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Cover image: Victor Ehikhamenor, *The King Returning from Holy Aruosa Cathedral* (detail), 2018, rosary beads, bronze statuettes, and thread on canvas, 116 × 71 in.. Digital image courtesy of Victor Ehikhamenor (all rights reserved).

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Royal Religion Series, Victor Ehikhamenor



Royal Religion Series

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In the fifteenth century, the Portuguese brought Christianity to the Benin Empire, an ancient kingdom in today's Edo State, Nigeria. Missionaries were sent from Portugal to establish churches in the kingdom. Circa 1485, a red-roofed, white-painted church was erected not too far from the king's palace, and was named Holy Aruosa Cathedral, which still stands today. According to records, the church is one of the oldest in West Africa and the only place generations of Obas (kings) have worshipped beside ancestral shrines, which were among those raided and looted by British soldiers in 1897, an event central to Dan Hicks' Conversation Piece provocation in this issue.

In this church, there is a juxtaposition of the Christian ways of worship and the ancient traditional Benin ways of worship, a hybrid of two disparate religions. There is no clash of doctrines and instead one is enamoured by the coalescence of cosmologies. Subsequent Obas and their chiefs dressed in "traditional" Catholic priests' fashion. The mixture of what is local and what is colonial resulted in an outfit that is a complete ersatz version of the cassock worn by Catholic priests.

To this day, the Benin monarch, his chiefs, and other traditional title-holders still dress like Catholic priests. The garment now represents royalty and one of the main codes of dressing of the Benin people, of which I am a part. This is my point of departure for this body of works that fuses Catholic rosaries, coral beads, and bronze statuettes (Figs 1-5).



Figure 1.

Victor Ehikhamenor, *The King Returning from Holy Aruosa Cathedral*, 2018, rosary beads, bronze statuettes, and thread on canvas, 116 × 71 in. Digital image courtesy of Victor Ehikhamenor (all rights reserved).



Figure 2.

Victor Ehikhamenor, *The Day Oba Esigie was Baptised*, 2019, rosary beads, bronze statuettes, and diamante fabric on lace, 89 x 68 in. Digital image courtesy of Victor Ehikhamenor (all rights reserved).



Figure 3. Victor Ehikhamenor, *I Am Ogiso, The King from Heaven*, 2017, rosary beads and thread on lace textile, 103 × 69 in. Digital image courtesy of Victor Ehikhamenor (all rights reserved).



Figure 4.

Victor Ehikhamenor, *My Last Dance as King Before Sir Harry Lawson's Army Arrive*, 2017, rosary beads and thread on lace fabric, 126 x 75 in. Digital image courtesy of Victor Ehikhamenor (all rights reserved).



Figure 5.

Victor Ehikhamenor, *Holy, Holy, Holy King*, 2018, rosary beads and bronze statuettes on canvas, 116 × 71 in. Digital image courtesy of Victor Ehikhamenor (all rights reserved).

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