

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

July 22, 2016

EXTENDED!
THROUGH SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2016

CURATED BY ANDRÉ MAGNIN

ROMUALD
HAZOU MÈ

GAGOSIAN GALLERY
26 AVENUE DE L'EUROPE, 93350 LE BOURGET



I send back to the West that which belongs to them, which is to say, the refuse of consumer society that invades us every day.

—Romuald Hazoumè

Gagosian Gallery is pleased to present the work of Romuald Hazoumè. Spanning the last two decades, the exhibition is organized by André Magnin and includes sculpture, installation works, and a single large-scale photographic tableau.

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Hazoumè, born in the Republic of Benin and of Yoruba descent, reflects boldly and critically on the immediate realities of contemporary Africa, as well as the broader ramifications of pan-African politics and culture in the global context. A consummate *bricoleur* whose formal currency is found and recycled materials—for example, the 50-liter plastic *bidon*, or jerrycan, that is a local staple for the illegal purchase of cheap petrol from Nigeria—Hazoumè uses repetitive and recombinative aesthetic strategies to create objects of great elegance and potency, intensified by the wordplay of titles to impart further layers of reference and innuendo.

Perhaps the best known aspect of Hazoumè's art—which ranges across all media, including film and sound—are the individual mask sculptures. Around the world, masks have long been used for sacred ritual and performance purposes, and African masks were amongst the earliest items of value exchanged between Africa and the Western world. Among modern Western artists, the inherent otherness of these masks became a critical catalyst in transforming ways of seeing, and ushering in the birth of Modernism. Freed from ritual purpose, Hazoumè's masks knowingly adapt the “hardware” of African art to contemporary realities. Composed of plastic *bidons* and other refuse, and freighted with subtext, they embody his subversive take on the ongoing inequalities of exchange between contemporary Africa and the Western world. As their titles suggest, each mask also represents an actual person or stereotype that Hazoumè has observed and then portrayed, achieving a vivid quality of illusion by which a discarded detergent container combined with an artificial hair braid, some fabric swatches, or a broom-head can so completely capture the essence and character of *Chouchou*, *Nanawax*, or *Dr Walker*.

In contrast to the intimately scaled masks are monumental mixed-media installations. *Rat-singer: Second Only to God!* (2013) is, doubtless, a sardonic retort to Pope Benedict XVI's paternalistic advice to Africans about society, economy and spirituality, reported during a visit in 2011. Here, a large white rat perches on a crossbar of an upended boat made entirely of flattered *bidons*, capsizing into an eddy of the same plastic containers. Associations from art and life abound, from Théodore Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa*, to the pictures of desperate refugees arriving on the shores of Europe that confront us daily. Or *mongouv.com*, another environmentally scaled installation, which consists of a curved partition wall of stacked, multicolored *bidons*, with a small cluster of white ones on the floor in front of it—a barbed reflection on the deadly ironies of post-colonial existence.

Underscoring Hazoumè's entire oeuvre are the persistent consequences of corruption and slavery in Africa: the many ways in which ordinary people continue to be subjugated by the insidious forces of economic and political pragmatism. Hazoumè's works are immediate and arresting, yet they effervesce and resonate with far-reaching implications. Both conceptually and aesthetically, these visceral and deftly fashioned works embody the world order as an interdependent eco-system, darkly elucidating the Manichean nature of its interconnectedness.

Romuald Hazoumè was born in 1962 in Porto Novo, Benin, where he lives and works. His work is included in public collections including The British Museum, London; Musée Barbier-Mueller, Geneva; Fondation Zinsou, Cotonou, Benin; Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA), Brisbane; Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel, Neue Galerie, Germany; and The Walther Collection, Neu-Ulm, Germany. Solo exhibitions include “La Bouche du Roi,” The Menil Collection, Houston (2005, travelled to Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, 2006; and The British Museum, London,); “ARTicle 14, Romuald Hazoumè,” World Museum, Liverpool (2006); “Romuald Hazoumè: My Paradise—Made in Porto Novo,” Gerisch-Stiftung, Neumünster, Germany (2010); “Romuald Hazoumè,” Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2011); “Romuald Hazoumè: Beninese Solidarity with Endangered Westerners,” Kunsthaus Graz, Austria (2013–14); and “Romuald Hazoumè: Dance of the Butterflies,” Manchester Museum, United Kingdom (2015).

Hazoumè has participated in the Biennale de Lyon and Gwangju Biennale (both 2000), as well as the 3rd Biennale of Contemporary Art at the Garage Museum for Contemporary Art, Moscow (2009). He was awarded the Arnold Bode-Prize for his participation in in documenta 12 (2007).

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Image: *Chouchou*, 2013, plastic, nylon, and metal, (22 1/8 x 13 3/4 x 9 7/8 inches (56 x 35 x 25 cm). © Romuald Hazoumè.

Gagosian Gallery was established in 1980 by Larry Gagosian.