

Barthélémy Togu

Water is a Right

7 September - 7 October 2023

Opening on Thursday 7 September at 6pm



Barthélémy Togu, *Water Matters* (detail), 2020
Ink and watercolour on canvas, table, engraved glass bottles

38 avenue Matignon

75008 Paris

Galerie Lelong & Co. is delighted to announce *Water is a Right*, the new exhibition by French-Cameroonian artist Barthélémy Togu. This time, Barthélémy Togu has “created a dream”, in which he invites viewers to discover new works, conceived for the exhibition as part of a residency at the Picasso Museum in Barcelona. Here he has created a realm where fish and birds live side by side, in paintings and sculptures, an amphora and ceramics with soft, flowing forms.

“It all started with a childhood memory. I remembered how I used to get up very early in the morning to fetch water from far away, to drink, to wash the plates at home, back home in Cameroon, before going to school. I was also thinking about the multi-coloured pots and buckets in which I carried the precious liquid. Ever since I moved to France, these images come back to me regularly. It was these hardships that made me realise the importance of water in our lives. The installation I created in 2015 at the invitation of Peter Gabriel in Charlton Park in England, for the World of Music Arts and Dance (WOMAD), speaks to this past. There I grouped together dozens of buckets of various colours hanging from pillars, which were to receive water to grow geraniums.

For my exhibition at the Musée du Quai Branly, I created *Water Matters*. I presented bottles from all over the world and a painted character who receives them and then offers them in return. It was symbolic way of distributing this precious resource to everyone.

Taking stock of the current problem of the lack of drinking water in many parts of Africa and the rest of the world, I decided to transform the exhibition space into an aquatic environment. I love the shape of fish and invent other imaginary ones. With the sea in mind, I often draw the blue dotted lines in my work. I imagine rain and oceans transforming a scene or landscape into a marine universe. I marvel at the fluidity of the water, which represents a gentle, non-violent world; its colour is undeniably beautiful. These depths are also dangerous, but it’s clear that this substance offers more visual softness than a rock, and the same applies to touch. The dream of falling into water rather than onto a rock creates greater serenity.”¹

¹ Interview with the artist by Androula Michael, Nantes, 13 June 2023.

Water “is an invaluable and vital element that invites us to dream and gives us life”, says the artist, concerned that this resource, which should be a right for everyone, is cruelly lacking in several parts of the planet, endangering the living world.

Barthélémy Togo was born in Mbalmayo, Cameroon, in 1967. Between 1989 and 1993 he studied art, first at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Abidjan then in Grenoble, and finally at the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf. Although he stayed in Europe and became a French citizen, Barthélémy Togo remains profoundly attached to Cameroon, and he regularly returns to the country. That is where he created Bandjoun Station, a foundation inaugurated in 2013 with the aim of hosting artists and academics from around the world in residential workshops, to develop propositions in harmony with the local population.

Barthélémy Togo’s art has attracted a great deal of interest in recent years. His work has found its way into the collections of a number of major private and public institutions in the UK, Europe and the USA. Recently, a temporary installation was commissioned under the pyramid at the Louvre Museum in Paris. This summer, his work is on show at a number of venues in Nantes, including the Château des Ducs de Bretagne, as part of “Expression(s) décoloniale(s) #3”, and the HAB Galerie for the “Voyage à Nantes”. Togo will be presenting a recent installation at the Autun Biennial in Burgundy, the International Festival of Contemporary Sacred Art, from 15 July.

Water is a Right is the sixth exhibition that Galerie Lelong & Co. has devoted to Barthélémy Togo since 2010, following *The Lost Dogs’ Orchestra* (Paris, 2010), *Hidden Faces* (Paris, 2013), *Strange Fruit* (Paris, 2017), *Urban Requiem* (New York, 2019) and *Partages* (Paris, 2021).

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