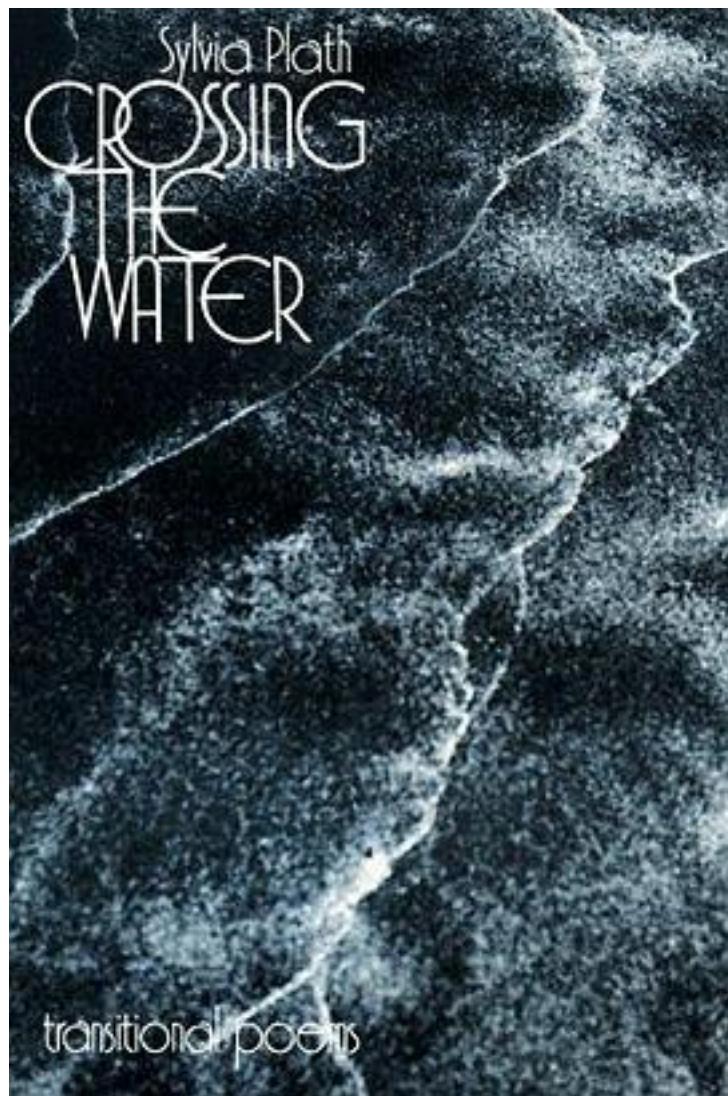


Crossing the Water



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著者:Garoutte, Claire/ Wambaugh, Anneke

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In the summer of 2000, two award-winning photographers, Claire Garoutte and Anneke Wambaugh, were in Santiago de Cuba, a city on the southeastern coast of Cuba. A chance encounter led them to the home of Santiago Castaneda Vera, a priest-practitioner of Santeria and Palo Monte. Out of that initial meeting, a unique collaboration developed. Santiago opened his home and religious practice to Garoutte and Wambaugh, who returned to his house many times over the next five years, cameras in hand. The result is "Crossing the Water", an extraordinary visual record of Afro-Cuban religious experience. A book of 157 striking photographs, many of which are in colour, "Crossing the Water" includes images of elaborate Santeria altars and Palo spirit cauldrons, as well as of Santiago and his godchildren, members of his large religious 'family', engaged in ritual practices: spirit possession, the feeding of the spirits, and private and collective healing ceremonies. As the head of a religious community, Santiago helps his godchildren with contentious relationships, physical ailments, emotional crises, and the hardships of poverty. He combines different traditions to achieve healing and harmony: not only Santeria and Palo Monte but also Espiritismo, a Cuban version of nineteenth-century European Spiritism. For Santiago and his followers, the three religions together form a coherent theological whole. Santiago eventually became Garoutte's and Wambaugh's godfather and spiritual leader, and "Crossing the Water" is informed by their experiences as practitioners of Santeria and Palo Monte. Their text provides clear explanations of the objects and practices depicted in the images. Describing the power and meaning of human-spirit interactions, and the sights, sounds, scents, motions, and sensations of many ritual practices, "Crossing the Water" takes readers deep inside the intimate world of Afro-Cuban spirituality.

作者介绍:

目录:

[Crossing the Water 下载链接1](#)

标签

评论

[Crossing the Water 下载链接1](#)

书评

[Crossing the Water 下载链接1](#)