



## Dada – Photomontage – Africa

During the turmoil of World War I, a group of exiled artists from countries on both sides of the conflict found refuge in Zurich, a neutral city in the middle of a war-torn Europe. In 1916 these artists founded Dada, a movement that shook the foundations of the art world. 2016 marks the centennial of Dada and hardly any contemporary artistic practice, be it in literature, music, theatre or the visual arts of could have come into being without Dada. The movement questioned social norms, ethical standards, academic traditions and blurred the distinction between fine and applied arts. As committed pacifists, the Dadaists believed that as art was mirror of society any society bent on its own destruction was not worthy of art. The Dadaists' were equally concerned with philosophy, psychology and politics, and let these touch upon their work.

The idea of anti-art was probably the only unifying aspect in Dada's visual practice. Two devices were essential in Dada's anti-art program: the use of collage/photomontage and an obsession with the primitive. The introduction of the collage caused a rift in the previously assumed integrity of artistic materials and the conventional unity of artistic illusion. The use of collage embodied an attitude of irony and contradiction: truth and falsehood weren't just diametric opposites. On the other hand, the 'primitive' served to conjure up a primeval state of consciousness considered by many modern artists a fundamental mode of thinking and seeing, more influential than the conscious mind distracted by daily life.

*In My Shade She is Engulfed* includes a floor work, a silhouette extracted from a drawing made by Marcel Janco as part of the invitation for the first Dada soirée. It is displayed alongside a rare female sculpture from the Basa group in Liberia. The similarity between the two works is startling. Janco would have never seen the work. He must have fantasized it, as many other artists of the 20th century did in relation to Africa and the arts of the 'noble savage'. Displayed next to this arrangement, is a photomontage by Guy Avital, a contemporary Israeli artist. The link between the works raises the question of whether modern art could have existed without the influence of Africa. Moreover, what would contemporary art look like without the influence of African art, whether real or imagined. Whatever the answers, Africa never gets the credit it deserves and remains engulfed in the Western shade.

The exhibition hinges around the photomontages Vincent Michéa's (b. 1963). Unlike Dada artists who deconstructed images in order to create a new artistic language, Michéa does not manipulate his photographs; rather, he leaves them intact and constructs upon them. Michéa's photomontages reflect his daily life in the African metropolis, engulfed as it is in the rhythms of West African music that deliver the clear shapes and colours of his paper cuts. For Michéa, Africa is not the exotic other, but his life experience. His work is not the product of a fantasy about the inhabitants of the 'black continent' but an ode to its people, mainly Senegalese women.

Idit Toldedano

