

# An Interview with Christopher Myers

## **Why do you collaborate in your work with local craftspeople?**

The convention of the singular artist as an idea is almost exclusively an invention of the West, and a recent invention at that. As someone who is interested in both non-Western traditions and traditions of art and craft that have been devalued by our slide into modernism (women's traditions, collective traditions, working class traditions), I am invested in using my skill sets to create in hybrid forms, making objects that live somewhere between my own hands and the hands of master artisans who have been doing work in these collective manners for generations. I hope that the practice of collaboration between myself and these various artisans, makes work that acknowledges and explores our shared and intersecting histories

## **Why did you choose pirogues for this installation?**

“Pirogue” is a generic name for the kinds of boats that French and Spanish colonial forces found in many of the lands that they forced into their empires. The kind that I have been working with are made for fisherman in Senegal. Their centrality to the culture of Senegal is reflected in the etymology of the name of the country, which descends from the phrase “Sunu Gaal,” which means “Our Pirogue.” Pirogues have been used as a livelihood and as an escape, as when economic refugees have tried to reach Europe in the larger ones. As so much of this exhibition focuses on globalization and internationalism in what is considered uniquely local, like the colonial relations inherent to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, or the figure of the wildman or satyr in the architecture of the Rotherwas Room, the use of pirogues, with their unique histories, and the ways that they echo the representations of Dutch ships in the stained-glass windows of the room, seems particularly apt.

## **How does this installation respond to the Rotherwas Room?**

The obsession with these contrasts between nature and culture, between “savage” and “civilized,” while absolutely present in earlier ages, took on new significance in the time of early colonial settlements. While craftspeople were carving and creating the Rotherwas Room, there was in England a rich discussion of the disposition of the colonies and the people that the English Empire had found there. This resurgence of the figure of the wildman, as represented by the satyr, emerging from and intertwined with the simulacrum of nature, the vines twisting up the colonnade, stands in for the anxieties of English society regarding the New World, and the populations that they would find there.

## **Where do the materials that comprise the art in this show come from?**

Like so many of the materials that comprise our contemporary life, the materials in this show come from everywhere and nowhere. I say everywhere because the fabrics come from China, Vietnam, India, Holland, England, and Egypt, and the oil drums are manufactured in Asia and Europe. I say nowhere because the histories of these materials are often erased through their constant exchange and trade on international markets. The materials I am primarily interested in are the ones that make more valuable materials more manageable. The oil drum is only as important as the oil in it, the fabric is only made important when it becomes something else, an article of clothing or a satchel.

The Rotherwas Room itself is a material like this. Once a sign of status of a wealthy family within the English context of Herefordshire, the room itself was the decorative plume in the importance of the merchants who commissioned it. After having changed hands numerous times, after having been reworked, imported, and remade, the room itself no longer serves as stage or packaging for important events and people. Rather, the room has become the focus, signifying a different kind of importance.