

MAKING THE CONNECTION: J.B. MURRAY AND THE
SCRIPTS AND FORMS OF AFRICA

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by
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AN ABSTRACT FOR
MAKING THE CONNECTIONS: J.B. MURRAY AND THE
SCRIPTS AND FORMS OF AFRICA

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University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2013

ABSTRACT

Many African and African America artists have chosen to represent Nsibidi and other African and Afro-Caribbean syllabaries in their works of art. However, some artists also produces art and script given to them “by God” with the intent of carrying out God’s will and helping others? J.B. Murray believed this to be his situation. Through a thorough investigation of the history of the scripts and forms of Africa and the writing systems that developed in the Americas from those African scripts, the diasporic path that African traditions took in the Americas, will be explored.

One of the challenges of this research has been the different perceptions expressed by Western and non-Western viewpoints. Through an analysis of several critical viewpoints, including sociological, anthropological, and art historical, these Western and non-Western viewpoints are critiqued in connection with the continuation of African traditions throughout the diaspora. Another area examined is the difference between knowing and choosing to use the scripts and forms of Africa to express a connection with that culture, such as the artists Betye Saar and Victor Ekpuk, and simply producing art, folkart, or script, and not knowing there is any connection between their work and the work of others, whether in other countries or their own.

J.B. Murray is a wonderful artist to examine, due to the fact that he had no preconceived notions of African art, traditions, or customs. He was illiterate and therefore had no opportunity to read and gain knowledge of other cultures. Until he had produced his script and forms for a

few years and gained notoriety with exposure to art institutions in the United States, he had no idea the messages going to his recipients through him, from God, had any connection to any other cultures.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Science, have examined a thesis titled “Making the Connection: J.B. Murray and the Scripts and Forms of Africa” presented by Licia E. Clifton-James, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xiv
Chapters	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. HISTORY OF AFRICAN SCRIPT AND SPIRIT FORMS AND THEIR MIGRATION TO THE NEW WORLD	
HISTORY OF SYLLABARIES AND SPIRIT FORMS IN AFRICA.....	12
HISTORY OF WRITING SYSTEMS IN THE AMERICAS	16
HISTORY OF AFRICAN SCRIPTS AND FORMS IN THE UNITED STATES	18
3. ANALYSIS OF MURRAY’S ARTISTRY AND ITS RECEPTION	
REVIEW OF THEORETICAL METHODS OF EXAMINING MURRAY’S ART...	27
COMPARATIVE ANALYSES OF MURRAY’S ART WITH THE SCRIPTS AND FORMS OF AFRICA AS SEEN THROUGHOUT THE DIASPORA.....	35
4. COMPARISON OF THE USE OF SCRIPTS AND FORMS BY MURRAY AND OTHER ARTISTS	38
5. CONCLUSIONS	44
ILLUSTRATIONS	47
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	107
VITA.....	111

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure	Page
1-1.	<i>John Bunyon Murray (1908-1988)</i> . Photo courtesy of Andy Nasisse47
1-2.	Figure 1. Nsibidi chart. Courtesy of Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D.....48
1-3.	Kpelle Syllabary. Courtesy of <i>African Alphabets: The story of writing in Afrika</i> , by Saki Mafundikwa49
1-4.	Vai Syllabary. Courtesy of <i>African Alphabets: The story of writing in Afrika</i> , by Saki Mafundikwa50
1-5a.	Anaforuana. Image courtesy of Saki Mafundikwa in <i>Afrikan Alphabets: The story of writing in Afrika</i> , 2004, 114.....51
1-5b.	Anaforuana. Image courtesy of Saki Mafundikwa in <i>Afrikan Alphabets: The story of writing in Afrika</i> , 2004, 115.....52
1-6a.	<i>The Spirit of African Art</i> , by Ndidi Dike Nnadiyekwe, carved wood panels, 85 x 250 cm, 1994, private collection. Image courtesy of Chika Okeke’s <i>Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa</i> , London: Whitechapel Art Gallery 27, 1995.53
1-6b.	“ <i>True Story of Our Love Is Our Secret</i> ,” 1997, acrylic, by Victor Ekpuk. Image courtesy of www.victorekpuk.com53
1- 7.	Photo of J. B. Murray, with a bottle of his well water, reading script from adding machine tape. Courtesy of Judith McWillie, 1985.54
1-8.	Mineral Springs Baptist Church, Mitchell, Ga. Photo by L. Clifton-James, March 28, 201054
1-9.	Photo of J.B. Murray’s home. Photo courtesy of William Arnett, 1986, in <i>Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow</i> , edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 473.....55
1-10.	Photo of J.B. Murray in front of his home. Photo courtesy of Roger Manley, 1988, <i>Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow</i> , edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 464.....56

1-11.	Photo of J.B. Murray and the interior of his home. Photo courtesy of Andy Nasisse, 1984, <i>Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow</i> , edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 464..57
1-12.	Photo of J.B. Murray’s Protective Elements in his yard. Photo courtesy of William Arnett, 1986, in <i>Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow</i> , edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 473.....58
1-13.	Photo of J.B. Murray’s Protective Elements in his yard. Photo courtesy of William Arnett, 1986, in <i>Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow</i> , edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 473.....59
1-14.	Marker on adding machine tape, 1978, J.B. Murray. Photo courtesy of Fred Padgelek from <i>In the Hand of the Holy Spirit</i> by Mary Padgelek60
1-15.	J.B. Murray, Untitled, c. 1980, Paint and marker on car windshield, 18” x 40”. Photo courtesy of William Arnett in <i>Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow</i> , edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 46661
1-16.	Interior of J.B. Murray’s “studio.” 1985. Photo courtesy of Judith McWillie.62
1-17.	J.B. Murray, Untitled, Early 1980s, Marker and paint on paper. 19” x 24” Image courtesy of William Arnett in <i>Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow</i> , edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 475.....63
1-18.	J.B. Murray, (Reverse of Fig. 42) Marker on Paper, 19” x 24”. Image Courtesy of William Arnett in <i>Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow</i> , edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 475.....64
1-19.	J.B. Murray, Untitled Early 1980s, Ballpoint pens, marker, and paint, on paper. 24” x 18”. Image Courtesy of William Arnett in <i>Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow</i> , edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 472.65

1-20.	J.B. Murray, <i>Untitled</i> , 1985. Marker, acrylic, watercolor and crayon on paper. Photo by Licia Clifton-James 04/01/2010 at High Museum, Atlanta, GA.....	66
1-21.	J.B. Murray, <i>Untitled</i> , 1985. Paint stick on paper. Photo by Licia Clifton-James, 04/01/2010, at High Museum, Atlanta, GA.....	67
1-22.	J.B. Murray, <i>God Bless This Little Babe, God Protect This Little Babe</i> , 1986, Ballpoint pen and marker on paper, 5-3/4” x 4”. Image Courtesy of William Arnett in <i>Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow</i> , edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 481	68
1-23.	J.B. Murray, reverse of <i>God Bless This Little Babe, God Protect This Little Babe</i> , 1986 Marker on Paper. Image Courtesy of William Arnett in <i>Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow</i> , edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 481	69
1-24.	J.B. Murray, <i>Untitled</i> , 1987, Marker and paint on paper, 23-3/4” x 17-3/4”. Image Courtesy of William Arnett in <i>Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow</i> , edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 480.....	70
1-25.	Bible. Image Courtesy of : http://us.123rf.com/400wm/400/400/GeoPappas/geopappas0710/geopappas07100009/1827712-a-concept-photo-of-the-holy-spirit-turning-bible-pages.jpg	71
1-26.	(Top) Outside of J.B. Murray’s Funeral Pamphlet. Image courtesy of Judith McWillie. (Bottom) Inside of J.B. Murray’s Funeral Pamphlet. Image courtesy of Judith McWillie	72
1-27.	J.B. Murray’s funeral, September 25, 1988. Image courtesy of Judith McWillie.	73
1-28.	Cemetery worker at site marked for Ray Murray’s burial on March 28, 2010. Photo by L. Clifton-James.	74
1-29.	Funeral pamphlet from the funeral service of Ray Murray on March 28, 2010. Scan by L. Clifton-James.....	74
2-1.	Makoza of Kingoyi with two of his miniature <i>niombo</i> . Photo courtesy of Swedish missionary, Karlman, approx. 1934, from <i>The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds</i> , by Robert Ferris Thompson and Joseph Cornet, 60.....	75

2-2.	Detail of chest of miniature <i>niombo</i> on which Makoza of Kingoyi has his hand. Photo courtesy of Swedish missionary, Karlman, approx. 1934, from <i>The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds</i> , by Robert Ferris Thompson and Joseph Cornet, 69.....	76
2-3.	Brazilian Points Ground Painting. Image courtesy of Maude Southwell Wahlman’s Brazil Lecture at University of Missouri-Kansas City. 2012	77
2-4.	Brazilian Ceremonial Textiles. Image courtesy of Maude Southwell Wahlman’s Brazil Lecture at University of Missouri-Kansas City. 2012.	78
2-5.	Brazilian Metalwork. Image courtesy of Maude Southwell Wahlman’s Brazil Lecture at University of Missouri-Kansas City. 2012.	79
2-6.	Cuban Abakua Altar with Anaforuana. Image courtesy of Maude Southwell Wahlman’s Cuban Lecture at University of Missouri-Kansas City. 2012.	80
2-7.	(Left) Ireme Costume from Brazil. Anaforuana. (Right) Detail with of Ireme Costume. Images courtesy of Maude Southwell Wahlman’s Cuban Lecture at University of Missouri-Kansas City. 2012.	81
2-8.	Anaforuana banner by Yuppi Pratt, Cuba, 1989, 35-1/2” x 37-1/2”. Image courtesy of Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D. <i>Signs and Symbols: Africans Images in African-American Quilts</i> . 1993. 83.	82
2-9.	Haitian Veve Ground Paintings. . Image courtesy of Maude Southwell Wahlman’s Haitian Lecture at University of Missouri-Kansas City. 2012.	83
2-10.	Haitian Drums with Veve. . Image courtesy of Maude Southwell Wahlman’s Haitian Lecture at University of Missouri-Kansas City. 2012.	84
2-11.	Kongo Cosmograms. Image courtesy of Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D. <i>Signs and Symbols: Africans Images in African-American Quilts</i> . 1993. 80.....	85
2-12.	Wooden grave sculptures (now destroyed) made by Cyrus Bowens in 1920, Sunbury, Georgia. Photo courtesy of Muriel and Malcolm Bell Jr. from <i>Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow</i> , edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 88.....	86
2-13.	Harriet Power’s Bible Quilt. . Image courtesy of Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D. <i>Signs and Symbols: Africans Images in African-American Quilts</i> . 1993. 65.....	87
2-14.	Harriet Powers Portrait in Masonic Eastern Star apron. Image courtesy of Dr. Maude Wahlman’s lecture, 04/20/10, at University of Missouri-Kansas City.....	88

2-15.	Tombstone in <i>Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery</i> , Athens, Ga. Photo by L. Clifton-James 03/31/10.	89
2-16.	Newsprint wallpapered walls, Amanda Gordon’s house. Photo courtesy of William Ferris, Jr. Taken from <i>Signs and Symbols: Africans Images in African-American Quilts</i> . 1993. 86.	90
2-17.	Nellie Mae Rowe in her yard, 1981. Photo courtesy of Jay Wieland from <i>Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow</i> , edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 291.....	91
2-18.	Nellie Mae Rowe’s <i>Trying on Earrings</i> , 1979, Crayon, felt-tip pen, jewelry, found materials, on Styrofoam 13” x 20”. From the collection of Judith Alexander in <i>Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow</i> , edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 296.....	92
2-19.	<i>The First African Baptist Church</i> in Savannah, Ga. Photo by L. Clifton-James 04/01/10.	93
2-20.	Basement floor of <i>The First African Baptist Church</i> in Savannah, Ga. Photo by L. Clifton-James 04/01/10.	94
2-21.	Interior of <i>The First African Baptist Church</i> in Savannah, Ga. Photo by L. Clifton-James 04/01/10.....	95
2-22.	A selection of the ends of the balcony pews of <i>The First African Baptist Church</i> in Savannah, Ga. Photo by L. Clifton-James 04/01/10.....	95
2-23.	Marie Laveaux Tomb in New Orleans, Louisiana. Photo courtesy of Daniel Lombard.....	96
2-24.	Plaque from the Tomb of Marie Laveau with X markings. Photo courtesy of Daniel Lombard.	97
2-25.	Anonymous figure found in the back storeroom of a barbershop in New Orleans, Louisiana, once in the Bert Hemphill, Jr. Collection, made between approximately 1920 and 1930. Image courtesy of Dr. Maude Wahlman’s African-American artist lecture at University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2012.....	98
2-26.	Fon god, Gu. Taken from West African Blog page at webpage at http://westafrica-2008.blogspot.com/2008/06/bnin.html . Viewed 2/23/2013.	99

2-27.	Tombstone Inscription. Tombstone inscriptions, such as the one found on this coastal gravestone, provide invaluable historical information. Publication of inscriptions is an essential step in documenting the existence of a cemetery, and photographs and videorecordings of historic cemeteries are also helpful as a reference for preservationists. Courtesy of Georgia Department of Economic Development	100
2-28.	Photo of rock pile in Dilmus Hall’s yard. Photo courtesy of William Arnett, 1986, from <i>Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow</i> , edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 221	101
2-29.	(Left) Cemetery sign for <i>Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery</i> , Athens, Ga. Photo by L. Clifton-James 03/31/10. (Right) Shells adorn grave at <i>Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery</i> , Athens, Ga. Photo by L. Clifton-James 03/31/10.	102
2-30.	(Left) Shells adorn grave at <i>Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery</i> , Athens, Ga. Photo by L. Clifton-James 03/31/10. (Right) Glass bowl with hole through base on grave at <i>Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery</i> , Athens, Ga. Photo by L. Clifton-James 03/31/10	102
4-1.	James Hampton with his assemblage entitled, <i>The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations' Millennium General Assembly</i> (Images from <i>Naives and Visionaries</i> , Walker Art Center , Minneapolis, 1974) The total altar-like construction, a symmetrical arrangement of shrines, pulpits, lecturns and wall tablets covered or wrapped in gold and tin foil, was assembled in a Washington, D.C. garage, 1950-1964.....	103
4-2.	James Hampton’s tablet of the Diagnosis of the Ten Commandments from his <i>The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations' Millennium General Assembly</i> (Images from <i>Naives and Visionaries</i> , Walker Art Center , Minneapolis, 1974) The total altar-like construction, a symmetrical arrangement of shrines, pulpits, lecturns and wall tablets covered or wrapped in gold and tin foil, was assembled in a Washington, D.C. garage, 1950-1964.....	104
4-3.	Sister Gertrude Morgan. Taken from National Public Radio website article entitled, <i>Preacher-Artist Gertrude Morgan, Remixed</i> , by Joel Rose, September 30, 2005. http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4864538 . Viewed 2/23/2013	105
4-4.	Sister Gertrude Morgan painting. Taken webpage entitled, <i>Once Upon a Time . . . Final year projects and dissertation</i> . http://hollietheedamillustrator.wordpress.com/ . Viewed 2/23/2013.....	105
4-5.	Bill Traylor’s <i>Preacher and His Congregation</i> , c. 1939-42, Pencil and colored pencil on cardboard, 16-1/2” x 16-1/2 Photo courtesy of Collection of Gael Mendelsohn, from <i>Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the</i>	

South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow, edited by Paul Arnett,
William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000,106

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

What happens when a person produces art and script *given* to him “by God” with the intent of helping others? J.B. Murray (Fig. 1-1) believed this to be his situation. It is my contention that Murray possessed knowledge that, unbeknownst to him or his ancestors, was passed throughout the African Diaspora, including North America. Evidence will be presented that connects script and spirit forms in the Americas with the scripts and forms found in Nsibidi (Fig. 1-2) from Nigeria and Congo; Kpella (Fig. 1-3) from Liberia and Guinea; Vai (Fig. 1-4) from Liberia and Sierra Leone; Anaforuana (Fig. 1-5a and 1-5b) from Cuba; or various other forms of scripts or imagery originating in Africa.

Many contemporary artists, including Ndidi Dike Nnadiokwe (Fig. 1-6a) and Victor Ekpuk (Fig. 1-6b), have chosen to represent Nsibidi and other African and Afro-Caribbean syllabaries in their works of art. The study of African syllabaries and imagery and the encoded messages held within them is wide and varied. Therefore, rather than begin with an explanation of these syllabaries, I will begin with an introduction and overview of J.B. Murray and then proceed to possible connections of his work to African syllabaries and imagery.

John Bunion Murray was born in Warren County, Georgia, on March 5, 1908. He attended public school there at the age of six, however, only for one month. From that time until the late 1970s, Murray was a general farm worker until he retired in the late 1970s. In 1929, Murray married Cleo Kitchens and together they had eleven children, five of whom died before Murray. When Murray passed away in 1988, he had sixteen grandchildren,

thirteen great grandchildren and three great, great grandchildren. In about 1977, Murray's wife became ill and went to live with one of their children, where she remained until her death in 1987. Murray lived with his son, Ray and a woman who was a friend of Ray's, in a small wooden house in Mitchell, Georgia. Murray had only been retired for about a year when he had his vision.

On a warm May afternoon in 1978, Murray was in his garden when a miraculous event occurred. He stated: "Well, I was out in the yard working on the potato patch and the sun came right to me. Had different colors, even around my hands turned kinda yellow, like different color ground. Well, I prayed and I took up a water hose, hosed up the sun and the rainbow come to me."¹

Murray then went on to describe Jesus coming down in the clouds. As he looked up at the sky, he saw an eagle fly before his eyes. He connected this with being able to, in his words, "see things other folks can't see." He also described hearing the voice of his dead mother asking Jesus to "take care of my child," referring to Murray.¹

It was after this vision that Murray began using paint, brushes, pens, scrap paper and relatively anything in his house to create his first script and painted marks. Murray believed he was directed to put the water from the well on his property into a clear bottle and use it to read the script to the intended recipient (Fig. 1-7).¹ When engaged in the creation of his works, Murray would appear to be in a trance-like state. Murray explained the giving of this script to him was like speaking in tongues.² Speaking in tongues or glossalalia has long been thought to be actually speaking in unknown languages, foreign to the common person.

¹ Judith McWillie. Transcript of videotaped interview with J.B. Murray.

² Ibid.

Mary G. Padgelek, Ph.D., in her 2000 dissertation entitled *In the Hand of the Holy Spirit : The Art of J.B. Murray*, passed along this account of the after affects of his vision:

Approximately six months after he had his first vision at age seventy, Murray's vision turned dark when he was put in jail for a week and after that committed to Central State Mental Hospital for six weeks. He was released on 11 November 1978. The facts of his incarceration and commitment are unclear and exact information is not available because of patient confidentiality. However, an employee of Central State Mental Hospital, who wished to remain anonymous, stated that in 1978 it was possible for a family member to commit someone who was a burden to take care of.³

Murray was a member of the Second Mineral Springs Baptist Church (Fig. 8) in Mitchell, Georgia. He was believed by some in his family and his church congregation to be insane, and others to be deceived by Satan, and so he was involuntarily committed to Central State Mental in Milledgeville, Georgia, for six weeks. He was cleared of any harm to himself or others. Ernest Ingram, a contemporary and a member of Murray's church, talked also about Murray's showing people "this unusual writing that you couldn't understand."⁴ Ingram mentioned that there was debate within the church he and Murray attended concerning the nature of Murray's experience.⁵ Nathaniel and Larry Tucker, who lived in Mitchell and were the age of some of Murray's children, talked about how Murray came up to them around town or outside the hardware store on several occasions and started "reading" in English from a page that contained his script. Nathaniel Tucker could not remember the content of what Murray said, but it did not pertain to him (Nathaniel) personally.⁶ Concerning this "reading," Larry Tucker remarked, "He couldn't read or write yet he could read off that paper like a high school graduate."⁷ Ernest Ingram also stated that toward the end of his life

³ Ibid., 12-13.

⁴ Mary Padgelek's transcripts of telephone conversation with Ernest Ingram, 20 July 1993.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Mary Padgelek's tape recording of interview with Nathaniel Tucker, Mitchell, GA, 20 July 1993.

⁷ Mary Padgelek's tape recording of interview with Larry Tucker, Mitchell, GA, 20 July 1993.

Murray was invited to lead prayer in his church, which displays a degree of acceptance by the church leadership.⁸

After his release in November, 1978, Murray suspected his commitment was the plan of the woman living in his son's house; therefore, he built a separate house on a portion of that same land where he lived alone and did his work by the light of a kerosene lamp. Murray's small home (Fig. 1-9) was little more than a shed, with no indoor plumbing, until his art brought in enough money to fund its installation. He took protective measures to ensure the land and home would remain safe from those who wish him harm. Similar to protective measures have been seen throughout Africa and the diaspora through the Caribbean and into the Southern United States.⁹ To find evidence of these protective measures, one merely needs to look at Murray's home and surroundings (Figs. 1-10 through 1-13). William Arnett gives this account of Murray's protective measures in Volume Two of the 2000 book, entitled, *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume Two: Once That River Starts to Flow*:

His first works were probably the small mysterious piles of rocks and stones, concrete blocks, and other found materials (one pile included an old toilet bowl and empty beer cans) that Murray built around his house. While these constructions appear highly idiosyncratic, they closely resemble similar small structures (not necessarily rural and not always African American) found in yards across the South. Murray declined to discuss their significance, yet their purposes seem to be protective and (additionally) related to burial traditions, because purposeful stacks of rocks are also often used as grave markers in African American cemeteries throughout the region. In a formal sense, Murray's piles of rocks anticipate some

⁸ Mary Padgelek's transcripts of telephone conversation with Ernest Ingram, 20 July 1993.

⁹ Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, and Theophus Smith. *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume Two: Once That River Starts to Flow* (Atlanta, GA: Tinwood, Inc. 2000), 471. "Similar sculptures were part of the yard architectures of Eldren M. Bailey, Dilmus Hall, and Ralph Griffin (African American artists who, along with Murray, lived in the Northern half of the state of Georgia), as well as Howard Finster (of the same region but not African American). Like Murray, each was unwilling to reveal his intention in building the sculptures, sometimes apparently out of fear of being perceived to be engaged in supernatural or superstitious practices. Many African American artists express apprehension, distaste, or resentment at being branded with such pejorative terms as "hoodoo" or "voodoo," not only by misinformed white observers but by members of their African American communities."

of his later protective drawings and paintings, compartmentalized combinations of rectangular and rounded forms with vertical and horizontal elements.¹⁰

Arnett continues that Murray was unwilling to reveal his intention in building the sculptures, sometimes apparently out of fear of being perceived to be engaged in supernatural or superstitious practices.¹¹ Can a connection be made between the continuation of these African traditions seen throughout the Southern United States, including Murray's home state of Georgia and the artwork of an illiterate, share-cropper, who was never taught these traditions?

Some of Murray's first writings were produced on adding machine paper, like this 1978 piece (Fig. 1-14) photographed at the home of William Rawlings, M.D., in Sandersville, Georgia. Murray enclosed these writings in sealed envelopes and stated they were warnings or messages to various people, similar to protective writings, a well-known aspect of the syllabaries in Africa. Other early paintings were created on found objects, which included old television sets and an automotive windshield (Fig. 1-15). According to Murray these were chosen because of their protective properties. The glass was chosen because of its penetrable nature by light rays, sounds and harmful, evil energies. He painted the entire glass area with vertical forms he believed to be guardian figures, both human and spiritual. Significantly, these vertical forms also have been found in protective works throughout the African Diaspora. One example is in the form of trees whose roots reach down to the watery world of the ancestors.¹² These figures were enclosed by Murray's script presumably to state a warning or provide protection of the owner and/or viewer. Murray also

¹⁰ Ibid., 471.

¹¹ Ibid., 471.

¹² Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D. *Signs and Symbols: African Images in African-American Quilts* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 1993), 80. "The Kongo cosmogram represents birth, life, death, and rebirth in the underwater world of the ancestors. Also referred to as the four moments of the sun, it symbolizes the four stations in the cycle of life. Souls of ancestors are believed to reside under water until reborn into the bodies of descendants. Simple and calligraphic versions of the cosmogram are found in ground paintings, graveyard arts, and on masks, sculpture, and textiles."

covered the makeshift, paneled walls of his house with these decorative protective pieces to keep away the evil that he thought some people were wishing on him (Fig. 1-16).

Color codification is an integral part of Murray's pieces. Three primary colors – yellow, blue and red – have specific symbolic references: red represents torment or evil, as in evil people, evil spirits or evil forces; blue represents positive strength or good; and, yellow indicates a divine presence, an energy emanating from or embodied in the sun.¹³ White represents a spiritual purity related to death or the afterlife, which is very common in ritual funerary sculpture in Nigeria and Congo.¹⁴ Black, when introduced into, onto and around white, blue and yellow forms, denotes imperfection or impurity – a transitional state between the thoroughly opposed red and blue energies.¹⁵

In December of 1978, Murray came under the care of Dr. William Rawlings whom he considered “more than just a physical doctor.”¹⁶ In an untitled, large, early work (Fig. 1-17), Murray showed concern with the harm that had come to his body once diagnosed with prostate cancer in 1984. Extensive markings, included in the work, along with an enormous amount of script on the reverse side (Fig. 1-18), are perhaps a warning about the dangers of prostate cancer and a request for protection from it. In this painting, the figures from the center out to the right, enveloped in red, represent invaded body parts, the genitals and perhaps bones. The picture is inundated with positive colors of white and blue. Murray

¹³ William Arnett, Paul Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, and Theophus Smith, Eds. *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume Two: Once That River Starts to Flow* (Atlanta, GA: Tinwood Books, 2000), 474.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Mary Padgelek. Interview with Andy Nasisse, tape recording. Athens, GA, June 30, 1993.

fashioned a complex diagram of his negative condition and a method for bringing about its healing or additional protection.¹⁷

In his family portrait from the early 1980s (Fig. 1-19), Murray is featured in the center inside a house, his wife on the right and their eleven children are arranged throughout the drawing.¹⁸ The yellow roof represents God's blessing on the house, however, the house is filled with turmoil (in red) and impurity (in black).¹⁹ Red and black represent Murray's wife with bits of white to acknowledge her positive qualities. The children are portrayed in different combinations of colors, showing Murray's feelings about each one, ranging from positive to negative.²⁰ Murray chose entirely blue for himself and one of his children. Another child, possibly one who died, is colored blue and white, with another child represented almost entirely red – certainly not Murray's favorite.²¹

Murray's color codification was future substantiated when Susan Crawley, the curator of Folk Art at the High Museum in Atlanta, Georgia, wrote the museum label for Murray's Untitled works from 1985 (Fig. 1-20 and 1-21),

The battle between good and evil rages among the abstracted forms of J.B. Murray's drawings. The artist developed a distinctive visual vocabulary of symbolic colors and forms, which he employed in drawings meant to capture or repel harmful forces or to illustrate struggles between good and evil. Many of his drawings also feature his own system of glossographia, or spiritual writing, intelligible only to him.

Additionally, it reinforces the thought that Murray used various methods to draw upon the protection against evil. Murray sought protection from God in the forms of color, script, and the use water to imbue the works of art with this protection.

¹⁷ William Arnett, Paul Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, and Theophus Smith, Eds.. *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume Two: Once That River Starts to Flow* (Atlanta, GA: Tinwood Books, 2000), 478.

¹⁸ Ibid., 477.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

In 1986, Murray created a small piece (Fig. 1-22) specifically for an eleven-year-old visitor, Tom Arnett, son of William Arnett, one of the authors of the volumes, *Souls Grown Deep*. Murray drew himself in yellow, touched by God, with arms raised up in a traditional praise position. In the left foreground, he placed a small bedside table with a bottle of water on top. This was apparently the way his bedroom appeared and was where he held his spiritual readings. He embellished the creation with gold, a color many ancient cultures associated with the sun and power, and Murray chose to use it quite often. On the reverse side (Fig. 1-23), Murray wrote the script while he raised the bottle of water and he spoke this blessing, “*God* bless this little babe, *God* protect this little babe.” Each time he intoned the word “*God*,” he drew several Xs around the edges of the glossolalia he had written.²² These Xs appear to be his tool for calling forth the power of God to imbue the work of art and the script with His protective powers.

As Murray’s work progressed, his work showed the influence Christianity and the Baptist Church had on him. In an untitled piece from 1987 (Fig. 1-24), Murray shows his move toward producing works that appear to imitate the Bible. The multiple columns on each page of figures and text are narrow and vertical, as in the Bible (Fig. 1-25). Though Murray never gave mention to duplicating the Bible in any form, his choice to format his works in this manner is a direct reflection of his ability to discern at least the written form of the word of God, even if he could not read it.

After Murray was released from the Central State Mental Hospital in December 1978, he began to bring his scripts and illustrations to his internist, William Rawlings, M.D. Rawlings eventually gave Murray five dollars to buy some posterboard, paint, and markers. In 1982, Murray took an art class from Andy Nasisse, an art professor at the University of

²² Ibid., 479.

Georgia. Immediately Nasisse became interested in Murray's artwork and contacted the Phyllis Kind Gallery in New York City. Murray's work was exhibited as far away as Toyko, Japan, in the Alpha Cubic Gallery and in the United States was exhibited in the Nexus Gallery in Atlanta, Ricco Johnson Gallery in New York, the San Francisco Museum of Folk Art, and many more. In 1996, as part of an exhibit for the Olympic games in Atlanta, Georgia, collector William Arnett included about 20 of Murray's works and script. In the later years of his life, Murray became aware of the appreciation of his work as art. Dr. Rawlings explained that Murray created his script more feverishly with the advancement of his prostate cancer. "It was like he had to complete this work before he died," Rawlings stated²³. Judith McWillie observed that Murray was additionally conscious of the disagreements regarding his work and was upset regarding this. According to McWillie, Murray was conscious that people were doubtful of his abilities and this troubled him. She went on to say, "I don't know if it had just all run its course or if he felt sick while that was happening, but there was definitely a closure."²⁴ By closure, McWillie means that since Murray was already ill with prostate cancer, this negative attention could have been a source that propelled his health even quicker on a downward spiral.

Even though negative attention came his way, Murray always was most happy and content when doing God's work through the gift he had been given. Padgelek reported in *In the Hand of the Spirit*, that "Rawlings, McWillie, [Andy] Nasisse, and [Sarah Murray] Pinkston (Murray's sister-in-law) commented that the work Murray did was a source of joy and happiness for him, although the experience was not without pain as a consequence of being misunderstood. Pinkston recounted the joy Murray would express as he told her about

²³ Padgelek, Mary. *In the Hand of the Spirit* (Macon, GA: Mercier University Press, 2000), 19.

²⁴ Ibid.

the art and what God told him to do and say.”²⁵ Murray expressed it in his own way, “I can’t need nothing else from God, like a mirror, and I’m happy. The work I’m doing, I’m happy because it’s come from Him. Man couldn’t do it . . . This well is deep and never go dry.”²⁶

That well did not go dry until Murray died. After his death in September, 1988, Murray’s funeral (Figs. 1-26 and 1-27) was held at Second Mineral Springs Baptist Church, in Mitchell, Georgia, and he was buried in the cemetery in front of the building, along with other Murray and Kitchens family members. On March 21, 2010, J.B. Murray’s son, Ray passed away in Mitchell, Georgia. His funeral was held at Mineral Springs Baptist Church just as his father’s funeral had been held in 1988. The cemetery worker, shown here in red (Fig. 1-28), stated that he believed J.B.’s grave was directly to the left of Ray’s, whose grave was adorned with flowers after his burial on March 28, 2010 (Fig. 1-29).

That sunny day in 1978 when Murray had his vision while his watering potatoes in his backyard, he did not know the extent to which his obedience to what he believed was God’s wish would go. Having never created art or been able to read or write, he was unaware of the art world that would eventually be his chief spectators and therefore the recipient of the message he was so feverishly distributing. He was a singular individual who believed God had come to him in the form of the sun to illuminate the ground around him and the new course for the remainder of his life. Murray explained, “Lord, I didn’t know I was close enough to You for You to bless me with this gift.”²⁷

The gift of which Murray was so appreciative was retained by Africans throughout the diaspora into South and Central Americas, the Caribbean, and the United States. Once in the destination country, whether it was Brazil, Haiti, Cuba, or the United States, the gift was

²⁵ Ibid., 19-20.

²⁶ Ibid., 20.

²⁷ Ibid., 20.

adapted to avoid persecution and influenced by the new cultures and environments to which it was exposed. After centuries of adaptations, the gift has been retained even though those retaining it may not understand the connection and pathway it took to be an endowment of the individual. In the following chapters, these connections and pathways will be examined giving important and credible evidence that J.B. Murray came by his script and figures, not only as a gift from God, but as a gift from his African ancestors as well.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY OF AFRICAN SCRIPT AND SPIRIT FORMS

AND THEIR MIGRATION ¹TO THE NEW WORLD

History of Syllabaries and Spirit Forms in Africa

Murray's use of personal syllabaries seems mystically connected to African forms and figures represented in indigenous syllabaries. In 1981 in *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds*, Robert Farris Thompson states,

This is a world of objects bearing humanistic messages of spirit and vindication, objects full of communal comment and aspiration, pointing to the perennial Kongo concerns with balance between worlds, the healing of minds disturbed by social disequilibrium, and the rediscovery of the ideal city, Mbanza Kongo, where wisdom and ecstatic sharing, justice and compassion, once were given perfect visage. Let us turn, then, towards the fullness of these reflected worlds.¹

His reference to messages is regarding communications set forth in the form of syllabaries from various cultures in Africa. A Westerner's closest comparison would be that of the alphabet, but in these instances the figure displayed holds much more information than a simple figure that helps to form a word or thought. The signs in African syllabaries held entire thoughts, notions, and, in some cases, proverbs. For example the syllabary Nsibidi, P. Amaury Talbot, in 1909, stated the art of Nsibidi was already being eroded by influence of the European interest. He based his account on three informants, two from Abiriba, and a woman whose mother had taught Nsibidi in a school, and who preserved a copy of the symbols made on cloth by her grandmother, many years before. Talbot stated that Nsibidi originated among the Igbo tribe. However he reminded us that it was stated that Nsibidi originated east of the Cross River and north of Uwet and this would indicate instead, an area

¹Robert F. Thompson, *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1981) 38-41.

other than Igbo, but especially close to the Igbo border.² It is a known fact the Nsibidi symbols were conserved by the Ejagham men's and women's secret societies, in particular the traveling blacksmiths; however, some signs were more widely known. Nsibidi was dispersed to the people depending on their level in society. There was a general level for the public and everyday use. This general level of Nsibidi would have been seen in public ceremonies, announcements, etc. The middle level was for members of the societies and more secretive use, such as private society ceremonies. Finally, the third level, for those holding the highest power was known by very few and used only among themselves.³

Nsibidi was not the only syllabary used in Africa. Other systems of syllabaries were used in other regions of Africa, for example, the Bwende Cloth Mannequin Reliquary (Fig. 2-1 and 2-2) shown in *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds* by Robert Farris Thompson and Joseph Cornet. The Reliquary is described in the Catalogue on page 227,

In a letter dated 5 May 1934, A.P. Karlman, the Swedish missionary, wrote of this piece to what is now the Musee Royal de l'Afrique Centrale in Tervuren: "I have purchased a miniature *niombo* [measuring] 70 x 70 cm." He had written the letter from Kingoyi, the very Bwende village where this image had been made. He purchased it from Makoza, its maker. The *niombo* arrived at Tervuren on 30 August 1934. With signs rendered in chalk or ingeniously embroidered in cord upon the belly and chest of the image, it represents one of Makoza's great late works, remarkable for its wealth of ideographic comments on the return of the spirit. The signs include a spiraling emblem of return, uncoiling from the right nipple; a navel-to-heart emblem of the python, symbolizing, among many things, longevity; and a square shield of paper, criss-crossed with the Kongo sign of cosmos on the heart. An upper portion of this "shield" is written over with an apparent fragment of "spirit writing," a form of visual glossolalia such as surfaces today in different forms among some of the prophetic churches which abound in Kongo. Photograph is taken in Kingoyi by Karlman. R.F.T.

² P. Amaury Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush* (London: William Heinemann, January 1912).

³ Maude Southwell Wahlman, Conversation with L. Clifton-James on February 25, 2013.

The syllabary incorporated on this reliquary piece would have used a syllabary associated with the Bwende people from the Kongo.

The Ejagham Leopard Society of Nigeria, a men's secret society, uses the connection of power and strength in connection with the symbol, ▲, of the leopard. In addition, the leopard's stealth maneuvering is another quality this society took on as their own.

Since 1904, among the Ejagham and related peoples, scholars have studied nsibidi ideographic patterns on masks and other paraphernalia of the Leopard Society (Kubik 1986: 77). Robert Farris Thompson argues that nsibidi were an agent of memory in the transport of the Ejagham Leopard Society to the Americas (Cuba) in the late 1800s. Their secrecy was largely responsible for the movement of an entire institution across the Atlantic, and for its survival in its new locale (1983).⁴

Although the secret society was for men, it was believed that women made the first symbols and were in charge of passing the symbols on to the men and future generations. Women, of the Ejagham women's secret society called *Nimm*, placed the symbols on cloth using the resist dye method, and the cloth was for use by the men in the Secret Leopard Society.⁵

The use of cloth as a means of remembering, reproducing, and passing on syllabaries can be seen in the United States as well. In her book, *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad*, in 2000, Jacqueline Tobin and Raymond Dobard connected African textile motifs and indigenous writing symbols to African American quilts⁶. Tobin purposed that Nsibidi, the Nigerian writing system, was encoded in textiles made for the Ekpe Leopard Society, and again in African American quilts. Though not directly obvious, even the use of symbols is a connection passed through generations as a means of secret communication. Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., in her 1993 book entitled *Signs and Symbols: African Images in African-American Quilts*, states that the


⁴ <http://sorrel.humboldt.edu/~rwj1/AFR/Secrecy.html>.

⁵ Maude Southwell Wahlman, Conversation with L. Clifton-James on February 20, 2013.

⁶ Jacqueline L. Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard, Ph.D. *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 9.


traditions of geometric patterns, abstract designs, strip piecing, bold colors and distinctive stitches are symbols and techniques that stem directly from the symbols and techniques in Africa.⁷

Tobin sees ways in which these quilts were also used to communicate what actions were to be taken at any given time in the resistance movement during slavery in the United States. Tobin gives credit to Ozella McDaniel Williams for passing the knowledge of the ten known quilt square designs used to communicate with other African Americans to give instruction for escape and to give directions on the Underground Railroad.⁸ The Monkey

Wrench⁹, , is said to be a sign to gather tools and necessities together in preparation for departure.¹⁰ The Wagon Wheel is said to represent the means of transport for many on the escape route, that being a wagon providing transportation for the escapees.¹¹ It is also worth noting how similar the Wagon Wheel symbol is to that of the Nsibidi symbol for Congress,



, from the Ejagham people in Africa. Though the meaning is not necessarily the same, in both cases the reference is to people and is pictorial. When it was time for escape,

the Tumbling Boxes¹², , pattern with its vision of movement was displayed usually draped over a fence.

⁷ Maude Southwell Wahlman, *Signs and Symbols: African Images in African-American Quilts* (New York: Penguin Group, 1993), 25-60.

⁸ Tobin. 15-23.

⁹ Kris Driessen, *Putting it in Perspective: The Symbolism of Underground Railroad Quilts* <http://www.quilthistory.com/ugrrquilts.htm>. Many of the [quilt blocks named in the book](#) were not given their names until the early 1900's. The monkey wrench, for example, was not invented until 1858 and so could not have been the name of a block used as a mnemonic device. 1. Viewed 2013.

¹⁰ Tobin. 83.

¹¹ Ibid., 88.

¹² Driessen, 1.

As another system of syllabaries in Africa, a group of indigenous scripts discovered in Liberia, Mali and Sierra Leone is called the Mande Syllabaries. The five syllabaries include the Vai, the Loma, and the Kpelle from Liberia, the Mende from Sierra Leone, and the Bambara from southern Mali. The Mande group of Niger-Congo languages is spoken by about 490,000 people in Liberia and around 300,000 people in Guinea. It is believed they were graphically inspired by traditional symbols and secret scripts used to transcribe Arabic in the Hodh region of Mauritania during from 1830 to 1930.¹³ The Vai coast was a prime location for slave trading. By 1807, slave trading was officially outlawed and the use of the Vai writing system made negotiations, required for the procurement, containment and exchange of large numbers of slaves easier. Just as traders were using the Mande syllabaries, so too were the slaves being traded. These mother tongues were transported with the slaves through the diaspora. Many took memories of secret society symbols with them to the Americas. African symbols were also combined with Masonic symbols throughout the Americas. In my opinion, there are strong connections between Murray's form of script and the script within the Kpelle Syllabary (Fig. 1-3), a writing form that is a member of the Mande group of Niger-Congo languages spoken by about 490,000 people in Liberia and around 300,000 people in Guinea. The Vai Syllabary (Fig. 1-4) is the oldest member of the Mande group and has similar connective possibilities.

History of Writing Systems in the Americas

Upon arrival in the Americas various African writing systems were retained, but adapted, to keep Africans from persecution for using traditions from the old country. African cultures in Brazil, Suriname, Haiti, Cuba, and the United States drew upon the religions of

¹³Saki Mafundikwa, *African Alphabets: The story of writing in Afrika* (West New York, NJ: Batty Publisher, 2004), 63.

these new environments and adapted their old religious traditions and customs to appear to accept new religious values. New scripts were formed from the fusion of West African scripts such as Vai, Adinkra, Fon, Yoruba, Nsibidi, and the Kongo cosmogram. Remnants of these scripts are seen in various African-American folk arts, such as ceramics, painting, sculpture, and textiles, as well as in protective measures taken for personal safety. In the Americas, both captive and free Africans established creolized religious models such as Candomble in Brazil, Santeria in Cuba and Puerto Rico, and Vodun in Haiti. Along with these religious models, writing systems were developed as well, taking the form of Points in Brazil, Anaforuana in Cuba, and Vive in Haiti.¹⁴

Africans were brought from Central and West Africa by the Portuguese to Brazil for about 300 years from 1550 through 1850. These Africans were used to work the sugar plantations and Bahia, Brazil became a central location for Yoruba peoples from Nigeria. Here the religions brought with them were fused with Catholicism to create a variety of creolized religions still practiced today. To communicate and celebrate their religious deities, the African Brazilian writing system referred to as ‘pontos riscados’ or ‘points drawn’ can be found in ground paintings (Fig. 2-3), ceremonial textiles (Fig. 2-4), as well as metalwork (Fig. 2-5).

In Cuba, the religion Santeria developed and retains strong properties of the Fon and Yoruba religions, Mayombe retain Kongo funerary concepts, and Abakua is an obvious derivation of the Ejagham religion.¹⁵ Central and West African cultures are seen in the art forms of these cultures and in particular the Abakua religious sect has sacred script called

¹⁴ Maude Southwell Wahlman lectures on the art and cultures of Brazil, Haiti, and Cuba, 2007.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Anaforuana that continues the belief in four eyes from the Ejagham.¹⁶ Anaforuana and the reference to four eyes can be seen in the Abakua Altars (Fig. 2-6), Abakua Ireme costumes (Fig. 2-7), and banners (Fig. 2-8) in Cuba. In regard to the Ireme, Jesus Nasako understands the term *ireme* as “manifested, materialized, or represented spirit . . . When a man dons the suit of the *ireme*, he is representing a spirit of the other world [*mas alla*].”¹⁷

In Haiti, the script takes the form of Veve which is a derivation of Fon, Yoruba, and Ejagham from West Africa, and the Central African Kongo ritual traditions of ground paintings. Just as the Africans taken to Brazil, Africans were taken to Haiti beginning in 1517 and continued for well over 300 years.¹⁸ They, too, combined their African religions and traditions with the Catholic religion of the new land and developed the religion of Vodun.¹⁹ The word Veve is derived from the Fon term for palm oil which is used in making ground paintings (Fig. 2-9) for the Fon gods.²⁰ A combination of the Central African Kongo cosmogram, and both Fon and Nsibidi forms, create the Veve forms seen on items such as this drum (Fig. 2-10).²¹ In addition, the Fon god of iron, Gu (Fig. 2-26), may be represented in Haiti as Baron Samedi, protector of spirits associated with cemeteries.²² Baron Samedi appears sometimes as a scarecrow-type figure dressed in old overcoats and top hats.²³

History of African Scripts and Forms in the United States

Just as these African religions and script forms were perpetuated in the Caribbean, so too were they continued in the United States. In J.B. Murray’s home state of Georgia, this

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ David H. Brown, *The Light Inside: Abakua Society Arts and Cuban Cultural History* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 115.

¹⁸ Maude Southwell Wahlman lectures on the art and cultures of Brazil, Haiti, and Cuba, 2007.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Maude Southwell Wahlman lectures on the art and cultures of Brazil, Haiti, and Cuba, 2007.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

continuity is seen in a grave dated to 1912 in Athens, Georgia, which has quartz stones embedded in a form resembling the Kongo cosmogram (Fig. 2-11).

In Maude Southwell Wahlman's book, *Mojo Working*, another example is given: In Sunbury, Georgia, Siras Bowen's family burial ground (Fig. 2-12) included wooden images of a sign, a snake, a male figure, and a clay marker painted yellow. The wooden sculptures were crafted from found wood specially selected for features which still have symbolic value in the Kongo culture. One piece in particular has been adapted to create a circle and a cross, reminiscent of the Kongo cosmogram. In the United States it is called by conjuremen and women, "the four corners of the sheet of paper and put a cross in there . . . that's the four corners of the earth . . . put that seal on the ground (the cross drawn within a circle) . . ." ²⁴

Wahlman informs us in *Mojo Working* that in Zaire, the conjuring cane symbolizes the vertical element of the cosmogram, that very important connection between living and ancestral powers. Conjuring canes were also used in Haiti to call on ancestral powers to make things happen. Haitian Africans brought the conjuring cane into the United States, where it adapted into many forms, such as protective broomsticks, batons twirled by innocent majorettes, and carved conjuring canes and walking sticks of African-Americans. These items were carved, just as in Central Africa, with animals from the water, each a symbolic messenger of Kongo ancestral powers. ²⁵

Looking at the African traditions at the slave trading waters' edge in Savannah, Georgia, *The First Baptist Church* had a white congregation, some of which were slave owners. The decision was made by the congregation to bring in the slaves to first observe, and then to learn Christianity. To accommodate the slaves during services, the church installed balcony seating (Fig. 2-22) was called the Slave Gallery. ²⁶ The pews in the Slave Gallery were built by the slaves themselves and adorned with script. After being purchased

²⁴ Maude Southwell Wahlman, *Mojo Working* (University Press, 2013).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ George Freeman Bragg, *History of the Afro-American Group of the Episcopal Church* (Baltimore, MD: Church's Advocate Press, 1968), 30.

by the local African American congregation, the church was renamed *First African Baptist Church* (Fig. 2-19). The present-day church historian, Karen Wortham, states, “It is the agreement of the members and leadership of the church, both past and present, that this script is most likely ancient Hebrew. Brought with the slaves from the continent of Africa, they believe the script could be read as, ‘To secure a desired harvest, to enter a pathway into a household.’”²⁷

However, Mary Padgelek cites Philip Curtin, in his book entitled, *Economic Change in Pre-Colonial Africa*, proposes that while about 29,695 African Muslims entered in the United States, their impact many times exceeded these numbers. Numerous enslaved, African-American Muslims were known to have memorized the Koran, in its entirety, in an attempt to maintain their Islamic faith and pass it on, especially to the children.²⁸ This opens the opportunity for the script adorning the pews of the Slave Gallery to possibly be an Islamic script.

In 1830, when the original building was considered dilapidated, it was sold to a black congregation and renamed *The First African Baptist Church* (Fig. 2-19). The congregation renovated the dilapidated building and constructed the church auditorium ceiling (Fig. 2-21) in the pattern of a 9-patch quilt, which was a symbol of a safe place on the underground railroad.²⁹ This same congregation toiled after plantation work hours ended, into the early

²⁷ Karen Wortham, *A Journey By Faith: The History of First African Baptist Church* (DVD) and interview on 04/01/10 with L. Clifton-James.

²⁸ C. Eric Lincoln, “The American Muslim Mission in the Context of American Social History,” in *The Muslim Community in North America*. 1983. 218.

²⁹ J. Tobin and R.G. Dobard, *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999). Explanation from Ozella McDaniel Williams regarding the significance of the 9-patch quilt and the encoding in it for the Underground Railroad, including the mnemonic device: “There are five square knots on the quilt every two inches apart. They escaped on the fifth knot on the tenth pattern and went to Ontario, Canada.” 68-109

morning hours, making and carrying bricks made from the soil of the banks of the Savannah River to recondition the building.

While making bricks at the river's edge and carrying them up the long hill to the location of the church, an underground tunnel was discovered and eventually completed to lead to the church's basement. The basement was constructed with a four-foot space underneath it to house slaves escaping to freedom in the North. To allow ventilation so the slaves could have fresh air to breathe, holes (Fig. 2-20) were bored into the wood flooring. The African slaves drilled these holes in the shape of a diamond, a direct reference to the Kongo cosmogram, with its reference to life, birth, death and rebirth at each of the points and its ever important connection with the African ancestors. In doing so, they were able to provide ventilation for the secret hiding space beneath the floor, while incorporating yet another African tradition from their lives and the lives of their ancestors, whether they remembered the true symbolic meaning from Africa or simply knew the diamond shape to be protective. Additionally, the use of symbols for appliquéd quilts (Fig. 2-13) and aprons (Fig. 2-14), as well as on tombstones (Fig. 2-15), show the continuation in the works of Harriet Powers, buried in the Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery in Athens, Georgia. Writing continued as a form of protection with those who wallpapered their homes with newsprint to protect against evil spirits (Fig. 2-16).

Mary Padgelek stated in her religious studies dissertation entitled, *In the Hand of the Spirit: The Visionary Art of J.B. Murray*, "Conjure and hoodoo constituted the spiritual entities he fearfully respected, but did not practice himself. Murray often called on Jesus to protect him from the conjure of those he believed wished him harm." And she quoted

Murray, in his own words, “Jesus is stronger than hoodoo.”³⁰ Padgelek goes on to say of Murray’s script that its creation might be a result of an African Islamic way of understanding the written word. Since the Bible does not mention the spiritual gift of a person writing in an esoteric script literally produced by the Holy Spirit moving the person’s hand, this fact raises the possibility of Muslim influence in middle Georgia, which historically connects the execution of certain scripts with religious devotion, prayer, and empowerment from God.³¹ Historically, the actual action of writing in Arabic was closely akin to believing and worshiping, for slaves who were African-American Muslims.³² Through this production of this prayerful script both in Africa and later in America, a person is set apart from those in his community as a spiritual counselor. In Islam, the act of writing is believed to endow a person with authority given by Allah.³³ A possible example of this endowed script was already mentioned in the script on the Slave Gallery Pews in the First African Baptist Church in Savannah, Georgia and continues to be seen across Georgia. Surrounding communities echoed Murray’s traditions of protective script as evidenced by images found on tombstones (Fig. 2-27) in Georgia and other southern states, as well as yard art such as the rock pile (Fig. 2-28) that protects Dilmus Hall’s yard near Athens, Georgia.

Other supporting evidence of the traditions of Africa in the Southern United States is found in the Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery (Fig. 2-29, left), an African-American cemetery founded in 1882, in Athens, Georgia. Numerous gravesites display the African tradition of placing shells on graves (Fig. 2-29, right and Fig. 2-30, left), to symbolize the connection of

³⁰ Padgelek, Murray, transcript of videotaped interview. 25.

³¹ Padgelek, *In the Hand of the Holy Spirit* (Macon, GA: Mercier University Press, 2000), 26.

³² Allan D. Austin, *African Muslims in Ante-bellum America – A Source book* (London: Rutledge, 1984), 17.

³³ Ronald A.T. Judy, *(Dis)Forming the American Canon – African-Arabic Slave Narratives and the Vernacular* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 173.

those present in this world with the ancestors in the watery world of the afterlife.³⁴ Another African custom was to place pottery, ceramic or glass household objects on the graves to honor the ancestor and make the connection between the two worlds.³⁵ A hole must be placed in the bottom of the vessel to show the ancestor that perfection is only in the afterlife.³⁶ This way the ancestor will not want to return and cause havoc in this world. In the case of one grave (Fig. 2-30, right), this is illustrated with the glass bowl that has had a hole punched through the base and then placed to decorate a grave.

In the same cemetery, the Georgia Historical Society and East Athens Development Corporation, Inc. claim the grave of Harriet Powers has been identified.³⁷ Evidenced by the Masonic symbols on her apron (Fig. 2-14), Powers was believed to be a member of the Eastern Star division of the Masonic group formed for African-American Women by Prince Hall after his induction as a Master Mason on March 6, 1775. Though not privy to the exact location, many tombstones in the Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery (Figs. 2-15) are adorned with Masonic symbols and could mark her gravesite.

Returning to the water's edge in South Carolina, Georgia, and northern Florida, the Gullah people have inhabited the coastline since the 1500s with a large influx during the early 1800s slave trade. They were thought to have been taken from the Congo or Angola areas Africa. Dr. Wahlman, in *Mojo Working*, presents supportive scenarios collected from several sources. She states that the Gullah people believed in evil spirits "capable of

³⁴ Maude Southwell Wahlman, 2007 Lecture on African American Graveyard Traditions.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Cemetery marker states: The Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery was founded in 1882 by the Gospel Pilgrim Society, a fraternal organization, to furnish respectable funerals and burial places for Athens-area African Americans. . . . Gospel Pilgrim also contains fine examples of African-American funerary art. Approximately 3500 persons are buried here, including state legislator Madison Davis and nationally recognized folk artist Harriet Powers. 2008.8 Erected by the Georgia Historical Society and East Athens Development Corporation, Inc. 29-6. Taken from <http://www.lat34north.com/historicmarkers/MarkerDetail.cfm?KeyID=029-HS6A&MarkerTitle=Gospel%20Pilgrim%20Cemetery>.

enslaving a person by controlling his will.”³⁸ Remembering West African charms which enclose writing, they sometimes paper the walls of their houses with newsprint, to keep away evil spirits.³⁹ The practice spread all over the South, where newsprint was placed on the walls of Southern homes (Fig. 2-16) for protection against the weather. But in African American homes where – where newsprint was put into shoes as well – it protected against both weather and evil enslaving spirits, in the belief that “evil spirits would have to stop and read the words of each chopped up column” before they could do any harm.⁴⁰ Additionally, this recalls the African American practice of leaving a Bible open at night so that the power of religious words would protect a family against nighttime evils.⁴¹

Finally, Nellie Mae Rowe (Fig. 2-17), of Georgia, included script in her paintings, as well as, Haitian Veve signs used to accent its border (Fig. 2-18). Rowe was a dedicated Christian with memories of being taught “fancy writing drawings,” probably derived from the Haitian script Veve. J.B. Murray’s work, as well, included spirit forms and his own script, which was meant to be read by him through a jar of well-water. Many of Murray’s creations included four eyes references reminiscent of the Ejagham and African Cuban traditions. Additionally, Murray saw his pieces as protective measures for both himself and the intended recipient of his pieces.

Taking a look at the continuum in North Carolina, the use of conjuring canes and symbolic messengers were carried through the African diaspora and into the United States. In 1799 at the Bennehan-Cameron plantation near Durham, North Carolina, a conjuring cane

³⁸ Joseph Opala, *The Gullah* (West Africa, 1986), 12.

³⁹ Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Illinois: University of Illinois, 1984).

⁴⁰ Ruth Bass, “The Little Man,” in Alan Dundes (Ed.), *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel: Readings on the Interpretation of Afro-American Folklore* (Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 1973), 393.

⁴¹ Trudier Harris, *African Arts, Volume 20*. (University of California, Los Angeles Press, 1984), “Roger Abrahams also told Wahlman that in many early literate cultures, if you want a wish fulfilled, or for protection for a child, you put a Bible under the pillow.”

was hidden inside the wall when the new addition was connected to the primary house. In 1850 near Durham, North Carolina, two forked branches were secretly placed between the walls. In interviews with African Americans around 1930, it was pointed out that forked branches were used “in various ways to ward off witches.”⁴²

Found in New Orleans, Louisiana, is yet another example of script being used as a form of worship or calling for help from the ancestors. In 2005, in her book entitled, *The Birth of New Orleans' Voodoo Queen: A Long-Held Mystery Resolved*, assistant professor of Religious Studies, African and African American Studies, and Women and Gender Studies at Louisiana State University, Ina J. Frandrich introduces her subject as Marie Laveau New Orleans' famous Voodoo Queen, the central leader and the heart and soul of New Orleans' nineteenth-century Voodoo tradition and to this day generally regarded as the most important figure among Louisiana's Voodoo practitioners. Her medicinal and magical knowledge must have been phenomenal. According to the 1881 obituaries, she must have healed thousands of fellow New Orleanians from deadly diseases such as malaria and yellow fever. This great conjure lady was also known for powerful spells and charms that assisted her numerous clients in matters of the heart (attracting a desired lover, turning an unfaithful spouse into a devoted partner, or make him/her disappear altogether), in court cases (granting a favorable outcome in legal matters, at times overruling death sentences), in job-related situations (protecting from abuse or advancing a promotion). Everybody in trouble of any sort seems to have sought her help, women and men, black and white, enslaved and free, the rich and famous, and the poor and unknown alike.⁴³ Once Marie Laveau had passed away, to request her continued help people to this day make their desired wish and mark an X on the exterior

⁴² Maude Southwell Wahlman, *Mojo Working* (University Press, 2013).

⁴³ Ina T. Frandrich, “The Birth of New Orleans' Queen: A Long-Held Mystery Resolved,” in *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, 2005. 293-294.

of her tomb (Fig. 2-23 and 2-24) to seal the wish and request her help. Some people even decorate her tomb and honor her periodically with gifts and additional markings.

Continuing with forms in New Orleans, Louisiana, Dr. Maude Wahlman, in her 2013 book entitled, *Mojo Working*, writes, “African-American folk sculpture and painting include references to the Haitian Vodun figure, *Baron Samedi*, symbolized by a top hat, and sometimes a cane and a cape.” To me the most striking example is an anonymous sculpture, once in the Bert Hemphill, Jr. Collection, made about 1930,⁴⁴ (Fig. 2-25) and found covered with chicken feathers in an African-American barber shop in New Orleans.⁴⁵ It is remarkably similar to the Fon cast figure representing *Gu* (Fig. 2-26), their god of iron. Both figures have now lost their clothing. The New Orleans figure has designs [or script] painted on the chest, probable adaptations from Haitian Veve.⁴⁶ This script present on the chest of Baron Samedi is yet another example of the use of protective script in the African American communities within the United States.

African scripts and forms definitely continued their presence throughout the areas of the United States where African and African Americans lived. Many examples from Murray’s home state of Georgia have been presented and demonstrate an ancestral continuation of African traditions and customs. These traditions and customs thrived in other states as well, such as North Carolina and Louisiana, to name only two from a multitude of examples. Having seen the continuation of African traditions and customs throughout the state in which he lived, Murray was definitely influenced by his surroundings and ancestral traditions.

⁴⁴ C. Kurt Dewhurst, Betty MacDowell, and Marsha MacDowell, *Religious Folk Art in America* (New York: E.P. Dutton in association with the Museum of American Folk Art, 1983), #106.

⁴⁵ Lynda Hartigan, *Made with Passion: The Hemphill Collection of American Folk Art* (Washington, D.C.: Published for the National Museum of American Art by the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 147.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 148.

CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS OF MURRAY'S ARTISTRY AND ITS RECEPTION

Review of Theoretical Methods of Examining Murray's Art

When looking at the art and script Murray produced in the last ten years of his life, the examiner must be careful to look at the work from several perspectives. According to *The Dictionary of Anthropology*, edited by Thomas Barfield in 2000, a necessary goal for understanding the relevance of an act or event is to distinguish the understandings of the cultural representations from the point of view of the native of the culture (emic) from the cultural representations from the point of view of an outside observer of the culture (etic). In the following analyses many viewpoints will be considered and pertinent information will be applied to the works of Murray.

In *The Predicament of Culture*, James Clifford looks at the use of the word *affinity*. He argues that practically any point can be argued and supporting evidence retrieved to aid in the defense of that point, but better conclusions can only be drawn when a wide variety of comparisons and contradictions have been made. He believes that the Museum Of Modern Art guided their viewers informative path by its selection of artifacts, to the exclusion of others, and “the maintenance of a specific angle of vision.”¹ He has several points that are quite relevant about drawing conclusions from apparent visual similarities. In the end, he suggested that MOMA (Museum of Modern Art) could have presented other areas of interest and could have taken the presentation in a different direction and perhaps a more conclusive end.² For instance, Clifford looks into the placement of tribal or primitive as a “vanishing

¹James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 53.

² *Ibid.*, 53.

past or an ahistorical, conceptual present.”³ He believes MOMA have failed to realize that the tribal art has continued to grow and is to presently being created with the updated visions of today’s people and their experiences in conjunction with the experiences of their ancestors. This is not an area like the prehistoric dinosaur that is extinct, but rather a continuing and constantly changing society, just like our own. Clifford implies that we should look at different societies and their social and cultural ways, even though different from our own, as equally relevant as our own. We must judge their art and artifacts in relationship to their culture, society, and its place in the world, not just in relationship to our own culture, society, and place in the world. If one cannot make this more educated judgment, it is as if it were okay to compare apples with oranges, in the narrowest of sense.

Additionally, David Freedberg’s *The Power of Images: Studies in the History of Theory of Response* may be relevant in assessing the complex reasons for which art is created. He looked at the ability of the viewer to impose human and divine qualities on works that they view, for example, the ability to be angry with a statue for a poor result from a request placed upon that statue, or the ability of the viewer to believe in the protection provided by one of Murray’s protective works. Freedberg says the researcher must take into account not only the reason the art was made, but the cultural and societal beliefs of the person(s) creating or viewing the piece of art. Many societies held within their beliefs that the form, in a work of art, of a deity or loved one could hold their spirit or soul. In addition, the form could affect a living person’s life. Freedberg goes on to attach to these objects the viewer’s response in the form of talking to the object or adjusting one’s behavior when in the presence of said object. In the end, he believes that one must fully understand the basis on which the object was created, the beliefs the people around this object imbue in it, and the

³ Ibid., 53.

response of the viewers in the form of their own behavior toward the work of art, in order to grasp the entirety of the significance of the work of art.⁴

J.B. Murray's art presents several problems with respect to historical research of certain art forms. For example, when speaking with Murray's physician, Dr. Rawlings posed several interesting questions. The first was, "Do you know much about the ways of the South?" With respect to J.B. Murray, this article brings to light the fact that it must be understood first and foremost the reason Murray felt compelled to create his works of script and art. He had very strong religious beliefs that are connected with each and every piece he produced. The response he received, or even just the reaction of the recipient, even if it was not directed to Murray, is also important. This will highlight the acceptances or rejections of the intent for which the pieces were created. And finally, one needs to discover if there were changes in behavior of the people in his culture and society who were exposed to his work.

The approach and analyses of Murray's pieces must include a non-Western art-historical and cultural point-of-view. In *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society*, Linda Nochlin first gave as a critical definition in Western literature the words of Edward Said, "as a mode for defining the presumed cultural inferiority of the Islamic Orient . . . part of the vast control mechanism of colonialism, designed to justify and perpetuate European dominance."⁵ Nochlin then puts forth the notion that in the absence of certain elements in the artwork from Orientalism, the lack of those elements turns around and acts as a distinct presence. In other words those elements are so important in the artwork that, when left out, they are there anyway because they are immediately brought to the viewers

⁴ David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History of Theory of Response* (University of Chicago Press, 1991).

⁵ Joanne Morra and Marquard Smith. *Visual Culture: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 19.

mind and not physically necessary. In addition, she goes on to discuss that the portrayal of the peoples of the orient in negative light, either barbaric or unsophisticated, was for the viewing pleasure of the Westerner.⁶

Many attempts to correct Western approaches came from varying points of view. From an anthropological point of view, Boas concluded his article entitled, *The Mental Attitudes of the Educated Classes*, with this statement:

Whatever our generation may achieve will attain in course of time that venerable aspect that will lay in chains the minds of the great mass of our successors and it will require new efforts to free a future generation of the shackles that we are forging. When we once recognize this process, we must see that it is our task not only to free ourselves of traditional prejudice, but also to search in the heritage of the past for what is useful and right, and to endeavor to free the mind of future generations so that they may not cling to our mistakes, but may be ready to correct them.⁷

This was the beginning of a very forward thinking and questioning anthropologist in the very early twentieth-century.

In 1958 Melville Herskovits opened his essay entitled, *A Cross-Cultural View of Bias and Values*, with the following statement:

We are not the most ethnocentrically oriented society the world has known, but we certainly possess one of the most powerful ethnocentrisms in the experience of mankind . . . Even today, it is difficult for us not to do what I term “thinking colonially” by applying to peoples whose ways of life differ from our own the dreary vocabulary of inferiority. . . . We must recognize that the pluralistic nature of the value systems of the world’s cultures . . . cannot be judged on the basis of a single system . . . Unless we realize that perhaps we do not have the only answers to questions of common concern, and that our biases, though they seem natural enough for us, cannot be universally accepted, we will be in for some very difficult times.⁸

⁶ Linda Nochlin, *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (United Kingdom: Westview Press, 1989).

⁷ Franz Boas, “The Mental Attitude of the Educated Classes” from *New England Review (1990-)* (Vol. 26, No. 4, 2005), 215.

⁸ Melville Herskovitz, *Cultural Relativism: Perspectives in Cultural Pluralism* (New York: Random House, 1972), 97.

Here Herskovitz puts forth a warning and proceeds in the remainder of the essay included in his 1972 book, *Cultural Relativism: Perspectives in Cultural Pluralism*, to right the path our thought processes have quite often had misguided. In the case of J.B. Murray's work, Herskovits would have encouraged his audience to inspect, critique, and absorb not only the work as it appears to the viewer, but the view it provides us into Murray's world and that of his ancestors.

A beginning to viewing Murray's work this way can be demonstrated by Thompson's stance on African art. From an art historical point of view, Robert Farris Thompson in his 1984 book entitled, *Flash of the Spirit: African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy*, states in his introduction, "This book begins the project of identifying *specifically Yoruba, Kongo Dahomean, Mande, and Ejagham* influences on the art and philosophies of black people throughout the Americas."⁹ Thompson continues the examination of other cultural perspectives and their influences on the development of art, music, dance, and choreography within the New World and particularly the United States.

However, this viewpoint would not have been accessible to most of Murray's contemporaries. From an historical and educational point of view, Carter G. Woodson, an early twentieth-century historian, in his 1933 book, *Mis-Education of the Negro*, denounced the Euro-centric school curricula thrust upon African Americans and found it detrimental to the self-image of African Americans while keeping the roles and images of the white man elevated. He stated,

⁹ Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1984), xiv-xv.

In the study of language in school pupils were made to scoff at the Negro dialect as some peculiar possession of the Negro which they should despise rather than directed to study the background of this language as a broken-down African tongue – in short to understand their own linguistic history, which is certainly more important for them than the study of French Phonetics or Historical Spanish Grammar. . . . From literature the African was excluded altogether. He was not supposed to have expressed any thought worth knowing. The philosophy in the African proverbs and in the rich folklore of that continent was ignored to give preference to that developed on the distant shores of the Mediterranean. . . . They failed to teach the student the Mediterranean Melting Pot with the Negroes from Africa bring their wares, their ideas and their blood therein to influence the history of Greece, Carthage, and Rome. Making desire father to the thought, our teachers either ignored these influences or endeavored to belittle them by working out theories to the contrary.¹⁰

Woodson expresses the anger of many at the mis-education of the African-Americans remaining in the United States, not to mention those around the world, by the blatant omission of African contributions in education. As Woodson points out, Murray and his community would not have had information educationally disbursed to them regarding aspects of African culture in their environment. As Mary Padgelek stated in her 1995 dissertation entitled *In the Hand of the Holy Spirit*, “Starting in 1978, when Murray experienced his first vision and began creating his art, a number of members within his Baptist church questioned the origins of his vision. According to their understanding, Murray’s experience could be from God, or from Murray’s own delusions, or from the satanic realm of false prophecy.”¹¹ In other words, Murray and his community may have been more accepting of his abilities had they known about the traditions and customs of Africa and felt they could acknowledge those traditions and customs without retribution.

From a sociological point of view, in Clovis E. Semmes 1992 book entitled, *Cultural Hegemony and African American Development*, he states that the fundamental thesis of his book is:

¹⁰ Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2005), 12-13.

¹¹ Padgelek, 38.

that cultural hegemony has become the metaproblem out of which epistemological, conceptual, theoretical, and critical issues emerge in African American studies. Cultural hegemony, the systemic negation of one culture by another, constitutes the major paradigmatic, historical, and structural phenomenon that has threatened African American institutional development and that has profoundly shaped this group's cultural strivings.¹²

When this perspective is considered for the art of J.B. Murray, a direct correlation can be seen with the original lack of acceptance by his own family and church congregation. Those closest to him refused to believe in his vision and gift, even having him committed to a psychiatric hospital for a short period of time. Then after acceptance, to find out those in the art world were quarreling over whether or not he was authentic, hastened his health's decline from prostate cancer. Semmes makes two points that directly relate to this situation. He begins by stating, "In fact, Christian imperialism became the vehicle by which Europeans denied respect to the diverse cultures and religions of Africans. The self-image of racial superiority for Europeans was embodied in their religious identity as Christians. This social context contributed to the systematic denigration of African ethnic variation and consciousness."¹³ With this statement Semmes gives reason for the initial skepticism of Murray's community to accept his visions as a religious calling. The community, being under direct ministry of the Baptist church, was hesitant to stick their necks out and believe in Murray for fear of negative repercussions from other church and community members. Having been indoctrinated in the Baptist church, the community would not accept any possibilities of other influences such as Islam, Voodoo, or any other religious practices. Which then leads to Semmes second point directly related to Murray's situation, "Traditional African religions survived most under Catholic or Latin slavery and least under Protestant or

¹² Clovis E. Semmes, *Cultural Hegemony & African American Development* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1992), xi.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 143.

English slavery. In the latter context, fragments of traditional African religions were preserved in the practices of conjuring, hoodooism, folk health beliefs and practices, various forms of expressive culture, and personal religious experiences, such as, spiritual dancing and spirit possession.”¹⁴ Had Murray known about the African traditions and had they been accepted within his community, he may have been able to discern an exact reason for his calling and accept and defend that reason without fear. As it were, Murray was compelled to accept his calling in terms that were accepted by the Baptist church and therefore most likely to be accepted within his community.

The experience of African Americans has to be taken into account as a progression of blending and separation. Due to the restrictions of slavery, African Americans were forced to live by Christian rule, to blend with and to take on Christian religious traditions. The intent of this religious indoctrination was to create African Americans in agreement with their lesser position in life, being slaves. As a result, enslaved Africans reassigned their profound spirituality and their perception of their actual circumstances with their earlier religious observances to Christianity, being the good and dutiful servant. This explains Murray’s ability to deal with the mystical properties, while simultaneously attributing it to his Christianity. The denigration by his family and congregation is an additional result of cultural hegemony, in that the White-based religion may have been subversively guiding their decisions out of fear of being rejected by their religion and the community in which they lived.

¹⁴ Ibid., 144.

Comparative Analyses of Murray's Art with the Scripts and Forms of Africa as Seen Throughout the Diaspora

Much of Murray's first writings were produced on adding machine paper as seen in Fig. 1-14. Murray enclosed these writings in sealed envelopes and stated they were warnings or messages to various people, similar to protective writings, a well-known aspect of the syllabaries in Africa. In a closer look at Figure 1-14, encased in a square is one of Murray's symbols created with a downward line looping to the left and angling back up to the right, then, again looping this time to the right and finishing with a downward curling tail to the right. This symbol is then accented with small marks to the upper right, this symbol mimics the symbols of *le/ne* or *ngi* from Figure 1-3, the Kpelle Syllabary. In addition, Murray's symbol to the right of the one in the square is has the same characteristics as the symbols *be/me*, *yeh/weh*, *yah/nyah*, and *ngesh* from Figure 1-3, the Kpelle Syllabary. It uses the same vertical mark with the same curving line that begins high left and dips down, crosses the vertical mark and continues back up to the right, giving a symbol of a vertical line bisected with the form of a "u". These few character comparisons are compelling and make it impossible to continue this research without a more in depth character analysis for the subsequent expansion of this thesis to a dissertation.

In Chapter 2, much was discussed regarding the syllabary forms of Africa, but visual communication in Africa encompasses many different areas from body movements to auditory sequencing. In 1986, Murray created a small piece (Fig. 1-22) specifically for an eleven-year-old visitor, Tom Arnett, son of the author of the volumes, *Souls Grown Deep*, William Arnett. Murray drew himself in yellow, touched by God, with arms raised up in a traditional praise position. In the left foreground, he placed a small bedside table with a bottle of water on top. This was apparently the way his bedroom appeared and was where he

held his spiritual readings. He embellished the creation with gold, which was a color most ancient cultures associated with the sun and power and Murray chose to use quite often. On the reverse side seen in Fig. 1-23, Murray wrote the script while he raised the bottle of water and spoke his blessing, “*God* bless this little babe, *God* protect this little babe.” Each time he intoned the word “*God*,” he drew several crosses around the edges of the inscription.^{vi}

Murray’s work for Tom Arnett was not just a painting with script handed to a young man. It was a choreographed performance piece that included the endowment of Murray with a message from God, a spiritual and creative interpretation of that message by Murray, and finally, a call or incantation to imbue the work with God’s protective powers. Murray’s work for Tom Arnett reflects the visual methods of communication described by Barbaro Martinez-Ruiz. As Martinez-Ruiz argued in his article entitled *Kongo Atlantic Body Language*, a multitude of types of body language can be flawlessly incorporated into visual and auditory communicative methods, which he calls graphic writing systems. Included in these systems are “proverbs, mambos, syncopated rhythms, a large variety of written symbols and oral traditions that are incredibly rich sources of cultural and social histories, religious beliefs, myths, and other expressions of the shared Bakongo worldview.”¹⁵ His work integrated significant instances procured during fieldwork with the people of Kongo residing in northern Angola and the southern portion of Democratic Republic of Congo, and, additionally in North America and the Caribbean in connection with Kongo-based religious traditions. Murray’s incantations of the word *God* and the marking of the *X* falls into the graphic writing system Martinez-Ruiz discussed. In addition, in this gift to Tom Arnett

¹⁵ Martinez-Ruiz, Barbaro « Kongo Atlantic Body Language », in Performance, art et anthropologie (« Les actes »), [En ligne], mis en ligne le 08 décembre 2009, Consulté le 15 février 2013. URL : <http://actesbranly.revues.org/462>

Murray has drawn himself in the praise position in the center of the piece. This form is portrayed in the same manner as the symbol entitled *This Land is All Mine* in Figure 1-2, *Nsibidi chart*.

Evidence is again given for the ancestral continuation of traditions and customs with Murray when the material he chose as the base for his art is reviewed. In Figure 1-11, he chose as the base for a protective piece that adorned the interior of his home, a stovetop with four round holes in it where burners used to be. Murray painted this piece with blue and yellow and adorned it with script and figures. This protective work is a direct replication of the form of the *Kongo Cosmograms* shown in Figure 2-11. The cosmograms are divided by vertical and horizontal elements and each of the four points represent birth, life, death, and rebirth. Throughout the Kongo area in Africa, cosmograms are seen displayed as protective symbols. Most closely connected to Murray's stovetop piece is the Ejagham *Nsibidi* sign for physical and spiritual vision from Nigeria. It must be noted the connection is not only in the shape and form of the piece but in the meaning of physical and spiritual vision associated with both the *Nsibidi* sign and Murray himself. *Nsibidi* was transported to Cuba with slaves taken from Calabar and Congo and then melded with Cuban forms to become *Anaforuana*. Additional credence is given to Murray's pieces when compared with Figures 1-5a and 1-5b, samples of *Anaforuana* by Alexis Gelabert of Havana, Cuba, 1992; not only is Murray's use of the stovetop apparent in the physical and spiritual vision symbol, but many, if not all, of his pieces contain Xs or +s which are seen extensively in the *Anaforuana* in Figures 1-5a and 1-5b.

CHAPTER 4
COMPARISON OF THE USE OF SCRIPTS AND FORMS
BY MURRAY AND OTHER ARTISTS

Murray's work can be better understood when seen in relation to other African American script artists. James Hampton and his use of script seemed to run parallel with the script of J.B. Murray, but in a much more organized manner. Hampton, born in 1909 in South Carolina, was the son of a traveling gospel singer and self-ordained Baptist preacher who left his family to follow a personal calling for him to spread the word of God. Just before turning 20, Hampton moved to Washington, D.C., and struggled with being gainfully employed during the Depression. In 1942, he was drafted into the Army, where he remained until his discharge in 1945. The remainder of his life he was employed at the General Services Administration in Washington, D.C. as a janitor. He passed away from stomach cancer in 1964 at the age of 55.

After Hampton's return to Washington, D.C., he began the project that he would work on for the remainder of his life, *The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations' Millennium General Assembly* (Fig. 4-1). This assemblage was created with pieces of discarded objects chosen specifically for the purpose Hampton had for them. These items, such as furniture, burned out light bulbs, and jelly jars, were covered with both silver and gold foil, and developed into his assemblage. Hampton had persistent visions throughout his life and filled several books with script he wrote in conjunction with the creation of his assemblage. To date, these books of script have not been deciphered. In many instances Hampton created tablets that embellish his assemblage. On these tablets Hampton used both

English and his own undecipherable script. One particular tablet (Fig. 4-2) contains the word “Jesus” in the center and “Diagnosis of the Ten Commandments” at the bottom. Christianity appears to be the religious basis of his work since many of his pieces contain Biblical terminology and in some instances quoted scripture. However, the form of his script and the tablets also bring forth the thought that he may have had an Islamic influence as well.

When we compare the script of Murray and Hampton, there are many dissimilar aspects. Hampton’s script is very detailed and precise, with each character painstakingly rendered in primarily level lines across the page. On the other hand, with his script, Murray took a free-formed approach, often times going back and forth on the page, only to continue going down the side of the page, across the bottom and back up the other side. He would then go back and add bits here and there, making for a greater improvisation of his work.

Hampton’s script was very private and not shared with many people, whereas Murray distributed his script widely and translated it for those to whom it was intended. In addition, Hampton included words in English, even though sporadic, thus informing us that he was definitely literate, whereas Murray we know was illiterate and unable to write English. Both men seem to have been inspired by religion and both men’s work show characteristics which might have been connected with not only Christianity, but with the Islamic religion as well. When it comes to comparison of their scripts to the syllabaries of Africa, again, we see the use of secret scripts, as in the Ekpe Secret Leopards Society, where the meaning of the script is given only to the very privileged chosen by God.

As previously stated, Murray created a small piece (Figure 1-22) as a gift to an 11-year-old boy in which Murray portrayed himself in the praise position, hands and arms stretched toward heaven and God. Many artists have used this type of character positioning

and in particular Bill Traylor, an African American artist who lived from 1854 to 1948. In Traylor's piece entitled *Preacher and His Congregation* (Fig. 4-5), c. 1939-42, he has used the same form for the preacher located inside a circle with his congregation members located on the outside of the circle. This was Bill Traylor's interpretation of a *ring shout*, a traditional religious practice derived from African rituals.¹

Another African American who used script in her work was Gertrude Morgan (Fig. 4-3), who wrote in English on the background of her paintings and then used them in her preachings (Fig. 4-4). According to Joel Rose from the National Public Radio website, "Sister Gertrude Morgan was born in 1900 in Alabama and died in 1980. At age 39, she decided to carry God's message to what she called the "headquarters of sin," New Orleans. It was there she preached, painted — and recorded an album."² Curator William A. Fagaly, New Orleans Museum of Art's Françoise Billion Richardson curator of African art and former assistant director for art, who knew Sister Gertrude during the last 10 years of her life, explained, "[Sister Gertrude] Morgan did not conceive of the paintings she was making as 'art' but as tools of her ministry, so it is likely that it simply did not occur to her to date them - it was not important to the message."³ Just like Murray, Gertrude Morgan felt she was visited by God and asked to do his work. Her work took on script in the form of English, since she was obviously able to read and write, whereas, due to the fact that he was illiterate, Murray's took the form of glossolalia or secret script, unintelligible to the normal person. Both artists appear to have been inspired by religion. When it comes to comparison of their scripts to the

¹ William Arnett, Paul Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, and Theophus Smith, Eds. *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume Two: Once That River Starts to Flow* (Atlanta, GA: Tinwood Books, 2000), 278.

² Joel Rose, *Preacher-Artist Gertrude Morgan, Remixed* (National Public Radio website, 2005), <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4864538>.

³ New Orleans Museum of Art. *TOOLS OF HER MINISTRY: The Art of Sister Gertrude Morgan 2004-2005*. <http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/5aa/5aa94.htm>.

syllabaries of Africa, again, we see the use of secret scripts, as in the Ekpe Secret Leopards Society, where the meaning of the script is given only to the very privileged chosen by God. In both instances, the script within their work is used to draw the power of God to their pieces. For Morgan it was yet another tool in her ministry to the “headquarters of sin,” New Orleans. And for Murray the script was a means by which he transported the word of God to His recipients and attempted to affect their lives in positive ways, either by redirecting wayward souls or by calling on God to guide or heal them.

The final artist for comparison is Nellie Mae Rowe (Fig. 2-17), of Georgia. She included script (English) in her paintings, as well as, the Haitian Veve sign for *Simbi* (life), an asterisk-like sign, used to accent its border (Fig. 2-18). Rowe was a dedicated Christian with memories of being taught “fancy writing drawings,” probably derived from the Haitian script Veve. J.B. Murray’s work also included spirit forms and his own script, which was meant to be read by him through a jar of well-water. Many of Murray’s creations included references reminiscent of the Ejagham, African Cuban, and African Haitian traditions.

It should be noted that the accounting of the use of African syllabaries in artwork would not be complete if it were not mentioned that some artists of African descent, but born in other countries or born in Africa and raised in other countries, have returned to Africa for formal training and used the syllabaries to enhance their work and its message. In these instances the artist makes a concerted effort to learn the syllabaries, know their meanings, and use them in their work. This is the case with Ndidi Dike Nnadiékwe, born in Nigeria in 1960, was raised in London, and a 1984 graduate of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Dike uses Nsibidi, Uli and Akwete motifs and designs in her artwork. Her wood panel (Fig. 1-6b) is presented as a successful combination in which objects from Akan, Fulani and Igbo

material cultures which come together to create something obviously African, but contemporary. Her use of these African motifs and designs haven't always brought her praise. About Dike's pieces in a London exhibition, Professor Chika Okeke in the exhibition catalogue for *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*, London: Whitechapel Art Gallery 27, critically stated:

Dike pays fleeting attention to the indigenous art traditions of Africa, as though leafing through a vast volume of African cultural history: images do not stay long enough to make any lasting impression. She is drawn to the culture and art of Africa, yet she is distanced from it to the extent that she enjoys her freedom to take as much from the vast resources as her spirit wills. Consequently her sculptures merely suggest their cultural provenance, making no claim to particulars.⁴

In this case, Dike's use of the motifs and designs are in question, which leads directly to the point at hand: how relevant is it for an artist to use syllabaries learned specifically in her research as an adult and not directly passed down through generations of ancestors? As in the case of Murray, he did not acknowledge ancestral knowledge passed down and had no means by which to research his African heritage due to his illiteracy.

A common theme comparison can be made between J.B. Murray and Victor Ekpuk. Ekpuk, born in 1964 and raised in Uyo, Nigeria, is a 1989 graduate of the University of Ife, Nigeria. Ekpuk creates through a combination of personal and contemporary sacred objects or symbols. Murray employed that the same strategy. He presently lives and works in Washington, D.C., and in his artists' statement for the Slosberg Music Center Gallery at Brandeis University, states:

I love expressing myself with these ancient forms, particularly those of Nsibidi, an indigenous African system of communication that employs graphic signs, as well as, pantomime and the placement of objects, to convey concepts. Nsibidi is still used for sacred communication among members of male secret societies of the Ejagham, Efik, Ibibio and southern Igbo peoples of southeastern Nigeria. By reducing shapes and forms to basic lines, I arrived at a style that gives the impression of written scripts.

⁴ Chika Okeke, *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery 27, 1995), 69.

When combined with Nsibidi signs, these “scripts” provide the background narrative for my compositions.⁵

In his 1997 acrylic painting, entitled *True Story of Our Love Is Our Secret* (Fig. 1-6b), the use of the Ejagham symbol for love and marriage, combined with a background of various symbols including the symbol for Trek, perhaps representing love and marriage as a couple goes through life together. Ekpuk also states:

I employ Nsibidi signs and my own invested “scripts” to make compositions with themes that center mostly on the human conditions of joy, pain and hope. The goal of bringing these two disparate cultural and religious symbols together in my work is to create personal and contemporary sacred objects that convey the sacredness and awe that both the Walaha and Nsibidi signs inspire.⁶

In regards to Murray, initially, the script he produced was sacred, having been given to him from God. Once, he added figures to his work, his own personal objects, such as family, cancer, and self, become sacred objects in his creations, accented with script to empower the figures with the word or script of God. Ekpuk states the objects he creates convey sacredness and awe. I believe this was the intent of Murray, as well. He was not concerned about the awe his work would bring from an artistic point of view, but rather he was concerned with the sacredness and awe of his creations spiritually.

⁵Victor Ekpuk, *Wellcome* (under ‘-View more of my work and detailed resume’) *True Story of Our Love is Our Secret*. 9. Viewed Sept. 5, 2006.

⁶ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we can look at the theory of art historian, George Kubler, that ideas programmed in things sometimes last for a longer period of time than those programmed in words. He expounded:

The artist is not a free agent obeying only his own will. His situation is rigidly bound by a chain of prior events. The chain is invisible to him and it limits his motion. He is not aware of it as a chain but only as a *vis a tergo*, as the force of events behind him. The conditions imposed by these prior events require of him either that he follow obediently in the path of tradition, or that he rebel against the tradition. In either case, his decision is not a free one; it is dictated by prior events of which he senses only dimly and indirectly the overpowering urgency, and by his own congenital peculiarities of temperament . . . the individual is driven in every action by forces of an intensity absent from other lives; he is possessed by his vision of the possible, and he is obsessed by the urgency of its realization, in a solitary posture of intense effort, traditionally represented by the figures of the poet or the muse.¹

Kubler's theory takes shape in African American consciousness, as in Mozell Benson's observation in the 1990s that: "Black families inherited this tradition [quilting and encoding messages]. We forgot where it came from because nobody continues to teach us. I think we hold to that even though we're not aware of it."² I hold fast to the beliefs of both Kubler and Benson, that through the work of the present-day African American artists we are seeing a continuation of the traditions of the scripts and forms seen on the continent of Africa.

Rural life in Georgia has been shown to have impacted Murray's work. The continuation of African traditions has been demonstrated surrounding Murray's life throughout the state of Georgia. Beginning at the waters' edge in Savannah, where slaves were not only traded, but also managed to provide their own house of worship, as well as

¹ George Kubler, *The Shape of Time* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), 50-51.

² Maude Southwell Wahlman, *Signs and Symbols: African Images in African-American Quilts* (New York: Penguin Group, 1993), 2.

provide a secret stop on the underground railroad, we have seen script reminiscent of that in Africa and the display of the Kongo cosmogram with an alternative meanings for the African American peoples. Moving inland to Athens, Georgia, we have seen the many symbols on tombstones, traditional practices of decorating graves and the use of protective measures taken to ensure that one's home and property were safe from negative energies. Combined, these bits of evidence make it quite apparent that J.B. Murray came by his script and figures, not only as a gift from God, but as a gift from his African ancestors as well.

In continuing this research for my dissertation, future research must include the Murray family genealogy. The use of DNA testing to tie Murray's family, as well as other African American artists, back to particular cultures in Africa could be an integral part in finding possible connections to ancestral traditions. There is also the possible influence of the traditions of Native Americans on the work of J.B. Murray. Judith McWillie, an artist from Athens, Georgia, has voice analyses that attempt to compare J.B. Murray's voice with that of Native American Shamans. Mircea Eliade, a Romanian historian of religion, philosopher, fiction writer, and professor at the University of Chicago, defined the shaman as "the great master of ecstasy. A first definition of this complex phenomenon, and perhaps the least hazardous, will be: shamanism = technique of ecstasy."³ In his definition, the word ecstasy includes an experience that enables a person to come into contact with the sacred order of the cosmos.⁴ Not only would McWillie's voice analyses be important here, but additionally, McWillie's videotape of Murray in a trance-like state during a reading of his script through a bottle of well water would be applicable as well to this research.

³ Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1959), 4.

⁴ Ibid.

Murray's script should have character counting and analysis done to discern if there is an actual syllabary being used in his work. In addition to a more in depth look at Murray and the artists currently discussed in this paper, other African American artists who have employed the use of African traditions should be explored as well. This will include, but will not be limited to: Willie Williams, Emma Sewell, Tyree Guyton, and Thornton Dial. I will also continue to explore the graveyards of African Americans, as they extend across the United States and examine the extent to which they retained African burial traditions. Additional research will also be done on present day African artists that fill the background of their work with script, such as Twin Seven Seven. By including the present-day art of Africa in my research, I will be able to see the extent to which the syllabaries of Africa are continuing to be remembered and incorporated into the lives of Africans, as well.

ILLUSTRATIONS

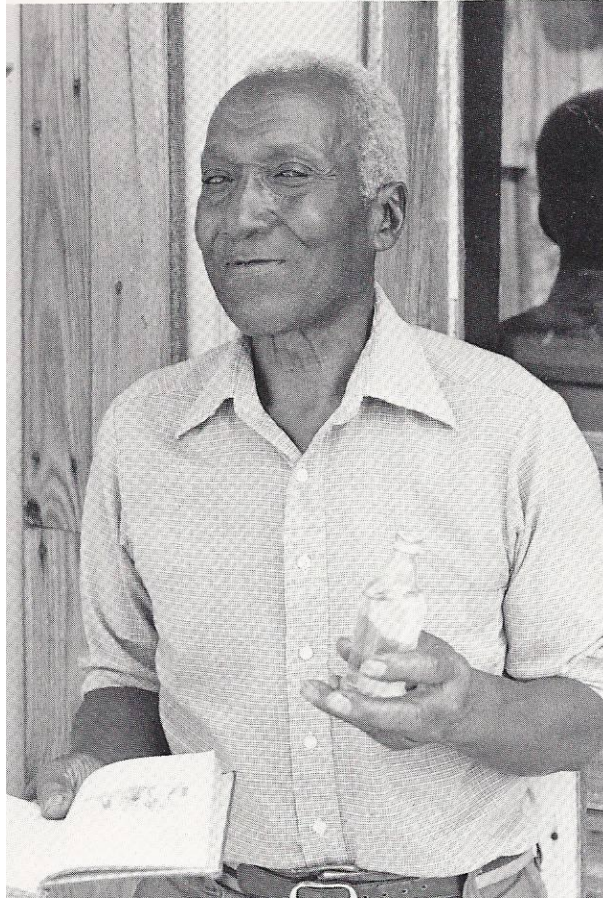
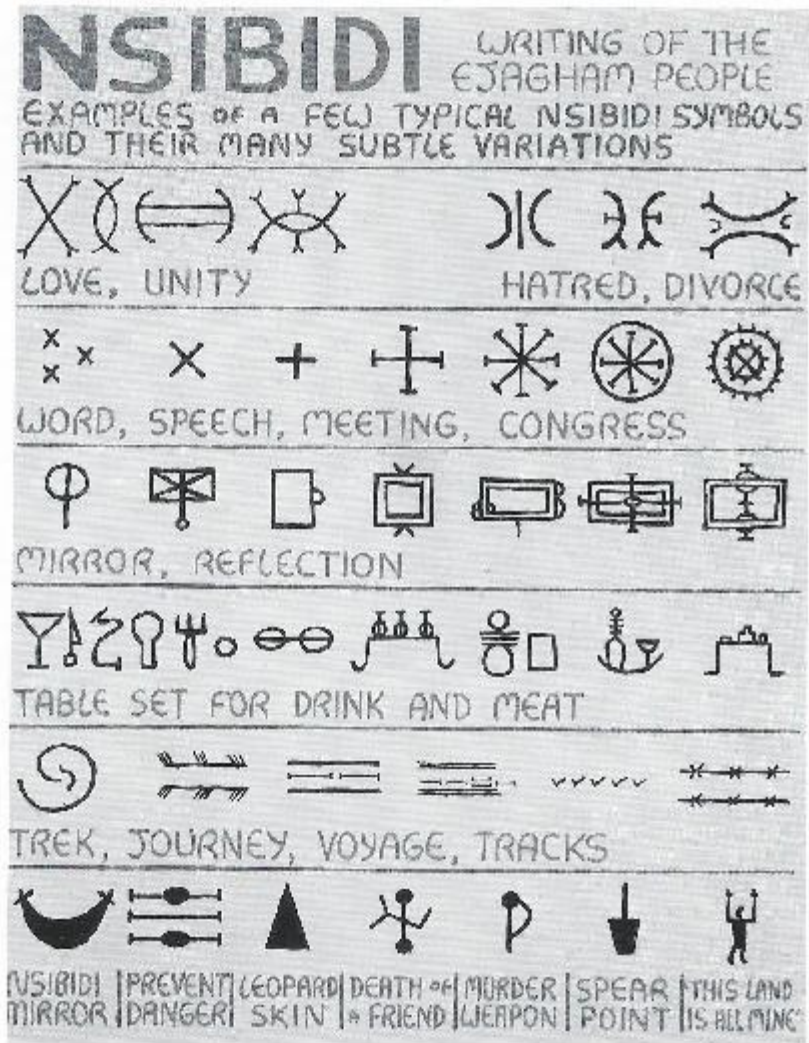
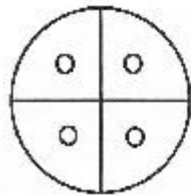


Figure 1-1. John Bunion Murray (1908-1988). Photo courtesy of Andy Nasisse.



Nsibidi script, Ejagham people, Nigeria. *Nsibidi* is the ideographic writing system of the Ejagham people of Nigeria. One can find it on traditional, sacred society buildings, costumes, ritual fans, headdresses, textiles, and in gestures and body and ground painting. Based on information in books by P. Annahy Talbot.

Nsibidi sign for physical and spiritual vision. Ejagham people, Nigeria. We will see this sign again in Cuba and in African American folk arts in the United States.



Ejagham *Nsibidi* sign for physical and spiritual vision, Nigeria

Figure 1-2. Nsibidi chart. Courtesy of Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D.

Nasal Syllables						

Figure 1-3. Kpelle Syllabary. Courtesy of *Afrikan alphabets: the story of writing in Afrika* by Saki Mafundikwa.

pe	pi	pa	po	pu	poh	peh	te	ti	ta	to	tu	toh	teh
be	bi	ba	bo	bu	boh	beh	de	di	da	do	du	doh	deh
ure	uri	ura	uru	uru	ururi	urum	le	li	la	lo	lu	loh	leh
mbe	mhi	mhu	mbho	mbhu	mihoh	mihet	dhe	dhi	dha	dho	dhu	doh	dheh
kpe	kpi	kpa	kpo	kpu	kpoh	kpeh	ndhe	ndhi	ndha	ndho	ndhu	ndhoh	ndheh
mgbe		mgba	mgbo		mgboh	mgbeh	ndhe	ndhi	ndha	ndho	ndhu	ndhoh	ndheh
gbe	gbi	gba	gbo	gbu	gboh	gbeh	se	si	sa	so	su	soh	seh
fe	fi	fa	fo	fu	foh	feh	le	li	la	lo	lu	loh	leh
ve	vi	va	vo	vu	voh	veh	ze	zi	za	zo	zu	zoh	zeh
nje	nji	nja	njo	nju	njoh	njeh	ce	ci	ca	co	cu	coh	ceh
ye	yi	ya	yo	yu	yoh	yeh	je	ji	ja	jo	ju	joh	jeh
ke	ki	ka	ko	ku	koh	keh	mi	ma	mu	meh		moh	
jpe	jpi	jpa	jpo	jpu	jboh	jbeh	ni	na	nu	neh			
ge	gi	ga	go	gu	goh	geh	ni	na	nu	neh			
he	hi	ha	ho	hu	hoh	hah	nyj	nya	nyeh	nyoh			
wi	wi	wa	wo	wu	woh	wah	nha	nheh	nhoh	nho			
e	i	a	o	u	oh	eh							

Figure 1-4. The Vai Syllabary. Courtesy of *Afrikan alphabets: the story of writing in Afrika* by Saki Mafundikwa.

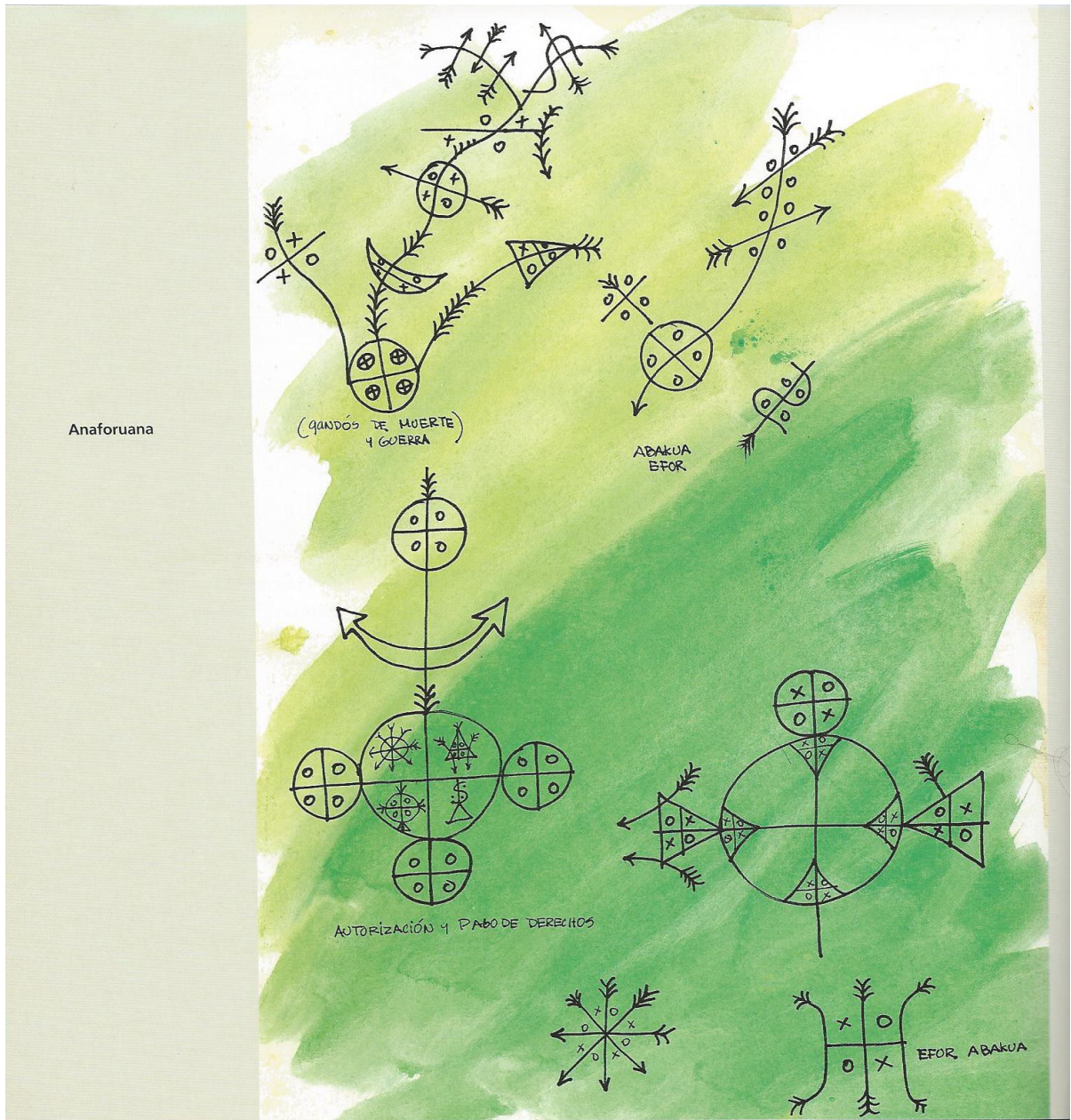


Figure 1-5a. Anaforuana. Image courtesy of *Afrikan Alphabets: The story of writing in Afrika* by Saki Mafundikwa , 2004, 114.

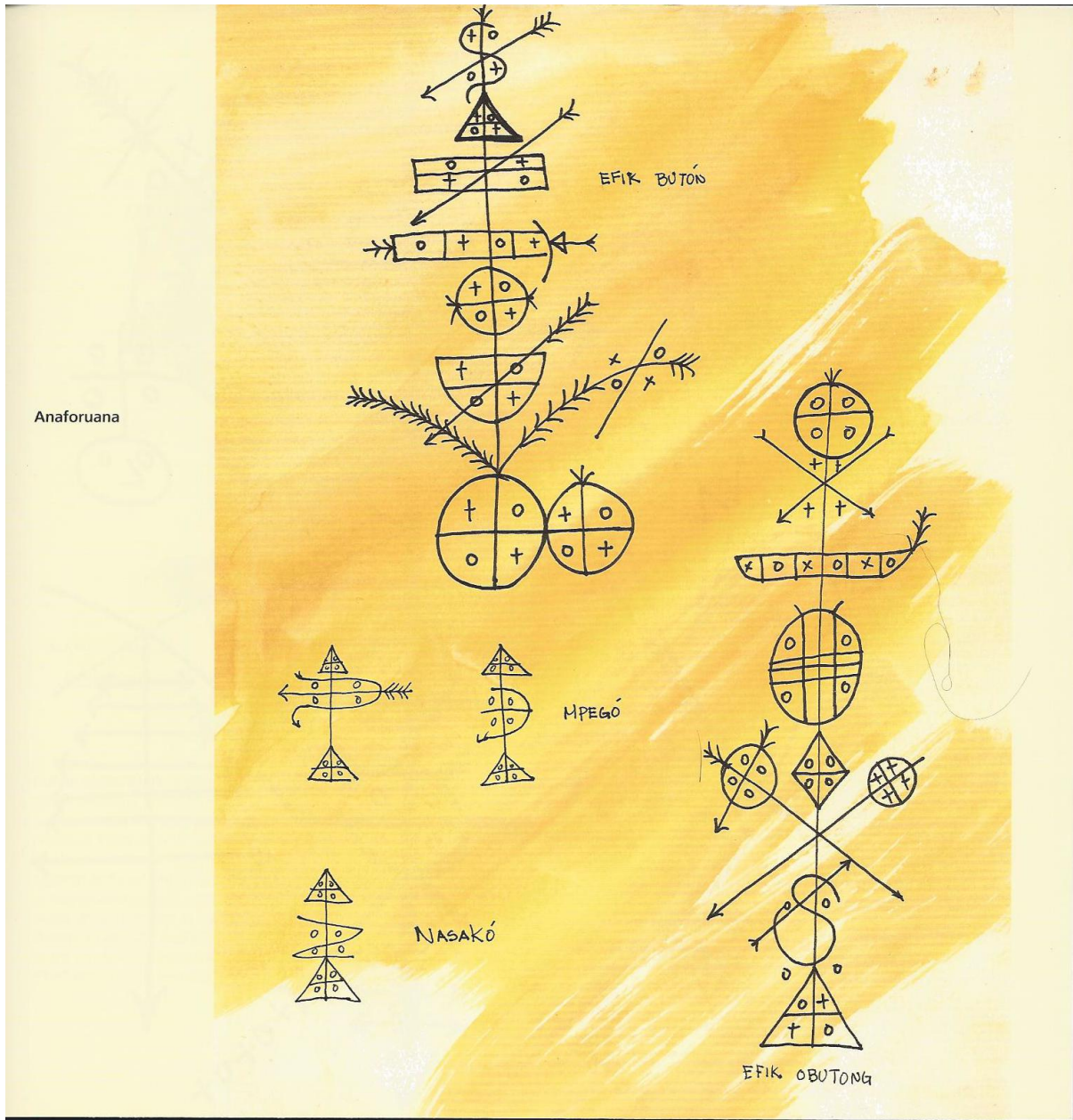


Figure 1-5b. Anaforuana. Image courtesy of *African Alphabets: The story of writing in Afrika* by Saki Mafundikwa, 2004, 115.

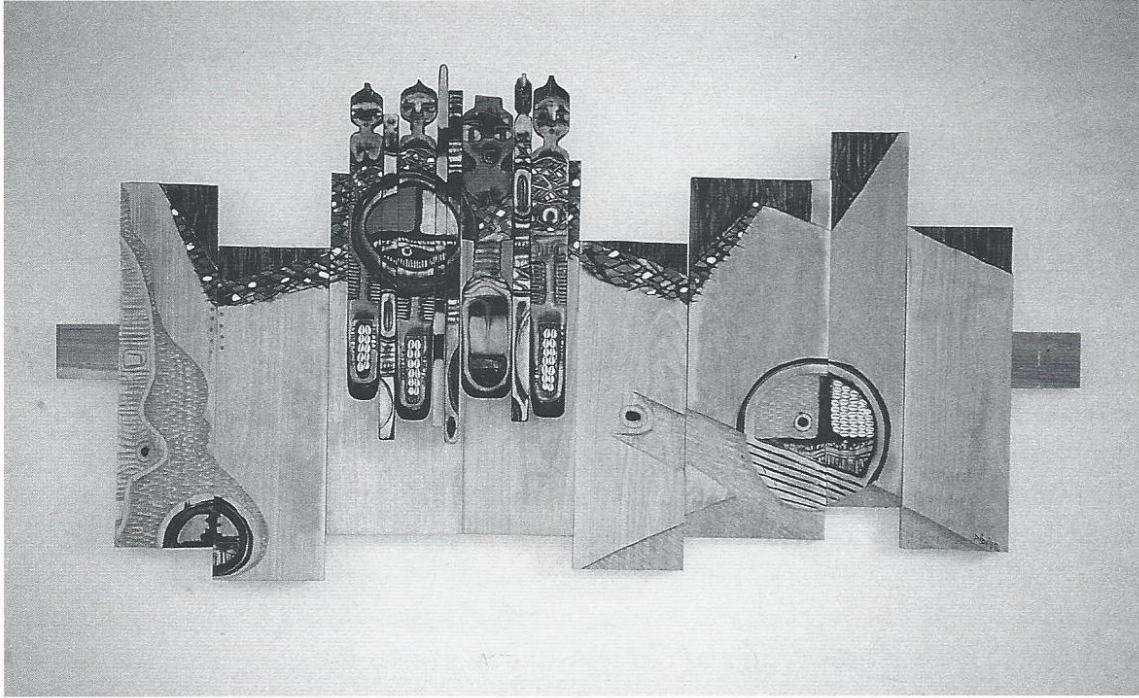
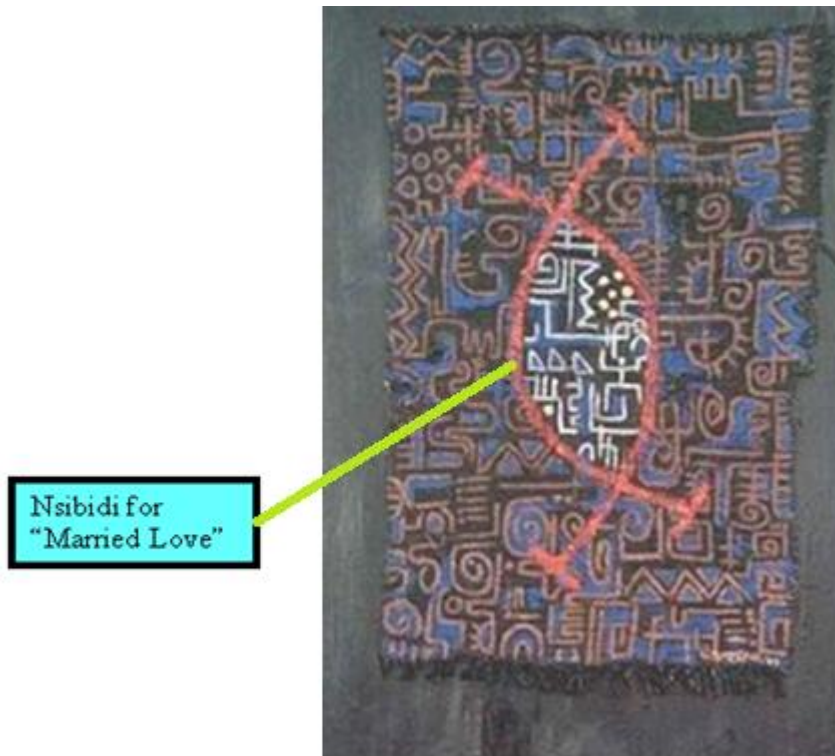


Figure 1-6a. *The Spirit of African Art*, by Ndi Di Nnadi, carved wood panels, 85 x 250 cm, 1994, private collection. Image courtesy of Chika Okeke's *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*, London: Whitechapel Art Gallery 27, 1995.



Nsibidi for
"Married Love"

Fig. 1-6b. *"True Story of Our Love Is Our Secret,"* 1997, acrylic, by Victor Ekpuk. Image courtesy of www.victorekpuk.com.



Photo by Judith McWillie 1985

Figure 1-7. Photo of J. B. Murray, with a bottle of his well water, reading script from adding machine tape. Courtesy of Judith McWillie, 1985.



Figure 1-8. Mineral Springs Baptist Church, Mitchell, Georgia. Photo by Licia Clifton-James, 03/28/10.



Figure 1-9. Photo of J.B. Murray's home. Photo courtesy of William Arnett, 1986, in *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow*, edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 473.



Figure 1-10. Photo of J.B. Murray in front of his home. Photo courtesy of Roger Manley, 1988, *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow*, edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 464.

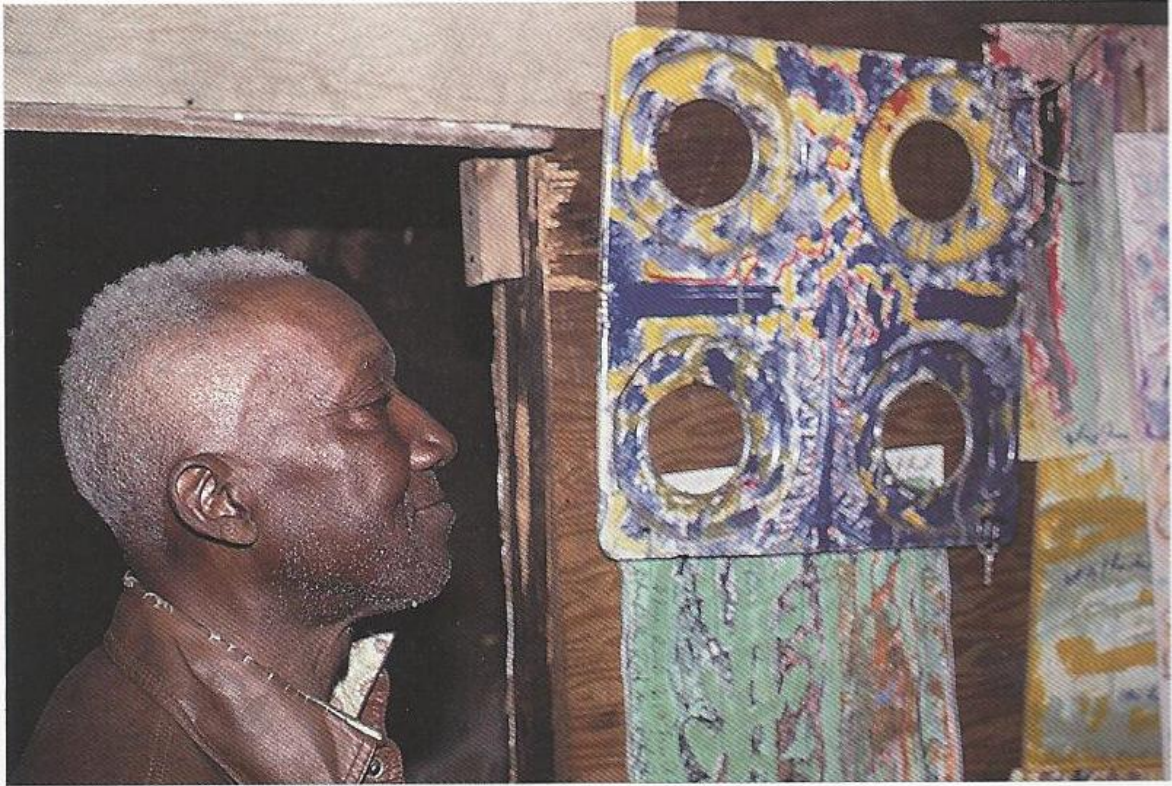


Figure 1-11. Photo of J.B. Murray and the interior of his home. Photo courtesy of Andy Nasisse, 1984, *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow*, edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 464.



Figure 1-12. Photo of J.B. Murray's Protective Elements in his yard. Photo courtesy of William Arnett, 1986, in *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow*, edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 473.



Figure 1-13. Photo of J.B. Murray's Protective Elements in his yard. Photo courtesy of William Arnett, 1986, in *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow*, edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 473.

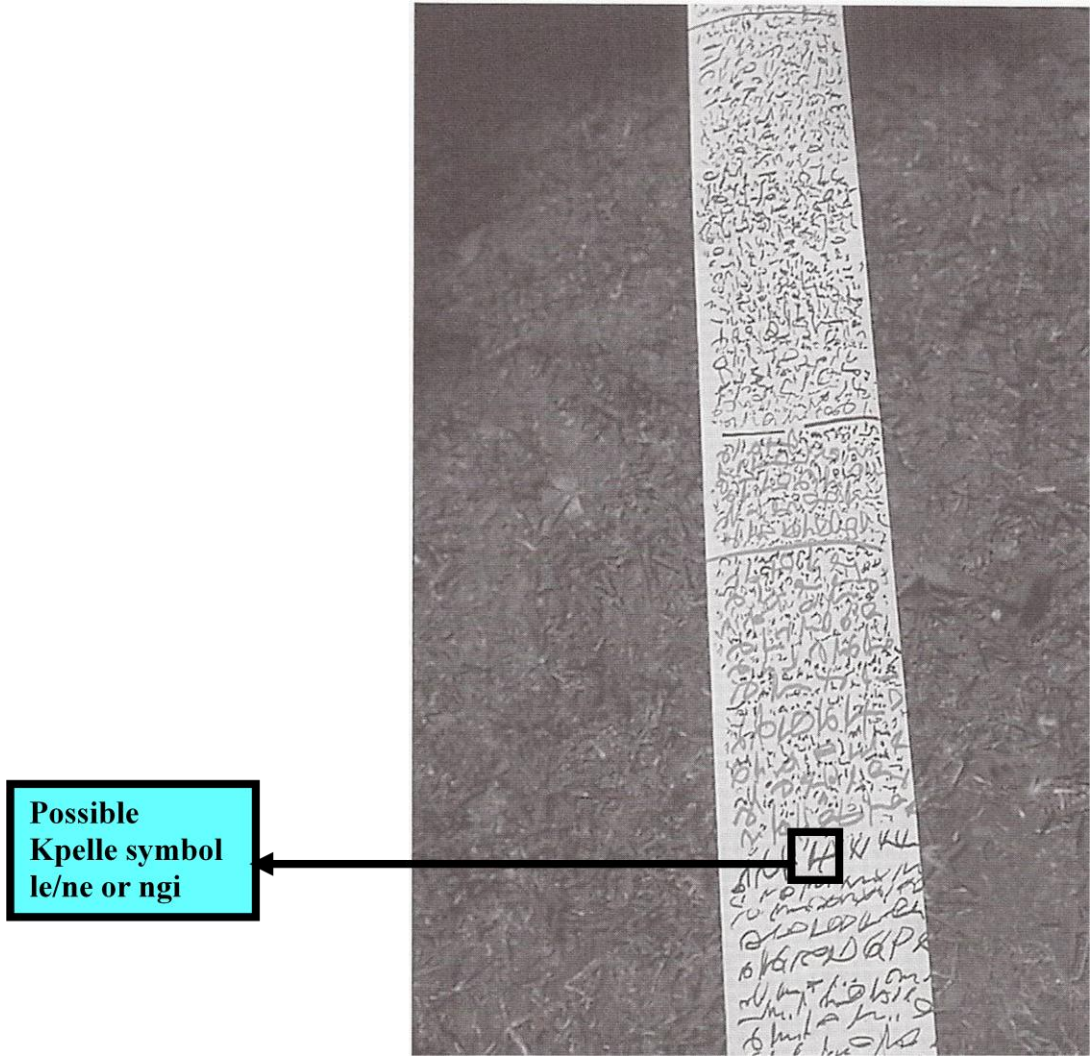


Figure 1-14. Marker on adding machine tape, 1978, J.B. Murray. Photo by Fred Padgelek at the home of Wiliam Rawlings, Sandersville, Georgia.

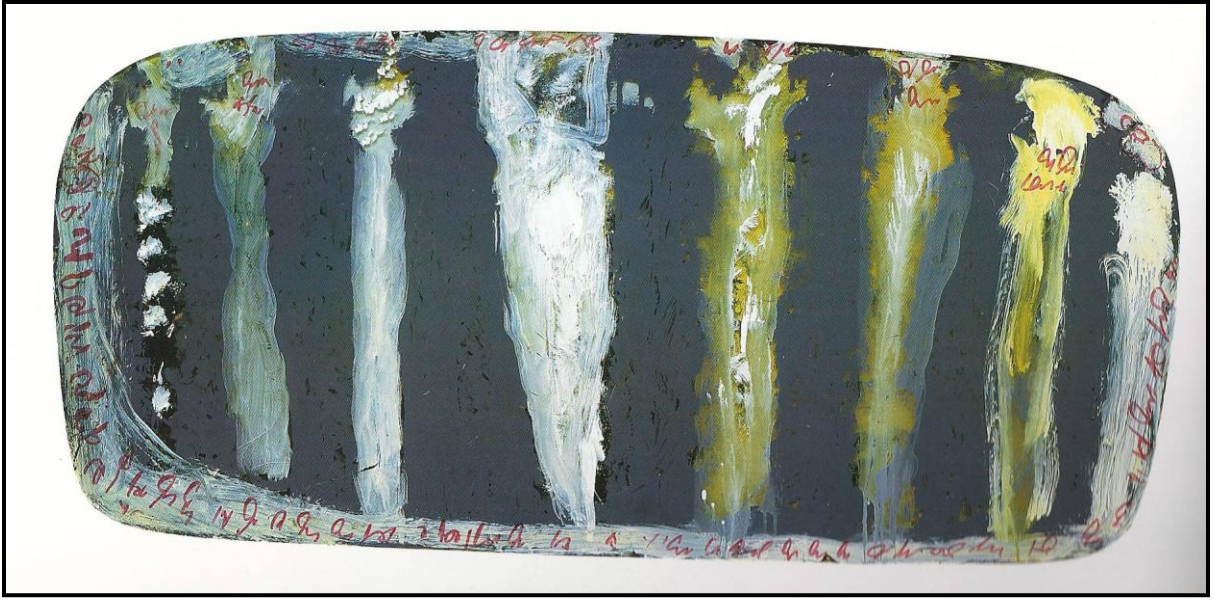


Figure 1-15. J.B. Murray, *Untitled*, c. 1980, Paint and marker on car windshield, 18" x 40". Photo courtesy of William Arnett in *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow*, edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 466.



Interior of J B Murray "studio". Photo by Judith McWillie 1985

Figure 1-16. Interior of J.B. Murray "studio". 1985. Photo courtesy of Judith McWillie.

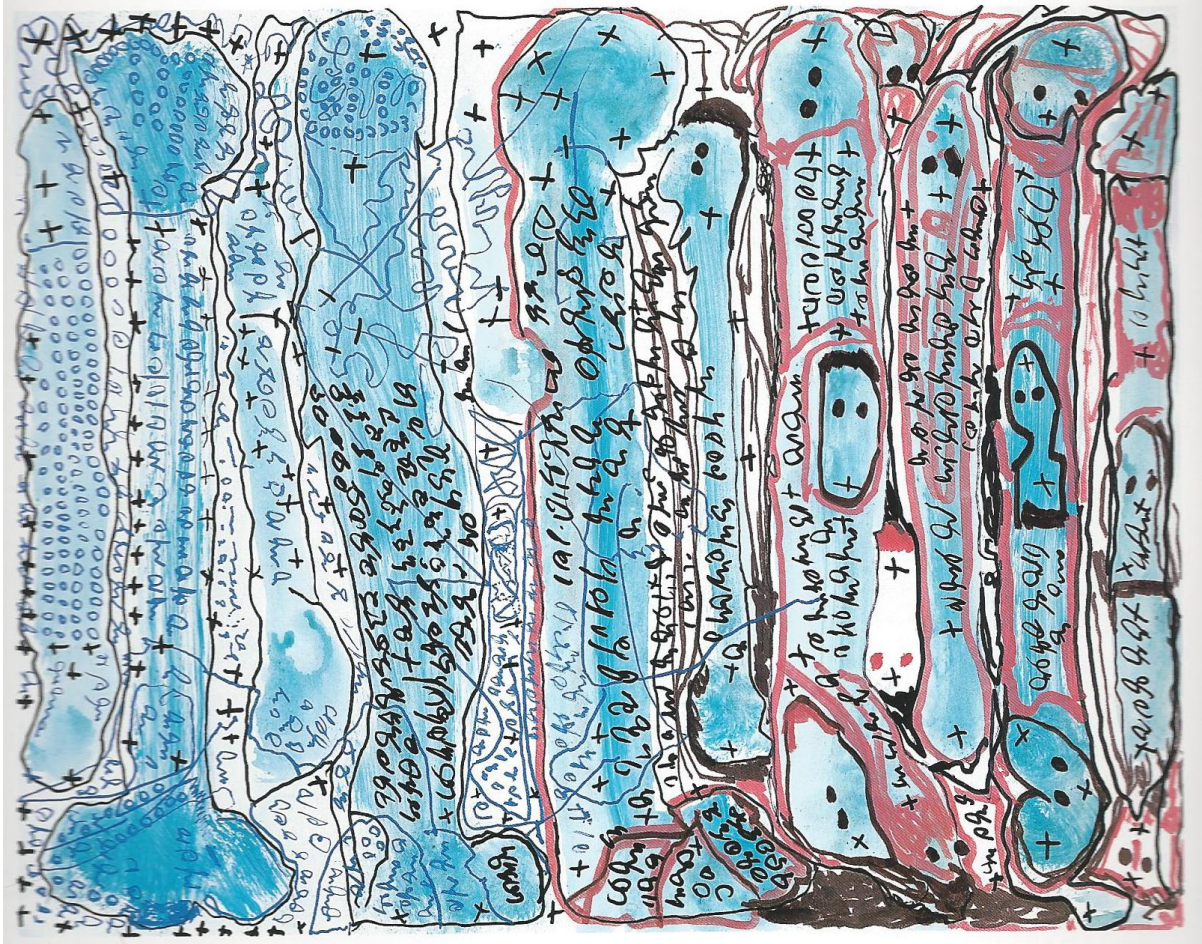


Figure 1-17. J.B. Murray, Untitled, Early 1980s, Marker and paint on paper. 19" x 24" Image courtesy of William Arnett in *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow*, edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 475.

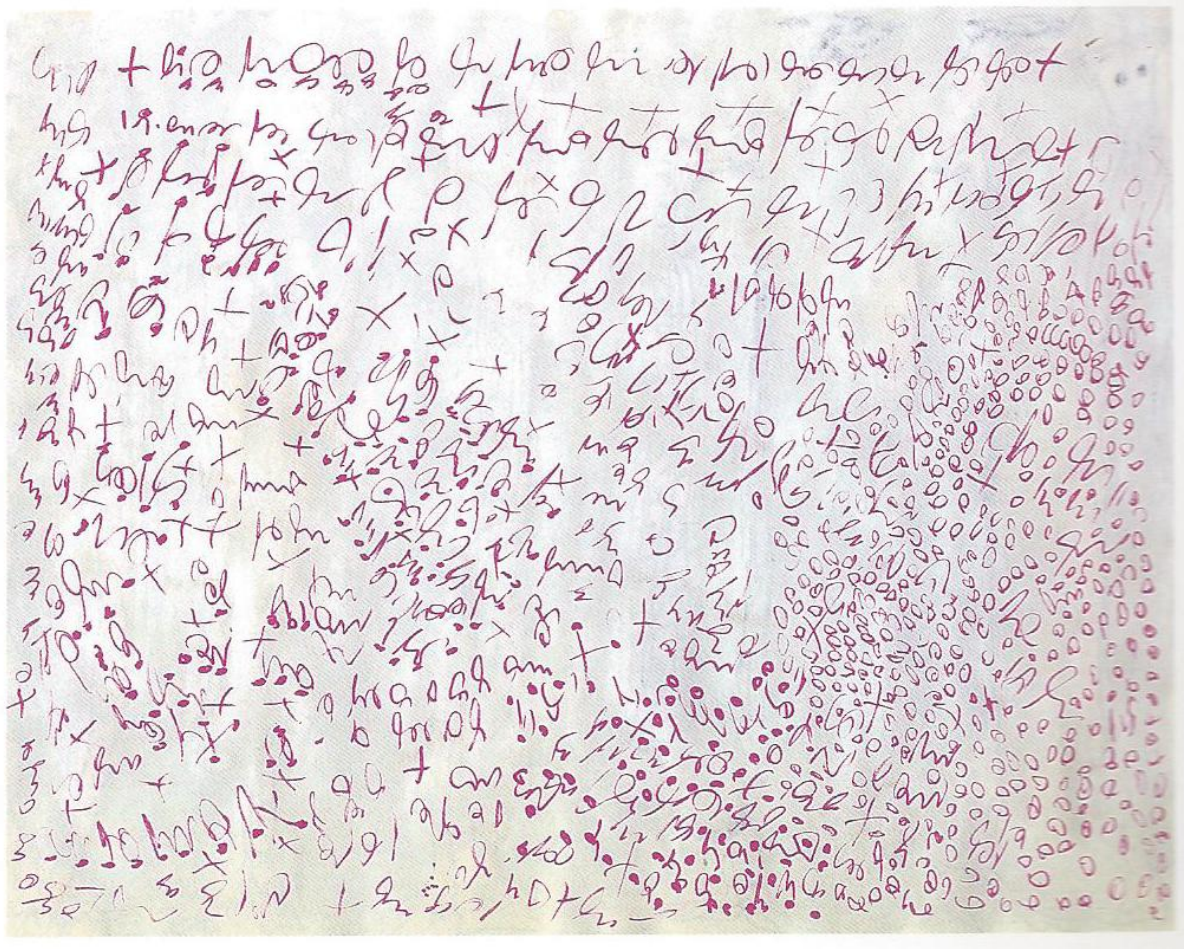


Figure 1-18. J.B. Murray, (Reverse of Fig. 42) Marker on Paper, 19" x 24". Image Courtesy of William Arnett in *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow*, edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, and Theophus Smith, 2000, 475.

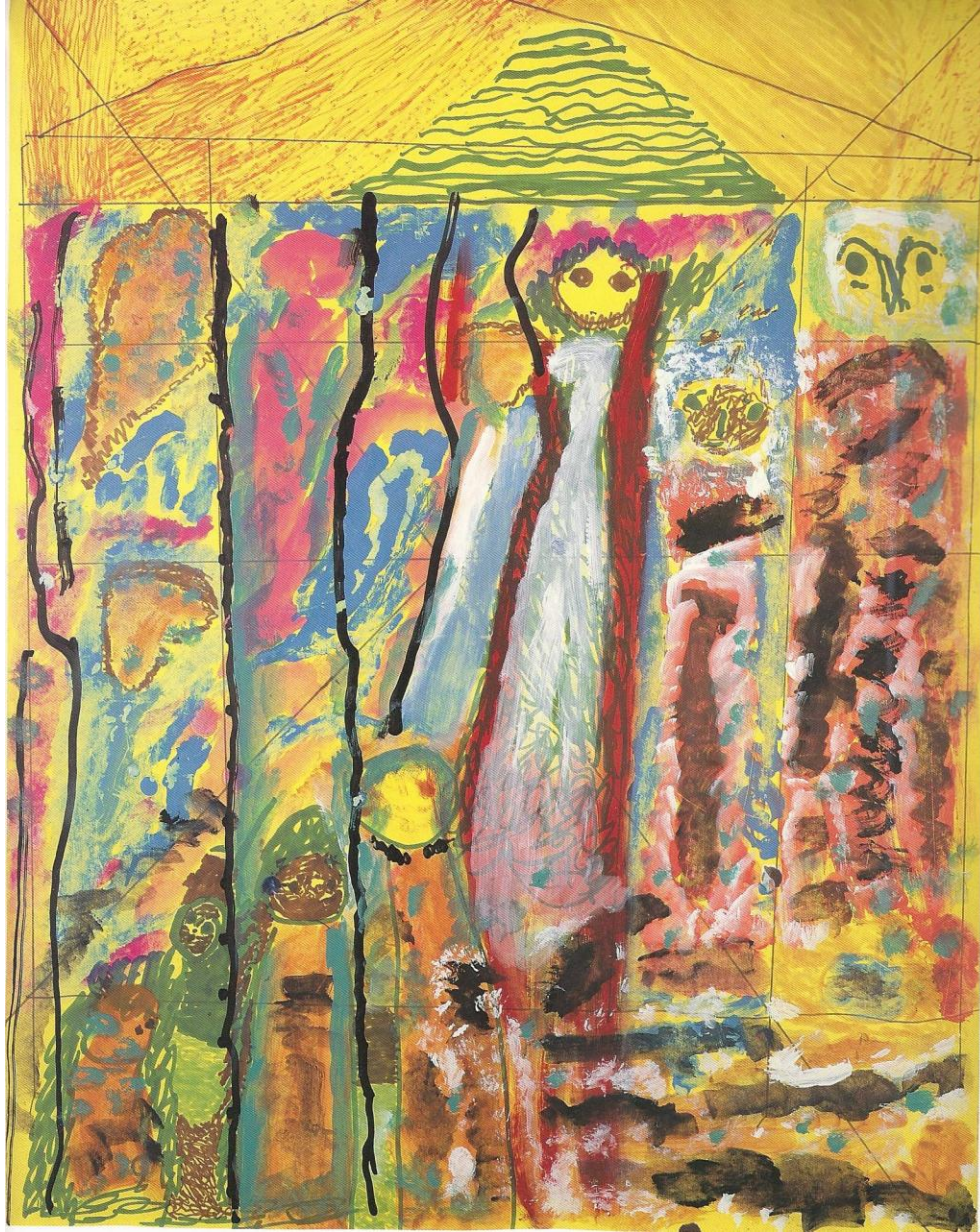


Figure 1-19. J.B. Murray, *Untitled Early 1980s*, Ballpoint pens, marker, and paint, on paper. 24" x 18". Image Courtesy of William Arnett in *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow*, edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 472.



Figure 1-20. Untitled. J.B. Murray, *Untitled*, 1985, marker, acrylic, watercolor and crayon on paper. Photo by Licia Clifton-James 04/01/2010 at High Museum, Atlanta, GA.



Figure 1-21. J.B. Murray, *Untitled*, undated, paint stick on paper. Photo by Licia Clifton-James, 04/01/2010, at High Museum, Atlanta, GA.

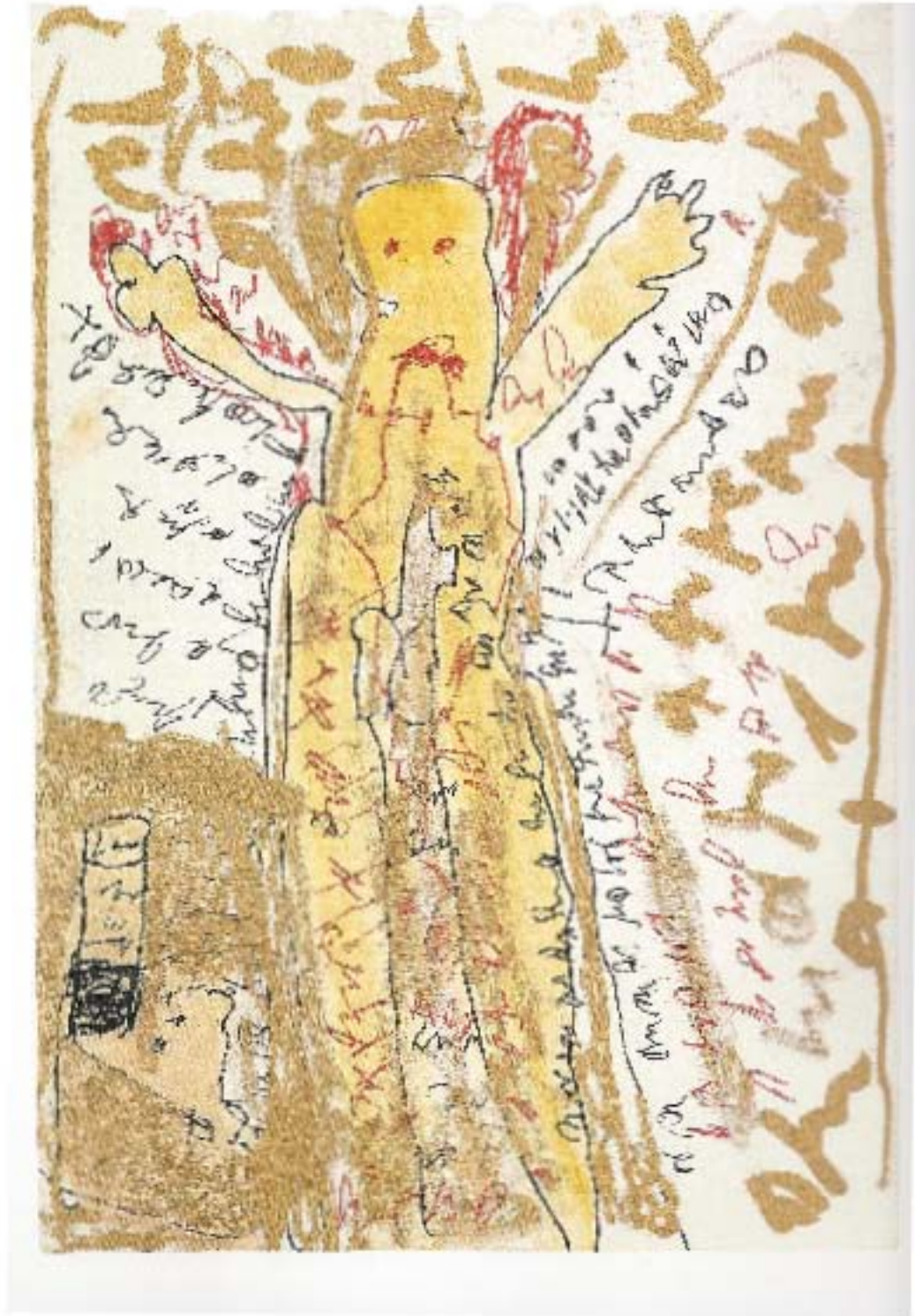


Figure 1-22. J.B. Murray, *God Bless This Little Babe, God Protect This Little Babe*, 1986, Ballpoint pen and marker on paper, 5-3/4" x 4". Image Courtesy of William Arnett in *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow*, edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 481.

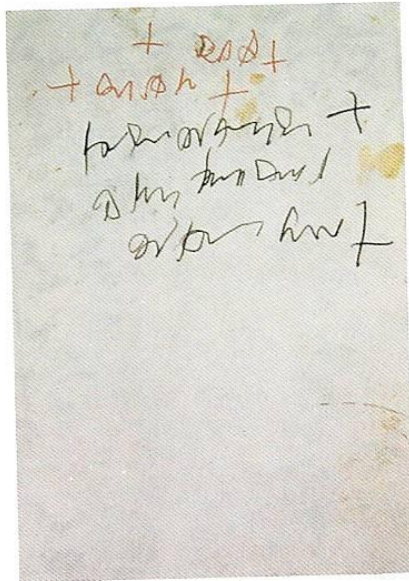


Figure 1-23. J.B. Murray, reverse of *God Bless This Little Babe, God Protect This Little Babe*, 1986 Marker on Paper. Image Courtesy of William Arnett in *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow*, edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 481.



Figure 1-24. J.B. Murray, *Untitled*, 1987, Marker and paint on paper, 23-3/4" x 17-3/4".
Image Courtesy of William Arnett in *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow*, edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 480.

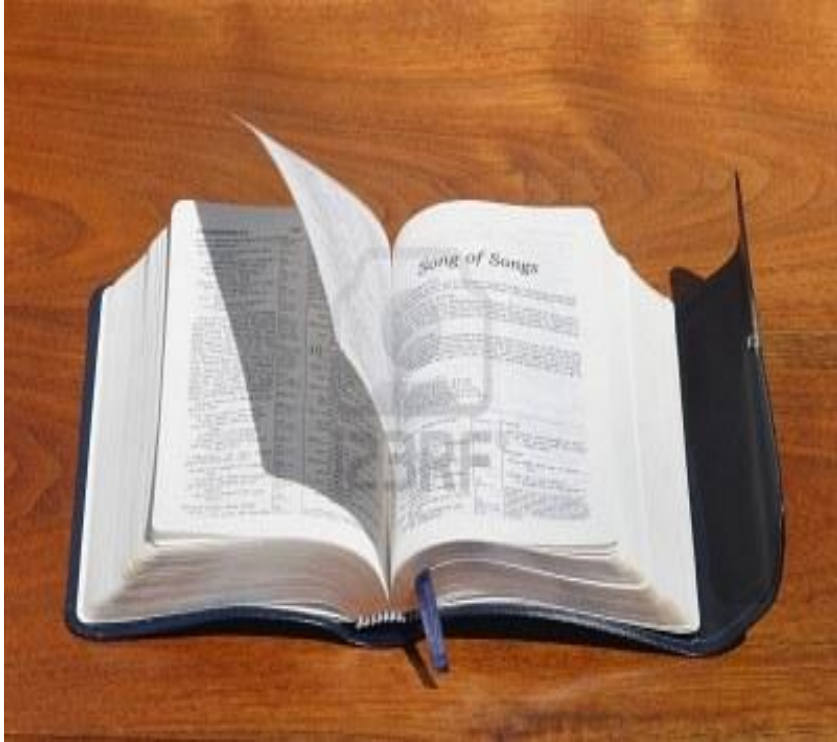


Figure 1-25. Bible. Image courtesy of :
<http://us.123rf.com/400wm/400/400/GeoPappas/geopappas0710/geopappas071000009/1827712-a-concept-photo-of-the-holy-spirit-turning-bible-pages.jpg>.



Murray funeral Sept 25 1988. Photo by Judith McWillie

Figure 1-27. J.B. Murray's Funeral, September 25, 1988. Image courtesy of Judith McWillie.



Figure 1-28. Cemetery worker at site marked for Ray Murray’s burial on March 28, 2010. Photo by L. Clifton-James.

Obituary

Ray Murray was born August 10, 1947 in Washington County, Georgia to the late J.B. and Amanda Cleo Murray. He departed this life on March 21, 2010 at his residence in Mitchell Georgia

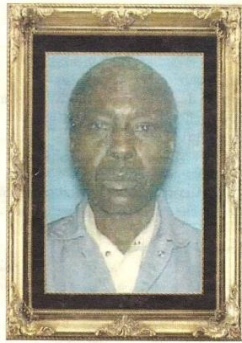
At an early age, Ray accepted Christ joining Second Mineral Spring Baptist Church where he served on the Usher Board. He received his education in Glascock County School System.

Ray was a former employee of Job Co Warrenton, Ga., Dudley R.A. Nurseries Inc. Thomson, Ga., and Hollywood Golf Club Asberry Park, New Jersey.

Preceding him in death Roy Murray (twin) Marion (MH) Arthur James (A) Dave, Willie Jame (Bill) J.B. Jr., Orlin Murray; two nieces preceded in death

He leaves to cherish his memories, like a son Taiwan Lindsey, three devoted sisters Ellen Lindsey, Annie Bert Brown of Mitchell, Georgia, Mary Elizabeth (Dollie) Rivera Beach, Florida; a devoted nephew Ronnie Lindsey , Thomson, Georgia, Betty Lindsey and nieces Gwanda (Cindy) Harris, Belinda (Faye) Lindsey Mitchell, Ga. One Aunt Mattie Mae Warthen Sparta, Ga., one Uncle Robert (Hogan) Glenis Kitchens of Sparta Ga. Three sister in laws Eva Murray Bell Warrenton, Ga., Gladys Murray Sandersville, Ga. Lula Murray , Atlanta, Ga.; twelve nieces, ten nephews thirteen great nieces, seven great nephew, five great-great nephews, fourteen great great nieces, devoted cousins Quinton and Carol Edwards, Edward, Evelyn Hazel, Charles, Linda Dent, Bill Bell. Dedicated friends James Clark, Ed Flicklin, Gladys Medlock, a host of cousins and friends.

**Homegoing Celebration of Life
For
Brother Ray Murray**



Sunrise
 August 10, 1947

Sunset
 March 21, 2010

Sunday, March 28, 2010
 1:00 p.m.

Second Mineral Spring Baptist Church
 Washington County
 Reverend Robert L. Smith, Pastor
 Officiating

Edwards & Sons
Mortuary

Figure 1-29. Funeral pamphlet with Obituary, inside cover, from the funeral service of Ray Murray. Scanned image by L. Clifton-James.



Figure 2-1. Makoza of Kingoyi with two of his miniature *niombo*. Photo courtesy of Swedish missionary, Karlman, approx. 1934, from *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds*, by Robert Ferris Thompson and Joseph Cornet, 60.

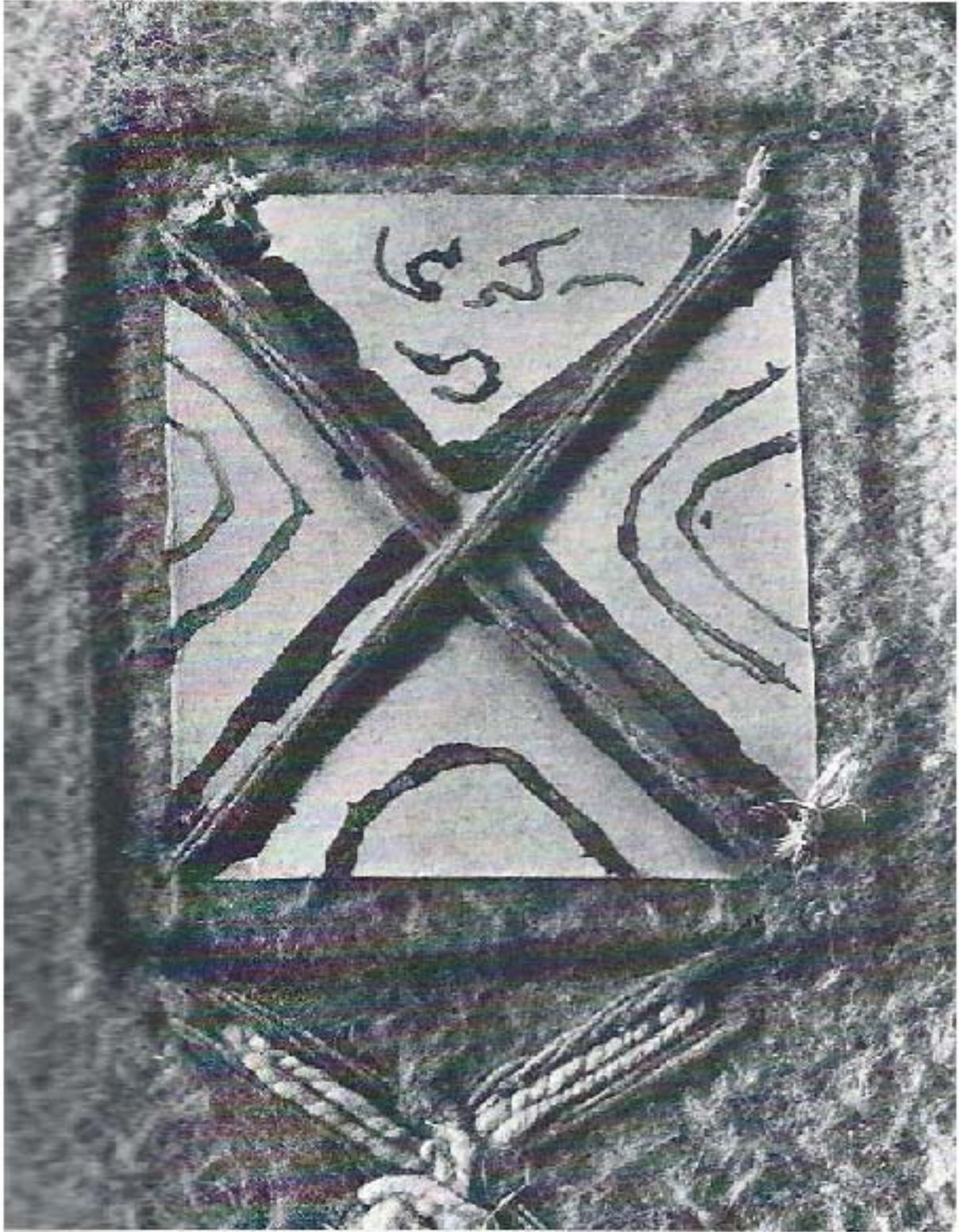


Figure 2-2. Detail of chest of miniature *niombo* on which Makoza of Kingoyi has his hand. Photo courtesy of Swedish missionary, Karlman, approx. 1934, from *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds*, by Robert Ferris Thompson and Joseph Cornet, 69.



Figure 2-3. Brazilian Points Ground Painting. Image courtesy of Maude Southwell Wahlman's Brazil Lecture at University of Missouri-Kansas City. 2012.



Figure 2-4. Brazilian Ceremonial Textiles. Image courtesy of Maude Southwell Wahlman's Brazil Lecture at University of Missouri-Kansas City. 2012.

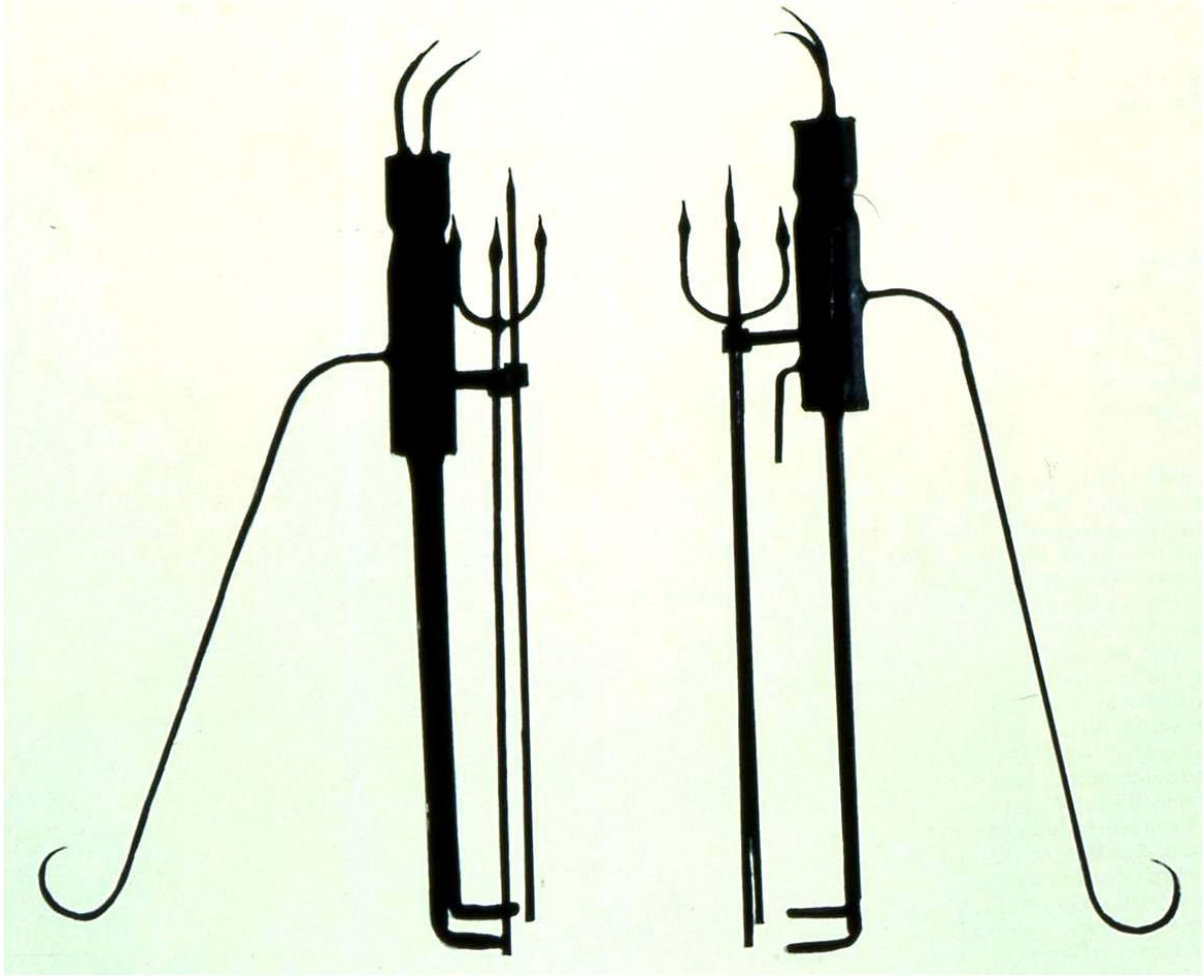


Figure 2-5. Brazilian Metalwork. Image courtesy of Maude Southwell Wahlman's Brazil Lecture at University of Missouri-Kansas City. 2012.



Figure 2-6. Cuban Abakua Altar with Anaforuana. Image courtesy of Maude Southwell Wahlman's Cuban Lecture at University of Missouri-Kansas City. 2012.



Figure 2-7. (Left) Ireme Costume from Brazil. Anaforuana. (Right) Detail with of Ireme Costume. Images courtesy of Maude Southwell Wahlman's Cuban Lecture at University of Missouri-Kansas City. 2012.

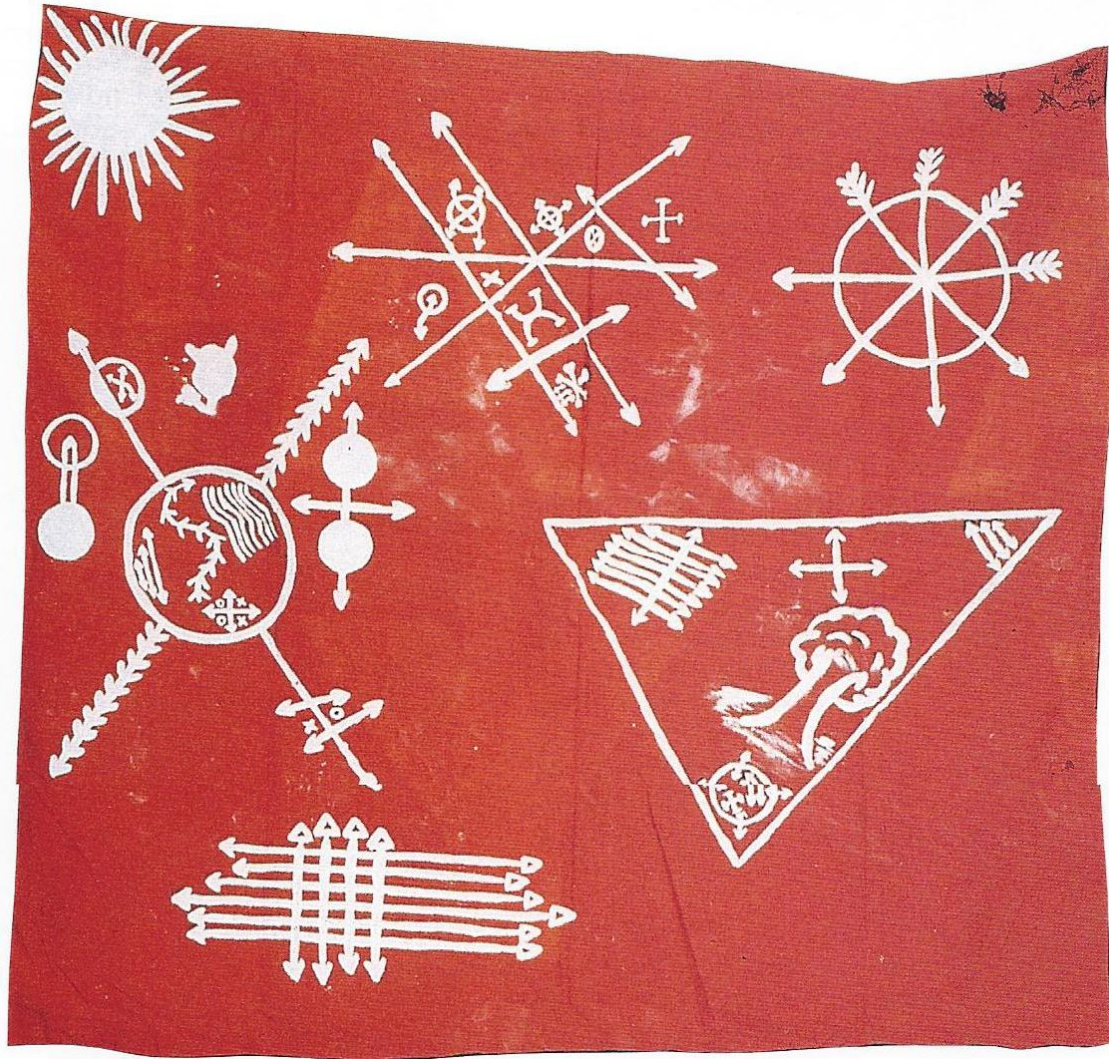


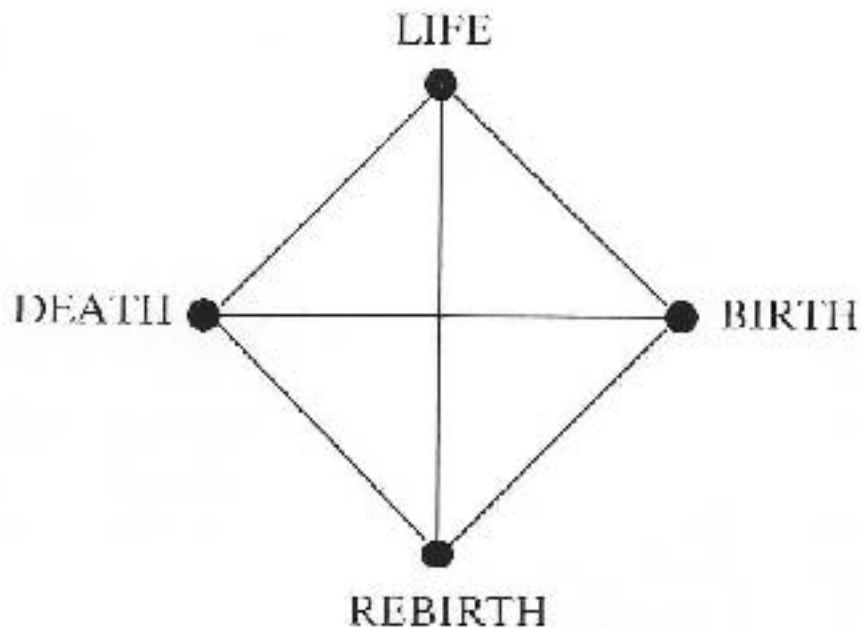
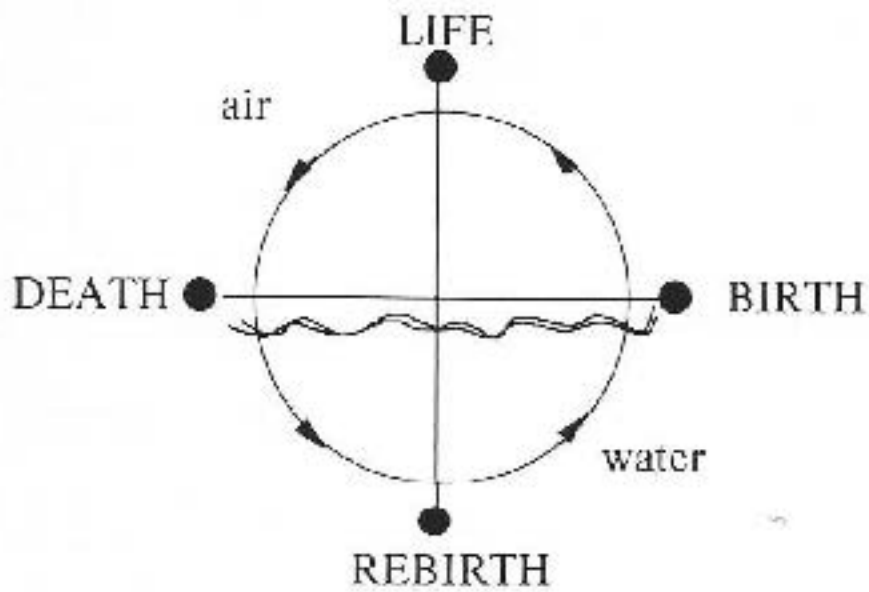
Figure 2-8. Anaforuana banner by Yuppi Pratt, Cuba, 1989, 35-1/2" x 37-1/2". Image courtesy of Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D. *Signs and Symbols: Africans Images in African-American Quilts*. 1993. 83.



Figure 2-9. Haitian Veve Ground Paintings. . Image courtesy of Dr. Maude Southwell Wahlman's Haitian Lecture at University of Missouri-Kansas City. 2012.



Figure 2-10. Haitian Drums with Veve. . Image courtesy of Dr. Maude Southwell Wahlman's Haitian Lecture at University of Missouri-Kansas City. 2012.



KONGO COSMOGRAMS

Figure 2-11. Kongo Cosmograms. Image courtesy of Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D. *Signs and Symbols: Africans Images in African-American Quilts*. 1993. 80.



Figure 2-12. Wooden grave sculptures (now destroyed) made by Cyrus Bowens in 1920, Sunbury, Georgia. Photo courtesy of Muriel and Malcolm Bell Jr. from *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow*, edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 88.



Figure 2-13. Harriet Power's Bible Quilt. . Image courtesy of Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D. Signs and Symbols: Africans Images in African-American Quilts. 1993. 65.



Figure 2-14. Harriet Powers Portrait in Masonic Eastern Star apron. Image courtesy of Dr. Maude Wahlman's lecture, 04/20/10, at University of Missouri-Kansas City.



Figure 2-15. Tombstones in *Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery*, Athens, Ga. Photo by L. Clifton-James 03/31/10.



Figure 2-16. Newsprint wallpapered walls, Amanda Gordon's house. Photo courtesy of William Ferris, Jr. Taken from *Signs and Symbols: Africans Images in African-American Quilts*. 1993. 86.



Figure 2-17. Nellie Mae Rowe in her yard, 1981. Photo courtesy of Jay Wieland from *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow*, edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 291.



Figure 2-18. Nellie Mae Rowe's *Trying on Earrings*, 1979, Crayon, felt-tip pen, jewelry, found materials, on Styrofoam 13" x 20". From the collection of Judith Alexander in *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow*, edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 296.



Figure 2-19. *First African Baptist Church* in Savannah, Ga. Photo by L. Clifton-James 04/01/10.



Figure 2-20. Basement floor of *First African Baptist Church* with diamond shaped Congo Cosmogram for ventilation of the space beneath. Photo by L. Clifton-James 04/01/10.



Figure 2-21. Interior of *First African Baptist Church* in Savannah, Ga. Photos by L. Clifton-James 04/01/10.



Figure 2-22. A selection of the ends of the balcony pews of *The First African Baptist Church*. Photos by L. Clifton-James 04/01/10.



Figure 2-23. Marie Laveaux Tomb in New Orleans, Louisiana. Photo courtesy of Daniel Lombard.



Figure 2-24. Plaque from the Tomb of Marie Laveau with X markings. Photo courtesy of Daniel Lombard.



Figure 2-25. Anonymous figure found in the back storeroom of a barbershop in New Orleans, Louisiana, once in the Bert Hemphill, Jr. Collection, made between approximately 1920 and 1930. Image courtesy of Dr. Maude Wahlman's African-American artist lecture at University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2012.



Figure 2-26. Fon god, Gu. Taken from West African Blog page at webpage at <http://westafrica-2008.blogspot.com/2008/06/bnin.html>. Viewed 2/23/2013.



Figure 2-27. Tombstone Inscription. Tombstone inscriptions, such as the one found on this coastal gravestone, provide invaluable historical information. Publication of inscriptions is an essential step in documenting the existence of a cemetery, and photographs and videorecordings of historic cemeteries are also helpful as a reference for preservationists. Courtesy of [Georgia Department of Economic Development](#).



Figure 2-28. Photo of rock pile in Dilmus Hall's yard. Photo courtesy of William Arnett, 1986, from *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow*, edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 221.

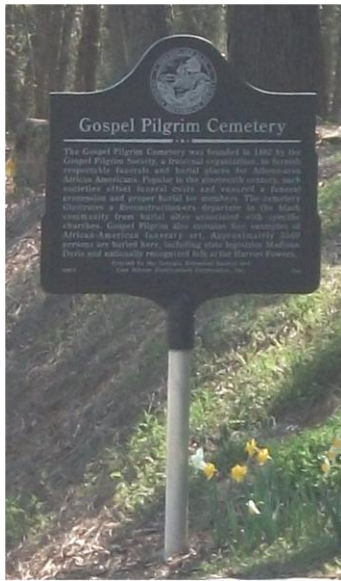


Figure 2-29. (Left) Cemetery sign for *Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery*, Athens, GA. Photo by L. Clifton-James, 03/31/10. (Right) Shells adorn grave at *Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery*, Athens, GA. Photo by L. Clifton-James, 03/31/10.



Figure 2-30. (Left) Shells adorned grave at *Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery*, Athens, GA. Photo by L. Clifton-James, 03/31/10. (Right) Glass bowl with hole through base on grave at *Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery*, Athens, GA. Photo by L. Clifton-James, 03/31/10.

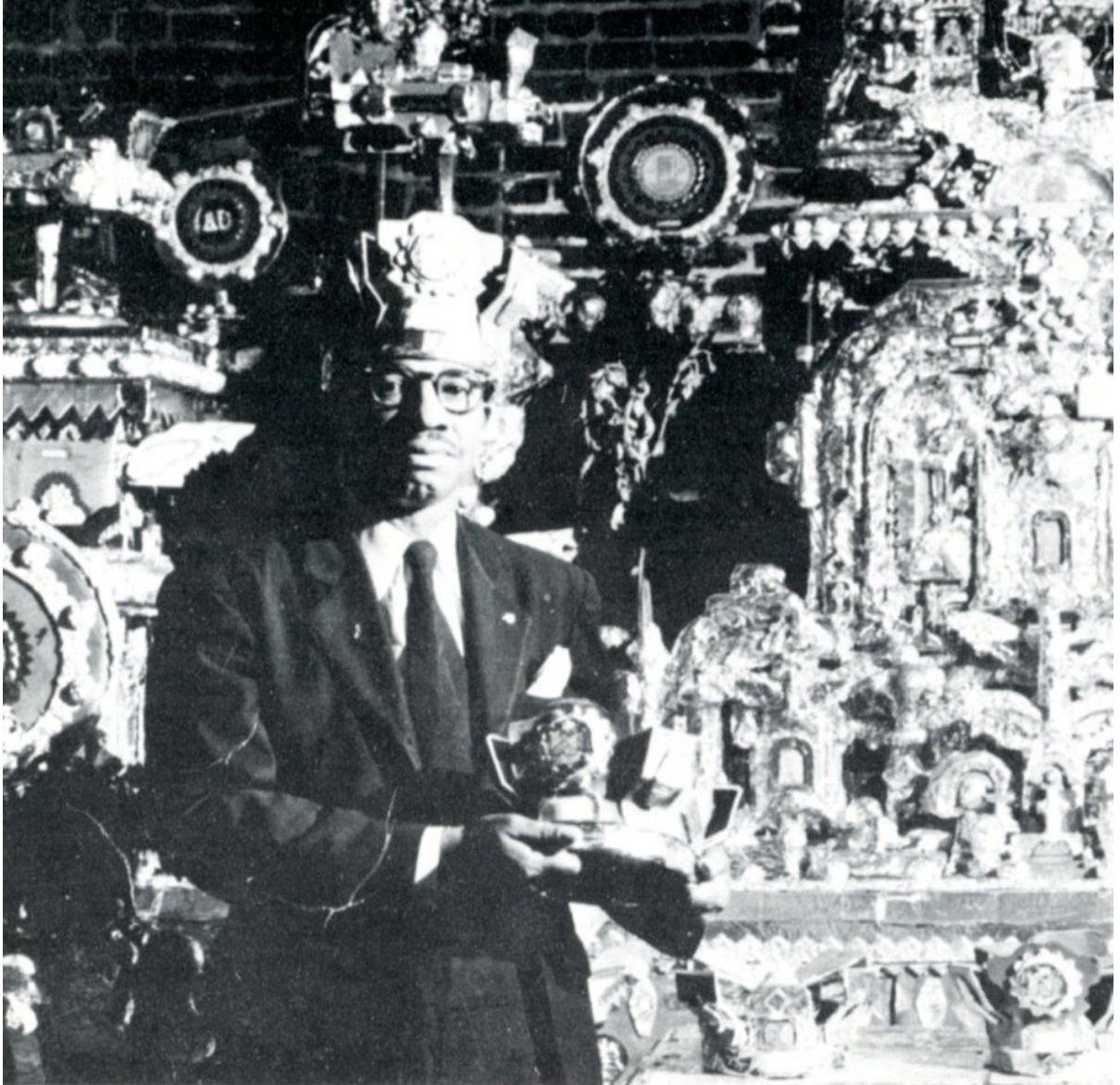


Figure 4-1. James Hampton with his assemblage entitled, *The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations' Millennium General Assembly*. Images courtesy of the Smithsonian Museum, 1974. The total altar-like construction, a symmetrical arrangement of shrines, pulpits, lecturns and wall tablets covered or wrapped in gold and tin foil, was assembled in a Washington, D.C. garage, 1950-1964.



Figure 4-3. Sister Gertrude Morgan. Taken from National Public Radio website article entitled, *Preacher-Artist Gertrude Morgan, Remixed*, by Joel Rose, September 30, 2005. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4864538>. Viewed 2/23/2013.

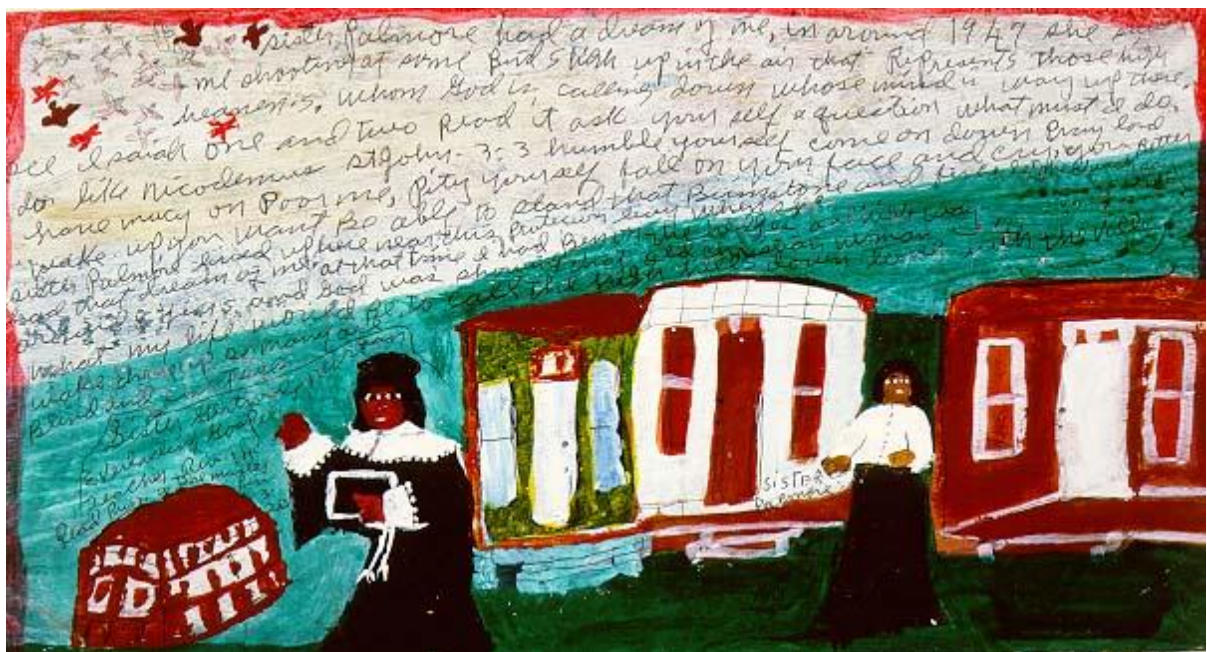


Figure 4-4. Sister Gertrude Morgan painting. Taken webpage entitled, *Once Upon a Time . . . Final year projects and dissertation*. <http://hollietheedamillustrator.wordpress.com/>. Viewed 2/23/2013.



Figure 4-5. Bill Traylor's *Preacher and His Congregation*, c. 1939-42, Pencil and colored pencil on cardboard, 16-1/2" x 16-1/2" Photo courtesy of Collection of Gael Mendelsohn, from *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One: Once That River Starts to Flow*, edited by Paul Arnett, William Arnett, Maude Southwell Wahlman, Ph.D., and Theophus Smith, 2000, 277.

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VITA

Licia E. Clifton-James is a candidate for a Master of Arts, Art and Art History, with a specialization in African and African American art and theory. Her qualifying paper is entitled *Making the Connection: J.B. Murray and the Scripts and Forms of Africa*. In her graduate studies, she attained a grade point average of 3.808 on a 4.0 scale. She received her Bachelor of Liberal Arts degree from the University of Missouri-Kansas City in December of 2007, with a grade point average of 3.625 on a 4.0 scale.

Ms. Clifton-James has provided graduate teaching assistance to Dr. Maude Southwell Wahlman for the Fall semesters of 2010 and 2012, as well as the Spring semester of 2013. In addition, she is currently assisting Dr. Wahlman in the production of her most recent book, *Mojo Working*.

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Ms. Clifton-James has been active in community service. She was a judge for the 5th District Congressional Student Art Competition, on April 13, 2011. She has served as a member of the Trustees' Programming Committee for the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art from January 2012 to the present and has been a member of the Advisory Board for the Bruce R. Watkins Cultural Heritage Center from January 2012 to present.

Additionally, Ms. Clifton-James is a member of the following organizations: Graduate Art History Association, Association of Historians of American Art, Midwest Art History Society, and the Association for the Study of African American Life and History.

Finally, Ms. Clifton-James has taken 4 years of university level German and has the fundamental skills of speaking, reading and writing this language. In addition, she has had 2 years of university level French and possesses limited reading and writing skills in this language.

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