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SEATTLE, July 14, 2016. Mariane Ibrahim Gallery is delighted to present “Film Noir”, the first North American solo exhibition of visual artist, Clay Apenouvon, running from August 4 until September 24, 2016.

In parallel, on the occasion of the second annual Seattle Art Fair, the gallery will be dedicating an entire booth to present, Film Noir de Lampedusa, an in situ installation.

As a deeply rooted and sentient being, Apenouvon is very conscious of his surroundings. Being a maker is an urgent and non-negotiable endeavor for him. His inspiration comes from the world around him and he commits every fiber of his being to that cause.

Plastic is Apenouvon’s medium par excellence. Film Noir de Lampedusa, which debuted in a group exhibition at the Fondation Blachère in Apt, then commissioned by the city of Paris at the Saint Merry church in 2015, clearly stated his black plastic signature. The critical acclaim of Film Noir de Lampedusa in Paris led to a subsequent collaboration between Apenouvon and the Teatro dell’Opera di Roma in 2016, where Apenouvon designed the set and costumes for Proserpina, melodrama written by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. When asked to elaborate on the symbolism of this medium he explains,

The black plastic symbolizes the black tide, waste from tankers and oil that is the source of new wars that destroy homes, which cast entire families into the desert and the sea, with only a hope of their lives being saved. The black plastic also symbolizes black skin, visible and invisible, despite its brilliance – a lightweight plastic body, black and with an intense spirit, filled with meaning.

Apenouvon’s inspiration for Film Noir de Lampedusa came from listening to the radio reportages of African immigrants shipwrecked off the coast of Lampedusa island (Italy). Hundreds had died and horrific images were circulating in the press and on social media. This tragedy touched him so profoundly, so much that he could not simply be a silent witness to this ongoing drama. Film Noir took on a heightened meaning and importance. More than just a medium for making work, it became the literal and figurative mechanism through which he kept the stories of these men, women and children alive. Playing with the concept of film noir, a Hollywood film genre known for plots of crime and passion, Apenouvon brought the stories of these African migrants to the fore with an equal amount of drama. Dolls, wallets, keys, photos, and shoes all covered with black plastic symbolize the few, pitiful belongings these people were able to bring with them when they left their homes to cross the sea headed to Europe.

Apenouvon sought to tease out sensitivities and sow doubt amongst the European viewer who is so accustomed to hearing about immigration through violent images in the press and social media. Rather than create a viral image,

he sought a personal engagement with the viewer, which allowed him to create pathways for the viewer to imagine the actual lives of these individuals from the traces and leavings illustrated by the black plastic.

Apenouvon's work however, has a universal relevance and is particularly poignant for the American public in light of the current election season, and the recent, tragic deaths of two young black men in Baton Rouge and Minneapolis. No matter who is viewing this work, "Film Noir" serves as stark reminder of the people we would like to forget – the undesirables. With "Film Noir" we see how carelessly black life is treated. Be it due to, environmental crises such as climate change and oil spills that destroy our shared planet and force migration, or the state-sanctioned violence heaped upon black bodies, Apenouvon's "Film Noir" is a deafening visual assault, which can not be forgotten, nor silenced.

About

After various experiences with painting, graphic design and screen-printing workshops, Clay Apenouvon (b. 1970, Lomé) left his homeland to establish himself in Paris (France). In Paris, Apenouvon came into contact with artists such as Claude Viallat (movement Support Surface) and Mounir Fatmi. He achieved his first artistic co-production "Africa en Yvelines" in Mante La Jolie with the designer and artist Jules Wokam. Art is a cure, a way to express, and it helps Clay to exorcise personal suffering from his past.

He explored the possibilities of various materials. He uses cardboards as a physical support and an artistic medium. In his mind, cardboard is the symbolic material to address the issue of packaging, a major subject of his thinking and his approach: packing things or vacuum packaging. In 2006, Clay Apenouvon had his own unexpected and remarkable performance at the opening of the FIAC Paris. Passing a small cardboard sign for an object containing a priceless work of art, he reroutes the attention of security personnel who became convinced that a work of art had been stolen right before their eyes. The simple packaging and cardboard containers were perceived as having the same value as the contents.

With a militant and engaged personality, Clay Apenouvon became interested in plastic. He created the concept "Plastic Attack" in 2010. Leveraging installation as the mode of presentation, "Plastic Attack" raises awareness of the harm and danger that plastic poses to the environment on a global scale. In these works, Apenouvon sought to express the concept of the "fatal beauty" of plastic. His insider/outsider position, allowed him a remarkable versatility to portray a foreseen disaster.

Apenouvon worked in Europe, Africa and the United States. He presented his recent installation, Film Noir de Lampedusa at the Foundation Blachere, Visibles / Invisibles, l'Afrique urbaine et ses marges, 2015.

Apenouvon lives and works in Aubervilliers (France) and Lomé (Togo).