

Programme Point Sud 2011-2012

**New Spaces for Negotiating Art (and) History in
African Cities**

14th-17th March 2012

Point Sud, Bamako, Mali

Report

DFG

New Spaces for Negotiating Art (and) History in African Cities

Organisers

Prof. Dr. Kerstin Pinther (Art History & Anthropology of Art), Art Historical Department, Arts of Africa, Free University Berlin

Dr. Larissa Förster (Anthropology), Morphomata – Center for Advanced Studies. Genesis, Dynamics and Mediality of Cultural Figurations, University of Cologne

Themes and Objectives

Currently one can observe a newly formed interest in researching art institutions and art events on the African continent; the special issue of the 2008 edition of the Paris based Journal *Africultures* on art festivals and biennales is one case in point; the re-editing – after 40 years of invisibility – of William Klein's seminal cinematic documentation on the Panafrican Festival of Algier (1969) is just another example. While museums, festivals and especially biennales as powerful manifestations of the globalization of the art world attract a lot of scholarly interest and discussion, independent art spaces and initiatives as well as archives and (alternative) museum projects in Africa have until now only scarcely been the focal point of research.

It was this neglect by art historical and anthropological research as well as the organisers' own experience in curating contemporary art from Africa (*Afropolis. City, Media Art*) and their own scholarly work on art, archives, exhibitions and museums in Africa, which led to workshop entitled *New Spaces for Negotiating Art (and) Histories in African Cities*. It seems that in particular during the last two decades a series of new spaces were created, which broadly can be characterised by their self-organised, non-hegemonic and experimental ›format‹. The purpose of the workshop was to take stock of existing initiatives, their history, their modus operandi, the infrastructures and public spaces they create, the theoretical discourses they tap into and explore, the aesthetic and (cultural) political debates they stir, the role they take on in the field of cultural institutions and cultural activism, and their relations with state and municipal institutions. Furthermore the conference tried to explore how methodological and theoretical programs and discourses that have been developed in these contexts can be connected to academic disciplines and fields of knowledge and their respective methodological/theoretical approaches (African Studies, Art History/Visual Culture Studies, Anthropology of Art, History).

Methodology and Results

The conference brought together invited papers and papers submitted after an internationally published call for papers. Among the speakers were scholars, curatorial practitioners, artists, up-coming as well as established professionals, participants from African, European and US American backgrounds.

The workshop was prepared in various ways: through a university course at the Art Historical Department / Arts of Africa at the Free University Berlin and through a digital platform, mainly organized at the Morphomata Center for Advanced Studies at the University of Cologne. The course was taught during the winter term 2011/2012 and included a bloc seminar (December 2-3, 2011) under the title *Biennalen – Museen – Archive – Laboratorien: Kunsträume in Afrika*. It anchored the topic within the broader field of studies on art

infrastructures and art worlds in Africa (biennals, museums, festivals). Upon submitting applications, three of the students participating in the course were invited to also participate in the workshop and help prepare it by creating an internet platform as part of the Digital Agora of Morphomata. They assembled a bibliography and a collection of links referring to the institutions and initiatives to be looked at and wrote short essays on some of the initiatives that were going to be represented in Bamako. Both were uploaded to the digital platform and can still be accessed by all participants of the workshop. Another student of the Free University, who submitted an abstract for the call for papers, was accepted and invited to write a paper on her MA thesis on artists' collectives in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. Moreover, as a result of the widely published call for papers Kerstin Pinther was invited to present a paper during the international conference *Condition Report*, organized by Koyo Kouoh from Raw Material Company in Dakar, Senegal. The three-day symposium (January 18-20, 2012) intended to address the changing role of art institutions and initiatives across the globe and thus was an ideal place to gain a deeper understanding of the situation beyond the frame of the African continent.

Altogether, the papers for the workshop were either invited or selected from more than sixty submissions after a call for papers published internationally. A particular focus was put on new research and new spaces that have not been investigated so far. The majority of papers presented at the conference were case studies (of a single or of more initiatives) ranging from Morocco to South Africa (for detailed information see the overview). Most of these papers looked at art spaces and initiatives (the oldest of which were Doual'art in Douala and the Pan-African Circle of Artists, founded in Nsukka; the youngest of which was the Megawra Built Environment Collective in Cairo) with one paper providing additional examples from non-African cities. Three papers complemented the ›independent‹ views with reports and reflections from public institutions (Sidibé, Peters, Chikukwa), another two papers looked at photographic (family) archives in West Africa and at a human rights archive (SAHA in South Africa), and discussed the ways of how they have been able to initiate alternative discourses vis-à-vis state or publicly funded institutions in the postcolonial state. Entitled ›Future Perspectives‹, the panel on the last day was organised as a type of wrap-up-session in which some more fundamen-tal questions cross-cutting areas, genres and countries were raised. In this context, for example one paper looked at more general theoretical and methodological issues and sought to explore and locate independent art spaces and independent curatorial practices in nationalist discourses on culture and in the history of the academic debate on African art.

In order to document *and* challenge the discussion started during the workshop in Bamako, we are currently preparing the publication of the papers. As a result of the debates and discussions we intend to organise the book in three chapters, offering a comparative and historically grounded and theoretically framed study of *New Spaces for Negotiating Art (and) History in Africa* (= the envisaged title of the book, to be published as volume 2 of the newly founded series *Kunst und Visuelle Kulturen Afrikas - African Art and Visual Cultures – Arts et cultures visuelles d'Afrique* at Lit-Verlag). As an outcome of the workshop we suggest to read biennales and independent spaces as two sides of the same coin, as different but interrelated results of the globalization of the arts. The establishment of such huge formats like the biennales and art festivals has itself provoked the emergence of off-formats and off-sites in opposition to state-initiated events (as was the case with CIC, Cairo). Moreover it became very clear during the workshop that these new spaces are often seen as ›saviours‹, who fill in the void that the erosion of public art institutions have left. However, equally important is to keep in mind and to critically discuss their possible relation to neo-liberal cultural politics in Africa. Again, crucial to this context is the possible role of independent spaces as ›new gatekeepers‹, who might be in the privileged position to determine what is

currently seen as ›Contemporary Art from Africa‹ in the global art world. A special section (*Archive*) in the book will document (via reprints of materials published by the art spaces or interviews with their founders) some of the activities of independent art spaces, without running the risk to uncritically promote these spaces.

A major interest of the workshop was to create a link to the cultural scene in Bamako and thereby connect to the local debate. Hence, the workshop was intersticed with two excursions. On the first excursion we went to see the Palais de la Culture Amadou Hampaté Ba, the national performing arts centre, founded in 1996. The Centre Soleil d’Afrique, an artist-run space, was introduced to us by its founder Hama Goro, himself an artist and its director. Medina, a newly founded independent gallery, was introduced to us by its founder Igo Diarra. The two spaces are very interesting and successful examples of how individual initiatives result in collective engagement. On the second excursion we were guided through the District Museum in Bamako by Macan Doucoure, and through the National Museum of Mali by its director Samuel Sidibé. While the District Museum with its very small collection struggles to attract visitors, the National Museum with its broad and precious collection has developed major permanent exhibits and various outreach programmes and collaborations with private individuals as well as independent platforms. The site visits of these institutions and initiatives provided the workshop with very rewarding insights into the cultural landscape in Bamako and the social, economic and aesthetic environments in which these operate. These two excursions were organized by Bathilde Maestracci, a Master-student from the Free University Berlin, who not only participated in the workshop, but also enrolled in a four-weeks internship with the District Museum.

Beside lectures and discussions we planned for a film screening in order to provide yet another, more subjectively and artistically biased access to the topic. Berlin based student Anne Haverkamp introduced the participants to the documentary *Africalls* – a film by Andres Ortin Perez on the work of five artists and two art spaces operating in African Cities. Artist and Photographer Mudi Yahaya from Lagos, Nigeria, presented his work *Conrad’s Circus - For Crown and Country*, using found-footage material from his privately established archive. The main language was English, with two members of Point Sud helping out Francophone scholars with adhoc-translations and summaries.

Sustainability of the Event

The main achievement of the workshop has been to bring together cultural practitioners and academic researchers from European, African and US American backgrounds in an emerging field of research, practice and debate, and hence to establish new relationships between the academia and artistic and curatorial practice. In order for the debate not to loose momentum the workshop was followed up on in a panel at the VAD conference in Cologne in May 2012 which was entitled (*New*) *spaces and strategies for negotiating art and cultural knowledge in African cities*. Similar to the Bamako workshop it brought together (young and up-coming) scholars from African and German academic backgrounds who are working on these issues. Some of the participants of the Cologne panel were among the applicants for Bamako who could not be considered due to financial and spatial constraints, others only submitted their papers for Cologne.

In terms of content, the Cologne panel added to the Bamako workshop in that it also provided case studies from Lusophone African countries (which could not be considered in Bamako), ventured into adjacent fields like dance and the world wide web and also provided a platform for the presentation of a three-day exhibition of an art project from Uganda. Thus, the panel served to discuss the insights gained in Bamako, develop further research perspectives and methodologies as well as advance networks for potential future collaborations between German and African institutions and individuals. It will also consolidate networks created in

and through Bamako. The papers presented in Cologne will be published in the aforementioned volume.

As a direct result from the Bamako workshop Prof. Frank Ugiomoh will participate in a mutually conceived research project on the interrelatedness of urban visual culture, fashion and media in selected African cities (to be submitted under the DFG program “Sachbeihilfe im Rahmen einer Kooperation mit Entwicklungsländern”). Moreover, the Art Historical Department of the Free University of Berlin has agreed with Katrin Peters-Klaphake from the Institute of Heritage Conservation and Restoration at Makerere University (Uganda) and her colleagues on future cooperations; the Free University has already accepted to financially support a first meeting in Kampala, Uganda in spring 2013.

Participants

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| 1. Prof. Adandé, Joseph | Art History, Université Abomey-Calavi, Cotonou, Benin |
| 2. al-Ibrashy, May | Curator, Megawra Built Environment Collective and British University, Cairo, Egypt |
| 3. Assegued, Meskerem | Curator, Anthropology, Zoma Contemporary Art Center, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia |
| 4. Afane Belinga, Ruth Colette | Art History, Curator, Artist, Institut des Beaux-arts de Foumban, Cameroon |
| 5. Chikukwa, Raphael | Curator, National Gallery of Zimbabwe |
| 6. Prof. Ekpo, Denis | Linguistics and Literature, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria |
| 7. Eliot, Sophie M.A. | Cultural Studies, University of Lüneburg, Germany |
| 8. Fischer, Berit | Free lance curator, Berlin, Germany |
| 9. Giacalone, Clara M.A. | Art History, Free University of Berlin, Germany |
| 10. Dr. Katchka, Kinsey | Curator, North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, USA |
| 11. Dr. Kennedy, Catherine | South African History Archive, Johannesburg, South Africa |
| 12. Kröger, Linda M.A. | Art History, Free University Berlin, Germany |
| 13. Dr. Haney, Erin | Independent scholar, Washington, USA |
| 14. Haverkamp, Anne M.A. | Art History, Free University of Berlin, Germany |
| 15. Maestracci, Bathilde M.A. | Art History, Free University of Berlin, Germany |
| 16. Nzewi, Ugochukwu-Smooth M.A. | Emory University, USA |
| 17. Dr. Peters-Klaphake, Katrin | Institute of Heritage Conservation and Restoration, Makerere University, Uganda |
| 18. Powers, Holiday M.A. | Art History, Cornell University, USA |
| 19. Schaub, Didier | Doual’art, Douala, Cameroon |
| 20. Dr. Sidibe, Samuel | Musée national du Mali |
| 21. Prof. Ugiomoh, Frank | Art History, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria |
| 22. Ostermann, Camille | Raw Material Company, Senegal |

Invited locally

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| 23. Hama Goro | Centre Cirque du Soleil |
| 24. Igo Diarra | Medina |
| 25. Macan Docouré | District Museum, Bamako |