Harmonia Rosales - Miss Education: Reclaiming Our Identity

Tour Notes

On View March 11, 2020 - May 24, 2020

SUMMARY

The third and final chapter in MoCADA's exploration of spirituality in the African diaspora features Harmonia Rosales' *Miss Education: Reclaiming Our Identity*, which examines America's puritanical foundation and approach to what is civilized while shedding a light on issues of today. Through these ideals made by Europeans often overlook those who don't fit into the traditional frameworks, and deny the African origins of religion and their involuntary route to the Americas, they have never determined the true value of the Black woman. The identity of the Black woman tells a much bigger story of creation, of god, of being a Black female, of being a work of art. And finally, these erroneous modes of thinking are questioned and shifted to carve out our new concepts of excellence.

Through Harmonia Rosales' work, Black women can no longer be manipulated. We see the beauty and contrast within ourselves, which begs us to dive deeper into our natural essence and our contributions, to relive through these eyes. *Scientifically the Black woman is the only organ that possesses the Mitochondrial DNA that has all variation possible for every different kind of human being on this Earth (African, Albino, European, Middle Eastern...etc.). When the DNA of a Black woman mutates, all other types of human beings come about. This is called the "Eve Gene" and it's only found in Black women.*

This is the beginning of an exploration that incorporates ourselves, to know who we are while journeying through America, the catch-all of culture. Though our spiritual forms were once destroyed, they defied time and space. And we are no longer disconnected. Every detail matters. Every picture tells a story. Every symbol and fabric means something in the greater context of history. Grab hold of this inspirational conduit and channel its flow. See us beyond slavery, but as collaborators in American history and the greater African Diaspora. The Black

woman is the provider, destiny's child, the creator of all human beings — an indestructible being made in god's image, to be loved, to be accepted, and to live fully as we are.

FEATURED ARTIST

Harmonia Rosales is an afro-cuban American born in Chicago. The black female bodies of her paintings is the memory of her ancestors expressed in a way to heal and promote self-love. In addition, the approach that nourishes Rosales's art is closely linked to her Multicultural Afro-Cuban background. The ethereal creations to which she gives birth on the canvas are a synonym of female empowerment and cultural acceptance, by which she has grappled with.

As a young girl, the renaissance master's impeccable skill and composition fascinated her but she could never relate because they depicted primarily a white male hierarchy and the idealized subordinated woman immersed in Eurocentric conception of beauty. Rosales's main artistic concern has been focused on black female empowerment in western culture. Her paintings depict and honor the African diaspora. The artist is entirely open to the ebb and flow of contemporary society which she seeks to reimagine in new forms of aesthetic beauty, snuggled somewhere between pure love and ideological counter-hegemony. Her message is to create a sense of harmony.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF *MISS REPRESENTATION: RECLAIMING OUR IDENTITY*?

Black and brown people are often misrepresented, therefore the phrase “Miss Representation” indicates Rosales’ artistic vision to create noble representations of Black women. The second part of the title, “Reclaiming Our Identity” alludes to the recontextualization of old renaissance paintings seen in Rosales’ work.

KEY WORDS

RECLAIM: to recover something previously lost

HARMONY: the quality of forming a pleasing and consistent whole

HEGEMONY: the political control or dominance over one state or others

THE EVE GENE (THE MITOCHONDRIAL EVE): the most recent common ancestor of all living humans. This gene was found in a woman from Africa.

ORISHAS: Spirits worshipped within the Yoruba faith.

YEMAYA: A powerful Orisha worshipped within the practice of Santeria, she is the ruler of the sea and ocean

AFRO-CUBAN: Cubans who have West African ancestry

SYMBOLISM: the use of images to represent an idea or an artistic movement in which symbolic images are used to express emotions and ideas

HERO’S JOURNEY: Also known as the monomyth, the Hero’s Journey, is a common story arc within tales. The Hero’s Journey story arc often involves a main character who goes on an adventure, faces a struggle, overcomes the struggle or wings a victory, then returns to their home transformed. Multiple well known stories such as the story of Christ, the story of Moses, and the story of Gautama Buddha all follow this story arc.

QUESTIONS:

1. What does it mean to reclaim something?
2. How do Rosales' paintings reclaim Black identities?
3. How have Black people and Black cultures throughout the world been misrepresented in the media throughout history?
4. What is the "Eve Gene"?
5. How does the discovery of the Eve Gene relate to this exhibition?
6. How do Rosales' portraits of Black women promote self-love?
7. What is the "Hero's Journey?"
8. Why does Rosales paint in a traditionally renaissance style of painting?
9. Who is Yemaya and why does Rosales depict her within her paintings?
10. How does Rosales combine the narratives of Yemaya and Eve within her works?

EXHIBITION THEMES

1. The Eve Gene

Rosales' digital drawing of Eve.

The Mitochondrial Eve

The Mitochondrial Eve, also known as *mt-Eve* or *mt-MRCA* or "The Eve Gene", is the most recent common ancestor of all living human beings. This means that if we trace back the lineage of all mothers, grandmothers, great-grandmothers and so on they all eventually derive from one woman. It is estimated that this gene came from one woman who lived 150,000-200,00 years ago. Due to geographical changes over time, it is hard to pinpoint the exact location in which the Eve Gene originates, however, scientists suggest that the earliest humans derived from Makgadikgadi, or the modern day Kalahari Desert in Botswana, Africa.[1]

Why the Name "Eve"?

Scientists call this gene the "Eve Gene" as a reference to the biblical story of Adam and Eve. According to the bible, Adam and Eve are considered to be the first humans that God created and put on Earth. Those who follow the bible believe that all humans descended from Adam and Eve. According to scientists, all humans descended from one woman, therefore they call her "Eve."

The Significance of the Eve Gene in Relation to the Black Identity

The discovery of the Even Gene pinpoints the power and importance of the Black African woman. This gene has mutated to create different races. This means that all races of the world are derived from an African woman. While Black women are often ridiculed and disrespected, this gene shows that Black women are crucial to the existence of humans. Without this gene and without the woman we now know as Eve, modern humans would not exist.

2. Symbolism

Symbolism in the Arts

The Symbolism Movement in the arts was a movement which involved the use of symbols to convey messages, ideas, or emotions through painting. Symbolist paintings can also involve

[1] "Scientists Think They've Found 'Mitochondrial Eve's' First Homeland." *LiveScience*, Purch, www.livescience.com/mitochondrial-eve-first-human-homeland.html.

symbols that are personal to the artist and not necessarily explicitly recognizable to the viewer. It is said that this was less of a specific artistic style and more of a philosophy regarding art.

Symbolism Within Rosales' Paintings

Rosales uses symbolism within her paintings to represent her ideas on black womanhood and spirituality. For example, her 2019 series *Orishas* shows many different symbols such as fish, flowers, peacock feathers and more to represent items that relate to each Orisha. In her 2018 series *New World Consciousness*, she depicts flowers, snakes, and more in relation to biblical stories such as Adam & Eve. Rosales writes, "**I believe in using symbolism in my artwork because it tells multiple stories in a single painting**. For example, in the painting *Ambushed* the woman represents Africa and the various animals represent the seven European powers of colonialism."

3. Renaissance Style of Painting

Historical Background & Key Stylistic Elements of Renaissance Paintings

Stylistically, Rosales' paintings are inspired by classical Renaissance paintings. The Renaissance was an artistic movement in Europe dating from the year 1300 to the year 1600, indicating the transition from *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo Da Vinci, *David* by Michelangelo, and *The Birth of Venus* by Sandro Botticelli are commonly celebrated Renaissance paintings. Here are some common components and techniques of Renaissance paintings:

- Realism: a technique in which figure or scenes are painted realistically with accurate proportions and details
- Earthy Backgrounds: depictions of nature in an ethereal style
- Symmetry & Balance
- Softness

How Harmonia Rosales Recontextualizes Renaissance Aesthetics

The Renaissance period was characterized by European artists. All of the famous paintings from this time period are by white artists with white subjects. However, Rosales purposely flips this history on its end. She utilizes the stylistic elements of the Renaissance in order to create paintings that depict Black women in noble, heavenly scapes. In this sense, she places Black women into a segment of art history that they were never allowed to be a part of - until now.

4. Black Female Empowerment

Honoring Black Women Through Art

Rosales strives to depict Black women in a noble fashion as an ode to their strength, beauty, and perseverance throughout history. Rosales expresses this goal through the way she paints

Black women. She places Black female figures within settings that history has not included them in. She creates a luminescent glow on the skin of each figure using different shades of blue and silver to add to the ethereal look of her figures. Her work subverts Eurocentric standards of beauty by placing Black subjects in ornate settings.

5. Spirituality

How Rosales Depicts Spirituality

Rosales states that this series depicts the universal human experience of survival on this earth, while maintaining grounded in an individual's identity. Modern life is filled with distractions, many of which can halt individuals from experiencing spiritual growth. Rosales' works represent the embrace of one's identity despite these distractions. Rosales focuses primarily on subjects of the African diaspora, though she wants people of all backgrounds to feel encouraged to explore themselves through her work. This exhibition also takes inspiration from the story of Jesus and the Hero's Journey. It explores how people of the African diaspora can reclaim their identities through the hero's journey.

From Orishas to Saints

Rosales' work is influenced by the **Orishas** of the Yoruba religion. Orishas are spirits who guide people in various parts of life such as love, wealth, health, and more. Rosales is specifically inspired by one of the most powerful Orishas known as **Yemaya**, who is the subject of many works in this series. Yemaya is the goddess of the ocean, the guardian of mothers and daughters, and is considered to be the mother of all living beings.[2] She gives life and protects. Rosales often depicts Yemaya interacting with Eve because they are both referred to as the mothers and creators of all beings. Although they come from different religious ideologies - Even from Christianity and Yemaya from Yoruba - they share similar powers.

6. The Hero's Journey

Also known as the monomyth, the Hero's Journey, is a common story arc within tales. The Hero's Journey story arc often involves a main character who goes on an adventure, faces a struggle, overcomes the struggle or wings a victory, then returns to their home transformed. Multiple well known stories such as the story of Christ, the story of Moses, and the story of Gautama Buddha all follow this story arc. Rosales takes these religious story tropes and depicts them with black female figures instead, showing that the "Hero's Journey" that is often centered on male triumph can also be used to describe the struggles and triumphs of black women. The typical structure of the Hero's Journey is as follows[3]:

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[2] "Yemaya." *Santeria Church of the Orishas*, santeriachurch.org/the-orishas/yemaya/.
[3] www.nuvotech.co.uk, Nuvotech Limited. "The Hero's Journey - Mythic Structure of Joseph Campbell's Monomyth." *Movie Outline - Screenwriting Software*, www.movieoutline.com/articles/the-hero-journey-mythic-structure-of-joseph-campbell-monomyth.html.

Ordinary World	This is where the story begins, often in the main character's homeland.
Call To Adventure	The main character will receive a "call" to their adventure - something that motivates them to leave their home. This can be a threat to their safety or the safety of others, or a life changing event. This threat poses a challenge or quest.
Refusal Of The Call	The main character feels hesitant to take on this journey, out of fear.
Meeting The Mentor	The main character meets someone or something that encourages them to take on their call to adventure.
Crossing The Threshold	The hero sets out for their journey.
Tests, Allies, Enemies	The hero faces obstacles, both physically and mentally. The hero meets many characters, some of whom help them and some who harm them.
Approach To The Inmost Cave	The hero comes across a location of danger that they must get out of.
Ordeal	A test or crisis that the hero must overcome. They use their skills to get themselves out of this situation, sometimes potentially deadly.
Reward (Seizing The Sword)	Once the hero overcomes each given challenge or struggle, they gain a positive result whether it be something physical or mental.
The Road Back	Now, the hero must make it back home safely with their reward.
Resurrection	This is considered the "final battle" that the hero must go through in order to be triumphant.
Return With The Elixir	The final stage of the hero's journey in which the hero returns home a changed person with new insights and skills.

FEATURED WORKS

Rosales created seven new works for this series. See images and descriptions below:

Ascension of a Woman

Symbolizes Eve's awakening from society's shackles and the embodiment of reclaiming her true identity.

Our Lady of Regla

Our Lady of Regla depicts the Yoruba Goddess, Yemaya, cradling Eve. The scarification symbolizes her travels and survival of our identity through the Atlantic slave trade, protecting all her children within the African-diaspora. She is our mother, her blood runs through our veins.
**Inspired by the 'Black Madonna of Częstochowa' and Cuba's 'Our Lady of Regla'.*

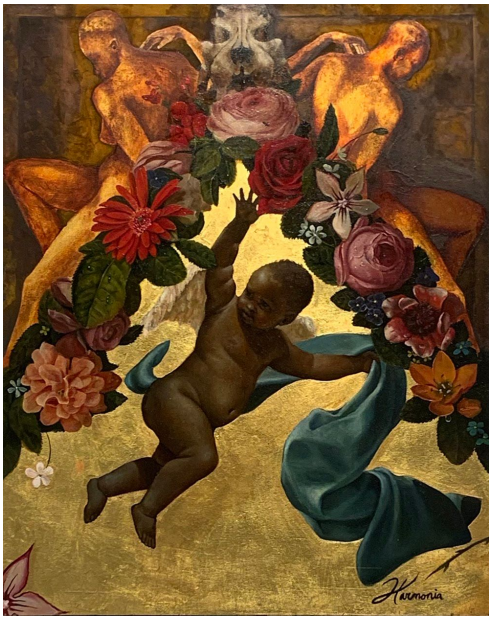
Stigmata

Eve bears these horrific markings as a sign of our ancestral sacrifice and perseverance. She reminds us not only how far we have come but how much further we can go if we continue her legacy.

Ambushed

A symbolic depiction of the colonization from the seven European powers (Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, and Italy) dedicated in stripping African decentralized and centralized states of its identity.
*The Painting is inspired by and parallels the story of ‘Hercules Slaying of Antaeus’.

Cherubs



Temptation and Acquiescence of Nzinga a Nkuwu
Goddess Yemaya and King Nzinga A Nkuwu are depicted with King Joao III in an exchange for Eve.
*Inspired by Michelangelo Buonarroti, Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel bay 4, *The Fall and Expulsion from Garden of Eden*, 1509-10,

"*Letters to the King of Portugal (Joao III), October 18, 1526*

*by Nzinga (Afonso I)**

Sir, Your Highness should know how our Kingdom is being lost in so many ways that it is convenient to provide for the necessary remedy, since this is caused by the excessive freedom given by your agents and officials to the men and merchants who are allowed to come to this Kingdom to set up shops with goods and many things which have been prohibited by us, and which they spread throughout our Kingdoms and Domains in such an abundance that many of our vassals, whom we had in obedience, do not comply because they have the things in greater abundance than we ourselves; and it was with these things that we had them content and subjected under our vassalage and jurisdiction, so it is doing a great harm not only to the service of God, but the security and peace of our Kingdoms and State as well.

And we cannot reckon how great the damage is, since the mentioned merchants are taking every day our natives, sons of the land and the sons of our noblemen and vassals and our relatives, because the thieves and men of bad conscience grab them wishing to have the things and wares of this Kingdom which they are ambitious of; they grab them and get them to be sold; and so great, Sir, is the corruption and licentiousness that our country is being completely depopulated, and Your Highness should not agree with this nor accept it as in your service. And to avoid it we need from those (your) Kingdoms no more than some priests and a few people to reach in schools, and no other goods except wine and flour for the holy sacrament. That is why we beg of Your Highness to help and assist us in this matter, commanding your factors that they should not send here either merchants or wares, because it is our will that in these Kingdoms there should not be any trade of slaves nor outlet for them. Concerning what is referred [to] above, again we beg of Your Highness to agree with it, since otherwise we cannot remedy such an obvious damage. Pray Our Lord in His mercy to have Your Highness under His guard and let you do forever the things of His service. I kiss your hands many times. . . .

(At our town of Kongo, written on the sixth day of July in 1526.)

Moreover, Sir, in our Kingdoms there is another great inconvenience which is of little service to God, and this is that many of out people, keenly desirous as they are of the wares and things of your Kingdoms, which are brought here by your people, and in order to satisfy their voracious

appetite, seize many of our people, freed and exempt men, and very often it happens that they kidnap even noblemen and the sons of noblemen, and our relatives, and take them to be sold to the white men who are in our Kingdoms; and for this purpose they have concealed them; and others are brought during the night so that they might not be recognized.

And as soon as they are taken by the white men they are immediately ironed and branded with fire, and when they are carried to be embarked, if they are caught by our guards' men the whites allege that they have bought them but they cannot say from whom, so that it is our duty to do justice and to restore to the freemen their freedom, but it cannot be done if your subjects feel offended, as they claim to be.

And to avoid such a great evil we passed a law so that any white man living in our Kingdoms and wanting to purchase goods in any way should first inform three of our noblemen and officials of our court whom we rely upon in this matter, and these are Dom Pedro Manipanza and Dom Manuel Manissaba, our chief usher, and Goncalo Pires our chief freighter, who should investigate if the mentioned goods are captives or free men, and if cleared by them there will be no further doubt nor embargo for them to be taken and embarked. But if the white men do not comply with it they will lose the aforementioned *goods. And if we do them this favor and concession it is for the part Your Highness has in it, since we know that it is in your service too that these goods are taken from our Kingdom, otherwise we should not consent to this. . . .*"

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES & INFLUENCES

Books

- *Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches: The Riddles of Culture* by Marvin Harris

Anthropologist Marvin Harris explores questions surrounding human behaviors and traditions. He goes in depth regarding the sources of certain practices such as Hindu worship of cows, post-medieval Europe's belief in witches, religions who do not eat pork, and more. This book relates to the spiritual subject matter of Rosales' paintings.

- *Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.* by Chancellor Williams

This book is composed of 16 years of research by Chancellor Williams used to rewrite and reinterpret the history of the African Diaspora. This reflects a time in which Black people all over the world were starting to question the way they were being taught about their own history. They began realizing that the watering down of Black history was leading to a negative perception of Black people by white people. The author argues that "nature, imperialism, and stolen legacies" have destroyed the reputation of Black people. Williams offers a new approach to research and history which focuses on the strengths and triumphs of Black people. This relates to Rosales' way of recontextualizing history through art, by taking historically white images and recreating them with Black subjects.

- *Seven African Powers: The Orishas* by Monique Joiner Siedlak

Orishas are African spirits present in practices such as Santeria, Voodoo, Yoruba, and other Caribbean cultures. Each Orisha has a specific function within daily life. For example, there is a specific Orisha for wealth, another for love, etc. Rosales herself actually did a series of paintings in 2019 depicting the Orishas.

- *The Handbook of Yoruba Religious Concepts*

The Yoruba nation of West Africa is an ancient civilization with its own traditions and spiritual practices. Due to the slave trade, the Yoruba people dispersed throughout Haiti, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Brazil, and the U.S. This book covers Orishas, prayers, dances, sacrifices and more that are crucial to Yoruba spiritual practices. Rosales uses influences from Yoruba culture within her artwork as she is an Afro-Cuban artist.

Spiritual Icons

- *The Black Madonna Of Częstochowa*

The Black Madonna Of Częstochowa is a Christian religious icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She is associated with Poland, but her image is also present in Haitian Vodou as Ezili Dantor.

Artworks

- *The Fall and Expulsion from Garden of Eden* by Michelangelo

Rosales is stylistically influenced by Renaissance artists such as Michelangelo. *The Fall and Expulsion from Garden of Eden* depicts a scene from the book of Genesis. In this painting, Adam and Eve are seen against a boulder surrounded by vegetation. Eve reaches towards Satan who is a serpentine wrapped around the tree and Eve grabs the forbidden fruit. The tree represents the tree of knowledge. The right side of the painting depicts Adam and Eve getting expelled from the garden after eating the forbidden fruit.

Questions? Comments? Concerns?
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