

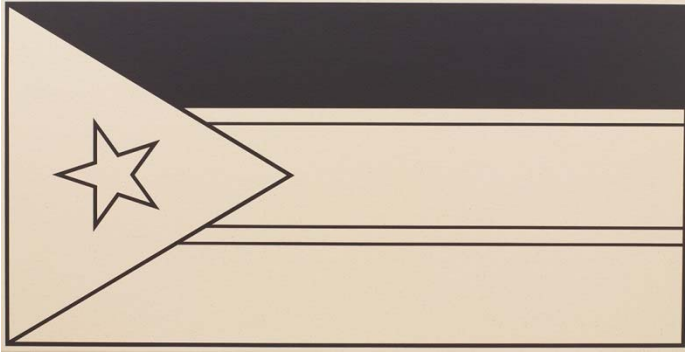


42 FLAGS BY FRED WILSON

A STUDY GUIDE



The exhibition *5 Takes | 42 Flags* will be on view until April 29, 2018.



Fred Wilson, *Untitled (South Sudan)*, 2011; acrylic on canvas 24" x 46" x 0". Photograph by Kerry Ryan McFate, courtesy Pace Gallery

MY FLAG PAINTINGS are about the zenith of the twentieth-century history of African people. The majority of them were created during the 1950s and 60s — the years of liberation from colonialism. They embody a “modern’ aesthetic and idea. They contain the typical tropes of flags: the colors representing the green beauty and fecundity of the land, the blue of the majestic sky or water, and the red blood shed in the fight for freedom. But often they also contain black, symbolizing the people. In as much as some mimic the “tricolore” of the colonizing countries, the different colors set them apart, often in stark contrast to their European counterparts. The colors can represent tribal, cultural, religious, and political identities as well as national ones, sometimes simultaneously. Conversely, the missing colors also speak to the fluid and in flux nature of Africa and its national identities. My flag paintings are here to reveal, through a curious absence of color, the dynamic nature of African visual history and thought. They are perhaps intentionally perplexing, to make viewers question and perhaps rethink their assumptions.

Many nations in Africa were formed according to the often arbitrary boundaries established by the colonial powers. Are the diverse peoples equally represented by the flag of their nation?

Many countries in Africa gained their independence in the 1960s and 1970s and underwent dramatic, sometimes violent changes. Do the colors of the flags, often symbolizing freedom, wealth, and nature, serve to inspire people in their conflicts?

Are the identities of the people or the individuals tied to the colors of their flags?

Many people revere their country’s flag. Why?

Consider Fred Wilson’s paintings about color in semantic terms: black and white, colored, no color. Is the artist trying to evoke racial associations?