



Xavier Verhoest

'I have only what I remember'

Displacement is at the core of Xavier Verhoest's current work. After the post election violence in Kenya in 2007, hundreds of thousands of people were displaced within the country.

The artist who has been living for 15 years in Kenya created a body of work inspired by displaced people now living in a land between memory and amnesia. He wished to go back to the origin of their journey and transformation. For them, memory loss is a generational and individual issue.

This exhibition shows how these Kenyans are no longer part of History and are unable to share what they have been through. They cannot play their part in their story.

How can one live in a society without being heard by others? The silence of the collective memory becomes stronger than the individual memory. In the artist's perspective, the sculptures shown here - as a symbol of physical and mental exile- and the memory-tree in the form of collage illustrate these losses.

The House of Others

Both a refuge and a prison, these shelters that the artist prefers to call "The Houses of Others" recall a lost place. They show how it is impossible to meet others and the isolation caused by exclusion and stigmatization.

These objects can be seen as universal, they are signs of pathology rather than a culture of silence. They give a palpable dimension to this silence which is the only answer when faced with the impossible task of expressing something beyond words. The fact that the artist worked for Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders) in Rwanda, Palestine and others war- torn regions definitely affected his work.

Displaced People

These recent works show us 'another place', no human beings are represented but "the other" is present. "My work is devoid of human presence but filled with stories. I try to translate the lack of



communication and unreliability of our memories. The next presidential elections in Kenya should take place in 2012 but the consequences of the last elections are still very present. Thousands of IDPs are still living in makeshift camps, isolated and forgotten while investigations at the International Criminal Court of the Hague of current and former ministers and potential future presidential candidates are still being carried out"

Disappearing

Working around silence reveals lost objects and entails a search for meaning: the water with its infinite forms, its flow and content, a picture between the sky and the earth, the tree as a silent witness or as a memory of the lost place.

The tree, clouds and other mental landscapes

What is more normal than to live with the sky, a tree or the sea? Emptiness and fullness are side by side and not opposites. Could it be a way of looking at the world where emptiness does not necessarily lead to fullness but rather to more emptiness and finally to silence?

The viewer may feel stillness and calm when contemplating the bigger paintings. However, lurking underneath the whites, greys and blues there is worry and darkness.

These works reflect the tension that lies between peace and intensity. They are like a traveler's or displaced person's notebook, signs of somebody looking for a land or landscape impossible to find, a homeland that has become a boundary beyond which it is impossible to go.

About the artist:

Xavier Verhoest was born in Boma (DRC, ex Zaire) in 1964. He lives in Nairobi since 2001 where he works as an artist and art curator. He is the co-founder of Art2Be (www.art2bebodmaps.com), an organization aiming at bringing positive living and social changes to marginalized groups focusing on self-expression and visual Art. After studying cinematography and editing, Xavier has worked between 1992 and 2003 as a non medical volunteer for Medecins Sans Frontieres. Since 2003, he has shown in Nairobi, Paris, Addis Abeba and Brussels.