

FRATERNITÉ MATIN

NOVEMBER 22, 2018

OUATTARA WATTS AT THE CÉCILE FAKHOURY GALLERY: WILL THE STATE ACQUIRE WORKS BY THE ARTIST?

by Salif D. Cheickna

This exhibition is entitled: "Before Looking at this Work, Listen to It." This is the artist's first personal exhibition on the shores of the Ebrié lagoon.

Despite his international fame, most Ivorians do not actually know who this artist is, who appears in important collections around the world. One of the motivations of gallery owner Cécile Fakhoury in presenting her works in Abidjan is above all to present them to Ivorians. "People must come to see this exhibition that he thought for his return to Abidjan, after 30 years spent in the United States of America," she said during a meeting with the press to discuss this exhibition.

At the opening on November 22, the public responded to this invitation. Better still, we noted the remarkable presence of three ministers of the Republic, namely Hamed Bakayoko, Maurice Bandaman and Pascal Abinan who came to discover this monumental artist on the world stage.

To see them, one could not help believing that for this artist, the State of Côte d'Ivoire will undertake to make acquisitions. Moreover, this will only be done justice because it is time for Côte d'Ivoire to have its own heritage made up of the acquisitions of major Ivorian artists and the world. Didn't an artist like Pablo Picasso appear in the collection of the founding father of modern Ivory Coast Félix Houphouët-Boigny? Just like the French artist Bernard Buffet.

To tell the truth, the great return of Ouattara Watts sounds like an opportunity which must be taken advantage of. According to Cécile Fakhoury, talking about the painting of Ouattara Watts is not easy. Intimately linked to Africa and to a world connected with her ancestors, the artist's works reveal cryptic ideograms, symbols of a forgotten religion or even complex equations. On his paintings, the artist seems to succeed in bringing together two worlds, like an intercessor. This makes the gallery owner say that there is "real power in her work".

Ouattara Watts, it must be admitted, is distinguished by his career and his artistic approach combining tradition and modernity. The artist, according to Professor Yacouba Konaté, was therefore ready when he was discovered in January 1988 in Paris by Jean Michel Basquiat, the avant-garde genius. The latter, impressed by his work, invited him to settle in New York. The two artists will work together until Basquiat's untimely death in August 1988.

Ouattara Watts was born in Abidjan in 1957, he lives and works in New York. He has notably exhibited at Documenta Kassel, the Whitney Museum and the MoMa PS1.