

# whitewall

## Pascale Marthine Tayou's Colorful Vocabulary and Global Vision

By Katy Donoghue

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On view this summer at **Richard Taittinger Gallery** in New York is a large survey of **Pascale Marthine Tayou**, entitled "Colorful Line." Curated by **Jérôme Sans**, it is the most comprehensive exhibition of the artist's work in the U.S. to date. Sans, in collaboration with **Galleria Continua**, has put together work from 2006 to 2018, taking viewers on a journey through Tayou's color-filled universe, presenting a transcultural vision that explores the role of the artist in the global village of today.

*Whitewall* spoke with Sans about "Colorful Line," open through August 22.

**WHITEWALL:** What was the starting point for "Colorful Line"?

**JÉRÔME SANS:** Since we met at the **Sydney Biennale** in 1998, **Pascale Marthine Tayou** and I have nurtured a relationship that has led to numerous collaborations in projects around the world, including two in France last year in Les Moulins for **Galleria Continua**. "Colorful Lines" exhibition was born from a desire to confront Tayou's works to the current New York art scene. It has been more than 15 years since he was exhibited in New York at **Lombard Fried Gallery**. This show is a new chapter, beginning here at **Richard Taittinger**.



Installation view of "Colorful Line"

Courtesy of GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano/Beijing/Les Moulins/Habana and RICHARD TAITTINGER GALLERY

Photo by Shark Senesac

**WW: What did you want audience's to understand about his work?**

**JS:** Tayou is a surveyor of the contemporary globalized world. This solo show has been conceived together with the artist as a journey within his own universe. Artworks from 2006 through 2018 confront and overlap with one another in a joyous cacophony. They express the perfect consequence of how diversity and plurality are at play, forming our global realities. His vocabulary is animated by a transcultural vision, conveying the richness and contradictions of society. The central question of his work is the ethical, social, sentient position of the artist today.

**WW: Tell us about some of the earlier works on view. What kind of themes was the artist exploring in those work?**

**JS:** The iconic *Plastic Tree*, made of different colored plastic bags, is an allusion to a material "always in transit, always global," in Tayou's words. His stacked Arabic pots are also emblematic of this notion. The charcoal paintings show the fragility of the world and values under construction that are challenged every day in the United States.

Other iconic works include *Poupées Pascale*. Made of crystal, the stylized naïve face carvings adorned in simple household objects such as leather samples and buttons evoke Western tourist souvenir gifts, like some new contemporary fetishes.. *Jpegafrica/Africagift*, a pyramid pile of the 54 African flags alludes to the different cultural identities of the African continent. Tayou's heterogeneous and prolific works dwell upon an individual moving through the world and exploring the issue of global village.



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**WW: What about the most recent works? How are they emblematic of his practice today?**

**JS:** This exhibition features artworks produced specifically for this show. *Bogo Bear*, a huge teddy bear dressed in Bogolan textiles, is like a contemporary totem from Tayou's universe. The figure of the teddy bear is symptomatic of American culture, which Tayou "Africanizes" here. Indeed, Bogolan fabrics hold cultural significance, strength, and energy, as they are typically worn by hunters and women newly initiated into adulthood.



The exhibition also features a new series of neon works from his "Graffiti" series. "Graffiti," initiated in 2005, are extended by new couple scenes conceived especially for the exhibition. In these works, the artist visually affirms the electrical tension of neon light. He pays tribute to the world of graffiti with another tool—neon—that he integrates into his aesthetic quest.



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**WW: Can you tell us about how Tayou honed his unique approach to materials?**

JS: Tayou never uses not noble materials. These materials have a universal simplicity, they convey shared experiences of different cultures. From more than 20 years, he has created his own vocabulary out of images and forms from the West and beyond. His work, a profusion of materials and information, hang in fragile balance, all the while preserving their own logic.

For Tayou all objects are possibilities. He always redefines them by sort of remix of materials. For example, he recycles plastic bags, a popular element that belongs to everyone, several works are made of cut up paper, fragments of documents or

collected objects. In a certain way, he operates a “revalorization” of the object that has been turned into trash, a mass consumerist cast-off. For him, nothing is a rubbish.

**WW: What role does color play in his sculpture and installations?**

**JS:** Color in his works expresses a quest for sweetness and joy. It alludes to a celebration of life. According Tayou, color brings a smile to people’s face. “I consider life to have been generous with me and I want to share this permanent effervescence (...) This is the thought that I’m trying to connect with in my relationship to color,” he told me once. Colors are also symbols of opening evoking all possible identities.