

HAGGERTY MUSEUM OF ART

*MARÍA
MAGDALENA
CAMPOS-PONS:
SEA AND SELF*

AUGUST 20 – DECEMBER 19, 2021





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*DIRECTOR'S
FOREWORD*

The Haggerty Museum of Art’s presentation of *María Magdalena Campos-Pons: Sea and Self* is the first major exhibition that the Museum has opened following a lengthy closure caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. When we originally planned to bring this remarkable exhibition to the Haggerty, we could not have imagined the way that a devastating public health crisis would separate us from each other. Now, I can’t imagine a more powerful catalyst for fully reanimating the Museum’s galleries—and for bringing us back to each other—than this body of Campos-Pons’s work.

Organizational psychologist Adam Grant recently published two articles in the *New York Times* describing the psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In “There’s a Name for the Blah You’re Feeling: It’s Called Languishing” (4/19/21), Grant defines “flourishing” (as opposed to languishing) as “the peak of well-being: You have a strong sense of meaning, mastery and mattering to others.” In “There’s a Specific Kind of Joy We’ve Been Missing” (7/10/21), Grant notes that “We find our greatest bliss in moments of collective effervescence . . . the sense of energy and harmony people feel when they come together in a group around a shared purpose.” *María Magdalena Campos-Pons: Sea and Self* re-births the Haggerty Museum of Art as an active site for both flourishing and collective effervescence. Bathing in Campos-Pons’s blue—the animation of divine light, of the bodily unconscious—reunites

us with each other, and with parts of ourselves from which many have felt disconnected. To paraphrase Elizabeth DeLoughrey’s essay, we participate in a “vision of becoming” by engaging with Campos-Pons’s metamorphoses of heaven, earth, water, spirit, mysteries, and miracles.

I’m profoundly grateful to the many people bringing this experience to the Haggerty Museum of Art. That list begins, of course, with María Magdalena Campos-Pons. I am truly grateful to the artist for this powerful body of work. I thank Tatiana Flores for both conceiving the original exhibition, and for collaborating with the Haggerty on this expanded version of it. I remain grateful to Emilia Layden, Haggerty Museum of Art Curator of Collections and Exhibitions, for her visionary and progressive curatorial work. I thank Tatiana Flores and Elizabeth DeLoughrey for contributing insightful essays that truly deepen our understanding of Campos-Pons’s work. I extend heartfelt gratitude to exhibition Presenting Sponsor the Lacey Sadoff Foundation for believing in the Haggerty Museum of Art’s work, and for knowing the critically important role that artists play in creating a thriving society. And I thank the Greater Milwaukee Foundation Mary L. Nohl Fund for generous support that helped the Museum bring this remarkable exhibition to the Milwaukee community.

Susan Longhenry
Director and Chief Curator
Haggerty Museum of Art





*SEA
AND
SELF*

TATIANA FLORES

María Magdalena Campos-Pons was born in the year that marked the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, in the province of Matanzas, home to the most beautiful beaches in Cuba and also a cradle of Afro-Cuban culture. Cuba was the next to last country in the Western Hemisphere to abolish slavery, in 1886, and Matanzas had a high concentration of sugar plantations, so its slave population was particularly large in the decades prior to emancipation, surpassing the population of free-born citizens. The artist herself was born on a sugar plantation, a descendant of Nigerian slaves, Chinese indentured servants, and Spanish immigrants. Her artistic oeuvre mirrors the complexity of her identity. She has worked in painting, sculpture, photography, performance, and video, and her art has resonated with publics around the world since she began exhibiting internationally in the late 1980s. The first Black woman to graduate from Havana's renowned art school, Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA), founded in 1976, she relocated to the United States in 1991. She continues to have a distinguished career, and her work forms part of multiple museum collections.

Campos-Pons has addressed themes relating to slavery; historical and contemporary migration; religion and spirituality; global circuits of trade; gender, race, and ethnicity; memory; personal and collective identities; and loss, among others. Her work has many points of entry and has been written about extensively. This exhibition, *Sea and Self*, examines the representation of the ocean in the artist's work.¹ Campos-

Pons has referenced the sea as a major facet of her practice throughout her career. While the works in the exhibition date from the mid-1990s to the present, this essay examines a broader range of objects so as to showcase both the complexity and constancy of the artist's engagement with it. In her words, "I come from an island. Continental experiences and borders are so meaningful, and to be surrounded by water is quite a unique and magnificently humbling thing. There is no place to go except to the sea."²

The mixed-media installation *Everything Is Separated by Water, Including My Brain, My Heart, My Sex, My House* (1990) features a female body, presumably the artist's own, symmetrically split along the vertical axis. Each half stands on an architectural pedestal and is encircled by seven rows of metal wire. Between them is a waterfall painted in a stylized manner. Above the cascading water are two boxes, one with the word "Brain" and the other spelling out "Heart." Reflecting the vogue for an expressionist manner of painting in Cuban art of the late 1980s, the piece varies stylistically from the art that Campos-Pons would later create. It meshes in both form and content, however, with the work that would follow it, evoking themes of migration, entrapment, and uprootedness, along with a fragmented body. In this case, the artist calls attention, not to the insular experience of being surrounded by water, but to the migratory condition of being divided by it. Even though it is an early work, the piece is significant as a point of departure. Part of its name—*Everything Is Separated by Water*—was

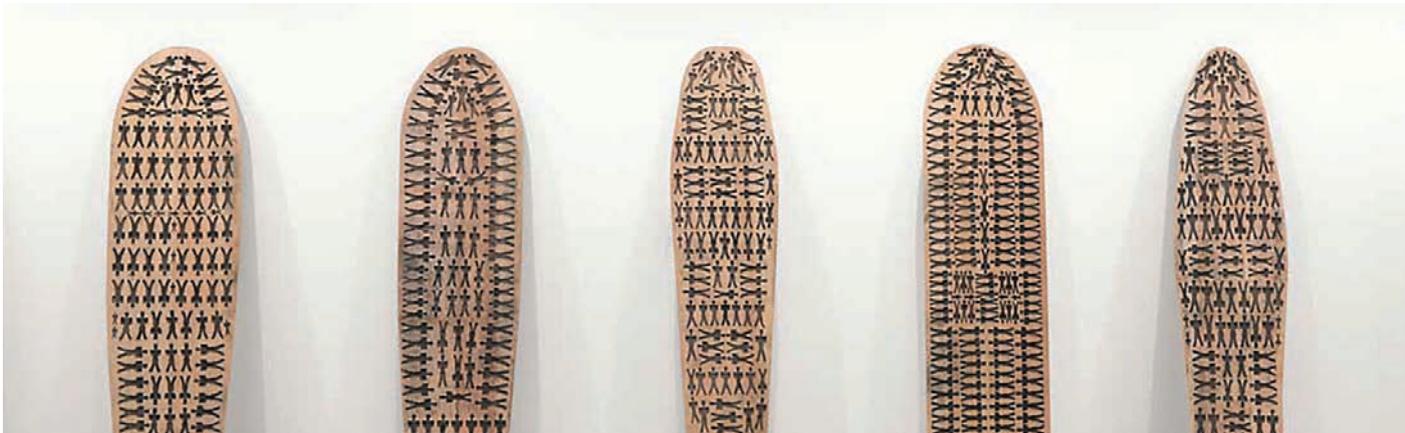
used as the title to the artist's 2007 retrospective at the Indianapolis Museum of Art.

The sea looms large in the Caribbean imaginary. Derek Walcott's poem "The Sea Is History" (1977) explains that for the descendants of African slaves brought to the Caribbean, the sea was the keeper of memory. The first stanza of his poem reads, "Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs? / Where is your tribal memory? Sirs, / in that grey vault. The sea. The sea / has locked them up. The sea is History."³ The representation of the ocean as gravesite is a common trope in Caribbean poetics.⁴ Elizabeth DeLoughrey points out that for Martinican philosopher Édouard Glissant, "the image of an oceanic grave for the lost souls of the middle passage is central to his effort to prioritize the diverse . . . histories of the Caribbean."⁵ Walcott's haunting words carry both beauty and violence. The poem goes on to describe the

plight of Africans brought into bondage through references to the Bible, the tone becoming increasingly ominous, the words harsh: "Then there were the packed cries, / the shit, the moaning; / Exodus." The imagery is wrenching, and, as the poem continues, Walcott contrasts the ocean's silence with the trauma of the passage. Discussing the drownings and "water deaths" of the Middle Passage, Valérie Loichot regards the absence of funerary rites or other forms of commemoration—which she refers to as "unritual"—as dehumanizing. She writes, "Unritual is a state more absolute even than desecration or defilement, since the latter imply the existence of a previous sacred state or object—a temple, a grave, a ceremonial. Unritual . . . is the obstruction of the sacred in the first place."⁶

Campos-Pons's early works evoking the ocean concern themselves with the Middle Passage, and they involve

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The Seven Powers Came by the Sea (detail), 1992. Mixed-media installation in seven sections, each section approx. 70 × 3 in., Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund.

a process of commemoration and sacralization. *The Seven Powers Came by the Sea* (1992) is an installation with seven wooden boards in the form of ships, inaugurated at the Institute of Contemporary Art / Boston. Referencing the infamous blueprint of the slave ship *Brookes*, the boards are imprinted with stick figures denoting the placement of the bodies along the ship's belly. Each one has slight variations, but what differentiates them the most is that they each carry the name of a specific deity from the Yoruba religion: OGGUN, OSHUN, YEMAYA, OBATALA, CHANGO, OCHOSI, and OYA. These are the seven powers referred to in the title. The implication is that they accompanied the captured African women, men, and children on their journey and that they continue to bless and protect their contemporary descendants. Each of the wooden slabs reads like a grave marker, consecrating the space of the installation. When the piece was first presented, the work included photographs of Afro-Cubans framed and placed on the floor of the gallery, along with letters spelling out "Let Us Never Forget" framed individually. Silhouetted figures—male and female—were positioned between the planks. During the opening of the exhibition, the artist carried out a performance in the gallery. Dressed in white and barefoot, she stood in the middle of the installation in silence for forty-five minutes.⁷ On her arms and neck were painted numbers that suggested statistics or commerce. The effect of her presence further called attention to the space as sacred. Cheryl Finley has likened the piece to an altar.⁸ As Boris Groys has observed, "Installation art . . . is not about individual objects but about the sacralization of a certain space. . . . That is absolutely different from the traditional way of dealing with art as the sum of certain objects. Of course, the antecedents of installation art are temples and churches, where lines are drawn between sacred

space and secular space."⁹ In the case of *The Seven Powers Came by the Sea*, the ocean is "'marked' as a site of history," to echo DeLoughrey. The oceanic "abyss" is consecrated and "territorialized" in the space of the gallery.¹⁰

Campos-Pons draws on a rich tradition of Caribbean poetics while also complicating it by repeatedly making reference to the female gender. Cuba and much of the rest of the Caribbean are deeply patriarchal spaces, and, while there have been notable women artists of Cuban heritage, including Amelia Peláez, Loló Soldevilla, Ana Mendieta, Tania Bruguera, Glenda León, and Campos-Pons herself, most of the island's successful artists by a large majority are men. Embracing the female body and feminine aesthetics, Campos-Pons asserts herself as a woman artist. In *Untitled (Breast and Bottle Feeding)* from the series *When I Am Not Here / Estoy Allá* (1994), she establishes a connection between the maternal and the sea in a photograph evoking Yemayá, Yoruba goddess of the ocean and universal mother. In this large-scale Polaroid, Campos-Pons's body is painted deep blue, punctuated with lighter blue markings to suggest waves. She holds a small, roughly carved wooden boat in both hands, and over her breasts are two baby bottles half filled with milk. The image brings to mind observations made by Trinh Minh-ha about writings by women: "Woman's writing becomes 'organic writing,' 'nurturing-writing' (*nourricriture*), resisting separation. . . . It draws its corporeal fluidity from images of water—a water from the source, a deep, subterranean water that trickles in the womb, a meandering river, a flow of life, of words running over or slowly dripping down the pages. This keeping-alive and life-giving water exists simultaneously as the writer's ink, the mother's milk, the woman's blood and menstruation."¹¹ The quote closely corresponds to the work *Soy una fuente /*

I Am a Fountain (1990), painted reliefs of female body parts, including breasts oozing milk, a bleeding vagina, a tongue spewing saliva, a torso superimposed with a stylized wave, and a teary eye. Referring to the tongue, Campos-Pons observes, “I was reclaiming woman not just as body but as intellectual entity and generator of knowledge.”¹² In *When I Am Not Here / Estoy Allá*, the connection of woman to ocean is made explicit. During a moment when Cuban art was channeling the famous words of poet Virgilio Piñera, “The damned circumstances of water everywhere,” and the sea was regarded as an emblem of entrapment within a Communist régime, Campos-Pons offered a benevolent reading of it as giver of life, refusing to retrace the common separation between (hu)Man and nature or to regard the ocean as a site of trauma.

When I Am Not Here / Estoy Allá is also the title of a 1997 vertical triptych which features an image of the artist cradling several small wooden boats in both arms. Similarly evoking Yemayá through maternal and oceanic references, Campos-Pons appears in the middle panel wearing a blue and white checkered dress and standing against a light blue background. The artist looks down, making the top of her head a focal point. Her hair is combed into sections, tied in several small bundles, and the scalp between them is painted blue. The bundles of hair themselves have white pigment, so that the hairstyle mirrors the colors and pattern of the dress. The top panel of the triptych is a photograph of the blue and white checkered cloth. This matrix references the visual language of geometric abstraction, but the cloth itself is creased, emphasizing the materiality of the fabric and thereby countering the rigidity of the grid itself.¹³ The third panel is a photograph of seven horizontal blue stripes against a white background; one stripe is punctuated by four white circular

pins. They are blue ribbons, and the number seven is an attribute of Yemayá. These bands resemble slices of the sea, and they also recall the horizon. The horizon has often been used in Cuban art as a metaphor for enclosure, with art works likening the island to a prison.¹⁴ Campos-Pons engagement with the sea does not align with these tendencies; her depiction of the ocean is vastly more polyvalent and complex.

The triptych *When I Am Not Here / Estoy Allá* establishes a dialogue between abstraction and representation and between technical reproduction and the handmade. It also evokes the genre of landscape painting within studio photography and calls attention to the image as construct. The artist does not consider herself a photographer. When she had the opportunity to explore the possibilities of the medium of large-format Polaroid during the 1990s, she created the series of works with the same title, all based around a particular hue. Those employing the color blue refer to the sea. Attracted to the chemical process of a photograph’s coming into being, which she likens to alchemy, Campos-Pons approached the photographic medium as both performative and painterly.¹⁵ In the triptych, the gingham fabric is a ready-made object with multiple connotations. The trope of the grid recalls pictorial conventions of Western painting as well as the turn towards abstraction that began in the early twentieth century; the blue and white fabric is a symbol of Yemayá; and textiles are deeply significant to African cultures—a famous quote by the artist El Anatsui states that “cloth is to the African what monuments are to Westerners.”¹⁶ A similar textile appears in the middle panel, as the basis for the artist’s handmade dress. Like the image below, the dress contains seven ribbons; four of them—in the form of a wave—are white, and between them are crocheted ribbons of blue and white. The



When I Am Not Here / Estoy Allá (detail), 1997 (p. 32)

handmade character of the dress accentuates the artisanal quality of the wooden boats the artist holds. Her presence between two abstract photographs emphasizes the human who is erased, not only by abstraction, but also by the genre of landscape, alluded to by the bottom panel. Her hair style—with blue lines painted on the scalp separating black masses of hair—becomes a makeshift map of territories separated by the sea. The artist notes that “the hair mounds are divided by the paths of the water,” emphasizing that the reference is not just to the Atlantic but to all the world’s oceans.¹⁷ The gesture of having the head of a Black woman as a surrogate

for the terrestrial orb is deeply poignant. Later works, such as *Constellation* (2004), relating the artist’s head and dreadlocks to a map of the cosmos, further probe this analogy.

In *Nesting IV* (2000), Campos-Pons continues to explore the body in relation to abstraction and landscape, while investigating the interplay between photography, painting, and sculpture. The piece consists of four panels that expand horizontally through a structure that is roughly bilaterally symmetrical. Bundles of hair at each edge thread their way through the pictorial space to compose a continuous line that suggests the horizon. Between them is the body of the artist, split in half, with eyes closed. Each half is positioned next to a panel of a slightly different shade of blue, akin to the sea. On the one hand, the work harkens back to the 1990 installation *Everything Is Separated by Water*. On the other, it brings up visual elements that are distinctly different, including formal simplicity; a stark, limited palette of white, black, brown, and blue; and a push and pull between horizontality and verticality. The piece elicits multiple readings, and I will begin to discuss it through the subject of the artist herself. Campos-Pons’s body is split down the middle by two blue rectangles evoking water. Water is typically represented on the horizontal plane, and the structure of the image invites the viewer to imagine the line between the artist and this plane as a horizon. Inverting the middle panels allows us to conceive of the artist as an island herself, or, in the words of Trinidadian author M. NourbeSe Philip, as an “I-Land.”¹⁸ Citing Philip, Elizabeth DeLoughrey notes that “island history has been recorded by westerners (occupants of larger, continental landscapes) without the presence of the ‘I-lander.’” She continues, “. . . western power structures . . . , the I-land voice is often cartographically diminished to the supposed insignificance

of its very landscape. Philip's term draws attention to the primacy of 'I' to foregrounds the self-expression of the I-land subject and her complicated relationship to the land/sea."¹⁹ While this piece has been interpreted as a manifestation of the artist's nostalgia for home, its implications are much more profound.²⁰ Seeing the artist's body as territory makes it possible to connect the image, not only to histories of colonization and forced migration, but to representational traditions—especially maps and landscape paintings—which gender land as female and assume territorial possession to be wholly unproblematic.

The strong vertical elements in *Nesting IV* contrast with the hair that threads through the piece, uniting the different components. The hair becomes a surrogate horizon line, handwoven and disjointed, but belonging to the artist herself. Campos-Pons has stated that she finds it fascinating that hair continues growing after death, as do fingernails,²¹ and the hair in the work could be interpreted as a connection between the past, present, and future. Certainly, the western tradition sees time as a linear continuum, and the piece suggests a beginning and an end. At the edges, the hair makes an abstract, entangled knot—the nest referred to in the title—but the forms also resemble a spider and an explosion. Perhaps it is the Big Bang on the left and the end of the universe on the right that frame the artist's self-portrait, whose stoic expression resembles a funerary mask. The stark composition and minimal elements, along with the different references to the horizon, recall the poem "Names" (1976) by Derek Walcott, which begins, "My race began as the sea began, / with no nouns, and with no horizon."²² The poet searches for the moment "when the mind was halved by a horizon" and claims not to locate it, but the reader suspects that it was

when continental Africans were transplanted to the Caribbean islands.²³ Walcott invokes the image of the horizon again when he writes, "Behind us all the sky folded / as history folds over a fishline."²⁴ The imagery of the poem corresponds to *Nesting IV* almost on a one-to-one basis. The difference is that the simple fishing line of Walcott's poem is replaced by woven strands of Afro-textured hair.

Hair plays an important role in another major work on the sea, *Elevata (2002)*, a sixteen-panel installation of large-scale Polaroids. The work evokes an underwater seascape, within which the artist appears suspended at the top edge, upside down and with her back to the viewer. Her long dreadlocks make their way downwards and across a blue expanse of different hues and textures. Simultaneously painterly and sculptural, the pictorial space contains gestural marks of different tonalities, drips of paint that mimic the movement of the braids, and blue orbs of varying sizes and irregular surfaces. Its indeterminate vastness calls to mind both the ocean and the cosmos. In the artist's words, "The ocean is blue because it takes on the color of the heavens—there is darkness in certain spaces in the universe just as there is at the bottom of the ocean."²⁵ Penetrating this deep space and winding around the largest orb, her hair becomes roots. Elizabeth DeLoughrey has argued that "botanical metaphors are embedded in national discourse" in the Caribbean, but often this imagery is tied to "national soil."²⁶ By rooting the body within an indeterminate aquatic space, the artist eschews inscribing it within a particular nation-state. She relies, rather, on the metaphor of "tidalectics," theorized by Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite as "dialectics with my difference. In other words, instead of the notion of one-two-three, Hegelian, I am now more interested in the movement of the water backwards and forwards

as a kind of cyclic, I suppose, motion, rather than linear.”²⁷ Already, in *Nesting IV*, Campos-Pons countered a linear trajectory by introducing vertical cuts and folding the image onto itself to suggest a closing off or a cycle. In *Elevata*, the hair/roots perform this cyclic motion while the blue markings suggest currents that move in multiple directions.

In addition to water, the blue in *Elevata* evokes the atmosphere. The downward movement of the roots liken the human body to a tree, an analogy that is made more evident in *Dreaming of an Island (2008)*, an installation of nine large-scale Polaroids. Here, the artist depicts herself seated on a base in the midst of a watery seascape, her back to the viewer. She looks ahead to the island of the title, a place in Maine with pine trees growing along the coast.²⁸ Below her are roots similar to leaves or algae that stem from a lock of hair that travels down the artist’s spine. While these roots are presumed to be a continuation of her hair, they are depicted in black ink that resembles oil. Their inky substance contrasts with the watery blue pigment that describes the water. Although the roots extend horizontally across the two bottom rows, the orientation of this installation is unambiguously vertical. Her roots are submerged, but the artist is not. In relation to this image, Campos-Pons has stated that verticality and “being rooted to the air” are conditions of being human.²⁹

A similar juxtaposition of sculptural hair and flat black ink occurs in *Esa Palabra MAR, and this word WAITING (2008)*, but the orientation is more emphatically horizontal, the expanse of sea and sky within it slightly disjointed and tenuously held together by locks of hair that join irregular black lines of varying widths. In this Polaroid diptych, the back of the artist’s head appears on the left, rotated ninety degrees from vertical. In the middle ground is a structure in the form

of a boomerang floating atop the sea. Resembling a pier that emerges from the front of the artist’s head, its forms recall the cylindrical roots that appear in *Dreaming of an Island* and a related watercolor titled *Thinking of It (2008)*, in which a young girl stands at the edge of a body of water, looking into the distance. A lock of the girl’s hair joins with tubular roots, some containing water, which extend sideways and downwards. Of *Esa Palabra MAR, and this word WAITING*, the artist has commented that part of her intent was “abstracting the body and the landscape to make them into one.”³⁰ The horizon appears on a diagonal, slightly curved so that the viewer becomes aware of being positioned, like the artist, above the earth looking down. The spatial discrepancy between the panels resonates with the experience of being in an airplane, and the upwards movement of the black lines—no longer behaving like roots—seems to pull the artist toward them. The calligraphic quality of these painted lines harkens back to the author’s Chinese ancestry; but their forms, rather than comforting, take on the appearance of a noose positioned disturbingly in line with the artist’s head. Migration here happens by air and leads into the unknown. The correlation between water and atmosphere recalls the words of Gaston Bachelard, “Water is truly the transitory element. It is the essential ontological metamorphosis between heaven and earth. A being dedicated to water is a being in flux.”³¹

Blue Refuge (2008), returns the viewer to the water and establishes a manner of representing the ocean different from prior works. In this nine-panel composition of large-scale Polaroids, the color white predominates. The artist—again with her back to the viewer—huddles in the middle panel wearing an orange dress with black markings. The expanse around her is dynamic and, given her body language, appears



Wet All Day, 2019 (p. 34)

inhospitable. Though there are cords of hair threading their way around the composition, they are not anchored to any particular spot. Instead, they wind around the body of the woman and seem to pull her in multiple directions. Gestural blue marks against a white background suggest water, and there are large blue flowers and leaves throughout, made of cut paper. The artist is sitting on one such blue plant. With its lack of depth, abstracted forms, and volumetric elements pressed against the surface, the work brings to mind nineteenth-century Japanese prints, the water lilies of Claude Monet, and Henri Matisse's cutouts. The warm tones of the artist's dress contrast with the icy appearance of the whites and blues. Indeed, for the artist, the figure could represent "the body of the diaspora in the middle of the winter in a blizzard" or "the *balsero* [refugee fleeing by boat] in the middle of the ocean. . . . Both are water."³² By contrast, the refuge of the title may be located "in the orange of the sun," drawing on its "energy, in the middle of the storm."³³

Campos-Pons's recent drawings, from the series *Un Pedazo de Mar* (2019), or *A Piece of the Sea*, return to the theme of maritime travel. They are inspired by the Mediterranean migrant crisis that peaked in 2015, as well as by the continuous movement of *balseros* across the Caribbean. The theme of death predominates, as the artist ponders both the decomposition of the human body and the duality of body and spirit. *Wet All Day* evokes the iconography of Christ on the cross to envision a body projecting both upwards and downwards, becoming water and spirit at once. *One More Time* features multiple brown bodies of indeterminate gender struggling in the sea—conceived as a large blue inkblot clouded with darker pigments and gestural marks that suggest undercurrents. A white background contains

this ocean, and some of the figures are within this space holding on to the edge of the water as if for dear life. Others are submerged and appear to be drowning, and a group of figures towards the top right edge are crowded together facing multiple directions. The body of one is in fragments, obscured by the water; another holds on to a submerged figure who appears to be dissolving.

Tragically, these modern-day sea crossings harken back to the foundational moment of the Middle Passage. DeLoughrey cites from the short story “Children of the Sea” by Edwidge Danticat, about Haitian migration to Florida, that makes this very point: “it was always meant to be, as though the very day that my mother birthed me, she has chosen me to live life eternal, among the children of the deep blue sea those who have escaped the chains of slavery to form a world beneath the heavens and the blood-drenched earth where you live.”³⁴ Several of Campos-Pons’s drawings from the series—including *Luminous Being* and *Floating Between Temperature Zones*—depict the transformation of people into heavenly bodies. The metamorphoses add an element of mystery, however, because the people also appear to transform into sea creatures, as in *Floating Between Temperature Zones*, or marine plants, as in *Five Apparitions*. The former visualizes submerged humans as becoming a school of fish, a sea lion, and a jellyfish, all with halos. The series introduces an iconography of the ocean that represents a new direction in the work of the artist. Imagining a merger between humans and sea fauna and flora and conceiving of this union as heavenly, she relates the seas and heavens as loci of mysteries and miracles.

She Always Knew of the Space In-Between (2019), an installation of five large drawings, returns to some of the artist’s earlier themes, including the analogy between ocean

and cosmos, the idea of maternal seas, and the presence of African deities as guardians of the waters. The painted scenes suggest a creation story from beginning to end, starting in the earth’s atmosphere and culminating in the cosmos. Within the vast expanse of skies and seas stands the small figure of a woman—the artist’s late mother—atop the waters. A heavenly being encircled by a halo and with a peacock feather at her torso suggestive of wings, her position, gesture, and a blue batonlike line emanating from her hand cast her in the role of orchestra conductor. Around her, a symphony of blues unfolds—of droplets that become constellations, asteroids, orbits, and exploding stars. In the center, standing as tall as the support, are two African statues painted in gray and facing each other. Their implied solidity contrasts with the ethereal quality of the elements around them. Next to them, on the fourth panel, a giant jellyfish erupts from the surface of the water towards the skies. The last scene suggests an explosion of light and water in an indeterminate space, leaving behind only the jellyfish’s outline. The writings of ecofeminist scholar Stacy Alaimo shed light on the possible meaning of this creature. She notes that, despite the acidification of the seas, jellyfish have continued to thrive, implying that they will outlive us all. She also makes note of their idiosyncratic constitution that allows them to be one with their environment. Alaimo writes, “Jellyfish—being watery—exist at the edge of the ‘visible, the sayable, and the thinkable,’ barely distinct from the seas that surround them, existing as flowing, pulsing, gelatinous, and just barely organized bodies. Jellies somehow live as the very element that surrounds them. (How does this make sense? How do *they* make sense?) Jellies, more than any other creature, would seem to embody Georges Bataille’s view that animals live ‘like water in water,’ in a state of immanence that humans

cannot experience.”³⁵ Campos-Pons’s recent drawings suggest that this “state of immanence,” of being one with water, happens following the death of the physical body.

The drawings of *Un Pedazo de Mar* are striking for their indeterminate spaces. They place the spectator above or within the water, making absent the most common point of reference at the shore, the horizon. *She Always Knew of the Space In-Between* establishes a clearly demarcated horizon line in its first panel, only to have it become increasingly amorphous and eventually disappear in the final scene. *Horizon* (2019) emphatically brings back this spatial marker, imagined and imaged as a line, but one which does not actually exist. This large abstract drawing features a zigzag in shades of teal and blue that rises and dips in relation to a constant horizontal white space brought into being by the colors around it. These jagged lines are the readings from Campos-Pons’s sister’s electrocardiogram, taken as she lay hospitalized during the time when the artist made this piece. *Horizon* establishes a deep contrast with the amorphous forms, ink blots, pools of color, and curved lines of the other recent drawings, and stands as a testament to the artist’s attachment to life. In her own words: “Horizontality is repose, stability, continuity. . . the rhythm of the heartbeat. The horizon is the heart, the center. . . It is a metaphor for how I understand.”³⁶ Over the course of her career, María Magdalena has taught us that water is life, death, and what lies between. ■

NOTES

Acknowledgements: This essay accompanies my curated exhibition *María Magdalena Campos-Pons: Sea and Self*, produced by the Center for Women in the Arts and Humanities at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, NJ, and exhibited in the Mary H. Dana Women Artists Series Galleries of the Mabel Smith Douglass Library from September to December 2019. An expanded version of the exhibition is traveling to the Haggerty Museum of Art at Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI, in 2021. I am grateful for the support of María Magdalena Campos-Pons, Nicole Ianuzelli, Isabel Nazario, Glenda Daniel, Wendi Norris, Matea Fish, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, and Emilia Layden.

Notable authors who have contributed to the discourse on the artist include Odette Casamayor-Cisneros, Eddie Chambers, Okwui Enwezor, Cheryl Finley, Lisa Freiman, Flora González, Nikki Greene, Salah Hassan, Julia Herzberg, Olu Oguibe, Selene Wendt, and Adriana Zavala.

- 1 This exhibition builds on topics addressed in my curated exhibition *Relational Undercurrents: Contemporary Art of the Caribbean Archipelago* and the article co-authored with Elizabeth DeLoughrey, “Submerged Bodies: The Tidalectics of Representability and the Sea in Caribbean Art,” *Environmental Humanities* 12:1 (May 2020): 132–66. See Tatiana Flores and Michelle A. Stephens, eds., *Relational Undercurrents: Contemporary Art of the Caribbean Archipelago* (Long Beach, CA: Museum of Latin American Art, 2017, distributed by Duke University Press).
- 2 Neon Queen Collective (Jessi DiTillio, Kaila Schedeen, and Phillip Townsend), “Visual Healer: An Interview with María Magdalena Campos-Pons,” in *Notes on Sugar / Like the Lonely Traveler: María Magdalena Campos-Pons*, ed. Neon Queen Collective (San Francisco: Wendi Norris Gallery, 2018), 11.
- 3 In Derek Walcott, *Collected Poems, 1948–1984* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986), 364–67. A 2019

- exhibition curated by Selene Wendt that included the work of Campos-Pons drew on the title of the poem. See Selene Wendt, ed., *The Sea Is History* (Milan: Skira, 2019).
- 4 See Valérie Loichot, *Water Graves: The Art of the Un-ritual in the Greater Caribbean* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2020).
- 5 Elizabeth DeLoughrey, "Tidalectics: Charting the Space/Time of Caribbean Waters," *SPAN: Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies* 47 (October 1998): 21.
- 6 Loichot, *Water Graves*, 7.
- 7 See Cheryl Finley, *Committed to Memory: The Art of the Slave Ship Icon* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018), 211–19.
- 8 Finley, *Committed to Memory*, 217.
- 9 Boris Groys, "The Art Seminar," in *Re-Enchantment*, ed. James Elkins and David Morgan (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 164.
- 10 DeLoughrey, "Tidalectics," 24.
- 11 Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Post-coloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 38.
- 12 Author's correspondence with the artist, July 3, 2020.
- 13 See Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," *October* 8 (Summer 1979): 50–64.
- 14 "See the section "Perpetual Horizons" in Tatiana Flores, "Inscribing into Consciousness: The Work of Caribbean Art," in Flores and Stephens, eds., *Relational Undercurrents*, 45–60.
- 15 Author's conversation with the artist, July 2, 2020.
- 16 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "The Essential Art of African Textiles: Design Without End," <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2008/african-textiles>. El Anatsui attributes the idea to Sonya Clark.
- 17 Author's conversation with the artist, July 2, 2020.
- 18 DeLoughrey, "Tidalectics," 31.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 See Museum of Fine Arts Boston, "Nesting IV: Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons," <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/321069>.
- 21 Author's conversation with the artist, July 2, 2020.
- 22 Derek Walcott, "Names," *Collected Poems, 1948–1984*, 305.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid., 306.
- 25 Author's conversation with the artist, July 2, 2020.
- 26 DeLoughrey, "Tidalectics," 20, 19.
- 27 Nathaniel Mackey, "An Interview with Edward Kamau Brathwaite," *Hambone* 9 (Winter 1991), 44. Reprinted in *The Art of Kamau Brathwaite*, ed. Stewart Brown (Bridgend, Wales: Seren, 1995), 14. Partially quoted in DeLoughrey, "Tidalectics," 18.
- 28 See Joshua Basseches, "Recent Work—A New Phase," in *Alchemy of the Soul: Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons* (Salem, MA: Peabody Essex Museum, 2016), http://alchemy.pem.org/new_phase/.
- 29 Author's conversation with the artist, July 2, 2020.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Quoted in DeLoughrey, "Tidalectics," 22.
- 32 Author's conversation with the artist, July 2, 2020.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Quoted in DeLoughrey, "Tidalectics," 23.
- 35 Stacy Alaimo, "Jellyfish Science, Jellyfish Aesthetics: Posthuman Reconfigurations of the Sensible," in *Thinking with Water*, ed. Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod, and Astrida Neimanis (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 153.
- 36 Author's conversation with the artist, July 2, 2020.













*BLUE
OCEAN
BEING*

ELIZABETH DELOUGHREY

Perhaps more than any other Caribbean artist, María Magdalena Campos-Pons (Cuba, Nashville-based) has represented the complexity, depth, volume, and embodiment of the oceanic realm. Since the 1990s her large-scale Polaroid work in particular has repeatedly returned to a series of interrelated panels that map a grid of watercolors representing a bright, submarine blue that incorporates some human or humanoid form. The artist's representations of the oceanic are compelling, intimate, and appealing. Her oceanic imaginary is often peopled, accessible, and while not realist, certainly suggests the volume and multi-dimensionality of the sea. These are not the dark, brooding, metallic seas of her fellow Cuban artist Yoan Capote, whose *Isla* canvases represent the thorny horizon of densely layered grey fishhooks, imagining the ocean in terms of its impenetrability for the Caribbean migrant or refugee. To Campos-Pons, the oceanic is neither the pure realm of "Nature," as the binaries of western thought would suggest, nor is it a foe to be conquered. Her oceanic imaginary, rendered as medium and matter in watercolors, invokes a "wet ontology," or sense of being created by and in water, most powerfully through color itself.¹ Thus we might understand her work as embodying what the anthropologist Michael Taussig has called a "color vision" that is world-centered, where color "is not secondary to form" but is rather an animating, life-giving force that is critical to the experience of the work.²

The color blue in Campos-Pons's photographic installations is associated with the orisha or spirit Yemayá.

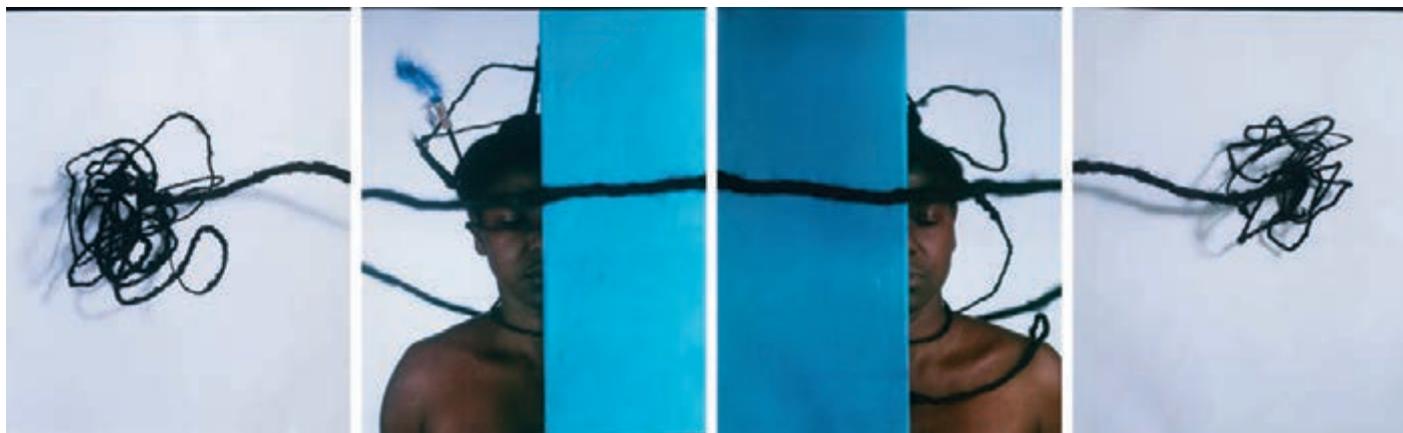
A Yoruba transplant to the Americas, Yemayá (also Yemoja, Imoja) is the mother of the orishas and an ocean spirit of maternal generosity associated with the crescent moon, seashells, the iridescent blue of the peacock, and the protector of fishermen.³ In Cuba, she's also manifested as the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Regla, the patron saint of Havana Harbor. While Yemayá provides the critical form and color to the majority of Campos-Pons's work, she is perhaps most visible in the panel *Untitled (Breast and Bottle Feeding)*, from the series *When I Am Not Here / Estoy Allá* (1994). This represents a photograph of the artist's upper torso painted in multiple hues of blue and purple, punctuated by white crescent waves. The artist holds towards the viewer an unvarnished wooden carved vessel, which presumably catches the milk hanging from two baby bottles that are worn around the neck and lie flat, partially filled, over the breasts. The image is striking for the color contrasts between the oceanic body and the lightness of the milk and vessel, as well as the prosthetic mammaries invoking the maternal generosity of Yemayá and her offerings. It also suggests her exploitation, since the bottles are weighted heavily by a plastic cord around the headless figure's neck. In a statement the artist has written of her attempt to represent "the spaces that are constructed between dualities,"⁴ and in this sense the dualities here are thematic: the exploitation of Black women's bodies in the plantation Americas as well as perhaps our own participation as spectators as we too drink from the aesthetic and spiritual milk of Yemayá. The vessel,

we might say, is her craft. Like other Caribbean artists, Campos-Pons creates a visual pun on *la mer(e)*, or *mar/madre*, recuperating what Barbadian poet and historian Kamau Brathwaite has written of in terms of the “submerged mothers” of African diasporic history.⁵

Campos-Pons is contributing to a long conversation in the Caribbean about the oceanic imaginary in which the sea represents both origins and the future; a sacred space of the orishas and ancestors; the fluidity of identity; the maternal body; the terrors of the historic Middle Passage; and the more recent refugee experiences of *balseros* and *botpippel*. To Trinidadian scholar Carole Boyce Davies, “the Caribbean Sea is . . . a site of continuous change and the ongoing questioning of self, origin, direction.”⁶ To Brathwaite, Caribbean “unity is submarine,” a fluid regional imaginary that Martinican author Édouard Glissant has often reiterated.⁷ For Glissant the Caribbean is not insular, but rather is defined through rhizomatic “submarine roots . . . floating free, not fixed in one position in some primordial spot, but extending in all directions in our world through its network of branches.”⁸ This worldly if not cosmic viewpoint has been echoed by Cuban author Antonio Benítez-Rojo, who imagines the region consisting of “Peoples of the Sea [who are] traveling together toward the infinite.”⁹ This sense of grasping towards the infinite is represented in Campos-Pons’s repeated connection between the ocean (inner space) and the constellations (outer space). This is evident in works such as *Elevata* (2002), *Constellation* (2004), and *She Always Knew of the Space In-Between* (2019). This interrelationship between cosmic and oceanic realms is represented figuratively as well as in the broad spectrum of blue and purple colors, creating a profoundly transformative “color sense,” to echo Taussig.

In an interview with Myriam J. A. Chancy, Campos-Pons has suggested that, while her oceanic imaginary speaks to the material histories of diasporic subjects to the Caribbean (including her Chinese and European ancestors), her work is equally engaged in exploring what she calls “psychological space.”¹⁰ This representation of oceanic inner space is rendered by floating, liquid dreamscapes that emanate from the artist’s suspended head and hair, as in *Elevata*, and are evoked in the titles such as *Luminous Being* (2019), *Floating Between Temperature Zones* (2019), and *Blue Refuge* (2008). For instance, in *Nesting IV* (2000), a photograph of the artist’s head is divided vertically into two panels separated by two additional panels of blue watercolor. As with most if not all of her work, the panels are separated by white bars or frames, while horizontal brushstrokes or hair extensions move across the borders, visually stitching them together. The two blue panels of *Nesting IV* that occupy the interstitial headspace suggest the figure’s inner consciousness—this is represented by the baby-blue color on the left inner panel, and a more steel-colored blue on the right. The hair extension that crosses them could be a bar of energy or electricity, suggested by the antenna-like, beaded, and feathered point emerging from the figure’s scalp on the left. As with most of the artist’s self-representations, her eyes are closed in a gesture of meditation, thought, or perhaps communication with and through this blue inner space, this blue ocean being.

There are two readings I want to present here of what Taussig calls “the bodily unconscious” generated by the color blue, and what scholar Babatunde Lawal refers to in Yoruba contexts as one’s “spiritual” or “inner” head. In Yoruba cosmology, the pottery-creator Obatala modelled the first human being out of clay that came to life with the divine breath of



Nesting IV, 2000 (p. 32)

Olodumare. Subsequently, all humans are gifted with a physical head that represents the materiality of the body, but must choose an “inner head” that represents their destiny. The inner head “mediates between the individual and the orisha”; elaborate, artistic hairdressing is a veneration of one’s inner or spiritual head.¹¹ As Lisa D. Freiman has suggested, this helps us understand the repetition of the disembodied head in Campos-Pons’s work, and the possibility that the long hair extensions that reach across boundaries emanate from the head of the artist/figure/Yemayá as a line or wavelength of communication, energy, and creativity.

The ocean surrounds and submerges the human form in the installation just as we as viewers are often positioned below, in a submarine dreamscape. The dreamscape is expansive rather than two-dimensional due to the way in which the artist represents depth and volume by staging her

works first as sculptures, then photographing the watercolors of layered shades of blue as well as waves and whirls of blue paint, as in *Elevata*.¹² So while these are meditative and often serene submarine-scapes, they represent the photographic capturing of a moment of stillness amidst subtle movement and change. We are invited to participate in that subtle meditation on blue being.

The “bodily unconscious” represented here, the seascape of the “inner head” or space, is perhaps what could be called an “oceanic feeling,”¹³ but more properly might be understood as a state of being in an ocean of becoming.¹⁴ Through her invocation of the blues of Yemayá, Campos-Pons allows us to participate in the process. This blue ocean of being and becoming can be witnessed. These are not the dark, inaccessible depths of the ocean, but rather bright blue waters permeated by light. They invite one to dive in, to



She Always Knew of the Space In-Between (detail), 2019 (p. 33)

merge, to experience an ocean of spirit.

In Christian tradition since the Renaissance, blue has been associated with the animation of divine light, evident in the iconography of European representations of the Virgin Mary and her Cuban sister, Our Lady of Regla.¹⁵ The color blue—in the sky as well as the seas—is the manifestation of how the white light of the sun is diffracted; the long wavelengths of red and yellow are absorbed by water or particles, leading the short wavelengths of blue to render light visible in and of itself. In that sense both air and water can be understood as mediums more than distinct spaces.¹⁶ Yet light itself cannot be seen—it is only illuminated by color and objects. Thus Campos-Pons’s preferred media—watercolor and glass—capture light’s blue illumination and enable our participation in this vision of becoming.¹⁷

It is this tension between absence and presence, the seen and unseen, that underlines so much of Campos-Pons’s visual vocabulary. In an interview she has mentioned the vital influence of scholar Homi Bhabha’s concepts of interstitial space, the space between, which is evident in the very title of her series *When I Am Not Here / Estoy Allá*.¹⁸ “Estoy allá” can be translated as “I am there,” but it also could mean “out there,” in the beyond.¹⁹ This tension between absence and presence is a throughline in Campos-Pons’s work read materially in terms of diasporic identity, and in the linguistic tension in the title between English and Spanish. Yet it should also be considered in ontological and psychological terms as a process of becoming. This is particularly evident in her more recent work *She Always Knew of the Space In-Between* (2019), which uses a gouache method that thickens the watercolors, giving them a sense of tactility. She produced this work using a peacock feather, associated with the iridescent

blues of Yemayá, deepening her usual palette of blues to incorporate more violet. The five-part panel is focalized by two figures in the center, possibly adapted from Dogon sculpture, who face each other, perhaps embodying the critical “space in-between.”²⁰ The right figure is larger than the left, but they are lacking the sex characteristics (particularly breasts) that would definitively gender one or the other.²¹ Both have large, rounded shoulders, oblong torsos, triangular buttocks, and elongated, almost extra-terrestrial-looking heads. The alien-cosmological theme is repeated throughout the panels, including painted lines of blue and violet that cross the figures and repeat the patterns of concentric circles as well as exploding or expanding energy, like the big bang or destruction of a star.

The theme of the “space in-between” is interpersonal, evident in the figures, as well as cosmological. Read left to right, the panels seem to move from the cosmological origins (the constellations and the ocean) to the figure of the generating mother in the second panel, whose luminous yellow, green, and blue figuration generates a series of blue and violet circles. These in turn give rise to a cardinal, perhaps even vaginal, mapping (North, South, East, and West) above her, reiterating a long-held theme in Campos-Pons’s work of what Trinidadian poet M. NourbeSe Philip describes as “dis place.” Creator of works such as *Chastity Belt* (1984–5) and *Conception* (1987), Campos-Pons has frequently invoked what Judy Chicago and other feminist artists have termed “vaginal iconography.”²² In fact, in resisting the label of abstract artist, Campos-Pons has argued, playfully I imagine, that her work is “simply a magnified representation of our sexual organs.”²³ To Philip, writing on women of African descent in the (post)plantation Americas, “public space . . . must be read and interpreted

from the point of view of the [safety of the] space between the legs.”²⁴ Thus the false dichotomy of inner versus outer space is dismantled and gendered in relation to the legacies of colonial and racialized violence against Black women.

Philip asks, “What is the language of the inner space?”²⁵ Campos-Pons seems to provide us with multiple, creative, and complex answers. Certainly it is not linear, nor can it be easily located in western models of time or space. It is oceanic, fluid, and in process. It seems to be more of a medium of transportation than a space. It is both the stillness of contemplation and generative becoming. It is maternal and generative, but perhaps conflicted about the relentless cycles of giving. It includes and even welcomes an audience in the process of initiation and transformation. It is blue ocean being and becoming. ■

NOTES

Acknowledgements: I am grateful to Judith Bettelheim, Robin Derby, Tatiana Flores, and Kathy Smith for their feedback and support, which informed the work of this essay.

- 1 Philip Steinberg and Kimberley Peters, "Wet Ontologies, Fluid Spaces: Giving Depth to Volume Through Oceanic Thinking," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 33, no. 2 (March 2015): 247–64, <https://doi.org/10.1068/d14148p>.
- 2 Michael Taussig, "What Color Is the Sacred?" *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 1 (Autumn 2006): 28–51, <https://doi.org/10.1086/509745>.
- 3 Solimar Otero and Toyin Falola, eds., *Yemoja: Gender, Sexuality, and Creativity in the Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic Diasporas* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013).
- 4 Quoted in Lisa D. Freiman, ed., *María Magdalena Campos-Pons: Everything Is Separated by Water* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 52.
- 30 5 This maternal ocean is discussed at length in Elizabeth DeLoughrey and Tatiana Flores, "Submerged Bodies: The Tidalectics of Representability and the Sea in Caribbean Art," *Environmental Humanities* 12, no. 1 (2020), 132–66; Kamau Brathwaite and Chris Funkhouser, *CONVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* (New York: We Press, 1999). On "Submerged Mothers," see Kamau Brathwaite, "Submerged Mothers," *Jamaica Journal* 9, nos. 2–3 (1975): 48–49.
- 6 Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 13.
- 7 Kamau Brathwaite, *Caribbean Man in Space and Time: A Bibliographical and Conceptual Approach* (Kingston: Savacou, 1974), 1–11.
- 8 He continues, "the abyss is a tautology: the entire ocean, the entire sea gently collapsing in the end into the pleasures of sand, make one vast beginning, but a beginning whose time is marked by these balls and chains gone green." Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of*

Relation, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 6.

- 9 Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 16. To Benítez-Rojo, "the culture of the Caribbean . . . is not terrestrial but aquatic . . . [it] is the natural and indispensable realm of marine currents, of waves, of folds and double folds, of fluidity and sinuosity" (11).
- 10 Myriam J. A. Chancy, "Recovering Origins: An Interview with María Magdalena Campos-Pons," in *From Sugar to Revolution: Women's Visions of Haiti, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013), 210.
- 11 Babatunde Lawal, "From Africa to the Americas: Art in Yoruba Religion," in *Santería Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art*, ed. Arturo Lindsay (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 19. See also Babatunde Lawal, "Orilones: The Hermeneutics of the Head and Hairstyles Among the Yoruba," in *Frank in African Art and Culture*, ed. Roy Sieber and Hank Herreman (New York: Museum for African Art, 2000), 93–109. See also discussion of this in Freiman, *María Magdalena Campos-Pons*, 52.
- 12 See Freiman, *María Magdalena Campos-Pons*, 52, on process of creating them as sculptural 3D objects.
- 13 The term is from French author Romain Rolland; Freud famously dismissed the concept of "une sentiment océanique" and defined it as a regressive narcissism associated with the child's boundarylessness with the mother—a fluidity between egos and bodies that did not fit in the progressive model of psychoanalytic individualism. Rolland was pursuing a mystical line of thought between west and east, from Baruch Spinoza to Sri Ramakrishna, about a state of being that was not linear or regressive but outside of time itself in an "ocean of spirit." See Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York:

- W.W. Norton & Company, 1962); Ayon Maharaj, "The Challenge of the Oceanic Feeling: Romain Rolland's Mystical Critique of Psychoanalysis and His Call for a 'New Science of the Mind'," in *History of European Ideas* 43, no. 5 (August 2017): 474–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2017.1356741>; William B. Parsons, "The Oceanic Feeling Revisited," in *The Journal of Religion* 78, no. 4 (October 1998): 501–23, <https://doi.org/10.1086/490288>.
- 14 To mystic Hinduism this was a merger with the divine mother; a turn not to the regressive subconscious but the maternal "superconscious." See Sri Aurobindo in Maharaj.
- 15 Michel Pastoureau, *Blue: The History of a Color* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
- 16 See James Jerome Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979).
- 17 See, for instance, her installation at PEM, *Alchemy of the Soul*, in blue glass, a figure looking like it has ancestral connections to the glass palette creator in Remedios Varo's painting *The Creation of Birds* (1957).
- 18 Lynne Bell, "History of People Who Were Not Heroes: A Conversation with María Magdalena Campos-Pons," in *Third Text* 12, no. 43 (1998): 33–42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528829808576732>.
- 19 Homi K. Bhabha, "Beyond the Pale: Art in the Age of Multicultural Translation," in *Biennial Exhibition*, ed. Elisabeth Sussman, Thelma Golden, John G. Hanhardt, and Lisa Phillips (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993), 62–73.
- 20 Many thanks to art historian Judith Bettelheim for her help with the iconography of the figures.
- 21 Campos-Pons has positioned Yemayá and Oshun facing each other in her photographs, so while it's tempting to identify the larger figure as male and the smaller as female, there is some ambiguity.
- 22 See Freiman, *María Magdalena Campos-Pons*, 17–23.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 60.
- 24 M. NourbeSe Philip, "Dis Place—The Space Between," in *A Genealogy of Resistance and Other Essays* (Toronto: Mercury Press, 1997), 76.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 98.



When I Am Not Here / Estoy Allá, 1997. Triptych of 3 Polaroid Polacolor Pro Photographs, 29 x 25 in each, 87 x 25 in overall. Collection of Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas



Nesting IV, 2000. Composition of 4 Polaroid Polacolor Pro Photographs, 29 x 25 in each, 29 x 100 in overall. Museum purchase with the Avis and James K. Heller Art Acquisition Endowment, Collection of the Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University



Constellation, 2004. Composition of 16 Polaroid Polacolor Pro Photographs, 24 x 20 in each, 96 x 80 in overall. Courtesy of the artist and Wendi Norris Gallery



Blue Refuge, 2008. Composition of 9 Polaroid Polacolor Pro Photographs, 28 x 24 1/2 in each, 78 x 69 in overall. Courtesy of deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum



She Always Knew of the Space In-Between, 2019. Composition of 5 Paintings, Gouache, Watercolor, Acrylic Ink, Peacock Feather on paper, 66 1/4 x 35 1/4 in each, 66 1/4 x 176 1/4 in overall. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris



Floating Between Temperature Zones, From the series *Un Pedazo de Mar*, 2019. Watercolor, Gouache, and Ink on Paper, 25 5/16 x 33 in. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris



Contaminant Thoughts, From the series *Un Pedazo de Mar*, 2019. Watercolor, Gouache, and Ink on Paper, 25 5/16 x 33 in. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris



One More Time, From the series *Un Pedazo de Mar*, 2019. Watercolor, Gouache, and Ink on Paper, 25 5/16 x 33 in. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris



Wet All Day, From the series *Un Pedazo de Mar*, 2019. Watercolor, Gouache, and Ink on Paper, 47 x 33 3/8 in. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris



Luminous Being, From the series *Un Pedazo de Mar*, 2019. Watercolor, Gouache, and Ink on Paper, 25 5/16 x 33 in. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris



Five Apparitions, From the series *Un Pedazo de Mar*,
2019. Watercolor, Gouache, and Ink on Paper,
25 5/16 x 33 in. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery
Wendi Norris

María Magdalena Campos-Pons: Sea and Self

Haggerty Museum of Art

August 20 – December 19, 2021

Published by the Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University, on the occasion of the exhibition *María Magdalena Campos-Pons: Sea and Self*. This exhibition was conceived by Tatiana Flores, PhD, produced by the Center for Women in the Arts and Humanities at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, NJ, and exhibited in the Mary H. Dana Women Artists Series Galleries of the Mabel Smith Douglass Library from September to December 2019.

Support for the expanded version of the exhibition at the Haggerty Museum of Art, and for the accompanying public programs and this publication is provided by:

Presenting Sponsor



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Additional support provided by



The Emmett J. Doerr Endowment Fund

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PO Box 1881
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53201-1881

ISBN 978-0-945366-33-1

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Printed by the Fox Company, Inc., West Allis, Wisconsin
Installation photography: Myrica von Haselberg
All other images courtesy of the artist and Gallery Wendi
Norris, San Francisco, CA.



