

Julien Sinzogan's 'Spirit Worlds'

FORTHCOMING

The Beninose artist explores the slave trade in his new exhibition, opening in London next month

BY OLUSHOLA OJIKUTU

The October Gallery, London, will be hosting a new exhibition by the Beninose artist, Julien Sinzogan, from September 24 till November 6. A private viewing event is scheduled for September 29 at the same venue.

The exhibition, titled 'Spirit Worlds', focuses on the return of the spirit of the enslaved African ancestors and the metaphysical significance of the 'trans-migration of the African soul'.

Sinzogan was born in the Benin Republic, once one of the largest slave-trading ports on the West African coast. In 'Spirit Worlds', the artist's work will feature ships and depict the legendary journeys that carried away the people of Benin and other areas of West Africa to become slaves in the New World.

Discerning the intensity of Sinzogan's works may require a certain familiarity with the cultures of the Yoruba and the Fon people of Benin. His works also contain elements of Vodoun, the dominant indigenous religion in the Benin Republic.

Sinzogan conveys his thoughts and ideas with his colourful ink works and traditional religion images, such concepts as 'The Gates of No Return' - the ports of the West African coast, which haemorrhaged millions of Africans during the transatlantic slave trade.

These gates are not depicted as sites of loss, but as the arrival point for the homeward return of lost spirits. Similarly, pieces such as 'L'Armada du Retour' are not merely a recollection of the sea vessels which carted away Africans, but rather, other worldly vessels, bedecked with Egungun masquerade costumes, and peopled with spirits, diviners, and ancestral ghosts.

Sinzogan explains, "There are voyages which should never have been, the Middle Passage for example. There are spiritual voyages, such as a meeting with a Babalawo, well known for travelling between visible and invisible worlds; and there are



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'Those of Life' PHOTO COURTESY OCTOBER GALLERY LONDON

imaginary voyages, through Gates of Return, and Gates of No Return."

Sinzogan has exhibited widely in Africa and Europe. He was part of 'Voyages', an exhibition held at the



The artist at work

PHOTO BY JONATHAN GREET

October Gallery in 2007. The artist also created a specially commissioned work on the theme of slavery for the 'Uncomfortable Truths' exhibition, held at London's Victoria and Albert Museum, also in 2007, the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade.

'Spirit Worlds' opens at the October Gallery in London on September 24.

A shift in the scale

MOTIVATIONAL

A review of Deji Fisho's e-book, SWITCH

BY JERRY ADESEWO

The portable book begins to talk to its reader from the off, replaying images of personal adventures in the reader's head. From one scene to another, the pictures switch and the reader is lowered as if into a well, into the exposition of a complex writer who has produced a simple book. SWITCH is resolutely contemporary, even though it bears every semblance of a classic.

Deji Fisho is a rare breed: an experimental writer with a deep commitment to his subject matter. He renders to his readers a story that is not only emotive and entertaining but intellectually stimulating and moving. A story told from start to finish with the precision and appeal of grandmothers in the era of oral tradition. He tells about 10 different stories in 24 lessons, yet any of these stories, so-called 'lessons' by the author, could stand alone, and the reader wouldn't feel confused or deprived.

The chapters contain common themes that work like musical bridges, or the harmony of an orchestra. The whole is greater as a bunch of conjoined intentions, read, with one desire overlapping into the other, than when read in parts.

Only a few pages into this elaborately embellished masterpiece and the reader is constrained for time. He knows that he has just started to read a book, but too quickly, he overcomes the initial fear of reading a boring work; and the new worry becomes that of time: will there be enough time to continue to read the book despite the drag from other interests?

Readers will be delighted by the fact that Fisho took his time to travel all the way from the simple exploration of what truly is greatness in lesson one to the realisation that we are the architects of whatever we eventually become (lesson 24).

The author is a storyteller who mixes his skill with the motivational trait. This combination produces an uncommon hybrid that future writers will discover and adopt as they tell their stories and write their non-fiction textbooks. I will go as far as to say Fisho has written a classic for this generation and beyond. His craft allows the readers to free themselves from any inner and outer sabotages; move out from any erroneous zones; uplift themselves to a level of total freedom; enjoy a perspective of the sky is not the limit; and experience daily miracles or real magic or luck.

SWITCH espouses the path to greatness and concludes that there is a drop of greatness in everyone. Starting with the rise to greatness of Aliko Dangote, possibly Africa's richest man (going by the Forbes List) and the lives of other individuals (like the roadside 'mama put') as well as companies like Nokia, Apple etc, the book reveals that through



SWITCH IS AN EXERCISE IN SELF-REDISCOVERY FOR THOSE WHO ARE YET TO TAP INTO THEIR INNATE DROP OF GREATNESS. IT IS HIGHLY RECOMMENDED TO ALL STUDENTS OF LIFE AND THOSE WHO HAVE A PASSION AND AN INSATIABLE QUEST FOR EXCELLENCE

their dogged commitment to values, their spirit of resilience and the quest for greatness, they were able to rise above the pack and become primus inter pares in their chosen enterprises.

For everyone who wants to succeed, the book recommends diversification and out-of-the-box thinking.

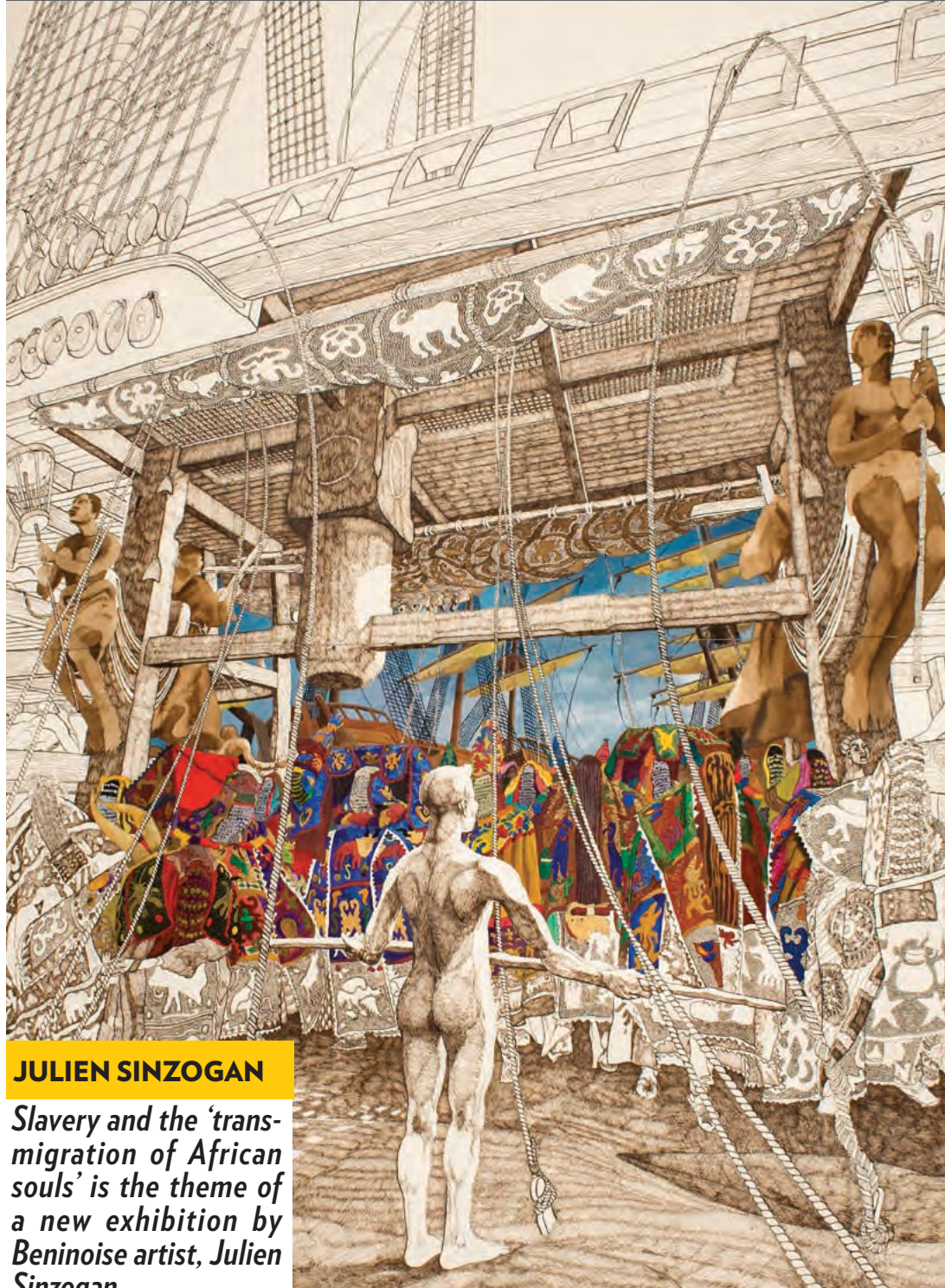
While not denying that sometimes, luck could propel one to success, Fisho holds that one cannot always be lucky and that the road to greatness is to reach within oneself. SWITCH is an exercise in self-discovery for those who are yet to tap into their innate drop of greatness. It is highly recommended to all students of life and those who have a passion and an insatiable quest for excellence. It would be the best of suggestions to propose here that the reading of a book like SWITCH - a reservoir of knowledge and wisdom - could be a good first step towards greatness.

One theme that runs through the book is that the average man is a development tool. The lessons put forward by the book are applicable to all sections of human endeavour, be it formal or informal, religious or otherwise. It is as much a handy manifesto cum policy document for politicians and government officials as much as it is a guide for all entrepreneurs.

It is also a guide to those who are still below the rungs of the ladder of success and those who are depressed due to chronic failure.

The use of analogies and simple but exciting stories makes SWITCH a compelling read. If you're still looking for a "big" book to carry into the night, one in which you can lose yourself without the guilty suspicion that you're slumming, then Deji Fisho's SWITCH is the book you want. In its powers of description, SWITCH is reflective and specific enough to wonder exactly about what a Mama Put does and how she does her thing. It is a tricky book, but in the best way.

'SPIRIT WORLDS' - NEW EXHIBITION AT THE OCTOBER GALLERY, LONDON



JULIEN SINZOGAN

Slavery and the 'transmigration of African souls' is the theme of a new exhibition by Beninose artist, Julien Sinzogan.

'Spirit Worlds' opens at the October Gallery, London, on September 24.

PHOTOS COURTESY OCTOBER GALLERY

