

Fowler

MUSEUM AT UCLA

Press Release

Lineage through Landscape: Tracing Egun in Brazil by Fran Siegel

July 23–December 10, 2017



Los Angeles, CA—The Fowler Museum at UCLA presents *Lineage through Landscape: Tracing Egun in Brazil*, a large-scale multifaceted drawing installation by Los Angeles-based artist Fran Siegel. The exhibition, which runs July 23 through Dec. 10, considers the potential of Afro-Brazilians to transcend global displacement through ancestral rituals as well as the symbolic systems that keep their connections to Africa alive. It is part of the museum's three-part exhibition program for Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA, exploring Brazil's African history and cultural heritage.

Siegel was inspired by a richly layered fabric ensemble viewed in the Fowler's collection. This particular ensemble was worn during the worship of Egun, or ancestral spirits central to the Afro-Brazilian religion of Candomblé.* The Egun still serve as protectors of society, and ceremonies for them have been regularly held since 1820 in two Candomblé congregations on the island of Itaparica, which is located off the coast of the city of Salvador in the state of Bahia in northeastern Brazil. The roots of this practice can be traced to the Yoruba peoples of West Africa, who were among those enslaved by the Portuguese and transported to Salvador to work on sugar plantations and to mine gold in the country's interior.

Siegel wanted to embody Egun in her work. Her research took her to Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo on a Fulbright Fellowship to study the history and rituals of Candomblé. This was followed by a residency at the Instituto Sacatar on Itaparica, focusing on the Egun. There Siegel was given special access to ritual experts, from whom she learned about sacred plants grown in preserves on the island, many of which derive from or are cognates with those from Africa. The leaves of these plants are believed to have spiritual force as well as medicinal and protective potencies. Their varied depictions dominate Siegel's installation underscoring their sacred significance within Candomblé, and also acting as surrogates for the ways that landscape can embed Africa in Brazil.

* The Fowler's Egun ensemble will be on view in the Fowler's Getty Gallery as part of *Axé Bahia: The Power of Art in an Afro-Brazilian Metropolis*, September 24, 2017–April 15, 2018.

This 35-foot-long woven drawing gives form to Siegel's layered and fragmented narrative concerning place and history, memory and heritage. The vertical elements or "warp threads" are constructed mostly from strips of diaphanous fabric interspersed with lengths of deep blue cyanotypes of actual leaves and of floral cloth printed in Brazil. The horizontal weft is mostly strips of translucent drafting vellum covered with delicate drawings in shades of blue depicting the sacred plant life of the ancestral landscape. The grid formed by the overlapping materials references the distinctive blue and white ceramic tiles used by the Portuguese to decorate colonial churches and other elite architecture in Salvador. These tiles are a reminder of the city's former colonial domination.

"The current mismatched state of these tiles—fractured and reassembled over the years—is to me a metaphor for the nonlinear reconstruction of African heritage in Bahia," Siegel said.

Tracery painted in gold on the vellum further underscores this vexed history and moves the narrative to Rio de Janeiro, the port city to which the Portuguese moved their capital from Salvador in the 18th century because of its proximity to the gold mines in Minas Gerais. Gold once mined by enslaved Africans also adorns the interiors of Salvador's Catholic churches, a marker of Portugal's former wealth and power. Likewise gold and other reflective surfaces are sacred signifiers in Candomblé, and are seen in the shimmering fabric and mirrors of the Fowler's Egun ensemble.

Elegantly crafted and deeply nuanced in its use of materials and techniques, *Lineage through Landscape* will be installed to wrap around three walls of the museum's Fowler in Focus Gallery. Hand-sculpted, bone-like porcelain leaves suspended from the wall give physical form to the myriad representations in the drawing, and sharpen our knowledge of Itaparica's powerful botanical legacy.

About the Artist

Fran Siegel received her MFA from Yale University School of Art and her BFA from Tyler School of Art at Temple University. Recent exhibition venues include ACME., Los Angeles; Lesley Heller Workspace, New York; Williamson Gallery, ArtCenter College of Design, Pasadena, California; The Museum of Arts and Design, New York; Art, Design and Architecture Museum at the University of California, Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, California. Siegel's work is included in the collections of Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut. Siegel is currently a professor in the School of Art at California State University, Long Beach.

Credit

Lineage through Landscape: Tracing Egun in Brazil by Fran Siegel is organized by the Fowler Museum and curated by Marla C. Berns, Shirley and Ralph Shapiro Director. The exhibition is made possible thanks to a grant from The Philip and Muriel Berman Foundation. Fran Siegel's research for this project was supported by a Fulbright Social Sciences and Humanities Award and by a residency at the Instituto Sacatar in Bahia, Brazil.

Presented as part of Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA, *Lineage through Landscape* is part of a three-part exhibition program exploring Brazil's African history and cultural heritage, which includes ***Axé Bahia: The Power of Art in an Afro-Brazilian Metropolis*** (September 24, 2017–April 15, 2018) and ***Africa/Americas: Photographic Portraits by Pierre Verger*** (September 10, 2017–January 21, 2018).

About Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA

Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA, is a far-reaching and ambitious exploration of Latin American and Latino art in dialogue with Los Angeles. Supported by grants from the Getty Foundation, Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA takes place from September 2017 through January 2018 at more than 70 cultural institutions across Southern California, from Los Angeles to Palm Springs, and from San Diego to Santa Barbara. Pacific Standard Time is an initiative of the Getty. The presenting sponsor is Bank of America.



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About the Fowler Museum

The Fowler Museum at UCLA explores global arts and cultures with an emphasis on works from Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and the Americas—past and present. The Fowler enhances understanding of world cultures through dynamic exhibitions, publications, and public programs, informed by interdisciplinary approaches and the perspectives of the cultures represented. Also featured is the work of international contemporary artists presented within the complex frameworks of politics, culture, and social action.

Fowler Museum at UCLA

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fowler.ucla.edu

Admission to the Fowler is free.

Hours: Wednesday 12–8pm and Thursday–Sunday 12–5pm

Parking available in UCLA Lot 4, 221 Westwood Plaza at Sunset Blvd., \$3/hr (maximum \$12/day)

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Caption:

Fran Siegel (b. 1960, New York, NY)

Lineage through Landscape: Tracing Egun in Brazil (installation view), 2015–2017

Suspended Drawing: pencil, pigment, gold leaf, string, and collage on cut drafting film, scrim, cyanotype, sewn and printed fabric

Leaves: porcelain

Length (drawing): 10.97 m

Commissioned by the Fowler Museum at UCLA; Collection of the artist