

RENNES (FRANCE)

BARTHÉLEMY TOGUO

LA CRIÉE

CENTRE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN

Going into La Criée is like descending into the bowels of a ship. Barthélémy Togo has built a wooden structure that brings to mind the slightly curved form of a ship and has covered the entire floor with packing cases. For the artist, the equation and the symbol are simple and sum up the relations between North and South: from the importation of goods to the exportation of people.

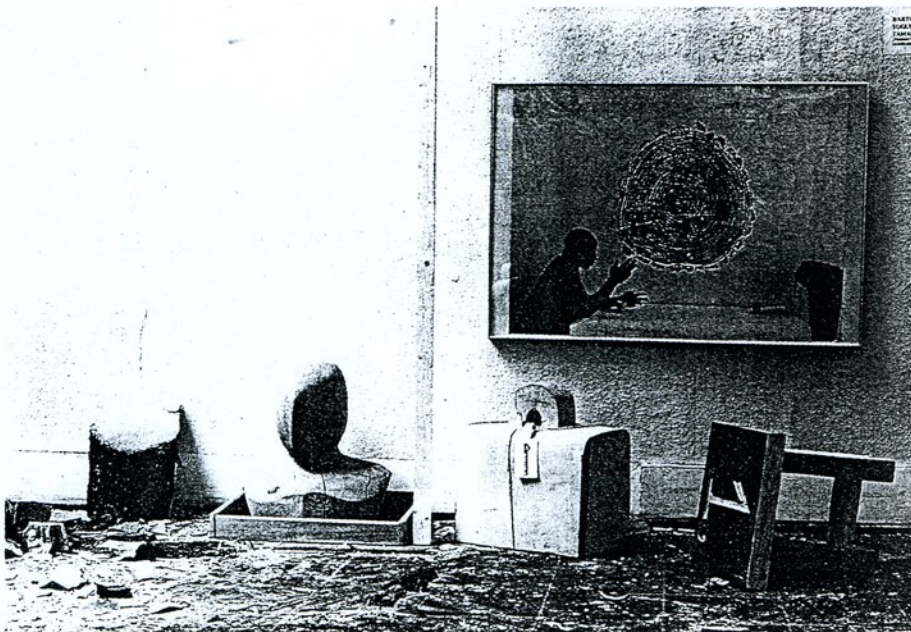
*Virgin Forest*, a title which is evocative of the proliferation typical of Togo's work and of the fertility and abundance demanded of him by his family in Cameroon, is an invitation to the voyage. Like posters, remnants of the artist's performances are displayed on the wooden structure alongside a series of watercolors, *Baptism* (1999), illustrating the various rituals deemed to assure him sexual vigor and fertility. Mixed with all this are life-size portraits of people Togo has met in the street. Everything is intermixed, leaving Togo's performances and gestures as brief sequences in the flux of everyday life, with no hierarchy apparent.

As traces of past performances and personal accounts, these works by Togo are more than short stories, they are epics. And if crossing borders was, for Robert Filliou, an event in itself, Togo makes a tragi-comic spectacle of it. Most notably, the artist carries out a series of performances, *Transits*, the first of which dates back to 1996. Tired of being treated with suspicion when crossing borders, Togo has turned the logic on its head, mocking customs officials by transporting three solid wood cases, objects of singular resistance, sculptures that are immune to violation.

Furthermore, Togo fully integrates the storytelling dimension into his work, presenting himself as a story-teller from the first pages of his book, *Labyrinth Process*, published in conjunction with his exhibition at La Criée. From the labyrinth to the virgin forest, all this confusion is Togo's way of re-connecting, even integrating his deeds and gestures into a natural cycle.

Sandra Cattini

(Translated from French by Christopher Martin)



BARTHÉLEMY TOGUO, Installation view.