

# OSART GALLERY

## *Where Thou Art – That – is Home*

by Nicolas Ballario

In his essay *Filosofia della casa*, Emanuele Coccia claims that the house is more of a moral idea rather than architectural. Through the house, we pursue our personal idea of happiness: a steady, not ephemeral, happiness. Perhaps it's our personal and arbitrary exercise of power, and thus while the city of Milan is celebrating the world's leading Design Week, Osart Gallery presents an exhibition where five artists celebrate a ritual of appropriation of a political space through their homes. Home – precisely – as metaphor and journey, in the name of a nomadism that takes walls down and enlarges houses.

These artists literally embody political manifestoes, by recalling Louise Bourgeois and her production inspired by childhood memories, and namely of the female body when, starting from the concept of house, she lets her most fighting spirit arise from the *Femme-Maison* series. Extraordinary works of female nudes, with their heads replaced by the shape of a house. *Femme-Maison* = “woman-house”: with these works, Louise Bourgeois rises against the clichés, anticipating decades of feminist struggle that would have later imposed a new, free, and independent vision of the womanhood.

At the same time, the exhibited artists create political manifestoes by using interiors to recount the world, be it an indoor or an outdoor space: through art, the house turns into a public square and takes on a contradictory yet fascinating dreamlike form (and, by definition, fleeting).

As a kid, Feni Chulumanco approaches creativity thanks to his sewing skills. He starts by creating shoes using rug scraps, and tells us a very meaningful story on this regard: “*In the community, the houses are so close, you know everything. When I began doing things, everyone in my neighborhood saw that*”. Here then those glass boxes take almost the shape of a bunker, like a protection against the outer world, not only to avoid nuisances and dangers, but also to exercise a form of resistance against contemporary life, which forces us to live an eternal performance and to give all of us, living a challenge whose rules are imposed by someone else.

Ikeorah Chisom Chi-FADA follows in the same footsteps aiming at the power of poetry, by painting male and female faces who long for self-realization. There's a marked religious trait in his domestic spaces, an aesthetic research that draws directly from the Catholic iconography he has always been exposed to, since he was a kid. But beware: iconography is multifaceted, and that of Ikeorah Chisom Chi-FADA is closer to that of calendars, commercial images and postcards rather than that of the Great Masters. And those flames carry a sort of tender naivety that lets us into those houses like if it was an artist's journal, disclosing their ambitions and frailties.

In Sethembile Msezane's works we can clearly hear the echo of her performances: the moment of creation starts during the long process of research of pieces of furniture in the properties of strangers and acquaintances, the very same moment in which she projects herself into the persona she will embody in her performances or in her installations and photographic works. Her works force us to cope with a moral superstructure that leads us to read the female body according to standards. When we look at the artist interacting with domestic symbols we see past the mere body and come to her person, or even more to single and collective stories that tell about the absence of black women in the South African apartheid narrative.

And which strange dimension are Katlego Tlabela's luxurious interiors taking us to? Is the black élite that he wants to represent? Or is it a surreal, metaphysical projection of a dream? Katlego Tlabela makes us believe that the duty of art is in fact to fix history through the individual experience. He creates new stories as an act of rebellion, by recalling Carol Hanisch's groundbreaking feminist essay, where she claims that one of the first things we learn about activism is the importance that stories have in understanding that collective issues are in fact political issues: "*There are no personal solutions at this time. There is only a collective action for a collective solution*". And what's more universal than art?

Yet, the same boundary between the public and the private sphere returns in Franklyn Dzingai's domestic "walls", that invite us into the most private space to discuss the actual authorship of the work, due to the large use of faces cut from newspapers, book, magazines, and family albums. Dzingai wants us to face the common obsession for photography which, freed from any social differences, acts as historical memory of the humankind, and at the same time is an expression of collective bulimia. There are more than 5 billion camera phones in the world and it is estimated, yet with uncertainty, that more than 1000 billion photographs are shot every year. This clearly tells us that every hour, more pictures are taken than those taken in the entire past century. Obviously, this has totally changed the framework, forcing it towards an uncontrollable standardization under every aspect. We can state that this is the photography era, but it's no longer the era of photographers. Everyone can be a photographer and anyone can be the author of an iconic picture without even the slightest know-how of the tool: Dzingai is thus transferring these photographs to a metaphorical yet paradigmatic perspective, bringing the different and the unknown inside a cozy and colorful apartment, and pushing us to relate to them.

For these people, the house is therefore a political and a revolutionary act: in this exhibition the spaces are decontextualized and universal, far from every definition. Even from that of "African art", a term we should question because borders – an element introduced by the European colonialism, especially in the sub-Saharan region – are more present than ever, and the artists in this exhibition often come from countries that must be ascribed to opposite fronts: people migrate from Zimbabwe to South Africa, and today the migration phenomenon within Africa is causing the demons of racism and social hate to re-emerge. Data show that on a total of 58 million inhabitants, in South Africa almost 4 million are Mozambicans, Malawians, Nigerians, Zambians and Zimbabweans. Hence, the political barriers do not seem to block creativity, that's why we can affirm that contemporary African art is going through a cross-border process that leaks out of the continent, maybe because the common features outnumber the diversity of languages. That's why, unlike in Western

art, in African art the avantgarde ideal has been surpassed, and the final goal is no longer experimentation at all costs: this allows to get away from the fetish of a status to stick to and where to concentrate all forces on, but above of all it allows these artists the use of a free creative vocabulary. They rather use a wide range of stylistic expressions letting the sociological subtrack emerge from the moment they live without even "leaving home".