

***Windows: Part 1* by Ndary Lo**

Big transparent plastic water bottles filled with bottle caps instead of water are stacked in tight fashion to create a wall of immense beauty that plays with the eyes and senses. The artistic process of stacking compares significantly to local systems of arranging objects either for sale in the market environment or for other purposes around Dakar and its suburbs. A mountainous pile of plastic bottle caps of soda beverage and bottled water, installed like an incandescent altar of colorful dots, invites comparison with Damien Hirst's spot paintings, and even more art historically, French impressionist paintings such as Georges Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (1884-86, oil on canvas). This is because of the stunning *tromp l'oeil* quality, intense coloration, pointillism and beauty of the installation when viewed from a measured distance. The iridescent heap of plastic bottle caps counts in several thousands. Each individual bottle top is perforated in the middle and for a symbolical reason. The tiny holes are windows which offer multivalent viewpoints into Ndary Lo's eclectic creative enterprise in the past 20 years. More importantly, they provide the first inkling of a new direction in Lo's artistic practice.

Sewing thread spools and dirty plastic caps of cosmetic and domestic products are stacked in rusted metal pans. Like the beverage bottle tops, they are recuperated from the environment. Unlike the beverage bottle tops which invoke beauty because of their warm colors and in the manner of their installation, the stack of scrunch up dirty and dull colored plastic container caps suggests the grotesque. Multiple ropes of warm colored plastic bottle caps hang from the roof to the floor in zig-zag fashion and cutting into each other. The ropes are systematically put together with a critical eye for rhythm, color combination, and balance. On a 28 meter wall surface, ropes of predominantly black and white bottle caps spell out a sentence that could very well read *La ila ha, ila laa (God is Great)*. With the subtlety of double play, of binary opposition; beauty and grotesque, sacred and profane, transparency and ambiguity, Ndary Lo introduces *Windows: Part 1*, his most recent creative endeavor.

Lo is interested in discovering creative possibilities inherent in plastic bottle caps. Thematically, the new works embrace the artist's penchant for addressing human and environmental concerns from a pan-African and humanist position. Conceptually and formally, Lo locates his practice at the intersection of form and material, artistic message and social activism. Working with huge number of plastic bottle caps which litter the urban environment of Dakar and its suburbs, Lo draws our attention to consumerism, underscored by a neoliberal climate where excessive consumption is celebrated. At the same time, he points out the scant regard for the environment, and the absence of recycling on an industrial scale in Africa. Lo equally employs the plastic bottle caps for their tactile quality. He repurposes the bottle caps from waste to aesthetic objects, reversing the absence of industrial recycling, yet affirming a culture of *petite* recycling in Africa where objects of industrial manufacture not only outlive their use dates but take on new careers. Such proclivity for creative reversal and affirmation is an intrinsic aspect of Lo's artistic practice.

Under the auspices of *Dak'Art* biennial, *Windows: Part 1* launches the birth of a new trajectory in Ndary Lo's artistic practice. The exhibition offers a fresh vista into his preoccupation with recuperated objects and the environment through works that are, largely, in-progress. New ideas and artistic approaches are explored in the exhibition which also serves as an incubator. Lo continually reinvents himself and his creative practice even as he has retained the integrity and substance of his artistic message over the years. The artist is well known for his steel sculptures and mixed media installations, which are made from cast-away metals, bones, and urban detritus. Hanging, stringing, assemblage, welding, repetition, and scaling up are formal processes employed by Lo. They define his aesthetic universe and are very visible in the current oeuvre.

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