

HYPERALLERGIC

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Two Different Artists Marvel at the Modern Means of Travel

By Seph Rodney

*At Richard Taittinger Gallery, painter Nirveda Alleck and
sculptor Eric van Hove evoke the mechanics of the modern world.*



Eric van Hove, "Untitled (Volkswagen Polo Diesel Cylinder Head)" (2014), yellow copper, red copper, nicked silver, cow bone, camel bone, recycled brass, Middle-Atlas walnut wood, lemon wood, mahogany wood, High-Atlas white cedar wood, tin, wood glue, Chinese superglue, 7.87 x 17.72 x 9.06 in, and a custom red copper box with inlays: 9.06 x 18.5 x 12.2 in (all photos courtesy Richard Taittinger Gallery)

In 2015, Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi curated an exhibition called Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? at Richard Taittinger Gallery; it was a brilliant exposition of work by contemporary artists from Africa. Since then, the shows at the gallery have been hit or miss for me. (I thought Francis Goodman's *Rapaciously Yours* in 2016 was brilliant, but not much else.) Now, Nzewi, a curator of African art at the Hood Museum, has returned to Taittinger to curate *Ethics in a World of Strangers*, which features the work of Nirveda Alleck and Eric van Hove. Amid our current political climate, the exhibition claims to ask: "what are the values of universal fraternity, compassion, and worldliness?" Given the strength of Nzewi's last show was, I was excited to see this one. Yet when I did, I found myself puzzled by it. I didn't immediately understand how the two bodies of work on view were speaking to the theme or each other.



Nirveda Alleck, "Continuum Dakar" (2017), oil on canvas, overall installed: 46.46 x 186.61 in



Nirveda Alleck, "Continuum USA" (2011-12) oil on canvas, overall installed: 48.03 x 153.54 in

The exhibition pairs a sculptor and a painter. The latter, Nirveda Alleck, was born in Mauritius in 1975. She's showing a selection of large-scale paintings and video from a series called *Continuum*, in which the figures look like they're posed for vacation photos, but against a background of decontextualized, serene whiteness. They float, really neither here nor there, though titles such as "Continuum USA" (2011-12) and "Continuum Dakar" (2017) place them geographically. Even their clothing is transformed into a blue screen onto which Alleck projects other places; in the USA painting, for instance, the characters' shorts and T-shirts become an idyllic lawn surrounded by a white picket fence. The work suggests that these bodies of various ethnicities and ages might represent any place in the world – that these people are mobile, not inextricable from their points of origin. They can be taken from wherever they originated, plopped down into the painting's invented circumstances, and live there.



Installation view, *Ethics in a World of Strangers* at Richard Taittinger Gallery

On the other hand, the work of Eric van Hove, who was born in Algeria in 1975, is radically different. It's all machine parts, specifically reproduced elements of motor engines, such as drive shafts or cylinder heads. The pieces are exquisitely fashioned from a menagerie of materials: yellow or red copper, nicked silver, recycled aluminum, walnut wood, Mahogany, cow skin, camel bone, and tin. They're presented on top of shipping crates and beautifully rendered, custom-sized, chiseled boxes of nickel silver or red copper.

Though on the surface they're vastly different, what may join the two bodies of work is their evocation of the mechanics of the modern world: van Hove's represents the tools for transportation on the ground, Alleck's the cargo of bodies that are conducted along global currents. Motor and touristic travel are key to existing in our world – we wouldn't be modern otherwise. And both bodies of work take a similar perspective: not critiquing our tools of conveyance but marveling at them, saying to their audiences, "Look at what we're able to do."

