

IBRAHIM MAHAMA

VANISHING POINTS. 2014 – 2020

5 JUNE – 18 SEPTEMBER 2021

EXHIBITION OPENING: SATURDAY, 5. JUNE, 11 AM – 8 PM

REITER SPINNEREISTR. 7, 04179 LEIPZIG



Construction site of *Parliament of Ghosts* in Tamale, Ghana. © Ibrahim Mahama

*With the exhibition "VANISHING POINTS. 2014 - 2020" at REITER, the Ghanaian artist Ibrahim Mahama (*1987) is realising his first solo project in a German gallery. For his site-specific installation, the artist assembles a hundred old wheelbarrows that he collected from workers in Ghana in exchange for new models. The rusty, battered wheelbarrows bear evident traces of daily hard work and can be understood as its symbols. They also represent the development that is architecturally manifested in the history of his home country. At the same time, labour is also to be seen in the context of his "Parliament of Ghosts" project initiated in Tamale (Ghana) in 2020. It will serve as a forum for discursive exchange and will carry forward the idea of social sculpture. A book will be released at the end of the exhibition.*

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The old wheelbarrows, reminiscent of primeval turtle fossils, science fiction beetles from the 1920s or imaginative theatre helmets, are stacked one on top of the other. They could also be rusted, buckled bodies, hanging down on skeletal extremities. Canted into each other, wedged or tightly entangled. On one of them it says "For rent", beneath it a telephone number. On another one can see embossing: "Germany", the country of origin. They are rusted, look bleached, they too have sweated. An indefinable color between yellow, orange, ochre, grey and brown remains. Their bodies are dried out. Together they form a dam of objects which keeps the viewer at a distance. Their essence appears hostile to a skin which could graze itself and become infected. Around them an earthy sand mixture from the region of Leipzig. Also dry. Also barren. It too should be kept out of a wound.

Ibrahim Mahama acquired the 100 wheelbarrows from workers in Ghana. He gave them new ones, they gave him the old. The long overdue replacement of their tools is either a simple, good barter trade, an anti-capitalist act, or action art. In the installation the wheelbarrows provide a reminder of the long history of their movements, of the physical labor, of the colonial history, the independence, the upswing, the problems, the construction ruins, the globalized trade in goods. In Ghana Ibrahim Mahama has initiated new building projects such as The Savannah Centre for Contemporary Art (SCCA) and the Red Clay Studio. Locations, not just for art exhibitions or cultural events, but also for schoolchildren who find new classrooms in airplanes. A number of the wheelbarrows also originate from these building sites.

Naturally this awakens associations with Joseph Beuys, his extended art concept and his social sculpture. Arte Povera, participative art and relational aesthetics are further categories from art history which can be applied to Mahama's works. Beyond this, he demonstrates aesthetic qualities which are also valid, irrespective of the political core. Mahama's outdoor works are simultaneously Land Art and monumental urban installations. The buildings shrouded in jute sacks are reminiscent of Christo and Jeanne Claude's wrapped works, however, as a result of their special fold aesthetic the latter tend to appear graphical, while Mahama's jute collages are more painterly. Their different colors, the chaotic compositional moments in the sewn together and their material reactions to different incidences of light, also make them into a gestural painting architecture.

That one position, like that of Ibrahim Mahama, proves itself on so many different levels, is rare. Mahama's approach is, on the one side, highly aesthetic in the way he handles colors', materials and forms, placing them in relation to the human body and its built environment, provoking a sensuous perception which repels or attracts the body. On the other side, his works demonstrate a constant feedback to the political, to Ghana and the active shaping of the future of his home country.

It is precisely this threshold which Mahama successfully negotiates in ever new ways. He picks the viewers up where they are, through aesthetic, physical sensations, triggered by the communicative power of his works. These initial (unpolitical) perceptions subsequently and relentlessly correlate with a content which, in his country and its colonial past, leads to the employment situation of many inhabitants and the narrations which are generated by Mahama's

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Ibrahim Mahama, *Vanishing Points*. 2014 – 2020, exhibition view REITER | Leipzig 2021,
photo: dotgain.info, © the artist and REITER Leipzig | Berlin

materials. In order to generate this perceptual process Mahama does not need to dispense with his contemporary aesthetic language. On the contrary, he manages to operate with several formal languages in parallel, combining different types of storytelling in order to address heterogeneous groups of recipients. This proves successful because his works are simultaneously regional and global, the former without appearing shallow or arbitrary, the latter without making too many concessions.

– Larissa Kikol

Translated by Colin Shepherd

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Ibrahim Mahama was born in Tamale, Ghana, in 1987. He lives and works in Accra, Kumasi and Tamale.

In March 2019, Ibrahim Mahama opened the artist-run Savannah Centre for Contemporary Art (SCCA) in Tamale, Ghana. This was followed in September 2020 by the inauguration of Red Clay in nearby Janna Kperɲɲ. Both sites house exhibition spaces and serve as research facilities and centers for artist residencies, and are Mahama's contribution to the development and expansion of the contemporary art scene in his home country.

IBRAHIM MAHAMA CV

1987 born in Tamale. Ghana
 2010 Bachelor of Fine Art (Painting). Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi. Ghana
 2013 Master of Fine Art (painting and sculpture). Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi. Ghana
 Since 2015 PhD in fine art. Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi. Ghana

Ibrahim Mahama lives and works in Tamale, Accra and Kumasi. Ghana.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS (Selection)

2021 »Vanishing Points. 2014 - 2020« REITER | Leipzig, Leipzig
 »As the Void Vali and Voli« APALAZZOGALLERY, Brescia. Italy
 »57 Forms of Liberty« Art in the Parks, High Line, New York. USA
 2020 »blankets« U-M Museum of Art, University of Michigan Institute for the Humanities, USA
 2019 »Labour of Many: Ibrahim Mahama« kuratiert von Owen Martin, Norval Foundation, Cape Town. South Africa
 »Parliament of Ghosts« The Whitworth, The University of Manchester, Manchester International Festival. UK
 »Living Grains« Fondazione Giuliani, Rome. Italy
 »A Friend« Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, Castelli Danzari, Porta Venezia – Piazza Guglielmo Oberdan, Milan. Italy
 2018 »Kunst & Kohle« Schloss Strünkede, Emschertal-Museum Herne, Städtische Galerie. Herne
 »A straight line through the carcass of history 1918–1945« DAAD Galerie. Berlin
 »Daò-Bahar Madwarha: A straight line through the carcass of history« Pixkerija, Valletta, Malta
 »In Dependence« APALAZZOGALLERY, Brescia. Italy
 »On Monumental Silences« Extra City Kunsthal, Antwerp. Belgium
 2017 »Non-Orienable Nkansa« Miami Design District, Miami. USA
 »Fragments« White Cube Bermondsey, London. UK
 2016 »Fracture« Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv. Israel
 »Food Distribution Corporation« K21 Art Collection. Düsseldorf

GROUP EXHIBITIONS (Selection)

2021 »sonsbeek20—24. force times distance — on labour and its sonic ecologies« SONSBEEK Arnhem. Belgium
 »Congoville. Contemporary artists tracing colonial tracks« Middelheim Museum, Antwerp. The Netherlands
 »GIBCA 2021 The Ghost Ship and the Sea Change« 11th Edition of Gothenburg International Biennial for Contemporary Art, Gothenburg. Sweden
 »Ecologies and Politics of the Living« Vienna Biennale for Change 2021 PLANET LOVE. University of Applied Arts Vienna / AIL – Angewandte Innovation Laboratory, Vienna. Austria
 »This Is Not Africa – Unlearn What You Have Learned« ARoS, Aarhus, Denmark. Curated by Mahama et al.
 2020 »The Inner Land« REITER | Leipzig
 »MONOCULTURE: A Recent History« M HKA Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp, Antwerp. The Netherlands
 »Global(e) Résistance« Centre Pompidou, Paris. France
 »NIRIN« Artspace and Cockatoo Island, 22nd Biennale of Sidney. Australia
 »tomorrow, there will be more of us« Stellenbosch Triennale, Cape Town. South Africa

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- 2019
- »Tirana Patience« National Gallery of Arts, Tirana. Albania
 - »Future Genealogies, Tales from the Equatorial Line« 6th Lubumbashi Biennale. Democratic Republic of the Congo
 - »Working Labor« SAIC Sullivan Galleries, Chicago. USA
 - Frieze Sculpture, Rockefeller Center, New York. USA
 - »Ghana freedom« Ghanaian Pavilion, Arsenale, 58th Venice Biennale, Venice. Italy
 - »Kubatana« Vestfossen Kunstlaboratorium, Vestfossen. Norway
 - »Eldorama« Tripostal, Lille. France
 - »Dirty Protest: Selections from the Hammer Contemporary collection« Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. USA
 - »Material Insanity« Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden (MACAAL), Marrakech. Morocco
- 2018
- »Torre Matarazzo« São Paulo. Brasil
 - »Geographies of imagination« Savvy Contemporary. Berlin
 - »Memory Palace« White Cube, London. UK
 - »0.10 RELOADED, Avantgarde 2018« Galerie Sabine Knust. Munich
 - »Time is the Game of Man« European Art East Foundation, Castello di Brolio, Gaiole In Chianti. Italy
 - »Histórias Afro Atlânticas« MASP Museu de Arte de Sao Paulo, Assis Chateaubriand, São Paulo. Brasil
 - »No Time For Caution 1966, 2014-2018« La Biennale de l'Art africain contemporain: DAK'ART, Dakar. Senegal
 - »Pulling at Threads: the Woven Object in Contemporary« The Norval Foundation Art Gallery, Cape Town. South Africa
 - »EX AFRICA« Centro Cultural Banco de Brasil, São Paulo; Centro Cultural Banco de Brasil, Rio de Janeiro; Centro Cultural Banco de Brasil. Brasil
 - »Triângulo do Atlântico« 11a Bienal de Artes Visuais do Mercosul, Porto Alegre. Brasil
 - Musée Théodore-Monod d'art africain IFAN, Rue Emile Zola, Dakar. Senegal
- 2017
- »When the Heavens Meets the Earth« The Heong Gallery. Cambridge. UK
 - »documenta 14. Learning from Athens« Kassel and Athens. Germany and Greece
 - »Future Generation Art Prize« 57th Venice Biennale, Palazzo Contarini Polignac, Venice. Italy
 - »Future Generation Art Prize« PinchukArtCenter, Kiev. Ukraine
 - »Orderly Disorderly« Museum of Science and Technology, Accra. Ghana
 - »Ex Africa« CCBB. Belo Horizonte. Brasil
 - »Manipulating the World« Moderna Museet, Stockholm. Sweden
- 2016
- »Cornfields in Accra« Museum of Science and Technology. Accra. Ghana
- 2015
- »All The World's Futures« curated by Okwui Enwezor, Arsenale, 56th Venice Biennale, Venice. Italy