

# BODY TALK

## FEMINISM, SEXUALITY & THE BODY



October 30, 2015 - January 17, 2016



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Opening: Thursday 29 October, 7pm  
& Frac in Live : Performance of  
Miriam Syowia Kyambi

### ACCESS

Free admission  
Tuesday to Friday: 2-7pm  
& Saturday & Sunday: 11am-7pm

The exhibition stays open Bank  
Holidays

Group visits in English on request  
mediation@fraclorraine.org

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Régional de Lorraine et du Ministère de la Culture  
et de la Communication - Dnac Lorraine.

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In *Body Talk*, six artists, all from Africa, and all marked by the shared history of the continent, by its wounds and its commitments, take a look at feminism, sexuality, and the body. *Body Talk* is the rising voice of a generation!

This is not the first time that 49 Nord 6 Est reflects on women's status and identity. The plurality of feminisms around the world and their protean struggle has always been at the heart of its concerns. It is therefore only natural that its interest has turned toward the African art scene. Koyo Kouoh, director of the Raw Material Company in Dakar and a key figure in the new artistic and critical landscape in Africa, has been invited to develop an exhibition: *Body Talk*. *Body Talk* opens our eyes to contemporary ways of looking at the world informed by the "other"—i.e. African—feminism, such as reappropriation of the body by subverting the idea of woman as sex object; embodiment of historical figures, like the "Black Venus" or the Nigerian woman activist Funmilayo Kuti; performative transformation that bridges tradition and modernity...

In order to counteract the invisibility of black women in France, even while they struggle for recognition with increasing vigor, and to restore to the black body its rightful place, we have designed a committed program of performances, talks, and meetings that accompany this exhibition.

### ARTISTS:

Zoulikha Bouabdellah (Born in 1977 in Moscow, Russia. Lives in Casablanca)  
Marcia Kure (Born in 1970 in Kano, Nigeria. Lives in Princeton, NJ)  
Miriam Syowia Kyambi (Born in 1979 in Nairobi, Kenya, where she lives)  
Valérie Oka (Born in 1967 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, where she lives)  
Tracey Rose (Born in 1974 in Durban, Afrique du Sud, where she lives)  
Billie Zangewa (Born in 1973 in Blantyre, Malawi. Lives in Johannesburg)

CURATOR: Koyo Kouoh, assisted by Eva Barois De Caevel (RAW Material Company, Dakar)

Exhibition initiated by WIELS, Brussels (BE) in coproduction with 49 Nord 6 Est, Metz (FR) & Lunds konsthall, Lund (SE)

1- Billie Zangewa, *The Rebirth of the Black Venus*, 2010. Private Collection.



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## A word from the curator

In *The Body Politic: Differences, Gender, Sexuality*<sup>1</sup> Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu evoke the gathering of Igbo Women in 1929 in the city of Aba, in Nigeria. This gathering, where women used their naked bodies to protest the tax policies of the British colonial administration, stands as a powerful picture of the meaningful use of the body by Nigerian women. The event in Aba is remembered as one of the first historical occurrences of a modern Nigerian women's movement, and also an example of the critique of colonial power. Manifesting the naked female body is a practice deeply ingrained in traditional African cultures as a means to expel injustice. A notable instance happened in 1819 in Nder, a small village in the north of Senegal, whose history is marked by the tragedy of the self-immolation of a group of women who preferred to kill themselves and their children rather than fall prey to the Arab and Moorish slave traders.

The critical resonance of a specifically African - and black - feminism, together with the spread of artistic practices to international networks, have given shape to the development of a black feminist art. Stemming from the continent and the Diaspora, this black feminist art depicts bodies that continue a tradition of activism and freedom of expression. *Body Talk: Feminism, Sexuality and the Body* presents a combination of newly commissioned and existing works dealing with the issues raised by such exposed bodies.

What is an African female black body? Is it the supreme object of patriarchal sacrifice? Is it the sacred, stained body, transgressing the boundaries of race and gender in the way it stages and embodies history? Is it all of the above?

Let us recall that this body-vehicle is inscribed in a feminism whose originary history can be traced to Egypt in 1923, to the formation of the Egyptian Feminist Union, the first African feminist movement, led by Huda Sha'rawi. In the early 1980s, some people preferred to speak of Womanism, rather than Feminism, considering it 'a more inclusive feminism' defended

1- Miriam Syowia Kyambi  
*Fracture (i)*, 2011-15.  
Performance / installation.  
Photo: Marko Kivioja, Terhi Vaatti & Anni  
Kivioja, Kouvola Art Museum Poikilo,  
Finland. Courtesy the artist.

1- in *Contemporary African Art Since 1980*

by African-American author Alice Walker. This preference for Womanism over Feminism among some black women deserves to be mentioned: it stems from the marginalization of women of colour in the most prevalent forms of feminism, and from the fact that African women and those of African descent have been disappointed by white radical feminism, which they see as often oblivious to the realities of black women. This unity of purpose – and the quest for it – is what can be found in the work of the artists shown here.

The works by the six participating artists can be seen as so many ways of reexploring, reintegrating and reincarnating the body; and the media of contemporary art – performance, photography, video, film, installation – are so many means to achieve that end. The works reference historical and political figures, they recreate modern personas and reanimate past and present bodies. This is the case with the recurring, and haunting, presence of Sarah 'Saartjie' Baartman, known as the 'Hottentot Venus' or 'Black Venus', an exposed and violated body-object that has become a fixture in the discussion of black body politics. Each of the participating artists is particular in the way she materially positions the body – her own or an abstracted form of it – in a story, and in its rereading as a singular space within an increasingly homogeneous world. It is this diversity and subjectivity of forms and answers that *Body Talk* aims to uncover.

### Koyo Kouoh



Valerie Oka, *Tu crois vraiment que parce que je suis noire je baise mieux ?*, 2015. Néon. © The artist.



## Biography

Koyo Kouoh is founding artistic director of Raw Material Company, a center for art, knowledge, and society in Dakar, Senegal, and the curator of FORUM, an educational program at the 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair in London. She has a degree in banking administration and cultural management in Switzerland and in France.

Koyo Kouoh, who maintains a sustained theoretical, exhibition, and residency program at Raw Material Company, also pursues curatorial, advisory, and judging activity internationally.

Koyo Kouoh lives and works in Dakar and Basel.

### AGENDA

2015 - 2016 / In collaboration with Rasha Salti, she is currently working on "Saving Bruce Lee: African and Arab Cinema in the Era of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy", a research, exhibition, and publication project spread out over three years, which will be featured at the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow in June 2015 and September 2016.

2016 / The 37th edition of EVA International, Ireland's biennial of contemporary art, will be curated by Koyo Kouoh.

### SELECTED RECENT PROJECTS

2015 - 2016 / "Body Talk: Feminism, Sexuality and the Body in the Word of Six African Women Artists," WIELS, Lunds Konsthall, 49 Nord 6 Est

2014 / "Precarious Imaging: Visibility surrounding African Queerness", RAW Material Company

2013 / "Word!Word?Word! Issa Samb and the undecipherable form", RAW Material Company/OCA/Sternberg Press, the first monograph devoted to the work of the pioneering Senegalese artist Issa Samb

2012 / "Condition Report on Building Art Institutions in Africa", a collection of essays presented at the eponymous symposium organized in Dakar in January 2012 and "Chronicle of a Revolt: Photographs of a Season of Protest", RAW Material Company & Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin.

She was a co-curator of Documenta 12 (2007) and Documenta 13 (2012).

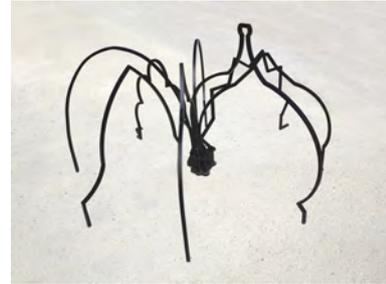
## Pictures available on request



1. BillieZangewa.jpg



1b. BillieZangewa.jpg



2. ZoulikhaBouabdellah.jpg



2b. ZoulikhaBouabdellah.jpg



2c.ZoulikhaBouabdellah.jpg



3. MiriamSyowiaKyambi.jpg



3b. MiriamSyowiaKyambi.jpg



4-ValerieOka.jpg

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