

An abstract painting featuring a large, expressive brushstroke in white and grey on the left, transitioning into a more textured, colorful area on the right. The right side includes dark, crumpled paper-like shapes and splatters of yellow, green, and blue.

YASSINE BALBZIOUI

galerie shart

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Entre trois chaises, 2012, huile sur toile, 100x200 cm, collection particulière



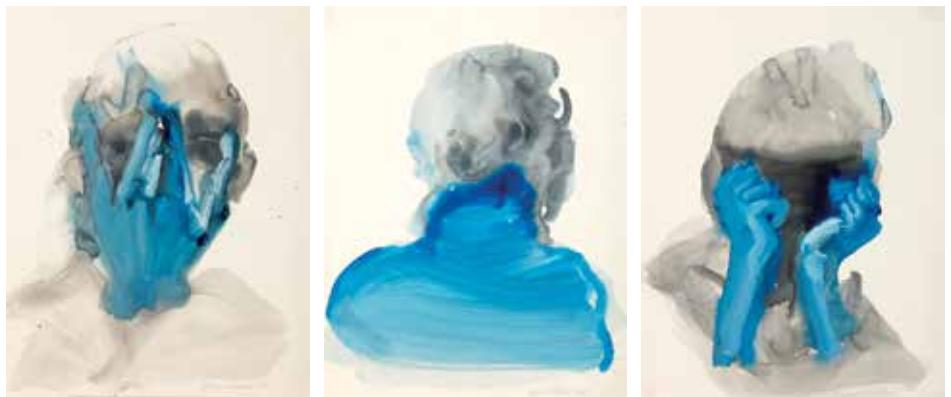
Hiding, 2010, encre et gouache sur papier, 65x50 cm, collection particulière



Hey ?!, 2013, huile sur toile, 86x68 cm, collection particulière



Zone interdite, 2013, huile sur toile, 150x140 cm, collection particulière



Série *Hiding*, 2010, encre et gouache sur papier, 65x50 cm chacune
Courtesy Galerie Shart



La fille au poney, assise, 2012, huile sur toile, 150x150cm, collection particulière

L'OBSESSION DU MASQUE

Mohamed Rachdi



Le troisième masque, 2012, huile sur toile, 150x150 cm
Courtesy Galerie Shart

Individus condamnés à vivre en société, nous sommes en permanence tendus entre être et paraître et notre visage est le lieu par excellence où se révèle ce jeu qui nous gouverne fondamentalement. Notre visage est l'interface entre l'extériorité et ce qui se trame dans notre intérieurité. Notre visage, et plus largement notre tête, concentre en lui la part importante des orifices qui nous lient au monde extérieur : les yeux, les narines, la bouche, mais aussi les oreilles. Autrement dit l'essentiel de nos organes de perception qui articulent notre relation à l'environnement : La vue, l'odorat, le goût, l'ouïe. Le visage nous permet d'être en vis-à-vis avec les autres. Il est ce qui oriente notre posture au mode, dirige notre corps dans ses déplacements et donne sens à nos actions.

L'activité créatrice de Balbzioui n'est pas cérébrale, elle se vit dans le corps à corps avec des supports quand elle ne s'énonce pas directement à partir du corps de l'artiste lui-même en tant que performer. Mais il s'agit toujours d'un corps à corps qui travaille à nier les visages des différents corps que l'artiste représente pour mieux en révéler la force expressive et surtout pour mieux nous interroger et nous questionner en tant que

regardeurs regardés. En effet, Yassine Balbzioui interroge notre visage qu'il soumet au jeu de la dissimulation et de la révélation, sans doute, pour mieux sonder les paradoxes qui structurent notre humanité et la fragilité de sa réalité agitée continuellement entre être et paraître, visible et invisible, vérité et mensonge, sincérité et hypocrisie. Mais aussi être et vouloir être, réalité et fiction, présence effective et projection fantasmatique, peur et audace, honte et fierté...

Le masque demeure essentiellement l'outil visuel, plastique et symbolique qu'affectionne Yassine Balbzioui dans sa création. L'artiste use volontiers du masque pour sa force de sollicitation et son pouvoir suggestif. Le masque s'adresse toujours au regard pour le soumettre à l'épreuve dynamique du visible et de l'invisible. Face à un masque, notre regard se retrouve en présence d'un objet énigmatique porteur d'une dimension d'étrangeté, voire d'inquiétante étrangeté, en présence d'une apparence qui déstabilise nos repères visuels et interroge nos références mnésiques.

Le masque fascine Yassine Balbzioui, comme beaucoup d'autres artistes avant lui, parce qu'il

ne travaille à soustraire le visible que pour mieux le rendre visible, ne nie que pour mieux affirmer. Au-delà de la distinction typologique du masque (protecteur, esthétique, rituel...) pour le plasticien, son mode opératoire est d'abord de cacher une certaine réalité pour ouvrir sur une autre, de dissimuler une expression pour en formuler une autre, de transformer le visage d'une personne pour représenter un personnage... Depuis la nuit des temps, de nombreux auteurs comme Claude Lévi-Strauss l'ont d'ailleurs bien étudié, le masque est par excellence l'instrument de la métamorphose : changement de formes, de traits, de couleurs, de caractères, de personnalités, de regards sur soi et sur les autres... Lié au pouvoir et à l'idéologie, au rituel et au jeu, à l'intégration sociale et la protection..., le masque joue une pluralité de rôles dans la structuration politique, sociale, culturelle et cultuelle, et par conséquent dans l'articulation de l'histoire individuelle avec l'histoire collective. Aussi, alors même qu'il cache, le masque est-il le

La fille au poney, debout, 2012
huile sur toile, 150x150 cm, collection particulière



révélateur paradoxal de la fragilité qui structure notre mode d'existence en tant qu'elle est fondée sur notre relation à l'autre. Il féconde les liens qui nous tissent les uns aux autres entre attrait et répulsion, séduction et haine...

Élément dissimulateur autant que révélateur, donc, le masque obsède Yassine Balbzioui qui l'exploite de diverses manières dans son activité créatrice, aussi bien dans ses dessins que dans ses peintures, ses collages que dans ses performances et autres actions. En effet, la quasi-totalité des œuvres de l'artiste présente des corps humains dont le visage est soit englouti dans une masse de couleur monochrome ou de matière chaotique, soit caché derrière un masque le plus souvent animal. Dans tous les cas, l'accès à la vision du visage humain semble nous être interdit dans les œuvres de l'artiste. Œuvres qui prennent leur point de départ le plus souvent dans la réalité visuelle et parfois même dans le quotidien le plus familier, voire familial. L'artiste travaille, en effet, la plupart du temps à partir des photographies qu'il a prises lui-même de son environnement immédiat ou de celles qu'il a glanées ici et là dans différentes publications : journaux, magazines, catalogues ou encore livres d'art. Certaines œuvres tiennent en une simple intervention, d'autres sont complètement transposées en peintures à travers divers procédés techniques. Mais, dans tous les cas, le masque demeure pour l'artiste le moyen efficace de questionner l'identité, son instabilité et la complexité de son rapport à l'altérité...

C'est que le masque offre à Yassine Balbzioui la possibilité d'ouvrir sa pratique artistique au-delà de la simple reproduction des apparences. En

effet, le recours à cet artifice et sa capacité à métamorphoser les visages, permet à l'artiste de dépasser le niveau de la représentation mimétique des scènes de genre classiques et les contraintes techniques et formelles soucieuses de l'objectivité du rendu et de la fidélité au référentiel réel, pour ouvrir son langage plastique à l'amplitude de l'imaginaire et au champ libre de l'interprétation subjective que favorise l'expression suggestive... Ces œuvres s'avèrent alors comme autant de fictions poétiques, de fables ouvertes et fécondes, capables de nourrir diverses interprétations et d'offrir une pluralité de significations...

Cette ouverture interprétative et sémantique doit beaucoup, bien sûr, à la manière de peindre de Yassine Balbzioui qui a tendance à noyer ses formes dans une matière colorée qui les tire vers l'informe et le chaos, mais aussi à l'instrumentalisation que l'artiste fait du masque. C'est, en effet, celui-ci qui dote les personnages de l'artiste d'une présence étrange et énigmatique. En niant les traits qui singularisent leur identité individuelle, le masque les ouvre sur l'identité plurielle et sur la complexité des figures du possible. Du fait qu'ils n'offrent aucun visage et encore moins de visage identifiable, ces personnages se transforment en espaces de projections infinies. Aussi, tout spectateur qui les envisage est-il porté à y projeter son propre visage ou la multiplicité des visages qui habitent sa mémoire. Les œuvres de Balbzioui deviennent ainsi comme autant de surfaces réfléchissantes aptes à renvoyer chaque regardeur à lui-même, à son histoire et à l'enchevêtrement de ses préoccupations et projections imaginaires et fantasmagoriques.

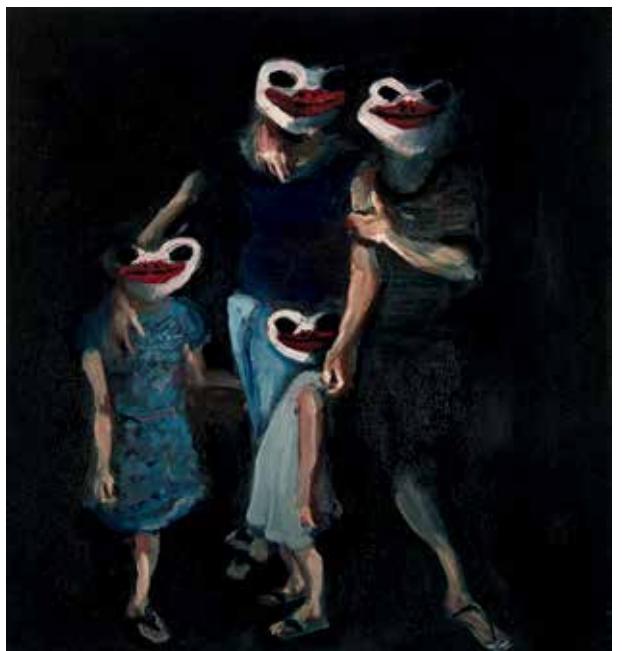


La fille au poney, sur le sol, 2012
huile sur toile, 150x150 cm, collection particulière



Friends, 2012, huile sur toile, 69 x 73 cm

Cousines et sœurs, 2012, huile sur toile, 72 x 67 cm, collection particulière



Sisters, 2012, huile sur toile, 150 x 150 cm

Courtesy Galerie Shart



Trio, 2013, huile sur toile, 180x210 cm, collection particulière



Caravane on ice, 2013, huile sur toile, 79x63 cm, collection particulière
Leçon de vélo, 2013, huile sur toile, 162x131 cm, collection particulière



L'INNOCENCE DISSIDENTE OU LA FIGURE DE L'IDIOT

Marie Deparis-Yafil

Résumer en quelques mots ce qui se passe dans les œuvres de Yassine Balbzioui présentées ici serait difficile: dans *Birdie*, un homme à tête d'oiseau, à moins qu'il ne fut masqué, scrute avec curiosité des balles de tennis devant vraisemblablement lui servir à jouer au golf. Dans *The fish inside me*, un homme rame tant bien que mal dans sa baignoire d'enfant pour atteindre quelque rivage impossible, et la *Grosse tête en chute libre* dévèle une colline en un slapstick de seize secondes. Faut-il nécessairement chercher un sens, qu'il soit narratif ou symbolique, ou au moins quelque chose de rationnel et de rassurant, à ces images ? Hélas, il est à craindre que non...

Par delà le non-sens et le décalage, le comique du geste, en terme de rupture de cohérence, qui pourraient suggérer le monde de l'enfance, ces absurdes performances manifestent l'invisible – et incommode – envers des êtres, sur le fil ténu entre l'étrangeté et la folie. Et les êtres hybrides qu'affectionne l'artiste – ici, lui-même, masqué –, aux confins de l'humain et de la bête, interrogent l'animalité en nous, révèlent cette part inexploitée, occultée par la pensée et le polissage de la civilisation, et pointent les basculements toujours possibles.

Car dans cette esthétique proche du carnavalesque, tendant vers la catégorie du grotesque,



The fish inside me, 2011, vidéo

se dessine un art de la transgression et du renversement comme forme de «radicalité négatrice», dans le rejet des normes, de la bienséance et des évidences.

Mais l'hyperbole, construite avec humour et ironie, retourne tout pessimisme en rire salvateur. «Le rire causé par le grotesque a en soi quelque chose de profond, d'axiomatique et de primitif» disait Baudelaire¹. Yassine Balbzioui a compris en quoi la nature même du déguisement est comique, qui, se détachant du «corps habituel», pour reprendre l'expression de Bergson², produit le décalage et l'inattendu.

Sacrifiant son amour-propre sur l'autel de la dérision, Balbzioui n'a peur ni du ridicule ni de

l'absurde, et son art est une manière de lutter contre la gravité, dans tous les sens du terme, et l'esprit de sérieux. Il est ainsi une forme de subversion, qui oppose sa force de résistance, au travers de ce geste régressif, de ce retour à la nature, aux idéalismes parfois dangereux et aux théories vides d'humanité. Alors le rire, plus que jamais grinçant et d'essence «satanique»¹, que provoquent les performances vidéo ou les photographies de Yassine Balbzioui exprime intensément les tiraillements de notre «nature contradictoire», entre ces deux infinis en nous, l'angélique et le diabolique, le sublime et l'animal.

Mais ce rire-là, résultant de la propension de l'artiste à user du non-sens, constitue, s'il faut en croire Bergson et d'autres avant lui, l'essence



Grosse tête en chute libre, 2011, vidéo

1. Charles Baudelaire, *Curiosités esthétiques -De l'essence du rire (et généralement du comique dans les arts plastiques)*, publié en 1855 dans *Le portefeuille*.

2. Henri Bergson, *Le rire -Essai sur la signification du comique*, Editions Alcan, 1924 et PUF, 1959.

3. Jean-Yves Jouannais, *L'idiotie*, Editions Beaux-Arts Magazine, 2003.

même de l'intelligence et de la créativité humaine, un pont jeté résolument entre la vie et l'art.

Car pour Balbzioui, il n'y a pas d'autre équation que celle de l'art à la vie, et, à la manière de Filliou, sans doute oserait-il proclamer que dans l'art comme dans la vie, rien n'est sérieux... bien qu'il n'y ait rien de plus sérieux. Cette idiotie de l'artiste, dont parlait Jouannais³, est clairement pour lui un combat, une posture stratégique, une attitude construite et jouée, fondée dans la lucidité d'un homme engagé dans son art, dans la vie des formes comme dans celle des hommes de son temps.

Seules les pierres sont innocentes, exposition du 13.04.12 au 12.05.12, Galerie Talmart, Paris
Commissariat Marie Deparis-Yafil



Birdie, 2011, photographies, 40x40 cm chacune







L'ART AFRICAIN
AU SUD AFRICAIN
SACS TISSUS CLOTHES APPARELS DE TABLET RADICE LEGOS
ARTICLE D'ART

TELE

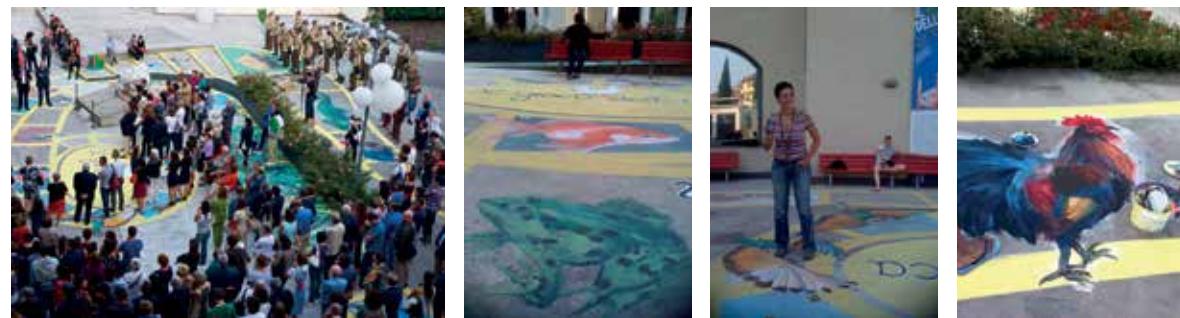
KANDJ FRERES

L'ART AFRICAIN chez Hoballah





Le Voyage de Twin Freaks, 2012, performance à travers la ville de Dakar,
huile sur toile 190x190 cm, Ker Thiossane, Festival Afropixel, Dak'Art off



Il Gioco dell'Oca, Cherimus, 2012, Gamec di Bergamo

Il Gioco dell'Oca è un'opera di Marco Colomboani, realizzata nel 2009 nel paese di Valledoria in Sardegna: un dipinto a cielo aperto nel quale chiunque può entrare e giocare e che apre le porte a un mondo fantastico popolato da animali di ogni specie.

In occasione della mostra IL BEL PAESE DELL'ARTE. Etiche ed Estetiche della Nazione alla Gamec di Bergamo dal 28.09.11 al 19.02.12, l'opera è stata riproposta nel cortile interno del museo, grazie al contributo di: Giuseppina Rubbi, Simon Njami, Yassine Balbioui, Leonardo Chiappini, Michele Gabriele, Giovanni Giaretta, Isa Griese, Cristian Raimondi, Beatrice Beilet, Matteo Rubbi, Carlo Spiga, Edna Gee, Gemma Noris, Derek Maria Francesco Di Fabio, Alek O, Santo Tolone, Cleo Fariselli, Elena Nerina Reverberi, Alberto Colzani, Emiliana Sabiu, Andrea Rossi.

Flower family, 2013, huile sur toile, 79x63 cm, collection particulière





Little Pablo, 2013, huile sur toile, 162x131 cm, collection particulière



La médaille, 2013, huile sur toile, 162x131 cm, collection particulière



We have to tell you something, 2013, huile sur toile, 83x66 cm, collection particulière



RENT AN IDENTITY IN BAYREUTH. A WORKSHOP FOR KIDS AT IWALEWAHAUS

Nadine Siegert



In September 2012, Yassine Balbzioui was invited for the first time to Iwalewahaus, the Africa Center of the University of Bayreuth as artist-in-residence. This institution functions as museum for contemporary art as well as a research and teaching centre within the African Studies program at Bayreuth University. Since 2012, Iwalewahaus also organises an art club for children from Bayreuth. This club is more than a classical museum educational program; rather it is an opportunity to make the doors of the museum wide open for the Bayreuth public. This is particularly true for children, who usually may not have access to museum and cultural institutions. In the workshop, most of the kids come from a

local asylum seekers' hostel, although this was not the original intention. Out of this rather random grouping of children and young people a stable group has now been formed, which went on to participate in a number of further workshops and is now an integral part of Iwalewahaus' outreach program.

The residency was part of the artist-in-residency program at Iwalewahaus, which has its main focus in the area of visual arts, providing a platform for diverse actors: artists, curators, writers, teachers and students. Up to four artists are invited every year to develop a project in connection with either the history of the institution, its archive



possibility for the kids to experience museum practices, including the setting up of a show and the social component of exhibition openings and a guided tour for the visitors.

What Yassine Balbzioui offered to the kid's club and to Iwalewahaus was thus extraordinary and far beyond the usual practise of museum educational programs. During a whole week, the artist worked with the children and developed not only a huge 10-metre-long collaborative painting, but also a number of costumes were created out of pure imagination from whatever materials such as newspapers, cardboard, aluminium and feathers can be used for. The painting was developed over some days in a highly performative manner. The children not only used their hands to create forms on the canvas but also their feet and finally their whole body. First, their body shapes were transferred to the surface and then filled with colour but also with different materials such as feathers. In the next step, the spaces in-between were also filled with words and sentences, which were found in newspapers.

Parallel to the canvas, a second task of the workshop was the collaborative creation of costumes. With these, new identities were created which gave participants the space to go beyond the ordinary life of a not-yet-teenager in a boring provincial German town. One highlight of the workshop was the public appearance of these fantasy figures and super-heroes in the city centre, mashing up a calm Sunday afternoon and irritating the German father-mother-kid setting on their Sunday walk for a little while. Kids ran though the pedestrian zone, climbed the monuments in Hofgarten, the garden of the city's castle until they were asked not to do so and stole apples directly from the trees. For two hours or so, they transformed

the small city into a supernatural space for fantasy and the imagination of a possible different self.

The visit of Yassine Balbzioui was the beginning of a new era of museum education at Iwalewahaus, which goes beyond the usual practices of experiments with material. Usually, in educational workshops, which deal with the African continent, western imaginations of traditions such as mask dances and the topic of recycling as cultural practice are stressed. Most often, that leads to a practical application in form of the building of masks out of paper mâché or the recycling of materials into toy cars. A serious, while playful engagement with content is not the intention, rather a perpetuation of an imaginary Africa branded into children's fantasy. On the contrary, *Identity to Rent* went the other way round and concentrated on the African artist and their aesthetic practise as the starting point. Yassine Balbzioui has the unique capability to apply his own artistic strategies on a level where children and young people can easily adapt and create their own ideas and imagination out of it. What was communicated in the workshop was not so much an artificial idea about where the artist might originate from (thus the African continent, more specifically a North African country named Morocco) but instead the comprehension that intercultural competence and tolerance has something to do with a collaborative project, where everybody is inserting her or his own experiences and cultural background – be it Moroccan, Azerbaijani, Turkish, German or French.

The experience of the workshop *Identity to Rent* and the collaboration with Yassine Balbzioui has on the one hand been an integral part of the goal to open a museum institution to a wider public, and to a public, which has not yet had much



access to the institution of the museum in general and to international artists in particular. It is on the other hand also part of the strategic development of the institution as a *laboratory*, as space where experiments with unknown outcome are possible and where process is of higher interest than result. In this laboratory space, not only artists give their input, but also the curators, researchers and students who work at Iwalewahaus. And last but not least, the audiences of the various formats such as exhibitions, conferences and workshops also provide their input through their active participation, critique and attention. Every one of these events in the laboratory space leaves its traces, creates an opportunity to follow up and investigate further, and to fully explore the potentials that the museum space offers to a society, which is willing to learn and experience.

and collection or the city of Bayreuth. Yassine Balbzioui's residency was clearly dedicated to the latter, engaging with the city of Bayreuth and young people who maybe consider this small, provincial town in Germany's southeast as home. The workshop was additionally funded by the German Ministry for Family in the program *Toleranz fördern, Kompetenz stärken*. This funding opportunity focuses on educational programs supporting tolerance and intercultural competence building.

In the workshop *Identity to Rent*, one of the most important elements was to take artistic practice seriously while developing it with the children. That meant not only providing high quality material such as a good canvases and acrylic paint, but also offering them the opportunity to show their results in a final exhibition. This was a unique



Lazy birds, 2012, installation, dimensions variables,
«BijlmAIR» Amsterdam, Pays-Bas, programme du CBK Zuidoost, Stichting FLAT et du Stedelijk Museum



DID YOU READ THE NEWSPAPER YESTERDAY?

Workshop, installation et performance, 2013, Musée ethnographique de Bordeaux - France
dans le cadre des expositions *Iwalewa - Quatre vues de l'Afrique contemporaine*

Virtual/Material : Fashion as logbook

Organisation : MC2A Aquitaine Afriques, Bordeaux - France et Iwalewa-Haus, Bayreuth - Allemagne











THE ART/IST IS PRESENT. WHILE FLYING.

Katharina Fink

*“(...) above the rules of the
and its control*

BEAUTIFUL (...)”

Heaps and heaps of newspaper, black figures with peckers, rubber-clad, lying in a paper landscape like corpses waiting for resurrection. Two canvases framing the chaos, one showing a horizontal triptych: Three naked people, one on top of the other. The headline, in thick black paint strokes, reads: “*Gefühsinvasion*”². To the right: A canvas showing two birdlike figures in what seems like a fight. Words read: “*Le hibou ne dort jamais*”, French for: *The eagle owl that never sleeps*. Close-up to the paper heaps: The newspapers, French and German titles mixed on

the floor, show blanks in their headlines, whole words are crossed out to obscure this; to create that. The title of the installation piece in total: “Did you read the newspaper yesterday?” “What if we wouldn’t have read yesterday’s newspaper”, asks Yassine Balbzioui.

The installation that awaited visitors at Bordeaux’ “Musée d’Ethnographie” in late summer 2013 would best be described as enigmatic. It contrasted strongly with its surroundings and the context it was located in: the MEB being an institution which, in ordinary times, is not particularly known for innovative art shows., the *musée* is usually host to a rehearsed display of objects from its massive and, in the ethnographic sense, well-ordered collection. But welcome extraordinary,



here's a Balbzioui show. Whose art makes things appear a bit different. The installation was part of a show entitled "*virtual/material: logbuch mode*", which in itself constituted one of the four parts of the exhibition project "*Iwalewa: Four Views Into Contemporary Africa*" spanning the city of Bordeaux. "*Four Views*" was conceptualized as cooperation between Iwalewahaus in Bayreuth/Germany and MC2A/France, an art organization devoted to the promotion of art by African artists, mostly based in France. "*Virtual/material*" assembled artworks around the theme of fashion as a 'log' – an instrument to measure estimated journeys by their progress, but moreso the alternatives opening up, the little shifts in a route, which consequently may alter the future passage. Fashion and textiles which dealt with the question of temporality; of possible futures within what is likely called 'past', were at its center. At the heart

of the show were the works of New York-based artist Emeka Alams and his label "Gold Coast Trading Company"³ as well as glimpses from the oeuvre of Zohra Opoku⁴, based mostly in Accra: T-Shirts, video installations, prints.

All well in the musée. But a heap of newspaper, a paper-clad male figure, a dancer in a dress made of fringes, an elephant man, leather-skinned by a painted canvas, moving - like Balbzioui introduced it "like in a Jim Jarmusch movie"? Balbzioui's installation baffled. What does it have to do with fashion, with textiles? As with all of Balbzioui's artworks it took a bit of time and pleasure to disentangle to get beyond the first-layer-experience. Birds often guide the way. By leaving the overall impression of the rich tapestry of images and ideas and zooming into details, the richness and the composition of the experience as a whole

becomes obvious. The inspiration and the texture behind it. There are: The stripes of the dancer's costume: Rags from fabric, each of them telling a history. The canvas painted by school children who took part in the workshop at "Sew & Laine", a creative space in Bordeaux. The blanks in the newspaper headlines and the new truths emerging. Framing it all: the birds, symbols of life, death, and anything, but in any case knowing, protecting and guarding the scene in an uncanny way. Indeed, the installation delicately touched on the theme of the exhibition: What if yesterday had been different? What if yesterday we had not acknowledged the then 'today'? What then, in the end, is time, when we leave the logic of the order that frames the piece and are confused by it: Time?

Balbzioui is the 'birdman' of contemporary global art. Birds live in all of his images; often paired with another of his signature strokes, the mask.

Once, he recalls in conversation, he had knitted masks for the pigeons that came visiting his atelier in Amsterdam. After which he then portrayed the visitors. Art scenes and temporal intersections come to mind: Montmartre. Zürich. Marrakech. Yet Balbzioui's centre of gravity is not fixed, and if it was it would surely not be coming together in Paris. Balbzioui is a man of routes; currently practicing from Morocco, at home likewise in the Netherlands, in France, in Germany. Much as in his life; Balbzioui's practice challenges notions of migration and identity – it is irrelevant where and when his works unfold. This became obvious in a previous cooperation with the artist in the context of Iwalewahaus' work with children from the local asylum seekers' home: "Identity to rent". Facilitated by Balbzioui, children got to know and try art techniques such as painting, costume-making, to disrupt notions of 'identity' and 'home'¹⁵.



Performance, besides the canvas, is the strongest of Balbzioui's media of choreographed expression. One of the powerful characteristics of art in general, but most obvious in performance art, the ephemeral beauty of not being on sale; something that holds a certain quality. This is a genre that was particularly driven by people such as Andy Warhol, who claimed fame by reproduction for everyone. At least for 15 minutes. Art and commodity, art as commodity: The accessibility of everything. Art, in an alternative reading of Balbzioui's works, is closer to the creative and unsettling force of the early DADA revolutionists around Tristan Tzara. Closer to art as practice, clearly "...without pretension, as life should be." Straight to the core, creating space. And, extending on the DADA manifesto – "...with the insistence of air into all the spaces that reason has not been able to fill with words or conventions."⁶ Clearly, a museum space such as the MEB is a space conventionally filled with words and conventions – about behavior; about ordering the world. DADA rejected this conventional ordering. It demanded the rupture, the break with logics; also: museo-logics. While to call Balbzioui's work one bordering Dadaism is not entirely apt; the direction that Dada gave to the work with spaces and the formulation of this relation reverberates here. Balbzioui poses questions with his work; and with his own investment in the art work. Classification as "African Artist" is out of the question for Balbzioui. A label that is too narrow; also too much of a selling point. What constitutes the "Africanness" of an artwork? Art is global, travelling. But most importantly: Present. In Balbzioui's works, the artist is present; as a recent film portrait of Marina Abramovic was entitled. Moreso; the art is present; his art creates presence. Almost as a response to the

ephemeral journey enabled by performance as art; Balbzioui integrates himself into the material pieces that constitute, as assemblage, the potentiality for the *Augenblick*, the momentous visibility. Asking performance as an art form to dance; Balbzioui integrates his body back into the canvas; and is in this close to epic works. Like a widely travelled (time and space), a bit more selective Bosch, who had a strong interest in a symbolic art-ornithology as well. Or like another of one of the big painters who ban and unleash their creative worlds on the canvas. Yet Balbzioui's re-integration of himself into the world created by the canvas; and the re-integration of the canvas into performance art – in its conventional format as the medium for painting, but also in the tailored version as in this installation worn by the 'Elephant Man' – is a clever take on the person cult in fine arts, where often the artist often overshadows the work.

Balbzioui is - much as Charlie Parker and Hieronymus Bosch were – fascinated by birds and a diligent worker for the constant improvement of their own work. Tristan Tzara, the Dadaist before DADA existed, named conventional art a "Parrot" in his poetic "Proclamation": art and rot and a vain version of pretension in one word – which doesn't do justice to the bird. Against the 'parrotism' of a commoditized art world, Balbzioui is flying freely; nonetheless by now being a frequent flyer in the art world as well. Many routes – past and future ones – connect him with Iwalewahaus, both in Bayreuth, Germany and elsewhere in the world. In a freestyle version of a bird Balbzioui "... names the sky his own."⁷ Plus the canvas, the stage: the sky that builds from here.

1. Tristan Tzara: Proclamation Without Pretension. (1919)

2. Which translates to: Invasion of feelings.

3. Check: www.before1444.com.

4. Check: www.zohraopoku.com.

5. See the text by Nadine Siegert in this volume.

6. Tristan Tzara on Dada. In: *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (1981) edited by Robert Motherwell, p.250 - 251

7. Maya Angelou: Caged Bird. In: *Collected Poems*. New York 1994: 194.

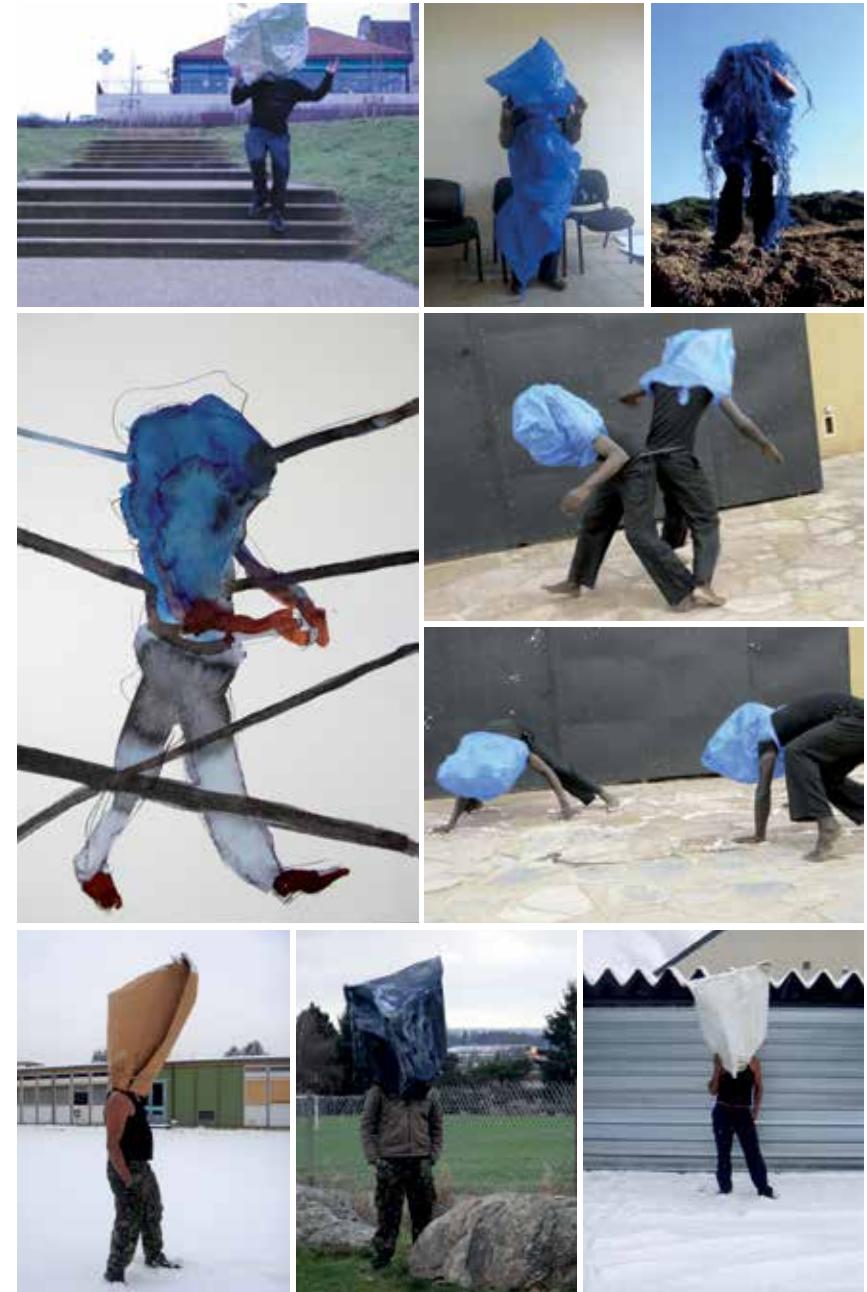






Série *Plastic man*, 2012, huile sur papier, 65 x 50 cm chacune

GROSSE TÊTE



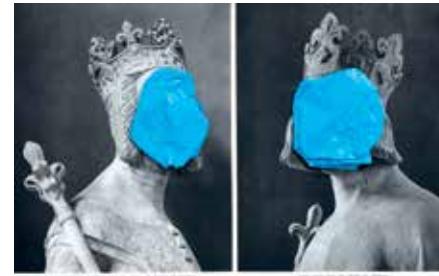
Grosse Tête descendant l'escalier, 2011, vidéo

Expérimentations autour de *Grosse Tête*, 2010, Shakers, Montluçon

Ceinture noire, 2010, performance, Biennale de danse Danse l'Afrique Danse, Musée national de Bamako, Mali



Sans titre, 2011, technique mixte, formats divers





Performance *Grosse Tête*, 2014, photographie, 120x90 cm



THE TALE OF THE ATLAS CHAMELEON

Bonaventure Soh Ndiung

There are a few animals that have successfully built for themselves the most flabbergasting reputations. One such animal is definitely the chameleon. Apart from the fact that it has biologically adapted itself to change its colour as a visual signal of its mood and behaviour, i.e. an indication of if its aggressive, happy or willing to mate for example, the chameleon has also made its way into the core of many myths. Many Bantu cultures, for example, are familiar with chameleon playing an important role in the myth of the origin of man and of man's death. It is said that the chameleon found an unusual species (a man and a woman) in its fish trap and astonished, showed these strange creatures to its god (Mukungu). The God decreed that the human race is worth living and they were thence given a place on earth. Back then, humankind was immortal, and multiplied in

abundance, such that the gods, who then lived on earth, retreated to the heavens. Upon leaving, the gods gave the chameleon a message to take to the people - they would die but return to life. They gave the lizard a different message - men would die and not return. Since the chameleon is known to be slower, the lizard arrived first with his message and so men became mortal.

Now, 3014 A.D. another tale is told of a peculiar chameleon, the Atlas chameleon, with the exceptional prowess of transforming into an artist. It is said that, not only could this chameleon metamorphose into a practicing artist, but also could it express itself artistically through diverse media such as painting, performance or even photography. Like any other myth, it is difficult to say where historical facts end and where fantasy or fiction



starts, but this notwithstanding, so-called antique evidence in the form of photographic material and even more archaic recordings through videos, and remnants of a popular medium of the time -called internet- dated around 2010-2014 A.D. show that this chameleon was indeed an artist. It is also rumoured that the Atlas chameleon adopted the pseudonym Yassine Balbzioui, with which it signed most of its paintings.

Analyses of these paintings and other antique recordings by art historians reveal that the Atlas chameleon's paintings seemed to have been a politico-social parody of its time. A recurrent motive in many of the painting series attributed to the chameleon is a kind of masking. Masks of all dimensions, colours and forms. The question that automatically arises is whether the masks are a

statement for a carnivalesque appropriation or if the masks serve primarily as a means of hiding, and thereby subconsciously revealing something intended to be hidden. Take the case of the functional masks that look like gas masks, but worn by children, as in *Jeux d'enfants*, 2013. The children that take centre stage in this series all wear work gears. There is a something awkward in the air, as the protagonists stir at a figure that might be the artist or the beholder while sitting in a wheelbarrow or posing arm in arm. It is the darkness from which they emerge, this cave-like atmosphere that makes this painting series particularly mysterious. The concept of the mask continues in the series *Le troisième masque*, 2012 wherein young girls have their faces hidden behind horse head masks. A strange symbolism that is almost ununderstan-



dable in our times. Historical material of that era suggests that there existed a culture of young girls being particularly fond of horses, but also that era was plagued by various scandals of horse meat being put in all sorts of canned food – with or without meat or instead of beef or swine. Could this practice have so much shocked the artist into representing kids with horse masks? Anyways, as of now there is no evidence why the artist would choose such a symbolism. Another typical example is the series *Plastic man*, 2012 in which faceless young men are portrayed. Faceless because they mask the carry to cover their visages are plastic bags. Suffocating images to see.

The philologist and philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who is said to have lived some 100 years prior to the Atlas chameleon, philosophised

about the mask in Section 40 of his masterpiece *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (1886):

Whatever is profound loves masks; what is most profound even hates image and parable. Might not nothing less than the opposite be the proper disguise for the shame of a god? (...) It is not the worst things that cause the worst shame: there is not only guile behind a mask - there is so much graciousness in cunning. (...) Every profound spirit needs a mask: even more, around every profound spirit a mask is growing continually, owing to the constantly false, namely shallow, interpretation of every word, every step, every sign of life he gives.

If Nietzsche were to be right, then he made a strong case for masking here. A choice of a mask reveals how one perceives oneself or how wants

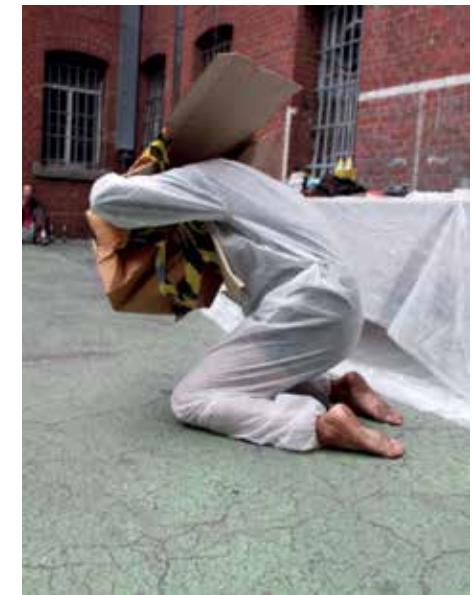
to be perceived by others. Intentionality plays a primordial role here, as an unintentional wearing of a mask might reveal something in the subconscious, but might also lead the beholder into perceiving a different you than what you really are. On the other hand, an intentional choice of a mask might just be appropriating a specific role as in a play that might lead the beholder astray. With regard to profundity, Nietzsche seems to make the mask an unbeatable accessoire of any profound spirit – either by choice, i.e. intentional or by imposition, i.e. by the observer's misinterpretation or misperception.

In any case, the performative act of choosing, and playing with the philosophy of the mask, the psychology of the observer seemed to be the crux of the chameleon's artistic practice. A metaphor is still told to date that the blood that flowed in the veins of the chameleon's works was one that had humour as the red blood cells and zeal to entertain as the white blood cells. It is said that the chameleon never pretended to be one of those intellectual artists, but rather an authentic artist that trusted his instincts and relied on these very basic emotional and instinctive approaches that are known to cause a chill run down one's spine.

Archeologists recently found excepts of what they claim was one of the most enticing performances the chameleon ever made called *Grosse tête*. The researchers further revealed that *Grosse tête* was a kind of mutant creature Balbzioui instantaneously created by plastering stuff on his head to form a gigantic mask. This stuff could be cartons, plastic bags, pots, glass etc. The myth holds that the audiences were always caught up in a state of despair and at the same time great astonishment, as they saw the artist struggle to put some holes

in this object on his head, so as to get some air to breath. It was not unusual that people in the audience left the space for fear of witnessing the unutterable. The performances went on and the tumour became bigger until Balbzioui, at the brink of suffocation, frantically tore down the tumour. Was *Grosse tête* the ego that threatened to throttle the artist, the politician, the layman on the street? Was *Grosse tête* megalomania that accompanied one on the way to success, but suddenly relaxed its grip when one was at the top? These questions cannot be answered by the archeologists and art historians, but they further revealed more information on who the chameleon might actually have been. With a 99% probability, they say it must have been Yassine Balbzioui - born in Morocco in 1972, records state that Balbzioui studied art at the School of Fine Arts in Casablanca, Morocco, School of Fine Arts in Bordeaux, France and at the University California (UC). The name was found in antique exhibition records, meaning that he exhibited in the International Museum of Women in San Francisco, the National Museum of Mali, at Dak'art Off, Savvy Contemporary Berlin, Iwalewa Haus Bayreuth, «BijlmAIR» Program of CBK Zuidoot, the Berlin Biennial or the Marrakesh Biennial. He lived and worked between Paris, Bordeaux and Berlin.

The consensus is that the myth of the chameleon stemmed from Balbzioui's ability to change his colour according to his mood and spirits, which were reflected in the forms of a painter, sculptor, installation or video artist, musician and above all a performer. His affinity to perform and ignite a conversation with the audience was reflected in most of his works, but especially in the piece *Grosse tête*.



Grosse tête, 2012, installation and performance during *Positioning Osmotic Impulses*, Former Prison Neukölln, SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin



Performance *Grosse Tête*, 2014, photographie, 120x90 cm





Blue gas mask, 2013, encre et gouache sur papier, 106x75 cm, collection particulière



Jeux d'enfants I, 2013, huile sur toile, 180x210cm
Courtesy Galerie Shart





Jeux d'enfants II, 2013, huile sur toile, 210x180 cm
Courtesy Galerie Shart



Ensemble, 2012, huile sur toile, 100x200 cm, collection particulière

BIOGRAPHIE

YASSINE BALBZIOUI

Né au Maroc en 1972

Vit et travaille à Paris et à Bordeaux

EXPOSITIONS

- 2014 *Where Are We Now?*, 5^{ème} Biennale de Marrakech, Marrakech, Maroc
Musée de la Fondation Abderrahman Slaoui, Casablanca, Maroc
- 2013 *Jeux d'enfants et autres histoires...* (solo show), Galerie Shart, Casablanca, Maroc
BijlmAir, CDK Zuidoost, Amsterdam, Pays-Bas
Cent ans, Cent artistes, Cent œuvres, Société Générale, Casablanca, Maroc
Quatre vues de l'Afrique contemporaine, Musée ethnographique, Bordeaux, France
Sulcis Oddity - 5 Years of Cherimus, MACC, Calasetta, Sardaigne, Italie
Le temps des cerises, CAPC Musée d'Art Contemporain, Bordeaux, France
Supermarket Art Fair, Stockholm Independent Art Fair, Stockholm, Suède
- 2012 *Le troisième masque* (solo show), Galerie Shart, Casablanca, Maroc
Black magic women, CBK Zuidoost, Amsterdam, Pays-Bas
Inexactly this, ZET Foundation, Amsterdam, Pays-Bas
La puissance des masques, performance avec DemoDrama Faces,
Carte blanche à Ker Thiossane, Institut français de Dakar, Sénégal
Positioning Osmotic Impulses, Former Prison Neuköln, SAVVY Contemporary Berlin,
Allemagne
Pornography of everyday life, SAVVY Contemporary, 7^{ème} Biennale de Berlin, Allemagne
Aquitaine Afrique : Contact Zones, Iwalewa-Haus, Bayreuth, Allemagne
Regards sur le continent africain, ART_SO Vidéo, Nantes, France
Jungle box (solo show), Ker Thiossane, Dakar, Sénégal
Parade – Von dort bis hier (solo show), Galerie Listros, Berlin, Allemagne
Museos y Modernidades Transito, Casa de América, Madrid, Espagne
Festival de l'Etrange, Alliance franco-marocaine d'Essaouira, Essaouira, Maroc
Seules les pierres sont innocentes, Galerie Talmart, Paris, France
- 2011 *Yassine Balbzioui* (solo show), Espace 29, Bordeaux, France
The Fish inside me (solo show), Château de la Louvière, Montluçon, France
Let's circus, Piccola Scuola di Circo di via Messina, Milan, Italie
- 2010 *Africa Light*, Musée national du Mali, Biennale Danse l'Afrique Danse, Bamako, Mali
Rencontres, 6B, Saint-Denis, France
Argonne, L'Agence Créative, Bordeaux, France
Galerie Monasilah, Assilah, Maroc
Africa light, CCBS, Dak'art Off, Dakar, Sénégal
Africa light, MC2a-Porte 44, Bordeaux, France
Pépinière d'artiste, Hourtin, France
- 2009 International symposium of painting, Zervas art, Patras, Grèce
- 2008 Biennale 2D, Morue Noire - Novart, Bègles, France
Crise de foi, Faculté d'anthropologie, Bordeaux, France
- 2007 Musée International de la Femme, San Francisco, USA



FORMATION

- 1996 Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Casablanca, Maroc
2000 Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Bordeaux, France
2001 Berkeley University, «Education abroad program», USA

RÉSIDENCES

- 2012 *BijlmAir*, programme CBK Zuidoost et Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Pays-Bas
Afropixel, Ker Thiossane, Dakar, Sénégal
Festival de l'Etrange, Alliance franco-marocaine d'Essaouira, Essaouira, Maroc
Identity to rent, Iwalewa-Haus, Bayreuth, Allemagne
- 2011 Cherimus, Sardaigne, Italie
2010 Shakers diffusion, Montluçon, France
Pépinière d'artistes, Hourtin, France
- 2008 Open studio, Pankow, Berlin, Allemagne
Espace 29, Bordeaux, France.

INTERVENTIONS / WORKSHOPS

- 2013 *Did you read the newspaper yesterday?*, Sew & Laine
dans le cadre de *Iwalewa - Quatre Vues de l'Afrique contemporaine*, Bordeaux, France
Biblioteca Fantastica, Cherimus, Sardaigne, Italie
- 2012 *Identity to rent*, Iwalewa-Haus, Bayreuth, Allemagne
- 2011 Ecole Jacques Prévert, Montluçon, France
Ecole Paul Langevin, Domerat, France
- 2010 Conservatoire des arts et métiers multimédias Balla Fesseke Kouyaté, Bamako, Mali
Avec le collectif d'artistes M'bartmi, Dakar, Sénégal
Journée nationale des réfugiés, Evreux, France
Hiding couscous, Pépinière d'artistes, Hourtin, France

TEXTES

Marie Deparis-Yafil, Katharina Fink, Mohamed Rachdi, Nadine Siegert, Bonaventure Soh Ndjikung

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CRÉDITS PHOTOGRAPHIQUES

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