OFFICINE DELL'IMMAGINE
CONTEMPORARY ART

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DIMITRI FAGBOHOUN – THE JOURNEY OF ERZULIE

Opening: February 6, 2020
February 6 – April 19, 2020
curated by Silvia Cirelli

From 6 February to 19 April 2020, Officine dell'Immagine gallery in Milan will host the first Italian solo show by Dimitri Fagbohoun (Benin, '72), curated by Silvia Cirelli.

Already known internationally, having taken part in exhibitions at prestigious museums such as the MMK Museum fur Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt, the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art in Washington, the Malmö Konsthall in Sweden and the Kunsthalle San Paolo, Fagbohoun was also one of the artists at the Dak'Art Bienniale (2012, 2016 and 2018) and the 2017 Venice Biennale.

The exhibition presented in Milan, entitled "The Journey of Erzulie", explores the artistic path of this multifaceted artist and brings together a selection of works including sculptures and installations, never before exhibited in Italy. With an incisive poetic force, Fagbohoun focuses on socio-cultural, identity and geopolitical issues, particularly representative of the complex African reality. Confronting the vulnerability of human beings, the artist explores their creative and destructive processes, mixing personal ingredients and testimonies related to his African cultural heritage.

His narration therefore pushes him towards a grammatical eclecticism that enhances themes such as memory, religion and the poetic dimension of existence, relying on a sensorial approach that enhances memory as a precious testimony of an emotional rather than only historical repertoire.

Born in Benin, he grew up in Cameroon and has lived in Paris for the past twenty years; Fagbohoun projects his composite and transcultural identity in his art, questioning the by now anachronistic definition of "African" and what this represents in common memory today.

The choice of the title of the exhibition, clearly inspired by religion, contextualises a theme very dear to the artist, the value of identity syncretism. Starting from the emblematic female divinity Erzulie, of Caribbean origin, Dimitri Fagbohoun interprets its symbolisms and derivations. Allegory of love, beauty and fertility, Erzulie is considered one of the central figures of the voodoo belief – very common in Benin, in fact - but over the years, it has often been associated with different iconographic figures, such as Our Lady of Sorrows in Christianity, the goddess Inanna of ancient Mesopotamia, or even Astarte, a Phoenician deity of the Greco-Roman age.

From the figure of Erzulie, and from the recognition of a deep-rooted collective contamination, the artist develops a path for the exhibition that turns into a real anthropological journey, an investigation into the various facets of interculturality.

Playing on the transfiguration of superimpositions, Fagbohoun surprises with a lexical register capable of mixing voodoo attributions, Christian references, ancient suggestions, alchemical treasures and ritualistic African inspirations on western realities, touching on delicate but necessary topics, such as ethnic identity, hybridisation and the value of ancestral inheritance.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Dimitri Fagbohoun was born in Cotonou (Benin) in 1972 to a Beninese father and a Ukrainian mother.
He currently lives between Paris, Brussels and Cotonou. He spent much of his adolescence in Cameroon, before moving permanently to France. In 2017, he was granted the Smithsonian Fellowship Award. To his credit, he has numerous exhibitions in important museums around the world, such as the MMK Museum fur Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt, the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art in Washington, the Malmö Konsthall in Sweden and the Kunsthalle San Paolo. He has also participated in festivals and biennials such as the Bamako Biennial (2007 and 2011), the Venice Biennale in 2017, the Pan African Festival of Algiers (2009), the Dak'Art Biennial (2012, 2016 and 2018) and the Picha Biennale in Congo.