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Call for Papers

VISUAL ARTS AND TRANSFORMATIONS IN AFRICA – International conference 12-13 June 2026 (online)

African societies are undergoing significant transformations, observable in all aspects of life. Social and political dynamics, the relationship to history and memory, positioning in relation to global influences, the economy, technologies, and geopolitics are all indicators that shape the characteristics of new cultures in Africa. The assessment of these transformations is neither linear nor homogeneous; their analysis is complex, multifaceted, and open to diverse scientific, ideological, and conceptual interpretations, given their numerous paradoxes and great diversity. This diversity is reflected in the approximately 2,400 languages spoken on the continent, the forms of interaction between African and external worlds, strategies for connecting with the past, and a resilience in the face of the many twists and turns of history and diverse national trajectories.

These transformations have an organic and structural meaning. They intersect with a critical African perspective on the relationship between the continent and the rest of the world. They shake up museums, permeate exhibition discourse, and are reflected in conferences and scholarly publications. They give rise to a vast body of intellectual production on the relationship to life and democracy, heritage and memory, Wokism and Afrofuturism, cultural translation, and

the decolonization of ideas. They sometimes draw upon social activism fuelled by a thought that is itself rooted in a critique of the universal conceived as “an active and cooperative process of creation”¹.

The currents of thought inherent in this intellectual production permeate the visual arts in their great diversity. It is within this global context that artists question this shifting world through both endogenous and exogenous techniques, media, and approaches. Artists produce knowledge that reflects ongoing transformations while simultaneously acting as agents of transformation. Their practices lie at the intersection of multiple strands of ideas, models, and images. It is precisely in the implementation of these mechanisms of transformation that artistic production in Africa and its diaspora should be analyzed. It would also be useful to examine the grounding of this creativity in research and its connection to other forms of engagement. Now is the time to take a retrospective look at the history of art in Africa, while focusing on contemporary cultural dynamics and the analytical methodologies they demand.

How do the visual arts embody, problematize, and express the transformations of African societies? In light of these questions, it is useful, if not vital, to examine the critical approach to the forms of expression in the visual arts and the techniques that underpin them. These offer an initial level of sensory experience of the relationship to art produced in Africa. This connection is of particular importance because it places practices, know-how, industry, and myth-making in perspective within the contemporary context. It engages the intelligible system to which artistic practice relates. It thus allows us to situate art within a relationship to the concrete, a relationship that takes on meaning in social life. It is in the course of daily life that we are best able to grasp the transformations of society, and it is precisely this daily life that nourishes the aesthetic essence of the visual arts. The importance of the role that art plays in contemporary African society

¹ Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *Ubuntu. Interview with Françoise Blum*. Paris, School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences Edition, 2024, p. 95.

is of great interest for understanding African culture, thought and personality, to paraphrase Ben Enwonwu².

This call for papers invites researchers, artists, curators, collectors, and other arts and heritage professionals to submit contributions focusing on the visual arts (classical and contemporary) in Africa, considered as expressions of a social imaginary and as sites for the development of a social aesthetic. Submissions should highlight how the visual arts reflect the transformations and tensions that characterize contemporary African societies at all levels.

Proposals may explore, in particular:

- Technical processes, know-how, and mechanisms of artistic production in the contemporary context;
- Forms of engagement, critique, or social mediation in the visual arts;
- The relationships between visual arts, social transformations, and everyday life;
- Issues of identity, authenticity, and aesthetic hybridizations;
- Systemic changes in artistic and heritage institutions;
- Strategies for engaging with the past, history, and memory in the visual arts;
- Artistic creation that challenges the future and reinvents archives.

Interested participants should please submit abstracts between 400 and 500 words to openproject@labadouala.com and direction@labadouala.com by 28 February 2026. Authors whose abstracts are accepted will be notified by the end of March. Conference presentations should be submitted by 8 June 2026.

The scientific committee for the conference is:

- Prof. Dr Romuald Tchibozo, Director of the National Institute of Crafts, Archaeology and Culture (INMAAC), University of Abomey-Calavi, Benin;

² B. Enwonwu (2021). Africa's perspective on art and the problems facing African artists today. In P. Falguières (ed.), *Contemporary African art: History(ies) of a concept by those who created it* (pp. 183-192). JRP/Editions.

- Prof. El Hadji Malick Ndiaye, Director of the Théodore Monod Museum of African Art, IFAN, Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar, Senegal;
- Dr. Edwige Zagre/Kabore, Deputy Director of the LACOSHS Doctoral School, Norbert ZONGO University, Burkina Faso.
- Prof. Paul-Henri Souvenir Assako Assako, Senior Lecturer, Head of the Visual Arts and Art History Department, University of Yaoundé 1 & Director of Libre Académie des Beaux-Arts, Douala, Cameroon;
- Prof. Runette Kruger, Research Associate at the University of Pretoria, South Africa.