



ABOUT NAMSA LEUBA

Namsa Leuba (b. 1982) is a Swiss-Guinean photographer and art director. Leuba studied photography at ECAL, University of Art and Design in Lausanne, Switzerland, and obtained a Masters in Art Direction at ECAL. She lives and works in Bordeaux, France.

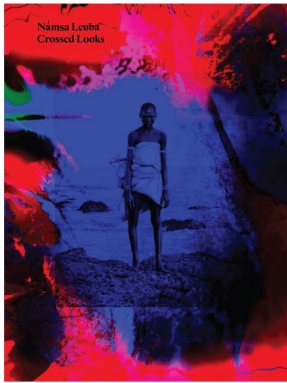
Leuba has participated in international exhibitions including *Making Africa: A Continent of Contemporary Design* at the Guggenheim Bilbao, Spain; *Africa Reframed* at Øksnehallen in Copenhagen, Denmark; Daegu Photo Biennale in Daegu, Korea; the Athens Photo Festival in Athens, Greece; *Photoquai* in Paris, France; LagosPhoto Festival in Lagos, Nigeria; and a performance in *Off Print* at the Tate Modern, London. She recently held a solo exhibition at the Hangar Art Center, Brussels. Leuba's work has been featured in group exhibitions *African State of Mind* at New Art Exchange, London; and *The New Black Vanguard* at Aperture in New York. In 2019 she was featured in the special project *Focus in the Eyes* at Art Basel's VIP Lounge.

Her work has been published in numerous magazines, including *The New Yorker*, *I-D*, *Numéro*, *KALEIDOSCOPE*, *Foam*, *Interview*, *Vice Magazine*, *New York Magazine*, *Libération*, *British Journal of Photography*, and *European Photography*.

PUBLICATION

The Halsey Institute has partnered with Damiani for the publication *Namsa Leuba: Crossed Looks*, a 180-page monograph featuring images of Leuba's works in the exhibition and essays by Joseph Gergel, Emmanuel Iduma, and Dr. Mary Trent and designed by Swiss design studio Maximage.

\$55
Learn more and order your copy at halsey.cofc.edu/about/publications



RELATED EVENTS
All events during this exhibition will occur in person in the Halsey Institute galleries, subject to change. Events are free and open to the public, unless noted.

MEMBER PREVIEW DAY
Thursday, August 26, 11:00 AM–7:00 PM
Free for all Halsey Institute Members
Email halseyRSVP@cofc.edu to reserve a time

WGS INTERSECTIONS: NAMSA LEUBA
Monday, October 11, 7:00 PM
A panel discussion with the College of Charleston Women's and Gender Studies Program

OPENING RECEPTION
Friday, August 27, 6:30–8:00 PM

HALSEY TALKS: PHOTOGRAPHY & COLONIALISM
Tuesday, November 9, 6:30 PM

ARTIST TALK WITH NAMSA LEUBA AND CURATOR JOSEPH GERGEL
Saturday, August 28, 2:00 PM

SIT A SPELL CONVERSATION SERIES
Wednesday, September 15, 12:00 PM

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CURATOR-LED TOUR FOR MEMBERS
Thursday, December 9, 7:00 PM
Free for all Halsey Institute Members

LOCATION
The Marion and Wayland H. Cato Jr. Center for the Arts
College of Charleston
161 Calhoun Street, Charleston, SC 29401
halsey.cofc.edu

PARKING
Available in the St. Philip St. and George St. garages

GALLERY HOURS
Open days and times are subject to change. Please check halsey.cofc.edu for the most up-to-date information.

Monday-Saturday, 11:00 AM–4:00 PM during exhibitions
Open until 7:00 PM on Thursdays
Free admission!

CONTACT
(843) 953-4422 or halsey@cofc.edu

BLOG
Learn more about the exhibition at halsey.cofc.edu/learn

MISSION: The Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art at the College of Charleston School of the Arts provides a multidisciplinary laboratory for the production, presentation, interpretation, and dissemination of ideas by innovative visual artists from around the world. As a non-collecting museum, we create meaningful interactions between adventurous artists and diverse communities within a context that emphasizes the historical, social, and cultural importance of the art of our time.

Namsa Leuba: Crossed Looks is organized by guest curator Joseph Gergel. *Namsa Leuba: Crossed Looks* is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia, and *Garden & Gun* magazine. This exhibition is also supported by Belinda and Richard Gergel, Diane and Garey De Angelis, South State Bank, Kathleen and Tom Wright, Carol Perkins and David Rawle, Cindy and Shon M. Barnett, Deena and Walter McRackan, and Marissa Sams.



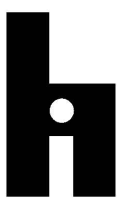
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COLLEGE of CHARLESTON
SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

NAMSA LEUBA CROSSED LOOKS

August 27 - December 11, 2021





Weke, created in the Republic of Benin, where she imagined narratives based on the Vodun (Voodoo) religion. In this series, her photographs turn towards the fantastical and ultimately abstraction—showing that ideas of Voodoo cannot be easily represented visually.

During an artist residency in Lagos, Nigeria, Namsa Leuba developed her series *NGL*, which focused on the bold style and swagger of Africa's most populous city. An acronym for "Next Generation Lagos," *NGL* explored the innovation and creativity of Nigeria's youth culture. Here, Leuba collaborated with local fashion designers and models in Lagos, offering a nuanced representation of the thriving metropolis. Leuba's endeavors in the world of fashion are represented here with works from *Cocktail*, *The African Queens*, and *Tonkôma*. In these, Leuba continues her critique of trite African tropes, for instance when she subverts the depiction of the "African queen" as a play on the stereotypes of African women.

Her most recent series *Illusions* was created in Tahiti, where the artist lived for more than two years. *Illusions* reassessed the paintings of Paul Gauguin and the fetishization of the Other in Western art. The subjects in Leuba's contemporary portraits act out the mythical role of the *vahine*, as women are referred to in Polynesian languages, but



Crossed Looks

by Joseph Gergel

Working across documentary, fashion, and performance, Namsa Leuba's images explore the fluid visual identity of the African diaspora. They pose fundamental questions about the medium of photography and its role in forming our understanding of the cultural Other.

With a dual heritage between Guinea and Switzerland, Namsa Leuba draws inspiration from her own experience growing up between two different cultures. Her work has run in two parallel directions over the course of her career, one informed by the tradition of religious ceremonies of her West African heritage and the other by contemporary fashion and youth culture. These two thematic threads overlap and amplify each other.

The result is a unique perspective that straddles reality and fantasy. Leuba re-stages and constructs narrative scenes in collaboration with her sitters, incorporating bold colors, striking patterns, and intricate clothing and props. She often uses models that she informally meets in the street, who become active collaborators in the portraits.

This exhibition features Leuba's five major bodies of work produced over the past ten years, in Guinea, Benin, Nigeria, South Africa, and Tahiti, alongside her parallel commercial and editorial work. In Guinea, she created the series *Ya Kala Ben*, a body of staged photographs that personify ritualistic statues popular in Guinean religious ceremonies. In *South Africa*, she worked within the Khoisan, Zulu, Lesotho, and Ndebele communities, creating a series of staged photographs that combine a variety of materials such as fur, lace, and fabrics. Her photographs were informed by the local practices and materials available in these rural villages while also inspired by her own imagination. Leuba evolved her long-term project even further in the series



through nonbinary definitions of gender conformity. After immersing herself in Tahitian communities and building relationships with these sitters, Leuba returns the pictorial plane to them as a site for subjecthood rather than objectification.

Leuba's images ultimately suggest that the only truth one might be able to hint at in photography is through its fictions. Her work in Africa pushes against what Nigerian curator Okwui Enwezor describes as the gaze of "Afro-pessimism," which he defined as the constant portrayal of a continent of poverty, conflict, and suffering. This gaze of "Afro-pessimism" was manifested in the photographic depiction of Africa during colonialism and continues today in the way that Africa is portrayed in the global mass media. In her role as a photographer, Leuba is keenly aware of the power of the photographic image and the cultural narratives that it can propagate.

Through her photographs Leuba searches for a visual sense of belonging, creating an alternative visual proposition that transcends fixed modes of representation. As Leuba explains, "I have always been characterized as the Other, whether I am too 'African' to be European or too 'European' to be African." Her work is about that tension, of creating a dialogue with cultures in which she has one foot in and one foot out. The title of this exhibition, *Crossed Looks*, references this diverse perspective.

Joseph Gergel is an independent curator based in Lagos, Nigeria and New York City.

IMAGE CREDITS:
this side, top left: *Untitled VII*, 2015. From the series *Tonkôma*; center: *Statuette Kafigeledio Prince*, 2011. From the series *Ya Kala Ben*; above: *Tealanie*, 2018-19. From the series *Illusions*; reverse side, top left: *Untitled I* [detail], 2014. From the series *Ndebele*, South Africa; cover panel: *Jessica* [detail], 2015. From the series *NGL*.

