

Gildas Sébastien Tòkpéou Gbaguidi

\* 1975 in Porto Novo / Benin

Autodidact

Paintings, sculptures, installations

Exhibitions in Benin, Nigeria, Kenya, France, Germany, Poland and the UK since 1999

Professional Association for Visual Artists Celle (Germany), Association for Visual Artists Benin (Benin Republic), The Pan-African Circle of Artists (Nigeria)

## **Emotive collages**

Born in West Africa and now living in Germany, Tòkpéou Gbaguidi's work represents a collision of cultures. Spirituality and ritual are essential elements of his home country, Benin, and his art reflects these traditions through his design elements and the materials he uses. But Gbaguidi's expression goes beyond such cultural boundaries to critically reflect and, challenge the Euro-centric perspective of the African continent and its art.

For Gbaguidi, culture can be found in everyday life and objects; cultural activities, views and customs shape our environment and create communities. Gbaguidi's plastic art breathes new life into everyday objects. Discarded objects that have reached the end of their lives, are given a new function; they are recombined and re-purposed for art and express his concerns for recycling and sustainability. Gbaguidi's use of colour, both impasto and using glaze, simultaneously express symbolic and atmospheric themes. Besides earthy colours, he employs bright yellows, oranges, reds or blues, "which, like the choice of material, are rich in value, culture and traditions." Besides acrylics and oil, wood is central to Gbaguidi's art. He also uses a wide range of pigments and material, objects like tables, cooking pots, rings and wires. He examines the functional and ritual ambiguity „of these cultural elements of life". Even jeans are transformed into meaningful murals by a mixture of water, glue and colour pigments, and sculptures with carved faces and symbols are created from chairs. Although these objects have lost their original function, they still have a story to tell as witnesses to both humanity and betrayal. How many people have probably sat on this chair, been rested, loved or argued with? Who wore the crumpled cloth on the painting as protection against the sun or cold? Which drink or remedy was in that container?

While he worked exclusively in a figurative and representative style at the beginning of his career, today, Gbaguidi employs more abstract forms of expression, together with Nsibidi signs – a pictographic system of writing from eastern Nigeria. In terms of form and content, Gbaguidi's art can best be summarised as “*collage*”. He distinguishes between the themes of communication and community through his observation of humans and animals, of peace and emotions. His art represents *emotive collages* of contrasts, between West African and European culture, art and everyday life. Gbaguidi creates art that is vibrant and, at the same time, critical. He perceives and understands art as a universal form of communication between cultures. In response to whether there is any concrete source of inspiration outside everyday life, Gbaguidi replies smiling, but quite explicitly: "Not artists... but insects."

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