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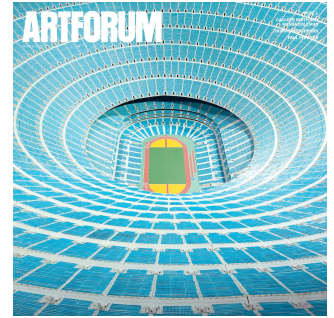
“Vertigineuses”

Selebe Yoon

By Agnieszka Gracza



Mélinna Fourn, *I'll regain my radiance, my candor of yore*, 2023, iron sculpture, jute sacks, pearls, bronze coins, brass coins, ceramic satalas. Installation view. From “Vertigineuses” (Vertiginous). Photo: Morel Donou.



Paul Pfeiffer, *Vitruvian Figure* (detail), 2008, cast resin, aluminum, acrylic, 9' 2 1/4" × 26' 3" × 26' 3".

MARCH 2024

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Curated by Jennifer Houdrouge and Clara Darrason, who jointly founded and ran the Chimney art gallery in Brooklyn from 2015 to 2020,

“Vertigineuses” (Vertiginous) brings together five female artists, four of whom have strong links with geographically and culturally diverse parts of the African continent. The heady mix of cultural influences—ranging from ancient Egyptian myths to Haitian vodou and Ghanaian adinkra symbols—present in this spectacular group show aptly reflects the meaning of the gallery name Selebe Yoon in Wolof: “crossroads.”

Housed in a white colonial building with a curved perforated facade dating to the 1950s, the exhibition spaces located on the second floor are accessed through an elegant spiral staircase. South African artist Attandi Trawalley’s contribution to the show, *Hands-Off*, (all works 2023), consists of loosely braided black synthetic hair, beaded in places, wound around the stairway’s railings and left to hang. A thicker crocheted element is suspended from the dome of the vertigo-inducing rotunda and coiled on the ground, its dull green, russet, red, and golden yellow melding together as in a rainbow. Hair also features in Iranian artist and activist Shahrzad Chngalvae’s floor-based installation *Everything Is Crystal Clear*, in the form of braids and locks shown in photographs—which also depict flames, clasped hands, and fingers making a V shape, among other recurrent motifs—protruding from a sea of salt crystals. The work’s title is borrowed from a slogan spray-painted onto a wall in Iran during the Woman, Life, Freedom protests.

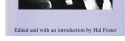
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The undulating salt-covered ground in Changalvae's piece has its counterpart in the coal strewn around the outsize metal kettle, supported by a solid rope and slightly leaning forward, at the heart of Franco Beninese artist M elinda Fourn's sculptural installation *I'll regain my radiance, my candor of yore*. A familiar presence in Senegalese homes and public places alike, the rounded plastic kettle known as a *satala* is used, among other purposes, for performing ablutions before the Muslim prayer. Hence, the jute sacks bearing adinkra patterns such as the All-Seeing Eye (*Abode Santann*), disposed around the giant teapot in a way that recalls prayer mats, on which rest *satalas* of ordinary dimensions but made of ceramic rather than plastic and dwarfed by the sheer bulk of the centerpiece.

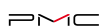
"Vertigineuses" plays with scale, calling on visitors to alternatively look up and down, stand back and peer closely at the works on view to take in the subtle details and rich textures. This is especially true of Guadeloupean Congolese artist Naomi Lulendo's *Potomitan*, with its delicately embossed metallic surfaces of ceramic tubes clad in pantyhose as well as plant fibers woven using basketry techniques and resting on a round concrete base. The title references the central pillar supporting vodou temples in the Caribbean, often made of palm-tree trunks. In fact, dried palm leaves form a canopy above the totemic poles of varying sizes displayed around a sturdy white column that is a structural element of Selebe Yoon's architecture.

For Lulendo, these anthropomorphic figures stand for women who are pillars in their own right, supporting the family and the wider community. The artist's body is present, albeit in distorted and truncated form, in *Faites vos Je, Fleurs Bleues* (May I Play I, Blue Flowers Blues), a group of photographs printed as jigsaw puzzles, each with a telltale missing piece revealing a blue background. The representation of the female body, to which all the works on view allude in more or less subtle ways, culminates in Nelly Zagury's erotically charged installation *Matrice*, featuring paintings in an exuberant palette of acidic colors displayed in an Egyptianizing style around a central water fountain, whose turquoise basin and curved gilded trunk ending in twin lotus buds evokes the female reproductive system. Zagury, a French artist of Moroccan origin, was inspired by *The Perfumed Garden*, an Arabic sex manual penned sometime in the fifteenth century by sheikh Muh-ammad al-Nafzawi from the Berber Nefzawa tribe in present-day Tunisia and often likened to the *Kama Sutra*.

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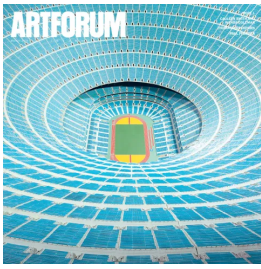
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