




DREAMHOUSE 315
ANGEL
SUAREZ-ROSADO

*October 25 -
November 20
1999*



Artist Angel Suarez-Rosado brings to the Banana Factory an installation which emerges from the tradition of "Espiritismo". While related to other religious practices such as Santeria, Macumba and VooDoo, Espiritismo promises protection and healing as it draws on the powers of saints, spirits and deities based in the African and Latin American belief systems.

Angel Suarez-Rosado was born in Cayey, Puerto Rico where he learned the practices and rituals of "Espiritismo" from his grandfather, a healer in the Espiritismo tradition. His interest in art led him to study at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. Rosado's art draws from the spiritual connections and symbols embedded in his Puerto Rican heritage. This installation demonstrates the way in which Rosado has transformed aspects of the mix of African and Christian cultural heritages to create an aesthetic that carries on the traditions of his country.

I would like to extend a sincere thanks to Angel Suarez-Rosado for sharing his art, knowledge and culture not only with the Banana Factory but also with many schools and organizations throughout the Lehigh Valley. In addition, thanks also Ricardo Viera for his help in planning and helping to implement this exhibition and catalogue.

*Diane LaBelle
Director*

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INTERVIEW

Ricardo Viera Angel Suarez-Rosado

- Is religion and cultural heritage the basic premise of the conceptual foundation of your work in general?

Yes, definitely yes. My work is about discovering, exploring and exposing the experience of my childhood while living back in Puerto Rico, as well as my experience in the complex context of the USA.

- There is among the many images, symbols, and paraphernalia, objects and color associated with Cuban Santería, Brazilian Macumba, Candomblé, Dominican Republic Gaga and Vudu and Haitian Vodoodoo. Is it a representative religion and/or cult besides "espiritismo" that could be native to Puerto Rico?

"Espiritismo" was practiced by members of my family, but the established religion was Catholic. I went to the Centros Espiritista from a very early age - when problems of health, love and hate surfaced in the family. As a child I remember as early as five years old "despojos". This is a cleansing with "palomos", a white dove cleansing related to Santiguos and Empaché. Where some people were dedicated to Espiritismo, other people practiced Pentecostal Revivalists beliefs. Everything I know about the Bible is from that time. This appears when I perform, especially with the Holy Spirit and the convulsions.

Another native cult of Puerto Rico is Mita and Aaron, more agriculturally and harvest oriented and very complex. I always feel inclined to participate in the ritual, but the Espiritismo and Pentecostal Revivalist movements battle and fight with each other, and as a result, the Pentecostal movement has more influence in the United States. I refer to this practice in the treatment and placements of ritual objects. For me, the "despojos", spiritual cleansings, are a pure representation of African heritage. The treatment of ritual objects with the Pentecostal movement is minimal - just a few objects; whereas the Espiritismo movement involves more objects and an accumulation of the objects. But they both have to do with agriculture.

- Where is the line that separates or distinguishes artistic freedom and aesthetics from ritualistic modes and cultural stereotypes?

This line is in the perception of freedom, just a moment of it - a vague reflection of liberty, a fragment of being free. As I work in my studio, it is like a nursery, like a beach where objects arrive each morning waiting to be transformed with the "Canon of Aché". I am only an artifice of the aesthetic. It is like I repair a reality that has been treated badly. I put the pieces together where the cultural stereotypes are imposed from the top culture, building and resting in a placebo of consumerism and political miasma of colonialism.

- What is art to you and to society?

Art is to communicate, to broadcast reality, to announce the new day, to articulate information clearly with color, form and object. It is to narrate the entire saga using new formulas, as I transform the reality, patterning, making a path to a road to follow as an alternative from the society where I live. My art is to improve society, linking the next centuries to give hope to the visually needy.

- You are an artist of ideas; you paint, sculpt, create installations in situ, perform as well as many other things. Are you also a priest or representative of any particular Caribbean religion or cult?

Yes, while living in Brooklyn during the end of the 70's and early 80's, I practiced Santería. I was initiated in the cult of Ochún, adopting my name of Ochún Chanké Kolé. Receiving "colleres", "querreros", "olugun" (the necklace, the warriors, pertaining to the sea). But my madrina felt it was very important to complete the initiation in a hurry. It was necessary for the saint to be fixed in my head. It was necessary to make a ritual called, "Santo de Justicia"; a practice done when there is not the necessary money for the ceremonies (which are very expensive), and the person is in danger. I was fascinated with all the aspects of the practices. I was not allowed to visit cemeteries or funeral homes for seven years. Then the experience of AIDS reached the peak. At the very beginning of the AIDS epidemic, The New York Times was accusing practitioners of Voodoo and Santería of creating a sanitation problem due to the involvement of blood in the rituals. The Times claimed that all of the people who practiced this ritual were involved with AIDS. So that was the final decision to work with all of the Caribbean traditions as an answer - as an answer for what was happening.

When I receive "Ocha", I was born again, but my conflict was that I was far away from home traveling back and forth to Puerto Rico. I realized I was like a fashion, like a trend. And talking about Yoruba art was "in". I changed again this time going home where espiritismo was present. It is said that Ocha works with the saints and espiritismo with the muertos, the dead spirits. In espiritismo, there are aspects of the ancestral past and Ocha and the integration of both. So the second big initiation was in the espiritismo; this time as a medium, as a priest where the guiding spirits, "Los protectores y los guías" was manifest with a hybrid santería. Perhaps I combined all of them while I was living in New York.

- In essence, you were trained in Puerto Rico and in the USA as an artist, an installer of Fine Art and performance artist. You have worked in museums and conducted many classes and workshops. What is your goal as an artist? Where is your work taking you?

My goal is to keep working in the home of the brave; to continue living abroad, to produce new pieces, to theorize about my own Puerto Rican culture, investigating from far away where all of the aspects look different. My art work is taking me back to my community to work with children in front of the classroom. I did not plan it this way. So, at the end of the 90's we are going into an education phase where more and more people will want to know about this practice and also about my art. I am making my artwork more permanent, changing materials, practicing and making a structure for its preservation. Whereas my installations were kind of fragile, because of the materials, I am moving into something more permanent.

- What do you expect from the viewer or better yet what kind of reaction do you anticipate from anyone that looks at or confronts your work?

I expect that the viewer is reacting to my art as if s/he was seeing a dream. Where things are beautiful, almost transparent, but at the same time, experiencing an alternative experience, a distinct sensation of being watched - carefully observed by me and confronting them with memories of home and the issues of being far away. I feel that the viewer is intrigued, perhaps it will change the viewer. But it is very demanding because of the altered aesthetics.



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"As I work in my studio,
it is like a nursery,
like a beach where objects
arrive each morning
waiting to be transformed"



1999 Exhibition Series

William Persa

January 8 - February 20

Chuck Zovko

January 8 - March 10

The Figure

February 26 - April 10

Curator: Ricardo Viera

*Contemporary Trends
in Printmaking*

April 16 - May 29

Curator: Curlee Raven Holton

Arts & Industry

June 4 - July 17

Curators: Linda Heberling,
Ricardo Viera and Allison Mackenzie

Young Artists

June 4 - July 17

Curators: Francine Citak and
Banana Factory Committee

Black & White

July 23 - September 4

Curator: Sidney Goodman

United Again

Nadezda Prvulovic, Artist-in-Residence

August 18 - September 18

Lehigh Art Alliance

64th Juried Exhibition

September 10 - October 16

Myths For Our Time

Richard Redd

October 22 - November 20

Dreamhouse 315

Angel Suarez-Rosado, Artist-in-Residence

October 25 - November 20

Banana Factory

Artists Annual Exhibition

November 25 - January 8, 2000

Party Time

Parade Magazine Traveling Exhibition

November 25 - January 8, 2000

2000 Exhibition Series

Abstraction

January 14 - February 26

Curator: Berrisford Boothe

Lucien Niemeyer

March 3 - April 15

Dietmar Herzog, Artist-in-Residence

March 31 - April 30

Young Artists 2000

April 21 - May 27

Curators: Sue Berkenstock
& Lois Hofschild

Local Color

June 2 - July 15

Curator: TBA

Parkland Art League

Members only exhibition

July 21 - September 2

Small Works

September 8 - October 21

Curator: TBA

Valerie Constantino

September 8 - October 21

Lehigh Art Alliance

Juried Exhibition

October 27 - December 9

Banana Factory Artists

Annual Exhibition

December 15 - January 21, 2001



Banana Factory: Third Street Gallery
25 East Third Street
Bethlehem Pennsylvania 18015
610.332.1300

**Name of Exhibition:
Dream House 315 exhibition**

Date: 1999

Names of Artists:

- **Angel Suarez- Rosado**