

## Edson Chagas

(Luanda, Angola, 1977)

Prior to his studies in photojournalism in London and in documentary photography in Newport, Edson Chagas spent most of his life in Luanda, the capital of Angola. He was born in this city in 1977, two years after the start of the civil war, and it was here that he returned after his European experiences. The importance of the three cities in the artist's biography is shown by the photographs in the series *Found Not Taken*, begun in 2008. The shots portray everyday objects abandoned along the roadside, some still in good condition, others worn out or half-destroyed. Chagas gathers them during his urban explorations and places them in a new context, in order to then photograph them against carefully chosen backgrounds, of which he exploits the patterns and chromatic contrasts. A deflated football seems to have been forgotten in front of a crumbling blue wall; the top half of a mannequin is repositioned in front of the door of a shop up for sale; two speakers from a stereo system are placed on the edge of the pavement; a mattress stands out against a wall and its typical red bricks.

While the dislocation of objects from one point of the city to another endows them with new value, in a sort of artist's recycling that saves them from the obsolescence to which they are doomed, at the same time it makes it almost impossible to tell which photographs were taken in Luanda, London or Newport. He thus deploys a subtle act of criticism against the society of consumption and waste, which progressively reduces the life cycle of goods, and levels the urban fabric from one part of the world with that of another. Compared to the end of the war in 2002, today Angola registers one of the highest growth rates on the African continent thanks to international trade agreements. Chagas continues his investigation into the new habits of consumption of his homeland with the photographs of *Oikonomos* (2011–2012), in which he portrays himself with his head covered by cloth or plastic bags decorated with a wide array of prints: British and American flags, Chinese ideograms, logos of Western products and even the face of Barack Obama. By moving out from behind the viewfinder, the artist embodies the depersonalised identity of the consumer, standardised by the debris of contemporary culture.

A major element of his research is represented by the series *Tipo Passe* (2012–2014) which the five photographs in the collection belong to. The anonymity of the portraits is recreated by traditional African masks, yet worn over modern apparel and thus decontextualised with regard to their original significance. Ironically, as the title in Portuguese also suggests, the shoulders-up framing makes these images akin to the passport-size photographs for identity documents, even though here we are unable to see what it is that makes such recognition possible. Each state the personal information, be it true or false, of the person hiding behind the mask, whose names of European origin coupled with local surnames are mindful of Angola's long colonial past.

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