

Umbanda Altars and Offerings Found in Niterói, Brazil

July 2009



This offering was found on Tuesday morning at 6:30 in the morning. Although, it could have been placed the evening before, it was probably set up recently because there were large chunks of pork in one of the clay dishes. The object placed across the glass of wine is a cigar. Notice how the white flowers are placed in an equilateral cross (Greek cross). The man in the orange jumpsuit is a garbage collector and street cleaner.



These altars, or offerings, are part of the Umbanda religion that is practiced in Rio de Janeiro. Candomblé, practiced in Bahia, is very similar to Umbanda. However, Candomblé practitioners eat all of the food after it has been offered to the orixá, or spirits.





Notice the wax leg in the picture to the left. Can you see the toes in the upper left corner?

The next picture shows wax keys. In Umbanda and Candomblé worshipers make wax castings of items that have received divine grace. For instance, if someone hurts a leg, or arm, they will pray for healing. Then, when they have been healed they offer a wax image in thanks to the spirits.





These wax images are either offered to the sea or hung up on the ceiling in a room of a church.



The two bowls are made of white ceramic. They have been filled with grains, five eggs, and five shrimp. Originally, the candles were standing up in a circle, but the wind or the waves have knocked them over. As the picture of these two bowls was taken, a dog came by to see what was in the bowls. Although food is left in these offerings at the beach, during a Candomblé ceremony, all of the food is eaten by people.





The green vegetable is okra. Women make their offerings in white ceramic bowls and men in terra cotta bowls. Do you think the bowls themselves act as mandalas?

Notice that one of the Marys has a black face and can probably be classified a “Black Madonna”.



Notice how the cups have been arranged in a pattern and in a mandala shape. The second picture is a close-up of all the sweets in the center. Can you see why some environmentalists are concerned to think of the plastic ending up in the ocean. What are some ways this practice of making offerings can be environmentally friendly?



The items in the clay bowl are corn and sugar cane. The grains on the ground are a mixture of beans and corn.





Cloves and Brazilian coins have been inserted into these potatoes to create a beautiful pattern. Other items include a cigar resting on the rim of the bowl and a red candle. Can you see how the bowl itself acts as a mandala?

