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The Dak'Art Biennial in the Making of Contemporary African Art, 1992-Present

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An Abstract of  
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the  
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University  
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2013

## Abstract

The Dak'Art Biennial in the Making of Contemporary African Art, 1992-Present  
By Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi

This dissertation examines the shift in contemporary African art in the 1990s. By focusing on the Dak'Art Biennial as an important context of analysis, it argues that the genesis of this shift was the economic and political failures of the postcolonial states in the 1980s, which led artists to reject cultural nationalism and the decolonizing aesthetics of easily identifiable but reinvented African art forms and leitmotifs. African artists began to reflect an expanded repository of creative and cultural references, and to work with more diversified media of creative expressions in the 1990s. The study thus explores a range of works exhibited at Dak'Art in the last two decades. A large-scale international exhibition, Dak'Art was established in 1989 by the government of Senegal to promote latest examples of African art. I show how early iterations of Dak'Art in 1992 and 1996, which exhibited mostly paintings and sculptures, reflected the formal outlines of post-independence modernism in Africa. I demonstrate how Dak'Art began to exhibit new trends, such as conceptual art, and art forms, including performance, installation, and time-based art that are international in orientation, from 1998 on. The study also explores Dak'Art's pan-African internationalism, a framework for cultural visibility, and argues that it is distinct from the approaches advanced in the pan-African events in Africa in the 1960s and 1970s. These events, which included the International Congress of African Culture in 1962 and First World Festival of Negro Arts in 1966, promoted global black solidarity and cultural nationalism that were based on the notion of "returning to the source." Instead, Dak'Art is outward looking, and seeks to secure a foothold for African and African diaspora artists in the mainstream artworld. Yet, in spite of Dak'Art's pan-African orientation, works in its exhibitions have not pursued any sectional aesthetic ideology. Ultimately, I argue that the absence of a collective aesthetic ideology represents the most significant manifestation of the shift in contemporary African art since the 1990s.

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## Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Chapter One</b>	
History and Context: The Making of a Postcolonial Pan-African Biennial.....	24
I. Senegal’s Cultural Policy and the Legacy of <i>Enracinement</i> and <i>Ouverture</i> .	
II. New Economic Realities and a Shift in Cultural Policy.	
III. A New Global Art Order.	
IV. New Biennials in the 1990s	
V. The Postcolonial Turn and Dak’ Art.	
VI. Conclusion.	
<b>Chapter Two</b>	
Dak’ Art and Black Cultural Politics in the 20th Century.....	67
I. The Intersection of Politics and Culture in the Diaspora.	
II. Congress of Black Writers and Artists.	
III. Pan-African Congress and Festivals in the 1960s and 1970s.	
IV. Conclusion.	
<b>Chapter Three</b>	
Exploring Dak’ Art.....	116
I. The 1980s in Perspective.	
II. Dak’ Art 1990 and 1992.	
III. Dak’ Art 1996 and 1998.	
IV. Conclusion.	
<b>Chapter Four</b>	
Dak’ Art and Contemporary African Art since 2000.....	163
I. Dak’ Art since 2000.	
II. Reading the Contemporary.	
III. Dak’ Art OFF.	
IV. Conclusion.	
<b>Chapter Five</b> .....	215
Conclusion.	
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	230



## List of Figures

- Fig. 1: The Opening of Marc Chagall Exhibition, Musée Dynamique, Dakar 18 March 1971.
- Fig. 2: Papa Ibra Tall, *Le Couple Royal*, wool tapestry, 1966.
- Fig. 3: Poster of the Picasso Exhibition, Musée Dynamique, Dakar, 6 April – 6 May, 1972.
- Fig. 4: Aaron Douglas, *Let my People go*, 1927, oil on canvas.
- Fig. 5: Aaron Douglas, *Study of Aspects of Negro Life: The Negro in African Setting*, 1934.
- Fig. 6: Edna Manley, *Bead seller*, wood, 1922.
- Fig. 7: Edna Manley, *The Negro Aroused*, wood, 1935.
- Fig. 8: Group photograph of ICAC participants, ICAC, 1962.
- Fig. 9: Ben Enwonwu, *Anyanwu*, bronze, ca. 1954-55.
- Fig. 10: Meta Warrick Fuller, *Ethiopia Awakening*, bronze, ca. 1914 or 1921.
- Fig. 11: Vincent Kofi, *Awakening Africa*, bronze, 1959.
- Fig. 12: Poster of the First World Festival of Negro Arts, Dakar, 1966.
- Fig. 13: Opening of *Tendances et Confrontations*, Dakar, 1966.
- Fig. 14: Ibou Diouf, *Tête*, oil on canvas, 1965.
- Fig. 15: Papa Ibra Tall, *Le Lutteur*, oil on canvas, no date.
- Fig. 16: Gerard Sekoto, *Mother and Child*, oil on canvas, no date.
- Fig. 17: Christian Lattier, *The Ram*, steel and rope, 1965.
- Fig. 18: Viyé Diba, *Malade Mental 1*, acrylic on paper, 1988.
- Fig. 19: Viyé Diba, *Échappement*, mixed media, 1996.
- Fig. 20: Viyé Diba, *Matières, rythmes et compositions*, mixed media, 1997.
- Fig. 21: Olu Oguibe, *National Graffiti*, acrylic on mat, 1989.
- Fig. 22: *Art Against Apartheid*, Musée Dynamique, Dakar, May 23 to June 23, 1986.

Fig. 23: El Hadji Sy delivering his speech at the opening of *Art Against Apartheid*, Musée Dynamique, Dakar, May 23, 1986.

Fig 24: Laboratoire Agit-Art, Performance, 1989.

Fig. 25: Poster of Dak'Art 1990.

Fig. 26: Place de l'Obelisque, Dak'Art 1990.

Fig. 27: *Aires Culturelles et Création Littéraire en Afrique*, Dak'Art 1990.

Fig. 28: President Diouf viewing a section of the International Selection of Dak'Art 1992 at the I'FAN Museum, Dakar, December 1992.

Fig. 29: Another section of the International Selection, showing works of Ghanaian and Senegalese artists, I'FAN Museum, Dak'Art 1992, Dakar, December 1992.

Fig. 30: Chuckley Vincent, *Retrouvailles*, batik, 1992, Dak'Art 1992.

Fig. 31: Fode Camara, *La Magie des Noirs*, acrylic painting, Dak'Art 1992.

Fig. 32: Malek Salah, *Matière-Energie II*, oil on canvas, Dak'Art 1992.

Fig. 33: Moustapha Dimé, *La Dame à la culotte*, driftwood, undated, Dak'Art 1992.

Fig. 34: Zehirun Yetmgeta, *When the Sun Gets the Moon*, acrylic on bamboo, 1992.

Fig 35: Official Dak'Art Logo.

Fig. 36: Opening Ceremony of Dak'Art 1996, Daniel Sorano Theatre, Dakar, 1996.

Fig. 37-38: Audience viewing works in the International Selection of Dak'Art 1996.

Fig. 39: Kra N'Guessan, *Reliquaire*, installation, 230 x 79 x 50.5cm, 1995, Dak'Art 1996.

Fig. 40: Yacouba Toure, *Oasis*, mixed media installation, 194 x 132 cm, 1994, Dak'Art 1996.

Fig. 41: Abdoulaye Konaté, *Hommage aux chasseurs du Mandé*, installation, 1994, Dak'Art 1996.

Figs. 42 and 43: Mohamed Kacimi, *From Life to Oblivion* [installation shot], I'FAN Museum, Dak'Art 1996.

Fig 44: Ezrom Lagae and Mary Nooter Roberts, *I think more with my eyes than with my mind* (installation shot), I'FAN Museum, Dak'Art 1996.

- Fig. 45: Ezrom Legae, *Dying Beast*, bronze, 43 x 36 x 29, 1993, Dak'Art 1996.
- Fig. 46: Pascale Martine Tayou, *Neither Primitive Nor Wild* [installation shot], Goethe Institute, Dakar, Dak'Art 1996.
- Fig. 47: Zerihun Yetmgeta, *A Spiritual Art* [installation shot], Galerie Quatres Vents, Dakar, Dak'Art 1996.
- Figs. 48 and 49: *From the Long Search for a Shadow* [installation shot], defunct Galerie 39, Dakar, Dak'Art 1996.
- Figs. 50 and 51: *Encounters and Exchange*, Dak'Art 1996.
- Fig. 52: Barthélémy Togou, *Carte de Séjour*, performance, Dak'Art 1998.
- Fig. 53: Soly Cissé, *Serie Colorée* [triptych], acrylic on canvas, 2010, Dak'Art OFF 2010.
- Fig. 54: Berni Searle, *Red, Yellow, Brown: Face to Face*, photography installation, 2000, Dak'Art 2000.
- Fig. 55: Tracey Rose, *Span II*, video and object installation, 1997, Dak'Art 2000.
- Fig. 56: Mfon Essien, *The Amazon's New Clothes*, photography, 1999, Dak'Art 2000.
- Fig. 57: Moridja Kitenge Banza, *Hymne à Nous*, video, 2008, Dak'Art 2010.
- Fig. 58: Joël Mpah Dooh, *Global Program Cols*, multimedia installation, 1999, Dak'Art 2000.
- Fig. 59: Dominique Zinkpè, *Malgré tout*, installation, 2000, Dak'Art 2000.
- Fig. 60: Dominique Zinkpè, *G8 promène son chien*, installation, 2000, Dak'Art 2000.
- Fig. 61: Emeka Udemba, *World White Walls*, wood, Plexiglas, earth, plastic flowers, and found objects, 300 x 1000 x 1000 cm, 2001, Dak'Art 2002.
- Fig. 62: Babacar Niang, *Émigration Clandestine: the Grand Debat*, collage and installation, 2008, Dak'Art 2008.
- Fig. 63: Hervé Youmbi in *Ces Totems qui hantent la mémoire des fils de Mamamdou*, variable installation, 2010, Dak'Art 2010.
- Fig. 64: Mounir Fatmi, *Liaisons et déplacements*, multimedia installation, 1998-1999, Dak'Art 2000.
- Fig. 65: Samba Fall, *Consomania*, video animation, 4mins, 4secs, 2007, Dak'Art 2008.

Fig. 66: Chika Modum, *Isi Aka*, installation, 2010, Dak'Art 2012.

Fig. 67: Ndary Lo, *La Longue Marche du Changement*, variable installation, 195 x 75 250cm, 2000-2001, Dak'Art 2002.

Fig. 68: Ndary Lo, *La Muraille Verte*, variable installation, 2006-2007, Dak'Art 2008.

Fig. 69: Robert Jem Koko Bi, *Darfur*, burnt wood, 2008, Dak'Art 2008.

Fig. 70: Robert Jem Koko Bi, *Autopsie*, collage, 236 x 155 cm, no date, Dak'Art 2008.

Fig. 71: Freddy Tsimba, *Elles Viennent de Loin*, variable installation, 2006-2007, Dak'Art 2008.

Fig. 72: Aimé Mpane, Congo, the Shadow of the Shadow, matchsticks, wooden boards hewn from alder and fir, 2005, Dak'Art 2006.

Fig. 73: Moataz Nasr, *Merge and Emerge*, Video-channel loop, 6mins 25 secs, 2011, Dak'Art 2012.

Fig. 74: Katia Kameli, *Untitled*, video, 2mins 30 secs, 2011, Dak'Art 2012.

Fig. 75: Bright Ugochukwu Eke, *Acid Rain*, variable installation, water, plastic bags, soot, 2005, Dak'Art 2006.

Fig. 76: Kwesi Owusu-Ankomah, *Movement No 11*, acrylic on canvas, 150 x 200 cm, 2003-2005, Dak'Art 2006.

Fig. 77: Justin Kabré, *Fetchie Protecteur*, welded steel, 100 x 35 x 35, undated, Dak'Art 2008.

Fig. 78: Saliou Traoré, *Fauteuil Marmite*, aluminum, 15 x 15 x 15 cm, 1998, Dak'Art 2000.

Fig. 79: Kabbaj Khadija, *Table Tbeq*, size and date unknown, Dak'Art 2008.

Fig. 80: Dak'Art OFF flag in a residential quarter.

Fig. 81: 3x3: Three Artists/Three Projects poster.

Figs. 82 and 83: David Hammons, Dak'Art 2004 Sheep Raffle, live performance, 2004, Dak'Art OFF 2004.

Fig. 84: Pamela Z, *An Evening of Works for Voices, Electronics and Video*, performance, 2004, Dak'Art OFF 2004.

Fig. 85: Pamela Z, *Just Dust*, six-channel sound work, 2004, Dak'Art OFF 2004.

Fig. 86 and 87: Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, *Threads of Memory*, video and object installation, 2004, Dak'Art OFF 2004.

Fig. 88: Afropixel 2012 poster.

Fig. 89: Afropixel 2012, *Petit-déjeuner*, Kër Thiossane, Dakar, April 21, 2012.

Fig. 90: Opening of Yassine Balbzioui exhibition, Afropixel 2012, Kër Thiossane, Dakar, May 12, 2012, Dak'Art OFF 2012.

Fig. 91: Visionary Africa: Art at Work exhibition, *Afropixel 2012*, Galerie Le Manege, Dakar, May 2012, Dak'Art OFF 2012.

Fig. 92: The African Renaissance Monument, Ouakam, Senegal.

## **Introduction**

The political and economic failures in several African countries, such as Senegal, in the 1980s led artists to reject cultural nationalism. Artists shifted from the decolonizing aesthetics of post-independence modernism and began to address the socio-political and economic realities in their various countries. This artistic change resulted in new forms of creative engagement and aesthetic production in the 1990s. It also led to the re-conceptualization of artistic identity, the mobility of African artists, and expansion of their cultural and aesthetic references. Although artistic practices in Africa have long been in dialogue with local and global traditions, these dialogues have been shaped over the years through politics/ideologies, social changes and movements, including colonialism, anticolonialism, postcolonialism, pan-Africanism, and transnationalism. The emphases on the inward/local and outward/international engagements have also shifted at different times. For example, when the emphases were on national and pan-African forms of modernism and art from the 1950s to the 1970s, the dialogues were with classical African forms as well as with other traditions of representation, such as two-dimensional painting on canvas or board. More recently, African artists have begun to address postcolonial experiences in new ways.

My dissertation focuses on Dak'Art Biennial as an important case study through which to explore this shift in contemporary African art since the 1990s. Created in 1989 by the government of Senegal to promote the latest examples of contemporary art in Africa, Dak'Art is framed as a pan-African biennial and exhibits the works of African and African diaspora artists. Two key questions thus orient the focus of this dissertation on Dak'Art. First, how can we understand Dak'Art's role in the shift in contemporary art and discourse in Africa in the last twenty years, given the importance of biennials as

trendsetters? And second, what is the relevance of pan-Africanism, which is an ideology of political and cultural solidarity, in a contemporary art biennial with global aspirations?

I argue that a change occurred in the practice of African artists in the 1990s. The impact of new technologies of communication on visual practices, neoliberal ideas with regard to the market values of art objects, and processes of globalization that increased cultural interactions on a grand scale though not on equal basis, all helped to catalyze this shift in the production, reception, and circulation of contemporary African art. The changes promoted more cultural interaction and the exchange of ideas between African artists and their contemporaries. They became increasingly mobile, traveling across the continent and beyond, tapping into the circuits of the global art world. Collaborating with peers in artists' workshops and residency programs, African artists also exhibited in major venues. They began to stress individual identities rather than a collective aesthetic ideology, and to reflect international artistic approaches, media, and art forms, including conceptual art, installation, new media technology, and performance. Many African artists, more so than in the past, perhaps, began to address themes and subjects that reflected local and global concerns. With these artists oriented to the international art world, this shift coincided with a proliferation of international art exhibitions in Africa.

Dak'Art is organized every two years in Dakar, Senegal, a country that since independence in 1960 has considered arts and culture as key to national development. Since the 1990s, Dak'Art has served as an important nexus between the African and international art worlds. It provides a place of contact and networking for artists and key constituents of the international art world, such as curators, art critics, art historians, art galleries and dealers, and an international audience. It has also helped to launch or

consolidate the careers of leading African artists, including Ndary Lo, Amal El Kenwawy, Moridja Kitenge Banza, Moataz Nasr, Berni Searle, Fatma Charfi, Otobong Nkanga, and El Anatsui, and continues to influence artistic practices in Africa. While it is neither the only nor the longest-standing biennial in Africa, it has exhibited a much greater number of artists and a wider range of contemporary art forms than any other biennial or exhibition.<sup>1</sup> By the last Dak'Art in 2012, the works of more than 300 artists have been exhibited in its official exhibitions. This statistic alone places Dak'Art in a leadership role among biennials, providing important context for this study.

I trace how Dak'Art's emergence in 1989 was dictated by a confluence of social, political, and economic factors. Apart from Senegal's policy of cultural diplomacy, the liberalization of Senegal's economy in the 1980s was an important factor. The new economic order shifted emphasis from the Keynesian model, which posited the State as the engine of development, to the neoliberal logic of lean government and the so-called "free market" through economic deregulation and privatization.<sup>2</sup> The effect of the economic shift was profoundly felt by Senegalese artists and the entire cultural sector. It disrupted a state system that had supported and provided subventions for artists while acquiring the bulk of their works.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the new economic climate helped create a new form of cultural patronage driven primarily by foreign and international

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<sup>1</sup> The first biennial in Africa is the Alexandria Biennial, created in 1955. It was followed by the Cairo Biennial in 1984. However, both the Alexandria and the Cairo Biennials were focused predominantly on the Mediterranean and Arab worlds, respectively. A limited number of artists from sub-Saharan Africa have participated in the two biennials, such as South African Berni Searle, who participated in the Cairo Biennial in 1998. Bassam El Baroni, "Remodeling Required: Official Biennales in Egypt and International Biennale Culture," *Art Criticism and Curatorial Practices in Marginal Contexts* (Addis Ababa: AICA Press, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Mark Gersovitz and John Waterbury (eds.), *The Political Economy of Risk and Choice in Senegal* (London and New Jersey: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> See Harney Elizabeth Harney, *In Senghor's Shadow: Art, Politics, and the Avant-garde in Senegal, 1960-1995* (Durham and London: Duke University, 2004).



institutions that engaged artists more directly. The flow of international funding also allowed significant collaborations among state institutions, artists, local and international cultural organizations, and the private sector. Such collaborations would later lead to Dak'Art.

Dak'Art's status as an international biennial of contemporary African art is very important. Its growth in the 1990s coincided with the expansion of the international art world beyond the Western hemisphere. A key indicator of this expansion was the proliferation of art biennials. From fewer than thirty in 1990, biennials have grown to over one hundred and fifty-five in a space of twenty years.<sup>4</sup> This upsurge brought about a more heterogeneous, complex, and global sense of contemporary art.<sup>5</sup> Arjun Appadurai's theory of "imagined worlds" describes the global flow of cultural capital between the center and the periphery.<sup>6</sup> Art biennials fit into this idea of "imagined worlds:" as global exhibitions, they bring together works of art from different geographical regions and convene a global audience.

Biennials vary in scope and mission, and not all assemble artists of diverse ethnicities and geographical backgrounds. Dak'Art is an example of a geographically and ethnically delimited venue. In this sense it might illustrate Monika Szewczyk's observation that, in moving from the universal toward a critical regionalism, some art biennials filter global pressures and affirm local and regional identities.<sup>7</sup> However,

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<sup>4</sup> See [www.biennialfoundation.org](http://www.biennialfoundation.org).

<sup>5</sup> See for example, Editors, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary,'" *October 130* (Fall 2009): 3-124.

<sup>6</sup> Arjun Appadurai. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) 33-35.

<sup>7</sup> Szewczyk uses the term "biennial bending" to describe such phenomenon. Monika Szewczyk, "How to Run a Biennial with an Eye to Critical Regionalism [A review of the workshop "How to Run a Biennial" by Yacouba Konaté, Mahita El Bacha Urieta, Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk, Jonas Ekeberg, and Gerardo Mosquera]," in Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø (eds.), *The Biennial Reader* Vol. 2 (Bergen, Norway: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 30-31.

Dak'Art shares certain common attributes with other international biennials, "such as globally acting curators, nomadic artists, intercultural curatorial boards, and traveling elite or cosmopolitan audiences."<sup>8</sup> I argue that the significance of Dak'Art as an international platform for contemporary art is rooted in its geopolitical commitments. It deploys pan-Africanism as a mobilizing tool for the promotion of African art and artists. Such an approach aligns with the neoliberal multiculturalism of the international art world, which celebrates the mixing of cultures but also diversity and difference.

Dak'Art's pan-African identity, which is parochial, would seem to clash with its global aspirations. For the Biennial, pan-Africanism is more than a convenient means to follow international trends or be different. Before the creation of Dak'Art, the structure of the international art world largely excluded non-Western artists and black artists in the West. Dak'Art was created specifically to address this problem by focusing on artists of African descent. It articulated an alternative framework for the reception of contemporary art from Africa. It also pursued a new vision of making and seeing biennials as global exhibitions that are regional in scope, a vision which I call pan-African internationalism. Although more African artists now exhibit alongside their contemporaries in Africa and elsewhere and on an equal footing, Dak'Art has continued to focus only on art and artists of Africa and the diaspora.<sup>9</sup> Its strategy has been one of creating geopolitical integration based on socio-cultural solidarities.

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Fillitz, "Contemporary Art of Africa: Coevalness in the Global World," in Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg (eds.), *The Global Art World: Audiences, Markets, and Museums* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 125.

<sup>9</sup> Artists like El Anatsui and William Kentridge have gained rock star status on the global art scene. Others, including Berni Searle, Motaz Nasr, and a host of other artists, who have exhibited at Dak'Art, have also been exhibited in major international venues, such as the Venice Biennial.

In the process, the Biennial distinguished itself from the multitude of other biennials, most of which are more influential and financially stronger. Issues associated with location and capital highlight the unequal distribution of global capitalism, which structures power and cultural relations between regional blocs and between the local and the global.<sup>10</sup> Dak'Art's regional focus and lack of financial strength narrow its influence. It cannot compete for international attention with a lot of biennials in Europe and emerging centers in Asia. However, it embraces its marginality or geopolitical focus to carve out a space for itself in the global circuit of biennials as a pan-African, postcolonial, and non-Western biennial.

I am mindful of the fact that there are other biennials in Africa with similar international reputations or pan-African agendas as Dak'Art.<sup>11</sup> For example, the defunct Johannesburg Biennial was launched in 1995 to return South Africa to the international fold after many decades of cultural isolation as a result of Apartheid. However, after its second iteration in 1997, it folded because in its globalist approach it failed to connect with local audiences.<sup>12</sup> On both occasions, the biennial was criticized for privileging an international art audience through highly conceptual ideas and themes that did not sufficiently reflect local realities and histories.<sup>13</sup> Unlike the Johannesburg Biennial, Dak'Art is mostly focused on African audiences.

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<sup>10</sup> James Elkins, Zhivka Valiavicharska, and Alice Kim (eds), *Art and Globalization*, Vol. 1 (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 85-96.

<sup>11</sup> They include Rencontres Bamako in Mali (1994 to date), Rencontres Picha, Lubumbashi, DR Congo (2010 to date), Doual'Art in Douala, Cameroon (2010 to date), and Regard Benin Biennial (2012). Others, such as Abidjan Biennial in Côte d'Ivoire (1993), Johannesburg Biennial in South Africa (1995 and 1997), Afrika Heritage in Nigeria (1995 to date), and East African Biennial in Tanzania (2003, and 2007) are either defunct or inconsistent.

<sup>12</sup> Jen Budney, "Who's It For? The Second Johannesburg Biennale," *Third Text*, No 42 (Spring 1998): 88-94.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

What makes Dak'Art noteworthy is that it is a trailblazer in the promotion of African and African diaspora artists, an orientation that has become the norm for art biennials in Africa. While the *Rencontres de la Photographie Africaine* in Bamako (otherwise known as the Bamako Biennial) is similar to Dak'Art in its focus on African and African diaspora artists, there are two major differences between the two.<sup>14</sup> These concern sponsorship and scope. The Bamako Biennial is co-organized and co-sponsored by the Ministry of Culture of Mali and Culturesfrance (the French government organ responsible for promoting French Culture in the world) and represents France's contemporary cultural relations with its former colonies in Africa.<sup>15</sup> Since its inception in 1994, the Bamako Biennial has focused on new trends in African photography, and most recently has expanded to include video and film. Unlike Dak'Art, it does not exhibit other art forms.

It is important to mention that several important exhibitions organized since the early 1990s, such as *African Explores* (1991), *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa* (1995), *The Short Century* (2001), and *Africa Remix* (2005), have engaged broadly with artistic modernity and contemporaneity in Africa. Like Dak'Art, these exhibitions drew attention to modern and contemporary African art on an international scale. They also provided an epistemological ground for engaging African art and history, which is also the case with Dak'Art and the several biennials that have proliferated in Africa in recent years. However, the exhibitions listed were not without criticisms. First, they were all organized primarily for a Western audience although *Africa Remix* eventually traveled to

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<sup>14</sup> Perrin Lathrop, "Localising the Global Biennial? The Encounters of Bamako: African Biennial of Photography, 1994-Today," *SAVVY: Journal of contemporary African Art*, [special edition on Curating: Expectations and Challenges] No. 4 (November 2012): 40-50.

<sup>15</sup> Jennifer Bajorek and Erin Haney, *Beyond the Biennial: Bamako at 15 years* (London: Autograph ABP, 2009).

South Africa. The rest were on view in Europe and the United States.<sup>16</sup> *Africa Explores* created rubrics that appear to have misinterpreted the nature of artistic practices and creative processes in Africa.<sup>17</sup> *The Short Century* constructed a grand narrative that subsumed subtleties and fissures that would have presented a more complicated picture of artistic trajectories in Africa since 1945.<sup>18</sup>

Dak'Art affords one the opportunity to analyze the changes in the topography of contemporary art in Africa since the 1990s through a biennial that was created specifically for that purpose. By looking at a range of works exhibited in Dak'Art in the last two decades, I have been able to identify changes in artistic production in formal and conceptual terms, and to outline some of the new aesthetic orientations of artists practicing today. The most apparent is the departure from the decolonizing legacies of easily identifiable African tropes and leitmotifs. The contemporary artists at Dak'Art address the postcolonial experience from individual positions rather than from any ideological or collective contexts. This marks a distinct shift from the modernists, such as Papa Ibra Tall (Senegal) and Gerard Sekoto (South Africa), who explored themes and subject matters steeped in the concepts of Africanness and Négritude. This, I argue, represents the clearest manifestation of a shift in artistic production in Africa in the 1990s.

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<sup>16</sup> *Seven Stories*, *The Short Century*, and *Africa Remix* involved African curators. *Africa Remix: Contemporary art of a continent*, which was curated by the Swiss-Cameroonian Simon Njami who is based in Paris, opened at the Museum Kunst Palast in Düsseldorf, Germany in July 24, 2004, was on view at the Hayward Gallery, London (from February 10 to April 17, 2005), Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (May 25 to August 8, 2005), Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (May 27 to August 31, 2006), and finally, Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa (June 24 to September 30, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> The categories were "Traditional Art," "New Functional Art," "Urban Art," "International Art," and "Extinct Art." A sixth category, "Afrokitsch," was introduced by one of the guest essays by Donald Cosentino in the exhibition's book catalog. See Susan Vogel, ed., *Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art* (New York: Center for African Art; Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1991).

<sup>18</sup> *The Short Century* was a highly omnibus exhibition, but which mostly focused on a political history of Africa beginning with the pan-African congress of 1945 and ending with Nelson Mandela's election as South Africa's first black president in 1994.

Dak'Art's adoption of pan-Africanism as the basis for its organization also presents a tension for artists who are keen to be addressed as international artists or just as artists without prefixes or modifiers, as is the case with their Western contemporaries.<sup>19</sup> Several artists at Dak'Art, including Soly Cissé (Senegal), Moridja Kitenge Banza (DRC), and Chiekhou Ba (Senegal) would want to be addressed as just artists. Others, such as Ndary Lo (Senegal), do not think that the label African makes any difference. Although some contemporary artists at Dak'Art make direct allusions to pan-Africanism, their creative strategies are stripped of the postcolonial modernist language of "returning to the source" to find traditional African influences. Ndary Lo, for example, pays homage to pan-Africanism by creating works that celebrate important black or African musicians, literary figures, artists, cultural administrators, civil right leaders and politicians.

In addressing Dak'Art's pan-Africanism as a cultural politics of visibility, this study considers other biennials that articulate similar guiding ideologies. The Havana Biennale, for example, was established in 1984 to represent art and artists excluded from the international mainstream. It focused mostly on non-Western artists from Africa, Asia, and Latin America based on a postcolonial discourse of "Thirdworldism."<sup>20</sup> While I argue that Dak'Art represents a postcolonial vision of cultural mediation similar to that of the Havana Biennale, its model of internationalism is more aligned with black cultural politics in the twentieth century, consolidated in the early pan-African congresses and festivals.

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<sup>19</sup> I was made aware of this tension in several discussions with artists including, Soly Cissé (May 15 and 18, 2010); Moridja Kitenge Banza (May 19, 2010); Ndary Lo (May 22, 2010); Chiekhou Ba (May 26, 2010); Viyé Diba (May 29); and Amadou Kan-si (June 8, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Miguel I. Rojas-Sotelo, *Cultural Maps, Networks and Flows: The History and Impact of the Havana Biennale* (PhD Diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2009).

A series of events --- the International Congress of African Culture (Salisbury [now Harare], 1962), the First World Festival of Negro Arts (Dakar, 1966), the First Pan-African Festival (Algiers, 1969), and the Second World Festival of Black and African Arts (Lagos, 1977) --- were organized during the 1960s and 1970s, a period of cultural nationalism and decolonization. The festivals celebrated the demise of colonialism in many parts of Africa by bringing together black and African visual and material cultures on a global scale. The festival provided not only the setting for the celebration of black and African cultures, but also served as a reminder of black peoples' resilience over racism and colonialism. This becomes particularly striking given that the festival was staged in the decade when most countries in Africa were beginning to gain independence. Although Dak'Art alone is considered a worthy successor of the First World Festival, all of the early pan-African events shared the same goal of promoting cultural solidarity. Beyond celebrating global cultures, the historical significance of these earlier events lies in their representation of alternative internationalism and modernism through their exhibitions of modern black and African art.

I argue that the festivals laid the groundwork for pan-Africanism as a framework for asserting African and African diaspora arts as a legitimate component of global art, a framework that currently orients Dak'Art. Yet Dak'Art's approach to cultural mediation is different from the approaches of its illustrious predecessors. Unlike the early pan-African events, Dak'Art's pan-African internationalism is outward-looking. Dak'Art is more concerned with enabling African artists to gain a foothold in the mainstream of the international art world. It is therefore a departure from the early pan-African events,

which aimed for a global cultural exchange on the basis of consanguinity and shared experiences and realities.

I also consider how the early pan-African events provide a useful launching pad to explore changes in artistic practices in Africa from the high modernism of the 1960s and 1970s to the contemporary 1990s and 2000s. These festivals and congress provided platforms to assess black and African artistic modernism in a pan-African context. Early iterations of Dak'Art in 1992 and 1996 reflected modernist modes of expression, such as two dimensional painting, that harked back to the 1960s and 1970s. From 1998 on, Dak'Art began to show works that mirrored international trends, including video and installation. Dak'Art thus presents a unique but challenging context to explore this shift.

In order to outline the shift in artistic production in Africa since the 1990s, this dissertation is interested in a distinction between “modern” and “contemporary.” This distinction challenges established historical paradigms in African art history. This is because periodization is often based on epochal events with far-reaching consequences in Africa’s history, such as colonialization and political independence, which fit neatly in a linear narrative. Recent developments in African art cannot be delineated by history-making events. Exceptions to this may be Mandela’s release from prison in 1990 and the beginning of majority rule in South Africa in 1994, which can be considered significant historical milestones. Yet while these events were indeed celebrated across the continent, they had few political implications for individual countries beyond South Africa, and did not affect artistic production on the continent.

The established periodizing paradigms of the pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial have been rendered obsolete and impractical by the fact that art in Africa



today is characterized by multiple temporalities.<sup>21</sup> It is not only these but the concept of the postcolonial which have become increasingly ahistorical. Artists in different parts of the continent create with traditional and new media and in a variety of styles and forms, ranging from wood carvings and paintings to videos. Not all works that are currently being produced can be labeled as “contemporary” in the art world sense, although this begs a larger question of who and what frames the definition. Yet, differences in aesthetic sensibilities trump any consideration of their contemporaneity and determine how they are written into art history.

The boundaries of modern and contemporary in African art are to a large extent still blurred, and require more rigorous analysis.<sup>22</sup> The two terms are, to a large extent, used interchangeably as the best way of dealing with the periodization of postcolonial African art. Sidney Kasfir suggests that “modern” and “contemporary” imply different theoretical approaches in writing about African art since the end of formal colonialism.<sup>23</sup> In making this claim, Kasfir acknowledges both the broad and specific contexts in which the terms have been deployed. The generally adopted time line of the formal end of colonialism in African art history is the late 1950s. This time period coincides with the independence of Ghana, the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to throw off the colonial

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<sup>21</sup> See for instance, Gitti Salami, “Towards ‘Radical Contemporaneity’ in African Art History: The ‘Glocal’ Facet of a Kinship-based Artistic Genre,” *Critical Interventions* No ¾ (Spring 2009): 78-99; and Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, “From Masks to Metal Cloth: Artists of the Nsukka School and the Problem of ‘Ethnicity,’” *Critical Interventions* No ¾ (Spring 2009):133-146.

<sup>22</sup> Evelyn Brown’s *Africa’s Contemporary Art and Artists* (1966) and Ulli Beier’s *Contemporary Art in Africa* (1968) pioneered the use modern and contemporary interchangeably. Both scholarships addressed new styles and art forms that emerged during colonialism and in the early post-colonial period. While postcolonial is a historical marker for the period after the end of colonialism, it carries more than a political weight in the context of African art history. It refers to modern and contemporary art produced from 1957, the date of Ghana’s independence, to the present. The date, in fact, is merely symbolic because the postcolonial emerged at various moments in the different African countries.

<sup>23</sup> Sidney Littlefield Kasfir, “African Visual Culture,” in *Oxford Handbook of Modern African History*, eds. John Parker and Richard Reid (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press, [in press] estimated September 2013).

yoke. This dating is now highly problematic because it was based on the old idea that North Africa is not part of Africa. Egypt, for example, gained independence from Great Britain in 1922 and became a republic in 1953. More importantly, formal colonialism ended on different dates for most countries in Africa, though 1960 was the date a number of them gained political independence. The point is that political or social events of huge historical importance do not necessarily match aesthetic developments, although they are often the basis of periodization.

As normative categories, both “modern” and “contemporary” are loaded terms. Although both imply a departure from the historical past and represent the state of being in the present, they have different aesthetic implications. “Contemporary,” for instance, refers to the “latest” or “current” art trends, differentiating what is being produced today from what came before, thereby excluding modernist practices. In a sense, the basis of the “modern” and “contemporary” in African art history is the relationship between African artists and external influences. In other words, the two terms describe works that are deemed to be hybrid, that is to say, works that are not produced in the pre-colonial styles. Contemporary masks and carved figures, for instance, are considered to be drawn from indigenous traditions, and are by implication devoid of outside influences, even when, hypothetically, the artist may have been drawing upon external ideas or representing an alternative reality through a familiar trope.

Kasfir, for example, includes the traditional genres of masks and carved figure that are still in production in her analysis of contemporary art in Africa.<sup>24</sup> This is because these works almost invariably reflect the changing milieu in which they are produced. Yet, for the most part, in African art history, hybridity is considered as the defining

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<sup>24</sup> Sidney Littlefield Kasfir, *Contemporary African Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 9-14.

element of modern and contemporary art in Africa since the end of colonialism. It gets murkier if two-dimensional painting, considered emblematic of modern art in Africa but now part of the (new) art traditions, is addressed alongside video art, a very recent introduction. Both are viewed as modern and contemporary, although they do not belong in the same conceptual or historical trajectory. Apparently, what they share is that they are the result of cultural hybridism, i.e., they are not part of indigenous traditions. The insistence on hybridism in African art history as the defining element of postcolonial African art dichotomizes the authentic past and the altered present.<sup>25</sup> It is also dismissive of the long history of appropriations across cultures in Africa, and between African cultures and outsider cultures.<sup>26</sup> While much has been written on the changing meaning of authenticity in African art as it relates to postcolonial subjectivity and artistic identity, the periodizing paradigms do not reflect these nuances.<sup>27</sup>

Recent scholarship offers an important model in teasing apart the modern and the contemporary, which this dissertation builds upon. Studies by Sunanda Sanyal (2000), Elizabeth Morton (2003), Elizabeth Harney (2004), Chika Okeke-Agulu (2004), and Jessica Gerschultz (2012) are excellent examples. Drawing upon the intersection between ideology and cultural politics, these scholars rigorously examine the various chapters of African modernist practices in Uganda, Zimbabwe, Senegal, Nigeria, and Tunisia, respectively. They traced shifts in aesthetic patterns and ideological positions in response

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<sup>25</sup> Kasfir suggests that hybridity is one of the most visible effects of globalization, which has increasingly influenced postcolonial art in Africa. Yet, she also argues that hybridity, which is the result of culture contact, does not need to be global. Kasfir, e-mail communication with author, 16 May 2013.

<sup>26</sup> An example is the ancient Benin court art, particularly the bronze plaques and carved ivories, which reflect cross-cultural relationship between the palace and the Portuguese.

<sup>27</sup> See for instance, Sidney Littlefield Kasfir, "African Art and Authenticity: A Text with a Shadow," in *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Marketplace*, eds. Olu Oguibe and Okwui Enwezor (London and Cambridge, Mass: Institute of International Visual Arts and the MIT Press, 1999), pp. 88-113; Richard P. Werbner, ed. *Postcolonial Subjectivities in Africa* (London; New York: Zed Books, 2002).

to cultural, social, political, and economic changes in the individual countries. They also consider the conditions of modernity in Africa within the larger discourse of twentieth century modern art. These studies provide a useful model for understanding the formal and conceptual distinction between post-1990 contemporary African art and what preceded it.

Okeke-Agulu, for example, establishes what he terms “postcolonial modernism” as the philosophical consciousness that underpinned the modernist project of the Zaria Art Society in Nigeria in the 1960s, but also the works of modernists in Africa and the diaspora in the same period.<sup>28</sup> He describes postcolonial modernism as “a set of formal and critical attitudes adopted by African and black artists at the dawn of political independence as a countermeasure against the threat of loss of self in the maelstrom unleashed by Western cultural imperialism and its enduring aftermath.”<sup>29</sup> The mid-century modernism outlined by Okeke-Agulu can be distinguished from the modernism of the early decades of the twentieth century, which involved an appropriation of the Western academic style of verisimilitude and basic techniques of perspective and anatomical accuracy. Instead, it showed the tactical combination of elements drawn from indigenous traditions and external sources, particularly Western but also Islamic.

Scholars have also begun to examine the more recent developments in the field and distinguished them from the modernist past. In *Contemporary African Art Since 1980*, Okwui Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu create a new timeline for the contemporary that departs from the conventional dating from the late 1950s.<sup>30</sup> To support the new timeline,

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<sup>28</sup> Chika Okeke- Agulu, “The Art Society and the Making of Postcolonial Modernism in Nigeria,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109, 3 (Summer 2010): 505-527.

<sup>29</sup> Okeke-Agulu, “The Art Society and the Making of Postcolonial Modernism in Nigeria,” 522.

<sup>30</sup> Okwui Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu, *Contemporary African Art Since 1980* (Bologna: Damiani, 2009).

they identify events that helped to produce a new kind of cultural production in Africa. These events, which included critiques of the failures of postcolonial states, the new economic order of liberalization, responses to globalization, and increased mobility, produced a new kind of social mobilization and cultural production. While I agree with most of the arguments presented by Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu, it is not very clear how they arrived at the 1980 timeline when they also propose the 1990s as the turning point in contemporary artistic practices in Africa.<sup>31</sup> They also place much emphasis on internationalism and transnationalism as defining elements of this transformation.

Apparently, the 1980 milestone reflects the introduction of neoliberalism and austerity measures in Africa, which had a radical impact on social and economic conditions. Yet, a more rigorous analysis of actual artworks would have been more helpful in presenting a more accurate picture of what transpired from either the 1980s or the 1990s. It may be argued that the hallmark of modernist practice in Africa through the late 1970s was the valorizing aesthetics of cultural nationalism and decolonization. It is also arguable that the bleak social, political and economic climate of the 1980s created a different kind of artistic atmosphere. Major social and political events, such as civil wars, droughts, and civilian and military dictatorships, re-shaped the artistic landscape. Artists such as Nigerian Obiora Udechukwu and Congolese Chéri Samba, for example, developed an activist mentality that was reflected in their political and social commentaries.<sup>32</sup>

As the euphoria of independence evaporated in the 1980s, artists addressed the failures of the postcolonial states. However, as in the preceding decades from the 1950s

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<sup>31</sup> Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu, *ibid*, 10.

<sup>32</sup> Obiora Udechukwu's *Exile Train* (oil on canvas, 1980), *Rhythms of Hunger*, (ink and wash on paper, 1985), and Chéri Samba, *La Bourgeoisie* (Acrylic on Canvas, 1981), are interesting examples.

on, artists in the 1980s worked mainly in two dimensional and three dimensional art forms, specifically painting and sculpture. There were certainly exceptions, but they were not widespread. One example was the experimental performance and installation of the Laboratoire-AGIT-Art, an artists' collective that became very prominent in the cultural landscape of Senegal in the 1980s. In the 1990s, artists began to engage more with the social realities in various ways and through a diversity of media and art forms that were not in use in the 1980s. In a sense, the reality of artistic practices in the period was different from that in the decades that preceded and succeeded the 1980s.

Dak'Art provides an important context within which to map the changes in the artistic landscape in Africa. Its earlier exhibitions in the 1990s showed various examples of post-independence modernism in Africa. In 1998, Dak'Art began to reflect the more recent trends in artistic practices in Africa and the diaspora. This can be attributed to the processes of globalization which had begun to be increasingly felt on the continent.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the tensions associated with the categorization and periodization of African art, it has become very clear that two perspectives orient discussions of contemporary African art since the 1990s in scholarship. The first is a consideration of contemporary African art as the totality of current African expressive arts. This includes traditional art forms such as masking, textile, pottery, wood carving, and metal work, which continue to thrive; new artistic traditions, including various forms of modernist paintings and sculptures as well as urban genres, such as barbershop signs; and the newer

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<sup>33</sup> By 1998, the internet technology was becoming available, though not widespread across Africa, and amplified communication between African artists and the outside world. Artists on the continent had also begun to increasingly travel within and outside Africa to participate in international artists' workshop and residency programs. Some of the artists, such as Viyé Diba of Senegal, who was awarded Dak'Art Biennial's top prize in 1998, participated in the Johannesburg Biennial in 1995, which was very globalist in orientation.

art forms, such as installations, time-based works, and performance.<sup>34</sup> The second is a consideration of contemporary African art as an aesthetic category that is defined by international art terms; this refers to art that circulates in art biennials, art fairs, and major international exhibitions. This second consideration also engages contemporary artists through internationalist and transnationalist lenses.<sup>35</sup>

The two perspectives are not necessarily opposed, but do advance different articulations of contemporary African art. By considering the entirety of contemporary African cultural production without aesthetic distinctions, there is the risk of forcing together disparate aesthetic sensibilities and contexts that should otherwise be addressed separately. For example, *Africa Explores* in 1991 assembled a variety of art forms that did not really belong together in an attempt to construct an all-encompassing narrative of artistic contemporaneity in Africa at the time. Conversely, art biennials are elitist venues and do have a narrow conception of contemporary art and art in general. Yet contemporary African art is not limited to works of artists who are based in the West or those who live in Africa but participate in the international art world. Ultimately, the discourse of contemporary African art should not be restricted to what is included or excluded. Instead it must aim for a deeper understanding of how artists think about, represent, and address the contemporary. The discourse should be about aesthetics in

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<sup>34</sup> Salami, "Towards 'Radical Contemporaneity' in African Art History: The 'Glocal' Facet of a Kinship-based Artistic Genre," *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> For a criticism of this position, see Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, "The Curator as Culture Broker: A Critique of the Curatorial Regime of Okwui Enwezor in the Discourse of Contemporary African Art in The Task of the Curator." <http://aachronym.blogspot.com/2010/06/curator-as-culture-broker-critique-of.html>; Rikki Wemega-Kwawu, "The Politics of Exclusion: The Undue Fixation of Western-based African curators on contemporary African diaspora artists," *Project 1975* (Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam Newsletter, No. 125), 9-22. <http://project1975.smba.nl/en/tag/rikki-wemega-kwawu>. Accessed January 12, 2013; and Sidney Littlefield Kasfir, "Lacuna: Uganda in a Globalizing Cultural Field," in *A Companion to Modern Art in Africa*, eds. Gitti Salami and Monica Visona, (Oxford: Blackwell [in press] estimated 2013).

terms of how artistic vocabularies and creative integrity can provide discerning lenses for comprehending artistic contemporaneity in Africa.

The goal of this dissertation, therefore, is to understand the dynamics of contemporary African art in the ways in which it reflect the current realities of Africa and African artists, and as it relates to the rest of the world. In focusing on this topic, I seek to fill a gap by contributing to African studies and to “globalized art history,” which pushes a multiplicity of narratives and histories. Scholars have suggested that the crystallization of contemporary art at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s resulted in a seismic change in the way in which art constitutes and addresses its viewer, and finds a parallel with other contemporary hegemonic configurations such as globalization and neo-liberalism.<sup>36</sup> By focusing on the Dak’ Art Biennial, my dissertation addresses a crucial shift in contemporary African art in the 1990s. This shift was manifested in formal, conceptual, and aesthetic terms. And, the ramifications of this shift were felt in social, economic, ideological, and political contexts.

This study of the Dak’ Art Biennial in its local and global contexts is divided into four main chapters. The first analyzes a range of events and issues in Senegal in the 1980s and in the international art world 1990s that laid the groundwork for Dak’ Art to emerge and to develop as a postcolonial pan-African biennial. I consider Dak’ Art as a product of Senegal’s long-standing state policy on cultural diplomacy, and a means to advance the international image of Senegal as a promoter of modern culture and a stable democracy. I therefore trace the history of this policy. As a postcolonial biennial, I situate

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<sup>36</sup> Boris Groys, “The Topology of Contemporary Art,” in *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, eds. Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor and Nancy Condee (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 71-82; Alexander Alberro, “Periodising Contemporary Art,” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, Vol. 9, No. 1/2, (2008/2009): 66-73.



Dak'Art within postcolonial debates of visibility and inclusion that were percolating when it emerged, using the lens of exhibitions such as *Magiciens de la Terre* and *The Other Story*. I also consider Dak'Art's pan-Africanism alongside the Havana Biennial's "Thirdworldism" as models of geopolitical internationalism though different in their articulations. I try to understand how Dak'Art differs from the multitude of art biennials that began to appear after the early 1990s. In short, Chapter One shows the critical interface of the local and the global in the creation of Dak'Art, and an explication of its cultural politics.

Chapter 2 traces the roots of Dak'Art's pan-African internationalism to the twentieth century black cultural activism that emerged in the early pan-African political conferences in the first half of the twentieth century, the Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Paris in 1956 and Rome in 1959, and pan-African cultural festivals in Salisbury (Harare), Dakar, Algiers, and Lagos in the 1960s and 1970s. I also explore the various waves of black aesthetic modernism in the United States, the Caribbean, and Europe as concomitant with the rise of pan-African internationalism. I will argue that this modernism was based on the desire for black cultural visibility on their own terms and involved a conceptual return to Africa as the source of black aesthetics. The pan-African cultural festivals were a physical celebration of black solidarity and modernism. I therefore examine several "modern" works of art in these festivals to establish the nature of artistic modernism in the early postcolonial period in Africa, which I later compare with contemporary works at Dak'Art in the 1990s in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 analyzes the role of Senegalese artists in the 1980s in the emergence of Dak'Art. I explore how artists began to organize on their own, after they lost the

patronage of the state, collaborating with cultural institutions in Senegal and abroad. I explore how such entrepreneurial proclivities by artists later led to Dak'Art. Chapter 3 also explores Dak'Art in detail. I trace its transformation from an alternating biennial of literary and visual arts to a conventional art biennial, showing the works of artists from different part of the world, and finally to its current status as a pan-African biennial of contemporary African art. In tracing this transformation in Dak'Art's institutional identity, I examine the associated developments in the composition of the biennial's structure and organizing body. My study also focuses on curatorial and thematic orientations, aesthetic agendas, and the public reception of Dak'Art's exhibitions. I also analyze a range of works from 1992 to 1998 to trace the gradual shift in the modernist practices of African artists to artistic contemporaneity.

Chapter 4 examines contemporary African art at Dak'Art since 2000 through a variety of works. I examine themes, media, and conceptual orientations adopted by artists in these works to understand how they articulate the contemporary. To provide a broader sense of developments in African art at Dak'Art, I explore the OFF, a parallel program of independent exhibitions at Dak'Art. I examine how the OFF grew in status and strength from an event organized by disgruntled artists who had been excluded from the official exhibition to an important component of Dak'Art. The official Dak'Art and the OFF reinforce the Biennial's objective to provide a venue for the promotion and presentation of contemporary African art, artists, and discourse in Africa. I also address the impact of the OFF in presenting Dakar as a pan-African city.

Chapter 5, the conclusion, recapitulates the complex issues addressed in this study as they relate to the understanding of recent African art and artistic contemporaneity. It

also summarizes some of the issues that have emerged at Dak'Art having to do with its role as a mediating platform for contemporary African art.

Research for this dissertation was carried out during three field trips to Senegal in the summers of 2008 and 2010, and an extended stay in the spring of 2012. In 2008, I familiarized myself with my research environment and networked to establish contact with individuals connected to the biennial, such as organizers, artists, and curators. In 2010, I was a participant observer for nearly the entire duration of the biennial. I attended almost all of the more than 250 official and fringe exhibitions. I conducted interviews with relevant stakeholders including Ousseynou Wade (the secretary general of Dak'Art from 2000 until August 2012), Sylvain Sankale (Dak'Art 2010 curator and former president of the Scientific Committee), artists, and other personalities who have been involved with the Biennial. My interest was to get a general sense of what Dak'Art meant as a pan-African event and how it is perceived by the organizers, artists, curators, and general public. In 2012, I spent six months conducting archival research and interviews. I also worked in the Biennial's Secretariat in Dakar without a stipend from January to May, 2012, and gained firsthand experience of the politics, processes and complexities involved in staging Dak'Art.

In addition, I conducted archival research in the following institutions: the National Archives of Senegal, the Dak'Art Secretariat, the Léopold Sédar Senghor Foundation, and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), Dakar. In 2009, I was awarded a graduate fellowship by the Smithsonian Institution. This allowed me to conduct extensive library research on global exhibitions, and organize the initial outline of my dissertation. Ancillary archival research at *Présence*

Africaine, Bibliotheque Nationale, and UNESCO in Paris in the Fall of 2012 allowed me to find important information about the two congresses of Black Writers and Artists in the 1950s and the First World Festival of Negro Arts. I also interviewed Paris-based artists who have participated in Dak'Art. Finally, my dissertation profited greatly from a 10-month pre-doctoral fellowship at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art, from August 15, 2012, to June 15, 2013, which allowed me to conduct extensive library research to supplement the primary sources and complete the writing.

## Chapter One

### History and Context: The Making of a Postcolonial Pan-African Biennial

Dakar will be hosting the Biennial of Arts and Literature from December 10-18, 1990. This regular event will enable men of culture on this continent and in other countries to meet and communicate and to share fascinating experiences of creating and recreating. Dakar will thus offer our peoples one of those moments of fraternity when civilization creates, thinks about what it is, and prepares to go forth and conquer the future.<sup>37</sup>

With this declaration by President Abdou Diouf on October 7 1989, Dak'Art was formally established. In choosing such a moment to announce the first biennial in sub-Saharan Africa, President Diouf may well have been aware of the gradual reorganization of the mainstream art world. He could also have been preempting the rising tide of art biennials as the biggest vehicle of cultural globalization in the incoming 1990s decade, or was reasserting Senegal as an important cultural hub after the economic challenges in the 1980s. However that may be, the official announcement of Dak'Art marked a crucial moment at the local and global levels. Diouf's government was emerging from the most difficult moments in Senegal's economy.<sup>38</sup> He was therefore keen to recalibrate his economic agenda to match the country's policy of cultural diplomacy. At the international level, the art world was going through a transition.

The dissertation examines Senegal's cultural policy since independence in 1960, mapping its impact on the political, social-cultural and economic landscape in the lead-up to Dak'Art. It analyzes the reorganization of the international art world in the early

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<sup>37</sup>Quoted in Abdou Sylla, *Arts plastique et état au Sénégal: Trente-cinq du mécénat au Sénégal* (Dakar, 1988), 148.

<sup>38</sup>Diouf's government had just finished its second economic plan, outlined under the rubric of the Structural Adjustment Program. The Senegalese economy was a little buoyant to take on a big international cultural event. See Yacouba Konaté, "The Invention of the Dakar Biennial," in *The Biennial Reader* Vol. 1, eds. Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø (Bergen, Norway: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 115.

1990s, which led to massive growth of art biennials. To understand Dak'Art's cultural politics, the study examines older global exhibitions, such as the Venice and São Paulo biennials, as well as the more contemporary ones, such as the Sharjah Biennial (1993 to date), and the Gwanju Biennial (1995 to date). It explores the mainstreaming of postcolonial arguments through exhibitions, such as *Magiciens de la Terre* and *The Other Story*, organized in 1989, in relation to Dak'Art. At the same time, I will argue that such postcolonial perspectives were first articulated by the Havana Biennale, which was the first biennial to institute a geopolitical model of cultural mediation. The study therefore compares Dak'Art's geopolitical model to that of the Havana Biennial. In mapping the history of Dak'Art in this study, I recall Vittoria Martini's observation that each biennial is archetypal, and its specificity must be identified in order to uncover a rich and unique history made up of disparities and differences.<sup>39</sup>

### **Senegal's Cultural Policy and the Legacy of *Enracinement* and *Ouverture***

The idea behind the establishment of Dak'Art is contested. Interviews and discussions with members of the art community in Dakar in 2008, 2010, and 2012, reveal the general consensus that the art community was instrumental to the creation of Dak'Art.<sup>40</sup> Most argue that artists and cultural producers seized every possible opportunity to lobby the state to create a platform for international cultural exchange. The cultural anthropologist Thomas Fillitz, who conducted similar interviews, suggests that

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<sup>39</sup> Vittoria Martini, "The End of the Histories of Biennials have Begun (A review of the lectures "Historical Origins" by Caroline A. Jones and "The Global Art World" by Charlotte Bydler), in *The Biennial Reader*, Vol. 2, eds. Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø [The Bergen Biennial Conference] (Bergen, Norway: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 12.

<sup>40</sup> Masamba Mbaye [journalist], interview by author and Hélène Tissières, 17 May 2010; Viyé Diba [artist], interview by author, 29 May, 2010; Abdou Sylla [art historian], interview by author, 25 May 2010; and Lamine Sall [former Secretary General, Dak'Art], 1 February 2012, tape recording, Dakar, Senegal.

Senegalese artists view Dak'Art as the actualization of their vision for a powerful dialogue with artists from around the world in the spirit of cultural exchange.<sup>41</sup> The benefits of an international cultural exchange cannot be overemphasized. It allowed artists to keep abreast of current trends, fraternize with their peers, and be part of the international art circuit and its markets of opportunities; it also connected the local art scene to the global art world, ultimately presenting Dakar as a cultural metropolis.

The exception to the generally accepted notion that it was artists who catalyzed Dak'Art is Lamine Sall, who in his capacity as the first Secretary General of Dak'Art organized the first and second editions of the biennial in 1990 and 1992. Sall credits then Minister of Culture, Moustapha Ka, with originating the idea of Dak'Art; Ka then invited him (Sall) to help develop it.<sup>42</sup> Sall also argues that Dak'Art must be seen as part of a trajectory of grandiose cultural events initiated and executed by the government of Senegal since independence to promote the image of the country as a bastion of modern culture and democracy at the international level.<sup>43</sup> It is probable that both the government and artists played complementary roles because a lot was at stake for both.

Facing accusations that his government was paying merely lip-service to arts, and that it was dismantling the structures for cultural development put in place by his predecessor, the venerable Léopold Sédar Senghor, President Diouf was keen to reassert his government's commitment to culture.<sup>44</sup> Another possible motivation for Dak'Art was nostalgia. In 1966, President Senghor had organized the hugely successful month-long

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<sup>41</sup> Thomas Fillitz, interview by author, 1 September 2012, tape recording, Vienna, Austria.

<sup>42</sup> Sall, *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> This would include the highly successful utopian First World Festival of Negro Arts in 1966 and the state-initiated exhibitions of Senegal's modern and contemporary art in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990. I will discuss the festival and exhibitions subsequently.

<sup>44</sup> Mamadou Diouf, interview by Tracy Snipes, 22 November 1991, tape recording, Dakar, Senegal. Cited in Tracy D. Snipes, *Arts and Politics in Senegal, 1960-1996* (Trenton, NJ.: Africa World Press, 1998), 72.

*Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres* (First World Festival of Negro Arts) as the affirmation of Senegal's brand of cultural diplomacy. Through the festival, Senghor exposed pioneer modern artists in Senegal to the international art world. Such a massive forum was absent in early post-Senghor Senegal. In creating Dak'Art, Diouf was eager to affirm his role as the benefactor and protector of arts and culture in the mold of Senghor. More important was his desire to fulfill the state's cultural policy on international cultural exchange. Although the notion of the President as the benefactor and protector of arts and culture reflects French practice and is therefore a colonial legacy, President Senghor was unique: he was truly a man of culture. He was an accomplished poet, cultural theorist, and art patron whose friendship with leading lights of the international modernist movement served to attract critical attention to Senegal.

After gaining political independence from France in 1960, successive Senegalese governments considered culture a key aspect of national planning, social development and economic prosperity. The tone was set by Senghor. As the first president of independent Senegal, he defined culture as the foundation on which national development and economic growth rests.<sup>45</sup> Senghor's promotion of culture was part of a development aesthetic which encompassed his political, economic and social agendas.<sup>46</sup> Négritude was the ideological foundation of Senghor's cultural policy.<sup>47</sup> Defined as the belief in a shared

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<sup>45</sup> Senghor's cultural policy frameworks included the integration of cultural development in the economic and social development, the need to promote mass culture, and the incontrovertible guarantee of freedom and flexibility in creative work. It also included the integration of cultural heritage with science and technology, support for creativity in intellectual and artistic fields, and the protection of literary and artistic works. Mamadou Seyni, M'Bengue. *Cultural Policy in Senegal*, (Paris: UNESCO, 1973), 20-21.

<sup>46</sup> Ima Ebong, "Négritude: Between Mask and Flag – Senegalese Cultural Ideology and the Ecole de Dakar." In *Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art*, ed. Susan Vogel (New York and Munich: The Center for African Art and Prestel, 1991) 198.

<sup>47</sup> Leonard Irving Markovitz, *Léopold Sédar Senghor and the Politics of Négritude* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 68-71.



black heritage, it was also understood as the self-affirmation of black peoples.<sup>48</sup> Initially, it was based on the need to reinvent and rehabilitate the “Negro” image and identity, which had suffered under the yoke of severe racism, colonialism, and Western imperialism. It was a philosophical idea proposed by Senghor and Aimé Césaire, who came from Martinique, together with their circle of black intellectuals, when they were students in Paris in the 1930s. The movement transcended geography and united blacks from different parts of the world.

Négritude’s basic tenets were the recognition, rehabilitation, and projection of Africa’s image, history and cultures, and the affirmation of being black through acts of self-empowerment. In the beginning, Négritude found immediate acceptance as a literary and aesthetic philosophy, serving the psychological and intellectual needs of the emerging black elites in Paris in their quest to define themselves as modern and cosmopolitan citizens. Négritude was, therefore, an intellectual movement that also enabled the black elites to frame a moderate political response to colonialism and colonization.<sup>49</sup>

When Senghor became the President of Senegal in 1960, Négritude was transformed and institutionalized. It therefore became a functional state ideology, covering the aesthetic, cultural, political and economic development programs of the

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<sup>48</sup> Critics of Négritude view it as racializing and romanticizing of Africa while its supporters consider Négritude as anti-colonial and restoring the cultural dignity of the Black race. I discuss Négritude in greater detail in Chapter 2. See also, Abiola Irele. “Négritude or Black Cultural Nationalism?” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 3, no. 3 (1965):321-48; Irele, “Négritude – Philosophy of African Being,” *Nigeria Magazine*, 1977, 1-13; Michael Lambert. “From Citizenship to Négritude: ‘Making a Difference’ in Elite Ideologies of Colonized Francophone West Africa.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35, no. 2 (1993): 239-262.

<sup>49</sup> See Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State. Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 162-167; Janet Vaillant, *Vie de Léopold Sédar Senghor. Noir, Français, Africain* (Paris: Karthala-Sephis, 2006), 149-152; Ndiouga Benga, “Mise en scène de la culture,” *Afrique et Développement*, Vol. XXXV, No. 4, (2010): 239.

newly independent state of Senegal. The concept gave rise to an intensive and extensive development of a culture in Senegal in the 1960s and 1970s. In his roles as president, cultural broker and art patron, Senghor was part of the cadre of African nationalists who believed in the development of a modern culture totally beholden to the new postcolonial reality. This modern culture was based on a combination of indigenous cultural traditions and best examples of external influences. Senghor, who was well-schooled in Western Enlightenment thought, was reproducing the enlightenment logic of cultural relativism and universalism.

Western enlightenment thought viewed modernity as progressive and rejected the past and tradition. In contrast, Senghor believed in recovering and rehabilitating the cultural past ravaged by European colonialism. Senghor was committed to using the public space to articulate a postcolonial modern culture that reinforced the social fabric, and recalled the cultural past, and also took full account of changes in the cultural present. He sought a return to the cultural self, but with openness to the cultural other. Senghor's cultural policy was thus framed as the dialectical notion of *enracinement* (rootedness) and *ouverture* (openness). *Enracinement* and *ouverture* epitomize Senegal's postcolonial cultural nationalism which was shaped by the ideology of Négritude, and the necessity of cultural diplomacy. The two concepts thus seek to recover the precolonial past, acknowledge the accident of colonialism, and accept the hybrid condition of postcoloniality.

*Enracinement* was the rubric under which values, epistemologies, and traditional social frameworks could be engaged from a pan-African perspective.<sup>50</sup> *Ouverture*

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<sup>50</sup> Léopold Sédar Senghor, *The Foundations of "Africanité," or "Négritude" and "Arabité"*. Trans. Mercer Cook (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1971), 7-8, 83-88.

welcomes the inclusion of non-African or black traditions and systems, including Western and Arab cultures.<sup>51</sup> Alioune Sene, Senghor's Minister of Culture stated:

[Modern] culture is not a return to the customs of the past. It is the attitude of our people to the future of its traditional values faced with the demands of modern technology, which is an essential factor of development and progress. This absorption is all the more necessary – not to say indispensable – in view of the fact that man today cannot win the battle of progress by relying only on the values of the past, while external factors which have a determining influence on his existence have substantially altered the nature of his daily struggle.<sup>52</sup>

Through *enrancement* and *ouverture*, Senghor also saw Senegal as a source of modern culture and an important meeting place for world cultures. This idea evolved out of his interest in the humanist philosophy of Teilhard de Chardin, the French theorist and Jesuit priest. In 1939, Chardin had posited the idea of “foyers of human development” as coinciding with the meeting of cultures and the synthesis of races.<sup>53</sup> Framing Négritude as black humanism, Senghor sought to demystify Western modernity as universal civilization, and to replace it with a more democratic form of world civilization:

The Europeans claimed to be the only ones who had envisaged culture in its universal dimensions. From there it was only a step, which had already taken years earlier, to maintain that European civilization was identified with the Civilization of the Universal and thus should be adopted as the Universal Civilization. We had little difficulty in demonstrating that each ‘exotic civilization’ had also thought in terms of universality, that Europe's only merit in this regard had been to diffuse her civilization throughout the world, thanks to her conquest and techniques.<sup>54</sup>

Senghor was not only refuting the Western grand narrative of modernity and its paradigms of civilization but also asserting the centerpiece of his cultural policy:

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<sup>51</sup> Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Discours d'Ouverture du Colloque sur la Littérature Africaine d'Expression Française* (Mimeo, N.P., 1963).

<sup>52</sup> M'Bengue, 27.

<sup>53</sup> Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Discours Prononcé à l'Université d'Oxford*, October 26, 1961 (mimeo, N.D., N.P.), cited in Markovitz, 68.

<sup>54</sup> Léopold Sédar Senghor, *On African Socialism*, trans. by Mercer Cook (New York and London: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1964), 68.

“Synthesis, not assimilation, formed great civilizations. Each civilization has some unique element. This element must be articulated before it can be brought as a contribution to the great civilization of the Universal Synthesis.”<sup>55</sup> Senghor believed that Négritude was Africa’s and the black world’s contribution to universal synthesis, and he saw in Chardin’s approach a justification of Négritude.<sup>56</sup> In positing synthesis rather than assimilation, Senghor recognized the need to move away from the legacy of the French colonial cultural policy, which sought to make French people out of their West African colonial populations. Indeed, the French colonial cultural policy was one of economic and political control. As Tracy Snipes points out, “*la mission civilisatrice*” was conceived to bring French culture to Africa, but it was also an economic policy. Culture was an appendage as French missionaries and *colons* attempted to reproduce their France overseas. From the outset, France equated culture with legitimacy to rule, the guise under which an assimilation policy would follow in the years to come.”<sup>57</sup>

Earlier, Senghor had suggested “the necessity of tutelage by the métropole so that the African could assimilate – always being careful not to be assimilated – and to adopt the best aspects of Western rationality on his or her way to a higher synthesis.”<sup>58</sup> And he further argued:

Since the beginning of the [twentieth] century, the gap between peoples and nations has been narrowed progressively as a result of three factors: the extension of European colonization, the intensification of inter-continental relationships, and the independence of former colonies. The cumulative action of these three factors has thrown the races closer together, showing them their brothers in a new light, and the complementary values of their different civilizations. It is in this context that we must study Négritude ... Henceforth, the militants of Négritude,

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<sup>55</sup> Markovitz, 68-69.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Snipes, *ibid.*, 23.

<sup>58</sup> This explains the pragmatic nature of Senghor’s modernist project. At worst, it shows the contradictions and at times, prevarications, that dogged Senghor’s intellectualism. Markovitz, 115.

as I have often said, must assimilate and not be assimilated by benefitting from European values in order to reveal the dormant values of Negritude and bring them as contribution to the civilization of the universal.<sup>59</sup>

At the risk of making excuses for colonialism or painting it in a positive light, Senghor believed that it brought the civilizations of different cultures into contact, and allowed cultures to contribute to the idea of a universal civilization as equals. Indeed, Senghor's pragmatism was based on his recognition of the need to reverse the imperialist policy that colonialism represented, which had real psychological consequences, yet ensuring that some aspects of European civilization could be synthesized and used in the march toward economic development. In a sense, Senghor was appropriating the French policy of cultural legitimation to advance his own views on the values of culture to economic development. Senghor claimed that:

while economic growth, on the one hand, frees man from certain material contingencies, thus affording him more leisure for and making him more receptive to the things of the mind, cultural development, on the other hand, allows for the expansion of the individual's intellectual and artistic personality, thus preparing him for the tasks to be carried out in connection with economic planning.<sup>60</sup>

Senghor underscored the fact that cultural development was dependent on economic development and vice versa.

Synthesis was very critical to Senghor's social ideology of communalism as the basis of nation-building. Senghor believed that socialism was already in operation in traditional African society, reflected in the idea of African communalism, and was familiar to Senegal. He suggested that social communalism could be viewed as a more rational economic system that matched production and distribution with the needs and

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<sup>59</sup> Senghor, "Negritude and the Concept of Universal Civilization," *Présence Africaine* (1963): 52-53.

<sup>60</sup> M'Bengue, 23.

necessities of human beings.<sup>61</sup> It was therefore a well-rounded system that combined the imperatives of development and those of democracy. It allowed for social justice and equitable distribution of national riches under the direction of the state. While emphasizing that modern capitalism was not in conflict with socialism, Senghor asserted that capitalism could be integrated into national development process in ways that would benefit all the segments of society. He insisted that the state can control the flow of both domestic and foreign capital for the common good.

A synthesis of Négritude and the philosophy of Chardin provided Senghor with an appropriate vehicle to articulate a postcolonial social contract for Senegalese people, with *enracinement* and *ouverture* becoming the obvious manifestation of that. Ironically, Senghor's embrace of Chardin's humanist socialism avoided relying on Marxist theories of class struggle, which would have posed a challenge to his elitist credential as a man of culture. Yet by accepting Chardin's theories, Senghor was able to reinforce a moralist message inscribed in African communalism.<sup>62</sup> Mercer Cook suggests that Senghor's eclectic approach weaved together "traditional African values such as religion and the community spirit," French Utopian socialists' trade unionism and cooperativism, and Marxism-Leninist's dialectics but without atheistic materialism to create an "open, democratic, and humanistic socialism."<sup>63</sup> Senghor thus believed that his democratic government enjoyed the popular mandate of its citizens, that its arts and culture stemmed

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<sup>61</sup> Markovitz, 68, 70-71.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 30-31, 145-152, and 158-159.

<sup>63</sup> Mercer Cook, introduction to *On African Socialism*, by Léopold Sédar Senghor, *On African Socialism*, trans. by Mercer Cook (New York and London: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1964), vii-viii.

from the people, and that his cultural policy was an authentic expression of the public will.<sup>64</sup>

In the 1960s, which was the formative stage of cultural policy development in Senegal, there was an intensive and extensive buildup of cultural institutions, including art schools, museums, and cultural centers. The entire funding for the cultural sector in the 1960s came from the state's budgetary allocation, international aid, and friendly governments and private individuals.<sup>65</sup> The government's cultural development agenda included massive building projects to house cultural institutions. These buildings included the Sorano National Theatre, which housed Senegal's dance and music schools, the École National des Beaux Arts, the premier school for fine arts; the Institut Fondamental Artistique National, a facility for ethnographic research and collection of ethnographic objects; the Musée Dynamique, the premier museum of contemporary art; and the National Gallery, a temporary exhibition space for artists. These, as well as procurement of audio-visual equipment for the conservation and preservation of cultural heritage, the construction of the Les Manufactures Sénégalaises des Arts Décoratifs, and the National library, were covered in Senegal's Third (development) Plan.<sup>66</sup> Senghor's government also initiated many cultural programs and sponsored a variety of visible international cultural events to draw attention to Senegal as an emerging cultural hub.

In the decade of the 1960s, 25 percent of the state's annual budget was allocated to cultural projects and activities, financed by internal budgeting resources as well as external sources of funding. The latter came primarily from French state institutions such as the Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique (ACCT), which provided

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<sup>64</sup> M'Bengue, 26.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 23-26.

scientific, technical, and cultural assistance to the French-speaking states of Africa, the Ministry of Cooperation and Development, and La Francophonie (the organization of French-speaking countries).<sup>67</sup> Although all the major cultural institutions were based in Dakar, there was also a push by the government to decentralize cultural activities as part of its promotion of mass culture. The state therefore introduced cultural and artistic education into the school curricula at the primary and secondary levels. It also established cultural centers and museums in the seven regions of Senegal to stimulate civic and cultural activities.<sup>68</sup>

The culmination of Senghor's cultural diplomacy in the first decade of independence was the successful staging of the First World Festival of Negro Arts. The primary purpose of the festival, which was jointly sponsored by the Senegalese government, the Paris-based Société Africaine de Culture (Society of African Culture), and United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), was to demonstrate the cultural ties among African countries, other countries with a substantial black presence, and the impact of black culture on world cultures. Leading up to the festival, government planners gave Dakar a modern facelift with the construction of marble government buildings, wide boulevards, parks and gardens, and an African-themed tourist village. The festival was a defining moment of *enracinement* and *ouverture*, and the crowning achievement of the Senegalese cultural agenda at the time. It presented Senegal to the rest of the world as a cultured and civilized society, open to international investment opportunities and development.

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<sup>67</sup> Snipes, 58.

<sup>68</sup> The first cultural center, which included the Tapisserie, was established at Thiès, the major city in west-central Senegal.



The 1970s witnessed a massive elaboration of state patronage and support for artists, who were central to Senghor's vision of modern cultural capital. They were harnessed to serve the progressive ideals of an African state, which has placed a lot of investment on international dialogue, on its path of modernization.<sup>69</sup> *Enracinement* and *ouverture* were polarities of rootedness and internationalism, which artists could mediate. Artists were the purveyors of modern culture and their work represented a synthesis of usable cultural past and external influences. Senghor crafted a patronage system that positioned artists as a unique social category. The image of the artist therefore gained a complex aura, in terms of both rhetoric and "forms of capital and power relations."<sup>70</sup> Artists were critical to the elaboration of *enracinement* and *ouverture* as cultural policy. State subventions and scholarships for artists and art students created a kind of guild system which bound artists to the state as her privileged children.<sup>71</sup> International scholarships were offered to many artists for further training abroad. The idea was for them to expand their horizon by imbibing what was useful from other cultures to enhance that their own creative capacities.<sup>72</sup>

In advancing *enracinement* and *ouverture*, modern Senegalese artists were expected to assume the traditional roles of artists in precolonial times, as griot, as seer, as documentarian of societal life, and at the same time serving the new and modern demands of a postcolonial Senegal.<sup>73</sup> As cultural ambassador, the artist was to be seen "as representative within the new national space...and as the quintessential male, modernist,

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<sup>69</sup>Joanna Grabski, *The historical invention and contemporary practice of modern Senegalese art: three generations of artists in Dakar* (Ph.D diss., Indiana University, 2001), 52-55.

<sup>70</sup>Elizabeth Harney, *In Senghor's Shadow: Art, Politics, and the Avant-garde in Senegal, 1960-1995* (Durham and London: Duke University, 2004), 81.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Introduction," in *Anthology of contemporary fine arts in Senegal*, eds., Friedrich Axt and El Hadji Moussa Babacar Sy (Frankfurt am Main: Museum für Völkerkunde, 1989), 20.

<sup>73</sup>Snipes, 25.

cursed, and misunderstood genius.”<sup>74</sup> In establishing a privileged social space for artists, Senghor expected them to address issues of “identity, tradition, and authenticity through a visual lexicon that drew on diverse cultural and artistic sources.”<sup>75</sup> In addition, artists were expected to drive Senegal’s modern culture and to secure a place for Senegal in the international sphere of modern and contemporary art.

Senghor’s government instituted “Great Masters of Contemporary World Art,” “Salon des Artistes Sénégalais,” and *Art Sénégalais d’Aujourd’hui*, to further Senegal’s cultural policy objectives and enhance cultural diplomacy. “Great Masters of Contemporary World Art” was created in 1970 as a series of monographic exhibitions which introduced the works of the leading lights of international modern art movements to Senegal’s art community.<sup>76</sup> On March 18, 1971, *L’Exposition Marc Chagall* opened at the Musée Dynamique in Dakar (fig. 1). The exhibition provided Senghor with a direct didactic opportunity to expound on the merits of *enracinement* and *ouverture* to modern Senegalese artists.<sup>77</sup> Chagall was a pioneer European modernist of the twentieth century whose work reflected a deep engagement with his Hassidic background, Eastern European Jewish folk culture, Parisian avant-gardism, and primitivist fauvism. Chagall fully embraced his Jewish roots and integrated his heritage into his art as a means of self-assertion and expression of will. Senghor believed that Chagall’s virtuosity in multiple media, including book illustrations, stained glass, stage sets, tapestries and fine art prints, was worthy of emulation. The fact that Chagall made tapestries was also instructive given that Senghor had created the Manufactures Sénégalaises des Arts Décoratifs (MSAD), at

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<sup>74</sup> Harney, 80-81.

<sup>75</sup> Harney, 52.

<sup>76</sup> M’Bengue, 44.

<sup>77</sup> Senghor, *Allocution prononcée à l’ouverture de l’exposition Marc Chagall, Dakar*, jeudi 18 mars 1971 (Leopold Sédar Senghor [Dakar]: Présidence de la Republic, 1971).

Thiès in 1966, to promote tapestry as a commercially viable artistic enterprise (see Papa Ibra Tall, *Le Couple Royal*, wool tapestry, 1966, fig. 2).

Similarly, and as a prelude to the yearly Dakar art and culture season, Senghor's government organized a *Pablo Picasso* exhibition at the Musée Dynamique in Dakar from April 6 – May 6, 1972.<sup>78</sup> The exhibition was conceived as a dialogue between Picasso's modernism and the emerging Senegalese modernism. Like the Chagall exhibition, Picasso's exhibition exemplified Senghor's penchant for providing examples of *enracinement* and *ouverture*. Senghor viewed Picasso's modernism as a product of his Iberian heritage, the avant-gardism of Parisian modernism and the universalizing aesthetic of primitive art.<sup>79</sup> These characteristics, according to Senghor, were important markers of modernism that should be emulated by post-independence artists in Senegal. These exhibitions of international modernists aimed to consolidate Senegal's cultural diplomacy strategy, one that positioned Dakar as a metropolitan cultural hub and brought Senegalese artists into dialogue with seminal figures of modern art.<sup>80</sup>

In 1973, Senghor inaugurated the *Salon des Artistes Sénégalais*, a national exhibition of Senegalese artists. Not only did this exhibition foster the discovery of emerging artists, offering them a path to artistic professionalization, it was also a vehicle for acquiring important works of art for the state collection and the adornment of

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<sup>78</sup> Senghor, "Hommage à Pablo Picasso," *Exposition Picasso* Exh. Catalogue (Dakar: Musée Dynamique, 1972), n.p.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Hudita Nura Mustapha suggests that the understanding of Dakar as a world city emerges from its legacy as the capital of Francophone Africa, the reinvention of local agendas by an astute consideration of postcolonial transnational cultural and urban processes "through growing trade, migration, tourism and media circuits ... World cities derive their import as they are cultural marketplace that thrive on the production of expressive specialists, professional artists and cultural producers ... It is not only the elites that make Dakar a world city. Far from that, ordinary persons fuel the engine of cultural and economic growth..." Hudita Nura Mustapha, "Practicing Beauty: Crisis, Value and the Challenge of Self-Mastery in Dakar, 1970-1974 (Ph.D: Diss., Harvard University, 1998), 30-31, 34.

government ministries, administrative offices and embassies of Senegal abroad.<sup>81</sup> The opening of the first salon on January 5, 1973 at the Musée Dynamique attracted a large turnout of government officials, diplomats and artists.<sup>82</sup> The inaugural show included the works of about 50 artists working in a range of media, from sculpture and drawing to collage and textile. It was followed by successive iterations at the same venue from December 21, 1973 to February 21, 1974, and July 4, 1975 to August 3, 1975.<sup>83</sup> The fourth installment took place in 1977.

The salons, important annual events in the cultural calendar of the Ministry of Culture, were hugely successful and played a vital role in the entrenchment of the aesthetic movement known as *École de Dakar*. Senegalese artists who mostly trained at the *École des Beaux Arts* in Dakar had begun to achieve a common aesthetic sensibility, now referred to as the *École de Dakar*. Art historian Elizabeth Harney argues that although almost all the *École de Dakar* artists trained at the National School of Fine Arts in Dakar, they did not share a consciously unified stylistic program or theoretical position.<sup>84</sup> Rather, what they shared was their cosmopolitanism and their participation in local and international art exhibitions.<sup>85</sup> A more compelling argument is that Senegalese artists were reinforcing the cultural policy of *enrancement* and *ouverture* both in their aesthetics and exposure through physical travels.

The annual salon exhibitions inspired “Art Sénégalais d’Aujourd’hui” (Contemporary Senegalese Art) in 1974, a state-organized international travelling

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<sup>81</sup> This, most likely, is the basis of Dak’Art as a platform for launching and/or consolidating the careers of African artists. In this sense, the national agenda becomes a pan-African agenda.

<sup>82</sup> Ousmane Sow Huchard, “The Salons of Senegalese Artists,” in Friedrich Axt and El Hadji Moussa Babacar Sy (eds), *Anthology of contemporary fine arts in Senegal* (Frankfurt am Main: Museum für Völkerkunde, 1989), 77.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Harney, 202.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

exhibition to expose modern Senegalese art to an international audience.<sup>86</sup> The exhibition included 140 works by 33 artists and toured for nearly ten years. According to Senghor, the exhibition was an opportunity to consider the growing influence of Senegal's modern art on the international stage, "an art which could make Senegalese artists ambassadors of their country."<sup>87</sup> The exhibition sought to provide a window into the state of art production in Senegal and the centrality of the state in defining the framework of what constituted modern Senegalese art.

### **New Economic Realities and a Shift in Cultural Policy**

When Senegal's economy began to falter in the mid-1970s and the country began to run a widening foreign exchange deficit, attention shifted to more pressing economic demands.<sup>88</sup> Many factors contributed to the dire situation of Senegal's economy, which was based on the Keynesian model of economics. This model envisions the state as the engine of national development and considers government intervention in the marketplace and monetary policy as the best way to promote growth and stability. The rising price of oil, a resource Senegal imported heavily, and fluctuation in the country's major export crop, peanuts, due in part to the great drought of the early 1970s, led to a

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<sup>86</sup> The exhibition opened at Grand Palais in Paris from April 26 until June 4, 1974, before traveling to several world cities that included: Paris, Nice (1974), Helsinki (1974), Vienna (1974), Stockholm (1975), Rome (1975), Florence (1975), Bonn (1976), Mexico City (1979), Washington DC (1980), Boston (1980), Massachusetts (1980), Hamilton, Canada (1980), Atlanta (1980), New Orleans (1981), Quebec (1981), Chicago (1981), Brasilia and São Paulo (1981), and Rio de Janeiro (1982). Djibril Tamsir Niane, "The Exhibitions of Senegalese Contemporary Art Abroad," in Friedrich Axt and El Hadji Moussa Babacar Sy (eds), *Bildende Kunst der Gegenwart in Senegal = Anthologie des arts plastiques contemporains au Sénégal = Anthology of contemporary fine arts in Senegal* (Frankfurt am Main: Museum für Völkerkunde, 1989), 83.

<sup>87</sup> Senghor, "Introduction," in *Anthology of contemporary fine arts in Senegal*, 19-20.

<sup>88</sup> The "Great Masters of Contemporary World Art" was discontinued as Senegal's economy declined, as were the annual salon exhibitions. They were sporadic until the last one in 1977. However, the annual show was re-established in 1985 but now as an artist-led initiative. The traveling exhibition also suffered a similar fate; it was discontinued but resumed again in the 1990s.

major economic crisis in 1978. France, the biggest consumer of Senegalese peanuts, had a preferential pricing mechanism that bolstered Senegal's foreign exchange earnings from groundnut products. Unfortunately, this could not be sustained due to the dynamic of the world market during the international oil crisis of the 1970s. Internal credit deteriorated as a result of the state's cancellation of farmers' debts and extension of credit (which became toxic) to prop the struggling peanut market, Senegal's biggest foreign exchange earner.<sup>89</sup>

As the largest employer of urban labor, the government was also burdened by its bloated work force.<sup>90</sup> To diversify the economy, the state focused on the manufacturing industry, establishing 87 state-owned enterprises, with little investment in the agricultural sector, which was mainly in the rural areas. A new emphasis on tourism and fishing at the twilight of Senghor's presidency did little to mitigate the situation. On the political front, Senghor's popularity waned as the economy continued to stagnate. The cumulative effect of the decline in earnings from export and increased external borrowing wore the economy thin. Unlike in 1972, when the cost of servicing the external debt was less than four percent, by 1979 it had skyrocketed to fifteen per cent, and was climbing further.<sup>91</sup> Seeing no recourse, Senghor handed power over to his protégé Abdou Diouf, a trained economist and technocrat, in 1981.

Diouf retained *Enracinement* and *ouverture* as a framework of Senegal's cultural policy, but the new economic reality lowered the priority previously assigned to cultural initiatives in the 1960s and 1970s. Senegal's economic woes made it amenable to the

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<sup>89</sup> John P. Lewis, "Aid, Structural Adjustment and Senegalese Agriculture," in *The Political Economy of Risk and Choice in Senegal*, ed. Mark Gersovitz and John Waterbury (London and New Jersey: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd, 1987), 296-298.

<sup>90</sup> Lewis, 289.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

reform package proposed by multilateral financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.<sup>92</sup> Diouf's government shifted Senegal's economy from social welfarism to economic liberalism in the bid to implement the reform package designed by the World Bank and IMF.<sup>93</sup> Significantly, other donor agencies, including French financial institutions which had adopted different mechanisms in dealing with the former French colonies, now began to follow the IMF and World Bank models. These international organizations advocated raising the prices of basic goods such as food items, raising import duties on agricultural equipments and products, levying indirect taxes, reducing wage earnings for groundnut producers, freezing salaries and reducing the number of civil servants, transferring economic functions previously undertaken by government agencies to the private sector, and the regularizing of prices of commodities in line with market forces.<sup>94</sup> The movement toward free markets and away from state intervention was known as the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP).<sup>95</sup>

The liberalization of the economy in the 1980s altered government relations with both foreign and local interest groups, of which the artists' community was one. While SAP disrupted the patronage system between state and citizen, it created new opportunities. For indigenous business groups operating in the informal economy, SAP gave them visibility and incentives to formalize their operations and to begin to negotiate

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<sup>92</sup> Senegal was one of the first countries to obtain a loan from the World Bank under the structural adjustment program.

<sup>93</sup> Senegal received its first standby loan of \$10.5 million from the IMF under the Medium-term Economic and Financial Recovery Plan in 1979. In 1980, it worked out an Extended Fund Facility (EFF) agreement for \$184.8 million to be spread out over a three-year period with the IMF and World Bank. Geeta Chowdhry and Mark Beeman, "Senegal," in *The Political Economy of Foreign Policy in ECOWAS*, ed. Timothy M. Shaw and Julius Emeka Okolo (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 154.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> William Easterly, "What did structural adjustment adjust? The association of policies and growth with repeated IMF and World Bank adjustment loans," *Journal of Development Economics*, No. 76 (2005): 1-22.

deals directly with international financial organizations.<sup>96</sup> While the SAP opened a floodgate of international funding that bypassed the official state structures and which benefitted the arts and artists, it had far reaching consequences on the role of the state in cultural activities.

Senghor's government had heavily subsidized cultural projects and artists, but the economic policy package outlined by the World Bank offered no support for arts and culture. The reforms initiated by President Diouf provided only limited support for arts and cultural institutions. Mamadou Diouf remarked that under President Diouf's reform programs, "technocrats equated cultural events with money."<sup>97</sup> While arguing that it was not only money that was required to promote cultural events, Diouf pointed out that artistic events were no longer important "because culture was no longer a part of daily life as it was during the Senghor years."<sup>98</sup> The state could no longer sustain the privileged position accorded artists in the new market-driven economy. As a result, not only were the monthly artists' stipends stopped, but artists were dramatically ejected from the Village des Arts (artist village).<sup>99</sup>

The Ministry of Culture was downsized, and programs including international touring exhibitions and the annual salon ceased. Important cultural institutions that were viewed as cultural landmarks were either closed or converted to other uses. The Musée Dynamique building, for example, was transformed into the Constitutional Court.

Although the state continued to support some art forms, such as filmmaking and cultural

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<sup>96</sup> Ibrahima Thioub, Momar-Coumba Diop, and Catherine Boone, "Economic Liberalization in Senegal: Shifting Politics of Indigenous Business Interests," *African Studies Review*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Sep., 1998) 63-89. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/524827>. Accessed February 24, 2010.

<sup>97</sup> Diouf, "interview by Tracy Snipes, *ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> As M'Bengue, "Recalling the Future," in *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa: An Exhibition*, ed. Clémentine Deliss (New York: Flammarion, 1995), 232.



institutions such as the Institut Culturel Africain (African Cultural Institute) in Dakar, it did so on a limited basis.<sup>100</sup> These policy changes resulted in the re-invention of artists as entrepreneurs who began to look beyond the government for material support and opportunities.<sup>101</sup> During this period, many cultural associations emerged to exploit new forms of financial capital associated with liberalization. The growing number of private galleries, foreign cultural centers and international opportunities provided artists with alternative sources of income.

The reduction in state-led cultural programs was offset in part by foreign cultural centers, especially the French Cultural Center, but also the Goethe Institut, the Dutch Embassy, the Swiss Cultural Center, and the United States Information Service (USIS [now defunct]). These provided local funding and exhibition opportunities for artists and facilitated international cultural exchanges. However, they did not effectively offset the sort of patronage formerly provided by the state. Unlike the state-brokered international cultural engagements which characterized Senghor's era, artists began to forge transnational networks in the 1980s and 1990s on an individual basis.<sup>102</sup> Artists also began to recognize private art collecting by the local Senegalese elite, expatriates and tourists. Additionally, artists opened art-related businesses, such as framing shops, galleries, and artists' workshops.<sup>103</sup>

As government support for national art exhibitions waned, artists met the challenge by becoming more entrepreneurial. The annual national salon, which served traditionally as the channel through which the state collected works for the national

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<sup>100</sup> Snipes, 72-73.

<sup>101</sup> This is addressed in great detail in Chapter 3.

<sup>102</sup> Harney, 14.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

collection, faced limited funding. The organization of the salon was taken over by Association Nationale des Artistes Plasticiens Sénégalais (ANAPS, National Association of Senegalese Visual artists), an artists' cooperative begun in 1984 which emerged from the ashes of defunct Artistes Plasticiens du Sénégal (ARPLASEN, Visual Artists of Senegal), the state-funded artists' organization created in 1975. Unlike the old ARPLASEN, ANAPS was independent of the state. From 1986 on, the annual national salons were organized by ANAPS, which expanded the national salon's sphere of influence to include public lectures and studio meetings as a way of returning Senegalese art to the public.<sup>104</sup>

In spite of the limited engagement of the state in driving cultural activities in the 1980s, the government's rhetoric was one that continued to cast President Diouf as benefactor and protector of arts and culture in the mold of Senghor.<sup>105</sup> His administration provided moral support for the arts when it could not support them financially. At the opening of the 1986 annual salon, Diouf remarked, that despite the constraints inflicted on Senegal's economy by structural adjustment, the state was "duty-bound to focus on its culture, and, as a matter of priority, develop the most representative manifestations of its originality."<sup>106</sup> He further added that, "defining a cultural policy which reflects our authenticity, and setting up functional infrastructures able to implement this policy, are a gamble which Senegal thought worth taking."<sup>107</sup> Diouf was once again restating the centrality of arts and culture to the national development of Senegal.

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<sup>104</sup> El Sy, cited in Oumane Sow Huchard, "Les Salons des artistes Sénégalais," in *Anthology of Contemporary Fine Arts in Senegal*, eds., Friedrich Axt and El Hadji Moussa Babacar Sy (Frankfurt/Main: Museum für Völkerkunde, 1989), 76.

<sup>105</sup> Harney, 221.

<sup>106</sup> Abdou Diouf, "Art against Apartheid (Inauguration address, Dakar, 1986)," in *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa: An Exhibition*, ed. Clementine Deliss (New York: Flammarion, 1995), 236.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

During the second half of Diouf's administration, he took significant steps to reassert his administration's attention on arts and culture. By 1989, the government had completed the second phase of the structural adjustment program and there was relative economic stability to undertake cultural projects again. Diouf's regime was ready to listen to the concerns of artists.<sup>108</sup> As public-supported cultural activities resumed, the state once again adopted the policy of *enracinement* and *ouverture* as the framework for Senegal's participation in local and international exhibitions. In the 1990 celebration of the bicentennial anniversary of the French Revolution in France, Senegal contributed a state-organized exhibition at *La Grande Arche de la Fraternité* in Paris. The exhibition, *Art sur vie: Art contemporain du Senegal* (Art on Life: Contemporary Art of Senegal), was modeled on the 1974 travelling exhibition, *Arts Sénégalais d'aujourd'hui* (Senegalese Art Today).<sup>109</sup> *Art sur vie* included 64 artists whose works reflected the broad spectrum of contemporary art in Senegal. The exhibition followed the formal announcement by President Diouf in October 1989 of the government's intent to establish a biennial of literature and visual art, from which Dak'Art Biennial subsequently emerged. Dak'Art was to re-establish Senegal's reputation as the art capital of Africa, re-inserting culture as the centerpiece of Senegal's national development while adhering to the unfolding trends towards cultural globalization.

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<sup>108</sup> Konaté, "The Invention of the Dakar Biennial," 115.

<sup>109</sup> *Art contemporain du Sénégal: 18 septembre-28 octobre 1990 à La Grande Arche de la Fraternité*. [Paris]: ADEC, [1990]; Marie-Hélène de Toffol, "Arts africains contemporains," *Afrique contemporain* (Paris) no. 157: 63-69, janvier-mars, 1er trimestre 1991; Françoise Balogun, "An open window," *West Africa* (London) no. 3844: 714, May 6-12, 1991.

## A New Global Art Order

Dak'Art entered the international scene as a biennial of visual arts in 1992. When the Biennial was conceived in 1989, it was expected to alternate between visual and literary arts. The first Dak'Art from December 10-18, 1990 with the title *Biennale des Lettres Dakar* was staged as a literary festival.<sup>110</sup> The early 1990s marked a critical juncture: the international art world was going through the early stages of a reformation that would open it to more participation by non-Western artists and cultural brokers. It was a departure from the center and periphery model of economic and cultural interaction between Euro-America and the rest of the world. Immanuel Wallerstein, who first coined the terminology of center and periphery in his seminal work *The Modern World System*, connects the rise of Western Europe to world supremacy to the development of global capitalism.<sup>111</sup> He asserts that the system of global capital, which he analyzes in detail, divided the world into semi-peripheries and peripheries, according to what they provided to Western Europe in terms of labor, raw material, and market for finished goods. Understanding the role of culture in the political-economic history of the world system is critical in comprehending the pre-1989 international art world.

Prior to the 1990s, international cultural exchange mirrored the flow of global capitalism sketched by Wallerstein. The anthropologist Ulf Hannerz notes that cultural interrelatedness between the center and periphery was a function of the transnational flows of labor and cultural commodities. The center controls the periphery completely by creating and institutionalizing the frameworks through which transnational cultural

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<sup>110</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>111</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (New York: Academic Press, 1988).

processes flow.<sup>112</sup> In drawing attention to the unequal distribution of global capital, Hannerz outlines a Western cultural imperialism that creates a psychology of dependence and associated sense of inferiority in the non-Western world. In the international art world, such frameworks of control were, by and large, exclusionary before 1989. At that point, all the existing art biennials, fewer than thirty, were located in the Western world, and exhibited mostly Western European and North American artists, with only a handful of non-Western artists living in major Western urban centers. The only exceptions were the biennials in São Paulo, Alexandria, Havana, Cairo, and Istanbul.<sup>113</sup> Apart from the Havana Biennial, the rest advanced a hegemonic notion of Western modernism as universal.

The Venice Biennale the fount of the biennial system, is synonymous with the dominant Eurocentric vision of modernity, which locates the modern art object squarely in the West.<sup>114</sup> The Venice Biennale was loosely based on the great world's fairs or universal expositions of the mid-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century. Events such as the Great Exhibition in London (1851), the Exposition Universelle in Paris (1855 and 1889), and the Columbian Exposition in Chicago (1893) are considered as the templates for art biennials. Although they were not focused on art alone their large-scale international scope and impact on public culture raised the level of aspiration for art biennials to follow. While these fairs celebrated Western material technological

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<sup>112</sup> Ulf Hannerz, "Scenario for peripheral cultures," in *Culture, globalization and the world-system: Contemporary conditions for the Representation of Identity*, ed. Anthony B. King (Houndmills and London: Macmillan and SUNY, Binghamton, 1991), 123. For an extended analysis, see pp.107-28; see also Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

<sup>113</sup> Sabine B. Vogel, *Biennials - Art on a Global Scale* (Vienna: Springer, 2010).

<sup>114</sup> Cameron McCarthy and Greg Dimitridas, "Art and the Postcolonial Imagination: Rethinking the Institutionalization of Third World Aesthetics and Theory," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 31: 1 and 2 (January – April 2000): 231.

advancements and material successes, non-Western cultures were mostly framed as strange and uncivilized.<sup>115</sup> Like these fairs, and despite its universal claims, the Venice Biennale was established with a Western audience in mind.

The Venice Biennale has undergone critical transitions in its trajectory since its inauguration in 1895 and now provides a window to understanding the gradual shift from a Eurocentric vision of modernity in art to a globalized one. Its transitions include the expansive growth and contraction of international participation and the deepening and weakening of cosmopolitan sensibilities.<sup>116</sup> These trends also marked the reinvention of other Western large-scale international exhibitions such as the Carnegie International (1895) and Documenta (1955). The Carnegie International, for example, was created in 1895 as a platform on which the Carnegie Institute would attract the art world to Pittsburgh and also acquire the works of old masters. It became a yearly survey in 1896. In 1950, its focus shifted to the avant-garde. It was renamed the Pittsburgh International and held bi-annually. In 1955, it became a triennial. It continued to evolve in the 1970s, becoming an international series, and exhibiting monographic or two-person exhibitions. In 1982, it reverted to the 1896 format as an international survey of contemporary art in America.<sup>117</sup>

Like the Carnegie International, the Venice Biennale's transitions show the ways in which older international exhibitions continually re-positioned themselves over the years to remain relevant. The Venice Biennale moved from the display of national

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<sup>115</sup> Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>116</sup> Nikos Papastergiadis and Meredith Martin, "Biennials as Platforms for Social Exchange [A review of the lectures 'Discursive Models' by Bruce W. Ferguson, 'Curatorial Responsibility' by Shuddhabrata Sengupta, 'Biennial Format' by Ranjit Hoskote, and 'To Biennial or Not ... and Bergen' by Rafal Niemojewski]," in *The Biennial Reader* Vol. 2 [The Bergen Biennial Conference], eds. Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, and Solveig Ovstebo (Bergen, Norway: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 38.

<sup>117</sup> [http://web.cmoa.org/?page\\_id=51](http://web.cmoa.org/?page_id=51).

cultures in an international context to the survey of art trends in a global context. Yet its recent and expansive model does not obscure the Venice Biennale's original parochialism and that of its contemporaries. The notable exception is the São Paulo Biennial, founded in 1951. São Paulo Biennial was, however, founded on the same premise as the Venice Biennale by the Italian-Brazilian industrialist Ciccillo Matarazzo, who sought validation from Europe.<sup>118</sup> From the beginning, São Paulo's orientation was global. It included both Western and non-Western artists, possibly because it was not located in Europe and Brazil has a large black population, although Latin America is part of the Western hemisphere. In its early years it included several African artists. These included Nigerian artists Uche Okeke, Demas Nwoko, Ben Enwonwu, Yusuf Grillo, Jimoh Akolo, Simon Okeke, and Bruce Onobrakpeya in 1961, and Senegalese artists Iba N'Diaye and Ibou Diouf in 1963 and 1965, respectively.<sup>119</sup>

Another exception to the pre-1990 established typology of art biennials was the Havana Biennale. It can be argued that, more than any other biennial; it influenced the post-1990 trajectory of the international art world by emphasizing post-colonialism as a discourse of intellectual emancipation and self-affirmation. Established in 1984 by executive decree of the Council of Ministers of communist Cuba, the Havana Biennale sought to explore the merits of postcolonial discourses as cultural responses deriving from local realities. It promoted a new internationalism based on the idea of "Thirdworldism," which is grounded in a postcolonial cultural consciousness with roots in anti-colonialism, decolonization, the Cuban revolution and the Non-Aligned

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<sup>118</sup> Charlotte Bydler, *The Global Art World: On the Globalization of Contemporary Art* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press), 50.

<sup>119</sup> See online exhibition catalogues.

<http://www.bienal.org.br/FBSP/en/AHWS/Publicacoes/pages/default.aspx>

movement.<sup>120</sup> The aim of Havana Biennale was to highlight the critical discourse surrounding postcolonial theory based on the local and historical realities of Cuba, the Third World, and the cultural peripheries within the First and Second worlds.<sup>121</sup> By promoting a new vision of internationalism that circumvents the traditional art capitals in Europe and North America, the Havana Biennale was to reflect the new conditions of globalization.<sup>122</sup>

The very designation of the “Third World” is loaded with different interpretations. The term was invented after the Second World War to describe countries that were formally colonized, and arose from the political and economic jousting over spheres of influence, as the Western world anticipated the demise of colonialism. Cold war politics, driven by the competing ideologies of capitalism and socialism, reshaped global politics. The United States and Western Europe --- the Western Bloc --- was the First World, and the Soviet Union and its allies --- the Eastern Bloc --- was the Second. Both blocs aimed to exert influence over formally non-aligned countries referred to as the Third World or developing world. According to historian Arif Dirlik, the quest to fasten the developing world to either capitalism or communism, highlighted a Western desire to continue to dominate the Third World’s future by ideologies of European origin.<sup>123</sup> It wasn’t only Western. The Maoists were also heavily involved in the contest for influence. However, their approach was more subtle.

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<sup>120</sup> Miguel I. Rojas-Sotelo, *Cultural Maps, Networks and Flows: The History and Impact of the Havana Biennale* (PhD Diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2009), 28, 33-37.

<sup>121</sup> The Cuban post-Revolution cultural policy, which was set in motion in the 1960s and which reflected postcolonial theory, found initial success in the Casa de las Américas (an organization that was founded by the Castro government in 1959 after the Cuban revolution to promote socio-cultural relations between Cuban and Latin American countries, the Caribbean, and the rest of the world) and the ICAIC (Cuban Institute for the Industry of Cinematographic Arts). It was consolidated in the Havana Biennale.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>123</sup> Arif Dirlik, “Specters of the Third World: global modernity and the end of the three worlds,” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2004):131-148.



As a discourse of political emancipation, the Third World has its historical origins in earlier struggles against Euro-American domination and colonialism around the turn of the twentieth century, and the desire to create a new world order based on revolutionary change.<sup>124</sup> The Bandung (Indonesia) conference of 1955 continued in that trajectory by offering a counter-position to Western domination and colonialism. More important, the Bandung conference provided the first visible platform to articulate the soft diplomacy of political self-determination, economic development, solidarity, non-aggression, and non-interference in internal affairs by newly independent African and Asian states. This soft diplomacy was advanced under the rubric of the largely utopian non-aligned movement.

Dirlik states that it is ironic that the concept of Third World in the sense in which it is deployed by Euro-America as a pejorative term was embraced wholeheartedly by anti-colonial advocates.<sup>125</sup> Yet he also argues that the concept serves as a positivistic and critical mobilizing tool to complete the task of decolonization.<sup>126</sup> Dirlik's argument is helpful in understanding the Havana Biennale's "Thirdworldism" as a postcolonial critique of Western hegemony and as the emancipatory quest for self-articulation and visibility. The significance of the Havana Biennale's alternative vision of internationalism would only become apparent in the 1990s, with the explosive rise of new art biennials in Africa and Asia and the creation of new nodes of cultural power as the West-dominated international art world scene became more inclusive. Seen in this light, it can be argued

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<sup>124</sup> Dirlik, 136.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 132-133.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

that the Havana Biennale anticipated postcolonial criticisms instigating the decentering of the international art world in the early 1990s.<sup>127</sup>

In 1989, at the cusp of this change in the international art world, some exhibitions presented new curatorial frameworks that explored postcolonial criticisms of “hegemonic forms of representation in the Western models...and [but also] a hierarchy of discourses [that] preserves the subjectivity of the Western actor.”<sup>128</sup> Two of the most important exhibitions that presaged the 1990s cultural politics of representation were *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989) and *The Other Story: Afro-Asian artists in post-war Britain* (1989). It is a coincidence that both exhibitions were organized in 1989, the year that marked a seismic shift in the global political climate [ironically the only place that did not experience this shift was Cuba] with the end of the cold war, and the beginning of the transformation of the international art world. *Magiciens de la Terre* took its cue from the *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, curated and organized by William Rubin at Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), New York in 1984. The *Primitivism* exhibition juxtaposed works by Western modernists, such as Picasso, Gauguin, Brancusi, and Klee, with traditional African art to trace formal and conceptual affinities. The exhibition also presented a selection of post-1970 Western art which, according to Rubin, conceptually drew from the traditional art forms of so-called primitive cultures.

Jean Hubert Martin, who curated *Magiciens de la Terre*, wanted to address some of the problems that emerged with the *Primitivism* exhibition; namely, the privileging of Western modernism and art history, and the selective representation of African art as

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<sup>127</sup> See, Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009) 151 – 167.

<sup>128</sup> Mccarthy and Dimitridas, 234.

evidence in the affinity argument. But the exhibition, as its title suggests, was about Western Primitivism. Martin felt a more credible pathway was to exhibit Western and non-Western art as cultural equals in the compelling exhibition that opened in two Paris venues, Center Georges Pompidou and the Grand Halle de la Villette on May 18, 1989, and was on view until October 14, 1989. The blockbuster show included fifty Western artists and fifty non-Western artists whose works were displayed as cultural equals. Yet, by re-constituting the West into a bloc and the rest of the world into another, the exhibition reinforced what it claimed it was keen to dismantle. In a conversation with Benjamin Buchloh, Martin admitted that his methodology was problematic but argued that the intellectual premise of the exhibition, to de-center Western hegemony was achieved by a focus on a formalist encounter between art works rather than on artists' biographies.<sup>129</sup> Yet, *Magiciens de la Terre*'s aim to engender a sort of contact zone of cultures through its display format only created a visual illusion of aesthetic parity and decontextualized the social, economic and political contexts of the art objects. In addition, the curatorial framework was also suspect. It reinforced the status of the Western artist as the purveyor of artistic modernism by its choice of formally-trained Western artists on the one hand, and informally trained non-Western artists on the other. The latter fit within the frame of the artist as a magician, and their works were approached through an ethnographic lens.

By constructing modern African art and artists in the exhibition in a particular way, *Magiciens de la Terre* ended up reinforcing the very issues it set out to confront. However, it was one of the few exhibitions that attempted to give prominence to non-Western artists in a period when they hovered at the margins of the international art

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<sup>129</sup> Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and Jean-Hubert Martin, "Interview," *Third Text*, No. 6 (Spring 1989):19-27.

world. For this reason, it is generally viewed as the first global exhibition. Further, it can be argued that *Magiciens de la Terre*, in making a strong case for cultural inclusion, was drawing upon postcolonial arguments, such as those represented by the Havana Biennale, and the radical journal, *Third Text*, which both challenged the Eurocentric nature of the art world.

*The Other Story* exhibition, organized on a similar intellectual premise as *Magiciens de la Terre*, had a different focus. It was curated by Rasheed Araeen, the founder of *Third Text*. Its aim was to challenge the exclusionary master narrative of British art history by mapping a counter-narrative, focusing on non-white artists like himself who were either British-born or émigrés. In this sense, the exhibition was a national exhibition rather than international one. Most of the artists in the exhibition were bound together by the legacy of British colonialism in their countries of birth in Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia. The others were first-generation British whose parents relocated to the United Kingdom after the end of World War II to contribute to reconstruction efforts.

As an anthology, *The Other Story* was intended to be exploratory rather than critical in considering the generic label of “blackness,” which included Africans, Afro-Caribbeans, as well as South Asians who together comprise the “British Other.” The aims of the exhibition, according to Araeen, were to consider the impact of non-Western émigrés in changing the demographic map of Europe, and to challenge the “old social structures that had been maintained by the geographical separation of the colonizer and

the colonized ... [through] the process of decolonization across the world, with its specific articulation of metropolis.”<sup>130</sup>

*The Other Story* exhibition timeline began with artists who are often described as first-generation black British artists.<sup>131</sup> They were mostly immigrants and included Ronald Moody and Aubrey Williams from the Caribbean, and Uzo Egonu from Africa.<sup>132</sup> The artists’ countries of origin and their movement to Britain defined the imperial reaches of the British Empire. Ronald Moody, who arrived in Britain from Jamaica in 1923, is considered to be the pioneer black British artist. Most of the artists of the first generation migrated to Britain either to fulfill the ambition of becoming artists, as was the case for Uzo Egonu who left Nigeria for London in 1945 to commence art training, or to join the modern international avant-garde, as was the case of Aubrey Williams, who moved to London from British Guyana in 1952.<sup>133</sup>

The “intermediate” generation comprised artists who were originally from the Caribbean, Africa and Asia but who came of age professionally in the 1970s.<sup>134</sup> They included Rasheed Araeen, Frank Bowling, Gavin Jantjes, and Francis Newton Souza. Their works combined the use of conventional media and art forms of the first generation with the cultural politics of the second generation that dealt with societal injustices. The second generation artists were mostly British-born; when they emerged in the 1980s,

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<sup>130</sup> Rasheed Araeen, “Introduction: when the chickens come home to roost,” *The Other Story: Afro-Asian artists in post-war Britain* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1989), 9.

<sup>131</sup> The exhibition opened at London’s Hayward Gallery on November 29, 1989, and toured the United Kingdom until June 1990, with stops at Wolverhampton Art Gallery from March 10 – April 22, 1990, and Manchester City Art Gallery and Cornerhouse from May 5 – June 10, 1990. It included 219 artworks by 24 artists who belonged to first, intermediate, and second generations of Black artists.

<sup>132</sup> Stuart Hall. “Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three ‘Moments’ in Post-War History.” *History\_Workshop Journal* Issue 61: 1 (Oxford University Press, 2006), 4-17.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> This group of artists neither belongs to the first nor second generations but straddle both as a result of their unusual status and age.

their works were heavily figurative and documentary.<sup>135</sup> They included Eddie Chambers, Sonia Boyce, Keith Piper, and Mona Hatoum.

The major problem with *The Other Story* was the sense of tokenism that drove it. Because it was organized to correct what was seen as the institutional invisibility of black artists, it was held in major venues some of which had previously excluded black artists. Another glaring problem was that some of the works were not selected on the basis of strong creative merit but rather to represent the different constituencies that make up generic Black Britain.<sup>136</sup> In spite of these drawbacks, *The Other Story* was seminal: it was one of the first exhibitions, the others being the Havana Biennale and *Magiciens de la Terre*, to take on postcolonial discourse as a curatorial framework at what was a very critical moment. The postcolonial discourse represented in these exhibitions would become part of the mainstream in the 1990s, and was the *raison d'être* of Dak'Art.

### **New Biennials in the 1990s**

From the early 1990s, the international art world began to portray a more deterritorialized and cosmopolitan version of cultural heterogeneity as a result of immigration, exile and cultural hybridism. The emergence of supranational regions as power blocs in the international art world favored the proliferation of art biennials. There are currently more than one hundred and fifty biennials in total and the number is still growing. Among the prominent are Dak'Art in Senegal (1992-date), Sharjah in United Arab Emirates (1993-date), Gwangju in South Korea (1995-date), and Shanghai in China

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<sup>135</sup> See David A. Bailey, Ian Baucom and Sonia Boyce eds., *Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, in collaboration with the Institute of International Visual Arts and the African and Asian Visual Artists' Archive, 2005).

<sup>136</sup> See Steve Edwards ed., *Art and its Histories: A Reader* (New Haven and London: Yale University, 1999), 263-276.

(1996-date). These biennials were created to connect their countries or regions to the international circuit of contemporary art. With these new biennials came the desire to chart alternative models of cultural representation that place emphasis on local conditions, geopolitics, and the individuality of artists as citizens of the world.

In some cases, the biennials projected themselves as emerging centers of cultural power by weaving together the symbolic values of art, commerce, and diplomacy to project national or regional interests. For others, such as Johannesburg in South Africa (1995-1997), and Tirana in Albania (2009-date), it was also a question of reinventing a difficult historical past and building international relationships afresh. Biennials such as the Sharjah and the Gwangju, shun the conventional biennial model of representation that tied participating artists principally to the nation-state; instead, their organizers frame them as representing global cities.<sup>137</sup> According to curator Hou Hanrou:

The new global cities represent the erection of new economic, cultural and even political powers which are bringing about a new world order and new visions for the planet. What is the most important is that with their own specific legacies, these cities become new and original spaces in which new visions and understandings of modernity, and new possibilities of ‘Utopian/dystopian’ imagination, can be elaborated and reinvented.<sup>138</sup>

Most of the new biennials share common features, including a set of curators who transit from one biennial to the other; transnational artists; globally-acting art professionals (critics, galleries, collectors, etc.); an elite and mobile international audience; and host cities that desire to be placed on the global map as major cultural centers.

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<sup>137</sup> This is the traditional biennial model based loosely on 18th century annual French salon exhibitions of visual art, and the great world’s fairs or universal expositions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to celebrate European colonialism and Western imperialism. E. Crow, *Painters and public life in eighteenth-century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

<sup>138</sup> Hou Hanrou, interviewed in Franklin Sirmans, “Johannesburg Biennale: Meet the Curators of ‘Trade Routes: History and Geography,’” *Flash Art*, vol. 30, no. 190 (October 1997), 78.

The face of a new global order is captured in what anthropologist Arjun Appadurai describes as the five dimensions of global cultural flows: ethnoscaples, technoscapes, mediascapes, financescapes and ideoscapes.<sup>139</sup> These flows are building blocks for imagining the post-1990 world of permeability, accessibility, and interconnectivity. According to Appadurai, “the five dimensions manifest as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order” with the result that global imagining of the world can no longer be understood as the dual configuration of Western center and non-Western periphery.<sup>140</sup> But Appadurai is also quick to assert that the five dimensions of global cultural flow neither indicate cultural parity nor follow an even process: they still reflect the Wallerstein world system of center and periphery, albeit in another guise.

One notes, though, that the discourse of global visual culture flows through controlled channels that highlight the perpetuation of a center and peripheries. Non-Western biennials are perceived as junior partners in the global biennial system and still need the validation and affirmation of the key art world institutions (the global market, and coterie of museums, and cultural NGOs) located in Western Europe and the United States. It is for this reason that the Cuban curator Gerardo Mosquera argues that globalization imposes “homogenized, cosmopolitan cultural patterns built on Eurocentric

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<sup>139</sup> Ethnoscaples capture a deterritorialized world of immigrants, tourists, refugees, exiles, and guestworkers moving constantly in a flow; Technoscapes refer to the global movement of technology (both high and low) at high speeds, across previously unyielding boundaries and borders, propelled by multinational corporations, multilateral institutions, NGOs, and government agencies; Financescapes describe the complex global web of international capital, securities, cash and plastic money, credit, stock, etc.; Mediascapes capture the worldwide flow of electronic information, images, and communication; and Ideoscapes refer to a landscape of competing and complementary ideologies which shape contemporary worldviews, political actions, and militaristic interventions, and geared at capturing state power or influencing power structures. Arjun Appadurai. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) 33-35.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. 32.



foundations, which inevitably flatten, reify, and manipulate cultural differences.”<sup>141</sup> Similarly, art historian Chin-Tao Wu argues that the tendency is to focus on how neoliberal capitalism pushes interconnectedness to the four corners of the world, failing to understand how globalized products are actually received in far-flung localities, and the debilitating forms of exploitation that are involved.<sup>142</sup> In short, Wu echoes the complexities that attend the transnational movement of labor and culture commodities, as highlighted by Hannerz. Although the implication is that the old center-periphery notion is still very much in force in terms of the structure of the art world, it can be argued that in the larger global cultural field, cultural exchange is now much more diffuse.<sup>143</sup>

There is an important positive outcome in the expansion and de-centering of the global cultural landscape. Most of the art biennials that emerged in the 1990s share a strong emphasis on a counter-narration of contemporary art from their own regional and local perspectives. These biennials, which include Dak’Art, Sharjah, and Gwangju, globalize local narratives and localize global narratives by highlighting subtleties that are crucial to understanding cultural similarities as well as differences. The question that may well be posed is: how local or regional are the narratives that emerge from the recently emerged biennials? The answer lies in seeing the biennial as a site of translation, where the local determines how it responds to or uses the protocols of the global. The local is the initial context from which biennials, such as Dak’Art, make sense of the contemporary world and then seek to address that world through contemporary art.

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<sup>141</sup> Gerardo Mosquera, “Alien-Own/Own-Alien: Globalization and Cultural Difference,” *Boundary 2*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Fall 2002): 163.

<sup>142</sup> Chin-Tao Wu, “Worlds Apart: Problems of Interpreting Globalized Art,” *Third Text*, Vol. 21, No. 6 (November 2007): 719.

<sup>143</sup> This is a point curator Paul O’Neill makes more forcefully when he argues that, “the periphery still has to follow the discourse of the centre.” Paul O’Neill, “The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse,” in Judith Rugg and Michele Sedgwick (eds.), *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007), 17.

Dak'Art mediates local concerns and also serves as important conduits through which events and discourses from the international art world are examined and translated for the local audiences. In addition, the idea of the local or global is not fixed. In a similar vein, contemporary artists are as much global as they are local, depending on the context.

### **The Postcolonial Turn and Dak'Art**

The emancipatory vision embedded in postcolonial criticisms has shaped the political agendas of biennials such as Dak'Art. This vision is considered as the postcolonial turn in the international art world.<sup>144</sup> According to Terry Smith, the postcolonial turn is a world cultural change that allowed for increased dialogue between “local and internationalist values,” especially in art circuits from around 1989.<sup>145</sup> Further, it also marks the emergence of a plethora of art, “shaped by local, national, anticolonial, independent, globalization, anti-globalization values (those of diversity, identity, and critiques).”<sup>146</sup> Scholars have indicated that the Havana Biennale is a forerunner of Dak'Art because of a similar political intention to speak for the excluded, to give visibility to the underrepresented, and to rewrite contemporary art from the margins.<sup>147</sup>

Dak'Art's cultural politics also reflect the postcolonial arguments of *Magiciens de la Terre* and *The Other Story*. On the one hand is the idea of cultural parity, which was the aim of *Magiciens de la Terre*, and on the other is the idea of a counter-narrative of art

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<sup>144</sup> Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 151 – 167.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Like the Havana Biennial, Dak'Art reflects a geopolitical perspective aimed at challenging the Western mainstream institutions' control of international participation and its definition of internationalism. Ibid, 8.

<sup>147</sup> Papastergiadis and Martin, 38; Vogel, *Biennials: art on a global scale*, 74-76.

history and alternative vision of cultural mediation represented by *The Other Story*. Such postcolonial perspectives became part of the mainstream discourse, shifting cultural debates, bringing about a postcolonial turn in the international art world. Yet, a more plausible model for Dak'Art's politics of representation and ideological focus would be the early pan-African congresses and festivals and exhibitions in the 1960s and 1970s. This is explored in detail in the following chapter. When Dak'Art was created in 1989, its initial goals were to address the problems of the poor reception of African art and the low visibility of African artists on the international circuit. Dak'Art was to assert that contemporary African art was deserving of international attention on its own terms. It also sought to place this art in a legitimate field of cultural and knowledge production. No argument illustrates this position with better clarity than the one put forward by the cultural philosopher Kwame Appiah in his classic essay "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post-in Postcolonial?"<sup>148</sup>

Appiah argues that while African expressive culture is part of the international system of exchange, its inclusion requires the manufacture of "otherness" or "strangeness" with roots in the age of Western enlightenment. Appiah is suggesting that aesthetic signifiers and market appreciation of African art are based on a colonial legacy as well as other forms of cultural exchanges that govern the global flow of capital controlled by the Western world. The Western interest in African art in the late 18th and early 19th centuries was based on the idea of cultural relativism, and part of an imperialist expansion, which involved the collection of material culture belonging to the cultural "Other" by Western museums. In a Western ethnographic context, African

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<sup>148</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?" *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 17, No 2 (Winter 1991):336-357.

expressive culture was first transformed into artifacts and curiosities, and then as *l'art primitif*. Robert Goldwater argues that the opinions and evaluations of ethnologists working in Western museums helped to engender the shift from scientific interests in African material culture to artistic interests.<sup>149</sup> The process of attaching aesthetic values to African art involved an epistemological assimilation of the “non-Western Other,” a term that now seems outdated.<sup>150</sup>

During the twentieth century, Western interests in African art expanded, and exhibitions became the primary site of exchange for negotiating the value of African art. Appiah cites as an example the brainstorming session that preceded the 1987 exhibition *Perspectives: Angles in African Art* organized by the Center for African Art New York, in which art collector David Rockefeller, for example, expressed value judgments about a Fante female figure and a Senufo helmet mask based on his own aesthetic criteria.<sup>151</sup> As Appiah points out, Rockefeller is permitted to speak, and to say anything about African art, because he is the buyer and because he is in the West, the center of the international art world. Rockefeller's aesthetic judgment is based on the negation of hybridism and cross-cultural appropriations, and a market appreciation of African art as interior decoration.<sup>152</sup> The “post” in the postcolonial, as Appiah wants us to believe, is a cultural

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<sup>149</sup> Robert Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art*. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986), 5-11.

<sup>150</sup> See, Hal Foster, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Port Townsend, Wash. : Bay Press, 1985), 196-208. Although the term the non-Western Other has become a cliché. What is still useful in all this is that international audiences were predisposed to assume that art produced by Africans ought to differ fundamentally from that produced by someone in New York or Dallas or Kansas City. When it did, it seemed to confirm their difference. When it didn't, it was called derivative.

<sup>151</sup> *Perspectives: Angles on African Art* (exhibition catalogue, Center for African Art, New York, 1987), 138.

<sup>152</sup> As Appiah also argues, “If there is a lesson in the broad shape of this circulation of cultures, it is surely that we are all already contaminated by each other, that there is no longer a fully autochthonous African culture awaiting salvage by our artists (just as there is, of course, no American culture without African roots). And there is a clear sense in some postcolonial writing that the postulation of a unitary Africa over against a monolithic West--the binarism of Self and Other-- is the last of the shibboleths of the modernizers that we must learn to live without.” Appiah, 354.

sign of dispossession and cooptation. It describes the conditions of postcoloniality against the enduring legacy of colonialism and “the occupying powers of the West in the ethical, political, and aesthetic forms of the marginalized.”<sup>153</sup> Yet, in the case of Rockefeller, the real problem was not that he was a former colonizer, but a rich Westerner, who wielded enormous financial muscle.

These critical issues laid out by Appiah were the very questions that framed the founding of Dak’Art. It was created to address the absence of African agency in the mediation of African art in the international system of cultural exchange, and the exoticization and anonymity of African artists in Eurocentric international events.<sup>154</sup> As the art historian and curator Yacouba Konaté suggests, Dak’Art began the process by which the vanquished takes it upon himself to recount, rewrite or produce history from the loser’s perspective and then gain a sense of the victor’s authority and character.<sup>155</sup> Dak’Art’s politics of presence also take into account the aspirations of the local art community in Senegal to be connected to international cultural flows on their own terms. It fulfills the Senegalese state’s desire to continue to promote culture as intrinsic to the nation’s development agenda. Dak’Art’s cultural vision is both global and local. Dak’Art’s physical site is Dakar, but its reach is global, given its focus on African and African diaspora (both the recent and older diaspora).

In this way, Dak’Art fulfills its claims that it represents the values of universal civilization, a concept first theorized by Léopold Sédar Senghor, the first president of

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<sup>153</sup> Mccarthy and Dimitriadis further argues that the “Uneven development between the metropole and periphery plays itself out in aesthetic form, in ways that problematize colonial/postcolonial networks of power relations as well as the Cartesian stability of subjecthood fabricated in and through these relations.” Mccarthy and Dimitridas, 233.

<sup>154</sup> Harney, 236.

<sup>155</sup> Konaté, 108.

independent Senegal.<sup>156</sup> Senghor believed that the greatness of civilizations is based on their mixed and interdependent nature, i.e., their ability to draw concretely and creatively from multiple cultures. World cultures, he argued, must contribute to an all-encompassing universal civilization based on symbiotic relationships and mutual respect for one another. Dak'Art's organizers draw upon the concept of universal civilization to bring together artists of African-descent and their cultural production, situate Dakar as a venue for the meeting of cultures, and insert Dak'Art into the global circuit of art biennials as Africa's representative. Dak'Art is therefore a supranational platform upon which Africa makes its contributions to universal civilization.

## Conclusion

The official announcement of Dak'Art in 1989 marked a pivotal moment in the local and global art scenes. Diouf's government had emerged from the worst part of Senegal's economic crisis in the 1980s, and was ready to revert to culture as the foundation of national development and economic growth. At the international level, the art world was going through a shift, occasioned by a new world order at the end of the Cold War. Yet, these events in the decades preceding the 1990s do not fully explain what precipitated Dak'Art. A full picture must include a rigorous engagement with the origins of the cultural politics that inspired and which continue to drive Dak'Art's geopolitical focus. The early pan-African congresses and festivals, including the International Congress of African Culture in Salisbury (Harare) in 1962, and the First World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar in 1966, the First Pan-African Festival in Algiers in 1969, and the

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<sup>156</sup> Senghor, "Un Humanisme de l'union française," *Esprit* (July, 1949):1025; Markovitz, 30-31, 145-152, and 158-159; and Walter Skurnik, *The Foreign Policy of Senegal* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 185-197.

Second World Festival of Black and African Arts in Lagos in 1977, were critical in shaping and instituting African artistic modernism and modernity. These festivals and congresses, which are discussed in the next chapter, gave international recognition to African modern artists, a role currently played by Dak'Art.

## Chapter Two

### Dak'Art and Black Cultural Politics in the 20th Century

The geopolitics of Dak'Art can be discerned through its pan-African internationalist scope, and attendant focus on African and African diaspora art and artists. To understand Dak'Art's broader context, it must be placed within the 20th century history of black cultural activism. As indicated in the preceding chapter, pan-African internationalism was first enunciated in the pan-African festivals of the 1960s and 1970s. The festivals, including the International Congress of African Culture (ICAC) in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) in 1962, the First World Festival of Negro Arts in Senegal in 1966 (Dakar festival), the First Pan African Cultural Festival in Algeria in 1969 (Algiers festival), and the Second World Festival of Black and African Arts in Nigeria in 1977 (FESTAC'77), assembled and celebrated African and black expressive cultures in a global context. These events explicitly invoked racial and cultural solidarity in the furtherance of African or black cultural visibility on the global stage.<sup>157</sup>

The quest for a dignified black presence in the international context in the first half of the 20th century preoccupied leading intellectuals in Africa and African diaspora. Several pan-African conferences and cultural fora organized between 1900 and 1959 in different locations in the Western world explored racial uplift, and attempted to forge a united political front against racism and colonialism. These events promoted interaction among black people from different countries and provided an initial context for pan-African internationalism to blossom. This particular pan-Africanist spirit culminated in the black cultural congresses in Europe at the twilight of colonialism, and later

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<sup>157</sup> I use African and black interchangeably in this chapter because it was the more dignified way that people of African-descent chose to address themselves in the first-half of the 20th century.



manifested in the pan-African cultural festivals in Africa. Here, I will examine the trajectory of pan-African internationalism, beginning with the initial pan-African events in Europe and the United States, and later focusing on the pan-African cultural festivals in Africa. This linear approach clarifies the entangled narrative of black cultural politics and provides a better understanding of Dak'Art's more recent pan-African internationalism.

This examination also takes into account those individuals who played prominent roles in advancing these pan-African movements. One key individual was W.E.B Du Bois, who first dealt with the political and cultural invisibility of black people in his book *The Souls of Black Folk*, published in 1903.<sup>158</sup> Addressing slavery and racism as the foundation of black dehumanization and subjugation, Du Bois believed that it was important to articulate black consciousness as the collective will to tackle centuries of black invisibility and erasure from history. For Du Bois, black consciousness began with an internal assessment of the black soul and personality to address racial, intellectual and cultural inferiority, which had perpetuated the psychology of black self-loathing and denigration. Black consciousness would lead to purposeful self-determination and a collective aspiration to restore the dignity of the black race. Racial solidarity, Du Bois argued, was an essential requisite in forging a collective front and building an effective coalition against racism and white prejudices.

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<sup>158</sup> Exploring the specifics of the African-American experience, Du Bois details the tension between fidelity to racial root, and being American in a society that rejected racial equality. He describes this tension as a double consciousness, a self-reflexive journey that begins with “this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of the others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks at one in amused contempt and pity.” W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1903 [1989 reprint]), 5.

According to Du Bois, “the problem of the twentieth-century is the problem of the color-line – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.”<sup>159</sup> By insinuating the global dimension of racism and colonialism, Du Bois anticipated the anti-colonial struggles that emerged subsequently in Africa, where he played a major role as a pan-Africanist.<sup>160</sup> He was one of the forty black leaders from the United States, the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa that convened in London in 1900 under the auspices of the first Pan-African Congress to begin the task of enunciating the black presence on an increasingly global stage.<sup>161</sup>

Throughout the twentieth century, the essence of black cultural politics was the aspiration for institutional, political and cultural visibility. The tenor of the quest has continued to evolve with changing historical and contemporary conditions. Dak’Art responds to the

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid,13; Manning Marable, *Living Black History: How Reimagining the African-American Past Can Remake America's Racial Future* (New York, Basic Civitas Book, 2006), 96.

<sup>160</sup> Du Bois was arguably one of the first black intellectuals to articulate an African heritage to serve as a source of racial pride and solidarity. In *The World and Africa*, published in 1947, Du Bois constructs a history of Africa’s role and contributions to the world and to human history. He challenges the distorted representation of the black image, urging Black people to believe in themselves, and arguing that without self-belief, the Black race will not be able to write its name in history. Du Bois writing is sympathetic, scathing, challenging, and ennobling. Yet Du Bois may well have been accused by Nietzsche of monumentalizing Africa’s past in his earnest desire to inspire and motivate. He may have taken liberty with historical fact in order to cast a favorable light on Africans or people of African descent in his construction of Africa’s history, as some have argued. Yet the important lesson to be learned is that by “stripping away the myths which European conquerors constructed around the African past, Du Bois hoped that racial pride would be established and with such pride the greatest obstacle to Negro emancipation, psychological inferiority, could be overcome.” See H.G. Pardy, *W. E. B. Du Bois and Pan-Africanism: His Place in its Early Development* (Master’s Thesis, McMaster University, Ontario, 1967), 14, 22-26; W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Conservation of Races.” *American Negro Academy, Occasional paper, No. 2*; Du Bois, *The World and Africa* (New York: Viking Press, 1947).

<sup>161</sup> The international meeting brought together nearly forty black intellectuals from mostly the English-speaking world, the United States, Canada, Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean and, their White and Indian sympathizers. In addition to Du Bois, they included Bishop Alexander Walters (who was the Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, and also the president of the National Afro-American Council, the largest civil rights organization in the United States until the organization was eclipsed by the NAACP and the National Urban League), G.W. Dove (a councilor from Free Town), Benito Sylvain (a Haitian who was in the employ of Emperor Menelik of Ethiopia), A.F. Ribeiro (a Gold Coast attorney of Afro-Brazilian origin), Dr R. J. Colenso (a White South African) and Richard Emanuel Phipp (from Trinidad and Tobago). See J.R. Hooker, “The Pan-African Conference 1900,” *Transition*, No. 46 (1974): 21; Marika Sherwood, *Origins of Pan-Africanism: Henry Sylvester Williams, Africa, and the African Diaspora* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

specifics of contemporary cultural politics, but with the benefit of a complex and often difficult black history, as is discussed in this chapter.

### **The Intersection of Politics and Culture in the Diaspora**

In 1900, Henry Sylvester Williams, a West Indian lawyer, organized the first Pan-African Congress, which took place at London's Westminster Town Hall, July 23-25.<sup>162</sup> The Congress sought to bring together peoples of African descent for the purposes of ameliorating the conditions of black people worldwide, advance their economic and political rights through a united front, and promote inter-racial relations for the benefit of humankind. Although there were no conference proceedings published at the end of the meeting, a communiqué addressed to "Nations of the World" was drafted by Du Bois in his capacity as the Chair of the Resolution Committee:

In the metropolis of the modern world, in this the closing year of the nineteenth century, there has been assembled a congress of men and women of African blood, to deliberate solemnly upon the present situation and outlook of the darker races of mankind. The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, the question as to how far differences of race - which show themselves chiefly in the color of the skin and the texture of the hair - will hereafter be made the basis of denying to over half the world the right of sharing to their utmost ability the opportunities and privileges of modern civilization.<sup>163</sup>

The communiqué also included a list of demands that addressed the fate of black people across the British Empire, and which was subsequently presented to Queen

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<sup>162</sup> In 1897, Henry Sylvester Williams put together the African Association (AA) in London as a pressure group for African and black interests. The African Association inspired the first Pan-African Congress. The African Association was replaced by the Pan-African Association (PAA) at the end of the London meeting. The PAA was expected to function as an international pressure group for Black people worldwide and to establish branches in Africa, the United States, and Caribbean. The PAA was to be the organizing body of subsequent annual pan-African conferences. Its monthly magazine was called *The Pan-African*, and would appear only once before its unfortunate demise. Marika Sherwood, *Origins of Pan-Africanism: Henry Sylvester Williams, Africa, and the African Diaspora* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>163</sup> Quoted in Ayodele Langley, *Ideologies of Liberation in Black Africa* (London: Rex Collings, 1979), 738-739.

Victoria. The list of grievances included the situation of natives in Southern Africa *vis-à-vis* the illegal compound system of native labor in Kimberley (South Africa) and Rhodesia (Zimbabwe and Zambia), the indenture system and compulsory labor on public works, economic exploitation, the segregation and degradation of indigenous peoples, and political disenfranchisement across sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>164</sup> Although the London meeting called for moderate colonial reforms, it was a formidable milestone in the anti-colonial struggle for Africa, and addressed the collective task of achieving black emancipation worldwide. Du Bois would become the torchbearer of succeeding pan-African congresses, or conferences as they would later be called.<sup>165</sup> Between the two World Wars, these instrumental conferences --- Paris in 1919 at the end of World War I, London and Brussels in 1921, London and Lisbon in 1923, New York in 1927, and Manchester in 1945 --- formalized pan-Africanism as an ideology of black presence.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Du Bois believed that racism against African Americans could not be resolved in isolation of the racism meted out on the black population in the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa. The succeeding pan-African congresses attracted more delegates and became increasingly more political in their demands for colonial reforms, and ultimately, self-rule for Africa. In 1945, however, Du Bois was eclipsed by George Padmore, the Trinidadian journalist and writer, T. Ras Makonnen, the Guyanese entrepreneur, and Africa's independence leaders, including Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, and Jaja Nwachukwu of Nigeria, who took the lead.

<sup>166</sup> As a humanist ideology of black empowerment and racial pride, pan-Africanism has many tributaries and precursors. Some scholars have seen slave insurrections in the Americas and the successful Haitian revolution as early stirrings of racial unity and therefore the origin of pan-Africanism. See Olisanwuche P. Esedebe, *Pan-Africanism: The Idea and Movement, 1776-1991* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University, 1982); Milfred C. Fierce, *The Pan-African Idea in the United States, 1900-1919: African-American Interest in Africa and the Interaction with West Africa* (New York: Garland Pub., 1993). Others have attributed the intellectual origins of pan-Africanism to the writings of the foremost black intellectual in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Edward Wilmot Blyden. Blyden was born in the Danish West Indies in 1832 to freed slaves. He spent the greater part of his life in Liberia and Sierra Leone, working as an educator, author, politician and diplomat. His major work includes *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (1887) and *West Africa Before Europe* (1905). See Edith Holden, *Blyden of Liberia: an account of the life and labors of Edward Wilmot Blyden, LL.D., as recorded in letters and in print* (New York: Vantage Press, 1966); Hollis R. Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pan-Negro Patriot, 1832-1912* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967) and Robert W. July, *A History of the African People: Edward Blyden Creates A Philosophy of African Nationalism*, (New York: Charles Scribners, Sons, 1980).

If in the beginning Du Bois tackled the curse of black invisibility from a sociological perspective, he also understood the necessity of facing it on the cultural front. Together with an influential cadre of African-American cultural leaders including Alain Locke, James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, Aaron Douglas, Claude McKay and Zora Neale Hurston, they instigated the New Negro art movement which reached its apotheosis in the Harlem Renaissance.<sup>167</sup> The New Negro movement was a crucial ideological attempt to express an encompassing black cultural presence in the United States. It also influenced and inspired similar efforts in the Caribbean and Europe. From 1919 to about 1934, black writers, artists, musicians and anthropologists articulated a new epistemology based on racial difference and nostalgia for an imagined African heritage. It was a radical intellectual and artistic re-engineering aimed at reinventing and consolidating a notion of ‘the black personality’ and creating a modernist cultural presence that would ultimately shore up a declarative political presence. This new discourse of race encapsulated a desire by the black intellectual elites to shed the image of racialized servility and inferiority in the United States, and a renewed determination to speak for themselves on their own terms.<sup>168</sup>

Harlem hosted a large concentration of black intelligentsia in the 1920s and 1930s. It was a melting pot for educated and middle-class African-Americans who came from within the United States, from the rural South to the industrial North, and blacks

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<sup>167</sup> Among others, see Gwendolyn Bennett, Jean Toomer, and Carl Van Vechten. In 1925, Alain Locke published the anthology *New Negro*, from which the movement drew its name. The anthology included works by the lead writers of the Harlem Renaissance.

<sup>168</sup> As Alain Locke puts it, the “Old Negro” is a stock figure who has lived under the shadow of stereotypes of docility and humiliating clichés, and the New Negro is assertive, proud of his blackness, and willing to improve the lot of his race. Alain Locke, “The New Negro,” in *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, ed., Alain Locke, with a New Introduction by Allan H. Spear (New York and London: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), 3-16.

from the Caribbean.<sup>169</sup> The reconstruction period at the end of the Civil War had triggered black migration to the North, where, it was hoped, there were more favorable social conditions. World War I affected migration patterns from Europe into the United States as well, and the thriving war industries in the North offered more opportunities for employment for African-Americans. The Harlem population included African American ex-soldiers who had returned from the war theatres of Europe.<sup>170</sup> As active participants in the war, African Americans soldiers were celebrated for contributing to the U.S. military effort to safeguard freedom and democracy in Europe, in sharp contrast to their experiences at home.<sup>171</sup> The returning veterans brought with them a sense of dignity and self-worth, which fueled and invigorated the national and international campaigns for racial equality and cultural democracy from an important center in Harlem.

Three critical early shapers of the New Negro movement were Alain Locke, W.E.B Du Bois, and James Weldon Johnson, whose individual positions and writings shaped an epistemological framework for the Movement. Alain Locke, the Howard University philosophy professor, believed that the only way the New Negro would shatter the barriers which prevented black greatness was by thinking in universal terms. As he put it, racial truth and beauty emerges in art that shuns propaganda and is culturally pluralistic. The New Negro must look beyond the narrow fields of black life and produce

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<sup>169</sup>Migrations to the United States, especially by Caribbean blacks, were important in giving the New Negro movement an international outlook. This category includes Claude McKay who migrated to the United States from Jamaica in 1912 to attend Tuskegee Institution and Kansas State University. McKay moved to Harlem after his studies. His *Home to Harlem* (1928) was a major literary achievement. The novel, which won the Harmon Gold Award for Literature, explored Black urban experience particularly that of Harlem, and would have a tremendous impact on Black literature in the United States, Caribbean, Europe and West Africa. Another prominent Black Caribbean émigré was Marcus Garvey, an ideologue, journalist, publisher, orator, social entrepreneur and leader of the “Back to Africa Movement,” who like McKay was from Jamaica. Garvey was highly motivated and founded the largest Black movement the Universal Negro Improvement Association, headquartered in Harlem, which preached racial purity and pride.

<sup>170</sup> Bryan Fulks, *Black Struggle: A History of the Negro in America* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1969), 208-231.

<sup>171</sup> Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the Making of America* (New York: Collier Books, 1969), 216-223.

art that is universal.<sup>172</sup> Locke proposed racial rehabilitation as the basis for evolving a black aesthetics representing the African-American cultural experience, but also argued that black aesthetics must be affirmed within the bounds of the American society.

On a similar note, Du Bois argued that black aesthetics should draw from African heritage but should also be universally appealing. However, Du Bois also believed that black aesthetics must be propagandist in order to promote a new racial consciousness.<sup>173</sup> In one of Du Bois's essays for *The Crisis*, the official journal of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which he edited for twenty-four years, he wrote, "all art is propaganda, and ever must be ... I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda."<sup>174</sup>

Black art, Du Bois insisted, should be culturally pure and enlisted in the service of racial emancipation. He therefore came to the conclusion that art should be propagandistic.<sup>175</sup>

James Weldon Johnson believed that African American racial experiences and African roots should be emphasized. Black folk culture, including slave songs, Negro spirituals, sermons, and folktales, provided a rich and complex wellspring that would enhance racial pride and enable an authentic black modern aesthetics.<sup>176</sup> Johnson also

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<sup>172</sup> Alain Locke, "The Legacy of Ancestral Arts," *The New Negro* (New York: Atheneum, 1992, first published in 1925), 254-267.

<sup>173</sup> Du Bois, in Rebecca T. Cureau, "Towards an Aesthetic of Black Folk Expression," in *Alain Locke: Reflections on a Modern Renaissance Man*, ed., Russel J. Linnemann (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 79.

<sup>174</sup> In Cureau, "Towards an Aesthetic of Black Folk Expression," in *Alain Locke: Reflections on a Modern Renaissance Man*, ed., Russel J. Linnemann (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 80

<sup>175</sup> Du Bois was the founding editor of *The Crisis*, the official journal of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the oldest civil rights association in the United States, which he also helped to found in 1909.

<sup>176</sup> Rebecca Cureau (1982, 80) argues that the ideological argument in favor of folk art by Locke, Du Bois, and Johnson appear to draw from the folk ideology proposed by Johann Herder, the German philosopher. Cureau bases this claim on the fact that Locke would have been exposed to Herder as a philosopher, and Du Bois, who trained in Berlin, would have been familiar with the work of Herder. A passage in Johnson's novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, published in 1912, places the narrator in Berlin, where he

argued that black writers and artists could enlarge their subject and audience. They should aim to speak pluralistically and universally. For Johnson, “pluralism” and “universalism” were code words for white acceptance, and meant that black cultural production should also appeal to a white audience. Nevertheless, universalism and propaganda as ideological positions remained largely ambiguous in the work of writers and artists of the Harlem Renaissance. What is highlighted in this study, however, is the focus on Africa as a cultural reference point for the New Negro modernism by Locke, Du Bois, and Johnson. The importance accorded Africa in black modernism also emerged in Jamaica and France.

Another thinker who had a marked impact during the Harlem Renaissance was the Jamaican Marcus Garvey. Garvey was very influential as a grassroots activist and literary advocate. He believed that propaganda was a desirable element in art and should be enlisted in the struggle for freedom, justice, and equality for the black race. He often stated, “universalism is to engage with one’s own reality.”<sup>177</sup> Black reality was not color-neutral, but tainted by pervasive racism perpetrated by a dominant white race.<sup>178</sup> Propaganda was therefore an important instrument to raise race consciousness. Garvey’s philosophy and literary activism advanced the ideology that mental, political, and economic liberation could be attained through promulgating arts and literature based on popular black culture, produced by black cultural producers, and consumed by the black masses.<sup>179</sup> Garvey was interested in subverting more elitist notions of arts and literature

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takes folk culture as material for classical composition. The passage subtly suggests that Johnson, widely traveled, might have been influenced by Herder’s folk aesthetics and modernism.

<sup>177</sup> Tony Martin, *Literary Garveyism: Garvey, Black Arts, and the Harlem Renaissance* (Dover, Mass: Majority Press, 1983).

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.



reserved for the few, a populism which ran contrary to the ideas propounded by Locke, Du Bois, and Johnson.<sup>180</sup> His ideology, subsequently termed the “Garvey Aesthetic,” was to become a fulcrum for mobilizing popular interest in black arts, literature, tradition and history in the New World.<sup>181</sup>

The New Negro episteme reflected contrasting, and often competing positions of these thinkers. Additionally, it mirrored a larger drive by some black cultural elites in the United States to be part of the international modernist movement, and to elevate Harlem as the international capital of black culture.<sup>182</sup> A modernist outlook was very important to the quest for racial redemption and a new black selfhood.<sup>183</sup> In 1926 Langston Hughes published what amounted to a New Negro manifesto entitled "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain:"

[...] So I am ashamed for the Black poet who says, “I want to be a poet, not a Negro poet,” as though his own racial world were not as interesting as any other

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<sup>180</sup> Garvey’s ideology also reflected a call for Black separatism, which put him at odds with the mainstream Black middle-class leaders in the United States whom he often chastised for their integrationist agenda. His idea of racial purity was militantly advanced, and was largely viewed as divisive and alienating, fueling mistrust about his political agenda especially among educated Blacks. Often described as the Black Moses, Garvey’s message of racial pride made him immensely popular among poorer Black people. His ceremonial costume consummated his official image as both a political and military leader, and was sufficient enough to brew resentment against him from people who felt intellectually superior to him including Locke, Du Bois and Johnson, who viewed him with disdain. Despite his lack of a college education, which set him apart from most of his contemporaries, he was a gifted leader with clarity of vision and a good organizer of men.

<sup>181</sup> Garvey set up the successful *Negro World* newspaper which helped him to sway and shape black public opinion.

<sup>182</sup> Henry Louis Gates writes that the Harlem Renaissance to a large extent owes its birth to Euro-African modernism, especially in the visual arts. Henry Louis Gates Jr., “Harlem on Our Minds,” in *Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance*, eds., Richard J. Powell and David A. Bailey (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 16-64. In a similar vein, Sieglinde Lemke who observes that African American artists and writers also looked towards Europe in the early twentieth century, suggests that modernism in a non-Western context arises from “Negro art helping to form White modernism, and White culture helping to shape Black expression.” Sieglinde Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 6-9.

<sup>183</sup> Magazines including *The Crisis*, *Survey Graphic*, *Fire*, *The Messenger*, *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life*, and *The Negro World* provided the outlet for introducing the work of the Harlem literati to the American and international audiences. The magazines were edited in turns by Du Bois, Locke, Johnson, and Garvey. Literary productions such as Claude McKay’s *Harlem Shadows* (1922), *Home to Harlem* (1927) and *Banjo* (1929); Countee Cullen’s *Color* (1925), and James Weldon Johnson’s *God’s Trombone: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* (1927), are among some of the major works of the Harlem Renaissance.

world. I am ashamed, too, for the colored artist who runs from the painting of Negro faces to the painting of sunsets after the manner of the academicians because he fears the strange unwhiteness of his own features. An artist must be free to choose what he does, certainly, but he must also never be afraid to do what he must choose . . . We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If White people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly, too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain free within ourselves.<sup>184</sup>

The significance of Hughes's manifesto draws from its dramatic claim, to connect the cultural experience of the African Diaspora to an imagined African heritage in the construction of a black modernist language. Hughes's poem "Afro-American Fragment" explores this connection: "So long, /So far away/ Is Africa/ Not even memories alive/ Save those that history books create. /Save those songs/ Beat back into the blood – /Beat out of blood with words sad-sung/ In strange un-Negro tongue – /So long, /So far away/ Is Africa."<sup>185</sup>

Graphic illustrations and paintings by Aaron Douglas were emblematic of the New Negro modernism in the visual arts during the Harlem Renaissance.<sup>186</sup> Douglas's signature use of a black figural silhouette, and incorporation of motifs and iconography drawn from Egyptian murals and from objects from Africa, demonstrated the inscription and claiming of 'Africa' as a cultural sign. Douglas's painting *Let my People go* (1927, fig. 4), a religious theme work, denoted a racially redemptive message distinct from the religious paintings of Henry Tanner, another of the most important African-American

<sup>184</sup> Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," *The Nation*, June 23 1926.

<sup>185</sup> Hughes, in Amy Helene Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas: Art, Race and the Harlem Renaissance* (Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 1995), 43.

<sup>186</sup> Douglas was a dominant figure whose activities gave a visual face to the New Negro movement. His first set of illustrations was for *Survey Graphic* magazine's special edition on the New Negro, and he subsequently illustrated other leading black magazines and journals including *Opportunity*, *Crisis*, and *Fire*, as well as some of the books of some of the major actors of the New Negro movement such as Weldon Johnson, Carl Van Vechten, and Claude McKay.

artists of the late nineteenth - and early twentieth - century. In another work *Study for Aspects of Negro Life: The Negro in African Setting* (1934, fig. 5), Douglas depicted an imagined Africa, thus addressing the social realities of black people in America in an uplifting way. Douglas's aesthetic, I assert, was both universal and propagandist in its uplifting message and cultural consciousness, and projected an exuberant visuality that was critical to the ideological campaigns of the New Negro movement.

Similar attempts to fashion an Africa-inspired aesthetic modernism in the visual arts occurred in Kingston, Jamaica between 1922 and 1946. While prominent Jamaican intellectuals like McKay and Garvey garnered more attention in Harlem while moving back and forth between Jamaica and New York, a new vision of art was unfolding in Kingston. Described as the Jamaican art movement, it was based on the appropriation of folk culture and recuperation of African heritage of the island's majority black population. Spearheading the new movement was Edna Manley. Born in England to an English father and a Jamaican mother, Manley moved to Jamaica in 1922 with her husband Norman Manley, who would later become Chief Minister of Jamaica.<sup>187</sup> Manley was drawn to the culture of the peasant class, and from it, drew inspiration, towards a national identity in the struggle against British colonialism in the 1930s. Together with

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<sup>187</sup> The art historian David Boxer stresses the absence of an indigenous artistic tradition in Jamaica prior to the arrival of Edna Manley. He then dates the Jamaican art Movement to 1922, the year Edna Manley arrived from England and the year she created *The Beadseller*. Although the colonial system privileged a metropolitan aesthetic, especially of portraiture, an alternative visual economy circulated among the peasant class. The visual images produced chiefly in the native churches and revivalist sects espoused a black iconography that was enlisted in resistance and political struggles subsequently, and which Manley drew from. David Boxer, "Jamaican Art 1922 – 1982," in *Modern Jamaican Art*, ed., David Boxer and Veerle Poupeye (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1998), 13.

the circle of artists who congregated at her home, Manley established a modernist art movement.<sup>188</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century, a neo-romantic vision of Jamaica was promoted through the colonizing palette and paint brushes of touring expatriate European painters and the local white artists who looked to England as source of inspiration. There was no black agency even when they were represented in colonial-themed paintings.<sup>189</sup> The dominant artistic production (in terms of painting, at least) partly reflected the structures of colonialism. Meanwhile, visual production thrived among the black peasantry whose art circulated in religious circles.<sup>190</sup> For the black middle-class, who initially saw themselves as distinct from peasant culture, an acceptance of British modernism was a way of showing off cultural refinement and modernity. As the art historian Krista Thompson observed, later on it was the middle-class, whom, in order to promote a uniquely Jamaican culture, turned to “the island’s black inhabitants as the source of Jamaica’s cultural specificity.” Cultural nationalists found in peasant culture “a

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<sup>188</sup> The circle of artists included Albert Huie and Alvin Marriot, who are viewed as pioneers of Jamaican modernism. They were familiar with the New Negro ideology and cultural nationalism arguments of Marcus Garvey who had established the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in Jamaica in 1914 before moving abroad.

<sup>189</sup> Krista A. Thompson, “Black Skin, Blue Eyes: Visualizing Blackness in Jamaican Art, 1922-1944,” *Small Axe* 16, 10 (2004): 1-34.

<sup>190</sup> There is the long history of the relationship between religion and social protest in Jamaica. Insurrections had occurred frequently in Jamaica since the period of Spanish rule. In the nineteenth century, however, two major revolts of significant consequence occurred. In 1831, the Christmas Rebellion or Baptist War shook the foundation of slavery and led to its subsequent abolition in 1838. The church, being the only legal institution for socialization for the black population in slavery and emancipation, was a hub where issues of mutual interest were discussed. Native churches became venues for the enactment of collective identity built on familial forms rooted in African cultures. The visual images produced chiefly in the native churches and revivalist sects espoused a black iconography that was enlisted in resistance and political struggles, and would emerge forcefully in the revivalist Ethiopian churches and Rastafarianism movement in the 1930s. See Gad Heuman, “A Tale of Two Jamaican Rebellions,” *The Jamaican Historical Review* Vol. XIX (1996):3- 5; Verene A. Shepherd, “Work, Culture, and Creolization: Slavery and Emancipation in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Jamaica,” in *Art and Emancipation in Jamaica: Isaac Mendes Belisario and His Worlds*, eds., Tim Barringer, Gillian Forrester, and Bárbaro Martínez-Ruiz (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 2007), 35-40.

wellspring for art but positioned themselves as the channel through which this source would have a common national currency,” with Edna Manley leading the charge.<sup>191</sup>

Upon her arrival in Kingston, Manley observed that sculpture was not among the colonial sanctioned art forms. The extant paintings, mostly watercolor and oil, were amateurish, conservative, and very imitative of the English tradition. Manley’s first sculpture on Jamaican soil, the *Beadseller* (fig. 6) in 1922, was an initial response to the crisis of self-perception among the black middle-class and artists.<sup>192</sup> The wood sculpture reflected a formalist borrowing of the robust corporal forms of classical African sculpture and the vernacular Jamaican creole aesthetic that would become Manley’s signature style. The 1930s in Jamaica were turbulent, with the rise of trade unionism, anti-colonial campaigns, and formation of political parties. Manley’s art provided a link between artistic development and political struggles. The *Negro Aroused* (wood, fig. 7), created in 1935, became the symbolic archetype of the new spirit of cultural nationalism as well as emblematic of a new mode of visual representation in Jamaica.<sup>193</sup>

The sculpture, carved from brown mahogany, represents the torso of a black figure without the lower body. The head is raised upward in a gesture of defiance, one arm placed closed to the body and the other is arched and positioned away from the body;

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<sup>191</sup> Thompson, “Black Skin, Blue Eyes...,” 12-14.

<sup>192</sup> In 1934, shortly before she created the iconic *Negro Aroused*, Manley penned a scathing critique of mainstream middle class aesthetics in the *Daily Gleaner*. The newspaper posed questions that could be viewed as a critique of the mainstream middle class aesthetic: “Who are the creative painters, sculptors and engravers and where is the work which should be expressive of the country’s existence and growth? A few anaemic imitators of European tradition ... nothing virile, original, nor in any real sense creative.” Edna Manley, *Daily Gleaner*, September 13, 1934, quoted in David Boxer and Veerle Poupeye, *Modern Jamaican Art*, 29. Manley’s criticism can also be read within the context which Krista Thompson’s describes as the middle class being the channel through which a national art is constituted. In that sense, one can argue that Manley was positioning herself as the precursor of modern art in Jamaica, as someone who was in a position of authority in the nationalist movement.

<sup>193</sup> It is also necessary to point out that scholarly interpretation of Jamaican art movement tends to infer a homogenous aesthetics based on not only ideology but also style. Although the spirit of political nationalism pervaded the social sphere, it was interrogated from different positions by the artists.

the hands are positioned one on the other. The work proposed racial dignity and affirmation, and would later be read by art historians as modernist. A highly propagandist work, it excited the public imagination. Its symbolic agency was further cemented when the work was acquired by public subscription in 1937 and presented to the Institute of Jamaica, the foremost cultural institution. This historical act summed up a new public perception of the role of visual arts in the struggle for liberation from colonial rule; it also pointed to what the public would thereafter accept as the canon of modern art in Jamaica. The work set the tone for the reclamation of peasant culture and its inscription as the dominant cultural form of anti-colonial struggle in Jamaica. More critically, in espousing a new creative paradigm, Manley connected Jamaica's art movement to the international modernist movement.<sup>194</sup>

The New Negro movement and Jamaican art movement were indications of the recuperation of African heritage and diaspora vernacular aesthetic traditions to assert a modern black cultural presence. Black modernism and cultural presence became visible in Paris in the late 1920s and 1930s, and in Africa in the mid-century, propelled by anti-colonial politics, cultural nationalism, and decolonization. In Paris, it became visible in black literary circles due to cultural exchanges within an expanded black diaspora. At the end of the First World War, Paris presented a more hospitable arena than the segregated United States.<sup>195</sup> French colonialism in Africa and the West Indies also resulted in a significant population of colonial subjects in Paris.

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<sup>194</sup> Although Manley espoused a creative impulse different from the neo-romanticism that was the vogue among the Jamaican middle class, she nonetheless looked towards a European epistemological tradition to validate her practice. This is well detailed in Jamaican art history. It was no less different from the neo-romantic Jamaican painters who painted in the metropolitan style. Yet she was seeking a different kind of validation by connecting the new Jamaican art movement to the European avant-garde modernism.

<sup>195</sup> About 370,000 African-American soldiers belonging to the segregated American Expeditionary Force were stationed in France and were well received by the French public. A large number of these soldiers

The discovery of the modernist qualities of African *objets d'art*, the interest it sparked in the Parisian avant-garde, the role of African-American soldiers who helped liberate France, and admiration for African-American performative culture, coalesced in the Paris bohemian culture scene during the interwar years.<sup>196</sup> Leading lights of the Harlem Renaissance spent considerable time in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>197</sup> In fraternal circles of Paris's Latin Quarter, they gathered with fellow black intellectuals from Africa and the French West Indies, setting in motion pan-African conceptions in ways that were not possible in Harlem or Kingston.<sup>198</sup> Notions of Africa as an ennobling cultural reference point were more pronounced here, defining the contours of Négritude, the most important black modernist movement in France.

In the 1930s, Négritude emerged as a response to European colonialism, and marked the quest for human dignity and cultural presence.<sup>199</sup> According to Léopold

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stayed in France at the end of the war, with most moving to Paris to perform or study. Paris had begun to warm up to *l'art nègre*, jazz, and African-American theatre. African-American performance was introduced to the French public through the performances of military music units including James Reese Europe's 369th Infantry Regiment "Hellfighters" Band, postwar musicians such as Palmer Jones and Ada Smith, and performers including Josephine Baker. See, Brent Hayes Edwards, "Prologue," *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2003), 3-4.

<sup>196</sup> This was the period of *Vogue Nègre*, or negrophilia, from French *negrophilie*. The term describes the avant-gardes' passion for African-American culture, a craze which hit Paris in the 1920s. Petrine Archer-Straw, "Negrophilia, Diaspora, and Moments of Crisis," in *Afro Modern: Journeys through the Black Atlantic*, eds., Tanya Barson and Peter Gorschlüter (Liverpool: Tate Liverpool, 2010), 30.

<sup>197</sup> Claude McKay spent a considerable amount of time in France, and he penned his novel *Banjo* (1929) during his time in Paris. The work explores the French colonial complex focusing on the treatment of African seamen in Marseilles.

<sup>198</sup> Following Tyler Stovall, Brent Hayes Edwards described 1920s Paris as a critical time and space for the articulation of a black modern aesthetic, truly international because of its concentration of black literati — African-American, African, and Caribbean. Edwards suggested that while African-American cultural elite based in Harlem thought of the neighborhood as a "worldwide black culture capital," Paris was especially attractive for its "black transnational interaction, exchange and dialogue." Edwards, Prologue, 5.

<sup>199</sup> The etymology of the term Négritude is credited to the poem term *Cahier d'un retour au pays* (Notebook of a return to native land) by Aimé Césaire, published in 1939. It is believed the poem formalized the aesthetic preoccupation of the movement; similar sentiments are traceable in earlier poems by Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Léon Gotran-Damas. As Gary Wilder has argued, Négritude was not exactly a "self-consciously organized movement" in the 1930s; rather "it consisted primarily of 'interminable discussions' among students who shared ideas, explored Paris, and began to write poetry."

Senghor, one of the prime articulators of the movement, Négritude came about because of the need to reclaim the black selfhood and subjectivity.<sup>200</sup> Caught between Europe's cultural turmoil and postwar anxieties, and the "borrowed personality" imposed on them by the French cultural policy of assimilation, the Négritude circle began to feel great discomfort and alienation.<sup>201</sup> According to Alioune Diop, founder and editor-in-chief of the influential black journal *Présence Africaine*:

Neither white, yellow, nor black, unable to completely turn to our original traditions nor to assimilate to Europe, we had the feeling that we were a new race, mentally cross-bred, but one that had not been taught to know its originality and that has barely become aware of it... we gathered to study the situation and characteristics that defined us.<sup>202</sup>

The colonial policy of assimilation was introduced in the late nineteenth century to expand French cultures to the colonies with the intention of making black Frenchmen out of colonial subjects. This was particularly the case in Saint-Louis, one of the four communes of colonial Senegal (which were Gorée, Dakar, Rufisque, and Saint-Louis), and the French West Indies.

The colonized were expected to adopt French customs and cultures, and were, at least in theory, granted the rights of French citizens.<sup>203</sup> Basically, the policy implied that the colonized were previously uncivilized and that it was their French citizenship that had made them civilized. By imitating French ways and discarding native or ancestral cultural

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Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 156.

<sup>200</sup> Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Apport de la poésie nègre," in *Liberté I*, 135-36, cited in Wilder, 204.

<sup>201</sup> Borrowed personality is the term used by Lilyan Kesteloot to describe the effects of the policy of assimilation on Senghor and his cohorts. Kesteloot quoted by Ellen Kennedy, in Ellen Conroy Kennedy, "Translators Introduction," in Lilyan Kesteloot, *Black Writers in French: A Literary History of Negritude*, Tran. Ellen Conroy Kennedy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), xvi.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Mamadou Diouf, "The French Colonial Policy of Assimilation and the Civility of the Originaires of the Four Communes (Senegal): A Nineteenth Century Globalization Project," *Development and Change*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (October 1998): 26.



values, black students and intellectuals adopted a borrowed personality. This consigned them to an interstitial space in which they were no longer natives nor fully French.

As students in Paris, Senghor from colonial Senegal, Aimé Césaire from colonial Martinique, and Léon Gotran-Damas from colonial French Guyana, addressed the crisis of identity.<sup>204</sup> Négritude arose from their desire to overcome self-rejection by consciously returning to assumed cultural roots.<sup>205</sup> Senghor, Césaire, and Damas sought to distill what they believed were the original qualities of the African person, worldviews, natural environment, and expressive cultures.<sup>206</sup> Négritude's "poetic return to Africa," was "not simply about recovering a primordial racial identity or reconnecting to a cultural tradition after straying in Europe."<sup>207</sup> It involved a process of reclamation in which the so-called "primitive" regains or re-inhabits his *a priori* being as a strategy of articulating a modernist African or black cultural presence. The Négritude circle was aware of the implication of the appropriation of the spiritual essence of African art by the Parisian avant-garde. Senghor, Césaire, and Damas were exposed to the enlightenment discourse of distilling "empirical realities and cultural fantasies through which Europeans attempted

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<sup>204</sup> Senghor's earlier poetry relied heavily on French Romantic and Symbolist poetry before his focus shifted to African-American and vernacular African poetry traditions. See Wilder, 206.

<sup>205</sup> Ellen Conroy Kennedy suggests that the quest by proponents of Negritude to recuperate cultural origins was inspired by the Parisian modernists' admiration of African art for its originality and social values. She also argues, and rightly, that the African American brand of cultural nationalism with Africa as an ideological anchor was in circulation in Black Paris through exposure to the work of New Negro authors, visits by Harlem Renaissance literati to Paris, and transatlantic relationships forged between individuals such as Alaine Locke and Jane Nardal, who was a very influential figure among the black Parisian elite, and was a critical model. Although valid, Kennedy's analysis is not complete. Without dismissing the cross-currents of influences that may have inspired Negritude, a more probable catalyst for the final shape Négritude took was the hypocrisy of the French policy of assimilation, which, while divesting Black Parisians of their so-called barbaric cultures, was coopting same primitive cultures for its so-called magical qualities to reinvigorate a Western modernism undergoing a crisis. This hypocrisy would have been obvious to the Negritude circle. Kennedy, "Translators Introduction," xvii.

<sup>206</sup> It is necessary to clarify that there was no singular or uniform vision of Négritude. Instead the philosophy was tempered by Senghor's, Césaire's, and Damas's individual visions and ideas of Africa, and by their cultural experiences in their countries of birth and in Paris in relation to French colonialism.

<sup>207</sup> Wilder, 205.

to create alternate identities that lay outside the frame of Western modernity.”<sup>208</sup> They were also exposed to other arts and literary movements in Europe but influenced mainly by surrealism.

Ultimately, Négritude’s insistence on Africa as both the object and subject of black cultural politics was a departure from New Negro and Jamaican art movements, which mostly engaged Africa as an imagined heritage. It is instructive that in his poetry and writing, Senghor approaches Africa as either lived or existential.<sup>209</sup> This acknowledges the fact that he also mythologized Africa. In the poem *Heritage*, Countee Cullen paints a romantic picture of a primeval Africa in which he is both an insider and an outsider. The beginning verses read as “[W]hat is Africa to me?/ Copper sun or scarlet sea, /Jungle star or jungle track, /Strong bronzed men, or regal black/ Women from whose loins I sprang/ When the birds of Eden sang?/ One three centuries removed /From the scenes his fathers’ loved, /Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,/ What is Africa to me?”<sup>210</sup> In contrast, Senghor’s *Epitaph* strongly reflects his Serer roots in Joal, the place of his birth. “When I’m dead, my friends, place me below Shadowy Joal / On the hill, by the bank of the Mamanguedy, / near the ear of Serpents’ Sanctuary/ But place me between the Lion and ancestral Tening-Ndyae/ When I’m dead, my friends, place me beneath Portuguese Joal/ Of stones from the Fort build my tomb, and cannons will keep quiet/ Two oleanders

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<sup>208</sup> Mary Gluck, “Interpreting Primitivism, Mass Culture and Modernism: The Making of Wilhelm Worringer’s Abstraction and Empathy,” *New German Critique*, No. 80 (Spring-Summer, 2000): 149-169.

<sup>209</sup> One can make similar arguments for Césaire and Damas to varying degrees. Senghor’s Négritude romanticized his early exposure to traditional life in Joal. Césaire, for his own part, “mythologized his relationship to Africa by claiming as his ancestor a Césaire who had led a Martinican slave insurrection in 1833 and by describing his grandmother as ‘a woman who visibly came from Africa.’ Wilder, “Notes to Pages,” in *The French imperial Nation-State*, 341

<sup>210</sup> Countee Cullen, “Heritage,” in *My Soul’s High Song: The Collected Writings of Countee Cullen, voice of the Harlem Renaissance*, eds. Countee Cullen and Gerald Lyn Early (New York: Doubleday Publishers, 1991)

The dialectical conundrum is present in the poetry of Langston Hughes and in the author Richard Wright’s non-fiction *Black Power* (1954).

-- white and pink -- will perfume the Signare.”<sup>211</sup> Senghor’s vivid imagery recounts a lived experience of Joal where he expected to be buried upon his death.

In its formative years, two key intellectual contributions helped to shape Négritude. The first was the novel *Batouala* (1919) by the Martinican René Maran. The novel was based on Maran’s own experience as a colonial administrator working in French Equatorial Africa. Written from the imagined point of view of the colonized population, the novel explores the rural life of the native in Oubangui-Chari (now Central Africa Republic), and exposes the harshness of French colonialism and the hypocrisy of the policy of assimilation. Maran’s unvarnished realism and ethnographic accomplishment in *Batouala* captured the imagination of Senghor, Césaire and Damas, who befriended him. Maran would become an intellectual mentor to the Négritude trio, reinforcing their initial exposure to the aesthetic and ideological arguments of New Negro, particularly that of racial rehabilitation proposed by Locke, Du Bois, and Johnson.<sup>212</sup>

The second intellectual milestone was the contributions of German archeologist and ethnologist Leo Frobenius to African history and anthropology. In 1936, after the ferment of Négritude had begun to solidify, Senghor, Césaire, and Damas encountered

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<sup>211</sup> Léopold Sédar Senghor, “Épitaphe,” in *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache*, ed., Léopold Sédar Senghor (Paris, Presses universitaires France, 2011, first published 1948), np.

<sup>212</sup> Between 1929 and 1934, Senghor, Césaire, and Damas were initially acquainted with the work and the persons of Claude McKay, Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen through Paulette Nardal, the co-founder of *Revue du Monde Noir*. The Clamart salon, a tea shop in the Latin quarters, which she co-owned and co-managed with her sister Jane, was the meeting place for African, West Indians, and African American intelligentsia in Paris. It was at the salon that Paulette Nardal co-founded *Revue du Monde Noir* with Haitian writer Leo Sajou. It was also where the Négritude movement began. See L.S Senghor’s letter to Lilyan Kesteloot, in Lilyan Kesteloot, *Black Writers in French: A Literary History of Négritude*, 56-57, Wilder, 164-166, 176.

Frobenius's writings.<sup>213</sup> In *History of African Civilization*, Frobenius explored the essence of African societies through myths, art, legends, folklore, and theorized the concept of continuity of cultures by linking various African cultures from Black Africa to Egypt in ways no European work had done before. Frobenius's approach, which created meanings through culture areas and saw culture as a living organism, was a new paradigm that rejected prior popular stereotypes of ahistorical Africa in the Western world. Frobenius's valorization of Africa's civilization echoed the Négritude philosophy, and Senghor, Césaire, and Damas found his views intellectually stimulating.

Nearly ten years after Négritude's formal emergence and after World War II, Senegalese writer Alioune Diop provided it with a major platform in the journal *Présence Africaine*, founded in 1947.<sup>214</sup> The journal was by far the most successful attempt to provide a public dissemination of Paris's black intellectual vanguard. Diop, who was an associate of Senghor, Césaire, and Damas, arrived in Paris in 1937 to study classical literature at the Sorbonne. He witnessed the early stirrings of the Négritude movement and was influenced by the movement's rhetoric of black subjectivity and perception. Diop launched *Présence Africaine* as utter refutation of the miserable social and intellectual rejection black people faced in Paris, and in the larger Western world.<sup>215</sup>

According to the Malagasy writer Jacques Rabemananjara, a founding member of the

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<sup>213</sup> See Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Les Leçons de Leo Frobenius," *Liberte I* (1973): 398-99; Senghor, "The Revolution of 1889 and Leo Frobenius," in *Africa and the West: The Legacies of Empire*, eds. Isaac James Mowoe and Richard Bjornson (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), 77, 84-88.

<sup>214</sup> Senghor, Césaire and Damas had founded and co-edited the literary journal *L'Étudiant Noir* as students. The journal provided an initial platform for their Négritude writings prior to the founding of *Présence africaine* of which they were all involved in creating. As Lilyan Kesteloot suggests, "*Présence africaine* took over the foundations laid by *L'Étudiant Noire*, the affirmation of Black culture." Kesteloot, *Black Writers in French: A Literary History of Négritude*, 292.

<sup>215</sup> Jacques Rabemananjara, "Historic Witnesses," in *The Surreptitious Speech: Presence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness 1947-1987*, ed. V. Y. Mudimbe (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press), 376.

journal, “the black man existed only to be an object of jeers and jibes; he existed only in humiliation and obliteration. The existence of the black man had to be reinvented; he had to be thrown resolutely and without complexes into the common path of the human species.”<sup>216</sup>

It was in this spirit that Diop reached out to “all contributors of good will (White, Yellow or Black), who might be able to help define African originality and to hasten its introduction into the modern world.”<sup>217</sup> Diop’s plea for progressive people to help introduce Africa to the modern world may be viewed as problematic. It suggests a lack of agency. But it is necessary to emphasize that cross-fertilization of ideas and goodwill abounded between black intellectuals and progressive white collaborators in the period.<sup>218</sup> Pragmatism was of crucial importance to Diop in order to ensure that his journal did not go the way of earlier and prominent black journals in Paris including *La Revue du Monde Noir*, *Légitime Defense*, *Le Cri des Nègres*, and *La Dépêche Africaine*. These journals were viewed by the Parisian establishment as radical, communist, or anti-French.<sup>219</sup> To avoid this, *Présence Africaine* brought on board progressive white collaborators with various intellectual interests into its Committee of Patrons.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>216</sup>Rabemamanjara, *ibid.*

<sup>217</sup> Alioune Diop, “Niam n 'goura ou les raisons d’être de *Présence Africaine*,” *Présence Africaine* No. 1 (Nov.-Dec, 1947):8-9.

<sup>218</sup> The Harlem Renaissance also had its own fair share of white collaborators and patrons such as Carl Van Vechten, who helped to publish the work of writers including Langston Hughes, and Countee Cullen. German-born American artist Winold Riess was instrumental to the success of his protégé Aaron Douglas. Both created the iconic images that defined the visual character of the Harlem Renaissance. While Riess invested the New Negro movement with a new way of representing the black self, Douglas’s works ultimately signaled the arrival of a modernist black art that encapsulated black racial consciousness. Douglas also enjoyed the patronage and sponsorship of American socialite and philanthropist Mrs. Charlotte Osgood Mason, who also supported other Harlem writers, including Zora Neale Hurston, and Langston Hughes.

<sup>219</sup> These journals preceded *Présence africaine* and shared similar concerns regarding culture, aesthetics and black identity. But when their focus shifted to politics and anticolonialism, they “rapidly came to grief.” Kesteloot, 8-11. *L’Étudiant Noir*, co-edited by Senghor, Césaire, and Damas as students, had a moderate stance on colonialism. The magazine folded when the trio became politically active as MPs in the

In its formative years, *Présence Africaine* combined the ideologies of New Negro, Négritude, and subsequently, a notion of “African personality,” to define its intellectual objectives. The espousal of “African personality” emerged as the more forceful ideology of African cultural nationalism and anti-colonialism in the post-World War II period. The concept was an insistence on the African person as civilized, capable of self-rule, and more fundamentally, an equal member of the human race.<sup>221</sup> *Présence Africaine* incorporated the “African personality” philosophy to criticize a Western humanism that projected universal values but justified white racial superiority. Conversely, *Présence Africaine* approached humanism through the framework of a dialogue of cultures, which would be espoused more broadly by Senghor much later. On the political front, it maintained a moderate stance on colonialism, a stance that would evolve as the quest for political independence in Africa gathered speed in the 1950s.<sup>222</sup>

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French parliament. *Présence africaine* became the new outlet for their intellectual energies and commitment. In other words, *Présence africaine* inherited *L'Étudiant Noir*.

<sup>220</sup> They included author and Nobel Prize winner André Gide, existentialist philosopher and political activist Jean-Paul Sartre, journalist and philosopher Albert Camus, and surrealist writer and ethnographer Michel Leiris. In addition to Senghor and Césaire, the journal's founding black members included ethnographer Paul Hazoumé, writer Jacques Rabemananjara, and writer Richard Wright. In a letter addressed to Jean-Paul Sartre, Diop explained the importance of having leading progressive intellectuals on the board of patrons of *Présence Africaine* to give legitimacy to the young journal, cited in Sarah Frioux-Salgas, “*Présence africaine*: Une tribune, un mouvement, un réseau,” *Gradhiva* No 10 (2009): 12.

<sup>221</sup> The first President of independent Ghana Kwame Nkrumah's philosophical idea of “consciencism,” is the most notable articulation of “African personality.” Drawing upon Marxism, Nkrumah argues that African personality is defined by the agglomeration of humanist ideals found in traditional African society such as communalism and egalitarianism, that is to say, the sense of self in/and the community, which is missing in the mechanized Western society. The impetus to stress, to insist on the African personality is ignited by an obverse, in the case of African personality, a threatening obverse, the white man. Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism* (London: Panaf Books, 1964); Ike F. H. Odimegwu, *African Personality and Nationalism in Nkrumah's Philosophy of Liberation*, “*Uche*,” vol. 14 (December 2008): 91-102.

<sup>222</sup> Lilyan Kesteloot argues that although *Présence Africaine*'s political position against colonialism was measured, its first issue took on the evils of segregation in the United States, and African women who mimicked European women. The inaugural issue included Andre Gidé's essay which attacked Gobineau's theories on the inequality of the human races, Théodore Monod's essay which focused on West's justification of slavery, Marcel Griauale's analysis of racial prejudices against black people, Georges Balandier's acerbic essay on Western stereotypes of black people, and Jean-Paul Sartre more direct attack of colonialism in Africa. Kesteloot, *Black Writers in French: A Literary History of Negritude*, 284-286.

## Congress of Black Writers and Artists

In the 1950s, Alioune Diop came up with the idea of an international congress to convene black intellectuals to galvanize black solidarity, and to promote cultural internationalism and modernism in anticipation of decolonization. Described as “Congress of Black Writers and Artists,” the first black Congress in Paris in 1956 sought to take an inventory of black cultures and analyze the role of Western culture in colonization and racism. After a tumultuous start, it opened on September 19 at the Descartes amphitheater of the Sorbonne with little fanfare but no less an awareness of its historical importance.<sup>223</sup> In his opening speech in Paris, Alioune Diop called for asserting and recognizing the presence of the world’s black people, whose talents were either suppressed or disregarded.<sup>224</sup>

While recognizing that black people were not the only victims of racism, Diop underlined that the origins and character of racism against black people were different.<sup>225</sup> He charged participants to think more critically about the history, commonality, ancestry, and shared experience of subjugation and dispossession that bound black people from the United States, the Caribbean, and the African continent together in spite of spatial

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<sup>223</sup> The authorization for the congress was delayed by the French government until the last minute. It took considerable diplomatic efforts by Alioune Diop, exploring all his progressive contacts including Michel Leiris, Jean Paul-Sartre, and Emmanuel Mounier, before authorization was finally granted. The government of France and its allies, including the United States, were worried about the political implications of the Congress because of the number and intellectual standing of participants. There was the fear that most of the black elites from Africa, the Caribbean, and the USA were either communists or entertained Marxist ideas. France was particularly worried about the implications of the congress on the political situation in Algeria. This was at a time when anticolonial activism was at a crescendo. The organizers of the conference also worried that France and then United States might attempt to disrupt the gathering. W.E.B Du Bois, slated to chair the event, was prevented from traveling by the American government. See *Lumieres Noire* (2006, [film documentary film on the congress] by Bob Swaim).

<sup>224</sup> Diop, “Editorial – La Culture Moderne et Notre Destin,” *Présence Africaine* (1957):3.

<sup>225</sup> Alioune Diop, “Le Discours d’Ouverture,” *Présence Africaine* (Le 1er Congrès International des Ecrivains et Artistes Noirs [Paris – Sorbonne – 19-22 Septembre 1956] – Compte Rendu Complet) nouvelle série bimstrielle, no 8-9-10 spécial (1957): 9.

distances.<sup>226</sup> Diop believed that a black cultural renaissance would help to counter racial prejudices and lead to global peace and mutual understanding among the world's different races.<sup>227</sup> Diop had described the meeting in Paris as a "cultural Bandung," referring to the Bandung Conference organized a year earlier in Indonesia to create a bloc of non-aligned countries from Asia and Africa.<sup>228</sup> Despite Diop's attempt to tie the Paris Congress to Bandung, the Congress had more in common with the preceding pan-African conferences because of the nature of its agenda, participants, and resolutions.

In addition to Bandung, several events unfolded on the international stage in 1956 which in hindsight must be recognized as part of the zeitgeist that spawned the Paris congress. That year Morocco and Tunisia gained independence, while France's refusal to extend a similar gesture to Algeria resulted in the intensification of that war of independence. Gamal Abdel Nasser became the president of Egypt and nationalized the Suez Canal in the spirit of postcolonial sovereignty, creating a massive international standoff with Britain and France. Hungary revolted against Soviet-imposed policies, and labor riots erupted in Poland. Fidel Castro and his 26th of July Movement began the revolution on Cuban soil. In the United States, the Montgomery bus boycott changed the course of the Civil Rights movement. George Padmore, the influential Trinidadian pan-

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<sup>226</sup> Participants came from twenty-four countries. Dr. Jean Price-Mars of the University of Haiti, who chaired the conference in the absence of Du Bois, Jacques Stephen Alexis (Haiti), René Depestre (Haiti), Frantz Fanon (Martinique and Algeria), Amadou Hampaté Bâ (Mali), Mercer Cook (USA), James Baldwin (USA), Richard Wright (USA), James Ivy (USA), Josephine Baker (USA), Édouard Glissant (Martinique), Aimé Césaire (Martinique), Cheikh Anta Diop (Senegal), Ben Enwonwu (Nigeria), Ebenezer Latunde Lasebikan (Nigeria), Paul Hazoumé (Dahomey), Davidson Abioseh Nicol (Sierra Leone), Jacques Rabémananjara (Madagascar), Léopold Sédar Senghor (Senegal), and Abdoulaye Wadé (Senegal).

<sup>227</sup> Diop, "Editorial – La Culture Moderne et Notre Destin," *Présence Africaine*, 9-10.

<sup>228</sup> From April 18-24, 1955, political leaders from newly independent countries and those who were anticipating political independence in Asia and Africa assembled in Bandung, Indonesia with the aim of creating a new international politics of non-alignment in order to navigate the post World War II global politics which pitched the Western Bloc against the Eastern Bloc. Some of the participants at the Paris congress including Alioune Diop and Richard Wright attended the Bandung conference.



Africanist published his seminal book *Pan-Africanism or Communism: the Coming Struggle for Africa*.

It was at this auspicious and critical juncture that the Paris Congress would articulate and present a collective black voice on the global stage. The four-day Congress brought to the fore the fragmented nature of black cultural experiences, but also the desire to reconcile intellectual and ideological differences and fissures in the black world.<sup>229</sup> Among competing ideologies and dispositions (including communism, capitalism, atheism, animism, Christianity, and Islam), Négritude was the most discussed at the Paris Congress. It was championed by some who believed in its necessity as an ideology to bring the black race together, and contested by others who believed that its principles were essentialist and romanticizing of black cultural experience. Colonial reality in Africa and the Caribbean worlds, and its absence in the African-American world, framed some of the political positions taken during the congress. Yet it was important that both organizers and participants respected diversity of experience and opinion in the black world while arriving at a consensus with which to present a united black front.

A major development at the Paris Congress was the creation of the Société Africaine de Culture (Society of African Culture), an elite cultural organization of black

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<sup>229</sup> The sticking point in the various presentations and discussions was the framing of black cultural politics to focus on Africa or to think of politics of culture in a universal context, that is to say, to think of culture as a weapon of emancipation for the world's subjugated population. There was also suspicion and distrusts among participants, especially African American participants, concerning moles who were on the payroll of the CIA. This particular issue came to the fore in Richard Wright's presentation. He felt that some members of the African American delegation such as himself, and rightly so, were considered to be agents of the American government. In fact, in 1953, after a trip to the Gold Coast (Ghana) at the height of struggle for independence, Wright gave a confidential report on his meetings with Kwame Nkrumah, the fiery political leader of the anti-colonial movement, to the American consulate in Ghana, and upon his return to Paris, he met twice with an official of the State Department. See Carol Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa: Writers in a Common Cause* (Manchester: Manchester University Press; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 124-29.

intellectuals, to be led by the Haitian ethnographer and diplomat Jean Price-Mars and Alioune Diop as honorary president and secretary general, respectively. The Society of African Culture became the new vehicle through which *Présence Africaine* organized its future conferences and cultural events. In collaboration with the Italian Institute for Africa, the Society of African Culture organized a congress in Rome in 1959. There, participants, most of whom had attended the Paris Congress, displayed an extraordinary understanding of the importance of cultural solidarity, and the need to solidify the framework agreed upon in 1956.

With the theme, “Unity and Responsibility of Black African Cultures,” the Rome Congress (from March 26 – April 1, 1959) explored the relationship between cultural and political struggles in the black world. Participants were encouraged to be involved in the creation of new templates for modern post-colonial cultures in Africa to break away from the suffocating influence of Western models.<sup>230</sup> Several presentations at the Congress reiterated the importance of demystifying colonial and Western hegemony to counteract an inferiority complex and the curse of black invisibility.<sup>231</sup> This was to be followed by recuperation and valorization of African and black cultures, which had been ignored as effects of colonial domination.<sup>232</sup> Lastly, participants addressed the political responsibilities of black intellectuals in the tasks of cultural decolonization and the creation of modern national cultures.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> See special issue of *Présence Africaine* dedicated to the Rome congress. Alioune Diop, “Discours d’Ouverture,” *Présence Africaine* (Duxieme Congrès International des Ecrivains et Artistes Noirs - L’Unité des Cultures Négro Africaines - [Rome March 26- April 1 1959] ) nouvelle série bimstrieelle, no 24-25 Vo. 1 (February – May 1959): 40-48.

<sup>231</sup> Alioune Diop, “Discours d’Ouverture,” *ibid.*

<sup>232</sup> Léopold Sédar Senghor, “Eléments constructifs d’une civilisation d’inspiration Négro-Africaine,” 249-282.

<sup>233</sup> Aimé Césaire, “L’Homme de culture et ses responsabilités,” 116-122; Eric Williams, “Le leader politique considéré comme un homme de culture,” 90-103; Touré, “Le leader politique considéré comme le

Another important idea that had emerged at the Paris Congress and was solidified in Rome was the necessity of a pan-African festival on African soil. This original idea represented a major shift in black internationalism: it signaled the physical return to Africa as critical and highly symbolic signal of the global direction of pan-Africanism. With the aim of celebrating black cultures in an atmosphere of political freedom, the pan-African festival was to also become a symbol of “the links between political liberties and cultural liberties”<sup>234</sup> In short, the Paris and Rome Congresses established the intellectual foundation of a pan-African postcolonial consciousness, deeply imbricated with the subjects and the public role of art, culture, and politics. The Society of African Culture would go on to co-organize the International Congress of African Culture, the First World Festival of Negro Arts, the First Pan-African Cultural Festival, and the Second Festival of Black and African Arts on the continent in the decades to follow.

### **Pan-African Congress and Festivals in the 1960s and 1970s**

Dak’Art’s cultural ideology flows from the different strands of the pan-Africanism movement, represented in the international meetings and cultural congresses, and the unfolding of black modernism in the USA, the Caribbean, and Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. However, the contexts of its exhibitions can be traced to the early pan-African congresses and festivals on the continent. The first precursor was the “First Biennial International Congress of African Culture,” otherwise known as the

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représentant d’une culture,” 104-115; and Fanon, “Fondement reciproque de la culture nationale et des luttes de libération,” 82-89. *Présence Africaine* (Deuxieme Congrès International des Ecrivains et Artistes Noirs - L’Unité des Cultures Negro Africaines - [Rome March 26- April 1 1959] ) nouvelle série bimstrieelle, no 24-25 Vo. 1 (February – May 1959).

<sup>234</sup>Musée du Quai Branly, *Présence Africaine: a Forum, a Movement, a Network* (Exhibition file, 11/10/2009 – 01/31/2010), 13. <http://www.quai Branly.fr/en/programmation/exhibitions/last-exhibitions/presence-africaine.html>. Accessed December 12, 2012.

ICAC.<sup>235</sup> It was the first international cultural event on African soil, and represented a bold shift from the diaspora as the physical site of pan-African internationalism to Africa.<sup>236</sup> Organized in 1962 by Frank McEwen, pioneer Director of the Rhodes National Gallery (now the National Gallery of Zimbabwe); the ICAC was also foundational in the sense that its structural model of exhibition display and accompanying colloquium would be echoed in succeeding pan-African festivals and, ultimately, Dak'Art.

McEwen had initially planned for the Congress to be held in 1959 but was stymied by lack of funding and the concerns of patrons and sponsors who questioned the practicality of hosting such a big event in Africa and organized by a white man.<sup>237</sup> The late 1950s and early 1960s marked the beginning of a new chapter in the liberation of Southern Rhodesia. On the one hand, it was a political struggle between the white minority government and Britain; on the other, it was a fight between African nationalists and the white minority government and colonialist Britain. The Rhodesian Front, a white minority party, emerged victorious in the 1962 elections. In 1965, it unilaterally declared

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<sup>235</sup> Appendix 1, The Official ICAC Announcement, cited in Jonathan Zilberg, "The Three Conditions in the Invention of Shona Sculpture: A Thanksgiving to Terence Ranger," unpublished paper presented at *Making History: Terence Ranger and African Studies* conference, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, October 14-15, 2010, 48.

<sup>236</sup> Biobaku, *Proceedings of the First International Congress of African Culture, August 1-11, 1962*, 13.

<sup>237</sup> R.I. Fleming, the resident director (Africa) of Rockefeller Brothers Fund, in his letter of June 5 1959 to Mr. Charles Noyes of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund in New York writes that "I took precaution before answering of (sic) discussing it with a number of African and European friends. Without exception their reaction was incredulity that such a thing would even be considered at this time... On first reading your letter, the thought crossed my mind that Mr. McEwen is either a very brave man or is merely unknowing." The letter was a response to the solicitation of financial support for the International Congress of African Culture by McEwen from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Unfortunately the ICAC was riddled with controversies related to McEwen's inflexibility and relationship with his sponsors, among other issues that arose after it was held. Jonathan Zilberg, "Modern Painters: Afro-German Expressionism at the Rhodes National Gallery, 1957-1963," 9-12. National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution.

independence from Britain. It was therefore under a cloud of political uncertainty that McEwen organized the ICAC.<sup>238</sup>

A former cultural officer and curator at the British Council office in Paris from 1945 to about 1956, McEwen had attended the Paris Congress.<sup>239</sup> Arguably, he was exposed to the cultural arguments of Négritude which dominated discussions at the Paris Congress, and which may have reinforced some of McEwen's own ideas on artistic purity, cultural authenticity, and the innate abilities of the 'primitive' soul absorbed from his exposure to the teachings of Henri Focillon, a prominent French art historian. After moving to Salisbury in 1957 to help establish the Rhodes National Gallery, McEwen was keen to organize an event similar to the Paris Congress, but with an emphasis on visual arts and music which he felt were not sufficiently addressed in Paris and Rome.<sup>240</sup> As McEwen put it, "there have been many exhibitions of African art since the turn of the century in Europe and America, but there were no really important ones in Africa. Therefore, we decided it was time one was staged in Africa and that we should show what works remained in the few collections in this vast continent."<sup>241</sup>

One can only speculate on the reasons that may have spurred McEwen's focus on the visual arts. But his biography suggests several clues. He was the nephew of the impressionist painter Camille Pissarro, and trained as a painter, was employed in a

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<sup>238</sup> Funding and logistic support finally came from a range of individuals and institutions including the Museum of Modern Art, New York (MOMA); the governments of Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), which donated 5000GBP and 15000GBP, respectively; and the Ford Foundation which donated 55,000USD, a large sum of money in 1962. Other patrons included Sir Stephen and Lady Courtauld, who donated 13,500GBP.

<sup>239</sup> In his capacity as a cultural officer, McEwen organized the first Henry Moore show in France in 1945, and several shows to introduce the Parisian avant-garde to the British audience. McEwen exhibited Picasso and Matisse at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1945, and Braque and Rouault at the Tate in 1946, among other exhibitions.

<sup>240</sup> There was actually a small exhibition of plastic art organized by the Senegalese artist Papa Ibra Tall as part of the Rome Congress, unfortunately there is little information on this exhibition.

<sup>241</sup> McEwen, "Opening Speech," *Proceedings of the First International Congress of African Culture, August 1-11, 1962* (Unpublished), 11.

museum, and studied “primitive” art under Henry Focillon at the Sorbonne in 1926.<sup>242</sup> McEwen also maintained close friendships with leading artists in Europe, forged while working as an itinerant curator in European cities and for British Council.<sup>243</sup> His international network of contacts allowed McEwen to invite leading cultural figures from the Western world to Salisbury, Rhodesia, to attend the Congress. These included William Fagg, William Bascom, Alfred Barr, Tristan Tzara, Jean Rouch, Michel Leiris, Robert Goldwater, Roger Bastide, Udo Kulterman, and Roland Penrose (fig. 8). He also attracted black cultural figures from the United States and the Caribbean such as dancers Pearl Primus and Percy Borde, and African modernist artists including Ben Enwonwu (Nigeria), Vincent Kofi (Ghana), Felix Idubor (Nigeria), Valente Malangatana (Mozambique) and Selby Mvusi (South Africa) (see fig. 8).

The main purpose of ICAC, which was held from August 1 to September 30, 1962, was to display the significance of African culture and arts through displays of classical and modern African art and artifacts.<sup>244</sup> Addressing the audience, S.O. Biobaku, a prominent Nigerian historian and member of the Society of African Culture, who chaired the event, argued that it was important to establish the legitimacy and authenticity

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<sup>242</sup> McEwen’s exposure to Jungian’s collective unconscious would inspire much of his life work and role in the making of Zimbabwean modernism. In his *Return to Origin: New Directions for African Art*, McEwen presented what arguably can be termed a manifesto. In it, he proposed an aesthetic ideal for a new African art built on an originary traditional aesthetic unencumbered and unspoilt by Western aesthetic conventions. ‘Spontaneity’ and vitality found in primitive societies were concepts he promoted within the framework of his theory of ‘collective unconscious of a culture.’ Western penetration into Africa, McEwen claimed, created a complete break between “a dynamic, highly organized past and a confused present.” The notion of the collective unconscious steeped in the ‘original manifestation of the artist’s mind’ was the essence of the workshop McEwen ran in Toulon in 1939 based on the teachings of Gustave Moreau and Focillon. He would later transpose the workshop experiment to Zimbabwe when he became the director of the National Gallery. This fascinating topic, however, falls outside the purview of this current research. Frank McEwen, “Return to Origins: New Directions for African Arts, in *African Arts*, Vol. 1, No. 2. (Winter 1968), pp. 18-25, 88.

<sup>243</sup> He organized the first joint exhibition of the work of Matisse and Picasso at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London in 1945.

<sup>244</sup> McEwen, “Opening Speech,” 11

of African cultures as an integral part of global culture, and to promote African culture to a skeptical, uninformed world.<sup>245</sup> ICAC also emphasized the influence of African culture on Western culture. McEwen believed it was necessary to present the impact of African art “on the school of Paris, activities of Musée de l’Homme with its collections, sessions of African films and recorded tribal music, and those waves of subtle jazz rhythms emanating from music centers: New Orleans, Brazil, the West Indies, and spreading round the world.”<sup>246</sup> ICAC thus sought to address the persistent lack of recognition of African cultural presence in international arenas, despite the visible imprint of African cultures on international modernism. This overriding objective of ICAC also informed the pan-African festivals which succeeded the Congress.

The exhibition of visual art at ICAC marked the first time anywhere that a comprehensive collection of African art was displayed. The more than 350 works drawn from collections in Africa, Europe, and the USA, and from artists’ studios, occupied two floors of the Rhodes National Gallery. The works on view ranged from Nok terra-cotta pieces and Benin Bronzes, to music instruments, ceramics, textiles, modern paintings and sculptures of pioneer African modernists. These were organized in three sections: “Traditional African Art,” Non-Traditional African Art,” and “African Influences upon Western Schools;” the last including modern European art. The “Traditional African Art” section included classical African art and musical instruments from Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire, the Congo (now DRC), Dahomey (Benin Republic), Tanzania, and Southern

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<sup>245</sup> Biobaku, then Pro-Chancellor of University of Ife, Nigeria (now Obafemi Awolowo University), also attended the Paris and Rome Congresses. His involvement at ICAC represented the support of Society of African Culture. See *Proceedings of the First International Congress of African Culture, August 1-11, 1962* (unpublished), 13.

<sup>246</sup> McEwen, “Foreword 1959,” *Proceedings of the First International Congress of African Culture, August 1-11, 1962*, 7.

Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). The “Non-Traditional African Art” section included modern African art from Nigeria, Mozambique, Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa. Lastly, “African Influences upon Western Schools” included works by Lynn Chadwick, Etienne Martin, Eduardo Paolozzi, Pablo Picasso, Constantin Brancusi, Georges Braque, Ernst Max, and Jean Dubuffet. The exhibitions were arranged to highlight continuity between classical African art, modern African art (referred to as “non-traditional”), and Western art.

The modern African works were positioned in such a way to suggest cultural continuity while also acknowledging cultural appropriations from external sources, particularly Western art. Similarly, the exhibit highlighted the influence of African traditional art on Western art. Among the modern African art in the exhibition was the replica of *Anyanwu* (fig. 9), one of the best known bronze works by the Nigerian artist Ben Enwonwu.<sup>247</sup> *Anyanwu*, which literally means “the rising sun” in Enwonwu’s Igbo language, is also a metaphor for a beautiful woman in the bloom of youth. Enwonwu combines both meanings to portray a graceful maiden, thrusting forward with boldness and acknowledgment of the weight of history, as a visual representation of an Africa rising from slumber. The bronze figure, produced between 1954 and 1955 at the cusp of political independence in Africa, symbolizes a rebirth of the continent, and reflects the ideology of Enwonwu, a committed pan-Africanist well-versed in the tenets of Négritude.<sup>248</sup> Enwonwu’s sculpture evokes an invigorated African and black cultural

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<sup>247</sup> A replica of the work adorns the lobby of the United Nations headquarters in New York and was given by the Nigerian government to the United Nations in 1966 to support the campaign for world peace. The other two known replicas are in the national collections of Nigeria and Zimbabwe. It is most likely that the replica exhibited at ICAC is now in the collection of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe.

<sup>248</sup> Enwonwu attended both the Paris and Rome Congresses, at Paris he presented “Problems of the African artist today.” He also painted a series on the subject of Négritude. For Enwonwu’s biography, see Sylvester



presence, resonating with the earlier works by African-American artist Meta Warrick Fuller, whose *Ethiopia Awakening* (bronze, ca.1914 or 1921, fig.10), drew upon the ideological sentiments and pan-African modernism in black America in the early twentieth century.<sup>249</sup>

Although *Anyanwu* and *Ethiopia Awakening* are, ideologically speaking, kindred spirits, the works differ stylistically and draw on different aesthetic repertoires. *Ethiopia Awakening*, which is a depiction of a mummified black woman coming to consciousness, draws its visual references from ancient Egypt. The compact block figure visually builds connections between the civilization of pharaonic Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa. In contrast, *Anyanwu* is sinewy and elegant, and demonstrates the attempt by pioneer African modernists to draw upon familiar resources, their indigenous aesthetic traditions (Edo-Igbo in the case of Enwonwu), and combining them with Western modernist modes of representation. The naturalistically-rendered female form wearing a curved crown that rises to a peak, reflects the bronze coiffure heads of sculptures of Queen Mothers in classical Benin art. This is hardly surprising: Enwonwu was a native of Onitsha, and according to Onitsha-Igbo lore, the ancestral progenitor of Onitsha was a renegade prince who fled the royal court of Benin in the 15th century and settled at Onitsha, across the Niger River. Enwonwu is drawing from his local senses of antique royal authority.

The attenuated outline of *Anyanwu* in relation to space can also be compared to Giacometti's reduction of form to critical outlines, which imbues Giacometti's delicate and nondescript bronze figures with powerful intensity. *Anyanwu*, thicker in the middle,

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Okwunodu Ogbachie, *Ben Enwonwu: The Making of an African Modernist* (Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press, 2008).

<sup>249</sup> See Babatunde Lawal, "After an imaginary slumber: visual and verbal imagery of an 'awakening' Africa," *Word and Image*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Oct-Dec. 2010): 420.

is adorned with geometric embellishment, distinct from Giacometti's anthropomorphic sculptures.<sup>250</sup> *Anyanwu* has as much in common with *Awakening Africa* (1959, fig. 11), another bronze work in the exhibition by Ghanaian sculptor Vincent Kofi. Created two years after Ghana's independence, *Awakening Africa* also symbolizes a reascent Africa.<sup>251</sup> Like Enwonwu, Kofi who was also a pan-Africanist, strategically combined elements of classical African sculptural form with the formal techniques of Western art. The reclining bronze figure with flat disk-like head, ringed neck, protruding breasts and navel button draws its visual orientations from the classical *Aku'aba* fertility figures of the Asante and Lobi people of Ghana, but he reinterpreted them in a formal modernist language.<sup>252</sup> Such aesthetic hybridism was the creative norm in Africa during the period, as pioneering African modernists' derived new artistic vocabularies to reflect cultural nationalism and political emancipation.

ICAC's exhibition was decisive in that it was the first large-scale exhibition to display modern African art alongside classical African art. Although Southern Rhodesia was still a British colony at that time, ICAC signaled a radical departure from the colonial style of representing African art as the spoils of the European conquerors, exemplified in colonial expositions which thrived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

ICAC's plenary sessions, filled with presentations and robust discussions, provided a

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<sup>250</sup> Enwonwu, who knew Giacometti, was well aware that *Anyanwu* had been compared to Giacometti's bronze works. However, he maintained that he was not influenced by Giacometti. Ogbechie, 131.

<sup>251</sup> Art historian Babatunde Lawal suggests that the "awakening" motif in the work of pioneer African modernists is a response to a tendency in pre- and early twentieth-century Western art to stereotype the African continent as a slumbering female culturally, under-developed when compared to Europe, America and Asia.

<sup>252</sup> Art historian Doran Ross suggests that the *Aku'aba* symbol is used by Kofi to denote "the birth of independence movements in Africa and the desire for children [that] has become the hope for the growth and empowerment of Africa." Doran Ross, 'Akua's Child and Other Relatives: New Mythologies for Old Dolls', in *Isn't S/He a Doll?: Play and Ritual in African Sculpture*, ed. Elisabeth L. Cameron (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1996), p. 53, cited in Lawal, "After an imaginary slumber: visual and verbal imagery of an 'awakening' Africa," 424.

context for an intellectual dialogue with the exhibition. Participants presented papers on issues related to African art, music, and the contributions of African art and culture to twentieth century global culture.<sup>253</sup> The structure of the ICAC, combining a colloquium and exhibition, was emulated in subsequent pan-African festivals and the Dak'Art biennial, but with adjustments and expansions.<sup>254</sup>

Beginning with the First World Festival of Negro Arts in 1966 (fig. 12), the various pan-African festivals that followed reflected a structure that included exhibition displays of traditional African art, modern African and black art, music, dance, but also drama, literature, and cinema. The Dakar Festival, which was held April 1-24, 1966, amplified the objectives and achievements of ICAC by assembling a massive audience geared to best celebrate the influence of the black world on world cultures.<sup>255</sup> President Senghor's inaugural speech at the opening ceremony underscored the significance attached to the Festival:

This festival is not an antiquarian's empty display; it is an articulate demonstration of our deepest thought, of our most genuine culture. To whatever God, to whatever language they belong, the nations are invited to the colloquy of

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<sup>253</sup>Presentations which included "African Thinking as Background to African Art" by Janheinz Jahn, "The Influence of African Music on Western Culture, Old and New" by A.M. Dauer, "The Artist in an Ibo Community" by Simon Okeke, "African Influence in the Caribbean" by Percy Borde, and "Art in Contemporary Africa" by Frank McEwen, were followed by discussions and debates.

<sup>254</sup> There are other striking coincidences between ICAC and succeeding pan-African festivals. Dr. Biobaku, William Fagg, Michel Leiris, and Alfred Barr, were very much involved with both ICAC and the Dakar festival. And, according to Jonathan Zilberg, McEwen was officially invited to the Dakar festival and chaired the session on modern and contemporary art. In his conceptualization of ICAC, McEwen had intended for it to be a biennial event with shifting venues. He considered Nigeria as the next venue of the second iteration of the ICAC because of what he thought to be the wealth of its artistic expressions. Similarly, Léopold Senghor, Aimé Césaire, and Alioune Diop, the principal organizers of the First World Festival of Negro Arts thought of it as a pan-African cultural event that would move to a different African country every two years. Minutes of the Board of Trustees meeting held on April 24, 1967, courtesy of Jonathan Zilberg and the National Gallery of Zimbabwe.

<sup>255</sup> This was also the objective of the ICAC although it was a smaller event, which begs the question whether the Dakar Festival too closely repeated the aims of ICAC. It is instructive that a major festival of African art and culture in Africa was proposed during the Paris Congress, and solidified at the Rome Congress. Since McEwen attended both events in Europe, it is difficult to say if ICAC would have been created independently of these.

Dakar, to bridge the gaps, to clear up the misunderstandings, to settle the differences. Partaking at all times – but at a distance and through intermediaries – in the building of the universal civilization, united, reunited Africa offers the waiting (sic) world, not a gigantic tattoo, but the sense of her artistic creation...<sup>256</sup>

The festival brought together nearly 2,500 writers, visual artists, performers, dramatists, dancers, cinematographers, poets, musicians, anthropologists, scholars, and over 27,000 visitors from over thirty nations. In attendance were also heads of states and governments and members of the diplomatic corps. Through exhibitions of fine arts, crafts, literature, cinema, music, dance and other performances and displays, the festival celebrated black people's contributions to the world, past and present.

Much of President Senghor's idea of a pan-Africanism with Négritude driving the cultural renaissance formed the basis of an eight-day colloquium organized by the Society of African Culture and UNESCO. The colloquium began two days before the formal opening of the Dakar Festival, titled "The Function and Significance of black African art in the life of the people and for the people."<sup>257</sup> It was expansive in dealing with the different aspects of African arts and culture, elaborating cultural ties between African nations, Africa and the African diaspora, and the influence of black culture upon world cultures.<sup>258</sup> In spite of its academic nature, the colloquium explored the meaning

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<sup>256</sup> "By Way of Introduction," ICA Information, Special FESTAC 77 (Dakar: African Cultural Institute, 1977): 3.

<sup>257</sup> The colloquium brought together anthropologists, visual artists, poets, musicians, ethnographers, museum practitioners, theologians, political scientists, writers, etc., from within and outside of the continent. They included André Malraux (then French Minister of Cultural Affairs), museum curators Bernard and William Fagg, anthropologist Germaine Dieterlen, anthropologist Jacques Macquet, theologian of African religion Engelbert Mveng, and anthropologist Daniel Biebuyck, whose panel focused on the pedagogical and methodological definitions of traditional African Art.

<sup>258</sup> This was a different approach to the discussions at Paris and Rome. One of the issues that emerged with the Rome and Paris congresses was that both seemed to cater to the black cultural elite. Therefore, educated opinions aired at both congresses reflected more of middle-class cultural assumptions. The Dakar colloquium took a slightly different approach in that it attempted to bring on board multiple perspectives and diverse insights by returning to the original functions and meanings of traditional African art to its

and values of art in traditional African society from multiple dimensions.<sup>259</sup> Négritude was critically engaged which, according to Senghor, was his reason for organizing the festival.<sup>260</sup> As was the case at the Paris Congress, Négritude was criticized for its fetishization of a precolonial African past, claims leveled by participants who were mostly from the Anglophone world.<sup>261</sup>

Despite some of the intellectual disagreements, the significance of Négritude as an aesthetic ideology crucial to decolonization movements, and to the enhancement of postcolonial cultural nationalism, art modernism, and artistic identity, was generally recognized. This was reflected in performances, film screening, recitations, literature readings, and visual art exhibitions at the Dakar Festival. The festival's exhibition of traditional African art titled "Negro Art: Sources, Evolution, Growth," was impressive and historical. It was held at the exhibition hall of the newly constructed Musée Dynamique, and curated by the anthropologist Alexandar Sènou Adandé. The more than 800 objects in the exhibition were among the rarest and original, borrowed from public and private institutions from around the world.<sup>262</sup>

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makers and users in traditional setting rather than aiming to (re)construct them as were the case in Paris and Rome.

<sup>259</sup> Panel presentations were given by scholars who covered various aspects of African culture and society from popular and conceptual perspectives. A series of talks explored the relationship between African and black art modernism and Western art, and was led by anthropologists Michel Leiris and Roger Bastide, and Robert Goldwater, a specialist in Western primitivism. Discussants included Nigerian artist Ben Enwonwu and African American poet Langston Hughes.

<sup>260</sup> Léopold Sédar Senghor, The Function and Meaning of the First World Festival of Negro Arts, *Africa Forum* Vol. 1, Number 4 (Spring 1966):6-10.

<sup>261</sup> For instance, the African American choreographer Katherine Dunham described Négritude as "meaningless," and the Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka declared that a tiger needs not declare his tigritude, rather it springs on its prey. Soyinka's dismissal of Négritude was based on what he believed to be its adherence to a Manichean system of thought, which positions Négritude as the antithesis of a European thesis. Lloyd Garrison, "Debate on 'Negritude' Splits Festival in Dakar," *New York Times*, April 24 1966, 17.

<sup>262</sup> See Africa, "A World Festival," *Africa*, No. 2 (Summer 1966): 5-7; Onuora Nzekwu, "Nigeria, Negritude and the World Festival of Negro Arts," *Nigeria Magazine*, No. 89 (June 1966):80-92.

The exhibition of modern and contemporary African art titled *Tendances et Confrontations* left an imprint on artistic modernism and modernity in Africa in mid-century. The exhibition, organized by Senegalese artist Iba N’Diaye in the grand hall of Palais de Justice, was much bigger than the modern art exhibition at the ICAC (fig. 13). It included works of pioneer and leading modern African and black artists from 28 countries in the Caribbean, Europe, South America, and North America.<sup>263</sup> The theme of “Trends and Confrontations” reflected the exhibition’s attempt to assemble examples of modern art in Africa and its diaspora in the period, and to find points of fissures and convergence. The exhibition also reflected the tendency of African artists in the period to combine aesthetic elements drawn from pan-African and external sources, and address themes of pan-Africanism and Négritude.

In the oil painting *Tête* (1965, fig. 14), Senegalese Ibou Diouf appears to draw upon formal elements of traditional African masks. The painting’s key motif, an androgynous mask-like portrait, has a coiffure similar to that of the Igbo *Agbogho mmuo* masquerade. The application of warm and cool colors for contrast is achieved by the artist’s careful yellow outline of the black cubist facial profile dominating the red background. The artist’s formal engagement with classical African art forms of non-Senegalese background in *Tête* appears to respond to Senghor’s urging of Senegalese artists to create new artistic language by looking toward a pan-African patrimony, which he described as *Africanité* (Africanness).<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Works were by more than a hundred and sixty-four artists from countries including Nigeria, Gambia, Congo, Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Togo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Mali, Rwanda, Britain (Afro-Caribbean), Zambia, Brazil, U.S.A, France, Haiti, Liberia, Madagascar, Liberia, Chad, Senegal, Mauritania, among others. Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègre Exposition, Art contemporain, 1964-1966 files, National Archives, Dakar.

<sup>264</sup> Léopold Sédar Senghor, *The Foundations of “Africanité,” or “Négritude” and “Arabité,”* trans. Mercer Cook (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1971), 7–8, 83–88.

*Tête* can be read as a symbolic representation of a collective black presence, a comparison it shares with the oil painting *Le lutteur* (undated, probably mid-1960s, fig. 15) by Papa Ibra Tall, a pioneer modernist in Senegal. In his signature style of highly decorative, geometric and profusely flowing lines, Tall painted a stunning image of a soaring African traditional wrestler who dominates the entire picture surface. The imposing figure has a black face embedded within a white face in ways that suggest the Yoruba concept of inner or invisible head *Orí Inú* and outer or physical head *Orí Òde*. The Yoruba metaphysics addresses the notion of the human self as consisting of spirit and matter. *Orí Inú* is the true self or the seat of consciousness; it coordinates the activities of the body and determines human personality and destiny. *Orí Òde* is the corporeal manifestation of the mind, and a vehicle of identity, communication and perception.<sup>265</sup> In addition, the image of a wrestler, a very popular sport in Senegal, stands as a postcolonial rebirth and collective black dignity and pride. *Le lutteur* also shows traces of analytic cubism in the style of Liubov Popova's cubist reconstructions, made apparent in Tall's reduction of the human form to geometric components, and in his organization of broken planes to congregate and diverge on the picture surface. Tall has used formal and subjective elements of Western modernism to create a work that evokes for many a sense of hybridity. However, he engages Négritude as a pathway to his version of a modernist postcolonial reality.

Gerard Sekoto's painting *Mother and Child* (undated, fig. 16) is a stylistic departure from Diouf's and Tall's more cubist approaches in breaking down the human

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<sup>265</sup> This reading is based on Senghor's admonition to Senegalese artists to draw from a pan-African heritage to create a Senegalese modernism that combines European and African elements. Modern Senegal is one of the few countries in West Africa without strong indigenous aesthetic traditions. Senghor was particularly fascinated by Nigeria, and would have urged several Senegalese artists to draw from Nigeria's rich traditions.

form. The image, however, is that of an African woman and child. The South African modernist's bold human forms dominate, a nod to the social realism found in some of the early township artists working from South African workshops. The bold features of the woman's face, especially the eyes, nose, and mouth, draw upon the formal structures of African masks. Sekoto's technique of impasto is deliberately expressive, and possibly influenced by works he saw in Paris after he left South Africa in 1947 because of Apartheid.<sup>266</sup> Sekoto strikes upon a widely appreciated subject, a nursing mother and child. His theme, however, is pan-Africanist as it suggests the notion of mother Africa as the cradle of humanity.<sup>267</sup>

In *The Ram* (1965, fig. 17), Ivorian artist Christian Lattier reduces plastic forms to cubist components without losing clarity or the substance of the forms.<sup>268</sup> Lattier, whose sophisticated visual vocabulary was well recognized, brings together traditional African weaving technique and French academic styles in his exploration of subject matters of symbolic nature. Using simple materials of rope and steel armature with precise craftsmanship, Lattier creates a powerful and evocative sculpture of a stylized human figure on the back of an equally stylized ram. Skillfully and intricately put together in Lattier's unique style, the schematized human figure is attached firmly to the ram figure with a bent head and elongated spiral horns. The facial structure of round bulging eyes

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<sup>266</sup> Sekoto spent the greater part of his career in Paris on self-imposed exile where he died at a retirement home on March 20, 1933.

<sup>267</sup> Sekoto attended the Paris and Rome congresses of 1956 and 1959, and in fact, designed the poster of the Rome congress. He was well-versed in the logic of Négritude as he was part of the black intellectual circle in Paris.

<sup>268</sup> *The Ram* won the grand prize for visual arts at the Dakar festival.



and receding forehead of the ram's rider is suggestive of West African masks, which Lattier variously re-interpreted in his work.<sup>269</sup>

Through these works, *Tendances et Confrontations* provided a rigorous assessment of pan-African modernism. One of the great successes of colonialism was that it generated amnesia about deeply entrenched intra-cultural and artistic relations among peoples of Africa on the part of former colonial subjects. This was achieved mainly through the arbitrary balkanization of people along seemingly innocuous ethnic or tribal lines. In her influential essay, *One Tribe, One Style*, Sidney Kasfir, while arguing against the ahistorical nature of the tribal group as the unit of analysis and the ethnographic present as the time frame, raises a more significant point about the indistinctiveness of territorial and cultural boundaries between socio-cultural groups with regard to artistic manifestations and appropriations in pre-colonial Africa.<sup>270</sup>

*Tendances et Confrontations* took into account both the pre-colonial and postcolonial cross cultural aesthetic borrowings and appropriations in addressing the multiple dimensions of pan-African modernism. For the black world, the Festival provided the setting for the celebration of black cultures, but also served as a reminder of black people's resilience over adversity. This was particularly remarkable given that the Festival was staged in the decade during which most countries in Africa gained political independence. As Senghor stated, the Festival achieved the goal of revealing the black

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<sup>269</sup> Lattier trained formally as a sculptor and architect at the Écoles des Beaux-Arts, Saint-Etienne and École des Beaux-Arts de Paris. On returning to Côte d'Ivoire in 1962 at the dawn of independence, he became professor of sculpture at the newly established École Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Abidjan. Lattier was well known for combining traditional West African iconographies, ritual masks and techniques with aspects of Western minimalism and abstract art to create his powerful and evocative string sculptures. He had a short but accomplished career before his untimely death in 1978.

<sup>270</sup> Sidney Kasfir, "One Tribe, One Style? Paradigms in the Historiography of African Art" *History in Africa*, Vol. 11 (1984): 171-173.

presence, presenting the values and responsibility of the black person to a global audience, and cemented the unity in diversity of black art and cultures.<sup>271</sup>

Unfortunately, Senghor's conceptualization of the black world based on the color line left North African countries feeling disenfranchised.<sup>272</sup> In certain racial discourses, Arabs were considered to be white. With the exception of Morocco and Egypt, North Africa was absent at the Dakar festival. The decision by the Society of African Culture and Senghor to refer to the Dakar Festival as the World Festival of "Negro" Arts was critiqued by North African countries that felt the Arab or Berber presence was obscured or unwelcome at the Festival.<sup>273</sup> They viewed the Dakar Festival as a "black monopoly" of African culture. The political reality was that North African countries simultaneously belonged to the pan-Arab world, which provided divided allegiances, with pan-Arabism often trumping pan-Africanism in North Africa. In addition, the shared reality of colonialism was partly eclipsed by the difficult history of Arab enslavement of sub-Saharan Africans, particularly in East Africa.

Between July 21 and August 1, 1969, Algeria celebrated the "First pan-African Cultural Festival." This was not necessarily a response to the Dakar Festival, but a means to create a greater sense of inclusiveness across the sub-regions of Africa, and the African diaspora. Organized and sponsored by the revolutionary government of Houari Boumediène and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Algiers Festival reflected the spirit of late Frantz Fanon, who spent a greater part of his life in the struggle to

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<sup>271</sup> Léopold Sédar Senghor, "The Role and Significance of the Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres," in *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*, ed., Clémentine Deliss (New York: Flammarion, 1995), 224-26.

<sup>272</sup> Senghor would later rethink his position. In the essay *The Foundations of "Africanité," or "Négritude" and "Arabité"*, published by *Présence Africaine* in 1971, Senghor considered the historical links between African and Arabic cultures.

<sup>273</sup> Abdourahmane Cissé, interview by Tracy Snipes. Tracy D. Snipes, "Art and Politics in Senegal, 1960-1996 (New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc), 50.

liberate Algeria from French colonialism, and the former president of Ghana Kwame Nkrumah, who was instrumental in the creation of the OAU (now the African Union). The Algerian bloody war of independence, colonialism in Africa, the black politics of presence, especially in the United States, and global political changes in the late 1960s informed the radical vision of pan-Africanism manifested at the Algiers Festival.<sup>274</sup>

The Algiers Festival largely reflected the cultural vision of Frantz Fanon, presented at the Paris and Rome Congresses, which concerned the intersection of culture, political leadership in national and continental liberation.<sup>275</sup> Thus, while the Algiers Festival called for a celebration of African and African diaspora cultures like the Dakar Festival, it was also framed as a reminder of the struggle for liberation for countries in Africa that were still under colonialism. It also insisted on the shift from racialism and ethnocentrism, which dominated the Dakar Festival, to the cultural pluralism more consonant with the African and African diaspora realities.<sup>276</sup>

The Algiers Festival also reiterated the idea of returning to cultural sources, espoused in Négritude, following in the frame of the Dakar Festival.<sup>277</sup> However, cultural sources were carefully oriented toward the future: their values were considered as a critical inventory, divested of everything archaic, and enriched with the scientific,

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<sup>274</sup> See George W. Shepherd, "Reflections on the Pan-African Cultural Conference in Algiers," *Africa Today*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (August – September 1969):1-3.

<sup>275</sup> See Frantz Fanon, *Racisme and Culture, Présence Africaine* (Le 1er Congrès International des Ecrivains et Artistes Noirs [Paris – Sorbonne – 19-22 Septembre 1956] – Compte Rendu Complet) nouvelle série bimstrieelle, no 8-9-10 spécial (1957):122-132; Fanon, "Fondément reciproque de la culture nationale et des luttes de libération," 82-89. *Présence Africaine* (Duxieme Congrès International des Ecrivains et Artistes Noirs - L'Unité des Cultures Nègro Africaines - [Rome March 26- April 1 1959] ) nouvelle série bimstrieelle, no 24-25 Vo. 1 (February – May 1959). Both presentations were reproduced in Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

<sup>276</sup> President Houari Boumediène's "Inaugural Speech," *First Pan-African Cultural Festival*, festival catalogue, (Algiers: C.E.D.L.A, 1969), 14-22.

<sup>277</sup> Like the Dakar Festival, the Algiers Festival included exhibitions of traditional African art, modern and contemporary African and black art, performances, music, dance, cinema, literature, and a colloquium. Field research is needed to explore the exhibitions at the Algiers festival in greater detail.

technical and social revolutionary attributes that would help to reinvent them as modern and universal.<sup>278</sup> The unity of the entire continent and the diaspora, which was paramount to the organizers, was to be amplified through culture, arts, and literature.<sup>279</sup> This was an intrinsic part of the Festival's colloquium, focused on cultural mobilization to achieve pan-African solidarity and political liberation. The Festival gave a prominent place to liberation and ideological movements including the African National Congress, the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola, the Zimbabwe African People's Union, and the Black Panther Party, with presentations given by their representatives, who actively participated in deliberations.<sup>280</sup> Messages of moral support were also delivered by African leaders or their representatives, and by left-leaning international leaders.<sup>281</sup>

At the end of the colloquium, a pan-African cultural manifesto was drafted and adopted. The manifesto was a new ideological blueprint for a postcolonial Africa, encapsulating culture, politics, economics, and social development. The document had three guiding themes: "The Realities of African Culture," "The role of African culture in the campaigns for national liberation and in the consolidation of African unity," and "The

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<sup>278</sup> Boumediène's "Inaugural Speech," *ibid.*

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>280</sup> The nearly 400 participants, some who had attended the Paris and Rome Congresses and Dakar Festival included, in no particular order, Ousmane Sembene (Senegalese film maker), Odilio Urfe Gonzalez (Cuban musicologist), Ha Xuan-Troung (Vice-Minister of Culture, Democratic Republic of Vietnam), William Fagg (Director of the British Museum), Lamine Diakhite (Society of African Culture), Maya Angelou (African American writer), Kamal Adouane (representative of Palestine Liberation Movement), Lazarus Mpofo (Head of Delegation, Zimbabwe African People's Union), Miriam Makeba (South African singer), Michel Leiris (French anthropologist), Engelbert Mveng (Cameroonian cultural historian), Demas Nwoko (Nigerian artist), Jacques Maquet (French anthropologist), René Depestre (Haitian writer), Walter Markov (German historian), Alex La Guma and Dennis Brutus (South African poets and members of the ANC delegation), Stokely Carmichael (Trinidadian-American black activist), Elridge Cleaver (Director of Information, Black Panther, USA), among others.

<sup>281</sup> African Culture – Algiers Symposium, First Pan-African Cultural Festival, July 21 – August 1, 1969 (Algiers: (Algiers: C.E.D.L.A, 1969).

Role of African culture and social development of Africa.”<sup>282</sup> The manifesto speaks of a common African heritage, shared destiny, and common future. It addresses the role of the African cultural and intellectual elites in representing the reality, experience, and mandate of African peoples. Through their actions, they (meaning the elites) “must inspire that radical transformation of the mind without which it is impossible for a people to overcome its economic and social underdevelopment... and benefit from their economic and cultural riches.”<sup>283</sup> The goals of the pan-African manifesto would also emerge in the debates and deliberation at the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture in Lagos in 1977. The pan-African internationalism established at the ICAC, Dakar Festival, and Algiers Festival, would assume a bigger dimension at the Lagos Festival, a trajectory from which Dak’Art also draws.

The Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, in Lagos in 1977, otherwise known by the acronym FESTAC ‘77 was a bigger event in its conceptualization of a global black world.<sup>284</sup> It also combined the militant rhetoric of pan-African solidarity of the Algiers Festival, and the pragmatism that attended the celebration of blackness at the Dakar Festival. The aims of the cultural meeting was to facilitate the revival and representation of the breadth of black and African cultural values and civilization; promote black cultural contributions to human civilization; provide a window of mutual co-existence with the other cultures of the world; and

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<sup>282</sup> “Pan-African Cultural Manifesto,” African Culture – Algiers Symposium, First Pan-African Cultural Festival, July 21 – August 1, 1969 (Algiers: C.E.D.L.A, 1969), 180-89.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid, 181.

<sup>284</sup> In addition to North Africa and the various black communities in North America, the Caribbean, Latin America, and Europe, it included Surinam, and aboriginal communities of Australia and Papua New Guinea. Awash with oil money, the Nigerian government aimed to eclipse previous pan-African festivals and to present itself as a pan-African nation. See Andrew Apter, *The Pan-African Nation: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

encourage the return to Africa as the original homeland of African diaspora peoples.<sup>285</sup>

Over 17,000 participants from sixty-two countries met in Lagos, where over 500,000 spectators attended the continuous stream of festival activities from January 12 to February 15, 1977.<sup>286</sup>

As in the preceding pan-African festivals, several exhibitions of modern art at FESTAC'77 addressed the merits of pan-African modernism through the works of leading black and African artists such as Ronald Moody (Jamaica/United Kingdom), Ben Enwonwu (Nigeria), Valente Malangatana (Mozambique), Juarez Paraiso (Brazil), and Jeff Donaldson (USA). FESTAC'77's more expansive 16-day colloquium had as its theme "Black Civilization and Education." It explored the arts, philosophy, literature, African languages, historical awareness, pedagogy, religion, science and technology, African governments, and mass media in over 200 presentations, attended by 700 participants. Despite its accomplishments, FESTAC'77 was not without controversies. Nigeria had taken total control of the Festival due to its oil money, and frozen out the Society of African Culture, which had co-organized the Dakar Festival and was supposed to oversee the Lagos Festival.<sup>287</sup> Because FESTAC'77 was organized under a military

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<sup>285</sup> Olusegun Obasanjo. "Foreward," *FESTAC '77* (London: Africa Journal Ltd and The International Festival Committee, 1977) 6-7; Ife Enohoro, "The Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, Lagos, Nigeria," *The Black Scholar* Vol. 9 No. 1 (September 1977): 28.

<sup>286</sup> Participating countries included: Angola, Algeria, Antigua, Argentina, Australia, Barbados, Belize, Botswana, Brazil, Benin, Burundi, Cameroun, Canada, Cape Verde and Principe, Central African Empire (Central African Republic), Chad, Congo, Cuba, Egypt, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, France, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Guyana, Ivory Coast, Jamaica, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberation Movements (South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, etc) Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Surinam, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Uganda, United States, United Kingdom and Ireland, Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), Zaire (DR Congo), and Zambia.

<sup>287</sup> At the Dakar Festival, Nigeria was slated to host the next festival in 1968 based on what was considered on the strength of its rich cultural repertoire, under the supervision of the Society of African Culture. Unfortunately, the festival was not staged because of the civil war in Nigeria. It was pushed forward to 1970, and later to 1975 due to the military coup in Nigeria, before it was finally held in 1977 at the height of Nigeria's oil boom. Ife Enohoro, "The Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture,

dictatorship, which had a different approach to cultural administration, the Festival's organization committee was populated by military personnel completely unrelated to the central mission of the activity. This led to the Festival being boycotted by many prominent Nigerian artists and intellectuals.

## **Conclusion**

To understand Dak'Art's more recent pan-African internationalism, this chapter has mapped the history of black cultural politics in the twentieth century, and shown the breadth and development of that politics through a range of settings and situations. The various pan-African festivals in Africa in the 1960s and 1970s were responses to earlier political and cultural meetings in the black world. The festivals also sought to deepen cultural solidarity among black people in an international context. Another element that I have addressed in this history was the unfolding of black or pan-African modernisms in Africa and the diaspora at various moments. During the first half of the 20th century, these various chapters of black modernism had at their core the idea of returning to Africa as a source. But interpretations of this return varied according to the different articulations and agendas.

The pan-African festivals provided important contexts to assemble and evaluate the nature and meaning of pan-African modernism, similar to Dak'Art's recent attempt to provide a pan-African venue for contemporary African and African diaspora art. Yet, it is important to state that, while the earlier festivals looked inward and sought to create pan-African linkages among black communities, Dak'Art is more concerned with engaging

the international art world. They are two different approaches, but with the same goal of asserting a black or pan-African cultural presence. It is clear that strands of black cultural politics in the twentieth century have adapted to the time, locations and diverse audiences.

It was for this reason that President Diouf, in 1989, declared the soon-to-be-created Dak'Art as a contemporary platform on which the African voice would be strongly asserted in the international cultural arena.<sup>288</sup> Diouf's speech was addressed to "men of culture" in Africa and the international community (see Chapter 1). It reflected some of the sentiments expressed in the resolution at the first pan-African congress in London, and Alioune Diop's inaugural editorial in *Présence Africaine*.<sup>289</sup> Diouf spoke of bonds of fraternity and meeting of cultures easily associated with leading black intellectuals of the twentieth century, including W.E.B Du Bois and Léopold Sédar Senghor.<sup>290</sup> He was connecting the yet-to-be established Dak'Art to this history of black cultural politics of presence which I have mapped in this chapter. Diouf understood the importance of pan-African internationalism, following in the footsteps of the early pan-African festivals.<sup>291</sup> However, he also recognized that contemporary conditions demanded a new approach to cultural politics, hence the imperative of a new event: Dak'Art.

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<sup>288</sup> President Abodu Diouf, quoted in Abdou Sylla, *Arts plastique et état au Sénégal: Trente-cinq du mécénat au Senegal* (Dakar, 1988), 148.

<sup>289</sup> The excerpt of pan-African congress' resolution and Diop's editorial is cited in this chapter.

<sup>290</sup> Diouf's language is hardly surprising given that he was the political protégé of Senghor and was deeply involved in the cultural programs initiated during Senghor's presidency as the Prime Minister of Senegal.

<sup>291</sup> See Abdou Diouf, inaugural address at the Biennale Internationale des Arts de Dakar, quoted in, "Fraternité, métissage, dialogue des cultures," *Le Soliel*, December 15, 1992, 10.



## Chapter Three

### Exploring Dak'Art

In the preceding chapter, I explored the roots of Dak'Art's cultural politics. I discussed how the 1960s and 1970s pan-African festivals laid the ground for an Africa-centered internationalism. Through their exhibitions of modern art, these festivals provided a platform to explore the dimensions of artistic modernism in Africa. Dak'Art builds on the legacy of the early festivals. It promotes contemporary African art, and provides a context to access and assess notions of artistic contemporaneity in Africa. In the decade prior to the creation of Dak'Art in 1989, fora of the nature and scale of the early pan-African festivals were absent from Africa. A major reason for this lack was the evaporation of the euphoria produced by political independence. Many African countries faced the challenges and pressures of managing the actual politics of postcolonial governance in an uncertain world. Social and political upheavals in the form of civil wars, droughts, civilian and military dictatorships, and economic hardship were rife, making ideological agitations untenable, and a large-scale pan-African event, practically impossible to organize.<sup>292</sup>

The 1980s was a decade of transition in the fields of culture and the arts as a result of changes in the economic and political fortunes in many African countries. As was pointed out in Chapter One, the economy of Senegal shifted from the Keynesian

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<sup>292</sup> A good example was the inability of Ethiopia to host the third pan-African festival in 1981 as it had been agreed upon at the Lagos FESTAC '77. The Derg communist dictatorship that overthrew the former Emperor Haile Selassie imposed a new cultural program that drew its strength from the Soviet-style Socialist Realism as opposed to pan-Africanism. In addition, there were the severe famine in the mid-1970s and from 1983 to 1985, crackdown of political foes by the dictatorship, and finally the long-standing war between Ethiopia and the break-away region of Eritrea that finally ended with an independent Eritrea in 1991. These developments made it unfeasible for Ethiopia to organize and host the third pan-African festival. For more on Ethiopia, see Seyoum Wolde, "Some aspects of post-revolution visual arts in Ethiopia," in *Proceedings of the Ninth International Conference on Ethiopian Studies, Moscow, 26-29 August 1986* (Moscow: Nauka Publishers, Central Department of Oriental Literature, 1988) 7-25.

welfare state model to so-called economic liberalism. This shift, which was widespread among African countries in the 1980s, ushered in the indirect control of developing economies by Western-based multilateral institutions and multinational corporations. Unlike the 1960s and 1970s, when pan-Africanism was, notionally at least, intrinsically woven into the fabric of governance in newly-independent African countries, it disappeared or was paid only lip-service in the corridors of power for most of the 1980s. There were no longer political leaders who understood the uses of pan-Africanism as a philosophical bedrock for the construction of national cultures; hence, it no longer guided the crafting of foreign policy and intra-continental and global black relations. Nyerere in Tanzania with Ujamaa and, in a nefarious way, Mobutu and his *authenticité*, both remained in power.

Most African political leaders at independence were ardent pan-Africanists; among their numbers were Kwame Nkrumah, Sékou Touré, and Léopold Senghor. By the 1980s, most of the first heads of independent states had either retired, been forced out of power, or were in exile, imprisoned, or dead.<sup>293</sup> Pan-Africanism had become largely an academic affair, discussed among Marxist Socialist circles in African universities. These continued to hold a radical position in relation to social Marxism, in opposition to the economic liberalism and deregulation promoted by Western-based multilateral institutions and enacted by African governments in the 1980s.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> There were few isolated exceptions such as Kenneth Kaunda, the first president of Zambia who was still in power until 1990 and continued his cultural policy of “Zambianization,” and Julius Nyerere whose policy of “Ujamaa” defined statecraft in Tanzania until his retirement in 1985.

<sup>294</sup> See for example, Joseph Garba, *Fractured History: Elite Shifts and Policy Changes in Nigeria*; (Princeton: SUNGAI books, 1995), 294; and James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 69-88.

In Chapter 1, I focused on the state's role in the creation of Dak'Art. Senegalese artists also played a consequential role through their activities in the 1980s, which is elaborated in this chapter. They responded to the gradual disappearance of the discourse of pan-Africanism in official circles and the new reality of economic liberalism in their own ways. Their responses, I will argue in the first half of this chapter, had a bearing on the creation of Dak'Art. In the latter part of this chapter, I analyze the transformation of Dak'Art's institutional identity and structure, exploring the impact on the Biennial's exhibitions. Dak'Art's successive transformations, first from an alternating biennial in 1990 to a normative art biennial in 1992, and finally as a pan-African biennial in 1996, were attempts to clarify its goals and vision to promote contemporary art from African perspectives. The re-insertion of pan-Africanism as a driving ideology of a cultural presence distinguished Dak'Art from other biennials, but more importantly, concretely established Dak'Art as a platform for African artists to gain entry into the international mainstream.

I then analyze works exhibited at Dak'Art from 1992 to 1998, and identify a gradual shift in the aesthetic sensibilities, creative strategies, media, and art forms in the Biennial's exhibitions. Dak'Art 1992 and 1998 included several examples of post-independence modernist practices, and were mostly paintings and sculptures, and few mixed media installation. Dak'Art 1998 marked the beginning of the Biennial's formal engagement with multiple mediums and new trends that had begun to emerge in the 1990s, such as photography, video, installation, performance and conceptual art. Although new art forms were part of this shift that was occurring in the art landscape, it was also manifested as an artistic reorientation. I therefore argue that 1998 marked the

beginning of the shift in Dak'Art's recognition of emerging trends in post-1990 contemporary African art.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, artists in Senegal and elsewhere on the continent, such as in Nigeria, had begun to move away from creative strategies that directly embraced cultural nationalism and decolonization. The shift was prompted by more pressing economic concerns and the failure of the postcolonial states to meet the expectations of their various citizenries following independence. The majority of Senegalese artists who came of age professionally in the 1980s, such as El Hadji Sy and Viyé Diba began to disentangle themselves from the institutional *École de Dakar* aesthetics, which combined a return to African cultural roots and the philosophical ideas of Négritude and pan-Africanism in order to assert decolonization. We saw that in the works *Tête* and *Le Lutteur* by Ibou Diouf and Papa Ibra Tall, respectively, discussed in Chapter 2. In other words, for the artists, the motivation to assert cultural nationalism was no longer there.

For example, Diba, the winner of Dak'Art's top prize in 1998, began to focus on everyday experiences in urban Dakar in the 1980s. *Malade Mental 1* (acrylic on paper, fig. 18), created in 1988, is part of a series in which Diba explored several cases of mentally ill people around the markets in Dakar as part of the urban fabric. The painting depicts what appears to be a half-clothed person in the foreground, striking a pose that suggests movement. In the background is a schematic outline of what may well be a tree. Diba's pictorial language is markedly different from Diouf's and Tall's. Gone are the gestures to postcolonial aspirations and cultural nationalism. There are no decipherable symbols of Africanness or suggestions of Négritude. Diba's human form, which he

reduces to basic outlines, is molded softly with warm colors of yellow, pink, and little dabs of blue. The same color scheme is used in the background. This departure from the decolonizing aesthetics in the 1980s became more prevalent in the 1990s.

Diba's aesthetics, for example, shifted to more abstract representations of social conditions in the 1990s. Instead of depictions that sought to address reality, he began to integrate reality in its more tactile form by incorporating found objects in his mixed media paintings and installations. In *Échappement* (1996, fig. 19) and *Matières, rythmes et compositions* (1997, fig. 20), Diba includes old clothes, fibrous ropes, and jute bags to the paintings. His warm color scheme has also undergone transformation to a more earthy color. Diba's use of found material is an aesthetic strategy referred to as *récupération* in the Senegalese art scene, which developed in the mid-1980s. While scholars suggest that *récupération* is the clearest example of the rejection of *École de Dakar* aesthetics, it can be argued that its initial emergence was a result of the economic challenges faced by artists in the 1980s.<sup>295</sup> Artists could no longer afford to buy the more expensive art materials when they stopped receiving stipends from the government of Diouf. *Récupération*, however, developed into a signature style in Senegal in the 1990s, adopted by different generations of Senegalese artists, such as Moustapha Dimé and Ndary Lo, who are also winners of Dak'Art's top prize.<sup>296</sup>

Yet such attempts to incorporate found material in conventional painting or sculpture were not particular to Diba or Senegalese artists. Elsewhere in Africa in the 1980s and into the 1990s, artists were working in a similar fashion with comparable

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<sup>295</sup> See Joanna Grabski, "Urban Claims and Visual Sources in the Making of Dakar's Art World City," *Art Journal* (Spring 2009): 8-15; and Susan Kart, "The Phenomenon of *Récupération* at the Dak'Art Biennale," *African Arts* (Autumn 2009): 8-9.

<sup>296</sup> Moustapha Dimé was a co-winner of the inaugural Dak'Art's Grand Prix Léopold Sédar Senghor in 1992. Ndary Lo won the top prize in 2002, and was a co-winner in 2008.

media. We see that in the works of Ivorians Kra N'Guessan and Yacouba Toure discussed in this chapter. In Nigeria, for example, Olu Oguibe was painting on local mats made from palm frond in the period. Others continued to work more conventionally in painting and sculpture, but using cheaper material such as burlap in place of canvas, or painting with enamel paints instead of oil or acrylic.<sup>297</sup> Formally, some of the artists continued to create works that drew upon African themes and tropes, and icons such as masks. However, the motifs were no longer imbued with essentializing ideological ideas nor steeped in cultural nationalism.

The trigger may have been economic: artists could no longer afford expensive art materials, and sought cheaper substitutes. But the dynamics was also political in the sense that it bred a new consciousness. The euphoria of political independence was replaced by disillusionment. Artists began to focus more on socio-economic conditions to make political commentaries on the state of affairs in their individual countries. Olu Oguibe's *National Graffiti* (acrylic on mat, 1989, fig. 21) is a good example. Borrowing from the traditional Igbo *uli* wall murals, and painting on cheap, easily-available fiber mat, Oguibe addresses the social reality in Nigeria under the military dictatorship of Ibrahim Babangida in the late 1980s. On the painting are legible inscriptions expressing Oguibe's love for his country of birth, Islamic symbols, and *uli* motifs and *nsibidi* ideographic symbols, which are indigenous to southeastern Nigeria where Oguibe is originally from. Dak'Art exhibitions in the 1990s presented these examples of post-independence modernism in Africa. From 1998, Dak'Art exhibitions began to reflect the trends that were beginning to emerge in the artistic landscape in Africa.

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<sup>297</sup> Examples include the Senegalese artist El Hadji Sy, who began to use burlap in place of canvas in the 1980s, and the Congolese artist Cheri Samba who was using enamel paints in the same period.

## The 1980s in Perspective

In 1986, the Association Nationale des Artistes Plasticiens Sénégalais [ANAPS] organized *Art contre l'Apartheid* (Art against Apartheid) at the Musée Dynamique (fig. 22).<sup>298</sup> It was the second annual exhibition of the newly re-constituted artists' association. Weaned off the patronage of the state, unlike its predecessor the defunct Artistes Plasticiens du Sénégal [ARPLASEN], ANAPS had begun to organize its own exhibitions and to explore themes of its own choosing.<sup>299</sup> The theme of the exhibition was especially political and showed solidarity with the black majority in South Africa in their liberation struggle.<sup>300</sup> My interest is in how the ANAPS' "Art against Apartheid" exhibition drew attention to the role of art and culture in the struggle against the last bastion of colonialism and racism in Africa, but more importantly, reflected the continued imperative of pan-Africanism in the public consciousness.<sup>301</sup> There is also an irony in the exhibition's focus. Not only was it organized during a period when pan-Africanism no longer featured in statecraft in Senegal, it also coincided with President Diouf's

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<sup>298</sup> Ousmane Sow Huchard, *La Culture, Ses Objets-Temoins et l'Action Museologique* (Dakar: Le Nègre International de Dakar, 2010), 405-412.

<sup>299</sup> The first annual exhibition of the reconstituted National Association of Senegalese Visual Artists was a collaborative venture with the Musée Dynamique in 1985. The exhibition which was held in the main hall of the Sorano Theatre focused on children's drawings, selected through several schools in Dakar. The exhibition, which was also co-organized with the UNICEF office in Dakar, was part of a campaign and social mobilization for the survival and welfare of the child.

<sup>300</sup> The exhibition may have been inspired by a similar exhibition of the same title organized by the Paris-based "Artists of the World against Apartheid" with the support of the United Nations Special Committee Against Apartheid in 1983 to mobilize collective action in support of the political struggles in South Africa. The exhibition included works by 80 leading international artists from different geopolitical regions including Magdalena Abakanowicz (Poland), Gavin Jantjes (South Africa), Iba Ndiaye (Senegal), Skunder Boghossian (Ethiopia), Robert Rauschenberg (USA), Twins Seven Seven (Nigeria), Sol LeWitt (USA), Julio Le Parc (Argentina), Patrick Betaudier (Trinidad and Tobago), Wau-ki Zao (China), Jesus-Raphael Soto (Venezuela), Mario Gruber (Brazil), Wilfredo Lam (Cuba), Valente Ngwenya Malangatana (Mozambique), Titina Maselli (Italy), Roberto Matta (Chile), Jean-Michel Meurice (France), Pedja Milosavljevic (Yugoslavia), Robert Motherwell (USA), Pierre Soulages (France), Klaus Staeck Germany, Saul Steinberg (Romania), Yasse Tabuchi (Japan), Emillio Tadini (Italy), Antonio Tapies (Spain), Joe Tilson (England), among others. See [www.mayibuyearchives.org](http://www.mayibuyearchives.org).

<sup>301</sup> El Hadji Sy, "Art against Apartheid [Opening address, 1986]," in *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*, ed. Clémentine Deliss (London, Paris and New York: Whitechapel and Flammarion, 1995), 235.

chairmanship of the Organization of African Unity (O.A.U), the premier pan-African institution.<sup>302</sup> The exhibition therefore performed a kind of critique of Diouf's government for the disappearance of pan-Africanism discourse from government business and for massively reducing state support for arts and culture.

While delivering an opening speech in his capacity as the President of ANAPS at the exhibition, El Hadji Sy (fig. 23) paid homage to President Diouf as the protector of arts and letters in Senegal, but also addressed the government's failure to implement Senegal's cultural policy as it is required by the constitution.<sup>303</sup> Sy claimed that the shift had left artists demoralized and unable to fulfill their role as cultural ambassadors for Senegal.

In his response to Sy, an obviously chastised Diouf reiterated his commitment to arts and culture as his predecessor President Senghor had done. He praised the creative output of Senegalese artists and their astuteness in organizing an exhibition that addressed a worthy pan-African cause.<sup>304</sup> Diouf was also eager to assert the relevance of visual art in political and ideological activism, insisting that culture was a binding imperative of the State. He stated that, in spite of the fragile economy and deep spending cuts as stipulated in the IMF's Structural Adjustment Program, the state owed it to Senegalese people to support and promote cultural activities.<sup>305</sup> Culture, as Diouf pointed out, represents an original contribution of any people, and Senegal's cultural policy is a reflection of Senegal's cultural authenticity.<sup>306</sup> In sum, he framed Senegal as a country of

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<sup>302</sup> Abdou Diouf, "Art Against Apartheid [Inauguration address, 1986]," in *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*, ed. Clémentine Deliss (London, Paris and New York: Whitechapel and Flammarion, 1995), 236.

<sup>303</sup> Sy also pointed out that in spite of the fact that the state reduced its budget for cultural activities to 1% of the total budget, it still found it hard to implement the budget. See Huchard, *ibid.*

<sup>304</sup> Diouf, 236, *ibid.*

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*



culture, asserting the country's obligation to nurture cultural dialogue in Africa, and to open its cultural exchanges beyond Africa. Diouf also underscored Senegal's full commitment to the highest values of freedom, political liberation, justice and democracy, which were the basis of the "Art against Apartheid" exhibition.<sup>307</sup>

"Art against Apartheid" therefore laid the groundwork for Dak'Art to emerge, as artists used the occasion to remind the government of its cultural policy. In addition, the exhibition reflected the collective will of artists to address an issue of cultural, political, and ideological significance in the spirit of pan-Africanism. This display of a united front would define their subsequent determined pursuit of a biennial.<sup>308</sup> Unsurprisingly, the decision to create Dak'Art was communicated to artists at a colloquium organized under the aegis of O.A.U in 1989.<sup>309</sup> Diouf reconfirmed his decision at the award ceremony of the annual grand prize of arts and letters on August 6, 1989.<sup>310</sup>

The other crucial factor that fueled the emergence of Dak'Art was the new spirit of enterprise shown by Senegalese artists, such as Mamadou Fall Dabo. In the 1980s artists began to seek alternative sources of patronage when subvention was no longer flowing from the government. They explored opportunities to exhibit and sell their works and began to collaborate with foreign cultural institutions, embassies, and multilateral organizations such as UNICEF. In addition, artists forged linkages to state institutions

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Ousseynou Wade, immediate past Secretary General of Dak'Art, suggests that President Diouf was ready to respond to the agitations by the art community for a biennial by 1989 because his government had completed the second phase of the Structural Adjustment Programs and the economy was in a better shape to undertake big cultural projects such as Dak'Art and the creation of the new artists village. See Yacouba Konaté, "The Invention of the Dakar Biennial," in *The Biennial Reader* Vol. 2, eds. Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø (Bergen, Norway: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 115.

<sup>309</sup> Abdou Sylla, *Arts plastiques et état: trente-cinq ans de mécénat au Sénégal* (Dakar: IFAN-CH. A. Diop, Université CH. A. Diop de Dakar, 1998), 148.

<sup>310</sup> *Le Soliel*, no 6060, Tuesday, October 7, 1990, 4, cited in Konaté, "The Invention of the Dakar Biennial," *ibid.*

such as the Musée Dynamique. These partnerships resulted in local and international solo and group exhibitions, creating a network of artistic contacts beyond the frontiers of the nation-state.<sup>311</sup> The economic challenges of the 1980s created more self-reliant and self-assured artists who appeared to take to heart the neoliberal argument of personal responsibility, accountability, and entrepreneurship.

For example, Mamadou Fall Dabo is described as very entrepreneurial by Ousmane Sow Huchard, former Director of the defunct Musée Dynamique, on the strength of his social capital, exhibitions in Senegal and abroad, interests in international cultural exchange, and personal relationship with art collectors in the 1980s.<sup>312</sup> Dabo is not an isolated example. Artists including El Hadji Sy, Papa Ibra Tall, Mamadou Diakhate, Amadou Seck, and Souleymane Keita were also involved in local and international exhibitions and cultural exchanges.<sup>313</sup> Some artists were more active in creating opportunities for themselves and others both locally and internationally. El Hadji Sy is an outstanding example. He led the ANAPS during its formative period from 1985 – 1987. In his capacity as the president of ANAPS, Sy facilitated many public and private exhibitions, and numerous international exchanges.<sup>314</sup> He was also involved in the book project *Anthology of Contemporary Fine Arts in Senegal*, as the co-editor with Friedrich

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<sup>311</sup> Some of the international exhibitions included *Expressions nouvelles de la jeune peinture sénégalaise*, Lorient, France (1984); *Kunst im Senegal heute*, Ifa-Galerie, Bonn, and Liebig-Haus, Darmstadt, both in Germany (1984); *Ansätze, Senegalesische Kunst der Gegenwart*, Iwalewa-Huas, Bayreuth, Germany (1985); *8 Künstler aus dem Senegal*, Galerie Neuheisel, Saarbrücken, Germany (1987); and several shows in the U.S.A and Canada. Huchard, *ibid*, 422-423, 434; El Hadji M. B. Sy, “The Galerie Nationale d’Art,” 65; and Friedrich Axt, “Independent Exhibitions of Senegalese Contemporary Art at Home and Abroad,” in *Anthology of Contemporary Fine Arts in Senegal*, eds. Friedrich Axt and El Hadji Moussa Babacar Sy (Frankfurt am Main: Museum für Völkerkunde, 1989), 93-95.

<sup>312</sup> Huchard, *La Culture, Ses Objets-Temoins et l’Action Museologique*, 400-404

<sup>313</sup> Axt, 95.

<sup>314</sup> In the 1990s, Sy was involved in a very ambitious project as the co-curator of the seminal traveling exhibition “Seven stories about Modern Art in Africa” at Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (27 September – 26 November 1995) and Malmo Konsthall Malmo, Sweden (27 January – 17 March 1996).

Axt, a project begun in 1984 and completed in 1989 with the financial support of Museum of Ethnology (now Museum of World Cultures), Frankfurt.

Sy, however, made a more profound impact on the Senegalese art landscape through his activities as a member of iconoclastic Laboratoire Agit-Art and his Tenq initiative. Founded in the late 1970s, Laboratoire Agit-Art --- a collective of visual artists, filmmakers, writers, performers and musicians --- was very active in creating a social space for cultural activism, public interventions, site-specific installations, live performances, and critical discourse, and offering a viable alternative to the institutionalized *École de Dakar* in the 1980s.<sup>315</sup> Members of Laboratoire Agit-Art sought to move the language of Senegalese art in a new direction beyond the over reliance on Négritude. They conceptualized the artist studio as a laboratory for artistic experimentations rather than as a space of art production, privileging the idea of ephemerality as an aesthetic strategy over the idea of art as a tangible cultural product (see fig. 24). The open house format in the courtyard of Issa Samb's home in central Dakar made Laboratoire Agit-Art accessible to the public, who attended the many live activities and partook in art criticism, public debates, and cultural activism.

In 1980 Sy co-founded Tenq with Ali Traore along the lines of the Laboratoire Agit-Art, as a public forum for art actions and critical interventions. For four years, Tenq operated out of Sy's and Traore's studio, which they had transformed into a gallery at the old *Village des Arts* on the Corniche.<sup>316</sup> Tenq, a Wolof word which roughly translates as

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<sup>315</sup> Ima Ebong, "Negritude: Between Mask and Flag: Senegalese Cultural Ideology and the École de Dakar," in *Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art*, ed. Susan Vogel (New York: The Center of African Art, 1991); Grabski, *The Historical Invention and Contemporary Practice of Modern Senegalese Art: Three Generations of Artists in Dakar*, 81-87.

<sup>316</sup> Tenq was disbanded in 1983 when the government drove artists out of the artists' village. The government claimed that artists had illegally occupied the empty Lat Doir army barrack, converting it into Village des Arts. After repeated warning to artists to vacate the property, which was the designated site for

“link,” “articulation” or “connecting piece,” provided a non-conformist and democratic space for art making, exhibition, film screening, and discourse on artistic process, pedagogy, art appreciation, criticism, and the role of art and artist in society.<sup>317</sup> Through programs aimed at returning the art to the public, Sy and his collaborators, including artists, writers, filmmakers and art students from the neighboring *Institut National des Arts du Sénégal*, were agent provocateurs and non-conformists who questioned institutional orthodoxy. They also succeeded in expanding the local art audience and helped to promote art collecting by local patrons who attended its exhibitions.<sup>318</sup>

Although Tenq ended abruptly in 1983, it was briefly resurrected in 1994 as the first international artists’ workshop in West Africa on the Triangle Network model.<sup>319</sup> The revived Tenq was the first in a long list of events that comprised Africa95, a celebration of Africa through exhibitions, music festivals, theatre performances, and discursive sessions assembled by a network of institutions in the United Kingdom between August and December of 1995.<sup>320</sup> Sy organized the Tenq workshop with former collaborators from the old Tenq and Laboratoire Agit-Art, including Fodé Camara, Moustapha Dimé, Djibril N’Diaye, and Souleymane Keita. Sy also enjoyed the

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the new Ministry of Technical Education, Water Supply, and Tourism, the State effectively mobilized and expelled the artists. Clémentine Deliss, “Free Fall – Freeze Frame: Africa, exhibitions, artists,” in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 287.

<sup>317</sup> Grabski, 84-85.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>319</sup> The Triangle model offers an alternative space for artists-led actions that highlights artists’ empowerment, conviviality, and artistic process rather than the art product. The Triangle model of workshop was already in vogue in Southern Africa as early as 1985 in South Africa, and subsequently in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Namibia, Mozambique, and Botswana, before Tenq in 1994. *Triangle: Variety of experience around artists’ workshops and residencies* (London: Triangle Arts Trust, 2007); Namubiru Rose Kirumira and Sidney Littlefield Kasfir, “An Artist’s Notes on the Triangle Workshops, Zambia and South Africa,” in *African Art and Agency in the Workshop*, eds. Sidney Littlefield Kasfir and Till Forster (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012), 111-124.

<sup>320</sup> According to Clémentine Deliss, who was the artistic director of Africa95, Tenq workshop “had the effect of anchoring the season in Africa itself.” Clémentine Deliss, “Returning the Curve: Africa95, Tenq, and Seven Stories,” *African Arts*, Vol. 29, No. 3, Special Issue: africa95 (Summer 1996):41.

organizational support of Anna Kindersley from the Triangle office in the UK, and Clémentine Deliss. The workshop had 26 participating artists, 12 from Senegal, 12 from across Africa, and 2 from the United Kingdom.<sup>321</sup> For two weeks in September of 1994, these artists gathered at the Lycée Cheikh Oumar Foutiyou Tall, an elementary school built by the French colonial government in 1840 in the coastal city of St Louis. The meeting consisted of intense artistic exchange and discussions that focused on art in Africa within an internationalist context.

The correlations between Tenq and Dak'Art reinforce the contributions of Senegalese artists to its creation. Though Tenq in 1994 was based on the Triangle workshops in Southern Africa, its context was Senegal. Clémentine Deliss suggests that the workshop “referenced a far earlier mission [the old Tenq] than ‘Triangle’ generated by artists in Senegal centered around building a long-term site for articulation without the constraint of the state... (and) aimed to help solder professional contacts between artists in different parts of Africa[...].”<sup>322</sup> Both the old Tenq and Laboratoire Agit-Art were invested in creating an alternative universe for Senegalese artists to commingle, create and display art, and challenge the state-sanctioned status quo.<sup>323</sup>

Dak'Art shares with Tenq and Laboratoire Agit-Art strategies of collective action, imagining and producing subjectivities, and articulation of alternative discourse. In a sense, Dak'Art appropriates the localized critique by Tenq and Laboratoire Agit-Art

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<sup>321</sup> The workshop took place from September 15 – 30, 1994, and included “Musaa Baydi (Senegal); Anna Best (UK); Flinto Chandia (Zambia); Paul Clarkson (UK); Ndidi Dike (Nigeria); Gulbril André Diop (Senegal); Mohamed Kacimi (Morocco); David Koloane (South Africa); Atta Kwami (Ghana); Khady Lette (Senegal); Amédy Kré M'baye (Senegal); Sam Nhlengethwa (South Africa); Agnes Nyanhongo (Zimbabwe); Pape Macoumba Seek (Senegal); Dasunye Shikongo (Namibia); Yinka Shonibare (UK); Damy Théra (Mali); Yacouba Touré (Côte d'Ivoire); Babacar Sédikh Traoré (Senegal); Jacob Yacuba (Senegal).” Clémentine Deliss, “Reply to Yinka Shonibare,” *Third Text* No 8 (1994): 28-29, 201-202; Clémentine Deliss, “Returning the Curve: Africa95, Tenq, and Seven Stories,” 40-41.

<sup>322</sup> Clémentine Deliss, “Reply to Yinka Shonibare,” *Third Text* No 8 (1994): 202.

<sup>323</sup> Deliss, interview by author, 31 October 2012, digital recording, Frankfurt, Germany.

(which involves challenging the orthodoxy of the *École de Dakar*, re-thinking the artistic process, and generating discourse), transforming it into a postcolonial institutional critique of the international art world, especially its excluding modus operandi. Whether Dak'Art was directly influenced by Tenq or Laboratoire Agit-Art is speculative. Yet it is instructive that members of both artists' collectives were actively involved in the quest for an international forum for cultural exchange in Senegal in personal capacities and through collective activities on the local art scene. When Dak'Art was finally created, artists including El Hadji Sy, Issa Samb, Fodé Camara, and Souleymane Keita, featured prominently in its technical, orientation, and organizing committees.

Dak'Art is unique in that belongs to a radical trajectory charted by Laboratoire Agit-Art and Tenq, but is also tied to the national development agenda of the government of Senegal. It is in this sense that it is a Senegalese creation. Yet, Dak'Art's mandate, which is pan-African, legitimizes its will to create geopolitical integration based on socio-cultural solidarities and interstate networks that transcend the territorial boundaries of Senegal. In a sense, it embraces Cynthia Lucas Hewitt's articulation of pan-Africanism as a "form of nationalism where the 'nation' is writ large – the continent of Africa and its entire scattered people (in Africa and the diaspora) – in comparison to the nationalisms of defined states, which are considered micro-nationalism."<sup>324</sup> Thus, Dak'Art potentially provides alternative ways of imagining Senegal's territorial sovereignty as transnational, and the host city of Dakar as a pan-African city.<sup>325</sup> In the following section, I focus on the formative period of Dak'Art from 1990 to 1998, a period marked by transformations in

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<sup>324</sup> Cynthia Lucas Hewitt, "Pan-African Brain Circulation," in *African Brain Circulation: Beyond the Drain-Gain Debate*, ed. Rubbin Patterson (Liedien, Boston: Brill, 2007) 24.

<sup>325</sup> Achille Mbembe, "At the Edge of the World: Boundaries, Territoriality, and Sovereignty in Africa," in *Globalization*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Durham and London: Duke University, 2001), 25.

its institutional identity, structure, and exhibitions. This period also signaled the beginning of shifts in art making, artistic process, artistic identity, forms of social engagement, and aesthetic production in Africa and its recent diaspora, for which Dak'Art was an influential catalyst.

### **Dak'Art 1990 and 1992**

The inaugural Dak'Art, which opened on December 12 1990 at *Place de l'Obélisque*, the grand parade ground in Dakar, was a literary festival (figs. 25 and 26). This was because the Biennial was initially planned to alternate between literary and visual arts.<sup>326</sup> The centralizing objectives of Dak'Art as enunciated in 1990 were: to promote national development and cultural diplomacy; create a space of dialogue between Africa and the rest of the world; promote creativity and literary and artistic developments; intensify inter-African cultural exchanges and integration; elaborate the cultural dimensions of development; implement sub-regional and regional strategies for the creation, financing, and profitability of creative and cultural industries in Africa; and lastly, encourage cultural cooperation that would lead to a better protection and distribution of African cultural property.<sup>327</sup>

These objectives mirror the technical language employed in government and by multilateral development agencies. As a cultural project, Dak'Art is meant to advance the

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<sup>326</sup> Sylla, *plastiques et état: trente-cinq ans de mécénat au Sénégal*, 148.

<sup>327</sup> Abdou Diouf, "Message de son Excellence Monsieur Abdou Diouf, Président de la République du Sénégal," *Biennale de Dakar 1990* (Dakar: Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, 1990), 3; Moustapha KA, "Message du Ministre de la Culture et de la Communication," *Biennale de Dakar 1990* (Dakar: Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, 1990), 5.

social and economic development programs of the government of Senegal.<sup>328</sup> Its objectives also manifest the goals of the Senegalese government to promote Dakar as a cultural hub, deepen cultural development in Africa, and present Dak'Art as the vehicle for the mobilization of an integrated African art world. Moustapha Ka, then Minister of Culture, suggested that Dak'Art sought to provide the context and venue for the assessment of artistic and cultural development in Africa.<sup>329</sup> This intention underlined the configuration of Dak'Art 1990 as a contact zone for cultural experts in Africa, political and economic leaders, government officials, and foreign interlocutors to meet and offer proposals and policies on contemporary culture of Africa.

Entitled *Rendez-vous des Lettres*, Dak'Art 1990 included a parade by elementary and secondary school students and the national band, theatre performances, the screening of African and films, literary presentations, music concerts, art exhibitions, and the main event, which was a colloquium on the theme *Aires Culturelles et Création Littéraire en Afrique* (Cultural Areas and Literary Creation in Africa).<sup>330</sup> The colloquium aimed to raise questions on the relationship between culture and literature, and to facilitate a dialogue on African cultural cooperation and collective development as critical to economic prosperity in Africa (Fig. 27). Plenary sessions at the colloquium explored various sub-themes such as “cultural areas of Africa and literary aesthetics” (which would include writing, style, images, and techniques of composition), “literary genres and intertextual problems” (such as the influence of indigenous literary traditions on

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<sup>328</sup>See Iolanda Pensa, *La Biennale de Dakar comme Projet de Coopération et de Développement/The Dakar Biennial as Project of Cooperation and Development* (PhD diss., Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales en cotutelle avec Politecnico di Milano, Dipartimento di Architettura e Pianificazione, 2011).

<sup>329</sup> Ka, “Message du Ministre de la Culture et de la Communication,” *Biennale de Dakar 1990*, *ibid.*

<sup>330</sup> Although the focus was literature, Dak'Art 1990 included two art exhibitions, at the National Gallery, Dakar, which included about 100 art works from the state collection, and artists' open studio at the new Village des Art, situated close to the highway leading to Léopold Sédar Senghor International Airport. Sylla, 149.



contemporary written literature), and “the problematic of national literature,” among others.

Deliberations focused on issues ranging from the relationship between cultural and literary production; the diversity of African literary production; hybridism and the influence of external literary traditions on African literature; ideological issues with regard to writing in foreign languages; intertextuality and the influence of African classical art forms and oral traditions on modern and contemporary literary production; writers’ independence; and lastly, the possibility of asserting an African cultural unity or the cultural dimensions of pan-Africanism. On the whole, the colloquium employed a pan-African approach in connecting languages, aesthetics, and cultural manifestations in Africa.

Dak’Art 1990’s focus on literature, and the presence of literary figures such as the Nigerian Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka, did not have the cultural impact the Senegalese government had hoped for as it moved to reassert Dakar as an important cultural hub in Africa. Even the presence of former President Senghor, who had come from Verson, in the Normandy region of France to which he had retired after leaving power, failed to draw significant international attention to Senegal as the First World Festival had done in 1966.<sup>331</sup> This led the state to reevaluate the idea of alternating the biennial between literary art and visual arts. Consequently, the state decided to convert literary Dak’Art to an annual national salon of literature and letters.<sup>332</sup> But the decision to

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<sup>331</sup> According to Amadou Lamine Sall, the Secretary General of Dak’Art during the Biennial in 1990, Senghor’s physical appearance was the high moment of Dak’Art 1990. Senghor was hesitant to attend the biennial because of the way Diouf’s government would have interpreted it. Senghor remained very popular even out of power and Diouf who was under his shadow, was insecure. Amadou Lamine Sall, interview by author, 14 February 2012, digital recording, Dakar, Senegal.

<sup>332</sup> Youma Fall [Director of the new National Theatre], interview with author, 27 April 2012, digital recording, Dakar, Senegal.

refocus Dak'Art exclusively on visual arts would be concretized only after the second iteration in 1992, after much lobbying by artists and recommendations of an international team of experts sponsored by the European Union and the Senegalese government.<sup>333</sup> I will return to this matter shortly.

Dak'Art 1992 was the first real attempt to address the concerns of Senegalese artists for an international artistic exchange. It was an impressive spectacle, bigger than the inaugural edition, with exhibitions in multiple venues, parades, music concerts, dance and folkloric presentations, spread around Dakar.<sup>334</sup> The biennial edition was framed as a venue of encounters between African and international artists, and as a space for cultural dialogue among civilizations.<sup>335</sup> In his speech at the opening ceremony at Daniel Sorano Theatre on December 14, 1992, President Diouf described Dak'Art as the successor of the First World Festival of 1966, and dedicated the Biennial to the memory of his predecessor Senghor. Diouf stated that both Dak'Art and the First World Festival presented an African vision of international cooperation and cultural exchange in the spirit of Senghor's universal civilization:

Wherever he is (meaning Senghor), his heart beats to the rhythm of the biennial. We want to tell him that the *École de Dakar*, this Dakar which gave birth to the famous Black encounter of 1966, carries his stamp at the end of the day. It is the synthesis of traditional and modern creativities, this mixing of forms and themes which make each brushstroke a declaration of the universality of art.... contemporary art has the same spiritual, moral, and aesthetic value as our

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<sup>333</sup> Dak'Art 1990 enjoyed the patronage and support of a host of individuals and institutions including former president Leopold Senghor to whom the event was dedicated and who was present; President Abdou Diouf, UNESCO, Organization of African Unity (O.A.U), *Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique* (now International Organization of the Francophonie, OIF), and European Union. Participants came from sixty two countries in Africa, Europe, North America, and South America but were mostly government officials, and experts from multilateral institutions such as UNESCO, OAU, and European Union.

<sup>334</sup> Sylla, 152

<sup>335</sup> "Requete Biennale de Dakar 1992: Aupres de la CEE, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, Republic du Sénégal." Documentation Center, Dak'Art Secretariat, Dakar, 15.

traditional art. It deserves the same respect, the same admiration, and also deserves to reach the same heights.<sup>336</sup>

This attempt by Diouf to connect Dak'Art to the First World Festival reflects the continuity of Senegal's cultural policy of cultural diplomacy. Yet this framing of Dak'Art as the worthy successor of the First World Festival reflected an inchoate articulation of Dak'Art's geopolitical ambition.<sup>337</sup> Moustapha Ka, the then Minister of Culture of Senegal, stated that Dak'Art 1992 was expected to serve as, among other things, the venue for the meeting of cultures, a space of dialogue among civilizations, the celebration of the resuscitated *École de Dakar*, modern African art, black art, and world art.<sup>338</sup> Whereas the First World Festival attempted to engage a global black world, Dak'Art 1992 pursued a broader notion of globalism. The assertion of pan-Africanism as the Biennial's mode of address, even when it included non-African artists, showed a lack of clarity. Pan-Africanism at Dak'Art 1992 was at best, rhetorical, asserted only in the speeches, such as those by President Diouf and Minister Ka. There was nothing in the activities that reflected pan-African solidarity, except, perhaps, the *Recontres et Échanges* colloquium. I will get to the colloquium subsequently.

Dak'Art 1992's official exhibition entitled *Arts et Regards croisés sur l'Afrique* (loosely translated as Art Glances across Africa) was based on the national pavilion model of older art biennials, such as the Venice Biennial and the São Paulo Biennial. It included over 110 works by over 110 artists from the continents of Africa, Europe, Asia,

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<sup>336</sup> Abdou Diouf, "Inaugural address at the Biennale Internationale des Arts de Dakar," quoted in, "Fraternité, métissage, dialogue des cultures," *Le Soliel* (December 15, 1992: 10).

<sup>337</sup> Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi, Curating Africa, Curating the Contemporary: The Pan-African Model of Dak'Art Biennial," *SAVVY: Journal of contemporary African Art*, [special edition on Curating: Expectations and Challenges] No. 4 (November 2012): 34-40.

<sup>338</sup> Moustapha Ka, "Preface," *Dakar 1992: Biennale Internationale des Arts*, exhibition catalogue (Dakar and Paris: Beaux Arts, 1992), 2.

and the Americas, displayed at the newly-constructed temporary exhibition gallery on the grounds of the *Musée de l'Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire* (I'FAN, figs. 28-29).<sup>339</sup>

With the exhibition, the government of Senegal aimed to assemble the world at Dak'Art and to draw massive international attention to Senegal.<sup>340</sup> Consideration was given to national and geopolitical spread.<sup>341</sup> However, not all the countries that were invited sent their artists. The exhibition did not have a curatorial direction; emphasis was placed on creating a visual spectacle rather than exploring a well-defined theme, narrative, or context. Neither works nor artists were selected on the basis of any formal or conceptual consideration.

The selection committee was composed of people with different cultural interests but without curatorial backgrounds.<sup>342</sup> The process of selecting artists was done in

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<sup>339</sup> The new temporary exhibition space was a gift of the North Korean government who has maintained a constant presence in the cultural landscape of Senegal. It supported the First World Festival of Negro Arts in 1966, and most recently, produced and donated a monumental sculpture titled *African Renaissance*, discussed in the concluding chapter.

<sup>340</sup> The government of Senegal sent official invitations to 47 African countries, which included, Nigeria, Burundi, Cape Verde, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Botswana; 10 countries in the Americas, which included, the United States, Venezuela, Brazil, Canada, Jamaica, and Argentina; 12 countries in Asia, which included, Bangladesh, China, Japan, Thailand, and Iran; and 16 countries in Europe, which included, France, Britain, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Norway. "Requete Biennale de Dakar 1992: Aupres de la CEE, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, Republic du Sénégal," (Documentation Center, Dak'Art Secretariat, Dakar), 1-6.

<sup>341</sup> The non-African artists included Jean Yves-Klein (Canada), Daniel Fauville (Belgium), Manuel Mandive (Cuba), Joe Overstreet (USA), Martine Nostrone (France), André Bregnard (Switzerland), Monique le Houelleur (Vietnam), José Tarabal (Uruguay), Barbara Prezeau (Haiti), Serge Hélénon (Martinique), Maria Causa (Argentina), Ahmed Shahabuddin (Bangladesh), Elvira Bach (Germany), Tiansio-po (Guyana), Toshi (Japan), Frank Bowling (Guyana/UK), Leonardo Drew (USA), Peter Weihs (Austria), Han Alexander Van Rhoon (The Netherlands), Ana Maria Cantuaria (Brazil), and Mauro Petroni (Italy). African artists included Sokari Douglas Camp (Nigeria/UK), Ouattara (Côte d'Ivoire/USA), Bruce Onobrakpeya (Nigeria), Abdoulaye Konate (Mali), Pascal Kenfack (Cameroun), Braïma Injaï (Guinea Bissau), Zerihun Yemgeta (Ethiopia), John Goba (Sierra Leone), Paul Ahyi (Togo), Bondo Tshibanda (Zaire, now Congo DRC), Malek Salah (Algeria), Tapfuma Gusta (Zimbabwe), Ablade Glover (Ghana), El Hadji Mansour Ciss (Senegal), Babacar Traore (Senegal), Ousmane Sow (Senegal), Fodé Camara (Senegal), and Moustapha Dimé (Senegal).

<sup>342</sup> Members of the selection committee included Samir Sobhy (Egypt and Representative of UNICEF in Dakar), Mamadou Niang (Professor of Fine Arts, Senegal), M. Francois Belorgey (Director, French Cultural Center, Dakar), His Excellency Hector Alberto Flores (Ambassador of Argentina to Senegal), M. Thomas Hodges (Director, American Cultural Center Dakar), Marie-Laure Croiziers de Lacvivier (cultural entrepreneur and collector of African art), M. Rémi Sagna (Director, National Library, Senegal), M.

consultation with foreign embassies, national Ministries of Culture, foreign cultural centers and embassies in Dakar.<sup>343</sup> Selected artists then submitted works that they deemed appropriate for the Biennial. A large number of the artists, both African and non-African, were based in Dakar.<sup>344</sup> According to Amadou Lamine Sall, Secretary General of Dak'Art in 1992, the process followed was the most expedient thing to do logistically and financially.<sup>345</sup> Sall explained that the organizers' knowledge of the international art world was limited at the time, so they relied on foreign embassies and informal contacts to select participating artists.<sup>346</sup> In general, works in the exhibition were mostly paintings and sculptures, and showed varying qualities from the very successful to the very weak.

The works of African artists showed a diversity of styles and aesthetic vocabularies, ranging from pure to semi abstraction, realism, and modernist primitivism. Some of the works, such as Gambian Chuckley Vincent Secka's batik painting *Retrouvailles* (1992, fig. 30), and Senegalese Fodé Camara's *La Magie des Noirs*, an acrylic painting on canvas (1992, fig. 31), allude to the strategy of repurposing usable African past or living traditions, prevalent in African modernism in the 1960s and 1970s. In these two paintings, iconic African masks are employed to achieve stylized human forms, and naturalistic and mask-like facial profiles are set against colorful background surfaces. The painters' brilliant brushwork, which breaks up the picture surface into large

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Kalidou Sy (Director of the National School of Fine Arts, Dakar). *Dakar 1992: Biennale Internationale des Arts*, exhibition catalogue (Dakar and Paris: Beaux Arts, 1992), 64.

<sup>343</sup> Sall, interview, 14 February 2012.

<sup>344</sup> In a commissioned report by the European Union, Isabelle Bosman observed that: "it was announced that Africa, Europe, America and Asia would all be taking part. The reality was that several countries, especially from Africa and Asia, were represented by only one or two works by a national based in Senegal or Europe." Cited in Konaté, "The Invention of Dak'Art," 113.

<sup>345</sup> Sall, interview, *ibid.*

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*

and tiny planes, produce abstract effects, visible in a lot of other paintings in the exhibition.

One example is Algerian artist Malek Salah's *Matière-Energie II* (1992, fig. 32), a reductivist painting consisting of mostly wavy grayish white brush strokes and two isolated geometric elements. *Matière-Energie II*'s different color scheme and absence of human and mask facial profiles make it difficult to connect with *Retrouvailles* and *La Magie des Noirs* on a formal level. Nonetheless, the three paintings share intense effervescent abstract brushstrokes, albeit in varying degrees, upon closer examination, and reflected the various modernist aesthetics in their various countries.

Two works by Senegalese sculptor Moustapha Dimé and Ethiopian painter Zerihun Yetmgeta appear to have captured the prevalent avant-garde trends in Africa or at least in their individual countries in the late 1980s and early 1990s in more compelling ways. Dimé's *La Dame à la culotte* (undated, fig. 33) is a schematized body of a woman with her pants outlined in deep brown paint. The woman's exposed breasts are carved in a pronounced fashion, and her head is attached to the body via a long spike. The sculpture is made from driftwood in the *recuperation* technique. *Récupération* involves salvaging items found around the urban environment as media. Dimé, until he died in 1998, was considered as one of Senegal's most successful proponents of *récupération*.

Similarly, Yetmgeta's *When the Sun Gets the Moon* (fig. 34) appears to draw upon the technique of using found material.<sup>347</sup> The artist creates his own painting surface using bamboo strips repurposed from weaving looms, over which he stretches and glues leather skin to create a two-dimensional surface. Working with acrylic, Yetmgeta covers the painterly surface in colorful geometric symbols and icons, some which are invented

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<sup>347</sup> I am indebted to art historian Ray Silverman for pointing out Yetmgeta's artistic process.

and others of which are derived from scrolls of Ethiopian Orthodox Church and popular African masks. Yetmgeta deviates from the social realism style that was officially promoted by the Communist military dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam, who presided over Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991.<sup>348</sup> Dimé's and Yetmgeta's works are outstanding on formal and conceptual levels, which is perhaps the reason why the artists were joint-winners of the Grand Prize Léopold Sédar Senghor, Dak'Art's top prize in 1992.

Apart from the main international exhibition at Dak'Art 1992, there was the *Salon de l'Amitié* at the National Gallery Dakar. It included about 100 works by 37 artists from ten countries, although the majority of the works were by Senegalese artists.<sup>349</sup> The exhibition explored aesthetic currents of Senegalese modernism in relation to the modernism represented in the works of the non-Senegalese artists. There were also smaller exhibitions organized by embassies and foreign cultural centers around Dakar, the nearby suburbs and Gorée Island. While the French Cultural Center organized an exhibition of young Senegalese artists at its defunct Galerie 39, exhibitions by the Italian Cultural Center, Goethe Institute, and American embassy focused on their own nationals. Resident artists on Gorée Island and at Village des Art organized exhibitions in their individual studios and houses. The private galleries, Four Winds Gallery, Amadou Hampâté Bâ Gallery, and Weteef Gallery organized exhibitions of Senegalese and foreign artists. Exhibitions were also put together in alternative spaces such as gas

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<sup>348</sup> See Geta Mekonnen, "Currents of Change," *Revue Noire*, No. 24 (March, April, May 1997): 36-37; Zerihun Yetmgeta and Meskerem Assegued, *Zerihun Yetmgeta: The magical universe of art* (Johannesburg and Addis Ababa: Unisa Press with Tsehai Publishers, 2008).

<sup>349</sup> Sylla, 151.

stations, hotels, restaurants, and private homes.<sup>350</sup> There is little archival documentation and materials available for a proper analysis of these exhibitions. However, these independent exhibitions would become a permanent and important component of Dak'Art, and would become known as the Dak'Art OFF.<sup>351</sup>

Dak'Art 1992's official exhibition lacked a curatorial focus despite its theme of *Arts et Regards croisés sur l'Afrique*. The gallery installations and visual displays were charged with being mediocre and lacking curatorial coherence.<sup>352</sup> The works were presented arbitrarily, arranged in haphazard fashion in the exhibition venue, and wall labels were poorly written. Octavia Zaya, one of the few international art critics that attended Dak'Art 1992, described the exhibitions as extremely academic and conservative.<sup>353</sup> There were no clear-cut criteria for the selection of artists and works, and some of the works arrived late. There were also poor flight arrangements for some of the participants. The exhibition catalogue was very modest and included few works of the participating artists. Zaya further claimed that the Biennial was politicized by President Diouf, who used it as a campaign fodder for his re-election.<sup>354</sup>

The art historian and curator Clémentine Deliss, who was a member of the Biennial's jury in 1992, outlined the major weaknesses of Dak'Art 1992 in a review.<sup>355</sup> She wrote that the biennial's organizers deferred too much to Western (French, in this context) cultural brokers who, among other things, resisted any attempt to challenge their authority on the content and shape of the biennale. The second issue was what Deliss

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<sup>350</sup> Sylla, 153.

<sup>351</sup> I discuss Dak'Art OFF in detail in Chapter 4.

<sup>352</sup> Octavia Zaya, "On Dak'Art 92," *Atlantica* No. 5 (1993):126-128.

<sup>353</sup> Zaya, *ibid.*

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>355</sup> Clémentine Deliss, "Dak'art 1992: When Internationalism Fell Apart," *African Arts* Vol. 26, No. 3 (July 1993):18,20,23,84-85.



described as a reliance on a so-called international art circuit built on a Euro-centric foundation.<sup>356</sup> The Senegalese government had relied on French expertise in organizing Dak'Art 1992.<sup>357</sup> In fact, the exhibition catalogue was published by the French magazine *Cimaise*. Deliss argued that the organizers were more interested in courting Western validation, which prevented them from really developing a pan-African focus for the biennale.<sup>358</sup> She also mentioned the biennial's dependence on European funding, and the lack of reliance on the African diaspora, particularly African Americans, who would have injected substantial money and energy into the biennial. This would have bolstered the biennial's weak finances.

However, Deliss was mistaken when she said that Dak'Art would have benefitted from a stronger alliance with the African American community. According to Lamine Sall, the Secretary General of Dak'Art in 1992, the organizers of Dak'Art had reached out to a number of constituencies for financial support in a manner reminiscent of the funding drive undertaken by Alioune Diop between 1963 and 1965 in organizing the First World Festival in 1966.<sup>359</sup> Sall claimed that they reached out to organizations, corporations, and individuals in Africa and abroad for support.<sup>360</sup> Few sources answered the appeal. The organizers were forced to reduce the size of the biennial events to a manageable scale.<sup>361</sup> At least 53% of the total cost of organizing Dak'Art 1992 which

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<sup>356</sup> Deliss, *ibid.*

<sup>357</sup> Clémentine Deliss, interview by author, 31 October 2012, digital recording. Frankfurt, Germany.

<sup>358</sup> Deliss, interview, *ibid.*

<sup>359</sup> Alioune Diop wrote hundreds of letters seeking support for the festival to Black diaspora communities, African and foreign governments, multinational corporations, and multilateral institutions. *Repertoire du Fonds du Festival Mondial des Arts Negres 1963-1967, correspondance générale (1964-1966) et demande du participation de certains particuliers adressés au Président du Festival,* *National Archives*, Dakar, Senegal.

<sup>360</sup> Sall, interview, *ibid.*

<sup>361</sup> The organizing committee included, Cheikh Hamidou Kane (president), Amadou Lamine Sall (Secretary General), Christian Tonani (Public relations), Mamadou Niang (exhibitions), Moustapha Tambaou

was about 300 Million CFA (approx. \$600,000, in today's money) was provided by European Union.<sup>362</sup> The bulk of the remaining balance was borne by the government of Senegal who also provided other forms of support and patronage, and partners such as UNESCO which provided 20,000USD that went into offsetting honoraria of African artists, among other logistics.<sup>363</sup> In fact, all of this really undercuts Deliss's point. Without the European Union's financial commitment, most especially, Dak'Art 1992 would have been a far more modest undertaking. Sall stated that it was important for the government to establish a viable international platform for contemporary art in Africa despite the logistics and financial challenges

Another important event at Dak'Art 1992 that also became a permanent component of future Dak'Art biennials was the international colloquium *Recontres and Échanges* (Encounters and Exchanges). It was convened as a discussion forum to address issues affecting contemporary African art, artistic practice, and cultural mediation. The Encounters and Exchanges colloquium, which is now a permanent feature at Dak'Art Biennials, offers a context for intellectual dialogue during the biennial along the lines of similar colloquia at Dak'Art 1990, and earlier pan-African exhibitions in the 1960s and 1970s. At Dak'Art 1992, the colloquium had two panels titled *Permanences et Mutations* (Permanence and Shifts) and *Journées du Partenariat* (Days of Partnership).<sup>364</sup> They were modeled after the First World Festival of Negro Art's colloquium.<sup>365</sup> Deliberations

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(international colloquium), and Marie-Laure Croiziers de Lacvievier (consultant on contemporary African art).

<sup>362</sup> "Requete Biennale de Dakar 1992: Aupres de la CEE, Ministere de la Culture et de la Communication, Republic du Sénégal;" and Correspondence between Amadou Lamine Sall and Tereza Wagner, Director of Arts, UNESCO, Paris, dated March 19, 1993. Documentation Center, Dak'Art Secretariat, Dakar.

<sup>363</sup> "Requete Biennale de Dakar 1992..." ibid.

<sup>364</sup> Moustapha Tambadou, "Le Colloque et le Journées du partenariat," *Les Cahiers du CAEC*, no. 1 (1993):4-8.

<sup>365</sup> Tambadou, "Le Colloque et le Journées du partenariat," ibid

at Permanence and Shifts focused on new developments in African art and the promotion of African art on the international level, a role Dak'Art was expected to play.

One issue that was given particular attention was the role of international exhibitions and foreign interlocutors. Two exhibitions --- *African Art Now* organized by French curator André Magnin at Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, and *Africa Explores* by the American curator and art historian Susan Vogel at the Museum for African Art in New York, both in 1991--- were particularly scrutinized. Discussions and criticisms centered on the two exhibitions' attempts to construct meanings around postcolonial African art, artistic identity, and artistic contemporaneity in Africa. The other panel, "Days of Partnership," called for a collective front in pushing for the viability of African art and artists in the international art circuit. It also explored the possibility of contemporary African art influencing international contemporary artistry as historical African art had shaped international modern art.<sup>366</sup>

It can be argued though that through its exhibitions and international colloquium, Dak'Art'92 began the important process of effectively instituting a broad forum for contemporary art and its discourse in Africa, a platform that was previously absent. It also established an inventory of contemporary cultural production in Africa and the diaspora by including works of African artists at various stages of their careers. These artists included the New York-based Ivorian painter Ouattara and the London-based Nigerian sculptor Sokari Douglas Camp, who had begun to chart significant international careers. However, it did not present as full a picture of contemporary art in Africa as was hoped. As already mentioned, due to logistics and funding difficulties, it could not assemble a large number of works from the continent despite sending out invitations to

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<sup>366</sup> Tambadou, *ibid.*

47 African countries. Apart from the works of non-African artists, most of the works were by artists of West African origin. Yet, the works that were exhibited reflected what may be considered as the prevalent modernist modes of expression (painting and sculpture) in Africa in the 1980s and early 1990s.

The process of addressing the ambiguous articulation of Dak'Art's geopolitical agenda and sundry logistics and organizational difficulties began in earnest at the conclusion of Dak'Art 1992.<sup>367</sup> Amadou Lamine Sall, who was accused of lacking professional and organizational competence by the new Minister of Culture Coura Ba Thiam, was relieved of his position as the Secretary General of Dak'Art. According to Sall, he was not replaced but resigned on his own volition because he could not work with Minister Thiam, who had replaced Moustapha Ka. Thiam was keen to implement the recommendations of the European Union uncritically. Sall said that he walked away from the position because he could not accept the evaluation by Isabelle Ibosman and her committee from the EU, who recommended that Dak'Art be transformed into a biennial of visual art.<sup>368</sup> Sall stated that he was annoyed that Europe wanted to dictate the nature of the Biennial because European Union was bearing the larger percentage of the total

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<sup>367</sup> Some of these logistics and organizational challenges continue to plague Dak'Art, and are well documented in reviews. See for example, Rasheed Araeen, "Dak'Art 1992-2002: The Problems of Representation, Contextualisation, and Critical Evaluation in Contemporary African Art As Presented by the Dakar Biennale." *Third Text*, Vol. 17, No. 62 (2003): 93-106; Olu Oguibe, "The Failure of Dak'Art?" *Third Text*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2004): 83-85; Iolanda Pensa, "Dak'Art 2010: Perspective and Retrospective," *Domus*. <http://www.domusweb.it/en/art/dakart-2010-perspective-and-retrospective/>

<sup>368</sup> Sall, interview, *ibid*. This insistence in dictating the direction of the Biennial by the European Union was also confirmed by Sall's successor, Rémi Sagna, who however said that Minister Thiam did not want to work with Sall, in part because he did not manage the finances of Dak'Art 1992 well. At the end of Dak'Art 1992, there was a mountain of debt arising from unpaid expenses for services rendered such as hotel accommodation for artists and international experts, meals, and other logistics. Sall was also owed some of his salary. Sagna liquidated the old debt before the next biennial in 1996. Rémi Sagna [former Secretary General of Dak'Art from 1993 – 2000], interview by author, 9 May 2012, digital recording, Dakar, Senegal.

cost of Dak'Art.<sup>369</sup> Yet his annoyance could have stemmed from his literary background as a writer and poet, and also from the extent to which he was important to the development of the Biennial. Certainly, Sall would have had misgivings concerning the idea of focusing Dak'Art solely on visual arts.

Yet Sall was neither an administrator nor an expert on contemporary art. He was replaced by the bureaucrat Rémi Sagna, who trained as a cultural administrator and had bureaucratic experience working with the art community, several local and international cultural organizations, and public institutions. He was also the choice of Senegalese artists who wanted to reclaim the Biennial.<sup>370</sup> Artists had also begun to lobby Minister of Culture Coura Ba Thiam to refocus the biennial exclusively on visual art.<sup>371</sup> In June 1993 the Ministry of Culture and the Dak'Art Secretariat organized a week-long evaluation panel sponsored by the European Union to address the issues and criticisms that had arisen at Dak'Art 1990 and Dak'Art 1992.<sup>372</sup> The panel included local artists such as Viyé Diba and Ousmane Sow, and curators and art historians, such as Abdou Sylla, along with European experts, including Isabelle Bosman of the European Union.<sup>373</sup>

The major issue discussed was the direction Dak'Art was to take: would it remain an international biennial or shift its focus to a geopolitical context?<sup>374</sup> It was already agreed that alternating the biennial between literary and visual arts was no longer feasible. It was also noted that African and African diaspora artists had little visibility at the international level. Thus, the decision was made to transform Dak'Art into a pan-

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<sup>369</sup> Sall, interview, *ibid.*

<sup>370</sup> Rémi Sagna, interview by author, 9 May 2012, digital recording, Dakar, Senegal.

<sup>371</sup> Sagna, interview, *ibid.*

<sup>372</sup> Dak'Art '92: Exploitation des Fiches d'Evaluation. Documentation center, Dak'Art Secretariat, Dakar.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*

African biennial totally dedicated to contemporary African art.<sup>375</sup> In clearly outlining a new direction for Dak'Art, the evaluation panel expected that the Biennial would become the foremost international venue for contemporary African art and artists. With the new pan-African identity, Dak'Art would distinguish itself from other biennials that had more financial strength and international recognition.

### **Dak'Art 1996 and 1998**

While announcing the reinvention of Dak'Art in October of 1993, Minister Thiam introduced changes in the organizational structure of Dak'Art. The new structure consisted of the General Secretariat, Scientific Committee, Technical Committee, and International Selection Committee. The General Secretariat took over the overall administrative responsibility of organizing the biennial from the Ministry of Culture and Communication, although it remained under the supervision of the Ministry. The Secretariat was overseen by a Secretary General, who is a government bureaucrat, and complemented by staff drawn from the Ministry of Culture.<sup>376</sup> The second component, the Scientific Committee (now referred to as the Orientation Committee) was tasked with making decisions concerning the general direction of the Biennial at each iteration, such as themes, exhibition venues, budget and sponsorship, exhibition catalogue, and other ancillary activities (lectures and workshops, etc). This organizational structure has

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<sup>375</sup> In this regard artists, Dak'Art organizers and the Senegalese government, and European Union were all in agreement. Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> The Dak'Art Secretariat is on the first floor of the National Gallery complex on Albert Sarraut Avenue in the busy business district of Dakar. In addition to the secretary general, the biennial's administration includes the secretary general, administrative secretary, cultural administrators, budget and finance officer, computer specialists for the computer lab, graphics and web manager, librarian/archivist for the documentation center, and a pool of logistic and office assistants. Extra hands are hired during the Biennial.

remained in force with slight adjustments and changes in personnel in succeeding Dak'Arts.

The Orientation Committee serves as a liaison with the Secretary General to manage the biennial events. It includes important Senegalese artists, cultural journalists, art critics, curators, art historians, art collectors, distinguished academicians, gallery owners, cultural administrators, and government officials, mostly based in Dakar, nominated by the Secretary General in consultation with the Ministry of Culture and the art community.<sup>377</sup> Financial decisions are taken by the Secretary General in consultation with the Minister of Culture.<sup>378</sup> At the end of every Biennial, the Secretary General is expected to present a report to both the Orientation Committee and the Minister of Culture.<sup>379</sup> The Technical Committee is tasked with the logistics of organizing Dak'Art with the General Secretariat and Orientation Committee. Lastly, the International Selection Committee is composed of a jury or/and curatorial team, determined by the Secretary General and the Orientation Committee. The Secretary General and President of the Scientific Committee are included as members of the International Selection Committee.<sup>380</sup> To signal the institutionalization of the Biennial, an official logo was commissioned for the first time. This was produced by the Vienna-based Senegalese artist Amadou Sow (fig. 35).

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<sup>377</sup> Over several Dak'Art editions, the Orientation Committee has included, Viyé Diba (artist), Ousmane Sow (artist), Issa Samb (artist), Mauro Petroni (artist), Aïssa Dione (artist and gallerist), Abdou Sylla (art critic and art historian) Ousmane Sow Huchard (museologist), Sylvain Sankale (art patron and collector), Marie-Jose Crespin (Magistrate), and Massamba Mbaye (art journalist).

<sup>378</sup> Sagna, interview, Ibid

<sup>379</sup> Ibid.

<sup>380</sup> The creation of the International Selection Committee was an important development that has helped to connect Dak'Art to the mainstream art world, and brought about more professionalism in the selection of artists and in the curation of Dak'Art from 1996. It has included leading curators, critics, and art historians such as Achille Bonito Oliva who directed the 45th Venice Biennial, David Elliott (former President of the International Committee of ICOM for Museums of Modern and Contemporary Art), and Marilyn Martin (former Director of the Iziko National Gallery of South Africa).

Dak'Art did not take place in 1994 due to the reorganization. Rémi Sagna had just resumed his appointment as Secretary General and needed the time to seek funding support from the government and potential local and international collaborators. Sagna approached a number of organizations and countries for financial and logistic support. Apart from the State, through the Ministry of Culture, support in cash and kind came from the French government through various cultural institutions, the Taiwanese government, the European Union and Francophonie Community in Belgium. Sagna insists that none of the funders tried to influence the direction of the biennial with the exception of European Union, whose so-called cultural experts wanted to make technical suggestions. Sagna states that the European Union experts were told that the government of Senegal and the organizers had a particular vision for the biennial.<sup>381</sup> This created tension between Dak'Art and European Union but was resolved. Yet, this tension has remained, rearing its head at successive iterations of Dak'Art because the European Union remains the biggest financial contributor to Dak'Art.<sup>382</sup>

The Biennial was postponed to 1995. When Dak'Art could not hold it then due to lingering financial and organizational problems, it was moved once more, to 1996.<sup>383</sup> In late 1995, Coura Ba Thiam was replaced as the Minister of Culture by Abdoulaye Elimane Kane, who fixed a substantive date. According to Rémi Sagna, Kane was the

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<sup>381</sup> Sagna, *ibid.*

<sup>382</sup> I discovered that this was the case in my interview with Abdourahmane Sy, the longest serving administrative staff of the Biennial. Sy, who has been involved with Dak'Art since the first edition in 1990, claimed that the state's average monetary support for every edition of Dak'Art is about 150 million CFA, while that of the European Union is about 250 million CFA, since 1992. Abdourahmane Sy, interview by author, 30 March 2012, digital recording, Dakar, Senegal.

<sup>383</sup> The major problem that plagued the biennial between 1992 and 1996 was the liquidation of old debts arising from Dak'Art 1992. After that was resolved, Minister Thiam sought to oversee the financial expenditures of the next Dak'Art. Sagna, interview, *ibid.*



Minister who truly empowered the Dak'Art Secretariat.<sup>384</sup> He left financial, artistic, and logistic responsibilities to the organizers, and only stepped in when his oversight was required. Sagna further stated that with the exception of Moustapha Ka, who was instrumental to the creation of the biennial in 1989, and Abdoulaye Kane who replaced Madame Thiam in 1995, successive ministers of culture in Senegal had lacked an understanding of the objectives of Dak'Art and its historical significance.<sup>385</sup> They underrated the massive logistics that went into the organizing of the biennial and did not last long enough as ministers to gain a critical insight. Shortly after Dak'Art 1998, Kane was relieved of his position. The high turnover of ministers of culture during the Presidency of Abdou Diouf, and also that of his successor Abdoulaye Wade, made it difficult to maintain a consistency in the programming of Dak'Art and to plan successive Dak'Art editions on time.

On May 9, 1996, Dak'Art became formally known as the Biennial of Contemporary African Art at the opening ceremony of Dak'Art 1996, held in the Daniel Sorano Theatre (fig. 36). In his opening speech, President Diouf once again made references to the First World Festival of 1966 as the main inspiration of Dak'Art.<sup>386</sup> Coincidentally, it was also the thirtieth anniversary of the Dakar festival, which as Diouf pointed out, called for celebration. It has been a standard feature at every Dak'Art biennial since the inaugural edition to reaffirm its connection to the Dakar festival in official speeches. Dak'Art 1996 was no different in that respect, but the Biennial's reinvented identity in 1996 added legitimacy to this connection.

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

<sup>386</sup> Abou Diouf, "Perenniser la Biennale," *Spécial Dak'Art '96 Magazine*, (Dakar: Dak'Art Secretariat), 4

Alioune Badiane, who was a member of the evaluation panel in 1993 and the coordinator of the exhibitions at Dak'Art 1996, suggests that Dak'Art allowed African artists to come together in pan-African solidarity, and to speak to humanity with a fraternal will that was not always present.<sup>387</sup> Similarly, Jacques Lenhardt, who at the time was the president of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA), believed that Dak'Art presented African artists with the opportunity, under a common front, to make contributions to a new universality in an era of globalization, and thus to challenge the monopoly of international art by the "occidental art world."<sup>388</sup> Both recognized that the reinvented Dak'Art was now a platform on which the African voice would be heard at the international level.

There were other important developments at Dak'Art 1996 which strengthened its new focus as a pan-African biennial. It became a longer and more elaborate event, moving from one week to two weeks, and would become a month-long event in succeeding iterations.<sup>389</sup> For as long as the biennial lasted, its art exhibitions and ancillary activities in nooks and crannies of Dakar re-mapped Dakar as a pan-African city. These changes at Dak'Art were based on the recommendations of the evaluation panel in 1993. Dak'Art 1996 marked a new process of selecting artists through submitted portfolios and the appointment of curators for the official exhibitions. The old format of inviting artists through official channels such as embassies and informal contacts was discarded, although not entirely. Appointed curators were allowed to suggest or work with artists of

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<sup>387</sup> Alioune Badine, "Note de Présentation des expositions," *Dak'Art 1996: Biennale de l'art Africain contemporain* (Paris: Cimaïse, 1996), 10-11.

<sup>388</sup> Jacques Lenhardt, "Dak'Art 1996: Une ouverture vers un avenir commun," *Dak'Art 1996: Biennale de l'art Africain contemporain* (Paris: Cimaïse, 1996), 9.

<sup>389</sup> The only exception was in 1998 when Dak'Art lasted for miserly one-week because of legislative elections.

their own choosing, in addition to those selected through submitted portfolios. All the selected artists at Dak'Art 1996 were living and working in their countries of birth in Africa at that point.<sup>390</sup>

The international selection, the Biennial's flagship exhibition, included works of forty-two artists from seventeen African countries.<sup>391</sup> The majority of the artists were from West Africa, particularly from Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire. This was also the major criticism of Dak'Art 1996 by Rasheed Araeen and the New York gallerist William Karg. According to Araeen, the Biennial showed "too many artists from Senegal and Cote d'Ivoire, while important artists from many other countries were absent."<sup>392</sup> Similarly, Karg stated that the biennial's goal of pan-African participation was not achieved. However, unlike Araeen, who suggested that the quality of exhibited works was not a

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<sup>390</sup> In an interview with Rémi Sagna in 1998, Chika Okeke-Agulu recalled that Dak'Art 1996 only exhibited artists based in Africa and wondered if it was an official decision to exclude diasporic artists whose work, as he puts it "may belong explicitly to mainstream, postmodern, and conceptual modes of representation." In his defense, Sagna explained that the organizers of the Biennial received a small number of applications from African artists based outside the continent because Dak'Art was not very well known then. He also said that Dak'Art's meager finances had yet to allow for wider international publicity. The status and fortune of the biennial would grow quickly in the following decade as it gained more international attention. Chika Okeke and Rémi Sagna, "Dak'Art 1998: an interview with 3rd Dakar biennale director Rémi Sagna," *Nka*, No 8. (Spring/Summer 1998): 24-27.

<sup>391</sup> Dak'Art 1996 included Salah Hioun (Algeria), Dominique Zinkpe (Benin), Siriki Ky (Burkina Faso), Alassane Drabo (Burkina Faso), Patrice Boum (Cameroon), Tchale Figueira (Cape Verde), Moussossoth Dieudonné Moukala (Congo), Tiénéba Dagnoko (Côte d'Ivoire), Tamsir Dia (Côte d'Ivoire), Kra N'Guessan (Côte d'Ivoire), Chukley Vincent Secka (Gambia, who previously exhibited in Dak'Art 1992), Kwesi Owusu-Ankomah (Ghana), Cordeiro Januario Tomas Souza (Guinea Bissau), Kivuthi Mbuno (Kenya), Gichugu Meek (Kenya), Abdoulaye Konate (Mali), Boubacar Boureima (Niger), Fodé Camara (Senegal, previously exhibited in 1992), Viyé Diba (Senegal), El Hadji Sy (Senegal), Amadou Sow (Senegal), George Lilanga (Tanzania), Tsongo Daniel Kambere (Congo DRC), and Daniel Manyika (Zimbabwe). The majority of the artists were from West Africa, particularly from Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire. The international selection is the core of the biennial; it aims to present the latest examples of artistic works that represent the dynamism of African art, and the ingenuity of African artists living and working in Africa and the diaspora. It is expected to showcase works by established, mid-career and emerging artists in a non-hierarchical way.

<sup>392</sup> Additionally, Araeen stated that, "the main exhibition at the l'FAN Museum did not have enough works of each artist to give an idea of the artist's oeuvre. It would have been better to show fewer artists, and more works of each artist, in this space." Araeen's statement is a little strange as the Biennial's international selection was not meant to show the body of work of individual artists. See Rasheed Araeen, "Dak'Art 96: Biennale de l'Art Africain Contemporain - Some Views and Suggestions" (Documentation Center, Dak'Art Secretariat, Dakar, 1996).

good representation of contemporary African art, Karg considered the works “extremely strong.”<sup>393</sup> Sagna stated that the skewed demographics were not intentional; the organizers had to start from a world that they were familiar with.<sup>394</sup> Moreover, as he alleged, English-speaking artists tended to consider Dak’ Art as a French neocolonial project, and were not interested in taking part in the Biennial.<sup>395</sup>

Most works in the international selection were paintings and sculptures, following a pattern established at Dak’ Art 1992 (figs. 37-38). They were eclectic in their formal offerings and aesthetic strategies. However, there was an increase in the number of installations at Dak’ Art 1996. Some of the installations were by artists who had participated in Dak’ Art 1992. The artists included Ivorian painter Kra N’Guessan, who had exhibited a mixed media painting at Dak’ Art 1992 and now presented a free-standing painted wood and bones installation titled *Reliquaire* (1995, 230 x 79 x 50.5 cm, fig. 39). As the title of the work suggests, it has a spiritual symbolism. Another Ivorian painter, Yacouba Toure presented a mixed media installation titled *Oasis* (1994, 194 x 132 cm, fig. 40), which combines acrylic painting and plastic plates held by ropes and dangling from the large canvas. *Oasis* is a patchwork of smaller paintings glued onto a larger canvas of a similar patchwork of different shades of red pigment. A rope runs through the work vertically, from top to bottom.

The most impressive of the installations was the mixed media *Hommage aux chasseurs du Mandé* (1994, 175 x 312 x 50 cm, fig. 41) by Malian artist Abdoulaye Konaté, who had also exhibited at Dak’ Art’92. *Hommage aux chasseurs du Mandé* is a

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<sup>393</sup> Correspondence between William Karg and Rémi Sagna, dated May 27, 1996. Documentation Center, Dak’ Art Secretariat, Dakar.

<sup>394</sup> Chika Okeke and Rémi Sagna, “Dak’ Art 1998: an interview with 3rd Dakar biennale director Rémi Sagna,” Sagna, 24-27.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

large-scale mud-colored textile installation, composed of multiple horizontal rolls of neatly sewn and arranged multicolored strings, some bearing tiny traditional medicinal amulets and other objects, including cowries, bits of ivory and driftwood, and wooden troughs laden with similar found material, arranged at the base of the hanging textile. Konaté's aesthetic vocabulary is refreshingly familiar. The installation combines the sophisticated Malian craft tradition, the Bògòlan technique of dyeing textile in rich mud, and visually translated the Malian folklore of the mystic world of hunters, to address tradition and modernity. The installation was awarded the top prize, Léopold Sédar Senghor Grand Prize, at Dak'Art 1996.

The individual exhibitions of five established and mid-career artists, who stood in for the five sub-regions of Africa, were an important curatorial development at Dak'Art 1996.<sup>396</sup> The artists were Mohammed Kacimi (Morocco), representing North Africa; Ezrom Lagae (South Africa), representing Southern Africa; Pascale Marthine Tayou (Cameroon), representing Central Africa; Zerihun Yetmgeta (Ethiopia), representing East Africa; and Moustapha Dimé (Senegal), representing West Africa. The exhibitions provided a context to explore the dimensions of artistic modernism in Africa in greater depth, addressing the figments of linguistic and cultural boundaries. They also advanced the imperatives of pan-African integration through culture, a cardinal objective of Dak'Art.<sup>397</sup> Each exhibition was curated by one of the five appointed curators, two Africans and three foreign curators.<sup>398</sup> The demographics of the curators reflected the

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<sup>396</sup> These individual exhibitions of important African artists have become a crucial component of Dak'Art.

<sup>397</sup> See Amat Armengol, "Intervention de Amat Armengol: Chef de la Cooperation Culturelle a la Commission Européenne," *Dak'Art 96: La Creation Artistique Africaine et le Marche International de l'Art [Actes des "Rencontres et Echanges" de Dak'Art'Art 96]* (Dakar: Secretariat General de la Biennale des Arts), 13-14

<sup>398</sup> The appointed curators were Mary Nooter Roberts (formerly of the University of Iowa), Daniel Sotiaux (Leader of the Delegation of the French Community of Belgium in Senegal), Brahim Alaoui (former

attempt to fully insert Dak'Art into the circuit of international art biennial without compromising its new identity as a pan-African biennial.

The Moroccan art critic Brahim Alaoui curated the impressive body of work by Mohamed Kacimi, a pioneer Moroccan modernist.<sup>399</sup> The exhibition titled “From Life to Oblivion” was at the temporary exhibition space on the second floor of the I’FAN Museum’s main building.<sup>400</sup> Kacimi’s large-scale haunting paintings, which covered the walls of the Museum, presented a critical lens into Kacimi’s pictorial strivings to find the depth and meanings of reality. Kacimi pushes the boundaries of form, oscillating between abstraction and figuration, and shifting from thick exuberant coloration to softer pastel effect (fig. 42 and 43). Kacimi’s described his creative practice as a dialogue with tradition, without which it will be difficult to engage the present.<sup>401</sup> In this sense, his modernism draws from a combination of the Islamic calligraphic tradition and Western modernism, particularly French abstract art.<sup>402</sup>

The powerful oeuvre of South African Ezrom Legae was curated by the American art historian Mary Nooter Roberts (fig. 44). Titled “I think more with my eyes than with

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Director, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris), Yukiya Kawaguchi (former curator, Setagaya Art Museum, Japan), and Abdou Sylla (Senegalese art historian and curator). The curators were also part of the international selection committee which included Ousmane Sow Huchard (President of Dak'Art 1996 Orientation Committee), Rémi Sagna (Secretary General of Dak'Art), Alioune Badiane (coordinator of Dak'Art 1996 exhibitions), Marie-Claude Volfin (former Secretary General of International Association of Art Critics [AICA]), Jean-Loup Pivin (Revue Noire Magazine, Paris), Ruth Shaffner (Director of Gallery Watatu, Kenya), Dominique Kanga (art collector, Côte d'Ivoire), Kalidou Sy (former Director, École des Beaux Arts, Dakar).

<sup>399</sup> Kacimi was one of the participating artists at the Tenq workshop in 1994, discussed earlier in this chapter, and also. He also exhibited at Dak'Art 1992.

<sup>400</sup> Kacimi was one of the participating artists at the Tenq workshop in 1994.

<sup>401</sup> “Discussions - Ayant suivi l'exposé de M. Brahim Alaoui;” “Discussions – Ayant suivi l'exposé de Polly Nooter Roberts,” 32 Dak'Art 96: La Biennale De l'art Africain Contemporain [La Création artistique africaine et le marché international de l'art – Actes des ‘Rencontres et échanges’ de Dak'Art 96 (Dakar: Dak'Art Secretariat), 23, 32.

<sup>402</sup> In the mid-1950s, a young Kacimi frequented the painting workshops organized by French interlocutor Jacqueline Brodskis in Casablanca. See Hamid Irbouh, *Art in the service of colonialism: French art education in Morocco, 1912-1956* (London [u.a.]: Tauris Acad. Studies, 2005), 218.

my mind,” the exhibition was also on the second floor of the IFAN Museum’s main building. Legae’s bronze sculptures and drawings of contorted and decapitated zoomorphic and anthropomorphic forms, some with machete-like incisions, evoke the difficult history of South Africa. Works in the exhibition, such as *Dying Beast* (bronze, 1993, 43 x 36 x 29 cm, fig. 45), capture the mood of political transition from Apartheid to democracy in South Africa in the early 1990s. *Dying Beast* depicts a headless zoomorphic figure resting on its back with outstretched legs. Legae’s bronze sculptures, as well as ink drawings, are grotesque as containers filled with horrific memory but very beautiful as aesthetic objects. Their formal qualities attest to Legae’s technical proficiency in bronze and his impeccable skills as a draughtsman. Until his death in 1999, Legae was a celebrated pioneer black modernist in South Africa whose works captured the harsh social condition in South Africa during Apartheid.

A body of installations by Pascale Marthine Tayou, who was then still an emerging artist, was curated by Japanese Yukiya Kawaguchi. The exhibition, titled “Neither Primitive, Nor Wild,” was held at the Goethe Institute in Dakar (fig. 46).<sup>403</sup> It explored Tayou’s universe, connecting his personal experiences to common social issues such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which he variously explored between 1994 and 1996.<sup>404</sup> Tayou’s five installations are made mostly of detritus (dolls, plastic cosmetic containers, plastic bags, socks, wood, etc) sourced from the immediate environment. Kawaguchi’s curatorial intent was to focus attention on Tayou’s aesthetics and particular penchant for detritus as an artistic medium rather than what he viewed as the tendency by

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<sup>403</sup> Pascale Marthin Tayou belongs to a cadre of African artists who were either publicized or discovered in the early 1990s by curators and collectors including Andre Magnin, Simon Njami, Jean Loup Pivin, and Jean Pigozzi in their attempt to represent a peculiar primitivist vision of “authentic” by untutored artists.

<sup>404</sup> Pascale Marthine Tayou, “Emotion Profonde,” *Revue Noire* [special issue on AIDS and African Artists], (Dec. 1995-Jan. and Feb. 1996):8-9.

Western curators to collectivize African artists' experiences and artistic practices.<sup>405</sup>

Tayou's installations reflect what was becoming increasingly visible in the African artistic landscape of exploring social issues, and working with found objects. In the 1980s, artists in Africa began to shun the decolonizing logic of post-independence modernism, which celebrated cultural nationalism. Instead they focused on the social issues that they were confronted with on a daily basis.

The works of Zerihun Yetmgeta, the co-winner of Dak'Art 1992's top prize, was curated by Senegalese art historian Abdou Sylla at Galerie Quatres Vents in Dakar. The exhibition titled "A Spiritual Art" explored Yetmgeta's preoccupation with symbolic and subliminal aesthetic vocabulary that combines Ge'ez scripts of the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition and the iconography of African masks. The works were produced in Yetmgeta's style of painting on dried animal skin stretched over strips of bamboo, held together with strings. The works, numbering over 25 pieces, were hung on the gallery walls (fig. 47). Completing the monographic exhibitions was "From the Long Search for a Shadow," at Gallery 39 and in the garden of French Cultural Center, curated by Daniel Sotiaux. The exhibition showed free-standing slender figures made from driftwood and wall-hung sculptures made of wood boards and steel by Moustapha Dimé (figs. 48 and 49).<sup>406</sup> Inscribed on the boards were Arabic scripts. The works of Yetmgeta and Dimé reflect different aesthetic approaches. Whereas Yetmgeta combines indigenous traditions from

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<sup>405</sup> This was the crux of the accompanying essay by Yukiya Kawaguchi. Kawaguchi critiqued the depersonalization of the works of contemporary African artists, and its replacement with the "chimerical 'national culture'" or the exaggerated idea of "Africanitude," claiming that such terms are Western imposition. The strength of Kawaguchi's argument lies in his suggestion that aesthetic judgment should be premised on individual consideration rather than on blanket categorization. Yukiya Kawaguchi, "Pascale Marthine Tayou: Neither Primitive, Nor Wild," *Dak'Art '96: Biennale de l'Art Africain Contemporain* [exhibition catalogue] (Paris: Cimaïse, 1996), 79-81.

<sup>406</sup> Sadly, Dimé died two years later in July 1998.



Ethiopia and from farther afield in the continent in his mixed media paintings, Dimé's works reflected his artistic approach of *récupération*.

An exhibition of Senegalese art was organized at the National Gallery, Dakar, to complement the international selection and monographic exhibitions.<sup>407</sup> Seeking to highlight the *École de Dakar* tradition and emergent aesthetic sensibilities in the Senegalese art world, the exhibition included the works of 45 local artists.<sup>408</sup> The other exhibitions at Dak'Art 1996 were a salon of African furniture, which included works by 13 artists at Weetef Gallery in Dakar; an exhibit of tapestry and textiles by 10 designers, two ateliers, and the Center for the Manufacture of Decorative Arts (MSAD), at the Chambers and Commerce Building in Dakar and at the Center for the Manufacture of Decorative Arts (MSAD), at Thiès, in the Western region of Senegal; MOD'ART, a fashion display by 19 designers chosen by the international jury; and a salon of African art publications.<sup>409</sup> Dak'Art's expansion into the realm of commercial and utilitarian art reflected a new thinking on the part of the government, which wanted to expand the State's official policy on culture and industrialization as a pan-African agenda.<sup>410</sup> It was also in keeping with the major thrust of making the biennial the basis of a pan-African cultural development, economic prosperity, and international African art market.<sup>411</sup>

Finally, there were other independently organized exhibitions such as the important

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<sup>407</sup> Badiane, "Note de Présentation des expositions/Note about the presentation of the exhibitions," 11

<sup>408</sup> Unfortunately, the national exhibition was discontinued after Dak'Art '96 because it went against the grain of Dak'Art as a pan-African exhibition. This left many local artists feeling disenfranchised. They began to organize more independent exhibitions during the biennial, leading to the massive explosion of the Dak'Art OFF.

<sup>409</sup> Some of the new exhibitions such as furniture and textile made inconsistent appearances at subsequent Dak'Art biennials as funding permitted.

<sup>410</sup> The early seed of such thinking was planted during the presidency of Léopold Senghor who established the school for the Manufacture of Decorative Arts (MSAD) at Thiès in the Western region of Senegal.

<sup>411</sup> Secretariat General de la Biennale des Arts, *Dak'Art 96: La Creation Artistique Africaine et le Marche International de l'Art [Actes des "Rencontres et Echanges" de Dak'Art'Art 96]* (Dakar: Secretariat General de la Biennale des Arts),

“AIDS and African artists” traveling exhibition, organized by the Paris magazine *Revue Noire*.<sup>412</sup>

Without a doubt, the major highlight of Dak’Art 1996 was the “encounters and exchanges” colloquium with the theme “African Artistic Creation and the International Market of Art (figs. 50 and 51).” In his speech at the official opening ceremony of Dak’Art 1996, Abdoulaye Kane, the Minister of Culture, had stated that the development of a market for African art with Dak’Art as a launching platform would provide a huge economic boost to Africa.<sup>413</sup> Similarly, in his address, Ousmane Sow Huchard, president of Dak’Art 1996’s Orientation Committee, who noted the similarity between the First World Festival and Dak’Art in uniting and promoting African artists at the international level, called for a permanent and viable art world structure in Africa with Dak’Art as the enabling platform.<sup>414</sup> Huchard also addressed Dak’Art as a venue for African art and artists to reach the international market.<sup>415</sup> Kane’s and Huchard’s thinking was reflected in the various presentations and discussions at the colloquium, which explored the conditions of the international art market and ways of creating opportunities for African artists.<sup>416</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> The traveling exhibition kicked off in Cotonou, Benin in December 1995. Artists in the exhibition included Henry Koombes-Kums (Mauritius), Pascale Marthine Tayou (Cameroun), Georges Adeagbo (Benin), Marie Wolfs (Rwanda), Hentie van der Merwe (South Africa), H  l  ne Cor   (La R  union), Mathilde Moro (C  te d’Ivoire), Kan-Si (Senegal), Abdoulaye Konat   (Mali), Mohamed Kacimi (Morocco), In addition to visual artists, it also included musicians, choreographers, dancers, filmmakers, and writers. *Revue Noire* [special issue on AIDS and African Artists] (Dec. 1995-Jan. and Feb. 1996).

<sup>413</sup> A version of Kane’s speech was published as “Preface” of the “Acts of the Meetings and Exchanges” document. Abdoulaye Elimane Kane, “Preface,” *Dak’Art 96: La Cr  ation Artistique Africaine et le March   International de l’Art [Actes des “Rencontres et Echanges” de Dak’Art’Art 96]* (Dakar: Secretariat General de la Biennale des Arts), 2

<sup>414</sup> Ousmane Sow Huchard, “Allocution,” *Dak’Art 96: La Cr  ation Artistique Africaine et le March   International de l’Art [Actes des “Rencontres et Echanges” de Dak’Art’Art 96]* (Dakar: Secretariat General de la Biennale des Arts), 7-12

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>416</sup> Presenters and discussants included, Iba Ndiaye Djadji (art critic, Senegal, who organized the event), William Karg (gallerist, Contemporary African Art Gallery, New York), Ruth Schaffner (gallerist, Watatu

Dak'Art 1996 was pivotal in that it began a new chapter for Dak'Art as a pan-African biennial. It was also better organized than its two predecessors, commanded a bigger budget of 470 million CFA (roughly \$750,000 in today's money), and attracted more patrons and partners.<sup>417</sup> However, it was plagued by some of the issues that were present in 1992, particularly logistics and organizational challenges.<sup>418</sup> Nonetheless, Dak'Art 1996's focus on an international market of contemporary art in Africa was a very important development, which was carried over to Dak'Art 1998. Dak'Art '98 created an enabling environment for galleries and artists to sell artworks directly to local and international collectors, which is not the usual practice in art biennials.<sup>419</sup> In a conversation with Chika Okeke-Agulu during the Biennial, Rémi Sagna stated that, given the lopsided nature of the international art market, it was necessary that Dak'Art become an "instrument that will integrate Africa through a common cultural market, a platform to allow African artists access to the international art market."<sup>420</sup> A thriving international art marketplace in Africa would help raise the value of contemporary African art, improve resources for artists living and working in Africa, launch them on the international stage, and raise the quality of artistic production on the continent in general.<sup>421</sup>

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Gallery, Nairobi, Kenya), Bryan Biggs (gallerist UK.), Simone Guirandou-Ndiaye (art historian), Yacouba Konaté (art historian and critic), Gerard Xuriguera (art critic, Cimaise art magazine, France), Rasheed Araeen (artist, and critic, UK), among others.

<sup>417</sup> They included the European Union, which contributed the biggest percentage of the total budget, Francophonie Agency, Ministry of Culture, Senegal, the city of Dakar, French Community of Belgium in Dakar, Senegal, TV5 Africa, UNESCO, and multinational companies based in Senegal.

<sup>418</sup> Since 1992, it is the culture of the biennial to build on criticisms, both positive and negative, after every edition. Some of the criticisms have also become routine for each successive editions of *Dak'Art* because of the lack of any real attempt to address them. These criticisms will include late arrival of works, under-defined curatorial contexts or even a lack of an articulate curatorial vision, unevenness of exhibited works and general organizational difficulties.

<sup>419</sup> "Culture d'orientation mai '98," *Orange Light* (Dakar: Baobab Center, African Consultants International, 1998).

<sup>420</sup> Okeke and Rémi Sagna, 24.

<sup>421</sup> The economic gains of an international marketplace for contemporary African art are addressed brilliantly by Emma Bedford. See Emma Bedford, "Contemporary African Art: Seismic Shifts in the

Due to legislative elections in Senegal in 1998, Dak'Art 1998 was brought forward to April from its usual date in May. The event was also short; it opened April 24th and ended on April 30th 1998.<sup>422</sup> However, it maintained the exhibitions structures and formats introduced in 1996: an international selection, five monographic exhibitions of important or promising artists, textile and tapestry salon, African designs (furniture and fashion), and exhibition of African art publication. Dak'Art 1998 also included an exhibition of the locally popular glass painting *sous verre*, salon on arts education, and workshops on children artistic expression. The Biennial's exhibitions of fine arts, utilitarian art, and intellectual platforms, especially the "meetings and exchanges," as well as independently and commercially driven art exhibitions, were viewed as organically connected to spur the much desired international market of African art at Dak'Art.<sup>423</sup>

Dak'Art 1998's main exhibition, the international selection, included 37 artists from 13 African countries.<sup>424</sup> Unlike the five monographic exhibitions at Dak'Art 1998,

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Markets," in *Who Knows Tomorrow*, eds. Udo Kittelmann, Chika Okeke-Agulu, and Britta Schmitz (Köln; London: Walther König, 2010).

<sup>422</sup> The organizers of Dak'Art 1998 included Ousmane Sow Huchard (President of the Orientation Committee), Alioune Badiane (Director of the National School of Arts, Dakar), Souleymane Bachir Diagne (Cultural Adviser to the President of the Republic), Victor Cabrita (Director, Cours Sainte Marie de Hann), Rémi Sagna (Secretary General of Dak'Art), Viyé Diba (artist), Ousmane Sow (artist), Abdou Sylla (art historian), and Mamadou Diouf (Director, The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, Dakar).

<sup>423</sup> Dak'Art, "Management de l'art africain contemporain: la biennale de l'art africain contemporain [actes des rencontres et échanges de la Biennale Dak'Art'98], (Dakar: Conseil scientifique de la biennale de l'art africain contemporain, 1998).

<sup>424</sup> The artists included Luis Meque (Zimbabwe), Fatma Charfi (Tunisia), Jane Alexander (South Africa), Sam Nhlengethwa (South Africa), Zwelethu Mthethwa (South Africa), Fernando Alvim (Angola), Cyprien Tokoudagba (Benin), Dominique Zinkpe (Benin), Zoungrana Saidou Beyson (Burkina Faso), Barthélémy Togou (Cameroun), Lindoun Salifou (Cameroun), Godfried Kadjo (Cameroun), Figuera Tchale Carlos (Cape Verde), Chéri Samba (Congo DRC), Dago Ananias Leki (Côte d'Ivoire), Doumbouya Abdouramane (Côte d'Ivoire), Godfried Donkor (Ghana), Oladele Ajiboye Bamgboye (Nigeria), Camara Sérigne Mbaye (Senegal), Diba Viyé (Senegal), Ndiaye Ousmane Dago (Senegal), and Kebe Ibrahim (Senegal).

which had individual curators, the international selection had no official curator.<sup>425</sup> The members of the international selection, who also doubled as the jury for the Biennial's prizes, supervised the official exhibition as was the case in Dak'Art 1992 and 1996.<sup>426</sup> Perhaps in response to the criticisms of Dak'Art 1996, more artists, especially from South Africa, but also from the diaspora, were included. However, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire and Cameroon accounted for most of the artists, as in previous editions. Dak'Art 1998 also showed the early signs of a shift from the modernism that defined much of post-independence African art to the more conceptually-driven and politically charged contemporary African art. The introduction of photography, performance, and multi-media installations in 1998 represented the beginning of Dak'Art's acknowledgement of changes in media, technology, forms of expression, aesthetic ideology and visual languages. Artistic vocabularies were becoming increasingly conceptual in addressing political, existential, humanist, and universal themes, and in bringing the local and global in a dialogue. However, conventional painting, sculpture, and mixed media were also exhibited. They dominated the official exhibition as in previous Dak'Art Biennials.

One of the works at Dak'Art 1998 that captured this shift was *Carte de Séjour* (fig. 52), a performance by the Cameroonian artist Barthélémy Togou. Togou, who lives in Paris and Bandjoun in Cameroon, enacts the joy of an African immigrant upon

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<sup>425</sup> Dak'Art 1998's monographic exhibitions focused on the connections between Africa and the diaspora by exhibiting two African artists based on the continent, one African artist based in Europe, and two artists from the older African diaspora. Yacouba Konaté, Ivorian curator and art historian, curated the works of South African artist Willie Bester. Mary Jane Jacob, American curator and Professor at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, curated the works of African-American photographer Carrie Mae Weems. The German curator Alfons Hug curated the works of the Angolan artist Antonio Olé. The Tunisian curator Ali Louati curated the works of the Paris-based Tunisian modernist Ahmed Hajeri. Lastly, the Quebec-based Haitian curator Dominique Fontain curated the works of the Cuban artist K.cho.

<sup>426</sup> The international selection and jury committee included Achille Bonito Olivia (curator and art critique, Italy), Linda Givon (Director, Goodman Gallery, South Africa), Yacouba Konate (curator and art historian, Côte d'Ivoire), Alphona Hug (Goethe Institut, Caracas, Venezuela), Mary Jane Jacob (curator, USA), Danièle Giraudy (museum curator, France), and Diana Porfirio (curator, Belgium).

obtaining the French residential permit, a permit which would allow him to find legal employment and to begin to live his European dream, so to speak. In the performance Togou caresses and holds tightly a large *Carte de Séjour*, fabricated from wood, relieving his own personal experience, an experience that is existential for most African immigrants but which is also universal. The aesthetic language of engaging themes or issues that affect people at local and global levels employed by Togou was enhanced in Dak'Art exhibitions in the following decade.

### **Conclusion**

From the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that the range of works at Dak'Art from 1992 to 1998 showed the various examples of post-independence modernist attitudes. For example, Mohamed Kacimi's abstract forms and vivid colors reflect the poetics of Islamic calligraphy, which the artist's claims he draws upon, and exposure to Western art. Zerihun Yetmgeta formally draws upon Ge'ez scripts of the Ethiopian Orthodox church and the iconography of African masks. Works by Viyé Diba, Moustapha Dimé, and Pascale Marthine Tayou reflect the aesthetic approach of working with found materials, which had begun to percolate in Africa in the 1980s. As a result of economic challenges that marked the 1980s, artists in Senegal, but also elsewhere on the continent, started to source for alternative art materials. In addition, they shifted from the decolonizing aesthetics of post-independence modernism as they lost faith with the postcolonial project in their various countries. Instead artists began to address the socio-political and economic realities in their countries as can be seen in the works by Diba, Dimé, and Tayou, as well as other artists discussed in this chapter. The focus on social

conditions became enhanced from the 1990s on. It is in this sense that I frame the 1980s as a bridge between the early post-independent modernism and the more recent contemporary practices.

The larger percentage of works exhibited at Dak'Art in the 1990s were painting and sculpture, reflective of the prevalent mode of artistic representation in Africa in the period. However, Dak'Art 1998 marked the beginning of the Biennial's recognition of the more conceptual orientation of African artists who had begun to embrace internationalist trends and multiple media. Performance such as Barthélémy Togou's *Carte de Séjour* was exhibited for the first time in 1998. Site-specific installations, performance, photography, and technology driven art became increasingly prominent from 2000, as we shall see in the next chapter.

## Chapter Four

### Dak'Art and Contemporary African Art since 2000

The second half of the last chapter discussed the institutional transformation of Dak'Art into a pan-African Biennial in 1996. This reinvention solidified Dak'Art's cultural politics. I also explored the institutional structure of Dak'Art in terms of its various exhibitions and organizing committees in detail, which came about with the Biennial's transformation. In 1998, Dak'Art recorded another milestone when photography and performance were included in its main exhibition for the first time. This marked a transition from modernist modes of representation in African art at Dak'Art, of which the principal forms were painting and sculpture, to trends that mirror international practices. From 2000 on, the Biennial began to increasingly exhibit technology driven and time-based art forms, such as video, film, photography, sound, as well as multi-media installations and performance. This development at Dak'Art reflects a shift in objects of representation in contemporary African art. Nonetheless, conventional paintings, drawings, and sculptures have continued to be featured in the Biennial because they remain important forms of visual expression on the continent.

Having explored Dakar's exhibitions and their formats in the last chapter, I will focus attention mainly on the variety works exhibited at Dak'Art since 2000 in order to understand how the Biennial frames the contemporary. In this regard, this chapter shifts from the chronological approach adopted in the previous chapter, which was helpful in charting the trajectories of events in Senegal and at Dak'Art in the 1990s. My analysis will also include works exhibited in the Dak'Art OFF, a parallel platform for exhibitions and events that are independently organized during the Biennial. In the second half of this chapter, I explore the development of the OFF and some of its exhibitions to establish



how it complements the official Dak'Art (also known as the IN). The IN and the OFF create a wider context for engaging the impact of Dak'Art on contemporary African art.

### **Dak'Art Since 2000**

After Dak'Art 2000, Secretary General Rémi Sagna was replaced by Ousseynou Wade, a bureaucrat in the Ministry of Culture.<sup>427</sup> Wade's assumption of the position of General Secretary in 2002 began a new era at the Biennial that ended in late Fall of 2012. The change in the administrative leadership in the period from 2000 to 2012 did not affect the direction of the biennial.<sup>428</sup> Instead, it solidified the Biennial's pan-African exhibition model, and brought about new developments such as *Afrik'Art*, the Biennial's magazine of visual art. Wade retained the exhibition's format (international selection, monographic exhibitions, fashion and textile, furniture design, etc.), which began at Dak'Art 1996. Nevertheless, slight adjustments were made to the biennial's structure in some of the succeeding editions based on the visions of appointed curators, themes, and the recommendations of the evaluation committee.

Wade organized six successive Dak'Art editions and served the longest in the position of Secretary General.<sup>429</sup> Wade's leadership style was totally different from that of his predecessor Sagna. He was quiet, unassuming, diplomatic, and was long suffering in dealing with successive Ministers of Culture, unlike Sagna. From 2000 to 2012, Wade

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<sup>427</sup> Sagna, who gained international visibility and experience from working at Dak'Art, became the Head of the Cultural Diversity Department of l'Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF, International Organization of the Francophonie), the umbrella organization of French-speaking countries from 2001 until 2012.

<sup>428</sup> Coincidentally, 2000 marked a change in the political climate in Senegal. Abdoulaye Wade, who had been the leader of opposition since independence, was elected as president, replacing Abdou Diouf. I discuss the impact of Wade's presidency on Dak'Art in the following chapter.

<sup>429</sup> After Dak'Art 2012, Wade was replaced by Mr. Babacar Mbaye Diop, a philosophy professor at the Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar.

invited a mix of international curators. They included British curator David Elliott (former Director of Museum of Modern Art at Oxford, England and Museum of Modern Art, Stockholm, Sweden), Swiss curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, Brazilian curator Ivo Mesquita, and American curator Mary Jane Jacob. African-based curators, including South African Marilyn Martin (former Director of Iziko South African National Gallery), Moroccan Abdella Karoum, Ivorian Yacouba Konaté, Nigerian Bisi Silva, Zimbabwean Barbara Murray, Congolese Célestin Badibanga ne Mwine, Algerian Nadira Laggoune-Aklouche, and South African Riason Naidoo participated, as did curators of African descent based in the West, including Salah M. Hassan, Simon Njami, N'Gone Fall, and Christine Eyene. These curators worked with the pan-African format of the Biennial.

Wade also invited more non-African curators to serve as members of the international selection and jury committees. They also curated Dak'Art alongside African curators as part of the strategy of attracting more international attention to the biennial, firmly placing Dak'Art within the global circuit of biennials and improving the quality of curation at Dak'Art and in Africa in general. Sagna had begun this move in 1996 by inviting the American art historian and curator Polly Nooter-Roberts and Japanese curator Yukiya Kawaguchi. In 1998, he invited Achille Bonito Olivia, the Italian curator who directed the 45th edition of the Venice Biennial, to serve on the artists' selection committee and as a member of the jury for the Biennial's prizes.

Like any other biennial, Dak'Art is international and functions at the intersection of the local and global. In its rhetoric of pan-Africanism, Dak'Art considers African art as part of the mainstream art world while at the same time offering an alternative vision of how that world takes shape in Africa. It is for this reason that it brings on board non-

African curators to curate some of its exhibitions and serve as jury members. Its global aspirations are particularly attractive to many artists, who seek a platform to enter into the international mainstream. However, its geopolitics based on pan-Africanism is not necessarily embraced by all the artists. In several conversations with artists at Dak'Art in 2010 and 2012, it was clear that some would want the Biennial to become international again by showing works of both African and non-African artists.

For example, Senegalese artist Soly Cissé argued that Dak'Art's focus on African artists is provincial, and that the artists and the Biennial pursue different agendas.<sup>430</sup> According to Cissé, the artists seek a platform to gain an entry into the mainstream art world, which would be better served if they exhibited alongside their contemporaries from elsewhere.<sup>431</sup> Cissé's position, however, does not quite capture the nature of Dak'Art's cultural politics of pan-Africanism, which is a strategy of visibility. It distinguishes Dak'Art from other biennials, and provides African artists with a venue that they can call their own. Although Dak'Art appears to draw upon the cultural politics of the earlier pan-African festivals by focusing on artists of African descent, it is not interested in identity politics *per se*. Unlike the earlier pan-African festivals, which sought racial solidarity through cultural interaction, Dak'Art's cultural politics agitate for international inclusion based on Africa's terms. It is for this reason that artists, including Cissé, who was discovered at Dak'Art in 2000, have gone on to chart significant international careers.

The Senegalese sculptor Ndary Lo, who has exhibited repeatedly at Dak'Art, agrees with Cissé that the biennial would be more interesting if it included non-African

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<sup>430</sup> Soly Cissé, interview by author, 18 May 2010, digital recording, Dakar, Senegal.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

artists.<sup>432</sup> Yet, Lo was also cautious about what the result would be. He said that it was easy to see how the African voice was swallowed by non-African artists at Dak'Art 1992, because the latter had access to means that were not available to most African artists. The subsequent reinvention of the Biennial in 1996, Lo said, was not protectionist; rather, it was a strategy to make the Biennial distinct from others and to give it a specific purpose.<sup>433</sup> Both artists, however, view Dak'Art as an important platform for African art and artists. It can be argued that Dak'Art seeks the relevance of pan-Africanism as it also relates to its selection of artworks in its exhibitions. However, this is true to the extent that Dak'Art has exhibited works that address postcolonial experiences in Africa. The works that are discussed in this chapter show the proclivity by African artists to engage subject matters and issues that affect people in Africa, but also elsewhere, such as the processes of globalization.

Cissé himself is an example. Cissé, whose work has been exhibited in several Dak'Art biennials since 2000, explains that his aesthetic incorporates multiple cultural references.<sup>434</sup> They include his Wolof ethnicity and the indigenous cultural traditions of Senegal; quotidian experiences in Dakar, his birthplace and place of domicile; the legacy of French colonialism (language and sociability); and, because Cissé travels quite often and is keyed into the circuits of the global art world, the palpable reality of cosmopolitanism. Cissé claims that his cosmopolitan consciousness dictates his familiarity with the worldwide flow of electronic information, what Arjun Appadurai refers to as “mediascapes.” For Cissé, this is a world of visuals.<sup>435</sup> Cissé scavenges this

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<sup>432</sup> Ndary Lo, interview by author, 22 May 2010, digital recording, Dakar, Senegal.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid.

<sup>434</sup> Cissé, interview by author, 30 May 2010, digital recording, Dakar, Senegal.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

world of visuals for inspiration and creative fodder to navigate the complexities and linkages that define his “glocal” world, in which Dakar is the center.

In *Serie Colorée* (2010, acrylic on canvas, 150 x 150 cm x 3, fig. 53), a triptych exhibited in the Dak’Art OFF in 2010, Cissé explores man as a composite of two selves, the interior and the exterior.<sup>436</sup> The interior is the spirit, the seat of consciousness, and therefore the fount of identity. The internal self defines the substance of Cissé’s creativity but in harmony with the external self, which is matter. The painting is composed of outlines and distorted forms, mostly of nude and clothed humans and animals that morph into one another. These forms are realized in a combination of warm and cool colors, and a mix of graphic, geometric and organic shapes, all set against a flat picture plane. The color scheme and grotesque forms combine effectively to present a haunting and phantasmagorical imagery. Cissé’s surrealist brushstrokes create captivating spirit-like forms which float and merge into one another on the picture plane. In his immense juxtaposition of forms, multiple layering of messages and meanings, and use of various media and techniques, Cissé opens up the physical and conceptual understanding of man as a visual experience. With the artist as an enabler, the painting transports the viewer to esoteric planes of communication between material and intangible selves through the viewer’s own power of imagination.

*Serie Colorée* also includes the legible numberings that have come to symbolize contemporary consumer culture in Cissé’s work, which he refers to as urban signs.

“Dakar – Senegal” is clearly inscribed on the first panel in the triptych to outline the sociological and physical space that is the subject of Cissé’s attention. Cissé is fixated on

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<sup>436</sup> The painting was one of the works exhibited by Cissé under the theme *Objets noyés et bribes de vies* in a joint exhibition with Cameroon artist Barthélemy Togou, organized by the French Institut’s Galerie Le Manège, Dakar, as part of Dak’Art 2010 OFF.

Dakar as a microcosm of Senegal because it is the city of his birth, his roots, and ultimately, his immediate world. The quality of the surreal is almost instinctive in *Serie Colorée* as Cissé attempts to capture the intensity and dimensions of Dakar.

Contemporary Dakar is defined by its own “sur-reality” --- a mélange of political and intellectual activism, economic difficulties and social inequalities, benign class warfare, communitarian solidarity, hope and contentment --- just like any other world city.

Cissé’s work is typically a natural extension of himself, even though his subject matters often consist of explorations of human conditions at various levels: local, national, pan-African, global, and universal. His work reflects the artist’s search for self-actualization, but bears the pensive and fractured marks of his urban experiences in Dakar and the various world cities where his international career has taken him.<sup>437</sup>

Nikos Papastergiadis notes that “the coda for the contemporary artist is defined by the desire to be in the contemporary, rather than to produce a belated or elevated response to the everyday.”<sup>438</sup> This coda, Papastergiadis suggests, “recognizes the dual right of artists to both maintain an active presence in a local context and participate in transnational dialogues.”<sup>439</sup> Contemporary African artists’ realities are no different; they address the everyday through personal, collective, existential, and historical experiences in and of Africa. Similarly, Ousseynou Wade, the immediate past Secretary General of Dak’Art, suggests that contemporary African art mirrors the multifaceted dimensions of African postcolonial experiences and subjectivities in the era of cultural globalization.<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>437</sup> Cissé, interview, 30 May 2010, *ibid.*

<sup>438</sup> Nikos Papastergiadis, “Spatial Aesthetics: Rethinking the contemporary,” in *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, eds. Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor, and Nancy Condee (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 363.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*, 363-364.

<sup>440</sup> Ousseynou Wade [immediate past Secretary General of Dak’Art], interview by author, 1 February 2012, digital recording, Dakar, Senegal. This perspective on African art was reinforced in many interviews

This is to say, contemporary African art addresses the various cultural experiences which stimulate African artists, and which allow them to take up multiple identities --- ethnicities, colonial legacies, formal and informal art training, nationality/nationalism, various forms of socialization (local, pan-African, transnational, etc.), and cosmopolitan mobility --- through various forms of identification and belonging. These identities and identifications are lenses through which African artists (either in Africa or the diaspora) envision, see, and insert themselves in their immediate and wider worlds.<sup>441</sup> The works exhibited at Dak'Art in the last 12 years show the interesting dialectic of the local and the global, which is a defining element of the contemporary.

### **Reading the Contemporary**

This section will discuss works by artists who have participated in Dak'Art since 2000, some of them repeatedly. This is helpful in showing how Dak'Art may have evolved through repeated exposure of some of the artists. I am interested in points of connections and divergence in the works, and how they convey the range of contemporary practices and forms of expressions. I emphasize photography, video,

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conducted in Dakar or during the biennial in 2010 and 2012, with the following: Ibrahima Niang (Senegalese artist, 22 March 2012), Ndary Lo (Senegalese artist, 24 May 24, 2010, 18 April 2012), Sofiane Zouggar (Algerian artist, 13 May 2012), Hervé Youmbi (Cameroonian artist, 28 May 2010), Moridja Kitenge Banza (Congolese artist, May 24, 2010), Moataz Nasr (Egyptian artist, 14 May 2012), Chika Modum (Nigerian artist 12 May 2012), Abdou Sylla (Senegalese art historian, 28 May 2010), N'Gone Fall (Senegalese curator, 9 June 2010, 17 May 2012) Simon Njami (Cameroonian critic and curator, 19 January and 12 May 2012), Marion Louisgrande-Sylla (French-Senegalese Director of Kër Thiossane, an independent art center in Dakar, 21 April 2012), Raison Naidoo (South African curator and current Director of Iziko South African National Gallery, 9 May 2012), Yacouba Konaté (Ivorian art historian and curator, 13 May 2012), and Achille Mbembe (Cameroonian philosopher, 12 May 2012).

<sup>441</sup> In my own view the multiple identities of African artists are captured in the philosopher Anthony Appiah's "Rooted Cosmopolitanism," which is the idea that an individual can belong to or engage with several overlapping communities or contexts, as forms and processes of identification. I will also add that most contemporary African artists are cosmopolitans, including those who have never been outside of their immediate communities, as postcolonial subjects. The legacy of colonialism makes them open to other cultures and external experiences. See Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press), 213-272.

installations, and performance, which became very prominent at Dak' Art in the 2000s. I also address a few examples of conventional sculpture and painting because they continue to be exhibited at Dak' Art. Altogether, the works offer insights on contemporary African art that go beyond the context of Biennial. It is important to emphasize that the works discussed are a subset of contemporary African art. They are neither the entirety of what has been exhibited at Dak' Art in the last few years nor the contemporary cultural production in Africa *writ large*. Yet, they present interesting trends in recent African art from the different sub-regions and the diaspora.

A critical underpinning of recent African art is the artists' emphasis on narratives (in both the figurative and literal senses) and dialogue as creative devices. This is evident in the themes that have been explored at Dak' Art in the last twelve years. In many instances, the choice of media of expression not only determines the realized work but also the artists' narratives. In other words, the artistic message is not complete without a synchronization of form, ideas, and media. The artistic message, however, reflects an engagement with issues of a dialectical nature. The works are organized into three broad thematic groupings: "embodied identities and subjectivities," "global relations and the dimensions of globalization," and "socio-cultural, economic and political conditions in contemporary Africa." The three thematic groupings cover a long list of subject matters and topics addressed by Dak' Art artists. The list includes race and ethnicity, cultural roots, histories, memories, political and economic relations between African and Western countries, experiences of mobility, immigration, colonialism, and globalization. It also includes civil war, poverty, consumerism, environmental concerns, and the urban experience.



## Embodied Identities and Subjectivities

In *Red, Yellow, and Brown: Face to Face* (2000, dimensions unknown, fig. 54), exhibited at Dak'Art 2000, the South African artist Berni Searle utilizes her body as a site of historical interrogation.<sup>442</sup> The photographic installation reflects a new artistic trajectory that became apparent in contemporary African art in the 1990s; there is increasingly a tendency to employ the artist's individual image or body as visual reference. This opens up a range of conceptual possibilities, allowing artists to address identity and cultural roots.<sup>443</sup> It is the image or body of the artist which drives both the creative process and meaning. The photographic installation consists of eighteen large-size digital color prints on vellum drafting paper of a nude Searle, who is lying down horizontally and covered in either red, yellow, or brown spices. In some of the prints, the outline of the artist's absent body is traced in the same spices. At the base of the sheets with outlines of Searle's absent body, there is a mound of the particular spice that matches the color of the spice in the individual prints.

*Red, Yellow, and Brown: Face to Face* belongs to a body of work, *The Colour Me Series*, in which Searle examines her personal history and inserts it into the broader histories of South Africa's social, economic and political evolution. According to Searle, the powder is a metaphor for East Indian spices, which in turn tells a narrative of

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<sup>442</sup> Dak'Art 2000 featured the works of 46 artists including Berni Searle (South Africa), Fatma M'seddi Charfi (Tunisia), Angèle Etoundi Essamba (Cameroon), Mounir Fatmi (Morocco), Samuel Fosso (Central African Republic), Amadou Camara Guèye (Senegal), Jems Robert Koko Bi (Côte d'Ivoire), Goddy Leye (Cameroon), Essien Mfon (Nigeria), Joël Mpah Dooh (Cameroon), Ali Mroivili (the Comoros Island), Zwelethu Mthethwa (South Africa), Suzanne Ouédraogo (Burkina Faso), Younés Rahmoun (Morocco), Tracey Rose (South Africa), Ndary Lô (Senegal), Kossi Assou (Togo), Kofi Setordji (Ghana), and Zoarinivo Razakaratriko (Madagascar). It involved a curatorial team and jury that included David Elliott (UK), Sylvain Sankale (Senegal), Simon Njami (France/Cameroon), Peter Pierre-Louis (Seychelles), Hans Bogatzke (Germany), Orlando Britto Jinorio (Spain), Malika Dorbani (Algeria), and Ablade Glover (Ghana).

<sup>443</sup> I do recognize a similar preoccupation before the 1990s in the work of the Nigerian-born British artist Rotimi Fani-Kayode, who was active from the mid-1980s until 1989, when he died. However, Kayode's artistic practice was principally in the United Kingdom.

mercantile trade on the Indian Ocean by the Dutch East India Company, the influx of Dutch East Indies indentured laborers as a result of this trade, the history of colonialism and European migration into South Africa, and the subsequent construction of racial categories by the Apartheid regime. Searle's story of South Africa's complex identity politics is revealed in her own cultural roots, which are a mixture of several racial groups and ethnic identities. She is of European, Asian, and African ancestry and also has Muslim and Roman Catholic roots.<sup>444</sup> As Judy Ramgolam suggests, "The acknowledgement and embracing of individual ethnic identities have been a mentally liberating exercise specifically for black people in terms of the reclaiming of a sense of self with place."<sup>445</sup>

The Apartheid system instituted the taxonomic categories of white, colored, Indian, and African as segregative and divide-and-rule tactics. However, one of the subversive lines of action against the color-code policy of Apartheid was the reconstitution of the racial classification into two broad categories of white and a generic "black" label for all who were categorized as non-white in the course of the struggle against Apartheid. The recent politics of ethnic nationalism in South Africa on the part of the black majority is a cathartic process of reclaiming the agency of self and collective representation. It is also part of the process of claiming indigenous status connected to land as an economic and ancestral resource to address forced removal and displacement that was tied to racial hierarchy during Apartheid. Racial identity and its connections to

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<sup>444</sup> Judy Ramgolam writes that South Africa has been home of an array of cultures and ethnicities for centuries; these have contributed to a "plural, heterogeneous and complex society... represented by Khoisan, Bantu-speaking Nguni, Dutch merchants and colonists, Afrikaners, English-speaking immigrants, Malay slaves, Chinese laborers, enterprising Indians, indentured laborers, Jewish immigrants and new identities that were constructed as a result of the merging of cultures." Judy Ramgolam, *Identity, place and displacement in the visual art of female artists at the Vaal University of Technology, 1994-2004* (D.Phil diss., University of Pretoria, 2011), 76.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid, 77

indigenous rights assume an added significance for South Africans who were classified as “colored” under Apartheid’s social taxonomy and racial segregation policies.

The “Colored” racial group is a composite of peoples with Bantu, Khoisan, European, Malay, Malagasy, Chinese, and Filipino ancestry, some of whose forebears came to South Africa as slaves or indentured workers. Neither “pure” white nor “fully” black, they were referred to as “Bastaards,” “racial misfits,” “non-persons...the leftovers,” because of their mixed race.<sup>446</sup> In post-Apartheid South Africa, colored South Africans began to insist on their African heritage, mostly aligning themselves with the Khoisan, regarded as a first nation people or original inhabitants of South Africa. The emphasis on Khoisan roots is connected to the politics of indigenous rights and land claims in post-Apartheid South Africa. Searle, who is labeled “colored,” has comprehensively explored the historical and contemporary conditions of race and identity in the context of South Africa, relying on her own background and personal history. She addresses the “colored racial category” as a historical construct, which resonates significantly in the contemporary and continues to shape the politics of identity in South Africa. The installation *Red, Yellow and Brown* won Searle the Revelation prize awarded by the Ministry of Culture of Senegal at Dak’Art 2000. Searle, who was born in Cape Town in 1964, where she currently lives, also exhibited at Dak’Art 2006. In 2012, she was one of the 3 artists officially invited by the Biennial to exhibit her body of work at the National Gallery, Dakar.<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>446</sup> Editorial, “Race in South Africa: Still an Issue,” *The Economist*, February 4, 2012. <http://www.economist.com/node/21546062>.

<sup>447</sup> Searle is one of the most active and visible South African artists today. Her participation at the Johannesburg biennial in 1997 and Dak’Art in 2000 launched her into international mainstream. She was included in *Authentic/Ex-centric* at the 49th Venice Biennale (2001), the *5th Shanghai Biennale*, Shanghai Art Museum, China (2004), *TEXTures: Word and Symbol in Contemporary African Art* at the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Washington DC, USA (2005), among other major international

Like Searle, Tracey Rose uses her own body to open up conversations on South Africa's social history, addressing similar issues around the female body, identity, and gender. Her nude body is the visual reference and conceptual point of departure in *Span II* (1997, fig. 55), a video and object installation exhibited as part of Dak'Art 2000's international selection.<sup>448</sup> *Span II* was initially exhibited as a performance and video installation in *GRAFT*, curated by Colin Richards at the Iziko South African National Gallery (ISANG) as part of the Second Johannesburg Biennial in 1997. In the ISANG installation, a nude Rose sits in a reclining pose on top of an overturned TV, which shows a looped video of Rose's naked body. Both Rose and the TV are in a large glass cabinet. Rose's head is shaven and tilted downward as she knits with some of her cut hair placed on her lap. The rest of her hair lies at her feet in the right hand corner of the vitrine. She intentionally presents a passive image of domesticity, exhibiting herself as a woman who is oblivious to her surroundings and apparently lacks agency over her displayed body, which is on full view for the spectators' consumption.

In *Span II*, Rose makes several allusions to her personal biography as a "colored" South African. She is of German and indigenous Khoisan ancestry and a Roman Catholic. She also explores the history of the ethnographic display of the black women's body, postcolonial thought, the fiction of racial constructs, and predatory colonial and male gazes that have objectified the female body. For instance, hair in the "colored" community is a fraught bodily attribute; it marks the individual as closer to blackness or

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exhibitions. She continues to explore issues of memory, place, and history, and to push the boundaries of her chosen media, photography and video.

<sup>448</sup> Born in Durban in 1974, Rose trained at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and Goldsmiths College, University of London, where she received her B.A. in Fine Arts (1996), and Masters of Fine Arts (2007), respectively. Since 1997, Rose has featured in major international exhibitions, including the Johannesburg Biennial (1997), the Venice Biennial (2001), *Africa Remix* (2005), and *Snap Judgments: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography* (2006).

whiteness. Straight hair, as opposed to curly hair, marks one as privileged, further into the sphere of whiteness, but it also means the individual was often insulted for thinking s/he is white.<sup>449</sup> Rose makes reference to the social construction of identity and race with her hair. The pensive act of knotting her cut hair invokes her Roman Catholic background of praying with the rosary as a child, as well as the idea of working with one's hands and producing craft "as a gendered activity ... and as form of empowerment."<sup>450</sup>

*Span II* also invokes the ethnographic display of black/colored women's body. The installation has been described as referencing the historical Sarah "Saartjie" Baartman, who was racialized, sexualized, and put on display as an ethnographic freak show attraction in Europe in the early 19th century under the name of the Hottentot Venus.<sup>451</sup> Rose makes reference to Bartmaan as an object of male and colonial gazes, and how both gazes continue to shape discourses around women's identity and gender history. At Dak'Art 2000, *Span II* was composed of the overturned TV showing Rose's naked body, and Rose's hair placed on the base of the vitrine. It did not include the original performative context, and therefore lacked the stronger visual impact that affective corporeal presence can provide. It may be argued that the Dak'Art version presented a more nuanced engagement for beholders.

It is not difficult to view Searle's and Rose's work as addressing the specific South African context. Indeed, both works belong to a late 1970s and 1980s conceptual

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<sup>449</sup> Rose, interview by Judy Ramgolam, in Ramgolam, *Identity, place and displacement in the visual art of female artists at the Vaal University of Technology, 1994-2004*, 146.

<sup>450</sup> Robert Atkins, *Art Speaks: A Guide to contemporary ideas, movement, and buzzwords, 1945-present* (New York: Abbeville, 1997), 93.

<sup>451</sup> Sue Williamson, "Tracey Rose," *Artthrob, Archive: Issue No. 43, March 2001*. <http://www.artthrob.co.za/01mar/artbio.html>. In another work, *Venus Baartman* (2001), Rose explores in greater detail the life and fate of Sarah "Saartjie" Baartman. See also, more recently, Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2009).

strategy in South African art history, where female artists focused on the female body as a “symbolic gesture to politicize the personal.”<sup>452</sup> Yet post-1990 contemporary African art shows a pattern wherein artists address postcolonial identities and postcolonial subjectivities in Africa. Several works at Dak’Art have presented the intersection of self-imagining, beauty, and history in addressing the female body. Artists such as Cameroonian Angèle Etoundi Essamba, Egyptian Amal El Kenawy, Tunisian Fatma Charfi, and Kenyan Ingrid Mwangi have explored women’s experiences from multiple perspectives using photography, video, performance, and installation.<sup>453</sup>

The Nigerian photographer Mfon Essien provides a personal and intimate account of her body, but with a poignant universal message, in a series of photographs entitled *The Amazon’s New Clothes* (1999, fig. 56). Exhibited at Dak’Art 2000, the black and white photographs are of the artist’s post-mastectomy body, addressing a resilient female nude.<sup>454</sup> They show Essien’s nude body in various poses to denote classical Amazon figures and challenge the heroic male nude convention. In one of the photographs Essien confronts the camera in full frontal pose, baring it all but with her face carefully elided from the photographic frame. In another, the camera lens zooms intently to the left part of

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<sup>452</sup> Liese Van Der Watt, “Tracing: Berni Searle,” *African Arts*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Winter 2004):74.

<sup>453</sup> The artists’ works have been exhibited repeatedly at Dak’Art. *Symbole 3* and *Au-delà du mystère* 5 (black and white photographs, 1999, 70 x 90 cm), *Noirs* 9, 26, 27, 29, 26 (black and white photographs, 50 x 60 cm, 2000, figs.), and *Burka, Prêtresses, Voile au vent 3*, and *Femme Feu, Femmes Flames* (colored photographs, 70 x 100 x 10 cm 2007) by Essamba were exhibited at Dak’Art 2000, 2002, and 2008, respectively; *The Room* (video performance, 20mins, 2003 [with Ghany Kenawy]), *Bobby Trapped Heaven* (video-photograph, 12 mins, 2006), and *Cairo... Eating Me Inside* (video, 2007, fig.) by El Kenawy were exhibited at Dak’Art 2004, 2006, and 2008 respectively; and *Installation verticale et Numismatique* (Plexiglas, metal, and tissue paper, 20 x 38 x 14 cm and 33 x 30 x 7 cm, 1999), *Cri d’enfant* (installation, interactive video, and photographs, 2001-2002), and *Projet Laboratoire de Paix L’Offrande* (installation and performance, 2003) by Charfi at Dak’Art 2000, 2002, 2004, and 2010. Charfi won the Biennial’s top prize, Grand Prize of Léopold Sédar Senghor, at Dak’Art 2000.

<sup>454</sup> Essien who passed away at the age of 34 in February 2001, was born in Ikot Ekpene in eastern Nigeria, but she relocated with her family to the United States when she was 2. After studying literature and art at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Essien moved to New York where she worked as a fashion photographer until her death. *The Amazon’s New Clothes* was her last work, and was produced after she underwent a mastectomy.

her torso, showing the scar of her procedure as what is left of her left breast; her left arm is flexed and her fist clenched in what appears to be a defiant pose. In two photographs, Essien is naked and seated. She shields her body from the camera glare in one of the photographs; in the other, she confronts the camera but her face is elided from the picture frame.

The visually impressive and sensual photographs capture a woman facing bodily change and infirmity bravely and with dignity. They are inspiring photographic self-portraits of Essien who rejects being scarred by an experience that would later claim her. By shielding her face from the picture frame, she insists on her body as both object and subject of visual expression, and more importantly, a symbol of universal courage. Although Essien does not address an African context specifically, her work certainly fits within the autobiographical body as a mode of address, so evident in the works of Searle and Rose.

Interests in the nude also extend to the male artist's body. Congolese Moridja Kitenge Banza offers a personal take on African history and postcolonial subjectivity using his body in the video installation *Hymne à Nous* (2008, 1 min 20 sec, fig. 57), which was awarded Dak'Art 2010's Léopold Sédar Senghor Grand Prize. In the video, Banza's nude body is multiplied, such that the doppelgängers stand in for a band of choristers singing Beethoven's *Ode an die Freude*. Banza, however, composed his own lyrics, which are a fusion of the Congolese, Belgian and French national anthems.<sup>455</sup> The nude body and combined anthem are unstable, multivalent signifiers, standing as

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<sup>455</sup> Banza, who was born in Kinshasa in 1980, attended the Académie des Beaux-Arts, Kinshasa, and then moved to Nantes, France where he obtained a Masters in Fine Arts from Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Nantes in 2008, and another Masters in Political Culture of the City, from the University of La Rochelle, France in 2009. He currently lives in Montreal, Canada.

metaphors for Banza's Luba ethnicity, Congolese nationality, Belgian colonial legacy, expatriation in France, and professional status as an artist-nomad. Like Searle and Rose, Banza addresses identity as a loaded construct shaped by political, historical, cultural, and social processes of belonging and socialization. The artist's focus on identity escapes the racial discourse that once plagued ideologies of cultural nationalism and African modernism, such as Négritude.

Banza's naked body is an object of inquiry. He engages subjectivity and identity as shifting and multiple, which can be subverted or affirmed, thus making *Hymne à Nous* a powerful representation of the postcolonial experience. As Anthony Appiah points out, "[T]he vocabulary of identity is our natural response to such processes, because we see communities as mattering in large measure not in themselves but because of what they provide for members of those communities. And part of what they provide is aid for each of us in shaping our lives, which they do by way of their role in helping to make our individual identities."<sup>456</sup> *Hymne à Nous* also highlights reflexive cosmopolitanism as a code of presence, suggestive of the ways in which African artists negotiate the complexity of the international art world and the world at large as postcolonial subjects. Reflexive cosmopolitanism enables African artists such as Banza, who occupy plural realities, to choose when to resist or assume the glut of labels of identification at their disposal.<sup>457</sup> It also empowers artists in Africa and the diaspora to explore germane issues pertaining to Africa and the larger world in a myriad of ways, both intimately and from a critical distance.

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<sup>456</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, "The Need for Roots," *African Arts*, Vol. 37, No. 1, (Spring 2004): 28.

<sup>457</sup> These labels include Wolof artist, Nigerian artist, African artist, postcolonial artist, Third World artist, feminist artist.



### Global Relations and the Dimensions of Globalization

In *Global Program Cols* (1999, multi media installation, fig. 58), exhibited at Dak'Art 2000, Cameroonian Joël Mpah Dooh addresses the contemporary economic relationship between Africa and the West, drawing historical references to slavery and the trans-Atlantic slave trade.<sup>458</sup> The installation is composed of a wooden crate, normally used to transport cargo for export, which contains a bowed human form draped in jute bags, and a kerosene lantern. Written and crossed out on the exterior of the crate are the words, "Third World," "Bretton Woods," "Global," "Program," "Customs," in white and black paint. Dooh is alluding to Africa's economic history. Using the metaphor of crated human cargo to address both the past and present, Dooh examines the continued exploitation of Africa through the institutions based in the West that were created during the Bretton Woods Conference in July 1944, i.e., the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The modus operandi of these financial institutions has largely been blamed for the collapse of African economies in the 1980s, the effects of which continue to reverberate until today. And perhaps as a matter of self-reflexivity, Dooh is also drawing attention to Africa's complicity in its economic bondage, given the continent's fair share of corrupt political leaders, just like elsewhere, who have played a duplicitous role in savaging the African economies.

Similarly, in *Malgré tout* (2000, fig. 59) and *G8 promène son chien* (2001, fig. 60), the Benin artist Dominique Zinkpè addresses Africa's relationship with the Western

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<sup>458</sup> Joël Mpah Dooh has participated in several IN and OFF exhibitions at Dak'Art between 1998 and 2006. Raised in Douala, Cameroon, where he currently lives and works, Dooh studied Fine Arts at Amiens, France, where he also obtained a law degree. He epitomizes the 21st century global citizen, one fluent in several languages and exhibiting internationally.

world.<sup>459</sup> Both installations were exhibited at Dak'Art 2000. *Malgré tout* (translated as “in spite of everything”) is composed of a human figure made of flexible wire, rags, and fibrous rope, bound to a hospital bed. The body represents a severely sick patient being fed by multiple intravenous drips from several plastic containers hanging above the patient and surrounding the bed. The containers of intravenous fluid are labeled with the names and acronyms of several international humanitarian agencies and donor institutions, such as USAID, UNICEF, and the IMF. *Malgré tout* provides a brutally honest comment on the effects of Africa’s continued dependence on external aid, which prevents the continent from asserting itself on the global stage and taking control of its destiny. The installation also offers a biting criticism of the white-savior complex that undergirds what the economist Dambisa Moyo refers to “as the self-perpetuating aid industry.”<sup>460</sup>

Zinkpè is interested in the complex relationship between the donor and receiver of financial aid, an interest he further pursues in *G8 promène son chien* (G8 Walks Its Dog). The title refers to the annual meeting of leaders from the US, Britain, Russia, Germany, Japan, France, Italy, and Canada, which see the rest of the world as their “pet.” Made largely of the same flexible steel and fibrous rope as *Malgré tout*, it depicts two small figures being dragged along with a rope around their necks by a much bigger

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<sup>459</sup> Zinkpè was born in Cotonou, Benin in 1969. He is a self-taught artist who works in various media and art forms including painting, drawing, sculpture, and installation. His subject matters are mostly political and address the fate of Africa in the world and the urban realities of Cotonou where he is based. He participated in Dak'Art's official exhibition in 2002 and 2006, and was awarded the Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa Prize (UEMOA Prize) at Dak'Art 2002.

<sup>460</sup> In *Dead Aid*, the Zambian-born international economist Dambisa Moyo addresses the encumbering effects of humanitarian and charity aid on African economies and the collective psyche of African peoples, arguing that it encourages corruption and economic indolence and suggesting instead that African governments should be made accountable to the domestic population. Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009).

anthropomorphic form. The installation is a barbed commentary on the paternalism, the politics of subterfuge, and the control of the G8. Zinkpè draws attention to the moral dilemma of inequality that has since been replaced by the question of poverty and hunger, of which Africa is the poster child at the international level. The seemingly innocuous substitution of one with the other underlines the deceptive nature of the global political economy, controlled largely by the G8. While the discourse of global inequality highlights the rapacious nature of the capitalist system, the more recent discourse of global poverty reinvents the image of the few who control the capitalist system, recasting them as philanthropists when they embark on the dubious enterprise of saving the wretched in Africa or the Third World.

Global inequality and its impact on mobility and access possibilities is the focus of the Nigerian Emeka Udemba's imposing installation *World White Walls* (2001, wood, Plexiglas, earth, plastic flowers, and found objects, 300 x 1000 x 1000 cm, fig. 61), exhibited at Dak'Art 2002. The outdoor installation, depicting an international airport's immigration hall, consists of two tunnel-like corridors of access, labeled "US and EU citizens" and "Others," respectively. The "US and EU citizens" corridor is wide and paved with hundreds of plastic roses planted on the dark soil covering the floor of the tunnel. Conversely, the "Others" corridor is narrow and twisted, the covering of its sides torn and disheveled, with fragments of glass and plastic implanted on a floor that has been covered in beach sand. In addressing the asymmetrical nature of international mobility, Udemba focuses attention on immigration policies and the different set of rules

for international travelers from the so-called developing world, and the contradictions of globalization as a catalyst for interconnections and movements.<sup>461</sup>

The Senegalese artist Babacar Niang also addresses the theme of mobility and access in *Émigration Clandestine: Le Grand Debat* (fig. 62), which featured in Dak'Art 2008. But Niang follows a somewhat different approach from Udemba's installation. Exploring the links between globalization and illegal immigration, Niang focuses attention on the desperate attempts by Senegalese and other Africans who undertake perilous journeys across land and sea to Europe in search of jobs and better lives. A significant number of Senegalese, West Africans, and others are known to have attempted the treacherous trip to Europe via the Sahara desert without surviving the experience. Niang sees globalization as an economic process that opens borders to allow the flow of goods and services that further the interests of big businesses, but shuts them to impoverished economic migrants from the so-called developing world, specifically Africa. These migrants seek the promises of globalization, interconnections and access with little or no success. Through the large-scale work, also located in a space of globalization, Niang seeks to stir an intellectual debate on the reasons for illegal immigration and to highlight some of the tragic outcomes.

Combining painting, collage, and installation, Niang follows a formal approach of layering of recycled and repurposed media to generate cumulative meaning on the subject of illegal immigration. The work includes several graphic inscriptions and newspaper

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<sup>461</sup> Originally from Nigeria, where he studied art education at the Lagos State College of Education, Emeka Udemba (1968) lives and works in Berlin. He has participated in several international biennials and exhibitions, including the Havana Biennial (2003), the Bamako Biennial (2003), and *Black Paris*, Iwalewa Haus, Bayreuth, Germany (2007). His visual practice, which encompasses installations, video, photography, performance, drawing, and painting addresses interconnectivity and communication in the social and political contexts.

clippings on the subject of illegal immigration, difficulties of international mobility and access for African immigrants, and some of the tragic accounts of the fate of African illegal immigrants. These items are written and glued to the picture surface, which is broken into planes of rusty brown, orange, and lemon green colors. Transparent plastic covers the newspaper clippings to safeguard them. Cutting across the newspaper clippings and writings are barbed wires and several padlocks with their keys attached, numbering about 60. Each padlock is placed close to a newspaper clipping. Taken together, the padlocks symbolize barriers and hurdles faced by illegal immigrants as they attempt to breach the unwelcoming and closed immigration borders of the so-called developed world.

The intersection of mobility, visibility, and consumerism is the focus of Cameroonian artist Hervé Youmbi in *Ces Totems qui hantent la mémoire des fils de Mamamdou* (2010, fig. 63). Exhibited at the French Institute as one of Dak'Art's OFF exhibitions in 2010, the multi-media installation examines Africa's culpability in its underdevelopment and continued dependence on the West in the last fifty years. It also addresses how neocolonialism affects the status of African artists in the international art world. The installation consists of photographic portraits of African artists, and the ubiquitous woven cheap plastic travel bags found across Africa. Donning fake designer sunglasses variously inscribed with Euro, Dollar, and British Pound signs, the artists become signifiers of the contemporary art world driven by neoliberalism and monetary capitalism. The plastic travel bags are stacked to create totem poles of varying sizes. On these bags are images of major Western art institutions such as the Tate Modern, the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MOMA), and major art works that epitomize the

contemporary art world's love for excess, such as Damien Hirst's *For the Love of God* (2007).

For Youmbi, the stakes are the dynamics of artists' mobility and the hype of international visibility that results in the unending quest by African artists to be seen and exhibited in the hallowed art temples of the West. The Cameroonian artist is also interested in the international art market system and the delicate position of artists from Africa who have to negotiate their visibility strategically. The travel bags also represent mobility for millions of African migrants in and out of Africa in search of opportunity and leisure in a globalized world that has yet to make it easier for the African traveler to traverse international borders and airports checkpoints.

Globalization and its effects have been a recurring theme in successive Dak'Art biennials, explored from multiple perspectives by artists. The Moroccan multi-media artist Mounir Fatmi's installation *Liaisons et déplacements* (variable installation, 1998-1999, fig. 64) addresses the connections between movement and foreignness in the context of France. Featured in Dak'Art 2000, the installation consists of four key elements: a video monitor showing an unending stream of people on Paris's streets responding to questions on citizenship and immigration; three photographic portraits of individuals without their faces included in the image surface and with labels placed across their chests; a bundle of stretched white cables held together with green, yellow, black, blue and red tapes; and two long black duffel bags, symbolizing movement. Fatmi draws upon his individual experiences as an artist who straddles multiple worlds (Western, Arab, Islamic, and African), and divides his time between Tangier (Morocco)

and Paris to explore the reception of foreignness and the meaning of multiculturalism in France.<sup>462</sup>

In *Consomania* (2007, 4mins, 4secs, fig. 65) exhibited at Dak'Art 2008, Senegalese Samba Fall focuses on consumerism as the most visible characteristic of economic globalization.<sup>463</sup> A well-made animation, *Consomania* depicts alien-like depersonalized human forms with motorized faces holding bar-coded signposts that read "Who am I" across their chests. These human forms, some of which are black silhouettes while others are composed of excerpted newspaper clippings, are clones of each other. These figures are placed against a blood red background and organized in ways that suggest that they are felons having their mug shots taken. It is most probable that they are prisoners of excessive consumption whose identities are reduced to barcodes. Surrounding the figures, in the background, are tiny shells emitting black and white smoke. In another scene, a human form lies in profile, recumbent on massive white barcodes. The skeleton can be seen through the human form which is dripping red blood through the barcodes. Both the human form and barcodes are placed against a black background. Fall's intervention is playful yet the gravity of his subject matter is not lost. His visual language is astute in conveying the dangers of consumerism on humanity and the environment.

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<sup>462</sup> Mounir Fatmi participated in Dak'Art 2000, 2006, 2010, and 2012, winning the biennial's top prize in 2006. His works in diverse media --- including sculpture, painting, video, and installation --- explores the human condition, history, and contemporary events. In addition to Dak'Art, his work has been shown at the Gwanju Biennial (2004), the Seville Biennial (2006), the Venice Biennial (2007 and 2009), the Lyon Biennial (2009), and other major international venues.

<sup>463</sup> Born in Senegal in 1977, Samba Fall trained at the École Nationale des Arts du Sénégal, graduating in 1999. Since 2003, he has been living and working in Oslo, Norway. Fall explores socio-political issues and human behavior particular to Africa but also the world at large through digital animation, painting, and multimedia installation.

The theme of consumerism is also visible in Nigerian Chika Modum's *Isi Aka* (2010, fig. 66), exhibited at Dak'Art 2012, although the installation works on multiple levels. It consists of over forty strands of braids created from re-purposed black garbage bags, painstakingly woven by the artist, and arranged to hang from top to bottom on a gallery wall. Modum's artistic process draws from the relational act of hair braiding and recycling of plastic that litters the environment, especially in Africa, to address consumerism as a monument to globalization, and movement and displacement as it concerns her own individual experience. Modum's engagement with discarded material seeks to prolong its life and call attention to the culture of waste, often embedded in consumerism. Recycling discarded materials becomes a conscious act of restitution. Hair-braiding creates a social and intimate bond between braiders and braided.

Originally from Nigeria, but currently living and working in Edmonton, Canada, Modum draws upon the traditional hair-braiding practice of the Igbo people of eastern Nigeria to also examine notions of cultural ambiguity, nostalgia, beauty, expatriation, and the reception of difference.<sup>464</sup> *Isi-Aka* is also related to how Modum is imagined as an African in Edmonton, and how braided hair styles become a signifier of her African origin, Igbo ethnicity, or wherever people thinks she is from. The artist questions and enforces her non-Western origin as a marker of difference, indicated by the braided hair. According to Modum, Edmonton's social space is mostly white and conservative, and she is made aware of her position as the social and cultural "other."<sup>465</sup> The work also serves as an object of nostalgia and longing for the artist's social network, which she left behind

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<sup>464</sup> Modum who was born in Enugu, Nigeria in 1980, received her Bachelor's of Art degree from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 2003, majoring in painting and installation. She completed her MFA at the University of Calgary, Canada in 2012.

<sup>465</sup> Chika Modum, interview by author, 12 May 2012, digital recording, Dakar, Senegal.



in Enugu, her birth city, upon emigration.<sup>466</sup> In a sense, the installation is an autobiography of the artist.

The Senegalese artist Ndary Lo examines the social transaction between himself and his environment. Like Modum, Lo works with salvaged material from the urban environment. His themes, however, address both human difficulties and triumphs. At Dak'Art 2002, Lo exhibited *La Longue Marche du Changement* (Long Walk for Change, 2000-2001, 195 x 75 x 250cm, fig. 67), which won the Biennial's top prize that year. The installation, a visual manifestation of Lo's new social vision for Africa, comprises several highly schematized human forms made from rebar, a material used conventionally as a tensile device in building constructions. The human forms march in files along paths strewn with salvaged rubber slippers. The construction rebar formed from carbon steel is a tough material that suggests longevity, strength and purpose. These are ideal qualities Lo believes Africans should possess in the march toward productivity and development. The medium allows Lo to create a minimalist style that highlights brevity of form and verticality, with message and meaning residing in both the medium and the realized form.

The installation may also have been inspired by Nelson Mandela. Mandela, the revered freedom fighter, published his autobiography under the title of *Long Walk to Freedom* in 1995, a year after he became the first black president of a democratic South Africa. The book, which details Mandela's trials, tribulations, and triumphs, was meant to serve as a moving story of forgiveness, reconciliation, and change in a new South Africa. One need not look any further to comprehend why the book could have potentially served

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<sup>466</sup> Similarly, the Belgium-based Nigerian writer Chika Unigwe wrote about her sense of despair and alienation in the first few years after migrating to Belgium, and the acute longing for her social network back in Enugu, the city where she grew up. See <http://www.aeonmagazine.com/living-together/chika-unigwe-sorrow-of-migration/>.

as a potent reference for Lo given his well-known emphasis on hope and perseverance.<sup>467</sup> *Long Walk to Change* also reflects Lo's commitments to progress and development in Africa as a pan-Africanist.<sup>468</sup>

Another work by Lo, jointly awarded the top prize of Dak'Art 2008 with Mansour Cisse, addresses multiple audiences with its powerful social and environmental messages. This is the substantial installation *La Muraille Verte* (The Green Wall, 2006/2007, fig. 68).<sup>469</sup> The installation was inspired by Nigeria's former President Olusegun Obasanjo, who, while on an official state visit to Senegal to attend the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) meeting, called for a concerted effort to tackle desertification and ocean surge in Africa through public sensitization campaigns and the planting of trees.<sup>470</sup> *La Muraille Verte* consists of several trees fashioned out of rebar and painted green, arranged on a pile of austere beach sand. Stripped of leaves to denote a lack of foliage, the impoverished branches of the trees are shaped into wiry, elongated, and contorted human forms, possibly to remind us of the role of human activities as a principal vector of environmental degradation. Yet Lo's combination of plants and human forms also indicate the complexity of human beings as composites of nature. They are both object and subject, reshaping yet remaining vulnerable subjects of the

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<sup>467</sup> Ndary Lo, interview by author, 18 May 2012, digital recording, Dakar, Senegal.

<sup>468</sup> Ndary Lo considers himself as a pan-Africanist. The *Walking Man* series, which he began in 1997, was the first time the artist began to articulate a social vision for Africa. His pan-Africanism is more in keeping with engaging issues that affect Africa and the black world than anything essentializing.

<sup>469</sup> Ndary Lo is the only artist to have received the Grand Prize Léopold Sédar Senghor, the Biennial's top prize, twice. Born in 1961 in Tivaouane, a small town near Thiès in Western Senegal, Lo trained at *L'Ecole Nationale des Arts de Dakar*, graduating with a Bachelors of Arts in Communications in 1992. He has exhibited several times at Dak'Art, in both the "IN" and "OFF" exhibitions from 1996 to date. In addition to Dak'Art, his work has been featured in major exhibitions, including the Havana Biennial (2000), the Biennial of Design, Saint Etienne (2006), Musée Dapper (2006), Changun Sculpture Symposium, China (2006), Malmö Kunst Museum, Malmö, Sweden (2007), the Center for Modern Art, Las Palmas, Canary Island (2008), and Fondation Jean-Paul Blachere, Apt, France (2009). He lives in Rufisque, a city that is south of Dakar.

<sup>470</sup> Lo, interview, *ibid.*

environment. The physical space, from which African artists create, as Lo suggests, is often a space of poverty but rich in context-driven and socially-engaged messages.<sup>471</sup> It is a space that mirrors the struggles and triumphs of Lo and a majority of artists in Africa, who operate with small means yet create large art that tells Africa's and universal human stories from multiple perspectives.

### **Socio-cultural and Political Conditions in Contemporary Africa**

Like Ndary Lo's *La Longue Marche du Changement* and *Muraille Verte*, several works of Dak'Art have addressed the existential conditions of contemporary Africa. Whereas Lo projects the message of hope and progressive change, other artists, including Robert Jem Koko Bi (Côte d'Ivoire), Freddy Tsimba (DR Congo), and Aimé Mpane (DR Congo) engage the harsher vicissitudes of Africa's recent history and contemporary social conditions from individual and collective perspectives. In *Darfur* (burnt wood, 282 x 210 x 140 cm, fig. 69), exhibited at Dak'Art 2008, Koko Bi extrapolates from the recent genocide in Darfur, Sudan, to address past instances of civil war in post-independence Africa. Bi's life-size installation consists of three nude figurative sculptures of a standing man, a kneeling woman, and a child huddled in a heap with nondescript faces, carved in wood and in the artist's conventional but realist style.<sup>472</sup>

The male figure's stomach is hollowed out, legs are spread apart, and hands are held behind with fists clenched. His face is contorted, indicating frustration and anguish, and he gazes upward, possibly beseeching the heavens. Like the man, the kneeling woman's visage shows tremendous anguish and she also gazes to the heavens. She

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<sup>471</sup> Ibid.

<sup>472</sup> Born in Sinfra Côte d'Ivoire in 1966, Koko Bi graduated from the l'Institut national supérieur des Arts et de l'action culturelle (National Institute of Art and Cultural Action), Abidjan, in 1994. He earned a Masters degree in sculpture from the Dusseldorf Art Academy in 2000. He lives and works in Essen, Germany. His work was included in Dak'Art's official exhibitions in 2000, 2002, 2006, and 2008.

gestures forward with her hands clasping her chest. Her stomach is also hollowed out. In between the man and the woman is the lifeless and kwashiorkor-ridden body of the child. It appears as if the couple is appealing to the heavens to rescue and revive their child, while knowing that it is a lost cause. The child's twisted head, exposed rib cage, and mangled limbs tell of the fate of children in Africa's theaters of war. The installation is painfully moving as Koko Bi presents the unvarnished reality of untold suffering and hardship, human carnage, violence, internal displacement, and deprivation in Africa's battlefields.

Koko Bi's other work at Dak'Art 2008, titled *Autopsie* (collage, 236 x 155 cm, fig. 70), also offers an intense engagement with the subject of genocide, drawing upon quotidian experiences in war-ravaged countries. The work consists of a large-scale drawing of human figures chained together and stacked tightly in ways that invite comparison to slavery and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. In fact, the formation of the human figures takes the shape of a massive ship. Placed around the drawing are several photographs drawn from actual theatres of war in Africa.

Similarly, in *Elles Viennent de Loin* ([They come from afar], 236 x 360 x 600 cm, fig. 71), featured at Dak'Art 2008, Freddy Tsimba thematizes the effects of armed conflicts in Africa on women. Working with found objects such as expended bullets, salvaged metal cutlery (fork, spoon, and knife), and monkey skulls, Tsimba creates monumental human forms. The cutlery and spent cartridges are welded to create three headless female bodies with bloated stomachs and without arms. Strewn around the bodies, on the ground, are silverware from the same set, expended bullets, and monkey skulls, as if they issued from the immobile bodies. The work is an indication of how

women, as mothers, wives, and sisters, are often the worst hit in wars. They are the primary caregivers to children, husbands, and parents. Stories of rape, forced prostitution, destitution, and slavery abound in places of armed conflicts. Tsimba, who lives in Kinshasa, is no stranger to this unfortunate reality. He draws upon his close proximity to one of Africa's most dreadful and unending armed conflict in DR Congo, which has been ongoing for most of his adult life.<sup>473</sup>

Historically, the war in Congo had its roots in the assassination of the country's first Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba in 1960, followed by the subsequent assumption of the presidency by Mobutu Sese Seko, an ex-military chief of staff. In 1997, Laurent-Désiré Kabila, a former acolyte of the late Lumumba, deposed Mobutu after a hard-fought guerilla war that began in 1965 in the Kivu and North Katanga regions. Kabila's attempt to get rid of Mobutu was initially premised on ideological grounds. However, it became clearer with time, as with most wars in Africa, that the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo had economic roots having to do with control of the mineral riches of the country. It is for this reason that the conflict, which also claimed Kabila, is unending. Contending factions joust for control of the rich natural resources. Joseph Kabila replaced his late father with the support of regional governments and international conglomerates with vested interests in the Congo.

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<sup>473</sup> Tsimba, who lost a brother to the conflict and has personally experienced trauma, describes himself and his artistic process as a pregnant woman, primed to give birth to life, a reality that is yet unknown, by giving life to life-using elements, expended bullets, guns, etc., that destroy life. See Jonny Hogg, Congo's 'Papa Machete' sculpts life out of death," *Reuters*, April 25, 2012. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/25/us-congo-democratic-sculptor-idUSBRE83O0FT20120425>.

These facts are not lost on Tsimba, who addresses the humanitarian crisis that has been prolonged by armed conflict in the DRC.<sup>474</sup> Tsimba's choice of medium is specific to the narrative he constructs, and conveys the experiences and outcome of the bloody war more viscerally. Atrocities and human tragedies resulting from African wars are a major focus in Tsimba's work. At Dak'Art 2006, he exhibited two sculptures that addressed the fate of refugees and their suffering; these works were created with spent bullet cartridges and salvaged military boots. Here the medium is the message; as much as the created form, Tsimba seeks collective and universal responses to civil wars. This approach of using the medium to convey the artistic message is also evident in some of the works already discussed. We see that in the use of the artist's individual body by Searle, Rose, Essien, and Banza. We see that also with Lo and Modum, whose choice of creative media contribute exceedingly to the artistic message.

Like Tsimba, Aimé Mpane, also from DRC, addresses the theme of war but from a fragile and meditative context. In his installation *Congo, the Shadow of the Shadow* (2005, matchsticks, wooden boards hewn from alder and fir, fig. 72), Mpane connects historical memory to extant memory as it relates to the civil war in the DRC.<sup>475</sup> The main element of the installation is a life-size transparent male figure created from 4652 matchsticks whose combustible heads were carefully removed before being assembled

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<sup>474</sup> Tsimba, who was born in Kinshasa in 1967, graduated from the Académie des Beaux-Arts, Kinshasa in 1989, majoring in sculpture. After graduating, he spent five years working with local blacksmiths and welders to develop his skills in welding. He has participated in more than fifty international exhibitions in Africa, Europe, North America, and China.

<sup>475</sup> Mpane, who was born in Kinshasa in 1968, is currently based in Brussels, Belgium. He trained at l'Institut des Beaux-Arts, Kinshasa (DR Congo) from 1984-1987, Académie des Beaux-Arts, Kinshasa (DR Congo) from 1987-1990, and Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Visuels, La Cambre, Brussels (Belgium) from 1994-2000. In addition to Dak'Art, Mpane's work has been featured in the Havana Biennial (2003); Artists-in-Dialogue, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution (2009); and the Liverpool Biennial (2010).

and glued together. Mpane's visual vocabulary is sophisticated and laborious, but also very successful in conveying the fragility of existential reality in the Congo DRC. The human figure stands with his arms folded across his chest and his head and neck hunched over in a meditative stance before three human shadows made of wood placed flat on the ground. The shadow in the middle is headless with the torso slightly elevated, and a cross with the inscription "Congo 1885" is implanted firmly as a tombstone where the neck would have been. The engraving and date refer to the Berlin Conference, in which the Congo area became a personal property of Belgium's King Leopold.

Unlike the other two shadows, which have old salvaged shoes placed at their feet, the central shadow has no footwear. Instead, it is the standing figure that has both feet placed atop the flat feet of the shadow in the middle. Together, the three shadows symbolize human carnage. The installation has an eerie tranquility that is enhanced by the looming shadow created by the intricate play of artificial light on the standing figure. The light brings substance and shadow together to suggest an other-worldly ethereality. In this highly affecting installation, Mpane addresses the shadow of death that has haunted Congolese people since the formal partitioning of Africa in 1885. The tragic reality of Congo today owes much to the exploitation of its mineral riches, but also reflects the long trail of human carnage since 1885. The work presents an arresting narrative of the Congo while at once memorializing the country's tragic history.

While artists at Dak'Art would appear to reinforce what many now consider a stereotyped image of Africa writ large --- conditions created by armed conflicts, economic exploitation and hardship, and political instability --- they also address hopeful aftermaths. Egyptian artist Moataz Nasr focuses on the Egyptian experience, specifically

the recent revolution of 2011 which led to the ousting of former President Hosni Mubarak. In the three video channel projection *Merge and Emerge* (2011, 3 video channel loop, 6mins 25secs. fig. 73), Nasr shows three Sufi dancers wearing red, blue, and green robes, respectively, captured from above. They float and swirl majestically in circles within individual video frames in controlled movement, and close in on each other's frame without colliding. The whirling dervishes' movement is syncopated to correspond with the accompanying Sufi music. The music is meditative and, together with the dancers' movement, almost hypnotic. Nasr's work is political and meditative because of his abiding interest in Sufism as a spiritual force that empowers one to confront the vicissitudes of life with equanimity. The video reflects the spirit of unity and love he witnessed during the initial 18 days of the revolution, when Egyptians put aside political, religious, and individual differences to fight for a common cause.<sup>476</sup> Nasr, an artist known for politically-charged work heavily critical of the Egyptian state, chooses to focus on the possibility of a harmonious post-revolution Egypt even while he acknowledges that such aspirations may not be tenable.<sup>477</sup>

The revolution in North Africa and the Middle East is also the subject of Algerian artist Katia Kameli's *Untitled* (2011, video, 2 min 30 sec, fig. 74). Although the sweeping mass revolts did not involve Algeria, they shook the entire Arab world. Filmed in the months of the Arab Spring, the video opens with the camera canvassing the sidewalk of a street, possibly in Algiers. The sidewalk is littered with cardboard used by

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<sup>476</sup> Author's interview with Moataz Nasr, Dakar, May 11, 2012.

<sup>477</sup> As a multi-media artist, Nasr works with video, photography, sculpture, painting, and installation to address the social, economic and political conditions in Egypt. However, his visual language addresses universal themes of tolerance, love, unity, hope as well as deprivations and human sufferings. He has participated several times at Dak'Art, winning the Biennial's top prize in 2002. His work has been shown in other major international venues, such as the Venice Biennial in 2003.



homeless people to construct sheds in which to sleep. The artist emerges from one of the sleeping sheds and constructs a placard out of a piece of a cardboard lying nearby. The placard is blank. She walks into the street and is joined by a group of women of different ages, some dressed traditionally, others in modern clothes. All the women, however, bear grave countenances as they walk silently on the street with their raised blank placards. A well-dressed man walks by hurriedly, pausing for a moment to gaze at the women. It is a very short but powerful video. It employs silence as a trope to focus attention on the strongly patriarchal and conservative values in the Muslim world, similar to other countries, which makes women socially subservient to men. The video is therefore a call for a cultural revolution, along the lines of the political revolution, to address the status of women. At the same time, the video takes into account the economic hardship that catalyzed the revolution.

Like several of the artists discussed above who address specific issues in the local and/or national context, but with broader resonance, Nigerian artist Bright Ugochukwu Eke merges public health issues, social activism, and environmental concerns in the installation *Acid Rain* (2005, water, plastic bags and soot, fig. 75). A visually arresting work, the installation looked like a massive chandelier dropping out of the sky at Dak'Art 1996, where it was a major highlight. However, it addresses an issue of grave concern. *Acid Rain* emerged from Eke's personal experience of the effects of toxic rain, which irritated his skin while he was in Port Harcourt, the major oil city in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region.<sup>478</sup> The installation consists of hundreds of suspended water balls sealed in plastic bags to represent droplets of rain water. Some of plastic bags of water are mixed with soot to connote toxic rain. *Acid Rain* carries a strong message of environmental

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<sup>478</sup> Bright Ugochukwu Eke, e-interview by author, March 13, 2013.

degradation and pollution, and economic exploitation. It also points an accusatory finger at the exploitation and activities of the oil companies operating in Nigeria in collusion with the Nigerian government, which pays only lip service to its responsibilities to the Nigerian citizenry in providing basic social infrastructure and safeguarding the environment. With *Acid Rain*, Eke also inserts Nigeria into the international politics of oil vis-à-vis the discourse of climate change, environmental concerns, and the rapacious nature of the global oil industry.

As noted earlier, Dak'Art has continued to include conventional paintings, drawings, and sculptures in its exhibitions. In *Movement No. 11* (2003-2005, acrylic on canvas, 150 x 200 cm, fig. 76), Kwesi Owusu-Ankomah explores the immanence of motion. The monochromatic painting, featured at Dak'Art 2006, is composed of *adinkra* symbols --- a graphic communication system from Ghana --- boldly painted in black with faint red acrylic outlines against a white background. Two monumental naked male forms merge into the black symbols and emerge from the white background. They are subtly outlined in thin graphite and red acrylic marks. Both figures stare vacantly into space, their posed bodies suggesting rhythmic movement. There is a harmonious juxtaposition of symbols and male athletic bodies on the tightly packed picture surface. Owusu-Ankomah is known for his condensed canvases, the combination of the *adinkra* system of signs that are printed on clothes traditionally worn during funerals in Ghana, his own invented symbols, and subliminal male forms that appear to draw from Michelangelo's ideal of the male form as object of divine beauty.

Owusu-Ankomah, who has been living and working in Bremen, Germany since 1986, has created a unique pictorial vocabulary that alludes to his Ghanaian cultural roots

and exposure to Western academic tradition and art history. He explores the decorative possibilities of the symbols but also their layered nature as chambers of memory, proverbs, documents of history and events, etc., loading his canvas with a wellspring of meanings. On a formal level, Owusu-Ankomah's visual language invokes the post-independence modernist strategy of combining indigenous and external aesthetic references similar to those prevalent in early postcolonial African art. However, the artist's visual interests are no different from those of other contemporary African artists addressed already.<sup>479</sup> His large scale paintings explore the contemporary realities of war, violence, struggle, and politics, but focus as well on the beauty of harmony and peace. The aestheticized male body in his work is an avatar of violence as well as site of desire, while the traditional adinkra symbols represent evergreen utopian knowledge. Owusu-Ankomah's broad interest is in universal harmony between man and nature.

In *Fetiche Protecteur* (welded steel, 100 x 35 x 35 cm, fig. 77), a metal sculpture exhibited at Dak'Art 2008, the Burkinabe artist Justin Kabré explores the connection between tradition and the contemporary, the past and present. The work is a recreated traditional power figure with jutting metal blades and nails welded onto and surrounding a mask figure and mounted on a circular base. It is clear that Kabré is making a visual and conceptual allusion to African power figures, such as the *nkisi nkondi* of the Congo basin. The artist, who belongs to a family of traditional sculptors, explores the conceptual properties, significance, symbolism, and plastic qualities of the power figure. What is not clear, however, is his intention; does he wish to recuperate or harness the spiritual energy imbued in the more traditional power figures as a protective shield against evil force, or is

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<sup>479</sup> A well travelled and internationally-exhibited artist, Owusu-Ankomah was born in Ghana in 1956 and trained at Ghanatta College of Art in Accra, Ghana, before relocating to Germany in 1986. He has exhibited twice at Dak'Art in 1996 and 2006.

he is only making a symbolical allusion? Conversely, given the institutionalized authority and metaphysical values associated with metal objects in African cultures, one may suggest that the artist seeks to recuperate both essence and aesthetic.

From the foregoing, it can be surmised that the works of contemporary African artists at Dak'Art engage the dialectic of the local and the global through recurring themes. These themes include embodied identities, consumerism, globalization, politics, violence, immigration, and civil wars. They overlap in some of the works, and highlight how artists think constructively about the fissures, contradictions, and temporalities that attend contemporary experiences. These themes have been subsumed under broad curatorial frameworks at Dak'Art since 2006. Before then, Dak'Art did not have centralizing themes. Dak'Art 2006's theme of "Agreements, Allusions and Misunderstandings" was based on a broad premise of engaging the complexity of social realities in Africa, which reflect issues such as corruption, fratricide, sexually-transmitted diseases, love, compassion, prejudices, dialogue, conflicts, and misunderstanding.<sup>480</sup> In 2008, the general theme was "Africa: Mirror?" The metaphor of the mirror was adopted as a reflection on a range of cultural, spiritual, political, and socio-economic issues pertaining to Africa, which shape contemporary artistic practices in Africa. Dak'Art 2010's focus was on the 50th anniversary of independence for Senegal and 16 other African countries. In 2012, the general topic was contemporary cultural production and social dynamics, which was not dissimilar from the 2006 and 2008 themes. These are very broad curatorial themes, which encompass the various subject matters addressed by artists in their works.

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<sup>480</sup> Yacouba Konaté, "Africa: Agreements, Allusions and Misunderstandings," *Dak'Art 2006: 7th biennial of African contemporary art* (Dakar: Dak'Art Secertariat, 2006), 412-413.

With narratives and dialogues, Dak'Art artists engage reality in its most direct form, offering responses to historical, political, psychological, and sociological issues that confront them in their social spaces in Africa and the diaspora. Yet, their narratives and dialogues resonate with the Biennial's objective of facilitating a pan-African encounter. The works discussed in this chapter reflect a collective consciousness in the ways in which the artists address aspects of contemporaneity in Africa. As postcolonial subjects who have been shaped by multiple cultural legacies and experiences, Dak'Art artists are at liberty to decide how to represent the globalized world in which they live. Yet the majority of these artists are a product of their immediate African societies, and they therefore engage with the lived and extant experiences of Africa. This dialectic of the global and local, which is reflected in most of the works discussed, extends beyond Dak'Art, and is found in the works of artists across the continent who have not been exhibited in the Biennial.

Dak'Art also includes furniture and contemporary fashion, exhibited under the rubric of "Spirit of Design," which shows the multiple forms of contemporary African art. Utilitarian objects, such as *Fauteuil Marmite* (1998, 15 x 15 x 15 cm, fig.78), a maquette of a chair made of re-purposed aluminum cooking pots and inlaid with African wax print by Burkinabe artist Saliou Traoré, exhibited at Dak'Art 2000, and *Table Tbeq* (size and date unknown, fig. 79), a decorative table made of African raffia by Moroccan designer Kabbaj Khadija, exhibited at Dak'Art 2008, reflect the contemporary design that abounds in Africa. Both works also mirror the aesthetic strategy of giving new functions to found or industrial objects. The "Spirit of Design" exhibition was discontinued after

Dak'Art 2008, but furniture and fashion design continue to be featured in the OFF, described in the following section.

### **The Dak'Art OFF**

The OFF provides an alternative space for artists not exhibiting in the official exhibitions at Dak'Art to be part of the Biennial. Many artists initially exhibited in the OFF before making it into the main exhibitions. Other artists have taken part in the main event have also participated in the OFF as a strategy of maintaining visibility while Dak'Art is ongoing. The art biennial is the ultimate form of global marketing for an artist; it is part of a network of consumption and visibility beyond national markets and the local art world. The artists therefore benefit from the presence of the international art world that comes to Dakar, which is crucial to their careers. In the last 20 years the OFF has grown from an uncoordinated string of fringe events to an important complementary extension of the official Dak'Art.

The OFF is organized by a range of artists, cultural agents, producers, and institutions. It highlights the convergence of the socio-cultural, economic, and political in making Dakar a destination for tourists. With several hundred exhibitions spread across the city of Dakar during Dak'Art, it helps to bring a critical mass of international and local visitors into close proximity with an array of photography, performances, video installations, mixed-media, easel paintings, sculptures, animations, and functional designs artworks and visual performances. These works are exhibited or staged in private residencies, restaurants, artists' studios, night clubs, restaurants, curio shops, gas stations, private galleries, public buildings, embassies and cultural centers.

From the outset, ancillary exhibitions were organized outside the official Dak'Art platform. At Dak'Art 1992, most of the independently-organized exhibitions were by foreign cultural centers and embassies; but there were some put together by local artists. The foreign institutions such the French Center, the Goethe Institute, and the Spanish embassy exhibited both their nationals and local artists. Local artists organized group and individual exhibitions in their private studios on Gorée Island, the Village des Art and private homes. At Dak'Art 1996, local galleries such as Galerie Weeteef and Galerie Atiss joined to take advantage of the influx of visitors and potential buyers. They first exhibited local artists but gradually began to include non-Senegalese artists (African and non-African), an approach that was also adopted by the foreign cultural centers. Some of the private galleries provided emerging artists an opportunity to benefit from the Dak'Art experience.

Artists including Soly Cissé (Senegal), Joël Mpah Dooh (Cameroon), Diagne Chanel (Senegal), Camara Gueye (Senegal), Sergine Ba Camara (Senegal), and Robert Jem Koko Bi (Côte d'Ivoire) were first exhibited by Galerie Atiss, managed by Aïssa Dione, a textile artist, before being featured in Dak'Art's official exhibitions.<sup>481</sup> This involvement of private galleries in 1996, but more crucially in 1998, launched the OFF on a new trajectory. The call for an international art market of contemporary African art in Africa with Dak'Art as the channel was made in Dak'Art 1996 and again at Dak'Art

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<sup>481</sup> Dione who was a member of Dak'Art's Orientation Committee in 2000, 2002, 2004 and 2006 was instrumental in the printing of the biennial's catalogue in Senegal from 2002. Prior to 2002, Dak'Art exhibition catalogue was printed in Paris. Aïssa Dione, interview by author, 20 March 2012, digital recording, Dakar, Senegal.

1998.<sup>482</sup> It is thus not surprising that local private galleries began to organize independent exhibitions during the biennial season.

Art exhibitions are the core component of the OFF, but other cultural activities such as concerts, fashion shows, film screenings, and panel discussions are included. The OFF became an important part of Dak'Art in 2000 when Mauro Petroni, an Italian artist who had been living in Dakar since 1988, was approached by Rémi Sagna, then Secretary General of Dak'Art, to help with the Biennial's communications.<sup>483</sup> Petroni printed an all-inclusive program of the IN exhibitions and about 50 OFF exhibitions for the first time. The program included dates and time of exhibition openings and ancillary programs, such as music concerts and panel discussions. Petroni's intention was for the IN and the OFF to feed off each other in order to give visitors a total experience. To make it easier for visitors to navigate the many events scattered around Dakar and the adjoining cities, Petroni introduced a flag with the biennial logo, which was placed at the entrance of all the IN and OFF venues (fig. 80). It was a rewarding experiment. The combined program and the flag have become part of the branding and communication strategy of Dak'Art.

Prior to Dak'Art 2000, there was a simmering tension between local artists and the organizers of Dak'Art.<sup>484</sup> The number of local artists participating in the international selection, the flagship event of the Biennial, had been drastically reduced from Dak'Art 1998. The national exhibition, an important venue for local artists to be seen, was scrapped by the Orientation Committee of Dak'Art. It was deemed as a preferential

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<sup>482</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>483</sup> Petroni, who is a principal organizer of the OFF, claims that prior to Dak'Art 2000, artists and galleries organized OFF exhibitions without a sense of direction. Mauro Petroni, interview by author, 10 March 2012, digital recording, Dakar, Senegal.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid.



treatment for Senegalese artists and had no basis in a pan-African biennial promoting the entire continent. Local artists began to mobilize alternative forms of visibility during the biennial, and this increased the number of OFF exhibitions. The OFF really took off at Dak'Art 1998 to counter the exclusion of local artists who believed that the biennial belonged to them.

After the success of Dak'Art 2000, Petroni proposed that the Dak'Art Secretariat continue to print a combined program for subsequent iterations of Dak'Art. From the initial 50 exhibitions at Dak'Art 2000, the OFF has grown to nearly 300 exhibitions at the last edition of Dak'Art in 2012. The printed program gave credibility to the OFF. Local artists began to feel a stronger sense of inclusion even when they were not in the official exhibitions. For non-Senegalese artists who were not in the IN exhibition, participating in the OFF became the fastest way to gain a foothold in the Biennial. There are often more interesting exhibitions in the OFF than in the IN. This is a subjective assessment, although there is a consensus that there is more freedom of expression and experimentation and no constraining protocol in the OFF. Prospective participants (artists, galleries, and independent art institutions) need only to submit the details of their exhibitions or events to Petroni and his team at least a month before the opening of Dak'Art to be included in the program. The OFF exhibitions vary in content and quality, ranging from the very sophisticated and conceptual, to curio-shop types. Nonetheless, they have improved tremendously in the last few years, at least on the organizational level.

In addition to local and African artists, non-African artists have participated in the OFF in recent years, adding a layer of complexity to what it means for the biennial to be

a pan-African and yet a global exhibition. From personal observations during Dak'Art 2008, 2010, and 2012, I believe there has been a strong attempt to make Africa the central focus of interest. This has produced an alignment in the issues, themes, and ideas tackled by artists both in the IN and OFF. Like their African counterparts, non-African artists have addressed similar subjects, drawing from everyday experiences in exhibitions such as *Urban Scenographies*, a collaborative project on the urban space which involved African and non-African artists at Dak'Art 2010.

Two exhibitions, *3x3: Three Artists/Three Projects* and *Afropixel* demonstrate how the OFF platform has challenged and/or complemented the official process of exhibition-making at Dak'Art. Both exhibitions pushed the boundaries of pan-Africanism as an aesthetic experience and critical underpinning of contemporary African art in ways the official exhibitions are yet to do. The *3x3: Three Artists/Three Projects* (fig. 81) curated by Salah M. Hassan and Cheryl Finley is one of the most interesting exhibitions in the annals of the OFF. With a large budget that probably matched that of the entire official Dak'Art 2004, it was presented as the official United States participation in Dak'Art 2004.<sup>485</sup> *3x3* dismantled the normative white cube of the official Dak'Art by taking the art directly to the Senegalese public in public spaces and landmarks.<sup>486</sup> It

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<sup>485</sup> It is instructive that *3x3: Three Artists/Three Projects* was presented as a national exhibition, although such framework was formally abandoned after Dak'Art 1992. It speaks of the curatorial freedom that abounds in the OFF. Yet, and more importantly, *3x3* was presented under the auspices of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State, in cooperation with the U.S. Embassy in Dakar. It enjoyed the generous support of a host of other institutions and foundations including The Fund for U.S. Artists at International Festivals and Exhibitions (through the U.S. Department of State and the National Endowment for the Arts, and Rockefeller Foundation, and administered by Arts International, a New York-based non-profit organization), Andy Warhol Foundation, the Art for Art's Sake Foundation, and the Prince Claus Fund (which funded the book that came out of the exhibition titled "Diaspora, Memory, Place: David Hammons, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Pamela Z," a collection of essays on the three featured artists, and edited by Salah Hassan and Cheryl Finley).

<sup>486</sup> See for example, Elena Filipovic, "The Global White Cube," in *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe*, eds. Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipovic (Brussels: Roomade and Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005), 63-84.

addressed the themes of diaspora, memory, and place, and sought to draw “key historical connections between artists of African diasporic origins and Dakar, Senegal, as well as Africa as a whole.”<sup>487</sup>

3x3 consisted of site-specific performance, video, and sound installations by David Hammons, Pamela Z, and Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons. The works were staged as interventions on the social and historical fabric of the city of Dakar and the neighboring Gorée Island. Gorée was of particular importance because it carries the memory of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. 3x3 was accompanied by a conference with big name speakers, mostly working in the United States and Europe but also local Senegalese artists, who presented a critical context to engage the stakes of contemporary African art, and which complemented the Encounters and Exchanges colloquium at Dak’ Art 2004.<sup>488</sup>

Hammons’s *Dak’ Art 2004 Sheep Raffle* (figs. 82 and 83), a performance, took the social and religious life of the Senegalese people as its point of departure. Staged at the intersection of the busy Avenue Bourguiba and Voie du Nord, where sheep are purchased or slaughtered to celebrate the Islamic holiday of *Eid-al-Adha*, *Dak’ Art 2004 Sheep Raffle* consisted of the raffling of two sheep per day for six-days. The crowd of participants with raffle tickets surrounded a platform on which stood Hammons, drummers, singers, dancers and the master of ceremonies who announced the raffle rules for participants. Once a winner was declared, he or she left with the sheep to the envy of the others. Behind the platform was a huge billboard advertising the event and its local

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<sup>487</sup> Salah M. Hassan and Chreyl Finley, “Introduction Diaspora/Memory/Place: Three Artists/Three Project,” in *Diaspora Memory Place: David Hammons, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Pamela Z*, eds. Salah M. Hassan and Cheryl Finley (Munich; London: Prestel Publishing, 2008), 27.

<sup>488</sup> The series of plenary discussions was entitled “Mega Exhibitions: Globalization and Contemporary Art,” addressed the politics and culture of art biennials and global exhibitions. On May 9, 2004, it featured curators Okwui Enwezor and Thelma Golden, Sally Berger, Selene Wendt. On May 10, 2004, it featured artists, musicians, and scholars including Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Pamela Z, George E. Lewis, Stanley Whitney, and Manthia Diawara.

sponsor, the Nestlé Corporation's *Maggi*, a food seasoning used in preparing various local cuisines.<sup>489</sup>

Additional advertisement included an adjoining billboard, designed by the Egyptian designer Ramez Elias. It portrayed a boy holding four sheep, from a photograph by Senegalese photographer Touré Mandemory. Raffle tickets and posters bearing the same image of the boy and sheep were distributed daily around public places and neighborhoods in the city from May 6 – 11, 2004. Hammons enlisted two art students from the National School of Fine Arts to help circulate the raffle tickets and posters. There were also radio jingles in French and Wolof created by Hammons and popular local hip-hop artists that advertised the event. According to curators Hassan and Finley, Hammons's "choice to raffle sheep, the most useful animal for the community, reflects his decision to work with an organic and living thing of value to the daily life of many Senegalese."<sup>490</sup> They further suggested that the work extended Hammons's ongoing interest in the ephemeral in his creative practice and critique of the art world elitism which the biennial represents.<sup>491</sup> By directly engaging the Senegalese public which may or may not have been aware of the existence of the biennial, Hammons democratizes the creative experience, dismantles the elitism surrounding the reception of contemporary art. He also returns art to society by aestheticizing a living cultural tradition.

At the Daniel Sorano National Theatre, the composer and sound artist Pamela Z performed *An Evening of Works for Voice, Electronics and Video* (fig. 84), a seventy-

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<sup>489</sup> It is possible that Hammons may also have been referencing Joseph Kosuth's billboards of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which is important in the genealogy of conceptual art.

<sup>490</sup> Hassan and Finley, 28-29.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid. In a conversation with cultural theorist Manthia Diwara, Hammons said that "people in Dakar do not go to exhibitions. They think that the Dak'Art is for white people....At least with the sheep raffle, I'll give them something they can relate to." Manthia Diawara, "Dak'Art 2004 Sheep Raffle," in Hassan and Finley, 138.

minute piece, on the opening night of Dak'Art 2004. The performance, which engaged the notion of foreignness, consisted of the digitally-filtered voice of the artist and video projections.<sup>492</sup> Like Hammons, Z was assisted by students from the National School of Fine Arts in realizing the performance-cum-multimedia installation. The students benefitted from the experience. Z also installed *Just Dust* (fig. 85), a six-channel sound work, in a former female slaves' holding cell used during the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the Maison d'esclaves on Gorée Island. This is a UNESCO World Heritage site that attracts hundreds of international visitors, especially African Americans, every year.<sup>493</sup> The aural installation consisted of sounds of birds, sheep, and people, recorded during the artist's initial familiarization visit to Senegal in December of 2003, interspersed with spoken words in English, French, and Wolof. With *Just Dust*, Z addressed the convergence of collective and personal memories connected to historical sites, and her interest in the power language, repetition, and translation to address issues of identity.

The Cuban artist Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons presented a six-channel video and object installation titled *Threads of Memory* (figs. 86 and 87) in a former textile factory in the industrial section of the city. Working with a physical space measuring about 5000 square meters and the material contents of the abandoned textile factory, Campos-Pons created haunting anthropomorphic sculptures by dressing up the old heavy textile machines once used to process cotton with colored threads.<sup>494</sup> A massive shimmering chandelier made from scrap material and luminous beads bought from the local market was the central element of the installation. Campos-Pons projected videos of

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<sup>492</sup> Hassan and Finley, 32.

<sup>493</sup> The artist seems to have been riffing on the African American film "Daughters of the Dust."

<sup>494</sup> Hassan and Finley suggest that the old machines resembled male and female forms, a probable reference to ghosts of the former workers of the factory or the artist's African ancestors. Hassan and Finley, *ibid*, 31.

scrambled images: some from her childhood in Cuba, other projections of archetypal figures that represent her multiple identities (Cuban, African, American, black, female, and artist), and some footage of Senegal in a dreamlike sequence on opposite walls.<sup>495</sup> The surreal effect was achieved using cast-resin screens that were hung in front of the projections. Like Hammons and Z, Campos-Pons was assisted by students from the National School of Fine Arts. In addition, she was assisted by about twenty Senegalese welders and construction workers, and Tom Postma (an exhibition designer) and his team, in putting the ambitious project together.

Of all the artworks in *3x3, Threads of Memory* made the most explicit reference to the umbrella theme of “diaspora, memory and place.” The symbolism of a former textile factory is loaded with meaning, as a place filled with the spirit of commerce and the memory of human labor. Campos-Pons stated that her reason for working with the factory was the fact that it reminded her of ruins. It is a ghost of what was once a thriving industrial section of the city, a memory Campos-Pons was keen to reclaim.<sup>496</sup> Well-known for her autobiographical mapping of historical memory onto existential personal memory in her oeuvre, Campos-Pons also engaged with transatlantic memory in the multi-channel video and object installation. The abandoned factory potentially recuperates the historical memory of human cargoes associated with the transatlantic slave trade, a theme the artist has variously developed. The project is a metaphor for the artist’s attempt to stitch together her historical and contemporary memories of displacement. Campos-Pons, who is of Yoruba ancestry, activates remembering and

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<sup>495</sup> The video projections were an adaptation of a previous work *One Thousand Ways of Saying Goodbye* that was commissioned for Henie Onstad Kunstsenter exhibition in Oslo, Norway in 2003. In Senegal, it was recreated to include footage of Senegal, mapping Campos-Pons’s connections to Cuba, America, and Africa. See Sally Berger, “Threads of Memory – Invisible Lines,” in Hassan and Finley, *ibid.*, 215.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-31.

spiritual ablution by her physical return to Africa. According to Sally Berger, “for Campos-Pons, the creative process inexorably links memory with form. Memory is the thread that covers distance and time.”<sup>497</sup>

If *3x3* was an attempt to bring diaspora and motherland together to create a palpable pan-African experience for Dak’Art’s audience, *Afropixel* took a different approach in engaging pan-Africanism and the Dak’Art public. *Afropixel* is a small-scale festival organized during Dak’Art that generates local content. It brings together local artists and artists from other parts of Africa and the diaspora. They are engaged in activities that include exhibitions, discussion panels by local cultural experts and invited international public intellectuals, music concerts, and film screenings, framed around a specific theme that concerns public partnership and the role of art and technology in Africa. It is a mini biennial in the sense that its compound programming mirrors that of any large-scale biennial. Therefore, it appropriates the protocol of Dak’Art to offer an alternative space of encounter for the art public. Like *3x3*, it has directly engaged the public on issues of local, pan-African, and international relevance in three iterations since 2008, devoid of the elitism commonly associated with art biennials.

*Afropixel* is a project of Kër Thioissane, a Dakar-based independent art center founded in 2002 by Marion Louisgrand-Sylla and her husband Francois Sylla. Located in the Sicap neighborhood of Dakar, Kër Thioissane focuses primarily on making multimedia technology accessible to the local public.<sup>498</sup> Working with artists, art students, musicians, low technology enthusiasts, and local entrepreneurs, it promotes the

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<sup>497</sup> Ibid.

<sup>498</sup> Kër Thoissane is truly one of the most exciting and important ongoing independent art initiatives in Africa. In addition to collaborating with artists, art students, computer scientists, etc., in blurring the lines between art and technology, it also engages all kinds of artisans such as electricians, in creating cheap technologies that address pressing needs in urban Dakar.

creation of new technologies based on the cross-pollination of Senegalese traditions and external influences, and has organized workshops and residency programs since 2008. Kër which means “house” and “Thiossane” which refers to culture and tradition in the Senegalese language of Wolof, embody the objectives and activities of the art center as a house of creativity, art, culture, and dialogue. It is centered on bringing together performance, activism, community participation, technology, and the art object to rethink the function and place of art in society. It thus challenges the conventional framework of official Dak’Art. Although Kër Thiossane organizes a range of activities all-year round, *Afropixel* occurs during Dak’Art.

The inaugural *Afropixel* festival, which took place May 1-18, 2008, during Dak’Art had the theme “Freeware in connection with the artistic practices and the citizens in Africa.” The festival was organized in partnership with Pixelache network, a transdisciplinary platform for experimental art, design, research and activism based in Helsinki, Finland.<sup>499</sup> It invited two emerging Indian artists, Shaina Anand and Ashok Sukumaran, to Dakar to work and exhibit with two young Senegalese artists, Abdoul Aziz Cissé and Arfang Sarr Crao, on the use of new and cheap technologies. *Afropixel 2008* also included a laboratory workshop “BRICOLABS” for Senegalese artists, a public debate/conference around the issue of open access and free software, and an exhibition of digital art by Senegalese artists Mansour Ciss, Aziz Cissé, Arfang Sarr, and The Trinity Session, a South African artists’ collective. In 2010, the theme of *Afropixel* was “Art, Technologies and Societal Transformation in Africa.” The festival addressed art and technology as a means of citizen’s action, and the possibilities inherent in open source

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<sup>499</sup> Kër Thiossane collaborates with many international organizations to organize its programs, such as *Afropixel*.



tools and technology for artistic creation in Africa. Through programs including art exhibitions, discursive platforms, and site-specific interventions, it explored the connections between digital artistic practices and other areas of society such as educational training, citizenship, urban development and renewal, and creative industries.

“Common Properties” was the theme of the third installment of *Afropixel* in 2012 (fig. 88). Artists, civil society activists, curators, TV commentators, public administrators, journalists, researchers, entrepreneurs, local musicians and computer scientists were invited to exchange ideas and views on the concept of common goods in Africa. Activities began two months before Dak’Art’s formal opening on May 11, 2012. They included a bi-monthly *Petit-déjeuner en Commune* (fig. 89), a communal breakfast from March to April, which brought sections of the Senegalese public, artists, researchers, and thinkers together to eat and engage Common Properties broadly defined.<sup>500</sup> The Moroccan artist Yassine Balbzioui, who was invited for a two-month residency to explore the theme of common properties, exhibited the performance, video, installations, and paintings he had produced during the residency at Kër Thiossane and l’IFAN museum as part of *Afropixel 2012* (fig. 90). *Afropixel 2012* also included the screening of videos and documentaries that addressed the *Afropixel* theme. Two creative workshops --- DAKARTYPO, exploring the use of open source software in graphics design, and “DYR Defko Yaw Rek” (Do It Yourself) --- created cheap technology-based responses to daily urban problems in Dakar. In addition, there were the *Visionary Africa: Art at Work* (a collaborative exhibition, facilitated by curators Simon Njami and David Adjaye, and the Italian organization Lettera27, fig. 91), multimedia projections in the

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<sup>500</sup> I attended the communal breakfast on April 21 and 28, 2012.

streets of Dakar by the South African artists collective The Trinity Session, music performances, and conferences.<sup>501</sup>

At Dak'Art 2012, *Afropixel* events lasted well into the early morning, and were well-attended because local and international audiences connected to them. The public response to *Afropixel* has been phenomenal due to the multiplicity of programs that address various aspects of urban experience in Senegal, Africa, and globally. Through its name, *Afropixel* seeks to facilitate an African postcolonial experience within a technoglobal frame. It is this dialectic that frames the contemporary. *3x3* attracted a similar response in 2004 because it approached the public rather than being approached by the public, as it is the case in official exhibitions and events. Although it was facilitated from the outside, it involved African and African diasporan interlocutors who were seeking a pan-African connection. In mediating a pan-African encounter in the OFF, *Afropixel* and *3x3* thus provided a biennial experience that challenged and complemented the official events.

## Conclusion

Dak'Art's exhibitions, both the official and the OFF, have been ongoing experiments in presenting trends in post-1990 contemporary African art. It has been the culture of the Biennial to build on criticism, both positive and negative, after every edition. Some of the criticism has also become routine and formulaic and typically

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<sup>501</sup> Invited speakers included, Achille Mbeme, Simon Njami, local hip hop collective Y'en a Marre, and Haitian video artist Maksaens Denis. Prior to the discursive platforms and conference on the theme of "Common Properties," during *Afropixel* in May 2012, Kër Thoissane organized a panel discussion with the theme "Responsibility of artistic creation in the construction of the common" from March 13 – 16, and presentations by South African artist Tegan Bristow on the topic "Digital Art in South Africa: Multiple Perspectives," March 17-19.

includes the late arrival of works, the unevenness of exhibited works, a lopsided selection of artists and curators, broad curatorial themes, and general organizational and logistical challenges. For example, there have been few East African artists at Dak'Art, which can be attributed to the fact that there has been no East African curator involved in any Dak'Art. At Dak'Art 2006 and 2010, participating artists from East Africa were selected by the curators Barbara Murray from Zimbabwe, and Marilyn Martin from South Africa, respectively. The Biennial continues to struggle with these issues.

Yet Dak'Art has continued to advance its objectives of promoting African art and artists internationally; encouraging creativity; forging partnerships among Africa's artists, cultural personnel and partners abroad; and contributing to art criticism and art education through publications on contemporary art and artists in Africa. It has launched the international careers of several artists, such as Fatma Charfi, Moataz Nasir, Ndary Lo, and Bright Eke, and enhanced those of artists, such as Berni Searle and Mounir Fatmi. Its bilingual journal *Afrik'Art* was created in 2005 to promote art writing, criticism, and art history in Africa.<sup>502</sup> In the next chapter, which concludes this study, I address some of the problems and issues that have emerged at Dak'Art in its role as a mediating platform for contemporary African art.

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<sup>502</sup> Allen F. Roberts, review of "Afrik'arts, Trimestriel d'Analyses et de Réflexions sur les Arts Visuels," *African Arts*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Spring 2007): 94-95.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

This study has explored the shift that occurred in African art in the 1990s and in the framing of pan-Africanism as a cultural politics of international visibility. It has situated this shift within a constellation of local and global events with political, social, and economic impact. In using Dak'Art to illustrate this shift, I am aware of its limits. If one is to examine the multiple visions of contemporary artistic practices, works that I have discussed in this study are only a subset that does not represent the entirety of cultural production in Africa today. But the focus of this dissertation was to examine trends that emerged strongly in the 1990s, and to situate them within art history. Dak'Art provided the best context for my analysis because of its influential position in Africa. This is because the Biennial's primary goals are to represent African art and artists, provide a critical venue for contemporary art in Africa, and establish an alternative approach to cultural mediation at the international level.

In highlighting important developments at Dak'Art, this dissertation has largely focused on the Biennial as an international and transnational event rather than on its impact on the local art scene. However, I have also shown how Dak'Art is a recent manifestation of Senegal's longstanding policy of cultural diplomacy. The policy, which was enacted in the 1960s by Léopold Senghor, the country's first president, and carried through by successive presidents of Senegal, promotes international relations, and the country as a cultural hub. I demonstrated how Dak'Art's emergence in 1989 and growth in the 1990s coincided with the de-centering of the international art world. This de-centering led to the proliferation of non-Western art biennials and new forms of cultural

mediation. I argued that Dak'Art's transformation from an alternating biennial of literary and visual arts to an international biennial of visual art, and to its current status as a pan-African event, were attempts to clearly outline its cultural politics that celebrate pan-African internationalism.

I grounded Dak'Art's pan-African internationalism within the history of black political and cultural presence, established in the several international meetings of black people convened in the Western hemisphere in the first half of the 20th century, and consolidated in the pan-African cultural events in Africa in the 1960s and 1970s. Dak'Art's pan-African internationalism is distinct from earlier approaches, which sought to create cultural solidarity and to celebrate cultural achievements within the black world. Instead, I argued that Dak'Art seeks to insert African art and artists into the international mainstream. Successive Dak'Art exhibitions have blurred the divide between sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa by including several North African artists. This is a significant departure from the First World Festival of Negro Arts of 1966. Artists, including Carrie Mae Weems, David Hammons, Magdalena Campos-Pons, who belong to the older African diaspora, have been featured in the Biennial. Dak'Art's interest in forging artistic linkages within Africa, and between Africa and the diaspora (both old and recent), outlines the extent of its pan-African internationalism, and further situates the Biennial within the history of global black cultural politics.

In the late 1980s, when Senegalese artists sought a platform for international cultural exchange, they were nostalgic for an event similar to the pan-African celebrations of African and black cultures in the 1960s and 1970s. But the reality of globalization in the 1990s demanded a new approach to pan-Africanism, one that is

outward-looking. I argued that Dak'Art's pan-African internationalism is a strategy of visibility that allows it to assert itself as an international biennial but focused on African and African Diaspora art and artists. In this sense, Dak'Art has provided the best example of Senghor's notion of universal civilization, wherein Africa and the black world contribute to the international cultural pool as equals. Dak'Art has helped to launch and consolidate the international careers of numerous African artists, including Ndary Lo, Barthélémy Togou, Berni Searle, Mounir Fatmi, and El Anatsui who enjoy significant visibility in the art world as contemporary artists largely without prefixes and labels.

I was also able to demonstrate a distinction between recent trends in African art, evident in works in Dak'Art exhibitions, and the modernist trends that were manifest in the works exhibited in the pan-African events in the 1960s and 1970s. My view is that, although some of the works at earlier iterations of Dak'Art reflected elements of Africanness, such as masks, they were shorn of the essentializing discourse of race or the decolonizing logic that once attended post-independence modernism. I addressed the 1980s as a bridge between the contemporary present and the modernist past by tracing the demise of cultural or aesthetic ideology-driven artistic practice to the crisis of nation-building and postcolonial despondence in the 1980s. In several African countries, the failures of the postcolonial states led artists to reject a celebration of cultural nationalism. In Senegal in the 1980s, artists began to move away from the institutional aesthetic of the *École de Dakar* that was based on the tenets of Négritude. This was in part an economic move, as they had to fend for themselves; but it was also a result of the disillusionment that set in with the state of affairs in Senegal under the Structural Adjustment Program. Artists began to focus on quotidian experiences from their individual positions.

In light of the neoliberal demands of personal accountability and entrepreneurship, which followed the liberalization of Senegal's economy in the 1980s, artists moved further away from the idea of collective aesthetics and identity represented in the *École de Dakar*. I have shown that the exploration of quotidian experiences that began in the 1980s in Senegal but which was also evident elsewhere in Africa, such as in Nigeria and Zaire (DRC), became amplified in the 1990s. This development marked the final decline of the decolonizing aesthetics of post-independence modernism, at least at Dak'Art. Thus, while works in the early iterations of Dak'Art in 1992 and 1996, which were mostly paintings, sculptures, and mixed media, reflected the formal outlines of post-independence modernism, they addressed contemporary social conditions. New trends, such as conceptual art, and art forms, including time-based, new media, installation, and performance, became the major art forms at Dak'Art in the 2000s. Painting and sculpture were still represented at Dak'Art as well, but they no longer bore the ideological markers of post-independence modernism.

Works at Dak'Art also reflect a collective consciousness rather than a collective identity because participating artists engage with contemporary and historical experiences of Africa. Yet, despite Dak'Art's pan-African orientation, the works cannot be so labeled from an aesthetic point of view. Artists whose works have been exhibited at Dak'Art no longer seek an aesthetic return to "Africanness." Yet, they are well aware of their cultural, ethnic, or national ties as forms of social identification, hence their participation at Dak'Art. They engage their identities, be it Luba, South African, and African as a given, without allowing them to dictate their aesthetic approaches. These identities become one of the many windows through which Dak'Art artists see the world around

them. As Stuart Hall once said, “we speak from a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture, without being constrained by the position of ‘ethnic artists.’”<sup>503</sup> Africa is the immediate cultural experience or point of departure for most of the artists at Dak’Art. Thus, they address contemporary sociopolitical and economic experiences in Africa in relation to the wider world as reflected in the several themes and subject matters explored at Dak’Art.

While Dak’Art is very important as a context of understanding recent trends in African art, it does not provide a complete picture of contemporary cultural production in Africa, nor does it seek to. This is because as a biennial with international aspirations, it reflects the institutional norms of an elitist venue. Dak’Art, however, has addressed this problem in various ways. In some of its editions, it exhibited a variety of art forms, such as in 2006. In other editions, such as in 2004, it showed more videos and photography. In 2010, it gave prominence to painting and sculpture, which had fared badly at Dak’Art since 2000. In attending to its objectives of promoting contemporary African art and artists, Dak’Art has recorded both successes and failures; as with most biennials, it remains an evolving work-in-progress.

Its earlier editions in the 1990s showed a disproportionate number of artists from the francophone world, which raised questions about its claims of speaking for African artists. In terms of demographics, it has shown fewer female artists. From Dak’Art 2004 on, the Biennial has made more conscious attempts to redress the unevenness in artists’ representation. But the problem is yet to be fully resolved; the curators’ and jury’s preferences when selecting from the pool of submitted portfolios has, at times, resulted in

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<sup>503</sup> Stuart Hall, “New Ethnicities,” in James Donald and Ali Rattansi (eds.), *Race, Culture and Difference* (London: Sage, 1992), 258.



lopsided selections. In several instances, Dak' Art has exhibited a disproportionate number of artists from Senegal, Cameroon, South Africa, North Africa, and West Africa. At the same time, it has also expanded its reach to include artists from hitherto marginalized countries, such as Burundi, Mauritius, Madagascar and Swaziland. Some of these artists were Nandipha Mntambo (Swaziland/South Africa), Serge Alain Nitegeka (Burundi), Amalia Ramanankirahina (Madagascar), and Niverda Alleck (Mauritius). Dak' Art also continues to invite artists based abroad to create a balance with those residing in Africa.

Beyond the issue of fair representation, there is also that of the repeated participation of certain artists. Some, including Ndary Lo, Moataz Nasr, Mounir Fatmi, Berni Searle, and Fatma Charfi, have been exhibited at least 3 times. There are both positive and negative implications to the repeated exposure of particular artists. It can be argued that such repetition shows how Dak' Art has evolved through these artists. It is also possible to track the creative evolution and careers of the artists who have been part of successive Dak' Art exhibitions. Artists such as Moataz Nasr and Bright Eke recognize the impact of Dak' Art to their individual careers. Nasr, who began exhibiting in 1995, states that his artistic career experienced an upswing after he took part in Dak' Art 2002.<sup>504</sup> He exhibited at the Venice Biennial in 2003, a direct result of having been at Dak' Art the previous year. For this reason, he has always agreed to participate in the different successive editions when he was invited. Eke, who is very young and has participated only once, states that he has also benefitted from Dak' Art. After his work was well-received at Dak' Art 2006, he began to receive invitations to important artists'

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<sup>504</sup> Moataz Nasr, interview by author, 11 May 2012, digital recording, Dakar, Senegal.

residency programs, biennials, and exhibitions.<sup>505</sup> He exhibited at the Sharjah Biennial in 2007, and has been part of important exhibitions in the United States, such as *The Global Africa Project* at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York in 2010-2011.

At the same time, the repeated exposure of some of these artists reduces opportunities for other artists who have yet to find a platform of exposure, and goes against the Biennial's objective of launching new talents. This point was raised by Senegalese artist Viyé Diba, a member of Dak'Art 2006's Orientation Committee. Referring to Dak'Art 2006's selection process, Diba wondered why certain works were included, based on what he referred to as "the unexamined reputation the artist."<sup>506</sup> He questioned the hybrid approach of Dak'Art 2006's artists' selection, stating that such a process can be less transparent and allows curators to give preferential treatment to artists from their own networks.<sup>507</sup>

Diba's argument raises important concerns on the inclusion of artists based on name recognition rather than on the quality of works. Nonetheless, Dak'Art 2006's selection process was generally viewed as successful. Such a hybrid model presents the best approach in the selection of artists for Dak'Art exhibitions. It allows the Biennial to maintain a level playing field for both established and emerging artists, which selection by submitted portfolios provides, but also guards against the exclusion of artists whose works and presence have the potential of enriching the Biennial. The portfolio method does have its limitation as well. Artists who are photo-savvy can put together very

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<sup>505</sup> Bright Ugochukwu Eke, e-interview by author, 13 March 2013.

<sup>506</sup> Viyé Diba, "Dak'Art 2006: A View from the Inside," *African Arts*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (December 2006): 62-63.

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*

impressive portfolios. In several instances, the photos were not a true representation of the original works when they were received by the Biennial.<sup>508</sup>

Of all the editions of the Biennial, Dak'Art 2006 was the most expansive and representative in terms of art genres, demographics, and national spread. The official exhibition included the works of 100 artists, and displayed more works of art than any of its predecessors and successors. For the first time in Dak'Art's history, an artistic director was formally appointed and empowered to select a curatorial team and adopt a curatorial focus devoid of administrative interference.<sup>509</sup> There was a call for curatorial proposals by the Orientation Committee, and the Abidjan-based curator and art historian Yacouba Konaté's proposal was selected. Having curated sections of Dak'Art in 1998 and 2004, and having been a member of several evaluation panels since 1996, Konaté had an intimate knowledge of the Biennial. This knowledge proved useful for Konaté in surmounting the bureaucracy at Dak'Art's Secretariat and the Ministry of Culture, as well as in engaging local power and cultural brokers.<sup>510</sup> He was reasonably successful in getting the Ministry of Culture to release funds for Dak'Art on schedule, which was a major achievement.<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>508</sup> This came up in interviews with several past curators of Dak'Art, including Yacouba Konaté, Marilyn Martin, Christine Eyene, and N'Goné Fall.

<sup>509</sup> Another interesting development at Dak'Art 2006 was that it had a separate international jury who selected winners of the different prizes awarded at the Biennial. In several editions of Dak'Art, members of the jury have doubled as the curators of the official exhibitions. In addition to the Léopold Sédar Senghor Prize, Dak'Art's top prize, these prizes are the Minister of Culture and Tourism Prize, the city of Dakar Prize, the International Organization for Francophonie Prize, the Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa Prize, and the European Union Prize for the best work by a young artist in the OFF. They are longstanding and can be considered as traditional prizes. Other prizes, which are in the form of artists' residency programs, are more recent and inconsistent. They include the Blachère Foundation Prize, the Vives Voix Foundation Prize, ResArtis Prize, Deveron Arts Prize, the Thami Mnyele Foundation Prize, Thamgidi Studio Foundation Prize, and the Centre Soleil d'Afrique.

<sup>510</sup> Yacouba Konaté, interview by author, Dakar, 13 May 2012, digital recording, Dakar, Senegal.

<sup>511</sup> This was the first and only time funds to organize Dak'Art were released on time. Konaté was also able to attract more international partners through his own network. In addition to the generous support of the Senegalese government and traditional partners, including the European Union, the Organisation

Konaté was able to assemble and mobilize an 8-member curatorial team (including himself) to travel around the continent and in Europe and North America to meet artists in their locales.<sup>512</sup> Some of the artists were selected on the basis of this direct contact. Others were chosen on the basis of submitted portfolios, which is Dak'Art's traditional selection process. This dual approach, according to Konaté, enabled the curators to include works of interesting artists who would not have followed the established procedure for submitting portfolios.

Dak'Art 2006's official exhibition occupied multiple venues across the city of Dakar to accommodate the large number of art works. The exhibition presented an eclectic collection of creative visions and interest, and works of varying quality and strength. The works included paintings, sculptures, installations, performances, photography, and video, and represented different generations of artists. Artists ranged from those who had been active since the 1950s, such as the late Valente Malangatana (Mozambique) and Bruce Onobrakpeya (Nigeria); to self-taught artists, such as Boubaré Frédéric Bruly (Côte d'Ivoire) and Chérin Cheri (DR Congo); to artists who emerged in the 1990s such as Ingrid Mwangi (Kenya/Germany), Bright Ugochukwu Eke (Nigeria), and Robin Rhodes (South Africa). For Konaté, it was important for the curatorial team to represent various facets of modernity in Africa by engaging different generations of

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International de la Francophonie, Afrique en Créations, UNESCO, support also came from new partners such as, the Blachere Foundation, Africalia Belgium, Belgian Development Cooperation, the Prince Claus Fund, and Resartis.

<sup>512</sup> The curators were Bisi Silva for Anglophone West Africa, Abdellah Karroum for North Africa, Youma Fall for Senegal and Francophone West Africa, Barbara Murray who focused on Southern Africa and East Africa, Célestin Badibanga ne Mwine for Central Africa, Amy Horshak for North America, and Marie Louis Syring for Europe. Horshak and Syring were the non-African curators.

artists who represent different historical moments, aesthetic sensibilities, and artistic vocabularies.<sup>513</sup>

Unlike the very successful Dak'Art 2006, Dak'Art 2010 marked the lowest moment in the history of the Biennial. It suffered greatly from a lack of interest by President Abdoulaye Wade, who succeeded President Diouf in 2000. Although Dak'Art was established by Diouf, the twelve years of Wade's presidency from 2000 – 2012 were a critical period in the development of Dak'Art. It is in this sense that Dak'Art represents a continuity of Senegal's cultural policy. However, Wade's cultural interests had begun to shift to high-visibility prestige projects that bore his imprint in the second half of his presidency. These projects competed with Dak'Art. The most outstanding of these projects, and those which elicited the most public attention, were the African Renaissance monument and the third edition of the World Festival of Negro Arts (otherwise known as FESMAN), following the First World Festival of 1966 and FESTAC'77. The two projects were formally unveiled in 2010 to coincide with the 50th anniversary of Senegal's independence; with the result that Dak'Art 2010 was eclipsed by the two projects.

The African Renaissance monument, an imposing and expensive complex that cost nearly \$28 million, is built on top of a hill in Ouakam, a suburb of Dakar. Its central feature is a 49-meter (over 160 feet high) bronze statue (taller than the Statue of Liberty) of a family unit, comprising a muscular man in heroic pose, whose right hand is wrapped around the back of his wife, and whose left raised hand holds their child, who is pointing into the distance (fig. 92). They seem to emerge from an erupted volcano and easily reflect the theme of "African Renaissance." Conceived as a tourist attraction, the statue is

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<sup>513</sup> Konaté, *ibid.*

part of complex that includes exhibition galleries, multimedia and conference rooms, and a top-floor with a viewing room that gives a bird's eye view of Dakar and the surrounding area.<sup>514</sup> It was constructed by the Mansudae Overseas Project Group, a North Korean construction and real estate company that has executed similar projects in Zimbabwe, Togo, Benin, Egypt, Algeria, Ethiopia, and Malaysia. But the monument has generated much criticism. Local artists have criticized its cost and Senegal's reliance on a team of North Korean artists when capable sculptors in Senegal could, so they claimed, have built the monument at a fraction of the cost. They have also criticized the monument's communist representational style, which they say does not reflect Africa's rich sculptural traditions, for a monument that is supposed to represent an African rebirth. The broader public has condemned the lack of sensitivity and respect for local cultural and religious mores: both man and woman are scantily dressed, leaving parts of the body exposed.

“African Renaissance” was also the theme of the FESMAN, which took place December 10 – 31, 2010. The world festival was Wade's last act to create his cultural legacy. The event included art exhibitions (photography, installations, crafts, architecture, painting, and video), conferences, dance, traditional and contemporary music concerts, theatre performances, and fashion shows. As was the case with the First World Festival and FESTAC'77, there was a designated country that was the focus of attention. Brazil, the chosen country, presented a solid display of its heritage, arts, music, and cuisine, which involved about 200 Brazilian artists. The FESMAN was a huge spectacle, but opinions are divided on its success as well as on its historical significance. Some have

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<sup>514</sup> Wade claims the monument as his intellectual property, and signed into law a bill that grants a foundation he plans to establish 35% of tourist revenues generated by the monument.

argued that it was a waste of scarce resources by Wade, who fed his vanity at a time of pressing economic needs. In the estimation of local artists, the FESMAN was a colossal diversion of funds that should have been used to strengthen Dak'Art.<sup>515</sup> This view was reinforced by the lack of proper organization of the visual art section of the FESMAN.<sup>516</sup>

The 9th edition of Dak'Art in 2010 was almost canceled as a result of these two projects. Although funding was secured at the last minute from the Ministry of Culture, the budget was smaller than usual.<sup>517</sup> The European Union, the largest contributor to Dak'Art, also pulled out in 2010. The disengagement was based on Senegal's failure to implement recommendations by the EU to improve Dak'Art's administrative capacity, and to make the Biennial less beholden to the Ministry of Culture.<sup>518</sup> Dak'Art's status as a state-led initiative makes it practically impossible for it to be independent. In addition, the administrative staff are employees of the Ministry of Culture and do not have much power to implement recommendations unless sanctioned by the government. Financial uncertainties have always plagued the Biennial, but in 2010 the situation was particularly precarious.<sup>519</sup> The Biennial's 9th edition was drastically scaled down. Out of the 400

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<sup>515</sup> This came up in conversations with artists, including Viyé Diba, Ndary Lo, Cheikh Ndiaye and Abdoulaye Ndoye. However, this view did not prevent a lot of the artists from participating in the Festival.

<sup>516</sup> President Wade's daughter, Sindjely Wade, who neither had organizational background in the field of culture nor knowledge of the art world, was put in charge of the visual art section, and with disastrous consequence. Due to the incompetence of her organizing committee, the visual arts section was badly managed. At the end of the FESMAN, artworks submitted by over 100 artists were not returned. In September 2011, South African artist Johann van der Schijff created an online petition to force the organizers to return the works of artists. While some of the works, mostly from the diaspora, were returned by May 2012, the rest are yet to be returned.

<sup>517</sup> Author's interview with Sylvain Sankalé, a former president of Dak'Art Orientation Committee in 2000 and co-curator of Dak'Art 2010, Dakar, April 20 and 30, 2012.

<sup>518</sup> I was made aware of these reasons by Sylvain Sankalé who was commissioned by the European Union to write an evaluation report of Dak'Art on several occasions, that last being in 2010. Author's interview with Sankalé, *ibid*.

<sup>519</sup> Some support did come from local partners, such as Eiffage Senegal (a local construction company), Sénégalaise de l'Automobile, Embassy of France in Senegal, Spanish Embassy in Senegal, Embassy of the United States of America in Senegal, City of Dakar, and French Community of Belgium in Senegal. However, it was not enough.

artists' portfolios that were reviewed by the five-member jury who also served as the curators of Dak'Art 2010, only 25 artists were selected.<sup>520</sup>

On March 25, 2012, President Wade was defeated by Macky Sall, a former protégé, after a contentious electoral season that was marred by protests.<sup>521</sup> Sall's ascendance in April 2012 began a new political era in Senegal.<sup>522</sup> The new regime has resuscitated what has become a haunting dilemma for Dak'Art: that it may either be unfunded or provided with greater institutional support. At the inauguration of Dak'Art 2012 on May 10, 2012, a newly-elected President Sall pledged to preserve Dak'Art, stating that it represents Senegal's most successful ongoing cultural policy statement and serves the entire continent.<sup>523</sup> Wade was also given to such lofty statements at opening ceremonies of Dak'Art during his administration, but his commitments to the Biennial shrank as his presidency progressed. It can be argued that Dak'Art will remain a centerpiece of Senegal's cultural policy into the future. What is less certain is the amount of support it will continue to attract from the state and its institutional partners, including the European Union. After many evaluation reports sponsored by the government and the European Union, the general conclusion is that Dak'Art must become independent in

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<sup>520</sup> The exhibition's curators were Marilyn Martin (a South African curator and former Director of the Iziko South African National Gallery), Sylvain Sankalé (a Senegalese lawyer and former president of Dak'Art's Orientation Committee in 2000), Kunle Filani (a Nigerian artist and educator), Maréme Malong Samb (a Cameroonian art administrator and gallerist), and Rachida Triki (an Algerian curator and art critic), all of whom live and work in Africa.

<sup>521</sup> After the first round of voting in the presidential elections of 2012 returned no majority winner, the rest of the opposition candidates rallied around Macky Sall, who had come in second behind Wade. Sall dealt Wade a crushing electoral blow in the second round of voting.

<sup>522</sup> A new dispensation also began at Dak'Art. After Dak'Art 2012, Ousseynou Wade, the long-serving Secretary General of the Biennial was replaced by Mr. Babacar Mbaye Diop, a philosophy professor at the Cheikh Anta Diop University Dakar. It is too early to know in what direction Diop will take Dak'Art. His vision will be evident at the next Dak'Art Biennial in 2014.

<sup>523</sup> President Macky Sall's official speech at the opening of Dak'Art 2012, 10 May 2012, digital recording by author, Dakar, Senegal.



order to attract more international funding and become financially stable and better organized.

In spite of its habitual disorganization and funding instability, Dak'Art has remained an important international venue for contemporary art in Africa. It has inspired the proliferation of other art biennials in Africa, including the Rencontres de la Photographie Africaine (Mali, founded in 1994), Afrika Heritage (Nigeria, founded in 1995), the Luanda Triennial (Angola, founded in 2006), the Salon Urbain de Douala (Cameroon, 2007), and the Regard Benin (founded in 2012). Dak'Art's quest for an international art market in Africa, first outlined at Dak'Art 1996, has spread with the emergence of contemporary art fairs in Africa, such as the Johannesburg art fair (South Africa, founded in 2008) and the Marrakech Art Fair (founded in 2010); and art auction organizations, such as the ArtHouse Lagos (Nigeria, founded in 2008) and Strauss and Co. (South Africa, founded in 2009). In addition, independent art spaces of contemporary art, including the Center for Contemporary Art, Lagos (Nigeria), the Raw Material Company (Senegal), the L'Appartement 22 (Morocco), the Darb 1718 (Egypt), have arisen in the last few years. Their founders have participated in Dak'Art exhibitions as curators or artists. These institutions are a measure of Dak'Art's impact on art in Africa in the last two decades.

It can thus be argued that Dak'Art has helped to mobilize an emergent African art world. Its elaboration of pan-African internationalism has paved the way for other contemporary exhibitions, and has been adopted by most biennials in Africa. Dak'Art has also influenced independent art initiatives in Africa seeking to engage the international art world on Africa's terms. The latter include the agency to decide how to frame artistic

practice and contemporary African art. As I have demonstrated, Dak'Art has reflected a shift from the “modern” to the “contemporary” in African art, and the Biennial has been an active agent in that shift. Finally, the recent selection of just five African artists in the Venice Biennial 2013's central international exhibition, points to the continued relevance of Dak'Art as a very important platform for African art and artists.<sup>524</sup>

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<sup>524</sup> The artists are Frédéric Bruly Bouabré (Côte d'ivoire), J.D. Okhai Ojeikere (Nigeria), Papa Ibra Tall (Senegal), Bouchra Khalili (Morocco), and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye (Ghana). This selection appears to be a drawback, on several levels, in the gains made in the last two decades in the representation of African artists as the Venice Biennial. First, there are fewer African artists in the Biennial's official exhibition. Second, with the exception of Bouchra Khalili from Morocco, the rest are from West Africa. There is no even representation of the continent. While Bouabré, Ojeikere, and Tall belong to a much older generation, and live and work in Africa, Khalili and Yiadom-Boakye belong to a more recent generation, and are based in Paris and London, respectively. See, [http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/bien/venice\\_biennale/2013/tour/palazzo\\_enciclopedico/artists](http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/bien/venice_biennale/2013/tour/palazzo_enciclopedico/artists).

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### **Illustrations**



Fig. 1: The Opening of Marc Chagall Exhibition, Musée Dynamique, Dakar 18 March 1971. Chagall is flanked by President Senghor and his wife. (*Allocution prononcée à l'ouverture de l'exposition Marc Chagall, Dakar, jeudi 18 mars 1971* (Leopold Sédar Senghor [Dakar]: Présidence de la Republic, 1971).



Fig. 2: Papa Ibra Tall, *Le Couple Royal*, wool tapestry, 1966



Fig. 3: Poster of the Picasso Exhibition, Musée Dynamique, Dakar, 6 April – 6 May, 1972



Fig. 4: Aaron Douglas, *Let my People go*, 1927, oil on canvas.



Fig. 5: Aaron Douglas, *Study of Aspects of Negro Life: The Negro in African Setting*, 1934.



Figs. 6: Edna Manley, *Beadseller*, wood, 1922.



Fig. 7: Edna Manley, *The Negro Aroused*, wood, 1935.



Fig. 8: Group photograph of the participants at the ICAC in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia in 1962. In the photograph are Frank McEwen, Vincent Kofi, Tristan Tzara, Miss Pearl Primus, William Bascom, William Fagg, Roland Penrose, Selby Mvusi, Alfred Barr, among others.



Fig. 9 (Left): Ben Enwonwu, *Anyanwu*, bronze, ca. 1954-55; Fig. 10 (Right): Meta Warrick Fuller, *Ethiopia Awakening*, bronze, ca. 1914 or 1921.





Fig. 11: Vincent Kofi, *Awakening Africa*, bronze, 1959.



Fig. 12: Poster of the First World Festival of Negro Arts, Dakar, 1966.



Fig. 13: Opening of Tendances et Confrontations, First World Festival of Negro Arts, Dakar, 1966.

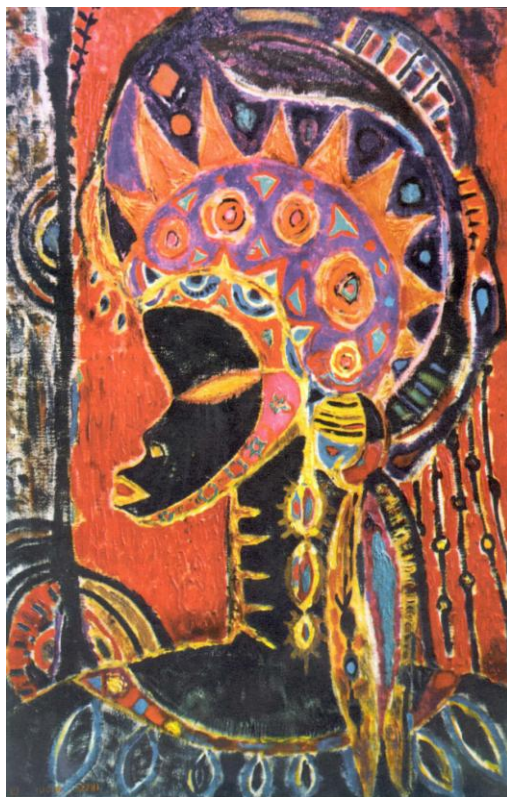


Fig. 14: Ibou Diouf, *Tête*, oil on canvas, 1965.



Fig. 15: Papa Ibra Tall, *Le Lutteur*, oil on canvas, no date



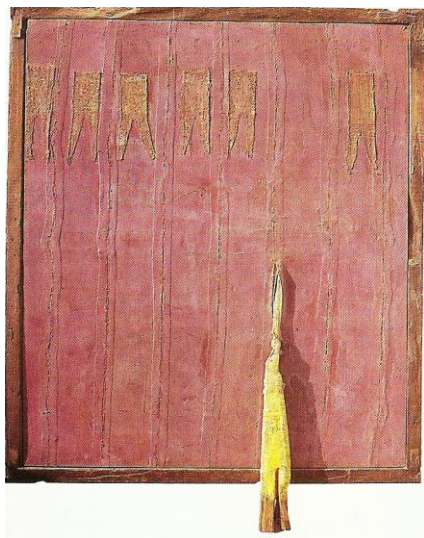
Fig. 16: Gerard Sekoto, *Mother and Child*, oil on canvas, no date



Fig. 17: Christian Lattier, *The Ram*, steel and rope, 1965.



Fig. 18: Viyé Diba, *Malade Mental I*, acrylic on paper, 1988



Figs. 19 and 20: Viyé Diba *Échappement*, mixed media, 1996; and *Matières, rythmes et compositions*, mixed media, 1997.

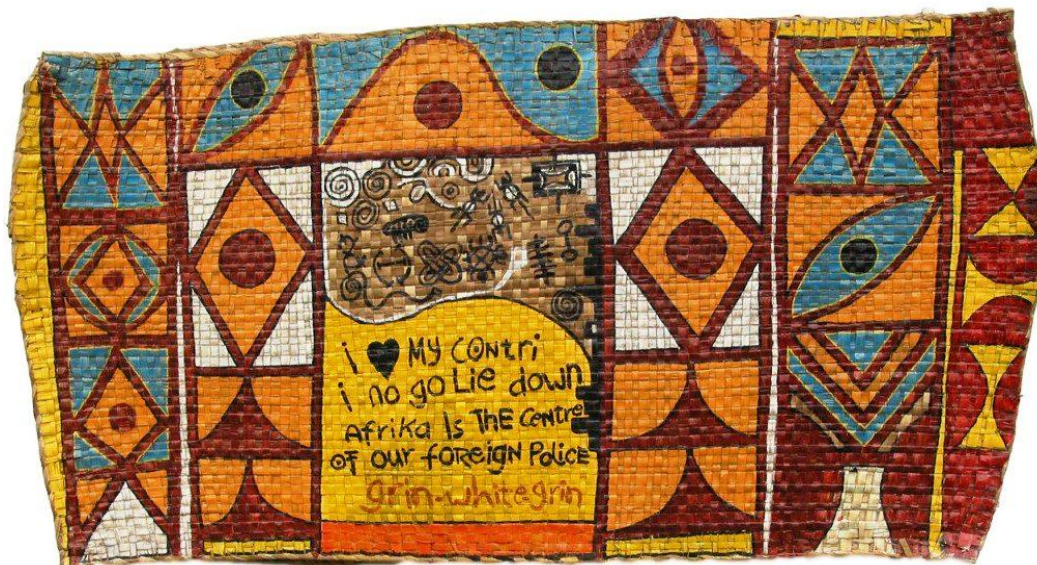


Fig. 21: Olu Oguibe, *National Graffiti*, acrylic on mat, 1989.



Fig. 22: *Art Against Apartheid*, Musée Dynamique, Dakar, May 23 to June 23, 1986



Fig. 23: El Hadji Sy delivering his speech at the opening of *Art Against Apartheid*, Musée Dynamique, Dakar, May 23, 1986.

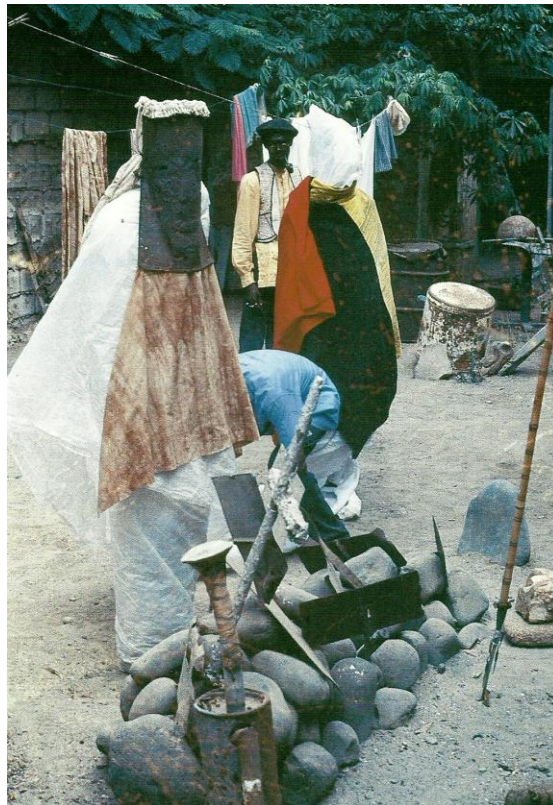


Fig 24: Laboratoire Agit-Art, Performance, 1989. In the background is Issa Samba (aka Joe Ouakam) Photo: El Hadji Sy. In *FAMA and Fortune Bulletin*, *Ecran-Mémoire I*, P and S Wein, 1996, No. 17.

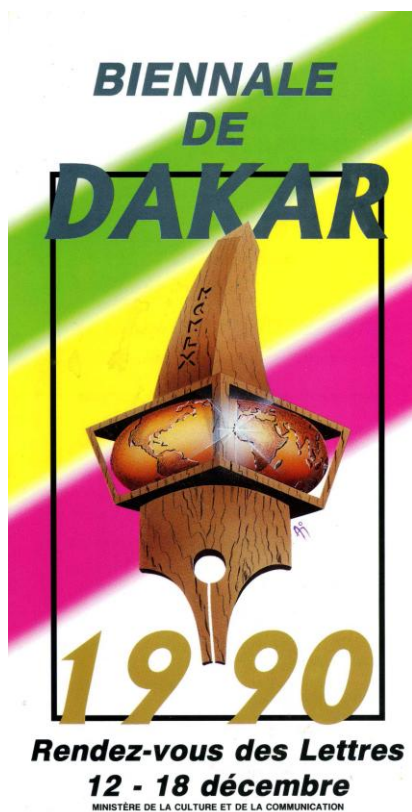


Fig 25: Poster of Dak'Art 1990



Fig 26: Place de l'Obelisque, Dak'Art 1990.



Fig. 27: Aires Culturelles et Création Littéraire en Afrique, Dak'Art 1990.





Fig. 28: President Diouf viewing a section of the International Selection of Dak'Art 1992 at the I'FAN Museum, Dakar, December 1992.



Fig. 29: Another section of the International Selection, showing works of Ghanaian and Senegalese artists, I'FAN Museum, Dak'Art 1992, Dakar, December 1992.



Fig. 30: Chuckley Vincent, *Retrouvailles*, batik, 1992.

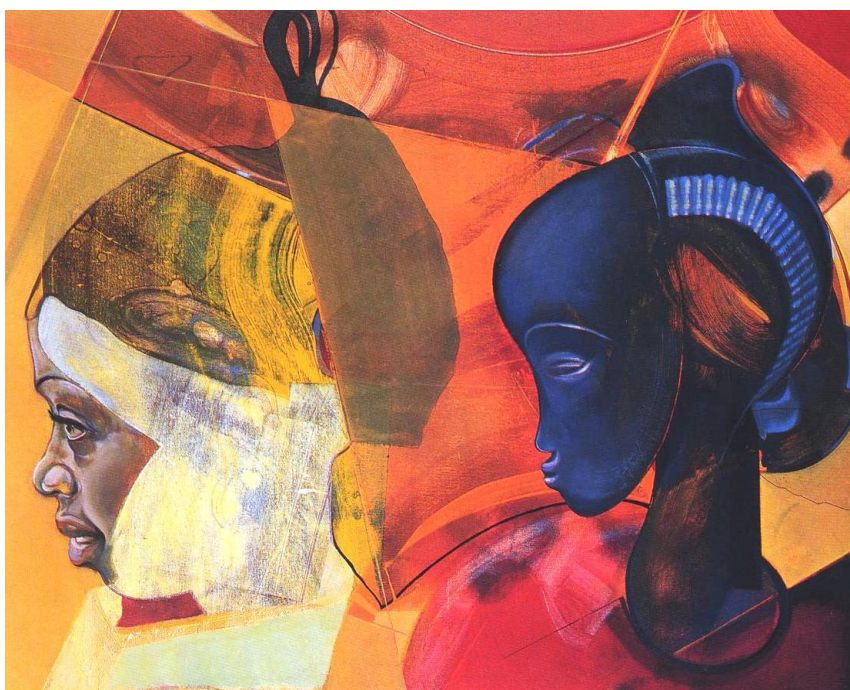


Fig. 31: Fode Camara, *La Magie des Noirs*, acrylic on canvas, 1992.

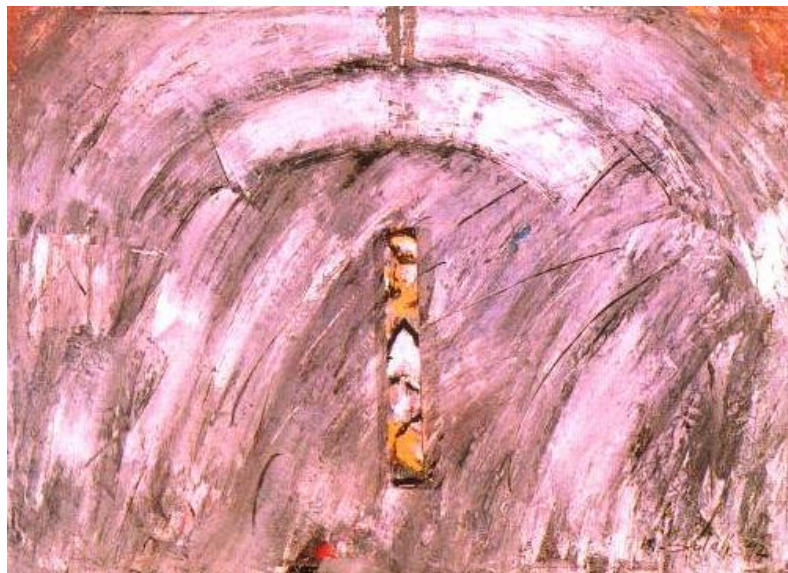


Fig. 32: Malek Salah, *Matière-Energie II*, oil on canvas.



Fig. 33 (Left): Moustapha Dimé, *La Dame à la culotte*, driftwood, undated, probably 1991/1992.

Fig. 34 (Right): Zehirun Yetmgeta, *When the Sun Gets the Moon*, acrylic on bamboo, 1991.



Fig. 35: Official Dak'Art logo designed by Senegalese artist Amadou Sow.



Fig. 36: Opening Ceremony of Dak'Art 1996, Daniel Sorano Theatre, Dakar, 1996. President Abdou Diouf is standing in the middle.



Fig. 37: Audience viewing a sculpture (artist unknown) in the International Selection of Dak'Art 1996.



Fig. 38: Audience viewing a painting by Boubacar Boureima (Niger) in the International Selection of Dak'Art 1996.



Fig. 39: Kra N'Guessan, *Reliquaire*, installation, 1995

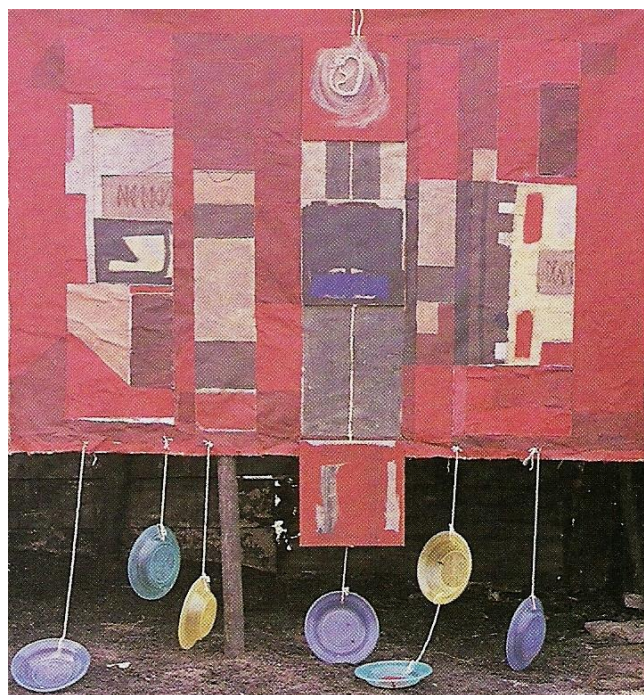


Fig. 40: Yacouba Toure, *Oasis*, mixed media, 194 x 132 cm, 1994.

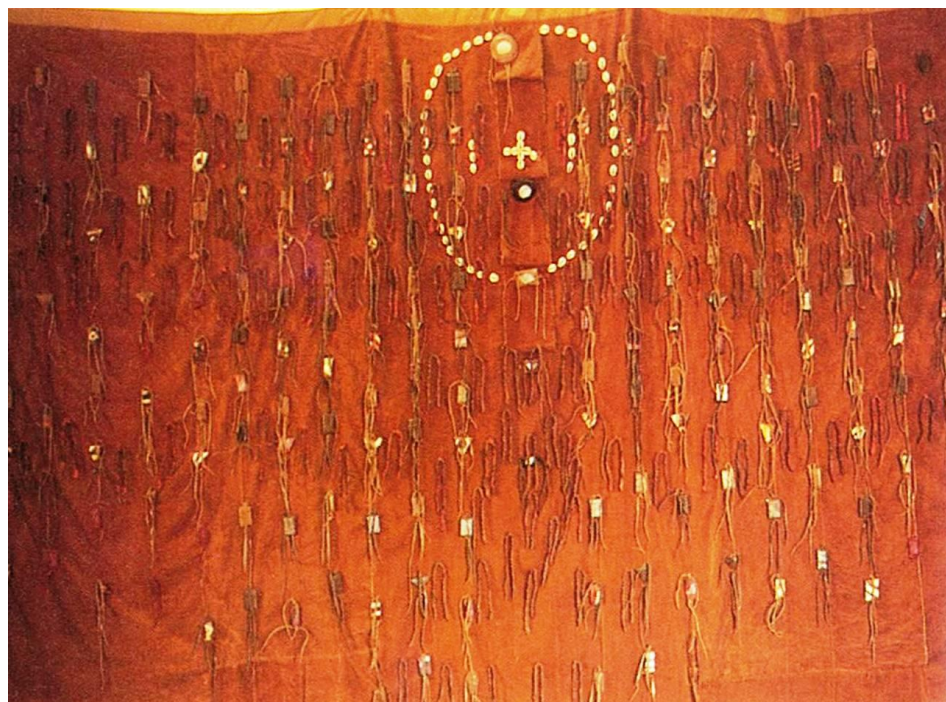


Fig. 41: Abdoulaye Konaté, *Hommage de Mandé*, 1994.



Fig. 42: Mohamed Kacimi, *From Life to Oblivion* [installation shot], Dak'Art 1996, I'FAN Museum, Dakar.



Fig. 43: Mohamed Kacimi, *From Life to Oblivion* [installation shot], Dak'Art 1996, I'FAN Museum, Dakar.



Fig. 44: Ezrom Legae and Mary Nooter Roberts (curator of the exhibition), *I think more with my eyes than with my mind* (installation shot], Dak'Art 2006, I'FAN Museum, Dakar.





Fig. 45: Ezrom Legae, *Dying Beast*, bronze, 43 x 36 x 29, 1993.



Fig 46: Pascale Marthine Tayou, *Neither Primitive Nor Wild* [installation shot]), Dak'Art 1996, Goethe Institute, Dakar.



Fig. 47: Zerihun Yetmgeta, *A Spiritual Art* [installation shot], Galerie Quatres Vents, Dakar.



Fig. 48: *From the Long Search for a Shadow* [installation shot], defunct Galerie 39, Dakar.



Fig. 49: *From the Long Search for a Shadow* [installation shot with the artist Moustapha Dimé standing near his work], defunct Galerie 39, Dakar.



Fig. 50: Encounters and Exchanges colloquium, Dak'Art 1996.



Fig. 51: Encounters and Exchanges colloquium, Dak'Art 1996.

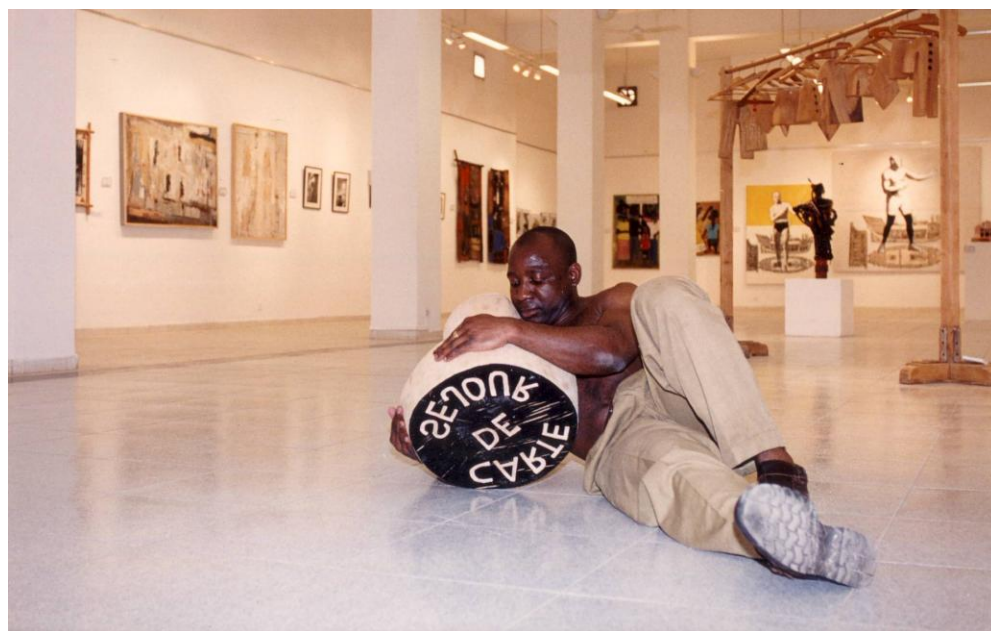


Fig. 52: Barthélémy Togou, *Carte de Séjour*, performance, Dak'Art 1998.



Fig. 53: Soly Cissé, *Serie Colorée*[triptych], acrylic on canvas, 150 x 150 x 3, 2010.



Fig. 54: Berni Searle, *Red, Yellow, Brown: Face to Face*, photography installation, 2000.



Fig. 55: Tracey Rose, *Span II*, video and object installation, 1997

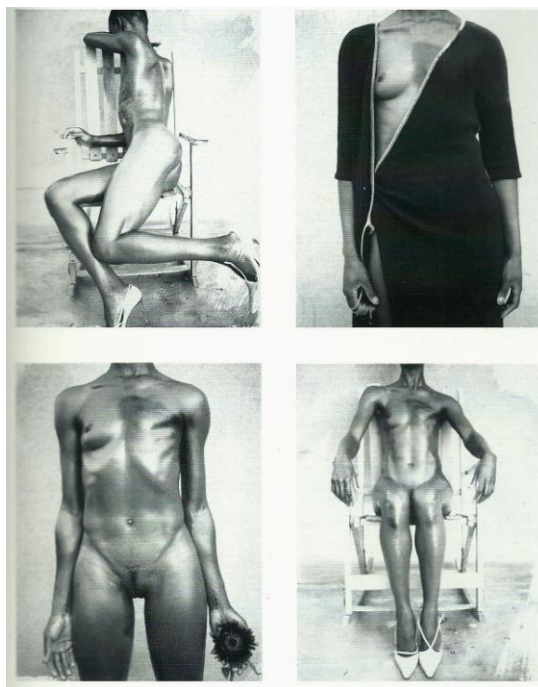


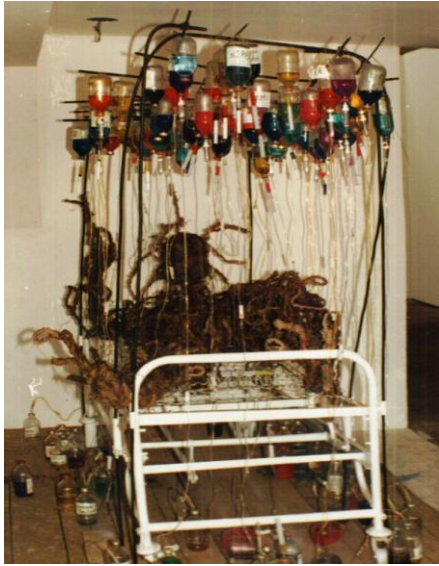
Fig. 56: Mfon Essien, *The Amazon's New Clothes*, photography, 1999.



Fig. 57: Moridja Kitenge Banza, *Hymne à Nous*, video, 2008.



Fig. 58: Joël Mpah Dooh, *Global Program Cols*, multimedia installation, 1999.



Figs. 59 and 60: Dominique Zinkpè, *Malgré tout*, installation, 2000; *G8 promène son chien*, installation, 2000.



Fig. 61: Emeka Udemba, *World White Walls*, wood, Plexiglas, earth, plastic flowers, and found objects, 2001.





Fig. 62: Babacar Niang, *Émigration Clandestine: the Grand Debat*, collage and installation, 2008.



Fig. 63 (Right): Hervé Youmbi in *Ces Totems qui hantent la mémoire des fils de Mamamdou*, variable installation, 2010.



Fig. 64 (Left): Mounir Fatmi, *Liaisons et déplacements*, multimedia installation, 1998-1999.



Fig. 65: Samba Fall, *Consomania*, video animation, 4mins, 4secs, 2007.



Fig. 66: Chika Modum, *Isi Aka*, installation, 2010.



Fig. 67: Ndary Lo, *La Longue Marche du Changement*, variable installation, 2000-2001.



Fig. 68: Ndary Lo, *La Muraille Verte*, variable installation, 2006-2007.



Fig. 69: Robert Jem Koko Bi, *Darfur*, burnt wood, 2008.

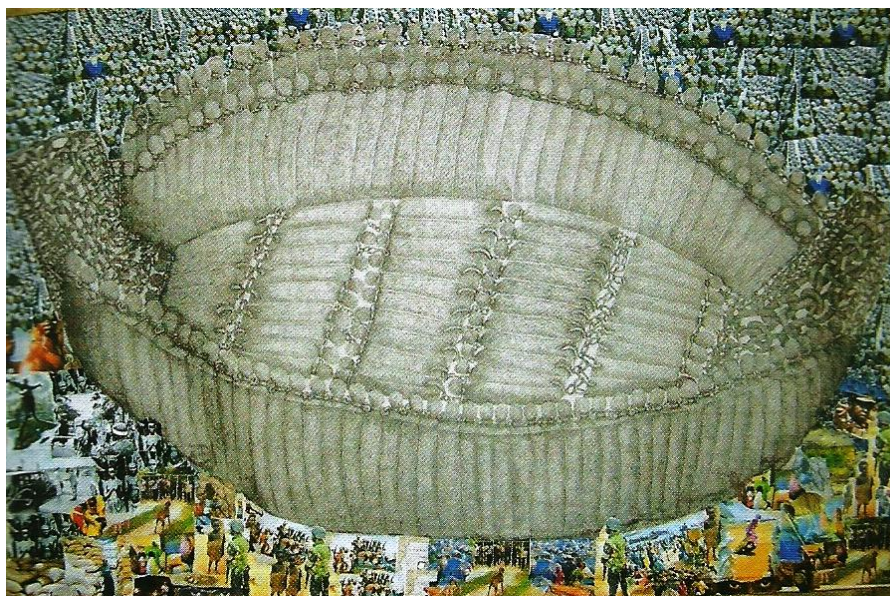


Fig. 70: Robert Jem Koko Bi, *Autopsie*, collage, 236 x 155 cm, no date.



Fig. 71: Freddy Tsimba, *Elles Viennent de Loin*, variable installation, 2006-2007.



Fig. 72: Aimé Mpane, *Congo, the Shadow of the Shadow*, installation, 2005

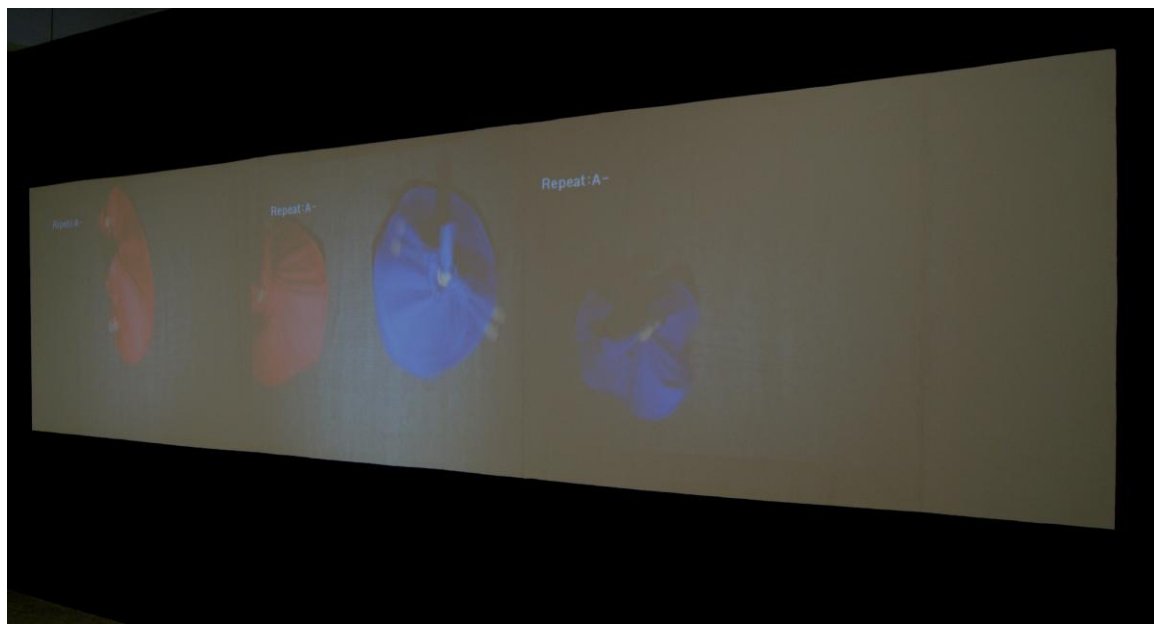


Fig. 73: Moataz Nasr, *Merge and Emerge*, Video-channel loop, 6mins 25 secs, 2011.



Fig. 74: Katia Kameli, *Untitled*, video, 2mins 30 secs, 2011.



Fig. 75: Bright Ugochukwu Eke, *Acid Rain*, variable installation, 2005.





Fig. 76: Kwesi Owusu-Ankomah, *Movement No 11*, acrylic on canvas, 2003-2005.



Fig. 77: Justin Kabré, *Fetchie Protecteur*, welded steel, undated.



Fig. 78: Saliou Traoré, *Fauteuil Marmite*, aluminum, 1998.



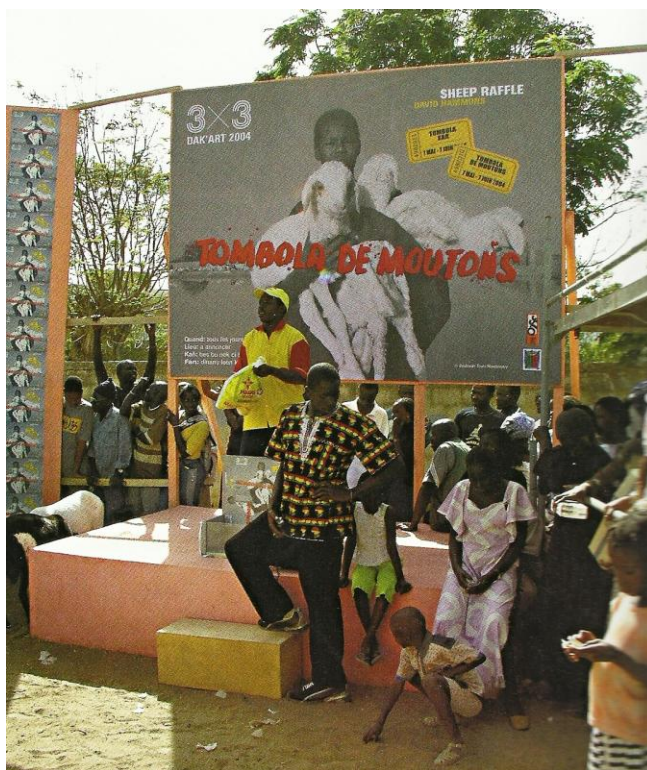
Fig. 79: Kabbaj Khadija, *Table Tbeq*, size and date unknown.



Fig. 80: Dak'Art OFF flag in a residential quarter.



Fig. 81: 3x3: Three Artists/Three Projects poster.



Figs. 82 and 83: David Hammons, *Dak'Art 2004 Sheep Raffle*, live performance, 2004.  
Photo: Salah M. Hassan.





Fig. 84: Pamela Z, *An Evening of Works for Voices, Electronics and Video*, performance, National Theater, Dakar, Dak'Art 2004. Photo: Salah Hassan.



Fig. 85: Pamela Z, *Just Dust* (detail), six-channel sound work, Gorée Island, Dak'Art 2004. Photo: Salah M. Hassan.

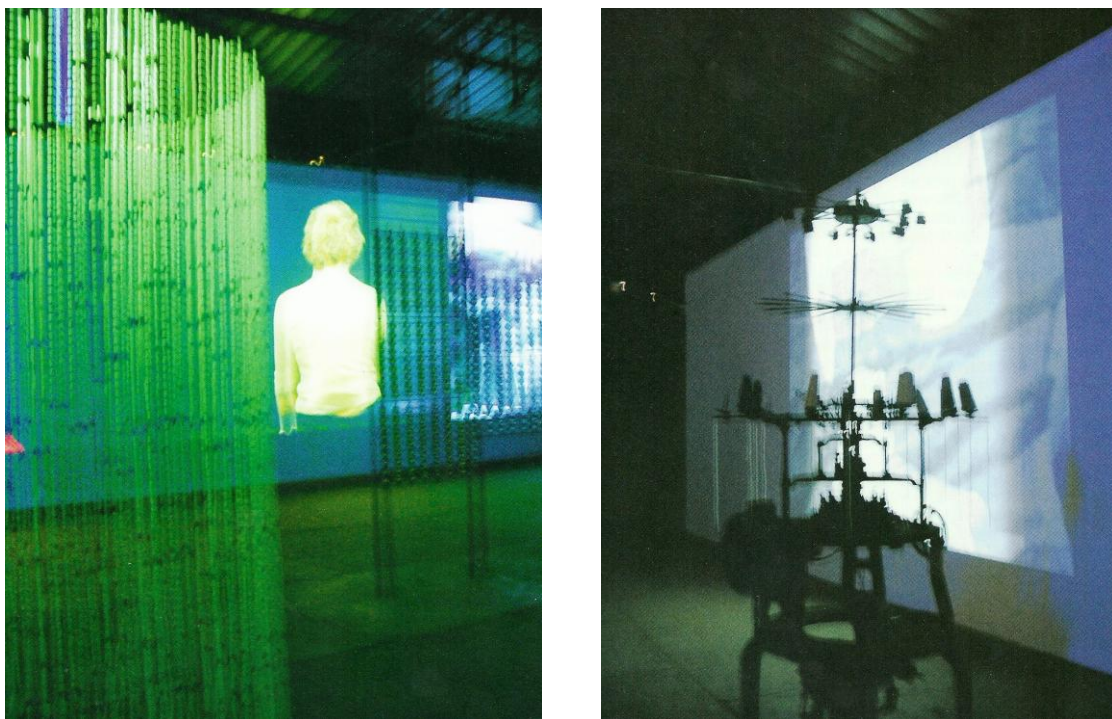


Fig. 86 and 87: Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, *Threads of Memory*, video and object installation, 2004. Photo: Salah M. Hassan.



Fig. 88: Afropixel 2012 poster.



Fig. 89: Afropixel 2012, *Petit-déjeuner*, April 21, 2012.



Fig. 90: Opening of Yassine Balbzioui exhibition as part of Afropixel 2012, Kër Thiossane, Dakar, May 12, 2012.





Fig. 91: *Visionary Africa: Art at Work* exhibition, Afropixel 2012, Galerie Le Manege, Dakar, May 11, 2012.



Fig 92: The African Renaissance Monument, Ouakam, Senegal.