

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Art Radar

Critical art voices: "When Things Fall Apart" at Trapholt Museum, Denmark

Rebecca Close

10 October 2016

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Exhibition at Trapholt Museum brings postcolonial and decolonial critique to small Danish town of Kolding.

Open until 23 October 2016, the exhibition "When things fall apart: Critical voices on the radars", curated by N'Goné Fall, includes 12 international artists who each offer a unique perspective on the various political and economic crises brought on by globalisation since the early 1990s.



Image: Arahmaiani Feisal, 'Do not prevent the fertility of the mind', 2014. Photo René Mastrup. Image courtesy Trapholt Museum.

The exhibition title takes its name from Nigerian author Chinua Achebe's acclaimed novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), which depicts the brutality of British colonisers in their treatment of the Ibo people of Nigeria throughout the 19th century. In referencing the novel in the show's title, Senegalese curator N'Goné Fall suggests that colonial conflicts, cultural dogmatism and racism – all

issues that the titular novel explores – are perhaps also at the centre of the current political crisis in Europe.

The 12 artists presenting work that explore various issues related to subjectivity, social justice and affect include:

Nidaa Badwan
Rehema Chachage
Tiffany Chung
Arahmaiani Feisal
Regina José Galindo
Milumbe Haimbe
Wambui Kamiru
Dinh Q. Lê
Babirye Leilah
Zen Marie
Thái Tuấn Nguyễn
Pascale Marthine Tayou

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Image: Pascale Marthine Tayou, 'Things fall apart', 2014. Photo René Mastrup. Image courtesy Trapholt Museum.

Writing in the exhibition's press release, curator N'Goné Fall explains how the exhibition is intended to offer visitors a space to reflect on current political crisis by critically avoiding or dismantling the inflammatory rhetoric of the global media,

Rather than staging the dichotomy of a hostile geopolitical, economic, socio-cultural and religious relationship based on "us" versus "them," the exhibition analyzes our common chronic pathologies. Built as a series of wake up calls, it tells us that the little we have retained of history could be the reason why societies, throughout the entire world, create their own Nemesis by living in an almost constant state of intolerance, withdrawal into oneself and fear.

The works included are predominantly multimedia installations, which the curator has arranged into three sections: "Justice for All" dealing with issues regarding gender, race and sexuality, "Social Change" exploring human rights, and "Empathy" challenging notions of solidarity and hope.



Image: Dinh Q. Lê, 'Erasure', 2011. Photo credit René Mastrup. Image courtesy Trapholt Museum.

Vietnamese artist Dinh Q. Lê's Erasure (2011) is an interactive sculptural and video installation that draws on recent debates in Australia concerning refugees and asylum seekers. Thousands of small black and white photographs – self-portraits, family and passport photos – cover the gallery floor, with the image facing down. Visitors are encouraged to pick up these photographs, consider the lives of the people within them, and perhaps find lost images of their own families. During the course of the exhibition, the photographs will be scanned, catalogued, stored and uploaded to a purpose built website, allowing people to browse through this collection of oan hon (lost souls). Overlooking the photographs is a large moving image of an 18th century tall ship being slowly consumed by flames.

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Image: Nidaa Badwan, 'One hundred days of solitude', 2014. Photo René Mastrup. Image courtesy Trapholt Museum.



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Nidaa Badwan is a Gaza-based photographer. Her work *One Hundred Days of Solitude* (2014) is a series of self-portraits in which she occupies herself with various activities in her small room in Gaza. Due to the city's being under siege, many citizens are confined to their

domestic spaces. In this work Badwan depicts a transformative personal experience in which the artist begins to use her three by three metres room as a studio. On her website, Badwan explains:

The moment I started to feel that my simplest rights were snatched away from me in Gaza, the besieged city I live in, I decided to abandon the world to create my own. Isolation gave me the ability to create a new language, every item in my room could tell a different story; the ladder, the clothes, and even the bed! I could change their colors, omit or add new items. I waited relentlessly every single day to catch the perfect moment so that I could depict new photos using the sunlight, photos that can be felt rather than seen.



Image: Thái Tuấn Nguyễn, 'Untitled', 2013. Photo credit René Mastrup. Image courtesy Trapholt Museum.

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Image: Thái Tuấn Nguyễn, 'Untitled', 2013. Photo credit René Mastrup. Image courtesy Trapholt Museum.



Image: Wambui Kamiru, 'Harambee63', 2013. Photo credit René Mastrup. Image courtesy Trapholt Museum.



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Tiffany Chung's work *Scratching the Walls of Memory* (2010) was first shown in an exhibition with the same title at Tyler Rollins Fine Art in January 2010, in which Chung presented a body of work inspired by maps of urban regions, featuring embroidery and appliqué techniques on canvas. At Trapholt Museum, the titular installation has been selected for show: a wooden school chair and table lies before a display of small chalkboards that have been arranged to fill the wall behind. Hung between these writing slates are handmade cloth satchel bags, carefully stitched and embroidered with messages from those who have lived the creation and destruction of various political borders.

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Image: Tiffany Chung, 'Scratching the walls of memory', 2010. Photo credit René Mastrup. Image courtesy Trapholt Museum.

Regarding the divide between North and South Korea the visitors can read on a blackboard, "No mail, telephone calls or email exchanges are allowed between ordinary citizens from the two sides." In relation to the Berlin Wall one hand stitched bag reads, "There was a wedding in Berlin yesterday... the mother of the bride stood on the other side of the wall, in East Berlin, crying."

The installation draws together many different family stories, revealing and critiquing the dehumanising effects of borders. Vietnam-based curator Zoe Butt, writing about this work in a catalogue essay for the 2010 "Scratching the Walls of Memory" exhibition at Tyler Rollins Fine Art, states:

These are the little histories, the anecdotes of official narratives that are not inscribed within national rhetoric. These are the statistics that struggle to be mapped for their immensity, their quantity is immeasurable [...] For the artist her fascination with the transformation of urban spaces is anchored in an examination of intent, process and affect.

The same could perhaps be said of the exhibition "When Things Fall Apart – Critical Voices on the Radars".