



ART CITIES: BERLIN - AJARB BERNARD ATEGWA

Cameroon's largest city, Douala, has had many foreign influences in the past, more recently having experienced an influx of migrants from within the country, as well as from its neighbouring regions. Shaping Douala into the vibrant and colourful metropolis that it is today, its evolving landscape is a major source of inspiration for Ajarb Bernard Ategwa, whose paintings form a constellation within a larger narrative based on the chaos of his hometown.

By Efi Michalarou

Photo: Peres Projects Archive

Ajarb Bernard Ategwa in his solo exhibition "The New Dialogue" at Peres Projects in Berlin, continues to deal with hardship on the streets of Douala and presents large format paintings, that show a constellation within a larger narrative of his hometown, which speaks of the chaos Ategwa has known and experienced. His painting style is based on complex line drawings on canvas, which are executed free-hand. They imply a movement and momentum reflective of his rapidly transforming city. In this sea of change, fish are depicted swimming in the sky and women in open air hair salons are shown in front of skyscrapers which appear to sway in the wind like palm-trees. Equal parts representation and storytelling, the paintings lead us sequentially through a larger narrative which describes the frenetic bustle of Ategwa's adopted hometown, and provide us with a singular visual experience. Ajarb Bernard Ategwa captures the glimpses of the taxi stands, newsagents, roadside markets, and fleeting moments of calm. His vibrant color palate renders the city in a distinct new light. Ategwa's scenes emerge from the candid snapshots of everyday life. His color-ravaged palette and the bold graphics echo the vernacular advertising language of Douala.. Employing these narratives, Ategwa is part of a new generation of Cameroonian artists who are pushing the medium of painting forward by adding their own imagery to the lexicon of painting where it has not previously existed. In Europe and North America, contemporary African life is often subject to preconceptions and stereotypes. Ategwa's distinct style of modified figurative painting, based on Cameroonian pop culture, is focused on the day to day realities of a bustling African metropolis.

