



Yelaine Rodriguez

Drawing upon syncretic Afro-Caribbean religions and histories of slavery and colonialism, Yelaine Rodriguez uses a lush, tropical palette and intricate costuming to explore histories and futures of what might have been or could still be. In the short film *Obatala: If God Was Black & From Loiza*, Rodriguez leads us to Cueva Maria de la Cruz, a coastal cave in the predominantly Black town of Loiza, Puerto Rico. As one figure in a white dress dances barefoot, sashaying to an upbeat rhythm, facts about slavery briefly appear on screen, then just as quickly are washed away by an ocean wave, showing the present and past in a constant state of push and pull. In another scene, the deity Obatala, creator of human beings who is syncretized with Jesus, guards the front of the cave. Tasseled, adorned with cowrie shells, and venerated, Obatala seems to ask, how might history have differed if God was Black and from Loiza? In the two photographs from the series *Children of the Water*, Rodriguez presents figures in or near bodies of water and wearing the same masks as those used in *Obatala*. While the photographs show water in states of beauty, tranquility and connection, they also remind us of the realities behind its geopolitical usages. The ocean, for example, is the medium for the slave trade in the *Obatala* video, and these photographs consider how waterways and borders continue to separate migrant families in our present day.

An Afro-Dominican artistic scholar, educator, independent curator, cultural organizer and writer, Rodriguez lives and works in the Bronx, NY. Rodriguez has exhibited in various venues in the U.S. and internationally, including El Museo del Barrio, Photoville, American Museum of Natural History, and Wave Hill, all in New York City, Mexic-Arte Museum, Austin, TX, El Centro Leon Biennial XXVII, Dominican Republic, Sur Gallery & Critical Distance Centre for Curators, Canada, Wereldmuseum, Rotterdam, Netherlands, and La Escocesa, Barcelona, Spain. Residences include an innovative Cultural Advocacy Fellowship from the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute, New York, NY; The Latinx Project Curatorial Fellowship at New York University; and the Bronx Museum's AIM Program. She was a Van Leer Fellow/Winter Workspace artist-in-residence at Wave Hill in 2018. Rodriguez earned a BFA from Parsons School of Design and an MA from New York University.

—CL