The Rockefeller Foundation

Bellagio Center Creative Arts Fellowship

BERRY BICKLE
BERRY BICKLE belongs to the generation of African artists who emerged on the international art scene in the early 1990s. Those stirring years witnessed the development of theoretical discourses on post-colonialism, post-cold war, cross-cultural identities and globalization. That new geopolitical context generated the inclusion of a larger group of non-western artists in international art projects and offered a myriad of positions on the state of a changing world.

Exploring issues of race, psychological violence, power, territory, history, memory and exile, Bickle raises questions about submission versus control, tradition versus modernity, and the local versus the global. For the installation Sarungano, The weaver of the tale or the end of the story, she uses salt and ashes, two fundamental elements of Zimbabwean culture (the salt that preserves, associated with life; the ashes of the deceased, associated with death), to suggest that in a nation, the people, no matter their color or gender, all inherit the same history. In Writtenonskin images and data of the slave trade are projected onto a body, in part as a reference to body painting and scarification, but also as a way to register how the past and its traumas remain, in a sense, inscribed on the flesh forever, their memory conditioning social behavior. A restless city a restless me deals with migration, loneliness and makes us wonder if exile is a new chance or a grave. Booklostpages looks back to the era of Portuguese seafaring and reuses the imagery of colonial kitsch to construct an ambiguous narrative about modern African societies. During her stay at the Bellagio Creative Art Fellowship residency, Bickle decided to leave behind her all the concepts she was engaged in at home. Her temporary 3 months relocation to Lake Como gave her the opportunity to explore western history by using the collection of tapestries in the Bellagio center as well as a box of old slides and images of Leipzig as a starting point. If Suite Europa refers to the past of Eastern Europe and to the ideology of socialism, in a way it also echoes independence and revolution movements in Southern Africa. The series deconstructs a dissolved concept, examines the tools of nation building and highlights the failure of political systems and deep social changes. Beyond all, it reveals a sense of melancholy that questions the relationship one can have with History. Suite Europa weakens the unconstructiveness of the Iron Curtain (and of the Southern African Front Line) by delivering multiple layers of interpretations. A disconcerting feeling hangs over these falsely faithful images as the viewer weaves between nostalgia emphasized by the delicate esthetic of the images and bitterness towards an age that has gone but is impossible to forget and maybe to forgive.

By playing with subjectivity Berry Bickle turns set ideas upside down and appeals to our imagination and to our senses, like an invitation to meditation and communion. She touches on rituals to emphasize the meaning of principles identifying and cementing together the members of a community. She addresses their souls and spirits, transforming social codes into allegories of a shared alienation, as if this process was a way to create an armor that could carry memory and transcends history.

By N’Goné Fall
The Rockefeller Foundation launched the Bellagio Creative Arts Fellowship in 2008, offering an exciting opportunity for visual artists. This high-profile program, selected by a distinguished international panel, hosts visual artists at the Bellagio Center for extended residencies to develop projects inspired by or related to social or global issues.

The Bellagio Creative Arts Fellows program is a selective award that helps advance the work of some of the most innovative, global, contemporary visual artists and raises their visibility in new arts, policy, and academic circles. The Fellows receive a cash award, undertake a two-month residency at the Center, and are provided with a travel award. They also contribute to and benefit from interactions among a stimulating community of scholars, writers, policymakers, and other artists who share dinners and occasional presentations at the Center. The combination of an extended stay, a generous stipend, private work space, and a unique group of fellow residents makes a Creative Arts Fellowship at the Bellagio Center a remarkable, unparalleled opportunity in the global arts community.

http://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/bellagio-center