

'My art is a tribute to my origins and childhood': An interview with Burkina Faso-born artist Saïdou Dicko  
'[H]is evocative paintings, photographs, and drawings emanate a profound nostalgia ...'



'La branche de la liberté,' Saïdou Dicko, 2018. Painted photography. 80 x 120 cm/31 x 47 in. Courtesy of Artco Gallery and the artist.

Embarking on a journey through the realm of contemporary art, one encounters the remarkable talent of Saïdou Dicko — a visionary artist who effortlessly merges the cultural riches of his country, Burkina Faso, with a contemporary artistic sensibility. Hailing from the picturesque landscapes of Déou in northern Burkina Faso, Dicko has captivated audiences around the globe with his awe-inspiring work.

Drawing inspiration from his early years as a shepherd, Dicko's artistic prowess blossoms against the backdrop of Sahelian landscapes. Today, his evocative paintings, photographs, and drawings emanate a profound nostalgia, inviting viewers on an introspective voyage through their cherished memories.

Michaëla Hadji-Minaglou, gallery manager of AFIKARIS in Paris and an independent art curator who has recently presented Dicko's groundbreaking artwork at the prestigious 1-54 African Contemporary Art Fair in New York, is deeply moved by the universal appeal of Dicko's oeuvre, and attests to his ability to transcend cultural boundaries.

"It speaks to everyone and calls for joy and peace," said Hadji-Minaglou, who is focused on the African art scene with the will to deconstruct stereotypes and convey the artists' messages. "I'm always impressed by how the audience receives the poetry of Dicko's painted photographs and drawings. They recall souvenirs and the tenderness of childhood."

Dicko's artistic practice defies categorization, effortlessly blending traditional West African influences with a contemporary artistic vocabulary. The result is a visual language that fosters dialogue and challenges preconceptions.



Recycling Princess Dior Bag ACT2 T Opéra de Sydney,' Saïdou Dicko, 2023. Painted photography. Unique piece. 90 x120 cm/35 x 47 in. Courtesy of the artist and AFIKARIS Gallery.

Saïdou Dicko's work has been displayed in renowned institutions such as Paris Photo, Institut des Cultures d'Islam, AIPAD, the Association of International Photography Art Dealers (AIPAD), and Dakar Biennial.

Growing up as a shepherd in Burkina Faso, Dicko found inspiration in the interplay of light and shadow within the Sahelian landscapes. This fascination with shadows eventually led him to incorporate them into his artwork. By covering the skin of his subjects with black ink, Dicko transforms them into captivating shadows, inviting viewers to engage their imaginations, and offering a fresh perspective on the universal human experience.

In an interview with Global Voices, Dicko generously shares insights into his creative process, reflects on the global attention his art has attracted, and speaks about the profound messages embedded within his masterpieces.

Excerpts from the interview follow:



Saïdou Dicko, May 2022. Photo London. Courtesy of AFIKARIS Gallery.

Omid Memarian (OM): From your photos, we learn that you are fascinated with shadows. Your 2018 series, “The Shadowed People,” is based around conversations with a subject that has become one of the dominant characteristics of your works. What’s your relationship with shadows and how was this created and developed in you and your work?

Saïdou Dicko (SD): My primary inspiration is the shadow. The shadow awakened in me the desire to make art by seeking to transcribe it graphically. My work also pays tribute to my origins and my childhood. These are essential sources of inspiration for me. In my work, I share the pleasant memories I have of when I was a young shepherd. Through my work, I share the emotions I felt in those landscapes, as well as the discoveries and moments of wonder I experienced there. It’s also for these reasons that I pay tribute to the generosity of this land, this nature, and these landscapes: so poor and yet so generous. It’s essential for me to share the beauty of these places. My work is a mixture of all these things.

I like the shadow because the shadow is neutral. The shadow is my childhood. The shadow has guided me in art. I like the imaginary side of the shadow.



**OM:** Children are present in many of your artworks or the main subject. Where does that come from? And how is it connected to your visual and intellectual journey?

**SD:** I am a happy child, so I try to share this joy and beauty that surrounds us, sometimes with a complex subject with a bit of humor. My gaze is that of a happy child. That's why children have a great place in my work because children reflect the future, joy, carelessness, curiosity, sharing... Children = past, present, and future.

**OM:** When did you start taking pictures and, after that, paint? How did you transform into an artist, and what impacted you to pursue this path in life?

**SD:** When I was a child, I was a shepherd. It was watching the shadows of my flock being drawn on the ground that inspired me to become an artist. They fascinated me. That's how I started drawing, to reproduce them on any medium I encountered.

I don't consider myself a photographer but an artist who uses the medium of photography. I started photography as an artistic practice around 2006. At first, I only photographed the shadows of my models. I like the imaginary, childlike side of shadows. I captured the shadows that appeared on the walls and floors, depending on the background. At a certain point, I felt limited because the sun didn't shine on every wall. There are backgrounds that I like but where the shadow doesn't go. The next logical step in my work was to start photographing people. From there, I said to myself: why not turn them into shadows? So I started painting the bodies to turn them into shadows. That was in 2009, and this series



'Comfortable In Business Class In Qatar Airways,' Saidou Dicko, 2021. Painted photography 90×120 cm/35 x 47 in. Courtesy of AFIKARIS Gallery and the artist

**OM:** From your 2014 series, *THE SHADOW THIEF*, go to your 2018 series, *THE SHADOWED PEOPLE*, we see a visible departure from realism to a more abstract visual environment. What's been the artistic dive behind this shift, if any?

**SD:** For me, "The Shadowed People 2017" is the continuation of the series "Le voleur d'ombres 2006," where I photographed only the shadows, and now I photograph characters that I transform into shadows, applying black paint to their bodies.

**OM:** How do you decide to use a particular medium — photography, video, painting, or installation?

**SD:** It comes naturally. At first, I drew the shadows, and I thought, why not photograph them? After the photos, I made videos. Then I integrated the videos into the installations.



'VIP MEETING TMR R SOLEIL,' 2022. Painted photography. 90x120cm/35 x 47 in. Series: Painted Photographs. Courtesy of AFIKARIS Gallery and the artist.

**OM: How much do you follow the work of other African artists?**

**SD:** I'm very close to other artists from the continent. I follow their work on social media and go to their exhibitions when I can. We often talk about our work. As an artist, it's crucial to support each other by giving advice and facilitating meetings within our network. I co-founded the "Rendez-vous d'artistes" group with other artists. This group aims to create encounters and exchanges between the artists living in Paris. As part of this, we organize monthly events. It's an opportunity to gather and discuss the latest artistic news.

**OM: What's your take on annual fairs like the 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair?**

**SD:** Fairs like the 1-54 contribute significantly to the development of the African scene and highlight the artistic diversity among artists of the continent. 1-54 teams are doing a great job, and they communicate so well about the event.



'Comfortable in business class' Ouaga Paris 2021, Saidou Dicko, 2021. Plastic on traditional organic cotton weaving, made in Burkina Faso 73 x 100 cm/28 x 40 in. Courtesy of AFIKARIS Gallery and the artist.

**OM:** There has been a lot of attention to African art in the past decade. Great artists have emerged and continue to shine internationally. How has this attention from both the market and the media affected the work you do?

**SD:** I am thrilled to see artists from the continent and those from the diaspora shine internationally because the power of their work deserves it. The continent is bursting with incredible talent and voices that carry important messages. It's great to see them being recognized internationally. I do not want this to affect my work, but rather, for greater visibility for my fellow artists and me.

Thanks to Yasmine Mechbal of Loft Gallery in Casablanca and Michaëla Hadji-Minaglou (AFIKARIS Gallery) for providing access and translation from French to English.