

Condition Report 3: Art History in Africa

Debating Localization, Legitimization and New Solidarities

Ruth Simbao, Koyo Kouoh, Ugochukwu-Smooth Nzewi, Suzana Sousa, and Emi Koide
all photos by Ruth Simbao except where otherwise noted

Ruth Simbao: Following on from the African Arts dialogue, "Zimbabwe Mobilizes: ICAC's Shift from Coup de Grâce to Cultural Coup" (Simbao et al. 2017) this dialogue considers another important event in the visual arts that recently took place on the African continent. Like the International Conference on African Cultures (ICAC) that was held in Harare in 2017, this event in Dakar contributes in important ways towards a shift of the center of gravity of the global academy, particularly the study of art history in and of Africa.¹

The Raw Material Company's Condition Report 3 symposium took place at the Musée des Civilisations Noires (Museum of Black Civilizations) in Dakar, Senegal September 20–22, 2018 (Fig. 1). Organized by Koyo Kouoh (Fig. 2) and Ugochukwu-Smooth Nzewi, the workshop was themed *Art History in Africa*, and discussions focused on ways of localizing art histories; the role of Senegal—in particular Dakar—in shaping the arc of art history in Africa; the history of "African Art History"; platforms that expand conventional praxis of art history; and the importance of situating Africa as the legitimate site of knowledge creation. Invited presenters were Salakou Jean (Fig. 3) and Paul Goodwin (keynote speaker), Sylvain Nankalé, Massamba Mbaye, Peju

Laiwola, Elizabeth Gleason, Suzana Sousa, Ruth Simbao, Babacar M. Diop, Emi Koide (Fig. 4), Dominique Malaquais, Zulu Mhoye, Yaelle Biro, Susan Agard, Dalcie Abrahams Altam, Eva Barois de Caubel (Fig. 5), Shamsy Ormazgabscha, Sean O'Toole, Ntse Edjabe, Benjamin Ndirangu, El Hadji Malick Ndiaye, and Nana Ofori Atta Agyem (Fig. 6).

Even being a comprehensive analysis of every conversation in Condition Report 3, this dialogue includes the reflections of a few participants on some of the issues that emerged. Importantly, not all of these authors or all of the participants at the symposium share the same views. By the time participants reached the final plenary session and engaged in lively discussion with the audience, it was very clear that these conversations had only just begun. Evidently there is great need for scholars, curators, and artists working in Africa—whether at universities, museums, galleries, or independently—to continue to debate how we create and shape our knowledge and how we do so in collaboration with other people locally as well as globally.

The Raw Material Company positioned the city of Dakar as a "protagonist" of this event, with the symposium "enquiring deeply into the histories of its locality and bringing these to the fore through site visits and a commitment to holding discussions in spaces that are the stages of new art histories."² As one might expect, participants went to the Musée de l'Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (IFAN Museum) where they met with curator El Hadji Malick Ndiaye. Of particular interest, though, was the fact that the symposium was hosted in the Musée des Civilisations Noires a couple of months before the new building officially opened.

According to Raw's Dalcie Abrahams Altam, the choice of this, at the time, yet-to-be-launched venue was a deliberate intervention.³ The 150,000 square feet, four-story, circular museum, which was built with Chinese money (costing over US\$30 million) and designed by the state-owned Beijing Institute of Architectural Design (Brown 2018), is situated opposite Dakar's Grand National Theatre, which opened in 2011 and was also funded by the Chinese. The Art History in Africa dialogues convened in a cavernous room with signage that was only in Mandarin and English.

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