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# ARTNEWS

## ‘It’s a Rip-Off’: Mariane Ibrahim Gallery Takes on Shipping Company Over Lost Artwork

BY *Andy Battaglia* POSTED 09/09/19 2:14 PM

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Clotilde Jimenez, *Rikishi*, 2019.

COURTESY MARIANE IBRAHIM GALLERY

When artist Clotilde Jimenez packed up a new work to be shipped from his studio while he prepared to leave London for a new home in Mexico City, he had promising horizons in mind: a change of location for his life, and a breakthrough for a new kind of work to develop in the form of a mixed-media collage titled *Rikishi*. Instead, the artwork vanished—and months later remains nowhere to be found.

Through an arrangement brokered by Mariane Ibrahim Gallery, the Chicago-based enterprise that represents him, Jimenez packed up his piece in June and sent it off for shipment with the British Shop, a high-profile international art-handling service based in the U.K. But when the gallery later requested a condition report for a group of works meant to be transported from the artist's studio to the British Shop's facility for further shipping, word came back that *Rikishi* appeared to have disappeared—possibly lost in the packaging it was wrapped in and discarded by mistake, the artist and the gallery came to believe.

“It’s heartbreaking for me,” Jimenez said. “If a piece gets stolen, there’s a chance it will come up one day. But the thought of it folding in on itself in a dumpster is just...”

The collage made with mixed materials (paint, fabric, sandpaper, magazine cut-outs, twine) tapped into personal history. “My dad, on the side, is a sumo wrestler,” Jimenez said of a reference to sumo tradition in the title. And the work was set to show in Mariane Ibrahim’s booth at the Expo Chicago art fair later this month as well as in a solo exhibition at the gallery next year.

But now the work’s disappearance is a source of potential litigation. “Where we are now is in a moment of a fight,” said Ibrahim, who, after months of interaction with the British Shop since the incident, is angered over what she sees as a strategy of inaction. “I’m not going to let this go and pass by. It’s not something I or the artist should accept.”

After describing the artwork as “lost” in response to queries, the British Shop told Ibrahim to file a claim with her insurance company to try to recoup the loss of the collage, which she values at \$20,000. But her insurance would not cover an incident that occurred during transport between the studio and the shipping facility in England—as opposed to a contracted shipment between the U.K. and the U.S.—and she said she was not given an option of extra insurance on the British Shop’s behalf.

During a course of communication that had come to an impasse, the British Shop forwarded an email—seemingly by accident—that included internal group correspondence and a draft of a letter the company had been working on to send in response. “I disagree that playing for time isn’t working,” a British Shop executive wrote to colleagues in part of the email, which was reviewed by *ARTnews*. “I don’t think the gallery has any legal route to redress. I think given the outrage expressed that if they had a reliable route to take action it would have happened by now.”

Ibrahim took it as a dismissal. “‘Let’s exhaust them until they get tired’—they didn’t think we were serious,” she said of months of working to try to resolve the matter amicably. “They took my willingness to cooperate as weakness. We tried to do it behind closed doors, but now it needs to be exposed.”

Asked by *ARTnews* to discuss the incident involving Jimenez’s collage and the company’s shipping policies in general, Jim Valentine, the British Shop’s director of strategy and operations, sent a brief statement in response: “The British Shop takes its commitment to the security of its artworks very seriously, with security checks at every stage of

operations. This artwork appears to have been the unlucky victim of an extraordinary set of events which are being thoroughly investigated.”



Clotilde Jimenez.

COURTESY MARIANE IBRAHIM GALLERY

In 2018, Ibrahim supported Lina Iris Viktor, an artist she represents, in a lawsuit against rapper Kendrick Lamar and R&B star SZA over allegations that a music video for their song “All the Stars”—featured on the soundtrack to the movie *Black Panther*—drew from Viktor’s work without permission. The parties later agreed to settle on terms that could not be discussed as part of the agreement, though not before 10 months of high-profile media attention was paid to issues surrounding artists’ rights.

Ibrahim said she feels a need to take up the matter of questions surrounding shipping on similar grounds. “I am going to push on behalf of the artist—I have to fight,” she said, citing the financial loss while adding, “More than that, this is a work that will not have the chance to be seen. No one will ever see it again.”

“A dealer or shipper who loses an artwork—it’s a taboo that nobody wants to talk about, but there has to be the question of who’s liable. I don’t know if this case will open a Pandora’s box and other things will come out, but it is not OK. The artist is devastated. It’s difficult to tell someone that a company lost a work, doesn’t care, and hopes that we’ll forget about it and will continue to do business with them. It’s a rip-off.”

While the gallery has weathered shipping mishaps that have resulted in damage or delays, Ibrahim said, none has involved an artwork that couldn’t be recovered. “To have no trace of a work is incredible,” she said.

Jimenez said the incident has left him feeling bruised. “I feel sad and angry, like they’re not taking this as seriously as they should be,” he said. “I have major trust issues when it comes to art handlers.”

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