

# PARTICIPATE

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP THROUGH ART AND DESIGN

october gallery

risc



Key stage 2 & 3 Resource pack:  
Exploring memory, identity & activism in the artworks of  
**JULIEN SINZOGAN**

This pack includes:

-  **Benin** - An introduction to the country and people of Benin.
-  **Gates of Return: Activism and change** - Julien Sinzogan's 'Gates Of Return' as a passage to reconciliation and understanding of our shared history of the transatlantic slave trade. This section will focus on the ideas of returning both as an act of remembrance and as a way of learning from our past to end the still continuing cycle of violence. The section 'teaching resources' contains activities that engage young people in thinking about the inequalities that exist in the world today and what actions they can take for an equitable future.
-  **Identity and memory** - Explores the symbolism and imagery in the artist's work which cause us to remember and reflect on the lives of our ancestors. The teachers resources and activities provide young people with an opportunity to think about the make up of their own identities and to what extent they have been shaped by their family as well as their environment.

 **Look out for these strips . The highlighted questions can be used to help young people interpret and understand key themes in the artist's work.**

## What is Global Citizenship?

*".....Global Citizenship is more than the sum of its parts. It goes beyond simply knowing that we are citizens of the globe to an acknowledgement of our responsibilities both to each other and to the Earth itself. Global Citizenship is about understanding the need to tackle injustice and inequality, and having the desire and ability to work actively to do so. It is about valuing the Earth as precious and unique, and safeguarding the future for those coming after us. Global Citizenship is a way of thinking and behaving. It is an outlook on life, a belief that we can make a difference"*

- Oxfam's definition of global citizenship  
<http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/gc/>



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# Benin and the Kingdom of Dahomey

Present day Benin was the site of Dahomey, a prominent West African kingdom that rose in the 15th century. The territory became a French colony in 1872 and achieved independence on 1 August 1960, as the Republic of Benin (CIA world fact book).

It should not be confused with the Kingdom of Benin, or Benin Empire (famous for the Benin bronzes), which was located in present-day Nigeria. Benin borders Togo, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Niger. The capital city is Porto Novo, but the seat of government is Cotonou. Like Britain, the population practises a diversity of religions: Christian 43%, Muslim 24%, Vodoun 17%.



The Coat of Arms of Benin was re-adopted in 1990 after being replaced in 1975. At the top of the emblem is the national crest that consists of two horns with corn in the ear and filled with sand. These are reputed to stand for prosperity. Below the crest is a shield that contains the actual coat of arms of Benin. The shield is broken into four quadrants. The top left quadrant contains a castle in the style of the Somba, representing the history of Benin. In the top right quadrant, is the Star of Benin, the highest award of the nation. Below this is a ship, that stands for the arrival of Europeans in Benin. In the lower left quadrant is a palm tree. The shield is supported by a pair of leopards, the national animal of Benin. Below the shield is the motto of Benin (Fellowship, Justice, Work) in French.

Source: Wikipedia



Garland School, Reading Y3 pupil's emblems

## Activity:

Research other coats of arms or emblems, for your favourite football team, your school, or the town you live in. What symbols do they use and what do they mean? Design one which celebrates some of the things which make your class special.



# 'olo'

In Benin 'Ilo' or 'olo' (its pronunciation changes from region to region) is an oral expression to describe allegories. These are poems or stories which can be interpreted to reveal hidden meanings, which usually have a moral or political message that are meant to educate and make people think. These contain knowledge that has been collected and passed down through the generations. The arts are interwoven into the everyday lives of the people of Benin. They are represented through a variety of media such as performance, film, music and painting and act as a vessel to carry the olo. The important role of the arts and artists within society, as a means of reflection, education and understanding, has meant that Benin has been able to develop a vibrant and progressive arts scene, whose artists work and exhibit internationally as well as hosting their own international arts festivals.

**Activity:** Can you find any examples of 'olo' in your culture? It could be a fable or a story that has been passed down through your family or your community. Why do you think it's important to remember these stories and what do they tell us about our past? You can pass your stories onto others by writing a short play and performing it to your classmates.





# ● The Transatlantic Slave Trade



## ● What has been the impact of the transatlantic slave trade on Africa's economy ?

Between the 15th and 19th Centuries, up to 12 million Africans were forced onto European slave ships and taken across the Atlantic (this excludes the untold millions who died en route to the West African coast and those who died on the so-called "middle passage" to America and the Caribbean). In pure numbers, the direct effect on population was huge - some estimate that without slavery the population of Africa would have been double the 25 million it had reached by 1850.

[www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6504141.stm](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6504141.stm)

[www.ucalgary.ca/applied\\_history/tutor/migrations/four5.html](http://www.ucalgary.ca/applied_history/tutor/migrations/four5.html)

[www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/9chapter6.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/9chapter6.shtml)

Those removed were the most able-bodied men, women and children, the youngest and fittest, the leaders and labourers, so society's ability to develop and reproduce itself socially, economically and culturally was impaired.

[www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6504141.stm](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6504141.stm)

Enslaving an enemy was a lucrative business, fuelled by European demand for slaves, encouraging wars which hindered society's development.

[www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6504141.stm](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6504141.stm)

[www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/9chapter6.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/9chapter6.shtml)

The devastation left by the slave trade, and the absence of able-bodied people, made it easy for European powers to move in and colonise. Africa's ability to defend itself was seriously compromised.

[news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6504141.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6504141.stm)

The drain on physical and intellectual resources caused by the slave trade prevented an agrarian revolution in some African countries, and likewise an industrial revolution - before you can industrialize you need to have stable agricultural production.

[news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6504141.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6504141.stm)

The few existing manufacturing activities were either destroyed or denied conditions for growth by the slave trade. Cheap European textiles, and articles made of iron and steel, from weapons of war to pins and needles, were imported and exchanged for slaves, displacing home-made wares.

[www.afbis.com/analysis/slave.htm](http://www.afbis.com/analysis/slave.htm)

The continual interaction between villages brought about by the migrations of slaves across Africa facilitated the spread of diseases, further disrupting the growth of populations.

[www.ucalgary.ca/applied\\_history/tutor/migrations/four5.html](http://www.ucalgary.ca/applied_history/tutor/migrations/four5.html)



Europeans benefiting from the slave trade tried to justify their actions to themselves in many ways, including the fallacious interpretation of Genesis, according to which the Blacks of Africa, as the alleged descendants of Ham, are cursed and condemned to slavery. This blossomed in the colonial era into attitudes of Africa's 'savagery' and 'The White Man's Burden'. Even today, relics of these attitudes remain in popular images of helpless Africans, cursed by natural disasters or civil war of their own making, gratefully receiving hand-outs from munificent white saviours.

[www.monediplo.com/1998/04/02africa](http://www.monediplo.com/1998/04/02africa)  
[www.watchingamerica.com/dailynationka000001.shtml](http://www.watchingamerica.com/dailynationka000001.shtml)

The very internal fabric of African societies was often corrupted by the lure of profits from slavery, including the introduction of oppressive laws.

*'Every trifling crime is punished in the same manner... They strain for crimes very hard in order to sell into slavery.'* - Francis Moore, Royal Africa Company, writing in the 1730's.

[www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/9chapter6.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/9chapter6.shtml)

While Africa was being sucked dry by slavery, Western Europe drew profits not only directly from the trade in slaves, but also from commodities produced (cotton, sugar, tobacco, coffee...), from shipping, the development of new industries based on processing raw materials, finance and insurance.

It is fair to say that our modern world was built upon the blood, sweat, and tears of Africans.

[www.afbis.com/analysis/slave.htm](http://www.afbis.com/analysis/slave.htm)

## Reading resources

### Primary

***Amazing Adventures of Equiano*** by Jean-Jaques Vayssieres

A graphic novel, published in Jamaica that follows the story of Equiano from his home in West Africa, across the sea. KS 2

***Follow the Drinking Gourd*** by Jeanette Winter

This is the fictional story about how one man taught his fellow slaves a song that instructed them to follow a drinking gourd – the star constellation the big dipper, to lead them to freedom. KS 1-2

***Sweet Clara and The Freedom Quilt*** by Deborah Hopkinson

A lovely fictional account of the people who made quilts to tell their stories, and to communicate messages to each other in slavery in America. KS 1-2

***History of the African and Caribbean Communities In Britain*** by Hakim Adi

A well illustrated history of this community and its contribution to life in Britain including lots of material on the British slave trade. KS 1-3

***Who was Harriet Tubman?*** by Yona Zeldis McDonough

A biography of the 19th Century woman who escaped slavery and helped many other slaves get to freedom on the Underground Railroad. KS 1-3



***Aunt Clara Brown: Official Pioneer*** by Linda Lowery

A biography of the freed slave Clara Brown who used her money to bring other former slaves to Colorado to begin new lives. KS 2-3

***The Underground Railroad for Kids: from slavery to freedom with 21 activities for kids*** by Mary Kay Carson

Beginning with a timeline that traces the history of slavery in America, this includes a narrative history, many quotes from primary sources, archival drawings and photographs, and 21 related activities. KS 1-3

***Amistad: the Story of a Slave Ship*** by Patricia C McKissack

This illustrated book tells the story of the brave kidnapped people onboard the slave ship, who rebelled and refused to give up their freedom. KS 1-3

## Secondary

***Hang a thousand trees with ribbons: the story of Phillis Wheatley*** by Ann Rinaldi

This is a fictional story, based on the real life of Phillis Wheatley, one of America's first black poets, who was bought by John Wheatley in 1761. KS 3-4

***Amistad*** by Joyce Annette Barnes

Based on the true story of the 1839 mutiny on board the Spanish slave ship, Amistad, it is the story of Cinque, the illegally enslaved son of a Mende chief. KS 3-4

***1807-2007 Over 200 years of campaigning against slavery*** by Kaye

A teaching booklet produced by Anti-Slavery International, full of information about the history of slavery and the last 200 years of campaigns against it. KS 3-4

***The Changing Face of Slavery:*** teaching pack with book and video Anti-Slavery International & Oxfam  
A pack which looks at the history of slavery (from West Africa to the Caribbean) and child labour (in the UK) and draws parallels with the present day situation for child workers world-wide. KS 3-4

***Adventures of Ottobah Cugoano*** by Primary Colours Ltd

A teaching resource that tells the true story of Ottobah Cugoano, a young boy who was sold into slavery and once freed travelled around England talking about his experiences and writing accounts that were an invaluable contribution to the abolition movement.

***Rebel Cargo*** by James Riordan

Based on historical events, this powerful and moving novel, full of hope, looks at black and white slavery in the 18th Century,

## Websites

[www.africanholocaust.net](http://www.africanholocaust.net)

[www.historyfootsteps.net](http://www.historyfootsteps.net)

[www.nmm.ac.uk/freedom](http://www.nmm.ac.uk/freedom)

[www.portcities.org.uk](http://www.portcities.org.uk)

[www.understandingslavery.com/citizen](http://www.understandingslavery.com/citizen)

[www.antislavery.org](http://www.antislavery.org)

[www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ism/](http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ism/) - the International Slavery Museum, in Liverpool

[www.blackhistoryforschools.com](http://www.blackhistoryforschools.com)

[www.black-history-month.co.uk/](http://www.black-history-month.co.uk/)

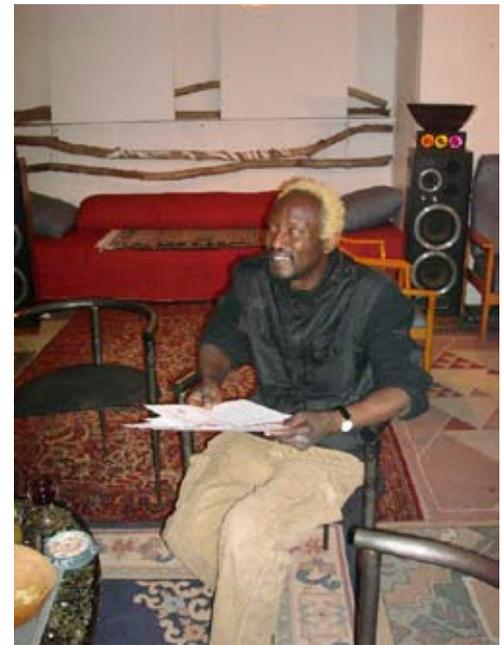
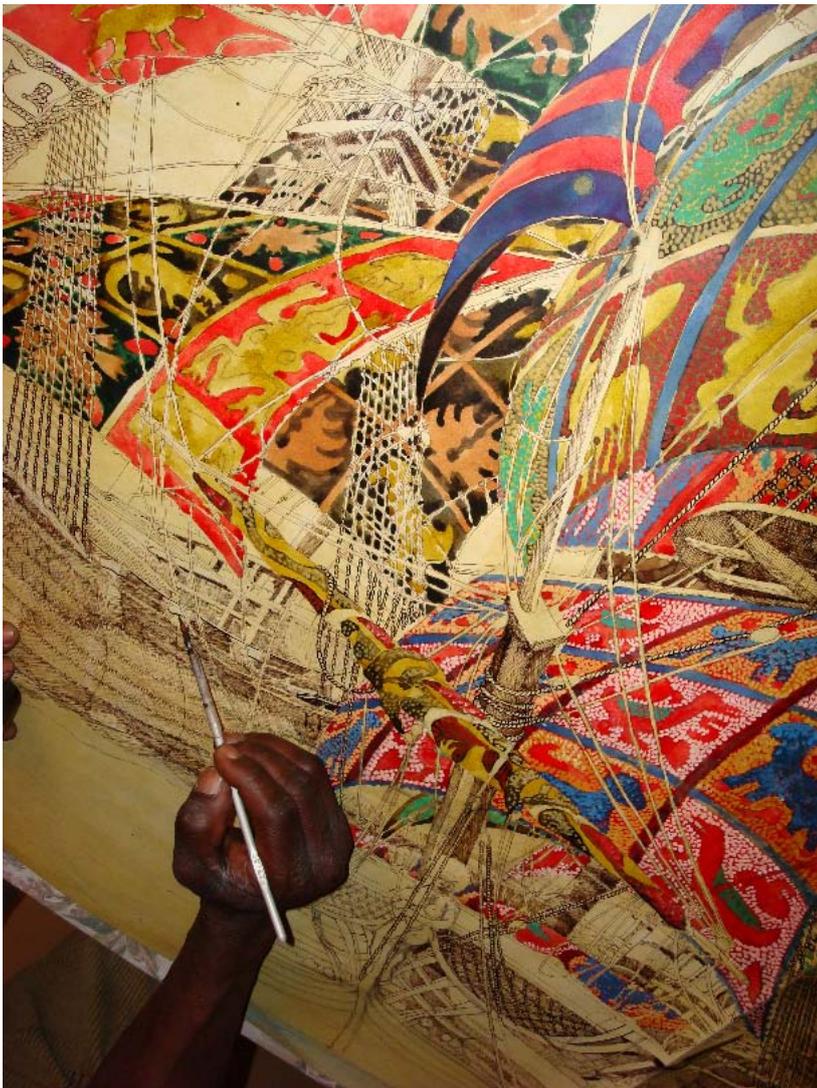
[www.100greatblackbritons.com/](http://www.100greatblackbritons.com/)



## ● Activism and change: An open gate of return

How does the artist acknowledge and reconcile the past through their art work?

Why does the artist think it is important to learn from the actions of those that came before us?



Julien Sinzogan, 11, 2008  
coloured ink on paper,  
108cm x 150cm

*'The basic instrument that made the slave trade possible was the boat. The art of navigation, the invention of the compass and the hunger for discovering other worlds and new riches all have one thing in common: the boat. But the true reason boats and their sails are such a part of my work is emotive, for more than three centuries, every time these sea monsters appeared on the horizon, it was almost certain that the destiny of hundreds of men and women would change radically'*

**Julien Sinzogan**



## The 'Gates of No Return'

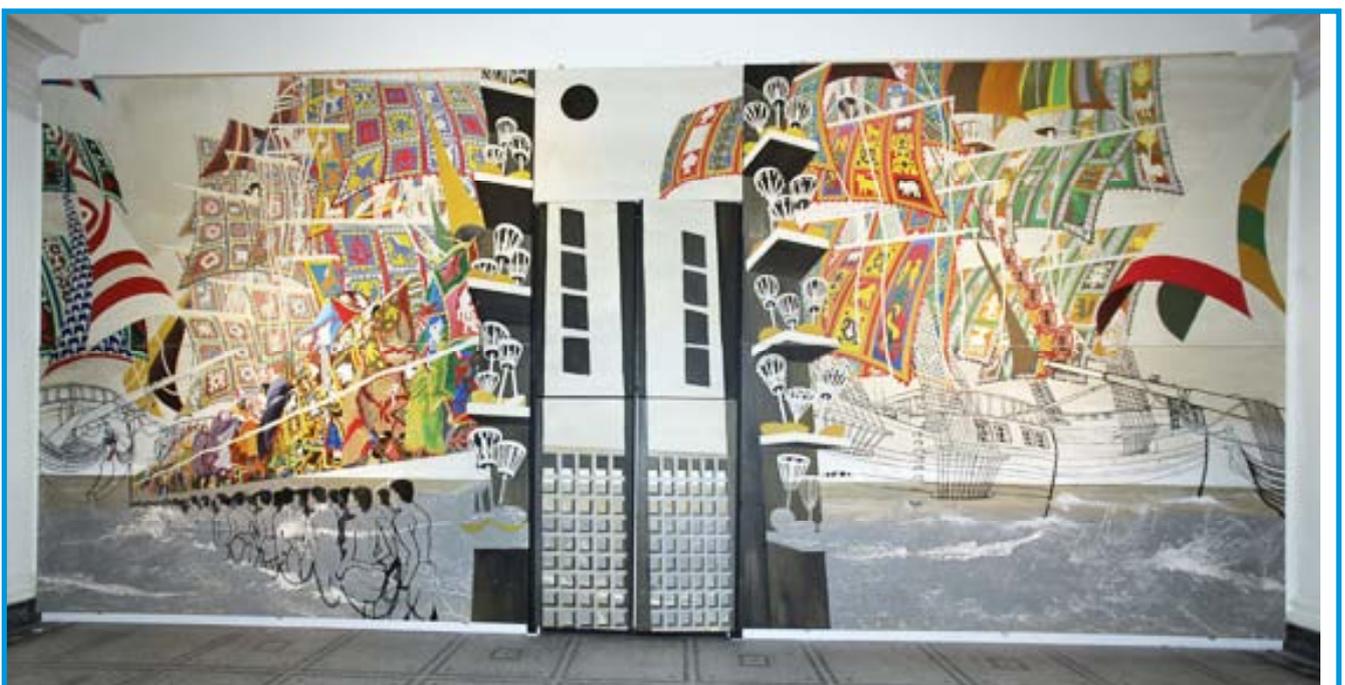
Between 1770 and 1850, a period that includes the time of the illegal slave trade, Brazilian merchants from Bahia went directly to the Gulf of Benin to buy slaves and sell tobacco. During this period, a great number of slaves, especially Hausa and Yoruba people from this region, were captured, shackled, sold and deported to Bahia in Brazil.

The slave route in Ouidah, Benin, is a three mile walk from the town to the beach which was thought to have been the route taken by slaves on their way to the Americas. One hundred monuments and different memorials remembering slavery and vodoun deities were placed on the route, mostly created by Benin artist Cyprien Tokoudagba. The route passes through important historical sites (such as slave markets and the home of merchants) and has now become a place of pilgrimage. At the very end of the route on the beach, overlooking the Atlantic is *The Door Of No Return*. Designed and ornamented by the Benin artist Fortune Bandeira, the piece was described as representing a symbolic departure point of slave captives who left African shores never to return to their homeland again. This powerful symbol or myth of *No Return* can also be found off the coast of Senegal and other departure points where forts and prisons were built by slave trading nations. These points resonate in the work of Julien Sinzogan. However, Sinzogan has commented that the design of the Ouidah gate, is identical to the arches built to represent European military victories: suggesting a celebration of conquest rather than the spirit of those enslaved. Sinzogan's work takes a different approach to the gates of no return. He explains that "*we talk of nothing but Gates of No Return. That is, there's no possibility, no way for those who ended up as slaves and their descendants to look back.*" Sinzogan believes that especially in the era of instant communication, we have come to a place where all people can look back, without anger, not as victims but as an act of reconciliation, to realise;

*"that despite the time, despite the distances, despite the wall of silence on the Slave Trade, we still have thousands of things to share, thousands of things in common".*

## Gates of Return, V&A 'Uncomfortable Truths' 2007

Julien Sinzogan, *Gates of Return*, 2007  
Acrylics on canvas, 4.65m x 10m





The exhibition *Uncomfortable Truths: the Shadow of Slave Trading on Contemporary Art* was held at the V&A in 2007 to mark the bicentenary of the abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The exhibition traced the Trade Discovery Trails which showed how art and design were linked into the transatlantic slave trade, highlighting objects on display in the V&A's permanent collection.

Julien Sinzogen's panel pieces titled 'Gates of Return' were placed around the Museum doors, which visitors freely pass through. The half painted phantom ships carry Egungun masqueraders who incarnate the spirits of their enslaved ancestors. Their final destination is a return to the African coastline.

For more information about the work please see:

[www.vam.ac.uk/collections/contemporary/past\\_exbns/uncomfortabletruths/aboutartists/sinzogan/index.html](http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/contemporary/past_exbns/uncomfortabletruths/aboutartists/sinzogan/index.html)

Other artists exhibiting their work, including Benin artist Romuald Hazoumé:

[www.vam.ac.uk/collections/contemporary/past\\_exbns/uncomfortabletruths/aboutartists/index.html](http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/contemporary/past_exbns/uncomfortabletruths/aboutartists/index.html)

*"This is a work of the imagination, depicting something that is still to happen. Rather than being, like Schubert's famous symphony, an unfinished piece, it is, however, a work that is yet to be brought to completion. To do this requires the spectators' active participation in a communal act of imagination that would realise an opened Gate of Return. This realisation would close the cycles of exploitation and violence done - man exploiting man - recognise the truth of our common humanity, and enable us to move forward together into a future which would ensure that such atrocities could never, ever happen again.*

*The concept of the Oroboros, the snake that bites its tail reminds us that we humans can repeat that which is Good, but also that which is Evil; so one must know this, have learnt it. The rainbow in the sky cannot hide from the universe" - Julien Sinzogan*



**Activity:** The artist suggests that a gateway should be a place to which people return to, a space of remembering, reconciliation and sharing. In this activity students will think about and design their own gateway or space.

- Ask students to imagine a place where they have been and want to return to. Can they think of other methods of travelling to that place, even if they can not physically get there? For example photographs (which could be on your mobile phone), internet, books.
- Encourage students to think about ways in which we communicate with others, and how we find and share information in public spaces (internet, libraries and in your school).
- Ask students to design their own space or gateway that gives people a place where they can contemplate, meet others and share ideas.
- What would the space look like? Would it be inside or outside? Who would go there? What would be contained within the space? What would you want to say to others?
- Students make a 3D model using card, boxes, pieces of found material.



## Teaching Resources

*'What you do today that is worthwhile, inspires others to act at some future time'.*

- Marcus Garvey

The following activities and links to campaigning organisations are designed to encourage pupils to think about actions that they can take for a sustainable and equitable future.

[www.understandingslavery.com/citizen](http://www.understandingslavery.com/citizen)

In 1807 the transatlantic slave trade was abolished in Britain. Many people and events forced the British Government to make this trade illegal. Using the resources in the website you can find out more about how this history is connected to being a citizen in today's society

The Citizen Resource: Activism section poses key questions:

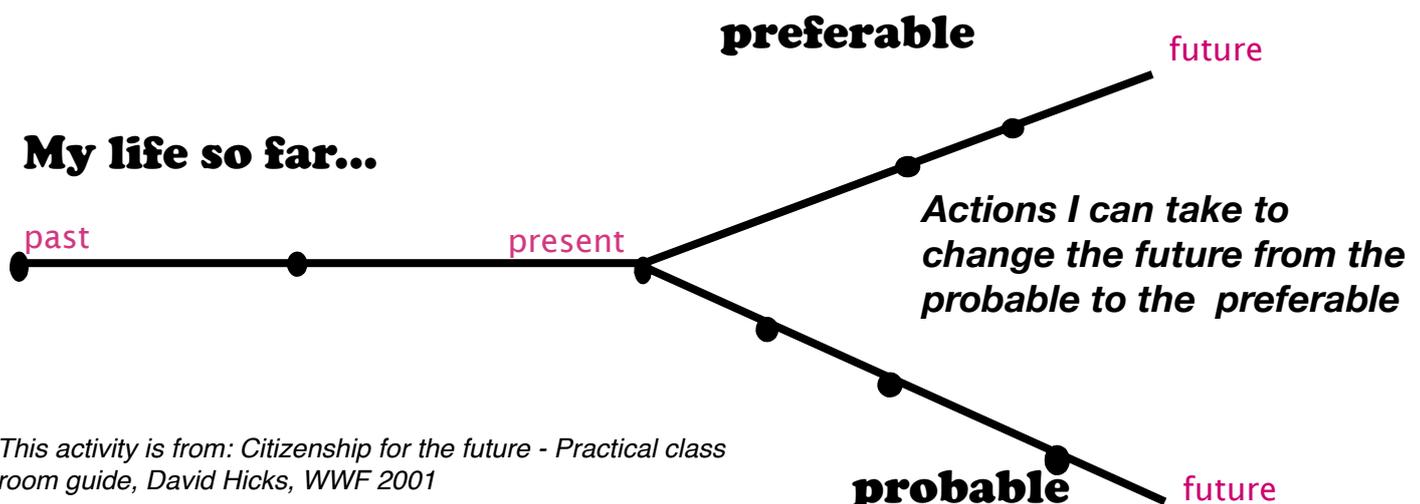
If a relatively small group of people can initiate such dramatic change in the world, why don't more people try?

How did the movement for the abolition of slavery set in motion the key tactics used in campaigning today?

What unethical practices exist today that are justified on the grounds that they are an economic necessity?

### **Activity:** *"Be the change you want to see in the world"* Mahatma Gandhi

- Ask the students to draw a time line of their lives from when they were born to the present, detailing important events and moments (for example starting school, places they have been to, achievements).
  - Ask them to draw two more lines forking from the point of the present. One line is the student's probable future. Ask the students to plot out the probable futures on one line, after this ask them to do the same but this time plotting their preferable future.
  - Follow this with a discussion on what actions they could take to change their probable futures into their preferable (they can write these between the fork).
  - You can also do this and ask students to map out a probable and preferable future world. Ask students to think about the actions and changes they would make for a sustainable and equitable future.
- [www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/TLSF/theme\\_c/uncofrm\\_c.htm](http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/TLSF/theme_c/uncofrm_c.htm)



This activity is from: *Citizenship for the future - Practical class room guide*, David Hicks, WWF 2001



For latest news and information on campaigns on slavery today visit the Anti Slavery website [www.antislavery.org](http://www.antislavery.org). This site provides links to useful resources and educational material and gives students an opportunity to have their say and take actions on current campaigns. For example if your students want to raise their concerns on the issue of human trafficking they could write to their local MP or send an email to the Prime Minister.

Breaking the Silence Education project (hosted on the Anti Slavery website) includes a section on slavery today that provides a variety of resources and ideas. Teachers can choose from Ready-to-Use Lesson Plans and Activities or Pick and Mix Resources for each theme on this site

[www.antislavery.org/breakingthesilence](http://www.antislavery.org/breakingthesilence)

### No Way Out

Bonded labour, or debt bondage, is the most common form of slavery in the world today. This activity looks at how someone can be tricked into slavery through debt.

### Rights, Wrongs and Change

This activity uses two case studies to get students thinking about how people can work in different ways to bring about change.

<http://old.antislavery.org/breakingthesilence/educationproject1.shtml>

## Television

### Our big fair trade adventure

Follows pupils from Cheyney School in Oxford as they travel to India to find out how their school uniforms are made

[www.channel4.com/lifestyle/green/on-tv/our-big-fairtrade-adventure/episode\\_guide.html](http://www.channel4.com/lifestyle/green/on-tv/our-big-fairtrade-adventure/episode_guide.html)

### The Great African Scandal

Cocoa is one of Ghana's most important exports and a vital ingredient of chocolate. Robert Beckford has heard stories of impoverished parents in the north of the country sending their children south to work. He has even been told that children are rented out in exchange for a sewing machine or a bicycle.

To find out what it is like to be a child labourer, he gets himself a job on a cocoa farm. He will be working alongside the farmer's 15-year-old niece, Alara, and 10-year-old nephew, Baba.

[http://www.channel4.com/culture/microsites/C/can\\_you\\_believe\\_it/debates/scandal2.html](http://www.channel4.com/culture/microsites/C/can_you_believe_it/debates/scandal2.html)

## Young people take action!

The following are websites of groups and campaigning organisations that provide material and information for young people to become active global citizens.

### Make your town plastic bag free

Modbury in South Devon is the first town to become plastic bag free. The Modbury website includes detailed information on why and how the town campaigned to remove plastic bags from their town.

<http://www.plasticbagfree.com/>

### Fairtrade

Fairtrade is about better prices, decent working conditions, local sustainability, and fair terms of trade for farmers and workers in the majority world. The Fairtrade Foundation is a coalition of organisations which awards the Fairtrade Mark to UK products as a guarantee that they have given their producers a better deal. Click on resources for downloadable campaign activities and promotional materials as well as how to make your school a Fair Trade school.

[www.fairtrade.org.uk](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk)

[www.risc.org.uk](http://www.risc.org.uk) for teaching resources on fair trade.



### **Global Youth Action**

Taking action on global issues through organising meetings and action groups, having your say online or in print.

[www.globalyouthaction.org.uk/](http://www.globalyouthaction.org.uk/)

### **Amnesty International Youth**

Support from the Amnesty International website if you are interested in setting up a human rights group at school.

[www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=10349](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=10349)

### **Unicef Youth Voice**

Human rights, current issues, getting involved – this gives you a great start for becoming an active and informed global citizen.

[www.unicef.org.uk/youthvoice/index.asp](http://www.unicef.org.uk/youthvoice/index.asp)

### **iNet student conferences**

Students can talk to other young people from around the world at one of iNet's online conferences. These focus on issues such as global citizenship, poverty, equality and peace.

[www.ssat-inet.net/Default.aspx?page=55](http://www.ssat-inet.net/Default.aspx?page=55)

### **European citizenship**

Speak Out! on European citizenship aims to bring together students from across Europe. Anybody is free to join in the discussion and share their views with students from around Europe.

[www.citizen.org.uk/speakout/about.html](http://www.citizen.org.uk/speakout/about.html)

### **The environment**

The latest on campaigns to lobby governments worldwide to introduce policies that combat global warming, threats to the welfare of the earth's natural resources, logging, poaching and hunting of rare species, pollution and environmental neglect.

<http://www.wwf.worldwildlife.org>

# Memory and Identity

## Egungun masquerade and Fon Banners (Efunfun): Meaning and symbolism in the work of Julien Sinzogan

The figures in the painting, *Les Voiles du Retour* are those of **Egungun** masqueraders, the costumes and masks represent a secret society of Egungun dancers who incarnate the spirits of their ancestors.

An Egungun masquerade is a way of remembering and paying respect to the deceased. In Benin the celebration is held twice a year. It is a time where you can ask for advice from your ancestors as well as saying sorry for any misdeeds against the family.

The Egungun dancer whirls the costume in circles so that the bits of cloth decorated with ribbons, mirrors and metal fly through the air. Sometimes the costume touches members of the audience like arms. In fact the Egungun strips can be seen as abstract arms that represent the spirit of important members of the community who are now ancestors.



Egungun masqueraders- Benin

YOU TUBE FILM: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvoqJfsmHm0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvoqJfsmHm0)



Julien in his studio, Paris 2008



A close up of: Julien Sinzogan, *Les Voiles du Retour*, 1998  
coloured inks on paper, 75cm x 108cm

The sails on Julien Sinzogan's ships are influenced by **Fon banners**, traditional textile appliqué wallhangings, produced for hundreds of years in Benin.

The appliqué practitioners were part of a cloth-working guild who mainly worked for Chiefs. They would commission the artists to design a banner with symbols that represented something specific about themselves. Often, this would take the shape of a motifs to depict a motto or story.

*"The King Houegbadja (1645-1685) was respected as a wise ruler and so his symbol was a fish with the meaning – once escaped from the trap, the fish never goes back – ie he learns quickly."* - *The Art of West Africa: textiles and global issues* by Nicci Wilson (Global Education Derby, 2001)



Fon Banner - RISC loans collection



## Textiles and trade

Cloth is often seen as craft rather than a fine art, but in West Africa, historically it was seen as very important in signifying complex systems and societies. Textiles are layered in rich symbolism, patterns and colours that can be translated into proverbs and metaphors describing, for example, personal statements, family heritage, gender and politics.

Textiles have also played an important role in West Africans trade network. Trading textiles from Egypt dates back to at least 3000BC and Kuba cloth from the 16th Century can be found in the Medici collection. Textiles from Europe such as printed cloths were also imported into Africa. As a result of Dutch attempts to undercut Indonesian batik production, European 'wax' resists printed and 'fancy' or roller-printed cotton fabrics found a thriving market along the West African Coast.

Other examples of West African textiles: Adinkra cloth from Ghana

[www.risc.org.uk/adinkra/](http://www.risc.org.uk/adinkra/)

*“Like everything to do with Voodoo, the clothing traditions of the Egungun have evolved over time, according to outside influences. We can say, without risk of exaggeration, that in the beginning the Egun covered himself in straw. Then came the big robes with simple motifs ...Until recently, the motifs had a direct link with the ancestor; if he was swift and tall, he was evoked through a giraffe, an elephant if he was big and tall, a lion or a panther if he was fearless ; a ram if he farmed livestock, a cockerel if he was proud and so on. Today, the motifs are more and more varied but they no longer correspond with the character of the ancestor...” - Julien Sinzogan*

During the slave trade, Africans that were captured or sold were stripped of clothing, possessions, and the representations of their spirits (bracelets and necklaces).

How does the artist reclaim the identity of the people on the ship through his painting?

## Vodoun

Sinzogan's paintings refer to the culture and religion of vodoun. The religion of vodoun spread to the Caribbean and South America carried by those who were captured, sold and traded as slaves. The history of Vodoun tells a story of survival, of those who were forced into labour and expected to adopt the faith and culture of their captors. In times of struggle, those enslaved would turn to the spirit of their ancestors for guidance (symbols of these spirits would often be hidden behind catholic icons). Religion as a channel to their dead ancestors was a way (as well as music and art) in which the descendants of the slave trade maintained their beliefs, values and traditions.

**“Our ancestors were not slaves. They were Africans.”** – Dona Maria, Brazilian spiritual medium (drawn and quoted by German artist Christine Meisner, exhibition Uncomfortable Truths)

One misconception is that Vodoun is a mysterious and sinister practice containing witchcraft and sacrifices, which has made it taboo in many cultures. However suggestions such as these were used to patronise and dismiss the cultures of African people, to emphasize the superiority of the slave trading countries and the lower status of African people.

Vodoun is an official religion of Benin, it is a 'spirit' religion in which 'spirits' of ancestors are honoured. In the work of contemporary artists from Benin you will find traces of vodoun tradition and symbolism, the religion is seen as an important part of the cultural life of the people of Benin.

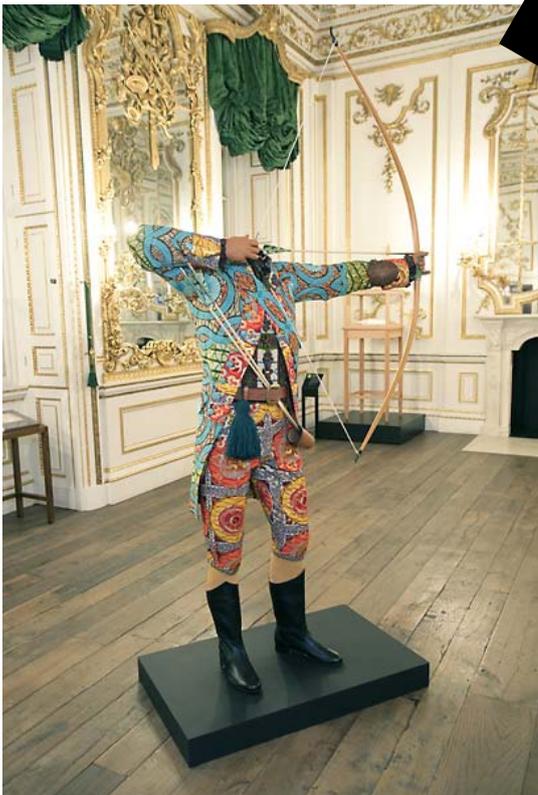




- How do you remember your ancestors? For example through photos, oral or written stories, artefacts passed down through the family or a family tree?
- Which pieces of our individual identities are formed from what is passed down by our ancestors (our characteristics, attributes, likes and dislikes, habits) and which parts are shaped by our environments such as friends, the places we live and our experiences?
- How do you present your identity to the world? Think about clothing and music which may identify you with a particular group, a sub culture or faith.
- How do we 'reconnect,' 'maintain' or 'remake' our identities in new places? For example through music, art, religion and food.

### Activity:

- Create a design which tells something about your identity and skills, make a banner, flag, bag or pencil case and decorate it with your design.
- You may want to draw an animal that represents your physical and personal characteristics, or like the Egungun a motif for your ancestors (eg. grandparents). Using materials such as felt, and other scrap pieces, appliqué your designs to make your flag or banner. These could be attached to a cloth bag, that you could take shopping.
- Design and make your own costume or accessory such as a hat or jewellery, from some of your old clothes. Include your motifs, remembering to think about the shapes, colours and images you use, what do they say about yourself or your family member?



- Take a look at this work by Yinka Shonibare, titled *Sir Foster Cuncliff Playing, 2007*.
- - Think about the style of clothing and its printed design, do they come from the same place?
- - What is the figure doing and is there anything else you notice about him?
- - What do you think the artist is suggesting through this piece?

Yinka Shonibare,  
*Sir Foster Cuncliff Playing, 2007*  
sculpture



## **In the class room**

Garland Primary School, Y3 Reading  
Richard Cobden Primary, Y5 London

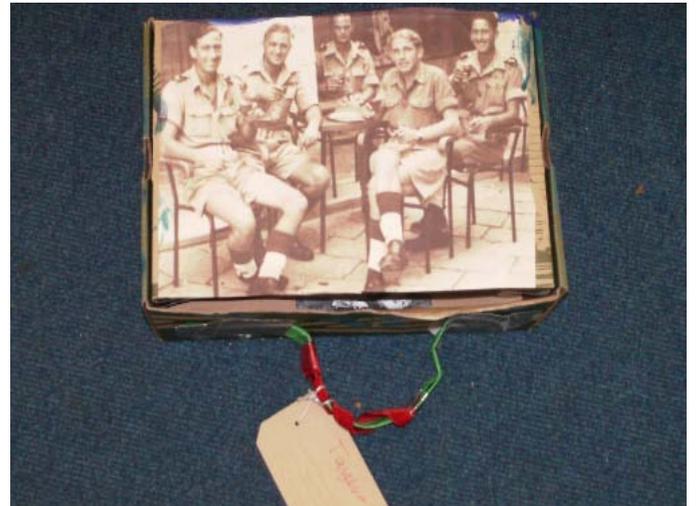


**“In the class room our teacher showed us pictures of the Benin coat of arms and we learnt the meanings of the emblems. She showed us our own school’s coat of arms and other familiar emblems and symbols .**

**We designed our own class emblems (see p. 4)**

**We looked at the artwork of the artist Julien Sinzogan and the significance of the banners painted on the sails.**

**Our teacher asked us to bring in pictures and objects that have memories or stories attached to them.”**



**I brought in pictures of my granddad taken during World War Two. I stuck these on the out side of my memory box. My granddad was a semi professional footballer. My family often tells me that we are very similar. My favourite sport is football, like my granddad. Inside my box I have placed a cup I won and a picture of me playing football.**

**Some people painted their emblems on the outside. We then made paper handles , so that we could take them home and keep them as a place to keep our stories.**





## Useful websites

### Moving Here

Records and illustrates why people came to Britain over the last 200 years and what their experiences were and continue to be. It offers free access, for personal and educational use, to an online catalogue of versions of original material related to migration history from local, regional and national archives, libraries and museums.

Students can find out how to trace their own family tree, read stories of peoples experiences of moving to the UK, add their own stories to the history of migration or send an E post card.

[www.movinghere.org.uk](http://www.movinghere.org.uk)

### Understanding slavery

**LEGACY** teacher's booklet explores the way in which the legacy of slavery has influenced representations of people of African descent. It questions how representations affect societies attitudes to people from different races and cultures. Who creates these representations and how do they influence us?

[www.understandingslavery.com/learningresources/?id=3025](http://www.understandingslavery.com/learningresources/?id=3025)

### Other cultures that honour the dead

You can also explore other celebrations which honour the dead. For example the Mexican Day of the Dead, an ancient festival, which celebrates the dead and the continuity of life and halloween.

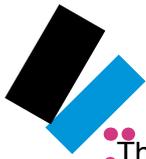
Halloween built on All Saints Day, November 1, when all saints without their own days are celebrated, and All Souls' Day, when the those who died during the year are celebrated. To incorporate the beliefs of the Celts that had been passed on in Ireland, celebration began on October 31. People wore costumes and went around asking for currant buns. Now, people celebrate the holiday not in honour of the dead, but in honour of the countless sweet manufacturers who make a killing.

[www.library.thinkquest.org/16665/celebration.shtml](http://www.library.thinkquest.org/16665/celebration.shtml)



## Julien Sinzogan's biography

Julien Sinzogan was born in the Republic of Benin, once one of the largest slave-trading ports on the West African coast. His works often feature ships and depict the mythical journeys that carried away the people of Benin and other areas of West Africa to be slaves in the New World. Julien Sinzogan lives and works in Paris. After studying architecture in Tashkent and then in Paris, he now devotes his time to drawing and painting. He often combines monochrome drawing with coloured forms which draw upon the sources of vodoun and history in Benin. A special commission made for "Uncomfortable Truths: the shadow of slave trading on contemporary art and design" was shown at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2007 and his work featured in the Voyages exhibition at October Gallery in the same year.



• The Artist's Studio

• What type of materials does the artist use to make his work?



# An Interview with Julien Sinzogan

## 1. How is the slave trade remembered in Benin?

Nota Bene: Il est de bien entendu que le phénomène de l'Esclavage, la mise en servitude d'êtres humains est un sujet plus vaste que le Commerce des Esclaves ou la Traite des Noirs que nous abordons ici en particulier.

It is well known that the phenomenon of slavery, of forced labour is a much broader subject than the Black Slave Trade that we are specifically discussing here.

Le commerce des esclaves ne figure pas au programme des enseignements primaire, secondaire au Bénin, les dit-enseignements étant calqués sur le modèle français qui n'en fait pas cas.

The Slave Trade does not appear in the programmes of study for either Primary or Secondary school in Benin. The curriculum follows the French model which does not mention it.

## 2. Can you explain why you created your ship painting series?

L'outil essentiel qui a permis le commerce des esclaves, c'est le bateau.

L'art de la navigation en mer, la découverte de la boussole, l'appétit à découvrir d'autres mondes, de nouvelles richesses, tous ces thèmes ont un point commun : le bateau.

Mais la raison véritable pour laquelle les bateaux avec leurs voiles au vent ont investi ma création est émotive : pendant plus de trois siècles, chaque fois que ces monstres de la mer apparaissaient à l'horizon, basculait avec une quasi-certitude le destin de centaines d'hommes et de femmes.

The basic instrument that made the Slave Trade possible was the boat. The art of navigation the invention of the compass and the hunger for discovering other worlds, new riches all have one thing in common : the boat. But the true reason boats and their sails are such a part of my work is emotive : for more than three centuries, every time these sea monsters appeared on the horizon, it was almost certain that the destiny of hundreds of men and women would change radically.

## 3. Do your ships leave from and return to a particular place in Benin?

Au Bénin, il existait deux points d'embarquement des esclaves, très proches l'un de l'autre, séparés de quelques centaines de mètres dans la région de Juda, actuellement Ouidah.

Il convient de préciser qu'en Afrique noire, du temps du commerce des esclaves, les bateaux accostaient et repartaient d'endroits bien précis, à Zanzibar, à l'île de Lamou du côté du Mozambique, de Luanda en Angola, de Lagos au Nigéria, de Juda donc de Ouidah, d'Accra au Ghana, de l'île de Gorée au Sénégal. C'est d'ailleurs sur ces cotes d'accostage et d'embarquement qui n'ont jamais varié pendant des siècles qu'ont été dressés les forts français, hollandais, espagnols, portugais et anglais.

A Ouidah au Bénin, sur les trois forts français, hollandais et portugais, seul le dernier subsiste.

Il y a une quinzaine d'années, les canons qui protégeaient le fort français étaient encore à leur place initiale. Ils ont été retiré depuis lors.

In Benin there were two points for loading slaves, very near to each other, separated by a few hundred metres in the Juda region, modern day Ouidah. It should be understood that in Africa, during the Slave Trade, the boats landed and departed from very specific places : Zanzibar, the island of Lamou off the Mozambique coast, Luanda in Angola, Lagos in Nigeria, Juda, Accra in Ghana and the island of Goree in Senegal. Moreover, it was on these coasts that never changed over the centuries that the French, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese and British built their forts. At Ouidah in Benin, the French, the Dutch and the Portuguese all had forts. Only the Portuguese one remains.

**About 15 years ago, the canons that protected the French fort were still in their original place. They were taken away sometime ago.**

#### **4. Many of your works incorporate images of gates (forts and prisons) that were built by the slave-trading nations – why have you decided to concentrate particularly on these?**

En 1996, l'Unesco décide avec monsieur Fédérico Mayor, alors Secrétaire Général et monsieur Tidjani-Serpos Noureïni, alors Ambassadeur du Bénin auprès de l'Unesco de réaliser une porte du Non-Retour au Bénin, sur la plage de Ouidah, la même où les esclaves en partance foulaient pour la dernière fois le sol de leur terre natale. Je me trouvais opportunément à leur côté lorsque la maquette fut étalée. La voyant, je fus quelque peu choqué : c'était une porte arquée, à l'identique des portes militaires, passages pour célébrer la victoire des armées en Europe. J'en fis la remarque, mais il était trop tard, le projet était dans sa phase définitive, voire active. Par entêtement et par curiosité, je fis quand même ma propre maquette présentant ce qu'aurait pu être la porte du Non-Retour sur la plage de Ouidah. Avec le temps, j'ai adopté le concept et j'y travaille encore et toujours.

In 1996, along with Federico Mayor, then Secretary-General, and Tidjani-Serpos Noureini, then UNESCO ambassador to Benin, UNESCO decided to construct a gate of No-Return to Benin on the Ouidah beach, a replica of the one through which the departing slaves last trod on their native soil. I was fortunate to find myself at their side when the sketches were laid out. Seeing them, I was a bit shocked : It was an arched gateway, identical to the arches built to celebrate European military victories. I pointed this out but it was too late, the project was in the final stages. Out of stubbornness and curiosity I drew my own plans of what the Gate of No-Return on Ouidah beach might have been...Over time I've taken on the concept and I'm still working on it.

#### **5. Why did you decide to incorporate the Egungun masquerades into your work? 6. How is slavery remembered in vodun / if a practice in Benin?**

Qu'il me soit permis ici de proposer quelques définitions.

Le Vodou est à la fois :

- une Religion avec un panthéon de divinités : Mawu-Lissa, Hévioso, Lègba, Sakpata, Gu, etc...
- une Philosophie de la Vie avec des cycles d'initiation ;
- une école de médecine avec des guérisseurs et des herboristes,
- le ciment de plusieurs sociétés secrètes, celle des Oros et des Zangbétos, les gardiens de la nuit, celle des Guèlèdès, protecteurs et garants de la paix dans les familles, les clans ou la communauté toute entière et celle des Egunguns, en charge de donner corps à l'esprit des morts.

I would propose a few definitions.

Voodoo is simultaneously :

- a religion with a pantheon of gods : Mawu-Lissa, Hévioso, Lègba, Sakpata, Gu, etc...
- a Life Philosophy with cycles of initiation
- a school of medicine with healers and herbalists
- the cement of several secret societies, that of the Oros and the Zangbetos, the guardians of the night, that of the Gueledes, protectors and guarantors of peace amongst the families, the clans or the whole community and that of the Egunguns in charge of giving the body to the spirits of the dead.

Ifa est une forme de géomancie incluse dans le vodou où il sert de pont entre le monde visible et le monde invisible. Ifa est le lieu commun à l'intérieur du système vodou. Au moment où j'inscris ces mots sur mon clavier d'ordinateur, il me vient que l'on pourrait oser la comparaison entre Ifa et le logiciel Windows de Microsoft. Dès lors que nous nous installons sur notre ordinateur, quelque soit la tâche à accomplir, windows est présent sans être visible.

Pour solliciter la bienveillance d'un Dieu, pour donner un sens à l'inexplicable, pour la médication en cas de maladie, pour le rythme des cycles d'initiation, pour le choix de la date de sortie, de la fréquence des Oros, Guèlèdès ou Egunguns, pour toutes ces choses, le devin ou le babalawo, représentant d'Ifa, est consulté.

Ifa is a form of geomancy included in Voodoo, it serves as the bridge between the visible world and the invisible world. Ifa is the common place at the centre of the Voodoo system. As I'm typing these words on my computer, the idea came to me that we might dare to compare Ifa to Microsoft's Windows software. From the moment we log onto our computers, whatever the task at hand, Windows is present without being visible. For seeking God's benevolence, for explaining the inexplicable, for medicine, for the rhythm of the initiation cycles, for choosing the departure date, the frequency of the Oros, Guèlèdès ou Egunguns, for all these things, the seer or babalawo who represents Ifa is consulted.

En ce qui concerne spécifiquement le commerce des esclaves, voici ce que l'on peut en dire :

Selon la croyance vodou, l'esprit, une forme vivante impalpable, quitte le corps après la mort et plane au-dessus des têtes des vivants. Il en est ainsi du grand nombre, mais les hommes et les femmes dont le passage sur terre est unanimement habillé de sagesse rejoignent à la mort Ifè, la cité des dieux vodou. Leur esprit cohabite donc avec les dieux et si les vivants continuent de les honorer et de les vénérer, ils peuvent intercéder auprès des dit-dieux en leur faveur.

Les sociétés secrètes des Egungun sont chargés de provoquer la réincarnation de ces ancêtres afin que la collectivité leur témoigne respect, les vénère et se souvienne de leur exemple.

C'est la raison pour laquelle, à la mémoire de ces millions d'hommes et de femmes morts sur des terres lointaines et dont la liberté a été balayée, bafouée, j'essaye à travers mes œuvres, de les ériger au rang d'ancêtres, dignes des grandes tenues des Egungun.

C'est un minimum, me semble-t-il, que nous leur devons.

With specific reference to the Slave Trade, here's what one can say :

According to the Voodoo faith, the spirit, an impalpable living form, leaves the body after death and floats above the heads of the living. So there is a great number of them, but the men and women whose time on earth is unequivocally characterised by wisdom return to Ifa in death, the city of the Voodoo gods. Their spirit then lives with the gods and the living continue to honour and venerate them, they can intervene on behalf of the gods in favour of the living.

The secret societies of the Egungun are responsible for provoking the reincarnation of these ancestors so the community shows them respect and venerates them and remembers their example.

It is for this reason, in memory of the millions of dead men and women in far away lands and whose liberty was swept away and scorned, that I try, through my work, to elevate them to the level of the ancestors, worthy of the great practices of the Egungun.

It seems to me that this is the least we owe them.

Au Bénin, à travers la philosophie vodou, les hommes et les femmes croient dur comme fer à la vie après la mort. Selon cette logique, il est donc possible de s'exposer à un châtement venant de l'invisible ayant pour origine les ancêtres depuis Ifè, la cité des Dieux, voire même les esprits qui planent au-dessus de nos têtes.

In Benin, through the Voodoo philosophy, men and women strongly believe in life after death.

According to this faith, it is possible to put oneself at risk of punishment from the invisible that comes from the ancestors in Ifa, the city of the gods, indeed even from the the spirits that float above our heads.

C'est ici la raison pour laquelle les prêtres du vodou au Bénin ont fait admettre deux rituels aux esclavagistes locaux :

- l'arbre de l'oubli : les hommes doivent en faire neuf fois le tour, les femmes sept. Cet arbre est censé provoquer chez l'homme ou la femme la perte de son identité et de son origine. Situé sur la route des esclaves entre Ouidah et sa plage distante de cinq kilomètres, il fut abattu dès l'abolition de l'esclavage.
- l'arbre du retour : les hommes et les femmes pris en captivité doivent en faire trois le tour, après quoi leur esprit est censé retrouver le chemin de leur terre natale. Cet arbre sacré se dresse toujours à Juda ou Ouidah.

It is for this reason that the Voodoo priests of Benin devised two rituals for the local slavers :

- The tree of forgetting : the men have to go round it nine times, the women seven. This tree is supposed to cause each man or woman to forget their identity and their origins. Situated on the slave route between Ouidah and its beach 5 kilometres away, it was cut down after the abolition of slavery.
- The tree of return : men and women taken from captivity had to walk round it three times, after which their spirit is supposed to recover the ways of the home land. This sacred tree still stands at Juda or Ouidah.

## **7. In the works of Les Voiles du Retour and L'Armada du Retour (above) many of the brightly coloured sails feature images of animals (such as giraffes, elephants, fish, crocodiles and birds) – do each of these symbols represent something different?**

Egun est un mot yoruba, peuple du Nigéria. Il se décline au pluriel en Egungun. La société secrète des egungun a forcément une origine lointaine. Comme tout ce qui peut l'être en matière de Vodou, la tradition vestimentaire des egungun a évolué au fil du temps, en fonction des apports et des influences extérieurs. On peut sans risque d'affabuler dire qu'au début, le Egun était couvert de paille. Puis vinrent les grandes robes avec des motifs très simples comme on peut l'observer sur les photographies d'époque de Albert Kahn ou de Pierre Fatumbi Verger ou encore dans la plupart des musées qui en possèdent. L'introduction des perles a donné lieu à des motifs complexes qui rappellent une autre terre : l'Inde. Jusqu'à une date récente, les motifs avaient un lien direct avec l'ancêtre ; s'il était sveltes et grand de

taille, on l'évoquait au travers d'une girafe, un éléphant si il était énorme et grand, un lion ou une panthère si il était sans peur, une brebis si il était un éleveur de bétail, un coq si il était réputé fier, ainsi de suite. Aujourd'hui, les motifs sont de plus en plus variés mais ne correspondent plus au caractère de l'ancêtre ; C'est au travers de la richesse et de la complexité de la confection des voiles d'egungun que les sociétés secrètes et les familles qui passent commandent rivalisent. Autrement dit : les costumes d'egungun sont devenus de véritables ouvrages artistiques extrêmement onéreux autour desquels les familles jouent leur prestige.

Egun is a Yoruba word, the language of a Nigerian people. In the plural it becomes Egungun. The secret society of the Egungun is therefore of distant origins. Like everything to do with Voodoo, the clothing traditions of the egungun have evolved over time, according to outside influences. We can say, without risk of exaggerating, that in the beginning the Egun covered himself in straw. Then came the big robes with simple motifs as we can see in the photographs of the era by Albert Kahn or Perre Fatumbi Verger or also in the majority of museums who own some. The introduction of pearls led to complex motifs that remind us of another world : India. Until recently, the motifs had a direct link with the ancestor ; if he was svelt and tall, he was evoked through a giraffe, an elephant if he was big and tall, a lion or a panther if he was fearless ; a ram if he farmed livestock, a cockerel if he was proud and so on. Today, the motifs are more and more varied but they no longer correspond with the character of the ancestor. It is through the richness and complexity in the making of the Egun sails that the secret societies and the families compete. That is : the costumes of the Egungun have become the true, extremely costly works of art through which the families exhibit their prestige.

**8. These works also lack a living human presence – have you purposely chosen not to include people in these images (except as carvings)? Why?**

La démarche dans la construction de mes œuvres est d'abord spirituelle. Elle s'inscrit plus dans l'évocation que dans une réalité palpable. C'est à ce titre et dans ce sens que je ne mets pas de personnages réels.

The reasoning in the construction of my work is primarily spiritual. It's more about evocation than palpable reality. This is why I don't include real people.

**9. The titles of many of your paintings, feature the word 'return' – why is it important to you to concentrate on themes of return and renewal within your work?**

De Gorée à Ouidah, en passant par Zanzibar, on ne parle et on n'érige que des portes du Non-Retour. Autrement dit, il n'y a aucune possibilité, aucune issue pour ceux qui ont fini esclaves et leurs descendants de porter le regard en arrière. J'ai une aversion profonde pour cette démarche.

Je voudrais m'en expliquer, quitte à être disert dans mon propos :

Si le concept de porte du Non-Retour a un sens au temps de l'esclavage actif, nous pouvons commencer en 2008 par faire entrer un peu de lumière dans cette sombre et triste histoire en accolant à cette issue fatale le concept de la porte du Retour.

A l'heure de la communication tous azimuts, à l'heure d'internet, au moment où de part et d'autre les passions s'apaisent, que les descendants d'esclaves ne reprochent plus à ce qui sont restés de les avoir vendus, chacun se rend compte, du Brésil à Cuba, d'Haïti aux Etats-Unis, de Trinidad et Tobago aux Antilles en passant par l'Afrique noire, chacun se rend compte que malgré le temps, malgré les distances, malgré la chape de plomb sur le commerce des esclaves, nous avons encore mille choses à partager et autant en commun.

From Goree to Ouidah, via Zanzibar, we talk of and erect nothing but gates of No Return. That is, there's no possibility no way for those who ended up as slaves and their descendants to look back.

I have a profound aversion to this approach.

Let me explain in simple terms :

If the concept of the Gate of No Return had a meaning at the time of active slavery, we can start in 2008 by letting some light into this sombre, sad history by joining to this deathly idea the concept of the Gate of Return.

In the era of instant communication, the era of the internet, at a time when on both sides anger is pacified, when the descendants of slaves no longer reproach those who remain that sold them, everyone realises, from Brazil to Cuba, from Haiti to the USA, from Trinidad and Tobago to the West Indies passing through Black Africa, everyone realises that despite the time, despite the distances, despite the wall of silence on the Slave Trade, we still have thousands of things to share, thousands of things in common.

**10a. Is there a reason why you use colour in some parts of your pictures and not in other parts?**

Le choix de la couleur dans une partie de certaines de mes œuvres est une démarche complexe qui est soit purement esthétique, soit, il s'agit de séparer des événements géographiquement ou historiquement anachroniques ou paradoxaux ( comme faire porter des lunettes de soleil à un roi du moyen-âge ou peindre des voiles de egungun à la place des voiles de négriers ), soit enfin de construire l'œuvre comme un théâtre et d'attirer par la couleur l'emplacement de la scène, le cadre où se joue la pièce.

The choice of colour in some of my works is a complex process that is sometimes purely aesthetic, sometimes it's about separating events that are geographically or historically anachronous or paradoxical (like making a Medieval king wear sunglasses or painting the Egungun sails instead of the slave-trader sails), sometimes it's to construct the work like a theatre and bring out in colour the scene or the setting where the play takes place.

**10b. Some young people want to forget a past in which their ancestors were enslaved and viewed as a 'subject race.' They feel that we should focus on changing the inequalities that exist today. Why do you feel it is important to remember slavery? How do you think examining the past can change the future?**

Le deuxième volet de la dixième question est sérieusement imprécise car je tenterais d'y répondre pleinement qu'il faudrait une centaine de pages.

Eduquer, C'est préparer, prendre par la main et mener un enfant dans le monde extérieur.

Ce monde a une histoire, un passé que l'on ne peut ignorer, car, l'Histoire a toujours été une lanterne qui nous éclaire dans le dos. Le concept de l'Oroboros, le serpent qui se mord la queue rappelle que nous, genre humain, pouvons répéter ce qui est de l'ordre du Bien, mais aussi ce qui est de l'ordre du Mal ; encore faudrait-il le savoir, l'avoir appris, l'avoir enseigné.

Or, le commerce des esclaves, à l'opposé de ce qu'en pensent les jeunes qui veulent éluder la question, le commerce des esclaves disais-je, est une histoire qui ne leur appartient pas quoi qu'ils en pensent. Cette histoire appartient à l'humanité ! Elle a duré trois siècles et demi, entraîné l'exode forcé de millions d'hommes et de femmes, a modifié le visage de notre bonne vieille terre, a entraîné des modifications profondes sur le plan alimentaire et sanitaire partout, avec son corollaire de fleuve de sang humain. Cette histoire n'appartient à aucun jeune, qu'il soit noir ou blanc, elle appartient à tous, de la même façon que personne ne pointe du doigt un jeune allemand de nos jours pour cause de fascisme hitlérien à moins qu'il s'en réclame expressément ! Si, au titre de la Mémoire, au titre de l'Histoire, chacun commence par trier par rapport à ce qui l'arrange ou pas, alors, le tueur en série ou le pédophile multi-récidiviste peut considérer son geste de la veille comme négligeable et le dictateur le plus immonde peut estimer que l'Histoire ne lui tiendrait pas grief !

The second part of the tenth question is very broad, if I tried to answer fully it would take hundreds of pages.

To educate is to prepare, it's taking a child by the hand and bringing them into the outside world.

This world has a history, a past of which we can't be ignorant, because, History has always been the lantern that lights us from behind. The concept of the Oroboros, the snake that bites its tail reminds us that we humans can repeat that which is Good, but also that which is Evil ; so one must know this, have learnt it.

And yet, the slave trade, contrary to what the young people who want to avoid the question think about it, the slave trade, I would say, is a history that doesn't belong to them whatever they think. This history belongs to humanity ! It lasted three and a half decades, caused the forced exodus of millions of men and women, changed the face of our good earth, led to profound changes in diet and health everywhere with its consequent river of human blood. This history does not belong to any young person, black or white, it belongs to everyone, in the same way that no-one points the finger at young Germans as the cause of Hitler's nazism and even less do they claim it for themselves ! If by way of Memory, by way of History, everyone starts picking and choosing what suits them then the serial killer and the reoffending paedophile can consider their act the night before as insignificant and the most inhumane dictator can believe that History holds nothing against him !

Pour ce qui est des inégalités, nous pouvons déjà remarquer qu'elles ont toujours été là et jamais les mêmes. Lorsque nous aurons soldé celles d'aujourd'hui, avant même d'en avoir fini, d'autres vont apparaître. Le terme en lui-même est un symbole, qui fait penser au panier que l'on voudrait remplir d'eau.

With regards to inequalities, we can remark that they have always been there but are never the same. As soon as we will have cleared off those of today, before we've even finished doing that, others are going to appear. The word itself is a symbol that makes the basket believe we want to fill it with water.

Eduquer, c'est préparer l'enfant au monde extérieur.

Comment éduquer si l'on ne sait pas d'où l'on vient ?

Savoir d'où l'on vient, alors, on peut se faire une idée de là où l'on est et planifier le futur.

Qui plus est, nous ne sommes que les produits du passé.

To educate is to prepare the child for the outside world.

How can we educate if we don't know where we come from ?

Knowing where we come from we can get an idea where we are and then plan for the future.

What's more, we are products of the past.

Hier, nous étions noirs et esclaves.

Aujourd'hui, nous sommes noirs et libres.

Hier, ils étaient blancs et libres.

Aujourd'hui, ils sont blancs et libres.

En creusant bien dans l'Histoire, ils avaient été blancs et esclaves.

L'Oroboros n'est pas un principe vain.

Yesterday, we were black and slaves.

Today, we are black and free.

Yesterday, they were white and free.

Today, they are white and free.

Burrowing into history, they have been white and slaves.

The Oroboros is not a vain principle.

Etant jeune, moi-même j'ai été profondément irrité par le commerce des esclaves. Plus j'apprends sur les uns et les autres, jaunes, noirs ou blancs, plus je bascule dans la tolérance et mesure combien chacun peut avoir été mauvais envers l'un et l'autre, plus largement entre eux. Et ça continue!

Les effets pervers de la traite négrière sont toujours vivaces en Afrique avec les guerres tribales au Rwanda, au Congo, au Kenya plus récemment, au Soudan, du Mali à la Côte-d'Ivoire où l'esclavage cru se poursuit dans les plantations sucrières, au Niger, en Mauritanie. Quelle autre dénomination accordée à la manière dont les enfants sont traités en Asie, dans les fabriques de tapisserie, les femmes en Afghanistan sous les talibans, voire même en Arabie Saoudite.

Que dire, de manière plus subtil, dans le contexte moderne, des extravagances boursières face auxquelles une infime minorité s'enrichit sans vergogne au détriment de millions de braves gens ? N'est-ce pas là une forme d'esclavage qui ne dit pas son nom ?

When I was young I was profoundly irritated by the Slave Trade. The more I learn about others, yellow, black or white, the more tolerant I become and I see how much each can have treated another badly, even more so amongst themselves. And that continues!

The perverse effects of the Slave Trade live on in Africa in the tribal wars in Rwanda, Congo, Kenya most recently, Sudan, Mali, Ivory Coast where harsh slavery continues on the sugar plantations, Niger, Mauritania. What other name can we give the treatment of children in Asia in the carpet factories, of women in Afghanistan under the Taliban or even in Saudi Arabia.

What about, more subtly and in a modern context, the stock market extravagances that allow a tiny minority to shamelessly get rich at the expense of millions of ordinary people? Is that not a form of slavery under a different name?

## **11. When did you decide you wanted to be an artist? What inspired you to be an artist?**

J'ai toujours été passionné, depuis l'enfance, par le dessin. Au lycée, j'étais dans la session peinture. Nous étions une dizaine et nous exposions nos œuvres à l'amphithéâtre une fois l'an. A l'époque, je peignais des affiches pour les concerts et les spectacles qui, une fois collées dans la ville, disparaissaient dans la nuit pour réapparaître dans les chambres d'étudiants et chez les particuliers ! Que je me souvienne, j'ai obtenu la mention au baccalauréat grâce au dessin et à la musique, mon autre passion. Plus tard, après des études universitaires, après quatre années d'activités professionnelles, je me suis retrouvé sans emploi et sans ressources. C'est alors que je me suis souvenu d'une formule de mon père : « si tu ne peux gagner ta vie qu'avec ta tête, fais en sorte de pouvoir le faire avec tes dix doigts ! L'idéal, c'est les deux ! ».

C'est ainsi que depuis 1987, je me suis investi dans la peinture.

I've always been passionate, since childhood, about art. At school, I was in the painting club. There were a dozen of us and we exhibited our work in the amphitheatre once a year. At the time, I painted posters for concerts and events that, once they were stuck up in town, disappeared in the night only to reappear in students' bedrooms and other people's houses ! I remember now that I got a merit in the baccalauréat thanks to art and music, my other passion. Later, after university, after four years of working I found myself with unemployed and penniless. It was then that I remember a saying of my father's « if you can't earn a living with your head try to manage it with your ten fingers ! Ideally use both ! » So this is how, since 1987, I've dedicated myself to painting.

## **12. How easy is it to work as a professional artist in Benin? Do you exhibit your work there? Can you tell us why you moved to France to work?**

Il est très difficile de répondre brièvement à cette question ; d'abord, parce que, l'ART, tel qu'il est perçu en Europe, est une notion à la fois vague et récente au Bénin et en Afrique en général. A la différence de quelques pays comme le Sénégal, la Côte-d'Ivoire ou le Mali, il n'y a pas d'école des Beaux-Arts au Bénin, où l'artiste n'a pas de statut social et est perçu comme un marginal, un non-productif. En d'autres termes, vous vous instruisez artiste lorsque vous ne savez rien faire. Si, à ce jour, l'Art au Bénin, y compris dans la perception qu'en ont les béninois, est en pleine évolution et connaît grand succès de par le monde, c'est le fait d'un homme. Il faut rendre à César ce qui est à César et à Dieu ce qui est à Dieu ; en propulsant à l'avant de scène les artistes béninois avec courage et audace lors du festival de Ouidah 92, monsieur TIDJANI-SERPOS Noureïni, actuellement Directeur Général adjoint de l'Unesco, les a définitivement installés sous la rampe des projecteurs. Grand bien lui fasse.

It's very difficult to respond briefly to this question ; firstly, because ART, as it's seen in Europe, is a new and vague concept in Benin and Africa generally. Unlike a few countries such as Senegal, the Ivory Coast or Mali, there is no Fine Arts college in Benin, where the artist has no social status and is seen as marginal and unproductive. In other words, you become an artist when you don't know how to do anything else. If, today, Art in Benin, and the people's perception of it, is undergoing a revolution and it is knowing success outside Benin, then it's because of one man. We must give credit where credit is due : in bringing Benin's artists to the fore with courage and audacity, since the 1992 Ouidah festival, Tidjani-Serpos Noureïni, currently assistant Director General of UNESCO, has definitively established them the spotlights. Much good may it do him.

J'ai eu deux fois l'opportunité de présenter mes œuvres au Bénin, en 1993 et en 1997. J'ai rencontré Dominique en 1998. C'est une petite bonne femme têtue, insupportable, née sous le signe du lion, rugissante, géniale, magnifiquement drôle quand elle s'y met, à la culture immense, qui vous entretient aussi facilement des mœurs à la cour de la reine Victoria ou à celle du roi des douala au Cameroun qu'elle vous mitonne en deux temps trois mouvements un mets succulent très compliqué. Elle est infirmière et psychologue dans un hôpital en France. Mes débuts en peinture étant financièrement épouvantables, Dominique m'a apporté un appui sans faille (c'est encore le cas ).

Notre fils aîné Calliste est né en 1993, Hadrien-Lorris, le cadet, en 1999.

Je suis resté en France au plus près de mes deux meilleures œuvres et de leur co-auteur.

I've had two opportunities to exhibit my work in Benin, in 1993 and 1997.

I met Dominique in 1998. This good little woman, stubborn and unbearable, a Leo, roaring, brilliant, magnificently funny when she wants to be, immensely cultured, who speaks to you as easily about the customs of the court of Queen Victoria or that of the king of the Douala of Cameroon as she lovingly cooks you a succulent, complicated dish. She is a nurse and a psychologist in a hospital in France.

My early paintings being financial disasters, Dominique has given me unflinching support (this is still the case).

Our oldest son Calliste was born in 1993, and Hadrien-Lorris, the youngest in 1999.

I've stayed in France nearest my two best works and their co-creator.

## **13. The rich colours and costumes that you have used in to your works conjure up immediate feelings of celebration and festivities – are these the emotions that you wanted to evoke?**

Absolument. Je suis par nature gai et optimiste et que cela transparaisse à travers mes œuvres sans que j'ai à le dire me réjouit.

Absolutely. By nature, I'm cheerful and optimistic and that that shows through my work without me having to say so makes me rejoice.

#### **14. How do you decide on the size / scale of your works?**

En fonction de la perspective, de la difficulté autant que pour l'originalité.

Je ne suis pas un artiste spontané. Il me faut penser longuement avant de démarrer une peinture. Quand il me vient une idée, je commence en général par me documenter à fond, ensuite, je fais plusieurs croquis à partir desquels je définis la taille, la palette de couleurs et le support. De l'idée à la réalisation, cela peut prendre plusieurs mois, en tout cas, au-delà d'une année.

Plus c'est compliqué, plus j'adhère.

According to the perspective and the difficulty as much as the originality.

I'm not a spontaneous artist. I have to think long and hard before starting a painting. When an idea comes to me, I generally start by doing detailed research, then I make several sketches from which I decide the size, the palette of colours and the medium. From idea to finished product, that can take several months, sometimes more than a year.

The more complicated it is the more I stick to it.

#### **15. Do you draw from real life or from imagination?**

Au tout début, j'étais un peu un artiste de marché, avec une inspiration proche de ce que l'on trouve sur les places de marché à Accra, par exemple : le joueur de tam-tam, la femme qui allaite, la séance de coiffure, etc.... Avec le temps, avec l'âge aussi, je constate qu'il existe deux formes d'artistes : ceux qui spéculent en bourse et gagnent beaucoup d'argent et ceux qui travaillent autour de l'esprit.

J'aime la difficulté et j'essaye de faire mon chemin par la voie spirituelle et didactique. C'est la raison pour laquelle je me concentre sur les aspects qui valorisent ma culture béninoise, le Vodou en particulier, et l'histoire de mon pays à travers la traite négrière.

Maintenant, face à mes œuvres, la plupart l'inscrive dans l'Onirisme et le Symbolisme. Je ne suis pas fâché.

At the very beginning, I was a bit of a market artist, with inspiration from what one finds in the marketplaces of Accra, for example : the tam-tam player, the breast-feeding woman, barber session, etc... With time, and with age too, I'd say that there are two types of artist : those who speculate on money and earn lots and those whose work centres on the spirit.

I like the difficulty and I try to make my way by the spiritual and didactic path. That's why I concentrate on the aspects that promote my Beninese culture, especially Voodoo, and the history of my country through the Slave Trade. Now, most of my work is dream-like and symbolist. I don't regret that.

#### **16. You have stated in previous interviews that you have been influenced by the cartoon artist - François Schuiten - are there any other artists that have influenced your work?**

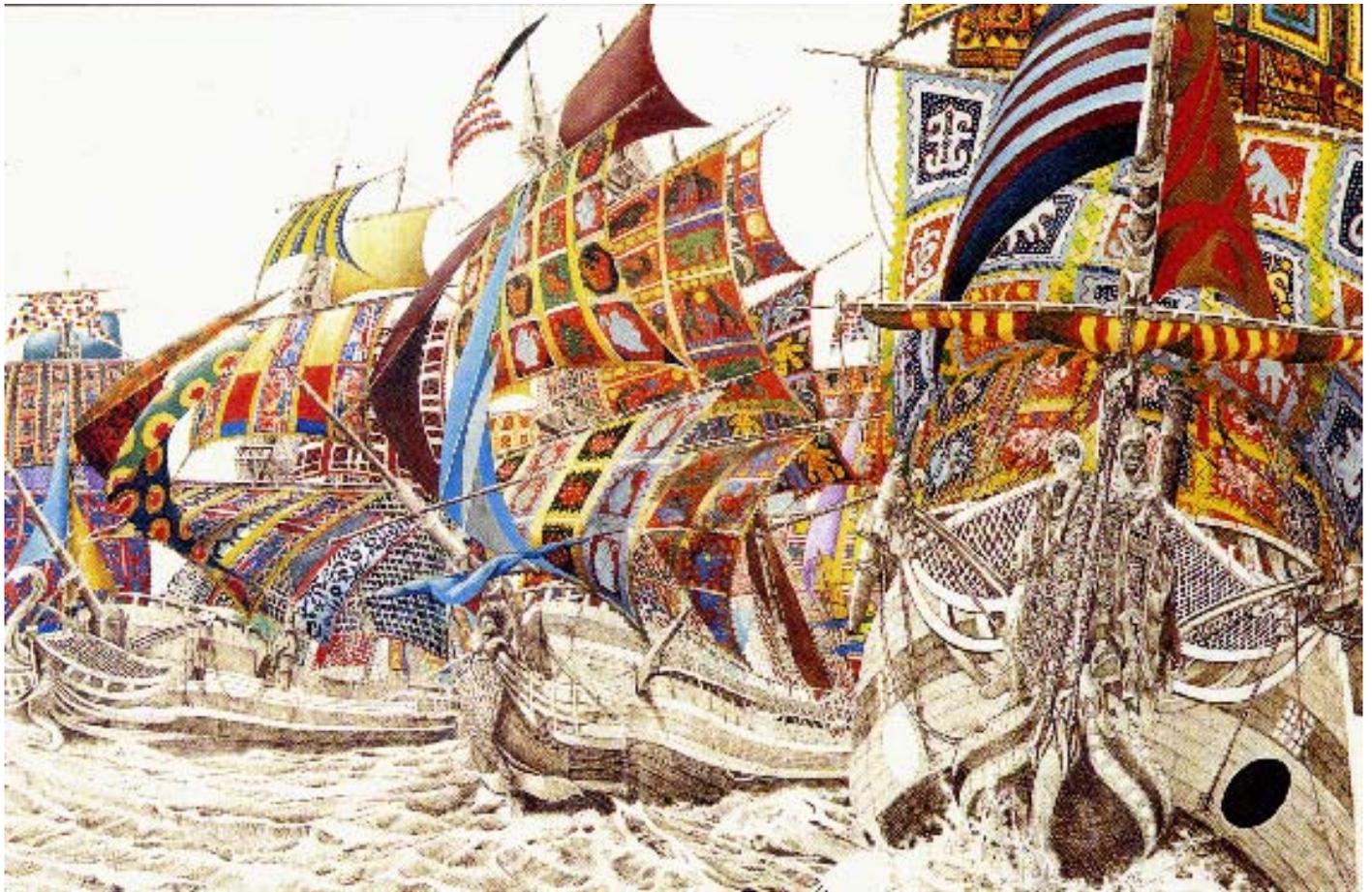
C'est vrai. Il me faut à nouveau rendre à César ce qui est à César. François Schuiten est à mes yeux un Maître, toutefois, je découvre au fil du temps d'autres artistes dont la création me touche profondément comme Léonard de Vinci, René Magritte, William Turner et quelques autres.

It's true. I must once again give credit where it's due. François Schuiten is a Master in my eyes, however, I am discovering as time goes by other artists whose work deeply touches me such as Leonardo da Vinci, René Magritte, [JM] William Turner and a few others.

#### **17. Your education and background in architecture has clearly influenced the technical drawing elements of your work, have you constructed / or thought of working in actual 3D / sculpture?**

J'ai effectivement démarré des pièces en volume. N'étant pas satisfait sur le plan technique, j'ai cherché un homme du métier avec lequel je puisse être en phase. Je suis tombé opportunément sur Karom Tomasson, qui, en brûlant sur des hectares des champs de blé, réalise des figures visibles uniquement du ciel, et qui est également un spécialiste du torchis en sculpture. Malheureusement, l'année même où il était disposé à m'initier, il a été foudroyé par un cancer. Nous étions en 2004. Toutefois, cela ne saurait tarder, pour que je propose sur le marché de l'art des sculptures.

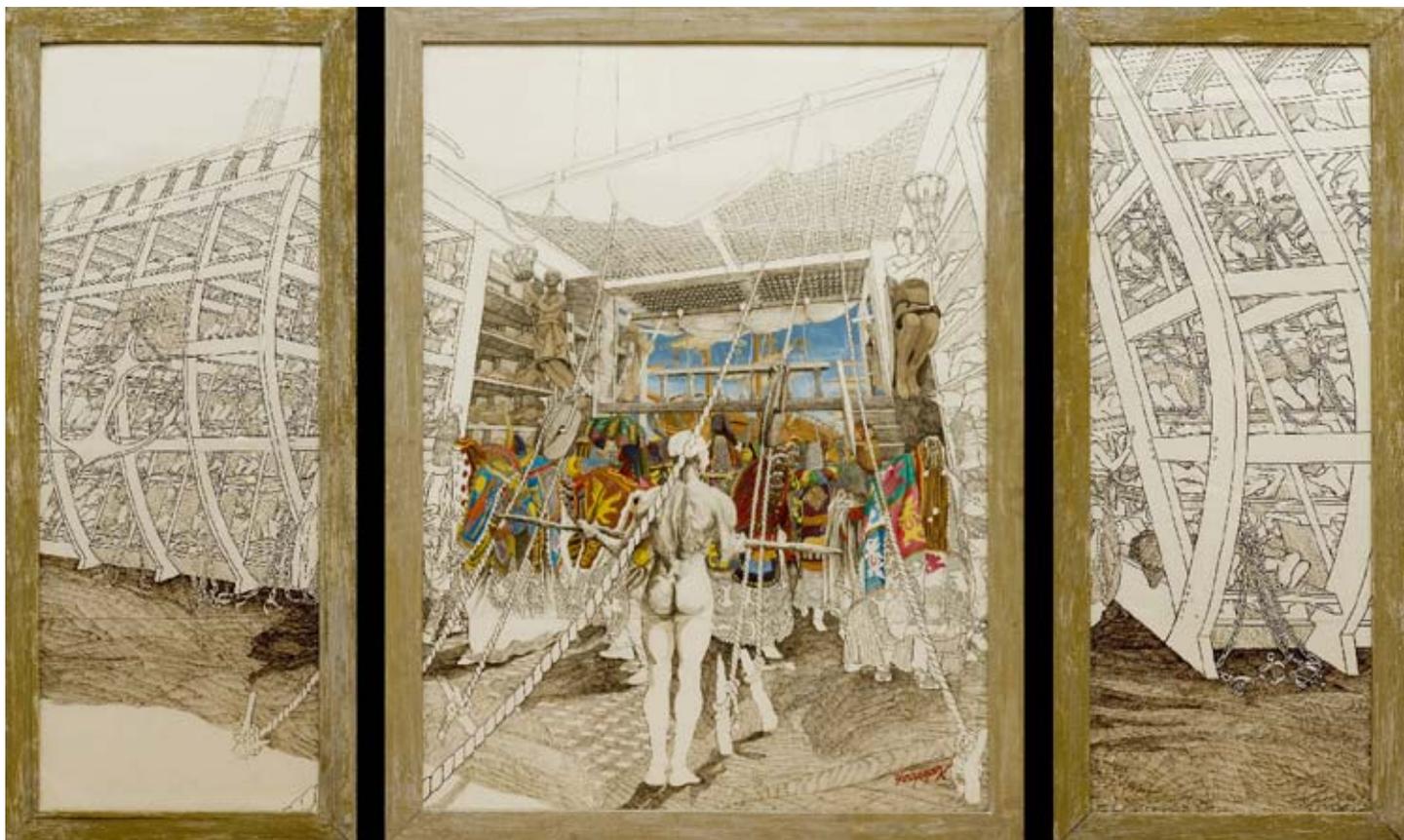
I've actually got many projects on the go. Not satisfied on a technical level, I looked for a professional on my wavelength. Fortunately I stumbled across Karom Tomasson, who, makes figures visible only from the sky by burning them into wheat fields, and who is equally in specialist cob (a mixture of clay and straw used for walls) sculptures. Unfortunately the year he was ready to start, he was struck down by cancer. That was in 2004. However, that can't be put off so that I can put sculptures on the art market.



Julien Sinzogan  
*Les Voiles du Retour*, 1998  
Coloured inks on paper  
75cm x 108cm



Julien Sinzogan  
*The Return of the Spirits*, 1998  
Coloured inks on paper  
75cm x 108cm



Julien Sinzogan  
*Gates of Return*, 2007  
Acrylics on canvas  
4.65m x 10m



Julien Sinzogan, *L' Armada du Retour*, 2002  
Coloured inks on paper, 75cm x 108cm



Julien at work in his studio

## **Your comments**

Please send your comments and any images of pupil's work and responses to shehnoor@risc.org.uk or Liz@octobergallery.co.uk

### **Teacher's feedback:**

Were you able to successfully deliver both Art & Global Citizenship through this project? please tell us about what happened

which GC concepts did you explore? Human Rights; Interdependence; Sustainability; Peace & conflict; Diversity; Social justice

What were the strengths of this project?

What were its weaknesses?

### **Pupils responses:**

When we did this art project I thought about.....

The best thing about this project was.....

Something I learned that I didn't know before.....

Before we did this project I thought..... but now.....



[www.octobergallery.co.uk/participate](http://www.octobergallery.co.uk/participate)

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