



YONAMINE

AIN'T NO SAINT

OPENING 2 FEB. 10PM

2 FEB. - 9 MAR. 2016

Yonamine was born in Angola in 1975. The artist lived in Angola, Zaire (R.D.C.), Brazil and United Kingdom. At the moment Yonamine lives and works between Lisbon, Luanda and Berlin. Yonamine describes himself as a Luso-Congolese artist.

“To act is to build. Destroying.”

Teixeira de Pascoaes

The title of Yonamine's new solo show is a first-person statement: “Ain't no Saint”. When we think of it, there's nothing new there: nobody is. Nonetheless, as soon as we enter the gallery space we realize the full irony and ingenuity of the statement.

A wall lined with toast, like tiles composing a figurative motif, reveals the repetition of a face and Arabic numerals. As we approach the mural, we discover that the face belongs to José Eduardo dos Santos while the numerals seem to form some kind of undecipherable code in which the numbers 0, 1, and 8 are predominant. The key to decode this cypher is the face itself. Number 1 refers to the status of the President of the Republic, the country's number 1, conveying all the symbolic and numerological significance of this number; but 1 is also ordinal, the 1st, and the synonym of Kwanzaa, the celebration of the beginning of the crop season in Africa, which also gives its name to Angola's currency. The 0 represents absence, the lack of something, the void, a meaning that gains extra dimensions when we think that its circular form is also the symbol of eternity. Finally, 8 is usually associated with the symbol of infinity, a cyclic number that has, in African beliefs, a totalizing symbolism. In the Kabbalah, it represents the appropriation of power and personal victory through the accumulation of wealth. That said, we cannot avoid thinking about the consequences of eating a toast with the face of José Eduardo dos Santos on it... But this game is also a visual epigraphy that refers to the ignorance and to the way “art is consumed” in certain contexts: “to eat art,.... art”.

The provocation which is implicit in this installation is continued on the square burlap canvases that occupy the remaining space in the gallery's first floor. To produce these pieces, Yonamine employed many of the artistic techniques he has been using throughout his career: newspaper clippings, silkscreen printing, collage, graffiti, drawing, painting, photography in offset posters. At the same time, the artist intensifies an archaeological process that consists in gathering iconographic and iconic elements of his memory and experience; he expands the semantics he has been exploring, inspired by urban semiotics; and creates new metaphoric analogies with anthropological and sociological resonances in which satirical humor is a constant ingredient in his deconstruction of stereotypes.

The artist's critical analysis is focused on the political, economic, social and cultural signifiers that pertain to Angolan society and to the world in general: Obama; "Je suis Charlie"; the symbol of weight in packaging is present in several of his pieces, a reference to the heavy social "burdens"; the bloodied washing machine drum and the cleaning supplies, Neo Blanc, OMO, CIF, refer to the white-washing of corruption and physical and psychological violence—CIF is also the acronym of China International Foundation, and a reference to the fact that China is "colonizing" Angola with its investments, colossal business ventures and tightly controlled network of influences; the graffiti erased by the authorities that, because there is not enough paint, are simply scribbled over so that their original message is rendered imperceptible, creating even more visual pollution, etc., etc.

With this countless accumulation and anarchic juxtaposition of elements, Yonamine evokes the mutation of street walls as posters are pasted on top of each other, ending up torn and destroyed by erosion. It is as if the artist is bringing the marginal element of urban landscape we usually ignore into the gallery space.

On each canvas there are layers upon layers upon layers, blending with each other in a seemingly riotous and unrelenting action of erasure. Given that the vast majority of these materials are manufactured, this is a complex, time consuming and demanding process that implies the destruction of several moments of rigorous artistic creation.

In an unprecedented way, the artist pushes himself to the limit, demanding himself the necessary courage and determination to put this process of self-vandalism into practice. The aggressiveness and nihilistic scorn one can feel in these works of art are reminiscent of punk aesthetics, the expression of a subversive culture. This is what differentiates these pieces, and what raises Yonamine to the category of artists who do not limit their work to the restraints imposed by the Market, who are not afraid to take chances.

Finally, a video. "M of M" (2013), is presented for the first time in Portugal. M, the letter, is the protagonist of a real story composed solely by words. White on a black background, the words appear following the tictacking of a clock, revealing an autobiographical universe of references, all of which start with the letter M and often relate to each other. Again, the artist uses accumulation and association, based on an archeological process—remembering—that, in this case, results in an inventory of words from disparate languages.

The show presents several moments of Yonamine's artistic discourse. If, as Agostinho Neto once said "Language is not the issue, but quality", then (and only then) "Victory is certain!"

Adelaide Ginga

Yonamine's work is present in the following collections: BIC - Banco Internacional de Investimento (Lisbon, Portugal); Centre National des Arts Plastiques - Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris, France); BPA Collection - Banco Privado de Angola (Angola); Norlinda and José Lima Collection (São João da Madeira, Portugal); Ellipse Foundation Contemporary Art Collection (Luanda, Angola); The Frank - Suss Collection (London, United Kingdom); Peter Nobel, Zurich, Switzerland.

Public installations: ESCOM Headquarters (Luanda, Angola) and Espelho de Água Space (Lisbon, Portugal).

Fevereiro 2016