

For the twelfth edition of the ongoing exhibition programme dedicated to Nature, Abreu Advogados, in partnership with Carpe Diem Arte e Pesquisa, presents a series of works by the artist Barbara Wildenboer.

Barbara Wildenboer

Barbara Wildenboer lives and works in Cape Town. She is represented by galleries in Cape Town, Johannesburg, and London. She is also represented in Lisbon and Luanda by THIS IS NOT A WHITE CUBE Art Gallery. In 2007 she obtained a master's in fine art (with distinction) from the Michaelis School of Art at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. The title of her Master's thesis was Present Absence / Absent Presence, and the research was concerned with aspects of melancholy, loss, and longing as is embodied by the photographic medium. Before that, she completed a BA(Ed) with majors in English literature, Psychology, and Pedagogics at the University of Pretoria in 1996, followed by a Bachelor of Visual Arts from UNISA in 2003. From 2009-2016 she worked as the head of the Photography Department at the CityVarsity College of Creative Arts, where she lectured Theory & Discourse and History of Photography. In 2011 she was nominated and subsequently selected as one of the top 20 finalists for the Sovereign African Arts Award, for which she received the Public Choice Prize. She was also among the top 20 finalists for the Thamy Mnyele Fine Art Awards (South Africa) in 2021. In addition to that, she has been awarded several international residencies, such as the Unesco-Aschberg residency (Jordan, 2006), the Al Mahatta residency (Palestine, 2009), the Red De Residencias Artísticas Local (Colombia, 2011), the Rimbun Dahan artist residency (Penang, Malaysia, 2013), L'Ateleier Sur Seine (Fontainebleau, France, 2017) and Hannacc (Barcelona, Spain, 2018).

"LOOT - Spoils of war" stems from the artist's growing interest in understanding how a distinctive model of significance was generated and shaped from the historical and civilizational encounter between Africa and Europe.

These ideas are materialized through the exploration of the concept of 'appropriation.' In this exhibition, the use of "appropriation" is, on the one hand, a direct reference to the artefacts looted and expropriated from their origins in the context of colonization. Yet, on the other hand, it also translates the plastic consistency of the artist's work, which has long involved the reconfiguration and integration of texts, books, maps, and pre-existing images into collages and three-dimensional installations. In appropriation "per se," the artist finds a truly essential working tool for constructing an artistic medium.

Transversally, Barbara Wildenboer uses in her creative process a combination of analogue and digital processes that contribute to the construction of a diverse and rich body of work, primarily consisting of collages, photographic constructions, paper installations, digitally animated photographic sculptures, and book arts.

Based on this model and the concept of appropriation, over the last two years, the artist has collected images of numerous ancient artefacts of distinct origins - from Africa, Oceania, Ancient Greece, Mesopotamia, and the Americas - currently part of the collections of museums in the western world, in Great Britain, Germany, France, and the USA.

Removed from their original context and assembled in complex visual systems, with a surreal character, these images undergo an authorial process of re-signification, taking on a renewed nature in this exhibition. At its genesis is an iconographic (re) reading that frames the historical weight of intercultural contacts.

Throughout the exhibition, we witness a ritual of iconographic re-signification, decoding, and re-coding of the image, contributing to the construction of a critical view of historiography and the processes of appropriation and "fetishization" of cultures.

At the epicenter of the show and of the debate that the artist thus seeks to promote, we find a set of monochromatic sculptural installations that in their configuration resemble "ladders, poles, trees, towers." These totems or small obelisks consist "of an assimilation of different relics, fertility figures, masks, vases, and various architectural elements."

These paper artifacts are shrewdly and ingeniously grouped in an envisioned accommodation that evokes, in an idiosyncratic and absurd way, the systematization of the Western Museum to highlight the multiple ways in which these objects can be perceived.

"The collaged paper sculptures echo how exhibitions of archaeological artefacts are curated, the artefacts being placed on pedestals or in vitrines, and then illuminated to produce the idea of the aura of an artwork that is far removed from its original functions.

The result is some kind of documentary fiction or fictional documentary that references real things but transforms them into something else."

The concepts of originality and authorship are central elements in this exhibition by Barbara Wildenboer. In a declared challenge to the conventions of the art world, her action has been producing significant contributions to the inversion of thought in an era marked by the need to impose a decolonial ideology.

Graça Rodrigues