



# UN/INVITED GUEST

ARLES 2019 . LES RENCONTRES DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE . EDITION#50

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**ABDOURAHMANE SAKALY** (Sénégal-Maroc) / courtesy of Revue Noire



# un/invited guest. arles#50

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# édito

à Bisi Silva, à Okwui Enwezor

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**Il n'est pas élégant de venir sans être convié.  
Mais il n'est pas légitime de laisser des  
protagonistes méritants à la porte du grand jubilé de  
la photographie internationale.  
C'est une faute.**

**Pour la photographie, comme pour l'art en général,  
il est anormal que France et pays africains - surtout  
francophones - s'ignorent, et que les deux parties  
jugent systématiquement plus moderne de regarder  
ailleurs. Un côté pense folklore, l'autre taxe de  
ringardise. Je serai malhonnête de victimiser  
l'«Afrique» qui entretient et rend bien l'indifférence  
ou l'ignorance crasse qu'on lui manifeste.**

**Dans le meilleurs des mondes, il faudrait que sur les  
braises encore ardentes du douloureux passé, les  
deux parties cultivent le jardin commun que la  
brutalité de l'Histoire leur a imposé. Ce terreau très  
riche - certes beaucoup plus pour certains que pour  
d'autres - peut permettre les meilleures réalisations.  
Et pas seulement sous prétexte d'une «saison» ou  
d'une «année».**

**Arles édition 50 sans photographie africaine. Soit.  
Pas question jouer des coudes et de mettre les pieds  
sur la table. Ce journal et les projections organisées  
du jeudi au samedi soir au 32 rue de la Liberté - le  
tout réalisé avec des moyens inexistants - essaient  
de faire remarquer, avec calme et détermination, une  
absente dont le talent est bien trop grand pour n'être  
remarqué que dans un « cadre ».**

**Anna-Alix Koffi**

# veteran ghanaiian photographer james barnor (b.1929) - in his own words.

Text Riaison Naidoo

**I** spent some time with Ghanaian photographer James Barnor in Paris last week on the occasion of his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June and his latest solo exhibition entitled *Colors* at Galerie Clémentine de la Féronnière. Barnor's photos are also included in the exhibition *Paris-Londres (1962-1989) - Music Migrations* at Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration, Palais de la Porte Dorée until 5 January 2020. Since his retrospective exhibition at Autograph ABP in London (2010) Barnor's photos have attracted international attention from curators, collectors, galleries and museums.

**not for internet**

**Riaison Naidoo: Dear James, tell me how it all began?**

**James Barnor:** In the 1940s I was an apprentice to a photographer and I did a lot of developing and printing, friends, as well as taking photographs. I'm from my Uncle James Barnor's Quick Photo Service - So he made money for Frederick Seton. If you bring me a negative, I will give you photos the next day. It was a makeshift studio, a small space. Once I saved up some money I went into Everything started.

They were starting an English newspaper press. They came to my relative who was an established studio photographer and asked him to work for *The Daily Graphic*, that they were setting up. It was not his thing. He referred them to me. I showed them my work. The photographer was an old *Daily Mirror* [London] man who served in the war. "Not quite," he said, "but we will train you."

So, from 1950-53 I was a photojournalist with *The Daily Graphic*. When Nkrumah was released, he went to the arena about 150m from my home. I ran to the place and held the camera high above my head; I looked through the viewfinder and took two pictures. The next day I was selling them right to the magazine.

I was doing groups and weddings. I was taking pictures dances and concerts and charging people for copies. I was close to the music fraternity too; I was taking their pictures now. E.T. Mensah – the highlife musician, I was catching a living from this. I did everything that came my way. I had an advertisement in the newspaper to teach photography, you know, or apprentices in the same way that I learnt, I was advertising to teach others.

**You worked as well for Drum in Ghana in the 1950s?**

*Drum* Nigeria was started before Ghana, and when *Drum* came to Ghana they came to me. Anthony Smith started the *Drum* office in Ghana, and he had Ghanaians working under him, including a business manager Henry Ofori, one of the remarkable journalists who worked there, worked with Henry Thompson at the end. There were other photographers. I had a studio. Ever Young studio the same time so I didn't care about that [the competition]. I took photos of the "Nigerians" had easy access to. I got to know them. I'd say go to *DRUM*. When I had some pictures of here, I would send them to *DRUM*.

**Can you describe your relationship with Jim Bailey, the founder of Drum magazine?**

I was very close to Jim Bailey and whenever he visited the *Drum* office in Ghana, he stayed at the hotel close to my place. We had night beach parties, sometimes I never thought of doing better. It was Jim McLean, Jim Bailey, sisters and girls - girls in bikinis because we can have party in my studio; I had to borrow a radiogram. Jim told me stories of how he knew Nelson Mandela very well and his family with him. In the evenings in Accra, Jim would go to night clubs and keep in my office and we would talk whether members of parliament visited Accra.

On the eve of Independence Day in March 1957 Bailey, who was staying in the hotel next to me, came to see me and said "What are you up to?" "I'm going to bed," I replied. He said "Come, take your camera and let's go." We walked to the Accra Polo ground, opposite the parliament. Nkrumah was addressing a crowd, saying "Ghana is now free!" I took pictures that night and sent them to *DRUM* in South Africa.

**You established and ran your first studio, photo studio in Accra from 1954-55. Can you describe the scene to me?**

I, or somebody working for me, would receive the person. Most people would not make appointments. There was always music in the background; I liked music. There was the Sea View Hotel next door and the Weekend in Havana nightclub nearby, owned by a Nigerian, with dance bands coming. Ghanaian bands would go to Nigeria and Nigerian bands would come to Ghana. People would drop by my studio. Around the corner was Fort James. The port was active. Lorries going up and down, everything that was happening in Accra was passing through my small street. My studio was overlooking all of this. People would come for passports, studio photos, whatever. I'd take your name and then you'd pass into the studio. One part was for sitting and one for the store or reception. People would wait, sitting on chairs for their turn. I had a stage one foot high off the floor, with different backgrounds, one painted on the wall, one painted on cloth on a wooden pole to be rolled up and put away when not in use. That's what my uncle, the photographer, and everyone used to do at the time. When the sitter's faces were too shiny, we used chalk to dab the faces. If you were automatically photogenic I could take more than one photo. Women liked full body photos in shorts, sardabag, and their accessories. Men liked the boss in shorts, and I would take a three-quarter or half crop.

The photos that I own today now at the gallery show the whole image, my real clothes etc. that I would have normally cropped out in my studio at the time. Good photographers crop from the camera because they know what they want. While I was taking the photos I'd communicate with the sitter. I had a good interaction with the models. Some sitters were not photogenic but then you do the best that you can afterwards, with touching up, etc.

I liked doing photojournalism too, when I was going out onto the streets with my camera. Those pictures would go out into the wider world, not only stay on walls and in photo albums.

**Tell me about your 10 years in London**

I went to London in December 1959, I first did evening classes at the London School of Printing. I struggled a bit; people thought I was mad to leave my studio in Ghana and come to London. But I wanted to learn. Then I started to work with Dennis Kemp in 1960, who worked for Kodak Lecture Service going around schools and talking about his photography.

Between 1961-63 I went to the Medway College of Art, an art college in Kent. I did not have G.C.E. (General Certificate of Education) but they allowed me in; my experience helped a bit. We did art, graphic design, liberal studies reading and researching. As soon as I finished my studies they employed me as a technical assistant in the photo department.

During that time I went to an exhibition of colour photography and at the stand the proprietor of Colour Processing Laboratory (CPL) was standing there. Kenneth Cobbley, "Where do you come from? Do you know CQ Thompson?" he said. Thompson was *DRUM* magazine's chief photographer, who learnt his photography from Underpuye (Deo Gratias Studio). "I said yes, I know him. I photographed him." He gave me his card and details and said come to Crookham Hill, to the laboratory.

**Was it difficult for an African photographer in London in the 1960s?**

You couldn't get work in the 1960s as a black photographer. It was impossible! It would not happen that a black photographer would instruct white sitters, etc. If you work for a studio in London, you would not be facing the public. You would work behind the scenes in the dark room doing odd jobs. So the photographer would come and we would do the printing work at the back.

**How did photographers and the public first respond to colour photography in Accra?**

It went down very well. The man was walking his feet. He said that would not catch on, when we started out we ordered very few prints and supplies ran out immediately. Everyone started to use colour.

**How did you feel when you first saw your photos on gallery and museum walls?**

When I saw *DRUM* magazine covers with my photos on the cover, alongside other magazines at the newsstands, I felt like I was heaven. At that time there wasn't always photo credits but I was paid well.



James Barnor Ali, 1963. Courtesy of the artist & Galerie Clémentine de la Féronnière

**not for internet**

**I** was technical advisor, also involved in sales at Sick-Hagemeyer - a subsidiary of Agfa-Gevaert. I was excited, ready to work. I wanted to organize workshops to demonstrate the effects of time and temperature, so that people could have the best results from the products. My manager was trying to make it difficult for me. It was a master-boy kind of relationship. It didn't occur to me to complain about it. I did that for three years.

**You also did some advertising work in Accra?**

I met a graphic designer Emmanuel (Odarte) Lamptey who had the contacts, who asked me to take photos for advertising commissions. You know, record sleeves, portraits, newspaper, calendars, advertising, etc. When he got a commission, from the musicians for example, I did the photography.

Naidoo has curated several photographic exhibitions on the themes of memory and identity—most notably one on the work of veteran South African photographer Ranjith Kally, which appeared widely across South Africa and travelled to Mali, Austria, Spain and France. In 2006, he curated *The Indian in DRUM Magazine* in the 1950s, from archival negatives in the Bailey's African History Archive (BAHA), and in 2008 published a book by the same name. Previously, he directed the Durban Mail Project: *India's Manuscripts*, and he has also coordinated artistic projects at the French Institute of South Africa, taught drawing, painting and art history at the University of Witwatersrand, and worked as an education officer at the Durban Art Gallery.

Riaison Naidoo

This is an extract from a two-part article published in the *Mail & Guardian* (South Africa) in June 2019.

Riaison Naidoo was born in Durban, South Africa. He holds a BA and MA in fine art from the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. Naidoo has been on scholarships to the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, in India (1997), and the Museum of Contemporary Art of Bordeaux, in France (2001).

# magical realism: sibusiso bheka

Text Sean O'Toole

**J**ohannesburg, a restive city of can-do aspiration and everywhere sprawl, was founded in 1886, nearly a half century after the invention of the camera. The camera, with its ability to arrest and flatten moving reality, has been a useful tool in recording this city's awkward lurch from get-rich mining encampment to cauldron of cosmopolitan possibility. Curiously, though, given the great many photographs made about this city since its start as a tented encampment of prospectors and labourers, the story of Joburg told by photographers has tended to be a daytime one. Partly this had to do with the limitations of technologies available to early photographers, but given the endurance of this omission into the present one has to wonder. Is Joburg defined by natural light and daytime enterprise? What about its other moods and character traits, the one's that emerge at night? What, to be precise, about Joburg after dark?

édition #50

Photographed in late twilight and early night, Sibusiso Bheka's essay 'At night, they walk with me' sets out to answer these questions, albeit on this young photographer's own terms and not in the grandiloquent way summarized in the introduction. "I was watching TV and saw some amazing nights shots," offers Bheka on his project's origin. "They showed the beautiful lights of Joburg at night. I had an idea that I'd like to do something like that, but I wanted to do it in a township style." Of course, Bheka is not the first South African photographer to make the night a subject of enquiry. Late one night in the mid-2000s, while making his way east across Joburg's CBD from the Market Photo Workshop, Sabelo Mlangeni saw a group of women sweeping and bundling rubbish into plastic bags. He recognised a relationship between these "invisible women" and the clean city that greeted morning commuters. Shortly afterwards, he began to document the lives of Joburg's black women street cleaners. Mlangeni's photographs, which link across time to the photos of black working women in the city from the late 1800s, offer one way of knowing this city after dark. Much like during the day, Joburg after dark is a place of labour and minimum wage. But Joburg after dark is also a time of diversionary pleasures, when the sobriety of a city characterised by discipline and work, also exploitation and alienation, yields to other things. Sometimes violence, as is suggested by Peter Magubane's celebrated night-time photo from 1956 showing township thug and knifeman Boy Mangena lying dead on a pavement outside a cinema in Alexandra. But the city by night is when family's get together, children are told stories, and televisions pimp information with entertainment. For many, especially on Friday and Saturday nights, it is also a time of pleasure, of drinking and dancing. The reputation of the Drum magazine archive partly derives from the commitment of photographers in the 1950s to show black life in Joburg as involving more than just struggle.

But the night is a far richer subject than even this. The dark and its many associative qualities make it a time of myth and intrigue. It is this imprecise territory, the night as a place of projection and unseen otherness, that is the subject of Bheka's essay. Begun in 2013 during his participation in the 'Of Soul and Joy' photography project, initiated by Rubis Mécénat, his essay revisits a childhood impulse. "I used to be one of those kids who enjoyed playing outside at night more than during the day," says Bheka, who was born in Kathlehong in 1997 and lives with his mother and grandmother in Phola Park. Evening is a sociable time in the townships as workers return from work and the silence that pervades these labour compounds by day abates. It wasn't that Bheka only played at night. Growing up, he would regularly explore Thokoza on foot. "I would go to those places where my parents told me I am not supposed to go," he says. To fulfil a simple childhood impulse: to see what was being prohibited. "There is a dam nearby, which I used to go with my friends and try to catch fish," he reminiscences. "There is also a train station that I was warned not to cross the tracks of." During these wanderings he would scavenge for pieces of metal to sell to a scrap metal dealer. "I used the money to play video games." These early mappings of Thokoza later played an invaluable role in his photography project. "I got to know where the dangerous places are, where to avoid, especially at night. If an area doesn't have electricity, it isn't safe."

The relationship between light and safety in Bheka's photographs is worth pausing on. "It is safer to make photographs where there is light," he says, but in the same breath admits, "I avoided places where there are a lot of people because you get robbed." Light is only a possible beacon of safety in his photographs, not a guarantee of it. The light sources in Bheka's essay vary: from the last filigree of daylight on the horizon to various forms of electrical sources. Electrical light pours from the hatch of a "spaza shop" (convenience store), spills from an open doorway to a cement-block RDP home (government-built starter home), is filtered by curtained windows (most with burglar bars), and seems strangely isolated in the impossibly tall streetlights. A hangover from the apartheid years, these were nicknamed "UFOs" for their strange hovering appearance. They were once amongst the few indicators of electrification in townships, where coal was the dominant fuel. Up until 1990, access to electricity was a privilege linked to race. Less than a third of South Africans, most of them white, enjoyed the benefits of electrification. By 2008, 70% of South Africans had access to electricity. Bheka's essay describes this turnaround, although it is not his focus.

Bheka's subject is mythical, not infrastructural. He recalls being reprimanded and told not to play at night. "I was told if you play at night you are playing with ghosts," he says. In part, his essay is playful exploration of "the idea of ghosts, whether they exist or not". In a community where rural superstitions are less than a generation old, the existence of a spirit world is an important anchor a context created out of desperation, in a region where hospitality is often lacking. But stories of spirits and ghosts

achieve more than creating continuity with the older customs of the village, for adults they are a way to negotiate the real-world context of cramped townships, where neighbourliness rubs up against poverty, struggle and criminality. A ghost story is a good way to keep a child off the streets, out of harms way. In his 2009 book *Native Nostalgia*, journalist Jacob Dlamini recalls the ambiguous mix of community and threat posed by the same dusty street where he lived in Katlehong, a community bordering Thokoza in the east. Close to his home there was an open plot of land, which he describes as "a place of anxiety, a notorious mugging spot, especially on Friday nights when labourers would be returning home with their pay-packets for the week, fortnight or month." He adds, "Our street was a terrain of encounters between neighbours and strangers, mostly friendly but sometimes violent, even deadly." This ambiguity endures. It also underlies Bheka's essay, which explores the changing attitudes of Thokoza youths to the use of public space amidst the endurance of hardship and criminality.

"To be honest, growing up as a child was tough," concedes Bheka. "You witness a lot of things happening in Thokoza." He says xenophobia has been a constant feature of his upbringing. Of course, none of these facets of Thokoza's character are pictured. But they are nonetheless imprinted into the time signature of his photographs. Bheka's photographs only describe a defined period of dark, an early dark. None of his photographs were made late at night. "That is a dangerous hour," says Bheka. "At that late time there is too much alcohol drinking. I have never thought of photographing at that time." Despite the optimistic claim his subjects make to public spaces at night, Bheka's photographs are defined by a prescribed working method. "I usually work alone because people know me here, but if I have to go on the outside section of Phola Park where I live, then I get people from school to join me." Bheka is completing his studies at Buhlebuzile Secondary School in Thokoza.

While Bheka's essay invites sociological readings directed at the meaning of electricity, crime and the changing role of public space in South Africa's slowly transforming townships, he is not a documentary in the manner of Brassai in 1930s Paris, or Weegee in New York of the same period. His is a playful and autobiographical project. Many of Bheka's photographs include him as a protagonist. "The reason why some of the pictures are staged is so that you don't get that actual feeling of real events," he says. "I am trying to describe my neighbourhood in a way I see and experience it. I am kind of creating my own scenario of what you would see in Thokoza – its atmosphere. I want you, when you look at the pictures, to experience the atmosphere."

Understood in this sense, the strange off-colours, long shadows, constant blurring and ghostly auras that surround his human subjects are integral to the meaning of his photographs, not mere by-products of shooting at night. They are expressive attributes, not simply examples of photography's on-going struggle to record events in low light. "When I show people who live in my neighbourhood my pictures, they don't believe it is actually Thokoza," he says. This constitutes praise for Bheka, who likens his photographic method in his essay 'At night, they walk with me' to storytelling. "It is like a novel about an old lost town," he says. A forgotten place that has been found and reimagined by an alert young mind.

#### Sean O'Toole

Sean O'Toole is a journalist, art critic and editor living in Cape Town  
This is an edited extract from  
*FREE FROM MY HAPPINESS*  
By South African photographers  
Sibusiso Bheka / Tshepiso Mazibuko / Lindokuhle Sobekwa  
A project by Rubis Mécénat Cultural Fund



Sibusiso Bheka At night they walk with us 2017. Courtesy of the artist

# on photography. a few words between jennifer samuel & reah combs

Interview Jennifer Samuel

**J Jennifer Samuel :**  
**n which ways do you think African photography has influenced American photography?**

**R Reah Combs :** If you look towards the middle of the 20 century, you can really see that the use of portraiture has been tremendously influential in the west. But I also feel as though, images, particularly of apartheid, social justice and discrimination is something that you see. Highlighting the ways in which photography helped to shift the narrative or helped to expose some of those injustices in Africa. If you look at the photographs of David Goldblatt, you would see that, not only just black African photographers, but photographers who are shooting in Africa have been influenced in the same way. It would be something that you saw in the 60's and works that we have at the museum, like a Spider Martin, or some of these other vanguard photographers, who were really committed to issues of social justice and human rights by exposing those sorts of things. I think in some way it shows areas of comparison especially when you look at works produced in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**When social justice "realmed" and which definitely feeds into...**

...into the work at the museum. Absolutely. When you think about portraiture, and you think of some of our Nigerian photographers, or someone like a Malik Sidibé their works allowed a sort of layering of the human figure and by that I mean, it allowed us to see the complexities and the expansion of the conversation around Africa and Africans. Which is very relevant to the work which we are doing at the museum, where you are taking photographers and portraits and thinking about how it provides a shifting of a narrative. Expanding conversations around the ways in which people understand African history, and with respect to the museum, African American history. And so again, I think that these are critical ways in which African photography and the use of the African subjects in photography has been influential in the work of the west.

**You mentioned the importance of family histories and family albums that became as important as these Spider Martins, and more well known African American photographers who had documented Civil rights movements in the States.**

Absolutely. I think that one of the powers of photography is to provide a sense of place. I read somewhere that our history is local, and I think that being able to document these sort of moments, allows a point of entry; a point of conversation, so that you CAN have this conversation that we're having right now, whereby you can make linkages and have a better understanding of the world around us. Photography provides that medium for that point of entry. So yes, portraiture or African photographers, by documenting that history, allows us to see our past, in many essences, in a humane way, in which history-making occurs just by the simple tool of capturing the moment. It shows us that we've been within these extraordinary milestone occasions that was built up over a series of, most likely, ordinary occasions. It helps to shape and provide context. I think it is a wonderful tool and one of the most important ways in which African photographers have been instrumental, as well as African American photographers. Indeed, they have been instrumental in helping to expand that narrative. So, to your point when we talk about lesser-known Civil rights photographers', we can think of African American photographers like a Frank Dandridge who had an unfettered access to the uprisings that occurred in the 60's in Cambridge, Maryland. He also had unfettered access to the terrorism that happened in Alabama, when the four little girls were bombed and because of that, he was able then to document these moments that were fully showing the violence in the domestic terrorism that was happening and it helped to spawn a conversation around the ways in which this social injustice was taking place, and that this country was better than that and needed to do something about it. Moreover, I am sure that there are South African photographers we can talk about more recently with the fight for free education. I am sure there were young, contemporary South African photographers on the ground, documenting that, and then it hit social

media networks. It helped to really expose this injustice. It is a powerful tools of having this local history being told by people that are within the community to better understand history.

**Right and I think that especially with social justice movements now, if there's a police shooting here in the US, within ten hours, protests' here are mirrored by protests' all over the world.**

Correct. Yes, you know the slogan and movement even the black lives matter has resonated across continents.

**Right. It's definitely an example**

It's interesting because, if you think about civil rights movements and independence movements in the 60's and 70's in Africa and how much "here" was working off those liberation movements, there was a cycle of ideas, a kind of brotherhood and sisterhood. And you know, it's not that we want to be having a renaissance of those things over the same issues right now, but it does feel like, there is again this narrative of injustices that are happening again around the world, that are then magnified, not just by local outrage but global outrage. You raise a point when you talk about the independence movements', because you're right, if you think about the Black power movement in the 60's and 70's, the late 60's and 70's, so not just the civil rights era and the ways in which that seems to parallel with some of the issues that were happening here, but moving a decade later, you read the dial, and you see independence movements', social, and again, black liberation movements. Those were very similar conversations and you saw the influence of someone like Kwame Nkrumah being educated here in this state, in the United States and then going back to help to liberate Ghana. Photographers have been documenting and taking portraits and making sure that we create this layered nuanced kind of understanding of black people here in the United States as well as black people on the continent of Africa. In comparison nowadays in South Africa you have this discussion around sexuality in South Africa. The photographs Zanele Muholi or Rotimi Fani-Kayode whose work is a lot like Lyle Ashton Harris', or even Marlon Riggs' are literally invest and look at African sexuality and Africans on the margins'. This kind of work is part of what I mean by unpacking and providing a new understanding of black people, or of Africans. The photographers are doing it on the social justice front, but they're also doing it in an identity front.

**Right.**

Some photographs such as Seydou Keita or Malick Sidibé are looking at black middle class contemporary folks and couples which is very similar to the ways in which, in that time period, Henry Clay Anderson was doing in Mississippi. Indeed, when people think about Mississippi during the segregation era, they're not looking at these portraits of folks going a ball, or sitting in front of their photography studio, or a motorcycle, which is the picture taking by Henry Clay Anderson. They're thinking of all of these kind of down trodden, segregation share cropping images. He impacts that and says, no, we had some of that experience but we also have this. I think this was the same thing with the power of these portraits of African photographers aforementioned. They are saying, yes, there were certain realities and there was poverty and injustices' going on but there was also a contemporary nightlife. There were people having fun and hanging out, and having a whole other middle class life. I think that those beautiful experiences and exchanges, and now moving forward. For instance with South African and Nigerian photographers who are exploring and expanding these ideas around sexuality and people on the margins' and they're interrogating that. When it came to film making people like Lyle Ashton Harris or Marlon Riggs were doing the same thing in the 90's, 80's, 90's and early 2000's. I think it is a lovely point of comparison and connection as well.

**Right. When you think of Lyle Ashton Harris, it's almost all autobiographical exploration, same with Zanele Muholi using a lot of herself in her work and expanding the narrowness of humanity that is often given to people of colour in the media. You get to see peoples' full lives and their family which adds a richness too.**

Exactly. Stereotypical version... so yeah, no I think that's all really interesting. And I remembered, another thing I just thought of, we were talking about; was how Dr Deb Willis... At that conversation

we were at last week, we talked about the latest thing that broke the Internet was Awol Erizku's photo of Beyoncé pregnant with, who is of course, pregnant with twins; because, of course, contemporary African photographers... and there's again, there's this conversation of music and culture that's kind of going back and forth between... That's true... Yeah. That's also really interesting. Yeah, I mean exactly. And again this transcontinental conversation essentially has been happening with or without anybody noticing; and I don't know if that's the appropriate way to describe it, yet, there's a delineation that happens in certain respects that seems that the lines are far more blurred in reality... Absolutely... I guess...

Absolutely. Someone whose work is really exciting to me right now is Victor Omar Diop's work. He places himself in the center of his work by using or harkening back to historical figures. In that way I think he adds layers to our understanding of historical figures or the place of historical figures in our own telling of our personal history. I think that through the vibrant use of colour and the ability to manipulate himself into all of these various historical selves, is a smart way of looking at how we are the embodiment of history. I think it relates to the museum. The project he's working on fits very nicely with the mission of the museum to make sure that we are integrating the complexities' of the human experience and to propose another American story through the African American lens.

**So Omar's in your collection?**

No, he is not in our collection. Laughs. But he is someone I would point. He is an example of African contemporary photographers pushing the boundaries. I don't know about pushing the boundaries, but sort of making comparisons as to what's happening in Africa. He's another example of someone who really has his finger on the pulse, leading to important conversation's, that are being had right now.

**Anything else you want to mention before we jump off here?**

No, I think this has been a wonderful opportunity, and it's been great to be able to actually have a cogent, thoughtful conversation about the ways that we have these kinds of transcontinental connections. It's something that you know about or you see or live but you don't really have the opportunity to articulate it in such formal ways, so this has been really great and I appreciate it.

J.S: No, thank YOU so much. Thanks Rhea.

**J Jennifer Samuel**  
Text published in *something we Africans got #6*  
**J Jennifer Samuel** is photo editor at National Geographic  
**R Reah Combs** is Museum Curator – Photography x Film Head, Earl W. and Amanda Stafford Center of African American Media Arts (CAAMA)

# jo ratcliffe- lebohang kganye

Text Olivia Marsaud  
with Breeze Yoko

**W**e are in Johannesburg. On one side, Jo Ratcliffe is, at 53, a major South African photographer, whose reputation is internationally well established. On the other, Lebohang Kganye, 24, just finished the Market Photo Workshop. Two very different photographic styles, two strong personalities, but still a lot of things in common... and a lot to talk about. An intense dialogue for *OFF the wall*, cultures photo.

even if it wasn't their country of origin... The communities were truly broken up. And then, with the arrival of democracy, the lands are given back to their heirs, and a lot of people came back, but not all of them. We have that fantasy that restoration is all-good. But who claimed the land? And how do you prove that someone originally comes from that land? The documents are scattered or lost, the members of some families are dead. That's what makes the process cruel to me: it was very painful, and nothing like a 'happy ending'. I think both of us, in different ways, are observing the failures and the promises of democracy. Or the way that promise has not lived up.

**I think you are writing, both of you in your own way, a story of physical and psychological violence, by working on the themes of displaced populations and war memories. Would you agree with that?**

**L. K.:** Yes, I agree. My new work, 'Ke Lefaka', is in three parts. The first focuses on my grandfather. The story starts with him moving from the part from the Free State to Johannesburg at the end of apartheid. The family moved from the farm to the city. And everything revolves around the issue of land.

**J. R.:** For me as well, I was interested in – partly because the war ended twenty years ago and it was very difficult to take pictures at that time - the land, and the way the land can speak and carry the scars. Often, these traces are not visible; you can walk through fields without guessing what happened there. Houses were destroyed people were moved, there are still underground mines there... More than writing the history of physical and psychological violence, I think for me, it's really about trying to find a history within the landscapes, to reveal the traces of that violence. What do you think?

**L. K.:** I think so too. When I started the project, even before taking any pictures, I had to face back with my family and go through, emotionally, to what my grand mother told me, the stories about being a maid, being beaten to train that farm, all the spaces that have been moved, ending up in the city. So I think the landscape like as much as you don't see it but... JR: It holds the story in a way.

**In an interview, Lebohang says that « art is perceived differently according to race ». Jo, what is your opinion?**

**J. R.:** Do you think we photograph differently?

**L. K.:** Yes, based on our background and the colour of our skin.

**J. R.:** That's interesting. A few years ago, a white artist, Wayne Barker, tried to enter a local contest under his own name, then under the name of a black person. This person's work was accepted, and Barker was rejected. You could sense people were looking for black artists.

I had never thought of this, and when I think of the South-African

photographers I admire, the colour of their skin doesn't cross my mind. When you see the poetry in Santo Mofokeng's work, there is no white artist to match that, except maybe Guy Tillim.

A lot of people talk to me about gender – and not necessarily about race -, telling me my work has a feminine quality, when it is everything but feminine! I was told my images have certain softness about them. I don't like this stereotype according to certain people, in a particular way. When you do a workshop with a group of kids taking pictures of each other, their portraits give them a sense of power. For me, photography is less about change than about creating connections. What about you?

**L. K.:** According to me, it's a space of reflection. Some of the issues I work on are both remote and close to me.

Like the *S'phamanda* project: it deals with people who are very far from me, but it affects me because of my family's history. I don't know if photography can influence change but it makes us think. It gives people the ability to question their lives and to reflect on what is fair and what is not.

**J. R.:** I think it is the perfect combo: connection and reflection? And that's why we have an audience. It projects itself into the work, connects with it and reflects upon it self. Photography is to connect and to reflect.

during the 90's, I was told I was an artist and not a photographer. But I've worked with this black and white documentary style, and no one ever excluded me from the side of social photography. It was truly fascinating. Which side do I belong to, then?

**What is the purpose of photography for you?**

**J. R.:** During the 70's and the 80's, for my generation, being a photographer or an artist was all about taking a stance against apartheid. You were a cultural worker, more than a photographer. The question of whoever was taking the picture came down to this: for or against the regime. At that time, the colour of the skin was already raising issues but it was more in terms of positioning: the white photographers were all about the career, the black were all about the political struggle. I was a little out of place at that time, I didn't really engage in all that. I just did things my way, on the side. It is interesting that you would see me as one of them... I always liked the idea of being special, of not belonging. The purpose of photography is much greater than political opposition. We didn't have the options that you have today. It was difficult to have a career as an artist. L: About the idea of non-belonging, I think it's the same today. You are still an outsider because you are a woman. Even if we have more options today, we still get put in boxes. The black photographer box. Do you think so?

**L. K.:** I do! When I was at the Market Photo Workshop, I was the one who didn't fit in.

**J. R.:** You think that stereotypes are still present today, about how you're perceived, how you're supposed to act?

**L. K.:** Of course!

**J. R.:** I think it is important to resist those. I was never part of the 'club'. When people tell me I am a 'fine art photographer' – what does that even mean? Is it decorative art? Drawing a line between art, documentary or fashion photography does not make much sense. What counts, according to me, is the intention behind the work, and the place where it will be showcased – a paper, a gallery...

**L. K.:** Sometimes you work for selfish reasons as well. For yourself. Photography gives you space to express yourself.

**J. R.:** I wouldn't use the word 'selfish'. We all work for our own interest, be it to order or a personal project. I don't have a lot of commissioned work (I never get asked, that's why), so I only do what I love, on my own terms. But you always hold a responsibility towards your subject. Even if I don't shoot people, I hold a responsibility towards the places I shoot and the people who live there, even if they are not on the picture. That brings us back to the purpose of photography. You have a choice to resist, to work outside the given norms and stereotypes. Even more so today than when I started...

**Can photography influence change within society?**

**J. R.:** I don't know. That is a big question. And it depends on what you mean by influence change. I don't think my work changes people's lives, but I think that when a connection is made through my work, even if it is small, it can give meaning to the life of certain people, in a particular way. When you do a workshop with a group of kids taking pictures of each other, their portraits give them a sense of power. For me, photography is less about change than about creating connections. What about you?

**L. K.:**

Especially with sensitive issues like race or violence. A black photographer will be perceived as more sensitive to those.

**J. R.:**

Yes, more legitimate, even. I remember a master class at the Market Photo Workshop, Thema Hadebe and Pieter Hugo were invited. Hadebe had shown this horrible picture of a man whose head had been blown off by a grenade. Richard Mosse, an Irish photographer, caused quite a sensation at Paris Photo with a similar picture. But nobody thought to ask Hadebe how he had even managed to shoot such violence.

**L. K.:**

Because he's black! It's got to do with the way you, white people, shoot these issues...

**J. R.:**

What 'you'? I was never part of that 'you'!

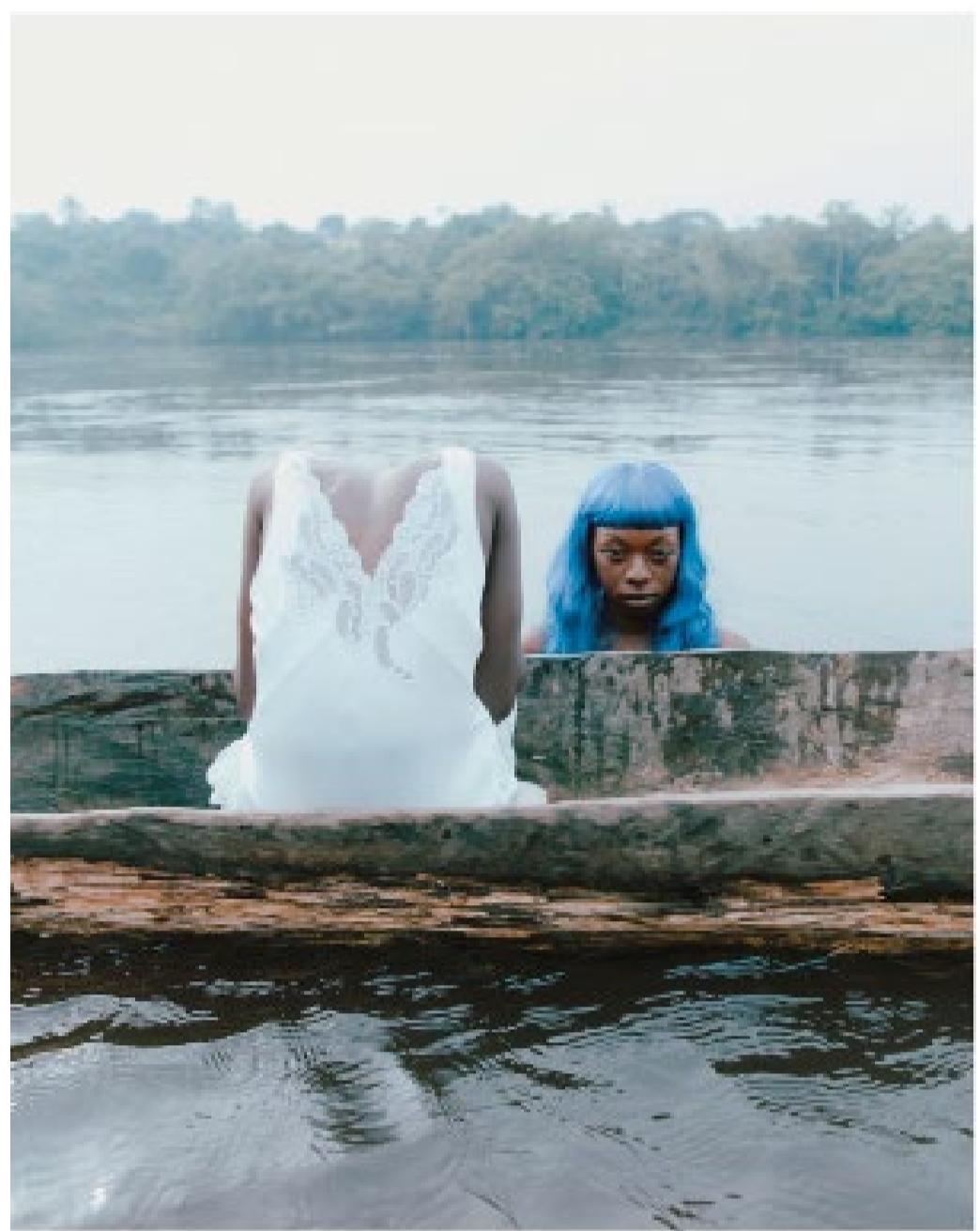
**L. K.:**

It was a whole generation of white photographers.

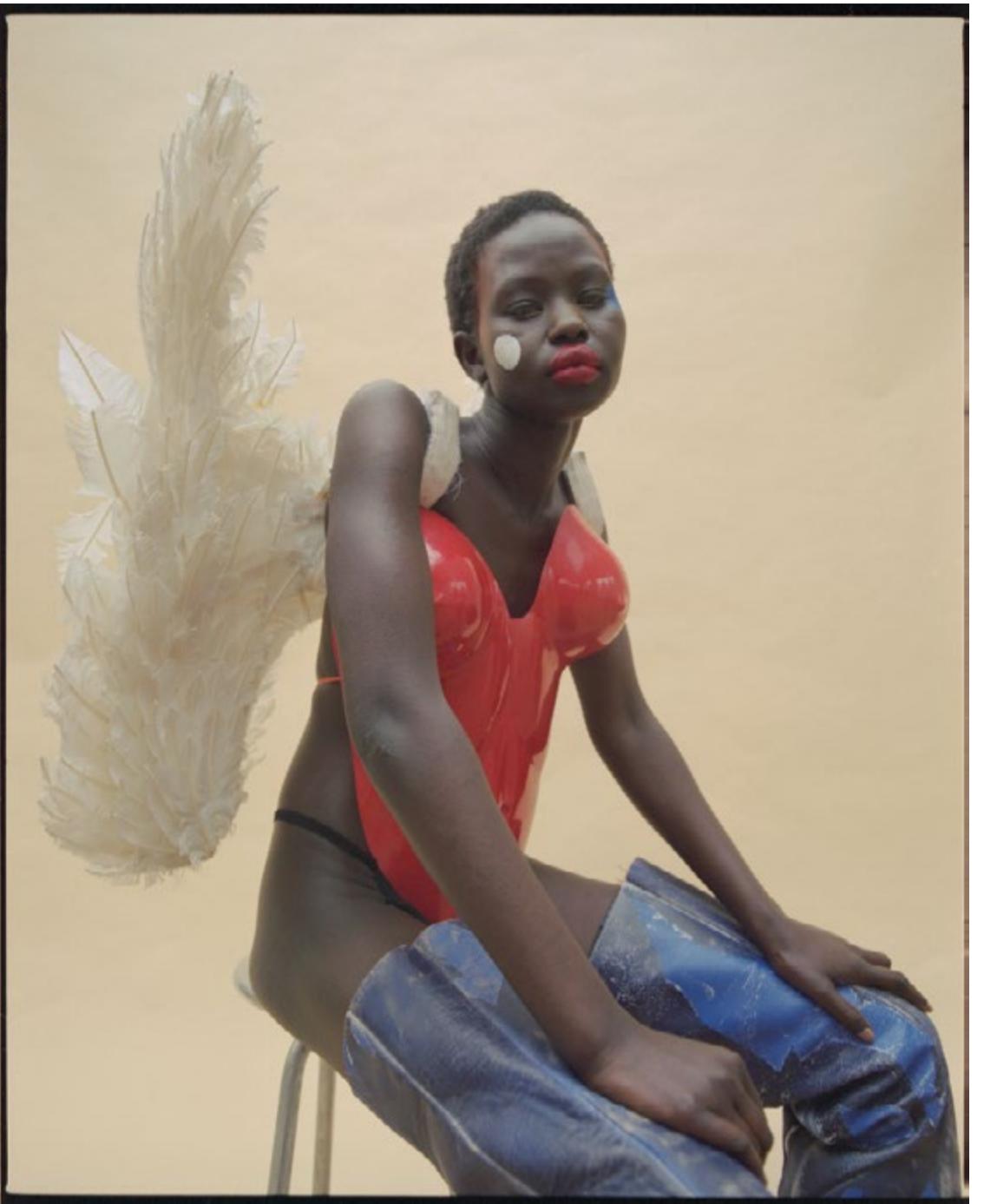
**J. R.:**

The times were different... photography had different function. I was not in that group; I was never this kind of social advocacy photographer. It was only with democracy that people started to call me a photographer. During the 80's, I was making montages and people told me it wasn't photography, and then

**Olivia Marsaud with Breeze Yoko**  
Text published in *OFF the wall*, cultures photo #3 "Eyes on, eyes from Africa", 2014



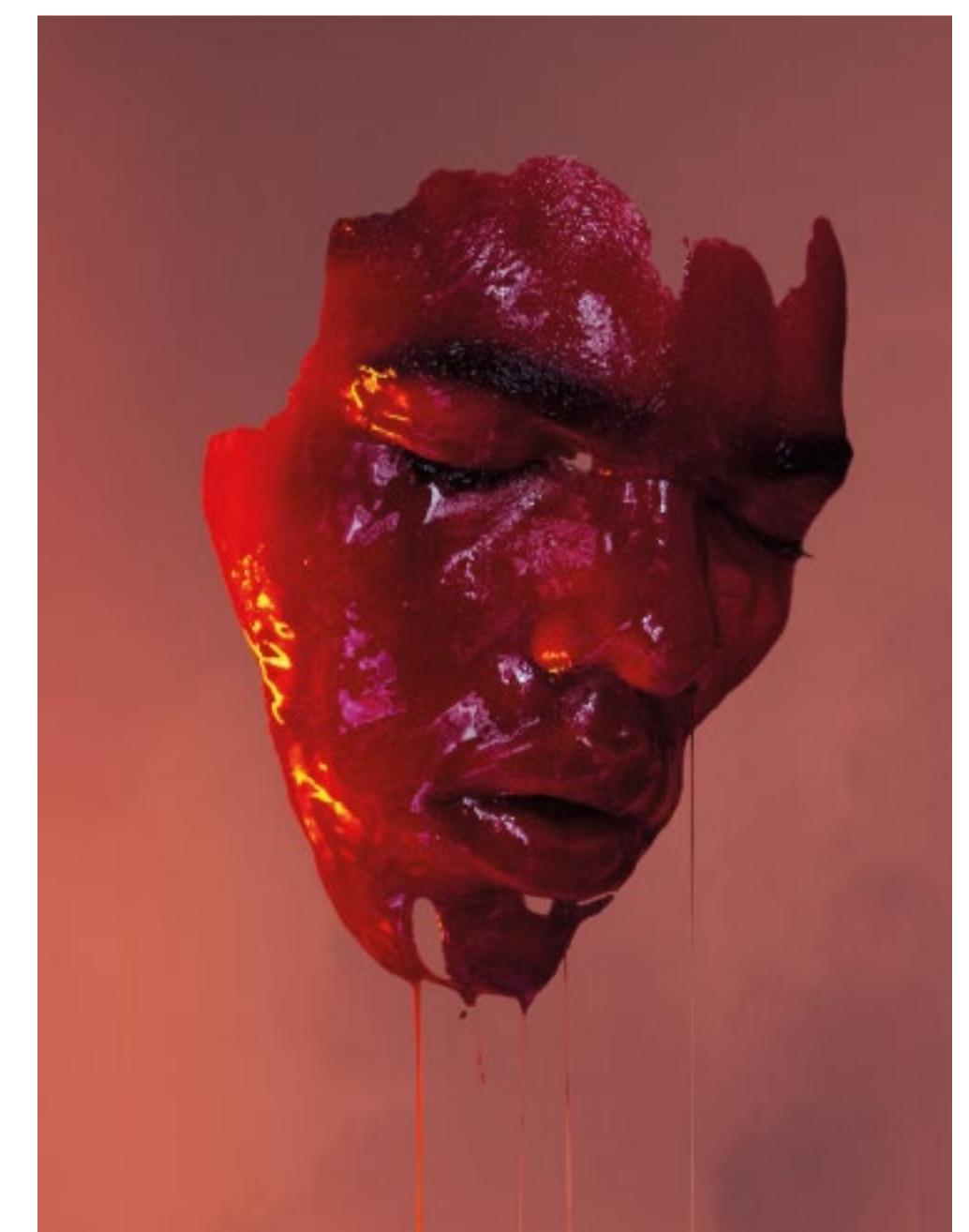
Kristin-Lee Moolman Courtesy of the artist



Nadine Ijewere Courtesy of the artist



Kyle Weeks 2017. Courtesy of the artist



David Uzochukwu Regrowth. Courtesy of the artist &amp; Galerie Number 8

# through the eyes of *vogue italia* alessia glaviano

In conversation with  
Maria Pia Bernardoni

**D** Maria-Pia Bernardoni: dear Alessia, we have been asked to share our impressions on African-Italian relations from an image point of view. Although in different ways and contexts, we both work with photography: me as a curator for international projects with African Artists' Foundation and LagosPhoto festival, and you as senior photo editor at *Vogue Italia* and *L'Uomo Vogue*, and web editor at *Vogue.it*. We both know the importance of an image, and the power it has in creating a thought and making culture. When a body or a face is in a magazine like *Vogue Italia*, its appearance becomes something from which the reader will inspire; hence an important instrument to add vision and diversity.

**Alessia Glaviano:** I am convinced that fashion photography can be an instrument of cultural change. Fashion is not superficial, it is a language. How we dress is also a way of communicating who we are, our interface with the world. Fashion and fashion photography are inherently political. It is true that I work mainly with fashion photography, but not exclusively. My research includes all types of photography. I have always thought of using my work with images to pass different messages and I am very happy to have built over the years a very diversified public: made of people who love fashion but also reportage and documentary photography. I am convinced that art is a tool for social change. Maybe the artwork - with the esthetic revolution that only art can bear - is worth more than a political debate. Politics can make laws but they cannot change the way we look at things. Art, and with it fashion, are able to do this. They have the power to depict life beyond prejudice and social labels.

**These years working with Africa in relation to our country have taught me that there is a real need to change our imaginary, replace the clichés and stereotypes of a poor and defenseless Africa by showing more, and differently. With your work you have a fundamental role: select the images that your public will see. You have been one of the first to use social media and in doing so your choices have always been very aware.**

I have always been interested in the issues of representation. The very rare representation of some topics in our society, and the partial or limited representation of other cultures than ours. As Fred Ritchin says, more than anything today we need curators, people who are capable of selecting images and saying what is worth seeing or less.

I try to do exactly this with my work: use selection to offer alternative or missing representations.

*Vogue Italia's* Black Issue was released in July 2008. Ten years have gone by and the situation has changed completely. A lot of road has been done in the direction of a representation that is more inclusive of difference, capable of taking into account the unity and complexity of all human beings.

People on the internet have positively relayed an always wider inclusivity project that has managed to influence even the most traditional brands and media, which in the end have had to adapt in some way. And never mind if the reason for this adapting was fear of losing potential customers or followers, because the final result has nevertheless been the undermining of stereotypes, clichés and labels.

Today we finally see a melting pot of women from different nationalities, origins and ethnicities walk on the fashion shows. And we also find, in addition to the marvelous and sculptural silhouettes of models, real women. Being skinny, soft, round, tall or petite, they smile, at ease with what would have been considered flaws to "retouch" - surgically or at least with photoshop - not too long ago. Now gender differences are ceasing to be the primary element to define identity, and above all they are no longer something to hide or to change. Gender fluidity, different bodies, beauties, ethnic groups and origins, are all part of a search that revolutionizes contemporary esthetic standards and starts to modify our codes, in terms of inclusivity, openness and dialog.

The road is still long, we are not there yet. Dark skinned and non-occidental photographers published in magazines are still few. When I think of the big names in fashion photography, they are mainly white male.

Until recently in photo galleries or festivals, it was difficult for a photographer who wasn't part of the field's traditionally active scene to attract attention. Now, thanks to the internet and the possibility to express oneself and being visible on social networks, the panorama has changed completely. Platforms like Instagram or EverydayAfrica have contributed in changing the dynamics and have opened the door to artists who would have remained invisible in traditional circuits. Absolutely, this has been one of the most positive effects of social media: to have created an open minded and inclusive context. It has considerably enriched the panorama. And as you said, it is also very important to see numerous photo festivals and events on the Continent, like LagosPhoto, Rencontres de Bamako, or AddisPhoto. It is crucial to tell the world about these great artists. In my selection for Photo Vogue and even on my personal Instagram page, I am always very attentive to guarantee the best visibility to all types of representations and visions. Both in terms of image and the photographer's geographical origin.

**Regarding the work on communication and diffusion of knowledge that we are doing with LagosPhoto these last years, one of our main goals is to eliminate this omni-comprehensive idea of Africa and raise the awareness that Africa is really a very vast continent with countless nuances in culture.**

I agree. Everything is still linked to our superficial and anachronistic idea of the African continent. I also believe that there is a huge archive work to be done which is fundamental to further demolish this vision. We need to tell a different past, not only focus on the new contemporary look of today's photography. Malik Sidibé or Jean Depara for example show us the existence of a photographic tradition and a vision that has been there for a while. But the road has been open much earlier, and it would be important to rebuild the personal archive of the African bourgeoisie.

Can we really say that we are far from the cliché? When we select African artists, or those from the diaspora, don't we choose what we believe we want to see? What we imagine should be the African vision? The important thing to focus on today is recognize the complexity of Africa: we cannot and should not think that there is such a thing as African esthetics.

I totally agree. Ideally we should go over the fact of presenting someone's work because he comes from an African country and focus on the subject. What is their vision on universal topics like migration, climate change, gender issues? To change the way we see the African continent we need to stop thinking of ourselves as the final judges on these visions. From the very first edition of your festival you have always had Azu Nwagbogu on your jury (founder of AAF and LagosPhoto) and I see this as a very powerful political choice. We find ourselves in a moment of transition where, as I was saying, the curatorial aspect, the editing process, becomes increasingly important. And therefore the presence of African curators like star curator Simon Njami or Azu Nwagbogu, now Director of Zeitz MOCAA, is essential. It is obviously not acceptable that we always are the only judges and the ones with an opinion about the world.

I believe we need more voices, especially in powerful positions in the art world and in fashion. Key positions in the establishment too, not only for independent events. Because that is how things will change. That is how we will expand our vision and open up to absorb diverse demands or interpretations.

**Which African or diaspora photographers have struck you lately, whose work you find pertinent in the contemporary photographic language? What do you look at?**

I always look for vision in photography. Storytelling is not mandatory but personal style is. The origin of the photographer does not count, I am looking for excellence and themes that have never been confronted before. I choose from what strikes me in an esthetic or an approach, but I try to be very careful not to base myself on what I expect to see from Africa, that would be a mistake. Obviously we all see things through our own culture, background and "library of mental images", but I try to remain informed and open to new visions.

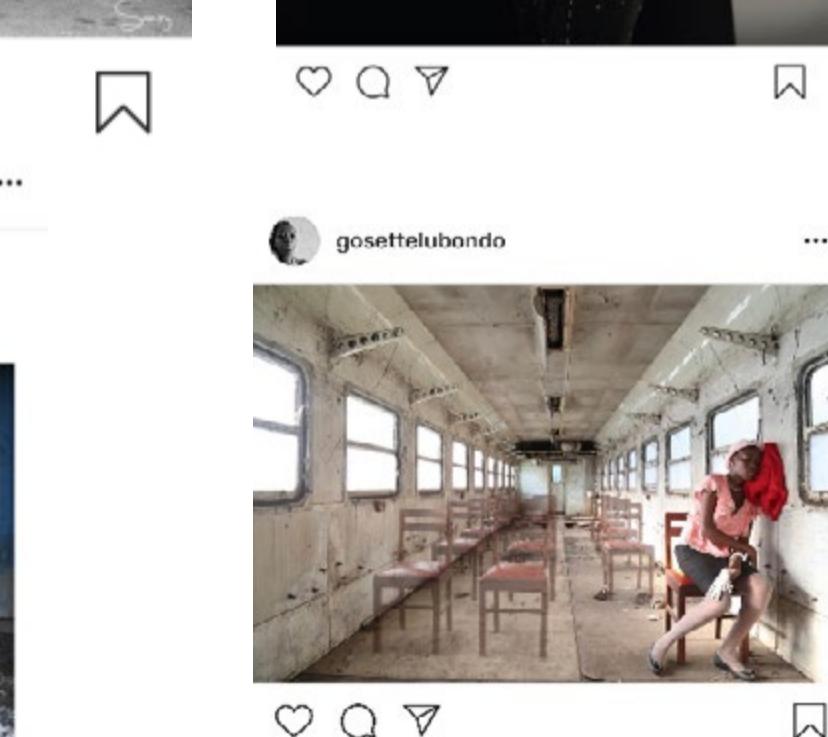
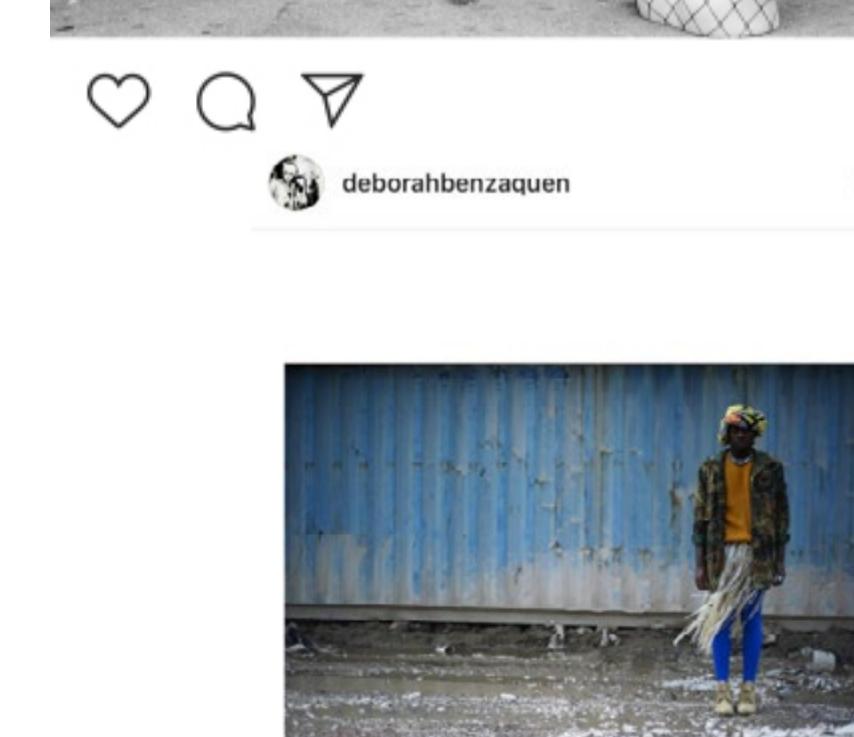
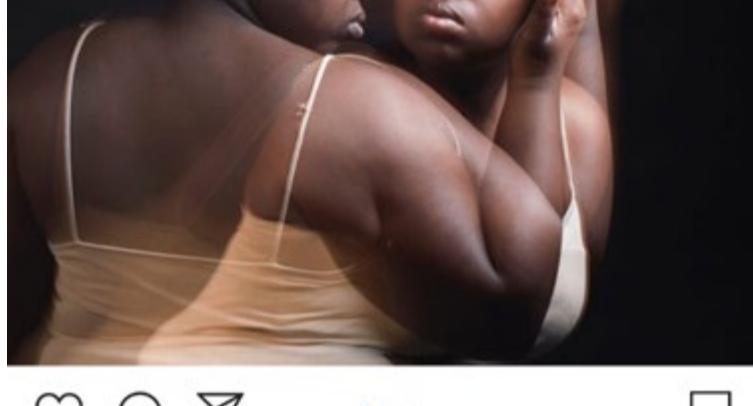
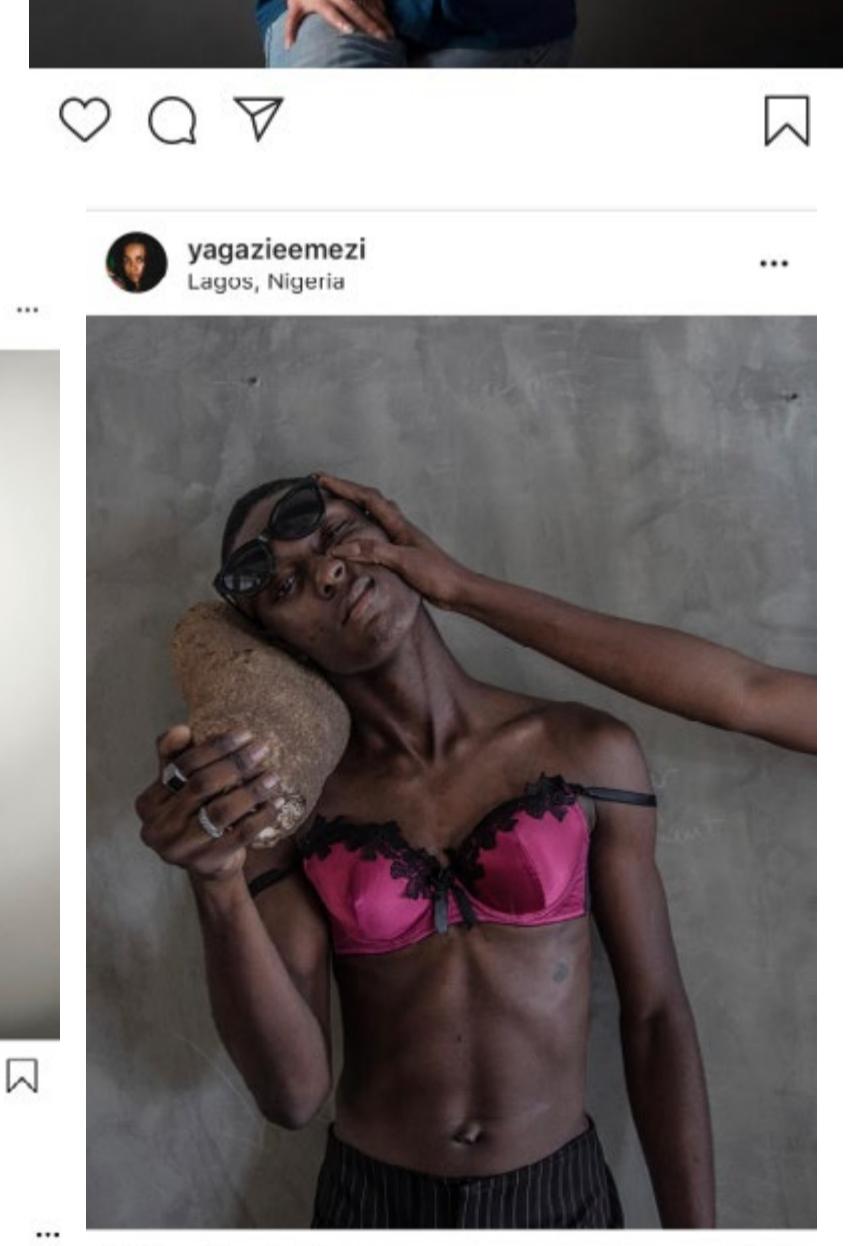
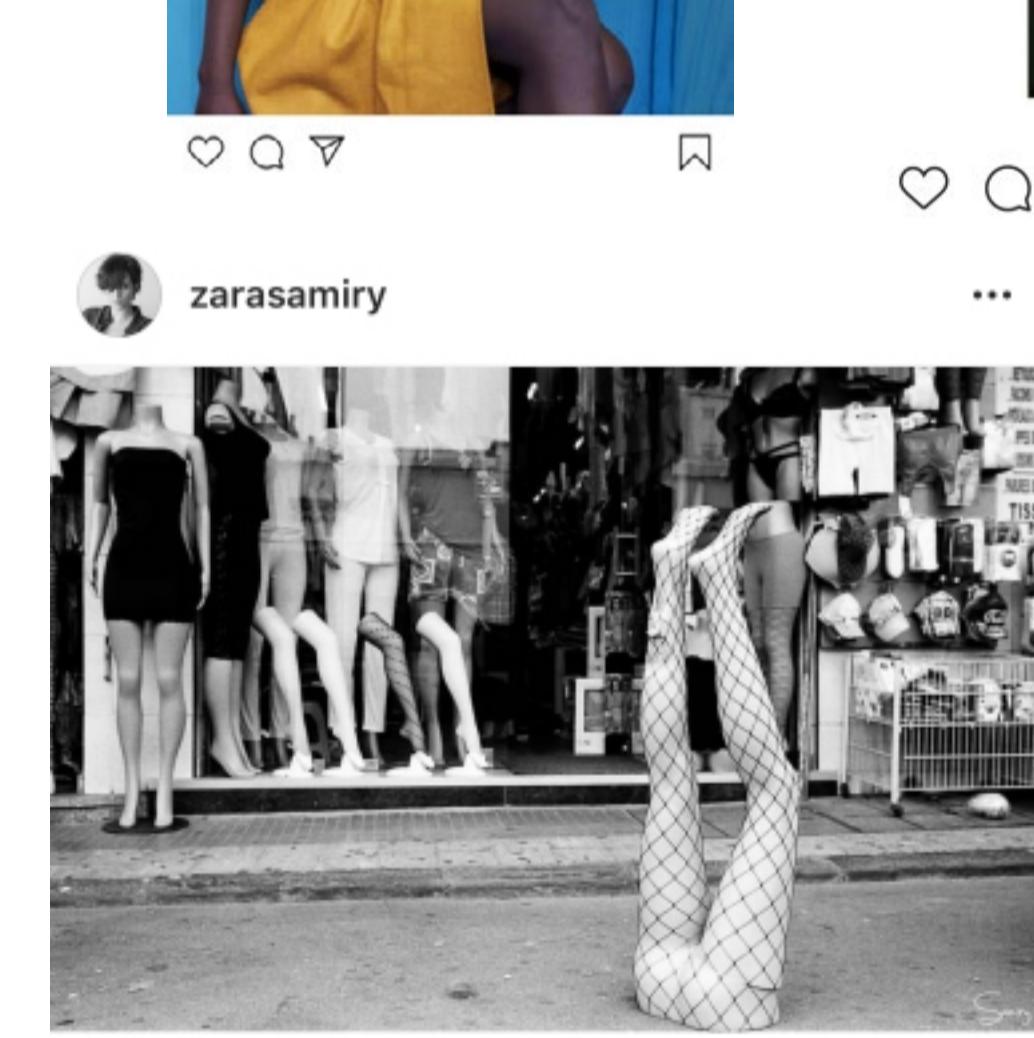
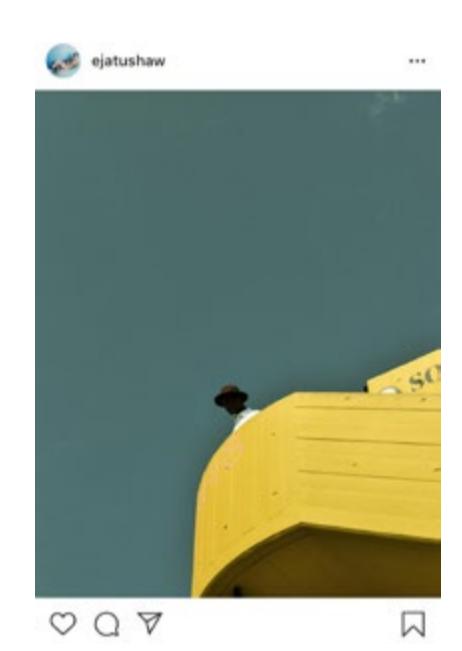
**This year will be Photo Vogue Festival's third edition, held in Milano from the 15th to the 18th of November. Being in charge you always focus on very current thematics: the power of women's vision in the art field (*The Female Gaze*, 2016), the political value of fashion photography (*Fashion & Politics*, 2017)... Is there a particular theme this year?**

Yes, this year the festival is dedicated to valorizing diversity and inclusion. We live in an ever more interconnected world where - thanks mainly to social media - there is a growing awareness that "global" cannot and should not be translated from a cultural point of view: equalizing specificities and singularities towards occidental esthetics and representations. Rehabilitating diversity and searching for that treasure that can only emerge from plurality is essential to oppose visual labeling and the thinning out of the thought. In this moment in time where we see nationalism and extremism getting stronger, and rejection of Others through the construction of physical or mental walls, there is an urgent need for a real representation of cultural peculiarities to fight against stereotypes that reinforce the formation of a moral hierarchy stating that whoever is different is inferior. In this simplistic dualistic diversity is no longer a quality or a possible source of betterment, but otherness. Let us hope that Embracing Diversity, PhotoVogue's exhibition at Photo Vogue Festival 2018, dedicated to discovering and valorizing diversity in all its forms: physical, of gender, geographic or cultural, will contribute to inspire curiosity and the desire to welcome different cultures, favoring a better understanding of our contemporaneity.

Maria-Pia Bernardoni

Text published in *something Africans got #5*, 2018

Maria Pia Bernardoni is a photography curator with a special connection with Africa and particular interest in managing intercultural art projects that offer a different perspective of gender and migration issues, and help create positive dialogue. Since 2011 she is the curator of the PhotoVogue exhibition for the African Artists' Foundation and LagosPhoto festival. Among others exhibitions, she curated "AfriAfrica" at Palazzo Litta in Milan in 2018. Maria Pia has been developing projects around migration and hosting issues in Europe, most recently the exhibition "Papua's project "My Story is a Story of Hope", and directed the short film "If I Left My Country", both shown at Les Rencontres d'Arles 2018. She is also a certified lawyer.



# Instagram, a window on african photography

# **moroccan photography today for a geo- photo graphy of daily life!**

# **Text Fatima Mazmouz**

In this age of image-submersion via social networks, facebook, and instagram, photography has become an essential ingredient of daily life in Morocco, which has given fresh impetus to an artistic scene that has never really embraced photography as an art. Festivals have flourished (2) (*Rencontres Photographiques* in Rabat, *Nuits Photographiques* in Essaouira, *La Chambre Claire*, etc) and publications have boomed (*La Photographie au Maghreb*, and more). Professionals everywhere are staging exhibitions and debates devoted specifically to the art of photography, an irrefutable proof that photography has become a key landmark on the Moroccan cultural and artistic landscape (3). Since the photography of Daoud Aoulad Syad (4) in the 1980s, it would seem that photography as an art (5) in Morocco has greatly progressed; genre photography, street photography, documentary photography: the styles abound. Amid this cascade of images, we cannot help but wonder: what is the value of photography, and more precisely, in which photographic territory do these images belong? What different approaches emerge within Moroccan photography? And what types of space does Moroccan photography create? It is through this spatial perspective that we intend to look at Moroccan photography of today (6): the street, the city, the rural, non-places, imaginary places, photographic territories which inform us of photographers' preoccupations today.

## **THE STREET, THE CITY**

The street forces us to ask questions of ourselves; it inspires us, teaches us, piques our curiosity. It is the primary locus of sharing and discovery, offering a *mise en abîme* of daily life. The photographer Rachid Ouettassi has been capturing street scenes in Tangiers for the last twenty years. From winding alleys of the Medina to the banks of the Mediterranean, his photography is unequivocally philanthropic, stripped of artifice, giving us especially moving perspectives of children absorbed in their meandering play. Children in a different setting, the seaside, is the subject of Fouad Maazouz's photography, marked with strong black/white contrasts in large format prints which amplify the aesthetics of the Hellenistic masculine body. The way he constructs his photography typically deploys oblique convergent lines, like the image of the flip-flops, apparently racing across the sand in the foreground, apparently awaiting the protagonist in the background, as he performs his acrobatic leap. Between yearnings for the street caught in perpetual motion, its constant tide of waves washing in the unexpected and an urban space banished of all formal and structural hierarchy, street photography relentlessly explores the unremitting turmoil of contemporary Moroccan daily life, driven by its intense passion for urban popular culture. It rivets the photographer's attention and, to the keenest observers, it is a visual feast for the eyes brimming with graphic potential. In the last few years, Yorias Yassine Alaoui's work has drawn great attention for its sense of acute observation. His photography is something breath-taking and always surprises the eye. His comical scenes, tinged with derision, manage to perfectly capture the situation. His *Casablanca Not The Movie* series depicts scenes of the daily lives of some of the poorest, turning these humdrum moments into acrobatic feats. While for some photographers, the street is a space for experimentation, for others it is a stage for political issues, the locus for social injustice. From Souad Guennoun's *Incendiaires* [Incendiaries] to Yto Barrada's *Dormeurs* [Sleepers], for Moroccan photographers, social photography is an explicit political weapon. Among them is the young M'hammed Kilito, a budding militant, for whom photography is a political act, as with his pieces *Fuck the Police* or *The City*. While many photographers keep permanent watch on the street for the slightest potential "photographic moment", for others, the City is the sole subject of their research. In 2013, the Moroccan Association of the Photographic Arts (AMAP) in Rabat staged an exhibition of works of the City as photographic subject: *Ville en Mutations* [The City in Changes]. Thami Benkirane's works *Fès* and *Geste* [Gesture] revealed the fine line between the categories of street and city photography and their dialectical relationship. In one interview, the Benkirane stated: "I don't see myself as a street photographer. My practice is manifold. I examine everything but above all, I favour an experimental approach that seeks to show how realities collide." (7) This middle ground is also where Rachid Ouettassi might situate himself and many others in the city of Tangiers. (8) What differentiates researching the city from street observation? Firstly, the city possibly has an iconic role and deeper exploration enables us to reveal its soul, to reflect and offer new perceptions. Surfing a less journalistic wave than his colleagues and working more through the optic of personal perception, Ziad Naitaddi, a short-film director influenced by the cinema of Nuri Bilge Ceylan, offers us photography of hypersensitive, poetic dimensions. He explores the misty, gloomy ambiances of his birth town, Salé, pervading the mind with his ethereal introspection. Ziad's images well up from inside. In one interview he stated: "As a photographer, all I seek is to reach out to and capture the depths of the human soul. In this series of dark hazy photos, I try to express my own feelings by photographing people with whom I identify and have an emotional resemblance – melancholic, solitary and isolated" (9). Where Ziad Naitaddi's work experiences the city as pure emotion, for the architect Zineb Andress Arraki it becomes a subject of investigation in its own right. An emissary of Casablanca, Zineb Andress Arraki studies the memory of the city. To him photography is about preserving and saving the heritage. His work is undeniably the most remarkable documentary of Casablanca of recent times. With perseverance and devotion, Zineb Andress Arraki regularly exhibits the finest images of his beloved city but also shares them on social media. He forces the gaze to discover the accidental (and accident damaged) architecture concealed within archetypal city spaces while bringing a bygone grace to the urban chaos and transforming it into a celebratory choreography where the familiar gives way to a strange feeling of pleasure. An expression of the "intimate immensity" and "joy" of which Gaston Bachelard speaks. (11) Other photographers are also sensitive to preserving the past, especially those who specialise in Morocco's unusual locations outside the city, on its outskirts and beyond, in disappearing rural worlds and forgotten spaces. Like Marc Augé we shall here call those spaces "Non-Places". (12)

# NON-PLACES

Motivated by the discovery for “forgotten architectures”, Hakim Benchekroun explores the length and breadth of Morocco in search of the country’s abandoned industrial heritage. As he says: “I look at obsolescent architecture, imagine how it was designed and built, and celebrate its existence before it becomes a tomb to itself.”(13) Termination is also the theme of his *Lost In Morocco* series, a collection of sharply contrasted black and white images in which the architecture melts into a lost, barren, almost polar landscape. In the

desolation of the settings we hear the bitter moan of the fragments of life now departed. As well as a locus for memory, photography becomes the site of a tragedy unfolding, where the absence of human forms is glaring, the human being and its creations fossilise and sediment within a vaster environment ruled by silence. Sensitive to this ongoing transformation and to break the silence of oblivion, the photo-journalist Mehdy Mariouch produced *Bribes de vie* [Snatches of Life], a photo story of deep emotional finesse on the mines of Jerrada, a small town in the mining basin of L'Oriental region. After their closure in 2000, the mines left job insecurity and social deprivation. The inhabitants rebelled and reopened the pits with their own resources, recreating their daily lives with their own anachronistic tools, propelling them backward into the world of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Mehdy Mariouch's photographs illustrate these contrasting worlds: we find the shell of a locomotive, faces black with coal dust, and machines stripped down to their barebones, the distinguished elegance and gravity in the miners' eyes, amid spaces that speak only of absence and abandonment held together by the slightest of threads. Altogether, it is a beautiful tribute from a truly humanist photographer.

In his own examination of abandonment and "non-places", Abderrahmane Doukkane revives the memory of abandoned country farmhouses, in Bouskoura for example where the memory of his childhood is still very present. "I have a close bond with farmhouses," he confides, "When I was young I lived on a farm in Azbane. We had to sell the land for peanuts and move to the city. I felt like had been cast out of my home. The feeling has never left me." (14). In his *Jidariat* series, we see walls transformed into a personal diary emblazoned with drawing and Nizar Kabbani poems. Superimposed on the wall is a burning body. Abderrahmane Doukkane conjures up an aesthetics of effacement, an almost carnal expression of his reminiscences. The merging of abandoned places and the memories they hold within personal recollections and life stories leads us onto another photographic domain where nostalgia meets in fiction in Yasmine Hatimi's series, *Amarcord*. "Amarcord" means "I remember" in Italian dialect, a reference to Federico Fellini's films. The series has the pictorial perspective and qualities of post-war aesthetics. My *Amarcord* series looks at nostalgia and memory in relation to a given space. I photographed several abandoned space in Morocco with the idea in mind that abandoned spaces have an ability to reimmerse us in a certain period of our lives: the smell of a room, its curtains and the objects that inhabit it remain intact." (15) In their quest for daily lives from ages past, Yasmine Hatimi's images of abandoned spaces resurrect absence and offer a space of salutary resurgence for a brief shutter flick, the instant when the past is "over-exposed". Capturing the silence of forgotten places, neglected and erased from the map, sometimes becomes the photographer's goal as they seek to capture the poetry of non-places and grasp their multiple facets. This is the case with Khalil Nemmaoui who, in his series, *La Maison de L'arbre* [The House of the Tree], aestheticises isolation itself, the space between "nature and civilisation", so dear to the photographer. His photography is more than a mere recording. It calls for introspection, opening the inner space of meditation, the very life breath of deserted architecture.

In a similar vein, Hicham Gardaf replaces Khalil Nemmaoui's introspective approach with symbolism, depicting closed worlds emanating impulsive strangeness. In his photography, so expressive of Tangiers, the protagonists are immobile and trapped in silent temporality, like the little girl in the red waistcoat standing before a pile of rubble, or the moustachioed man whose eyes are riveted to the window. Hicham Gardaf's voiceless photography is a blunt reminder of the atmospheres of Edward Hopper's painting and its nostalgic chronicle of deep change. Ymane Fakhir is not to be outdone. In his photography for the *Ajammar* exhibition presented at the Abderrahman Slaoui Museum in March 2018, the photographer examines the venerated site of Sidi Abderhaman in Casablanca made famous for its occult practices. Of this non-place par excellence, in Michel Foucault's terms (16), the photographer only depicts the silence of secrecy, disregarding the swarms of people who come here to release their suffering and frustrations with life. The only living creatures in his work are a handful of goats gazing out at the sea.

Among these uncountable non-places gaining ground in Morocco, there are also the suburbs. The development of real estate on the fringes cities like Casablanca is gradually encroaching on the rural space, creating zones of dissonant temporality. With her *Annexes* series, Zakria Ait Wakrim, absorbs these silences and translates them via her infrared technique to create sense of trapped gravity, the cruellest emanations of which can already be felt in the changing countryside.

To bring a close to non-places and the silence they encapsulate, the humour of work by Othman Zine, also a director of cinematic photography, and the work of the Chambre Claire prize winner, Youssef Lahrichi, offer other possible directions for photography. Youssef Lahrichi's series, *Nouveaux Mondes* [New Worlds], produced for the Burning Man Festival in Nevada offers a surreal dream world in which the solitary protagonists are caught mid-activity or contemplation, and clearly part of some bigger drama. The sense of space in Othman Zine's work troubles the gaze. His photography offers an ambiguous perception of the real world as it merges with the imaginary, demonstrating how close in nature the staged and constructed imaginary scene and the photographic space of the non-place revived through inner poetry can be. Youssef Lahrichi breaks these codes by using the city as a stage setting for his own tableaux. Emptied of its inhabitants, Casablanca seems to

pose beside the protagonists as they perform their quirky activities. By displacing meaning, *Rêveries Urbaines* [Urban Dreams] access a photographic space of the absurd disturbing Casablanca's usual visual codes, and in the process, those of the altruistic recognition of the individual. This theatricality brings humour and social criticism.

## **IMAGINARY WORLDS / STAGED SETTINGS**

Imaginary places are brought to life through staging which in photography creates worlds of make-believe or artifice. Both require total control of what is captured with the frame. (17) Among staged photography in Morocco, Hicham Benhoud's work is perfectly executed in this respect, whether it is *La salle de classe* [The Classroom] or more recently the *Acrobatics* series, where nothing is taken for chance in the photographic performance. In his series *Down in the Rabbit Hole* begun in 2013, Amina Benbouchta offers similar theatrical works in which she poses regally in kaftans in Moroccan interiors, her face masked by domestic objects. Since Shadi Ghadirian and her famous series from 2000, *Like Every Day*, in which her female protagonists' faces were covered by household implements expressing women's status in Arab-Islamic society and their feeling of enclosure, many other artists have used the same process to create critiques of their worsening daily conditions. With equally querulous verve, Amina Benbouchta had the ingenuity to imbue her photography with her own poetic and artistic world. By staging her photographs, rather than opt for direct confrontation, she deploys strangeness: we find the photographer, her face covered by a coal shovel, standing amid a pile of apples on a living room table; or we find piling up metal lampshade frames to form a skirt. The iconographical world she creates metamorphoses the photographic space into a locus for writing, vacillating between allegory and fable. In a very different photographic register, Amine Oulmakki plays on these hybrid worlds the strangeness of which emanates from a sense of suspended temporality. The young set-photographer, video editor and filmmaker sets her characters in freeze-frame against a black background in quirky settings, lit by sardonic half-light, an aesthetic which combines the Spanish tenebrist heritage with Pedro Almodovar's offhandedness. The space produced by Amine Oulmakki initially emerges in a feeling of gravity soon counterbalanced by the artifice of theatricality. In her *Intérieurs* [Interiors] series, her photography creates a space for derision. Caught up in the desire to transcend the day-to-day through the banalities of our surroundings, Déborah Benzaquen produces photography of surrealist inner poetry. She sets her *Désenchantée* [Disenchanted] series in the abattoirs of Casablanca, a legend in its own right. Within this setting she writes a new story with carefully selected objects, such as a blouse and pants hanging above a pit between two meat hooks. In this landscape of deliquescent beauty, a site in ruins, replete with its own history and aura, Déborah Benzaquen's photography is both enigmatic and irresistibly insolent. Safaa Mazirh takes intimacy to its ultimate conclusion to create photography with a very different approach and perception of daily life. The only tool and setting she deploys is her own body, which she uses to ask searching questions of the private space, using it as a shelter for the stigmata of a life, while abandoning herself to it with a highly delicate photographic expressiveness similar to early 20<sup>th</sup> century pictorialism. With this ineffably charming pictorial approach, the photographer examines the identity of her female body, its movements and postures. The site of the imaginary becomes the site of the unspeakable for Safaa Mazirh, a space for ultimate regeneration, recasting the fragmentation of the identity in a poetic space sometimes ornamented with traces of the Berber culture which cloud her evanescent memory.

the unspeakable, is a locus of reparation and healing. It begins to rewrite history, becoming a valve through which the banes and blights of the past can drain out. It enables tragedy to be experienced afresh in calmer settings. In his series *Chronique d'un deuil familial* [Chronicle of Family Grief], Jaafar Akil daubs photos from the family album with splashes of colour, as though dressing the still-open wound of his father's death, the truth of which was hidden for so many years. With this series, Jaafar Akil is able to drain the tumult of life and of his family history and, in the process, abandons operative classicism for a more committed form of photography. Family albums and reparation also form the basis of Carole Bénitah's work, who day-by-day explores the joy and impulsiveness of her Moroccan childhood. The reparative photographic space is a space of atonement where the galactic free-floating fragments of memory become reconciled with their real space, Morocco. For both photographers, the imaginary places within photographic territory when staged, embroidered, sculpted, drawn upon and repaired function as a form of therapeutic transfer, as though "patching up the incurable"(18), promising new, less tortuous routes within an inner topography in turmoil.

CONCLUSION

The many varied aesthetics of contemporary Moroccan photography are vibrant proof of its great creative and artist output. Whether as street, city or rural photography or as imaginary scenes, the spaces created speak volumes of the “global organisation of society” (19) in Morocco today. It is a space which seeks out a deep sense of individuality bringing great subjectivity to their modes of perception. This whole new generation of photographers has appropriated photography for themselves in the express goal of creating a personal form of writing, influenced naturally by cinema. Through it they demonstrate a common interest in mankind depicting either memory in transition as in the work of Mehdy Mariouch or



**Mustapha Azeroual** *Résurgences*. Courtesy of the artist & Galerie Binome

recounting personal worlds like Ziad Naitaddi's photos or creating poetic realism like Yasmine Hatimi. Human beings and sensitivities are at the heart of Moroccan photography whether speaking of human absence, of metaphysical human presence in constructed spaces, or of peoples' place in society or in their personal lives: all cast a devious critical eye on Moroccan society today. A mode of legitimizing individuality, Moroccan photography today could be defined as a critique of daily existence caught between the compromise of Roland Barthes' *ça a été* and Gilles Deleuze's famous "Time-Image" offering a glimpse of the joyous becoming inherent in the "Movement-Image" of photography, a territory to be conquered.

**Fatima Mazmouz**

<sup>1</sup> – In reference to the title of Michel Foucault's *Cercle d'études architecturales*, 14 mars 1984, October 1984, pp. 46-49. "Of Other Space," translated from the French by Jay Miskowicz.

2 - La Chambre Claire is an innovative African program which supports emerging African photography. It is organised by Foundation Alliances and was founded by Ottaviano Lanza and Madam Remond.

It is organised by Fondation Alliances and was founded by Othmane Lazraq and Meriem Berrada.  
*-La photographie au Maghreb, Enjeux symboliques et créations artistique*, [Photography

-La photographie au Maghreb, Enjeux symboliques et créations artistique, [Photography in the Maghreb, Symbolic Stakes and Artistic Creation] edited by Abdelghani Fennane, Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 2012, 2nd edition, April 2013.

and published in January of this year with Editions Aimance Sud, 2018  
3 – The art scene in Morocco is still dependent on an unfortunate and damaging amalgamation of

3 – The art scene in Morocco is still dependent on an unfortunate and damaging amalgamation of different artistic statuses – professional, amateur and occasional dabbler – devoid of distinction, which effectively obscures the quality of what is made. Criticism is sparse, the visual arts

which greatly affects the reception of photography in Morocco. Criticism is based on the simple following premise: command of the tool and technique is paramount; creative processes and

following premise: command of the tool and technique is paramount; creative processes and approaches have no role to play. There is no interest in educating the gaze or in photographic

sensibilities. This is not just true of Morocco but applies to contemporary art in general.  
4 – *Le Maroc de Daoua Aoulad Syad* - Daoua Aoulad Syad's Morocco: a touring

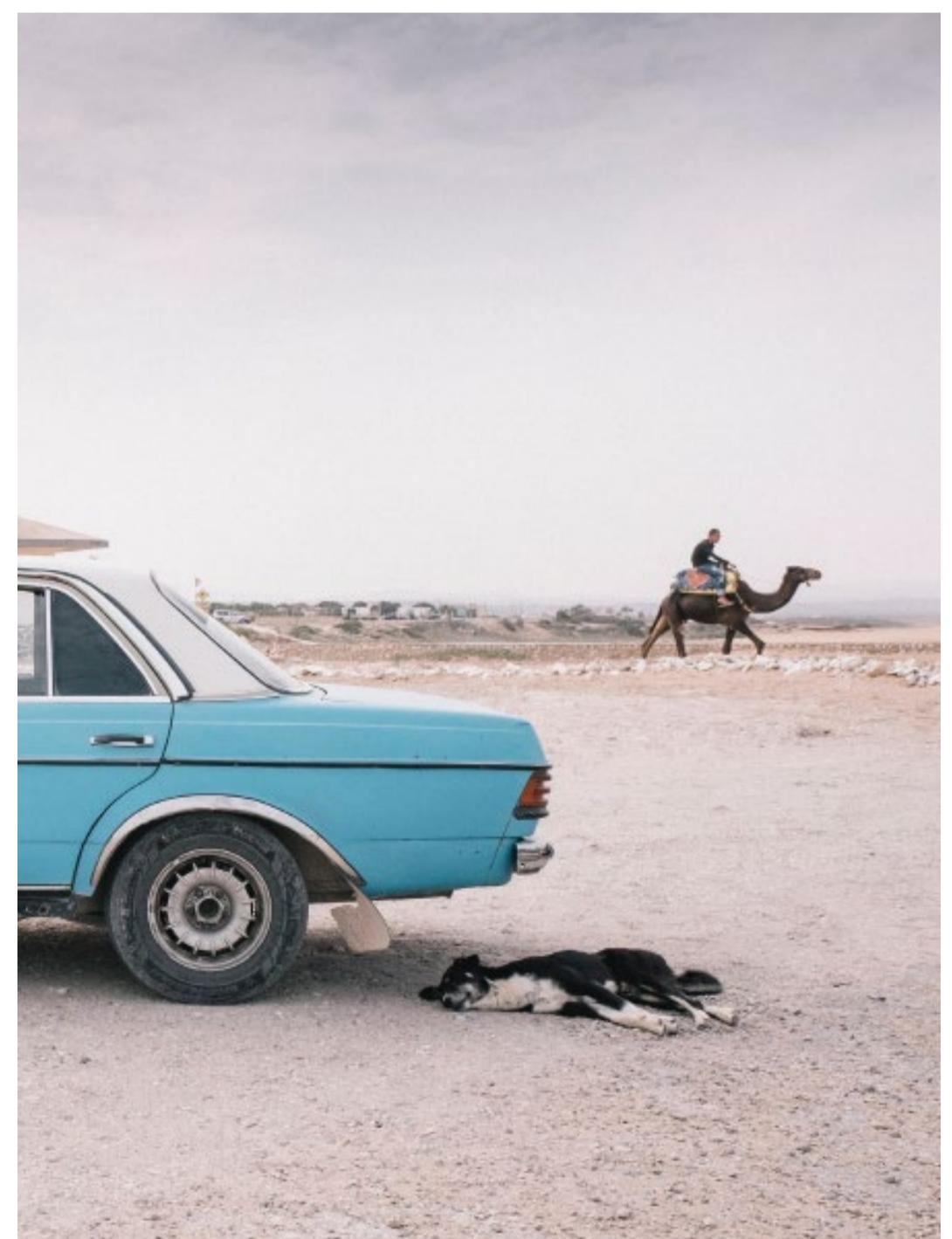
<sup>4</sup> – *Le Maroc de Daouda Aoulad Syad* - Daouda Aoulad Syad's Morocco: a touring exhibition of French Institutes in Morocco, February 2018 to January 2019

5 - Dominique BAQUÉ, *La Photographie plasticienne, un art paradoxal*  
[Photography – a Paradoxical Art], Paris, Éditions du regard, 1998

[Photography – a Paradoxical Art], Paris, Editions du regard, 1998  
6 - This article will only look at work that could be termed "*auteur* photography".  
7 - It's also worth noting that this is one of the best books on the subject. See notes on this.



Fatima Mazmouz Bouzbir series - Uterus, 2014. Courtesy of the artist



M'hammed Kilito Sidi Kaouki. Courtesy of the artist

Hicham Gardaf, *The red square*, 2014. Courtesy of the artistLeila Alaoui, *Les Marocains* © Fondation Leila Alaoui

# les rencontres africaines de la photographie de bamako

Texte Chab Touré

**L**a programmation de la première édition de ces Rencontres de la photographie reposait essentiellement sur des archives photographiques des années cinquante et soixante de Seydou Keïta et de Malick Sidibé et, dans la même veine, sur les archives des indépendances nationales réalisées par les agences gouvernementales de presse du Mali (l'Agence Malienne de Presse, l'AMAP) et de Guinée (Office nationale du Cinéma de Guinée, ONACIG.) Le travail photographique de témoins visuels de l'apartheid, Santu Mofokeng, Jenny Gordon et Ingrid Hudson a apporté une note panafricaine à cette programmation, quelque peu, exclusivement malienne. Paradoxalement, ces rencontres qui visaient à rompre l'isolement des photographes africains laissaient peu de place à la photographie non africaine. C'est, en fait, l'exposition proposée par la Revue Noire qui sauva les velléités internationales de ces Rencontres premières. Pour sa qualité cette exposition de la Revue Noire est mémorable. Et pas seulement. Elle l'est aussi pour la polémique qu'elle a suscitée en présentant, en plus du travail de Malick Sidibé, les propositions de Rotimi Fani-Kayode (photographe britannique d'origine nigériane dont la démarche photographique explore la transgression par le corps dénudé) et d'Elise Fitté-Duval dont le travail, à mon sens, mérite qu'on s'y attarde. Car l'histoire de cette photographe est la vraie histoire de rencontre dans les Rencontres de 1994.

## Les « portraits nus » d'Elise Fitté-Duval

Elise Fitté-Duval, martiniquaise, finissait ses études à l'ENSAD à Paris en 1994. Dès son arrivée en métropole, elle dit avoir été frappée par le fait que là-bas, certainement en raison du climat, « on vit emmitouflé sous plusieurs couches de vêtements la plupart du temps ». Alors, elle commença à observer les gens dans la rue et autour d'elle et à s'interroger sur « la prégardance des corps », sur la relation entre l'inaccessibilité du corps et l'accessibilité des personnes... Les questions ont cheminé et, au moment d'envisager un projet artistique de fin d'études, un dispositif était déjà bien élaboré dans sa tête : « Jusque, là j'avais surtout procédé par morcellement de l'espace et du corps. Avec ce travail, j'ai voulu faire une œuvre non seulement plastique, mais qui se situait dans le monde. Comment, en plaçant le modèle dans un espace intime et en exposant la partie la plus intime de lui-même, la photographie pouvait révéler son être ? Je m'interrogeais sur les rapports de l'intime et du public. C'était une grande préoccupation de l'art des années 1990 qui m'interpellait profondément. J'étais obsédée par la sensation d'être prisonnière d'un corps qui me conditionnait aux yeux des autres. Mais au lieu de faire des autoportraits, j'ai préféré voir comment les autres le vivent. J'ai fait appel à des relations d'amis, des camarades de classe, des membres de ma famille. J'avais passé une annonce, mais cela n'a pas marché. Il y a des gens que je n'ai vus qu'une fois pour cette séance de prise de vue. »

Elise obtint son diplôme. Quelques temps après, elle monta ce travail à l'équipe de la Revue Noire qui travaillait, à ce moment-là, à la proposition d'une exposition aux premières Rencontres africaines de la photographie de Bamako. « La scénographie de la mise en abîme du corps et aussi la présence et la convivance que dégagent les personnes photographiées » suscita leur intérêt. Ainsi, une partie du travail de fin d'études d'Elise Fitté-Duval fut sélectionnée pour une exposition Revue Noire à Bamako en décembre 1994. Elise fut invitée à Bamako, une terre inconnue pour elle... Un vernissage officiel de l'exposition de la Revue Noire eu lieu le 7 décembre 1994 à 10 h du matin au site de la FEBAK (Foire de Bamako), dans le quartier de l'ACI. Le protocole et la répartition des vernissages ont fait que cette exposition de la Revue Noire soit vernie sous la houlette du Président de la Chambre du Commerce du Mali. Un homme d'affaire malien connu pour être, à la fois, un malien très riche et un musulman très pieux. À son arrivée sur les lieux de l'exposition, il fut accueilli par les photographes, l'équipe de la Revue Noire et les représentants du Ministère de la Culture. Lorsqu'il eut atteint sur le seuil de la salle, il dit, en détournant le regard des photographies de nus d'Elise Fitté-Duval et de Rotimi Fani-Kayodé « retournez ces nus que je ne saurai voir... » Les organisateurs (l'équipe de la Revue Noire) et quelques artistes présents protestèrent avec des arguments, à leurs yeux, très convaincants - du genre "l'art est libre", "l'expression est un droit", "quel peut être le désir malien de démocratie sans des artistes libres de s'exprimer" ? - arguments que la censure « sociale officielle » n'entendait pas. Les initiateurs de l'événement (Françoise Huguier, Africains en créations (Institut français, NDLR) et les commissaires) tentèrent de négocier en vain. Les photographies incriminées (celles d'Elise Fitté-Duval et Rotimi Fani-Kayodé) furent retournées afin de ne pas choquer la pudeur musulmane des personnalités maliennes qui étaient venues, non pas pour la photographie et les photographes, mais, pour honorer de leur présence le vernissage. L'équipe de la Revue Noire était furieuse et la communauté photographique française présente à Bamako scandalisée. L'incident assombrit l'ambiance. Comment expliquer que ce soit seulement à l'heure du vernissage d'une exposition du programme officiel que le personnel du Ministère de la Culture découvre des photographies et accepte leur censure ? Plus loin au cours de cette journée, plusieurs questions ont traversé les commentaires de l'incident: Le Ministère de la culture du Mali et les initiateurs français avaient-ils partagé leurs conceptions sur la photographie (Qu'est-ce qui l'est ? Qu'est-ce qui ne l'est pas). Les deux « partenaires » s'étaient-ils entendus sur les objectifs artistiques de l'événement et les conséquences politiques qui pouvaient en découler ? Le Mali continuait-il d'être (à notre insu) le bastion d'une censure obscure que l'on pensait révolue ou était-ce le fait d'une auto censure manipulée par des fonctionnaires un peu trop zélés ? Les questions et les commentaires, il y en a eu... dont certaines courageuses de l'Essor, le quotidien gouvernemental, dont le journaliste se demandait « ...au nom de quoi ? D'une conception particulière de ce qui peut être chez nous

« politiquement correct » ou « religieusement correct » ? Qui devra alors énoncer les principes de cette nouvelle orthodoxie ? » Puis il conclut, prudent et poli, « sans mettre en cause les convictions personnelles des uns et des autres, on peut simplement relever que les convictions d'une artiste ont été brimées sans recours par les convictions d'un officiel. Les organisateurs n'auraient pas dû laisser commettre une telle injustice. »

Elise Fitté-Duval, elle, eut « l'impression que l'exposition de la Revue Noire était un peu à part ; qu'inviter des photographes de la diaspora, pour les organisateurs, était hors sujet... quand on m'a dit que les photos devaient être retournées pendant la visite du ministre, j'ai été un peu déçue, mais pas mortifiée. Et surtout soulagée qu'elles ne soient pas interdites pendant le reste de l'exposition. Cela renforçait cette sensation de ne pas savoir où j'étais et de ne pas maîtriser mon environnement. » Toute rencontre ne réussit que si elle commence bien. Les Rencontres africaines de la photographie de Bamako ont commencé sur un tas de malentendus et, depuis ces débuts truqués, des questions restent sans réponse.

En visitant la littérature (mémoires, études et articles divers) sur les Rencontres africaines de la photographie de Bamako, je me suis rendu compte que cet incident autour des « portraits de nus » d'Elise Fitté-Duval est bizarrement tu. Même qu'il est très peu fait mention du travail photographique de l'artiste martiniquaise dans les expositions de la première édition de l'événement. L'oubli du travail d'Elise Fitté-Duval dans l'histoire des Rencontres a, semble-t-il servi une erreur commune qui mérite d'être réfutée, selon laquelle, il a fallu attendre la quatrième édition pour que la photographie produite par la diaspora africaine rentre en scène à Bamako.

Elise Fitté-Duval est, à mon sens, la première icône des Rencontres africaines de la photographie de Bamako. Elle qui aurait pu être dégoutée à jamais par l'Afrique à cause de cette première rencontre, plutôt ratée, vit depuis, à Dakar où elle continue son œuvre photographique.

## Bamako et Ouagadougou... ou Paris à Bamako

Françoise Huguier est arrivée au Mali, la première fois en 1982, pour le magazine Rock'n'folk sur un reportage photo consacré aux musiciens Salif Keita et Mory Kanté qui étaient déjà connus en Europe. L'un comme la plus belle voix du Mandé et le deuxième comme un grand virtuose de la kora. Fille d'un directeur de plantation d'hévéa au Cambodge, Françoise Huguier connaît bien l'Asie du Sud-Est. Elle a longtemps tourné en Chine, au Japon, en Birmanie, en Malaisie et en Indonésie. L'Afrique, elle ne connaît pas. Ce séjour au Mali qui n'aura duré qu'une petite semaine, est aussi sa découverte de l'Afrique... qu'elle ne lâchera plus. Sur les conseils d'un ami qui connaît et aime l'Afrique, elle se met à écouter de la musique africaine et surtout malienne. Elle lit aussi des ouvrages sur l'Afrique... Michel Leiris et son *Afrique fantôme*... Depuis, Françoise n'a cessé de venir au Mali. D'abord, « Sur les traces de l'Afrique fantôme » dès 1988/89. Puis, en 1991, pour couvrir (pour le journal Libération) le coup d'état qui a mis fin au régime militaire du Général Moussa Traoré. Entre 1991 et 1993, elle rencontre plusieurs photographes bamakois, Racine Keïta (sur le reportage sur le coup d'état), Seydou Keïta que Django Cissé, lui-même photographe de cartes postales, lui fait rencontrer et Malick Sidibé chez qui on l'amène pour faire réparer un appareil photo qui risquait de la lâcher. Françoise Huguier affirme être la première personne à avoir vu les archives de Seydou Keïta, puis de Malick Sidibé. Mais, elle ne fait rien de sa découverte. Elle la garde pour elle, pour plus tard... Une deuxième personne, André Magnin à l'époque, conservateur de la collection de Jean Pigozzi, est aussi associée à cette découverte. Magnin, lui aussi arrive à Bamako la même année 1992 à la recherche d'un photographe anonyme, auteur de deux tirages vus dans l'exposition « Africa Explores, 20th Century African Art » qui eut lieu au Center for African Art à New York (1991). Selon Magnin, lorsqu'il découvre les archives de Seydou Keïta en mars 92, elles avaient déjà été consultées comme en témoignait un classement récent de quelques négatifs sélectionnés. Ce serait la marque laissée par Huguier qui était déjà passée par là. Le marchand qu'était déjà André Magnin flaire « la bonne affaire » et s'y engouffre aussitôt sans attendre. Une fois que lui et son employeur Jean Pigozzi auront acquis « à quel prix ? » quelques centaines de négatifs, ils lancent le processus de fabrication simultanée d'une photographie africaine et de deux

stars (Seydou Keita et Malick Sidibé) de cette photographie. Au même moment, à Bamako, le musée national du Mali consacre une exposition au travail de Françoise Huguier « Sur les traces de l'Afrique fantôme ». Au cours du vernissage et tout le long de cette exposition, Françoise Huguier, côtoie les photographes de Bamako et parle de photographie avec eux : « Lorsque j'ai exposé l'Afrique Fantôme au Musée de Bamako, avec Alioune, Racine et Cissé, j'ai proposé d'organiser un événement consacré à la photo, l'équivalent de ce qu'il existait pour le cinéma à Ouagadougou. » Françoise Huguier retourne en France après son exposition au Musée national de Bamako avec l'idée d'organiser un événement autour de la photographie, plus confortée, car validée avec enthousiasme par les photographes maliens avec lesquels elle en a discuté. Aux yeux de Huguier, l'importance esthétique des archives des deux « anciens » (Seydou et Malick) qu'elle a pu consulter constituait à elle seule un argument patrimonial qui peut soutenir et défendre l'idée d'un événement autour de la photographie. À cela s'ajoute l'enthousiasme des autres photographes tels que Django Cissé, Racine Keita et Alioune Ba. Lorsque Françoise Huguier commençait à parler, dans le milieu de la photographie en France, de son événement prévu au Mali, André Magnin, de son côté travaillait (avec le soutien financier de Jean Pigozzi) à un dispositif qui servirait le mieux à monter, dans la même France de l'art photographique, les archives des deux photographes maliens Seydou Keita et Malick Sidibé. Dès le début de l'année 1993, des expositions leur sont consacrées en France. C'est renforcé par l'engouement français et européen pour le travail photographique de Seydou et Malick, que le projet des premières Rencontres africaines de la photographie de Bamako, pensé et développé par Françoise Huguier, s'est construit : « J'ai parlé de mon idée à Roger Aubry qui travaillait pour Afrique en création (et que j'ai connu à l'Institut français) et avec l'aide de Patrice Peltier, le projet a pu se construire, » se rappelle Huguier. Françoise Huguier était déjà connue pour être une photographe exigeante, au style audacieux et entêté. Elle collaborait depuis quelques années au journal Libération et était membre de la fameuse Agence Vu créée par Christian Caillolle. Elle avait de nombreux amis parmi le personnel culturel et photographique français de l'époque. Ses amitiés ont été très utiles pour la construction conceptuelle de son idée d'événement : Les Rencontres de la photographie africaine devaient casser l'isolement dans lequel se trouvaient les photographes africains sur leur propre continent et faire connaître leur travail dans le reste du monde. Mais comme Françoise Huguier aime le rappeler, elle ne savait pas comment coordonner institutionnellement et financièrement un projet international aussi complexe (montage en France et mise en œuvre au Mali avec des partenaires établis et associatifs dans les deux pays), alors elle a dû chercher une expertise en gestion d'événement culturel à cheval sur la France et le Mali. Elle trouve Roger Aubry, un ancien directeur (de 1982 à 1985) du Centre Culturel Français du Mali, directeur d'une agence culturelle associative « Atout Centre ». Aubry prend en main la recherche de partenaires institutionnels et financiers. Françoise Huguier avait, auparavant, eu l'accord d'un certain nombre d'institutions photographiques et même de l'état français à travers le ministère de la culture en France notamment « Agnès Gouvion de Saint-Cyr qui, en voyant les images de Malick et Seydou a pensé qu'il était intéressant d'investir dans une biennale africaine. » Roger Aubry, lui parvint à convaincre la Fondation Africaine en Création de financer les futures Rencontres de la photographie africaine. Françoise réussit aussi à convaincre la Revue Noire : « qui occupe un rôle important dans la découverte d'un certain nombre de photographes africains. Les relations entre Afrique en création et Revue noire n'étaient pas au beau fixe, j'ai fait la médiation pour qu'ils soient présents à la première biennale, ce qui a permis d'obtenir un financement du ministère de la coopération. » Ainsi, c'est seulement lorsque le projet a été bien ficelé, en France (entre toutes les parties) que le Ministère de la culture et de la communication du Mali est rentré en ligne de compte, comme le précise Françoise Huguier : « Roger et moi sommes allés à Bamako rencontrer le Ministre de la culture et le président de la république afin de leur proposer ce projet, ils ont tout de suite adhéré. »

A ce stade de la construction du projet des rencontres, l'Etat malien n'était le partenaire d'une photographie française (accompagnée d'un ancien directeur du Centre Culturel Français de Bamako) qui se proposait d'organiser, au Mali, un événement photographique qui, selon elle, fera de Bamako la capitale de la photographie comme Ouagadougou est la capitale du cinéma. Il apparaît clairement que le Ministère de la culture et de la communication du Mali n'a été ni co-initiateur, encore moins initiateur des Rencontres de la photographie africaine de Bamako. Pas plus qu'il n'était le partenaire de l'Etat français sur l'événement à ses premières heures.

Le ministre de la culture et de la communication du Mali à l'époque de cette première édition des Rencontres africaines de la photographie de Bamako, un magistrat très intelligent, était un serviteur efficace et rigoureux de l'état mais un homme peu intéressé par l'art en général, encore moins par les arts plastiques et la photographie. Le président de la République du Mali était Alpha Oumar Konaré, un professeur de géographie et d'archéologie qui, fut un ministre de la culture bien remarqué sous

le régime militaire de Moussa Traoré. On le disait grand « homme de culture », surtout lorsqu'il fut élu premier président de l'ère démocratique du Mali. Mais, que veut dire « un homme de culture » ? Il m'a toujours semblé que c'est une expression par défaut. Le genre d'expression que l'on donne comme « qualité » à une personne chez laquelle on a du mal à cerner de façon précise une seule qualité qui le flatte véritablement. Pour moi, le président Konaré est avant tout un homme de politique. C'est seulement accessoirement, qu'il s'est occupé de culture et d'art notamment (en tant que directeur de l'ICOM) dans le réseau « francophone » dont il fut, un moment « le petit chéri. » N'était-il pas le seul invité « africain » autorisé à prendre la parole, lors de l'ouverture des « Rencontres Africaine en créations », après le ministre de la Coopération et du développement, Jacques Peltier et même avant le Premier ministre Michel Rocard. Cela se passait en janvier 1990 et Alpha Konaré, qui n'était pas encore président de la République du Mali, dans son discours disait alors, en guise de conclusion, que « Toute politique de coopération culturelle qui ne se fondera pas sur le respect, sur la promotion des cultures nationales africaines, favorisera à moyen terme d'autres cultures étrangères... » J'ai la conviction que les jeunes maliens seront des partenaires sans complexe pour battre « la terre des hommes. » À l'arrivée de Françoise Huguier et de Roger Aubry, au Mali, pour proposer le projet des Rencontres africaines de la photographie de Bamako, il est très probable que leur interlocuteur le plus décisif, du côté malien, fût le président Konaré lui-même. Il était de fait le gérant de la politique culturelle. Alors, était-il possible de penser que c'est parce que ce président ne voyait pas la culture comme une priorité (selon Jeanne Mercier) qu'il eut si peu d'engagement et d'investissement de l'état malien dans la construction (au début) et dans la mise en œuvre (plus tard) de la première édition des Rencontres africaines de la photographie ? Est-ce une légèreté d'analyse du dossier par les services du Ministère de la culture et de la communication qui ne percevaient pas l'intérêt national d'un tel événement qui expliquerait l'absence politique du Mali dans l'événement ? Sans doute, les services techniques du ministère de la culture ont été légers mais n'ont-ils pas été contraints à une telle légèreté ? Dans ces années d'illusions démocratiques du Mali, le président élu, Alpha Oumar Konaré était tout puissant de légitimité et, par extension de sagesse. Il menait toutes les négociations. Il élaborait toutes les stratégies. Surtout lorsqu'il s'agit de coopération culturelle... Aussi, il est impensable que la faiblesse du partenariat entre la France et le Mali, si mal concoccté, autour des Rencontres africaines de la photographie de Bamako puisse s'expliquer que par une simple légèreté. Alpha O. Konaré, qui se préparait déjà à être le président du Mali, lors des rencontres Africaine en Créations disait, avec une grande lucidité, à propos de la coopération culturelle, qu'il « s'agit de coopérer autrement. Une saine politique de coopération culturelle est le prolongement d'une politique de coopération qui nous aide à résoudre la crise de l'endettement et à assurer une juste rémunération de nos matières premières, surtout de nos produits agricoles pour une relance économique. » Il y a lieu de se demander comment un président qui sait, autant que Konaré, l'importance de la maîtrise du discours politique a pu, d'un côté dire des choses aussi sensées et de l'autre, laisser faire ce qui advint en 1994.

Quant à Françoise Huguier, elle demeure celle par qui tout est arrivé. Les bonnes idées, c'était elle. Les faux pas aussi, par naïveté ou par aveuglement. Je penche pour l'aveuglement. Françoise n'aime pas le Mali comme certains occidentaux qui aiment le pays et le confort du pays plus que les gens du pays, plus que les hommes eux-mêmes. Françoise, elle, aime les maliens... Elle a des amis maliens et des amours maliness. Souvent, quand on aime, on est aussi aveugle. Françoise Huguier a tout porté et elle le dit sans formule : « Pour ne pas être seule, j'ai demandé à Bernard Descamps si ça l'intéressait de venir m'aider pour cette biennale. Quand il a suggéré de décider qui serait exposé, j'ai moi-même fait un voyage au Zimbabwe, en Afrique du sud et à Abidjan, Bernard est allé en Centrafrique où il a rencontré Samuel Fosso et à Dakar. Je pensais qu'il était important de se déplacer pour rencontrer les photographes par pays. »

« Au départ, c'est moi toute seule qui suis allée voir Aubry pour qu'il y ait un événement photo à Bamako. Pourquoi Bamako ? Pour moi, le Mali était le pays de la lumière en référence au film de Souleymane Cissé, Yeelen. Elisabeth Benichou, qui s'occupait de la production à Arles, est venue m'aider un mois avant la Biennale pour tout mettre en place. Il n'y avait ni infrastructure ni savoir-faire, tout avait été fait en France... » Ainsi, il y a aucun doute sur le fait que les Rencontres de Bamako n'étaient l'initiative ni du Ministère de la culture du Mali ni des photographes du Mali même si Françoise Huguier, très gentiment mais sans convaincre s'efforce de faire croire que c'était « un événement malien. Il s'agit de mon idée et de celle des photographes maliens. » Par contre, on la croit plus aisément quand elle ajoute : « Financièrement la France était présente, c'est un accord avec Alpha Konaré, le président de la république du Mali. » La première et la deuxième édition des Rencontres africaines de la photographie ont été pensées, montées et portées par Françoise Huguier et quelques personnes amies d'elle. Malgré les

ratés, malgré les non-dits, ces deux éditions ont été traversées par le désir passionné de la photographie, désir apporté par les photographes et les spécialistes de la photographie qui sont Huguier, Descamps, Robert Delpire, Agnès Gouvion de Saint-Cyr, Christian Caillolle, Elisabeth Benichou, Robert Pledge et autres. La hauteur professionnelle, au plan conceptuel, de ces éditions montre à quel point l'événement a été conçu, exactement, comme s'il s'agissait d'un événement photo en France. Il fut, des scénographies, des accrochages, du choix des lieux d'exposition, des discours « techniques », des choses à discuter et à débattre, comme dans les grandes rencontres autour de la photographie en France. En fait on faisait un événement « français » à Bamako : Ce sont toutes, ou presque, les figures connues et reconnues de la photographie en France qui se sont mises au service de ces rencontres de Bamako. Ce sont les mêmes experts des Rencontres d'Arles, les mêmes fonctionnaires ministériels, les mêmes critiques, les mêmes journalistes, en un mot, le même personnel de la photographie en France, à l'époque, qui s'est retrouvé aux manettes des Rencontres africaines de la photographie de Bamako en 1994 et 1996. Dès la troisième édition, les détracteurs ont commencé à tirer sur les Rencontres sous prétexte qu'elles étaient un événement extérieur. Cela est vrai certes, mais n'épuisait pas les questions sur les autres problèmes qui pointaient déjà le nez. Que l'initiative de ces rencontres ait été française, que « le tout Paris de la photographie » ait été aux commandes, que toutes les ressources financières aient été apportées par la France, tout cela n'explique pas toutes les difficultés d'exister que l'événement a connues depuis deux décennies. Une partie (la plus grande) de la responsabilité des incertitudes et des dérapages incombe à l'état malien qui n'a, depuis, dépassé le départ, que bénir et applaudir toutes ces éditions bricolées, au lieu de réfléchir à rechercher des objectifs propres et des résultats nationaux et/ou africains à atteindre dans la prétendue co-opération de l'événement avec Paris. Il existait au Mali, dans ces années 90, une forte communauté de photographes de studios et de photographes ambulants. Les Rencontres telles que pensées ne s'adressaient pas vraiment à cette communauté qui, de reste, ne se sentait pas concernée par un événement qu'elle jugeait extérieur et qu'elle pensait être fait pour les blancs. » Tout au plus, une demi-douzaine de photographes maliens a été impliquée dans les premières éditions. C'est vrai, le Mali n'était pas un de ces « pays anglophones comme le Ghana, le Nigeria, l'Afrique du sud ou encore des pays lusophones comme le Mozambique qui sont techniquement et artistiquement bien plus avancés. Leurs créations sont souvent proches de celles de leurs contemporains occidentaux. »

En l'absence d'une communauté de photographes avertis et compétents capable de porter un projet propre et national, face aux errements « incompréhensibles » de l'état malien et à son manque d'exigences de résultats, « les amis » qui sont venus, d'après eux-mêmes, pour aider, se sont retrouvés à tout penser, à tout payer, à tout faire et à tout contrôler. Puis, un jour ce ne fut plus « les amis » et ce ne fut plus pour aider...

**Chab Touré**  
Professeur d'Esthétique,  
auteur et critique d'art

1 Elise se rappelle avoir rencontré Pascal Martin Saint-Léon, son interlocuteur principal mais aussi Ngoné Fall.

2 Elise Fitte-Duval brimée », article de Youssouf Doumbia dans l'Essor du 8 décembre 1994

3 Jean Jacques Mendel, anthropologue et journaliste.

4 Huguier ne précise pas l'année de cette rencontre.

5 Un héritier de Simca devenu un important collectionneur d'art contemporain africain.

6 La Fondation Cartier exposait dès 1993 des photographies de Seydou Keïta et de Malick Sidibé à Paris.

7 Roger Aubry ne travaillait pas encore pour Afrique en création au moment de sa rencontre avec F. Huguier.

Directeur de la Fondation Africaine en Créations créée en 1990 à l'initiative de Jacques Peltier, alors ministre de la Coopération et du Développement français.

9 Amie de Françoise Huguier et fonctionnaire du ministère de la culture de France.

# jean depara night & day in kinshasa

**Texte Jean-Loup Pivin  
Pascal Martin Saint Léon**

The cities dance, the cities sing, the cities in Africa in the years 1950-60 shed the yoke of their colonial origins to move, some slowly and with difficulty, but firmly, towards the joy of their independence. Everyone knows it, everyone experiences those moments when the modern world finally becomes accessible to them, regardless of whether Black or White. In Kinshasa this is taken for the American way of life, its cars and fashionable Bills in cowboy outfits, the electric guitars, sax and music from around the world that cuts across the pool of cultural traditions of all the regions of the Congo, and even of the two Congos. Music that takes the polka, the merengue, the tango, the cha cha cha and above all the rumba into a mad dance known worldwide as "Congolese music." And above all "Zairian rumba," brought by musicians and singers from Kinshasa, giants who regenerate themselves incessantly, Franco, Rochereau, Grand Kalle, followed in the eighties by Papa Wambe, Pepe Kalle and many others. The bands of young Kinshasans are organized in groups, each one with a bandleader, with their own distinctive attire and their female muses, attending frequently one or the other of the innumerable bars/dancing halls, the Siluvangi, Amouzou, Congo Bar, Air France, Quist, Ok Bar, Chez Macauley... and supporting a music band here, Franco's OK Jazz, another one there, Joseph Kabasele's African Jazz. The numerous music labels (Ngoma, Lonzinga, Opika, Eseango, La Voix de son Maître, Philips, Olympia, Cefá) active in the area since 1940 allow the nurturing of talent and its international diffusion, and safeguard the status of singers and musicians.

That is the scenery and the lifestyle of which the photographer Jean Depara (1928 Bokobilo, Angola-1997 Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo) makes us partake with each one of his images. He dwells in that universe of which he is himself one of the entertainers: with his equipment, he is there on the same level as the young girls, the infatuated lovers, the musicians, the efficient bartenders, the exuberant barmaids, the smiling and attentive proprietor or proprietress of the Afro Mogenbo, the Champs-Elysées, the Djambé-Djambu, the Oui, the La Péruche Bleue, the Fifri or the Show Boat. In 1955, the Kongo Bar (these days turned into a church) was the most popular place in Tshoapa, just like the bar Opika (at the junction between Kabambaré and Bokassa) or, still today, the Bingabar by the Moero lake (Burumbu suburb). During the years of independence in the nineteen sixties, the city is cosmopolitan and enjoys its tolerance, welcoming Ghanians, Senegalese, Congolese, Africans from all countries as well as Europeans. Léopoldville (soon to be Kinshasa) and Brazzaville (right across, on the other side of the Congo River) live in unison. It is not until the seventies when the border between the two capitals is drawn up with a sharpening of their identities, which Mobutu's Congo, formerly Belgian Congo, then called Zaire, will affirm with its "Zairization," meant to decolonize cultural behavior. But the city of Kinshasa will continue to celebrate its mad liberty with the music, the fashion and the behavior that characterize it. Even when the "Abacost" (the anti-suit), preferred by the authoritarian and visionary president, "officially" replaces European fashions, the elegant "SAPErs" boastfully wear the latter with more eccentricity than severity!

There, the two banks of the Congo River in which the capitals would define the countries: people know the Democratic Republic of the Congo as the Congo Kinshasa, a country which today, in 2010, has more than 70 million people, 10 million of whom live in the capital, "miraculously rich" in raw materials and socially miserable, famous for its "ethnic" wars, of interests, between gangs; much like the small brother is known as the Congo Brazzaville, referring to the Republic of the Congo, a country of four million people, one and a half million of whom live in the capital, famous for its oil and its civil war, which marked the 90s.

It is precisely in this Congo, Belgian at the time, that the unending youth of Depara unwinds, in this city, Léopoldville, which will become Kinshasa. It flourishes with such liberal photography that not everything can be shown here, in accordance with his own wishes. It is, therefore, he who shows us and trusts us his images in 1995, he the man who declares himself retired from the independent photography scene since almost two decades. "The wise," he calls himself, smiling, mischievous, with a look of complicity, to tell his life, his joy of living, which was anything but "wise."

In each meeting, Depara shows us his photos, of which

the first ones are collages, a moment of play with the image. Then, countless, photos of musicians, among them those of his friend, the singer Franco, photos of the days and the nights, of plenty of women and some men, among them a number of friends. Images of the athletes who, proud of their bodies, could not be immortalized in the studios but precisely there where they paraded before their admirers, both male and female: at the pool of the Fun sports complex, multiracial hotspot for relaxation and meeting place of Kinshasans. The photos of Bills in cowboy outfits, feet trailing, hips swinging, the cigarette fumes of the hashish in their "beaks:" rogues, anarchists, vigilantes, simple followers, as if in a Western, the "Bills" become a trend, "Billism," with their own neighborhoods, which adopt the names of Buffalo Bill, Bing Bill... Depara is nearby, due to his anarchist side. One of his many stamps explicitly says Photo Foreman (against the master), the money that irks me, the woman I am digging (I don't care). And almost as evidence for the image, numerous self-portraits that simply reveal the bon vivant that he was with the most beautiful girls between his lips, or not too far away from them. In effect, naughty photos that make us discover them with a suppressed, if puerile, chuckle: "the boldest ones could not be published in Zaire," he told us, confiding in us, "not to offend the ladies that could be recognized." We shall respect his memory in relation to the young ladies... even if most of them are probably no longer there.

We met Jean Depara in the context of the magazine Revue Noire looking at Kinshasa (n°22, June 1996). A photographer from the official agency Congo Presse, Oscar Membré Freitas (whose father had been one of the first photographers in Congo), who, at the time, had photographed the mythical boxing match between Mohammed Ali and George Foreman in 1974 in Kinshasa, spoke to me about this colleague who could meet my expectations.

Depara greeted me with Oscar (also he is deceased, these days) as if he had been waiting for a long time for someone to come to see his negatives, carefully sorted in carton boxes stacked along one of the walls of his room. The courtyard was bright, clear, her welcoming protective sister never too far away. Once the Kinshasa issue was published, he was invited to a large party we organized. He wore a colonial helmet, lit up by his smile, as if to show that the mischievous Depara had been there all along, never taking himself too seriously.

Following his death in 1997, most of the negatives were destroyed. We kept to ourselves, with his approval and later that of his family, a large selection in order to be able to produce a book and prints. This little book is a sample that shall be followed by a larger project in which we worked for a long time with Francis Articlauf, our accomplice in Zaire, doctor, artist, White, music-lover, living in Kinshasa, before he was assassinated in his home, for a few pennies and a bit of love, at the start of 2010. The monographic exhibition we presented together at the Rencontre de la Photographie Africaine Bamako 2009 was the subject.

The photography scene in Africa in the fifties and sixties was a flourishing business before it became art. Photo studios and the practice of professional photography spread through the continent by the thousands. Most of them had studios such as Mama Casset in Senegal, or Seydou Keita in Mali. Studios that combined outdoors reportage, such as Malick Sidibé in Mali or Philippe Koudjina in Niger were rarer. For Depara, the lover of the nights and of the life of Kinshasa, his studio, the Jean Whisekys Depara, at 54 Kato Road, open days and nights, is more a "cock a snook" studio, as indicated by its name, and the ultimate instrument of seduction, than the place where he would truly exercise his profession.

He practices photography from 1950, the year of his marriage in the province of Matadi, with a 6x6 Adox camera. In 1951 he moves to Léopoldville, where he combines photography with a number of other trades, as shoemaker, repairing motorcycles, watches, clocks and cameras. Passport photos do not interest him, even if, as any good commercial photographer, he is forced to take them both by obligation and because his friends and relations of the night keep asking him to do them. He shuts down his studio in 1966, devoting himself entirely to exterior photography, to the reportage.

When we look at the extent of his work, the good judgment of his decision no longer warrants validation. His friendships with the Bills, the revelers of the night, and musicians, such as Franco,

that future giant of the Congolese rumba, as a seducer acting shy at his eighteen years of age, dressed in different outfitts, in a Vespa, then as an absolute star in his first American car, quickly make us understand that Jean Depara only takes photos from the heart, in which we can feel the sensuality in every captured glance. You had to be this talented and tireless dilettante to be amused by everything, and to desire everything, to have his photographic eye preying constantly, his "bow in a shoulder strap," as he used to like to call his flash camera and the arrows that he shot on his targets: the sharp eye never misses its subject. This blessed period lasted until the middle of the seventies. He did not tire, but the times had changed, the glow of independence began to be shaded with a tense political climate, color photography had taken over with more responsive and less demanding competitors - Depara was no fan of color, which "took all relief from the images" - with automatic photo labs overrunning the place with lower and lower prices, with clients becoming photographers themselves with easy-to-use cameras accessible to all. The times become harder for him, too. And the dilettante does not enjoy the commercial battle week in, week out. There is less heart in it, even if there is still the same pleasure as ever to be part of the nights, set alight by the music bands, big and small, by the "gestures" of the SAPErs, by the pleasure of all, until the break of dawn. During this period of "Zairization" of the country, after 1974, plenty of Europeans left the country and opened positions. He becomes lab photographer for Parliament in 1975



*Untitled*, 2014. © Nobukho Nqaba. Courtesy of the artist & Art Meets Camera

## nobukho nqaba

### Umaskhenkethé

#### Likhaya Lam

Unomgcana or Umaskhenkethé is the Xhosa word for the plastic mesh bag, which is made in China. Unomgcana means 'the one with lines' and Umaskhenkethé means 'the traveler.' In South Africa the bags are more commonly known as China bags, Zimbabwe bags, Khumbulekhaya bags or Mashangaan bags. These bags are ubiquitous and go by many names: the 'Ghana must go home' bag in Nigeria, 'Bangladesh bag' in the UK, 'Turkish bag' in Germany, 'Mexican bag' in the US and 'Guyanese Samsonite' in the Caribbean. These alienating names reveal something of the anxiety expressed towards the carriers of these bags in the communities they relocate to. These bags have become global symbols of migration – not only across borders but also within countries. They are objects that carry a home and act as a means of survival for one who does not have much. The bag is a personal reminder of my own migration within South Africa. I have experienced many of the challenges of a migrant and it took me a long time to adjust to life in the places that I have moved to. I grew up surrounded by Unomgcana. I remember when my mother (who worked in Grabouw) would visit our family in the Eastern Cape during the off season. She would bring umphako (treats for the family), which often included a half-

cooked chicken stuffed with raw onions, lots and lots of apples, and a few items of clothing. During school holidays, I would travel to Grabouw and my father would pack my belongings in Unomgcana. The bag was an everyday object used by many people travelling from the Eastern Cape to Cape Town. At the Langa bus terminal, massive Unomgcana would be packed, with people's names written on to avoid them being lost or mistaken. This series of photographs reflects on my memories of growing up using the bag. For me it symbolizes a home. I have a love-hate relationship with the bag because for me it is a symbol of struggle – growing up as part of a family with my mother as the breadwinner – we often did not have enough to live on but tried to maintain a stable home. At the same time, it reminds me of where I come from and gives me more drive to succeed in life. Unomgcana has always been my companion, throughout my childhood life and journeys. It has been my comfort and my home.

Text published in *Snapped by Art Africa*, fall 2014.



Plastic crown © Phumzile Khanyile. Courtesy of the artist & afronova gallery

## afronova

Texte Emilie Demon  
& Henri Vergon

**L**a création photographique sur le continent africain est en pleine effervescence et explore sans cesse de nouveaux territoires artistiques et politiques.

Les photographes et artistes rencontrent de nouvelles audiences à travers le monde et consolident une visibilité internationale incontestable. Grâce à une présence originale et significative dans les biennales ou dans les foires d'art contemporain comme Paris Photo ou 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair à Londres, New York et Marrakech, une économie saine s'est développée autour de la production photographique africaine. Soutenue par une critique informée et une documentation abondante, avec les remarquables publications d'*Afrique in Visu, something we Africans got, Gup, Aperture* ou encore *Camera Austria*, qui consacrent des dossiers entiers à des artistes du continent et de la diaspora, les photographes africains sont fermement engagés dans la conversation globale. Ce dynamisme artistique ouvre les portes d'institutions internationales prestigieuses à l'exemple de la Fondation Louis Vuitton, la Fondation Prada, La Maison Rouge, Les Galeries Lafayette, la Fondation Cartier, ou encore la Fondation Astrup Fearnley. Les photographes africains jouissent d'une visibilité accrue dans les musées à travers le monde et sur le continent africain, avec notamment des expositions passionnantes au MACAAL à Marrakech, ou au musée Iziko à Cape Town. Ce sont aussi des rendez-vous et manifestations ancrés en Afrique, à Bamako, Addis, Dakar ou Lagos, qui stimulent la création et nourrissent la pensée artistique. Ces rencontres sont de solides plateformes pour un débat

vigoureux et un partage d'expertises et de réseaux. Le robuste marché de la photographie africaine est porté par des collectionneurs avisés en Europe et aux États-Unis essentiellement, et dans une moindre mesure en Afrique. Des collections sérieuses valorisent leurs acquisitions à travers des lieux d'expositions et des publications à la manière de la Collection Artur Walther. Bon nombre de galeries d'art contemporain embrassent aujourd'hui la production artistique et photographique émanant du continent et présentent les travaux de vétérans aux côtés de plus jeunes générations, pour le plus grand plaisir des amateurs et des collectionneurs. Même les salles des ventes d'Europe, des États-Unis et d'Afrique du Sud rivalisent sur ce marché porteur en plein éprouvement. Depuis plus de quinze ans, la galerie AFRONOA (Johannesburg) accompagne l'émergence d'une nouvelle culture photographique en Afrique du Sud, tout en produisant des expositions majeures de photographes du continent comme Malick Sidibé ou Ricardo Rangel. Nous avons eu la joie de collaborer avec des photographes merveilleux comme Nontsikelelo Veleko, Jodi Bieber, Andrew Tshabangu, Mauro Pinto, Roger Ballen, Musa Nxumalo et Malala Andrálavídrázana. Aujourd'hui, nous avons le privilège de représenter internationalement le travail de quelques-unes des photographes les plus avant-gardistes d'Afrique du Sud comme Lebohang Kganyane, Phumzile Khanyile, Elsa Bleida, Alice Mann et Nombuso Bhorhozi – toutes des jeunes femmes de moins de trente ans – ainsi que des photographies historiques comme celles de John Liebenberg. Ceci offre une lecture pertinente des développements sur la durée d'une photographie majoritairement documentaire et politique, se dirigeant vers une photographie plus personnelle et en conversation avec les autres formes de création - film, animation, AR/VR, installations et autres performances. Grâce aux relations fortes avec chacun des photographes, nous avons pu récemment présenter leurs travaux sur des plateformes internationales importantes avec une réponse

critique et une reconnaissance artistique massives. Récemment, Lebohang Kganyane s'est vue décerner le prix de *Camera Austria*, le CAP Prize 2017, ou encore le prix de photographie de Tokyo, tandis qu'Alice Mann recevait le Grand Prix du Festival de Hyères, et Phumzile Khanyile le CAP Prize 2018... La réponse commerciale est à la hauteur. Nous participons à plusieurs foires d'art contemporain en Europe et aux États-Unis, avec des ventes soutenues pour chacun des photographes. Nous revenons tout juste de New York pour une cinquième édition spectaculaire de la foire 1:54 que nous ferons aussi à Londres en octobre, puis nous serons sur Paris Photo, en collaboration avec la Galerie Magnin-A, ainsi que sur Salon a ppr oc he, qui a lieu à Paris en même temps - une jeune foire fantastique dédiée à la photo contemporaine. Si le printemps africain 2017 en France semble parfois déjà lointain, il est évident que les photographes du continent participent activement au discours urbain contemporain sur tous les fronts, jouissant d'une appréciation renouvelée et sont le sujet d'un engouement durable.

En 2020, de nombreuses manifestations et expositions continueront à mettre en avant la scène artistique africaine en France et ailleurs. La photo africaine a la cote !

Emilie Demon & Henri Vergon  
Afronova gallery, Johannesburg

# 2006 2019, hier aujourd'hui demain

Texte Jeanne Mercier

## 2006

En 2006, lorsque nous avons lancé la plateforme Afrique *in visu* à Bamako, l'idée était de montrer sans distinction toutes les facettes d'une profession allant du photojournalisme à la photographie documentaire en passant par le studio ou la photographie d'art. Tout simplement, ce que signifie être photographe sur le continent? En Europe, c'était un temps où, les seules images, provenant du continent, qui figuraient dans les livres, les médias, les écoles montraient toujours la famine, pauvreté, désert, guerre. Nous voulions voir autre chose ... Un monde moins réduit à son stéréotype.

Ce fut une période charnière, à une époque où plusieurs chercheurs et photographes tentaient, chacun à leur manière, de surmonter les faiblesses du développement d'outils de collaboration sur le continent. Pour certains, c'était à travers la création de collectifs, tels que Depth of Field ou Black Box, pour d'autres, la création de festivals, comme la Biennale de Lubumbashi, ou le Festival de la photo de Lagos ou des plateformes Web comme *Afriphoto* et nous avec *Afrique *in visu**.

Notre idée première était de créer un réseau sur tout le continent lequel, à commencer par les forces techniques et théoriques de chaque pays, produirait un riche échange d'expertise et de connaissances. Au départ donc, l'objectif était de mettre en contact des professionnels du continent, quelle que soit leur nationalité, leur origine ou leur affiliation, et de diffuser la création contemporaine pour permettre l'échange de savoir-faire photographique. À travers des interviews ou des articles figurant sur le site, nous avons voulu illustrer la diversité et les différences entre les pratiques photographiques sur le continent et les approches multiples, parfois même contradictoires, de la profession. Nous étions bien avant Instagram, Internet était très lent, personne n'avait son propre site Web à ce moment-là et il était très difficile pour les artistes de voyager. Soudainement, Internet est devenu le meilleur endroit pour regarder / montrer la photographie.

## 2006/2019

Aujourd'hui en 2019, *Afrique *in visu** n'a plus le même rôle, le contexte ayant complètement évolué. La plateforme est une archive vivante de la pratique de la photographie en Afrique. Aucune tentative de prétendre à l'existence d'une histoire de la photographie africaine. Un seul leitmotiv, un territoire qui transcende les frontières terrestres et maritimes de l'Afrique. *Afrique *in Visu** représente un nombre considérable d'histoires d'un continent révélées par des photographies qui tentent de remplacer toutes les images et stéréotypes qui lui sont associés. Depuis sa création, *Afrique *in Visu** a publié plus de 1300 articles par une centaine de contributeurs à travers le monde, exposé plusieurs expositions en Europe et en Afrique, organisé des ateliers et offert son soutien à des projets photographiques. Le notre n'a jamais suivi un plan prédefini. Il a toujours évolué en fonction des photographes, de leurs projets et de ce que nous avons développé en collaboration.

Le contexte a donc changé. Aujourd'hui les outils pour être visibles sont multiples. Instagram, que, comme le reste du monde, les photographes du continent utilisent quotidiennement. Et il y a aussi de multiples relais, des commissaires, critiques, plateformes, festivals sur le continent et ailleurs qui illustrent comment l'Afrique est désormais pensée différemment parce que la géographie évolue au rythme des mouvements, des connexions et de la circulation des hommes et des idées. Il suffit juste de s'y intéresser.

Ce que la plateforme *Afrique *in Visu** nous a permis d'observer, c'est l'évolution de la pratique des photographes, l'évolution du discours autour du continent par des commissaires ou critiques. Il est maintenant possible voir des artistes du continent

partout, de Lisbonne, New York, Paris, Madrid ou Tokyo. Il faut tout de même chercher toujours plus loin pour ne pas montrer toujours les mêmes. Comme on devrait aussi d'ailleurs le faire pour les photographes en Europe, en Asie ou en Amérique.

De nos jours, les photographes montrent un habitant, un territoire, complexe, nourri par l'histoire, la confrontation coloniale mais aussi la mondialisation. Ils cherchent dialogue et affrontement et soulèvent la question de la décolonisation de notre histoire mais surtout de notre vision.

## DEMAIN

L'avenir nous dira si les institutions, les commissaires, les critiques, les médias sauront prendre le train en marche pour enfin répondre à la négative à l'idée que « l'Afrique est à la mode » pour affirmer que l'art, les artistes comme tous les acteurs confondus du continent ne sont plus à envisager comme un focus, une saison, une continent invité mais font partie intégrante d'un marché réellement mondial.

Jeanne Mercier  
pour *Afrique *in visu**

Jeanne Mercier est critique et commissaire depuis 2006 basée entre l'Europe et l'Afrique. Elle est co-fondatrice et rédactrice en chef d'*Afrique *in visu**, plateforme indépendante autour du métier de photographes en Afrique (2006). [www.afriqueinvisu.org](http://www.afriqueinvisu.org)  
Formée en Histoire de l'Art et de la Photographie, elle a réalisé en 2005 un mémoire sur « Les Rencontres Africaines de la Photographie » (LHIVIC-EHESS). Elle travaille sur les nouvelles pratiques de la photographie autour du continent africain. Aujourd'hui, elle partage son temps entre Afrique *in visu* et des commissariats pour plusieurs festivals et expositions en Europe et Afrique. Elle écrit régulièrement pour différentes revues sur les arts visuels et collabore avec des artistes, musées, galeries, résidences pour des textes d'expositions.

# francoise huguier

Texte Laurence Cornet

**S** L'histoire de Françoise Huguier avec l'Afrique remonte au début des années 90, quand elle entreprend un voyage d'un an sur les traces de la mission ethnographique de Michel Leiris. L'année suivante, elle publie « Retour sur l'Afrique Fantôme », un récit à la fois personnel et sociologique de tous les pays qu'elle a traversés. Elle y retourne souvent par la suite, intéressée par ses shamans et ses virtuoses. Elle profite d'être une femme pour pénétrer l'intimité des africaines jusque dans leurs chambres, et en a sorti le livre « Secrètes », « C'est vrai qu'en Afrique j'ai pu entrer dans la chambre des femmes, alors que c'est très codifié. Même les hommes n'y ont pas accès si facilement, car c'est là où elles gardent leurs secrets. En Afrique on ne donne pas ses secrets - ni à sa famille, ni à ses enfants - car on estime que cela donne au dépositaire un pouvoir sur vous. Beaucoup de choses ne se sont pas transmises à cause de cela », explique-t-elle.

Son travail sur l'Afrique, elle tient à l'exposer sur place. A la publication de *Retour sur l'Afrique Fantôme*, elle s'arrange pour avoir une exposition au musée de Bamako. C'est alors le début de nombreux aller-retours puisqu'elle propose alors à Afrique en Crédit de faire des stages avec des photographes maliens. Par hasard, elle découvre les maintenant incontournables photographies de studio Malick Sidibé et Seydou Keita. « Je les ai montrés à Actuel, au ministère de la Culture, personne ne trouvait cela terrible jusqu'à l'arrivée d'André Magnin ! », se rappelle-t-elle.

C'était en 1994 et elle se dit qu'il serait intéressant d'organiser une exposition – et pourquoi pas une biennale – avec trois photographes maliens. « Il faut remettre les choses en place, ce n'était pas que moi ! », insiste-t-elle. Mais ça devait être au Mali. « Car le Mali, c'est la lumière ! », s'exclame-t-elle, avant d'en expliquer l'origine. « J'ai rencontré Souleymane Cissé en 1987 quand il a reçu le prix du jury de Cannes pour Yeelen et l'ai accompagné à son retour au Mali. Yeelen veut dire lumière en Bambara. Le Mali, c'est la lumière - en intérieur, j'utilise du 800asa, alors qu'en extérieur il faut du 200asa ! » Françoise Huguier s'est depuis détachée de la Biennale, même si elle suit son actualité de près. « Cette année, le commissaire est un Camerounais-Allemard, qui a choisi pour thème « le flux de conscience ». Il a écrit un texte imitable en citant Deleuze et en disant que c'est la biennale de la décolonisation. La décolonisation c'était en 62 ! Que ce soit la biennale de la post-décolonisation je veux bien mais pas la décolonisation ! Il y a du boulot encore ! », commente-t-elle.

De son côté, elle continue les workshops avec les photographes maliens une fois par an avec le soutien de la Fondation Blachère. Le résultat de l'édition 2017, sous le titre « A l'Est de Bamako », était exposé le mois dernier à la Fondation Blachère. Basé sur les archives des étudiants maliens formés en ex-URSS dans les années 60, il éclairait sur un aspect peu documenté de la guerre froide en Afrique - celle de la coopération soviéto-malienne. Les étudiants de Françoise Huguier ont fouillé ces archives et sont partis à la rencontre des artistes, philosophes, médecins, ambassadeurs qui ont fait leurs études en Union Soviétique avant de revenir au Mali. « Le nouveau directeur du musée de Bamako a fait ses études d'archéologie en Union Soviétique et veut à tout prix l'exposition », ajoute-t-elle. En attendant, elle regrette que la production africaine n'ait pas la place qu'elle mérite sur la place internationale. A commencer par les Rencontres d'Arles. « J'ai demandé l'année dernière à Sam Stroudzé s'il avait entendu parler du continent africain », s'exclame-t-elle. Affaire à suivre.

Laurence Cornet  
Texte extrait d'un entretien à paraître dans *woman paper* novembre 2019  
Laurence Cornet est journaliste indépendante



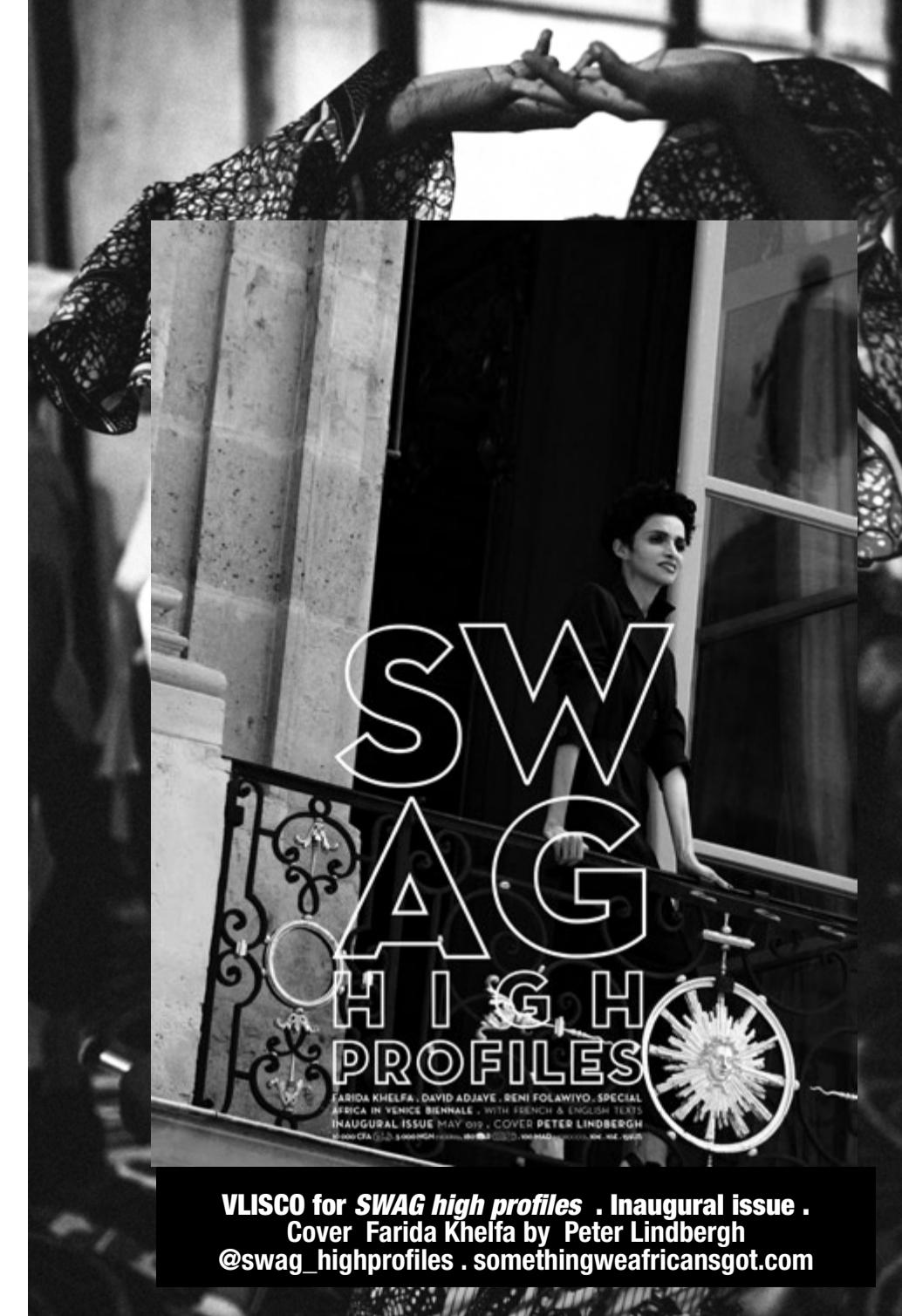
© Rena Effendi Woman baking bread, 2006

# ILEX Gallery

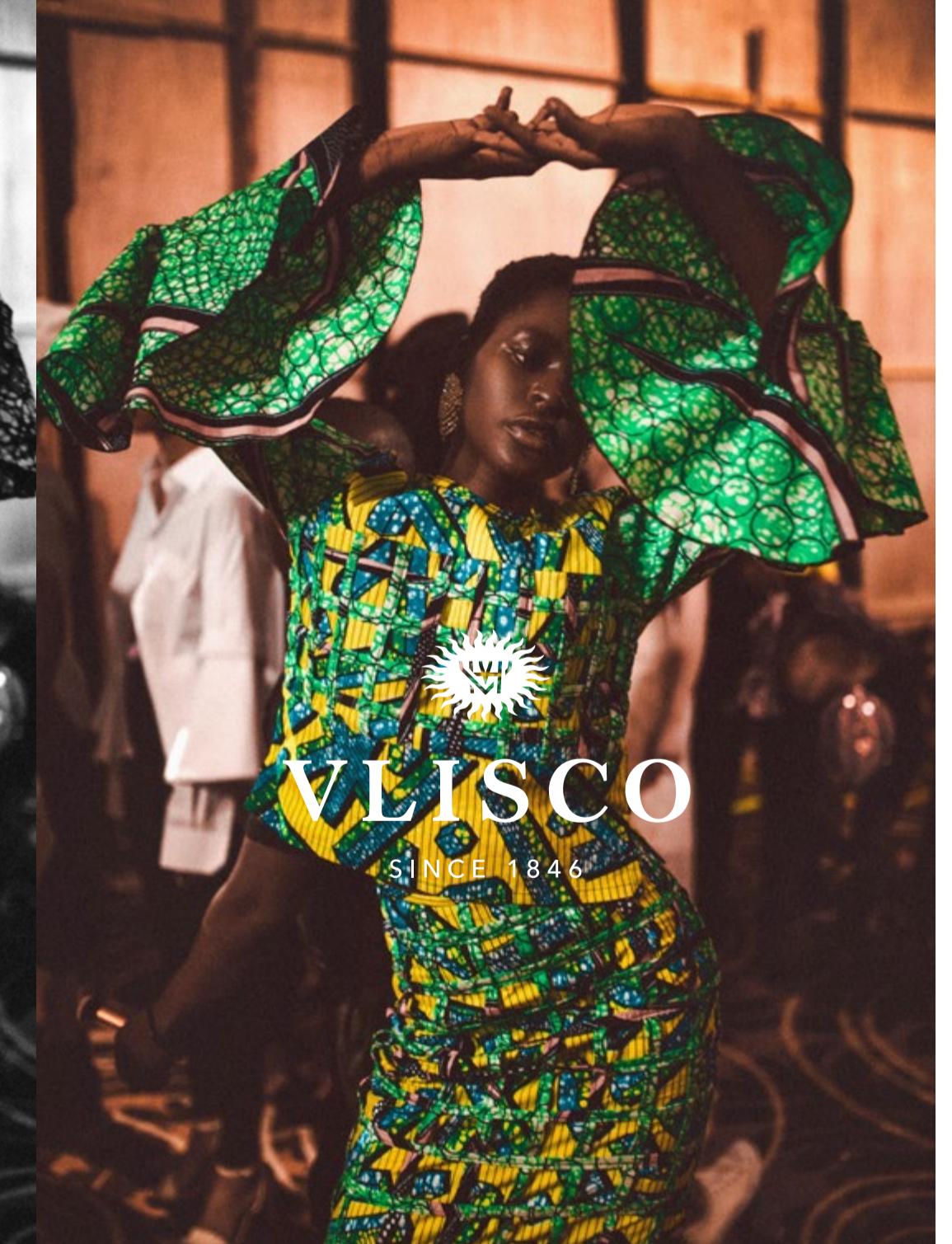
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# L'afrique, d'une mode périodique à une attribution thématique

Texte Olfa Feki

**U**n vague d'aigreur a noyé les réseaux sociaux suite aux propos de Sam Stourdzé, directeur des Rencontres d'Arles interviewé par Roxana Azimi sur l'absence de photographes africains pour l'édition du festival. « Venant d'un professionnel comme lui, c'est une réponse maladroite, une forme de naïveté ou d'honnêteté, mais tenir de tels propos au vingt-et-unième siècle, avec tous les moyens de recherche dont on dispose aujourd'hui, c'est inadmissible », rétorque Igo Diarra, le nouveau délégué général des Rencontres de Bamako (Biennale africaine de la photographie, NDLR). Certes, la réponse paraît inopinée, mais Arles n'est pas le seul festival au monde à ne pas donner assez d'importance aux acteurs africains. Toutes les manifestations majeures sont quasi inaccessibles. Peu importe la qualité du travail de l'artiste ou l'expérience avérée du commissaire, pour en être, il faut faire partie des bons cercles, connaître les bonnes personnes ou battre sans relâche. « Il faut toujours passer par quelqu'un ou par une galerie pour être sûr d'être montré à Arles », déplore Georges Senga, artiste RD congolais de la région de Lubumbashi. Doit-on pour autant s'offenser de ce genre de pratiques ? On est désormais habitués au fait que les cercles des institutions demeurent fermés pour certains et accessibles pour d'autres, ainsi qu'à leurs programmations, à la fois politisées et étroites. Heureusement, aujourd'hui, beaucoup de figures africaines de renom ont compris que de telles manifestations ne représentent plus des passages obligés pour leur carrière, mais surtout que l'intérêt se porte aujourd'hui sur les événements « hors circuits officiels » qui laissent une vraie liberté aux artistes et aux commissaires. On remarque de plus en plus l'apparition de micro-manifestations qui s'organisent dans les ateliers d'artistes, dans des hôtels ou au sein d'espaces non conventionnels. Et à l'évidence, les acteurs culturels découvrent enfin une nouvelle sorte d'extase et de satisfaction. Il ne s'agit plus de combler les bailleurs de fonds ni d'atteindre un public précis, mais de réellement concrétiser des projets plus personnels. Toutefois, le dérange vraiment dans la réponse du directeur des Rencontres d'Arles, c'est qu'apparemment, la photographie africaine ne convienne pas à la thématique. On commence à s'habituier à l'idée que l'Afrique soit l'objet d'une mode périodique, mais serions-nous aussi devenus victimes d'une thématique attribuée par le biais d'une perception erronée ? Cette image est-elle, une fois de plus, le reflet de l'ignorance honteuse des décideurs ou celui d'une polémique interne ? La manière dont l'Afrique est, aujourd'hui encore, perçue comme deux continents distincts - l'Afrique du Nord et l'Afrique noire - est perturbante. « Des Noirs pour sujets, mais aucun derrière l'objectif » (reprise d'une citation de l'article de Roxana Azimi pour le *Monde Afrique* paru le 10 mai 2019, NDLR). « Cela me dérange beaucoup. Je suis Noir mais beaucoup d'autres ne le sont pas. Ne pas voir l'Afrique au-delà de la couleur de la peau, c'est un vrai problème. » Ajoute Abdo Shanan, photographe membre du collectif 220. Pendant longtemps, les Nord Africains ont été ralliés à l'Europe, de par leur proximité et leur couleur de peau, mais aussi parce qu'ils étaient arabes et maghrébins. Les Africains sub-sahariens ont, quant à eux, gardé cette image, et rares ont été les moments de coopération visant à les rallier. Cette ambiguïté, qui engendre des rapports factices et forcés, n'est que le fruit d'une histoire identitaire perturbée par les différentes périodes coloniales. Les Européens se sentent coupables, et les Africains susceptibles. En conséquence, on a parfois tendance à oublier le fond du sujet. Il est évident que ce n'est pas une généralité, mais cela demeure une réalité problématique.

D'autre part, en réponse à l'absence africaine lors de cette 50ème édition, une bourse de recherche curatoriale pour les commissaires africains a été mise en place en partenariat avec l'Institut français pour les rencontres d'Arles 2020. Un appel qui ne laisse pas le temps d'agir : les candidatures ne sont ouvertes que pour un mois, et il est demandé de présenter un projet de recherches très détaillé sur un calendrier d'un an. Par conséquent, plusieurs acteurs africains se demandent si les relais africains sont si inaccessibles qu'une invitation directe comme pour tout autre commissaire européen ne soit pas envisageable. Où s'il s'agit d'une forme maladroite d'ouverture.

« Ils essaient tout simplement de dissimuler leurs dégâts. Maintenant que les questions sont posées, ils veulent être perçus comme faisant quelque chose à ce sujet. Mais c'est tout de même une opportunité. Si les gens ne postulent pas pour entrer dans le système - même si le processus rabaisse l'Afrique - les choses pourraient rester les mêmes, » déclare le Sud-Africain Lekgetho James Makola. Et le directeur du Market Photo Workshop (école de photographie basée à Johannesburg,

# the marathon continues

Text Niama Safia Sandy

**L**es Rencontres d'Arles is widely recognized as a major event on the global photography scene. On their website the organizers purport that the festival is at the forefront "in disseminating the best of world photography," and acts as a "springboard for photographic and contemporary creative talents." This July the festival will celebrate its 50th edition ; a landmark occasion for obvious reasons, but there is something in the shadows of the frame that gives me pause. Of the over sixty photographers and visual artists whose work will be on view, there are no Black artists invited. Black is not simply defined for me as a racial designation. While its an encompassment of skin color, it is also one of cultural positionalities that are inclusive of the lived experiences and cultural productions of people of dark-skinned African people dispersed globally. To tell the truth, it is not terribly mind boggling or surprising as it is neither the first nor the last slight in a long history of the art world's exclusion and misrepresentation of Black people and their culture, but I genuinely find it hard to imagine that the organizers and their partners were not able to find more imagemakers of diverse backgrounds to participate in this year's festival. For clarity, I am aware of the participation of Mohamed Bourouissa, a Franco-Algerian visual artist of North African descent who grew up in the banlieues outside of Paris. Mr. Bourouissa's work is important and inclusive in that he often turns his lens and focus to the depiction of young Black and Brown men. While I cannot speak to the specifics of his ethnic background, generally, most North Africans do not self-identify as Black. Even if he does identify as Black, one person out of well over 60 is nothing to brag about.

My practice as an anthropologist, curator and writer is critically engaged with the creation and evaluation of the mechanisms of visibility for artists and people outside of the dominant culture in the West. That often means illuminating the blindspots, and asking difficult questions toward the cultivation of empathy. Empathy is the one thing that can inspire change in hearts and minds. I believe that the cultivation of empathy will lead to new pathways for all of humankind. The absence of Black photographers at Rencontres d'Arles, particularly in this moment where diversity and inclusion are among the most pressing concerns, begs a few difficult questions: can a festival truly claim to offer the "best of world photography" if large swaths of diverse populations are excluded?

In a moment where

# Les canons décomplexés de la photographie africaine

Texte Igo Diarra

En prévision de la des Rencontres africaines de la photographie, Bamako a jeté loin ses files pour ramener de nouveaux passeurs d'images, qui ont fait la gloire de la ville aux trois caimans. En Afrique, à l'instar de toutes les disciplines artistiques contemporaines, la photographie rayonne de vitalité, de créativité, d'humour et d'enthousiasme. Elle rayonne aussi géographiquement car les événements se multiplient sur le continent, plus d'une dizaine à l'heure actuelle, dont Addis Photo, la Biennale de Lubumbashi, Lagos Photos.

La photographie africaine, extrêmement dynamique, est portée par une grande adhésion populaire, militante, quasiment palpable. Pour preuve, l'organisation l'an passé à Bamako d'une Inter-Biennale, par les jeunes photographes eux-mêmes sous la houlette du feu leur ainé Seydou Camara et de Photo Art. L'initiative a reçu un très bel accueil du public s'appropriant l'événement, le suivant dans les rues de la capitale.

C'est en effet surtout lors des Rencontres africaines de la photographie de Bamako, lieu fondateur, Biennale mère de toutes,

édition #50

que s'expriment toutes les tendances du continent, sa diversité, son dynamisme. Les photographes, en provenance du monde toute l'Afrique y sont présents en grand nombre. Les artistes contemporains présents y expriment, de manière consciente, leur propre regard dans un discours plastique universel. Marcus Gravey, disait-il pas qu'il est bon de voir à travers ses propres lunettes

Leurs œuvres, comme c'est le cas de la musique, des arts plastiques, parcourent aussi le monde, irriguant d'autres continents qui s'y intéressent, au-delà des différentes diasporas.

La prochaine édition en novembre prochain peut s'inspirer

des atouts du continent africain, de sa jeunesse, de sa

fougue, de son potentiel humain et économique.

Elle peut s'imprégner des propres concepts de philosophie

et de l'humanisme de l'Afrique - Maya -, de l'hospitalité,

de la joie de vivre, de l'authenticité qu'on y respire, et

du concept d'hospitalité - Djé Tigi « de la commissaire

indépendante Nakhama Diakité Prats qui vont étonnés.

La très inspirante photographie malienne continue à porter, par

ses exemples illustres, Seydou Keita, Malick Sidibé, Alioune Bâ,

un éclairage à la fois historique, traditionnel et contemporain

mais les aspirations de ces jeunes artistes, leur volontarisme

révolutionnaire

et le concept d'hospitalité - Djé Tigi « de la commissaire

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Sarah Preston, portrait de James Barnor pour le numéro «photographie africaine» de la revue OFF the wall. Courtesy of the artist

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