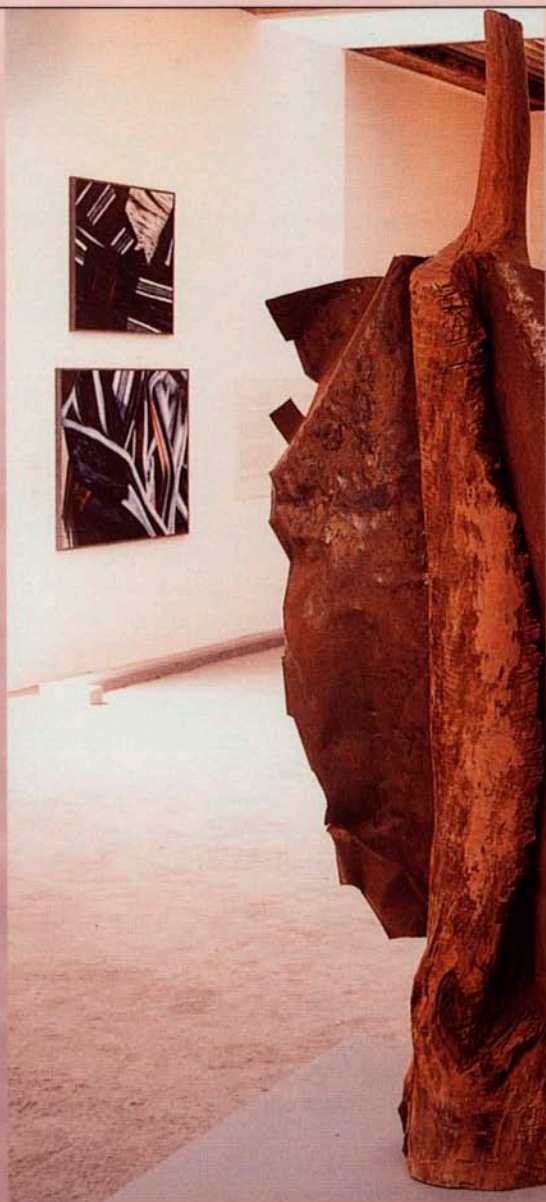




# In Senghor's Shadow

ART,  
POLITICS,  
AND THE  
AVANT-  
GARDE  
IN SENEGAL,  
1960-1995



ELIZABETH HARNEY

## **In Senghor's Shadow**

**Objects/Histories**

Critical Perspectives

on Art, Material

Culture, and

Representation

A series edited

by Nicholas Thomas

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ART,  
POLITICS,  
AND THE  
AVANT-GARDE  
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1960-1995

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Elizabeth Harney

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*In memory of my father,* ROBERT FOREST HARNEY  
*and my grandmother,* BESSIE FOREST HARNEY



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---

## Preface

In the decade since I began research for this study of Senegalese modernism and Negritude philosophy, the exhibition of and scholarship addressing contemporary African arts have proliferated and matured. Since the 1990s, a number of significant publications, exhibitions, journals, and doctoral dissertations have emerged to help shape an exciting, vibrant critical discourse. I write these words as the first curator of contemporary arts in the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution—a position that is clear evidence of the expansion and growing acceptance of this field.

These developments have served not simply to challenge archaic definitions of authenticity, artistry, and identity within the field of African arts history but also notably to affect considerable shifts within the mainstream art world, opening up new spaces and possibilities for contemporary African artists. Most scholars would agree, however, that the avenues through which these artists enter the global art world remain limited, inconsistent, and, at times, highly politicized and contentious.

While I cannot possibly address all the changes that have occurred since the early 1990s in this book, I believe that there has been a certain coalescence of events in the first years of this new millennium making this study quite timely. On 20 December 2001, Léopold Sédar Senghor died in Normandy, at the age of ninety-six, after years of quiet retirement from public life. Not surprisingly, his passing led many to reflect on his intellectual, artistic, and political accomplishments. As a poet, statesman, and philosopher who lived through and contributed to the changes of a century, Senghor

left a rather complicated, checkered history. While many praised the profundity of his thought, clarity of his vision, and depth of his commitment to “black civilization,” others regarded his legacy more skeptically, arguing that his approach to black subjectivity was both reactionary and naive. In his remembrances of Senghor, writer, curator, and critic Simon Njami wrote, “Let me come right out with it—I loathe the man. I have done for years. Why? Mainly because of his *reason from the Greeks, rhythm from the Blacks*. To people of my generation it was like an abdication. In that utterance he condemned the Black to an essentially hedonistic role, cutting him off from the area of intellectual investigations.”<sup>1</sup> Njami quickly acknowledged that Senghor’s remarks had to be understood within the historical context of the early to mid-twentieth century. And yet this criticism of Senghor’s theories persists.

Writing in the autumn following Senghor’s death, one Senegalese scholar called for a reassessment of his works in order “to do justice to the way in which he authentically challenged French colonial claims; to pay attention to the open character of a thought that has been petrified into formulas; and to understand the ethics embedded in the notion of a ‘dialogue of cultures.’”<sup>2</sup> This study will engage deeply with Senghor’s thoughts on artistry, identity, and modernism, focusing attention on the complex relationship between theory and practice as the president-poet helped shape the contours of modern art in Senegal through his patronage.

In the same year of Senghor’s death, curator Okwui Enwezor focused the art world’s attention on the pioneering arts and philosophical debates that accompanied the years of anticolonial struggle, liberation movements, and independence in Africa. With his exhibition *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945–1994*, Enwezor sought nothing less than to “construct a ‘critical biography’ of Africa.”<sup>3</sup> In his introduction to the catalogue and anthology that accompanied this groundbreaking exhibition, Enwezor described the aim of the project as follows:

To explore and elaborate on the critical paradigms and ideas related to concepts of modernity, the political and ideological formations of independence and liberation struggles, their impact in the production of self-awareness, new models of cultural expression, dialogues with processes of modernization, and what lies at the heart of modernity itself out of the ruins of colonialism.<sup>4</sup>

While much broader than visual arts, the scope of this exhibition encompassed the history of the École de Dakar, Negritude writings, and processes of modernization and modernism that are central concerns of this detailed

study of Senegalese art history. My study, like Enwezor's, engages broadly with current scholarly interest in the histories and workings of multiple, plural modernisms outside the metropolitan West and with the legacies of the era of decolonization. Enwezor's exhibition was equally important for the venues that it inhabited—P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Space in New York and the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) in Chicago. It would seem, then, that with the dawn of a new millennium, the contemporary art world was ready to give greater and more nuanced thought to the modern and contemporary arts of Africa.

In April 2001, *ARTnews* published an article declaring Africa the source of “the newest Avant-Garde” from which contemporary art “has suddenly burst onto the international art world’s radar screen,” noting that “in the past five years, artists from Benin, Senegal, Zaire, Mali, Tunisia, Egypt, Nigeria, and especially, South Africa have been receiving high-profile exposure in museums, galleries, and biennials.”<sup>5</sup>

Ironically, *ARTnews* “discovered” contemporary African artists at a moment when many art insiders were questioning the relevancy of identity-based exhibitions. In the same year, Studio Museum curator Thelma Golden coined the term *postblack* to refer to a new generation of young African American artists who approached notions of racial and ethnic identity with skepticism, and *New York Times* art critic Holland Cotter wrote of a paradigm shift ushering in a new freedom for art “beyond multiculturalism”—a kind of “postethnicity.” He explained: “Multiculturalism ended up being as much a hindrance as a help. It made ethno-racial identity a source for gaining culture power, but it also turned it into a trap.”<sup>6</sup> Cotter rightly recognized and warned of the pitfalls of quickly adopting these new labels and assuming that a change in semantics would effect a change in the systemic racism of the art world:

The labels postblack and postethnic sound cool. But what they actually describe is a precarious balancing act. Ideally, they imply a condition of diversity in the widest sense, with minority artists right at the center of the art world—all the time, no badge of identity required—where they belong, side by side with everyone else. But, like many social ideals, postethnicity could easily end up being yet another exercise in control from above, a marketing label of greatest benefit to the privileged.<sup>7</sup>

Certainly the national and international exhibition offerings of the last several years by the brightest curators and scholars have tended to support and further develop this notion of freeing the art and the artist from the confines of ethnic, racial, or national parochialism to celebrate transnational



and global contemporary experience and artistry. The year 2001 also marked a major turning point in the history of the Venice biennale, when Olu Oguibe and Salah Hassan created the first African Pavilion for contemporary artists, producing an exhibition, *Authentic/Ex-centric: Conceptualism in Contemporary African Art*, which argued for a clearer understanding of the importance of African artists in the realm of conceptual arts. Its agenda, coupled with its venue, epitomized the ironies of this age in which curators and artists alike strive to move beyond identity-based affiliations but tend to reinforce them at the same time. While *Authentic/Ex-centric* valued the contributions of Africa and diaspora-based artists to global conceptualism, it did so with the express intent of inserting an African pavilion into the traditional, Euro-centric, and nationalist structure of the Venice biennale.<sup>8</sup>

The common thread that ties together remembrances of Senghor, increased interest in the history of modernisms in Africa and in contemporary African arts, lively debates over identity-based exhibitions, and the now common curatorial agendas that advance global, non-identity-based interpretations and exhibitions is the ongoing tension and uneasy marriage between particularism and universalism. In the “First Word” of *African Arts* in 2002, Bennetta Jules-Rosette said of Senghor and his colleagues that “their visions of Négritude became not only the foundation of an African cultural philosophy and aesthetics but also a pathway to the redefinition of the universal in its valorization of African identity through the canons of the West.”<sup>9</sup> This confluence of events suggests that we would do well to revisit Senghor’s attempts to define a broader humanism in light of continuing particularisms and local inflections of modernism. While Senghor’s thoughts about civilization of the universal (*civilisation de l’universel*) envisioned an instrumentalist role for the artist and an essentialist vision of identity, they nonetheless provide important links for today’s scholars to an intellectual history with direct relevance to many current debates on identity and artistry.

The most successful of the recent set of international art biennales to emerge in the age of globalism is held in Dakar. Fittingly, Dak’Art successfully celebrated its tenth anniversary at the turn of the new millennium. Some forty years after Senghor envisioned a new place for modern art in the development of an independent nation and supported ambitious patronage programs to fulfill these dreams, Dakar finds itself again the site of debates over contemporary art and identity. In the catalogue accompanying the tenth biennale, two critics expressed the opposing poles of thought regarding the best way to approach, interpret, display, and market the arts of contemporary Africa. One contributor argued, “No artist wants to be judged through the distorting lens of identity,”<sup>10</sup> while the other warned that the

label “contemporary could be an avatar of assimilation; a metamorphosis of this key word of the colonial period that has survived the so-called post-colonial time.”<sup>11</sup> This case study of modern arts history in Senegal aims to further these fascinating, timely, and important discussions on the place of Africa’s contemporary artists within a global context.



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## Introduction

In 1984, the tragic death of a young Dakarois painter, little known at the time outside his country, sparked a flurry of art critical interest in the modernist visual expressions of Senegal. Mor Faye died at the age of thirty-seven, from cerebral malaria, but word on the street was that he had died of a broken spirit and mind, driven insane by the political, cultural, and artistic environment he encountered in postindependence Senegal. At the time of his death, he left behind a collection of some eight hundred works, most of which are now preserved in the Joint Atlantic Collection, a New York-based foundation run by Senegalese lawyer and art enthusiast Bara Diokhané, with the financial backing of Spike Lee.

In the years since his death, Faye has achieved, at home and abroad, mythic status as a misunderstood, alienated artistic genius and a political martyr—the ultimate *artiste maudit*. Faye’s beatification can be traced to the highly acclaimed and well-attended 1991 retrospective of his works curated by Diokhané at the French Cultural Center’s Galerie 39 in Dakar. It was on this occasion that Diokhané first referred to Faye as an African Van Gogh. When reviewing this show for *Artforum*, Glenn O’Brien built on this burgeoning myth, calling Faye “a poor black Picasso,” a “solitary medicine man,” and a veritable “African saint.”<sup>1</sup>

Faye’s biography, his practice, and his meteoric, posthumous rise to fame as an “international” and “outsider” artist hold great interest. The complexities of his practice and the subsequent reception of his works introduce

many of the discussions of canonicity, hybridity, avant-gardism, Africanité, and modernism within the Dakarois art world which form the basis for this study. Faye engaged with many aspects of the Senegalese art world, forging a very personal, sometimes contradictory path between official patronage, concerns with Africanité, artistic and political freedom, and interest and participation in such modernist practices as collage.

Mor Faye's career began within the structures of the Senegalese art world. Senegal's first president, Léopold Sédar Senghor, established a lively, well-supported cultural system complete with art schools, a national museum, festivals, and touring exhibitions. This robust state patronage encouraged a new Senegalese modernism, using theories of Negritude as its guide. To date, most studies of this period have argued that this patronage directly resulted in a rather formulaic indigenous art school, known as the École de Dakar, best characterized by its fascination with pan-African motifs.

After attending the École des Arts, the national arts school created at independence under the patronage of Léopold Senghor, Faye participated in the 1966 First World Festival of Negro Arts and included his works in the international traveling exhibitions and national art salons of the 1970s. He attended exhibitions of Picasso, Messanier, da Vinci, and others brought to Dakar's Musée Dynamique during Senghor's era. Without ever having traveled abroad, Faye was thus able to acquire firsthand knowledge of both modernist and classical European artworks. He benefited, as many others did, first from the teachings of the great Senegalese modernist Iba N'Diaye and, later, from those of a series of French *coopérants* (technical assistants) at the art schools. He also slipped easily into a civil service position as art teacher in a Dakarois high school, a sinecure provided by the Senghorian system that he would later attack.

A one-man show at Galerie 39 in 1976 would prove his last public exhibition. After it, Faye spent increasing amounts of time isolated in mental institutions, enduring the dementia caused by his illness and producing artworks at a remarkable rate. While Faye exhibited widely under the auspices of Senghorian patronage throughout the 1960s and 1970s, he later broke away from the École de Dakar and is said to have vehemently and ceaselessly campaigned against the primacy of a Negritude-inspired nationalist aesthetic and the autocracy of Senghorian rule. Some accounts include colorful public displays of dissent performed outside the gates of the presidential palace. He aligned himself with those artistic forces in Dakar that sought to broaden the art world's structure and discourse.

Faye's work was exhibited internationally in the African section of the 1994 Venice Biennale, organized by the Museum for African Art in New York,

and later in the museum's related New York City show. Several years later, his works were gathered into a solo exhibition at the World Bank Galleries in Washington, D.C., in October 1997. Despite this spate of exhibitions, the writings on his work have remained cursory at best and have failed to fully address the complexities of his career and the reasons behind his sudden success.

The style, method, and iconography of Faye's practice were broad in scope, ranging from early romantic landscapes in soft gouaches to rich, painterly compositions of solitary, often masked faces to the playful, satirical, sometimes politically charged collages, produced in the last few years of his life. Ironically, he had the most freedom, time, and materials at his disposal after his commitment to a mental institution in 1980.

The breadth of this artistic production has meant that Faye's work can satisfy wide-ranging, disparate patrons. Moreover, it has baffled those seeking to fit contemporary African art works into neat categories. His oeuvre is not easily periodized and suggests a rather complicated and negotiated process of creation, both within his own practice and in the larger Dakar art scene more generally. For example, his interest in and use of diverse materials, from canvas to newspaper scraps and other detritus, was evident throughout his career. A number of his Senegalese colleagues have also innovatively employed recycled materials for economic, aesthetic, and political reasons.

Yet iconographic and technical consistencies are nonetheless apparent in his works across time. The masked forms do not disappear even after Faye no longer associates himself with the École de Dakar. They return, rather, in unexpected places, appearing within mixed-media pieces and in haunting, expressionistic portraits. Many of the compositions, whether in oil, gouache, crayon, or charcoal, are marked by a meticulous detail of line, producing, in some cases, strongly contoured figurative scenes, and in others, the kind of doodling and overembellishment that suggests an agitated mind.

It is easy to explain the appeal of Mor Faye's works to a broad international audience, for they are rich in color, clever in their manipulation of volume and space, and often topical in content, with references to the apartheid struggle and icons of global popular culture. In fact, Faye's artistry seemingly demonstrates an easily digestible modernist vocabulary, allowing Western curators to situate his work within the ambit of a shared universalism. They present him simply as an international artist, homogenized, as it were, who shares formalist concerns with artists worldwide. His critical reception signals a politics of representation and interpretation prevalent within global understandings of modern and contemporary arts from the periphery.

Coupled with stories of his troubled persona, his eventual institutionalization, and his untimely death, Faye's practice appeals simultaneously to the modernist fascination with genius and mastery and the long history of European primitivist ideas about the so-called outsider artist, which conflate the creativity and artistry of the instinctual primitive, the lunatic, and the child with general Otherness (in Faye's case, his Senegalese and Muslim origin). These connections to primitivism have profound importance to broader understandings of the iconography of the École de Dakar art world from which he emerged—one vastly more interesting than most critics have charged.

So, was Faye a black Picasso, Van Gogh, or saint? Of course, such proclamations always say more about the mythologizing processes of the art world than they do about the artist. The “worlding”<sup>2</sup> of Faye as an artistic figure has, for the most part, encouraged critics to ignore the complexities and contradictions of the local circumstances that so need to be documented if a more nuanced history of Africa's artists and arts is to be told.

This book constitutes a study of artistic governmentality in the postindependence period in Dakar, Senegal. It seeks to supplement and complicate recent narratives of contemporary African art history by documenting and questioning the often contradictory and innovative means through which Senegal's artists have engaged with the histories and practices of modernism and have participated in attempts to link a new aesthetic to the project of nation building.

As this examination of the Dakarais art world will show, the material history of this important period since independence cannot be fully understood simply by employing a now familiar vocabulary of postcolonial jargon or universalist aestheticism, nor can it easily be fitted into the existing anthropologically inclined categories that still dominate the scholarly field and market for African visual arts.<sup>3</sup>

Rather, any attempt to document these arts must form part of an effort to write a bottom-up history in which the uniqueness and vibrancy of local artistic practice and cultural narrative is read in terms of the artists' own concerns, their understandings of current discourses on Otherness in relation to their practices, and their role in the formation and contestation of various postindependence ethnic, racial, national, religious, personal, and aesthetic identities. This focus would avoid another characterization of these individuals as faceless postcolonials acting out a prescribed narrative, and it would ultimately serve to challenge stale yet persistent European approaches to contemporary African cultural practices, which locate authenticity and value within restrictive temporal and spatial parameters. One can acquire

more subtle understandings of the cultural products at hand and a clearer view of alternative modernisms traditionally considered “beyond the pale of Modern art history”<sup>4</sup> simply by addressing the particularities of local histories of patronage, education, practice, and modes of assessment and interpretation.

As noted above, the defining feature of Senegalese art history in the era following independence was the development and persistence of a particular artistic system, which evolved under the patronage of president Léopold Sédar Senghor. He regarded art as a medium of change—a tool that could be used to advance his cultural, political, and economic development plans. Consequently, he envisioned the artist as a representative of and advocate for a new nation.

All Senegalese artists, during Senghor’s time and since, have had to grapple with the influence of Senghor, his patronage, and the Negritude philosophy he propounded. For some, their involvement has been limited to a conscious decision not to engage with it. Others have sought to address it directly. In all cases, the Senghorian legacy casts a long shadow over debates about the role of the artist, the structure of the art market, and the relationship between formations of identity and artistic practice that are the subject of this study.

My research on the history of Negritude-inspired visual arts and the birth of a Senegalese modernism draws on models from current scholarship that address non-Western “parallel” or “alternative” modernisms, as well as on recent efforts to reassess the contradictions and complexities of European and North American formulations of modernism.<sup>5</sup>

Increasingly, scholars, critics, and curators are focusing their attention on the place of previously marginalized artists in the political economy of the late capitalist art market and are calling into question the universality and diversity of European notions of internationalism, pluralism, and globalism.<sup>6</sup> Such artists innovatively process and contribute to a cosmopolitan aesthetics that selectively filters the global through the local.

Thus this book contributes to a “new discourse that is not organized by the art world’s fetishization of innovation and avant-gardism” but that is “available to discuss the range of artistic expressions that are no longer adequately compartmentalized by a Western/non-Western distinction.”<sup>7</sup> It takes the era of anticolonial struggle as its starting point—an era in which the projects of decolonization and nation building required the imagining and shaping of new senses of modern identity and subjectivity. Senghor’s dedication to African socialism addressed these shifts of political, economic, and cultural power. But more important for our purposes, his patronage of the arts



helped foster a rich visual lexicon, which combined local and foreign motifs, materials, and techniques and resulted in a hybrid, complicated, and often misunderstood canon of art. These visual productions were nourished, on the one hand, by a sense of nostalgia for precolonial Africa and, on the other, by a modern practice of quotation and mixing. Not surprisingly, the art practice of Senghor's time reflected the deep sense of ambivalence and indeterminacy that has so characterized cross-cultural encounters during the colonial and postcolonial era. Envisioning the revaluation and rearticulation of African culture as key to a successful cultural and political reawakening of the continent, these efforts at shaping a new, modern African identity in Senegal mirrored those taking place within political and cultural circles throughout the continent.

The parameters of this study extend into the art world of post-Senghorian Senegal, an era in which the project of decolonization is considered incomplete and the utopian visions of a newly independent nation have shifted to better suit new realities. Artists working in Senegal from the 1980s through to the present day have found their works placed within the frame of art world concerns about postcoloniality, globalization, and hybridity. For many, these arts, which offer intercultural iconographies, seem clearly to fit within paradigms of postcoloniality. Characteristically perceived as a contradictory, ambiguous, and ambivalent site, postcoloniality is shaped by what Ella Shohat has called a "mutual imbrication of central and peripheral cultures,"<sup>8</sup> ripe for forging resistant identity politics and negotiating multiple cultural positions through acts of syncretism. One can see that the debates on the links between artistry and identity, so prevalent in the years leading to independence and throughout Senghor's era, merely prefigured those of today.

My analysis is informed by a wide array of scholarship in African and diaspora studies, which continues to grapple with the complexities and ever-shifting definitional parameters of African identity discourses.<sup>9</sup> Paul Gilroy's concept of a "Black Atlantic" in particular allows one to reconceptualize diaspora, community, racial quintessence, and performative identity formation, aiding in our understanding of earlier Negritude and pan-Africanist projects.<sup>10</sup>

Scholarly and curatorial focus on contemporary African artists, which began as a trickle in the years following independence and continued slowly and inconsistently for several decades, has recently developed into a steady stream of art critical and historical writings characterized by sophisticated arguments and supported through a growing infrastructure within the art world.<sup>11</sup> The visual productions from the era of decolonization and nation

building extending into the present day have, however, presented serious challenges to the definitional parameters of the field of study and the market serving “traditional” African art. As a discursive space situated at the interstices of ethnography and Western art history, African art history has approached its subjects as both worthy of the kind of aesthetic attention afforded Western visual arts and as important markers or metonyms of the distinctive cultural orders and practices of Others.

The engagement of Africa’s artists in modernist arenas of practice, discourse, and the political economy of late capitalism, coupled with a growing interdisciplinary emphasis on the politics of representation and notions of Otherness have made old paradigms and categorizations untenable.<sup>12</sup> Confronted with challenging visual forms, radically altered criteria for authenticity and the constructed nature of traditions, African arts scholars have attempted to fit these arts into categories that suit existing definitions. Often, they have refused to comment on them altogether, claiming an inability to assess adequately their quality and provenance in a manner equivalent to the study of so-called traditional works. It is little wonder, then, that many of the studies in this area seem more preoccupied with debating the validity and relevance of proposed categories than with dealing with the artworks and artists at hand.<sup>13</sup>

Both professional and amateur interest in modern arts in Africa dates back to the colonial period.<sup>14</sup> Not surprisingly, much of this early attention grew alongside political sympathies for anticolonial struggles. European amateur artists, art enthusiasts, and educators established art schools and informal workshops throughout the continent to encourage young artists either to pursue new avenues of creation or to recapture what were thought to be quickly disappearing traditional practices and iconographies. The recent attention afforded figures such as Frank McEwen, who worked in Rhodesia, Romain Desfossés in the Belgian Congo, Pierre Lods in the French Congo and Senegal, Margaret Trowell in Uganda, Kenneth C. Murray and Ulli and Georgina Beier in Nigeria, as well as others, underscores the central roles played by Europeans or European-styled institutions in the development of new discourses and in the introduction of different working methods and materials.

In its earliest years, the primary journal of the field, *African Arts*, joined other cultural publications such as *Transition* and *Présence Africaine* to highlight modern African art.<sup>15</sup> In these analyses, Western scholars often brought the structures inherent to the Euro-American art worlds to bear on African arts, so that “fine” arts were separated from “popular” and “folk” arts, schools or -isms were identified in order to lend an easy model of catego-

rization, and the artist figure was endowed with patriarchal, individualistic, and genius qualities. Existing categories within the art market for African and non-Western traditional arts in general set the mark of authenticity, relegating all contemporary productions to the realm of the inauthentic.<sup>16</sup> Critic Evelyn Nicodemus has argued that the dawn of contemporary art practice in Africa corresponded to a fundamental paradigm shift—a break in the understanding and role of the visual in African cultures, moving practices from ritual, communal, and local use to highly individualistic, aesthetic realms.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, John Picton in his writings cautions us about the need to acknowledge the continuities between past and present production, the malleability of traditions, and the dangers of drawing a strict boundary between so-called traditional and contemporary practices.<sup>18</sup> Commenting upon the West's reluctance to acknowledge the contemporaneity and vitality of African cultures, Senegalese curator Ery Camara wryly noted, "The West seems to believe that it alone is capable of assimilating other cultures without ceasing to be itself. In this bag are still trapped those who believe that Tarzan is the President of Tanzania. The African artist can, without losing his identity, adopt elements of Western civilization which, without us, would not be as it is today."<sup>19</sup>

New ways of thinking about authenticity, cosmopolitanism, and hybridity move beyond calls for homogenized globalization or exoticized provincialism to consider, instead, the contemporary cultural productions of non-Western artists under a more nuanced rubric of criticism—or, as this study suggests, through a sensitive bottom-up history, one that takes into account the complicated, lived experiences of these transnationally oriented individuals. As James Clifford has noted,

New definitions of authenticity (cultural, personal, artistic) are making themselves felt, definitions no longer centered on a salvaged past. Rather, authenticity is reconceived as hybrid, creative activity in a local present-becoming-future. Non-western cultural and artistic works are implicated by an interconnected world system without necessarily being swamped by it. Local structures produce *histories* rather than simply yielding to *History*.<sup>20</sup>

The philosophical, cultural, and political rubric under which President Senghor encouraged his compatriots to throw off the yoke of colonialism and to create a new sense of identity provides one such unique history in the development of modernisms throughout the globe. President Senghor's government policies were informed by a firm commitment to the philosophy of Negritude. By the time he assumed power in 1960, this philosophy,

born out of the confluences of colonial experience and anticolonial agitation throughout the Black Atlantic, had been the focus of debate for several decades. Its roots can be traced to 1930s Paris where black students from the French colonies, African Americans, and others caught in oppressive political and cultural situations fostered a discourse of racial awareness that carried them into the era of decolonization.

As one of its primary advocates, Senghor, while a student and then a young deputy in Paris, sought to reignite pride in African cultural subjectivity and to engineer a philosophy to which all blacks, in Africa and throughout its diaspora, could look to revitalize their shared “soul.” The strength and significance of these revelations and pronouncements, advanced by Senghor and colleagues such as Aimé Césaire, Léon Damas, Alioune Diop, and Etienne Léro, have been somewhat tempered by the potency of the later critiques of Negritude’s essentialist claims.<sup>21</sup>

Senghor’s formulations of Africanité, which drew heavily on European anthropological, evolutionist, and primitivist models to characterize racial-cultural authenticity, coupled with his insistence on the “emotive” and “rhythmic” qualities of this reclaimed Africanness, led many to dismiss his philosophical writings as reductivist, misguided, and ultimately self-primitivizing. My first chapter addresses the significance of these first debates and attempts to form a cohesive voice and identity with which to counteract the travails of colonialism.

In order to better appreciate the richness of both the written and visual material of this period, one must trace Léopold Senghor’s contributions to the development of a Negritude philosophy, noting its highly cosmopolitan sources in the writings and political activism of the Black Atlantic and in European intellectual history. Mindful of its paradoxes, the analysis can then focus on the manner in which Senghor converted Negritude into both a nationalist and humanist ideology on which he based his approach to governance and patronage of the arts.

In the first years after independence, Senghor developed the tenets of Negritude philosophy into a model for forging national and supranational identity discourses. By the time he became president, he had broadened his philosophical outlook into a humanistic vision of what he called a “Universal Civilization,” to which all cultures would contribute their unique elements. Negritude would thus serve as a wake-up call, a rallying point around which blacks could formulate and nurture unique cultural characteristics to then contribute to this greater whole.

As main patron of the arts in his new nation, Senghor encouraged artists to craft a distinctive visual vocabulary through which to share and cele-

brate a newfound sense of and belief in Africanness. This aesthetic was to be composed of recognizable, pan-African motifs — masks, carved statues, incised combs — all of them, ironically, commodified signs of *l'art primitif* (primitive art) within the European marketplace and imagination. This plea for reclaiming and revaluing Africa's visual traditions was accompanied by a modernization agenda positing that Africa's artists should and could appropriate materials and techniques from abroad. The Senghorian government's patronage system thus resulted in the canonization of an aesthetic of Africanité, one later labeled the École de Dakar. This school was primarily associated with the teaching mechanisms and visual productions of the government-endowed art academy and textile center. The works of this École de Dakar featured prominently within the annual salons at the national gallery and in internationally traveling exhibitions. So strong was the rhetoric surrounding these visual productions that few critics questioned either the visual coherence of the school or the directness of the links between Negritude philosophy and the school's visual forms. Many have therefore easily accepted the existence of this school, seeing it as a crude, simplistic visual translation of a complex set of philosophical writings.

Many of the artworks associated with anticolonial agendas and emergent so-called third world nationalisms have been dismissed as blind, rather ineffectual attempts to invent new cultural traditions that perpetuated primitivist tropes of Africa and/or drew heavily on European modernist models of artistic form and technique. Hence Senegal's École de Dakar has been viewed either as mere mimicry of École de Paris<sup>22</sup> imagery or as a misguided adherence to the cultural primitivism of Negritude.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the usual narrative surrounding the arts from this early independence era assumes that the overwhelming power of the state-run art world resulted in few creations of any art historical significance. Rather, artists, seduced by money and duped by ideology, simply translated philosophical tenets into visual form.

On closer analysis, however, it becomes clear that the École de Dakar did not form a coherent visual whole. Moreover, the kind of reductionist reflection theory thus far employed to characterize the links between Negritude ideology and an École de Dakar iconography neglects the negotiable and highly subjective aspects of artistry. As T. J. Clark and others have argued, ideology is not directly transferred to a work of art, it is, rather, carefully and selectively adapted and manipulated by visual practices.<sup>24</sup> By accepting a one-to-one correlation between ideology and aesthetic, past accounts have linked the failures of Negritude's claims with those of the period's visual products. As this study will attest, the milieu of early state patronage and racist discourse was witness to highly complex, at times paradoxical,