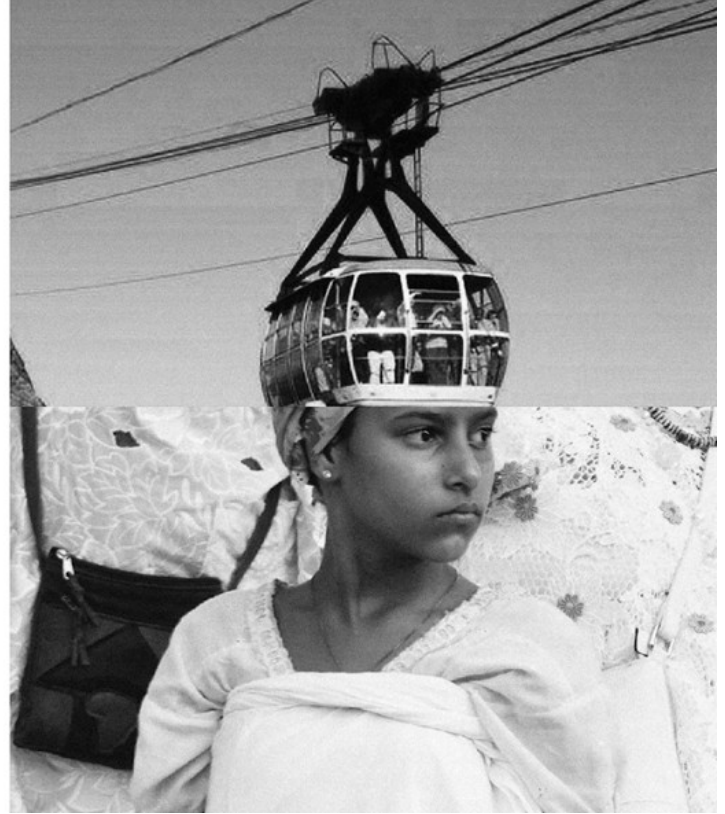


Joelington Rios's *What Sustains Rio* series

by [Yohana A. Junker](#) in the [August 2024](#) issue

Published on August 7, 2024



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Joelington Rios brings a unique perspective to his art as a member of the Quilombo Jamary dos Pretos. *Quilombos* are traditional Afro-Brazilian settlements, part of what Abdias do Nascimento described as a centuries-old movement for Black survival within the nexus of coloniality. A multidisciplinary artist, Rios often explores the confluences between land and water and the experience of living and working in two distinct worlds: the Afro-Indigenous world of the *quilombo* and the urban landscape of Rio de Janeiro.

In this photomontage series, Rios juxtaposes the everyday experience, memory, and history of Black individuals against the backdrop of Rio de Janeiro's iconic sites—usually reserved for its elite—such as Sugarloaf Mountain, *Christ the*

Redeemer, and Ipanema Beach. “As I traveled from my home in the favelas of Rio to reach my workplace downtown,” he explained to me, “I began to note how we—the Black population of Rio—carry out this sustaining process. . . . Black people from the favelas literally carry the city on their heads.”

One way Black communities have resisted the brutality of racism and colonialism in Brazil is through their religious practices. In this series, Rios specifically references the orixá Oyá, also known as Iansã. In the Candomblé tradition, this female spirit controls the winds and the storms. A powerful warrior, Oyá erodes Western constructions of femininity and divinity. Afro-Brazilian women look to her as an encouragement to fight for justice, dignity, and sovereignty. Rios registers a moment within a protest against religious intolerance organized by practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religious traditions. His series highlights the capacity Black Brazilians have to safeguard their future through religious practice and poetic ingenuity.