



## PASCALE MARTHINE TAYOU: *Colorful Line*

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Tens of branches sprout out of a large white wall, each with a colored plastic bag hung to it at the entrance to *Colorful Line*, Pascale Marthine Tayou's first exhibition in New York in over a decade. *Plastic Tree* (2018), a site specific installation of variedly-hued disposable bags that cling to limb-like contorted wooden branches, encapsulates the overall tone of Tayou's return to the city of urban grime, perpetual waste, and radiant tones. Transient, incidental, and intermediary, these bags of no attributed value or purpose receive distinct emphasis in lieu of the anticipated spring blossom. At once negligible and dull, the objects are rejuvenated through the power of diligence and attention, reflecting the essence of the Cameroonian artist's oeuvre invested in hope and solidarity in its core. "Color brings a smile to people's faces," explains Tayou in his conversation with exhibition curator Jérôme Sans. "It celebrates life and affects me like a vitamin . . . The different variants of color are symbols of opening, they evoke all possible identities . . ."



Installation view, Pascale Marthine Tayou: *Colorful Line*, Richard Taittinger Gallery, 2018. Courtesy Richard Taittinger Gallery.

Color is as political as it's jubilant and vivacious in Tayou's vocabulary; the exhibition title carries an inherent heftiness beneath its simply light-hearted vocation. Color echoes with separation and oppression, a hurdle before a universe the artist strives to intricately devise with glowing plastic bags and chalk not scattered, but configured into art—as hundreds of pieces of chalk do in the wall-spanning eye candy installation *Chalk Fresco A* (2015). Black codes, defining the discriminatory regulations practiced in Europe and United States during and following the abolition of slavery, is most evident in *Code Noir* (2018), a series of large scale paintings on wooden panels with silhouettes of people and totemic figures carved onto surface. Composed of seven 59-inch by 114-inch panels, the work's horizontal hang implies a narrative structure, while its dreary presence of ghostly figures—some of which are tied together with shackles—conveys demise and perseverance as well as mobility and petrification. Contrasting the panels' bleak aura is the *Graffiti Neon* (all 2018) series of life-size red, yellow, or blue neon bodies, based on haphazardly scribbled figures, engaging in overt sexual acts. Here, Tayou strips the body from its physical or immaterial

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layers, freeing the body from clothes or morals, to reveal the simplistic carnal state. In a group of C-prints titled *Kids Mascarade* (all 2009) African subjects, mostly children, don "western" masks of popular super heroes and animals. Responding to the West's fetishization of African masks, Tayou flips the exploiter and exploited. In a modest-size horizontal print, a group of kids stare at the camera behind lifeless visages of noticeably "off-brand" Batman or Bugs Bunny masks, leaving us curious about what they have to convey in their shielded expressions.

Exhibited on the basement floor are the exhibition's arguably two strongest bodies of works, *Les Troubadours* (all 2012) and *Poupée Pascale* (varying years), both sculptural collages of mixed-media in modest scales. In the first series, drums penetrated by pins, sit atop sculpted crystal feet of birds of different kinds. Substituting for thighs with stretched forms, the musical instruments replicate bodies enduring pain and suffering overstated by the pins. The latter series combines mundane found objects and, again, sleek crystal sculptures that replicate totemic African figures with occasional phalluses and animal feet. In a 2010-dated work, a bundle of decorative kitsch objects shroud a naked body, whose crystal transparency conveys a spectral accent. In another version from 2012, the lucent figure is burdened by a clutter of bags carelessly held together with fishnets, signaling displacement and despair. In Tayou's poetic approach, the tension between pristine crystal bodies and marred objects culled from everyday manifests the challenges, contradictions, and struggles humanity has tirelessly generated for the sake of authority and prosperity.



Installation view, Pascale Marthine Tayou: *Colorful Line*, Richard Taittinger Gallery, 2018. Courtesy Richard Taittinger Gallery.