

# A TRIBUTE SPATIALITY

FÉRIELLE DOULAIN-ZOUARI  
GÉRARD QUENUM

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*“Listen more often  
To things than to beings,  
The fire’s voice spreads,  
Hear the water’s voice.  
In the wind, listen  
To the weeping bush:  
It is the breath of the ancestors.”*

*Birago Diop, The Breath of the Ancestors,  
Excerpt from Leurres et Lueurs*

Indelimitable, space has no contour, no orientation, no direction. Indefinable, it is indistinguishable. It is through our very existence that we manage to find meaning within it. Humanity, from its own perspective, has given space an infinite number of possibilities through the connections it has forged with what we think of as empty, but which we make full. The confluence of space and humanity gives rise to what we call spaciality, the foundation of any meaningful relationship between a subject and its environment. By its very existence, society implies the existence of these lived spaces, these infinite relationships between space and humanity. A society thus produces its own space, in an inexhaustible kaleidoscope of interlocking strata, from the collective to the most singular. Men and women, cultures and societies, are perpetual co-producers of spatial meanings that intersect and influence each other.

In this world, art thus has the opportunity to work on this connection between humanity and its space. More than just describing, reading the use of space, and the meaning it carries, opens up a new perspective on the world.

Férielle Doulain-Zouari and Gérard Quenum, each in their own way, engage in a spatial dialogue, delving into existing relationships that are invisible to us. They work on this spatiality that we pass through every day without ever seeing it. What we call empty, but is in fact full, is an integral part of their installations. They dialogue with the air, leading us to look at the inexpressible. They direct our gaze to the movement of things that circulate, to the transparency of the channels of our relationships. They create movement, foster new connections, test new assemblages and dig deeper into existing grooves. Férielle Doulain-Zouari fully embraces the three dimensions we know, leaving Gérard to study the two axes of the canvas. Férielle Doulain-Zouari comes from a textile background. She weaves the invisible text of the world through the use of raw materials drawn from her environment, allowing herself to be surprised by the forms they can take, enveloped in this over-present space. Above all, these compositions enter into conversation with their surroundings. What matters is not their presence, but the way in which they are present: their place in space, from there, in relation to there, all the way over there. In Cotonou, Férielle’s site-specific works, combining fragments of everything from metal to plant matter, question her own unfamiliar relationship to the work. She celebrates the power of the living, and the strength of materials refined by human hands, which echo her native Tunisia and which she rediscovers in Benin. She appeals to the spirituality that connects us to the infinitely greater, from wherever we are on earth.

Gérard Quenum questions the body’s relationship to space. The body is the instrument that captures energies, uses them and makes them more complex. It absorbs flows and releases them, while maintaining balance. To this end, Quenum restricts himself to a defined palette of colors in order to carefully explore the implications of bodily spatiality. Thanks to this palette, an obvious contrast effect enables Quenum to explore his true subject, space, for which the body is only one access route. By its very existence, the human body makes space happen before our eyes. The immensity of these white expanses invites us to look at what is and what radiates outwards. Quenum doesn’t tell us, he highlights the most beautiful thing that space has to offer us: our own spatiality, the one we choose. It is in this call to recollection that Férielle Doulain-Zouari and Gérard Quenum pay their tribute to what binds and connects us to one another, what encompasses and transcends us, what makes us a community.



## BIOGRAPHY

FÉRIELLE DOULAIN-ZOUARI, of French-Tunisian origin, born in 1992, lives and works in Tunis. Férielle studied applied art and textile design and explores the link between weaving, art and her environment. Her work has been exhibited in many national and international museums such as the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Angers, the Musée des arts et des traditions populaires in Kef and the Chapelle Saint Monique in Carthage, Tunisia. In 2022, she received the Revelation Prize from the Senegalese Ministry of Culture at the 14th edition of the Dakar Biennale - Dak'Art 2022, thanks to her installation *Current Water*, which was highly acclaimed. She was exhibited in the international exhibition, *Ī Ndaffa #/ Forger/ Out of the fire*, curated by Malick Ndiaye, director and curator of the Musée Théodore-Monod d'art africain in Dakar, Senegal.

Through the use of manual techniques that operate in the present, she questions the different cohabitations that exist between the natural world and the artificial. She questions the ways of materially representing the meeting, the reconciliation and the resolution of conflicts (identity, contextual...). Her work takes the form of installations, sculptures and weavings of different styles. They are linked to daily life, are inspired by the environment, the elements that surround it (industrial materials, functional objects, local flora) and the coping systems implemented on a daily basis. Her studio moves according to the opportunities encountered, including with craftsmen. Through this journey, the reference to manual work has become essential in its creation as well as the desire to spark exchanges and questions thanks to an artistic language.

GÉRARD QUENUM was born in 1971 in Porto-Novo, Benin. Early on, Quenum made a name for himself on the Beninese scene and succeeded in going beyond the country's borders. His work has spread throughout the African continent and has been exhibited in international institutions and galleries such as the Museu Afro-Brasil in São Paulo, the Fondation Zinsou, and October Gallery in London. Quenum is also part of important public and private collections such as the British Museum and the Pigozzi Collection.

“Gérard Quenum, in his singular and very accomplished aestheticism, advocates a temporal, geographical and cultural crossbreeding. His work is built by confronting traditions and modernity. To go to the essential with a minimum of means. Black on a white background, sometimes two or three colors at the most, characters without faces or with empty eyes, silhouettes that are glimpsed, evanescent, fleeting and vulnerable like dreams.”

*André Jolly*

“The artist literally straddles the oceans to create bridges, elaborating a network between continents but also cultures, generations, peoples, histories. His work is not exotico-African, it accompanies us in a deeply human and universal thought.”

*Nicolas Bouillard*