ARTSY

Malick Sidibé's Photographs Captured Moments of Joy and Liberation in Mali

● Alina Cohen Jul 23, 2018 3:22 pm

Malick Sidibé, *Untitled*, 1984/2004. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery.

Beginning in the 1960s and continuing for the next five decades, Malick Sidibé photographed the citizens of Bamako, Mali, in bold black and white. In his studio, he took pictures of locals—a man in a beret and pinstripes, a trio of women in sunglasses—often dressed stylishly and posed assertively. The photographer also brought his camera out on the town. Well-clad youth became his muse, dancing and reveling in intimate groups at Happy Boys Club, Le Surfs, and other local hotspots. Sidibé's prints are casual, personal, and improvised. They tell the story of a city's evolution.

Sidibé was born around 1935 in the rural French Sudanese village of Soloba (located in the southwest of present-day Mali, near the Guinea border). He attended a school for Sudanese craftsmen, studying painting and jewelry making. After graduating in 1955, he secured a job as an apprentice to French photographer Gérard Guillat. Sidibé began to take his own shots in the latter half of the decade, focusing on portraiture. In 1958, he opened his studio, Studio Malick, and the community swiftly began seeking his services for special occasions—and for fun.

Malick Sidibé, *Untitled*, 2004. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery.

Malick Sidibé, *Surprise Party*, 1974/2008. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery.

At the time, his country was in the midst of a major political overhaul. Mali gained independence from France in 1960 and became a socialist single-party state. Relative freedom enlivened the region until a 1968 coup. The Military Committee for National Liberation (CMLN) took power, with lieutenant Moussa Traoré at the helm as president. A military dictatorship followed, until a 1974 constitution returned the country to a single-party state. Civil unrest and additional coup attempts plagued the country into the 1990s.

But during the 1960s and into the early 1970s, Sidibé captured Bamako's newfound liberation, shooting the city's joyous nightlife. (Though the party pictures would cease, the artist's studio portraiture continued throughout the following decades.)

The photographs from this era offer stories of celebration tinged with American and British cultural influence. In *TWIST! Avec Ray Charles* (1969), a woman in a boldly patterned dress and a feathered, polka-dotted hat holds the titular Ray Charles record. *Les copins à Niarela* (1967) features a group of smartly attired partygoers huddled together around a record player. In the days after capturing such evening festivities, Sidibé printed the pictures and posted them in front of his studio. Recovering revelers would stop by to see if they were in the shots, turning the spot into a community hub and a kind of proto-social media feed. Sidibé sold the prints for a very affordable 100 to 200 francs.

Malick Sidibé, *TWIST! avec Ray Charles*, 1969/2008. Courtesy of Jack Shaiman Gallery.

Malick Sidibé, *Les copins à Niarela*, 1967/2008. Courtesy of Jack Shaiman Gallery.

In the 1990s, French curator André Magnin visited Mali and came across Studio Malick. He introduced Sidibé's work to France, and a variety of international honors followed. Paris's Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art honored the photographer with his first exhibition outside Africa in 1995; he would later land the prestigious Golden Lion prize at the 2007 Venice Biennale. If Sidibé's camera initially captured the influence of the West on Malian culture, his photographs now had the opportunity to likewise influence Western artists.

"The world took note of these images of Malian youth in this free moment of self-expression," says Alexandra Giniger, director of artist relations at Jack Shainman Gallery, which has represented the artist since 2002. "Once Malick's work started being viewed in Europe and the [United] States, it was like a new presentation of the continent of Africa."

In an essay titled "The Sixties in Bamako: Malick Sidibé and James Brown," Manthia Diawara writes that Sidibé's nightlife photographs made local youth "look like the rock and roll idols and movie stars they wanted to be." As they vamped for the artist, the subjects asserted their independence, relevance, and ultimately, their power. At a time of nationwide change, their self-presentation promoted what Diawara calls a "diasporic aesthetic."

Malick Sidibé, *Untitled (Chris Ofili)*. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery.

Malick Sidibé, *On se regard! hum ?*, c. 1970/2008. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery.

As fans of James Brown, for example, Malian youth connected with ideas of black pride that were circulating in the United States. Listening to rock 'n' roll and naming their cliques after bands (The Beatles, The Rolling Stones), they integrated into the global countercultural revolutions of the era. Invoking popular culture, this generation rejected their predecessors' conception of a world split between the colonizers and colonized. Sidibé captured this shift.

Chelsea's Jack Shainman Gallery has mounted 85 Sidibé photographs in its current exhibition, entitled "LOVE POWER PEACE." British artist Chris Ofili appears in a suite of four images. Despite the subject's prominence, Sidibé gave Ofili the same treatment in Bamako that he'd offered to all his guests over the years: The painter stands on a tiered platform (covered, this time, in a shiny checkerboard pattern), facing a striped curtain. One shot features Ofili and Sidibé together, smiling at the camera. The informality and geniality of the shoot radiates.

Jack Shainman is also spotlighting Sidibé's wedding photographs and baby pictures—happy occasions take center stage. Brightly hued glass frames with whimsical leaf motifs (edged with brown tape and made by a Bamako glass artist, Sidibé's long-standing collaborator) enhance a sense of ease and cheerfulness.

Sidibé's baby pictures are particularly winning. With their chubby legs, diapers, and miniature wardrobes, the subjects offer gazes both innocent and confused; the most authentic returned gazes that Sidibé's camera captures. The kids all sit in chairs draped with patterned fabrics. Bamako's youngest citizens reign on tiny thrones that convey tradition, craft, and local culture.

The studio portraits of adults, meanwhile, are often theatrical. A man in a wide stance holds pistols in both hands, aimed at the viewer. Two women stand with their backs to the camera, reading a manuscript. A woman in a burka sits behind a tray of cups and a samovar. There's a often a sense of confidence, self-determination, and play.

Sidibé died in 2016. The next year, the Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art hosted a major exhibition of more than 250 of his photographs. The artist's international fame may have reached its apotheosis when, later that year, Beyoncé hosted a baby shower inspired by his aesthetic. A picture from her party features the pop star in a patterned skirt, dancing with Jay-Z. Dressed in all white, he wears a necklace with a black pendant in the shape of the African continent. Sidibé's spirit of improvisation, liberation, and pan-African exuberance lives on, far beyond the confines of any gallery or national border. •

Forbes

Love Power Peace, Malick Sidibé At Jack Shainman Gallery

Clayton Press Contributor
Jul 15, 2018, 10:34am • 211 views • #DeLuxe

Malick Sidibé. *Untitled.* 1982/2004.

French Sudan was a colonial territory in the federation of French West Africa from around 1880 until 1960, when it was separated from Senegal and was renamed Mali. Malick Sidibé was born in 1936 into French colonialism in the village of Soloba, approximately 185 miles from the country's capital Bamako. From the age of 5 or 6, he began herding animals, first sheep, then cattle in his Mandé village, a geographic homeland centered between Mali and Guinea. Sidibé's family owned a large number of livestock, and his mother decorated huts. Sometime after 1948, Sidibé's parents sent Malick to the "white school," where he began to draw. He recalled, "There is a certain pride in imitating nature. I drew trees, and even animals. . . I think that drawing is somewhat innate in a being, in man."

He began drawing for official Malian events, and his work came to the attention of "the Major," a colonial official, who sent Sidibé to the School of Sudanese Craftsmen in Bamako. Sidibé earned a jeweler's degree in 1955. In the meantime, French photographer Gérard Guillat, who was nicknamed *Gégé la pellicule* literally, Gégé (the roll of film)—hired Sidibé to decorate the windows of his photography studio. After completing the décor, Guillat asked Sidibé if he would like to be a photographer. His answer was a quick yes. In a 2008 interview recorded in Rouen, France, Sidibé recalled, "I didn't hesitate. I leapt on it straightaway, on photography. I was used to working with pictures. I found that the camera was a lot faster than a paintbrush."

Malick Sidibé. *Les "Yokoros" contemporains.* 2004-2008.

Under Guillat's tutelage, Sidibé photographed the African social events, while Guillat photographed the white ones. Because Sidibé used a small hand-held camera (first a Brownie Flash, then an Agfa 6x6, still later a Foca Sport 24×36) rather than a tripod-based plate camera, he could bicycle all around Bamako shooting weddings, christenings, family celebrations, picnics, dances and other social events. Mali in the early 1960s was a one-party, socialist state. Like many former West African colonies, the newly established government encouraged a variety of reactionary cultural nationalism events. Tradition was emphasized. But a wave of Western-inspired cultural rebellion—dubbed a "diaspora aesthetic" by the Malian intellectual Manthia Diawara—was precipitated by post-colonial freedom and a fascination with western pop culture, particularly music and fashion.

MUSÉE
VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE

Exhibition Review: Love Power Peace, Malick Sidibé

Soiree eu famille, 1972/2008, gelatin silver print, 8 3/4 x 5 3/4 inches image size, 9 1/2 x 7 inches paper size, signed, titled, and dated on front. Image courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery.

By Labanya Maitra

"Throughout the 1960s and '70s, Sidibé captured the spirit of a Bamako in transition, and with it the personas of those living in Mali's capital city," said Jack Shainman, co-founder of the eponymous Jack Shainman Gallery. "The country had just gained independence from France. Hope and excitement for the future was palpable, and individuals were empowered through self-expression. Malick was there to capture the joy."

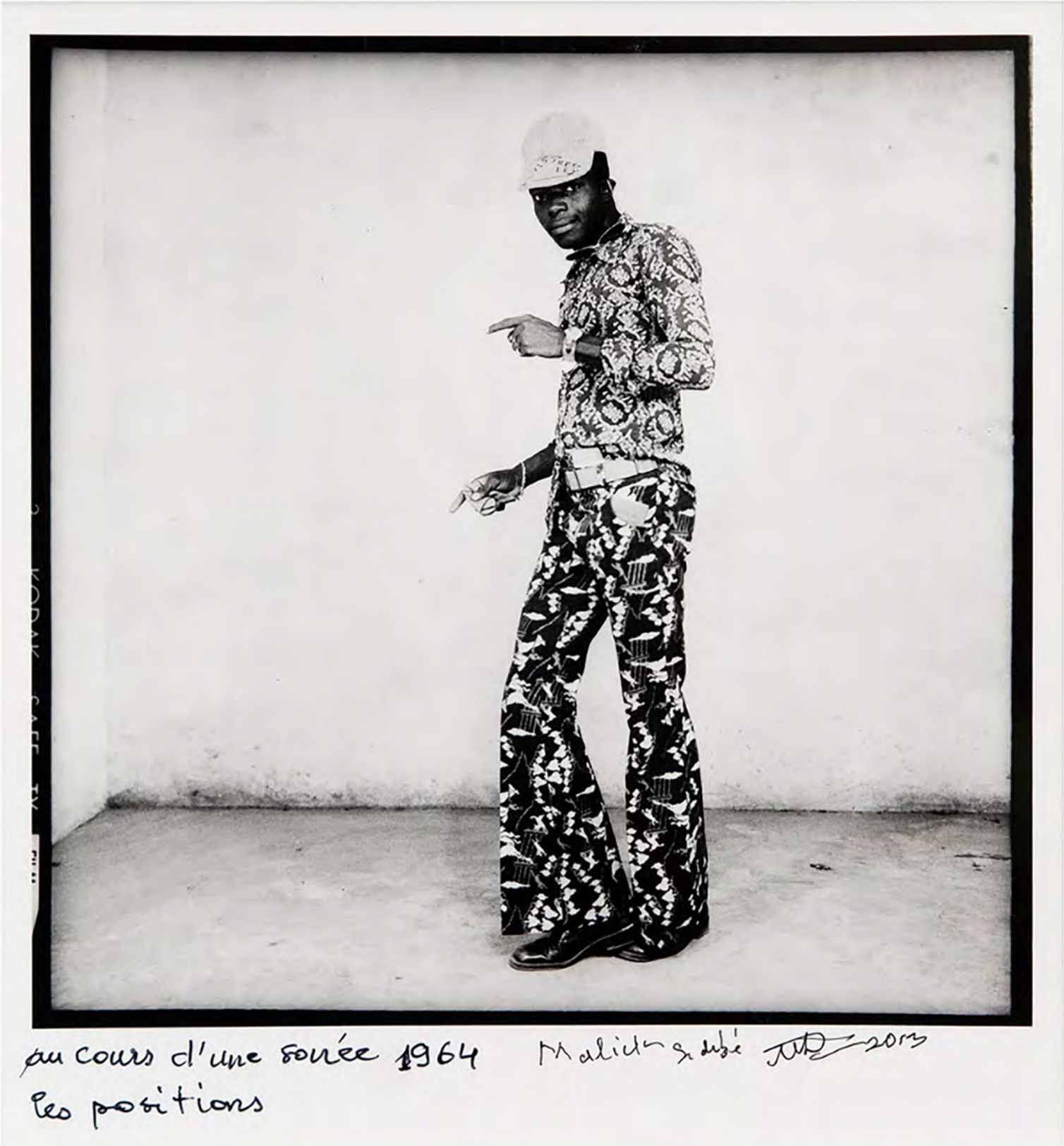
Surprise Party, 1973/2008, gelatin silver print, 8 3/4 x 5 7/8 inches image size, 9 5/8 x 7 inches paper size, signed, titled, and dated on front. Image courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery.

And capture joy he did. The white walls of the gallery were bejeweled with colorful panels framing Sidibé's black and white "party images." Sidibé wanted to bring back a hopeful time with his photographs. He would capture his images at parties or in a studio where people would come dressed in the latest fashion of the time.

The exhibition is loosely arranged in two groups: marriage photos and baby photos, aiding the visual flow of the images, a lot of them never seen before.

'On se regarde! hum ?, circa 1970/2008, gelatin silver print, 10 3/4 x 7 1/4 inches image size, 11 5/8 x 9 1/8 paper size, signed, titled, and dated on front. Image courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery.

"The exhibition title is borrowed from a classic James Brown hit," said Shainman. "Love, power, and peace are all words that fit the energy of the time Sidibé was documenting, and as James Brown was an icon of 1960s Malian youth culture, it seemed like an apt choice. You can easily imagine James Brown playing while so many of Sidibe's portraits were taken."



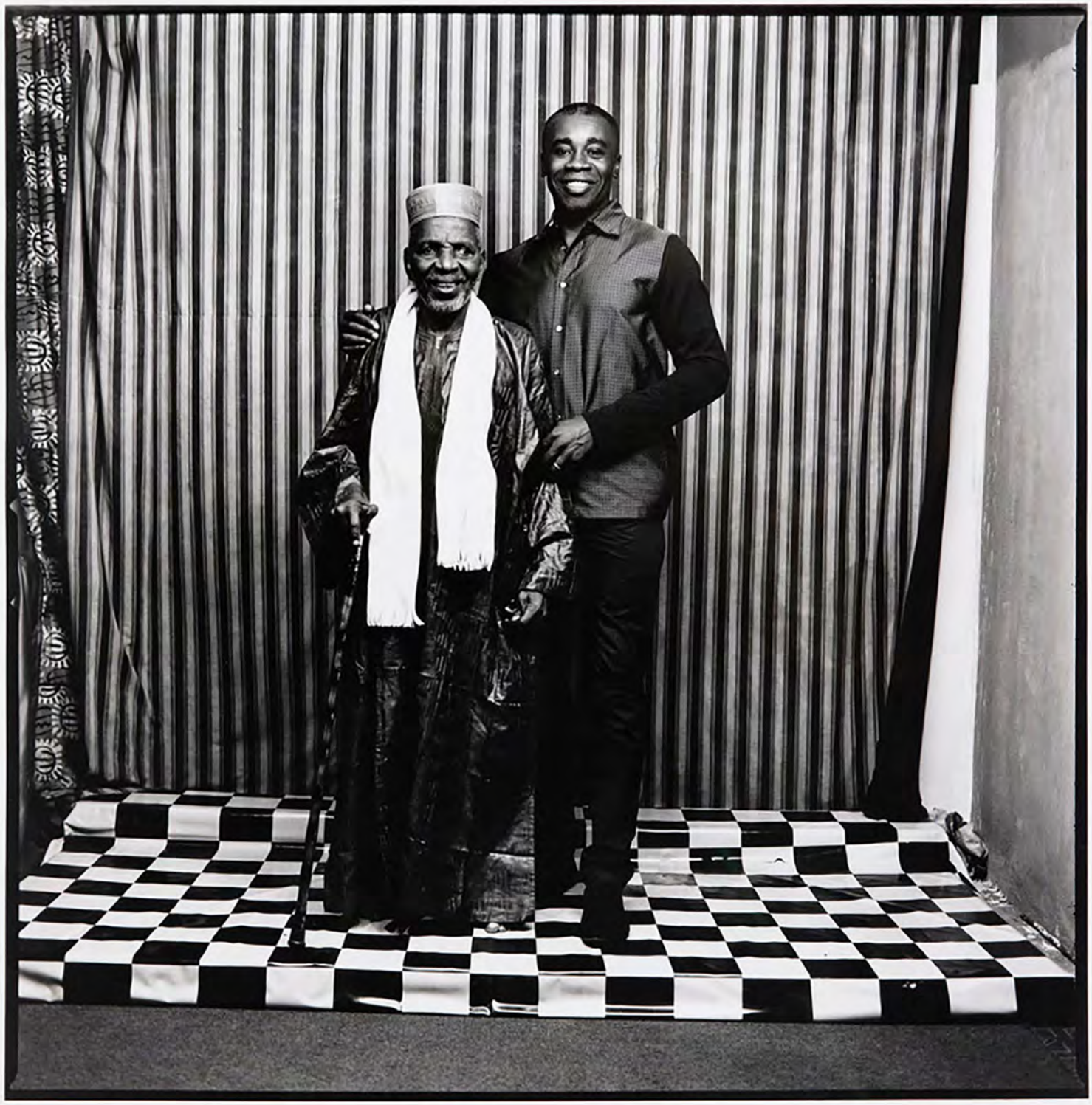
Au cours d'une soirée, les positions, 1964/2013, silver gelatin print, 8 1/4 x 8 1/4 inches image size, 12 x 9 1/2 inches paper size, signed, titled, and dated on front. Image courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery.

The photographs ranged from candid group shots of friends laughing, couples holding hands, to posed portraits of men and women festively dressed, children shot in studios. "Sidibé really changed the way Westerners viewed Africa," said Shainman. "His images broke down stigmas and supported universality. They captured the newfound freedom after colonialism — that time, and that moment."

Les "Yokoros" contemporains, 2004-2008, gelatin silver print, 11 x 7 inches (image size), 11 3/4 x 9 inches (paper size), signed, titled, and dated on front. Image courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery.

Sidibé also greatly influenced other artists, added Shainman. "Everyone from Beyoncé and Dev Hynes to Chris Ofili and Janet Jackson have made work inspired by Sidibé's legacy. Malick Sidibé's work is a continual touchstone for contemporary artists working across disciplines and that, to me, is what's most exciting."

The exhibition also features some of Sidibé's self-portraits that he created as recent as two years before his death. True to his legacy, most of the photographs are in black and white, but the colorful, ornately painted frames around some of them make the gallery feel alive.



Untitled. Image courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery.

The photographs hardly ever had the same background, a lot of them taken on the go. "I think Malick enjoyed the challenges presented by shooting in different settings," said Shainman. "When he was in the studio he spent a lot of time staging his subjects and drawing out their individual beauty. In public, there was the excitement of the unknown and always being ready to capture the special moments that came up organically."

Soirée à la maison blanche. Bagadadji - 1964. Image courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery.

Sidibé's photographs built a narrative where he let his subjects take control of their own stories and, as a consequence, the people of a culture decided how they would be represented to the world.

"No matter the setting," said Shainman. "I think above all else he enjoyed the interactions his camera allowed him to have."

All images courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery.

The Love Power Peace exhibition is showing at the Jack Shainman Gallery on 24th street from June 28th to August 10th, 2018.

THE CUT

GALLERY

5 Artists to See at the Contemporary African Art Fair This Weekend

By Mary Dellas

APRIL 30, 2018 5:30 PM

Malick Sidibé: *Un Yé-yé En Position*

Un Yé-yé En Position, 1963. Photo: Malick Sidibé/Courtesy of Galerie MAGNIN-A

Sidibé is a renowned Malian photographer best known for his black-and-white depictions of nightlife and popular culture in his native Bamako during the '60s, '70s, and '80s. Last year, a major exhibition dedicated to the late artist's photography opened in Paris at the Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art. On Sunday his photographs will be displayed in Gallery MAGNIN-A's booth.

These photographs and more will remain on display at 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair from Friday, May 4 to Sunday, May 6 at Brooklyn Pioneer Works.

HYDE
HYPOCRITEDESIGN MAGAZINE

PHOTOGRAPHY

Malick Sidibé

Malick Sidibé was a photographer known for his black-and-white images chronicling the exuberant lives and culture, often of youth, in his native Bamako, Mali in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. Sidibé's work documents a transitional moment as Mali gained its independence and transformed from a French colony steeped in tradition to a more modern independent country looking toward the West. He captured candid images in the streets, nightclubs, and sporting events and ran a formal portrait studio.

In a 2010 interview with John Henley in *The Guardian*, Sidibé explained, "To be a good photographer you need to have a talent to observe, and to know what you want. You have to choose the shapes and the movements that please you, that look beautiful. Equally, you need to be friendly, sympathique. It's very important to be able to put people at their ease. It's a world, someone's face. When I capture it, I see the future of the world. I believe with my heart and soul in the power of the image, but you also have to be sociable. I'm lucky. It's in my nature."

Sidibé was born in Mali in 1936, where he was based. His work has been exhibited extensively. In 2012, the DePaul University Art Museum, Chicago, organized an exhibition titled *Studio Malick* in collaboration with Gwinzegal/diChroma Photography that traveled to Cornell Fine Arts Museum at Rollins College, Florida, and to the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center at Vassar College in Spring 2014. In 2008, a solo exhibition was organized by Fotografiemuseum (FOAM), Amsterdam, the Netherlands. It traveled to Musée Nicéphore Niépce, Chalon-sur Saône. Both solo exhibitions were accompanied by catalogues. In 2008, his work was also shown at the University Art Gallery at the University of San Diego, California.

Sidibé has work in numerous public and private collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the Getty Museum, California, the Brooklyn Museum, New York, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California, the Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland, the Birmingham Museum of Art, Alabama, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania, and the Rhode Island School of Design Museum. He was awarded the International Center of Photography Infinity Award for Lifetime Achievement (2008), the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement Award by the Board of La Biennale di Venezia (2007) when he was included in *Think with the Senses Feel with the Mind*, curated by Robert Storr at the 52nd Annual Venice Biennale, and the Hasselblad Award (2003).

Jack Shainman Gallery has represented Sidibé since 2002. His most recent solo exhibition was in 2016.

NEW YORK

October 19, 2016 2:38 p.m.

Party Photos of Teens Being Teens in 1960s Mali

By **Hattie Crisell**

Photo: © Malick Sidibé; Courtesy Galerie MAGNIN-A; Paris

In 1960, the country of Mali became independent after over 60 years of French rule, and for young Malians, everything changed. “For the first time, Malians could listen to Western music, and they wanted to be dressed just like the stars they saw in the magazines,” says Philippe Boutté, co-curator of the new exhibit *Malick Sidibé: The Eye of Modern Mali,* on view at London’s Somerset House. From 1962 and on, the late photographer Malick Sidibé captured the aftermath (and the changing fashions) in the capital city of Bamako.

Sidibé owned a popular portrait studio where personal style was highly prized. His customers posed, often solemn and regal, in cowboy hats, loud check suits, or boxing gloves. In the evenings, Sidibé would head to clubs with a DJ friend and shoot the local party scene: girls in prom-style dresses, boys wearing a wide variety of flares, tight shirts, tunic-style suits, and trilby hats. “This is an ambience that you only saw in the parties, during the night, in fact,” Boutté says of the starkly different day-to-night styles. “This is the first time that the boys and girls could touch each other and could dance together.”

The following mornings, tired partygoers would show up at Sidibé’s studio and buy photos. Sometimes he went with them down to a river to continue the fun and photographs — groups pose in swimsuits or topless, arms slung around each other. “There are no adults in the photographs,” Boutté points out. Most of Sidibé’s subjects look like teenagers, and some of the images have an undercurrent of flirtation or eroticism. “They came out to the Niger River so they were alone — they could do what they wanted.”

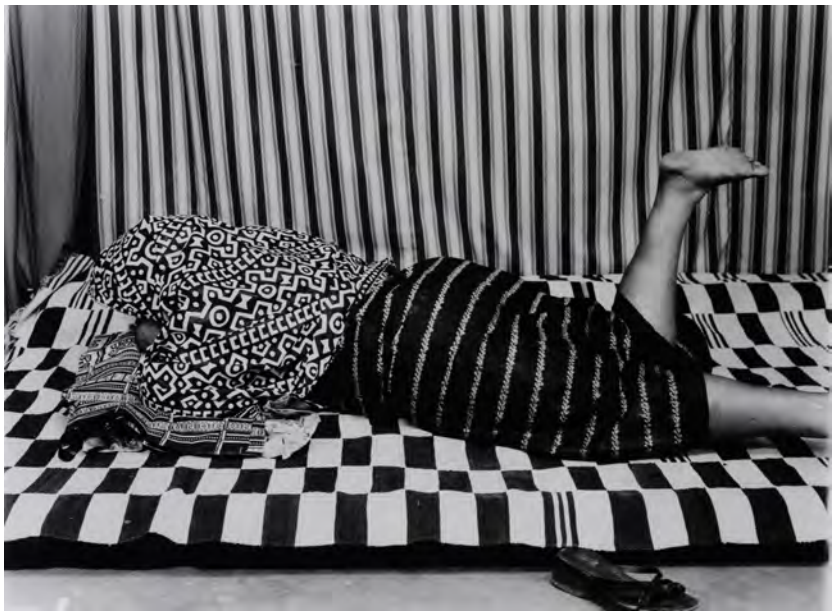
Sidibé died last April, leaving an enormous collection of almost half a million negatives. He spent most of his career in Bamako but earned worldwide acclaim toward the end of his life; in 2007, he became both the first photographer and the first African artist to receive a Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale. “It was a crazy, crazy decade of freedom, of joy, of opening up to the world and to liberty,” Boutté says Sidibé’s time. “Malick made an archive of a history of Mali that we don’t know in Western countries.”

Click ahead to see moments he captured.

“Malick Sidibé: The Eye of Modern Mali” runs until January 15 2017, at Somerset House, London.

The New York Times

LENS PHOTOGRAPHY, VIDEO AND VISUAL JOURNALISM



Courtesy of Malick Sidibé and Jack Shainman Gallery

Malick Sidibé: Creative Force of African Culture

By Fayemi Shakur Apr. 11, 2016

Malick Sidibé's images of popular and youth culture still resonate among young photographers who have been influenced by the noted Malian documentary photographer. Mr. Sidibé was born into a peasant family, and his life was changed when he was selected to attend the School of Sudanese Craftsmen in Bamako. Later, he became the first African and the first photographer to be awarded the Golden Lion Award for Lifetime Achievement at the Venice Biennale in 2007. Even the Malian-French singer Inna Modja paid tribute to him in a 2015 music video, "Tombouctou."

À côté de la boîte à musiques. Circa 1969-2002.
Credit Courtesy of Malick Sidibé and Jack Shainman Gallery

“He’s such an important figure,” said Jack Shainman, whose New York gallery is now featuring his work. “In terms of African photographers there are two masters, Malick Sidibé and Seydou Keita. Sidibé is in his 80s, still influencing pop culture.”

Mr. Sidibé, who was born in Bamako, Mali, in the 1930s, had a career-changing apprenticeship at Gérard Guillat-Guignard’s Photo Service Boutique in 1955. He bought his first camera, a Brownie Flash, in 1956 and became a full-time photographer two years later.

Focusing on youth culture in Bamako, he became known for his black-and-white studies of popular culture. His documentation of Mali’s postcolonial period portrays smiling, dancing couples, street scenes and young men seducing girls at parties with a sense of newfound freedom and identity.

In the ’70s, he opened his first studio, where he began making portraits, positioning his subjects with backgrounds that give the appearance of movement and liveliness.

Decades later, his images full of humanity, dignity and life continue to speak to a shared spirit of modernity and diaspora.

Vues de dos. 2003-4.
Credit Courtesy of Malick Sidibé and Jack Shainman Gallery

Much of the work in this latest exhibition — which runs through April 23 and is his sixth solo show at the gallery — focused on Mr. Sidibé's most recent series, "Vue de Dos," which depicts women with bare backs and views of the shoulder suggesting a concealed, sensual beauty rather than something explicit.

Mr. Sidibé resists exhibiting this work, which has been considered risqué, in his native, predominantly Muslim country, where revealing parts of the body is taboo. The series experiments with an artistic variation of the female nude, the goddess as a voluptuous muse, in his singular, powerful style.

Sine Sidibé au sortir de chez lui. 2001-8.
Credit Courtesy of Malick Sidibé and Jack Shainman Gallery

"He's done something that's kind of normal for us, but it's taboo in Mali to reveal parts of the body," Mr. Shainman said. "Throughout art history it's been done many times by so many artists and he's putting his own spin on it, in a beautiful and even sculptural way."

MUSÉE

March 21, 2016

MALICK SIDIBÉ AT JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

Image above: ©Malick Sidibé Vues de dos, 2003-2004 gelatin silver print / Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Image above: ©Fernando Sandoval, Opening Night

Jack Shainman Gallery is pleased to announce Malick Sidibé's sixth solo exhibition at the gallery, which chronicles this living master's iconic career, beginning in 1950s Bamako, Mali, where he still lives and works. Many of this diverse selection of vintage and contemporary black-and-white prints have never before been exhibited, yet solidify Sidibé's lasting influence in today's art world. Street scenes and studio shots, while formally distinct from each other, all capture a pervasive sense of freedom and identity amongst youth in postcolonial Mali and continue to speak to a shared spirit of modernity and diaspora.

Image above: ©Malick Sadibé, Vues de dos – Juin, 2003-2004, gelatin silver print / Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

While internationally acclaimed for his formal portrait studio and candid shots of exuberant parties and nightclubs, Malick Sidibé presents lesser known works to provide context for the depth of the artist's diverse practice. Street scenes and images like Horloger dans son Atelier (1963/2008) and Le Technicien de Radio Mali (1966/2008) capture everyday Malians at their jobs with the same intensity of the iconic studio work, while featuring subjects comfortably in their element.

The recent series, Vue de Dos (2001—ongoing), which depicts women turned with their often bare backs to the camera, marks an important shift in Sidibé's career. Previously, he had never considered himself a fine artist, although his studio work and candid images gave rise to artistic impact that has resonated for decades. By taking on a classic genre of art history—the female nude—Sidibé comes to terms with his legacy as a major creative force of African culture in the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. Considered risqué, Sidibé resists exhibiting this work in his native country. For the exhibition, these private portraits are made public in the gallery space.

Image above: ©Malick Sidibé, Un petit bain de soleil à la plage, 1975-2008 gelatin silver print / Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

The unidentified figures, each photographed uniformly from behind, are reminiscent of Velazquez'sRokeby Venus (c. 1647–51), suggesting the most sensual kind of beauty is that which is concealed, rather than made explicit. Here the goddess is reimagined as a voluptuous muse, exuding eroticism. The women are at once sculptural and faceless, but still radiate a powerful style all their own.

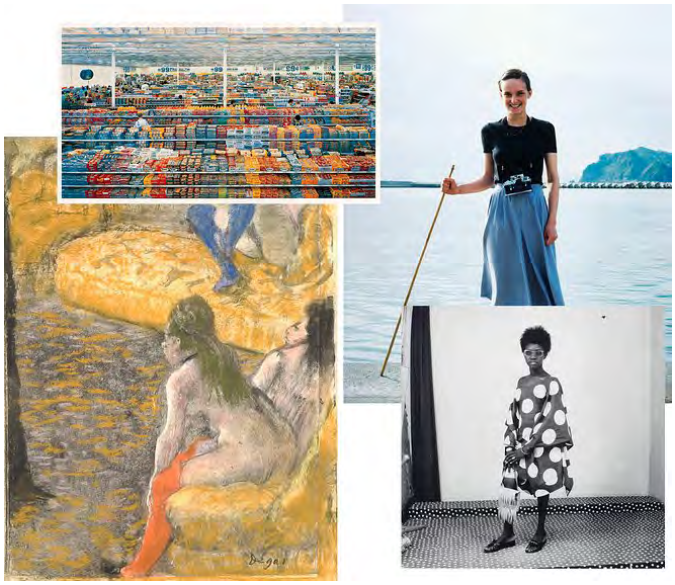
Image above: ©Malick Sidibé, Jardin d'enfants – à Croix-Rouge, route de Koulikoro, 1963-2008 gelatin silver print / Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Sidibé has work in numerous public and private collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Getty Museum, California; the Brooklyn Museum, New York; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California; the Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland; the Birmingham Museum of Art, Alabama; the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania; and the Rhode Island School of Design Museum. He was awarded the International Center of Photography Infinity Award for Lifetime Achievement (2008), the Hasselblad Award (2003), and the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement Award by the Board of La Biennale di Venezia (2007) when he was included in Think with the Senses Feel with the Mind, curated by Robert Storr at the 52nd Annual Venice Biennale.

VOGUE

The Top 10 Art Shows to See This Spring

MARCH 25, 2016 4:05 PM
by DODIE KAZANJIAN



From top left: Andreas Gursky, 99 Cent, 1999; Seiichi Furuya, Izu, 1978, from the series Portrait of Christine, 1979; Malick Sidibé, Avec Mon Nouveau Sac, Ma Bague et Mon Bracelet, 1975-2001; Edgar Degas, Waiting for a Client, 1879

The art world likes its "isms": Cubism, Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, Conceptualism, to name a few in the 20th century. But after a brief flirtation with Neo-Geoism in the 1980s, "isms" seemed to evaporate. Until now. Without noticing it, we're in Globalism. And the shows this spring more than bear that out. Ten shows I'm looking forward to are:

Malick Sidibé, Vue de Dos—Juin, 2003-2004
Photo: © Malick Sidibé / Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shaman Gallery, New York

Malick Sidibé: Jack Shainman Gallery gives this master Malian photographer his sixth solo show. The black-and-white images by this iconic photographer—a young couple dancing, street scenes, and studio shots in his hometown of Bamako—since the 1950s grow in their importance and influence. Chris Ofili traveled to Mali to be photographed by Sidibé for his *New Yorker* profile two years ago. Sidibé's most recent works, *Vue de Dos*, takes on the nude, showing women with bare backs to the camera. He's never shown these private portraits in Mali, but you can see them at Jack Shainman through April 23.

CRAVE

Exhibit | Malick Sidibé

The photographer of happiness returns with a selection of lesser-known works that celebrate the people of his native Mali.

By Miss Rosen Apr 3rd 2016

Photo: Soirée familiale, 1964-2008 gelatin silver print

“Man tried to imitate God by drawing; then we invented the photo,” **Malick Sidibé** observed. Indeed, there is a sense of the eternal, ethereal soul that resides below the flesh, deep in the bone in the photographs of the man from Bamako. Born in Mali in 1936, Sidibé has lived and worked in his native land for six decades, becoming one of the greatest photographers of the twentieth century. His iconic images from the 1950s, ‘60s, and ‘70s take us back to a time of transition as African countries gained their independence from foreign imperial powers in Europe.

Sidibé began his career in 1955 as an apprentice, purchasing his first camera, a Brownie Flash, one year. In 1958, he opened Studio Malick in Bamako, and grew to become the premier photographer of youth culture. Whether at the clubs or at sporting events, on the

beach or in the studio, Sidibé brilliantly captured the vibrant joy and energy of the first generation of free Malians.

Amoureux des disques, c. 1969-2002 silver gelatin print

Malick Sidibé, on view at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, now through April 23, 2016, presents a selection of lesser-known works by the master to provide a context for the vast range and diversity of his vast archive. The exhibition extensive, charting a dynamic path through Sidibé career from a new vantage point, offering a selection of images that complement our sense of the photographer's world and way of life.

"I wanted to be the photographer of happiness," Sidibé revealed, and In his work we can witness that spirit revealed. There is a sense of hope, of the pleasure of possibility, of the spirit that embodies youth and all of its dreams. Whether in the club or on the street, Sidibé brought the heat, capturing regular people enjoying life, experiencing the joy of being completely in the moment. He observed, "People said if [I] was at a party, it gave it prestige. I would let people know I'd arrived by letting off my flash… You could feel the temperature rise right away."

Taximan avec Voiture, 1970-2008 gelatin silver print

The photographs on view in Malick Sidibé are an exquisite collection of work that speak to the timeless nature of the medium. Included in the exhibition is the cent series, Vue de Dos (2001—ongoing), which depicts women turned with their often bare backs to the camera. This series marks an important shift in his career. Previously, Sidibé had never considered himself a fine artist, but the female nude has changed his perception to his role in the creation of the photograph. Considered risqué, Sidibé resists exhibiting this work in his native country and so it is here in our milieu that we can consider the work on its own terms.

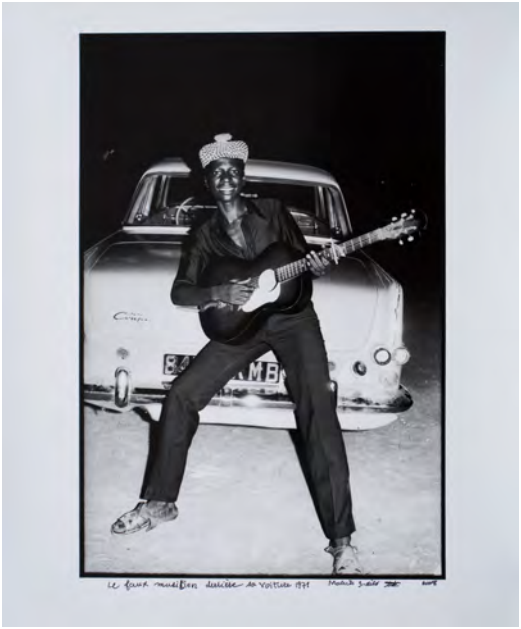
Sidibé challenges us to look at the photograph, as it really is. He observes, “It’s all the same. It’s the same face. We always look for an idea, for the same face, for the same position. There is no such thing as a ‘European’ or an ‘African photography.’ It’s all the same thing.”

À côté de la boîte à musiques, c. 1969-2002 gelatin silver print

the PARIS REVIEW

In Bamako

March 17, 2016 | by Dan Piepenbring



Malick Sidibé, *Le Faux Musicien Derriere sa Voiture*, 1971/2008, silver gelatin print, 20 7/8" x 14".

The Malian photographer Malick Sidibé's latest exhibition opens tonight at Jack Shainman Gallery. Sidibé, who's seventy-nine or eighty, lives in Bamako, where he's worked as a photographer since the fifties; he's known for his vivacious black-and-white studies of the city's youth culture. "You go to someone's wedding, someone's christening," he told LensCulture in 2008, speaking of the renown he gained as a party photographer:

> I was lucky enough at that time to be the intellectual young photographer with a small camera who could move around. The early photographers like Seydou Keïta worked with plate cameras and were not able to get out and use a flash. So I was much in demand by the local youth. Everywhere … in town, everywhere! Whenever there was a dance, I was invited … At night, from midnight to four A.M. or six A.M., I went from one party to another. I could go to four different parties. If there were only two, it was like having a rest. But if there were four, you couldn't miss any. If you were given four invitations, you had to go. You couldn't miss them. I'd leave one place, I'd take thirty-six shots here, thirty-six shots there, and then thirty-six somewhere else, until the morning.

His new show spans the whole of his career; it's up through April 23. Read More »

Wallpaper*

Mali master: Malick Sidibé's lesser-known photographs are showcased in New York

ART / 14 MAR 2016 / BY DANIEL SCHEFFLER

The Malian photographer Malick Sidibé has opened his sixth solo exhibition at the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York. Pictured left: Mr. Cissé le pharmacien, 1973, 2001. Right: Untitled, 1976/2004

Malick Sidibe, the photographer from Bamako in Mali, is opening his sixth solo exhibition at the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York – simply titled 'Malick Sidibe'. Known, and lauded, for both his formal portrait work and candid shots of soirees and nightclubs, this show will chronicle the living master's métier.

The show combines an assortment of vintage and never-before-exhibited black and white prints, and speaks to the idea of freedom and identity in postcolonial Mali. His recent work, dubbed *Vue de Dos*, 2001–, and also on display here, comprises women turned with their bare backs to the camera, and so heralds a shift in the artist's career.

'I have always wanted to present lesser-known works by Malick Sidibé,' says Jack Shainman from the gallery. ' Our exhibition will feature a selection of street scenes, many that have never before been exhibited. It is incredible to trace the same focused intensity that Malick is able to capture across all his varied subjects.'

Sidibe is prolific and constantly collected in private and public institutions across the globe – including the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Getty Museum. The artist has also received numerous accolades including the International Center of Photography Infinity Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2008, the Hasselblad Award in 2003, and the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement Award by the board of the 2007 Venice Biennale, when he was included in the Robert Storr-curated exhibition 'Think with the Senses, Feel with the Mind: Art in the Present Tense'.

ARTNEWS

9 ART EVENTS TO ATTEND IN NEW YORK CITY THIS WEEK

BY ***The Editors of ARTnews*** POSTED **03/14/16 10:22 AM**

Opening: Malick Sidibé at Jack Shainman Gallery
Long before Cindy Sherman popularized the concept of photographing herself performing various roles, Malian photographer Malick Sidibé was taking pictures of Bamako youths posing for the camera. The young people's looks—a rock-and-roll wannabee, a woman in traditional dress and hip sunglasses, a boy with a shirt stuffed so that he appears pregnant—can sometimes be ridiculous, but they are never anything less than extraordinarily personal. In private, these people can assume various identities that they never could in public, and it shows in these black-and-white photographs. This exhibition of Sidibé's recent work includes portraits such as these alongside works from the "Vue de Dos" series, in which women are photographed from behind and posed like odalisques—this time, with their clothes on.

Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 West 20th Street, 6–8 p.m.

The New York Times Magazine

Magazine

Portrait of a Lady

JUNE 24, 2015

On Photography

By TEJU COLE

A photographer working in a commercial studio in West Africa in the 20th century had a straightforward task: to please his clients. In that sense, the Malian photographer Seydou Keïta was — like his father, who worked as a blacksmith, carpenter, mechanic and electrician, among other jobs — a craftsman. He was paid by the public to make pictures. But like his esteemed Malian compatriot Malick Sidibé, Mama Casset of Senegal and Joseph Moise Agbodjelou of Benin, he produced such fine work that we now consider him a great African artist. These master photographers gave us panoramas of life in Bamako, Dakar and Porto-Novo, a vivid record of individual people, largely shorn of their names and stories but irrepressibly alive. Here are good clothes gracefully cut, glowing skin, beautifully coifed hair, polished shoes: all the familiar markers of a person taking pride in his or her appearance. Here's someone who looks witty, here's another who looks querulous, another who's modest, or vain, or sweet. There we see a renegade bra strap slipping off a shoulder, there a large laughing man with a baby, a woman in a bathing suit, youths partying at night with their Afros, bell-bottoms, precious LPs and endless reserves of cool.

These photographs are ripostes to the anthropological images of "natives"

made by Europeans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Those photographs, in which the subjects had no say in how they were seen, did much to shape the Western world's idea of Africans. Something changed when Africans began to take photographs of one another: You can see it in the way they look at the camera, in the poses, the attitude. The difference between the images taken by colonialists or white adventurers and those made for the sitter's personal use is especially striking in photographs of women. In the former, women are being looked at against their will, captive to a controlling gaze. In the latter, they look at themselves as in a mirror, an activity that always involves seriousness, levity and an element of wonder.

A portrait of this kind is a visual soliloquy. Consider, for instance, one of Keïta's most famous pictures, now called the Odalisque. A woman reclines in a long dress with fine floral patterning on a bed with a checked bedspread. Her head scarf is polka-dotted. The bed is placed in front of a wall, which is draped with a paisley cloth. And even her face is marked with cicatrices. Then we notice, emerging from this swirling field — a profusion of pattern that brings to mind Matisse at his most inventive — her delicate hands and feet, dark but subtly shaded; the right arm on which she rests her head; her narrowed eyes. Her look is self-possessed rather than seductive. She's looking ahead but not at the camera. It is the look of someone who is thinking about herself, simultaneously outward and inward. The image challenges and delights the viewer with its complicated two-dimensional game.

Keïta's and Sidibé's oeuvres make me think of August Sander's record of German people in their various occupations in the years between the World Wars, or of Mike Disfarmer's thousands of portraits taken in Heber Springs, Ark.: faces peering out of the past, unknown to us but as expressive and intense as those we love. Keïta was not directly influenced by these photographers, nor by any of the conventions of photography in the West. In an interview he gave the French gallerist André Magnin in the mid-'90s, he said: "I've heard that in your country you have old photographs that are like mine. Well, I've never met any foreign photographers, nor seen their photos."

By his own account, he was an original. Looking at the body of his work, we become conscious of implied community, customs and connections, a world that is perhaps now irretrievable.

Malick Sidibé — the younger of these two photographers — made many fine portraits as well, generally working with hipper, less formal poses than Keïta did and shooting more often at night and at parties. There's one portrait of Sidibé's in particular that I'm always drawn to. A woman stands alone in a sleeveless blouse and an ankle-length skirt. She has sandals on her feet, a pendulous earring in each ear and hair woven close to her scalp. Her address to the camera is direct. No, she's not quite alone: A man's shoulder and arm are visible just to her left. We also see his right shoe and half of his right leg. But the rest of him has been dodged away in the printing of the picture.

"Je veux être seule," 1979.

Malick Sidibé, from Jack Shainman Gallery

On the brown paper border that frames the photograph are written the words: “Je veux être seule. 1979 — Malick Sidibé.” On the right border are Sidibé’s signature and the date 2009. I suppose Sidibé signed this photograph in 2009 and wrote down what the woman told him 30 years earlier, before he had printed the photograph: “Je veux être seule” (“I want to be alone”). This young woman, like many others in Sidibé’s work, has decided her own image. The photo’s peculiarity is the mark of her authority.

I love the West African women in the photographs by Keïta and Sidibé, some of whom are of my mother’s generation and the generation just before, women to whom a university education was widely available, and for whom working outside the home was a given. In West African photography of this period, there are many photographs of friendship among women, many photographs of women with their families, many of young women with their young men. And there are photos of women alone, some of whom perhaps might also have told the photographer, “Je veux être seule.”

The confidence visible in photographs like Keïta’s and Sidibé’s can be evoked even when we don’t see the sitters’ faces. J. D. ’Okhai Ojeikere, who

was born in Nigeria in 1930 and did most of his work there, understood the expressive possibilities of women’s heads, particularly those crowned with the marvelous array of hairstyles common to many Nigerian ethnic groups. These photographs, made in the years following the country’s independence from Britain in 1960, record evanescent sculptures that are both performance art and temporary body modification. Most of these heads are turned away from us. Has the back of a head ever been more evocative than in these photographs? Ojeikere made hundreds of them, and each head seems to convey an attitude, and even a glance. On the streets of Lagos today, such heads, necks, hairstyles and elaborately constructed and tied head wraps can still be seen, tableaux vivants of assertive elegance.

Photographs by Keïta, Sidibé, Agbodjelou and Ojeikere are united by the period in which they were made as well as by geographical and cultural proximity to one another. There seems to me a correspondence between the energy of these pictures and the optimism and determination of the West African independence movements of the ’50s and ’60s. The photographs’ legacies have had a powerful effect on 21st-century African portraiture, but the contemporary work that most reminds me of them is from farther away on the continent, and made in very different circumstances. Zanele Muholi, one of the most prominent contemporary African photographers, who started working only a few years after the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994, is in a sense a “postindependence” artist. She has tried to document a specific aspect of the country’s new political, social and economic terrain. One of Muholi’s long-term projects, called “Faces and Phases,” focuses on the portraiture of black lesbian and transgender people, most of them in South Africa. Like her West African forebears, she shows people as they wish to be seen.

South Africa is one of the few countries whose constitution protects its citizens from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. But persistent prejudice remains a reality for many black South African lesbians and transgender people, many of whom have been raped and even murdered. Muholi’s work is an answer to those who want to wish them away or intimidate them into invisibility. To look at their faces, in portrait after portrait, is to become newly aware of the power of portraiture in a gifted artist’s hands. Muholi doesn’t grant her sitters independence — they are independent — but she makes their independence visible. “Faces and Phases,” currently on view at the Brooklyn Museum as part of a show of Muholi’s work, is a complete world.

The work of Keïta and Sidibé, too, makes us aware of an entire world of experiences, one in which men are sometimes secondary. Keïta did well enough from his photo studio that, in the early 1950s, he was able to buy a Peugeot 203. Here is that car, used as a background prop for a group portrait made around 1956, featuring two women and a girl. The women's dark foreheads and cheekbones are echoed in the Peugeot's sinuous lines. And way off to the right, touching the hood of the car, is a man's hand. He has been sidelined, just as the man in "Je veux être seule" was. But a closer look reveals another man in the picture. He can be seen in the front wheel well of the car, in the glimmer of its reflective shine. This second man, dressed in white, is stooped over something. He is the photographer, Seydou Keïta himself, in his limited role, collaborating with the true authors of the image: the women.

Teju Cole is a photographer, an essayist and the author of two works of fiction, "Open City" and "Every Day Is for the Thief." He teaches at Bard College and is the magazine's photography critic.

A version of this article appears in print on June 28, 2015, on page MM20 of the Sunday Magazine with the headline: Portrait of a Lady.

AnOther Magazine

Lessons We Can Learn From Malick Sidibé

– April 30, 2015 –

We turn to Studio Malick in 1960s Bamako for lessons in style, posturing and self-determination

© Malick Sidibé, Courtesy of GALLERY FIFTY ONE

Text Olivia Singer

Having apprenticed under leading society photographer Gérard Guillat and learning his trade at colonial balls and banquets, in 1962 **Malick Sidibé** opened **Studio Malick**: a photographic studio located in Bamako, Mali. The decades that followed saw both the studio and Sidibé's documentary photography rise to a global renown, his work capturing an exuberant period of liberation in a country that had lived under colonial rule for centuries.

Malick Sidibé
17 images

What Sidibé offered was a space where people were afforded agency over their image, rather than being subject to a western lens that projected an exoticism or poverty upon them. The resulting pictures were "Africans for Africans". But, as well as that, the studio was a place where people came to hang out – as he told The Guardian in 2010, "often it was like a party. People would drop by, stay, eat. I slept in the developing room. They'd pose on their Vespas, show off their new hats and trousers and jewels and sunglasses. Looking beautiful was everything. Everyone had to have the latest Paris style. We had never really worn socks, and suddenly people were so proud of theirs, straight from Saint Germain des Près!" So, in honour of some of the most iconic fashion images we know, we are turning to Studio Malick for the lessons that we can learn from Sidibé's clientele.

© Malick Sidibé, Courtesy of GALLERY FIFTY ONE

Posture is key

Although Sidibé carefully and deliberately instructed the pose of his subjects, the resulting images always appear to capture a moment rather than feeling static or staged. An early love for Eugène Delacroix, sparked when he was given a book as a prize at school, Sidibe went on to spend four years studying art at École des Artisans Soudanais on command of the colonial governor, and his formal education is particularly apparent in his understanding of composition and posture.

© Malick Sidibé, Courtesy of GALLERY FIFTY ONE

James Brown is King

Speaking to American Suburb X, Sidibé explained, "It wasn't so much our independence as it was Western music that changed many things during that time. Music was really the revolution because after 1957, rock music, hula-hoop, swing came to the country. Music was a true revolution in Mali." After making a name for himself by documenting parties and dances (his camera was lighter

than his contemporaries like Seydou Keita whose weighty equipment restricted their mobility), the inclusion of specific records or dancing within his studio photography was grounded in a Malian cultural revolution that combined west African identity with western influences like James Brown.

© Malick Sidibé, Courtesy of GALLERY FIFTY ONE

Motorbikes are always cool

The appearance of motorbikes and Vespas within portraits is a recurrent theme in Sidibé's studio work – young Malians would arrive on them and then want them included in the images to advertise their modernity. He explained to Jerome Sother in 2008 that "People came by motorbike or Vespa. I was also lucky at that time because when I opened the studio, electricity was becoming available. And to be photographed where there was electricity, people enjoyed that. Electricity was something of a luxury. So people would come to my studio because it had electricity."

© Malick Sidibé, Courtesy of GALLERY FIFTY ONE

Dress up

The party atmosphere of his studio inspired groups of young people to arrive together, to hang out and to get a print that showed them and their friends at their finest. One of the greatest elements of Sidibé's work is the personal styling that went into every picture; keen to show off new clothes, new looks and a new identity, his subjects are frequently wearing the latest trends – with sunglasses worn indoors a popular feature. It is dressing up at its greatest, with everyone proud of the outfits that they have assembled and reminding us that there is no shame in trying to look cool if the result is this good.

© Malick Sidibé, Courtesy of GALLERY FIFTY ONE

Incorporate different cultural references

Mali had previously been a French colony, and Sidibé's work documents a period of major political change that is reflected in the clothing of his subjects. Combinations of European fashions, west African prints and, here, even a traditionally Francophile beret, show the amalgamation of a variety of cultural references that ensure the outfits (and their wearers) stand the test of time; they look just as cool in 2015 as they did in the 60s.

Photography by Malick Sidibé will be on show at Photo London, Somerset House, on May 21-24.

ARTFORUM
APRIL 2014

CRITICS' PICKS: NEW YORK

Malick Sidibé

JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY | 524 WEST 24TH STREET
524 West 24th Street
March 28–April 26

Malick Sidibé, *Danseur Méringué*, 1964, silver gelatin print, 20 7/8 x 14".

Malick Sidibé's current exhibition of photographs offers a glimpse into the dynamic youth culture that emerged in Bamako during Mali's post-Independence era. Though trained as a studio photographer, Sidibé was lured into the city's streets and dance clubs, where his clients wanted to be seen participating in Bamako's thriving nightlife. There, Malian youths forged a uniquely diasporic aesthetic, finding inspiration in American Black Power icons and musicians, including James Brown and Angela Davis. As his subjects began to imitate the styles and gestures found in magazines and album covers, Sidibé, in turn, closely emulated those sources in his compositions. "He was internalizing the history of photography without knowing it," filmmaker and art historian Manthia Diawara asserts—this was instrumental towards the creation of a 1960s "Bamakois" visual culture.

Sidibé's images capture the vibrancy of this moment in visual, sonic, and tactile registers. You can almost hear the sound track emanating from his nightclub snapshots, in which flirtatious young couples dance and twist in unison. In several images, albums by Jimi Hendrix, Ray Charles, and Jimmy Smith are held up like trophies for the camera. The records are even lugged to the beach; one photograph captures boys in swimsuits displaying a set of 7" singles.

The real gem in the exhibition is a series of rare color Polaroids and vintage prints (Sidibé's photographs typically circulate in the form of enlarged reprints from an archive of negatives). Some of these are mounted in wooden frames that have been colorfully hand-painted, complementing the richly patterned textiles worn by Sidibé's sitters. In one yellowing print from 1970, a teenage girl models a minidress sewn from a patchwork of wax fabrics. While its composition is consistent with traditional studio portraiture in West Africa, the subject's provocative outfit and subtle confidence express the sense of freedom felt by many who came of age in a newly independent Mali.

— Allison Young

Young, Allison. "Critics' Picks: New York–Malick Sidibé" (Jack Shainman Gallery exhibition review). *Artforum* (April 2014). Online. <http://artforum.com/?pn=picks&section=nyc#picks46379>.

The New York Times

The Young and the Rebellious

A Review of 'Malick Sidibé: Chemises' in Poughkeepsie

By **MARTHA SCHWENDENER**

FEBRUARY 27, 2014

Malick Sidibé took photographs at parties from the 1960s to the early 1970s.
Malick Sidibé; Courtesy of Malick Sidibé/Gwinzegal/diChroma Photography

In the early 1990s, European and American curators and art dealers became aware of African photographs taken in the mid-20th century by the operators of small portrait studios, particularly in Mali. Discovering negatives that had been stored for decades, they went about printing, exhibiting and selling these works, making local photographers like Seydou Keïta and Malick Sidibé international art stars in the process.

What happened, however, is that the original nature of the photographs — the way they were made and later displayed — got a bit lost as they made their way into galleries and

museums. Instead of the small, low-contrast prints their original clients would have commissioned and owned, the photos were shown as large, high-contrast prints, in keeping with the tastes and practices of the ’90s European and American art world. “Malick Sidibé: Chemises” at The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., offers an opportunity to see some of these works in their near original state, with 50 small vintage prints being shown alongside 53 recent enlargements.

Photographs by Mr. Sidibé are on display at The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. Courtesy of Malick Sidibé/Gwinzegal/diChroma Photography

Mr. Sidibé, who was born in 1936, earned a diploma in jewelry making and then worked in a photography studio of a French colonial. In 1956 he bought his first camera, a Brownie Flash, and in 1957 became a full-time photographer, opening Studio Malick in 1962. In a video interview accompanying the show, Mr. Sidibé, who still lives in

Schwendener, Martha. “The Young and the Rebellious: A Review of Malick Sidibe: Chemises’ in Poughkeepsie.” *The New York Times*, 27 February 2014. Online. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/02/nyregion/a-review-of-malick-sidibe-chemises-in-poughkeepsie.html?_r=0>.

Bamako, Mali, describes how people came to his studio partly because it had electricity, which was a luxury there at that time.

What Mr. Sidibé is really known for, however, is his candid photographs of young people taken at parties from the 1960s to the early 1970s. Mali gained independence from France in 1960, and there was a flowering of music and culture. (Bamako has remained an international music center, although recent conflicts have upset that somewhat.) Taking advantage of the lighter 35-millimeter camera, Mr. Sidibé photographed people, attending surprise parties, celebrations for new babies or graduation parties at social clubs called "grins."

Mr. Sidibé is known for his candid photographs of young people. Malick Sidibé

One of the best known of these works is "Nuit de Noel, Happy Club (Christmas Eve, Happy Club)" photographed in 1963 and exhibited here as a 2008 print, in which a smiling couple — the man in a suit, the woman in a Western party dress, but barefoot — dance to music we can't hear but can almost feel. A wall text quotes Mr. Sidibé on the circumstances of these photographs: "When young people dance they're spellbound by the music. In that atmosphere, people didn't pay any attention to me anymore." What is not immediately obvious in the works is that many were taken after curfew, and the clothes the young people were wearing and the music they were listening to weren't seen as appropriate in conservative Malian culture. (Just like rebellious teenagers all over the globe in the '60s.)

Schwendener, Martha. "The Young and the Rebellious: A Review of Malick Sidibe: Chemises' in Poughkeepsie." *The New York Times*, 27 February 2014. Online. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/02/nyregion/a-review-of-malick-sidibe-chemises-in-poughkeepsie.html?_r=0>.

What is also notable about this show, however, are the dozens of small, vintage prints attached to colored office folders — the "chemises" (from the French "shirt" or "sleeve") of the exhibition's title. "Arrosage de trois admis Niarela (Party for the Three Graduates)" from 1968 shows more than two dozen contact prints mounted on orange-brown cardstock, mostly of couples and groups of friends posing or toasting the camera.

The exhibition includes various forms of Mr. Sidibé's work, including prints displayed in hand-painted frames. Malick Sidibé and Jack Shainman Gallery

On the walls are arrangements of photographs in hand-painted frames made by an artisan named Checkna Touré who has had a shop around the corner from Mr. Sidibé since the 60s. While picture frames often get ignored in many photographic traditions, here they are treated as part of the picture, something that turns it into a unique object rather than an infinitely reproducible one.

Although the "chemises" and the photographs in painted frames distinguish this from the dozens of exhibitions — probably hundreds, at this point — devoted to African portrait photography, it's also always great to see Mr. Sidibé's studio portraits. And it is undeniable that they gain something from being enlarged, and with a punched-up contrast. There is a sense of joy and curiosity in his studio portraits, with people posing together in matching patterned outfits, showing off new gadgets, like a watch or a motorbike, or in one, dressed in a trench coat and sunglasses as "Monsieur Dembelé, agent secret (Mr. Dembelé, Secret Agent)" from 1964.

In the upstairs gallery are several works from the '30s by James Van Der Zee, whose studio in Harlem produced glamorous portraits of African-Americans. These make for an interesting comparison. Similarly, questions of racism embedded in technology are being raised more frequently since the advent of digital photography and cinema, which allow artists and filmmakers greater control over the skin tone and representation of their subjects. (Filmmakers from Jean-Luc Godard to Steve McQueen have commented on the inherent problems of photographing darker skin with sensitive chemical and celluloid film stock, and more recent charges have been made against webcams and face-detection cameras for being racist.)

With this in mind, "Malick Sidibé: Chemises," continues the conversation around not only African photography, but also other issues. Altered or in their original state, Mr. Sidibé's photographs capture your attention, and this generates myriad other dialogues around history, race, representation, technology and beyond.

"Malick Sidibé: Chemises," the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, 124 Raymond Avenue, Poughkeepsie, through March 30. Information: (845) 437-5632 or fllac.vassar.edu.

A version of this review appears in print on March 2, 2014, on page WE9 of the New York edition with the headline: The Young and the Rebellious. Order Reprints | Today's Paper | Subscribe

TIME LightBox From the photo editors of TIME

Thursday, January 16, 2014 | By Jehad Nga

Inside the Photographer's Studio: Malick Sidibe

Jehad Nga for TIME

The following photographs were taking in Bamako, Mali in March 2013

A curtain used as a backdrop hangs in Malick Sidibe's Bamako studio. The curtain has been in use since the opening of the studio in 1960 and never has been replaced. Many of Sidibe's most famous photographs feature the backdrop.

His photos have been prized on the international art market for years and adorn the walls of leading photo galleries across the world, but 76-year-old Malick Sidibe still resides in a one-room home in Mali so timeless that it feels as if the air within hasn't stirred in decades. Marked boxes — *1972, 1968, 1965* — containing much of Malick's vast archive balance atop one another, stretching to the ceiling. Orphaned 6 x 6 frames dot the floor. A large wooden crate bulges with ruined cameras in a tangled mass. Occasionally the scorching air outside shifts, sending a breeze through the room that does nothing to dispel the overwhelming heat inside. On a good day, electricity powers a single bulb that barely illuminates the otherwise pitch-dark space. Decades' worth of Malian dust covers every surface.

Malick is not surrounded by the material trappings one might expect a major contributor to the contemporary arts landscape to enjoy, or pursue, nor do I imagine he spends much time obsessing over his place in the photographic firmament. In this way he is, to my mind, the perfect artist. His wives and children constantly attend to him, and while inside his home time seems not merely to slow but to cease altogether, the courtyard outside buzzes with activity. A national hero, his contribution to his country's historical record has, for many, crafted *the* image of Mali.

Malick Sidibe - Courtesy of Vassar College

Voici ma montre et ma bague (Here is My Watch and My Ring), 1964

In his home, light years from the art centers of the world, Malick is, I trust, exactly where he wants to be in his life and in his career — the same neighbor to Malians that he has always been, despite the fame that has gradually found him.

Housed in a busy suburb of Bamako, Mali's capital, Malick's tiny studio has a readily detectable pulse — a touch shallower than I imagine it once was, but still present. The studio itself has become as much a subject in his photos as the countless men, women and children who have set foot inside the place to have their portraits made, or simply to visit with the local legend. The portraits, meanwhile, are remarkable, each one of the thousands of pictures somehow teasing out a central, telling element of the individual's character. These portraits, one realizes, are evidence of a rare and intimate exchange, an empathy between sitter and portraitist.

Malick Sidibe - Courtesy of Vassar College

Surprise Party, 1964, printed 2008
Gelatin silver print

Digging through Malick's archive I continually encountered series after series of photos that he had started and never finished, pictures that were unlike anything else I had seen from him. His challenges to the methodology of traditional studio portraits were clearly evident in these projects, and my admiration for his work — and for him as an artist and as a man — brought me back to his home every single day while I was in Bamako. All my questions about his techniques and his philosophy of photography having run their course, I was content at last to simply visit and sit with him, time and again. I suspect he makes everyone feel as welcome as I felt.

As a photographer, being around Malick in his small, storied, marvelous studio stirred something in me. The unflinching commitment to his ever-evolving, self-realized process, and his evident contentment with the place he has carved out for himself in the world of art, is both humbling and inspiring; his example forces me to engage the personal fears and hesitancies I suffer in my own work. The perfect artist, it seems to me now, fully gives himself over to a hard-earned trust in his own work, in his own methods. He doesn't just avoid the creative roadblocks that so many of us place in our own paths; instead, he is so quietly confident making his own way that the roadblocks simply don't exist.

Nga, Jehad. "Inside the Photographer's Studio: Malick Sidibe." *Time Magazine*, 16 January 2014. Online.
<http://lightbox.time.com/2014/01/16/inside-the-photographers-studio-malick-sidibe/?iid=lf|around#1>

Jehad Nga for TIME

A view from inside Malick Sidibe's now cluttered and dusty Bamako studio. Virtually nothing has been thrown away over the years from the studio including broken cameras and studio equipment.

Jehad Nga for TIME

Malick Sidibe's photo enlarger now out of use sits in a corner of the photographer's Bamako home.

Nga, Jehad. “Inside the Photographer’s Studio: Malick Sidibe.” *Time Magazine*, 16 January 2014. Online.
<http://lightbox.time.com/2014/01/16/inside-the-photographers-studio-malick-sidibe/?iid=lf|around#1>

Jehad Nga for TIME

Inside Malick Sidibe's Bamako studio, a strobe lighting system has been updated to accomidate his son Kareem's job as an I.D. photographer.

Jehad Nga for TIME

Equipment piles up in all corners inside Malick Sidibe's Bamako home and studio.

Nga, Jehad. “Inside the Photographer’s Studio: Malick Sidibe.” *Time Magazine*, 16 January 2014. Online.
<http://lightbox.time.com/2014/01/16/inside-the-photographers-studio-malick-sidibe/?iid=lf|around#1>

Jehad Nga for TIME

On the patio of Malick Sidibe's Bamako studio, photographs taken by Sidibe as well as ones featuring him over the years decorate a wooden wall.

Jehad Nga for TIME

Inside Malick Sidibe's home, a huge archive of negatives sits piled up and unprotected. Sidibe and his sons are trying to find people to help them begin to digitally archive his work before much of it is ruined by moisture and dust.

Nga, Jehad. “Inside the Photographer’s Studio: Malick Sidibe.” *Time Magazine*, 16 January 2014. Online.
<http://lightbox.time.com/2014/01/16/inside-the-photographers-studio-malick-sidibe/?iid=lf|around#1>

Jehad Nga for TIME

Samba Sidibe (Malick's younger brother) sits on the floor surrounded by old studio equipment and film negatives in Malick's bedroom.

Jehad Nga for TIME

Inside Malick Sidibe's Bamako studio, a collection of Sidibe's old cameras takes up an entire wall.

Nga, Jehad. “Inside the Photographer’s Studio: Malick Sidibe.” *Time Magazine*, 16 January 2014. Online.
<http://lightbox.time.com/2014/01/16/inside-the-photographers-studio-malick-sidibe/?iid=lf|around#1>

Malick Sidibe sits in his bed in his Bamako home. With temperatures rising to 110 degrees Fahrenheit, the heat take its toll on the aging Sidibe. His younger brother Samba and his sons help keep him cool using a hand fan.

Malick Sidibe *is a Malian photographer. He is represented by Jack Shainman Gallery in New York, Afronova Gallery in Johannesburg and Fifty One Fine Art Photography in Antwerp.*

Jehad Nga *is a New York-based photographer. LightBox has previously featured Nga's Green Book Project as well as work about his Libyan roots and a photo essay on the world's biggest refugee complex.*

Nga, Jehad. "Inside the Photographer's Studio: Malick Sidibe." *Time Magazine*, 16 January 2014.
Online. <http://lightbox.time.com/2014/01/16/inside-the-photographers-studio-malick-sidibe/?iid=lf|around#1>

Interview

CAN'T DISTRACT FROM MALICK SIDIBÉ

By BRIENNE WALSH
APRIL 2012

The agnès b. Galerie Boutique in Soho might not seem the ideal space to stage a solo exhibition of works by photographer Malick Sidibé, given the distraction of, well, the racks of clothing. But given the subject of the work, which focuses on street and nightlife culture in Bamako, the capital of Mali, during the 1960s and '70s, the photographs seem right at home in a sartorial setting. Unabashedly joyful, and oozing with hormones, the images depict tall, lanky men peacocking in perfectly tailored bell bottoms and platform boots, and glistening young women in minidresses and sandals. More than just advertisements for a lifestyle that today seems surprisingly modern, they are the embodiment of the period right after Mali was liberated from the French in 1960, when the country, drunk on freedom, was throwing impromptu dance parties on the banks of the Niger River.

A hybrid of the studio photographer Man Ray, and the Polaroid camera-wielding Andy Warhol, Sidibé opened his photography studio in Bamako in 1957. There, he invited stylish young people to come pose for black & white snapshots on their Vespas, in get-ups inspired by the latest fashions trickling down from Paris. In the evening, Sidibé, trained as an event photographer, would hit the nightlife scene, hopping from dance to dance to capture kids who for the first time were able to come out in public holding hands, swaying close, and losing their inhibitions in front of the camera. Eventually, the studio itself became a party, a place where figures like couturier Amadou Ballo—featured prominently in the exhibition—and his retinue of stylish protégés could come to show off their newest accessories, and hang out until 6 am.

Large prints include *Les deux Amoureux devant leur villa* (1977), a powerful image of an entangled couple lounging on the floor of Sidibé's studio, the woman's direct gaze into the lens of the camera a challenge to anyone who might disapprove of her kissing her man. Most moving of all, however, is *Nuit de Noël* (1963), a tiny print on the back wall, which depicts a gorgeous pair in crisp white outfits, dancing in perfect synch, their heads bowed in supplication to one another. More than just capturing a specific moment in time in Bamako, the longing the image evokes is universal.

THE NEW YORKER

August 8, 2011

Goings On About Town: Art

Malick Sidibe

Like the great studio photographers James Van Der Zee and Mike Disfarmer, Sidibe, who works in Bamako, Mali, is an artist for hire. Popular and prolific, he has taken portraits of single sitters, couples, and groups, posed before plain or patterned backdrops in his studio, and has also documented weddings, dance parties, and gatherings at the beach. His subjects are mostly young people with vivacious natural style, and this roundup of nearly eighty images could pass as a show of fashion pictures—not unlike Bill Cunningham's work for the New York *Times*. Effortlessly charming and full of spirit, Sidibe's photographs subvert formality with flair. Through Aug. 5.

"Goings on About Town: Galleries—Chelsea: Malick Sidibe at Jack Shainman Gallery." *The New Yorker*, 8 August 2011: 9.

Art in America INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

The Lookout: A Weekly Guide to Shows You Won't Want to Miss

by Leigh Anne Miller 08/04/11

With an ever-growing number of galleries scattered around New York, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Where to begin? Here at *A.i.A.*, we are always on the hunt for memorable shows that stand out in a crowded field. See below for an abbreviated summer "Lookout" of five of the best shows we saw this week, featuring black-and-white photographs by both Miroslav Tichý and Malick Sidibé, Mark Wagner's collages made from thousands of cut-up $1 bills, delicate sculptures and etchings by the late Christopher Wilmarth, and yet another strong group show of abstract paintings.

[...]

Malick Sidibé at Jack Shainman, through Aug. 5
In the late 1950s, Malick Sidibé opened a commercial photography studio in Bamako, the bustling capital of Mali, and has been snapping group and solo portraits, plus vibrant street and nightlife scenes, ever since. These large, ovoid clusters of vintage and contemporary prints—many mounted on colorful, patterned backgrounds—are an endlessly entertaining record of Bamako life.

The New York Times

Why Now

By ERIC WILSON
Published: June 11, 2009

PHOTOS: 2007: The Malian photographer Malick Sidibé is honored for lifetime achievement at the Venice Biennale.; MALICK SIDIBé COURTESY OF JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, N.Y.;

WAS it only last year that round sunglasses were considered square?

The hot eyewear look of 2008 was pretty much defined by plastic Wayfarer knockoffs, garish neon trapezoids often seen color-coordinated with a plaid shirt and sneakers. Or else it was "shutter shades," those ventilated blinders popularized by Kanye West.

This summer, however, the memo for sunglasses says circles are in. Very round shapes, as round as goggles in some cases, appeared in the recent women's collections of Marc Jacobs and Proenza Schouler; and, for men, from Ralph Lauren, Zegna and Lanvin (most costing from $300 to $400). Last month, New York magazine included round sunglasses among the anticipated trends of the summer. And, as predicted, they are already appearing on the streets in numbers not seen since the release of the last Harry Potter book.

While most fashion trends -- and especially this one -- are circular, round sunglasses, seemingly everywhere all at once, provide a case study of the group-think mentality of the fashion industry. There are even inexpensive examples ($10 to $11) at Urban Outfitters and Fred Flare.

Given that there is no obvious source for the revival and that typically it takes more than a year to develop expensive sunglasses from a design to prototype to salable object, how could it be that all of these designers stumbled upon the same idea at the same time?

"This is what fashion is," said Simon Jablon, the English designer behind the Linda Farrow sunglasses label, which was founded by his mother in 1970. "It is a trend. You can just sense it. You have a feeling for where things are going to go."

Designers are looking at the same things -- art exhibitions, fashionable parties, rock stars -- so their impulses are often surprisingly in step with one another. But sometimes it's possible to trace where their ideas are coming from.

Round frames last appeared as a fashion trend about two decades ago. In 1989, when Alain Mikli introduced a thick-rimmed version, Woody Hochswender wrote in The New York Times that "a modified John Lennon look is the newest old thing."

Before that, they were a defining element of hippie style during the 1960s counterculture movement -- just about the only time that round glasses could be described as an unqualified fashion hit. Throughout the last century, round glasses have been associated with celebrated architects, literary stars and intellectual thinkers -- Philip Johnson, Le Corbusier, Dominick Dunne, Gandhi -- almost all of them men and rarely a figure noted for his cutting-edge personal style, unless you count Mr. Chow.

And yet something about the style, as uncommercial as it may seem, has clicked with designers. Or, as it turns out, several things happened at roughly the same time, in 2007 and 2008, that help explain why you are seeing round sunglasses again.

One of the most intriguing explanations comes from Selima Salaun, the eyewear maven behind the Selima Optique shops. Ms. Salaun, who also develops styles for other designers, including Proenza Schouler and Adam Kimmel, noted that one of the biggest influences on her work was the black-and-white portraits taken in the 1950s and '60s by the Malian photographer Malick Sidibé, who was given a lifetime achievement award at the Venice Biennale art fair two years ago.

Shortly after that event, which was attended by prominent designers (Miuccia Prada, Karl Lagerfeld, Stefano Pilati, Azzedine Alaïa, Alberta Ferretti and Mr. Jacobs among them), Mr. Sidibé, now in his 70s, began to have an unexpected fashion moment. Designers sought out monographs of his work, notably a 2004 edition published by Steidl that conveyed the exuberance of postcolonial West Africa with images of stylish young men and women, many of them wearing incredible sunglasses.
Echoes of his work then began to appear in designer collections and in the images created for their promotion. A new line called Suno replicated the staging of Mr. Sidibé's photographs for its lookbook, right down to the checkerboard marble floor. In April, Mr. Sidibé's work was also featured in T: The New York Times Style Magazine, as a fashion story, including several of the photographer's 17 children dressed in clothes from Marni and Dries Van Noten.

"A lot of designers used his book," Ms. Salaun said.

But it was not Mr. Sidibé's influence alone that set off the trend. John Lennon deserves some credit, too. In July 2007, Mr. Lennon's name was again in the news when a pair of his wire-rimmed round glasses were sold at auction, drawing bids of more than $1.5 million, the BBC reported, though the final sale price, which was never disclosed, was believed to be far less.

That sale did not escape the attention of Kristen McCabe, a buying executive at Ilori, the upscale sunglasses retailer started by Luxottica Group in 2007. Ms. McCabe had a hunch that round glasses would return because they mesh with other eyewear themes occurring at the moment, like vintage, geek-chic and Hollywood.

It also helps that Mr. Lennon's image, in round sunglasses, has been peering at New Yorkers from subway walls and billboards since May, on posters publicizing a Lennon exhibition at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Annex in SoHo. That show ignited requests for round sunglasses at stores around the city.

"Women are really embracing them," Ms. McCabe said. "Lady Gaga was seen in an airport in Japan this weekend wearing them."

When Proenza Schouler introduced round sunglasses in spring 2008, the designers were actually so far ahead of the trend that they were at a disadvantage. Circular frames are not face-friendly, Ms. McCabe said, and usually look best on women with strong jaw lines, so the line's initial styles were difficult to sell. But newer versions, which are slightly larger and more angular, with the stems positioned higher on the frame, have been a success.

Jack McCollough and Lazaro Hernandez, the designers of the label, said in an e-mail message that they had been bored with the prevailing Wayfarer look and that, while looking at images of midcentury factory workers in goggles, "something about the simplicity of that shape against the face turned us on."

Still, the story of round would not be complete without a nod to the hippies. This year's Broadway revival of "Hair," while not exactly fashion friendly, had its first performances last summer at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park. At a preview last May, its cast performed at the Costume Institute gala at the Metropolitan Museum of Art before an audience that included a spectrum of international fashion designers.
By the end of the year, as Ms. McCabe and other retailers were looking at styles for spring 2009 at trade shows like the Vision Expo in New York and Las Vegas or the SILMO international eyewear exhibition in Paris, round shapes were widespread.

Mr. Jablon of Linda Farrow, who also produces sunglasses for Dries Van Noten, Matthew Williamson, Raf Simons and others, said that it was probably the most natural shape for designers to embrace, and he predicted that another signature Lennon style -- an upside-down pear shape -- would be the next big thing after that.

He must be onto something. Two of his clients, Mr. Jablon said, just had the same idea.

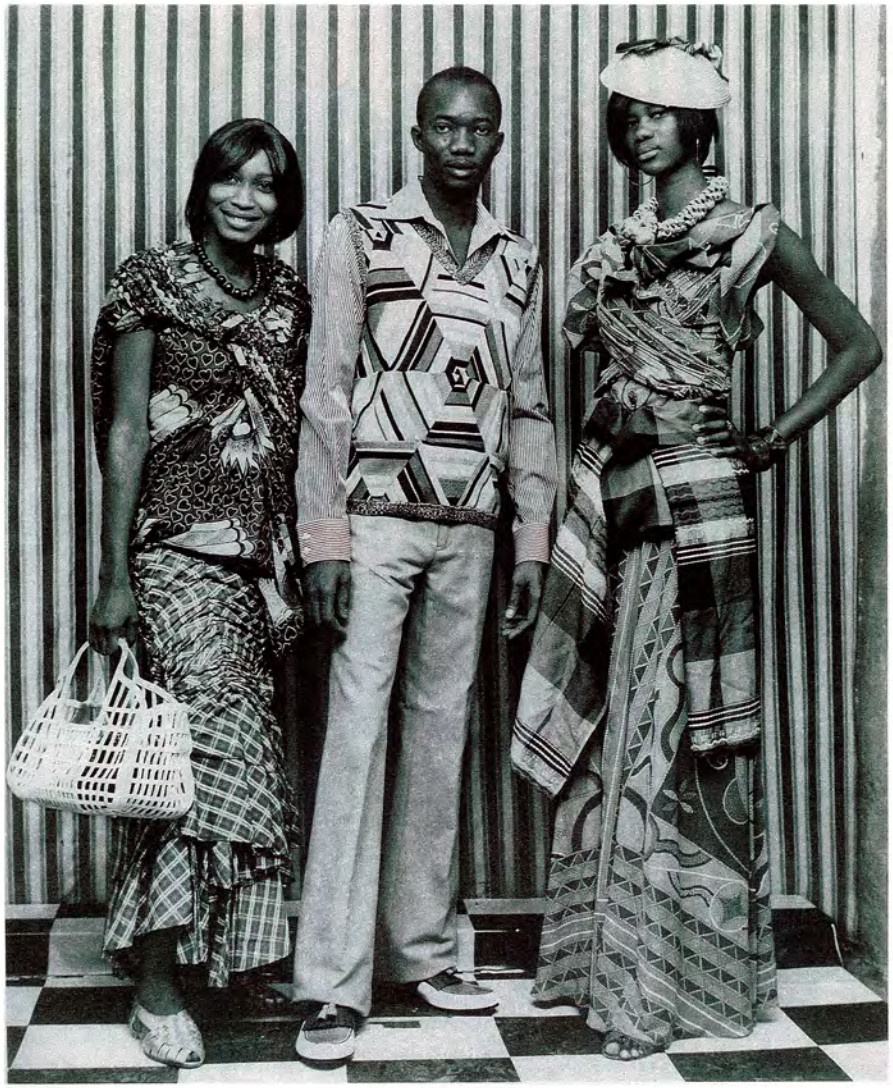
The New York Times Magazine
APRIL 5, 2009

PRINTS AND THE REVOLUTION

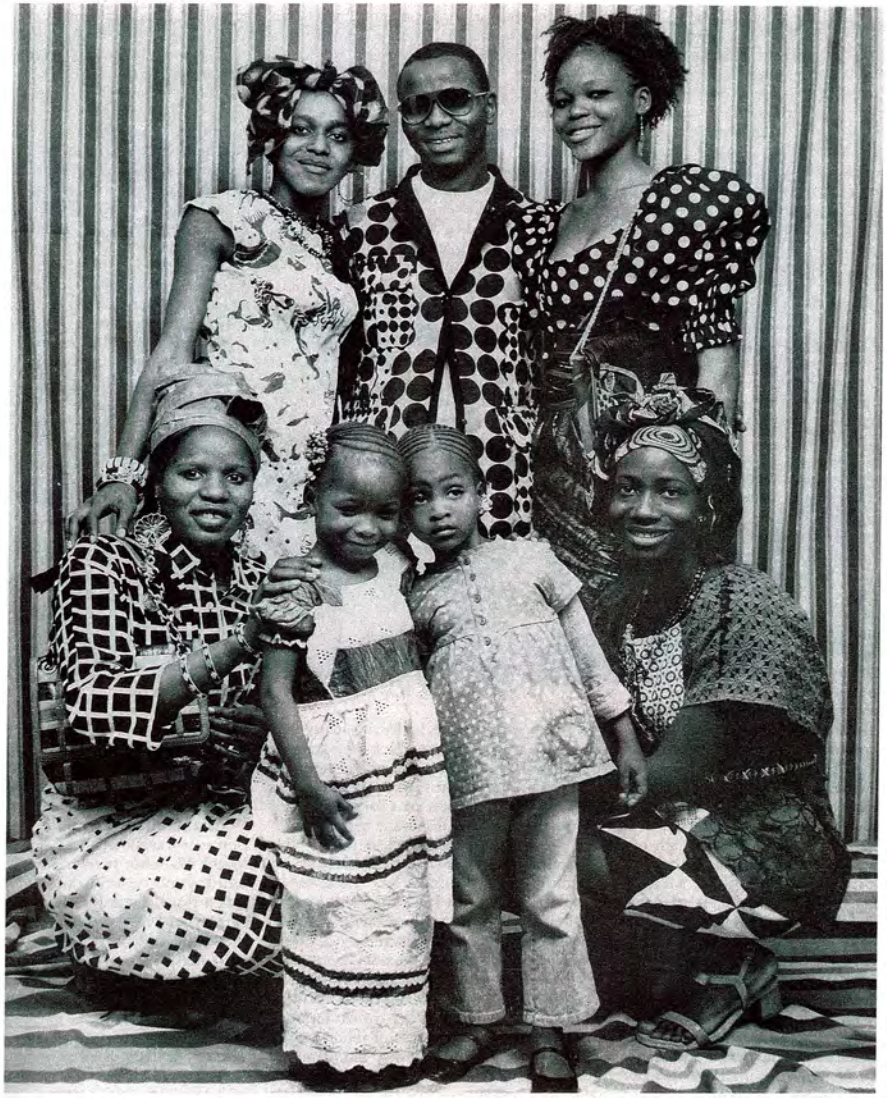
FROM MILAN TO MALI, A RIOT OF CHECKS, STRIPES, PATTERNS AND POLKA DOTS.

Photographed by MALICK SIDIBÉ Fashion editor: ANDREAS KOKKINO

Assitan Sidibé (this page) wears a **Marni** polka-dot top. **Christian Lacroix** striped top. **Marc Jacobs** dress.



Fataumata Cissé (this page, from left) wears a **Junya Watanabe** multicolored top and green plaid skirt. **Miu Miu** bag. **Zoraide** shoes. Mamadou Gamara wears a **Dsquared2** blue-and-white striped shirt. **Missoni** multicolored vest and pale blue pants. **Gucci** shoes. Mariam Sidibé wears a **Nicole Miller** multicolored dress. **Tsumori Chisato** multicolored wrap-skirt. **Christian Louboutin** shoes. **Albertus Swanepoel** hat. **Dries Van Noten** necklace. Opposite page, from left: Modibo Zounkara wears an **Ann Demeulemeester** cream and black



Mouibatou Cissé (this page, clockwise from top left) wears a **Prada** red-black-and-white dress. Lassine Sidibé wears a **Comme des Garçons Homme Plus** black-and-white jacket. **Prada** white shirt. **Raf Simons** sunglasses. Saoudotou Traoré wears a **Betsey Johnson** black-and-white polka-dot dress. **Marc Jacobs** multicolored skirt. **Chloé** bag. Matakari Dembelé wears a **Tsumori Chisato** blue-and-white top. **3.1 Phillip Lim** blue-black-and-white dress. Belt from New York Vintage. **Tila March** shoes. Kaudé and

Art in America
JUNE/JULY 2005

View of Emile Guebehi's sculptures and Malick Sidibé's photographs; at Jack Shainman.

Malick Sidibé and Emile Guebehi at Jack Shainman

This exhibition of photographs by Malick Sidibé and figural sculptures by Emile Guebehi allowed for a consideration of two African artists, contemporaries in age, in the context of the postcolonial experience of identity, individuality, self-image, beauty and sexuality. Three hundred of Sidibé's lovely black-and-white photographs were on view, all tonally nuanced gelatin silver prints of different sizes and formats, and ranging in date from 1956 to 2003. They were arranged in four big circular clusters on the walls of the gallery—an effective way of displaying such a very large selection. Many were framed by a thin strip of light brown tape enclosing the protective glass, which was painted with floral borders in red, yellow, dark green and brown. It made for a colorful presentation, especially in the company of Guebehi's polychrome statues, life-size figures that stood directly on the floor, thereby inhabiting our realm.

Sidibé (b. 1935) is a highly accomplished portrait photographer who opened his Studio Malick in Bamako, Mali, in 1962. Since the late '90s, he has achieved increasing international recognition. The subjects in his portraits are shown standing, sitting or reclining, full- or bust-length, alone or in groups. These people make eye contact with us or look away, often assuming poses and facial expressions found in earlier traditions of portraiture. What makes Sidibé's photographs so riveting, besides their technical and formal accomplishment, are the ways in which the sitters combine Western and indigenous styles, sporting clothes of pattern-rich fabric and the various fashionable hairstyles of their day. Highly self-aware, they want to look their very best—to be seen as they see themselves. Sidibé is the Nadar of his people.

In a recent series, Sidibé has photographed women turned away from the viewer with their bare backs exposed to view. The sitters do not wish to be identified, for the images are considered to be risqué—an eroticism that, in the exhibition, provided a bridge to Guebehi's sculptures of nude or scantily clad women, embodying an African canon of beauty. Guebehi (b. 1937) works in Abidjan in the Ivory Coast. His extraordinarily sensual and realistic *femmes fatales*, made of coconut wood and putty, painted in glossy enamels and sometimes embellished with other mediums, stand in arrested poses making angular gestures (all untitled, 2004). The tradition of carving statues of highly voluptuous women goes back many centuries in West Africa; Guebehi updates the form in these contemporary females. One young girl wearing sandals and a tiny thong raises her right hand to her mouth as if she were surprised. A slightly older woman, also wearing just a thong, her arms hanging by her side, turns her head and advances her leg as if walking. The bodies are hard and immaculate. A comparable aura of individual perfection is achieved in Sidibé's photographs.

—Michaël Amy

WEEKEND Arts FINE ARTS LEISURE

The New York Times

Art in Review

Emile Guebehi
Malick Sidibé

Jack Shainman
513 West 20th Street, Chelsea
Through Feb. 5

Malick Sidibé, the internationally celebrated studio portrait photographer from Mali, and Emile Guebehi, an Ivory Coast sculptor, were paired in an exhibition at Deitch Projects six years ago. For that show, Mr. Guebehi contributed specially commissioned life-size cartoonish dancers copied from figures in Mr. Sidibé's photographs. For this exhibition, Mr. Guebehi is represented by striking new sculptures that are all his own.

The show features painted wood and putty representations of almost comically full-figured, naked or partly naked women, some visibly pregnant, some bigger and some smaller than life; a life-size portrait of a tribal queen in a purple dress; and a life-size, three-figure tableau in which a big, muscular man threatens to kill a light-skinned infant in front of his naked, imploring wife, who he presumes has had intercourse with a white man. The sculptures look like the works of a folk artist with a fetish for maternal women.

Mr. Guebehi's sculptures nicely complement Mr. Sidibé's photographs, which also look like the works of a self-taught artisan. (Coincidentally, both artists are 73.) The gallery has installed scores of his portraits from the last 40 years in circular clusters. They range from snapshot to easel-size, and while many are conventionally formal, many others are casually or eccentrically composed and printed. Many have colorful, leaf and flower-patterned borders added by the artist.

A series of his newer black-and-white images depict heavy women in long striped skirts with their backs exposed; they seem to be animated by more private and probably erotic concerns. A curious resonance arises between those works and Mr. Guebehi's sculptures of corpulent women.

KEN JOHNSON

ART REVIEW

Showing African Works As They Were Intended: For Life, Not Museum

By HOLLAND COTTER

PHILADELPHIA — Leontyne Price singing Bach is what I thought of when I saw the Yoruba carving of a seated woman, a child on her back and a big bowl in her hands, in "African Art, African Voices" at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. With her tensed stance and closed eyes, she projects the throbbing gravity of that sound.

Then I thought, Why, with all the election-year jabber about values, aren't Americans crowding into galleries of African art all over the country to see such truly adult models of goodness embodied, of moral poise in a slip-sliding world? One reason is that we don't know what we're looking at when we look at African art. We're still seeing what the Museum of Modern Art saw in its 1984 "Primitivism and Modern Art" exhibition: things "monstrous and ominous, such as Conrad's Kurtz discovered in 'The Heart of Darkness' " as one of the curators wrote. That was hogwash, of course, but tenacious hogwash. We're far from being clean of it.

Aesthetic conventions are also a problem. Traditional African art and traditional Western art museums make a bad fit. Museums are cultural deep freezes. Their purpose is to stop objects from moving and changing, keep them stationary, retard their decay, arrest their history. In this sort of protective custody, art is a passive phenomenon. It is viewed; it is studied; it is enjoyed.

'African Art, African Voices'
Philadelphia Museum of Art

A lot of modern Western art is conceived as passive, tailor-made for a museum life. But objects originally meant to be functionally active have to relinquish their function, and with it part of their meaning, to qualify as art in an institutional setting.

Traditional African art — much of it, anyway — is functional almost by definition. Its value lies as much in what it does as in how it looks, and doing things requires mobility. Objects move from here to there, interact with other objects and with people. Art goes into the field to ensure that crops come up. It entertains through dances, gymnastics, storytelling. By reporting gossip and satirizing local politics, it keeps a community up on the news.

"African Art, African Voices" remains at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Benjamin Franklin Parkway at 26th Street, (215) 684-7500, through Jan. 2.

Philadelphia Museum of Art

"Untitled (Three Girls and a Baby)," a 1986 photograph by Malike Sidibe.

It also serves as a social regulator and a moral agent, a cool instrument for handling hot situations like judging crime, settling disputes and confronting evil. It offers instructions in deportment and shapes self-definition. It promotes physical and psychological health. At once conservative and progressive, art's goal is to maintain social order in the face of chronically threatened disorder, even if doing so requires changing society itself.

If, during an arduous, hands-on career, art suffers wear and tear, becomes a beat-up version of its original, spiffy self, that's all right. As long as it is in active use, it is alive and valuable. When it becomes permanently inactive, it becomes something else. And something else is what we see in art museums.

Is it possible to restore this vivacity, or some sense of it, to African art in a mainstream museum setting? Many exhibitions have attempted to do so over the past two decades, and "African Art, African Voices" is among the more recent. The show originated at the Seattle Art Museum with an effort by the resident curator of African art, Pamela McClusky, to rethink the permanent African display along the lines of a few basic propositions.

One, African art is a dynamic, multimedia, multisensory experience; sight sound, smell and touch all play a part. Two Africans are the original and expert curators of their own art. Three, far from being an artifact of the past, African art is still vital and in every way — intellectually, aesthetically, politically — pertinent to the present.

Seattle Art Museum

Ga Wree Wree mask of wood, cloth, bells, leopard's teeth, hairpins, shells and twine.

Pieces meant to entertain or to inform or to ensure that crops come up.

Applying these ideas to the Seattle collection, Ms. McClusky produced a solid, personable book, "Art From Africa: Long Steps Never Broke a Back" (Princeton University Press), and the exhibition, coordinated at the Philadelphia Museum by John Zarobell, an assistant curator.

It opens with a sculpture and a moving picture, a Benin bronze head set in front of a panoramic film of contemporary African cities. Benin bronzes can date back as early as the 12th century, yet in them past and present fuse. Their semirealist style makes them a comfortable entry point to African art for contemporary Western audiences. And although a Benin head would seem to have no connection to the jostling streets and noisy markets in the film, it may well have been produced in just such an urban culture.

From this point on, the show divides into thematic sections shaped by several curatorial advisers, all but one of them African. Their contributions put Ms. McClusky's idea of filtering African art through African eyes into play, with particularly striking results in the selection of Maasia objects from Kenya.

They were acquired for the collection by Kakuta Hamisi, a Maasai scholar and a former intern at the Seattle Art Museum. He arranged for the museum to send money to his home village to build a school. In return, villagers gave the museum personal objects of their own choice, from ordinary household items to handsome beadwork ornaments, for the collection, in the process shaping the picture that a Western audience would have of their culture.

An absorbing documentary film of the villagers presenting their donations to Mr. Hamisi is on view in the gallery. In fact, in general film is given unusual prominence in this show as a means of establishing an atmospheric context for objects. And on the whole it does exactly what it's supposed to do, enhance and expand the art experience.

It's thrilling to see Asante gold jewelry up close in a museum vitrine, where its symbolism can be scrutinized and its craftsmanship admired. But to see the same jewelry worn by a king and his entourage during open-air enthronement festivities, as we do in a film here, is instantly to comprehend art's role as a component of social theater, a tool of political persuasion.

Films of masquerades in Nigeria and Sierra Leone give a comparable sense of immediacy to displays of Gelede and Sowei masks, objects that are now usually seen in isolation were once part of elaborate, kinetic ensembles. At the same time, however, many individual pieces in the show, even without audiovisual enhancement, generate tremendous energy.

A standing male Kongo figure is certainly one, with his combative wrestler's stance, his torso bristling with nails and his eyes covered with mirrors. A type of Dan mask called Ga Wree Wree, snaggle-toothed and

Seattle Art Museum

"Mother and Child Figure for Sango," a 19th-century Yoruba work.

wearing an elegant hairpin-and-cowry-shell hat, is another. And then, looming over everything, there is the eight-foot-tall image of the spirit named Basinjom, from Cameroon, composed of a feather-crowned alligator mask and a midnight-blue caftan that trails on the ground.

Monstrous and ominous? Well, awesome for sure and for a reason. The Kongo figure, once packed with potent medicines, was meant to face down evil and protect innocence. His mirrored eyes reflected the heaven. The Dan mask, at once sinister and soigné, was a supernatural judiciary agent who settled personal and communal arguments that might have lead to bloodshed and whose verdicts had the weight of law.

As to the towering Basinjom — the name means "god's medicine" — he was a combination of avenging angel and detective, a hunter of witches and other malign beings. He is said to have been particularly active during the colonial period, when African communities, and the moral paradigms they represented, were being shattered.

The Basinjom costume was once actually worn in a religious initiation by one of the show's curatorial advisers, the art historian Robert Farris Thompson. This protean scholar has done more than any other to advance the concept of African art as interactive drama. He has also been assiduous in tracing that dynamic from the past into the present. And "African Art, African Voices" follows his lead in a concluding selection of contemporary work.

Several of the artists — Malike Sidibe, Zwelethu Mthethwa, William Kentridge, Yinka Shonibare — are well known internationally. Most work in media that are foreign to pre-modern Africa. Almost all make objects for museum display. Yet in every piece chosen, the traditional moral weight — the sense of art as a complex system of lived, in-the-now values — is sustained. That's why, when I saw Mr. Sidibe's 1986 photograph taken in Bamana, Mali, of two solemn women in vibrant striped dresses flanking a third woman with a baby on her lap, I thought of the Yoruba mother and child. And I heard the music again, but a little changed. Maybe Lutheran soul with an Afro-pop beat.

The Art Newspaper

NO. 133, FEBRUARY 2003

Malick Sidibé: Studio Malick, Bamako

Jack Shainman Gallery

Had exposure times been shorter in the first days of photography, those 19th-century portrait sitters might look less grimly bored, and more like Malick Sidibé's exuberant subjects, ordinary folks who seem genuinely thrilled to be in front of a camera. Sidibé, who took these photographs at his studio in Mali mainly during the late 1960s, 70s and 80s, was concerned with capturing the beauty of his fellow city dwellers. His photographs, nearly all of them postcard sized, as originally printed, are infused with the simple joy of posing. Two young women looking coy, a young bride, defiantly proud, a group of strapping young men acting tough—these are a few in a vast cast of characters that marches though these pictures (right, "Cigarette-Poste Radio, 1976"). Like the equally stunning, formal studio portraits of Sidibé's contemporary, the late Seydou Keita (whose work was recently paired with Sidibé's in a traveling show aptly titled "You Look Beautiful Like That"), Sidibé's work ennobles his fellow Africans, and the small scale of these pictures seems, ironically, to enlarge their effect, as it is necessary to move in quite close to get a good look. The show at Jack Shainman (until 8 February)—assembled during Mr Shainman's recent trip to Mali—calls up an entire community; gazing at these little pictures, evokes the mood of Sidibé's studio itself, where people would gather to gossip, play cards or just hang around: "it was always very lively! I'd put up a large sign: 'Studio Malick',...that place was jammed!"

Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Chosen by Sarah Douglas

The New York Times

ART IN REVIEW

Malick Sidibé
'Mali, 1974'

Jack Shainman
513 West 20th Street, Chelsea
Through Feb. 2

Along with Seydou Keïta, who died in November, Malick Sidibé has become one of the best-known modern African portrait photographers in the West. For 40 years, clients have been visiting his studio in Bamako, Mali, to take advantage of his pictorial flair, which seems to lend every sitter an effortless chic.

The real news in this show of two dozen beautiful pictures, though, is their format. For most exhibitions, Mr. Sidibé's work is enlarged to a scale that fits Western notions of art photography, meaning competitive with the dimensions of paintings. Shainman breaks this pattern by presenting vintage prints as they were produced for Mr. Sidibé's clients: just a few inches high and framed with borders of brown tape.

Seen this way, the images retain a sense of their original context. They were conceived as keepsakes rather than display pieces, things to be carried in a pocket or purse, sent through the mail or passed from hand to hand. Not surprisingly, the photographer's distinctive style — tonally bold, sparely decorative — is seen to particular advantage at this scale. So are the personalities of his subjects. Because they require close-up viewing, their portraits have an intimate, confiding air; they pull you in and hold you there.

It's great that Shainman has chosen to show Mr. Sidibé's work in this form. In fact, with him and other contemporary African artists, including Claudette Schreuders and Zwelethu Mthethwa, on the exhibition schedule, this gallery has been looking more adventurous by the year, a rare phenomenon in Chelsea. (There is also a show by Keïta at Sean Kelly Gallery in Chelsea through Feb. 2.)

HOLLAND COTTER

ART REVIEW

At Harvard, Images in a Distinctive African Style

By HOLLAND COTTER

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — The several buildings and collections that make up the Harvard University Art Museums encompass riches beyond count, though the art of Africa isn't among them. Not that Harvard owns no African art. It owns plenty, but most of it is housed, as it has been for well over a century, in a separate on-campus institution, the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, where it stays.

In an effort to get Africa into the larger art historical mix at Harvard, this season the art museums have scheduled three concurrent exhibitions devoted to African material, old and new. One of them represents a first-time collaboration with the Peabody Museum.

This integration of resources is long overdue for a university that has the largest Afro-American studies program in the United States. It also makes timely sense, given a growing public interest in the hugely diverse stretch of cultural terrain known as "African art." Numerous exhibitions across the country are being devoted to various aspects of it this year. And as an art historical field, it is generating some of the most exciting scholarship around.

All three exhibitions at Harvard are modest in size but strong in concept, in design and in their accompanying publications. They are organized by young curators with close ties to the university, and two of the shows are devoted to contemporary African photography, a category barely noticed in the West before a decade or so ago.

"You Look Beautiful Like That: The Portrait Photographs of Seydou Keïta and Malick Sidibé" at the Fogg Art Museum showcases work by two still-active photographers from the West African city of Bamako, in Mali. A generation apart in age, each helped shape distinctively African photographic styles.

Mr. Keïta, now in his 70's and with international stature, picked up the rudiments of the medium from two older Bamako photographers, Mountaga Dembelé and the French colonial resident Pierre Garnier. In 1948 he established a local practice making portraits, often in a postcard-size format. Over the years he has produced thousands of negatives, most of which are still extant.

He did much of his work in controlled outdoor settings, often in the courtyard of his home. In place of European-style painted scenes, he used boldly patterned African fabrics, including his own bedspread, as backdrops. When his subjects wore robes of contrasting design, the optical clash could be exhilaratingly vibrant. He also devised flattering poses — in one, a subject is authoritatively seated, in another she reclines on cushions as if at home — that added up to a signature style.

Fogg Art Museum

In Bamako, Mali, in 1972, three young shepherds showed their best to the photographer Malick Sidibé.

Also working in Bamako, beginning in the 1960's, was Malick Sidibé. The pictures for which he has gained attention are his on-the-spot shots of the city's night life during the heady early years of national independence, when Western pop music and fashions transformed the look of urban youth culture.

But this change can also be seen in Mr. Sidibé's wonderful studio portraits, particularly when they are paired with Mr. Keïta's, as they are in the Harvard show, which has been organized by Michelle Lamunière, an assistant curator in the department of photography at the Fogg.

Here, in pictures made some 20 years apart, there are marked differences in clothing styles, in the sitters' choices of props and even in body language. At the same time, no firm generational lines can be drawn: one of Mr. Sidibé's clients poses with his favorite sheep, while one of Mr. Keïta's appears in American hipster attire. What is certain is that throughout the better part of the 20th century, both photographers have been creating innovative, distinctive and immensely stylish modern images of, and for, Africans.

A second exhibition, "Beyond Decorum: The Photography of Iké Udé" is installed in the Sert Gallery of the Carpenter Center for Visual Arts, next door to the Fogg. Organized by Mark H. C. Bessire and Lauri Firstenberg, the show originated at the Maine College of Art in Portland, where Mr. Bessire is director. But there is a strong Harvard connection: both curators studied at the university and Ms. Firstenberg is now a doctoral candidate in its art history program.

Born in Nigeria in 1963, Mr. Udé has lived in the United States since 1981 and he has shaped a versatile career as a photographer, performer and founding editor of the handsomely des glossy magazine called aRude, in whicl fashion, celebrity and attitude meet.

In all of these roles, Mr. Udé is essen a conceptual artist who combines per panache with a needle-sharp socio-pol wit. In his series of "Cover Girl" photogr begun in the mid-90's, he reworks the cov international magazines to give them content: his version of GQ, for example tures his own androgynous-looking face headline announcing "Conservative Skir the Working Man"; his blood-red Condé Traveler cover has a 19th-century print trans-Atlantic slave ship and a headline ing "The Sardine Pack."

In addition to these twists on race gender, Mr. Udé also deftly plays with a s ically African content. In his "Uli Portr series, nude models are covered with pa patterns, based on a form of body pai associated with Nigerian Igbo culture, which the artist is descended. Similarly personal style, which includes makeup gender-bending apparel, has sources in performances that include men in fe roles.

Mr. Udé's public persona and his photogr are extensions of each other. Both are phys manipulated, hybrid creations, at once We and African, or neither of the two. He's some kind of thing in the process of developing.

Back at the Fogg, the work in the exhil "Marking Places: Spacial Effects of African is closer to familiar notions of African art. O ized by Kristina Van Dyke, another doctoral c date in African art at the university, the reverses a pet exhibition theme of recent y rather than asking how context affects the r ing of traditional African objects, Ms. Van explores ways in which objects shape their ronment.

Carved Yoruba house posts turn a pat earth into a royal enclosure. Intricately v baskets filled with jewelry transform a home into a high-style House Beautiful. An o masquerade costume transports a dancer syı ically from the earthly to the spiritual realn

Ms. Van Dyke's subject is broad, poetic accessible, and she has given it arresting illustrating many of her points with objec first-time loan from the Peabody to one o neighboring Harvard art museums. Her shov have an extended but temporary run at the as happened with another exhibition of Af art, drawn from the William Teel collectio stalled there a few years ago.

When the earlier exhibition went up, was talk of establishing a gallery for African the Fogg, where it would join Renaissance s ture and Impressionist painting, the classi Western art. The plan for a permanent didn't come to pass at the time. But why can Van Dyke's show be regarded as markin; place for it to happen now?

"You Look Beautiful Like That: The Portrait Photographs of Seydou Keïta and Malick Sidibé" remains at the Fogg Art Museum, 32 Quincy Street, Cambridge, Mass., (617) 495-9400, through Dec. 16. "Marking Places: Spacial Effects of African Art" is on longterm view at the Fogg. "Beyond Decorum: The Photography of Iké Udé" is at the Sert Gallery, Carpenter Center for Visual Arts, 24 Quincy Street, Cambridge, (617) 495-9400, through Oct. 21.

The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts

Paper Series on the Arts, Culture and Society

Paper Number 11
"The 1960s in Bamako: Malick Sidibé and James Brown"
Manthia Diawara

The 1960s in Bamako: Malick Sidibé and James Brown

Manthia Diawara is Professor of Comparative Literature and Africana Studies at New York University. He is editor-in-chief of Black Renaissance/Renaissance Noire, a journal of arts, culture and politics. An author and filmmaker, Diawara lists among his films Rouch in Reverse and his latest book, In Search of Africa.

I was looking at a book of Malick Sidibé's photographs, put together by André Magnin (Scala Press, 1998), with my friend Diafode, who has been living in France since 1979. As we flipped through the black and white photos of our teenage years in Bamako, Diafode's attention was suddenly drawn by a photo of a group of boys entitled "Friends, 1969." *"Les Beatles!"* he exclaimed, and added, putting his index finger on the photo, "*voilà les Beatles*" ("The Beatles, there are the Beatles"). I looked closely at it, and before I could even say a word, Diafode started identifying them one by one: there was John Lennon, Ringo Starr, and all the other members of the Beatles of Medina-Coura, one of the hip neighborhoods of Bamako in those days.

Diafode and I spent that evening in my Paris apartment, looking at the Beatles of Medina-Coura and reminiscing about our Malian youth in Bamako. Sure enough, I now could see Nuhun, aka John Lennon. He's wearing a "*Col Mao*" jacket with six buttons, just like the one John Lennon wore on the cover of one of the Beatles' albums. Nuhun now lives in Canada. And there's Cissé, aka "Paris," with his arm on Nuhun's shoulder. He's wearing a tight-fitting shirt, with a scarf *à la* Elvis Presley, a large belt, and bell-bottom pants. We used to call him "Paris" because he was so elegant and smooth. When he used to live in Bamako-Coura—a neighborhood on the southern tip of the commercial center—and did not have a motorcycle to come to Medina-Coura on the north side, he would walk for forty-five minutes to cross the busy commercial center, under the hot sun at two o'clock, to join the group at Nuhun's house to listen to music, play cards, and drink tea.

The elegance of Paris's style was also marked by a pack of "Craven A" cigarettes, which he placed in his shirt pocket while holding one unlit cigarette between his lips. He walked slowly through the busy crowd of the Market and across the railway, without losing his rhythm and without sweating a drop. When he arrived at Nuhun's place, his shoes were always shiny and his face was as fresh as ever. He would always say, "*Salut, les copains*" before taking a napkin out of his pocket, wiping off a chair, and sitting down. We used to say that one day, Paris would

providing entertainment and pleasure. They also constitute a link between the immigrants and their original homes, and thus foster a sense of community culture.

But to understand the conditions of emergence and evolution of Sidibé's formal style in these photographs, it is important to place him in the social and historical context of the 1960s in Bamako. Malick Sidibé was one of the first studio photographers in Bamako to take a lighter and cheaper 35mm camera outside, to house parties and picnics, in order to take pictures of young people. As he followed the youth, who themselves were following a universal youth movement, he discovered his style in photography, which I will call rhythmic or motion photography. But how did we arrive at the finished product that we have in this book today; how did the bodily dispositions and the structure of feeling of the subjects in Sidibé's photography change from those in the work of his predecessor Seydou Keita?

It is important to understand that at the time they were taking people's pictures in Bamako, neither Malick Sidibé nor Seydou Keita considered himself an artist. It is also important to understand that the types of photos each took and the perfection they both achieved in their work were a condition of the demand that existed at their respective times. Photographers in Bamako were no different than the barbers or tailors—they all beautified their clients or provided them with styles for the visual pleasure of people in Bamako. Their success depended on word of mouth, which contributed, as French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu would put it, to increasing their symbolic capitals. They only became artists by first pleasing their customers, by providing them with the best hair styles, dresses, and photographs.

Seydou Keita's photography was both enhanced and limited by the economic, social, and cultural conditions prevailing in Bamako between 1945 and 1964, when he had to close his studio and become a civil servant for the socialist government in Mali. The people he photographed in his studio were from the middle class. They were from traditional Bamako families—businessmen and their wives, landlords, and civil servants (schoolteachers, soldiers, and clerks for the colonial administration). As a photographer, Seydou Keita's role was to make his subjects look like they belonged to the bourgeoisie and middle class of Bamako, to make them feel modern and Bamakois. The women were very beautiful, with their hair braided and

decorated with gold rings, and their long dresses with embroidery at the neck. The men wore European suits or traditional boubous, and they exhibited their watches, radios, or cars. Seydou Keita produced artifice through studio *mise-en-scène* and makeup to ensure that every one of his subjects looked like an ideal Bamakois, a bourgeois nobleman or woman, or a civil servant invested with the authority of the colonial administration.

When independence arrived in 1960 and the colonial administration had to cede its place to the new government of Mali, people's relation to photography, as to many other things in Bamako, began to change. Civil servants were no longer content with their intermediary roles between whites and Africans; they were now competing with the traditional leaders for control of the country. They no longer wanted to mimic the colonial administrator in Seydou Keita's studio; they wanted to be seen occupying the colonial master's chair at the office, his house, and his places of leisure. As these patterns of life changed in Bamako, new structures of feeling emerged and studio photography became devalorized as something conservative and artificial. Soon the studio's customers would be largely composed of people who needed passport and identification photos and visitors from rural areas. Seydou Keita's reaction to the changes was also conservative: not only did he have problems with the new socialist government, but he also found women in pants, mini-skirts, and Afro hairdos to be neither beautiful nor religiously acceptable in a predominantly Muslim country.

Thus, the change in power from a colonial system to an independent state brought about a profound transformation in people's sense of aesthetics in photography. Young people especially began to look upon studio photography as old-fashioned or as something reserved for people who were pretending to be Bamakois. To be photographed in the studio was associated with being a fake and a powerless pretender. In other words, studio photography was seen as unreal, whereas realism had become the criterion for defining the new aesthetics of Bamakois photography. By insisting on realism, people were demanding a new photography that portrayed them as actors in situations, a photography that was neither a studio re-enactment nor an imitation of something previously done. The new Bamakois wanted to be filmed while he or she took the center of the action that was unfolding. Photographers therefore had to come out of the studio and follow the action wherever it was taking place.

It was these limitations of studio photography—a genre fostered by colonialism—that led to Malick Sidibé's emergence as the photographer of the young generation. While maintaining his studio—largely for passport photos and camera repair—Sidibé took his camera to where the youth were and photographed them there. I will therefore define the youth's sense of a new realism in photography less as an absence of artifice, *mise-en-scène,* and mimicry, but as something tied to the location and historical action of the subjects in the photos. In other words, each photo tells a story located in space and time that serves to empower the subject. The emphasis on action was meant to bring photography as close to live action as possible.

There is, however, another problem related to a change in power relations in Bamako that needs to be addressed when discussing Sidibé's photography. It would seem that his photos of young Bamakois are in contradiction not only with colonial-era studio photography, but also with the patterns of life that one would expect in a decolonized state. According to the famous theses on culture developed by Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, it is not only impossible to create a national culture under colonialism, but it is also equally evident that artifacts like these photos are signs of neo-colonialism and Western imperialism. Writing about African independence in the 1960s, Césaire stated that whereas the colonial era was characterized by the "reification" of the African, the transition to independence would give rise to a revival of his creative energies, and a recovery of his authentic ways of being that had been forbidden by the colonizer. Independence would awaken in the individual the African personality that had for so long been suppressed. For Césaire, "after the 'moment' of pre-colonial Africa, a moment of 'immediate truth,' and the colonial 'moment,' a moment of the shattered African consciousness, independence inaugurates a third dialectical 'moment,' which must correspond with a reconciliation of the mind with its own consciousness and the reconquest of a plenitude" ("La pensée politique de Sékou Touré," *Présence Africaine* 29 [December 1959-January 1960], 67).

For theoretical purposes, it is important to retain Césaire's use of the terms "moment," "immediate truth," "own consciousness," and "plenitude." All of them refer to independence as an authentic state of being, a state of genuine creative and natural harmony between the pre-colonial past and the present. In contrast, the colonial and neocolonial state was characterized by assimilation, alienation, and depersonalization of the African. Authors like Césaire expected the

continent to create a new man with an African style in politics and culture. Lumumba, Sékou Touré, and Kwame Nkrumah were the prototypes of the ideal post-independence image, and they were all fiercely nationalist, authentic, and anti-imperialist. That the images of the youth in Sidibé's photographs did not seem to reflect the Africa these leaders were attempting to shape has been interpreted as an indication of how alienated the youth were, as a sign that the youth were not in continuity with the political history of the nation. The photos could be said therefore to reveal the presence of neo-colonialism among the youth.

Indeed, in Mali, the socialist government created a militia in the mid- 1960s to monitor the behavior of the people in conformity with the teachings of socialism. This militia was aimed not only at abolishing traditional chiefs and other tribal customs, but also at correcting the youth's habitus. In Bamako, curfews were set and youth caught wearing mini-skirts, tight skirts, bell-bottom pants, and Afro hairdos were sent to reeducation camps. Their heads were shaved and they were forced to wear traditional clothes. The situation did not get any better for the youth after the military takeover in 1968. Even though the former regime was castigated for taking people's freedom away, for being worse than the colonizer in its destruction of African traditions, and for being against free enterprise, the soldiers who replaced the militia continued to patrol the streets of Bamako in search of rebellious and alienated youth. It was clear, therefore, that to both the independence leaders and the military regime in Bamako, the youth in Sidibé's photographs were not obeying the teachings of independence, nationalism, and tradition. They were mimicking the culture of the colonizer, which shut the door to authentic self-actualization.

Looking at Sidibé's photographs today, it is possible to see what was not visible then on account of the rhetorical teachings of revolution. It is indeed clear to me that the youth's refiguration of the independence movement, their appropriation of the political history of decolonization, and their representation of their freedom were all misrecognized by their elders. According to Bourdieu, one can obey the past without representing it, (Lecture on Edouard Manet, College de France, 2000). In assessing the youth's continuity with and transformation of the political history of independence in Bamako, it is therefore critical to look at the degree to which the youth had internalized and incarnated the lessons of the revolution. The youth had quickly internalized African culture, collapsed the walls of binary opposition between colonizer and

colonized, and made connections beyond national frontiers with the black diaspora and international youth movements. That the theory of decolonization could not recognize this at the time as anything but mimicry and assimilation is an indication of its failure to grasp the full complexity of the energies unleashed by independence.

First of all, the youth saw in the departure of the colonizer from Bamako an opportunity to seize the city for themselves, to become the modernizing agents of their home town, and to occupy its leisure spaces. Independence also enabled them to exhibit African cultures that until then had been forbidden by the colonizer. Thus, they could go back and forth in history without interruption, and without the permission of the new government or the traditional religious and tribal leaders. The youth in Bamako felt free to pick and choose as a prerogative of their new freedom. Their dress style, their point of view, and their corporal hexus constituted a new habitus in Bamako that was misrecognized by their parents. What I call here "change of habitus," following Pierre Bourdieu, can also be understood through Raymond Williams's notion of change in patterns of life. For Williams as well, the training of youth in social character and cultural patterns may result in youth's developing its own structures of feeling, which will appear to come out of nowhere: "The new generation responds in its own ways to the unique world it is inheriting, taking up many continuities that can be traced, and reproducing many aspects of the organization, which can be separately described, yet feeling its whole life in certain ways differently, and its shaping its creative response into a new structure of feeling" (*Marxism and Literature*, 49).

Clearly, what Bourdieu and Williams are saying is that one cannot predict the outcome of a revolution, nor the new habitus that will develop out of power relations, nor from where the youth will draw the resources for their creative and epistemological ideas. As the civil rights leaders in America have learned from the generation that succeeded them, it is much easier to liberate people than to tell them how to live their freedom. Unlike revolution, freedom cannot be taught—otherwise, it is a freedom that is no longer free, a freedom under siege. The youth in Bamako did not want to be restricted in their freedom, and therefore used it to express the themes and aesthetics of Pan-Africanism, the black diaspora, and rock and roll—some of which were in continuity with the independence movement, and some in contradiction with it.

If one follows Bourdieu's statement that habitus + capital = action, the challenge in Sidibé's photographs becomes how to describe the components of the youth's actions, the extent to which they represent an accumulation of social and cultural capitals in relation with diaspora aesthetics and bodily dispositions that Bourdieu terms, appropriately, habitus (Lecture on Manet).

The youth in Bamako, as in most modern African capitals in the 1960s, began building their social networks in high schools and soccer clubs. High schools were important centers of intellectual and cultural life in Bamako because, in the absence of a university at that time, they constituted the sites where the future elite of the nation gathered. Most young people in those days met at high school or at soccer games organized between schools, before forming their own clubs or *Grins,* to use the common Bamako term of reference. By the time high school youth had formed their own Grins, they had already self-selected among the masses of students, cemented their friendships, and developed attitudes and styles specific to them. They would have already chosen a name—the Rockers, the Temptations, the Rolling Stones, the Soul Brothers, the Beatles—by which they were known, and they spread their reputation throughout Bamako.

The name was not the only important thing about a club; it was also crucial to have a permanent location associated with it—e.g., the Beatles of Medina-Coura—a sort of meeting place or headquarters for the group, with a turntable and a good collection of records, magazines, and detective novels that club members exchanged among themselves. Most Grins also had a shortwave radio which received BBC Radio, the Voice of America, and Radio France International. The Beatles of Medina-Coura regularly had the local newspaper *L'Essor,* and occasionally one could find French papers like *Le Monde* and magazines like *Paris-Match* and *Salut les copains,* from which they removed the posters of the Beatles of Liverpool, Jimi Hendrix, and James Brown to put on the wall. Finally, every Grin had green tea, which the members drank while listening to music and debating several topics of the world at the same time. Every club built its reputation and symbolic capital by accumulating these important resources at the headquarters, and by organizing parties and picnics to which rival members of other groups were invited. It has been estimated that by the time Malick Sidibé was at the height of his career, there were more than 250 clubs in Bamako (see Andre Magnin, *Malick Sidibe*).

Besides debating over favorite rock stars, political discussions constituted an important characteristic of Grins in 1960s Bamako. Indeed, the way the youth talked about the music, movies, or detective stories was always related to their own condition in Mali. They always made a comparison between themselves and the people they saw on album covers, magazines, movie posters, as well as fictional characters in movies and novels. They debated the rock stars' stances against the war in Vietnam, racial discrimination in America, the peace movement associated with Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi, and Muhammad Ali as the world's heavyweight boxing champion. Discussion of African politics was generally concerned with the heroes of independence—Sékou Touré, Lumumba, and Nkrumah—who defied France, Belgium, and England respectively. The youth elevated these freedom fighters to the rank of icons like Mao Zedong, John F. Kennedy, André Malraux, Marilyn Monroe, James Dean, Malcolm X, Angela Davis, Che Guevara, and Fidel Castro.

The Grins were important centers of social criticism about what was lacking and what was needed in Bamako. People talked heatedly about the government, the restriction of people's freedom, and the incapacity of African nations to unite. Some argued that neo-colonialism was the reason that the leaders could not get together, and that France and the CIA still had their hands in our affairs. People at the Grin also saw themselves as rebels in Bamako against traditional societies, which wanted to interject more religion into their lives and control the way they dressed and behaved. The youth thought of themselves as open-minded and tolerant toward each other, regardless of ethnic and caste origins. They therefore did not want to go back to the separation of people by tribe that was encouraged during the colonial era. They defined themselves first of all as Bamakois, Malian, and Pan-African, as opposed to Bambara or Fulani. Not only did the youth in Bamako organize their own Woodstock to listen to music in a public sphere and protest against apartheid in South Africa, Ian Smith's regime in Rhodesia, and the imprisonment of George Jackson and Hurricane Carter in the USA, but they also continued to resist the military dictatorship in Mali until its overthrow by a mass movement in 1992.

When I look at Sidibé's photographs today, I see this political action of the youth of Bamako: the way in which they transformed the themes of independence and adapted them for themselves, to the point of not being recognized by their elders. Because Bamako's youth could not content

themselves with the mechanistic application of the political theory of independence, nor return to certain African traditions which would have imposed limits on their freedom, they turned to Pan-Africanism and the African diaspora as powerful sources for the expression of their freedom.

The Impact of James Brown

Looking back at the period between the mid- 1960s and the early 1970s in Bamako, it is clear that the single most important factor, after independence, that introduced change into youth's habitus was their exposure to diaspora aesthetics through rock and roll and the Black Power movement. And in this respect, it is also clear from the visual evidence in Sidibé's photographs that James Brown was one of the most important references that combined the ethos of black pride with the energy of rock and roll. As independence changed power relations in Bamako, the reception of diaspora aesthetics through popular culture opened the floodgate of youth's energy and creativity. The youth could see themselves more easily in James Brown or in a glossy photograph of a defiant Muhammad Ali, than in any other motif of independence at that time.

This enthusiastic embrace of popular culture from the United States may seem odd in a newly-independent socialist country like Mali. In Mali, as in other African countries, the U.S. had at that time been identified as the symbol of imperialism and capitalist exploitation. It is therefore crucial to explain what James Brown and other diaspora aestheticians from North America were able to provide to Bamako's youth that could escape the critical eye of anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism, but that was lacking in the other independence-era social and political formations.

The identification with James Brown was total and uninterrupted; from the way he appeared in album cover photographs—as if caught in the middle of a trance—to the way his music and dance provoked the youth to action, James Brown was captivating. The dress styles that James Brown's influence popularized among Bamakois included tight turtleneck shirts with buttons or a zipper, which the local tailors made from looking at the pictures on the album covers. The

same tailors in Bamako also made the "James Brown" style of shorter, above-the-ankle bell-bottom pants; which were thought to enhance one's ability to dance the Jerk or the Mashed Potato.

In 1967, Malick Sidibé photographed two young women holding between them a James Brown album, *Live at the Apollo,* released that same year. I remember that white suits similar to the one James Brown is wearing on that album cover were all the rage at dance parties in Bamako. It is also a measure of the popularity of the *Live at the Apollo* album that it appears more often than any music album in Malick Sidibé's photography. There were also some songs on it, such as "Cold Sweat," "There Was a Time," "I Feel Good," and "It's a Man's World," without which no dance party in Bamako could rise to greatness. These James Brown hits, along with "Papa's Got a Brand-New Bag" and "I've Got a Feeling," remained at the top of the charts in Bamako for more than a decade.

One of the girls in the photo is wearing a sleeveless blouse and skin-tight pants, while the other has on a checkered mini-dress reminiscent of the Supremes. They are both laughing and looking into the camera, each with one knee bent forward and the other leg spread back as if to mark a dance step. The girl on the left, wearing the mini-dress, is holding the record album in the center, between herself and her friend. The other girl is pressing her body against the album as if she were dancing with it. The *Live at the Apollo* album thus becomes an important part of the composition of this photo. Inasmuch as James Brown is clearly identifiable here by his picture and by his name written in big letters on the album, one can say that he has become the third person in the photograph. By putting him in the center against their hearts, the two young girls transform him from a lifeless photo on an album cover to an omnipresence in front of Malick Sidibé's camera. It is as if, in the photo, they were dancing with the "real" James Brown.

It is also important to understand that the presence of the album in the photo helps redefine the young women. By seeing themselves in James Brown, identifying with the *Live at the Apollo* album, and becoming one with their idol through dance, they change themselves. The person looking at the picture also begins to see the two girls differently. For him, they assume a new identity that is secular and cosmopolitan. They are no longer stuck in the Malian identities


JAMES
BROWN
'LIVE'
AT THE

defined by the tribe or by Islam. For example, in Mali, young women were not allowed to be seen by their parents dressed the way they were in this photo. Such conduct would have been deemed indecent by Islam. When young women went to the Grin or to a dance party, they smuggled their pants and mini-skirts out the window beforehand, and then walked out the door dressed in traditional clothes. They only changed into their modern outfits once they were far from home and unrecognizable.

Clearly, therefore, diaspora aesthetics were opposed to the habitus imposed by tradition, home, and Islam, and which sought to control the young girls' bodies. In this sense, identification with James Brown was an indication of where the youth in Bamako wanted to be at the time of independence, and of nationalist leaders' blindness to these desires. In fact, the origin of this photo becomes indeterminate, as the two young women take on this new identity influenced by James Brown and diaspora aesthetics, one that had begun to emerge at the same time in Zambia, Liberia, Harlem, Senegal, Ghana, etc. The presence of James Brown in this photo helps therefore to explain the new habitus of post-independence, why young people dressed the way they did, and freed their bodies from the limitations imposed by older power relations.

I call this a diaspora aesthetic, as opposed to a Malian or even an African aesthetic, because it is defined beyond the national boundary and united black youth through a common habitus of black pride, civil rights, and self-determination. The civil rights movement in America and the worldwide movement of decolonization were resources for this new aesthetic, and James Brown was the dominant symbol for the youth.

James Brown, as a figure mediated through civil rights and worldwide decolonization, had become for the youth the link between the new freedom and an African identity that had been repressed by slavery, Islam, and colonialism. By that, I mean that there is a storehouse of African cultural and spiritual practices that had been forced into silence and rendered invisible by colonialism and Islam and that emerge to the surface when the youth enter into contact with James Brown's music.

It is no secret that both colonialism and Islam fought hard to rid Africans of their gods, rituals, and cultures. Colonialism imposed itself in a binary manner, collecting African statues and masks in order to burn them or send them to museums in Europe, and replacing them with the Bible. For both Islam and Christianity, polytheism was the root of evil, and they therefore sought to fill the African's need for several gods with one God. In the process, they banned the priests who represented different gods, and left the rituals and dances unattended by an intermediary between the people and their creator. This destruction of the spiritual and technical base of African cultures is eloquently described in masterpiece after masterpiece of the creative writing of Africa and the African diaspora. In Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, the African priest loses his place in the harvest ritual to the Christian missionary. In Yambo Ouologuem's *Bound to Violence,* the anthropologist assists in the destruction of an African kingdom by collecting the masks and the oral traditions. In Maryse Condé's *Segu,* Elhadji Oumar's army of Jihad destroys the Bambara Empire, burns the fetishes, baptizes the king, and puts a Muslim priest in charge of Segu.

By the time of independence in the 1960s, therefore, what we call "African" had been changed through and through by Islam and Christianity. Most importantly, the connections with the pre-Atlantic-slavery African had been destroyed or forgotten. The rituals seen today, performed for tourists or at the celebrations of the anniversary of independence, are fixed in time and devoid of any spiritual and technical meaning. They can no longer cure an epidemic, nor teach people the meaning of a puzzle. The presence of Islam and Christianity also means that people adopted a different way of praying that excludes dance, as well as a different disposition of the body which involves submission to God rather than an imitation of God through dance. It is therefore safe to say that Africans, who were famous in the literature of primitivism for their sense of rhythm, were without rhythm at the time of independence.

James Brown's music reconnected Bamako's youth to a pre-Atlantic-slavery energy that enabled them to master the language of independence and modernity and to express the return of Africanism to Africa through Black aesthetics. The term "Africanism" has been used in a varied manner by diaspora authors and theorists, including Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) in *Blues People,* Robert Farris Thompson in *Flash of the Spirit,* V.Y. Mudimbe in *The Invention of*

Africa, and Toni Morrison in *Playing in the Dark.* My use of "Africanism" here is closer to the way Baraka and Thompson have adopted the term, and to Houston Baker's concept of the "vernacular" in *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*—all of which indicate the survival, transformation, and influence of pre-Atlantic-slavery African cultures on modernist cultures. By subverting Christianity and Islam as the spiritual guardians of modernity, Africanism endows itself with distinctive resources that my friend and colleague Clyde Taylor calls "pagan modernism."

To understand the impact of James Brown's music on the youth in Bamako, and what is here called pagan modernism, it is important, first, to make a detour to one of the pre-Atlantic-slavery cultures, which seems to have survived in James Brown's own performance. I refer here to the Dogon of Mali. According to Marcel Griaule, in his classic book *Dieu d'eau* (Fayard, 1966), Dogon cosmology revolved around men and women's desire to be perfect like the Nommo. The Nommo were twin offspring of Amma, the Almighty God. Unlike their older brother, the incestuous jackal, who was ill-conceived through a union between Amma and the Earth, the Nommo were perfect in everything they did. They each had male and female organs, and would therefore reproduce without the other's help. That is why the Dogon refer to the Nommo both as singular and plural; every Nommo is identical to the other, but also depends on the other like the left hand depends on the right. It is through their function in identity and binarism that the Dogon believe the Nommo to be part god and part human, part fluid and part solid, part water and part snake.

The symbol of Nommo—variable and unlimited in Dogon cosmology and iconography—is also the vehicle for language. For the Dogon, the Nommo revealed the secret of language to men in three stages, each corresponding to a specific work and form of prayer. The first language, which is also the most abstract, came with the transformation of baobab barks into fibers with which to clothe the nakedness of the earth. Even today, the Dogon dress their masks and statues with these multicolored fibers that contain the most ancient language of Nommo, which is understood by very few people. The second language was revealed through the technique of weaving, and it was clearer, less sacred, and available to more people. Finally, the third language came with the invention of drums. It was a modern and democratic language

understood by all. For the Dogon, mastery of these languages brought men closer to the purity and perfection of Nommo and placed them in control of their environment.

Through imitation of the Nommo's language, men could therefore partake of a divine essence and, like the eight ancestors of the Dogon, become Nommo themselves. If Nommo were in the drums that they had made to teach men language, then men, by beating drums, were speaking the language of Nommo, and they themselves were Nommo at that moment. As Ogotemmeli, Griaule's interlocutor in the book, puts it, men were "learning the new speech, complete and clear, of modern times" *(Dieu deau, 74)*.

When we return to James Brown in the 1960s and consider his impact on the youth of post-independence Africa, we realize his Nommo-like quality: the desire to elevate men and women to perfection. James Brown is a Nommo—known as "shaman' elsewhere in the world—part god and part human, who teaches the world, through his music and dance, the complete and clear language of modern times, and who makes Bamako's youth coincide with the Dogon desire for perfection. Just like the Nommo was one with the drum—the beating of which taught men the language of modernity—James Brown was one with his band, though his was never complete without his red cape and his invitation to the masses to become part of his groove. People often say that James Brown, the hardest-working man in show business, does not say much in his songs, that he is notorious for limiting himself to a few words like, "I feel all right," "You've got it, let's go," "Baby, baby, baby." In fact, James Brown, like the Nommo, uses his voice and vital power to imitate the language of his instruments—the trumpet and drums—to make his audiences understand better the appropriate discourse of our modern condition. James Brown's mimicry of the sound of his instruments—letting them speak through him as if he were one with them—communicated more clearly with his audiences the meaning of 1960s social movements than any other language at the time. By subordinating human language to the language of the drums, or the language of Nommo, James Brown was partaking in the universalization of diaspora aesthetics, the freedom movements, and the discourse of black pride.

The reception of the *Live at the Apollo* album in Bamako was due in part to the fact that it contained a complete and clear language of modernity with which the youth could identify.

James Brown's didactic concern with history and the names of dance steps and American cities was an important factor of identification with the album for the youth who knew that their independence was tied to the civil-rights gains of people in the diaspora. If we take, for example, a James Brown song, "I Feel All Right," it is easy to account for its popularity in Bamako. James Brown begins the tune in a ritualistic manner by addressing everybody in the building. Like the high priest in a ritual about to begin, James Brown, calling himself the "groove maker"—as in rainmaker, the priest of a harvest ritual or funeral—makes sure everyone is ready for the amount of soul, or vital energy, that he is about to unleash. He even summons the spirit of the Apollo Theater in these terms: "Building, are you ready? 'Cause we're gonna tear you down. I hope that the building can stand all the soul. You've got a lot of it coming." Then James Brown, at once the son of Nommo and Nommo himself, proceeds to explain the dance steps he is about to teach the world. He performs the dance a few times, asking the audience to repeat after him. Repetition is the key word here for diaspora aesthetics: it marks the rhythm and accent of this new language. By imitating James Brown, one becomes James Brown, just as the imitation of Nommo's acts brings men closer to him.

Interestingly, as in all rituals, there is the risk of impurity, of something not working properly, and therefore threatening the success of the performance. During the song, we hear James Brown struggling with a man who was not properly following the directions he was giving: "My man always got to get his own extra thing in there," says an amused Brown. But, luckily for the people at the Apollo that evening, the groove prevailed and the ritual was a success, as James Brown screams: "You got it? Yeah, you got it! Now, let's go!" It is at such moments that James Brown reminds us most of Nommo, who could empower men and women and put them in control of their environment.

In Griaule's book, Ogotemmeli states that the first dance ever was a divination dance: "The son of God spoke through dance. His footsteps left marks on the dusty dance floor, which contained the meaning of his words" (198). Ogotemmeli goes on to say that the masked society that performs the dance rituals symbolizes the whole system of the world. When the dancers break onto the scene, they signify the direction in which the world is marching, and predict the future of the world. Similarly, one can say that, in *Live at the Apollo,* James Brown—son of Nommo

and Nommo himself—was speaking with his feet and tracing, on the floor of the auditorium, the divination language which contained the future directions of the world. The youth in Bamako as well were interpellated by this movement, the language of which was absent from the other political movements of the time in Mali. They found the political and spiritual articulation of independence through James Brown's music, and thereby could become Nommo themselves; that is to say, connect with the African culture of pre-Atlantic slavery.

Ogotemmeli, the Dogon philosopher, likes to state that, for human beings, articulation is the most important thing. That is why the Nommo provided men and women with joints, so that they can bend down and fold their arms and legs in order to work. According to Dogon cosmology, the Nommo had placed one pebble at every joint—at the waist, the knee, the ankle, the wrist, the elbow, the neck joint, etc.—to symbolize a Dogon ancestor that facilitated the articulation of the joint. The movement of every joint is therefore tied to the presence of Nommo, who blesses and instructs it. The concept of articulation is also important for the system of language that permeates all Dogon activities. Language, for the Dogon, is opposed to silence and nakedness, while being at the same time the essence of action, prayer, and emancipation. Language prolongs action through prayer, and articulation provides every language system with its accent, rhythm, semantic content, and form. Ogotemmeli states that for each one of the eight Dogon ancestors, there is a language which is different from the others, and which is spoken by people in his village. The way a specific language is articulated by a people can also be read through the way they dance and communicate with God. In a word, articulation determines for the Dogon the rhythm of the world by relating, through a system of alliance, left and right, up and down, odd and even, male and female. It is thus easy to see how important the system of articulation was for both communication and aesthetics among the Dogon people. It was that which united opposites and created meaning out of seeming disorder, enabling men and women to enlist the help of their God and prolong their action on earth.

For me, the two components of diaspora aesthetics—repetition and articulation, in other words, the incessant presence of Nommo and the joining of opposites in time and space—were missing in Bamako before the time of independence. It obviously had been suppressed by colonialism and Judeo-Christian and Islamic religions, which understood modernism as teleological, lacking

in repetition and contradiction. To state this differently, before independence the youth in Bamako were mostly Muslim boys and girls without rhythm, because they were detached from Nommo and other pre-Atlantic slavery cultures.

So imagine James Brown in *Live at the Apollo* when, in a song called "There Was a Time," he invokes Nommo in these words: "But you can bet / you haven't seen nothing yet / until you see me do the James Brown!" To "do the James Brown" in this instance is to speak a different language with one's body, to improvise a new dance different from the ones mentioned before, like the Jerk, the Mashed Potato, the Camel Walk, and the Boogaloo. It is to dance with Nommo's feet, and to leave on the dance floor the verb of Nommo, i.e., the complete and clear new speech of modern times. Finally, it is to perform one's own dance of Nommo, without an intermediary, and to become one with Nommo and James Brown.

In Bamako, in those days, James Brown's music had an intoxicating power to make you stand up, forget your religion and your education, and perform a dance move beyond your ordinary capacities. As you move your legs and arms up and down in a scissors-step, or slide from one end of the dance floor to another, or imitate the blacksmith's dance with an ax, your steps are being visited by the original dancers of pre-Atlantic-slavery African peoples. The Nommo have given you back all your articulations so that you can predict the future through the divination dance of the ancestors.

For Ogotemmeli, to dance is to pay homage to the ancestors and to use the dance floor as a divination table that contains the secret of the new world system. Clearly, therefore, what James Brown was preparing the world for at the Apollo was the brand new body language of the Sixties: a new habitus that would take its resources from the civil rights movement, black pride, and independence. The catalogue of dances that James Brown cites, from the Camel Walk to the Mashed Potato, is composed of dances that the Nommo taught men and women so they could clearly understand the language of civil rights, independence, and freedom.

In Bamako too, young men and women, upon hearing James Brown, performed dances that were imitations of the way Nommo swam in the river, the way the chameleon crawled and changed

colors. The sun-dance of the Great Dogon mask, the thunder dance of the Kanaga mask, and the undulating movement of the snake were included too. In this way, the Bamakois took charge of their new situation, showed how the system worked, and predicted the future. Just as the Mashed Potato or the Camel Walk were coded dances that told different stories of emancipation, the dances the youth performed in Bamako were also expressions of independence and connection with the diaspora.

James Brown's music and other rock and roll sounds of the Sixties were therefore prefiguring the secular language that the youth of Bamako was adapting as their new habitus and as expression of their independence. The sweat on the dance floor, reminiscent of James Brown's sweat at the Apollo—itself reminiscent of the sweat that runs down the body of Dogon dancers possessed by Nommo, is the symbol of the new and clear language pouring out of the body of the dancers. James Brown, with his red cape, heavy breathing, and sweat, is none other than Nommo.

Looking at the Malick Sidibé photograph of the two young girls with the *Live at the Apollo* album, one revisits this new language and habitus of the Sixties. Curiously enough, at the same time that Malick Sidibé was taking photographs of the youth in Bamako, Ali Farka Touré, a blues guitarist from the North of Mali, was also imitating the songs from the diaspora. First, people would gather at night in schoolyards and cultural centers to dance to his modernized music. Then, Radio Mali in Bamako began to play his music on the air. There is one particular song by Ali Farka Touré from those days, "Agoka," which takes several riffs from James Brown's "There Was a Time." It is therefore obvious that the youth used independence as an opportunity to latch onto diaspora aesthetics, i.e., a pagan modernist style opposed to religious modernism and the "nationalist" and conversionist modernism of Fanon, Aimé Césaire, and Jean-Paul Sartre-thinkers who could think of post-independence Africans only as part of the proletariat.

Copying the Copiers

In Malick Sidibé's photography, we see an encounter between pre-Atlantic-slavery Africa, the post-civil-rights American culture, and the post-independence youth in Bamako that produces a diaspora aesthetic. Thus, to say that Sidibé's photographs are "Black photographs"—as a photographer friend, Charles Martin, has stated to me—is to affirm his participation in the 1960s in shaping the new and universal look of the youth of African descent. Because Sidibé's photographs made Bamako youth so stylish, *au courant*, and universal, it was easy to identify with them. The youth in Bamako saw themselves in them, and they wanted to be in them, because the photographs made them look like the rock and roll idols and movie stars they wanted to be.

To say that the youth in Bamako saw themselves in Sidibé's photographs is to state that his style was modern, and that his photographs presented a Bamakois that was beyond tradition. By leaving the studio to follow young people outside, Sidibé was also discovering his style. At the conscious and unconscious levels, Sidibé's eye was being trained to recognize the youth's favorite movements and postures during dancing, their hairdos, and their dress styles. By following the youth, he began to acquire their aesthetic taste, instead of imposing old-fashioned photographic models on them. This is why the youth in Bamako considered Sidibé's photography to be realistic: he recognized their style and used his camera to immortalize it. Sidibé saw the emergence of a rebellious youth in Bamako who wanted to demarcate themselves from the rest through their love of rock music, dancing, and dress style. By photographing them in the manner in which they wanted to be seen, Sidibé too was able to distinguish himself from other photographers in the city.

Sidibé, then, copied the youth who themselves were copying rock stars and movie stars. And if we consider that the youth in Bamako acquired their habitus by carefully watching images of James Brown, Jimi Hendrix, James Dean, Angela Davis, Aretha Franklin, and Mick Jagger in glossy magazines and movies and on album covers, it becomes possible to see these media outlets as important sources of Sidibé's style. It is therefore no exaggeration to state that Sidibé,

who never attended a photography school, had learned from the best in the field. By following the youth of Bamako, who were wearing flowered shirts made by famous designers—because they saw their idols wearing them in magazine photos—Sidibé was getting his eye trained by great photographers. And by following the copy of the copy, he was internalizing the history of photography without knowing it.

It is possible to see the influence on Sidibé's photography of great contemporary photographers from Richard Avedon to Andy Warhol, as well as that of black-and-white movie images. But what is important about Sidibé's art is its ability to transform the copy into an original and to turn the images of the youth of Bamako into masterpieces of the Sixties' look. Looking at Sidibé's photographs today, it becomes easier to see how productive they were in the Sixties in shaping the youth's worldview and in uniting them into a social movement. In this sense, Sidibé is the James Brown of photography, because he was not only the number-one photographer in Bamako, but his photographs also helped universalize the language of the Sixties. Consider his single portraits of young men and women wearing bell-bottom pants, flowered shirts, and tops revealing the navels of the girls. It seems as if the individuals in the portraits define their identities through the outfits they are wearing. The bell-bottoms, in these pictures, become as much a feature of the portrait in claiming its position as a signifier of the Sixties and Seventies, as the person wearing them. In a way, the person wearing the bell-bottoms is, like a model, celebrating the greatness of the pants to the onlooker.

There is one particular portrait of five friends, all of them wearing the same pattern of shirt and bell-bottom pants. They are standing facing the wall, with their backs to the camera. What dominates the visual field in this portrait are the bright black-and-white colored pants, which come all the way down to the floor and cover the young models' feet. The rhetoric of the image implies that the five friends are identical and equal in their bell-bottom pants. In fact, this Sidibé masterpiece of the representation of the Sixties conveys a sense of redundancy, a mirror-like excess that keeps multiplying the image until it produces a dizzying, psychedelic effect on the viewer.

This photograph is still remarkable for the youths' daring and eccentricity in wearing the same outfit to a party. The expressionist patterns of their shirts and the black-and-white designs of the pants work together to produce a kitsch presentation, which erases individual identities and replaces them with a group identity. In other words, the portrait creates the illusion that we are looking at a photograph of a painting of five young men in the same outfit, instead of a live photograph. By wearing bell-bottom pants and sacrificing their individual identities for that of the Grin, or the new social movement, they were indicating a break with tradition and their commitment to the new ideas symbolized by their eccentric outfits. Sidibé's photograph captures this moment of the Sixties as parodied by itself—a moment of humor and kitsch, but also a moment marked by the universalism of its language. In this photograph, we not only see the location of the Sixties dress style in kitsch—the artifice associated with bell-bottoms, tight shirts, Afro-hair, and high heels—but also the labor that went into getting it right. Sidibé's photography defined bell-bottoms for Bamako's youth and told them that they had to wear them in order to be modern.

I have argued that Sidibé attained mastery of his craft by copying copies; that is, by following Bamako's youth, who were themselves following the black diaspora and the rock-and-roll social movement. It is now important to point out the significance of movement in Sidibé's art. We have seen that the youth's desire to have Sidibé follow them at dances and beach parties was based on their belief that studio photos were not real enough. For them, the way they dressed and comported themselves at the Grin and the parties was more original in terms of reproducing the energy and savoir-faire of the 1960s worldwide, than the *mise-en-scène* of the studio, which was stuck in the past. Sidibé had therefore to capture them in the details of their newly-acquired habitus. They wanted to be photographed looking like Jimi Hendrix, dancing like James Brown, and posing like someone in the middle of an action.

The subjects of Sidibé's portraits look like they are posing in the middle of a ritual. Their action can sometimes even reveal the content of the ritual they are performing. It is easy enough to imagine who was photographed in the middle of dancing the Twist, the Jerk, or the Boogaloo. It is even possible to hear certain songs while looking at Sidibé's photographs. In a way, one can

say that the postures and the forms of the body's disposition in Sidibé's portraits contain signifiers specific to youth habitus in the Sixties.

Space is most significant in Sidibé's shots, because the subjects are moving in different directions and the camera needs to account for the narrative of their movement in the shot. A depth of field is always required in order to reveal where the dancers are going and where they are coming from. It is therefore through the configurations of space that Sidibé captures rhythm in his photographs. We see the characters leaning backward and forward, pushing each other around, or moving in the same direction to mark the groove, as in a James Brown song. Sidibé's portraits are possessed by the space, which they fill not only with the traces of the great music of the Sixties and the symbolic gestures of rock stars, but also with the spirit of great dancers, from Nommo to James Brown.

There is always a narrative going on in Sidibé's group portraits. Instead of the subjects revealing themselves for the camera to photograph, they engage in different activities, as if some of them were unaware of the camera's presence. We see this already in shots with three or four people: they treat the camera more as a spectator to an unfolding story than as the reason they are posing. Looking at the images taken on the beach, for example, we can see the complexity of narrative in Sidibé's photography and how the subjects seem to invite the camera to participate in its unfolding. Sometimes, each subject in a Sidibé portrait acts as if he were the main character in the shot. He attempts to achieve this level of characterization by manipulating the narrative time in the shot through a behavior that differs from the others. In one of the photos at the beach, there are six persons who all seem to be engaged in different activities. First, each individual is defined in space as if he were the focus of the shot and the others were there to enhance the *mise-en-scène*. Second, the facial expression of each one of the six people invokes a different emotion in the photo—contemplative, self-absorbed, playful, fatigued, or reacting to something off-field. At any rate, each of the characters in this shot seems to occupy a field of his own that is totally independent from the others.

I believe that this predilection for narrative indicates two things in Sidibé's art. First, the characters in Sidibe's photography pretend to ignore the camera, or not to act for it, or simply to

be caught *in medias res,* because they are posing like their idols on record albums, movie posters, and magazines. They are waiting for the moment of the photo to be like James Brown and Nommo, and to become like gods of entertainment themselves. It is their belief that Sidibé's photos can transform them into stars, make them bigger than life, and that is why they act so dramatically in the photos. Each of Sidibé's portraits looks like an actor in a black-and-white movie who has been asked to carry the action to the next level.

By capturing movement—an action caught in time and space, which here I call narrative—in his portraits, Sidibé also enables each character to tell his own story. This act is political, insofar as it allows the youth in Bamako to seize upon their own individuality, away from tradition and the high modernism of the independence leaders. By looking like the modern black image, deracinated from nation and tribe, the youth in Bamako were also showing their belonging to Pan-Africanism and the African diaspora. Therefore, to say that Sidibé's photographs reveal Bamako's youth as alienated is to address their politics, which were more aligned with the diaspora and the universal youth movement.

Finally, as I now look at Sidibé's album with my friend Diafode, I think of the pervasive influence of Hip Hop in Africa and the rest of the world. The young people participating in the movement today in Bamako are the ages of Diafode's and my children. What Sidibé's photographs achieve is to teach us to be more tolerant of today's youth, to understand that their action is not devoid of politics, and to see in them the triumph of the diaspora.

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