

## Spinning Wheel

"A man made God with the face of a hero," said the clock while striking the first hour of a new day.

Once upon a time we men decided to explore the universe. And we built painted vessels. And we were excited. We would testify. Bring novelty back to our anguished wives. Blow our brothers' minds with stories of exotic pleasures. Spread joy and dignity all around. The beauty of life, it must be said, lies in the amount of good will each of us carries in this little purse of emotions we call a heart. We want to share with others, to understand them. We want wealth to turn sad and sordid neighbourhoods into havens of bliss. We want to help build new schools and bring happiness to desolate landscapes. We want to learn, through art, the complexity of the human soul. We want the colours of the posters on the wall to match our sofa and be beautiful memories of moving moments. We have the best of intentions. So we say and do what we believe. We achieve. We succeed. We complete our tasks. We are the pride of our fathers, mothers and sisters. We have no secrets.

The object as reminder. I mustn't forget. I was there. I did. It means something. To me it does, to you it should. Watch. Want. The object shines. It helps you bypass that burning in your soul. You put it in your bag and then you hang it on your wall. You use a hammer to hit the nail. It matches the surroundings and says a lot about you. How you built your brain. How you followed what you saw, what was said, what you believe you should be. In your own way.

From 1922, the French car manufacturer André Citroën decides to expand his firm's activity to Africa, taking part in the huge colonial fuss that at that time mingled so called philanthropic ideals with business motives. There's the ghost of WWI to forget, the vastness of the desert, the power of Industry. There's a moment in time that no one understands.

Sand erases everything, memories and roads alike. Burning sun and forever drifting sand. From the desert a dream arises. A huge dream that spreads like an illness and that comprehends, in its essence, thousands of future dreams. People in shiny caterpillars wandering under palm trees, killing beautiful lions, taking pictures of natives - tokens. Monstrous hotels. How luxury creates a drive. The whole question of faith, displaced and distorted. Put in artefacts. No mourning at all. Things come and go. Like cars, from one end to another, through the sand, deep into the wild. The whole point being that people would be happy. And that progress would bring sanity that would bring joy to all the population.

André dreamt. As his father had before him. His father had dreamt and bet on Africa and lost it all, and after all André could dream - he'd always had very good ideas. André had it all prepared. It would be called CITRACIT. It would be about taming the desert and about how France would finally beat England in the great battle for the position of world-leading Land of Wisdom. It would prove the efficiency of the automobile as a means of transportation,

especially the comfort and elegance of Citroën vehicles. Cars would be sold. People would travel. And dream of travelling. Savages would also dream. Yet it never happens. The CITRACIT project is cancelled. People don't dream. Everything is erased and replaced as fast as possible. On October 28<sup>th</sup> 1924, 8 caterpillar vehicles leave Colomb-Béchar for "*La Croisière Noire*" : scientists, a painter, photographers with an anthropological idea in mind are sent into the burning wilderness of Africa. They have a personal chef to make sure they're well fed.

Adrien Guillet has nothing to do with Citroën, nor does he have any fondness for cars, or Africa per se. Yet he likes games. Games, for example, that use fiction in order to shed light on reality's nooks and crannies. Let's say CITRACIT had happened; and lasted; and enabled very rich people to go on safaris. Because it *could* have lasted. Despite the ever-vanishing roads, despite the need for camels to bring gas and supplies along the way, despite the whole inefficiency of the project. People would have had fun. Taken pictures. Told tales of exotic landscapes and funny beasts. Bought artefacts. It has to be noted, though, that the absurdity of the whole CITRACIT idea wasn't the reason for its failure. The real reason was fear, a slight shiver at the idea of natives rebelling, attacking the caravans and stealing all the courageous adventurers' stuff. These adventurers who were adventuring because of the idea of Colonial Humanism.

Also, at the same time, my great-grandfather was doing the maths for Renault. And, soon enough, there would be cars with WHEELS able to go through the sand. And wheels, well let's just say, a caterpillar can't do much against a spinning wheel.

\*

Years later, shop windows glow. The light here is precise. Goodies on the floor, on the wall, on the market stall. Buy me, buy you, buy us to feel complete. Think of giving me away, but then keep me. Worship. Fight with your neighbour, your father, to buy me, the last copy, the one you need on your wall, in your bag, under all the dust in your attic. Dream as I dreamt before, conceived to make you dream or at least live with your dream or forget about your dream. Buy me.

\*

People walk by. Do they see, while digesting their Sunday lunch, the story of the battle between the wheel and the caterpillar? Do they understand the immensity of André's dream? Do they want the object? Are there any black people among the public? Should we call them people of African origin? And does it matter? Do we still think? Why are we here? The museum is a temple, the shop is a temple, the temple is a temple. And the street a stage, a temple, a public place, a no man's land, my property.