



Manny Vega, *Bombo Celestial*, Colored glass on plaster, 2009–2010, Collection of Bobbito García a.k.a. Kool Bob Love, courtesy of Manny Vega

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK PRESENTS
BYZANTINE BEMBÉ: NEW YORK BY MANNY VEGA
A Vibrant Solo Exhibition Showcasing the Bronx-Born Artist's Celebratory Work
Opens December 8, 2023
Press Preview: December 5, 10AM-12PM

Byzantine (adj): intricately involved; labyrinthine
Bembé (noun): a religious ceremony involving drums; a big party

NEW YORK, NY (November 2023) – The **Museum of the City of New York**, NYC's storyteller for the last century, today shared details about its new exhibition, ***Byzantine Bembé: New York by Manny Vega*** -- the latest in the Museum's centennial celebration. This extraordinary show highlights the captivating and colorful artistry of Bronx native **Manny Vega**, whose mosaics and murals grace the streets, subway stations, cultural hubs, and business facades across East Harlem / El Barrio. Featuring object labels in both Spanish and English, it offers a mesmerizing journey through Vega's distinctive visual narratives as they highlight community tales with themes ranging from African deities to urban mythologies, bridging personal and collective experiences. **Opening December 8th**, *Byzantine Bembé* marks the artist's first solo museum show.

Manny Vega, a masterful visual storyteller, skillfully blends the richness of diverse homelands in his works, whether mosaics, watercolors, or drawings. These works delve deep into the heart of New York's urban diasporas, exploring the depths of the human spirit and consciousness. His creative journey spans his ancestral homeland of Puerto Rico, his spiritual connection to Brazil, and his enduring bond with El Barrio (East Harlem), the Museum's very own neighborhood, where his public artworks adorn numerous spaces. Rooted in a unique understanding of the diaspora experience, Vega's worldview is a vivid, rhythmic, passionately spiritual, and yet accessible journey.

In Vega's own words, "My art is a finely honed visual language crafted over years of creative exploration and a personal odyssey through the diverse tapestry of New York City. The lives of my neighbors and the vibrant city itself are an ever-evolving theater, depicting our shared joys, sorrows, challenges, and universal truths. This awe-inspiring reality fuels my artistic endeavors, expressed through drawings, paintings, murals, and mosaics, creating my own modern-day Renaissance."

Byzantine Bembé is organized into three interwoven sections: **Música** (Music), **Figuras** (Figures), and **Justicia** (Justice). These sections delve into the art forms driven by movement and music within Vega's communities, offering vivid representations of the human figure and portraying Afro-centric spiritual practices that have historically grounded Black diasporas in the Americas. Each work, complemented by photographs and images of Vega in action by his esteemed art colleagues and contemporaries, paints a vivid picture of Vega's vision, his dedication to his community, and the pure joy and celebration of life and art. The show also includes a map pinpointing the locations of some of Vega's most significant works in the streets of El Barrio, just a stone's throw away from the Museum. Additionally, visitors can enjoy an interactive display, allowing them to manipulate colored tiles with a magnetic stylus to create their very own mosaic.

Stephanie Wilchfort, Ronay Menschel Director and President of the Museum of the City of New York, shares her excitement, "So many of us have encountered Manny's art on the streets and spaces of East Harlem. It's a true delight to bring his colorful and joyous creations inside the Museum. We welcome visitors from near and far to celebrate his talent and the infectious energy that infuses both his work and our El Barrio community."

"*Byzantine Bembé* highlights Vega's master craftsmanship and storytelling prowess," says **Monxo López**, Curator of Community Histories at the Museum who organized the exhibition. "It also underscores MCNY's unwavering commitment to its thriving neighborhood while charting the course for the next century."

Support

Byzantine Bembé: New York by Manny Vega is made possible in part by the Mellon Foundation, Basha Rubin and Scott Grinsell, and Kathleen Benson Haskins. Additional support provided by a collective of generous individuals in celebration of Manny Vega's work.

About Manny Vega

Manny Vega is a painter, illustrator, printmaker, muralist, mosaicist, and set and costume designer. His work portrays the history and traditions of the African Diaspora that exist in the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Vega was born in Bronx, New York, in 1956 and attended the High School of Art and Design. He joined the artist collective Taller Boricua in 1979 where he studied through 1986. While there he was also a pupil of Harlem printmaker Robert Blackburn at his Printmaking Workshop from 1980-1990. For many years, Vega has been teaching visual arts for organizations such as El Museo del Barrio, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the American Museum of Natural History, and the Caribbean Cultural Center. He has exhibited extensively in the United States, Puerto Rico, and Brazil. Vega has been involved in the restoration of several murals in the city, and often involves local youngsters in the work. His other projects have included on-site artist documenting Paul Simon's musical *The Capeman* and a custom-painted set of timbales for the late, great Tito Puente.

About The Museum of the City of New York

Celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2023, the Museum of the City of New York fosters understanding of the distinctive nature of urban life in the world's most influential metropolis. Winner of "Best Museum" in *Time Out New York's* "Best of the City 2021" and multiple American Alliance of Museums (AAM) awards, MCNY engages visitors by celebrating, documenting, and interpreting the city's past, present, and future. To connect with the Museum's award-winning digital content, visit www.mcny.org, or follow us on Instagram and Twitter at @MuseumofCityNY and on Facebook at [Facebook.com/MuseumofCityNY](https://www.facebook.com/MuseumofCityNY).

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