

La Sombra Series – Wendy Phillips, Ph.D, LMFT, REACE



La Sombra Series #2 by Wendy Phillips

My conceptual work is informed and inspired by the ethnographic research project I have been doing with women of African and North American indigenous descent in the communities of the coastal states of Oaxaca and Guerrero, Mexico over the last ten years. “La Sombra Series” is informed by the traditional belief among women in these communities that illnesses and instances of spiritual disharmony and disequilibrium occur when an aspect of an individual called *La Sombra*, also known as the soul, or shadow, becomes lost or endangered. *La Sombra* must be "caught" or "called back" to its owner so that equilibrium may be restored, making healing possible. The traditional healer, *La Curandera* who specializes in the illness, *Espanto* performs the appropriate healing ritual. In this body of work, I have photographed objects that I imagine represent *La Sombra*. The images also reflect my musings about the feminine archetype.

I made the photographs in my garden using an experimental camera called a Holga. I printed them on fiber based photographic paper in the darkroom, and then toned them with selenium, a metal solution incorporating traditional and historical photographic processes. The work in the darkroom is for me, pure alchemy. The traditional darkroom is one of my favorite spaces.

La Limpia Project

NOTE: "La Limpia" means "Energetic Cleansing"

This work is based in my search for the beliefs, philosophies, and healing practices that may have been those of my ancestors. Written records of world history, as well as the oral histories of my ancestors inform me of my West African and Native American (Iroquois) heritage. Unfortunately, the cultural and political climate in which my great-grandmothers lived did not encourage or permit the holding on to, practice, or expression of their traditional West African and North American indigenous beliefs and healing practices and all but a few nuances of these were lost to me.

My research on the people of African and indigenous descent who live on the southern coast of Mexico has included an ethnographic research project about women's traditional beliefs and ritual practices and at the same time making black and white photographs including portraiture and documentation of rituals and daily life in their communities. From the women there, I have learned about how a woman protects herself from negative spiritual influences in pregnancy and after the birth of her infant, rituals for energetic cleansing and the treatment of illness, and rites marking an individual's passage from this world into the next. Although the women do not identify themselves or know that they are of African descent, their rituals and practices seem to refer to Akan and Yoruba (African) practices and use of symbols. As I spent time with the Mexican women, learning about their traditions, I felt as if I had found the knowledge that my foremothers were unable to pass down to me.

Thinking about what the Mexican women taught me, I made portraits of myself together with the objects and materials that are components of their traditional African-North American indigenous rituals. My body gestures refer to ways of positioning the body that confer meaning according to Kongo spiritual and cultural systems. In the Kongo culture, bodily gestures represent those personal characteristics that are valued. These gestures are often seen in Kongo sculptural art. I also made still lifes of the objects that are symbols or are important components of the rituals. Here, my body is the location of the ritual. These images are about the way I have thought about these practices in relation to my own soul, and spirit. The images are printed by silver gelatin process on fiber then they are sepia toned. Certain objects in each composition are highlighted by surface painting using gold leaf and mica pigments.

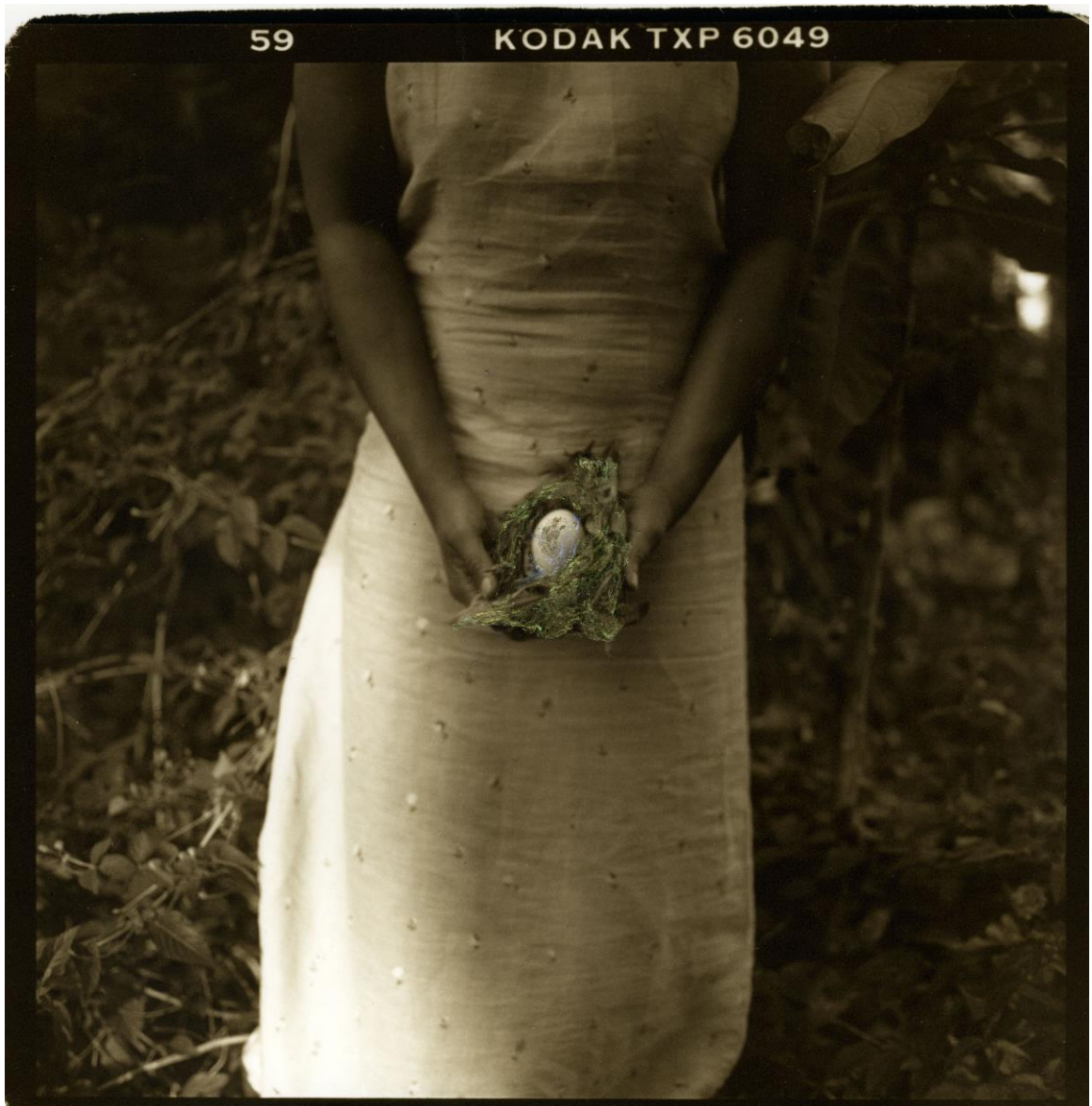
Serie "La Limpia"
"La Limpia" quiere decir "La Purificacion"

La inspiracion para este proyecto llego de las viajes que hice, y de mis experiencias en la busqueda de las creencias, las filosofias, y los rituales de mis antepasados. Entendi que mis antepasados eran de Africa y de las comunidades indigenas de Norte America. Desgraciadamente, el ambiente de los EEUU en los siglos XVII, XVIII, and XIX no permitio la expresion de los rituales ni las practicas de los sistemas de la medicina tradicionales que pertenecieron a mis antepasados. Por esas razones, no era posible que las mujeres de mi familia podian pasar sus practicas tras las generaciones.

En mis investigaciones en las comunidades Afromestizos de Guerrero y Oaxaca Mexico, estude con las mujeres de las comunidades para aprender aspectos de sus practicas tradiciones para sanar y sus rituales metafisicas. Aprendi practicas de proteccion para una mujer durante el embarazo y despues del parto, rituales de purificacion, y rituales para curar enfermedades, Aun si las mujeres de la Costa Chica no se identificaban como personsas de la decendencia Africana, hay resonancias entre practicas y sus tradiciones y las de la gente de regiones de Africa y del Caribe. Cuando convivia con las mujeres de la Costa Chica de Oaxaca y Guerrero, para aprender de sus tradiciones ,sentí que yo habia encontrado algo de la sabiduria que mis teterabuelas que por sus circunstancias no podian compartir conmigo.

Pensando en lo que me enseñaron las mujeres Afro-Mestizas, hice autoretratos de mi cuerpo conjunto con los objetos y los materiales que son componentes de sus rituales en el ambiente de mi jardin.

Las imagenes representan mis pensamientos y mis reflexiones sobre la relacion entre los rituales y mi cuerpo, mi alma y mi espiritu. Las imagenes son de plata geletina sobre papel de fibre con sepia con pigmentos de oro y otros metales.



La Limpia #22 by Wendy Phillips

My Mother's Trunk

When my mother died, I inherited the responsibility of taking care of the belongings of three generations stored in our family home. As an only child, the responsibility was all mine. Among the contents of the garage was an imposing, very old trunk. My aunt explained that it was my mother's trunk from her time at college.

My mother and her sister struck out from the village of Scottsville, New York by train, headed for Wilberforce University, an Historically Black University in Ohio, founded after the abolition of slavery. The two secured scholarships and I remember my mother's story that she found a wealthy patron in her village to buy her train ticket to get there. This was in 1941. So I knew I needed to keep the trunk, but my grief was too deep to open it. I had it moved to the basement of my home in Atlanta, Georgia where it sat for almost 30 years. When we moved from our house to an apartment, I had the trunk shipped to my studio.

When the trunk arrived in my studio, first I began photographing the exterior. It took me several days to open it. Since my mom died when I was a very young adult, we didn't have the opportunity to talk about her own young adult and college life. I was not sure what I would find buried inside. I finally opened it and began photographing the contents layer by layer.

In the first layer, I found handwritten class assignments for her courses in social work, written in beautiful penmanship in blue ink. I also found books and doodles and sketches I imagined she made when she was bored in class. The next layer was clothing and a built in chest of drawers. I found skirts and blouses inside, even her undergarments. Below the chest were mementos and letters and gifts from her sweethearts.

I made still lifes of the objects using film and then made silver gelatin prints on fiber and toned them with selenium.

El Baul de Mi Mama -

Cuando se fallecio mi mama, yo tenia la responsabilidad de cuidar a sus pertenencias y tambien las de 3 generaciones de nuestra familia. Como la unica hija, yo tenia toda la responsabilidad. Entre las cosas guardada en el garaje encontré un baúl enorme, y muy antigua.

Mi tia, la hermana de me mama me dijo que que el baul era de mi mama donde guardo sus cosas que uso cuando era estudianta en la universidad. Mi mama y su hermana atraverciern desde su pueblo en el estado de Nueva York a la Universidad "Wilberforce" una universidad HBCU fundado por personas Africanas Americanas después de la abolición de la esclavitud. Las dos recibieron becas y me acuerdo de que mi mama me contó que una persona rica de su pueblo les compro sus boletos del tren. El ano era 1941. Tome la decision que iba a guardar el baúl. In mi tristeza, no podia abrirlo. Lo mande a

mi casa en Atlanta, Georgia, donde me cambio después de su muerte de mi mama. Se quedo cerrado en mi casa por 30 anos.

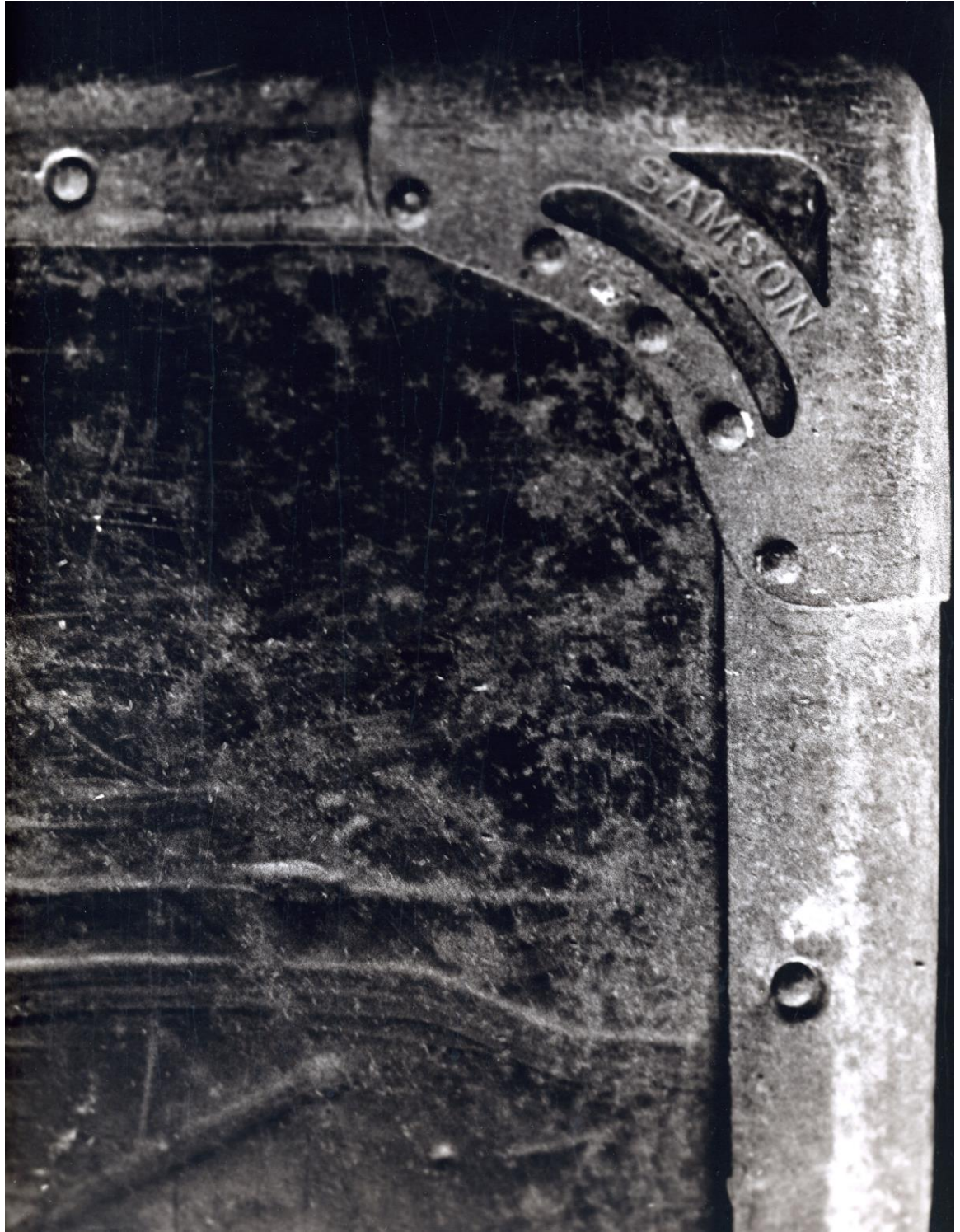
Cuando nos cambio de nuestra casa a un departamento, movimos el baúl a mi taller.

Cuando llego el baúl a mi taller, primero, hice fotos del exterior. Espere unos cuantos dias antes de abrirlo. Mi mama se falleció cuando era una adulta muy joven. No tuvimos la oportunidad de hablar de su propia vida como una adulta joven ni sus experiencias en la universidad. No sentí segura de lo que iba a encontrar adentro del baul. Cuando por fin lo abrí, hice las fotos de los objetos, capa por capa.

En la primera capa, encuentre sus tareas de su programa de trabajadores sociales escrito por mano. Formo letras muy finas en tinto azul. Tambien encontré garabatos y dibujos que me imagino que hice cuando estaba aburrída en sus clases.

Abajo de sus documentos, encuentre un mueble con gavetas. Adentro encuentre su ropa, faldas, blusas, hasta su ropa interior. Abajo de todo, habían sus libros, y sus recuerdos, y sus mementos de su sororidad, y de sus novios.

Hice naturalezas muertas de los objetos. Las fotos son de plata gelatina sobre papel de fibre



My Mother's Trunk #14 by Wendy Phillips

El Colectivo Macondo Expressive Arts Training Institute
www.elcolectivomacondo.com www.diasporacitizen.com
www.blog.diasporacitizen.com

El Colectivo Macondo is inspired by the imagined town of the same name from Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel, One Hundred Years of Solitude. Macondo symbolizes the entirety of Latin America, focusing especially on its cultural richness, Our objective is to introduce students to the popular art of the different cultures of Latin America: the indigenous, the European, and the African. We will study the manifestations of culture in the arts, creative processes and techniques, ceremonies and rites, churches, markets, archaeological ruins, and culinary traditions all of which are fundamental aspects of culture. Throughout our experiences we will work Multimodally, moving from one process to the next as we explore the naturally occurring and culturally relevant Expressive components of traditional. Popular Art and ritual practices. The name of our collective, Macondo refers to its work and purpose: the diffusion (via the arts) of the cultural richness of Latin America.

El nombre de nuestro Colectivo Macondo, tiene como inspiracion el pueblo imaginario de la novela de Cien anos de Soledad del escritor Gabriel Gacia Marquez. Macondo simboliza la unidad latinoamericana, se centra esencialmente en su riqueza cultural. Nnuestro objetivo es la intoduccion de los estudiantes al arte popular de las diferentes culturas en Latinoamerica, las indigenas, europeas y africanas . El curso estudiara sus manifestaciones culturales en las artes, los procesos creativos y tecnicas, , ritos y ceremonias, sus iglesias, mercados, piramides y tradiciones culinaria.Estas tradiciones son parte fundamental de su cultura. En todas nuestras experiencias trabajamos por los procesos "Multimodal", moviendo desde una via de expresion al la otra mientras explorando los aspectos de las practicas del Arte Popular, las tradiciones culturales, y los rituales que pueden informar el trabajo con nuestros clientes y en nuestras comunidades. El nombre de nuestro colectivo Macondo tiene como objetivo y proposito la difusion (via las artes) de la riqueza cultural en Latinoamerica.

We offer workshops in Mexico and also two Certificate Programs including an Online – Skype, and email program.

Ofrecemos talleres en Mexico y tambien dos programas con diploma con una opcion para participar en el programa complete por Skype y el correo electronico.