

"Bundles": Empowered Packets in the Early Modern Atlantic World: a workshop with Cécile Fromont

Hosted by Medicine and the Making of Race

The Council Room, King's College London, April 28th, 2023, 09:00-17:00



9:00-10:00: Coffee and Cécile Fromont introduction

10:00-11:15: **Matthew Francis Rarey:** 'Feitiços, Mandingas, and Relics: Forming African Art History in Portuguese Inquisition Records, ca. 1700-1750'

Claudia Stella Valeria Geremia: 'Pervasive and Resilient Objects: the use of bolsas from the African Continent to the Canary Islands (16th-17th Centuries)'

11:15-11:30: Coffee

11:30-12:45: **Nathalie Miraval:** 'Bolsas and Bundles in New Spain: Saint Martha, Huitzilopochtli, and the Inquisition'

Andrea Guerrero Mosquera: 'Matías Torres: the image desecrator and the Inquisition'

12:45-13:45: Lunch

13:45-15:15: **Danielle Boaz:** Implements of “Obeah” and “Witchcraft”: The Use of Ritual Objects in 19th and 20th Century Prosecutions in Jamaica and South Africa

Vanicléia Silva Santos: ‘Revisiting bolsas de mandinga Among the Early Black Atlantic: Tradition, Innovation, and People’

15:15-15:45: Coffee

15:45-17:00: **Lexie Cook:** ‘And the Word Became Flesh”: Bolsas, Relics, & the Experience of Incarnation’

Monique Allewaert: ‘Fugitive Signs: François Makandal, Kongo-Atlantic Semiosis, and Literary Form’

Papers

Matthew Francis Rarey: ‘Feitiços, Mandingas, and Relics: Forming African Art History in Portuguese Inquisition Records, ca. 1700-1750’

Since its deployment in the context of Europeans’ and Africans’ disagreements over the value of objects and lives in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century West Africa, the discourse “fetishism” has played a critical role in delimiting a European concept of African art history and its constitutive objects. But, in response to a dearth of scholarship regarding Africans’ opinions on the material culture of the eighteenth-century Atlantic, this talk asks how Africans’ responses to Europeans’ accusations of fetishism re-map the concept’s entanglements with art history’s early development in eighteenth-century Europe. My sources are the testimonies of a series of African-born men – tracing their origins to Angola, Cape Verde, and Ouidah – who appeared on trial before the Portuguese Inquisition in Lisbon between 1704 and 1731. Each was accused of feitiçaria (translated here as “fetishism” or “sorcery”) stemming from their use of apotropaic objects and amulets for physical protection in Africa, Brazil, and Portugal. And each objected to or explained away the accusation by re-classifying the objects using terms like “Mandinga,” “Salamanca,” “Cape Verde,” and “Relic Pouch.” Focusing on select case studies to analyze each of these terms in turn, as well as the objects they identified, I suggest the accused did not deploy these names as a kind of corrective to Europeans’ mislabeling, but rather to interrogate Inquisitors’ conceptions of their objects’ cultural genealogies and valuations. If we are to understand, in Delinda Collier’s words, art history’s early formation as a “pidgin language in the theater of conquest,” what might these men have been saying to their European interrogators by defining their objects in this way? And given that these debates over objects took place in the Portuguese Inquisition, how might these terms impact our historical framing of not only African art history’s institutional origins, but its concomitant racializing mechanisms?

Claudia Stella Valeria Geremia: 'Pervasive and Resilient Objects: the use of bolsas from the African Continent to the Canary Islands (16th-17th Centuries)'

This paper examines the ritual practices and objects of enslaved women in the Canary Islands. Here the Spanish Inquisition imprisoned and tortured women who moved from Maghreb and West Africa, and native Amazigh with the accusation of witchcraft. The paper focuses on the use of the bolsas, an African ritual object which became customary also in the Canary Islands in the 16th century.

Nathalie Miraval: '*Bolsas* and Bundles in New Spain: Saint Martha, Huitzilopochtli, and the Inquisition'

In 1593, the Holy Office of the Inquisition in New Spain charged the mulata Inés de Villalobos with hechicería, or sorcery. They accused Inés of superstitiously praying to Saint Martha to control the free will of men. Facing detention, Inés went to great lengths to protect a watercolor image of Saint Martha that she kept in a taffeta bolsa, or pouch. A little over than a century later, in 1705, inquisitors condemned the mestizo Pedro Ramos for using hechicería to allure women. After consulting with indigenous men and an unnamed mulato, Pedro assembled an amuletic bundle whose main component was a hummingbird. Notably, inquisitors preserved both of these amulets in their respective inquisitorial dossiers. This paper compares these cases to interrogate the construction, use, and contested meanings of bolsas and bundles in early modern New Spain.

Andrea Guerrero Mosquera: 'Matías Torres: the image desecrator and the Inquisition'

Through the Inquisition files, the strategies used by Matias Torres to obtain freedom were analyzed. Therefore the most relevant aspects of his life, his trajectory, and the different interpretative connotations that the prisoner consigned to two faith-related crimes were identified in the text, and thus interact with these and see them as a vehicle to get out of prison. The relationship between Matías Torres and Juan Nepomuceno del Espíritu Santo, another desecrator of images, will also be analyzed. A story that allows knowing the uses of religion in the prison context.

Danielle Boaz: 'Implements of "Obeah" and "Witchcraft": The Use of Ritual Objects in 19th and 20th Century Prosecutions in Jamaica and South Africa'

Starting in the mid-18th century, Britain outlawed certain African spiritual practices in many of its Atlantic colonies. From the passage of the first legislation targeting African spiritual practices, ritual objects played an important role in these bans. In several colonies, legislators banned the possession of certain items believed to be commonly used in African spiritual rituals. In others, colonial authorities arrested and prosecuted people of African descent based primarily, or sometimes solely, upon the possession of "implements" or "instruments" believed to be used in "Obeah" or "witchcraft." This presentation will explore these prosecutions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Jamaica and South Africa—the first British colonies in the Caribbean and Africa, respectively, to criminalize African spiritual practices. It will also briefly discuss the continued impact of such legislation and prosecutions in countries where the criminalization of Obeah and witchcraft persist in the 21st century.

Vanicléia Silva Santos: 'Revisiting bolsas de mandinga Among the Early Black Atlantic: Tradition, Innovation, and People'

What distinguishes Brazil's *bolsas de mandinga* from others? Professor Santos revisits the agency of these objects that she began studying 20 years ago. These amulets represent both tradition and innovation. She considers the interconnections of ideas surrounding objects of protection. She provides several examples of *bolsas de mandinga* found in the Portuguese National Archive of Torre do Tombo. She asks us to consider the social plasticity of material conditions that allowed the production of these amulets of protection. This leads us to think about the impact of the knowledge that circulated among the early Black Atlantic. And she expands the meaning of the object in the context of racial colonialism and enslavement.

Lexie Cook: 'And the Word Became Flesh': Bolsas, Relics, & the Experience of Incarnation'

African mandingueiros did not just craft amulets they crafted experiences. In fact, "experience" (*experiência*) is the precise word that early mandingueiros like Patrício de Andrade (1690), Francisco (1700) and Jacques Viegas (1704) used to describe the spectacular, death-defying demonstrations they staged of the protective powers of their amulets for onlookers and potential clients. In the words of Viegas, it was the firsthand "experience" of its powers that "assured" the client that an amulet would deliver on the promise of its maker and protect its wearer from bodily harm. In a world where ordinary life was marked by the threat of violence on a quotidian (street fights and duels) and world-historical (the Atlantic slave trade) scale, these experiences both dramatized and promised a solution to the essential vulnerability of the incarnated body, transforming mortal coil into psychic armor. Yet in the repertoire of the mandingueiro we find not only a set of techniques developed to produce experiences, but a larger practice of experimentation and experiential truth, one that, before the law, constituted a claim on the nature of experience itself. In this short intervention we will reconstruct one mandingueiro's practical approach to problems of incarnation and experience, with an eye towards expanding the field of actors, institutions, and geographies typically associated with the debates over experience in this period.

Monique Allewaert: 'Fugitive Signs: François Makandal, Kongo-Atlantic Semiosis, and Literary Form'

This presentation explores the semiotic elements of François Makandal's power objects by intersecting Cécile Fromont's work on Early Modern bundles with Barbaro Martínez Ruiz's documentation of Kongo-Atlantic graphic writing. The talk proposes that aspects of Kongo-Atlantic signs figured in Makandal's artifacts, which suggests that this Kongo-Atlantic symbology circulated in eighteenth-century St. Domingue. The talk concludes with a consideration of how early Haitian poet Charles Hérard-Dumesle's explicit engagement of Makandal and African traditions in his apparently neoclassical poetry might be drawing on Kongo-Atlantic semiotics (ways of producing meaning) to decolonize poetic form.