

Thomas Erben Gallery

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Review

Oladele Bamgboye, The Unmasking, Part II

@ Thomas Erben Gallery



Oladele Bamgboye, ...Arise I ..., 1991/97.
Courtesy Thomas Erben Gallery.

These diverse projects by Oladele Bamgboye raise the problematical relationship between the personal and the institutional. The artist's earlier photographs, *Arise I* and *II*, 1989, give a striking visual setting for his recent computer project *The Unmasking, Part II*. *Arise* depicts Bamgboye's nude body engulfed by a corn patterned sheet from the artist's native country, Nigeria. Seen from behind, he leaps into the work in *Arise I*; in *Arise II* his leg has been fragmented with the help of photographic manipulation. Based on the Phoenix motif, the photographs are performative. The intense presence of the artist's body and the tactility of the photographs themselves - over lifesize and hanging from the wall - forces the viewer to deal with the corporeal self and gives the message of personal regeneration.

As a Nigerian-born artist working in London, Bamgboye's rebirth is into that place between cultures. In *The Unmasking* Bamgboye expands his theme on various levels emphasizing the key role of the hybrid. For one component of the project, the artist went to the San Antonio Museum and scanned artifacts, which are not exhibited because they defy the standard art historical categorization. Within the gallery, the viewer can interact with the objects through the computer, manipulating them in their virtual existence. Bamgboye's self-portraits deal with personal hybridity through the artist's own body and the surface of the medium, both of which act as a screen; the digital images too offer themselves as a screen in the literal sense for the breakdown of the normative role of institutional purification of the hybrid object.

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