

VODOU

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A THOUGHT-PROVOKING
LEAFLET ON VODOU: HISTORY,
WORLDVIEW AND RITUALS.
YOU CAN READ THE LEAFLET
AS YOU GO THROUGH THE
EXHIBITION OR REFER
TO IT AFTERWARDS.
FOR ADULTS AND TEENS.



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EXHIBITION COMPANION

During your visit, if objects, symbols or words raise questions, look around and listen. You will most likely find texts or audio-visuals that help put things into perspective by explaining Vodouists' point of view.

DIFFERENT MEANINGS

Vodouists and non-Vodouists often attribute different, and sometimes opposite, meanings to certain objects, symbols or words associated with Vodou.

For example, for those who practise Vodou, human remains have a positive association because they represent ancestors. When ancestors are close by, the living can communicate with them and benefit from their help and experience.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

To better understand the significance of human remains in Vodou, ask yourself questions about how you perceive the deceased.

- What types of objects that belonged to deceased loved ones do you keep? Photographs, personal objects, locks of hair, ashes?
- What significance and role do you attribute to these objects? How would you feel if they disappeared?



CANADIAN MUSEUM OF CIVILIZATION
MUSÉE CANADIEN DES CIVILISATIONS

Canada



MEG MUSÉE D'ETHNOGRAPHIE
DE GENÈVE



Tropenmuseum

COULD CERTAIN EPISODES IN HAITI'S HISTORY HAVE GIVEN RISE TO THE CLICHÉS SURROUNDING VODOU?

Persecuted in Haiti, Vodouists saw Vodou banned, faced anti-superstition campaigns and were forced to convert to Christianity. And Vodou has been distorted in the mass media and portrayed as evil.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES,
with their own spiritual traditions,
ENSLAVED



HAITI,
controlled by
CATHOLIC
European
COLONIZERS



AFRICAN SLAVES
with their own spiritual traditions

African and indigenous
SPIRITUAL PRACTICES
were
PUNISHED AND BANNED.

~~VODOU~~

VODOU emerged
when indigenous
and African people
came together.

Clandestine practice

Viewed as
**BARBARIC
AND BAD**

INCOMPREHENSION
and false accusations

Distorted in
MASS MEDIA



Anti-superstition
campaigns



CLICHÉS
surrounding
Vodou

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POSSESSION IN VODOU?

Possession is a special way of communicating with the *lwa*. In a universe where everything is interconnected, Vodouists consider it normal for humans to be able to temporarily house the energies of the *lwa*.



WORLDVIEW

Reality consists of spirits and spiritual entities whose energies permeate everything in the universe.

WHAT ARE LWA? A special category of spirits, MANIFESTATIONS OF THE GRAN MÈT (GOD)

WHERE? EVERYWHERE

- Everyday places
- Sacred places



WHO? ANYONE

Especially Vodouists, who communicate more easily with *lwa*



POSSESSION

WHY? To keep the ENERGIES in the world BALANCED

or to restore their balance



WHAT? Successful COMMUNICATION with a *lwa*



HOW?

- People let *LWA USE THEIR BODIES*.
- They do not suffer.
- After, they **RETURN TO THEIR USUAL STATE**.
- Length of time and intensity vary.

WHEN? ANY TIME

- Daily activities
- Spiritual ceremonies



THE IMPORTANCE OF SECRET SOCIETIES IN VODOU

Vodouists have differing perspectives on the relevance of secret societies.

There are hundreds of *LWA* (spirits), divided into many rites. Some rites are practised by Vodouists organized into **SECRET SOCIETIES**:

- Bizango
- Sanpwel
- Zobop
- Vlenbendeng



COLONIAL PERIOD

- Vodou banned
- Vodouists punished
- Slavery and oppression

TODAY

Secret societies are not viewed the same way by all Vodouists.

ROLES of secret societies



Helped organize the
**FIGHT FOR
FREEDOM AND
INDEPENDENCE**

MARKS OF VIOLENCE

on objects
and figures
**EVOKE BATTLES
FOUGHT**

CLANDESTINE Vodou PRACTICE



DEFENDED oppressed Vodouists



FOR



They ensure
JUSTICE
where
the state
is absent.

They defend
Vodouists.

AGAINST

Vodou
**OFFICIALLY
RECOGNIZED**
in Haiti in 2003.



**POLITICAL
INDEPENDENCE**
was gained
in 1804.

