

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Juliette Soulez, "Paris's Palais de Tokyo Launches New Triennial With Racially Charged First Edition," *Artinfo*, April 25, 2012.

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Photo by André Morin

View of the "Intense Proximity" Triennial at the Palais de Tokyo

by Juliette Soulez, ARTINFO France

Published: April 25, 2012

With "Intense Proximity," the **Palais de Tokyo's** new Triennial that opened April 20 and continues through August 26, France finally has a large-scale contemporary art exhibition that engages the full breadth of today's art world. Curator **Okwui Enwezor**, the Nigerian-born American art historian and director of Munich's **Haus der Kunst**, assisted by four French co-curators — **Emilie Renard**, **Mélanie Bouteloup**, **Abdellah Karroum**, and **Claire Staebler** — selected artists from every continent who are engaged in questioning the politics of representation. Now the French public has the chance to discover a whole segment of recent contemporary art that has been too rarely seen here.

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The exhibition's political and poetic title engages in a radical questioning of places near and far, examining history, otherness, and post-colonialism. "There is a tendency to reject the involvement of art and curatorial practice in public debate," Enwezor told **ARTINFO France**. "I completely disagree with this tendency. I think that there is no taboo that can't be a concern for the curator. Ethnocentrism, ethnophilia, xenophobia, xenophilia: these themes reveal a paradoxical moment and my exhibition questions their junction today, by opening boundaries between disciplines."

The artworks included in the Triennial demonstrate Enwezor's willingness to take on taboos. In "The War Treasures Frieze," **Sarkis**, a Turkish-born Armenian artist living in France, places photos of artworks that were stolen by colonial powers alongside unbearable images of corpses and the bodies of victims of sexual assault. **Thomas Hirschhorn's** video "Touching Reality" is just as difficult to watch, and features enlarging and shrinking images of people violently killed in warfare. In their horror and brutality, these two works speak to viewers' sense of responsibility.

Another significant and disturbing work is **Carrie Mae Weems's** "From Here I Saw What Happened And I Cried" (1995-96). The 34 sepia-toned photos under glass are archival images, including **Louis Agassiz's** daguerreotypes of African slaves, on which Weems has inscribed racial prejudices. It's a pointed critique of ethnology, which always risks being used to justify hateful actions. The Jamaican-American artist **Lorraine O'Grady** also takes on race in the 16 Cibachrome diptychs of "Miscegenated Family Album," which juxtapose photos of her family — especially of her sister Devonia Evangeline — with Egyptian bas-reliefs of Nefertiti. By focusing on the resemblance between the two women whose beauty and splendor immediately strike the viewer, the work affirms the existence of a culturally black and ethnically hybrid Egypt. "Because these personal images have been compared to images that were politically and historically contested, a space has been created to make visible a class that was previously invisible," O'Grady has written.

A full program of talks, films, and concerts is part of the Triennial. The French-Guyanese musician **Mathieu Kleyebe Abonnec** opened the exhibition last week with a work for four pianos blending jazz, minimalist, and pop genres, and based on a piece by African-American composer and dancer **Julius Eastman**.

A version of this article originally appeared on [ARTINFO France](#).