

ARTFORUM

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

FALL PREVIEW

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ART IN DAKAR

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CHEIKH NDIAYE

WITH INDEPENDENCE came the freedom to once again fully inhabit this city, the imperative to inscribe in our new urban designs the ancient pact between our ancestors and the spirits that had guided them here, to this benevolent green cape embraced by a blue Atlantic. Dakar. *Ndakar*. Denatured by more than a hundred years of foreign rule, our *Dëkk Raw* had always meant to serve as a refuge for the oppressed of all origins. With our newly recovered autonomy, we translated this mandate into an architecture of openness; we drew up municipal plans as a poet crafts his verses. Our modern aspirations for millennial peace and middle-class comfort were housed in neighborhoods named Liberté and Amitié.

But all this concerted planning failed to anticipate the rural exodus that followed. In leaving their villages due to drought and scarcity, millions abruptly abandoned the strictures of a rigid social structure in which every member of the community had acted as a load-bearing wall. The massive influx of the poor and disadvantaged stress-tested Dakar's promise to assist and assimilate anyone in need. In an urban landscape whose poetry the villagers had not yet learned to read, communal spaces seemed suspect and were abandoned to the fate of the vacant lot, which in belonging to everyone is the responsibility of no one.

How do we now stake a collective claim on what Alain Badiou calls the atonal worlds left in the wake of colonization and rapid urbanization? With what offering or by what form of postmodern sacrifice could we reenact the original pact on which this city was founded, in an effort to peacefully cohabitate with the spirit world and respect its command to welcome all those seeking sanctuary? What new feat of social engineering could make a citizen of the villager, an interior of the exterior, a public space out of a private domain? I submit that it may be a question of coaxing night into day and lightly urging day into night. □

CHEIKH NDIAYE IS AN ARTIST BASED IN NEW YORK AND DAKAR.



Cheikh Ndiaye, *Privatisation d'un espace par son ciel bleu* (Privatizing a Space by Its Sky), 2016. plastic tarps, concrete, iron. Installation view, Sicap Liberté 3, Dakar. From "Afro Pixels," *Dak'Art*.

