



ROMUALD HAZOUMÈ
CARGO LAND



Water Cargo, 2012.

Mixed media installation, 175 x 550 x 320 cm



ROMUALD HAZOUMÈ CARGOLAND

An Interview with Romuald Hazoumè.

Gerard Houghton: Romuald, I remember your once telling me how you're always looking for ways to show us what Africa 'is' right now, at this moment in time. How do these new works suggest the immediate reality of contemporary Africa?

Romuald Hazoumè: Well, let's begin with the 'masks' which were the first artworks I ever showed in Europe, and which link back to those traditional African masquerades still surviving into the present. My 'masks' aren't the same power objects as those masks formerly used for ceremonial purposes. Instead, they're portraits of real people I know, or sketches inspired by something, maybe a photograph, I've recently seen. In Africa today much attention is paid to the way women dress their hair, and lots of information is transmitted in the coded language of coiffure. If a woman is unattached, but looking to meet someone, her hairstyle will spell out that fact. Again, the way a certain knot is tied might mean she's had enough children already and has had enough of men too, and the knot in question announces that her firm resolve won't be undone. So each of my 'masks' denotes a real individual or a distinct personality type today – not in some distant past. Some of the 'masks,' like *Fukoshima*, deal with non-African realities and refer to other current events. I purposely altered this work's title, out of respect for the pain of the Japanese people displaced by the twin natural disasters of March, 2011. The poignant photograph of that young Japanese woman, draped in a blanket, her face a study in shock, touched the hearts of many around the world, and this 'mask' records my own immediate reaction to what happened there, including my admiration for the way the Japanese collective banded together, offering to the world examples of individual bravery and group solidarity. By changing the title to *Fukoshima* the link is made to another Japanese city, also the



scene of a nuclear disaster, and both references reveal certain consequences of man's constant thirst for power, be it nuclear energy, coal power or the 'black gold' of oil fuelling our booming economies. Much of what happened in Japan was predictable, but with the explosive meltdowns of the nuclear reactors came clouds of radioactivity spreading through the air, falling as rain, draining into the rivers and flowing into the global marine system. It was a good thing everyone was watching carefully, since the whole world is now involved.

Gerard Houghton: This idea of a collective, and of the artist as the representative of that community, finds frequent expression in your work.

Romuald Hazoumè: Well it's important to understand that although I spend time travelling around with various exhibitions, I always return home to Porto-Novo, since that's where I come from, and where I am happiest and can work best. An African proverb says: "When you don't know where you're going, just remember where you come from." I know where I'm from, and am very proud of those roots. In Africa, artists played important roles in the reconstruction of their countries after Independence from the colonial powers. They were of incalculable value to the emerging states in forging a common sense of national identity, and that crucial role was founded upon the artists' traditional position within their communities. The fact is that in our culture we cannot live without our communities. This is built into our customs and our beliefs. There's no way, for example, that we would exclude old people from our



homes, or put them into a retirement home. We still need them, perhaps to answer questions about things that we ourselves still don't understand. Having received our training from them, we've no right - even if they go mad - to evict any person from the family house. We have a real duty to take care of them, just as they once looked after us. Our art follows a similar logic, in the sense that any artist works for and is at the service of his or her community, because that wider community has fashioned our lives and our art. If we were to forget these traditions today, then it would uncouple us from our people, and that would mean a regression at the level of that community which we wish to help advance. The very last thing we'd want is for this traditional culture to disappear, and today in the face of all the destabilising pressures that assail us from outside, we need to mount a coordinated resistance.

Gerard Houghton: So you see the artists as leaders who have a vital role to play in the maintenance and development of each community?

Romuald Hazoumè: Well, even though artists are not in any real sense politicians, we still have a prominent role to play in what I call 'the politics of the people.' We are the ones obliged to tell the truth to the community, since our elected politicians appear constitutionally incapable of that! Remember Fela Kuti, the charismatic Nigerian musician. His music challenged the Nigerian government and exposed the endemic corruption that existed. Who, when knowing Nigeria today and listening to Fela's songs, is going to say that he wasn't absolutely right? Fela changed so many things by getting on the government's nerves so much. He was harassed, beaten and tortured



Moncongo, 2011.
Found objects, 51 x 22 x 28 cm



Fukushima, 2011.
Found objects, 52 x 24 x 14 cm



in prison, yet his music drove his message home to the people, so they could recognise what was really happening: the corruption, the exploitation, the systematic abuse of power. If he hadn't died, Fela would have been a real force for change in Nigeria. Or look at the writer, Wole Soyinka, the first African Nobel Laureate. He had an enormous effect on what was happening because he wrote about things that no one else dared to describe. Soyinka is still alive and continues the same fight from wherever he is today. He's not engaging in abstract politics; he concretely describes what's happening in people's lives. Soyinka's contribution is nothing less than an exact description of reality. His sole reason for publishing the truth is that he wishes to contribute to the continuing development of Nigeria and all her peoples. So the artists must assume their responsibilities as *de facto* leaders whose task is to illuminate

the various choices that must be made in order to advance. For every one who says, 'I'm alright Jack! I've made it!' there are nine others who accept the responsibilities of pulling the community along in their wake – of strengthening the people to whom they belong.

Gerard Houghton: Can you tell us something about your two installations in this exhibition, *Petrol Cargo* and *Water Cargo*.

Romuald Hazoumè: Anyone who follows my work will already know of my focus on the hardships suffered by those engaged in trafficking black market petrol or '*kpayo*' from Nigeria to Benin. These two installations provide new updates about this hitherto hidden world, and broaden the debate to include

Marché de bidons, 2005. Lambda C-type digital print mounted on Dibond, 43 x 243 cm



wider aspects that go beyond what's happening in Benin alone. In fact, the same problems involve everyone today no matter where they live. Today, we exploit the petrol reserves discovered in Africa. If you go into the Nigerian Delta region, everything you see is conditioned by the obsessive exploitation of vast petroleum reserves. The chilling photos of the Nigerian, George Osodi, show harrowing evidence of how the groundwater table in these areas has become completely compromised. Oil has contaminated the subsurface geology, which means that the drinking water of the local people is tainted with heavy hydrocarbons. It's a major environmental problem, but it's kept hidden away. Then there are the chemical 'cracking' plants in this and other areas, which are producing and dumping all kinds of other pollutants, similarly destructive of the natural cycles of life. Our civilisation is sufficiently advanced

to have huge energy needs, and so as to keep on going along the same path we turn a blind eye to the by-products which poison our own environment. We've become accustomed, today, to think of oil as the source of fabulous wealth. Here, I want to add another counterpoint. Water, pure, fresh water, something that few people think about, is also an incredibly important source of riches, indispensably vital to life, and one that is destined to become scarcer and therefore increase in value if we continue along our current course. So I've made these two installations to set the two systems in counter-balance with each other. Using local developments in Benin, it's possible to compare the two side by side, analysing the means by which they are transported and delivered from source to user, using cargo-carriers of water and petrol.



Petrol Cargo, 2012.

Mixed media installation, 120 x 450 x 180 cm



Djiogoma, 2011.
Found objects, 38 x 30 x 29 cm

Gerard Houghton: So *Water Cargo* and *Petrol Cargo* represent two different things hanging in the balance that require us to consider all kinds of possible futures.

Romuald Hazoumè: Exactly! My photographs and panoramas have documented the distribution system for black market '*kpayo*' for some time. I wanted to introduce another element to the scenario: the critical issue of pure, fresh drinking water, which, if less spectacular is at least as important as petrol. Clean water is a precious resource, and many financiers are beginning to take an unhealthy interest in its annexation and exploitation. Major conflicts over rights to sources of clean water have already started, and many future wars will be waged as access to water becomes synonymous with access to life. So I've started to think about the distribution networks associated with these contemporary sources of wealth – petrol and water – and begun to consider the entire system as descriptive of a place I call 'cargoland.' Our daily world has already become 'cargoland.' The word 'cargo' has been appropriated in West African French to mean anything of weight and value that needs to be transported. The word comes from the Spanish term describing loads carried on a 'cart.' In Benin 'cargo' has become the name for these tricycle scooters re-fashioned from normal scooters and designed to carry heavier loads. Most interestingly, the first tricycle cargo was originally made by a disabled man, by the name of Prince Mambo, from Porto-Novo in Benin. His idea was to make something more stable, and since he didn't need space in front for his legs, the additional space could accommodate even more cargo! He designed the first 'cargo' so that he too could carry '*kpayo*' - since he didn't want to have to beg for alms on the streets. His infirmity didn't prevent him from selling small items on the streets, but he had much bigger dreams, and found a way of using his disability to his advantage by creating a custom-built scooter where

he could sit on top of the enlarged petrol tank and use hand-controls to work the accelerator, brake, gears etc. The underworld of '*kpayo*' smuggling from Nigeria to Benin is not only back-breaking work, it's also incredibly dangerous. Many of the two-wheeled motorbikes engaged in this trade simply explode: petrol leaking from the oversized plastic containers is ignited by a spark from an electrical wire somewhere, and Boom! Instead of using lights connected by wires to the bike's batteries, Prince Mambo attached pieces of reflectors from car hazard triangles to the back of his cargo. This proved a quantum leap in protection from fiery explosions. So the cargo introduced a bigger machine able to carry even more '*kpayo*' than ordinary bikes, with increased safety margins and a significant increase in efficiency (and comfort!) on the driver's part. Since the efficiencies were real – and obvious - cargoes became all the rage.

Gerard Houghton: So how many 'cargoes' are there on the streets of Benin today?

Romuald Hazoumè: There are maybe thousands circulating today, delivering not just '*kpayo*' but also fresh water. What happened was that as soon as they made the forward tank larger, the increased efficiency made the first disabled cargo-drivers a lot of money. So they then transformed themselves into water-carriers, by creating a cargo specifically designed for water, because it was much less dangerous all round. These new cargoes carried a container in which they would transport sachets of pure drinking water. They were simply street-wise, and ploughed the money they'd made carrying the dangerous '*kpayo*' back into their new start-up by buying a water filtration system with their profits. Next they registered themselves with the Beninese Water Board to comply with regulations. They could then filter the water, seal the



Coursita, 2011.
Found objects, 36 x 36 x 26 cm



Pied à terre, 2004.
Baryte print, 80 x 120 cm



Croissant de lune, 2004.
Baryte print, 80 x 120 cm



pure filtrate in plastic sachets and deliver their product to the many villages around Porto-Novo and Cotonou where fresh drinking water – often cooled by ice – was much in demand. They transformed themselves into successful entrepreneurs in a much less dangerous environment. It’s an amazing story! I include such African realities in my work, so you can see what’s actually happening there today. These installations and images, if you can read them, describe the minute details of the world in which I live and, by extension, the world in which you exist too. I am a maker – someone who translates what exists into a work of art – something which itself travels the world and speaks to others of the things I think are important. Since the appearance of the real world petrol cargoes is not particularly striking, I’ve added an original visual

element, the large ‘*kpayo*’ bottles commonly found at the point of sale. You can see the same bottles being used in the panoramic photograph, *Station d’essence d’Abomey Calavi*. To render *Water Cargo* similarly attractive and give it another twist, I added the buckets that would normally be used to raise the well water to the surface, as though they were feathers in the wings of this otherworldly creature. I might have softened the impact a little, but the point is that the reality of these things remains unchanged. I put them forward here to attract the attention of an international audience and as a reminder to everyone that cargoland really exists - and we all belong to it.

Gerard Houghton, October Gallery, June, 2012.

ARTicle 14, *Débrouille-toi, toi-même!* (version 1), 2005. Lambda C-type digital print mounted on Dibond, 49 x 243 cm





Station d'essence d'Abomey Calavi, 2006.

Lambda C-type digital print mounted on Dibond, 75 x 486 cm (in 2 panels)









OFNI, 2011.
Found objects, 36 x 62 x 23 cm



Ton pied mon pied, 2011.
Found objects, 27 x 34 cm x 29 cm

ROMUALD HAZOUMÈ

b. 1962 Benin

Solo Exhibitions (Selected)

2012

Romuald Hazoumè: Cargoland,
October Gallery, London

2011

Romuald Hazoumè, Irish Museum of
Modern Art (IMMA), Dublin, Ireland, touring
to Oriel Mostyn Gallery, Llandudno, Wales

2010

*Romuald Hazoumè: My Paradise - Made
in Porto-Novo*, Herbert-Gerisch-Stiftung,
Neumünster, Germany
Romuald Hazoumè: Exit Ball, Galerie Aliceday,
Solo Projects ARCOmadrid, Madrid

2009

Romuald Hazoumè: Made in Porto-Novo,
October Gallery, London
Exit Ball, Galerie Aliceday, Brussels
La Bouche du Roi, The Herbert Museum and
Art Gallery, Coventry

2008

La Bouche du Roi, Horniman Museum &
Gardens, London

2007

La Bouche du Roi, The British Museum,
London, touring to Ferens Art Gallery, Hull;
Merseyside Maritime Museum, National
Museums Liverpool; Bristol City Museum &
Art Gallery, Bristol; Laing Art Gallery, Tyne &
Wear Museums, Newcastle
Romuald Hazoumè, Galerie Art & Public,
Geneva

2006

Romuald Hazoumè: La Bouche du Roi, Musée
du quai Branly, Paris

2005

Romuald Hazoumè, Fondation Zinsou,
Cotonou
ARTicle 14, Débrouille-toi, toi-même!, October
Gallery, London, touring to World Museum,
Liverpool
Romuald Hazoumè: La Bouche du Roi,
The Menil Collection, Houston

2002

Romuald Hazoumè, Centre Culturel Français,
Turin

2001

Romuald Hazoumè, Galerie Olivier Houg, Lyon

1999

Romuald Hazoumè: La Bouche du Roi, Centre
Culturel Français, Cotonou, Benin
Romuald Hazoumè, Galerie Art & Public,
Geneva
Romuald Hazoumè, Galerie Gut Gasteil,
Prigglitz, Austria
Romuald Hazoumè: Vor-Sicht, Dany Keller
Galerie, Munich, touring to Museum für
Konkrete Kunst, Ingolstadt and The Project,
New York

1998

Romuald Hazoumè, Art Gallery of New South
Wales, Sydney

1997

Romuald Hazoumè, Galerie 20, Arnhem

1996

Romuald Hazoumè, Gelbe Musik Galerie,
Berlin, touring to Dany Keller Galerie, Munich
and Firma Harlekin Art, Wiesbaden

Group Exhibitions (Selected)

2012

*Moving Into Space: Football and Art in
West Africa*, National Football Museum,
Manchester

African Cosmos: Stellar Arts, National
Museum of African Art, Smithsonian
Institution, Washington D.C.
We Face Forward, Whitworth Art Gallery and
Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester
Afrovision – Contemporary Art from Africa,
Baku Museum of Modern Art, Baku,
Azerbaijan
*At Eye Level: Masterpieces of Medieval and
Modern Art*, Ulmer Museum, Ulm, Germany

2011

Environment and Object - Recent African Art,
Tang Museum, Saratoga Springs, NY (touring
to Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia
and Middlebury College Museum of Art,
Vermont in 2012)
*Reconfiguring an African Icon: Odes to the
Mask by Modern and Contemporary Artists
from Three Continents*, The Metropolitan
Museum of Art, New York
The Land Between Us, Whitworth Art Gallery,
Manchester

2010

21st Century: Art in the First Decade,
Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of
Modern Art, Brisbane
The Global Africa Project, Museum of Arts and
Design, New York
*Events of the Self: Portraiture and Social
Identity*, The Walther Collection, Neu-Ulm,
Germany
The Land Between Us, Whitworth Art Gallery,
Manchester
African Stories, Marrakech Art Fair, Marrakech
Art Dubai with October Gallery, Dubai
Joburg Art Fair with October Gallery,
Johannesburg

2009

*AFRICA? Una nuova storia, Complesso del
Vittoriano* (Jean Pigozzi Collection), Rome
*3rd Moscow Biennale of Contemporary
Art: Against Exclusion*, Garage Center for
Contemporary Culture, Moscow
Africa Arte Contemporanea, Four Seasons
Hotel and Galerie JZ Art Trading, Milan

*PERSONA. Ritual Masks and Contemporary
Art*, Royal Museum for Central Africa,
Tervuren, Belgium
Bénin 2059, Fondation Zinsou, Cotonou
Who's Betting on the 47?,
Nassauischer Kunstverein, Wiesbaden
Art Dubai with October Gallery, Dubai
Joburg Art Fair with October Gallery,
Johannesburg

2008

U-TURN, Quadrennial for Contemporary Art,
Copenhagen
Angaza Afrika. African Art Now,
October Gallery, London
Art Dubai with October Gallery, Dubai
Joburg Art Fair with October Gallery,
Johannesburg

2007

Why Africa?, Pinacoteca Giovanni e Marella
Agnelli, Turin
documenta 12, Kassel
UN/FAIR TRADE. Die Kunst der Gerechtigkeit,
Neue Galerie, Graz
*Uncomfortable Truths: The Shadow of Slave
Trading on Contemporary Art & Design*,
Victoria and Albert Museum, London; touring
to Salford Museum and Art Gallery, Salford,
and Ferens Art Gallery, Hull
From Courage to Freedom, October Gallery,
London

2006

100% Africa, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao,
Bilbao
De ida y vuelta : África, La Casa Encendida,
Madrid
*Snap Judgements. New Positions in
Contemporary African Photography*,
International Center of Photography,
New York; Miami Art Central,
touring to Mexico, Canada and Europe

2005

*African Art Now: Masterpieces from the
Jean Pigozzi Collection*, National Museum
of African Art, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington D.C.
Arts of Africa, Grimaldi Forum Monaco

African Art Now: Masterpieces from the Jean Pigozzi Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

2004 – 2007

Africa Remix, Düsseldorf; Hayward Gallery, London; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Mori Art Museum, Tokyo; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg

2003

Armour: The Fortification of Man, Biennale de Fort Asperen, Acquoy, Netherlands
Magic Markers: Objects of Transformation, Des Moines Art Center, Iowa; travelled to Musée Bellerive, Zurich and Musée de design et d'arts appliqués contemporains (MUDAC), Lausanne

2002

African Market, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, University of New South Wales, Sydney
40 Jahre: Fluxus und die Folgen, Kunstsommer Wiesbaden, Wiesbaden

2001

TRADE, Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam; Fotomuseum Winterthur, Winterthur
XXXV Prix International d'art contemporain de Monte Carlo, Salle des Arts, Monte Carlo
Œil pour œil, Le rectangle centre d'art contemporain, Lyon

2000

Sieben Hügel, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin
Romuald Hazoumè, Paul Pfeiffer, Duke University Museum of Art, Durham, North Carolina
Partage d'exotismes, 5th Biennale d'art contemporain de Lyon, Lyon
Man + Space, Kwangju Biennale, Korea
Dinge in der Kunst des XX: Jahrhunderts, Haus der Kunst, Munich



Construction in Process VII: This Earth Is a Flower, The International Artists' Museum, Bydgoszcz, Poland
Art Basel 2000, Galerie Art & Public, Basel

1999

Spaceship Earth, Art in General, New York
Paradise 8, Exit Art, New York
Liverpool Biennial: International Festival of Contemporary Art, Liverpool

1992

Out of Africa: Contemporary African Artists from the Pigozzi Collection, Saatchi Gallery, London

Bibliography (Selected)

2011

Romuald Hazoumè, exhibition catalogue, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin.
Environment and Object: Recent African Art, eds. Lisa Aronson and John S. Webber, exhibition catalogue, The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, New York.

2010

The Global Africa Project, eds. Lowery Stokes Sims and Leslie King-Hammond, exhibition catalogue, Museum of Arts and Design, New York.

Romuald Hazoumè: My Paradise - Made in Porto-Novo, Herbert-Gerisch-Stiftung, ed. Martin Henatsch Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern.

21st Century: Art in the First Decade, ed. Miranda Wallace, exhibition catalogue, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane.

Contemporary African Photography from the Walther Collection, ed. Okwui Enwezor, Steidl, Göttingen, pp. 27, 300-301, 371 and 436.

2009

Romuald Hazoumè: Made in Porto-Novo, exhibition catalogue, October Gallery, London.
3rd Moscow Biennale for Contemporary Art: Against Exclusion, exhibition catalogue, Garage Center for Contemporary Culture, Moscow, pp. 90 – 91.

Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Contemporary African Art Since 1980*, Damiani, Bologna.

2008

Christopher Spring, *Angaza Afrika. African Art Now*, Laurence King Publishing Ltd, London, pp.124 – 131.

2007

UN / FAIR TRADE: Die Kunst der Gerechtigkeit, ed. Christian Eigner, exhibition catalogue, Neue Galerie, Graz; Wien and New York, pp. 250 – 251.

John Picton, *Romuald Hazoumè: An Itinerant Artist* - arranged by Gerard Houghton.

Wayne Edge, *Romuald Hazoumè: A review of 'La Bouche du Roi'*, in: *Freedom and Culture. The Bicentenary of the Parliamentary Abolition of the Slave Trade*, vol. 7, No. 2, ed. Shirley Chew, *Moving Worlds*, University of Leeds, Leeds, pp. 89 – 94 and pp. 95 – 98.

documenta 12, exhibition catalogue, Cologne, pp. 142 – 143.

2006

Romuald Hazoumè: La Bouche du Roi, exhibition catalogue, Musée du quai Branly, Paris.

100% Africa, exhibition catalogue, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Madrid.

Romuald Hazoumè, exhibition catalogue, Fondation Zinsou, Cotonou, Benin.

2005

African Art Now: Masterpieces from the Jean Pigozzi Collection, ed. André Magnin, exhibition catalogue, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; London and New York.
La Bouche du Roi, exhibition catalogue, The Menil Collection, Houston.

2004

Afrika Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent, ed. Jean-Hubert Martin et al.: exhibition catalogue, Hayward Gallery, London.

1999

Romuald Hazoumè: Vor-Sicht, ed. Peter Volkwein, exhibition catalogue, Städtische Galerie, Ingolstadt.

1998

André Magnin, *Romuald Hazoumè* in, 7th *Triennale der Kleinplastik. Zeitgenössische Skulptur. Europa Afrika*, exhibition catalogue, Ostfildern, pp. 140 – 143.

Frits Bless, *Romuald Hazoumè*, in *Benin – Benin Tussen Gisteren Morgen*, exhibition catalogue, Van Reekum Museum, Apeldoorn.

1996

Contemporary Art of Africa, ed. André Magnin and Jacques Soullilou, Harry N. Abrams Inc., New York.

Awards and Prizes

2009 *3rd Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art*, Moscow

2007 *Arnold-Bode-Preis, documenta 12*, Kassel

1996 *George-Maciunas-Preis*, Wiesbaden

Collections (Selected)

Barbier Muller Collection, Geneva
Jean Pigozzi Collection, Geneva
Collection Agnès b, Paris
Collection David Bowie
The Robert Devereux Collection, London and Nairobi
The British Museum, London
La Fondation Zinsou, Cotonou, Benin
Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane
Museumslandschaft Hessen, Neue Galerie, Kassel
Emdash Foundation
The Walther Collection

Romuald Hazoumè would like to give special thanks to:

Guillemette Salam
Olagnika Salam
Bernadin Sadeler
Saint Cyr Sadeler



Papillon, 2011.
Found objects, 47 x 44 x 16 cm

This catalogue was published on
the occasion of the exhibition

ROMUALD HAZOUMÈ
CARGOLAND

at October Gallery
28th June to 11th August, 2012

© October Gallery, 2012. All rights reserved. No part of this publication
may be reproduced or used in any form without the permission of the publishers.