

S E L E B E

Y O O N

D A K A R

EL HADJI SY

NOW
/ **NAAW**

19.05.22 - 30.07.22

SELEBE
YOON

DAKAR





Press Release

A prominent figure of West Africa during the independence era, El Hadji Sy (born in 1954 in Dakar) is presented in Dakar at Selebe Yoon after years of withdrawal from public appearance in his native home, even though he participated in the most important international artistic events in recent years such as Documenta Kassel (2017) or the Biennial of Sao Paulo (2015). After more than fifty years of career, a witness to a colonised society in-transition, an important voice in the development of a new modernity, the itinerary of El Hadji Sy is transnational, travelling and working across Western or African countries such as South Africa on the brink of apartheid. Yet his artistic life profoundly anchors itself in the city he chose not to ever leave, Dakar. As a painter, a cultural activist and the first black curator to collaborate with a western institution in the 1980s, his social commitment and collective initiatives always aimed at an artistic autonomy. This solo exhibition will gather the artist's most recent works, site-specific interventions, aerial pieces, as well as archives from the end of the 20th century on the artist and his various collective groups, namely the Laboratoire AGIT'ART, Tenq et Huit Facettes.



Press Release

The title of the exhibition *Now / Naaw* plays on the simultaneous Wolof meaning of the word "to fly". As a painter, his works are made with a variety of materials such as industrial jute sacks originally used to ship rice or sugar, kites, butcher's paper and recycled paper, mirrors, glass, shells, wood, tar - and all hold a performative function. Mobile like props on a stage, semi-functional, blurring the boundaries between functionality and aesthetics, his works metamorphose into paravents, doors, windows, clothes, furnitures and itinerant structures.

His political stand manifests itself with paintings both figurative and abstract that convey a visual musicality whereby the bodies and forms submit themselves to a permanent undulatory rhythm. From poetic interpretations of political events, renderings of daily scenes, references to Dakar's urbanism, portraits of political, intellectual, mythological or ordinary figures, his works interweave politico-socio-economical comments and critical reflections on cultural and globalized systems of production.

In "*Now / Naaw*", his new works conceived as assemblages of panels and columns on wheels with a variable compositional scheme transform the exhibition venue into a heterogenous landscape. El Hadji Sy disobeys the "don't-touch" institutional rule of museums that sanctifies the artwork and imposes a distant and contemplative relationship to the visitor. In his exhibition, the artist-scenographer subverts the space, imposes a choreography to the visitor who must work around, touch, walk through, open or close the piece in order to have access.

Naaw (to fly) symbolizes the action, the freedom and the refusal to let oneself get paralyzed by institutions and societal dogmas: a stand that has always been that of El Hadji Sy. Upon graduating from the school of Beaux-Arts in 1977 in Dakar, he remained defiant towards state cultural policy and the aesthetics principles of the negritude - yet he received the support and admiration of former president Leopold Sedar Senghor with whom he exchanged and confronted with continuously. In the 1970s, he walked, stamped, danced and painted with his feet on the canvas as an act of rupture with the aesthetics of the Beaux-Arts. Outside institutional walls, he worked artistically in social spaces, such as streets, hospitals, and train

stations in order to involve a wider public and merge his interests in education, development and art.

The double phonetic meaning of *Now / Naaw* evokes the principle of play and "glissement" (sliding), dear to the artist. The junction of genres, the simultaneity of meanings, or the sliding and drifting of identities (*glissement d'identités*) are visual strategies that the artist uses to bypass the rigid classifications of the world. In a post-independence era, this multidisciplinary consciousness also aimed at avoiding the essentializing and exoticizing risks of a so-called « africanity ».

Committed to developing autonomous infrastructures for artists based in Senegal, El Hadji Sy created studio complexes such as the first Village Des Arts from 1977-1983 from which the artists were eventually expelled, and a second one in 1996 in a former Chinese workers' camp - the current Village Des Arts. While the controversial exhibition «Primitivism in the 20th Century » at MoMA opened its door in 1984, El Hadji Sy conceived that same year a contemporary Senegalese art collection for the Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt - a pioneering work that shortly after, resulted in the first anthology of Senegal's contemporary visual art, prefaced by Leopold Sedar Senghor. Committed to write a non-western and modern history, he was invited by the curator Clementine Deliss as the co-curator of the exhibition "Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa" at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in 1995 during Africa95. In 2005, he received a major retrospective *Painting, Performance, Politics* curated by Clementine Deliss, Yvette Mutumba and Philippe Pirotte at the Weltkulturen Museum in 2015 where the artist placed his work in dialogue with objects from the museum's ethnographic collection.

Between political mobilization and disengagement from public life, community-oriented work and solitude, provocative acts and reclusiveness, El Hadji Sy's work and figure are plural and crucial to the cultural history of Senegal in the 20th century. After several decades of work, one commitment remains: poeticize and subvert the world with aesthetic reinventions.

- Jennifer Houdrouge

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



El Hadji Sy Now / Naaw

19 May - 30 July 2022

Private opening on May 18th 2022 at 5pm

To receive an invitation: contact@selebe-yoon.com

A booklet will be published with essays by professor Ass M'bengue, the collector Bassam Chaïtou (JOM Collection) and the director of Selebe Yoon, Jennifer Houdrouge.

The presentation of archival materials is the result of a collaboration with the curator and daughter of the artist, Ken Aicha Sy.



Informations

Opening hours

Open from Tuesday through Saturday from 11 AM to 7 PM

Adress

Crossroad Rue Parchappe x Rue Salva
(Behind Canal +)
BP1390
Dakar, Plateau

Founder/Director

Jennifer Houdrouge
jennifer@selebe-yoon.com

Gallery Assistant

Jessiah Dieng
contact@selebe-yoon.com

Tel +221 338 211 696 / +221 78 151 68 64

Website www.selebe-yoon.com

Instagram @selebe_yoon

Youtube Selebe Yoon

