

# HYPERALLERGIC

*ART*

## The Halcyon Days of Postcolonial Mali Through the Lens of Malick Sidibé

The artist's candid event photographs demand the spotlight in his current exhibition in New York.

Jasmine Weber



Malick Sidibé "Soirée à la maison blanche. Bagadadji" (1964/2008), gelatin silver print, 18 7/8 x 12 5/8 in. (image courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery)

Malick Sidibé, I would argue, is art history's ultimate event photographer. His subjects' raucous joy beams out, beyond the picture plane and past the glass. It is exceptionally rare to find a photographer who can capture the free-flowing energy and glorious celebration as he has throughout his career, with apparent ease. Malick Sidibé's pictures have rhythm.

His current exhibition, *LOVE POWER PEACE*, on view at Jack Shainman Gallery in Chelsea, is likely a nod from the gallery to James Brown's live performance-turned-raw-cut-album of the same name. Sidibé's photographs and Brown's soulful funk and excited cadence project the same energy.

Left raw and unpolished, the live audio of Brown's 1971 concert at the Olympia in Paris (released in its intended form in 2014) brims with an authentic, albeit imperfect, sound that encapsulates the crowd's

emphatic energy. Parisians, tourists, and transplants went wild, the crowd teeming with energy and a genuine love for the music. The recording captures a slice of French nightlife, fans reveling in electrified sexuality and plain old good music.



Malick Sidibé “Les copains à Niarela” (1967/2008), gelatin silver print, 14 x 14 1/2 in. (all images by the author for Hyperallergic unless otherwise noted)

Sidibé’s images picture another side of the Francophone Afrodiaspora in Bamako, Mali. Like the charged crowd at a James Brown concert, Sidibé captures Malian youth lapping up a taste of postcolonial West Africa, forming a new youth culture, creating their own adolescent worlds. The late Sidibé’s snapshots are shrines to the hopeful time. His work is an exaltation to a newly independent nation and the luminous citizens it birthed after Mali achieved its independence in 1960.

*Malick Sidibé: LOVE POWER PEACE* features rarely seen photographs — some not widely circulated digitally, and others that have never been exhibited publicly. The exhibition immediately greets viewers with photos of young Malians eagerly interacting with a global Black diaspora, newly in reach to a nation recently independent of French colonization, through the burgeoning music industry in this region of the continent, proudly bearing records and immersing themselves in the nightclub scene.



Malick Sidibé "TWIST! avec Ray Charles" (1969/2008), gelatin silver print, 17 x 17 in.

Rather than focusing on Sidibé's widely circulated and well-known maximalist studio portraits — which fill the frame with vibrant patterning despite their monochromatic tone — the exhibition's standouts are his nightlife images. These candid shots of Malian nightlife are the most impressive works in the gallery. His portrayals of bell-bottomed youths are lively and sleek enough to make any New York club kid green. These subjects are cool as hell.



Malick Sidibé "Un Amoureux de disques" (1973/2007), gelatin silver print, 10 3/4 x 7 1/4 in.

Sidibé was one of the first photographers to provide the outside world with insight into West African culture as the continent began the process of decolonization. His portrayals of Malian fashion and nightlife make a political statement about a burgeoning culture finding its footing, which, according to Sidibé, brought a newfound dynamism to the nation and its nightlife.

In the face of a largely underrepresented and underappreciated history of African portraiture, Sidibé's work is one of the best pieces of evidence that firsthand cultural experience and insight can lend an otherwise out-of-reach authenticity to cultural photographs. He treats his subjects with tenderness and respect, but also playfulness. The actors in these images — as that is what they are, really — are free and giving in charm and body language, posing with uninhibited glory. Even in these candid images, the subjects are explicitly aware of the camera. And they love it. They project excitement, pride, and a bit of well-deserved cockiness. Their joy is palpable.



Malick Sidibé "Surprise Party" 1974/2008, gelatin silver print, 10 x 7 in.

Sidibé's best-known works — hyper-patterned studio photographs typical of West African artists of the time — are absent in the exhibition. The only example in this style is more recent than the artist's most commonly reproduced works. The model wears rubber-soled sneakers and has a more formal demeanor than some of Sidibé's past models. The portraits feel out of place. Their solemnity and apparent date contrast with the lively nightlife shots on the other side of the gallery, presenting what feels like a very different Mali — one that has already come down from its postcolonial high.



Malick Sidibé "Untitled (Chris Ofili)" (2014), gelatin silver print, 18 x 17 7/8 in.

This initially off-putting decision makes more sense upon realizing that these 2014 photographs portray contemporary British Nigerian artist Chris Ofili, posing with Sidibé himself in one frame. They represent two generations of West African artistry, Ofili continuing Sidibé's project of thoughtful representation, amplifying the firsthand perspectives of West African artists by broadening global representation of their discounted legacy.

The strength of Sidibé's work comes from his ability to show Malian people how they wanted to be shown — with grace, excitement, and an eager embrace of cultural innovation.

Malick Sidibé: LOVE POWER PEACE continues at Jack Shainman Gallery (524 West 24th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through August 10.

# Forbes

## Love Power Peace, Malick Sidibé At Jack Shainman Gallery



Clayton Press Contributor

Jul 15, 2018, 10:34am • 211 views • #DeLuxe



Malick Sidibé. *Untitled*. 1982/2004. © 2018 THE ESTATE OF MALICK SIDIBÉ, COURTESY OF JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

French Sudan was a colonial territory in the federation of French West Africa from around 1880 until 1960, when it was separated from Senegal and was renamed Mali. Malick Sidibé was born in 1936 into French colonialism in the village of Soloba, approximately 185 miles from the country's capital Bamako. From the age of 5 or 6, he began herding animals, first sheep, then cattle in his Mandé village, a geographic homeland centered between Mali and Guinea. Sidibé's family owned a large number of livestock, and his mother decorated huts. Sometime after 1948, Sidibé's parents sent Malick to the "white school," where he began to draw. He recalled, "There is a certain pride in imitating nature. I drew trees, and even animals. . . I think that drawing is somewhat innate in a being, in man."

He began drawing for official Malian events, and his work came to the attention of "the Major," a colonial official, who sent Sidibé to the School of Sudanese Craftsmen in Bamako. Sidibé earned a jeweler's degree in 1955. In the meantime, French photographer Gérard Guillet, who was nicknamed *Gégé la pellicule* literally, Gégé (the roll of film)—hired Sidibé to decorate the windows of his photography studio. After completing the décor, Guillet asked Sidibé if he would like to be a photographer. His answer was a quick yes. In a 2008 interview recorded in Rouen, France, Sidibé recalled, "I didn't hesitate. I leapt on it straightaway, on photography. I was used to working with pictures. I found that the camera was a lot faster than a paintbrush."



Malick Sidibé. *Les "Yokoros" contemporains*. 2004-2008. 2018 ESTATE OF MALICK SIDIBE, COURTESY OF JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.



Under Guillat's tutelage, Sidibé photographed the African social events, while Guillat photographed the white ones. Because Sidibé used a small hand-held camera (first a Brownie Flash, then an Agfa 6x6, still later a Foca Sport 24×36) rather than a tripod-based plate camera, he could bicycle all around Bamako shooting weddings, christenings, family celebrations, picnics, dances and other social events. Mali in the early 1960s was a one-party, socialist state. Like many former West African colonies, the newly established government encouraged a variety of reactionary cultural nationalism events. Tradition was emphasized. But a wave of Western-inspired cultural rebellion—dubbed a “diaspora aesthetic” by the Malian intellectual Manthia Diawara—was precipitated by post-colonial freedom and a fascination with western pop culture, particularly music and fashion.

# BROOKLYN RAIL

## MALICK SIDIBÉ: *Love Power Peace*

by *Will Whitney*

JACK SHAINMAN | JUNE 28 – AUGUST 10, 2018



Malick Sidibé, *Untitled (Chris Ofili)*, 2014. Gelatin silver print, 18 X 17 7/8 inches. Courtesy Jack Shainman.

A mother standing with her children; a group of young adults dressed smartly; babies gazing; the manner in which Malick Sidibé's subjects seem at ease speaks volumes to Sidibé's photographic genius. *Love Power Peace* (the title comes from a James Brown album) exemplifies Sidibé's magic, showcasing never seen before photos in an exhibition that confirms his status as a cultural icon. Having passed away two years ago, Sidibé's influence remains prominent in our picture-centric society with Beyoncé's now famous baby shower instagram as well as Gucci's "Soul Spirit" campaign featuring Sidibé's iconic striped studio backdrop. Chris Ofili acknowledged Sidibé's influence in his 2004 retrospective at the New Museum, *Day and Night*, accompanied by his profile

in the *New Yorker*, which featured images from Sidibé's photo-shoot with the great painter.

On view in this exhibition, these four photographs present Ofili standing solo as well as with the Malian photographer himself. Displayed in a simple wooden frame, Ofili is seen standing causally yet confidently, being handed tea, and then drinking the tea with his mix and match button-down now draped over his shoulder in the manner of one removing a suit jacket on a humid day. The small adjustments to the images—such as the removal of the button-down—or the slight inclusion of the person handing Ofili the teapot confirm Sidibé's excellence in capturing prescient and quotidian moments.

These adjustments, as well as Sidibé's willingness to take his camera outside—something uncommon for portraitists in the '60s and '70s—set the tone of this photographer's oeuvre. Some of the smaller works include an additional delicate touch of Malian culture: back painted glass frames created by a friend of Sidibé which feature floral designs. The color in these painted designs gives a warm contrast to the black and white photographs.



Malick Sidibé, *Arrivée de la voiture des mariés devant la mairie 15 Octobre 1970*, 1970-2008. Gelatin silver print, 13 1/8 x 13 3/8 inches, signed, titled, and dated on front. Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery.

*Love Power Peace* features many stages of youth: the baby, the partygoer, or the newly married couple. In *Arrivée de la voiture des mariés devant la mairie 15 Octobre 1970* (1970 – 2008), the bridegroom’s family arrives at the town hall in a slightly battered, white, 1950s style Chevrolet. The crowd is fixated on the family, while a small girl with braids, seated in between the bride and groom, stares directly into the camera. The dress code imparts a sense of modernism mixed with nostalgia; some wear button downs, others traditional garb. Sidibé was capturing a nation in the midst of a cultural challenge. In his essay on Sidibé and James Brown, Manthia Diawara quotes Raymond Williams’s ideas regarding social character and cultural patterns:

The new generation responds in its own ways to the unique world it is inheriting, taking up many continuities that can be traced, and reproducing many aspects of the

organization, which can be separately described, yet feeling its whole life in certain ways differently, and its shaping its creative response into a new structure of feeling.<sup>1</sup>



Malick Sidibé, *Nuit du 31 Decembre*, 1971/2008. Gelatin silver print, 9 × 5 3/4 inches, signed, titled, and dated on front. Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery.

This is the context in which Sidibé's art inspires. He captured the essence of youth, bliss, and happiness while also understanding its challenges. *Nuit du 31 Decembre* (1971 – 2008) exemplifies this desire. The photograph of the young couple dressed in party attire, embracing as they stare pointedly at that the camera demonstrates a common feeling in this body of work: people's desire to be seen and their desire to shape the narrative of which the world viewed Mali. *Love Peace Power* represents a look at that desire, as well as Sibidé's impact on American culture, offering a powerful reminder of how the youth can impact the world.

# photograph

## MALICK SIDIBÉ: LOVE POWER PEACE AT JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

By Diana McClure



Malick Sidibé, *Au cours d'une soirée, les positions*, 1964/2013. Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery

Malick Sidibé's photographs are internationally recognized for their narrative exploration of identity and a particular swagger born of youth culture in 1960s Mali. Emboldened by their nation's recent independence from France, his subjects confidently revel in their stature as members of an emerging modern decolonized nation.

Accordingly, *TWIST! Avec Ray Charles*, 1969-2008, is the first photograph on view in the seventh exhibition of Sidibé's work at [Jack Shainman Gallery](#), on view through August 10. A magnetic young woman gazes directly at the camera and holds a sign announcing a dance party featuring the iconic American singer. Sidibé's signature rhythmic composition of the body in space is at play in this work, seen in the subtle angles of hands, shoulders, and legs against a painted wall and window dissected in thirds. The photograph suggests an intercontinental connection and the flavor of Mali's nascent party vibe.



Malick Sidibé, *Actrices de la biennial*, ca. 1976-2008. Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery

Two salon-style installations within the exhibition break up a steady flow of black-and-white framed photographs. The collections of small-scale images, one a set of wedding portraits and the other baby portraits, feature vintage gelatin-silver prints in handmade frames made of glass, paint, cardboard, tape, and string. Most of the mats bordering the prints feature colorful, loosely painted variations on leaf motifs. The expressions of the sitters in Sidibé's matrimonial images convey a certain solemnity, but the subjects in *Marriage Sissoko*, 1966/2004, look playfully at each other, entranced in their own sense of seduction and adoration.

Shot in 2014 (two years before Sidibe died) for *The New Yorker* and exhibited for the first time here, a series of four portraits of renowned painter Chris Ofili are staged against three clashing surfaces – a striped backdrop, an African textile curtain pushed to the side, and a checkerboard floor. The set reflects Sidibé's eye for the asymmetrical and offers a striking counterpoint to Ofili's masculine, black-clad presence within the frames. Sidibé's portraits capture a mature man seasoned with age, success, and the evolution of a global diaspora of black artists. One of the four portraits features Ofili and Sidibé knowingly beaming at the camera in mutual admiration and joy.

# ART SY

## Malick Sidibé's Photographs Captured Moments of Joy and Liberation in Mali

● Alina Cohen Jul 23, 2018 3:22 pm [f](#) [t](#) [✉](#)



Malick Sidibé, *Untitled*, 1984/2004. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery.

Beginning in the 1960s and continuing for the next five decades, Malick Sidibé photographed the citizens of Bamako, Mali, in bold black and white. In his studio, he took pictures of locals—a man in a beret and pinstripes, a trio of women in sunglasses—often dressed stylishly and posed assertively. The photographer also brought his camera out on the town. Well-clad youth became his muse, dancing and reveling in intimate groups at Happy Boys Club, Le Surfs, and other local hotspots. Sidibé's prints are casual, personal, and improvised. They tell the story of a city's evolution.



Sidibé was born around 1935 in the rural French Sudanese village of Soloba (located in the southwest of present-day Mali, near the Guinea border). He attended a school for Sudanese craftsmen, studying painting and jewelry making. After graduating in 1955, he secured a job as an apprentice to French photographer Gérard Guillaat. Sidibé began to take his own shots in the latter half of the decade, focusing on portraiture. In 1958, he opened his studio, Studio Malick, and the community swiftly began seeking his services for special occasions—and for fun.



Malick Sidibé, *Untitled*, 2004. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery.



Malick Sidibé, *Surprise Party*, 1974/2008. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery.

At the time, his country was in the midst of a major political overhaul. Mali gained independence from France in 1960 and became a socialist single-party state. Relative freedom enlivened the region until a 1968 coup. The Military Committee for National Liberation (CMLN) took power, with lieutenant Moussa Traoré at the helm as president. A military dictatorship followed, until a 1974 constitution returned the country to a single-party state. Civil unrest and additional coup attempts plagued the country into the 1990s.

But during the 1960s and into the early 1970s, Sidibé captured Bamako's newfound liberation, shooting the city's joyous nightlife. (Though the party pictures would cease, the artist's studio portraiture continued throughout the following decades.)

The photographs from this era offer stories of celebration tinged with American and British cultural influence. In *TWIST! Avec Ray Charles* (1969), a woman in a boldly patterned dress and a feathered, polka-dotted hat holds the titular Ray Charles record. *Les copins à Niarela* (1967) features a group of smartly attired partygoers huddled together around a record player. In the days after capturing such evening festivities, Sidibé printed the pictures and posted them in front of his studio. Recovering revelers would stop by to see if they were in the shots, turning the spot into a community hub and a kind of proto-social media feed. Sidibé sold the prints for a very affordable 100 to 200 francs.



Malick Sidibé, *TWIST! avec Ray Charles*, 1969/2008.  
Courtesy of Jack Shaiman Gallery.



Malick Sidibé, *Les copins à Niarela*, 1967/2008. Courtesy of  
Jack Shaiman Gallery.

In the 1990s, French curator André Magnin visited Mali and came across Studio Malick. He introduced Sidibé's work to France, and a variety of international honors followed. Paris's Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art honored the photographer with his first exhibition outside Africa in 1995; he would later land the prestigious Golden Lion prize at the 2007 Venice Biennale. If Sidibé's camera initially captured the influence of the West on Malian culture, his photographs now had the opportunity to likewise influence Western artists.

“The world took note of these images of Malian youth in this free moment of self-expression,” says Alexandra Giniger, director of artist relations at Jack Shainman Gallery, which has represented the artist since 2002. “Once Malick's work started being viewed in Europe and the [United] States, it was like a new presentation of the continent of Africa.”

In an essay titled “The Sixties in Bamako: Malick Sidibé and James Brown,” Manthia Diawara writes that Sidibé’s nightlife photographs made local youth “look like the rock and roll idols and movie stars they wanted to be.” As they vamped for the artist, the subjects asserted their independence, relevance, and ultimately, their power. At a time of nationwide change, their self-presentation promoted what Diawara calls a “diasporic aesthetic.”



Malick Sidibé, *Untitled (Chris Ofili)*. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery.



Malick Sidibé, *On se regarde! hum ?*, c. 1970/2008. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery.

As fans of James Brown, for example, Malian youth connected with ideas of black pride that were circulating in the United States. Listening to rock ‘n’ roll and naming their cliques after bands (The Beatles, The Rolling Stones), they integrated into the global countercultural revolutions of the era. Invoking popular culture, this generation rejected their predecessors’ conception of a world split between the colonizers and colonized. Sidibé captured this shift.

Chelsea’s Jack Shainman Gallery has mounted 85 Sidibé photographs in its current exhibition, entitled “LOVE POWER PEACE.” British artist Chris Ofili appears in a suite of four images. Despite the subject’s prominence, Sidibé gave Ofili the same treatment in Bamako that he’d offered to all his guests over the years: The painter stands on a tiered platform (covered, this time, in a shiny checkerboard pattern), facing a striped curtain. One shot features Ofili and Sidibé together, smiling at the camera. The informality and geniality of the shoot radiates.

Jack Shainman is also spotlighting Sidibé's wedding photographs and baby pictures—happy occasions take center stage. Brightly hued glass frames with whimsical leaf motifs (edged with brown tape and made by a Bamako glass artist, Sidibé's long-standing collaborator) enhance a sense of ease and cheerfulness.

Sidibé's baby pictures are particularly winning. With their chubby legs, diapers, and miniature wardrobes, the subjects offer gazes both innocent and confused; the most authentic returned gazes that Sidibé's camera captures. The kids all sit in chairs draped with patterned fabrics. Bamako's youngest citizens reign on tiny thrones that convey tradition, craft, and local culture.

The studio portraits of adults, meanwhile, are often theatrical. A man in a wide stance holds pistols in both hands, aimed at the viewer. Two women stand with their backs to the camera, reading a manuscript. A woman in a burka sits behind a tray of cups and a samovar. There's often a sense of confidence, self-determination, and play.

Sidibé died in 2016. The next year, the Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art hosted a major exhibition of more than 250 of his photographs. The artist's international fame may have reached its apotheosis when, later that year, Beyoncé hosted a baby shower inspired by his aesthetic. A picture from her party features the pop star in a patterned skirt, dancing with Jay-Z. Dressed in all white, he wears a necklace with a black pendant in the shape of the African continent. Sidibé's spirit of improvisation, liberation, and pan-African exuberance lives on, far beyond the confines of any gallery or national border. ●

# AnOther

## The Tender Story Behind Malick Sidibé's Wedding Portraits

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY THE STORY BEHIND THE IMAGE



Untitled © Malick Sidibé, courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery

Love, Power, Peace shows a more intimate side of Mali's treasured photographer, Jack Shainman explains

AUGUST 01, 2018

TEXT Irina Baconsky

For over two decades, Malick Sidibé famously immortalised the pulse of a Modernist Mali, newly free from colonial constraints and ardently joining a global, diasporic youth movement. From intoxicating dance parties to eccentric fashion sights, no fragment of the West African nation's thriving culture would escape the lens of the ingenious image-maker known as the 'Eye of Bamako'. Yet, despite being best known for his buoyant, irresistibly vivacious photographs of 60s and 70s Malian youth, artistic scene and nightlife, Sidibé was no stranger to the charming simplicity of intimate portraiture.



Mariage Sissoko© Malick Sidibé, courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery

Taken between 1963 and 1989, the photographic cycle titled *Mariage* is a visual tribute to the quaint, enduringly tender appeal of traditional life in times of rapid historic and cultural changes. “This series of images is a circular installation,” explains Jack Shainman, whose eponymous gallery is currently exhibiting a selection of the late Sidibé’s lesser known works. “The individuals depicted are young couples on their wedding days. These images are very distinctive, yet a part of his practice that many are unaware of.” Much of the political and social identity of independent Mali took shape through individual and collective presentation – in fashion, music, and dance – which Sidibé’s rhythmic compositions never failed to crystallise; yet, the artist wasn’t looking to create the image of a country whose recently acquired freedom was used to emulate the Western world. “Malick really changed the way Westerners view Africa,” Shainman continues. “He embraced change but was unafraid to capture traditionalism. His images broke down stigmas and supported universality – they captured the spirit of post-colonial liberation, but did not shy away from traditional customs. Most importantly, he did not try to construct images for a Western audience, but truly captured Bamako as it was swiftly developing its own modern identity.” The frames depict couples exchanging looks of unadulterated affection and displaying relaxed attitudes, stripped from the premeditated, polished façades often encountered in conventional wedding photography.



Love, Power, Peace© Malick Sidibé, courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery

Capturing his subjects in the midst of ceremonial action, Sidibé builds the narrative of a specific time and space that empowered a culture to dictate its own stories. “When Malick was working in the 1960s and 70s, he was very much a part of the scene in Bamako,” Shainman asserts. “He was there to capture the jubilant nightlife, as well as those hoping to pose in the studio. Being photographed by Malick was a rite of passage, and for many, they also wanted him to capture significant life moments. While his individual images are strong on their own, these groupings really allow you to get a sense of how embedded he was in the community.” Crucially, aside from its documentary quality, Sidibé’s work is above all a celebration – an exhilarating ode to the joy, possibilities and spirit of hopefulness emerging from newfound independence. As such, there is a striking sense of agency felt in Sidibé’s subjects, who boldly occupy both the photograph’s frame and their nation’s public and leisure spaces. “Malick immortalised his subjects at their best,” Shainman concludes. “These wedding portraits, for instance, capture individuals as they wanted to present themselves on one of the most important days of their lives. You also get a sense of hope and joy for the future in these images; a trademark characteristic throughout Malick’s practice.”

*Malick Sidibé : Love, Power, Peace* runs until August 10, 2018 at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

# MUSÉE

VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE

## Exhibition Review: Love Power Peace, Malick Sidibé



*Soirée en famille - 1972 Malick Sidibé 2008*

*Soirée en famille*, 1972/2008, gelatin silver print, 8 3/4 x 5 3/4 inches image size, 9 1/2 x 7 inches paper size, signed, titled, and dated on front. Image courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery.

By Labanya Maitra

“Throughout the 1960s and ‘70s, Sidibé captured the spirit of a Bamako in transition, and with it the personas of those living in Mali’s capital city,” said Jack Shainman, co-founder of the eponymous Jack Shainman Gallery. “The country had just gained independence from France. Hope and excitement for the future was palpable, and individuals were empowered through self-expression. Malick was there to capture the joy.”





*Surprise Party - 1973 Malick Sidibé 2008*

*Surprise Party, 1973/2008, gelatin silver print, 8 3/4 x 5 7/8 inches image size, 9 5/8 x 7 inches paper size, signed, titled, and dated on front. Image courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery.*

And capture joy he did. The white walls of the gallery were bejeweled with colorful panels framing Sidibé's black and white "party images." Sidibé wanted to bring back a hopeful time with his photographs. He would capture his images at parties or in a studio where people would come dressed in the latest fashion of the time.

The exhibition is loosely arranged in two groups: marriage photos and baby photos, aiding the visual flow of the images, a lot of them never seen before.



*on se regarde! hum ?* Malik Sidibé *MS* 2008

*'On se regarde! hum ?*, circa 1970/2008, gelatin silver print, 10 3/4 x 7 1/4 inches image size, 11 5/8 x 9 1/8 paper size, signed, titled, and dated on front. Image courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery.

“The exhibition title is borrowed from a classic James Brown hit,” said Shainman. “Love, power, and peace are all words that fit the energy of the time Sidibé was documenting, and as James Brown was an icon of 1960s Malian youth culture, it seemed like an apt choice. You can easily imagine James Brown playing while so many of Sidibé’s portraits were taken.”



au cours d'une soirée 1964 Malid Sidibé MDS 2013  
les positions

*Au cours d'une soirée, les positions, 1964/2013, silver gelatin print, 8 1/4 x 8 1/4 inches image size, 12 x 9 1/2 inches paper size, signed, titled, and dated on front. Image courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery.*

The photographs ranged from candid group shots of friends laughing, couples holding hands, to posed portraits of men and women festively dressed, children shot in studios. "Sidibé really changed the way Westerners viewed Africa," said Shainman. "His images broke down stigmas and supported universality. They captured the newfound freedom after colonialism — that time, and that moment."



*Les "Yokoros" contemporains, 2004-2008, gelatin silver print, 11 x 7 inches (image size), 11 3/4 x 9 inches (paper size), signed, titled, and dated on front. Image courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery.*

Sidibé also greatly influenced other artists, added Shainman. “Everyone from Beyoncé and Dev Hynes to Chris Ofili and Janet Jackson have made work inspired by Sidibé’s legacy. Malick Sidibé’s work is a continual touchstone for contemporary artists working across disciplines and that, to me, is what’s most exciting.”

The exhibition also features some of Sidibé’s self-portraits that he created as recent as two years before his death. True to his legacy, most of the photographs are in black and white, but the colorful, ornately painted frames around some of them make the gallery feel alive.



*Untitled.* Image courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery.

The photographs hardly ever had the same background, a lot of them taken on the go. "I think Malick enjoyed the challenges presented by shooting in different settings," said Shainman. "When he was in the studio he spent a lot of time staging his subjects and drawing out their individual beauty. In public, there was the excitement of the unknown and always being ready to capture the special moments that came up organically."



*Soirée à la MAISON blanche. Bagadadji - 1964*

*Malick Sidibé 2009*

*Soirée à la maison blanche. Bagadadji - 1964. Image courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery.*

Sidibé's photographs built a narrative where he let his subjects take control of their own stories and, as a consequence, the people of a culture decided how they would be represented to the world.

"No matter the setting," said Shainman. "I think above all else he enjoyed the interactions his camera allowed him to have."



All images courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery.

The Love Power Peace exhibition is showing at the Jack Shainman Gallery on 24th street from June 28th to August 10th, 2018.



JULY 25 - 31, 2018

## GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



At the age of eighteen, the bassist, singer-songwriter, and funk auteur **Raphael Saadiq** toured with Prince—an auspicious beginning to a career that has included leading his family band, Tony! Toni! Toné!, producing award-winning music for Solange Knowles and D'Angelo, and collaborating with Erykah Badu. (He also scores Issa Rae's HBO series, "Insecure.") He'll bring his seamless pairing of the old school and the new to Damrosch Park, on July 25, as part of Lincoln Center Out of Doors.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RYAN PFLUGER

## Malick Sidibé Shainman

**CHELSEA** Sidibé's astonishing black-and-white photographs of the effervescent nineteen-sixties youth culture in Mali—African-accented rock-and-roll dandyism—have, by now, become classics. This show turns up more of them, supplemented by examples of the artist's commercial work, in portraiture and in the documentation of ceremonies, chiefly weddings. What is the magic of this artist, who died in 2016, at the age of eighty? In part, it's a peculiar gravitas. Sidibé invested his



GALLERY

# 5 Artists to See at the Contemporary African Art Fair This Weekend

By Mary Dellas

APRIL 30, 2018 5:30 PM

Malick Sidibé: *Un Yé-yé En Position*



*Un Yé-yé En Position*, 1963. Photo: Malick Sidibé/Courtesy of Galerie MAGNIN-A

Sidibé is a renowned Malian photographer best known for his black-and-white depictions of nightlife and popular culture in his native Bamako during the '60s, '70s, and '80s. Last year, a major exhibition dedicated to the late artist's photography opened in Paris at the Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art. On Sunday his photographs will be displayed in Gallery MAGNIN-A's booth.

*These photographs and more will remain on display at 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair from Friday, May 4 to Sunday, May 6 at Brooklyn Pioneer Works.*

# huck



## Never before seen photos from Malick Sidibé's archive

### Love power peace

*Posted Thursday 26th July 2018 /*

*Text By Miss Rosen*

*Photography © Malick Sidibé*

*The legendary photographer, who is known for his stylish documentation of Mali in the '60s, is being celebrated in a new exhibition at New York's Jack Shainman Gallery.*

Malian photographer Malick Sidibé (1936-2016) bought his first camera, a Brownie Flash, in 1956 while working as an apprentice for Gérard Guillet in the nation's capital of Bamako. Self-taught, Sidibé hit the scene, taking photographs at African events filled with teenagers coming of age at the same time that the country reached independence in 1960.

Whether photographing at parties or in his studio, Sidibé effortlessly captured the dignity, style, and pride of the first generation of post-colonial Malian men and women. Now, his portraits have become symbols of LOVE POWER PEACE – which just happens to be the title of Malick Sidibé's seventh solo exhibition at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, on view now through August 10, 2018.

*LOVE POWER PEACE* presents a selection of previously unseen work from Sidibé's archive that chronicles the creation of a nation liberated from nearly a century of French rule, filled with the hope, optimism, and boundless energy of youth. Photography gave Sidibé a means to mirror and amplify, creating exquisite images that speak to self-representation, to how one sees themselves and wants to be seen.



Untitled, Chris Ofili

In Sidibé's Mali, the night is always young, filled with the promise and possibility of true love. Every party was picture perfect, offering a timeless vision whose influence can continue to be felt in music, fashion and art over the years; inspiring the look of Janet Jackson's "Got Til It's Gone" Solange's "Losing You," and Maxwell's "Let's Not Play the Game."

"Malick changed the way Westerners look at Africa," says Shainman. "His work challenged stigmas, and offered a platform of universality. Through Malick's lens, a global dialogue became invigorated."

"Everyone from Beyoncé and Dev Hynes to Chris Ofili and Janet Jackson have made work inspired by Sidibé's legacy. Malick Sidibé's work is a continual touchstone for contemporary artists working across disciplines and that, to me, is what's most exciting."



Untitled, 1982/2004

*LOVE POWER PEACE* includes a series of 2014 portraits of Chris Ofili, commissioned by *The New Yorker*, which were inspired by Sidibé's work and will be on view for the first time in this exhibition. In turn, Sidibé's portraits of Ofili, made for a Calvin Tomkins profile in the magazine, are included in the show.

Contributor Jihad Nga recounted their photo session for *The New Yorker*, painting a vibrant picture of life in Sidibé's world: "Despite the studio's small size, five of us stood behind Sidibé, watching the shoot. This turned into five directors giving five different sets of suggestions to Ofili, which at times became confusing to him and overwhelming to all of us. Meanwhile, the temperature in the studio was rising by the minute, not only because of the heat outside but also because of the enormous light bulbs Sidibé uses instead of flash. We switched the bulbs off and on between each shot, owing to their heat and the power they draw."



'On se regarde! hum ?, circa 1970/2008

These photographs, taken just two years before his death, speak to Sidibé's lifelong commitment to his art – one that afforded him the ability to be deeply involved in people's lives. In *Malick Sidibé: Mali Twist* (Fondation Cartier/Editions Xavier Barral), the artist reveals: "Photography enabled me to be charitable. My house was always full. Sometimes there was not even room for me to sleep in my own bedroom, there were people everywhere. I fed everybody."

"It's rare to see a photographer so embedded in a community," adds Shainman. "To be photographed by Malick was a rite of passage for Bamakois, and his studio, Chez Malick, operated as an archive for the community. In showing a selection of never before seen works, the exhibition continues to shed light on a community filled with love and joy."



Untitled, 1979/2004



Au cours d'une soiree



Les copins à Niarela, 1967/2008



Untitled, 2004

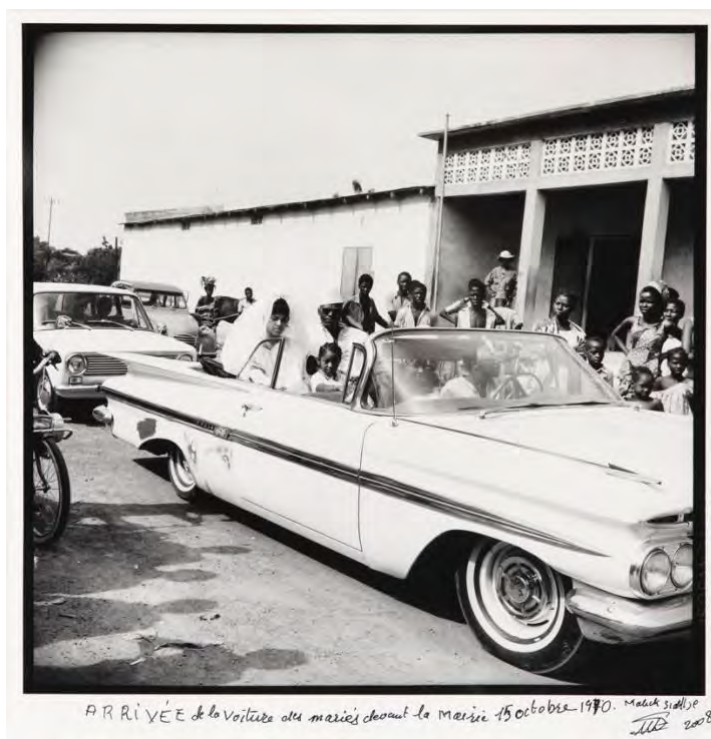


Nuit du 31 Decembre, 1971/2008





La Maraine, 1968/2004



ARRIVÉE de la voiture des mariés devant la mairie 15 octobre 1970. Masak 31/08/08  
JTB 2008





Sine Sidibé



Studio Malick, 1971/2008

**LOVE POWER PEACE is on show at the Jack Shainman Gallery, New York until August 10, 2018.**

# HYDE

HYPOCRITEDESIGN MAGAZINE

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— PHOTOGRAPHY —

## Malick Sidihé



Malick Sidibé was a photographer known for his black-and-white images chronicling the exuberant lives and culture, often of youth, in his native Bamako, Mali in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. Sidibé's work documents a transitional moment as Mali gained its independence and transformed from a French colony steeped in tradition to a more modern independent country looking toward the West. He captured candid images in the streets, nightclubs, and sporting events and ran a formal portrait studio.



In a 2010 interview with John Henley in *The Guardian*, Sidibé explained, "To be a good photographer you need to have a talent to observe, and to know what you want. You have to choose the shapes and the movements that please you, that look beautiful. Equally, you need to be friendly, sympathique. It's very important to be able to put people at their ease. It's a world, someone's face. When I capture it, I see the future of the world. I believe with my heart and soul in the power of the image, but you also have to be sociable. I'm lucky. It's in my nature."



Sidibé was born in Mali in 1936, where he was based. His work has been exhibited extensively. In 2012, the DePaul University Art Museum, Chicago, organized an exhibition titled *Studio Malick* in collaboration with Gwinzegal/diChroma Photography that traveled to Cornell Fine Arts Museum at Rollins College, Florida, and to the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center at Vassar College in Spring 2014. In 2008, a solo exhibition was organized by Fotografiemuseum (FOAM), Amsterdam, the Netherlands. It traveled to Musée Nicéphore Niépce, Chalon-sur Saône. Both solo exhibitions were accompanied by catalogues. In 2008, his work was also shown at the University Art Gallery at the University of San Diego, California.





Sidibé has work in numerous public and private collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the Getty Museum, California, the Brooklyn Museum, New York, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California, the Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland, the Birmingham Museum of Art, Alabama, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania, and the Rhode Island School of Design Museum. He was awarded the International Center of Photography Infinity Award for Lifetime Achievement (2008), the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement Award by the Board of La Biennale di Venezia (2007) when he was included in *Think with the Senses Feel with the Mind*, curated by Robert Storr at the 52nd Annual Venice Biennale, and the Hasselblad Award (2003).





Jack Shainman Gallery has represented Sidibé since 2002. His most recent solo exhibition was in 2016.

October 19, 2016 2:38 p.m.

# Party Photos of Teens Being Teens in 1960s Mali

By Hattie Crisell



Photo: © Malick Sidibé; Courtesy Galerie MAGNIN-A; Paris

In 1960, the country of Mali became independent after over 60 years of French rule, and for young Malians, everything changed. “For the first time, Malians could listen to Western music, and they wanted to be dressed just like the stars they saw in the magazines,” says Philippe Boutté, co-curator of the new exhibit *Malick Sidibé: The Eye of Modern Mali*, on view at London’s Somerset House. From 1962 and on, the late photographer Malick Sidibé captured the aftermath (and the changing fashions) in the capital city of Bamako.

Sidibé owned a popular portrait studio where personal style was highly prized. His customers posed, often solemn and regal, in cowboy hats, loud check suits, or boxing gloves. In the evenings, Sidibé would head to clubs with a DJ friend and shoot the local party scene: girls in prom-style dresses, boys wearing a wide variety of flares, tight shirts, tunic-style suits, and trilby hats. “This is an ambience that you only saw in the parties, during the night, in fact,” Boutté says of the starkly different day-to-night styles. “This is the first time that the boys and girls could touch each other and could dance together.”

The following mornings, tired partygoers would show up at Sidibé’s studio and buy photos. Sometimes he went with them down to a river to continue the fun and photographs — groups pose in swimsuits or topless, arms slung around each other. “There are no adults in the photographs,” Boutté points out. Most of Sidibé’s subjects look like teenagers, and some of the images have an undercurrent of flirtation or eroticism. “They came out to the Niger River so they were alone — they could do what they wanted.”

Sidibé died last April, leaving an enormous collection of almost half a million negatives. He spent most of his career in Bamako but earned worldwide acclaim toward the end of his life; in 2007, he became both the first photographer and the first African artist to receive a Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale. “It was a crazy, crazy decade of freedom, of joy, of opening up to the world and to liberty,” Boutté says Sidibé’s time. “Malick made an archive of a history of Mali that we don’t know in Western countries.”

Click ahead to see moments he captured.

“*Malick Sidibé: The Eye of Modern Mali*” runs until January 15 2017, at [Somerset House](#), London.

# The New York Times

**[ LENS ]** PHOTOGRAPHY, VIDEO  
AND VISUAL JOURNALISM



Courtesy of Malick Sidibé and Jack Shainman Gallery

## Malick Sidibé: Creative Force of African Culture

By Fayemi Shakur Apr. 11, 2016

Malick Sidibé's images of popular and youth culture still resonate among young photographers who have been influenced by the noted Malian documentary photographer. Mr. Sidibé was born into a peasant family, and his life was changed when he was selected to attend the School of Sudanese Craftsmen in Bamako. Later, he became the first African and the first photographer to be awarded the Golden Lion Award for Lifetime Achievement at the Venice Biennale in 2007. Even the Malian-French singer Inna Modja paid tribute to him in a 2015 music video, "[Tombouctou](#)."



À côté de la boîte à musiques. Circa 1969-2002.  
Credit Courtesy of Malick Sidibé and Jack Shainman Gallery

“He’s such an important figure,” said Jack Shainman, whose [New York gallery](#) is now featuring his work. “In terms of African photographers there are two masters, Malick Sidibé and Seydou Keita. Sidibé is in his 80s, still influencing pop culture.”

Mr. Sidibé, who was born in Bamako, Mali, in the 1930s, had a career-changing apprenticeship at Gérard Guillat-Guignard’s Photo Service Boutique in 1955. He bought his first camera, a Brownie Flash, in 1956 and became a full-time photographer two years later.

Focusing on youth culture in Bamako, he became known for his black-and-white studies of popular culture. His documentation of Mali’s postcolonial period portrays smiling, dancing couples, street scenes and young men seducing girls at parties with a sense of newfound freedom and identity.

In the ’70s, he opened his first studio, where he began making portraits, positioning his subjects with backgrounds that give the appearance of movement and liveliness.

Decades later, his images full of humanity, dignity and life continue to speak to a shared spirit of modernity and diaspora.



Vues de dos. 2003-4.  
Credit Courtesy of Malick Sidibé and Jack Shainman Gallery



Much of the work in this latest exhibition — which runs through April 23 and is his sixth solo show at the gallery — focused on Mr. Sidibé’s most recent series, “Vue de Dos,” which depicts women with bare backs and views of the shoulder suggesting a concealed, sensual beauty rather than something explicit.

Mr. Sidibé resists exhibiting this work, which has been considered risqué, in his native, predominantly Muslim country, where revealing parts of the body is taboo. The series experiments with an artistic variation of the female nude, the goddess as a voluptuous muse, in his singular, powerful style.



Sine Sidibé au sortir de chez lui. 2001-8.

Credit Courtesy of Malick Sidibé and Jack Shainman Gallery

“He’s done something that’s kind of normal for us, but it’s taboo in Mali to reveal parts of the body,” Mr. Shainman said. “Throughout art history it’s been done many times by so many artists and he’s putting his own spin on it, in a beautiful and even sculptural way.”

# MUSÉE

March 21, 2016



## MALICK SIDIBÉ AT JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

*Image above: ©Malick Sidibé Vues de dos, 2003-2004 gelatin silver print / Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York*



*Image above: ©Fernando Sandoval, Opening Night*

Jack Shainman Gallery is pleased to announce Malick Sidibé's sixth solo exhibition at the gallery, which chronicles this living master's iconic career, beginning in 1950s Bamako, Mali, where he still lives and works. Many of this diverse selection of vintage and contemporary black-and-white prints have never before been exhibited, yet solidify Sidibé's lasting influence in today's art world. Street scenes and studio shots, while formally distinct from each other, all capture a pervasive sense of freedom and identity amongst youth in postcolonial Mali and continue to speak to a shared spirit of modernity and diaspora.

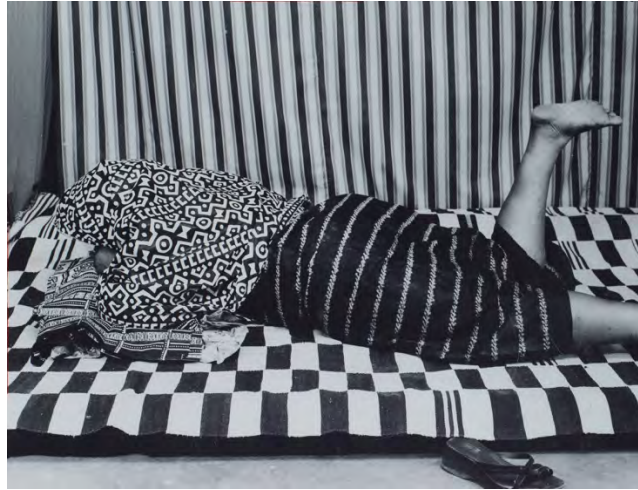


Image above: ©Malick Sidibé, Vues de dos – Juin, 2003-2004, gelatin silver print / Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

While internationally acclaimed for his formal portrait studio and candid shots of exuberant parties and nightclubs, Malick Sidibé presents lesser known works to provide context for the depth of the artist's diverse practice. Street scenes and images like *Horloger dans son Atelier* (1963/2008) and *Le Technicien de Radio Mali* (1966/2008) capture everyday Malians at their jobs with the same intensity of the iconic studio work, while featuring subjects comfortably in their element.

The recent series, *Vue de Dos* (2001—ongoing), which depicts women turned with their often bare backs to the camera, marks an important shift in Sidibé's career. Previously, he had never considered himself a fine artist, although his studio work and candid images gave rise to artistic impact that has resonated for decades. By taking on a classic genre of art history—the female nude—Sidibé comes to terms with his legacy as a major creative force of African culture in the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. Considered risqué, Sidibé resists exhibiting this work in his native country. For the exhibition, these private portraits are made public in the gallery space.



Image above: ©Malick Sidibé, Un petit bain de soleil à la plage, 1975-2008 gelatin silver print / Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

The unidentified figures, each photographed uniformly from behind, are reminiscent of Velazquez's *Rokeby Venus* (c. 1647–51), suggesting the most sensual kind of beauty is that which is concealed, rather than made explicit. Here the goddess is reimagined as a voluptuous muse, exuding eroticism. The women are at once sculptural and faceless, but still radiate a powerful style all their own.



Image above: ©Malick Sidibé, Jardin d'enfants – à Croix-Rouge, route de Koulikoro, 1963-2008 gelatin silver print / Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

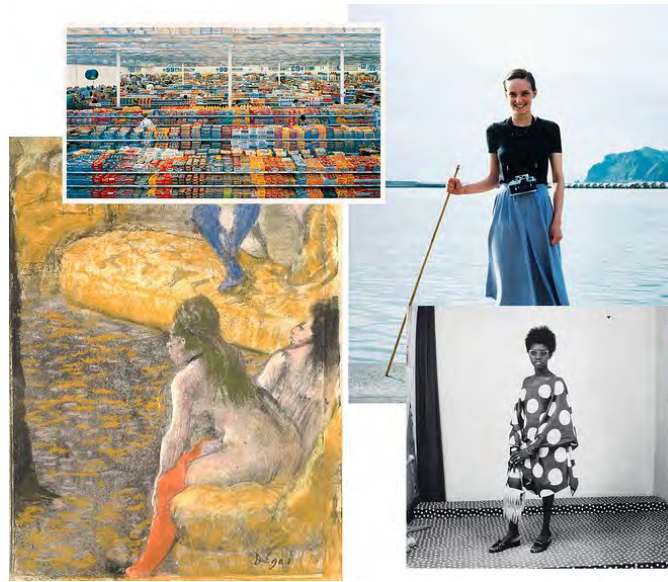
Sidibé has work in numerous public and private collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Getty Museum, California; the Brooklyn Museum, New York; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California; the Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland; the Birmingham Museum of Art, Alabama; the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania; and the Rhode Island School of Design Museum. He was awarded the International Center of Photography Infinity Award for Lifetime Achievement (2008), the Hasselblad Award (2003), and the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement Award by the Board of La Biennale di Venezia (2007) when he was included in *Think with the Senses Feel with the Mind*, curated by Robert Storr at the 52nd Annual Venice Biennale.

# VOGUE

## The Top 10 Art Shows to See This Spring

MARCH 25, 2016 4:05 PM

by DODIE KAZANJIAN



From top left: Andreas Gursky, *99 Cent*, 1999; Seiichi Furuya, *Izu*, 1978, from the series *Portrait of Christine*, 1979; Malick Sidibé, *Avec Mon Nouveau Sac, Ma Bague et Mon Bracelet*, 1975-2001; Edgar Degas, *Waiting for a Client*, 1879

Photo (From top left): © Andreas Gursky / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / Courtesy of The Doris and Donal Fisher Collection at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; © Seiichi Furuya / Courtesy of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; © Malick Sidibé / Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shaman Gallery, New York; Courtesy of Museum of Modern Art

The art world likes its “isms”: Cubism, Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, Conceptualism, to name a few in the 20th century. But after a brief flirtation with Neo-Geoism in the 1980s, “isms” seemed to evaporate. Until now. Without noticing it, we’re in Globalism. And the shows this spring more than bear that out. Ten shows I’m looking forward to are:



Malick Sidibé, *Vue de Dos—Juin*, 2003-2004

Photo: © Malick Sidibé / Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shaman Gallery, New York

**Malick Sidibé:** Jack Shainman Gallery gives this master Malian photographer his sixth solo show. The black-and-white images by this iconic photographer—a young couple dancing, street scenes, and studio shots in his hometown of Bamako—since the 1950s grow in their importance and influence. Chris Ofili traveled to Mali to be photographed by Sidibé for his *New Yorker* profile two years ago. Sidibé's most recent works, *Vue de Dos*, takes on the nude, showing women with bare backs to the camera. He's never shown these private portraits in Mali, but you can see them at Jack Shainman through April 23.

# CRAVE

## Exhibit | Malick Sidibé

The photographer of happiness returns with a selection of lesser-known works that celebrate the people of his native Mali.

By Miss Rosen Apr 3<sup>rd</sup> 2016



*Photo: Soirée familiale, 1964-2008 gelatin silver print*

“Man tried to imitate God by drawing; then we invented the photo,” **Malick Sidibé** observed. Indeed, there is a sense of the eternal, ethereal soul that resides below the flesh, deep in the bone in the photographs of the man from Bamako. Born in Mali in 1936, Sidibé has lived and worked in his native land for six decades, becoming one of the greatest photographers of the twentieth century. His iconic images from the 1950s, ‘60s, and ‘70s take us back to a time of transition as African countries gained their independence from foreign imperial powers in Europe.

Sidibé began his career in 1955 as an apprentice, purchasing his first camera, a Brownie Flash, one year. In 1958, he opened Studio Malick in Bamako, and grew to become the premier photographer of youth culture. Whether at the clubs or at sporting events, on the

beach or in the studio, Sidibé brilliantly captured the vibrant joy and energy of the first generation of free Malians.



*Amoureux des disques, c. 1969-2002 silver gelatin print*

**Malick Sidibé**, on view at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, now through April 23, 2016, presents a selection of lesser-known works by the master to provide a context for the vast range and diversity of his vast archive. The exhibition extensive, charting a dynamic path through Sidibé career from a new vantage point, offering a selection of images that complement our sense of the photographer's world and way of life.

"I wanted to be the photographer of happiness," Sidibé revealed, and in his work we can witness that spirit revealed. There is a sense of hope, of the pleasure of possibility, of the spirit that embodies youth and all of its dreams. Whether in the club or on the street, Sidibé brought the heat, capturing regular people enjoying life, experiencing the joy of being completely in the moment. He observed, "People said if [I] was at a party, it gave it prestige. I would let people know I'd arrived by letting off my flash... You could feel the temperature rise right away."



*Taximan avec Voiture, 1970-2008 gelatin silver print*



The photographs on view in Malick Sidibé are an exquisite collection of work that speak to the timeless nature of the medium. Included in the exhibition is the cent series, *Vue de Dos* (2001—ongoing), which depicts women turned with their often bare backs to the camera. This series marks an important shift in his career. Previously, Sidibé had never considered himself a fine artist, but the female nude has changed his perception to his role in the creation of the photograph. Considered risqué, Sidibé resists exhibiting this work in his native country and so it is here in our milieu that we can consider the work on its own terms.

Sidibé challenges us to look at the photograph, as it really is. He observes, “It’s all the same. It’s the same face. We always look for an idea, for the same face, for the same position. There is no such thing as a ‘European’ or an ‘African photography.’ It’s all the same thing.”

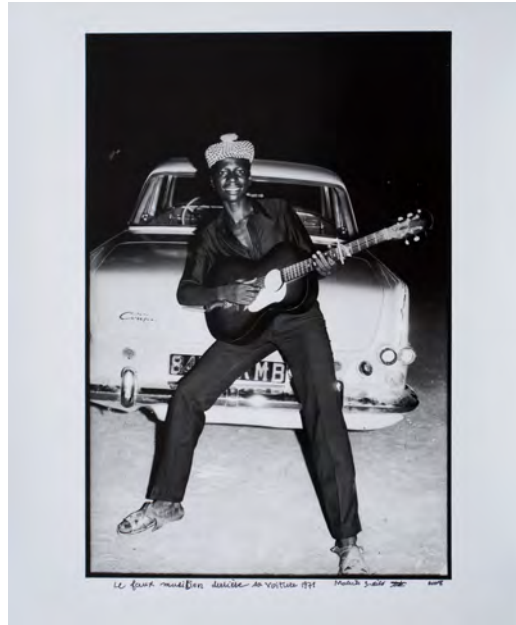


*À côté de la boîte à musiques, c. 1969-2002 gelatin silver print*



## In Bamako

March 17, 2016 | by [Dan Piepenbring](#)



Malick Sidibé, *Le Faux Musicien Derrière sa Voiture*, 1971/2008, silver gelatin print, 20 7/8" x 14".

The Malian photographer Malick Sidibé's [latest exhibition opens tonight at Jack Shainman Gallery](#). Sidibé, who's seventy-nine or eighty, lives in Bamako, where he's worked as a photographer since the fifties; he's known for his vivacious black-and-white studies of the city's youth culture. "You go to someone's wedding, someone's christening," he told *LensCulture* in 2008, speaking of the renown he gained as a party photographer:

I was lucky enough at that time to be the intellectual young photographer with a small camera who could move around. The early photographers like Seydou Keïta worked with plate cameras and were not able to get out and use a flash. So I was much in demand by the local youth. Everywhere ... in town, everywhere! Whenever there was a dance, I was invited ... At night, from midnight to four A.M. or six A.M., I went from one party to another. I could go to four different parties. If there were only two, it was like having a rest. But if there were four, you couldn't miss any. If you were given four invitations, you had to go. You couldn't miss them. I'd leave one place, I'd take thirty-six shots here, thirty-six shots there, and then thirty-six somewhere else, until the morning.

*His new show spans the whole of his career; it's up through April 23. [Read More »](#)*

# Wallpaper\*

## Mali master: Malick Sidibé's lesser-known photographs are showcased in New York

ART / 14 MAR 2016 / BY DANIEL SCHEFFLER



The Malian photographer Malick Sidibé has opened his sixth solo exhibition at the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York. Pictured left: Mr. Cissé le pharmacien, 1973, 2001. Right: Untitled, 1976/2004

Malick Sidibe, the photographer from Bamako in Mali, is opening his sixth solo exhibition at the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York – simply titled ‘Malick Sidibe’. Known, and lauded, for both his formal portrait work and candid shots of soirees and nightclubs, this show will chronicle the living master’s métier.

The show combines an assortment of vintage and never-before-exhibited black and white prints, and speaks to the idea of freedom and identity in postcolonial Mali. His recent work, dubbed *Vue de Dos*, 2001–, and also on display here, comprises women turned with their bare backs to the camera, and so heralds a shift in the artist’s career.

‘I have always wanted to present lesser-known works by Malick Sidibé,’ says Jack Shainman from the gallery. ‘Our exhibition will feature a selection of street scenes, many that have never before been exhibited. It is incredible to trace the same focused intensity that Malick is able to capture across all his varied subjects.’

Sidibe is prolific and constantly collected in private and public institutions across the globe – including the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Getty Museum. The artist has also received numerous accolades including the International Center of Photography Infinity Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2008, the Hasselblad Award in 2003, and the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement Award by the board of the 2007 Venice Biennale, when he was included in the Robert Storr-curated exhibition 'Think with the Senses, Feel with the Mind: Art in the Present Tense'.

# ARTNEWS

## 9 ART EVENTS TO ATTEND IN NEW YORK CITY THIS WEEK

BY *The Editors of ARTnews* POSTED 03/14/16 10:22 AM

### **Opening: Malick Sidibé at Jack Shainman Gallery**

Long before Cindy Sherman popularized the concept of photographing herself performing various roles, Malian photographer Malick Sidibé was taking pictures of Bamako youths posing for the camera. The young people's looks—a rock-and-roll wannabee, a woman in traditional dress and hip sunglasses, a boy with a shirt stuffed so that he appears pregnant—can sometimes be ridiculous, but they are never anything less than extraordinarily personal. In private, these people can assume various identities that they never could in public, and it shows in these black-and-white photographs. This exhibition of Sidibé's recent work includes portraits such as these alongside works from the "Vue de Dos" series, in which women are photographed from behind and posed like odalisques—this time, with their clothes on.

*Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 West 20th Street, 6–8 p.m.*

# The New York Times Magazine

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Magazine

## Portrait of a Lady

JUNE 24, 2015

On Photography

By TEJU COLE

A photographer working in a commercial studio in West Africa in the 20th century had a straightforward task: to please his clients. In that sense, the Malian photographer Seydou Keïta was — like his father, who worked as a blacksmith, carpenter, mechanic and electrician, among other jobs — a craftsman. He was paid by the public to make pictures. But like his esteemed Malian compatriot Malick Sidibé, Mama Casset of Senegal and Joseph Moïse Agbodjelou of Benin, he produced such fine work that we now consider him a great African artist. These master photographers gave us panoramas of life in Bamako, Dakar and Porto-Novo, a vivid record of individual people, largely shorn of their names and stories but irrepressibly alive. Here are good clothes gracefully cut, glowing skin, beautifully coifed hair, polished shoes: all the familiar markers of a person taking pride in his or her appearance. Here's someone who looks witty, here's another who looks querulous, another who's modest, or vain, or sweet. There we see a renegade bra strap slipping off a shoulder, there a large laughing man with a baby, a woman in a bathing suit, youths partying at night with their Afros, bell-bottoms, precious LPs and endless reserves of cool.

These photographs are ripostes to the anthropological images of “natives”

made by Europeans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Those photographs, in which the subjects had no say in how they were seen, did much to shape the Western world's idea of Africans. Something changed when Africans began to take photographs of one another: You can see it in the way they look at the camera, in the poses, the attitude. The difference between the images taken by colonialists or white adventurers and those made for the sitter's personal use is especially striking in photographs of women. In the former, women are being looked at against their will, captive to a controlling gaze. In the latter, they look at themselves as in a mirror, an activity that always involves seriousness, levity and an element of wonder.

A portrait of this kind is a visual soliloquy. Consider, for instance, one of Keïta's most famous pictures, now called the *Odalisque*. A woman reclines in a long dress with fine floral patterning on a bed with a checked bedspread. Her head scarf is polka-dotted. The bed is placed in front of a wall, which is draped with a paisley cloth. And even her face is marked with cicatrices. Then we notice, emerging from this swirling field — a profusion of pattern that brings to mind Matisse at his most inventive — her delicate hands and feet, dark but subtly shaded; the right arm on which she rests her head; her narrowed eyes. Her look is self-possessed rather than seductive. She's looking ahead but not at the camera. It is the look of someone who is thinking about herself, simultaneously outward and inward. The image challenges and delights the viewer with its complicated two-dimensional game.

Keïta's and Sidibé's oeuvres make me think of August Sander's record of German people in their various occupations in the years between the World Wars, or of Mike Disfarmer's thousands of portraits taken in Heber Springs, Ark.: faces peering out of the past, unknown to us but as expressive and intense as those we love. Keïta was not directly influenced by these photographers, nor by any of the conventions of photography in the West. In an interview he gave the French gallerist André Magnin in the mid-'90s, he said: "I've heard that in your country you have old photographs that are like mine. Well, I've never met any foreign photographers, nor seen their photos."

By his own account, he was an original. Looking at the body of his work, we become conscious of implied community, customs and connections, a world that is perhaps now irretrievable.

Malick Sidibé — the younger of these two photographers — made many fine portraits as well, generally working with hipper, less formal poses than Keïta did and shooting more often at night and at parties. There's one portrait of Sidibé's in particular that I'm always drawn to. A woman stands alone in a sleeveless blouse and an ankle-length skirt. She has sandals on her feet, a pendulous earring in each ear and hair woven close to her scalp. Her address to the camera is direct. No, she's not quite alone: A man's shoulder and arm are visible just to her left. We also see his right shoe and half of his right leg. But the rest of him has been dodged away in the printing of the picture.



"Je veux être seule,"  
1979.

Malick Sidibé, from Jack  
Shainman Gallery



On the brown paper border that frames the photograph are written the words: “Je veux être seule. 1979 — Malick Sidibé.” On the right border are Sidibé’s signature and the date 2009. I suppose Sidibé signed this photograph in 2009 and wrote down what the woman told him 30 years earlier, before he had printed the photograph: “Je veux être seule” (“I want to be alone”). This young woman, like many others in Sidibé’s work, has decided her own image. The photo’s peculiarity is the mark of her authority.

I love the West African women in the photographs by Keïta and Sidibé, some of whom are of my mother’s generation and the generation just before, women to whom a university education was widely available, and for whom working outside the home was a given. In West African photography of this period, there are many photographs of friendship among women, many photographs of women with their families, many of young women with their young men. And there are photos of women alone, some of whom perhaps might also have told the photographer, “Je veux être seule.”

The confidence visible in photographs like Keïta’s and Sidibé’s can be evoked even when we don’t see the sitters’ faces. J. D. ’Okhai Ojeikere, who was born in Nigeria in 1930 and did most of his work there, understood the expressive possibilities of women’s heads, particularly those crowned with the marvelous array of hairstyles common to many Nigerian ethnic groups. These photographs, made in the years following the country’s independence from Britain in 1960, record evanescent sculptures that are both performance art and temporary body modification. Most of these heads are turned away from us. Has the back of a head ever been more evocative than in these photographs? Ojeikere made hundreds of them, and each head seems to convey an attitude, and even a glance. On the streets of Lagos today, such heads, necks, hairstyles and elaborately constructed and tied head wraps can still be seen, tableaux vivants of assertive elegance.

Photographs by Keïta, Sidibé, Agbodjelou and Ojeikere are united by the period in which they were made as well as by geographical and cultural proximity to one another. There seems to me a correspondence between the energy of these pictures and the optimism and determination of the West African independence movements of the '50s and '60s. The photographs' legacies have had a powerful effect on 21st-century African portraiture, but the contemporary work that most reminds me of them is from farther away on the continent, and made in very different circumstances. Zanele Muholi, one of the most prominent contemporary African photographers, who started working only a few years after the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994, is in a sense a "postindependence" artist. She has tried to document a specific aspect of the country's new political, social and economic terrain. One of Muholi's long-term projects, called "Faces and Phases," focuses on the portraiture of black lesbian and transgender people, most of them in South Africa. Like her West African forebears, she shows people as they wish to be seen.

South Africa is one of the few countries whose constitution protects its citizens from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. But persistent prejudice remains a reality for many black South African lesbians and transgender people, many of whom have been raped and even murdered. Muholi's work is an answer to those who want to wish them away or intimidate them into invisibility. To look at their faces, in portrait after portrait, is to become newly aware of the power of portraiture in a gifted artist's hands. Muholi doesn't grant her sitters independence — they are independent — but she makes their independence visible. "Faces and Phases," currently on view at the Brooklyn Museum as part of a show of Muholi's work, is a complete world.

The work of Keïta and Sidibé, too, makes us aware of an entire world of experiences, one in which men are sometimes secondary. Keïta did well enough from his photo studio that, in the early 1950s, he was able to buy a Peugeot 203. Here is that car, used as a background prop for a group portrait made around 1956, featuring two women and a girl. The women's dark foreheads and cheekbones are echoed in the Peugeot's sinuous lines. And way off to the right, touching the hood of the car, is a man's hand. He has been sidelined, just as the man in "Je veux être seule" was. But a closer look reveals another man in the picture. He can be seen in the front wheel well of the car, in the glimmer of its reflective shine. This second man, dressed in white, is stooped over something. He is the photographer, Seydou Keïta himself, in his limited role, collaborating with the true authors of the image: the women.

Teju Cole is a photographer, an essayist and the author of two works of fiction, "Open City" and "Every Day Is for the Thief." He teaches at Bard College and is the magazine's photography critic.

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# AnOther Magazine

Fashion & Beauty / Lessons to Learn

## Lessons We Can Learn From Malick Sidibé

— April 30, 2015 —

We turn to Studio Malick in 1960s Bamako for lessons in style, posturing and self-determination



© Malick Sidibé, Courtesy of GALLERY FIFTY ONE

Text [Olivia Singer](#)

Having apprenticed under leading society photographer Gérard Guillaud and learning his trade at colonial balls and banquets, in 1962 **Malick Sidibé** opened **Studio Malick**: a photographic studio located in Bamako, Mali. The decades that followed saw both the studio and Sidibé's documentary photography rise to a global renown, his work capturing an exuberant period of liberation in a country that had lived under colonial rule for centuries.



**Malick Sidibé**  
17 images

What Sidibé offered was a space where people were afforded agency over their image, rather than being subject to a western lens that projected an exoticism or poverty upon them. The resulting pictures were "Africans for Africans". But, as well as that, the studio was a place where people came to hang out - as he told The Guardian in 2010, "often it was like a party. People would drop by, stay, eat. I slept in the developing room. They'd pose on their Vespas, show off their new hats and trousers and jewels and sunglasses. Looking beautiful was everything. Everyone had to have the latest Paris style. We had never really worn socks, and suddenly people were so proud of theirs, straight from Saint Germain des Près!" So, in honour of some of the most iconic fashion images we know, we are turning to Studio Malick for the lessons that we can learn from Sidibé's clientele.



© Malick Sidibé, Courtesy of GALLERY FIFTY ONE

### **Posture is key**

Although Sidibé carefully and deliberately instructed the pose of his subjects, the resulting images always appear to capture a moment rather than feeling static or staged. An early love for Eugène Delacroix, sparked when he was given a book as a prize at school, Sidibe went on to spend four years studying art at École des Artisans Soudanais on command of the colonial governor, and his formal education is particularly apparent in his understanding of composition and posture.



© Malick Sidibé, Courtesy of GALLERY FIFTY ONE

### **James Brown is King**

Speaking to American Suburb X, Sidibé explained, "It wasn't so much our independence as it was Western music that changed many things during that time. Music was really the revolution because after 1957, rock music, hula-hoop, swing came to the country. Music was a true revolution in Mali." After making a name for himself by documenting parties and dances (his camera was lighter

than his contemporaries like Seydou Keita whose weighty equipment restricted their mobility), the inclusion of specific records or dancing within his studio photography was grounded in a Malian cultural revolution that combined west African identity with western influences like James Brown.



© Malick Sidibé, Courtesy of GALLERY FIFTY ONE

### **Motorbikes are always cool**

The appearance of motorbikes and Vespas within portraits is a recurrent theme in Sidibé's studio work - young Malians would arrive on them and then want them included in the images to advertise their modernity. He explained to Jerome Sother [in 2008](#) that "People came by motorbike or Vespa. I was also lucky at that time because when I opened the studio, electricity was becoming available. And to be photographed where there was electricity, people enjoyed that. Electricity was something of a luxury. So people would come to my studio because it had electricity."



© Malick Sidibé, Courtesy of GALLERY FIFTY ONE

### **Dress up**

The party atmosphere of his studio inspired groups of young people to arrive together, to hang out and to get a print that showed them and their friends at their finest. One of the greatest elements of Sidibé's work is the personal styling that went into every picture; keen to show off new clothes, new looks and a new identity, his subjects are frequently wearing the latest trends - with sunglasses worn indoors a popular feature. It is dressing up at its greatest, with everyone proud of the outfits that they have assembled and reminding us that there is no shame in trying to look cool if the result is this good.





© Malick Sidibé, Courtesy of GALLERY FIFTY ONE

**Incorporate different cultural references**

Mali had previously been a French colony, and Sidibé's work documents a period of major political change that is reflected in the clothing of his subjects. Combinations of European fashions, west African prints and, here, even a traditionally Francophile beret, show the amalgamation of a variety of cultural references that ensure the outfits (and their wearers) stand the test of time; they look just as cool in 2015 as they did in the 60s.

*Photography by Malick Sidibé will be on show at Photo London, Somerset House, on May 21-24.*

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# ARTFORUM

APRIL 2014

## CRITICS' PICKS: NEW YORK

### Malick Sidibé

JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY | 524 WEST 24TH STREET  
524 West 24th Street  
March 28–April 26



Malick Sidibé, *Danseur Méringué*, 1964, silver gelatin print, 20 7/8 x 14".

Malick Sidibé's current exhibition of photographs offers a glimpse into the dynamic youth culture that emerged in Bamako during Mali's post-Independence era. Though trained as a studio photographer, Sidibé was lured into the city's streets and dance clubs, where his clients wanted to be seen participating in Bamako's thriving nightlife. There, Malian youths forged a uniquely diasporic aesthetic, finding inspiration in American Black Power icons and musicians, including James Brown and Angela Davis. As his subjects began to imitate the styles and gestures found in magazines and album covers, Sidibé, in turn, closely emulated those sources in his compositions. "He was internalizing the history of photography without knowing it," filmmaker and art historian Manthia Diawara asserts—this was instrumental towards the creation of a 1960s "Bamakois" visual culture.

Sidibé's images capture the vibrancy of this moment in visual, sonic, and tactile registers. You can almost hear the sound track emanating from his nightclub snapshots, in which flirtatious young couples dance and twist in unison. In several images, albums by Jimi Hendrix, Ray Charles, and Jimmy Smith are held up like trophies for the camera. The records are even lugged to the beach; one photograph captures boys in swimsuits displaying a set of 7" singles.

The real gem in the exhibition is a series of rare color Polaroids and vintage prints (Sidibé's photographs typically circulate in the form of enlarged reprints from an archive of negatives). Some of these are mounted in wooden frames that have been colorfully hand-painted, complementing the richly patterned textiles worn by Sidibé's sitters. In one yellowing print from 1970, a teenage girl models a minidress sewn from a patchwork of wax fabrics. While its composition is consistent with traditional studio portraiture in West Africa, the subject's provocative outfit and subtle confidence express the sense of freedom felt by many who came of age in a newly independent Mali.

— Allison Young

# The New York Times

N.Y. / REGION | ARTS REVIEW | WESTCHESTER

## *The Young and the Rebellious*

A Review of 'Malick Sidibé: Chemises' in Poughkeepsie

By MARTHA SCHWENDENER

FEBRUARY 27, 2014



Malick Sidibé took photographs at parties from the 1960s to the early 1970s.  
Malick Sidibé; Courtesy of Malick Sidibé/Gwinzegal/diChroma Photography

In the early 1990s, European and American curators and art dealers became aware of African photographs taken in the mid-20th century by the operators of small portrait studios, particularly in Mali. Discovering negatives that had been stored for decades, they went about printing, exhibiting and selling these works, making local photographers like [Seydou Keïta](#) and [Malick Sidibé](#) international art stars in the process.

What happened, however, is that the original nature of the photographs — the way they were made and later displayed — got a bit lost as they made their way into galleries and

museums. Instead of the small, low-contrast prints their original clients would have commissioned and owned, the photos were shown as large, high-contrast prints, in keeping with the tastes and practices of the '90s European and American art world. "Malick Sidibé: Chemises" at [The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center](#) at [Vassar College](#) in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., offers an opportunity to see some of these works in their near original state, with 50 small vintage prints being shown alongside 53 recent enlargements.



Photographs by Mr. Sidibé are on display at The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. Courtesy of Malick Sidibé/Gwinzegal/diChroma Photography

Mr. Sidibé, who was born in 1936, earned a diploma in jewelry making and then worked in a photography studio of a French colonial. In 1956 he bought his first camera, a Brownie Flash, and in 1957 became a full-time photographer, opening Studio Malick in 1962. In a video interview accompanying the show, Mr. Sidibé, who still lives in

Bamako, Mali, describes how people came to his studio partly because it had electricity, which was a luxury there at that time.

What Mr. Sidibé is really known for, however, is his candid photographs of young people taken at parties from the 1960s to the early 1970s. Mali gained independence from France in 1960, and there was a flowering of music and culture. (Bamako has remained an international music center, although [recent conflicts](#) have upset that somewhat.) Taking advantage of the lighter 35-millimeter camera, Mr. Sidibé photographed people, attending surprise parties, celebrations for new babies or graduation parties at social clubs called “grins.”



Mr. Sidibé is known for his candid photographs of young people. Malick Sidibé

One of the best known of these works is “Nuit de Noel, Happy Club (Christmas Eve, Happy Club)” photographed in 1963 and exhibited here as a 2008 print, in which a smiling couple — the man in a suit, the woman in a Western party dress, but barefoot — dance to music we can’t hear but can almost feel. A wall text quotes Mr. Sidibé on the circumstances of these photographs: “When young people dance they’re spellbound by the music. In that atmosphere, people didn’t pay any attention to me anymore.” What is not immediately obvious in the works is that many were taken after curfew, and the clothes the young people were wearing and the music they were listening to weren’t seen as appropriate in conservative Malian culture. (Just like rebellious teenagers all over the globe in the ’60s.)

What is also notable about this show, however, are the dozens of small, vintage prints attached to colored office folders — the “chemises” (from the French “shirt” or “sleeve”) of the exhibition’s title. “Arrosage de trois admis Niarela (Party for the Three Graduates)” from 1968 shows more than two dozen contact prints mounted on orange-brown cardstock, mostly of couples and groups of friends posing or toasting the camera.



The exhibition includes various forms of Mr. Sidibé’s work, including prints displayed in hand-painted frames.  
Malick Sidibé and Jack Shainman  
Gallery

On the walls are arrangements of photographs in hand-painted frames made by an artisan named Checkna Touré who has had a shop around the corner from Mr. Sidibé since the 60s. While picture frames often get ignored in many photographic traditions, here they are treated as part of the picture, something that turns it into a unique object rather than an infinitely reproducible one.

Although the “chemises” and the photographs in painted frames distinguish this from the dozens of exhibitions — probably hundreds, at this point — devoted to African portrait photography, it’s also always great to see Mr. Sidibé’s studio portraits. And it is undeniable that they gain something from being enlarged, and with a punched-up contrast. There is a sense of joy and curiosity in his studio portraits, with people posing together in matching patterned outfits, showing off new gadgets, like a watch or a motorbike, or in one, dressed in a trench coat and sunglasses as “Monsieur Dembelé, agent secret (Mr. Dembelé, Secret Agent)” from 1964.

In the upstairs gallery are several works from the ’30s by James Van Der Zee, whose studio in Harlem produced glamorous portraits of African-Americans. These make for an interesting comparison. Similarly, questions of racism embedded in technology are being raised more frequently since the advent of digital photography and cinema, which allow artists and filmmakers greater control over the skin tone and representation of their subjects. (Filmmakers from Jean-Luc Godard to Steve McQueen have commented on the inherent problems of photographing darker skin with sensitive chemical and celluloid film stock, and more recent charges have been made against webcams and face-detection cameras for being racist.)

With this in mind, “Malick Sidibé: Chemises,” continues the conversation around not only African photography, but also other issues. Altered or in their original state, Mr. Sidibé’s photographs capture your attention, and this generates myriad other dialogues around history, race, representation, technology and beyond.

“Malick Sidibé: Chemises,” the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, 124 Raymond Avenue, Poughkeepsie, through March 30. Information: (845) 437-5632 or [fillac.vassar.edu](http://fillac.vassar.edu).

A version of this review appears in print on March 2, 2014, on page WE9 of the New York edition with the headline: The Young and the Rebellious. [Order Reprints](#) | [Today's Paper](#) | [Subscribe](#)

Thursday, January 16, 2014 | By Jihad Nga

## Inside the Photographer's Studio: Malick Sidibe



Jihad Nga for TIME

### *The following photographs were taking in Bamako, Mali in March 2013*

A curtain used as a backdrop hangs in Malick Sidibe's Bamako studio. The curtain has been in use since the opening of the studio in 1960 and never has been replaced. Many of Sidibe's most famous photographs feature the backdrop.

His photos have been prized on the international art market for years and adorn the walls of leading photo galleries across the world, but 76-year-old Malick Sidibe still resides in a one-room home in Mali so timeless that it feels as if the air within hasn't stirred in decades. Marked boxes — 1972, 1968, 1965 — containing much of Malick's vast archive balance atop one another, stretching to the ceiling. Orphaned 6 x 6 frames dot the floor. A large wooden crate bulges with ruined cameras in a tangled mass. Occasionally the scorching air outside shifts, sending a breeze through the room that does nothing to dispel the overwhelming heat inside. On a good day, electricity powers a single bulb that barely illuminates the otherwise pitch-dark space. Decades' worth of Malian dust covers every surface.

Malick is not surrounded by the material trappings one might expect a major contributor to the contemporary arts landscape to enjoy, or pursue, nor do I imagine he spends much time obsessing over his place in the photographic firmament. In this way he is, to my mind, the perfect artist. His wives and children constantly attend to him, and while inside his home time seems not merely to slow but to cease altogether, the courtyard outside buzzes with activity. A national hero, his contribution to his country's historical record has, for many, crafted *the* image of Mali.

In his home, light years from the art centers of the world, Malick is, I trust, exactly where he wants to be in his life and in his career — the same neighbor to Malians that he has always been, despite the fame that has gradually found him.

Housed in a busy suburb of Bamako, Mali's capital, Malick's tiny studio has a readily detectable pulse — a touch shallower than I imagine it once was, but still present. The studio itself has become as much a subject in his photos as the countless men, women and children who have set foot inside the place to have their portraits made, or simply to visit with the local legend. The portraits, meanwhile, are remarkable, each one of the thousands of pictures somehow teasing out a central, telling element of the individual's character. These portraits, one realizes, are evidence of a rare and intimate exchange, an empathy between sitter and portraitist.



Malick Sidibe - Courtesy of Vassar College

*Voici ma montre et ma bague (Here is My Watch and My Ring), 1964*



Malick Sidibe - Courtesy of Vassar College

*Surprise Party, 1964, printed 2008*  
Gelatin silver print

Digging through Malick's archive I continually encountered series after series of photos that he had started and never finished, pictures that were unlike anything else I had seen from him. His challenges to the methodology of traditional studio portraits were clearly evident in these projects, and my admiration for his work — and for him as an artist and as a man — brought me back to his home every single day while I was in Bamako. All my questions about his techniques and his philosophy of photography having run their course, I was content at last to simply visit and sit with him, time and again. I suspect he makes everyone feel as welcome as I felt.

As a photographer, being around Malick in his small, storied, marvelous studio stirred something in me. The unflinching commitment to his ever-evolving, self-realized process, and his evident contentment with the place he has carved out for himself in the world of art, is both humbling

and inspiring; his example forces me to engage the personal fears and hesitations I suffer in my own work. The perfect artist, it seems to me now, fully gives himself over to a hard-earned trust in his own work, in his own methods. He doesn't just avoid the creative roadblocks that so many of us place in our own paths; instead, he is so quietly confident making his own way that the roadblocks simply don't exist.





Jehad Nga for TIME

A view from inside Malick Sidibe's now cluttered and dusty Bamako studio. Virtually nothing has been thrown away over the years from the studio including broken cameras and studio equipment.



Jehad Nga for TIME

Malick Sidibe's photo enlarger now out of use sits in a corner of the photographer's Bamako home.



Jehad Nga for TIME

Inside Malick Sidibe's Bamako studio, a strobe lighting system has been updated to accommodate his son Kareem's job as an I.D. photographer.



Jehad Nga for TIME

Equipment piles up in all corners inside Malick Sidibe's Bamako home and studio.



Jehad Nga for TIME

On the patio of Malick Sidibe's Bamako studio, photographs taken by Sidibe as well as ones featuring him over the years decorate a wooden wall.



Jehad Nga for TIME

Inside Malick Sidibe's home, a huge archive of negatives sits piled up and unprotected. Sidibe and his sons are trying to find people to help them begin to digitally archive his work before much of it is ruined by moisture and dust.



Jehad Nga for TIME

Samba Sidibe (Malick's younger brother) sits on the floor surrounded by old studio equipment and film negatives in Malick's bedroom.



Jehad Nga for TIME

Inside Malick Sidibe's Bamako studio, a collection of Sidibe's old cameras takes up an entire wall.



Malick Sidibe sits in his bed in his Bamako home. With temperatures rising to 110 degrees Fahrenheit, the heat take its toll on the aging Sidibe. His younger brother Samba and his sons help keep him cool using a hand fan.

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**Malick Sidibe** is a Malian photographer. He is represented by Jack Shainman Gallery in New York, Afronova Gallery in Johannesburg and Fifty One Fine Art Photography in Antwerp.

**Jehad Nga** is a New York-based photographer. LightBox has previously featured Nga's Green Book Project as well as work about his Libyan roots and a photo essay on the world's biggest refugee complex.

# Interview

## CAN'T DISTRACT FROM MALICK SIDIBÉ

By BRIENNE WALSH  
APRIL 2012



The agnès b. Galerie Boutique in Soho might not seem the ideal space to stage a solo exhibition of works by photographer Malick Sidibé, given the distraction of, well, the racks of clothing. But given the subject of the work, which focuses on street and nightlife culture in Bamako, the capital of Mali, during the 1960s and '70s, the photographs seem right at home in a sartorial setting. Unabashedly joyful, and oozing with hormones, the images depict tall, lanky men peacocking in perfectly tailored bell bottoms and platform boots, and glistening young women in minidresses and sandals. More than just advertisements for a lifestyle that today seems surprisingly modern, they are the embodiment of the period right after Mali was liberated from the French in 1960, when the country, drunk on freedom, was throwing impromptu dance parties on the banks of the Niger River.

A hybrid of the studio photographer Man Ray, and the Polaroid camera-wielding Andy Warhol, Sidibé opened his photography studio in Bamako in 1957. There, he invited stylish young people to come pose for black & white snapshots on their Vespas, in get-ups inspired by the latest fashions trickling down from Paris. In the evening, Sidibé, trained as an event photographer, would hit the nightlife scene, hopping from dance to dance to capture kids who for the first time were able to come out in public holding hands, swaying close, and losing their inhibitions in front of the camera. Eventually, the studio itself became a party, a place where figures like couturier Amadou Ballo—featured prominently in the exhibition—and his retinue of stylish protégés could come to show off their newest accessories, and hang out until 6 am.

Large prints include *Les deux Amoureux devant leur villa* (1977), a powerful image of an entangled couple lounging on the floor of Sidibé's studio, the woman's direct gaze into the lens of the camera a challenge to anyone who might disapprove of her kissing her man. Most moving of all, however, is *Nuit de Noël* (1963), a tiny print on the back wall, which depicts a gorgeous pair in crisp white outfits, dancing in perfect sych, their heads bowed in supplication to one another. More than just capturing a specific moment in time in Bamako, the longing the image evokes is universal.

# THE NEW YORKER

August 8, 2011

Goings On About Town: Art

## Malick Sidibe

Like the great studio photographers James Van Der Zee and Mike Disfarmer, Sidibe, who works in Bamako, Mali, is an artist for hire. Popular and prolific, he has taken portraits of single sitters, couples, and groups, posed before plain or patterned backdrops in his studio, and has also documented weddings, dance parties, and gatherings at the beach. His subjects are mostly young people with vivacious natural style, and this roundup of nearly eighty images could pass as a show of fashion pictures—not unlike Bill Cunningham’s work for the *New York Times*. Effortlessly charming and full of spirit, Sidibe’s photographs subvert formality with flair. Through Aug. 5.

# Art in America

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

## The Lookout: A Weekly Guide to Shows You Won't Want to Miss

by *Leigh Anne Miller* 08/04/11

With an ever-growing number of galleries scattered around New York, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Where to begin? Here at *A.i.A.*, we are always on the hunt for memorable shows that stand out in a crowded field. See below for an abbreviated summer "Lookout" of five of the best shows we saw this week, featuring black-and-white photographs by both Miroslav Tichý and Malick Sidibé, Mark Wagner's collages made from thousands of cut-up \$1 bills, delicate sculptures and etchings by the late Christopher Wilmarth, and yet another strong group show of abstract paintings.

[...]

### **Malick Sidibé at Jack Shainman, through Aug. 5**

In the late 1950s, Malick Sidibé opened a commercial photography studio in Bamako, the bustling capital of Mali, and has been snapping group and solo portraits, plus vibrant street and nightlife scenes, ever since. These large, ovoid clusters of vintage and contemporary prints—many mounted on colorful, patterned backgrounds—are an endlessly entertaining record of Bamako life.



## Why Now

By ERIC WILSON  
Published: June 11, 2009



PHOTOS: 2007: The Malian photographer Malick Sidibé is honored for lifetime achievement at the Venice Biennale.; MALICK SIDIBÉ COURTESY OF JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, N.Y.;

WAS it only last year that round sunglasses were considered square?

The hot eyewear look of 2008 was pretty much defined by plastic Wayfarer knockoffs, garish neon trapezoids often seen color-coordinated with a plaid shirt and sneakers. Or else it was "shutter shades," those ventilated blinders popularized by Kanye West.

This summer, however, the memo for sunglasses says circles are in. Very round shapes, as round as goggles in some cases, appeared in the recent women's collections of Marc Jacobs and Proenza Schouler; and, for men, from Ralph Lauren, Zegna and Lanvin (most costing from \$300 to \$400). Last month, New York magazine included round sunglasses among the anticipated trends of the summer. And, as predicted, they are already appearing on the streets in numbers not seen since the release of the last Harry Potter book.

While most fashion trends -- and especially this one -- are circular, round sunglasses, seemingly everywhere all at once, provide a case study of the group-think mentality of the fashion industry. There are even inexpensive examples (\$10 to \$11) at Urban Outfitters and Fred Flare.

Given that there is no obvious source for the revival and that typically it takes more than a year to develop expensive sunglasses from a design to prototype to salable object, how could it be that all of these designers stumbled upon the same idea at the same time?

"This is what fashion is," said Simon Jablon, the English designer behind the Linda Farrow sunglasses label, which was founded by his mother in 1970. "It is a trend. You can just sense it. You have a feeling for where things are going to go."

Designers are looking at the same things -- art exhibitions, fashionable parties, rock stars -- so their impulses are often surprisingly in step with one another. But sometimes it's possible to trace where their ideas are coming from.

Round frames last appeared as a fashion trend about two decades ago. In 1989, when Alain Mikli introduced a thick-rimmed version, Woody Hochswender wrote in *The New York Times* that "a modified John Lennon look is the newest old thing."

Before that, they were a defining element of hippie style during the 1960s counterculture movement -- just about the only time that round glasses could be described as an unqualified fashion hit. Throughout the last century, round glasses have been associated with celebrated architects, literary stars and intellectual thinkers -- Philip Johnson, Le Corbusier, Dominick Dunne, Gandhi -- almost all of them men and rarely a figure noted for his cutting-edge personal style, unless you count Mr. Chow.

And yet something about the style, as uncommercial as it may seem, has clicked with designers. Or, as it turns out, several things happened at roughly the same time, in 2007 and 2008, that help explain why you are seeing round sunglasses again.

One of the most intriguing explanations comes from Selima Salaun, the eyewear maven behind the Selima Optique shops. Ms. Salaun, who also develops styles for other designers, including Proenza Schouler and Adam Kimmel, noted that one of the biggest influences on her work was the black-and-white portraits taken in the 1950s and '60s by the Malian photographer Malick Sidibé, who was given a lifetime achievement award at the Venice Biennale art fair two years ago.

Shortly after that event, which was attended by prominent designers (Miuccia Prada, Karl Lagerfeld, Stefano Pilati, Azzedine Alaïa, Alberta Ferretti and Mr. Jacobs among them), Mr. Sidibé, now in his 70s, began to have an unexpected fashion moment. Designers sought out monographs of his work, notably a 2004 edition published by Steidl that conveyed the exuberance of postcolonial West Africa with images of stylish young men and women, many of them wearing incredible sunglasses.

Echoes of his work then began to appear in designer collections and in the images created for their promotion. A new line called Suno replicated the staging of Mr. Sidibé's photographs for its lookbook, right down to the checkerboard marble floor. In April, Mr. Sidibé's work was also featured in *T: The New York Times Style Magazine*, as a fashion story, including several of the photographer's 17 children dressed in clothes from Marni and Dries Van Noten.

"A lot of designers used his book," Ms. Salaun said.

But it was not Mr. Sidibé's influence alone that set off the trend. John Lennon deserves some credit, too. In July 2007, Mr. Lennon's name was again in the news when a pair of his wire-rimmed round glasses were sold at auction, drawing bids of more than \$1.5 million, the BBC reported, though the final sale price, which was never disclosed, was believed to be far less.

That sale did not escape the attention of Kristen McCabe, a buying executive at Ilori, the upscale sunglasses retailer started by Luxottica Group in 2007. Ms. McCabe had a hunch that round glasses would return because they mesh with other eyewear themes occurring at the moment, like vintage, geek-chic and Hollywood.

It also helps that Mr. Lennon's image, in round sunglasses, has been peering at New Yorkers from subway walls and billboards since May, on posters publicizing a Lennon exhibition at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Annex in SoHo. That show ignited requests for round sunglasses at stores around the city.

"Women are really embracing them," Ms. McCabe said. "Lady Gaga was seen in an airport in Japan this weekend wearing them."

When Proenza Schouler introduced round sunglasses in spring 2008, the designers were actually so far ahead of the trend that they were at a disadvantage. Circular frames are not face-friendly, Ms. McCabe said, and usually look best on women with strong jaw lines, so the line's initial styles were difficult to sell. But newer versions, which are slightly larger and more angular, with the stems positioned higher on the frame, have been a success.

Jack McCollough and Lazaro Hernandez, the designers of the label, said in an e-mail message that they had been bored with the prevailing Wayfarer look and that, while looking at images of midcentury factory workers in goggles, "something about the simplicity of that shape against the face turned us on."

Still, the story of round would not be complete without a nod to the hippies. This year's Broadway revival of "Hair," while not exactly fashion friendly, had its first performances last summer at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park. At a preview last May, its cast performed at the Costume Institute gala at the Metropolitan Museum of Art before an audience that included a spectrum of international fashion designers.

By the end of the year, as Ms. McCabe and other retailers were looking at styles for spring 2009 at trade shows like the Vision Expo in New York and Las Vegas or the SILMO international eyewear exhibition in Paris, round shapes were widespread.

Mr. Jablon of Linda Farrow, who also produces sunglasses for Dries Van Noten, Matthew Williamson, Raf Simons and others, said that it was probably the most natural shape for designers to embrace, and he predicted that another signature Lennon style -- an upside-down pear shape -- would be the next big thing after that.

He must be onto something. Two of his clients, Mr. Jablon said, just had the same idea.



# PRINTS AND THE REVOLUTION

FROM MILAN TO MALI, A RIOT OF CHECKS, STRIPES, PATTERNS AND POLKA DOTS.

Photographed by **MALICK SIDIBÉ** Fashion editor: **ANDREAS KOKKINO**

Assitan Sidibé (this page) wears a Marni polka-dot top. Christian Lacroix striped top. Marc Jacobs dress.



Fataumata Cissé (this page, from left) wears a **Junya Watanabe** multicolored top and green plaid skirt. **Miu Miu** bag. **Zoraïde** shoes. Mamadou Gamara wears a **Dsquared2** blue-and-white striped shirt. **Missoni** multicolored vest and pale blue pants. **Gucci** shoes. Mariam Sidibé wears a **Nicole Miller** multicolored dress. **Tsumori Chisato** multicolored wrap-skirt. **Christian Louboutin** shoes. **Albertus Swanepoel** hat. **Dries Van Noten** necklace. Opposite page, from left: Modibo Zounkara wears an **Ann Demeulemaester** dress and **Blair**





Mouibatou Cissé (this page, clockwise from top left) wears a Prada red-black-and-white dress. Lassine Sidibé wears a Comme des Garçons Homme Plus black-and-white jacket. Prada white shirt. Raf Simons sunglasses. Saoudotou Traoré wears a Betsey Johnson black-and-white polka-dot dress. Marc Jacobs multicolored skirt. Chloé bag. Matakari Dembelé wears a Tsumori Chisato blue-and-white top. 3.1 Phillip Lim blue-black-and-white dress. Belt from New York Vintage. Title: *Black and White*

# Art in America

JUNE/JULY 2005



View of Emile Guebehi's sculptures and Malick Sidibé's photographs; at Jack Shainman.

## Malick Sidibé and Emile Guebehi at Jack Shainman

This exhibition of photographs by Malick Sidibé and figural sculptures by Emile Guebehi allowed for a consideration of two African artists, contemporaries in age, in the context of the postcolonial experience of identity, individuality, self-image, beauty and sexuality. Three hundred of Sidibé's lovely black-and-white photographs were on view, all tonally nuanced gelatin silver prints of different sizes and formats, and ranging in date from 1956 to 2003. They were arranged in four big circular clusters on the walls of the gallery—an effective way of displaying such a very large selection. Many were framed by a thin strip of light brown tape enclosing the protective glass, which was painted with floral borders in red, yellow, dark green and brown. It made for a colorful presentation, especially in the company of Guebehi's polychrome statues, life-size figures that stood directly on the floor, thereby inhabiting our realm.

Sidibé (b. 1935) is a highly accomplished portrait photographer who opened his Studio Malick in Bamako, Mali, in 1962. Since the late '90s, he has achieved increasing international recognition. The subjects in his portraits are shown

standing, sitting or reclining, full- or bust-length, alone or in groups. These people make eye contact with us or look away, often assuming poses and facial expressions found in earlier traditions of portraiture. What makes Sidibé's photographs so riveting, besides their technical and formal accomplishment, are the ways in which the sitters combine Western and indigenous styles, sporting clothes of pattern-rich fabric and the various fashionable hairstyles of their day. Highly self-aware, they want to look their very best—to be seen as they see themselves. Sidibé is the Nadar of his people.

In a recent series, Sidibé has photographed women turned away from the viewer with their bare backs exposed to view. The sitters do not wish to be identified, for the images are considered to be risqué—an eroticism that, in the exhibition, provided a bridge to Guebehi's sculptures of nude or scantily clad women, embodying an African canon of beauty. Guebehi (b. 1937) works in Abidjan in the Ivory Coast. His extraordinarily sensual and realistic *femmes fatales*, made of coconut wood and putty, painted in glossy enamels and sometimes embellished with other mediums, stand in arrested poses making angular gestures (all untitled, 2004). The tradition of carving statues of highly voluptuous women goes back many centuries in West Africa; Guebehi updates the form in these contemporary females. One young girl wearing sandals and a tiny thong raises her right hand to her mouth as if she were surprised. A slightly older woman, also wearing just a thong, her arms hanging by her side, turns her head and advances her leg as if walking. The bodies are hard and immaculate. A comparable aura of individual perfection is achieved in Sidibé's photographs.

—Michaël Amy

# WEEKEND Arts FINE ARTS LEISURE

The New York Times

## Art in Review

### Emile Guebehi Malick Sidibé

Jack Shainman  
513 West 20th Street, Chelsea  
Through Feb. 5

Malick Sidibé, the internationally celebrated studio portrait photographer from Mali, and Emile Guebehi, an Ivory Coast sculptor, were paired in an exhibition at Deitch Projects six years ago. For that show, Mr. Guebehi contributed specially commissioned life-size cartoonish dancers copied from figures in Mr. Sidibé's photographs. For this exhibition, Mr. Guebehi is represented by striking new sculptures that are all his own.

The show features painted wood and putty representations of almost comically full-figured, naked or partly naked women, some visibly pregnant, some bigger and some smaller than life; a life-size portrait of a tribal queen in a purple dress; and a life-size, three-figure tableau in which a big, muscular man threatens to kill a light-skinned infant in front of his naked, imploring wife, who he presumes has had intercourse with a white man. The sculptures look like the works of a folk artist with a fetish for maternal women.

Mr. Guebehi's sculptures nicely complement Mr. Sidibé's photographs, which also look like the works of a self-taught artisan. (Coincidentally, both artists are 73.) The gallery has installed scores of his portraits from the last 40 years in circular clusters. They range from snapshot to easel-size, and while many are conventionally formal, many others are casually or eccentrically composed and printed. Many have colorful, leaf and flower-patterned borders added by the artist.

A series of his newer black-and-white images depict heavy women in long striped skirts with their backs exposed; they seem to be animated by more private and probably erotic concerns. A curious resonance arises between those works and Mr. Guebehi's sculptures of corpulent women.

KEN JOHNSON



# Showing African Works As They Were Intended: For Life, Not Museum

By HOLLAND COTTER

PHILADELPHIA — Leontyne Price singing Bach is what I thought of when I saw the Yoruba carving of a seated woman, a child on her back and a big bowl in her hands, in "African Art, African Voices" at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. With her tensed stance and closed eyes, she projects the throbbing gravity of that sound.

Then I thought, Why, with all the election-year jabber about values, aren't Americans crowding into galleries of African art all over the country to see such truly adult models of goodness embodied, of moral poise in a slip-sliding world? One reason is that we don't know what we're looking at when we look at African art. We're still seeing what the Museum of Modern Art saw in its 1984 "Primitivism and Modern Art" exhibition: things "monstrous and ominous, such as Conrad's Kurtz discovered in 'The Heart of Darkness'" as one of the curators wrote. That was hogwash, of course, but tenacious hogwash. We're far from being clean of it.

Aesthetic conventions are also a problem. Traditional African art and traditional Western art museums make a bad fit. Museums are cultural deep freezes. Their purpose is to stop objects from moving and changing, keep them stationary, retard their decay, arrest their history. In this sort

## 'African Art, African Voices'

Philadelphia Museum of Art

of protective custody, art is a passive phenomenon. It is viewed; it is studied; it is enjoyed.

A lot of modern Western art is conceived as passive, tailor-made for a museum life. But objects originally meant to be functionally active have to relinquish their function, and with it part of their meaning, to qualify as art in an institutional setting.

Traditional African art — much of it, anyway — is functional almost by definition. Its value lies as much in what it does as in how it looks, and doing things requires mobility. Objects move from here to there, interact with other objects and with people. Art goes into the field to ensure that crops come up. It entertains through dances, gymnastics, storytelling. By reporting gossip and satirizing local politics, it keeps a community up on the news.

"African Art, African Voices" remains at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Benjamin Franklin Parkway at 26th Street, (215) 684-7700, through Jan. 2.



"Untitled (Three Girls and a Baby)," a 1986 photograph by Malike Sidibe.

It also serves as a social regulator and a moral agent, a cool instrument for handling hot situations like judging crime, settling disputes and confronting evil. It offers instructions in deportment and shapes self-definition. It promotes physical and psychological health. At once conservative and progressive, art's goal is to maintain social order in the face of chronically threatened disorder, even if doing so requires changing society itself.

If, during an arduous, hands-on career, art suffers wear and tear, becomes a beat-up version of its original, spiffy self, that's all right. As long as it is in active use, it is alive and valuable. When it becomes permanently inactive, it becomes something else. And something else is what we see in art museums.

Is it possible to restore this vivacity, or some sense of it, to African art in a mainstream museum setting? Many exhibitions have attempted to do so over the past two decades, and "African Art, African Voices" is among the more recent. The show originated at the Seattle Art Museum with an effort by the resident curator of African art, Pamela McClusky, to rethink the permanent African display along the lines of a few basic propositions.

One, African art is a dynamic, multimedia, multisensory experience; sight, sound, smell and touch all play a part. Two Africans are the original and expert curators of their own art. Three, far from being



Ga Wree Wree mask of wood, cloth, bells, leopard's teeth, hairpins, shells and twine.

## Pieces meant to entertain or to inform or to ensure that crops come up.

an artifact of the past, African art is still vital and in every way — intellectually, aesthetically, politically — pertinent to the present.

Applying these ideas to the Seattle collection, Ms. McClusky produced a solid, personable book, "Art From Africa: Long Steps Never Broke a Back" (Princeton University Press), and the exhibition, coordinated at the Philadelphia Museum by John Zarobell, an assistant curator.

It opens with a sculpture and a moving picture, a Benin bronze head set in front of a panoramic film of contemporary African cities. Benin bronzes can date back as early as the 12th century, yet in them past and present fuse. Their semirealist style makes them a comfortable entry point to African art for contemporary Western audiences. And although a Benin head would seem to have no connection to the jostling streets and noisy markets in the film, it may well have been produced in just such an urban culture.

From this point on, the show divides into thematic sections shaped by several curatorial advisers, all but one of them African. Their contributions put Ms. McClusky's idea of filtering African art through African eyes into play, with particularly striking results in the selection of Maasia objects from Kenya.

They were acquired for the collection by

Kakuta Hamisi, a Maasai scholar and a former intern at the Seattle Art Museum. He arranged for the museum to send money to his home village to build a school. In return, villagers gave the museum personal objects of their own choice, from ordinary household items to handsome beadwork ornaments, for the collection, in the process shaping the picture that a Western audience would have of their culture.

An absorbing documentary film of the villagers presenting their donations to Mr. Hamisi is on view in the gallery. In fact, in general film is given unusual prominence in this show as a means of establishing an atmospheric context for objects. And on the whole it does exactly what it's supposed to do, enhance and expand the art experience.

It's thrilling to see Asante gold jewelry up close in a museum vitrine, where its symbolism can be scrutinized and its craftsmanship admired. But to see the same jewelry worn by a king and his entourage during open-air enthronement festivities, as we do in a film here, is instantly to comprehend art's role as a component of social theater, a tool of political persuasion.

Films of masquerades in Nigeria and Sierra Leone give a comparable sense of immediacy to displays of Gelede and Sowe masks, objects that are now usually seen in isolation were once part of elaborate, kinetic ensembles. At the same time, however, many individual pieces in the show, even without audiovisual enhancement, generate tremendous energy.

A standing male Kongo figure is certainly one, with his combative wrestler's stance, his torso bristling with nails and his eyes covered with mirrors. A type of Dan mask called Ga Wree Wree, snaggle-toothed and



"Mother and Child Figure for Sango," a 19th-century Yoruba work.

wearing an elegant hairpin-and-cowry-shell hat, is another. And then, looming over everything, there is the eight-foot-tall image of the spirit named Basinjom, from Cameroon, composed of a feather-crowned alligator mask and a midnight-blue caftan that trails on the ground.

Monstrous and ominous? Well, awesome for sure and for a reason. The Kongo figure, once packed with potent medicines, was meant to face down evil and protect innocence. His mirrored eyes reflected the heaven. The Dan mask, at once sinister and soigné, was a supernatural judiciary agent who settled personal and communal arguments that might have led to bloodshed and whose verdicts had the weight of law.

As to the towering Basinjom — the name means "god's medicine" — he was a combination of avenging angel and detective, a hunter of witches and other malign beings. He is said to have been particularly active during the colonial period, when African communities, and the moral paradigms they represented, were being shattered.

The Basinjom costume was once actually worn in a religious initiation by one of the show's curatorial advisers, the art historian Robert Farris Thompson. This protean scholar has done more than any other to advance the concept of African art as interactive drama. He has also been assiduous in tracing that dynamic from the past into the present. And "African Art, African Voices" follows his lead in a concluding selection of contemporary work.

Several of the artists — Malike Sidibe, Zwelethu Mthethwa, William Kentridge, Yinka Shonibare — are well known internationally. Most work in media that are foreign to pre-modern Africa. Almost all make objects for museum display. Yet in every piece chosen, the traditional moral weight — the sense of art as a complex system of lived, in-the-now values — is sustained. That's why, when I saw Mr. Sidibe's 1986 photograph taken in Bamana, Mali, of two solemn women in vibrant striped dresses flanking a third woman with a baby on her lap, I thought of the Yoruba mother and child. And I heard the music again, but a little changed. Maybe Lutheran soul with an Afro-pop beat.

# The Art Newspaper

NO. 133, FEBRUARY 2003

## Malick Sidibé: Studio Malick, Bamako Jack Shainman Gallery

Had exposure times been shorter in the first days of photography, those 19th-century portrait sitters might look less grimly bored, and more like Malick Sidibé's exuberant subjects, ordinary folks who seem genuinely thrilled to be in front of a camera. Sidibé, who took these photographs at his studio in Mali mainly during the late 1960s, 70s and 80s, was concerned with capturing the beauty of his fellow city dwellers. His photographs, nearly all of them postcard sized, as originally printed, are infused with the simple joy of posing. Two young women looking coy, a young bride, defiantly proud, a group of strapping young men acting tough—these are a few in a vast cast of characters that marches through these pictures (right, "Cigarette-Poste Radio, 1976"). Like the equally stunning, formal studio portraits of Sidibé's contemporary, the late Seydou Keita (whose work was recently paired with Sidibé's in a traveling show aptly titled "You Look Beautiful Like That"), Sidibé's work ennobles his fellow Africans, and the small scale of these pictures seems, ironically, to enlarge their effect, as it is necessary to move in quite close to get a good look. The show at Jack Shainman (until 8 February)—assembled during Mr Shainman's recent trip to Mali—calls up an entire community; gazing at these little pictures, evokes the mood of Sidibé's studio itself, where people would gather to gossip, play cards or just hang around: "it was always very lively! I'd put up a large sign: 'Studio Malick',...that place was jammed!"



Chosen by Sarah Douglas

## ART IN REVIEW

### **Malick Sidibé**

**'Mali, 1974'**

*Jack Shainman  
513 West 20th Street, Chelsea  
Through Feb. 2*

Along with Seydou Keïta, who died in November, Malick Sidibé has become one of the best-known modern African portrait photographers in the West. For 40 years, clients have been visiting his studio in Bamako, Mali, to take advantage of his pictorial flair, which seems to lend every sitter an effortless chic.

The real news in this show of two dozen beautiful pictures, though, is their format. For most exhibitions, Mr. Sidibé's work is enlarged to a scale that fits Western notions of art photography, meaning competitive with the dimensions of paintings. Shainman breaks this pattern by presenting vintage prints as they were produced for Mr. Sidibé's clients: just a few inches high and framed with borders of brown tape.

Seen this way, the images retain a sense of their original context. They were conceived as keepsakes rather than display pieces, things to be carried in a pocket or purse, sent through the mail or passed from hand to hand. Not surprisingly, the photographer's distinctive style — tonally bold, sparsely decorative — is seen to particular advantage at this scale. So are the personalities of his subjects. Because they require close-up viewing, their portraits have an intimate, confiding air; they pull you in and hold you there.

It's great that Shainman has chosen to show Mr. Sidibé's work in this form. In fact, with him and other contemporary African artists, including Claudette Schreuders and Zwelethu Mthethwa, on the exhibition schedule, this gallery has been looking more adventurous by the year, a rare phenomenon in Chelsea. (There is also a show by Keïta at Sean Kelly Gallery in Chelsea through Feb. 2.)

HOLLAND COTTER

## ART REVIEW

# At Harvard, Images in a Distinctive African Style

By HOLLAND COTTER

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — The several buildings and collections that make up the Harvard University Art Museums encompass riches beyond count, though the art of Africa isn't among them. Not that Harvard owns no African art. It owns plenty, but most of it is housed, as it has been for well over a century, in a separate on-campus institution, the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, where it stays.

In an effort to get Africa into the larger art historical mix at Harvard, this season the art museums have scheduled three concurrent exhibitions devoted to African material, old and new. One of them represents a first-time collaboration with the Peabody Museum.

This integration of resources is long overdue for a university that has the largest Afro-American studies program in the United States. It also makes timely sense, given a growing public interest in the hugely diverse stretch of cultural terrain known as "African art." Numerous exhibitions across the country are being devoted to various aspects of it this year. And as an art historical field, it is generating some of the most exciting scholarship around.

All three exhibitions at Harvard are modest in size but strong in concept, in design and in their accompanying publications. They are organized by young curators with close ties to the university, and two of the shows are devoted to contemporary African photography, a category barely noticed in the West before a decade or so ago.

"You Look Beautiful Like That: The Portrait Photographs of Seydou Keïta and Malick Sidibé" at the Fogg Art Museum showcases work by two still-active photographers from the West African city of Bamako, in Mali. A generation apart in age, each helped shape distinctively African photographic styles.

Mr. Keïta, now in his 70's and with international stature, picked up the rudiments of the medium from two older Bamako photographers, Mountaga Dembelé and the French colonial resident Pierre Garnier. In 1948 he established a local practice making portraits, often in a postcard-size format. Over the years he has produced thousands of negatives, most of which are still extant.

He did much of his work in controlled outdoor settings, often in the courtyard of his home. In place of European-style painted scenes, he used boldly patterned African fabrics, including his own bedspread, as backdrops. When his subjects wore robes of contrasting design, the optical clash

"You Look Beautiful Like That: The Portrait Photographs of Seydou Keïta and Malick Sidibé" remains at the Fogg Art Museum, 32 Quincy Street, Cambridge, Mass., (617) 495-9400, through Dec. 16. "Marking Places: Spatial Effects of African Art" is on longterm view at the Fogg. "Beyond Decorum: The Photography of Iké Udé" is at the Sert Gallery, Carpenter Center for Visual Arts, 24 Quincy Street, Cambridge, (617) 495-9400, through Oct. 21.



Fogg Art Museum

In Bamako, Mali, in 1972, three young shepherds showed their best to the photographer Malick Sidibé.

could be exhilaratingly vibrant. He also devised flattering poses — in one, a subject is authoritatively seated, in another she reclines on cushions as if at home — that added up to a signature style.

Also working in Bamako, beginning in the 1960's, was Malick Sidibé. The pictures for which he has gained attention are his on-the-spot shots of the city's night life during the heady early years of national independence, when Western pop music and fashions transformed the look of urban youth culture.

But this change can also be seen in Mr. Sidibé's wonderful studio portraits, particularly when they are paired with Mr. Keïta's, as they are in the Harvard show, which has been organized by Michelle Lamunière, an assistant curator in the department of photography at the Fogg.

Here, in pictures made some 20 years apart, there are marked differences in clothing styles, in the sitters' choices of props and even in body language. At the same time, no firm generational lines can be drawn: one of Mr. Sidibé's clients poses with his favorite sheep, while one of Mr. Keïta's appears in American hipster attire. What is certain is that throughout the better part of the 20th century, both photographers have been creating innovative, distinctive and immensely stylish modern images of, and for, Africans.

A second exhibition, "Beyond Decorum: The Photography of Iké Udé" is installed in the Sert Gallery of the Carpenter Center for Visual Arts, next door to the Fogg. Organized by Mark H. C. Bessire and Lauri Firstenberg, the show originated at the Maine College of Art in Portland, where Mr. Bessire is director. But there is a strong Harvard connection: both curators studied at the university and Ms. Firstenberg is now a doctoral candidate in its art history program.

Born in Nigeria in 1963, Mr. Udé has lived in the United States since 1981 and he has shaped a versatile career as a photographer, performer and

founding editor of the handsomely designed glossy magazine called aRude, in which fashion, celebrity and attitude meet.

In all of these roles, Mr. Udé is essentially a conceptual artist who combines per panache with a needle-sharp socio-political wit. In his series of "Cover Girl" photographs begun in the mid-90's, he reworks the covers of international magazines to give them content: his version of GQ, for example, features his own androgynous-looking face. A headline announcing "Conservative Skirt the Working Man"; his blood-red Condé Traveler cover has a 19th-century print of a trans-Atlantic slave ship and a headline reading "The Sardine Pack."

In addition to these twists on race and gender, Mr. Udé also deftly plays with a specifically African content. In his "Uli Portraits" series, nude models are covered with patterns, based on a form of body painting associated with Nigerian Igbo culture, which the artist is descended. Similarly, his personal style, which includes makeup and gender-bending apparel, has sources in performances that include men in female roles.

Mr. Udé's public persona and his photographs are extensions of each other. Both are physically manipulated, hybrid creations, at once Western and African, or neither of the two. He's some kind of thing in the process of developing.

Back at the Fogg, the work in the exhibition "Marking Places: Spatial Effects of African Art" is closer to familiar notions of African art. Organized by Kristina Van Dyke, another doctoral candidate in African art at the university, the show reverses a pet exhibition theme of recent years rather than asking how context affects the meaning of traditional African objects, Ms. Van Dyke explores ways in which objects shape their environment.

Carved Yoruba house posts turn a patch of earth into a royal enclosure. Intricately woven baskets filled with jewelry transform a home into a high-style House Beautiful. An ornate masquerade costume transports a dancer spiritually from the earthly to the spiritual realm.

Ms. Van Dyke's subject is broad, poetically accessible, and she has given it arresting illustrations, many of her points with objects. Her first-time loan from the Peabody to one of the neighboring Harvard art museums. Her show has had an extended but temporary run at the Peabody as happened with another exhibition of African art, drawn from the William Teel collection, stalled there a few years ago.

When the earlier exhibition went up, there was talk of establishing a gallery for African art at the Fogg, where it would join Renaissance and Impressionist painting, the classical and Western art. The plan for a permanent gallery didn't come to pass at the time. But why can't Van Dyke's show be regarded as marking a place for it to happen now?