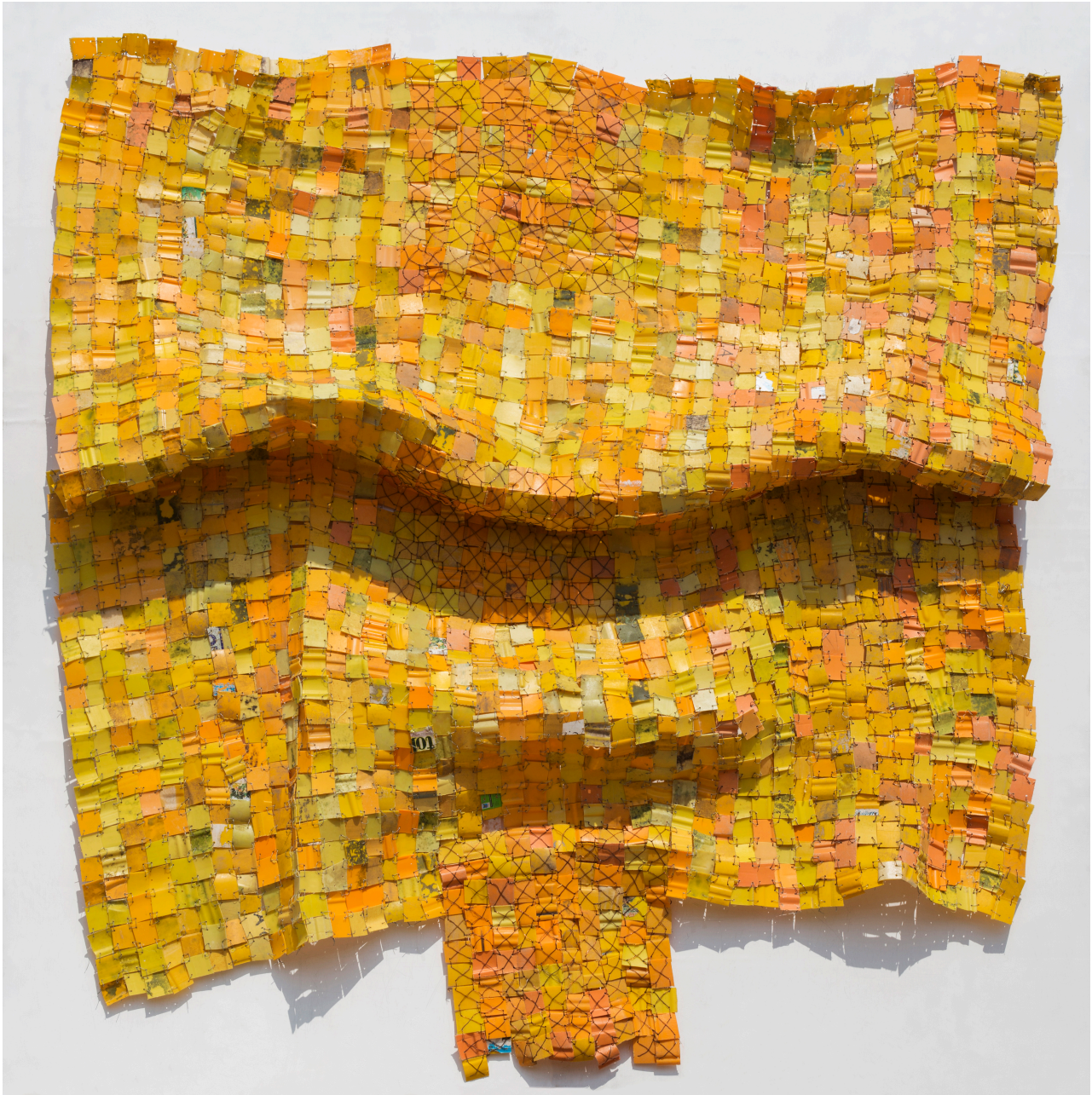


Serge Attukwei Clotney: *Sensitive Balance*

Opening: March 13th 2020 from 6 to 9 pm



Serge Attukwei Clotney, Meet and greet, 2019, plastic and copper wires, 88 x 103 in, 223,5 x 261,6 cm.

Serge Attukwei Clottey: *Sensitive Balance*

March 13th - April 25th, 2020

Expressive colours, large formats, abstract forms and a confrontation with the latest crises in the globalised world characterise Serge Attukwei Clottey's artistic practice. His second solo exhibition in Berlin shows drawings and wall works, focusing on pressing social, political and environmental issues that are taking place on a local level in Accra and are yet inextricably linked to migration and extensive commodity trading worldwide.

Clottey is one of many contemporary artists coming from the periphery of the art center but working and exhibiting internationally. Nonetheless, to understand his artistic practice the following assertion of Okwui Enwezor is of pivotal significance: 'I think it is important that we hold on to things that are specific to the subjectivity of the artist and to locations of practice that cannot be simply erased by the idealism of a global art scene that has no boundaries.' Using yellow plastic gallons—in Ghana also known as 'Kufuor gallons', named after former President John Agyekum Kufuor who had water distributed in these containers during a serious drought in the early 2000s—as his artistic medium, Clottey is not the only artist working with found material potentially contributing to plastic pollution and linked to water scarcity. The well-known Ghanaian artist El Anatsui uses pressed bottle caps for his large-scale installations. Though both practices deal with different topics, they affirm the status of plastic as an important artistic medium that—just as in all other parts of human life—has come to stay. Whilst provoking reflections about consumption patterns, the beautifully composed wall installations made up of plastic pieces and copper wire invite for a detailed study of the assemblages that reference their origin through odd stickers and paintings. With the extended lifecycle of his *objets trouvés*, Clottey's artworks are transformed into cultural archives, following Griselda Pollock's reminder that 'Archives matter. What is included shapes forever what we think we were and hence what we might become.'

Clottey's charcoal drawings re-appropriate the use of African masks from the colonial Western artistic practices of the twentieth century, most prominent in Pablo Picasso's *African Period*, by assigning the traditional African mask to its contemporary context through replacing the carved wooden specimen with the top of plastic containers. Inspired by the Spanish painter, Clottey started to draw large-scale abstract figures which often appear in front of dooming black backgrounds made of rough strokes. In his drawings as well as in many of his performances, the human figure takes central stage and modes of gender representation are negotiated. Similar to *Les Femmes d'Alger*, Clottey's *Femme vibes* (2019) portrays naked women wearing African masks, but while Picasso's figures co-exist independently of each other, Clottey's female appearances are intertwined by touching arms and bodies. Picasso slightly indicates the figure's chests and paints some of the figures' faces, whereas Clottey draws voluptuous breasts and the figures' heads are hidden behind yellow plastic masks with over-accentuated red mouths, referencing their sexuality and hinting at same-sex desires. In contrast to Picasso's use of skin tones for his figures, Clottey, like in many of his drawings, applies primary colours—an artistic choice which might be connected to Clottey's experience of first feeling his colour in Europe, stating that 'In Ghana, we don't talk about colour. We don't care. When I went to Austria for the first time, I actually started looking at myself because people were treating me very differently.' Building on Western art history, Clottey thus questions hegemonial representations of gender and race, highlighting the mobility of thoughts and ideas through space and time.

In his lifetime, the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe proclaimed the need for a global 'balance of stories,' encouraging every people to tell their own story as a means to reclaim power and avoid a victimisation through other people's accounts, particularly in the light of a westernised one-sided view of Africa. Serge Attukwei Clottey's multi-layered and locally rooted artistic practice can be read as a step towards such a *sensitive balance* of stories within the art world.

by Marie Meyerding



Serge Attukwei Clotey, *Encourage*, 2018, plastics and wires, 49 x 49 in, 124,5 x 124,5 cm.

Serge Attukwei Clotey (b. 1985) comes from Ghana and is based in Accra. He works across installation, performance, photography and sculpture, exploring narratives of personal, family and collective histories, which often relate to trade and migration. Working internationally, Clotey is the creator of *Afrogallonism*, an artistic concept that comments on consumption within modern Africa through the utilization of yellow gallon containers. Through cutting, drilling, stitching and melting found materials, his sculptural installations are bold assemblages that speak to the international art market as well as to the particular social reality of many people in Ghana. As the founder of Ghana's *GoLokal* performance collective, Clotey sees art as a way to transform society. With aspects of activism prevalent in his practice, his works challenge convention and advocate the importance of creativity. In August 2019 Clotey received the award of Honorary Doctorate of Arts from the University of Brighton.



Serge Attukwei Clotey, *Behind Every Man*, 2017, charcoal on paper, 60 x 45 in, 152.4 x 114.3 cm.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2020

Sensitive Balance, GNYP Gallery, Berlin

Serge Attukwei Clotney: Routes, The Mistake Room, Los Angeles

Radical Revisionists: Contemporary African Artists Confronting Past and Present, Moody Center of the Arts, Houston

2019

Serge Attukwei Clotney: Solo Chorus, The Mistake Room, Los Angeles

Kubatana, Vestfossen Kunstlaboratorium, Oslo

Current Affairs, Fabrica, Brighton

2018

Everyday Myth: Survival and Sustenance, Ever Gold [Projects], San Francisco

360LA, Accra, Ghana

Differences Between, Jane Lombard Gallery, New York

Gallery Takeover, Lawrie Shabibi Gallery, Dubai

2017

Astala Tsala, Patricia Low Contemporary, Gstaad

2016

My Mother's Wardrobe, Gallery 1957, Accra

10th year anniversary exhibition, Nubuke Foundation, Accra

Hand to Mouth, Ever Gold [Projects], San Francisco

Earthly Conversations, GNYP Gallery, Berlin

2015

The Displaced, Feuer/Mesler, New York

Time, Trade and Travel, Nubuke Foundation, Accra

2014

Color Unfinished, 27th Festival Les Instants Vidéo, Marseille

Migration Messages, Collective Realities of African Migration, WUK, Vienna

The Auction Room — African Contemporary Photography, Ozwald Boateng, London

Du Bois In Our Time II 'Colour Unfinished', University of Amherst, Massachusetts and Nubuke Foundation, Amherst

2013

Art Speaks, Residency at Wuk, Vienna

Insidethemoskitonet, Alliance Française, Accra

2012

whose puppet are you?, performance, Accra

The Beautiful ones are not yet born, Goethe Institut, Accra

Alternative Independence Day Celebration, Freedom Tour, Nubuke Foundation, Accra

Inside The Mosquito Net, Brazil House Jamestown, Accra

2011

Cultures in Confluence, Alliance Française & Goethe Institut, Accra

Trash to Treasure, chale wote street art festival, Accra

2010

Climate Change, Caspar House, Accra

Portrait of Ghana, The Drum Ace Café, Birmingham

My Life, Charity Photo Show, W.E.B. Dubois Memorial Centre, Accra and Haverford College, Pennsylvania

2009

Africa Show, African Contemporary Art, Naples

2008

Global Warming, Featured Project, British Council, Accra

Portrait of Accra, Junior Art Club sponsorship, Bristol

Untying the Human Spirit, CAN 2008, Goethe Institute, Accra

2003

Different Strokes, The Loom African Gallery, Accra

Selected Group Exhibitions

2019

Stormy Weather, Museum Arnhem, Arnhem

2018

Right at the Equator, Depart foundation, Malibu

Defying the Narrative: Contemporary Art from West and Southern Africa, Ever Gold [Projects], San Francisco

2017

Untitled Group Show, Ibid Gallery, Los Angeles

Frédéric Bruly Bouabré & Serge Attukwei Clottey, Burning in Water, New York

Dans Un Ciel Ensoleille, UTA Artist Space, Los Angeles

2016

Practical Common Sense, Chale Wote Street Art Festival, Jamestown, Accra

2015

We Don't Contemporary, Hamburg

What is Matter, Intelligentsia Gallery, Beijing

Silence Of An Ordinary Things, The Mistake Room, Los Angeles

2014

Mohr-Villa trifft Ghana: Gesellschaft im Auge der Kunst, Mohr Villa, Munich

MULTIPOINT, International art Symposium, Nitra

Masked Unmasked, 11th Dakart, Dakar

2013

Muses, Goethe Institute, Accra

Du Bois in our Time I 'Colour Unfinished', Massachusetts and Nubuke Foundation, Amherst

We Are Africa, Nubuke Foundation, Accra

2012

Time, Trade & Travel, Stedelijk Museum Bureau, Amsterdam & Nubuke Foundation, Accra



Serge Attukwei Clottey, *Society is unity*, 2018, plastics, wires and oil paint, 49 x 60 in, 124,5 x 152,4 cm.