



GALLERY OF AFRICAN ART
LONDON

Press Release

Hassan MUSA

THE CHICKEN CONSPIRACY: Paintings and Calligraphy

21st September – 24th November 2018

The Gallery of African Art (GAFRA) is pleased to present **THE CHICKEN CONSPIRACY: Paintings and Calligraphy**, a unique and diverse collection of paintings on fabric and calligraphy by the renowned French-based, Sudanese *image creator*, Hassan Musa.

Musa's political and cultural topical paintings on fabric reflect his deep immersion in the history of European art (Doctorate in Art, Université de Montpellier). He employs a diversified mix of richly colourful collages of biblical figures, Italian renaissance religious iconography, mid-19th century impressionism and naturalism, and progressive modern pop art and slogans

Throughout the collection, one is engaged by a hybrid of Musa's multicultural identity and his personal perspective on European *image making*. The European practice, to Musa, also encompasses an "applied gleaning" of Chinese watercolours and calligraphy indigenous to North-east Africa and the Middle East.

The 'Chicken Conspiracy' of the exhibition title and the name of one of the recent paintings exhibited on fabric, symbolises the struggles of artists of Musa's generation as they came to grips with the assimilation of Africa's local and regional cultural diversities into a new genre of Western-imposed and market-driven global African art. In "Le Complot des Poules, (2018), the economically disadvantaged and their artistic brethren are depicted as chickens controlled by the standards of the global marketplace and quest for the almighty Dollar.

The superb examples of Musa's calligraphy portfolio, some of which are included in the exhibition, demonstrate his long-acclaimed skills with ink on paper, as a leader in the field and illustrator of at least 20 books, dating back to his formative years in Khartoum in the 1970s. The beautiful and diverse calligraphy exhibited here includes finely detailed wildlife studies from the mid-1990s plus more recent abstract seascapes, bird studies, a depiction of

Sudan's Janjaweed militia, and an exotic nude inspired by Rimskij-Korsakov's 1888 symphony *Dal Scheherazade* (also known as *The Arabian Nights*).

Reflecting Musa's outlook as a visual artist, and his penchant for visual texts as an inroad to understanding his artistic practices, he stated in 2014-

"...an image, deep down, is like a bottle thrown into the sea. I write a message that I put into a bottle, that I throw to the sea. It may reach someone who cannot read my writing or someone who reads me but cannot understand a thing that I'm saying to people." "...the image, like a bottle at sea, progressively becomes a text, a message, and ultimately speech...."

Another quote from the same interview illustrates Musa's interesting views on the current world order and strife-

"The problem with believers engaged in a political conflict is that they are capable of dragging all others into total destruction because they hold the firm conviction that God is with them."

Artist Biography:

Hassan Musa was born in El Nuhud, Western Sudan in 1951. He graduated from the Khartoum *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* in 1976, and went on to earn a Doctorate in the History of Art from Montpellier University (1989).

Hassan Musa's engagement with calligraphy can be traced back to his teen years working on his school's mural newspaper in Western Sudan. Over the years, Musa has pursued his artistic practice in his studio, in workshops, in illustrated books, in academic discourse and in electronic media.

Now domiciled in Nîmes, France, Musa's style is a synthesis of African, Occidental and Oriental traditions that distinguish his *oeuvre* as truly original.

Musa's many exhibitions have included *Seven Stories About Modern Art in Africa* at Whitechapel Gallery in London, in 1995; *Modernities and Memories* at the *Venice Biennale* in 1997; *New Premises: Three Decades*, at the Museum for African Art in New York in 2012; *Contemporary Calligraphy*, a solo exhibition at the Gallery of African Art (GAFRA) in 2013; a major touring exhibition that featured at the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution in Washington in 2014; an exhibition at the Mori Art Museum in Japan; the *Biennale de la Calligraphie*, United Arab Emirates; and his works have been exhibited at the *Centre Georges Pompidou* in Paris.

His work can also be found in many permanent collections including the Fondation Blachère (Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, France), the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College (USA), Museum der Weltkulture in Frankfurt, the Paris-based Matthias and Gervanne Leridon collection of African art, and several other institutions. His work is also held in many private collections around the world.

Exhibition Information:

Private View: Thursday, 20th September 2018 | 6 – 8:30pm

Artist Tour: Saturday, 22nd September 2018 | 2 - 4pm

Exhibition: 21st September - 24th November 2018

Visitor Information:

Opening times: Monday – Friday, 10am - 6pm and Saturday, 11am - 5pm

Admission: FREE

Gallery of African Art (GAFRA)

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