

Media Release

Milan 22 April 2009

MOROSO presents: M'AFRIQUE

There is an image, an idea of Africa that lives deep in human imagination. Its form often transcends the power of the word and its profile lies under layers of conscious retrieval. It is alive within each one of us on a primordial level, inexplicable yet undeniable.

Maya Angelou

The reasons behind a project centred around Africa are explained to us by **Patrizia Moroso**, who devised the event and asked **Stephen Burks** to design the installation in Moroso's Milan showroom in Via Pontaccio: "multifaceted, modern Africa deserves to be known and sustained for the originality of the creative languages with which it enriches global culture. The African continent is extraordinarily rich in creativity, materials and ideas that are sources of inspiration and nourishment for us. When applied to design, they engender products which exude tradition and modernity, innovation and history, form and beauty. I think there is so much of Africa and in this event my intent was to showcase the creativity of a few of the great artists and personalities of contemporary African culture. Going beyond the stereotypes that present Africa as a tragic or, at best, exotic experience, we want to highlight some aspects of contemporary African culture, which is in effect comparable to global culture.

Looking at Africa through the eyes of contemporary art, photography, architecture and design is perhaps the most appropriate way of approaching this vast, powerful continent, so creatively rich and diverse that today it is still one of western modernity's greatest sources of inspiration".

The event presents a few examples of Africa's power and beauty in the work of some of its leading artists.

Fathi Hassan, who expresses symbolism in various forms through the written word: a tray is like an eternal vessel that holds and keeps the word. Nubian calligraphy is unusual in that it is composed of symbols, like the leaves of the desert or a nomad's baggage. Another unmissable installation features the scarab beetles of ancient Egypt which eat precious dust to become immortal.

Soly Cissé, on the other hand, expresses the contrasts of African culture in his work: modernity contrasts with conservatism, the amazing cultural diversities which made the continent artistically rich yet, at the same time, burdened it with a controversial and in some ways mysterious history. His sticky tape-covered chair is a mystic object which belongs to both the past and the present.

The exhibition rounds off with the beautiful photos of **Mandémory**, a self-taught photographer who rejects the concept of an ethnographic-realist characterisation of Africa and prefers suggestions, details and portraits in which colour and light intertwine and generate energy.

Then there is **David Adjaye**, one of the best-known, widely acclaimed architects on the world scene and also a keen photographer. For M'Afrique he presents his photographic documentation of five African cities (Dakar, Addis Abeba, Harare, Pretoria, Bamako), part of a bigger, highly successful exhibition held at Harvard in 2007. His photos are part of a study of new urban planning models and were

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taken in order to show the key characteristics of the urban – and, if possible, suburban – layout, without the ambition of providing an exhaustive photo study of each city.

David Adjaye was recently appointed by Moroso to design its new main office building in its time-honoured Udine headquarters.

Products made in Africa by local craftspeople:

Last year Moroso started using a hand-weaving technique employing the plastic threads traditionally used for making fish nets. This created the success of **Tord Boontje's** Shadowy collection, which we present today in its entirety: chairs, armchairs, loungers and a stool/table in light, light-hearted shapes.

The same technique is now used by **Bibi Seck and Ayse Birsal** who created a wide range of attractive, softly rounded products, such as Madame Dakar, a enormous armchair as enveloping as a hammock.

Then there's **Patricia Urquiola's** "bench" that sits on the sand like a tree trunk, accompanied by a smaller, single-seat twin and by a low table.

Stephen Burks's creations are equally beautiful: a chair, an armchair and a range of pouffes in various sizes.

New products inspired by Africa:

By **Philippe Bestenheider**, an armchair, Binta; a sculptural form with the solid, heavy look of the baobab rooted to the ground. Binta is upholstered in multicolour patchwork wax prints. Plus the Bogolan Pouffe, made of a very distinctive material – a tyre recycling by-product – printed with decorative motifs.

Patricia Urquiola designed Rift, a range of contract seating inspired by a rift valley. The seating is composed of various, superjacent layers which give the impression of division.

Classic products reinterpreted in an African version:

On this occasion, some of Moroso's iconic designs are upholstered in African fabrics: **Ron Arad's** Victoria & Albert and Do-lo-rez, **Patricia Urquiola's** Antibodi, Fjord, Bohemian and Lowland; and **Tokuji's** splendid Bouquet chairs.

Fabrics:

Another special aspect of African society is its **fabrics**, which are not simply textiles to buy and sell or to use for clothes. Their decorative motifs convey a kind of text which embodies the people's social and religious identity. There was no written word in ancient African society and communication was solely oral, therefore each sign conveyed a meaning.

The greatest number of this kind of textiles is designed and made in **Senegal**. Its strategic geographic position, between the desert, the savannah and the ocean, made the country one of Africa's main trading bases, transforming it into a rich commercial and cultural workshop. A cross-fertilised universe of styles in which Western-style clothing, most appreciated in urban areas, mixes with traditional ethnic fabrics and costumes.

The fabric African women choose for their typical costume, the *boubou*, is very important because its richness indicates the family's social status. Nowadays, the classic fabrics, called *pagne*, are usually made and printed on an industrial basis. The Dutch firm, **VLISSCO**, leads this particular market; in fact its vast collection of African prints was used for many of the Moroso collection designs.

Other visually stunning fabrics are those designed and made by the Senegalese textile artist **Aissa Dione**, a symbol of African women's successful creativity and managerial skills. She applies her pictorial talent to the creation of cotton and raffia textiles.

Lastly, the collection also uses a range of new **batik** fabrics made by local craftspeople and purchased directly in Africa.

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