

PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION PROJECT

BLACK

DOLLS

MIRTHO LINGUET

Photography Exhibition «Black Dolls» by Mirtho Linguet  
Project Promoter: French Guiana Association of Edition  
Sponsors: French Ministry of Culture and Communication -  
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« Truth does not care for feelings, it just is. You have to face the truth of diagnosis, even if it hurts; especially when it hurts. » Mirtho Linguet



# FORE- WORD

***In his photos, Mirtho asks the question why?***

***It's all about questions.*** Mirtho questions the social and aesthetic dynamics and the power relationships of the representation of the individual, in a context marked by unequal treatment sourced from injustice, originated from the ideology of racism which according to him intoxicates day to day the relationships between individuals of our world on the basis of skin color.

His images raise questions, sometimes create discomfort, but above all their purpose is to invite the beholder to reconsider the codes of representation, so that we see and perceive ourselves as we are, individuals before anything else.

Thinking about his personal history, Mirtho realizes that he was an object of curiosity, subjected to a diktat disguising itself with various subterfuges.

He does not consider diversity as an issue.

The work before you is in no way a «simple» glance at reality. Moreover, it is neither pantomime, nor identification to negritude or to «black empowerment».

***It questions the dynamic power relationships induced by the persisting issue of skin color.***

« My first contact with effects of racism occurred at the very moment of my birth. My mother told me one day that right after my birth my father asked why I was so «black»? Since then, I never stopped trying to understand why my father said that. » Mirtho Linguet

The everyday life, the relational place in which people evolve, run into each other and meet is the material for this work. The common thread is the idea of rupture and tension along with the perception of absurd and confusion, all of which derive from this major issue putting through individuals in a «tragic arrangement».

Through an aesthetic of astonishment and reflection, the artist shows how he questions this reality.

***The intention is thus to encourage the beholder to ponder over this problem which causes people to mistreat themselves because of their complexion. It's a question of injustice in a world where people should advocate justice.***

# INTEN- TION

***A «humanity» could exist, however it has to be created. A human being is not supposed and destined to abuse another human being, a human being is an individual who produce JUSTICE when he or she relates to others. The photographic work presented shows individuals in real-life situations. It raises a question. Does being human and more precisely «being black» imply having to endure abuse? Is the vocation of the individual to kill one other and/or to abuse the other on the basis of skin color?***

The portraits, which provoked astonishment and stupefaction during the ***Alchemy, Flora*** and ***Black Dolls exhibits***, constituted a questioning approach. The issue being the absence of production of justice.

Progress implies an interrogative perspective through the corresponding research of understanding/solution. When a problem is identified, it raises questions, thus one should consider questioning in order to open up a perspective of solution for the benefit of all.

***From within his own experience, Mirtho found in photography a functional form of expression. Beyond the photographic work, he says something.***

It is through its explanation that the work takes on its productive and constructive dimension. As such, these portraits are not just there for the contemplation, they invite the beholder to question the issues that they bring to his attention. Consequently, they provide consideration on the research of solution without confining the observers in presuppositions but true prejudice.

This work claims to be a rebuilding. The reality that we live all over the world, in all its dimensions (social, cultural or economical) is tragic. Society subliminally asks these people designated as «black» to maintain stereotypes and to respond to them, rather than to question them and act logically. And it seems that they comply willingly or by default. By refuting the idea of being black or by openly asserting being black, these people unknowingly contribute to and serve the racist paradigm. Accepting this idea enables the justification that the black man is a «race» and that him being subject of injustice is justified.

Consequently, we keep on fabricating ***new stereotypes to justify our existence rather than focus on the benefit of our productions***, in terms of social, technological, relational progress and more. All these productions also deserve to be defined with precision, supposing that all these forms of progress are synonymous with JUSTICE. This focus enables the production of justice in order to eradicate the plague of racism.

Logically, the universality tends to break down the artificial barriers to make space for the truth that is to say what «is» in what an individual thinks, says and does which is either constructive, or non-constructive. And this, whatever the looks. The same applies to said «humanity» which remains a concept and not a reality. People do not produce injustice. They acknowledge both the existence of others and their own in mutual respect. Universality means producing justice.

# PROJECT CONTEXT

The representation of the world within which we evolve is the **fruit of a thought, a systemic, ideological thought which is, to this day, the dynamic and prevailing thought designated as Racism.** This system of thought is the **source for the majority of the problems that people face because it is used in every field of activity where all the white and non white individuals are involved, in an unhealthy and tragic relationship.** This way of thinking causes disasters in the quality of the relationships between people in this world. Said relationships are subjected to the dynamic influence of this ideology which exhorts people into abusing themselves either in what they think, say or do. Directly or indirectly, it occurs in every field of activity such as: Economics, Education, Entertainment, Politics, Work, Law, Religion, Sex and War (conflict), 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

A distorted relationship with the world generates artificial relationships. As such, **every action aiming to eradicate the problem should be conducted uncompromisingly.**

Faced with this Tragic Arrangement in all levels, such as social, identity, economics or aesthetic level, **the act of creation as representation and questioning of reality, is firstly constructive and productive. The ultimate goal being to settle the issue.**



# ART PROJECT

*While not openly claiming itself as part of the Negritude or the Creolity movements, which admittedly deal with a part of humanity being perceived by another as «subject of curiosity», the artistic work exhibited before the eyes of the beholders questions the idea of how the world is represented by some and the effects of this representation.*

From the beginning, the «portraits» exhibition (Alchemy, 2011) in the Luxembourg Garden brought the issue to the fore and generated reactions inherent to the dynamic effects of the ideology of domination derived from the idea of race.

***In a situation of constraint, artistic creativity is of course an aesthetic channel of expression but mostly a channel for constructive suggestions.***

Ideas are not independent from the representations which define them in a given mentality. Thus, the cultural «hegemony» distorts the decoding of the individual, of the human being relationship with his or her environment, with his or her own kind.

Whether they live in Countries known as developed (formerly described as civilized) or Countries known as developing, people are violently and passionately obsessed with the **question of racism**. It also **pollutes the artistic expression because racism extends to all the fields of activity as a dynamic power relationship**.

**Racism generates the same division, levelings between artists, depending on their classification of skin colors, between their artistic intentions.**

Inaugurating the 2015 Cultural Programming of the Regional Council of French Guiana, the **Black Dolls** exhibition invites us to see the individual and not his or her skin color. The raw aspect and the makeup precisely aim at forcing the look, exaggerating it in order to compel and see beyond.

**These works of art do no exalt but rather question Negritude, in order to know why it was born.**

The intention being to leave it to the visitors who wander about the portrait gallery to ask themselves this very question. **This possibility gives access to a transcendence of the agreed perception, the one which enables the birth of an accurate perception.**



The combination of intentions possesses a documentary aspect and illustrate the preoccupations that drive the author of these pictures. The use of a model contributes to an assertive taste and also a documented investigation.

The photographic medium allows the artist to share these preoccupations on how these individuals are represented in their relationship with the world and how said preoccupations are constructed. It offers a possibility for a reconstruction of the individual, if not a reeducation.

**This work opens up the field for an investigation** through evidence disseminated by the attention to detail and intensity in the scene of daily life. The coarseness and subtlety of the daily life are revealed by colors, lights and angles asserting, **without embellishment, the tragic dimension of this particular issue. The black man must then disappear in order to incite to know more, to question more than to entertain or look for some recognition.**

Sometimes, in this journey, discomfort arises and makes way for questioning. A genuine call into question can then emerge from both sides of the barrier, from this invisible yet real wall of institutionalized exclusion.

# BIOGRA- PHY

« *My photography questions the individual and his role in society as a factor of cultural wealth. I am interested in the individual, his story and his territory. Reality remains my inspiration.* » Mirtho Linguet

Born on the 25th of October 1968 in Cayenne (French Guiana), Mirtho Linguet, studies at the MI 21 Photography School in Montreuil, before he settles in Zurich, Switzerland in 1998. During 8 years, he works for fashion magazines and ad agencies.

Today, Mirtho lives in French Guiana. This is with the photographic series from the **Alchemy** project, created in 2009, that he expresses his questioning, marking a rupture with the artificial world of fashion.

His photography becomes clearer, more distinct, and more frank. In some of his series, even though in documentary form, his models reveal themselves in all truth, bodies and postures remain raw, faces without makeup but not without a certain aesthetic appeal. The organization of the elements in the images conveys the willingness to reveal the singular character of the model he photographs. All the elements finding themselves on an equal footing. By a subtle mirror effect, his models give the impression to become one with the scenery.

After a one-month residency at Point Éphémère in Paris in 2010, he goes in another residency in the beginning of 2011 during 3 months in the National Advanced Arts School of Dijon.

## AWARDS

1996 1st prize JIP (International Photography Festival) Arles

## PUBLICATIONS / REVIEWS

2010 Area revue n° 2 France

2011 Supplement of « OMA » Magazine, Beaux Arts Éditions (Fondation Clément Martinique).

2011 Regards partagés édition plume verte, French Guiana

2012 Afrikadaa France

2013 ARC magazine n° 7 Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

2013 Transition Magazine USA Harvard University W E B Du Bois African Afro American Research Institute

## EXHIBITIONS

2009 Botanic Garden, French Guiana, «ALCHEMY»

2011 Saint-Sulpice Place, Paris, «ALCHEMY»

2011 OMA Orangery of the Senate, Luxembourg Garden «collective exhibition», Fondation Clément, Paris

2012 Global Caribbean, Miami

2012 Impressions en Espaces Improbables, Cayenne

2012 Photographic Encounters Guiana, Cayenne

2013 Global Caribbean Fondation Clément, Martinique

2013 Photaumnales Beauvais France at the invitation of Michel Semeniako

2013/2014 International Biennial of Contemporary Art, Martinique

2015 Regional Exhibit, Black Dolls, Cayenne

## ARTIST RESIDENCIES

2010 January - Point Éphémère, Paris, France

2012 January-March, Fine Arts School, Dijon, France

2013 Saint-Laurent du Maroni, French Guiana

# THE A.G.E IN A FEW WORDS AND FIGURES

***Contrary to what the name of the association might suggest, (Association Guyanaise d'Édition, A.G.E.) French Guianese Association of Edition, its goals and activities go beyond fostering the edition of literary works.***

In fact, it is an association for popular education, in specific areas of literature and art. Its slogan is «Educate, popularize». The A.G.E. was created in 1995, and as soon as 1996 and 1997, published various works (theater, poetry) in collaboration with les Editions Ibis Rouge. They both work together on the implementation of and the participation in literary events in the Caribbean.

In 2005, the association was restructured. In the meantime, its orientations broadened. From then, the A.G.E gets involve in a more dynamic scope of work. It organizes:

- literary events: poetry and musical nights like FalaMizik or like the Black African spirituality

conference that made an impression in the cultural year 2015.

- cultural exhibitions crossing different artistic approaches. It organized, with the photographer Mirtho Linguet, the **Alchemy** Project which was selected for an exhibition in Paris in the framework of the Year of Overseas territories in 2012.

- educational and pedagogical programs with multiple collaborators. It establishes links with schools from the West of French Guiana and from the Cayenne «Island» since four years, in order to raise the interest of youth in literature generally speaking, and for French Guianese writers particularly. This initiative consisted in lending books to the school libraries, creating theatre workshops in various schools through preparations and plays of dramatic works, and an academic project named **Sinaldo**. The latter was created with a hundred children of two high schools and one middle school. It was a representation of an historical and theatre fresco played in Cayenne, in different cities of French Guiana and in our neighboring country Suriname.

- the edition of books, that speeded up in the last five years. The A.G.E publishes now half a dozen works a year, coordinating the republication of great French Guianese authors' works.

# MEDIA / REFERENCES

uprising art  
contemporary  
caribbean art

Extract : «Exclusive, interview of Mirtho Linguet, French Guianese artist, International Pavilion » by Clelia Coussonnet

**Uprising Art Web** Magazine >>  
<http://www.uprising-art.com/portfolio/mirto-guyane-francaise/>

...

## **Your work refers to your universe and your language?**

Yes, I try to create my own language and incorporate my elements, my stories, references of my reality, my daily life. This does not prevent me from incorporating things from elsewhere (exotic), nothing forbids me to do it, and it would be naive to deny the changing world, beyond its territorial vision, because we are part of it too, with varying degrees of «success», if that word means anything, because at the end of the day it is primarily a question of existence

## **You are participating in the Biennial in the International Pavilion. You are exhibiting the series Black Dolls and Flora.**

The commissioner of the International Pavilion, M. Tumelo Mosaka, heard about this work, and included it in the Biennial. Given the theme (About the Resonance of the Literary Scream in Visuals Arts), the series Black Dolls and Flora suited well to what the Commissioner wanted. I only wanted to exhibit Black Dolls and Flora which is still a series in progress. It is important for me to show them to the public because many people stayed focused on «Alchemy» which laid the outline of my future productions in terms of reflection.

## **Could you tell us more about the influence of Léon Gontran Damas on your plastic investigations in this series? And the influence of literature**

## **in general, especially «le Réel Merveilleux»?**

Leon Gontran Damas has developed a quite unique literature. And I understand some of his views. Indeed, we still have today, and throughout reality proof that we are still under the cultural hegemony. We remain constrained within an ideological framework that makes us subjects, as I said earlier. We are considered children in this system that is primarily ideological.

The Black Dolls series was inspired by Damas' poem Limbé in which he talks about the issue of representation, and refers in particular to the position of artists today who - because they come from other regions - feel obliged to silence their work and references because they often fear that their works would be deemed irrelevant. Who should define the subject for the artist? Who has to define his approach to art? Apparently some are better placed than others to respond. And on what criteria? Here again, there is a kind of hoax.

Our works globally seem to lack a certain bias that would assert what we are, more over there is no more «significant» artwork in the Caribbean. We shouldn't fall in the «doudouism » because we have to produce strong work, it is almost vital and this without any complacency, to address the critical dimension, unveil what must be, and stop lying to one another.

# AFRIKADAA

« Mirtho Linguet, Capture the visible to make it invisible » de Gladys Okatakyie

Afrikadaa, Magazine

## PORTFOLIO

# MIRTHO LINGUET

## CAPTURE THE INVISIBLE TO MAKE IT VISIBLE

Par Gladys Okatakyie  
Photos : © Photo Mirto - mirto.fr

The visibility theme couldn't be addressed without considering the artworks of Mirtho Linguet- aka Mirto. Mirto was born in French Guiana in 1968 and still lives there. The exercise of his art and its medium led him to think thoroughly on human nature and its environment.

In 1992, Mirto gives up university to embrace a photography career "to preserve the trace of amazement of this medium" Therefore, he leaves French Guiana for France, after obtaining a scholarship. He spends 3 years in the Photography School, MI21, in Montreuil and heads to Zurich in 1998. He works several years in illustration photography for magazines and ad agencies. Mirto is motivated by the lens magic and its capacity to reproduce. His work is rewarded by the 1st prize of the International Photography Festival in Arles

in 1996 and a participation in the International Photography and Fashion meetings in Hyeres the next year.

*Talking about visibility with the artist raises a question on what he considers a hot topic, "What makes us visible and how to become visible?"*

«However, he aspires to a more personal vision in his practice of photography. A will to leave a stronger mark in his work, to address issues that touch him. as an artist but also as a human being with a realistic perception of his environment, without justifying his artistic choices. He adopts then a new approach.

In 2009, his work takes a different course, leading to his project "Alchemy" in which he exhibits a series of overwhelming photos that deeply touch the feelings and the eyes. « Attention to detail, refusal to call on manipulation, sincerity and asperities, direct approach», this is how Mirto defines his Alchemy. His background in advertising is visible through his project which he sees as a "photographical anthem" and also as a critique of the advertising image, using the same format as in the industry. This significant project was exhibited in many occasions : such as in the Saint-Sulpice Place during the Festival des Outremer ( Overseas Territories Festival) in 2011 and at the Félix Eboué Airport in French Guiana during the Rencontres Photographiques (Photographical Encounters) in 2012.

Since Alchemy, the French Guianese artist makes it a point to confront us to the singularity of its models, to confront us to what we are not used to look at. By convenience, by comfort. Does he give us a choice? Certainly not as we can see in other series like Black Dolls and Flora in 2012, works of his that are meaningful example.

Mirto is looking for the beauty of the soul; the human side is the most important. With his story, his failures, his desires « Reality without tricks and artifacts». Finally, he makes visible what is invisible at first sight and he does it wonderfully because it is impossible not to see this woman in a wheelchair, the voluptuous curves of another, and those different women and men's eyes full of stories.

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When we ask Mirto where he takes his current inspiration from, the answer is both simple and obvious; his "Reality" is his mean to look for an answer to the different questions he faces, with relation to him, to his environment. Photography is a help in his quest, undoubtedly.

Talking about visibility with the artist raise a hot question to him «What makes us visible and, how to be visible? ». The photographer addresses the question of artistic contents that can be dictated by others, meaning "stepping aside to exist on the eye of others" An alarming observation which he illustrates by the exoticism that we expect from African and Afro-descendent artists.

The artist living now in French Guiana, a region lacking recognition in the areas of photography, does not escape the way others look at him, which he considers sometimes biased and condescending. However, his choice is made. He assumes his human story.

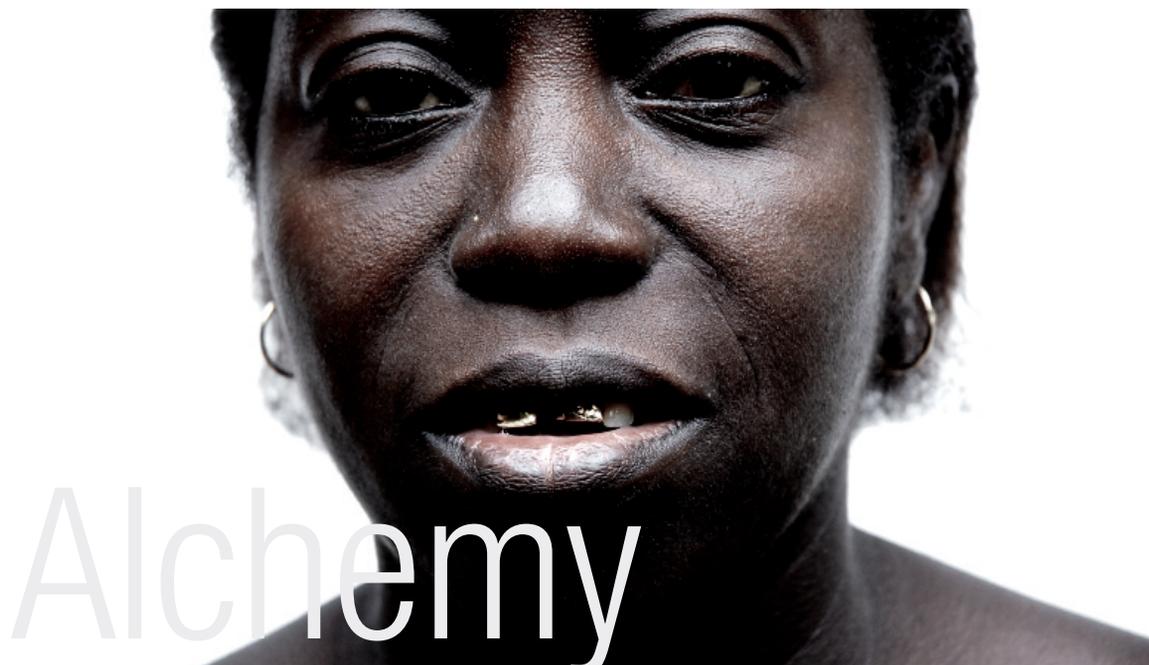
Mirto continues to produce; he is currently working on a new project which links the question of stereotypes to the body. It's a project that will be in the continuation of the Alchemy project and Mirto was approached to participate in the Global Caribbean in Miami who takes place in December 2012.

# Le Bon Air

Le Bon Air,  
Magazine

## Exhibit

In the check-in hall of the Félix Eboué Airport, Mirtho Linguet, photograph, recently exhibited *Alchemy*. Le Bon Air looked into the artist motivations...

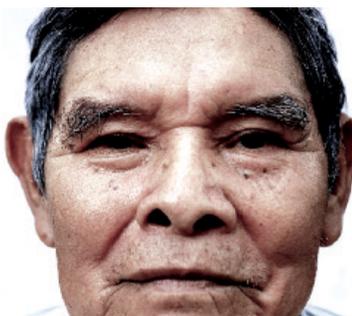


## by Mirtho Linguet

**L**and of contrasts, French Guiana consists of numerous villages situated at the edge of rivers or in the forest whose inhabitants, reserved but welcoming, keep on preserving and perpetuating their ancient customs while adapting to the evolutions of today's world. ... That is no easy task. **With their specificities which ranges in just as many distinct faces**, Mirtho Linguet, through his *Alchemy* exhibition, **aims at highlighting the common thread of rupture, tension, absurd and complexity**. *I am interested in the dramatic side of what some call multiple identity, a word which to me still remains incomprehensible, even conducive to confusion, and in everyone's relationships with their social, historical and/or cultural environment that is constantly changing*, explains the artist. *I want to show the complexity of the individual who lives in two or more worlds and attempts to adapt to their paradoxes*.

Thus, the artistic intention is clear: transport the beholder to an immediate inner self, his own reality that he or she seems to

forget sometimes. Then, through the selected form, **the images arouse new astonishments, calling to mind through their relation to humanity, to dissonance, to the idea of chaos and the unexpected**. *I imperatively keep the coarse, sincere, authentic aspect of my models in a resolutely frontal and direct approach, supported by an asserted aestheticism*, reveals Mirtho who therefore draws a parallel between his work and contemporary questionings on the idea of identity and territory. How do we claim it and how do we segment it? How do we modify it and how do we keep on writing our history according to what seems to separate us more than unite us?



Mirtho Linguet was born in October 1968 in Cayenne. He started studying in MI21 Photography School in Montreuil before settling in Zurich to work for the most famous fashion magazines like Edelweiss, Boléro, Vogue, FHM, Cosmopolitan. In 1996, he won the first prize of the JIP in Arles. In 2011, he organized an exhibition in the National Advanced Arts School of Dijon. He lives and works in French Guiana where he creates photo series in which bodies and postures are raw, with asperities and coarseness.

**For the information and photos included in this page, we would like to thank:**

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