



6 Official stamp collections produced to commemorate the 1966 festival
Photo: Musée du Quai Branly, Paris

7 Part of the installation featuring official objects (books, festival poster, magazine covers) produced to commemorate the 1966 festival; “Dakar 66: Chronicles of a Pan-African Festival”
Photo: Musée du Quai Branly, Paris

radical turn. This emerging radicalism cast the Dakar Festival as the conservative cousin to the revolutionary forces now coming to the fore, which would reach their apogee at the First Pan-African Cultural festival in Algiers in July 1969.

“Dakar 66: Chronicle of a Pan-African Festival” guided the visitor through these stories of the event’s successes and failures with great panache, giving a clear sense of the cultural and political context in which the festival unfolded. And, in so doing, it helped to rescue the memory of an event that marked one of the highpoints of black modernism in the twentieth century.

DAVID MURPHY is Professor of French and Postcolonial Studies at the University of Stirling (UK). He is the editor of *The First World Festival of Negro Arts, Dakar 1966: Contexts and Legacies* (Liverpool University Press, 2016). d.f.murphy@stir.ac.uk



exhibition review

Dak’Art—12th Biennale of Contemporary African Art “Reenchantments: The City in the Blue Daylight” May 3–June 2, 2016 Dakar, Senegal

reviewed by Verena Rodatus and Kathleen Reinhardt

In 2016, internationally renowned curator Simon Njami was commissioned to organize Dak’Art, the oldest “Biennale of Contemporary African Art” founded in Senegal in 1989, and since then the central contemporary arts event on the continent. For this twelfth edition, Njami alluded to the poem “Guélowâr où Prince,” of Négritude writer and the country’s former president Léopold S. Senghor:

Your voice tells us about the Republic that we shall erect
the City in the Blue Daylight
In the equality of sister nations.
And we, we answer: Presents, Ô Guélowâr!

This verse points to the high aspirations before and during African independence movements, at the dawning of a post-colonial age. Inspired by Senghor’s lines, Njami ambitiously positioned Dak’Art to become “a new Bandung for Culture,” in reference to the 1955 conference in Indonesia with its Afro-Asian alliance, transferring the historic idea of solidarity among nations of the Southern hemisphere to the contemporary global artworld. Such connections are promoted in favor of a historically coherent and strong antidote to the still very present domination of the Euro-American art system.

Closely related to the biennial’s overall thematic set-up, the curatorial concept of the main exhibition was entitled “Reenchantments: The City in the Blue Daylight.” The artists were invited to present artworks that “reentchant” not only the African continent but the entire world. Njami selected sixty-five artists, among them many young and emerging individuals, but also established ones like Ouattara Watts, Theo Eshetu, or Mwangi Hutter. More than half a dozen special projects including for instance a screening by Cameroonian film maker Jean-Pierre Bekolo widened the curatorial concept also to film as artistic genre. Two symposia



1 Dancers from the Indian dance school run by Somnath Mukherjee perform in the courtyard of IFAN Museum
Photo: Kathleen Reinhardt

2 Palais de Justice (Dakar's former courthouse)
Photo: Tania Meyer and Dirk Wiemann

3 Youssef Limoud
Maqam (2016)
 Mixed media installation; variable dimensions
Photo: Tania Meyer and Dirk Wiemann

entitled “States of Opacity,” an engaging public program curated by Elvira Dyangani Ose and Mara Ambrožič Dak and “Symbioses,” a rather official gathering, were organized in the first week of the biennial. The main exhibition took place in the Palais de Justice, the city’s former courthouse, while the Gare Ferroviaire, Dakar’s one-time train station, served as lively meeting point, event space, and late-night dance venue. Here, an international biennial crowd mingled with African artists, curators, and intellectuals who had travelled to Dakar from all over Africa. In the National Gallery as part of the official biennial, the show “Contours/Hommages” was an independently curated presentation dedicated to painting from Senegal.

At the Museum IFAN, five invited curators from Cameroon/France, Canary Islands, Brazil, Italy, Korea, and India presented exhibitions and performances that conceptually revolved around the idea of an alignment with multiple connections among the countries of the Global South with presentations often marked by biographical reconstructions and politics of memory. With “India’s Search for Power 1966–1982,” Mumbai-based curator Sumesh Sharma proposed individual points of departure alongside official political partnerships during these decades. In the 1970s, Somnath Mukherjee set out by bicycle on a government-backed peace mission from India, promoting international fraternity

and friendship. But stranded in Dakar with no means to return to India, he opened a record business and dance school. For the biennial’s opening, the school’s Senegalese amateur dancers performed Indian dances in Bollywood costumes in the backyard of the IFAN, emphasizing also Sharma’s interest in immigrant culture and vernacular equalities (Fig. 1).

With these international invitations, Njami deviated intelligently from the traditional framework of Dak’Art, which is focused exclusively on art from Africa and its diaspora. And even though previous editions had already attempted to open up the biennial to participants from other regions, Dak’Art can historically be seen in line with the famous “Festival des Arts Nègres” (established 1966 in Dakar and organized by Senghor among others), which promoted arts through a black self-consciousness.

Yet, the label “Biennale of Contemporary African Art” should not only be perceived as a self-empowering gesture; it functions simultaneously as a response to global expectations in the sense of “ethnic marketing,” raising the question why artists from Africa and the diaspora must ascribe to a constructed “African-ness” in order to be acknowledged in the international art-world. In the recent decade, this conception additionally seemed to be connected to an ongoing urge for a “postcolonial criticality,” reflected in artworks and curatorial concepts—a tendency that could also be observed throughout the history of Dak’Art. But problematically, such a conception limits artistic expressions from Africa to a certain thematic scope. Consequently, it might be worth asking: how did the biennial conceptions of 2016 break with common expectations of contemporary art from Africa?





4 Bili Bidjocka
Last Supper: "Do not take it, do not eat it, this is not my body..." (2016)
 Mixed media installation and performances; variable dimensions
 Photo: Marlene Genschel

5 Bronwyn Katz
Grand Herinnering (Soil Memory) (2015)
 HD Video, Sound
 Video still: Bronwyn Katz

6 Michèle Magma
Sous le paysage (Under the landscape) (2015)
 Installation of 81 wood boards; 200 x 300 cm
 Photo: Tania Meyer and Dirk Wiemann

In his catalogue essay, Njami introduced the theme of “reenchantment” for the exhibition and he sketched his motivations for the show decidedly not in over-rehearsed arguments about the contemporaneity of art by African artists but embedded it elegantly in the intricacies of our global present. The tone was set by the text’s dedication to the late Moroccan photographer Leila Alaoui. The absence of not only further explanation

symbolic and fitting choice for the show (Fig. 2). The main hall with high, slim columns, a turquoise mosaic floor and an open atrium was specifically renovated for the biennial, and was enhanced by light blue wall panels, offering generous open views and granting each artwork on the main-floor an intensified atmosphere. This exhibition display was a truly “reenchanting” synthesis of individual works with visual threads spun

the grown-ups’ reality. The panacea of using the ruins of modernity to display contemporary art is not new and indeed practiced all over the world; with every iteration it restores a certain urgent agency to art and most importantly makes the viewer aware of the complexities of their present. In the work of Bili Bidjocka, who actively engaged with a former courtroom, past and present notions of “justice” were highly perceptible.



but even her actual work in the show was most telling—on assignment in Burkina Faso for Amnesty International in January 2016 to work on a series of photographs focusing on women’s rights, Alaoui was murdered by the North African affiliate of Al Qaeda. Just as her own body was simultaneously visible and vulnerable, as photographer she also possessed the power to see and make visible; Njami chose this notion as the guiding theme that informed his essay “The Seeing Power,”³ published in the catalogue featuring the biennial’s artists. For Njami, the polyphony of African voices in the exhibition—described by him as magicians, shamans, and masters-of-the-head—are the ones to confront the visible as well as invisible powers that cause the region’s multiple traumas. Crucial in this is the necessity to look beyond geopolitical frontiers, according to Njami.

The hauntingly beautiful space of the former Palais de Justice, an architectural landmark in the style of tropical modernism from the late 1950s, which had been closed and abandoned in 2005, was a highly

across the airy space, expanding further into the many installation and video rooms. The works could breathe and captions indicating the national origin of the artists became increasingly irrelevant, rendering geographic markers affirming “African identity” less important. And indeed, many of the exhibited artists already have rigorous global careers, also often due to their schooling outside of Africa and their residence in the epicenters of the Western artworld.

Artist Youssef Limoud presented a highly “enchanted” city-in-miniature as a floor installation composed of wood, metal, earth, sand, stones with transformations of everyday objects like tin cans (Fig. 3). The Arabic word *maqam*—the work’s title—means settlement, but also shrine or an event people go to for worship. Limoud poetically reflected on the show’s theme with this work composed of poor materials—perhaps from the neglected Palais de Justice—which in their materiality and set-up almost allude to fantastical children’s play-worlds that emerge from the leftovers of

“REVOLUTION” was painted on a back wall as well as other words and formulas like “Capitalism,” “politique/économie/religion,” and in a reference to René Magritte: “Ceci





7 Fabrice Monteiro
(P)resident, This is not a Phoenix (2016)
 Mixed media installation; variable dimensions
 Photo: Fabrice Monteiro

8 Joël Andrianomearisoa
La Maison Sentimental (2016)
 Mixed media; installation view, Galerie Le Manège, Dakar
 Courtesy of the artist and Sabrina Amrani
 Photo: Adji Dieye

n'est pas mon corps. Vous ne pouvez pas le consommer—creating a manifest statement not only towards an imagined former colonizer, but against exploitative mechanisms in times of globalization (Fig. 4).

Connections were spun across the exhibition, affectively also with the photo series “Purification” (2010) by Héla Ammar, which visually dialogued with Bronwyn Katz’s video *Grond Herinnering (Soil Memory)* (2015) (Fig. 5). Both women perform rituals of cleansing through organic materials—blood for Ammar or red earth for Katz. But the exhibition display opened these works up to move beyond interpretations arresting them in pure body politics, allowing for an aestheticized and abstracted reading despite their heavy visual tone. Katz’s multilayered work was presented in one of the many video cabinets, where it once more became clear how central this medium is to contemporary African artists. Michèle Magema’s wall installation *Under the Landscape* (2015) was another work that demonstrated how Njami’s concept of reenchantment was able to dissolve fixed thematic and geographic ideas. Magema drew the viewer in through abstract lines finely carved into beautiful wooden panels, and it is only later that the viewer understood that these lines were indeed alluding to the arbitrarily drawn borders of what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo (Fig. 6).

Njami’s curatorial approach allowed artworks to be both aesthetically pleasing and engaged in explicit political critique, as for instance Fabrice Monteiro’s room-filling installation (Fig. 7). In its center, a glamorous red-golden throne was staged in historical reference to Jean-Bédel Bokassa’s pretentious enthronement in the Central African Republic in 1977. Large photographic portraits on the former courtroom’s sidewalls showed highly overstated ironic enactments of dictators donning various accessories of absolute



power. The photographs’ highly colored and calculated kitsch aesthetic stressed the explosive character of bad governance in post-colonial Africa. Ultimately, Njami’s concept of “reenchantment” can be assessed as smart gambit: it did not impose the exclusive rhetoric of a “postcolonial critique”; instead, the framing narrative of the exhibition gave the selected artworks the space to freely develop their own agency and semantics. However, we should not forget that the concept of “magic,” which Njami closely connected to the term “re-enchancement,” is also far from neutral, particularly in association with Africa.

Parallel to the official biennial exhibitions, the engaging and independent OFF program with almost 300 shows and events spread once more all over the city of Dakar. This integral part of the biennial experience traditionally situates itself between a local rootedness and extensions towards presentations with wider international scope.

In the Manège space of the Institut Français, Joël Andrianomearisoa showed his delicate large-scale paper works facing frame-like boxes containing reproduced excerpts, collages, and pages of the more than 130 issues of the *Revue Noire* (Fig. 8). In the courtyard an open archive of the actual issues and publications of the pathbreaking art magazine, which was cofounded by Simon Njami and published in France from 1991–2001, was on display. The Laboratoire Agit’Art with Issa Samb and Ican Ramageli initiated *Le Congrès de Minuit* at their Rue Jules Ferry location, where younger artists took over the grounds to install in-situ works (Fig. 9). In Sicap the Afropixel festival took place for the second time at Kër Thioussane with the project GriGri Pixel fusing socially engaged art with engineering ambitions. Other OFF projects included the presentation of the Cameroonian art space Doual’art or the African Art Book Fair with lively discussions



9 Laboratoire Agit'Art
Le Congrès de Minuit (2015)
 Mixed media; courtyard installation
 by various artists at 17 Rue Jules Ferry,
 Dakar (May 3–June 2, 2016)
 Photo: Tania Meyer and Dirk Wiemann

on art publishing and writing, from which the gaps that open between global perspectives and deeply-rooted local engagements of diverse cultural practices became clear.

All of these programs amounted to an extraordinary 2016 Dak'Art Biennial. By giving the official exhibitions a new, almost overdue international opening, Njami shifted away from narrow geographic and thematic expectations connected to contemporary art from the African continent, and instead stressed the possibilities of multiple connections of the countries of the Global South within the international artworld.

Dak'art 2016 is accompanied by a catalogue in English and French: *The City in the Blue Daylight*, Simon Njami (ed.), with contributions by Mara Ambrožič, Nadine Aimé Bilong aka Nad Bil, Orlando Britto, Elvira Dyangani Ose, Solange Farkas, Valentina Levy, Sujong Song, Sumesh Sharma,

Delphine Calmettes, Marilyn Douala-Bell, Marion Louisgrand, Simon Njami, and Azu Nwagbogu (Berlin: Kerber Publishing, 2016; 320 pp., 216 color and 64 b/w ill.; € 39.95).

VERENA RODATUS is a Lecturer and Research Associate in the Department of Arts of Africa at the Freie Universität Berlin, where she currently works on oral art histories of contemporary art in Benin. Her recent book, *Postkoloniale Positionen? Die Biennale DAK'ART im Kontext des internationalen Kunstbetriebs*, was published in 2015. Verena.Rodatus@fu-berlin.de

KATHLEEN REINHARDT is a writer and Curator at the Albertinum in Dresden, Germany. Her research and teaching at the Arts of Africa Department of Freie Universität Berlin and as Fulbright scholar at UC Santa Cruz focused on African-American art and the notion of a global contemporary. She wrote her PhD thesis on the artistic practice of Theaster Gates. Kathleen.Reinhardt@web.de

Notes

1 Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Guélowâr ou Prince." *Poèmes* (Paris: du Seuil, 1948, 72–73). Translated from the French.

2 Biennale Foundation. <http://www.biennalefoundation.org/2016/05/dakart-2016-is-now-open/>. Accessed August 23, 2016.

3 Simon Njami, "The Seeing Power," in *The City in the Blue Daylight* (Berlin: Kerber Publishing, 2016, pp. 20–41).

exhibition review

Dak'Art—12th Biennale of Contemporary African Art "Reenchantments: The City in the Blue Daylight"—Video section May 3–June 2, 2016 Dakar, Senegal

reviewed by Abigail E. Celis

The title of the 12th edition of the Dak'Art Biennale, "The City in the Blue Daylight," comes from a line in one of Léopold Sédar Senghor's poems. Curator Simon Njami's deft borrowing signaled an investment in pushing artistic practices forward while drawing on the deep wells of an existing poetic heritage. The selection of twelve videos or video-based installations—accounting for about one-fifth of the artworks presented in the international competition, "Reenchantments"—may have been part of this investment in younger art forms that nevertheless transpose previous literary, filmic, and visual oeuvres into their creations.

To accommodate the time-based media, a long hallway of offices on the north side of the former Palais de Justice was converted into a series of white-cube viewing rooms with additional rooms on the upper level of the south side. This layout allowed for private viewing experiences, but isolated the videos from the rest of the exhibition. In addition, hasty remodeling resulted in some oversights—a lack of electrical outlets, for example, or improperly installed equipment—that meant some videos were not viewable until several days after the opening.

The only interpretive material provided was an introductory panel at the venue's entrance and some of the oeuvres received identifying labels only a few days later. If a clear-cut curatorial vision was not articulated through the installation of the pieces, the selection was nevertheless rich enough to invite a bevy of imaginative resonances between the oeuvres. In fact, taking up the lens of the human body in or as a site of displacement, a coherence emerged out of the twelve video installations and the dialogues of interior and exterior, labor and leisure, memory and material history.

One of the most compelling uses of displacement as not only subject matter but as