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Black Ecologies

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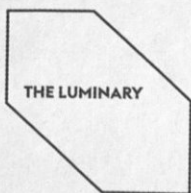
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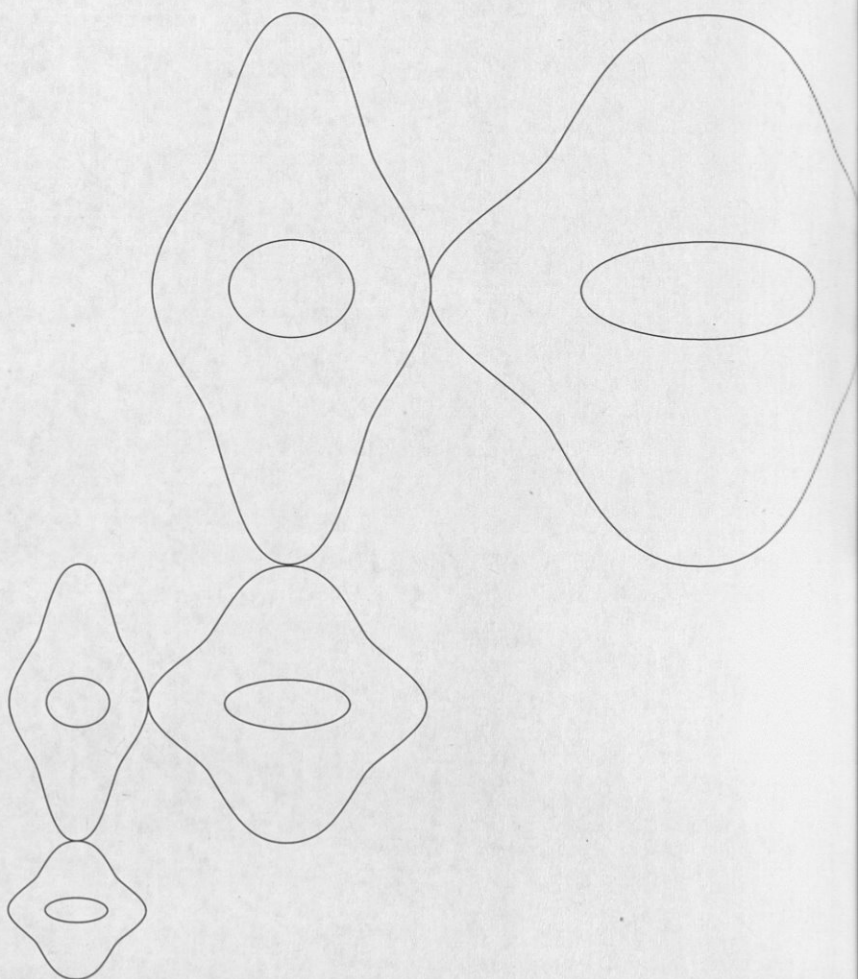
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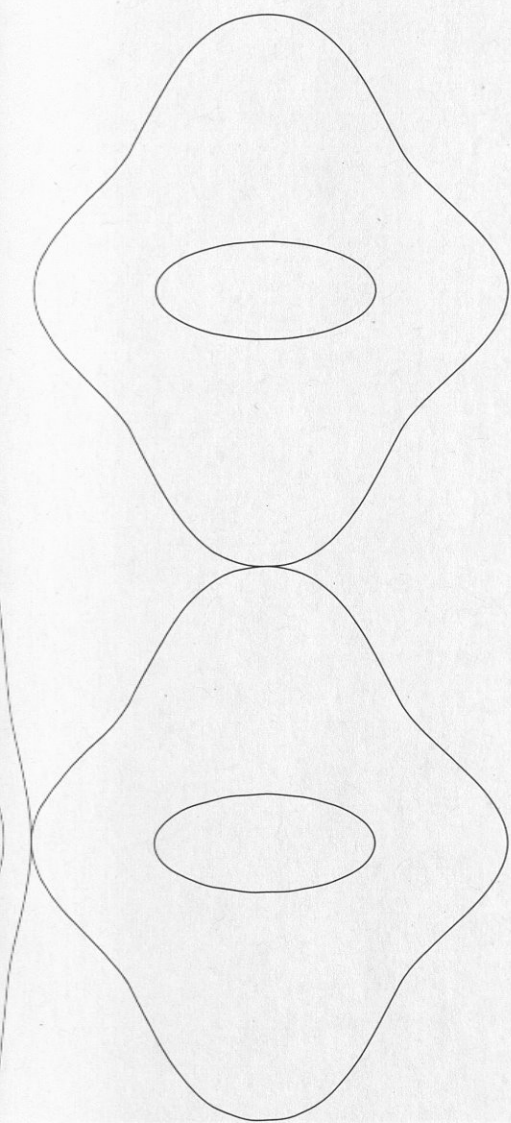
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Ghost



BY LISANDRO SURIEL



Island

Who am I? Where do I come from? Where does my story begin? I find myself marooned on an island in a state of amnesia. Here, the only thing I can remember is that I am Black.

Ghost Island came to be when the Ethiopian Sea changed its name to the Atlantic Ocean and, with it, displaced a plethora of memories. Where the waves of recollection meet you find *Ghost Island* adrift in a mist, nearly forgotten. What was once a node of ancestral knowledge has become a secret space where the memories and intuition of the African diaspora dwell—a realm of uncharted Black imagination filled with spirits, gods, figures of lore, and forgotten souls.

Black Magic





The Jumbie Parade



As a child of the diaspora, no formal institution ever introduced the idea that our history and identity might extend beyond being a descendent of slavery. *Ghost Island* seeks to build an epistemological framework and metaphor with which to document and process the dynamic and unseen influences of Caribbean identity: the Black imagination. By visually deconstructing New World imagination, *Ghost Island* seeks to uncouple the Black and/or Caribbean narrative from the colonial sphere. *Ghost Island* also stands for Suriel's own insular background in Saint Martin and connotes the New World condition of complex overlapping histories and immateriality. Suriel proposes that the imaginative lens is arguably the best with which to view how folkloric figures act as agents in history and animate cultural memory. As a documentary of imagination, *Ghost Island* posits the Black subconscious as a device for reconfiguring collective memory and reclaiming histories. Importantly, Suriel's process also includes interviews with people as a means of visual and empirical research. For *Ghost Island*, it is crucial that Suriel meets people and gets involved with the community on a more personal level. This is executed by means of audio-visual recording. In this way, oral storytelling will always be the point of departure of his research/project. The objective of this research is to understand how the local populations visualize their ancestors, deities, and folkloric figures. With *Ghost Island*, Suriel tries to answer the three fundamental questions that underlie both his artistic research practice and his own ontology: What constitutes a Caribbean and/or Black identity? How can we imagine this identity? What cognitive tools can be developed to engage with Caribbean/Black identity?

The Whispering Palm



Apparition - Mama Winti





Ichanti



Sangoma





Black and the Mystery of Salty Water

by Lisandro Surriel

In a childish attempt to escape my own naivety, I once tried to visit the unknowable Mystery who lives at the bottom of the sea. I took a dive!... and to my dismay I could not swim. Instead, I sank... and I sank... pulled down into the womb of the Great Mother as if I had been unborn. Soon Blackness overcame me, as I (be)came closer to the infinite; the living realm from whence all came:

“I am deeper than I could ever imagine... at the bottom of the sea”

As she moved about, I could feel the weight of her eternal body pressed upon mine, crushing me into a single point of existence. Suddenly... at the brink of death, the Ocean shook into me, what I had perceived to be all the memories of her life; a wisdom so vast that it killed me instantly. When I opened my eyes the darkness was gone. Or so I thought... for upon a glance at my watery reflection, I saw that she had woven the mystery of her embrace into the color of my skin:

“Now all I can remember is that I am Black...”

Have you ever drowned in the Ocean and realized you were merely gazing at her body from a rocky shore? Now that my eyes have been opened, I must try to remember what she shook into me: secrets of the cosmic womb manifested as the Blackness who lives in salty water.

“Where do I come from? Where does my story begin?”

Black is the mother of the Universe, for without her darkness, there is no beauty—no star—to behold. So Black in fact! is Yēmoja—the mother of all creation—that she appears blue! She mirrors cosmic infinity rendered right here on Earth. Unfathomable! I am a child of the sea, and my skin, a sublime reflection of her realm.

“Thanks to the Ocean, I can now see myself through the eyes of eternity...”

A photographer of magic realism and artistic researcher from the Caribbean, **Lisandro Suriel** earned his Bachelor's degree in Photography at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague and received his Master's of Art in Artistic Research at the University of Amsterdam. As part of his Master's thesis he analyzed early twentieth-century illustrations of West-Indian mythology in relation to cultural aphasia. This research forms the foundation of his ongoing artistic project *Ghost Island*.

Throughout his work Suriel has always been interested in the telling of folkloric stories that have a close relationship to his personal life. He maintains that his constructed images are an analogy to what is taking place subconsciously. Photographically, Suriel attempts to transform the empirical world into a rendering of a dreamscape, to open up the mind for imaginative thinking and pull the subconscious into existence. The use of magic realism as an artistic expression stems from the assumption that the marvelous is universal, inherently constituting a world of archetypes that everyone intuitively understands.

