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The articulate remedies of Dolores Lolita Rodriguez

Hyatt Kellim Brown
University of South Florida

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The Articulate Remedies of Dolores Lolita Rodriguez

by

Hyatt Kellim Brown

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Department of Art History
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University of South Florida

Major Professor: David Wright, Ph.D.
Committee Member: David T. Doris, Ph.D.
Committee Member: Kevin Yelvington, Ph.D.

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The Articulate Remedies of Dolores Lolita Rodriguez

Hyatt Kellim Brown

ABSTRACT

For eighty-six-year-old Tampa, Florida, native Dolores Lolita Rodriguez, yard decorating was more than just “decoration”; it was a form of therapy. Her yard was a massive assemblage of found objects arranged into a personalized visual vocabulary that involved honoring the deceased, her Spanish identity, and local spiritual practices. The yard also upheld a unique conception of beauty. Her creations were an articulation of, and remedy for, a life of tremendous loss. They were also the cause of her stroke and confinement to rehabilitation in November 2002.

Dolores’s property was visually cognate with a mode of yard decoration, called the African-American yard show, which defends the home from evil spirits and honors the deceased. Although Dolores was not African-American, but of Spanish-American descent, it was important to explore possible influences from the local African-American community. It also became necessary to interact with Caribbean religious practices present in her west Tampa neighborhood in order to understand her coded yard.
After a year and a half of meetings with Dolores in her rehabilitation center room, it was determined that no academic paradigm or any one religious practice could be used to explain her world. Dolores did not abide by any specific set of rules—other than her own. Her daily act of decoration was a make-do phenomenon. She improvised with found objects and elements of local spiritual practices creating a *bricolage* of meaning. She surrounded herself with an autobiographical sketch of her past, something she found to be “beautiful.”

Her twenty-five years of hard work were completely destroyed in May 2004, by her long-lost grandson. The property was erased of everything Dolores—then put up for sale. Dolores Lolita Rodriguez died of a heart attack in her rehabilitation center bed in November 2005. All that remains are her words and the photographs of her work as they have been presented in this project. I do hope that my research serves her legacy well.
On the corner of Cordelia Street and North Howard Avenue in West Tampa, a sign in an elaborately decorated yard reads “Dead End” (Appendix B, Illustration 1).\footnote{The casual passer-by may read this ordinary sign as nothing more than an indication of a roadway’s terminus. However, upon closer inspection, one notices that the dead-end sign surmounts a pole to which is bound a broomstick wrapped in multicolored cloth and fastened vertically with string, wire, and glittering Mardi Gras-type necklaces.}

Until recently, the decorated yard was a massive assemblage of found objects that at first appeared to be meaningless piles of junk: broken electronic equipment, stuffed animals, plastic figurines, wooden diamond-forms, mirrors, fan blades, and concrete lawn ornaments—all dispersed in and around rose bushes, trees, and potted flowers on the porch (Illustration 2). The yard perimeter was lined with broomsticks standing upright and plastic and metal archways wrapped tightly with multicolored fabric. Behind the house was a cinder block enclosure, a black plastic figure surmounting a pole at its center (Illustration 3). Ashtrays, cookware, bottles, and a stuffed bear filled the open cells of the cinder blocks. This yard was like no other in the vicinity.

Created by a member of Tampa’s Caribbean community, Dolores Lolita Rodriguez, the yard was decorated in a makeshift manner. Mrs. Rodriguez had

\footnote{All illustrations referenced in the text are numbered consecutively in Appendix A.}
appropriated and constructed with available materials from her community. Her work, an aesthetic of bricolage,\(^2\) was a process that transformed everyday, mass-produced objects, removing them from their originally intended uses.

Similar vernacular practices might be used to categorize and interpret the yard of Dolores Lolita Rodriguez—the Outsider Art and African-American yard show frameworks. Practice of the African-derived religion of Santeria, present in the Tampa community and in Mrs. Rodriguez’s work, is also a useful framework. None of these manage to capture her work entirely; however, her work contained individual elements consistent with each of these academic models. Mrs. Rodriguez’s work, however, can be located within the framework of Visionary Environments,\(^3\) a title positioning her project under the greater art historical aegis of Outsider Art. Visionary Environments are constructions of found materials arranged in a meaningful manner. Detritus of a community is recycled, reused, and repositioned in a context that assigns it new meaning.

Since the early 1970s, documentation of such decorative “self-made worlds” has been situated under the label Outsider Art since these worlds did not fit within existing art categories of the day. Artists of this orientation became known as: outsiders, visionaries, primitives, naives and folk artists. Roger Cardinal’s

\(^2\) Claude Levi-Strauss originated the term bricolage to addresses a process in his 1968 text The Savage Mind.

\(^3\) John Maizels states, “One unique feature of Outsider Art, and one found in no other sphere of art, are [sic] visionary environments” (7).
seminal text *Outsider Art*⁴ neatly organized the workings of such untrained artists (72), whose inner urges compel them to create *outside* of the regimentation and narrowing of formal academic training⁵ and also *outside* the art market. These untrained artists embark upon an often lifelong process of assemblage for many reasons. Some hope to achieve local fame or the attention of the art world; others hope to gain spiritual fulfillment through their creations.

There is a well-documented vernacular⁶ of yard decoration particular to some African Americans that is spiritually involved and in tune with the Visionary Environment. The African-American yard show is said in academic studies to recollect a classical tradition⁷ of grave decoration and spirit appeasement from the former central African kingdom of Kongo.

The Rodriguez yard bore a striking resemblance to the African-American yard. It shared with that mode of decoration a visual vocabulary that instructed passers-by in an esoteric language that beautifies, honors the deceased, and

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⁴ Roger Cardinal was one of the first to apply the term *outsider* to the phenomenon of the untrained artist. Earlier, Jean Dubuffet’s Art Brut sought an anonymous art that had no definition in mid-twentieth-century art circles. Dubuffet “discovered” the art of prison inmates and the mentally ill. After Dubuffet, Cardinal continued the search for others working outside of art “-isms” and compiled the 1972 text that includes the untrained, the mad, and others.

⁵ For examples of recent Visionary Environments around the world see “Outsiders,” *Raw Creation: Outsider Art and Beyond* by John Maizels.

⁶ Vernacular, a term common in discussion of language, is also used in the yard show paradigm to describe the visual language of recurring icons identified by academia. Grey Gundaker suggests the term is also a euphemism for artists operating under self-taught or untrained labeling. Gundaker further suggests that vernacular is to the art/gallery world “nothing more than a marketing tool” (44).

⁷ Robert Farris Thompson was the first to identify *yard shows* and place them within the Kongo-Atlantic paradigm in *Flash*. 
defends against malevolent spirits. Following the groundbreaking scholarship that has already established a branch of African Art History, this thesis will illustrate the visual parallels between Dolores Lolita Rodríguez’s creations and the African-American yard show. Although Mrs. Rodríguez’s yard is not African-American, it will be shown that her work is visually parallel to and even honors and protects much like work in the African-American yard show. This research is the first of its kind to be conducted in the State of Florida, and will add yet another chapter of art history about the various individuals decorating their homes in this manner.

However, unlike the African-American yard show, Mrs. Rodríguez’s aesthetic of “making things beautiful” stemmed from childhood myths of Spain, inherited elements of the Caribbean religious practices of Spiritism and Santeria, and found materials from local Goodwill and Salvation Army stores. Her yard was inscribed with her past, which not only beautified her surroundings but also responded as a visual coping mechanism to a life of great loss. Mrs. Rodríguez’s work was a unique personal bricolage of memory elements borrowed from many sources, items endowed with personal significance and involving deceased family, her Spanish identity, Spiritism, and a distinctive concept of beauty.

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* The seminal works, *The Four Moments of the Sun* (1981) and *Flash of the Spirit* (1983) by Robert Farris Thompson link Kongo funerary practices and spiritual beliefs with traditions in the Americas, i.e., yard shows and grave decoration.

* Grey Gundaker’s article “Tradition and Innovation in African American Yards” (1993) continues and expands upon the Thompson framework. Gundaker illustrates the basic elements of yard show vernacular and stresses locations in Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, and Virginia but not in Florida. As of 2004, Gundaker was unaware of any yard shows existing in Florida (personal communication, April 2004).
Generally, African-American yard show and Outsider Art scholarship has not dealt with influences of Santeria or Spiritism in yard shows as a source of inspiration. Because Mrs. Rodriguez was not African-American, but rather of Spanish/Cuban descent, and because she incorporated imagery associated with the Afro-Cuban religion of Santeria and her self-avowed involvement with Spiritism, a French belief system of spirit interaction, it became necessary to investigate the possible influences from Afro-diasporic cultural transmission via Tampa’s Cuban immigrant population. Over the course of this research it became apparent that Mrs. Rodriguez’s work did not fit within any one of the above-mentioned academic models. She culled ideas and materials from any source she chose and did not adhere to any specific religious practice. Her story is about her process of honoring, protecting, and remedying grief. She defied any specific labeling. Her work is best described through the process of bricolage that permitted her to move freely in her decision-making.

The Beginning of a Journey

I first met Dolores Lolita Rodriguez in March of 2003, and continued to see her on a weekly basis until the fall of 2004. Early on, it became apparent to me that her yard was much more than decoration, but Mrs. Rodriguez was hesitant in divulging the deeper motivations behind her work. I spent endless hours exploring West Tampa neighborhoods looking for others decorating in the same way she did, and also in religious shops hoping to gain a better understanding of her work through the eyes of others in the community.
Dolores suffered a stroke while working in her yard in November of 2002, and was confined to rehabilitation. My time with her was spent sitting at her bedside in the Rehabilitation and Health Care Center on Martin Luther King Boulevard. Our meetings were one- to two-hour informal discussions about her yard, her life, and other matters. More formal interviews consisted of sets of questions prepared prior to tape-recorded discussion. Our meetings were unpredictable, and even after a year of acquaintance, Dolores continued to teach—and bewilder—me with her life story. My fieldwork was a process in constant flux as I positioned and repositioned my questions, and indeed my self, according to the development of her story.

Methodology

Renato Rosaldo discusses the anthropological method of positioning one’s self in relation to his or her subject. The ethnographer begins “research with a set of questions, revises them throughout the course of inquiry and at the end emerges with a different set of questions” (7). The first formal recorded interview with Dolores began with predetermined questions about photographs of her yard. I transcribed and studied Dolores’s responses—sometimes direct, sometimes ambiguous—and in response was compelled to create new sets of questions. Over time, as I became more flexible in my approach, I began finding consistencies in Dolores’s responses.

In March of 2003, I began presenting Dolores Rodriguez with photographs of the interior and exterior of her home. She discussed some images at length while
giving others little or no attention. Her refusal to comment on a photograph was usually signaled by a quick change of topic or a motion toward her shaking hands while claiming to be “very nervous.” Dolores was often hesitant to discuss other photographs because of a concern that I might find her “crazy.” Once I assured her that I did not regard her in that way, there was a noticeable change in her comfort level, usually a sign that she was about to reveal something important. There were, however, several photographs that never received any comment other than a simple, “Beautiful.”

After many months of conversation, Dolores felt I had reached a point of understanding and respect for her world. She asked me, “Will you clean up the yard?” inviting me also to “make it look pretty.” Trusting I had learned enough to serve her yard properly, I cleaned it on several occasions and photographed my efforts. Dolores always responded to photographs of my yard work with a smile and a tone of gratitude.

Then, one day, she called on my assistance for a job directly involved with honoring the spirit of her beloved deceased son Dickie. She asked me to fill a cup of water positioned before his photograph. Filling the cup, according to Dolores, would “make him rest better.” It was a great honor to be trusted with tending to her most important memorial space located next to her bed at home. This was the first moment of my direct participation in her spiritual practice.

My interaction with Dolores’s community, including family, friends, and owners of local Caribbean religious shops called *botanicas*, augmented my understanding of existing Caribbean cultural forces in West Tampa. The
information gleaned from these outside sources enhanced my knowledge of the practices Dolores appropriated into her world. But they do not fully describe her work. Dolores was an individual acting on her own, not a representative of a specific group. She operated according to a very personalized set of rules, and it is therefore her word that is important and is directly quoted throughout this research.

In this thesis, I focus on Dolores’s work at its most mature stage, rather than attempting to address her entire creative history. This is consonant with Dolores’s own concerns during the period before May 2004, when her work in her yard was vandalized and then completely destroyed by her grandson Richard.

My academic interests prior to this research, and my desire to interpret and include Dolores in those interests, made my journey a confusing one. My process of discovery and academic background limited and shaped this research. The result is a narrative of my experiences and the pitfalls encountered along the way.

Getting to know Dolores was not difficult. She was always friendly and happy to have me at her bedside listening to her discuss her life experience. However, she made it difficult to understand why she was compelled to decorate the way she did. This difficulty is made evident on the pages of this thesis. Along the way, I questioned my ability to conduct ethnography. Was I sensitive enough to her precious world? Did I need to be? Did the fact that I was not fluent in Spanish and that our meetings were always conducted in English affect the outcome of our relationship and my understanding? Shortcomings were many; I was limited
in ways that became apparent over time. My work is therefore provisional. It represents what I have learned to date from the amazing life of Dolores Lolita Rodriguez. Furthermore, it suggests that with continued thought and research, Dolores’s world could be interpreted and reinterpreted many times over, in many different ways.

Research Limitations

Meeting with Dolores and spending time in West Tampa, an area I had rarely visited prior to this research, was at first a bit awkward. Although the language barrier was rarely an issue with Dolores because of her fluent English, I became aware that the language barrier and my physical appearance would limit my access to the community. I am Caucasian male, about the size of an average football player, and I suspected that I appeared more like an undercover police officer or FBI agent than a graduate student interested in the secretive practices of Santeria. Discussion with Dolores’s neighbors and others in the community was at first often difficult. Though people eyed me suspiciously, they eventually opened up to my presence in their community, and I reached what I felt was a rewarding acceptance in the West Tampa community.

Dolores’s yard and the interior of her home, once rife with color and the effects of hard work, are now nothing but a memory to her neighbors and her grandson Richard. On November 30, 2004, Dolores Lolita Rodriguez passed away from a heart attack in her rehabilitation bed. All that remains of her work are the photographs and her comments, as I have presented them in this thesis.
Chapter Two

Visual Parallels: The African-American Yard

Prior to my attendance at the University of South Florida, I had been deeply involved with the traditional arts of Africa. My strong object-oriented training at the University of Florida in the 1990s, and later, in my work with renowned Belgian African Art dealer Marc Leo Felix, focused upon originary ritual contexts and on the Western re-contextualizing spaces of the museum and gallery. Felix urged me to return to the United States and attend an American Art History program to broaden my methodological perspectives beyond those I had learned from him. I had little idea that my experience in Florida would lead me toward the complementary field of the African Diaspora, in which at first I was reluctant to engage.

My work with the forward-looking Africanists, Dr. Amanda Carlson and Dr. David Doris of the University of South Florida, ended my previous work in the field. I was exposed to African-American vernacular practices and the parallels between their expressions in past African traditions and in the United States. Amanda Carlson had worked with local Nigerian masquerade performance and deconstructed the representation of Africa in the Tampa Busch Gardens theme park. David Doris’s distinguished dissertation research focused on Yoruba vernacular practices of landscape protection and elaboration in Nigeria. He introduced me to the African ideological imports of the slave trade into the
Caribbean and United States. Doris recommended that I take my early interest in traditional objects from the Kongo and other Central African peoples, and attempt to locate manifestations of these traditions in Tampa's African-American community.¹⁰ A project of this sort would require that I experience these practices directly through human contact rather than through exclusively archival sources.

I was aware of a particular practice of yard decoration found in some African-American communities and its suggested association with Kongo funerary and cosmological practice.¹¹ Given the presence of a large Caribbean community in Tampa, the possibility of encountering any one of the African-derived religious systems, e.g., Cuban Santeria and Palo Monte, or Haitian Vodoun, was in my favor. However I had little exposure to these religions and decided to focus on my strengths by searching the Tampa area for the icons and practices said to be continuations and transformations of Kongo cosmological practice: African-American gravesites and yard decoration.

Many of the sites related to Kongo practices in the United States were located in the vicinity of the two former slave ports of Charleston, South Carolina, and New Orleans, Louisiana. Very little Kongo-related research had been conducted in Florida, aside from the identification of a few African-American gravesites. However, not one African-American yard show had been identified in Florida. If a yard show could be located in Florida, and more specifically in Tampa, not only

¹⁰ There was already a well developed body of literature on such Kongo-izing objects and practices in the Americas.

would it provide an accessible site of study, but it would also be the first of its kind to be studied in Florida. I was excited at the prospect of working with new and original research.

My University of South Florida course work, focused in this classical tradition, sent me on a search for African-American yard shows in the Tampa community. After many months of searching Tampa neighborhoods, I managed to locate the yard of Dolores Rodriguez, which, at the outset, seemed reminiscent of Afro-yard motifs.

The Search

From November 2002, to February 2003, I explored Tampa neighborhoods, focusing on African-American communities and ignoring the Cuban enclaves of Ybor City and West Tampa. This oversight blinded me to the possibility of finding non-African Americans decorating their homes in a manner similar to African Americans' homes. Aside from the random concrete lawn ornament and old Christmas lights, nothing of significance appeared in the African-American sections of town. Then one day I came upon what I had hoped to discover. On the north end of Howard Avenue in West Tampa sat a home replete with all the facets of the African-American yard show: archways, fan blades, large circular objects, empty chairs, mirrors and oddly placed piles of found objects. For several weeks I repeatedly knocked on the front door but received no reply. Finally, a neighbor explained that the owner of the property, Dolores Rodriguez, had recently suffered a stroke and was confined to a rehabilitation center.
In March of 2003, I went to Room 210 in the Rehabilitation and Healthcare Center of Tampa on Martin Luther King Boulevard, where I introduced myself to 86-year-old Dolores Rodriguez. She appeared unsure of what to make of her visitor. I explained that I had seen her home and her beautiful display of artistic activity. Her reaction to my comments was one of ease for, as I soon discovered, she was accustomed to attention from the Tampa community. She had decorated her home for more than twenty-five years, and her work had been featured in two newspaper articles; in the *Tampa Tribune*, “Colorful Garden Fools the Eye” (August 4, 1989) and in the *St. Petersburg Times*, “Lola, How Does Your Garden Grow?” (1996). Dolores’s work also was the subject of a short spot on *TV 20 News*. Each interview about her work highlighted the flowers in her yard, some real and others fake. None of the news coverage scratched the spectacular surface of Dolores’s creations. As I was to discover over the next fourteen months of conversation, grief and deeply spiritual involvement motivated Dolores to honor deceased family members. Her acts of creation recalled and remedied her past.

Given the visual parallels between the Rodriguez yard and the Kongo practice central to my academic interests, it made sense to search for the slightest hint of transmission between the two. During my time working with Dolores, I continued to search for Kongo influence in Tampa and managed to locate several sites in African-American graveyards and in the neighboring town of Beallsville, where
traces of this Kongo-Atlantic bond are visible. As such phenomena have been central to the academic study of vernacular yards in North America, it is necessary to give an introduction on Kongo spiritual practices, how they spread to the New World, and how they have been manifested in African-American culture.

Kongo Funerary and Cosmological Practice

For 500 years, Kongo beliefs have been central in Afro-Atlantic religious and funerary practices throughout the Americas and the Caribbean. At the core is a foundational conception of the soul’s spiritual path through life and death, a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, mapped by a cruciform ideogram called dikenga. The dikenga ideogram represents the “Four Moments of the Sun,” which are often depicted in circular, diamond, or lozenge-form (Appendix A). This cosmogram articulates the soul’s spiritual continuity through the worlds of the living and the dead. The cosmogram represents life as a journey, equating the path of the soul with that of the sun, beginning at dawn with birth, moving toward the zenith of life at noon, and descending at sunset into the ancestral world, and returning through rebirth to its starting point at dawn (Thompson, Flash 108-116, 188-191). Variations of this cosmogram are commonly found in Afro-Atlantic grave sites and yard shows.

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12 See my short essay “Transatlantic Kongo: Echoes of the Cosmogram” discussing Tampa area Kongo sites located during this research
The Kongo belief in a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth is perpetuated in two primary spheres: ritual and grave decoration. In ritual, nganga, ritual specialists, outline the cosmogram on the Earth, where the cruciform pattern acts as symbolic crossroads upon which the nganga or the supplicant kneels. This symbolic prostration facilitates oath taking, spirit placation, and direct contact with the world of the dead. Kongo graves are regarded as crossroads where the two worlds of life and death meet.

The Bakongo, or Kongo people, honor, protect, and appease the deceased with assorted grave decoration. White rocks often enclose the grave, thus protecting spiritually charged grave earth from wandering evil spirits. Standing terracotta pipes act as conduits for communication between the living and the dead. Broken objects—such as bottles, pottery, and objects last used by the ancestor—surmount graves for use by the deceased in the spirit world where objects reclaim wholeness.

North America

The ports of Charleston, South Carolina, and New Orleans, Louisiana, were sites of the most concentrated slave trading in North America. As a result, the American South is rich in Kongo-influenced grave and yard decoration, mostly in Louisiana, Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, and the Carolinas, but not in Florida.¹³

¹³ Doctoral candidate Kara Morrow of the Florida State University has documented Florida grave decorations that will appear in a forthcoming book on Africa in Florida. Although she has documented some compelling grave sites, she has yet to encounter a Floridian yard show.
African-American gravesites in the southern United States are often decorated in a fashion similar to Kongo graves. Both include: broken objects formerly used by the deceased, white rocks and sea shells, and even lamps lighting “the way to glory” (Thompson, *Flash* 139). Variations of the *dikenga* “four moments of the sun” cosmogram are often present on African-American grave markers. In the Tampa area, this enduring symbol is located on a headstone in a Martin Luther King Boulevard cemetery in white diamond form (Illustration 5). Also, twenty-five miles to the east of Tampa in Beallsville, Florida, (Illustration 6) another echo of the cosmogram\(^{14}\) consists of small white stones pressed into the concrete headstone of Farrist Rogers. The arching line of stones may have at one time completed the circle around the central cruciform,\(^{15}\) an ideogram said to “cryptically honor the spirit in the earth, guide it to the other world, and prevent it from wandering or returning to haunt survivors” (Thompson, *Flash* 132). Related beliefs stemming from funerary practices are also operative in African-American yard decoration.

African-American yard shows are assemblages of found objects that beautify surroundings, establish boundaries, defend the home from evil spirits, and pay homage to deceased ancestors. A multitude of found objects are compiled in

\(^{14}\)See again “Transatlantic Kongo: Echoes of the Cosmogram” for a brief exposé on the cosmogram and its suggested manifestations in several of the African-derived religious systems of the Caribbean and Tampa African-American graveyards.

\(^{15}\)Robert Farris Thompson responds thusly to this image: “Fascinating visual materials. What it is, it seems to me, is yet another echo of the Kongo cosmogram. The arching line above could be sunrays at dawn announcing new life in the other world, *bonso ntangu yankaka* [as a second of the sun]” (personal correspondence, November 2003).
meaningful ensembles, including car parts, mirrors, carpet, bicycle wheels, fan-blades, whirly-gigs, upturned potting jars, arrangements of white stones, and toy animals. Such objects constitute an esoteric visual vocabulary: what may appear to be a pile of junk is in fact a coded message through which the artist “speaks” to passers-by. Some messages are clearly legible signs simply stating, for example, “Beware of Dog,” even where no dog exists on the premises. Other signs covertly convey messages through visual and linguistic puns and homonyms. Grey Gundaker documented Edward Houston’s Alabama yard, which “played on the homonym sole/soul when he positioned shoe soles walking up a tree in his yard, as if ascending toward heaven” (78).

Yards are also repositories of memory. A tree fronted by an empty chair represents a throne on which the spirit of the deceased may sit. Objects last used by a family member before death, sewing machines or plates and cups for example, are placed beside the chair as a reminder of the deceased relative who sat in it.

In early attempts to locate a path of transmission between the African-American yards and the work of Dolores Rodriguez, I asked if she had ever seen any Afro-Cubans or African-Americans in Tampa decorating like she did. “Nobody make things the way I do,” she said. It was difficult not to interpret certain objects and assemblages in her yard through the African-American yard paradigm. After all, it was my point of academic origin and

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16 Spirit thrones were first identified and added to the yard show paradigm through Gundaker’s fieldwork.
the fact that several spaces on her property appeared to mirror what I had read in the literature that I felt compelled to explore her yard in this light.

The very first day I encountered her yard, I found behind her home an arrangement of materials that appeared similar to Kongo grave decoration. A space roughly eight feet by eight feet was delimited by cinder blocks filled with broken bottles and porcelain cups (Illustrations 3 and 7). In a black wicker basket surmounting a pole in the center of the arrangement was a black plastic female figure with arms raised skyward, holding a light bulb in each hand. On the right side was another human figure comprised of several plastic materials including a garden pot and black painted cloth with the addition of a small red strip of fabric wrapped around its middle. Dolores said it was Jesus watching over the grave.

My immediate association with African-American and Kongo funerary decoration caused me to think about the space as a grave, or more likely a symbolic one. I discovered within weeks of first meeting Dolores that my assumption was not far from the truth. When discussing a photograph of the arrangement, she remarked, “Uh-huh, I remember this. When I was making it, I was thinking of my father. When my mother died, he did all around the grave, you know, all around it like that.” Pointing to the cinder blocks, she added, “I was doing the same thing.” The cinderblocks held flowers that made her mother “rest better.”
Yard Motifs

To illustrate the similarities between the African-American yard and the Rodriguez yard, the following sections contain descriptions of the relevant motifs.17

The Diamond/Star

Positioned on the iron bars in the middle of a window facing Howard Avenue, a diamond motif is tied with cloth (Illustration 8). Although Dolores has no recollection as to why she placed the diamond there, its image was striking to me upon first visiting her yard. An image associated with the Kongo cosmogram, the diamond or star often represents the soul and sometimes “doubles as both the all-seeing, protective Eye of God, and an emblem of commitment to advanced wisdom, especially when the shape occurs most often near windows or doors” (Gundaker and McWillie 28).

17 At the College of William and Mary in March of 2004, I visited Professor Grey Gundaker, who presented me with an unpublished manuscript authored by herself and Judith McWillie. No Space Hidden: The Spirit of African American Yard Work is the most current academic approach to the African-American yard phenomenon. Its focus is not on Kongo-Atlantic bonds but on biblical connotations. In it, Portfolio II titled “Lexicon: Traditional Signs used in African American Yards, Homes, and Churches” delineates the motifs common to African-American yard vernacular; this material is a continuation of Thompson, McWillie, and Gundaker’s publications. Gundaker’s list of Afro-yard attributes reads as if the Rodriguez yard were a model of study. The motifs presented in the unpublished manuscript will serve as sole source of comparison.
God’s Wheels: Objects of Motion

Two hula-hoops (Illustration 9) held high in the bushes near Dolores’s front door and a fan blade in the side yard (Illustration 10) echo forms common to the African-American yard, where the visual equivalent of motion is signified by fan blades, tires, hubcaps, clocks, and other round objects that recall the diamond/star motif. Thompson argues that circular forms and objects of motion in African-American yards continue Kongo conceptions of time and life’s continual motion as depicted in the cosmogram. According to Thompson, tires, hubcaps, and wagon wheels

mystically “wheel” anti-social spirits off the premises. I say this not only by analogy with the tradition of the bottle tree,18 as well as variant foil- and light-bulb trees, but also on the basis of protective usages of wagon wheels, and other motion emblems. (“Circle” 30)

Flashing and Reflective Surfaces

Reflective surfaces, such as mirrors and tinfoil placed on porches, act on trespassers and wandering evil spirits, “deflecting negativity and unwanted energy back onto the sender” (Gundaker and McWillie, No Space 30). Dolores

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18 Bottle trees are a well-substantiated phenomenon occurring throughout the South. Bottles were filled with flashy objects and jammed on the ends of tree branches; their contents attracted wandering spirit forces, capturing them inside the bottle. Local African-American minister and artist Ruby Williams explained to me in a recent interview about seeing and hearing clanging bottles in trees as a child near her farm in Beallsville, Florida.
placed mirrors near her front door, on the front gate, and even scattered them through some of the bushes lining her porch (Illustration 11).

Watcher Figures

Placed around the home, especially near the front and rear doors are stuffed and plastic animals. In the Afro-yard context, these figures keep a watchful eye over the property acting as “guardians reminding those who approach that, upon entering the yard, one should behave as if all the world is watching” (Gundaker and McWillie 33). Watching over Dolores’s driveway, a painted green lion (Illustration 12) defended the rear part of the yard, while a large green stuffed frog faced Howard Avenue (Illustration 13). Dolores claimed that sometimes she would “do things like that, to make it beautiful,” and refused to talk of defensive objects. 19

Other peculiar objects with an apotropaic significance were placed near entryways into the yard. For example, located alongside Dolores’s driveway in the backyard was a large plastic Christmas candle protruding from a wire-mesh cylinder filled with odd scraps of paper, cloth, and fragments of garbage bags (Illustration 14). Imprinted on the front of the candle in large lettering was the word “Noel.” Dolores wrapped plastic ribbon around the base covering the latter

19 Gundaker explained that this is a typical reaction when interviewing yard creators: “They will talk about the objects that stand to remember their past or deceased family but refuse to discuss the objects doing the work.” The “work” is of a defensive/protective nature and usually associated with personal spiritual beliefs (personal communication March 2004).
two letters e and l, leaving the letters No in plain view. In terms of the African-American yard, this might well be read as a warning to trespassers.

_Fences and Objects Wrapped and Tied_

The Rodriguez yard was fronted with several archways that twisted about in space, most of which were tightly wrapped with multicolored cloth (Illustation 15). Yard show studies suggest that the act of tying and wrapping, “are traditional ways of enclosing charms and sealing intentions. Tied and wrapped fences are reminders that the yard has assimilated the protective powers of the signs within” according to Gundaker and McWillie (34).

_Thrones and Chairs_

On the right side of the Rodriguez house, in an area of direct sunlight, was a metal chair with a broken back, resting on uneven ground (Illustration 16). In the African-American yard context, single chairs or groupings of chairs “remind visitors of unseen watchers, especially when they are memorials to the persons who used them” (Gundaker and McWillie 35). When asked about the chair in her yard, Dolores said, “Well, I go and sit there.” This did not seem possible because it was a broken chair in direct sunlight, not necessarily the ideal location for an elderly person to rest. Therefore, a symbolic significance may be a more plausible explanation.
Twisting Roots and Trees

A section of the Rodriguez backyard was protected by a chain-link fence, over which a real branch, painted green, was draped (Illustration 17). According to Gundaker and McWillie, in the African-American context such forms “become suggestive of animals, serpents, or humans. Yard workers often collect and prominently display these formations. Some paint them to bring out their anthropomorphic qualities” (41).

Although Dolores claimed never to have seen African Americans creating yards like hers in West Tampa, or even during her childhood in Ybor City, it is clear that there was the possibility of such an influence, given the visual parallels between her work and that of the African-American yard. Not only did her work share common motifs with the yard show, but as I was to discover, her yard, like the work of African Americans, was also spiritually motivated, honoring the deceased and defending property from malevolent spirits.

Furthermore, even if I was finally unable to establish a path of transmission between Dolores and African-American practices, I knew that at least one aspect of Africa, without question, existed in her world—the presence of imagery associated with the Afro-Cuban religion of Santeria.
Chapter Three

Ybor Cigars and West Tampa Botanicas: Afro-Cuban Religion

Dolores Rodriguez was not of African-American descent. However, I could see in her work traces of African influence that called for exploration: emblems associated with the Afro-Cuban religion of Santeria. In addition, given the gravesites I discovered in Tampa cemeteries, I made an effort not to discount the possibility of a resonant African-American influence.

Early in my relationship with Dolores, I hinted at the topic of Santeria but was cautious of crossing what may have been a sensitive boundary. As an outsider to her community, I felt she might not wish to disclose an association with the religion if one existed. Instead of asking direct questions, I listened as she often eagerly explained her life. In compiling her biography, I could see that her Ybor City childhood, her work in cigar factories dominated by Cuban immigrants, and her residence in West Tampa, in all likelihood, exposed her to the practice of Santeria.

The following biographical sketch was compiled from transcribed interviews done between March 2003, and September 2004, at Dolores’s bedside. Unrecorded discussions with her long-time friend Nilda Perez, her grandson

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20 Santeria is widely misperceived in American popular culture, and perhaps here is the reason for her reticence.

21 Transcribed interviews are included in Appendix A.
Richard Rodriguez, owners of Caribbean religious shops, and priests of Santeria (babalawos) were documented in handwritten field notes.\textsuperscript{22}

Her Story

The life of Dolores Rodriguez was filled with moments of nurturing and loss. During the countless hours I spent at her bedside, she mentioned the death of almost everyone important to her: her three husbands, her only son, and her closest friends. It seemed as though every person she mentioned in our many hours of discussion had passed on to the spirit world. One day during the summer of 2003, I was leaving her to rest in her rehabilitation center room when, as I exited into the hallway, she let out a very emphatic “Everybody has died!” There are far too many among Dolores’s “everybody” to recount here, but she provided me with the names of those most important to her and discussed the yard constructions and interior spaces that honored each.

Dolores Lolita Gonzales was born in Ybor City, Florida, on July 20, 1916, to a Spanish immigrant father, Mike Gonzales, and a Cuban-born mother, Virginia. Her father, a very strict and often difficult man, owned an Ybor City barbershop that catered to a group of regular Caribbean clients. Mike taught Dolores how to cut hair and what it meant to be a beautiful girl. In the Spanish sense, a beautiful Lolita always wore a flower behind her ear. It was “the way girls go out in Spain” according to Dolores’s recollection of her father’s instruction. From her earliest

\textsuperscript{22} Dolores urged me to discuss her story and photographs of her work with her friends and neighbors. I asked if it was permissible to show my research to owners of local botanicas; she gave permission for me to speak with anyone I wished about her work.
memories she recalled a compulsion to make flower arrangements for her father’s barbershop and for decoration of her deceased mother’s photograph.

Virginia Gonzales, Dolores’s mother, worked as a seamstress. She died when Dolores was only seven years old. Dolores’s father Mike sailed from Spain to Cuba, where he noticed Virginia in a crowd. Mike was overwhelmed by Virginia’s Gypsy-like appearance. His ancestors in Spain were gypsies (Gitana), and they had long fascinated him. Virginia seemed to embody everything Gitana—her attire, her long dress, her bracelets, and the flower behind her ear drew Mike to Virginia. Virginia was Espiritista, a practitioner of eSpiritismo (Spiritism), and Dolores remembers learning about the practice from her. Virginia’s spiritual practice would later be especially important in providing Dolores with a visual vocabulary for honoring her deceased family members in and around her home. In 1923, in a cemetery on Woodlawn Avenue in Tampa, Virginia Gonzales was laid to rest. There, Dolores recalled, her father produced an elaborate display of grave decoration that Dolores later reproduced behind her home in remembrance of her mother (Illustration 3).

Dolores was the middle child of three, including her sister Estrella, twelve years Dolores’ senior and younger brother Mike Gonzalez. Estrella was a schoolteacher who reared Dolores and Mike after their mother’s passing. She was “smart,” dedicated to the church, and lived to be 93. Estrella had a son,

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23 Mike Gonzalez was a bit of an anomaly in the story. Dolores rarely talked about him and led me to believe he was no longer alive. Nilda Perez claimed he was alive, living in Tampa, in and out of mental homes, “crazy,” carried guns, and not to be dealt with. For this reason I made no effort to contact him.
Henry “Billy” Perez, who married Dolores’s longtime friend Nilda. Dolores’s nephew Billy died of a heart attack in the bathroom while Dolores sat just a few feet away in the living room.

Dolores had little interest in school or church activities. Her father withdrew her from the ninth grade, insisting it was time to find an occupation that would sustain her throughout life. Dolores vividly remembered the conversation with her father when he questioned her: “What would you like to do?” and she responded, “Well, I like cigars. I would like to make cigars.” She spent the next forty years of her life as a cigar wrapper in several of the Ybor City and West Tampa factories, including the famed Cuesta Rey and Morgan cigar factories, where she rolled an average of 250 cigars per day. Dolores liked rolling cigars and even enjoyed the smell of cigar smoke, but said she never smoked one.

Dolores proudly worked long hours in the cigar factory with a flower in her hair—the all-important symbol of Spanish beauty. Mr. Morgan, owner of Morgan Cigars, requested that she remove the flower because its scent affected the cigar flavor. In need of maintaining her “Lolita” status amongst the Ybor socialites, she began creating fake flowers, which she wore from that day until her retirement from cigar wrapping. Later in her life, fake flowers became a mainstay in her yard decorations.

24 Nilda Perez, a gentle soul in her late 70s, was introduced to me through Dolores as the caretaker of the Rodriguez estate. She visited Dolores several times per week, cleaning Dolores’s gowns and giving her updates on her yard and friends in the neighborhood. Nilda possessed the keys to Dolores’s home and granted me access to the interior whenever needed. She was my only regular outside contact in this project before the surprise return of the long-lost grandson Richard.
Dolores was nineteen and living in Ybor City when she met her first husband, Oscar Zayas, a Spanish sailor who perished when his boat sank. Her second husband, Aristide Rodriguez, the father of her only child Richard “Dickie” Rodriguez, also died at a young age. Dolores’s son Dickie married Sherrie Jacobson, the daughter of a St. Petersburg family in the jewelry business. Sherrie bore a son, also named Richard. Dolores’s third husband, Philip Romano, an Italian, worked for a towel accessory company. He died unexpectedly in 1962, leaving Dolores without any income at a time when her son Dickie had been diagnosed with Hodgkin’s disease.

The following year, Dickie died too. Traumatized, Dolores sold her property on the corner of La Salle and Gomez Streets and moved to the corner of North Howard Avenue and Cordelia Street in hopes of leaving sad memories behind. She had long since retired from cigar wrapping and, without the support of a husband, began caring for the terminally ill in her home. Many of the patients were close friends who came to live with her until their passing.

Her home at the corner of North Howard Avenue and Cordelia Street is two blocks from the heart of West Tampa where Howard and Armenia Avenues intersect with Columbus Boulevard. Along the main thoroughfares are neighborhoods of single story 1950s- and 60s-style homes, with occasional gentrified cigar factories. In the area private residences are variously decorated with mass-produced lawn ornaments or lawns, flower beds, and carefully trimmed hedges. A few residents have chosen to turn their spaces into
elaborately decorated environments, but none are enriched on the scale of the Rodriguez home.

Her Environment

Haitians, Jamaicans, Trinidadians, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Spaniards, and Italians began flocking to the port of Tampa in the late nineteenth century, seeking opportunities while also fleeing the various tribulations of their homelands. One way these ethnic groups maintained individual identities in Ybor City was through, among other things, traditional religious practices such as Vodoun, Santeria, Palo Monte, Protestantism, and Catholicism. A German visitor in 1931 remarked, “Here they have Italian Opera houses with balconies, cock fights, bullfights, houses with balconies, incredibly numerous coffee shops where Italians, Spaniards, creoles gesticulate wildly. . . . We are in Ybor City” (qtd. in Mormino and Pozzetta 60).

Cuban cigar production in the United States began in Key West, in the 1830s. The whole industry was destroyed by fire in the 1880s and relocated to Tampa where Vicente Martinez Ybor, the Spanish cigar manufacturer, purchased the acreage on which Ybor City now stands. Today Ybor City has transformed from a living site of colorful mixings of European and Caribbean cultures into a tourist spectacle, but West Tampa remains the domicile of the residual Latin communities.25 Most Tampa residents have probably experienced this part of

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25 I use the word *Latin*, positioning all Italians, Afro-Cubans, Cubans, Spaniards, and Puerto Ricans under its aegis. This use of the term *Latin* defined these marginalized
town at some point or another, maybe to eat puerco asado at the Spanish/Cuban restaurant *La Teresita* on Columbus Avenue, or at the many other “authentic” eateries to be found in this multilingual community.

Another important but often overlooked site in West Tampa is the *botanica*, a kind of pan-Caribbean spiritual pharmacy. This “symbol of Caribbean cultural healing” fulfills the religious needs of the local community (Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, *Healing* 1). More importantly for this research, the *botanica* was one of the material sources for Dolores’s work.

*Botanicas: A Locus of Practice and Healing*

*Botanica* is the term used for a religious shop specializing in goods for African-derived religious systems in the Caribbean and United States. Each of the five such shops I frequented during the course of this research presented window displays full of plastic and plaster-cast statues of Catholic saints. To the uninformed passer-by, these shops appear to offer little more than Catholic religious supplies. However, those willing to explore further are confronted with a kaleidoscopic array of figures, beaded necklaces, soaps, fragrances, candles, and varying forms of American Indian, Egyptian, Hindu, and Chinese imagery.

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26 Tampa *botanicas* visited in this study: 1) *Botanica* San Martin on N. Armenia Avenue; 2) *Botanica La Virgen De Regla* at 3310 W. Columbus Drive; 3) *Botanica Ismar*, 1118 E. Busch Boulevard; 4) *Botanica Pititi Religious Shop*, 10012 N. 30th Street; 5) *Botanica Seven African Powers*, 2505 N. Armenia Avenue.

groups against the greater Anglo population of Tampa. Mormino and Pozzetta recognize this use of the term *Latin* as a “local expression” (11).
The *botanica* provides alternative medicines for members of Tampa’s Caribbean community. In Cuba and elsewhere, a *botanica* is a recognized site of healing. The *botanica* owner, who is often a practitioner of Santeria or *santero* (Gonzales-Wippler, *Santeria* 283), is, according to Susan D. Greenbaum, “particularly important as a source of help with physical ailments and personal problems, especially those involving romance. Medicinal herbs and rituals of healing [are] connected to the overall medical system in the community” (210).

Items typical of the *botanica* are herbs and cleansing potions. “Afro-Cuban ethno-medical therapeutics is essentially plant-based: decoctions, infusions, aromatics, and/or baths are prescribed to cleanse an evil spell or attract beneficent healing spirits” (Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, *Creole* 97). A broad range of fluids is often prescribed for washing one’s body and floors; their labels announce their purpose: “Destroy Everything”; “Protection from Envy”; “Angel Guardian” (Illustration 18). Spiritual cleansing, however, is but one of the many services provided by the *botanica*.

The *botanica* is primarily the house of the deities and accoutrements necessary for practicing a Nigerian Yoruba-derived religion. The transmission of this religion to Cuba during the slave trade, and its openness to other ideologies, have allowed the Cuban variant, called *Regla de Ocha*, merely *Ocha*, or locally *Santeria*, to survive the oppressions of the slave trade. While Santeria is

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27 According to Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, in Cuba *Regla* translates as religion, order, or rule (*Creole* 24).

28 *Santeria* translates as worship of the saints. According to Greenbaum, Santeria was present in Ybor City mutual aid societies as early as 1906. The Martí Maceo mutual aid
usually the main attraction in the *botanica*, items related also to Haitian Vodoun, Cuban Palo Monte, and Abakua are also present.

Enslaved Yoruba were forbidden to practice their traditional religion on the plantations of the New World. As a result, the Yoruba pantheon of protective deities, which shared attributes with the saints of Roman Catholicism, were skillfully masked with the religion of the slaves’ oppressors, thus enabling covert practice and tribute to their protective deities. For example, the Yoruba deity Chango—symbolic of fire, thunder and lightning, dance, and war—is most commonly associated with Saint Barbara. Both Santeria and Catholicism “make use of devotional images and venerate sacred personages known as *orichas* and saints” (Lawal 28). Practitioners of Santeria (*santeros/santeras*) honor the images of Catholic saints, associated also with the Yoruba divinities (*orichas*), aligned with an initiate’s inner spiritual head. The *santero/a* creates altars, wears color-coded beads and makes various offerings throughout life in honor of and appeasement to his or her deity.

The pairings of saints with deities is fairly consistent: “Most of the Yoruba deities worshiped in the New World are the same in Brazil, Cuba, and Trinidad. [However] adaptational and regional differences exist, as well as phonetic and grammatical variations in the spelling of the names in accordance with the dominant language in each country” (Ramos 60).

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society, which “provided an economic safety net of immense importance [also] established formal membership, a legitimacy of belonging, within the larger enclave of immigrant cigar workers,” was headed by at least one known Santero (135-49). Santeria spread rapidly as a result of waves of immigrants from the 1959 Cuban revolution.
On Religion

What were the spiritual and religious implications in the work of Dolores Rodriguez? Did her constructions originate from deeply spiritual instruction passed from generation to generation? Was she an initiate of Santeria? Or a Catholic? My background of study in the African-American yard paradigm compelled me to determine if her creations operated in a similar spiritually driven way as the African-American yard. Initially, I found images of Christ and the saints in her home, along with altar-type spaces and color schemes commonly associated with orichas. I questioned her religious involvement and was surprised to find that she denied any such Africanizing practice.

Dolores made it very clear, without specifying any denomination, that she did not like the Christian church. Her sister Estrella and her father forced her to go to the local Catholic Church on Eleventh Street in Ybor City. She remembered not liking the way the priests tried to make her live her life, and she also feared the nuns. “I was afraid of them,” she said. “I didn’t want to go to them—not to church—they pinched me. It hurts.”

I hoped she would interject into one of our casual meetings that she was in fact a practitioner of Santeria, but she never did. Her home was rife with the religion’s imagery; furthermore, given that she worked in cigar production, grew up in Ybor City, and was a member of the local Caribbean community, I thought it possible that a connection existed. After months of alluding to Santeria I asked Dolores directly, “Do you practice Santeria?”
I asked this question one afternoon while presenting photographs of her yard to several of the rehabilitation center nurses. As they hovered over the photographs I mentioned Santeria. The nurses all giggled and chattered in Cuban Spanish. One of the nurses turned and mentioned the word *santa* to Dolores. The room went silent as we waited for her response. Dolores turned and looked at me and said, “Santeria? Well, maybe.” Everyone erupted in laughter but nothing more was said about it that day. Later that week, I asked her again: “Do you practice Santeria?” Her response revealed her attitude toward *santeros*, the practitioners of Santeria, but not toward the religion as such.

Santero … because they make you believe what they say is true. They like to make you believe what they want. And that’s not right. You believe what you think is right or true but not the things they do.

Those Santeros, if you have a sore they say, “I fix that sore for you in ten minutes,” and they try to bring some medicine. I don’t like them … they try to make a black medicine. And, they put it all around where you have a bit of something like that, and it smells good. I don’t like it. I don’t like what they doing.

I like what I like. If they force me to like this, I don’t like it.

During the following months, I was curious to know if Dolores had purchased any materials from one of the two *botanicas* within walking distance of her
property. She always stressed her frequent trips to the Goodwill and Salvation Army stores on Nebraska Avenue but never mentioned a trip to a *botanica*. For a time she ignored the term *botanica* when I questioned it. But then, after months of eluding the issue, she admitted to frequenting a *botanica*.

By *La Teresita*, here in West Tampa, there is a store. The *botanica* that I used to go there and the only thing I buy from there was the smell of little things—you know to smell around the house. I have little candles like that. I put it all around the house and that's all I used to buy from there.

I spent quite a bit of time in several of the local botanicas looking at items for sale and discussing my project with owners willing to listen. The owner of Botanica Seven African Powers was excited to learn of my project and offered his feedback as long as I did not record our conversations or mention his name in my research. He was an invaluable source, providing an experienced eye on Dolores's work. I showed him all my photographs, which he carefully analyzed. Photographs of the yard and porch did not interest him. However, photographs of a single room in Dolores's home did. I had suspected this part of her home was the key to a possible involvement with Santeria. It contained the colors of a particular oricha, a large vase, and dolls Dolores referred to as Gitana.

Interior Questions

The first time I entered the room in Dolores's home that interested the *bontanica* proprietor, I found the dominant color scheme of blue and white, colors
associated with Yemaya, the oricha of the sea and motherhood, commonly
aligned with female practitioners of Santeria (Brown, *Santeria* 166). Upon close
inspection, several objects in the room suggested not only the oricha herself, but
also a deeper involvement with Santeria.

Hanging on the wall above many porcelain, terra-cotta, and plastic objects,
was the dominating figure of a white and blue porcelain bust with rosary beads of
the same colors draped around its neck (Illustration 19). Dolores said it was the
image of *Virgen de Regla*\(^{29}\) and, “Oh! In Spanish they call it *Imowa* [transcribed
phonetically in English].” In Santeria, the Virgin doubles as Yemaya, sometimes

\(^{29}\) Within a Catholic context, this female image with rosary beads in blue and white is the
Virgin Mary. Dolores called it *Virgen de Regla* and also mentioned the Spanish *Imowa* or
Yemaya. However, according to academic and local description, this image is not the
*Virgen de Regla*. Miguel Barnet states that Yemaya is “jet black, the babalao say, which
is why she is compared to the Virgin of Regla” (92). The owner of Botanica Seven
African Powers agreed that the *Virgen de Regla* is always black and that the image on
Dolores’s wall was, therefore, not the *Virgen de Regla*.

Many of the orichas are aligned with multiple saints. Regional variations of each exist.
Yemaya, however, is syncretized with only the *Virgen de Regla*. The *Virgen de Regla* is
then associated with St. Augustine, an African Bishop instructed by an angel to carve the
image of the Virgin in wood (Gonzalez-Wippler, *Powers* 95-6). According to David
Brown, the Virgin and her counterpart Yemaya, the oricha of the sea and motherhood,
have since come to name and protect the Cuban port town of Regla (*Santeria* 217-18).

There are many contradictions between the academic literature and opinion in the
West Tampa community regarding the syncretism of Yemaya. Both academics and ritual
specialists agree that Yemaya and *Virgen de Regla* are one and the same; however, few
academic texts cite the Virgin Mary in the mix. As listed by David Brown, several
“Virgins” are associated with deities: The Virgin of Mercy, or *La Virgen de las Mercedes*,
is associated with Obatala; the Virgin of Regla, or *La Virgen de Regla*, is associated with
Yemaya; the Virgin of El Cobre, or *La Caridad del Cobre*, is associated with Ochun”
(*Santeria* 223).

A Google search revealed numerous Web projects on Yemaya, most of which
specifically cite the Virgin Mary. I sought the advice of the Botanica Seven African
Powers owner and two of his customers, who disagreed with the results of the Google
search. They claimed that the Virgin Mary was specifically Obatala regardless of what
my computer searches told me. In the end, it is Dolores’s word that is most important.
She made her own rules.
spelled *Yemoja*. Dolores’s utterance of *Imowa* bears an uncanny similarity to *Yemoja*.

Dolores’s verbal recognition of the Santeria deity *Yemaya*, and the objects and colors that decorated the interior of her home, compelled me to investigate further the possibility of a greater commitment to the religion than she had previously led me to believe. Given Dolores’s initial unwillingness to discuss several objects, I showed to several knowledgeable individuals in the West Tampa community photographs of objects from Dolores’s house that, according to academic literature, were of ritual importance in Santeria.

**Soperas**

In the same room of her home, positioned next to a bar directly across from the bust of the Virgin, Dolores had placed a large hand-painted blue, white, and gold terracotta vase. Information from *botanica* owners and descriptions found in academic texts confirmed that it was a *sopera*, an important ritual implement in Santeria (Illustration 20).

During initiation into Santeria, each initiate receives a large vase called a *sopera*. The *sopera* (or soup tureen) acts as housing for one’s guardian *oricha* where “the *orichas* residing in their *soperas* are covered artfully with their dazzling *panos* (‘bright square blazons of cloth representing the constellation of the three or four additional protectors’), topped with metal crowns (where appropriate)” (Brown, *Toward* 89). Two curious dolls were suspended on blue *panos* over Dolores’s *sopera*. When I asked if this was a *sopera*, Dolores looked
me in the eyes and said “Soup tureen? I bought this at the flea market—I only wanted the vase but they gave me the dolls for free.”

The two dolls were of great interest because they related to an object positioned several feet away. Next to the sopera on a table was a Barbie doll-type figure dressed in a green gown and necklaces, in front of a photograph of Dolores’s deceased friend Elba (Illustration 21). Dolores refused for almost a year to discuss this object and the photo behind it. For some reason she was hesitant to identify the doll or the photograph of her friend Elba. Then, one day, she said, “Gitana,” or Gypsy, while looking at the photograph of the doll.

In Santeria practice the Gitana doll is a spiritual medium through which one contacts the deceased. The doll is associated with the figure of the Spanish Gypsy woman, who is renowned for her clairvoyant abilities. In an interview with Steve Quintana about the practice of doll making in Spiritism and according to Anna Wexler, individuals who use the Gitana as a spiritual medium use “a doll with a very Spanish face, of brown complexion, and dressed in a lot of colors and a lot of jewelry on top of it” (92).

Dolores defined the characteristic accoutrements of a Gypsy lady: a long dress and plenty of bracelets. This was exactly the manner in which her mother had dressed. She identified this doll as a model of a Gitana: “I buy the doll and make it myself because I know how they dress.” Pointing to the beaded necklaces, she continued, “They like plenty of things all around.” However, Dolores never mentioned contacting spirits through her Gitana or any other object.
Dolores expressed a strong dislike of *santeros* and priests but never directly denied practicing Santeria. I had consulted several *botanica* owners who all said that Dolores was not practicing Santeria, that “she [was] doing her own thing.” I could not quite grasp what the *botanica* owners were telling me. How could Dolores dedicate her private space with imagery of such power and not be an involved with the honoring of *orichas*? I approached this contradiction by putting together two themes that were visible in her home: those of the *Gitana* and the American Indian. Both important to her, the *Gitana* for its connection to her mother and her ancestral homeland, and the Indian because, “I like Indians, I don’t know why but I like Indians.”

In the spring of 2004, I was in a Puerto Rican-owned sandwich shop in St. Petersburg, Florida, where several large plaster-cast busts of American Indian chiefs sat atop a shelf. The shop owner explained, “They are my spirit guides,” and a big piece of the puzzle fell into place. The *Gitana* and the Indians are also images found in the practice of Spiritism, a French philosophy syncretized with Cuban Santeria to honor and communicate with the dead. Once Dolores realized I was familiar with Spiritism, and I had pronounced a word or two correctly, she responded to my questioning of Santeria with a grin. She raised her right arm holding her hand close to my face, pinching her index finger within a millimeter of her thumb, and in a soft tone whispered that, indeed, it was “a little bit of Santeria.”
Chapter Four

“Yeah, She’s Doing Her Own Thing”: A Little Bit of Santeria

The pieces of Dolores’s story began to make sense. Other arrangements of objects in her home, away from the sopera, Gitana doll, and Virgen de Regla were evidence of a part of Santeria, a method of honoring the deceased called Spiritism (ESpiritismo). From the outset of my research, I had been aware of ESpiritismo as being one of the fundamental aspects of Santeria. In Dolores’s kitchen, I found the image of an American Indian, one of Bill Clinton, and in her bedroom an altar-like assemblage that led to me to wonder if she was a practitioner only of Spiritism and not of Santeria.

Mickey & Minnie Mouse, Plains Indian, and Cleaning Fluids

Displayed on a table centered in a small room off the kitchen was Dolores’s arrangement of dishwashing fluids, rubbing alcohol, hand soap, deodorant, a porcelain bull, and an American Indian statue flanked by Mickey and Minnie Mouse (Illustration 22). Because the soaps were multicolored, unused, and lined up one after the other, I perceived that this was some form of defense mechanism. I recognized the Indian figure for its role as a Spiritist guide,30 and

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30 According to Raul Canizares, spirit guides are often Lucumi or Congo spirits, Plains Indians, and Gypsies. “The appearance of Plains Indians in Cuban Santeria is curious, probably a direct contribution of nineteenth-century American Spiritualism, where such Indian guides were common” (78). Imagery was also appropriated from Plains Indian as depicted in Hollywood films exported to Cuba and other areas of the Caribbean. The
that the cleaning fluids perhaps referenced spiritual soaps common to the local botanicas. I showed the owner of Botanica Seven African Powers this photographs (Illustration 22) and explained my hunch. He shook his head no and remarked again, “Yeah, she is doing her own thing.” When I asked Dolores if she used the fluids to clean her home, she said, “No, I say. I like the colors.”

The truth came out when I showed Dolores photos of botanica interiors on my laptop computer. She was very surprised that I had been allowed to take the photos. I specifically photographed the magical cleaning agents in multicolored bottles with labels such as “Destroy Everything” and “Protection from Evil” (Illustration 18) in hopes that Dolores would believe that I had understood the message behind the bottles of commercial cleaning soaps lined up in her kitchen. Each magical cleaning agent’s label instructs how to make a spiritual bath: “Empty contents in bathtub half-full and bathe for seven minutes.” Such a practice is “routine procedure in spiritist houses on Tuesdays and Fridays, days of the week when malevolent influences are thought to be strongest” (Harwood 61). When asked about the soaps, Dolores said, “Spirit cleaning, it will help you, yeah. I use it. The day that I use all this is on Friday, because Friday is a nice day, everybody comes to see you on Fridays.”

Day of E(s)piritismo

I mentioned to Dolores the term ESpiritismo and even the English equivalent Spiritism many times during our first year together, but she always responded Plains Indian came to represent the spiritual powers of the extinct Arawak peoples of Cuba and the Taino peoples of Puerto Rico.
with a look of confusion. I could not understand why she did not recognize the term. The practice of Spiritism was commonplace in West Tampa and also explicitly present in the botanicas near her home. Late in the summer of 2004, I discovered—with great delight—that I had been mispronouncing the term. The Spanish *ESpiritismo* was clearly understood by all botanica owners I had consulted and was also mentioned throughout academic literature. I was to learn that Cubans drop the first letter s pronouncing the term as “*Epiritismo*.” In August of 2004, I mentioned *ESpiritismo*, as I had many times before, but this time somehow Dolores thought I said “*Epiritismo*” and very emphatically stated, “*Epiritista*? Yes I am *Epiritista!* My mother was *Epiritista.*” There it was, after more than a year of mispronouncing a single word—suddenly the “little bit of Santeria” was made clear!

Kardecism or *Espiritismo*

Kardecism, also known as Spiritism or *Espiritismo*, is a western philosophical phenomenon syncretized into many of the African-derived religious systems of the Americas and Caribbean. This phenomenon was outlined by Hypolite Leon Denizard Rivail, a Frenchman who used the pseudonym Alan Kardec, after what he believed to be his previous incarnation—a druid of the same name from ancient Gaul (Canizares 75). In his 1859 publication *Qu’est-ce-que le Spiritisme?* and the 1861 *Le Livre des Mediums*, Kardec revealed the fundamentals of Spiritism through spirit invocation, affirmation of spirit identity, spirit manifestation, and different media through which spirits communicate. In
addition, Kardec revealed how spirits communicate and how the living can avoid being possessed by inferior spirits.

Spiritism arose in 1848 in reaction to the American Spiritualism movement that had rapidly gained popularity in European circles. Kardec worked beyond the table-turnings, mysterious raps, and levitations of the spiritualist séance where individuals ( mediums) encountered spirits through visual, aural, or tactile perceptions (Palmie 2). Kardec established a moral philosophy and outlined a spiritual hierarchy of the immaterial world:

There are souls, or spirits, of deceased persons that are capable of communication with the living through mediumistic phenomena. They belong to an invisible but natural world; there is no discussion of magic, miracles, and the supernatural in Kardecism. This invisible and non-material world is, as part of the natural world, susceptible to experimentation, but, unlike the natural world, it is eternal and preexistent and is identified with goodness, purity and wisdom. (qtd. in Canizares 75)

The soul thus inhabits a realm inexplicable through science and religion. Kardecism sought to identify what science and religion could not: the expanse between the living body and the spirit world. In the Kardecian sense, the soul “is a moral being, distinct, independent of matter, and preserving its individuality

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31 Table turning or “the dance of tables” included a medium heading a séance around a table of participants. The medium, thought to have the gift of spirit communication, performed acts causing tables to levitate, knocking and cracking sounds indicating communication with spirits (Kardec, Spirits’ 25-8).
after death” (Kardec, Spirits’ 22). The soul links the material body and the immaterial world via the *perispirit*, the essential fluid uniting the spirit with the body, permitting the soul, during sleep, to exit and return to the body. At death, the perispirit floats freely in the immaterial—the energy contacted through spiritualist séance. Awaiting reincarnation, the spirit assumes a place among others in a spiritual hierarchy. According to Kardec

> Those of the highest order are distinguished from those below them by their superior purity and knowledge, their nearness to God, and their love of goodness; they are “Angels” or “pure spirits.” The other classes are more and more distant from this perfection; those of the lower ranks are inclined to most of our passions, hatred, envy, jealousy, pride, etc.; they take pleasure in evil. (Spirits’ 33-4)

Kardec adds that this classification is arbitrary and that there may be as many as “five, ten, or twenty classes” (Spirits’ 33-4). The ultimate goal of every spirit is thus to achieve a place as near as possible to God, and during the process of birth, death, and rebirth, each spirit gains the experience and wisdom to move the soul upward in classification.

In Cuban Santeria, Kardecism replaced a fundamental tenet of the religion, the *Lucumi* tradition of honoring the ancestors called *egungun*, which required individuals able and willing to become possessed at funerals. Those practicing *egungun* held an honorable and dangerous position because, according to Lydia Cabrerra’s *La Sociedad Secreta Abakua*, “if the *egungun* rituals were not carried out exactly according to tradition, the person attempting to perform the ritual
would fall down dead” (qtd. in Carnizares 77). In time, Cubans replaced *egungun* with Kardecian Spiritism, which enabled spirit contact but in the process did not pose the threat of death.

Dolores Learns from Her Mother

Dolores’s mother explained the practice of *Epiritismo* to her when a young boy in their neighborhood died. She told Dolores not to cry and to “pray a little.” Her mother also told Dolores that a cup of water “makes the spirit rest in peace” Dolores said, “I don’t know too much of that. I know a little bit—not too much.” Even though Dolores claimed not to know much, her belief in the existence of spirits and her practice of maintaining them were well substantiated even though her mother had described the practice some 78 years earlier.

According to Harwood, practitioners of Spiritism are those who exhibit at least one of four characteristics: 1) identification as a Spiritist; 2) belief in mediumistic communication and the removal of harmful spiritual influences through the interaction of mediums; 3) private or public-session visitations to a Spiritist [medium] regularly or in times of crisis; 4) performance of certain rituals in the home to cleanse the premises of harmful spiritual influences (27).

Dolores identified herself as *Epiritista* and, as will be seen, was involved with all of the characteristics listed except for regular visits to a Spiritist. She never once indicated that she sought spiritual help from anyone. Given her blunt rejection of *santeros* and priests, “they tell me how to be,” and her penchant for
“doing her own thing,” I cannot expect that Dolores consulted any spiritual advisor.

Despite that, the many deaths Dolores witnessed—family, friends, three husbands, a son—and passage through a phase when she could actually see the dead, bolstered her trust in *Espiritist* practice:

I believe in *espiritista* and I’m gonna tell you why. One day I came from the dance and I came home and I was sitting on the bed and I was taking off my shoes and I put my head up like that, and I say “Oh Ma’am! Who are you?” I saw a lady, a beautiful lady with a veil on her and when I say, “Tell me who you are?” she just go. It was like a *santa* [saint], you know and she came to me and I have that problem for a long time that I can see those people that die and I don’t see no more … She was dressed all in blue, sky blue—and a veil—all in sky blue.

Waters of Defense

The first time I was permitted in the interior of Dolores’s home I was struck by images strongly resonating with Santeria. I felt that the practice could be at the core of her decorating, but in conversation she strongly opposed the religion, passing it off as “black medicine.” There were other spaces with arrangements of soaps, fake flowers, and images of American leaders. This did not seem part of the Afro-Cuban religion I had been studying.
However, there was one space in particular I recognized as resonant with one of many facets syncretized into Santeria. Next to her bed on a small table was an arrangement of objects that comprised a version of a Spiritist altar called the **boveda espiritual**: a photograph of her deceased son Dickie, a large water-stained glass, and a porcelain figure of Christ (Illustration 23).

The **boveda espiritual** is:

> An altar made by covering a table with white cloth and placing a number of clear glasses of water on top of it. Each glass of water represents a particular ancestor or spirit guide. A crucifix and photographs of the dear departed are also placed on top of the table. (Canizares 78)

As Dolores came to know me better, she asked that I fill the glass with water to ensure that her son’s spirit would "rest better." Even though she had explained how she believed the arrangement operated, she never once identified it as *Epiritismo* or any variation of the term. She believed that Dickie’s spirit consumed the liquid, making him rest better, and that was all she said of it. As Dolores explained,

> People laugh at me and they say, “You’re crazy, Lola,” and I say I’m not and the cup of water is for him, the cup of water is for him, the spirit of him. You can get a flower—a white flower, you know, right in front of his picture and make him rest more. . . . And they ask me, “Lola, why do you have that cup of water in front of the

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picture?” And I say, “Well, you come back next week and you’ll see the water’s already gone.” It dried up, you know. I say, “You see, it’s his spirit that come. . . .” I’ve been doing that for years. That’s why I put a little bit of flower and water for Dickie, not too much. And then I look and see the water all dried up and I say, “Well that’s his spirit.”

According to Spiritist doctrine and the opinions of botanica owners, water is a defense mechanism that traps malevolent spirits nearing the image of the deceased (Harwood 145). Often Spiritists include white candles next to the photograph of the departed, lighting the way to Christ’s image. Others may use honorific white flowers “in conjunction with or as substitutes for candles in petitions to saints and other spirits” (Harwood 63). In the minds of some, fresh flowers honor the spirit to a greater degree than candles, as flowers are more expensive and have shorter life spans.

Bill Clinton, Al Gore, and Dom Bayo

Arranged in a recessed shelf across the kitchen table from the cleaning fluids altar was a dominating set of images: the American flag, Bill Clinton, Al Gore, and Dolores’s long-time boyfriend Dom Bayo were fronted by a clock, three compact discs, fake flowers, and an empty wine glass (Illustration 24). I was amused by these images, but could not imagine that a relationship between them
and the spirit world existed. Dolores never expressed anything other than her respect toward Clinton: “I love Clinton like he was my brother.”

It is common practice to have figures of power and prestige present in a spiritist’s home. “In addition to statues of saints,” observes Harwood, “most altars contain effigies of important spirit guides who act as intermediaries with higher-ranking spirits (for example, Congos, an Indian chief, and John and Robert Kennedy” (62). Bill Clinton and Al Gore, both important and powerful men, acted as spirit guides. So did Dolores’s boyfriend Don Bayo. In most cases, however, images of powerful men are deceased leaders. According to the owner of Botanica Seven African Powers, the figures of power must be dead to be effective; therefore, Clinton and Gore were technically ineffective as guardians. Once again, Dolores was doing her own thing.

Protection in the Yard

Dolores’s willingness to discuss her involvement with the American Indian figure, the images of powerful men, the Gitana, the weekly filling of glasses with water, and other Spiritist practices revealed the deeper goings-on inside her home. However, she later explained that these ideas also operated in her yard. The interior of her home proved to be the key to unlocking the defensive or protective nature of her yard.

One day, when paging through photographs of her yard, Dolores stopped at the image of a green plastic man surmounting a small pole encased by an upside-down black construction cone (Illustration 25). In an early interview she
said the figure “looked like Jesus,” but later changed her mind. “I say he’s a Gypsy,” she said. “I have part of my family they were gypsies. . . . That’s why I have it there.” After divulging her beliefs in Spiritism, Dolores revealed that the green-man figure not only represented her Gypsy ancestors, but that it also received the same attention as her boveda espiritual.

During one of our last recorded interviews, Dolores discussed the importance of cleaning the house on Fridays, a day when she made a special offering to the green plastic man figure in her yard.32 “I put water in it,” she said, pointing to the construction cone, and motioning downward with her finger. “I put it to the spirits. It gives you good luck for the house. You have to know the day too, and I always do it on Fridays.” As Dolores filled a cup of water for her son Dickie in her bedroom, she did likewise for a makeshift cup in her yard, an upturned construction cone, as an offering to the spirits and for good luck. The spiritual practices apparent inside her home were mirrored in the yard.

I was excited finally to learn that, like the African-American yard, spiritual beliefs also drove Dolores’s work. But I was perplexed by the presence of the sopera, the prominent colors of blue and white, and the virgen in her bar room, imagery usually associated with the powerful oricha Yemaya. Maybe Dolores was a practitioner of Santeria but was not ready to give me all the details. I soon

32 Dolores’s close friend Nilda Perez walked me through the yard one afternoon, explaining that Dolores had placed there the aluminum grave marker that stood on her son’s grave prior to headstone installation. The marker was located next to the green wise-man figure, but Dolores had no recollection of such a marker. If she had actually placed the aluminum marker, a parallel may be suggested between this area of her yard and the boveda espiritual, where a photo of her son stood behind the cup of water that made him rest better.
found out that her decorations were typically created by those who practiced Santeria, but also created by those who did not.

One afternoon in the fall of 2004, I had a serendipitous moment in the *Botanica Seven African Powers*. I was discussing photographs of Dolores’s home with the owner when a very gregarious man walked through the door. He spoke Spanish in an excited manner as he greeted everyone in the shop, pausing once to touch the ground with his hand. The man was Choko, a local priest (*babalocha* or *babalawo*) of Santeria. After an introduction we realized that we had met almost two years before at a University of South Florida symposium on Santeria and Lucumi. Choko was excited by my photos and commented, like everyone else, that Dolores was “doing her own thing.” I explained my confusion about the *sopera* and the *virgen* and wondered if Dolores had been initiated into Santeria. Choko summed it up very convincingly. He explained that Dolores’s involvement with Spiritism did not limit her from including things related to an *oricha*. “It’s like you,” he said, pointing to me. “Do you believe in the things that go on in your church?” He answered his own question without hearing my response: “Even if you don’t go to church, is it okay for you to have the image of Christ in your home?”

He had made his point: Dolores did not follow any rules other than her own. She culled from her surroundings anything she liked, usually with little formal understanding of appropriated images and ideas in her work. Spiritism was something Dolores used to protect and help deceased family members rest better. Although she claimed to not know much about it, the practice was
common in her community, and she learned the little she knew from her mother. Her decision to include imagery from both Santeria and Catholicism were not based on religious affiliation. The *sopera* and colors of *Yemaya* were familiar images that she simply loved, so she included them in her decorations as important elements in her very personal spiritual and aesthetic practices. Fragments of Spiritism and Santeria were appropriated from her community and mixed with objects purchased from second-hand stores to create a private world of symbolism on her small plot of land. In doing so, these practices and aesthetic choices became central moments in her life, about her life, and in honor of those with whom she shared her life.
Dolores’s life was not regulated by any rules other than her own. She was not a trained artist, nor was she well versed in Santeria or Catholicism. Dolores borrowed elements from a diversity of local religious practices and altered mass-produced objects purchased at second-hand stores. Through these processes, Dolores improvised a meaningful and highly personal visual language.

Dolores kept her own counsel, speaking of her past through objects that articulated what her words did not. Her work was an adaptive course of action in which she worked with any means available. She executed her decorations without being limited by particular restraints. The result was a unique and personal bricolage of meaning, in which borrowed elements were endowed with personal significance involving family, her Spanish identity, Spiritism, and a unique concept of beauty. Her decorations, and the act of creating them, served as visual remedies for the tragic losses she experienced throughout her life. At the end of a day of “workin’ in the yard,” Dolores said that her hard work and decorations always “make me feel better.”

Dolores’s process of remembering, recollecting, and reorganizing her past was performed in a method similar to cultural critic Walter Benjamin’s suggestion about how history is written. The articulation of the past “means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger” (255). Dolores’s work was
structured by, and was a response to, dangerous events—love, failed relationships, and death—all of which compelled her to begin decorating in her own personalized way.

Dolores’s home was testament to what a person of limited means could establish with limited resources. She epitomized Claude Levi-Strauss’s process of bricolage through which the artist, or *bricoleur*,

> Principally derives his poetry from the fact that he does not confine himself to accomplishment and execution: he “speaks” not only with things, but also through the medium of things: giving an account of his personality and life by the choices he makes between the limited possibilities. (21)

Dolores made the most out of “limited possibilities,” obtaining materials from varying sources in her community; recycling European, American, and African traditions; borrowing iconography from Catholicism, Santeria, and Spiritism.

**An Aesthetic of Assemblage**

Dolores was a self-avowed copyist. She learned from her family, friends, and community as she appropriated ideas, and even copied other local yard decoration. “I pass by someone’s yard,” she said, “and I saw the figure and I look at it for a long time and I go home and say, ‘I'm gonna' make one in my yard!’” Her resulting work was a visual language of accumulation, a kaleidoscopic array
of elements that epitomized the creolization process. Dolores combined elements from disparate sources, thus creating an aesthetic that defies any single interpretation. Dolores inscribed her world with her own vocabulary in a context regulated by her own rules of operation.

New Meaning

The mechanisms at work in Dolores’s visual language reassigned meaning to commonplace items. In semiological terms, Dolores appropriated fragments of other sign systems into her own “language” and imbued them with her own personal meaning. The green plastic wise-man figure discussed in Chapter Four is a fine example of this process (Illustration 25). The figure was originally intended for a Christmas nativity scene. Dolores painted it green and placed it atop a pole in remembrance of her Spanish Gypsy ancestors. As defined by Seriff, the “object contains with it a reference to two or more distinct times, technologies, and meaning systems of which the former, and usually the

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33 There is a great confusion among the terms creolization, hybridization, and syncretism. Each term is used extensively in Caribbean studies, often appearing to be synonymous. I have often found scholars defining creolization through syncretism and hybridity or vice versa. On one level, all three are described as a fusion of two or more things; however, each term stems from differing contexts. Hybrid was first used in the biological sciences; syncretism was employed to describe fusions of religious and philosophical practices; and the term Creole was used first to label those of mixed ethnicity born in the new world and later to describe the human process of language. Borrowed from linguistic analysis, the term creolization addresses the multidirectional voicing or “doublings” when multiple sign systems or histories are referenced. Given that Dolores created her own visual language that referenced multiple sign systems, I find the phrase creolization process to be appropriate.

34 It is doubtful that others knew how to read her work. Her neighbors in the immediate vicinity and even her best friend, Nilda Perez, claimed to know nothing of Dolores’s work other than that she was making things beautiful in her own way.
dominant, has been artfully subverted by its incorporation into the latter” (21). As a mass-produced element of a nativity scene, the figure continues to mean within an originary context—it remained a symbol within the broader signifying system of Christianity. But for Dolores, and probably for no one else, the figure was also a Gypsy.

Secondhand items and the practices of Spiritism and Santeria were merely fragments Dolores appropriated to serve her purposes. Stuffed animals once used as children’s toys may have acted as guardians; mass-produced images of Latin women were included to depict Dolores’s unique concept of beauty and of Spanish identity.

Autobiography

Dolores’s yard not only recalled her deceased family, friends, and eSpiritismo, but also indexed her occupation as a cigar maker and producer of fake flower arrangements. Dolores’s yard was an autobiographical sketch created through inclusions of multiple elements: found objects, flowers, and specific colors that created a simulacrum of her ancestral Spanish homeland while honoring a personal ideal of beauty, deceased family, and the Spanish Gypsy (Gitana). Her plot of land on the corner of Cordelia Street and Howard Avenue was inscribed with what was most dear to her throughout her eighty-eight years: the spiritual and moral teachings of her parents, the remembrance of family, and Spain.

Over a twenty-five-year period Dolores drew upon her past as the impetus of extensive decorations in and around her home. Childhood stories of her Cuban-
born mother and her Spanish father’s homeland compelled her to adorn her home with a Gitana theme that operated as both a model of ideal beauty and also as a spiritual guide through which she honored, protected, and possibly communicated with the deceased.

Her neighbors criticized Dolores’s daily regimen of rising at the crack of dawn to begin decorating. Dolores remembered friends calling her crazy and saying she should stop working so hard because she could injure herself. But “that’s the way I am,” said Dolores. “What do you want me to do, sit down with my hands on the porch all day? No I won’t. I can’t be like that. I’m very active. I work very hard.” She believed her overly active work ethic was the reason for her stroke. “That’s why I’m so sick now. I went straight to the ground. It was very bad. I fell and I could see this part of my body going away [her left side became paralyzed], and I said ‘Oh my God!’ I couldn’t stand up, and the man across the street came and picked me up and called 911.”

Tied and Wrapped: Traces of the Trade

Dolores was especially proud of two things she learned in her life: cigar wrapping and the construction of fake flowers. Both were central moments in her work and were clearly evident in her decorating both inside her home and in the yard.

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35 The stroke almost completely paralyzed Dolores’s left side and made swallowing difficult. She was confined to the rehabilitation-center bed with a feeding tube in her stomach.
Throughout Dolores’s yard were many archways and poles tightly wrapped in multicolored fabrics (Illustration 15). The wrapping recalled the one trade she had proudly mastered and shared with fellow cigar factory workers over a forty-year career in Ybor City cigar factories. Former factory worker Honorato Henry Dominguez spoke of cigar wrapping as an occupation of prestige: “It was a position of importance to make the cigar. It was the lifeblood of the community. And pride in yourself and your craft demanded you to put total concentration and effort into the job” (qtd. in Ingalls and Perez 153). Dolores always spoke of her time as a cigar wrapper with great enthusiasm and pride.

One afternoon during the summer of 2003, Dolores showed me how to wrap a cigar. Though her left hand, severely impeded by the stroke, could barely reach the table, Dolores felt confident enough to teach me the main skill of her trade. She lifted her one good hand, the right, and slowly raised the left up onto the bed table, grasping a paper napkin. She began rolling the napkin with the right, attempting to include the left in the act. Over the course of several minutes I watched her struggle to wrap the spiraling form that she had produced many times in her life. Embarrassed by the amount of time expended and her apparent lack of dexterity, she withdrew her trembling hands from the table as an uncomfortable grin appeared on her face. In the past she had rolled 250 cigars per day, but on this day she barely rolled one. Perhaps, I thought, Dolores’s meticulously wrapped objects spoke to the West Tampa elders who knew, respected, and maybe even mourned the now diminished trade of cigar wrapping.
Fake Flowers

Dolores was recognized by her neighborhood for her various natural flowers: roses, petunias, daisies, and many others that engulfed her yard. Intermingling with natural plants she placed fake flowers constructed with red, pink, orange, and glittering cloths. When Dolores was a teenage cigar wrapper, she was asked by the owner of Morgan Cigar factory to remove the flower she wore in her hair because its scent affected the cigars’ flavor. Dolores immediately began crafting fake unscented flowers and wore them behind her ear every day until she retired from the cigar industry. And after leaving the trade, she began making fabric petals for her yard rather than for wearing behind her ear. Dolores received accolades for her fake flowers in Karp’s 1996 newspaper article mentioned in Chapter One, and she said that curious pedestrians usually photographed the fake rather than the living flowers because of their convincing appearance.

Spanish Beauty

The all-encompassing theme on Dolores’s property was her concept of Spain. Everything on her property related to Spain in some way or another. “It’s real Spain,” she would say while pointing to the sanctifying aspect of each creation that made it “Spanish.” Spain was signified through flowers and colors that also rendered things “beautiful.”

Dolores constantly used the term “beautiful” to describe what she saw in photographs of her home. What at first seemed to be the everyday use of an
adjective soon proved to be a term signifying something greater. To be “beautiful,” according to Dolores, things must first be garnished with the colors red, green, yellow, and black, the colors of the Spanish flag. Flowers were the final requirement, as they reflected an ideal of Spanish beauty Dolores had learned from her father. All during her early childhood, Dolores’ father taught her that wearing a flower behind her ear would make her a beautiful Spanish Lolita. Her father’s idea of “beautiful” was based on the way his female Gypsy ancestors adorned themselves with flowers behind their ears. Dolores wore a flower every day until her stroke in 2002.

Dolores’s adherence to her father’s ideas of things Spanish is a form of what Paul Connerton calls “incorporating practice.” According to Connorton, diasporic communities retain traditions of their imagined homelands through culturally specific postures, dress, and traditional foods, among other things (72-3). Conscious repetition becomes a mode of documenting the past. The flower arranged behind the ear is one such culturally specific posture that, for Dolores, upheld a standard or ideal of beauty.36

The other main components in Dolores’s conception of Spain were the colors: red, green, yellow, and black. According to Dolores, all of her decorations must be adorned with these colors to be “real Spain.” Colors were an essential key to unlock her coded yard.

36 The flower may not be culturally specific to Spain. According to Dolores, her father said this was the way “all girls went out in Spain.” She believed in the practice and, at least in her own mind, she thought of it as being specific to Spain.
Spain: Red, Green, Black, and Yellow

A 1989 newspaper article by Fowler written about Dolores identified the colors red, yellow, green and black with Spain. Dolores painted many of the objects in her yard with at least one, and often more of the colors, or selected found objects based on their coloration. For example, standing near her driveway was part of a large plastic Santa Claus figure purchased at the Goodwill store (Illustration 26). It was broken in half, but retained the red and white coat and black boots. Dolores was not concerned with representing Santa Claus in her work. The figure’s coloration fit her needs and added to her things “Spanish.” There were also other objects that depicted these “Spanish” attributes in the form of altered images inside her home.

Grandmother Painting and Self-Portrait

Nothing depicts Dolores’s conception of Spanish beauty better than a pair of twin mass-produced images hanging one on her bedroom and the other on her living room wall. Purchased from the Goodwill store many years ago, both images were altered with the appropriate coloration of Spain and flowers to represent Dolores’s grandmother. They also are Dolores’s self-portrait.

For Dolores the grandmother portrait symbolized everything Gypsy (Illustration 27). The grandmother image was the model through which Dolores saw her imagined Spanish *senorita*. The original red colors of the figure’s blouse and the floral motif on the shawl were not enough for Dolores to glorify her
grandmother, so she painted a green background and glued a floral border. “I decorate it with flowers,” Dolores explained. “Everything has to be with flowers.”

On Dolores’s living room wall next to the entrance to her bedroom, hung the second mass-produced image: a self-portrait illustrating Dolores’s ideal Spanish beauty, with flowers in pink, her favorite color, spray-painted on the bosom of the figure and in a fluff, flower form atop her head (Illustration 28). In the center, flowers cut and pasted from a magazine adorn her bosom, and a shawl in with a red floral motif drapes around her.

Dolores surrounded herself with the “beautiful” and “real Spain” not only to honor her identity as prescribed by her father but also as an act of self-medication. Her visual language was a remedy for tremendous trauma experienced throughout her life.

Articulating a Remedy for Grief

Although we each deal differently with grief, a general framework describes the process of grief as seen in years of case studies. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, identifies five main stages often experienced during grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (7). According to Kubler-Ross, acceptance usually comes as the final phase of bereavement. “This is where our final healing and adjustment can take a firm hold. . . . Healing looks like remembering, recollecting, and reorganizing” (25). Kubler-Ross’s insights suggest that Dolores’s yard is evidence of the acceptance stage of grief. Her
creations clearly remembered, recollected, and reorganized her life; they were redemptive motions that healed, in her words, made her “feel better.”

Dolores transformed objects beyond mere art, opening other dimensions that facilitated her belief in, and maintenance of, a spiritual presence on her property and her private ideal of beauty. Her personal visual vocabulary mapped her past and upheld what represented her Spanish identity. But most importantly her hard work was a continual practice requiring long hours, a process engaged with a need to honor and remedy her past. She sought to make herself feel better. Her decorations, as she once proclaimed, “decorate me!”

As they say, all good things come to an end, and such was the case with this project. Dolores knew that someday she would depart this world and rejoin those she had lost. Even though she was unable to tend to her yard with her own two hands, she had trained me to continue making things beautiful as best I could. But even my efforts in her rapidly decaying yard were no match for the devastating forces that acted upon it during the last few months before she left this world, physically, for good.
Chapter Six

Not a Dead End

On a beautiful day in March of 2004, I went to Dolores’s home intending to take new photographs because most of those I already had were hastily made. As I entered the back yard, I found the window air-conditioning unit dangling by its power cord. The neighbors said that someone had broken in and lived in her home for nearly a week, completely destroying the interior.

I peered through the window into Dolores’s bedroom. I could see that her important table-altar (*bovida espiritual*), which had housed the photos of deceased family members and cups of water, had been cleared of its spirits and replaced with a large radio. Everything had been ruined. The objects in her bar room—the *sopera*, *Gitana* doll, the image of the Virgin, and her collection of porcelain figures—were smashed to pieces. Several walls in her living room were spray-painted black. The words *fuck* and *bitch* were painted in large letters followed by the initials *P.R*. Dolores’s long time friend Nilda Perez and other neighbors believed those initials stood for the Puerto Rican gang living down the street.

Everyone, myself included, agreed not to say a word of this to Dolores. “It would kill her,” said neighbor Tony Bravo. I knew it was best to hide this incident from Dolores. I knew that typical visits began with her asking, “How does the house look?” I felt uneasy about having to keep the truth from her. However, I
agreed with everyone in her yard that day that things must be kept secret. As it turned out, this episode was only the beginning of the end of her decoration. The final destructive force had yet to arrive.

On Saturday morning, May 20, 2004, I received a disturbing phone call from Nilda Perez. Dolores’s long-lost grandson Richard had returned to claim the Rodriguez property home for himself. According to Nilda, he was tearing apart the yard “right now!” Within thirty minutes of Nilda’s call, I drove past Dolores’s home and watched two men cleaning her yard of its objects. Stunned and angry, I hurried to Dolores’s bedside in the rehabilitation center where I found her calm and relaxed. She explained that Richard had returned several days ago wanting to “clean up the yard.” I wondered if she knew how much cleaning was actually going on; the yard was completely torn apart, and her creations had been pushed into a large haystack-like pile behind the house. She said she had no problem with whatever Richard did to her home.

I met with Richard several days later in Dolores’s yard, and I explained my work with his grandmother. He appreciated my interest in his family and lauded my visiting her as often as I had. He said that Dolores really enjoyed having me there to talk about her life. “It made her feel good,” he told me. I was happy to

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37 Dolores led me to believe that her grandson Richard had moved to California with his mother Sherrie after Dickie’s death. Supposedly, Richard had been missing since the 1960s. As it turned out, however, Richard had had an altercation with Dolores’s long-time boyfriend Dom Bayo sometime in 2001. Richard explained to me that his “misunderstanding” with Dom Bayo was the reason for his three-year absence from Dolores’s life. “So I just left the house and decided not to go visit my grandmother no more,” Richard said. He did, however, drive past her home on occasion. If Dom’s car was in the driveway, then Richard thought everything was okay. He was not notified of his grandmother’s stroke in 2002.
hear this. Richard said that he wanted to clean up the home and make it suitable for Dolores’s return someday. Over the following weeks he stripped the entire yard of its objects, cleaned the mess left by the vandals inside, and repainted the entire exterior of the home. Watching it all disappear made me realize just how much of an emotional attachment I had with her yard. I would never be able to tend to or admire her creations again.

I continued to visit Dolores every week and was confused as to why she didn’t appear unhappy about the recent changes in her home. I presented her with some photographs of Richard’s cleaning. “It looks good,” was all she had to say. Throughout the remaining summer of 2004, we continued to talk about her yard in the past tense. Her quarter century of work had vanished. It seemed that the end of her yard triggered something within her; she began speaking of her death with greater regularity.

Missing the Message

Dolores’s anticipation of her own death was clear throughout our year and a half of discussion, but she usually spoke of it in a casual manner. However, on that one day in September 2004, when she revealed her involvement with Spiritism, she also spoke of her future with surprising confidence (her photograph appears in Illustration 29):
“Maybe I die one of these days with you,” she said.

“Die with me?” I asked.

“Maybe one day when you are here, I close my eyes and goodbye.”

“You think?”

“Yeah” she said “that’s gonna’ happen.”

I was shocked by her comments. I reassured her, and myself, by pointing out that she was as alert and healthy as ever and would not be passing on anytime soon. Besides, Dolores had a yard in need of redecorating. I was unaware that what Kubler-Ross calls *anticipatory grief* had run its course in Dolores’s mind (1).

Kubler-Ross remarked that the dying tell us everything we need to know before they pass.38 I wondered if Dolores had actually avoided my questions about Spiritism until that time because she knew death was near and thought it necessary to give one last bit of important information to me, the one who was recording her legacy.

Even though Dolores had talked about her death many times before, I sensed that she knew something difficult was on her horizon. I hoped it was not death; maybe she was concerned about a future routine hospitalization to replace her feeding tube, a procedure that had always troubled her. This is what I wanted to believe, and today, in hindsight, I see that I was in denial of her future. Denial

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38 David Kessler, the co-author of Kubler-Ross’s last text before her death in 2004, transcribed her final thoughts about her work on grief. Kessler said that before their text was to go to the publisher, Kubler-Ross told him, “I am done.” She added that we should “listen to the dying. They will tell you everything you need to know about when they are dying. And it is easy to miss” (xv). Elizabeth Kubler-Ross died shortly after this conversation.
was a way for me to deal with my own anticipation of the grief that I would experience upon her death. I was afraid. And as a result, I am sorry to admit; I began avoiding visits with her.

Thanksgiving arrived—a time when I usually brought Dolores a special roasted chicken meal from our favorite restaurant La Teresita. This Thanksgiving, however, I did not make my usual visit before leaving town for the holiday. I saw her for the last time one week before the holiday. Dolores was her usual self, wanting to know how her yard looked, and what I thought of her grandson Richard. I remember telling her to hurry up and get better so that I could take her on a Goodwill shopping spree. I urged her to begin redecorating as soon as possible. She smiled as I left her room.

Two weeks later, I drove into the Rehabilitation Center parking lot where I passed Frances, Dolores’s favorite nurse, who always greeted me with a smile. On this day, though, she was not smiling. I knew from the look on Frances’s face what had happened. I parked my car and ran to Dolores’s room on the second floor. The plaque inscribed with her name next to the door was gone. When I asked the secretary in the first floor main office of Dolores’s whereabouts, she was reluctant to give me any information. The rehabilitation personnel on Dolores’s floor knew me as the friend who made the photographs and who brought the flowers that decorated her room. The main office personnel, however, knew very little of me. The secretary said that she had seen me over the years entering the elevator, but strict institutional policy forbade non-family members to be granted patient information. She could see my concern for
Dolores and with a bit of persuasion she entered Dolores’s name into her computer. “Yes, Dolores died at Thanksgiving,” she said.

Her Death

On the morning of November 30, 2004, Dolores Lolita Rodriguez passed away from a heart attack in her bed. To be completely honest, my initial response was one of relief. I had sat with Dolores for nearly two years, listening to her complain about the feeding tube implanted into her stomach. I watched tears roll down her face as she discussed those she lost in life. I also knew how she felt about being confined to a bed where she was dependant upon others. She was miserable in that bed, and she knew better than anyone that she would not walk away from it. One thing that morning was certain: her incessant battle with grief had reached the ultimate remedy, and she was reunited with her family and friends in a better, more beautiful and peaceful place.

I drove away from the rehabilitation center for the last time. I was happy, then sad, then happy, and then angry. I spun through these emotions for the ten-minute drive home. Anger took the greatest toll on me that day. I was angry with myself for not having seen her the day before Thanksgiving, when I had avoided her in fear of watching her “pass” before me as she had predicted a month and a half earlier.
Reflections

I was compelled to work with Dolores because she worked for her own purposes. She was not academically trained in art and did not consider her work to be art. She created her own visual vocabulary, something far from anything I had studied. Her work was not meant for a gallery, to be labeled or sold as folk art—it served her to no ends other than to honor and remedy her past. This project was entirely new ground for me and challenged my approach toward it with great regularity.

Over time I endured a metamorphosis of sorts. I defined this project, at the outset, by what I was: an individual bound by academic models, self-imposed time restraints, and in search of something definitive. I eventually found all of my lenses serving the same purpose: they attempted to capture and label objects and human activity. Dolores’s activity, however, could not be so easily captured. I had sought definitive, easily explicable phenomena that did not exist because Dolores was not bound by a specific set of religious rules or local practices. She was an active, open-minded individual whose life could not be explained away by existing academic models. She had created her world through an improvisational process of bricolage, involving a diverse repertoire of bits and pieces of information that were important to her in her life: her Spanish identity, her connection to her social environment and, most painfully, the multiple deaths of her family members.

Those remembered on Dolores’s property continued to receive her attention as if they were actually alive. After all, they were spiritually present, and
therefore, not dead. Much like the Kongo cosmogram, which maps the soul’s spiritual path through the worlds of the living and the dead and then a return to life, Dolores’s yard guided spirits through their worlds. Her map of that universe may not have been circular or diamond in form, but its complex shape sprouted through Dolores’s yard and into her home in more organic terms—always in her terms. Now that her work has disappeared, I like to believe that the mother, son, and spouses who once received her guidance are still protected and honored through indelible marks left in the minds of her neighbors and in the earth of her yard, and that such marks will continue to guide, protect, and honor Dolores’s living spirit world.

Her process was not about a finished product. It was a vital remedy for death and the memory of love. My work arrives at nothing conclusive, nothing concrete, and so it too is an unfinished product. It is, as Kenneth Burke suggested, part of an endless conversation.39 A conversation that has been interpreted and edited—in this case to meet the requirements for an academic thesis. My work remains for others to engage with, but each who chooses to engage with it may arrive at his or her interpretations, none of which can be finite or conclusive. This thesis remains part of Dolores’s legacy. It is my contribution to an endless conversation.

39 If one considers the whole of Dolores’s story, i.e., her mother, father, grandmother, and all the lessons and spiritual practices passed through her family, we see a continual process of ideas and beliefs transmitted from one generation to the next, a cycle likened by literary theorist and anthropologist Kenneth Burke to an endless conversation. Burke suggests that an ethnographer should view any situation of study as a conversation-in-progress since the beginning of time ad infinitum (Rosaldo 104). In this way, the ethnographic documentation of Dolores’s “conversation” is a synchronic moment remaining as evidence of only my brief period of study. This research does not stand as testament of times prior to my interaction with Dolores, but it does map things learned from her reflections during the final year and a half of her life.
conversation regarding an individual and her yard, or more accurately, a yard that was the individual, the ultimate expression of the soul of Dolores Lolita Rodriguez.
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Appendix A Illustrations

Illustration 1 Dead End
Illustration 2 Yard Overview
Illustration 3 Symbolic Grave
Zenith of life (Noon)

Death/sunset

Birth/rebirth/sunup

Midnight

Illustration 4 Cosmogram
Illustration 5 MLK Grave
Illustration 6 Beallesville Grave
Illustration 7 Bottles in Grave
Illustration 8 Diamond
Illustration 9 Hula Hoops
Illustration 10 Fan Blade
Illustration 11 Mirrors
Illustration 12 Lion
Illustration 13 Frog
Illustration 14 Candle
Illustration 15 Archways
Illustration 18 Magic Soap
Illustration 19 The Virgin
Illustration 20 Sopera
Illustration 21 Gitana Doll
Illustration 22 Cleaners
Illustration 24 Bill Clinton
Illustration 26 Santa
Illustration 28 Self-Portrait
Illustration 29 Dolores Lolita Rodriguez
Appendix B Transcribed Interviews: March 2003 to September 2005

Dolores Lolita Rodriguez Interview April 22, 2003

I had almost one hundred photographs made of items in her yard and asked her to describe what she saw.

Fan Blade:
This is a radio—this one I like. It was a stand I had the TV on.

Tennis Racquet:
I put more flowers around here. When I get back I’ll put flowers all around the base of the palm.

Nose Cone:
I got that at the goodwill. A pilot came to visit her. PILOTS and their uniforms make her “feel so Bad” I began to cry and then I think about my boy Dickie, He ask me why you cry, Oh mama don’t cry no more. She said to Dickie oh you don’t wanna fly a plane, he said no I don’t— I wanna play my music to make you happy. Then I said well go ahead and play the music. He boy was beautiful in the eyes and the face. “I said boy you look like Elvis Presley.” Ha ha.

K—So you say this was the top of a lamp?
D—Yeah it was the top of a lamp.
K—It looks, like I said, it was part of an airplane
D—No it was—standing up like that—this was a top of a lamp
K—Yeah I understand.

Darth Vader:
K—A very famous figure
D—One day somebody pass by and they steal it from me and I go down to the street and look in pieces—look what they did to me, so I went over there into the street and got it
K—They stole it from you?
D—Yeah they been doing lots of things from me.
Big pause
I like this one too, it was a lamp and then I get paint and paint it all
K—Who is this?
D—that look like a statue of Jesus or something like that and you see I put flower into his hand.

Ball Figure in Tree:
D—that’s an Orchilia.
K—What is this right here in the tree, a big rubber ball
D—Uh huh——no response—pause

Long pause

A female nurse enters the room and interrupts.
She shows the parts of her house to the nurse and discusses her home in Spanish with the nurse.
I introduce myself to the nurse and explained that I was from the art department of USF...
Dolores continues with our discussion after the nurse leaves the room.

D—I look at that and can’t believe I make all that day by day—that’s why I’m sick.
(10:40 minutes)

Precinct Photo:
K—Yeah, this is—you did a lot of work to make that—all those cinder blocks.
D—I put carpet all around so the grass won’t grow. And then when I get back home I’m gonna put all the flowers (points to the cells of the cinder blocks) more flowers more flowers.
K—What is this—this big arch it looks like?
D—Yeah that’s a fence I have around there—its not good its breaking up see?
K—This black bar that goes over is the fence?
(I thought she was remarking about the wooden fence in the background—all broken up)
D—That’s right
K—That’s the fence
D—Uh huh! I can bring some flowers and put them all around (she’s talking about the arch fence thing)
I have to go back to the goodwill store and get me all those things

Turn to next page of photographs.
The reporter from the TV asked where she got all those flowers—she said “I go to the goodwill store” Prices of the flowers and materials she purchased at Goodwill skyrocketed because of what the newspaper articles and TV spot said about her work.
(13:00 minutes.)

K—I see you wrap the post like you wrap cigars.
D—Yes.... Roll it up all around them.
K—This is incredible what you have done here with the light bulbs.
D—Ha Ha.
D—It’s a lamp—I can decorate it all with flowers—that’s a lamp
I used to have this lamp inside the house—I said Well I’ll take this out and make it beautiful—with a statue see.
K—Where does the figure come from?
D—In a store I said I’d like to see the lamp I’ll take this one to make the yard nice.
And this one is a basket—it’s a basket. And I covered it with carpet.
K—You had carpet in here at one time—oh okay.
D—Uh hmm. I had grass outside but I couldn’t use the lawnmower so I put carpet. I have to cover all this grass—I don’t have to use lawnmower too much.

K—What is this teddy bear, did you paint that?
D—A teddy bear and I got at goodwill too.

K—What about this here, this big sculpture? (She points to tall black thing in a cinderblock)
D—That’s a statue that was inside of the house and I still go two more in the house—in the living room I have one here……….and I paint it.
K—So you make that statue.
D—in my living room I have one like that.
K—in your living room—interesting, I don’t remember seeing one in your living room.
D—Well I do things are crazy. Crazy thing but it come out pretty. And I have…did you see the bar that I have in the living room?
K—What does this mean to you—it’s a sculpture of what??
(18:51 minutes)

D—(long pause) Yeah that’s another stature but small and then I paint it all over again and decorate it. You see when I go home I think I’m gonna buy more flowers, I’m gonna put one over here and here. And its gonna look beautiful.

Turn page

K—What about this" that’s amazing I love that.

Big Green Sandbox Figure:
D—I used to have this at the kitchen—a little boy like that and I’m gonna decorate it and put it outside. That’s the way I do things.
K—It’s for little boys??
D—Uh hmmm
K—And I see you have this some metal electric—I don’t know what it is.
D—For anything that I see I make something.
(20:00 minutes)

Long talk about cigars and people coming by to learn how she makes things. She talks about three doctors coming over for her dinner—they love her food.

K—What about this here—in the back of your house?
Bottle in Front of Hole:
(23:28 minutes)
D-It's a brick
K-Ok so you put some green on the bottle then a stripe of the pink on there.
D-Uh huh then you put the flowers around there.
D—Is at the back of the house.
K—Does this keep animals out of your house or something, cuz that goes
underneath the house—the hole.
D—Right because they hide under the house. Cats, few of them and come and
they say meow. And I say wait a minute I get something you'll like, and I get tuna
fish for the cat. They love it—and then the next day I have four more cats—I say
ok you're gonna come and I open two more cans of tuna fish..........and when
they finish they look at me and say thank you, oh they are gorgeous beautiful.
That was one of my life that is what I used to do (I think she means she cared for
people in need—cats in need)

Figures on the Window Sill:
K—And on the back you have these figures up on the windowsill.
D—Orchillia we call it in Spanish.
D—Busch Garden—that’s on the back of the house, I find it on the street and
everybody comes and says what the hell you brining Lola?? They say why you
run away so fast and I come and right away decorate.
D—People come by and ask Mrs. Rodriguez can I help you in the yard today?
And I say I'll give you 10 dollars if you fix the things I want. (She gave money
once to kids for candy if they cleaned the yard).

The Green Lion Figure:
She asked me what that was? I said it's a big green Lion.

Red Plastic Candle:
K-What is this here
D—I tell you I get everything at the goodwill store for a few pennies

K—You have a big frog up there in the front.
D—Some people don’t like it so much—one of the neighbors complained.

Concrete Bundles:
K—What about this? Mrs. Perez said take a photograph of this, it's in the back of
the house.
D—In the back of my house?
K—Yes
D—No?
K—It looks like its concrete.
Bathroom:
K—And this is your bathroom
D—Oh this is on the inside of the house.
K—I like the color there, this blue is beautiful
D—yeah
K—More blue here, almost looks like Yemaya—that’s nice.

Mickey Mouse and Cleaners:
K—I saw this and I got you the Mickey Mouse backscratcher.
D—I love to do all these things that’s why I have.
Then I come over and clean the house with those soaps
(She’s getting a bit nervous here, not really wanting to explain)

Dolls in Vase:
What is this here, you have a doll figure up in the
D—This bottle was very pretty I see, I decorate it all and I put some flowers on it,
I’m gonna make it more pretty when I get home.

Doll with Soap:
K—And here you have some Cuban soap.
D—Uh huh it looks like Cuban soap.
Who is this here with the beads (doll figure)?
D—(Long pause) I believe it’s a Chinese, looks like a Chinese.
K—And there is a photo behind it of two people. This girl die—she was real close
to me. She come over all the time and see what I doing and she go home and
start doin it to her house too.
K—She is making things in her house like you
D—Yeah but she over and asks teach me how you doing I tell her what I doing
and she start laughing, saying I can’t believe you because I make it nice and I
don’t care if it comes out pretty or not.
K—What is her name?
D—Elba
K—And she died huh?
D—She died
K—I’m sorry to hear that.
D—We both were together all the time.

This is on your wall
D—uh huh

Yellow Ceramic Doll:
D—I have this on the wall—very pretty

Bill Clinton and Al Gore:
K—And a boyfriend? Mrs. Perez said this is an old boy friend of yours.
D—Yes but I don’t have him no more now. He don’t come no more. He got mad with me.
D—What is this? I don’t know I made two birds here. There is the Chinese girl and the Chinese boy, one on this side and the other side too.

Paintings:
K—And then you have these paintings here.
K—Here these two
D—I’m playin a piano over here
K—that’s you?
D—Yeah I’m playin the piano
(Her friends can’t believe that her piano is in the kitchen.)

Spanish Senorita Painting:
D—Yeah I had this in my room and here I decorate it with flowers. See, everything has to be with flowers.
K—Everything must have flowers.
D—Oh yes the only way you can decorate and make beautiful is with flowers.
D—I love the flowers. When I was a little girl I asked my daddy to take me where they sell the flowers. They say Lola—in Spain they call all Delores Lola or Lolita.
K—and your father—he came from Cuba
D—No, my father and mama they were from Spain they speak different they are Gayello, which means real Spain.

Father’s Barbershop:
D—You should have seen that barbershop I decorate it all you ought to see how many people who come and stay for my daddy to cut their hair.
K—Were born here in Tampa?
D—Yes I was born here in Tampa.
K—in Ybor?
D—And I had a sister. When my mama died she take care of me all the time until I grow up and then my father said you have to learn to do something for world when I grow up—well I like to make Cigars. I worked for cigar factories for years and I make a little money like that.
K—So you worked in a cigar factory?
D—The cigar factory used to laugh at me when I used to come over because I had a flower in my hair. And the owner of the factory, Mr. Morgan, laughed at my flower and he say does that flower smell? If it smell you cannot have it because the cigar will have the smell of the flower and they when they going to smoke.
K—They don’t want to smell the flower.
D—They don’t want to smoke the flower. And I say it’s not real and they all start, everyone says look at Lola with that flower in her hair, and I say you know what that means that’s Spain. That’s the way girls go out in Spain.
K—Girls wore flowers in Spain.
K—So you started making your own flowers because you wanted to wear them into work?
D—I used to take a lot of flowers every Saturday to the American legion where we go and dance. They were waiting for me to decorate.
D—So that’s my habit the flowers that’s all.
K—So all the pretty girls in Spain wear flowers in their hair.
D—That’s real Spain see how they do it. They like to have flowers in their hair.

Rodriguez Interview Friday, April 25, 2003

D—Is it working now? (She asked about the recorder)
K—Here are the new photos—the front of your house.
D—I still got this one there (photo of the street corner—there are still some flowers there?
K—There are still some flowers there. What are these big arches here these poles?
D—Well I just decorate with flowers all around. That’s what I have. All the things you see here is decorated and decorated, that’s what I’m doin.
K—What about this here, this bag you have tied into the window with some tinfoil (Her hands are beginning to shake a bit. I have noticed at times she has no nervousness and at others she shakes quite a bit)
D—That was a balloon. (Actually it is a bluish plastic bag stuffed with other plastic bags)—the children bring it to me and I say all right! I’ll hang it over here. Children pass by and they bring me things you know?
K—The children bring you things.
D—The children that come by they say Mrs. Rodriguez I bring this for you. And I say well thank you. They always come around see.
K—I see you paint many things green.
D—When I got the brush I paint all over, and I say well Yes!
K—And I see you have this stick over the back fence and it is green as well. What does green mean to you?
D—I like green
K—You just like green?
D—Yes I like Green
Turning Pages—She doesn’t comment much this time around. These are new photos from the day before and she seems hesitant to address them, unlike the first day with photos.)

K—What is this chair over there? Who sits in that chair?
D—Well I used to sit here in that chair. Most of the time I don’t remember this—not too much
K—You don’t remember this here?
D—Not too much.
(We are looking at a photo of the green sandbox figure with the ball fig in the tree)
D—That’s the back yard.
K—So you don’t remember this here?
D—Oh yes Oh yes I remember when I came from the good will I get the paint and paint it the color blue (its actually green—maybe she is colorblind)
K—What is this?
D—A base to put flowers on
K—A base to put flowers on?
D—No they pass by they going to the store to buy ice cream and I always give them money—where are you going and they say I’m going to the store.
K—Yesterday or uh the other day you said to me it reminds you of little boys
D—uh huh (softly mumbled)—right.
K—What little boys in the neighborhood?
D—What is this?
K—A base to put flowers on?
D—To make it pretty—ha ha.
K—See I was wondering if—you have these two next to each other so does that mean something to you?
D—I put the Santa Claus all around at Christmas. You know.
K—I brought out the photo of the lampshade in the tree…no comment silence
Then she flipped to the Red candle-like-thing.

Pause…no comments
D—I know that one yeah.
I hang it on a tree.
K—Why did you put that in the tree?
D—to make it pretty—ha ha.
That’s why I have so many things, when I like something I put it in the tree and have it all around like that.
K—I put the Santa Claus all around at Christmas. You know.
D—I’m nervous very nervous.
K—Why are you nervous?
D—Because I want to find out what they gonna give me—something for my nerves. I’m really nervous—see how I am (her hands are shaking quite badly). I’m shaking all around
Cough—when I get like that and when I’m working here in the yard I calm down.
K—When you work in the yard
D—Yeah I don’t get any nervous.
K—What about this—this red thing? You have all these objects inside of this
D—This was in the color green.
K—It was the color green.
D—It’s a gas tank a water heater somebody brought it and I said I’m gonna decorate it.
(She is looking and the photo opposite the red candle thing. Maybe she doesn’t want to answer so she chose to talk about the green water heater on the corner of the yard.)

D—Look how they so pretty!
She continues to flip through pages without saying anything except for the occasional “uh huh”.
K—You have that green lion there.
D—I remember when I put this here (She ignores the lion and goes fro the green saint figure)
K—The saint??
D—Uh huh
K—It looks like a saint—a plastic saint.
D—Did you show these to Nilda?
K—She has seen some of them.

K—This looks very interesting with the triangle—in your window. This with the pink balls
D—big pause—Uh huh
K—What does that mean to you?
D—This one hear—pausing
Well it don’t mean nothing I just do it and I decorate and I say how pretty it looks, very nice. And all this come to my mind right away like that.

K—my cell phone interrupted us for a brief moment.

K—You have mirrors in the bushes and this broom it looks like you tied it in there
D—Uh huh—she starts to giggle.
K—It looks like you are saying something to everyone you know?
D—Yeah I have something to say.
D—See what I did over here in the front
K—Yeah with the cinder blocks—that’s very interesting in the back of your house.
D—how bout the front porch you need to take pictures of the front porch.
K—I’ve got some
D—There it is I remember when I put that there
K—The red hat you have flowers around
D—I decorate it its what I’m doing they decorate me!
K—the red bear
D—yes the red bear right
D—on Christmas you will see how many pretty things I put there.
K—what about this here with the mirror in this (on the gate)
D—That’s inside of my house.
K—that’s in front of your gate.
D—in the gate (question)
K—Yeah the mirror is on the gate up to your front door.
D—Yeah I know that I know I decorate it I put everything in front.
K—What about this? This is very interesting looking
D—(Soft giggle) ha ha.
K—This with the chain and the thorns on the tree.
D—Its for water, If I got fire they come and put that—if I have fire in the house
that’s the water they have for the city.
K—That looks like a tree stump—you have this chain here with thorns on the
tree.
K—It looks like a message to me of some kind.
D—Uh huh mumble….
Silence
And all this—you have a green toy, green circle
D—Uh huh
Silence
D—Nilda would like to see this—she would like to see all this
K—Really—maybe I will go by and see her after I leave
D—yes take these to her
K—Okay.
K—Do you sit in this chair here (metal wire on in front yard)?
D—Most of the time yeah, to listen to the birds in the tree, the birds come and
sing to me (light giggling" ha ha ha ha.
K—Okay I will bring this by to Nilda
D—Yes take it to her she would like to see it.
D—Nilda—she say Lola I think you’re crazy I say Why do you think I’m crazy?
Because I’m decorating and making things so pretty? No (said Nilda) because
you’re doing so many things all the time. I say Well that’s the way I am. What do
you want me to do sit down with my hands …… on the porch all day No I won’t I
can’t be like that I’m very active. I work very hard
K—Yes you have you have been a very busy lady.
D—That’s why I’m so sick now I went straight to the ground.
K—You fell in the yard
Time—#7 0:03

D—It was very bad. I fell and I could see this part of my body going away (left
side went paralyzed) and I said Oh my God. I couldn’t stand up and the man
across the street he came and picked me up and called 911 take me to the
hospital.
K—the emergency room—yeah

K—Well I notice that—many times when I talk to you —flowers remind you of
Spain.
D—Uh huh well she didn’t know that (Nilda—about her father coming from Spain)
and then my father married my mother and my mother and I had my mother until
I was seven years old and my mother passed away—she died and my sister took care of me I grew up.
K—Where was your mother from?
D—She don’t know it’s a part of Spain too my father brought her over from there (she’s talking about Nilda questioning the origin of the family). You don’t know so many things about me that’s what I told her.
K—She thought your father was Cuban
D—Its not right father was from a part of Spain they call Courro The way they talk in Curro they say so many nice things they make you laugh.I got some of my daddy the way he was.

K—What made you start decorating you house?
D—I used to have another house on La Salle and Gomez. And I decorate it very pretty too. My son Richard he was living with me. He was playing music all the time and he say mama I’m gonna play in a band—and I say well learn the music better he start playing the accordion and he used to play accordion for me one day he start and he say mother I have a pain right here in my back and I say having the accordion on you back make the pain. Said take the music out of your head
K—Well he played guitar didn’t he?
D—Yes –He says I’m gonna be like Elvis Presley
He came to me an said mother I’m gonna play music for you and I say play all.
(She starts singing) la lu la la laaaa la la la lalalalalalal.
Oh he would learn to play that beautiful—when he was so sick he used to play for me too.
K—I saw a photograph of him with his guitar in your bedroom.
D—Oh yes and he was a handsome boy.
K—And he looks like Elvis.
D—He says oh mama you know where I’m going to the coliseum Elvis is coming to the coliseum. He said I’m gonna take a picture of him and he did he bring me a picture of him—and I don’t know what he did with that—then he got married everything he took to his home. They call him Dickie.
K—Dickie?
D—You ought to see the girls that he had oh they come in like that through the window—Elvis Presley come outside.
He died from Hodgkin’s disease.

K—So when you moved into this house you started decorating
D—Oh
People gave her a hard time about buying her present home because it was a mess—she just started decorating it.

D—Nilda is a very nice lady—she likes things too. One day she says Lola I think you are cuckoo and I said no I know what I’m doing. If I was Cuckoo I couldn’t do all this. I would do something more ugly.
K—Ha ha you’re not cuckoo
K—If you were Cuckoo I probably wouldn’t be talking to you.
D—That’s right ha ha ha.
K—I am here because I know you have something to say—you are saying. I think that you are saying something here to your neighborhood and your community.
D—And some they like it and some don’t.
Some of the neighbors don’t like it because they can’t have it—they don’t know how to do it like I do. They come to me sometimes and they say how you make this flower? I like everything that looks nice and pretty see?
K—When I see your house I see things like this…. This sculpture here, the green figure with this…
D—Well I went to the goodwill store and I see all this to decorate with.
K—What were you thinking about when you made this—you know sometimes people remember their family.
D—No I was thinking of this because I liked the way it looks—a turtle (sand box figure)
K—And something like this, this is amazing…back here all of this whole section of your yard with the cinder blocks. I think it’s amazing that you have this figure in the center of it
D—This is a gate—pointing to the background of the photo.
K—Sometimes I’ve seen artists making things in their yards to remember their religion or family
D—Yeah that’s right uh huh.
K—Family members who have died
Pause
D—(light) “uh huh.” (Pause)
D—I remember this—when I was making it I was thinking of my father when my mother died he did all around the grave you know all around it like that. I was doing the same thing.
K—When your mother died he put cinder blocks around the grave?
D—Around the grave yeah and he had it so beautiful. Everybody would come to the cemetery and say who did that
(#10, 2:30)
D—I would say my daddy did it and people would say oh your daddy had a good idea—yes he is smart.
K—Is that grave here in Tampa
D—Yeah! It’s on Woodlawn. My father and my mother is there on Woodlawn.
K—So this was inspired by your father making your mother’s grave?
D—Uh huh!
K—Decorated your mother’s grave.
(#10, 2:30)
K—Who is this? Does this remind you of someone or something and the basket?
D—No it don’t remind me of nothing. I saw it in a shop and liked it. I copy from somebody else—from another yard.

K—From another yard?

D—I have pretty things in my yard and I say I’m gonna go home and make one in my yard.

K—So you copied this basket figure out of someone’s yard in Tampa.

D—Yes.

K—That’s the way I do it.

D—Oh that’s the way you do it you see how other people in the community were making things in their yards.

K—No they the one don’t do that. I’m the one who do that. I’m the one.

K—Yeah you’re the one I know.

D—I pass by someone’s yard and saw the figure and I look at it for a long time and I go home and say I’m gonna make one in my yard. And I did and see how pretty it come.

Rodriguez Friday Night April 25, 2003

Dolores explained the day she found out her son’s illness. After Dickie and her husband died—both within a year or so of one another, she sold her house and moved to her current location where she claims to have lived for the past seventeen years. Dickie was in the hospital for two months before he died.

K—Did you ever go to Spain?

D—No.

K—But your father and mother came from Spain.

D—Yeah.

K—So did you ever want to go to Spain?

D—No I don’t think I have to go there for what?

My father took a picture of my grandmother, did you see the painting of the Spanish senorita in the house. One of them looks like my grandmother. The one in the bedroom is my grandmother.

K—This is you playing the piano.

D—Uh huh.

K—Did you buy this picture at the goodwill store?

D—Yes the frame and the picture was there too.

K—When I hear you talk about your yard…. Or inside your house.

D—Did you see the little bar I have?

K—Yes.

D—I painted it all myself.

K—It’s interesting, when you tell me about you yard or your sculptures you are making it sounds like you are telling me about your family. You know because
like your grandmother is in the painting, and outside where you have that area where its like what your father made for your mother.

D—that was here in Tampa and the frame come from Spain. That’s soap right there with the doll, is it Cuban or Spanish soap.

D—I don’t remember.

K- When I see this—the colors, Um I spent several years living in Africa and I work with African religion.

D—There are plenty of things beautiful there.

K—Yes they do. They most certainly do. And I study Santeria.

D—Uh huh.

K—And when I see this, you know...

D—Uh huh!

K—The color and these colors here and this I mean it looks like it could be Santeria

D—Sure!

K—Did you grow up around that type of thing?

D—No I didn’t go out no more I just went to Orlando, I went with a cousin I have here, Gloria I stayed with her in Orlando for two or three days and she took me to Disney world and she said Lola you gonna see what you like. I went crazy that day and I say I want that I want that. And she says, “You can’t have that.”

D—And I say well I go home and I’ll copy.

Indian Minnie and Mickey Mouse:

D—This is in the kitchen where I have this

K—Yep

D—(pause) I wish I could go home again.

D—well first I have to be in a very good condition to go home again because if I go home and start doing anything and I come back again its gonna be worse. I’m gonna get more sick than what I am now.

D—And there is this kind of soap. Every time I see on the TV I go to the store and I get this kind and this kind and I put it there on the table.

K—so what do these mean, you have different colors.

(#2, 2:35)

D—Well that means the name of the color see, one name is different this is Palmolive. This is Ajax. I like the smell of the soap, alcohol too! See?

K—Yep rubbing alcohol.

D—I add this room to my house.

She then talks about her friends wanting her to make them dresses.

K—When I was here this morning when you saw this photograph you were very excited to see this photograph of your hat. And you said that here its like—you said you were decorating me.

D—It look like a horse.

K—Ehh, it kinda looks like a horse I can see that
K—Did you wear this hat?
D—I do things like that and I don’t know what I’m doing sometimes. It came out nice.
K—It looks very nice with the flowers.
D—Hanging there uh huh
K—Yeah I thought that was interesting, I thought that that meant something to you.
D—Things that comes out and I don’t know what I’m doing. It look like a horse
K—Okay.
D—And the horse is smelling the flowers.
K—I can see that I see what you’re saying. —That’s his nose
D—Yeah that’s his nose, he’s smelling the flowers.
K—Ha ha it does look like a horse smelling the flowers.
D—And you know in the morning those little birds are out there and I put out something for them to eat then I put music for the birds and they hear the music and they go away.
D—Then they come back.

(The neighbor across the street is very nosy, she explained.)
K—What makes you do this—this is Bill Clinton.
D—That’s another story I have from him. I cut a bit of hair and put it in his head,
K—You cut your hair and put in bill Clinton’s head?
D—I have a wig and I cut a little bit of the hair on the wig and put it in his head because I like the way it was one time. I love him, I like him very much but we don’t have him no more now.
K—Yeah I know we have Bush.
D—Ha ha that’s right!
D—Yeah I put my flag around there too. The clock I have there, I want to see his face.
K—What about the compact discs right here? You have three compact disks.
D—Music—yeah my cassette.
K—Why do you have those there?
D—I took it up from the window and the flowers I put it there for the birds and they listen to the music and it keep em goin around and around I enjoy that very much.
K—And you have Al gore there and is that Dom?
D—that’s Dom Bayo.
(She purchased the Clinton picture for ten or twenty dollars)
D—All those things come right to my mind just right away.

Chinese dolls:
D—I like the Chinese girl.
K—Why do you like the Chinese girls?
D—Because I think they dress more pretty that the Chinese men.
(Francis is her favorite nurse)

K—I really like this photograph, you have all these round objects in here
   And the arches but what is going on there?
D—Nilda don’t like it she says you have too much trash in the yard.

K—Something interesting—he, [the green Wiseman figure] is looking at your
   house.
D—Uh huh!
K—All the other figures in your yard are looking out.
D—That’s the way I painted the figure up and put it up.
(She then talked about flowers and watering them every morning—diverting the
   discussion)
K—Yeah but what is this object in the center, this round—it’s a fan I believe.
   And it looks like you’re making some kind of a sculpture there
D—I used to have really pretty flowers there but they not there no more.

(Flowers were all over the place but have died.)

K—Here you have a piece of crystal—a piece of cut glass
D—(silence) I can’t remember.
K—It’s a lion next to it.
Pause
D—I make things crazy like that and it comes out nice.
K—Yeah it does come out nice
D—I do things crazy
K—It’s not crazy.
K—But that’s how an artist works—what you do and what you believe is not
crazy.

D—When my boy died I started making all this.
K—Since your boy died you started making all this?
D—Yeah (a little hesitation in her voice)
K—It makes you feel better?
D—Sure I was thinking of him all the time because the thing he like is to play the
   music the accordion and the piano and all that.
   By ear by ear…uh huh
K—So making these sculptures makes you feel better?
D—Uh huh
K—Do you feel like it protects you?
D—Oh yes I know!
   Long pause
D—Did you see in front of his picture a little glass of water—a cup of water?
K—The lights were out and I grabbed the photo and I set it back and I did not see
   a cup—it’s by your bed right next to your bed?
D—Uh huh!
K—What about the little cup of water
(#9, 0:49)
D—long pause.........People laugh at me and they say your crazy Lola and I say
I’m not and the cup of water is...pause...for him, the cup of water is for him, the
spirit of him you can get a flower a white flower you know right in front of his
picture and make him rest more.
K —Yes I know what you say! Understand see (ha ha she laughs) I have seen this
before. What you are telling me is not new to me. I understand and so what
you’re telling me. The water is for his spirit.
D—And they ask me Lola why do you have that cup of water in front of the
picture, and I say well you come back next week and you’ll see the waters
already gone. It dried up you know. I say you see its his spirit the
come.......pause.....and make him......
K—Yeah well next time I go in your house I will fill the cup with water. If there is
no cup I will put one there.
D—Yeah a little one like that—points to one on the table in front of us. But not
too much water
K—Okay!
D—And put it right there in front of him
K—So in your yard...
D—I’ve been doing that for years.
K—Do you also have things in your yard that remind you of your son?
That maybe you will give water to—you can feed the spirit in your yard
D—Yes
K—Yes there is?
D—Big roses but they die already I have beautiful roses.
K –Well what about a sculpture—would something like this remind you of your
son?
Or your husband or have you named these objects?
Pause
K—I mean –so when you walk around your yard and you walk past something,
an object it reminds you of... your family—your son
D—Very much yeah.
D—When I come in and see them playing the guitar on the TV I start crying
because it reminds me of my son.
K—On the TV?
K—But what about in your yard?
D—No, not in the yard. No I don’t think of him in the yard. I see his picture inside
of the house.
Pause

D—There is a photo of his little son, who has been missing for years, in the
house near Dickie’s photo.
K—So you make offerings to his spirit—that is beautiful.
D—Uh huh
K—I said that when I lived in Africa and that is what many African people do except they have a sculpture.
D—yeah
K—You know a little wooden figure in the home and they put water or food on the figure They feed the spirit because he’s still alive
D—You see they make you feel better
K—Yeah
D—That’s why I put a little bit of flower and water for Dickie, not too much. And then I look and see the water all dried up and I say well that’s his spirit.
K—Do you have other objects in your house or home or yard the represent the spirit of your husband, or family.
D—They’re all in my mind—when they come to my mind then I start doin things like that see.
K—Doing things like that so is it possible that some of these creations or these objects are shrines to your family.
D—Uh huh (low tone) I feel very good when I see some of those things. They make me feel good.
K—Well I hope that when I show you these photographs it makes you feel good.

She prays the Richards little son [her grandson] comes back to her someday. Her grandson and his mother took off to California after Dickie’s death. (# 11, 1:46.)

She wants to have an Indian for the front yard. Talks about vase…colors. Used to have a cat in the top of it now there is a little doll instead. (Time. # 14)

K—Well earlier you were talking about this and how the grave of your mother was inspiration to build this
D—Yeah my father did something very beautiful. And right here in the corner he put in a statue of Jesus.
K—Maybe next week I can go and find the grave and take a photograph of it for you
D—I don’t think its gonna be the same way that was a long time ago.
K—So this is like you mothers grave…would you put something like this to guard your grave? Is this your mother here? Are these objects here to feed your mother or protect your mother?
Pause
D—So many years ago I was a little girl (she was 7) Didn’t answer the question

Silence
D—I like this one here…. She points to the statue of the green Wiseman
D—This is a Gypsy, Gypsy man
K—The what?
D—Gypsy
K—He looks like a saint to me
D—I say he's a Gypsy
K—He's a Gypsy huh? Why a Gypsy?
D—I have part of my family they were gypsies
K—Part of your family were gypsies?
D—They read the palm of your hand
K—This represents part of your family as gypsies
D—That's right that's why I have it there
K—Ahhhh! You said it looked a saint…. And you just didn't want to tell me—
that's great.
D—Sometimes my mind a little bit off and I'm too old.
K—So that is a Gypsy—amazing that is incredible. It looks like its all about your
family here this is incredible. This sounds to me like your entire family history in
your yard
D—it looks to me like it yeah.
Pause.
D—When my husband died I moved and I start fixin the yard.

She worked in the MORGAN cigar factory…
Plans to go home and plant more flowers.

K—we have had a long talk maybe I should let you rest
D—I'm a little bit tired—that’s a Jesus here (points to ball on stump.)
K—that’s Jesus—how is that Jesus
D—he’s there
(Time # 17 2:54.)
K—it looks like there is a ball on his head.
D—it's like what they have in Africa, you know on their head they put flowers up
there
K—What about the chains in the tree.
D—I had all that because of Christmas

Rodriguez Interview with Cat Thompson May 12, 2003

Cat and I went to the Rodriguez yard armed with cameras and yard cleaning
tools. We spent two or three hours sweeping and raking. In the Sacred Precinct I
discovered a fire screen buried behind the black basket figure. Today was just a
brief meeting with Dolores, Cat really wanted to meet her. I was also interested to
see if Cat could discern the mental state of Dolores based on her background
with terminally ill patients. Today was nothing remarkable. Cat felt that Dolores was relatively stable—quite good.

We talked about Dickie’s photo
His wife was Sherrie Jacobson from St. Pete—a family of jewelers.

Cat inquired about medical care for Dickie.

Dolores was beginning a phase of vomiting—this lasted for about a week. I could not interview her during this period. I was very concerned but the nurses said it was normal for people on feeding tubes.

She told Cat that her family was from Madrid.

Rodriguez Interview Wednesday, May 21, 2003

Dolores describes the years she cared for ill people. She once worked for an Italian woman and her doctor husband living on Bayshore Blvd. for three years.

Dolores got sick and her son Dickie wanted to take her to Miami to a good doctor. She didn’t want to get on the plane.

D—When I get in the plane and I sit down I see the men to drive (pilots) they were beautiful, oh beautiful and I started to cry and Dickie ask what’s wrong mama you sick? And I say no I can’t stand to look at them why that makes you cry mama? And I say well I cry because I feel so sorry for them, you know they are so beautiful. They are beautiful men that’s why I cry so much. And I think that one of these days they’re gonna get in trouble
K—Crash?
D—Yeah.

I introduce the current photos of her house and Dickie with water in the cup.

D—You know there are two drawers over here (pointing to the photo of Dickie) You can open—one over here I have my sister a picture of my sister—she used to be a teacher a smart lady I have a little glass of water that is empty but I don’t care for that no more
K—Do you want me to fill that?
D—If you want to you can see her. She was a very smart lady she was all the time in church.
K—What about the other drawer?
D—The other drawer I have another picture of somebody dead, that I know that died, very close friend to me—Elba??
K—is Elba in this photo here behind the doll
D—No, different a person, Elba came to me to take me out an help me. That’s my story of life—always working for people in their house nurturing people.

She says that beads are fro Christmas and to make things pretty.

K—and here in this area that you said reminds you of your mothers grave, OK I cleaned this out I had the rake and I removed all the leaves around there and behind this basket, the figure, in the middle, I found this—a fire screen, it was buried underneath.

D—I have it there because I have it there for when Christmas comes I hang the balls of Christmas and lights, all lights around here, that’s what I do that for

K—So this stood up behind the figure

D—Yeah!

(She changes the subject)

D—So a man from the city came and say I’m gonna help you to make the flowers like we want you to…(she is referring to the flower arrangements in the sidewalk next to Howard Ave).

(#8 5 seconds)

The green head was to decorate flowers.

The arrangement with the shoe is supposed to be the American Flag.

Rodriguez Interview Tuesday, May 27, 2003

Today was rather interesting. Dolores came out for the first time and gave me the date of her birth. This is nothing I had asked for in the past but for some strange reason she just came out with it. JULY 20 1916. She said she is, without any confidence in her voice, 85 or 86 years old—she did not know exactly.

She gave me a brief recount of her husbands and their untimely departures. Often she would have to strain to remember their names and had no idea as to the exact dates for any of their marriages/deaths. As a matter of fact, up until today, her birth date is the only date she has provided me with any confidence.

She grew up in Ybor until she reached the age of 19 or 20
Married at 23-a man from Spain Oscar Zayas—Quiet man, nice with green eyes and red hair—did not look Spanish. He traveled for work, his boat sank, and he perished.

Her second husband was Aritides Rodriguez.
He was 44 and she was 23? (Ages may be mixed up.)

Her father was Mike Gonzales.
Her mother was a seamstress.
The third or maybe second Husband—Phillip Romano—was Italian. Were married for two or three years—he worked for a towel accessory company Looked like Dean Martin. Died a year before Dickie. Romano was a friend of her former husband Rodriguez.

At some point during the hour or so that I was conversing with Lolita, a twenty-something chick came in and interrupted us. Hi Delores, I am so and so the social worker and I have come to ask you a few questions: This woman really barged in on us—rather pissed me off. She asked Delores to tell her date of birth. Delores got it immediately, then the girl asked what month we were in, Delores did not know and guessed it was October. Then the girl asked what year it was—Delores had no idea.

Rodriguez Interview Sunday, June 1, 2003

I approached a healthy and alert looking Dolores in her rehab bed, She said she was feeling bad—her stomach and the feeding tube were the problem. We only spoke for about five minutes. She spoke of yet another death in the family, that of Billy Perez—the son of Delores’s sister Estrella. He had a heart attack in the bathroom while Delores was sitting in the house—he was in the bathroom of his home, not hers. Before I left the room, she blurted out “Everybody has died!”

Rodriguez Interview June 3, 2003

Today she was very lethargic at first. The doctors are concerned about her lack of food intake. The feeding tube is filling her up and she refuses to eat anything they giver by mouth. The nurse told me that her ability to swallow has been affected by the stroke. She says that she has no trouble swallowing but the nurses say she does. At first I didn’t think I would get a good talk with her today but she pepped up once I sat down.

K—As a child you were afraid of the nuns—the sisters Ha ha.
D—Yeah I was afraid of them. I didn’t want to go to them—not to church—they pinched me. It hurts.

She then goes into a description of being forced to go to Church by her father. She would cry and was afraid of the nuns. She hated being told what to do.

Her sister was twelve years older than Dolores—a schoolteacher—died at 93 She went to a catholic church on 11th street—not far from where they lived.
Delores says she was a mean girl…. I always wanted my way.

K—You were growing up in Ybor city at this time and there was a large Cuban population, you are Spanish you are not Cuban, but did you see a lot of the religion Lucumi? Uhh Santeria?

D—Santeria…no I don’t like that.

K—You didn’t see it?

D—They put a veil on and go down to the floor to pray?

K—It’s Regla de la Ocha?

Pause

K—You didn’t see it?

D—No, I was different than all those things.

K—Did you see this in Ybor City? It was a very popular religion

D—Santero

K—Santero—yeah!

D—I don’t like that.

K—Why don’t you like that?

(She is hesitant to talk about this stuff.)

D—Santero…because they to make you believe what they say is true. They like to make you believe what they want. And that’s not right. You believe what you think is right or true but not the things they do. Those Santeros, if you have a sore they say I fix that sore for you in ten minutes and they try to bring some medicine ……I don’t like them.

K—Yeah the Santero in the botanica.

D—Yeah they try to make a black medicine. And they put it all around where you have a bit of something like that, and it smells good I don’t like it. I don’t like what they doin. I like what I like if they force me to like this I don’t like it.

K—So is there anything a Santero has that you like?

(Pause)

D—The medicine— you do not like because it’s black. Something that they do or that they believe that maybe you like. No I never did like I was a stranger. They say Lolita look at this santero is gonna cure you and I say no way. I don’t believe in santeros. Bring the real doctor and I believe in the real doctors.

(#8, 30seconds.)

K—Well what about the religion itself? They have all the saints that are in the catholic religion.

D—Yeah I know…I used to go to the Catholic Church and sing…. I like to sing and hear what they talk.

(She is hesitant to give out this information. She appears to struggle with it.)

D—I don’t like to be forced…it have to come from me and that’s all. If it don’t come from me I don’t do it.
K—When I look at your yard, there are things that look like
D—Santeros?
K—Yeah! Like you were influenced by a santero—with the beads.
D—Yeah but no no I just see it and I buy it. Well like this I’m gonna put a candle
on it and that’s it. But no I wasn’t so interested in that…
K—But you liked the images the figures.
D—Yeah yeah. And I used to put a candle on it, and see how it worked, and then
tomorrow I changed my mind, I don’t want it no more.

K—Well see, artist like you, you borrow ideas from different places you know
maybe things that you tell me that your father has taught you things, your
husbands have taught you things, a Santero may have taught you things. So
when I look at your yard and everything you’re making in your yard it all comes
from your mind but these are things that you have learned over your life.
(Then Dolores turns the discussion on to two ladies she was nurturing in her
home.
We will return to this –taking care of people during their final days.)

Rodriguez Interview November 10, 2003

I walk in the room and place the book of photos in front of her. It has been
several months since I last did a recorded interview with her. I have been
hearing much of the same story from her over the past few months—she
regularly makes the same comments about photos thus giving me some
confidence.

Here are some of the more notable comments:

(Track 2 1:21)
She is talking about her sister Estrella, who was a church-going regular,
K—Did you ever go to church?
D—No, I used to tell my sister one of these days when I feel better I’m gonna go.

(I showed her a photo of her bedroom and the photo of Dickie)
(Track 4—time)?
K—Dickie’s photo is up here—(I’m inquiring about the arrangement of glasses
and photos on the desk by her bed.)

She goes on about her death in track 4.

I ask her about the image of the Virgin Mary on the wall next to her bar.

K—Where did you find this—these beads?
D—I got everything from the goodwill store
K—it looks like something from a botanica.
D—Yes but no I didn't get it there.

She says she was looking around for an Indian.
K—Why do you like Indians?
D—I like Indians. I don't know why but I like Indians. (Pause…. silence)
(She goes on to the next topic.)
(Track 6, 5:10.)

Rodriguez Interview August 4, 2004

I had been trying to get a good talk with Delores for the past few days but she has been feeling terribly. Yesterday they pulled out her feeding tube and medicated her so that she could rest. She had been throwing up. When they unplugged her she made sure that I could see how they did it. She said, “Come and watch how they do it” then nurse cleaned out the tube leading into her stomach with a large syringe of water.

Today 8/4/04 we sat and looked at digital photos on my computer and talked. Today was monumental to say the least. In short I found out that Dolores had been a regular at the local botanicas for a long time…. she admitted gleefully that she was a Spiritist—that her mother was from Cuba and dressed like a Gypsy—that’s why her father wanted to marry her ——and that Dolores, at one time, had the ability to see and talk to the deceased.

This was a long interview so I will transcribe only the dialogue between us leaving out the interruptions with nurses.
Before I turned on the recorder one of the Cuban nurses looked at the photos in my computer and commented. I asked her about Santeria and she said it didn’t look like it. I even used the words Ocha—Lucumi—Espiritismo and others plus while looking at the large vase in the bar area of her house I said the word Sopera and the nurse lit up claiming that I really knew this stuff…. Dolores still denies a connection to Santeria.

K—Were did you buy this?? (Looking at a photo of the Sopera vessel)
D—At the flea market.
K—And the dolls why do you have the dolls
D—To put it there to see if I buy like a decoration but I didn't buy it and they give it to me. (She is describing the seller and hoe they tried to sell all of it to her including the dolls but she didn’t want the dolls and they gave them to her anyway) They wanted me to have it.
K—Have you ever heard of the word Sopera?
Confusion
K—Yes you can buy these at the *botanica*.
D—Where?
K—Botanica 7 African Powers on Armenia.
D—Oh yeah! I know I’ve been there and I seen one of those at the door when you get into the door and I thought they were gonna sell it and they say no—not they don’t sell it to me they just put it there for me to look at

D—They have so many beautiful things there you know!

Discussion about Tampa *botanicas* she knows where they are
I show her the photos of *botanica* interiors
D—Yes I know these, there they sell grass to make like tea.

D—Look at the Indian I love the Indian.

K—What about this do you know these? (Pointing to a photo of soaps on the shelf to clean from evil and envy. Etc.)
D—Yeah I know
K—Do you ever use those?
D—Yeah like soap.
K—In your bath?
D uh huh!
K—Does it protect you?
D—I have some of this for the bathroom, yeah I’ve been using it.

D—I bought a record at this store about the Virgin de Regla.
(She sings the tune about the Virgin and then goes into a talk about putting the glass of water out for Dickie.)

The Virgin brings her good luck.

D—When I get into those places (Botanicas) they know me already “here comes Lola Lola what do you like around here?? She wanted to buy a record.

She talks about frequenting *botanicas*.

Back to the protective soaps:
D—I used to buy one once in a while for good luck

(She stops me on the photo of the blue and white saint looking figure on the wall of her bar area.)
D—*Virgin de Regla*, that’s what they call her.
Silence
Talk about coconuts looking at the photo of the spiritual *leggua*
D—Those people believe in all of those things. No I don’t make those things.
D—There is a song in Cuba that says eleggua all the time. Yeah! An Africa song. She confirms that the photos of the thrift store she used to frequent.

Back to the cup of water for Dickie
D—His spirit rest n peace that’s what I say
K—When you lived in you house and took care of his spirit how did you do that?
D—I kiss his picture and change the water and I say God Bless you honey

D—I have little candles all around but I most put them for the smell for the smell in the room
K—But you light the candles
D—Yes I do
K—Why do you light the candles?
D—Because it comes from Jesus from the church I have to learn all those things from my sister (Things from the church Estrella used to give Dolores grief about not practicing the church)
K—Where did you learn to do this?
D—Nobody I just make it myself.

D—My friends didn’t do this but Elba may have.
K—Was Elba Cuban?
D-Elba’s father was Cuban.
(#6 …1:24)

K—Do you know what this practice is called?
D—Faith you make it because you have Faith. I believe in Epertista—yes I do I sure do.
I believe in Espiritista and I’m gonna tell you why. One day I came from the dance and I came home and I was sitting on the bed and I was taking off my shoes …and I put my head up like that and I say Oh Ma’ am who are you? I saw a lady a beautiful lady with a veil on her and when I saw “Tell Me who you are.” She just go.

Dolores went on to add that she told this spiritual encounter to one of her girlfriends who said that you cannot speak to a spirit—if you do then they will leave. Just keep on watching her but don’t talk to see how long she stay “ but if you talk like that right away she go.”
D—It was a beautiful lady with a veil on her. It was like a Santa you know?
K—Like a saint?
D—And she came to me and I have that problem for a long time. That I can see those people that die and I don’t see no more. One time I see them they come to me.

K—You can see the dead?
D—I can see and even I talk to them.
She was dressed all in blue, sky blue, and a veil all in sky blue.
K—Do you see Dickie?
D—No that wasn’t that time. Dickie wasn’t dead at that time.
K—Today can you see things like that?
D—No no no more because I don’t even think of things like that. My mind is so sick I don’t think like that.
K—When you are decorating the house and inside the house do you see spirits there in the yard?
D—No I just say I’m gonna decorate things in this way.

Talks about the yard photos—grave cinder blocks etc.
(# 7,1 min)

D—I remember my father told me that my mother was a *spirituale*.
K—Spiritual?
D—Yeah and I say why did she do it daddy? Why did she do so many beautiful things? That’s why I came like her.

Dolores talks of learning to be a barber from her father.

Shows nurse who enters the room
(# 7 3:50)

Talks on Don Bayo at length. (#7, 6min).

D—I love Clinton like he was my brother

A Cuban or Puerto Rican Nurse talks to us here about Clinton and Don Bayo.

Cleaning Fluid altar:
D—Mickey Mouse—I was thinking of my grandson
K—Why Mickey Mouse
D—Well Mickey mouse doing something nice for the children so that’s why I put it that way.
K—What about these bottles here
D—Those are to wash the dishes and do the clothes that’s a very good soap dial and mint. I don’t know what I was doin but I had it in mind when I came from the store.
K—I look at he colors and then these—point to the fluids in the botanica
D—The alcohol is for headaches I put it on my head—hand lotion
She looks at the photos of the botanica fluids and say
D—yeah soap too.
K—Evil spirits cleaning?
D—Spirits cleaning—it will help you. Yeah I use it and I have to take the day that I use it. The day that I use all that is on Friday.
K—The day that you use this in on Friday?
D—Yes
K—Why Fridays?
D—Because Friday is a nice day—everybody comes to see you on Fridays
K—Why do you have the bull?
D—Because it make it pretty
K—Could the bull be like...from Spain?

SPAIN:
(#9 4:40)
D—Everything comes from Spain all the things that I like—in my Idea.
K—Everything in your idea comes from Spain?
D—Yeah I have Spain all the way in my head.
Talks of her father and how her grandmother looked like a famous actor
All these people she comes from were Gallieros, from part of Spain. I fell in love
with one of those Gallieros one time.
D—My daddy came to Cuba and met my mother who looked like a Gypsy
(#11)
K—Was your mother a Gypsy?
D—She looked like it with a long dress and bracelets. Old Spain men from Spain
liked girls brunettes come from Spain.

Yard Figure of Wiseman:
D—That’s wine in the bottom. There’s water always I put water in it (motioning
down in the upturned construction cone.
K—Why
D—I put to the spirits
(# 11 3:30)
D—It gives you good luck for the house.
K—So if you pour water in this.
D—You have to know the day that too and I do it all the time on Fridays.

D—I make believe what I like.
K—You make something your own?

Pause
D—I'm thinking.

Long pause

She then goes in to a talk about Oscar Zayez a husband of hers who died on a
boat ride to Cuba—he never came back
He was not a merchant marine but was a “sailor.”

Gypsies:
K—Do you like gypsies?
D—I like because I remember that my mother looked like a Gypsy

(Her father was from Spain and her mother was from Cuba.)
D—My sister taught me how to cook in Spain—to cook Spanish food.

We both are getting very tired time to quit for the day—long interview.

Rodriguez Interview August 5, 2004

Dolores was looking much better today and was happy to see me. I began by refreshing her memory about yesterday’s talk about the spirits.

K—We were talking about Espiritismo.
D—Yeah I remember. I came from outside and the lady came in all dressed in blue and that’s a Santa.
K—Do you know what Santa?
(Her friend told her that that was Santa Maria)
K—Is that why your house is blue?
D—I love everything in blue.
(We are looking at photos of the bar room.)
K—The Santa came to see you?

Mother:
D—When people die my mother was very special for that. When people die my mother say don’t cry never do that—how can I stay without crying—don’t cry no more
K—The Santa Maria came to see you but did any other saints come to see you?
D—No I don’t think so—since my sister die I haven’t seen nothing yet.
K—Why?
(Her sister made her first wedding dress.)

Gitana:
K—The doll—is this a gitana?
D—It’s a Gypsy.
K—This doll here with the beads—this is a Gypsy??
D—For me she is a Gitana—the way I dress her
K—How did you dress her?
D—You see I get my things I have in my drawer and I put it all around like a Gypsy
K—underneath she is sitting on something.
D—It’s a bench a little one that goes around like that _Nava keta_? That’s what they call it.
D—Maybe I die one of these days with you.
K—Die with me?
D—Maybe one day when you here I close my eyes and goodbye
K—You think?
D—Yeah that’s gonna happen.
K—I don’t think you’re going to die anytime soon
D—I hope I don’t you in a way sometimes I hope that I don’t die that I don’t go because I would like to be up again like I was cleanin the house and make it beautiful.
K—Why do you make beautiful things?
D—Because I love it comes out like that.
(#3, 2 min)

(Her sister loved the church)

D—My father say you just like your mother cleanin and decorating.
K—And your mother was a like a Gypsy.

Gitana Doll:
K—There’s Spanish soap in front. Why do you have the gitana here?
D—It comes like that I just make it here like anything else.
K—Do you have friends who make gitana like you—do you go to a friend’s house and see a gitana in their house?
D—They already die.
K—Karen— she already die? Is that Karen in the photo?
D—No that’s Elba.
K—Who is the gitana?
D—No that’s a gitana I make myself—I buy the doll and make it myself because I know how they dress—they like plenty of things all around (pointing to the beads)
K—Uh huh a lot of jewelry.
(#3 4min.)

K—What is this (photo of the blue vase looks like a sopera)?
D—I painted that with a little brush—I always doin something in the house—the little dolls I was gonna throw them away
K—there is a cloth here. What is that? They are sitting on a cloth (the dolls) Have you ever heard of the word *lbeji*?
D—*lbeji*?
K—No do you know the twins?
D—Oh in Spanish they call it *imowa*?

(Tells a story of her father cutting the hair of twin brothers.)

Porch assemblage:
That is something that I make when it comes to my mind. I had a flag on my hand and I just make it. It needs more red.

K—Why does it have to have red to be a flag?
D—Because a flag is red white and blue

(#3, 7min)

What are the colors of Spain?
D—Red and green
K—Is yellow a color of Spain?

Grandmother painting:
D—That’s a real gitana.
K—And it’s your grandmother as well. You tell me this.
D—Yeah she was gitana.

My father told me about my grandmother and how they cook in Spain—they cook good.

K—Your father came from Spain.
D—Yeah
K—And your mother came from Cuba.
D—Let me tell you what he told me. He was in Spain so he went to Cuba and met my mother and he liked her and got married.

K—Your house has a lot of Spain in it—does your house have a little bit of Cuba in it?
D—No I never think of Cuba. I never went to Cuba, daddy take to Cuba, nope.

(Dolores will be buried on Columbus drive and Lincoln)
D—My mother and father are at Woodlawn (cemetery)

D—My sister was a pretty woman and she liked the school too much and me, No!

K—You said you worked in a cigar factory.
D—I worked in two cigar factories—the first one was at Morgan. It’s close to my house.
(Always wore a rose in the back of her hair (on her ear) “Like in Spain—that makes it real Spain”)

She describes the cigar factories:
I ask if most of the workers were women.
D—Both girls and boys.
K—How long did you work at the cigar factories?
D—Oh all my life—I was 18 when I started.
K—When did you quit working at the cigar factory?
D—Everybody have to quit because of Fidel Castro—an embargo. So my father say you come over to the barbershop and learn how to be a barber. Some beautiful ladies cut hair downtown.

She then took care of her husband who lost his eye in an operation—while he was laid up she went back to the factory. He died after a long time—this was Aristides—Dickie’s father.
(#7, 8:30)

Espiritismo:
K—Did you ever learn anything about espiritismo?
D—My mother was espiritismo
K—Who taught you about it?
D—My mother say Lolita because someone die in the neighborhood and I started crying because I can see the mother of the boy who died I can see her cry so much and my mother say oh when they die you don’t cry—stay quiet like that—pray a little.
K—And she showed you how to put the cup of water?
D—And that cup of water makes the spirit rest in peace—that’s what I heard. I don’t know too much of that I know a little bit—not too much.
K—Was anyone in your family a Santero?
D—my daddy was a little bit Santero yeah.
K—A little bit?
D—You know I can tell that because he used to say on Sunday I pick you up at the house and I bring you to the cemetery with me and take me to the cemetery right in front of my mother and pray he says now pray for your inside—you pray for my mother.
K—But you think he was a little bit of a Santero.
D—Yeah—he likes to read the letters La Carte. He used to read the card on the palm of your hand. My father was smart.
K—Yeah the Tarot card.
D—Uh huh Espagnole—those come from Spain.
K—The tarot card comes from Spain.
D—Gitano
K—hmmm
D—They read the palm of your hand—they used to read the palm of my hand.

K—what do you think about your yard?? I look at your yard and you house and everything that you make. What does it all mean to you?

D—Ohm! I love it I enjoy it and I laugh when I make something pretty like that—oh look how beautiful and I start laughing.
(She would clean her friend’s home when it was really dirty)
K—But your yard seems to have many spirits in it.
Pause
(Talks about Mike Gonzales her half-brother, a *gitano* and Gypsy)
(#12)

Cleaning Fluids Photo:
D—I like to make things beautiful it comes out easy for me. It comes out fast—the bird used to sing a song.

K—Do you clean the house with these fluids?
D—no I say! (She is mumbling about going to see someone about being sick and the importance of keeping the kitchen and the bathroom of the house clean)
D—I like the colors.