



Exhibition «Africas: The Artist and the City»
29/05/2001 - 11/09/2001

Africa: Visions of a Future

With his proverbial cynicism, Henry Kissinger said some time ago that Africa was for the 21st century to solve. Well, now we're there. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall the sensation of chaos in the African continent has grown. The image the news media sporadically present us with is of wars and conflicts. In Africa during the last decade a campaign of genocide has been perpetrated—in Ruanda—with undeniable joint responsibility at the international level, and the war in the Congo alone has claimed three million lives. The more brazen among us speak of tremendous general readjustment. And the news bulletins echo this. For all that, the slow but continuing signs of progress in South Africa and the normality of official turn-taking in Senegal are instances of good news also arriving from Africa.

For me, an exceedingly strong impression remains of a brief visit to Senegal: the sensation—which I don't know how to articulate very well—that many things belong to the past there, but many others to the future, too. And that if we go on believing that all is permitted to the globalizing powers, it's by no means ridiculous to imagine that the future of the big cities of the West could bear a great similarity to the gigantic megalopolises of Africa, the same ones that outstrip and alarm us.

Within the postcolonial mind set, the vision of Africa rarely extends beyond the culture of exoticism and a fascination for the noble savage, that European fantasy the rest of the world has never shared. All the same, Africa has a cultural life with features of its own, and, in many aspects, one incorporated into international cultural channels. It's true that the predominant debate continues to be about tradition and modernity. Yet it's not odd, either, that they don't go beyond something seen at a glance when strolling down the street: the limitations of the past and the opportunities of the future, the stamp of the local and the imprint of the foreign. It's this creative topicality the exhibition *Africas: The Artist and the City* seeks to put on record.

The title provides three clues to our proposition. *Africas*: the plurality of Africas and the across-the-board nature of a continent that extends as far as Paris and London, since we ought to be clear that everything that happens in Africa concerns us all. *The artist*: the African creator who, out of his or her own experience, opts for the universality of art, proffering the added worth of a number of realities the West looks upon with ignorance and disdain. *The city*: because in Africa, too, this is the locus of creation and conflict, of the concretion of contradictions and the defining of possibilities. With these criteria as his point of departure, Pep Subirós has put together an exhibition that rather than being about big names, is, I would say, about experience. The experience encroached upon by African cities seeking signs of a future. A future in which —commencing with the opportunity provided by this first installment of *Barcelona Art Report 2001*— an African presence will become habitual in the CCCB.