

ARTFORUM

SPOTLIGHT

Belkis Ayón

The Milk of Dreams

David Castillo



Belkis Ayón, Sin título (Cabeza Negra, Cabeza Blanca), 1999. Courtesy the Belkis Ayón Estate and David Castillo. Photo: José A. Figueroa.

Belkis Ayón is named among the artists whose work will illustrate the themes explored in the main exhibition of the upcoming 59th Venice Biennale: *The Milk of Dreams* curated by Cecilia Alemani.

From the curator's statement: "The exhibition at the Arsenale opens with the work of Belkis Ayón, an artist whose work draws on Afro-Cuban traditions to describe an imaginary matriarchal society" that exemplifies "art's myth-making potential".

Centering the art practices of women and gender-nonconforming artists, the exhibition traces a

historical trajectory across 150 years of “subjectivities, hierarchies, and anatomies” that are ever-relevant and have transformed in tandem with the urgencies of the present moment: “The pressure of technology, the heightening of social tensions, the outbreak of the pandemic, and the looming threat of environmental disaster remind us every day that as mortal bodies, we are neither invincible nor self-sufficient, but rather part of a symbiotic web of interdependencies that bind us to each other, to other species, and to the planet as a whole.”

Among the artists represented in *The Milk of Dreams* are Josephine Baker, Leonora Carrington, Nan Goldin, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, and others.

The 59th Venice Biennale takes place from April 23 - November 27, 2022.

Belkis Ayón (b. Havana, January 23, 1967; d. Havana, September 11, 1999) was a master of collagraphy—a printmaking technique where materials are collaged onto a rigid backing. She studied at San Alejandro Academy in Havana, Cuba (1986) and received her Bachelor’s degree in Engraving from the Higher Institute of Art (ISA), Havana, Cuba (1991). Ayón participated in international biennials such as the Venice Biennale, Havana Bienal, Bharat Bhavan International Biennial of Prints, India; The First International Print Biennial, Maastricht, among others. The artist’s work is held in the permanent collections of The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Wifredo Lam Contemporary Art Center, Havana; National Museum of Fine Arts, Havana; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and many others. The first U.S. museum retrospective of her work, *Nkame*, was presented at the Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles, CA (2016), and traveled to five institutions including the El Museo del Barrio, New York and the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO. Most recently, Ayón’s work was presented at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, and the 34th São Paulo Bienal, Brazil.