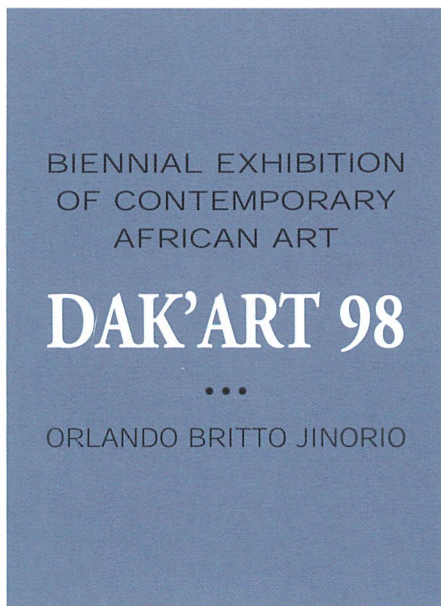


DakArt 98 is the third edition of a biennial exhibition established to provide a venue for African artists and to promote their showing overseas. It is the organisers intention that DakArt should be a showcase of contemporary African art. Critics have raised their voices within this selfsame Biennial organisation, however, vis-a-vis the 2nd edition of 1996, deeming it essential not to turn away from influences beyond Africa and to open up towards other areas of the international creative scene. They say it is not necessary to limit the scope of the exhibition to the African continent and that one must try to analyse the creativity of African artists in the context of the world art scene. This nonetheless continues being a question for internal debate inasmuch as ample sectors of the organisation insist that there are some notions, such as that of *Pan-Africanism*, which can never be abandoned.

Correlated to this is the reality of a significantly large number of artists of African origin who live in other parts of the world (mostly in Europe and North America) carrying out their work in a manner no different to that of other



artists in those places and not necessarily producing works of art subject to an Africanist interpretation.

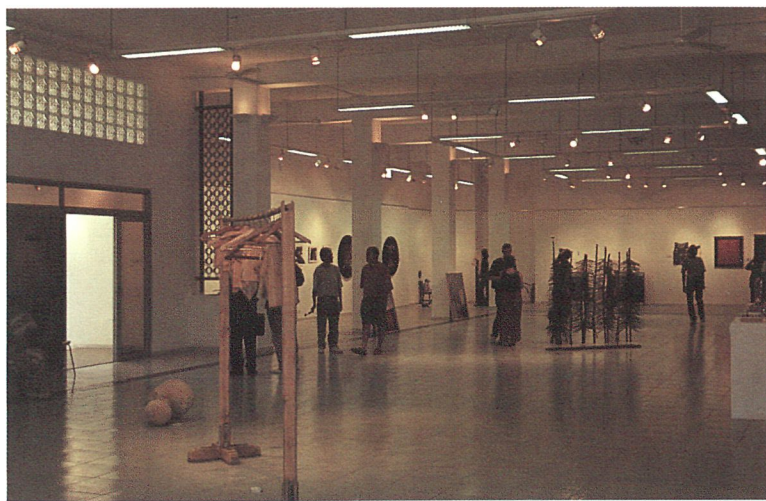
It is my sincere belief that to restrict the basis of selection to an exclusionist (and consequently exclusionary) standard automatically gives rise to a logical incongruity: the meaningless twofold proposition of self-affirmation/exclusion.

The artists, as creators, evolve their work from a series of experiences, exposures, observations, etc., not necessarily entirely supplied them by the land of their birth or origin. Fortunately,

the world of the artist is of greater breadth and complexity, and with issues not so divergent or far-removed from those of other artists the world over.

This brief analysis serves as preamble to the fact that the organisers of this year's edition of the Dakar Biennial have shown a greater willingness to admit foreign influence, inducting European and American members as well as specialists from the African continent into its scientific and selection committees and allowing entry to other than strictly African artists.

Along with the matters of argument that we have already described, other issues stand unresolved, such as the suitable financing of the Biennial. The Biennial organisation, which is under Senegals Ministry of Culture, does not possess sufficient means to be able entirely to meet the considerable expenses generated by such an event. To balance the budget it has to rely on significant amounts of economic aid from the European Commission, which in turn keeps watch to ensure that its funds are properly administered in sponsoring a biennial that it would have be



Hall Principal Building. Bienal. Works of Barthélémy Togo (Camerún).
Photo: Orlando Britto Jinorio (O.B.J.) Dak'Art 98.



Hall Principal Building. Bienal. Works of Godfried Donkor (Ghana). Photo: O.B.J. Dak'Art 98.

independent and self-sufficient. The European Commission's financial aid – *paternalistic* in the view of some Europeans – has made possible the survival to date of a Biennial that aspires to a world audience. Rounding out the budgetary picture of DakArt 98 and supplementing Senegalese Ministry of Culture and European Commission contributions is the financial assistance provided by the business sector and an ever increasingly larger group of institutions with ties to the African art world.

The enormous effort entailed in organising an event as complex as this can be undermined by the infelicitous treatment of such important aspects of an exhibition of contemporary art as the mounting, presentation, and design of the exhibition spaces. The works are not installed in accordance with clear criteria of content, format, or any other standard of judgement that permit a proper viewing. Rather they appear crowded together in an incongruous jumble, giving rise to a singular sense of confusion on the part of the spectator. The arrangement of the central rooms of the Biennial, though to a certain extent an

improvement over previous editions, continues to be carried out in default of any exhibitory criterion that would make it possible to observe the works correctly. Some of them, of outstanding quality, end up lost in a disordered mass of forms and colours.

Nevertheless, as regards the selection of artists and works, we appreciate – aware, naturally, of the subjectivity of our own critical gaze – a more well balanced choice of works than on previous occasions, with the sole caveat that in the case of some artists it becomes a difficult task to judge their oeuvre owing to a scant number of works presented or to a format of limited size (conditions originating outside, imposed by the prohibitively high cost of art transport in Africa).

In its competition section, DakArt 98 includes works by 37 artists from countries like South Africa, Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Tunisia, and Zimbabwe. At the National Gallery, four international artists nominated by as many critics and specialists were chosen to exhibit in a programme providing for a greater

number of the individual artist's works to be put on view, thereby permitting a better understanding of their oeuvre. We refer to works by the South African artist Willie Bester, nominated by Ivory Coast critic Abdoulaye Konate; the American artist Carrie Mae Weems and curator Mary Jane Jacob, also American; the Angolan artist Antonio Ole and German specialist Alfons Hug; and paintings by the Tunisian Ahmed Hajeri, selected by Ali Louati. In this section of the Biennial, it was also expected that the Cuban artist Kcho (Alexis Leyva) would participate on the island of Goree; his work (not without a flair for the spectacular, which was promoted by the Canadian critic Dominique Fantaine, had to be presented, unfortunately, in his absence.

As far as an analysis of the works shown in this Biennial, we again note that a considerable number of them are constructed by means of certain devices common to particular artists, specific methods of procedure that have almost become a sort of style. We refer to such determined reiterative (although for that neither less valid nor less interesting) aspects as the syntax of the vignette; i.e. the aesthetic and language of the comic strip, but with powerful social content. Some of these works are of great interest – such as those by the internationally known artist of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cheri Samba, or the paintings on glass by Burkina Faso artist Saidou Beyson Zoungrana. Likewise maintaining a strong presence are aesthetics based on assemblage, collage, and recyclage as well as a stubbornly persistent abstract painting that combines different types of physical material to inharmonious effect.



Hall Principal Building. (Installation view). Photo: O.B.J. Dak'Art 98.



Alassane Drabo (Burkina Faso). 48 x 35 cm. Photo: O.B.J. Dak'Art 98.

Nevertheless, we must also draw attention to the presence of a considerable number of works of quality and interest such as the mosaics executed on the facade of the central Biennial building by South African artist Kevin Brand; the strange sculptures of metamorphosed beings by Jane Alexander, also South African; the splendid works by Cameroon artist Barthelemy Togu; the series of collage/paintings relating to slavery by Ghanaian artist Godfried Donkor; the photographs by Oladele Bamgboye of Nigeria; the installation by Senegalese artist El Hadji Masour Ciss; the work of Viye Diya -winner of the Biennials grand prize; or the subtle and exceptional work of the Tunisian Fatma Charfi MSeddi.

Omitted from the exhibition (although illustrated in the catalogue) are two magnificent works by the Angolan Fernando Alwin.

Photography was well represented in this edition of the Biennial with outstanding works by the aforementioned Oladele Bamgboye of Nigeria and the two Ivory Coast artists, Ananias Leki Dago and Edith Tao.

Concurrent with the Biennial, the Salon of African Design rekindled enormous interest among those attending DakArt 98 by reason of the high quality of its exhibits and the great number of possibilities, in our opinion, for marketing abroad.

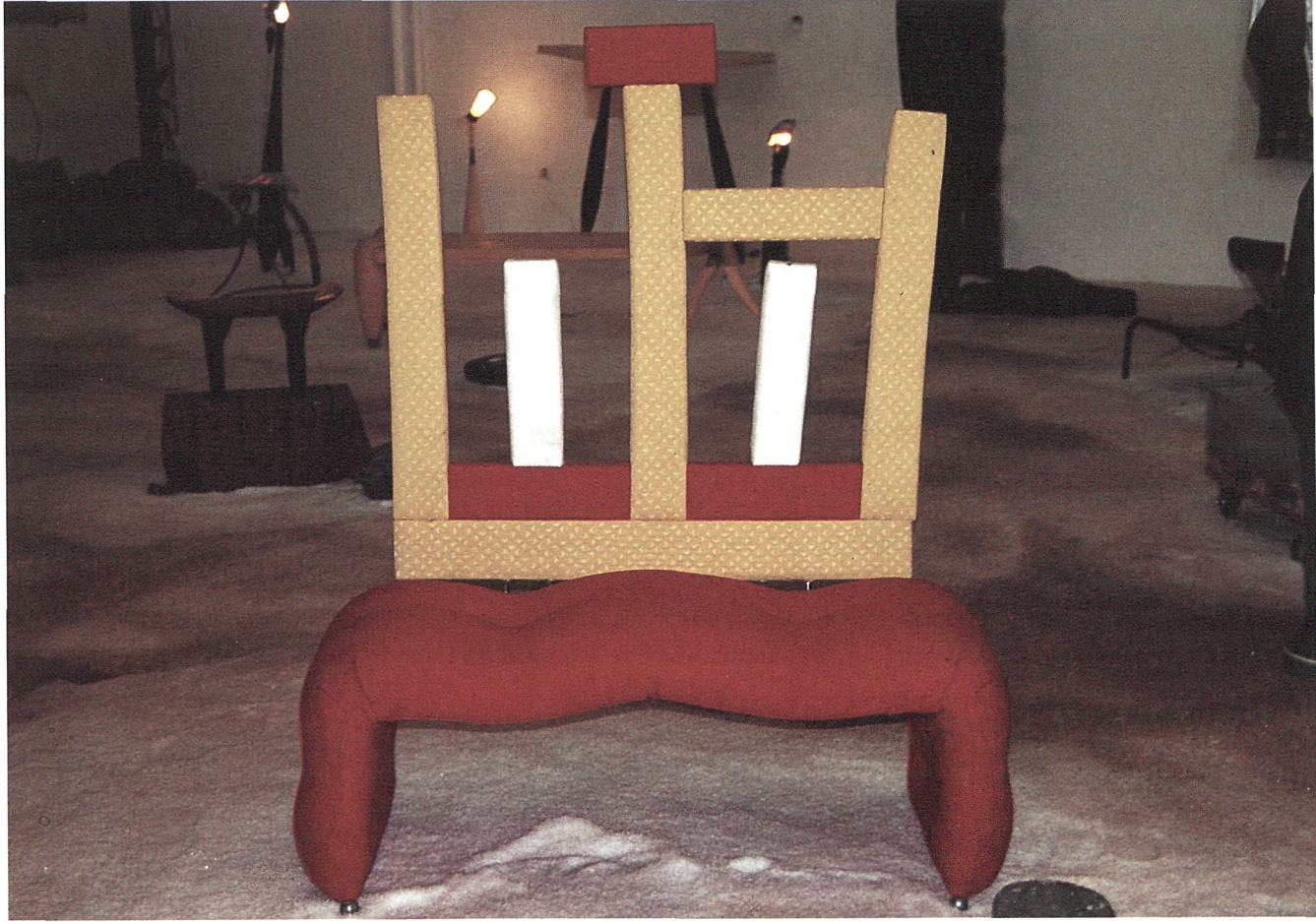
Worthy of special mention here are furniture designs by Alassane Drabo of

Algeria, Issa Diabate and Cesar Dogbo of the Ivory Coast, and Annie Jouga and Aissa Dione of Senegal.

Thus, and by way of conclusion, we wish to express our ever greater interest in the Dakar Biennial, a venue for contemporary art on the west coast of Africa.



Pape Youssou Ndiaye (Senegal).
Photo: O.B.J. Dak'Art 98.



Salon du Design Africain, Espace V.E.M.A. Photo: O.B.J. Dak'Art 98.



Obouframane Doumbouya (Ivory Coast), Traditional House. Photo: O.B.J. Dak'Art 98.



José Abad | Andreu Alfaro | Walter Bodmer | Reg Butler |
Alexander Calder | Anthony Caro | César | Lynn Chadwick | Chen
Ting-Che | Eduardo Chillida | Martín Chirino | Geneviève Claisse
| Doru Covrig | Germán Cueto | Calixte y Théodore Dakpogan
| Richard Deacon | César Domela | Sokari Douglas Camp | Nino
Franchina | Paolo Gallerani | Pablo Gargallo | Julio González |
Philippe Hiquily | Siem van den Hoonaard | Hsu Li-Hsien |
Robert Jacobsen | Zoltan Kemeny | Ervand Kotchar | Norbert
Kricke | Dominique Labauvie | Emile Lanc | Berto Lardera | Alf
Lechner | Miquel Navarro | Wolfgang Nestler | Ansgar Nierhoff
| Jorge Oteiza | Antoine Pevsner | Pablo Picasso | Reinhoud |
Riera i Aragó | Nicolas Schöffer | Richard Serra | Naomi
Siegmann | Jesús Soto | Richard Stankiewicz | Jean Tinguely |
Hans Uhlmann | Patrick Vilaire | Isabelle Waldberg | Alison
Wilding | André Willequet | Xawery Wolsky | Bill Woodrow

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MUSÉE DES BEAUX-ARTS ET DE LA DENTELLE

Calais
23 juin--30 septembre 1999

Serge Fauchereau
Comisario

