

DEMANDS OF ANCESTORS & GODS

by Janet Ruth

Standing among waves that wash a jetty below the Malecón, she wears a yellow cap. Her skirt swirls with the seven colors of Africa, this Cuban child of Oshun. She sings to the surf, shakes a maraca, extends her hand.

Olokun
god of the sea
his briny embrace

Who is she? Reaching like a ship's ebony figurehead across the strait to El Morro, oblivious to rushing, honking Havana traffic and camera-toting visitors like me. A devotee of Santería, mahogany skin of the tribe of diaspora. Steely alloy of African Yoruba and Catholicism smelted in the New World's cultural crucible—La Virgen de la Caridad dances with Olokun. A woman joins her on the rocks. A man beyond the breakers' grasp. The suck & surge at their feet.

white box
covered with flowers—
the ocean's heave

What is this ceremony? I do not know and will not ask.

her prayers rise
with rattling maracas
my heart beats time

She kneels. The box slips from her fingers, turns in eddies below the rocks, rises up and away from the shore.

waves roll in & out
the hem of her skirt
stained with salt

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