



The African gaze

Why is the CCCB presenting a selection of works from the Bamako *Rencontres de la Photographie Africaine*? Because the discovery of Africa only has a meaning if it serves to discover the world. Among an interconnected humanity, where it is no longer possible to keep Africa out of the frame, seeing the world through African eyes is as important as discovering Africa itself. In other words, it is a question of recognising African gazes onto things. Cultural relationships only have a full meaning as relationships of recognition. The prior condition of any communication protocol is to situate both parties who come into contact on the same level of dignity. The true recognition of the Other comes about when we are able to understand or decipher its gaze at things and to endow this gaze with the same statutes as our own. Conflict, dialogue and cooperation can only come about in the fullest sense from this recognition. This is the idea which inspires the different cultural activities the CCCB has put forward in recent years, and will continue to put forward in the coming years, about the emerging African culture. An exhibition about African photography provides an opportunity to gain an insight into the gazes from the neighbouring continent, and to understand that these gazes –as is the case everywhere– are infinitely diverse, something which does not prevent them from bearing nuances which strengthen the interest in changing perspective.

Basically, this is what it is about: seeing how things are seen from another position, from another perspective of the world, thereby trying to break with the Western trend to provide guidelines for, and canonise, gazes and to use their communicational resources to adapt all gazes to Western canons, and in the final analysis, to the same point of view.

There are no more watertight compartments in the world. Everything has been contaminated. And we all contaminate one another. However, it is as important to discover that, at times, the gaze of African photographers is not so different from our own, as it is to understand the unquestionable specific nuances of the position from which they contemplate reality. They also suffer the impact of fashions and trends, but, to a certain extent, they are still resistant to them. And they face a shining reality of dramatic changes, of troubled accesses to modernity, of terrible epidemics and conflicts of growth and modernisation which are difficult to manage and only they can see without the prejudice of Western exotic Africanism.

Africa is a world in its own right, with as much diversity as the entire planet: from Senegalese to Egyptian Islam, from South African to Maghrebi modernity, from the political, moral and social catastrophe of the Great Lakes region, to Kenyan development policies, the distances –as Pep Subirós tells us– are vast. And as a backdrop, there is a huge linguistic, cultural and religious complexity. There is no African gaze. There are infinite African gazes, but they all have a nuance, which we must be able to recognise. Within them, the person at the centre of the story is essential: the individual who struggles to live and survive.