

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FAMAKAN MAGASSA: SOIFS

albertz benda, New York

January 27 – February 26, 2022



Left: Soif de justice (2021) Acrylic on canvas 46 x 57 inches | Right: Soif Lubrique (2021) Acrylic on canvas. 46 1/8 x 53 inches

New York, NY - albertz benda is thrilled to announce Famakan Magassa: *SOIFS*, the U.S. debut of Malian artist Famakan Magassa, on view from January 27 through February 26, 2022. Magassa will present an incisive body of work entitled 'SOIFS,' or 'thirsts,' developed in collaboration with Floreal Duran of 5Mondes Gallery and exhibited 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.

The 'SOIFS' appear primarily in midsize and large-scale formats, many of which incorporate collage in addition to acrylic on canvas. Varying in tone from exuberant to melancholy, they 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.

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



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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.

In collaboration with Cité Internationale Des Arts, Institut Français, 5 Mondes Gallery, and Ecole supérieure d'art et design Saint Etienne.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Famakan Magassa [b. 1997] received his BFA in 2018 from the 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'Institut 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 in Mali and was one of the 2020 Laureates of the Cité Internationale des Arts Residency in Paris, France, in addition to a dual-artist exhibition with William Bakaimo at Bolo L'Espace Art & Culture in Douala, Cameroon. He is currently featured in the exhibition 'Les Magasins généraux,' BETC, Paris, France.

ABOUT ALBERTZ BENDA

Founded in 2015, albertz benda is a contemporary art gallery with an international program exploring material and textility as well as cultural and social dialogues. Our Chelsea space is host to rotating exhibitions with an emphasis on solo presentations of emerging artists, new research into historic figures, and thematic group exhibitions.

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Opening hours: Monday - Saturday, 10am - 6pm

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