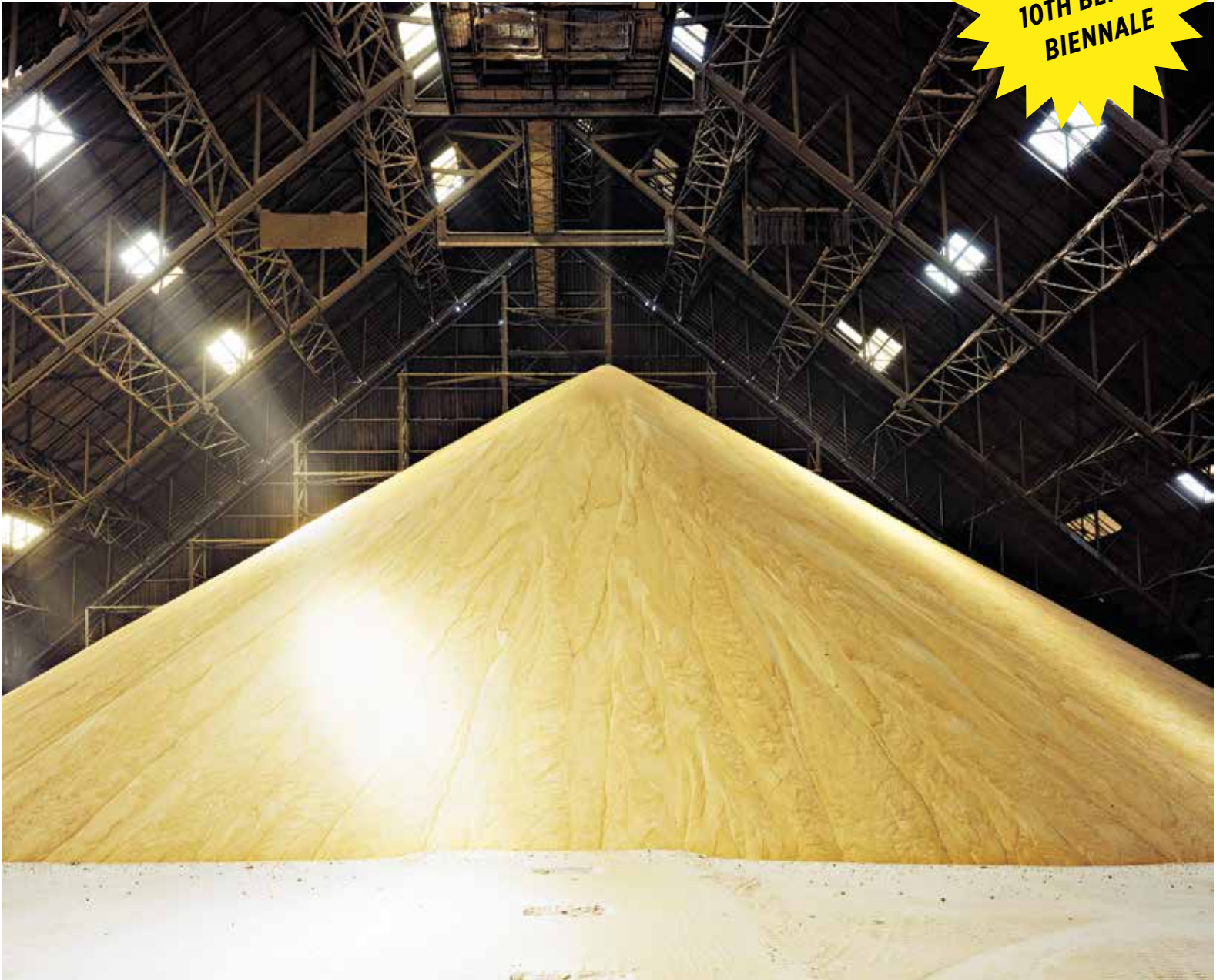


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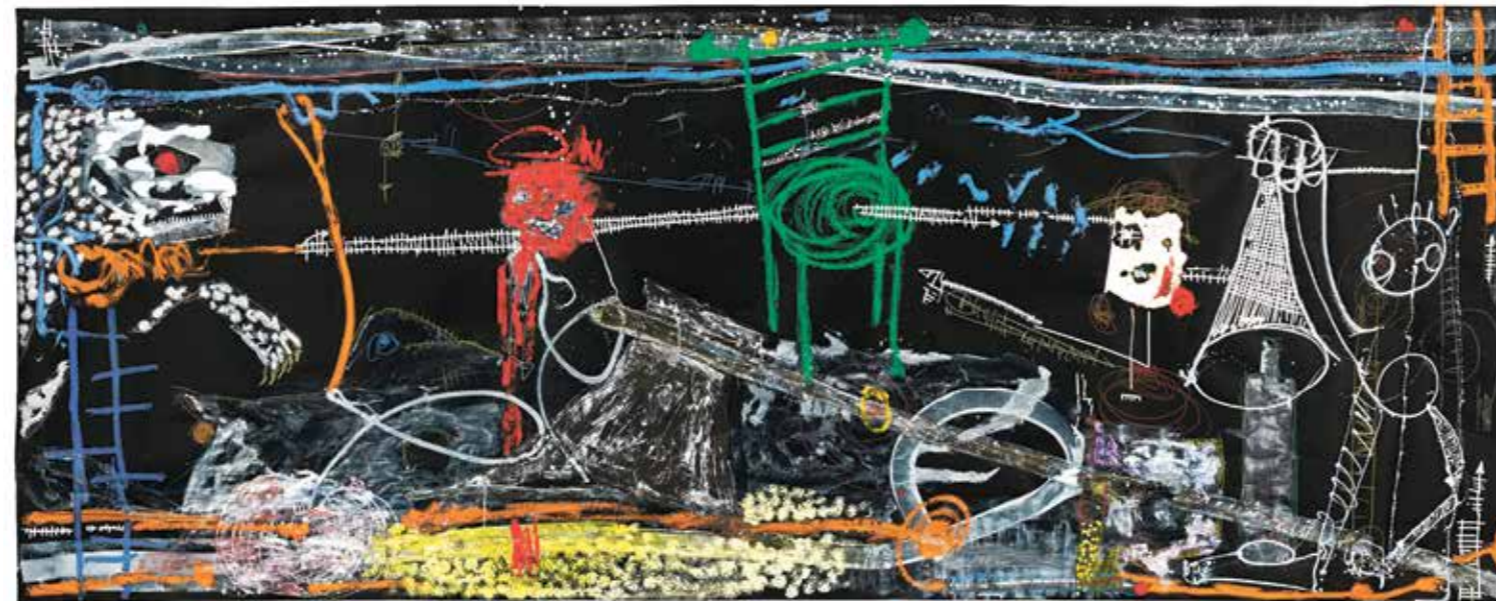
PLATFORM FOR INTERNATIONAL ART
FROM AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES

SPECIAL:
10TH BERLIN
BIENNALE

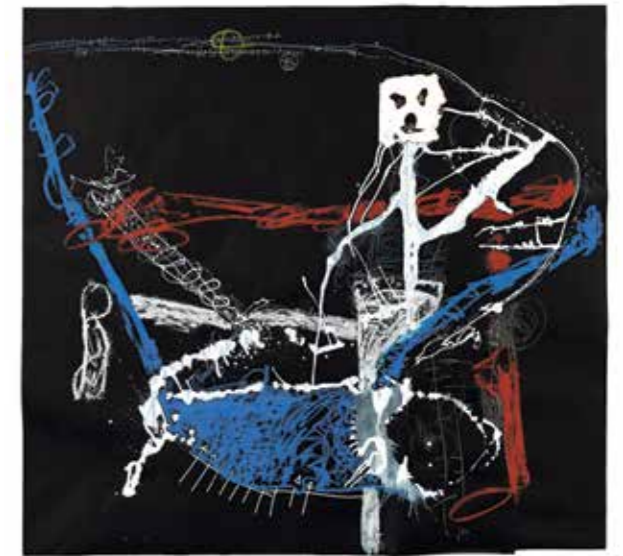


YOU ARE ALREADY IN IT
LOOKING AT A GLOBAL DIASPORA

FROM ARCHEOLOGICAL METHODS



With C&'s **JULIE ABRICOT**, the painter **THIERRY OUSSOU** explains why his work for the 10th Berlin Biennale is a piece of contemporary remembrance and why we don't need more heroes



TO CONTEMPORARY ART



above Thierry Oussou, *Two as one*, 2018.

Mixed media on paper, 226 x 57 cm

centre Thierry Oussou, *You can divide the apple but not the word*, 2018. Mixed media on paper, 151.5 x 382.5 cm

both images Courtesy the artist and Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg

top right Thierry Oussou, *City's colour*, 2018.

Mixed media on paper, 214 x 229 cm

top left Thierry Oussou, *Untitled*, 2018.

Mixed media on paper, 214 x 224 cm

both images Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg

“As a contemporary artist, of my generation, I have the right to talk about it in the way that I can and in the way that I see it.”

His family had wanted him to become a policeman. At the time there just didn't seem to be prospects for young and visionary artists in Benin. So in 2011, Thierry Oussou founded his own kind of art school, Yè art studio in Cotonou, from where he still organizes art and visual culture workshops. With his socially and ethnographically investigative works Oussou has been nominated for the One Minute Africa Award, and is now taking part in the Berlin Biennale.

CONTEMPORARY AND (C&) Your show at the Stevenson Gallery in Johannesburg (February 10 – March 16, 2018) was entitled *Before It Is Completely Gone*. You seem very attached to South Africa. To what extent does this country feed your artistic work?

THIERRY OUSSOU My work is related to the environment. The places where I work both inspire and influence me. I like observing my surroundings when I'm traveling. The pieces exhibited at the Stevenson Gallery have a connection with South Africa, and with the African continent in general, within an overall view of globalization. My idea with the title is to imply that there are witnesses to what we are at the moment. It's a way of reminding us that what we are doing is documented, recorded. As a contemporary artist, of my generation, I have the right to talk about it in the way that I can and in the way that I see it.

C& Your works on paper have this recurring theme of masks and a black background. What about this recent exhibition?

TO My work on paper comes out of the idea of appropriating this medium. I originally started with the idea of slates, with small drawings on black sheets of paper. Now I prefer a much larger format. Embers recall human suffering. I sculpt the faces and use acrylic to represent the skin. Paper, like the human being, is fragile. This highly symbolic medium is with us our whole lives, from the birth certificate to the death certificate.

C& Your working methods seem to hook up with your intention to create archeological documentation. The notion of strata is there in your installation *Ce que nous sommes* (That which we are) as well as in your works on paper, which are made of several layers of different media. Are the rough wood on the ground and the processed wood on the wall (the paper, in other words) also a reference to this relationship between nature and culture?

TO In my work *Ce que nous sommes*, I invite the public to appropriate the wood, which has been moved from the park to the gallery. So, in my performance, visitors can sit on this material and have a different view of the wood. They form part of the work. At the moment we enter the exhibition space, we become one with the environment.

C& What variations do you bring to your installations in situ? Is there a consistency running from *La Poésie* (Poetry, 2015) to

Ce que nous sommes (2018)? Why this need to use wood from the places you're in residence?

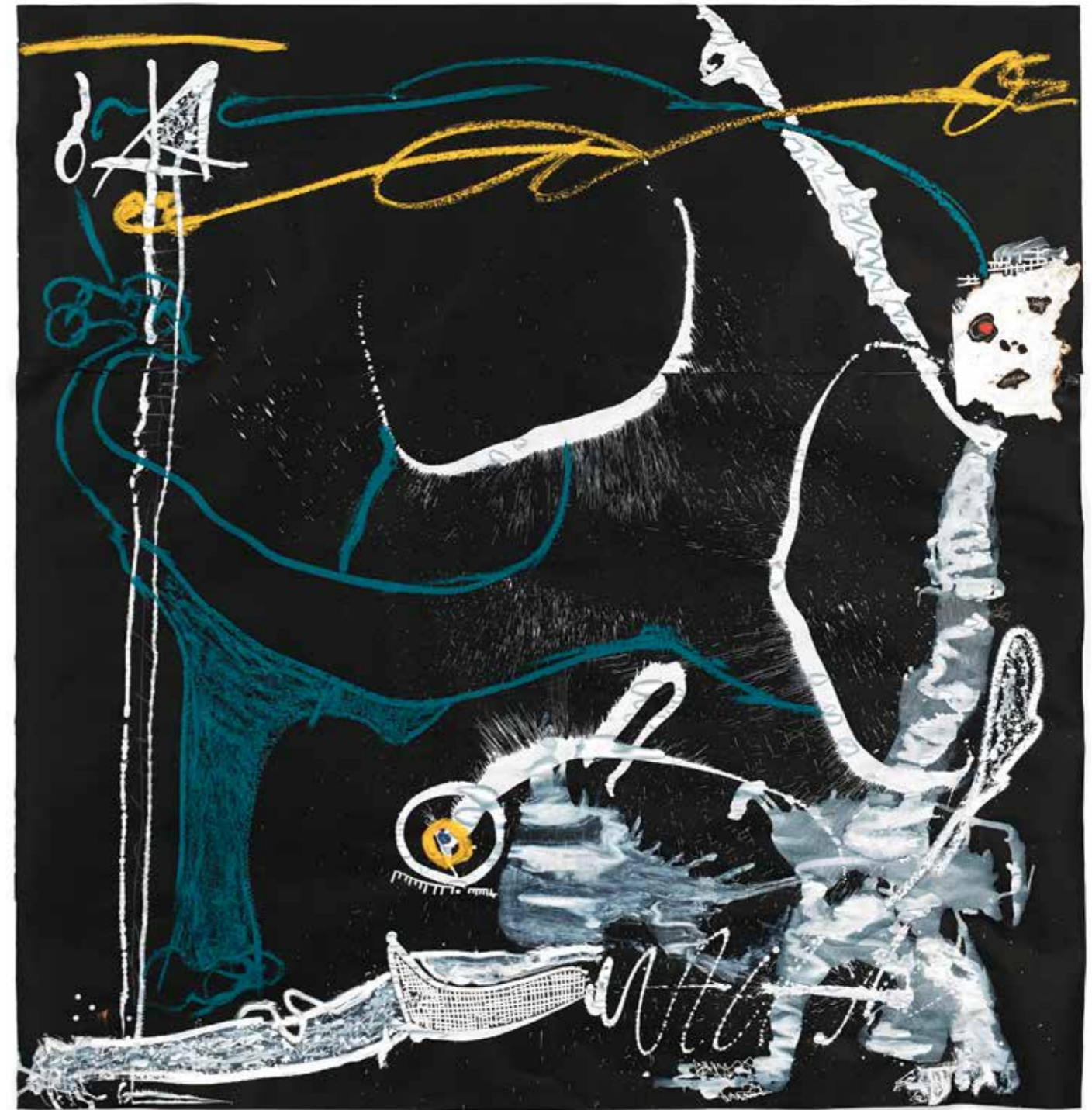
TO Yes, there are some variations. I presented *La Poésie* in situ for the first time in Benin in 2012/13. An installation with twigs, some drawings on paper, leaves from trees, etc. When I went to the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten, I followed a different approach. I devoted myself exclusively to developing my installations, using only wood, this time without any drawing. The installation evolved from day to day. In the group exhibition *Gaia in the Anthropocene* in Rotterdam (February 2 – March 31, 2018), it was not the same presentation as in 2015.

I'm currently in Berlin. If I need to present the work here, I'll follow a different approach. My encounters with the architecture and the local people are important for me. The results of this and the presentation of my work are bound to be different depending on the city. As in poetry, I use the same material, but each time I give it a different meaning, taking into account the characteristics and technical constraints of the place where I am exhibiting.

C& On a final note, how does *We don't need another hero*, the title of the 10th Berlin Biennale, resonate for you? What was your initial feeling when your participation was announced? Can you tell us about the project you're preparing for the event?

TO We really don't need another hero. We're already heroes. For me it's easy to grasp. No one is going to do our work for us. It's the first time I've been an official participant at a biennale, so you can imagine what it's like! I've always wanted to show the project *Impossible Is Nothing* in other cities outside Amsterdam. It's been my hope that one day the throne might be put on show at the Palais de Tokyo. In Amsterdam, it was presented as part of an academic research project, whereas now we're talking about a large-scale exhibition. On this occasion, I intend to exhibit it together with the reports of the students who worked with me and the video of it being excavated. It's a symbol of culture and power. When it's presented, we are unable to touch it. Our cultural wealth is only visible through a small window. The work is a piece of contemporary remembrance.

Thierry Oussou is a participating artist in the 10th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, taking place from June 9 to September 9, 2018.



Thierry Oussou, *On Mandela Bridge*, 2018.
Mixed media on paper, 223.5 x 214.5cm.

Courtesy the artist and Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg

