

MUNICH,
MARCH 2023

**PRESS RELEASE
FROM MYSTIC TO PLASTIC
AFRICAN MASKS
PHOTOGRAPHS BY STÉPHAN GLADIEU
31.3.-6.8.2023**

Mask costumes from the Republic of Bénin and Kinshasa (DR Congo) are the subject of two portrait series by the French photographer Stéphan Gladieu (*1969). The two series are being shown together in a special exhibition in the Museum Fünf Kontinente. The exhibition focuses on the central importance of mask performances in African contexts. They link past and present and address both personal and social challenges.

The *Egungun* series (2018–2020) shows ceremonial mask costumes from the Republic of Bénin that are used for mask dances. The dancers, covered from head to toe in *Egungun* garments with numerous adornments, act as intermediaries between the living and the dead: the ancestors appear regularly as part of these ceremonies and offer their descendants support and advice to help them cope with every life situation.

The *Homo Détritius* cycle (2020/2021) is the result of Gladieu's stay with the multidisciplinary artist collective *Ndaku ya, la vie est belle* (in English Life is Beautiful) initiated by Eddy Ekeke in Kinshasa. The Congolese artists create mask costumes from discarded materials such as disposable products, cables, CDs, radio and car parts. With their mask performances in the streets of the capital they denounce social, political and ecological ills to bring them to the attention of the residents and authorities.

Stéphan Gladieu began his career in 1989 as a photo journalist in crisis regions. In his artistic projects he combines his documentary style with aesthetic research, and mixes reality and fiction. He uses portrait photography to highlight the circumstances of a wide range of people from all over the world. Gladieu's iconic portrait series are characterized by their colourfulness and precise composition. His evidently staged depictions are always dignified and centred, and show his subjects in their immediate surroundings.

With around 50 photographs, Gladieu gives us a glimpse of a West-African secret society in *Egungun*, while in *Homo Détritius* he points out the effects of the western consumer and throw-away society especially on the global south.

**From Mystic to Plastic
African Masks**
Photographs by Stéphan Gladieu
31.3.2023–6.8.2023

Publication

Homo Détritus: Stéphan Gladieu, with texts by Wilfried N’Sondé and Stéphan Gladieu, English/French, Actes Sud 2022.

Opening times

Tue–Sun, 9.30am–5.30pm

For times on public holidays see www.museum-fuenf-kontinente.de

Admission charges

Adults €6, concessions €5. All admission charges can be found on our [Website](#) under Öffnungszeiten & Tickets (English summary)

Contact person

Clarissa Bluhm M.A.

Press and public relations

T +49 (89) 210 136-122 | clarissa.bluhm@mfk-weltoffen.de