



## Changó Wallpaper series: a fort fying design

BY CINO COLINA (Granma International staff writer) / PHOTOS: JORGE VALIENTE

**SPEAKING IN** Havana, U.S. painter Ben Jones, a professor at the New Jersey City State College, said he was sure that the U.S. government has him blacklisted, but since he considers it a legal cultural exchange visit, he came anyway.

With several one-man and group exhibitions already to his credit in France, Japan, Nigeria and the main U.S. galleries, in addition to works on display in various museums, Jones gave his first one-man exhibition entitled *Changó Wallpaper Series* in Santiago and Havana. This was his eleventh visit to Cuba, and he had previously participated in the 1991 Biennial, at the Wilfredo Lam Center.

In an attempt to create a rhythmic pattern using Yoruba religious symbols, featuring arrows to represent the forces of change in the world and other attributes, Jones manages to convey a feeling of humanity, solidarity and peace with this series.

He recalls that in 1966, during an African dance course, he became acquainted with Yoruba culture and devoted himself to its study. Africa is always present in the very basis of his art, and he adds that it also contains a synthesis of Africa, Afro-America and Afro-Cuba.

In this series now on display after a year of preparation, his point of departure is the god Changó from the Orisha pantheon, chosen for his strength. Changó is a metaphor to show the world what can be done for love, peace and goodness. We all need strength for health, work, sex, friendship and hope, Jones says.

Starting with floral and geometrical patterns for wallpaper, he now proposes a design which will fortify the viewer and liberate positive energies. First he applies intense colors, then he covers the whole work with a thick layer of black paint onto which he scratches the symbols — the double-headed axe and the thunderbolts, which belong to Changó, Yin and Yang, the Egyptian ankh, arrows — which gives texture to the base.



Cuba for the first time in 1977 and fell in love with the country. Since then he has visited other nations, but he feels so tied to the island and its people that he always returns. Whether it is because of his eagerness to ac-

quire knowledge, or his personal charm, he certainly finds it increasingly difficult to get together with all of his friends during a visit, as his large datebook is filled with addresses and phone numbers.

He feels that President Bush does not allow U.S. citizens to come to Cuba for fear they may have a similar positive experience, getting to know such open people. He maintains that reactionaries do not want this kind of contact.

Cuban culture is very strong, and he does not believe that European culture predominates — rather, that there is a balance with the African base. He also points out that in Cuba there is a fascination for copying what is best in the United States; this can be seen, for example, in the young Cuban rap groups. If the best of Cuban culture could freely reach the United States — ballet, folklore, music — then these contacts would make many U.S. citizens realize they have been deprived of something important.