

**PRESS RELEASE**

**ART for The World** presents a dual exhibition of the artist **Georges Adéagbo** from Benin, “Geneva, Switzerland of yesterday and Geneva, Switzerland of today”

**The exhibition will take place in two different locations:**

**Maison Tavel**

Rue du Puits-Saint-Pierre 6

1204 Geneva

**from May 3 to July 8 2018**

**The Palace of Nations, UNOG**

Avenue de la Paix 8-14

1211 Geneva

**from May 3 to May 18**

&

**Opening May 3**

**12p.m** **Palace of Nations** (espace between buildings A and C, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, door 6) **press visit and opening ceremony**

**Please register your participation at <https://reg.unog.ch/event/22681/>**

**6p.m** **Maison Tavel opening ceremony**

**Press Information:**

**UNOG** Information service, t.: +41 22 917 43 59

**MAH** [www.mah-geneve.ch](http://www.mah-geneve.ch)

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The Art and History Museum, the United Nations Office at Geneva and ART for The World presents a dual exhibition of the artist Georges Adéagbo from Benin conceived in two parts for the Palace of Nations and the Maison Tavel. The first African artist to receive the Jury’s Grand Prize at the Venice Biennale in 1999, his work reveals the affinities and similarities, sometimes unsuspected, that can exist between different cultures. In these two never before seen installations, the artist highlights both the permanent collection of the oldest residence in Geneva, as well as the UN archives stored in the Library of the Palace of Nations.

Project conceived, organized and realized by ART for The World - NGO associated with the UNDPPI, Department of Public Information of the UN. In collaboration with the Museum of Art and History and the Library of United Nations in Geneva as well as the South-North Kulturforum, Hamburg - Cotonou.



AVEC LE SOUTIEN  
DE LA  
VILLE DE GENÈVE



FMAC

Special thanks to UN Director-General Michael Møller, Mr. Administrative Advisor Sami Kanaan and Air France Benin.

**A dual exhibition of the artist Georges Adéagbo from Benin,  
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**“Art is in nature! It is the art that makes  
the artist. It is not the artist who makes  
the art” – Georges Adéagbo**



*“Adéagbo's approach, creates a meaningful dialogue with works of art from various horizons, to weave a memory between African and Western cultures.” Adelina von Fürstenberg, Project Director*

Born in 1942 in Benin (then Dahomey), Georges Adéagbo currently works between Cotonou and Hamburg. The first African artist to receive the Jury's Grand Prize at the Venice Biennale in 1999, he has participated in several prestigious international exhibitions such as the DOCUMENTA 11 in Kassel in 2002, the Paris Triennale, and the Palais de Tokyo in 2012. He was the artist of honor at the 2015 edition of ArtBasel. His works are now in famous collections such as the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Museum Ludwig in Cologne and the Toyota Municipal Museum of Art in Tokyo. Adéagbo has been linked with Geneva since 1995 when he participated in the exhibition Dialogues de Paix, an event organized by Adelina von Fürstenberg as part of the 50th anniversary of the UN.

*"Like a contemporary archaeological site, Adéagbo's achievements trace the destiny and evolution of humanity.” Adon Peres, Exhibition Curator*

The installations created by Adéagbo, are always constituted by the assembly of a large number of objects - found objects, sculptures, paintings, clippings of newspapers, books, etc.- collected both in his country of origin and in those visited by the artist. These different objects and documents, associated with his personal writings, are arranged in a precise system that generates particular relations between them. Arranged both on the floor and on the walls, as in a kind of market, they are there not to be purchased of course, but rather to create a philosophical dialogue between the different cultures to which they belong. They take on a symbolic value and evoke essential notions such as those of exchange and coexistence.

*“The artistic research of Georges Adéagbo is characterized by the desire to reveal affinities and similar aspirations, sometimes unsuspected, that can exist between different cultures.”  
Stephan Köhler, Kulturforum South-North, Hamburg - Cotonou*

The possibility for the artist to intervene in the spaces of the Maison Tavel's permanent collection – an exceptional historical place of importance on a regional and national scale that aims to enhance and preserve memory – fits perfectly into his approach and allows the creation of an exchange between his artistic practice and the collection of the museum. Within the framework of this new installation that Adéagbo designed for Maison Tavel in Geneva, beyond provoking dialogue between different cultures, this approach also draws attention to the works of the collection. As Stephan Köhler points out, following the artist's work since 1999, Adéagbo's approach seeks to *“raise dialogue between the objects introduced and those already existing and not to create a fracture”*. His research is characterized by the desire to reveal affinities and similar aspirations, sometimes unsuspected, that can exist between different cultures.

*“Georges Adéagbo's meeting with the Maison Tavel takes a fresh look at this heritage structure; as an observer, he let himself be guided by the place for the creation of his artistic narration, the*

*most enriching intercultural dialogues for our city." Alexandre Fiette, Chief Curator at Maison Tavel*

Cultural activities organized within the United Nations include exhibitions, concerts, performances, film screenings, cultural lectures, and a collection of works of art through numerous donations. This program is a celebration of the cultural diversity present in the United Nations and offers a forum for exchange and the sharing of traditions and cultures. These exchanges are essential for building peace, tolerance and prosperity among peoples. For this dual exhibition in two key locations of the City of Geneva, Georges Adéagbo started from the principle of a "source," the history of Geneva, represented by the permanent collection of Maison Tavel, and a continuation, embodied by the UN's commitment in various fields concerning the world.

*"In addition to the cultural dialogue West-Africa, usual in the approach of Georges Adéagbo, his intervention at the Palais de Nations helps reflect on the communicative potential of art in international relations. The relevance of the event is reinforced by the fact that this year 2018 celebrates the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."*

Francesco Pisano, Director of the United Nations Library and President of the United Nations Cultural Activities in Geneva

## **Publication**

This dual exhibition is accompanied by a book containing photographic documentation of the artist's work as well as texts and interviews written by specialists in various fields. The book highlights the subtle aspects of the cultural dialogue that the artist establishes between his own culture and that of local and international Geneva.

## **Timetable**

### **Palais des Nations**

9a.m - 5.30p.m

Inscription au préalable sur le site: <http://reg.unog.ch/e/georgesadeagbo>

### **Maison Tavel**

11a.m - 6p.m

Monday closed

## Georges Adéagbo

### Solo Shows (selection):

**2018** « Jeanne et Jeanne (the expressionnists with the impressionnists, and the history of Jeanne) ... ! », Museum of Fine Art Rouen; « The country, their country, my country, the history of my country ... », The André Malraux Center, Rouen, « What am I born for or made for in life (the meeting of the second self) ... », l'ESADHaR, Rouen;

**2017** *Georges Adéagbo - Finkenwerder Kunstpreis 2017*, Kunsthaus Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany;

**2016** « Knowing oneself, does one know who the other is? Africa in Jerusalem », Focus Gallery, The Israel Museum, Jérusalem, Israël;

**2014** « The Birth of Stockholm », Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden;

**2008** « The meeting...!, Venice-Florence », Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, Italy;

**2007** « The meeting...!, Venice-Florence », Fondazione Querini Stampalia-Venise, Italy;

**2004** « The explorer and the explorers at the front of the history of exploration... !-The theatre of the world.. ! », Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany;

**2000** « The meeting of Africa and of Japan », Toyota Municipal Museum of Art, Toyota, Japon.

### Group shows (selection):

**2017** *AFRICA. Telling a world*, Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, Milan, Italy, under the commission of Adelina von Fürstenberg;

**2016** *Why not Ask Again?*, 11th Shanghai Biennale, China ; *An Age Of Our Own Making*, Images Biennial, Holbaek, Denmark;

**2015** *Global Imagination*, Lakenhal Museum, Leiden, Netherlands;

**2014** *Secret Box*, Dakar Biennale, Off event curated by Martine Boucher, Dakar, Senegal;

**2012** Triennale of Paris, Palais de Tokyo, France, under the commission of Okwui Enwezor; Biennale Regard Benin, Porto Novo et Togbin Plage, Cotonou, Benin;

**2007** Creating a world making collections – an hommage to Christoph Weickmann in « Weickmann's Wunderkammer », Ulmer Museum, Ulm, Germany;

**2005** The Belgian Colonisation in Sub-Saharan Africa. Modified version for Belgian Visionary, Bozar, Brussels, under the commission of Harald Szeemann;

**2002** The explorer and the explorers at the front of the history of exploration... !-The theatre of the world.. ! », DOCUMENTA 11, Kassel, Germany;

**2000** *The Resurrection of Edith Piaf* in « Here. The World in the Head », Museum of Modern Art of the city of Paris, France

### Press Reviews (selection)

Online Article

[http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2015/06/18/le-beninois-georges-adeagbo-a-l-honneur-a-la-foire-d-art-contemporain-debale\\_4657044\\_3212.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2015/06/18/le-beninois-georges-adeagbo-a-l-honneur-a-la-foire-d-art-contemporain-debale_4657044_3212.html)

#### Le Béninois Georges Adéagbo à l'honneur à la foire d'art contemporain de Bâle

Par Roxana Azimi

Le Béninois fidèle à l'art conceptuel expose en solo dans la plus grande foire d'art contemporain.

Georges Adéagbo a beau jouer d'un « solo show » – une exposition personnelle – à la Foire de Bâle, Mecque de l'art contemporain qui se tient jusqu'au 21 juin, il ne semble guère impressionné. Sans doute parce que ce sexagénaire béninois, qui expose simultanément au Moderna Museet de Stockholm, n'a plus rien à prouver. Il ne se voit d'ailleurs pas en artiste mais en arbitre qui « doit départager qui a tort, qui a raison ». A l'écouter, d'autres qualificatifs viennent à l'esprit : conteur, anthropologue, archiviste...

Rien ne prédisposait ce natif de Cotonou à se retrouver un jour à la Foire de Bâle. A 14 ans, Adéagbo est impatient. Il se rêve en entrepreneur indépendant. Il fera finalement des études de droit en Côte d'Ivoire avant de migrer en 1967 en France. Quand son père décède deux ans plus tard, il est stagiaire chez Péchiney. On le presse de rentrer. C'est à lui, l'aîné de onze enfants, qu'incombe la tâche de gérer la famille. Il n'en a guère envie et ajourne son retour.

« Tu devras souffrir d'abord »

C'est alors qu'apparaissent de curieux symptômes : cauchemars répétés, sensations d'étranglement, irascibilité. « Ma famille a eu recours à la magie et à la sorcellerie pour me faire revenir », affirme-t-il. De guerre lasse, il retourne au bercaïl en 1971. Il ne pensait rester qu'un mois, le temps de mettre de l'ordre dans les affaires paternelles. Mais sa famille lui confisque son passeport. Le voilà crucifié sur place. « Mon père m'avait prévenu quand j'étais petit : tu auras une belle vie, mais tu devras souffrir d'abord ». Et quelle souffrance : durant vingt ans, il essuiera les brimades et quolibets de son entourage. Muré dans son monde intérieur, il se met à collecter des objets abandonnés dans les rues. Parallèlement il noircit des carnets entiers d'écrits philosophiques. Son entourage le prend pour un fou, le fait interner et vide régulièrement sa chambre des reliques accumulées. Adéagbo s'enfonce dans une solitude que viendra rompre en 1993 Jean-Michel Rousset, alors collaborateur du curateur français André Magnin.

L'année suivante, il expose à la Saline royale d'Arc-et-Sénans. En 1999, c'est la consécration : il expose à la Biennale de Venise et rencontre le curateur Stephan Köhler. Trois ans plus tard il participe à la Documenta de Cassel orchestrée par Okwui Enwezor.

Sa méthode n'a guère changé, même si la présentation est aujourd'hui plus soignée, conforme aux codes de l'art conceptuel. Adéagbo reste un glaneur, qui se saisit des éléments clés des sociétés qu'il croise pour construire « un libre langage ».

### Glissements et courts-circuits

Cette collecte est agencée de manière aussi subjective que précise. Rien n'est laissé au hasard dans ses combinaisons à multiples fonds mêlant objets trouvés, coupures de journaux, livres et écrits personnels.

Construites en rhizome, ses installations tressent d'étonnantes analogies, creusent un dialogue souterrain entre sa culture africaine et celles des pays où il est invité à exposer. Observateur implacable de la marche du monde, Adéagbo pointe les constantes de l'Histoire à coup de glissements et courts-circuits.

L'oeuvre « Les artistes et l'écriture !... », présentée par la galerie Wien Lukatsch à la Foire de Bâle, tisse ainsi des parallèles entre la guerre du Biafra, la Saint-Barthélemy et la Shoah. Critique envers le sentiment de supériorité des Européens, Adéagbo l'est tout autant à l'égard de ses compatriotes.

« Dans mon pays les gens passent leur temps à attendre. Ils ne prennent pas l'initiative. Ils pensent à l'argent qui viendrait d'ailleurs,

*Online Article*

<http://www.contemporaryand.com/magazines/georges-adeagbo-receives-the-2017-finkenwerder-art-prize/>

### Finkenwerder Art Prize 2017 - Georges Adéagbo has been awarded this year's Finkenwerder Art Prize

On the occasion of the Finkenwerder Art Prize, the Kunsthaus Hamburg will present a solo exhibition from 5 September to 3 October 2017

Since 1999, the award, which is issued by the Kulturkreis Finkenwerder and comes with a prize donated by the company Airbus Operations, has gone out to artists who have made an outstanding artistic contribution to contemporary art in Germany.

Recent prize winners include the artists Almut Heise, George Rickey, Candida Höfer, Neo Rauch, Daniel Richter, Thorsten Brinkmann, Ulla von Brandenburg, and Christian Jankowski. With Georges Adéagbo (born 1942, lives in Cotonou, Benin, and Hamburg, Germany), the jury of five experts appointed by the Kulturkreis's board of trustees is honouring an artist who is able to overcome cultural differences in a unique way and who manages to make the complexity of cultural identity comprehensible through his art.

Georges Adéagbo's often site-specific, room-filling assemblages can be described as associative art historical puzzles. The individual fragments of his often large, multi-media collages consist of written documents, photographs, books, paintings, and objects, which Adéagbo collects on his travels, at flea markets, in his everyday surroundings, or in antiquarian bookshops. He organizes these items according to themes before assembling them into discursive but subjective narratives. His installations portray a broad range of different personalities, like Edith Piaf, Abraham Lincoln, or famous European philosophers. Or he uses abstract concepts such as foreignness, globalization, and colonialism as the starting point for his works.

In these arrangements, he juxtaposes the culture – along with its history and reception – of his West African home country of Benin with the European history of art and culture and a reflective approach to his own artistic practice. Academic discourses and everyday culture, the mainstream and minorities – all meet at eye level in his works. Through the way the artist arranges his disparate references and artefacts and comments on them in his own texts, narratives emerge that run counter to a one-sided reading of history.

In the last 25 years, he has not only made an essential contribution to the engagement with Europe's postcolonial legacy; he has also challenged the way we see "African" art in the Western art context. By reversing the role of the colonial "explorer", Adéagbo deconstructs the mutually determining clichés and projections of the Other.

Georges Adéagbo, who did not receive a classic art education, was noticed fairly late by the international art world. Although he did not see himself as an artist, he independently put his ideas into practice every day in Cotonou, using found objects, images, and texts. Since the mid-1990s, he has become a regular fixture in prominent exhibitions, and he became the first African artist to receive an award for his participation in the 48th Venice Biennale in 1999. He took part in the documenta 11 in 2002 with a site-specific installation. He has also had solo exhibitions at the Museum Ludwig in Cologne (2004), the MAK in Vienna (2009), the MUSAC

Leon (2011), and the Moderna Museet in Stockholm (2014). He is now one of the most famous West African artists and is internationally renowned. His most recent project in Hamburg was the public art installation in 2015 called Inverted Space, which he created in collaboration with the Kulturforum Süd-Nord (Stephan Köhler) and the project Stadtkuratorin.

On the occasion of the Finkenwerder Art Prize, the Kunsthaus Hamburg will present a solo exhibition from 5 September to 8 October 2017 that will offer extensive insight into the prize winner's work. This will be the first time his works will be shown an art institution in the City of Hamburg, which is his second home. Georges Adéagbo will also present a work on site for the award presentation on 31 August in the Airbus Factory in Finkenwerder, Hamburg.