cadeira de Mãe Senhora, Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá* [Chair of Mãe Senhora], 2000.

terreiro communities, agreements, opinions, friendships, and political actions helped to create a unique Black identity in Bahia. The strength of these communities would also provoke the concern of the elite and the authorities.[10]

From their inception, Afro-Brazilian religions were criminalized and suffered an intense and systematic campaign of denigration. But even when not criminalized by the state or demonized by the Catholic Church, Candomblé was exoticized by ethnological fiction, which often devastated *terreiros* with its aim to publicize the secrets of these "primitive cults", to exhibit them in ethnographic museums and widely-circulated magazines, and to satisfy the perverse desires of the public.[11]

It is in this context that the modernist elites in Bahia—often proponents of the idea of racial democracy—understood Black participation in Brazilian social development as a "pacifying influence" for the construction of a harmonious mixed society. From this perspective, the place of Black culture was in the past, a place of sterile tradition and "historical mummification."[12] Thus, according to this perspective, the intellectual and artistic contributions of Afro-descendants were confined to the strictures of the primitive, the popular, and the folkloric.

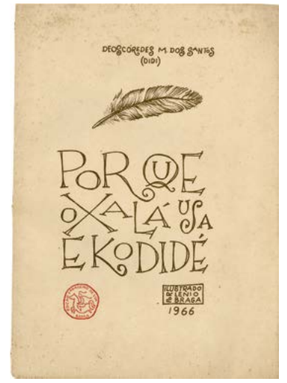
"For the Public Gaze/ Behind Closed Doors"

The *terreiro* community Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá, founded by Mãe Aninha in São Gonçalo do Retiro on the lands of the old Cabula and Urubu *quilombos* (settlements of escaped and freed slaves) in Salvador, responded to the disrespectful and sensationalist ways that Candomblé and Afro-diasporic cultures were treated by introducing a "visibility strategy" based on Nagô tradition that organized and systematized knowledge, liturgies, territories, and practices.[13] This approach, known as "da porteira pra fora/ da porteira pra dentro," clearly set out what could be reported or shared with the public and what should be reserved for those initiated in the religion.[14]

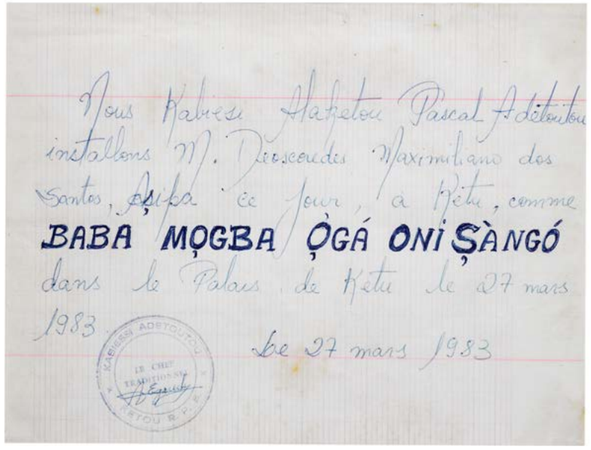
The category "da porteira para fora" encompasses a broad and multifaceted anti-racist struggle that is manifested through actions, interventions, and political and epistemic demonstrations of resistance. The objective of such practices is to demystify stigma and prejudice associated with the cosmogony of the African diaspora, as well as to popularize rites and deities from the Afro-Brazilian pantheon. This set of affirmative actions sought better integration within an inclusive society while also empowering the Black subject and celebrating their values, beliefs, culture, and African ancestry.

It is through this interpretative lens that we should view Didi's numerous interventions within the culture of the African diaspora and Bahian society. His pioneering act of bringing Afoxé Pai Burukô to the streets in 1942 pushed the limits of what could be shown as a way of disseminating Black performance originating from Candomblé. *Afoxés* are carnival associations directly tied to the *terreiros* that gained widespread recognition in Brazil for their rhythm, the *ijexá*. Didi recounted how the afoxé had started in 1935 as a children's game in the context of the *terreiro*. According to him, he had carved a wooden doll that he named Pai Abê. When Mãe Aninha heard about the game, she reprimanded the children and warned them that the old orisha Abê should not be involved in any carnival games. In renaming the afoxé Pai Burukô, Didi had one of his first lessons about what should stay "behind closed doors" and what could be communicated "for the public gaze."[15]

Mestre Didi's literary involvement was, like nearly all the actions that oriented his life, dedicated exclusively to promoting and honoring Nagô culture in Brazil. Indeed his first publication, *Iorubá tal qual se fala* (Yoruba As It's Spoken, 1950) sought to translate the ritual language of Candomblé for worshippers.



[11] Mestre Didi (Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos). *Por que Oxalá usa ekodide* [Why Oshala wears ekodide], 1966. Edição Cavaleiro da Lua, Salvador, Bahia. Illustrations by Lênio Braga.



[12] Documentation of Mestre Didi's title as Babá Mogba Ògá Oni Sàngó from the palace of Ketu, March 27, 1983.

With the creation of the Sociedade de Estudos da Cultura Negra no Brasil (Society for the Study of Black Culture in Brazil) (SECNEB) in 1974, Didi and other Black activists, intellectuals and artists sought to build a center for memory, tradition, research, and the dissemination of Afro-diasporic culture.[16] Through a variety of actions and events such as congresses, seminars and meetings, SECNEB exploited the mood for Pan-Africanism, encouraging triangular exchanges between Africa, Brazil, the USA, and the Caribbean. SECNEB promoted radical new ideas about Blackness through influential publications, art exhibitions, films, and teaching practices. For example, beginning in 1980 SECNEB would take part in the *Conferências Mundiais da Tradição dos Orixás e Cultura* (International Congresses of Orisha Tradition and Culture). These events were a collaboration with Haiti (Max Beauvoir), Nigeria (Wande Abimbola), and Cuba (Julito Collaso), with the third presentation held at the Caribbean Art Center in New York.[17]

One of SECNEB's greatest contributions was the innovative and relatively little-known multicultural education project "Mini-Comunidade Obá Biyi" (Obá Biyi Mini-Community), with children from São Gonçalo do Retiro and its environs. The pedagogy that was developed there set a precedent for decolonial education practices in Brazil. Its philosophy was founded on the Yoruba idea of *Èkó*, a holistic concept of education based on learning through all one's perceptive senses.[18]

"Behind Closed Doors"

The concept "behind closed doors" is a principle of restriction intended to preserve the domains and knowledge that are reserved for initiates and worshippers. Its purpose is to maintain the traditions that legitimize the sacred power of the *terreiro* community. The architecture of the *terreiro* clearly demarcates these distinct domains, with one space for the lay public and another reserved for initiates.

The political relationship of the *terreiro* communities with the wider society was marked by tactics and strategies that had been developed by the former over the course of conflicts and negotiations to achieve respect and recognition. An example of this kind of strategic action was the creation of the court of the "Ministros de Xangôs" (Ministers of Shango) comprised of twelve obás, whose role was to support and defend the orisha worship services.[19] Intellectuals, artists, and other prominent figures such as Jorge Amado, Dorival Caymmi, Pierre Verger, Carybé, and Vivaldo da Costa Lima were among those who held the title of Obá de Xangô.[20]

Over the course of the twentieth century, the *terreiro* communities would deploy the concept of "behind closed doors" to protect their sacred heritage from the insatiable curiosity of the Rolleiflex cameras, the Brazilianists with their ethnography notebooks, the Africanists in search of African orthodoxy, the anthropologists seeking informants, and the major newspapers and magazines with their taste for the terrifying primitive. A strict control over religious initiation and training legitimized and consecrated the quality—and as a result, the respectability—of Candomblé, all due to careful maintenance of "behind closed doors" practices. From the 1930s onward, religious associations connected to the *terreiros* and aimed at validating their institutional existence sprung up all over Brazil. These associations were responsible for legitimating the *terreiros'* governing bodies and stewarding their resources.

It was in this context of preserving and protecting the secrets of Candomblé that Mestre Didi underwent his rigorous sacerdotal initiation. At the age of eight he received his first title, *Kori Kowê Olokotun* (the scribe of *Babá Olokotun*), in the Egungun cult. At fifteen, he was given the title of *assogbá* (high priest) of Obaluaiye, and later, *Babá L'Osanyin* of Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá.[21] It was through these roles that he began making the enchanted objects that would later lead him into the world of the arts.

The Artist-Priest

The biography of Mestre Didi stands in stark contrast to the conventional training of a white artist at the School of Fine Arts of the University of Bahia. Although Didi's family were of modest means, they were endowed with a symbolic power inherited from a lineage of revered Afro-Brazilian spiritual leaders. As a child, he was given the nickname Omo Bibi (well-born) and he learned sewing and draping with his father, who was an accomplished tailor. His exquisite handwriting and artistic skills were recognized early on. However, the School of Fine Arts was not within the professional reach of his race. Didi studied carpentry at the institution designated for Black vocational training in the city, the Liceu de Artes e Ofícios da Bahia (Bahia School of Craft and Trade). It was as a carpenter that he refined the techniques that he would later employ in his art.

The absence of an advanced diploma in the arts did not diminish his deep understanding of visual language, a legacy of the complex and sophisticated artistic tradition of the Yoruba which evaluates all aspects of existence from an aesthetic perspective.[22] Didi had a sophisticated education guided by the cultural history of the Nagô people in Bahia, their associated traditions and knowledge, and the universe of the Egungun cult, in which he attained the highest role of Alapini. However, the intellectuals and the art system of the time generally did not recognize him as a contemporary artist. Manoel Quirino, also Black, was not regarded as an art historian or anthropologist, but rather as a quirky folklorist. Similarly, as a Black man, Mestre Didi was considered a Candomblé "craftsman," officially registered as an artisan at the Museu de Arte Popular da Bahia.[23] These were the racial limits of the framework of Black inclusion within the paternalism of Bahian modernism.

As an *assogbá* (a priest responsible for the creation of sacred objects for the orishas of the earth pantheon), Didi was able to explore the mystical depths of the Nagô aesthetic concept of *odara*.[24] According to this principle, there is no separation between art and the sacred, nor a hierarchy of artistic and utilitarian objects. The Western phantasmagoria of beauty for beauty's sake is absent. For the Nagôs, beauty exists only if it is useful, and it gives form to the sacred. Their saying goes that everything beautiful is both useful and sacred. Thus, part of liturgical apprenticeship is to train the artist-priest, the one who shapes the objects of enchantment. Didi was one such illustrious initiate.

Objects of enchantment are sacred elements produced within a delicate web of symbolic meanings, and are used exclusively on altars and as adornments for deities.[25] Responsible for life and death, the orishas of the earth (Nana, Obaluaiye, Osanyin, and Oshumare) require careful handling due to the potent energies they embody. The complex and meticulous training of the priests serves this end. The shashara of Obaluaiye and the ibiri of Nana–symbols of the masculine and feminine, respectively, are

[13] Mestre Didi with an Egungun, most likely at Ilê Asipá, undated.

foundational objects of enchantment for the training of an *assogbá*.

The object of enchantment associated with the identity of Nana, an important female deity of Dahomeyan origin worshipped across much of Central Africa, is her ibiri. This is made from a bundle of palm fronds, bound with leather strips and with a loop at the top, adorned with colored beads and cowrie shells. It is a kind of scepter which the deity uses to exert influence over the earth and the world of the ancestors. The shashara is the sacred scepter of Obaluaiye. It is also made from palm fronds but lacks the ibiri's curve. It is a hieratic and vertical piece, representing a magical broom that sweeps the world, cleansing it of disease and spiritual impurities.[26]

In addition to a familiarity with the unique qualities of the materials, the artist-priest also needed to have complete mastery over the assembly process, including the sewing, the formation of the bundles, the dyeing of the leather, the selection of colors informed by the characteristics of the deities, and the techniques for threading the cowries and beads.

For the artist-priest Didi, his technical woodworking knowledge further enhanced the quality of his objects of enchantment. However, what stands out in the pieces that bear his signature is how he combined a repertoire of symbolic meanings linked to the earth pantheon with other African mythical figures, reinventing traditions with a Yoruba sense of artistic improvisation and originality. Mestre Didi's highly poetic sculptural arrangements manifest a sacred energy. They are narratives of the power of the Afro-Brazilian deities embodied as art-amulets.[27] His pieces conjure stories. They recombine layers of meanings through his unique use of Candomblé imagery and its syntaxes. Through sculpture, the artist mobilizes magical elements, creating a genuine visual oriki.

The Visual Oriki

Oriki is a poetic genre of Yoruba oratory. In formal terms, they have a balanced composition of repeated rhythms, ideas and counter-ideas, alliterations and assonances that provide mnemonic support.[28] Oriki also have very specific characteristics regarding their various uses and roles. The terms "Ori" (head) and "Ki" (to greet) evoke verbal riddles generally associated with the magical enchanted realm.[29] In the Yoruba mythical and philosophical system, oriki forge connections with the world order and mobilize the elemental forces of nature. In this literary genre, words do not merely communicate or represent; they also have the ability to intervene in reality, mediate relationships with the divine, and appease the mysteries of the world. Words are strength. They are power.

There is a part of Mestre Didi's work that transcends the strictly sacred, to be classified as artistic objects of enchantment. As we have elaborated, these objects are not separate from the sacred. What qualifies them as art objects is the regime of visibility they carry. They are things to be displayed to exalt Nagô cultural principles, informed by mythical and ancestral powers. They are actions meant for the public gaze, actions *da porteira pra fora*.

In the diversity of his artistic production we find the same materials that are used in the ritual objects. Palm fronds, raffia, cowries, leather, fabric and trims, gourds, seeds, and beads are all part of his technique. The distinctiveness of his art does not stem from the introduction of new materials and technologies. What Didi achieves is an expansion of the creation of objects of enchantment by finding new combinations. Using the same techniques of facture, he creates objects that are breathtakingly new. It is in transcending the ritual object while preserving its secret precepts (behind closed doors) that he earns the status of a contemporary artist (for the public gaze). By referring to Mestre Didi's sculptural production as visual oriki, we are underscoring the inventive complexity of his craft and his ability to compose, recompose, and invent visual poems that manifest the sacred.

Didi's sculptures can be analyzed in the light of Nagô and Yoruba aesthetic principles observed by Robert Farris Thompson during his research in Nigeria during the 1960s and 1970s.[30] The scepters of Mestre Didi embody *Gigun*, a hieratic sensibility promoted by the symmetrical and vertical composition of the whole. This is clear in the spear-topped pieces that project *Ayê* towards Orun. In their meticulous, perfectionist crafting, the pieces have an unfettered visibility, with forms and lines that can clearly be seen from all angles and distances, reflecting the concept of *Ifarahon*. His sculptures also show the acumen of *Jijora*, creating a delicate balance between naturalistic representation and abstraction. The embrace of the palm frond bundles with leather strips dyed in colors reminiscent of the rainbow and laboriously darned with continuous and syncopated chain-stitches evokes the rhythmic repetition of the oriki. All these aesthetic processes manifest one of the highest values of Nagô culture, the pursuit of total balance and harmony, the *Tutu*.[31] These principles seem to guide the creative process the artist used to fashion his pieces. As with the poetics of the oriki, Mestre Didi's sculptural work touches the intangible.

The relationship between art/religion and art/spirituality has led to other important works in the production and reflection of contemporary culture. For a long time, Western art-historical prejudice toward African art was due to the innate relationship between African art and the sacred. In this conceptual field, African artworks were seen as mere ethnographic objects. Their covenant with the divine and their functionality did not fit within the hegemonic Western conception of art. Today, decolonial and anti-racist thinking are challenging the traditional hierarchies of the art system, radically reevaluating

their different subjects, languages, and poetics, and thereby prompting a deep revision of the conventional legitimization of artworks.

Didi made his debut on the art circuit when he was nearly fifty years old, introduced by the French anthropologist Roger Bastide and the writer Jorge Amado. His first exhibition took place at the Galeria Ralf (1964), an art and interior design space in Salvador that welcomed Black artists. The Afro theme, even though it was considered folkloric, held an important position in the modernist cultural production of Bahia. Taking advantage of this more favorable context, some Black artists began to gain recognition. The *assogbá* Hélio de Oliveira (1932–1962) pioneered a series of woodcuts on Candomblé altars and shrines in the 1950s; the sculptor Agnaldo dos Santos (1926–1962) produced sculptures based on the mythic repertoire of the African diaspora; Rubem Valentim (1922–1991) made a creative semiological reading of Afro-Brazilian religious emblems; and Emanoel Araújo (1940–2022) developed a powerful poetics of Afro-minimalist constructivism (see Pls. 45-49, 52-53).

All these artists were of undeniable repute and were contemporaries of Mestre Didi. They all had trajectories marked by racism, struggled to have their works legitimized by the art system, and found their art was limited to certain circuits. Only recently, with the rigorous criticisms of the system of coloniality/modernity, have they begun to burst the bubble of racism and attract wider international interest and recognition from major galleries and contemporary institutions.

Mestre Didi transposes the sacred into the world of art, invigorating the ways in which art objects are perceived without compromising their sanctity. This understanding of artistic process that respects the sacred builds a visual poetics that indelibly connects art and religion. Perhaps this ethical and aesthetic lesson of Mestre Didi's is the most important for future generations of creators of what is termed Ebó-art—art as offering.

As a major ancestor of Afro-diasporic art, Mestre Didi began an insurgency against Western concepts of art by deconstructing Eurocentric canons and introducing other forms of thinking and aesthetics that were capable of dismantling the dominant culture. Didi started from pre-colonial African modernity, which had been buried and plundered in successive raids that victimized "The Great Mother," to rewrite the history of the diaspora based on more affirmative assumptions. His art points to a new form of existence, in a world redeemed of its inequalities.

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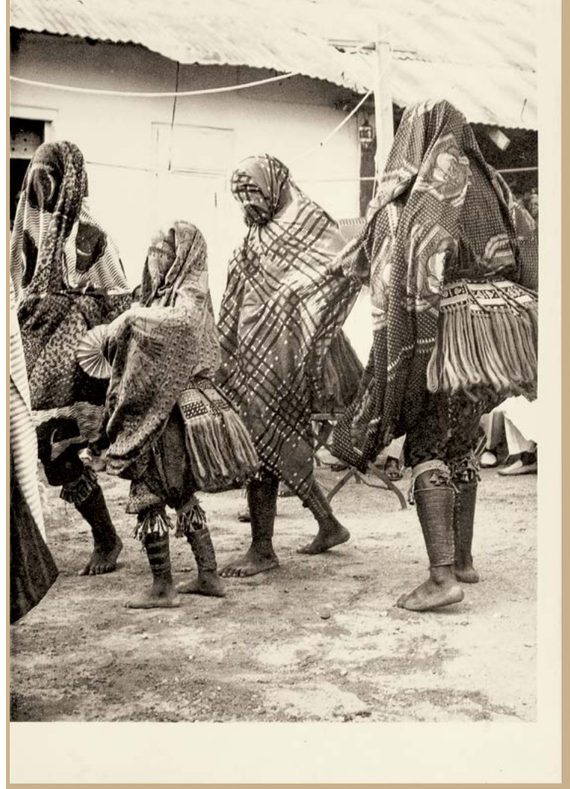
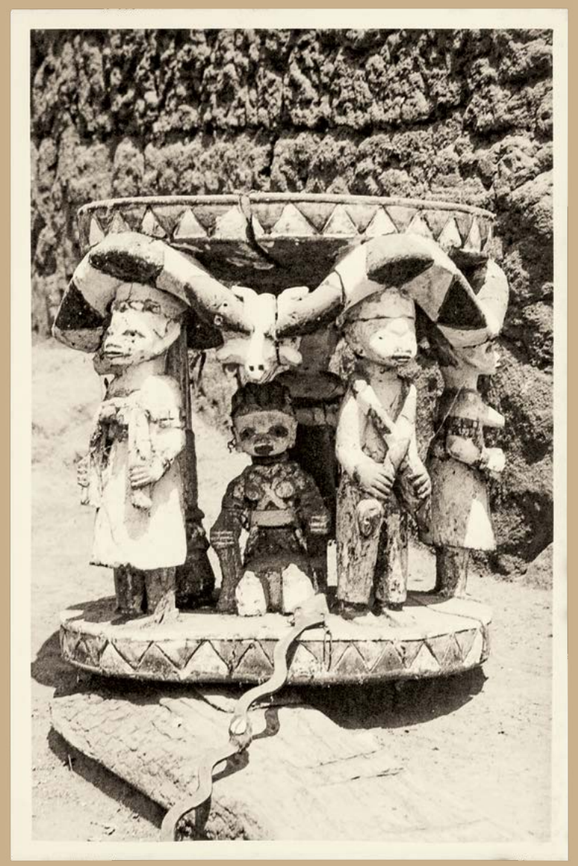




ROBERTO CONDURU

Healing Spears – Mestre Didi's Scepters, Sculptures, and Monuments

A Disruptive Late Beginning

Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos's first two solo exhibitions took place in 1964: *Mestre Didi* started in September at Galeria Ralf in Salvador, in northeastern Brazil, and *Emblemas de Orixás* (Orishas Emblems) began in December at Galeria Bonino in Rio de Janeiro, in the country's southeast.[1] The titles of these exhibitions succinctly and directly defined the artist's mode of intervention in the art circuit by indicating the type of work he produced, symbols of Afro-Brazilian deities, and his status as a master despite being a beginner in the visual arts. Despite the historiographical silence about Mestre Didi's entry into the world of visual arts, it constitutes a critical moment in the history of art in Brazil, as a break with the centuries-old refusal to consider and include the art of Afro-Brazilian religions.[2]

When he started exhibiting shasharas and ibiris—ceremonial scepters of the divinities Obaluaiye and Nana, respectively—in art institutions, Didi was a 46-year-old religious figure with important positions in distinguished Nagô (Yoruba-descendant) communities: *Ojê Korikowê Olukotun*, priest, in the cult of the ancestors at Ilê Agboulá in Itaparica; *assogbá*, the supreme priest, in the cult of Obaluaiye, and *Babá L'Osanyin*, priest, in the cult of Osanyin at Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá in Salvador. Furthermore, by the mid-196Os, he had already extended the ideals, practices, and symbols of the *terreiro* (Afro-Brazilian religious community) into the city fabric through carnival, linguistics, and literature. Didi helped to establish the *afoxé*, or musical group, *Troça Carnavalesca Pai Burukô em Folia* (Father Burukô in Revelry Carnival Parody) in 1942.[3] He published a Yoruba–Portuguese glossary, *Iorubá tal qual se fala* (Yoruba As It's Spoken), in 195O, as well as two compilations of short stories: *Contos Negros da Bahia* (Black Tales from Bahia), in 1961, and *Contos de Nagô* (Tales

of the Nagô), in 1963 (figs. 6, 14).[4] Later, he published other stories and myths and transmuted some of them into multimedia participatory role-plays.[5] His interventions in the visual arts were part of a broader cultural action, imparting an Afro-Brazilian religious worldview.

Opening Paths

When considering the work of Mestre Didi within the broader context of modern art, it may be tempting to associate it with Marcel Duchamp's readymade.[6] Indeed, in the exhibitions of 1964 and throughout his career, Didi transposed objects that were foreign to the artistic system, minimizing their original utilitarian purpose and highlighting their aesthetics, proposing that audiences view them as artworks. Until that date, his creations were excluded from the mainstream art world, as they went unnoticed even by art experts who sought Black art in Brazil in sculptures, like the African art valued in European and North American contexts then. However, his artifacts did not match other characteristics of the Duchampian readymade. Besides not being mass-produced nor widely available commercially, these ceremonial scepters had an author, one who voluntarily transposed them from one social domain to another and who consciously made them according to specific, deep-rooted aesthetics.

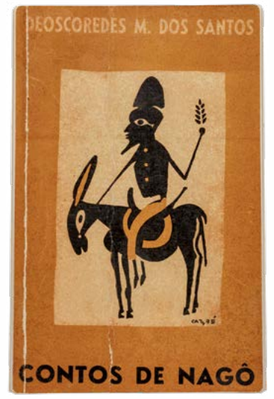
What the model of the Duchampian readymade usefully offers is a reminder of how radical the social displacement of Didi's creations was. The institutional insertion of religious tools like ibiris and shasharas into spaces designated for visual art was a pivotal event with broad social and political implications. When Didi transposed his creations from the religious realm to the artistic circuit, he challenged viewers, gallerists, and institutions to face, experiment, feel, and think about an aesthetic with African origins which they had historically dismissed.

Beyond crossing established artistic limits, Didi also fought against anti-Black racism in Brazil. Since the beginning of slavery in the Portuguese colony in South America, the settlers persecuted practitioners of any religion other than Catholicism. The formation of what are currently understood as Afro-Brazilian religions—Batuque, Candomblé, Macumba, Tambor de Mina, and Xangô, among other regional designations—was a process marked by prohibition, control, manipulative tolerance, utilitarian use, and arbitrary violence. Despite these brutalities, from the end of the nineteenth century, other kinds of reactions to Afro-Brazilian religions also emerged in the public sphere. Objects manufactured and used in Afro-Brazilian religious *terreiros* were institutionally and individually collected, often through violent police seizures, and occasionally presented without indication of authorship in museums and other exhibition spaces. In time, a handful of critics began to recognize specific types of artifacts as works of art—mainly wood or iron sculptures produced and used in Afro-Brazilian religious communities.[7] The Brazilian federal institution dedicated to preserving cultural heritage reflected this shift when they registered, albeit in a discriminatory way, a part of the Rio de Janeiro Police Museum's collection as national heritage in 1938.

While artisans were creating these aforementioned religious tools, only a few visual artists depicted Afro-Brazilian religious rituals from their emergence in the seventeenth century through the nineteenth century. This lack of representation began to change in the mid-twentieth century, as more artists—a few connected to Afro-Brazilian religious communities themselves—represented those rites, transforming Afro-Brazilian religions into a recurring modernist trope. In the 1950s, multimedia artist Carybé (Hector Julio Páride Bernabó) and photographer Pierre Verger, who were associated with Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá, used artistic media of European origin to represent Candomblé deities, environments, objects, practitioners, and rituals. Agnaldo Manoel dos Santos outlined a more independent path, working independently of the *terreiro* and dealing with varied aesthetic references, including African sculpture, and taking liberties such as representing Oshosi in contemporary attire characteristic of northeastern Brazil, therefore bringing the orisha associated with hunting to the artist's time and place.[8] Instead of naturalistically representing the Afro-Brazilian sacred universe as Carybé and Verger did, Rubem Valentim used its symbology and material culture to renew the visual language and traditional formats of Western art. Affiliated with Afro-Brazilian religious communities but not himself an initiate, Valentim fused religious symbols and Euclidean geometry, therefore articulating the traditional media of Western art—painting, drawing, and sculpture—to liturgical artifacts of Candomblé and Umbanda *terreiros*. Didi, who was born, raised, initiated, and trained in religious communities, went further by opening other paths: initially, he transposed objects made for religious ritualistic use into the realm of art and later used Candomblé's symbols, materials, and techniques to produce sculptures that defied artistic classification.

Communal Training, Solo Adventure

Because institutional racism prevented or hindered Afro-Brazilians' access to formal art education, many of them instead leveraged the training available via family or professional networks in the applied arts. Heitor dos Prazeres' father was a carpenter, and his mother was a seamstress. Valentim had a wall painter-decorator as his first informal master and learned art independently after his formal study of dentistry. Agnaldo Manoel dos Santos started wood carving while working in limestone and quicklime production. Emanoel Araújo was born in a family of goldsmiths. Mestre Didi's case is no different. Learning tailoring from his father, Arsenio dos Santos, was essential for Didi's elegance in dressing and his craftsmanship, which affected both his religious and artistic creations. Although only subtly evident, cutting, draping, stitching, and embroidering are crucial in Mestre Didi's work. As firm, precise, and discrete fundaments of his craft, these skills suggest connections with artists such as dos Prazeres, Maria Auxiliadora, Madalena dos Santos Reinbolt, Arthur Bispo do Rosario, Sonia Gomes, Rosana Paulino, and Lidia Lisbôa, who consciously activate the multiple meanings of sewing, embroidery, and textiles within Afro-Brazilian experience, using these methods for much more than their physical capacity to bind and stitch materials together (figs. 15–17.).



[14] Mestre Didi (Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos). *Contos de Nagô*, 1963. Edições GRD, Rio de Janeiro. Cover artwork by Carybé.

However, unlike the artists just mentioned, Didi became an artist from within Afro-Brazilian religious communities. In a certain way, the *terreiro* shaped him. He probably started making objects out of necessity. His religious roles obliged him to know how to produce vestments for the worship of Egunguns—a Candomblé ancestor cult—as well as Nana's ibiris, Obaluaiye's shasharas, Osanyin's sacred tools, and other religious artifacts. According to Didi, Eugênia Anna dos Santos, known as Mãe (Mother) Aninha, founder of Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá, initiated him in these arts after confirming him as *assogbá* in October 1936.[9] Both Mãe Aninha, one of his religious mentors, and Maria Bibiana do Espírito Santo, Didi's mother, known as Mãe Senhora and one of Mãe Aninha's successors in running the *terreiro*, encouraged him to develop his artistic skills.[10]

Jaime Sodré, in his monograph on Mestre Didi, proposes that, although Mãe Aninha may have "provided him with important information" about the mythological repertoire, "the increase in his technical capacity was due to his interaction with people who were experts in the artisanal production of pieces of Afro-Brazilian sacred art."[11] Martiniano Eliseu do Bonfim was one of these experts who transmitted the methods and traditions he had learned

[15] Arthur Bispo do Rosario. *Manto da apresentação* [Presentation mantle], undated. Cloth with sewing, embroidery, and writing. 46 5/8 × 55 5/8 × 2 3/4 in. Collection of Museu Bispo do Rosario de Arte Contemporânea.

[16] Sonia Gomes. *Boitatá (protetor das florestas)* [Boitatá (protector of the forests)], 2018. Stitching, binding, different fabrics, and laces. Dimensions variable.

from Africans in Lagos to Didi.[12] A key agent in the transatlantic religious exchanges between the late nineteenth century and mid-twentieth century, Martiniano was a Bahian-born and Lagos-initiated babalawo (high priest of the Ifá oracle) and Egungun priest, who helped Mãe Aninha structure her *terreiro* and was confirmed by her in the position of *ajimudá*, a male role in the cult of Obaluaiye, on the occasion of Didi's confirmation as *assogbá*.[13]

Despite undergoing a collaborative artistic training process amid religious initiation, Didi took charge of his own religious, technical, and aesthetic development when he decided to position himself as an artist. As decisive as people from the *terreiro* were in transmitting the principles, symbols, techniques, and shapes of African and Afro-Brazilian models to him, it was for him to improve his knowledge, skills, imagination, and creativity. When he started exhibiting, the people of the *terreiro* already considered him a master due to his positions in the religious hierarchy and his spiritual, technical, and aesthetic erudition. They recognized him as a virtuoso, which indicates how people of the *terreiro* evaluated his creations and other people's performances in music, dance, singing, clothing, decorating, cooking, and everything else that made up the ritualistic environment based on aesthetic principles transmitted from one generation to another, from Africa to Brazil, cultivating deep, refined knowledge and sensibilities.

Thus, Didi's trajectory allows us to understand how Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá functioned as an institutional locus of communal art training and production parallel to other formal schools of art in Salvador, such as Bahia's School of Fine Arts and its Lyceum of Arts and Crafts, which taught European-derived art. Not surprisingly, the *terreiro* was disregarded as a place of artistic training, production, experience, and appreciation by agents of the institutionalized art system. Didi could have remained anonymous like Bamboxê Obitikô in the mid-nineteenth century, Martiniano Eliseu do Bonfim, and other distinguished religious practitioners who were creators and have not yet been recognized as disseminators of African aesthetics in Brazil. However, he chose a different path.

According to Jaime Sodré, Mãe Senhora's period in the leadership of Ilê Axé Opô

Afonjá, between 1942 and 1967, was the occasion for growing dialogue between the *terreiro* and a network of artists, writers, and intellectuals—a process that had already begun during Mãe Aninha's time, especially from the mid-1930s.[14] Brazilian and international figures from art, culture, and politics visited the *terreiro*, which was integrated into cultural and touristic circuits in the city. As many people attended its public ceremonies, it is likely that artists, art critics, and other cultural agents observed members of the *terreiro* ritualistically performing orishas with Didi's scepters. However, there is no record of someone publicly recognizing his artifacts as artworks before he intervened in the art circuit. Didi had to wait for more than two decades after he started producing for someone to notice the mastery of his work and propose that he overcome the racist sociocultural boundaries delimiting the art world. Just as the encouragement and support of Vivaldo da Costa Lima, Zora Seljan, and Antônio Olinto had been instrumental in Didi's efforts to publish his books, the anthropologist Juana Elbein had a decisive role in suggesting, convincing, and supporting Didi to exhibit his ibiris and shasharas as art.[15]

Scepters

The ibiri is the ceremonial scepter of Nana, the ancestral mother, the deity of primeval creation whose fertility is associated with mud. It comprises a group of young palm tree ribs, representing her children, and beads and cowrie shells, signs of fertility. The ibiri curves in on itself, alluding to the womb of the Earth from which all beings are born and to which they return. During rituals, Nana's devotees dance with an ibiri in their arms and cradle it like an infant.

The shashara is the ceremonial scepter of Obaluaiye, one of Nana's mythical sons, the divinity of earth and patron of health who is strongly associated with both infectious diseases and healing. It is also structured by a bundled group of young palm tree ribs,

[17] Lidia Lisbôa. Untitled (from the series *Tetas que deram de mamar ao mundo* [Tits that suckled the world]), 2024. Crochet. Dimensions variable.

symbolizing the collective ancestral spirits, and ornamented with beads and cowrie shells; some shasharas have calabashes containing medicines tied to them. During ceremonies, Obaluaiye's devotees dance with the shashara, the ritual broom that sweeps away disease, in choreographies that reenact curing processes.

From the beginning, Didi changed his scepters to introduce them to the artistic world. In Candomblé, many artifacts become sacred after being ritualistically manufactured, transformed, or prepared for liturgical use. According to Sodré, Didi did not sacralize the scepters he presented as artworks.[16] Furthermore, his changes derived from the practical need to transform portable objects made to be handled by people during religious trances into self-sufficient, static artworks that activate corporeal-visual sensations in those who engage with them.

Didi explored the aesthetics of shasharas and ibiris through both their morphology and emblematic elements. The scepters' verticality contrasts with horizontal leather bands in different colors, either plain or with incisions configuring rhythmic lines and suggestively figurative conformations,

plus beads and cowrie shells arranged in threads and ornamental motifs. Even though Didi composed his pieces with few elements, he achieved a discrete, enduring, and captivating intensity. The play with shapes, colors, and textures, contrasting dominant opaqueness with subtle brightness, creates syncopated rhythms, imbuing the concentrated, centripetal objects with a dynamism that activates the visual and tactile senses.

However, Didi never reduced his scepters to purely formal, abstract, or sensory experiments, as he dealt with the significations of each element—whether material, shape, color, or figure—and combined them in expressive titles that synthesize the meaning sought in each scepter, such as *Opa Omo Edá — Cetro do filho da Natureza* (Son of Nature's Scepter, Pl. 16). In some shasharas, like *Xaxará Ati Axó Ayo — Xaxará da Roupa Alegre* (Shashara of the Joyous Clothes, undated, Pl. 4) he emphasizes anthropomorphism, with incisions on the leather straps indicating facial features and a miniature of the African raffia cloak with which Obaluaiye usually covers himself to hide his scarred and deformed body.

A Complicated Reception

Despite some artists' use of Afro-Brazilian religious elements in the 196Os, Didi's simple presentation of ibiris and shasharas as artworks challenged the art system, exceeding the limits of mainstream recognition.[17] Their organic materiality, craftsmanship, functionality, and, above all, religious references led critics to classify them as popular or folk art, categories demarcated by racist and classist social hierarchization.[18]

Didi himself even had doubts when entering his works into the art world. Although he had already presented emblems of the orishas in art galleries, he submitted them for the Decorative Arts section of the First National Biennial of Plastic Arts of Bahia in 1966.[19] The difficulty of fitting Didi's work into the artistic system is exemplified by the biennial jury transferring his works to the Sculpture section but awarding them the "State Decorative Art" prize.[20]

Not by chance, Didi initially presented his work in galleries of different types focused on new artistic trends, such as Ralf, an interior and furniture design and manufacturing company whose store had an exhibition space in Salvador; Bonino in Rio de Janeiro and Atrium in São Paulo, galleries that promoted various modernist trends; and G4, idealized as a bastion of the avant-garde in Rio de Janeiro.[21] Subsequently, he presented his work in individual and collective exhibitions that ranged in their artistic or cultural emphasis, especially in museums and cultural centers, as well as at conferences, book fairs, and hotels. Commercial art galleries' interest in his work was sporadic and limited to later in his career.[22]

Sculptures

Despite the difficulties in public reception, Didi insisted on presenting his creations as artworks, a risk in itself which served to disrupt and expand the Western artistic tradition. Soon after his initial forays into the art sphere in 1964, he began producing scepter-derived sculptures using the materials, techniques, shapes, figures, and meanings he had learned in the *terreiro*. He used "the technology of enchantment" to translate "into art form the narrative contents of the rich mythical collection of the Nagô tradition, without losing the essence of its rich and complex symbolic elaborations."[23]

Although Didi created sculptures using other materials (wood and clay) and representational systems (anthropomorphic naturalism), he concentrated on palm-rib scepters and scepter-derived creations throughout his career. Despite the functional differences between his pieces for the religious and artistic realms, they are all artworks of an author who claimed to be a "priest-artist."[24] Rather than progressing from the sacred to the secular, or from one artistic idiom to another, Didi continued to create and present both scepters and sculptures from the mid-196Os onward, as well as monuments from the late 198Os.

Didi's sculptures gradually increased in height and width, gaining amplitude after the 196Os. Playing with the scepters' formal structures, particularly the shashara's dominant self-centering and the ibiri's ambiguously distended but self-absorbed spatiality, his pieces maintained their firm anchorage in the ground and moderate expansion in space. Although axial structures persisted, he sometimes achieved lesser hieraticism, configuring works with varying degrees of symmetry and dynamism, as in *Igi Nilé Ati Ejo Ori Meji – Árvore da Terra com Serpente de Duas Cabeças* (Tree of Earth with Two-Headed Serpent, 199Os, Pl. 38).

The bundled groups of palm tree ribs structured with colored planes, lines, and dots constitute volumes that are massive but not heavy, solid but not rigid, whose flexibility and expansion are activated by the shashara's verticality and the ibiri's curvature. Indeed, the scepters' morphologies were precedents and stimuli for the conquest of space in Didi's other sculptures. The characteristic lightness of his slim scepters intensified as he aggregated more space to the seemingly weightless volumes. Greater spatial prominence, in turn, increased symbolic propagation. The spears that appear in several works, such as in *Opa Eye Agba Ati Itoka – Cetro da Grande Ave Ancestral com Lança no Topo* (Scepter of the Great Ancestral Bird with Lance on the Top, 1977 or 1978, Pl. 75), are vectors of infinite dissemination of meanings. A representation of Oshunmare, Nana's mythical son and Obaluaiye's mythical brother, the serpent patron of transformation, wealth, and wisdom was also a motif that energized the sculptures' dynamism, as in *Eso Ode Ibo – Serpente do Caçador Místico* (Serpent of the Mystic Hunter, 198Os, Pl. 79).

In the 197Os and 198Os, continuing to expand his domain of matter, materials, and the void, shapes and spaces, sizes and scales, Didi achieved more resourcefulness in expressing universal values based on Nagô cultural symbolism. One can observe this process by comparing his 1966 untitled piece (Pl. 4O) to the 198Os *Opa Exim Ati Ejó Meji – Cetro com Lança e duas Serpentes* (Scepter with Lance and Two Serpents, 198Os, Pl. 27), as the latter seems to be an elongated, less compressed and more elegant unfolding of the first. The axial element in both works comes from Obaluaiye's shashara, while the arms—two in the earlier work, four in the later one—allude to Nana's ibiri. The two serpents intertwined represent Oshumare, therefore invoking the earth pantheon trinity comprised of these three deities. In the the newer piece, the spear indicates their infinite expansion.

In addition to committedly exploring a seemingly restrictive formal language, Didi expanded his themes. Some sculptures refer to orishas beyond the earth pantheon: Osanyin and Oshosi in *Opa Igbo Olu Ode – Cetro do Senhor da Vegetação e da Caça* (Scepter of the Lord of the Flora and the Hunt, 199Os, Pl. 17), Shango in *Opa Ose – Cetro da Dinastia e Ancestralidade* (Scepter of Dynasty and Ancestrality, 2007, Pl. 2O), the ancestral mother in *Eye Iyá Agba — Pássaro Mãe Ancestral* (Ancestral Mother Bird, 2012, Pl. 74), and Obatala in *Opa Aiye Orum – Cetro de Oxalá* (Oshala's Scepter, 1969, Pl. 23). In addition to serpents representing Oshunmare and birds referring to Osanyin or the ancestral mothers, there are mythical and playful animals, such as insects and octopuses, as in *Agemon – Grande Carocha* (Agemon – Great Beetle, 1987, Pl. 77) and *Eran L´Okun – O Polvo com Quatro Tentáculos* (The Octopus with Four Tentacles, undated, Pl. 73).

Composed of elements of botanical, mineral, and animal origins, his creations organically derive from and refer to nature. They also speak of social, historical, and spiritual existence when figuring or alluding to deities, animals, and trees, or addressing

[18] Hélio Oiticica. Nildo de Mangueira wearing *P 17 Parangolé*, *Estou possuído* [I am possessed] (1967) de Hélio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro, 1979.

themes such as health and disease, hunting, paths, justice, and peace. Departing from, but not limited to, Nagô myths, Didi deals with the encompassing categories of time (past, present, and future) and space (the earth and beyond) or themes like birth, life, and death. He meditates upon and communicates specific and universal values through his works of art, transcending not only the boundaries between religion and art but also the realm of Candomblé, expressing himself to people worldwide.

Dialogues Over Time and Space

Moving continually as he did between the spiritual and the visual worlds, Mestre Didi's oeuvre shaped modern and contemporary art in Brazil in a number of important ways. The art critic, theorist, and curator Mário Pedrosa did not particularly mention Mestre Didi's work in his 1978 "Museum of Origins" proposal for the reorganization of Rio de Janeiro's Museum of Modern Art after the fire that drastically affected it that same year. This oversight is all the more notable because he obliquely referred to Didi's work in his brief descriptions of the sections of the new museum. Pedrosa proposed one section, the "Museum of the Black People's collection," which would be "based on pieces brought from Africa and others made here in Brazil, especially for religious use," a characteristic anonymization of the authorship of the "art of peripheral peoples."[25]

Pedrosa had addressed this topic a decade earlier when he published "Art of the Caduveo, African Art, Contemporary Artists," stating, "The primitive artist creates an object 'that participates.' With something akin to despair within him, today's artist calls upon others to bring participation unto his object."[26] Pedrosa's comparison could imply a dialogue between Hélio Oiticica, whose *Parangolés* have been associated with Egungun clothing, and Didi, an Egungun priest (fig. 18).[27] While pairing these artists is thought-provoking, Didi was by no means a primitive, never proposed Egungun robes as artworks, and abolished the manipulation of his scepters when he introduced them into the art circuit.

To illustrate Pedrosa's juxtaposition of quite separate social domains, perhaps it is more productive to compare the trajectories of Didi and Lygia Clark (fig. 19). While Clark moved from art to psychoanalysis and created artifacts for her therapy, he intervened in art from religion, transforming symbolic healing artifacts into artworks. They both opened innovative paths: she abandoned the fetishization of artworks when creating objects for use in intersubjective therapeutics; he challenged the public to experiment with socially disregarded art and aesthetics. However, healing and aesthetics have different weights in their works. Just as Clark never fully abandoned the aesthetic dimension in her therapeutic *Objetos Relacionais* (Relational Objects), likewise Didi preserved the healing function of his ceremonial scepters, aesthetically disseminating their sacred purpose even when he exhibited in secular contexts.

In addition, it is worth comparing Didi's and Willys de Castro's slender volumes. While Didi's scepters and sculptures contrast the subtle colored brightness of beads and leather straps amid the opacity of vegetable fibers, Willys' *Objetos Ativos* (Active Objects) and *Pluriobjetos* (Pluriobjects) expand luminosity through chromatic play or metallic variations. Elsewhere, I have explored how Willys critically dialogued with votive images of Catholic oratories in his polychrome and light-reflecting volumes on a scale typical of interior environments.[28] While Willys re-purposed Catholic images' devotional function to his critical, emancipatory constructivism, Didi explored Nagô religious myths and enchantment technology to renew the possibilities of the art object, propagate aesthetic healing, and meditate about the world.

Following Didi's path, a new generation of artists have continued to transpose elements from Afro-Brazilian religions to their artistic practices, often reflecting their rituals. For example, Jorge dos Anjos transmutes a purification rite into a method to draw Afro-constructivist grids with gunpowder and fire on plastic in his *Desenhos de Fogo* (Fire Drawings) series, while in Marepe's 2007 *Pérolas de Água Doce* (Freshwater Pearls), an ecocritical performance in which he offers pearls to the waters, votive ritual and artwork are one. The artistic translation of Afro-Brazilian religious rites infuses series such as Ayrson Heráclito's 2015 *Sacudimentos* (Cleansing) and Tiago Sant'Ana's 2016 *Manufatura e Colonialidade* (Manufacturing and Coloniality) with performances and photography that disseminate social criticism and healing.

Monuments

Didi never abandoned Candomblé's artistic tradition, continuing to refine the possibilities of his ibiris and shasharas and to expand their social reach. Transforming sacred tools into secular works, he worked apart from the Western mandate of art as a means of self-expression, and instead explored scepters as devices that could disseminate his Nagô worldview and heal aesthetically. Expanding from the production of ceremonial wands for orishas in Candomblé *terreiros*, he later displayed his scepters and sculptures in artistic spaces, culminating in his planting of monuments in urban contexts. In this spatial expansion of the 1980s, Didi's work conquered other city contexts, reaching Brazil's streets, territories, and beyond.

During the 1988 carnival, he placed an enlarged 12-meter-high version of one of his sculptures, *Opá Exin Ati Eyé Meji* (Religious Staff with Two Birds), in Pelourinho, which is part of Salvador's historic center named after the pillory that existed there, to which enslaved people were tied and tortured in public punitive rituals, and which has been a cultural hub for the Afro-Brazilian community (fig. 20).[29] As carnival is historically a period of subversion of order, *Opá Exin* confronted persistent colonialism, raising Nagô symbols to counterstate the various centuries-old towers of Catholic churches in that area and the past violence that continued to reverberate.

In 1997, he installed *Opà n'lle – Cetro da Terra* (Earth Scepter) in the sculpture park of Museu de Arte da Bahia translating his 1996 *Opa n'llé – Cetro da Terra* (Earth Scepter,

[19] Lygia Clark. *Rede de elástico* [Elastic net], 1969. From *Phantasmatics of the Body*.

[20] Mestre Didi. *Opo Babá N'Laawa – Cetro da Ancestralidade* [Scepter of Ancestry], 2001. Bronze. 32 feet high. Enseada de Paciência, Rio Vermelho, Salvador, Brazil.

[21] Mestre Didi. *Opà n'Ile – Cetro da terra* [Earth Scepter], 1997. Polyester resin and glass. 23 feet high. Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia, Salvador, Brazil.

Pl. 26) in painted reinforced concrete to resist the effects of weather conditions better (fig. 21). At 7 meters high, it is his first sculpture to permanently and publicly spread Nagô culture across the landscape. However, the institutional framing of the art museum still limits its social resonance.

Didi had the opportunity to intervene more permanently in the city fabric when he installed *Opo Babá N'Laawa – Cetro da Ancestralidade* (Scepter of Ancestry) in Salvador's Rio Vermelho neighborhood in 2001. In this 10-meter-high work, he reviewed his brief carnival intervention, reworking the motif of the tallest vertical spearhead flanked by curvilinear stems that each culminate in a bird, also present in the *Ceremonial staff* (undated, Pl. 44), as in other of his works. If Didi mixed the palm ribs, leather, beads, and shells characteristic of his pieces with wood and metal in *Opá Exin*, he transmuted the characteristic luminous and textured polychromies of his works into bronze in the *Scepter of Ancestry* to ensure its stability and permanence.

With this public sculpture, Didi's spatialization went even further. Installed by the sea, the *Scepter of Ancestry* connects Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, and the Americas to other shores of the Atlantic Ocean. In Africa, it reveres all African ancestors. The *Scepter of Ancestry* is mainly connected with the *Opa Oranmiyan* (Staff of Oranmiyan) in Ifé, Nigeria, referring to the legendary Yoruba king from the kingdom of Ifé Empire (fig. 2).

Didi's public scepters continue to question and subvert the exclusionary process of mainstream commemorative practice and public histories in previously colonized territories. With the scepters, he inscribes urban space with previously silenced cultural values. The *Earth Scepter* draws our attention to the land, ultimately the planet, where all life emerges and ultimately returns, and questions the extractive annihilation of the land's telluric powers. The *Scepter of Ancestry* brings forth the memory of the African ancestors of those who helped to build the Americas since the sixteenth century. Thus, both scepters are counter-monuments, standing in opposition to a society still marked by colonialism and slavery. Artistically, he healed a territory stained with tears and blood throughout enslavement, colonization, and their aftermath. As an exceptional contribution to the art of the Americas, Didi's scepters, both the small-scale sculptures he made throughout his career and the monuments he made at its end, cure and consecrate the Earth, longing for a new way of living.

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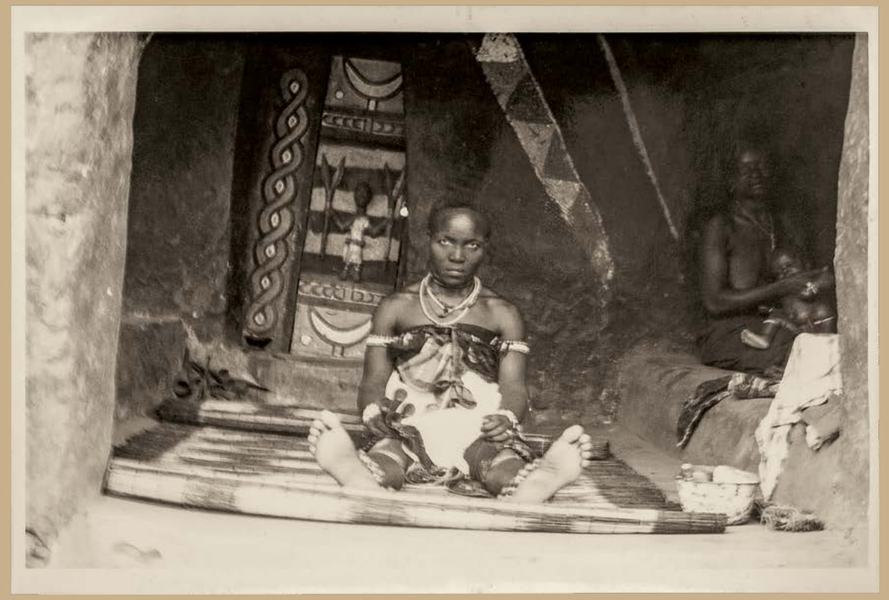

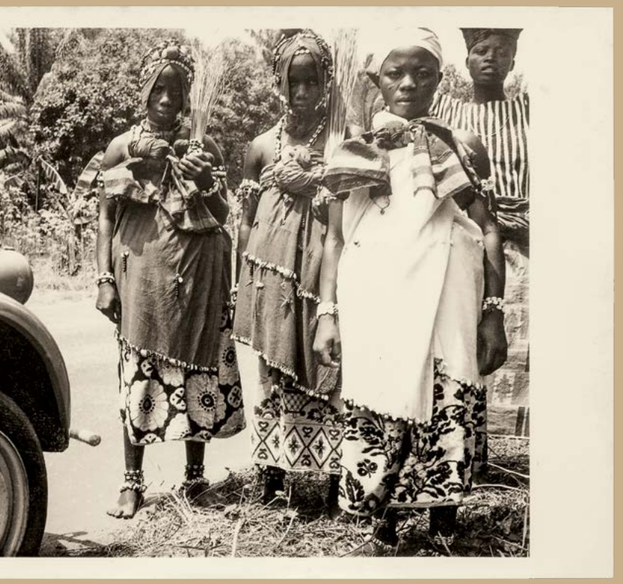

JOSELIA AGUIAR

From a Scribe of Babá Olokutun to Priest-Artist

In December 1943, the maritime company founded by Miguel Archanjo de Sant'Anna contracted Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos, then twenty-five, for work. It was a promising position. The docks of the port of Salvador were famously among the busiest in the world, ever since the port's major trafficking of enslaved people and the subsequent vast exports of sugar and tobacco during the colonial period. Half a century had passed since the abolition of slavery, and now the workforce needed to adapt to new conditions. With this job opportunity, Didi possessed, for the first time, a *signed* social security work card, a valuable document in Brazil, particularly at the time, as it meant he was part of the workforce and had full rights, including a state pension on his retirement.

This document, coveted by any Brazilian citizen, was particularly significant for young Black men like Didi, in a country whose systems continued to be marred by racial discrimination. The circumstance is even more symbolic considering his employer. Twenty-one years his senior, Miguel Archanjo de Sant'Anna, also of African descent, was part of a Black Bahian elite who occupied social positions marked by affluence and prestige. More than just a legally-binding agreement, the position was the result of a network of relationships formed within the affective space of Afro-Bahian religiosity. The relationship between Didi and the stevedore businessman was strengthened daily through their participation in two different religious societies: one dedicated to the orishas, which was more familiar to the public, and another, more secretive, society of the Egunguns.[1]

Didi's first registered employment was as an office assistant. Documentation shows his basic education but does not list his training in woodworking at the Liceu de Artes e Ofícios da Bahia, an institution that, since the turn of the twentieth century, had

[22] Mestre Didi (Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos). *Iorubá tal qual se fala* [Yoruba As It's Spoken], 1950. Tipografia Moderna, Salvador.

enabled young Afro-descendants to become artisans. The presence of a master carpenter in the world of bureaucracy should not come as a surprise, since at the time literacy was rare among Brazilians of all races.

In fact, completing primary education was itself a significant achievement. Didi's talent for reading and writing was recognized, and his handwriting was much admired. Indeed, before he became the renowned priest-artist of Brazilian art history, Didi initially dedicated himself to writing, and never failed to update the handwritten registry of his work card over four decades of employment in private offices and public departments. Within three years of being hired as an office assistant, his resumé shows the singular publication in 1950 of his book *Iorubá tal qual se fala* [Yoruba As It's Spoken], a compilation of key vocabulary translated from Yoruba into Portuguese, printed by the local publishing house Tipografia Moderna with Didi's original orthography.[2] It was singular because Yoruba was not a language familiar to the majority of the population in Bahia. The aim of the book was to help devotees of the religious societies to connect with the Yoruba words and expressions of the rituals, safeguarding the transmission of knowledge. But in fact, Didi's role as a custodian of Candomblé wisdom had begun even earlier.

One way to tell the story of his artistic vocation is to start 13 kilometers from Salvador, on the nearby island called Itaparica, a summer resort considered suitable for a boy with respiratory problems. In 1925, when he was eight years old, he was initiated by Marcos Theodoro Pimentel, who held the position of *Alapini*, the Supreme High Priest, the highest rank in the cult of the Egunguns at the *terreiro* de Tuntun, dedicated to Babá Olokutun, ancestor of all the Nagô people.[3] Didi received his first title, Kori Kowê Olukotun, the clerk of Babá Olukotun. One of the priests in the same *terreiro* in Itaparica was the eminent Miguel Sant'Anna, who held the position of Ojé Orepê.

The Alapini had not chosen Didi by chance. Didi's father, Arsenio dos Santos, was a tailor who had tried to convince his wife to migrate to Rio de Janeiro, but since she had refused, ended up going alone. A street food vendor, Maria Bibiana do Espírito Santo had had her reasons for staying. In the cult of the orishas there was a special place reserved for her as the great-granddaughter of Marcelina da Silva, Obá Tossi, one of the three founders of the very first Candomblé society in Bahia at the end of the nineteenth century, the Ilê Axé Airá Intilé, also known as the Candomblé da Barroquinha, and later as the Casa Branca do Engenho Velho. Maria Bibiana was initiated at age seventeen by Eugênia Anna dos Santos, familiarly called Mãe Aninha, the founder of Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá, in the neighborhood of São Gonçalo do Retiro, on the site of the earlier Cabula and Urubu quilombos (settlements of escaped and freed slaves).[4] Mãe Aninha was like a grandmother to Didi. After her death, Maria Bibiana became her successor, following the will of the orishas, who had revealed their decision through the *búzios* in 1942.[5] Maria Bibiana would become better known as Mãe Senhora, the most revered *ialorixá* (priestess) of her time. In that period, Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá elected protective figures called Obás de Xangô, choosing prominent men in Bahian society to serve as allies, and once again, Miguel Sant'Anna appears in the story; he was one of the Obás de Xangô, the first seated on the right.[6]

The environment Didi grew up in encouraged him from an early age to take on the role of guardian of the knowledge of his African ancestors. His initial appointment as the scribe of Babá Olukotun was but the beginning, and over the years the number of his titles and responsibilities grew, not only in the *terreiro* de Tutun, but also in Opô Afonjá, even in the era of Mãe Aninha, when Didi was still a teenager. By 1936, he received the positions of *assogbá* of Obaluaiye and Babá L'Osanyin. His exposure to Yoruba myths and sacred objects, and his mastery of wood, led him to create his first artistic pieces: wooden carvings embellished with beads, cowries, leather cord, and palm leaves. His skills blossomed at a time when Afro-Brazilian religions continued to face prejudice and state repression, while simultaneously inspiring artists and intellectuals who would go on to shape modern Bahian art and literature. In the early twentieth century, the *terreiros* were frequently raided by the police; their priests were imprisoned, and their sacred objects confiscated. The white elite feared the social cohesion that the religion fostered. Yet, with the passing decades, African religiosity became an integral part of the Bahian imaginary. The embrace of Yoruba culture by this generation of poets, musicians, and painters was so strong that scholars of other African traditions such as the Bantu came later to lament their relative obscurity in the media and academia.

The initial engagement with Yoruba culture was among literary figures. In the career of the great Brazilian novelist Jorge Amado, of popular acclaim both at home and abroad, one can see how his infatuation deepened into inspiration. The son of a "cacao colonel" from southern Bahia, Amado arrived as a child in Salvador, where he was privately educated.[7] By fifteen, he was one of a group of poets and writers who called themselves the Academia dos Rebeldes (Academy of Rebels), in opposition to the venerable and traditional Academia Brasileira de Letras (Brazilian Academy of Letters), which they deemed stuffy and conventional. Drawn to popular culture, they attended street festivals and Afro-Bahian religious ceremonies, conducting an ethnographic and linguistic exploration of the Afro-diasporic culture forged in Salvador and in the towns dotted along the famous Baía de Todos os Santos in the Recôncavo Baiano. Although this region was not exclusively Yoruba, Yoruba was its most prominent cultural context. Amado and his contemporaries frequented its homes and *terreiros*, learning from Black artists, priests, and intellectuals, and inviting them into their social circles. The babalawo Martiniano Eliseu do Bonfim, a wise advisor to Mãe Aninha, was the inspiration for Amado's creation of the *pai de santo* priest Jubiabá, in the eponymous novel of 1935. Three decades later, Miguel Sant'Anna would become the prototype for the character of Pedro Archanjo, a kind of alter ego for Amado and the protagonist of his 1969 novel *Tenda dos Milagres* (Tent of Miracles, fig. 23). Throughout his long career, Amado continued to be captivated by the stories he heard in the *terreiros*. His final novel, *O Sumiço da Santa – Uma História de Feitiçaria* (1988) (The War of the Saints), depicts the clash between two characters, the devout Catholic Adalgisa and her Candomblé-following niece Manela, who symbolizes freedom.

In the visual arts, this wave of interest took place two decades later, compared with the dynamism of the Academia dos Rebeldes literati. At the same time as Didi was publishing his Yoruba-Portuguese lexicon, the mid-1940s saw the start of an artistic fervor that had as one of its epicenters the unfinished hotel-casino at the foot of the Ladeira da Barra in Salvador. The sculptor Mário Cravo, combining his knowledge of the avant-garde and his ethnographic inclinations, saw the hotel's potential as the perfect space for his studio. Even in his final days, Cravo would reminisce about the extraordinary quality of the light that streamed through the open windows into rooms with six-meter-high ceilings. The space was so vast that it was also able to accommodate the painters Carlos Bastos and Genaro de Carvalho. The trio were the same age and shared similar backgrounds; sons of the white merchant class in their early twenties, they had all recently returned from their *de rigeur* seasons abroad. This generation was later known by the same name as the magazine that brought them together, the *Caderno da Bahia*. Cravo continued to recruit more artists to his circle, including the Black artists Agnaldo dos Santos and Rubem Valentim. The government took notice. At the head of the state administration, Governor

[23] Jorge Amado. *Tenda dos milagres* [Tent of miracles], 1969. Martins, São Paulo. Cover and illustrations by Carybé.

[24] Carybé. *Oxóssi – Terreiro Apô Afonjá* [Oshosi], 1950. Watercolor on paper. 11 7/8 × 8 1/4 in. Collection of Museu de Arte da Bahia - IPAC / Secult Ba.

[25] Carybé. *Omolú*, 1950. Watercolor on paper. 11 7/8 × 8 1/4 in. Collection of Museu de Arte da Bahia - IPAC / Secult Ba.

Otávio Mangabeira was able to imagine something even more important than Cravo's huge studio windows. In this vibrant cultural melting-pot, he saw a way to promote tourism and to attract both recognition and revenue. As Secretary of Education and Health, he appointed Anísio Teixeira, a patron of the arts and popular culture who is even today considered a seminal figure in the history of education in the country. One of his initiatives was to offer scholarships to artists from every region, so that they could reinvent Bahia in their works.

In an even more fervent embrace of Yoruba culture, the 1940s also saw the arrival of two foreign artists who are equally representative of the history of Bahian modern art and literature: the Argentinean painter Carybé, and the French photographer Pierre Verger. Both had read the French edition of Amado's *Jubiabá*, published by Gallimard in 1938, and dedicated themselves to studying and visually representing the myths and rituals of Candomblé. Carybé had first visited Bahia in 1938, sponsored by his employer, the Buenos Aires-based newspaper *El Pregón*. Next, he made short trips in 1941 and 1944, both for the Esso Calendar project. He visited Bahia for the fourth time in late 1949. With a letter of recommendation from the writer Rubem Braga addressed to Secretary Anísio Teixeira, he secured a year-long grant to create a visual record of the people and customs of the Recôncavo Baiano, which emphasize local "types" like *baianas*, fishermen, and *mães de santo*, the members of the *terreiros* (figs. 24–25). Verger first disembarked in Salvador on August 5, 1946, a date he liked to make a point of repeating. His photographs of Afro-Bahian rituals in Bahia and West Africa earned him French scholarships to study the cultural exchanges across the Atlantic. One of his most famous photos shows the imposing upstanding figure of Mãe Senhora (fig. 26). Verger spent decades traveling between Bahia, France, and Africa, and only eventually settled down in the Ladeira da Vila América after becoming a babalawo, or high priest.

Carybé and Verger were not the only foreigners to arrive during this period. By the turn of the 1950s there were also several European academics living in Bahia at the invitation of Edgard Santos, dean of the newly founded University of Bahia. Known for their bold experimental approaches and interest in ethnography, they included the

[26] Pierre Verger. *Mãe Senhora*, 1946–1950.

German Hans-Joachim Koellreutter, who recruited the Swiss musicians Walter Smetak and Ernst Widmer for his Free Music Seminars. Yanka Rudzka, a Polish dancer, directed the Dance School. The Portuguese philosopher Agostinho Silva, during his long stay in Brazil, lived in Bahia and founded the Centro de Estudos Afro-Orientais (Afro-Oriental Studies Center), or CEAO, one of the most important institutions in promoting the study of African and Afro-Bahian cultures in the university. Closely following this cultural renaissance was Roger Bastide, a French anthropologist and academic at the University of São Paulo, who focused much of his research on Afro-Brazilian religions in Bahia. Around the same time, a wave of American social scientists sponsored by UNESCO arrived to study race relations in Bahia in comparison to the United States, a project that later extended to other regions. The UNESCO project's scientists sought to understand the country's racial dynamics. With so much attention paid to Afro-Bahian religions, local newspapers of the time began to receive letters from displeased readers complaining that what had once been called witchcraft had now become a subject of study. When the UNESCO project began its research in the Bahian capital, the photographer they hired was none other than Verger. As a freelancer, he published a series of reports on local life and culture in the newspaper *O Cruzeiro*.

The artistic flourishing was not driven only by foreign participation. Bahian talent flourished in every field. Among Black intellectuals, Milton Santos stood out in

the field of geography, while Vivaldo da Costa Lima made his mark in anthropology, each forming their own circle of thinkers. Walter da Silveira, a former member of the Academia dos Rebeldes, led a film club to discuss Soviet cinema by Sergei Eisenstein, Italian neorealism, and the French New Wave. This period also witnessed the emergence of the Bahian cinematic genius Glauber Rocha. His generation succeeded that of the *Caderno da Bahia*: at first, he and his peers from the Colégio Central, the poets Fernando da Rocha Peres and João Carlos Teixeira Gomes, gathered around the *Jogralesca*, a series of theatrical poetry performances. They later collaborated to launch the magazine *Mapa*, which gave name to their group between 1957 and 1958. Their circle included the printmaker and sculptor Calasans Neto and the poets Myriam Fraga and Florisvaldo Mattos. This fertile cultural environment also saw the creation of two other magazines, *Seiva* and *Angulus*. Together with Fernando da Rocha Peres and Paulo Gil Soares, Glauber founded Yemanjá Filmes, a film and culture cooperative; with Calasans Neto, he started the publishing house Edições Macunaíma.

Mãe Senhora was a revered figure, and following in the footsteps of her predecessor Aninha, she worked tirelessly to ensure the continuity of her *terreiro*. Social ties with artists and intellectuals of the period were strengthened. In August 1952, Verger

[27] Employment contract of Mestre Didi, 1943.

brought back from Nigeria—where he had been studying and conducting research—a *xeré* (rattle) and an *edun ará* (a type of stone) entrusted to Mãe Senhora by Onã Magbá, at the request of Obá Adeniran Adeyemi, Alafin Oyó, with a letter bestowing upon her the title of Iyá Nassô. A grand confirmation ceremony took place at the Afonjá *terreiro*, attended by its members, delegations from other *terreiros*, artists, intellectuals, and journalists. Her full title, Iyá Nassô Oyó Akala Magbo Olodunare Axé Da Ade Ta, meant that Mãe Senhora held the same esteemed position in Nigeria as in Bahia. The conferment of this title was seen as a gesture of understanding between priests on both sides of the Atlantic, strengthening communication between the two communities.

Mãe Senhora's interactions with artists and intellectuals were widely known. When visiting Rio, she used to stay at the home of Jorge Amado and his wife, Zélia Gattai. Years later, their son João Jorge recalled how he would remove the Eshus from the living room shelf before she arrived. They knew that the *mãe de santo* disapproved of using the image of the orisha as a decorative object. A deity who is often misunderstood, Eshu is the emissary between the heavens and earth, and the disruption he can provoke may lead to trouble. During Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir's visit to Brazil, an event widely covered by the press, Amado took them to the Afonjá *terreiro*. Upon consulting the *búzios*, Mãe Senhora revealed that Sartre belonged to Oshala (the god of creation) and Simone to Oshun (the goddess of femininity, fertility, beauty and love). When he moved back to Bahia in 1963, Amado had an unexpected visit from Mãe Senhora. She had heard that without her being there, he had installed a massive iron Eshu, a work by the sculptor Manu from the Gantois *terreiro*, among the trees in his new garden in the neighborhood of Rio Vermelho. The priestess came to warn them of the dangers, as Zélia Gattai described in one of her books of memories. "Have you lost your mind, Mr. Jorge?" she reportedly

[28] Mestre Didi and Juana Elbein dos Santos, undated.

exclaimed. "How could you think of putting such an orisha on your land without the proper foundation?" The foundation, in the terminology of devotees, refers to a ritual to welcome the orisha. The next day, Mãe Senhora sent someone from the *terreiro* with a huge bag containing the ingredients for the required ritual to assuage the spirit. Every Monday the homeowners had to pour out a half glass of cachaça in offering. Mãe Senhora returned to scold them again not long after, because they had placed beside Eshu a sculpture by the artist Tati Moreno of the Umbanda entity Maria Padilha. To avoid any further conflict, they moved the newly arrived sculpture to the other side of the house, near a pool. When Mãe Senhora increased the number of Obás de Xangô, she invited Amado, Carybé, Verger, and the musician Dorival Caymmi to serve as counselor-protectors, just as she had once done with Miguel Sant'Anna.

Didi was yet to receive his own acclaim. A slender 5 feet and 8 inches tall, wearing crisply-ironed clothes, he is unassuming in photos taken by Zélia where he appears amidst other artists and intellectuals who frequented the Rio Vermelho house. In keeping with the concentrated silence in which he operated and worked, he began his most successful phase without fanfare right at the beginning of the 1960s. First, he

[29] Installation view of *Exposição Nordeste: Possibilidades da Manufatura Popular*, curated by Lina Bo Bardi. Museu de Arte Popular na Bahia, Salvador, 1963.

returned to publishing books; *Contos Negros da Bahia* (Black Tales of Bahia, 1961) with a preface by Amado and illustrations by Carybé, was published by GRD, a company owned by Gumercindo Rocha Dorea, a Bahian who had left Ilhéus, the same cacao-exporting region where Amado was from, for Rio de Janeiro (fig. 6). The following year, *Axé Opô Afonjá* (1962) featured notes by Bastide and a preface by Verger, and was published by the Instituto Brasileiro de Estudos Afro-Asiáticos (Brazilian Institute of Afro-Asian Studies) in Rio de Janeiro. For its reprint it was renamed *História de um terreiro nagô* (Story of a Nagô *terreiro*), marking another milestone in the documentation of Afro-Brazilian memory, much like his Yoruba-Portuguese lexicon, which was still in circulation.[8] A third book, *Contos de Nagô* (Nagô Tales, 1963) followed, illustrated by Carybé and also published by GRD (fig. 14).

Behind the scenes of this increasingly productive phase, there was a shift in his family life. Didi remarried. In his youth, he had had a daughter, Nídia dos Santos, from his relationship with Maria de Lourdes. Nídia grew up under the protection of Mãe Senhora and is now also a priestess. Didi's subsequent union with Edvaldina Falcão dos Santos produced two more daughters: Inaicyra Falcão, a teacher and lyric singer, and Iara Lindback, a visual artist. His new partner, beginning in the 1960s, was Juana Elbein, who, in accordance with Brazilian law, took her husband's surname, becoming Juana Elbein dos Santos. An Argentinean anthropologist with a doctorate from the Sorbonne, she became not only his partner, but also his co-author on various projects that would span the next half-century. With her dynamic personality, she opened doors both in Brazil and abroad. At the same time, she also may have alienated some of the circle of artists and intellectuals who perhaps resisted her for being a woman and, above all, a foreigner. Both alone and in partnership—either with his wife or with other experts—Didi authored another score of books that were eagerly received by readers, as recalled by his last publisher, the photographer Arlete Soares (Pl. 82-90). Soares had founded the publishing house Editora Corrupio, which was initially dedicated to Verger's works but later expanded to Afro-Bahian culture more broadly. Didi's life as an author of literature, memoir, and oral tradition did not falter, even as his great vocation as a visual artist began to take up more of his time.

His road to recognition as a sculptor started in 1964 with his first solo exhibition at Galeria Ralf in Salvador. Juanita, as Elbein dos Santos was known, recalled in an interview that Bastide first referred to Didi as a "wise man" in the introduction to one of his publications.[9] The artistic name he had begun to use, Mestre Didi, short and to the point, replacing the unusual Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos, came from the title of the text written by Amado for the exhibition.[10] The moniker seemed natural, given that his talent as a master carpenter was well-known. That same year, he arrived at the prestigious Galeria Bonino in Rio, also with a solo exhibition. In 1965, he had a show at the Galeria El Altillo in Buenos Aires and then at the Galeria Atrium in São Paulo, followed by another solo show in 1966 at the Galeria G4 in Rio. At that point, Didi was hired to help with the preparations for the Afro-Brazilian section of the Museu de Arte Popular, part of the new Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia. The Italian architect Lina Bo Bardi was commissioned for the installation by the Bahian government and chose an old urban sugar mill, the Solar do Unhão, at the edge of the bay. Didi of course registered this job in his work card. It was the first time he had listed his occupation as "artisan."

The establishment of his role as a priest was given a significant boost by something that happened on African soil during his first visit, which took place in the 1960s. Even as a child, Didi had been called Omo Bibi, the well-born, and had learned from Mãe Senhora about the importance of his ancestors, the founders of cities between Benin and Nigeria, though he did not fully comprehend the implications of this at a time when communications in general were difficult, particularly with Africa. In 1966 he was contracted by UNESCO to conduct comparative studies between Brazil and Africa, which was where he met the King of Ketu, Oba Pascal Adeoti Adetutu, accompanied in this instance by Juana and Verger, who witnessed the episode. As Didi described in the essay "Um Negro Baiano em Ketu" (A Black Man from Bahia in Ketu), Didi presented songs from the repertoire he had learned from his mother, and his hosts recognized them as part of a shared history that had been lost after the war with the Dahomeyans, a war that coincided with the era of slave trafficking to the Recôncavo Baiano.[11] It seemed that these songs had survived in Bahia. Juana suggested that Didi recite his family's oriki, which is like an oral family crest: "Asipá Borogun Elese Kan Gongoôô." The king, hearing the name Asipá, rose from his chair and pointed in the direction where the family had lived. According to Marco Aurélio Luz, a social scientist who had a long intellectual and religious association with Didi, the visit to Ojubo Odé, which was the place of Oshosi worship for the Asipá family, confirmed its similarity to that which had been reestablished in Brazil. After this encounter, and with a greater understanding that he belonged to an African lineage, in 1968 Didi was conferred the title of *Balé Xangô* of the Asipá line by the temple of Shango in Oyó, Nigeria.

The priest-artist continued to exhibit in Brazil and abroad in solo and group shows, and his works were shown in Germany, the United States, Ghana, England, France, Nigeria, and Senegal. It was a trajectory that the young Black man first employed at Miguel Sant'Anna's maritime company could never have foreseen. Out of caution, he continued to pay his social security contributions as an independent craftsman, and only stopped in 1983, when he retired.

Among his numerous medals and awards, one of the highlights was the 23rd São Paulo Biennial in 1996, when he was honored with one of the Individual Galleries alongside artists like Edvard Munch, Paul Klee, and Louise Bourgeois. In 1999, he became the first Afro-Brazilian priest to receive an honorary doctorate from the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), having been nominated by the CEAO.

Despite acclaim for his sculptures, and his many religious titles, he continued to live simply, and to involve himself in his community. After retirement, Didi fulfilled his dream of founding his own *terreiro*, Ilê Asipá, which is dedicated to the cult of the Egunguns and currently located in the Piatã neighborhood. In this endeavor, he united the families of Marcos Theodoro Pimentel and Miguel Sant'Anna. In photos, Didi can be seen among the workers raising the building for the first headquarters. The people who remember his role in Asipá, like his granddaughters Maria Aparecida and Nicea, and the current *alagbá* (priest and leader of the *terreiro*) Genaldo Antonio dos Santos Novaes, agree on his rigor for the rituals, his insistence on everyone learning Yoruba—sometimes asking difficult questions in the language, surprising those who were unprepared—and his dedication to education, especially for children and teenagers, which he believed boosted self-esteem. Dedicated students of Bahian literature and culture and also members of Asipá, Filismina Saraiva and Gildeci Leite, remember him as a man who did not waste words but who when he did speak was very eloquent. According to Leite, Didi eventually decided not to give any more interviews, "because the word of an Alapini cannot risk being misinterpreted."

On a more festive note, however, Didi founded the carnival association, Pai Burukô, which although it ceased activity temporarily, was revived shortly before his death. Marco Aurélio recounts that when he was in the hospital, Didi was deeply moved to learn that Pai Burukô was going to parade once again. Before he died, Didi's grandson Antonio Oloxedê showed him his work for the first time, and demonstrated that his chosen path was a tribute to his grandfather (Pls. 95-96). When he saw the works of his grandson, Didi was delighted. One of his descendants would continue his artistic legacy.

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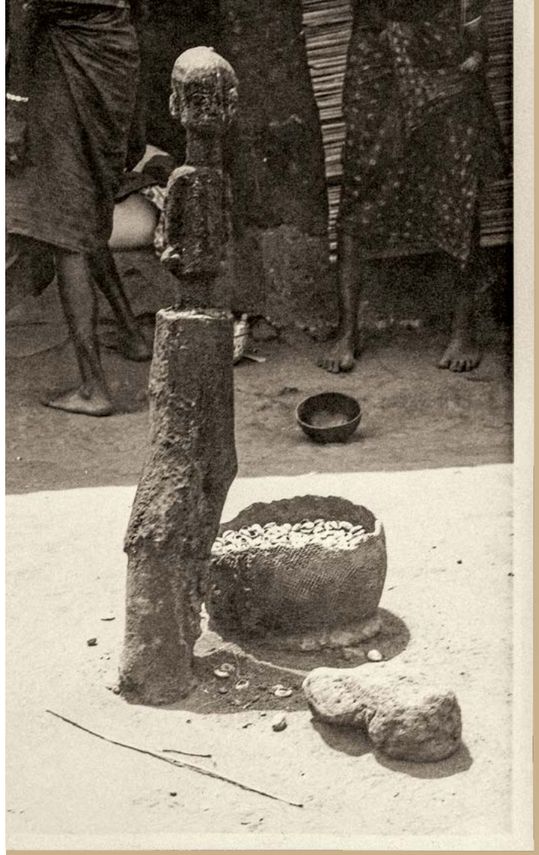
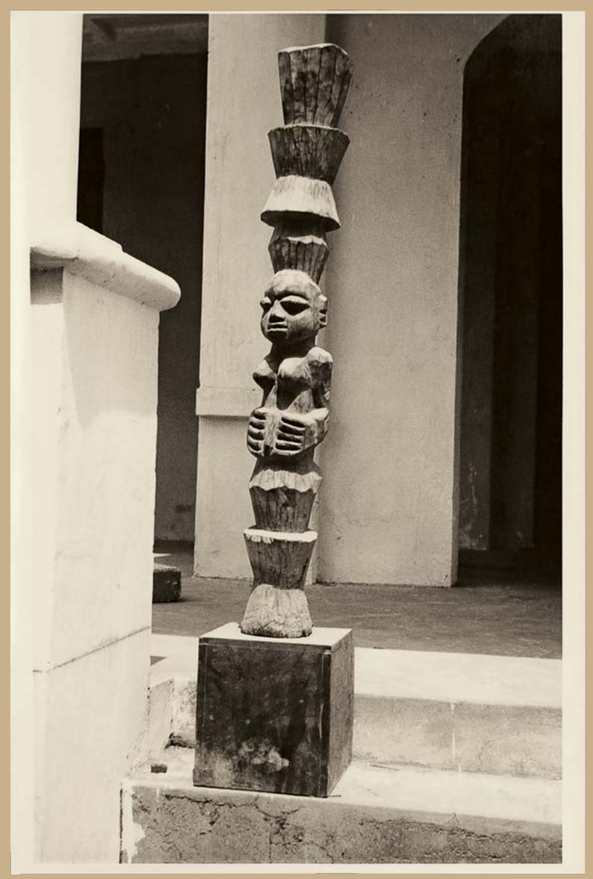
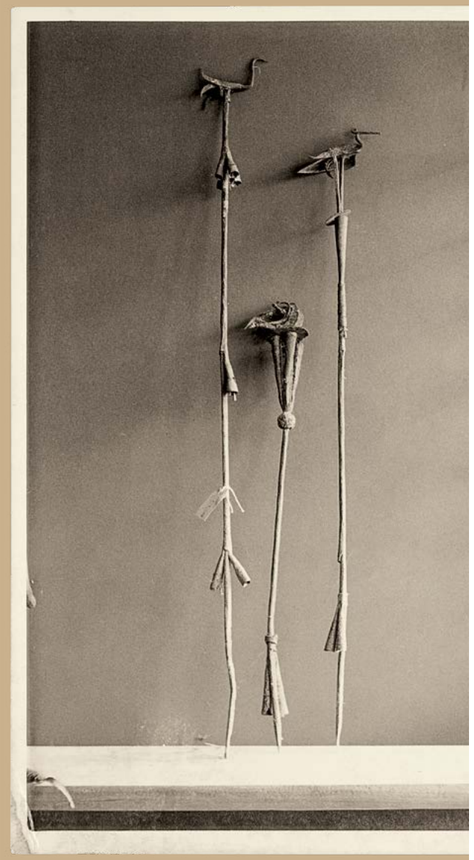






ABIGAIL LAPIN DARDASHTI

Mestre Didi's Transatlantic Exhibitions and the Redefinition of Afro-Brazilian Art

Throughout his career and after his death, Mestre Didi's work has permeated exhibition spaces across the transatlantic world. Three of these exhibitions mark important moments in the redefinition of his sculpture in relation to Afro-Brazilian art history. First, from 1968 to 1974, the exhibition *Arte Afro-Brasileira* (*Afro-Brazilian Art*), which Didi curated with his wife, Argentinean anthropologist Juana Elbein, traveled to Lagos, Dakar, Accra, Paris, London, and Rio de Janeiro (fig. 30).[1] Featuring decorative, everyday, and ritual objects from the northeastern state of Bahia as well as sculptures by Didi, the exhibition marked one of the first large-scale efforts to tour Afro-Brazilian art to a variety of countries, and was organized in collaboration with Itamaraty, Brazil's State Department, at the height of a repressive military regime.[2] A little over a decade later, in 1986, Didi presented his work at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York, aligning his art with the activism of Latinx leaders including Marta Moreno Vega—a seminal cultural activist who served as El Museo's del Barrio's second director, the founder of the Caribbean Cultural Center, and the organizer of three international orisha conferences in Lagos, Salvador, and New York during the 1980s (fig. 31). Finally, in 1988 Didi presented his work at the Musée National d'Art Moderne's *Magiciens de la Terre* in an individual gallery, propelling his career in the commercial art world and aligning him, albeit through the label of an outsider, to cultural producers from around the Global South (fig. 36). In addition to bringing visibility to Didi's own art, these exhibitions enabled him to develop his political discourse, asserting the cultural richness of Afro-Brazilian religion and everyday life, and, later, decrying Brazil's erasure of Black artistic contributions. The exhibitions provided a platform for Didi to articulate

[30] Installation view of *Afro-Brazilian Art*, curated by Mestre Didi and Juana Elbein dos Santos. Africa Centre, London, 1971–72.

the redefinitions of his artwork based on contemporaneous political climates. They also afforded him access to various artistic networks of international exchange, hemispheric Black social-rights activism, and global contemporaneity.

The 1960s and 1970s: Afro-Brazilian Art Around the Transatlantic World

In *Afro-Brazilian Art*, Didi and Elbein created a narrative in which anthropology overlapped with Afro-Bahian art history, reflecting decades of contentious discussions about Black identity and religion in Brazil. The exhibition presented a vision of Afro-Bahian art that was at once popular and modern, rural and cosmopolitan, ultimately unsettling these binaries in a transatlantic context. It featured objects employed in the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé—which syncretizes elements of Yoruba religion, Catholicism, and other faiths—as well as Didi's own sculptures, showing them to be rooted in West Africa.[3] At the same time, the curators portrayed Afro-Bahian art as independent, respectable, and non-derivative, and Bahia as the center of Black artistic production in Brazil. *Afro-Brazilian Art* complicated the international understanding of Black art in Brazil, separating it from the rest of Brazil's modernist art production while publicizing it on a global scale.

Although Didi and Elbein curated *Afro-Brazilian Art* independently from the government, they relied in part on Itamaraty for funding, help with transportation, and professional introductions. The Brazilian state funded the project because it closely aligned with their cultural diplomacy programs in West Africa. Since the 1930s, Brazil had implemented a rhetoric to define national identity that came to be known as racial democracy, which argued all Brazilians had white European, African, and Latin American Indigenous heritage.[4] With the onset of independence movements across the African continent in 1960, Itamaraty had grown its cultural and diplomatic projects in the region in an effort to be prioritized in these new economic markets. Itamaraty leveraged the arts as a vehicle to become an attractive partner for liberated countries.[5] Through exhibitions like *Afro-Brazilian Art*, diplomats aimed to present Brazil as a country without racism, veiling centuries of anti-Black discrimination and injustice.

Didi's background also served Itamaraty, as his religious training, ancestry, and Afro-Brazilian identity provided him with the authority to be a spokesperson for Black culture in Brazil. After his initiation to Candomblé as a child, at twenty years old Didi gained the title of *assogbá* (high priest), which gave him the privilege of making and consecrating objects for ritual using specific materials: cowrie shells, glass beads, palm tree fiber, and leather strips. Didi's oeuvre includes curved and erect palm-fiber bundles that also inform the non-consecrated sculptures that he arguably began making after meeting Elbein in 1962, and which he started exhibiting in 1964.[6] This foundation in object-making shaped his visual arts production as well as the exhibition *Afro-Brazilian Art*.

After spending five months traveling around Nigeria together in 1967, Didi and Elbein began organizing the exhibition

[31] Mestre Didi and Mãe Stella de Oxóssi at the exhibition *Mestre Didi: An Afro-Brazilian Artist*. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, 1986. Photograph by O. L. Abel.

from Bahia.[7] From May through July 1968, they fundraised and collected objects in preparation for *Afro-Brazilian Art*. Calling on vendors throughout Salvador and smaller towns in the interior of Bahia, they purchased over 250 objects representing both secular and religious Black culture.[8] For example, in Cachoeira they acquired miniature ceramic sculptures of a large boat with thirteen figurines, an Indigenous leader, *baianas*, and a capoeira group of sixteen figures including musicians and different dancers. The resulting exhibition *Afro-Brazilian Art* was divided into three sections, the first of which highlighted traditional Candomblé rituals, including eleven mannequins dressed as orishas (deities), metal sculptures designating the characteristic signs of orishas, and handheld ritual objects. A vitrine of twenty ceramic figurines portrayed a Candomblé ceremony with musicians and practitioners clad in their ritual dress, as well as onlookers and the *mãe de santo*, the temple's priestess (fig. 30).[9] The second section displayed twenty sculptures by Didi, grouped under the rubric of "recreations" of religious objects. The third one showcased decorative and everyday art and craft, including eighty small Black figurines and sculptures representing typical Bahian figures such as Candomblé practitioners, *baianas*, dancers and objects from the martial-arts dance capoeira, Catholic saints, musical instruments of Candomblé ceremonies, and everyday objects like fishing nets, spoons and plates.[10] While the exhibitions in West Africa, Argentina, and Western Europe had identical checklists, the Rio one contained additional works from Bahia due to the ease of transportation within Brazil itself.[11] In each location, the exhibition also featured extensive programs of panels, films, music, guided tours and lectures.

Representing the wealth of popular Bahian artistic practice, the exhibition displayed everyday objects like rosewood cups and bowls collected in Muniz Ferreira as well as ceramic jars and cups from the rural town of Maragogipinho.[12] The steel, silver, and iron objects used for either quotidian or religious purposes included items such as silver-plated charms of different local fruit for the Afro-Brazilian syncretic *balangandan* amulet, as well as ritual objects used in Candomblé ceremonies, such as the sword of the orisha of winds and storms, Iansã, or the scepter representing leaves and a bird of Ossain, the deity of medicinal leaves and plants.[13] The exhibition even featured a hammock and a life-size one-person raft. Didi and Elbein highlighted Afro-Bahians' Catholic worship, as they included small Black figurines of Catholic saints purchased in Cachoeira. These popular Bahian objects framed everyday activities, like fishing and creating cutlery from local materials, as diasporic practices linking Brazil to West Africa.

[32] Installation view of *Afro-Brazilian Art*. Museum of Antiquities, Lagos, 1968.

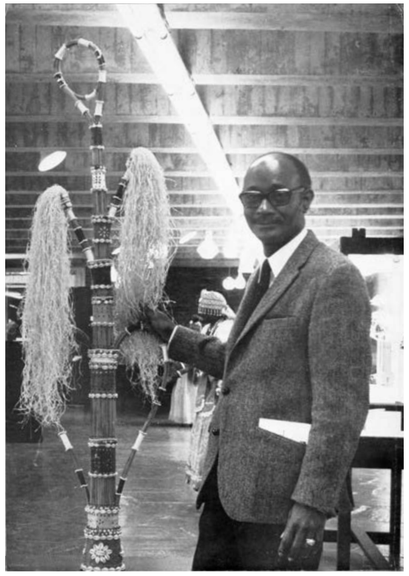
[33] Installation view of *Bahia no Ibirapuera,* organized by Lina Bo Bardi and Martim Gonçalves for the V Bienal de São Paulo. Museu de Arte Moderno de São Paulo, 1959.

The curators dressed the exhibition's life-size mannequins of orishas in traditional Bahian garb as well as Yoruba textiles.[14] At the first venue of the exhibition, the Museum of Antiquities in Lagos, Didi and Elbein included a mannequin representing Iansã wearing an overskirt fashioned from a Nigerian textile adorned with geometric patterns of stars and suns, and a headdress displaying the word "Nigeria" (fig. 32). This quintessentially Brazilian representation of the orisha is distinct from the one in the West African Yoruba religion, where the deity is identified with a round animal-skin fan and cowrie-shell bracelets. Didi's inclusion of a Nigerian fabric coincided with the rise of the textile market in Nigeria, which grew by over 35 percent between 1963 and 1969.[15] While the textile's decorative pattern depicting stars and the sun is not representative of Iansã's associations with wind, storms, lightning, or death, Didi may have purchased it at the market in Ifé for its red color, which is fundamental to Iansã's costume. The rest of the accompanying garments and accessories, including a small sword, an *erusin* (a scepter adorned with shells and topped with horsehair), beaded necklaces, metal bracelets, and a white lace blouse and patterned white petticoat, were brought from Bahia.[16]

Didi and Elbein's decision to intertwine Nigerian and Brazilian objects on the mannequin muddled the differences between the two religious traditions, directly connecting Candomblé to its Yoruba origins, rather than treating the Afro-Brazilian religion's differentiation over centuries. As constructed by anthropologists, government officials, and intellectuals like the Franco-Brazilian anthropologist and photographer Pierre Verger, Candomblé's purity and authenticity validated the religion as an African practice that had survived in Bahia thanks to racial democracy, directly bridging Brazil to West Africa politically and culturally.[17] Building from this approach, Didi's exhibition showed that Candomblé was not merely derivative of Yoruba religion, but rather a parallel evolution of it, which, moreover, retained visual references traceable to the continent. While Didi's predecessors, like his own mother the priestess Mãe Senhora, had always maintained complex and more distant relationships with their West African counterparts, Didi now highlighted his direct lineage as a proof of legitimate kinship on the continent itself.

Afro-Brazilian Art's emphasis on popular culture related to an interest, flourishing in southeastern Brazil since the 1950s, in a generalized idea of northeastern Brazilian regional culture, developed predominantly by white intellectuals and artists like Lina Bo Bardi. An Italian immigrant architect who settled in São Paulo in the late 1940s, Bo Bardi lived in Bahia in the second half of the 1950s, renovating the Solar de União complex that became the Museu de Arte Popular na Bahia (MAPB) in 1959, where she served as the first director. In 1960, she also founded the Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia (MAMB) in a temporary space.[18] Working alongside Bo Bardi at MAPB, Didi was the "founder and curator of the Afro-Bahian sector," which included objects similar to the ones in *Afro-Brazilian Art*.[19] Bo Bardi's 1959 exhibition *Bahia no Ibirapuera* (Bahia in Ibirapuera) at the Museu de Arte Moderno de São Paulo, like *Afro-Brazilian Art*, displayed Candomblé ritual objects on temporary walls as well as life-size models of orisha attire (fig. 33). With many buildings designed by Oscar Niemeyer, including the museum itself, Ibirapuera Park exemplifies Brazil's modern architecture. Yet Bo Bardi's exhibition emphasized Bahia as a rural place marginal to this modernism. Didi had either seen the exhibition in person or via photographs, which likely inspired him. Bo Bardi's exhibition *Exposição Nordeste: Possibilidades da Manufatura Popular* at MAPB in 1963 displayed everyday Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous objects made of wood, metal, and ceramic throughout the galleries of the museum, often presented on the floor or in large groupings on unpainted wooden shelves (fig. 29). Bo Bardi's display aesthetics related to her Brutalist architectural language, while Didi and Elbein organized *Afro-Brazilian Art* in an organic fashion, displaying as many objects as possible on a single wall and spreading mannequins throughout the space. Bo Bardi's exhibitions and her museum initiatives in Bahia in the 1960s offered Didi and other Bahian artists a vision of popular culture as valid for museum display, albeit through a fetishistic lens that considered the objects as othered, rural, and separate from São Paulo's modern-art scene. A consequence of Bo Bardi's experiences in both São Paulo and Salvador, her exhibition framed two urban centers as opposites; one as white, modern, and cosmopolitan, and the second as Black, insular, traditional, and timeless. However, the exhibition also brought visibility to objects and practices only seldom on display in São Paulo.

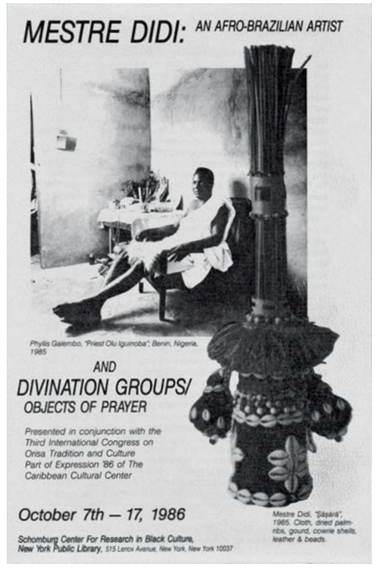
Didi and Elbein's exhibition diverged from Bo Bardi's projects because it demonstrated their intimate knowledge of Candomblé. For example, he limited his selection to objects from the Nagô branch of Candomblé, which is derived from Yoruba religion, differing from Bo Bardi's inclusion of African masks and "Macumba" objects.[20] This focus on Nagô culture overshadowed the variety of Candomblé origins like Candomblé Bantu, for instance, which has roots in Angola, privileging the Yoruba lineage of Nigeria, Togo, and Benin that had been emphasized by Verger.[21] Bo Bardi had constructed a rural environment in the modernist pavilion at Ibirapuera, spreading leaves and plants throughout the exhibition and painting the freestanding walls in different colors.[22] On the other hand, *Afro-Brazilian Art* was displayed in West African, Western European, and Brazilian modernist buildings using traditional white pedestals and simple freestanding walls. Bo Bardi's exhibition design leveraged the broad idea of northeastern popular authenticity to challenge Brazil's midcentury developmentalism, offering viewers an immersive zone of escape, refusal, or respite. On the other hand, Didi and Elbein aimed to create a diasporic understanding of Afro-Brazilian authenticity that connected Candomblé concretely to African religion and quotidian life, rather than conjuring general imaginaries of these elements. Another major difference between *Bahia no*



[34] Installation view of Mestre Didi, *Afro-Brazilian Art*. UNESCO, Paris, 1970.

Ibirapuera and *Afro-Brazilian Art* was Didi and Elbein's inclusion of his own artwork. In her exhibition, Bo Bardi had separated modern art from popular objects. Didi's works in the exhibition featured modern sculptures that mixed the characteristic objects of several orishas, including some that surpassed the usual size of ritual objects. At UNESCO in Paris in 1970, Didi posed next to a sculpture taller than him by half a meter, comprised of a monumental shashara trunk with two ibiri semicircles on the bottom half (fig. 34).[23] On the upper half, two branches with unruly raffia at each end emerge from an enlarged version of the vertical ritual object shashara. The height of the sculpture is striking: while Didi's art from 1964 had matched the handheld size of ceremonial objects, this work emerges as a life-size monument, emulating the enormous sacred trees in West Africa that Didi had documented in his research during his first trip to Nigeria.[24] Taken by Elbein in 1972, the photograph of Didi next to his sculpture was published in *Afro-Brazilian Art*'s catalogue when the exhibition took place at the Africa Centre in London .[25] While the image documents the scale of the object, it also displays Didi's own body as a spectacle of Afro-Brazilian authenticity.

For Itamaraty, Didi and Elbein's exhibition provided the opportunity to directly involve West African politicians in their endeavors. Senegalese president Léopold Sédar Senghor wrote an enthusiastic letter to Didi about the exhibition and exclaimed that it would "constitute an important contribution to the strengthening of the cultural links between Brazil and Senegal."[26] In Lagos, the exhibition gained the support of the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of External Affairs, as well as the Museum of Antiquities, which funded local transportation and installation costs. According to Didi, even the "King of Lagos," Obá Adeyinka Oyekan II, visited the exhibition. The U.S. embassy organized a dinner, lunch, and cocktail in honor of Didi and Elbein.[27] Likewise in Accra, the curators gained the support of the Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, which helped coordinate several panels and events at the Achimota school.[28] In addition to increasing the image of Afro-Brazilianness in West Africa, as desired by Itamaraty, Didi and Elbein's exhibition provided them with an international outreach in both African and African diasporic spaces as well as general ones like UNESCO. Beyond the important scope of the exhibition, his ability to show his work in major West African and Western European cities with the presence of important politicians—an unprecedented venture for an Afro-Brazilian artist—showcased his work and its significance for an international audience.



[35] Exhibition pamphlet for *Mestre Didi: An Afro-Brazilian Artist*. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, 1986.

The 1980s: The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, and *Magiciens de la Terre* in Paris

In 1986, Didi presented a small selection of his work at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York as part of the third orisha conference organized by the Caribbean Culture Center, which was founded and directed by Moreno Vega. Didi had participated in the first and second conferences, held in Ifé, Nigeria in 1980, and in Salvador in 1983. These international events aimed at bringing together religious figures, intellectuals, and cultural producers from the African diaspora to position orishas as emblems of resistance to the whitewashing of Black culture, the marginalization of Black Latin American artists, and the attempted erasures of African-derived religions in the Americas. Entitled *Mestre Didi: An Afro-Brazilian Artist*, the exhibition evidenced the continuous transatlantic exchange between Brazil and West Africa. However, curators framed Didi's work as "sculptural artifacts," sidelining his investment in visual art and positioning him as a religious authority who also made craft objects.[29]

Displayed alongside photographs of people and religious figures from the city of Benin by the U.S. artist Phyllis Galembo, Didi's work presented an Afro-Brazilian perspective on transatlantic and hemispheric Black activism (fig. 35). His work provided visibility for Afro-Brazilian religious objects as well as their artistic production.

[36] Installation view of works by Mestre Didi in *Magiciens de la Terre*. Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1989.

However, the New York exhibition's approach sidelined the modernity of his objects, the importance of both his travels and the exhibition *Afro-Brazilian Art* in shaping his artistic practice, and the shifts in his sculpture since the 1960s. To advocate for its religious authenticity, his work was situated in a timeless sphere and presented primarily as "ritual sculpture."[30] Yet the exhibition inserted him into an international network of Black activism grounded in African-derived religion and art, inserting him into a community of like-minded artists and activists.

In addition to Didi, other Brazilian artists including the Afro-Brazilian painter, theater director, and activist Abdias Nascimento engaged with New York's Black and Puerto Rican artistic communities (Pls. 54-56). Nascimento had an exhibition at Taller Boricua in 1980, with Marcos Dimas installing his work in the hallways of the very same building that El Museo del Barrio occupies today.[31] A professor at University of Buffalo's Puerto Rican Studies Department, Nascimento was also in dialogue with other notable artists in both East and Central Harlem like Jorge Soto Santos and Romare Bearden. When he came to New York in 1968, he met African American intellectuals like Amiri Baraka and had numerous exhibitions and fellowships at universities in the northeast including Columbia University, Yale University, and Wesleyan College.[32]

Both Nascimento and Didi joined New York-based networks of Black and Puerto Rican art-making, positioning their work in an international context of visual resistance to those who devalued their oeuvre.

In parallel to Nascimento during his exhibitions in New York, the presence of Didi's work at the Schomburg Center inscribed him into a global network of African diasporic knowledge making and art in the Americas. Arturo Schomburg sold his vast archival and bibliographic collection to the New York Public Library in 1926 in order to establish one of the first publicly-available collections about the African diaspora. Originally from Puerto Rico, Schomburg moved to New York as an adult and religiously searched for limited tomes, archival material, and rare books related to the African diaspora. A writer who worked a day job as a mail clerk, he collected financially devalued but intellectually essential material to build a Black history that had long been silenced and denied. As historian Laura Helton has argued, "Schomburg simultaneously rebuked the market's devaluation of Black textuality and paradoxically depended upon that devaluation to afford his acquisitions."[33] For him, Black history was both "rupture and reparation," as Helton writes.[34] It comes as no surprise that Didi's work would be compatible with Schomburg's mission as his trajectory evidences similar goals. Grounded in Bahia's Black culture as well as the consequences of enslavement, oppression, and persistent racism, Didi created art and, alongside Elbein, exhibitions that evinced the underlying discrimination against Black visual sources within Candomblé and Yoruba objects and practices as divorced from the modern. Rather than divorcing African diasporic religious imagery from its context, as many other artists had done in their search for a distinctly Brazilian modernism, Didi worked from a holistic perspective of Candomblé spiritual principles and aesthetics as a living culture constituted by diasporic communities. His work presents a rupture from prior modern engagements with Yoruba imagery by positioning Candomblé not as an anachronistic or "pure" source for modernist cultural renewal, but as already modern in its very constitution. He thus mends the assumed division between modernism (or modernity) and Afro-diasporic religion.

The perception of Didi's work as ritualistic continued through a contemporary art lens at the seminal exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre*, presented at the Centre Pompidou and the Grande Halle de La Villette in 1989. Jean-Hubert Martin, the show's principle curator, aimed to respond to the foundational history of European museums as well as exhibitions that positioned artists outside the Global North as Others. More specifically, his exhibition responded to the Museum of Modern Art's *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and Modern* in 1984, which displayed modern artworks alongside sculptures from the African continent, the ancient Americas, and Polynesia. Instead, Martin sought to reject the exclusive Western idea of the "artist," replacing the term with "magician" and including as many cultural producers from the Global North as from outside it. However, as has been amply demonstrated, many critical responses to the exhibition considered it "the embodiment of a neocolonialist attitude that allowed the contemporary art system to colonize, commercially and intellectually, new areas that were previously out of bounds," as curator and writer Pablo Lafuente has explained.[35] Despite its pitfalls, the exhibition brought attention to the inequalities in modern and contemporary art history and its display in influential museums of the Global North and beyond.

In the exhibition, curators displayed Didi's work on green pedestals against a navy wall in their own gallery on the Centre Pompidou's fifth floor (fig. 36). Resonating with Bo Bardi's *Bahia in Ibirapuera*, the floor was also covered with green material resembling grass, evoking rural spaces. His gallery was surrounded by rooms with art by Per Kirkeby (Denmark), Georges Liautaud (Haiti), Nuche Kaji Bajracharya (Nepal), and Francesco Clemente (Italy). Some of these adjacent artists included spiritual aspects in their work, and much of the work was abstract. However, apart from these loose connections, the artworks and artists had little in common. As anthropologist Amélia Siegel Corrêa has argued, the exhibition lacked contextualization, making interpretation and comprehension difficult for viewers.[36]

Alongside other artists from the Caribbean and Latin America including José Bedia (Cuba), Alfredo Jaar (Chile), Cildo Meireles (Brazil), and Liautaud, among others, Didi's presence in the exhibition unsettled Martin's attempt at dismantling the non-West/West binary. Indeed, artists from the region belong to the Western hemisphere and are ultimately "Western" artists according to their location. However, because some of the artists' work directly addressed or represented African-derived culture and religion, Martin and his team considered them as part of the so-called "non-West," revealing the inherent racist practices of the Global North's art world, despite their efforts to challenge them. Considering the artists as "magicians," rather than visual artists, irrespective of the type of objects they made, further isolated those like Didi, whose work had occupied a liminal space between ritual object and artwork because of the contemporaneous discourses that relegated it either exclusively to religion, or those that denied it the status of modern art. Perhaps in 1989, similarly to today, Didi's work, grounded in South-South transatlantic relationships, Afro-Brazilian religious imagery and object making, as well as Brazil's rich history of abstraction, was not acceptable as Western art for *Magiciens de la Terre*'s curators.[37]

Redefining Afro-Brazilian Art Around the Transatlantic World

Didi's exhibitions outside Brazil undoubtedly raised his profile as an artist, an activist, a religious authority, and a prominent figure in the African diasporic art world. Through different political contexts, the artist not only developed his work from his research and new relationships, but also increased the presence of Black artists from Brazil in a variety of institutions around the transatlantic world, ultimately redefining the role of Afro-Brazilian art. Despite his international reach in large modern art museums, international organizations, and small non-profits, his work continued to occupy a liminal space.

Yet Didi's exhibitions demonstrate his work as belonging to modernism, modernization, and modernity, despite the consequential framing of his art during his lifetime. Much attention has been placed on his participation in *Magiciens de la Terre*, as he was an artist from the global south who operated outside traditional modernist artistic networks and grew his commercial success largely after the 1989 presentation. However, as I have demonstrated in this essay, it was his groundbreaking traveling exhibition *Afro-Brazilian Art* that shaped his practice and experience with sculpture, culminating in his participation in *Magiciens de la Terre*. Ultimately, his work and circulating exhibitions embody the rootedness of transatlantic Black modernisms because of the upward growth of his sculpture, the multivalent relationships between the different lines in his artworks, the complex trajectories of his shows, as well as his experience making Candomblé objects and studying Yoruba ones.[38] Grounded in African diasporic object creation, his work is essential to understanding Brazil's modern, international artistic networks during the postwar period.

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Mestre Didi
Selected Writings

Alongside his practice as an artist, Mestre Didi also produced an important body of scholarship documenting Candomblé spiritual beliefs and culture. His publications draw from a variety of disciplines—history, linguistics, anthropology, and memoir—to create a textured corpus of the Candomblé universe. The following excerpts are an incomplete but important selection of Didi's writings, made available in English for the first time. The first entry is a selection of pages from the pioneering booklet *Yoruba As It's Spoken* (1950), which Didi created to promote the use and comprehension of Yoruba as a vital heritage language in Brazil. Due to space limitations, they have been condensed; ellipses in brackets [...] signify omissions from the original text.

ALFABETO

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Yoruba As It's Spoken, 1950 [selected pages]

Originally published as *Iorubá tal qual se fala*. Salvador: Tipografía Moderna, 1950. Reproduced in *História de um terreiro nagô: crônica histórica*. São Paulo: Carthago & Forte, 1994.

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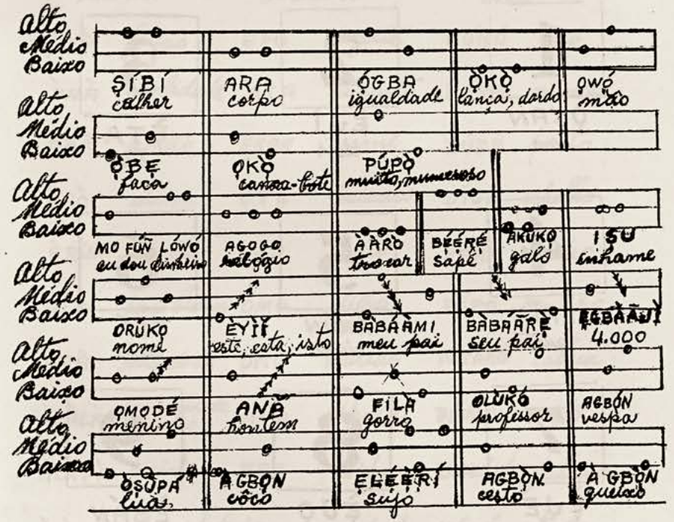

ÌṢÍRÒ = NÚMEROS

1 ỌKAN *um*	2 ÈJÌ *dois*	3 ẸTA *três*
4 ẸRÌN *quatro*	5 ÀRÚN *cinco*	6 ẸFÁ *seis*
7 ẸJE *sete*	8 ẸJỌ *oito*	9 ÈSÁN *nove*

Exercícios para o reconhecimento e domínio dos tons

Baixo		Médio		Alto	
ẸWÀ	*feijão*	EPO	*azeite*	KÓKÓ	*nó*
ÌWÀ	*qualidade*	ATA	*pimenta*	RÁRÁ	*nunca*
ẸBÀ	*pirão*	ẸRAN	*carne*	DÚPẸ́	*preto*
ÒJÒ	*chuva*	ẸYẸ	*pássaro*	DÍGÍ	*espelho*
ẸRÙN	*verão*	EKU	*rato*	PÁRÁ	*campo*
ÀLÀ	*pano branco*	ỌMỌ	*filho*	PÓPÓ	*caminho*
ÈPÀ	*amendoim*	ỌKỌ	*marido*	PÁTÁKÓ	*tábua*
ÀMÀLÀ	*caruru de quiabo*	AYA	*esposa*	DÉNPÉ	*curto*
ÀLÀPÀ	*ruína*	ARA	*corpo*	LÁGBÁÁ	*fulano*
ÒKÙNKÙN	*obscuridade*	ÌRE	*Bondade*	KẸ́SẸ́	*estribo*

AJA
Cachorro

AJA GBE ẸJA
O cachorro leva o peixe

ÀGA
Cadeira

ÌYÁ GBÉ ÀGA
a mãe leva a cadeira

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a mãe está sentada sobre a cadeira

BABA GBE ADE OBA
o pai leva a coroa do rei

ADE
coroa

EWÉ
folha

OBA DE ADÉ
o rei está com a coroa

IYA NJA EWE
a mãe destala folhas

IYA RU EWÉ
a mãe carrega as folhas

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tesoura

ABẸ̀RẸ́
agulha

ÀTÙPÀ
lâmpada

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ỌKUNRIN WÒ ÌWÉ LỌWỌ́ ÒSI RẸ

O homem olha o livro na sua mão esquerda

ỌKUNRÌN GBÉ ÀWỌN ÌWÉ LÁBẸ́ APÁ ÒSÌ

O homem carrega os livros embaixo do braço esquerdo

ỌKUNRÌN WÒ ÌWÉ LỌWỌ́ ỌTÚN RẸ

O homem olha o livro na sua mão direita

ADÌẸ KAN ÀTI ÀWỌN ỌMỌ RẸ

Uma galinha e todos seus filhos.

ỌMỌ ADÌẸ
pinto

ÀKÙKỌ MÉJÌ KÒ SỌ RỌ́ NI BỌ̀DI

Dois galos não cantam em um terreiro

ÀKÙKỌ KAN
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Axé Opô Afonjá: An Historical Account of a Bahian Terreiro [selected excerpts]

THE EARLY DAYS OF THE AXÉ

The first *Iyalorixa* (*mãe de santo*) of the *Axé Opô Afonjá*, founded in 1910, was Eugênia Anna dos Santos, known as Aninha.[1] Born in Bahia on July 13, 1869, she was the legitimate daughter of Sergio dos Santos (Aniyó) and Lucinda Maria da Conceição (Azambriyó), both of whom were Africans of Gurunsi descent.

[She] practiced Shango at the house of Maria Júlia Figueiredo, herself a daughter of the first priestess Iyá Nassô in Rua dos Capitães. Through this rite, Aninha was given the name Obá Biyi.

When the time was right, after she had completed her seven years of initiation, and as ordained by the orishas, further rites empowered her to act as one of the custodians of the Afro-Bahian religious tradition and to become the *Iyalorixá* of the traditional *Axé de Ketu* and she became known as Iyá Obá Biyi. Although she was a descendant of the Gurunsi nation, her spiritual practice was *Shango Ogodô* and *Afonjá* of the Ketu nation.

Later, she studied with the numerous learned African aunts and uncles she had met who were well-versed in the religious traditions [...] she was then invited to join the *Engenho Velho Candomblé* (the Casa Branca). [...] However, after some internal disagreements there, Aninha and her followers moved to a site known as "Camarão" in Rio Vermelho, which was the *terreiro* of Joaquim Vieira (Obá Sãiyá), a devotee of Shango, [...]. Sometime later, she moved to another *terreiro* known as "Santa Cruz" in the same district.

Four years later, [...] on November 4 [1907], together with José Theodório Pimentel, [...] Balé Xangô [...], she initiated several *iyawôs*,[2] including Maria Bibiana do Espírito Santo (Senhora), of Oshun.

Time passed, and three years later in around 1910, Aninha Iyá Obá Biyi was living on the Ladeira do Pelourinho, near the Church of Nossa Senhora do Rosário where she held a position of distinction, not only within the religious brotherhoods there but also in the Church of Barroquinha. It was then, guided by her *Eledá* (or guardian angel) Shango, that she bought a plot in Alto de São Gonçalo do Retiro. There, she set up her *terreiro*, naming it *Axé Opô Afonjá*; and soon afterwards, she built a grand house to honor all the orishas and for the elders who went with her, and marked the inauguration of the new *terreiro* with the initiation of Agripina Souza, a daughter of Shango.[3] Agripina is today the *Iyalorishá* of the *Axé Afonjá* in Rio de Janeiro, in Coelho da Rocha in the state of Guanabara. [...]

On August 27, 1911, having started to settle in, there was the initiation of [...]. By this point, Iyá Obá Biyi had personally initiated twenty-three initiates [...] and had twenty men serving as *Alabês*, *Axoguns*, and *Ogans*. With her hard work, tenacity, and with the support of those around her, Iyá Obá Biyi continued to build the Axé, constructing shrines for Eshu and Oshala, complete with a room for the *Ayabás*. She also built *Ilê Iyá*, a shrine to Yemaya where Mãe Aninha worshipped *Iya n'ilé Gruncis* (mother of the Gurunsi lands in Africa), and others for *Obalusiiê*, Oshosi, as well as the *Ilê Ibó Iku* (a house of veneration for the dead).

The years went by, and the festivals and ceremonies for the orishas at the *Axé* continued to be observed with the correct rituals, even when she was away in Rio de Janeiro and left the *Axé* in the hands of those she trusted.

In 1934, for the annual festival of the *Águas de Oxalá* (Waters of Oshala), and when Iyá Obá Biyi was in Rio, a modest straw pavilion in front of the house of Oshala was renovated, and the *Senhora*, then Osi Dagan, ordered the construction of a new house for Oshun, her guardian spirit, next to the house of Oshosi, so as to be able to hold the celebrations in accordance with the calendar.

In June 1935, Iyá Obá Biyi (Mãe Aninha), had returned to Bahia and resumed the observances dedicated to her orishas [...]. This was when, in her wisdom and authority, Mãe Aninha formally designated the twelve *Obás de Axé*, also known as the Twelve Ministers of Shango, a tradition preserved only in Bahia's *Axé Opô Afonjá*. These high ranking *Obás* were divided into six on the right (*Otun Obá*), who were granted voices and votes, and six on the left, granted only their voices. [...]

The revival of the ancient tradition of the *Obás de Xangô* increased the reputation of *Opô Afonjá*, and was testament to the skill and the wisdom of Iyalorixá Aninha Iyá Obá Biyi.

THE CREATION OF A CIVIL SOCIETY

The civil society, the *Sociedade Beneficente Cruz Santa Opô Afonjá*, was then set up with Mr. Martiniano Elizeu do Bonfim (Ajimudá) serving as honorary president. The initial board of directors included Arkelao de Abreu (Obá Abiodun) as president, Miguel A. de Sant'Anna (Obá Aré) as vice-president, Tiburcio Muniz (Ogá lie Qgun) as secretary, and Jacinto Souza (Obá Odófin) as treasurer.

In 1936, under the guidance and determined efforts of Iyá Obá Biyi, the foundation stone for the current main hall was laid. This event was celebrated with a gathering of the entire community and the local authorities of the time. Shortly after, a house was built for Ossanyin, the master of herbs, and another for *Onilé*, the owner of the earth. [...]

Towards the end of 1937, with the advent of the *Estado Novo*,[4] the writer and ethnographer Edison Carneiro, who was wanted by the state, sought refuge at the *terreiro*, where Mãe Aninha offered him safe asylum. He stayed in the house of Oshun, in whom Aninha placed her faith to watch over him and protect him.

Not only Edison Carneiro but also several other important figures were —through their friendship with Mãe Aninha, connected to the *Axé*, and attended its celebration. Among these were Artur Ramos, Donald Pierson, Jorge Amado, and Aydano do Couto Ferraz.

To mark the second Afro-Brazilian Congress, held in Salvador in 1936, for which Iyalorixá Iyá Obá Biyi (Aninha) contributed a paper on Bahian liturgical cuisine, the congress attendees were celebrated at the *Axé* on the occasion of the renovation of the house of Iyá, a ceremony that was noted for its pure ritual and exquisite beauty, and which left a lasting impression on all present.

THE DEATH OF MÃE ANINHA AND HER SUCCESSION

On January 3, 1938 at nine o'clock, Iyá Obá, in her great wisdom, saw that she was soon to die, and had clothes for her burial prepared. She summoned her grandson, the *Assobá* (myself), Miguel A. de Sant'Anna – the *Obá Aré*, and the Senhora – Osi Dagan. [...]

Although her speech was already a little unclear, Iyá Obá Biyi (Mãe Aninha) said, "Obá Aré, Obá Abiodun shall remain president of the Society, and you, I want you to stay by the side of Osi Dagan, *Iessé orisha* (at the feet of the Saint)." She then switched to Yoruba, saying things that none of them understood, before finally saying, "You do not know what you have lost." She requested to be taken to the house of Iyá, where, after performing some rites with the assistance of her *filhas-de-santo* and the gathered *Obás* and *Ogans*, she spoke no more, and passed away at three in the afternoon. [...]

After the necessary preparations, at seven o'clock that same evening Iyá Obá Biyi's body was carried in a hearse from the *Axé Opô Afonjá* to the Church of Nossa Senhora do Rosário, where the open casket remained on display until three o'clock the next afternoon, the start of the funeral procession. The guestbook at the entrance of the Church registered over eight hundred signatures.

When the funeral procession was ready, and the hearse and eight buses for those in attendance had arrived, the neighborhood of Pelourinho was thronged with cars and people come to pay their respects. [...]

According to the newspapers of the time, the vast numbers of people stalled traffic for an hour and forty-five minutes.

At the foot of the Ladeira das Quintas, as fitting for the deceased *Iyalorixá*, the casket was passed to the *Obás*, *Ogans*, and *filhos-da-casa*. The ceremonial procession began, led by Osi Dagan (Senhora) who praised Shango and prayed God to grant the *Iyalorixá* eternal rest.

This was followed by the customary hymns, and those carrying the casket walked forwards a few steps, took three steps back, and then moved forwards again, until, in this manner, they reached the gate of the Quintas, where they passed the casket back to those who had carried it from the Church. In deep and solemn silence, they proceeded to the cemetery of the Brotherhood of São Benedito, where the burial took place, and eulogies were given by Ajimudá (Martiniano Elizeu do Bonfim) and many others.

Thus was Iyá Obá Biyi, Eugênia Anna dos Santos, Mãe Aninha, interred with the formalities of both the Catholic faith and Afro-Brazilian cult. She now rests in a beautiful mausoleum provided by the *Sociedade Beneficente Cruz Santa Opô Afonjá*.

After all due rites and obligations were completed in accordance with regulation, and with everything suitably arranged within the *Axé Opô Afonjá*, Maria Bibiana do Espírito Santo (Senhora), born March 31, 1900, in Ladeira da Praça, Salvador, and the rightful successor due to her family heritage in the Ketu Axé nation, assumed the title of Iyalaxé Opô Afonjá (Mother of the Axé Opô Afonjá), and alongside Maria da Purificação Lopes (Badá Olufan Deiyi), who was a friend of Iyá Obá Biyi (Aninha), and daughter of African parents, took the helm of the *terreiro*.

Together they took over the operations of the *Axé*, and on June 26, 1939, they inaugurated a new house to venerate the dead, which had been constructed for the observances for the late Aninha, next to the crucifix that was on the *terreiro*. [...] Later in 1939, a house was built for Ogun, and the work on the new main hall and the house of Shango were restarted.

[...] In December 1940, *Senhora* was running the *Axé* alone, and initiated her first *Iyawô* without the aid of the elderly Maria da Purificação Lopes (Badá), who due to ill health had delegated all responsibilities for the *Axé* to *Senhora*. Badá's health continued to decline, and she passed away the following year at the end of 1941.

MÃE SENHORA

On August 19, 1942, after completing the requisite mourning period and the necessary obligations in accordance with the rituals and the rights that were due to the aged Badá, and with the main hall already inaugurated, work on the *Axé* resumed, and several *Iyawôs* were initiated. [...] After these *Iyawôs* had been initiated, and the orishas had given them their respective names, a new chapter began in the life of the *terreiro*, and everything was running smoothly under the sure administration of the *Sociedade* and the clear leadership of Senhora, the *Iyalorixá*, who both then (and now) was worthy of her position, and was a deserved successor to Aninha, Iyá Obá Biyi – her predecessor at the *Opô Afonjá*. [...]

On January 3, 1945, the service called *Aku*, or the seven year obligation, was held to honor the spirit of Eugênia Anna dos Santos, and in attendance were representatives from nearly all the African Candomblé houses in Bahia, personal friends, writers, journalists, and numerous visitors. This was the group's final obligation to Iyá Obá Biyi, to grant her peace and eternal rest.

In August 1952, Pierre Verger returned from Africa, bringing with him a *Xeré E Edun Ara Xangô* given to him in Nigeria by Onã Mogbá, at the request of Obá Adeniran Adeyemi, the 2nd *Alafin Oyo*, to give to Maria Bibiana do Espírito Santo (*Senhora*), along with a letter conferring on her the title of Iyá Nassô. This was confirmed in the main hall of the *Axé Opô Afonjá* on August 9, 1953, in the presence of all house members, delegates from other *terreiros*, intellectuals, followers, writers, and journalists, among others. This event marked the renewal of the longstanding religious links between Africa and Bahia, which have continued and expanded, with a steady exchange of gifts and messages between Mãe Senhora and kings and notable figures from the sect in Africa.

On November 4, 1958, Senhora —as the Iyalorixá Iyá Nassô is more commonly known— commemorated 50 years since her religious initiation, 50 years devoted to Oshun, her guardian angel (whom she worships in Catholicism as Our Lady of Aparecida, with a yearly mass on March 31, which coincides with her birthday). The fiftieth anniversary of Mãe Senhora's dedication was marked with a deeply moving celebration – the richly decorated main hall was filled to overflowing, and there were countless Afro-Brazilian delicacies served, washed down with the refreshing *aluá*[5] (or *aruá*).

The event was attended not only by delegations from many of the Candomblé groups in Bahia, who came to honor the *Iyalorixá* of the *Axé Opô Afonjá*, but also prominent intellectuals, many of whom traveled especially from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, amongst whom were the representatives of President Juscelino Kubitschek, Pascoal Carlos Magno, and that of the Minister of Education Dr. Clóvis Salgado, deputy Celso Brant.

Following on from and extending Aninha's traditions, Mãe Senhora has understood how to welcome and bring together eminent figures from Brazilian intellectual life, especially those from Bahia, within *Opô Afonjá*, and how to forge connections between the *terreiro* and scientists, writers, and artists, introducing them to the lively and ever-evolving popular culture of our house of worship. Alongside those simple folk who hold positions in the hierarchy of the *terreiro* are also well-known names such as Jorge Amado, Pierre Verger, Carybé, Vasconcelos Maia, Antônio Olinto, Moysés Alves, Vivaldo and Sinval Costa Lima, Zora Seljan, Zélia Amado, Lênio Braga, and Rubem Valentim.

Mãe Senhora has blessed the heads of the poet Vinícius de Moraes, the ethnographer Edison Carneiro, the composer Dorival Caymmi, the singer João Gilberto, the sculptors Mário Cravo and Mirabeau Sampaio, the writer James Amado, the painter Jenner Augusto, the actress Beatriz Costa, the essayists Clarival Prado Valadares and Waldeloir Rego, the professors Rui Antunes, Paulo and Doris Loureiro, Milton Santos, Ramiro Porto Alegre, and Heron de Alencar, the publisher Diaulas Riedel, Dr. Eugênio Antunes, the *senhoras* Olga Bianchi, Suzana Rodrigues, and Lais Antunes, Professor Roger Bastide from the Sorbonne, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir, to mention only those that memory recalls.

When they visited Bahia, taken by Jorge Amado, Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir spent a long time with Mãe Senhora at the *Axé*. Sartre later remarked that he had seldom met anyone with such a profound wisdom about life. Mãe Senhora decreed that Sartre's orisha is Oshala, and that of Simone is Oshun.

With these brief notes, I have wished to give an overview of the history of one of Bahia's most important houses of worship, the *Axé Opô Afonjá*. I have spoken only of that which I could and was permitted to say, but I hope that these pages, along with those that follow, may be of some use to those who are interested in the subject of African worship and its development in Brazil. The *Axé Opô Afonjá*, under the leadership of *Iyalorixá* Iyá Nassô, Mãe Senhora, continues to grow, devoutly preserving its essence and ritual, maintaining the Nagô tradition, and welcoming with friendship and respect all those who come to this *terreiro*, where the glories of Shango and all the orishas are exalted.

LIST OF ORISHAS (SAINTS) WORSHIPPED AT THE AXÉ OPÔ AFONJÁ

1. Oshala
2. Oduduwa
3. Shango
4. Oshosi
5. Aranyia
6. Iyá Masê
7. Bayni
8. Onilé
9. Osanyin
10. Ogun
11. Omolu or Obaluaiye
12. Oshumare
13. Cajapriku
14. Iyá
15. Oshun
16. Nana
17. Yemaya
18. Obá
19. Euá
20. Iansan
21. Beji
22. Otin
23. Logunéde
24. Eshu

Furthermore, Roko and Apaoká, sacred trees. Eshu is worshipped as the messenger of the saints. Cajapriku and Iyá are saints from the Gurunsi nation.

Originally published as *Axé Opô Afonjá (Notícia Histórica de um Terreiro de Santo da Bahia)*. Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Brasileiro de Estudos Afro-Asiáticos, 1962.

A Black Man from Bahia in Ketu

I used to always hear my mother and other older people of African heritage saying that we were descended from one of the royal families of the Kingdom of Ketu, but I never gave it much thought, and thought it a bit ridiculous to talk about it with anyone else. I assumed that everything I'd heard about my family's royal lineage – taking into account the hardships Black people have historically faced trying to preserve African traditions in Brazil and particularly in Bahia – was just an attempt to boost the respectability of Afro-Brazilian worship and religion. That was until, through the CEAO (Center for Afro-Oriental Studies) at the Federal University of Bahia, UNESCO gave me a grant to conduct a three month comparative study on West African sacred art in Brazil, Nigeria, and Dahomey – now the Republic of Benin.

And so, on January 6, 1967, I set off with my wife Juana Elbein dos Santos, a Research Fellow at the Institute for the Study of Man in New York, who had also been given a grant to collaborate on the project. We arrived in Lagos on the 7th, and three days later we went on to Ibadan, where, after introducing ourselves to Professor Robert G. Armstrong, the director of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ibadan, we set up base. We met Pierre Verger the next day, on the 11th, and with his help and that of his little two-horsepower Citroën, we began making short trips to establish our first contacts.

On the 21st, we crossed the border into Dahomey, where we stayed at the Hotel des Députés in Porto Novo. We left there on the 23rd, the day after my mother passed away, a fact of which I only learned on my return to Ibadan eleven days later.

We departed, bound for the Kingdom of Ketu and accompanied by an interpreter who worked for IRAD [Institut de Recheches Africaines du Dahomey], to continue our research and to pay a visit to the king on my own behalf, and on that of all of my Ketu brothers and descendants living in Bahia. I had no expectations of meeting anyone descended from that royal family I had heard so much about, because, hard as it may be to believe, up until then, the idea of such a thing had not occurred to me.

Passing through Cotonou, we stopped off at the *Monoprix* to buy some good French wine as a

gift for the king in accordance with custom, and continued on our way. The little Citroën, with Verger at the wheel, raced like a wild beast with brakes screeching through villages, scattering piglets, goats, and chickens, and navigating steep, winding roads past fields and stunning landscapes. Eventually, we found ourselves following a red dirt track, the dust turning the landscape red, until we finally reached the entrance to the Kingdom of Ketu.

After four and a half hours on the road, we stopped at a store owned by a friendly man called *Exú* —named after one of the orishas who, in Brazil, has been erroneously syncretized with the Devil— and we had a brief meal of sardines, bread, and *Mocacola*, a delicious coffee-based soda. Half an hour later, we arrived at the king's palace. How at ease I felt! I was happy with everyone and everything I saw and heard, even though I struggled with my Yoruba since I was not used to speaking it every day, and I found it difficult to follow more complex conversations. This was not helped by the fact that Yoruba dialects vary greatly from one place to another.

Pierre Verger, who was known in the region as *Babalawo Fatumbí* and who already knew the king, introduced us. I presented our gift, and the king immediately ordered the bottle to be opened and served to everyone present, leaving himself for last, as is tradition. We chatted, and I mentioned that I was a descendant of Ketu. Taken aback by my Nagô Yoruba, he asked for proof, so I sang some songs in praise of the land, the king and the wealth of his people.

The king, his ministers, and everyone present were both astonished and moved as they listened to me, as they had never imagined that there were still people like me across the ocean who could sing the traditional songs of our ancestors.

After I had finished singing, the king —overcome by emotion— pointed to the crown he was wearing and translated one of the songs, telling us that this crown was not the one mentioned in the song, but another, used to consecrate kings.

There was great joy in the rooms, and everyone looked at me with admiration and a glow of warm affection on their faces.

Meanwhile, my wife reminded me of the story about the royal family and asked why I didn't recite our family's *Orikí* or *Orilé*, which I refer to as an oral coat of arms. I demurred, but she and Verger pressed me so much that I felt obliged to recite it, particularly after the king had taken an interest when Juana spoke to Verger in French. And so I declaimed the following words in Nagô: *Asipá Borogun Elese Kan Gongoo*. When I finished the king burst out, "Ah! Asipá!" and rising from where he was seated, he pointed towards a side of the palace and said, "Your family lives over there."

Everyone stood for a moment in disbelief, and then the king called to one of the oldest women, *Iyá Naná*, and told her to take us to the Asipá family home.

When we arrived, we saw it was not just a house, but an entire neighborhood, and we were led to the main house. Because it was a weekday, most of the men were working in the family's fields, named *Kosiku* (meaning "there is no death"), but I was introduced to everyone present, and when I recited the *Orikí*, people were delighted and applauded, shook my hand, and wanted to talk to me, though I was so overcome that I could barely take it all in. The only thing I was aware of was the happiness in the faces of all who came to greet me. A short time later they took us to the *Ôjubó Odê*, the shrine to Oshossi, showed us the *Axé* of the house, and called on one of the oldest family members to furnish us with more detailed information.

This is how we learned that everything my Mãe Senhora and the elders had spoken about in Bahia was true. Irrespective of my royal lineage, our family was one of the seven principal families that founded the Kingdom of Ketu.

Originally published in 1968 as "Um Negro Baiano em Ketu" by *A Tarde*, Salvador.

West African Sacred Art and Rituals in Brazil: A Comparative Study

ART AND RELIGION

Religion, mythology, folklore, and art are the most sensitive channels in which a culture can express itself. We've already seen how religion has permeated and marked every aspect of Afro-Brazilian life. African art has a deep connection to religion, and so it's not surprising that this connection is also present in Afro-Brazilian *terreiros*. The mystical and sacred are manifested through a complex system in which elements are expressed through an expressive and aesthetic symbology. The songs, music, dances, clothing, vestments, and sacred emblems all serve a specific purpose. Their aesthetic elements are in service of the ritual. Actions, music, clothing, and symbols and sacred emblems give rise to an important production of arts and crafts that is rooted in mythical and liturgical necessity.

Some such elements, their comparative study, materials, symbolism, and, above all, role in the liturgical context of Brazil and West Africa, are at the heart of this project. It is beyond the remit of this work to examine the dynamic contribution of Black people to the wider landscape of Brazilian art. From their unique contributions to the Baroque to the works of Agnaldo dos Santos (Valladares, 1963); from folk toys to popular music; from the use of vibrant color, necklaces, *balangandãs*[6] and other jewelry to elaborate Carnival costumes; from wooden spoons, ceramics, and basketry to elegant straw bags and hats; from the sculptures and drawings of Mário Cravo and Carybé to the more abstract reformulations of Rubem Valentim —the entire panorama of Brazilian art is infused with the unmistakable stamp of an African heritage.

[...] As already mentioned, the focus of this work is limited to the Gege-Nagô cultural complex that has been so well-preserved in Bahia and that corresponds to Yoruba and Fon cultural heritage. It has also been mentioned that the religious and artistic aspects of the Fon, were —with some adaptations— taken from those of their neighbors via trade, intertribal wars, and throughout the long periods of subjugation.

In Brazil, the emblems seen in museums,[7] private collections,[8] *terreiro* communities,[9] and those used in ceremonies and rituals, have clear features that make it easy to identify them as originals, as replicas, or as inspired by Yoruba models. This is because they play a vital role in the interconnected elements that express Gege-Nagô rituals. Art and craft production arises from the needs of the faith, including those related to music, clothing, instruments, symbols, and emblems.

ATTRIBUTES

In West Africa, each orisha is associated with specific types of clothing, certain colors, necklaces, bracelets, and special adornments characteristic of that orisha. Similarly, in Brazil, certain objects are specific to certain orishas. While they are possessed, the priestesses hold these objects, which are otherwise typically kept in the shrines or alongside the other trappings of the orisha. These are sacred objects and can only be handled by consecrated priestesses, those of the highest ranking, or people with designated titles —*oloiês*.

Sometimes the objects that are part of the sacred spaces are distinct from those used to adorn the orishas. These objects have a purpose and function; they serve as insignias that help identify the origins, type, and function of the orishas and the unique characteristics given them in myths. They therefore express categories, and their symbology is part of the entire mystical system of the ritual. They are parts of a whole, and in turn, the different elements they are made up of are part of the symbol that they express.

The elements that adorn an object and the materials from which it is made carry their own meaning. It is precisely because of these intrinsic qualities that these materials are chosen to convey the symbolism of the object. Particular materials are used in different emblems and they have a common reference. The object's own symbology is redefined and in turn then takes on a liturgical function by participating in a system organized around the manifestation of the sacred (Elbein, 1967).

[...] The materials used to create these emblems are assorted and can only be crafted in accordance with liturgical practice.

The manifestation of the sacred is expressed through a formal symbology with an aesthetic content (Elbein, 1964). The aesthetic expression must follow traditional models, nevertheless, despite the strict requirements for certain materials and forms, the craftsman and artist still have considerable freedom. Variations in size, finish, design, and numerous possible combinations of materials allow for rich variations in the creation of each ritual emblem.

Depending on the materials to be used, there are specific craftsmen for creating the emblems. Blacksmiths make emblems of iron; woodworkers and carvers produce wooden emblems; and tinsmiths and metalworkers craft emblems from non-ferrous and sheet metals. In addition to these, there are people who are specially trained within the religious traditions and who are responsible for the creation of specific emblems, which only they may produce due to the ritual observances required. These include emblems commonly made from palm fiber, cowrie shells, and leather, as well as those incorporating mirrors and that are created within and specifically for the orishas' sacred spaces, and are part of them.

To better understand the function of these emblems, we will categorize

them according to their roles within the orishas' rituals and worship. We will refer sequentially to the worship of the earth and ancestors; the worship of trees, leaves, and hunters; the worship of water; the worship of fire; and the worship of the sky, which we prefer to call the worship of the *funfun* orishas. However, before examining these rituals and some of their emblems, we will also look at some emblems that are commonly made of wood, known as *ère* in Africa, though the term is not used in Brazil for such objects. [...]

THE WORSHIP OF THE EARTH

The pantheon of the earth includes Nana, Obaluaiye, *Onilé*, and the *Awonará-ile* or *Até-Orun*. *Oxumarê* is also part of this group. [...]

Trees represent one of the most ancient mythical emblems and are considered both symbols and dwellings of spiritual entities and orishas. Their priests, known as *elebogí oni bo igi* —those who worship trees— form a separate ethnic group. Trees grow from the earth and derive their power from it and from the spirits that inhabit it. Included in this group are *Irôko*, *Ègun*, *Aràbà*, *Odón*, *Akoko*, and others with equivalents in Brazil.

NANA BURUKU

Nana Buruku is one of the most important deities due to her wide-reach, the spread of her worship, and the cultural interaction between the many regions where her worship has been transported, adapting and reformulating in many aspects, both in the worship itself and in her attributes. From Ifé in the east of Nigeria, to Siade Tchari in the west of Ghana, passing through Atakpamé in Togo, and extending to the regions of Savé, Dassa Zumé, Savalu, and Abomé in Dahomey in the vast region of West Africa, Nana Buruku —also known as Nana Buluku, Buku, or Nana, is one of the most important orishas in the Nagô pantheon.

In Bahia, she is considered to be one of the oldest entities, associated with the waters contained in the earth such as lakes, lagoons, springs, and wells. The tradition passed down by the African elders which was told to one of the authors, who as a child used to visit the *terreiro* community during the time of the long-gone *Tun-Tun*[10] and the *Axé Opó Afonjá*, also associates Nana with the earth and with death. These three elements —water, earth, and death— are represented in numerous emblems, songs, greetings, and myths that are part of her worship.

[...]

Nana is characterized by the *ibíri* she carries in her right hand. This *opá*[11] is the most important representation of Nana, and she was born with it, not given it by anyone. According to the myth, after being born with her, the *opá* became covered with cowrie shells and rich ornaments; its upper end curled over, taking the distinctive shape that sets it apart from the *opás* of other orishas.

The following myth tells the story of the *ibíri* and its function. The story goes that Obaluaiye, Nana's son, was the one who found the *opá* and returned it to her. Hence the name *ibíri*, which comes from the word *ibíríri*, meaning "my child [relative] found it and brought it to me." Another possible origin of the word is that it is a contraction of the phrase *bí ól ir oun ít ó sonú* which means "relatives saw that which we lost." The *ibíri* is an ancient term, little known, and is applied to emblems that have been recovered.

The *ibíri* is made in the same way as the *shashara* of Obaluaiye, using palm fronds tied together. The tips of the fronds are curved and secured to the body of the *opá* and it is then decorated with leather, cowrie shells, and beads, and made by a priest entrusted in the tradition. Specific rites must be followed while it is being made, similarly to the *shashara*. The *ibíri* is a consecrated object, and its base contains sacred ingredients.

In Africa, when carried by the priestesses possessed by Nana, the *ibíri* is entirely covered with *osùn* (camwood powder). Other than these times, the *ibíri* is part of the altars, together with other emblems.

[...]

In Yorubaland, the name *ibíri* is not widely known nor used to refer to this *opá* of Nana, and is called *esin*, *ilé-ésín*, or *isin*. This term is also used for some of Obaluaiye's attributes and is applied to *opás* with mythical powers.

The name *ibíri*, exclusive to Nana's *opá*, is known in West Africa only by a select group of *babalawos* (priests) who preserve in secret the most orthodox liturgical traditions of Nana and Obaluaiye. Just as we found it difficult to verify the origin of the *ibíri*, it was equally difficult to find information related to the *asogba, assobá*, the word used for the chief of the cult of Obaluaiye, of which more later.

[...]

OBALUAIYE

Nana Buruku is the eldest of the entities in the earth pantheon. In the myths, she is described as the mother of Obaluaiye, which makes clear that she is the oldest. Even in some myths where she is portrayed as the wife of Obaluaiye, it is emphasized that she was first his mother. Obaluaiye is the son who was crowned alongside her. Nana is the feminine aspect and the oldest of the earth pantheon, and both Nana and Obaluaiye symbolize this aspect, so much so that in many places in West Africa, they are merged, and their shrines are close together with rituals being performed simultaneously.

Like that of Nana, the cult of Obaluaiye spread across all the Yoruba territory, crossing cultural boundaries. The Dahomeans, fearing his power, imported his cult and named him *Sapatá*, and the Tapas also adopted him. Obaluaiye is known by many names, some of which are only known in specific regions, but the most feared of them all is *Sapanã*, *Sanponná*, or *Soponá*, revealing his vengeful aspect.

Obaluaiye's *opá* can take many forms, transforming into various emblems:

- The *kùmo* is a mace of about 30 cm long, with a head that is sometimes carved, solid or hollow. Obaluaiye is considered the son of *Ibàhín*, who was a great hunter who later became an important orisha: he was an *olú*, spirit or orisha, and this is why Obaluaiye is known as *Omo-olú*, the son of an entity. The *kùmo* was given to Obaluaiye by his father, and had a lion's head carved into it to symbolize the power bestowed upon him.

Obaluaiye uses the *kùmo* to kill. It is an emblem of power and is dangerous. It is kept at the sacred seat of Obaluaiye, covered with camwood powder, like other emblems that represent supernatural powers. Because of its association with the dangerous side of Obaluaiye it is rarely used by the priestesses when they are possessed. In Abeokutá, at the temple of Obaluaiye in Adatan, we had the chance to see a possessed priestess carrying a *kùmo*.

- The *okó* is a spear ranging from 30 to 140 cm long, which may be simple with a short handle, or long and decorated with leather strips and cowrie shells. Sometimes it appears as a carved column with a pointed base meant to be stuck into the ground (reminiscent of the *opá*) and with the upper part finishing with one or two iron spikes. The *okó* is not used to kill, but rather to wound or cause pain. It is a symbol of Obaluaiye's ability to inflict illness and suffering. It is kept at Obaluaiye's sacred seat and used in special rituals.
- *Esín* is a term used in some *terreiro* communities to refer to several emblems, about 30 cm in length, shaped like spears, arrows, and spatulas. These emblems are used in rituals and are kept wrapped in red cloth (*aso-osùn*) at the shrine of the orisha.
- The *Sàşàrà* or *Xaxará* is an emblem used for healing ailments and "sweeping away" supernatural impurities and evils. The *shashara* is used for this purpose and the possessed priestesses carry it during their rituals. It is made in a similar way to the *ibíri*, using fronds of palm trees tied together to form a kind of broom. The *shashara* is decorated with leather, cowrie shells, bells, and beads, and it sometimes has two gourds that represent Obaluaiye's magical power and knowledge of ritual herbs.

In Bahia, like the *ibirí*, the *shashara* can only be made by people who have been consecrated. It also has sacred ingredients in its base, as we noted in the important temple of Obaluaiye in Ilará, where the large *shashara* known as *Sásá*, had a sacred wrap containing the consecrated ingredients sewn into its base.

In Dahomey, in the cult of *Sapatá*, the *shashara* is called a *há* and serves the same purpose and function. [...]

In Bahia, the *shashara* is carried by priestesses who are possessed and who dance with it, making sweeping motions to brush away danger and disease.

Posthumously, with Juana Elbein dos Santos. Published as *Arte sacra e rituais da África Ocidental no Brasil: um estudo comparado*. Salvador: Corrupio, 2014.

Plates

The plates that follow are organized in thematic categories that reveal recurring typologies across Mestre Didi's decades of work, demonstrating how he iterated upon the traditional formats of Candomblé practice and devised endlessly varied approaches to the same core set of materials. The section "Afro-Brazilian Modernisms" presents select works by Didi's artistic peers, while "Rituals" and "Legacies" feature works by contemporary artists who, like Didi, are deeply committed to Afro-Brazilian cosmologies and aesthetics.

Texts by Chloë Courtney

Sacred Forms

The sacred forms of Candomblé and its many orishas, or deities, constitute the basis of Mestre Didi's sculptural language. In religious sites called *terreiros*, practitioners invoke the orishas using ritual objects imbued with symbolism. Didi first began producing these implements as a teenager, with his confirmation as the high priest, or *assogbá*, of the *terreiro* Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá. Two of the most prevalent forms within Didi's oeuvre are the shashara and the ibiri. The shashara is a handheld broom of bundled palm fiber which Obaluaiye, the deity of both healing and disease, uses to sweep away unwanted elements. The looping form of the ibiri evokes the womb of Nana Buruku, a primordial mother goddess associated with the earth and its fertile waters. By the early 1960s, Didi began to reconceive these palm-fiber objects, creating artworks that departed from ritualistic conventions. The combination of the shashara and ibiri, seen in some of the following sculptures, contemplates the link between female and male, fertility and mortality.

1. *Xaxará Lewa – Xaxará mais belo* [Most beautiful shashara], **1980s.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 24 ½ × 4 × 4 in. Estrellita B. Brodsky Collection.

2. *Xaxará no. 14*, 1985.
Palm fiber, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 20 ½ in. tall. Collection Rafael Moraes.

3. *Xaxará Iona – Xaxará que abre os caminhos* [Shashara that opens paths]**, 1970s.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 20 ⅛ × 4 ⅞ × 2 ¾ in. Instituto Paz Collection.

92

4. ***Xaxará Ati Axó Ayo – Xaxará da roupa alegre*** [Shashara of the joyous clothes]**, undated.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and raffia. 27 ½ × 6 × 2 ¾ in.

93

5. ***Sasara Ati Aso Aylo*****, 1960s.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, beads, and raffia. 27 ½ × 5 ⅞ × 2 ¾ in. Collection of Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand, gift of Ana Dale, Carlos Dale Junior, Antonio Almeida, Thaís Darzé and Paulo Darzé.

q4b **6. *Ibiri – Cetro do panteão da terra*** [Ibiri – scepter of the earth pantheon]**, 1980.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 28 3/16 × 5 7/16 × 5 1/16 in. Collection of Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand, gift of Ana Dale, Carlos Dale Junior, Antonio Almeida, Thaís Darzé and Paulo Darzé.

q5 ***7. Panteão da terra*** [Earth pantheon]**, undated.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 26 × 6 in. Private collection.

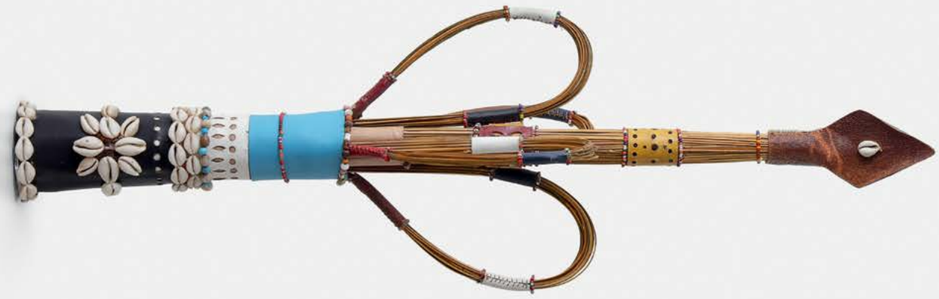
96 **8. *Ibiri Ati Igba Meji – Ibiri com duas cabaças*** [Ibiri with two gourds]**, 1980s.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and raffia. 27 1⁄8 × 8 5⁄8 × 4 3⁄4 in.

97 **9. Untitled, c. 1998.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 27 3⁄4 × 8 5⁄8 × 3 7⁄8 in.

10. *Ibiri*, 1988.
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 27 × 3 × 4 in. Collection of the Dallas Museum of Art, gift of Deedie Potter Rose.

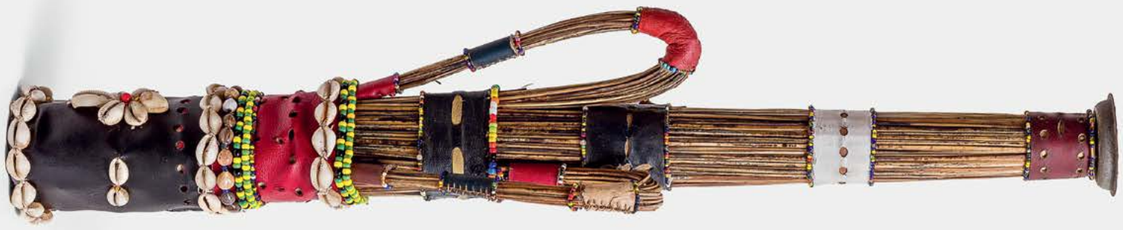
11. *Ibiri Meji – Cetro dos Ibiri* [Scepter of ibiri], **1980s.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, and cowrie shells. 35 ½ × 14 × 5 ½ in. Fernanda Feitosa and Heitor Martins Collection.

100 **12. *Emblema de orixá – xaxará-ibiri*** [Emblem of the orisha – shashara-ibiri]**, 1960s.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 18 ⅛ in. tall. Collection Rafael Moraes.



101 **13. *Ibiri Igba Ati Eye Loke – Ibiri da cabaça com pássaro no topo*** [Ibiri of the gourd with a bird on top]**, undated.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 32 ⅝ × 8 ⅝ × 4 ¾ in. Instituto Paz Collection.

102 **14. *Catisal – Sasará Ati Ibiri Meta*, 1968.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 24 ⅜ × 7 ½ × 4 ¾ in. Collection of Allison and Larry Berg.



103 **15. *Catisal – Sasará Ati Ibiri Meta*, 1968.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 24 × 8 ⅜ × 8 ⅜ in. Collection of Allison and Larry Berg.

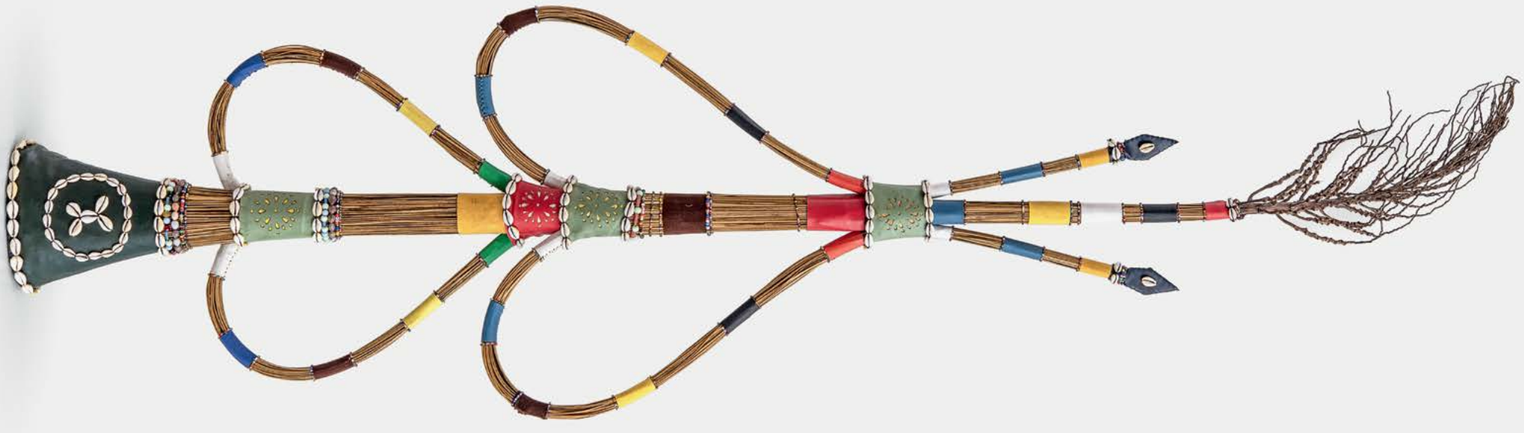
16. *Opa Omo Edá – Cetro do filho da Natureza* [Son of Nature's scepter]**, undated.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, fabric, and beads. 66 × 10 ¼ × 7 ⅞ in. Collection of El Museo del Barrio, gift of Almeida & Dale Galeria de Arte and Paulo Darzé Galeria, 2021.

Orishas

In the pantheon of orishas, each deity has an identifying symbol, which together make up a rich geometric lexicon shared by the Yoruba-descended religions of the Black Atlantic. Didi's corpus of sculpture recombines and remixes these forms in new configurations informed by the orishas' traits and mythologies, originally titling them in the Yoruba language. The scepter *Awon Icba Nice* [Earth Pantheon, 198Os] combines the ibiri of Nana Buruku and the shashara of Obaluaiye with two arching serpents, symbols of Oshumare's dual gender and ability to traverse heaven and earth. Didi's unified representation of these three deities invoke a holistic conception of life, mortality, and the divine. *Opa Nilé* [Earth Scepter] and *Opa Igbo Olu Ode* [Scepter of the Lord of the Flora and the Hunt], both from the 199Os, include both the bow of Oshosi, the great hunter, and the six-pointed geometric treetop of Osanyin, lord of the forests, elucidating the reciprocity of flora and fauna. Elsewhere, Didi invokes the followers of the orishas, as in the anthropomorphic work *Iyawo Xangô: Oxê Ati Eye Meji* [Priestess of Shango with Double Axe and Birds, 2011] or the more schematic *Omo Oba Aye* [Son of the King of the Earth, 198Os].

17. Opa Igbo Olu Ode – Cetro do Senhor da Vegetação e da Caça [Scepter of the Lord of the Flora and the Hunt], 199Os.
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 5O ¾ × 18 × 5 in. Private collection.

108 **18. *Omo Oba Aye – Filho do Rei da Terra*** [Son of the King of the Earth], **1980s.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 41 × 23 ½ × 6 in. Fernanda Feitosa and Heitor Martins Collection.



104 **19. *Opa Ode Arole Nila – Cetro do Grande Caçador Místico*** [Scepter of the Great Mystic Hunter], **undated.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 72 × 20 × 5 in. Almeida & Dale and Paulo Darzé Galeria Collection.

110 **20.** ***Opa Ose – Cetro da dinastia e ancestralidade*** [Scepter of dynasty and ancestrality]**, 2007.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, beads, and raffia. 72 ½ × 7 ¾ × 7 ¾ in.

111 **21.** ***Iyawo Xangô: Oxê Ati Eye Meji – Sacerdotiza de Xangô com duplo machado e pássaros*** [Priestess of Shango with double axe and birds]**, 2011.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 61 × 9 ⅞ × 9 ⅞ in.

112 **22. Untitled, 1980s.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 82 5/8 × 17 7/8 × 14 1/8 in. Instituto Paz Collection.

113 **23. *Opa Aiye Orum — Cetro de Oxalá* [Oshala's Scepter], 1969.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 63 × 9 7/8 × 9 7/8 in. Instituto Paz Collection.

114 **24. *Awon Icba Nice – Panteão da Terra*** [Earth pantheon]**, 1980s.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 37 ¾ × 16 ½ × 5 ⅞ in. Collection of Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand, gift of Ana Dale, Carlos Dale Junior, Antonio Almeida, Thaís Darzé and Paulo Darzé.

115 **25. *Erè – Divindade infantil*** [Child divinity]**, 2008.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 68 ⅞ × 19 ⅝ × 7 ⅛ in.

26. Opa Nilé – Cetro da terra [Earth scepter]**, 1996.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 123 ¼ × 33 ½ × 7 ⅞ in. Private collection.

Scepters

Scepters are customary accoutrements of Candomblé practice. Artisans typically make them of iron, but in Didi's work they are reimagined in his characteristic palm fiber. While his early artworks hewed to the smaller scale and simpler formats required for ceremonial use, by the late 1960s, Didi was producing larger and more complex scepters. Expressive titles also emphasize the scepter-sculptures' rich symbolism. The title of *Opa Ofá Iode* [Scepter of the Arrow That Guards the Path, 1980s] emphasizes the talismanic quality of Oshosi's drawn bow, rendered as a dramatic pair of opposing volutes. Other works evoke the connection between trees and ancestors in Candomblé, as in *Iwin Igi N'Ia* [Great Spirit of the Tree, 1979], with its raffia arms that signify both branches and anthropomorphic limbs. These departures from convention responded, in part, to Didi's exhibition opportunities in Brazil and abroad. In the late 1980s and 1990s, Didi installed several large-scale scepters in public locations, countering the perennial marginalization of Afro-Brazilian histories and subverting the often-imperialist histories of public monuments.

27. *Opa Exim Ati Ejó Meji – Cetro com lança e duas serpentes* [Scepter with lance and two serpents], 1980s.
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 78 × 24 ½ × 9 ½ in. Instituto Paz Collection.

120 **28. Untitled, undated.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and raffia. 41 × 17 ¾ × 4 ¼ in. Fernanda Feitosa and Heitor Martins Collection.

121 ***29. Iwin Igi N'la – Grande Espírito da árvore*** **[Great Spirit of the tree], 1979.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, beads, and raffia. 97 ¼ × 20 ⅞ × 12 ⅝ in. Instituto Paz Collection.

122 **30.** ***Opá Ìdarí Mérin Pèlú Òkò Lókè*** [Scepter of the four ibiris with a spear on top]**, undated.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 36 ⅝ × 12 ¼ × 4 ¾ in.

123 **31.** ***Opa Ibiri Merin Ati Ejo Meji – Cetro dos quatro ibiri com duas serpente*** [Scepter of four ibiri with two serpents]**, 1980s.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 72 × 20 ½ in. Instituto Paz Collection.

124 **32.** ***Opa Ibiri Merin Ati Ejo Meji Eye Loke – Cetro dos quatro ibiri com duas serpentes e pássaro na ponta*** **[Scepter of four ibiri with two serpents and bird at top], 1980s.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 81 ½ × 22 ½ × 10 ¼ in. Instituto Paz Collection.

125 **33.** ***Opa Exin Eda Ohunkohun – Cetro da lança e força da natureza*** **[Scepter of the lance and the force of nature], 1980s.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 59 7/8 × 30 ¾ × 6 ¼ in.

34. *Ibi Agbara – Nascente do poder místico* [Emerging from mystical power]**, 1976.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, calabashes, cowrie shells, and beads. 69 × 19 × 9 ¾ in. Private collection.

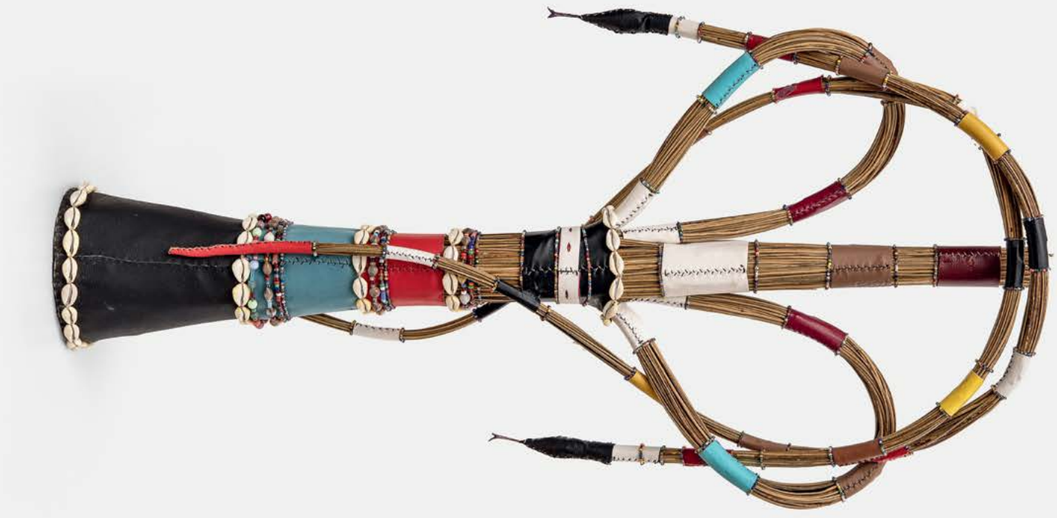
128 **35.** ***Ope Iya Agba Nilé - Palma da grande mãe ancestral*** [Palm of the great ancestral mother]**, 1980s.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 43 ¼ × 14 ⅝ × 14 ⅝ in. Instituto Paz Collection.

129 **36.** ***Opa Esin Meta Kesi – Segundo cetro da três lanças*** [Second scepter with three lances]**, 2002.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 74 ⅛ × 23 ⅝ × 9 ⅞ in. The Joyner/Giuffrida Collection.

130 **37. *Opa Omo Ofá Dê – Cetro da primeira flecha mística*** [Scepter of the first mystic arrow], **1980s.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 47 5/8 × 9 × 5 7/8 in.

131 **38. *Igi Nilé Ati Ejo Ori Meji – Árvore da terra com serpente de duas cabeças*** [Tree of earth with two-headed serpent], **1990s.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 43 3/4 × 20 × 6 1/4 in. Paulo Darzé Gallery collection.

132 **39. *Opa Oba Ile Ati Ejo Meji – Cetro do panteão da terra*** [Scepter of the earth pantheon], **1980s.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 32 ½ × 15 ¾ × 5 ¾ in. Instituto Paz Collection.

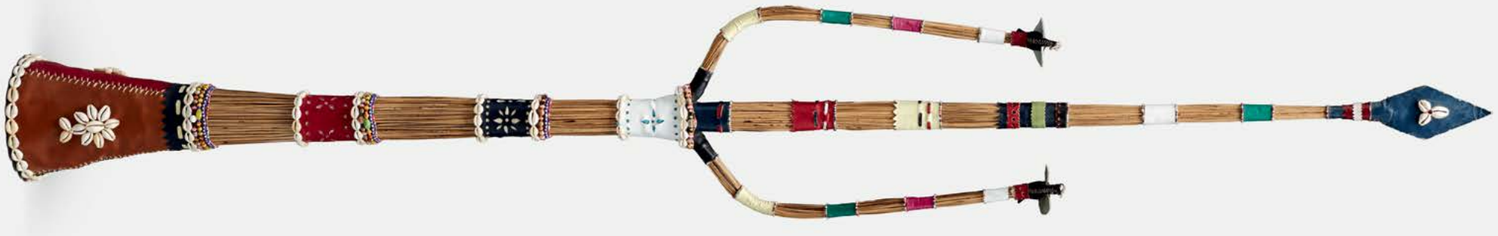


133 **40. Untitled, 1966.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 25 ⅜ × 17 ⅝ × 3 ⅛ in. Pérez Art Museum Miami, gift of Allison and Larry Berg.

134 **41.** ***Opa Esi Nile Fun Orun – Cetro da lança da terra para o além*** [Scepter of the lance of the earth for the beyond]**, 2007.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 83 ½ × 22 ½ × 10 ⅝ in.

135 **42.** ***Opa Ofá Iode – Cetro da flexa que vigia o caminho*** [Scepter of the arrow that guards the path]**, 1980s.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 49 ¾ × 17 ¼ × 5 ½ in.

136 **43.** ***Opa Exin Ona Merin – Cetro dos quatro caminhos*** **[Scepter of the four pathways], undated.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 44 × 16 ⅛ × 6 in. Instituto Paz Collection.



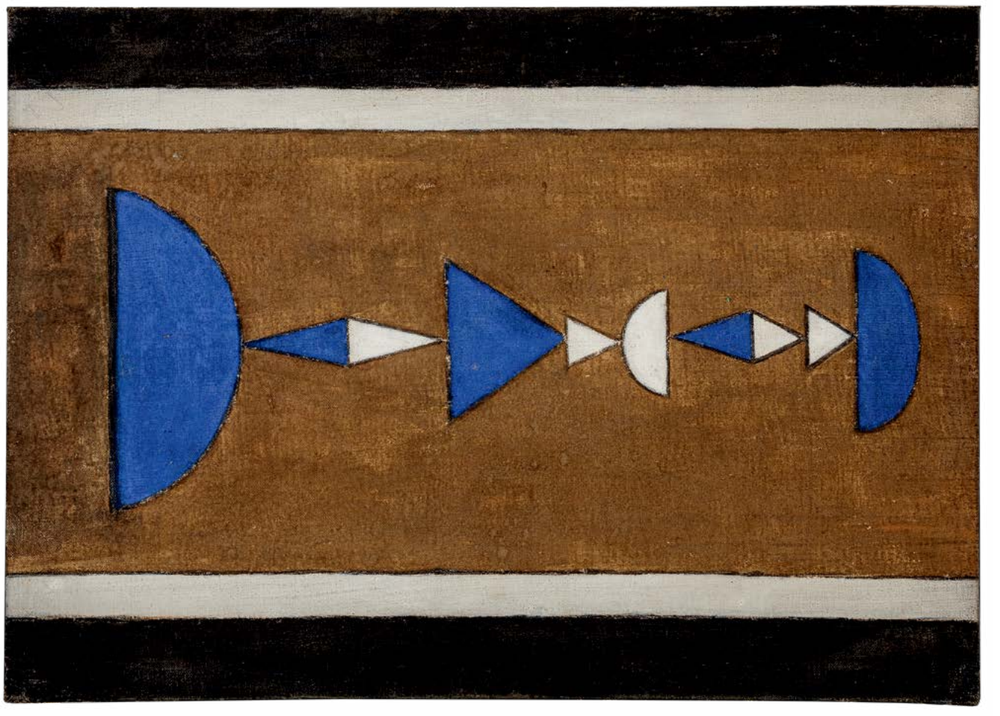
137 **44. Ceremonial staff, undated.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, and cowrie shells. 96 × 12 in. Dallas Museum of Art, gift of Deedie and Rusty Rose.

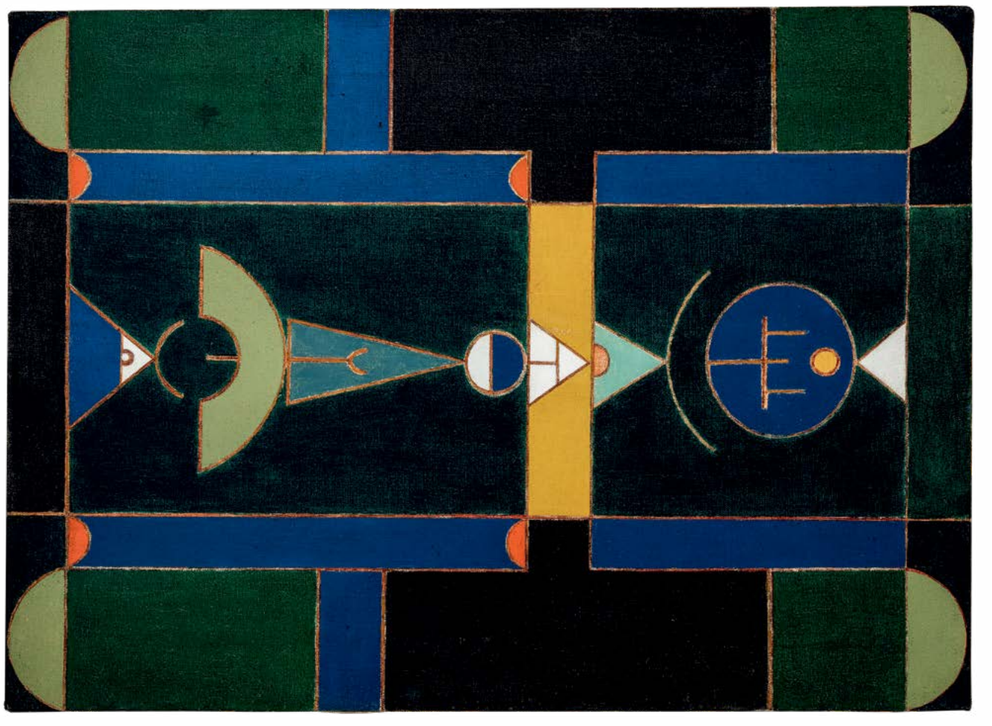
Afro-Brazilian Modernisms

Afro-Brazilian artists embraced African cultural legacies in their elaboration of new visual languages in the second half of the twentieth century. Together, they challenged the idea of abstraction as an invention of European modernism. With trajectories parallel to that of Didi, many of these artists participated in the emerging cultural scene of Salvador. In the 1960s and 1970s, the social and intellectual fervor of Bahia's capital extended beyond the visual arts to the realms of literature, music, theater, and the social sciences. Amid pervasive concerns of how best to achieve a distinctly Brazilian modernism, the artists represented here took various approaches to diasporic Black aesthetics, recalibrating notions of identity and authenticity. They experienced varying degrees of racial and class-based marginalization. Some had access to formal training, while others were self-taught. While some embraced the formal strategies associated with popular painting and devotional woodcarving, others placed themselves within mainstream movements like constructivism and concretism.

45. RUBEM VALENTIM. *Emblema V* from the series XII Bienal de São Paulo, 1973. Acrylic on canvas. 47 ¼ × 28 ¾ in. Private collection, São Paulo.

140 **46. RUBEM VALENTIM. Untitled, 1961.**
Oil on canvas. 27 ¾ × 19 ½ in. Collection Luís Paulo Montenegro.



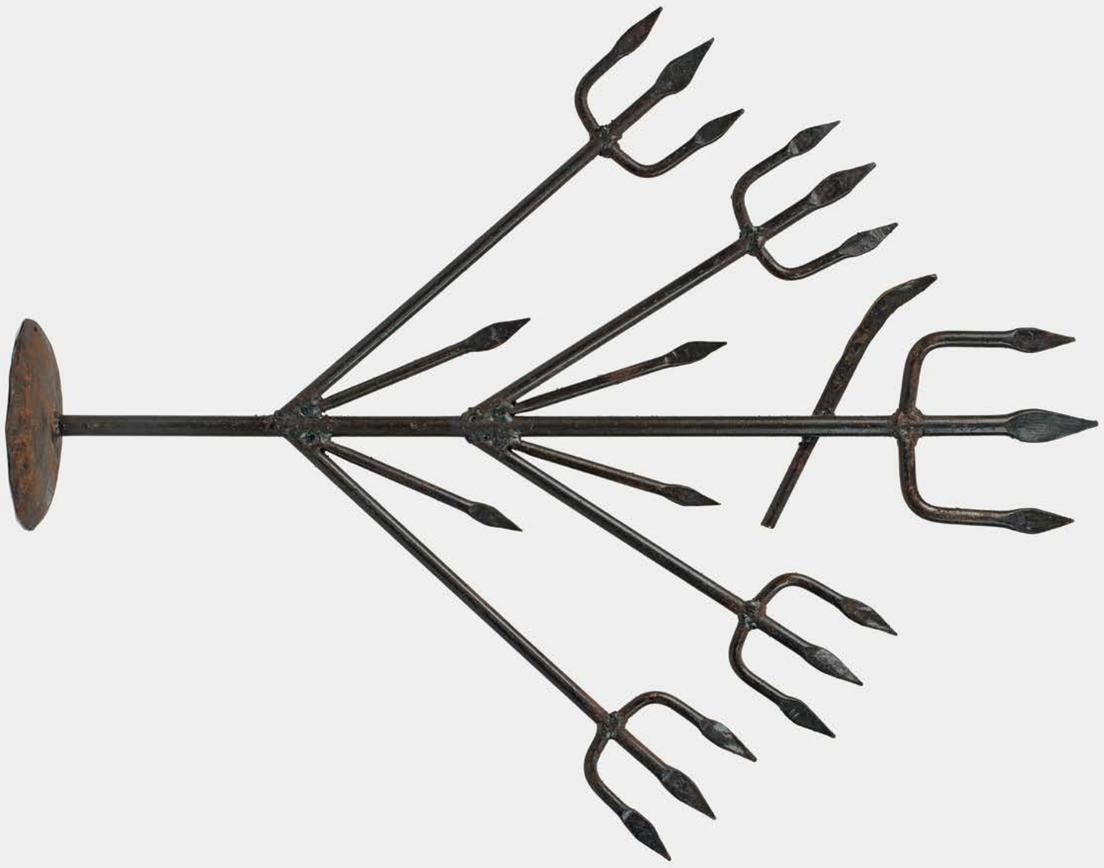


141 **47. RUBEM VALENTIM. Untitled, 1961.**
Oil on canvas. 27 ¾ × 19 ⅝ in. Collection Luís Paulo Montenegro.

142 **48. AGNALDO MANOEL DOS SANTOS. Untitled, 1950s.**
Wood. 14 5⁄8 × 9 × 1 in.

143 **49. AGNALDO MANOEL DOS SANTOS. *Ogum*** [Ogun], **1960.**
Wood. 15 1⁄16 × 8 1⁄4 × 3 1⁄16 in. Private collection, São Paulo.

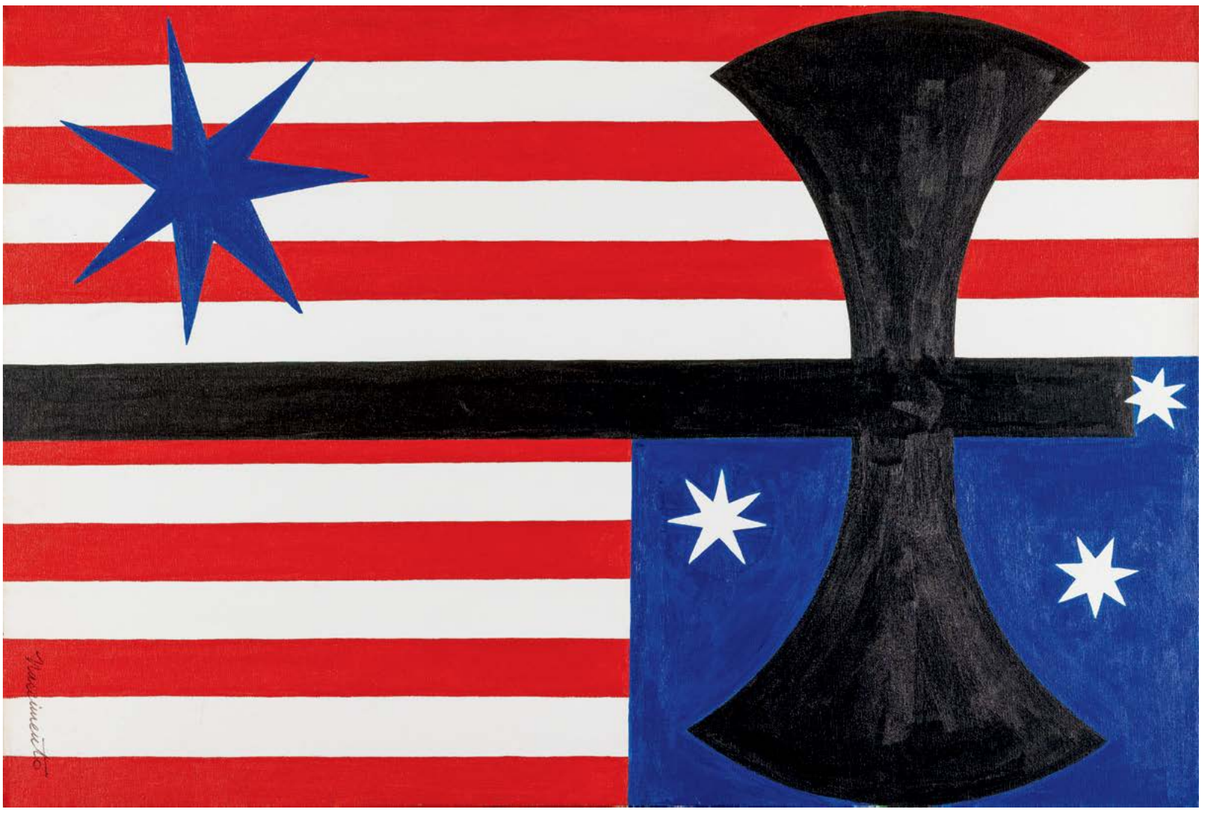
144 **50. JOSÉ ADÁRIO DOS SANTOS.** ***Ferramenta de Exu (escravo de Ogum)*** [Exu's Tool (Ogun's Slave)], **c. 2019.**
Iron and varnish. 25 ¼ × 19 ¾ × 5 ⅛ in. Collection of El Museo del Barrio, gift of Galatea, São Paulo, 2023.



145 **51. JOSÉ ADÁRIO DOS SANTOS.** ***Ferramenta de Oxóssi*** [Oshosi's Tool], **2022.**
Iron and varnish. 25 ¼ × 16 ⅞ × 5 ⅛ in. Collection of El Museo del Barrio, gift of Galatea, São Paulo, 2023.

52. EMANOEL ARAÚJO. Untitled, 1970.
Wood and automotive paint. 86 ¾ × 63 × 7 ½ in.

53. ABDIAS NASCIMENTO. *Xangô Sobre (Shango Takes Over)*, 1970.
Acrylic on canvas. 36 × 24 in. IPEAFRO Black Art Museum Collection.



54. ABDIAS NASCIMENTO. *Composição n. 1* [Composition n. 1], 1971.
Acrylic on canvas. 36 × 24 in. The Joyner/Giuffrida Collection.

55. ABDIAS NASCIMENTO. ***Teogonia Afro-Brasileira n. 2: Iansã, Obatalá, Oxum, Oxossi, Yemanjá, Ogum, Ossaim, Xangô, Exu*** [Afro-Brazilian Theogony n. 2: Iansan, Obatala, Oshun, Oshosi, Yemaya, Ogun, Osanyin, Shango, Eshu]**, 1972.**
Acrylic on canvas. 40 ⅛ × 59 ⅞ in. IPEAFRO Black Art Museum Collection.

152 **56. AURELINO DOS SANTOS. Untitled, 2014.**
Acrylic on particleboard. 15 ⅜ × 20 ½ in. Collection of El Museo del Barrio, gift of Almeida & Dale Galeria de Arte, São Paulo, 2021.

153 **57. AURELINO DOS SANTOS. Untitled, 1997.**
Acrylic on cardboard. 20 ⅝ × 20 ⅝ in. Collection of El Museo del Barrio, gift of Almeida & Dale Galeria de Arte and Paulo Darzé Galeria, 2023.

Material Experiments

Didi's inventive use of natural materials included formal strategies that emphasize the conceptual value of palm fiber, leather, and cowries. Raffia and gourds transform shasharas into dynamic humanoid forms, a potent reminder that palm, like all of Didi's materials, is imbued with living energy. In a rare figural sculpture, *Guardian* (1970s), an exposed palm spine supports a clay head and torso, while in *Ohun-Àso* (2007) hanging palm fiber cords evoke vines and bromeliads. He employed the palm leaf both as a support material and a central motif in several works. *Ope Awo Ibo* [Mysterious Palm of the Woods, 2004/2011] features twisted branches and seeds bursting from the central mantle, evoking cycles of regeneration. Beginning in the 1970s, Didi also used palm and animal skins to create striking jewelry, bringing his work in closer contact with the human body itself. By extension, these wearable ornaments evoke the aesthetics of Black liberation that was increasingly present in the fashion and self-styling of Brazilian urban Black populations.

58. ***Ori Iyawô*****, 1970.**
Painted clay, wood, beads, palm fiber, and cowrie shells. 10 5/8 × 12 5/8 × 9 in. Collection Rafael Moraes.

156 **59. *Exu Amuniwa*, 1982.**
Painted clay and cement, cowrie shells, and iron. 30 ⅜ × 7 ⅞ × 7 in. Collection Rafael Moraes.

157 **60. *Guardião* [Guardian], 1970s.**
Clay, iron, palm ribs, beads, and cowrie shells. 20 ½ × 7 ⅞ × 4 ¾ in. Collection Rafael Moraes.

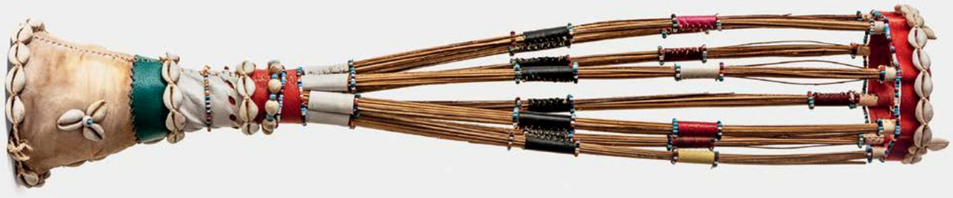
158 **61. *Ògó Esu – Emblema do orixá Exu*** [Emblem of the orisha Eshu]**, 2006.**
Painted wood, painted leather, cowrie shells, beads, and cloth. 22 in. tall. Collection Rafael Moraes.

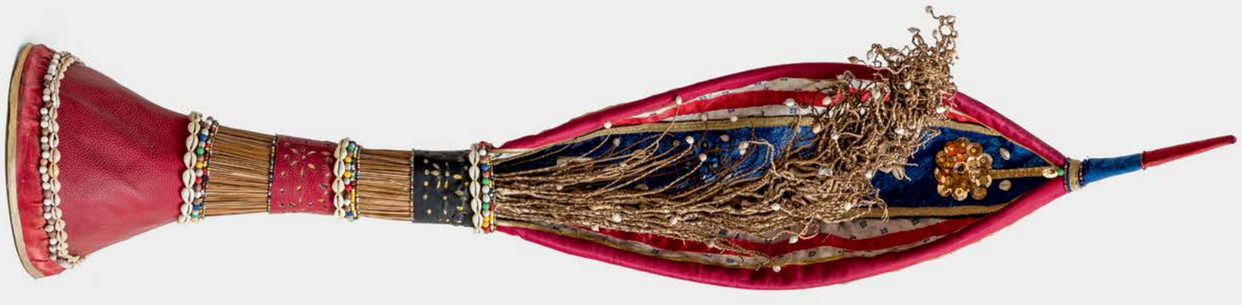
159 **62. *Xaxará Ado Meji*, 1985.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, beads, and calabashes. 23 ½ × 8 ¾ × 6 in. Collection of the Dallas Museum of Art, gift of Deedie Potter Rose.

160 **63. *Opá Ìdarí Mérin Pèlú Òkò Lókè*** [Scepter of the four ibiris with a spear on top], **2007.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 36 ⅝ × 12 ¼ × 4 ¾ in. Courtesy of James Cohan and Simões de Assis.

161 **64. *Opa Ope Ibiri Ati Exin Meji – Cetro da Grande Mãe Anciã com duas lanças*** [Scepter of the Great Ancient Mother with two lances], **1980s.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 47 ¼ × 22 ½ × 8 ¼ in. Private collection.

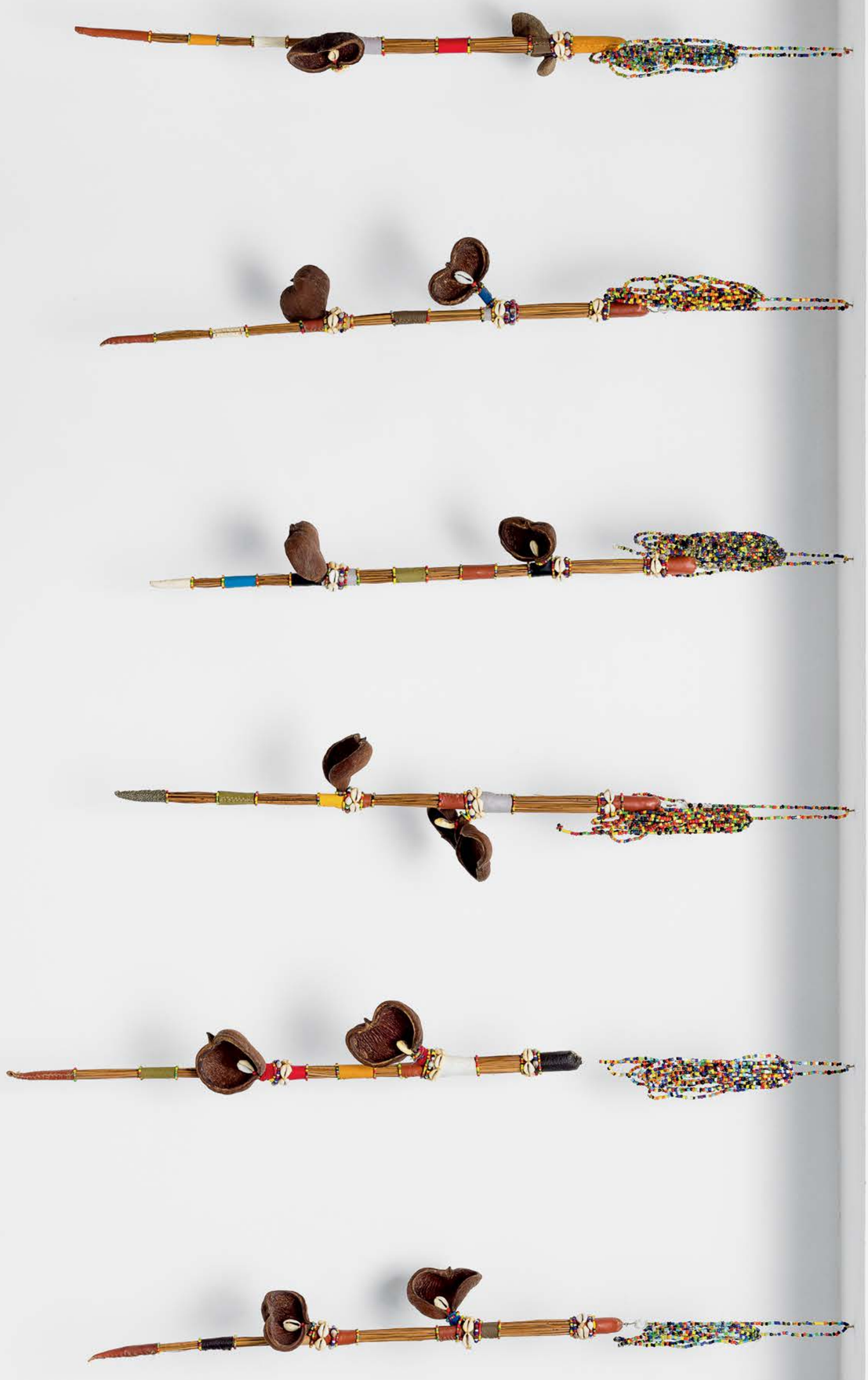
162 **65. Untitled, 1990.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 22 × 4 × 4 in. Collection of Marta Chilindron.





163 **66. *Ope Awo Ibo – Palma misteriosa do mato*** [Mysterious palm of the woods], **2004/2011.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 51 5/8 × 14 1/8 × 11 3/4 in.

***67. Ohun-Áso*, 2007.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. Each component 27 × 2 ¼ × 5 in.



166 **68. Necklace, 1980s.**
Palm fiber, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 9 × 4 ¾ in. Collection Rafael Moraes.

167 **69. Necklace, 1980s.**
Palm fiber, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 7 ½ in × 5 ⅛ in. Collection Rafael Moraes.

168 **70. Necklace, 1980s.**
Palm fiber, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 7 ½ × 5 ⅞ in. Collection Rafael Moraes.

169 **71. Necklace, 1980s.**
Palm fiber, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 9 ⅞ × 4 ¾ in. Collection Rafael Moraes.

Critters

Animals like birds, snakes, and other critters recur across Didi's body of work. They are intimately connected with the orishas, some of whom are directly associated with natural spaces through their cosmological grouping into pantheons, such as the Earth Pantheon, the Pantheon of the Forest and Hunters, and the Water Pantheon. Birds, closely associated with the creator Oshala, are ubiquitous to Candomblé iconography. *Eylé N'la* [Mythic Dove, 1985] offers a graceful representation of a bird in flight, while other more abstract examples are tied to ancestrality, which is an important facet of the Earth Pantheon. *Eye Iyá Agba* [Ancestral Mother Bird, 2012] combines anthropomorphic and avian qualities with its aquiline face and raffia wings. Serpents also recur across Didi's decades of practice. Beyond these animals, Didi also explored other zoomorphic representations, coaxing palm fiber into branching tentacles or probing antennae to create a dynamic bestiary of forms.

72. Iwin Igbo – Espírito da floresta [Spirit of the forest], 2009.
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 67 7/8 × 13 3/4 × 15 3/4 in. Shah Garg Collection.

172 **73. *Eran L´okun – O polvo com quatro tentáculos*** [The octopus with four tentacles]**, undated.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 44 7/8 × 25 5/8 × 25 5/8 in. Private collection.

173 **74. *Eye Iyá Agba – Pássaro mãe ancestral*** [Ancestral mother bird]**, 2012.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, beads, and raffia. 64 1/8 × 23 5/8 × 7 1/8 in.

75. ***Opa Eye Agba Ati Itoka – Cetro da Grande Ave Ancestral com lança no topo*** [Scepter of the Great Ancestral Bird with lance on the top]**, 1977–1978.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 83 ½ × 22 ½ × 10 ⅝ in. Instituto Paz Collection.

176 **76. *Eyin Olorun – Louva Deus*** [Praying mantis], **1979.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 72 ½ × 26 × 15 in. Instituto Paz Collection.

177 **77. *Agemon – grande carocha*** [Agemon – great beetle], **1987.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 56 ½ × 29 ⅛ × 6 ⅜ in. Instituto Paz Collection.

178 **78. *Ejolorun*, 1990.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 22 ½ × 38 ⅛ × 10 ⅝ in. Private collection, New York, USA/São Paulo, Brazil.

179 **79. *Eso Ode Ibo – Serpente do Caçador Místico*** [Serpent of the Mystic Hunter], **1980s.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 11 ¾ × 15 ¼ × 26 in. Private collection.

180 **80.** ***Ejó Epé Mimo*****, 2009.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 41 ⅜ × 17 ¾ × 8¾ in. Collection of Diane and Bruce Halle.

181 **81.** ***Eylé N'la – Pomba mîtica*** **[**Mythic dove**], 1985.**
Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads. 66 ⅞ × 23 ⅝ in. Private collection.

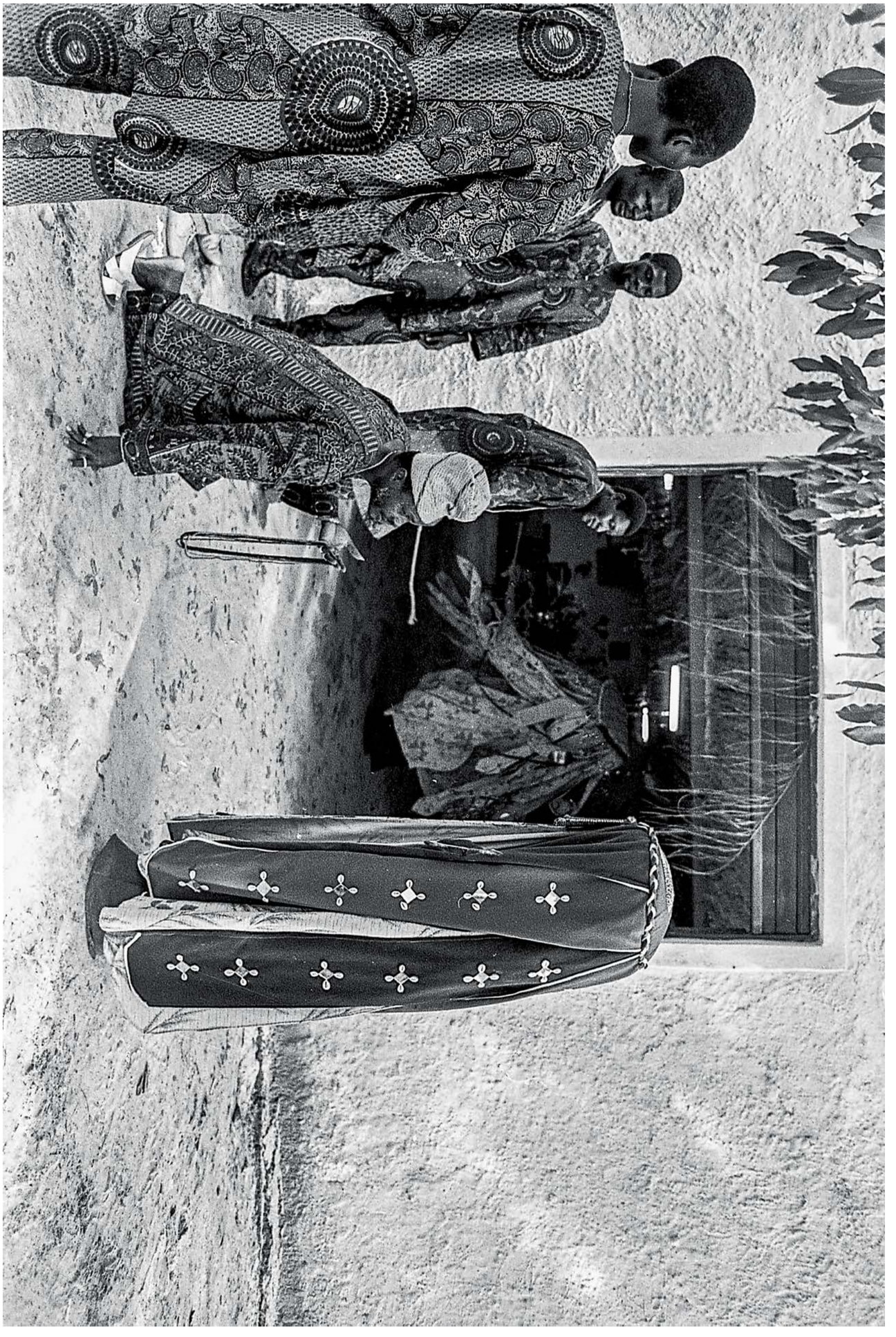
Rituals

Over her decades-long career, photographer Arlete Soares has amassed a deep knowledge of Candomblé and produced a body of work that carries the influence of her mentor, the photographer, ethnographer and Candomblé priest Pierre Verger while manifesting a distinct sensibility. Her photograph *Chair of Mãe Senhora* (2000, fig. 10), shot at Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá, evokes Verger's well-known portrait of the *iyalorisha*, fig. 25. Many of the images included here represent two different aspects of Candomblé practice: the matriarchal worship of the orishas, and the male-led veneration of the Egunguns, or ancestors. The black-and-white series Festival of Oshosi documents white-clad priestesses gathered in the *terreiro* São Jorge Filho da Gomeia, in Salvador, shown here arrayed with leaves, paper banners, and symbols of the hunter deity. Along with Mestre Didi, the writers Jorge Amado and Zélia Gattai are among the festival's participants. By contrast, an image from the *terreiro* Ilê Axé Opô Aganjú portrays the veneration of the Egunguns, with their ornate, layered regalia invoking the ancestors' divine spirits. These beautifully ornamented garments are also visible in the Voduns series, which Soares photographed in Benin during the 1986 Benin-Bahia cultural exchange that celebrated ongoing connections between Candomblé practice and Yoruba religion.

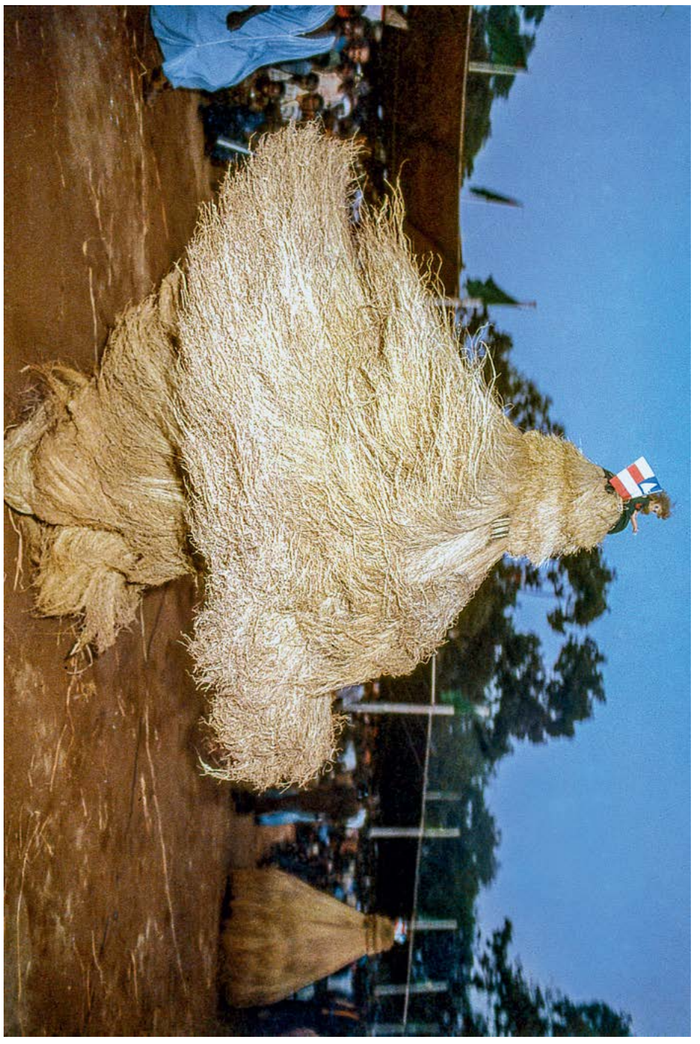
82–85. ARLETE SOARES. Festival of Oshosi, Terreiro de São Jorge Filho da Gomeia, Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, 1980.
Black-and-white photographs. 16 × 20 in each.

86. ARLETE SOARES. Realeza daomeana [Dahomean Royalty], **Benin, 1987.**
Black-and-white photograph. Dimensions variable.

87. ARLETE SOARES. Egunguns of the Terreiro Omo Ilê Agbôula (Ilha de Itaparica) at the Ilê Axé Opô Aganjú, Lauro de Freitas, Bahia, Brazil, 1986.
Black-and-white photograph. Dimensions variable.



88–90. ARLETE SOARES. Voduns, Benin, West Africa, 1986.
Color photographs. 16 × 20 in each.




AJANMI

Legacies

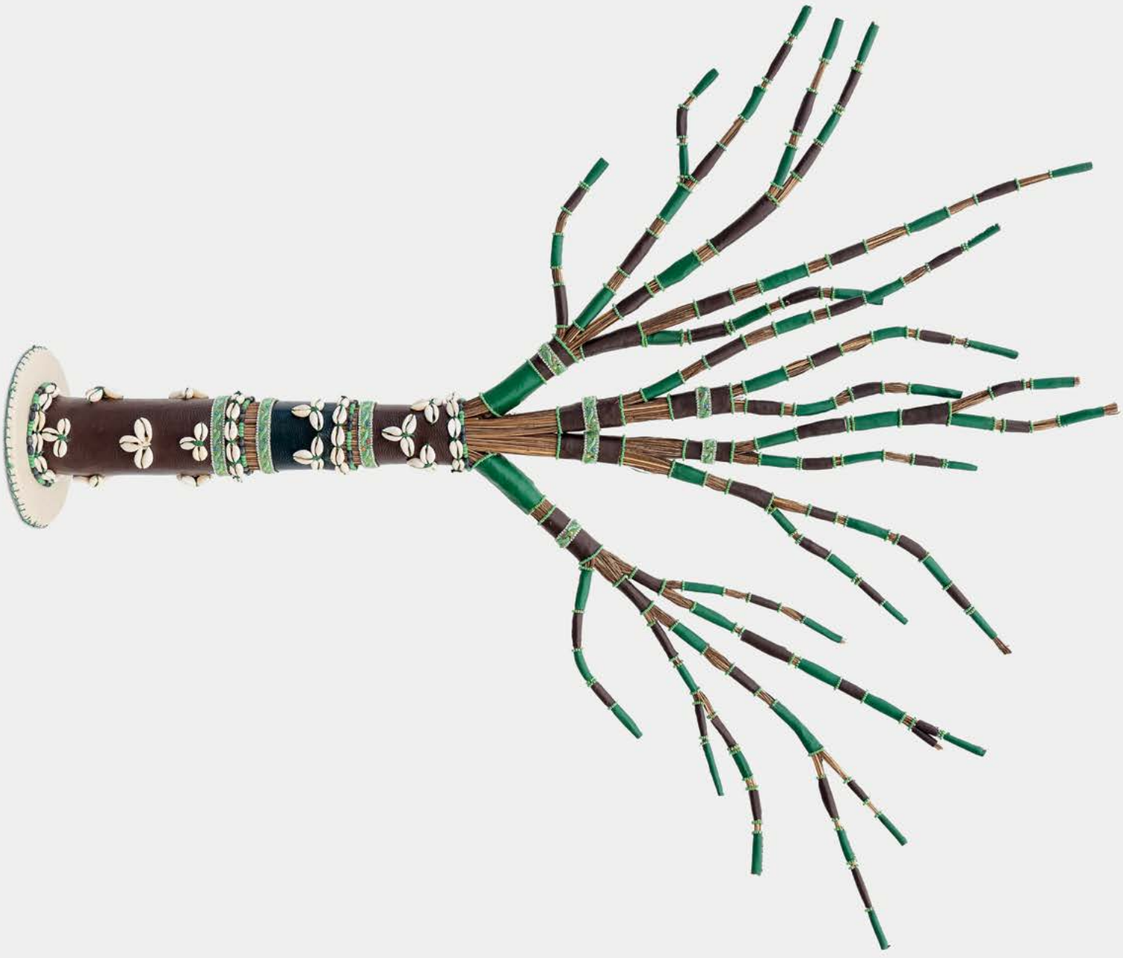
Mestre Didi's legacy of deep engagement with Candomblé forms and concepts continues in the artistic output of new generations of artists practicing today. Calligraphic drawings by the Minas Gerais-based artist Jorge dos Anjos meld symbols of the orishas with dreamlike landscapes and the distinctive architecture of the region, creating a potent sense of spiritual vitality. Stills from Ayrson Heráclito's video *Ijó Mimó* [Sacred Dance, 2019] similarly demonstrate the generational transmission of Candomblé through the movements of the choreographer and dancer Inaicyra Falcão, Didi's daughter, and the dancer Negrizú. This work reminds us that Mestre Didi's earliest objects participated in corporeal modes of storytelling. In the realm of sculpture, Nádia Taquary's regal ibiri and expressive evocation of Omolu recall the emblems and symbols of Didi's work. Heráclito's *Juntó* (2024), combining the energies of Obaluaiye and Shango, continues the Master's interest in hybridizing the orishas through potent spiritual forms. The sculpture *Igi Axé* (2024) by Antonio Oloxedê, Didi's grandson, poignantly invokes both ancestors and new life through the form of a tree spreading *axé,* the sacred life force.

91. AYRSON HERÁCLITO. *Juntó (Xaxará com Oxé)* [Shashara with Oshe], 2024. Metal. 55 in. tall.

92. NÁDIA TAQUARY. *Oriki Atotô*, 2024.
Wood, African cowrie shells, raffia, copper, and glass beads. 62 ¼ × 7 ⅞ × 4 in. Paulo Darzé Galeria Collection.

93. NÁDIA TAQUARY. *Nanã Buruquê*, 2024.
Glass beads from the Czech Republic, African cowrie shells, and copper. 63 × 15 × 4 ¾ in. Paulo Darzé Galeria Collection.

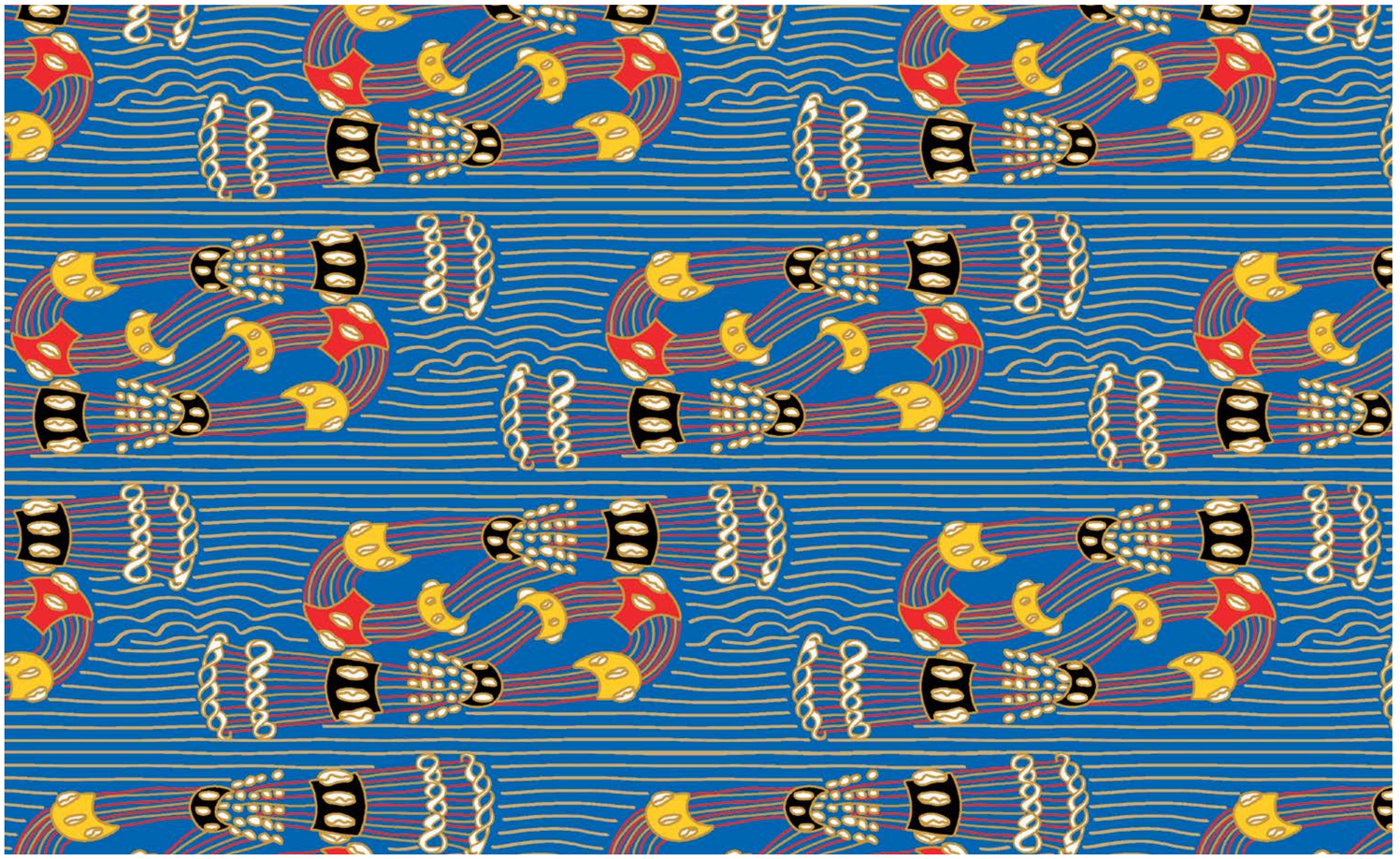
200 **94. ANTONIO OLOXEDE.** ***O Búfalo do entardecer – Efon Aşalẹ*** [The evening buffalo]**, 2023.**
Coconut palm, beads, leather, thread, and cowrie shells. 47 ¼ × 15 ¾ × 15 ¾ in.



201 **95. ANTONIO OLOXEDÊ.** ***Igi Axé*****, 2024.**
Coconut palm, paint, cowrie shells, beads, leather, and gemstones. 38 ⅛ × 33 ¼ in.

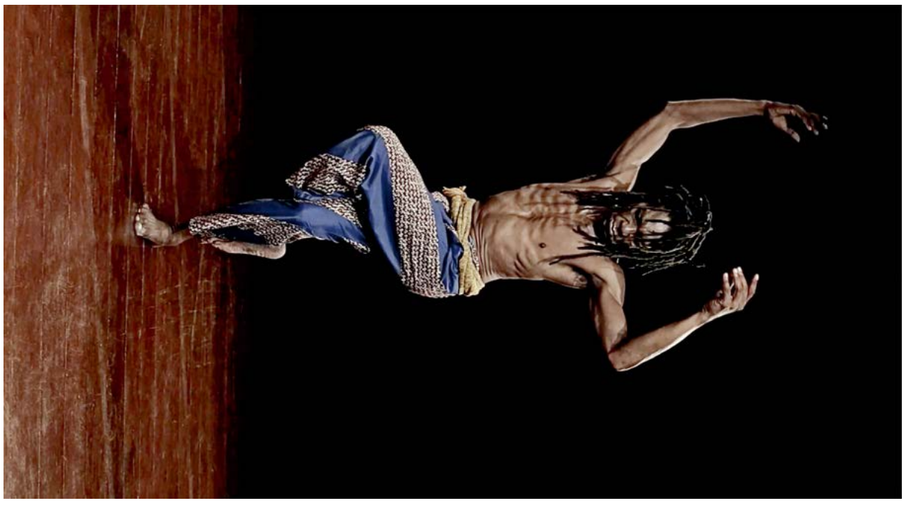
96–99. JORGE DOS ANJOS. Untitled, 1984.
Ink on paper. 27 ½ × 39 ¼ in each.

204 **100. GOYA LOPES.** ***Estampa Orixás*** [Orishas Pattern], **2024.**
Design for fabric print. Dimensions variable.



205 **101. GOYA LOPES.** ***Nanã em Miniatura e Colorida*** [Nana in Miniature with Colors], **2024**
Design for fabric print. Dimensions variable.

102-103. AYRSON HERÁCLITO. *Ijó Mimó*, 2019.
3-channel HD video with color and sound, 9'58".



Endnotes

Spiritual Form: Mestre Didi at El Museo del Barrio

RODRIGO MOURA

1. El Museo del Barrio has a longstanding investment in Afro-diasporic culture. A striking early example is the exhibition *Aspectos de la esclavitud en Puerto Rico* (Aspects of Slavery in Puerto Rico), 1974.
2. An iyalorisha is a Candomblé priestess. The *terreiro* is the place of worship, and metonymically, the religious community.
3. *Yoruba As It's Spoken* (Bahia: Tipografia Moderna, 1950).
4. Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos, *Axé Opô Afonjá, Notícia Histórica de um Terreiro de Santo da Bahia* (Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Brasileiro de Estudos Afro-Asiáticos), 1962.
5. For more information on the Ilê Asipá Cultural and Religious Society see the essay by Ayrson and Beto Heráclito in this publication, p. 21-28.
6. A historical review of SECNEB (Society for Black Culture Studies in Brazil) and the full scope of its activities is still needed, especially for a non-specialized audience and readers without access to Brazilian libraries. However, it is important to highlight its significance in fields such as heritage, museology, and film production. See the documentary trilogy now considered a classic in cinema and decolonization studies: *Orixá Ninu Ilê* (dir. Juana Elbein dos Santos, 1978), *Iyá-Mi-Agbá* (dir. Juana Elbein dos Santos, 1981), and *Egungun* (dir. Carlos Brajsblat, 1982). Unofficial copies of these films can be found on YouTube.
7. Elbein dos Santos's classic ethnography, *Os nagô e a morte: Pàde, Àsèsè e o culto Égun na Bahia* (The Nagô and Death: Pàde, Àsèsè and the Egungun Cult in Bahia), was presented as a PhD thesis at the Sorbonne and published as a book in Brazil in 1975 by Editora Vozes.
8. *Afro-Brazilian Art*. The exhibition benefited from the military dictatorship's diplomatic interest in foreign policy concerning Africa.
9. Mãe Senhora articulated this policy, which translates as "For the public gaze/behind closed doors" as a way to guide the Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá's interactions with the public. See page 23 in this volume.
10. Festac '77 is the widely used acronym for the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, held in Lagos in 1977. *Templo de Oxalá* [Temple of Oshala] included twenty sculptures and ten reliefs by Valentim.
11. The lyrics of Caetano Veloso's *Beleza Pura* are, in the original Portuguese, "Quando essa preta começa a tratar do cabelo" (...) "Toda trama da trança transa do cabelo/ Conchas do mar," and then "Tudo é chique demais tudo é muito elegante / Manda botar / Fina palha da costa/ E que tudo se trance / Todos os búzios." *Odara* is the first song in *Bicho*, Veloso's 1977 album.

Mestre Didi: Creator of Visual Oriki

AYRSON HERÁCLITO AND BETO HERÁCLITO

1. The expanded concept of art is reminiscent of the reflection of the German artist Joseph Beuys. See Alain Borer, *Joseph Beuys* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2001).
2. Orlando Senna, "Mestre amigo" in *Mestre Didi 80 anos: ancestralidade africana no Brasil,* ed. Juana Elbein dos Santos (Salvador, Bahia: SECNEB, Sociedade de Estudos da Cultura Negra no Brasil), 27–29.
3. Renato da Silveira, *O Candomblé da Barroquinha: processo de constituição do primeiro terreiro baiano de Keto* (Salvador: Maianga, 2006).
4. Joaze Bernardino-Costa, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and Grosfoguel, Ramon, eds., *Decolonialidade e pensamento afrodiaspórico*, Coleção Cultura Negra e Identidades, 2nd ed. (Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2023).
5. Waldir F. Oliveira and Vivaldo Da C. Lima, eds., *Cartas de Édison Carneiro a Artur Ramos: de 4 de janeiro de 1936 a 6 de dezembro de 1938* (São Paulo: Corrupio, 1987).
6. Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos, "Troça Carnavalesca Pai Burukô em Folia," in *Autos Coreográficos: Mestre Didi, 90 Anos*, ed. Juana Elbein dos Santos (Salvador: Corrupio, 2007), 40.
7. Anamaria Morales, "O afoxé Filhos de Gandhi pede paz," in João José Reis, ed., *Escravidão e invenção da liberdade: estudos sobre o negro no Brasil* (São Paulo: Brasiliense: CNPq, 1988), 264–274.
8. Alberto Heráclito Ferreira Filho, "Desafricanizar as ruas: elite letrada, mulheres pobres e cultura popular em Salvador 1890–1970," in *Afro-Ásia* no. 21–22 (1998–1999): 239–256.
9. An ancient African city that prospered between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries and that was the capital of the Yoruba kingdom.
10. Julio Braga, ed., *Na Gamela do Feitiço: repressão e resistência nos candomblés da Bahia* (Salvador: CEAO/ Edufba, 1995).
11. See for example the article "As noivas dos deuses sanguinários" (The brides of the bloodthirsty gods), published in the magazine *O Cruzeiro*, a controversial 1951 report with photographs by Jose Medeiros of an initiation into Candomblé.
12. Bernardino-Costa, Maldonado-Torres and Grosfoguel, eds., *Decolonialidade e pensamento afrodiaspórico*, 17.
13. Marco Aurélio Luz, *Cultura negra em tempos pós-modernos*, 3rd ed. (Salvador: EDUFBA, 2008), 90.
14. Ibid., 20.
15. Dos Santos, "Troça Carnavalesca Pai Burukô em Folia," 33.
16. Marco Aurélio Luz, "Mestre Didi Alapini – origem e originalidade,"

in *Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos–Mestre Didi: o reverberar ancestral africano-brasileiro*, ed. Jean Paul d'Antony Costa Silva, Kleyson Rosário Assis, and Roberto Henrique Seidel (Salvador: EDUNEB, 2017).
17. Juana Elbein dos Santos, ed., *Mestre Didi 80 anos: ancestralidade africana no Brasil* (Salvador, Bahia: SECNEB, Sociedade de Estudos da Cultura Negra no Brasil), 112–113.
18. Ayrson Heráclito Novato Ferreira, "Solenidade da cumieira," in *Histórias Brasileiras: Antologia*, ed. Adriano Pedrosa, André Mesquita and Lilia Moritz Schwarcz (São Paulo: MASP, 2023), 552–553.
19. Édison Carneiro, *Antologia do negro brasileiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Globo, 1950), 199–201.
20. Vagner Gonçalves da Silva, "Artes do axé: o sagrado afro-brasileiro na obra de Carybé," in *Ponto Urbe*, 10 (2012), https://doi.org/10.4000/pontourbe.1267.
21. Emanoel Araújo, ed., *Mestre Didi: Homenagem aos 90 Anos. Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos. O Escultor do Sagrado* (São Paulo: Museu Afro Brasil, 2009), 51.
22. Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: arte e filosofia Africana e afro-americana*, trans. Tuca Magalhaes (São Paulo: Museu Afro-Brasil, 2011), 23.
23. In 1963, Mestre Didi was contracted as an artisan for the preparation of the Afro-Brazilian section of the Museu de Arte Popular, founded by the Italian architect Lina Bo Bardi in Salvador.
24. Hélio Viana, *Fica odara: as artes do corpo do candomblé nagô do Rio de Janeiro* (Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional, 1994).
25. Renan Vieira Andrade, "Objetos de encanto: design e memória na objetuária sacra afro-brasileira," (PhD diss, São Paulo: Universidade Anhembi Morumbi, 2022).
26. For more on the ritual tools and amulets of the earth pantheon see Raul Lody, *Tem dendê tem axé: etnografia do dendezeiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Pallas, 1992) 25–29.
27. For more on art-amulets, see https://site.videobrasil.org.br/pt/canalvb/video/2246924/Ayrson_Heraclito_Acervo_Comentado.
28. Alex Kévin Ouessou Idrissou, "Oriki: uma epistemologia yorùbá oralitura e arte (verbal)," in *Revista Trama* Volume 18, no. 42 (2022): 68–79.
29. Antonio Riserio, *Oriki Orixá* (São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 1996).
30. Robert Farris Thompson, "Esthetics in Traditional Africa," *ARTnews* 66 (January 1968): 44–45.
31. Ibid.

Healing Spears – Mestre Didi's Scepters, Sculptures, and Monuments

ROBERTO CONDURU

1. Emanoel Araujo, ed., *Mestre Didi: Homenagem aos 90 Anos. Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos. O Escultor do Sagrado* (São Paulo: Museu Afro Brasil, 2009), 53.
2. Paulo Sergio Duarte, *Anos 60: Transformações da Arte no Brasil*, (Rio de Janeiro: Campos Gerais, 1998).
3. Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos, "Troça Carnavalesca Pai Burukô em Folia," in *Autos Coreográficos: Mestre Didi, 90 Anos*, ed. Juana Elbein dos Santos (Salvador: Corrupio, 2007), 31–38.
4. See Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos, *Yorubá Tal Qual se Fala* (Salvador: Editora e Livraria Moderna, 1950); *Contos negros da Bahia* (Rio de Janeiro: GRD, 1961); and *Contos de Nagô* (Rio de Janeiro: GRD, 1963).
5. Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos, *Por que Oxalá usa Ekodidé* (Salvador: Edições Cavaleiro da Lua, 1966); Juana Elbein dos Santos, ed. *Autos Coreográficos: Mestre Didi, 90 Anos* (Salvador: Corrupio, 2007).
6. Nelson Aguilar, "Juana Elbein dos Santos e Mestre Didi: a expansão do circuito artístico," in *Mestre Didi: Homenagem aos 90 Anos*, ed. Emanoel Araújo, 19.
7. Roberto Conduru, "The Belated Pioneering Criticism of Afro-Brazilian Art," *Art in Translation* 14, no. 1 (2022): 1-7.
8. Juliana Ribeiro da Silva Bevilacqua, "Beyond the Revealed Unconscious: Agnaldo Manoel dos Santos as the Protagonist of His Own Art," *Critical Interventions* 9, no. 2 (2015): 116-119.
9. Apud Jaime Sodré, *A influência da religião afro-brasileira na obra escultórica do Mestre Didi* (Salvador: EDUFBA, 2006), 250.
10. Araujo, ed., *Mestre Didi: Homenagem aos 90 Anos*, 187.
11. "Acreditamos que o incremento da sua qualidade técnica deve-se ao convívio com pessoas exímias na produção artesanal das peças de arte sacra afro-brasileira." Sodré, *A influência da religião afro-brasileira na obra escultórica do Mestre Didi*, 248. Author's translation.
12. Jayme Mauricio, "Itinerário das Artes Plásticas," *Correio da Manhã* 22.607, December 16, 1966, 2° Caderno, 2; Roberto Conduru, "Formações transatlânticas – Mestre Didi, Martiniano do Bonfim e a arte da África no Brasil desde os oitocentos," *19&20* 16, no. 1 (2021).
13. Lisa Earl Castillo, *Entre a oralidade e a escrita: a etnografia nos candomblés da Bahia* (Salvador: EDUFBA, 2008).
14. Sodré, *A influência da religião afro-brasileira na obra escultórica do Mestre Didi*, 177.
15. Antônio Olinto, "Contos Negros," *O Globo*, July 1, 1961, 9; Antônio Olinto, "Mestre Didi," in *Ancestralidade Africana no Brasil. Mestre Didi: 80 Anos*, ed. Juana Elbein dos Santos (Salvador: SECNEB, 1997), 45-47; Aguilar, "Juana Elbein dos Santos e Mestre Didi: a expansão do circuito artístico," 19.
16. Sodré, *A influência da religião afro-brasileira*, 223.
17. Duarte, *Anos 60: Transformações da Arte no Brasil*; Roberto Conduru, "Índices afro na arte no Brasil nas décadas de 1960 e 1970," in *Arte não-Europeia: conexões historiográficas a partir do Brasil*, eds. Claudia Mattos Avolese and Patricia D. Meneses (São Paulo: Estação Liberdade, 2020), 143-152.
18. Antônio Olinto, "Porta de Livraria," *O Globo*, December 3, 1964, 8; Jayme Mauricio, "Itinerário das Artes Plásticas," *Correio da Manhã*, December 16, 1966, 2° Caderno, 2; Apud Olinto, "Importante em Arte é o exercício da Liberdade," *O Globo*, November 24, 1965, 2; "Didi, o folclore na G-4," *Jornal do Brasil*, December 15, 1966, caderno B, 3.
19. Harry Laus, "Concluída seleção da Bienal da Bahia," *Jornal do Brasil*, November 17, 1966, caderno B, 2.
20. "Panorama das artes plásticas," *Jornal do Brasil*, December 6, 1966, caderno B, 4; "Bienal da Bahia foi mais importante fato artístico do ano, segundo Gershman," *Jornal do Brasil*, December 30, 1966, 10; Harry Laus, "Premiação da Bienal da Bahia," *Jornal do Brasil*, January 5, 1967, caderno B, 2. Clarival do Prado Valladares, Mário Pedrosa, Mário Schemberg, Riolan Coutinho, and Wilson Martins were part of the jury.
21. Yumara Souza Pessoa, "Decoração Soteropolitana na década de 70: cores, formas e representações" (MA Thesis, UFBA, 2007), 122-126.
22. Denise Mattar and Thais Darzé, eds., *Mestre Didi: Mo Qui Gbogbo In* (São Paulo: Almeida e Dale Galeria de Arte, 2018), 93-107.
23. Alfred Gell, "The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology," in *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetic*, Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton, eds. (Oxford, Clarendon Press: 1992), 40-63; Juana Elbein dos Santos, "As Criaturas Míticas de Mestre Didi. Èdá-Elemi," in *Èdá-Elemi. As Criaturas Míticas de Mestre Didi*, ed. Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos (São Paulo: Galeria São Paulo, n.d.).
24. Juana Elbein dos Santos, "Mestre Didi, emergência mítica – olhar universal," in Araújo, *Mestre Didi. Homenagem aos 90 Anos*, 9. On the artisticity of Didi's creations, see Hélio Menezes, "Atravessando fronteiras: uma releitura da antropologia da arte proposta por Alfred Gell a partir de um ibiri de Mestre Didi," *Revista UFMG* 22, no. 1-2 (jan./dez. 2015): 104-123.
25. Mário Pedrosa, "The new MAM will consist of five museums," in *Mário Pedrosa: Primary Documents*, eds. Glória Ferreira and Paulo Herkenhoff (New York: MoMA, 2015), 173-174.
26. Mário Pedrosa, "Art of the Caduveo, African Art, Contemporary Artists," in *Mário Pedrosa: Primary Documents*, 153.
27. Ricardo Basbaum and Eduardo Coimbra, eds., *Afro-américas. Item: Revista de Arte* 5 (2002): 83.
28. Roberto Conduru, *Willys de Castro* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2005), 214.
29. Juana Elbein dos Santos, ed., *Ancestralidade Africana no Brasil. Mestre Didi: 80 Anos* (Salvador: SECNEB, 1997), 182.

From a Scribe of Babá Olokutun to Priest-Artist

JOSELIA AGUIAR

In writing this article, I interviewed, in alphabetical order, Gildeci Leite, Marco Aurélio Luz, Rafael Moraes, Maria Aparecida Santos, Nicea Maria Santos, Genaldo Antonio dos Santos, Nídia Aparecida dos Santos – Mãe Nídia, Filismina Saraiva, and Arlete Soares. I consulted the archives of Antônio Olinto and Mestre Didi under the care of Rafael Moraes, and also studied works by Mestre Didi held in the rare books section of the Mário de Andrade Library in São Paulo. I consulted the memoirs of Jorge Amado and Zélia Gattai, and articles and books by Pierre Verger and Marco Aurélio Luz in order to understand Yoruba myths and rituals, as well as the contexts of Afro-Bahian relations. The Casa de Jorge Amado Foundation provided invaluable documents and images. In addition, I watched two documentaries, *Orixá Ninú Ilê* (1978), by Juana Elbein dos Santos, and *Alápini—A Herança Ancestral de Mestre Didi Asipá* (2017), by Emilio Le Roux, Hans Herold, and Silvana Moura.
1. In Yoruba tradition, orishas are deities that possess the bodies of initiates during ceremonies, and the Egunguns are the spirits of people of renown who have become influential ancestors, visitors to the world of the living.
2. See excerpts in this volume, 66-77.
3. A *terreiro* is a place of worship where Candomblé adherents congregate.
4. See Didi's history of the founding of Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá, excerpted in this volume as "Axé Opô Afonjá: An Historical Account of a Bahian Terreiro," 78-81.
5. *Búzios* refers to a divination practice using cowrie shells to communicate with the deities, and that is part of the daily life of the *terreiros*.
6. The Obás of the right had both a "voice and a vote" in the leadership of the *terreiro*, while the Obás of the left had a voice but no vote. See Didi, "Axé Opô Afonjá", 78.
7. The term "cacao colonel" emerged in the nineteenth century to characterize the aggressive practices of the plantation-class, who had been formally empowered to maintain order in Brazil's vast interior via the creation of a national guard. See Gustavo Falcón, *Os coronéis do cacao* (Salvador: Ianamá / Centro Editorial e Didática, Universidade Federal da Bahia, 1995). Jorge Amado depicted how landholders used informal militias to protect and enlarge their landholdings in his 1933 novel, *Cacau* (Cacao).
8. See excerpts in this volume, 66-77.
9. The words of Juana Elbein dos Santos are part of the article "Um homem de muitas histórias e títulos" (A man of many stories and titles) by Edson Rodrigues in the newspaper *Correio da Bahia* on June 8, 1993.
10. The Casa de Jorge Amado Foundation holds the original manuscript.
11. "Um negro baiano em Ketu" originally appeared in 1968 in the publication *Jornal A Tarde* in Salvador. See translation in this volume, 81-82.

Mestre Didi's Transatlantic Exhibitions and the Redefinition of Afro-Brazilian Art

ABIGAIL LAPIN DARDASHTI

1. The exhibition was on display at the Museum of Antiquities at the University of Lagos from August 23 to September 26, 1968; the Education Service Hall linked to the Ghana National Museum from September 26 to October 20, 1968; the Musée Dynamique in Dakar from November 2 to December 1, 1968; the Maison de l'UNESCO in Paris from September 22 to October 5, 1970; and at the Africa Centre in London from December 15, 1971, to January 15, 1972, and also traveled to Buenos Aires. A variation on this exhibition entitled *Semanas Afro-Brasileiras* took place at the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro from May 30 to June 21, 1974 (Folder 565: Semanas Afro-Brasileiras, Fundo Exposições, Archive of the Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro). The exhibition was originally supposed to travel to the American Museum of Natural History in New York, but never went there. See Mestre Didi to Pierre Verger, March 10, 1969. Folder 1-B-543: Mãe Senhora/Mestre Didi, Archive of the Fundação Pierre Verger, Salvador. Also see Annexes 1 to 4. Mestre Didi, *Relatório da missão: Exposição e programa cultural Afro-Brasileiro em Lagos, Acra e Dacar*, May 1969. Waldeloir Rego Archive, Salvador.

2. Smaller exhibitions had previously displayed Afro-Brazilian art in West Africa, including Antônio Olinto and Zora Seljan's 1963 exhibition *Brazilian Contemporary Art* in Lagos, and the Brazilian selection to the 1966 First World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar. Didi's work was not included in either exhibition.

3. The Yoruba ethnic group and its religious practices are found in parts of Nigeria, Benin, and Togo.

4. The idea of racial democracy in Brazil emerged from the work of sociologist Gilberto Freyre in the 1930s. See Gilberto Freyre, *Casa grande e senzala: formação da familia brasileira sob o regime de economia patriarcal* (Rio de Janeiro: Maia & Schmidt, 1933). For more on racial democracy in Brazil, see Edward Telles, *Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); and Livio Sansone, *Blackness Without Ethnicity: Constructing Race in Brazil* (New York: Palgrave, 2003).

5. See Abigail Lapin Dardashti, "The International Rise of Afro-Brazilian Modernism in the Age of African Decolonization and Black Power," (Ph.D. diss., The Graduate Center, City University of New York, 2020); and Jerry Dávila, *Hotel Trópico: Brazil and the Challenge of African Decolonization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

6. It is unclear if Elbein directly influenced him to alter his object-making practice. The date of Didi and Juana's meeting remains undefined. They may have married in Bahia in 1963, and again in the UK in 1967. Elbein arrived in Bahia around 1961 or 1962 and met Didi at this time through her research on Afro-Brazilian religion. See "Um amor nascido no terreiro de Egum," *Correio da manhã*, 18 December 1966, Feminino, p. 1. Didi's early exhibitions include Galeria Ralf, Salvador (August 1964); Galeria Rubbers, Buenos Aires (June 1965); Galeria Atrium, São Paulo (December 1965); Brazilian Center, New York (February 1966); Museu de Arte Moderna, Salvador (April 1966); and the Museu de Arte Popular, Salvador (April 1966). See Mestre Didi, Curriculum Vitae, n.d., probably mid-1966. Fundo Roberto Pontual, FUNARTE Archive, Rio de Janeiro.

7. Their trip spanned from December 1966 to April 1967.

8. Didi and Elbein traveled to Cachoeira and Muniz Ferreira on April 20, 1968, and again on May 25, 1968. They then made two trips to Maragogipinho on July 14, 1968, and July 24, 1968, when they also travelled to Nazaré. See hotel, food, transportation, and gas receipts, as well as travel itinerary in Annexes 5. J. 1, 5. J. 4, and 5. J. 5.1. Mestre Didi, *Relatório da missão: Exposição e programa cultural Afro-Brasileiro em Lagos, Acra e Dacar*, May 1969. Waldeloir Rego Archive, Salvador.

9. "Popular Ceramics from Cachoeira," annex 5. B. 1. Mestre Didi, *Relatório da missão*. *Baianas* are typically elderly women of African descent dressed in white, billowing dresses, who work in Salvador as food street vendors or hosts for private or public events. See Vanessa Castañeda, "*Mucamas or Baianas?*: Black Female Empowerment and Cultural Representation in Bahia," *The Latin Americanist* 65, no. 1 (March 2021): 9-34.

10. "Diplomatas inauguram hoje a noite busto da Mãe Senhora," *Jornal do Brasil*, 13 May 1969, caderno 1, 16. For the list of objects for fishing and Capoeira, see annex 5. E. 1, annex 5. H. 1, and annex 5. G. 1. Mestre Didi, *Relatório da missão*; and "Popular Ceramics from Cachoeira," annex 5. B. 1. Mestre Didi, *Relatório da missão*.

11. Elbein and Didi brought works from the Instituto Histórico da Bahia that had not traveled abroad. See Juana Elbein and Mestre Didi to José Maria Nunes Pereira, 6 August 1973, Folder 565: *Semanas Afro-Brasileiras*, Fundo Exposições, Archive of the Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro.

12. For a complete list of objects, see "Popular objects made of rosewood and cajá from Muniz Ferreira," annex 5. C. 1; for ceramic objects from Maragogipinho, see annex 5. A. 1, Mestre Didi, *Relatório da missão*.

13. For silver objects and ornaments, see annex 5. D. 1 and receipts in annex 5. I. 3. The *balangandan* is a silver ornament that combines Candomblé and Catholic imagery.

14. There were a total of eleven mannequins. See the exhibition pamphlet by Elbein and Didi, "Afro-Brazilian Art," FUNARTE Archives, Rio de Janeiro.

15. Joanne Bubolz Eicher, *Nigerian Handcrafted Textiles* (Ilê-Ifé: University of Ifé Press, 1976), 18. Ewá is the orisha associated with the sun and stars.

16. See receipt for repair and reconstruction of the attire in annex 5. K. 2 and for dry cleaning in annex 5. K. 3. For ritual objects and jewelry, see annex 5. I. 1 and 5. I. 2, Mestre Didi, *Relatório da missão*.

17. Pierre Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traites des nègres enter le golfe du Bénin et Bahia de todos os Santos du XVIIe au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Mouton, 1968).

18. The museum was installed temporarily in the lobby of the Castro Alves Theater in Salvador and did not have a collection. The military regime eliminated the project in 1964. The institution eventually moved to the Solar de União. See Zeuler Lima and Sandra Vivanco, "Culture Translated and Devoured: Two Brazilian Museums by Lina Bo Bardi," *Journal of Romance Studies* 2, no. 3 (2002): 55.

19. See Didi's CV, p. 2, likely 1967, Fundo Roberto Pontual, FUNARTE Archives, Rio de Janeiro. See also Joselia Aguiar's research on this subject in this volume.

20. Macumba is a generic and essentializing term that denotes Afro-Brazilian religions in Brazil.

21. Verger, *Flux et reflux*.

22. Several sources suggest the green material were the leaves of the *pitanga*, a Brazilian fruit tree closely associated with Candomblé ritual, but I have not found definitive evidence of this. See for example Roger M. Buergel, "'This Exhibition is an Accusation:' The Grammar of Display According to Lina Bo Bardi," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, Issue 26 (Spring 2011): 55.

23. Shasharas and ibiris are ritual objects from Candomblé. For a full description of their purposes and iconography, see Conduru in this volume.

24. Mestre Didi, *West African Sacred Art and Rituals in Brazil: A Comparative Study* (Research manuscript, University of Ibadan, 1967). See excerpt from the 2014 version in this volume, 82-85.

25. Elbein and Didi, *Afro-Brazilian Art* (London: The Africa Centre, 1972).

26. Léopold Sédar Senghor to Mestre Didi, 29 November 1968, Appendix 1, Mestre Didi, *Relatório da missão.*

27. Annex 1, Mestre Didi, *Relatório da missão.*

28. Annex 2, Mestre Didi, *Relatório da missão*.

29. Howard Dodson, "Foreword," *Mestre Didi: An Afro-Brazilian Artist* (New York: Schomburg Center for Research in Brazil Culture, 1986), n.p. pamphlet.

30. "Schomburg Exhibit Celebrates African Tradition," *New York Amsterdam News*, 4 October 1986, p. 30.

31. For more on Nascimento's relationship with Nuyorian artists, see Abigail Lapin Dardashti, "Afro-Latinx Intersections: Nuyorican and Afro-Brazilian Art and Activism in New York City," *American Art* 36, no. 3 (Fall 2022): 98-125. For Latin American artists in New York, see Aime Iglesias Lukin, Karen Marta, and Tie Jojima, eds., *This Must Be the Place: An Oral History of Latin American Artists in New York, 1965-1975* (New York: Americas Society, 2022).

32. See Abigail Lapin Dardashti, "Abdias do Nascimento in New York: Migration, Resistance, and Transnational Black Art, 1968-70," *Modos* 6, no. 1 (Jan. 2022): 471-493.

33. Laura Helton, "Schomburg's Library and the Price of Black History," *African American Review* 54, nos. 1-2 (Spring/Summer 2021): 110.

34. Ibid.

35. Pablo Lafuente, "Introduction: From the Outside IN—'Magiciens de la Terre' and Two Histories of Exhibitions," *Making Art Global (Part 2): 'Magiciens de la Terre' 1989* (London: Afterall, 2013), 11.

36. Amélia Siegel Corrêa, "Brazilian Artists in *Magiciens de la Terre* and the Challenges of Classifications," *World Art* 11, no. 3 (2021): 298.

37. In addition to central curator Jean-Hubert Martin, the exhibition's curatorial team included Mark Francis, Aline Luque, and André Magnin. See Lafuente, "Introduction."

38. Elsewhere I employ Édouard Glissant's concept of the rhizome to understand Didi's work. See Abigail Lapin Dardashti, "Exhibiting *Afro-Brazilian Art* Abroad: Mestre Didi and the International Rootedness of Blackness in Brazil," *3rd Text Africa*, no. 13 (January 2023): 88-104.

Mestre Didi Selected Writings 1962–2014

1. Also known as the Centro Santa Cruz Axé of Opô Afonjá or Casa de Xangô.

2. New initiates.

3. Throughout this essay, Mestre Didi carefully recounts all of the initiations performed by Mãe Aninha and Mãe Senhora. These references have been removed due to space limits, but can be found in the full version of the essay.

4. Under the rule of the dictatorial president Getúlio Vargas, the *Estado Novo* was characterized by Brazilian nationalism, centralized power, anti-communism, and authoritarianism. It translates literally as the New State.

5. A non-alcoholic, fermented fruit drink.

6. Symbolic jewelry pieces and charms used as spiritual protection.

7. Discoteca Municipal de São Paulo; Instituto Histórico e Geográfico da Bahia; Museu do Estado da Bahia; Museu da Cidade, in Salvador; Instituto Joaquim Nabuco, in Recife; Museu Histórico do Rio de Janeiro.

8. The private collections of Nina Rodrigues, Arthur Ramos, Gilberto Freyre, Estácio de Lima, and the author.

9. The seats of Ilê Iyanaso, the Casa Branca, the Engenho Velho; the *terreiro* do Gantois, the Federação; the Axé Opâ Afonjá, in São Gonçalo do Retiro, in Salvador; in the Ilê Agboula, in Ponta de Areia, the Ilha de Itaparica; in the houses of D. Santinha and Nezinho de Ogum, in Cachoeira, all in Bahia, Brazil.

10. Tuntun was an ancient African settlement in Ponta de Areia, Amoreiras, on the island of Itaparica. (Original).

11. A religious staff or scepter.

Artists

MESTRE DIDI (Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos) (1917 – 2013, Salvador, Brazil)
Born into an established Candomblé family, Mestre Didi spent decades making ritual objects at the religious society Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá. Around 1962, he began to reconceive these objects as sculptures, and to exhibit them in galleries and museums. He participated in landmark exhibitions such as *A mão afro-brasileira* (Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM/SP), 1980); *Art in Latin America* (Hayward Gallery, London, 1989); *Magiciens de la Terre* (Centre Pompidou, Paris, 1989); the 23rd Bienal de São Paulo, with a solo presentation (1996); *Brazil: Body and Soul* (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2001–2002); and, posthumously *Afro-Atlantic Histories* (Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP), 2018). His works are included in public and private collections internationally, including at El Museo del Barrio, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Dallas Museum of Art, MASP, Museu Afro Brasil, and Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM-RJ).

JORGE DOS ANJOS (1957, Ouro Preto, Brazil; lives in Belo Horizonte, Brazil)
Jorge dos Anjos's constructivist work incorporates Candomblé references and an emphasis on material experimentation. Since the 1980s, he has participated in important group exhibitions, such as *Os herdeiros da noite: fragmentos do imaginário negro* (Pinacoteca de São Paulo, 1994) and *Réplica e rebeldia* (MAM-RJ, 2006); and the solo exhibition *Pedra, ferro e fogo* (Galeria Coleção de Arte, Rio de Janeiro, 2011).

EMANOEL ARAÚJO (1940, Santo Amaro da Purificação, Brazil – 2022, São Paulo, Brazil)
An influential curator, collector, and artist, Emanoel Araújo was director of the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo (1992–2001) before founding the Museu Afro Brasil in 2004. His geometric sculpture incorporates his interest in African textiles and sculpture and his Candomblé practice. His work has been included in many group exhibitions and was the subject of a 2018 retrospective at MASP (*Emanoel Araújo, The Ancestrality of Symbols: Africa-Brasil*).

AYRSON HERÁCLITO (1968, Macaúabas, Brazil; lives in Salvador, Brazil)
Ayrson Heráclito is a visual artist, curator, and professor who works across photography, installation, performance, and time-based media, often using materials like palm oil, blood, meat, and sugar. Heráclito has participated in many international exhibitions, including the 57th Venice Biennale, 2017; *Axé Bahia: The Power of Art in an Afro-Brazilian Metropolis* (Fowler Museum, Los Angeles, 2017); *Afro-Atlantic Histories* (MASP, 2018, which he also co-curated); and the 35th Bienal de São Paulo, 2023. At the 18th International Architecture Exhibition of the Venice Biennale (2023), he and his collaborators won the Golden Lion award for their work *Terra*.

GOYA LOPES (1954, Salvador, Brazil; lives in Salvador)
Working at the intersection of visual art and textile design, Goya Lopes creates patterned fabrics and garments that reference Afro-Brazilian spirituality. Recently, Lopes started to produce silk-screened canvases that combine her distinctive graphic language with figural motifs. Her textiles have appeared in several exhibitions, including *Axé Bahia* (Fowler Museum, Los Angeles, 2017) and *Um Defeito de Cor* (Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR), 2022).

ABDIAS NASCIMENTO (1914, Franca, Brazil – 2011, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)
Abdias Nascimento was a cultural and political activist, dramaturg, and visual artist. He founded the vanguard Teatro Experimental do Negro in Rio de Janeiro (1944–1968), which positioned the performing arts as an arena for racial equity. After seeking political refuge in New York in 1968, he joined the city's Puerto Rican and Black art scenes. His colorful, symbolic paintings received solo shows at the Studio Museum in Harlem (1973) and at the artist-founded Taller Boricua (1980). Recent exhibitions include *Abdias Nascimento: Um Artista Panamefricano* (MASP, 2022); *This Must Be the Place: Latin American Artists in New York, 1965–1975* (Americas Society, New York, 2021); and *Project a Black Planet: The Art and Culture of Panafrica* (Art Institute of Chicago, 2024–2025).

ANTONIO OLOXEDÊ (1967, Salvador, Brazil; lives in Salvador)
A priest in the Ilê Asipá religious community of Salvador, Antonio Oloxedê creates sculpture that maintains Candomblé tradition while pursuing contemporary aesthetics. He continues the legacy of his grandfather, Mestre Didi, and has also restored some of Didi's sculptures. In 2016, the Centro Cultural da Barroquinha in Salvador presented the solo exhibition *Mãos que Herdam* and his work was also included in *Um Defeito de Cor* (MAR, 2022).

AGNALDO MANOEL DOS SANTOS (1926, Gamboa, Brazil – 1962, Salvador, Brazil)
A self-taught artist, Agnaldo Manoel dos Santos began making figural sculpture in the early 1950s while working as a studio assistant to the artist Mário Cravo Júnior. With the support of Cravo and other established members of Salvador's cultural scene, his career grew quickly, with his first solo show in 1956 at the Petite Galerie, in Rio de Janeiro. Recently, his work has been included in *Afro-Atlantic Histories* (MASP, 2018) and *Mãos: 35 anos da Mão Afro-Brasileira* (MAM/SP, 2023).

AURELINO DOS SANTOS (1942, Salvador, Brazil; lives in Salvador)
Aurelino dos Santos began painting in the 1960s with the encouragement of Agnaldo Manoel dos Santos and the architect Lina Bo Bardi. A prolific painter still active in his modest house-studio in the Salvador neighborhood of Ondina, dos Santos is known for his dense, abstracted cityscapes. His work was included in the exhibition *Southern Geometries, from Mexico to Patagonia* (Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain, 2018) and *Os herdeiros da noite* (Pinacoteca de São Paulo, 1994).

JOSÉ ADÁRIO DOS SANTOS (Zé Diabo, 1947, Salvador, Brazil; lives in Salvador)
From age eleven, José Adário apprenticed as a blacksmith under Maximiano Prates, learning to craft the liturgical tools of Candomblé in wrought iron. As early as the 1960s, his work attracted critical attention, including that of U.S. art historian Robert Farris Thompson, who wrote about his sculpture in connection with Yoruba religion. Adário subsequently participated in exhibitions like *Os herdeiros da noite* (Pinacoteca de São Paulo, 1994) and *Arte e religiosidade no Brasil: heranças africanas* (Padre Manoel da Nóbrega Pavilion, Ibirapuera Park, São Paulo, 1997). His work was recently included in El Museo del Barrio's exhibition *Something Beautiful: Reframing La Colección* (2023–2024) and in *A forma do fim: esculturas no acervo da Pinacoteca* (Pinacoteca de São Paulo, 2024–2025).

ARLETE SOARES (1940, Valença, Brazil; lives in Salvador, Brazil)
Arlete Soares has produced an extensive body of photographs documenting spiritual rituals in Salvador. In 1980, she founded the publishing house Editora Corrupio, which fostered publications by many artists and writers invested in Candomblé, such as the photographer Pierre Verger, writer Zélia Gattai, and Mestre Didi. In 1988, she cofounded, with Verger and Lina Bo Bardi, the institutions Casa do Benin in Salvador and Casa do Brasil in Ouidah, Benin. In 2024, her solo exhibition *Lapso Temporal* took place at the Casa do Benin.

NÁDIA TAQUARY (1967, Salvador, Brazil; lives in Salvador)
Nádia Taquary works with the context of African and Afro-Brazilian sacred practices. Her symbolically charged sculptures often evoke female guardian figures or Afro-Brazilian jewelry. Taquary has participated in exhibitions nationally and internationally, including *Axé Bahia* (Fowler Museum, Los Angeles, 2017) and *Um Defeito de Cor* (MAR, 2022), which also hosted her first solo exhibition *Ònà Irin: Railway* (2023).

RUBEM VALENTIM (1922, Salvador, Brazil – 1991, São Paulo, Brazil)
The self-taught artist Rubem Valentim based his "artistic-visual-signographic language" on the formal principles of concrete and neo-concrete art. By the mid-1970s, he had begun to publicly assert the the presence of Afro-diasporic symbols in his work, as in the title of his sculptural installation *Templo de Oxalá*, presented at the 14th São Paulo Bienal (1977). His work has been included in many exhibitions, such as *A Mão Afro-Brasileira* (MAM/SP, 1988); *Brasil: 100 Anos de Arte Moderna* (Museu Nacional de Belas Artes, Rio de Janeiro, 1993); and *Concrete Matters* (Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 2018).

Contributors

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ROBERTO CONDURU is Endowed Distinguished Professor of Art History at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. His research addresses modern and contemporary art and architecture in Brazil, with an emphasis on Afro-Brazilian art. He published *Arte Afro-Brasileira* (C/Arte) in 2007 and was a co-curator of *Axé Bahia: The Power of Art in an Afro-Brazilian Metropolis* (Fowler Museum UCLA, 2017).

ABIGAIL LAPIN DARDASHTI is Assistant Professor of Art History at the University of California, Irvine. Her research examines modern and contemporary Latin American, Latina/o/x, as well as African and Jewish diasporic art with a focus on international exchange, migration, racial formation, and activism. Her current book project, "Itinerant Modernism: Politics and the Rise of Afro-Brazilian Art," examines Afro-Brazilian art and international exchange during the period of the military dictatorship.

AYRSON HERÁCLITO NOVATO FERREIRA is a visual artist and curator whose installations, performances, and photographs feature Afro-Brazilian spirituality and explore the connections between Africa and the diaspora in the Americas. Ayrson co-curated the 3rd Bienal da Bahia in 2014 and the landmark traveling exhibition *Afro-Atlantic Histories,* organized by the Museu de Arte São Paulo (MASP) in 2018.

ALBERTO (BETO) HERÁCLITO FERREIRA FILHO is a writer and Professor of History at the State University of Bahia, Feira de Santana (UEFS). Among other scholarly works, he has published *Quem pariu e bateu que balance: mundos femininos, maternidade e pobreza. Salvador 1890/1940* on women, motherhood, and poverty in Salvador, Bahia, between 1890 and 1940.

RODRIGO MOURA has been chief curator at El Museo del Barrio since 2019. Before coming to El Museo, Rodrigo spent twelve years at Instituto Inhotim as curator and then as artistic director. As adjunct curator of Brazilian Art at the Museu de Arte São Paulo (MASP), he organized exhibitions such as *Djanira: Picturing Brazil* (2019), *Melvin Edwards: Lynch Fragments* (2018), *Images of the Aleijadinho* (2018), and *Who's afraid of Teresinha Soares?* (2017).

CHLOË COURTNEY is an art historian and curatorial fellow at El Museo del Barrio. Her current research investigates the intersection of craft, art, and race in the Americas.

CHECKLIST

ARTWORKS BY MESTRE DIDI (Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos, 1917–2013, Salvador, Brazil)

Contos negros da Bahia [Black Tales of Bahia], 1961. Edições GRD, Rio de Janeiro, with cover and illustrations by Carybé. El Museo del Barrio Archives

Por que Oxalá usa ekodide [Why Oxala wears ekodide], 1966. Artist book published by Edição Cavaleiro da Lua, Salvador, Bahia, with illustrations by Lênio Braga, 12 × 8 ½ × ⅛ in. El Museo del Barrio Archives

Catisal – Sasará Ati Ibiri Meta, 1968. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 24 ⅜ × 7 ½ × 4 ¾ in. Collection of Allison and Larry Berg

Catisal – Sasará Ati Ibiri Meta, 1968. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 24 × 8 ½ × 8 ⅜ in. Collection of

Opa Aiye Orum – Cetro de Oxalá [Oshala's scepter], 1969. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 63 × 9 ⅞ × 9 ⅞ in. Instituto Paz Collection

Ori Iyawô, 1970. Painted clay, wood, beads, palm fiber, and cowrie shells, 10 ⅝ × 12 ⅝ × 9 in. Collection Rafael Moraes

Guardião [Guardian], 1970s. Clay, iron, palm ribs, beads, and cowrie shells, 20 ½ × 7 ⅞ × 4 ¾ in. Collection Rafael Moraes

Opa Eye Agba Ati Itoka – Cetro da Grande Ave Ancestral com lança no topo [Scepter of the Great Ancestral Bird with lance on the top], 1977–1978. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 83 ½ × 22 ½ × 10 ⅝ in. Instituto Paz Collection

Eyin Olorun – Louva Deus [Praying mantis], 1979. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 72 ½ × 26 × 15 in. Instituto Paz Collection

Four necklaces, 1980s. Palm fiber, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 9 ⅞ × 4 ¾ in., 7 ½ × 5 ⅛ in., 7 ½ × 5 ⅞ in., and 9 × 4 ¾ in. Collection Rafael Moraes

Omo Oba Aye – Filho do Rei da Terra [Son of the King of the Earth], 1980s. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 41 ¾ × 23 ½ × 6 in. Fernanda Feitosa and Heitor Martins Collection

Opa Exim Ati Ejó Meji – Cetro com lança e duas serpentes [Scepter with lance and two serpents], 1980s. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 78 × 24 ½ × 9 ½ in. Instituto Paz Collection

Opa Ibiri Merin Ati Ejo Meji Eye Loke – Cetro dos quatro ibiri com duas serpentes e pássaro na ponta [Scepter of four ibiri with two serpents and bird at top], 1980s. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 81 ½ × 22 ½ × 10 ¼ in. Instituto Paz Collection

Xaxará Lewa – Xaxará mais belo [Most beautiful shashara], 1980s. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 24 ½ × 4 × 4 in. Estrellita B. Brodsky Collection

Exu Amuniwa, 1982. Painted clay and cement, cowrie shells, and iron, 30 ⅜ × 7 ⅞ × 7 in. Collection Rafael Moraes

Sasara Ati Aso Iko, 1982. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 21 ¼ in. tall. Inaicyra Falcão

Xarxará Ado Meji, 1985. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, beads, and calabashes, 23 ½ × 8 ¾ × 6 in. Collection of the Dallas Museum of Art, gift of Deedie Potter Rose

Ibiri, 1988. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 27 × 3 × 4 in. Collection of the Dallas Museum of Art, gift of Deedie Potter Rose

Ejolorun, 1990. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 22 ½ × 38 ⅛ × 10 ⅝ in. Private collection, New York, USA/São Paulo, Brazil

Untitled, 1990. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 22 × 4 × 4 in. Collection of Marta Chilindron

Igi Nilé Ati Ejo Ori Meji – Árvore da terra com serpente de duas cabeças [Tree of earth with two-headed serpent], 1990s. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 43 ¾ × 20 × 6 ¼ in. Paulo Darzé Gallery collection

Opa Igbo Olu Ode – Cetro do Senhor da Vegetação e da Caça [Scepter of the Lord of the Flora and the Hunt], 1990s. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 50 ¾ × 18 × 5 in. Private collection

Opa Nilé – Cetro da terra [Earth scepter], 1996. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 123 ¼ × 33 ½ × 7 ⅛ in. Private collection

Ope Awo Ibo – Palma misteriosa do mato [Mysterious palm of the woods], 2004/2011. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 51 ⅝ × 14 ⅛ × 11 ¾ in. Courtesy James Cohan and Simões de Assis

Ògó Esu – Emblema do orixá Exu [Emblem of the orisha Eshu], 2006. Painted wood, painted leather, cowrie shells, beads, and cloth, 22 in. tall. Collection Rafael Moraes

Ohun-Áso, 2007. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, Each component 27 × 2 ¼ × 5 in. Courtesy of Simões de Assis

Opa Ose – Cetro da dinastia e ancestralidade [Scepter of dynasty and ancestrality], 2007. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, beads, and raffia, 72 ½ × 7 ¾ × 7 ¾ in. Courtesy of Simões de Assis

Ejó Epé Mimo, 2009. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 41 ⅜ × 17 ¾ × 8 ¾ in. Collection of Diane and Bruce Halle

Iwin Igbo – Espírito da floresta [Sprit of the forest], 2009. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 67 ⅞ × 13 ¾ × 15 ¾ in. Shah Garg Collection

Untitled, undated. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and raffia, 41 × 17 ¾ × 4 ¼ in. Fernanda Feitosa and Heitor Martins Collection

Ceremonial staff, undated. Palm ribs, painted leather, and cowrie shells, 96 × 12 in. Dallas Museum of Art, gift of Deedie and Rusty Rose

Eran L'okun – O polvo com quatro tentáculos [The octopus with four tentacles], undated. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 44 ⅞ × 25 ⅝ × 25 ⅝ in. Private collection

Opá Ìdarí Mérin Pèlú Òkò Lókè [Scepter of the four ibiris with a spear on top], undated. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 36 ⅝ × 12 ¼ × 4 ¾ in. Courtesy of James Cohan and Simões de Assis

Opa Ode Arole Nila – Cetro do Grande Caçador Místico [Scepter of the Great Mystic Hunter], undated. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 72 × 20 × 5 in. Almeida & Dale and Paulo Darzé Galeria collection

Opá Omo Eda – Cetro do filho da Natureza [Son of Nature's scepter], undated. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, fabric, and beads, 39 × 10 ¼ × 7 ¾ in. Collection of El Museo del Barrio, gift of Almeida & Dale Galeria de Arte and Paulo Darzé Galeria, 2021

ARTWORKS BY OTHER ARTISTS

Jorge dos Anjos (1957, Ouro Preto, Brazil; lives in Belo Horizonte, Brazil)

Untitled, 1984. Four ink-on-paper artworks, each 27 ½ × 39 ¼ in. Courtesy of the artist

Emanoel Araújo (1940, Santo Amaro da Purificação, Brazil – 2022, São Paulo, Brazil)

Untitled, 1970. Wood and automotive paint, 86 ¾ × 63 × 7 ½ in. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York and Simões de Assis, São Paulo

Ayrson Heráclito (1968, Macaúbas, Brazil; lives in Salvador, Brazil)

Ijó Mimó, 2019. 3-channel HD video with color and sound, 9'58". Courtesy of the artist

Juntó (Xaxará com Oxê) [Shashara with Oshe], 2024. Metal, approx. 55 ⅛ in. tall. Paulo Darzé Gallery collection

Goya Lopes (1954, Salvador, Brazil; lives in Salvador)

Estampa Orixás [Orishas Pattern] and *Nanã em Miniatura e Colorida* [Nana in Miniature with Colors], 2024. Silkscreen on cotton, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist

Abdias Nascimento (1914, Franca, Brazil – 2011, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)

Composição n. 1 [Composition n. 1], 1971. Acrylic on canvas, 36 × 24 in. The Joyner/Giuffrida Collection

Teogonia Afro-Brasileira n. 2: Iansã, Obatalá, Oxum, Oxossi, Yemanjá, Ogum, Ossaim, Xangô, Exu [Afro-Brazilian Theogony n. 2: Iansan, Obatala, Oshun, Oshosi, Yemaya, Ogun, Osanyin, Shango, Eshu], 1972. Acrylic on canvas, 40 ⅛ × 59 ⅞ in. IPEAFRO Black Art Museum Collection

Xangô Sobre (Shango Takes Over), 1970. Acrylic on canvas, 36 × 24 in. IPEAFRO Black Art Museum Collection

Antonio Oloxedê (1967, Salvador, Brazil; lives in Salvador, Brazil)

Igi Axé, 2024. Palm ribs, leather, cowrie shells, and raffia, approx. 29 ½ in. tall. Paulo Darzé Gallery collection

Agnaldo Manoel dos Santos (1926, Gamboa, Brazil – 1962, Salvador, Brazil)

Ogum [Ogun], 1960. Wood, 15 ⅛ × 8 ¼ × 3 ⅛ in. Private collection, São Paulo

Aurelino dos Santos (1942, Salvador, Brazil; lives in Salvador)

Untitled, 1997. Acrylic on cardboard, 20 ⅝ × 20 ⅝ in. Collection of El Museo del Barrio, gift of Almeida & Dale Galeria de Arte and Paulo Darzé Galeria, 2023

José Adário dos Santos (1947, Salvador, Brazil; lives in Salvador)

Ferramenta de Oxóssi [Oshosi's Tool], 2022. Iron and varnish, 25 ¼ × 16 ⅞ × 5 ⅛ in. Collection of El Museo del Barrio, gift of Galatea, São Paulo, 2023

Arlete Soares (1940, Valença, Brazil; lives in Salvador, Brazil)

Festival de Oshosi, Terreiro de São Jorge Filho da Gomeia, Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, 1980. Four black-and-white photographs, 16 × 24 in. each. Courtesy of the artist

Voduns, Benin, West Africa, 1986. Two color photographs, 16 × 24 in. each. Courtesy of the artist

Nádia Taquary (1967, Salvador, Brazil; lives in Salvador)

Nanã Buruquê, 2024. Glass beads from the Czech Republic, African cowrie shells, and copper, 63 × 15 × 4 ¾ in. Paulo Darzé Galeria collection

Serie Dinkas Orixas, 2024. Russian glass beads, cowrie shells, gourds, and raffia. 63 × 15 ¾ × 5 ⅛ in. Paulo Darzé Gallery collection

Rubem Valentim (1922, Salvador, Brazil – 1991, São Paulo, Brazil)

Emblema V from the series *XII Bienal de São Paulo*, 1973. Acrylic on canvas, 47 ¼ × 28 ¾ in. Private collection, São Paulo

Untitled, 1961. Oil on canvas, 27 ¾ × 19 ⅝ in. Collection Luís Paulo Montenegro

ARCHIVAL MATERIAL

Unidentified photographer, Mestre Didi at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, 1967. Black-and-white photograph. Collection Rafael Moraes

Pierre Verger (alias Fatumbi) (1902, Paris, France – 1996, Salvador, Brazil)

Dieux D'Afrique [Gods of Africa], 1954. Paul Hartmann, Paris. El Museo del Barrio Archives

Exposição pequeno tamanho: Caio Mourão, Didi [Small format exhibition], 1964. Catalogue; Galeria Bonino, Rio de Janeiro. Watson Library, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Mestre Didi: An Afro-Brazilian Artist, 1986. Exhibition pamphlet; Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York. Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

Mestre Didi and Mãe Stella de Oxóssi at the exhibition *Mestre Didi: An Afro-Brazilian Artist*. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, 1986. Color photographs by O. L. Abel. Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

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Mestre Didi and his sculptures, December 1960.

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