

GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

PARIS - BRUXELLES

Nú Barreto

L'imparfait et l'impératif

April 15 - May 22, 2021

Espace II

3, rue du Cloître Saint-Merri, 75004 - Paris



Traces, *Diário 1*, 2020
Set of 42 drawings - Mixed media on paper, 332 x 284 x 4,5 cm (130³³² x 111¹³¹⁶ in.)
Photo Credit: Atelier 80
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia Paris / Bruxelles

Galerie Nathalie Obadia is delighted to present Nú Barreto's third exhibition, after *Homo Imparfais* in 2019 in Brussels. Born in 1966, in São Domingo, in Guinea-Bissau, Nú Barreto has lived and worked in Paris since 1989. After trying his hand at photography, he soon turned to drawing as his medium of choice. His reflections on contemporary Africa are also expressed in powerful mural installations. Selected to represent his country at the World Exposition in Lisbon, in 1998, Nú Barreto now enjoys an international career and incarnates a notable figure of contemporary African art.

The exhibition *L'imparfait et l'impératif* presents a group of new works on recycled paper, which are part drawing part collage, and a 42-drawing polyptych conceived as a sort of logbook for these months of pandemic. A striking demonstration of graphic eloquence put to the service of a bitter vision of reality, these works illustrate the suffering of the African people and the human condition, via the theme of confinement. Under the artist's sharp and lively draftsmanship, life is seen as a high-risk exercise. When he thinks of his native country, a former Portuguese colony, Nú Barreto recalls the grueling march toward independence, followed by political and military instability punctuated by numerous coups. Today, the artist looks at the current situation in Guinea-Bissau with lucidity and acerbity. He sees the ever growing socio-economic disparities. More broadly, what shines, figuratively through his work, in the form of his 'homos imparfaits,' is the complexity of the issues that determine relations between the different African states and the Western world.

Drawing, to which Nú Barreto had already turned during his troubled adolescence, is where he airs his daily suffering and the stigmata of collective memory. But this graphic work inscribes itself in an approach that is becoming increasingly sculptural, where collage, the play of materials, the imported elements all acquire as much importance as the represented motifs. In these large works on paper that look a bit like murals, the artist turns to raw, inexpensive materials, such as cardboard, recycled paper (made by the artist using supermarket pallets), scraps of fabric and pieces of torn wrapping paper. The way he composes them into an anarchic patchwork seems to evoke a type of precariousness, the poverty of the urban fabric, makeshift dwellings, social misery. In fact, certain decoupage motifs suggest sheet metal, while the hesitantly drawn lines that awkwardly structure these works denotes a certain fragility, imbalance. And perhaps also a questionable aspiration to the excesses of the Western model. The added inscriptions, news clippings or fragments of posters add to the authentic and expressionistic dimension of this work that is resolutely anchored in reality.

However, the particularity of these drawings by Nú Barreto resides in the spaces that seem to float, devoid of reference points, in spite of the allusions to urbanity that bring to mind jungles. The upside-down silhouettes look like they were brutally thrown into existence, adopting acrobatic or stooping postures and garish expressions that evoke Munch's *Scream* and reveal the pain that resides inside these works. Omnipresent in Nú Barreto's drawings, the gesticulation of several figures that appear to be

tumbling down echoes the fall of the Damned as depicted in medieval and Renaissance scenes of the Last Judgment. As the title suggests, the artist insists on the deeply imperfect nature of humans, who are now submitted to an unheard-of collective effort, the “imperative” of confinement. With natural empathy, he uses metaphors in every little detail of a particularly arresting iconography. Thus, several men are imprisoned like messages in bottles thrown at sea, reduced to resignation, to being tossed around, to silence – an image that also refers to the feelings brought up by the current lockdowns. Another recurring motif that is subjected to the same disorientation: the ladder, whose usefulness always seems vain or implausible, and that illustrates the illusion of social climbing as well as the misleading mirage of consumeristic lifestyles. Conversely, the chair signals “the person who won his place in the sun.” These works are also imbued with symbols that originate from indigenous West African cultures.

Violence is present as well, above all in the colors the artist uses to sketch these unfortunate existences. Red: the blood that permeates the earth and determines our personal trajectories; the still raw scars of a region marked by war and violence. “Funguili black”: a veritable social marker, synonym of poverty; it is the grayish, chalky tint that black skin takes on when it is dehydrated or a victim of deprivation.

Paradoxically, a certain lightness emanates from these works: the artist’s airy handwriting, which almost resembles Joan Miró’s abstract compositions, counterbalances this blackness and allows us to digest the burden of anti-establishment with which it is endowed. Something like a dream, like poetry, like hope is thus deployed in these compositions, intensified by a palette of colors that are increasingly diversified and optimistic.

What’s more, these representations distance themselves from their subjects, thus acquiring a universal scope: they portray a humanity in which Nú Barreto conserves an unwavering confidence. The products of consecutive lockdowns, these recent works experiment with plasticity, a new materiality that attests to a creative passion that is constantly evolving, despite the circumstances.

Born in 1966 in São Domingos (Guinea-Bissau), Nú Barreto has been living and working in Paris since 1989.

Graduated from the École Nationale des Métiers de l’Image des Gobelins (Paris, France), Nú Barreto has forged a language of his own and developed a multidisciplinary and political practice. His original work was quickly spotted. In 1998, he represented his country at the Lisbon World Fair (Portugal). His work has since then received international exposure and Nú Barreto has established himself as one of the most prominent artists of African contemporary art.

As evidenced by the many solo and group exhibitions dedicated to his work, among which: “AFRO, Rencontres avec l’art de l’Afrique contemporaine” at the Centre culturel de l’Escale in Levallois-Perret (France) in 2019; “0.10 RELOADED Avant-Garde” at the Sabine Knust gallery in 2018, in Munich (Germany) where he exhibited alongside William Kentridge, El Anatsui and Isaac Julien; the great exhibition entitled “Lumières d’Afrique”, which, between 2015 and 2018, travelled to the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, (France), the Donwahi Foundation in Abidjan (Côte d’Ivoire), the IFAN Museum in Dakar (Senegal), the Palace of Nations in Geneva (Switzerland), the African Union of Addis-Abeba (Ethiopia) and at the EUMETSAT in Darmstadt (Germany); “Hommage à la Biennale d’Art contemporain africain de Dakar” in Martigny (Switzerland), and “Convergences” held at the headquarter of the West African Economic and Monetary Union in Ouagadougou (Burkina-Faso) in 2016. In 2015, the artist enjoyed his first solo show in China entitled “Ressonância” at the Taipa House Museum of Macao (China), and took part in “Rastros” at the Capixaba do Negro Museum (MUCANE) in Vitória (Brazil). Before, in 2013, he was exhibited at the Boribana Museum of Dakar (Senegal); at the Arpád Szenes and Viera da Silva Foundation in Lisbon, PLMJ, (Portugal) in 2012 on the occasion of “Fundação PLMJ, 100 obras - 10 años”; at the Latin American Foundation of São Paulo (Brazil) in 2011; at the Biennale of São Paulo (Brazil) in 2010; at the Cité des sciences et de l’industrie de la Villette for the exhibition “Quand l’Afrique s’éveillera”; in Paris (France) in 2007. In 2006, he took part in the famous Biennial of Contemporary African Art of Dakar (Senegal), as well as in “Afrique Europe – rêves croisés”, an exhibition organized by the EU Commission at Les Ateliers des Tanneurs in Brussels (Belgium).

Nú Barreto’s works are featured in major public collections such as the Musée Capixaba do Negro Museum (MUCANE) in Vitória, Brazil; the Pro- Justitiae Foundation in Porto, and the Arpád Szenes and Viera da Silva Foundation (PLMJ), in Lisbon, Portugal; the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) in Ouagadougou, in Burkina-Faso; as well as the Taipa House Museum of Macao in China The National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C., USA, the Africana Foundation, Geneva, Switzerland, the Société Générale Foundation, Abidjan, Ivory Coast, the Collection of the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO), Bissau, Guinea Bissau, the H Foundation, Antananarivo and Paris, Madagascar, France.

Paris Bourg-Tibourg

Antoine Renard

AMNESIA
February 5 - April 10, 2021

Sophie Kuijken

April 24 - June 5, 2021

Paris Cloître Saint-Merri

Group Show

High Emission Zone
February 11 - April 17, 2021

Jorge Queiroz

April 24 - June 5, 2021

Paris Cloître Saint-Merri II

Sarkis

Au commencement la chaleur
February 11 - April 3, 2021

Nú Barreto

L'imparfait et l'impératif
April 15 - May 22, 2021

Brussels

Laure Prouvost

*Reaching hi her grounds
from the rub he she we grow*
April 8 - May 29, 2021

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