



AACHEN

## Belkis Ayón

LUDWIG FORUM FÜR INTERNATIONALE  
KUNST

Jülicher Straße 97-109

October 22, 2022–March 12, 2023

“Ya Estamos Aquí” (We’re Here Already), the first survey exhibition in Germany by the Cuban artist Belkis Ayón (1967–1999), features nearly seventy works from the mid-1980s to the late ’90s illustrating the characters and legends related to Abakuá, a magical and religious male secret society that originated in Nigeria and Cameroon and was brought to Cuba in the nineteenth century by enslaved people. For years Ayón was preoccupied by the story of Sikán, a mythological princess and the only female figure in Abakuá lore, according to which

she discovered a worshipped spirit in the form of a fish who shared with her the secret of power. Sworn to silence by the male organization, Sikán broke her vow and was thus condemned to death. Resurrected by Ayón across highly stylized, mostly black-and-white collagraphs, Sikán is often depicted in a majestic pose with a single fish in her lap and scales covering her skin, as in *Sikán*, or her throne, as in *La familia*, both works 1991.

In 1995, Ayón placed syncretic motifs from Abakuá in the Church of St. Barbara in Breinig (located about nine miles from Aachen), as documented in photographs displayed in vitrines here. Fourteen of Ayón’s prints from the central nave of the church, each representing one of the Stations of the Cross with Christ replaced by Sikán, fill the second gallery. The room is introduced by *Sikán* and *Mokongo*, 1991, which portray representatives of the Abakuá’s highest court, and which had flanked an altar cross in Breinig. Through these interventions, the artist confronted the church over the crime of slavery in the name of Christ. Her literally enchanting images maintain their magical effect in museums, institutions inextricable from histories of colonialism that continue to shape the here and now.

— Gürsoy Doğtaş

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<sup>1</sup> Belkis Ayón, *La sentencia* “Apártame de todo pecado”(The Sentence “Save me from all sin”), 1994 collagraphy on paper, 40 x 31”.