

THE RECEPTION OF AFRICAN ART

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Being the same and different seems to be the paradoxical condition in which contemporary art evolves. When there is innovation, it often has to come from within, from an approved, established artist with the support of a status-enhancing discourse. The art world likes to see itself as completely open to everything new, but is in fact governed by habits, conventions and methods that constitute an unspoken set of rules that every postulant has to be able to master. It did not take a young generation of African artists long to assimilate these parameters and put them into operation. Today we are dealing with a group of artists who have no inhibitions about availing themselves of the methods and techniques current in contemporary Western art to handle topical questions relating to a post-colonial African reality. Several of them take part in the international exhibitions that are now held throughout the world. They travel widely, some dividing their time between Africa and other continents, which is why *Africa Remix* makes no distinction between those artists residing in Africa and those scattered across other countries. Where the latter are concerned, all those who have been invited to contribute to *Africa Remix* refer to their African roots in one way or another. They often speak of them in a raw, direct manner; hardly any trace of references to so-called 'traditional' or 'primitive' art practices can be found. In this sense African art has made a huge leap since 1989, when I curated the exhibition *Magiciens de la terre* at the Centre Pompidou.

The purpose of *Africa Remix* is not historical. It does not attempt to reconstruct the chronology of developments that have taken place over several decades. Rather it sets out to show the state of African creativity in its most recent manifestations, though at the same time not excluding an older generation of artists that has had the advantage of having gained some recognition in contemporary art circuits. *Africa Remix* combines the work of self-taught artists and those who are actively involved in the international art scene, across the whole continent: sub-Saharan Africa as well as North Africa. However, it must be said that there are many places that curator Simon Njami did not have time to visit during the selection process for *Africa Remix*, each constituting a gap that our successors will have to bridge.

The knowledge that we had in the late 1980s was very fragmentary. It may be useful to recall what we did know at that time in order to gain a better