

In Many Voices Art Speaks “Narrating History in the Mirror of Its Own History”

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Abstract

Grounding Dak'Art on Exhibitions that showcased emergent African and other non-western art productions, processes and styles, this article avers a history. Instrumental to impacting visibility for modern and contemporary African art in the international arena and the comprehensive contexts of African artistic modernity in the 20th century, these shows are feasible links of African history and art history. In the creation of storylines, fairs in the past did not only function as locations of display but conveyor-belts of repeats, reincarnations and recalibrations characteristic of African art and its histories in perpetual flux (Belting 2009:54). Dak'Art 2022 narrates the deft celebration of diversity, liberty and freedom of expression. This essay takes the works of three (3) artists to reflect art that speaks in many voices' in African art and its history. Indeed, Dak'Art 2022 constructs narratives of art modernism, modernity and enkindling spirituality that significantly make exhibitions active means in those narratives.

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Background to the Study

Dak' Art (1990), *Biennale des Lettres*, Dakar; was dedicated to Senegalese president Leopold Senghor (1960-1980). Staged as a literary festival made-up of four panels: African languages, cultural production, African aesthetics, and Africa and its Diaspora Affairs. It also included music, theater, dance and an art exhibition. *Dak' Art* was geared to present an Africa-centered vision of international contemporary art by concentrating on artists with ties to Africa. This was also an occasion to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the *Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Negres*. Senghor created the unwavering *fiesta* in April 1966 to reveal the demise of colonialism in Africa, and to showcase a pan-African rebirth that went beyond nationalist structures.

An exhibition titled *Tendances et Confrontations*, was organized as a crucial component of the 1966 festival. That exhibition would later be viewed as the forerunner of *Dak' Art* biennials, and other major exhibitions of modern and contemporary African art that have proliferated in decades. Distinctive among these are: *Africa Explores*, Museum of African Art, New York (1991); *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*, the Whitechapel gallery, London (1995); *The Short Century* (Museum Villa Stuck, Munich, (2001); Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin (2001); Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, (2001); P.S.1 New York (2002); and *Africa Remix* (Museum Kunst Palast, Du'sseldorf (2004); Hayward Gallery, London (2005); Centre Georges Pompidou (2005); Mori Art Museum 2006); Johannesburg Art Gallery (2007).

These shows created significant visibility for modern and contemporary African art in the international arena. They articulated wide-ranging contexts of African artistic modernity in the 20th century, employing frameworks that put exhibitions as epistemological grounds for engaging the intersection of African history and art history. Hans Belting, empathizing on the role of museum exhibitions in the creation of art historical narratives, says that museum displays in the past did not only serve as shows but were active agents "in narrating history in the mirror of its own history" (Belting 2009, 54). Following that train of thought, this paper puts exhibitions as sites of knowledge production that construct narratives of art modernism and the consciousness of modernity, but more importantly active means in those narratives.

Presenting a convivial platform of African artistic modernism in the 20th century these shows maintained expositions as epistemological grounds for congenial links of African history and art history. As art chronological storylines, however, Exhibitions in the past did not only serve as sites of display but were active agents in telling stories that reflected the times and spaces of peoples' emergent visual histories.

Tendances et Confrontations was the most important exhibition of modern art in Africa in the 1960s. It displayed works of leading African modernists and Black artists from Haiti, Brazil, Canada, United States and Trinidad and Tobago. The exhibition, under the patronages of the First World Festival of Negro Arts, enabled the standing of Dakar as an international cultural center of modern art in Africa. Building on the success of that show, Senghor 's government in the 70s started the series '*Masters of Modern Art*'. The sequence

attracted the leading lights of the international modernist movement, including Pablo Picasso.

The emergence of *Dak'Art* as the first biennial in Africa, in the 1990s, re-shaped Africa's engagement with the international art world. It catalysed changes in artistic identity, proficiency, and mobility by African artists everywhere, who began to construct new forms of social engagement and aesthetic production. *Dak'Art* has strengthened Dakar's reputation as the venue for a continual mobilisation of a nascent contemporary African art world. Although budgetary limitations have distressed support for the arts in Africa, *Dak'Art*, now in its 14th edition, is funded solely by the government of Senegal. In exhibitions artists and cultural producers from the continent and its diaspora converge in Dakar for the fiesta. Beyond *Tendances et Confrontations* (1966), *Africa Explores* (1991); and even *Africa Remix* (2007), a modernist era representing key junctures put the more contemporary with its insistent *transvangardisation*, stylistic and conceptual complexities, origins and intellectual paths in perspective.

This paper focuses on (I) a discourse of *Dak'Art* 2022, its intellectual groundings, practice and processes; art and art history as an elongation of the discourses initiated by key artists of *Dak'Art* 2016: Eikhamenor (Nigeria) and Limoud (Egypt); and (II) a hermeneutic discourse of three (3) participating visual artists' artworks to demonstrate the inflection of the new regime of images and imageries that state the spirit of the age. 2022's biennale (postponed from 2020 due to the pandemic) is titled "*I Ndaffa*", a *Serer* expression, insinuates "*Out of the Fire*"; alluding to a blacksmith's forge, where material is transformed, and meanings are made. Dakar itself is metaphorically its cauldron, with sprawling shows and events known as "*Le OFF*". That expanse reaches the outskirts and secondary towns.

This intellectual sparkle reflects the sense of myriad projects hatched and advanced with a pan Africanist/global South orientation energy that resonates beyond its main curated events. Most regulars come for the *OFF*. The lead curated show is held in a former courthouse now maintained in an evocative state of decay. *OFF* spans a display of ground-breaking conceptual projects that echo the ethos and regime of the epoch.

Reflecting the millennium and man's being-in-the-world is symbolized in the artworks as icons that tell of that time and space. Space permits understanding of how things and events relate to one another. The concept of time plays a crucial role in that analogy. Exhibitions are readings of the sequence of arty things. The celebration of happenings defines time. Hence, defining time relative to happenings, shows appear as benchmarks. Space translates to a void when devoid of occasions that define time (Ugiomoh, 2022:8). Space as an accessory to things locates images forged in time. Consciousness of time, sequestering in what humans do, is man's prerogative. Such awareness undergirds the expectations in this exhibition. Artists' creations translate as cultural codes that define time within the limitlessness of space in envelopes, solids and planes.

"In a bloom of one thousand flowers", Dak'Art 2022 artists in a fever of post-independence express in their art the ethos of freedom and in personal expressions reflect spontaneous emotions and sensibilities that echoed the remnant of self. Art aggregates to the remnants of an artist's encounter with the sensible world of sight, touch, and feeling (Shahn, 1957). The effect was romanticism undergirding personal self-interests, unpacked narcissisms inflecting a withdrawal to interiority, subjectivism and the interrogation of self. In celebrations of diversity the artists presented ways of seeing their art worlds. In adroit narratives and engaging new materials: the renewables and the ready-mades, artists broke away from the One Story / One Narrative and totalization of knowledge.

Indeed, with a nose in the air for the spirit of the dawn, artists foisted their own discourses. Hence, in unique feats of shapes and forms, and visual metaphors crystallise the accumulation of human actions symbolically arrested and stored as cultural codes that the artworks recite. This is the demand that this study as "*history of things*" represents. The visual artist plays diverse roles as a visible member of community, within its social and cultural space. Artists generate metaphors, as much as they make up the ever-changing identity of themselves and society. Artists' memories are dependable retrievers, crystallised as Images and imageries driven on as visual information for all to see and read.

Gleaning the Groundings of Artistic Substance

Disaggregation of the colonial world was initiated at independence and self-rule in the colonies; but the intellectual leadership of their world remained in the hands of the former masters. However, the collapse of the Enlightenment paradigm forced emancipation and a revelation of truth: the Black contribution to the dynamism of the intellectual new world order was a *sine qua non* to the future. It is on this threshold that the philosophical posture *Negritude* rebounds. Engagement with literary paradigms, specifically Texts that charge black resistance, such as the philosophy of *Negritude*, with inspiration from Philosophy and Poetry, particularly Jean-Paul Sartre's ground-breaking *Anthology of African and West Indian Poetry*, edited by Leopold Sedar-Senghor *Anthologie de la nouvelle poesie negre et Malagache de langue francias* (1948); and Aime Cesaire's *Poetry and Knowledge*; extensive in anti-Cartesian knowledge that inspired the cultural roles of poetic imagination. It is, therefore, necessary to mention Sartre's "aesthetic historicism" and its response to the Enlightenment paradigm that informed the *natural synthesis* 1960s regarding the place of imagination, poetry and myth-making to bear on a conversation on the inflection of Cesairean poetry and Sartre's *Black Orpheus* (1967). Indeed, *negritude* key to black consciousness, points to its entrenching of poetry and myth in the creation of awareness, culture and community.

Sartre like the Cartesians thinkers, understanding of earlier societies, recognized a study of language and myth were indispensable, while emphasizing the role of imagination and mythopoeic creation in the development of history. That vision is appropriately called "aesthetic historicism". Grant (2018) claims that such a man-made method of historical criticism presents a history that connects mind's eye, metaphor and myth to the creation of the gods by the poet. Like the anthropologists and psychologists that emerged in the 20th century, the unconscious communicates the unknown by way of symbols. These symbols

purchase a social function. Living symbols compel unconscious participation and bestow a life-enhancing effect. Symbols of this latter kind, woven into mythic structures shape culture. Myth is the ruling element of the individual and society; worked over and explicated by awareness and group processes. Myths, poetry, and art are the dynamics for understanding the spirit of a culture in a given age. Hence, in the search for truth, it is authoritative to begin with imagination. This is the search for and the figural significations whereby they are epitomized in iconic transformations in history”.

The Texts and Poetry

Let's explore how the foregoing notions of poetry and myth as agency are insightful to poetry's *negritude* accomplishment in the task of imaginatively reconstituting the identity, culture and history of people despite geography and colonial domination. I hope to show that poetry fits the model of a myth-making poetic. Hence, the visual artist in attempting to “reinvent” himself/ herself engages the force of lyrical language akin to the manner of the myth-making power of the *negritude* poets, who actively evoke and elevate black identity. This effectively undermines the domination of the colonialist *natural-synthesis dicta*.

However, the humanistic study of Language and its undercurrents of poetry coupled with poetic imagination borne out of profound lyrical language deepens the nature of being and gives the study of man and nature a fuller discursive frame. Césaire claimed that “at the heart of poetic knowledge” lies a mobilization of cosmic and humanistic forces. This governs the poem in the entirety of experiences that it unknots. Further claiming that myth binds us to the source of being the mythopoeic imagination connects us to nature, ancestry and history. Césaire points out that the unconscious which all poetry appeals to is the receptacle of the kinship that connects man to nature. Poets have long known that life cannot proceed with-out symbols and myth.

Great poetry, like Sedar-Senghor's, *Anthology of the New Black and Malagacy Poetry* (1985) and its Introductory essay *Orphee Noir* culled from Jean-Paul Sartre's *What is Literature and Other Essays* (1988); and the Poetry of Aime Césaire create a living counter-myth from the insights, sentiments, thoughts and visions of black poets. Hutton (1972) reminds us that it is not man's existential involvement with the physical world that is crucial for the way man fashions his own nature. Instead, Hutton insists that the process of creation is entirely the product of imagination. Indeed, imaginative creation is the means by which man's consciousness of the world unfolds. Reminiscent of the Negro Renaissance poet Langston Hughes' *A Dream Differed*, the black artists' dream of a reawakening does not die, instead explodes in ground-breaking spectacles. These feverish reincarnations are imploded in Foucaultian feats “*resumptions, disappearances, and repetitions*” (Michel Foucault, 1987). These are captured and metamorphosed in spite of their evanescent memorials in symbols.

How Did the Artists Do It

The artist in Sartrean language is likened, thusly:

“Orpheus going to claim Eurydice from Plato....it is by letting himself fall in trance, by rolling on the ground like a possessed man tormented by himself, by singing his own anger, by exhibiting his wounds, his life torn short, by becoming most lyrical, that the black poet is most certain of creating a great collective poetry” (Sartre, 1967)

In dream-like fashion, the artist's decent into himself dares like Sartre's *“Orpheus to claim Eurydice from Pluto”*; transposes the pictorial elements. For example, the artist Abdoulaye Konate engaging Bazin fabrics simulates the *“weave and weft processes”* of Kente making and its design elements onto his artworks by becoming lyrical in thoughts and imaginative creation, the consciousness of his world unfolds. In rejection of rationalist *“natural synthesis”*, but in espousal of the mythopoeic imagination Konate plunges deep into his true world of *“dream and childhood innocence”*, connecting to nature, culture, ancestry and history. True to the *Sankofa dicta*, a resort to *“the aesthetic principles and values of the past”*, as a groundswell for understanding the intuitions of modern expression (Kofi Antubam, 1963; Kwame Nkrumah, 1965; Leopold Senghor, 1963); Konate tapped into the *“collective consciousness”* (Jung, 1927) to recast cultural memories engaging the strategies and media of modernism. Thusly, enacting a personalized discursive space for the narrating of postcolonial production that shocked the world, Abdoulaye made Africa's contribution to *“universal civilization”* (Senghor, 2010).

Konate's art offers nuanced commencements in surfeits of fleeting memorials that set a razor-cutting *pictorial turn*. Challenging the neocolonial power games, *No to Terrorism* and *Death Sentence* (Figs. 4 & 5) unveil and devastate the traditional western compartmentalisation system of signs. In fact, the artworks discuss African artistry as the overarching mechanism of change that affects a de-centering from the erstwhile *“natural synthesis”* cognomen. In *reale politique*, these position-takings framed in artistry; symbolically recast the Sartrean and Foucaultian metaphor of power through the opposition *invisible/ visible* in political assertiveness. These images inflect on Black arts alterity by simply *“unpacking”* coloniality. In fact, these artworks replete the framing of the enunciations of visions of consciousness recited in international Shows like *Magiciene de la Terre* (1989) and *Africa Remix* (2007)

Historical and Geo-Political Contexts

Articulated in the Texts *Revue Noire* and *NKA* (henceforth, *RN & N*) Konate's *oeuvre* confirmed the collapse of the *“Dakario”* paradigm. Mbembe (2015) intuitively that in seminal dialogues of cultural identity in the African art world; the framing of the African body, urban sites and the dynamics between African aesthetics and the Western outlook, *RN & N* while aiming at the widest possible international art world and its media affected the *“tourist gaze”*. In the same vein the simulacra of Kwame Nkrumah's *Sankofa* ideological *cultural turn* (1965) with its idiosyncratic notions of consciousness in self-independence, project the plurality of the personality of the artist.

Abdoulaye's expressions force to the notice Simon Njami's distinctions between Africa and Africans, between identity and nationality; between expression and politics (2016). Hence, by dint of artistic intuition and “*the critical light shed by anthropology on cultural relativity and intercultural relationships*” (Solal, 2018), the *Magicienne de la Terre* Show (1989) heuristically legitimized and synchronically time-honored the direction of the *oeuvre* of artists and the discourses of art. It is instructive to allude to the new shuffled geo-political order of the time that permitted the exchanges and interactions with other territories, which until then had been impossible.

Parting ways with the French academy and set traditions of exhibition-making, instead inserting storylines rooted in idiosyncrasies of artistic slants, distinctive *oeuvres* and contexts; histories and styles emerged. Hence, with perspectives that recognized the former colonial places' sovereignty, and the critical lenses of academe's leading lights like Jean-Paul Sartre and a host of others, who debunked western arrogance; the West made gestures supportive of art and artistic styles from the emergent world of Africa and Oceania.

Well-travelled artists, therefore, became the meteors of the new art world canvassed by RN and N. Crucial to the role of providers of essential changes and of transformations heralded by exhibitions and the Texts that they recited, there **is** the urgency to take stock of the complex phenomena represented by *transvanguardism*. Konate should be perceived as a qualified individual straddling the hypothesized new tracks of artistic globalization initiated by RN & N, all hemmed on the coat-tails of key European sponsored Shows of the time: *Seven Stories about Africa* (1969), *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989) and *Africa-Remix* (2007) offer a short-term reaping of that artistic substance.

Resoluteness in salvaging what society creates is the artist's sterling quality. Efficiently acting on short-term memory artists offer society labyrinths derived from external stimuli, either iconic or semantic; engaging general information fabricated over years of storing and sorting different stimuli and their value-effects.

Dak' Art 2016 and the Pale of history” (Graves, 2016), maintained that the unravelling from the *Negritude* foundations of *Dakarois* modernist ideology and universalistic hypothesis, artworks by Ehikhamenor and Limoud echoed commentaries on an emergent *pictorial turn*. Indeed, in the re-calibrations of imageries, the diverse paintings of Ehikhamenor declaim the universalist dicta of *Dakarois* *negritude*, inflecting the outlining of RN & N as the intellectual foundations that inspired the 1960's paradigm shift.

With conceptual picture making tooling mechanisms and the story-telling traditions of Nigeria, Ehikhamenor affected a cutting-edge vista in imageries and language reminiscent of. RN & N; Limoud's artworks in sync echo poetics of the three dimensional cardboard style of the Congolese, Body Isek Kingelez, and the “fun cities” of Peter Fischli & David Weiss. Simulating the catastrophe and devastation of the Syrian crisis as metaphor for the character of the troubled times, Limoud adapted that sensitivity to direct a history (Graves, 2016).

2022 artists deft on a *Trans avant-gardist* trail, made visible confirmations of that reality. Nestling a biography, the artworks of three (3) participating visual artists follow to demonstrate the inflection of a new regime of images and imageries reflecting the epistemology. With heroic verve and the ludic playfulness of art, these artists engage commonplace materials: the recycled, and factory ready-mades as art materials and tools to bear witness to the joy, anxiety and worry in our reality of independence and freedom. In this presence they cause a reflection upon the relationship between life and death, between tradition and the reality of a postindustrial age.

The sculpture Obinnah Makatah employed factory crafted plastic fillets to convey radical and subversive themes in a socially concerned narrative. In an increasingly fragile, polarised world, Obinnah engaged a nuanced discourse of the ever-tense relationship between the ecosystem and man's use and abuse of it. Daringly he ventures to discourse the darker, lesser reported history of development and international Humanitarian Aid in a ludic subversive protest narrative. In folkloric gestures, Ngozi-Omeje Ezema grounds her discourses on vernacular anecdotal slants, in conceptual visuals alloyed in metaphors to inflect the virtues of hard work and perseverance as sterling virtues for artistic development. Abdoulaye Konate Dadaistically created artworks that state the postindustrial synthetic machine made as statements of the alternative for the now!

Preceding the details of this essay, it is important to situate the biographies of Konate, emphasizing the parochialism of his education and background; Ezema's and Makatah's liberal artistic exposure to the Canon. George Kubler (1962:6-7) notes that artists' lives are the knitting mechanisms that hold together traditional and progressive art practices, while reflecting contemporaneity. The biographies of these artists, offer a provisional gleaning of their artistic substance. These masters are qualified individuals bestriding the new tracks of development emanating from the *Negritude* canon inspired by RN & N and Principal European sponsored exhibitions of the time, for example, *the Seven Stories about Africa*. I, therefore, claim that if the biography of artists is sufficient provisionary means of gleaning the groundings of artistic substance; then their artistry reflects conscious masterpieces that ingrain symbolic codes in narratives, metaphors, storytelling mechanisms and vestigial content. These artworks reflect departures that collapsed the *Dakarois* ideology and the dissolution of its foundations.

Abdoulaye Konate

Graduate of Mali National Art Institute, Bamako; and Plastic Arts School, Havana, Cuba. Steeped in the artistic traditions of the Sahel, Konate's *oeuvre* is the textiles of Africa. He eclectically simulates their ontologies, represents stories of Africa in his designs, and utilizes the autography of local cultures to undergird contemporaneity. Konate's art immortalizes oral history while showcasing 'social engagements and concerns': war, immigration, abuse of power, terrorism *etcetera*.

Obinnah Makatah and Ngoze-Omeje Ezema are graduates of the Department of Fine & Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, majoring in sculpture under the tutelage of EL Anatsui. Fascinated by EL's liberal and informal teaching style; and emphasis on the

exploration of heterogeneous and indigenous locally sourced art materials and processes of art making, both artists imbibed the master's way. In spite of residencies overseas and Shows to their credits, Obi survived many lean years of painting practice in studio to “put bread on the table”; while Ngozi remained at home honing the traditions of the crafts of sculpture, pottery and needlework.

Many Voices, Art Speaks

Beyond the pale of contemporary African art and its validation by western standards *via* galleries, collectors and auction houses, whose attention oils stars and apporions values; 2022's artists deftly speak in distinctively independent voices. With a nose in the air for the epistemic pool of *R N* and *N dicta*; and the overarching political consciousness of the afrocentricism framed in the pan Africanist stances of leading independent African countries like Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana.

In spite of the turn of the century intellectual movements, specifically Satreane and Heideggarian existentialism; leaps in Psychology and Psychiatry, it is informative to recognize the impact of 20th century intellectual sparkles culled from ethnographic research in Francophone West Africa that grounded exposés in Phenomenology. Besides the 20th century witnessed the fashionableness of “recycled materials and the recourse to materials from heterogeneous sources”.

African artistry simply reflected these trends. In simulacra's of the Kwame Nkrumah (1965) ideological *cultural turn and the fever of independence*, reflecting ways of being African in singular expressions that affect differences between Africa and Africans, between identity and nationality; between expression and politics (Njami,2016; Ndiaye,2022).

In fact, African artists wondered aloud “where we are today, hence what is the discursive binge that enflames our consciousness? What art to expect in this spirited consciousness is the anxiety and expectation of the astounding world art viewers? African artists keen on reflecting the ethos like the chameleon in *simulacra* of the new being-in-the-world ethos took on the mantra of the rebel *a la Zarianists*, 1960s Nigeria. Konate, Makata and Ezema indulged “*Sankofa*”, “*Go home and pick*”.

Victor and Youseff; Abdoulaye, Obinnah and Ngozi made existential choices by grounding their discourses on assemblages of “*Forgotten Biography*” in recalibration of personal expressions; in language and imageries that inflect individual spiritual ties to ancestry and the reality of a cosmopolitan inflexion with a global world view. In fact, wresting all into a momentous symbol, thusly registering knowledge production, art and art history as groundings that intuit display but also active agents in “narrating history of the soul of African black folks”.

Dak' Artists 2022 did not only “*go home to their pasts*” but dared an alchemy beyond “*natural synthesis*” to fuse other art worlds; histories of indigenous and multi-sited modernist experiences to forge new expressions and narratives. Reflecting the post *Dakarois* ethos,

the nascent images and imageries speak volumes in modernist artistry that reimage and redefine the cosmopolitanism and global contemporary art scene. Little wonder, therefore, with the “many voices” cursing stream-like from 2016 to *Dak'Art 2022*; there is an overriding maneuver between the ahistorical, traditional and the postcolonial “contemporary” in the vibes of these images.

Konate, Makata, and Ezema are artists trained in the canon and the abstract tradition. They also sourced local materials for their entire works in simulacra's of the African tradition of using recycled objects delivering their artworks brilliantly. A leading Africanist and art historian Harney (2022) intuits “*they have so combined African and modernist ideas to create artworks that give even the western aesthete that sense of the sublime that we're always talking about when we're looking at big abstract art.*”

Presence Consciousness, the Wordless Spectacle of Interpretation

Abdoulaye KONATE (Mali, *Palias de Justice*)

Gangs of men (under the master's gaze) produced screens towering up to 6 meters high, fashioned from colors and patterns formatted on giant fabrics, machine sewn to create massive yardages: Fig.4: '*Death Sentence*', and Fig. 5: '*No to Religious Fanaticism*'. These installations resemble paintings when viewed from a distance. Made-up of hundreds of synthetic polygon pieces machine-sewn from colorful bright fabrics called *Bazin*, native to West Africa. Konate employs Sahel specific colours and ready-made fabrics to stress themes of social concerns. He connects African symbolisms with western modernist graphic elements in colourful compositions akin to a symphony, the layering inflects sculptural tactility, but Tapirs-like create a playground for light and shadow. Rembrandt like, Konate simulates compositions to look like music scores. One of the officially selected 59 artists of the Biennial, Konate exhibited under the title “*The Master / Le Maitre*”. Abdoulaye's artworks were displayed under special flood lighting in the largest courtroom spaces, indeed, in the halls where trials were held in the 1950s to 1990s. Privileged, an artwork in the *Palias de Justice*'s ample courtroom spaces directed the appropriateness of the messages: '*Death Sentence*' on the wall of an old courtroom that beheld such trials.

Declaiming all mimetic representation, abstract motifs and symbols, watermark like invoke absolute music. Only the weave-on shapes and colour repeats remain as a kind of visual music encrypted on polygonal gestalt repeats that secure the wholeness of the artwork, Konate addresses the viewers in this soft-touch tableau. *Dadaistically*, playfulness that only the initiates know, all in literalist gestures, in indefinite duration, and temporality of time both passing from Tawaric dirges. Without the trivia of modernist Pop Art, or even symbolic associations; *Sentence* is tethered to the traditional architecture and hollowed decorative tableau of the locale. It is apt to look at that ground of knowledge in the consciousness of Tawaric perception for the poetic ontology of this work. In synchronisations; crossing boundaries in spite of confluences of West African traditions, *Tawaric* envelopes and shapes, and the Canon by way of pigments stir the artwork.

Simulating *Tawaric* lyrical poetics, Abdoulaye offers a prophylactic feat for the mega-immersion of his audience. In embedded imageries culled from *Tewaric* and Islamic cosmology in adaptive human play, *any one artwork* is expressive of that heartfelt polemic and its rhetoric's. Gigantic montage installations echoing atypical Sahel hollowed reliefs' commonplace on mud walls, are eddy memorialization's of that artistry.

Engaging the viewer's eyes is an encounter simulacra's of reading a book, watching a movie, or even hallucinating (Bishop, 2005). Affecting illusionary picture making techniques of post antiquity civil architecture paintings commonplace in Papal palaces but standard in Jesuit Baroque architecture (Grau, 2003), an illusionary immersion of the viewers, implodes. In fact, this technique of affective "*total immersion and illusion*" is ingenious of filmic landscape vistas. The viewers are confronted, in fact "blocked in" by the artworks on display, thusly invoking a presence. Something is said to have presence avows Michael Fried (1967:7) when it forces the beholder not only to take it-in but recognize its "affective presence". The artwork, indeed, draws the viewers "in" making its message the viewers' business, in effect the viewers' become subject; laterally theater fashion with gestalt polygon repeats pulling them in to look and imbibe its message, "*No to Death Sentence*"!

The beholder is aware of being distanced by the work; starred in indeterminate moments, open-ended and exacting relationship as subject to the impassive object on the wall in front of him/her. Indeed, the viewer is crowded by the silent presence of another person. Konate's artworks encourage participation and involvement of the viewers. This is the bounced-upon effect of the encounter! This is not an artwork that visitors can tentatively skirt by, "*like the idea of putting the viewers inside the middle of the hurricane*"!

In creative artistry engaging synthetic materials, Konate exploits alternative sceneries to deliver urgent social protest messages in all artworks. With artworks that are poetic reflections utilizing materials full of aesthetic qualities, readily are eddy responses to Simon Njami's curatorial concept of a reincarnation grounded in the poem, *The City in the Blue Daylight*. The engagement of that metaphor compliments the use of the old courtroom as allegory of nostalgia. The suitability of the dream scenario as enabling instrumentality foregrounding Abdoulaye's installations is hinged on the total effect of the artwork on the viewers. That engineering of the artworks reels the activation of the wheel of associations: cultural, everyday analogies, even personal memories.

Calling forth the sensory immediacy of conscious perception, a composite structure, absorption and immersion in this massive scenery, forces a "mental landscape" making the viewers to engage a deployment of creative free association of the images in playful display in front of them. Hence, a taking-on of the assemblage piece by piece and as a whole read "symbolically" as metonymic parts of a story-line. The appropriation of dream as an analogy affirms how this assemblage of innumerable "art works" forces cultural and specific associations on the beholder. Abdoulaye makes the audience phantasy on the complex emotional interiority of the artwork. Reminiscences and reflections on the familiar past are the burden of the audience!

Expressing the Show kernelled on the general theme of reinvention *via* protean inventiveness, Abdoulaye echoes Limoud: “An artist has to be a visionary. Someone who sees things without looking but senses their materiality” (Graves, 2016). Utilising that metaphor, therefore, Konate makes critical statements on the state of the Sahel's every day. In 'Death Sentence' (Fig. 4), however, *Le Maitre* in formalistic graphic marks incorporates silhouettes of commonplace symbols: the Hangman's noose, the Lethal Injection Syringe, the Sabre Sword of Justice and Equity; and the Plaques of state Sovereignty, Authority and Justice.

Bathed in Light, however, an immersive enforced gaze effect is heightened by the share audacity of repeats. While enunciating a decorative repertoire, Abdoulaye's artistry is distinctive for its metaphysical significance and portrayal of spectacle of depth in his own “global locality”; suffused in the disentanglement from the *Dakario* narrative, the artist engaged heterogeneous iconographies.

Konate's work forces environments in an allover engulfment even the viewer(s) are swallowed up. Unlike commonplace art where the ethos of the work is located in itself, each artwork simulates a “situation” that virtually incorporates the viewers. The audience is not wandering into sacred site where art is usually contemplated like a museum; but an affective theatrical absorption where viewers encounter an experience (Grau, 2003). Bathed in Fluorescent Lighting Konate's artworks are no collector's Items. They initiate “gallery” all their own both temporal and ephemeral. They are site reliant.

Fried (2012), informs that absorbing theatricality of art plays on the threshold of the Thespian space and its antics. Konate's artworks stand for: a play that takes on the audience, with stage ploys; imploding, absorbing and initiating vistas of experiences. *Sentence* exists only in relation to the viewers; depending on their presence to be an art form; ideally taking the audience to a place and time. With neither orthodox Frame nor pedestal, the artwork initiates the “entering” of the audiences into a weird space. Hence, the viewers as a human body meets not painting, in the traditional sense, but art as object in a site-specific space. In minimalistic stylisations, the viewer launches a relationship as he grasps the artwork from various station-points under the fall of florescent lighting and its spatial illusions. Absoulaye's art is an instrumentality for the “*encounter experience*”.

Reflecting the ultra-self-conscious, creativity of the 1990's, Abdoulaye's entropic work is paradigmatic of the “dream scene” framed in absorption and physical immersion. The *Elan vital* in encounter is placed in the middle as a protagonist. Capable of triggering fantasies, individual memories and cultural associations” in the viewer's mind, this symbolically suffused dream scenario, embeds a model of comparison for our experiences of the work.

Obinnah Makatah (Nigeria, L'OFF)

Against the apartheid in the *Dak'Art 22's* separatist arrangement, *Palais de Justice* and *L'OFF* Exhibition spaces, is the Show's *piece de resistance* and protest *Medicine After Death* (Fig.3) a 9-meter-high installation composed of machine crafted fiber-glass molds to represent a sinister theater of objects: bones, the human skeleton effigy; sub-machine gun

stationed on a cartridge chain recharge carrier. This installation defies definition. With a title echoing a foreboding of disaster, the mystery of a first look is deepened. A critical re-look unravels the reality of the message in this assemblage. Steering emotions that bring the *literati* and everyday people to the reality of Africa, albeit the developing world, the viewer's come to terms not only of own mortality but the part own lives have to play in the larger theater of human history.

In pursuit of a socially committed discourse, Makatah employs *ready-mades*: medical syringes and synthetic human skeleton and bones to impel a critique of western hypocrisy in Aid/Humanitarian relief and the contradictions of armament supply to nations at war. In *Medicine After Death* (Fig.3) Obinnah deploys key icons of the industrial revolution and medical science technology and its practice as symbolic metaphors to weave a narrative. Syringes, atypical symbols of health delivery, framed in the story of a condition of war, are fashioned as bullet chain-rounds for the AK47 submachine gun: symbol of desecration that create bones and skeletons as features of death, decay and destruction (Fig 3B).

In conversation Obinnah reiterated the real-life description of the double sidedness of Humanitarian Aid with a *picturesque* Igbo metaphor "*onye ana gwoo ebi afor a nae foo nya*", translatable reflects the "picturesque imagery of a mouse munching away at uncleaned fingers of a sleeping child after a late supper. Indeed, in viciousness: "*blowing hot and cold*", while chopping away even inflicting blisters on the skin of the innocent victim. With grotesque imageries, Obinnah casts the viewers' mind to a refugee camp scenario in Africa and the Dollars of Western Aid and humanitarian social welfare money expended. Analogously *Death* intuitively a war situation and the constant resupply of arms and weapons of mass destruction symbolised by the AK47 and bullet chain complex (Fig. 3B) in seemed trade by barter exchange for mineral resources and scarce foreign exchange.

Obi retorts and queries the scenario: as palpable hypocrisy and treachery with the proverb "*Amosu gbulum mmadi na anyasi bia eebee akwa nu ututu*", translation inflects: "*the witch that killed in the night is the same witch that comes in the morning to sympathise with the deceased's family*". Makatah advances the argument and debate over the sincerity and genuineness of so-called Aid packages to war victims in Africa, albeit all the third world's war-ravaged countries; indeed, Aid donors' technology aides and abates the many wars!

Ngozi Omeje Ezema (Nigeria, L'OFF)

Keen acolyte of her dotting father 'Ori Eme Enyi', *the tireless worker with the strength of an elephant*: a muse and metal craftsman; and a home full of childhood rhythms, all in a festive country setting. Ngozi-Omeje fashioned her world view on the wisdom espoused in poetic anecdotes spurred aloud at home and in her father's workshop. "*Creativity, passion and keen hard work is the key to success*", she avers, "*Eka (hand) ejega nee buta Onee mannu*". "*Dirty hands bring dirty ugly hands*"; "*No success without Huddles*"; "*The Energy you put into your work, is the raison d'etre for the successful outcome of your artwork*", but hands symbolically put together make light work" Anecdotality trails her creativity.

Cup and Tea Pot... Think Tea Think Cup, (Fig. 4) elucidates Omeje's world view. Symbolically CUP signifies her goal, Tea as an appetizer is representative of stimuli to work harder; *TEA POT* (a virtual creation spurn out of a castellation of miniature cups) is representative of passionate engaged efforts leading to achievements; the contents of the POT reflect micro efforts. The miniature cups, therefore, symbolically are the micro efforts that together lead to the passionate goal. Hence, CUP and TEA POT come together to achieve goal.

Deploying miniature stoneware versions of the giant teacup Omeje strings all together in an *antimacassar* weave latched onto a labyrinth of (synthetic Fishing-net) string suspensions conceptually creates the virtual form that metaphorically inflects "*Teacup and Kettle*". Otherwise, this installation is collapsible to a heap of miniatures and strings transportable as a sleeping bag luggage for movement from a local site like the Nigerian Center of Contemporary Art (CCA) Yaba, Lagos to Biennales in faraway China and Japan. Impermanence, migration and displacement are highlights in the discourse of *Teacup and Kettle*. Symbolic celebration of the international favorite Tea, native to Asia but popular refresher of travelers everywhere puts this artwork on the global turf!

Recalling her inspiration for "*Teacup*", Ezema (in conversation) metaphorically recasted her first encounter with winter on the first day of her Houseman-ship tour (Seattle, Washington, DC, May 2010): "*Journey Just Come*" requested for a cup of tea. Clasp the teacup in the cusp of her hands she sipped hot tea to keep warm, while contemplating the houseman project "job in hand". Carrying on with the anecdotal imagery 'Ori Eeme Enyi', 'the tireless worker with the strength of an elephant' Ngozi makes her artwork a message for the society where the virtues of hard work and rewards are increasingly perceived as old fashioned in sync with the Nigerian artist-crusader Ijalobomo (2019 & 2022) in the exhibition: *ISE NI OUNISE "MURA SI ISE ORE MI" Work is the antidote for poverty*.

In a narrative scheme engaging moral lessons encrypted in folklore, Ngozi's discourses interrogate the loss of hard work and its morals encrypted in childhood values. In scenic metaphors Ngozi seizes lively imageries, pulls them out of their obsessive twilight, and turns them into palpable free-standing forms. For example, a "*cup in the cusp of hands*" is a provocative and quaint metaphor. The cup represents the goal to be achieved by passionate, perseverant effort. The hands clasping the bowl reflect energetic keen hands of the long suffering and perseverant creativity of hard work. Indeed, a fulfilment of 'Ori Eeme Enyi', 'the tireless worker with the strength of an elephant'. That is the attitude to work that breed's success! *CUP* is a *metonai* of hard work and creativity. Indeed, the overriding message of *CUP* to a world where technology in her swiftness tends to make people lazy is: "*a regimen of passionate hard work pays*"!

Conclusion

Konate, Makatah and Ezema make visible for all time the emancipation of the autonomous African voice, debunking universalisations of *oeuvre* in terms that it confirms and pleads virtuality. Hard-nosedly, their works project the recalibration of *Africanite* from the standpoint and sensibilities of codes, individual tastes and choices, imploding *transavant-gardesism*.

Ezema's and Makatah's art inflect the knack for "becoming" endogenous in ideas, imploding notions of "at homesness" and rootedness in Africa. In protean language, revaluation of Roots and recreations hinged on *africanite* is the ethos. Spiritualisation and intellectual underpinnings grounded in local roots is the logos that inflects refreshment, rejuvenation and the rooting for the ethos that entrusts reinventions.

Makatah in character with *Illuminati* alchemists of modern life engaged artistry in the conscious search for novel expressions and the reinvention of both art and material. In the processes of recreation, humorous answers and avowed miraculousness of commonplace things is achieved via ready-mades. Letting art unspool, while debunking strapped and spooked art-school strictures and what's "permissible", Obinnah made art that speaks. In shapes and volumes reminiscent of the playfulness of art Konate, Makatah and Ezema returned to "childhood innocence" saying "Dada" like the Zurich artists 100 years ago. In concert with the kin-folk consciousness of the erstwhile cultural policies of Senghor, the artists' utilised endogenous cosmological imageries, even synthetic materials to create artworks. These creations, distinguished by their characteristic transience, simply played out the texts of the fiesta. Epitomising "recycling", these are directed to all/ *tout le monde* to read as images cast in front of them.

Reflecting the effects of *R N & N* schemes, these seminal works focused their energies on the celebration of an African nationalistic consciousness grounded on independence and freedom. Thusly imposing a reconstructive "seeing process" with ingenuity, while in varied *portmanteaus* bestride the tracks of development of art for that process in a postmodernist paradigm. That process took on a dual toll (I) a retooling process in the present and (II) beyond the present in an attempt to re-see in the nodes of culture and aesthetics, daring a reconciliation between African identity and cosmopolitanism in language of colour and native imaginary, as a mastery of that ontological reality. Hence, moving forward the artists with lines, volumes, colour, and iconography that eludes "universalisation and uniformisation" re-appropriating the moment of consciousness, counters education and training; but engage in a production of own vision. *Dak' Art22* demonstrates how artists in heroic gestures have engaged the material resources of the millennium as tools of narration. Indeed, this is hermeneutically espoused in the Ibo metaphor, "nku di naamba ne yellum mba nnee" appropriately inflects cleverly "it is the people's wood that is the source of their cooking fire".

Retorting to the mythical "eternal return of the same", in a poly-temporal analogy (Bruno Latour, 1993) I engaged the metaphor of the "Python's Eye" (Alagoa, 1997) to kernel the discourse of the new imaginary. Insisting on personalised ways of "seeing", artists' creativity imploded meanings through the consciousness of this new gaze. This is the penumbra, resorted to for illumination and rootedness. Beset, therefore, in deconstructing a past and daring to invent a future in a present time that is synced to perpetual renewals akin to the symbolic python movement, artists dared to create art that inflected the times. "In a bloom of a thousand flowers", *Dak' Artists 2022*, over fifty years after the *Zarianists* shedding of the Canon (Okeke-Agulu, 1999:203); in *transavangardist* mien imbibed the strides of EL Anatsui and other individual contemporary African artists,

imploded Art that Speaks in Many Voices. That demanded a reinvention of self, fusing a language that echoed that aspiration in a lexicon logy decipherable by all, irrespective of history and milieu. Njami (2016) writes, myths and legends, even the esoteric realms of belief systems of thought must be demystified so as to become vehicles of self-expression. It is the burden of the creative artist to unravel the codes in which tradition was set forth. Sequel to that ethos, it remains the responsibility of artists from the nations to vent unique ways of expression in music, dance, theatre, literature and aesthetics.

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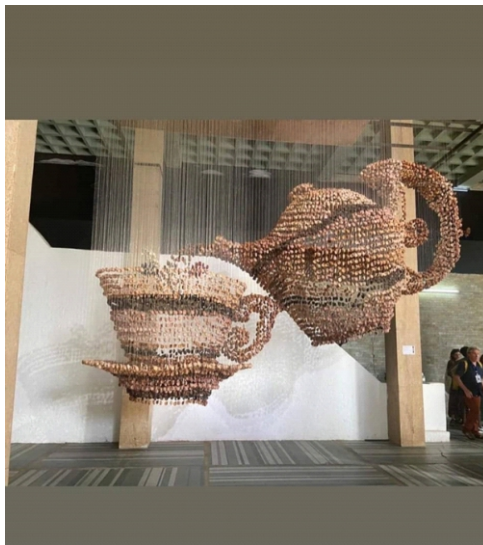


Fig. 1: CUP and TEA Cup, Ngozi-Omeje Ezema, Installation (fired clay nuggets and threads), © Ezema Artist Foundations, 2022.



Fig. 2: Medicine After Death, Obinnah Makatah, Installation (factory-made syringe modules, copper wire and adhesives), © Obinna Makatah, 2022.



Fig. 2b: Medicine After Death. Obinnah Makatah (Detail)



Fig. 3: No to Death Sentence, Abdoulaye Konate, Installation (machine-sewn rectangular synthetic templates) 590cm x 312cm, © Artist estate, 2016.