

College of Charleston, SC, Offers Works by Namsa Leuba

The College of Charleston in downtown Charleston, SC, is presenting *Crossed Looks*, an exhibition of work by Swiss-Guinean photographer and art director Namsa Leuba, on view at the College's Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art, through Dec. 11, 2021.

Crossed Looks is the first solo exhibition of Swiss-Guinean artist Namsa Leuba in the United States. The show will feature over 90 works from the photographer's projects in Guinea, South Africa, Nigeria, and Benin, and it will premiere new work created in Tahiti. As a photographer working across documentary, fashion, and performance, Leuba's images explore the fluid visual identity of the African diaspora.

With a dual heritage between Guinea and Switzerland, Leuba draws inspiration from her own experience growing up between two different cultural traditions. Her images are influenced by the Animist traditions of her mother's family in Guinea Conakry, and the visual codes of statues, masquerades, and religious ceremonies in West Africa. They are also inspired by contemporary fashion and design. The result is a unique perspective that straddles reality and fantasy.

Leuba re-stages and constructs narrative scenes in collaboration with her sitters, incorporating bold colors, striking patterns, and intricate clothing and props. She often uses models that she informally meets in the street, who become active collaborators in the portraits. Leuba's photographs pose fundamental questions about the medium of photography and its role in forming our understanding of the cultural "Other."

Leuba states: "I have always been characterized as the Other, whether I am too 'African' to be European or too 'European' to be African. In this unique positioning, I am interested in the politics of the gaze - who is looking, who is being looked at, and the medium of which this looking occurs."



Namsa Leuba "Untitled I", 2015, 41.34 x 31.5 inches, Fiber pigment print on Dibond Tonkōma series, South Africa

Leuba has continued her focus in challenging the visual representation of the cultural other in her newest series, *Illusions*, created in Tahiti. After living in Tahiti for over two years, Leuba collaborated with a group of transgender youths to re-stage imagery reminiscent of the "Primitivist" paintings of Paul Gauguin and "tropical" images in modern art. The series poses an ideological assault to the symbolism of Gauguin's paintings in Tahiti, which fetishized the indigenous female body and its myths of exoticism.

Through her photographs, Leuba ultimately searches for a visual sense of belonging, of finding a vocabulary that speaks to the experiences and perspectives of not fitting in one ready-made mold.

The title of this exhibition, *Crossed Looks*, references this diverse perspective, creating an alternative visual proposition that transcends fixed modes of representation.

The exhibition is organized by guest curator Joseph Gergel, currently based in Lagos, Nigeria. *Namsa Leuba: Crossed*



Namsa Leuba "Damien", 2015, 34 x 47.2 inches, Fiber pigment print Dibond NGL series, Nigeria

Looks is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia, and *Garden & Gun Magazine*. This exhibition is supported in part by Belinda and Richard Gergel, Diane and Garey De Angelis, South State Bank, Kathleen and Tom Wright, Carol Perkins and David Rawle, Cindy and Shon M. Barnett, Deena and Walter McRackan, and Marissa Sams.

The exhibition's accompanying publication, *Namsa Leuba: Crossed Looks*, was designed by Swiss design studio Maximage and will be published by Damiani.

Crossed Looks features Leuba's major projects to date, including photography series in Guinea, South Africa, Nigeria, Benin, and the debut of a new series recently made in Tahiti. The exhibition and monograph consider how Leuba's photographic practice explores the representation of African identity and the cultural Other in the Western imagination. Over 90 photographs inspired by the visual culture and ceremonies of West Africa, contemporary fashion and design, and the history of photography and its colonizing gaze present Leuba's unique perspective that straddles reality and fantasy. Through the adaptation of myths attributed to the Other, Leuba's photographs acknowledge this double act of looking, a cross-dialogue of global cultures. The book features essays by Joseph Gergel, Emmanuel Iduma, and Dr. Mary Trent which examine the nuanced themes of identity and representation in Leuba's multiple bodies of work.

Namsa Leuba (b. 1982) is a Swiss-Guinean photographer and art director. Leuba studied photography at ECAL, University of Art and Design in Lausanne, Switzerland, and obtained a master's in art Direction at ECAL. Leuba has participated in international exhibitions including *Making Africa: A Continent of Contemporary Design* at the Guggenheim Bilbao, Spain; *Africa Reframed* at Øksnehallen in Copenhagen, Denmark; *Daegu Photo Biennale* in Daegu, Korea; the Athens Photo Festival in Athens, Greece; Photoquai in Paris, France; LagosPhoto Festival in Lagos, Nigeria; and a performance in *Off Print* at the Tate Modern, London.

In 2018, Leuba was featured in the group exhibition *African State of Mind* at New Art Exchange, London and held a solo exhibition at the Hangar Art Center, Brussels. In 2019, Leuba was featured in the special project *Focus in the Eyes* at Art Basel's VIP Lounge. In fall 2019, her work will be included in the group exhibition *The New Black Vanguard* at Aperture in New York. Leuba was commissioned by Nike to create the Nigerian campaign for the 2018 FIFA World Cup, and she was commissioned by *The New Yorker* to create a photographic series with emerging Afrobeats musicians in Lagos in 2018. She has produced fashion campaigns for Christian Lacroix, Edun, and La Prairie. She also collaborated with Dior to create two Lady Dior art bags.

Her work has been published in numerous magazines, including *The New Yorker*, *continued on Page 5*

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