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Kelvin Haizel Wins the “A New Gaze 2” Sponsorship Award

– Tribute to the artist in the context of an exhibition at Vontobel in Zurich on March 8, 2019

This year Kelvin Haizel receives the “A New Gaze” sponsorship award for young, contemporary photography, amounting to CHF 20,000. In his work, Kelvin Haizel examines the area of tension between rich and poor on the islands of the Comoros archipelago. At 6 p.m. on March 8, 2019, the artist will be presenting his work from recent months in the context of a public exhibition on Vontobel’s premises at Gotthardstrasse 43 in Zurich. “A New Gaze” is an award created by the Vontobel Arts Commission in cooperation with the independent curator Urs Stahel to support young, contemporary photography.

The “A New Gaze” sponsorship award is dedicated in each case to young artists and, in the process, it migrates from continent to continent. Anyone who has been nominated by experts from the field of photography or contemporary art in the context of the chosen continent can take part. For “A New Gaze 2”, over 80 African photographic artists submitted their applications to the jury and Kelvin Haizel from Ghana came out on top in the evaluation commission.

“For Vontobel, contemporary photography is a way to enhance, question and break through our everyday reality with new perspectives. With A New Gaze, Vontobel aims to promote and convey alternative, surprising perspectives on the world around us. The prize is thus an element of our corporate responsibility”, says Axel Schwarzer, Head of Asset Management and President of the Vontobel Art Commission.

31-year-old Kelvin Haizel has a BFA in painting and sculpture from the College of Art, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (Kumasi, Ghana), and an MFA from the same university. His works have been shown in numerous exhibitions in his Ghanaian homeland, as well as in Nigeria, Mozambique, France, and Portugal. His work “things and nothings” was shown at the 11th edition of the Rencontres de Bamako, Biennale Africaine de la Photographie, which was entitled “Afrotopia” (December 2, 2017–January 31, 2018). Kelvin Haizel was a guest curator at the Lagos Biennale in 2017.

In his work, Haizel deals with the Comoros conflict, which is largely unknown in the West. The Union of Comoros, a former French colony, is one of the world’s poorest countries. The island of Mayotte, which is in fact part of the archipelago, remained attached to France due to a referendum conducted in the 1970s. As part of France, it benefits from transfer payments from Paris, so the standard of living is considerably higher there. Consequences of this split include a refugee drama which has persisted since 1995 and the unresolved question of the identity and rights of the inhabitants of the individual islands. The award winner feeds on this complex situation with elaborately staged photographs, reportage images, video material, and performance art, and gets to the bottom of the different identities of this microcosm. Under the working title “Desperately Seeking Forever II”, an exhibition of works has been created, which impressively demonstrates the differences between the inhabitants, friendships and enmities, as well as questions of belonging.

The jury, made up of the Vontobel Arts Commission, the curators Urs Stahel and Luisa Baselgia, as well as the experts Julia Grosse (editor in chief of the art magazine Contemporary And) and Azu Nwagbogu (chief curator of the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa) was impressed by the broad artistic spectrum of the project and its multifaceted treatment. “Kelvin Haizel won the award because, on the one hand, he finds very intelligent and unconventional ways to present a theme in visual terms. On the other hand, his work is impressive because it investigates the themes of migration and identity, which occupy us all, in a highly volatile, prototypical location which is largely unknown to us here,” says curator Luisa Baselgia.

As the award-winner, Kelvin Haizel receives CHF 20,000 for the realization of his project, non-material and financial assistance with its implementation in Zurich, as well as publication. The exhibition in the lobby of Vontobel at Gotthardstrasse 43 will be open to the public from March 8 until April 5, 2019. The artist will be present from 6 p.m. on the opening evening.

More information about the sponsorship award can be found at anewgaze.vontobel.com.

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