

Introduction

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This special issue of *Africanidades* is the product of a summer school focusing on Black Atlantic visual arts. Three sessions were scheduled on different continents: the first in Senegal, the second in Haiti and the third in Germany. In the end, the first gathering at the Théodore Monod Museum in Dakar (part of IFAN, which is directed by Malick Ndiaye) in March 2019 was the only session to take place. The second session, which was scheduled for June in Port-au-Prince, was cancelled due to local political upheaval. The third session in Hanover fell victim to the pandemic in early 2020. Despite these obstacles, we were still able to expand our network. The Kunstverein in Hanover organised a remarkable exhibition titled *Beyond the Black Atlantic*, which was accompanied by a wonderful catalogue.¹ At the start of 2021, a Zoom meeting was held for students to present their thesis projects. We decided to organise another meeting in Salvador da Bahia, although this too was disrupted by the pandemic. It is thanks to the generosity of the Volkswagen Foundation and the hospitality of MAFRO that this publication has been able to bring many of the participants back together.

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In his pioneering book on the Black Atlantic, Paul Gilroy did not discuss Africa, which remained a ghostly spectre in the background, nor explore the African diaspora in Latin America. Our approach to the Black Atlantic draws on his concept, while expanding the scope and adding nuance. Drafted in 2017, it reads:

Moving beyond Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic, we understand the Atlantic as a space of interaction shaped by the multiple connections and interrelations forged by African, European, Latin American and Caribbean activity over the last 500 years. Along its North-South and South-South axes, the Atlantic has become an increasingly 'globalised' site of contention, exchange and transformation. Therefore, we define Black Atlantic visual arts as those produced by artists of African origin or artists living in sub-Saharan Africa, employing a wide array of methods and techniques both within and beyond canonised Western formal languages. These artists' work does not necessarily form part of a clearly identifiable African stylistic tradition, although they may draw on African heritage as the subject of their work; equally, regardless of thematic concerns, these works may contain "the subterranean trace or voice of Africa" (Stuart Hall). In Atlantic interrelations past and present, contemporary African and diaspora artworks (these concepts will be discussed at our meetings) share a common cultural agenda, challenging Western modernity and contemporary ideas of globalisation while showcasing the diversity present in aesthetic expressions of the Black Atlantic.²

1 The artists whose work was displayed were Sandra Mujinga, Tchabalala Self, Paulo Nazareth and Kemang Wa Lehulere.

2 This was the initial definition. It would also be pertinent to include the influence of Black Atlantic visual arts on artists and art forms more commonly associated with Western culture.

It is clear, therefore, that our aim from the outset was to explore the relationship between anthropology and the history of art. When Brigitte Reinwald, a historian of Africa, agreed to join the management team and host the project at Leibniz University Hannover, the research project was transformed into a summer school. The majority of the thesis projects that we accepted were linked to the history of art. Anthropology was also present, as several of the texts in this dossier reveal. It is important to note that, in recent years, Black Atlantic art (at least contemporary art) has made its way out of ethnographic museums and museums of world cultures and into contemporary Western art centres. In light of this shift, we had to rethink our approach. Although anthropology can play an important role in casting light on the history of art, regardless of the region under study, Black Atlantic visual art must not be explored through a purely cultural lens.

In this volume, readers will find texts written by doctoral students from Benin, India, Haiti, Brazil, Cuba and Germany and by post-doctoral researchers and established scholars from South Africa, the United States, Senegal, Germany and France. We have sought to avoid a hierarchical structure, as the emerging ideas and questions raised by the doctoral students reflect the themes that haunt the present of the Black Atlantic: on the one hand, the issue of museums and their intended, desired interaction with educational institutions, and on the other, the collective memory generated or channelled by the state through museums and cultural mediation. The long-debated identity issue appears to rest on solutions aimed at constructing a collective memory. Contemporary art – postcolonial or otherwise – comes into play here, sometimes running counter to the reason of state. Yet sharing national cultural wealth also raises questions about citizenship. Artists take responsibility here, too. It must be noted that there are fewer doctoral students working on artistic practices. Our publication is not representative but it does suggest that, in Benin and Haiti especially, doctoral research is currently more focused on the relationship between collective memory, museums and pedagogy. This work provides insight into the new generation that we hope will delve deeper into and reinvent the field.

We have organised this dossier into three sections.

The first section features texts that focus on the two sides of the Atlantic: the American side and the African side. An essay on visual anthropology by Eduardo Monteiro opens the section, followed by a reflection on the 'issue of return' in 20th century Haitian art and on Vodou in contemporary art by Sterlin Ulysse and Niklas Wolf. In the next text, Katja Gentric reports on a three-part project spanning Cuba, Angola and South Africa, exploring the debate surrounding the multiple memories that artists attempt to bring into dialogue with one another and discussing what happens to artworks when they are sponsored by states. Tackling a topic that appears to have received little attention from researchers in the context of the Black Atlantic, Philippa Sissis pursues a line of research brilliantly opened up by Simon Njami's 2015 exhibition in Frankfurt on *Dante's Divine Comedy* reworked by African artists. Finally, Christoph Singler makes the argument for a history of Black Atlantic visual arts that revives the relationship with text and sign, both African and Western, among other key strands.

The second section focuses on contemporary artistic practices, touching on several key issues. It opens with an essay by Roberto Conduru on a practice that blurs the

boundaries between art with a capital A and an everyday life that subverts artistic codes in an understated manner. The topics explored in this section have given rise to numerous, sometimes heated debates and have triggered stubborn resistance: the stereotyped image of Black women that Betye Saar unpacks with a ferociously jubilant irony (Shaweta Nanda); Black abstraction driven by the refusal to depict Black bodies, explored from a feminist perspective (Huey Copeland); the artist's skin colour and the definition of Afro-descendant art (Cary Yero García); the origins of performance art and artistic challenges to the ruling powers in 1970s Senegal (Mallik Ndiaye), and finally, leading into the final section, the friction between modernism and memory in Guyana (Leon Wainwright).

The third section combines museography and collective memory, touching upon a variety of other disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, political science and historiography. On both sides of the Atlantic, memory arouses or reawakens latent conflicts that influence nation building. The reception of heritage by local audiences has received little attention from researchers on either side of the Atlantic. Gbénidaho Achille Zohoun discusses the topic in the context of Benin. Meanwhile, at the heart of the diaspora in Brazil, a museum focusing on Black culture is only tentatively accepted by the population: preceded by an overview of the history of racism in Brazil by Christine Douxami, Marcelo da Cunha's essay highlights the obstacles that hindered the creation of MAFRO, situating them largely among the local elites. His detailed account traces the museum's origins and casts light on the memory that other local majorities wish to build (or block, or build by blocking) of their Black diasporas. Kessler Bien-Aimé explores the collective memory conveyed by Duvalierist photography in Haiti. Barbara Prézeau describes the situation of Noailles art village in the suburbs of Port-au-Prince. Recently this jewel of the Haitian artistic scene was the scene of clashes between two criminal gangs, resulting in 15 deaths and more than 100 displaced families. To contribute to its reconstruction, we join a call for solidarity.

This section also contains texts by Jean-Mozart Féron and Fritz-Gérald Louis that address strategies for mediation or education on both sides of the Atlantic, illustrating the difficulties facing museums and raising questions as to the competing political and social interests surrounding museums and public art. Preceded by an exploration of the practices employed at a Beninese museum by David Gnonhouevi and Romuald Tchibofo that shows how important it is for Africa to recover its heritage, the section and the dossier close with an important contribution to the debate on the restitution of African art objects from Romuald Tchibofo.

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From our European perspective, the editors of this volume feel and hope that they have learned a lot from the texts. Between plenary sessions in Dakar, we discussed our working conditions, our prospects and our plans. The memory of these warm conversations remained with us throughout the editorial process. Despite this, this publication must not be the end of the summer school. Although academia aspires to be international, doctoral education is far from it. Our work with doctoral students from all walks of life has shown us that in order to create a common space for reflection (Aby Warburg's *Denkraum*), we must share our words and ideas, which remain the source of multiple disagreements. In particular, our understanding of the

term 'postcolonial' can take very different forms in different contexts. Perhaps this could be discussed at a future gathering. The same is true of our reading: in Europe, everyone is familiar with Warburg, Benjamin and Glissant. However, few in the Global North draw on the work of Paulin Hountondji, Ekpo Eyo or Valentin Mudimbe. Now that the topics of our research are global, let us endeavour to bring *all* educational institutions up to the same level. We must share our bibliographies, our sources and our resources more widely. Initiatives and reflections taking place in the Global South must be more broadly disseminated and taken into consideration in the North. It is said that in order to move forward together, the slowest partner's pace must be respected. Those who speak the loudest are not necessarily the quickest.

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A word on the illustrations. In a few cases, the image rights exceeded the budget of an online and free access journal. We have been forced to place a link that will take you to the image. We apologize for the inconvenience. On the other hand, Edu Monteiro, photographer carioca, was kind enough to share with us his PhD research in visual anthropology on Laamb and Ladja; Maksaens Denis and Josué Azor, artists based in Port-au-Prince, entrusted us with images of the Village of Noailles. We feel honored to be able to show their photographs.