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THE POWER OF
ART & DESIGN

Kindred Spirits

Chicago gallerist
Mariane Ibrahim
and her newly
represented artist
Raphaël Barontini
found inspiration
in quarantine

Mariane Ibrahim
in front of artist
Raphaël Barontini's
*Bug Jargal, the
Blue Hercules* (2017).



Since Mariane Ibrahim opened her gallery in 2012, initially in Seattle and then in Chicago, where she relocated it last year, she has focused on artists of the African diaspora, most recently bringing Raphaël Barontini to her roster. Ibrahim, who was raised in Somalia and France, found a kindred spirit in the young French artist, who has ties to the Caribbean, Africa, and Europe. As Barontini was finishing up a seven-month residency in Singapore for the LVMH Métiers d'Art, he discussed with Ibrahim via Zoom their relationship and first exhibition together, which is scheduled to open at the gallery in November.

First Impressions

Mariane Ibrahim: I was exhibiting at the Untitled Art Fair in San Francisco. One of my friends kept telling me to check out the work of Raphaël, which was on the opposite side of the fair. I was stuck in my booth until the last day, but when I finally made it, I told the gallery, "This is amazing, why has it not sold?"

Raphaël Barontini: Then I messaged you on Instagram.

Ibrahim: We kept the conversation going there. Last October, I said, "I'm coming to Paris for FIAC." When we finally sat down after a year and a half of texting, that was the moment we said, "Let's begin this journey together."

A Shared Background

Barontini: It's a great thing to start with an American gallery led by a French woman. I really found a peer to talk with. That was what I was waiting for in a way. I'm very happy that we began this collaboration, because I feel we are connected with the same questions, the same issues.

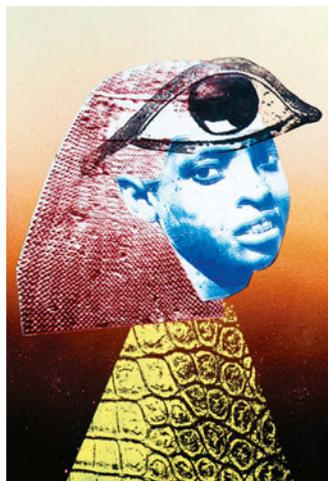
Ibrahim: When I saw the work of Raphaël, I secretly imagined he was telling my story. It was very easy to indoctrinate my collectors and my friends in his work.

Collaborating in Quarantine

Ibrahim: Raphaël is the kind of artist where I just go full in and say the space is yours. We've sent him sketches, we've sent him video, we've done a couple of FaceTimes in the gallery to show him around. When he wakes up in Singapore, I'm starting to have dinner in Chicago, and we can talk until I go to bed. And then he's waiting for me to wake up so we can have a little bit of a chat until he goes to sleep.



From top: Barontini during his LVMH Métiers d'Art residency in Singapore. Barontini's *Cleopatra I* (2020) and *Toussaint Louverture* (2019).



Barontini: Even before COVID-19, I had experience imagining a show without seeing the real space, so I can deal with this. But I really hope that I can travel in early November. The setup of the show is an exciting moment for an artist.

Celebrating a Global View

Barontini: My work is really a hybrid of classical painting with different layers of silkscreen printing, fabric, collage, and sewing. I deal with

Western codes of old-court portraits, how power could represent itself in Europe, and I mix this with other types of references from the Caribbean and Africa. The exhibition's title, "The Night of the Purple Moon," is a track by Sun Ra, the jazz musician. He has always been a big reference for me and has a vision of African-American history as a time lapse. I was also really interested in Romare Bearden's series "Black Odyssey," a kind of fantasy of the travel of Black people throughout history.

Ibrahim: I call Raphaël "the phantom." He's like this character who's moving from past to present. Of course, it's imaginative, but it is something that could lead to reforming the Eurocentricity of how global history is told. When you look at the work of Raphaël, it's almost an archaeological canvas.

marianeibrahim.com —HILARIE M. SHEETS

