

In Burkina Faso, Africa with photographer Cheryl Koralik, we discover the tribal masques and raffia dress and adornments worn in Animist ceremonies. Animism believes that not only humans but all natural phenomena, natural objects, and the universe, embody a soul or spirit. Animists propagate the doctrine that the soul is the main driving force of life.



CHERYL KORALIK
Masque Bobo Close-Up
Pigment Print, 22x17
Copyright: Cheryl Koralik
Courtesy of Elisa Contemporary Art

She has captured the other-worldly essence of these rituals. According to photographer Cheryl Koralik, *“One day, while driving through Bobo she saw men adorned in raffia [straw-like fiber] running through the streets with whips. I followed the men and discovered a whole new world—the spirit world of West Africa and the sacred masques. The chief of the village had died and, for weeks on end, the funeral rites would continue. Tradition played its role as guns fired in salute, the women sang a cappella and, as the balafons began to play, the sacred masques danced themselves into trances, acting as mediators while channeling the supernatural world of the dead in order to safely lead the deceased’s soul to rest with those of his ancestors: ceremonial protection through animistic beliefs, the spirit world unveiled [...] Thus began for me a new quest, a new photographic endeavor and a new journey—one filled with passion and magic that would take me to several West African countries.”*

Cheryl Koralik’s career as a photographer began while studying at Columbia College in Chicago under the tutelage of Bob Thall, Ruth Thorne-Thomsen and Alan Cohen. After decades as a successful fashion and advertising photographer, Cheryl moved in a new direction. She began to explore a photojournalistic path and traveled to India and Burkina Faso on humanitarian assignments with a non-governmental organization. This is when she discovered the West African masques. And, suddenly, with an organic force and a passionate surge of obligation, her life changed completely. She found her true voice. Thus began a new chapter in her photographic career—the masque series. Over the next two decades, she made several expeditions to various West African countries, researching and photographing tribal masques—mediums of the spirit world—and their associated rituals.

In early 2016, the Bronx based photographer John Conn spent a month in Cuba capturing the atmosphere of the 1950s-era, created by its cars and Spanish-colonial architecture, as well as the Timeworn but magnificent, dilapidated but dignified surroundings and the Cuban people. As a freelance photographer and writer, Conn has captured a range of subjects photojournalism delving into political and social issues, nature and landscapes, architecture, and underwater images. Starting in 1970, Conn travelled to South Africa capturing images of the people and social divide of Apartheid. Throughout his career he has captured images including homelessness, Subway violence, hospital and hospice care. In 2010, John Conn spent 45 days in Antarctica and Patagonia, traveling and hiking to capture the land and seascapes. He spent over 20 days journeying over 3,200 nautical miles in Antarctica before heading to Patagonia for the second part of his expedition. In 2014 John began a series of treks across the US photographing Americans, similar to Robert Frank’s journeys in the late 1950’s. In early 2016, he spent a month in Cuba photographing the people and their surroundings. Montreal based artist, Marie Danielle Leblanc takes us to the Mountains of Nepal, where she traveled in 2014

though Annapurna and Thorong La over 17,769 feet above sea level and throughout the Himalayan Region which includes eight of the existing 14 highest summits in the world. Her paintings transform landscapes into poetic worlds. The artist loves to work with matter, her creativity leading to a never-ending fascination. She has developed her own style, almost her own signature. Her work leads toward the creation of a bare space, a world that can be discovered and contemplated. She presents us with the result of a meditative process, the testimony of a new contemplation of the horizon.

Back down to earth, Ferdinanda Florence takes us through the industrial streets of Vallejo California. Born in Washington, DC, and growing up in Arlington, VA, Florence is a second-generation Armenian-American. She has explored in her research the role of place in artistic expression. Her Master’s thesis detailed the link between Armenian religious rituals and church architecture. In her artwork, she uses industrial sites in her home city of Vallejo to explore issues of place on a more personal level.

Alexis Duque was born in Colombia 1971 and currently lives and works in New York City. In this exhibition he takes us through the transformed skyscrapers of New York City, as reimagined with a Colombian hillside perspective. His works rely on just a few colors. Notwithstanding the use of acrylic paint, he makes the influence of illustration apparent, equally attending to all of the aspects of the painted surface without leaving anything to chance. Duque introduces architectural features that are characteristic of the Western Civilization, from ancient Greece and Rome: columns, capitals, and niches. They are symbols of the bygone ruling culture and the aesthetic model of the European colonizers, now an integral part of daily life of the populations of Latin America.

Yasemin Kackar Demirel builds her cityscapes with fragments of all the places she has lived and visited including Turkey, Chicago, and New York. According to Demirel, *“I portray my reminiscences of places, which I then transform onto the image’s surface by colors, shapes and patterns. I believe every place and every memory of a place is fragmental and can be broken down to its constituents. Taken out of their context, reconstructing and remapping elements that I once personally experienced enables me to express abstracted narratives.”* She was born in Istanbul and currently lives in New York. Her work is a fragmented and reconstructed journey through the places she has lived and traveled, both real and imagined. The Elisa Contemporary Art Gallery in NYC currently represents a portfolio of emerging through mid-career contemporary artists. Gallery founder, Lisa Cooper states that its artists are those exploring and testing the boundaries of various media, techniques, materials and ideas about humanity or nature.

Journey Around the World



ALEXIS DUCQUE
Uptown
Acrylic on Canvas, 36x48
Courtesy of Elisa Contemporary Art



CHERYL KORALIK
Masque Bobo Posed
Pigment Print, 17x22
Copyright: Cheryl Koralik.
Courtesy of Elisa Contemporary Art