

Sadikou Oukpedjo

Portfolio



Born in 1970 in Kétao, Togo, Sadikou Oukpedjo lives and works in Abidjan, Ivory Coast.

His work features half-human, half-animal characters that question the notions of origin and heritage for African peoples. For Sadikou Oukpedjo, tales, cosmogony, rites and witchcraft are all attempts and tools created by man to find his place in the world and learn to know himself. By exploring the ambiguous relationship between man and his animality, he questions our awareness of the cruelty of human relationships, in Africa and in the world.

His work is driven by a constant and profound questioning of our humanity, with regard to our animality. Sadikou Oukpedjo seeks to understand the violence of history in West Africa's past. The invisible and its power, the unknown and the hidden appear as a red thread, inscribing themselves in the exploration of human consciousness as a single quest that runs through the evolution of his plastic research.

Trained in the studio of the Togolese artist Paul Ahyi, a major figure of West African modernity, Sadikou Oukpedjo is deeply involved in the history of African forms. He mainly practises wood sculpture. After living in Bamako, he moved to Abidjan in 2013 where he mainly devotes himself to painting, drawing and sculpture, while experimenting with pastel, chalk, pigments and ceramics.

A multidisciplinary artist, from 2014, upon his return from the Dakar Biennale, he began a series of works, whose hybrid figures have subsequently been presented in collaboration with Galerie Cécile Fakhoury in several contemporary art fairs and have since joined prestigious private and public collections.

Recent exhibitions: Mémoires contemporaines d'un continent (Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, Paris, 2022); Stasis (Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, Dakar, 2020); 1-54 Marrakech (Morocco, 2020); Kubatana (Vestfossen Kunstlaboratorium, Norway, 2019); Silentium (Galerie Cécile Fakhoury - Abidjan, 2019); Mutation (Cité internationale des arts de Paris, 2018); Les Fantômes de l'Afrique (collaboration with Vincent Michéa, Galerie Cécile Fakhoury - Dakar, 2018); Des Hommes et des Totems (Galerie Le Manège, Dakar, 2018)

Collections (selection): Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; Mohammed VI Museum, Rabat, Morocco; Tiroche DeLeon Collection, Jaffa, Israel; Fondation Blachère, Apt, France

Expositions personnelles Solo shows

- 2022** • *Mémoires contemporaines d'un continent*, Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, Paris, France
- 2020** • *Stasis*, Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, Dakar, Sénégal
• Foire Internationale d'Art Contemporain FIAC, Paris, France
• Biennale de Dakar OFF, Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, Dakar, Sénégal
• *Combat de coqs*, Villa Soudan, Bamako, Mali
- 2019** • *Silentium*, Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
• *The Council of Elders*, Palais de Lomé, Togo
• *Transcendental*, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, Berlin, Germany
- 2018** • *Mutation*, Nuit Blanche 2018, Cité internationale des arts de Paris, France
- 2016** • *Anima*, Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
- 2014** • *Paintings*, Blabla Bar Hippodrome, Bamako, Mali
• *Dans les rues d'Abidjan*, Galerie Guirandou Arts Pluriels, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
• *Galerie Koffi-Yao*, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
- 2013** • Blabla Bar Hippodrome, Bamako, Mali
• Institut français de Bamako, Mali
- 2012** • *Le cri silencieux*, Goethe Institut de Bamako, Mali
- 2003** • Centre Culturel Français de Lomé, Togo
- 2002** • Centre Culturel Français de Cotonou, Bénin

Expositions collectives Group shows

- 2021** • *Un pied sur terre*, Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, Paris, France
• *La clairière d'Eza Boto*, Jardin des plantes de Rouen, France
- 2020** • 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, Marrakech, Maroc
• *Tu es beau comme tu es*, Exposition à ciel ouvert, Dakar, Sénégal
- 2019** • *Kubatana*, Vestfossen Kunstlaboratorium, Vestfossen, Norvège
• Parc des sculptures, Palais de Lomé, Togo
• 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, Londres, RU
• Investec Cape Town Art Fair, Cape Town, Afrique du Sud

- 2018** • *Les Fantômes de l’Afrique : Sirel Rellik*, Dakar, Sénégal
• *Des Hommes et des Totems*, Galerie Le Manège, Dakar, Sénégal
• *Pioneer Works*, 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, New-York, Etats-Unis
• *Palimpsest*, African Studies Gallery, Tel-Aviv, Israël
• 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, Londres, Royaume-Uni
- 2017** • 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, Londres, Royaume-Uni
• *Art Paris Art Fair*, Paris, France
- 2016** • 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, Londres, Royaume-Uni
• *Une collection particulière*, Biennale de Dakar OFF (12e édition), Dakar, Sénégal
- 2015** • Art Twenty One, Lagos, Nigeria
- 2014** • Biennale de Dakar OFF, Hôtel Djoloff, Dakar, Sénégal
• 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, Londres, Royaume-Uni
- 2013** • African Art Yaya Gallery, Londres, Royaume-Uni
• Festival Arkadi (17e édition), Institut Français, Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire
- 2012** • Biennale de Dakar OFF (8e édition), Maison d’Aïssa Dione, Dakar, Sénégal
- 2010** • Cinquantenaire de l’indépendance, Radisson Blu, Bamako, Mali

Résidences Residencies

- 2021** • Résidence de création, La Pagerie, Martinique, France
- 2018** • Résidence Institut français, Cité internationale des arts de Paris, France
• START, Fondation Tiroch DeLeon, Tel-Aviv, Israël
- 2016** • THREAD, The Josef & Anni Albers Foundation, Tambacounda, Sénégal
• La Vallée, Bruxelles, Belgique
• La Somone, Fondation Blachère, Dakar, Sénégal

Collections

- Centre Pompidou, Paris, France
- Mohammed VI Museum, Rabat, Maroc
- Tiroche DeLeon Collection, Jaffa, Israël
- Fondation Blachère, Apt, France

Catalogues Publications

- 2020** • Catalogue d’exposition, Biennale de Dakar, ed. Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, Dakar, Sénégal
- 2019** • *Silentium*, catalogue d’exposition, ed. Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire
- 2017** • *Transition*, the magazine of Africa and the Diaspora, ed. Harvard University, USA

The artist's work



Sadikou Oukpedjo's works seem to be inhabited by a magical power. They sometimes seem to have been revealed to us from an immemorial time, as if excavated from a place preserved by the passage of time. The gentle colossi in Sadikou Oukpedjo's work are sometimes shown in introspective postures, withdrawn from the hustle and bustle of the world, sometimes in scenes of struggle or confrontation. Sadikou Oukpedjo's works take us into a temporal and material elsewhere, their quasi-mineral support taking us into the field of sculpture and giving us access to an imaginary world of thousand-year-old cave paintings.

His therianthropic figures, half-human and half-animal, are part of a long series of myths and beliefs, ranging from Egyptian deities to shamanic rites. In a manner reminiscent of Greek or African mythologies, Sadikou Oukpedjo's works present heroes and their epics, sometimes fantastic creatures, intermediaries between gods and men, as a pictorial system to explain our societies and the origin of our cities.

His representations are charged with or crossed by the invisible and its power, by the unknown and the hidden. Man analyses the world, models nature, seeks to know the secrets he can use. He is a magician, a master, an illusionist, a scientist, when the essence of life inevitably metamorphoses and transcends the world of ideas.

The pastels on paper, the monumental outdoor sculptures, the large canvases, the engravings, the ceramics and the carved stones reflect an inner state, in the tortuous silence of the inner self. This morphological, anatomical study has to do with the spiritual. The creature that Sadikou Oukpedjo brings to life in his works constitutes an archive of human consciousness crossed by the question of its primary origin, to tend towards an uncertain future.

The aesthetic subtlety of Sadikou Oukpedjo's paintings, a prophet artist, nevertheless suggests the sharpness of the ideas that they evoke. The acerbic criticism is never devoid of tenderness, and the accuracy of the artist's gaze is made up of as much sadness as hope. If the struggle of men with each other and within themselves is often not pretty, the gods have sometimes thwarted their fate. The word of the oracle always has several meanings, which are expressed here in the beauty of the antagonisms, open or intimate, told by Sadikou Oukpedjo through his works.







Anima: breath, breathing. Soul, spirit, beginning. Throughout the ages and areas, myths have carried human consciousness. Rites, religions and beliefs were imagined, told, transmitted and rewritten to federate the social group around a common vision, bearer of peace and progress. In the face of the uncertain depths of the world, man, with these tales, never ceases to build up tools against the abyss, against the insurmountable idea of being nothing but subtle dust in the immensity of the cosmos, against the visceral rage to contemplate his imperfection and the duality of his being. Anima: breath, breathing. Sadikou Oukpedjo embodies this movement of life in his art. His technique is protean, evolutionary - engraving, painting, drawing, sculpture. The artist experiments with matter, often starting with raw elements such as coal, stone or pigments. In this material, he knows how to recognise the ally and the opponent: «all these elements that enter into practice in my creative phase speak to me and remind me that I am neither superior nor inferior to them, since they sometimes resist me and drive me into negotiation» he says. Finding inspiration in the harmony of things. Blending, hybridity as a path to elevation.

Silentium: absence of noise. Sadikou Oukpedjo's works always reign in a deathly silence imposed by the grandeur of his figures. The majestic canvases overhang you as you enter the space. The figures are powerful, the muscular bodies are those of mythological athletes, the smooth-skinned heads reveal skulls like sealed Pandora's boxes. And of course, the animals in the mix are animals of strength, both literal and symbolic, horses, oxen, gorillas, bulls. Strength makes us silent, we are silent in the face of so much strength. Then we listen in silence to the violence of what can no longer be told because it has been entirely exploited, consumed and usurped. It is the silence of a state of extreme mutation: the forms have changed, we have to look at length to know where one stops and where the form of the other begins: the centaur. From now on, the being is hybrid, the product of two entities which confront each other and which will never really be able to cohabit in a single container. Then the paint cracks, it bloats, in some places it folds, in others it relaxes. Sadikou Oukpedjo's technique is mimetic of his subject: hybrid of matter and mutating.

Stasis: internal conflict, political and moral crisis. Inertia. In Sadikou Oukpedjo's painting one must grasp the echo of a Nietzschean thought that is not named. For the philosopher as for the artist, man is a «maker of Gods». His will to believe is so powerful that it pushes him further and further in a nihilistic gesture that tends to privilege what is not to the detriment of what is; that pushes him to fight for the hypothetical love of an above, a beyond rather than for that of his neighbour. «There are more idols than realities in the world,» said Nietzsche in the preface to *Twilight of the Idols*. These idols, money, consumption, religion, Sadikou Oukpedjo nails them to the pillory of painting, thus showing their power and their horror. These entities carried a system of values for man that some men themselves have misappropriated. «Humanity needs to create new tales to lead to gentler gods. Isn't it paradoxical that a God can base his reign on fear and exploitation?» asks the artist. Overcoming seduction, overcoming fear, getting out of inertia and making the pictorial space a place for the invention of new mythologies, such is Sadikou Oukpedjo's poetic enterprise.



Galerie Cécile Fakhoury is delighted to present *Silentium*, the second personal exhibition by the Togolese artist Sadikou Oukpedjo in Abidjan.

In *Anima*, Sadikou Oukpedjo presented a body of work focusing on the human body whose moulded shapes were a testimony to the physical and spiritual duality, half-human and half-animal, found in each of us. His works were designed as a distorting mirror, unsettling, but only to better reveal the essence of human life and of a fragmented identity destined to be reinvented.

In *Silentium*, the artist returns to the figure of the animal to bring to light our most intimate contradictions. While our modern mythologies are based on the divine gift of speech expected to elevate human beings from their animal condition, mankind often fails to meet this challenge.

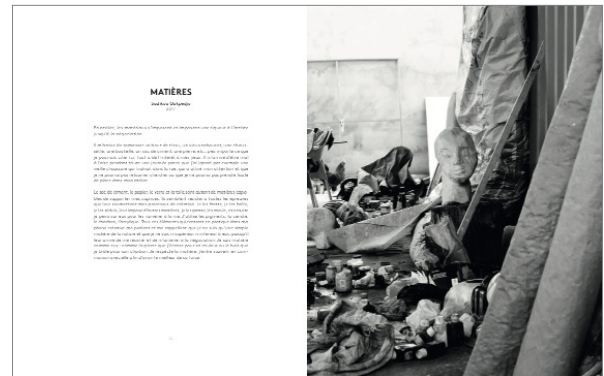
Offering with one hand the power of words and implementing with the other the fundamental prohibition to name him, the divine roots speech within an original silence, thereby sealing the joint destiny of might and helplessness.

Since speech has lost its power to act, Sadikou Oukpedjo sets his paintings against this silence. Through his work, he denounces a resounding absence, a contagious internal mutism that silences all that should be said not only to others, but also to ourselves in the first place; words whose violence and strength would otherwise suffice to break the wall of silence and the silence of our consciousness.

When the consciousness becomes quiet, mankind falls from its pedestal and loses the legitimacy of its superiority. The metamorphosis that occurs before our eyes testifies to the urgency of a paradigm shift. This silence must be heard and acknowledged for us to reclaim an authentic humane voice and to regain the performative nature of speech.

Set in a delicate balance between being and nothingness the evanescent figures arising from his canvases seem to be fighting against their own disappearance. Mankind is absorbed in a hand-to-hand combat with his double nature, a struggle with no winner. Inherently part of its being, the animal side now represents its fall just as well as its rise.

The silhouettes attempt to square the weight of their gravity with the unbearable lightness of their silence. Between relief and frustration, the deep colors Sadikou Oukpedjo uses reveal our own asperities, our eternal duplicity, and our unavoidable responsibility.



The catalogue is made of a text by the philosopher Seloua Luste Boulbina, «The Animal that I am», exhibition views, studio photos and reproductions of the works from the *Silentium* exhibition.

A bullock, a cockerel. A hen, or, rather, a guinea fowl. A nanny goat, a billy goat. Human bodies. Carcasses. Hybrid beings. A painting brought to life. Swathes of colour simultaneously blur and obscure the false clarity of the forms. A streaky or smudged blue. Bright white patches. A sombre, trans- parent and sometimes grainy grey. A colourful halo and yellow where feet are buried. Red spots. An opaque black paradoxically illuminates a strange scene. A red or bluish hue delineates new spaces. Shreds of pictorial matter congregate in an organised chaos. The painting therefore contrasts with the natural order of things. The dual presence of shapes and materials contributes to the intensity of Sadikou Oukpedjo's large canvases : a space to show, tell and reflect. There are outpourings (of sympathy or pain). Above all there are mysteries, secret rituals, hidden things and the inexplicable. A whole mythology is at work behind the image, full of hybrid animals and enigmatic figures. In the face of death, do animals have a soul ?

Excerpt of «The Animal that I am», by Seloua Luste Boulbina



Sculptures in half-human and half-animal forms take possession of the gallery and make its immaculate walls resonate with a past and contemporary history. The tutelary, albeit ambiguous, figure of Michel Leiris («Siriel Rellik» read backwards as «Killer Leiris») is asked to take part, against the backdrop of the controversy surrounding the restitution of works looted by France in Africa during the colonial period. This collaborative work thus unfolds as a repertoire of precise gestures, sometimes harmonious and sometimes dissident, using the medium as a field of experimentation.

Carved out of the mass, Sadikou Oukpedjo's sculptures with their primitive aesthetics reveal the artist's explosive gesture, a controlled energy that creates powerful aesthetic forms. In a radical posture, these sculptures are then adorned with Vincent Michéa's metal bases with their sharp points of leakage. Both ornaments and imposed crutches, the metal rods pierce their compressed flesh without compromise. A back and forth of matter then opens up. The rust contrasts with the traces of gold that can be seen on these anthropomorphic silhouettes, fragmentary traces of a past greatness; or perhaps the future rediscovery of a forgotten treasure, buried in the ancestral wood.



In tales and mythology, objects come to life and animals can speak. Man, who is aware of his dual nature, attempts to access his own knowledge through cosmogony, rituals and witchcraft. The *Anima* exhibition explores relationships between humans and animal forms, as well as between animals and a human forms.

Within his painted scenes the subject has a tendency to disappear, at times the silhouette seems to fall, to founder, to disappear in a struggle or duel between two entities. At other times, the figure suddenly arises like a revelation. It almost seems to be asserting its full existence. Metamorphosis of the material, the forms takes place leading to a new composition of the living thing. The process, the transformation is expressed in this polymorphous work imparting the signs of the change in the physical body and its psyche.

The pastels on paper, the monumental sculptures outside, the large canvases, illustrations, ceramics and stones reflect an inner state, in the tortuous silence of the 'between oneself.' This morphological, anatomical study is related to the spiritual. The gesture and expressiveness of Sadikou Oukpedjo's work is repetitive and precise, as well as spontaneous. His forms are guided by the doubts and apprehensions of the world in his eyes. For him the animal world represents a source of study vital to man finding his place in our societies. Man now mechanises all his production, after using animals to progress, sometimes losing certain values, traditions and precepts of nature.

The creature that Sadikou Oukpedjo brings to life in his works represents an archive of human consciousness fuelled by the issue of his primary origin, to move toward an uncertain future.



Sadikou Oukpedjo

Mémoires d'un continent #16, 2022

Technique mixte sur toile Mixed media on canvas

162 x 76 cm



Sadikou Oukpedjo

Untitled #15, série Combat de coqs, 2021

Technique mixte sur toile Mixed media on canvas

92 x 79 cm



Sadikou Oukpedjo

Untitled #3, série Combat de coqs, 2021

Technique mixte sur toile Mixed media on canvas

188 x 87,5 cm



Sadikou Oukpedjo

Le défilé des dieux #2, 2020

Technique mixte sur toile Mixed media on canvas

171 x 148 cm



Sadikou Oukpedjo

New land, 2019

Technique mixte sur toile Mixed media on canvas

250 x 400 cm



Sadikou Oukpedjo

Nouvelle mythologie #5, 2019

Technique mixte sur toile Mixed media on canvas

284 x 353 cm



Sadikou Oukpedjo

Cosmos, 2018

Technique mixte sur toile Mixed media on canvas

195 x 92 cm



Sadikou Oukpedjo

Armure #2, 2018

Technique mixte sur toile Mixed media on canvas

135 x 125 cm



Sadikou Oukpedjo

Untitled #6, 2018

Technique mixte sur toile Mixed media on canvas

150 x 150 cm



Sadikou Oukpedjo

100 Titres #2, 2018

Technique mixte sur toile Mixed media on canvas

220 x 215 cm



Sadikou Oukpedjo

Et l'homme créa dieu #1, 2017

Gravure et acrylique sur miroir Engraving and acrylic on mirror

193 x 58 cm



Sadikou Oukpedjo

Exode #5, 2016

Céramique émaillée Enamelled ceramics

25 x 23 x 19 cm



Sadikou Oukpedjo

Mue #11, 2016

Pastel sur papier Pastel on paper

161 x 155 cm



Sadikou Oukpedjo

Mue #5, 2016

Pastel sur papier Pastel on paper

60 x 60 cm



Sadikou Oukpedjo

Séduction #1, 2018

Technique mixte sur papier Mixed media on paper

193 x 58 cm