



El Hadji Sy

Les Tambours de la Mer
The Drums of the Sea

12.05 - 29.07.2023

Press Release

SELEBE
YOON

DAKAR

"Deaf is the voice of the sea, transparent is its calling"
- Daouda Gueye

Selebe Yoon is pleased to present "Les Tambours de La Mer" (The Drums of the Sea) a sculptural exhibition of recent works by El Hadji Sy (b. 1954) as an ode to Doudou N'diaye Rose - an internationally renowned Senegalese percussionist. Dozens of vertical sculptures composed of elements of the marine realm are placed in the exhibition space like a silent orchestra.

El Hadji Sy, has always aimed, since the creation of the Laboratoire Agit' Art in 1974, at the articulation of the arts - theater, dance, music, visual arts, literature and design - and the translation of these different mediums into a "visual syntax". As scenic objects, his works celebrate the great master of drums, who was able to lead a hundred drummers on several rhythms at the same time. Emblem of the sabar drum, Doudou N'diaye Rose innovated percussion by alternating new rhythmic creations with traditional sounds. Faced with these sculptures, one can imagine the frenzy of the hands and feet of the percussionists but also those of El Hadji Sy, known for painting while dancing, stomping and hitting the canvas in the 1970s, his feet covered with paint to mark his protest against the aesthetic dogmas of Negritude.

While some of the sculptures are covered with shells, pebbles, fishing lines, portholes, sea lanterns, sails - the monolithic-looking upper part is painted, wrapped in paper mâché, or with several layers of white fabric. This gesture of mummification recalls his SOS Culture performance where he himself was wrapped by the late Issa Samb at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1995.

These sculptures simultaneously evoke other functional and highly symbolic objects, as the artist notes:

"The Mortar becomes a drum,
the Pestle transforms into a stick,
Megalithic sounding,
The whole thing becomes a sculpture." (Interview with the artist, april 2023)

By evoking the first music of the world, the sea, El Hadji Sy summons the underbelly of the marine world that encircles the peninsula and this maternal womb that today suffers from global warming. This is not the first time that the artist alludes to the Atlantic: in 2015, at the Biennial of Sao Paulo, he proposed an installation entitled "Archéologie Marine" in tribute to those who perished at sea during the slave trade.

Within the exhibition, visitors also roam through "The Cabinets of Memory" - works halfway between design and art that reveal the artist-designer for the first time. The cabinet, a functional space that teases one's imagination, is a place of intimacy, of memory, with a possible opening onto the world.

A sound piece conceived by artist and musician Gadea (b. 1993, Spain) accompanies the exhibition alongside a room dedicated to Doudou N'Diaye Rose.



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Biography

As a multidisciplinary artist, cultural activist, curator and art historian, El Hadji Sy (born in Dakar, 1954) is one of the pioneering artists of Senegal in the post-independence period and is one of the founders of Africa's most important artist collective founded in 1974 - Le Laboratoire Agit'Art. As a cultural activist, El Hadji Sy has always been involved in the development of art and culture of his country through collective initiatives. In 1977, he founded the first Village des Arts in a former military camp based in Dakar city center. Forced to close down, he then took over a Chinese camp and transformed it in artist studios - the current "Village des Arts". Throughout these years, he organized international workshops with the project space and artist group "Tenq" as well as "Huit Facettes" - a collective taking part in rural areas whose work was presented at Documenta 11 in 2002. In 1984, he was invited to build a collection of contemporary art from Senegal for the Weltkulturen Museum - an ethnographic museum in Frankfurt - and published on this occasion the first anthology of the arts of Senegal, prefaced by Léopold Sédar Senghor in 1989. This research - published one year ahead of "Les Magiciens de la Terre" at the Pompidou Center in Paris (1989) - contextualised contemporary art from Senegal and revealed a non-western modernity. In 1995, he was invited by Clémentine Deliss to co-curate the exhibition "Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa" at the Whitechapel Gallery during Africa95 festival. Internationally, his work has been exhibited in numerous institutions such as the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (1980); Linda Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, (1995); Documenta 14, Kassel (2017); U-jazdowski Castle Center for Contemporary Art, Warsaw (2016); the National Gallery, Prague (2016); the Sao Paulo Biennial (2015); Blum & Poe Gallery, Los Angeles (2020); Kunstverein, Hamburg (2021), amongst others. The artist received a major retrospective Painting, Performance, Politics curated by the artist together with Clémentine Deliss, Yvette Mutumba and Philippe Pirotte at the Weltkulturen Museum in 2015 for which objects from the museum's ethnographic collection, selected by the artists, were placed in dialogue with his work. In Dakar, he is one of the only senegalese artists to exhibit at the Musée Dynamique in 1966, following Pablo Picasso (1972) and Pierre Soulages (1974). El Hadji Sy worked with numerous curators namely Clementine Delisse, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Alison Gingerich, and Peter Pakesch. His work is held in a number of important collection - Weltkulturen Museum (Allemagne), la Fondation Blachère (France), David Bowie (USA), Bassam Chaitou (Sénégal), Kehinde Wiley (USA/Sénégal), Jean Loup Pivin (France). Despite having travelled and exhibited internationally, El Hadji Sy has always been working and living in Dakar, Senegal.

Artist CV

Solo Exhibitions

2022 Now / Naaw, Selebe Yoon, Dakar, Senegal
2022 Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin, Germany
2020 Musée de la Rue, Dakar, Senegal
2016 "At first I thought I was dancing", U-jazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, Warsaw
2015 "El Hadji Sy: Painting, Performance, Politics.", Weltkulturen Museum, Frankfurt am Main, Germany
2013-2014 "Lettres de Verre", Galerie Bookoo, Dakar, Senegal
São Paulo Biennial, Brazil
2003 Galerie Artefact, Dakar, Senegal
"El Hadji Sy en peintures (El Hadji Sy in Paintings)", Centre d'Art der Fondation Jean-Paul Blachère, France
1995 Linda Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, Africa
1993 Galerie 39 at the Institut Français, Dakar, Senegal
1988-1989 Galerie 39 at in the Institut Français, Dakar, Senegal
"La Fourchette (The Fork)", Darmstadt, Germany
1987 Musée Dynamique, Dakar, Senegal
1985 Galerie 39 at the Institut Français, Dakar, Senegal
1981 Paul Waggoner Gallery in Chicago, USA
Centre Culturel Français, Abidjan, Ivory Coast, Africa

Group Exhibitions

2021 "Carnavalesca, What Painting Might Be", curated by Bettina Steinbrügge, Kunstverein Hamburg, Germany
2020 "New Images of Man", curated by Alison M. Gingeras, Blum&Poe, Los Angeles, CA, USA
2017 "Disso - Concertation", documenta 14, Kassel, Germany
"La nouvelle muséologie ", documenta 14, Athen, Greece
2015 31st São Paulo Biennale, São Paulo, Brazil
2010 "The World of Gimel", in conversation with Antje Majewski, Dakar, Senegal
2007-2008 "Trajectoires (Trajectories)", curated by Chaitou Bassam and Serge Villain, IFAN Museum of African Arts Dakar, Senegal
Intelligences en Peinture (Intelligences in Painting), Galerie Nationale in Dakar, Senegal
1998-1999 "Laboratorium", curated by Hans-Ulrich Olbrist & Barbara Vanderlinden, Museum for Photography, Antwerp, Belgium
1996 "Seven Stories About Modern Art in Africa", Malmö Konsthall, Sweden
Galerie des 4 vents, Dakar, Senegal
1995 "Seven Stories About Modern Art in Africa", Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK
"Cross Currents", curated by Fodé Camara, Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool, UK
1986-1987 Saarbrücken, Germany
1980 "Art sénégalais d'aujourd'hui (Senegalese Art Today)", Touring exhibition, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Boston, USA and Chicago Public Library., Chicago, USA
1979 Two-man exhibition at Galerie 39 in the Institut français in Dakar