

TIDIANE NDONGO



Bogolan and Ndongo's Contemporary Vision

Known as Mudcloth, Bogolan, an ancestral technique originating in Mali, was long an exclusively feminine practice before spreading to neighboring regions over the decades. This Bambara term, literally meaning "created with earth," evokes a dyeing method of impressive richness and complexity, using plant extracts such as ngalama (*Anogeissus Leiocarpus*) and clay, applied to woven cotton. This use of natural materials underlines a deep connection between art and the earth, where the material becomes both support and essential message.

Women preserved ancestral techniques while passing on graphic vocabularies charged with symbolism, reflecting Bambara cosmogony and beliefs. These motifs, inspired by animal tracks and human footprints, do more than simply decorate; they form a complex visual language that conveys cultural knowledge and values. Through these ideograms, they convey myths, historical narratives and moral advice, each drawing carrying a message to be deciphered to grasp its full depth. In this way, Bogolan, beyond its aesthetic function, reveals itself as a veritable didactic tool.

In this context, the work of Tidiane Ndongo stands out not only for its determination to perpetuate this age-old tradition, but also for its bold reinvention through the style he has named Dogodogoni, or "labyrinth" in the language of Bambara. This style transcends the simple repetition of traditional Bogolan motifs. It also incorporates signs from Bambara initiation societies. Notably, those from the Komo, the most prominent initiation society.

Ndongo addresses contemporary issues through this reinterpretation. These include the role of women, the challenges of migration, and societal and political issues. He also addresses many other pressing matters. He does all this while maintaining a dialogue with these ancestral symbols.

By offering a contemporary reinterpretation of Bogolan, Ndongo invites us to explore modern challenges and life's winding paths. His visual labyrinths, woven from intertwining strokes, create a sense of mystery and contemplation. By immersing themselves in these interweavings, viewers are led to meditate on the complexity and unpredictable nature of life, while being captivated by the harmony and intrinsic beauty of the works.

A Socio-Political Context in Transition

His work comes at a time when imported fabrics, notably Dutch wax, are increasingly market share over traditional African textiles like Kpokpo in Sierra Leone, Pano de Obra in Guinea-Bissau, Adanudo in Togo and Ghana, and Lamba akotifahana in Madagascar. This situation has revived debates around questions of cultural identity, appropriation, and acculturation. Through his aesthetics, Ndongo reaffirms the importance of traditional textiles, offering renewed visibility to symbols of African spirit and craftsmanship.

Ndongo's practice also unfolds within a socio-political context in flux. It is marked by the reconfiguration of geopolitical influences in the Sahel. This is particularly true in Mali, his homeland, which is experiencing major upheavals. These include a gradual break with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

In this transformative context, Ndongo's artworks serve as reflections of the region's realities. They provide insight into the complexities experienced by its people, and also highlight the tensions shaking the area.

Ndongo's mastery of the Bogolan technique is total, reflecting his 30 years of experience in this practice. The precision with which he traces each line of clay, an irreversible gesture, is the sign of a rare virtuosity. His complex labyrinths, in which each symbol is perfectly positioned, reveal his artistic maturity.

At the same time, it's essential to mention that Bogolan has also found its place in modern design thanks to pioneers like Chris Seydou. In the early 1980s, Seydou became the first African designer to collaborate with major haute couture houses such as Yves Saint Laurent and Paco Rabanne, integrating Bogolan symbols into high fashion. This introduction of Bogolan into the design world opened new pathways for this traditional technique. It allowed it to reach an international audience and enabled it to reinvent itself in a contemporary context.

By revisiting Bogolan's signs and motifs, Ndongo thus opens a labyrinth of meanings where each path leads to a deeper understanding of contemporary issues while preserving the richness of this ancient cultural heritage.