



Edwine Seymour
Island Possessed/Vodou Rituals in Haiti

July 10 - October 4, 2001



The Trance, 2001

Island Possessed—Vodou Rituals in Haiti is an intimate photographic exploration documenting the contemporary practice of Vodou in Haiti. Vodou, a syncretic religion incorporating West African traditions within Catholicism, is practiced by thousands of Haitians. Seymour approaches this project as an insider who has documented major celebrations and ritual sites in an attempt to dispel misconceptions and to create a better understanding of the practice of Vodou. This exhibition of work from the past four years is a part of Seymour's ongoing documentary series.

As a child growing up in Haiti, Seymour spent summer vacations in the countryside with family members. It was during these summer retreats that he first encountered "Basin St. Jacques" and the ritual mud baths which took place there. Interested in photography since the age of thirteen, Seymour started documenting Vodou practices in 1994 as part of his work at Parsons School of Design. In 1998 he received a New York Foundation for the Arts grant in support of his documentary work. Seymour has returned to Haiti numerous times to continue the project, photographing rituals in Souvenance, a major sacred site, as well as Saut D'eau, Plaine-du-Nord, Anse-a-Foleur, and Limonade, most of which are northwest of Port-au-Prince.

While documenting a pilgrimage in Soukri, Seymour met and began to collaborate with Carline Viergelin, an anthropologist who has done extensive research on Vodou practice and hosts a popular Saturday morning program on Vodou on The National Radio of Haiti. Her notes are included with the checklist.

Checklist

Notes by Mme Carline Viergelin

1

The Imploration of Divinities
Plaine-du-Nord, Haiti, 1997
gelatin silver print
39-1/2 x 39-1/2"

A boy holding candles made from oranges is imploring the Nago divinities and the 21 Nanchon Vodou (nations). These burning wicks give light and heat while they recall a fundamental element of life.

2

Saut D'Eau, the Magical Water
Ville Bonheur, Haiti, 1998
gelatin silver print
16x20"

In Haitian popular beliefs the Vodou deities haunt the water sources and waterfalls. Every 15th and 16th of July, thousands of pilgrims demonstrate their beliefs by honoring Ville Bonheur with a visit to the waterfall to venerate the "Lwa" (Vodou spirit) of Erzulie Freda. The legends, beliefs and practices that have developed around this waterfall give this holy place a mystical touch that is found nowhere else.

3

The Possessed
Saut D' Eau, Haiti, 1998
gelatin silver print
16x20"

An initiated woman has fulfilled her annual duty by making a pilgrimage to the sacred ground, "Basin St. Jacques," to which the Vodouists claim great curative properties.

4

The Spell
Saut D'Eau, Haiti, 1998
gelatin silver print
16x20"

This picture represents one of the many Vodou spells. At the foot of this cross are the offerings of the initiated which are presented in order to implore the favors of "Baron Samedi," the guardian of the graveyard.

5

Offering to the Lwa
Plaine-du-Nord, Haiti, 1997
gelatin silver print
11x14"

Inherited from the traditional ancestral African religions, animal sacrifice is an essential element of the Vodou ceremonies. Each "Lwa" has its favorite animal that the expert must learn to prepare accordingly.

6
Animal Sacrifices
Souvenance, Haiti, 2001
gelatin silver print
16x20"

Once dedicated, sacrificial animals must be prepared according to the ritual of the concerned "Lwas."

7
Animal Sacrifices
Plaine-du-Nord, Haiti, 1997
gelatin silver print
11x14"

Once dedicated, sacrificial animals must be prepared according to the ritual of the concerned "Lwas."

8
Animal Sacrifices
Soukri, Haiti, 1998
gelatin silver print
16x20"

Once dedicated, sacrificial animals must be prepared according to the ritual of the concerned "Lwas."

9
Hougan (vodou priest)
Soukri, Haiti, 1998
gelatin silver print
11x14"

10
Bed
Souvenance, Haiti, 2000
gelatin silver print
16x20"

This bed, dedicated to the spirit of Erzulie, the goddess of love and water, is used during an annual ceremony held in Souvenance.

11
Church of Virgin Miracle
Ville Bonheur, Haiti, 1998
gelatin silver print
16x20"

This church was built by the Haitian dictator, Jean-Claude Duvalier, known as Baby Doc, in Ville-Bonheur in the 1970's. During the month of July pilgrims attend a mass at this church that is dedicated to the Virgin.

12
The Grove's Galore
Cap-Haitien, Haiti, 1997
gelatin silver print
16x 20"

Typically, in Haiti, the design of tombs and graves is

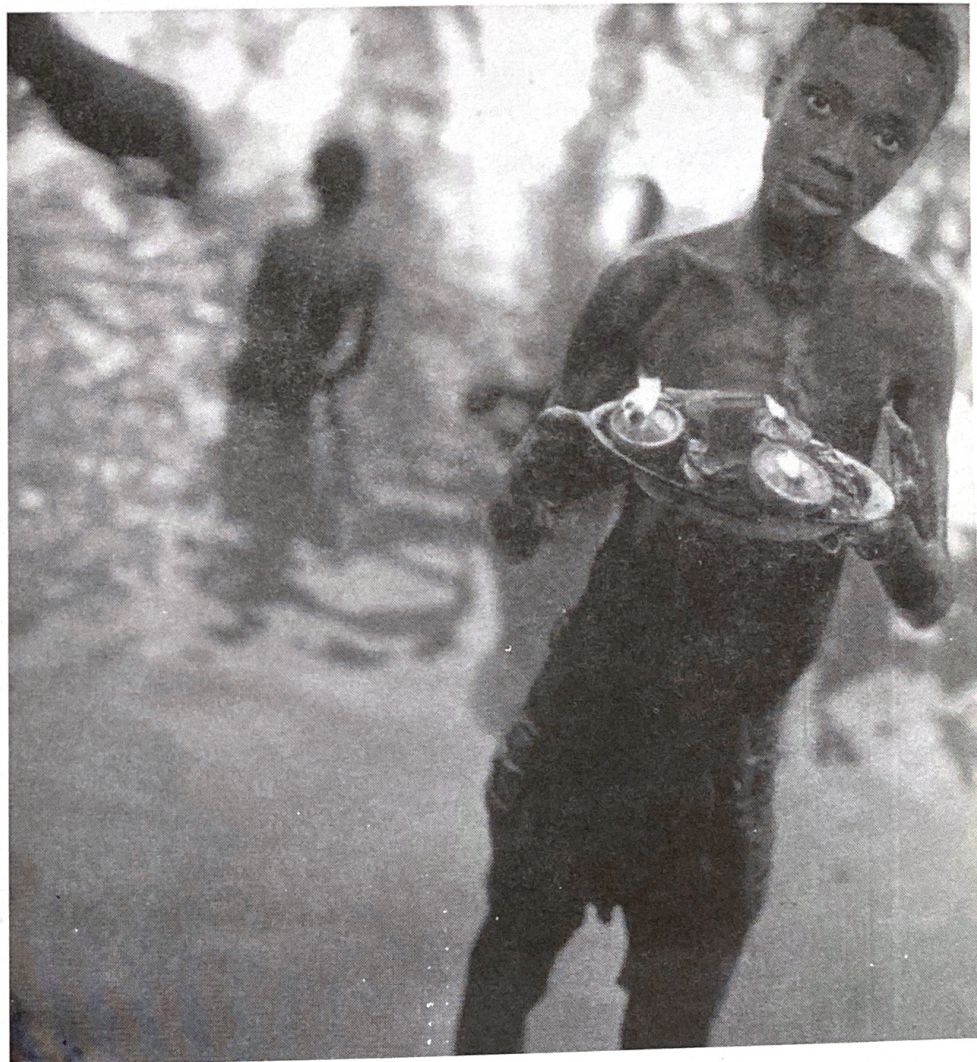
lavish. To the Vodouist, this attention to the tomb is a sacred duty that must be observed in order to avoid supernatural tricks or punishments.

13
The Possessed
Plaine-du-Nord, Haiti, 1997
gelatin silver print
11x14"

This initiated woman has fulfilled her annual duty by making a pilgrimage to the sacred ground, "Basin St. Jacques," (waterfall or mud baths) to which the Vodouists claim great curative properties.

14
The Possession
Plaine-du-Nord, Haiti, 1997
gelatin silver print
16x20"

Once "horsed" (possessed), the initiated loses all contact with reality and is left to the mercy of dark, powerful forces. The body of the initiated can be burned, cut, or mutilated without the person being conscious of it.



The Imploration of Divinities, 1997