

DAKAR BIENNALE FESTIVAL IN SENEGAL



The Dakar Biennale was conceived in 1989 as a **biennale** alternating between literature and art. The first edition in 1990 was focused on **literature** and in 1992 on **visual art**. In 1993 the structure of the biennale was transformed and Dak'Art 1996 became an exhibition specifically devoted to **Contemporary African Art**. In 1998 the structure was consolidated and in 2000 there was considerable change: **Abdoulaye Wade** was elected president of Senegal a few months before the opening of the event. The new president

confirmed the support of the Senegalese government for the event and since 2000, Dak'Art has taken place bi-annually. Dak'Art 2002 was characterized by new staff and new partners. Dak'Art 2004 received more international visitors and wider press coverage; during the opening the president announced his intention to organise a new edition of the **World Festival of Black Arts**. For the first time an artistic director was appointed for Dak'Art 2006 and the event was organised with the participation of many artists and a more consistent budget. In 2008 the biennale decelerated. The event took place on a smaller budget and was organised at the last minute. In 2010 the **European Commission** - a major financial partner - did not support the event. In December the third edition of the **World Festival of Black Arts** was organised in Dakar.

The 2014 edition was curated by **Abdelkader Damani, Elise Atangana** and **Ugochukwu-Smooth Nzewi**.^[1] The 2016 edition was curated by **Simon Njami**. Dak'Art is the African continent's longest running grand-scale art event. In 2014, it was opened to non-African nationals for the first time, with the exhibition 'Cultural Diversity' at the IFAN Theodore Monod Museum including invited internationals.^[2]

The Biennale of Contemporary African Art aims at being a space of different prejudice-free visions on approaches

and inspirations to analyse in relation to a plurality of influences from both immediate and farther sources.

The environment itself is today characterised by its relative spatial limitations in spite of the strong influence of the immediate social environment. Dak'Art provides an occasion to fight the propensity to be prejudiced about contemporary art as expressed by some African creators by giving the floor to a different category of experts working at other levels of the visual arts world that refuse to confine themselves within some certainties and are concerned about a certain ethic.

In its maturation phase, Dak'Art is no doubt a relevant cultural proposal for the African Union. The history of the Biennale of Contemporary Art is the natural extension of a sum of reflections and actions carried out by intellectuals and culture experts from Africa and the diaspora who have very early been aware of the role culture plays faced with the varied challenges met at various stages in our societies' progress towards a better life.

The Biennale of contemporary African art in Dakar is the only event of note on the continent to consecrate its selection in particular to living artists in and outside the continent.



It has enabled:

- to valorize the creation of new models in the field of arts
- to confirm or reveal new talents in the visual arts' world as in the world of design and digital arts
- to create new approaches in the definition and the conceptual view of contemporary art in Africa
- to show to a large audience coming from all over the world a creative and innovative Africa
- to create new partnerships among African creators and also between African creators and creators from other continents

The biennale is created thanks to the will of both the Senegalese state which assumes the supervision and the local artists who since the seventies, have been organizing regular annual art exhibitions which bring to light the different shapes of the evolution of contemporary art creation. The aim was to make of it a show-window of Art and literature in Africa.

After two editions, the decision was made to focus the event exclusively on visual arts and on design with a small-scale exhibition in textiles and tapestry. Nowadays, digital arts take their place in Dak'Art. The tapestry and textiles show is no longer a part of the biennale.



“We have come to support the event because it is a major pan-African event. It is also a privilege for us to come and see our own creations,” Igo Lassana Diarra, founder of Galerie Medina of Bamako said.

For many years, artists from other continents have dominated the visual arts space.

The Dak’Art festival therefore creates an opportunity for the forging of new partnerships between African creators and those from other continents.

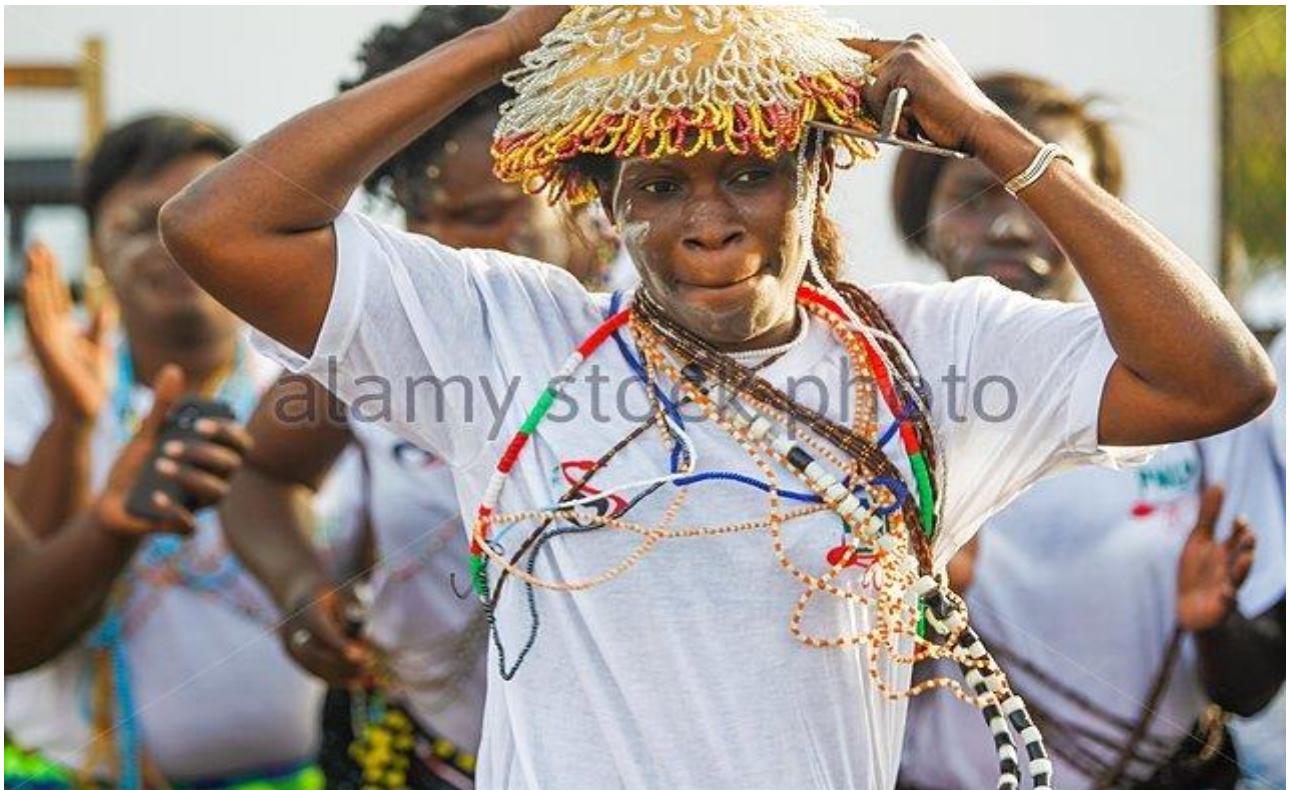
“There is a huge awareness about African arts now. You can see that the international community is huge in this place. I just met someone from the international museum in New York. If it wasn’t interesting they won’t be coming,” Nigerian artist Victor Ehikhamenor said.

Observers have been quick to point out that for twelve years now the event has succeeded in being a showcase of art from the continent.

“African art is really alive. It is still very close to its roots. Africa is now seeking to polish its identity. Many things are coming up. So people have reasons to come because the art is strong and original,” an art lover, Charles Adriaenssen told AFP.

The Senegalese government and local artists conceived the event with the hope of increasing opportunities for artists.

DAKAR BIENNALE GALLERY



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