

Contemporary African Art

A Multilayered History

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It is always pretentious to treat African art as though a unitary vision of art as it is currently practiced in Africa were possible. This point of view in fact ignores or neglects African diversity: the individual plastic art experiments of African artists. These diversities, tied to the varied contexts and rapid changes that are steadily taking place everywhere, no longer permit such claims.

In this area, as in many others, it is no longer possible to aim to propose syntheses on Africa. It is also necessary to set the boundaries of our goals immediately and to indicate the difficulties of achieving them.

The expression "African art" used here can be explained by the reference to several, but not all, African countries whose plastic traditions have been studied; still, such traditions do not exist in many countries. In countries where plastic arts are practiced, the experiments vary, as do the levels of development of these arts, and the conditions and available materials. Moreover, throughout sub-Saharan Africa, the venture into Western-style fine arts is recent – the turn of the century at the earliest – and dependence regarding the West has remained unchanged in several areas ever since.

African art? African-art-for-Westerners? Contemporary colonial art? Negro-art-for-whites? These questions are not new. Freedom was slow to come from the African independence movements. Trends and tendencies have diversified since. Authentic contemporary African art forms have emerged and are affirming themselves on both a national and international level. But at the same time, differences are being accentuated and national specificities are taking root in the particular traditions of the countries and nation-states of postcolonial Africa.

The evaluation of these art forms clashes with their extroversion¹ and although the promotion of their entrenchment is rather timidly taking shape in Africa,² the only real understanding possible remains quite sketchy. A fragment of knowledge can only be understood when linked to history.

History: Schools

The African arts have only been promoted by isolated individuals, each having led, in a solitary way, his or her own experience. In fact, between 1920 and 1950, several Europeans, missionaries, artists or amateurs, conducted specific artistic experiments in different African colonies. From the beginning, these artistic experiences thus assumed the shape of Western fine arts, since their initiators reproduced more or less faithfully in Africa the formulas and models they knew in the West.

Given the number and variety of these experiments throughout Africa, only a few will be mentioned here.

One of the oldest experiments was introduced in the Ivory Coast and established in Bingerville, not far from Abidjan. In 1923, French sculptor Charles Combes (1891-1968) set up a sculpture studio there, which would become a school of sculpture and join the *École normale supérieure des Beaux-Arts* in 1962 before being converted into a regional museum in 1987.

From 1927 and for many years onward, art professor Kenneth Murray had an important influence on the artistic education and the training of several young Nigerians, inciting the creation of the "Murray School."

In 1937, the direction of the art department of the college in Achimota, Ghana, was entrusted to German sculptor H.V. Meyerowitz, who also introduced artistic education to the Winneba Teacher College. In 1946, the college in Achimota was transferred to the *Université des Sciences et de Technologie de Kamas*, before becoming the *École des Beaux-Arts Kwame Nkrumah*.

In 1937, the School of Arts of the *Collège Makereke de Kampala* (Uganda) for training in sculpture and applied arts was entrusted to Margaret Trowell. This institution became a university and

exercised a great influence on all of central and southern Africa, from the Sudan to Zimbabwe.

In 1939, through the impetus of reverend Edward Paterson, the Cyrene mission in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) created an arts center for all of southern Africa.

In 1942, Brother Marc Wallende, who was both a painter and a sculptor, opened the Saint-Luc center in Combe-Matadi in the Middle Congo. This center was later transferred to Leopoldville (Kinshasa), where it became the Académie des Beaux-Arts and was finally integrated with the Université nationale du Zaïre.

In 1945, the School of Design of the Golden Memorial College in Khartoum (the Sudan) was founded by Jean-Pierre Greenlaw; in 1951, it became the College of Fine and Applied Arts of Khartoum.

In 1947, Pierre Romain-Desfossés, French naval officer and amateur painter, opened a "hanger" in Elisabethville, a sort of independent painting studio where he received young Congolese students. This center later became the Académie de l'art populaire congolais, the origin of the École de Lumumbashi.

Desfossés was convinced that artists could create solely from their own experiences. This assertion has been contradicted by all of art history: painting, like all forms of art, is learned by watching that of others... How can one imagine an isolated group of artists, working by the will of their instructor, but also from the cultural poverty of the colonial or postcolonial milieu, without contact with any other plastic art production, without any possibility of choosing the language that suits their personality, how can one imagine these artists renewing themselves and gaining awareness of their originality! Only comparison with others can lead to a feeling of singularity and can incite in art, once training is complete, to defend everything that encourages this specificity.³

After Romain-Desfossés's death in 1954, Laurent Moonens continued to run the Académie in the same manner until 1959.

In 1948, Laurent Moonens founded the École de Stanley-Pool (Pool Malbo) in the Belgium Congo as well. This school first became the Académie des Beaux-Arts et Métiers d'Elisabethville in 1951, then the Académie des Beaux-Arts de Lumumbashi.

That same year, courses were offered at the Institut technique des arts graphiques in Yaba, Nigeria.

In 1951, in a district of Brazzaville, French painter Pierre Lods created a center for African art in the image of Romain-Desfossés's "hanger," which would be known by the name of *École de Poto-Poto*.

I will never forget the joy of Ossali, my domestic servant, when, after two days' absence, I found him painting blue birds on an old signpost from Oubangui. They were disturbing, funny little birds, in the shape of throwing knives, they had a presence like that of the most beautiful African masks... In the days that followed, the younger brothers, cousins, and friends all tried. I brought everyone back to my case-atelier in Poto-Poto. It was thus a wealth of talents, a squandering of ideas, an astounding blossoming of inspiration, a paradise of colors, of joy, and of song. Papers, boxes and canvases, an old sheet, the floors, walls, windows, and doors were covered with gesticulating characters, hunting, dancing, at the market, fishing, at war, with birds, insects, fish, plants, masks, stunning heads, sometimes everything mixed together, no flowers or arrangements of objects referred to as "still art"... It was all awkward perhaps at the start, but done with harmonizing colors, well placed, teeming with the spirit of invention, as if by miracle, in a word, the portending sign of the imminence of a real painting that was far from the obsessions of the "*Musée imaginaire*"... Thanks to this prodigious and incredible gathering of spontaneous talent, I can make an accurate choice and keep only those painters who immediately demonstrate all the natural skills of drawing, composition, harmony, and imagination, which allows me to intervene only to uphold the artists' inner strength, to encourage them or rid them of their doubts, to distribute materials and give them the indispensable information on the use of color, brushwork, and the use of medium, paper or canvas ... To feed the painters' inspiration, I surround them with traditional African objects, in the garden there is a wide variety of plants, I organize celebrations. Occasionally, we read African legends, proverbs, and poems that I feel correspond to the black world or that demonstrate the same values (Senghor, Césaire, Saint-John Perse, Michaux, Prévert, etc.). The countless number of possible experiences, in a population where everyone is an artist, are what chiefly explain the success of the *Atelier de Poto-Poto*.⁴

This school held a great influence for many years on all of western and central Africa. When Pierre Lods left the center in 1961 to pursue his teaching experience in Senegal, the school was taken over by a Congolese artist, Nicolas Ondogo.

In 1952, Italian missionaries founded the *École de céramique* in Gieteta, Burundi. In 1966, it was converted into an *École technique secondaire d'art*.

In 1955, the *département des Beaux-Arts de l'Université* of Zaria in Nigeria opened, and was joined with the departments of art and engraving of the Yaba Technical College and the college in Ibadan to form the *département des Beaux-Arts de l'Institut nigérian des*

arts, des sciences et de la technologie. This department was later integrated with the Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria.

In 1957, Mac Ewen, who was the curator of the National Art Gallery of Salisbury (Harare) in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), opened a sculpture studio to teach the Shonas, while he also headed a training session on painting.

That same year, the Fine Arts School of Addis-Abeba in Ethiopia was created and inaugurated by Emperor Hailé Sélassié.

In 1959, the artisan section of the secondary school for vocational training in Libreville, in Gabon, was converted into the Centre national d'art de la manufacture de Libreville.

In 1960, the arts departments of the vocational school of Yaba in Lagos and the college of Ibadan in Nigeria opened; the college of Ibadan became the faculty of arts of the Université d'Ibadan in 1962.

In 1961, the American-style College of Fine Arts of Nsukka in Nigeria was created.

In 1962, the École normale supérieure des Beaux-Arts d'Abidjan was created on the Ivory Coast; it first became the Institut national des arts in 1967, then the Institut national des arts et de l'action culturelle.

In 1963, Ulli and Georgina Beier, with the help of Suzanne Wenger, took over the studio-club of Mbari Mbayo in Oshogbo (Nigeria), where they offered art courses until 1967, the year they left for New Guinea. This studio gave rise to the school of the "Oshogbo artists."

Over the course of that same year, the Maison des artisans de Bamako in Mali was converted into the Institut national des arts, and the Centre d'art et d'artisanat Mailikazi opened in Bulawayo in Zimbabwe, etc.

Not all the former African colonies were concerned with these experiments of artistic introduction, however; those that weren't represent approximately half of the African countries (Mauritania, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Mali, Burkina-Faso, Niger, Benin, Togo, Chad, the Central African Republic, Cameroon, Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, Zambia, Namibia, Rwanda, Tanzania, Djibouti, etc.). This repertoire also displays three categories of English, French, and Belgian experiments. To our knowledge, such "schools" were not created in the

Portuguese colonies (Angola, Cape Verde, Zambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique). Also worthy of note, the English colonies are the ones most affected, while they are also historically advanced in comparison to the French and Belgian colonies.

From a pedagogical point of view, all of these experiments fall within two categories: on the one hand, there is academic training according to the Western model of fine arts schools, and on the other, training according to the independent studio model, in which the master, that is to say the European, intervenes as little as possible.

Generally speaking, even when taught by an artistic individual (European *amateur*, artist, or collector), these experiments were very soon either transformed or integrated. There are several reasons for this, the most likely undoubtedly due to economic reasons. For example, the *École de Poto-Poto*, created on the initiative of Pierre Lods, must have had to resort to funding from the colonial administrative authorities of the time. If Charles Combes was able to maintain his sculpture studio for so many years, it is surely due to the solicitude of his friend, Houphouët-Boigny. It was not in fact easy to make such structures work on a volunteer basis, since they required enormous amounts of financial support for their equipment and supply of work materials. It was impossible to continue to invest in lost funds.

In the English colonies, the experiments were more often integrated within larger state structures (departments, faculties, and universities), while in the French colonies, they were transformed into state structures on a national level. In such a way, during the independence movements of 1960, the majority of these structures were already built into institutions for which the state had taken charge of operations and various related expenditures.

But the European or Western aspects of these experiments remained constant by means of:

- *method*: fine arts-style school, or independent studio, often in the form of an academy;
- *pedagogy*: direct intervention or freedom of student initiative;
- *techniques and tools*: painting on easel, oil painting, gouache, brushwork, etc.;
- *medium and materials*: canvas, paper, paints, cloth, etc.

Even after the independence movements, they did not lose these Western features; hence the aforementioned expressions used recently; hence the division between contemporary African art and African society.

Still today, everything, or almost everything, is derived from the West: the tools, the art supplies, the materials, the accessories (the canvas and the paper, the paintbrushes, the pencils and paints, etc.). Moreover, production is generally intended for European ex-patriots, that is to say, the completed works of art are generally bought by Westerners, even if today, more and more African nationals and Senegalese are starting to purchase works of art. But the bulk of the art market, practically two-thirds, is made up of resident or visiting ex-patriots.

By its nature and its tendencies, contemporary African art still concerns African societies very little, for it is painting done on easels, works confined to the shape of frames, destined for contemplation and aesthetic pleasure: in traditional African society, painting was done on masks, bodies, and walls. The function of these types of painting was precise: generally, traditional sculpture produced statues and masks, mainly destined for religious ceremonies, while contemporary sculpture diversifies its works, with round sculpture next to bas-relief and without any specific purpose. That is why, in initiating these experiments here and there throughout Africa, Europeans inaugurated a new tradition of plastic arts that was previously unknown in Africa. The initial motivations were to either save African art, or to herald a new art form (see Pierre Lods, Marc Wallendo, Lalou, Pauvert, among others).

What was it exactly? Did this newly created art form assume any sort of African aspect? What establishes this African aspect of the art? The themes and/or plastic shapes created? Earlier (1951-1961), Pierre Lods read legends, proverbs, and poems on Africa, distributed pictures of Africa (magazines, journals, etc.), and surrounded his students with traditional African objects to stimulate their creative imagination. That did not seem to suffice, for the marginality of that art with respect to the societies and populations remained evident.

Trends: Multi-levelled Pedagogy

Colonial education: popular art and naïve art

In the very beginning, the prevailing method in the majority of experiments, as much in the French colonies as in the English and Belgian colonies, was that of the studio, in which the master was alone with his students; more often than not, the principle of the independent studio prevailed, particularly in the French colonies.

In this context, the master gave his students almost complete freedom in his studio; he intervened very little or not at all. Pierre Romain-Desfossés, one of the first to experiment with this type of independent studio, merely provided the premises, some paper or canvas, the paintbrushes, paints, etc., and gave some practical advice. His method of teaching gained widespread acceptance. Lods spoke of silence and respect. Of course, this teaching method presupposed, for both Lods and Romain-Desfossés, that blacks were creative by nature: they needed no training or master. And thus with no education, the "students" were left to themselves.

As such, artists trained in such a way mastered neither the techniques nor the composition of color ... Thus, a colleague of Lods at the *École des Arts du Sénégal* was able to say that when Lods "left on his travels, his section was non-existent," that is to say that his students did nothing and awaited his return, for "... they didn't produce anything without him finding it in a journal or elsewhere, sticking it under their noses and saying do this."⁵ Double dependence.

As regards plastic arts, the results of independent studio training are well known. They are the source of what has been called popular and naïve African art, which was for a long time believed to be the only form of contemporary African art possible. For some Western art criticism, if African art could only be as such, then there was in reality no contemporary art in Africa. The only true African art is Negro art, i.e., the African art of old, the art that stemmed from and was destined for traditional African religions.

Art made popular by its creators, i.e., the young students recruited by European masters (drivers, domestic servants, clerks, cooks, street sweepers, car wash attendants, vendors, unskilled or unemployed adolescents, from modest backgrounds, etc. from the

working-class stratum of the colonial cities), naïve as much by theme as by the plastic process.

In these works, the chromatic clashes are striking both in the abundance and range of colors and in the predominance of bright or somber colors, creating the impression that for these painters, painting consists solely of creating *faux aplats*, that is applying thick layers of paint on blank surfaces, with no consideration for harmony or compatibility.

To stimulate their imagination, the master surrounded them with sculpted objects, such as models of ancient Negro art, i.e., three-dimensional objects, which accounted for the trend to reproduce three dimensions in their paintings, and produced a type of "*géométrisme*." This led to oversimplification and approximation, the use of square and rectangular shapes, the abundance of lines, signs, and marks (see Mbaye Diop, Ibou Diouf, Modou Niang, Philippe Sène, Chérif Thiam, Baba Dia, Khalifa Guèye, etc.).

Sometimes the geometricalization aspires to representation, sometimes it leans toward abstraction, but the representation is never absolutely realist and the abstraction is never perfect. These artists do not seem to have been able to free themselves from their models. The stylistic analogies in their creations were in fact simply the reflection of a chronic technical dependence, for the master was indispensable; he had to be constantly present during the work in progress of his disciples (stimulation, advice, criticism, etc.).

"Negritude" styles

At the same time, around 1960, in Senegal, an artistic style similar to this popular and naïve art came to light, which was called "*art nègrifiant*." This is the art form that inspired and promoted Léopold Sédar Senghor between 1960 and 1980. Senghor wanted to bring about an authentic contemporary Negro art, in the image of the ancient Negro art that captivated the world and was glorified as much by European artists at the turn of the century, "daring in taste," as by the Western ethnologists of the same period. Generally recognized in Senegal, Senghor was a true patron⁶ who contributed to the promotion of the plastic arts and schools of art and whose support for the artists was constant: he awarded them fellowships and funding, invited them in small groups to his presi-

dential palace, and during these receptions was happy to teach them about the aesthetics of Negro art (see the accounts of Mamadou Wade, Moustapha Dimé, and Djibril Ndiaye especially). For twenty years, he maintained, at the very least in Dakar, a cultural ambience and atmosphere governed by Negritude, which he wished would become the foundation of all modern Senegalese life: political, social, cultural, artistic, etc. As regards the arts, Senghor's influence was so present and coercive that all the young artists created in reference to the theories and demands of Negritude, idealizing the original and pure Africa, celebrating ancestral values, gaining inspiration by ancient Negro art, expressing the Negro cultural identity, etc. Hence the steadfastness of the themes and titles so dear to Senghor in their works.⁷

Today, this popular art is both prolonged and perpetuated by contemporary artists such as Valente Malangatana (Mozambique), Twins Seven Seven and Moke (Nigeria), Cheri Samba (the Congo), Clemclem Lawson (Togo), Sinaba (Mali), Alphadio (Senegal), Georges Lilanga and Elias Elieza Jengo (Tanzania), and the like, seemingly preferred by Western critics as they are the ones most often displayed in the regular exhibits throughout the West (see Gaudibert, *Revue Noire*). In Senegal, this trend continues, for Ibou Diouf, Amadou Seck and Diatta Seck, Mbaye Diop, Seydou Barry, Khalifa Gueye, Amadou Wade Sarr, Chérif Thiam, Baba Dia, and still others, all former disciples of Lods, are still there and still creating.

African art? Negro-art-for-whites? In reality, this is "colonial art," "colonial" in its marginality with respect to the Africa for which it serves no use and with respect to the West which does not recognize it, and "colonial" with respect to its promoters, who organize, sustain, and appreciate it and for whom it is destined.

In the end, this art is neither African, for it is unaware of the plastic tradition, nor is it Western, for the plastic tradition is not taught to the artists.

Artists in the academic tradition

Alongside the popular and naïve painters, were those trained in the fine arts tradition of academic training. In this respect, Senegal, like most of the black African countries, experienced such

artists, for, in the image of Lods's model, there were several authentic artists who received a solid academic background at the *École des Arts*.⁸ There has always been, and there still exists today throughout Africa, a third type of artist, the self-taught artist, as well as those who have been trained in the West, notably: the Nigerian Aina Onabolu (1882-1963), who studied in London and then in Paris, and returned to his country in 1923; the Ghanaian sculptor Oku Ampofo, who returned to Ghana in 1940; Iba Ndiaye, who returned to Senegal in 1959, and Papa Ibra Tall, who also returned in 1960; Christian Latier (1925-1973), who studied in France, and returned to his native Ivory Coast to teach at the *École des Beaux-Arts d'Abidjan*, among others.

Even today, these different artistic figures meet in Africa, even if the number of those that derive from the independent studios tend to diminish, precisely since the studios have all but disappeared, as have the great masters.

Among them, Europeans and Africans alike (Iba Ndiaye in Dakar and Christian Latier in Abidjan), some did not want to sacrifice the demands and principles of a solid and rigorous academic training and were thus held to instilling in their disciples a perfect technical mastery, in such a way as to make them painters and sculptors, that is to say technicians, before Africans. This is the breed of artists who are in the progress of writing the best pages in the history of contemporary African art; they are in fact present at all the great artistic events, national and international, and some for over twenty years (among them Souleymane Keïta, Alpha Walid Diallo, Jacob Yacouba, Viyé Diba, Amadou Ba, Mamadou Fall Dabo of Senegal, Grobli Zirignon, Mathilde Moreau, Tamsir Dia, Kra Nguessan, Michèle Tadjó of the Ivory Coast, Ablade Glover and Sualihu Agendey of Ghana, Zerihun Yetmgeta and Lemma Guya of Ethiopia). Naturally, the levels of writing of these artists are vary enormously, but what is constant is their distinction between their art and that of the popular and naïve art of the 1970s. An authentic art, of which the productions suffer from international competition; hence their presence on the international art market. In their works, the *géométrisme*, chromatic clashes, abundance of marks and lines, etc. have disappeared; the

harmony, shapes, and tones are more serene and calme (see the Dak'Art catalog 1992/96).

Consequences

Since the end of the 1970s, the evolution of the African arts seems to have been marked by several major phenomena, each denoting a distinctive stage.

"La récupération" (Salvaging)

In Senegal, for example, the division took place at the beginning of the 1980s, when French fine arts teachers in Dakar got the idea of using local materials in artistic practices and advised their students to get in the habit of substituting canvas, linen, or Canson paper, etc., with local materials such as fabric, sisal, cloth, glass, and to try to manufacture their paints themselves from local pigments, leaves or roots, rather than from imported industrial paints.

In the Ivory Coast this change gave rise very early to a movement called "Vohu-Vohu," while in Senegal, it gave rise to what is known as "*récupération*."

Vohu-Vohu and *récupération* are movements of integration or insertion of local materials from the surroundings within the plastic arts; in painting, local cloth or woven fabric or sisal bags replace imported canvases; and instead of oil, paint is obtained from crushed and kneaded cola. In sculpture, tin or iron cans are collected and welded or glued to form works, reminding us of Picasso's *Tête de taureau* (1943), a sculpture he made from a welded bicycle seat and handlebars. It consists, insofar as possible, of substituting imported materials within the artistic creation with materials from the surrounding area. Of course, the shapes and degrees are quite varied. *Récupération* consists thus of collecting, finding, acquiring by donation or purchase all objects used or not, old or new, and assembling, combining, thus recycling them within an ensemble: this gives them new life, a new destiny. The concept of *récupération*, ever present, is thus the recycling of materials that are collected, acquired, or given.

Of course, the West enjoyed a form of *récupération*, followed by pop art and today's land art; salvaging occurred at the turn of the century, when, in *Nature morte à la chaise cannée* (1912), oil on canvas, Pablo Picasso produced the first modern day collage, which was also the first example of *récupération*; the salvaged objects were newspaper, fabric, metal wire, rope, and various everyday objects. But there is no affiliation between Western *récupération* and the *récupération* practiced in Africa, even if the concept is the same (to give way to the expression of artistic creativity with the means readily available in the surroundings), the motivations are different. For Picasso, it was a matter of diversifying the expression and his methods and means, while in Africa, the underdeveloped situation, along with its consequences (shortages, high prices, etc.), commands a search for alternative solutions, and thus of accessible means, i.e., inexpensive and at hand. In such a way, the creation is free of the tyranny of "beautiful material" or noble material, and can thus exercise itself at will and is limited only by its own abilities. This no doubt explains the prodigious development of *récupération* almost everywhere in Africa; rare are the artists who have not practiced it.

At any rate, *récupération* and Vohu-Vohu seem to have been a godsend for many of our artists and the alternative salvaging of noble materials is comparable to that of representation and free composition.

Today, it has entered into the artistic values in Africa, as in Europe and elsewhere in the world. It has become widespread in the new artistic phenomenon called "installation art," with which it is increasingly confused. That is because installation art in fact implies *récupération*, in the sense that many installation artists often resort to salvaged objects, whether used or not.

Installation Art

In Africa, the phenomenon that marked the plastic arts was, in the early 1990s, the emergence of "installations."

In Senegal, the determining event was the new, artistic phenomenon that dawned in the city of Dakar, and then spread throughout all the urban centers of the country. This phenomenon was called "*Set-Sétal*," a Wolof expression that literally means "clean and make clean."

During the summer vacation from July to October 1990, this phenomenon rallied the youth in all the cities, assisted by the fine arts students and sometimes the artists themselves.

In essence, "*Set-Sétal*" was an aesthetic movement that consisted of "making clean" (*set*) and "beautifying" (*sétal*). In fact, in all the districts of the cities, the young boys and girls, alone or grouped by sport and cultural associations, began to sweep, clean, and dredge the streets; then, the sidewalks and the walls were whitewashed; all these surfaces were left to the "artists" and covered with amusing paintings, while the public squares, crossroads, and various open spaces were fitted with monuments, made from sculptures, sometimes masks and other salvaged objects (tires, bits of wood, bottles, scrap metal, boxes, string, cowries, etc.), all painted in bright colors.

All in all, during three months, cities were beautified, decorated with paintings on walls and roadways, frescos and sculptures, monuments, flowers planted around monuments and at crossroads, creating lively kaleidoscopes of color.

The particularity of this artistic and social phenomenon is to have created and introduced beauty in all the cities and in all their districts by salvaging and recycling all sorts of used materials.

This aesthetic perception of scrap material did not escape all the Senegalese artists, and the first to incorporate it into his art in the same way was the young sculptor Moustapha Dimé (who died in 1998). During an interview with us in 1991, he acknowledged that a real act of consciousness was taking place during the socio-plastic phenomenon of "*Set-Sétal*," in which he appreciated the attachment the Senegalese population had to the material elements (tools, utensils, various accessories, etc.) of their traditional civilization. Since then, and in almost all the cities, there has been an outbreak of traditional artists and, with them, other trade guilds called "*Baay Jaggal*" (scrap metal merchants, metalworkers, and salvagers, etc.), who have taken to all sorts of activities, salvaging and recycling all sorts of materials that they either collect or buy.

Moustapha Dimé had practiced the art of salvaging since 1981 when, at the Dakar port, he collected or bought old ship cords that he integrated into his sculptures. As of 1990, however, he did what he called, "installations."

Nevertheless, up until 1994, his form of "installation" takes on a specific meaning, since he is still making sculptures, in the sense that he creates a type of montage, an assembly of several materials integrated to form sculptures. Thus, in *L'Homme qui pleure* (1990), all of the integrated materials were salvaged: a large piece of slightly charred mahogany represents the head; a blackened wooden bench with a hole in the center serves as the body (thorax, pelvis, legs); ropes attached to the top of this bench represent the arms; another bench, perpendicular and fastened to the first, allows the sculpture to stand free. In another sculpture entitled *Femme* (1991), two mortars, one placed upside down on the other, form the inner limbs and the buttocks of the woman; above the upside down mortar, a pestle makes up the rest of the body, the neck and the head; at the chest, i.e. the top part of the pestle, two wooden calabashes turned upside down represent her large breasts; pieces of ebony in the shape of nails driven into the head-end of the pestle signify the woman's hair.

It was during the 1996 edition of Dak'Art that the "installations," as a new genre, prevailed. In fact the installation of Abdoulaye Konaté, from Mali, entitled *Hommage aux chasseurs du Mandé* (1994), was awarded the Grand Prix du Président de la République; this work consists of an immense traditional "pagne," dyed red, on which various material elements such as trinkets, cowries or bits of fabric are either sewn or hung.

Like Moustapha Dimé, Pascale Marthine Tayou was honored during this 1996 edition; Moustapha as the winner of the 1992 edition and Tayou the artist chosen and presented by the representative of Asia, Kawaguchi Yukiya, and for a special exhibition. Tayou is an installation artist par excellence, for, in his personal exhibition held at the Goethe Institute, he displayed only installations: *Chaussettes universelles*: fabric, paper, string, socks, various materials; *Folie Tripale 11* (1995): wood, earth, masks, cans, plastic, fabric, etc.; and *Folie Tripale 12* (1995): same materials.

With Tayou, installation tends to revert to popular art, through his work materials and their organization. No painting, no sculpture. With the new installations, in Africa, like elsewhere, the field of plastic arts seems to be broadening.

In fact, from the *École de peinture de Poto-Poto* and from the popular and naïve style of the current installations, African plastic arts have experienced profound changes. New specialties have emerged beside painting and sculpture. Modern architecture has been introduced in certain countries, with the creation of schools of architecture and urban planning. In painting, as in sculpture, creation techniques have been invented and diversified: the practice of mixed techniques has spread; new work matter and new materials have been experimented with; research has been conducted on paint; convergence has developed between art and the artisan.

Also worthy of mention are glass painting (spanning tradition and modernity) and batik (a dye-and-fabric painting technique), painting by collage or by sewing fabric and paper on fabrics or paper, painting on sand; but also those disciplines closer to painting such as graphic arts and photography; other trades are now practiced a little bit everywhere; serigraphy and lithography, tapestry-making and mosaic, decoration, etc.

New techniques

Painting techniques have also been diversified; it is now rare for a painter to use only one technique in a work: oil is sometimes mixed with gouache, acrylic, or Indian ink. In addition to oil painting, sewing and collage can also be implemented into the same work; mixed techniques have become widespread.

Pictorial genres are also varied and waver between the most naturalist realism, sometimes the most naïve, to the most absolute abstraction, representation alternating with free composition.

In representation, landscapes (historical scenes and everyday scenes) mix with portraits, animals, and mythical figures; naturalist representation is practiced alongside the most inventive representation. Abstraction is also practiced, both a spontaneous abstraction and a constructed one.

As for modern sculpture, the second great artistic specialty, it should enjoy extensive development, considering the permanence of African sculptural tradition and the abundance of wood. But, as indicated earlier, this is not the case in all African countries, particularly Muslim countries, where it is just about forbidden. The interdiction of creating Islamic images has been interpreted in

such a way that sculpture has been condemned, to the point that believers should not even own sculpted objects. The only form of sculpture that has survived is utility sculpture, which produces in particular cooking utensils (mortars, pestles, ladles, vases) and other domestic objects (benches, pirogues, paddles); it is this form of sculpture that innovated, at the beginning of the African independence movements with the coming of international tourism, by reconverting to the production of non-utility objects, most often statues and masks, imitations of the ancient styles of Africa (Ifé, Benin, Nok, Senoufo, Baoulé, Akan, etc.) and which constitutes what has been dubbed "airport art." Moreover, modern African sculpture suffered on account of the indirect competition brought upon by the great Negro statuary, which had been known in the West since the beginning of the twentieth century and was thought to be the only form of art possible in Africa; it survives through the ancient creations that can sometimes still be found.

Finally, in the fine arts schools, the departments of sculpture had generally lower enrollment than the departments of painting, due to the earlier prejudices, but also due to the difficulties surrounding the acquisition of materials (more costly tools and machines) and stock.

But more and more African sculptures are presented as "installations" and it is increasingly difficult to discern the border between sculpture and "installation," between modern sculpture and traditional sculpture, notably with respect to Romuald Hazoumé (Benin), Joseph-Francis Sumegne (Cameroon), Dominique Zinkpe (Benin), Willie Bester (South Africa), Papa Youssou Ndiaye and Guibril André Diop (Senegal). Mixtures, similar to patchwork quilts, of materials and techniques predominate in most cases.

Like traditional sculpture, modern African sculpture is generally representative, more often anthropomorphic, sometimes zoomorphic, but the realism is not always perfect; it can be suggestive, as, for example, in the case of Tafsir Momar Guèye (Senegal), Alassane Drabo (Burkina Faso), Elija Ogira (Kenya), Ezrom Legae (South Africa).

Ceramic art exists, but it is less developed than sculpture or painting; it has no doubt been penalized by the prodigious development of traditional pottery, which has always provided the

African populations with the vases and different utensils required for domestic activity. When oriented towards artistic creation, ceramics produce statues, masks, and various sorts of gadgets.

In the domain of plastic arts, sub-Saharan Africa thus emerges as the continent of disparities, where the uneven development alternates between areas of extensive artistic tradition with areas of artistic poverty, even absence. In light of the grave economic crisis faced by the majority of African countries since the early 1980s and the ethno-political conflicts that have dismantled states (Somalia, Burundi, Rwanda, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, etc.), artistic life remains very troubled.

Artists who participate actively in the development of contemporary African arts, dynamic and creative, diversify their fields of activity and at the same time practice different specialties: painting, ceramics and batik, carpentry and decoration, architecture, etc. Thus, aside from broadening the domains of their creative investment through these means, they also increase their sources of revenue. That is why some artists have introduced cultural units, veritable embryos of cultural industries, economic bases of the culture, which have appeared in several African countries over the last few years.

Translated from the French by Mara Bertelsen

ARTICLE SYNOPSIS IN WOLOF

Tënk

« Aari » tey yu Afrig réewu nit ñu ñuul ñi, tubaab yee leen fi dugaloon ci njalbéeni ati 1900, ñenn ci ñoom ittewoo woon sàmm « aaru » Afrig démb (aaru nit ku ñuul : cosaan), ñeneen ñi taxawoon rekk ngir dugal Afrig aar yu bees. Aaru Afrig ? Aaru tubaab bi ? Aaru Afrig ngir tubaab yi ?

Donte taxawayam aju na cïaaru tuhaab bi ci fãna yu bari (juntukaay ji, suti yeek xarala yi, yiy duggci ndefar bi, aãs), beddiku bi tãmbali na ca ndoortey jamono yi réewi Afrig yi moomee seen bopp (1960) te day wéy ba fãww. Jaar jarr yeek jëmu yi daldi nañu yaatalu boobaak léegi, waaye dañuy jëmmal ci anam yu bari, ñakka yemoo bi ci wallu yokkuteb aar bici Afrig réewu nit ñu ñuul ñi ; ndaxte ci wetu réew yi ci sóobu bu baax, am na ciyeneen yoo ci xam ne baax, am na ci yeneen yoo ci xam ne aar yi doxuñu fa mbaa tuuti lañu fa dox. Ci réew yi ñu njëkka tudd, ay nit yu màce ci aar bi ñooy féll, ñuy faral di tëral ay jetaay yu mag yu ay réewi-réew di teewe ñaari at yu nekk (biyenaal), bokk ci lwy yombal seenub dugg ci marseb aar yi : boole ci ñu indiwaale seen wàll ci yokkute ak tasoareb aari Afrig.

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Notes

1. In Africa, there is practically no literature (journals, magazines, etc.) on the arts: scientific research (dissertations, theses and various types of research) is rare. The aesthetics of contemporary African art forms is being developed in Europe and generally speaking the West. See *Revue Noire*, *Revue Beaux-Arts*, *Cimaise*, published in Paris; *Art Africain contemporain* (Contemporary African Art) by Pierre Gaudibert; *L'art africain contemporain, guide* (Contemporary African Art, a guide) by Nicole Guez. These constitute the main journals and works available in the field.
2. For about a decade there have been major artistic demonstrations of continental scope: the Bantu Biennial, the Dak'Art Biennial in Dakar, and the Johannesburg Biennial. But they do not always provide an exact idea of the reality of art on the continent, by reason of the necessary selections preceding them.
3. Francine Ndiaye, "La creation plastique, artisanale et architecturale en Afrique," in *Patrimoine culturel et création contemporaine en Afrique et dans le monde arabe* (Dakar, Nea 1977), p. 64.
4. *Presence Africaine*, numéro spécial, nos. 24-25, vols. 1 and 2 (1959).
5. Alioune Badlane, "Papa Ibra Tall et la peinture contemporaine senegalaise," *Mémoire de Maîtrise*, Université de Paris I, 1980.
6. See our works in: Ch. A. Diop, *Arts plastiques et Etat au Senegal* (Dakar, 1998); "Le Mecenat de Senghor," *Ethiopiennes* 59 (1997).
7. There were several great masters at the *Ecole des Arts du Senegal* (1960-1972): Iba Ndiaye, Papa Ibra Tall, Pierre Lods, and Andre Seck, each of whom directed a section and had his disciplines: Iba Ndiaye: "Plastic Arts"; Papa Ibra Tall: "Research in Negro Plastic Arts"; Pierre Lods was to become part of the "Research in Negro Plastic Arts" section and second Papa Ibra Tall, but ended up creating an independent studio in his home where he welcomed his "students"; Andre Seck: "Sculpture."