

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Mariane Ibrahim Gallery is very pleased to announce *Back Stories* a group exhibition in honor of the gallery's fifth anniversary. *Back Stories* is a group exhibition featuring over a dozen works across various mediums, and includes works by Scarlett Coten, Maïmouna Guerresi, Mwangi Hutter, Ayana V. Jackson, Sofie Knijff, Clotilde Jiménez, Frank Marshall, Fabrice Monteiro, Jean-Claude Moschetti, Zohra Opoku, Malick Sidibé, and Lina Iris Viktor. This exhibition, curated by Mariane Ibrahim-Lenhardt with guest curator Negarra A. Kudumu, will run from January 25 until March 25, 2017 with an opening reception on Wednesday, January 25 from 6 - 8 pm.

The back is a metaphor for the invisible self that others are only occasionally able to see. When one sees the back, the face is invisible. Emotions cannot be betrayed. In this instance, the back is a safe haven, a protection, a homestead. The back is also a subtle metonymy for attraction, a yet to be fulfilled, possibly forbidden, desire.

The back is also the site of profound transformation: a holy place protected with ceremonial scarring or a defiant protest symbol signifying its autonomy in a sea of homogeneity. The back makes labor and, by extension, commercial production a reality. It also supports the shoulders and legs thus permitting escape from perilous conditions. Escape followed by recapture, results in a back marked by torturous lashes and ultimately enslavement.

Fabrice Monteiro's "Marrons #12" is a photographic reenactment of chattel slavery conditions revealing a back that supports the weight of torture visited upon recaptured Maroons under the French colonial administration, the Code Noir. The stillness of the enslaved man's posture emulates strong aspirations for emancipation, a posture that reverberates in Ayana V. Jackson's portrait "Stella", which depicts a woman who is carefree and animated by a strong desire for independence. In this sense, the back has a double entendre: it is the organism that suffers for daring self-determination and the mechanism through which freedom becomes reality.

Seeing one's back also evokes sentiments of departure, detachment, and enigma as Jean-Claude Moschetti captures in "Tchakatou #02". The Tchakatou figure has completed its magical task and is heading towards an unknown horizon. Perhaps it is returning to its point of departure, or embarking upon a new task. Showing the back transcribes an interruption, a moment of self-reflection as shown in Guerresi's "Fikr", meaning thinking in Arabic, which presents an adorned dorsal sculpture, but also as a conduit for inward, self-meditation. This characteristic is also contained within Guerresi's "Egg Man", the only sculptural work featured in the exhibition, and reveals a transformative aspect of the human body – the muscular, yet sensual back of a man returning to a fetus-like state or to his roots.

A masculine sensuality exposed in Scarlett Coten's "Elie", presents a sensitive and eroticized subject through the lens of a woman. The male subject reveals his tattooed back as an act of rebellion while simultaneously divulging his vulnerability. The back becomes ornament - a sacred and secret painting. Comparably, in the works of photographer Lina Iris Viktor, the adorned back is an ancestral tradition with an esoteric component. Viktor uses 24 karat gold to

glorify the mystical body as a return to ancient, traditional ceremonies. It is in this occurrence elemental and reunited with the mysteries of the earth from whence it came.

Revealing the back brings an intimate, mysterious, and at times, a sensual insight to the human figure as in Mwangi Hutter's "Twinshipping", which enchants with the delicate outlines of two female forms, whose curves invite a curiosity to examine what lies on the other side. Malick Sidibé's portrait, "Vues de Dos", one of a series he developed late in his career, exudes the photographer's fascination with the rear view of his female subjects. This series is suggestive of a yet unrealized romance - the subject is dressed very seductively, though the face remains safely hidden, as if the Sidibé is protecting her from public view.

Back Stories is as much a celebration of the human form as it is an investigation into the ways in which these artists feel the body, particularly the back, can be used to tell a story. They explore the back both as its own entity and as an integral part of the human body. These rear views present the back in all its mysticism, secrecy, defiance and splendor that is the gateway through which we engage with the totality of the lived, bodily experience.

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