

## THE BURKINABÈ ARTIST ON THE IMPORTANCE OF SHADOWS IN HIS WORKS SHOWN AT 1-54 NEW YORK 2023

1-54 returned to New York this season, reawakening the city to artists shaping the future of African art. Trading in the grand religiosity of Harlem Parish, where it took place last year, for sleek, modern digs in Manhattanville Factory District and satellite exhibitions in Chelsea, the fair's commitment to evolving interpretations of the diasporic experience was apparent. Among the sea of conversation-sparking displays, one artist's work stood out: Saïdou Dicko, the Burkina Faso-born, Paris-based multimedia artist whose obsession with shadows brings the complexities of humanity to life.



Self-taught, Dicko's work is heavily influenced by his childhood as a Fulani shepherd, when he would study the outlines of the natural landscape intently. Nature and innocence are constant threads in his series of painted photographs dubbed 'The Shadowed People', several pieces of which appeared at 1-54 New York. In them, images of children are flattened into silhouettes using black paint and situated against boldly patterned backgrounds. In *Recycling Princess Yacht ACT2 T Paris Green 2022*, a young girl sits in an oversized plastic tub with her feet lifted. The warm, floral backdrop liberates the figure from time and space. The tub is positioned in a way that goes against its intended use — it's become a chair or, in the child's mind, a tool to act out their fantasies. Together, they remind viewers about the limitlessness of childhood imagination.

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“I often focus on children because they are the source of joy, happiness, and carelessness,” Dicko says. “They’re also fascinatingly creative. They can sit on a simple can and imagine that they are comfortably installed in a plane in business class or their dream cars. Beyond that, they are the best embodiments of our past, present, and future. The past, because when we watch children play, it brings us back to our childhood. The present, because children take full advantage of the current moments. The future, because children are the guardians of it.”



When he isn't busy showing his work, Diko is collecting prizes for his talents. From the Prix Blachère in 2006 at Dakar Biennale to the Fondation Thamgidi prize in 2008 in Dakar and the Off prize of the European Union, the intimacy with which he approaches topics including maternity, childhood, and freedom has struck a chord with global audiences. He views his participation in 1-54, where he was presented by AFIKARIS, as vital. “1-54 is the only international fair dedicated to contemporary art from the African continent and its diaspora. Thanks to the fair, the art of the continent and the diaspora has dramatically increased its visibility in Europe, Africa and the USA. I hope we'll soon have a version of the show in Asia, fingers crossed. I'm thrilled that my work has been as well received here in the USA as in Europe. Its themes are universal.”



His mix of materials, ranging from photography and watercolour to weaving and drawing, adds poetic mystery to each work and to his ability to speak to different audiences. This blend helps him to tell cross cultural narratives. “I paint my photographs to make each one feel as unique as a painting. ‘The Shadowed People’ series has allowed me to share several stories from my life. As I said in a recent statement, ‘We are in a world filled with shadows surrounded by a few people. We hope that most of our shadows will become the people we were. I am sure and hope our children will cultivate all our fields and share the crops under trees at night.’”