

# The Orixás

*dedicatória*

abdiás do nascimento



**Malcolm X House**  
(AFRO-AMERICAN INSTITUTE)

**WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY**  
MIDDLETOWN, CONN. 06457

*instituto de arte*

# The Oríxàs

AFRO-BRAZILIAN PAINTINGS AND TEXT

BY

*abdías do*

**Xangô crucificado ou o Martirio de Malcolm X**  
(Xangô crucified or the Martyrdom of Malcolm X),  
40 X 26 in.

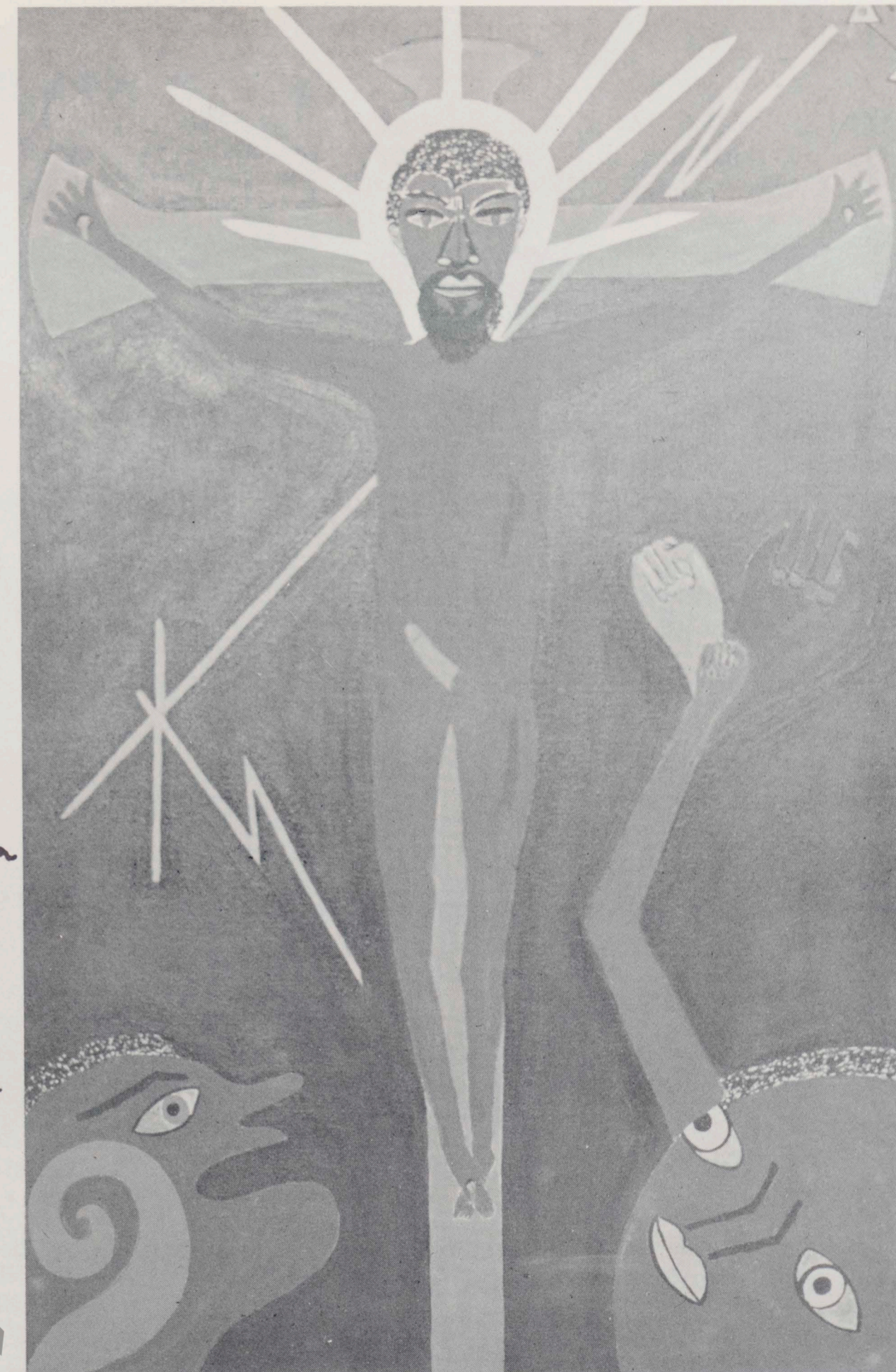
In this picture are integrated three myths: the Afro-Brazilian, the Afro-American, and the Christian - Xangô, Malcolm X and Jesus Christ.

Xangô's three wives are present: Yansan, goddess of lightning, Obá, warrior goddess, and Oxun, love goddess.

*Do Ivan Sampa  
com votos de feliz  
Ano Novo para toda  
a família. Abucos  
do*

*Abdias Nascimento*

*Mid. 20-11-969*



**NASCIMENTO**

## abdias do nascimento

Mr. Nascimento was born in the city of Franca, in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. He resides in Rio de Janeiro, state of Guanabara, where he directs the **Black Experimental Theatre** which he founded in 1944. Mr. Nascimento holds a Bachelor's degree in Economic Science from the University of Rio de Janeiro. He is director of **Black Art Museum** that he founded in 1968.

Mr. Nascimento has published the following books: **Dramas para negros e prólogo para brancos** (Dramas for Blacks and Prologue for Whites) — anthology of Black-Brazilian Theatre; **Teatro Experimental do Negro-Testemunhos** (The Black Experimental Theatre — Testemonies); **O Negro Revoltado** (The Black in Revolt) — studies of a social nature; **Sortilégio** (Sortilege) — Black mystery — a play which he wrote and presented himself; and **Rapsódia Negra** (Black Rhapsody), a musical drama.

Mr. Nascimento was a visiting lecturer at the Yale School of Drama, and he is presently a Visiting Fellow at the Wesleyan Center for the Humanities.

Mr. Nascimento has exhibited at the Harlem Art Gallery (New York), Gallery of Yale's School of Art and Architecture (New Haven, Conn.), and the Crypt Gallery of Columbia University (New York).



(Photo Isabeljorge)

## INTRODUCTION

Two major reasons prompted me to found the Black Experimental Theatre and the Museum of Black Art in Rio de Janeiro, in 1944 and 1968, respectively. First was the task of the restoration of the values of African culture to my country. Associated with this was the challenge of artistic creation that would signify a unique Afro-Brazilian esthetic.

In the decade of the forties, I asked for the assistance of the anthropologist Artur Ramos and the sociologist Guerreiro Ramos in promoting beauty contests for black and mulatta women, who had been systematically excluded from contests of this type. The style of beauty that they represented did not correspond to the "standards" held to be representative of Brazilian women. The refusal to accept Afro-Brazilian esthetic patterns was proof of the operation of the premise, **Black is not beautiful**. Such black beauty contests were in fact used as a social tactic and a pedagogic instrument. Thus, beauty contests, which normally are nothing more than entertainment and pure exhibition of social prestige had for the black and mulatta women a true significance.

This situation is certainly strange for a country such as Brazil, totally built by the work of blacks; a country which when it became independent (1822) had an absolute majority of blacks and even today 40% of its 90 million inhabitants are black; and is thus the largest black nation in the world, (excluding Nigeria, which is involved in secessionist wars). It is not only strange but perplexing that this country defines itself as Latin, that is, as white. Thus Brazil renounces the blacks that built her and implicitly rejects the culture that the Africans brought when they were forcibly brought to the "New World." In very liberal terms, Brazil does permit the ambiguous classification as a Luso-tropical country.

Guerreiro Ramos had the opportunity to do a study entitled "Social pathology of the 'white' Brazilian." This study truthfully describes the anomalous and morbid desire to be white. The economic and political power structure as well as the predominant society coincide with the exclusiveness of the whites.

There exists an empire of whiteness, a corrupting and perverse ideology for the black. Its final objective is the extinction of the black in the Brazilian context; a subtle and hypocritical type of genocide that does not leave the marks of its crime.

What has been the strategy of this genocide over the centuries? It is enough to remember some numbers. In 1822, there were 3,800,000 inhabitants in Brazil — 1,043,000 whites and 2,456,000 blacks and mulattos. As the years pass, the black is disappearing in the process of "whitening," primarily through the mulatto. In 1872 there were 3,800,000 whites and 1,900,000 blacks and 4,100,000 mulattos. In 1890 there were 6,300,000 whites, 2,000,000 blacks, and 5,900,000 mulattos. In 1940, there were 26,200,000 whites, 6,000,000 blacks, and 8,700,000 mulattos. And in 1950, there were 32,000,000 whites, 5,600,000 blacks and 13,800,000 mulattos.

Strategically, the situation is this: The mulatto, as he loses his somatic characteristics — the whitening skin, the thinning of the lips and nose, the "improvement" of the hair — turns into a member of the dominant **race**. In Brazil, we have the inverse of what occurs in the United States: Here a drop of **black blood** integrates the possessor into the black race; in Brazil, a drop of white blood gives the happy possessor the pretension to include himself as a member of the white race.

Not even the abolition of slavery in Brazil, on May 13, 1888, nor the proclamation of the Republic in 1889 were sufficient to alter the dominance of the white over the black. Eighty years of legally free life have passed for the ex-slaves and their descendents and the situation that mocks them is simply cruel. Even in the state of Bahia where 70% of the population is black, the opportunities are scant. In a study of Bahia, Professor Florestan Fernandes affirms: "The demographic predominance of the black and the mulatto doesn't much affect the socio-economic structure nor the persistence of the social privileges associated with the inequality of the races." (Cadernos Brasileiros, No. 47, page 56.)

After the abolition of slavery, the black found himself without work, without shelter, without food, without clothes, without anything. It was impossible for him to compete with the European immigrant who arrived prepared for the new type of work relationship inaugurated by the industrial revolution. The

immigrant arrived with the prestige of a free worker and had the protection of the government of the country from which he came. They rapidly emerged from farm work or from modest jobs in the cities to positions of economic and social privilege. Meanwhile, the black remained on the margin, as a pariah in the fields, as an inhabitant of the urban slum, or in unclassified jobs such as janitors, kitchen workers, washwomen, etc. These positions were attained when something worse did not occur. Unhappily, it commonly happens that blacks are in prisons, black women are forced into a life of prostitution, black children are often abandoned to their own luck and are always near delinquency. Even the organs of the official government blame racial (or color) discrimination as the most important factor in unemployment, based upon research conducted in Porto Alegre and Rio de Janeiro.

Theoretically, Brazil is a racial democracy and a mixed race culture, but in practice the white-European cultural standard is considered to be uniquely valid and dominant. Never have the black people been asked, for example, what they think of their African brothers. Consequently, Brazil has several agreements and treaties with Portugal, colonizers of Africa even today, dealing with foreign policy and cultural activity. Most simply put, Brazil is ashamed of the blacks who built her. Because of this the blacks are permitted to enter only those occupations which are irrelevant to the advocacy of their own causes. Naturally the activities of blacks in their fields don't begin to threaten the solidarity and exclusivity of the white power in command of all the opportunities in the country. The occupations offered to the black, besides those already mentioned are, obviously, in entertainment and in sport: the samba and soccer.

When in 1955 Guerreiro Ramos and I organized a contest for artists dealing with the theme of the Black Christ, the very idea was considered by certain sectors as a sacreligious provocation. It was asked: where has one ever seen such a monstrosity — a Christ that does not display the classic Aryan model with blond hair and blue eyes. In the nominally Catholic population of the country, only one Bishop — Don Helder Camara — did not forget the words of a contemporary of slavery — the famous Father Antonio Viera, when he said that no other human being looked more like Christ and none was more similar to his passion than the slave.

The cult of **whiteness** has always tried to deny, throughout the history of my country, the values of African culture; thus, the denial of black beauty in the Brazilian esthetic now in force. In what terms is the African cultural contribution accepted? In the category of the exotic (ex-optic, out of the eyes): that is as something really foreign to the authentic nature of that culture. African culture is accepted for its picturesqueness and folkloric value. This has occurred even with the most profound manifestation of the African soul — its religion. The **candomblés** have always been persecuted by the political structure. The African gods were considered to be witches and hobgoblins and their priests as sorcerers. Even today the **candomblé** in Bahia, like the **macumba** (the name it acquired in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo) are tolerated only as inferior cults or simple manifestations of local folk culture.

The few blacks and the rare whites who have studied the problem and who have tried to inform and form a lucid consciousness regarding Brazilian race relations are looked upon with distrust, when they are not labelled simply as subversives. There are laws, said to be national security acts, recently decreed by the government, classifying as a crime any denunciation of the myth that Brazil is a racial democracy. In the same form as the law of abolition, this last piece of legislation is part of the fabric of **white magic** raised to mask the serious racial problems and to silence the voices of those who would rise up to denounce the problem. These laws are intended to maintain the Black Brazilian in a state of eternal economic, educational, political, and cultural inferiority: in a word, to plunder the black man in all forms, imaginable and unimaginable.

Certainly the black race in Brazil has lost its biological purity. But the word "black" as well as the black man himself are involved in a cultural situation and a historical contingency. He exists as a black man and, as a black, he is discriminated against. Because of his racial origin or the color of his epidermis, he suffers permanent limitations and injuries, both on a personal level and much more seriously on a spiritual level. Anything else would not bring about the aggression which victimizes him as a culturally inferior man, for the idea of biological inferiority has been completely discredited. Euphemistically, they demand that he — the black — be a Brazilian. What does this mean in reality? This means that the black man has to acculturate; he has to assimilate — in short, he has to be at least "white inside." In this new condition, as the "black with the white soul", he will have his chance

in the world of whiteness, scorning his origin and, even going farther, applauding the **civilizing activities** of the Portuguese in Africa.

My decision to organize the Museum of Black Art occurred during the First Congress of the Black Brazilian, which the Black Experimental Theatre promoted in Rio de Janeiro. There was a major discussion of the thesis of Professor Mario Barata concerning "Sculpture of African origin in Brazil." The author of this work stated that, "The black in Africa and in some parts of Oceania has created some of the world's finest plastic art." The author described in detail the geographical and cultural areas of Africa from which came the slaves who built Brazil. He referred to the differences in conceptions about the fine arts that are characteristic of each area of the black continent. He pointed out three predominant tendencies: one realistic, another geometric, and more recently, an expressionistic form. He further stated that perhaps this last form is secondary and is a result of the first two. The author concluded by lamenting the lack of a museum for the study and examination of the "function that sculptures of black origin play in the life of a racial group or in all of society."

At the sorry end of the 19th century, no one could have predicted that the predatory action of the European colonizers against the physical and cultural person of the African would have produced a new artistic universe for the extension of white European culture. Those mysterious and base fetishes — the works of wild men and primitives — provoked a great sensation when they were shown in Brussels in 1897. Immediately, many masks, statues, and sculptures came to inhabit the most important and cultured salons, such as the celebrated Trocadero of Paris, the British Museum, and the Museum of Berlin. These rapidly became a pole of attraction for the most promising artists of the epoch: Vlaminck, Derain, Braque, Picasso, Matisse, Modigliani. Almost all acquired and lived with African pieces of art. Matisse, for example, had nearly twenty. These are facts registered in the history of art, but it is appropriate also that we cite **Les Demoiselles d'Avignon**, of Picasso, as the illustrious example of cubism borne from the affectionate and generous tits of African sculpture. **Fauves** and cubists dove into that "life giving sperm" (Paul Guillaume) expressed in the absolute and novel creative liberty of the black African artist.

The first major study of African masks appears in 1898, published by Leo Frobenius, and in 1914 the same author published the **Decameron Negro**, which revealed to the world the complexity and profound richness of African culture. Has time, by any chance, depleted the vitality of the African styles? Even a superficial investigation immediately replies no. Exactly the opposite has happened. Esthetic meaning, formal styles, transcendental substances and all other attributes of black African culture — and by extension, black culture the world over — remain as valid today as they ever were. With every new day the black man of today regains something of his past; in this wearing task of reestablishing the vital bonds of his life, family, history, and culture, he reincorporates the past in the present moment, and in this way sketching his plans for the future. There have been many movements which mark this historic trajectory, such as the **Quilombo dos Palmares**, the great black republic that resisted for nearly a century (1604-1694) situated between the Brazilian states of Pernambuco and Alagoas. Other movements include Haiti's fight for independence and against slavery in all the Americas; the pan-African movements and the return to Africa of Marcus Garvey; Negritude, led by Aimee Cesaire and Leopold Senghor — all of these forces are summed up in the affirmation of the black man and his culture. The cultural space of the black man is enlarged and enriched every day — his is the culture of spirituality. This, in a world where the mechanization of life and the technological character of existence are pursued as basic goals.

A consciousness of the historical process in which black culture is implanted confers an inescapable responsibility on black artists and intellectuals, and to any other person dedicated to cultural authenticity. The responsibility is to develop a culture free of ideological distortions, free from domesticating pressures, and safe from racist perversions expressed in the privilege of one race, which considers itself better than another and, on this basis, has enjoyed an immoral exclusiveness for centuries.

In the absurd context of Brazilian reality, the almost complete absence of black artists producing works of cultural significance should not be considered strange. One or another might distinguish himself, to see himself called a "primitive"; that is, a contributor to so-called primitive art — characterized by terms of docility and poetic comfort (Clarival Valladares); either this or be classified as someone who is compromised by white standards and submissive to the criteria of the establishment. Black

artists who are authentically creative and still grounded in the artistic standards of their African origin are very rare indeed.

Researchers and scholars of Brazilian art confirm the presence of Black and mulato artists, principally in the 18th century — in the middle of the slavery period — who were able to achieve fame and upward social mobility by virtue of their artistic ability and the quality of their works. One of these was Manuel da Cunha, an ex-slave who studied in Lisbon after he gained his freedom. However, even before the 18th century, the black artists, especially in Bahia, produced African art; — religious objects, symbols for rituals, and sacred statues (**Xangô**, **Exú**, etc). The art objects, as a rule, were confiscated by the police, as proof of delinquency in an officially Catholic country and at other times were collected by medical psychiatric institutions as examples of the pathological state of the black population.

Recently, when I was in New Haven as a visiting lecturer, at the Yale School of Drama, I had the opportunity to visit their exhibition of African-American art. The Afro-Brazilian pieces shown there were, as the descriptive card stated, from the Police Museum in Rio de Janeiro or the Nina Rodrigues Institute in Bahia. This is not a mere accident. This is a perfect example of the esteem that official Brazil devotes to the Black and especially to religion of black origin.

At the same time the country takes great pride in the mulato artist, Mestre Valentim, and has a cultish dedication to another mulato genius; Antonio da Silva Lisboa — Aleijadinho (the little cripple) — the creator of the most impressive of Brazilian sculpture — the 17th century baroque of Minas Gerais.

It is obvious that the economic situation has to be considered in analyzing the problems of the acceptance of artists and artistic creation in the world today. In Brazil, as I have stated, the situation of the black is one of extreme misery. Consequently he does not have the opportunity to enter into artistic activity, for this is generally restricted to the "sophisticated layers" of society. And the galleries, reflecting their commercial interests, are not interested in examples of black art which are directed to the objective of giving expression to cultural heritage.

Of the few black artists presently producing works of art with a true sense of responsibility toward Afro-Brazilian culture, José Heitor, a young railroad worker, stands out. Self-taught, and enormously creative, he imposes force, movement, understanding, and poetry in his sculptures. It is as if he were in reality an African tribal artist who finds himself Brazilian in the city of Alem Paraiba. Each piece of sculpture has the solemnity of a liturgical act and a communitarian function. His pieces represent **works in communication**, a basic and specific quality of traditional African sculpture. For José Heitor, the tribal life of Africa is replaced by the carnivals and soccer clubs of Alem Paraiba. To begin with, his works are shown in these places of congregation. Generally, his monumental pieces are shown in the streets of his small city before being seen by sophisticated art audiences. They are shown as an integral part of the "schools of samba" and the carnival parades. For example, in the "momescos" pageant, the sweat and the lyricism of the artist are paralleled by the dust, light, heat, smell, rhythm, suffering and happiness of the land of his ethnic and human group.

**The dreams** of José Heitor (which is the way the artist classifies his sculptures), supported by a strong sense of mass, and sometimes by an evident disproportion and disequilibrium, always have a **crossed rhythm**, polymetric and polyrhythmic — of which the students of African art speak. They are worked in cedar, vinewoods, or other woods that José Heitor's friends — the tribe — find in the woods around the city. He never attended an art school and never lived in artistic circles. He is an instinctive artist. He is a privileged heir of millenia of artistic knowledge of his race. He is a confirmation of what has already been said of Brazil: "Of the whole American continent, only our country conserves, in an evident manner, the concepts and fine art techniques of Africa." (Mario Barata)

But there are other names that also require special mention, such as the painter from Minas Gerais, Sebastião Januário, still strongly influenced by Catholic culture, but striving toward an authentic form of expression. Ruben Valentim, who is highly educated, integrates in his pieces the symbols, signs, forms and other attributes of **candomble'** — he, himself, being a devotee of **Omulu'** (and thus a member of **the candomble'**!) José de Dome, Juarez Paraizo, Yeda Maria, Estevão, Nilza Benes, Roberto, Gildemberg, the late Heitor dos Prazers, the excellent weaver and painter Iara Rosa, the engravers Emanuel Araujo and Manuel Messias; the late Agnaldo Manoel dos Santos considered by many contemporary critics

to be Brazil's most important sculptor; the sculptor Agenor Ferreira dos Santos, Manuel do Bonfim, Lito Cavalcanti (metal working — he is also highly educated), Caetano Deolindo, and Deoscóredes dos Santos (Didi) the holy man of Axê Opô Afonjá, one of the traditional **candomblés** of Bahia, the wood carver: Zú, José Barbosa and Assis.

My art is the fruit of my attempts to deal with the problem of the restoring the values of African culture in Brazil — and a natural result of my own reflections on that problem. I am not solely preoccupied with esthetic forms, but of primary importance to me are the spiritual events of the Afro-Brazilian. The myths, the religious history, the fables, the ritualistic signs, the dance, the songs, the poetry, the colors, the rhythm, the worship. The spiritual vitality of the black race in my country, in spite of adverse conditions, in spite of political persecution, has always asserted itself in an astounding way. From the Amazon forests of Northern Brazil, to the border of Brazil with Uruguay in the South, the **candomble'** persists. It is called **Casa de Minas** in Maranhão, and its ritual is predominantly Dahomean; it is called **Xangô** in Pernambuco; **Candomble'** in Bahia (principally of Yoruba, or Nago, origin); it is **Macumba** in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Minas Gerais (a mixture of Yoruba, Spiritualism, Catholicism, and Amerindian influence); or it is **Batuque** in Rio Grande de Sul. The religion that the slaves brought with them from Africa still exists today.

The white scholars of the Brazilian **candomble'**, with a few exceptions, view it only as picturesque. Nina Rodrigues, for example, who in 1896 wrote the first articles on the subject was a medical examiner and psychiatrist who believed in the racial inferiority of the black. She saw in spiritual ecstasy only a manifestation of hysteria. Her science never penetrated the significance of the trance and of the daughters of the saints being possessed by the gods, or **Orixás**. Another physician, Artur Ramos, initiated the most correct investigations between 1933 and 1940 from the perspective of psychoanalytic theory; meanwhile Herskovits brought to bear the vision of the africanist. Manuel Querino, a black Bahian, contributed between 1916 and 1922 to the knowledge of the black man and black religion in spite of being accused of possessing no ethnological knowledge. However, the most significant contribution has been made by Professor Roger Bastide, of the Sorbonne (**Candomblé da Bahia**), and has been followed by the contributions of Pierre Verger and José Medeiros.

What is important to me in my paintings is the mental world and cultural difference of the black who feels African but is in the Americas. Of concern are the human and social problems that the black man has had to build for others, but in which he remains practically a foreigner because of the marginal condition to which he has been relegated.

But in this return to the original sources of African art, we don't intend to commit the suicide of historical retrogression. We don't advocate the reproduction of an existential form that is of the past. Because of this, my **Orixás** (Gods) aren't immobilized in time and space. They are dynamic; they inhabit Africa as well as Brazil and the United States. The **Orixás**, the spiritual and creative life of the black man, are not petrified in the dead centuries. They are forces of the present. They emerge in daily life and secular affairs; they are bequeathed to us from history and from ancestors. The **Orixás** receive the names of living persons; they undertake the defense of heroes and martyrs, who are offered even today by the black race, as sacrifices in the holocaust of their search for liberty.

I hope to receive as my only reward the satisfaction that my art represents an instrument of knowledge, of communication, and of revelation. A greater happiness still would come if my art might represent a sign of contact between black North Americans and black Brazilians; a type of bridge that would be complementary to each culture. The blacks of North America furnish the example of a courageous social and political fight. The Brazilian blacks offer the models of African culture and the inspiration of their spirituality.

Permit me to thank publically the Fairfield Foundation (New York), the Harlem Art Gallery (New York), the Gallery of Yale's School of Art and Architecture (New Haven), the Crypt Gallery of Columbia University (New York), the Center for the Humanities at Wesleyan University (Middletown, Conn.), and especially the Afro-American Institute of Wesleyan University which has been inaugurated with the most optimistic expectations, and the opportunity for the realization of these objectives.

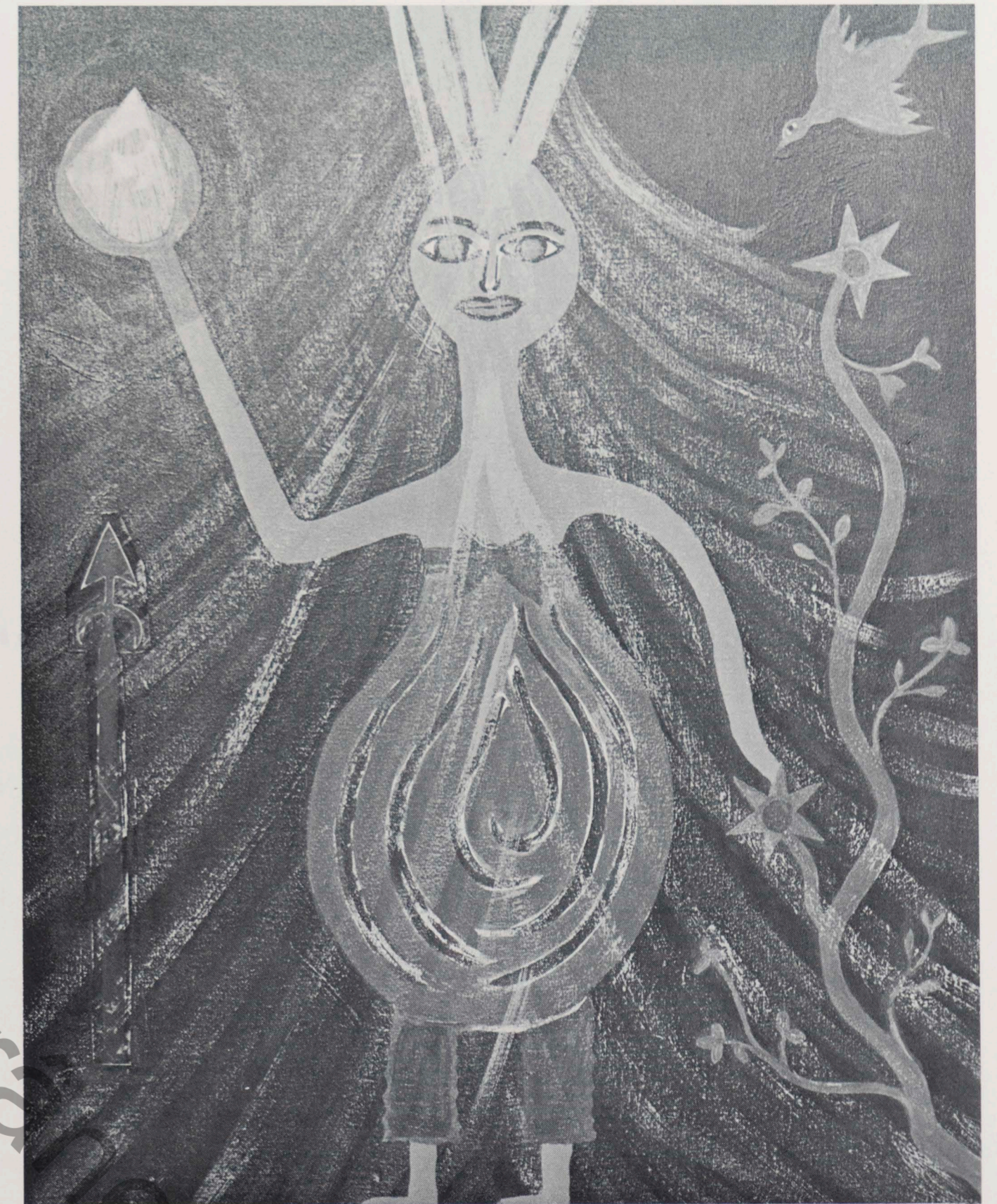


**A Santissima Trindade (Exú)** — (The most holy Trinity),  
21½ X 28½ in.

Exú is the Orixá who incarnates the permanent conflict  
between Good and Evil.

**Omulú Azul — Liberdade para Huey** (Blue Omulú—Free Huey) 30 x 24 in.

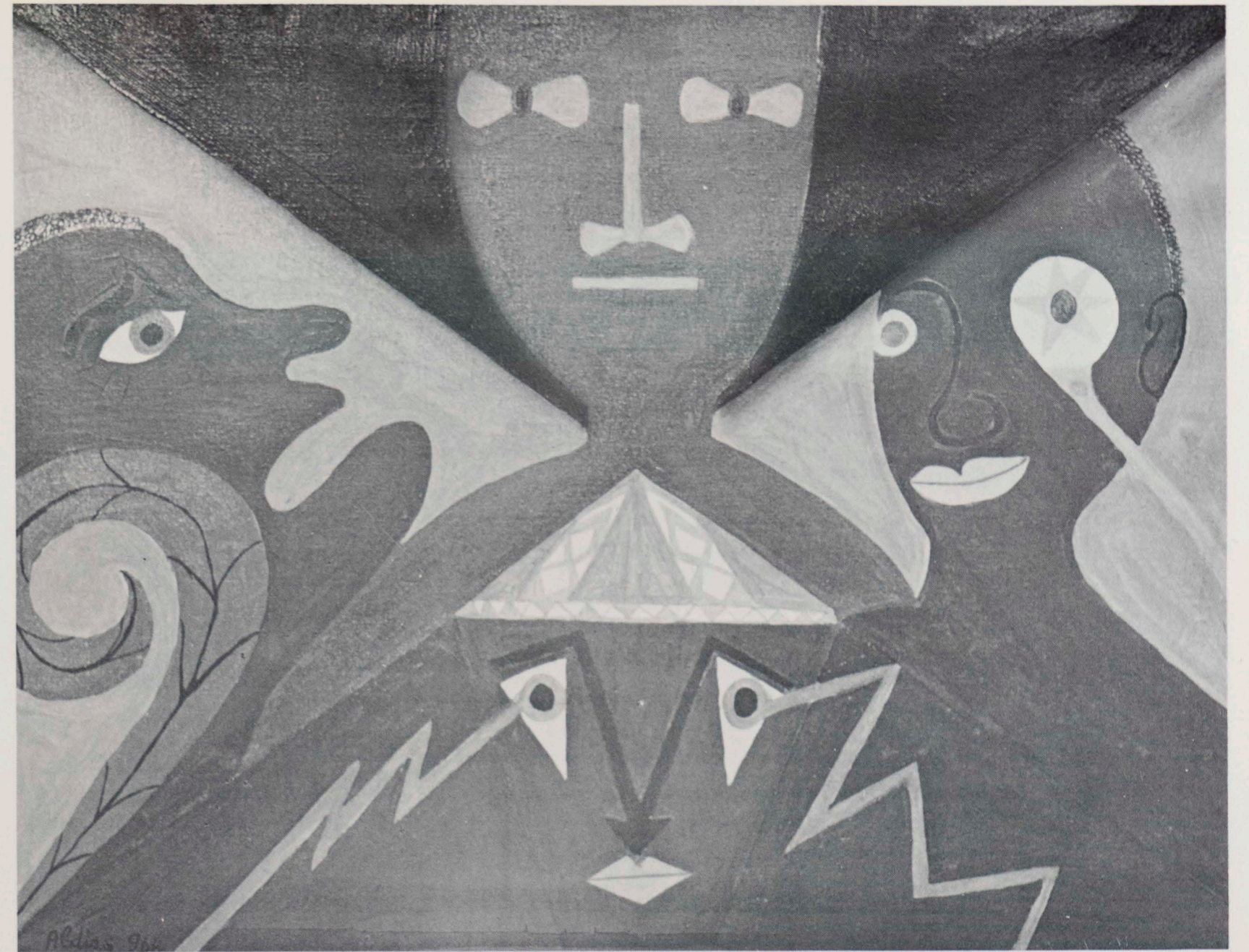
Omulú or Obaluayê is the Orixá of smallpox and of other contagious diseases. By extension, he is the god all sickness and of death, and also of health and life. In the painting, Omulú becomes a contemporary myth, an emerging power: he raises the head of Huey P. Newton on high as one who defends the life of the imprisoned hero.



Olho de Ifá (Ifá's Eye), 16 X 12 in.



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**Xangô e suas três mulheres** (Xangô and his three wives), 21½ X 29 in.

Xangô is the Orixá of thunder and storm. He uses a two-edged stone axe. He is considered to be a god with great vitality and eroticism who has three wives.

**Obá** is the oldest of Xangô's three wives. It is said that once upon a time she asked the other two wives, Yansan and Oxun, what she could do to get the love of her husband. They told her that she should cut off her ear and give it to Xangô in a stew. She did it, but she was only uglier and still unloved. She disguises

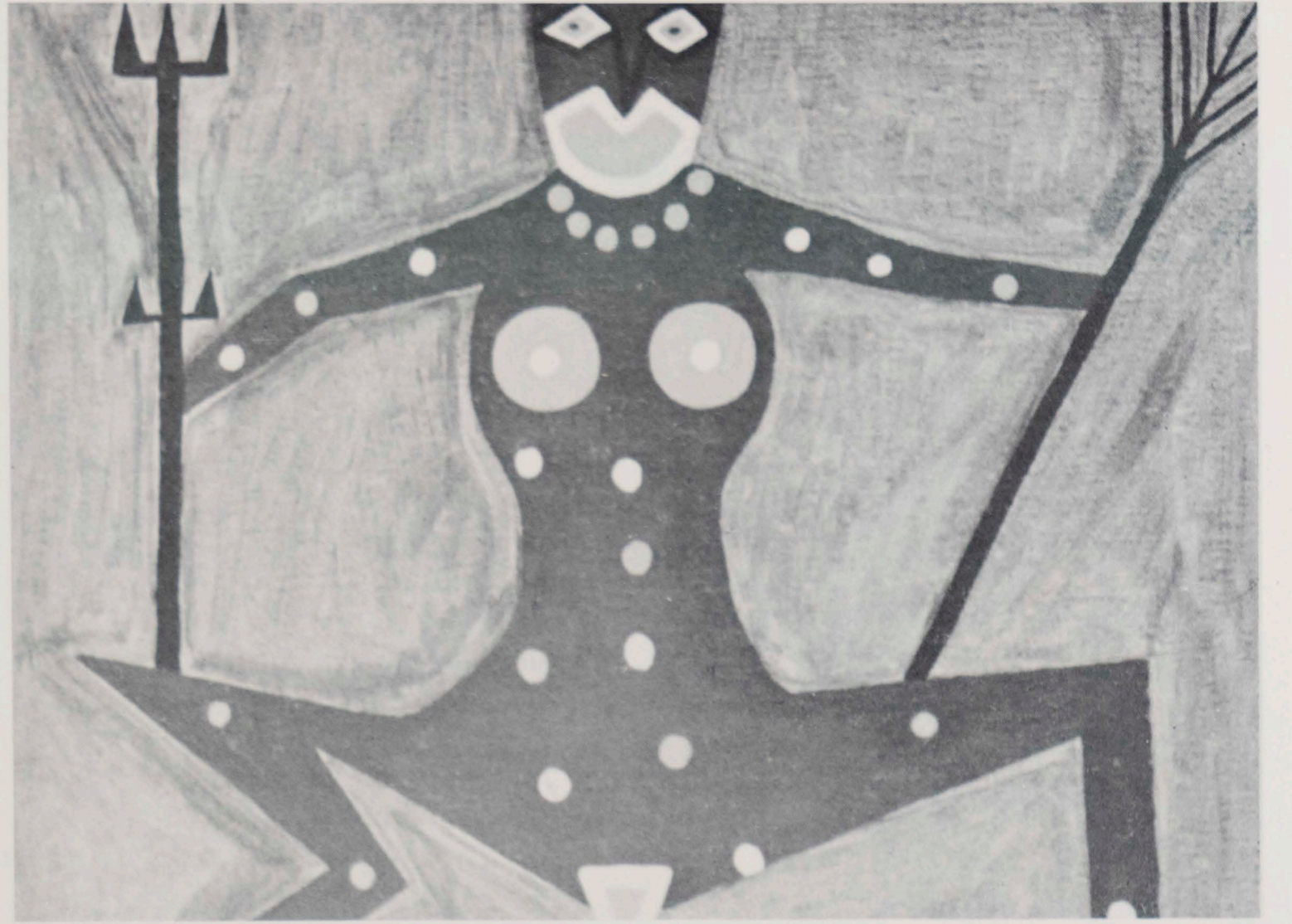
the lack of the ear by covering the orifice with a leaf.

**Oxun** is the Orixá of the rivers. She is characterized by a choreography full of languor and charm. Among the three wives of Xangô, she is the one that is noted for her voluptuousness and always dances with the **Abébé** (a type of fan) in her hand. She dances with gestures that symbolize vanity, as if she were combing her hair in front of the mirror.

**Yansan** is the Orixá of lightning and storms. she is restless and authoritarian, and she symbolizes the emancipated woman. She dances with a copper sword in hand.



Oxumarê nº 5,  
50 X 30 in.



Pomba Gira (Bombonjira or Exu's wife),  
12 X 16 in.

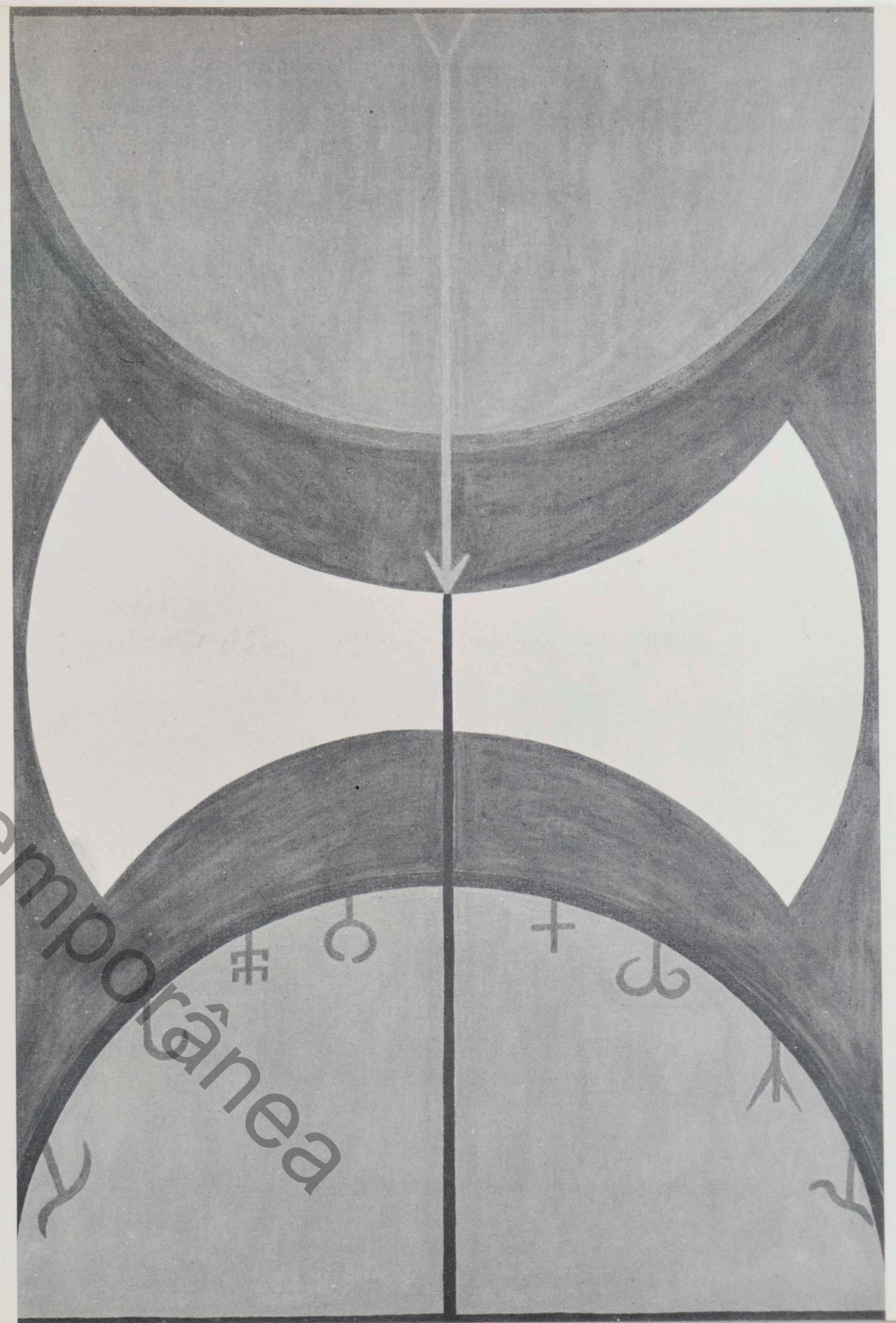
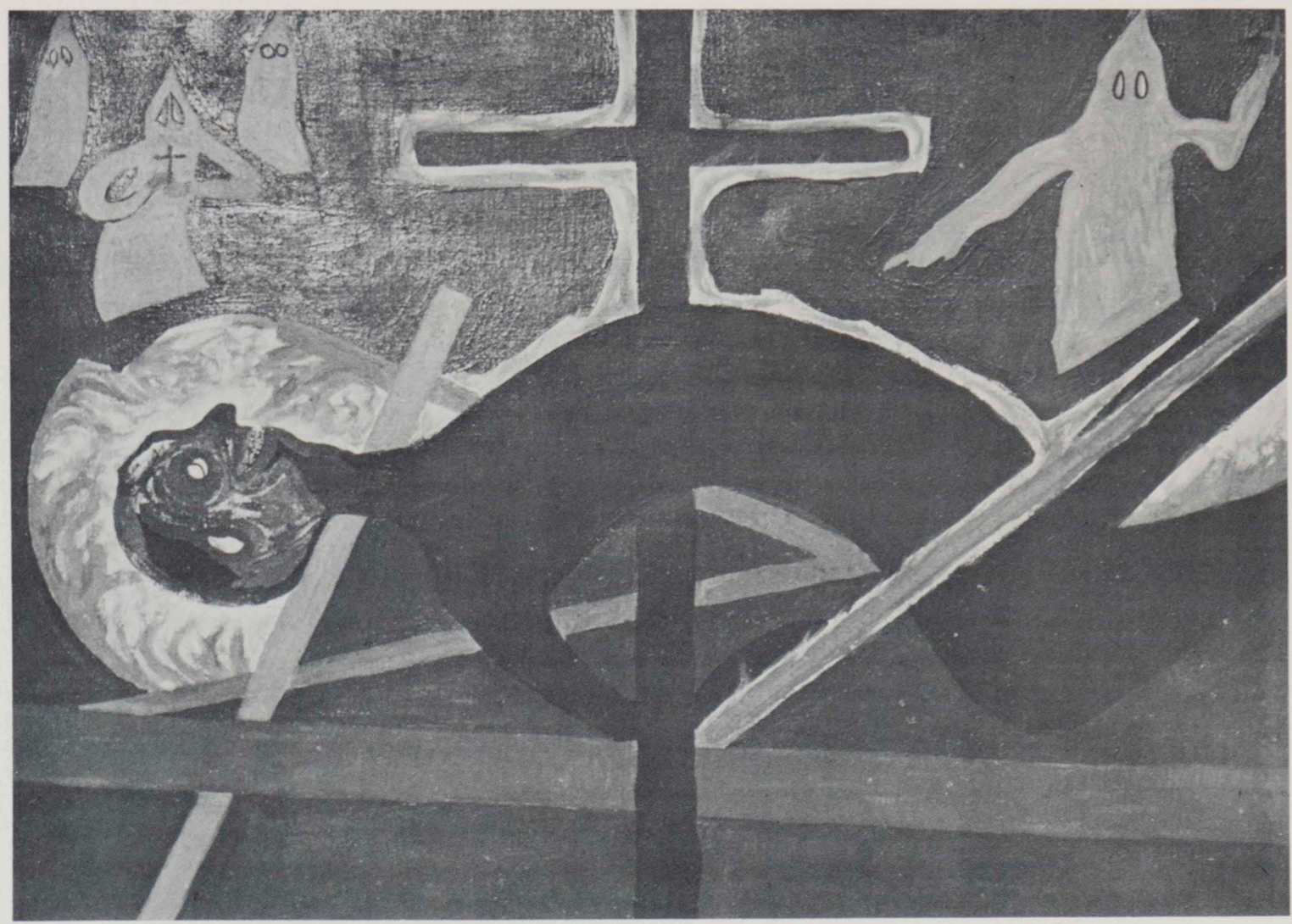
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Efraín Bocabalístico, 60 X 40 in.

Three Orixás: Oxóce, the hunting Orixá; Xangô, the Orixá of the thunder and storm; and Ogun, Orixá of iron and war.

O Cristo Negro (The Black Christ),  
21 X 28½ in.





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JUAN EN SU LABORATORIO

DE PRIS DE MOURDES

EL HOMBRE  
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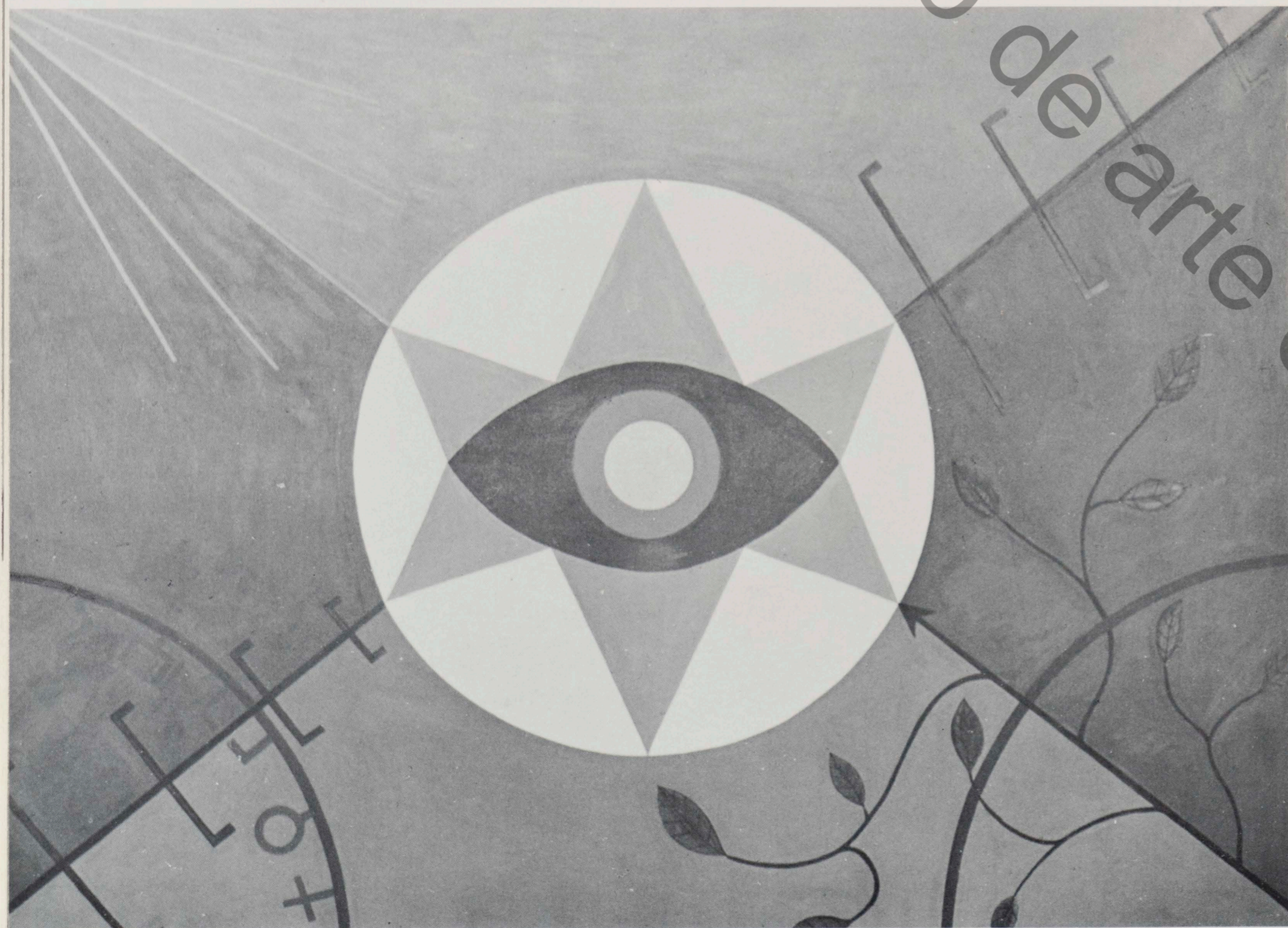
NE TO  
LE 20

Sortilegio

**O vale de Exú** (The valley of Exú), 32 X 50 in.

The valley of Exú represents the final judgment when all of us leave our tombs to be judged. Exú, the Orixá that does Good and Evil will be the judge.

Exú, the Orixá of the dialectic contradiction, originally had many serpents coming out from various part of this body symbolizing the principle of the perpetual movement of life.



**Síntese em volta do Olho de Ifá** (Synthesis around Ifá's Eye), 60 X 84 in.

## THE ORIXÁS

In the beginning was **Olorum** and **Olorum** was one. He was the creator of the cosmos. He constituted the very essence of unity. Later this unity ruptured. Then **Obatalá** or **Oxalá** was charged by his father, **Olorum**, with the mission of inhabiting and populating the cosmos. Even though he was severed from the original unity, **Oxalá** contained within himself the duality of being masculine and feminine at the same time. The masculine upper part was heaven; the lower feminine part was the land, also called **Odudua**. From the coupling of the heaven and the earth were born the African Gods, that is the **Orixás**.

The cult of the **Orixás** constitutes the fundamental part of the **Candomblé**, the religion that the African slaves took to Brazil. According to certain superficial analyses that this religion has suffered, the **candomblé** is nothing more than an innocent and superficial cult, lacking profundity. It has been considered to be nothing more than superstition, black magic, and sorcery. Following this line, the **candomblé** would be destitute of any complexity or transcendence. No greatness would be credited to it in the destiny of human beings or in the achievement of dignity and life. Why is this?

Among the possible explanations, it is not difficult to prove that the deepest reasons are based on the predominance of white culture. This culture, pretentiously superior and enslaving, wanted the African to be a slave not only in body, but also in spirit. Thus the white man attempted to make the black inferior as a race and as a culture, in spirit as well as body. The "students" of **candomblé** falsified its authentic nature. Rare, isolated, and single facts assumed in these studies the significance of absolute truths. The total incomprehension of certain "students" obliged them to transform the **candomblé** into a purely sensationalistic subject. Note the example of the mystic trance. This most dramatic moment of the Afro-Brazilian religion is presented as self-suggestion, hysteria, or hypnotism — a psychiatric curiosity. In fact, the trance might be that which Roger Bastide defined as the "realization in the present of that which Gods achieved at the beginning of time."

The **candomblé** is based on a certain conception of life and philosophy of the universe. It possesses a cosmology, a theology, and a psychology. In order that chaos not be predominant after the disruption of the original unity, the cosmos was divided into compartments. In this hierarchy of the cosmos, the **Orixás** occupy the most eminent and illustrious position.

In the rough and schematic way in which we are discussing the **candomblé**, we can distinguish four divisions of the cosmos: the world of the **Orixás**, or of the gods; the world of **Ossain**, or nature; the world of the ancestors, or the **Eguns**; and the world of men.

The state of Bahia alone has more than 700 temples that are completely autonomous and independent. The **Babalorixa**, or father of the saint (when the temple is led by a man) or the **Yalorixa**, or mother of the saint (when the temple is led by a woman) have absolute authority over the temple and the members of the faith. But there is also a complete hierarchy of holy men within this structure which presides over the system of participation among men, things, the dead, and the **Orixás**, in which is constituted the secular and the mysterious life of the **candomblé**. The **candomblé** has a guarded and occult side and another that is visible and public. Thus, the temple is open to all, whether they are believers or not, while the cloister is closed to all but the initiated.

The **candomblé** is a hallowed space, vast and mysterious and difficult to encompass. However, description of the ceremony of initiation will give an idea of its complexity. The initiation is mandatory for anyone who wishes to enter into the life of the **candomblé**, and it has implications for the secular existence of the candidate as well as entailing spiritual consequences and responsibilities.

First, it is necessary to consult the **Babalão**, the priest of **Ifá**, to find out who is the "owner of the head," or in other words, to discover which **Orixá** has chosen the candidate. The **Babalão** will consult the necklace of **Ifá** (**Opele**), or else will read the conches of **Exú** (**Diogun**). Next the **Babalorixa** or **Yalorixa**, the high priest of the temple, starts the initiation ceremony, which begins with the ceremonial washing of beads. These correspond to the colors of the divinity by which the initiated is to be claimed. Next is

the cleansing of herbs and leaves, which correspond to the mystic flowers of the **Orixás**, since each **Orixá** has his own species. The time for the **Bori**, or the ceremony of giving "food to the head," then occurs which is preceded by first cutting the hair and then completely shaving the head. At this time, the initiate's street clothes have already been exchanged for ritual attire. The candidate is obliged to live for some time at the **candomblé**, and is not permitted to leave the sacred area of the **candomblé**. The period of initiation — the ritual of creation — is under the patronage of **Oxalá**. When the head has been shaved, incisions are made with a razor in the skin at the crown of the head. The candidate, now with a baptism of blood from the animal of his **Orixá**, becomes a **Yaô** — a fiancé or wife of the divinity. An important episode in the initiation ceremony is the consecration of the stone of the divinity, which also becomes the personal stone of the **Yaô**, to be protected for the rest of her life.

The **Yaô** for a period of time remains completely enclosed in a special room called a **camarinha**, receiving lessons about ritual, and mythical history, etc. This is the school of the holy men, and constitutes the rite of passage. Once the initiation is over, the **Yaô** becomes an **Ebômin** — that is, she has been anointed and proclaimed a priestess — she is already a daughter of the saint.

We have already mentioned the **Babalaô**, the priest of **Ifá**, the **Orixá** of divination and of telling the future. This priestly order is out of the realm of authority of the **Babalorixá** or **Yalorixá**. The **Babalaô** presides over the domain of the human person. Similarly, the priests of **Ossaim** (the domain of nature), the **Babalosaim**, as well as the **Babaloge**, priests of **Egun** (domains of the ancestors and the dead) are not subject to the authority of the "father of the saint" and the "mother of the saint". In Brazil as in Africa, the evocation of the dead is a secret cult.

Under the command of the chief of the temple (the **Babalorixá** or **Yalorixá**) exists a complete hierarchy of priests. For example, there is the **Axôgun**, who practices the sacrifice of two and four-pawed animals; the **Pegi-Gã**, president of the administrative counsel of the **candomblé**; the **Alabê**, the player of the **Rum** and chief of music (the sacred drums are the **Rum**, **Rumpi** and **Lê**); the **Ogan** (male); the **Ekedy** (female), helpers of the "daughters of the saint" (but who do not receive the saint directly); the **Oba**, minister of **Xangô**; and the **Iya-Bassê**, the cook of the gods.

Generally, the sacrifice of animals is only observed by a small group of the faithful, perhaps because of the strong effect of the sight of blood. This part of the ritual generally occurs in the morning. The first sacrifice is for **Exú**, followed by the sacrifices for the other divinities. The offering of food to the divinities occurs in the late afternoon. When the sun sets the public ceremony begins and goes all through the night.

Both the private and public ceremonies always begin the **Padê de Exú** or the **Despacho de Exú** (sending forth of **Exú**). He is the messenger **Orixá**, the intermediary between men and the supernatural world. **Exú** knows both the idioms of the earth and the language of the Gods. Because of this he takes the call of the black Brazilians to the ancestral **Orixás** in the lands of Africa. Beyond his function as a messenger, he has a higher purpose: he is the regulator of the cosmos. He is the only **Orixá** who passes from one domain to another of the cosmos. Thus, he is the basis for dialectic interchange. He occupies a place in the world of the **Orixás**, in the kingdom of **Ossian**, and issues calls to the **Eguns** as well as serving in the kingdom of **Ifá** and **Babalaô**. Normally he is represented by horns, symbols of power and fertility. His **pegi** (altar) is situated at the entrance of the temple, but outside of the principal parts of the structure. The other **Orixás** whose **pegi** (altars) are on the outside are: **Ossain**, the **Orixá** of herbs and leaves; **Omulú**, **Orixá** of smallpox; **Ogun**, **Orixá** of war; and **Oxóce**, the hunter's **Orixá**. The altars of the other **Orixás** are located inside the main structure of the **candomblé**.

The sacred drums, **Rum**, **Rumpi**, and **Lê** (in diminishing order of size) also serve as intermediaries because through special beats they carry the petition of the faithful to the **Orixás**. They are also mystical entities in that they "eat" the sacred produce: Dendê oil, honey, holy water, and chicken blood.

After the **Padê de Exú** (a special beat without song or dance), a type of prologue, the ceremony itself begins. As always, it begins with **Exú** and it must end with **Oxalá**, father of heaven, the greatest of the **Orixás**. Chants, drum beats and dances make up the first part of the ceremony, the objective

of which is the evocation of the past of the race and the history of the **Orixás** through enacted and spoken myth. Thus, the importance of the mime — the gestures, the posturing in the enchantment that begins. Everything is profoundly symbolic, having as an objective the stripping of the Brazilian personality from the black. That is, one aim is to take the whiteness from the black Brazilian and leave him with his basic African nature. The ceremony reaches a high point of intensity when the daughters of the saint come to be possessed by their respective **Orixás**. In a state of crisis, she seems to lose her equilibrium and becomes transformed; she bucks like a horse and becomes the god's horse.

At this point, the intensity of the ceremony falls. Helped by the **Ekedy**, the horses (that is the daughters of the saint possessed by the gods) are taken to the **camarinha**. There they put on the liturgical garments of their divinity.

After a short time, they return to the larger room dutifully robed. They are changed, completely transformed. They are not persons, but gods. The phenomenon of possession is so profound that it produces a total metamorphosis. The cook has become transformed to **Yemanjá**. She has in her hand the **abebe** (a type of fan) and executes a dance that is at the same time maternal, comforting, and imitative of the motion of ocean waves. The humble worker now shows the carriage of a king — it is **Xangô**. He has in his hands a winged, double-edged ax — his symbol. The woman whose profession is washing clothes is now the goddess of love, **Oxun**, and her ostentatious dance shows a carnal voluptuousness. Another is **Ogun**, the **Orixá** of war who holds his sword ready. Still another comes with a bow and arrow — it is **Oxóce**, the god of hunting. Another comes covered with a straw mask and carries a **xaxará** — a kind of short broom: this is **Omulú**. **Oxalá** holds the **pachorô**, a phallic stick. The symbols parade and mystery floats in the air, concentrating in the masks. The gestures of obeisance, the meaning-laden steps, the unique ecstatic dance of each **Orixá** — all in communion with transcendent mystery form together a complete and intensely strange poetry.

We have spoken of the mystic flower but there is also a mystic cuisine. We have mentioned **Iya-Bassê**, the god's cook. The **Orixás** each have their favorite dish. The saint's food and the cuisine of the gods is so enticing and delicious that it has been adopted outside the temple. The sacred food has become secularized. Especially in Bahia, but also in other Brazilian cities such as Rio de Janeiro (in New York I have been served saint's food in a Brazilian restaurant), it is very common to have on a household or restaurant's menu **xinxin de galinha**, Oxun's dish; **amala** (**carurú**) of **Xangô**; the rice of **Oxalá**, the **abará**, the **vatapá**, and others.

The holy time begins on Monday, which is the day of **Exú**, the only divinity who participates in all domains of the cosmos. He contains the polarity of the good and the bad. He possesses a malicious character and likes to play tricks on men as well as the gods. His colors are red and black; his animals are the rooster, the he-goat and the dog. He is owner of the streets and the roads and the crossroads of the world. He is the phallic **Orixá** that presides over the sexual act. His virile member represents the beginning of the restoration of the unity of the cosmos.

Monday is also dedicated to **Omulú** or **Obaluayê**, the **Orixá** of sickness and health and thus of life and death. His body is covered with sores and because of this his face and body are always covered with a long hood and cape. His colors are black and white. His animals are he-goats, roosters and pigs. He symbolizes the earth and the sun and he is considered the doctor of the poor.

Tuesday is the day of **Oxunmaré**, the **Orixá** that has the shape of a serpent, with the seven colors of the rainbow. His function is to take water from the lakes, rivers and oceans to feed the clouds and the palace of **Xangô** that is in the clouds. His animals are the rooster and the billygoat. On the same day **Anamburucú** or **Nananburucú** are commemorated. She is the wife of **Oxalá**, and just as her husband, an **Orixá** of procreation and of the perpetuation of the species of gods and men.

Wednesday is dedicated to **Xangô**, **Orixá** of the sunrays, of thunder, of tempests, and of fire. He is the god of justice. His colors are red and white — sometimes only red. His animals are the rooster, sheep, and the crab. He lives in a stone and his symbol is the wing shaped two bladed ax made from a meteorite stone. The same day is also consecrated to his wife **Yansan**, also the **Orixá** of the sunray,

the wind and the storm. Her colors are red and white, or sometimes only red. Her animals are the she-goat and chicken. Except for **Exu**, she is the only Orixá that doesn't fear death and the **Eguns**. She is queen of cemeteries. She has conquered death. Because of this, in the secret ceremony of the **Eguns**, she is one of the two choreographic priestesses. The other is **Eruosaim** who has two masks, one in front in front of the face and the other behind the head.

Thursday is the day of **Oxocé**, the **Orixá** of hunting, who lives in the woods and forests. His colors are green and yellow. His animals are sheep and the roosters. Thursday is also dedicated to **Ogun**, the **Orixá** of iron and war. His color is blue and his animal is the guinea fowl.

Friday belongs to **Oxalá**, father of creation, the hermaphrodite **Orixá**. His color is white and his animals are the she-goat and pigeons. He lives in a celestial abode. He is the oldest of the **Orixás** — the father of all.

Saturday is dedicated to the **Orixás** of water: **Yemanjá** and **Oxun**. **Yemanjá** is the **Orixá** of the sea and of fishing. Her colors are pink and light blue, and her animals are pigeons and sheep. Some myths consider her to be the mother of the waters and of all the **Orixás**. **Oxun**, the **Orixá** of fresh water, symbolizes love. Her color is gold and her animals are the she-goat and the chicken. **Oxun** is also **Xangô's** wife. Besides **Exú** she is the only **Orixá** who possesses the gift of divination, having the use of the power of the necklace of **Ifá**.

Sunday is dedicated to all of the **Orixás**. We have mentioned only those **Orixás** who are the objects of greatest devotion in the Afro-Brazilian temples. But there are many others. **Obá**, the oldest of **Xangô's** wives, is a war-like **Orixá**. The **Ibeji**, children, are the twin saints. **Ifá**, **Orixá** of divination and clairvoyance, and the future, has green, yellow, and the color of straw as her colors. **Egun** is not an **Orixá**; but is the soul of the dead and of ancestors. This cult is run as a secret society and functions only in Itaparica island in Bahia, and those who reveal their participation in this secret society pay with their lives.

Thus, as the domains of the cosmos complement each other, the gods are also complementary among themselves. And with **Exú** taking care of the order of the cosmos in all of its domains, and with **Oxalá** presiding over the fertilization, generation, and perpetuation of the species, the black race, the issue of Africa, will survive and proceed through the centuries adoring the ancestral gods — in dance, in song, in mystery, in herbs, in ecstasy, living with the **Orixás**.

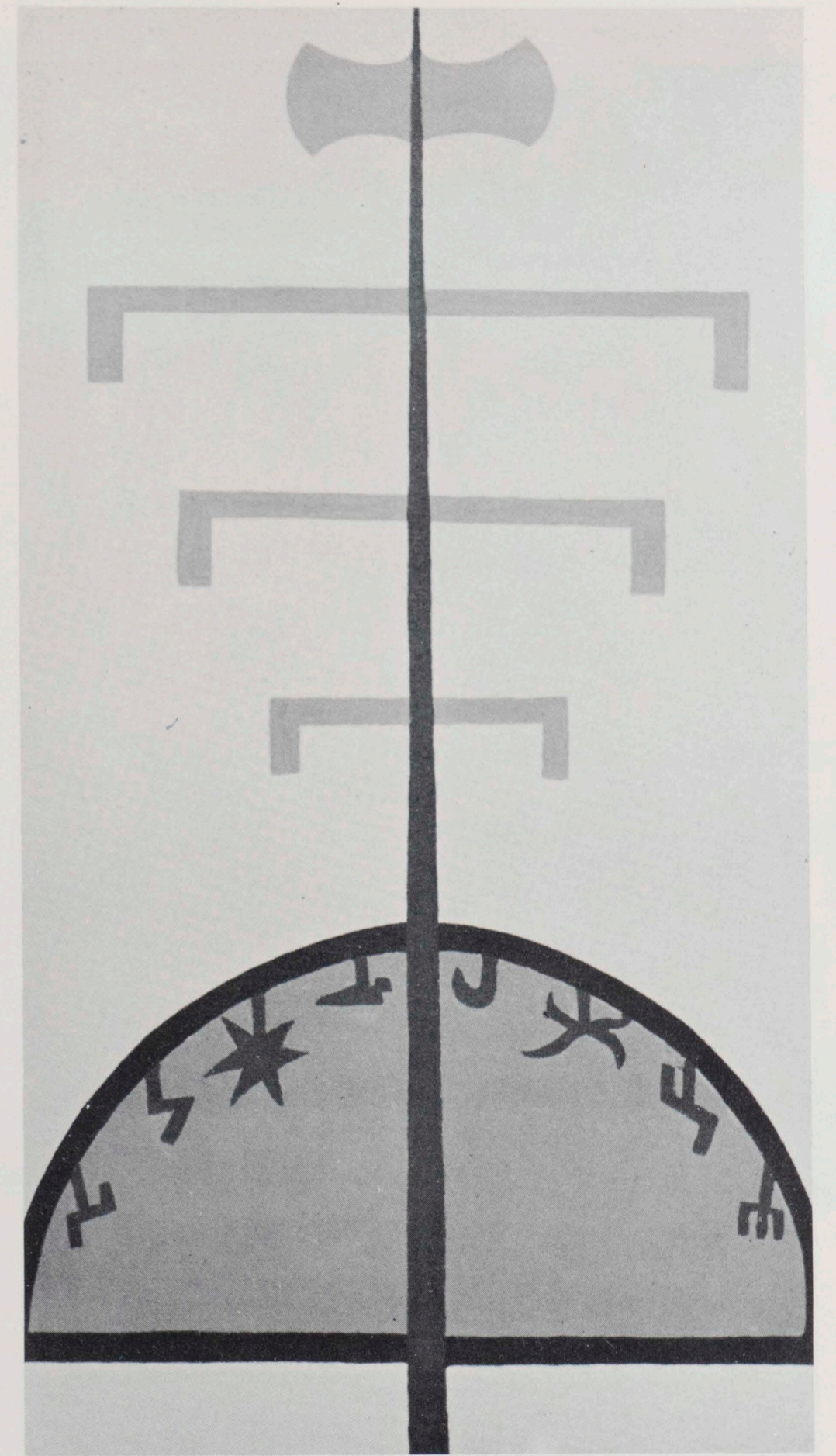
## CATALOGUE OF EXHIBITION

- 1—Tema para Léa Garcia—(Theme for Léa Garcia)—**"Oxunmarê,"** 60 x 42 in.
- 2—Invocação Noturna ao Poeta Gerardo Mello Mourao—(Nocturnal Invocation to the Poet Gerardo Mello Mourão) **"Oxóce,"** 55 x 36 in.
- 3—Efraín Bocabalístico — (Three Orixás: Oxóce, Xangô and Ogun), 60 x 40 in.
- 4—A Fléxa do Guerreiro Ramos — (Guerreiro Ramos' Arrow) — **Oxóce**, 60 x 40 in.
- 5—Abébé de Oxun com Olho de Ifá — (Abébé of Oxun with Ifá's Eye), 55 x 36 in.
- 6—Olho de Ifá no leque de Oxun — (Ifá's Eye on Oxun's Fan), 16 x 12 in.
- 7—Germinal nº 1 — (Germinate), 16 x 12 in.
- 8—Germinal nº 2 — (Germinate), 48 x 28 in.
- 9—Síntese em volta do Olho de Ifá — (Synthesis around Ifá's Eye), 60 x 84 in.
- 10—Nuvens nº 2 — (Clouds), 12 x 16 in.
- 11—Cinco Signos — (Five Signs), 12 x 16 in.
- 12—Metamorfose nº 1 — (Metamorphosis), 12 x 16 in.
- 13—Metamorfose nº 2 — (Metamorphosis), 12 x 16 in.
- 14—Borboleta de Franca — (Franca's Butterfly) nº 2, 12 x 16 in.
- 15—Martin Pescador, 16 x 12 in.
- 16—Machado de Xangô — (Xangô's Axe), 16 x 12 in.
- 17—Caça Marítima — (Sea Hunt) — Oxóce, 16 x 12 in.
- 18—A caca noturna de Oxóce — (Oxóce's night hunt), 16 x 12 in.
- 19—Signo em verde — (Green Sign), 16 x 12 in.
- 20—Lua de Sangue — (Bloody Moon), 16 x 12 in.
- 21—A fléxa vem do céu — (The arrow comes from sky), 16 x 12 in.
- 22—Pomba Gira — (Bombonjira or Exú's wife), 12 x 16 in.
- 23—Olho de Ifá — (Ifá's Eye), 16 x 12 in.
- 24—Protesto — (Protest), 12 x 16 in.
- 25—Fléxa de Oxóce — (Oxóce's Arrow), 16 x 12 in.
- 26—Três Orixás — (Three Orixás: Oxóce, Xangô and Ogun), 16 x 12 in.
- 27—Objétos rituais nº 2 (Ritual Objects), 16 x 12 in.
- 28—Objetos rituais nº 3 (Ritual Objects), 30 x 16 in.
- 29—Objetos rituais nº 5 (Ritual Objects), 48 x 28 in.
- 30—Ossain — (Orixá — Leaf), 30 x 16 in.
- 31—Metamorfose nº 4 — (Metamorphosis), 40 x 60 in.
- 32—Santa Maria Egípcíaca (Saint Marie of Egypt), 29 x 21½ in.
- 33—Yemanjá, mãe das aguas e de todos os Orixás — (Yemanjá, mother of the waters and all the Orixás), 28½ x 21 in.
- 34—Cristo Negro — (The Black Christ), 21 x 28½ in.
- 35—Santíssima Trindade — (The Holy Trinity), 21½ x 28½ in.
- 36—Xangô e suas, 3 mulheres (Xangô and his 3 wives: Obá, Oxun and Yansan), 21½ x 29 in.
- 37—Yemanjá enluarada — (Moonlit Yemanjá), 21 x 29 in.
- 38—Oxalá na cruz — (Oxalá on the Cross), 30 x 20 in.
- 39—O vale de Exú — (The valley of Exú), 32 x 50 in.
- 40—Anjo Negro — (Black Angel), 25½ x 39 in.
- 41—Oxunmarê — (diptico: male and female), 32 x 44 in.
- 42—Oxunmarê nº 5, 50 x 30 in.
- 43—A Missa — (The Mass), 25½ x 39 in.
- 44—Café Arvore — (Coffee Tree), 30 x 20 in.
- 45—A morte do poder branco — (The death of white power), 44 x 32 in.
- 46—Omulú azul — (Blue Omulú) **Free Huey**, 30 x 24 in.
- 47—Processo da Liberdade Negra — (The Process of Black Liberty), 30 x 20 in.
- 48—Exú Black Power, 30 x 24 in.
- 49—Ogun Vingador — (Ogun, the Avenger), 40 x 24 in.
- 50—Martíro de Malcolm X ou Xangô crucificado — (Martyrdom of Malcolm X or Xangô crucified), 40 x 26 in.

All the paintings shown were made in acrylic on canvas



Invocação noturna ao poeta  
Gerardo Mello Mourão  
(Nocturnal invocation to the  
poet, Gerardo Mello Mourão)  
"Oxóce", 55 X 36 in.

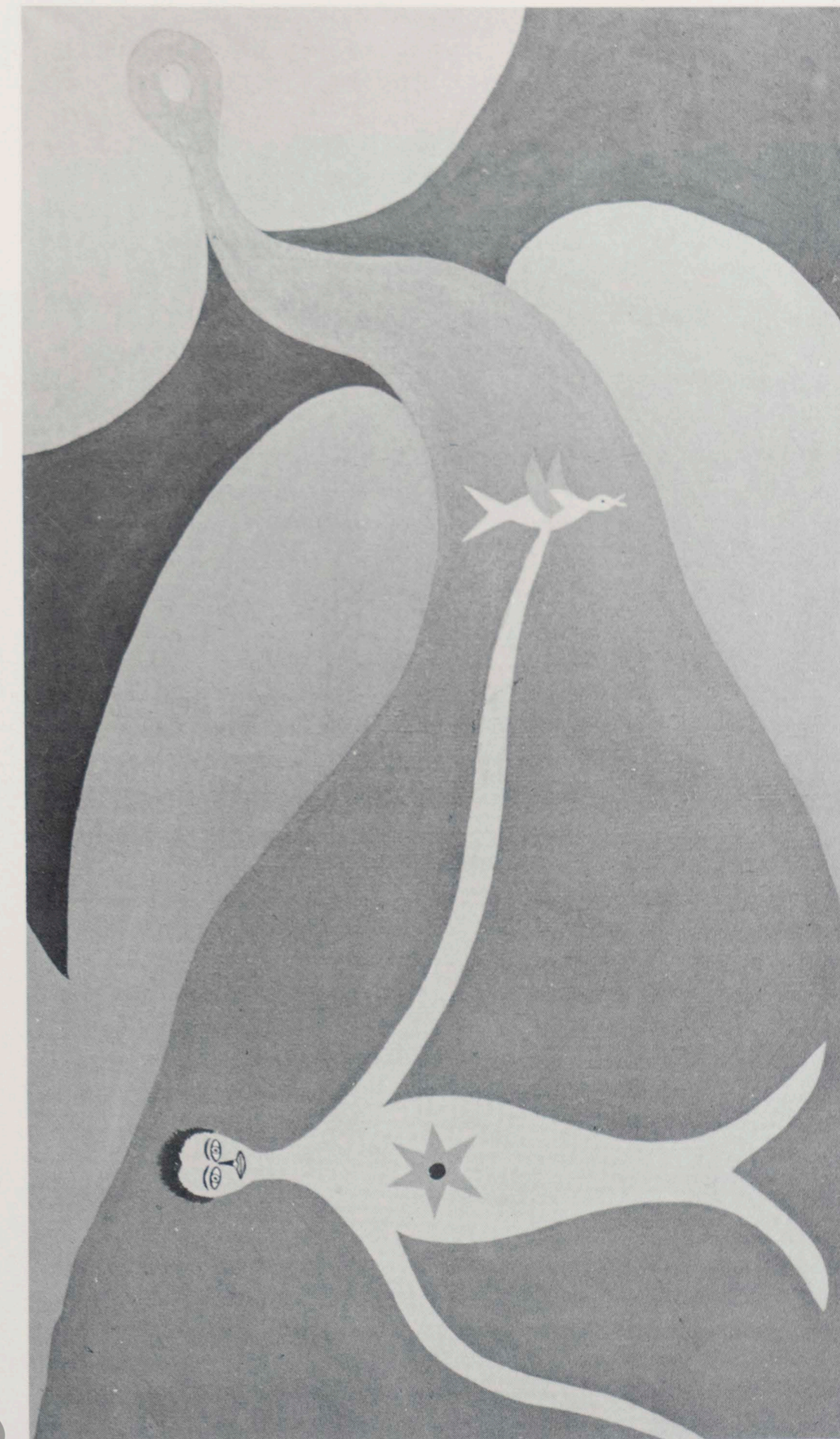


Objetos rituais nº 3  
(Ritual objects nº 3), 30 X 16 in.



**Oxunmarê** (Díptico: male and female), 32 X 44 in.

For six months of each year this Orixá is masculine and lives as a hunter in the forest; during the other six months, this Orixá is feminine, and lives by fishing in the seas.



**Germinal nº 2** (Germinate nº 2) "Ankh", 48 X 28 in.

The **Ankh**, symbol of Life in the old Egyptian culture, is shown here in a moment of gestation.

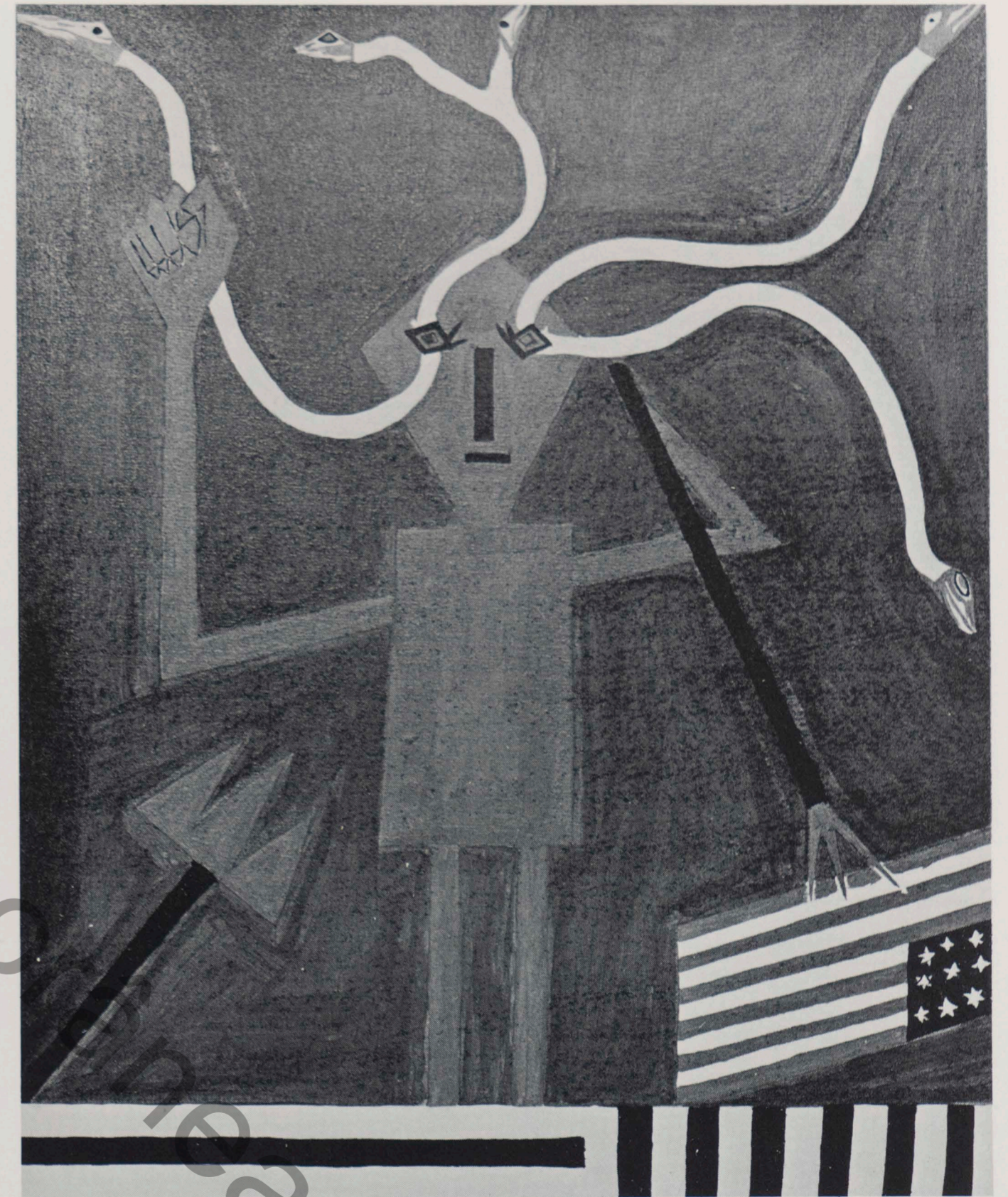


Ossain (Orixá-Leaf), 30 X 16 in.

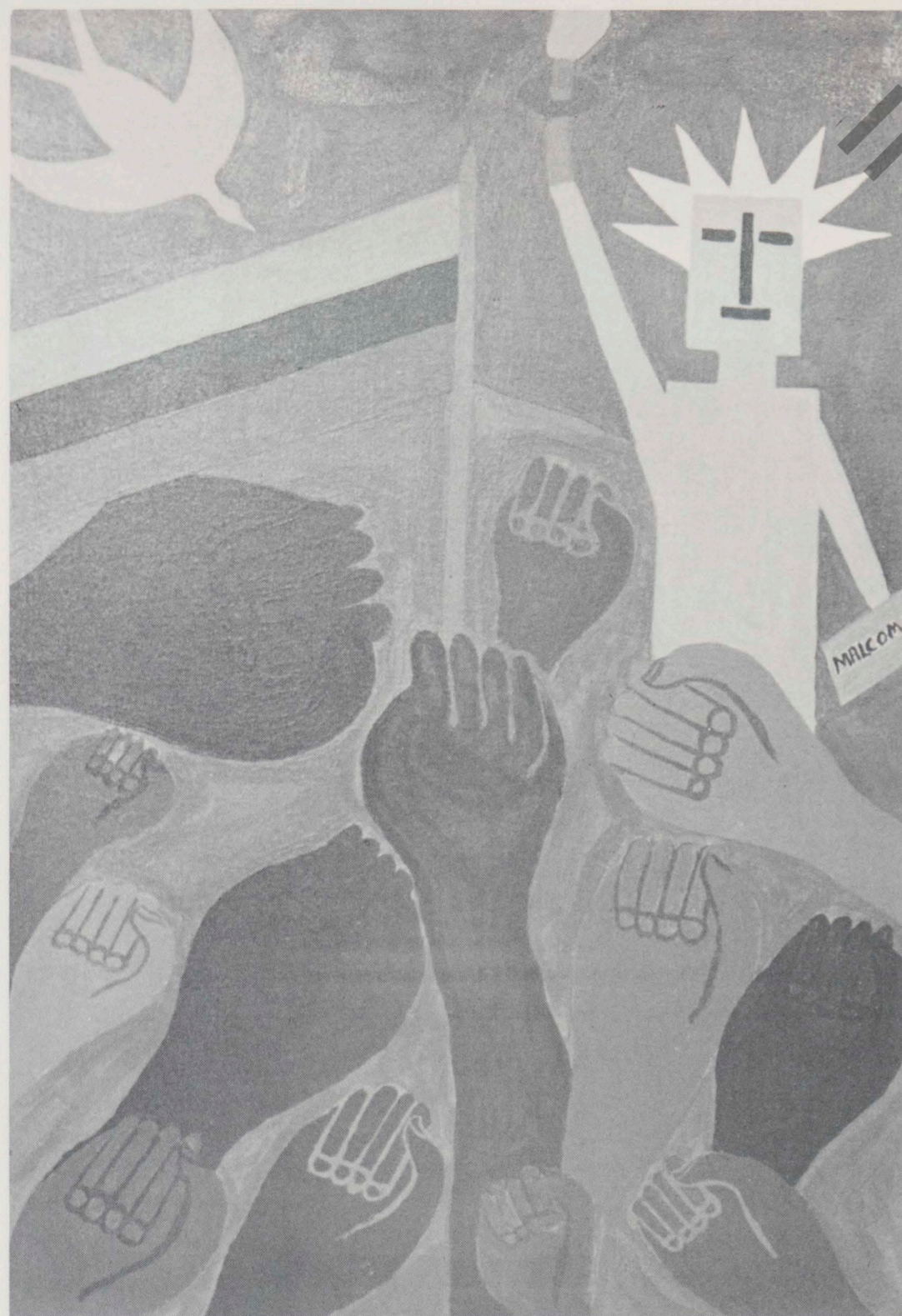
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Exú Black Power, 30 X 24 in.

This painting makes Exú a contemporary and militant Orixá in the struggles of the American Black of today.







**O processo da liberdade negra** (The process of Black Liberty),  
30 X 20 in.

In this work Exú takes the place of the White woman of the Statue of Liberty. The Flag shows the colors of the liberation of Africa and the liberation of the Black people: the **red** stands for the struggle and the blood of the Black race; the **black** for the very race; the **green** symbolizes the fertility of the African earth, the richness of the Black soul and the hopes that the Black people put in the future.

**Abêbé de Oxun com Olho de Ifá** (Abêbé (fan) of Oxun with Ifá's Eye), 55 X 36 in.

In this picture Oxun is represented only by the Abêbé (fan) with the Eye of Ifá, the SÉER god. Seeing the future and seeing the Orixá of people are the most important and most difficult work of Candomblé.





**Ogun vingador**  
(Ogun, the Avenger),  
40 X 24 in.

Ogun is the Orixá of iron and war. In this painting he combats Portuguese colonialism in Africa and attacks the South African apartheid.

**COVER**

**Tema para Léa Garcia** (Theme for Léa Garcia)  
"Oxunmarê", 60 X 42 in.

This Orixá Oxunmarê is identified with the rainbow in the form of a serpent of seven colors. One of the ritual functions of this Orixá is to bring water from the sea to the palace of Xangô which is located in the blazing clouds of the sky.

**BACK-COVER**

**A fléxa do Guerreiro Ramos** (Guerreiro Ramos' Arrow)  
"Oxóce", 60 X 40 in.

Oxóce's arrow isn't mortal in this picture. It has pro-created life in form of branches and leaves.

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