



Shiraz Bayjoo // *Apart Bez, Tu Korek* // June 16 – July 11

Ed Cross Fine Art at Clerkenwell Gallery // 20 Clerkenwell Green, EC1R 0DP, London

PRESS PREVIEW: June 16, 10am – 12pm // RSVP emily@edcrossfineart.com

OPENING HOURS: Tuesday to Saturday, 11am – 6pm // Sunday by appointment

Shiraz Bayjoo's first solo show with Ed Cross Fine Art – *Apart Bez, Tu Korek* – considers the implications of social and colonial hierarchies on both communities and environments of the Indian Ocean. Across the exhibition's two floors, the artist presents painting, photography, sculpture and installation to articulate his ongoing multi-disciplinary and research-based practice.

Apart Bez, Tu Korek grapples with the visual language of European status imposed on native populations and reconfigured by Bayjoo materially and conceptually. The exhibition's archival genealogies stem from Malagasy culture as well as Bayjoo's own Mauritian heritage; its Creole title, meaning 'everything's fine except for the fuckery', wryly illuminates the exploitation which brought the region's linguistic diversity into being.

For the exhibition, Bayjoo presents a series of new ceramic works: *Coral Island*. Characteristic of his practice in their layering of meaning and material, each object is detailed with a sketch made by Dutch sailors and reinterpreted by printers who made them into lithographs before finding their final incarnation beneath Bayjoo's fired glaze. Representing the unfamiliar lands, creatures and abundant resources encountered on the sailors' journeys to and around Africa, the small drawings are nestled in textured clay and moulded into ornate frames nodding to Europe's colonial opulence. Hung in small arrangements to enhance the intimacy of the individual works, *Coral Island* runs through the exhibition both spatially and conceptually: here, the natural world is just as much subject to colonialism's heavy exploitation as human populations.

Bayjoo's experiments with scale and significance extend to *En Cours*, a series of paintings emerging from his *Politique de Races* panels (2018) and ranging from jewel-like keepsakes to larger triptychs the size of altarpieces. Recuperating images of Malagasy royalty and society from French colonial archives, the series highlights the powerful and dignified presences of historically othered subjects through a multi-layered artistic technique, thus reversing the archival process by which such imagery has been wielded to oppress.

Bayjoo positions the social technology of textiles – from traditional Kanga cloths to the ostentatious European drapery of flags and military standards – in conversation with the leap in maritime technology that facilitated the first colonial expeditions. *San Vizyon*, a large triangular swathe of Panama woven fabric trimmed with gold tassels, features three young individuals; their eye contact with the photographer transcends space and material to meet the viewer's own gaze. The encounter trills with snapshot immediacy, vibrating against the solemnity suggested by its royal medium.

San Vizyon's trio are pictured on a canoe, likely made of East African hardwood – perhaps Sapele, from which Bayjoo has constructed the neighbouring *Sambo* sculpture. For all its maritime inferences – *Sambo*'s Kangas might be mistaken for sails, its beams for masts – the installation foregrounds sacredness over seafaring. Hanging from *Sambo*'s Sapele struts, small objects recall *Coral Island* and *En Cours*, articulating intimate presences and places within a revered space. Shrine-like, *Sambo* invites the viewer to imagine a hand at work beyond the artist's: that of a devotee, a mourner or a celebrant.

Apart Bez, Tu Korek examines what materials themselves are able to testify to; the ideas they might be able to articulate which evade their more mediated subjects. From considering the manipulation of visual languages imposed by colonising cultures, Bayjoo's work moves to investigate the possibilities of reformulating, setting new terms for its own thinking. *Apart Bez, Tu Korek* begins with the 'archive', but its closing remarks offer new articulations – of meaning, of visibility, of materiality – in the present.

The exhibition was developed by Shiraz Bayjoo in curatorial conversation with Ilaria Conti, who has written an accompanying text for the project.

Shiraz Bayjoo is a contemporary multi-disciplinary artist who works with film, painting, photography, performance, and installation. His research-based practice focuses on personal and public archives addressing cultural memory and postcolonial nationhood in a manner that challenges dominant cultural narratives. Bayjoo has exhibited with the Institute of International Visual Arts, London; New Art Exchange, Nottingham; 5th Edition Dhaka Art Summit; 14th Biennale of Sharjah; 13th Biennale of Dakar; and 21st Biennale of Sydney. Bayjoo is a recipient of the Gasworks Fellowship and the Arts Council of England. He is an artist in residence at the Delfina Foundation, and has recently been awarded an Artist Research Fellowship with the Smithsonian.

As an independent curator, **Ilaria Conti** focuses on research-based practices engaging with decolonial epistemologies and articulating new relationships between institutional infrastructures, communal knowledge, and civic agency. Most recently she served as Research Curator at the Centre Pompidou, where she was part of the curatorial team of *Cosmopolis*, a multi-year platform devoted to research-based art. Previously, she served as Exhibitions and Programs Director at CIMA New York; Assistant Curator of the 2016 Marrakech Biennale; and Samuel H. Kress Interpretive Fellow at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, among other positions. She is the Vice-President of the African Art in Venice Forum.

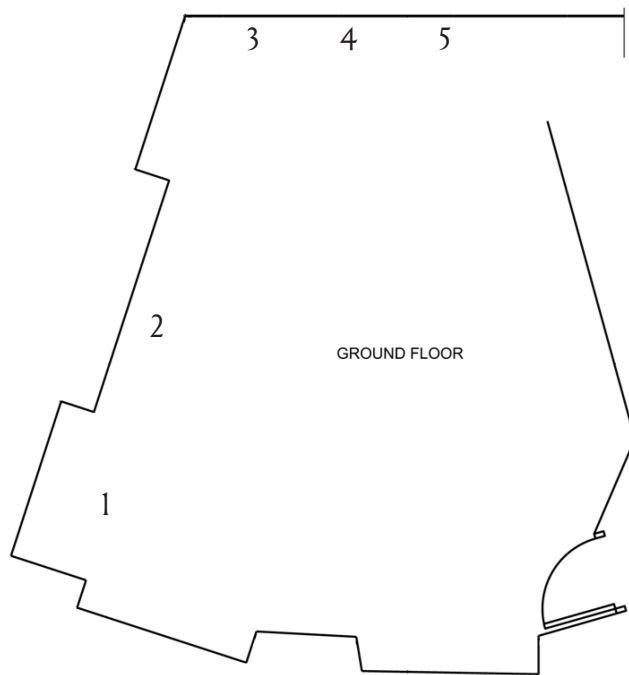
Since 2009, **Ed Cross Fine Art** has worked with emerging and established artists across and beyond the African diaspora. The gallery seeks to stage conversations – between practitioners, international audiences and as guided by its artists – to amplify voices historically silenced, and to create space for their independent development.

For more information, artist interview requests or high-res images, please contact Emily Watkins (emily@edcrossfineart.com)

APART BEZ, TU KOREK

SHIRAZ BAYJOO

Ed Cross Fine Art



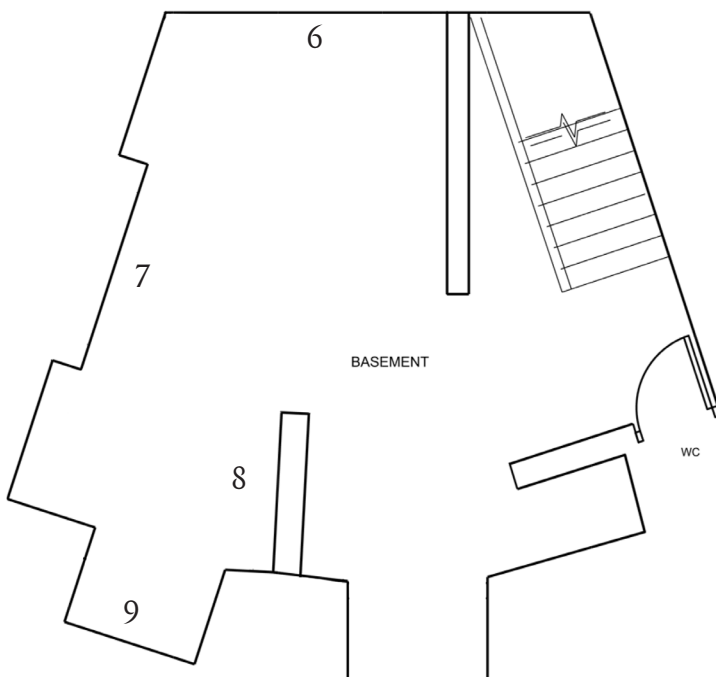
1. *Sambo*, 2021. Sapele wood, brass, cotton, alloy chain, archive photograph, card, coral stone.

2. *Coral Island (set 1)*, 2021. Decal and glaze on vulcan black stoneware.

3. *En Cours, Nu Ban Ansyen (2)*, 2021. Acrylic on wood, resin.

4. *En Cours, Water Banana (study 1)*, 2021. Acrylic on wood, resin.

5. *En Cours (set 1)*, 2021. Acrylic on wood, resin.



6. *Politique des Races (4)*, 2021. Acrylic on wood, resin.

7. *San Vizyon*, 2021. Woven panama, dye sublimation ink, Sapele wood, brass.

8. *Coral Island (set 2)*, 2021. Decal and glaze on porcelain white stoneware.

9. *En Cours, Pour le Patrimoine (2)*, 2021. Acrylic on wood, resin.

Archival Disruptions for a Poetics of Futurity by Ilaria Conti

Shiraz Bayjoo deconstructs the material and visual languages of coloniality to articulate new critical strategies for decolonial sovereignty in the present. The artist's research-based practice, rooted in his Mauritian heritage, addresses the settlers' endeavours that have marked the Indian Ocean by pursuing a transversal understanding of the region as a whole. His work investigates the implications of such interconnectedness, in resonance with Édouard Glissant's notion of 'poetics of relation' and Patrick Chamoiseau's interpretation of *creolité*.

Shiraz addresses these regional entanglements in recognition of how crucial the fluidity of movement among neighbouring islands such as Mauritius and Madagascar has been to the development of the wealth of empires. This circulation of peoples and goods is regarded by the artist as the key building block of what sociologist Anibal Quijano defined as the 'coloniality of power': "the control of all forms of control of the subjectivity/intersubjectivity, of culture, and especially of knowledge, of the production of knowledge."¹

The inquiry into the perverse, intimate relation that the exploitation of beings and territories entertains with the production of colonial knowledge is central to *Apart Bez, Tu Korek* (creole for "Everything's Fine Except for the Fuckery"). The exhibition sheds light on the multiple technologies that have allowed the colonialist project to thrive: sailing, extraction, vision, archives. It re-envisions them through a *détournement* that, to echo the words of Saidiya Hartman, aims to generate a "disruptive poetics."²

The artworks presented appropriate the technological thinking of the colonial process, re-enacting its chronology to conjure new outcomes: the colonisers' sails and stands transform into devices of resistance and affirmation in *Sambo* and *San Vizyon*; charming furnishings become mirrors of extractive violence in *Coral Island*; the normativity of vision that reinforced the colonial social order is sabotaged in *En Cours*.

The ceramic series *Coral Island* extends Shiraz Bayjoo's ongoing reflection on the symbolical value of objects. The small sculptural pieces, mimicking French ornate frames similar to the ones historically used to cherish portraits of loved ones, reproduce the endearing quality of bourgeois comfort and social status. On closer inspection, however, images of colonial violence can be seen to inhabit these charming decorative ornaments. Underneath the ceramic glazes, which in their multiple colours and textures evoke marine seabeds, earthy landscapes, and volcanic soils, are crystallised images from the De Bry collection of voyages, a series of 25 volumes published in Frankfurt between 1590 and 1634 and collecting almost fifty accounts of colonial travel across *India Occidentalis* (present-day Americas) and *India Orientalis* (Africa and Asia).

The ceramics become vessels of the double violence that colonisers perpetrated on living beings and local ecologies in the Indian Ocean region. From settlers sitting on giant turtles to men trying to kill birds with a club, the naïve representations of exotic heavens provided by the explorers are manipulated to shed light on the relentless exploitation of land and bodies that such stereotypical imagery enabled. *Coral Island* thus forms a new narration, in which the colonial imaginary that continues to thrive today through seemingly innocent fantasies of paradise island vacations reveals its genocidal and ecocidal ferocity.

¹ Anibal Quijano. 2000. *Colonialidad del poder, globalización y democracia*. Caracas: Escuela de Estudios Internacionales y diplomáticos "Pedro Gual", p. 1-2

² Saidiya Hartman. "The Dead Book Revisited." *History of the Present* 6, no. 2 (2016): p. 210

The *En Cours* painting series extends this subversion of the colonial vision by drawing from the archives of the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris. The historical photographs, wielding the settlers' gaze and assigning subordinate and racialised identities to members of the Malagasy society, are transfigured by the artist's process of material thinking. Avoiding an acritical reproduction of such charged imagery, Shiraz incorporates the photographs into an artistic process in which layers, colours, and matter modulate the focal points, the atmospheres, and the inferences of the figures represented.

Reversing the process that turned complex identities into archetypes, the resulting works defy the certainty of fixed racist categories. *En Cours* brings to the surface presences that are from the past but are not relegated to it: they are to be seen and understood in their present-day significance. Through a process of painting that applies material layers as lenses capable of adjusting one's vision, Shiraz generates a defiant and alternative archaeology of these images. He unearths the sovereignty of representation that colonial archives have historically erased through their 'order of perception,' in which, as described by scholar Rolando Vázquez, "the spectator knows little about what is not represented, what lays outside the artifice."³

The rhizomatic constellations formed by the paintings further illuminate the artist's approach to interconnectedness as methodology and to research-through-making. Each image becomes part of a broader network of meaning, forming a choral mosaic in which the aura conjured by the frames — which echo altarpieces and other religious representations — is transferred to the subjectivities liberated from colonial objectification.

The imposing textile work *San Vizyon* amplifies this emancipatory process by tackling the symbology of royal banners as another technology of oppression to be overthrown. The figures at the centre of the photograph, most likely staged as an encounter with *sauvages*, do not simply return the gaze originally imposed on them. They appropriate the visual frame, asserting the autonomy of their bodies, identities, and surroundings and transforming the image into a space of affirmation. As the creole title of the work ("Without Vision") suggests, through a material and conceptual manoeuvre, the hegemonic order of vision is here erased.

Colonial legacies can be dismantled in the third dimension, too. In *Sambo*, Shiraz further articulates his object-based thinking. Realised in Sapele, an African timber referencing traditional East African and western Indian Ocean hardwoods, the sculpture operates a symbolic shift from seafaring to remembrance by substituting sails with Kanga fabrics. Celebrating these textiles as tools of identity affirmation and knowledge circulation, the work exudes familiarity thanks to the cloths' mottos and vernacular language. Evoking the intimacy of places of spirituality and offerings, the sculpture delineates a space in which to envision new technologies of memory and affirmation that, in response to the urgent need to decolonise our present, substitute hegemony with relationality, *owning* with *owing*.⁴

Apart Bez, Tu Korek defies the inexorability of colonial history. It articulates forms of material and visual resistance that respond to the urgency of generating new narratives through which historically colonised/resilient subjects can re-exist in the future. Saidiya Hartman's teachings on how to overcome the mortuary, deterministic violence of colonial archives, come to mind:

I navigated the limits of evidence by invoking a series of speculative arguments that exploited the capacities of the subjunctive—the what might have been—and by inhabiting a figural or affective relation to the past rather than a causal or linear one.⁵

³ Rolando Vázquez. 2020. *Vistas of Modernity*. Amsterdam: Mondriaan Fund, p. 41

⁴ Rolando Vázquez. 2020. *Vistas of Modernity*. Amsterdam: Mondriaan Fund, p. 32

⁵ Saidiya Hartman. "The Dead Book Revisited." *History of the Present* 6, no. 2 (2016): 210

