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ArtReview



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Joana Choumali *La Terre n'a qu'un Soleil*
 Galerie Farah Fakhri, Abidjan 16 May – 25 July

In Joana Choumali's tranquil, luminous mixed-media canvas *The Day Dreamer* (2025), the scene is alight with the amber jewels of streetlights of Abidjan's early-morning landscape. Layered onto the stillness of this digital photograph printed on cotton canvas is a bounty of embroidered flora and fauna spilling out across the canvas, where the titular character stands larger than life. A young Ivorian girl, her image collaged onto the canvas, draws the viewer into a scene patterned by green and pink pointed leaves, growing among building materials ready to be used in the construction of a bridge. A sense of hope is conjured by the depiction of a flight of golden birds, sewn onto the surface, breaking free before dawn. In the 16 works of varied scales that are peppered across the small gallery space, Choumali's combination of textile and photography offers the artist's personal view of a city progressively waking up to meet the sun. In *La Terre n'a qu'un Soleil* (The Earth Has Only One Sun), the early morning fog that envelopes Abidjan in the first light of day is captured in the sheer fabric that lingers over each canvas as an intricately stitched final layer. It's work that explores broader stories of memory, light and

the emotional significance of architecture, as the weight of materiality meets the weightlessness of time unfolding.

The Day Dreamer calls out across the gallery to its visual counterpart *The Wind Sounds like Peace* (2025): a photographic image of a dancing female figure is superimposed atop Abidjan's iconic Cocody Bridge. Here, the architectural elements are rendered in wool thread, in contrast to Choumali's use of photographs, as if the bridge were traced from memory. The figure's hands reach to the sky with doves in the wind, where delicious blues coalesce with ephemeral oranges and yellows. Both figures, generations apart, are looking out onto the Ébrié Lagoon, a surveying of the city that conveys a sense of anticipation as well as bright-eyed optimism.

Choumali's figures foreground each canvas, collaged onto the grand scale of urban backdrops. At times, the cityscapes at daybreak are devoid of traffic except for the faint lights of a lone, distant car. At others, Abidjan pulsates with a spectral gleam of brightly coloured thread tracing the edges of buildings, from ordinary apartment blocks to the city's monumental St Paul's Cathedral. In her multifaceted

approach to composition, the artist plays with the built environment, both physical and imagined. Though they represent a portrait of the city, Choumali's artworks are also concerned with rituals of perception, an observation of both emotional and physical terrains, imparting care and attention to buildings as much as bodies.

A tangle of Lurex cotton intriguingly shrouds *I'm Still Learning* (2025). Visible through the veil of sheer fabric that simultaneously reveals and protects her, a figure sits on top of the digitally photographed cityscape, her demeanour serene. There is an eruption of green and gold textiles, as if botanical growths emerging from the pages of the book the figure is studying. Choumali's delicate balance between lush textiles and the verity of documentary photographs takes the viewer on an almost mystical journey between what the eye perceives and what the mind recalls. The scenes go beyond bright depictions of everyday scenes right to the edge of astral projections, offering an ode to images made visible when dreams end and a new day begins.

Chaze Matakala



The Day Dreamer, 2025, digital photograph printed on cotton canvas, manual collage, embroidery, painting, sheer fabric and muslin, metallic, lurex cotton and wool threads, 100 × 150 cm.
 Photo: Pimii Pango. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Farah Fakhri, Abidjan