

Thomas Erben Gallery

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Oladélé Bamgboyé, "The Unmasking, Part II and earlier photoworks"

Thomas Erben Gallery,
through June 10
(see Chelsea).

Londoner Oladélé Bamgboyé made a splash on the international scene in 1997 at Documenta X with the dramatic video installation *Homeward Bound*, which focused on the artist's relationship with his native Nigeria. His first solo show in the U.S., "The Unmasking, Part II and earlier photoworks," is similarly ambitious but offers a less impressive blend of new media works.

With *The Unmasking, Part II*, Bamgboyé bites off more than he can chew, especially with regard to the impact of new media on museums. The

Oladélé Bamgboyé, *Arise I*, 1991-97.



installation features three computer monitors, each examining such aspects of this phenomenon as digital archiving, Web-based programming and other Net-related exhibition strategies. One screen, for instance, displays the physical relocation of the British Museum's collection of Egyptian art from one gallery to another, along with images of stored Yoruba objects from Calgary's Glenbow Museum; we also see Bamgboyé himself placing antique objects from the archives of the San Antonio Museum into a high-tech, 3-D scanner (an accompanying text, written by the artist, recalls '80s-style commodity critique theories). Nearby, an iMac clone gives audiences the chance to play with images of the antiques he's scanned, while on the floor, two light-boxes feature more of the same imagery. The third computer controls a scanner—so you can bring in your own stuff and scan it, though just why you would is anyone's guess.

The institutional framework of the museum has already been dissected by such artists as Fred Wilson, Mark Dion and Renée Green; Bamgboyé's attempt to re-examine this issue from the perspective of the computer age adds little to their efforts.

Seemingly unrelated, but far more compelling, are the large-scale black-and-white photographs, *Arise I* and 2. These nude self-portraits, set against backdrops of African textiles, seem to refer to the outstanding portraiture of Seydou Keita—proving that Bamgboyé's work is at its strongest when he opts for traditional over cutting-edge.—Karen E. Jones

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