

Alice Christel Penda

Cameroon

Biography

Alice Christel PENDA is a Cameroonian visual artist working in Cameroon. She graduated from the Institute of Fine Arts (University of Douala) with a Master II en Arts Plastiques et Histoire de l'Art, in 2020. Prior from studying art, she has a B.Sc. in Banking; and, another one in Mathematics/Computer Sciences.

Her artistic practice focuses on re-examining history, environment/climate emergency and free-expression/civil society. She is currently working upon the post-colonial economical system of Central Africa, and its impact on populations.

In February 2022, she is a GRIP Inequality winner on "Imaging Inequality" project. The Global Research on Inequality Project (GRIP Inequality) is hosted by the University of Bergen (UiB Norway) and the International Science Council (ISC).

In 2021, her work has been showcased in USA ("Import-Export Exhibition", Kent State University on behalf of GURI) and Germany (Sabaa Art Award 2021).

In 2020, she participated in collective exhibitions in Cameroon ("Patrimoine Contemporain", Center of Contemporary Art doual'art) and Italy ("Artisiti del Camerun", Museo Civico di Taverna).

She also attended the following workshops in Douala: "African Fabbers School Douala" animated by architect Paolo Cascone; and Fondation Moleskine's "Atwork" by Simon Njami.

She's recipient of Prince Claus Seed Award 2021.

The artwork: aesthetic positions

"In Cameroon, there is a climate of ethnic antagonism. This is a consequence of the unjust distribution of wealth.

To avoid a clash similar as in Rwanda, I paint children whose clothes are a mixture of two different ethnic tribes.

In this way, I make visible the fact that the mixing of blood is a reality that has created a nation with common interests. The country is no longer a collection of coexisting ethnic groups, but of citizens whose parents loved each other without ethnic stigmatization.

Alice Penda asks critical questions with and in her work. She uses the iconography of the banknote to draw attention to neo-colonialism and grievances and to criticize. Penda decisively points out that the current economic system is an enslaving machine."

Artworks

He's both ...

Acrylic on canvas

2021

Diameter: 48 cm, 1.5 cm thick

Alice Penda: "In this painting, the child wears a mixture of the traditional clothing of the Bamiléké tribe and the Sawa tribe."

Bamiléké et Haoussa,

Acrylic on canvas

2021

Diameter 60 cm 1.5 cm thick

Alice Penda: In Cameroon, there is a climate of ethnic antagonism. This is a consequence of the unfair distribution of wealth. To avoid a clash similar to Rwandan, I paint children whose clothes are a mixture of two different ethnic tribes. Doing this, I make visible the fact that the mixing of blood is a reality that has transformed a geographical area into a nation. Cameroon is no longer a collection of coexisting ethnic groups, but citizens whose parents loved each other without ethnic stigmatization.

Money series

Alice Penda: "The digital works from a series are a critique of Central Africa's current financial currency, the XAF. In Cameroon, 80% of the working population is made up of farmers. Therefore, I took scenes of farm workers and pasted them on money bills I created myself. These works show some of the effects of cash crop agriculture and XAF currency on these people.

You can see how people manipulate other people, imbalances in international exchange, how technological dependence then produces desperate migration, land and cultural dispossession.

Some works from this series were exhibited in October 2020 at Doual'art Gallery (Cameroon) in a collective exhibition curated by Yves Makongo entitled "Patrimoine contemporain".

In April and May 2020, one of these works was exhibited on the campus of Kent State University (USA). It was shown as part of the collective exhibition Import-Export organized by GURI (General Understanding Research Initiative) and curated by Dawit L. Petros & Joseph L. Underwood (PhD)."

Expropriation

Digital collage, digital print on alu dibond

2020

Size: 59,4 x 30,9 cm

Edition: 10 pieces

Alice Penda: "This bill is one of a series of five bills. In my opinion, Africans are the scapegoats of capitalism. Therefore, I have redesigned the banknotes of the XAF currency to illustrate its impact on the people of Central Africa.

This image illustrates the fact that the European colonies replaced sacred traditional African artifacts with banknotes to associate the African population with their own enslavement and land dispossession.

La Broyeuse - The Crusher

Digital collage, digital print on alu dibond

2020

size: 59,4 x 30,9 cm

Edition: 10 pieces

Alice Penda: "This bill is one of a series of five bills. In my opinion, Africans are the scapegoats of capitalism. Therefore, I have redesigned the banknotes of the XAF currency to illustrate its impact on the people of Central Africa.

This image shows that behind the so-called "modern" industrial sectors there are always exploited people working in archaic ways and precarious conditions."

Work comment by kukutana

Regarding the banknotes (quote after Penda):

"On behalf of Kent State University's (Ohio, USA) GURI (Global Understanding and Research Initiative) Import-Export exhibition, Dawit L. Petros & Joseph L.

Underwood (PhD), co-curators of Import/Export, wrote the following about this work, "As an activist and artist, Penda foregrounds the problems of land grabbing and unbalanced economies in Cameroon. By reinterpreting the 500 XAF banknote,

Penda depicts the agricultural labor of workers in the pepper fields of Penda. She laments that exporting a crop at a low price means that locals must import expensive food to sustain the ecosystem. Taking a cue from colonial times, European countries benefit from African land, resources, and human labor. If Europe has their grain and cultural heritage like statues, how can these workers ever break the cycle?"

There is little to add to this.

The two circular paintings, each in a different color monochrome, "He's both ..." and "Bamiléké et Haoussa," point to the ethnic tensions in Cameroon's society. Penda disagrees with rigid boundaries: everyone is a hybrid, no matter what the components and no matter what the number of components of the mixture. Ethnicities, languages (French-speaking colonized versus English-speaking colonized), religions, gender - these boundaries are arbitrarily drawn. However, they are important for identity, they are formative, only in the boundary does a "something" emerge that can say "I". However, this does not have to exclude all others. Thus, in the paintings, the components are harmoniously united in one person. They are visible, but they do not repel each other, they complement each other to form an individual whole. Almost the persons on the work - depicted without a face - seem to be children - there is perhaps hope that the attitudes and natures (can) change.