

**International Summer School: Anthropology and Contemporary Visual Arts from the Black Atlantic:
Between the Art Museum and the Ethnological Museum in the Global North
(Volkswagen Foundation – AZ: 94 727)**

Interim Report – Dakar, March 4-9, 2019
(for the Organizers' Team: Brigitte Reinwald)

Preliminary Remark

As the first of three events of this Summer School series, the meeting in Dakar was originally scheduled for December 8-13, 2018. Delays in the peer review process as well as the call for proposals and selection of participants based in Germany made it necessary to postpone this meeting to the beginning of March 2019. Unfortunately, this rescheduling resulted in the cancellation of Key Note Speakers (Krista Thompson & Roberto Condruru) who had already confirmed their participation. Two new key notes were acquired, which proved to be a productive gain (see in the following and refer to the attached programme). Apart from these restructurings, we followed the schedule as planned.

Schedule, highlights and achievements of the Dakar event

Following the conceptual idea of this Summer School to go against the grain of continental determinism, the first event was dedicated to contemporary art of the African diaspora in the Americas and the Caribbean and how it relates to art on the African continent. In order to investigate in more detail how these Atlantic interrelationships are processed in artistic forms of expression and representations of "Africa", we had selected five transversal topics: the "Black Atlantic" from a diasporic perspective; African retentions & departures; modernity / modernism; performance arts; Framing Black Diaspora arts. Accordingly, readings (see attached programme) and keynotes had been chosen along these lines:

In her keynote, Sabrina Moura underscored the dilemma that, in the global art market and its circuits, African-American and Caribbean artists are commonly denied their independence and originality insofar as they are merely traded as representatives of African art. In order to counteract this renewed essentialized Africanism(s), various art theorists call for a reconceptualization of diasporic art forms beyond the Africanness thus claimed. This presupposes, however, that belonging (in the sense of origin from and location within a certain nation or ethnic group) is more strongly linked to processes, experiences and trajectories, as the Canadian-Haitian writer Joël des Rosiers suggests with his notion of *métaspora* that understands belonging from the experience of exile, migration and colonization.

Huey Gene Copeland (keynote 2) focused on the intersections of race and gender by addressing the "Negress" (la négresse), the phantasmagorical figure of black femininity in works of Western artists, and of how African American women artists have been re-appropriating this racially and sexually overdetermined image of the black female body for their own purposes. He emphasized the importance of the reversal of the gaze for the construction of another self-image, namely to deal with stereotypical attributions from the perspective of the observed, the suppressed and subjugated self. Copeland's keynote provided an innovative approach of abstraction, a longstanding issue in the African diasporic arts, spanning from art forms traditionally considered "folk" (quilt) to modernist and

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contemporary abstraction (Howardena Pindell, Sam Gilliam, Wangechi Mutu, among others). It shed light on motivations unremarked by western formalist debate.

Shifting the attention to the contemporary Haitian art scene and its major proponents, Elisabeth Prézeau-Stephenson (keynote 3) highlighted the social and demographic changes resulting in a shift from rural to urban art, as a result of which artistic creativity has generated new forms of expression linked to global art experimenting with multimedia technology, video installations and performances. If the earthquake of January 2010 has radically changed the conditions for producing and promoting Haitian art production, the precarious conditions of artistic creation do neither prevent the local and global networking of the contemporary art scene nor its growing international visibility and recognition. Of particular interest were her remarks on artistic expressions dealing with Vodun art in the global art context.

The fact that both keynotes and readings met with a lively response from the participants, some of whom positioned themselves very controversially, provided productive insights into the various academic knowledge cultures, some of which were juxtaposed for the first time in Dakar. In this respect, the concept of the African diaspora as a self-description was not unanimously accepted, for example, or the paradigm of the Black Atlantic in the wake of Gilroy was found to be too limited to reflect the diversity and “situatedness” of contemporary artistic creation in the Americas and the Caribbean. As much as promising perspectives for the further work of this Summer School opened up here, this prompted us organisers to consider formats for the following two events that would encourage doctoral students and post-docs to relate their projects more sustainably to current research discussions (see attached draft programme for the event in Port-au-Prince).

The artists' talk proved to be particularly stimulating, thanks above all to the personality of the two invited guests, Viyé Diba and Soly Cissé, who discussed the position of the artist in society. With great commitment and a keen sense of reality, they brought home their message by presenting the participants with a multi-faceted picture of the postcolonial emergence and current conditions of (Senegalese) fine arts, whose protagonists are increasingly degraded in the context of the neoliberal economy and the global art market, i.e. being reduced to function as "technicians of emotions" (Viyé Diba). The fact that the participants greatly appreciated this exchange strengthened our intention to make such encounters with local artists an integral part of the programme in Port-au-Prince as well.

The first workshop of the international curators to prepare the joint exhibition planned for Hanover proved to be fruitful, albeit marked by different positions on the contextualization of the works from the Péus Collection. The discussions focused primarily on the question of how best to take into account the selective character of the paintings collected by Péus, which today is considered problematic because strongly marked by the temporally bound and highly personal choice. Possible options to be explored in the coming weeks are an archival exhibition focusing on the formation of the collection, the collector himself and a small selection of paintings to be framed by contemporaneous modernist tendencies in African art. The opening up of a space for dialogue by juxtaposing current works by visual artists from Africa, the Americas, or the Caribbean remained a controversial issue.

Challenges to be met and conceptual considerations for the event in Port-au-Prince

As the concluding session showed, the meeting in Dakar proved to be a valuable start in terms of testing target-oriented formats for this international summer school. The

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participants especially acclaimed the lively discussions and the opportunity to exchange ideas with peers and senior scholars about their current dissertation and postdoc projects, but also expressed the wish for more thematically focused discussions and dialogical formats in the forthcoming meetings. A total of eight participants presented their current projects in Dakar; in Port-au-Prince we want to put at least 10-12 further presentations on the agenda, the intention being the follow-up of the evolution of the research projects.

In Dakar, the first thought-provoking links have already been established between readings, keynotes and project presentations. In the concluding meeting of the organizers (Sunday, 10 March), we decided to systematize these more strongly. The aim is to create more space for in-depth discussions of the projects which should be more closely related to current research debates (see thematically focused ateliers in the draft programme for Port-au-Prince) and to involve the young researchers more extensively in the conceptual work: as moderators of the selected basic literature as well as facilitators and discussants both in round-table sessions and the ateliers. Altogether, all contributions to an event day should be closely linked to the respective transversal topic.

While the idea of transversal topics has proved its worth in Dakar, the topics planned for the event in Port-au-Prince should be more closely related to the dissertation and post-doc projects (which we can now better assess and group). In view of this, we envisage the following topics: heritage & museums, visibility/materiality (optionally: conceptual materialism), temporalities, and modernisms (see draft programme).

Port-au-Prince June 2019

The overall – regional – focus of the forthcoming meeting in Port-au-Prince will be, not surprisingly, research on the arts of the African continent. For the three keynotes, we have earmarked the following persons:

Ruth Simbao (art historian, curator & Professor in the Fine Art Department at Rhodes University, Grahamstown / South Africa) whose main research interests are on contemporary art with a particular focus on Africa, the geopolitics of art and society, geopolitics in relation to biennialisation, contra-flow diasporas, cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitanism, but also on performance theory, and the performance of heritage.

Romuald Tchibozo (art historian & Professor in the Department of History and Archaeology at the University of Abomey-Calavi, Cotonou / Benin, Co-Applicant and Member of the Organizers' Team) whose main focus is on the production and reception of contemporary African art particularly in post-war Germany, and the emergence of contemporary art in Benin, international cultural relations concerning African art. He is also interested in the development of collaborative projects in the field of provenance research and cultural heritage.

Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung (independent art curator, Berlin) who is the founder and artistic director of the art space SAVVY Contemporary in Berlin / Germany, and a highly interesting resource person with regards to the nexus of art and civil society activism, and concepts of participative exhibitions in postcolonial perspective.

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Further challenges to be solved

As the excellent cooperation and fruitful inputs of all co-organisers proved very successful for the first event in Dakar, we will be able to stick to the tried and tested concept for Port-au-Prince, including the modifications described in more detail above. The language divide (French-English) is still a challenge, especially as the participants belong to roughly equal parts to one of the two language communities. We will thus have to further refine some translation aids which we tried in Dakar (power point slides in the other language, simultaneous translations on site by bilingual participants).

Due to the currently quite high air fares and a relatively high price level in Haiti for accommodation and meals, we assume that we will have to spend the calculated costs at least to the extent planned, if not provide for additional funds.

Given the persistently tense social situation in Haiti, it cannot be ruled out that, should it deteriorate again, we will have to decide at relatively short notice on a different venue in the Caribbean or Brazil in the interests of the participants' safety.