



Rafael Gómezbarros, *Casa Tomada*, courtesy of Saatchi Gallery, London

# Pangaea: New Art from Africa and Latin America at the Saatchi Gallery

With his latest exhibition, Charles Saatchi turned his sights toward Africa and Latin America, two very different continents that once formed the supercontinent of Pangaea. He brought the work of 16 contemporary artists together 'by the utopian notion of a unified Pangaea,' according to Argentinean-born, London-based curator, Gabriela Salgado. *Classicfeel's* Lore Watterson spoke to South African artist, David Koloane, who was represented with several works at the exhibition.

**T**hroughout the Earth's history, the forming of new supercontinents and their breaking up appears to have been happening every 300 to 500 million years. There are varying opinions as to whether the amount of continental crust is increasing, decreasing, or staying about the same, but it is agreed that the Earth's crust is constantly being reconfigured and it is also agreed that the most recent supercontinent, Pangaea, formed about 300 million years ago, once united Africa and Latin America, before it began to break apart 200 million years ago.

When asking David Koloane about a common thread throughout the works of these 16 different artists, he smiles and says that he could not see one, but he saw some amazing art displayed and enjoyed the exchange with the other artists of the Saatchi exhibition. To recharge his creativity, it is important for Koloane to interact with new impressions, to see new works, meet new people.

It was also a homecoming of sorts for Koloane because it was here, in London, in the 1980s that friends and fellow artists made it possible for him to get his very first studio, a place that he could call his own and where he could work undisturbed. Something that he had never experienced before and something that he still treasures to this day, having his own space at the Bag Factory in Newtown, Johannesburg. It was, of course, this concept – to provide space for other young artists to work in – that led him to found the Bag Factory.

Koloane explains how last year, the Saatchi Gallery curator of *Pangaea: New Art from Africa and Latin America* came to South Africa and chose him as one of the artists representing Africa. Several works of his were purchased from the Goodman Gallery and these pieces now form part of the Saatchi collection, a well-deserved place for them.

According to Zoe Pilger, an art critic at *The Independent*, 'the frenzied, mixed-media expressionist drawings of black



Antonio Malta Campos, *Figures in Red*, courtesy of Saatchi Gallery, London



Vincent Michea, *Before the Bigger Splash*, courtesy of Saatchi Gallery, London

South African artist David Koloane stand out. They are wonderful. *The Night Has a Thousand Eyes* (2007-8) is a startling, eerie drawing of dogs with glowing eyes roaming under a full moon. Owls watch over women in pink dresses marked with crosses. The dog is a recurring symbol of greed and police brutality in Koloane's work. While well-fed dogs bark behind the high-security fences of wealthy whites, mongrels prowl the black townships and scavenge. 'Apartheid was a politics of space more than anything,' Koloane has said. 'Claiming art is also reclaiming space.'

When asked, Koloane talks about the wonderful work of fellow Africans that he really liked, such as the paintings by

Aboudia, a young artist from Ivory Coast. He creates large canvases that radiate a special kind of exuberance, even though their subject matter centres on the trauma of his country's civil war.

The works of Vincent Michea, who lives and works in Paris and Dakar, '[operate as bright-coloured] souvenirs of Dakar's past glories, visual documents of the city's underlying glamour. The capital of Senegal, Dakar, is seen behind the reticular lens of Michea's illustrations, as on a TV set. Captured with postcard style graphic sensibility, his images are built upon photographs of city views, ostensibly focusing on the jewels of its modernist architecture and the



David Koloane, *A Matter of Time*, 2008, courtesy of Goodman Gallery

overwhelming elegance of the inhabitants of the pearl of West Africa,' according to curator Gabriela Salgado.

Perhaps the most commented work at the exhibition has been the installation by Colombian artist Rafael Gómezbarros, which comprises of sculptures of huge ants crawling all over the walls of the first room. 'They are monstrous – the size of human babies. They clamber over one another, desperate to gorge on some hidden patch of honey. Some are solitary, others cluster in corners and these ants are to signify the plight of migrant workers in Latin America... Gómezbarros' ants are most horrifying when you look at them up close. Each is made from two casts of human skulls,

bound together by dirty white cloth, like bandages. Their legs are sticks cut from trees. These objects of death seem very alive; they appear to swarm in the corners of your vision. They symbolise how the world too often sees the migrant worker: as vermin... It would be a wonderful decoration for a fashionable restaurant or in the entrance hall of Deutsche Bank, where it could take on an entirely different meaning,' reviewers wrote.

Charles Saatchi did a great thing by donating the gallery to the public in 2010, providing free admission and to curate such exhibitions like *Pangaea: New Art from Africa and Latin America*, which is still on until 31 August 2014. CF