

Harvard Presents Three Diverse Exhibitions of African Art

You Look Beautiful Like That: The Portrait Photographs of Seydou Keïta and Malick Sidibé
Marking Places: Spatial Effects of African Art
Beyond Decorum: The Photography of Iké Udé

Student-Curated Exhibitions Demonstrate the Unique Mission of the Harvard University Art Museums

Cambridge, MA (August 23, 2001)—The Harvard University Art Museums, long a supporter of student-curated projects, is now presenting three such exhibitions focusing on African art. Two are devoted to photographs by contemporary African photographers—two Malians and a Nigerian who works in New York—and the third offers a new look at traditional African objects, examining the ways in which they "define" space. A fall program of lectures by leading Africanists and art historians will supplement the exhibitions.

"Harvard University, with its long history of scholarship and research in the field of African studies, is a fitting venue for refreshing perspectives on that region's artists and works of art," said James Cuno, Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director, Harvard University Art Museums. "We are especially pleased to present these three exhibitions curated by students."

You Look Beautiful Like That: The Portrait Photographs of Seydou Keïta and Malick Sidibé

Fogg Art Museum, September 1—December 16, 2001

During the decades before and after Mali's independence from France in 1960, Seydou Keïta and Malick Sidibé operated highly regarded commercial photography studios in the capital city of Bamako. They were among the most interesting and active photographers in the city, catering to a burgeoning middle class, making tens of thousands of portraits for members of their communities. Since the early 1990s, their work has attracted interest internationally for its formal qualities as well as its engaging subjects.

You Look Beautiful Like That—the title is a favorite phrase in Bambara, the language most frequently spoken in Bamako—has been organized by Michelle Lamunière, curatorial intern in the Department of Photographs at the Fogg Art Museum. The exhibition includes 72 black-and-white images. Fourteen of them, postcards and photographs from the early part of the 20th century, show the portrait conventions used by early European and African photographers in West Africa and provide a context for the development of Keïta's and Sidibé's work. Another fourteen are postcard-size prints by Sidibé. These show the original format of the studio portraits, which sitters distributed among family and friends. The bulk of the exhibition consists of modern enlargements made from the photographers' original negatives by Philippe Salaün in Paris.

Commercial portrait photography first came to Mali in the 1930s, as it did to much of the French West African interior. Keïta (born c. 1921) was one of the first African photographers to work in Bamako, beginning in the 1940s. Although clearly connected to long-established conventions of studio portraiture, his mesmerizing portraits convey a unique expressive style that both confirms his clients' status within the community and reflects their desire to be seen as cosmopolitan. Sidibé (born c. 1935) adapted that expressive style for a new generation. As portrait conventions and societal roles became more flexible in the 1960s and 1970s, the subjects of his photographs took a more active, often theatrical, role in constructing their self-

images. Although the names and professions of many of the sitters have been lost, their identities, aspirations, and fantasies are communicated through clothing, accessories, props, and poses.

Sidibé and Keïta have both spoken about the long lines of people who used to wait in front of their studios on Saturdays and around Muslim holidays when, as Sidibé described it, "People saved up and bought brand new clothes for the festival. They made the most of it and had themselves photographed in their new clothes." At times the crowds around the studios were so thick that customers couldn't get through. "Africans love photography," Sidibé said. "It is the very emblem of the self. People want to preserve themselves, their faces ... the person knows that he can look in the mirror and see his own face ... what a discovery! So the camera functions like a mirror in a way; it proves one's existence, or at least a part of one's existence, and leaves you with a permanent trace."

Describing her experience as curator, Lamunière said, "I'm grateful to the Harvard University Art Museums for giving me the opportunity to study such incredible material and for sending me to Mali to do research and to meet with the photographers. The resulting exhibition explores Keïta's and Sidibé's remarkable work with an emphasis on its place in the history of portrait photography in West Africa, and particularly the use of portraits by African photographers and subjects as a site of self-definition. *You Look Beautiful Like That* demonstrates the work's rootedness in the history and society of Mali while acknowledging the necessarily different form and context in which the images are viewed on the walls of a museum.

A 116-page catalogue published by the Harvard University Art Museums and distributed by Yale University Press will accompany the exhibition.

Marking Places: Spatial Effects of African Art

Fogg Art Museum, June 23—December 31, 2002

This exhibition, which will be on view for at least a year and a half, presents approximately 40 objects, from architectural elements to masks to power figures, that were produced by sub-Saharan cultures between the 16th and the 20th century. *Marking Places: Spatial Effects of African Art*, the first collaboration between the Art Museums and the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University, is curated by Kristina Van Dyke, Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Intern in the Department of Islamic and Later Indian Art at the Arthur M. Sackler Museum.

Marking Places explores how objects physically and conceptually define particular locales and the social and spiritual relations within them. Many of the objects in the show have been used to "mark off" a space as distinct from others in its vicinity. Palace posts, for example, both set off a geographical area and frame the relations among king, courtiers, and servants there. At the same time, artworks such as masks can "mark the spot" where a given locale connects to something beyond it, creating a link or site of meditation between the seen world and the unseen spirit realm.

"It's wonderful to bring these African objects to the Fogg Art Museum for the first time," said Kristina Van Dyke, "African art is most often situated in a cultural context, broadly speaking, by curators and scholars. This exhibition tries to go beyond questions of how objects perform within a cultural context to see how they assist in producing that context."

Beyond Decorum: The Photography of Iké Udé

Sert Gallery, July 28—October 21, 2001

Beyond Decorum: The Photography of Iké Udé emphasizes the growing impact of media and fashion on contemporary art through more than 40 works on view at the Sert Gallery in the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts. Iké Udé infuses his photography with critical references to fashion and the media through performance, always revealing the tenuous balance between perception and reality. This is exemplified in his diverse body of work, including the installations *Beyond Decorum* (1999), *Project Rear* (1993), *He* (1997), *Uli* (1997), *Celluloid Frames* (1995), and *Cover Girl* (1994). Through his work, Udé celebrates pop culture while deconstructing myths created by the media.

The exhibition, organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art at Maine College of Art in Portland, Maine, was curated by Mark H. C. Bessire and Lauri Firstenberg. Firstenberg, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of History of Art and Architecture at Harvard and curator of Artists Space in New York, adapted it for the Harvard venue. "We curated this exhibition within a contemporary global art context, avoiding the strictly African label that accompanies many exhibitions of African contemporary artists," said Firstenberg. "Iké Udé is now breaking new ground, revealing and questioning the growing influence of fashion and even pornography on art today."

Iké Udé's historical position is within the artistic and intellectual tradition of dada and surrealist artists Jean Cocteau, Man Ray, and Salvador Dali. He brings to his work a combination of traditional and contemporary strategies and styles, including *Adanma*, a performance from the Igbo culture of Nigeria, as well as a connection to the work of contemporary artists Yasumasa Morimura, Matthew Barney, and Cindy Sherman. His interest in style, fashion, and media, seen also in *aRude*, the art and culture magazine he founded, echoes the work and cultural influence of Andy Warhol. Like Warhol, Udé is also a filmmaker and style arbiter intrigued by popular culture, the cult of celebrity, and stereotypes, as well as the power of images and the politics of representation.

Lecture Program

Several lectures about African art and architecture are on the fall schedule to accompany the exhibitions. They include "Another Image: Postcards by African Photographers," by Dr. Christraud Geary, curator of the Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives at the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution; "The Presentation of the Self in Colonial Life," by Anthony Appiah, Charles H. Carswell Professor of Afro-American Studies and Philosophy at Harvard; "Art Objects and Constructed Scenes in Southern Nigerian Landscapes," by Dr. Ikem Stanley Okoye of the Art History Department at the University of Delaware; and "African Architecture in Transit: A Model of Spatial and Temporal Continuity," by Labelle Prussin, professor emerita, School of Architecture, City College of New York, and research associate at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art.

A lecture focusing on Iké Udé as arbiter of fashion will be given by Valerie Steele, chief curator and acting director of The Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York.

Informal gallery talks by curators are also planned for the fall, as is a youth workshop in portrait photography called "Creating Your Own Persona."

Student Curated Exhibitions

Each of these exhibitions was made possible by the Art Museums' Curatorial Internship Program, which is designed to broaden the experience of people embarking on professional and scholarly careers in art history and considering the museum profession.

Past Harvard University Art Museums curatorial interns have gone on to hold positions at the Baltimore Museum of Art; the High Museum of Art, Atlanta; the Cleveland Museum of Art; the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities; the Museum of Modern Art; the Madison Art Center; The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; and the Harvard University Art Museums.

The Harvard University Art Museums

The Harvard University Art Museums is one of the leading arts institutions in the United States and the world. It is distinguished by the range and depth of its collections, its groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of its staff. For more than a century, it has been the nation's premier training ground for museum professionals and scholars and is renowned for its seminal and ongoing role in the development of the discipline of art history in this country.

The three art museums at Harvard—the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, the Busch-Reisinger Museum, and the Fogg Art Museum—are all outstanding institutions in their respective fields. The Fogg also houses the Straus Center for Conservation, long a leader in the research and development of scientific and technology-based analysis of art, as well as the U. S. headquarters for the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis, an ongoing excavation project in western Turkey. The 150,000 objects in the art museums' collections range in date from ancient times to the present and come from Europe, North America, North Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia. Each museum also has an active program of special exhibitions that promotes new scholarship in its areas of focus.

As an integral component of the Harvard University community, the three art museums serve as a resource for all students, adding a special dimension to their areas of study. The public is welcome to experience the collections and special exhibitions as well as to enjoy lectures, symposia, and other programs in the various museums.

The collections are divided among ten curatorial areas: Ancient and Byzantine Art and Numismatics; Architecture and Design; Asian Art; Busch-Reisinger Museum; Drawings; Islamic and Later Indian Art; Modern and Contemporary Art; Paintings, Sculpture and Decorative Arts; Prints; and Photographs. Developed with an emphasis on their value for teaching and research, these holdings are a uniquely broad and rich resource that is continually enhanced through gifts and acquisitions. Together, the holdings of the three museums comprise one of the finest university art collections in the world, with resources rivaling those of many major public museums.

The Straus Center for Conservation is the oldest fine arts conservation treatment, research, and training facility in the United States. The Center specializes in the conservation of paintings, sculpture, decorative objects, historic and archaeological artifacts, and works of art on paper. Its team members are pioneers in developing new applications of digital imaging in conservation. The Center's state-of-the-art facilities support a broad range of analytical services.

The Art Museums are open Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m., and Sunday, 1–5 p.m., and are closed on national holidays. Admission is \$5.00; \$4.00 for senior citizens; \$3.00 for students; free under 18, and for all individuals on Saturdays until noon and all day on Wednesdays.

For general information, call 617-495-9400 or visit www.artmuseums.harvard.edu. All groups of seven or more must schedule in advance by calling 617-496-8576. The Harvard University Art Museums receives support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

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