

KEYNOTE Ì NDAFFA# /FORGER /OUT OF FIRE

Initially slated for May 2020, the 14th edition of the Biennial of Contemporary African Art, entitled Ì Ndaffa¹, has been postponed to 2022, with the same selection and a slightly revamped program. The next edition thus keeps the same track, honing however its title's tone with a *sharp*: Ì NDAFFA #.

By spiking its title, the upcoming biennial propels itself into a movement respectful of, albeit other than its vision of same. It depicts a transferred and parallel world, on the wake the Covid-19 pandemic, without abandoning the original idea of the 14th edition.

The pandemic's narrative has elicited a plethora of questions akin to the respect for nature and to the autonomy of African societies, and the crisis has been the bedrock of social and artistic activism fueling on the needed birthing of a new world in order to iron out imbalances, as well as for healing the psyche of a humanity infested by racism after George Floyd's public assassination.

However, the 2022 edition does not purport to focus on the pandemic. Yet, its message has not changed. Indeed, long before the Covid-19 crisis, the theme of this biennial had invited us to reinvent our models, and the pandemic only made this approach more imperative, exacerbating the urgent need to ponder over it.

The new global geopolitical structures are redrawing the maps with a propensity to rebalance forces, and are thus compelling African states to grapple with antagonistic internal dynamics. Civil society activism for more justice and equitable sharing of resources, emerging civic awareness, advocacy for a knowledge review, calls for monetary autonomy and revaluation of legacies, variable geometry ecological and social challenges place the African continent at the crossroads of new interrogations. In a non-exhaustive list of all these parameters which necessarily have a toll on the ongoing reconfigurations, it is worthwhile to cite the demands of a youth endowed with an increasing command of technologies and which requires more significant consideration.

Such is the prevailing framework of the transition to a new order, for the next edition of the Dakar Biennial which invites us to the smithcrating of a new world.

Ì NDAFFA # therefore lays down two imperatives: firstly, to refuse the form as given; and secondly, to chisel the yet shapeless meanings.

¹ Ì NDAFFA, is drawn from I NDAFFAX which - in Serer language - invites to the forge. By posing its spelling as a dual action of naming and confusing the meaning, the term expresses the freedom to transform as well as the multiple possibilities to create. Like a slogan, Ì NDAFFA is then a graphic and poetic performance. Likewise, the expression - Out of the Fire - has been chosen to better suggest the alchemy of the forge and the transitory act that leads to a new stage. It indicates the production and not the product. With these two biases, the fourteenth edition of the Dakar Biennale calls for the transmutation of concepts and the foundation of new meanings. In the face of such challenges, one could not continue to name things while ignoring African languages. This ability to name things in African languages is the first step in change

Refusing the form as given. The verb “to forge” connotes the transformation of matter, most often metal, and contains a now obsolete meaning, i.e. to create, imagine and invent. Transforming resistant material by a twist which deforms and orients it in terms of meaning and shape; this is what the theme of this edition is inviting us to. Obviously, we are beckoned to epistemic disobedience and to the subversion of models already served. *Ń Ndaffa #* sounds like a nudge to create a new common destiny and a future together, at a time when the world is cowering behind its identities and particularisms, and several States behind their walls and their nationalism. *Ń Ndaffa #* takes on its full meaning at the Dakar Biennial, which is in a transitional phase, like the African continent, which has become the venue of possible futures.

Chiseling yet shapeless meanings. Africa is the continent that mastered iron processing long before Europe and its industrial revolution. Knowledge and science were surrendered when it lost the initiative. The invitation to the forge is symbolically one to possess it once again. Also, in our societies, the smith’s forge has often been perceived as a pervasive mystery with dark forces and magic. There is of course the idea that knowledge mastered by a third party operates and transforms the world, enables us to manage our environment, and provides us with “miraculous weapons”. The alchemy of the material here is that of brain power and reflection. It is therefore about rediscovering unknown sciences, powers and energies; unearthing the wealth and exploring knowledge sources of the African continent; revisiting its archives and shaping new cognitions.

The crux of the matter is therefore to build new knowledge and know-how mainstreaming African readings of the world, as well as those of other geographical and cultural areas, in order to create shared tools likely to help us meet contemporary challenges, and the constantly renewed construction of a meaning which allows us to grasp all the complexity of the world. In the face of such challenges, artists and the grammars of contemporary African creativity have an essential role to play. The critical and theoretical dimension of artistic images and signs of fiction must be better analyzed in the process of a new forge of knowledge. This alchemy should help us better take stock of the scientific contribution of contemporary artistic imagery. To this extent, the work of art establishes another relation to knowledge at a time when digital technology, the development of which has led to a transformation of our habits and thinking modes, is changing the very concept of culture.

Drawing on African sources and knowledge, revisiting endogenous forms of knowledge, negotiating representations of the world at the local level, taking into account the heirloom of local knowledge in history and the appreciation of aesthetic objects; such are the vantage points to be explored in order to forge new methods of History and art in Africa. History is the fruit of a forge, for time is molding metal. Writing history is about entering the forge again. This biennial invites us to forge new mythologies and revise our protocols for research and the apprehension of reality.