



---

## Romuald Hazoumè

---

9 February - 22 May 2011

### Exhibition Notes for Primary School Teachers General Information for the Public

Winner of the Arnold Bode Prize at documenta 12, Romuald Hazoumè is one of Africa's leading visual artists. He has worked with a wide variety of media throughout his career, from discarded petrol canisters, oil paint and canvas to

large-scale installation, video and photography.

The exhibition at IMMA focuses on his iconic sculptures made from discarded plastic canisters which resemble the primitive tribal masks that were such an influence on the early Modernists. The 40 works implicitly criticise the presence of multinational oil companies in West Africa where natural resources are exploited with no benefit to the local communities, a form of neo-colonialism that Hazoumè equates with an unending form of slavery. Hazoumè has exhibited widely in Europe and America including the Menil Collection, Houston; the Musée Quai Branly, Paris; the Guggenheim Bilbao; and the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Hazoumè was born in 1962 in the Republic of Benin, where he continues to live and work.

The exhibition is curated by Enrique Juncosa, Director of IMMA, and Seán Kissane, Head of Exhibitions, and is accompanied by a fully-illustrated catalogue published by IMMA with texts by Seán Kissane, Gerald Houghton, Yacouba Konate and André Magnin.

The exhibition is open to the general public from 9<sup>th</sup> February until 20<sup>th</sup> May 2011 (East Ground Galleries).

**The IMMA Primary School Programme will focus on Romuald Hazoumè from 21<sup>st</sup> March 2011 until 22<sup>th</sup> May 2011.**

The exhibition is organised by IMMA and will travel to the Oriel Mostyn Gallery, Llandudno, Wales.

The exhibition is supported by Fondation Espace Afrique and the French Embassy.

### Exhibition Information for Primary School Teachers

**This exhibition of works by the African artist Romuald Hazoumè continues a strand of programming at IMMA that seeks to present artists from the periphery whose works are socially engaged and act as a document of a moment in time within a cultural history. The importance of such artists is that they provide an incisive social commentary on global politics from a local point of view. For children, the exhibition is a wonderful opportunity to encounter and engage with artworks in a variety of forms such as found objects (an object not designed for an artistic purpose but existing for another purpose already), photography, installation, video, sound, painting and sculpture. For primary school teachers, the exhibition offers a rich source of inspiration for the children's learning back in the classroom. Many of the artworks on show are easily linked to the various strands of visual arts education in the primary curriculum. Elements to be explored with the children throughout the exhibition include everyday household objects used in artwork; photographs of ordinary everyday life; sculpture and music made of everyday noises; shapes and colours; spatial organization; texture. The exhibition lends itself to consider such topics as geography, culture, history and environmental concerns, identity and masks, and social and personal.**

#### Who is Romuald Hazoumè?

Romuald Hazoumè was born in 1962 in Porto-Novo, the capital city of the Republic of Benin on the west coast of Africa where he currently lives and works. Benin borders [Togo](#) to the west, [Nigeria](#) to the east and [Burkina Faso](#) and [Niger](#) to the north. Its short southern coastline on the [Bight of Benin](#) is where the majority of the population is located. Benin has a population of approximately 9 million.

Benin, a former French colony, received its independence from France in the 1960s.

Historically, the region of current-day Benin was known as the Slave Coast due to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Hazoumè's practice calls to attention the legacy of colonialism and the continuing exploitation of Africa's resources. The official language of Benin is [French](#), but indigenous languages such as [Fon](#) and [Yoruba](#) are commonly spoken.

Hazoumè's was raised a catholic but has Yoruba ancestry (the ethnic group of the Yoruba had migrated from Nigeria in the 12<sup>th</sup> c), and his roots in the tribe are significant to his work. The importance of this meeting between the imported religions of the west and the indigenous rituals of his locale is pervasive in his artworks.

Hazoumè does not identify himself as an 'artist' in the western sense but sees himself as an aré in the Yoruba tradition whose function it is to exchange ideas and represent Yoruba culture. Within that culture the artist holds a respected position and is seen to embody spiritual, social and symbolic knowledge. An aré must travel perfecting and handing on skills. He is, in essence, an agent of intercultural exchange. As an aré, Hazoumè sees his main task as showing what Africa really is, right at this moment.

#### List of Artworks

Please note that a substantial number of the following artworks will be visited during a guided tour of the Romuald Hazoumè exhibition. However, the number visited will vary according to circumstance on the day, and additional artworks which are not covered here may be included in any given tour. The list below contains both background information for teachers and viewing suggestions for children.

#### Masks

##### *Background Information for Teachers*

On entering the exhibition at IMMA one is faced with Hazoumè's masks. The series exhibited is part of the ongoing series of found objects that Hazoumè transforms into reflections on contemporary African society.

The Yoruba tribe has a long tradition of mask making. Hazoumè adapts the jerry can and other found objects to make masks that traditionally are used in ritualistic ceremonies in West Africa to contact ancestral spirits. The masks can also be symbols of ideal female beauty. Hazoumè's subversion of the traditional mask parodies the Western notion of primitivism that was adopted by artists such as Picasso and Braque in the early 20th century. He gives the continuing processes of material exchange between the western world and modern Africa a tongue-in-cheek twist by returning to the west as 'art' what the west had sent as rubbish to Africa.

If these were authentic African masks, mysterious powers and magical properties would be attributed to them, and they could not be displayed in a gallery as it wouldn't be a sufficiently sacred space.

##### *Viewing Suggestions for Children*

A 'portrait' is a drawing, painting, or photograph usually of a person but sometimes of a group of people. In a book or film, a 'portrait' is a detailed description. 'Portraiture' is the art of making portraits, and masks are one form of portraiture. In the present exhibition the masks suggest everyday African people.

What do you see when you look at the various masks? Are they friendly or scary or mysterious? Do you feel like imitating the different expressions? There is a great tradition of hairstyles with specific meanings in Africa. What could the different hairstyles signify? What everyday household objects could you use in making masks? Where do you think the goods go that we recycle?

*Citoyenne* (1997): the artist calls this mask 'woman citizen'. Would you have thought this was a woman? Does she have a narrow or a broad face? What does her mouth express? Can you see her eyes? Do you like this mask, and if so, why?

*Peintre* (2002): the artist calls this mask 'the Painter'. Can you see why he would have given the mask this name? What objects did he use to make it? Do you think it looks funny? If so, why?

*Dogone and Dogon* (1996): the artist calls these two masks 'Dogon woman' and 'Dogon man'. The Dogon are a people who live in Mali. They are famous for the beautiful masks which they use in dances during religious ceremonies. What objects did the artist use to make these masks? What would be equivalent Irish objects? Why do they look older than the other masks?

*Marge S.* (2002): the artist calls this mask 'Margin S.' or 'Blank Space S.' Is the mask of an old or a young person? Somebody happy or sad? Interesting or boring? Fashionable or old-fashioned? How do you know these things? Could you guess at the name given to the mask by the artist?

*Bye Bye* (2009): the artist calls this mask 'Bye Bye'. Can you see why? What objects did the artist use? Do you think the mask looks sad? Why might a mask made of these objects look sad? Have the colours got anything to do with it?

#### Paintings

##### *Background Information for Teachers*

The paintings exhibited are integral to Hazoumè's artistic practice. The technique is based on an old west-African mural technique that covered buildings: the ochre pigment is combined with cow dung to create the textured background. Hazoumè adds a contemporary twist to the

paintings through his addition of modern acrylic colours that are used to delineate the foreground from the background.

The symbols and glyphs depicted in the paintings are part of a visual lexicon that is widespread in Africa. For Hazoumè the signs relate to the ancient system known as Ifá which is central to the Yoruba tribe and used for medical diagnosis and divination by signs from the earth. Ifá is a West African literary, divinatory and philosophical system. Hazoumè does not view his canvases as paintings in a traditional sense but as 'evocations' of another reality.

#### *Viewing Suggestions for Children*

**Woli-Meji (1993):** The artist used ancestral materials such as natural pigments made of organic materials and cow dung on this canvas but also acrylic. Do you think you recognise the animal, or what animal does it remind you of? Do you think the writing beneath the animal looks interesting? Are you curious to know what language it is and what the words mean?

**Lete-Meji (1993):** As in *Woli-Meji* the artist used natural pigments made of organic materials, cow dung and acrylic on this canvas. Can you see the circle, rectangle and the square? What effect do the lines around the square have on the eye? What does the texture of the rectangle remind you of? Do you think there might be a relationship between the little pattern or marks in the left bottom corner and the writing?

#### *Photography and Video*

##### *Background Information for Teachers*

In his panoramic photograph *Market Forces: Better to Sell Meat than Men!*, 2006 Hazoumè captures the scene of a goat market set in an idyllic beach location. The title of the work alludes to the subtext of the photograph which is the historical precedence of the slave markets. This location may have been a site where slave traders set sail with their newly purchased slaves and hence the last place slaves saw on departing Africa. To this day economics in Benin force men and sometimes entire families to leave their homes in search of better conditions.

Hazoumè's photographs and film works document the illegal trade of petrol siphoned from the pipelines in Nigeria. They concentrate on the movement and transport of the sculptural mounds of jerry cans by canoe, bicycle, moped, trucks. In the video piece *La Roulette Béninoise*, 2004, 'Roulette' suggests both two-wheeled vehicles and the casino game.

#### *Viewing Suggestions for Children*

##### *Re: photography:*

**Market Forces: Better to Sell Meat than Men! (2006):** the photograph shows a panorama. A panorama is a wide-angle view of a physical space. Look closely. What do you see in this picture? Are there more people or animals? Does the atmosphere seem hectic or leisurely? Have you ever seen anything that reminds you of such a market? Why the title '*Better to Sell Meat than Men!*'? Is this perhaps a special place? Have you ever heard of men or women or children being sold? Who would buy a human being?

**Nature Vivante (2004):** the artist calls the sculpture in this photograph 'Not a Still Life'. A 'still life' is a work of art depicting inanimate subjects, for example everyday objects such as flowers and food or vases and drinking glasses. The photograph is of a moving sculpture. Do you like the shapes that make up this sculpture? Why do you think would people transport so many containers? Do you think it is hard work transporting so many canisters in the African climate?

**Bidon armé (2004):** the artist calls the sculpture in this photograph an 'armed canister'. That makes the containers sound like weapons. Actually, people first heat the containers to make them hold more fuel. They then fill them with petrol. In order to make a living, many people trade in petrol illegally. It is very dangerous to have so much fuel in such light canisters. Why is it so dangerous? Why would people take such a risk? What do people use petrol for? Do you like the shapes and colours that make up the sculpture? What do you think decides the shape of such a sculpture?

##### *Re video:*

Did you notice how the jerry cans are all marked? Why would the smugglers do that? Why would they kick and beat the cans? Do you begin to see faces on jerry cans everywhere?

### ***Sculptures***

#### ***Background Information for Teachers***

The sculptures *Made in Porto Novo* (2009) and *Exit Ball* (2009) are primarily made from jerry cans; they are manipulated to create familiar forms such as musical instruments and footballs. The sound emanating from *Made in Porto-Novo* is based on the recordings of a full day following illegal petrol traffickers. It brings alive the photographs and masks within the exhibition by placing us in the context from which they stem.

#### ***Viewing Suggestions for Children***

***Made in Porto-Novo* (2009):** Porto-Novo is the capital city of the Republic of Benin in West Africa and is the city in which the artist was born. What does the sculpture represent? Do you recognise the instruments? Do you like their size and colours? Do they look light or heavy? Why might the artist have made this particular sculpture out of jerry cans? Does the sculpture make you feel happy or sad? Listen to the music. What does it remind you of? Have you ever heard African music?

***Exit Ball* (2009):** does the name or shape of the sculpture make you want to kick it? Would this ball be heavy or light? What stops it from rolling across the courtyard of the Royal Hospital? Or does the sculpture remind you of the globe? Do you think it is easy or difficult to make such a big ball out of jerry cans?

#### ***Suggested Practical Extensions in the Classroom***

The Hamouzè exhibition offers great potential for inspired work in the classroom including the Green Schools programme. Everyday household objects such as discarded milk or egg cartons, brushes, fabrics and fibres or broken electrical equipment can all be used to make masks, collages or sculptures. Children will see that 'poor' material doesn't preclude the telling of rich tales.

Photographs of ordinary everyday life are shown to tell stories. Children can bring in their favourite photographs and talk about memories. They can also think of everyday noises as music and think of a composition. The videos should fit easily into areas covered in SPHE. The paintings contain symbols. They could be a starting point for discussing abstract decoration, and the decorations at Newgrange could be mentioned. Alternatively, they might provide an opportunity for talking about formal writing systems such as Ogham or Egyptian hieroglyphics.

The abstraction found in the paintings may lead to Picasso and Braque both of whom are represented in the IMMA collection and their use of African masks.