

African Identities through Western Eyes, an interview with Namsa Leuba

2 WEEKS AGO

Namsa Leuba is one of the artists that will have works on view as part of The Amory 2016 Focus: African Perspectives. She was born in 1982 from a Guinean mother and a Swiss father. Spanning documentary, fashion, and performance, Leuba's images explore the semiotics of her upbringing and cultural heritage. Motifs derived from rituals, ceremonies, statuettes, and masquerades abound.

During the past 4 years, her research focused on African identity through Western eyes. She is currently based in Switzerland but has lived in New York before so she was able to give us some suggestions on her favourite spots in the city.

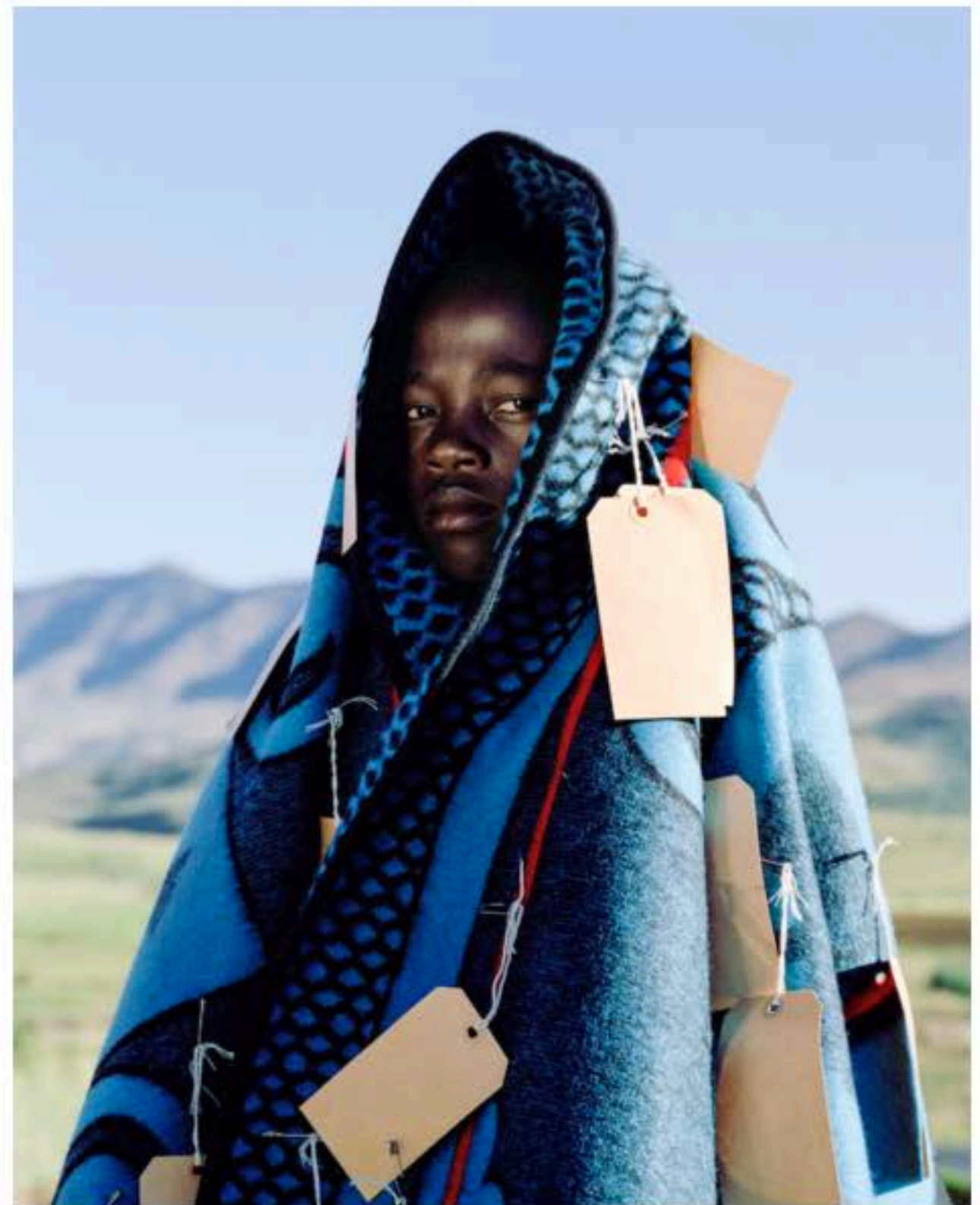
Elena Scarpa: How does your personal mixed background influence your work? How important are your African origins in the inspiration for your work?

Namsa Leuba: My mother is Muslim and animist and my father is a Protestant, although I've not been baptized. I became very interested in the religious aspect of my mother's country. I discovered an animistic side to Guinean culture, based on people's respect for it. I had already been exposed to the supernatural side to Guinea when I was a child. I visited marabouts (kinds of witches) when I was younger and this time around took part in many ceremonies and rituals. For me it was important to do this work, because now I feel more aware of this situation, the existence of a parallel world, and the world of spirits.

My work focuses on African identity through Western eyes. I am interested in African cosmogony in order to start a dialogue with my origins. Fascinated by fetish and mystical load precisely meant desecrating the immortalizing them in a composition in the West. These two identities in permanent struggle I try to reconcile in a form of cultural syncretism, which questions the way the ambiguity of ethnocentrism.

ES: You will be one of the artists included in the African Perspective Focus of the Armory show, could you tell us more about the work you will be showing there?

NL: It will ne shown the series Zulu kids, Kingdom of Mountain, Koi San and NGL. NGL is a new work. «Namsa Leuba's newest series, NGL, makes its debut at The Armory Show. Produced in 2015 during the artist's residency with Art Twenty One in Lagos, Nigeria, NGL follows the artist's previous work in fashion photography. Leuba was inspired by the energy of the city of Lagos – its chaos, vibrancy, and determination – translating this spirit



Namsa Leuba, The Kingdom of Mountains. Courtesy of the artist

into a unique visual language. Leuba collaborated with local fashion designers and models in Lagos, often times sourced from the street, to create a potpourri collection of clothes, props and accessories. Staged in the studio, Leuba imagines narratives for the characters she portrays through a surrealist and psychedelic filter. With the acronym standing for "Next Generation Lagos", Leuba points to the innovation and creativity of Nigeria's youth."

ES: You live in Switzerland but you have also lived in New York. Could you tell us some of your favourite places in NY? The ones you think are unmissable for a contemporary art addict?

NL: My unmissable spots in town for an art addict are MoMA PS1, Yoshi Gallery, Aperture Foundation and Gagolian.

ES: Do you have any new upcoming projects?

NL: I will have an exhibition at University of Fribourg in Switzerland from 11th of March to 23rd of May and a solo exhibition on September at my gallery Art twenty One in Lagos.

More details about **Namsa Leuba's** work can be found on her [website](#).

Elena Scarpa

