

Sanctuary / Sepultures

« The worst African experience is not colonialism but slavery, which lasted over 300 years. For generations, It struck defenceless societies. The continent was depopulated and still is... Psychological aftermath is tremendous. »

Ryszard Kapuscinski

A multimedia installation

Diagne Chanel

2005/2007

SANCTUARY / SEPULTURES

Aims & Purposes

Sanctuary / Sepultures is the third chapter of a series on the martyrs of slavery. Transatlantic slave trade has been abolished. However, Arabic slave trade is still devastating sub-Saharan Africa, specifically Sudan.

The *Dinkas*, Negro-African (christians and animists) populations of southern Sudan and the *Nubas* (whose land became a strategic stake when major oilfields were detected by western companies in the central Nuba Hills overhanging the route to Darfur) are both victims of modern slave trade and genocide by the North. Their endless resistance (since the 70's) to the imposed *charia* muslim law, as well as their age-old contributions to the magnificent civilisation of Egyptian Antiquity being stubbornly silenced.

The early stages of my visual research since the 90's, have been attempting to reminisce this bold and tragic chronicle: « **A Season in Southern Sudan** » (paintings), the first chapter of this work was presented at Sabine Herbert's Gallery in **Paris** in **1992**. « **No Spring for Geronimo** » (sculptures), the second chapter, has been exhibited at the French Cultural Institute of **Casablanca**, in January **2001** and at the MC2A Gallery in **Bordeaux** (France) in November **2002**.

Sanctuary / Sepultures, this third chapter, is a fusion of all my prior researches - be it topographic, sensitive, historical or compassionate. It illustrates enslavement as perpetuated from the 6th Century until the the 20th century at the heart of Saharan and Sub-Saharan Africa.

With this third installation, my aim is to retrace the itineraries and routes taken by caravans of enslaved men, women, and children on the path to **Teggery** in the **Fezzan** (now Southern Libya) in **Kuhawa**, capital of **Bornon**, famous for its « production » of *eunuchs*, castrated young boys.

« *This route was cluttered with so many human bones that an explorer, even if he hadn't been familiar with this precise region of the desert, could almost have found his way thanks to them.* » (*Silent Terror: A Journey into Contemporary African Slavery*, by Samuel Cotton, Writers & Readers Publishing Inc., Harlem River Press, 1998, NewYork)

Graveless, forgotten corpses and remains shape an invisible sanctuary.

Sanctuary / Sepultures seeks to virtually reconstitute this **road of flesh**, embodying those dead « *walkers* » displayed over **14 centuries**, all along the **2000 Km** of the **Teggery Route**. A spiritual burial at last.

A Season in Southern Soudan



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Statement

My work is articulated on progressive cycles, leant on my favorite crafts and techniques, framed by paintings' depth and richness, shaped by sculptures' form and contour, lit up by colors, textures and drenched in the visual effects of a synthetic composition.



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The inclusion of screens and monitors, new images and new mediums in my creative work becomes instrumental at this stage. The essence and relevance resides in the diversity of works and media. Moreover, the emergence of multimedia with regards to my previous cycles of paintings, sculptures and drawings nourishes an articulated visual ceremony. In order to magnify its atemporal dimension.



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Classical practices, with their antic simplicity induce an extreme restriction of means, a harsh discipline and technical constraint propitious to patient and thorough creative work. New images, sounds and effects speed up a wide range of issues and patterns.

To unveil the current genocide and slave trade of Sudan, as well as the forgotten history of the trans-Saharan slave trade of a recent past, gradually, my work is endowed with numerous documents: photography, archives, ancient and current maps, films, texts and testimonies. They now imply a public setting in their transmuted forms and contemporary digital elements.



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Juxtaposed and merged together, their display in a multimedia installation –referring to a contemporary African altar- enables me to proceed to a spatial setting, in interaction with the sensitive perception of an audience offered remote controls, digitalized sounds, images, caption stands and texts. In totality, it creates a solemn communion at one with emotion, meditation, ranging from outrage to delight.



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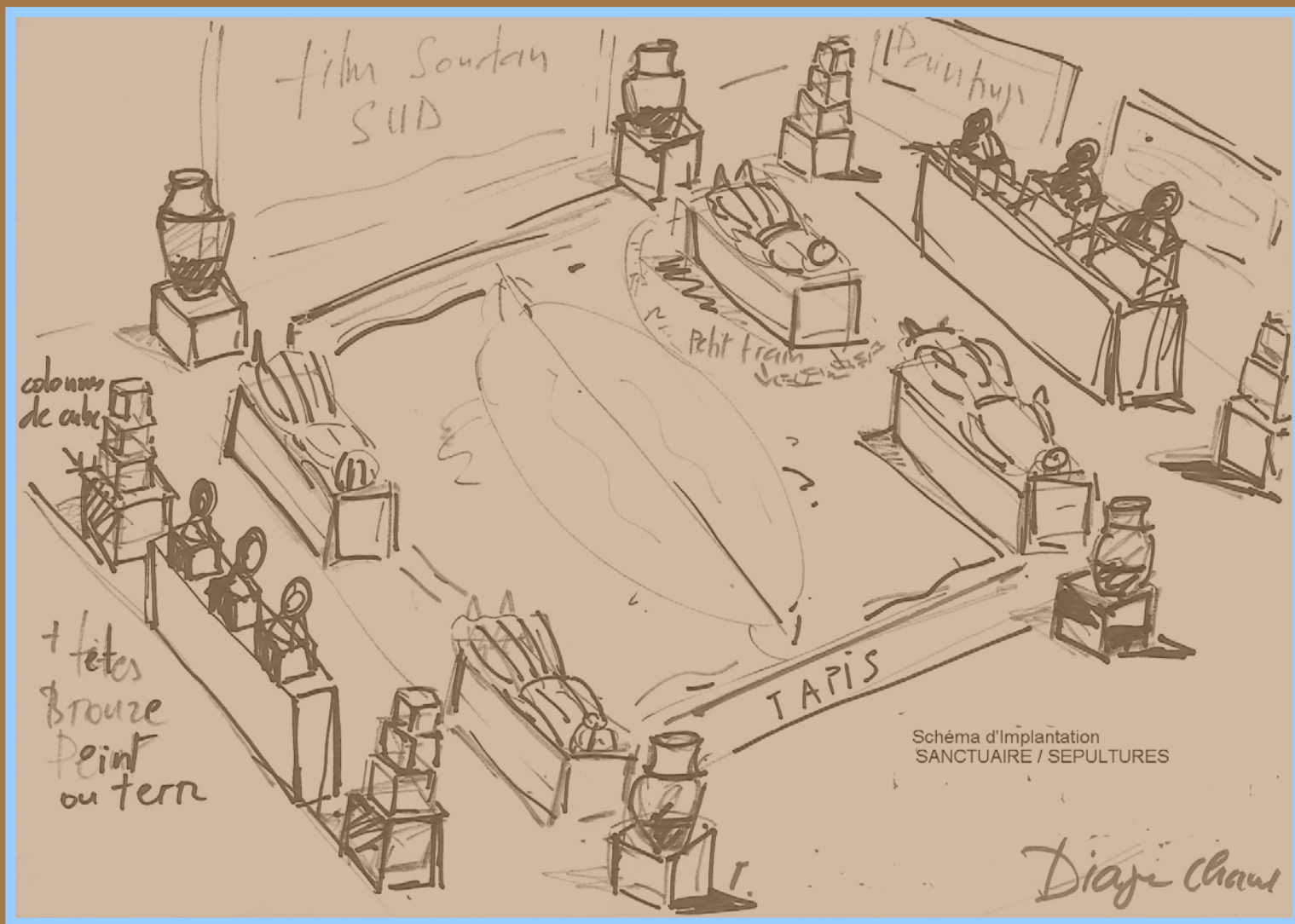
Never have they been staged in a simultaneous way, yet it seems that from the dynamic combination of a diversity of approaches, I now enter in the polyphonic and polyrhythmic « scoring » of these processed mediums.



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Sanctuary / Sepultures

Installation outline



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Sanctuary / Sepultures Installation



Therefore, "**Sanctuary / Sepultures**" is structured on three sequences of coherent creative cycles:

1. "**A Season in Southern Sudan**"
2. "**No Spring for Geronimo**"
3. "**Beneath a sky by starlight**"

The spatial setting consist of :

- ④ 4 paintings & 4 "Recumbent statues"
- ④ 10 taracotta heads
- ④ 4 cubic columns
- ④ 4 funeral urns and 1 altar carpet

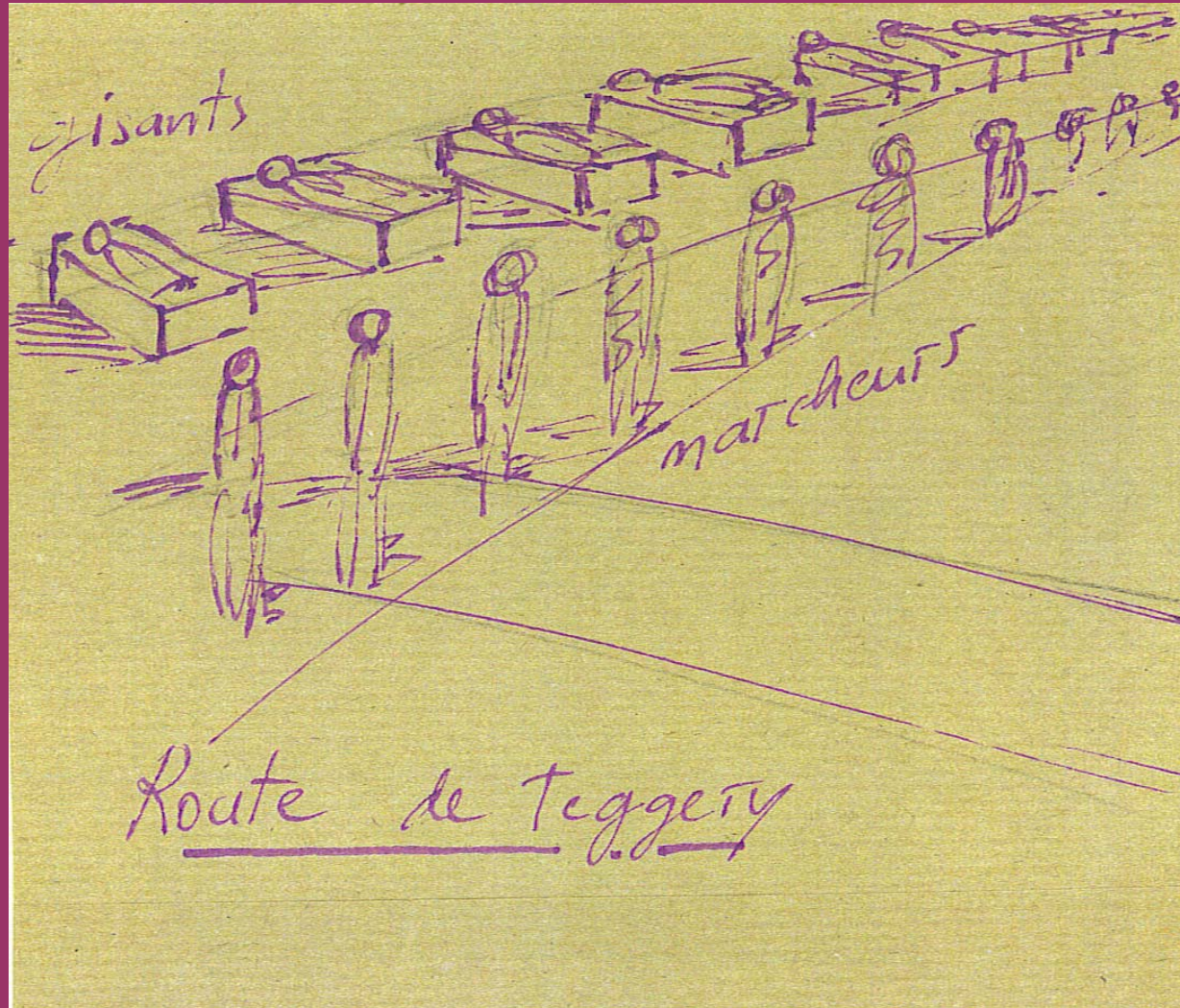
And is articulated around:

- ④ Texts by Samuel Cotton's *Silent Terror*, (Harlem River Press, 1998, NY) on transparent altuglas
- ④ Audio testimonies of freed slaves
- ④ Caption stands and lit strips of texts of these testimonies on the floor
- ④ Wall projected videos of : « *Nubas from Tomo Kriznar* », « *Under the Aleph Trees* » and Lord Tabhan's* interview.

Finally, a film will retrace the virtual march of thousands of enslaved children crossing the desert on the *Teggerly Route* and doomed to become *eunuchs* of Northern harems...

* **Lord Tabhan**, Bishop of Southern Sudan, charismatic figure of the Southern Sudanese liberation movement. In 1992 in New York, he spoke to the United Nations' Security Council, about the permanent violations of human rights suffered by the Black populations of Sudan, a kind of Sudanese 'Desmond Tutu'. I interviewed and filmed him when he was invited to the Paris Conference at La Sorbonne in May 2001 "Mauritania / Sudan", organised by the 'Comité Soudan' with 'Aircrige'.

Along the Teggery Route



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Recumbent Statues



The Recumbent Statues'
Staging at Blachère Foundation
(Apt, 2004, France)



Collection Jean Paul Blachère, © Diagne Chanel, 2003/2004

To always remember that ...

« Slave traders emptied the continent (Portuguese, English, French, Americans, Arabs) and sentenced it to a vegetative existence: up to now a large number of territories are depopulated and desert like. In this day and age Africa has never recovered from this disaster [...]. Above all, this traffic left a deep, painful and lasting wound in the psychological mindset of the African [...]. The one any White man, any trafficker, any occupier, any torturer might drag away from his home or field, clap in irons, pack off on a slave ship, display on a market, then whip and plunge into the nightmare of the forced labour[...].

The slave traders' ideology rests on the concept that the Black is no human being. The future ideology of racism and totalitarianism is rooted in these tradesmen's notes[...], which gist relies on the idea that the Other is the enemy, and much worst, a non-human. This very philosophy of scorn and obsessive hatred, of meanness and barbarism, before inspiring the **Kolyma** and **Auschwitz** camps, was defined and inscribed from the merchant ship's cabin, by the Marthe, Progresso, Mary Ann and Rainbow's captains, while keeping a close watch at their successive freights of Negros [...].»

Ryszard Kapuscinski, in "Ebony: African Adventures "

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