

A Pioneering Collection

Contemporary Art in the Weltkulturen Museum Frankfurt

Une collection d'avant-garde. Art contemporain de l'Afrique dans le Weltkulturen Museum Francfort

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Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesafriaines/18542>

DOI : 10.4000/etudesafriaines.18542

ISSN : 1777-5353

Éditeur

Éditions de l'EHESS

Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 3 octobre 2016

Pagination : 699-712

ISSN : 0008-0055

Référence électronique

Yvette Mutumba, « A Pioneering Collection », *Cahiers d'études africaines* [En ligne], 223 | 2016, mis en ligne le 01 janvier 2016, consulté le 25 avril 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesafriaines/18542> ; DOI : 10.4000/etudesafriaines.18542

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Contemporary Art in the Weltkulturen Museum Frankfurt

In 1904, today's Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt was founded as an ethnographic museum, the Städtische Völkermuseum. Over the past 110 years it has gathered more than 67.000 objects from every continent in the world, with the aim to categorise, inventorise and preserve them for eternity. Over the course of a century, the ideas and motivations in regards to the tasks and aims of the museum as an institution changed: From apparently objective and scientific claims to be dissecting "exotic" cultures, with colonialism, trade and consumerism being equally motivating factors, to a socio-political educational mission in the 1970s. Here, the public was offered information on the history and lifestyles of other cultures specifically in regards to their problematic present day situation due to the destructive influence of (neo-)imperialism. This approach was followed by an exhibition programme, which used cultural comparison and critical contextual presentations to look at questions around religion, myth, but also the phenomenon of xenophobia. Since 2010 the Weltkulturen Museum's unique feature is the Weltkulturen Laboratory, which creates fruitful links between scholarly research and pioneering artistic practice on the basis of objects and artworks from the museum's collection. All research and collaboration feeds into the public exhibitions and projects of the museum.

Apart from these programmatic changes, the museum took a pioneering step when, in the mid 1980s, director Prof. Josef Franz Thiel¹ decided to make the acquisition of contemporary art from the regions represented by the institution a focal point of collecting. This shift was first initiated by then curator for Africa Dr. Johanna Agthe, who began to buy contemporary art from the African continent already in 1974. Due to Agthe's specific interest, the museum's Africa section now holds by far the biggest collection of contemporary art works in comparison to the other departments: around 3.000 pieces by artists from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. No other institutional collection in Europe holds this amount of artistic production from that time; the Weltkulturen collection hence is unique.

1. Director of today's Weltkulturen Museum from 1985 to 1999.

A further defining feature are the collection's four main strands—works from Uganda, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa—acquired by mainly German collectors who had different affiliations towards the respective regions. In the following text I will outline the motivations, ideals and strategies behind the build-up of this collection.

Moments of African Art Histories in a German Museum: East Africa

“The collection is created on the basis of the self-concept that a contemporary ethnographic museum is not intended to be a historical collection, but just as at the time of its foundation, a museum of recent culture. If ethnological museums are not to be historical institutions, they must include the present situation. [...] to document cultures of the late 20th century with ethnographic objects from the turn of the century is impossible, even if individual shapes and materials have changed little” (Agthe 1989: 12).

With this idea in mind Johanna Agthe travelled to Kenya in 1974 and bought a number of contemporary art works, mainly from the important Gallery Watutu based in Nairobi. The reason why she decided to buy art specifically from East Africa was rather pragmatic: Agthe assumed the German audience to be sceptical towards contemporary artistic productions, and that they might find an easier access to the works if they came from a region they already knew. Kenya, at the time, had the highest number of German tourists on the African continent. Another reason for Agthe to make this choice was that East Africa was presumed to be a region with only minimal development in visual arts, which motivated her even more to conduct research in and collect from this area. Indeed money-spinning souvenir-art was mainly supported here and not artistic productions, which aimed to be independent from the tourist market. To buy non-tourist-art, Galerie Watutu was the ideal place to resort to as it represented not only Kenyan, but also a broad number of artists from other East African countries.

Agthe's main interest at the time was art produced by autodidacts—artists that had not attended an academic art school. Those artists mainly created work that dealt with historic, political or social events and developments of their culture. Among the very first pieces of the *Weltkulturen* collection are wood sculptures by Samwel Wanjau (born in 1936, Kenya, fig. 1). The work “Freedom Fighter” is an example for the reflection on socio-historical moments as it is a memorial for the War of Independence—the so-called Mau-Mau War—against English colonial oppression. Another example are the everyday scenes and/or references to traditional (hist)stories in the works by Ugandan born, Kenyan based artist Jak Katarikawe (born in 1938 or 1940, fig. 2). Katarikawe has a rather prominent position in the museum's collection as Agthe profoundly appreciated his work and bought numerous of his paintings. Together with a later donation, the museum today owns around 160 works by the artist. At the time Katarikawe's paintings were

popular among international buyers such as tourists, diplomats or expatriates in Kenya, particularly because his painting style was compared to Marc Chagall, some even calling him “the Chagall of Africa” (fig. 3). Just as popular amongst international buyers was the so-called “Tinga Tinga” or “Square Painting”. Firstly introduced in the 1960s in Tanzania by the autodidact Edward Saidi Tingatinga (1932-1972) these works depict traditional stories painted in bicycle paints on wooden square panels.

Johanna Agthe’s initial focus on non-academic art applied to a generally prevailing idea that contemporary art from Africa had to reflect an “African-ness” or “authenticity”, which would distinguish it from other artistic practices, particularly in Europe and North-America. A further aspect of this approach was that art from African perspectives was assumed to be only truly “authentic” if artists had not been exposed to any kind of European/North-American influence, for example through an academic art education. Agthe’s perspective as an anthropologist was “that people from different ethnicities and classes document or reflect their view of their own culture [in the art works]. Art is thus a witness of time—collected over long periods of time it also is an indicator of changes” (Agthe 1989: 12). It seems therefore consistent that she, at least initially, preferably collected works, which in her opinion would mirror most authentically the current state of those cultures the artists originated from. This idea of authenticity was problematic in the sense that it made “neo-primitivism an acceptable form of expression for modern African art” (Picton 2004: 56). Particularly in the 1950s to 1970s it was fostered by a number of European expatriates who set up workshops or informal “schools” on the African continent where they provided locals with art materials to support and develop their artistic expression. One example is an initiative in the Republic of Congo where the former soldier, mathematics teacher and hobby painter Pierre Lods founded a studio for local participants, which later became famous as the so-called “Poto-Poto School”. A rather successful student of Desfossés’ school is the artist Pili-Pili, whose work is also represented in the collection of the Weltkulturen Museum (fig. 4). Another important example of this approach are the workshops of Ulli and Georgina Beier during the 1960s in Oshogbo, Nigeria, which became known as the “Oshogbo School”. Works by artists from that school are also part of the museum’s collection. I will, however, come back to these at a later point in this text.

The support of patrons and mediators helped artists emerging from those workshops or schools to receive international recognition, at least among experts and collectors of arts and culture from Africa. Thanks to the contacts of these supporters, those works, which corresponded to the previously mentioned vision of “authentic African art”, shaped the European/North-American definition of art created on the continent. A very restricted notion of contemporary art from Africa was the result. The international promotion of work produced by autodidacts has been widely criticised as a denial of the real conditions of artistic practice in Africa. Sidney Littlefield Kasfir

(1992: 41) for example argued that “art produced within a colonial or post-colonial context is relegated to an awkward binary opposition: it is inauthentic because it was created after the advent of a cash economy and new forms of patronage”. And Salah Hassan (1996: 38-39) noted that “[t]he colonial experience is often regarded as detrimental to the fate of Africa’s ‘authentic’ classical and traditional arts. Modernization, often perceived as Westernization, is believed to have led to the near extinction of Africa’s great traditions in the arts”.

When British painter Margaret Trowell founded an art school at Makerere University in Kampala already in the late 1930s, she promoted spiritual and cultural topics as inspiration for artistic practices and also tried to keep Western influences away from her students. Still, this was the beginning of an academic, organized art development in East Africa. While Agthe did also consider few works from former Makerere students in her acquisition policy, such as by Elimo Njau (born in 1932, Marangu, Tanzania, fig. 5), Louis Mwaniki or Kiure Msangi, a major addition came only in the late 1990s, when the museum acquired the collection of late Jochen Schneider. He had lived in Uganda from the 1960s to 1970s, where he predominantly bought works by students from today’s Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Art at Makerere University.

His aim was to open a new gallery in Europe in which he could show these works. After his sudden death, the Weltkulturen Museum took over the collection of about 1.000 works, which gives a broad overview of student production in the 1960s and 1970s, an archive, which does not even exist to that extent in Uganda today.

Moments of African Art Histories in a German Museum: Senegal, Nigeria, South Africa

Franz Josef Thiel explained his motivation to declare contemporary art as the main acquisition focus as follows:

“In our traditional collections details about the origin, function and artists of the objects are sparse, if not inexistent. We wanted to counteract this shortcoming with our new collections. [...] At the time I made contemporary art a priority, because I believed that you cannot show this ancient art and pretend that with colonialism the spiritual process of these people is over”².

In 1985, Thiel commissioned the Senegalese artist and curator El Hadji Sy and the German educator and art patron Dr. Friedrich Axt to build up a collection of contemporary art from Senegal for the museum. Friedrich Axt had lived in Dakar for five years (from 1974 to 1979) where he met

2. Prof. Franz Josef Thiel in conversation with the author, 24 September 2014.

El Hadji Sy just before returning to his home city of Darmstadt, near Frankfurt am Main. Significantly, El Hadji Sy's curatorship meant that for the first time an artist and curator who lived and worked in Africa had been asked to create a collection, without the museum attempting to influence his approach or choices in any way. Sy was and still is an artist, curator and cultural activist equally known for his very diverse practice as a painter and performance artist as well as for his defiant attitude towards state cultural policy. As an individual but also as the member of the collective Laboratoire AGIT'ART (founded in the mid 1970s) he was involved in political actions questioning and challenging the cultural policy of President Léopold Sédar Senghor (1960-1980), that was committed to *négritude* ideology and as a result led to the aesthetic of the so-called École de Dakar. Sy's activism later also addressed the ideological and economic disengagement of Senghor's successor Abdou Diouf (1981-1983), whose government promoted technocratic expertise and the private sector.

Sy and Axt had already worked on various projects together; amongst others they co-curated smaller exhibitions presenting contemporary Senegalese art in different German cities. In 1984, they decided to edit an anthology on current art production in Senegal. Axt had approached Thiel the following year to ask him for support. Thiel agreed to publish the book through the museum and suggested that they should additionally buy work for the collection. Until the present day the tri-lingual (German, English, French) *Anthology of Contemporary Fine Arts in Senegal* (ed. by Friedrich Axt and el Hadji Sy) remains a key-arthistorical reference work on post-Independence art production in Senegal. Sy and Axt decided to acquire works, which would reflect the different facets of the Senegalese art scene, from self-taught artist such as Amadou Bâ and Ousmane Faye (fig. 6) to academically trained artists and representatives of the École de Dakar like Souleymane Keita and Mor Faye. Friedrich Axt was above all a dedicated supporter of El Hadji Sy. When Axt died in 2010, works that he had kept in his house on behalf of Sy as well as works from Axt's private collection in addition to a comprehensive archive about the artist's career, were given back to the artist, who in turn gave the whole estate as a permanent loan to the Weltkulturen Museum in 2013. This gesture as well as Sy's exceptional, long-standing relationship with the museum gave the incentive to stage the exhibition *El Hadji Sy: Painting, Performance, Politics* (4th March to 16th October 2015) and publish the accompanying publication with the same title.

Furthermore, Ronald Ruprecht was commissioned to acquire Nigerian contemporary art for the museum in 1987. He bought about 130 works. At the time Ruprecht was the head of the Iwalewahaus in Bayreuth, which played an important role in the presentation and perception of contemporary art from Africa in the German and European context. It was founded in 1981 at the University of Bayreuth, which since the mid-seventies had a focus on Africa in all disciplines. Founding director was Ulli Beier.

Because of his close connection to Oshogbo, Beier mainly produced a high number of exhibitions with artists of the “Oshogbo School” in Bayreuth as well other places in Germany. As there were hardly any other projects presenting contemporary art from Africa, he hence reinforced this specific notion of “authentic African art” in the German context. Ulli Beier left his post in 1984 and only returned for another seven years as director of the institution in 1989. Ruprecht took a four-year leave from his position as director of the Goethe-Institut in Lagos to take over, the Iwalewahaus. He broke up Beier’s focus on the “Oshogbo School” and showed a broader field of art from the African continent. For the Weltkulturen Museum he did indeed acquire works by representatives of the “Oshogbo School”, such as Twins Seven Seven (1944-2011), Jimoh Buraimoh born in 1943 (fig. 7) and Rufus Ogundele (1946-1996). But in addition, he collected works, which reflected further artistic developments in Nigeria such as the “Zaria Group” or “Zaria Art Society” in Northern Nigeria. Formed by young art students at the Zaria College of Arts, Science and Technology in the late 1950s, the group saw a neglect of traditional techniques in the development of new art that was taught in the academy. They developed the theory of “Natural Synthesis”, which was essentially a combination of local art traditions and Western techniques. For the Frankfurt collection Ronald Ruprecht bought, amongst others, works by key figures of the “Zaria Society” such as Bruce Onabrakpeya und Uche Okeke. Okeke also played an important role in the establishment of the so-called “Nsukka Group”, whose members referenced Uli-painting³ in their art. One of today’s best known artists, who was also connected to the Nsukka movement is El Anatsui (born in 1944). The Weltkulturen collections holds one of Anatsui’s early wood works, where he reworked the material with a chain saw which he regarded as a symbol for modern day’s hectic and aggression. Ruprecht’s acquisitions do not provide a complete overview of artistic production in Nigeria at the time, but they give an insight into the main developments in auto-didact and academic art.

The final major geographical strand of the Weltkulturen Museum collection is South Africa. After Franz Josef Thiel had seen a small exhibition of graphic works by South African artists in the center of a local parish, he contacted the owner of the works, Pastor Hans Blum and asked him to acquire works for the museum in 1986. Blum had lived in South Africa from 1966 to 1979. During that time he started to build up his collection of South African contemporary art. All works Blum acquired for the museum were produced by black artists who had no access to formal academic training in Apartheid South Africa. Workshops and non-academic training opportunities, such as the art and craft centre Rorke’s Drift, located

3. Traditional painting of bodies and walls during festivals and ceremonies, which had a purely decorative purpose.

in what is today KwaZulu-Natal were set up to offer educational possibilities. Whereas Rorke's Drift provided basic training in the graphic arts, for many artists more informal workshops played a key role in the development of their artistic practice. Even if many of the participating artists did not regard themselves as political activists, the official restrictions of Apartheid meant that the decision to make art as a black person was itself a political act. Blum exclusively bought work by those artists in order to show his support and make a clear statement against Apartheid. He purchased about 500 works, including productions by artists nationally and internationally renowned today such as Peter Clarke (fig. 8), Lionel Davis, David Koloane, Pat Mautloa, Sam Nhlengethwa, John Muafengejo, Dan Rakgoathe and Azaria Mbatha.

A Pioneering Step

The decision of today's Welkulturen Museum, not only to start a collection of contemporary art, but to make it a major focus of acquisition policy, was pioneering. The so-called "Global Turn"⁴ soon to change the international discourse and to boost the visibility of the African continent's previously marginalised art was barely on the horizon. Major museums and other cultural institutions—not only in Germany, but across Europe and in the United States—showed little inclination to buy, exhibit or promote contemporary art practice from Africa. Instead, the art scene was dominated by a discourse that focused on the relationships between European and North American contemporary art. Africa barely featured in these debates. It was mainly a specific group of art lovers—like the collectors of the Welkulturen collection—who would buy contemporary art on the African continent. In the German context the German journalist and former Africa correspondent Gunther Péus is a further collector who built up a major private collection while travelling the African continent in the 1960s and 1970s. The artists represented in the collection Péus correlate in wide parts with those, whose work can be found in the collection of the Welkulturen Museum. This is mainly related to the earlier mentioned prescribed ideas of what was "authentic African" art at the time. Agthe as well as the other art patrons who acquired works for the museum therefore followed the same taste and approach as Péus. The latter, however, is the only one who regularly presented his own collection in public: in 1979 many of his works

4. In contemporary art, 1989 is regarded as a turning point after which an increasing amount of non-Western contemporary art became part of exhibitions and the general art discourse (BYDLER 2004). See also <www.globalartmuseum.de> for further publications and J.-H. MARTIN and B. H. BUCHLOH (1989 : 197), O. ENWEZOR and O. OGUIBE (1999), S. NJAMI (1997), <<http://ezines.onb.ac.at:8080/www.univie.ac.at/Voelkerkunde/theoretical-anthropology/njami.html>>.

were part of the exhibition *Moderne Kunst aus Afrika, Horizonte '79*⁵, which took place in West Berlin as part of the festival *Horizonte '79*. This event presented a diverse range of African cultures including theatre, dance, film and music. The purpose of *Horizonte '79* was to offer the West German audience direct experience of African cultures. The concept came from the highest echelons of government: "The idea for *Horizonte* came up during a round table meeting, initiated by Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, which took place at the Aspen Institut⁶ and at Schmidt's own home"⁷. While the exhibition was not officially part of Germany's cultural diplomacy, it can still be regarded as a part of government strategy to intensify cultural relations and exchange with the African continent. Officials claimed they wanted to show German audiences that Africa was about more than postcolonial struggles and perished cultures: "As bearers of a worldwide influential culture we do not know enough about other world cultures, which were suppressed or submerged by the expansion of our culture." This, however, remained the only major West German project with contemporary art from Africa. In the 1970s and 1980s, international projects were carried out by two of the "mediating organisations"—quasi-autonomous non-governmental bodies funded mainly by the Foreign Office: the Goethe Institute and the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (IFA). The mediating organisations were also responsible for promoting projects involving contemporary art from Africa. On the continent the Goethe Institute started partly already in the 1960s to support local art sciences, important examples here are the institutes in Lagos and Addis Ababa—a commitment that has continued unbroken until the present day. Within Germany, it was the IFA-Galerie which exhibited art from Africa at that time. During the 1970s and early 1980s, the curatorial approach there was to show traditional art and crafts. The priority was to cast light on cultural and social facets of various regions, rather than to trace specific art-historical developments. There was little interest in, let alone knowledge of, the vast array of autonomous expressions and artistic modernisms that had emerged before and after Independence. That did not change even in the mid-1980s, when IFA began to pay more attention to contemporary visual arts with country-specific exhibitions. Apart from those projects in the framework of West German cultural foreign policy the Weltkulturen Museum was, apart from the Iwalewahaus, the only

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5. After *Horizonte*, Péus has presented a selection of works from his collection in various exhibitions in Bremen, Hannover, Erlangen, Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Hamburg, Amsterdam, Stockholm, London, Graz, Zürich, Brüssel und Aachen, Berlin over the course of the past 30 years.
 6. The Aspen Institut Berlin operates as an international non-profit organization providing a forum for transatlantic issues since 1974, <www.aspeninstitute.de>.
 7. "Horizonte entstand als Idee, in einer von Bundeskanzler Helmut Schmidt ange-regten und geleiteten Gesprächsrunde, die im Aspen Institut und im Haus des Bundeskanzlers getagt hat" (ECKHARD 1979 : 8, translation by the author).

FIG. 1. — SAMUEL WANJAU (KENYA), “FREEDOM FIGHTER”,
ACQUIRED 1974, WOOD, 141 CM (HEIGHT)



Weltkulturen Museum.

FIG. 2. — JAK KATARIKAWA, “HUMAN SPECIES”,
ACQUIRED 1974, OIL ON CANVAS, 61 × 45.5 CM



Weltkulturen Museum.

FIG. 3. — JAK KATARIKAWE (UGANDA), “WHY ARE WE DYING EVERY DAY?”,
ACQUIRED 1998, OIL ON HARDBOARD, 92 × 76 CM



Weltkulturen Museum.

FIG. 4. — PILI PILI (DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO), UNTITLED (ANTILOPES),
ACQUIRED 1991, CRAYON ON CANVAS, 130 × 47 CM



Weltkulturen Museum.

FIG. 5. — ELIMO PHILIP NJAU (KENYA), “DREAM LANDSCAPE“,
ACQUIRED 1974, OIL ON CANVAS, 130 × 47 CM



Weltkulturen Museum.

FIG. 6. — OUSMANE FAYE, “LE CAVALIER”,
ACQUIRED 1987, OIL ON CANVAS, 75 × 98 CM



Weltkulturen Museum.

FIG. 7. — BRUCE BURAIMOH, UNTITLED (THE INNER EYE),
ACQUIRED 1987, OIL AND BEADS ON HARDBOARD, 122 × 50.5 CM



Weltkulturen Museum.

FIG. 8. — PETER CLARKE, “WANTED”, 1978,
COLLAGE AND WATER COLOURS, 66.5 × 51 CM



Weltkulturen Museum.

institution in the sphere of central art und cultural institutions which considered artistic productions from African perspectives.

Apart from taking this innovative step of going beyond the idea of art according to a European/North-American canon, the commitment of the museum led to another fact: The earlier mentioned phenomenon of European travellers and expats buying contemporary art on the continent led to a dispersion of works produced before 1989 and contributed to a fragmentation in the historical development of artistic practices, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. The Weltkulturen collection, however, brings together a huge body of works, which were produced during that time, an important period of re-defining national and cultural identities in post-colonial Africa. It includes works by artists of a generation, who by dealing with these topics have strongly influenced the artistic developments on the continent.

The seminal engagement on the part of the Weltkulturen Museum brought a new form of contemporaneity to a museum collection that had been developed over the course of a century. Works of contemporary art from Africa were no longer anonymously produced objects, but now carried titles and names of the artists as well as the exact date of production.

Throughout the history of museums of ethnology, the classification of objects shifted between being defined as ethnografica, craftwork or art⁸. In particular since the beginning of the 20th century their presentation moved between art and cultural history (Muttenthaler & Wonisch 2006: 36). This is of course related to the fact that those artefacts became major references for the development of European modernism, and the parallel emerging interest of ethnology for the aesthetics of other cultures, the artistic quality of these ethnographic artefacts was recognised⁹. This also was the beginning of the “never ending discussion about the possibility of changing the museums of ethnology into museums of non-European art” (Harms 1997: 23). Other ethnographic museums have been acquiring or presenting contemporary art from the regions represented in their collections. However, never to the same extent as the Weltkulturen Museum and increasingly after the co-called “global turn”, with some of them intensifying their purchases of contemporary art only around the turn of the Millennium. Examples in the German context are the Munich Völkerkundemuseum and the Ethnologische Museum in Berlin.

As monuments of colonial collecting mania, these museums represent a hegemonic and Eurocentric position with regard to non-Western cultures. In a postcolonial world in which hegemonic and ethnocentric imaginaries of “us” and “the Others” has to be continually challenged and refuted, the museums find themselves in a dilemma that is not easy to solve. So to what extent is contemporary art production limited to being ethnographic

8. On this issue, see also M. PRUSSART and W. TILL (2001).

9. See also from that time F. BOAS (1915), H. KÜHN (1923), E. VON SYDOW (1923), E. VATTER (1926).

exhibition material when it is presented in the context of an ethnological museum? Homi K. Bhabha (1993: 358 *sq.*) once called inscribing non-Western contemporary artists into the discipline of ethnology an extremely racist act. In his opinion this implied there were particular cultures, which could only be viewed from an ethnological or anthropological perspective and not as a part of modernity. Annie Coombes (1998: 496) has argued, the ethnographic museum, which is traditionally the site of “visibility” of colonial appropriation and territorial expansion, paradoxically has the greater potential to dispel discriminatory categories. As Coombes explains this is the case “precisely because its ‘visibility’ was never the neutral in-difference of modernist—the claim to subjective individualism that is historically the project of the modern art museum”. On the other hand Mirjam Shatanawi (2009: 370) noted that the blurring of categories which has taken place in contemporary art was very confusing for ethnographic museums since its *raison d’être* presumes the compartmentalisation of each culture—each culture in its own drawer. Present-day art is simply difficult to categorise.

In the case of the Weltkulturen Museum the collection of contemporary art constitutes a treasure of major developments in African art histories. It testifies to the complexities of parallel modernisms that form the foundations of present-day creativity, which is a crucial aspect in regards to an increasing interest in contemporary art from African perspectives in recent years. It is now the time to look at these collections again, to re-evaluate their historic as well as aesthetic value and to firmly situate them in an international art historical discourse. Only in this way is it possible to understand what really characterises the present of art from African perspectives. By doing so it is possible to create new concepts and ideas around them that will contribute to future artistic productions on the African continent.

Weltkulturen Museum, Frankfurt am Main.

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ABSTRACT

In addition to its collection of 67.000 ethnographic objects, the Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt began engaging with contemporary art practices in Africa forty years ago. Since 1974, the museum has collected almost 3.000 works by artists from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe, mainly produced during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Included here are early works by internationally renowned artists El Anatsui, Twins Seven Seven, Peter Clarke, Chéri Samba, El Hadji Sy and Vincente Malangatana. The museum's research into contemporary art from the African continent is pioneering as it started long before the so called "global turn" in 1989. In this regard, the Weltkulturen collection is unique as it includes works from that specific time. A further defining feature is the collection's four main strands—works from Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda and South Africa—acquired by German collectors on behalf of the museum, who had different affiliations with the respective regions. The text traces the motivations, ideas and strategies behind the build-up of the Weltkulturen collection while also looking at the question of collecting and presenting contemporary art in the context of an ethnographic museum.

RÉSUMÉ

Une collection d'avant-garde. Art contemporain de l'Afrique dans le Weltkulturen Museum Francfort. — Il y a quarante ans que le Musée Weltkulturen à Francfort a commencé de se pencher sur la pratique de l'art contemporain en Afrique en plus de sa collection de 67 000 objets ethnographiques. Depuis 1974, le musée a recueilli près de 3 000 œuvres d'artistes de la République Démocratique du Congo, du Kenya, de Namibie, du Nigeria, du Sénégal, de l'Afrique du Sud, de la Tanzanie, de l'Ouganda et du Zimbabwe, surtout produites pendant les années 1960, 1970 et 1980. Sont incluses ici les premières œuvres d'artistes de renommée internationale, El Anatsui, Twins Seven Seven, Peter Clarke, Chéri Samba, El Hadji Sy et Vincente Malangatana. Ce musée est pionnier dans ses recherches sur l'art contemporain du continent africain car il a commencé avant ce qu'on appelle le « *global turn* » en 1989. À cet égard, la collection Weltkulturen est unique car elle rassemble des œuvres de cette période précise. Une caractéristique le définissant en outre sont les quatre principaux volets de la collection — des œuvres en provenance du Nigeria, du Sénégal, de l'Ouganda et de l'Afrique du Sud — acquises par des collectionneurs allemands au nom du musée, qui avaient différentes affiliations vers ces régions. Le texte retrace les motivations, les idées et les stratégies derrière l'accumulation de la collection Weltkulturen tout en analysant la question de la collecte et celle de la présentation de l'art contemporain dans le contexte d'un musée ethnographique.

Keywords/Mots-clés : Africa, East Africa, Germany, South Africa, West Africa, art history, collections, contemporary art, global turn, museums, museum studies/Afrique, Afrique de l'Est, Allemagne, Afrique du Sud, Afrique de l'Ouest, histoire de l'art, collections, art contemporain, global turn, musées, études muséales.