



MEMOIRS - FILHOS DE IMPÉRIO E PÓS-MEMÓRIAS EUROPEIAS | **MEMOIRS** - CHILDREN OF EMPIRES AND EUROPEAN POSTMEMORIES
MAPS - PÓS-MEMÓRIAS EUROPEIAS: UMA CARTOGRAFIA PÓS-COLONIAL | **MAPS** - EUROPEAN POSTMEMORIES: A POSTCOLONIAL CARTOGRAPHY

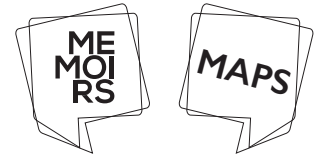
Saturday, 16 October 2021



Dada (sculpture, plaster cast of hands and old leather belt, variable dimensions)
Sabrina Belouaar | 2018 © ADAGP, Paris (courtesy of Mohamed Bourouissa)

THE EXHIBITION *EUROPA OXALÁ*

António Pinto Ribeiro



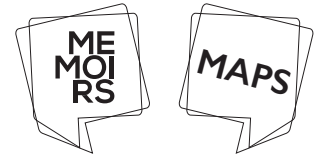
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This is not an African art show. It is an exhibition of works of art produced mainly in Europe by artists living and creating in European cities, artists who consider family memories, originated in African colonial or post-colonial contexts, as a fundamental capital of their artistic production emerging in Europe at the beginning of this century. The exhibition *Europa Oxalá* is also the ideal time to deconstruct the colonial myth and the post-colonial melancholy designated as “African art”. Attributed to all artistic production that originates in the African continent, the expression has been used to differentiate it in a coarse way from all the art included in the compendiums and narratives of the universal history of art founded in the Western matrix. So-called African art was seen as an art without authorship, disconnected from the diversity of its production contexts, be they a country of North Africa, of the South or the east or west coast, be it the 14th or 20th century. It was considered and presented only as “traditional”, exclusively associated with rites, alienated from the historical time in which it was produced and usually connected with black creators with no relation to its contemporaneity.

The first exhibitions with works from territories in Africa presented in Europe and in the USA [1] conveyed an exoticism that functioned as an appeal for them to be seen. As confirmed by hundreds of catalogues - documents that reinforce the myth - “African art” was the expression of the perception of a homogeneous continent, it served as an artistic category of the colonial vocabulary and included all forms of artistic production performed by Africans, irrespective of their place of origin, nationality and residence.

More recent exhibitions, such as “The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945-1994” (2002), “Africa Remix” (2005), “The Global Africa Project” (2010), were produced in collaboration between African, American and European artists and institutions. They have thus altered this perception and this anachronistic categorisation of the arts produced in Africa, but only partly with success. It fell to a group of artists of the second and third generations of Afro-descendants to call into question, without denying stories of African past, a Eurocentric art history and to disobey its underlying epistemology, opening other spaces of artistic inscription, other themes, other potentially regenerating languages.

It is the works of these artists that are present in this exhibition. They show, in the diversity and multiplicity of their approaches, a question about Europe where the old and the new are disputed. This is all that is present now in *Europa Oxalá*: in the cinema and photography of Katia Kameli, which establish complex relations between a nation - Algeria -, its history and the determining role that images play in the process of building a national narrative and its archetypes. The past and the need for



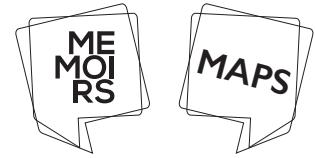
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national reconstruction is a very present theme in most of the works: in the artist Délio Jasse who, in his photomontages, detects the signs of colonialism in present-day Luanda; in the sculptures of Djamel Kokene-Dorléans that have a direct impact on the way to denounce the colonial and racist violence expressed through minimal elements, but are loaded with contagious energy, just as other minimal sculptures by Carlos Bunga express the fragility of the human condition.

Associated with the visual arts, hip-hop music, urban graffiti and slammer poetry, these artists present here, but many others of this same “scene”, produce new artistic genres, present new heroes, and other ways of appropriating the public space, as happens in the portrait painting of Francisco Vidal, in the photographs of Mohamed Bourouissa & Anoushkaashoot, who were interested in portraying young people from the outskirts of Paris strolling in the Halles neighborhood dressed in Lacoste. Using the portrait again, the photographer Pauliana Valente Pimentel offers us the portraits of Afro-descendant artists living in Lisbon during the pandemic that witness and reflect on the complexity of their identities.

In the works of this exhibition, memories are a permanent theme, that is addressed and questioned in various ways. They constitute a vast horizon conducive to a necessary public debate, whether in the ancestral figures of artists such as Pedro A.H. Paixão, in the phantasmagories and unbalanced characters in the paintings of Nú Barreto, in the use of all language resources used by Sammy Baloji to combat amnesia produced by colonial nostalgia, in particular through the everyday and trivialised use in Europe of objects from the colonised Congo, or, also, the approach of Sandra Mujinga on the harmful effects that capitalism produces on African fauna, countering new relations between humanity and nature.

Appropriation, being a method of composition used with intensity in the contemporary arts, is also the manifestation of a political expression and the deconstruction of narratives and imaginaries bequeathed by the history compendiums, by the unquestioned images that are made available to us on paper or through social networks. In the context of these appropriations, we highlight the works of Aimé Ntakiyica on criticism of Eurocentric geographies, the rebel maps of Malala Andrialavidrazana against racist propaganda, the creation of hybrid works and neo-futurists fictions producing new imaginaries of Sara Sadik’s archipelago-shaped thinking, as well as Márcio Carvalho’s “Falling Thrones” cartoon series, in which, using the analogy of the Olympic Games, heirs of histories of oppression overthrow the public statuary of the protagonists of colonialism. In a more enigmatic way, the works on territories and identities of Fayçal Baghriche provoke a strangeness that stimulates the revisitation of the colonial heritage. But the memories are also present in the history of movements and migrations



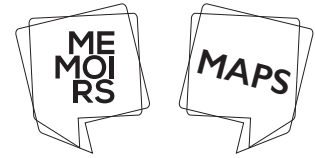
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from the South to the North and in their consequences for those who dared to enter post-war Europe, one extraordinary example of which is the work “Dada”, a leather belt wrapped around the closed fists of Josèfa Ntjam’s father who was a worker in a belt factory: it is the body of the African immigrant flogged by the capitalist and colonizing system.

Europa Oxalá is an exhibition whose works are the result of two types of cultural negotiation according to the artistic interests of its producers, the artists. On the one hand, there is an outstanding presence of an artistic formation with a European matrix carried out by these artists, who put it at the service of their decolonizing, anti-colonial, anti-racist, eco-political objectives, combining all this with the uses of transferred memories and, on the other hand, the artists use materials and artistic languages of African origin. At the same time, nothing prevents them from resorting to European technologies and forms of dissemination of their artistic practices. This is evident in the working materials used by John K. Cobra in the installations and sculptures made from rubber, hair threads, leather, brass - natural resources from the Congo region, and in the cinema he also directs it is the condition of mestizo that poses as a challenge to question the dogmas of colonial intermingling. In turn the artist Aimé Mpane uses wood sculpture with adze - a Congolese technique - and performance, a genre with a strong implementation in the ephemeral practices of the arts of a strong interventionist bias to expose the deception of humanism as a universal ideology.

Once the public debate this exhibition will certainly trigger on topics such as decolonization, the return of works to the ex-colonized territories or the neocolonial narratives of the expansion takes place, the idea will certainly surface that we are deconstructing, undoing, forcing to collapse something relatively diffuse, but which, in any case, is Europe and its heritage. It is as if in that moment a mood of irreversible failing would assert itself. This is because Europe and the West of the North have propagated the idea of being unquestionable and perennial winners. And, while this type of debate is not new, it had rarely been sparked from within, in this case from these African-European artists. As a rule, the questioning was led by external subjects, namely the independentists or those who exalted *négritude* and, more recently, the authors of postcolonial theories, from Africa.

But only the collective and nostalgic narcissism of colonial empires and the inability to share symbolic power and the domination of extractivist and exploitative mechanisms draining all human and natural resources justifies this fear of losing, this inability to recognize that the permanent victory of these colonial empires would be an illusion. After all, one can look at this Europe and this West as places in an



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era of construction to which these new actors, these artists, are crucial, in this Europe confronting itself daily. The *Europa Oxalá* exhibition is a relevant current contribution to that construction.

The *Europa Oxalá* exhibition opens on October 19th at MUCEM, in Marseille, where it will stay until January 16th, 2022. It will then be opened on March 3rd, 2022, at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon, where it may be visited until May 30th, and then travel to the Royal Museum of Central Africa/Africamuseum in Tervuren, Belgium, where it will be present from October 6th to March 5th, 2023.

The first recorded exhibitions are from the late 19th century; most catalogues are not dated, but since the end of that century productions from African countries began to be shown under the broad designation of African art shows. Two determinant examples: “Art of Africa: Traditional Arts of the African Negro”, Detroit, n.d. (but prior to 1898); probably the first exhibition in a museum of works of art originating in Africa, which would become a historical landmark, was the exhibition of the collection of the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadero in Paris, opened in 1878, where Picasso saw the African masks that inspired him to his *Demoiselles d’Avignon*.

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António Pinto Ribeiro is a researcher at the Centre for Social Studies at the University of Coimbra, and part of the project *Memoirs: Children of Empire and European Post-memories* (ERC Consolidator Grant, nº 648624) and *MAPS - European Postmemories: a postcolonial cartography* (FCT - PTDC/LLT-OUT/7036/2020). His latest works include: *Peut-on Décoloniser les musées?* [Can we Decolonize museums?], Gulbenkian Foundation, Paris, 2019, and *Novo Mundo, arte contemporânea no tempo da pós-memória*, Edições Afrontamento, 2021.

António Pinto Ribeiro is the main curator of the exhibition *Europa Oxalá*, along with Katia Kameli and Aimé Mpane.

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