



Quiet Like an Oyster

FRIDA ORUPABO / STEVENSON

BY
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Frida Orupabo is an artist and sociologist based in Oslo who recently debuted her second solo show on African soil, in Cape Town at the Stevenson Gallery. For those in the know, the artist is on Instagram with a unique handle: @nemiepeba. It is a great place to visit to understand her process which is multilayered and diverse. It shows at first glance that her collages, aesthetically bold and intellectually acute, are interconnected, layering waves of history and narrative. Her archive is a digital thought-catcher she uses to disrupt narratives and create her collages.

The importance of visuals began at an early age. Orupabo grew up painting and drawing. Later, when she got her first computer, she began to manipulate images and make collages. The introduction of a computer, alongside her curiosity for images, marks an early shift to which she owes her current distinct practice of combing through digital images: “I go online and gather things I like. I often use Google, Tumblr, or Pinterest and I play around with different images on my phone. My Instagram is an archive I can go back to.” Living in Norway as a person of color, she



Pink stockings
2022

Collage with paper pins
226 x 168cm
Stevenson

their very absence. Orupabo's work challenges stereotypical versions of Blackness: "It's important for me to create identities or subjects that break with what we are used to seeing or hearing."

Orupabo grew up with subdued anger, which was in her own words "quiet as an oyster". Oysters may be mute, but their silent resolve turns threats into pearly treasure. A process poetically akin to the driving force behind Orupabo's art: "there is this clash between the internal you, how you see yourself, and what is projected on you from the outside. I am interested in what that does to you as a human being". Resistance is the shared gritty compound that drives oysters to make pearls and set the course for Orupabo to make art. Her *Ouverte*, championed all over the world, is a testament to her voice firmly found. Far gone is the quietude of an oyster, and now her voice is loud, like the roar of the ocean itself.

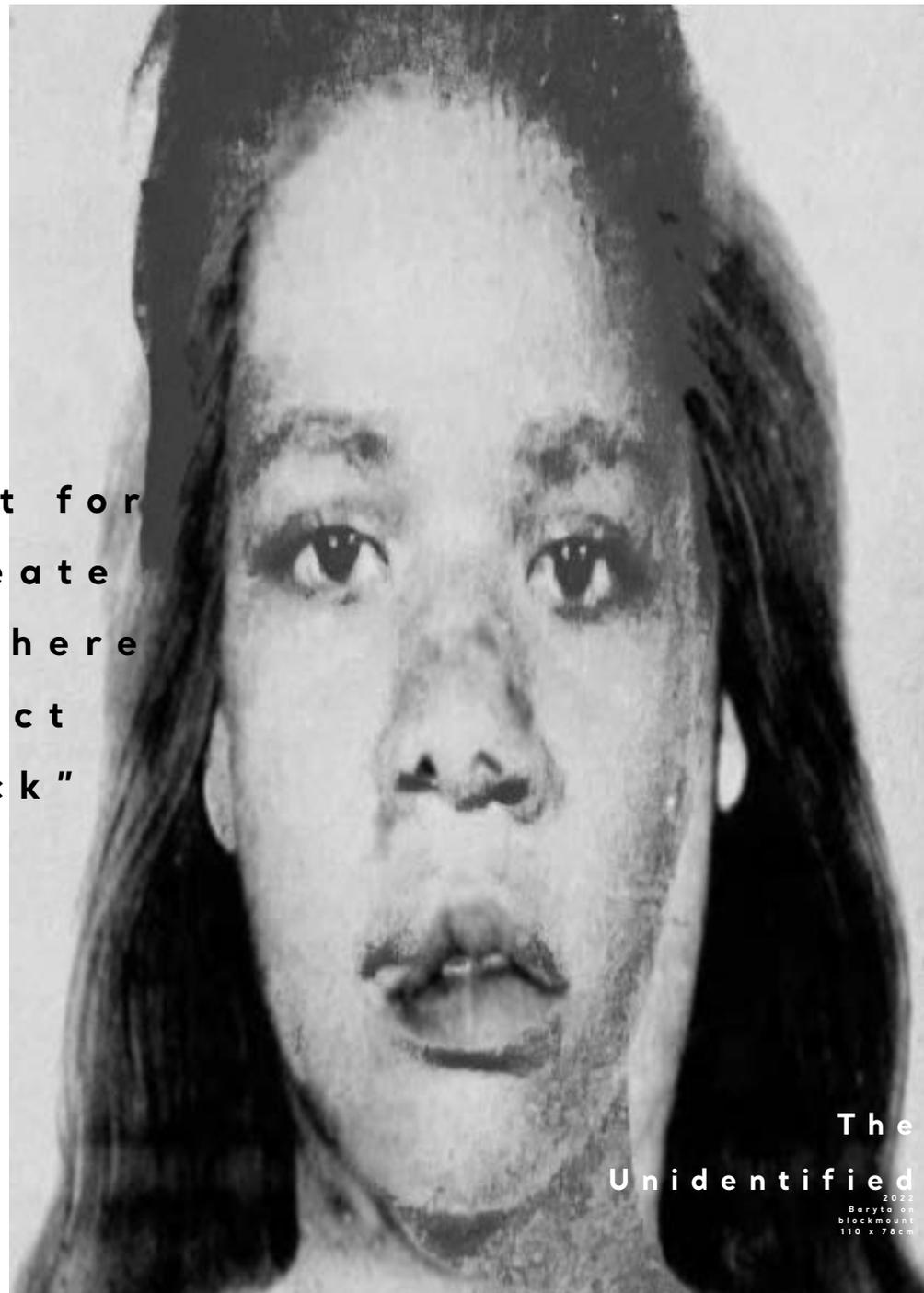
Orupabo speaks candidly to curator Elvira Dyangani Ose in a recorded interview hosted by Stevenson Gallery in which she shares her motivation:

"Being brought up in Norway in a predominantly white society, in a white family (except for my sister) I felt for a

very long time that I was unable to speak. The only thing I had was my eyes and my anger. Anger is a form of resistance. It sends out a message to your whole body that something is wrong – that what is being done towards you is not OK, even when you remain quiet as an oyster.” Orupabo expands on this feeling as a link to her working with archives “this is what I recognize in many of the images from the colonial archive- the anger of the quiet resistance.”

A marked characteristic of Orupabo’s work is the strong gaze of her subjects, “It is important for me to create visuals where the subject looks back, as a direct response to my own life experience.” Flipping through books on her work, and encountering these notable stares is one thing, but seeing the work lifesize in a gallery setting is another. It’s profoundly moving. The Stevenson exhibition titled “I’ve Been here for Days” presents her work in such a measured and precise way that the gazes of the subjects surround you. They are unflinching, inescapable even. The collages, hanging on all four walls of the main room and make the viewer feel watched. Each collage is in various poses, often positioned with reposeful body language, but the gaze is unmatched in its sheer purpose and intensity. The staring contest between

**“It is
important for
me to create
visuals where
the subject
looks back”**



The
Unidentified

2022
Printed on
blackmount
110 x 78cm



**I'VE BEEN
HERE FOR
DAYS**

Installation View
Frida Orupabo
Stevenson
Cape Town, South Africa

the subject and viewer is an invitation into Orupabo's world. A place steeped in millions of visuals, churning thoughts, and a direct mission to re-examine the world she witnesses and partakes in.

Though the artist has an unquestionably unique visual signature, there is one piece, 'Untitled Spider II' that is unmistakably Bourgeois in tone. It is the absolute highlight of the show. Surreptitiously hung on a wall tucked away by the gallery's office, you stumble across it unwittingly. It's unexpected, like when you spot a spider in the corner of the room. The impact of seeing it is so unnerving that it seems to crawl off the wall, follow you out of the gallery and into the street, and stay in your bones until bedtime. But isn't that what art ought to do? Evoke a reaction, remove you from your thoughts and channel new ones? Haunt you even?

Orupabo weaves a web of her universe by pinning, pasting, nailing, researching, juxtaposing, and actively deconstructing to re-construct. She spins a space for onlookers to do the same, an encouragement to re-imagine. Each piece presented at Stevenson functions as a powerful self-contained story on resilience but grouped together in the show they speak to a larger narrative about regeneration.



U n t i t l e d

(S p i d e r I I)