

Fowler

MUSEUM AT UCLA

Inheritance: Recent Video Art from Africa

February 17–July 28, 2019

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Los Angeles—The Fowler Museum at UCLA presents *Inheritance: Recent Video Art from Africa*, on view February 17 through July 28, 2019. The exhibition features time-based work by **Kudzanai Chiurai** (b. 1981, Zimbabwe), **Zina Saro-Wiwa** (b. 1976, Nigeria), and **Mikhael Subotzky** (b. 1981, South Africa)—three contemporary African artists who are contending with the political, social, and environmental realities of the postcolonial era in their respective home countries.

Every generation inherits intangible histories, mores, and practices from its predecessors. As artists of post-independence generations, Chiurai, Saro-Wiwa, and Subotzky look to the past to help define a way forward. The works on view reflect a process of acknowledging the transmission of trauma and dispossession, not simply triumph and freedom. In addressing the historical complexities of unwanted legacies, the artists aim to dismantle colonial constructions perpetuated by the social and political powers that be.

“Inheritance provides an opportunity to introduce three young artists whose time-based works offer timely and penetrating views into the ongoing struggles of the postcolonial period in Africa,” says **Marla C. Berns**, Shirley & Ralph Shapiro Director of the Fowler Museum. “The Museum is committed to presenting the fresh perspectives of these young artists who disrupt the status quo and who bravely dramatize through their art very personal and political challenges.”

Kudzanai Chiurai’s *We Live in Silence* (2017) is made up of seven chapters, each reflecting the continued presence of colonial-era mentalities. The short chapters present theatrical constructions for the performance of identity, collapsing historical time and location: they all take place on a set with archival photographs as a backdrop and varying arrangements of props and botanical decorations framing the actors. In each chapter, the same lead actress puts forth a new history with black African women at its center. The series of scenes might be characterized as tableaux vivants drawing on cultural touchpoints for Zimbabweans: Western European painting, American

politics, Christian biblical stories, and African history. Three chapters restage Mauritanian filmmaker Med Hondo's 1969 film *Soleil Ô*, a poignant examination of midcentury African immigration to Europe. Rather than focusing on male experience and particularities of place, as did Hondo for *Soleil Ô*, Chiurai relies mostly on dialogue and casts female performers in the central roles. *We Live in Silence* offers a vision of what could be: a different path where the culture inherited by post-independence generations is severed from the imposed teachings of the past.

Zina Saro-Wiwa's video series ***Table Manners*** (2014–ongoing) explores the present political and environmental predicament of Ogoni peoples by filming local diners eating traditional dishes. Each video constitutes a portrait of an Ogoni person and place. On eight screens in the gallery, sixteen unique videos show single individuals consuming typical homemade meals from beginning to end, using their right hand, as is the custom in Nigeria. Set in the context of the Niger Delta, where Ogoni live, the series highlights the politicization of food. Multinational oil companies control large swaths of land in the Niger Delta where they siphon petroleum and contaminate local agriculture. The at once quotidian and ritual act of repeatedly bringing food to the mouth becomes a gesture of suturing: eating locally sourced food is an act of resistance that binds Ogoni to their land.

Mikhael Subotzky's video installation ***WYE*** (2016, pronounced like the letter Y) welcomes viewers onto a stretch of sand laid out on the gallery floor in front of three large projection screens. Filmed at Cape Recife Nature Reserve, on the outskirts of Port Elizabeth in South Africa, *WYE* follows three fictional narratives concerning protagonists who inhabit this same beachfront at different points across time. All three protagonists feel alienation, stemming from the desire to connect with this place, at the southern tip of Africa, and to control it. Feio is an individual of unnamed gender and race, living in an undefined future; Craig Hare is a white man living in present-day South Africa; and James T. Lethbridge is a 19th-century English settler in the region. The interwoven narratives—which appear simultaneously as sequences repeating on different screens—concern figures striving to be more than mere visitors in South Africa. This sentiment holds resonance for today's white South African population, many of whom are still trying to understand their position post-apartheid. All three protagonists follow a course of failure: unable to survive, they blame the land and history. Subotzky steers clear of describing colonialism, and instead delivers intimate portrayals of lone, disconnected explorers. Says the artist, "I want to get inside the colonial mindset and collapse it from within."

About the artists

Kudzanai Chiurai (born 1981, Harare, Zimbabwe; lives and works in Harare) was the first black student to graduate with a BA in Fine Art from the University of Pretoria in South Africa. He was born one year after the establishment of the Republic of Zimbabwe, formerly the white-ruled Rhodesia, and his work focuses on his homeland. Chiurai has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions since 2003 and has participated in local and international group exhibitions including *Figures & Fictions: Contemporary South African Photography* (2011) at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and *Impressions from South Africa, 1965 to Now* (2011) at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. His *Conflict Resolution* series was featured in dOCUMENTA (13) in Kassel in 2012.

Zina Saro-Wiwa (born 1976, Port Harcourt, Nigeria; lives and works in Brooklyn, New York, and the Niger Delta region of Nigeria) primarily produces videos but also makes photographs, sculpture, sound works, and food. She is the founder of the contemporary art gallery Boys' Quarters Project Space in Port Harcourt, where she is also a curator. As recognition for her work in the Niger Delta, Saro-Wiwa was named one of Foreign Policy magazine's *Global Thinkers of 2016*. In 2016–17 she was Artist-in-Residence at Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, and in April 2017 she was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for Fine Arts. Saro-Wiwa's work can be found in museums and private collections around the world.

Mikhael Subotzky (born 1981, Cape Town, South Africa; lives and works in Johannesburg) graduated from the Michaelis School of Fine Art at the University of Cape Town in 2004. His installation, film, video, and photographic works have been widely exhibited in museums and galleries, and he has received awards including the KLM Paul Huf Award, the W. Eugene Smith Grant, the Oskar Barnack Award, and the Discovery Award at Rencontres d'Arles. Subotzky has published the books *Beaufort West* (2008); *Retinal Shift* (2012); and, with artist Patrick Waterhouse, *Ponte City* (2014). In 2015, his multicomponent video installation *Pixel Interface* (2013) was included in *All The World's Futures*, curated by Okwui Enwezor for the 56th Venice Biennale.

Credits

Inheritance: Recent Video Art from Africa is organized by the Fowler Museum at UCLA and is curated by Erica P. Jones, Associate Curator of African Arts. The exhibition is made possible by major support from the Philip L. Ravenhill Endowed Fund as well as generous funding from the Fowler Contemporary Council, Andrew Adelson, Arthur Lewis and Hau Nguyen, Azita and George Fatheree, Jay Geller and Lowell Gallagher, and Sandra Lang.

About the Fowler Museum

The Fowler Museum at UCLA explores global arts and cultures with an emphasis on works from Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and the indigenous Americas—past and present. The Fowler enhances understanding of world cultures through dynamic exhibitions, publications, and public programs, informed by interdisciplinary approaches and the perspectives of the cultures represented. The work of international contemporary artists is presented within complex frameworks of politics, culture, and social action.

Fowler Museum at UCLA

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Admission to the Fowler is free

Hours: Wed 12–8pm and Thu–Sun 12–5pm

Parking available in UCLA Lot 4: 398 Westwood Plaza at Sunset Blvd. (\$12/day)

Rideshare drop-off: 305 Royce Drive

CAPTION

Left to right: Kudzanai Chiurai, *We Live in Silence*, 2017. Courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery. Mikhael Subotzky, *WYE*, 2016, Commissioned by Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation, Sydney. Courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery. Zina Saro-Wiwa, *Table Manners*, 2014–2018. Courtesy of the artist.