

Exhibition Review: Body of Evidence, National Museum of African Art,  
Washington DC, June 14, 2006-December 2, 2007

by A. M. Weaver

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Ouattara Watts' *Ka Cabala* (1995) is representative of his painting oeuvre of the mid 1990s. Prominent in *Ka Cabala* is the image of a leopard, a symbol of power and prowling which is painted in outline on wooden plaque that includes the words "Ka Cabala/Voodoo." Perhaps Watts intends to convey the synergy between mystical practices inherent in Judaism and West African or Haitian religions. The massive work is covered with a highly textured earthen red paint. White forms hover at the edges of this painting, with a distinctive red and white papal hood placed on its upper corners. A cross is painted in white on the left hood and red on the right. If the reference is to Christianity, do the hoods represent Catholicism or the KKK? His works intuitively and spontaneously paint from the center of his canvases out. Watts's meanings are illusive; he uses loaded signs, symbols, and emblems that provide insight into his psyche. One can ascertain their multiple readings given an understanding of his transatlantic experiences. Watts was born in Abidjan, Cote d' Ivoire, and was influenced by his training within the indigenous Senufo religion. He studied at the Ecole de Beaux Arts in Paris and later took up residence in New York City at the prodding of Jean Michel Basquait. Watts constructs his own unique cosmological system, through which he filters cross-cultural lived experiences and reflections on the juxta position of modernism and traditional practices.

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