

## OWANTO | FLOWERS

**Vernissage: 16 december | h19**

**Exhibition: 18 dec 2017 – 10 fev 2018**

VOICE gallery is pleased to invite you to the opening of the exhibition FLOWERS by the artist Owanto, it is her second exhibition at the gallery after 5 years. The event will take place on Saturday, December 16th in the presence of the artist.

While social demands about woman rights in the modern society are still the subject of vigorous debate, Owanto highlights one of the sensitive topics, which seems sometimes considered as outdated. She puts into perspective the cutting, female genital mutilation as a societal, social and sometimes religious question. To this practice, prohibited in numerous countries, is overlapped a political question: the postcolonial vision of Africa. It is this representation, this anthropological and ethnographical, even often voyeuristic way, used to document and describe those territories once conquered, which Owanto tries to expose and to transform.

French-Gabonese artist, child born from a mixed marriage, her artist name, is that of her mother, « Owanto », meaning « women » in Gabonese. Strong with her different origins, he inspires herself from that memory, both collective and personal, past and present, to redraw memories, sometimes dreamt.

Her pieces are a poetic mix between an effective history, a testimony through photographs to her sensitive personal history. She establishes a play between a fictive, affective and blended memory. In *Le phare de la mémoire* or in her new series *Feeding my ancestor* Owanto brings to a universal level our questioning about our own origins and about art as a medium of identity without boundaries. Adding to those old photos, new elements, the viewer is able to identify to those situations, and while not being reduced to a voyeuristic situation, he/she can feel concern.

Using colonial images found in her father's archives, the artist embraces the opposite of the postcolonial vision to implement a political will. She is questioning the position of the photographer as viewer, the journalist a voyeur, the documentalist as well as going out of this context to centre on the inherent subject of the photographs.

According to Tandazani Dhlakama « So Owanto cuts out a large hole in the photographs to create a void and to remove the injury. Replacing the wound with a flower offers the subjects in the photographs an alternative narrative. One where trauma can be replaced by fragile beauty. » [...] « The hand-made cold porcelain petals protrude out of the metal surface where she printed the image, (...) are a corporeal provocation to create awareness.

These floral protrusions are synonymously masks, crowns and shields. They mask several violations, violations that are as a result of both the cutting and the camera. If FGM/C is the epitome of discrimination against women, then the flowers make processing the suffering a degree less confounding. » (Tandazani Dhlakama, *Flowers that Shield, Mask and Crown*, 2017)

Transforming them, she reintroduces with sensitivity a poetical approach. The creative process is marked by unity and an identity without borders: she transcribes those societal questions around the female identity, taking position with these anonymous women.

She is claiming her political commitment through artistic positions. She is trying to create a consciousness and a dialogue for those women living in every continent of the planet.

Instead of being able to return which has been taken from them, she is collecting their voices to give them back their value and their voice, in a world, which sometimes seems to have forgotten them.