



Ministry of  
Culture, Gender,  
Entertainment  
and Sport



unesco

Jamaica  
National Commission

An Agency of the Ministry of Culture, Gender,  
Entertainment and Sport

# *Journeying Revival Iconography*

An Exhibition at The African Caribbean Institute of  
Jamaica/Jamaica Memory Bank (ACIJ/JMB)

A division of the Institute of Jamaica,  
(An Agency of the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport)

**December 15 , 2023 - March 31, 2024**



The African Caribbean Institute of Jamaica/Jamaica Memory Bank is a division of the Institute of Jamaica  
12 Ocean Boulevard, Kingston Mall info@acij-joj.org.jm (876) 922-4793 / 7415

## Acknowledgements

The African Caribbean Institute of Jamaica/ Jamaica Memory Bank acknowledges the support and sponsorship of individuals, groups and organisations that have made this exhibition possible. We recognise the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport for granting the Division permission to feature the Revival documentary in this exhibition. We also acknowledge the generous sponsorship of the Jamaica National Commission for UNESCO with special mention of Dr. Maria A. Robinson Smith for donating the poster boards for inclusion in the exhibition and for granting the ACIJ/JMB Library three copies of her book, *Revivalism: Representing an Afro-Jamaican Identity*, which further edifies visitors on the subject of Revivalism.

We are also indebted to Archbishop Raleigh Christie and Bishop Davion Gordon for donating their ritual gowns for this educational display. Additionally, we recognize Pastor Travis Drummond for his generous loan of a Revival drum and a Sybil Jack. We say thanks to the Institute of Jamaica and especially National Museum Jamaica for lending us significant artefacts and the National Gallery of Jamaica and Liberty Hall: The Legacy of Marcus Garvey for their support which allowed for the successful opening of this exhibition.

We are especially thankful to Professor Clinton Hutton for his contribution of six captivating photographs showcasing the vibrant world of Revivalists and their spiritual activities; enriching the visual narrative of the exhibition.

Finally, special thanks to the ACIJ/JMB team for their technical and administrative support in successfully mounting *Journeying Revival Iconography*.

## The Editors



**Kirt O. Henry, Ph.D.** is the Director of The African Caribbean Institute of Jamaica/Jamaica Memory Bank and lead curator of the exhibition. He is also a scholar-practitioner of Revivalism whose academic interests explore the intersection between dress, identity, spirituality, gender, and performance within the African Diaspora. Dr.

Henry participated as an author in the British Academy's Writing Programme and served as a curatorial fellow in the Afro-Caribbean Art programme in New York City. He is currently working on his book manuscript titled, *Sacred Representations of Self: Gender, Identity and Performance in Revivalism*. Through his research and presentations, Dr. Henry continues to make an impact by sharing aspects of Jamaica's tangible and intangible cultural heritage with the world.



**Georgette McClashen-Miller** is the Research Fellow at The African Caribbean Institute of Jamaica/Jamaica Memory Bank, and holds a Bachelor's degree in Entertainment and Cultural Enterprise Management and a Master's in Cultural Studies, making her a

central figure in the Revival exhibition. Her academic focus on the resilience of dancehall culture during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly through the analysis of Vybz Kartel's song "Dancehall," showcases her scholarly depth and understanding of the intricate connections between culture and societal challenges. Currently, her research as a fellow delves into the role of children in the Jamaican music

## Preface

The study of iconography is a profound way of understanding, interpreting, and making sense of the material and non-material world of Revivalists. *Journeying Revival Iconography* allows the reader to travel the spirit world of Revivalists through assemblages carefully curated to evoke dialogue around themes such as ritual, identity, healing, power, meaning-making, resistance, and bodily performance. The exhibition introduces just a fraction of the symbolic world of Revivalists to readers and in the same breath provides an opportunity to clarify and challenge pervading colonial narratives concerning the symbolic representation of this heterogeneous expression.

Revivalism is a folk religion that emerged in Jamaica during the early 1860s in response to the Great Revival which started in North America. Importantly, Revivalism emerged in response to British colonialism and religious oppression which resulted in the blatant retention of African spirituality conflated with Christianity and other forms of Chinese and East Indian spiritual traditions. Evidence of this is embedded within the complex ritual performances and interpretation of signs, symbols and images found in sacred spaces of Revival across Jamaica and its diaspora.

The Revival religion is primarily oral in its dissemination of knowledge and therefore, the philosophical questions of what we know and how we know what it is we know are presented through the seals, photographs, items of dress, Tables, musical instruments, sounds, colours, and herbs/plants/spices found in this exhibition.

*Journeying Revival Iconography* can be best understood as a tool to interpret and communicate Revivalism as an African-Jamaican spirituality, through the lens of both a researcher and a practitioner. The aim as curator is to exhibit the visual images and symbols of Revivalism, and attempt to define, and to offer interpretations of them, so that a better understanding of the practice will be gained by the observer.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	1
The Editors	2
Preface	3
Incantation: Journeyman Song	5
Introduction	6 - 8
Revival Iconography: Seeing the Exhibition	9
Symbols in Revivalism	
a. Revival seal	10 - 11
b. The table	11 - 12
c. Ritual Gowns	12 - 14
d. Peak Turban	15
e. Banners & Flags	15
f. Ritual Broom	16
g. Water	16 - 17
h. Spiritual Writings	18
i. Rope Drum	18
Posters	19 - 20
Photographs	21
References	22

## Incantation: Journeyman Song

Journeyman come journey along with me (x2)  
I want to go to heaven, and I have no time to tarry  
Journeyman come journey along with me.



## Introduction

The emergence of Revivalism is said to have been influenced by the Great Revival that swept across Jamaica in the early 1860s. However, Scholars such as Martha Beckwith and Orlando Patterson (1969) have made the claim that an African-Jamaican spirituality was being observed long before the Great Revival. Beckwith stated for instance that, “The Revivalists are said to date from the Great Revival of 1860, under the influence of the religious enthusiasm of that period, but they appear in reality a great deal earlier...” (Beckwith 158). Revivalism therefore has its roots in the traditional practices of Myal worship (recorded as early as 1841) which emphasised healing and “getting in the Spirit” as fundamental. Although the cultural and spiritual heritage of Myalism was deeply West African in practice, Myalism was not completely devoid of Christian influences. Elements of Christianity such as the belief in the trinitarian manifestation of God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit; preaching, singing Christian hymns, Christian phraseology, and prophesying God (Curtin 170) became absorbed into Myalism.

During the Great Revival of the early 1860s, Revivalists found common ground with Christianity in the belief of one supreme being, the Holy Spirit, angels, and fallen angels, and especially the Christian bible, that recalls, records, and reaffirms African experiences (Robinson-Smith 1). Polytheism, however, remained a key feature and Myal still offered a space for West African religious retentions which were later integrated into the Native Baptist sects. Later influences from practices such Kumina, Chinese and East Indian spirituality have found their way into the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of Revival ritual practices across the island. The complexity therefore of such

confluence is to be observed in the varying rituals and ceremonies practised by Revival bands across Jamaica.

Many Christian churches, however, did not take a liking to this syncretic practice of incorporating Christianity as part of the spiritual tapestry and as such the movement was labelled as demonic, uncivilised and a cult which contributes to mental instability. This resulted in pejorative terms such as 'Pocomania' taking root among the Jamaican population in defining Revivalism. 'Pocomania', or the shortened expression 'Poco', was widely used by scholars and some Jamaicans to identify practices of Revivalism. The definition of the term Pocomania is political and controversial. Former Prime Minister of Jamaica and cultural analyst Edward Seaga deconstructed the term to its native meaning which equated to the Spanish translation - "Poco (a little) mania (madness)". The association of 'madness' with Revivalism has resulted in the recommendation of Dr. J.W.N. Hudson to parliament, calling for the prohibition of Revival practices in the island. At the Jamaica Constabulary Headquarters in Kingston, the inspector for Westmoreland reported in the minutes addressed to the Colonial Secretary on July 9, 1930, calling for the banning of Revival practices based on the belief that Revival was contributing to mental insanity among the population. Despite colonial efforts to eradicate Revivalism, the movement has remained an important and significant part of the island's religious landscape. In fact, Revivalism is national in scope and character with a record of over 36, 000 Jamaicans identifying as part of the religion, according to the *Population and Housing Census, 2011*.

Revival Iconography invites participants to *Journey* beyond colonial prejudice and explore in an intentional and serious way the knowledge-based system of the folk religion. In iconography,



participants are able to learn, understand and appreciate the relationship between the material and non-material worlds of Revivalists. This exhibition seeks not only to display visual artefacts but to unravel the profound cultural and religious dynamics inherent in Revivalism and its contribution to the development of Jamaica's religious identity. Journey with us as we seek to decode the Revival Iconography, inviting you to challenge preconceived notions and immerse yourself into the rich narrative woven into each assemblage.

## Revival Iconography: Seeing the Exhibition

The Revival religion is replete with symbolisms conveyed and interpreted through modes of movement, sound, images, and even scents deployed in the performance of rituals. Therefore, an exploration of Revival iconography provides insights into the complex meanings and interpretations of the spirit world within Revivalism. The Revival iconography forms a critical part of the knowledge-based system of the adherents which allows them to make sense of their shared identity and practices. Scholars do agree that sacred knowledge in Revival is primarily transmitted orally, iconography thus becomes the main avenue used to communicate with each other where movement, visual images and sounds are simultaneously channels of communication and interpretation, between the natural and the spiritual realm.

Revival Iconography invites participants to *Journey* beyond colonial prejudice and explore in an intentional and serious way the knowledge-based system of the folk religion. Using iconography as a tool for teaching and learning, participants are able to learn, understand and appreciate the relationship between the material and non-material worlds of Revivalists. This exhibition seeks not only to display visual artifacts but to unravel the profound cultural and religious dynamics inherent in Revivalism and its contribution to the development of Jamaica's religious identity. Journey with us as we seek to decode Revival Iconography, inviting you to challenge preconceived notions and immerse yourself into the rich narrative woven into each assemblage.

## Revival Seal

There many different types of seal used in Revivalism. The seal serves as a consecrated liminal space/place, where practitioners



*Figure 1: Healing Seal*

engage in acts of purification, spiritual invocation, and the clearing of malevolent spirits, often referred to as, "to cut and clear". Seals are sometimes referred to as sacred portals composed with spirit-imbued emblems. These emblems are diverse and can be represented by natural and manufactured ritual objects "abounding with movement (aliveness) from the interplay of shapes, colours, light, shade, and texture," according to Clinton Hutton (qtd. in Williams).

The *water seal* showcased in this exhibition serves as a profound symbol within Revivalism, embodying the central theme of healing. At the center of this arrangement is the basin of water, acting as a spiritual conduit for communication between the Revivalist and the spirit realm. It represents a sacred medium through which the spirits impart their message, guidance, and blessings. Adjacent to the basin, the sybil jack asserts its presence as a potent emblem of authority, traditionally wielded by leaders of the movement.

Intertwined with the theme of authority is the tape measure, a tool carried by leaders that extends beyond its practical use in maintaining order among band members. In the context of Revivalism, it assumes multiple roles, serving as a tangible instrument for maintaining order and simultaneously functioning as a numerical gauge of members' spiritual accuracy. Additionally, it is used to bring balance between the spiritual and natural world when tied around the waist of the wearer. It ensures that the wearer is balanced as they journey the spirit world.

Adding another layer to the healing table is the olive oil and coconut, each laden with its own significance. The olive oil symbolizes healing, employed as a sacred agent within Revivalist rituals. The coconut, with its pure water and three eyes representing the all-seeing eyes of the trinity, holds cleansing properties. When broken, it is believed to possess the power to dispel evil spirits from its surroundings, encapsulating the dual themes of protection and purification. Placing these symbols strategically at the four corners of the table extends the narrative beyond the individual elements, symbolizing a connection to the four corners of the world within the Revival cosmology.

## ***The Table***

The Revival Table is an amalgamation of offerings to Spirits, be it heavenly, ancestral, or ground. Revival Tables are traditionally assembled using a combination of fruits, cakes, alcoholic and carbonated beverages, ritually prepared foods, flowers/roses, candies, breads of various shapes and sizes as a means of



*Figure 2: Revival Table*

celebration to mark important life events. Tables are purpose driven and Tables are set with a particular theme or intention in mind. It is an artistically arranged exhibit of traditional Jamaican dishes. These dishes are sometimes ritually prepared, often without the use of salt. In some cases, especially for ancestral Tables, the dishes prepared are thought to be the favourite of the ancestors. The act of offering food to the ancestral spirit holds deep significance and serves as a pervasive and central practice within African religious life, shaping the understanding of one's existential reality and self-identity. This

act of communion with the ancestors, shows the continued connection and communication between the living and the dead, which in Revivalism is seen as a necessary part of life.

In this exhibition, a Healing Table is set with the following: Herbs and spices: pimento seeds, cinnamon leaves; candles; mortar; olive oil; water; red label wine; incense; carbonated beverages; and grains.

Other items on the table may include alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, raw food, fruits and nuts, spices, spiritual and medicinal plants, candles, flowers, and ritualized objects.

## **Ritual Gowns**

### *All-Nation Gown*

Colourful modes of dress worn by devotees give the folk religion its definition and character. There are variotes dress ensembles worn by Revivalists such as traditional uniforms and ecclesiastical attire, however, the Ritual Gown is distinctly featured in this exhibition. Kirt Henry in his dissertation mentioned that:



*Figure 3: All-Nation Gown*

"Revival Gowns... were worn at Tables to symbolise authority and royalty. In an interview, Bishop Gordon reinforced that, 'a gown represents a nation or a city. Once you get a gown you are recognised in the field as a King, Prince, Queen or Princess'.

Revival gowns were not gender specific and were given by the Spirit to be worn for ritualistic purposes such as healing, praying,

consecrating, chanting, drilling, blessing of babies and wheeling. Gowns were also worn for the protection of the wearer in the spirit realm. Gowns were mainly worn by the Thanksgiver at Revival Tables and were used to represent the various nations of Revival. Gowns varied in symbolism, arrangement, and style. The predominant features were typically a full ankle length skirt covering a circumference of up to four feet during wheeling rituals; a waistband or rope girding the loins of the wearer; a close fitted jacket with long sleeves and a cape covering the shoulders. All the Gowns observed were worn with a turban or a crown. This form of Revival gown resembled robes with capes worn by bishops of the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches and by leaders of the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church in Jamaica. The colours, ornaments and other decorations of the gowns were specific to the personal Spirit of the wearer" (267).

The two types of Ritual Gowns featured in this exhibition are: The All-Nation Gown and the African Nation Gown. The All-Nation Gown in figure 3 is owned by Bishop Davion Gordon, leader of the Little Africa Star Bethany Church of God, located in Spanish Town, St. Catherine. Bishop Gordon's ritual identity is a Hindu Prince.

The one who wears this attire has the ability to "entertain" the ancestors of all the nations of Revival which are the Chinese, Indian, African and Bongo nations. The Bongo nation is least performed in Revival because of its origin in Kumina. The All-Nation Gown is usually constructed using a multiplicity of colours or the red madras plaid fabric.

## African Gown

This African gown was worn by Archbishop Raleigh Christie in St. Thomas, leader of the Diocese of Effectual House of Praise International Ministries. In special performances, Archbishop Christie assumes the ritual identity of King of the African nation. In Revival there are two (2) types of African: the Bush African and the Palace African. The Palace African regalia is more elaborate or "fancy", while the Bush African is less decorated and is usually found wearing earth tone colours.



*Figure 4: African Gown*

Revival ritual gowns are oftentimes constructed with an extended skirting to facilitate wheeling rituals. It is believed that wheeling is a symbolic

act of "journeying through the spirit realm. The excess fabric used to construct the skirting gives the garment its heavy weight. It is believed that the weight of the gown is to anchor the wearer as he or she wheels in the spirit. During the act of wheeling, the circumference of the skirting is extended and this symbolises the cutting and clearing of the space of any malevolent spirits or bad omen.

The African gown is a loan from Archbishop Raleigh Christie, from Effectual House of Praise International Ministries Knightsville District, Yallas, St. Thomas, Jamaica. The All-Nations gown is a loan from Bishop Davian Gordon Little Africa Star Bethany Church of God Spanish Town, Winters Pen. St. Catherine, Jamaica.

## **The Peak Turban**

The Peak Turban, sometimes referred to as “Zion Turban” is worn by male and female Revivalists to signify leadership and authority. The purpose of the peak serves as an antenna, as the leaders ought to be "hearing from heaven". The pleats of the turban are said to hold spiritual orders or numbers. So, the amount of the pleats represents the keys or the height at which you are in the spiritual realm. The peak turban is mostly worn by “60 Revivalists”; those who entertain heavenly or the angelic realms. The blue and white colour of the turban represents peace, love, tranquillity, and healing’ (Henry, 210). It also represents the water and in some cases it is a representation of the ocean.



*Figure 5: Peak Turban*

The combination blue and white also represents the messenger or water deity, “Riva Muma”.

## **Banners or Flags**

Banners and flags are prevalent in Revival spaces. These emblems are usually mounted on a pole or a high wall to signify the presence of a Revival space, a spiritual/balm yard.. Like the peak turban the flags are placed atop poles that function as antennas to the spiritual realm. Spaces that mount banners or flags are expected to function in the spiritual realm through readings and healing of visitors to the spaces.



*Figure 6: Banner/Flag*



## **Ritual Broom**

This is used similarly to the wheeling gown, to cut and clear malevolent spirits and omens. However, the broom is used to sweep out malevolent spirits and omens.



Figure 7: Ritual Broom

## **Water**

*Basin with silver coins in water*



*Figure 8: Basin with water and coins*

The basins contain water which in many cases is used in rituals of healing but it is also used to represent the river, the home of Riva Mumma. Riva Mumma is translated to River Mother. Henry (2022) stated that:

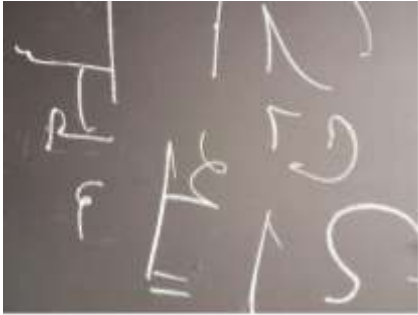
In other religious ceremonies and festivals in Santería (Cuba), Candomblé (Brazil), religion (Trinidad) and Vodoun (Haiti), Riva Mumma was referred to as Ochun, Osun or Mami Wata - the goddess of rivers, lakes, love, beauty, sex, fertility, femininity, desire, modernity, wealth, among other things (qtd. in Drewal 160; Kuyebi 139-142; Rush 12-13). Although her names vary, elements used to assemble her identity in performance rituals were identifiable across geographies (272).

In this exhibition, the coins in an enamel basin of water symbolises the presence of Riva Mumma within African-derived

spaces such as Revival. In Revivalism, the symbol of the white enamel basin filled with water is prevalent. This water holds a profound meaning, representing a rebirth, not just in Christian doctrine but also signifying a deeper reconnection with Africa, the place of ancestral origins. It embodies a transformative rebirth, as well as spiritual cleansing, and a journey of rediscovery that transcends conventional religious boundaries, reinforcing the enduring connection to one's African heritage.

## ***Spirit Writings***

Spirit writings are considered a form of divine communication or



*Figure 9: Example of Spiritual writings*

revelation from the spiritual realm. This is done with the use of chalk to inscribe symbolic markings on the ground. These markings are oftentimes unintelligible to the one who does not have the spirit to interpret. In other cases, a pencil is also used to make writings of the spirit in a notebook as record

keeping. These ritual writings are often produced by a devotee as he or she passes through the spirit world and are given messages by either an ancestor, angel, or other divine entities.

## ***The Rope Drum***

Drums in the Caribbean exhibit variations from their African counterparts, influenced by the unique materials available to the



*Figure 10: Rope Drum*

African descendants in the region. The primary objective was to craft instruments capable of producing specific beats for communicative purposes, bridging connections between the human and spirit worlds. Despite the variations, these drums retained their essential role as powerful

conduits for cultural expression, spiritual communication, and rhythmic storytelling, becoming integral components of Caribbean musical traditions shaped by the experiences of the African diaspora.

## Posters

All the posters in the Journeying Revival Iconography are donated by the Jamaica National Commission for UNESCO (JNC-UNESCO) through Dr. Maria A. Robinson-Smith. The posters cover the themes of Dress & Accessories; Rituals in Revivalism; Music & Dance; Symbols; and A Pilgrimage to Watt Town, St. Ann.



Together, the posters complement the artifacts within the exhibition, offering essential context and foundational

information about Revivalism. The artifacts, imbued with cultural and spiritual significance, come to life as they are enriched by the collective narrative provided, creating a comprehensive and immersive experience for visitors, allowing them to grasp the depth and significance of Revivalism within the broader cultural and historical context.

# Photographs



## References

Seaga, Edward. 1969. "Revival cults in Jamaica: notes towards a sociology of religion". *Jamaica Journal* 3, no. 2:3-13.

Robinson-Smith, Maria. 2018. *Revivalism: Representing an Afro-Jamaican Identity*. University of the West Indies Press. Kingston.

Williams, Paul H. 2015. "In the Spirit of Revivalism – Part III." *Jamaica Gleaner*, June 25, 2015.  
<https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/news/20150627/spirit-revivalism-part-iii#slideshow-3>.

Henry, Kirt. 2022. *Spiritual Assemblages: Revival, Dress, Ritual and Power*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of the West Indies, Mona.

Hudson, J.W.N. "Revivalism Legislation." 9 July 1930. *The National Archives of Jamaica*, C.S.O no. 3243/107.

Beckwith, Martha W. *Black Roadways: A Study of Jamaican Folk Life*. Negro Universities Press, 1969.

Patterson, Orlando. *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development, and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica*. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1969.

Seaga, Edward. "Revival Cults in Jamaica: Notes Towards a Sociology of Religion." *A Reader in African-Jamaican Music, Dance and Religion*, edited by Markus Coester and Wolfgang Bender, 2015, pp. 362-379.

"Population by Sex and Religious Affiliation/Denomination by Parish" and "Population by Sex and Ethnic Origin by Parish". *Population and Housing Census 2011, Jamaica, General Report, Volume I*, The Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 2012,  
<https://statinja.gov.jm/Census/PopCensus/Popcensus2011Index.aspx>.

June 21, 2021.



## About The African Caribbean Institute of Jamaica/ Jamaica Memory Bank

The African Caribbean Institute of Jamaica/ Jamaica Memory Bank (ACIJ/JMB) is mandated to “research, document, and disseminate information on African heritage and its impact on Jamaican culture”. The division highlights African cultural retentions and its relationship to other ethnic groups in Jamaica through exhibitions, public lectures, outreach activities, workshops, and seminars. Additionally, The ACIJ/JMB is regarded as the storehouse and focal point for the identification, collection, documentation, and preservation of Jamaica’s rich intangible cultural heritage (ICH). The ACIJ/JMB in playing its role in documenting and protecting the nation’s ICH and supporting the 2003 The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage has developed an extensive inventory of ICH in Jamaica.

Connect @acijmb



12 Ocean Boulevard, Kingston Mall

info@acij-ioj.org.jm

(876) 922-4793 / 7415