

Thierry Oussou
(Allada, 1988)





Thierry Oussou wins the Royal Award for Modern Painting

Amsterdam, 5 October 2023

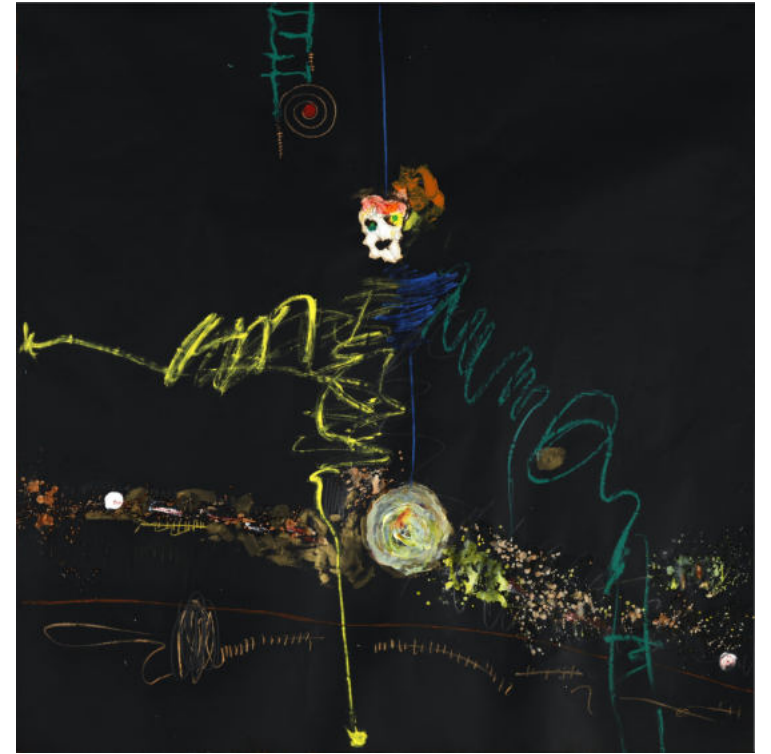
The Royal Award is annually presented at the Royal Palace in Amsterdam to encourage talented young painters active in the Netherlands.

In the series of works Oussou entered for the Royal Award, cotton plays a key role.

By incorporating meetings with people on cotton plantations into his paintings, he gives a face to major global themes like the fight against poverty and decolonisation. Oussou's approach can be seen as a plea to heal historical abuses and to start rebuilding bridges



Credits: Jeroen van der Meyde



Thierry Oussou
Workers - Untitled III-A (2023)
 Acrylic, ink, color pencil, pastel soft,
 graphite stick, pastel oil stick, collage

Oussou explains: 'Cotton has a long and complex history in my country. Three years ago, I myself acquired a large cotton plantation, where tens of people do seasonal work. Benin has countless farmers who produce cotton to support their families and communities. It is the number one export product. The white and brown cotton I use in my films and paintings has been cultivated in my own plantation, then processed, after which it was shipped to Amsterdam from Benin.

I use this material to highlight the leading export product of my home country, and to advocate a fair global production and distribution cycle for a product whose price is clearly very different from that of gold or oil. My work places the plantation workers, who do such incredibly strenuous physical labour, in the limelight.'

The large, performative gestures in Oussou's work – coloured contours and textures against black backgrounds in an expressive, graphic style – are reminiscent of Cobra, a school of art that Oussou has studied in depth. He says: 'The joy of regaining total intellectual and artistic freedom after the Second World War helped to counterbalance the nightmares of the past. I really respond to that spontaneity, and recognise an artistic kinship in Cobra's mission to address and assimilate historical events that are traumatic or that have been overlooked. Some time ago I met Karel Appel's widow and we talked for hours about the power of gestures, colours, and collaboration, and the importance of being part of something bigger, part of a movement.'

Words by Heske ten Cate



Equilibrium Wind presented at
Aichi Triennale 2022 in
Tokoname City , Japan





When your dreams are alive, 2019, mixed media on paper, 152 x 402 cm



Equilibrium Wind

A solo show by Thierry Oussou

19 March– 30 April, 2022

Artist **Thierry Oussou** returns to Lumen Travo Gallery with the solo exhibition *Equilibrium Wind*, which presents a completely new body of work, developed by the artist in Benin. Part of an on-going project initiated by Oussou in recent years, this show addresses the cotton plantations located in the district of Panouignan in Benin and the significant impact they have on the country's economic growth.

Cotton is an important African product in the globalized arena. Beside its highly symbolic reference to a colonial history of oppression, the “white gold” is featured in international discourses and debates on privatisation, poverty alleviation, and sustainable development. Far from being just a raw material, cotton embodies a precious tool for Beninese working class, offering a dignified and fair life to those cultivating it. Oussou’s multi-layered investigation stands as a reminder of the overlooked potential of this material.

After gaining first-hand experience by cultivating cotton himself, Oussou translates this very knowledge into the creation of the works featured in the exhibition, consisting in a new series of paintings, a video and several installations.

Each of the works exhibited at Lumen Travo Gallery offers us the chance to observe and interact with Oussou’s cotton plantation and the lives of those working there every day.

The new series of paintings is inspired by the lives of Beninese men and women working in the cotton plantations. Oussou paints exclusively on black paper and favours large-scale formats. Distorted figures, faces, objects and symbols float freely against the dark background of the paper.

His distinctively gestural style with drips, scratches, splatters and calligraphic marks aims to recreate the sequence of movements taking place in the cotton plantations and, in a broader sense, in all those settings where the workers act.

The aim of this on-going project is to obliterate the distance between *creation* and *consume*, while raising awareness about the different stages of cotton production: from the plantations to the comfort of our homes, from the unprocessed material to the manufactured clothes that we wear every day, Oussou points out the sequence of actions that we, as consumers, often forget about.



Thierry Oussou
Equilibrium Wind





From left to right:
Workers - Untitled XIV, XIII, XII | 2022 | mixed media on paper | 151.5 x 62.5 cm



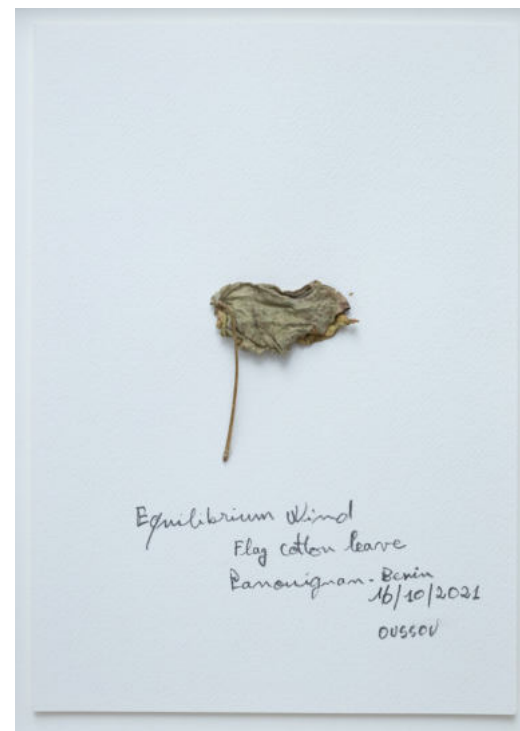
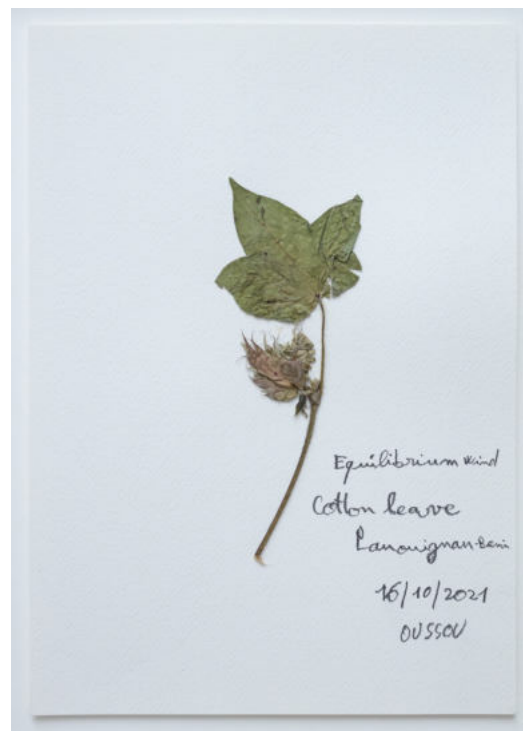
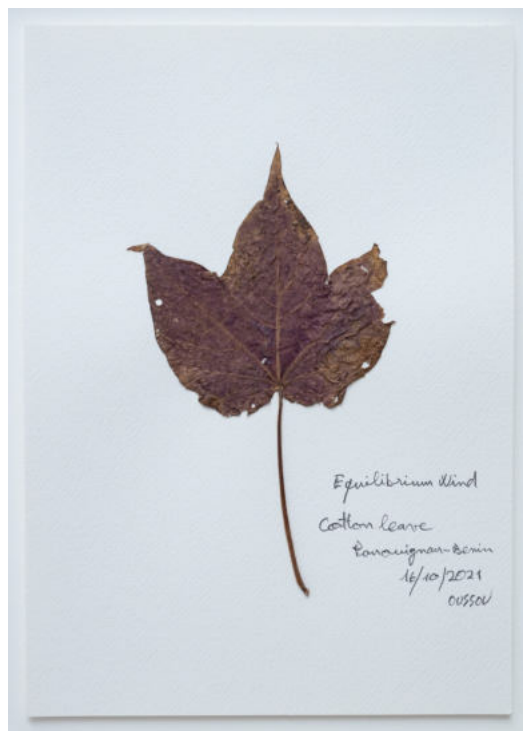


Workers - Untitled VII (2022)
Mixed media | 162 x 152 cm



Workers - Untitled VIII (2022)
Mixed media | 152 x 80.5 cm

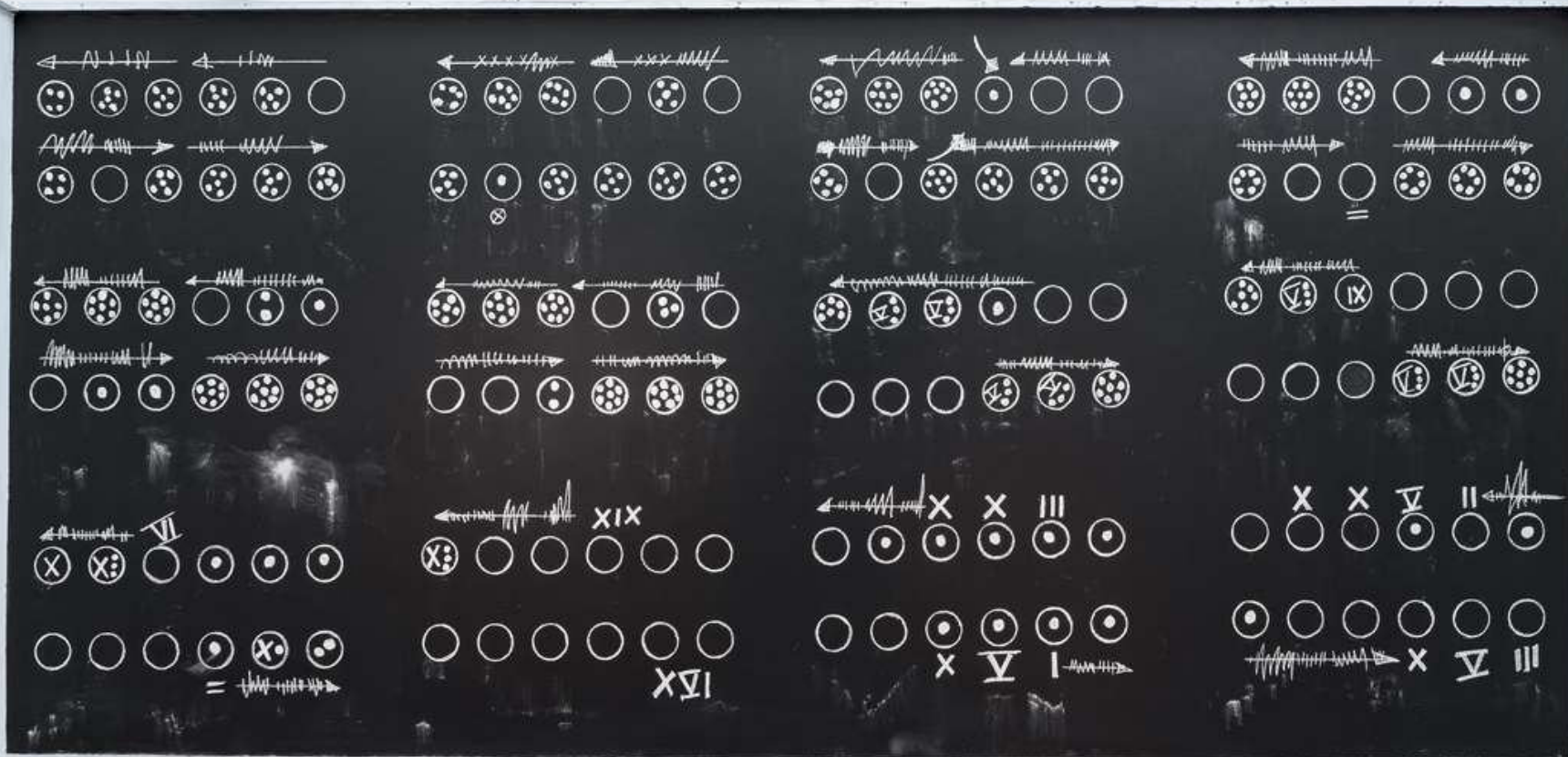




From left to right: *Equilibrium Wind* - Cotton Leave II, III, IV, Empty Cotton Ball | 2022 | 36 x 28 x 4 cm each



Adjikoui, 2019, mixed media on paper





Installation, 2020, gloves, concrete.
Rozenstraat 59 Project, Amsterdam, NL



What is Left of the Sugar Cubes, video installation
São Paulo Biennial, 2019

Part of the Brazilian Pavillion which
which received the Golden Lion for best national participation at
the BIennale di Architettura 2023 in Venice



Thierry Oussou, *Restless Matter*, installation, wood sticks
Cobra Museum, 2018



Works on Paper and Some Objects, Group show
Lumen Travo Gallery, 2018



Untitled #9, 2017, papier-mâché
18 x 9,5 cm



Together II, 2015, papier-mâché
23 x 15,5 cm



Untitled #6, 2017, papier-mâché
16 x 10 cm





“Impossible Is Nothing”, RijksakademieOPEN, 2016



“Impossible is Nothing”, 10th Berlin Biennale, 2018

Thierry Oussou paints exclusively on black paper and favours large-scale formats. Distorted figures, faces, objects and symbols float freely against the dark background of the paper.

As a visual and conceptual artist, he describes his method as social archaeology, in which he explores the relationship between contemporary art and ethnographic objects.

In his artistic practice, Oussou shows great interest in professions that are marginalised and overlooked. From cotton workers to public transport drivers, his visual investigation aims to emphasise, or rather turn visible the different terms of labour that exist, and how they contribute to the society we live in.

Thierry Oussou (1988, Allada) lives and works between Amsterdam and Benin. In 2015-16 he attended the Rijksakademie van beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam. Oussou is the recipient of the 2023 Royal Award for Modern Painting. Recent shows include: Riga Biennial (2023); Biennale di Architettura Venice, Italy (2023); British Textile Biennial, Pennine Lancashire, UK (2023); Centraal Museum, Utrecht (2023); Aichi Triennale, Japan (2022). Oussou is the recipient of the Royal Award for Modern Painting (2023). Oude Kerk, Amsterdam (2020); Impossible is Nothing, Art Exchange, Essex (2019); São Paulo Biennial (2019); 10th Berlin Biennale (2018).



Credits: Berend van Breda

CV

Born in 1988 in Allada, Benin

Lives and works in Amsterdam, Netherlands

EDUCATION

2015-16 Rijksakademie van beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam, NL

2012-14 Assistant to Meschac Gaba and Barthélémy Toguo

2007-8 Assistant to Ernesto Hounbo

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2022

Equilibrium Wind, Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam NL

2019

Political Strategy, Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam NL

Impossible is Nothing, Art Exchange, Essex, UK

Patrimoine materile, immateriel, et artérite, MCN, Dakar, SENG

2018

Tiwani Contemporary, London, UK

Before It Is Completely Gone, Stevenson Gallery, Johannesburg, SA

2017

Soil, Bradwol Project Space, Amsterdam, NL

Une histoire: le miel aux lèvres, Cargo in Context, Amsterdam, NL

2016

Don't Sit In, No Man's Art Gallery, Amsterdam, NL

Thierry Oussou, Ornis A. Gallery, Amsterdam, NL

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2023

Casa de Cercaïs, Lisbon, Portugal

Biennale Architettura 2023 - Brazilian pavilion, Venice, Italy

'Impossible is Nothing' at Centraal Museum, Utrecht, NL

Koninklijke Prijs voor Vrije Schilderkunst, group show, Royal Palace, Amsterdam

British Textile Biennial, Pennine Lancashire, UK

14th Kaunas Biennial, Survival Kit 14, Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia

2022

Aichi Triennale , Tokoname City , JP

2021

Talking Mirrors Hamburg, DE

Lumen Travo Gallery, NL

Benin Contemporary Abidjan, CI

2020

Mirrors of Time, KASTEEL OUD-REKEM, BE

3 Package Deal Talents 2019/2020 VondelCS, Amsterdam, NL

Oude Kerk Museum, Amsterdam, NL

Rozenstraat 59 Project, Amsterdam, NL

Untitled (Spirit of changing times), Lumen Travo Gallery Amsterdam, NL

Stories and Poems, Capital C, Amsterdam, NL

2019

Imagined Communities, the 21st Contemporary Art Biennial Sesc_Videobrasil, São Paulo, BR

2018

Restless Matter, Cobra Museum of Modern Art, Amstelveen, NL

Before The Fire Starts, Galerie van Gelder, Amsterdam, NL

Works on Paper and Some Objects, Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam, NL

We Don't Need Another Hero, 10th Berlin Biennale, Berlin, DE

Gaia in the Anthropocene, Garage Rotterdam, Rotterdam, NL

2017

Field Work, Tiwani Contemporary, London, UK

Impossible is Nothing, Bradwol Project Space, Amsterdam, NL

2016

Dutch Royal Award for Modern Painting, Royal Palace, Amsterdam, NL

NO Futur, Performance Biennale, Athens, Greece

What About Africa?, Witteveen Art Space, Amsterdam, NL

2015

Nine Artists, Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town, SA

Aqui Africa, SESC, Belenzhino, São Paulo, BR

Starting Block, Cotonou, BJ

2014

Textiles, Brazzaville, CG

Dokoutin, Mosso, Brussels, BE

Green Art Project & Multiplicity, Dak'Art Biennale, Dakar, SENG

TGD 10, IFAN Museum, Dakar, SENG

2013

UTOPIA, Holbaek Museum, DK

Western Waste meets African Craft, Blaakildegaard Museum, DK

2012

A WHAN KPO DO Te, Cotonou, BJ

Density New Generation, Cotonou, BJ

Inventing the Image Mode, Benin Biennial, Ouidah, BJ

2011

GBAVI NOUKPIN NON, Cotonou, BJ

2010

WABA, Cotonou, BJ

2009

The Free Education in Benin, Cotonou, BJ

2008

The Artistic Vision of Prison Life in Benin, Cotonou, BJ

2007

Young Prom'Art: Waste and Environment, Cotonou, BJ

2006

The Centenary of the Death of King Behanzin, Abomey, BJ

2005

National Arts School Competition, Cotonou, BJ

RESIDENCIES AND AWARDS

2023: Winner of Royal Award for Modern Painting

Awarded

2018: Winner the 14th Tollman Award for the Visual Arts

2017: Arthouse residency, Lagos, NIR

2016: Nominated for Dutch Royal Award for Modern Painting, Royal Palace,
Amsterdam

1st Jacqueline van Tongeren Fellowship, Rijksakademie, Amsterdam, NL

2015-16: Rijksakademie residency, Amsterdam, NL

2014: Dokoutin residency, Brussels

Mava Unit residency, Cotonou, BJ

2013: Youth Programme, World in Motion Images

2012: Men Standing workshop, Fondation Zinsou, Cotonou, BJ

COLLECTIONS

Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis MN, USA



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