

art & photo

Best in Show

## Heartbreak of Darkness

by R.C. Baker

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On entering this dimly lit gallery you are greeted by a teetering wooden totem of rectangular blocks topped with a classical head; a realistic nude man, likewise carved from wood, complements these references to Brancusi's sculptures and Michelangelo's David. Between them lies an overcoat, the words "I like Africa and Africa likes me" written across the back, recalling a shamanistic 1974 performance in which the German conceptualist Joseph Beuys tussled with a live coyote amid scattered copies of the *Wall Street Journal*. On the floor, boards cut roughly in the shape of a woman and a child lie flat like toppled tombstones; they are separated by a hollow figure constructed of matchsticks that casts a towering shadow, which is echoed by a cross-hatched charcoal drawing looming on the opposite wall. Mpane's shadow-play, while dense with tragic allusions—a wooden cross reads "Congo–1885," the year the European powers met in Berlin to carve Africa into colonial chunks—also projects a rough beauty.



Aime Mpane's "Couple infernal (The Infernal Couple)"

photo: Courtesy Skoto Gallery

**Aime Mpane: 'Bach to Congo'**

Skoto Gallery, 529 West 20th Street

Through January 27

A separate series of strong paintings deftly captures the flickering light of a campfire as it turns faces and figures into visceral slabs of color.

Skoto Gallery, 529 West 20th Street. Through January 27.