



Press release Fotomuseum Winterthur, February 2022

# Frida Orupabo – *I have seen a million pictures of my face and still I have no idea*

## 26.02.–29.05.2022

Norwegian Nigerian artist and sociologist Frida Orupabo (\*1986) creates analogue and digital black-and-white collages and video installations from visual material circulating online. From photographs from the colonial era as well as from contemporary imagery, from ethnography, medicine and science to art and pop culture, Orupabo dissects representations of the Black, mostly female body as a means to negotiate themes of colonial violence, racism, sexuality, identity and belonging. In rearranging and newly reassembling the dissected fragments, Orupabo creates figures of resistance that challenge how and what we see in a present-day reality that remains permeated by colonialism.

Orupabo's exploration of personal and cultural belonging is the starting point for her delicate, sculptural collages and video works. In order to write herself into the (hi)stories that leave Black women invisible or twist the images she cannot recognise herself in, Orupabo dismembers images of Black bodies before reassembling them layer by layer. Processes of objectification, fixation and 'othering' are deconstructed, exposing, in a discomforting and disturbing way, how photography significantly contributes to the formation and perpetuation of colonial power relations and violence.

**'I am interested in what we see and how we see. I engage with images from colonial archives and with collage as a medium to explore what they can do in terms of breaking things up, recreating and questioning.'**

Frida Orupabo

Orupabo started posting on the social media platform Instagram, on which the nine-part video installation shown in the exhibition is based, nearly a decade ago. Using it as an ordering system, a form of expression and a personal archive, she also ventured with her work into a public arena for the first time. Orupabo arranges and condenses snippets of photographs, videos and text from a wide range of online sources into multi-layered narratives that seek to liberate the depiction of Black lives from one-dimensional representations and attribute to them instead the complexity, ambivalence and contradictions that form part of every human existence.



**'I wish to create subjects that look back and question rather than being mere objects, a distant other that can be described and boxed in.'**

Frida Orupabo

Orupabo's collages are pervaded by subtly resistant and emancipatory moments: the direct gaze or the clenched fist; figures that fly or remain in a graceful, suspended state. They express pride and dignity as they attempt to transform the confining categories of image and imagination that they demonstrate or evoke.

The collage *Batwoman* exemplifies this dynamic by defying the racist gaze that looks down on Black people as if they were animals with a mixture of unwavering strength and graceful ease. Orupabo has not removed or retouched the logo of a picture agency which remains visible in the watermark on the photograph but instead appropriated it. Even when images from colonial archives circulate freely on the internet, the image rights are owned by primarily *white* institutions – which means that they not only financially benefit from these images but also have a say in the context in which they may appear. The collage furthermore reads as an ironic take on the superhero, a role usually reserved for men. *Batwoman* cares little for male fantasies. Instead of squeezing herself into a skin-tight bodysuit, she flutters away with her bat-like body, free from any sexist expectations. The collages presented at Fotomuseum Winterthur are an expression of Orupabo's aesthetic exploration that attempts to escape the voyeuristic, sexualising and sexist gaze by rendering the gender of the collaged bodies increasingly indefinable. Finally, Orupabo expands her visual language by including motifs from Renaissance paintings as well as references to figurative painting.

In Orupabo's collages, the fractures stand out visibly, like scars. They mark the violent, spatially and temporally dissociated colonial experience whose legacy continues to shape the everyday realities, life experiences and images of today. By appropriating the colonial visual memory, by tearing it apart, reassembling and rewriting it to narrate different potential (hi)stories, the scars also visualise the process of emotional labour. Perhaps they imply the possibility of healing – if we accept the challenge of the gaze, confront its moments of irritation and ambivalence, and become aware of its complex legacy and ways in which it operates.

Fotomuseum Winterthur presents the first solo exhibition of Frida Orupabo in Switzerland. As part of the accompanying programme, the artist Legion Seven will develop a sound performance that enters into a dialogue with Orupabo's works to explore the tensions of identity, belonging and representation. Legion Seven breaks with normative constraints: the wreckage of the literal cult rigidity into which they were born is scattered into dream mythologies, science fiction and chaos logics that spawn projects as diverse as the imagination. Conceived in collaboration with Museum Rietberg and its exhibition 'The Future is Blinking' (18.03.–03.07.2022), the newly developed performance will also address the tension that opens up between the two exhibitions in the way they speak of photographic representation and self-determination. The performance will take place on Wednesday, 18.05.2022, in the rooms of Fotomuseum Winterthur and on Thursday, 19.05.2022, in the rooms of Museum Rietberg.



## Information on the artist

Frida Orupabo (b. 1986) lives and works in Oslo, Norway. After studying sociology, she worked as a social worker with sex workers and victims of forced prostitution. Since 2013, Orupabo has been publishing her work on Instagram under the name @nemiepeba and since 2017 she has been exhibiting as an artist. Her work has been included in solo and group exhibitions internationally, including the São Paulo Art Biennial (2021), Kunsthall Trondheim (2021), Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2020), Venice Biennale (2019), Julia Stoschek Collection, Berlin (2018) and Galerie Nordenhake, Stockholm (2018).

## Information on the museum

Fotomuseum Winterthur is at the forefront of presenting and discussing photography and visual culture. As part of its repertoire of temporary exhibitions devoted to individual artists and group shows, the museum displays works by young photographers as well as those with an established reputation. In addition, it examines photographic phenomena in the context of new technologies and digital media, exposing them to critical scrutiny. A broad range of artistic, applied and cultural forms of photography are explored, with a primary focus on dialogue and the exchange of ideas. The institution is committed to the considered, autonomous and creative use of media. Its collection (which dates back to 1960) has helped to shape the history and narratives of photography as well as our understanding of it as a medium in all its different forms.

Fotomuseum Winterthur was founded in 1993. In 2002, it combined with Fotostiftung Schweiz to create the Fotozentrum – Switzerland's foremost centre for photographic expertise.

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