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Image [modified]: : Unknown photographer, installation view of África arte Negra in Brasília, 1970. Private collection of Henri Senghor, Paris.

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“África Arte Negra” no Brasil: Exposições, Diplomacia e o Imaginário da África no Brasil

Abigail Lapin Dardashti*

ABSTRACT

This essay examines *África arte Negra*, a major exhibition of over 750 African artworks that traveled to Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Brasília from 1969 to 1970. Organized by Henri Senghor, independent Senegal’s first ambassador to Brazil, in collaboration with both Senegalese and Brazilian officials and curators, the exhibition became a site of debate about Brazil’s national identity and definitions of art, presenting an idea of Africa through the art of numerous ethnic communities on the continent. The exhibition articulated independent Senegal’s theory of *Négritude*, broadly defined as an anticolonial intellectual movement promoting African and diasporic culture and solidarities as well as global Black consciousness, which clashed with Brazil’s rhetoric of racial democracy. Yet the exhibition, I argue, mended these competing discourses for the sake of diplomacy, creating bridges grounded in African art and the history of exchange between West Africa and Brazil.

KEYWORDS

Diplomacy, Art, Exhibitions, Circulating Exhibitions, African art, Brazilian art, *Négritude*, Racial Democracy

RESUMO

Este artigo examina *África arte Negra*, uma grande exposição de mais de 750 obras de arte africanas, que viajou pelo Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo e Brasília de 1969 a 1970. Organizada por Henri Senghor, primeiro embaixador do Senegal no Brasil, em colaboração com autoridades e curadores brasileiros e senegaleses, a exposição tornou-se um centro de debate sobre a identidade nacional do Brasil e as definições de arte, apresentando uma ideia da África através da arte de numerosas comunidades étnicas no continente. A exposição articulou a teoria da *Négritude* do Senegal

independente, geralmente definida como um movimento intelectual anticolonial que promovia a cultura e as solidariedades africanas e diaspóricas, bem como a consciência negra global, e entrou em conflito com a retórica brasileira de democracia racial. No entanto, defendendo que a exposição articulou esses discursos concorrentes em prol da diplomacia, criando pontes baseadas na arte africana e na história do intercâmbio entre a África Ocidental e o Brasil.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Diplomacia. Arte. Exposições. Exposições Itinerantes. Arte Africana. Arte Brasileira. Nêgritude. Democracia Racial.

“Africa has arrived in Rio,” an article in the major daily newspaper *Correio da Manhã* announced on March 17, 1970, gesturing to the opening of the exhibition *África arte Negra* at the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio).¹ Composed of over 750 masks, weapons, figurative sculptures, and utilitarian objects from over a dozen countries such as Ivory Coast, Nigeria, and Mali in the collection of the Institut Fondamental d’Afrique Noire in Dakar, Senegal, the show traveled starting in 1969 to the Museum of Art and Archeology at the University of São Paulo (MAE), MAM Rio, and the Exhibition Hall of the Cultural Outreach at Itamaraty, the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in Brasília.² A diplomatic endeavor spearheaded by Henri Senghor, the first Senegalese ambassador to Brazil, the exhibition aimed to shift predominant derogatory interpretations of African art in Brazil, forge closer cultural bonds between the two countries, and address a predominantly Eurocentric Brazilian art scene to advocate for African liberation in relationship to global Black artistic production. *África arte Negra* successfully brought independent Senegal’s arguments about African art serving as the basis for universalism and humanism to a white and elite Brazilian audience of intellectuals and government officials.

Henri Senghor arrived in Brazil in 1964, four years after Senegal gained independence from France in 1960 [Fig. 1]. Since the late 1950s, Brazil eagerly committed to growing its diplomatic and economic relationships with newly independent African countries. Although Brazil's foreign policy in liberated Africa emerged during the country's democratic governments (1961-64), the military dictatorship (1964-85) expanded the state's program on the continent as well as the visibility of Afro-Brazilian art. Both administrations relied on racial democracy – a rhetoric positing that all Brazilians, regardless of their appearance or heritage, had roots in Africa, Europe, and the Indigenous Americas – to argue for the lack of racism in the country, even though racial prejudice and inequality were stitched into Brazil's fabric. Brazilian officials at Itamaraty highlighted the country's African-derived culture and religion, while maintaining it outside modern art and architecture. As historian Jerry Dávila has demonstrated, "African decolonization (...) created an international context in which leveraging an African identity suddenly became especially meaningful" (Dávila, 2010: 4). Bridging Africa and Brazil, exhibitions like *África arte Negra* became crucial sites of diplomatic tension, ultimately pushing the Brazilian modern art world to reevaluate its marginalization of African art.

Through a focus on the entire continent's artistic production in *África arte Negra*, Henri Senghor propagated Senegal's ideas of Négritude – broadly defined as an anticolonial intellectual movement promoting African and diasporic culture and solidarities as well as global Black consciousness – which typically clashed with Brazil's racial democracy.³ Formed in the 1930s in Paris by writers including Léopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire, Négritude became Senegal's nationalist framework after independence in the 1960s and under Senghor's presidency, encompassing global solidarity with diasporic communities around the world (Bachir Diagne, 2011). *África arte Negra* was a microcosm for independent Senegal's notions of Négritude as it demonstrated African objects as respectable global art, arguing for a strong continent that stood socially and politically on its own. The discourses

of racial democracy and *Négritude* advocated either for racial exclusivity or inclusivity, one fighting against global anti-Black racism through the celebration of African and diasporic culture and solidarities, while the other denied Brazil's existence of racism and racial difference. These competing approaches either embraced or assimilated Black identity, culture, and solidarities, either encouraging or suppressing Black consciousness for art and artists. Yet, as I argue, *África arte Negra's* installation and press coverage mended these narratives for the sake of diplomacy. Circulating in some major metropolises, it troubled Brazil's conception of its national identity and ultimately raised the profile of African art in Brazil.



FIG. 1. Photographer unknown, Ambassador Henri Senghor arrives in Brasília and is accompanied by Brazilian officials, n.d., between 1964 and 1972. Private collection of Henri Senghor, Paris.

The Diplomacy of Circulating African Art Exhibitions in Brazil

África arte negra was one of many African art exhibitions circulating in Brazil since the 1960s, but it was one of the only ones that had at its helm an African diplomat on mission in Brazil. These exhibitions of African sculpture and modern art traveled throughout Brazil and took a central place in the country's art scene.⁴ This unprecedented visibility of African art throughout the country, alongside the country's increased collecting practices, was often aided by funding or support from Itamaraty. The few art-historical studies on African art in Brazil have largely focused on collecting; I build on this work and show that *África arte Negra* played a central diplomatic and cultural role in constructing an imaginary about Africa that was not only respectable but also part of the art museum world.⁵

The exhibitions of African art circulating in Brazil targeted a diplomatic public and marginalized Afro-Brazilian artists and communities who had a stake in helping to forge these relationships and had a history of collecting and interacting with the objects. The institutional collecting of African objects in major art institutions became more widespread in Brazil after the acquisitions at the Museu Nacional de Belas Artes (MNBA) in 1961.⁶ MNBA's acquisitions were inextricably linked to Brazil's emerging diplomatic ties with independent Africa, as 97 of the 101 African art objects came from the collection of the Brazilian ambassador to Ghana, Gasparino da Mata e Silva, and the Senegalese government donated the four others, as art historians Gabrielle Nascimento (2019: 63-64) and Daniel Barretto (2016: 85) have shown. MNBA also invited Henri Senghor to give a lecture about African art (Nascimento, 2019: 64). Curators and diplomats created space for African art and exhibitions in Brazilian elite institutions, while also overlooking the artistic productions of Afro-Brazilian artists and artisans long sidelined by major art museums in the country.

While Brazilian diplomats embraced and financially supported *África arte Negra*, the exhibition also represents a response to Brazil's approach

in relationship to newly independent nations in Africa by integrating Négritude into the conversation. It showed African sculpture to a public that had already developed an interest in the continent but considered it a monolithic, oblique, imagined space that loosely related to Brazil's Afro-Brazilian culture (Dávila, 2010: 5). Presenting African art as a valuable and respected art form, the exhibition unpacked both the continent and its visual arts practice for an audience unfamiliar with it; it identified different ethnic groups and the uses of objects, while also highlighting those that, through their simplified form and elongated figures, could be attractive to an elite public accustomed to geometric abstraction and modern art in general, such as the numerous Bambara antelope masks from Mali, as well as easily-legible figurative sculptures performing daily tasks. Yet for political purposes, it temporalized the objects through the present, overlooking how oral histories have informed the making of art in the continent through time; changing social and political contexts that impact artmaking; and local, non-linear notions of time. The exhibition also omitted modern painting by the already prolific École de Dakar movement, for instance. Whether inadvertently or not, it fed into Western exoticized concepts of the idea of Africa that subsumed the continent into an essentialized framework without the necessary context to understand the nuances of the objects' meaning and the processes of their makers.⁷

The exhibition also reflected the centrality of diplomacy for Senegal's recently-formed independent government. Several years before, in 1966, Senegal had hosted the First World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar, a major event that united diasporic artists from around the continent in dance, art exhibitions, music, as well as other artistic endeavors and scholarly colloquium. For Léopold Sédar Senghor, art was an essential diplomatic tool to spread the idea of Négritude, promote decolonization, and lead Senegal into economic and cultural success. *África arte Negra* fit perfectly into Senegal's diplomatic goals, traveling African art from around the

continent that belonged to a Senegalese public institution, and reaching elite audiences in major Brazilian metropolises.

1964: Ambassador Henri Senghor's First Year in Brazil

A champion of the rhetoric of Négritude, Henri Senghor disseminated his ideas in Brazil through conversations with cultural organizers, artists, and musicians such as Abdias do Nascimento and Abigail Moura.⁸ He articulated diplomacy through cultural activities. He collaborated with the architect Wilson Reis Netto to build the Senegalese embassy in Brasília, showing him images of medieval African mosques to inspire his design.⁹ When Senegalese president Léopold Sédar Senghor made an official visit to Brazil in 1964 [Fig.2], Henri facilitated the organization of a major exhibition of African art that traveled to MNBA in Rio, followed by institutions in Belo Horizonte, São Paulo, and Curitiba. Notably, he organized the exhibition *África arte Negra*, which served as evidence for Négritude, according to the ambassador. At each of *África arte Negra*'s openings, Henri Senghor would remind Brazilians of their African roots, presenting the materiality of African religion and culture through the objects in the exhibition as related to Brazil's heritage.¹⁰

During his visit in 1964, President Léopold Sédar Senghor went to Recife, Salvador, Rio, São Paulo, and Brasília. He emphasized his country's position against colonization in Africa and its embrace of Négritude, despite the military regime's support of Portugal. At the Federal University of Bahia, Senghor gave a speech titled "Latinité et Négritude" that stressed Brazil's contemporary cultural similarities with Africa. He exclaimed, "These traits of the face, of Brazilian culture, we find the same ones in Africa, and more specifically in Senegal" (Senghor, 1966: 9). The Brazilian press painted this visit as an image of "Brazil's lively interest and active sympathy with the important problems of the African continent."¹¹ According to Dávila (2010:

128), during Senghor's visit Brazilian diplomats made "many gestures intended to present an image of benign race relations." Senghor and dictator Castelo Branco discussed FESMAN, which would occur two years later in Dakar with Brazil's participation, and signed cultural and commercial accords.¹² Dávila (2010: 128) has argued that Senghor's primary intentions during his trip consisted of convincing Brazil to serve as an intermediary between the West and African countries under Portuguese rule, as the newly-instituted dictatorship supported the continuation of Portuguese colonialism in Africa.¹³ Additionally, culture presided over all of Senghor's discussions during his trip. One of his major interests lay in promoting and receiving support for FESMAN, itself a celebration of decolonization.

In honor of Senghor's visit, Itamaraty collaborated with Henri Senghor and other Senegalese officials and curators to organize an exhibition of African art from the collection of the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire (IFAN), University of Dakar.¹⁴ The critic José Roberto Teixeira Leite, then director of the Museu Nacional de Belas Artes in Rio (MNA) where the exhibition began, traveled to Dakar to select artworks with IFAN's curator Thaim Bodiel. Composed of 327 sculptures from a variety of ethnic communities such as the Baulé and Luba cultures and 150 photographs of religious and cultural practices as well as objects, this major exhibition, entitled *Arte Negra Africana*, marked the first of its kind on Brazilian soil.¹⁵ At MNBA, it took up not only the exhibition galleries but also the corridors and lobby because of its size. MNBA had begun collecting African art in 1961 and organized conferences that, according to a critic at *Jornal do Brasil*, "altered the concept that African sculptures was just a degenerate offspring of Egyptian art."¹⁶ The exhibition curators believed that it would be "very important for Brazilians and Africans and their study of the influence [of African art] on Brazilian popular art, especially in Bahia."¹⁷ However, except for the show that began at MNBA, most large-scale exhibitions of African art traveling from African countries did not go to Salvador, and instead remained in cosmopolitan and white centers of power, politics, wealth,

and internationalism like Rio, São Paulo, and Brasília. Since *Arte Negra Africana* had traveled to Salvador and Léopold Sédar Senghor had visited there during his official trip in 1964, the city was on the radar of politicians but likely did not fit Itamaraty's diplomatic endeavors and justify the cost of traveling an exhibition there. The MNBA exhibition presented African sculptures as artworks to be admired on white pedestals in a fine-art museum. Curators and diplomats marginalized Afro-Brazilian modernism and craft in favor of exhibitions and art that would cement diplomatic and economic relationships between independent African countries and Brazil. At more than twice the size of the MNBA show, *África arte Negra* was the largest exhibition that followed the MNBA show.



FIG. 2. Photographer unknown, President Léopold Sédar Senghor in center with his wife on his left followed by Brazilian President Humberto de Alencar Castelo Branco, and Ambassador Henri Senghor and his wife on Léopold Sédar Senghor's right, 1964. Private collection of Henri Senghor, Paris.



FIG. 3. Unknown photographer, Henri Senghor at center surrounded by Brazilian officials at the opening for *África arte Negra* at Itamaraty in Brasília, 1970. Private collection of Henri Senghor, Paris.

Similarly to the MNBA exhibition, Thaim Bodel, the curator of the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire housed at the University of Dakar, organized *África arte Negra* in collaboration with Henri Senghor. It included art by people belonging to 46 ethnic groups from Senegal, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Cameroon, Mali, Guinee, High Volta, Benin, Chad, and Mauritania. Objects ranged from wooden masks of many different configurations to a chief's metal chair and examples of cutlery [Fig. 3]. It also featured gold jewelry and ceremonial costumes, as well as everyday objects like spoons. The works presented the diverse aspects of economic, social,

religious, and political life in Africa. The exhibition offered an introduction to sculptural Africa art for an audience unfamiliar with its production. Each of the three venues in São Paulo, Rio, and Brasília published their own catalogues with similar information, including a text by Henri Senghor, a checklist of objects, and a map of Africa with the locations of the many ethnic communities represented throughout the exhibition, and presentation texts by the respective museum or government representatives. The majority of works in *África are Negra* were made by different ethnic groups in former French colonial territories such as Mali, Ivory Coast, Guinea, and High Volta. Indeed, this distribution reflects IFAN's French colonial foundation, as it emerged after independence out of the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire, established in 1936, which created the art collection.

Curators and government officials linked the group of objects in *África arte Negra* to ethnic identity, relating to the construction of identity in Brazil through racial democracy. Pierre Fougeyrollas (1969: 4), the director of IFAN, insisted both in his catalogue essay, "Universalidade e atualidade da arte africana," as well as in his conversations with the press, on the ethnic source of African art, arguing against derogatory colonial and racist notions of the tribal and shifting the language employed for discussing objects from the continent. This approach also paralleled the ways in which Brazilians understood their various heritages through the mix of ethnicities in racial democracy.¹⁸ In the MAM Rio catalogue, Gonzaga da Gama Filho (1970, MAM: n.p.), the State Secretary for Education of Culture in Guanabara (present-day Rio de Janeiro state) wrote: "Brazil, Guanabara, can realize up-close why this component of our ethnic whole is, because of the force of its richness and intensity, an active agent of our national culture. This exhibition of *arte negra* is at once African and Brazilian."¹⁹ Interestingly, Minister Vasco Mariz (1970: 3), the Chief of the Cultural Department at Itamaraty, detached himself from this approach, writing instead that African art and culture "is so close to us," but avoided linking the objects to Brazil's African heritage, as

opposed to others involved in the exhibition's presentation and circulation. Emphasizing dissimilarity, Itamaraty reflected the dictatorship's approach that emphasized racial democracy, embracing while also distancing white, elite Brazil from African heritage. Yet the physical presence of over 700 objects of African art in Itamaraty's newly-inaugurated modern halls cemented the diplomatic bonds of Senegal and Brazil and demonstrated African art's foundational relevance to both Brazilian identity and politics.



FIG. 4. Unknown photographer, Henri Senghor at center surrounded by Brazilian officials at the opening for *África arte Negra* at Itamaraty in Brasília, 1970. Private collection of Henri Senghor, Paris.

The exhibition included ethnographic photographs of different performative rituals, which do not appear in the catalogue, juxtaposed next to objects resembling those in the images [Fig. 4]. Through this installation,

the curators situated the objects in the present everyday life of African people. Yet because the exhibition was organized by type of object rather than geographically or chronologically, it subsumed all African art into one generalized idea, rather than identifying the differences between ethnic groups and their practices. Art critic Jayme Maurício lamented the absence of photographer and ethnographer Pierre Verger's work and "critical output" in the exhibition."²⁰ He also decried the lack of emphasis on Yoruba art, which was championed by Verger, who had argued that Afro-Brazilians had the closest connection to Yoruba people and religion.²¹ Verger's work created a hierarchy that privileged the African-derived religion Candomblé Nêgo, which had roots in Yoruba, rather than faiths with links to Congo or Angola people. *África arte Negra*'s focus on Baule, Senufo, Bambara, Dan, Bobo, Yaure, and Dogon people, among many others in countries in former French colonies in Africa, shifted both the aesthetic and religious focus from Yoruba, understanding Brazilian relationships with the continent through the sublimated lens of the idea of Africa, which related to the discourse of Négritude.

The tensions between Brazil's centering of Yoruba art and religion and the broader attention to ethnic communities in former French colonies in *África arte Negra* also manifested in the three exhibition catalogues covers, relaying the different institutions' political objectives [Figs. 5-7]. On the MAE cover, the curators displayed a Yoruba copper sculpture featuring three women, with exposed busts and floor-length skirts, grinding food using long instruments. The object recalls the practice of grinding food in Brazil, and specifically in art representing Afro-Brazilian women pursuing this activity as demonstrated in the sculpture of Agnaldo Manoel dos Santos, for instance. In relationship to MAE's catalogue, as art historian Juliana Bevilacqua (2017: 2) has shown that the museum's collection privileges Yoruba artworks, which may explain their choice of a cover object, even though the exhibition had a small number of Yoruba and Fon sculptures typically privileged by Brazilian institutions. MAE's catalogue with a Yoruba object contrasts the other two

catalogues from MAM Rio and Itamaraty, which display Tyi Wara objects of the Bambara people in current-day Mali. While the sculptures come in different form, those represented in the catalogues are vertical, geometric, and synthesized to present essential thin lines resonating with the animal's long horns and legs. The MAE catalogue reproduced two other Tyi Wara sculptures on the inside pages of its catalogue. These objects may have been selected because of their appeal to a Brazilian audience unfamiliar with African art and accustomed to geometric abstraction, a similar strategy to African masks sent to Europe in the early twentieth century.²² MAM Rio and Itamaraty chose the same path, selecting art according to their audience.



FIG. 5. "Mulheres pilando cobre," wax, 28 cm, Yoruba, Nigeria, from the MAE catalogue for *África arte Negra*, 1969. Author's archive.

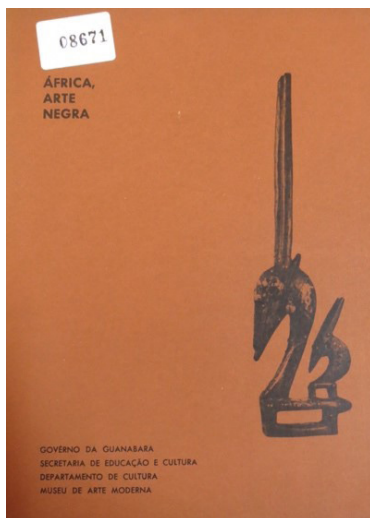


FIG. 6. MAM catalogue cover for *África arte Negra*, 1970. Author's archive.

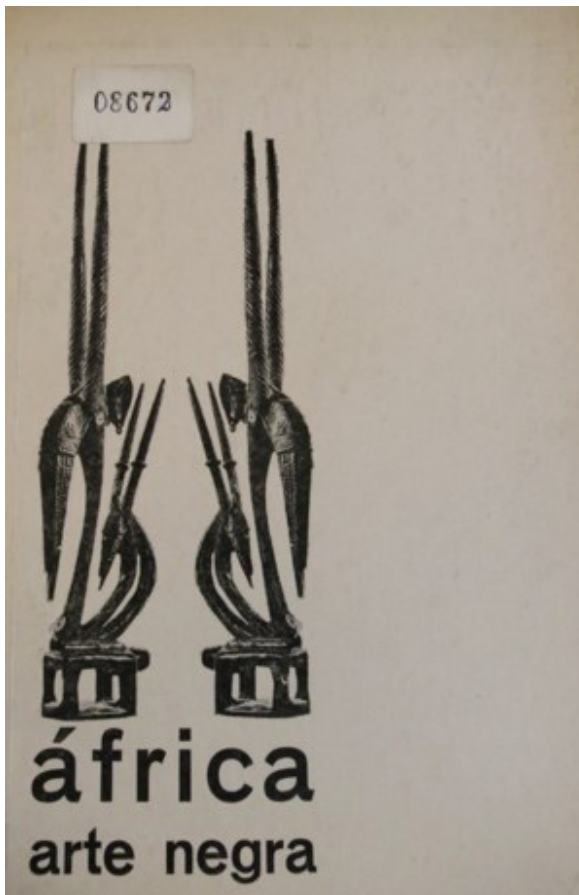


FIG. 7. Itamaraty catalogue cover for *África arte Negra*, 1970. Author's archive.

While at Itamaraty, the Tyi Wara masks were displayed against the wall, at MAM Rio they were placed on a long black pedestal one after another without much coordination, and the press highlighted them, demonstrating their singled-out importance for the exhibition and its interpretation [Fig. 8].²³ Maurício bemoaned their packed installation, writing that the Tji Wara's "long projections and elegant curves require isolation," but the installation at MAM Rio looks like a "museum storage unit."²⁴ The lack of attention to organizing an installation that highlighted the objects' uniqueness, lumping them into groups and setting them close together, demonstrates the institutions' lack of understanding for African art, despite the text in the catalogue. The exhibition installation contrasts the one in Brasília, where the Tji Wara were installed against the wall adjacent to the photographs.



FIG. 8. Unknown photographer, installation view of *África arte Negra* in Brasília, 1970. Private collection of Henri Senghor, Paris.

An exhibition arguing for the presentism of African art, *África arte Negra* articulated the richness of African art without explaining the different temporality of utilitarian objects, namely that some are discarded after use, or that some sculptures have remained consistent for a large number of years (Senghor, 1969: 3). Although the press mentioned the presence of art from the previous two centuries, neither the catalogue nor the installation identify the date of the objects and focuses instead on aesthetic qualities, arguing for the value of the works as art.²⁵ It does not explain the long history of African art making and the different theoretical understandings of time and place that one requires to understand it. However, the emphasis on presentism rendered African and diasporic cultures relevant to contemporaneous Brazil. At one of the inaugurations, Fougeyrollas said: “For those of us who look for the liberation of all modes of expression, African art is particularly

actual.”²⁶ For Senegal, it was important for Brazil to consider the importance and present-day relevance of African art and politics, rather than explaining the meaning and timeframe of the objects themselves. Additionally, the exhibition’s manifestation in two modern art buildings – the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio and Brasília’s Itamaraty Palace, which had been inaugurated that same month, in April 1970 – situated it within the current moment and in relationship with living artists and architects, demonstrating its relevance and importance to modernism.²⁷

While the exhibition did not include modern art, in the catalogue and speeches Henri Senghor repeatedly expressed how African art had provided the foundation of European modernism (Senghor, 1969: 3).²⁸ In April 1966, the large-scale exhibition *L’art nègre* at FESMAN had included both African art from all over the continent, similarly identified through ethnic groups and function, and concluded with artwork by established European modernists such as Pablo Picasso and Hervé Léger next to African masks (Taylor, 2019: 94). Henri Senghor (1969: 3) claimed that through African art, Picasso and Braque’s works attained universalism. Yet the exhibition excluded modernist paintings by the École de Dakar, a group of Senegalese artists who had been prolifically making art that was even exhibited at the São Paulo Biennial. Because of this omission, the exhibition only represented the Senegalese territory through a handful of works from the Diola people. However, this did not seem to matter to Henri Senghor or the IFAN staff; indeed, because one of the goals included arguing for Négritude through visual art, it was the whole group of objects from the entire continent that articulated their ideas instead of individual works, despite the bias reflecting IFAN’s colonial precedents. Additionally, curators consistently repeated that the show portrayed African art as the basis for European modernism while maintaining its independence, its rich array of functions, and complex geometric form, a discourse reiterated in the press.²⁹ As Brazilian artists had been developing geometric abstraction and modern architecture for decades and showcased it around the world, positing African art as the universal base

for European modernism, which was highly respected in Brazil, not only made it relevant to Brazilian contemporaneous art, but also to the art history that Brazilian cherished.

In their speeches and texts in the catalogues, Henri Senghor and Fougeryrollas repeatedly argued for African art's important role in the idea of the universal. In the MAE publication, Fougeryrollas (1969: 4) wrote: "It's common to forget, today, that the ethnic particularity of the works of African art does not exclude its absolute universal reach." The idea of universalism had been essential to President Senghor's project of centralizing African art in the global cultural world. As Cohen (2018: 10) explains, for President Senghor, Négritude "took root in diaspora consciousness, but it also aimed to interfere with Eurocentrism on its own terms." Following his mentor, president, and uncle, Henri Senghor aimed to unsettle Eurocentric conceptions of art and identity in Brazil. He sought to highlight the African roots of Brazilian identity, of the European art that informed modernism in Brazil, and, in solidarity with diasporic communities in Africa and beyond, of the contemporaneity of Blackness in the country.

Circulating *África arte negra*

As MAE had originally been the only venue for the show and did much of the preliminary work, its leadership felt that Itamaraty coopted the exhibition for its own diplomatic endeavors and overlooked the institution's work in producing the catalogue and exhibition.³⁰ Following his agreement with MAE, Henri Senghor worked to convince institutions, especially MAM Rio and Itamaraty, to support and present the exhibition in their buildings. In a public letter that appeared in the daily newspaper *Correio da Manhã*, Ulpiano Bezerra de Menezes, MAE's director, claimed that his museum was "the only one responsible for the realization of the exhibition."³¹ While outlining the labor and money that went into the process of organizing the exhibition

and the cataloguing of the objects, he also writes that MAE proposed the exhibition to several museums, which replied negatively to the offer. Because of the last-minute requests to travel the exhibition to MAM Rio and Itamaraty, MAE had to close the exhibition early, which prevented students from seeing it at the start of the semester. In response, Vicente Barreto, the director of the Department of Culture of the state of Guanabara (currently Rio de Janeiro) wrote a letter also published in *Correio da Manhã*.³² Barreto wrote that he approached Henri Senghor about bringing the exhibition to MAM and paid for the exhibition's expenses in Rio as well as transportation. He wrote that the Senegalese embassy provided all the information for the catalogue. The belated interest of Itamaraty and Guanabara state to host *África arte Negra* also caused a shift in the presentation of an exhibition through MAE's ethnographic lens to showcasing the works with diplomacy in mind.

África arte Negra made a political statement, but also relied on a perspective of the continent that subsumed a large and diverse expanse of land into one monolith that only existed in the present. Notably, the exhibition excluded liberation movements against Portuguese colonialism in Africa. At the time of the exhibition, the dictatorship supported Portuguese colonialism despite President Senghor's encouragements during his visit. During a highly repressive period of the regime that curtailed free speech and opposition, one newspaper article called the absence of Portuguese Africa "an unforgivable omission" that prevented viewers from understanding "*arte Negra*."³³ Another critique was the lack of a venue in Bahia, which one author in *Correio da Manhã* lamented, "one can neither explain nor justify that an exhibition of this nature, and this importance, would take place in Rio de Janeiro, marginalizing and overlooking Bahia, the homeland of Black Brazilians."³⁴ In response, the critic Jayme Maurício highlighted Rio's large Black community and wrote, "O problema é do embaixador do Senegal."³⁵ A similar letter was cited in art critic Walmir Ayala's column in *Jornal do Brasil*, which asked, "does white civilization water down Black blood?" implying the true intended audience of Brazil's

elite art world and diplomats for the show.³⁶ These critiques highlight the intricate connections between Brazil and the idea of Africa manifested through the exhibition.

Despite these observations, the curators as well as the venue collaborators bridged Brazilians' everyday life and racial democracy with the art in the exhibition. In an interview, Fougeyrollas said: "The Brazilian public will be able to contemplate carefully works of African art and could, looking to unpack them, continue to discover oneself."³⁷ One critic in *O Jornal* mirrored his words, saying that Henri Senghor "reminded us of our nation's ethnic formation and its paradigm of integration through art."³⁸ This reflexivity emphasized racial democracy as it encouraged the predominantly white audience to relate to imagined African roots, while at the same time including all Brazilians into the project of *Négritude*. Maurício compared the works in the exhibition with popular art from the Nordeste.³⁹ He also wrote: "This exhibition is an opportunity to express pride and rejoicing as it helps evidence the richness and energy of cultures that contribute as a whole to our formation."⁴⁰ Similarly, Menezes (1969: 5) wrote in his catalogue essay that the exhibition "allows for an in-depth treatment of the anthropological problem of the Brazilian Man," which, he argued, derived from the Americas, the Mediterranean, and Africa, mirroring the rhetoric of racial democracy. By connecting an African art exhibition that emphasized presentism to the foundation of Brazil's identity, curators, diplomats, and critics foregrounded the country's heritage from the continent in Brazilians' everyday reality and visual world.

The Aftermath

Through *África arte Negra*, Henri Senghor successfully related Brazil to Africa and positioned his country of Senegal as the representative of African art. Widely reported on in the press, the exhibition attracted

numerous visitors and convinced many of African art's importance and its significant relationship to Brazil.⁴¹ Although Senegal's land did not represent ethnic groups with long and important histories of artmaking in Africa, through the exhibit and their collection at IFAN they united art from throughout the continent and took credit as the spokesperson of its art history. The successful collaboration between Henri Senghor and Itamaraty revealed each party's political agendas, which came together through *África arte Negra*. The locations were not selected at random, and each articulated a different aspect of diplomacy. MAE's own collection reflected the continent's importance in one of Brazil's most prestigious universities. MAM Rio, as one of the premier institutions for modern art in South America, demonstrated the objects' relationship to the history of Western modernism usually on display at the museum. Finally, Itamaraty's presentation cemented diplomatic, cultural, social, and political bonds between Brazil and Senegal and demonstrate the priority of Brazil's foreign policy to focus on the African continent.

In 1981-82, at the end of the military regime, the exhibition *Arte contemporânea do Senegal* traveled to the same three cities as *África arte Negra*: Brasília, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro, centers for diplomatic work in Brazil. While it also went to MAM Rio, in São Paulo the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP) featured it, and, in Brasília, it was presented in the Teatro Nacional de Brasília. Rather than including an array of African art from all over the continent and a focus on religious sculpture, *Arte contemporânea do Senegal* showcased modern and contemporary art, particularly painting made since independence, including works from members of the École de Dakar, presenting artistic developments in the country that situated the country's production in relation to Brazil's geometric abstraction, new figuration, and pop art. Taking place over a decade after *África arte Negra*, *Arte contemporânea do Senegal* demonstrates a shift in Senegal's cultural diplomacy. Rather than showcasing the idea of Africa inherent to the postcolonial discourse of Négritude, *Arte contemporânea do Senegal* showcased the richness of artistic

production on Senegalese territory, such as tapestries highlighted in one *Jornal do Brasil* article.⁴² Yet both approaches related to promoting anticolonial ideas about the continent and to redefine its artistic production abroad. At a time when Black social rights movements gained ground in Brazil and the official stance toward colonization in Africa had shifted, the exhibition was especially meaningful and provided an opportunity for events about solidarity with African liberation movements.⁴³ *Jornal do Brasil* identified the exhibition with the title: “the cultural roots of a people reborn,” which also resonated with the consequences of *África arte Negra*, bringing to light the complexities and tensions of diplomacy, circulation, and the foundation of identity in both Brazil and Senegal.⁴⁴

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Notes

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- 1 "África chega ao Rio," *Correio da Manhã*, March 17, 1970. Newspaper clipping, folder MAM-EXP: 418, institutional archive, Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro. Other represented countries included: Sierra Leone, High Volta, Guinea, Benin, Mauritania, Cameroon, Gabon, Niger, Chad, and Liberia.
- 2 Henri Senghor, Manuscript of Speech Given at the Opening of the Exhibition in Brasília, April 28, 1970. Private papers of Henri Senghor, Paris.
- 3 For more about racial democracy, see (Skidmore, 1992).
- 4 Exhibitions of African art in Brazil between the 1960s and 1980s in museums, government buildings, and commercial art galleries included, but are not limited to: *Arte Negra Africana*, Museu Nacional de Belas Artes and other venues, 1964; *África arte Negra*, Museu de Arqueologia da Universidade de São

- Paulo, Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro, and Exhibition Hall of the Cultural Outreach at the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brasília, 1969 to 1970; *Arte Africana: Coleção Benjamin Steiner* at Galeria Múltipla, São Paulo, 1973; *Arte tradicional da Costa do Marfim*, Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro, Palácio do Itamaraty, Brasília, and Museu de Arte de São Paulo, 1973-74; *Arte Contemporânea do Senegal*, Teatro Nacional de Brasília, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, Museu de Arte de São Paulo, 1981-82; 36 *Máscaras Rituais Africanas*, Skultura, São Paulo, 1982; *África Negra*, Museu de Arte de São Paulo, 1988. The Museu Afro-Brasileiro in Salvador, which included a collection of African art collected largely by the ethnographer and photographer Pierre Verger, opened in 1982. The São Paulo Biennial began including objects of African art in 1953, as demonstrated by Gabrielle Nascimento (2018: 74) and Luciara dos Santos Ribeiro (2019), and there were other smaller exhibitions of African art in Salvador during the 1950s.
- 5 Nascimento discusses the collection of the MNBA (2018), and Juliana Bevilacqua and Renato Araújo (2017) describe the African art collections at MAE and Museu Afro-Brasil. Juliana Bevilacqua's article (2022) is an exception as she discusses three African art exhibitions that took place at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo from the 1950s through 1980s.
 - 6 "Artes". *Jornal do Brasil*, March 28, 1962, caderno 1: 10.
 - 7 The "idea of Africa" comes from V. Y. Mudimbe, who describes it as "a product of the West and was conceived and conveyed through systems of knowledge" (Mudimbe, 1994: xi).
 - 8 Author interview with Henri Senghor, January 17, 2018, Paris.
 - 9 Author interview with Henri Senghor, January 17, 2018, Paris.
 - 10 For instance, see Senghor cited in "Arte Negra no MAM". *O Jornal*, March 17, 1970, caderno 1: 8.
 - 11 Senghor e Castelo Fazem Comunicado". *Correio da Manhã*, September 25, 1964, n.p. JMR-Do54-013, Instituto de Estudo Brasileiros, Universidade de São Paulo.
 - 12 "Le Président Senghor annonce une importante contribution du Brésil et de Trinidad au Festival des Arts Nègres". *Dakar Matin*, October 5, 1964: 1.
 - 13 Senghor called Brazil "a loved sister", and said that Brazil, as an independent state, should provide the same opportunities to those countries seeking independence. "Le Président Senghor lance l'idée d'une communauté Luso, Afro-Brésilienne". *Dakar Matin*, September 21, 1964: 1.
 - 14 "Museu vai mostrar a arte da África". *Correio da Manhã*, September 22, 1964, caderno 1: 11.
 - 15 Harry Laus. "Escultura da África Negra." *Jornal do Brasil*, September 25, 1964, caderno B: 4.
 - 16 "Artes." *Jornal do Brasil*, March 28, 1962, caderno 1: 10.
 - 17 "Thaim coordena mostra de arte que Senghor abrirá." *Jornal do Brasil*, September 12, 1964, caderno 1: 5.
 - 18 "Brasília inaugura este mês exposição da arte Negra na África com acervo de Dacar". *Jornal do Brasil*, April 19, 1970, n.p. Newspaper clippings, folder MAM-EXP: 418, institutional archive, Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro.
 - 19 "África, arte Negra." *Jornal de Letras*, April 1970: 7.
 - 20 Jayme Maurício. "Arte Negra aglomerada." *Correio da Manhã*, April 9, 1970: n.p. Newspaper clippings, folder MAM-EXP: 418, institutional archive, Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro.
 - 21 Jayme Maurício. "Arte Negra aglomerada." *Correio da Manhã*, April 9, 1970: n.p.
 - 22 Art historian Joshua Cohen (2017: 142) has argued that European modernists saw Fang masks in Paris and London made specifically for export, painted in white and mimicking European features.
 - 23 Celina Luz. "Uma visão da África Negra." *Jornal do Brasil*, April 4, 1970, caderno b: 5.

- 24 Jayme Maurício. "Arte Negra aglomerada."
- 25 "Itamarati vai mostrar peças de arte Negra". *O Globo*, April 27, 1970: n.p. Newspaper clippings, folder MAM-EXP: 418, institutional archive, Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro.
- 26 Cited in Jayme Maurício. "Plásticas". *Correio da manhã*, March 14, 1970, annex: 5.
- 27 While Brasília was inaugurated in 1960, the transfer from Rio de Janeiro to Brasília took over a decade especially because much of the city was still in construction.
- 28 Henri Senghor, Manuscript of Speech Given at the Opening of the Exhibition in Brasília, April 28, 1970. Private papers of Henri Senghor, Paris.
- 29 "Arte Negra no MAM." *O Globo*, Rio de Janeiro, March 21, 1960. Newspaper clippings, folder MAM-EXP: 418, institutional archive, Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro; "Arte Negra influencia arte branca." *O Jornal*, March 28, 1970, caderno 2: 1.
- 30 MAE had a vested interest in *África arte Negra* as they already had a collection of African art acquired since the 1950s, but which represented primarily Yoruba objects (Bevilacqua, 2017).
- 31 Jayme Maurício. "Plásticas: Arte Negra: Protesto do M. de Arqueologia." *Correio da Manhã*, April 15, 1970, annex: 6.
- 32 Jayme Maurício. "Plásticas: Arte Negra: Barreto defende-se." *Correio da Manhã*, April 17, 1970, annex: 7.
- 33 Untitled article. *O Globo*, Rio de Janeiro, March 17, 1970, newspaper clippings, folder MAM-EXP: 418, institutional archive, Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro.
- 34 Anonymous writers cited in Jayme Maurício. "Plásticas." *Correio da Manhã*, April 2, 1970, annex: 7.
- 35 "It is the problem of the Senegalese ambassador." Anonymous writers cited in Jayme Maurício. "Plásticas." *Correio da Manhã*, April 2, 1970, annex: 7.
- 36 Paulo Santiago de Jesus cited in Walmir Ayala. "Arte na semana." *Jornal do Brasil*, March 30, 1970, caderno b: 2.
- 37 Cited in Jayme Maurício. "Plásticas." *Correio da manhã*, March 14, 1970, annex: 5.
- 38 "Arte Negra no MAM." *O Jornal*, March 17, 1970, caderno 1: 8.
- 39 The Nordeste is a Brazilian region in the Northeast and includes the state of Bahia, which counts a large Afro-Brazilian population.
- 40 Jayme Maurício. "Arte Negra aglomerada."
- 41 This is especially related in the press coverage of the exhibition. See, for instance: Henrique Alves. "Visão da África." *Jornal de Letras nos Estados*, January 1970: 6.
- 42 Christiane Samarco, "As raízes culturais de um povo que renasceu," *Jornal do Brasil*, October 14, 1981: n.p. Newspaper clippings, folder MAM-EXP: Arte Contemporânea do Senegal, institutional archive, Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro.
- 43 "Cultura Negra é tema de debate no MAM," *Última Hora*, February 9, 1982: n.p. Newspaper clippings, folder MAM-EXP: Arte Contemporânea do Senegal, institutional archive, Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro.
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