



2024 ART SEASON

BEE BARN

PASCALE MARTHINE TAYOU

"OXYGEN"



Since the mid-1990s, Pascale Marthine Tayou has been practising art that is borderless, intuitive and linked to travel. He combines and assembles all sorts of objects and energies along his way. The artist takes an interest in all backgrounds and forges connections between geographic locations and cultures, as well as between humans and nature. He is self-taught and refuses to belong to any particular movement that would limit his artistic output. He does not confine himself to a particular medium. As a result, he uses drawings, sculptures, installations, photographs and videos to create his "artworks", which he prefers to refer to as "work". With incredible energy, the artist takes visitors on a journey, engaging them in a casual conversation and conjuring up new ways of seeing the world which make it more acceptable both for humans and for their environment.

Pascale Marthine Tayou weaves his Cameroonian roots and post-colonial African identity with his European life and travels across the globe, bringing together his memories and impressions, rituals and symbols, current and past events, and political and social views of globalisation. His work reflects his views on

overconsumption, pollution, the excessive use of natural resources, social and cultural divides, conflicts, migrations, etc. He expresses his opinion without being specific, but rather by using poetry, magic and spirituality instead. His quest is above all for harmony in his artistic work.

Wherever he goes, the artist collects objects, scraps and natural materials. He transforms all these materials and conjures up a scene with them in situ, sometimes creating monumental installations to explore and experiment with, much like living environments. Plastic bags and bottles are also used for their functional qualities, before even considering the fact that they pollute the environment.

In the Bee Barn, Pascale Marthine Tayou offers visitors the chance to discover *Oxygen* (2023). Much like mistletoe at New Year's celebrations, branches carrying rather unexpected fruit hang in the air. As usual, the artist invites us to find just the right distance so that the improbable beauty of this piece can be fully apprehended.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Pascale Marthine Tayou

CAMEROON



Pascale Marthine Tayou spent his childhood in Cameroon, his native country and a place that continues to influence his artistic work. He was born Jean Apollinaire but then changed his name and gave his first names a feminine ending to distance himself from the importance of artistic authorship and male/female ascriptions. With this decision, he wanted to portray that he does not believe in categorising a living being to its gender, geography or culture.

His artworks explore the porosity of the boundaries between personal and collective history. His work also raises issues that are particularly significant in Africa, such as building cultural and national identity, the relationships between the dominating and dominated, and exchanges between north and south. Since his series of artworks devoted to AIDS (1994), his participation in Documenta 11 (2002) in Kassel, Germany, and at

the Venice Biennale (2005 and 2009), Pascale Marthine Tayou has become known to a broad international public. His work is characterised by its variability, since he confines himself in his artistic work neither to one medium nor to a particular set of issues. While his themes may be varied, they all take the artist himself as their starting point.

Pascale Marthine Tayou is represented by the Galleria Continua, and has been teaching at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris since 2013.



SPOTLIGHT

Pascale Marthine Tayou's Material World

Pascale Marthine Tayou's survey exhibition at Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation foregrounds the artist's fluid and transcultural compositions.

☆ Save to My Ocula



Exhibition view: Pascale Marthine Tayou, *LOBI LOBI*, Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi (3 May–26 November 2023). Courtesy Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi.

By Stephanie Bailey – 18 July 2023, Abu Dhabi

Around the mid-1990s, Jean Apollinaire Tayou abandoned his law studies at the University of Yaoundé in Cameroon to become an artist and changed his name to Pascale Marthine Tayou.

Marthine is Tayou's mother's name with an added 'h', and Pascale is their father's name feminised. 'I wanted symbolically to underline that there is no comparison between the genders, that there is a form of fusion between people,' the artist said in 2022. 'Of course, there can be a difference, but it is important that there is the fusion of these differences.'¹



Pascale Marthine Tayou, *Coloris* (2022). Exhibition view: *LOBI LOBI*, Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi (3 May–26 November 2023). Courtesy Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi.

This notion of fusing differences encapsulates Tayou's practice. As a widely travelled cosmopolitan based between Europe and Africa, the artist creates fluid and transcultural compositions out of ancient and contemporary forms and references.

Tayou's current survey at the Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation foregrounds this fluidity with an exhibition title, *LOBI LOBI* (3 May–26 November 2023), referring to a Lingala word describing the day before yesterday, the day after tomorrow, and soon.



Pascale Marthine Tayou, *Welcome Wall* (2023). Exhibition view: *LOBI LOBI*, Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi (3 May–26 November 2023). Courtesy Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi.

Casting an open net between continental shores is *Welcome Wall* (2023), a series of LED welcome signs in African, Arabic, and South Asian languages installed on a large window at the institution's entrance.

Among these signs are titles of works inside the space, like *Plastic Bags* (2023). This monumental hanging chandelier of plastic bags indicates the materialist approach that Tayou takes by exploring informal economies as communal sites bridging local, regional, and global cultures.



Pascale Marthine Tayou, *Fantasia Urbaine* (2007) (still). Courtesy Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi.

The video installation *Fantasia Urbaine* (2007), screened on seven monitors on one wall, anchors this aspect of Tayou's practice. Each screen shows footage from a 2007 parade Tayou organised in Douala, Cameroon, during the Salon Urbain de Douala, a triennial festival of public and contemporary art.

Parade participants were street vendors known as *sauveteurs*, from the French for 'saviour', describing their ability to sell things people need, from clothes and medicinal products to repair services. As a protest against the Douala municipality's plan to remove *sauveteurs* from the neighbourhood of Akwa, Tayou's intervention honoured their role within society.



Left to right: Pascale Marthine Tayou, *Colorful Calabashes* (2014); *Home Sweet Home* (2011). Exhibition view: *LOBI LOBI*, Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi (3 May–26 November 2023). Courtesy Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi.

Tayou worked as a *sauveteur* for years after leaving university. His background feeds into a practice that turns salvaged objects into sculptures like *Colorful Calabashes* (2014), a wall installation of calabashes sourced from B Market in Bafoussam, Cameroon, strung into a cloud-like plume.

Similarly, *Coloris* (2022) comprises 53 cement-caked buckets used during the construction of Tayou's house in Cameroon, now covered with shades of glitter and lined against the wall like a sculptural spot painting.



Pascale Marthine Tayou, *Sauveteurs/Couple de supporters* (2012). Exhibition view: *LOBI LOBI*, Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi (3 May–26 November 2023). Courtesy Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi.

‘Ancient legacies are never far from Tayou's compositions, but they are always integrated into a tangible present.’

These crystal forms symbolise ancestral spirits in Tayou's sculptural universe. In *LOBI LOBI*, crystal masks hang from an olive tree in *Arbre de vie* (2015), while for *Mask* (2019–2022), ten faces line one wall, each adorned with objects like Mickey Mouse ears and wooden earrings shaped like Africa. Integrated among them are wooden visages from *Masque Bronze* (2019), similarly ornamented with household items such as a scaffolding of blue, green, and yellow hand brushes on one.



Exhibition view: Pascale Marthine Tayou, *LOBI LOBI*, Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi (3 May–26 November 2023). Courtesy Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi.

Ancient legacies are never far from Tayou's compositions, but they are always integrated into a tangible present. Take *Fresque Bantu* (2021), among the artist's towel 'paintings' that reference Bantu, a linguistic subgroup that historically migrated from West-Central Africa to the south and east of the continent.

The two-by-two metre panel is sectioned into eight parts, each defined by a differently coloured hand towel into which colour-blocked forms of figures and animals have been appliquéd.



Pascale Marthine Tayou, *BoboLand 1* (2013). Courtesy Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi.

While reaching into the past, *BoboLand 1* (2013) simultaneously casts visions of the future. The composition is part of a series showing childlike figures scratched into panels coated with red earth, which the artist associates with memories of their mother sweeping the yard. Rooted to a fictional story of a boy who dreams of going to the moon, these images, as Tayou describes in the wall label, are 'portraits of memories and of this sacred space that "carries" everything'.



Left to right: Pascale Marthine Tayou, *Colorful Calabashes* (2014); *Home Sweet Home* (2011). Exhibition view: *LOBI LOBI*, Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi (3 May–26 November 2023). Courtesy Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi.

That sacred space where all things converge is monumentalised in the shrine-like *Home Sweet Home* (2011), a forest of tree trunks on a hay mound base, topped by a plume of cables, birdcages, and microphones.

Small, carved and painted wooden *flâneur* figures are found among their entanglements. These wanderer figures, whose cosmopolitan styling evokes the suited, sartorial swagger of Congolese *sapeurs*, are among the many signals that Tayou integrates into their compositions to connect ideas of culture and adaptation across time and place.



Left to right: Pascale Marthine Tayou, *Fresque Bantu* (2021); *Bendskin Cotonou B* (2014). Exhibition view: *LOBI LOBI*, Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi (3 May–26 November 2023). Courtesy Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi.

Bendskin Cotonou B (2014), for example, is a bicycle holding a stack of cardboard boxes on its back and a small television. A video shows *benskinieurs* in rural Benin, informal motorbike couriers and taxi drivers in West Africa who navigate winding routes while carrying heavy loads, including passengers who bend their bodies to even the spread. Hence 'bendskin', which also refers to a Cameroonian form of dance.



Pascale Marthine Tayou, *Garden House* (2010). Exhibition view: *LOBI LOBI*, Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi (3 May–26 November 2023). Courtesy Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi.

Garden House (2010) creates another intersectional form with seven wood panels structuring an enclosed space. Each is printed with images of forests, wooden shacks, and dirt floors, and hosts found objects on their surfaces, including birdhouses, corrugated iron sheets, and white plastic garden chairs.

This deconstructed shanty town, based on those Tayou has observed in Benin, Cameroon, and Japan, is positioned under *The Falling House* (2014), two model houses hanging upside down from the ceiling made from photographs printed on wooden panels, with corrugated iron roofs. When shown in Tayou's 2015 *Serpentine Gallery* show in London, *Boomerang*, the artist called the installation an embodiment of the human race.



Pascale Marthine Tayou, 'Colonne Pascale' (2010–ongoing). Exhibition view: *LOBI LOBI*, Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi (3 May–26 November 2023). Courtesy Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi.

These embodiments extend to series like 'Colonne Pascale' (2010–ongoing), which stacks pots and vases from around the world, reminiscent of Constantin Brancusi's *Endless Column* (c. 1938). Five new columns commissioned for the Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation's outdoor fountain include two composed of clay pots from an artisanal pottery studio in the U.A.E. where craftsmen blend South Asian and Arab designs, and three created from steel pots painted with patterns characteristic to the Gulf.



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These columns speak to Tayou's resolute engagement with the world as a material space formed from the handiwork of all. Nowhere is this more clearly expressed than in the 'Cloth Paintings' series (2013), which Tayou has described as 'portraits of the crowd'.

Pieces of fabric drawn from found clothes are patchworked on wood to create undulating collages of colours—from black to green and orange to white—expressing a humanist perspective that evades the flattening universalism of colonial modernity.



Pascale Marthine Tayou, *White Spirit B* (2018). Exhibition view: *LOBI LOBI*, Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi (3 May–26 November 2023). Courtesy Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi.

Indeed, while Tayou's forms integrate histories of violence into their compositions, they also seek pathways through these embedded human stains. In *White Spirit B* (2018), white chalks on wood create a monochromatic surface referencing the artist's Cameroonian education under the French and British educational systems as vestiges of Africa's colonial past.

But while the work visually references whiteness as a power structure, these white chalks, as exhibition materials note, refer to childhood innocence, when the mind is not yet indoctrinated into believing myths of superiority.



Exhibition view: Pascale Marthine Tayou, *BOBO LAND*, Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi (3 May–26 November 2023). Courtesy Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi.

Tayou's chalk paintings form a characteristic trajectory in the artist's practice, with compositions like *Chalk Fresco E* (2014) arranging red, blue, and yellow chalks across a panel to create a 'painted' surface. In *LOBI LOBI*, these works form a link with *BOBO LAND* (3 May–26 November 2023), a companion show organised by the Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation for younger audiences in the same building.

BOBO LAND opens with an installation of giant painted wood chalks, *Colorful Thorns* (2020), which bear down like stalactites from the ceiling over a hand-tufted carpet printed with a chalk fresco. Arranged on the wall nearby are wooden *flâneurs* bordering a snaking pathway, around which a wall text points out that, while everyone comes from different times and places, 'we are all on the same voyage towards our dreams.'



Pascale Marthine Tayou, 'Kids Masquerade' series (2019). Courtesy Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi.

Two large collages from the 'Kids Spirit' series (2011) expand on these reveries. Over pages from student notebooks, Tayou has drawn an organic grid of children amid a flow of lines and ladders, while the photographic series 'Kids Masquerade' (2009) shows children wearing cartoon character masks, from Batman to Sailor Moon.

Calling back to the series after which this show is named, where Tayou inscribed the dreams of a boy on red earth, *BOBO LAND* reminds kids and adults alike that the imagination is limitless. 'Once one dream ends, another is born,' one wall text states. 'Round and round the path takes you, Around the circle of life.'



Exhibition view: Pascale Marthine Tayou, *BOBO LAND*, Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi (3 May–26 November 2023). Courtesy Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi.

Of course, Tayou has no illusions that life's spiral is forever harmonious, as suggested by *Tornado* (2023), which is installed in an external portico like a prologue and epilogue at once. Kite-like diamonds of corrugated metal sheets painted candy colours hang from the ceiling, open to the elements that surround them—like another portrait of a crowd. —[O]

1 Matteo Mammoli, '[Masks, colours, coffee – Pascale Marthine Tayou from Cameroon to the world](#)', *Lampoon Magazine*, 8 November 2022.

Main image: Exhibition view: Pascale Marthine Tayou, *LOBI LOBI*, Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi (3 May–26 November 2023). Courtesy Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi.



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