

THE BLACK SPHINX II

From Morocco to Madagascar

31 May – 7 September 2018
Opening: 31 May

Ghizlane Sahli (Morocco), Marie-Claire Messouma Manlanbien (Ivory Coast)
Ouattara Watts (Ivory Coast)

Amina Zoubir (Algeria), Ifeoma U. Anyaeji (Nigeria), Yasmine Ben Khelil (Tunisia), Houda Terjuman (Morocco), Januario Jano (Angola), Troy Makaza (Zimbabwe), Joël Andrianomearisoa (Madagascar)

Primo Marella Gallery is pleased to present *The Black Sphinx II*, the second chapter of that art journey started last year with *The Black Sphinx* show, aiming to highlight a careful selection of emerging contemporary artists whose practice and life intertwine with Africa.

This exhibition exploits the book written by Mario Appellius, first published in 1925. In the almost unknown Africa of that time – at least from a Western perspective - a group of European explorers began to look for trade opportunities, investigating both cultural and political aspects. The long and difficult path that goes through the entire black continent is meticulously described by the author, able to transmit the African magic environment and to create an engaging atmosphere.

Likewise, as the title reveals, our project wants to draw the attention on the contemporary African continent as a true expression of a great cultural and artistic dynamism and an even stronger self-awareness. The political instability of certain regions is just the inescapable backdrop of stories that actually aspire to go beyond the local affairs. If Mario Appellius in his book identifies the black sphinx as metaphor of a mysterious, if not mystified territory, here the meaning of such mythical creature is radically overturned embodying the vivid artistic development and the extraordinary contribution of these nine young artists to the international artistic debate.

Based on the above, Primo Marella Gallery disclose the show with the eyes of a resilient explorer, enthusiast of the journey undertaken, calling for an audience to share his discoveries with. Behind the heterogeneity of such a large area, it is clear how these experiences offer a new and original voice to the cause of contemporary art.

Ghizlane Sahli (Morocco, 1973) explores materials transformation, their textures and their universality. Living and working in Morocco, she collects waste (plastic bottles) and embroiders them using silk with the help of local artisan women. Ghizlane studies the transition between two conditions, the tiny interval between the before and the after, the bridge which connect material to mind, order to chaos, accumulation to dispersion. Her chief shapes are the *Alveoles* (three-dimensional embroidery, made from the tops of used bottles, covered with silk thread), imagined as human cells that generates also feminine part as in the work *Histoires de Tripes #24, 2018*.

Marie-Claire Messouma Manlanbien (Ivory Coast, 1990) currently lives and works in Paris. She defines herself as a storyteller of poetry who creates artworks inspired by many different elements coming from feminine world and female conditions. Among female forms, genital lips and animal crests her research bases especially upon the violence toward women. Currently exhibited at the 8th Eva International Biennale, worth of mention is the installation *#No name* (2016) which took inspiration from the cruel gang rape occurred in New Delhi in 2012¹.

Amina Zoubir (Algeria, 1983), video maker and visual artist, works on the notions of body related to specific environments. Female and bodies interact with urban and rural spaces in the Arab world. Her artworks question the social and historical thoughts from the poetics and myths in the Maghreb. Moreover, through her performative actions, she attempts to reveal and at the same time to reject the established order and the dissimulation of the imagination. For example, in *Escape from the body, 2012* she questions the ambivalence of the profane and sacred spaces in Algeria when the environment issues are sensitive for the common living.

¹ New Delhi, December 16, 2012, 9 pm: Jyoti Singh Pandey, a 23 years girl, physiotherapy student, is on the bus taking her (and a male friend) home. A gang approach and brutally rape, beat and torture her. After 13 days of agony she will die cause internal injuries. Before dying she was able to explain all the details of the assault to the police. During the interrogatory, Mukesh Singh, one of the rapist, asserted: "She was out during the night, a good girl has only to stay home doing house works. She had not to resist to the rape, she had to stay calm and permit it [...] A woman is much more responsible of a rape than a man. Men have the right to teach this lesson".

Ifeoma U. Anyaeji (Nigeria, 1981) is a Nigerian neo-traditional artist born in Benin City. Growing up in a society fueled by the dualities of excesses and repression, where art was yet to be accepted as a "decent" profession, Ifeoma decided to take-up art as a full-time career exploring her boundaries, as a female artist beyond the conventions of her initial academic training in painting. She later went on to pursue her earlier interest in sculpture and engaging further her passion for non-conventional art making and repurposing discarded objects, an interest stimulated by the constant environmental problems she encountered around her community particularly from non-biodegradable plastic bags and bottles which were in abundance. While experimenting with these environmental pollutants, engaging possible processes of object remaking and reuse especially with non-conventional art making techniques and traditional craft processes, Anyaeji developed a style of art she calls "*Plasto-Art*". This is an eco-aesthetic process of remaking, where she transforms her primary medium - used non-biodegradable plastic bags and bottles - by applying her crafting skills in a receding traditional Nigerian hair plaiting technique called Threading, combined with traditional basketry and fabric weaving techniques. Using this technique, with an experimental approach to object-making that most often excludes anticipated conventions, Ifeoma creates very conceptually complex and organic sculptures and installations, with intricate textures and colours, that reference architectural forms, domestic spaces and furnishings, reiterations of cultural experiences, and discourses about the human body. And by spontaneously engaging the "old", she questions the implications of modernity's: consumptive systems of mass accumulation and waste generation, definitions of cultural assimilation and attitude to value, the expiration-date syndrome, and colonial orientations on beauty, authenticity, and newness.

Yesmine Ben Khelil (Tunisia, 1986) after a Master in Plastic Arts and Art Science at the University of Paris (the Panthéon-Sorbonne) she wanted to overcome all those clichés we often have to undergo. Her works present a series of pieces that belong to a very old publication, dating back to 1963, integrated with her drawings, previously made in pencil and watercolour. This practice involves different techniques ending with the identification of characters featuring a coloured mass in vegetal and mineral form as a dreamlike extension. By questioning the image, the artist tries to evoke the real, starting with the assumption that the only reality is therefore the only certainty.

Houda Terjuman (Morocco, 1970) accepts that globalised characters of the world's that of the cultural mix, it follows an uprooting and displacement resulting reverberations on the individual. The man in exile becomes an uprooted tree, through a painful path in order to regain stability, in liquid and contemporary floating spaces. The sculpture is a founding function space that becomes a place of life and works within an identity negotiation process.

Januario Jano (Angola, 1979) is a multidisciplinary artist who has completed his undergraduate degree at London Metropolitan University in 2005. Since then, he has been involved in self-initiated research projects that have been a core set for his artistic practice. He works with painting, installation, video and photography using them to develop performances ending up in wall-mounted installations. Januario is the founder member of the Cultural Collective Pés Descalços and mentor and organizer of the TEDx Luanda since 2012.

Troy Makaza (Zimbabwe, 1994)' surreal works, woven from painted silicone strings, inhabit the space on both side of painting and sculpture, creating a threadlike spider web. His broader examination of the fluid and in-flux relationships between the sexes in contemporary Zimbabwe bound together powerful metaphors for social and intimate spaces, where traditional values and liberal attitudes are no longer assured.

Joël Andrianomearisoa (Madagascar, 1977). In his 'dealing with time' he falls into no clear category: his work crosses boundaries into fashion, design, sculpture, photography and installation. Nevertheless, his works with paper and textile are most indicative of his larger interests. Black – along with his uncountable shades - features prominently. His *Sentimental Products* hover enticingly between the ephemeral and the permanent: they are partly sculptured and partly left to the chance and serendipity of the material he works with.

Yassine Balbzioui (Morocco, 1972). As a multidisciplinary artist, Yassine's works often revolve around different dimensions following a path that can be defined as Neo-Expressionist. In his vast and heterogeneous universe, the artist represents the innate animal nature of man - often disguised by masks - using a certain amount of parody, derision and idiocy. Everyday life is his main source of inspiration as much as cinema, tv series, dance, theater, legends and fantastic tales.

Ouattara Watts (Costa d'Avorio, 1957) "He is not a painter. Ouattara Watts is the black architect, the builder of a twenty-first century city of assembly, association and not of division. This is the main concept inherent in the artist's works built on a structure made of competing constructive and de-constructive forces that interact with each other and that make the viewer feel as an active participant". (see the background of the paintings that evoke a universe of chaos but also of positive energy).

Robert Farris Thompson