

HOME / INTERVIEWS / CRISTINA DE MIDDEL: THIS IS WHAT HATRED DID



ARTISTS MEDIUMS 03.06.2015 Jessica Saxby

## Cristina De Middel: This is What Hatred Did

Photography began as a tool to prop up her practice as a fine artist, when her focus was on drawing, but Cristina De Middel soon made the shift to the dark room. She tells me that after graduating she realized that “fine art, artistic language, I didn’t get it, I didn’t understand half the time what artists meant.” But after a long stint as a photojournalist, including training with the Spanish army as a war correspondent, she came back to the world of fine art, or as she puts it, “I realized it [photojournalism] was bullshit... You’re not actually going to change anything, it is too direct, or pretends to be direct. I stepped back and stayed in the middle, I am very interested by the subjects and people that photojournalism addresses, but I am interested in the language of a controlled yet abstract, personal art. ”



From the series "This is What Hatred Did" by Cristina De Middel

*"Fine art, artistic language, I didn't get it"*

This in-the-middle stance describes perfectly the series "This is What Hatred Did", shot in Makoko, Lagos, Nigeria and inspired by Amos Tutuola's novel *My Life in The Bush of Ghosts*. Tutuola's story recounts the fate of a West African boy abandoned by his family with his elder brother who unwittingly enters the perilous, surreal, magical wilderness of the bush. Makoko is described "a place where no logic seems to prevail and that is equally forbidden for those who

do not belong." De Middel explains how "It is a neighborhood that a lot of photojournalists have depicted as a sort of Africa stereotype, I realized that it would be the perfect location, that it could work as a metaphor for the bush that is described in the book, I wanted to look at this place, explain it."

### *"Makoko is a place where no logic seems to prevail"*

But how did she get to this point? "When I created the Afronaut series [a fictional series based on the true story of Zambia's failed space program in the 1960s], it was there that my career really took off. I was a photojournalist and I quit my job at the newspaper and started telling the stories that I wanted to tell," she tells me. Curiously enough she started being invited as an "expert" on Africa, but as far as De Middel was concerned "I was maybe an expert on the clichés or stereotypes of Africa as I had learnt to be through photojournalism" having not visited the continent. So she took the opportunity to delve deeper into Makoko, an area where it is "difficult to gain access". And so began the journey to create these theatrical and mystical images "over a period of three weeks I had to be interviewed by the two kings of Makoko, we had to get drunk together in order for them to trust me," she recounts. But once inside the shooting of the series came off like a performance "everyone is having fun, so people are relaxed". However, De Middel insists that the shots were not overly staged "I adapt reality to find what I need" she explains, "It was quite easy because a lot of the people I was working with knew the book, knew the story and the author, also a lot of the people who live there are from Benin and Benin is voodoo country, so they weren't surprised when I asked them "can you dress like a ghost" for example."



Installation shot, "This is What Hatred Did" an exhibition by Cristina De Middel at La New Gallery

*Over a period of three weeks I had to be interviewed by the two kings of Makoko, we had to get drunk together in order for them to trust me"*

The bond with Lagos was not fleeting either, De Middel will be back in October, curating Lagos Photo Festival 2015. That is, in-between releasing eight books, and completing four projects spanning the Brazilian Favelas to the North Pole.

"This is What Hatred Did" is on display at La New Gallery, Madrid, from June 5 to July 18. Lagos Photo Festival is to take place from October 17 to November 21.