

CÉCILE FAKHOURY

A GALLERY RESPONDING TO THE GLOBAL REFLECTION ON THE MAKING OF CONTEMPORARY AFRICA

Galerie Cécile Fakhoury has firmly established itself as one of the leading galleries representing contemporary artists from Africa with two impressive locations on the continent, their mothership in Abidjan and a new space in Dakar, which is located in the historic neighbourhood of Le Plateau, as well a showroom in Paris.

The gallery has taken a leading role in the development and expansion of the continent's contemporary art scene through its participation in international art fairs, biennials and collaboration with international institutions and galleries. Their exhibition programme is carefully curated according to the artists' specific practice and is responsive to a global reflection on the making of contemporary Africa, as evidenced in Chapter 1 of the group show *'L'Esprit du large* (The Spirit of the open sea), in their Dakar venue. The group exhibition serves as an invitation to see far away, to widen our horizons and knowledge, and to trade at the crossroads. In this exhibition, the artworks commingle without imposing any order; they converse at the discretion of the artists' imaginations. From one work to the other, they suggest new itineraries.

The exhibition brings together works by a diverse group of artists including Jems Koko Bi, Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Dimitri Fagbohoun, François-Xavier Gbré, Yo-Yo Gonthier, Vincent Michéa, Sadikou Oukpedjo and Ouattara Watts. *L'Esprit du large* - Chapter 2 will be presented in their Abidjan gallery in September.

Armand Boua's latest exhibition, entitled 'Yopougon, Adjamé, Liberté', invokes the

neighbourhoods of Abidjan that inspire this body of work. The works depict scenes of everyday life, both fleeting and persistent, singular and emblematic of a district, a city, a country and more broadly of a shared history. Successive to 'Brobrosseurs', his first solo show presented in Dakar in 2018, the new series on cardboards and canvases, appears as the fragmented depiction of the story of a youth struggling with a confused and restless, yet fascinating modernity.

Fakhoury realises the importance and power of publishing to legitimise and promote an artist's work. Galerie Cécile Fakhoury is developing a publishing programme with two monographic catalogues published to date, Ouattara Watts', *Before Looking at this Work*, *Listen to It*, December 2018 and Sadikou Oukpedjo's, *Silenitum*, May 2019. Further editions will follow.

The gallery understands the challenges of operating in an emerging art market, but their positioning in Dakar and Abidjan - with a European base in Paris - means they are well-positioned to capitalise on their roots on the continent while having good access to international markets. Fakhoury regards the placement of the galleries in West Africa as crucial to her vision that the contemporary African art market will only reach its full development potential if galleries remain fully rooted on the African continent. She acknowledges the real challenges and sensitivities that the art scene in this region faces. The market may not have matured yet, at least in West Africa, but there are many positive signs that the market is moving in the right direction. As Fakhoury says in a previous statement:

"When I wanted to develop the gallery, I did not choose Brussels or Paris, but Dakar. We cannot conceive the expansion of a market for contemporary African creation coming only from the United States or from Europe. We need to see it come from the continent itself."

The aim of the gallery to promote contemporary art from Africa is supported by their commitment to ensuring the high visibility of their artists, their creativity and the gallery's stable contemporary artistic diversity. Their programme delivers this both on and off the continent through solo and group exhibition formats, supplemented by an essential international outreach.

Firmly rooted in their respective identities and stories, the artists represented by the gallery distinguish themselves through the use of a language that abolishes barriers and rejects geographical stigmatisation. Observers of the world they live in, these artists take an enlightened and critical look at our society. The diversity of aesthetic gestures and committed position to redressing the complexities of our collective histories means that the gallery's participation in the writing of new African histories also challenges us to reconsider our own relationship to the world.

Brendon Bell-Roberts is the Editor-in-Chief & Co-founder of ART AFRICA.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, March 2019. Ouattara Watts, *Dogon Culture*, 2018, technique mixte sur toile, 264 x 246cm © Ouattara Watts, Exhibition view, *L'Esprit du large*, Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, Dakar, Senegal, September 2019 with Jems Koko Bi (Sculpture), François-Xavier Gbré (photos, backwall) and Yo-Yo Gonthier (photos, left wall) Courtesy Galerie Cécile Fakhoury.