

RIMITIVE CABARET
A spiritual Voodoo confrontation

Omar Ba / Andrew Gilbert
Michel Macréau / Helmut Rieger / Christine Sefolosh

10 January - 23 February 2013
Vernissage on Thursday, 10 January, from 6 pm

Daring, imaginative, dreamlike, spectacular! Five contemporary artists – painters and draughtsmen – invite themselves to “Primitive Cabaret”, a dialogue between artworks and voodoo fetishes, mostly from the Fon people in Benin. These come from a first-rate collection proposed by Mr. Claude Rouyer, a long-time collector of African and contemporary art (Michel Macréau, Anselme Boix-Vives...). In all freedom, the artists will create connections between the shapes and meanings of their universe and those of the collection.

Practiced by millions of people worldwide, voodoo thrives in Africa and America. The fetishes required for the cult have stimulated a wealth of formal creativity. These inhabited, real-life objects, endowed with healing, protective or intercession powers, have fascinated many contemporary artists such as Jean-Michel Basquiat. We are reminded of how, in the early twentieth century, “Negro Art” nourished the artistic production of Derain, Picasso and others. Today, a multitude of artists draw their inspiration from the universe of voodoo as they compare and share cultures.

That Africa may be a dreamed, invented, idealised land. Thus, Andrew Gilbert re-interprets British colonial history and Helmut Rieger creates strong bonds with African art in his hunting scenes; or it could be a real Africa, as the one experienced by Omar Ba and Christine Sefolosh. However, beyond what is being represented, a kind of incantatory force radiates from these drawings and paintings.

The exhibition therefore puts into perspective the relationship between these artists and voodoo, and more generally African art. Each artist will be allotted a space inside the gallery, where he / she can enter into a dialogue with the fetishes. Andrew Gilbert, Omar Ba and Christine Sefolosh took up the challenge and created specific artworks for this exhibition. In other cases, as for Michel Macréau and Helmut Rieger, formal affinities between the artworks will be elaborated through the setting.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue with a text by Leanne Sacramone from the Fondation Cartier, who curated the exhibition “Vaudou” in 2011.

Artists exhibited:

Omar Ba (born in 1977 in Senegal). Lives in Geneva. Collaboration with Anne de Villepoix gallery
Andrew Gilbert (born in 1980 in Edinburgh). Lives in Berlin
Michel Macréau (born in 1935 in Paris – died 1995)
Christine Sefolosh (born in 1955 in Switzerland). Lives in Montreux
Helmut Rieger (born 1931 in Silesia). Lives in Munich

The press pack and visual info can be downloaded from:

<http://polad-hardouin.com/dossier-de-presse/primitive-cabaret>

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Voodoo fetishes from the Claude Rouyer collection (selection)

"These voodoo fetishes, soaked in the blood of sacrifices, dressed in that disturbingly crusty matter, often disappear under an accumulation of diverse materials, magical ingredients, mirrors, padlocks, shells... all are representations of their own power. These mysterious beings interpret the spirit of ancestors or the power of gods. Invested with visibility beyond visibility, they become sacred. Then a journey begins through a land of appeased faces, through the often indecipherable voices of ancestors or gods, towards an encounter with our own selves !... ."

Claude Rouyer



Fetish statue

Fon Benin, cowries, feathers, fabric, gourds, bells, plants, sacrificial patina.

Dimensions : 56 x 22 x 16 cm



Fetish maternity with 3 children

Fon Benin, cowries, feathers, fabric, gourds, bells, plants, sacrificial patina.

Dimensions : 69 x 27 x 29 cm



Fetish Statue: Mating

Fon Benin, wood, cowries, fabric, gourd, pottery,
feathers, iron, glass, plants, sacrificial patina
Dimensions : 68 x 24 x 61 cm



Fetish statue with raised hands

Fon Benin, wood, cowries, skulls, horns, fabric,
metal, jaws, glass, feathers, sacrificial patina
Dimensions : 71 x 56 cm

The artists exhibited

Omar Ba

Born in Senegal, Omar Ba lives in Geneva since 2003. After graduating from Dakar's National School of Fine Arts, he obtained a Master in Art and Public Space from Wallis' Cantonal School of Visual Arts (in Sierre, Switzerland), then a postgraduate degree from the School of Fine Arts in Geneva, where he currently lives and works. Through its encounter with European figurative tradition, his artistic production was extended to a comparison between the West and the African continent, making stereotypes clash on imposing pieces of corrugated cardboard. In 2011, he was the recipient of the prestigious Swiss Award.

Omar Ba develops a personal imagery of intertwined figures, animals, symbols, brightly coloured landscapes made with oil paints, gouaches and inks, upon which detailed pencil drawings are hastily superimposed. The use of thick black with numerous touches of pearly white add luminosity to the ferocity of his subject.

His works combine ancient beliefs and a society which he accuses of being "a hole dug by its own sons". Members of the African elite and corrupted politicians illustrate his narrative, inspired by official portraits which he does not hesitate to associate to threatening beasts.

Senegalese animists believe that everything in nature has a soul. In his works, Omar Ba develops a triangular relationship between nature, humanity and the sacred. Some traditions resist to modernity. The smallest icon in his paintings seems to echo the concerns we all have within our souls: conflicts, censorship, justice or injustice in a precarious world.

For this exhibition, Omar Ba took up the challenge of creating works in dialogue with the voodoo fetishes of the Claude Rouyer collection.



Omar Ba, *Perte des valeurs III* ("Lost Values III"), 2012
Acrylic, pencil and oil on grey cardboard
70 x 50 cm
courtesy gallery Anne de Villepoix



Omar Ba, *Au royaume des pyromanes*, 2012
Acrylic, pencil and oil on corrugated cardboard
203x105 cm
courtesy gallery Anne de Villepoix

Andrew Gilbert

Andrew Gilbert takes us to the heart of the British Empire's colonial wars. This recurring, obsessive topic allows him to revisit with creativity, irony and ferocity the great moments of British military history. His inspiration draws on specific historical episodes and accurately renders the details of the uniforms or the battalion's position. However, he lets his extravagant imagination loose by becoming the hero of the stories he is staging.

The history and art of Africa play a major role in the work of Andrew Gilbert, although he claims that he never visited it. As in the case of early 20th-century Western artists, African art is a source of formal inspiration that goes through the prism of German Expressionism. In 2011, Gilbert visited the exhibition "Vaudou" at the Fondation Cartier. This visit inspired the production of a series of sketches. Moreover, the evocative power of his works is functionally analogous to voodoo fetishes; sometimes, sentences similar to magical spells cover the whole sheet.

Born in 1980 in Edinburgh, he attended Edinburgh's Fine Art University and the Edinburgh College of Art from 1997 to 2002. Since 2002, he lives and works in Berlin. He had numerous personal exhibitions throughout Europe, in particular in Berlin, London, Prague and Amsterdam. In 2011, Polad-Hardouin gallery organised his first personal exhibition in Paris. An additional exhibition is scheduled for April 2013.



Andrew Gilbert, *The Holy Brocoli at home cleaning his collection of Tribal Art*, 2012, mixed technique on paper, 70 x 100 cm

Michel Macréau

After starting as a draughtsman, Michel Macréau (1935-1995) worked as a decorator in the ceramic workshops of Vallauris. In the late 1950s, he moved into an old deserted castle in the valley of Chevreuse to paint full-time. He abandoned the paintbrush to work directly with the tubes of paints, which he squeezed directly on the canvas or sheets of paper. From 1960 onwards, he started using every available surface (bed sheets, jute bags, wooden boards). He was filled with a kind of furious urge to paint his own obsessions.

His first personal exhibition took place in 1962 at the gallery Raymond Cordier. It was a success: Georges Pompidou bought two works. With the support of Cérés Franco, he took part in numerous artistic events in Paris and in Brazil.

In 1969, although the Musée d'Art Moderne of Paris bought one of his works, and despite the support of several galleries, the painter started going through a difficult period: maybe due to their unconventional nature, his works were no longer selling. Doubts and depression became his daily lot until things started getting better in the 1980s, parallel to the emergence of artists such as Basquiat.



Femme et masques, 1984, oil on canvas, 160 x 150 cm

Close to urban graffiti, Michel Macréau's spontaneity and way of treating the surface as a wall is often provocative and develops without any complexes a tentacular universe that stages his very personal sketches. His pioneering work associates on the same level figures, graphic elements and writing. His direct and abounding style is both appealing and off-putting: it is a kind of fury which he expresses with uncompromising passion.

As a precursor, Michel Macréau freely explores a multitude of different supports (cardboard, fabric, wood, bed sheets...). He imposes an unprecedented rhythm and spontaneity to this works. This renewal anticipates by 20 years artists such as Penck, Combas or Basquiat. While we do not know Michel Macréau's relationship to voodoo and African art, the strong presence of his canvasses, their freedom and most importantly the formal creativity of his life as an artist, prompted us to suggest a comparison between his work and the fetishes exhibited.

Helmut Rieger

Born in 1931 in the region of Neisse (currently in Poland), Helmut Rieger lives in Munich. He was exhibited at the gallery created by Otto van de Loo from its very beginnings until today. As a member of the group GEFLECHT – which formed from the groups SPUR and WIR, he was already present in the 1960s with his spatial “anti-objects”, mostly the result of collective works.

After that tense and highly interesting period from a political and artistic viewpoint, painting allowed him to position himself outside the context of groups, and he proved to be an excellent painter.

If the first impulse of his artistic concern and of its close tie to the artist’s biography is no longer perceptible to the viewer in his world of images anchored in symbolism and mythology, the existential energy from which they emerge is nonetheless present. Thus, for instance, Rieger’s archaic-inspired hunting scenes illustrate the fundamental human conflict between hunting and being hunted.

Helmut Rieger never went to Africa, but African art is very present in his work through German Expressionism. We therefore deemed it appropriate to compare his works, especially his hunting scenes, to the voodoo fetishes.



Helmut Rieger *Scène de chasse*, 1998- 2005, mixed technique on wooden panel, 63 x 83 cm

Christine Sefolosa

Born in 1955, in Switzerland.

Fiction, vision, fairy tale... It is as if Christine Sefolosa had the power to summon on the canvas the presence of spirits. She gives them a body made of surprising materials such as earth, tar and oil, suggests their delicate transparency with a subtle layer of water and bleach, dissolves their essence in ink or watercolour. She has also been practicing monotypes for several years. As an alchemist, she allows humanity to emerge from her magical bestiary...

Christine Sefolosa lived in South Africa for nine years, and that experience had a marking influence on her artistic practice. Regularly exhibited at Polad-Hardouin gallery, her work is increasingly successful in Europe, but also in New-York and Chicago, but also in New-York and Chicago, with some exhibitions in various american museums : American Visionary art Museum (Baltimore), John Michael Kohler Art center (Sheboygan) and in Switzerland : Museum im Lagerhaus (St. Gall), Museum Jenisch (Vevey). In 2007, she had a remarkable exhibition at the Halle Saint-Pierre in Paris. In 2010, the gallery presented a series of her monotypes and drawings around the theme of ghost ships.



Christine Sefolosa, *Baron Samdi*, 2012, mixed techniques on paper, 105 x 62 cm