



Barbara Davis Gallery

Amesegëmallô (Thanks)

Miguel Soler-Roig



Miguel Soler-Roig, *Dogon Dance*, 54" x 80

**Artist Reception:
March 6th, 6:00 – 8:30 pm**

On View:
March 6th, 2020 - April 3rd, 2020

Barbara Davis Gallery is pleased to announce *Amesegëmallô (Thanks)*, an exhibition featuring Photographs, Video, and Installation by Miguel Soler-Roig opening Friday, March 6th, 2020, with an artist's reception from 6:00 - 8:30pm. This exhibition is on view through April 3rd, 2020.

Amesegëmallô (Thanks)

In 2012, Miguel Soler-Roig made an intense and adventurous journey through southern Ethiopia and the surrounding Omo River Valley. Designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 1980, this river basin is home to important paleontological deposits and is known as the cradle of humanity. Unlike the northern part of the country, the south retains an almost virgin character and is known to have been a crossroads for thousands of years for diverse migrant cultures and ethnic groups. The area is populated by semi-nomadic tribes such as the *Hamer, Mursi, Karo, Surma, Bume, Galeb, Dassanetch or Bodi*; many of whom practice body modifications.

Through coexistence and a close approach, the artist manages to capture the freedom of a country that, with the exception of the Italian occupation between 1936 and 1941, has remained free of the colonialism carried out during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Ethiopia had an expansive and reformist spirit under Emperor Haile Selassie, later became a communist regime and today is a democracy with its internal conflicts and famines due to drought. The landscapes of savannahs, with small trees and low density between them, frame photographs that express tradition and astonishment in equal parts.

Portraits, nature and everyday scenarios make up a very complete body of work that allows the spectator to enter into the daily life of the tribes from a sort of shared familiarity. Soler-Roig flees from dramatization, anthropological analysis, clichés or hegemonic perspective to manifest a look full of respect and fascination. From the brave face of a young man in the foreground, the determination of a woman who leads a path, to the intimacy between two men accomplices in their gestures. There is also room for magic: that which can be released by a donkey in the moonlight, protected by the constellation of Pegasus or that which produces the clash between rituals and contemporaneity.

Vivid colours and daring compositions round off a photographic series that praise the enjoyment of everyday life, the idiosyncrasies of its villages and the spectacular nature of a landscape of its own, still undeveloped. *Amesegëmallô* means thanks in Amharic, an expression that the artist uses in two different ways: on the one hand, the celebration of learning together through this experience, but also the survival of these tribal cultures in time.

Nerea Ubieta

Below is a brief descriptive text in the artist's own words.

The African continent offers us a very particular reality, full of rituals and joy, but also full of terrible stories. Vivid lights and immeasurable shadows. The latter are those that confront the reality of wars, famine, the trafficking of organs destined for the first world, the abuse of women and children or the pandemics of incurable diseases. Being aware of them leads to an understanding of mass migration in search of a life freed from suffering and terror.

My trip to the east of Africa hosts a hidden reflection on the relations of the so-called first and third world. One could say that I made a reverse journey to the one that about 30 million people make every year in search of hope. Personally, I have encountered episodes of unimaginable human lives and have understood at a profound level, the certainty of Africa as the place of origin of the human race.

The travel I took in the opposite direction entails other codes, other values, wrapped in a halo of adventure and prospects for discovery and exploration. In recent history, Europe has exercised a paternalistic colonialism on the native Africans, but today, in an era of revolution and wars for reasons of political, racial, economic or religious control, the tables might have turned and we find ourselves prisoners of the doctrine we have preached with despotism, at the first sign of change.

During my journey, I was looking for new experiences, unaware of the danger I was immersing myself in. I came to feel the absurdity of fate when, unwittingly, I found myself in an unexpected and irreversible situation. In the face of the setback, came the regret and the anguish of not seeing a way out. I was held captive in one of the tribes, near the

Sudanese border, where their spears and arrows have been replaced by AK47 rifles. The hours were endless and seemed like days. Fortunately, I was released after dark, from a nightmare that I thought might have been the last day of my life.

Analyzing the adversity that suddenly arises, without having foreseen the consequences, you understand that the parameters on which life is measured, are not the same as those we find in the Western world. They have other values, their values, and it is better not to disturb the natural balance that is established within their territory. You have to get rid of the colonialist view once and for all and approach them without judgement, open to understanding their idiosyncrasy, just as one of those first travelers, Arthur Radclyffe Dugmore, understood it, at the end of the 19th century:

"We might be inclined to inquire into the morals of such an interesting people, and would probably be socked at hearing what their customs are, but as their point of view differs so entirely from ours it is not fair for us to judge. They at least live up to their code, which is frequently more than we can say of ourselves."

I said thank you, Ameseğenallô... My journey was over and I was able to return back to my surroundings, even though I will never forget the beauty of the place and its people. I understand that they prefer to stay and not escape from there, if not for reasons of necessity. I would like to paraphrase Karen Blixen, as if her memories had accompanied me, and in the context of "Out of Africa" conclude my story with these words:

*I traveled to a part of Africa on the banks of the Omo River, north of the equator,
through a fertile, green valley at the foot of Lake Chamo...*

<https://www.soler-roig.com/amesegenallo>