

## Faces of the Gods (2006) Raimi Gbadamosi

### The Gods

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, — a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

(W.E.B. DuBois. 'Of Our Spiritual Strivings' in The Souls of Black Folk. 1903)

Nehebkau, is the Egyptian god who guards the entrance to Duat, the underworld. After bodily death Nehebkau binds two immortal parts of the soul together, Ka and Ba, to contain spiritual demise. With its two serpent heads he can see and attack in two directions at once. Nehebkau sees the living and the dead and gleans knowledge. Ani, an Etruscan sky god and a passage deity, he simultaneously gazes in two directions with his two faces. He lives on high above watching humanity's strivings.

Best known of all bicephalic gods however is the Roman god Janus that looks towards both sides. On a flat surface he looks left and right, either way he looks to the future and the past. There is some difficulty in understanding how he processes this amount of 'conflicting' information and function properly in his own present. Janus is bound by what he sees behind him as much as what he engages with in front. Even the gods dwell in the present, but by the dispensation allowed the immortals he remains in the past he requires while transporting himself to the future he desires and adjusts his actions in the present. His gatekeeping significance in Western psyche is so fixed that the month of January is named after him.

The artists in *Look Both Ways*; Kofi Allen, Godfried Donkor, Mary Evans and Errol Francis are forced to function Janus-like, they identify their own past and unearth the realities that brought them thus far. They find themselves bound in a gallery acting out their role as social critics, to guide the viewer to a new mental space. The better a guards is, the less intrusive their presence; when we see Mary Evans; patterns based on icons of The Middle Passage, we are pulled up short, to carry on unchecked becomes impossible.