

albertz benda presents the U.S. debut exhibition of Malian artist Famakan Magassa



Famakan Magassa [b. 1997], *Soif d'immigration*, 2021. Acrylic on canvas. 55 5/8 x 80 inches, 141.5 x 203 cm. Courtesy of the artist and albertz benda, New York.

NEW YORK, NY.- albertz benda opened *Famakan Magassa: SOIFS*, the U.S. debut of Malian artist Famakan Magassa, on view from January 27 through February 26, 2022. Magassa presents a selection of new, unexhibited works from his incisive ongoing series entitled 'SOIFS,' or 'thirsts'. The first iterations of this series were developed in collaboration with Floreal Duran of 5Mondes Gallery and presented at the L'Institut Français du Mali, Bamako and La Cité internationale des Arts, Paris in 2021.

First conceived by the 24-year-old artist while enmeshed in one of Abidjan's frequent traffic jams, Magassa's 'thirst,' is not the immediate, most literal need for water - though it is a crucial issue in his native Mali and throughout much of the world. These are thirsts anchored in society, spanning from the literal to the allegorical: such as the 'thirst for addiction,' the 'thirst for freedom,' 'virtual thirst,' and the 'thirst for power,' among many others.

Varying in tone from exuberant to melancholy, the 'SOIFS' are unified by Magassa's voice that brings together figuration, energetic abstract patterning, and dream-like settings. Certain works, such as *Soif de solitude* depict a lone figure, while in others, such as *Soif de Justice*, a grouping of Magassa's distinctive subjects gambol and entwine around a giant scale on a tile floor. A short documentary, produced and developed by Acrobates Films and Christian Lajoumard, elucidating the artist's process will also be on view. The film follows Magassa as he completes a painting in his studio at the Cité Internationale des Arts Residency in Paris, France.

Growing up in Mali, Magassa has borne witness to the clash of modern cultural developments and the weight of traditions. He seeks a balance between the desire for order and idealism and the reality of a society steeped in contradictions. While displaying a keen sense of observation for human behavior, Magassa maintains humor throughout, abstaining from didacticism, moralism, or denunciation. The artist deftly navigates friendly mockery, social satire, and self-reflection in a spirit that recalls the anarchic wit of nineteenth century Belgian painter James Ensor or the colorful yet penetrating social analysis of Honoré de Balzac's 'La Comédie Humaine.' Magassa casts himself in the role of the griot – traveling poets, musicians, and storytellers who maintain a tradition of oral history in parts of West Africa – drawing meaning from the irrationality and unpredictability of life.

The thirsts themselves are universal, while certain imagery makes specific reference to the cultural and geographical landscape of Mali. The enigmatic, undulating figures that occupy Magassa's canvases are a direct reference to kourédougas – ritual dancers shrouded in secrecy, and a frequent subject for Magassa. The kourédougas are members of a non-religious community that follow a code of conduct and philosophy which emphasizes wisdom, righteousness, good works, and humility. Externally, they can be identified by festive and extravagant outfits of hats, feathers, objects, and jewelry that are seemingly at odds with their measured guiding principles.

It is Magassa's skill for drawing out humor and pathos from both quotidian and existential contradictions that sets his work apart. Reality will always be present in the allegory, poetry will sometimes adorn the discourse, and joyful irreverence will be an integral part of the message.

The artist would like to extend special thanks to the Cité Internationale Des Arts, Institut Français, 5 Mondes Gallery, and Ecole supérieure d'art et design Saint Etienne.

Famakan Magassa (b. 1997, Mali) received his BFA in 2018 from Conservatoire Arts et Metiers Multimedia Balla Fasséke Kouyaté in Bamako, Mali. He exhibited for the first time in 2019 with several institutional shows, including presentations at L'Institute Français du Mali and La Fondation La Maison de l'Artiste in Assinie, Côte d'Ivoire. In 2020, he was included in 'L'exposition collective Jeunes Talents' at the residence of the Ambassador to the European Union, Mali and was one of the 2020 Laureates of the Cité Internationale des Arts Residency in Paris, France. In 2021, he was included in the exhibition Hotel Sahara at Les Magasins Généraux in Paris curated by Anna Labouze, Keimis Henni, and Maïa Hawad. His work has been featured in L'Oeil and ArtsMagazine.