

# Belkis Ayón

**Welcome!**  
This guide has been created for you to read as you walk through the exhibition. There are lots of different things to notice in the gallery.

**Activity Sheet**

Belkis Ayón, San Tula (Santana con el río) [United States with Central], 1993. © Belkis Ayón Estate. Courtesy of the Belkis Ayón Estate and David Castillo. Photo: José Figueras

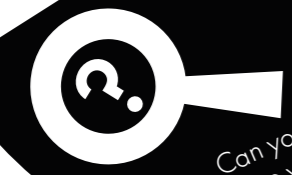
## Getting Creative at MAO

In the gallery there are lots of opportunities for you to get creative.

We have a gallery on our ground floor for you to explore.

? What is on display in there?  
? How do the artworks make you feel?  
? How could you describe what you see in the galleries without using words?

? Can you find the snake-like creature in our Studio? Use the materials provided on the table to create your own collograph to add to its back.



Can you find our Studio? Here you will also find lots of exciting activities that you can do to explore the exhibitions.

## About the Show

Belkis was very interested in myths and telling stories. She used her printmaking to explore different stories, and to think about what they might look like.

Belkis didn't know everything about the Abakuá society. She did lots of research and then made up her own images to illustrate it. Is there something that you are interested in, but don't know much about? Belkis' work shows us that it's okay to not know everything, and use our imagination to create our own stories and pictures. You can draw things that you don't know!



Belkis Ayón, Makumba, 1991. © Belkis Ayón Estate. Courtesy of the Belkis Ayón Estate and David Castillo. Photo: José Figueras



Belkis Ayón, Nihilos (Whispering), 1991. © Belkis Ayón Estate. Courtesy of the Belkis Ayón Estate and David Castillo. Photo: José Figueras

The only person she allowed to help with her process was her mum, who was allowed to cut out the paper to stick to the plates.



Belkis Ayón in the printmaking studio at the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA) in Havana, c. 1998. Unknown Photographer. Courtesy: Belkis Ayón Estate.

? **Did you know?**  
Belkis cut out each scale one by one to create her collaged plates.

Often printers would create the printing plate themselves and work with an impressor to create the print, but Belkis did the whole printing process herself. An impressor is the person who puts the plate into a printing press to make the print. A printing press is typically two heavy rollers which you turn with a big wheel. It allows you to apply enough pressure to transfer the ink from your printing plate onto your paper. You can see Belkis using her printing press in this photo.

? In the exhibition you can see lots of her prints, but can you find the plates she used to print them with? They are artworks in their own right!



Belkis Ayón, Sikán, 1992. Courtesy of the Belkis Ayón Estate and David Castillo. Photo: José Figueras

One of her biggest inspirations was the Abakuá, a secret society in Cuba. Belkis said "in the society, they use a series of signatures and graphic symbols, which are very interesting and also stood out to me".

In Abakuá there is a story about Sikán, a woman who accidentally found a special fish in the water. This fish gave whoever found it great power and the 'sacred voice'. The Abakuá society wanted the fish and its power to themselves. They sent snakes to Sikán to scare her into dropping the fish so they could have its sacred voice.



Can you find the fish scales and snakes in Belkis' prints? Look out for Sikán too, she is usually the white figure.

Use your imagination to draw your ideas in the space below.

# About Belkis

Belkis Ayón was an artist from Havana, the capital city of Cuba, an island in the Caribbean. Belkis was well known in her country during her lifetime, and showed her work internationally too, but this is the first time her works have all been exhibited together in the UK!



Belkis Ayón. La sinfonia [The Judgement] 1993. Courtesy the Belkis Ayón Estate. Courtesy of the Belkis Ayón Estate and David Castillo. Photo: Isak Figueras

Belkis worked with everyday materials to create prints called collographs. They were made by glueing different textured materials to a cardboard 'plate' to make a collage. She then applied ink and printed the layered image onto paper.

There was a short supply of art materials in Cuba so Belkis used what she could get her hands on, including paper, sand paper, cardboard, packaging materials and glue.



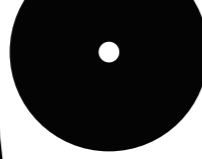
Belkis Ayón. Sin título (Figura negra que carga figura blanca) [Untitled (Black figure carrying a white one)], 1996. © Belkis Ayón Estate. Courtesy of the Belkis Ayón Estate and David Castillo.



Belkis' large works were made by carefully lining up multiple plates and prints, as large scale printing wasn't possible, and large paper was expensive. It's very hard to do this as well as Belkis did - the ink can come out lighter or darker in each print, or the paper could move.

**Can you find the joins in her prints?**

Usually you can make lots of prints from one plate, but Belkis used cardboard and paper for her plates rather than wood. This means they could only be printed about 3 times each.



You can create your own collograph using this activity sheet. Turn the page to find out how!

On the next page create a collage using different textured materials. Once you are happy with your collage, turn back to the last page and use a crayon or pencil to create a rubbing of the image.

## What about:



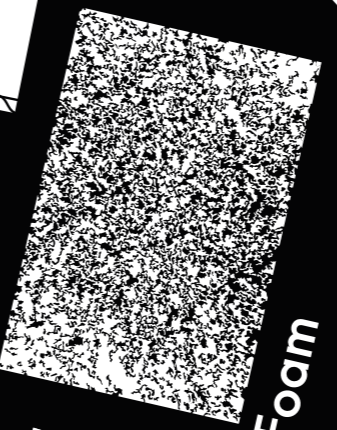
**Paper** (use scissors for a sharp edge, or rip it for a wobbly edge!)



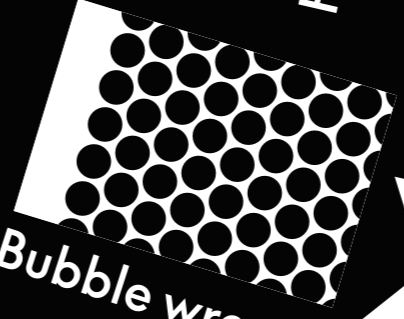
**Cardboard** (try using the bumpy inside too!)



**String**



**Foam**



**Bubble wrap**



**Leaves**



**Twigs**



Anything else you can think of that has an interesting texture!

**2. Create your rubbing here!**

**1. Create here!**