



**Expo Hamedine Kane & Soly Cissé  
De Markten 03 > 27.02.22**

Handmade squiggles and recurrent patterns jostle against spills of emerald green, flares of cobalt blue and cadmium red. Here black-and-white silhouettes pop up; there bursts of broad irreverent brush strokes are unleashed, dressed in flamboyant colors. Any hierarchy is absent – just like our supersaturated urban and digital present, whose explosion of information has been accompanied by a collapse of order. Soly Cissé's collisions of word and image, blots of paint and scraps of paper, invoke both the crux and chaos of the megalopolis that is Dakar. His Dakar is one at the crossroads of globalisation and tradition, consumerism and animism. As Mamadou Diouf once observed in El Hadji Sy's work - one of Soly's contemporaries - *"the city becomes the framework for an aesthetic crystallisation that is nurtured and reinvented by "an abundance of signs and markers' were the multiple (such as the doubling of festivities), the polyvalent (street hawkers, lunatics, beggars, civil servants of suspicious work ethic, sellers of tricks and charms), the polychromatic (piles of household rubbish, accessories, cars and horse-carriages, dirt, embroidered and starched robes of those strong powerful woman the diryankés<sup>1</sup>, all the clothing sculpted in multi-colored silks suspended on threads of perfume and incense enough to take one's breath away) all dance to an infernal sabar."*<sup>2</sup>

Cissé, like artists of the *École de Dakar* before him, is a painter of modern African life, and all the more relevant for projecting its condition not on screen but on canvas. The artist grew up

---

<sup>1</sup> The drianké or diryanké, a Wolof word, designates a curvy woman of mature age, who knows how to turn heads just by her walk. *"They have queenly bearing, a mute arrogance [...]. They have the pleasant roundness of the majas vestidas, the wrathful air of offended princesses, and an ample gesture"*, writes the Franco-Senegalese author Catherine Ndiaye of them (in *Gens de sable*, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> Mamadou Diouf, "El Hadji Sy and the quest for a post-négritude aesthetics", in: Clémentine Deliss and Yvette Mutumba (2015) *El Hadji Sy: Painting, Performance, Politics*. Zurich: Diaphanes, p. 138.

during a period of intense political transition and constant search for identity in Senegal, from its independence as part of the Mali Federation to establishment as a republic under President Léopold Senghor, from the influence of socialism to the Senegambian Confederation formed in 1982. Echoing the waves and tides of his country, Cissé's works condense its politics into works that at times reinforce and at others dissolve it. They also, and perhaps more powerfully, ground themselves *inside* a larger political and artistic tradition, utilizing the very tropes and techniques once used in exclusionary imagery to new, more moral ends. Rather than a framework, art history serves as the mood music for the artist's contemporary visions offset by palettes of smudged pigment, anthropomorphic markings, scraps of urban signs and betimes indecipherable writing. Like both local and Western predecessors - from Picasso's African-derived cubism to the *École de Dakar's* Pan-African stylisation of French painting - Soly's works gain their force from the historical tradition they partially embrace, partially refute, and ultimately expand. Schooled at Dakar's *École des Beaux-Arts* - founded by Senegal's first president, Léopold Sedar Senghor- Soly is an heir to the lineage of *Négritude*.

Following independence from France, Senghor imagined Senegal through the prism of *Négritude*. As a result of a complex process of appropriation and re-articulation of earlier European ideas about Africa and its peoples, *Négritude* emphasized the existence of a specific pan-African cultural identity and art across the continent and its diaspora. The poet-president envisioned *Négritude* not only as a vital cultural base for those seeking the emancipation of the black race but also as a cultural rallying point with which to begin the crucial postcolonial process of nationalist affirmation. As Senghor lyrically defended at the famous 1966 First World Festival of Black Arts, "*Here in Dakar, where images and ideas are borne about by four winds, we are witnessing a new wave of national art, which has its roots in the black basalt of Cape Verde. Negro art uplifts us from despair, supports us in our struggle for social and economic growth, in our stubborn determination to live.*" His resulting *École de Dakar*, much like Cissé, explored the ideological tenets of *Négritude* by merging African iconography with the formal characteristics of European modernism.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed account, see: Elizabeth Harney (2004) *In Senghor's shadow: Art, Politics, and the Avant-garde in Senegal, 1960-1995*. Durham : Duke University Press.

But while Soly Cissé's work departs from and expands the canon of this emblematic era, both through his medium, iconography and education, Hamedine Kane - an emerging artist belonging to a younger generation - operates within its ruins and fissures. From the debris of these past pan-African idealist futures, Hamedine Kane and Stéphane Verlet-Bottero's *School of Mutant's* project unearths the interconnected histories and intellectual legacies of educational institutions and academic utopias that were forged during the nation-building processes in Senegal and West Africa. Bringing back the intimidating and innovative anthems of now-forgotten grand visions - from the William Ponty School, The University of African Futures, the University of Mutants to Kumi Attobrah's Afrihili language center and beyond - the duo lays bare not only the unfulfilled promises and dreams of an essential era, but also the ruined rocks it may offer for the reassemblage a new one. "*Ruins are an opportunity, a space to be occupied, hijacked, and lived in without being ambushed by architectural authority sacralizing the institution,*" Verlet-Bottero and Kane write. "*Emptiness, tabula rasa, is not at all the opposite of the architectural gesture, but its extension, or its introduction.*"<sup>4</sup> By means of archive research, fieldwork, and public assemblies, the artists and their platform revive these ruins as the fertile soil from which counter-narratives may blossom and postcolonial ideas may further mutate.

Here, the idea of a tabula rasa is primordial. As both a physical and mental territory pregnant with uncharted paths, the tabula rasa ignites the utopian potential of wandering and to reflect on it as a movement that allows us to reappropriate and recreate certain relationships to space and history, both singular and multiple. This holds true for the *School of Mutants* as much it does for Kane's work on exile and wandering.

In works such as *Habiter le monde* or *A L'ombre de nos fantômes*, the artist navigates the paths crossed and inscribed by the refugee, the wanderer, designed and serendipitous alike : harbours, enclaves, deltas, and borders, spaces transformed into places of desolation and detention. His work draws on ancient and modern mythologies of wandering—from pilgrimages and diasporas to flâneurisms and derives—as part of its effect. As the artist's trail presses itself into the grass, into the dust and along the borders of territories and seas, he reveals a state in which the mind, body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three

---

<sup>4</sup> "L'Ecole des mutants," Unpublished exhibition booklet by RAW Material Company, p. 37

characters finally in conversation together. Much like Soly Cissé's vibrant paintings where materialist consumerism blends into phantasmagorical animism, Kane sets up continuous dialogues between the past and present, mind and body, nature and man. As such, both Kane and Soly reveal an immediate method for unfolding stories –of hope, love, play and despair - for reclaiming the hostile territories, memories or minds and transforming them back into fertile ground for life and creativity. Each walk, scrap of paper or paint stroke containing their own measure, complete at every point along the way.

Aude Tournaye - independent curator and art critic