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Current Identities

Abdoulaye Konaté, Turiya Magadlela, and José Yaque

March 18 – May 01 2022

To call something current may suggest a static state of being. A state of being that is divorced from that which has passed; that which has already lived; something that has occurred and is no longer relevant. A state of being that refers to the now, the last minute or second before it is no longer. But the term itself can only be significant when considered in relation to the past. History defines the contemporary. It is the point of reference to understanding and acknowledging what and how the present exists. This relationship between being and time is how Identity develops. It is the positive and negative charge of time that lives within the individual and the collective and in a fast-paced digitized world, acknowledging history can often be an act of defiance.

In a time when technology and political advocacy are paramount to how we navigate the world, whether it be social, racial, political, economic, or other realms of life including art; traditions and practices of bygone generations may seem passé, even quaint, if not painful. We often learn about different cultures and traditions through the lens of academia, popular culture, mass media; trickled-down images that hold only fragments of what may have been in some place at some time. However, Culture and Identity are not static terms. Culture and Identity are everything that revolves around contemporary life and history. They are our individual and collective realities. They are all social, political, cultural, geographical histories that are carried within each individual's narrative and experience. While many seek to forget and ignore when a few others do the diligent work of remembering, we are composed of what once was. Remembering then becomes an act of defiance to how we understand change; progress. This is why the production of an artwork that references the past can itself also function as a rebellious act.

Current Identities brings together artists who, despite their geographic and cultural distance, relate through one fundamental concept: a common appreciation for their past. Appreciation for its impact on their current realities; an impact that permeates their contemporary existence however subtle or striking it may be. However dark or beautiful, painful or spiritual, they refer to the impact of history through the act of making in the present. Whether explored through concept, material, or process, Abdoulaye Konaté, Turiya Magadlela, and José Yaque address origin, tradition, and political truth in their practice and artwork. Through the act of drawing on paper, threading textile, painting on canvas, or creating situations that invite us to their worlds, these artists connect the act of making in the now to the historical weight of their individual and collective identities. By referencing what was, has been, and remains, the past nurtures their work so it can exist in the present.

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Abdoulaye Konaté (b. in 1953 in Diré, Manila) is a Malian contemporary artist whose textile-based practice balances between commemorating and communicating an ancestral past with contemporary socio-political issues. Using West African textile practices and materials native to his home country, Mali, Konaté's large fabric installations vibrate with color, symbols, and a precision for contemporary aesthetics and formal language.

Turiya Magadlela (b. 1978 in Johannesburg, ZA) is a South African contemporary artist who, by the manipulation of cloths and textiles, creates abstract works that challenge notions of femininity, motherhood, and the colonised black body. Through cutting, sewing, stitching, and applying multiple techniques usually associated with women, Magadlela looks to demonstrate a personal narrative that touches upon the South African experience and the politics of skin.

José Yaque (b. 1985 in Manzanillo, Cuba) is a Cuban artist working across several mediums including painting, video, and installation. His practice includes sourcing minerals, plants, and stones from his hometown Manzanillo, and applying techniques which are unique to his ancestral roots while referencing natural phenomena.