



PRADA CONGO CLUB

CARSTEN HÖLLER HAS CREATED ONE OF THE MOST EXCITING AND ELUSIVE ART PROJECTS OF THE YEAR. PUT ON YOUR DANCING SHOES. THE PRADA CONGO CLUB IS HERE

With the success of the African pavilion at last year's Venice Biennale and the world tour of greater-than-life tycoon Johnny Pigozzi's contemporary African art collection, the second-largest continent seems to be on everybody's lips. Adding to the fer-

vor is the Prada Congo Club, opening this month in London. With the support of art patroness Miuccia Prada, the Belgian artist Carsten Höller has designed a nightclub-cum-art installation that, for the next six months, will spice up the city 'til the wee hours of the morn. Shrouded, until recently, in secrecy, it is one of the more mysterious art projects of the year.

"In 2004, I made an exhibition in Marseille where all the pieces were symmetrical like a Rorschach test," says Höller of the project's genesis. "Then I made another exhibition in Stockholm called 'One day One day,' in which two huge artworks were shown one day after another without people realizing it. I always wanted to take this idea of the double and put it in a user-friendly context, not a museum or a gallery. So when Miuccia Prada asked me to suggest a project, my dream came true. What I like is that this project is so abstract and conceptual. It shows two things, at the same time, in the same space, without making any decision."

Divided by an invisible line, the Prada Congo Club is half-African, half-Western. On a rotating dance floor, guests will groove to either obscure Congolese music or more familiar radio hits. In the chess set-like restaurant (overseen by chef Mourad Mazouz of London's Sketch), diners will nibble on traditional Congolese food or classic lasagna. In the Western part of the club, there will be a wall covered with tiles (a tribute to the infamous '80s Parisian nightclub Les Bains Douches), a 3-D installa-

tion in azulejo, and a copper bar. On the African side, revelers will admire a painting by Chéri Samba, Congolese wooden furniture, colored plastic chairs, parasols, and panels of African beer ads. And as in Congolese culture, the dress code will be crucial: Sapeur style or nothing else. Which is to say, a stream of flamboyant, designer-label clothes, ornate jewels, luxurious furs, and elaborate haircuts.

At 46, Höller, a former scientist, has become a master at playing with human perception through his art. His playful and widely-acclaimed installation at the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall in 2007 was comprised of five gigantic steel slides built for patrons to use. And he has always adored Africa. "The first time I went, it was in 1995. I went to Benin to visit a scientist friend, and he dragged me to a discotheque called 2001. It was the first time I heard Congolese music and it was a shock."

Certainly, the Prada Congo Club will elicit the same response from its patrons. But, alas, it is ephemeral, open only for six months. "I like the idea that this project is temporary," says Höller. "But maybe it will travel from one city to another." New York is waiting. **Julie Boukobza**

Photography Carsten Höller
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See more of Carsten Höller's work on vmagazine.com