



A still from *Addio del Passato*

### *Out & About*

# Love, Life, Loss

“The Progress of Love,” a transatlantic exploration of the human heart, makes a stop at the Pulitzer

BY STEFENE RUSSELL

**W**hile earning her Ph.D. at Harvard University, Kristina Van Dyke traveled to West Africa to research representation in the oral cultures of Mali. While there, she encountered traditional African practices like arranged marriages and polygamy. “As a Western woman, I was really challenged by those ideas, and very curious about them and curious about how people felt about them,” she says. “It got me to thinking, ‘Where does this idea of love that I have, where does this come from?’”

The result of those musings—and several conversations with family, friends, artists, and other curators—is “The Progress of Love,” an ambitious collaboration between the Pulitzer’s new director (who was still at her curatorial post with The Menil Collection in Houston when the show was conceived) and Bisi Silva, founder and director of the Centre for Contemporary Art in Lagos, Nigeria. When Van Dyke proposed the idea to Silva, she was receptive, but added that she was not interested in a standard traveling exhibition. “She said, ‘The project will be richer, and the outcome will be richer, for thinking through our localized wants, needs, and desires.’”

The result is a trio of exhibits focusing on contemporary African art, with cascading opening dates and different visions. “The Lived Experience of Love,” which was set to open at CCA in October, is heavily performative, including an interactive exhibit on how cellphone technology has changed courtship in Nigeria; “Global Systems of Love,” opening next month at the Menil, includes more than 50 pieces of work from artists in Africa, Europe, and America and asks how technology has impacted our experience of love. By contrast, “Love

## CULTURE&EVENTS

as Mourning," the Pulitzer's portion (organized in part by departing curator Francesca Herndon-Consagra), focuses on old-fashioned heartbreak.

Zina Saro-Wiwa's video installation, *Mourning Class*, will be the first thing visitors see when they enter the lobby. "It's largely a response to the death of her father, [Nigerian activist Ken Saro-Wiwa], and her frustration at her inability to mourn," Van Dyke says. "She hired these Nollywood actresses, and asks them to cry on cue, and they have to end their episode by laughing or smiling." Being jarred out of sympathy for the actress, she says, "is brilliant, because it makes you aware of the artifice of these conventions we use to process loss." In a companion piece, Saro-Wiwa attempts to follow the same acting directions, but finds that she cannot cry and can't help speaking—something she explicitly instructed her actors not to do.

In the Main Gallery will be Sophie Calle's sprawling installation, *Take Care of Yourself*, which debuted at the 2007 Venice Biennale. The core of the piece is a breakup letter—sent by email. "In response, she sends the letter to 107 women and asks them to help her process this email and understand it," Van Dyke says. "There's a judge, a lawyer, a copy editor, an etiquette advisor, a sharpshooter..." Calle photographed the women as they undertook their projects. "One of the great pieces is the sharpshooter who had tacked up the letter to a bull's-eye and shot through all the places where 'love' is mentioned," Van Dyke says.

Yinka Shonibare's video installation *Addio del Passato*, scored with the aria of the same name from *La Traviata*, swaps out the opera's original characters, Alfredo and Violetta, for the historical figures of Lord Horatio Nelson and his betrayed wife, Frances. It's accompanied by a photograph riffing on Henry Wallis' famous painting *The Death of Chatterton*. The piece asks how cultural norms "seep into our constructions of what loss looks like and what loss feels like," Van Dyke says.

"You don't get to start from scratch," she adds. "You don't get a blank page where you get to invent your very own notion of love, or love and loss... It all comes to you from this sweep of cultural and historical material that you are implicated in, in this particular moment."

*"The Progress of Love: Love as Mourning" opens November 16 and runs through April 20. For more information, go to [pulitzerarts.org](http://pulitzerarts.org).*



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