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*Reflections*

# Afro-Caribbean women and resistance: An exploration of decolonial feminist pedagogies in the Women's Museum Costa Rica

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## INTRODUCTION

I am the founder of the Women's Museum Costa Rica (WMCR) and a professor in the Universidad Latina. The mission of the WMCR is to provide emancipatory feminist education opportunities in the context of women's and girls' human rights as our contribution to a decolonialized gender justice future. Our key educational strategy is curate in house and virtual exhibitions of feminist cultural and artistic expressions, but we also offer courses and workshops on art and feminism and educational internships for both domestic and international university students who require community work experiences and are interested in feminist issues and art.

In this article I share findings of a visual study I undertook on various artworks in an online exhibition titled Memories and resistances: Women, artists, Afro-Latina and Caribbean stories. My interest was to explore how the artworks in this exhibition, which (re)positioned Black Latina and Caribbean women as political subjects, contributed to our museum's mission of gender justice. This virtual exhibition was launched on November 07, 2022, as a collaboration between the Women's Museum Costa Rica (WMCR) and Instruments of Memory, a virtual art history documentation project that promotes women in the arts through workshops, exhibitions, and other forms of educational programming. Specifically, I analyzed the works of four contributing feminist artists: Vanessa Charlot (Haiti-United States), Joiri Minaya (Dominican Republic), Marcela Ramos Bertozzi (Costa Rica), and Luisa Nieves Rondón (Venezuela-Costa Rica). The questions that guided my study were: How do these exhibitions contribute to creating a broad, decolonial gender awareness? How do they make women often ignored visible as political subjects? How do they operate as sites of feminist adult education? What do they make visible and what do they challenge? We conduct studies such as this to understand for ourselves the value of the artworks and artist connections which in turn, helps us to design future pedagogical exhibitions and other activities.

How do these exhibitions contribute to creating a broad, decolonial gender awareness? How do they make women often ignored visible as political subjects? How do they operate as sites of feminist adult education?

I begin this article with a brief discussion of the decolonial turn in Latin America and the Caribbean followed by a discussion of the WMCR and its pedagogical mission. I then briefly describe the works in the exhibition and share my analysis process. My analysis shows how decolonial feminist artistic representations in women's museums promote new understandings and appreciation of the cultural and historical contributions of Afro- descendant women from across Latin America and the Caribbean. I argue the importance of art exhibitions but also women's museums as instruments and spaces to develop feminist, anti-racist and decolonial consciousnesses, address the matrix of gender, race and class oppressions that continue to exist but also, to recover the memories of women's historical resistances which can contribute to a collective sense of agency.

## THE DECOLONIAL TURN IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Latin America and the Caribbean were colonized predominantly by the Spanish, but also, the English, French and Portuguese. Although the colonial slave system was abolished in the 19th century, forms of colonialism and slavery persisted in most territories for many years. The effects on African people brought to the Caribbean and Latin America -- and today on their descendants -- as they were stripped of their humanity by European- patriarchal supremacist actions are immeasurable and have left in their wake what scholars call 'structural racism' (e.g., Maldonado Torres, 2008).

Unlike most Latin American countries whose multicultural constitutional reform took place at the end of the 1980s or during the 1990s, in Costa Rica it was not until 2015 that constitutional recognition of the multiethnic and multicultural character of the nation began to materialize. The impact of the racial laws that began to gestate in Costa Rica around 1897 affected not only Black people but also the Chinese, Arabs, Turks, Hindus.

However, on April 26, 2018, a law was passed that declared August Historic Month for 'Afro-descendants' in Costa Rica which was for us extremely important and what we call the 'de-colonial'. The term Afro-descendants refers to a heterogeneous group of people of African origin who live in the Americas and in all areas of the African diaspora because of slavery. Maldondo Torres (2008) speaks to the decolonial turn by addressing the complex reality of linked and related racial divisions. This turn has created new understandings of different forms of power, specifically what she calls the 'technologies of death' that have had lasting impacts and different effects on communities, and particularly, women. The decolonial turn recognizes that colonial forms of power were and still are multiple and seeks to challenge these as well as find alternatives and ways forward. While there is no single definition of decolonization, or a decolonized world, Maldonado Torres (2008) describes the decolonial turn as seeking "to put at the center of the debate the question of colonization as a constitutive component of modernity, and decolonization as an indefinite number of strategies and contestation forms that propose a radical change in the current hegemonic forms of power, being, and knowing" (p.66).

While in many countries the leadership of Indigenous and Afro descendant movements was mostly male, in Costa Rica Afro Costa Rican women predominately led the constitutional reform process. However, this history is often silent and unknown so one of the roles of our museum is to make this history seen and heard through our exhibitions and educational programming. We show how women in this era, and later, got involved primarily because 'political subjectivity' or citizenship in constitutional reform measures needed to include women if it were to speak to the entire nation. Costa Rican women have also been front and centre in more contemporary changes, such as the Third World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance

that was held in Durban in 2001. The women who took part in this included Deputy Joycelyn Sawyers Royal, Vice Foreign Minister Elaine Whyte Gómez, Carol Britton González, founder of the Art and Culture Association for Development and the Flores de la Diaspora Festival, Laura Hall Moore, representative at that time of the Caribbean Project Association and Afro-Costa Rican youth. Also included were Epsy Campbell Barr, the founding member of the Centre for Afro-Costa Rican Women, and delegates from the Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women (Muñoz Muñoz, 2017). Our museum names these women because it is important that we see women as a 'group' and that we hear the names of individual Afro-Costa Rican women who were at forefront of the struggle for change. In other words, women have been important individually as much as they have created powerful collectives that fight not just at local but at international levels.

## GENDER AND DECOLONIALITY

McClintock (1992) argues that to understand fully colonialism and postcolonialism, we must recognize race but also gender and class as these are not distinct domains of oppression. Rather, gender, race, and class interact with each other in contradictory and conflicting ways. Gender, therefore, "is not simply a matter of sexuality, but also a matter of labor subjected to and imperial plunder; 'race' is not simply a question of skin color, but also a question of workforce, crossed by gender." (p. 5). McClintock does not reduce these categories as "identical with, each other, but that they exist in intimate, reciprocal, and contradictory relationships" (p. 5). On the contrary, the categories are a dynamic of intimate interdependence. She goes on to say that racial purity depends on rigorous surveillance of women's sexuality and thus inextricably implicated in gender dynamics. Feminist popular educator Lugones (2021) concurs with this, arguing that to theorize multiple oppressions in Latin America there can be no "decoloniality without gender decoloniality" (p. 15). Essential to her vision of decoloniality is listening to the voices and stories of Indigenous, Afro and mestizo women. Lugones reminds us that only white bourgeois women were counted as women whilst all other females were "excluded by and in that description" because they were "seen and treated as animals, in a deeper sense than the identification of white women with nature, children, and small animals. Non-white females were considered animals in the deep sense of being 'genderless' beings, sexually marked as female, but without the characteristics of femininity" (p. 94).

The decolonial, anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and anti-colonial feminist movement that is emerging in Latin America and the Caribbean today proposes a series of epistemic ruptures that are based on questioning patriarchy and its basis in liberal notions of feminism. Lugones considers that biological dimorphism, heterosexism, and patriarchy are inserted in the modern colonial organization of gender and questions the monolithic conception of a woman who, for Bidaseca (2021) "represents the norm that defines the white, bourgeois, heterosexual woman" (253). Lugones focuses on discussions about coloniality and gender, the relationship between feminism and essentialisms, sexual violence of LGBTIQ+ communities, femicides and eco- femicides of Native and peasant women across Latin America and the Caribbean. In relation to debates on coloniality and gender, Segato (2011) makes a distinction, therefore, between what she calls high and "low intensity patriarchy" (pp. 81-82). For Segato (2011) liberal feminism's narrative of universal gender domination has not only failed to consider differences amongst women but has ignored problematic gender relations in the pre-colonial world. Segato (2011) has in fact documented ethnographic data from historical tribal cultures that show social structures which are quite like the problematic gender relations of modernity, including clear

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hierarchies of power and privilege between masculinity and femininity in figures that represent men and women. Segato calls a "patriarchal prehistory of humanity" (p. 83), meaning gender distinction and oppression, as having existed since time immemorial. She also notes, however, that although the social order was hierarchical, there is evidence that community deliberations included the voices of women. The continual modernization of communities has created a more 'high intensity' patriarchy, whereby the ties between women which were orientated towards reciprocity and collaboration in both productive and reproductive activities, were torn apart and women were pushed toward domesticity and 'private life.' This breaking of the ties between women and the end of their public engagement and political alliances has resulted in greater vulnerability to male violence made possible by pressures from worlds and ideas beyond their control. For Segato, femicide, homophobia, and misogyny are part of 'high intensity' patriarchy introduced by colonial modernity. The coloniality of power, knowledge, and being is a discursive matrix and social practices derived from colonialism.

Coloniality of power is the term used by Quijano (2003) to characterize a pattern of global domination typical of the modern/capitalist world-system that originated with European colonialism at the beginning of the 16th century. The term refers to the discursive matrix and social practices derived from colonialism but without mediating a legal relationship of dependency. Faced with the universal thought system established by the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being, it is necessary to produce disruptive thought and generate actions from the local to restore the social fabric and rebuild the common. For this reason, Sayak Valencia (2014) proposes that political practice must be rewritten under the variables of minority developments that seek alliances for the construction of the 'commons'. The commons, according to Galcerán (2009), is the very object that must be politically constructed which she argues includes "accepting to measure oneself with the simultaneity of oppressions. Not the power to 'govern others' but the power to build in common and in a shared way, the spaces in which we inhabit" (p.198). In this sense, the exhibition discussed in this paper contributes to the commons by making visible issues of race, gender, class, nationality, and social justice will strengthen civil society.

What I explore in this paper, is how it is feminist artists who have the ability, show so creatively and critically the existence of social conflicts such as migration, sexism, racism, and discrimination. By questioning, disruptive, and destabilizing languages of everyday life in their works of art, feminist artists draw the public's attention to topics that we know in our museum's educational work that had often not been considered.

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What these artworks show us in the museum is one of the first steps to generate discussion, to draw attention to exclusions, and to work together to design proposals for change that we can hope to turn into real actions for a more just society. In the Women's Museum Costa Rica, we believe that a socially and gender just world is a better world for everyone. However, if gendered coloniality persists, there will be no possibility of having this justice. Therefore, recognizing and defending the rights of women and girls as a human right is crucial to achieving this goal.

## AFRO-FEMINISMS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Assuming a decolonial and anti-racist feminist subjectivity, which many artists do, and the museum does, implies confronting conservative forces within the social movements themselves (Bidaseca, 2021). The theses of Afro-feminism since the 1950s are reflected in

the concept of intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, as well as in anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-class struggles. Violet E. Barriteau from Barbados uses the intersectionality approach to deploy public policies that seek equality for women in a context of majority Afro. In Cuba, after the triumph of the revolution, the feminist movement had no political force since many of the demands of feminism were already granted rights. However, the Afro-Cuban feminist Liudmila Morales Alonso explores new forms of political organization around repressed sexual dissent. Afro-Latin American and Caribbean feminisms were the least visible despite having been part of suffrage movements, national revolutions, or colonial liberation movements. It was not until the end of the last century, when they began to demand recognition from the national States (González Ortuño, 2018).

One of the principles of Black feminism in Latin America and the Caribbean, is one our museum takes up is its diversity of response in different contexts and moments (Ramírez Abella, 2018). Black feminism arises at the historical juncture of the transatlantic slave trade when the capitalist system based on the triad of racism, sexism, and classism is structured.

The independence process in the American colonies began with a slave revolution in Haiti led by the slave Cécile Fatiman (1771-1883). The pioneering work of Black Caribbean feminism by Una Marson (Jamaica, 1905-1965) and Amy Jacques-Garvey (Jamaica, 1895-1973), both anti-colonial feminist activists, was overshadowed however, by the political movement of Pan-Africanism in which the visible faces were the men. Africanness and its religiosities, the diaspora and becoming a Black woman were the central themes of Marson's poetry. Amy Jacques-Garvey claims the beauty of women of African origin who were represented in a prejudiced way by the white world.

According to Segato (2019), the thinking of contemporary Black feminism in Latin America and the Caribbean has developed in various fields and emphasize different themes, since each movement and each feminism has its own elements and history. Caribbean feminist theorists from the Dominican Republic Yuderkis Espinoza, based in Argentina, and Ochy Curiel Pichardo, take a decolonial anti-racist position by criticizing the imbrication of the heteronorm with race, and see white feminism as racist and colonial because by universalizing the category of women separated from the category of race, the white woman is reaffirmed as the paradigm of all women. Campbell Barr from Costa Rica has headed the Centre for Women of African Descent, the Alliance of Leaders of African descent in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Black Parliament of the Americas. Black feminist liberation theology is developed by the theologian Mariel Mena in Colombia, and by Silvia Regina De Lima, a Brazilian theologian based in Costa Rica. According to Bidaseca (2021), one of the most important Afro-feminist figures is Lélia Gonzalez (Brasil, 1935-1994) who showed the silenced construction of Black women in the history of Brazil and how this had a decisive influence in Latin America.

Afro-Caribbean and Latin American feminists have also developed their own methods by recovering testimony and oral traditions, their ancestral knowledge, and their organizational capacity. Its wealth lies in its diversity in adopting and adapting aspects of feminisms such as lesbian, autonomous, anti-segregationist, anti-colonial, Marxist, anti- capitalist, and anti-sexist Afro feminisms, without forgetting topics such as its spirituality. A characteristic of Latin American and Caribbean Black feminisms is that they went from an anti-colonial position that criticized the intervention of great powers in the continent to a decolonial position that contemplates various aspects: a self-critical process of how subjectivities are formed, the denunciation of injustices, the historical recovery of knowledge, appreciation for the land of birth, pride in origin, the questioning of heterosexuality, and the hierarchization by gender to which women were subjected by the Latin American national States (González Ortuño, 2018).

## FEMINIST ADULT EDUCATION AND THE WOMEN'S MUSEUM COSTA RICA

Although I have alluded to the vision and pedagogy of the WMCR it is important to position it more formally. As suggested above, our work is grounded in decolonial feminist adult education as a practice of knowledge construction which includes uncovering deconstructing and challenging "traditional patriarchal and authoritarian epistemologies of 'dominance' that limit our vision and knowledge" (Clover et al., 2020, p. xiii). Our educational work in the museum therefore begins with active listening to the experiences and ways of knowing (and creating) of women and others who suffer domination. It aims toward both personal and social transformation, enables a meaningful critique of power and domination, questions androcentric cultural practices, and promotes dialogue (Clover et al., 2020; Korol, 2007). Our feminist adult education practices work to deconstruct and challenge gender binaries and colonialism to promote women's multiple identities, to encourage both critical historical thinking (about what is missing), and the development of artistic skills, be that in making things or in understanding feminist artworks (Clover et al., 2020; Hazirlayanlar, Akkent & Kovar, 2019). Alongside these central strategies is the development of what Clover (2020) calls 'a sense of agency' that allows women and the gender diverse to reframe power as something they have individually and collectively, and to feel confident in engaging in acts of resistance and defiance. She goes on to say that within this framework, 'voice; as an empowerment strategy is essential to create spaces for women to tell their stories, as well as to listen authentically. Bringing these together, Butterwick (2015) positions feminist adult education as "a language of critique, exploring the origins of the subjugation and exclusion of women, and a language of possibility, that is, designing learning environments that empower and support women" (p. 12).

Most specifically for our museum is the centering, recentering, and voices of Black Afro Caribbean women, as noted, and we do this in a number of ways. One way is to construct new narratives and other representations of Black Afro-Caribbean women to contribute to a decolonial gender justice. The second is to recognize and showcase the artistic practices of all women but specifically Black Afro Caribbean women in order to provide not only new ways to see and understand the world, but also and importantly for our museum, artistic role models for women and girls to encourage them to see themselves as artists and work on their art. The third is to be a space for dialogue about patriarchal violence and oppression as liked to gender, race, and class.

## THE ONLINE EXHIBITION

The online exhibition that I focus on in this article is titled Memories and resistances: Women, artists, Afro-Latina, and Caribbean stories. It was curated to promote knowledge and appreciation of the cultural and historical contributions of 'Afro- descendant' women of the Americas and Caribbean. The four curators involved were Adriana Palomo (Argentina), Claudia Pretelin (Mexico-USA), Sussy Vargas Alvarado (Costa Rica), and I, Author (Argentina-Costa Rica). Each of us selected a number of artists for the exhibition based on three criteria. The first was a political commitment to the

community through the artistic work they carried out. The second was the strength of the feminist nature of their visual works and specifically, its focus on women. The third was the artist's availability to participate not just in the exhibition, but also in conversations with the public as a fundamental aspect of the virtual exhibition project to create an opportunity for dialogue between artists, curators, and the public using zoom.

Based on our selection process, this virtual exhibition includes photographic and audiovisual images

by eighteen contemporary authors from more than ten countries in Latin America and the Caribbean who investigate and document women of African diaspora and Afro descendants in Latin America. Based on a historical, social, and political approach, the exhibition explores a multiplicity of complex themes which include the struggle against discrimination and sexism, identity as a form of resistance, the deconstruction of representations of race and gender, and the role the body and sexuality play in the construction of subaltern subjectivities.

## STUDY METHODOLOGY

I am interested in how Women's Museums are contributing to gender justice and change through their exhibitions and most specifically, how the artists in Memories and resistances make women as political subjects visible in their interpretations and representations. The questions I used to analyze this exhibition were: How does each artist address racialized gender oppression? What counternarratives do they propose as a form of resistance against oppression? How does each artist recover the historical memory of the African diaspora? From this large exhibition of eighteen works, I selected four feminist artists -- Vanessa Charlot (Haiti-United States), Joiri Minaya (Dominican Republic), Marcela Ramos Bertozzi (Costa Rica), and Luisa Nieves Rondón (Venezuela- Costa Rica). I chose these works as they best answered my study questions.

### Vanessa Charlot

I selected two works by Vanessa Charlot (Haiti-USA). The first is titled Fire next time. She is an award-winning photojournalist and documentary photographer, filmmaker, speaker, and curator. Her work focuses on the intersectionality of race, politics, culture, and sexual/gender expression to explore the collective human experience. Charlot's family comes from the island of Española. Raised by Haitian mother, she grew up in Miami, Florida in an enclave of immigrants where there was a plethora of Haitians, Dominicans, Cubans. Charlot explains in her artistic statement that "this project arises in the shadows of the Ferguson uprising after the death of Michael Brown Jr., a Missouri teenager killed by police officer Darren Wilson in the suburbs of the city of St. Louis in August 2014. Specifically, her work takes up ideas of 'racial tension' and struggle in diverse ways. She notes that her family is not African American; we are from the Caribbean and so the way that I view things are a little bit different. The myth making in terms of the storytelling of how I have shaped my identity through my own community is not one that my Blackness is inferior. Being from Haiti and us being the first free Black Republic like that is our story always. So, to be in a space where I center my identity on liberation and to be amid other people who look like me that are fighting for their right to exist in this space was deeply conflicting. I use a Haitian liberation lens to photograph that: I highlight very strong women that are the pulse of the Civil Rights Movement (Artist statement).

Figure 1: Mother's pain, Fire next time series, 2020. St. Louis, Missouri, US, 2020

The Fire next time series challenges normative ideas of critical social happenings around race by telling the story from the position of the victim. More specifically what her work shows is an imaginary of people affirming their own lives and their right to exist in a city that systematically ignores them. To illustrate this, Charlot took a photograph in front of the house of Lezley McSpadden, the mother of Michael Brown Jr. (see Figure 1). Charlot draws attention to her dress, noting "She was intentionally well dressed, and I really appreciated that

because I really wanted to challenge all the other images of her that present her as a very irrational emotional woman" (artist statement).

Building on this, Charlot argues that by placing this woman in the centre of the work, I challenge "preconceived notions about who can take the right frame and who can appear in a picture." For Charlot, her photographs are visual markers of the fact that we were here. Black and Asian communities are essential to shaping civilization, but they fall outside the mainstream narrative, make us invisible, and so photography gives us a means to ensure that our collective experiences are included in the telling of history and the power of storytelling is rebalanced. Failing to do so, I dare say, perpetuates a drab whitewashed society that excludes the rich tapestry of what it means to be a diaspora.

The second work by Charlot is The Shadow of a Black Woman (see Figure 2). Through this work, Charlot responds to the question: How do Black women cope with the alienation and angst of their experience? This work is an intimate view into the psyche of Black women as she grapples with trauma, as well her anger, fear, and loneliness. This work focuses on the intersectionality of race and sexual/gender expression to explore the emotion or feeling of collective human experience. As Charlot writes about the work, "I externalize my emotions by collaborating with someone who was living in St. Louis with me at the same time during the height of civil unrest industries with George Floyd. What everyone saw was Black and Brown people in the streets." This is the external face of racism and the struggle against.

But Charlot's critical question is about what she calls the "day-to-day grind when we go home. What does that look like when we are by ourselves and we're having these arrays of emotions and we are grappling with very deep emotional or mental anguish that no one sees but it's heightened because of our woman-ness, our race, our sexual orientation." For Charlot, many photographs in this series provide what she calls a 'meditative place,' "a place where I go to cry and I go to process. I wanted us irrespective of race to see ourselves and say it is okay to feel those things and be in those faces because these are universal emotions that we all feel." (artist statement).

Figure 2. Shadow of a Black Woman Series, St. Louis, Missouri, US, 2020.

Building on this, the woman portrayed in the photograph is soft and caring, which for Charlot breaks the myth that women of color need to be strong and forceful all the time. But the woman photographed also symbolizes the complex potential, yet broken promises made to Black America. As Charlot argues in her statement, "the result is pain, sadness, and exasperation, emotions that shape this series of photographs. While she is a symbol of hope for Black America, she still carries a heavy burden: loving a country that does not love her back."

For Charlot, the 'feminist camera' is a weapon to process trauma but also a tool of liberation and a way to reposition women. In her work the level of intimacy is on purpose as she goes "beneath the skin" to help people, including herself think more deeply about the women as subjects in here images. As she notes

> When I'm working on longer projects, I'm really engaging in deep conversation not just with the subject but with myself. I'm always thinking about my intention behind the work. By doing that and rendering myself vulnerable to the subject it creates a very collaborate process.

> I want to ensure the subjects are depicted to the rest of the world in a way that makes them proud. (Artist statement).

As noted above, photographs are critical markers of the fact that we have been here. Photography as an artistic practice, for this artist, works to challenge preconceived notions about who occupies the frame and who appears in an image. Charlot also repositions Brown and Asian communities as essential to shaping civilization by making them visible. To work against oppression, Charlot uses photography as an act of resistance, as a pedagogical means to tell a different story of individual but more importantly, collective experiences. Her work offers a new vision of Black Afro descendent women as complex, thus breaking stereotypes and silences, things central to the feminist adult education mission of our museum.

## AYOOWIRI / GIRL WITH POINCIANA FLOWERS

The second work I chose is by Joiri Minaya (Dominican Republic), a multidisciplinary artist whose work investigates the female body within constructions of identity, multicultural social spaces, and hierarchies. Born in New York, United States, she grew up in the Dominican Republic. She graduated from the National School of Visual Arts of Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic (2009), the Altos de Chavón School of Design (2011) and Parsons the New School for Design (2013).

Minaya created a series of collages based on postcards she collected on her trips to the Caribbean and undertook research into various photographic archives. Ayoowiri / Girl with poinciana flowers, 2020 (see Figure 3) is a collage superimposed on the image of a girl holding poinciana flowers in her hands based on a 1970 postcard from Martinique. Through the cutaway profile of the girl, a woman is revealed, looking directly at us. This image was taken in Martinique around 1870-1880 by Gaston Fabre, who often turned his subjects into photographic ‘ethnic types’, as an exploration between ethnography, anthropology and ‘souvenir tourism’. Ayoowiri is the name of a plant (caesalpinia pulcherrima) used by the shamans in Amazonas whose flowers closely resemble the flowers of the poinciana (delonix regia), a picturesque and decorative tree abundant throughout the Caribbean and often depicted in the tourist sector.

What is interesting that comes through in the collage work of Minaya is that these plants have two contrasting elements because Ayoowiri is both a medicinal plant and a poison. It is also known to have been used by enslaved women to abort children they wanted to be free from a fate of being born into slavery. Minaya explores this complex representation of tropical nature as a relationship, therefore, between the body and nature and how both “are exercised, consumed, and exploited in ways that are interrelated” (cited in (Villa-Pérez, 2021, para. 3).

Figure 3: Ayoowiri / Girl With Poinciana Flowers, 2020.

Minaya addresses racialized gender oppression by exploring the visual codes configured in the colonial era through which the woman's body was usually represented as a decorative object immersed in tropical nature. In Continuum, 2020 (see Figure 4), Minaya uses two images: the background image of this collage was taken by Roland Bonaparte (1858-1924), who used photography to conduct an anthropological inventory of human populations. On top of that image Minaya places fragments obtained because of the search for “Dominican women” on Google. The action of posing for someone, constructed in an unnatural and artificial way, emulates certain ideas of tropicality, exoticism, and hypersexualization of the female body. Continuum II, 2020 (see Figure 5) is a collage made up of fragments of two images: the one on the left, belongs

to a painting by Canadian artist Francois Beaucourt (1740–1794) titled Portrait of a Haitian Woman. The image on the right was taken from the brochure of a tourist town in the Dominican Republic. By juxtaposing the portraits of these two women smiling and holding tropical fruits, Minaya establishes a parallel between them underscoring her vulnerability to sexual exploitation for the enjoyment of the male gaze. This notion of the masculine gaze – the way in which we see the world through men's eyes – is a critical pedagogical teaching element used by this artist, and one that is critical to highlight in our museum.

Figure 4: Continuum, 2020

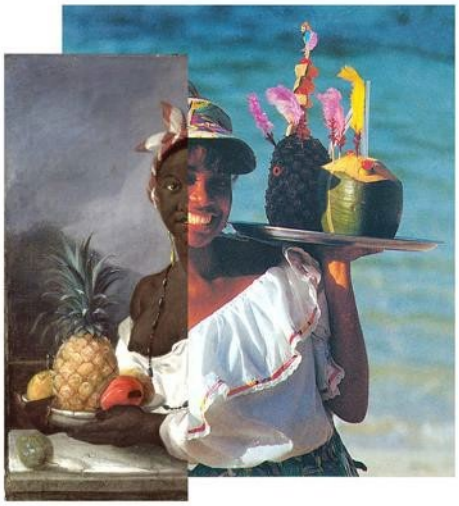

Figure 5: Continuum II, 2020.

The Grand Gala Parade

A third artist I selected is by Marcela Ramos Bertozzi (Costa Rica), a documentary photographer and independent photojournalist. Her work titled The Grand Gala Parade commemorates the Day of the Black person and Afro-Costa Rican culture. It consists of a parade that gives visibility to the traditions, customs and values of the Afro descendant culture and its contributions to the country. The parade, created by the Black Ethnic Cultural Civic Committee in 1999, is carried out in the streets of the province of Limón located in the Caribbean, an area that has been characterized throughout history for being the result of the fusion of the heritage of

Africa and the Caribbean, as well as a reception point for immigrants from many regions including Chinese and Arab as well as the local Indigenous populations.
Ramos's works also focus on issues of migration, and with the migration that occurred for the construction of the railroad. As Ramos Bertozzi explains:

> My ancestors arrived around 1870 along with the first wave of Jamaican migrants. Furthermore, I feel that Limón is like a magical place and although as a child I never had an experience, a memory, an exploration with the place, as an adult I fell in love with this space and its people, I feel that it is a very special place... I always do. I associate it with magic, it's like magic. (Artist statement).

> Ramos explains that when she met with Alexandra Nelson (see Figure 6) in Vargas Park in the city of Limón and showed her the photo, she was shocked because it was her first participation in the parade after ending an abusive relationship with her ex-partner: "When Alexandra saw herself in the photograph she told me that the image revealed that she felt like

new and that she was happy" (Artist statement).

Figure 6: Mito-Grand Gala Parade, Limón, Costa Rica, 2016-2019, digital photography.

The Grand Gala Parade series recovers the historical memory of the African diaspora in the Limonense Caribbean, its traditions, and cultural legacy. The photograph of Alexandra Nelson portrayed with a smile and open arms in an attitude of plenitude and gratitude represents a counternarrative which operates as a form of resistance against gender violence and oppression.

Hybrids

The final work I selected is by Luisa Nieves Rondón, a photographer based in Costa Rica since 2015. She completed her technical studies in graphic design and bachelor's degree in photography at Veritas University. Hybrids series emerged from a study by the artist on the symbolic feminine that is found within the goddesses that inhabit the universe of Venezuelan syncretism. Rondón divides the composition of the photographs into two proportional parts using a vertical axis, representing on the right parts of the female body accompanied by a natural element and, on the left, the elements that symbolize the female deities of Indigenous and African roots (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Hybrids, Costa Rica, 2022, Digital Photography

Hybrids as a series is closely related to the family and cultural memory of Rondón, who grew up in a mestizo family surrounded by myths and legends. Rondón's grandmother offered fruits, coffee, and rum at the altar of Christian and secular saints whom she prayed to perform miracles. In Hybrids, Rondón integrates different symbolic elements that have to do with the female deities of Venezuelan religious syncretism such as snails, water, fire, fish, skin, smoke, sea, waning moon, bulls to create a sacred space, which has a totemic and mythical charge, recovering the elements of the ritual as part of a parallel universe between magic and reality. One of the female deities of Indigenous and African roots investigated by Rondón, is a goddess who protects the jungle, animals, and crops. She is often characterized as a fierce and profane force through elements such as snakes, blood, and fire. This

goddess is also today one of the main elements of popular religiosity in Venezuela, syncretic since she integrates deities from the Indigenous world, Catholic symbology, Cuban Santeria, spiritualism, and eastern religions.

Other female deities included in Hybrids are Yemayá, Mother Goddess of the seas, and the animals that live there. Represented by blue, the natural elements that make it up are rocks and sea creatures, the crest of the waves, the uterus and fruit offerings. Ochún, Goddess of fertility, abundance, and beauty, represented by yellow or gold, is present in rivers, springs or streams and its elements are snails, pumpkins, sunflowers, and river fish. Oyá, Goddess of natural phenomena, represented by red, is a sorceress and warrior with a strong and dominant character. She reigns in the cemeteries and the elements that represent her are the heavens, the machete, blood, breasts, fire, stomach. Obbá, Goddess of the underworld, represents sacrifice for loved ones. It can be seen in cemeteries, waters, lakes or ponds and its main elements are flowers, stones, snails, and ears. Represented in pink, she is described as a strong, feminine, and very energetic figure. Through Hybrids series Rondón recovers the historical memory of the African diaspora and rescues the female forms linked to the Mother Goddess and the syncretic ancestral origins of the Venezuelan Caribbean. The conception of the female body associated with Mother Earth is also recovered by Rondón under the lens of the system of beliefs and symbols of Afro-Caribbean cultural roots. Female deities reflected a matriarchal society where women were given recognition, respect, and authority. This social order, which was broken due to the historical processes that led to the subordination of women, is what Hybrids series seeks to makes visible.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The exhibition Memories and resistances: Women, artists, Afro-Latina and Caribbean, through the compilation of documentation and visual interpretation works by renowned contemporary women artists, problematizes the consequences of social inequality that historically affects Afro descendant women. This exhibition seeks to recover the identity memory of our communities that recently began to identify themselves as Afro descendants in countries that still do not fully accept this heritage. The contribution of the artists is for us in the museum critical practices of feminist adult education in that they challenge and disrupt racialized gender oppressions, make visible the masculine gaze, and visualize new dimensions or create new positionings of normative ideas of culture, racial historical events, myth, and magic. These works promote the empowerment of women by showing social complexities but more importantly, by placing them in the centre of the frame, at the heart of the parade, as the makers of magic and myth.

By curating exhibitions like this, our women's museum plays a crucial role in creating a new gender awareness. We are documenting and elaborating on stories of women from an anti-racist, anti-traditional and anti-patriarchal perspective to educate current and younger generations about the histories and lives of women who have been ignored through artworks that challenge them to think beyond and through the norm of our gendered society. While we do have other types of programming which are important, our art exhibitions are central to our pedagogical vision of gender justice and change and our contributions to the larger struggles in Costa Rica of visualizing, revisualizing women of Afro Caribbean descent and tackling the oppressive norms and myths that hold gender injustice in place. Exhibitions and their artworks such as these are for us, key instruments of feminist adult education and our aim to unlearn colonialities of power and promote feminist power to imagine and reimagine the world.

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