

In the Garden of Eden, by Ruth Belinga

Bitter roots

Fabiola Ecot Ayissi

Curator

Ruth Afane Belinga (Elobowa, 1976) is a Cameroonian multidisciplinary artist and art historian living between Foumban and Yaoundé. Recognized as a central figure of performance art in Cameroon, she also exhibits her work internationally. Belinga, who teaches visual arts at the University of Fine Arts, Foumban quickly associated her practice with a theoretical and academic approach to art. Since the 1990s, Belinga's work has explored the relationship between painting and sculpture. It was also during this time that she met the visual artist Goddy Leye, who introduced her to this art, and the Cameroonian performer Christian Etongo, whose work is strongly imbued with an ecological sensitivity. For Belinga, the forest, inhabited by its trees, its centuries-old essences, by ancient noises and sounds, becomes a cherished cosmogonic imaginary space and is celebrated as a matrix associated with woman, the biological carrier of humanity.

In this space something is disappearing before our eyes. The forest is ravaged by human hands along with the precious species that call it home. These animals are threatened with extinction while humans multiply. Paradoxically, the more man "progresses", the more he is annihilated. The human soul is diluted, the identity of the human being is deprived of its transcendence and ability to recognize the tree and the forest as sacred. By recognizing himself as a sacred being, a fortiori man can recognize his fellow human, the woman. To regain this awareness, our cluttered memories must free themselves in order to regain clarity. To look man's actions in the face and thus see what he becomes through collective and individual actions is to reject passivity and reinvigorate the spirit.

The double installation and performance presents a Garden of Eden, the originating place of the Christian religion, revisited. This place, where the original sin was ascribed to woman and condemned humanity, is preceded by violence and rape. The Garden of Eden thus becomes a tormented place where innocence never predominated. Where the original manipulation anticipates the original sin. Belinga moves through the installation, guided by her own pre-recorded voice, a soothing voice that conveys the feminine nature in its beauty and pain. This pain results from violence which itself dates back to "the dawn of time." Through gestures and a voice steeped in a paradoxical softness, the feminine refuses to submit and to capitulate. Despite its wounds, beauty continues to resist. Thus, Belinga presents a struggle that consists of affirming, rehabilitating, and celebrating a principle of life superior to that of destruction.