



Mohamed Bourouissa

LE MIROIR (THE MIRROR)

Oct. 10 – Dec. 30, 2011

Gallery See | SCAD Atlanta, 1600 Peachtree St. | Atlanta, Georgia

Feb. 4 – May 6, 2012

SCAD Museum of Art | 601 Turner Blvd. | Savannah, Georgia

June 4 – August 24, 2012

Moot Gallery | SCAD Hong Kong | 292 Tai Po Road, Sham Shui Po, Hong Kong

Sept. 14 – Nov. 23, 2012

La Galerie Pfiem | SCAD Lacoste, Rue Trophime | 84480 Lacoste, France



Le Miroir (The Mirror) was organized by SCAD with support from the French Cultural Services in Atlanta, Georgia, to complement the 2011 France Atlanta festival with cultural events focused on themes of diversity and integration. The solo exhibition features photographs by French artist Mohamed Bourouissa and is guest curated by lecturer, art critic and independent curator Simon Njami, with coordination support provided by SCAD Senior Curator Melissa Messina.

Bourouissa's oversized photographic *tableaux vivants* drop viewers into the heart of social tensions and struggles playing out in France as a result of the riots that took place in Paris in Fall 2005. These riots, which began in the Parisian suburbs and then spread to other areas of France, were incited primarily by racial injustices, frustration with high unemployment, and police harassment and brutality against African and Arab youths. The glances, nuanced gestures and flash points of Bourouissa's images capture the energy, psychological dimensions and complexity of the underlying social rifts. His images also speak across time as Bourouissa draws compositional and conceptual inspiration from historic paintings such as Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, 1830.

The vision and conceptual rigor of Bourouissa's work further the mission of the SCAD exhibitions department that is committed to artistic diversity, to innovation and to originality, and aims to provide an educational forum for current trends in contemporary art.

A very special thank you to Mohamed Bourouissa; Simon Njami; Mr. Pascal Le Deunff, Consul General of France in Atlanta; Carole Scipion, cultural attaché, Consulate General of France in Atlanta; Heather Kircher, French cultural services and press assistant, Consulate General of France in Atlanta; and galerie kamel mennour, Paris, for their numerous invaluable contributions to the exhibition, affiliated public programs and this catalog.

LAURIE ANN FARRELL

Executive Director of Exhibitions, SCAD



A few years ago, the world watched in astonished disbelief mixed with a dash of ironic pleasure as the poor outlying suburbs of France's large cities were set ablaze. This feeling of amazement that seized hold of those who viewed this violent fury stemmed from the fact that, still today, France is seen in the world

to say that they are alive and breathing. They lure in the television news cameras, which are wont to turn their lenses only toward an event, a spectacle that has become news. Mohamed Bourouissa is well aware of all that. He could have been one of those kids whose life ends on a scooter at the bottom of some street. He

THE MIRROR *BY SIMON NJAMI*

as the land of the Rights of Man and cultural diversity. To be honest, we were not the only ones to be moved by this kind of revolution, which still remains anchored in people's memories. We were witnesses to an event, in the most etymological sense of the term—that is to say, to the rising up of the unexpected. France awoke to find itself forced to face its ghosts, to look squarely at the failures of its colonial past and its inability to really integrate into the French Republic all its subjects who were not considered to be "French like the rest." Suddenly, a generation left to its own devices, tired of being treated as nonexistent and systematically stigmatized, stood up and shouted out its despair and its anger. They are French—French like the rest. Though confined within the horizonless setting of high-rise housing projects far removed from city centers, they are citizens of the French Republic. Their countries of origin, the lands from which their parents or their grandparents came, are quite often nothing but an old dream kept up within the family, a fantasy from which they know they are already excluded. So, they burn in order to exist. They break things in order

could have thrown some bricks through the windows of the lavish stores in the French capital that seem to be there just to taunt anyone who does not have the means to buy the luxury items inside.



LEFT: *La Bascule*, 2007-08

RIGHT: *Le miroir*, 2007-08

But this has turned out not to be the case. Aware of the trap set beneath his feet, he has preferred to turn himself into a narrator and to enter into the necessarily fictitious world of artistic creativity in order to recount for us the incoherent details of the society in which he lives. His gaze betrays no anger, just an acute sense of irony, a disabused look of amusement, a clear acknowledgment of the facts, done in a joking way. Before turning toward video, he chose photography as his primary medium, undoubtedly because of the documentary

nature of the photographic print. Whether we like it or not, photography still makes us believe that what it reveals to us necessarily contains a slice of truth. With his constant *mises en abyme* (“placing into infinity”), these self-reflexive embeddings he shows us in his photographs, Bourouissa has decided to play on this slice of truth and to deconstruct things to his heart’s content. He makes light of clichés and received ideas while making them his own, adopting an intelligently distanced attitude that turns to ridicule French society’s

most consistently recurring prejudices simply by staging them. With dark humor, his *tableaux* are composed like a classical painting, underscoring all the contradictions inherent in that society. The models are chosen with care. Their clothes perfectly cling to their roles, and their attitudes are meticulously choreographed by a stage director who is a stickler for details. And Bourouissa succeeds in creating the illusion he wishes to achieve. These young people who are playing their own roles have necessarily entered into what Jean-Paul Sartre had called the process of *splitting*. In becoming aware of the image they are projecting within society, they become *other*, abstractions, thinking beings who are making an ontological and political comment on the gaze of those who want to trap them within the image they have agreed to take on. This is a fool’s game, a game of mirrors, in which those who thought they were looking are in fact those who are under the watchful eye of others. The mirror affords this necessary splitting. What is expressed here is the impossibility of being “one,” the fact that this reflection of ourselves comes back deformed because it is but a reflection. This is the reflection of a subject, no doubt, but still more it is a reflection of the world that surrounds this subject and of the setting that conditions the subject and dictates to him his humanity. Bourouissa’s work is eminently political, even though he would undoubtedly refrain from saying so. For, in being content to be a neutral observer and in being persuaded that there is no need to add anything to the obvious facts he reveals, he becomes subversive. He starts to sing a sometimes forgotten hymn, the one Ernst Bloch had called the “key question:” the

self-contained question of “we.” For, in every “we,” there is first of all an “I.” And how will we ever succeed in constructing a way of living together that accepts difference as an item of wealth, as the sole guarantee of our aptitude for humanity? These are the pressing questions raised by Bourouissa’s photographs, the violence of which appears so contained. And the French Republic—this symbol represented by blue, white and red—had better watch out, if it proves incapable of loving and protecting its children. All its children.

*Translated from French
by David Ames Curtis.*



LEFT: *Le cercle imaginaire*, 2008

EXHIBITION IMAGES



LEFT: *La rencontre*, 2005
RIGHT: *L'impasse*, 2007



LEFT: *Sans titre (metro)*, 2007
RIGHT: *La république*, 2007-08



Carré rouge, 2007-08





Le Périphérique, 2007



INSTALLATION IMAGES



Mohamed Bourouissa

LE MIROIR (THE MIRROR)

Feb. 4-May 6





1971



1971



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Small white caption card.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Mohamed Bourouissa

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IMAGE CREDITS

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All installation images by John McKinnon, courtesy of SCAD, SCAD Museum of Art.

BIOGRAPHIES



Bourouissa's photographs were included in the New Museum of Contemporary Art's exhibition *Younger than Jesus* in 2009. Bourouissa's work was recently featured in a 2011 two-person exhibition *Live Cinema/Peripheral Stages: Mohamed Bourouissa and Tobias Zielony* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. His work is included in the collections of the Fonds National d'Art Contemporain in Puteaux, France, and the Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris. Bourouissa was born in 1978 in Bilda, Algeria, and attended the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, and the Sorbonne, Paris. He lives and works in Paris.

ABOVE: Raftermen Photography



Simon Njami is a Paris-based independent curator, lecturer and art critic. Njami was the co-founder and editor-in-chief of *Revue Noire*, a journal of contemporary African and extra-occidental art. He has served as artistic director of the Bamako photography biennale from 2001-08, and he co-curated the first African pavilion at the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007. Njami has curated numerous exhibitions of African art and photography, including *Africa Remix* (2004/2007) and the first African Art Fair, held in Johannesburg in 2008. Currently Njami serves as adviser for the Sindika Dokolo Collection, and he is consultant in visual arts for the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs cultural branch.

ABOVE: © Laurence Leblanc

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