

(Fig. 4) also obliquely recalled El Anatsui's use of found wooden logs with minimal human interventions to create installations. Here, Onuora took a satirical poke at what may be construed as open season on Nigeria's political space (the show took place a few days to Nigeria's general elections). Elongated semiabstract figures looking up to another, larger abstract figure wove an all-too-familiar narrative on the relationship between politicians and the electorate.

Chike Akabuiké's *Grazing Colony* (Fig. 5) interrogated violence and conflict within contexts of territorialism, conquest, and power imbalance. It evoked the image of a rampaging herd of beasts (presumably cattle) chaperoned by herders depicted as half beasts and half men (an obvious reference to the trail of bloodshed, killings, rape, arson, and pillage attributed to the activities of Fulani herdsmen, particularly in the middle belt and southern regions of Nigeria). The destructive force, aggression, and uncensored power in *Grazing Colony* were projected through the dynamic forms constructed with old logs and branches of wood shaped by nature and the natural elements. The influence of Anatsui's *On Their Fateful Journey Nowhere* is clearly evident in this piece. On the down side, the strong light coming from the undraped windows made viewing this piece disconcerting and very much diminished its impactful presence.

Identity and the relativity of human thought was the underlying theme in Ekene Anikpé's *Uche bu Akpa* (The mind is a bag) (Fig. 6). The installation struck formal and conceptual chords with Anatsui's *Waste Paper Bags* (2004–2010). It also pointed out new directions in Anikpé's use of the bottom end of beverage cans cut out from the parent body for conceptual musings. In *Uche bu Akpa*, unlike in his earlier works where it was used in its natural state, the artist infused the medium with new meanings and contexts by wrapping it in colorful textile materials before joining hundreds of them together with copper wire to form bags of different shapes and sizes. The use of textiles as identity marker even in a simulated state as seen in the metal sculptures of Anatsui finds other interpretative contexts in the works of Eva Obodo, Amuche Ngwu, and Sunday Odoh.

Eva Obodo's *Exodus I* (Fig. 7), a soft sculpture installation produced with jute, cotton fabric, and thread, expanded the stylistic quotient of Nsukka school art. The artist's studio processes, which involve techniques of stitching, tying, dyeing and bundling, were deployed as contextual and symbolic signposts for the objectification of human experience. With respect to the compositional strategies employed in *Exodus I* and in other related works by the artist, Obodo struck "an aesthetic and formal balance between what can be viewed as both sculpture and painting."<sup>4</sup>

Another work by the artist, *Oracle in Reverse* (Fig. 8) explored the materiality of charcoal as an expressive and evocative medium and further illustrates the radical aesthetics of the language of sublime awe.

Beyond paying tribute to El Anatsui, who attended the show's opening, the exhibition provided critical ground for engaging researchable anxieties that frame debates on the role and place of appropriation and influence in the making of art and artists. Considering that the show contained a rich trove of information on the current stylistic trajectory of Nsukka School art, staging the exhibition in Lagos, Nigeria's art capital, would have exposed the works and the participating artists to a wider audience. Sadly, *Igwebuíké* flew under the radar and with it, a robust understanding and appreciation of the radical aesthetics that have come to be synonymous with Nsukka school art.

GEORGE ODOH and NNEKA ODOH both teach painting and African art history in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. george.odoh@unn.edu.ng

#### Notes

- 1 In his introductory text to the *Igwebuíké* exhibition catalogue, Ozioma Onuzulike (2019) used the term "aesthetics of the critical mass" to describe how the artists featured in the show assembled individual pieces of materials that were similar yet varied in form, color, and texture in ways that initiate a chain of aesthetic experience in viewers.
- 2 Chinedu Ene-Orji (2019) critically engages the *uli* experiment and its stylistic manifestations in the drawing culture of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- 3 Sylvester Okwuonodu Ogbechie (2009) uses the term "language of sublime awe" and "radical aesthetics" as stylistic markers of Nsukka School art. The aesthetic regime of this style reflects dialogic encounters between indigenous knowledge and local/global sites of artistic production.
- 4 Ozioma Onuzulike (2019) draws this inference based on Eva Obodo's studio processes and creative sensibility.

#### References cited

- Ene-Orji, Chinedu. 2019. "Continuity and Change in Nsukka Art: George Odoh's *Illustration of Things Fall Apart*." *African Arts* 52 (3): 48–61.
- Ogbechie, Sylvester Okwuonodu. 2009. "From Masks to Metal Cloth: Artists of the Nsukka School and the Problems of Ethnicity." *Critical Interventions* 3 (4): 133–46.
- Onuzulike, Ozioma. 2019. "Igwebuíké: Aesthetics of the Critical Mass." In *Igwebuíké: exhibition of sculpture in honour of El Anatsui at 75 years*, pp. 3–5. Enugu: The Sculpture Section, Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria.

## book review

**Déborder la Négritude: Arts, politique et société à Dakar**  
 edited by Mamadou Diouf and  
 Maureen Murphy  
 Dijon: Les presses du reel, 2020. 250 pp.,  
 46 color ill., 13 b/w ill. €24, paper



reviewed by Susan Kart

*Déborder la Négritude* is a tremendously welcome anthology on twentieth century Senegalese art. It introduces French audiences to research by several Anglophone scholars, whose work appears in dialogue with European and Senegalese scholars. The book further presents several significant Senegalese artists in their own words through interviews conducted with them between the years of 2003 and 2019. Presented in French with several essays translated from the English by Zoé Jourdain, this book presents Senegalese, French, and North American viewpoints on Senegalese post-colonial art in equitable dialogue. The book traces key movements from the 1960s through their interpretation by artists of subsequent generations, making a strong contribution to scholarship of Senegalese art by dismantling stereotypes associated with the well-studied Ecole de Dakar artists and the first generation of teachers/scholars at the Ecole Nationale des Beaux-Arts du Senegal. It further presents the important work being done by subsequent generations of artists working from the 1990s through today as part of a sustained discussion of art (and politics) from the 1960s to the present.

*Déborder la Négritude* emerges from an international symposium "Dakar: scènes, acteurs et décors artistiques. Reconfigurations locales et globales?" held at the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art (INHA) from April 27–28, 2017. Mamadou Diouf and Maureen Murphy were the co-organizers of the conference, and the chapters in their current anthology arise from the papers read at this symposium and the artists interviewed during the proceedings. The goal of the symposium at the time was to situate the work of contemporary Senegalese artists into the history of modern art making in Senegal. Beginning with the influence of

inaugural president L.S. Senghor and his role in creating and sustaining the national art school (now the ENA–Ecole Nationale des Arts) in Dakar, the organizers proposed further discussion around the role of the art biennales, begun under Senghor in the late 1960s and reconstituted in the early 1990s for their creation of an art market for today's artists (INHA 2017). The unquestioned strength of this symposium was that Murphy and Diouf brought together scholars and artists from three continents to focus on how contemporary Senegalese art has been formulated and practiced in a globally cognizant, internationally strategic manner from its inception.

The book is primarily dedicated to the scholars and artists at the 2017 conference, although not every 2017 presentation appears here, while some papers not presented in 2017 are included in the book. It is divided into three sections, which largely progress in chronological order from independence to the present. The first section, "Récits esthétiques et politiques," begins with Joshua I. Cohen's take on "art nègre" and the artistic events of the 1960s, including the founding of the École de Dakar under Senghor. Coline Desportes and Giulia Paoletti further contribute to the Senghorian era through their important dissections of the French influences on artists, photographers, and certainly on Senghor himself. Murphy adds context by highlighting the impacts of the major Senegalese traveling exhibition *L'art sénégalais d'aujourd'hui* in 1974. Emmanuelle Chérel contributes a fascinating new reading of the artists Joe Ouakam (Issa Samb) and Vincent Meessen, who both based projects off of a photograph of Omar Blondin Diop, a Senegalese anticolonial revolutionary and promoter of street performance art who died under suspicious conditions in a jail on Gorée Island while serving a three-year prison sentence. In reading these essays as a group, what they do well is delete the notion of Senghor as the only political influence on the arts of the 1960s–80s and point out how other artists and revolutionaries were joined in a more fervent and desperate struggle against colonialism, assimilation, and the embrace of French values that seemingly pervaded all art produced during the Négritude period.

In the section "Confrontations et débordements," four authors bring the reader out of the Senghorian period and into the thirty years spanning the 1990s to the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Diouf looks at the work of El Hadji Sy<sup>1</sup> in order to examine one artist's refusal of Négritude aesthetics and his signature importance in the development of a post- (or rather anti-) Négritude art style. Elizabeth Harney takes another tack, examining how artists such as Cheikh Ndiaye and non-Senegalese artists have looked back to the Senghorian period, now conceptualized as "modern," and committed to a sort of

intentional nostalgia, what Harney terms the "retromodern," in projects featured in the 2018 edition of the Dak'Art Biennale. El Hadji Malick Ndiaye uses the image of the "vortex" to capture the importance of the Dak'Art Biennales from the 1990s to the present. He argues they served not just as important platforms for emerging African artists, but more crucially for the creation of Dakar as a primary destination city for the production and consumption of contemporary art in the global market. This, of course, was the subject of Joanna Grabski's 2017 book, *Art World City: The Creative Economy of Artists and Urban Life in Dakar*. As the book has not yet appeared in French, Grabski's summary of its main arguments here provides a helpful précis for French readers.

This brings us to the third and final section of the book, "Dialogues," which features master Senegalese artists Iba Ndiaye, Viyé Diba, Soly Cissé, Diadij Diop, Cheikh Ndiaye, and El Hadji Sy in conversation with Murphy, Diouf, Malick Ndiaye, and Grabski in regards to the issues discussed by the scholars at the conference in Paris and Senegalese postcolonial art more generally. With the exception of Iba Ndiaye's (2003) and El Hadji Sy's (2019), all of the artist interviews were conducted at the 2017 conference. Therefore, there is slight dissonance between the printed scholarly essays and the artist's commentaries, which reflect the discussions of the 2017 conference, and not the essays that appear in this volume. That being said, the last chapter in the book, Sy's 2019 interview, discusses neither the 2017 conference nor the preceding chapters. Murphy instead focuses her questions on historical exhibitions (*l'Art sénégalais d'aujourd'hui, Magiciens de la terre, 7 Stories About African Arts*), asking Sy to comment on them or look back at his role (in the case of *Magiciens*, his non-role) in these pivotal moments. This interview feels short and choppy, as if snippets were extracted and stitched together rather incongruously. Sy mentions his frustration with André Magnin, who approached him about participating in the 1989 *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition. Sy's comments that he was not a "magician or sorcerer" deserve more time, given that this was a primary concern about the racist, Eurocentric pedagogy of *Magiciens*. Yet Murphy's next question is to ask about the *7 Stories* exhibition in 1995. It feels like much was left out of this one exchange, and I was left wanting to ask Sy so much more about that moment in the late '80s.

What is most exciting about this volume is the multitude of voices and perspectives, from artist to historian, emerging scholar to established practitioner. There is ample room for the hidden and understudied stories emerging from Senegalese art practice over the last sixty years. So many "cooks in the kitchen" could have had the effect of creating a dissonant and incoherent cacophony of opinions, and

yet this anthology avoids this. Given that the focus of the 2017 conference and this volume is the legacy of the Senghorian period and the way subsequent generations of artists have internalized that history, the contributors are all presenting different pieces of the same larger puzzle. The many contributors fill in gaps in the knowledge record of Senegalese art since independence, and the most successful moments in the book are when scholars and artists correct each other and help each other see a much bigger picture by putting all their information at each other's disposal.

For example, Murphy asks Soly Cissé about how he positions himself in relation to the artists who preceded him. Did he see himself as following in their footsteps or was he in disagreement with them during his artistic training at the École Nationale (p. 215)? His complete answer comes over several pages: his artistic practice is freedom. He was trained by artist-professors, he and his contemporaries were thus grounded in the history of African art taught to them, but they were willing to exploit this history for a new purpose, Cissé says, for the new needs of the times (p. 215). Cissé describes his complete independence from the thoughts and practices of his teachers and colleagues via his work with live sheep in one exhibition (p. 217). It is one thing to be taught; it is another to take what one has been taught and radically bend it into a new form. So no, is his ultimate answer to Murphy. He is not the inheritor of a legacy that must be safeguarded and preserved, he is free to do what he wants with that history. As he puts it, to be "Senegalese and sculpt [Roman] gladiators" (p. 219).

Cissé's comments find unexpected support in the words of Iba Ndiaye, one of the founding professors hired by Senghor to set up the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts. Ndiaye points out in his interview with Murphy that the three founding professors (Papa Ibra Tall, Pierre Lods, and Ndiaye) were frequently at odds with each other, constantly disagreeing on what should be taught and how. When Cissé and his peers were studying at the École, its very founders (and successors) were still in disagreement on its pedagogy, so there was no unified vision for Cissé to follow or rebel against, leaving him and his fellow student artists free to develop their own paths. The seemingly homogenized state-art of Négritude was always more dynamic than it appeared, and this is buttressed by Chérel's arguments about artists actively pushing back on Senghor's vision while he was ostensibly in charge of the arts and the government. Issa Samb's rebellion against the École was therefore a default rejection of the state, his artistic interventions much closer to political revolution than previously described. If there is a common thread throughout the formation and development of art in Senegal after 1960, it is the undeniable fact that art since this time is inextricably

married to politics. Happy marriage or not, the two have never finalized a divorce.

A single criticism emerges in this book, one that was also present in the 2017 symposium in Paris: while the work of emerging scholars is presented in both (Cohen, Paoletti, Desportes), the work of emerging artists is not. Further, while the work of female scholars was well represented at both, the work of female artists was hardly present (Harney's essay being an exception), and no female Senegalese artists were mentioned in any essays or included as artist presenters/interviewees. As women artists in Senegal have practiced alongside the male artists featured in this volume, especially since the 1990s, they are appropriate interlocutors for a volume that sets out to surpass the (patriarchal) legacy of Négritude. The inclusion of more emerging artists—male and female—who have inherited not just the École de Dakar style, but also the Laboratoire Agit-Art, Set-Setal, récupération, retromodern, hip-hop, and street styles along with their experiences in a myriad of international schools, travels and exhibitions would have made this book all the more perfect.

SUSAN KART is Assistant Professor of the Arts of Africa in the Department of Art, Architecture and Design and the Africana Studies Program at Lehigh University. She publishes on the arts of Francophone West Africa, the exhibition and display of African objects, and anticolonial movements in twentieth–twenty-first century African art histories. sek213@lehigh.edu.

#### Notes

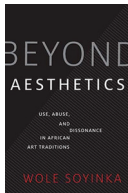
1 Note that El Hadji Sy's name is misprinted in the table of contents listing for Diouf's chapter as "El Hadj Sy." The artist's name appears correctly in Diouf's essay and throughout the rest of the book.

#### References cited

Institut national d'histoire de l'art (INHA). 2017. Programme du colloque international 'Dakar: Scènes, Acteurs et Décors Artistiques: Reconfigurations locales et globales?' LABEXCAP, Aprile. <http://labexcap.fr/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/DakarPrintFr.pdf>

## book review

***Beyond Aesthetics: Use, Abuse, and Dissonance in African Traditions***  
by Wole Soyinka  
New Haven, CT: Yale University Press  
in association with the Hutchins  
Center for African & African American  
Art, Harvard University. 160 pp.,  
11 b/w illus., \$25, hardcover



reviewed by Jenny S. Martel

In his most recent book, Nobel laureate, poet, essayist, and political activist Wole Soyinka offers a personal and poetic look at the politics and aesthetics of collecting. As a longtime art collector, Soyinka argues—usually passionately so—for the power of collecting as a vehicle for reclamation of Yoruba tradition and against dogmatic colonial and religious cultural cleansing. *Beyond Aesthetics* was developed and expanded from a three-part series of Richard D. Cohen Lectures delivered by the author at Harvard University in 2017. Of likely interest to art historians, the lectures were delivered concurrently with an exhibition at the Cooper Gallery of African and African American Art, which included objects from author's personal collection as well as the contemporary work of Nigerian artists Peju Alatise and Moyo Okediji, among others. Following the lecture format, the book is split into three chapters: "Oga, Na Original Fake, I Swear!"; "Procreative Deities: The Orisa's Triumphal March"; and last, "From Aso-Ebi to N\*\*\*\*wood." Like an unprintable profanity, Soyinka obscures "Nollywood," the common sobriquet identifying commercial Nigerian film and industry. The meaning of this gesture, not immediately explained, but derived eventually through the chapter's jaunty personal narrative, is representative of Soyinka's literary method of delivering meaning in *Beyond Aesthetics*. The discussion is achieved through highly personal narrative rather than organized chronologically, geographically, or by medium—this is not to say that *Beyond Aesthetics* is illogical, quite the contrary. However, much of the meaning and thematic application is discovered after reading and rereading, allowing the weaving storylines to permeate the consciousness in an organic way. Appropriately to the author's background, the text is best considered in the way one

might process a well-written play—language, story, and characterization may not obviously express underlying sociopolitical ideology; rather, these elements allude to deeper insights of this nature.

In the first chapter, Soyinka explains the acquisition process of some of his favorite objects, replete with ample tangential and amusing commentary. True to his literary character, Soyinka's first object—an entire domestic Sango shrine—is not exactly an object and was never actually acquired, much to Soyinka's chagrin. The sacred objects comprising the ancestral shrine were retrieved in their entirety by a mystery curator before Soyinka was able to do so himself. In addition to the shrine, Soyinka discusses the acquisition of a bracelet from the Sungbo Eredo and a Korean Silla dynasty clay mug. The second chapter continues with a discussion of an overtly sexualized "unmatched pair" of objects from the author's collection: a male monkey and a caryatid. This much admired (or reviled, depending on the audience), nearly life-sized duo graced the entry of his home study, creating what he calls a "Field of Force," until they were stolen—never to reappear despite earnest attempts at recovery. Of the monkey-caryatid couple, Soyinka states: "My immediate purpose, of course, was to insist that we do not have to be solemn over antiquities or their substitutes, otherwise we present a distorted and prissy approach to the African art traditions" (pp. 80–81). The diversity of these objects and personal anecdotes serve to underscore two important aspects of Soyinka's deliberately tenuous definition of "aesthetics": first, that a collection and therefore the objects within are ultimately a private extension of the self; and second, that there is an inherent beauty and value in ancient objects. These aspects include a highly personal and broadly applicable definition of aesthetics, respectively, but in the context of *Beyond Aesthetics*, Soyinka most enthusiastically maintains that admiring, collecting, and conserving the material embodiment of Yoruba culture is a weapon of good against cultural annihilation at the hands of religious zealots: "as long as one Santeria, *bembe*, or *candomblé* remains, and is placed at the service of its adoptive community—even as a reference point, or warren of options—humanity is enlarged and its totality benefits" (p. 127).

Throughout the text, Soyinka champions the march of the Orisa against iconoclastic destruction—most notably through *abiku*, the Yoruba child who is born, dies, and is born again. Soyinka argues that the Orisa religion has "never indulged in other-demonization, yet it has survived the assault of centuries, and is destined to survive into the same eternity that other religions consider their own special preserve" (p. 101). In past publications Soyinka has explored cultural syncretism with some delicacy and interest, but here the author