

Belkis Ayón and Carlos Alfonzo: Odyssey on view through May 10, 2026



Belkis Ayón and Carlos Alfonzo: Odyssey installation view, January 22, 2026. Photo by Oriol Tarridas.

MIAMI, FLA.- The aesthetic languages developed by Belkis Ayón (b.1967, Havana, Cuba–d.1999, Havana, Cuba) and Carlos Alfonzo (b.1950, Havana, Cuba–d. 1991 Miami, USA) present distinctive layers of embedded meaning. Each artist takes a strong, resolute approach to image-making. Although their individual visual styles differ, works by Ayón and Alfonzo find connection in historical myths and complex spiritualities. Raw, bold, expressive storytelling informs their work; each composition contains an unending narrative or journey.



Carlos Alfonzo (1950–1991), *Artist and the Genie*. Oil on canvas, 1987. 96 x 84 inches. On loan from Craig Robins Collection, Miami.

In tune with the world around them, both artists recognized violence and oppression. They experienced the challenges of scarcity and lack of freedoms afforded in their birth country of Cuba. Ayón and Alfonzo navigated their art in different ways, but they both received critical acclaim for their work during their lifetimes. Works by these artists continue to shape generations of artists and impact the ways in which contemporary art history takes shape. *Odyssey* provides new context to the works on view, uncovering each layer of meaning as an entry point to a transformative journey.



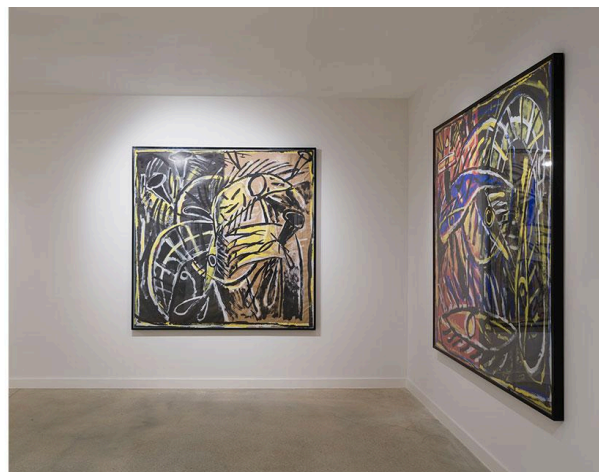
Belkis Ayón and Carlos Alfonzo: *Odyssey* installation view, January 22, 2026. Photo by Oriol Tarridas.

In the case of Ayón, her work evolved from deep research. Her approach to her distinctive subject matter evolved through experimentation and astute technical skill. She focused on collagraphy after studying printmaking at the Instituto Superior de Arte. Her skill at printmaking led to her receipt of the acclaimed Maastricht Prize in 1993. Her dedication to the medium extended beyond her work and she shared knowledge with others at ISA and beyond.



Belkis Ayón (1967–1999), Sin título (Figura blanca abajo tapándose la cara/Labertino de grecas) Collagraph, 1996. On loan from Carmen Corrales. Image courtesy of the Belkis Ayón Estate and David Castillo

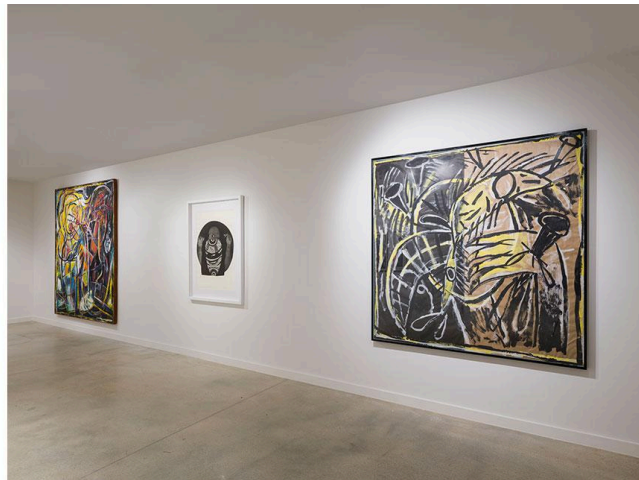
Much of Ayón's practice draws inspiration from Abakuá, an all-male Afro-Cuban religious society. These works are not meant to be understood as literal readings of spiritual traditions. Instead, they present the artist's own mythic world informed by Abakuá. Ayón's interest in Sikán stemmed in part from the way in which this mythic woman is treated within Abakuá. Her sacrifice can be understood as a metaphor for oppression. Sikán's challenges begin when she accidentally gets hold of a fish believed to bring great prosperity to whomever possesses it. As the story continues, Sikán is taken to a cave to reclaim the fish, but the fish dies. A struggle ensues and Sikán is lost through an attempt to seize her voice. Iterations of these narratives echo in Ayón's compositions.



Belkis Ayón and Carlos Alfonzo: Odyssey installation view, January 22, 2026. Photo by Oriol Tarridas.

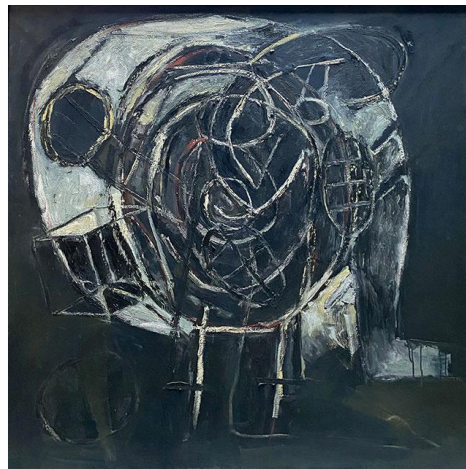
Born in Havana, Alfonzo studied at the Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes San Alejandro and the University of Havana. His first solo exhibition took place at the Amelia Peláez Gallery in Havana in 1976. In the following year, a traveling exhibition of his work visited eight Cuban cities, and in 1978, the National Museum of Fine Arts, Havana presented a solo exhibition featuring painting and ceramics.

Alfonzo left Cuba during the Mariel boatlift of 1980. In Miami, he found new sources of connection and opportunity. While he worked in various scales, large-scale paintings defined his mature work. Over the years, several exhibitions presented at Miami Dade College featured the artist's work, including solo and group exhibitions at the downtown and Little Havana campuses. His solo exhibition *Triumph of the Spirit: Carlos Alfonzo, A Survey, 1975-1991*, curated by Olga M. Viso for the Miami Art Museum, on view from December 18, 1997, to March 8, 1998 traveled to the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C.



Belkis Ayón and Carlos Alfonzo: *Odyssey* installation view, January 22, 2026. Photo by Oriol Tarridas.

Alfonzo produced paintings titled the *Circolo* series during the last fourteen months of his life with deep black passages and intense geometric and human forms. These somber, psychologically powerful paintings, like all works by both Alfonzo and Ayón, live on as a part of an endless journey. They share stories of vulnerability, mortality, and transcendence. Indeed, Ayón and Alfonzo developed their own visual languages that make their works widely recognizable.



Carlos Alfonzo (1950–1991), *Circolo #1*. Oil on canvas, 1990, 60 x 60 inches. On loan from Craig Robins Collection, Miami.

This exhibition was organized by the Museum of Art and Design at Miami Dade College. MOAD's programs are made possible with the support of the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs and the Cultural Affairs Council, the Miami-Dade County Mayor, and Board of County

Commissioners. They are sponsored in part by the State of Florida through the Division of Arts and Culture, and with generous support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.