

**ZINA SARO-WIWA
THE TURQUOISE MEAT INSIDE**

13 September – 27 October 2018

“The oil-producing Niger Delta has a latent indigenous environmentalism that is ignored by international onlookers and often even locals themselves. It moves silently, in subcutaneous layers beneath the plastic, petroleum-fuelled economy and works within the system but rarely speaks its name. This is the space where I choose to make work because this is the place where we learn most about ourselves as humans and where history and possible futures are hiding...”

Zina Saro-Wiwa

Tiwani Contemporary is pleased to announce *The Turquoise Meat Inside*, an exhibition by the British-Nigerian artist Zina Saro-Wiwa. This marks her first solo show in Europe following two solo museum presentations of her work in the US in 2015 and 2016.

The Turquoise Meat Inside furthers Saro-Wiwa's interests in emotional landscapes, psychogeographies and invisible ecosystems, and develops the artist's ongoing research into Niger Delta region of South-eastern Nigeria, the artist's place of birth. Drawing on Nigerian food traditions, folklore and masquerade, the exhibition brings together works which examine and reimagine notions of environment and environmentalism.

For more than 60 years, the Niger Delta's multibillion dollar petroleum industry has been the cause of intense violence, wide-scale corruption and environmental degradation in the region. In recent years, narratives of devastation, violence and failure have intensified and seen highly public outings. Against this fraught and lethal backdrop, Saro-Wiwa focuses instead on the Niger Delta's visible and unseen cultures to reveal a radically distinct and generative re-engagement of the region. At a time when oil companies are beginning again to push for the resumption of oil production activities in Niger Delta communities specifically in Ogoniland despite widespread local protest and historical resistance, the artist's work takes on a vital agency and urgency to affect and ultimately change the status quo.

At Tiwani Contemporary, Zina Saro-Wiwa presents potent and energetic works which tap into the hidden layers of Niger Delta life. In a challenge to long-standing beliefs and 'disaster narratives' about the region, the works in the exhibition summon a deeper and unfamiliar history of propinquity between the Ogoni, their land and its fecund yield.

The Turquoise Meat Inside includes *Karikpo Pipeline* (2015) – a five-channel video installation shot on location with a drone camera in Ogoniland. Situated at the intersection of nature and cultural tradition, the title of the work refers to *Karikpo* – a masquerade – playful in practice and unique to the Ogoni in the Niger Delta. At least once a year for popular entertainment, male performers don zoomorphic masks to mimic the dramatic movements of the antelope. In *Karikpo Pipeline*, Saro-Wiwa presents the performers dancing amidst lush scenery and over visible and unseen markers of oil-infrastructure which crisscross the region: disused pipelines, an ageing wellhead, a decommissioned flow station and roads where pipelines are buried on a subterranean level. While the viewer glimpses the decaying yet ever-present architecture of oil-extraction in the Ogoni landscape, the camera also surveils the agile, defiant feats of the dancers against an Edenic backdrop. At once primeval and futuristic, the work gives form to a human and spiritual relationship with the environment and invites us to rethink the connection between land and ultimately, the nature of power.

The exhibition introduces a lightbox work from a new series *Karikpo: Holy Star Boyz* (2018) which continues Saro-Wiwa's interest in Karikpo masquerade. Shot on location again in Ogoniland, these works give a sculptural form to the insidious impact of petroleum extraction on Ogoni culture. For the series, she stages a parallel world in which male performers – The Holy Star Boyz - wear petroleum resin-based masks in different hues produced by the artist. Translucent in appearance, these masks are in fact heavier than the traditional wooden objects worn by the performers in *Karikpo Pipeline*. As such, if these masks were to be ever used – they would unsurprisingly impede the echt, acrobatic character of the Karikpo performance limiting the traditional feats expected of the performer. Yet Saro-Wiwa also generates the possibility of new outcomes. Thus, the masquerade's key sign and its animating instrument, the antelope-like mask, becomes a visual metaphor at once for change, alienation and hybridity. As Saro-Wiwa says, "The Holy Star Boyz are a new breed. From another place that is still being invented, they are hybrid forms of existence that cannot truly belong. Born to perform yet they cannot behave as their original mother would have them behave. They are made of new material."

The show also includes *Table Manners* (2014-ongoing) – a video work in which the artist offers a reflection on the consumption of local food and its spiritual and politico-symbolic implications. In this series, Saro-Wiwa enlists members of the Ogoni people as subjects in an 'eating performance'. A person is shown seated at a table. The subject begins to eat until he or she has consumed the dish – all the while looking directly into the camera and ultimately the viewer, who becomes, in effect, a dining partner. Subjects eat *garri* (fried cassava flour) and *egusi* soup (ground melon seeds) – dishes eaten commonly throughout the Niger Delta. Each work is titled after the name of the performer and the food eaten. At the end of each meal, the site of consumption is stated forcing the viewer to consume the name of the location and ultimately its language. *Table Manners* points to the historical especially colonialist disregard for local eating practices. Its subjects refuse voyeuristic impulses as they gaze back unfazed at the viewer, consuming and ultimately finishing their meal on their own terms. Like *Karikpo Pipeline*, *Table Manners* is about place and power: acts of insistence and self-determination which re-inscribe and re-insinuate the subject back into the landscape.

About Zina Saro-Wiwa

Zina Saro-Wiwa (b. 1976, Port Harcourt, Nigeria) is a British-Nigerian, Brooklyn-based artist working in video, photography and installation. Recent exhibitions include Montreal Museum (2018), Prospect New Orleans Triennale (2017/2018); Bamako Biennale (2017/2018); The Walther Collection, NY and Ulm (2016/2017); solo exhibitions at Krannert Museum (2016-2017), IL and Blaffer Museum, TX (2015-2016); Arles Photo-Festival (2016); Brooklyn Museum, NY (2016/17); UCLA Fowler Museum (2016); Seattle Art Museum (2015); Nikolaj Kunstal, Copenhagen (2015); The Menil Collection, TX(2012-13); and the Pulitzer Foundation, MO (2012-13). In 2017, Saro-Wiwa was awarded a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship for Fine Arts. In 2018, she launched Mangrove Arts, a new foundation which uses contemporary art and indigenous crafts to foster creative engagement with environmentalism in the Niger Delta. Zina Saro-Wiwa is the founder of Boys' Quarters Project Space, a contemporary art gallery that opened in 2014 in Port Harcourt, Nigeria where she curates and programmes exhibitions that explore the relationship between the self and environment. Her current show which she curated *Black Box: Video Poetry and Environment* features video works by artists John Akomfrah, Kader Attiah and Allora & Calzadilla and is on display till October 2018.