

Still life

He has been living in Italy for over 15 years - nearly half of his life. He got ("got" so to speak, since the bureaucratic effort to get it would rather justify the use of the word "conquered") the Italian citizenship this year. Nevertheless, looking at the works of art of Joachim Silue, you can guess its African origin at first sight. The black line, strong, determined and elementary, and the materials used are the elements that betray him. The cardboards, the objects and the textile fabrics employed – as well as the subjects of his paintings and of his assemblages – reveal that the author's interest in his works focuses on issues far away from Italian everyday life.

While the choice of materials suggests the aesthetics of Arte Povera, Silue's figurative approach clearly distinguishes his way of painting from this Italian "style" that schooled all over the world. Silue has a clear message to communicate, he does not try to mystify, he has rather a narrative approach. He speaks of the country he left, the living conditions of people he had to leave behind and of those who came with him to Italy, his new homeland.

The genre chosen for his more recent artistic production, the "still life", is an important indication of Silue's role: putting his finger into the wound caused by the comparison between North and South of the world. And Silue belongs to both hemispheres. He is in a position that allows him to see clearly the lines of "friction" between two realities that have little in common. "Still life", according to Silue, "is an occidental genre that does not exist in African tradition." The fact that Silue sets the south against the west and not against the north is significant, especially considering that Silue, comes from the Ivory Coast which is geographically in the west. This comparison shows that, from the standpoint of cultural history, he sides with the West that is facing the east. The south, from this perspective, is nonexistent, a blank or a white area in our cultural map ...

Although the first representations of compositions of objects, devoid of human figures, can already be found in the Egyptian culture, in the cubicles of the pyramids, as hints or even as allegories referring to life after death, African culture was and is focused on living beings.

In Europe, the still life experienced its strongest bloom in the seventeenth century, especially in Flanders but also in Italy, especially in Lombardia and Emilia, around Bologna. Representations of the widest range of natural products always had more than one goal: to demonstrate the richness of the client, and often to give a presentation of various natural objects with the purposes of cataloguing them through rich scholarly iconographic references. In the interpretation of still life, the meaning of vanitas, a reminder of the transience of life, gained dominance only in retrospect, when the complex iconographic knowledge of the average public decreased and left place to more secular Weltanschauung.

Silue's still lives, rather than alluding to vanity, seriously stress the contradiction of the technical term "still life" in itself, as this genre often represents a rich supply of food, that is a source of life. Silue's assemblages insert instead objects and indigestible materials such as soil and dust that symbolize the transience of all living beings.

In this way, Silue's compositions become contemporary form of concrete poetry. His "African" interpretation plays in a virtuous way with Western artistic heritage relativising it

by using a concrete language in the true sense of the word. Indeed, through an elementary grammar, he creates a complex, poetic and reflective narrative discourse. "*Cela n'est pas une pipe*" was titled the famous painting by Magritte that highlighted the difference between *signifiant* and *signifié*, and which served as one of the most important icons of the semiotic discussion of structuralism and poststructuralism.

"This however is a still life," Silue seems to say to cut short very artistic and theoretical reflections by Joseph Kosuth: this is not a representation of precious objects, but of real objects, lifeless and devoid of living power.