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For Immediate Use

Continental Rifts: Contemporary Time-Based Works of Africa and Transformations: Recent Contemporary African Acquisitions
Open Feb 22 at the Fowler Museum at UCLA

“[Diverse] visions, artistic practices, and forms of life...are shaping the contemporary African imaginary today. ...Given the scale of migration and the trans-national character of flows in the globalising, postcolonial moment, they belong to a shared, deeply intertwined, but highly uneven and unfinished global world, from whose impact none is excluded.”

Stuart Hall, *Fault Lines: Contemporary African Art and Shifting Landscapes*

Long dedicated to exploring the vast range of African artistic expression, the Fowler Museum at UCLA will present two concurrent exhibitions of contemporary art from or about the continent, including video and film, photography, painting, sculpture, and prints. *Continental Rifts: Contemporary Time-Based Works of Africa* features the work of five internationally acclaimed artists: Yto Barrada, Cláudia Cristóvão, Alfredo Jaar, Georgia Papageorge, and Berni Searle. *Transformations: Recent Contemporary African Acquisitions* includes two large-scale metal “tapestries” by celebrated artist El Anatsui, as well as paintings, prints and sculptures by seven other African artists. Both exhibitions will be on display at the Fowler from Feb. 22–June 14, 2009, and will be considered in a special presentation on Mar. 19 by noted critic/writer/ philosopher Simon Njami.

“The artists presented in these two exhibitions offer multiple perspectives on African artistic production today, fracturing any sense of a singular African aesthetic,” explains Polly Nooter Roberts, curator of both exhibitions and professor in UCLA’s department of World Arts and Cultures. “Their works offer a plurality of visions that destabilize and also disrupt the neatness of continental categories or boundaries, while at the same time offering powerful prisms through which to see many Africas at once.”

Continental Rifts

Continental Rifts explores time-based media—video, film, and related photography—and considers ways in which new media lend themselves to the representation of complex identity negotiations resulting from transnational movement, shifting notions of “home” and “abroad,” and deep emotional attachments and divides. The works raise the question “Whose Africa?” by considering issues of geology, geography, botany, war, memory, exile, and loss. In the process, national and continental boundaries become blurred as lived experience and remembered pasts defy such arbitrary divides.

The featured artists have deeply individual relationships to the continent. Most have multiple heritages but consider themselves to be African, some reside elsewhere but have powerful memories of the continent, some move back and forth between continents, and some are from other parts of the world but find themselves compelled to produce films about Africa.

The works in *Continental Rifts* are all being shown in Los Angeles for the first time and include *Africa Rifting: Lines of Fire: Namibia/Brazil, 2001* by Georgia Papageorge of South Africa; *Home and Away, 2003* by Berni Searle of South Africa; *The Botanist, 2007* and eight photographs from the *Iris tingitana* series by Yto Barrada, who was born in Paris, grew up in Morocco and now lives in Tangier; *Fata Morgana and Le voyage imaginaire (The Imaginary Journey), 2008* by Cláudia Cristóvão, who was born in Angola of Portuguese parents; and *Muxima, 2005* by Alfredo Jaar, who was born in Chile and in recent years has worked in Rwanda and Angola. Several of these works have been exhibited in international contemporary art venues such as the Venice Biennale, Documenta, and the Dakar Biennale.

As described in a recent preview article published by the College Art Association about the exhibition, “Papageorge’s video uses the ancient splitting of Gondwanaland into Africa and South America as a metaphor for social, cultural, and political ruptures, while also offering a chance for redemption and healing. Likewise, Searle’s video places images of Spain and Morocco on opposite screens, emphasizing not only the body of water but also the physical, emotional, and legal distances between the two continents. Barrada’s work also focuses on Morocco, exploring identity, migration, and dislocation in that country through a video that emphasizes an endangered, native wildflower, and through photographs of Moroccan youths and urban development and entropy. The African-born people in Cristóvão’s videos describe their memories and projections of the continent, which they left as children. And a work by Jaar uses music, landscape, and lived realities as launching points for aesthetic meditation.” (Howard, 2008).

Transformations

Transformations presents works by eight artists of African heritage who explore the potential of their mediums to engender new forms, histories, and intentions. They have pushed the limits of the materials with which they work to elicit different textures, colors, layers, shapes, and dimensions.

Included are two recently acquired works by acclaimed artist El Anatsui: *Fading Scroll, 2007*, co-purchased this year by the Fowler and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art with major support from The Broad Art Foundation, and *Versatility, 2006*. El Anatsui’s work garnered copious praise and attention last year at the 2007 Venice Biennale and in the traveling exhibition, *El Anatsui: Gawu*, which appeared at the Fowler Museum in 2007.

Transformations also features paintings, linocut prints, and sculptures by seven other artists—Viyé Diba, Yelimane Fall, Norman Kaplan, Wosene Kosrof, Azaria Mbatha, Moussa Tine and Durant Sihlali—typifying the daring, resourceful artistic production occurring in African cities today. Their work and careers are both global and local, in that they participate in international art biennials, residencies, and other exhibitions, while at the same time creating art grounded in the realities of everyday life in Africa: concerns about consumerism and poverty, religion in problem solving, histories and realities of segregationist politics, and people’s roles in the economic cycles.

Additional Information

Continental Rifts is made possible by the generous support of the CAA College Art Association, FLAX Foundation (France Los Angeles Exchange) in collaboration with French Cultural Services, the Joy and Jerry Monkarsh Family Foundation, and the Jerome L. Joss Fund. The exhibition was selected as the CAA College Art Association 2009 Annual Exhibition. Additional support for both exhibitions

was provided by the Yvonne Lenart Public Programs Fund, and Manus, the support group of the Fowler Museum.

The Fowler is open Wednesdays through Sundays, from noon to 5 p.m.; and on Thursdays, from noon until 8 p.m. The museum is closed Mondays and Tuesdays. The Fowler Museum, part of UCLA Arts, is located in the north part of the UCLA campus. Admission is free. Parking is available for a maximum of \$9 in Lot 4. For more information, the public may call 310/825-4361 or visit fowler.ucla.edu.

Related Events

Saturday February 21, 2009 4-6 pm

Fowler OutSpoken Panel: Whose Africa?

Curator Polly Roberts provides an overview of *Continental Rifts: Contemporary Time-Based Works of Africa* and talks with three of the artists whose work is featured: Yto Barrada, Claudia Cristóvão and Berni Searle. Each artist will give a short presentation illustrated with new and recent clips of their work. The program continues with an informal, moderated discussion and concludes with questions from the audience. The Fowler members' opening follows this panel. For information on joining the Fowler call 310/206-0306.

Sunday, February 22 12–5 pm

Opening Day

Continental Rifts: Contemporary Time-Based Works of Africa and *Transformations: Recent Contemporary African Acquisitions*

2 pm

Exhibition Tour: Medium as Message

Polly Roberts, curator of *Transformations* and *Continental Rifts*, focuses on the ways that diverse contemporary artists of Africa, from El Anatsui to Viyé Diba, use materials in deliberately transformative ways to convey aspects of meaning and memory. Following the tour, three artists featured in *Continental Rifts*, Yto Barrada, Claudia Cristóvão, and Berni Searle, will comment on their explorations of time-based media—video and film, as well as related photography—and the relationships between the media they employ and the messages that emanate from their works.

1–4 pm

Kids in the Courtyard: Pop Art

Use soda tabs and bottle caps to create works of art inspired by El Anatsui's sculptures.

Thursday, March 19, 2009 7 pm

Fowler OutSpoken Lecture by Simon Njami

Africa in the World: Curating African Contemporary Art in an International Arena

Cameroon-born and Paris-based, noted essayist and art critic Simon Njami has been described as "Europe's reigning monarch of Afro-hip." Drawing on his expertise as the curator of the recent Joburg Art Fair, the African Pavilion at the 2007 Venice Biennale, and the much-acclaimed *Africa Remix*, Njami explores some of the key artists and issues in the thriving and sometimes contradictory contemporary art scene.

Co-presented by the Santa Monica Museum of Art in conjunction with the exhibition *Eye of the Needle, Eye of the Heart: Elias Simé, 20 Years*; sponsorship support from the Department of Art History, UCLA.