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Staff Picks

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BELKIS AYÓN, *LA CENA (THE SUPPER)*, 1991.

Last Saturday, my roommate took us to El Museo del Barrio to see “NKAME,” a haunting retrospective of the late Cuban printmaker Belkis Ayón. It is a show of paradoxes, crackling with stillness and intricate in its simplicity. Ayón’s work merges elements of Christian narrative with that of the founding mythology of the Afro-Cuban fraternal society Abakuá to establish an independent and forceful iconography of her own. Her prints are populated by androgynous, ghostly figures, featureless save for the almond-shaped eyes that peer out from their canvases in a resolute, subtly confrontational stare. One piece reimagines Da Vinci’s *The Last Supper*, but many of the scenes are more deliberately abstract, and those are the ones that are the most viscerally evocative. The show includes one of her color prints, but the rest are the result of her midcareer decision to work only in grayscale. Ayón’s true virtuosity is in her command of this palette, and the nuance of patterns she weaves into her prints is captivating. These patterns imbue the stillness of her scenes with a buzzing energy just below the surface, underscoring the archetypal uncanniness of her hybrid mythology. It was my roommate’s third time seeing the exhibition, and it is certainly one to pull you back again and again. Spend time with each print; the experience of each is a slow, mysterious revelation of masterful detail. —**Lauren Kane**