

How to tame ghosts...

An exhibition project featuring Halida Boughriet (FR/DZ) and Mudi Yahaya (NG)

SAVVY Contemporary Berlin

„History (with a capital *H*) ends where the histories of those peoples once reputed to be without history come together. “ History is a highly functional fantasy of the West, originating at precisely that time when it alone 'made' the history of the world.¹

Edouard Glissant, The Quarrel with History – The Known, the Uncertain

To articulate what is past does not mean to recognize “how it really was.” It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger... The only writer of history with the gift of setting alight the sparks of hope in the past, is the one who is convinced of this: that not even the dead will be safe from the enemy, if he is victorious. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.²

Walter Benjamin, On the Concept of History

It is common knowledge that history, as concrete as it may be portrayed in history books, and the privilege to write history is one of the most prestigious chalices, earned or seized by any victor or person in power. History thus must be seen and appreciated only through the prism of he/she who wrote it, as the facts in history are usually rather subjective than objective, and the definition of the “truth” in any historical context is to be treated with some caution.

In its multi-dimensionality, it is this concoction of the real/truth, the fictitious, and the untold that makes history what it is... especially as it is the case that the silent voices in history are much louder than the voices, which have found a way into our ears today.

History is thus like a ghost that lingers, in undecidability, between the worlds of the living and the dead, between the darkness of night and the light of day, between the planets of truth and those of lies. Thus, to talk about history one has to research upon the shades between these aforementioned extremes. The crux of the matter is the hypothesis that this space between the extremes of a factual and non-factual history, i.e. this space occupied by untamed ghosts can most appropriately be occupied by using a medium more superior to language - which is art. In his *Essay on the Origin of Language*³, Jean-Jacques Rousseau writes „But the most powerful language is the one in which all is said without a word being uttered“. If one were to engross thoughts on this statement, one could easily suggest that artistic expression IS the language in which all is said without necessarily uttering words.

This holds through at least for the artists Halida Boughriet (FR/DZ) and Mudi Yahaya (NG) who, willingly or unwillingly, recount the past and history’s trace to the present using photography as their main utensil. Their photography stands as a voice of the unspoken or the unuttered, as they do not seek to represent “historical facts” but dare to portray an alternative historical narrative. These

¹ Edouard Glissant, *The Quarrel with History – The Known, the Uncertain*

² Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*. 1940, Original German: *Gesammelten Schriften I:2*. Suhrkamp Verlag. Frankfurt am Main, 1974

³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau [Essay on the Origin of Languages](#), published 1781 (*Essai sur l'origine des langues*)

artists succeed in occupying the space between the “factual” and the “nonfactual”, thereby being able to tame the ghost of history in that sphere. Theirs is not an articulation of “how it really was”, but taking control of and abstracting memory. It is this abstraction of history that lays the foundations for mythologies, which in turn are designed to become history.

The exhibition *How to tame ghosts...* will feature Halida Boughriet’s series «MÉMOIRES DANS L’OUBLI» and Mudi Yahaya’s «Conrad’s Circus – For Crown & Country».

While the protagonists and setting in «MÉMOIRES DANS L’OUBLI» could be a citation of figures and set-ups in the works of great painters like Gustave Courbet, they do in their own right convey a story of the cameo role, but also the backbone of each society. The melancholic expressions in their faces betray that they could be the mothers, sisters, wives of fallen heroes.



With the series “Conrad’s Circus – For Crown & Country”, Yahaya situates his works in the post-colonial Nigerian era. But his spatio-temporal consciousness informs this series as a legitimate, though surreal depiction of what history is or could be. Through the fine collaging and manipulation of analogue and digital images, Yahaya seizes the privilege of the victor and constructs a memory of the unspoken.



The three dots in *How to tame ghosts...* depict the intention of this project as a work-in-progress exhibition. It will develop as a project for all those who have the functional fantasy of making history, especially those once reputed to be without history.

A project conceived by Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung (Savvy Contemporary) and Marc-André Schmachtel (Goethe Institut Lagos)