

On and Off 'Ĩ NDAFFA #': An Extended Review of the 14th Dakar Biennale

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The 14th Dakar Biennale, various venues, Dakar, Senegal, 19 May – 21 June 2022



Figure 1: Exhibition view, 'Ĩ NDAFFA # / Forger / Out of the Fire', 14th Dakar Biennale, Ancien Palais de Justice, Dakar, 2022, with Adjí Dieye, *Culture Lost and Learned by Heart – Part 2*, 2021, metal structure and printed silk, variable dimensions (front left), and Tegene Kunbi, *On the Wall II*, 2021, oil on canvas and textile, 200 x 250 cm (back left), photo by Ana Balona de Oliveira

1 'Ĩ NDAFFA #' or Forging Out of the Fire

The opening week of the 14th edition of Dak'Art, the Dakar Biennale of Contemporary African Art (19 May – 21 June 2022), was a momentous time for vibrant encounters and re-encounters after its 2020 postponement due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Dakar reverberated with the pulsating energy of innumerable exhibition openings, most notably of 'Ĩ NDAFFA # / Forger / Out of the Fire', the main Biennale exhibition at the Ancient Palais de Justice (**fig 1**); 'Nkabom', 'La Havane forge des suds', 'Unsettled' and 'Mutatis Mutandis', four invited curatorial projects at the Musée Théodore Monod d'Art Africain; the invited national pavilions of Ivory Coast and China, alongside that of the host Senegal, at the Musée des Civilisations Noires; special projects such as 'Teg Bët Gëstu Gi', 'Black Rock 40', 'Les Restes Suprêmes', etc, in various locations;

and countless other shows integral to the main programme and its parallel OFF. The opening week included an important three-day colloquium devised by Felwine Sarr, with speakers such as Gayatri Spivak and Benedicte Savoy, as well as the African Art Book Fair with its own programme of talks.

Curated by Dr El Hadji Malick Ndiaye, the Biennale's artistic director, with the assistance of Delphine Buisse and Anna Karima Wane, 'Ĩ NDAFFA # / Forger / Out of the Fire' was generally inspired by Walter Mignolo's 'epistemic disobedience'.¹ It called for the forging or smithing of new forms of knowledge production from and about Africa, notably regarding the limits of Eurocentric art history: 'This rewriting of history is partially through curatorial activity that must demonstrate disobedience to the canons, criteria and temporal sequences as already defined by the discipline.'² Such a forging should be undertaken 'out of the fire'— that is to say, out of the aesthetic and political actions and imaginations of art and activism (namely, although far from exclusively, curatorial).³ Ndiaye was adamant about the fact that, although 'Ĩ NDAFFA #' had been devised before the global COVID-19 pandemic, the latter, as well as the murder of George Floyd by the police in Minneapolis on 25 May 2020 and the global protests that ensued, potently reinforced the urgency contained in the very title of the Biennale. 'Ĩ NDAFFA' comes from 'I NDAFFAX' in the Serer language, meaning smithy or forge, the place where hard matter such as metal is reshaped by fire.⁴ Transforming through fire evokes both the deep planetary fractures caused by the ever-changing extractive tools of centuries-old colonial and racial capitalism, as well as historic and contemporary forms of militant protest and resistance, including symbolic, cultural and linguistic. Transforming through fire conjures a pluriversality of mythic and ritual knowledges and practices, as well as technical and artistic capacities that, contrary to what is often told, emerged in the African continent long before they did in Europe.⁵ With the inclusion of the Serer-based term 'Ĩ NDAFFA' in the Biennale's title, Ndiaye performed a gesture that was political as much as it was poetic, signalling linguistically the forging of new meanings that he intended to put forth in his curatorial practice, while insisting on a decolonial politics of language that refuses to do away with African languages.⁶ Through the material and digital transmutations of artistic production, 'Ĩ NDAFFA # / Forger / Out of the Fire' tried to rekindle various African and Afrodiasporic onto-epistemologies with which to rethink critically the past, present and future of the continent and the world.

¹ See El Hadji Malick Ndiaye, 'Text by the Artistic Director of Fourteenth Edition', in El Hadji Malick Ndiaye, ed, *Ĩ NDAFFA # / Forger / Out of the Fire: 14^e Biennale de Dakar*, exhibition catalogue, Secrétariat général de la Biennale de l'Art africain contemporain, Dakar, 2022, p 29. See also Walter Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom', *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol 26, nos 7–8, December 2009, pp 159–181. On decoloniality, see Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledge, and Border Thinking*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2000; Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2011.

² Ndiaye, 'Text by the Artistic Director', op cit, p 34

³ Ibid pp 32–34; Ndiaye draws on Maura Rilley's notion of curatorial activism (see Maura Rilley, *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2018)

⁴ Ndiaye, 'Text by the Artistic Director', op cit, p 29

⁵ Ibid, p 30

⁶ The slightly revised 2022 version became 'Ĩ NDAFFA #'

Here, ‘to forge’ acknowledged the potency of fiction, even when documentary; the power of creativity and affect, even when rigorously research-based and conceptual; the politics of the imagination and futurity, even when historiographical; the poetics of the archive, even when future-oriented; the onto-epistemic vitality of ancestral myths and cosmogonies, which, highlighting the spiritual and sacred forces embedded in the very material and energetic fabric of cosmos, nature, body and objects, have resisted the onto-epistemicide of colonial and racial capitalism. ‘To forge’ comprised the poetics afforded by all sorts of techniques and technologies: manual, mechanic and digital; material, visual, textual, auditory and performative. Considering African conceptions of knowledge as culture and of ‘the laboratory as an open space that fits with a holistic vision of knowledge’,⁷ Ndiaye considered how science, technology, knowledge production, cognition and an ‘acute sense of commitment for a social and intellectual cause’ have always been historically linked with the production and circulation of cultural artefacts, rituals, symbols, lived experience, imagination and their attendant poetics.⁸ Against depoliticised theories of art and knowledge, he concluded: ‘It is at the point of intersection between scientific knowledge and knowledge derived from “activism” and imaginaries that we must revise the protocols for producing new knowledge about Africa.’⁹

However, the Biennale’s main exhibition seemed to privilege material and object-based art forms, with a considerable amount of large-scale painting, sculpture and material installations, to the detriment of the performative and the bodily, as well as digital, sound and lens-based media such as photography. Although obviously present, the latter were comparatively less prevalent. To be sure, materiality is no less capable of being inventively and rigorously conceptual, and its aesthetic appeal does not deprive it of its epistemic and ethico-political significance. Likewise, more performative, dematerialised and digital art forms offer no guarantee of epistemic or political relevance. And yet, it often seemed as if the metaphor of material forging had been taken all too literally. The most enticing works were mixed media, forging new discourses and meanings about the contemporary, enduring past legacies and archival futures from a combination of material and conceptual, personal and political means, to be experienced both bodily and affectively, as well as cognitively, by the viewer.

2 On ‘Ń NDAFFA #’

The South African artist Ntshepe Tsekere Bopape (also known as Mo Laudi) presented a powerful installation comprising the sonic composition *Motho ke motho ka batho (A Tribute to Mancoba)* (2019), as well as the pictorial *Rest-itution* (2022) and the sculptural *Rest-itude* (2022), both pertaining to his *The Rest Paintings* series (**fig 2**). The installation had an architectural

⁷ Ndiaye, ‘Text by the Artistic Director’, op cit, p 33

⁸ Ibid, p 34

⁹ Ibid, p 33

dimension as the artist intervened in the entire space assigned to him, painting it white, and connecting the music notation represented in painting and sculpture to the one inscribed on the wall and in the linear geometry afforded by some stairs. The ‘rest’ note used in musical scores – a black rectangle placed between lines – refers to varying intervals of silence. The ‘rest’ symbol emerged in the black, brown and white shades produced by charcoal, acrylic, clay, Senegalese soil and coffee, as well as in the material void of the steel-made *Rest-itude*. The walls stated ‘restitution’ and ‘silence of the archive’ in handwriting, adding a textual layer to the visual and sonic writing. The starting point for the installation was *Motho ke motho ka batho*, an archival audio tribute to the South African artist Ernest Mancoba,¹⁰ which countered the artist’s invisibility in Western art history despite having co-founded the important CoBrA movement in Europe in the late 1940s. The sound piece is an immersive juxtaposition of archival fragments of Mancoba’s recorded voice, Laudi’s original compositions and samples of field recordings and music, including Xhosa throat singing and drum playing, Solomon Linda’s song *Mbube* (1939), surviving miners chanting one year after the 2012 Marikana massacre, and sounds from Winnie Mandela’s 2018 funeral.¹¹ *Motho ke motho ka batho* is the *ubuntu/botho*-inspired proverb in Sotho languages, according to which ‘a person is a person because of other people’.¹² Combining all these voices, Laudi restores Mancoba’s presence within the larger framework of past and present collective struggles for justice, equality, reparation and restitution in South Africa and beyond. If Laudi’s powerfully immersive sound countered archival erasure and silence,¹³ at the same time the visually abstract and sparse quality of his installation pointed to ‘rest’ and intervals of silence as elusively rebellious and fugitively resistant acts of retreat from the extractive commodification of Blackness, a healing opacity of sorts.¹⁴

¹⁰ Mancoba was born in Johannesburg in 1904 and died in France in 2002

¹¹ The Marikana massacre took place on 16 August 2012 at the Lonmin platinum mine in Marikana in the North West province in South Africa, when the South African Police Service (SAPS) killed thirty-four of the miners who were striking, with no union support, for a living wage. Many were also injured and arrested. See ‘Marikana Massacre 16 August 2012’, *South African History Online* www.sahistory.org.za/article/marikana-massacre-16-august-2012

¹² Mo Laudi, ‘Motho ke motho ka batho (A Tribute to Mancoba)’, in Ndiaye, ed, *Ī NDAFFA #*, op cit, p 104; artist statement available on site. This proverb was poetically elaborated into ‘Motho ke Motho ka Batho Babang (A Person is a Person Because of Other People)’ by South African poet Jeremy Cronin while in prison during apartheid; see Jeremy Cronin, *Inside*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1983, p 18. *Ubuntu* is the term for humanity in the Nguni languages (Zulu, Xhosa, etc) and the idea according to which ‘I am because you/we are’ (*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu/ngabanye bantu*). It has similar equivalents in other branches of the Bantu languages, like *botho* in the Sotho languages. It is an important philosophical concept pertaining to an African ethics, which considers the actual attainment of a person’s humanity within the relational, the communal and the collective. See ‘Hunhu/Ubuntu in the Traditional Thought of Southern Africa’, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <https://iep.utm.edu/hunhu/>; Mluleki Mnyaka, Mokgethi Motlhabi, ‘The African Concept of *Ubuntu/Botho* and its Socio-Moral Significance’, *Black Theology*, vol 3, no 2, 2015, pp 215–237, <https://doi.org/10.1558/blth.3.2.215.65725>; Nkonko M Kamwangamalu, ‘Ubuntu in South Africa: a sociolinguistic perspective to a pan-African concept’, *Critical Arts*, vol 13, no 2, 1999, pp 24–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560049985310111>; M B Ramose, ‘The Ethics of *Ubuntu*’, in *The African Philosophy Reader*, P H Coetzee and A P J Roux, eds, Routledge, London, 2003, pp 379–387; M B Ramose, ‘*Motho ke motho ka batho*, An African Perspective on Popular Sovereignty and Democracy’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Political Theory*, Leigh K Jenco, Murad Idris and Megan C Thomas, eds, Oxford University Press, New York, 2020, pp 261–280, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190253752.013.43>

¹³ Concerning archival erasure and silence, Laudi acknowledges the inspiration of Saidiya Hartman’s work; see the artist statement available on site, and Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women and Queer Radicals*, Serpent’s Tail, London, 2019

¹⁴ On opacity, see Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation: Poétique III*, Gallimard, Paris, 1990

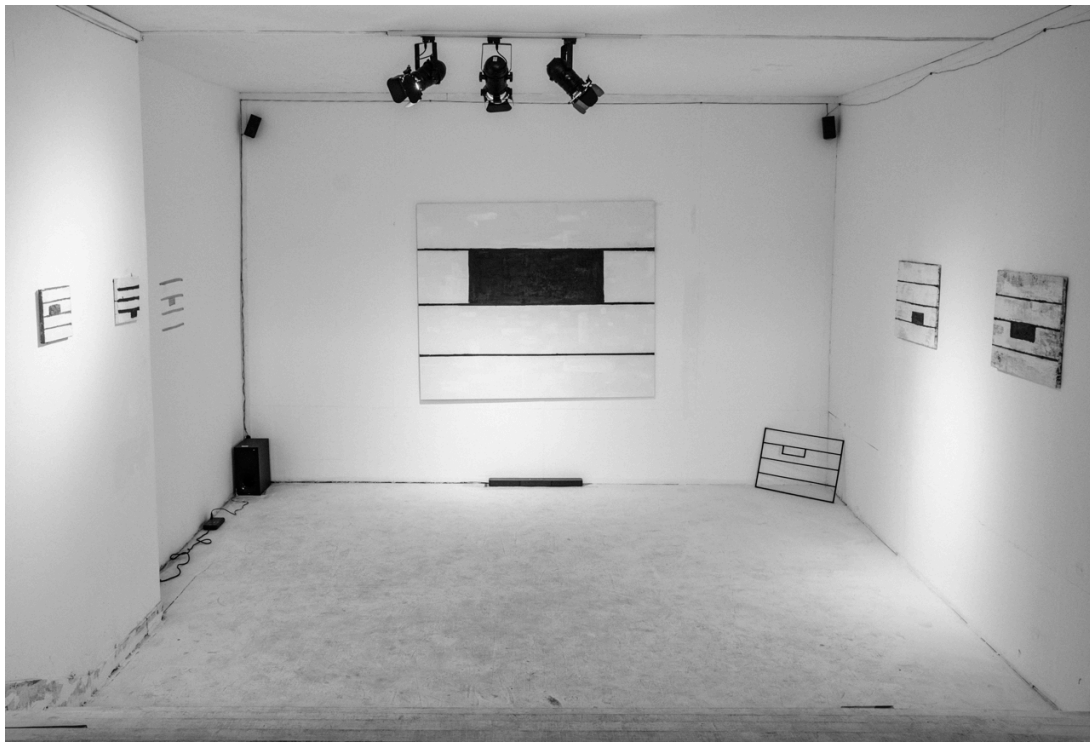


Figure 2: Ntshepe Tsekere Bopape (aka Mo Laudi), *Motho ke motho ka batho (A Tribute to Mancoba)*, 2019, sound, 10.10 min; *Rest-itution*, 2022, clay, Senegalese soil, coffee, charcoal and acrylic on canvas, variable dimensions; and *Rest-itude*, 2022, steel, variable dimensions – installation view in ‘Ī NDAFFA # / Forger / Out of the Fire’, 14th Dakar Biennale, Ancien Palais de Justice, Dakar, 2022, courtesy of the artist

The South African artist Mzwandile Buthelezi similarly intertwined visibility, sound and silence in his mixed-media installation, which comprised the drawing series *The Texture of Silence* (2020–2021) (**fig 3**) and music from one of the Johannesburg-based interdisciplinary collectives to which he belongs, The Texture of Silence.¹⁵ Following the trio’s usual process, Buthelezi’s drawings were produced spontaneously during the recording of the music, an experimental sound indebted to jazz and Southern African sonic traditions.¹⁶ He improvised with black charcoal and red pastel on white paper, echoing visually the improvisation of the musicians’ composing and performing process. The graphic outcome of the artist’s drawing performance was a series of ethereal-looking minimal compositions, abstract visual responses to the music’s ‘textural densities’ of sound and silence, which nonetheless retain the performative and embodied quality of their making.¹⁷ Undulating shapes of varying densities, made of masses of small traces, appear to move in the bidimensional space of drawing. They seem energised by circular rhythms and interrupted by linear ones, apparently swirling when actually static (on paper), both ‘fixed and spontaneous’, ‘planned and random’.¹⁸ Albeit abstract, Buthelezi’s visual compositions evoke micro- and macrocosmic forces, pulsating body and nature, veins, winds and tides. Like jazz improvisation, they revolve around repetition and change, conjuring a flexible structure, the continuous interplay between part and whole, individual and collective, elemental and cosmic, sound and silence.

¹⁵ Besides Buthelezi, *The Texture of Silence* includes the musicians Cara Stacey and Keenan Ahrends

¹⁶ Mzwandile Buthelezi, ‘The Texture of Silence’, in Ndiaye, ed, *Ī NDAFFA #*, op cit, p 48

¹⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁸ *Ibid*



Figure 3: Mzwandile Buthelezi, *The Texture of Silence*, 2020–2021, charcoal and pastel on Fabriano paper, variable dimensions, with sound by The Texture of Silence – installation view in ‘Í NDAFFA # / Forger / Out of the Fire’, 14th Dakar Biennale, Ancien Palais de Justice, Dakar, 2022, courtesy of the artist

An important conceptual thread traversing the Biennale’s main exhibition were ideas around African cosmologies, ancestry, ritual and Afrodiasporic legacies across the Atlantic. The Mozambican artist Lara Sousa presented *Kalunga* (2019) (**fig 4**), a video work made in Cuba where she has lived and studied film. *Kalunga* means sea and death in Kimbundo, as well as the watery frontier separating the living from the dead in Kikongo (both are national languages in present-day Angola), and immediately evokes the Atlantic and the violence of the Middle Passage. In her film, *kalunga* acquires related Afro-Cuban meanings, since it also refers to Mama Kalunga, the sea and death goddess of the Palo Monte religion, indebted to religious traditions from the ancient Kongo kingdom. The film portrays rituals in which Sousa has participated and during which she was identified as Mama Kalunga’s daughter, destined to sea- and border-crossing, both geographically and spiritually. The film also pays homage to Sousa’s great-aunt, the Mozambican poet Noémia de Sousa (1926–2022), a major cultural figure of the Mozambican struggle against Portuguese colonialism, whose life was deeply marked by the experience of exile in Europe. Sousa thus enmeshes the personal, the familial and the political, the past and the present in a visual poem, by means of which she inscribes her own body and voice in an intergenerational lineage of ocean-crossing female ancestors.¹⁹ Addressing diverse diasporic dislocations across time and space, memory and desire, oceanic landscape and the body, the language of dreams, symbols and ritual, Sousa elaborates on departure, death, return and rebirth. She entwines diasporic and anti-colonial personal and family history within the larger collective histories of the transatlantic trade of enslaved Africans to the Americas –

¹⁹ Sousa uses not only her own voice as voiceover but also her mother’s, the Mozambican filmmaker Isabel Noronha, adding another layer to this female lineage. The script includes two poems by her great-aunt: one original, ‘A mulher que ri à vida e à morte’ (The woman who laughs at life and death), the other adapted, ‘Sangue Negro’ (Black blood); see Noémia de Sousa, *Sangue Negro*, Associação dos Escritores Moçambicanos, Maputo, 2001, p 149, pp 140–142

a trade that the Portuguese were the first Europeans to establish and the last to abolish, and which departed not only from Angola, among other West African locations, but also from Mozambique across the Indian ocean. Of course, Mozambican, Angolan and Cuban historical connections include the important legacies of socialist internationalism, namely in and through cinema, of which Sousa could also be said to be a daughter.²⁰ Sousa thus performs a cinematic ritual of return and rebirth for herself, her great-aunt and all those who were forcibly taken from the African continent through the deadly depths of *kalunga* – an African word that, having crossed the Atlantic and acquired new meanings without relinquishing the old, epitomises cultural resistance, survival and reinvention.



Figure 4: Lara Sousa, video still from *Kalunga*, 2019, video, colour, sound, 22 min – shown in ‘Í NDAFFA # / Forger / Out of the Fire’, 14th Dakar Biennale, Ancien Palais de Justice, Dakar, 2022, courtesy of the artist

It was Brazil, however, that received the largest number of enslaved Africans during the trade, and it was also the last place in the Americas to abolish slavery in 1888. Today, more than half of the Brazilian population is Afro-descendant, while the country’s ruling, economic and cultural elites have remained white. This is the historical and contemporary backdrop for the video installation presented by the Brazilian collective Fluxus do Atlântico Sul. In their three-channel video installation, *Crossing Archives* (2020) (**fig 5**), and in accompanying research material, they examine the histories and collections of the Afro-Brazilian Museum and of Casa do Benin in Salvador, in Bahia, where African ancestry is prevalent. They document the museums’ collecting and exhibiting histories in the framework of institutional efforts to value

²⁰ Sousa’s father, Camilo de Sousa, is also a Mozambican filmmaker, who took part in the Mozambican liberation struggle within FRELIMO, Mozambique’s Liberation Front. De Sousa and Noronha directed the documentary *We Dreamed of a Country* (2019), about the dreams and disillusionments of post-independence. See also Ros Gray, *Cinemas of the Mozambican Revolution: Anti-colonialism, Independence and Internationalism in Filmmaking, 1968–1991*, James Currey, Martlesham, 2020

African and Afro-Brazilian culture and to establish exchanges with African countries after their independence.²¹ Importantly, they also document the various ways in which the artists themselves have activated and critically engaged with the collections through artistic practice. From a decolonial perspective, they thus unveil the historical complexities of Bahia's (and Brazil's) relationship with African heritage and contemporaneity, which is deeply fractured by the colonial and postcolonial legacies of slavery and the failures of the post-abolition period. They also highlight institutional and artistic attempts to acknowledge the extent to which Brazilian cultures and identities are Afro-diasporic, despite the genocidal and commodifying violence of colonialism, slavery and structural racism.

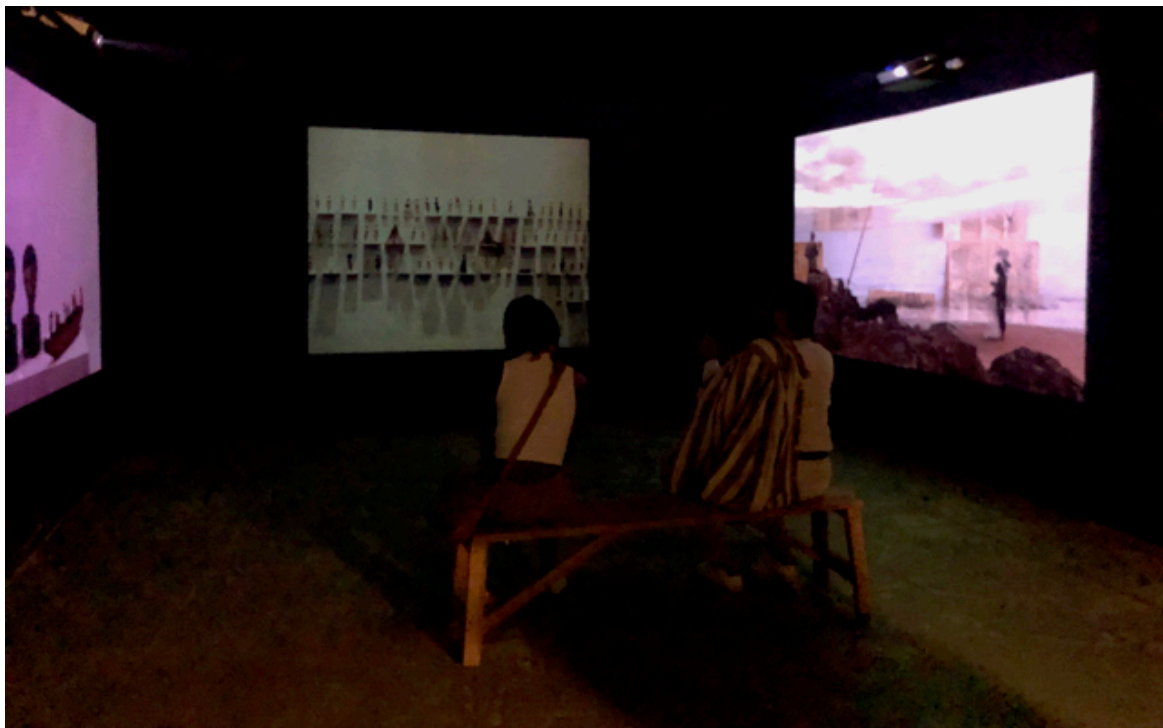


Figure 5: Fluxus do Atlântico Sul, *Crossing Archives*, 2020, video and archival installation, variable dimensions – installation view in 'ĨNDAFFA # / Forger / Out of the Fire', 14th Dakar Biennale, Ancien Palais de Justice, Dakar, 2022, courtesy of the artists

Ritual and ancestry from an African Black female perspective are also the driving force in South African Sethembile Msezane's video work, *Ukukhanya* (2019) (**fig 6**), which means light (the state/being of light/lighting) in Zulu and Xhosa. Performing an apparently simple and brief ritual of candle lighting (and herb burning) for the floor-focussed camera, Msezane elaborates on the physical and spiritual meanings of bringing about light. She inserts her own bodily

²¹ These efforts were notably promoted by Pierre Fatumbi Verger (1902–1996), a French-Brazilian photographer and ethnographer who studied the transatlantic slave trade between Benin and Bahia, Afro-diasporic religions (which have been historically prohibited, persecuted and discriminated against in Brazil) and botanical knowledges, and who converted to Candomblé. Verger moved to Salvador in 1946, having travelled worldwide, namely to West Africa and the Caribbean. In 1973 he became a professor at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), in Salvador, and was a pivotal figure in the founding of UFBA's Afro-Brazilian Museum (MAFRO) (which was created in 1974 and opened in 1982) and of Casa do Benin (which opened in 1988) and in their dialogue with West African institutions. See Fundação Pierre Verger www.pierreverger.org; Fluxos: Acervos do Atlântico Sul <https://fluxosdoatlanticosul.wordpress.com/>; MAFRO www.mafro.ceao.ufba.br/en; and Casa Do Benin <https://fgm.salvador.ba.gov.br/casa-do-benin/>

subjectivity, at times split into several priestess-looking presences, into a lineage of ancestral knowledges and practices that remain contemporary. An almost meditative sense of repetition and change is produced by doubling and tripling the body, multiplying the ritual objects and gestures into series and sequences, and on-loop screening. Lighting and burning become material and performative metaphors for celebrating, remembering, mourning, purging, cleansing, reflecting, contemplating, envisioning and gestating, somewhere between past, present and future. Standing, kneeling and lying down connect the female body to enmeshed height and depth, sun and soil, life and death, but the ground-oriented action and viewpoint keep reminding one of rooted ancestry as a nourishing way forward, and of the necessity of quiet in order to move.



Figure 6: Sethembile Msezane, video still from *Ukukhanya*, 2019, video, colour, sound, 5.56 min – shown in ‘Ī NDAFFA # / Forger / Out of the Fire’, 14th Dakar Biennale, Ancien Palais de Justice, Dakar, 2022, courtesy of the artist

The textile installation by the Angolan artist Ana Silva, *Legado (Tributo)* (2020) (**fig 7**), meaning legacy and tribute in Portuguese, was also an altar of sorts, paying homage to the quotidian struggle and strength of Black African women in patriarchal societies. *Legado* features a black female mannequin, dressed in a white gown, a lacy head mask, a threaded veil, a long shawl of sewn doilies, cloths and reused plastic bags (from import trade), and with strings coming out of her hands. The shawl and strings sprawled along the adjacent wall like an unfolded scroll, inviting both visual reading and spatial dislocation, a material journey across abstract and figurative motifs stitched on textile surfaces of varying shapes, textures and colours, sewn together and traversed by threads. Silva gathered the round, crocheted lace doilies, traditionally made in Portugal by elderly white women to adorn tabletops, irreverently on the wall, disrupting their docile domesticity. Splashes of vibrant colour interrupted the sartorial predominance of white, relating the Black female figure to the revered goddess or priestess more than the Westernised bride. If Msezane’s ritual performance ignites and is ignited by fire, with connotations of spiritual cleansing, Silva’s homage to Black women includes embroidered representations of water and washing. Sewn after being photographed, several scenes feature groups of older and younger Angolan women whom Silva has met, depicting activities of labour and intergenerational conviviality: women carrying basins and bidons, washing clothes and plaiting each other’s hair. Woven threads give life to water, leaves and the beautifully patterned

braids, headscarves and garments of mothers, sisters and daughters. Without romanticising their real-life struggles, Silva nonetheless captures their majestic dignity. Resisting patriarchal entanglement, Silva's women appear resolutely interlaced by a gendered, intergenerational politics of solidarity and care, leaving a potent legacy in their wake, to which she unfolds her tribute as a trail and tail/tale of testament.

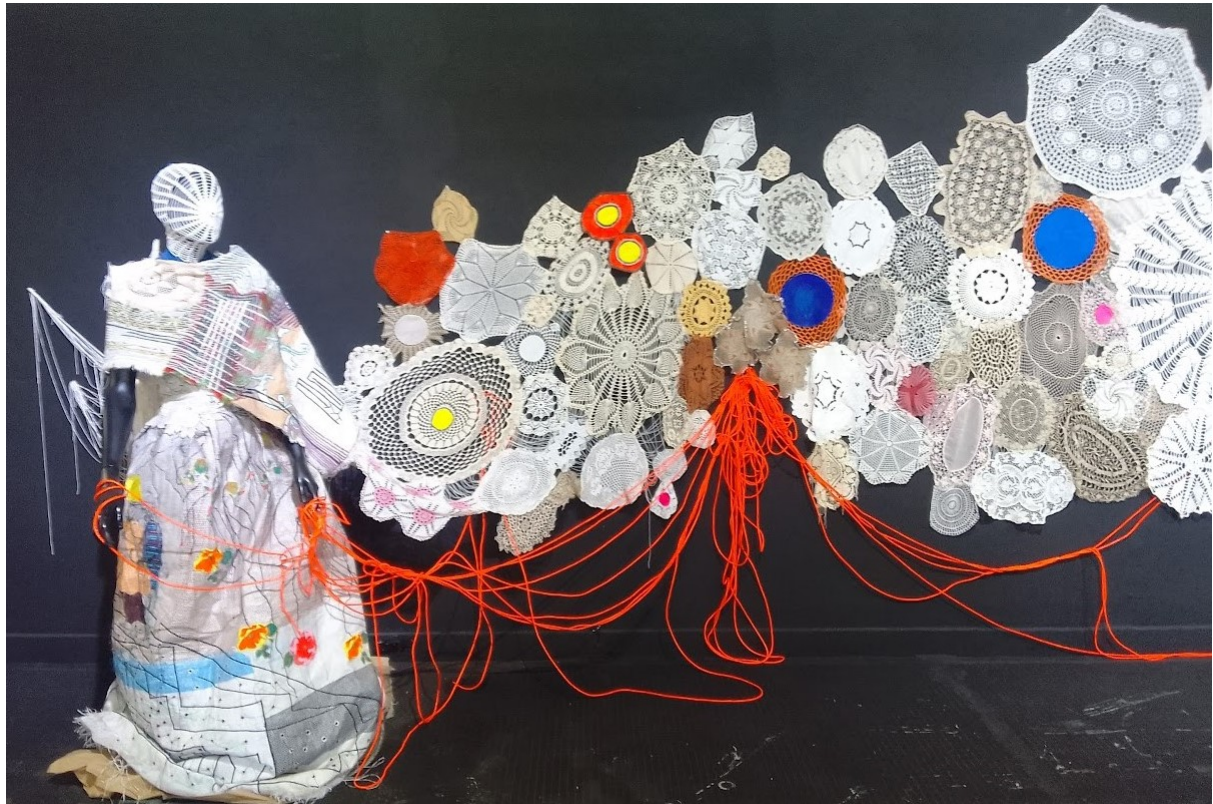


Figure 7: Ana Silva, *Legado (Tributo)*, 2020, mixed media, variable dimensions – installation view in 'Ĩ NDAFFA # / Forger / Out of the Fire', 14th Dakar Biennale, Ancien Palais de Justice, Dakar, 2022, photo by Ana Balona de Oliveira

3 On and Off 'Ĩ NDAFFA #'

The artists in Dakar addressed relevant questions pertaining to the politics of the archive and its erasures, as we have seen, but one specific topic came up significantly in several artworks, both in the main exhibition and in the OFF parallel programme: the colonial history of the French army's *tirailleurs* (riflemen). These were North and West African regiments that were initially formed by Algerian and Senegalese troops in the 1840s–1850s to assist in colonial conquest and occupation, and subsequently encompassed soldiers from other French colonial territories. France deployed them in countless wars, including World War I and II, the Indochina War (1946–1954) and the Algerian War (1954–1962), keeping them underpaid and in poorer conditions than their white peers (as did other European colonial empires). In *Camp de Thiaroye* (1988), Ousmane Sembène and Thierno Faty Sow famously filmed the Thiaroye massacre that took place on 30 November–1 December 1944 in Dakar's suburbs, when the protests of West African veterans who had fought for France in World War II were met with



Figure 8: Modou Dieng, *Déjeuner sur l'herbe with the Celebrated Black Troops*, 2020, mixed media on cotton paper photograph, 92 x 120 cm – installation view in 'Ĩ NDAFFA # / Forger / Out of the Fire', 14th Dakar Biennale, Ancien Palais de Justice, Dakar, 2022, courtesy of the artist

mass killings by the French. In 'Ĩ NDAFFA #', the Senegalese artist Modou Dieng presented a group of paintings on archival black-and-white photographic portraits of Senegalese *tirailleurs*: *Déjeuner sur l'herbe with the Celebrated Black Troops* (**fig 8**), *Portrait of a Young Soldier* and *Brothers* (2020). The *tirailleurs* are highlighted by the covering of their background and uniforms in layers of patterned bright colours, resembling popular icons of sorts, symbols of the nation's past, present and future struggles, and of the African 'combat of the universal': a combat for pluriversality against murderous so-called universals.²² The Ivorian artist Roméo Mivekannin also drew on ethnographic photography and Western art historical iconography to make his paintings *Campagne du Maroc – Tirailleurs sénégalais et leurs femmes* (**fig 9**), *Une pyramide de dahoméennes* and *La famille royale, Hollande* (2021). His use of black acrylic and elixir bath on large-scale free canvas, comprising sewn fragments, reinforces the works' archival quality, insofar as they seem at times to replicate augmented versions of unfolded old photographs. However, Mivekannin disrupts the archive's racist and patriarchal coloniality by replacing the faces of bare-breasted Black women and fully clothed white women with his own, and by decidedly returning his gaze back to the viewer. Thus, he counters historical and contemporary visual narratives that, predominantly produced and consumed by a white, male, Eurocentric gaze, have objectified Black female subjectivities.

²² The artist handwrote on the wall: 'Honneur/ Patrie du futur/ Passé présent/ Pour un combat/ De l'universel'



Figure 9: Roméo Mivekannin, *Campagne du Maroc – Tirailleurs sénégalais et leurs femmes*, 2021, acrylic painting and elixir bath on free canvas, 249 x 357 cm – shown in 'Ī NDAFFA # / Forger / Out of the Fire', 14th Dakar Biennale, Ancien Palais de Justice, Dakar, 2022, courtesy of the artist and Cécile Fakhoury Gallery, Dakar, Abidjan and Paris

The OFF programme included two important solo exhibitions that similarly elaborated on colonial and postcolonial histories and identities by examining neglected narratives around the Senegalese *tirailleurs* and their families and descendants. At the Cécile Fakhoury gallery, the Senegalese-Italian artist Binta Diaw presented 'Toolu Xeer (Le champs de pierres)', meaning the stone field in Wolof, while at the Raw Material Company, the Vietnamese artist Tuan Andrew Nguyen showed 'The Spectre of Ancestors Becoming'.

By means of material and archival installations, Diaw paid homage to protesters who were killed by state violence in different periods of Senegalese history, such as the war veterans massacred by the French at the Thiaroye camp in 1944, and those who died in the 2021 uprisings against the curtailing of civil and political rights.²³ *Strange Fruit* (2022) consisted of a heap of stones enveloped by the national flag in a suspended ball, which, ready to fall and crush those beneath it, gets torn by its own weight. 'Protesting' stones liberate themselves from the flag's restraint in a slow yet unstoppable movement. *Strange Fruit*, named after Billie Holiday's song on the enduring legacies of slavery in the US, also evoked lynching and inserted the 2021 protests and the crushing of them into a transnational lineage of Black struggles for freedom and

²³ Earlier discontentment towards the government (due to pandemic restrictions, the restraint of the opposition, unemployment, etc) increased with the arrest of opposition leader Ousmane Sonko on rape charges on 3 March 2021. Stone-throwing protesters were severely repressed by the police, leading to thirteen deaths. Social media were disrupted during protests. Several demonstrations ensued, notably in June 2022 when many Senegalese protested the invalidation of the opposition's list of candidates for the legislative elections on 31 July 2022.

justice. In *1/12/44* (2022) (**fig 10**), an earth-covered floor with red chechia hats, part of the *tirailleurs*' uniforms, from which corn and millet leaves sprouted, poignantly lacked due gravestones. Resembling agricultural fields (most *tirailleurs* were peasants), war trenches and unmarked burial grounds, *1/12/44* became a memorial to the victims of the massacre – the murdered and the wrongly prosecuted and imprisoned. Whilst the 1945 Thiaroye trial failed to bring about truth and reparation, the exact number of victims and the location of their remains have never been disclosed, and no reparations have been made to this day. Signalling both archival erasure and the mnemonic tradition of oral history, a sound piece recalled inaccuracies in trial documents and the names of the falsely accused. The series *Je suis chez moi, je n'ai pas d'ordre à recevoir* (2022) comprises archival images of the *tirailleurs* from the Museum of the Armed Forces in Dakar and excerpts of trial reports, both transferred to fabric in superimposed, faded layers that betray the archive's limits. Importantly, *Terère* (2022), a wooden mortar and pestle with satin robes in a darkened room, evoked the wives of the *tirailleurs* who tended to the daily life of the camp, and the many women who have participated in recent protests in Senegal. 'Toolu Xeer' examined the ongoing violence of history's omissions and unrepaired injustices, confronting the coloniality of present-day inequalities and honouring the emancipatory force of various forms of resistance. Until the past is properly remembered and repaired, it keeps repeating itself under new guises.



Figure 10: Binta Diaw, *1.12.44*, 2022, sound, soil, seeds (millet, maize), chechias, variable dimensions – installation view in 'Binta Diaw: Toolu Xeer (Le champs de pierres)', Cécile Fakhoury Gallery, Dakar, 2022, photo by Khalifa Hussein, courtesy of the artist and Cécile Fakhoury Gallery, Dakar, Abidjan and Paris

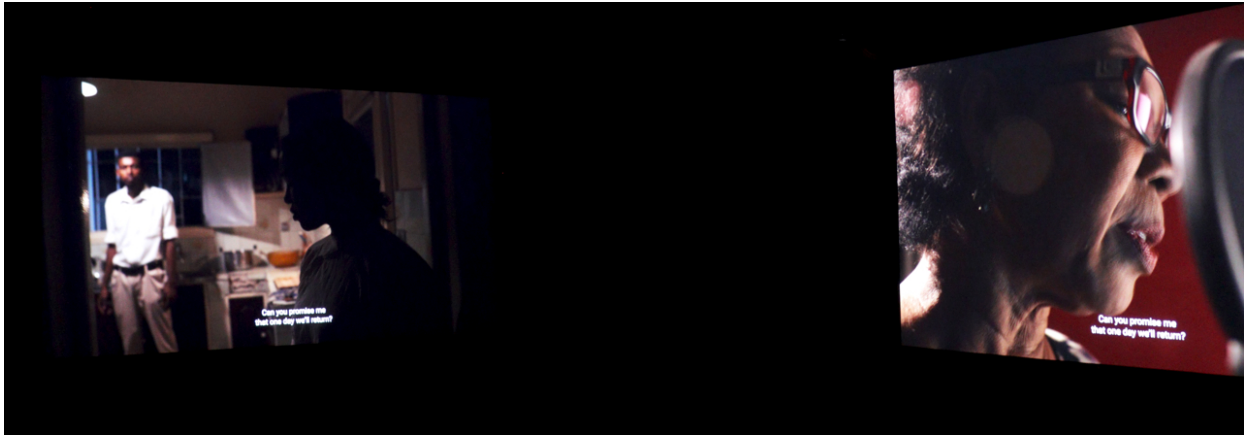


Figure 11: Tuan Andrew Nguyen, *The Spectre of Ancestors Becoming*, 2019, four-channel video installation, colour, sound, 28 min, family photographic archives of the Vietnamese-Senegalese community, variable dimensions – installation view in ‘Tuan Andrew Nguyen: The Spectre of Ancestors Becoming’, Raw Material Company, Dakar, 2022, photo by Kerry Etola Viderot, courtesy of the artist, James Cohan Gallery, New York, and Raw Material Company, Dakar

Nguyen’s ‘The Spectre of Ancestors Becoming’ delved into the history of the Senegalese *tirailleurs* who were deployed by France in Indochina to fight against Vietnamese anti-colonial uprisings, of the Vietnamese women they met, left behind or brought back, and of their descendants, some of whom never met their Vietnamese mothers. The exhibition included a four-channel video installation, large- and small-scale archival photography from family albums, and wall text pieces, all of which constitute the work *The Spectre of Ancestors Becoming* (2019) (**fig 11**) that gives the title to the exhibition.²⁴ Working very closely with the Vietnamese-Senegalese community in Senegal and the diaspora, Nguyen highlights the complexities of such history by focussing on personal and familial memory through visual, textual, audio and performative storytelling, and by emphasising women’s perspective. He worked with Vietnamese-Senegalese writers who fictionalised conversations with and between their parents and grandparents from their own inherited and/or imagined memories. The video installation is powerfully immersive, inviting viewers to a polyphonic and multivocal experience and a constant bodily shift of the gaze across four screens. These show various male and female characters acting and narrating amidst archival images, by means of which Nguyen examines the poetic and political intricacies of history, memory and identity across generations, cultures, religions, race, class and gender. Recounting experiences of love, separation, loss and silence, namely transnational and intergenerational, the work reflects on mourning and desire, the longing for those one has lost or never met – ancestors, offspring, home countries. With colonial, anti- and postcolonial histories unfolding in the background, *The Spectre of Ancestors Becoming* pays a potent homage to several generations of Vietnamese-Senegalese women and their often-silenced experiences of (un)belonging and loss. It considers the ways in which several forms of

²⁴ This textual component drew on Marguerite Duras’s script for Alain Resnais’s film *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), replacing Hiroshima with Indochina: ‘Je me souviens. I remember. / De quoi te souviens-tu? What do you remember? / Je me souviens que tu viens d’un endroit qui s’appelle l’Indochine. I remember you are from a place called Indochina. / Qu’est-ce que tu te rappelles de l’Indochine? What do you remember about Indochina? / Je me rappelle de tout en Indochine. I remember everything about Indochina. / Tu ne te rappelles de rien en Indochine. You remember nothing of Indochina. / Tu n’as rien vu en Indochine. You saw nothing of Indochina’. See Marguerite Duras, *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, Richard Seaver, trans, Grove Press, New York, 1961.

coloniality have also pervaded personal and familial lives, and acknowledges these women's contributions to Senegalese contemporary society.

Archival research also featured prominently in the guest-curated exhibitions at the Musée Théodore Monod d'Art Africain, in 'Black Rock 40' at the Maison de la Culture Doua Seck and in '(Un)Charted Grounds' at the Matter Art Project, part of the OFF programme. Ndiaye invited four women as guest-curators. The Ghanaian Nana Oforiatta Ayim presented 'Nkabom: The Museum as Community', with works by Rita Mawuena Benisson, Kwasi Darko and Kuukua Eshun. The Canadian Lou Mo, with the Catalan David Castañer, curated 'La Havane forge des suds', featuring Mariano Bartolomeu, René Peña, Alexis Esquivel, Roberto Diago, Abdoulaye Konaté, Pok Chi Lau, Ibrahim Miranda, Carlos Martiel and Marta Maria Pérez. The South African Greer Valley presented 'Unsettled', comprising works by Bronwyn Katz, Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja, Nolan Oswald Dennis and Zayaan Khan; and the Moroccan Syham Weigant invited Hamedine Kane and Stéphane Verlet-Bottéro from the Dakar-based The School of Mutants in 'Mutatis Mutandis'. 'Nkabom' elaborated on several community-oriented artistic practices, both inside and outside the museum, from the standpoint of the Ghanaian Akan's onto-epistemologies on coming together; it referenced Black female communality, Afahye sacred ceremonies, urban circulation and youth culture. 'La Havane forge des suds' highlighted relevant South–South connections from the historical perspective of Cuba's pivotal role in anti-colonial internationalism, notably through education and culture, the militant tradition of muralism, less-known narratives on the Chinese-Cuban community, African ancestry and the enduring coloniality of racism, the South–North migratory crisis and the limits of Western democracy.

Curatorially, however, the most accomplished projects in this guest-curated section were 'Unsettled' and 'Mutatis Mutandis'. The former was sparser, while the latter was fuller, but both appeared coherently conceived and installed. 'Unsettled' (**fig 12**) was inspired by Sol Plaatje's 1916 book, *Native Life in South Africa*, and his description of the impact of the 1913 Natives Land Act on Black South Africans. The opening line is prescient of what apartheid would reinforce from 1948 to 1994, and of what post-apartheid has failed to structurally repair ever since: 'Awakening on Friday morning, June 20, 1913, the South African native found himself, not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth'.²⁵ The Natives Land Act legalised a process of land dispossession that the Dutch and British conquest and occupation had begun much earlier. Repealed only in 1991, the Act prohibited Black South Africans from buying or renting land except in a few wasteland reserves, forcing them into displacement and cheap labour for white land- and mine-owners. Despite continuous resistance to it, the Act paved the way for apartheid forced removals and spatial segregation, both rural and urban, and political and socio-economic destitution along a deeply entrenched race/class/gender divide that remains unsettled today. Addressing such historical violence and resistance and their enduring legacies,

²⁵ Solomon T Plaatje, *Native Life in South Africa, Before and Since the European War and the Boer Rebellion*, P S King, London, 1916, available on *South African History Online*: <https://sahistory.org.za/archive/native-life-south-africa-and-european-war-and-boer-rebellion-sol-t-plaatje>

‘Unsettled’ presented land as living memory of (un)belonging, and human and non-human ancestry as community. Rituals, objects, images, texts and sounds were gathered in performative, material and digital archives, which, future-oriented, reclaimed several forms of restitution for actual repair.



Figure 12: Exhibition view, ‘Unsettled’, 14th Dakar Biennale, Musée Théodore Monod d’Art Africain, Dakar, 2022, with Zayaan Khan, *Comensality through Deep Time*, 2022, clay, sand, salts and ash, variable dimensions (front); and Bronwyn Katz, *Wees Gegroet*, 2016, video, colour, sound, 11.25 min (back right) and *kx’orakx’ora (Renew)*, 2022, copper-coated wire, rust and twine, variable dimensions (back left), image courtesy of Greer Valley

As for The School of Mutants’ ‘Mutatis Mutandis’ (**fig 13**), this consisted of a multi-layered, colourful installation comprising several interconnected elements. Evoking a market stall, a Fulani hut displayed a multitude of objects, ranging from the quotidian to those with more specific ritual, cultural and nomadic uses. Installed at the Musée Théodore Monod (whose origin is linked to the cultural and scientific institute, which, founded by the French in 1936, gathered the ethnographic collections that later became the museum’s), this hut/stall’s collection upset the onto-epistemic models of Western and Westernised museums.²⁶ These models have often

²⁶ The history of the Musée Théodore Monod d’Art Africain is a complex one, connected to the founding of the Institut Français de l’Afrique Noir – IFAN in 1936. IFAN grew to become the headquarters of a network of research centres supporting the epistemic branch of French colonialism in West Africa. It was headed by the French naturalist Théodore Monod from 1938 to 1965. After independence in 1960, IFAN was integrated into Cheikh Anta Diop University, while the building where it had been housed became one of its museums, the Musée d’Art Africain, promoted by Senghor. Keeping its initials, IFAN was only renamed as the Institut Fondamental de l’Afrique Noir in 1966. The museum was renamed after Monod in 2007. Although IFAN and this museum are inextricably bound to colonial history, they were also a relevant space for African intellectuals who resisted French colonialism; see <https://ifan.ucad.sn/musees-musee-theodore-monod/>. The Biennale’s artistic director, Ndiaye, is also a researcher at IFAN and a curator at the Monod, where he co-curated, with Emmanuelle Chérel, ‘Teg Bët Gëstu Gi’ (meaning to see research or to touch it with the eyes in Wolof) within the Biennale’s special projects section (‘Teg Bët Gëstu Gi’, in Ndiaye, ed, *ÏNDAFFA #*, op cit, pp 270–271). In this exhibition, contemporary artists were in close dialogue with Monod’s ethnographic collection, literally enmeshing their works within it, upsetting its chronology and conventions, addressing the wealth of meanings pertaining to its objects, and considering heritage and tradition as living and relational, in an attempt to provoke an ‘epistemological disturbance’ (ibid). Surprisingly, the invited artists were all male (Hervé Youmbi, Ibrahima Thiam, Uriel Orlow, Alioune Diouf, Patrick Bernier/Olive Martin/Ousmane Ka,



Figure 13: Hamedine Kane and Stéphane Verlet-Bottéro (from The School of Mutants), *Mutatis Mutandis*, 2022, mixed media, variable dimensions – installation view in ‘The School of Mutants: Mutatis Mutandis’, 14th Dakar Biennale, Musée Théodore Monod d’Art Africain, Dakar, 2022, photo by Stéphane Verlet-Bottéro, courtesy of the artists

separated scientific and artistic realms not only from one another (with African art objects being ultimately confined to ethnography despite receiving aesthetic validation) but also from spiritual and everyday life.²⁷ Deprived of protective glass and a categorising label, and gathered in an open, circular and heterogenous community, these objects materialised museal and non-museal being and knowing as partaking of the same energy of life. They shared this exhibiting space with other objects variously placed on the floor, on nearby shelves, on the walls, and even on a pedestal for the sake of inclusive contrast. Beneath their apparent immobility, this material and spiritual community of living things seemed to move and mutate. ‘Mutatis Mutandis’ was inspired by Souleimane Bachir Diagne’s concept of a ‘museum of mutants’, one that is able to openly home African art objects as ‘mutants that do not hold in place and are always excessive’, countering ‘the very separation of inside and outside, of the living and the inert’ according to a ‘cosmology of emergence’.²⁸ What is more, an urban museum of mutants should echo, according to its own modalities, the mobility and mutability of what Diagne calls ‘the eco-museum of the village’, which the Fulani hut/market stall seemed to imaginatively materialise.²⁹

Vincent Meessen, François Knoetze, Mamadou Kouma Gueye), except for Ariane Leblanc, who co-authored one of the two featured works by Orlow (ibid).

²⁷ These models have been famously contested by James Clifford and others; see James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1988

²⁸ See Souleimane Bachir Diagne, ‘Musée des Mutants’, *Esprit*, July–August 2020, <https://esprit.presse.fr/article/souleymane-bachir-diagne/musee-des-mutants-42835>, author’s translation; Diagne writes: ‘... les choses que nous appelons objets d’art africains sont ces mutants qui ne tiennent pas en place et sont toujours excessifs ... qui remettent en question la séparation même du dedans et du dehors, du vivant et de l’inerte ...’

²⁹ Ibid, author’s translation. Diagne writes: ‘Les écomusées reposent sur ce principe. Mais même les musées de la capitale, de la ville moderne et de la déterritorialisation qu’elle produit continûment peuvent s’efforcer de mettre en œuvre le même

For Diagne, the noun/adjective ‘mutant’ functions as a verb (*muter/mutate*) conjugated in the present participle (*mutant/mutating*): instead of being ‘the result of a metamorphosis’, ‘it is the metamorphosis always in progress, which defines life’.³⁰

The hut was surrounded by wall-hung blackboards containing textual, numeric, geometric and material fragments of scientific, technical and artistic knowledge (mathematics, astronomy, weaving, forging), retrieved from African scholarship on African cultures, such as that of Amadou Hampâté Bâ and Cheikh Anta Diop. Their books were in turn readable, alongside those of Frantz Fanon and others, in a cosy library of sorts, where one could sit on pillows made from reused plastic bags of various commercial origins. Drawing was also performed with electric bulbs of varying shapes and colours, and significant writing reclaiming epistemic pluriversality – the Wolof words *xeetu* (group) and *xam-xam* (knowledge) – could be read in motion on tiny electronic blackboards. Indeed, the contemporaneity at play here included both ancient and more recent technologies. ‘Mutatis Mutandis’ also drew on the complex histories of Senegalese emancipatory educational projects: the University of Mutants (to which The School of Mutants and Diagne’s conceptual museum are somewhat indebted), founded by President Léopold Sédar Senghor in Gorée in 1979 and which closed in the early 2000s;³¹ and the University of the African Future (UFA), initiated (although never completed) by President Abdoulaye Wade in Sébikotane in the mid-2000s.³² These pedagogic utopias relied heavily on the political leaders and regimes that initiated them, failing to become enduring decolonial alternatives to Westernised universities. However, remembering through archival work past desires for pan-African, decolonised and pluriversal epistemic models became an inspirational force in the ‘Mutatis Mutandis’ university – one which, albeit critical of previous and current states of things, nonetheless refused defeat by way of archival imagination, pregnant with futurity. Importantly, ‘Mutatis Mutandis’ seemed to embody the desire for a bottom-up, grassroots university where decolonial education is built first and foremost by local/nomadic communities, and whose architecture is not monumentally imposed on people and their ecosystems by those in power.

principe ... Ainsi l'imposant musée de la capitale ne rompra-t-il pas avec la mobilité, la mutabilité de l'écomusée du village, mais lui fera écho selon ses modalités propres.'

³⁰ Ibid, author’s translation. Diagne writes: ‘Ce qui fait mutant, c’est que ce mot est construit comme un participe présent. Ce n’est pas le résultat d’une métamorphose, c’est la métamorphose toujours en train de se faire, qui définit la vie.’

³¹ The University of Mutants was housed in an old colonial building facing the Estrées Fort. It fostered cultural and diasporic dialogue through international conferences and seminars. It was legally dissolved in 2005. See Michel Kajman, ‘L’Université des Mutants de Gorée : Inventer l’Afrique de demain’, *Le Monde*, 26 February 1979, www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1979/02/26/l-universite-des-mutants-de-goree-inventer-l-afrique-de-demain_3056608_1819218.html; and Hamedine Kane, Stéphane Verlet-Bottéro, Olivia Anani, and Lou Mo, ‘We Are the Ambassadors of the Blurred Mirages of Lands that Never Fully Materialized (About the School of Mutants)’, *e-flux*, no 114, December 2020, www.e-flux.com/journal/114/364979/we-are-the-ambassadors-of-the-blurred-mirages-of-lands-that-never-fully-materialized-about-the-school-of-mutants/

³² UFA was designed by Senegalese architect Pierre Goudiaby Atepa, President Wade’s architectural advisor who also designed the African Renaissance Monument in Dakar, among other buildings. Sébikotane is a rural outskirts of Dakar. See Ferdinand De Jong, Brian Quinn, Jean-Nicolas Bach, ‘Ruines d’utopies: l’École William Ponty et l’Université du Futur africain’, *Politique Africaine*, vol 135, no 3, 2014, pp 71–94, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-politique-africaine-2014-3-page-71.htm>; and Kane et al, ‘We are the Ambassadors’, op cit.

Despite such impositions, architectural and other ruins have often become, *mutatis mutandis*, shelters for resistant forms of communal life. Recalling the unfinished modernist ruin of UFA’s library at Sébikotane,³³ artists Laurence Bonvin and Cheikh Ndiaye’s video *Ghost Fair Trade* (2022) (**fig 14**) also took viewers on an archival/architectural journey into Senegal’s post-independence modernist utopias. The video featured in the collective exhibition ‘Black Rock 40’, which, curated by the African-American artist Kehinde Wiley at the Maison de la Culture Dousta Seck, presented a wide selection of works by artists from the Black Rock Senegal residency programme and others.³⁴ *Ghost Fair Trade* stood out for examining the complexities of a postcolonial desire for a vernacular form of progress that ultimately failed to respect local and spiritual ways of life. This was the case of Senegal’s International Centre of Foreign Trade (CICES), which, inaugurated by President Senghor in 1974, has hosted Dakar’s International Trade Fair since then, as well as other commercial, cultural and political events, while being more quietly inhabited most of the time. Unlike the inverted pyramid of UFA’s brutalist library, CICES’s modernist project was indeed finished. However, despite Senghor’s support and the beautiful vernacularism of its triangular structures, CICES was designed by French architects without much consideration for ancestral and quotidian life, being dismissed and subtly repurposed by local communities.³⁵ *Ghost Fair Trade* shows how these communities include ancestors and animist deities, living spiritual beings that inhabit the territory where CICES was

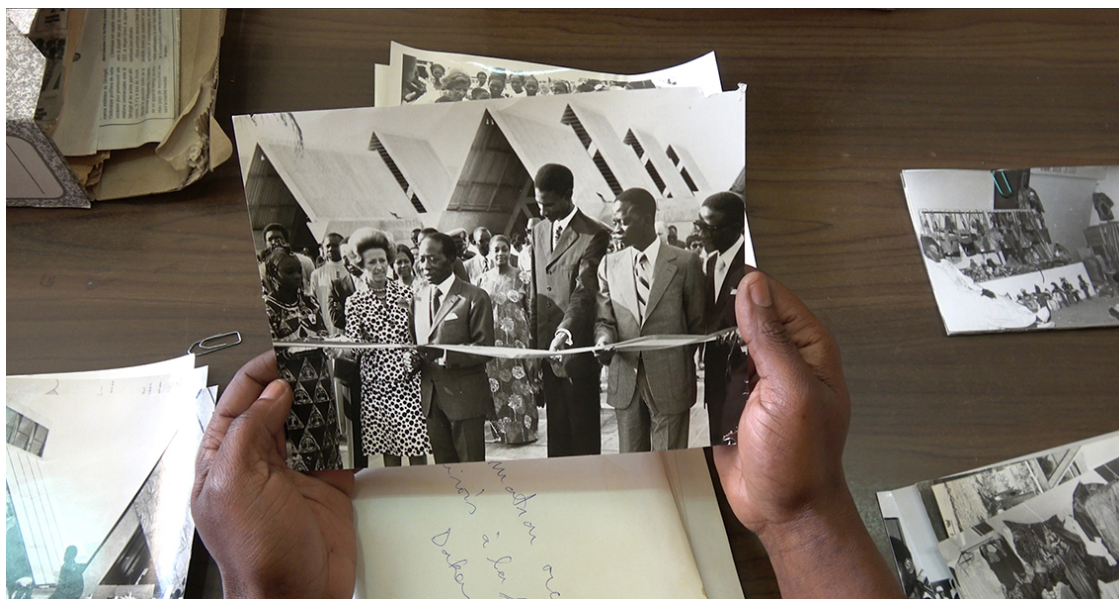


Figure 14: Laurence Bonvin and Cheikh Ndiaye, video still from *Ghost Fair Trade*, 2022, video, colour, sound, 38 min – shown in ‘Black Rock 40’, 14th Dakar Biennale, Maison de la Culture Dousta Seck, Dakar, 2022, courtesy of the artists

³³ Although not exhibited in ‘Mutatis Mutandis’, an image of the library was published in the Biennale catalogue as part of The School of Mutants’ research (‘Mutatis Mutandis’, in Ndiaye, ed, *ŊNDAFFA #*, op cit, pp 262–263). Their other published image is that of William Ponty Normal School’s ruins in Sébikotane (ibid, p 259). This school was founded by the French in Gorée and transferred to Sébikotane in the 1930s. It was meant to educate West African elites destined for colonial administration but ended up educating important anti-colonial leaders and intellectuals. These schools’ abandoned buildings, including the University of Mutants, have been reinhabited by the people of Gorée and Sébikotane. See De Jong et al, ‘Ruines d’utopies’; Kane et al, ‘We Are the Ambassadors’, op cit.

³⁴ The Black Rock Senegal residency was founded by Wiley in Dakar in 2019

³⁵ CICES was designed by Jean-François Lamoureux and Jean-Louis Marin

built and partake of daily life. The video depicts a complex site where the Westernised and globalised meanings of trade fair (or exhibition) and (so-called) fair trade, as well as progress and development, are upset by endogenous onto-epistemologies. At the same time, Dakar's recent decades of increased urbanisation have turned CICES's privileged location and considerable extension into easy targets for real estate interests, eager to counter the protection of a space that has become part of Senegalese and African architectural heritage. Again, poor local communities have been the ones most affected by such changes. In *Ghost Fair Trade*, CICES is thus haunted by ghosts from the past and the future, the no-longer and the not-yet that are integral to the present: the enduring strength of autochthonous forms of spiritual and material life, and the unfulfilled emancipatory dream of a fully liberated and decolonised prosperity for all that is respectful of local ecosystems.

Concerning archival research, my final highlights go to two projects in the group show '(Un)Charted Grounds' at the Matter Art Project, followed by some final considerations on a few homages. '(Un)Charted Grounds' was loosely curated around a poetics of territory and identity, with a broad range of works from which Teddy Mazina's *Muzungu Tribes* (2021) (**fig 15**) and Mame-Diarra Niang's *Since Time is Distance in Space* (2016–ongoing) stood out. Mazina's work consisted of an archival installation comprising photographs, a video piece, objects and text pertaining to the 1972 confidential police files on 'Muzungu Tribes', the anthropometric laboratory secretly led by a group of five Black African students and their white friends in Brussels. The students had been conducting research on white people (*muzungu*) and sending their findings to the University of Makerere in Kampala, Uganda, and the Education Commission of the Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, until the lab was discovered and closed down by the police on 20 February 1972. Four of the students were arrested and deported, while a fifth escaped and all of the white collaborators were released. On the wall, 'a news item expunged from the official record', penned by Mazina, provided detailed information on these silenced events that had been 'concealed from the press'. The almost flawless archival re-enactment gave a semblance of historical truth. However, the ironic reversal of pseudo-scientific racialising methods proper to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European colonial discourse, here mimicked and mocked by 1970s Fanon-reading, pan-Africanist Black students, immediately hinted at this archive's fictionalised, critical and humorous nature.³⁶ The use of such racialising strategies served here to expose how race, racism and stereotyping have been historically constructed and reinforced by white so-called science, whereby whiteness itself was made visible as neither neutral universal nor unspoken norm.

³⁶ In wall texts, Mazina mentioned that the students had particularly targeted the theories of the French palaeontologist Georges Cuvier (1769–1832): 'Travail sur la dé-construction des théories du paléontologue Georges Cuvier, 18–19 siècles. Georges Cuvier représentait la pensée scientifique dominante en France, en accord avec les théories et les préjugés racistes de l'époque.' On mimicry and mockery as subversive strategies, see Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London and New York, 1994. Mazina's installation also included a wall text with the last page of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, which the students had been reading and which was found amid their belongings during detention. Here, significantly, Fanon wrote: 'I, the man of color, want only this: / That the tool never possess the man' (Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Charles Lam Markmann, trans, Pluto Press, London, 2008 [1952], p 180).

Racism has never been about ignorance but rather skilfully crafted; opposing it requires an equal measure of skilful deconstruction, including creativity. In fact, the students' mockery of 'the master's tools' went way beyond critical mimicry and included devising their own tools: they replaced the centimetre for their own measurement unit, the *ntu*, and invented the *ubuntu*-metre.³⁷ While intelligence notes and interrogation excerpts evinced the students' resistant evasiveness and police bewilderment, their arrest and deportation also highlighted the enduring coloniality of fortress Europe. Archival fiction and humour allowed for a compelling investigation on colonial legacies, Pan-Africanism, liberation and the politics of knowledge.



Figure 15: Teddy Mazina, *Muzungu Tribes*, 2021, mixed media, variable dimensions – installation view in '(Un)Charted Grounds', The Matter Art Project, Dakar, 2022, photo by Ana Balona de Oliveira

In the Matter Art Project's inner courtyard, a black box showed Niang's *Since Time is Distance in Space (Chapter: I Rise)* (**fig 16**). This was a beautifully immersive multi-channel installation in a darkened room with walls, floor and ceiling dimly enlivened by seemingly futuristic moving image and sound. After taking off shoes to walk and lie down on foam, the viewer's barefoot body was entirely enveloped by visceral liquids, cosmic landscapes and bodily presences – the artist's own body. In negative black-and-white hues and accompanied by a meditative

³⁷ *Ntu* means entity in the Nguni branch of the Bantu languages and is the root for *ubu-ntu*, *mu-ntu*, *ba-ntu*, etc. In wall texts, Mazina defined *ubuntu* ('faire Humanité ensemble. Je suis humain.e parce que tu es humain.e'), *ntu-ze* ('L'autre Moi'), *mu-ntu* ('l'Humain') and *ba-ntu* ('plusieurs *ntu-ze* sont des *ba-ntu* = l'Humanité'). On these concepts, see Ramose, 'The Ethics of *Ubuntu*', op cit, pp 379–387. On the limits of using the master's tools, Audre Lorde importantly wrote in 1979 that '... *the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change*' (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, Crossing Press, Berkeley, California, 1984, p 112, original italics).

soundtrack, such imagery produced the contemplative atmosphere of an outer and inner journey, both physical and psychic. A seemingly female, Black body, yet not thoroughly definable as such, appeared ambiguously both grounded and afloat, either whole or fragmented but never in place, observing but not constrained by framing limits. The work is indebted to Niang's own migratory life from an early age, and to a personal and political journey of self-discovery, of return and reconnection to her Senegalese roots after her father's death.³⁸ Like the artist's own trajectory of dislocation, the work changes in each stop, always and never being the same, archiving and adapting to its many times and spaces. For migrating and diasporic subjects, the experience of time is indeed marked by distance in space: the distance from a past space of more-or-less rooted belonging, left behind either by the desire for a future space of fulfilment or survival, or by force. Psychically, diasporic subjectivity is inescapably ambivalent: between memory and desire, loss and hope, neither here nor there; the past inhabits, hopefully nourishing instead of limiting, present visions for better futures. Niang's dreamy landscape portrayed a journey of emancipatory rising, of being and becoming, of up- and re-rootedness, of un- and re-belonging: a subject's embodied and spiritual journey from ancestral soil to the cosmos and back.³⁹



Figure 16: Mame-Diarra Niang, *Since Time is Distance in Space (Chapter: I Rise)*, 2016–ongoing, multi-channel video and audio installation, variable dimensions – installation view in '(Un)Charted Grounds', The Matter Art Project, Dakar, 2022, photo by Mame-Diarra Niang, courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town, Johannesburg and Amsterdam

³⁸ See Milisuthando Bongela, 'Mame-Diarra Niang's vision for the invisible', *Mail & Guardian*, 29 September 2017, <https://mg.co.za/article/2017-09-29-00-niangs-vision-for-the-invisible/>

³⁹ *Chapter: I Rise*, the subtitle of this iteration of *Since Time is Distance in Space*, recalled Maya Angelou's poem 'Still I Rise', from which I extract the following fragments: '... Just like moons and like suns, / With the certainty of tides, / Just like hopes springing high, / Still I'll rise ... Out of the huts of history's shame / I rise / Up from a past that's rooted in pain / I rise / I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide, / Welling and swelling I bear in the tide...' (Maya Angelou, *The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou*, Hachette, London, 1994, pp 160–164, Kindle edition)



Figure 17: Abdoulaye Konaté, ‘Le maître/The Master’, 2022, exhibition view, 14th Dakar Biennale, Ancien Palais de Justice, Dakar, 2022, photo by Ana Balona de Oliveira

My final comments go to three homages to African masters, significant artists from earlier generations whom the Biennale celebrated in its various sections. Partaking of Ndiaye’s ‘Ĩ NDAFFA #’ at the Ancien Palais, ‘Abdoulaye Konaté, Le maître/The Master’ (**fig 17**) showed Konaté’s (born Mali, 1953) large-scale textile wall pieces, which, beautifully conveying textured symbols through serial strips of colourful fabric, were (perhaps too) majestically installed in one of the main rooms of the former courthouse.⁴⁰ Within the Biennale’s ‘Carte Blanche’ section, Massamba Mbaye curated ‘Soly Cissé, La légende/The Legend’ (**fig 18**) at the Galerie Nationale d’Art, covering Cissé’s (born Senegal, 1969) small- and large-scale, delicate and vigorous painting. In the OFF programme, gallery Selebe Yoon’s Jennifer Houdrouge curated ‘Now/Naaw’, El Hadji Sy’s (born Senegal, 1954) (**fig 19**) timely show after years of withdrawal from public life. It included recent painting on canvas, glass, fabric, etc, installed sculpturally as assemblages on walls, wheels and ceiling, and an archival room on the artist’s impressive trajectory at home and abroad. It paid tribute to a prolific artist whose strong impact on local and international arenas has not always been sufficiently acknowledged, notably at home. Active since the 1970s, Sy has co-founded art collectives with which he has activated urban and rural public space, fostered (trans)continental dialogue through exhibitions and workshops that he has organised in Senegal, and curated modern and contemporary African art (besides exhibiting his own work) in the West. These three exhibitions provided living artistic genealogies to Dakar’s audiences and aspiring artists, the Biennale’s African and diasporic artists, and its international cohort of visitors. I was left, however, with a pressing question in mind: where were the equally

⁴⁰ The Ancien Palais de Justice harboured the Musée Dynamique and the Mudra-Afrique danse school before becoming a courthouse in 1990. On the building’s history, see Abdou Sylla, ‘La tumultueuse histoire du Musée dynamique de Dakar’, *Africultures*, vol 70, no 1, 2007, p 89, www.cairn.info/revue-africultures-2007-1-page-89.htm#no1

deserving, prominently installed homages to African female masters? We look forward to seeing their work, or the broader context for their absence discussed, in 2024.



Figure 18: Soly Cissé, *Chien jaune*, 2020, papier mâché and acrylic on canvas, 150 x 100 cm (x3) – shown in ‘Soly Cissé: La légende/The Legend’, 14th Dakar Biennale, Galerie Nationale d’Art, Dakar, 2022, courtesy of the 14th Dakar Biennale, Dakar



Figure 19: El Hadji Sy, ‘Now/Naaw’, 2022, exhibition view, Selebe Yoon Gallery, Dakar, 2022, photo by Tevin Lima, courtesy of the artist and Selebe Yoon Gallery, Dakar

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