

Pamen Pereira

Rewired

Opening

Thursday 17 September at 6.00 p.m.

Exhibition

17 September – 22 October 2020

An anthropologist proposed a game to the kids in an African tribe. He put a basket full of fruit near a tree and told the kids that whoever got there first won the sweet fruits.

When he told them to run they all took each other's hands and ran together, then sat together enjoying their treats. When he asked them why they had run like that as one could have had all the fruits for himself they said: 'UBUNTU, how can one of us be happy if all the other ones are sad?'

'UBUNTU' in the Xhosa culture means: 'I am because we are'.

I began to work on this exhibition more than a year ago on my travels, when I was experiencing extraordinary adventures, brimming with emotion and thinking, at some point, that I was verging on madness as all my experiences caught my attention and the

traces of each significant moments began to pile up on my studio desk. Everything was overflowing with life in its fleeting essence!

Well trained in refining my attention, identifying myself in the commonplace and continuously reinventing myself, lingering in the apparent fate that surrounded me, new winds swept me off in search of something more atavistic. A call from the land where nature isn't tamed and order isn't visible. Since 1986 I've made numerous visits to North Africa (Algeria, Egypt and Western Sahara), almost always in the context of an art project, but the experience that has stirred my oldest memories was my recent trip to Tanzania and Mozambique. Africa took root in me, and I was bewitched by the spiritual exploration of new ways of understanding the world, by the discovery of new colours, new smells, new tastes and, above all, by the shadowy presence of our ancestors.

I don't usually follow a predetermined plan on any of my travels. This helps me accept unexpected situations and go with the flow, curiously penetrating the mystery of the unknown. Perhaps this explains why, however strange it may seem, in sub-Saharan Africa I had the same feeling of rediscovering a part of myself I had experienced during my sojourn in Japan. A connection with a world that cannot be perceived by the mind or the senses, and yet is as real as the visible world: an archetypal world, intuitive and transindividual, inhabited by other intangible energies. I've often mentioned having the feeling that art discovers and expresses this connection between matter and such subtle energies. In traditional African art, which cannot possibly be reduced or rationally pigeonholed, this is very obvious: figures, masks and all sorts of objects are vehicles of this power and matter, like a thread that connects to human presence acts as an intermediary or link between these two worlds.

Furthermore, the African soul embodies the community spirit, a collectivist tradition that necessarily involves sharing among clan members, given that difficulties can only be overcome by the group, particularly as survival is always at risk. And so far away, once again I can confirm that individual subjects do not have an existence of their own; they don't exist independently, unrelated to everything else. The great reality of life embraces absolutely everything: men enjoy freedom of movement but are totally interdependent. There is a Zulu word that sums up this concept, UBUNTU, which means 'I am because we are.'

If the East gave me a chance to grasp the profound connection between all things and an opportunity to accept the fragility and the impermanence of all that exists, in the African continent I discovered this incarnate experience. Africa is a continuous present, pure vitality and, in turn, a reminder of how complex, fragile, finite and unique we are.

I found a root that bound my soul to the earth thanks to which I'll be able to experience bare moments in all their splendour.

UBUNTU

Pamen Pereira

March 2020, a few days before lockdown