

Press Release

For Immediate Release

Sakhile&Me premieres works by Gabonese artist and human rights activist Owanto in solo exhibition

Flowers reflects upon the experience of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) survivors

February 10, 2020

Frankfurt/Main, Germany – Sakhile&Me is pleased to present the first solo exhibition of Gabonese artist and human rights activist Owanto in Germany. Titled “Flowers,” the exhibition will open on 8 March 2020, coinciding with International Women’s Day, and will run until 2 May 2020.

“Flowers” showcases a series of enlarged archival pictures of a Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) ceremony. The analogue photographs are digitalized, enlarged and printed on aluminium before Owanto disrupts the violation in the image by removing the sections deemed most private and covering the void with delicate hand-crafted cold porcelain flowers. The flower is a symbolic cover-up that masks the identity of the young girls in the photographs – an identity that was taken away from them – and hides this very loss.

Through the series, Owanto brings to light the complex and contested issues surrounding FGM/C. Often done in discreet initiation ceremonies around the world, it is an age-old ritual that has been used to signify the important transition from childhood to womanhood by curbing sexual desire. More than 200 million girls and women alive today have been cut in 30 countries where FGM/C is concentrated, of which 44 million are under 15 years old. Currently, more than three million girls are at risk for FGM/C annually.

“I understood that these photographs carried a symbolic and ambivalent meaning. They depicted a ceremony, a celebration, yet, they also revealed pain. I wanted to bring the past into the present to open an important dialogue. I wanted to transform these old analogue photographs using digital technology, and to keep a record of human behaviour. I understood that these images taken by a Westerner during the colonial era could be perceived as voyeuristic, but I wanted to use them and elevate them to the rank of art and activism to fight FGM/C.”

The show is an extension of the artist’s 2019 solo exhibition “One Thousand Voices” which was held at the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary African Art in Cape Town, consisting of photographs and audio recordings of testimonies from FGM/C survivors. It also features “Pardonne-Moi,” a selection of embroidery works from the exhibition “Material Insanity” which was shown at the Musée d’Art Contemporain Africain Al Maaden in Marrakech, each work comprising a single word or short phrase relating to the experience of survivors sewn onto a sheet of cloth by reformed cutters, as their way of atoning.

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About the artist

Owanto is a multi-cultural Gabonese artist whose multidisciplinary practice emerges from a 30-year career engaging with consciousness through the notion of memory, both personal and collective, and exploring cross-cultural and trans-historical dialogues to interrogate the meaning of existence, as well as of her personal and shared history. Her current projects focus on the female condition, emancipation and the breaking of silence. Her work on this matter reflects upon the psychological concept of resilience by exploring the notion of healing, repair and transformation. In 2009, Owanto represented the Republic of Gabon at the 53rd Venice Biennale.

About the gallery

Sakhile&Me is a contemporary art gallery based in downtown Frankfurt working with emerging and established international artists, creative entrepreneurs and curators, with a particular focus on Africa and its many diasporas. The gallery's two founders, Sakhile Matlhare and Daniel Hagemeyer, received bachelor's degrees from Hamilton College and master's degrees from the University of Sydney. Matlhare then pursued a doctoral degree at Northwestern University focusing on how contemporary artists work alongside curators, art historians, and other art experts in the gatekeeping process, within and beyond the rubric of contemporary African art. Hagemeyer has worked with his father, Achim Hagemeyer (Kunsthandel Hagemeyer), for the past four years, specializing in German Expressionist and classical modern art.

Opening hours

Tuesday - Friday: 12 pm - 6 pm; Saturday: 10 am - 4 pm; by appointment.

Image Material

Owanto. 2019. Portrait. **File name:** owanto-large.jpg. **Caption:** Owanto.

Owanto. *Flowers VII*. 2019. Photograph UV print on aluminium with cold porcelain flower. 182x130x17cm. **File name:** owanto-flowers-007-large.jpg. **Caption:** Owanto: Flowers VII (2019).

Owanto. *Flowers XI*. 2019. Photograph UV print on aluminium with cold porcelain flower. 75x75x17cm. **File name:** owanto-flowers-011-large.jpg. **Caption:** Owanto: Flowers XI (2019).

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