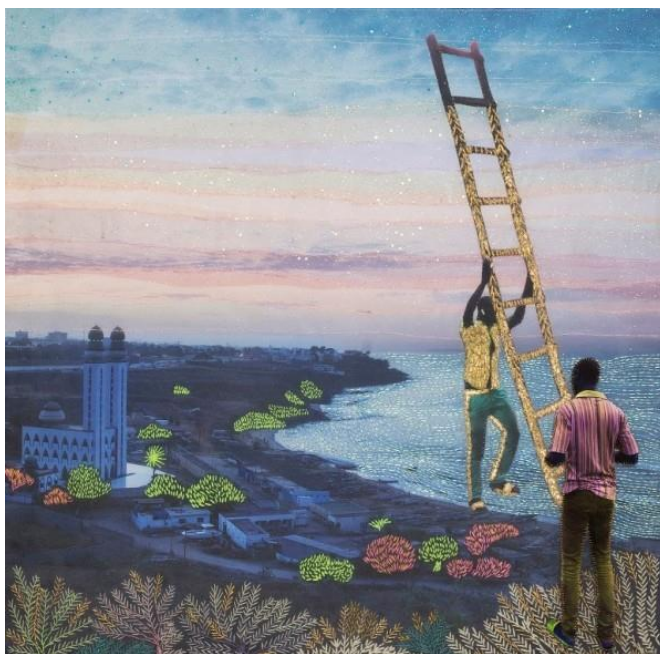


Joana Choumali: *How Do You Spell A Silent Sound* 24 August- 5 October 2019



Joana Choumali, *It will be Harder to climb Down*, Serie Albahain (2019). Image courtesy of Gallery 1957

This August, Gallery 1957 (Accra) presents a solo exhibition by the award-winning Ivorian photographer and mixed media artist Joana Choumali, running from 24 August- 5 October 2019. Presenting new and recent works which blend photography with collage and embroidery, the exhibition will include works from the series *Ça Va Aller*, *Translation*, and *Alba'hian*. It will also debut works inspired by the artist's early-morning explorations of Accra in the summer of 2019; marking a departure for the artist, this latest body of work sees the artist working on a larger scale (up to 2m x 1m), for the first time.

Choumali is known particularly for her photography work, including the critically-lauded series *Hââbré/The Last Generation* documenting portraits of a "last generation" of scarified Burkinabè men and women living in Abidjan, as well as individuals from Niger, Nigeria, and Benin. Following the 13 March 2016 terrorist attacks in Grand-Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire, Choumali instinctively turned to embroidery as a way to process the trauma of the event. Rather than dismiss her feelings with the favored Ivorian maxim "Ça va aller" ("It will be OK"), she chose to explore them via the gesture of slowly stitching, sometimes over several months. Richly worked, they reflect not only the artist's physical touch, but also her emotional evolution as she used this new way of art making to both process this moment of national grief, and face challenges in her personal life. In the artist's words, discovering embroidery "opened a new gate in my life," through which she was free to be sensitive, to speak the unspoken, and to connect with others on a human level.

A cathartic and deeply intimate technique, Choumali found that what began as "a quiet diary" became a means of communication when she shared the resulting works publicly. The immediate response and connection she received from diverse viewers inspired the

Gallery 1957

exhibition's title *How do you spell a silent sound?* Through these works, a wordless conversation begins between artist and viewer, transcending difference.

Transposing her inner landscape on top of the visible world, Choumali overlays gauzy panels of embroidered chiffon and tulle on collaged cell-phone photographs of figures and cityscapes. In the series *Alba'hian* - meaning 'the first light of day' in the Agni language of the Akan group in Côte d'Ivoire - the artist meditates on the cityscape during the time and processes of dawn. On show at Gallery 1957 are new works expanding this series - taken in Accra during the summer of 2019. Shooting between 5 and 7a.m. when the artist takes her morning walk (a ritual begun as physical training for a trek in Asia, and since ritualised as a daily routine) Choumali intimately surveys the land around her, observing landscapes, the shapes of buildings and objects slowly revealing themselves - the streets and its people awakening, starting a new day.

Using a mixed technique of collage, embroidery, quilting and photomontage, Choumali then superimposes her photographs with several layers of ethereal fabrics intertwined with other images taken during these walks: silhouettes of passers-by, street-photographs or stills. The resulting delicate and dreamy toiles evoke the invisible meanings and revelations of the artist's morning experiences, existing seemingly at the margin of the real world and the world of imagination; like dreams overlapping reality, it is unclear where one begins and the other ends. Works depicting specific individuals encountered on these morning walks, contemplate the core of the human being, capturing their *état d'esprit* (state of mind). Through her textile interventions and collage, subjects move larger-than-life through silent cities; faces blurred by motion or by fabric, their figures and gestures remain legible and become universal.

Curator Maria Pia Bernardoni comments:

"The morning light has a symbolic value of rediscovery and illumination in almost every culture. It's the vital energy that is born again, renovated any new day - the hope of a new beginning. As the morning light slowly reveals each detail of the material world, so this practice of observation allows Choumali to assert a personal shift in thoughts and perceptions... Joana's work is made of the same substance memories and dreams are made of: impalpable and barely perceptible images that overlap one another, mixed with ancient suggestions and recent sensations."

In the series *Translations*, also on show at Gallery 1957, Choumali explores migration - literally and figuratively. Cutting out subjects from photos taken in Southern cities, she transports then embroiders these figures onto scenes photographed within cities of the north. The works consider the inequalities inherent within processes of travel - inequalities determined by birth, nationality, culture and even religion - alongside those facets of life which unite all humans, specifically a collective quest for well-being or a 'better life'.

Curated by Maria Pia Bernardoni, the exhibition will be accompanied by a publication with essays by Kristen Windmuller-Luna and other contributors.

Gallery1957

About Joana Choumali

Joana Choumali, born in 1974, is visual artist/photographer based in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. She studied graphic arts in Casablanca (Morocco) and worked as an art director in an advertising agency before embarking on her photography career. She works mainly on conceptual portraits, mixed media and documentary photography. Much of her work focuses on Africa, and what she, as an African, learns about the innumerable cultures around her.

In her latest works, Joana embroiders directly on the images completing the act of creating the photograph image with a slow and meditative gesture. Joana has exhibited her work at the Museum of Civilizations-Abidjan, the Donwahi Foundation for Contemporary Art-Abidjan, at the Rotonde des Arts Contemporary Art Center - Abidjan, at the Vitra Design Museum-Basel, at the Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden- Marrakech, at the Museum of photography -St Louis, Senegal, at the Tropen Museum -Amsterdam at the International Photography Biennale of Bamako, at the Photoquai Biennale (Quai Branly Museum- Paris), at the Lagos Photo Festival, and PhotoVogue festival. In 2014, she won the CapPrize Award and the 2014 Emerging Photographer LensCulture Award. In 2016, she received the Magnum Emergency Grant Foundation, and the Fourthwall Books Award in South Africa. In 2017, she exhibited her series "Translation" and "Adorn" at the Pavilion of the Ivory Coast during the 57th Venice International Biennale. Her latest mixed media series Alba'hian is exhibited at the Zeitz Mocaa Museum of Contemporary Arts-Capetown.

Her book "HAABRE", was published and edited in Johannesburg in 2016.

About Maria Pia Bernardoni

Maria Pia Bernardoni is a photography curator with a special connection with Africa and particular interest in managing intercultural art projects that offer a different perspective of gender and migration issues, and help create positive change.

Since 2015 she is the curator of international exhibitions for the African Artists'Foundation and LagosPhoto festival. In this capacity, she has co-curated the exhibition "Day your Lane" at Bozar Museum in Bruxelles and "Tear my Bra" at Les Rencontres d'Arles in 2016. She also curated the exhibition "AfricAfrica" at Palazzo Litta in Milan in 2018. She was part of the curatorial team for the 6th edition of LagosPhoto Festival, in Nigeria in 2017.

In parallel, Maria Pia has been developing projects around migration and hosting issues in Europe. She recently collaborated to Patrick Willocq's project "My Story is a Story of Hope", and directed the short film "If I Left My Country", both shown at Les Rencontres d'Arles 2018. She is also a certified lawyer.

About Kristen Windmuller-Luna

Kristen Windmuller-Luna is the Sills Family Consulting Curator of African Arts at the Brooklyn Museum in New York City. She holds a PhD and MA in Art and Archaeology from Princeton University, and received a BA in the History of Art from Yale University. Previously, she worked in curatorial roles at the Princeton University Art Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Neuberger Museum of Art, the Renee and Chaim Gross Foundation, and also served as a lecturer at Columbia University. An art historian and curator, her research and writing on both historic and contemporary art has been published

Gallery1957

and presented in a variety of African, American, and European venues, and was featured in Henry Louis Gates' PBS documentary *Africa's Great Civilizations*. She recently worked in Nigeria conducting research for her critically-praised exhibition *One: Egúngún*, and is currently co-curating a major exhibition on the Malian photographer Seydou Keïta.

About Gallery 1957

Gallery 1957 presents leading artists working across West Africa and the diaspora.

Launched by Marwan Zakhem on Ghana Independence Day, 2016, Gallery 1957 has since expanded across two gallery spaces within Accra, dedicating its programme to spearheading international exchanges between contemporary West African art practices and the rest of the world.

Presenting a programme of exhibitions, installations and performances by the region's most significant artists, Gallery 1957 bridges the gap between local and international audiences. Beyond its roster of diverse artists and exhibitions, global gallery partnerships and the establishment of the artist residency programme have welcomed many international artists and arts professionals to Ghana, encouraging them to engage further with the country's rich contemporary art scene.

Gallery 1957's work expands beyond the gallery walls through a public programme that includes fairs, talks, off-site projects and site-specific installations commissions - continuously supporting cultural initiatives in Ghana, and beyond.

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Exhibition: Joana Choumali: *How Do You Spell A Silent Sound*

Dates: 24 August - 5 October 2019

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