The *École des Arts du Sénégal* in the 1960s
Debating Visual Arts Education Between "Imported Technical Knowledge" and "Traditional Culture Felt from Within"

Judith Rottenburg

This paper explores the contested approaches to visual arts education in Senegal during a moment of profound transition. In the 1960s, when most African countries gained independence from European colonial powers, the artistic expression of renewal became a matter of urgent concern – and controversial discussion. Debates centered around the need to accommodate African art histories and visual traditions while reconsidering the role of European methods in arts education on the African continent. Through its special structure and constellation of people, the art school in the Senegalese capital Dakar came to be the site where these issues manifested themselves most clearly.

When Senegal gained independence from France in 1960, its newly elected first president, the poet and philosopher Léopold Sédar Senghor, put art and culture at the center of nation building and devoted important funding to their development.[1] Between 1960 and 1980, his government established a cultural policy that revolved around concepts of national and Pan-African identity and Senghor's vision of a "civilization of the universal," in effect founding a cosmopolitan field of contemporary arts. During the first years of independence, a new infrastructure of cultural institutions was built in the Senegalese capital, including an art school, the *École des Arts du Sénégal*, opened in 1960 as successor of the former *Maison des Arts du Mali*.[2] The school served as a platform for the discussion of postcolonial esthetics and as a center

1 Harney 1996, p. 43.
2 Harney 2004, p. 56.

Published in: Nino Nanobashvili, Tobias Teutenberg (Eds.): Drawing Education: Worldwide! Continuities – Transfers – Mixtures. Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing, 2019. DOI: https://doi.org/10.17885/heiup.457

of artistic production. Within the institution, two departments of visual arts offered opposing pedagogical approaches: one focusing on technical training, considered either as European or as universal, and one based on the idea of a purposeful lack of technical training to encourage an intuitive and spontaneous expression of a supposed authentic African art. These two pedagogical approaches mirrored the two schools of thought dominating arts education on the African continent in dialog with European and American art teachers throughout the twentieth century.[3] Their coexistence within the *École des Arts du Sénégal* in Dakar was a unique constellation, making it a striking case study.

The curriculum of the so-called academic department of visual art (*Arts plastiques*) offered drawing from life and plaster models, still life drawing, composition, graphic art, anatomy, perspective, painting, sculpture, general knowledge as well as African and Western history of art.[4] The Senegalese artist Iba N'Diaye (1928–2008) was appointed its director in 1960. He had studied painting and architecture in Paris and agreed to come back to Senegal at the moment of independence to teach at the art school in Dakar.

The second department of the school was called "Research in African Art" (*Recherche plastique nègre*). It advocated an idea of a specific African approach to art, focusing on research in African visual traditions. This department's curriculum only offered two courses: oil painting and artistic sketching.[5] The Senegalese artist Papa Ibra Tall (1935–2015) became its first director in 1960. After he started to set up a tapestry workshop within the department in 1963 and in 1965 became head of the newly founded *Manufacture nationale de tapisserie* in Thiès, about 70 kilometers east of Dakar, the French mathematician and amateur painter Pierre Lods (1921–1988) gradually took over the lead of the department. Lods followed his own ideal of a *laissez-faire* approach that he had developed in Brazzaville in the former French Congo as teacher and founder of the *Poto-Poto School of Painting*. He considered European teaching methods an obstruction to the promotion of a supposedly authentic African art, a perspective he shared with other European art instructors on the African continent. Prominent examples are Pierre Romain Desfossé who opened *Le Hangar* in Lubumbashi, Congo, in 1944, or Uli and Georgina Beier who started their art education in Oshogbo, Nigeria, in 1961.

The early history of the *École des Arts du Sénégal* in Dakar has been told as a tale of two departments opposing their respective teaching methods, personified by Iba N'Diaye as head of the academic department, and Papa Ibra Tall and Pierre Lods as heads of the department devoted to "Research in African Art."[6] I argue that this assumed dichotomy was not in fact the case by differentiating between Lods' and Tall's

3 See, for example, Gaudibert 1991, pp. 40–42; Harney 2004, pp. 66–68.
4 Sy, Kalidou: *The School of Fine Arts of Senegal*, in: Axt/Sy 1989, pp. 35–39, 35–36.
5 Sy, Kalidou: *The School of Fine Arts of Senegal*, in: Axt/Sy 1989, pp. 35–39, 36.
6 This opposition can be found, for example, in Axt/Sy 1989; Harney 2004; Grabski 2006 and 2013; Collection Bassam Chaïtou 2007.

Fig. 1 Pierre Lods with some artists in Poto-Poto (in: Odita 1978, p. 63).

approaches. A closer look at Tall's position reveals him as a third figure who breaks this binary and the inherent assumption that technical training was linked to Europe and its traditions of naturalistic representation, while African art, imagined as non-naturalistic, required purposeful rejection of technical training.

In the following, I will first present Pierre Lods and Iba N'Diaye as emblematic figures for their respective teaching methods, and then discuss Papa Ibra Tall's approach. Lods, N'Diaye, and Tall were not the only teachers at the art school in Dakar, but as heads of the departments they occupied particularly important positions in the first six years of the institution that are in the focus of this paper. In 1966, the first generation of students of the Dakar art school showed their work in the contemporary African arts exhibition *Tendances et confrontations*. This exhibition took place on the occasion of the *First World Festival of Negro Arts* in Dakar and was attended by an international public. Following the festival, the setting of the *École des Arts du Sénégal* changed significantly. Iba N'Diaye decided to return to Paris while Tall became head of the *Manufacture nationale de tapisserie* in Thiès. Only Pierre Lods remained as a key figure in visual arts education in Dakar until his death in 1988. He had a considerable influence on the way art education and the role of the artist was conceived in Dakar.[7] Pierre Lods' self-promotion as a teacher guided by "silence and respect"[8] towards his students can be discerned from a photographic representation of a teaching unit in the 1950s (» *Fig. 1*). The photograph taken at the Poto-Poto school in Brazzaville depicts Pierre Lods and a group of young artists. Though we do not know the exact circumstances in which this photograph was taken, there is no doubt that its carefully constructed composition is supposed to tell us about the visual art education at Poto-Poto,

7 Grabski 2017, p. 138.
8 Lods 1959, p. 355.

about the students, the teacher and most importantly about their relation to each other.

In the lower two thirds of the photograph, we see five young men and their drawing materials – white sheets of paper, pens and little glasses of ink. They are sitting together in a crowded row at a table, where they are busy drawing and focusing on their sheets. In the upper third of the photograph, we see Pierre Lods, the founder and only teacher of the school, and beside him, there are three wooden masks and a hat. A triangle formation becomes apparent within the photograph's composition: the students' faces form the lower side of this triangle; the two wooden masks positioned slightly below Lods' face on its right and left side provide a middle layer; and Pierre Lods' face constitutes the peak of this formation. He is positioned in the center, behind the student sitting in the middle of the row. Standing behind his students, Pierre Lods assumes the paternalistic position of teacher, mentor and protector. He is bending downward slightly and attentively observing the students' working progress. Pierre Lods poses as a silent observer who apparently does not interfere – he neither comments nor enters his students' field of vision. It is striking that the students do not seem to say a word either. This class is held in silence. Everyone's attention is geared toward the emerging drawings: while the attention of the viewer is attracted toward Pierre Lods, his eyes redirect the attention toward his students, and their eyes are focused on their drawings. None of the students raises his eyes. This drawing lesson is not presented as a lesson in watching, observing, measuring an object from a distance and rendering it on paper while constantly re-looking at it. The students do not seem to actually have any object or model in front of them. Rather, they seem absorbed in introspection as if drawing from their own imagination, to create something independent of the world surrounding them.

Pierre Lods believed to face "a population where everyone is an artist"[9] and considered drawing instructions therefore not necessary or even harmful, as he reported in 1959 at the *Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists* in Rome.

> Thanks to this prodigious and incredible assembly of spontaneous talents, I was able to make a specific choice and only keep the painters who showed straight away all the natural qualities of *drawing, composition, harmony* and *imagination*.[10]

He described his teaching method as a *laissez-faire* approach, saying that to narrow his interventions down to a minimum is

9 Lods 1959, p. 358.

10 Lods 1959, p. 357. The French text reads: "Grace à ce prodigieux et incroyable rassemblement de talents spontanés, je pus faire un choix précis et ne conserver que les peintres qui montrèrent,

> […] to sustain the internal tension of the artists, to encourage them or free them of their doubts, to distribute their material to them and give them the essential indications about the use of colours, brushes and medium, paper or canvas.[11]

While Lods himself did not recognize the important part he played in the construction of a supposedly authentic African art, he obviously did influence his students in many ways. The decoration of the classroom with wooden masks was only one example, as Lods himself explained,

> To nourish the inspiration of the painters, I surrounded them with traditional African objects, with a great variety of plants in the gardens, and I organized festivals. Sometimes we read African legends, proverbs or poems which seemed to me to correspond with the Negro world, or share the same values (Senghor, Césaire, Saint-John Perse, Michaud, Prévert…).[12]

It is remarkable that the masks presented in this photograph are positioned behind the students, as a background. Moreover, their display can remind us of European ethnographic collections as they are stripped of their constitutive trappings and de-contextualized from the masquerade, dancing and singing that provide their meaning in their original contexts. Within the context depicted by the photograph, the masks acquire different meanings. They stand for an unspecified Africanness and are enacted as art objects. While Lods presented the teaching at Poto-Poto as a mere *laissez-faire*, the school was obviously built on a European's idea of African art and his expectations toward the production of his students.

When Senegal gained independence in 1960, it was Senghor's wish that Lods would contribute his experience from Poto-Poto to the newly founded art school in Dakar and help shape the emergent post-independence art scene of the country. Senghor and Lods had first met in 1959 at the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Rome, and Senghor had remained deeply impressed by the French teacher's account of his teaching methods. Lods accepted the invitation and moved to Dakar in 1961,

tout à coup, toutes les qualités naturelles de *dessin*, de *composition*, d'*harmonie* et d'*imagination* […]" (Lods 1959a, p. 328).

11 Lods 1959, p. 357. The French text reads: "le maintien de la tension intérieure des artistes, pour les encourager ou les débarrasser de leurs doutes, pour leur distribuer le matériel et leur donner des indications indispensables sur l'emploi des couleurs, des pinceaux et l'utilisation du support, papier ou toile." (Lods 1959a, p. 328).

12 Lods 1959, p. 358. The French text reads: "Pour alimenter l'inspiration des peintres, je les entoure d'objets africains traditionnels, dans le jardin d'une grande variété de plantes, j'organise des fêtes. Nous lisons quelquefois des légendes africaines, des proverbes, des poèmes qui ont une correspondance pour moi avec le monde noir ou qui participent des mêmes valeurs (Senghor, Césaire, Saint-John Perse, Michaud, Prévert…)" (Lods 1959a, p. 329).

ten years after he had founded the Poto-Poto School of Painting. In Dakar, he started to teach with Papa Ibra Tall in the department for "Research in African Art." When Tall was appointed director of the *Manufacture nationale de tapisserie* in Thiès in 1965, Lods became the head of the department. In addition, he opened an *atelier libre*, a free studio at his home in Dakar that functioned very much like the Poto-Poto school. In a photograph taken in Dakar around 1975 (» *Fig. 2*), we can again see Pierre Lods standing behind his students and their works, conveying the same attitude of restraint we already saw in the Poto-Poto photograph from the 1950s. While the students seem to be in the midst of a discussion, sitting between a painting by Amadou Seck on the right and one by Ousmane Faye on the left, Pierre Lods is again posing as a silent observer. His hands crossed behind his back, he signals that he will not intervene. Convinced that his students find their subjects through introspection and have already incorporated the "natural qualities of *drawing, composition, harmony* and *imagination*"[13] before they come to art school, the role of the teacher only consists of providing them with material and encouraging them to explore a talent that according to Pierre Lods they have by birth and origin.

Lods' belief that his students were equipped with an innate talent for spontaneous artistic expression can bring to mind the anti-academic principles of the *Kunsterziehungsbewegung* (Art Education Movement) in Europe during the first decades of the twentieth century.[14] This movement of education through the arts evolved in the context of the *Reformpädagogik* (Progressive Education) and introduced an anti-academic drawing education based on spontaneous expression. Children's drawings were appreciated for their originality and authenticity, values that were considered to be lost in an increasingly industrialized world and a feeling of alienation associated therewith. Pierre Lods' search for authentic African art was also informed by discourses of alienation, and in his art teaching, similar notions of innate artistic ingenuity were intertwined with essentialist ideas of African authenticity. As the exchange between Pierre Lods and Léopold Sédar Senghor demonstrates, this idea of authentic African art in turn connected the European art patron with the Negritude writers. Their idea of authentic Africanity equally needs to be understood in the context of modernist alienation discourses as can be found in surrealism, as Hans-Jürgen Heinrichs points out.[15]

Iba N'Diaye, the emblematic figure of the *Arts plastiques* department of the School, vehemently rejected any essentialist assumptions about African artists, as he elaborated in a statement in 1979:

13 Lods 1959, p. 357.

14 Joanna Grabski more generally points out that art making at Lods' department "engaged with a cluster of modernist notions about creativity, spontaneity, freedom of expression, and artistic intuition" (Grabski 2013, p. 280).

15 Heinrichs 1998, p. 122.

Fig. 2 Pierre Lods and his students in Dakar, ca. 1975 (in: Fall/Pivin 2001, pp. 236–237).

> We are not born more talented than others, most of us do not come from traditional artist families where the profession was transmitted from one generation to the next, but we are sons of African cities which were created, for the most part, in the colonial era, and were crucibles of an original culture, in which, according to the country, foreign or indigenous cultural contributions dominate.[16]

By emphasizing the transcultural entanglements that shaped the urban contexts both in colonial and postcolonial conditions, N'Diaye expressed a standpoint opposed to Lods who continuously tried to maintain an essential difference between African and European contexts, people, and their supposedly authentic art forms. While Lods tried to shield the students from any art historical references other than African masks and sculptures, N'Diaye encouraged them to expose themselves to all kinds of external influences, acquainting them with both Western and African art history:

> […] while I was teaching, I introduced an art history course using slides so that the students could become familiar with artists from all over the world – including those who were profoundly influenced by African art – and their

16 N'Diaye, Iba: À propos des arts plastiques, quoted in: Huchard 1994, p. 49: "Nous ne sommes pas nés plus doués que les autres, la plupart entre nous ne sont pas issus de familles d'artistes traditionnels, au seins desquelles le métier se transmettait de génération en génération, mais sont fils des villes africaines, créées pour la plupart à l'époque coloniale, creuset d'une culture originale, dans laquelle, suivant les pays, dominent les apports étrangers ou autochtones." English translation: Harney 2004, p. 63.

> techniques and artistic careers. In my opinion, this was an indispensable step in educating the eye. But the art schools of other African countries, which were often run by French and Belgian educators, and even my colleagues at the *École des Arts in Senegal* offered an education that was the opposite of what I proposed. These teachers claimed that my program, by putting African arts and European arts on the same level, led to the devaluation of the former. In a word, I was "Europeanizing" the students. I was the European and they were the Africans![17]

N'Diaye advised his younger colleagues to acquire a mastery of techniques "which alone will permit us to overtake the period of infantile imagery […] and to give us the courage to advance the iconographic themes of contemporary Africa."[18] N'Diaye himself had acquired these tools that according to him "only Europe seemed to provide."[19] He remembered that as a student he "was in Europe to learn a craft, and most of all, to learn to draw,"[20] explaining his particular emphasis on drawing education as follows:

> Drawing, for me, is the foundation of all work, the means of acquiring the necessary tools, without which nothing holds up. An artist who does not learn to draw – that's as absurd as a writer who refuses to read on the pretext of finding his own style. […] You can't achieve quality without apprenticeship.[21]

Therefore, as a professor at the *École des Arts du Sénégal*, Iba N'Diaye provided his students with technical training, teaching them naturalistic representation, the rules of

17 Enwezor/Kaiser 2002, p. 55. The French text reads: "j'avais introduit dans mon enseignement un cours d'histoire de l'art avec des projections de diapositives, afin que les élèves se familiarisent avec les artistes du monde entier – y compris ceux que l'art africain avait profondément marqués –, leurs techniques et leur parcours. À mon avis, c'était une éducation de l'œil indispensable. Mais au sein même de l'École des arts du Sénégal, et dans les écoles d'autres pays d'Afrique, dirigées par des Français et des Belges, était dispensé un enseignement opposé à ce que je proposais. Ces professeurs prétendaient que mon programme, mettant sur le même plan les arts africains et les arts européens, entraînerait une dévalorisation des premiers. Qu'en un mot j'européanisais les étudiants. C'était moi l'Européen et eux les Africains!" (Enwezor/Kaiser 2002, p. 54).

18 N'Diaye, Iba: À propos des arts plastiques, quoted in: Huchard 1994, p. 49: "[les] techniques qui seules nous permettent de dépasser le stade de l'imagerie enfantine […] et nous donner l'audace d'aborder les thèmes iconographiques de l'Afrique contemporaine". English translation: Harney 2004, p. 64.

19 Enwezor/Kaiser 2002, p. 50.

20 Enwezor/Kaiser 2002, p. 50.

21 Enwezor/Kaiser 2002, p. 53. The French text reads: "Le dessin, pour moi, est la base de tout travail, le moyen d'acquérir les outils sans lesquels rien ne tient. Un artiste qui n'apprendrait pas à dessiner, c'est aussi absurde qu'un écrivain qui se refuserait à lire sous prétexte de trouver son propre style. […] Il n'y a pas de qualité possible sans apprentissage." (Enwezor/Kaiser 2002, p. 53)

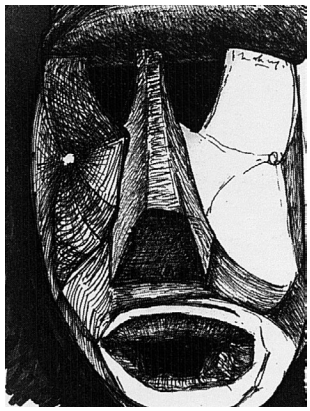

Fig. 3 Xu Beihong, *Woman*, coal on paper, 32 x 50 cm, 1924, Xu Beihong Museum, Beijing.

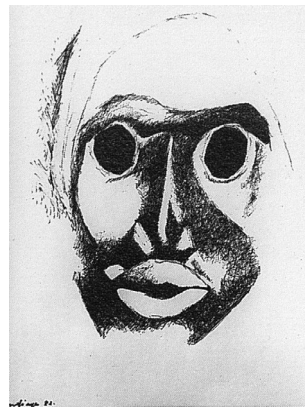

Fig. 4 Iba N'Diaye, Étude d'après un masque de course dan, 1982, ink on paper (in: Huchard 1994, p. 48).

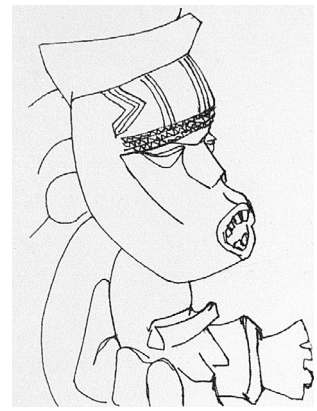

Fig. 5 Iba N'Diaye, Croquis d'après une statue ibo, 1980, ink on paper (in: Huchard 1994, p. 48).

perspective and the principles of proportion. They learned to draw from live and plaster models. In the beginning, N'Diaye sometimes held his course in a café in downtown Dakar and asked his students to sketch the passersby.[22] By teaching them to draw in the streets of Dakar, he invited his students to find their subjects in the urban context and the society surrounding them, whereas Pierre Lods in the other department promoted an artistic practice that focused on introspection and the imagination or visualization of legends and myths. This important contrast between N'Diaye's and Lods' teaching methods can be further evidenced by the role they respectively attributed to African masks and statues for contemporary artistic practices in Africa.

Iba N'Diaye dealt with the subject of African masks and statues throughout his artistic career. While he remembered his journeys to the Dogon country in Mali as formative experiences, he highlighted above all the importance of studying African art in ethnographic museums. N'Diaye, who worked for many years at the *Musée de l'Homme* in Paris in the Africa department headed at the time by his wife Francine N'Diaye, produced numerous drawings of African masks and statues (» *Fig. 3–5*). These drawings show isolated objects almost in the manner of documentation. Through drawing techniques that are typical of the European academic context, such as the use of cross-hatching as a method for modeling volume through shading, N'Diaye evokes the three-dimensionality of the objects on the surface of the paper. He never considered the African art objects a model to follow in his own artistic practice but rather a motif whose volumes, lines and shapes he studied.

22 Harney 2004, p. 63.

> As concerns any formal relationship that might exist between my production and the plastic arts of the African continent, I have not looked for them systematically. I studied African sculpture by drawing in museums, just as I did for Antique, Roman or Gothic sculptures…or European painting. I never borrowed directly, and even if certain forms of African sculpture are frequent in my sketches, this was because they offered solutions to problems in representing volume in space, proportions, and important formal details.[23]

N'Diaye's analytical distance from the objects he renders is the essential difference with Pierre Lods' conception of the role masks and statues should play for contemporary African artists. While N'Diaye represented them with an almost scientific interest, Pierre Lods encouraged his students to enter into a vital connection with the African art objects. In contrast to N'Diaye, Lods considered it necessary to imagine modern art in Africa in a relation of continuity to so-called traditional African art. Accordingly, Lods' students in their paintings and drawings would not represent African art objects but rather use them as examples, as we can see in the paintings by Amadou Seck and Ousmane Faye (» *Fig. 2*) as well as in a later ink drawing by Amadou Seck (» *Fig. 6*). The flatness of their productions stands in sharp contrast to the illusion of three-dimensionality in N'Diaye's drawings. It presumably relates to the absence of training in naturalistic representation and rules of perspective in Pierre Lods' art teaching, as well as to the aspiration to participate as painters in the spirit of African sculptures that Lods encouraged.

Papa Ibra Tall was the third key figure at the *École des Arts du Sénégal* during the first years of the institution. Having been trained in the 1950s in Paris as an architect and having gained insights into painting, serigraphy, tapestry, mosaics and pedagogy[24], Tall returned to Senegal in 1960 and was appointed the first director of the department "Research in African Art." His approach to visual art education is commonly lumped together with that of Pierre Lods. Joanna Grabski asserts that "Papa Ibra Tall and Pierre Lods shared a common vision about the training of artists as well as what would constitute modern Senegalese art," even if she notes that "their perspectives

23 Musée de l'Echevinage 1986, p. 21. Translation by the author. The French text reads: "Quant aux rapports formels qui peuvent exister entre ma production et les arts plastiques du continent africain, je ne les ai pas recherchés de façon systématique. J'ai étudié la sculpture africaine en la dessinant dans les musées ainsi que je l'ai fait pour les sculptures antique, romane, gothique... ou la peinture européenne. Je n'ai jamais fait d'emprunts directs et si certaines formes de la plastique africaine sont fréquentes dans mes études graphiques, c'est parce qu'elles m'offraient une solution au problème du rendu du volume dans l'espace, des proportions et des détails formels signifiants."

24 Harney 2004, p. 56.

Fig. 6 Amadou Seck, *Prinz Lat Soukabé*, 1982, 65 x 50 cm, ink on paper, Sammlung - Bildende Kunst aus Afrika (Schenkung Dr. Helke Kammerer-Grothaus), Carl-von-Ossietzky-Universität Oldenburg, Seminar für Kunst und Medien (IBIT der Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg).

were informed by distinctive experiences."[25] Elizabeth Harney states more generally that "one can […] draw parallels between Tall's beliefs in African artistic expressivity and those espoused by European art mentors and teachers working in other parts of the African continent."[26] However, Tall explicitly distanced himself from Pierre Lods' teaching methods and vision for contemporary African art. When Tall gave a talk at a conference in Dakar in 1972 and reported about the current developments in fine arts in Senegal, he likewise criticized N'Diaye's and Lods' approach to visual arts education.

> In terms of training, two main theories are opposed: that of the *École des Beaux-Arts* copied from the European model, and that of the *ateliers "libres"*. Of course, each one of these theories has its weaknesses.[27]

Tall was against education based on European models and its principles of naturalistic representation for artists in postcolonial Africa. As Elizabeth Harney quotes from an interview, "he sought to deemphasize the impact of Western education on Senegalese artists, claiming that 'when one leaves the European schools of fine arts, one spends the next ten years of life trying to undo these learned habits…. One has to do exactly the opposite of classical education.'"[28] Tall considered the use of European teaching methods an act of assimilation that imposed European art by pretending that it was universal:

25 Grabski 2013, p. 278.
26 Harney 2004, p. 56.
27 Tall 1972, p. 108. Translation by the author. The French text reads: "Au niveau de la formation, deux théories principales s'opposent: l'une préconise des Écoles des Beaux-Arts copiées sur le modèle européen, l'autre des ateliers 'libres'. Bien sûr, chacune de ces théories comporte ses faiblesses."
28 Harney 2004, p. 56.

> The proponents of the "European School," with the pretext of the universality of European masterpieces, import both the content and the organization of Western teaching. They even impose the drawing of classical plasters.[29]

However, Tall did not see the promotion of an assumedly "authentic" African art that deliberately rejects any form of technical instruction as an alternative to a European *Beaux Arts* education. He considered a *laissez-faire* approach even more inadequate, "The gap in the doctrine which reduces the artist to automatisms is, from a pedagogical standpoint, the greatest threat to the future of our plastic arts."[30]

Tall criticized the fact that the *ateliers libres* were led by Europeans and shaped by European ideas of African art.

> […] the masters of these *ateliers*, by their omnipotence and sheltered from any type of control, influence the work of the artists they train much more than they would care to recognize. It is worth noting further that these promoters are Westerners, and think like Westerners, and despite their protests against the Western school, nonetheless propose a Western approach.[31]

According to Tall, the artistic practice of the *ateliers libres* responded to neocolonial expectations of an authentic, naïf or primitivist art coming from Africa: "The promoters of these gatherings have their own idea of African art that they wish to perpetuate against the current of History."[32] Tall deplored that the students who attended the *ateliers libres* were "artificially distanced from external artistic currents, maintained in an

29 Tall 1972, p. 108. Translation by the author. The French text reads: "Les tenants de 'l'école européenne' importent, sous le prétexte de l'universalité des chefs d'œuvre d'Europe, le contenu de l'enseignement occidental en même temps que son organisation. Ils vont jusqu'à imposer le dessin de plâtres classiques."

30 Tall 1972, p. 108. Translation by the author. The French text reads: "la lacune doctrinale qui réduit l'artiste à des automatismes est, au niveau de la formation, le plus grave des dangers qui menacent l'avenir de nos Arts plastiques."

31 Tall 1972, p. 109. Translation by the author. The French text reads: ", par leur omnipotence, à l'abri de tout contrôle, les piliers de ces ateliers interviennent beaucoup plus qu'ils ne veulent le reconnaître dans le travail des artistes qu'ils encadrent. Il faut ajouter à cela que tous ces promoteurs sont des Occidentaux, pensant en Occidentaux, et qui, malgré leurs vitupérations contre l'école occidentale, nous proposent néanmoins un système occidentale."

32 Tall 1972, p. 109. Translation by the author. The French text reads: "Les promoteurs de ces regroupements, au mieux, ont leur idée de l'Art Nègre qu'ils veulent faire perpétuer à contre-courant de l'histoire."

embryonic state vulnerable to the slightest threat."[33] According to Tall, these students became "young people incapable of creating should their master be absent".[34]

Disagreeing with both Iba N'Diaye and Pierre Lods, Tall opted for a third way. He refused to understand their approaches as mutually exclusive options, envisioning them rather as two poles of a productive field of tension within which contemporary artistic practices in postcolonial Africa could develop. Tall's views on the debate that opposed N'Diaye's and Lods' teaching methods amount to a criticism of its premises, namely that this debate located skills, knowledge and technical training in the European academic system and linked it to traditional European principles of naturalistic representation while assuming that African arts, imagined as non-naturalistic, would unfold without any training and mastery of techniques. In this debate, it was impossible to imagine an African art not conditioned by primitivist ideas. Papa Ibra Tall agreed with Pierre Lods on the importance of African traditions of non-naturalistic arts, which he deemed essential to cultivating a modern art practice in Africa. However, in contrast to Lods, Tall did not believe this to be the result of innate talent with no requirement of technical training. On the contrary, he attached great importance to technical skills and understood art in Africa, like art in Europe, to be an activity that needed to be learned, developed, and understood. Tall disconnected the assumed relation between a non-naturalistic relation of the arts to reality and the idea of a naïve unspoiled African artist. He aimed at overcoming the primitivist assumption of the self-taught African artist who spontaneously follows his or her intuition. In his talk in Dakar in 1972, Tall came to the conclusion that "[i]n summary, training an artist is teaching a technique and a foundational culture combined with a deep knowledge of cultural heritage and of foreign realities."[35]

On the one hand, Tall agreed with Iba N'Diaye on the importance of technical skills as well as general and art historical knowledge about both Africa and the rest of the world, considering them necessary conditions for any artist. On the other hand, Tall refused to adopt European methods of art education as universal. He shared Pierre Lods' belief in specific characteristics of African art and the vision that contemporary African artists should draw from African art histories. As head of the *Manufacture nationale de tapisserie* in Thiès, Papa Ibra Tall placed particular emphasis on sustaining

33 Tall 1972, p. 109. Translation by the author. The French text reads: "Ils sont, artificiellement, tenus à l'écart des événements artistiques de l'extérieur, et maintenus dans un état larvaire que tout souffle menace."

34 Tall 1972, p. 109. Translation by the author. The French text reads: "des jeunes gens incapables de produire dès que le pilier s'absente."

35 Tall 1972, p. 109. Translation by the author. The French text reads: "En somme, former un artiste, c'est donner une technique et une culture de base alliant une connaissance approfondie de l'héritage culturel et une large information sur les réalités du dehors."

the applied arts in Africa, claiming that the distinction between fine art and applied or decorative art was foreign to African contexts.[36]

Tall's own artistic work – which was exemplary for many young Senegalese artists at the time – translated his vision of contemporary art and art education in postcolonial Africa. Tall was himself a skilled draftsman who was best known for his monumental tapestries, which were based on meticulous drawings of complex geometrical constructions oscillating between figuration and abstraction (» *Fig. 7*). While dealing with legends, myths, and religious topics he encountered in Senegal, as well as with planetary and cosmic subjects such as nature, life or death, Tall drew techniques, materials and art historical references from diverse times and places. He did not consider this approach a threat to African art but precisely the future of an African art that neither imitated Western art nor shut itself off from external influences. In this way, artists could transcend neocolonial ideas of unspoiled Africanness. Both as an artist and as an art teacher, Papa Ibra Tall developed ways to overcome what Aimé Césaire described in 1966 as a double dilemma of imitation that he believed African artists were facing during the post-independence era. According to Césaire, both African artists "who try to copy European art works or apply European canons" and those who set out to "mechanically repeat ancestral motifs" could not but fail.[37]

Senghor agreed with Césaire on the necessity of encouraging African artists to pursue their artistic practices beyond essentialist binaries. While Senghor strongly supported the installation of two distinct departments of visual art within the Dakar art school, he did not conceive them as competing alternatives. As becomes clear in a statement Senghor gave in 1966 at the inauguration of the *Manufacture nationale de tapisserie* in Thiès, the purpose of the installation of two distinct departments of visual art revolved around the entanglements and mutual impregnations that would emerge between them. Quoting the minister of Cultural Affairs, Senghor phrased the vision of "a new art for a new nation" in Senegal as "achieving the miracle of the harmonious blending of imported technical knowledge and traditional culture felt from within."[38] While in Senghor's explanations this idea remained a theoretical construction, Papa Ibra Tall developed ways to imagine and design such "harmonious blending" in his monumental tapestries.

As a synthesis between Iba N'Diaye's and Pierre Lods' approaches, Tall's position allows us to move beyond the entrenched interpretation of the two departments as mutually exclusive alternatives, and to explore the important artistic developments between these poles. Highlighting Tall's role within visual art education in Senegal in the 1960s illuminates the inherent ambivalences of both approaches and opens new

36 Tall 1972, p. 110.

37 Césaire 2009, p. 212. Translation by the author.

38 Senghor 1977, p. 103. Translation by the author. The French text reads: "de réaliser le miracle de la combinaison harmonieuse des connaissances techniques importées et de la culture traditionnelle sentie du dedans."

Fig. 7 Papa Ibra Tall, *Maternité*, 1960, drawing on paper (*Le Soleil*, 8 February 1980).

ways to interpret the artistic production of the first generation of artists who studied at the *École des Arts du Sénégal*. Instead of subordinating their works to the program of the department they were officially part of, their works should be understood within the broader context out of which they evolved. Regardless of the department these students belonged to, they were all necessarily exposed to the plurality of teaching methods and schools of thought that characterized the Dakar art school during their formative years. They accomplished their studies within a field of tension between *Beaux Arts* and *laissez faire*, between intuition and technical knowledge, between African and European art histories, and in the middle of the cosmopolitan city that was Dakar in the 1960s.

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