

# FABRIK

CONTEMPORARY ART & DESIGN



## **Fran Siegel: Lineage through Landscape: Tracing Egun in Brazil (July 23—December 10, 2017)**

Fran Siegel's commissioned work, *Lineage through Landscape: Tracing Egun in Brazil*, features the artist's interpretation of Egun (or Egungun), the worship of ancestors. The ritual originated in West Africa and was practiced mainly by followers of Candomblé on Itaparica, an island off the coast of the city of Salvador in Brazil's northeastern Bahia state. Siegel's two-part work consists of a thirty-five-foot long woven drawing curving over two walls and an installation of porcelain leaves extending from the drawing, both reflected in a mirrored pillar.

Part of the Fowler Museum's three-part program for *Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA*, Siegel's piece explores how diaspora, continental drift and cultural reconstruction have changed the Brazilian landscape. The New York-born artist's elegant and intricate work stems from her early studies of the Yoruba people while attending Yale University. Having viewed the artist's work for Ecuador and her piece *Translocation and Overlay* at the Art, Design and Architecture Museum at the University of California, Santa Barbara, Fowler director Marla C. Berns invited Siegel to engage the Fowler's collection as catalyst for a new project. When Siegel spotted a richly layered Afro-Brazilian ensemble worn during the worship of Egun, her direction was sealed. In 2015, during an extended stay in Brazil while on a

Fulbright Scholarship, Siegel conducted research at the National Archives in Rio de Janeiro, the Museu Afro in São Paulo and on-site at the Instituto Sacatar on Itaparica. While there, she met with ritual experts, observed Egun ceremonies and began working on the piece, which she completed in her Los Angeles studio.



FRAN SIEGEL (B. 1960, NEW YORK, NY)  
LINEAGE THROUGH LANDSCAPE: TRACING EGUN IN BRAZIL, 2015–2017  
SUSPENDED DRAWING: PENCIL, PIGMENT, GOLD LEAF, STRING, AND COLLAGE ON CUT DRAFTING FILM, SCRIM, CYANOTYPE, SEWN AND PRINTED FABRIC  
LEAVES: PORCELAIN. LENGTH (DRAWING): 10.97 M  
COMMISSIONED BY THE FOWLER MUSEUM AT UCLA; COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST. PHOTO: DON COLE

In an interview with Fabrik, Siegel explained that there are only two terreiros (worship or community centers solely devoted to Egun) in Brazil, both on the island of Itaparica. In her piece, she emphasized the importance of the island to this ethnic-religious group with a cutout in the shape of the island, as well as through leaf drawings, leaf-shaped cutouts, fabric with leaf patterns and the porcelain installation. “There is a special preserve on the island of Itaparica that contains a range of sacred leaves,” Siegel said. “Each leaf has associations with a specific orixá (deity). So, the landscape becomes codified and personified and connected to the ancestral roots of Africa. Certain leaves are used for distinct Candomblé ceremonies and have curative powers. They can cleanse, are magical and can protect by warding off bad spirits.”

The quilted appearance of the work suggests family heritage. Its uneven edges add an irregular quality. “The holes or gaps are a subtractive process (mostly at the left and right edges of the suspended drawing),” Siegel observed, “which allows the piece to visually merge with the gallery space. Shadows are projected in these areas. The mirrored column adds a spatial complication to this work by contrasting ephemerality with physical form. The grid also refers to the Portuguese tiled interiors or courtyards of churches that I saw throughout Bahia. Many tiles have been replaced, so they are mismatched and new associations emerge.”

As in her previous work, Siegel plays here with light, density and shifts in perspective; achieved through the mirror and the juxtaposition of either transparent and non-transparent or coarse and fine-fibred materials. She also embeds symbols of Egun into her portrayal of Afro-Brazilian history. The use of

exuberant multicolored fabric, phrases in gold from letters and documents related to the gold trade and various other golden elements integrated into her work refer to the history of Rio de Janeiro. “The central area of the suspended drawing deals with the power of gold and its relationship to Rio,” Siegel noted. “Rio secured its position as the Brazilian capital away from the city of Salvador because they made a more efficient road (Strata Nova) connecting its port with Minas Gerais (where the gold was mined). Slaves came in and gold went out of the Rio port. I’ve included drawings of the Portuguese seal used on gold shipments: the documentation of who and what was exported.”

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

Kussatz, Simone. “UCLA Fowler Museum, Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA Fran Siegel: Lineage through Landscape: Tracing Egun in Brazil.” *Fabrik*, 17 October, 2017. [online]