

Hassan Musa

by Simon Njami

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Hassan Musa is an artist whose work borders on the political, historical and aesthetical commentary. His knowledge of the history of art, not in the restrictive sense as viewed by the European history, but in the generic sense of the word history, allows him to run from and to the notion of identity and traditions. What Ernst Bloch defined as “the essential question” - the question per se of the We - always resonates in both his paintings and his installation works. In a world which quickly confines any uncommon thing in facile categories, Musa, through the complexity of his questions, forces the audience to look beyond appearances and prejudices by confronting the audience to what Baldwin called “the obviousness of the things we do not see”.

The obviousness of the things we see, or that we believe we see, starts with the name, which determines an origin and relates back to a fixed geography, with all its sociological and anthropological clichés.

What we do not see constitutes, in every individual, this part of the We as referred by Bloch. This We, that some people would like to reduce to a local belonging, is wide-ranging, protean, polysemous. When he discovered the Negro statuette, Picasso understood it : nothing human is alien to man. That is the meaning of Musa’s work, who always plays outside the space where we would like to confine him.

This fierce will to escape from confinement, that is to say reduction, has been expressed in a letter sent to the experts of the Biennale de Lyon a few years ago. Some people could think that Musa tries to escape from the question of identity. They are wrong. Both his written and plastic works tend to demonstrate the impossibility of reducing a person to a collection of objective elements. Objective like the Cartesian reason which was already condemned by Césaire and Senghor decades ago. If our world has become global, it is important to say once again that, to be significant, this entirety can only be based on composite features.

Simon Njami was main curator of the touring exhibition “Africa Remix, *Contemporary art of a continent*”, 2004-2007, hosted by museum kunst palast in Düsseldorf (Germany), the Hayward Gallery in London, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris and the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo.