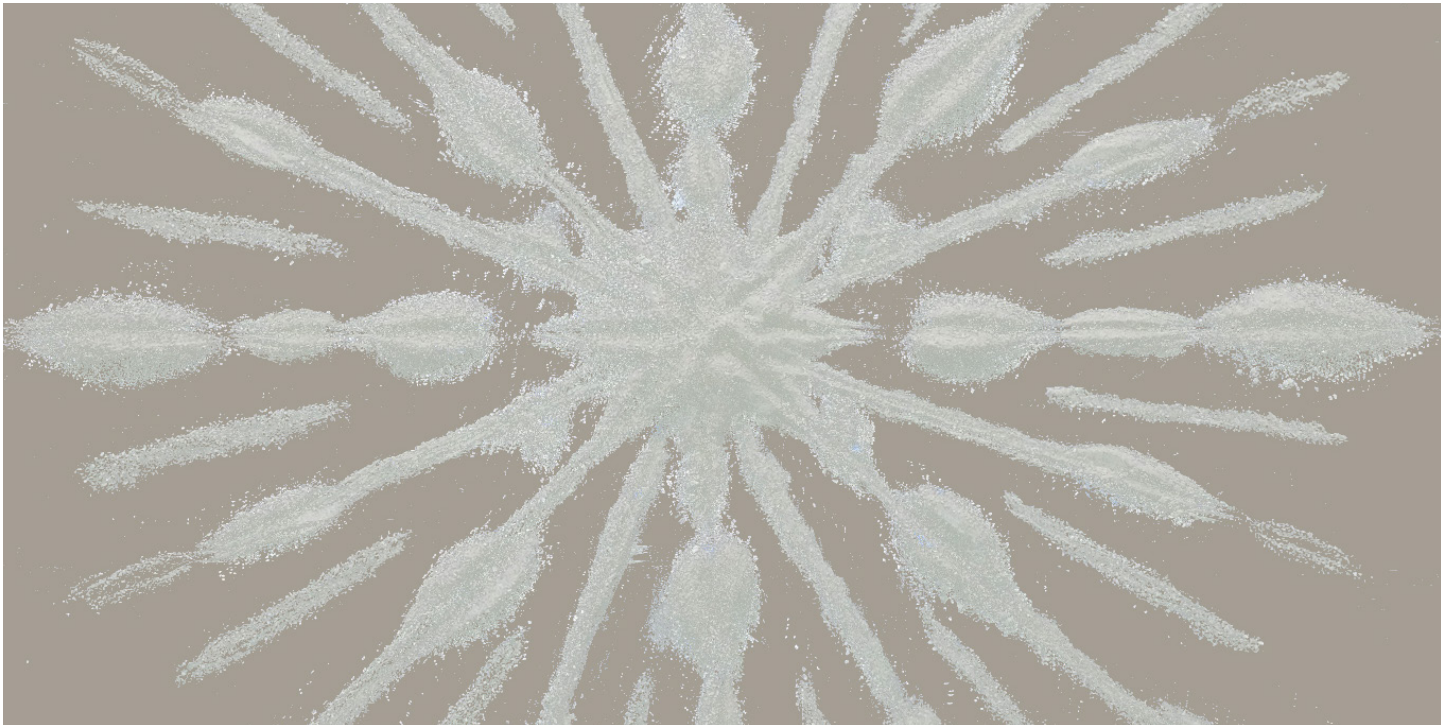


Press release

Group show

An exhibition by SEPTIEME Cotonou



Interstellaire

Hommage à la sculpture du Bénin

**ELISE TOKOUDAGBA
CHARLY D'ALMEIDA
MARIUS DANSOU
SÉBASTIEN BOKO
EULOGE GLÈLÈ
ELIANE AÏSSO
ZINKPE**

SEPTIEME Gallery is pleased to present Interstellaire, a collective exhibition that pays tribute to contemporary Beninese sculpture. This exhibition, held in our space in Cotonou, highlights the works of seven artists: Eliane Aïssou, Sébastien Boko, Charly D'Almeida, Marius Dansou, Euloge Glèlè, Elise Tokoudagba, and Zinkpe.

Info

Dates: June 6th to september 21st 2024

Opening: June 6th 2024, 6-9 pm

Location: SEPTIEME Cotonou, C/641 bis Mifongou, Gbgamey, Cotonou

Interstellaire

Tribute to Beninese Sculpture

Interstellaire (Interstellar) is a curatorial journey through an ethereal, endless canvas, the tableau of a space to be crossed, from star to star. It's an invitation to penetrate a specific radiating field, the kind that fills the space between stars, whose energy, through its interactions, fosters the formation of new celestial bodies, endlessly renewing themselves.

The exhibition showcases contemporary Beninese sculpture in the manner of a spatial journey, suggesting a subtle parallel between works and stars. It explores the inter, which expresses the reciprocity, the mutual action, occurring between an interval, a stellar cluster, selected pieces of sculptural work from Benin, drawing today on the traditions of yesterday to make tomorrow, and whose entanglement suggests that a whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

A star is a celestial body that radiates its own light. As an energy-producing and energy-emitting body, it can be compared to a work of art, a radiant interface for intentions, ideas, emotions and claims. Contemporary Beninese sculpture is all the more suited to this analogy, because of the spirituality and traditional history it carries, drawing on roots that go far beyond the realm of art. It is affiliated to an ancestral order whose founding foundation is the production and emission of energy.

Eliane Aïssou, whose work explores the existence of life following death, reinterprets the asen, a portable Vodoun altar ritually planted in the ground to link the world of the living and the dead. The energy produced and referred to radiates quiet power. The works of Sébastien Boko, meanwhile, appeal to a form of mediated timelessness. His wooden sculptures transcend our humanity and honor the majesty of the gods. It is through the prism of war, represented in Vodoun culture by iron, that Charly D'Almeida impels imposing energies inspired by a strong spirituality. Marius Dansou, too, invokes iron, but to celebrate the power of women through their headdresses, sculpting a balance between aesthetic tradition and contemporary trends. Euloge Glèlè's pieces confront Benin's spiritual heritage head-on through chiselled earth figures that carry history and memory, as does the work of Elise Tokoudagba, also carved in clay, which explores the spiritual as much as the historical, paying profound homage to the ancient Dahomey but also to the gods and divinities of her country. Finally, Zinkpe, whose entire practice is dedicated to the impossible quest of capturing the human soul, proposes, through his carved ibeji sculptures, a rooting in one of the most powerful beliefs of Fon and Yoruba tradition.

Interstellaire (Interstellar) rethinks our relationship with space, based on what Beninese sculpture has to offer, and suggests ways of better inhabiting the world. This (interstellar) journey, normally impossible for humans given the speed of light, is made possible by the power of the works, taking us into a space where boundaries are abolished and energy becomes king. The notion of time as a continuous linear thread is also abrogated. No work belongs to the past, without being the prerogative of the present and the condition of the future. Beninese sculpture is a symbol of this, in that it is capable of instilling a relativity of time. This excursion beyond our landmarks invites us to look far out into the universe, to take a step upwards to broaden our vision and nurture the absolute humility taught by the vast expanse of space that surrounds us.

Léa Perier Loko

Biography

ELIANE AÏSSO

Born in 1989 in Abomey-Calavi, Benin, Eliane Aïssou holds a Master's degree from the Ecole du Fresnoy – Studio National des Arts Contemporains. A visual artist and photographer, her artistic practice is rooted in the traditions and mythologies of Benin. A multidisciplinary artist, she explores the mediums of painting, drawing, photography, video and installation. Inspired by her cultural roots and personal history, Eliane Aïssou seeks to materialize complex concepts such as the presence of ghosts and revenants in everyday life, supported by the writings of Birago Diop, who asserts that "The dead are not dead". Her work, imbued with her theoretical research into art history and sociology, explores themes such as identity, intimacy and collective memory, and draws on Léopold Sédar Senghor's concept of the "Civilization of the Universal". Eliane Aïssou has taken part in numerous group and solo exhibitions in Benin and abroad.

CHARLY D'ALMEIDA

Born in 1968 in Cotonou, where he lives and works, Charly D'Almeida forged his artistic path in the studio of painter and film set designer Joseph Kpobly, before taking up sculpture in 2003. After years divided between Cotonou and Orléans, in 2014 he established his studio and artist residence, Cénacle expérimental, and then inaugurated Gallery Charly in Cotonou. Inspired by Vodoun traditions and spirituality, D'Almeida works in iron, materializing the spirit of war, Gou or Ogoun, in his creations. Sensitive to ecological issues, he favors recycled materials, breathing new life into them through sculptures with clean lines and contrasting colors and textures. Each of his works, with their evocative names, celebrates the symbols and rituals of Vodoun, rooted in Beninese culture. His artistic commitment transcends borders, regularly exhibiting his creations in galleries and museums around the world, including prestigious events such as the Dakar Biennale and Documenta in Kassel.

Selection



ELIANE AÏSSO

Synchrétisme
123x30x29 cm
Iron, aluminum, wire
2022



CHARLY D'ALMEIDA

Mémoires de l'Œil
237x97x40 cm
Metal assembly, soldering, and painting
2023

Exhibition view



Biography

SÉBASTIEN BOKO

Sébastien Boko, a self-taught artist born in Agonli Covè, Benin, was introduced to the art of woodcarving by his father at an early age through cooptation, one of the oldest methods of apprenticeship in Africa. By fusing wood, metal and paint, he creates works that capture timeless forms and movements, and offer a meditation on the realities that define our existence. Through his sculptures, he evokes timeless forms and movements that transcend our humanity and lend it a certain majesty akin to the Gods. Over the course of his artistic career, he has won several awards, including the gold prize in the national woodcarving competition in 2012, 2013 and 2015, and the Strongest Content award for African sculptor in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Sébastien Boko's work has been featured in numerous exhibitions both in Benin and abroad.

MARIUS DANSOU

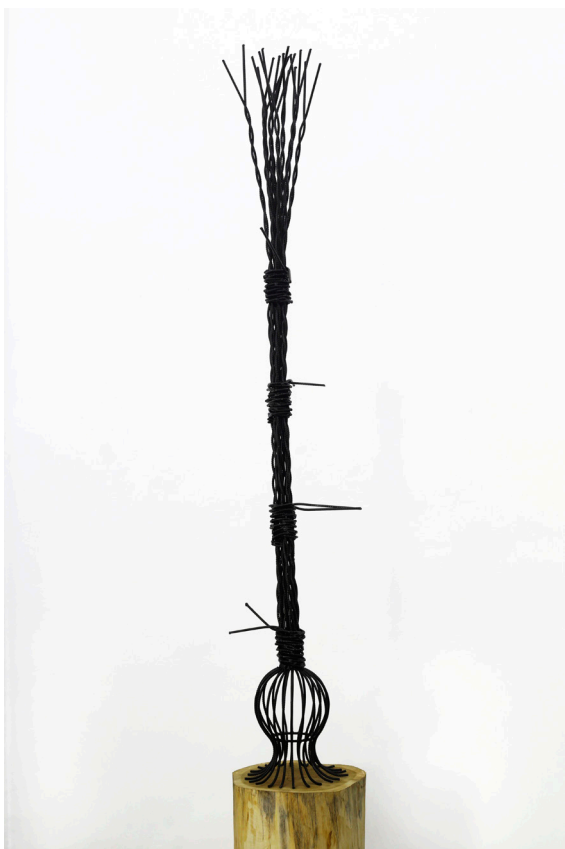
Marius Dansou, who lives and works in Cotonou, Benin, began his artistic career in wood sculpture under the aegis of Zinkpè. Gradually, he cultivated his own artistic language, fashioning masks from pirogue wood and evolving towards sculptures in concrete reinforcing iron that capture the moving essence of traditional Beninese hairstyles. Lulled by the Ayôounda (fongbé mats) of his environment, he captures their movement and technicality to forge these headdresses, drawing inspiration from fashion trends and traditions. Marius Dansou questions the societal and aesthetic role of hairstyles, drawing on the iconic photographs of J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere to refine his artistic expression. Today, his work flourishes in monumental sculptures in bronze, aluminum and wood, exploring the duality between impersonal effigy and individual expression. Marius Dansou's work has been shown in numerous exhibitions in Benin and abroad.

Selection



SÉBASTIEN BOKO

La poésie des ancêtres 1
171x35x35 cm
Carved wood, pigments
2024



MARIUS DANSOU

Quatre noeuds
186x28,5x41 cm
Reinforcement steel
2024

Exhibition view



Biography

EULOGE GLÈLÈ

Euloge Glèlè, born in 1977 in Cotonou, is a ceramic artist whose work captures the daily and spiritual life of his Beninese community. A descendant of the kings of Abomey, he quickly embraced ceramics after his beginnings in drawing. Inspired by the social fabric of his environment, Glèlè sculpts expressive figurines representing various trades and scenes from urban life in Cotonou, from dancers to motorcycle cab drivers to market gardeners. His meticulously crafted pieces are sometimes painted in bright colors, revealing his mastery of form and color. Beyond everyday life, Euloge Glèlè's art also explores the Vodoun cult, with sculptures dedicated to the deities of the Vodoun pantheon and to ghosts, the Egun-gun. In Benin, the belief in ghosts comes from the Yorubas of Nigeria. Through their cult, the deceased are honored so that they may enjoy a better life in the afterlife, and in return respond to requests for help. Rooted in Vodoun beliefs, Euloge Glèlè's creations bear witness to the spiritual and cultural richness of Benin. His work has been exhibited in Benin, Belgium, Brazil and France.

ELISE TOKOUDAGBA

Elise Tokoudagba (b. 1978, Abomey) is a visual artist who lives and works in Abomey, Benin. Deeply influenced by her parents, both visual artists, Elise Tokoudagba has developed a diversified artistic practice, developing sculpture, painting and bas-reliefs, historic works of Dahomey architecture. Her work extends to private and royal palaces in the Abomey region, as well as cultural spaces. Her work is distinguished by its exploration of religious and historical themes from ancient Dahomey, and by her use of a variety of materials such as clay, cement and paint. Through her art, she promotes the gods, demi-gods, divinities and spiritualities of her country.

Selection



EULOGE GLÈLÈ

Couple Royal
70x41x38 cm
Terracotta
2023



ELISE TOKOUDAGBA

Tchango
23x10x31 cm
Clay and oil paint
2022

Exhibition view



Biography

ZINKPE

Zinkpe was born in 1969 in Cotonou, Benin. He began his career by taking part in numerous workshops and residencies in Africa and Europe. He soon made a name for himself, winning the Prix Jeune Talent Africain at Grapholies in Abidjan. Zinkpe is also present at major events on the international art scene, and was awarded the Prix Uemoa at the Dakar Biennale in 2002. Zinkpe's approach is complex and diverse. Far from confining himself to a single artistic style, he makes use of all kinds of media, insofar as they allow him to express himself: installation, drawing, painting, sculpture and video. His sculptures are born of small wooden figurines amalgamated together, exploring the poetry of the world's equilibrium, balanced by the tension between the individual and the collective, the universal and the singular. Carved with a knife, these wooden statuettes, as identical as they are different, give rise to a multitude of intertwined lives, the infinity of worlds and lives. An integral part of Beninese culture, they also represent twins, the lbejis in Yoruba, that imperfect double, that exception in life that allows women to give birth to two children, creating a very special in-between space. Celebrated across borders in Benin, Nigeria, Togo and Ghana, the cult of the lbejis is honored by Zinkpe, who pays tribute to the creation of life and the invisible, magical links that weave the world.



ZINKPE

Omniprésence

228x60x48 cm

lbedji figurine assembly, metal, wood

2024

Exhibition view

