

DJIBRIL
COULIBALY

the Wake
OFF

Symbols of Life

Beyond perception

An Artistic Exploration of the Human Soul

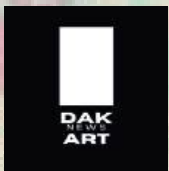
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TIDIANE
NDONGGO

Organizer



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CARAVAN
Transformation through the Arts

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Symbols of Life

Beyond perception

An Artistic Exploration of the Human Soul

The exhibition "Symbols of Life: Beyond Perception – An Artistic Exploration of the Human Soul", organized by Dakartnews in partnership with CARAVAN Arts, presents the work of two remarkable artists: Tidiane Ndongo and Djibril Coulibaly. Their art delves into the profound nature of symbols and the essence of life. Symbols are more than just visual elements; they are a means of expressing deeper human truths.

Echoing Léopold Sédar Senghor's view that African art should offer more than mere representation of objects, the artists invite us to look beyond surface appearances and engage with their work on a deeper level. Their creations serve as both symbols and suggestions, prompting us to explore the meanings behind the images.

The exhibition addresses universal themes such as identity, transformation, heritage, migration, and connection. Tidiane's intricate mudcloth patterns and Djibril's dynamic fingerprint motifs encourage reflection on the human condition and our shared experiences.

Symbols of Life: Beyond Perception is an invitation to explore these universal truths through the powerful lens of art, offering a profound and sensory journey that resonates well beyond the visual by speaking to our souls.

The Transformational Power of Art

"I realized... that painting... has the power to reveal to ourselves our secret humanity," writes David Diop, the Booker Prize winning Senegalese-French novelist, at the end of his moving novel, *Beyond the Door of No Return*. These words resonate deeply with this inspiring exhibition, *SYMBOLS OF LIFE: Beyond Perception – An Artistic Exploration of the Human Soul*. CARAVAN Arts is honored to be in partnership with this creative initiative in our dedication to building bridges through the arts. We believe art can transform lives and communities. Our experience around the world has shown us that the arts can serve as one of the most effective mediums to enhance understanding, bring about respect, and deepen relationships between diverse peoples, cultures and spiritual traditions. Our name reflects our mission to facilitate reframing perceptions of the "other" by journeying together through the arts.

This exceptional exhibition features two remarkable artists whose work enhances our experience and understanding of each other and the transcendent. Tidiane Ndongo and Djibril Coulibaly brilliantly embody our vision of seeing the arts play a strategic role in transforming our world; they touch the spiritual dimension of our human existence. Art is a universal language that has the ability to dissolve the differences that divide us. As long as division has torn apart the human family, art has offered a mode of reconciliation and wholeness. As evident in this exhibition, artistic initiatives, by their very nature, are "encounter points," bringing people together from different backgrounds who might otherwise remain apart, deepening understanding across cultures and spiritual traditions.

Hafez, the 14th century Persian mystic-poet, wisely wrote, "Art is the conversation.... an opening for the heart." This exhibition is an invitation into conversation, with the "other," and within ourselves. It explores some of the most profound aspects of our shared humanity. In so doing, it furthers our global quest for a more harmonious future, both with each other and with the earth. The transcendent dimension of this exhibition echoes the words of Senegal's first president, Leopold Sedar Senghor, "Art is animated by invisible forces that rule the universe." These artists, through their distinct spirituality, lead us into life's deeper dimension. Their work has the power to impact us at a subconscious level, guiding us into new ways of being. Their art invites us to re-imagine ourselves, our situations, and our internal narratives, reminding us of what makes us most human.

By Paul G. Chandler, President, CARAVAN Arts

THE ARTISTS

TIDIANE NDONGO



Past Exhibitions

- 1997 Permanent exhibition at the restaurant Le Fleuve in Bamako, Mali.
- 1999 Exhibition at the Jazz Festival in Sorgues, France.
- 2000 Exhibitions at Galerie Tarquini in Marseille, France, and in Bamako-Coura, Bamako, Mali.
- 2000 Artistic residency at ACI 2000 in Bamako.
- 2001 Exhibitions at the Salon des Jeunes Artistes in Bamako; Le Ricochet in Toulouse, France, and the Business School in Lyon, France; Artistic residency l'Entre deux Mondes in Bamako with a tour across France.
- 2002 Exhibition and workshop at the Africa souraTonik Festival in Cherves de Cognac, France.
- 2004 Exhibition at the guesthouse Sokura in Bamako, Mali
- 2006 Exhibition at the Guesthouse Sokura in Bamako, Mali
- 2008 Exhibition at Kultour 2008 in Dendermonde, Belgium
- 2009 Exhibitions at Rood Noot Café in Utrecht, Netherlands, and Malu Biyipa in Malle, Belgium.
- 2014 Exhibition at the French Institute of Mali, in Bamako.
- 2016 Private exhibition at Torokorobougou, Bamako, Mali.
- 2017 Exhibition at the Yelen Festival in Baulmes, Switzerland
- 2018 Exhibited at the National Museum of Mali and participated again in the Yelen Festival in Switzerland.
- 2019 Exhibition at the Contemporary Art Festival Segou'Art

Tidiane Ndongo was born in 1970 in Bamako, Mali. His work is influenced by the research of the late Youssouf Tata Cissé, a Malian scholar, specialist in the myths and legends of Mali. He began his education at a Quranic school with his peers, then transitioned to a Franco-Arab institution at his mother's insistence, where he studied until he obtained his baccalauréat. After being unable to secure a scholarship to study abroad, he took on various small jobs.

In 1994, Tidiane decided to learn the Bogolan technique from Youssouf Sidibé Nelly in Bamako-Coura, a popular neighborhood in the Malian capital. Quickly, Nelly, who became both his mentor and friend, entrusted him with the management of his workshop.

Following his training in Bogolan, Tidiane began teaching the technique to the youth in his Bamako-Coura neighborhood. During this time, he formed a close relationship with his neighbor, the late Yssou Keita, a prominent artist from the same area. It was Yssou Keita who encouraged and guided Tidiane in creating his first paintings.

While adhering to the traditional techniques of using clay, plants, and roots, Tidiane developed his own unique style, which he named Dogogogoni, meaning "labyrinth" in Bambara. Dogogogoni represents a process, a necessary passage. Everything, from the mundane to the exceptional, is a process. Even a simple, everyday object that can be held, turned over, and examined, involves a process, which can be lengthy. What doesn't stem from a process? A process is a path, a journey with its own meaning and logic.

For Tidiane, Dogogogoni is akin to a chameleon: a symbol of surprise, discovery, reflection, change, and adaptation. In essence, it represents both the style and philosophy of Tidiane.

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.



Kissè (Le Point), 2023, Argile et plante sur Velours, 140 x 125 cm

Le mot kissè en bambara signifie tomi, « le point », et évoque l'infiniment petit, à l'image de l'atome. Bien que les femmes, gardiennes du savoir du bogolan, évoquent rarement ce symbole, il m'inspire depuis mes débuts dans cet art. À travers cette œuvre, je questionne la condition féminine, souvent reléguée à une position secondaire dans la société, une réalité qui me dérange profondément, car je prône l'équilibre entre hommes et femmes. Le kissè renvoie aussi subtilement à l'intimité féminine, tout en symbolisant l'importance des éléments petits mais essentiels, comme les fourmis ou abeilles, piliers de notre écosystème. Dans les religions révélées, la femme est souvent placée en second. Mais qui vient réellement de qui ? Est-ce nous qui venons de la femme ou la femme qui vient de nous ? Ce questionnement sur l'équilibre des sexes est au cœur de ma réflexion artistique, car kissè, c'est aussi l'idée du début et de la fin.

Kissè (The Point), 2023 Clay and Plant on Velvet, 140 x 125 cm

The word kissè in Bambara means tomi, "the point," and evokes the infinitely small, like the atom. Although women, the custodians of bogolan knowledge, rarely mention this symbol, it has inspired me since the beginning of my journey in this art. Through this piece, I question the condition of women, often relegated to a secondary position in society, a reality that deeply disturbs me, as I advocate for balance between men and women. The kissè also subtly refers to feminine intimacy, while symbolizing the importance of small yet essential elements, like ants or bees, which are pillars of our ecosystem. In revealed religions, women are often placed second, as if coming after men. But who truly comes from whom? Is it us who come from women, or women who come from us? This question of origin and gender balance is at the heart of my artistic reflection, as kissè also represents the idea of both beginning and end.



Sin Bara (Mamelles), 2022 Argile et plante sur coton, 150 x 160 cm

Sin signifie « sein » et Bara « caisson » en bambara. Ensemble, Sin Bara se traduit littéralement par « caisson de sein ». Cette pièce s'inscrit dans la même réflexion que celle amorcée avec le Kissè, interrogeant la condition féminine et la place de la femme dans la société. Nous avons tous été nourris au sein d'une mère, la figure nourricière par excellence. Le sein incarne la douceur, la tendresse, et reste un objet de convoitise pour les hommes. Même après avoir quitté l'enfance, les hommes semblent toujours attirés par ce symbole. À travers cette œuvre, je souligne l'omniprésence de la femme et je propose de revisiter son rôle afin qu'elle puisse enfin occuper pleinement la place qu'elle mérite dans la société.

Sin Bara (Breasts), 2022, Clay and plant on cotton, 150 x 160 cm

Sin means «breast» and Bara means «box» in Bambara. Together, Sin Bara literally translates to «breast box.» This piece follows the same line of questioning I began with Kissè, exploring the condition of women and their place in society. We were all nurtured at our mother's breast, the ultimate symbol of nourishment. The breast embodies gentleness and tenderness, and remains an object of desire for men. Even after leaving childhood, men are often drawn to this symbol. Through this work, I highlight the omnipresence of women and suggest that we revisit their role so that they may fully occupy the important place they deserve in society.



Nyêshi (Sourcils), 2023, Argile et plante sur coton, 120 x 130 cm

Nyêshi, qui signifie « sourcils » en bambara, se compose de « Nye », signifiant « œil », et « shi », qui se réfère aux « poils » mais symbolise également la longévité. Au Mali, l'expression « Shi Bé Karsala » est utilisée pour souhaiter une longue vie à quelqu'un. C'est à partir de cette citation que j'ai créé cette toile. Dans cette œuvre, les sourcils sont représentés sous une forme qui évoque délicatement la féminité et la création. Les silhouettes rappellent la douceur et la protection, tout en suggérant un espace de vie et de potentiel. Les femmes sont comme les sourcils du monde ; le monde est beau quand il est orné de sourcils. Lorsque l'on tire sur un sourcil, on se fait mal à soi-même. Ce n'est pas aux sourcils que l'on fait mal, mais à nous-mêmes. Ainsi, s'attaquer aux femmes, c'est s'attaquer à la société et au monde.

Nyêshi (Eyebrows), 2023, Clay and plant on cotton, 120 x 130 cm

Nyêshi, which means «eyebrows» in Bambara, is composed of «Nye,» meaning «eye,» and «shi,» which refers to «hairs» but also symbolizes longevity. In Mali, the expression «Shi Bé Karsala» is used to wish someone a long life. It is from this saying that I created this piece. In this work, the eyebrows are represented in a way that delicately evokes femininity and creation. The silhouettes remind us of softness and protection, while also suggesting a space of life and potential. Women are like the eyebrows of the world; the world is beautiful when adorned with eyebrows. When we pull on an eyebrow, we hurt ourselves. It is not the eyebrows we harm, but ourselves. Thus, to attack women is to attack society and the world.



Fla Mousso (Femme peule), 2023, Argile et plante sur coton, 165 x 132 cm

Les Peuls occupent une place centrale au Mali et en Afrique. Si les différentes ethnies maliennes formaient un tissu, les femmes peules en seraient les fils qui cousent et unissent chaque partie. Cette œuvre est un hommage à ces femmes nomades, et en particulier aux femmes peules. Par leurs déplacements, elles créent des liens, rapprochant les communautés. Par exemple, chez les Dogons, la diversité des dialectes est telle qu'il arrive que certains ne se comprennent pas. Dans ces moments, ils communiquent en peul, leur langue commune. Je rends hommage, à travers cette toile, à l'esprit unificateur des Peuls et à ces femmes qui incarnent la transmission des cultures. D'autant plus que, par mon père, je suis moi-même Peul, ce qui confère à ce travail une résonance personnelle.

Fla Mousso (Peul Woman), 2023, Clay and plant on cotton, 165 x 132 cm

The Peuls hold a central place in Mali and Africa. If the different ethnic groups in Mali were a fabric, Peul women would be the threads that sew and unite each part. This artwork is a tribute to these nomadic women, and particularly to Peul women. Through their travels, they weave connections, bringing communities together. For instance, among the Dogons, the diversity of dialects is such that some cannot always understand each other. In those moments, they communicate in Peul, their common language. Through this painting, I pay homage to the unifying spirit of the Peuls and to these women who embody cultural transmission. Moreover, as my father is Peul, this work holds a personal significance for me.



Miri (Réflexion), 2024, Argile et plante sur coton, 215 x 126 cm

Miri signifie réflexion en bambara. À travers mon travail, je cherche à susciter une prise de conscience collective sur la situation sociopolitique du Mali, et au-delà, de toute l'Afrique. Bien que les méthodes des dirigeants actuels, en particulier militaires, ne fassent pas l'unanimité, il existe un espoir partagé au sein de la population. Je souhaite inciter chacun à réfléchir aux solutions durables qui pourront nous unir dans la recherche d'un avenir meilleur.

Miri (Reflection), 2024, Clay and plant on cotton, 215 x 126 cm

Miri means reflection in Bambara. Through my work, I aim to raise collective awareness about the sociopolitical situation in Mali, and beyond, across Africa. Although the methods of the current leaders, particularly the military, are not universally accepted, there is a shared hope among the people. I seek to encourage everyone to reflect on sustainable solutions that can unite us in the pursuit of a better future.



Donda Ba (La grande porte), 2024, Argile et plante sur coton, 205 x 125 cm
Donda Ba symbolise le concept de pouvoir, représenté par une « grande porte d'entrée », métaphore de l'entrée et de la sortie avec honneur, notamment dans le domaine politique. J'ai lié cette idée à la figure de Nelson Mandela, car celui-ci est entré et sorti de la politique par la grande porte. Il incarne les valeurs d'honneur et de respect que je cherche à transmettre à travers cette œuvre. La superposition de motifs sur cette porte indique que le pouvoir doit être exercé avec dignité. Donda Ba rend hommage non seulement à Mandela, mais aussi à toutes les figures de pouvoir qui exercent leur autorité avec droiture et respect, des qualités malheureusement trop rares de nos jours.

Donda Ba (The Big Door), 2024, Clay and plant on cotton, 205 x 125 cm
Donda Ba symbolizes the concept of power, represented by a « great entrance door,» a metaphor for entering and exiting with honor, particularly in the political realm. I connected this idea to the figure of Nelson Mandela, as he entered and exited politics through the great door. He embodies the values of honor and respect that I seek to convey through this work. The overlapping patterns on this door signify that power must be exercised with dignity. Donda Ba pays tribute not only to Mandela but also to all figures of authority who wield their power with integrity and respect, qualities that are unfortunately all too rare today.



Bourou Kèlè (Querelle de trompettes), 2024, Argile et plante sur coton, 145 x 206 cm

Bourou Kèlè, qui signifie « Querelles de trompettes », exprime le mécontentement général face à l'état actuel du monde. À travers cette création, je souhaite mettre en lumière les dynamiques complexes derrière les décisions des Nations Unies et du système financier mondial. L'émergence des BRICS apporte une nouvelle voix, offrant une alternative où chaque acteur défend sa propre vision et ses intérêts. Cette réalité se reflète également au niveau sous-régional, notamment avec la création de l'Alliance des États du Sahel (AES), qui s'affirme en rupture avec la Cédéao, la Communauté économique des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest.

Bourou Kèlè (Trumpet Disputes), 2024, Clay and plant on cotton, 145 x 206 cm

Bourou Kèlè, which means «Trumpet Disputes,» expresses the general discontent with the current state of the world. Through this creation, I aim to shed light on the complex dynamics behind the decisions made by the United Nations and the global financial system. The emergence of the BRICS brings a new voice, offering an alternative where each actor defends their own vision and interests. This reality is also reflected at the sub-regional level, particularly with the creation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), which stands in contrast to ECOWAS, the Economic Community of West African States.



Lampedusa, 2024, Argile et plante sur coton, 117 x 268 cm

Lampedusa est une œuvre qui reflète la tragédie vécue par des milliers de jeunes, notamment des Africains désespérés, contraints de risquer leur vie en traversant la Méditerranée pour rejoindre l'Europe. Voir ces jeunes partir, sans avenir chez eux, est profondément triste. Ils laissent tout derrière eux, prêts à affronter la mer, souvent au péril de leur vie, parce que chez eux, les perspectives sont inexistantes. Nous avons pourtant tous les moyens pour améliorer les choses. Mais nos dirigeants ne font pas leur travail, et c'est cet abandon qui pousse la jeunesse à se suicider dans l'eau. Cette œuvre est un cri de détresse, mais aussi un appel à l'action pour que cette situation change.

Lampedusa, 2024, Clay and plant on cotton, 117 x 268 cm

Lampedusa is a work that reflects the tragedy experienced by thousands of desperate young people, particularly Africans, forced to risk their lives crossing the Mediterranean to reach Europe. Watching these young people leave, with no future in their homeland, is profoundly sad. They leave everything behind, ready to face the sea, often at the cost of their lives, because back home, opportunities are non-existent. Yet, we have all the resources needed to improve things. But our leaders are not doing their job, and it is this neglect that drives the youth to «suicide in the water.» This piece is both a cry of distress and a call to action for this situation to change.



Klé Koro (Sous le soleil), 2024, Argile et plante sur coton, 155 x 130 cm

Cette oeuvre un hommage à ceux qui effectuent de petits boulots informels sous un soleil accablant pour subvenir aux besoins de leurs proches. Ces activités ne sont souvent pas reconnues comme un véritable travail, mais elles permettent de nourrir des familles entières. Je pense aux commerçants des centres urbains du pays, notamment aux femmes qui vont chercher du bois mort pour le revendre, toujours sous le soleil. C'est une réalité difficile, souvent ignorée. À travers mon travail, je cherche à rendre visible ces luttes et à mettre en lumière leur résilience.

Klé Koro (Under the Sun), 2024, Clay and plant on cotton, 155 x 130 cm

This piece is a tribute to those who do small, informal jobs under the scorching sun to support their families. These jobs are often not recognized as legitimate work, yet they provide sustenance for entire households. I think of the traders in urban centers across the country, especially the women who gather deadwood to sell, constantly exposed to the sun. It's a difficult, often overlooked reality. Through my work, I aim to bring visibility to these struggles and highlight their resilience.



Bê ni Ta (A chacun ce qu'il possède), 2023, Argile et plante sur coton, 145 x 100 cm

Cette œuvre représente un souhait que je formule pour chacun. Le titre « Talé », une chanson de Salif Keita, m'a profondément inspiré dans la création de cette toile. Dans cette chanson, Salif Keita se questionne sur la destinée de chacun, tout en exprimant le souhait du meilleur pour tous. J'adhère pleinement à cette aspiration et la retranscris à travers cette oeuvre, en célébrant la dignité et le respect des différences ainsi que des parcours individuels.

Bê ni Ta (To each their own), 2023, Clay and plant on cotton, 145 x 100 cm

This artwork embodies a wish I express for everyone. The title « Talé », a song by Salif Keita, deeply inspired the creation of this canvas. In this song, Salif Keita questions each person's destiny while expressing a desire for the best for all. I fully embrace this aspiration, which I convey through this piece, celebrating dignity, respect for differences, and individual journeys.



Nyogomê (Le dromadaire), 2024, Argile et plante sur coton, 132 x 140 cm
Le dromadaire est un symbole de compréhension mutuelle. Nyogomê renvoie certes au dromadaire, mais en bambara, il signifie également « entente mutuelle ». Il est très important pour moi de rappeler cette signification, car on a souvent tendance à l'oublier, même parmi les locuteurs bambaraphones. Nyogomê souligne donc l'importance de la coopération et de l'écoute entre les individus pour construire une société harmonieuse.

Nyogomê (The dromedary), 2024, Clay and plant on cotton, 132 x 140 cm
The dromedary is a symbol of mutual understanding. Nyogomê indeed refers to the dromedary, but in Bambara, it also means «mutual understanding.» It is very important for me to remind people of this meaning, as it is often forgotten, even among Bambara speakers. Nyogomê thus highlights the importance of cooperation and listening between individuals in building a harmonious society.

MANDI (SERIE)

Une de mes philosophies de vie est que l'humain est un mélange de défauts et de qualités, exhibés en fonction des circonstances. C'est à partir de cette réflexion que je questionne le terme Mandi, qui signifie en bambara à la fois « bien aimé » et « ce n'est pas bon ». Cette dualité évoque la complexité qui réside en nous. La perfection n'est pas propre à l'humain ; on ne peut pas être grand et petit, ou gros et mince, simultanément. Cependant, nous pouvons incarner l'un ou l'autre à différents moments de notre vie. Dans un collectif, chaque individu est un complément du groupe. Je souhaite transmettre l'idée que la perfection est inaccessible et que l'alternance fait partie intégrante de notre existence. C'est un appel à embrasser la modération et l'humilité dans nos interactions.

One of my life philosophies is that humans are a mix of flaws and qualities, displayed depending on the circumstances. From this reflection, I question the term Mandi, which in Bambara means both "beloved" and "it's not good". This duality evokes the complexity within us. Perfection is not inherent to humans; we cannot be tall and short, or big and thin, at the same time. However, we can embody one or the other at different moments in our lives. In a collective, each individual complements the group. I want to convey the idea that perfection is unattainable, and that alternation is an integral part of our existence. It's a call to embrace moderation and humility in our interactions.



Tié Dourou (Cinq hommes), Argile et plante sur coton / (Five men), Clay and plant on cotton / 2024, 100 x 120 cm



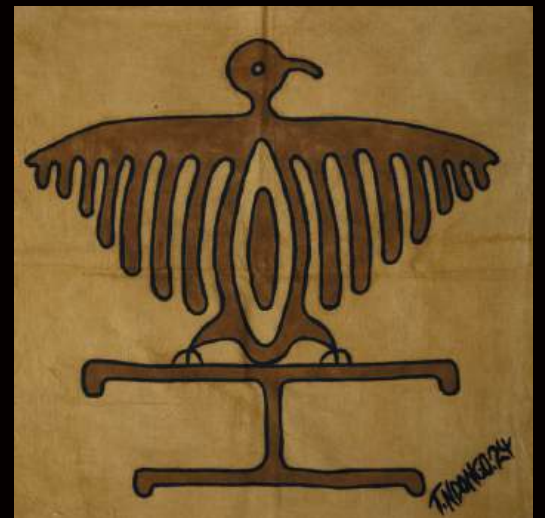
Sounkoro (À la source), Argile et plante sur coton, 60 x 65 cm / (At the source), Clay and plant on cotton / 2024, 60 x 65 cm



youroukouyouroukou (Corruption), Argile et plante sur coton / Clay and plant on cotton / 2024, 60 x 60 cm



Boli (Fétiche), Argile et plante sur coton / (Fetish), Clay and plant on cotton / 2024, 60 x 60 cm



Cèkè (L'aigle), Argile et plante sur coton / (The eagle), Clay and plant on cotton / 2024, 60 x 60 cm

DJIBRIL COULIBALY



Djibril Coulibaly, born in 1996 in Dakar, Senegal, grew up in the legendary neighborhood of Medina and frequented the Village of Arts in Soumbedioune near Medina from a young age, an experience that profoundly influenced his artistic sensitivity. At the age of 8, he began drawing in his school notebooks, using pencil and pen to express his creativity.

In secondary school, his talent quickly emerged earning several awards in drawing competitions, attracting the attention of his art teacher. Impressed by his abilities, the teacher advised him to enroll at the School of Fine Arts in Dakar. Following this advice, Djibril enrolled at the School of Fine Arts in Dakar in 2019, attending evening classes while simultaneously studying Graphic and Digital Arts at the Virtual University of Senegal. In 2023, he graduated from this prestigious institution.

Past Exhibitions

2020 Collective Exhibition at the African Memory Square in Dakar

2022 DAKART'OFF Collective Exhibition at Amnesty International

2022 Winner of the National Drawing Competition organized by the Delegation of the European Union to Senegal

2022 Collective Exhibition at the Virtual University of Senegal

2022 Collective Exhibition at the Magal Fair of Mouride Entrepreneurs

Early in his career, Djibril focused primarily on figuration, creating portraits of personalities and religious guides. Throughout his artistic journey, he has been on a quest for a personal imprint, an original touch that would distinguish his work. This search led him to deep spiritual meditation and perpetual solitude, relentlessly exploring the various facets of his artistic expression.

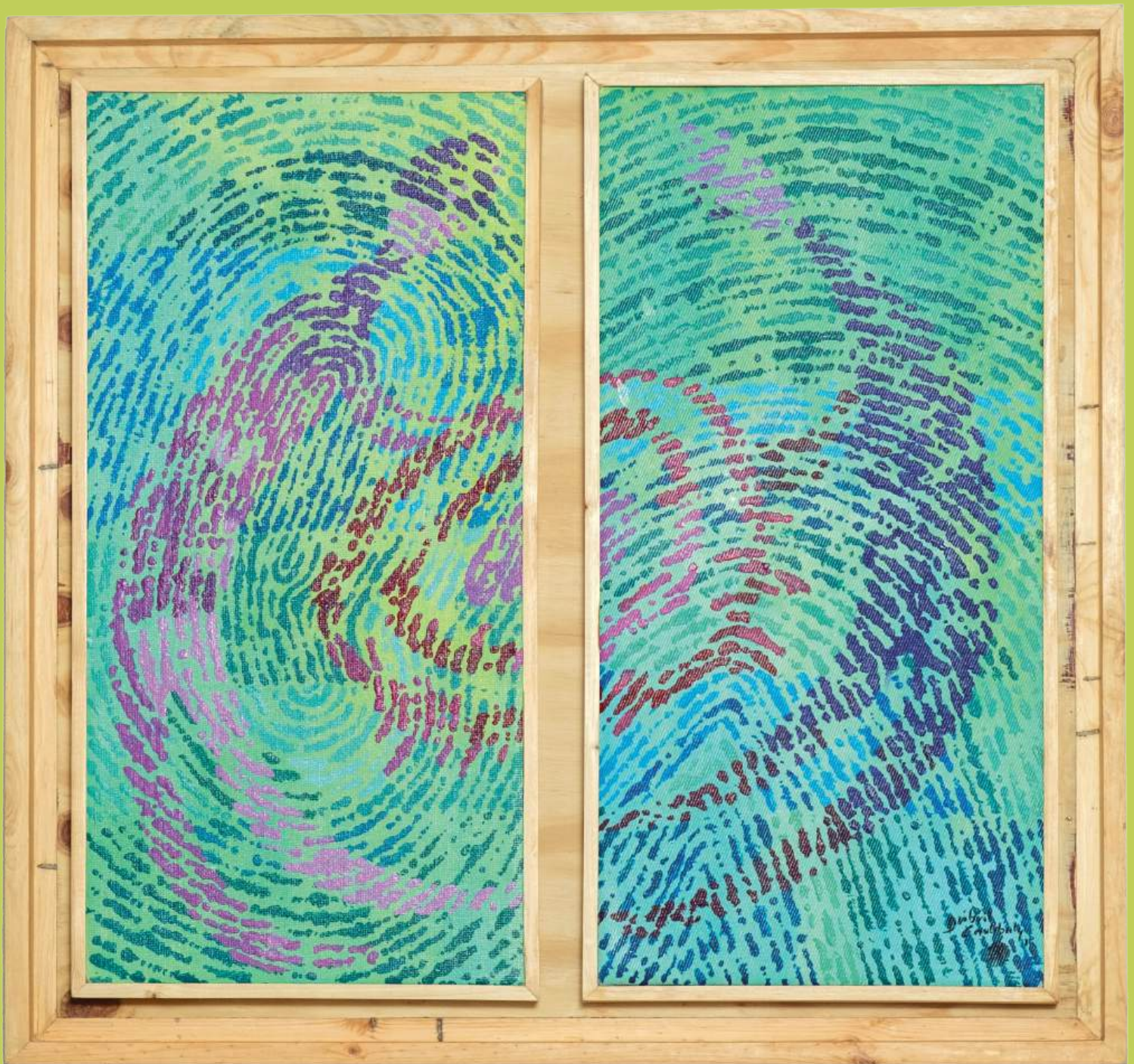
In 2024, after meditating on the Surah Al Imran, which speaks of God's signs in Creation and the alternation of day and night, he had a revelation. Contemplating his fingers, he discovered a whirlwind of signs in his fingerprints, a natural and universal motif that could embody his artistic vision. This moment of epiphany marked the beginning of a new phase in his art, where fingerprints became the central motif of his expression, symbolizing both the uniqueness and universality of the human experience.

Coulibaly's works are distinguished by their dynamic and captivating movement. Rich in colors and textures, they create intriguing compositions where fingerprints intertwine to form complex patterns. These compositions suggest subtle and sometimes tumultuous interactions between different forces, playing with contrast and fluidity to express the diversity and complexity of the human experience.

His paintings on family, love, migration, and couples reflect a keen sensitivity to these fundamental dynamics. By exploring these subjects, he touches on the very essence of humanity, transcending cultural and geographical boundaries.

Djibril also questions otherness, thinking beyond superficial differences to grasp what constitutes our common essence. His fascination with fingerprints symbolizes this quest for universality: each individual possesses unique prints, yet this uniqueness also reveals our universal interconnectedness. By highlighting this commonality, Coulibaly unveils a profound truth about humanity – we are both unique and inseparably linked. His works thus become visual meditations on identity, connection, and the universality of the human experience, inviting the viewer to reflect on the complexity and beauty of our shared existence.

Through his art, Djibril Coulibaly seeks not just to be seen, but to be felt, inviting deep introspection where each fingerprint becomes a symbol of human uniqueness and universal spiritual connection. "My works are not meant to be looked at, but to be meditated upon" he says.



Cordon ombilical, 2024, Acrylique sur toile, 73 x 68,5 cm

L'attachement entre les êtres vivants, qu'il s'agisse de la complicité entre humains – qu'ils soient couples, amis ou membres d'une même famille – ou même entre espèces animales, est un puissant vecteur de connexion physique, psychologique et parfois génétique. Ces liens, bien plus que des interactions visibles, se prolongent à travers les générations et se tissent dans le patrimoine que nous transmettons : noms de famille, valeurs et traits hérités. Ainsi, le cordon ombilical, souvent réduit à un symbole d'une connexion primaire entre la mère et l'enfant, peut être vu comme une métaphore universelle. Il incarne un lien fondamental qui relie toutes les formes de vie sur Terre, révélant une interdépendance profonde et vitale entre les espèces.

Umbilical Cord, 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 73 x 68.5 cm

The bond between living beings, whether it's the closeness between humans – couples, friends, or family members – or even between animal species, serves as a powerful vector of physical, psychological, and sometimes genetic connection. These bonds, far beyond visible interactions, extend through generations and are woven into the heritage we pass down: family names, values, and inherited traits. In this sense, the umbilical cord, often reduced to a mere symbol of the primary connection between mother and child, can be seen as a universal metaphor. It embodies a fundamental link that connects all forms of life on Earth, revealing a deep and vital interdependence between species.



L'amour, 2024, Acrylique sur toile, 74 x 74 cm

L'amour, la plus belle des forces qui unit les êtres vivants, est invisible mais ressenti par tous. Dans cette œuvre, je cherche à capturer cette énergie invisible qui relie non seulement les membres d'une même famille ou des amis, mais aussi les animaux et toutes les formes de vie. Un monde sans amour serait comme une vie sans atmosphère ni eau : une existence sans essence. À travers cette pièce, je souhaite rappeler que, malgré nos différences, nous habitons tous la même maison, la Terre, et que nous sommes, au fond, frères et sœurs, descendants d'Adam et Ève. Mon travail explore cette connexion universelle, en espérant inspirer chez chacun une réflexion sur notre capacité à aimer et à vivre ensemble.

Love, 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 74 x 74 cm

Love, the most beautiful force that unites living beings, is invisible but felt by all. In this work, I seek to capture this invisible energy that connects not only family members or friends, but also animals and all forms of life. A world without love would be like a life without atmosphere or water: an existence without essence. Through this piece, I wish to remind us that despite our differences, we all live in the same home, the Earth, and that deep down, we are brothers and sisters, descendants of Adam and Eve. My work explores this universal connection, hoping to inspire in each person a reflection on our capacity to love and live together.



Le couple, 2024, Acrylique sur toile, 110 x 80 cm

Dans un couple, il y a une alternance naturelle : parfois l'un est en position de force, parfois c'est l'autre. Mais quelle que soit la situation, cette aventure doit toujours être vécue dans la réciprocité. Le couple fonctionne un peu comme une entreprise : chacun doit, à des moments différents, soutenir l'autre pour affronter ensemble les obstacles. Cette dynamique entraîne des changements de rôle, de sentiments et même de comportements, mais avec le temps, une véritable complémentarité s'installe. Et le plus beau fruit de cette union, ce sont les enfants qui en naissent.

The Couple, 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 108 x 80 cm

In a couple, there is a natural alternation: sometimes one partner is in a position of strength, and sometimes it's the other. But regardless of the situation, this journey must always be experienced with reciprocity. A couple functions much like a business: at different times, each partner must support the other to face challenges together. This dynamic leads to shifts in roles, feelings, and even behaviors, but over time, true complementarity emerges. And the most beautiful outcome of this union is the children it brings into the world.



Le tourbillon, 2024, Diptyque, Acrylique sur toile, 83 x 58 cm

Le tourbillon est un élément central dans l'existence humaine, symbolisant un voyage intérieur. Il représente les défis de la vie - maladies, difficultés, et autres épreuves - mais aussi le retour à un état de normalité, offrant une délivrance physique, mentale et psychologique. Comme si chaque tourbillon, avec ses turbulences, était nécessaire pour atteindre une prise de conscience. Qu'ils apparaissent dans les ronds-points sur les routes, dans les tourbillons d'eau en mer, ou dans les phénomènes naturels tels que les tornades et les tsunamis, les tourbillons sont omniprésents. Même les planètes, en suivant leurs orbites, créent des tourbillons invisibles dans l'univers. Cela illustre l'existence d'un centre de gravité unique et invisible qui guide ce voyage intérieur tout au long de la vie, évitant toute collision avec autrui.

The Whirlwind, 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 83 x 58 cm

The whirlpool is a central element in human existence, symbolizing an inner journey. It represents the challenges of life—illness, difficulties, and other trials—but also the return to a state of normalcy, offering physical, mental, and psychological relief. As if each whirlpool, with its turbulence, is necessary to reach a state of awareness. Whether they appear at roundabouts on the roads, in the whirlpools of the sea, or in natural phenomena such as tornadoes and tsunamis, whirlpools are omnipresent. Even planets, following their orbits, create invisible whirlpools in the universe. This illustrates the existence of a unique and invisible center of gravity that guides this inner journey throughout life, avoiding any collision with others.



Le rêve perdu, 2024, Acrylique sur toile, 74 x 74 cm

Pour certaines personnes, l'océan représente une aventure, voire une porte vers la richesse, mais des milliers de vies sont perdues en poursuivant cette illusion. Le phénomène de l'immigration clandestine est aujourd'hui constaté partout dans le monde, notamment dans mon pays, le Sénégal, où des hommes et des femmes, jeunes et vieux, empruntent la mer pour rejoindre l'Europe dans l'espoir de réaliser leurs rêves. La pauvreté, le manque d'emploi et la pression sociale sont les principales causes de ce phénomène. Pour certains, la patience de semer une graine et de l'arroser jour après jour jusqu'à en récolter les fruits ne fait pas partie de leur vision. Ils veulent, coûte que coûte, récolter immédiatement le fruit de leurs efforts. Malgré ce désir acharné, beaucoup voient leur vie se terminer dans l'océan, poursuivant cette illusion mentale et physique.

The Lost Dream, 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 74 x 74 cm

For some people, the ocean represents an adventure, even a gateway to wealth, but thousands of lives are lost in pursuit of this illusion. The phenomenon of illegal immigration is now observed everywhere in the world, particularly in my country, Senegal, where men and women, young and old, take to the sea in hopes of reaching Europe to fulfill their dreams. Poverty, unemployment, and social pressure are the main causes of this phenomenon. For some, the patience to plant a seed and water it day after day until they can harvest the fruits is not part of their vision. They want to reap the rewards of their efforts immediately, at any cost. Despite this relentless desire, many see their lives ending in the ocean, chasing this mental and physical illusion.

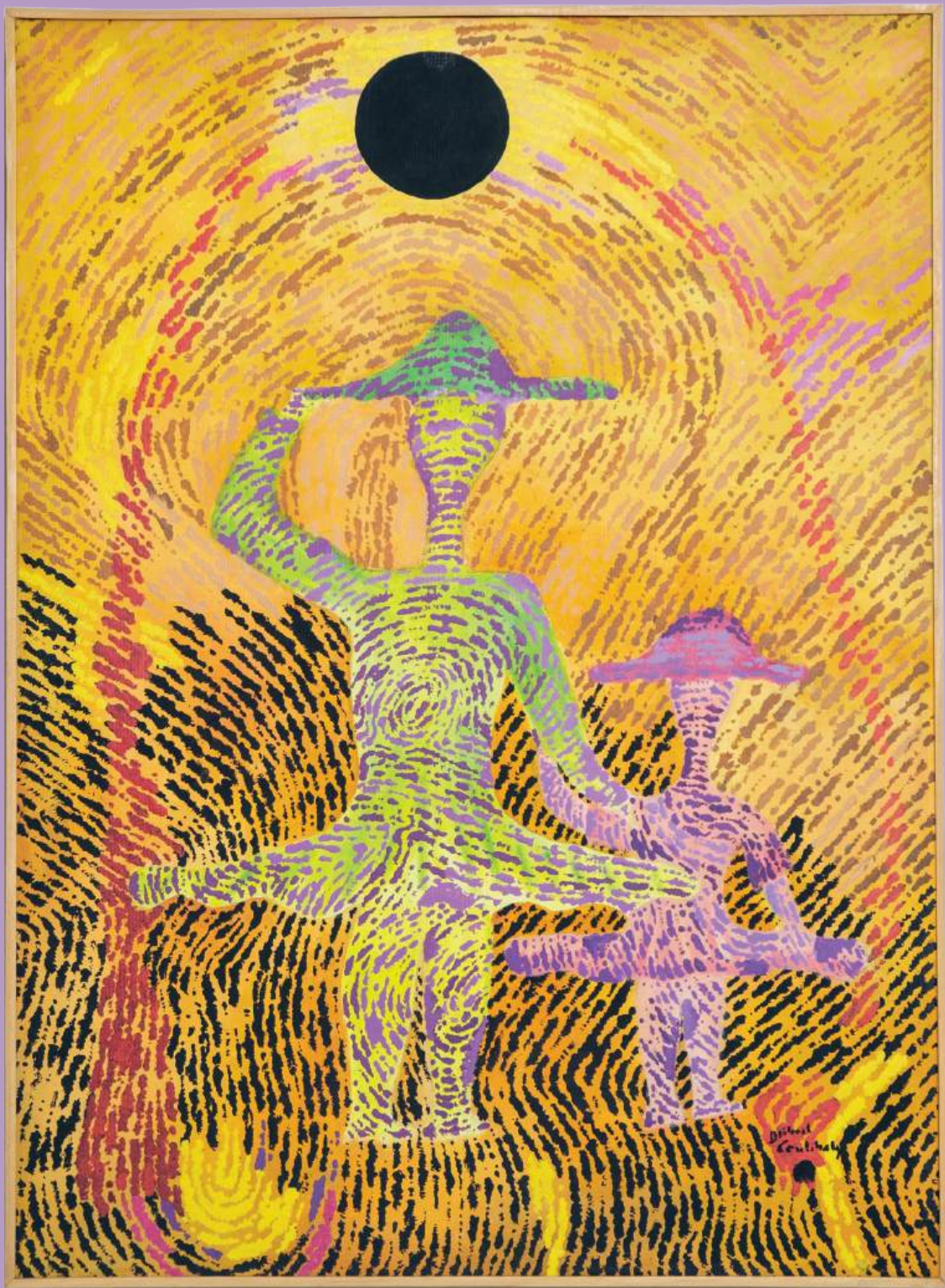


Horillusion, 2024, Acrylique sur toile, 51 x 70 cm

C'est une illusion d'optique, un artifice de l'horizon qui, par sa nature, trouble la perception du spectateur. Bien qu'il soit conscient d'observer une surface, une toile, il est néanmoins dupe des moyens employés pour produire cette illusion. La clarté du jour est démentie par l'obscurité de la nuit, le froid par la chaleur, la laideur par la beauté, et la réussite par l'échec. Ainsi, une dualité constante régit notre existence. La vie elle-même se définit par cette opposition, un bien égaré pour celui qui n'a pas su la vivre selon ses désirs. Une question me taraude : Comment des milliers d'âmes s'engagent-elles sur la mer, poursuivant leur propre « Horillusion » ? À travers cette œuvre, je questionne l'illusion d'un horizon meilleur qui attire tant d'âmes, mais qui se révèle souvent aussi insaisissable que l'horizon lui-même.

Horillusion, 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 51 x 70 cm

It is an optical illusion, an artifice of the horizon that, by its nature, distorts the viewer's perception. Although one is aware of observing a surface, a canvas, they are nonetheless deceived by the means used to create this illusion. The clarity of day is contradicted by the darkness of night, cold by warmth, ugliness by beauty, and success by failure. Thus, a constant duality governs our existence. Life itself is defined by this opposition, a lost opportunity for those who haven't lived it according to their desires. One question haunts me: how do thousands of souls set out to sea, chasing their own «Horillusion»? Through this piece, I question the illusion of a better horizon that lures so many souls, only to often reveal itself to be as elusive as the horizon itself.

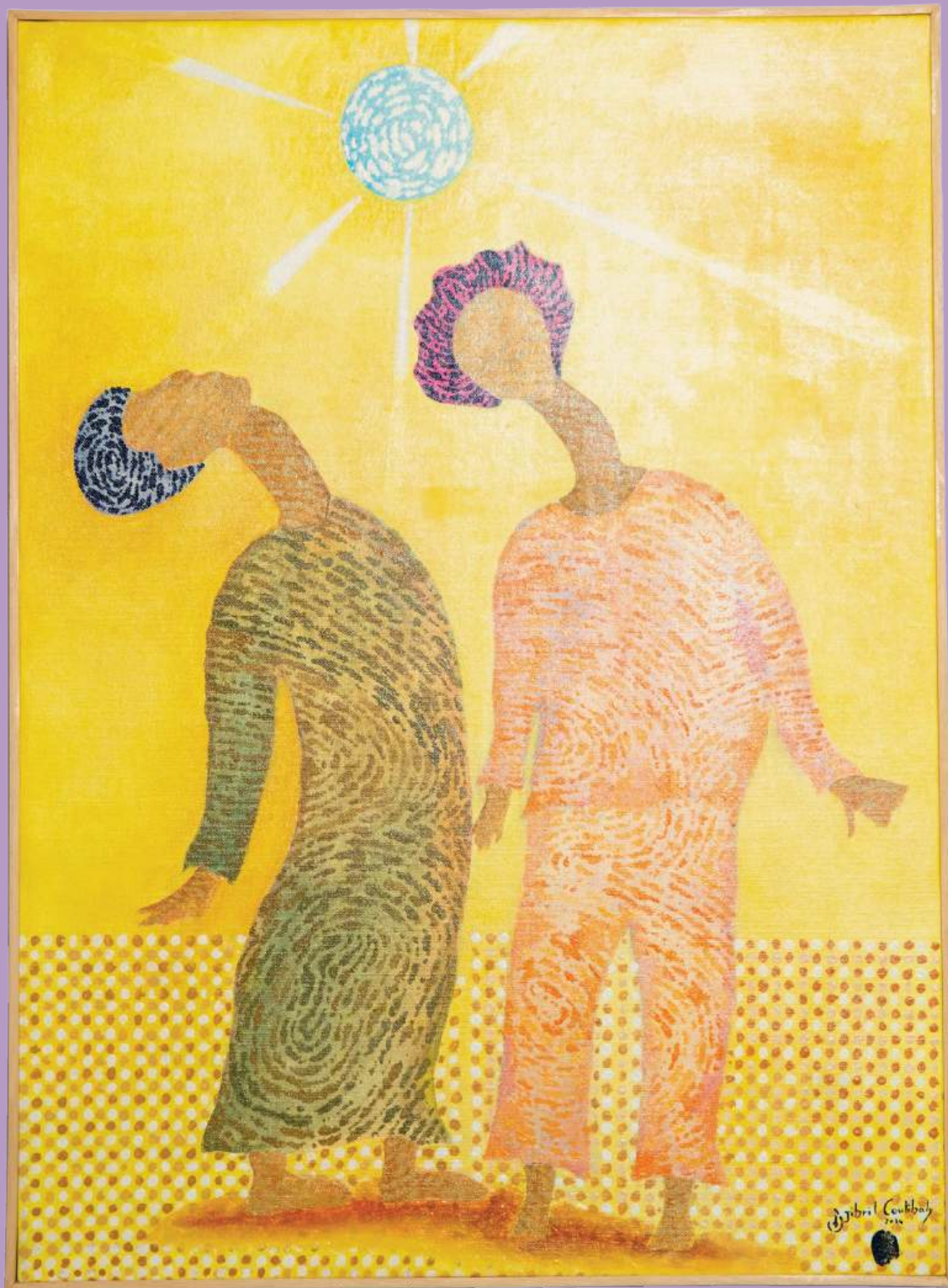


Le coucher du soleil, Acrylique sur toile, 71cm x 97cm

Le coucher du soleil, un instant de calme et de réflexion, marque le moment où l'être humain synthétise l'énergie accumulée durant la journée pour en créer de nouvelles. À cet instant, on aperçoit les beautés du ciel, le scintillement des étoiles, et souvent, c'est l'occasion d'organiser des événements nocturnes comme des feux de camp ou des séances d'enseignement coranique pour les enfants, afin de leur permettre de mémoriser le livre saint. C'est aussi le moment où certaines espèces animales, telles que les chauves-souris et les hiboux, entrent en scène, symboles de la vie nocturne qui s'éveille. Ainsi, le coucher du soleil marque la fin d'un cycle, un moment apaisant pour certains, une ouverture vers un autre monde pour d'autres.

The Sunset, Acrylic on canvas, 71 cm x 97 cm

The sunset, a moment of calm and reflection, marks the time when human beings synthesize the energy accumulated during the day to create new ones. At this moment, one can see the beauty of the sky, the twinkling of the stars, and often it's an opportunity to organize nighttime events like campfires or Quranic teaching sessions for children, allowing them to memorize the holy book. It is also the time when certain animal species, such as bats and owls, come into play, symbols of the awakening nightlife. Thus, the sunset marks the end of a cycle, a soothing moment for some, and an opening to another world for others.



Le lever du soleil, 2024, Acrylique sur toile, 71cm x 97cm

L'aube est un grand rassembleur, une source d'énergie pour l'humanité. Chaque lever de soleil marque la naissance d'un nouveau jour, une nouvelle opportunité pour l'homme pensant d'extérioriser les idées germées durant la nuit. Ces pensées, accumulées dans l'obscurité, trouvent leur expression sous la lumière du jour. Le jour représente un flux constant, un combat à mener avant que la clarté ne cède sa place à la nuit. L'homme attend avec impatience l'aube pour réaliser les bonnes idées formées dans le silence nocturne. Ce phénomène se retrouve également chez les autres formes de vie. La plupart des oiseaux se lèvent avec le jour, tandis que les arbres absorbent la lumière solaire pour entamer le processus vital de la photosynthèse. L'énergie du jour symbolise un nouveau départ, incitant chacun à fixer des objectifs et à relever des défis.

Sunrise, 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 71 cm x 97 cm

Dawn is a great unifier, a source of energy for humanity. Each sunrise marks the birth of a new day, a new opportunity for the thinking person to express the ideas that sprouted during the night. These thoughts, accumulated in the darkness, find their expression in the light of day. The day represents a constant flow, a struggle to be fought before clarity gives way to night. People eagerly await dawn to realize the good ideas formed in the nocturnal silence. This phenomenon is also seen in other forms of life. Most birds rise with the day, while trees absorb sunlight to begin the vital process of photosynthesis. The energy of the day symbolizes a new beginning, encouraging everyone to set goals and take on challenges.



Feu de camp, 2024, Acrylique sur toile, 1m x 94 cm

Il existe une énergie qui réunit les gens, les rassemble autour d'un feu. Cette énergie façonne la nuit, incarnée notamment par le feu de camp. C'est un grand rassembleur, compris par la plupart des sages, des savants, des philosophes, et même des acteurs culturels, qui reconnaissent l'importance de cette énergie pour éduquer, enseigner la vertu, et réconcilier ceux qui sont divisés par des idéologies diverses. Le feu de camp est un moment essentiel pour l'humanité, car il apaise l'âme, enseigne le sens de la vie, le partage, et la générosité. Malheureusement, cette pratique est en déclin. Avec l'avènement des nouvelles technologies, l'urbanisation croissante, et la transformation des modes de vie, elle est souvent perçue comme une activité démodée.

Campfire, 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 1m x 94 cm

There is an energy that brings people together, uniting them around a fire. This energy shapes the night, embodied most notably by the campfire. It is a great unifier, understood by most sages, scholars, philosophers, and even cultural actors, who recognize the importance of this energy to educate, teach virtue, and reconcile those divided by different ideologies. The campfire is an essential moment for humanity, as it soothes the soul, teaches the meaning of life, sharing, and generosity. Unfortunately, this practice is in decline. With the rise of new technologies, increasing urbanization, and changing lifestyles, it is often seen as an outdated activity.



L'agonie de la mort, 2024, Acrylique sur canvas, Diamètre 80 cm

Le voyage de l'âme vers son Seigneur est un moment empreint de mystère pour l'être humain. C'est l'instant où l'âme et le corps se séparent, chacun retournant à sa source : l'âme s'élève vers le ciel, vers son Créateur, tandis que le corps retourne à la poussière. À cet instant, comme un écho silencieux de notre vie, des souvenirs se dévoilent – nos actions, nos paroles – avant de franchir les portes de l'au-delà. Ce moment, Dieu l'a promis à chaque être humain, bien que l'arrivée de l'ange de la mort demeure imprévisible.

The Agony of Death, 2024, Acrylic on canvas, Diameter 80 cm

The journey of the soul toward its Creator is a moment filled with mystery for humans. It is the instant when the soul and the body part ways, each returning to its source: the soul ascends to the heavens, to its Creator, while the body returns to dust. In that moment, like a silent echo of our life, memories unfold—our actions, our words—before entering the gates of eternal life. This moment, as promised by God, is inevitable for every human being, though the arrival of the angel of death remains unforeseeable.



La conférence de l'au-delà, 2024, Acrylique sur toile, 2 m x 130 cm

La plus grande conférence de tous les temps, avant même le début de l'aventure humaine, est celle de l'au-delà. Elle réunit Dieu, Adam, les anges et le diable pour discuter de la création de l'homme. Dieu annonça qu'il créerait un être à partir d'argile, et les anges, perplexes, demandèrent : " Vas-tu créer un être qui sèmera le désordre sur Terre ? " Dieu répondit : " Je sais ce que vous ne savez pas. " Dieu ordonna ensuite aux anges de se prosterner devant Adam. Tous obéirent sauf le diable, qui refusa, affirmant sa supériorité en raison de sa création à partir de feu. Dieu le bannit alors, et le diable jura de détourner les humains. Cette conférence rappelle la faveur accordée à l'Homme, porteur des secrets de l'univers et destiné à un haut rang parmi les créatures.

The Conference of the Hereafter, 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 2 m x 130 cm

The greatest conference of all time, even before the beginning of human existence, is the one from the hereafter. It brought together God, Adam, the angels, and the devil to discuss the creation of man. God announced that He would create a being from clay, and the perplexed angels asked, " Will You create a being that will sow disorder on Earth? " God replied, " I know what you do not know. " God then commanded the angels to prostrate before Adam. All obeyed except the devil, who refused, claiming his superiority because he was created from fire. God banished him, and the devil swore to lead humans astray. This conference serves as a reminder of the favor granted to mankind, carriers of the universe's secrets and destined for a high rank among all creatures.

Organization & Curation



www.dakartnews.com

The exhibition *Symbols of Life: Beyond Perception* is curated by Rémy Mallet, DakartNews' founder. Based in West Africa, DakartNews is an online platform dedicated to African visual arts.

Through interviews with artists, experts, collectors, and art critics, as well as reports and analyses, DakartNews highlights the contemporary African art scene.

This approach aims to deepen the understanding of contemporary African art and foster enriching dialogue within the international art community. DakartNews publishes in English to reach an international audience and build bridges between different artistic perspectives.

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