



## **SAVE THE DATE – TRIPOLI - NOVEMBER 29, 2010**

**Preview in Tripoli of the itinerant urban multi-disciplinary project “Visionary Africa– Art at work”**

**VISIONARY AFRICA (in Africa) - “Art at Work”**

**ITINERANT MULTI-DISCIPLINARY PROJECT IN AFRICAN CAPITALS**

Phase 1: TRIPOLI (29 November), ADDIS ABABA (January 2011), OUAGADOUGOU (February 2011)

## **SHORT DESCRIPTION**

This project focuses on the importance of culture and creativity as development tools and is directly in line with the Brussels Declaration by Artists and Cultural Professionals from EU and ACP countries. It includes an itinerant urban exhibition of contemporary African artistic practices, residencies of African artists in a different country and workshops on the relation between art and development of modern urban centres in Africa.

## **CONTEXT**

### **Culture at the heart of African-European dialogue**

Since the end of the 1990s, the European Union has been progressively more committed to strengthening dialogue and building more specific and special relations with Africa. The first **EU-Africa Summit** was held in **Cairo** in April 2000. It defined a framework of political and global dialogue and laid down an action plan in the areas of African integration in the global economy, democratisation, health development, education, the environment and security.

The second Summit took place in **Lisbon** in 2007. This Summit further strengthened the partnership and brought the EU-Africa dialogue to a higher political level. The Treaty of Lisbon signed at that Summit emphasised culture and creativity for the first time by according it a central role in **all** European policy fields ranging from regional policy to foreign affairs and development. Culture must therefore find a place “at the heart” of development policies. At Lisbon, the frequency of the Summits was also determined. From now on, they will take place every three years. The next one is held in **Tripoli**, Libya, on November 29 2010.

The theory was quickly put into practice. The European Commission has increased its efforts to show that culture is a factor of human development, social cohesion and employment. It was thus thanks to the impetus provided by Louis Michel, the then European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, that in April 2009, the seminar on “**Culture and Creativity as Vectors for Development**” was organised. This brought together around 800 participants: politicians (of whom 46 were ministers of



African countries), artists and civil society representatives from the different countries of the EU, but also from the 65 ACP countries (Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific). On that occasion, Louis Michel insisted on the importance of addressing a broad public, on culture is not "a plaything for the pretentious elite" but an integral part of development, "a sphere in which society explains its relationship with the world and plans its future ... in a certain way, a mental cement of social cohesion." In the conclusions to the seminar, stress was placed on the importance of launching an exhibition on African artistic heritage on the occasion of the **third EU-Africa summit** held in Tripoli.

**Commissioner Andris Piebalgs co-chaired a High-Level Round Table on Culture and Development during the United Nations Summit on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).** Culture is increasingly recognised as a fundamental dimension in building development and in constructive relations between people. The European Union-Africa partnership has also identified **cultural cooperation** as one of the priority actions to consolidate this important dialogue between the two continents. The campaign, "African Cultural Renaissance", launched by the African Union for the period 2010-2012 and supported by the European Commission, is one of these actions, and the itinerant exhibition of African artistic practices "Visionary Africa: Art at Work" forms part of this.

## **THE PROJECT**

### **"Visionary Africa: Art at Work", urban and itinerant project in Africa**

The exhibition will be presented in three African cities in conjunction with important institutional and cultural events. It starts off in Tripoli (Libya) in the form of preview on November 29 at the same time as the **Europe-Africa Summit**.

It will then be staged, in a wooden pavilion designed by the architect David Adjaye, in **Addis Ababa** (Ethiopia), headquarters of the **African Union**, from January 10-30, 2011, dates which coincide with the festival of Timkat. The exhibition can be seen from February 19 to March 13, 2011, in **Ouagadougou**, the capital of Burkina Faso and one of the focal points of celebration of African culture, with, notably, the pan-African cinema and television festival FESPACO (which for a number of years has been part-financed by the EU). The exhibition will spend three weeks in each city. A broad attendance is therefore expected.

The aim of this new exhibition is to provide, through the work of African artists, a snapshot of the transformations that have occurred on the African continent during the last half century, as well as put its future development into perspective. The exhibition will be staged in a pavilion designed by David Adjaye and divided into three sections: **Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow**. It will feature some thirty reproductions of works by contemporary African artists from different regions of the continent. Each section will retain its autonomy. At the same time, there will be a continuous interface and dialogue between the three "space/time" modules. Seen from this perspective, the exhibition dovetails perfectly with the philosophy of the "Visionary Africa" festival and represents its



natural extension. The fourth space in the pavilion will be dedicated to video projections of the living arts. Every evening, the public will be invited to share the performances of African artists (musicians, choreographers, film-makers, and actors) committed to and involved in African cultural development. These videos were filmed for the most part during the event "48 hours in Brussels", which was also a part of the "Visionary Africa" festival.

It is from this perspective that in 2009 the European Commission launched this partnership with the Palais des Beaux Arts (Centre for Fine Arts) in Brussels, which consisted of emphasising and strengthening relations between the cultural centres and museums of Europe and Africa. This ambitious project began with the foundation of a "**Visionary Africa**" festival. Inaugurated on May 30, 2010, it ran until September 26. The festival will continue in itinerant form in major African capitals in the form of the exhibition of African art practices "Art at Work".

The festival was a vast platform for African culture, bringing together an eclectic programme adapted to all types of audience, uniting exhibitions, debates, concerts, film screenings, performances and shows. Two exhibitions dedicated to the African culture of yesterday and today constituted the high point of the "Visionary Africa" festival. The ambition of "**GEO-Graphics**", which was developed and designed by architect, David Adjaye, with the assistance of the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren, was to redraw the cultural map of Africa and instigate a visual and narrative dialogue with contemporary art. For its part, the exhibition "**A Useful Dream. African Photography 1960-2010**", put together by Simon Njami, celebrated 50 years of African photography and presented some 200 photos taken by contemporary African artists (living or deceased). It also signalled the point of departure for drawing up a long-term vision of the relationship between African art and culture, and its development.

The reflections initiated in Brussels by "Visionary Africa" is thus extended to the African continent thanks to the itinerant exhibition "**Art at Work**". The third EU-Africa summit in Tripoli is the starting point for an essential extension of "Visionary Africa" in Africa. The moment chosen is opportune, for in 2010-2011, 22 African countries are celebrating the **50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their independence**, an independence which has been closely linked to profound changes in political, economic, social and cultural life. In addition, this it is also the moment when the African Union is rediscovering the importance of culture as a factor for development by launching the campaign "African Cultural Renaissance".

## **THE BOOK:**

### **The common dignity of art and work (Emiliano Battista and Nicola Setari)**

A symbolic project, if we look at the etymology of the words, means, literally, to cast forward something that brings together. *Visionary Africa: Art at Work*, an artistic initiative with ambitious political aspirations, falls squarely under this definition. *Art at Work* has been conceived to be adaptive, both to the varying urban realities of the different capitals on its itinerary, and to the responses generated by its temporary



transformation of the urban landscape during each of its stops. What architect David Adjaye says about the pavilion—that it is a ‘device capable of organizing a context, precisely because it was designed without a particular context in mind’—applies to the platform as a whole. The pavilion does not impose a pre-fabricated artistic programme; rather, it inscribes itself into the landscape as another site where a specific aesthetic can materialize, like the markets and courtyards across Africa that are spontaneously transformed into ‘aesthetic’ spaces, as Simon Njami says. *Art at Work* wants to release that potential, which is why it offers only a series of frames—architectural, visual and conversational—which have to be activated if they are to be meaningful or useful.

Public participation and involvement is inscribed into the day-to-day operations of the platform, for it is really the local communities that will determine the direction *Art at Work* takes. In the West, the notion of public participation has become something of a tired cliché, but Simon Njami suggests that it may have currency in the African setting precisely because of the spontaneity with which every space can become aesthetic. The argument here is about the relationship to public (and also private) space, and this relationship is not devoid of political implications: ‘there is no “centred causal logic” in Africa, but a series of micro-logics, which, brought together, form the *social fabric*’ (italics added). *Art at Work* respects these micro-logics. It provides a multifaceted structure—pavilion, artist residency programme, workshops—within which the combination of micro-logics may yield insight into the place that art and culture can play in weaving the ‘social fabric’ and in shaping the urban landscape of African cities. The platform is a public art project: by changing, if only for three weeks, the coordinates of the citizens’ daily experience of the city, it invites reflection on their role in shaping their own urban environment.

If we step back for a second to take in the long view, it is clear that the platform aims to be a two-way bridge, connecting *Visionary Africa*’s life in Brussels to the African capitals it will travel to, and those capitals to Brussels, and thus, following a now common symbolic extension, to Europe. Indeed, it is highly symbolic that the presentation of the project, and of this publication, is scheduled to be a side event of the first Africa-EU Summit to be held in Africa. For this book, we have asked many of the African and European voices involved in the Brussels phase of *Visionary Africa* to reflect on the short- and long-term potentials of this platform, for their vision, it seemed to us, was best suited to promoting the intended reciprocity of these two continents.

*Art at Work* inscribes art in the day-to-day tasks of urban life, and it does so, paradoxically perhaps, by liberating it from its commoditization and by reasserting art’s visionary quality, its capacity to mediate between the visible and the invisible. Art and work, after all, share a common dignity: both patiently reconcile past and future through the (imaginative and material) transformation of reality in the present.



## **THE PAVILLON**

### **1) David Adjaye's Pavilion structure**

My concept for these pavilions is based on the notion that they represent a molecular unit for the design of an art space. Each pavilion is intended to be self-sufficient (they could not be rendered simpler without becoming ineffective), and each provides a very direct way of intervening in the public realm to make new art accessible to a wider audience. The reason for working at this level is that it is between the state, which provides institutional spaces, and the commercial market with its private galleries. For the state, art is a political project, focused on issues of culture and identity, while for galleries, art is about money and value: in either case, art practice is restricted. Our idea is to talk about art and work, with the intention of supporting civil society in a wide range of locations. Instead of spending money to campaign for better facilities, we intend to use that money to work with art institutions or local organizations, to build a structure. The structure will be linked to a local organization that can look after it, and that will allow artists who are not in the mainstream to show their work in a space that supports public discussion and education. To meet both sets of requirements, the exterior of the building is as much part of the exhibition as the interior.

### **2) Simon Njami about David Adjaye's Pavilion structure**

What we plan to show within this structure, this tool, are moments. One moment will be called yesterday, a second today, and a third tomorrow. It goes without saying that these moments blend into one another. For a formal description, yesterday is a space composed of photographs. What better to situate, with the illusion they give of reality, those stated moments? A black and white photograph calls the 1960s to mind, and you are immediately transported elsewhere. I am thinking, for example, of the amazing photo of Nelson Mandela sparring on a rooftop. This image can be a symbol for all sorts of things: of Mandela's fights, or of Africa's many struggles, many bouts. Then there are moments of passage, of transition, which I call hubs, or today. This is represented by David Adjaye's decade-long photographic survey of fifty-two African capitals. These photos localize us, they situate the debate, not in the exhibition space, but in the larger space of Africa's capitals, its urban context. Within these hubs— I should add that these are interactive spaces—there will also be videos of contemporary works of art and of "art testimonies". A third space, tomorrow - which again is a metaphorical tomorrow - is where we plan to show pieces of contemporary art. These will also be the spaces for the local communities, the local stakeholders, as they like to say, to intervene and bring their contribution to the project. These spaces will change with each stop.

## **The commissioners of the "Art at Work" project**

### **1) David Adjaye**

**Artistic Director of the "GEO-Graphics" exhibition**





## **Joint Commissioner of the "Art at Work" project and designer of the itinerant pavilion**

Of Ghanaian origin, David Adjaye was born in 1966 in Dar es Salaam, in Tanzania, where his father was Ambassador of Ghana. At the age of 14, he moved to London, where he still lives. In 1993, he completed a degree in architecture at the Royal College of Art. After work placements in the offices of architects David Chipperfield and Eduardo Souto de Moura, he founded his own offices, Adjaye Architects, in 1994. His rise was rapid. Professionals and specialists welcomed his vision and artistic sensitivity, his ingenious use of materials, and his talent for sculpting and emphasising light. Versatile and the winner of several prestigious competitions, David Adjaye excelled in architectural projects, design exhibitions, temporary pavilions and private homes in Great Britain and the United States. Artists of global renown called on his talent. He worked with Dane Olafur Eliasson for the light installation "Your Black Horizon" at the Venice Biennale in 2005. In 2002, he designed the staging and lighting for Chris Ofili's exhibition of paintings "The Upper Room", now on display at the Tate Britain.

According to David Adjaye, "architecture must make the world a better place." The way it influences and shapes daily life is at the centre of his thinking and his work. He also attaches great importance to the public and cultural character of architecture. His design of arts centres and large public buildings, built recently in London, Oslo and Denver, bear witness to the interest he shows in the needs of the community as well as the integration of architecture in the existing local environment. Practising his profession extends into major broadcasting and communication work. David Adjaye regularly develops his theories on the BBC, in the "Dreamspaces" programmes. In June 2005, he presented the television programme "Building Africa: Architecture of a Continent". Aware that he is a role model for future generations of architects, he is involved in teaching, giving classes at the University of Princeton and at the Royal College of Art. Currently, David Adjaye leads an Anglo-American team in charge of the building of the Museum of Afro-American History and Culture in Washington, whose objective is to celebrate the contribution of Afro-Americans to American culture. It is scheduled to open in 2015.

In parallel to his work as an architect, David Adjaye has for some years been researching urban mutation on the African continent. At the end of his travels in all the countries of the continent, some 53, he has gathered together an impressive collection of photographs reflecting the great diversity of the African continent and the dramatic speed of urban growth. The display of these photographs was a high point of the "GEO-Graphics" exhibition.

## **2) Simon Njami**

### **Commissioner of the exhibition "A Useful Dream" Joint Commissioner of the "Art at Work" exhibition**

Born in 1962 in Lausanne (Switzerland) to Cameroonian parents, Simon Njami is an author, critic and exhibitions commissioner. After studying law and the arts, he began his



professional career in Paris as a journalist, a writer, and then as a visual arts consultant at the Association française d'action artistique (AFAA - French Association of Artistic Initiatives). In 1991, with Jean-Loup Pivin and Pascal Martin Saint Léon he co-founded the excellent cultural journal *Revue Noire* (of which he is also editor-in-chief). This rapidly asserted itself as a reference work for contemporary African art. In 1997, the three colleagues organised the "Suites africaines" (African Suites) exhibition in Paris. An enthusiastic public discovered the installations, photographs and sculptures of totally unknown artists. Its success was considerable. The *Revue Noire* disappeared in 1999, but Simon Njami carried on his activities as an commissioner of exhibitions and has 20 to his name. In 2001, 2003, 2005 and 2007, he was the general commissioner and artistic director of the African Festivals of Photography in Bamakp, the only international event dedicated to contemporary African photography and its diaspora. In 2007, he designed the African "Check List Luanda Pop" pavilion at the 52<sup>nd</sup> International Art Biennale in Venice.

A prolific writer, Simon Njami's works include, among others, *Cercueil et Cie (Coffin and Co., Lieu Commun, 1985)*, *Les enfants de la Cité (The Children of the City, Gallimard Jeunesse, 1987)*, *Les Clandestins (The Stowaways, Gallimard Jeunesse, 1989)*, *African Gigolo (Seghers, 1989)*, *La Peur (Fear, Serpent à Plumes, 1990)* and *James Baldwin ou le devoir de la violence (James Baldwin or the Duty of Violence, Seghers, 1991)*. He has also co-edited a number of works, including *Anthologie de la photographie africaine (An Anthology of African Photography, 1999)* and *Anthologie de l'art africain au XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle (An Anthology of 20<sup>th</sup> Century African Art, 2002)*.

One of his principal struggles is to make contemporary African artists visible throughout the world and above all, on the African continent – a struggle that is slowly beginning to bear fruit. One example? Between 2005 and 2007, it proved possible to present his ambitious "Africa Remix" project, of which he was the exhibition curator, in Düsseldorf, London, Paris, Tokyo and also in Johannesburg. Plastic responses of African artists to the questions they have in common were at the heart of the exhibition and were articulated around three themes: history/identity, body/soul and town/earth.

Given his impressive background, the choice of Simon Njami as the curator of the exhibition "A Useful Dream". African Photography 1960- 2010" was an obvious one. Simon Njami gives voice exclusively to artists of the African continent, living or deceased, some of whom have managed to make a name for themselves, and have become known worldwide. It is enough to mention Mohammed Dib (who died in 2003), Cornélius Yao Augustt Azaglo (who died in 2000), Malick Sidibé, Sammy Baloji, Dorris Haron Kasco or Aïda Muluneh. In 200 superb images, most of them in black and white, these great photographers provided a panorama of the development of the African continent over the last 50 years.