

TRANSFORMATIONS:

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE ORISHAS



THE ARTIST

Harmonia Rosales is a Chicago-born, Afro-Cuban American artist. Growing up in Chicago, Harmonia visited the Art Institute of Chicago where she first engaged with Renaissance painting as a child. When she returned as a mother many years later, she was struck by her daughter's observation that the Renaissance figures didn't look like her, and thus she didn't connect with them. That realization began Harmonia's artistic journey.

Her work has been shown in various exhibitions including **Harmonia Rosales: Master Narrative** (2023) at the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art in Memphis, Tennessee and the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art in Atlanta, Georgia, **Garden of Eve** (2022) in Los Angeles, California, **Harmonia Rosales: Entwined** (2022) at the Art, Architecture & Design Museum at the University of California, Santa Barbara, **Miss Education: Reclaiming Our Identity** at the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Art (2020) in Brooklyn, New York, **Femme Touch** at the Andy Warhol Museum (2020) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.





Her work is held by public institutions across the U.S. including the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History, Washington, D.C.; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York; Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island; Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, South Hadley, Massachusetts; AD&A Museum, Santa Barbara, California; the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis, Tennessee; Spelman College Museum of Fine Art, Atlanta, Georgia.

Since the start of her career, Harmonia's main concern has been focused on Black female empowerment in Western culture.

Through the lens of Renaissance and Baroque painting, as well as global mythologies, Harmonia visualizes the stories of West African deities called Orishas and the survival of the Yoruba culture across the Middle Passage. Thus, her message is not to create an ideal or simply to copy, but rather to create a sense of harmony between the struggling dichotomies.

With Black protagonists, her work challenges specific ideals of beauty and power.

Nourished by her multicultural Afro-Cuban background, the Black female subjects in Rosales's paintings are in memory of her ancestors and function as a way to heal and promote self-love. The dark cast of her subjects is specifically meant to separate its viewer from physical reality and transport them to a world that largely transcends the two-dimensional canvas. In this universe, the Orishas represent physical manifestations of life's healing tools. She asks that one sets aside any religious associations and focus on the historical meaning of each painting. These universal elements empower and provoke analysis and communication.

To further express the spiritual world, Rosales places blue and silver hues onto the subject's skin, creating a natural luminescent glow against an often contrasting background. Additionally, the gilding of metals and rust provide a unique balance to her composition, allowing for a variety of textures on the canvas and serving as a motif for moral decay in society.

Rosales draws on the energy of living life as a woman of color and society's objectification of that identity. Yet her subjects embody something within us all as they serve as conduits to an inner struggle within our society, which she depicts through metaphorical crowns and deities. The primary purpose of her art is and will always be to encourage sympathy, empathy, and empowerment.

Pictured: Eve & the Orishas, Harmonia Rosales, 2023, 48 x 60 in, [Courtesy of Harmonia Rosales]





THE WORKS

Since 2017, Harmonia Rosales's paintings of West African deities and Yoruba culture have engaged and empowered audiences. Using the frameworks of Renaissance, Baroque, and Neo-Classical work, Rosales recovers the stories of Yoruba gods and goddesses called Orishas through her work. In doing so, her paintings invoke the deep histories of the African Diaspora, portray Black female empowerment, and challenge audiences to consider new perspectives of beauty, strength, and the Black figure.

Transformations: The Rise and Fall of the Orishas delves into the ancient stories of the Yoruba. This is an epic tale about the origins of the Orishas, whose identities and stories have been masked by Christianity for over 500 years. These works are the artist's way of creating a visual narration for stories that primarily live in one's ancestral memory.

Pictured: Jakuta and the Nupe Princess, Harmonia Rosales, 2024, 60 x 48 in, [Courtesy of Harmonia Rosales]

OLOKUN

Olokun, the primordial god of the ocean, rages.

Angered that Obatalá created the lands without her consent, Olokun sought to reclaim her dominion with a great flood.

To stop the floods, Obatalá chains her to the bottom of the ocean with the help of Ogun, the god of iron.

This marks an important moment in Yoruba mythology as she is imprisoned within her own kingdom.

Like Greek mythology's Titanomachy - the fight for dominion of Earth between Yoruba's old and new gods was also a struggle for change and order.

Olokun stands as a symbol of the chaos that bubbles beneath our calm surface, a profound reminder of the lesser-known parts of ourselves we often retreat from, the parts we bury deep within.

Pictured: Olokun, Harmonia Rosales, 2023, 60 x 72 in, [Courtesy of Harmonia Rosales]



THE ALCHEMIST

Obatalá, the divine artisan of land and human bodies, resides in his sanctuary of creation. His studio echoes the vestiges of his past masterpieces, with the birth of his magnum opus, “Eve”, taking center stage.

Yet, amidst this grandeur, there lies a tragic irony. Scattered around him are the hollow vessels of palm wine, a testament to his struggle with intoxication.

In his hand, he clutches yet another bowl of the intoxicating brew. It is this very vice that eventually leads to his downfall, stripping him of his divine privilege to breathe life into human form.

Pictured: The Alchemist, Harmonia Rosales, 2023, 36 x 36 in, [Courtesy of Harmonia Rosales]





QUEEN MOREMI

Moremi was a Yoruba queen who sacrificed her child to the Esmirian spirit in order to defeat a rival tribe.

As a mother who relinquished her own flesh and blood to protect the children of her entire kingdom, Moremi's selfless act for her people is cemented in Yoruba legend.

Rosales presents Moremi as a mother and a leader. She wears gold, a symbol of her status, and cowrie shells connecting her to the Esmirian river spirit.

Looking towards the light, her expression solemn and knowing, she cradles her child—wrapped in white symbolizing innocence—ready to make the ultimate sacrifice.

Pictured: Queen Moremi, Harmonia Rosales, 2023, 48 x 36 in, [Courtesy of Harmonia Rosales]



LAKANGE AND ODUDUWA'S ESCAPE

Lakange, captured and made a bride of war to Ogun, finds unexpected love with Oduduwa, the legendary founder of Yorubaland.

United by passion, they plot their escape from Ogun and his Iron Kingdom by slipping a sleeping agent into his palm wine. As he drifts into a deep slumber, Oduduwa arrives to whisk her away.

Lakange plays a pivotal role in Yoruba mythology for she is the mother to Oranmiyan, the first emperor of Oyo.

Pictured: Lakange and Oduduwa's Escape, Harmonia Rosales, 2024, 48 x 60 in, [Courtesy of Harmonia Rosales]

THE EXHIBITION

Transformations chronicles the Yoruba mythology, from creation to the death of Eve. In Rosales's iconography, Eve embodies not only the first woman but also the mother of all African peoples forcibly removed from their homeland during the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Yoruba culture and religion dates back 5,000 years to West Nigeria. Through the transportation of Yoruba people in the slave trade, the traditions migrated overseas and their stories (patakís) have been passed down orally through generations over time. This exhibition is Rosales' way of creating a visual narration for stories that primarily live in one's ancestral memory.

Pictured: Yemaya Meets Erinle, Harmonia Rosales, 2019, 48 x 36 in, [Courtesy of Harmonia Rosales]





Rosales's project seeks to reclaim and retell these original stories of the African deities, producing a needed dialogue to harmonize the struggling dichotomies of Eurocentric ideals and the African Diasporic representation in Art and Society. In over 32 paintings, Rosales weaves the patakis into a grand narrative reimagining the origin story of the Orishas through a female gaze. This exhibition is the illustration source for a new novel, also written by Rosales. Similarly structured after Ovid's epic poem *Metamorphoses*, Rosales's manuscript consists of ten books, telling the first linear storyline of Yoruba history - which has historically been maintained through oral tradition.

Rosales's impetus to create ***Transformations*** derives from her realization that a lacuna existed in the teaching of Yoruba culture and knowledge in Western institutions. In both the painting cycle and the book manuscript, *Transformations* presents the concepts of death, rebirth, and physical and spiritual transformations that are foundational to the beliefs of the Yoruba religion. The West African tales, excluded from hegemonic narratives and Western institutions, come together in Rosales's all-encompassing painting cycle and book. *Transformations*, with power struggles and dynamics of Orishas and ancient Yoruba stories, along with their syncretism with Christianity, will educate, inspire, and empower today's audiences and future generations.

Pictured: Oranmiyan's Legacy, Harmonia Rosales, 2024, 60 x 72 in, [Courtesy of Harmonia Rosales]

Chronicles of Ori



Harmonia Rosales

COMING SOON

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. has announced the upcoming publication of *Chronicles of Ori: An African Epic*, a groundbreaking new literary work by acclaimed visual artist Harmonia Rosales. Set for release in October 2025, Rosales's debut is the first of its kind to use African mythology in a narrative linear framework, weaving ancient myths and the author's ancestral knowledge to shape a sweeping epic. Featuring original artwork, *Chronicles of Ori* pairs Rosales's inventive storytelling with her striking paintings to bring these ancient myths to life.



Pictured: Erin Erinle, Harmonia Rosales, 2024, 48 x 60 in, [Courtesy of Harmonia Rosales]

Harmonia

EXHIBITION INFORMATION

CONTENTS

32 to 35 paintings, including a full interpretation

EXHIBITION EXPERIENCE

Backstory Video

Audio with oral histories for each painting

Tableau Vivant - one scene inspired by a painting with live actors (occasional programming)

GALLERY REQUIREMENTS

Museum standard environment & security
Approximately 400 running feet for 2D works

BOOKING PERIOD

12 - 16 weeks (estimated)
Loan Fee Upon Request

AVAILABILITY

Spring 2026 and beyond

ANCILLARY OPTIONS

MERCHANDISE

Chronicles of Ori: An African Epic, a novel to accompany the exhibition, written by Harmonia Rosales and published by Norton Publishing (releasing in 2025)
Clothing, Fashion collaboration to be announced

EXHIBITION PROGRAMMING

Live conversations and panels with Artist and notable scholars
Film screening, documentary about Harmonia's work
Live reading of excerpts from book



Pictured: The Taking of Oya's Freedom, Harmonia Rosales, 2023, 48 x 60 in, [Courtesy of Harmonia Rosales]



CONTACT

For booking inquiries, please contact Dala Projects
at hello@dalaprojects.com

Pictured: Golden Serpent, Harmonia Rosales,
2024, 60 x 72 in, [Courtesy of Harmonia Rosales]