

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

# ARTNEWS

### L.A. Habitat: Thomas Houseago

*A visit with the Los Angeles transplant in his Frogtown studio. 'To be an artist here is really thrilling, and really frightening.'*

Katherine McMahon



*Thomas Houseago in his Frogtown studio on December 9, 2015.*

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*L.A. Habitat is a weekly series that visits with 16 artists in their workspaces around the city.*

#### **This week's studio: Thomas Houseago; Frogtown, Los Angeles.**

Thomas Houseago moved to Los Angeles from Brussels 13 years ago. "At that time," he said during a recent visit to his studio, "it was like you were going to the desert. It didn't feel like a very smart move. It looked like a desperate move for me." A friend of Houseago's suggested coming out to California for a "breather." "I was really tired and at a breaking point." Upon his arrival in L.A., he had a series of serendipitous meetings, including with David Kordansky, Houseago's first dealer, who subsequently introduced his work to influential collectors Mera and Donald Rubell. Today, Houseago owns four massive, connected warehouse spaces in Frogtown. He bought the first building in 2008 during the financial meltdown. "The neighborhood was falling apart economically. I went from not really being able to afford one [warehouse] to owning four," he said. "It was the smartest thing I ever did."

Originally from Leeds, Houseago had reservations about how he would be received on the West Coast. “I couldn’t possibly anticipate L.A. as a place that would nurture me in the way it did,” he said. “I didn’t quite know if I would fit, or if there would be room for me as an immigrant.” After he made the quantum leap from being a European to a Californian, Houseago’s career took an up-turn in unforeseen ways. “For the first time in my life, everything clicked,” he told me. “To be an artist here is really thrilling, and really frightening.” (As if in reference to this, at one point near the end of our interview, the table we were sitting at seemed to tremble. “Was that an earthquake?” Houseago asked. “Did you feel it?”)

“I had to radically rethink who I was, and radically rethink the relationship to my references, which were very European,” he continued.

A big draw to living and working in Los Angeles is the amount of space available. At his sprawling studio compound, he skips making models for his sculptures altogether. “I make things the size they’re meant to be,” he said. “You have a lot of space to make your own universe in L.A. If you really want, you can live in that universe independently.” Houseago believes artists tend to be more eccentric in Los Angeles.

Of course, working in L.A. is not always easy. He said the main challenge is that “you have to be really self-sufficient.” But Houseago has high hopes for his adopted home. “The next ten years are going to be amazing, but I think it’s going to change a lot,” he said, adding that he hopes to one day buy a chunk of land and create a sculpture park. In Los Angeles, he says, “That’s still doable.”