

INTRODUCTION TO ALIOUNE DIOP'S "ART AND PEACE" (1966)

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In April of 1966, thousands of first-time visitors to Senegal flooded the freshly renovated gates of the Dakar-Yoff International Airport to attend the Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres, or First World Festival of Negro Arts. People from around the world had been drawn to the nation, then six years independent from France, by an event unlike anything that had ever before taken place on the African continent. As the decolonization of Africa and the growth of Black empowerment movements transformed the global geopolitical landscape, the festival offered a 24-day celebration of dance, theater, music, literature, and visual arts, all by African and African-descended creators. Senegalese President Léopold Sédar Senghor called the festival a “defense and illustration of Négritude,” and indeed, the event granted increased visibility to the conceptualization of Black identity that the president had helped formulate beginning in the 1930s.¹ But hand in hand with their commitment to Black uplift, the festival’s organizers asserted that the event must also play a role in the pursuit of a yet broader goal: the attainment of world peace. Alioune Diop, the president of the Festival’s organizing

1 Léopold Sédar Senghor, “The Function and Meaning of the First World Festival of Negro Arts,” *African Forum* 1, no. 4 (1966).

committee, proclaimed the event's relationship to this ambitious objective in "Art and Peace," the first essay to appear in the Festival's official *livre d'or*, or guidebook.²

Addressing the uncertain future of mankind, thrown ever into imbalance by the mounting tensions of the Cold War, the devastating toll of World War II, and the yet-undecided future of newly formed African states, Diop argued that the resolution of international conflicts would rely on the international exchange of cultural achievements. The arts, in his view, offered to create mutual understanding between peoples by fostering a depth of intercultural empathy that was unattainable through political agreements or persuasive language. Thus, for Diop, creating networks through which to share the arts—such as the nexus of artists and audiences generated by the 1966 Festival—enacted an urgent step toward global reconciliation.

For present-day scholars, Diop's impassioned call to arts illustrates the wide-reaching potential that a number of independence-era West African leaders associated with the creation and circulation of visual culture. "Art and Peace" also sheds light on two understudied influences on Black internationalist thought, invoking the midcentury philosophies of the Catholic Church and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).³ But Diop's essay is perhaps most prescient in its identification of the paradoxes that the era's increasingly global exhibition itineraries thrust upon the continent's artists. His discussion of the responsibilities facing contemporary African artists provides an illuminating precursor to present-day debates surrounding what it means to identify as an African artist amid an ever-globalizing art market.⁴

2 Before the essay, a brief foreword by President Senghor appears. *Premier Festival Mondial Des Arts Nègres: Dakar, 1/24 Avril 1966 (Livre D'or)* (Paris: Atelier Bernard Gaulin, 1966).

3 Elizabeth Foster's recent book illuminates some of the ways in which the Catholic Church and independence-era African leaders influenced one another, and it makes a powerful case for the importance of studying these connections further. Elizabeth A. Foster, *African Catholic: Decolonization and the Transformation of the Church* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019).

4 See, for example, Rasheed Araeen, "Dak'art 1992–2002: The Problems of Representation, Contextualization, and Critical Evaluation in Contemporary African Art as Presented by the Dakar Biennale," *Third Text* 1 (2003); Olu Oguibe, *The Culture Game* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu, "Networks of Practice: Globalization, Geopolitics, Geopoetics," in *Contemporary African Art since 1980*, ed. Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu (Bologna: Damiani, 2009).

THE “UNKNOWN BUILDER OF THE BLACK WORLD,” ALIOUNE DIOP⁵

If the globalist ambitions underpinning the 1966 Festival have been underrecognized, this is in part a result of the insufficient scholarly attention granted to the author of “Art and Peace.” Best known as the founding editor of the literary review *Présence Africaine* (1947–), Diop remains an otherwise unsung architect of Négritude thought amid narratives attributing its development to three better-known protagonists: Senghor, Léon-Gontran Damas, and Aimé Césaire.⁶ Diop, however, engineered the forums that facilitated the exchange of ideas between Black intellectuals of the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, organizing the conferences and founding the publications responsible for launching Négritude thought beyond the Black Parisian intelligentsia. “Art and Peace,” a declaration of the vital importance of intercultural exchange, might thus be understood as a kind of unofficial manifesto revealing the values and beliefs that guided Diop’s career-long efforts to support the circulation of artistic and intellectual work.

Diop’s own formation crossed international borders. Born in 1910 in Saint-Louis, Senegal, to a Muslim family, he studied classics at the University in Algeria, and in 1937, he moved to Paris to attend the Sorbonne. There, Diop formed relationships with leaders in the fields of philosophy, politics, and religion. He organized gatherings of students from various regions affected by French colonialism, generating a loosely defined social group of young anticolonial intellectuals nicknamed the *cercle du Père Diop*.⁷ Diop’s mentorship became especially vital to the flourishing of Black Parisian student communities during the early years of the Second World War, in the absence of Césaire, who

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- 5 The lack of recognition afforded to Diop for his role in Négritude thought and Black internationalism is the basis of the subtitle of a biography about him, which this section title adopts—*Alioune Diop: The Unknown Builder of the Black World*. See Frédéric Grah Mel, *Alioune Diop Le Bâtisseur Inconnu Du Monde Noir* (Abidjan: Presses Universitaires de Côte d’Ivoire, 1995).
 - 6 Léopold Sédar Senghor, “Preface Letter,” in *The Surreptitious Speech: Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness, 1947–1987*, ed. V. Y. Mudimbe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). In addition to Diop, Césaire, and Damas, Senghor names Jacques Rabemananjara as one of Négritude’s founders. The three-founder origin story of Négritude has been increasingly problematized by scholars who have identified the important female voices that it excludes. See T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Négritude Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).
 - 7 Foster, *African Catholic: Decolonization and the Transformation of the Church*, 65. Elizabeth Foster describes Diop’s arrival in Paris, the professional relationships that he formed, and the support that he provided for the city’s Black students.

had returned to Martinique, and Senghor and Damas, both of whom served in the French armed forces.

Ever expanding his *cercle*, in 1947 Diop released the founding volume of *Présence Africaine*. Diop declared the journal to be devoted to three objectives: (1) circulating literary texts by African people, (2) publishing studies on African culture and civilization, and (3) sharing reviews of arts and literature created by African and African-descended people.⁸ A testament to his powerful network, the first edition of *Présence Africaine* was endorsed by a “patronage committee” that included Senghor, Césaire, André Gide, Michel Leiris, Jean-Paul Sartre, Richard Wright, and other contemporary luminaries. Reflecting upon Diop’s contributions, Senghor called *Présence Africaine* “the primary instrument of the Négritude movement.”⁹ But because various approaches to African identity and liberation advocated different routes to success in newly independent nations, which were divided especially on the matter of whether capitalist or socialist economies would best support the continent’s emerging states, Diop refused for the journal to become the mouthpiece of a particular doctrine, instead hoping it would provide mutual visibility between viewpoints.¹⁰

Présence Africaine gained popularity quickly and internationally; in 1949, a publishing house and bookstore was founded in its name. Through the journal, Diop organized the First Congress of Black Writers and Artists (1956), a Paris meeting of Black intellectuals from around the world. According to attendee James Baldwin, Diop called the conference a “second Bandung,” as it was, like its Indonesian predecessor, a massive convening of individuals devoted to establishing

8 Alioune Diop, “Niam N’goura: Ou Les Raisons D’être De Présence Africaine,” *Présence Africaine*, no. 1 (1947).

9 Senghor, “Preface Letter.” On the legacy of *Présence Africaine*, see V. Y. Mudimbe, ed., *The Surreptitious Speech: Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness, 1947–1987* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

10 Earlier writings by Diop suggest that he viewed doctrinal thinking, or the promotion of a given ideology at the expense of others, as the very sort of oppressive action that *Présence Africaine* had been created to counteract. Writing on the liberation of African subjects in 1962, for example, he remarked, “Our nationalism is not truly a doctrine that should be fought, as was the case for many nationalisms that sprang from the West. Ours is not a way of thinking rigidly and coherently developed from other doctrines just as rigid and coherent. The nationalism of the nonwhites carries more weight than a pure doctrine. It is not inspired by the aggressive and barbarian dialectic of Hitler or Mussolini who tried to dominate the West through a shameful and monstrously criminal racism.” Alioune Diop, “Political and Social Solidarity in Africa,” *Journal of Human Relations* 10 (1962): 251.

solidarity in the worldwide fight against colonialism and racism.¹¹ But the 1956 Paris Congress was unprecedented in taking cultural—rather than political—decolonization as its primary object of inquiry. For Diop, focusing on culture was a way of directing attention to the most fundamental source of disagreement and the most encompassing grounds for healing; he understood culture to be the “origin of political thought,” and believed that the cultural sphere’s role was to “supply, inspire and enlighten our most basic substance of politics.”¹²

At a second rendition of the Congress of Black Writers and Artists, held in Rome in 1959, the first seeds for the First World Festival of Negro Arts were sown when a formal resolution was adopted recommending that the next Congress be accompanied by a multimedia festival. After decades of derogatory representation fueled by colonialism and white supremacist thought, organizers deemed it urgent to provide an internationally visible platform through which Africans and other African-descended people were portrayed in a positive light, speaking on their own behalf through their arts.¹³ Seven years later, the festival imagined by this resolution was finally realized as the First World Festival of Negro Arts.

On the occasion of its opening, visitors opening their guidebook were met with “Art and Peace,” its location as the volume’s first essay positioning it as a kind of mission statement. Diop’s entry addresses three themes, reflecting the author’s understanding of human subjectivity as a composite of three dimensions: the religious, the moral, and the artistic. Diop ultimately concludes that the most effective approach to establishing intercultural empathy is to appeal to one another’s artistic sensibilities. Still, his brief discussions of religion and morality merit study. These sections prompt today’s readers to reconsider the historical relationships linking Black internationalist thought to the contemporaneous visions of a peaceful future world espoused, on the one hand, by the Catholic Church, and on the other, by UNESCO.

11 James Baldwin, “Princes and Powers,” in *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948–1985* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1951, reprinted 1999), 42.

12 Diop, “Political and Social Solidarity in Africa,” 251.

13 The representation of the continent through creative outlets, the committee wrote, “can be of extraordinary value to the native states of Africa (or of imminent harm, if delivered to remain by default, under alien domination).” *The Unity of Negro African Cultures: Second Congress of Negro Writers and Artists, Rome, 26 March–1st April 1959* (Paris: Présence Africaine), 456.

THE UNIVERSALIZING VISIONS OF CATHOLICISM, UNESCO, AND NÉGRITUDE

Diop laments the difficulty of cultivating interfaith understanding, but he points to the work of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) as a promising example of how such spiritual gridlock might be overcome. The brevity of Diop's gesture to the council, often nicknamed Vatican II, belies the two preceding decades of active contemplation that informed this succinct but bold suggestion that Négritude and papal policy could be aligned in their efforts to establish peaceful international relations.

While living in Paris, Diop gradually deepened his relationship to Catholicism through a friendship with the French theologian Emmanuel Mounier, culminating, in 1944, in Diop's baptism into the church.¹⁴ Mounier introduced Diop to the Personalist movement, an approach to Catholicism devoted to the importance and dignity of the human subject. Diop believed that under the correct leadership, the Catholic church could advance the objectives that he most valued: the healing of a world in which colonialism and racism had systemically devalued human life and thereby disrespected the human spirit. Diop's aspirations for the church, however, were tempered by a longstanding frustration with its failure to better serve African populations. While Catholic leaders professed to serve all of humankind, Diop believed that the implicit premise of the church's claim to universal appeal was the colonialist belief that European culture could, and should, be applied anywhere in the world.

Diop's hopes were somewhat restored when, in an unexpected announcement in 1959, Pope John XXIII declared the intention to convene Vatican II. The council was organized in part to facilitate unity between different Christian denominations, and it included an international array of participants, paying considerably more attention to non-European practices than had the previous council, held nearly one century earlier. Diop capitalized upon Vatican II as an opportunity to demand that the church reform its relationship to African Catholics. To this end, Diop appeared as a guest on Vatican Radio programming, and in 1962 he organized a two-day meeting of the Society of African Culture, a group formed at the First Congress of Black Writers and Artists, in an effort to convey "the presence and the expression of

14 Foster discusses Diop's increasing investment in Catholicism in chapter 2 of Foster, *African Catholic: Decolonization and the Transformation of the Church*.

African Personhood in Catholic Life.”¹⁵ Diop reportedly compared the efforts of African Catholics to those of Négritude literary leaders, in that both were trying to bring African perspectives before a Western audience.

In addition to Diop, Senghor too identified as Catholic, as did other leaders involved with the Festival. One of these was Father Engelbert Mveng, a Cameroonian priest who played a major role in organizing *L'Art Nègre: Sources, Évolution, Expansion*, the event's largest art exhibition. Catholicism was also the faith of significant independence-era leaders such as Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the inaugural president of independent Côte d'Ivoire. Despite the religion's influence upon the era's political and cultural leaders, the philosophical tenets underlying 1960s Black internationalist thought and African Catholicism have long been discussed separately from one another, rather than in dialogue. Diop's passing but unusually direct alignment of their missions in "Art and Peace" testifies to the necessity for contemporary scholars to consider their interrelationship, an effort initiated in the recent work of historian Elizabeth Foster.¹⁶

"Art and Peace" similarly prompts contemporary readers to consider the ways in which the Festival and its underlying mission relate to the mid- to late-20th-century cultural programs of UNESCO. Diop praises UNESCO in his discussion of "moral sensibility," which the author defines as the values instilled by the norms and customs of one's local community. On one level, this comment makes an appreciative nod to an organization that provided significant support to the Festival; on another, it calls attention to similarities in the objectives and world-views espoused by both Négritude leaders and the UN organization.

Founded in the wake of the Second World War to facilitate international cooperation on educational, scientific, and cultural initiatives, UNESCO had in fact been one of the earliest organizations Diop contacted in his efforts to make the Festival a reality.¹⁷ He eventually succeeded in enlisting the organization's support, which was provided in the form of the Musée Dynamique (Dynamic Museum), a state-of-the-art museum designed by Jean Gabus, a Swiss curator and ethnographer who provided curatorial guidance in the years following the museum's

15 Ibid., 92–93.

16 Ibid.

17 Alioune Diop, "Alioune Diop to Vittorino Veronese, November 16, 1960" (UNESCO Archives).

opening. Inaugurated at the Festival, the museum hosted L'Art Nègre, the largest exhibition of African art that had ever appeared on the continent itself. The display included works loaned from a variety of sources, ranging from Bamum *chefferies* to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Literature published on behalf of UNESCO defined museums as being particularly effective agents for “spreading knowledge and promoting international understanding as a positive contribution to peace.”¹⁸ A testament to this belief, UNESCO founded the bilingual (French and English) journal *Museum* in 1948 to foster the exchange of ideas between museum professionals around the world, and in 1953, an international panel of experts working on behalf of UNESCO voted to fund an “International Campaign for Museums.”¹⁹ The impact of this campaign upon launching in 1956 was far-reaching and varied: it instigated the opening of new buildings and galleries and supported related conferences and teaching initiatives in countries on all sides of the Cold War and on every continent aside from Antarctica.²⁰

Collaborating with UNESCO, Diop found like-minded colleagues on the topic of intercultural exchange. For example, Gabus, the UNESCO-affiliated museum designer and curatorial consultant for the Musée Dynamique, believed that the “only true justification of the museum’s activities” was “to place humans in contact with one another,” allowing viewers to “arrive at the summits of a common humanity.”²¹ The Musée Dynamique was understood by both Négritude leaders and the UN organization to serve a distinct but overlapping humanistic vision, participating in a broader movement to frame international cultural gatherings as essential to world peace.

RECONCILING NÉGRITUDE AND CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION

Diop devotes the latter half of his essay to considering what the implications of such universalizing approaches might be for contemporary African artists. Though he describes the globalization of the art world to be an indispensable step in pursuing lasting peace, he also discusses the possible side effects that such a process might impose on African artists and audiences. Would not a value system that prioritized the cul-

18 “Museum and Museums,” *Museum* I, no. 1 (1948).

19 André Leveillé, “International Campaign for Museums,” *Museum* IX (1956).

20 *Museum* XI (1958).

21 Jean Gabus, “Principes Esthétiques Et Préparation Des Expositions Didactiques,” *Museum* XVIII (1965): 16.

tivation of intercultural empathy also motivate an artist to consider the interests of foreign audiences before local ones? By extension, might the globalization of art's marketplaces and exhibition spaces incentivize the eventual alienation of the African artist from the continent's people? What could be done to ensure that the international visibility and mobility of African artists destabilized, rather than reinforced, the hegemony of a Euro-North-American critical apparatus?

Gesturing to these concerns, Diop ultimately concludes that events like the Festival would sufficiently strengthen networks between artists and audiences of African descent, supporting both international visibility and community vitality. The Festival did succeed in bringing an unprecedented breadth of artists, performers, and writers from throughout Africa and its diasporas into contact with one another. At the same time, however, the event and its organizers were widely criticized for neglecting local interests in their pursuit of international recognition. From Lagos to New York, press coverage of the Festival noted the contrast of its grand efforts to impress visitors alongside the widespread impoverishment of the Dakar populace.²² Relatedly, while Senegalese attendance at the Festival's art exhibitions reportedly included only a limited social elite, a robust international press corps covered the exhibitions, and through their critical assessments, journalists sometimes perpetuated discriminatory ideas about the continent's contemporary artists.²³ For example, the *Washington Post's* correspondent to the Festival panned *Tendences et Confrontations*, an exhibition of work by contemporary artists of African descent, deeming the display subpar; he claimed this fate was inevitable because "painting was alien to black civilization."²⁴ If the Festival fulfilled aspects of Diop's optimistic vision, it also exemplified some of the obstacles to the agency of African artists and audiences that could arise in international arts arenas, even those based on the continent itself.

Aspects of Diop's discussion are glaringly dated, including the neat

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- 22 Lloyd Garrison, "Senegal Returns to Reality's Grip," *The New York Times*, May 9, 1966; Onuora Nzekwu, "Nigeria, Negritude and the World Festival of Negro Arts," *Nigeria Today* 1966.
- 23 Both Tripet and Tassart reported scarce attendance by Senegalese viewers at the Festival's exhibitions. Maurice Tassart, "À Dakar, Le Festival Mondial Des Arts Nègres (Opération Déficitaire . . . Mais Payant)," *Carrefour* (1966); Lison Tripet, "Le Sens Et La Portée Du Premier Festival Mondial Des Arts Nègres," *Construire*, June 1, 1966.
- 24 Donald H. Louchheim, "African Artists Disappoint Viewer at World Festival of Negro Arts," *The Washington Post*, April 9, 1966.

distinction he assumes between “modern” and “traditional” art, and most troublingly, his call for artists to “bring the African people up-to-date with the modern world.” But “Art and Peace” speaks to present-day concerns as it lays some of the coordinates structuring ethical debates on today’s biennials and art fairs. Diop’s text offers a precursor to polarizing analyses of the increasing centrality of such international exhibitions to African artists’ careers, a phenomenon alternatively celebrated as liberatory (as in *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds*, 2013) and maligned as neocolonial (as in *The Culture Game*, 2004).²⁵ In Dakar, discussions regarding the value of a biennial devoted to works by African artists re-emerge with each iteration of the Dak’art Biennale, the contemporary inheritor of the Festival’s legacy.²⁶

“Art and Peace” makes visible some of the philosophical and political beliefs that informed the Festival’s understanding of the international exhibition. Interpolating Vatican II and UNESCO initiatives, and grounded in the author’s career-long commitment to Négritude theory, the essay reveals the intertwined international peacemaking efforts through which Diop made sense of the ever-globalizing art world surrounding him. Before all else, however, the essay enlists the cultural achievements of mankind in the pursuit of lasting international harmony. It is grounded in the assertion that peace exceeds ceasefire, residing in a dimension of one’s subjectivity to which the arts have privileged access.

25 Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg, and Peter Weibel, *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013); Oguibe, *The Culture Game*.

26 For example, see Araeen, “Dak’art 1992–2002: The Problems of Representation, Contextualization, and Critical Evaluation in Contemporary African Art as Presented by the Dakar Biennale.”