

Imna Arroyo

Statement

My work focuses on issues of identity. Which is nurtured by personal and collective references to my ancestral culture. Working in various mediums such as painting, printmaking, sculpture, and mixed media installations gives voice to multiple layers of my identity. This binds me to my Neolithic past, as well as, my Indigenous and African Caribbean heritage. My work explores the different manifestations of nature and the spirit of the African ancestors; they give voice to some of their stories activating both physical and spiritual spaces.

In 1997, I traveled to Ghana to study Batik and visit the fortresses where Africans were kept before they were shipped to the Americas. This trip was a turning point in my art making process; it initiated my interest of printing woodcuts onto satin fabric. It also



Imna Arroyo, Detail from *Ancestors of the Passage*, 2005, Lithograph & collograph (see caption below for complete information)

introduced me to the world of the Adinkra symbols. Adinkra symbolism is a system of visual and verbal imagery that contains poetic messages, proverbs or aphorisms and when decoded they reveal legends, history, and the myths of the Akan people of Ghana, West Africa. From these symbols, I use the Sankofa image of a bird, which refers to the idea of retracing steps, or going back to the past to reclaim the past.

In my woodcuts, I use the Adinkra symbolism derived from traditional Adinkra cloths that represents the Sankofa bird, which is part of a complex vocabulary of symbols distinctive of the Akan people from South Central Ghana, West Africa. Conceptually, I am using the Sankofa-Adinkra symbol to bring me back to my source. Sankofa links me to my African lineage in the Diaspora. Using the Sankofa symbol as an icon serves as a tool or bridge to access my history and claim my heritage. The symbol affirms who I am and serves as a symbol of empowerment.

Biography

Imna Arroyo was born in Guayama, Puerto Rico. She studied at La Escuela de ArtesPlasticas del Instituto de Cultura in San Juan, Puerto Rico and obtained her BFA from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York and her MFA from Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. She has also studied at other printmaking techniques at the Tamarind Institute, New York University Printmaking Studio and at the University of Guanajuato, in Mexico. Her work is also in numerous collections including the Museum of Modern Art Library/Franklin Furnace Artist Book Collection, Yale Art Gallery and Schomburg Center for Research and Black Culture.

She is currently a Professor of Art at Eastern Connecticut State University where she chaired the Visual Arts Department. Imna Arroyo has been the recipient of numerous awards and grants including several professional development grants. She received the 2000 Excellence Award, in Recognition of Excellence in Creative and Scholarship Activity from Eastern. She also received the 2003 Steinkraus-Cohen Memorial Outstanding Women of Connecticut Award, in recognition of achievements and dedication to public service. The award is under the auspices of the United Nations Association of the USA (Connecticut, Southwestern Chapter) and UNIFEM-Connecticut, members of the CT.

Selected Exhibitions: She has exhibited extensively including different venues in Connecticut, New York and Mexico. She participated in the collaborative installations of Altares /Altars at the Arco Chato in Panama City, Panama and Voices of Water at the CESTA Festival in the Czech Republic. Most recently she is exhibited her Yemayá multimedia installation at Casa Guayasamin in Havana. Her Trail of Bones multi media installation was exhibited at the Evergreen Gallery at the Evergreen College in Olympia, Washington and at the Museo Casa Humbull in Havana, Cuba and the Galeria de Arte José Miguel González in Colon, Matanzas, Cuba.. Her encaustic relief print installation was exhibited at the InterAmerican University in Bayamón, Puerto Rico and the Heredia Theater in Santiago , Cuba.



Imna Arroyo, *Ancestors of the Passage*, 2005, Lithograph & collograph, Edition 1/10. Printed at El Taller Experimental de Grafica de la Havana by Juan Carlos Menendez/Experimental Printmaking Workshop, Havana, Cuba, 44" x 90"

Selected Publications: Her work appears in several publications including *Women of Color in Art Resource Series* published by Universal Color Slide, (Jan. 1997) and *Women Artists of Color: A Biocritical Source Book to 20th Century Artist in the Americas* by Dr. Phoebe Farris published by Greenwood Publishing Group (May 1999). She also illustrated *Why Goats Smell Bad and other stories from Benin*, translated and retold by Dr. Raoul Mama and published by Linnet Books (Jan. 1997).

Service: She has served on national boards and international committees. Her service included serving as President for the national Women's Caucus for Art (1996-98), Non Governmental Organization (NGO) Representative to the United Nations for the national Women's Caucus for Art; delegate to the Vienna NGO Committee on the Status of Women and the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women/NGO Forum in Beijing, China; and Commissioner of Cultural Affairs for the city of New Haven (1986-1996). In Willimantic, she is one of the founding members of the Windham Art Center and Gallery; she serves in the Board of Director's and Chair the Gallery Advisory Committee. Together with the committee members, she helped established the guidelines in which the gallery presently operates. She also helped to form the *CollectivoMestizal*, a Latin American and Caribbean group whose mission is to promote Latino arts, education and culture in the region.