

# XXX CROSSINGS

IBRAHIM EL-SALAH  
DAVID HAMMONS  
STANLEY BROUWN



## Salah M Hassan: Opening Remarks for David Hammons' Holy Bible

Due to unforeseen circumstances beyond my control, I am not able to be with you this morning to welcome you to the opening of our exhibition *David Hammons: The Holy Bible: Old Testament*. But here are few words to introduce the exhibition and its concept to you, as well as to express my utmost gratitude to everyone who contributed to making this exhibition a reality.

I start with few words about the installation, while trying hard not to spoil the surprise of the encounter with the work which you are about experience in person, touch and peruse its pages. Conceived as part of the multi-sited exhibition *Three Crossings*, (which include Ibrahim El Salahi, and Stanley Brouwn), exhibition features Hammons' ***Holy Bible: Old Testament***, his first **experimentation with the genre of the "artist's book."** Although the work has been exhibited in gallery settings, this is the first time for it to be viewed in a "functioning" church as site-specific installation, **but also coupled with an enacted performance, in which you as visitors are invited to be full participants.**

We are, therefore, very grateful to De Waalse Kerk for being so open and welcoming to this project and for allowing us to install the work in the beautiful space of De Waalse Kerk in Amsterdam.

**As you make your way in,** you will find Hammons' **Holy Bible** installed in one of the raised pews inside the Church. As scripted by the artist, visitors are instructed to first cleanse their hands using the sanitizer placed next to the entrance of the pew. You are invited to step into the pew one at a time, sit down, take Hammons's *Holy Bible* out of its case, and peruse its pages, placing the book back into its case before leaving.

**As you make your way out, you most likely ponder the question:** How to read Hammons's *The Holy Bible* as a work of art? There are a variety and often contradictory ways of interpreting Hammons's art. It can be read as an homage to Marcel Duchamp, by rebinding Italian art historian Arturo Schwarz's *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (1969) as a golden-edged Bible. Indeed, the work embodies the spirit of appropriation in art-making credited to Duchamp. The work could be considered a critique of Duchamp's readymade, as parody, or homage. As art critic Steven Burry said it eloquently "What more appropriate strategy than to use a book on the inventor of the readymade as a readymade?"

Whether it is an homage, parody or critique of Duchamp, Hammons comes out as someone who pushes the boundaries with sharp wit and humour. Hammons's relationship with Duchamp is obvious and complex as well. The Duchampian readymade is visible in Hammons's 1980s assemblage series on the irony of racial slurs, *The Spade*, and in his work *Public Toilets* (1990), where he installed series of urinals on trees in forest in Belgium. Hammons has referred to himself as the CEO of DOC "Duchamp Outpatient Clinic," and according to property records, his new space in Yonkers, New York, is registered as an entity called Duchamp Realty LLC.

Hammons's *The Holy Bible* can only be fully understood when situated in the expanse and uniqueness of the artist's contribution to contemporary art over the last five decades. He certainly has carved a singular position, and achieved a legendary status. His early work from the 1970s came at a time when the art world was awakened to issues of anti-racist and feminist activism, and the rising voices of sexual minorities, as they started to intersect and trouble the exclusionary narrative of the art world. He has since risen to prominence while at the same time consciously avoiding the attention of critics, galleries and museum curators, preferring to work in public places such as streets or vacant parking lots.

In conclusion, **Hammons** has forever challenged our understanding of conceptual art practices, through his unique reinterpretation of the ready-made and other aspects of performance art via the subtle prism of the black experience. **Hammons** is known to be among the most elusive and enigmatic figures in the contemporary art world. He has built a career based on defying the mainstream, and critiquing of the contemporary art market, beating both at their own games.

**I hope these few words give you a sense of the exhibition and helps you explore its subtlety, complexity, as well as wit and humour à la Hammons.**

Before I end, it is important to pay dues, and to express utmost gratitude, when it is most appropriate. Many people and institutions have contributed to the success of this modest tribute to Ibrahim El Salahi and to the larger project of *Three Crossings*. The design of the installation is a very much contribution of the master designer Tom Postma and his design team. I am grateful to Tom Postma for his unwavering support over the years. Despite his stature in the field of exhibition design globally, and despite his busy schedule. To Mihaela Rodesou (MIKA) of Tom Postma design, I am so grateful for your efforts, diligence and eloquent designs and renderings, for your patience, and for being so graceful.

To the brilliant Irma Boom, I am so grateful for the designs that graced several of my publications over the years! Despite her busy schedule, she took the time to design the publications for this

project and to equally brand it! **XXX Crossings!** Thanks Irma.

Words cannot express my gratitude to the Prince Claus Fund and its wonderful and most professional team. Starting with its Director, my sister Joumana El Zein Khoury, thanks for inviting me to do this **Three Crossings**, to honour not only a Prince Claus laureate and my Sudanese hero Ibrahim El Salahi, but also to honour two other heroes of mine: Stanley Brouwn, and David Hammons. I owe Prince Claus a lot in supporting my projects, my career, over the years since the days of its founder Els van der Plas. I hope this project is one way to return the debt. So thank you Joumana. To my dearest sister Fariba Derakhshani, I owe you a lot, and most importantly your friendship and unwavering support. Words cannot express my gratitude for your hard work in shepherding this project from its inception to this moment of its realization. Fariba, I appreciate the tireless effort to ensure all goes well, and know of the late evening train journeys back home after hours of overtime! So forgive me for the headaches and sleepless nights. I am so grateful Fariba!!! To the indefatigable and hardworking team of Prince Claus Fund Hannah Vollam, Ginger da Silva, Sarah Smith, Dilara Jaring, and Akvile, I am so grateful to you hard work and efforts to ensure the success of this and the other two exhibitions.