

COOLBE

SERWAN BARAN // CHEIKHOU BA



Code:

A system of words, letters, figures, or symbols used to represent others. A phrase or concept used to represent another in an indirect way.

Serwan Baran (Iraq) and Cheikhou Ba (Senegal) are two distinctive artists from two different continents but it is their use of enigmatic visual imagery that unites them. Each artist has perfected a unique language of cryptic artistic expression filled with vivid layered symbolism. Creatures, figures, shapes and numbers form two and three dimensional artworks infused with coded messages. Between physical transformations of bodies and the integration of several beings into one body, we are placed in front of a surrealist scene transforming reality into mythology.

Fantastical scenes are unveiled - a sardonic commentary in which both artists interrogate the deficiencies, contradictions and mysteries of our collective human condition. Questioning scenarios where man is sometimes just a number, marginalised and unimportant and others that explore our eternal, puzzling relationship with mortality.

The mythical realism, used by Cheikhou and Serwan is reminiscent of the legendary realism in the world of drama conceived by the likes of Kafka and Roberto Márquez. A contemporary form of realism where everything from reality and virtuality is blended as if caught between dream and lucidity.

We find in Serwan's paintings a deep screaming silence that captures thousands of years of mankind's anxious grappling with matters of life and death. As relevant now as then. Here the ancient guardian of the dead - symbolised by a frenzied dog icon - and the lower world feature in infinite transformations that reference ancient Assyrian, Babylonian and Egyptian mythologies. Number sequences, vivid colours and fluid shapes form an ambiguous and mesmerising code, first luring us in with its beauty and then assaulting us with images of hidden torment.

As we examine Cheikhou's work we are confronted with an array of diminutive three dimensional creations packed with striking visual intrigue. Fantastical compositions which include children toys that become just material in the artist's hands. Cheikhou's code lies in the irony of everything; even of the art itself as he transforms everyday materials into soaring, but at the same time unsettling aesthetics bursting with colour and latent energy. At first glance, this series appears playful and humorous, but on closer scrutiny it does everything but laugh. Beheaded toy cows, skewered soft toys and tiny buckets filled with black melted plastic form a paradoxical world where childhood amusement meets the delusion and complexity of adulthood.

The dialogue between these two bodies of work sparks and flows as it shifts between the two and three dimensional manifestations of each artist's encrypted narrative. Challenging the viewer to decipher overt and obscured messages and ultimately crack the code.





Curated by
Mohamed Abou El Naga

Mohamed Abou El Naga is a multidisciplinary visual artist, art professor, curator and consultant. Over the course of his career, he has produced an internationally recognized body of work, created award winning art projects and curated numerous exhibitions. At the same time he has used his talent, passion and knowledge to help disadvantaged communities gain valuable skills. Through his work as a teacher he has encouraged a new generation of young people to pursue their visions and passions as aspiring artists.

Born in Egypt in 1960, Mohamed Abou El Naga graduated with honors from the Faculty of Fine Arts, Alexandria and later acquired a Masters Degree in Fine Arts and a PhD In Philosophy of Arts.

He was the first Middle Eastern artist to receive a grant from the Japan Foundation to study the art of paper making. His images combine intuitive strokes and bold design to address subjects from history to current affairs. His earlier work generated great interest when it went on view at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the new Library of Alexandria, where it remains on permanent exhibition. Over the last two decades, Abou El Naga has held numerous solo shows in the Middle East, US and Europe. He represented Egypt in the Venice Biennial 2002 and received the First Prize at the Alexandria Biennial in 2001.

He is currently Curator of the Qatar Visual Art Centre in Doha.



CHEIKHOU BA
SENEGAL

"I'm interested in this process by which the sculpture begins with fully finished products that have nothing to do with art or sculpture. Children's toy series manufactured for European children on the other side of the world, become - for the Senegalese artist that I am - a mere material, a working substance. Through the toy that transforms into art object, I want to evoke the paradox of the kingdom of childhood, and the world of adulthood.

To see, understand and appreciate these objects would we need to borrow the eyes of the child we once were, or is the look of the independent adult enough? Or should it be both? Obviously, this approach questions the freedom of artistic expression we own and which through passing time can help reconcile the difficulty of living in a complex world where everything happens as the antithesis of life.

At first glance, this series is something playful, humorous. Think again! It does everything but laugh with these stiff and extremely alert "characters", often cut into two or three and carefully stitched and glued, as if to hide and forget our wounds and bleeding, posing in a decorative weeping flower bouquet as if to keep up appearances in the ballet of death that we lead.

The buckets, full or empty buckets, are vital substances more or less. And those skewer spikes that no matter what, still remain spikes."

Cheikhou Bâ was born in 1971 in Dakar, Senegal. He is a graduate of the National Arts School in Dakar. He also has a degree in Ceramic and Polymer Production from the Geneva University of Art and Design.

Cheikhou currently lives and works in Senegal and Switzerland.



LOOK AT YOU

Medium: Mixed media
27 X 16 cm
2015



IT WAS WRITTEN

Medium: Mixed media
26 X 18 cm
2015



MISSING MOON

Medium: Mixed media
38 X 17 cm
2015



INNERMEN

Medium: Mixed media
26 X 18 cm
2015



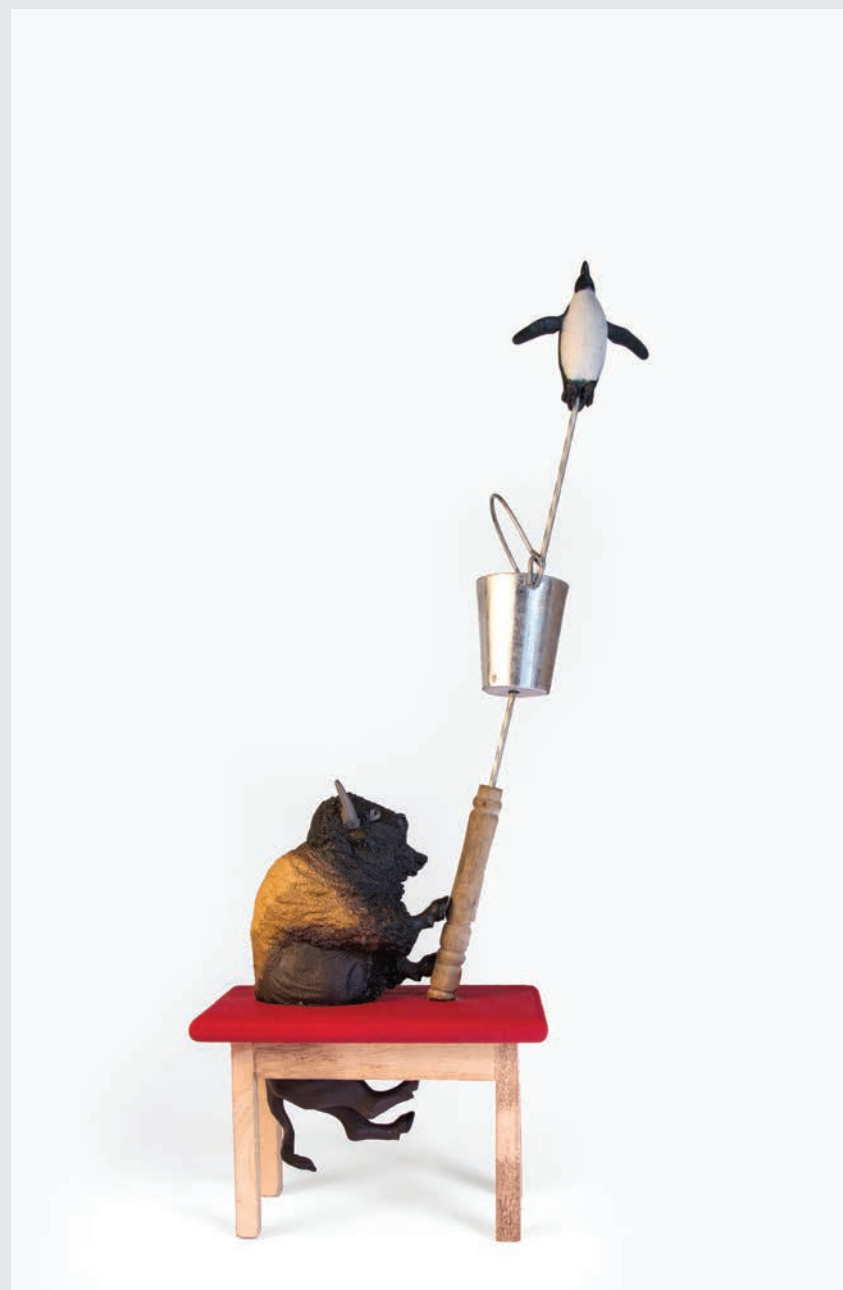
L'ANONYME

Medium: Mixed media
26 X 18 cm
2015



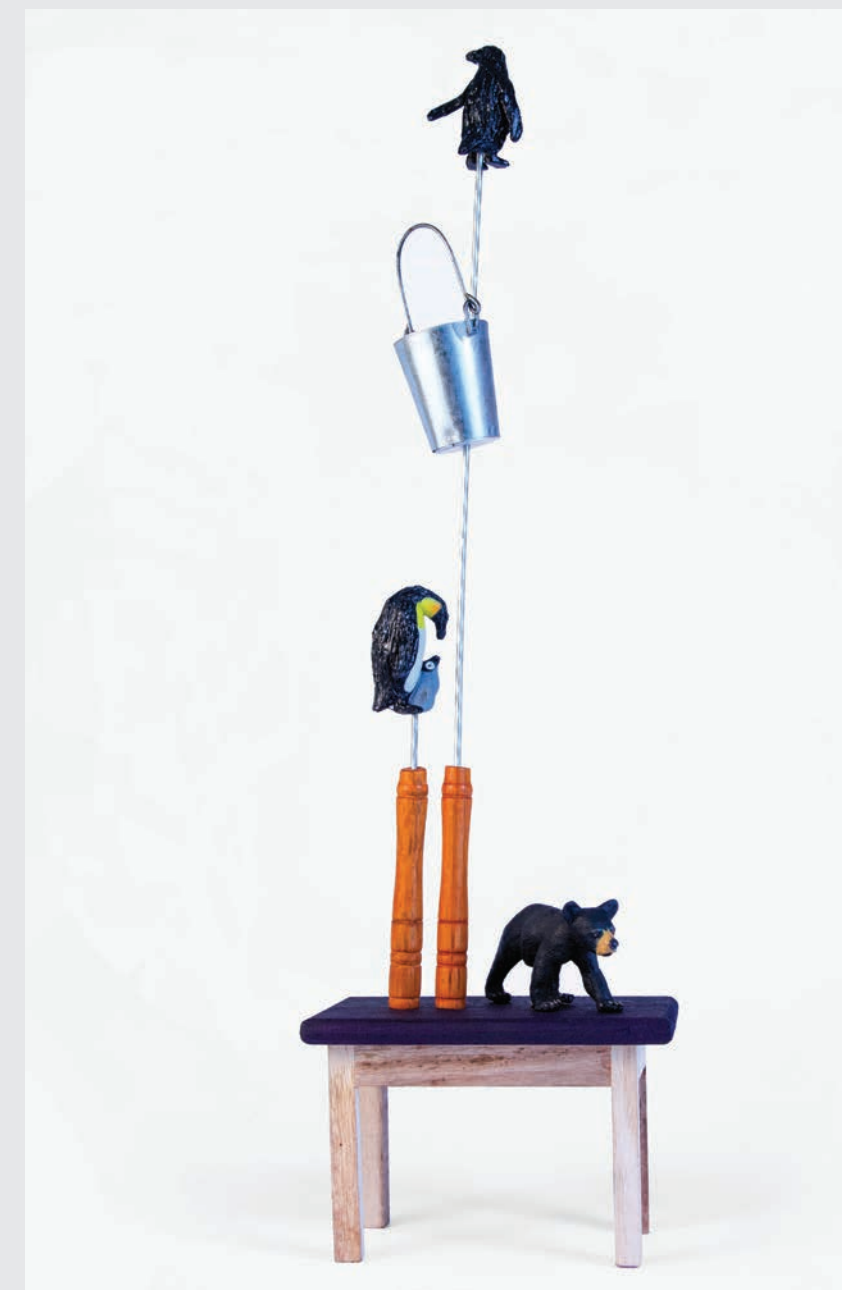
LE REPOS

Medium: Mixed media
21 X 16 cm
2015



LA MAGIE DU DESTIN

Medium: Mixed media
38 X 22 cm
2015



WISHES

Medium: Mixed media
46 X 16 cm
2015



SACRIFICE

Medium: Mixed media
27 X 16 cm
2015



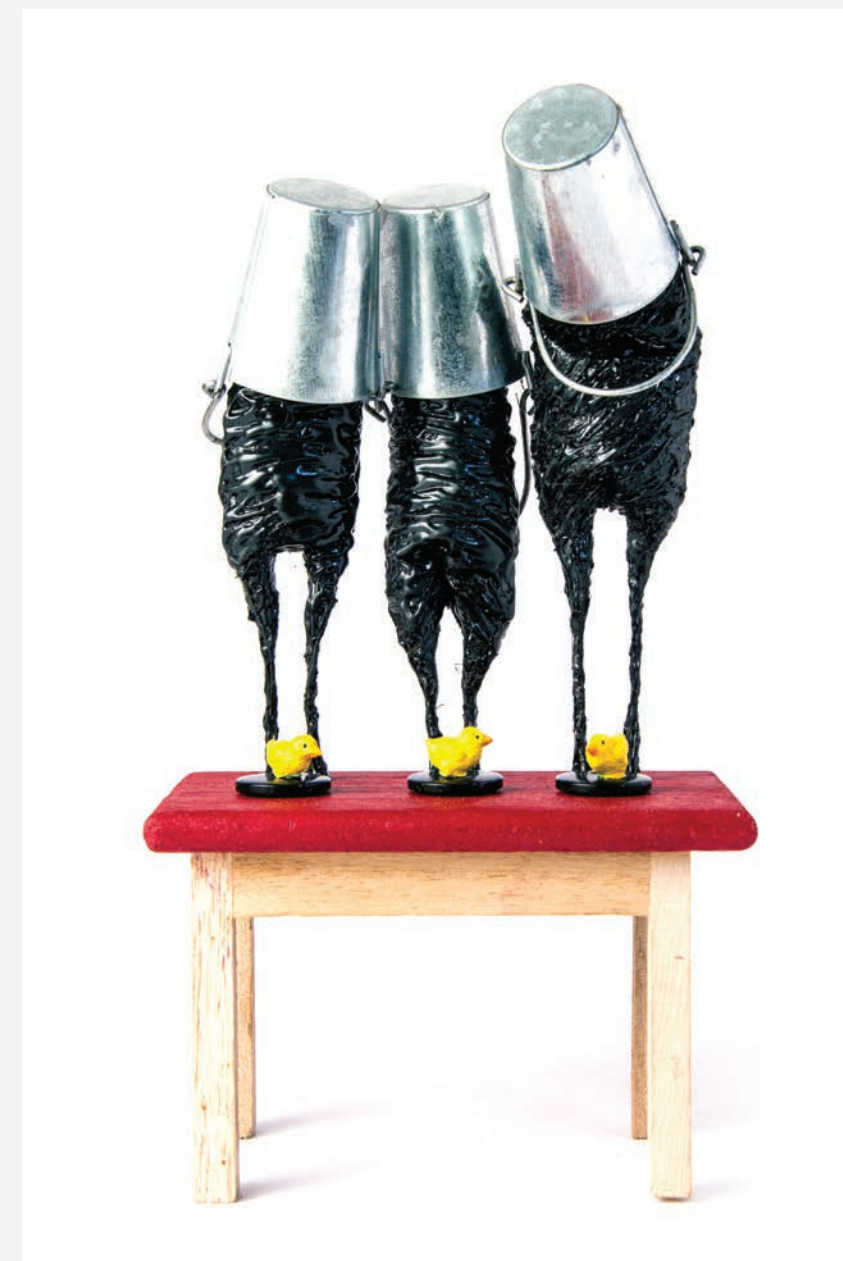
UNTITLED 1

Medium: Mixed media
37 X 26 cm
2015



PROMESSES

Medium: Mixed media
26 X16 cm
2015



SILENCE

Medium: Mixed media
25 X16 cm
2015

Cheikhou Ba

Group shows

- 2012: “Flying” Bethanian, Berlin, Germany
“Contemporary art and social dynamics”. Biennale de Dakar, Sénégal
2nd ROUND, Kalao Gallery, Bilbao, Spain
- 2011: “The return” Fiac, Museum of contemporary art of Algiers, Algéria
“Senegal contemporain” Kalao gallery, Bilbao, Spain
Le Douze Gallery, Nantes, France
- 2010: “As it is “ Mojo gallery, Dubaï, Arabes Emirats.Head, Genève. Suisse. Galerie le Douze, Nantes, France
- 2009: Animal, Anima, Jean Paul Blachère Foundation, Apt Art Center, France. All Bamsley Diversity Festival, South Yorkshire, England. Oude Kerk , Amsterdam, Holland Europ’ Art O9, Geneva, Switzerland.
- 2008: Paraplu Fabriek, Nijmegen, Holland Espace Eiffage (ex-Fougerolle), Dak’Art Off, Dakar, Sénégal
- 2007: Etat des Lieux .01, Strasbourg, France
- 2006: China International Sculpture Symposium, Changchun, China “Sénégal Contemporain ”, Musée Dapper, Paris, France Sélection à la Biennale d’Art Contemporain Africain Dak’Art 2006, Dakar, Sénégal
- 2005: “Création Contemporaine au Sénégal”, Institut Français Léopold Sédar Senghor, Dakar, Sénégal
“Beneen Bêt (Otra Mirada)”, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Canaria Island “Water for everyone ”, Ottawa, Canada
- 2004: “L’Homme est un Mystère ”, Espace Lamennais, Saint Briec, France
- 2002: “Multicultural 2002 ”, Tenerife, Canaria Island Espace Fougerolle, Dak’Art Off, Dakar, Sénégal
Centre Culturel Français, Dakar, Sénégal
- 2001: Francophonie Games , Ottawa, Canada
- 2000: “Un artiste, une œuvre, une carte”, Dakar, Sénégal
- 1999: Musée IFAN, Dakar, Sénégal

Solo shows

- 2012: “Blur of life”, Villa Racine, Dakar.Sénégal
- 2011: “Where are we going...” Kalao galerie, Bilbao. Spain
- 2010: Identity, Villa Racine, Dakar, Sénégal
- 2009: Identity Galerie Atiss, Dakar, Sénégal
- 2007: Kulttuurikauppila. li, Finland
Galerie du Château, Renens, Switzerland.
- 2005: Espace d’Art Contemporain Rur’Art, Poitou-Charentes, France
- 2004: “Wernadé”, Studio Ebéris, Dak’Art Off, Dakar, Sénégal
- 2003: Galerie Arte, Dakar, Sénégal

Distinctions and selections

- 2012: Dak’Art biennials selection., Senegal
- 2011: Fiac Algiers - “The Return”, Algeria
Winner of the Foundation Brückner price, Carouge, Switzerland
- 2016: Dak’Art biennials selection, Senegal
Winner of the Kulttuurikaupila price, li, Finland
- 2004: Winner of the Poitou-charente price Dak’Art 2004 biennial, France
Spécial mention of Jean-Paul Blachère foundation , Apt-Marseille,France
Winner of the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation price, Connecticut. USA
- 2005: Represent Sénégal at the Francophonie games (Sculpture), Ottawa, Canada.



SERWAN BARAN
IRAQ

Serwan Baran started his artistic career as a realist and evolved into the sphere of expressionism. An interest and exploration of abstract art making took place at a later stage in his career.

His fearless approach and expressive use of large spaces and intense colours reveal a psyche filled with deep feelings and explosive energy. The possibilities of his imagination are unpredictable and fluid as he uses his canvas as an open door to his inner world of fantastical imaginings.

Serwan Baran was born in 1968 in Baghdad in Iraq. He is a graduate of fine arts from the University of Babylon, Iraq. He is a member of the International Association of Art, the Iraqi Fine Artists Association and the International Network for Contemporary Iraqi Artists.

Serwan currently lives and works in Jordan.



UNTITLED 2

Medium: Mixed media on canvas
174 X 174 cm
2015



UNTITLED 3

Medium: Mixed media on canvas
120 X 120 cm
2015



UNTITLED 4

Medium: Mixed media on canvas
80 X 80 cm
2015



UNTITLED 5

Medium: Mixed media on canvas
150 X 150 cm
2014



UNTITLED 6

Medium: Mixed media on canvas
350 X 175 cm
2015



UNTITLED 7

Medium: Mixed media on canvas
250 X 180 cm
2015



UNTITLED 8

Medium: Mixed media on canvas
100 X 120 cm
2014



UNTITLED 9

Medium: Mixed media on canvas
140 X 120 cm
2015



UNTITLED 10

Medium: Mixed media on canvas
175 X175 cm
2015



UNTITLED 11

Medium: Mixed media on canvas
200 X 160 cm
2014



UNTITLED 12

Medium: Mixed media on canvas
120 X 90 cm
2015



UNTITLED 13

Medium: Mixed media on paper
110 X 80 cm
2014



UNTITLED 14

Medium: Mixed media on paper
78 X 110 cm
2014



UNTITLED 15

Medium: Mixed media on paper
110 X 80 cm
2014



UNTITLED 16

Medium: Mixed media on paper
110 X 80 cm
2013

SERWAN BARAN

Solo shows

- 2013: Nabad Art Gallery, Amman
- 2013: Matisse Art Gallery, Marrakech
- 2012: Orfali Art Gallery, Amman
- 2011: Gallery Duhok, Iraq
- 2011: Sardam Gallery, Iraq
- 2010: Art House Gallery, Damascus
- 2007: Tche Wa Gallery, Tokyo
- 2006: Orfali Art Gallery, Amman
- 2000: Dar Al-Anda, Amman
Art Gallery
- 1991: Al Riwaq Gallery, Baghdad

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2013: AL Markhiya Gallery, Doha
- 2013: Orient Gallery, Amman
- 2012: Albareh Art Gallery, Bahrain
- 2012: Dar Al-Anda Gallery, Amman
- 2012: Marrakech Biennale, Morocco
- 2011: Al Kharafi Biennale, Kuwait
- 2011: Al Riwaq Art Space, Bahrain
- 2008: Orfali Art Gallery, Amman
- 2003: Khanji Gallery, Aleppo
- 2002: Baghdad, Iraq
International Biennale
- 1999: Cairo Biennale, Egypt
- 1994: Hewar Gallery, Baghdad

We would like to thank Power Print for their continued support of the arts.



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The word "mojo" is written in a highly stylized, cursive, and scribbled font. The letters are interconnected with many loops and flourishes, giving it a dynamic and artistic appearance. The 'm' and 'o's are particularly prominent with their swirling lines.