

Malick Sidibé

Photographic studio, Bagdadji

19 June - 28 September 08

Exhibition organised by the Andalusian Contemporary Art Centre and di CHroma, produced by Gwinzegal. A catalogue has been edited to show a selection.

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Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo

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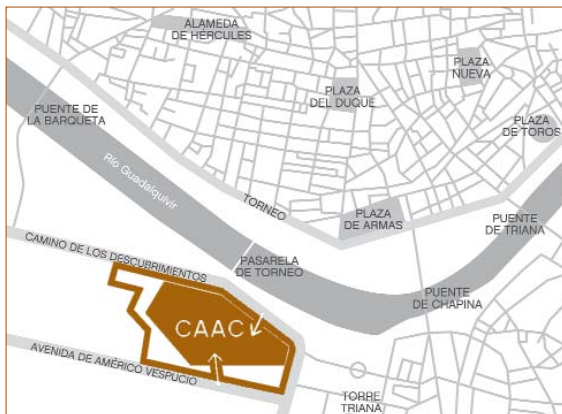
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Access

Avda. Américo Vespucio nº 2
Camino de los Descubrimientos s/n

Transport

C1 and C2 buses



Timetable

1 abril - 30 septiembre
Tuesday to Friday: 10 - 21 h.
Saturday: 11 - 21 h.

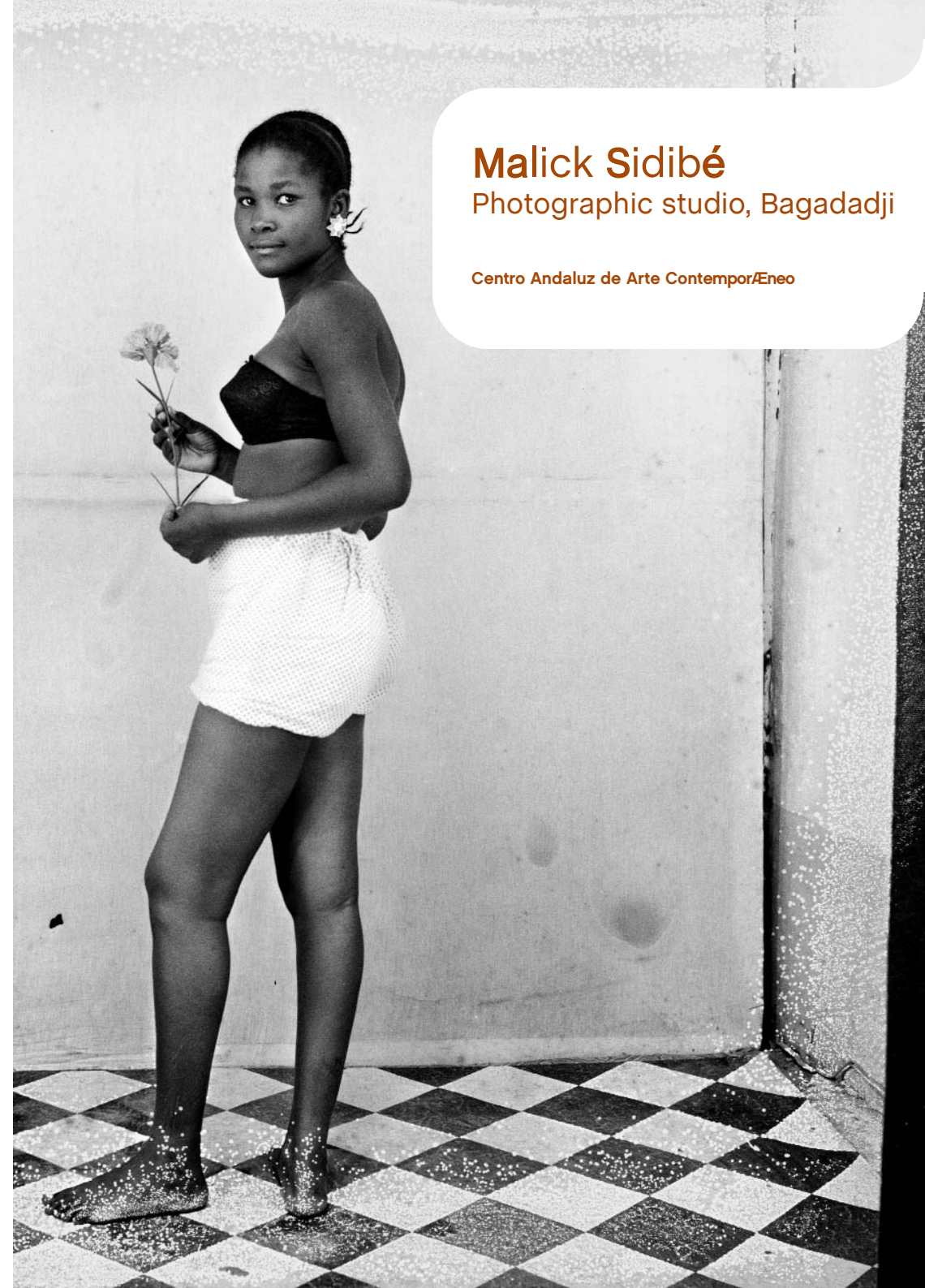
Night: July - August (Nocturama)
Wednesday to Saturday: 20 - 24 h.

Sunday: 10 - 15 h.
Closed on Monday
Holidays: Consult with Centre

Library

Monday to Friday (except holidays):
9 - 14 h.

Tickets sales until 30 minutes before
closing.



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The story of Malick Sidibé, photographer born in 1935 in Soloba, Mali, began in 1970. It is the story of a young peasant of Peul ethnicity whose talent for drawing was discovered at school, and who completed higher studies in Crafts in Bamako, the political and economic centre of what was then the colony of French Sudan. After finishing school, he learned techniques of conventional photography as an employee in a French studio. If this apprenticeship may be representative of the way that African youth appropriated Western photography, then Sidibé's next activity is also a model example of the photographic awakening that was later to take place on the African continent.

Beginning in 1957, he worked as a reporter in countless festivals and events before opening his own Studio Malick in Bagdadji, a vibrant neighbourhood in Bamako. Unlike other photographers who mainly reached out to clients from the official and upper-class circles in Mali, Sidibé, then a young man in his twenties, was interested in Bamako's urban youth and their euphoria due to the country's independence, gained in 1960. Malick Sidibé was instantly converted in the chronicler of this culture; no mere distant observer, he had an inside view as one of its members.

The current exhibition focuses on a selection of Sidibé's studio portraits. Most of them are of young people who came to Studio Malick, almost always in the evening, to sit for photos before going out at night. Unlike what happens with his snapshots, in which dancers improvise in public parties, the atmosphere in Sidibé's studio presents people with another challenge. In front of the camera, beneath the canopy of the set, before the uniform studio backdrop and with the studio lights upon them, the models seem to reinvent themselves, to step onto the stage of their own doing.

Searching for their place in the rapidly modernising Mali society, they are drawn to the studio because they have something they want to show, to record for posterity: a new watch, a new dress, new bell-bottom trousers, a new motorcycle or a new girlfriend, or maybe their fabulous style, their boxing skills, their business talents, or even a close friendship or an addition to the family. The images from his darkroom are imbued with a spontaneity resembling that of photojournalism. Many portraits give off energy of their own; they escape



Monsieur Dembelé, secret agent, 1964



Four companions, June 1967



An enthusiast named Kala, April 1966



My watch and my ring, March 1964



Untitled, 1975



The two of us on a motorbike, July 1970

from the ritual petrification of the act of portrait-making that Roland Barthes described as "*the shroud of the pose*" in his book *Camera Lucida, Reflections on photography*.

The visual representation of Mali fashion in the 1960s is to be found on film posters and record jackets that inspired Sidibé's models. They play their part very seriously, sometimes clumsily, but always with pride, without getting distracted by the studio decorations, which are sometimes placed or constructed poorly. The modest set of Studio Malick became a catwalk where ideals were brought forth and set before reality imposed itself, and where modernity and tradition went hand in hand.

For this photographer from Bagdadji, the cultural backdrop is marked by political emancipation and its elixir of aesthetic life, by music, jazz, soul, and emerging pop culture. After twenty years of photographic work that made him one of the leading African chroniclers, Malick Sidibé, with his professional photographer's modesty, never calls himself an artist, but the current art market has made him into one. Ever since his "rediscovery" in one of the first *Rencontres Africaines de la Photographie* in 1994 in Bamako, the attention fixed on Malick Sidibé's photographic work has not stopped growing, whether in the Western art world, or among young African photographers.

But there is something in Sidibé's images that is even more fascinating, even more powerful than the fact that they are a source of nostalgic projections, apart from their vitality, their sensitivity and their sense of humour. Their true value does not so much reside in their visual innovation or in the originality of their formal composition, but in the balance of two complementary, invisible forces: on one side, the model's liberty of presentation granted by the photographer, and on the other side, the role that he himself plays by setting the scene. This is the talent that has made him a great portrait photographer. Sidibé's portraits are not works in which the creator imposes his artistic vision on those he contemplates, but rather photos that one would like to hold, because they were taken for that purpose. This is why these images seem truly authentic, and it is no small achievement that they show this fortunate coincidence; they have been made because of the man's necessity to show himself and to leave a picture for posterity and because of photography's intrinsic need to serve as a faithful mirror of these images.