

PATRICK WOKMENI - L'EUROPE FANTÔME

6 September – 27 October 2018

Patrick Wokmeni (°1985, Douala, Cameroon – lives and works since 2012 in Ghent) is an autodidact who has fully applied himself to photography as a medium since 2006. This spontaneous passion for images has its origin in Patrick's association with numerous artists who frequented the neighbourhood where he lived as a child, the district of New-Bell in Douala. He wandered through the alleys of his hometown and other urban environments looking for images. His fascination mainly focused on obscure places and nightclubs, the reverse side or underground of society.

Wokmeni's photographic work is a reflection of his participation in the simple moments of life, but it also makes the harsh reality of our society more explicit. "I approach youngsters from the neighbourhood with an affective gaze. I try to capture their daily life of rebellion, of illusory dreams and frequently of apathy in my photographic images."

Based on his portfolio and some exhibitions in Cameroon, as well as a few participations in projects in Paris, Arles, Berlin, Madrid and Brussels, he was admitted to the Higher Institute of Fine Arts (HISK) in Ghent and obtained a Laureate in 2013 with the exhibition 'Portrait of the Artist. Works and References' curated by Katerina Gregos.

After his residence in the HISK, he continued to live and work in Ghent. He maintains a good relationship with his compatriot Pascale Marthine Tayou, who curated an exhibition of Wokmeni's work in gallery Olivier Robert in Paris in 2015.

His work has received greater conceptual substance in recent years. He doesn't see himself as a documentary or reportage photographer but rather as an artist that uses the medium of photography. The series that he made in the red-light districts of Douala ('Les Belles de New-Bell'), Makutano (DR Congo) and in the Northern Quarter (Brussels) are not a sociological study; they are more of an investigation into visibility, exhibitionism and the possibilities and limits of imaging. On a conceptual level, his work has more to do with the observer (the person who looks and interprets) than with the maker (as an interface) or with what is depicted, which often appears as very explicit images or as abstractions. You can describe Patrick Wokmeni's work as ethically amoral, but with a political dimension and a specifically aesthetic strategy.

Patrick Wokmeni made one of the most important works of recent years for the project 'European Ghosts – the representation of art from Africa in the twentieth century' in MuZee, Ostend. Director Phillip Van den Bossche invited Wokmeni to rephotograph masks, sculptures and fetishes that were supplied by the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren. Patrick Wokmeni created a set with live performers (friends from the African Diaspora) and recorded the event on photo and video. Amidst a typical African décor, African people carefully manipulate objects of immense value: masks, fetishes and sculptures move in an almost choreographic manner from hand to hand, are placed on heads, and are presented in a scenography. In this work, Patrick Wokmeni and his African friends seem to reclaim "their" ritual objects, which have adopted a museum status here in Belgium. The photo in Hopstreet Gallery's Window Project: Masque - L'Europe Fantome, 2015, is a good example of this. The full series is part of the collection of MuZee in Ostend.

Hans Martens (b. 1963, Ghent) is director of the Royal Academy for Fine Arts in Mechelen and an independent curator. He worked as a curator for the Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art (SMAK) in Ghent from 1991 to 2000. Between 2000 and 2004 he was curator of the Caermersklooster - Provincial Centre for Art and Culture in Ghent. From the end of 2004 to the end of 2006 he was a cultural advisor for the domains of visual arts, museums, heritage, architecture and design under Bert Anciaux, Flemish Minister of Culture, Youths, Sport and Brussels. From 2006 to 2010 he was artistic director of the Higher Institute of Fine Arts Flanders (HISK Vlaanderen) in Ghent.

Together with Jan Hoet he was curator of the exhibition 'Sint-Jan' (2012, St Bavo Cathedral in Ghent) and artistic advisor for the exhibition 'De Zee – salut d'honneur Jan Hoet' (2014, MuZee in Ostend). He was recently a co-curator for the exhibition 'Zot Geweld/Dwaze Maagd' (2016) regarding the iconic sculpture of Rik Wouters in Mechelen and on the Triennial 'glorious (?) Failure' (2018) in the Psychiatric Hospital in Duffel. He was also a co-curator of the inaugural exhibition in the new museum Hof van Busleyden in Mechelen (June 2018). Moreover, he curated the first Biennale of Ideas in CC De Steiger in Menen in September 2018.

More info on: www.patrickwokmeni.be