Portobel Project

I was invited by Arturo Lindsay to travel to Portobelo, Panama during the summer of 2005 to create a site-specific project in the jungle. Armed with anti-malarial medication and many ideas, I traveled to the Central American country. Panama is a land of lush jungles, super sized insects and a mestizo culture informed by the descendents of indigenous native peoples, slaves from the Congo, and Spanish colonists. Like my African forbears, I entered the rain forest; and, thus, began my journey.

Chasing Arrows at Las Orchièdas

I stenciled the symbol for recycling onto coconut trees in Las Orchièdas. Las Orchièdas is a 13-acre plot of land in the jungle across the bay from Portobelo, Panama. The name of the property derives from the fact that wild orchids grow there.

There are 13 stencils in all, one for each acre of land at Las Orchièdas. The sign is formed by three chasing arrows, which cue the viewer to seek the marks as he/she passes through the jungle. The prints will change over time and eventually disappear, signaling the fragile regeneration of this ecosystem.

Altar of Cycles

The arrows also form a triangle, the points of which channel the slave trade's sugar-rum-human triumvirate. The altar at Centro de Facilidades Turistias (CEFATI) reflects the brutal cycle of the slave trade as a subtext to the larger theme of the complex exchanges and alterations that occur over time in nature and human society.

CEFATI is the local tourist office in Portobelo. The site is the former home of a Spanish colonist and dates back some 300 years. The room I used for my installation is the former kitchen and features a very old brick stove. The stove, which has three arches, was incorporated into my altar.

The project in Panama culminated with a festival, the Ferias de Portobelo, that included artists from the US and Central America. The event featured the site-specific work as well as a poetry reading, dance performances and a children's play. The artists of Taller Portobelo organized the festival.

Rain Forest Totes

The Rain Forest Totes are an extension of the chasing arrows piece. I took a digital photo of a detail of the work and transferred it onto canvas tote bags. The bags are intended for use when shopping to provide US consumers a way to avoid using plastic bags. They also allow us to offset the guilt that accompanies our privileged existence in style. The bags, which embody "eco-chic," also come in a smaller size for children.
Installation detail (acrylic paint on coconut tree trunk)

Tempo at the "Altar of Cylcles" on festival day.

Rain Forest Totes (ink transfer on canvas)

Altar detail (mixed media with frog)
Altar detail (sugar, glitter, coconut shell)