

Baronian Xippas

Press release

Seyni Awa Camara /
Olaf Holzapfel

03.04 - 16.05.2021

Opening

Saturday 3rd March
11h-20h

731 Zeedijk-Het Zoute
8300 Knokke-Heist

Seyni Awa Camara / Olaf Holzapfel

Albert Baronian and Renos Xippas are proud to present a new duo-exhibition in Knokke-Heist showcasing the latest works of Seyni Awa Camara and Olaf Holzapfel. Camara's clay sculptures will be set in a dialogue with Holzapfel's straw and chaguar fibre pictures.

Their interaction generates fascinating resonances that challenge dichotomies of tradition and modernity, of decorative and fine art, of past and present. The works showcased in the exhibition represent three separate ancient techniques, Chaguar fibre weaving, straw weaving and clay working. While such traditional artisanship is often relegated to the fringes of high art as purely 'regional' or 'ornamental', Holzapfel and Camara's practices question these very dividing lines. Their work dusts off such ideas by revealing the vivacity and poignancy of these crafts and their significance for today's local and global audiences. Holzapfel cut across the compartmentalization of human society and finds beauty in the interstices, in the poetry of spaces that can't quite be defined. Camara in turn is an artist whose work exists in the in-between, occupying multiple space simultaneously, both spiritual and concrete, both innovating and indebted to her ancestral techniques, deeply personal but infused with an emotional universality.

In this exhibition clay, chaguar fibre and straw are celebrated for their aesthetic value but also as vehicles and metaphors for relevant societal concerns of identity and globalization.

Seyni Awa Camara (*1945 Bignona, Senegal)

From discovering her talents for clay sculpting at a young age, Camara has evolved over time to become an iconic artist in the contemporary art scene. She developed her own artistic language to represent a private universe of fantastical beings often revolving around the subject of motherhood.

Camara learnt the ancestral techniques of pottery making from her mother, but quickly turned away from the utilitarian nature of the craft to focus on sculpture. Her work was first shown in the seminal 1989 exhibition 'Magiciens de la Terre' at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris leading to her exponential worldwide success.

Her sculptures are produced through a technically arduous and spiritually crucial process. Before producing a work Camara will pray to receive visions that will inspire her next day's work which she will set out to mould in clay in the morning. The ancient craft used to produce these sculptures is complex and lengthy, some sculptures taking up to ten days to be realized.

Despite her global success the artist has always chosen to stay far away from the limelight, limiting interviews and exchanges to focus entirely on her practice.

Olaf Holzapfel (*1967 Dresden, Germany)

Sedentarism versus nomadism, center versus periphery, modern versus traditional, urban versus rural; such dichotomies are key to Holzapfel's exploration the concept of the 'city'. His work is subtle and poetic, it captures the invisible forces that exist in the interstices of cities, resulting in a richer form of representation.

The straw and chaguar fibre pictures focus on representing cities through their landscape. His chaguar pictures, entitled 'Paths of Buenos Aires' consist of digital images of the Argentinian city and its surroundings produced with chaguar textile. This material has played a fundamental spiritual and practical role in Wichí culture, an indigenous population spread throughout Northern Argentina and Southern Bolivia, deeply affected by European colonization. These chaguar pictures are collaborative projects produced together with a family of Wichí craftswomen, Teresa, Luisa and Mirta Gutiérrez.

Combining European colonial urban grids with the traditional motifs of Wichí culture raises questions about how notions of space define a culture and its identity.

The straw works on the other hand are closer to Holzapfel's own heritage. As an artist living and working in Brandenburg, Holzapfel became interested in straw, an ubiquitous agricultural by-product in that region. His works echo religious straw artefacts, which, while abstract, represent very concrete things, like the sun, life, death or resurrection.

Similarly, the straw pictures are abstract, but unpack concepts related to the city, such as digital nomadism and the city as a collection of 'signs'.

Formally, the works deconstruct 19th century tropes of landscape painting by bringing the landscape into his works. They become representations of and with the landscape from which the materials are derived. Formally thus the works reflect on the two-dimensional image and the three dimensional space and explore novel ways of representing space, landscape and identity.

His multilateral approach to these concepts created an extraordinarily large body of work consisting of installations, sculpture, painting, digital imaging, photography and video art, shown at the Venice Biennale (2011) and as part of his project 'Zaun' (Fence) in Documenta 14 (2017).