

## **ACID RAIN / AFRICAN SPIRIT**

Bright Ugochukwu Eke and Alfred Weidinger

**An Exhibition at the**

**Ursula Blicke Stiftung**

**September 15 – October 20, 2013**

Cultural events, art fairs and well-known art galleries have shown a growing interest in contemporary African art over the past few years.

The artist Bright Ugochukwu Eke, born in 1976 in Mbaise (Imo State), Nigeria works with found objects and recycled materials (such as carelessly discarded plastic bottles) to create highly symbolic installations based on environmental pollution and ecological destruction. Eke's preferred artistic medium is water, one of the four basic elements that were outlined by the earliest philosophers. It is the ultimate symbol of life and links all humans with their environment. Inspired by suffering from a skin infection triggered by acid rain while living in his home country of Nigeria, Eke created an installation called "Acid Rain," which consists of numerous small plastic bags filled with acidified water, for the 2006 Dakar Biennial of Contemporary African Art in Senegal. When seen as a whole, the floating "poisoned raindrops" take on the appearance of a giant cloud.

For the first time in Germany, Bright Eke will create multiple large-scale installations for the Ursula Blicke Stiftung that will touch on the ecological problems in his home continent. In his own way, Bright Ugochukwu Eke tries to come to terms with the environment and the history of the African peoples.

With his portraits of the last kings in Africa, documentary photographer Alfred Weidinger, born in 1961, takes a completely different approach to documenting a disappearing, fundamental aspect of the genesis of the human and cultural history of Africa. Since 2009 he has sought out the last surviving monarchs of the grandest kingdoms in Africa and photographed them. They have preserved their long-standing traditions and are still revered for their wisdom and power; however these last survivors of Africa's great kingdoms have become a living paradox. They live on in these regal portraits, which are photographed in black-and-white, and represent a part of Africa's great legacy. The photographs do not use color or flash. Using cameras with particularly fast lenses, which restricts the focus to just a few centimeters, Weidinger is able to draw the viewer's attention to the eyes, the feature that "says the most about a person". The kings select the clothing and ornaments they will wear as well as the location of the photographs. Young or old, standing in front of the camera with their regal costumes they all make a proud impression on the viewer.

The large-format prints of the portraits will be exhibited for the first time.

### **Biography**

Alfred Weidinger is the assistant director of the Belvedere in Vienna, Austria. He studied Art History and Classical Archeology from 1985 to 1998 at the University of Salzburg and completed his studies with a dissertation on the early work of the Austrian Painter Oskar Kokoschka. As the curator for Classical Modern Art at the Belvedere, he is responsible for organizing major exhibitions both in Austria and internationally. His research focuses on visual and applied arts as well as photography of the 19th and 20th centuries. Since 1980 he has traveled through Africa as an independent documentary photographer and photographed 110 kings for his most recent project, "The Last Kings of Africa". Bright Ugochukwu Eke was born in 1976 in Mbaise, Nigeria and obtained his BA and MFA from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He had a solo exhibition at the Goethe Institute in Nigeria in 2006 and designed an installation for the 2007 Sharjah Biennial. His work has received numerous prestigious awards and residencies, including from the Rolex Mentor Initiative and UNESCO. His upcoming exhibition for the Ursula Blicke Stiftung will be his first solo exhibition in Europe.