



Search

GET ON FAD

FEATURES

EVENTS

REVIEW

INTERVIEWS

ART PICS

PEOPLE

ABOUT

TEEVEE

THE
OTHER
ART
FAIR

17-20 OCTOBER 2013
OLD TRUMAN BREWERY
BRICK LANE
LONDON E1 6QL

LONDON'S LEADING
ARTIST-LED FAIR
BOOK TICKETS AT
THEOTHERARTFAIR.COM

HOME » FEATURES » REVIEW »
CURRENTLY READING:

Review: Meschac Gaba: Museum of Contemporary African Art @Tate Modern

July 17, 2013

Features, review

No Comments



Meschac Gaba was born in 1961 in Cotonou, Benin. He currently lives and works between Cotonou and Rotterdam. Gaba studied at the Rijksakademie voor Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam (1996-7). Widely exhibited, his work appeared in Documenta 11 in 2002 and at the Liverpool Biennial in 2010. Gaba's *Museum of Contemporary African Art 1997-2002* at Tate Modern (Level 2) runs through to 22 September 2013. The exhibition is open every day from 10am – 6pm and until 10pm on Friday and Saturday. Admission is free. It is curated by Kerry Greenberg: Curator (International Art) at Tate Modern <http://www.tate.org.uk>.

Review by Yvette Greslé

An imaginary museum enters Tate Modern. A monumental installation by Meschac Gaba consists of twelve rooms. Each contains objects specially constructed or found, and invites a different way of relating, and a different kind of interaction or performance (within the space of a museum). In the *Museum Shop* we can exchange money for commodities (from T-shirts to books). The idea of money is threaded through Gaba's *Museum* most visibly in decommissioned banknotes, transformed and re-imagined. Relationships between money, commodities, marketplaces and global circuits are re-staged in installations that speak to Beninese markets, and trade routes that cross continents, oceans; and the spaces produced by technology. Of course, these relationships and these histories are not simply benign and are woven into systems of exploitation, corruption and abuse. There is a playfulness to Gaba's *Museum* but it is also in dialogue with politics and power.

Gaba's *Architecture Room* allows us to build our own museum or structures, out of wooden blocks. The objects I see throughout the rooms are simultaneously recognisable and unfamiliar. I recognise music tapes from a time before iPods, and the pleasure of recording and mixing music. But the tapes and the music I hear also invoke the sounds and images of markets that I visit when travelling to the African continent. The instruments laid out on the floor are not necessarily known and produce the sensations of curiosity and the impetus to learn. The *Salon* with music, chairs and tables invite us to relax or talk; and perhaps play the piano in the corner. On a computer is an adaptation of a game (*Awélé*) that any of us are invited to play. The *Art and Religion Room* tell a story about the relationships between visual images and belief systems that crisscross time, and geography. A Tarot reader proposes a reading; producing a space of curiosity or discomfort depending on what you believe. Objects for the purposes of worship sit alongside those that form part of the language of

LOGIN WITH

Login with Facebook

RELATED CONTENT

Kimathi Donkor: 'Daddy, I want to be a black artist' @ Peckham Space

October 3, 2013



'I wanted to talk about inspiration, desire, commitment, and the determination these young people have'.

The Worlds First Ever Commercial Real-Time Virtual Gallery Launches Tomorrow 2nd October 2013

October 1, 2013



Curators Futurecity launch Paynes & Borthwick Gallery – a real-time virtual replica of an actual gallery

space, due for completion in autumn this year, at the Paynes & Borthwick development project on the banks of the River Thames in West Greenwich, SE8.

Tate and Bloomberg combine forces to launch new creative space which allows visitors to leave their own interpretive mark!

September 20, 2013



Yet another example of how the virtual and physical realms are becoming more intertwined on a diurnal

basis! Now, with the help of Bloomberg Connects, Tate's collection will be used to stimulate a conversation between Tate and its visitors by using the Bloomberg-supported digital space as a fresh canvas for creativity. With over 75 digital screens and corresponding digital drawing bars, visitors will become participants and co-creators, exchanging ideas, images and experiences.

FAD NEWS

ART STUFF on a train # 23: 'One Thing on Top of Another'

October 8, 2013

FAD DAILY

To receive The Daily FAD news directly into your mailbox please sign up [HERE](#).

Apart from the daily newsletter we will also send you a monthly newsletter with the hottest topics of the month as well as info on forthcoming FAD events and competitions.

YOU SAY



Giorgia Rossini on **FREE Film screening: Girl Rising comes to Rich Mix for one-off on Monday July 15th** Love this film! SO inspiring.. and something I've ...



Hannah on **Talks with 100% Design** Thank you for the useful information! It has been ...



Rose Marie O'dowd on **Platform 6 Debut Exhibition showcasing LGB artwork from Judy Blame, Boy George, William Baker + a many more ..** You're the best Boy George ! x



John Mathis on **Coolerwalls Partners with Warner Bros Consumer Products and DC Comics for DC Comics Wall Murals** Where can I buy this mural



Cat Weaver on **A user's guide to artspoke** Rule #1: Say 'gesture' #h2taa

Older »

WE ALSO LIKE

1:54

AO ArtObserved

ArtRabbit

colette

Contemporary African Art Fair

tourism, kitsch, and consumerism.



The *Library* draws attention to different kinds of knowledge and ways of telling a story. A long wooden table invites us to read or engage in dialogue or debate. The books stacked on the surrounding shelves do not presume their audiences. Rather the selections suggest exchange or dialogue: books about **contemporary African art** rest alongside those about nineteenth century European painting. There are books for adults and for children; and we can read them freely. An installation constructed out of chandeliers with candles and burnt books refer to a proverb: 'when an old person dies, it is like when a library burns down'. Oral traditions (including proverbs) are woven into the visual histories and knowledge systems that shape the African continent as a whole. Outmoded computers attached to bicycles lead us to virtual spaces that document dialogues about current practices in African art. The bicycles and the computers speak (with much humour) to the ways in which knowledge travels, is useful or becomes defunct. Nothing can be taken for granted and we adapt, move and transform with the passing of time.



In the *Library* we can sit alongside a coffin and listen to an account based on imagination and story-telling: Gaba imagines his dead father's voice as he tells us about his son's journey as artist, and their relationship. In 1996 Gaba left his home in Benin to study at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam. Listening to the imagined voice of Gaba's father is a moving and poignant experience that we all, as human beings, facing our own mortality (and the mortality of those we love) can relate to. It is also an installation within a larger whole that constructs a narrative about what it is to be an artist working in the world today. Travel, leaving home and migration is an accepted part of the experience of being an artist, a curator, a scholar or a writer. Art practices produce sites of exchange and dialogue across the globe; and these exchanges take place in-between countries and continents. The art world (as a sphere of circulation, exchange and intellectual life) cannot function as a world demarcated by borders and rigid boundaries. In the *Marriage Room* Gaba again invites us into a private world; his marriage at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Personal objects such as wedding photographs, a video of the ceremony, gifts and the bride's dress speak to how art, life and the experience of being human are connected and interwoven.

As a student at the Rijksakademie, Gaba was struck by how African art was presented, curated and imagined in the museums he visited. Museums filled with images and objects of ethnographic and anthropological interest; the pillages of war (or the idiosyncratic individual curiosity of collectors) detached African objects from their context, their rituals and their meanings. Objects such

This website uses cookies to improve your experience. We'll assume you're ok with this, but you can opt-out if you wish.

traditional museum displays suspend these objects in time refusing them circulation, movement and transformation. Like every other part of the world, visual practices across the African continent shift and change over time: there are histories about twentieth and twenty-first century art (produced across the African continent) that counter assumptions about what African art is, and can be.

Gaba's *Museum*, in its entirety, stages questions that go to the heart of tensions that continue to circle African Art. 'Africa' is too often a hold-all for many different kinds of visual practices that emerge out of a continent as vast and complex as any other. Gaba's *Museum* states what should be taken for granted. It disrupts the idea that African visual practices are simply about the production of cultural artefacts, which are imagined via the circuits of tourism, anthropology, and



Most days art Critic Paul Carey-Kent spends hours on the train, traveling between his home in

Southampton and his day job in Surrey. Could he, we asked, jot down whatever came into his head?

KOLKATA CROSS-CURRENTS First showing in London of work by Leading artists from India

October 7, 2013



Major works by three leading Indian artists from Kolkata never before seen in London have been selected for the inaugural

STRARTA art fair by curator, Griselda Bear.

Lots of *Cool Stuff* from Moving Image London this year

October 4, 2013



Moving Image runs during Frieze week over at The Bargehouse down by the Southbank in London.

Moving Image is the best contemporary video art fair around.

SCREAM EDITIONS release exclusive TRACEY EMIN limited edition print online NEXT WEEK

October 2, 2013



SCREAM EDITIONS release exclusive TRACEY EMIN limited edition print online on Tuesday 8th October 2013.

Lisson Gallery to show Dan Graham / Richard Long at Frieze London / Frieze Masters

October 2, 2013



The Lisson Gallery is presenting two solo exhibitions at the autumn fairs in London.

FAD goes LIVE ! and exhibits 8 painters at The Inaugural STRARTA art Fair

October 2, 2013



After six years supporting and promoting emerging and established artists in the digital world, FAD, is about to cross over into

the real world this October to showcase a hand-picked selection of London's most exciting emerging and established artistic talent at The new STRARTA Art Fair.

30 ARTISTS COME TOGETHER ONLINE TO HELP LONDON'S HOMELESS

October 1, 2013



30 artists including Maggi Hambling, Rob Ryan and Terry Duffy have donated artwork for an online art auction to raise money for homelessness charity, The Connection at St Martin's, art room which inspires and

designboom

DUMMY

Free Range Art and Design Show

Moving Image

this is tomorrow

museums. There are innumerable artists, curators, collectors and scholars working in the arena of contemporary African art. But depending on who is looking and speaking they risk invisibility. Gaba's *Museum of Contemporary African Art* stages a number of questions: What is contemporary African art? Where are the museums for contemporary African art? What does this art look like? Are categories such as 'African' valid? Are categories and labels necessary? Who decides what contemporary should be and what it should look like?



In a *Financial Times* article titled 'Africa's bright glare', Jackie Wullschlager writes about Meschac Gaba and Ibrahim el-Salahi at Tate Modern. She begins: 'Name an African artist. Name two more. It's a struggle: African art still has the most minor presence in the world's museums, biennales, galleries. And when we do see it, too often it lacks the context for us to make sense of it'. This paragraph is emblematic of the space into which Gaba inserts his *Museum*. Wullschlager's space makes numerous assumptions: about the identity of the 'we'; and about the meaning of the 'world'. It erases the existence of countless curators, scholars, writers and artists. She quite simply imagines that they do not exist. Wullschlager inserts herself into an arena that is highly charged, deeply political and finely tuned to the nuances of language and its violence. Earlier this year, writing about *Trade Routes*, a group exhibition at Hauser & Wirth she similarly erases the importance of the work and the identities of the artists concerned referring to them as 'non-white'. The artists she refers to are reduced to the category of a non-person and a category that cannot exist without an imagined skin. A skin that is 'not white'. How do artists categorised in this way feel about this reduction and this erasure? I suspect that in this case their voices and their practice as artists were considered secondary to the matters at hand: how to deal with the perplexing problem of that which appears strange, different and impenetrable.

Gaba's installation doesn't claim to have all the answers to the questions he poses. This in itself counters the assumption that everything can be explained, analysed and categorised; or indeed that it should be. At no point in the *Museum* is there an attempt to shut down debate. These are spaces that anyone can freely enter (there is no charge) and nothing in the installations themselves excludes. Gaba's *Library* does not reproduce a dogma that places Africa and the West in opposition to one another. Rather it searches for points of connection, sharing and dialogue. While this is an ideal (given the ongoing prejudices and conflicts of the world we live in) it is at least an imaginative attempt to consider something else. Even if this attempt is temporary it speaks to art as a space for reflection and imaginative possibility.



Exhibition closes 22 September 2013 <http://www.tate.org.uk>.

This exhibition marks Tate's acquisition of the *Museum of Contemporary African Art* 1997-2002. Promised gift of the artist and acquired with funds provided by the Acquisitions Fund for African Art supported by Guaranty Trust Bank plc 2013.

I refer to Jackie Wullschlager. 'Critics Choice', *Financial Times* May 4/5 2013, p.15 and 'Africa's bright glare', *Financial Times*, July 5 2013 (available on-line).

helps people move away from the streets.

All images shown here courtesy of Tate Modern: Meschac Gaba, *Museum of Contemporary African Art 1997-2002* © Meschac Gaba

Disqus seems to be taking longer than usual. **Reload?**



Moving **i**mage

LONDON
Oct 17-20, 2013

CONTACT US:

MARK@FADEMAIL.COM

[ADVERTISING? CLICK HERE](#)

[TERMS & CONDITIONS](#)

©2010 FAD WEBSITE - ALL RIGHTS
RESERVED