



Interview

In conversation : Mamadou CISSÉ

The works of Mamadou Cissé (b.1960) tell us about real and imaginary cities, tinged with optimistic progressivism in the face of the massive urbanisation of our worlds. CISSÉ's imagination, originally from Casamance (Senegal), transforms skyscrapers into intricately sharp crystals and traffic jams into beaded threads, resembling dazzling gemstones. The city is perceived as a place of life where collective intelligence improves the organisation of modern societies. A former night watchman and postcard collector, Mamadou CISSÉ traveled for a long time through ink and paper, recreating his dream cities. Now exhibited at Galerie Christophe Person in Paris, the nomadic artist shares with us his inspirations and unique journey.



Mamadou CISSÉ

Ngalula MAFWATA, MAYI-ARTS: What is your relationship with cities?

Mamadou CISSÉ: I like observing the world around me; the city is my passion. In my opinion, architects are true artists. For example, I love strolling around Paris and can marvel like a child at places like La Défense, or even New York, which inspire me in the same way. Cities, for me, are both real and imaginary. I see them as works of art in constant evolution. It is a fascinating world.

MA: Is this the approach for your works as well ?

MC: There are imaginary cities, but also reinterpretations of existing ones. I have reimagined cities like Dakar or Bamako, picturing them in the future. When I look at a city in a photograph, I naturally visualise the spaces that could have been arranged differently, and I translate these ideas into my works. This has led me to become more and more interested in cities.



Chateau e Versailles, Mamadou Cissé, 2019

A Unique Journey

MA: Your journey is unique, can you share more with us ?

MC: When I was a security guard, I spent long hours alone on site. To keep busy, I tried many activities because... I had to stay awake! (*laughs*) Then one day, someone gave me a notebook. Being a postcard collector, I started by reproducing one that showed the Bridge of Normandie. That, gave me the idea to draw cities. I began with plans, then started to rework cities, neighbourhood by neighbourhood, integrating real elements like the Eiffel Tower or the Pyramids for Paris for example. That's when my art started to take shape.

MA: Your art differs from the popular Contemporary Arts

MC: True; Figurative Art and portraits are predominant at the moment. I wanted to do something different, so I chose to draw cities. This passion developed thanks to some great encounters, particularly during the Dakar Biennale in 2012, which launched my art onto the international scene.

What followed for Mamadou Cissé was a combination of fortuitous encounters that would be pivotal in bringing his art into international museums and galleries, in Europe and America, whether it was the Fondation Cartier or galleries in Amsterdam and London more recently. Cissé's architectural lines, as well as his work with colours, quickly draw attention.



Sans Titre, Mamadou Cissé, 2023

"Mamadou CISSÉ's artistic work stands out for its fused approach between urbanism and fine art drawing. A keen observer, he carefully studies the dynamics and ecosystems of the cities he visits or observes, nourished by his postcard collection. Conversely, he imagines fictional cities populated with real elements."

MA: What differences have you noticed between cities?

MC: In Africa, for example, we often build without thinking about tomorrow. Cities expand to respond to urban growth without necessarily considering the preservation of nature. I call them horizontal cities because they spread over vast areas. In Senegal, for a long time, we only had two major cities: Dakar and Rufisque. Today, Dakar has expanded significantly with its suburbs. Sometimes I wonder why not build upwards, like in the United States, where urbanism integrates natural spaces. Also we must always strive to maintain a balance between urbanisation and nature. Manhattan, for example, couldn't have housed its million inhabitants without this consideration.

MA: Why this particular enthusiasm for the city?

MC: I have noticed that many of us Africans are drawn to large cities. It's probably due to the influence of culture, books, and media that present them as signifiers for success and opportunities. The city represents a dream, an aspiration. In Europe, it is somewhat the opposite, where people seek a connection with nature. Perhaps one day, when our cities reach a certain level of development, we too will feel the need to reconnect with nature and build differently.



Kémo City, Mamadou CISSÉ, 2024

MA: Which cities inspire you the most?

MC: Every city has its own charm, it's hard to pick just one. I'm fascinated by laboratory cities like Dubai or Singapore, which embodies futuristic and intelligent urbanism. In Singapore, for example, they have even integrated farms into the environment. These cities show that it's possible to reconcile urbanisation and nature. In my work, I observe current urban spaces and imagine what could be done there.

You can find a curation of Mamadou CISSÉ's work in RUBIK'S exhibition at Galerie Christophe PERSON - until 12 October 2024

Lien : <https://www.mayiarts.com/in-conversation/mamadoucisse-interview>