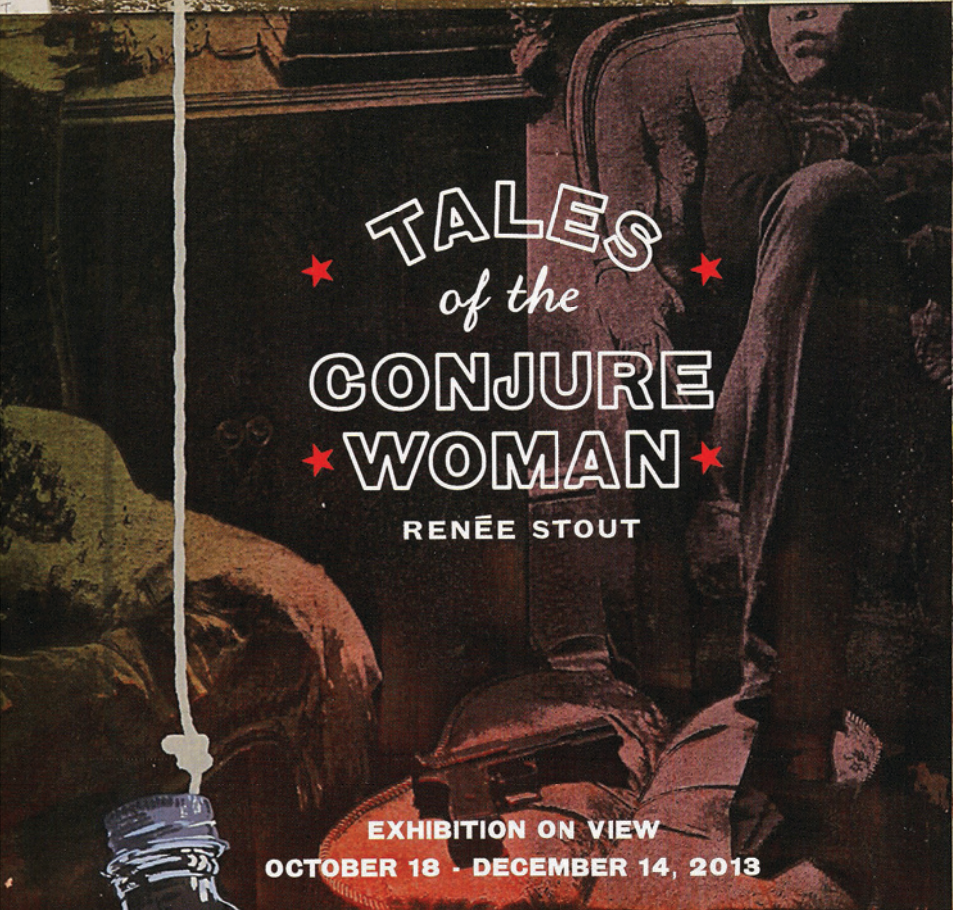




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★ TALES ★
of the
CONJURE
★ WOMAN ★

RENÉE STOUT

EXHIBITION ON VIEW
OCTOBER 18 - DECEMBER 14, 2013

287
432
9981
5
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draft #1
617
813

FATIMA

Not even death will end your possession of me. I searched for a home and you lead me to this old place we visited a decade before.

Now I may never have the distance I need. A faded picture of you as a young woman moves mysteriously from room to room and turns up in the strangest places. This house needs so much but I belong here.

BECK'S
-78998

Abbreviated interview with Fatima Mayfield (Renée Stout's alter ego) conducted by Dr. O (Ade Ofunniyin's alter ego). The full interview can be read in the exhibition catalogue and on our website.

Dr. O: What was your childhood like, once it was discovered that you had the gift of sight?

Fatima Mayfield: As a child, I never felt like I had the "gift of sight," but, rather, that I was extremely aware of and sensitive to other people's moods and feelings. As an adult, that sensitivity has only become more acute. In a strange way, I'm more empathic than anything else, and that can cause problems when I have close friends who can't seem to work out the "drama" in their lives.

There have been incidents, like the riots over Rodney King, 9/11, and Hurricane Katrina, where, days before, I announced that something major was going to occur, because I would suddenly have an unexplained panic attack. When I was younger, I remember that my mother and all of her sisters had experienced "a vision" a time or two, and when I was a child, my mother and, my aunt were both visited by the ghost of a man in our family home on separate occasions, and were amazed, once they later compared descriptions on what they had seen and found, that their descriptions matched.

Dr. O: Do you know of any of your ancestors who are believed to have been conjurers or healers?

ROOTS & READINGS

MONDAY-THURSDAY 9^{am}-6^{pm}

SPIRITUAL SUPPLIES



FM: This wasn't the kind of information that my mother would have volunteered out of nowhere, but I guess, because I asked, she told me that her great aunt had been a minister who also practiced root work and folk medicine, even though the root work part of it was never really openly discussed. At the time my mother told me this, my maternal grandmother, who died last month at ninety-four, was still alive. I would have asked her, except that she was a devout Christian, and she made it known that she was not interested in my work when she saw a chicken foot I had placed in a jar in one of my pieces in an early exhibition. I'm quite sure that she would have shut me down



immediately if I had started a line of questioning concerning Hoodoo within the family.

I feel that my initial interest in any kind of African-based spiritual beliefs was triggered by seeing a Nkisi Nkondi, when I was taking Saturday art classes at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Museum as a child, around ten years old. That image burned in my memory, coupled with the fact that, around 1986, I discovered a local spiritual supply store (root store) called Clover Horn. In 1989, I made the first of many trips to New Orleans. That was what blew the lid off of everything. The more I encountered, the more I researched to find more information to connect the dots of these experiences.

Dr. O: Music and numerology seem to be important to your work. Both appear to be subdued, but suggest coded messages. Are you communicating messages that are intended for a particular kind of viewer and/or listener/seeker?

FM: Music is important to me. As a child, I really wanted to be a musician before I wanted to be a visual artist. My grandfather had taught himself to play many musical instruments, and loved playing blues with some of his neighborhood friends in his yard on warm summer nights back in Pittsburgh. That's where I learned to love the blues. Later, I loved it even more when I started to catch and understand the Hoodoo references in it.

I once asked for a violin, but never received it, so I channeled my creative impulses into drawing and painting. Somehow, music has always been a backdrop to everything I do, so when it comes to making work in my studio, I naturally want to hear music. Sometimes, the music dictates the art that I make, and sometimes the work I make dictates the music I feel like listening to. Either way, music is an important part of my process.

Sometimes, the piece is so influenced by the music that, as I complete a work and write the title and other information on the reverse, I will include the titles of the songs or particular album I was listening to as I worked. I do this so that if the piece is eventually purchased, its owner can get a sense of the mental space I was in during

the creation of the piece by listening to the song or songs that I was listening to.

Dr. O: Do you believe that the interest in conjure is growing or declining?

FM: From what I've seen, the interest in Hoodoo/conjure seems to be fading somewhat, because it's not being passed on the way it used to be. Dr. Katrina Hazzard-Donald has written a book that addresses the issue specifically. There are myriad reasons that the practice of Hoodoo and conjure is in decline in both urban and rural African American communities. She goes into depth on many of the reasons, including the fact that many of the traditional methods have been lost, only to be replaced by meaningless products being sold in shops that have no real cultural or



spiritual ties to the African American community. And yet, it does seem that the belief and participation in Yoruba, Santeria, and other African-derived spiritual belief systems seems to be growing.

Dr. O: What influences your continued interest in conjure?

FM: The thing that continues to influence my interest in the history of root-working and conjure is that it hasn't been as fully researched and documented in the way other belief systems in the world have been. During the Civil Rights Movement, black Americans seemed to have openly embraced everything from their natural hair texture and skin color to African-style clothing, yet, to this day, while there are a few younger people who seem to be embracing the African-based systems like Yoruba, Palo, etc., African-derived spiritual belief systems and Hoodoo seem to remain a relative taboo. In other words, you can sport your dreadlocks and a dashiki, but you'd better not profess to be

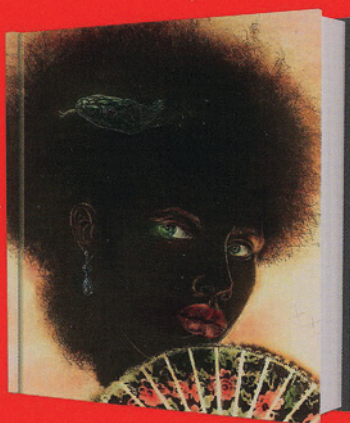
anything other than Christian.

Part of the reason why I make the kind of work that I make is that it's my way of honoring the ancestors and asserting that, as an African American woman, I owe it to them and myself to keep that door open. When some people in the community try to close that door, I'm going to keep sticking my foot in the way, metaphorically, through my work.



ABOUT DR. O

Ade Ofunniyin (Gullah conjuring consultant and interviewer) is a native Charlestonian. Also known as Dr. O, he has a BA in social science from Fordham University and a MA and a Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Florida. He is a cultural anthropologist and curator with a special interest in multiculturalism and diversity. Ofunniyin is the grandson of the renowned Charleston artisan blacksmith Philip Simmons.



EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

\$39.95

Hardcover

174 pages

Includes a forward by Dr. Andrea Barnwell Brownlee, essays by Mark Sloan and Kevin Young, an interview of Fatima Mayfield conducted by Dr. O. (Ade Ofunniyin), and a conjuring glossary.

TO PURCHASE THE EXHIBITION CATALOGUE, stop by the galleries, call 843.953.4422, or visit halsey.cofc.edu/support/publications.

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RENÉE STOUT'S WORK

explores the contours of the African American experience and the existence of an underground system of African-derived folk beliefs as transmitted from slavery to the present. This system, known variously as Hoodoo or conjuring, has its origins in herbal medicine, root work, and a belief in the spiritual attributes of plants and animals. For many years, the artist has used the alter ego Fatima Mayfield, a

fictitious herbalist-fortune teller, as a vehicle to role-play and confront such issues as romantic relationships, social ills, or financial woes in a way that is open, creative, and humorous.

Tales of the Conjure Woman offers a peek into a fascinating world ruled by superstition and ancestral wisdom. Fatima Mayfield offers her best advice and works her roots. Renée Stout is an able guide, but she only leaves a trail. Her role is to awaken us to the unseen forces at work all around us—to heighten our senses. Through her art we are presented a prism that enables us to view a particular aspect of the rich traditions and cultural practices of African America.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE ARTIST

Friday October 18, 5:30-6:30PM
Artist lecture with Renée Stout
Room 309
Simons Center for the Arts

JOIN US FOR THE OPENING RECEPTION

Friday October 18, 6:30-8PM
Enjoy complimentary refreshments and hors d'oeuvres provided by ICEBOX, Sapporo, and Whole Foods Market.

MEET THE ARTIST

Saturday October 19, 2PM
Exhibition walk-through with Renée Stout.

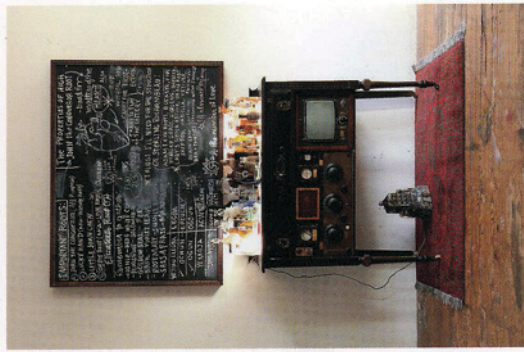
JOIN US FOR AN INTIMATE MEMBERS-ONLY TOUR

Thursday December 12, 6PM
Members-only tour with the exhibition's curator Mark Sloan, Halsey Institute director.



TALES of the CONJURE WOMAN

★ EXHIBITION ON VIEW OCTOBER 18 - DECEMBER 14, 2013 ★



HAISEY INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART
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PARKING is available in the St. Philip and George Street Garages.

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BOOK A GUIDED TOUR

Free tours are led by knowledgeable and experienced guides and can be adapted to different time lengths, group sizes, and ages. Contact Lizz Biswell at Biswell@cofc.edu or 843.953.5957

TALES OF THE CONJURE WOMAN WAS PRODUCED BY THE HAISEY INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART and coorganized with the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art and the Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art, Hamilton College

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HAISEY INSTITUTE
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