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2016-17 Franchise Proposal

Guis Sou Me Le Mbao (I do not see you at Mbao)

submitted by: Claude Gomis and Saskia Koebschall

Franchise location: Thiaroye, Senegal

Proposed Artists: Kader Attia, Cool Diabang Mory, Nathalie Mba Bikoro, Michele Magera, Soly Cisse, Pierre Mary Ciss

SUMMARY:

The project "GUIS SOU ME LE MBAO" (I DO NOT SEE YOU AT MBAO) will create a site specific exhibition on the premises of "Camp Thiaroye" on the outskirts of Dakar (Senegal), the site of a brutal massacre of Tirailleurs Sénégalais (African soldiers conscripted for the French army) at the hands of the French army in 1944. The commemoration of both the massacre and the institution of the Tirailleurs, which remains a controversial and largely silenced chapter in colonial history, will function as a starting point for reflections on (postcolonial) politics of memory, modes of resistance, and the persistence of economic and racial injustices that continue to frame the asymmetric relations between the West and the non-West.

CONCEPT:

Shortly after the news about the massacre in Camp Thiaroye had started circulating, family and friends of the soldiers rushed to the village of Mbao, where the survivors had fled and found refuge, hoping to see their loved ones. The expression "I do not see you at Mbao" - meaning you are not among the survivors - entered the Wolof language as an expression that is nowadays used to warn someone that he or she is in great danger.

The expression is one of the traces that reveal the deep trauma caused by the massacre, whose brutality and mercilessness sent shock waves throughout French West Africa. It was a wake up call to many, that despite the sacrifices hundreds of thousands of West Africans had made for France in both World Wars and countless military interventions on three continents, they had come home to the same colonial brutality, racial injustice and discrimination.

The Tirailleurs Sénégalais who were killed in Thiaroye had been deployed at the war fronts against Hitler's troupes during WWII, many had been detained in German war prisoner camps, had seen thousands of their fellow soldiers get killed and tortured, and were relieved to have survived and be discharged from the service. But instead of receiving their pay and be send home, they faced discriminatory treatment, shortages of food and shelter, were denied equal pay and in some cases they were denied pay all together (until today). Their protest in demand for fair treatment was brutally crushed, leaving many of the soldiers (accounts vary between 35 to 300) killed, hundreds wounded, and dozens sentenced to jail terms.

The title of the exhibition - "GUIS SOU ME LE MBAO" - literally issues a warning of the danger of non-remembrance of the colonial past and the invisibility but severeness of it's repercussions in our present through the persistence of colonial epistemologies, social and economic structures. The project will invite 6 artists to engage with the community of Thiaroye and the surviving veterans, in order to create site specific works at the Camp Thiaroye that will reflect on modes of resistance and means of challenging (post)colonial politics of memory, in order to imagine a self-determined future.

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