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Oude Kerk Commission: Ibrahim Mahama - Garden of Scars

5 November 2022 – 19 March 2023, Amsterdam



Ibrahim Mahama working in Oude Kerk Amsterdam, 2022

From 5 November 2022 to 19 March 2023, the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam will present *Garden of Scars*, the first Dutch solo presentation by Ghanaian artist Ibrahim Mahama. Over 800 commemorative stones, composed of casts of Ghanaian monuments and the gravestones in the Oude Kerk, will be set up in

the space. In the past ten years, Ibrahim Mahama has become an internationally respected artist who uses his work to draw attention to the cultural and social effects of international trade and migration.

A new large-scale work for the Oude Kerk

Commissioned by the Oude Kerk, Mahama has spent the past two years working on his new large-scale site-specific installation. *Garden of Scars* connects local history with an international context. Mahama places over 800 upright stones, composed of casts he made of the floor in the Old Church and the floors of Fort Elmina (1482) on the coast of Ghana, among other places. The shapes of the sculptures are derived from cemeteries in Tamale. The fractures, scratches and cracks in the work represent a history of failure, recovery, repair.

For me it was very interesting to be able to look at the memory of the space, in relation to the echoes of history, and connection to other spaces.

Ibrahim Mahama



Ibrahim Mahama working in Oude Kerk Amsterdam, 2022

Walking through the *Garden of Scars* is a journey through the past of the thousands of Amsterdam citizens who have been buried in the church over the centuries, as well as through the history of Ghana. The 3000-m2 floor area of the Oude Kerk is made up of tombstones. There are many stories and memories attached to them that people identify with to this day. Mahama considers the gravestones in the Oude Kerk as a form of collective memory, and questions the social and political aspects of its formation. He connects the family histories of the merchants, captains and mayors buried in the Oude Kerk with the traces of the history of the ancient forts along the coast of Ghana, where people lived through the (consequences of) colonial trade in Africa. The installation is accompanied by a sound work with sounds that Mahama recorded around these historical sites.

The castles and forts were built on the West African coast from the fifteenth century onwards by traders from Europe, including the Dutch. Fort Elmina, for example, initially served the gold trade and later played an important role in the development of the transatlantic slave trade. Mahama wants to make this shared history visible.

Global networks that were and still are linked to both places are made palpable. 'I think we should also look to the future. And art is a tool for that,' says Mahama.



Fort Elmina, Ghana

Mahama's works addresses the major issues of our time

The large-scale installations that Mahama often makes in collaboration with others touch on important issues of our time, both globally and specifically for his home country Ghana. Migration, border crossing, movement (through trade) of goods and people, the reuse of materials and the reinterpretation of buildings are themes that he makes visible in his work. He calls himself a time traveller who shows different places and perspectives simultaneously. Mahama is known for his installations with decommissioned jute sacks, which for him symbolize the bad side of globalization: they are made in Asia, used for exporting cocoa from Ghana, and returned to Ghana as a waste product.

About Ibrahim Mahama

Ibrahim Mahama (1987) lives and works between Accra and Tamale, Ghana. He studied painting and sculpture at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana. During his university years, he embarked on a series of interventions and activities reflecting on the theme of globalization, labour and the circulation of goods, with works also created through a series of collaborations with Ghanaian citizens. In 2019, he established the Savannah Centre of Contemporary Art in Tamale, which includes workshops for schoolchildren and exhibitions of Ghanaian artists. In 2020, he opened the sprawling Red Clay Studio complex, with exhibition spaces, research facilities and artist residencies. He received the Prince Claus Fund's 2020 Grand Prize, which is awarded every two years to people who use culture to promote development in their country.

Mahama's work has been included in numerous international exhibitions, including Sonsbeek 20-24 (2020), NIRIN, the 22nd Biennial of Sydney (2020), Tomorrow, There Will Be More of Us, Stellenbosch Triennial (2020), Living Grains, Fondazione Giuliani (Rome, 2019), Parliament of Ghosts, The Whitworth, University of Manchester (2019), documenta 14, Athens and Kassel (2017). Mahama participated in two editions of the Venice Biennale, in 2015 and 2017. In 2018, he was DAAD artist-in-residence in Berlin.



Oude Kerk 2022, credits: Isabel Nabuurs

About Oude Kerk Amsterdam

The Oude Kerk is a national monument and the oldest building in Amsterdam. Artists are invited to realize large-scale art productions in the church space that both appeal to the widest possible audience and have relevance for the collective of the art world. Commissions have been given to, among others: Taturo Atzu (2015), Marinus Boezem (2016), Sarah van Sonsbeeck (2017), Iswanto Hartono (2017), Christian Boltanski (2018), Giorgio Andreotta Calò (2018), Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller (2018), Children of the Light x Philip Glass (2019), Adrian Villar Rojas (2020), Aimée Zito Lema (2021), Susan Philipsz (2021/2022), Antonio Obá (2022).

Visitor information

Oude Kerk

Oudekerksplein, Amsterdam

www.oudekerk.nl

NOTE FOR EDITORS

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