

FORT GANSEVOORT

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il manifesto

Myrlande Constant, a storyteller of voodoo spirits in sequins

The solo exhibition of the Haitian artist at Fort Gansevoort in New York, before reaching the Fowler Museum/UCLA in Los Angeles (from 26 March). Her works, woven with beads, were also at the *Venice Biennale 2022*, in the exhibition curated by Cecilia Alemani

By Manela De Leonardis, February 10, 2023



Myrlande Constant, Reincarnation Des Morts, 2022

Wearing a pink turban and holding a mirror, Erzulie Dantor (also known as Ezili Dantor or Erzulie Dantó) is one of the most important spirit-gods ("lwa" or "loa") of the syncretic voodoo pantheon. Protector of women and children, of single mothers, she is also associated with the image of the Madonna and Child (in its variants on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean) and sometimes with African Santa Barbara: a great vain Mother no less than greedy who sits enthroned in front of the table laden with many delicacies. Usually, she is offered perfumes such as Florida Water (the American version of Eau de Cologne), fruit and many traditional Haitian spiced sweets, including the popular Blan manje, Dous Makos and Cuisse Dame.

This is how Myrlande Constant (Port-au-Prince, Haiti 1968) in Erzulie Freda also represents it in her personal interpretation . A work that is part of the series created during 2022 for the *Drapo* exhibition , the Haitian artist's first solo exhibition at the Fort Gansevoort gallery in New York (until 11 March) which anticipates the anthological Myrlande Constant: *The Work of Radiance*, curated by Katherine Smith at the Fowler Museum/UCLA in Los Angeles (March 26-July 16). The artist who «paints with beads», as Constant herself defines herself, recently invited by Cecilia Alemani to exhibit her work at the 59th Venice Biennale, is the greatest contemporary interpreter of her country's creative tradition linked to production of flags («drapo») of the voodoo religion, usually a male prerogative.

Technical ability, together with the traditional symbolic and formal elements, is combined with a personal dose of irony that accompanies the narration of the stories contained in the individual works, itself the protagonist. But the artist-storyteller departs from traditional representation, much more schematic and rigorous, also for the elaboration of complex and sophisticated works such as *Après Gran Met La Fey Nan Bwa Se Tretmant Yo Viy* , *Zouzen Zaka Minis Agrikilti* and *Reincarnation Des Morts* , in which the vicissitudes of the microcosmos of spirits (Damballa Wedo, Azaka Mede, Ayida Wedo and many others) expand and occupy entirely large-format canvases, with obvious references also to musical rhythm and the dynamism of movement.

Glass beads, sequins and colored tassels are the elements that the artist has used since the 1990s, but with which she has been familiar since she was very young working as an embroiderer, together with her mother, in a wedding dress factory. Time itself with the movement of the needle held between the fingers of the hand, as it pierces the surface of the fabric, enters the work. Following a process in which the canvas is held taut, the embroidery is always done in reverse and following a sketch.

To the drama of slavery and the bond with a distant Africa that has remained deeply in the hearts and cultural roots of the people of Haiti, Cuba, Trinidad also refers the imagination of Myrlande Constant, so pervaded by a profound sense of belonging, vital and also a joyful spokesperson for a precise desire to find in art a sign of emancipation and freedom.