

On the imagination of (non-existent) images

A popular lore is known to state that an image says more than a thousand words. Of course, because this saying is popular and because it is a lore, it sounds no thing else but worn-out... But going into the crux of this proverb, one realises that truly one needs just a few images to recount some of those stories that fill up our story books, and especially our history books.

This saying presupposes on the one hand the existence of images, for that matter, images that have the prowess and capacity to contain and reflect history and on the other hand, that the existence of history, i.e. when history telling is neither tabooed nor recounted only in its partiality. But what about the case where both of the above mentioned cases apply? Where certain episodes of history are systematically kept out of the memory of a society and thus hardly exist neither in the forms of word nor image?

Thus is the extremely complicated context in which the artist Dalila Dalleas Bouzar finds herself. Born in Oran, Algeria and bred in Paris, France, Dalila Dalleas Bouzar like 713,334 other Algerians based in France or French of Algerian background, she shares the peculiar situation of being tied in the crossroad of history, i.e. that crossroad where the aggressor meets the aggressed and where the coloniser meets the colonised. If one finds him-/herself in such a context, one is either forced to bow to the circumstances of history, forget the past and deal with what lies ahead, or one looks back, tries to sort out what really happened so as to pave a clearer path for the future. Dalila Dalleas Bouzar belongs to the latter of the 2 alternatives. But the harder she tried to look at her past the bleaker and the more fuliginous her history seemed to be. The more she read the history books about her countries, especially her country of birth, the more she found pits and gaps between the lines of history, which made the understanding of this history almost impossible. So, as one would expect from an artist, she set out to find those images, which are said to say more than a thousand words. Helas, she found some images... but images concerning the two important wars in recent Algerian history: the independence war of (1954-1962) and the Algerian Civil War (1992-2002) were lacking or hard to find! Her research revealed that there were even more gaps in the pictorial depiction of these two historical moments than in writing, as if there was a constructed memory lapse or memory leakage in the society, so as to keep away those dreadful images but also maybe to camouflage the correlation between both historical events.

These uncertainties led to the birth of the art project **Algérie Année 0** a project on memory about

the period of Algeria's war for independence and civil war.

Using drawings, paintings, writings on paper and canvas, the artist has tried to reconstruct a pool of images that relate to these two historical events. The images are sometimes fictional but also appropriations of images she found in other contexts, adapted to suit the new context in question. The works in this series could, for a purpose of clarity, be classified into the figurative, the abstract and the symbolical, whereby many works could at any time fit to one or more of these classifications.

The figurative group would consist of works like "Les enfants du soleil", "fraternité" of "Freiheitskämpfer", but also "Amirouche" or "Iounes Matoub". The works in this group range from clear, recognisable drawings of soldiers like "fraternité" to sketchy and almost silhouette-like drawings like "Bleu Blanc Rouge". The issue of life or death, culprit or victim, aggressor or helper remains an uncertainty in many of the pieces, like in "sans titre", "Amirouche" or "Iounes Matoub". And the recurrent gaudy neon-yellow colour in many of the pieces capture the viewer's attention first of all on the retinal level before he/she has the possibility of digesting the content of the works cerebrally.

The abstract group consists of works with numerous geometrical elements, mostly spheres and lines of many shades. The spheres, which could also be found in the group of figurative works, criss-cross, overlap, and engulf one another. They could just be the abstracts spheres they look like or parachutes or bombs like in the numerous pieces titled "planeurs". Another series "ecritures" is made up of writings and scribbles reminiscent of Basquiat. The writings squeeze themselves into spheres or not, and just try to make poetry out of themselves.

The symbolic group consists mainly of pieces like "Les enfants du soleil", "Bleu Blanc Rouge" or "Origines", that all carry the sign of the star, which is symbol very pregnant with meaning across Africa, but also across the Arabic world.

Algérie Année 0 is just the start of a project that will bring Dalila Dalleas Bouzar's drawings and paintings, interviews with fellow citizens, photography of her research trips and residencies in Algeria. By so doing, Dalila Dalleas Bouzar instigates a process of imagination of images, that could one day fill up the gaps in history and more so, offer the required images that have the potential to fulfil that popular lore that states that "an image says more than a thousand words".

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About the author:

Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung (PhD), born in 1977 in Yaoundé, Cameroon, is an independent art curator and biotechnologist resident in Berlin, Germany. He is the founder and art director of the art space SAVVY Contemporary Berlin www.savvy-contemporary.com, where he has directed and curated exhibits with more than 40 artists from 5 continents. He has worked as curator, art director or adviser for several international exhibition projects or festivals in Germany, France, England and Cameroon and has published more than 16 exhibition catalogues. He is also the initiator and editor-in-chief of the journal SAVVY|art.contemporary.african. www.savvy-journal.com, the first bilingual e-journal on contemporary African art. He has cooperated in different projects with the Tensta Konsthall Sweden, Goethe Institute, Institute für Auslandsbeziehung (ifa), Kunstraum Kreuzberg /Bethanien, Arsenal Berlin.

He is currently curator of the exhibition by Dalila Dalleas Bouzar **“Comblér les lacunes de la mémoire: le passé composé du futur”** in the French Cultural Centre in Algiers, Algeria.