

The Spiral and The Crossroads

The Dual Universalisms of Senegal's First Art Museum

Lauren Taylor

The seaside Musée Dynamique in Dakar looks something like a hard-edged, flat-roofed Greek temple: Pericles meets Le Corbusier meets the Senegalese shore (Fig. 1). In April 1966, only six years after Senegal's independence from France, the art museum's doors opened to the public during the First World Festival of Negro Arts. Amid a broader celebration of Négritude and the arts, visitors gathered inside to see *Negro Art: Sources, Evolution, Expansion (L'Art Nègre: Sources, Évolution, Expansion)*, in which Benin "bronzes," Kuba textiles, Gelede masks, and some 500 other historical objects were brought together in the largest exhibition of African art ever to have been staged on the continent (Fig. 2). Senegalese President Léopold Sédar Senghor declared the art museum to be the festival's "most meaningful testament" (Senghor 1966: 6). His enthusiasm was shared by the international press, who photographed and discussed it in scores.¹ As tens of thousands of visitors from around the world saw the Musée Dynamique either in person or in print, the museum did more than provide a well-equipped space in which to view objects. It was also a material expression of the reconciliatory role that art, Africa, and the nation of Senegal might play amid the fraught international landscape of the 1960s.

With the devastation of World War II close in memory, the still-unknown future of independent Africa on the horizon, and the fractures of the Cold War omnipresent, a tense international climate surrounded the decision of the French government and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to collaborate with Senegal in developing the Musée Dynamique. The museum had no permanent collection and was instead intended to accommodate an ever-updating roster of temporary, loan-based exhibitions. Indeed, its future offerings included topics ranging from the contemporary arts of Senegal to drawings by Leonardo Da Vinci.² But its inaugural exhibition, *Negro Art*, accounted for much of the motivation

behind its construction. The exhibition was organized by a committee that included three members from West Africa, three members from France, and one from UNESCO.³ One of the exhibition's French co-commissioners, Georges-Henri Rivière, said the museum's international panel of organizers were moved to collaborate on its construction by what he called "three clear, generous ideas": the desire of Senghor to mount a major exhibition of African art in Dakar; the wish of French Minister of Culture André Malraux to facilitate a similar display in Paris; and the goal of UNESCO to create a "pilot museum" in Senegal, anticipating the Organization's increased involvement on the African continent (Rivière 1966: xxxvi).

Though the organizers portrayed the initiatives surrounding the museum to be simple, their alignment required a formidable reconciliation of agendas. Lodged into the spaces beneath its floorplan and behind its façades, concerns quietly affected the construction of the Musée Dynamique. How does an art museum honor Négritude's particular stake in African identity and UNESCO's stake in universal humanism?⁴ Could architecture built in collaboration with the former colonizer, France, effectively express the nationhood of a newly independent Senegal? And what viewpoint would this construction occupy amid the era's many rivalries—between the eastern and western blocs, and between newly formed African nations?

When considered as a material response to these questions, the Musée Dynamique provides a foothold from which to examine the role of art, architecture, and the museum in mediating the theories of cosmopolitanism that shaped international relations of the mid- to late-twentieth century. Primarily the outcome of dialogues between representatives of UNESCO and the Senegalese government, the Museum testifies to the exchange, compromise, and mutual influence linking the cultural theories of each organization. Drawing upon the archives of France, Senegal, and UNESCO, this article identifies the practical and political negotiations conditioning the construction of the Musée Dynamique, before examining the ideological work performed by its architecture. The pages that follow discuss the effects of the Museum's allusions to architectural modernism, to a modestly sized ethnography museum in

LAUREN TAYLOR is an assistant professor in the Department of History of Art and Architecture at the University of Pittsburgh. L.Taylor@pitt.edu



1 Exterior view of the Musée Dynamique in Dakar, Senegal. Photographer unknown, ca. 1965–66.
 Photo: Photo Artis. © MEN (Musée d'ethnographie de Neuchâtel), Switzerland

Switzerland, and finally, to Greco-Roman antiquity. Each of these three reference points, cited in the museum's forms, represents a distinct route through which to express the ideals of universalism. Together, interwoven points of reference allowed the art museum to accommodate multiple mid-century approaches to intercultural relations.

While several scholars have rightly identified the cultural imperialism inherent in upholding European aesthetics and values as universal (for example, the human proportions of the Greek temple, or Le Corbusier's subsequent Modulor), less attention has been paid to the meanings that forms associated with the universalist conceit might hold for African politicians, architects, and critics. In the absence of such analysis, African nations have too

often been assigned a passive role in the development of cosmopolitanist thought and architecture, precluding the possible meanings that such architecture can acquire in, for example, a newly independent Senegalese capital. To make legible these multiple meanings, this essay proposes the "spiral" and the "crossroads" as emblems of the distinct humanist visions espoused by UNESCO and the Senegalese government, respectively.

THE SPIRAL

The origins of the Musée Dynamique extend to the earliest days of Senegal's independence in 1960. As president, Senghor considered artistic programming to be a lead priority for the burgeoning nation. He viewed cultural development to be indispensable, even prerequisite, to political and economic health.⁵ This belief drove his legendary investment in literature, theater, film, and other art forms in Senegal. A testament to such prioritization of the arts, Senegal was not yet an eight-month-old state when its minister Alioune Diop wrote to the Director-General of UNESCO to propose a partnership (Diop 1960). Diop requested UNESCO's support in planning a multimedia cultural festival in 1961 to mark the first anniversary of Senegalese independence.

The Senegalese minister's appeal was met with skepticism. The UNESCO representative judged the festival to be too ambitious to be achieved within the proposed time-frame (Dard 1960). Furthermore, UNESCO had never before



2 Installation view of *L'Art Nègre: Sources, Évolution, Expansion* (1966) at the Musée Dynamique in Dakar, Senegal. Photo: © Roland Kaehr

sponsored a festival and was reluctant to set such a precedent. But by the time that 1961 arrived, the Festival's target date had been delayed to 1963 and its function thus became less clearly linked to commemorating Senegalese independence and more devoted to mounting, in Senghor's words, a "defense and illustration of Négritude" (Senghor 1966a). With this shift towards a more transnational purpose, UNESCO's trepidation subsided. The organization promised to send an expert on its behalf to help with only one section of the broader festival: a museum exhibition and accompanying colloquium ("Dr. Adiseshiah's Mission," n.d.).

If festivals had been unfamiliar undertakings for UNESCO, museums certainly were not. Museums had long been used in the name of UNESCO's stated mission to deter international conflict through educational, scientific, and cultural initiatives (see "Museum and Museums," 1948.) In 1948, seeking to create a forum through which museum professionals could share ideas, UNESCO founded the journal *Museum*. In its pages, André Leveillé, then-president of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), unironically called for UNESCO to lead a "museum crusade" (Leveillé 1949; see also Allais 2018). By likening the global promotion of museums to histories of Christian imperialism, Leveillé's words betray the Eurocentrism enabling UNESCO's utopic portrayal of museums. (On the imperialist character of UNESCO's museum projects, see Knodel and Reubi 2022.) Throughout the preceding century, museums had often been constructed in colonized regions as instruments

of European expansion and exploitation. Still, in 1956, under the banner of global harmony, UNESCO launched an International Campaign for Museums. Throughout this campaign, the organization opened museum spaces and facilitated related programs on six continents (Leveillé 1956).

UNESCO's track record planting museums around the world was thus well established by March 1963, when the

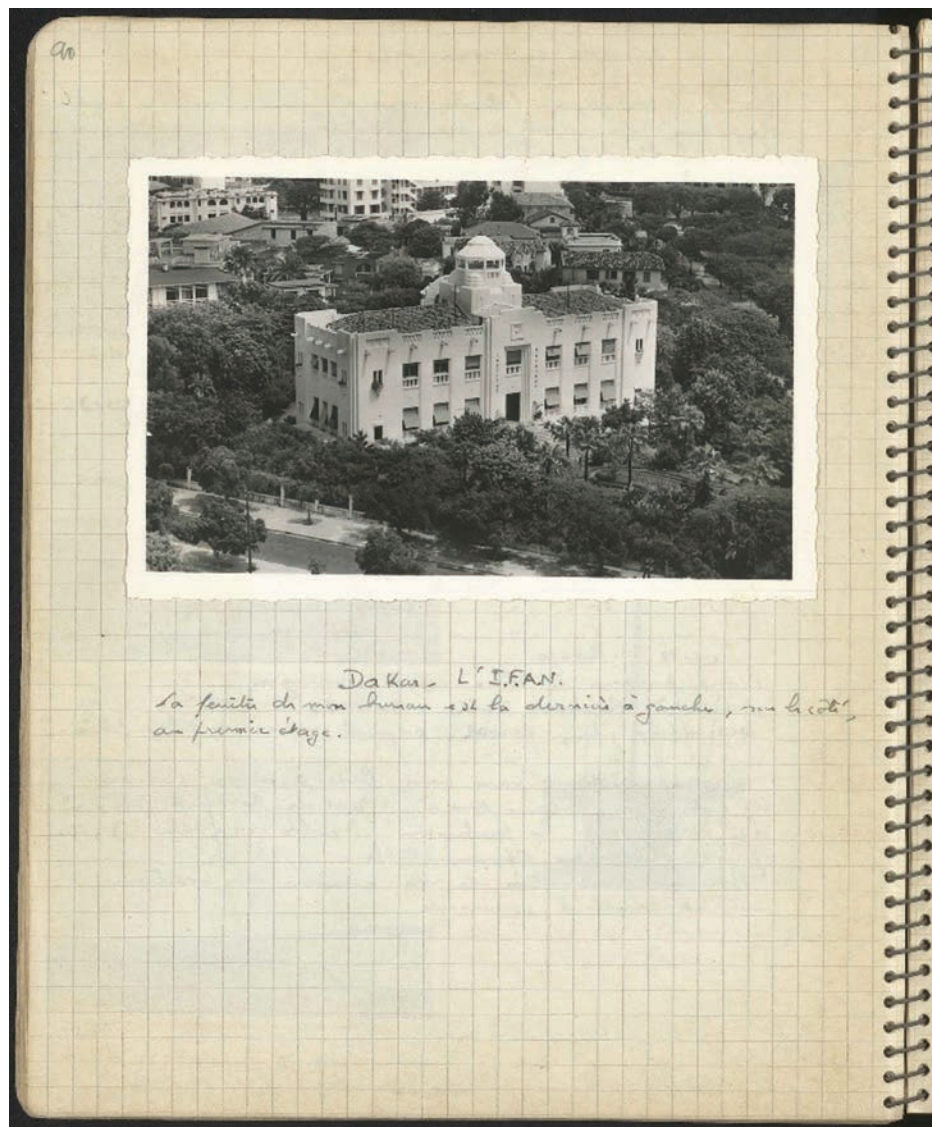
Swiss ethnographer Jean Gabus arrived in Dakar as the organization's representative. Gabus had traveled from Neuchâtel, Switzerland, where he directed the small lakeside city's ethnographic museum. Moreover, he had acted as a museum consultant for UNESCO since 1957, when, on its behalf, he led the reorganization of the National Museum of Kabul in Afghanistan (Centlivres 1993: 182). By the time the United Nations' contribution to the Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres was realized, he would already have assisted with the creation of a museologist training center in Jos, Nigeria, and a conservation project at the Royal Palaces of Abomey in Dahomey (see Allais 2018).

Responding to the Senegalese minister's request for support, Gabus visited Dakar for nine days to examine its museological resources and needs. This goal led him early on to the building of the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (IFAN) in Dakar, a research institute and museum founded in 1936 to serve the colonialist agenda of the French government. Its cream-colored, deco facades typified French colonial architecture of the interwar years (Fig. 3). In preliminary meetings, IFAN had been favored by the Senegalese organizing committee as a venue for the planned exhibition. But Gabus lamented its limited lighting and space and

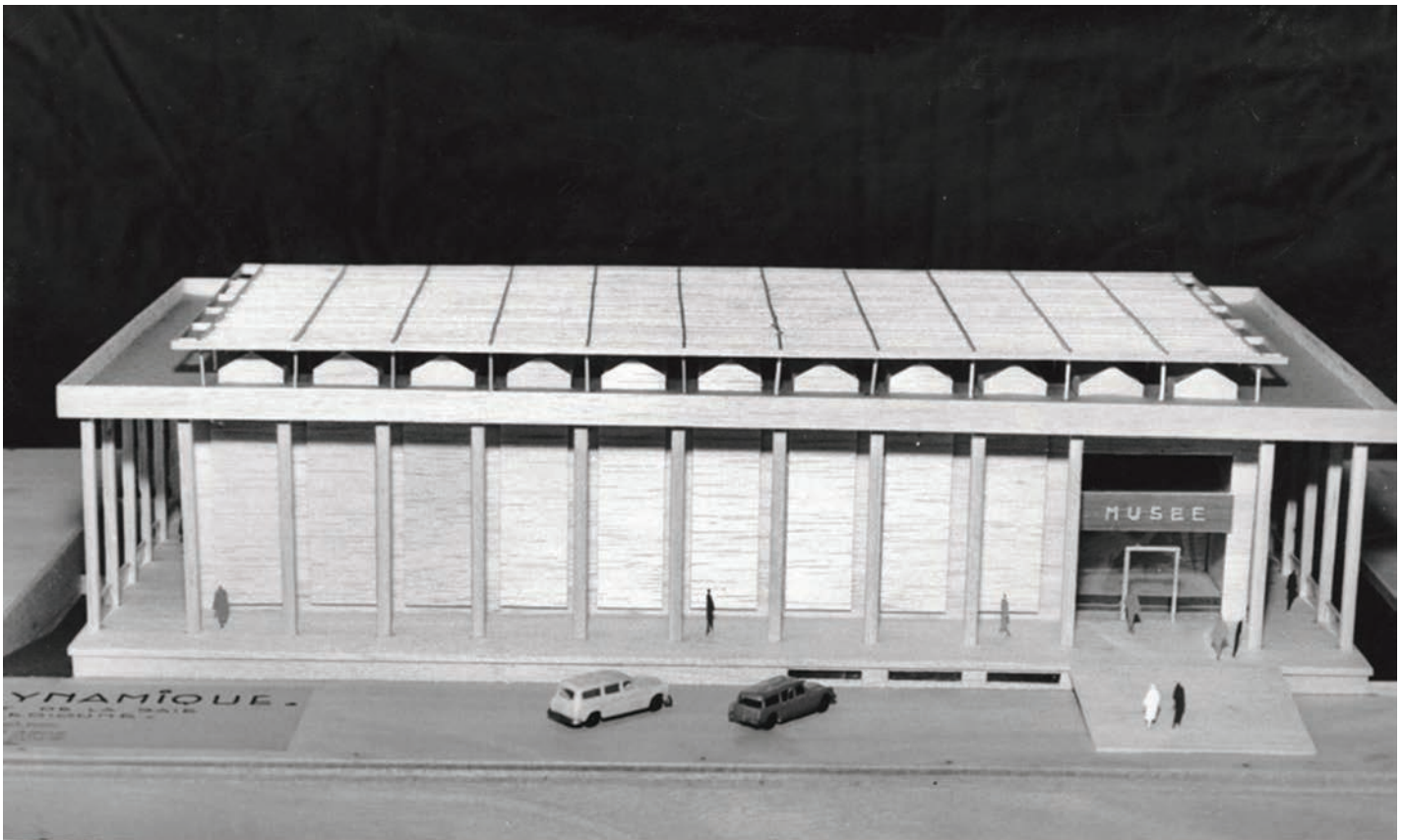
warned that its aging facilities might deter potential lenders from allowing their works to appear (Gabus 1963b: 2).⁶ What Dakar really needed, he thought, was a completely new museum. He envisioned that the new museum would host several temporary exhibitions rather than a static display, suggesting that it accommodate transformable walls that could be reconfigured in various combinations.

Just a week after Gabus's departure, the Senegalese Ministry of Education and the Dakar-based French and Italian architects who would build the museum, Michel Chesneau and Jean Verola, issued a tentative blueprint for the building. Chesneau, notably, had founded the Regional Council of Architects of West Africa and Togo in 1949, composed mostly of French settler architects based in Dakar (Dione 1992). Chesneau and Verola's proposed museum was balanced and rectilinear, surrounded by slim columns, with a flat roof and unornamented surface (Fig. 4). Indoors, its floor plan was almost entirely open. A staircase led visitors to an L-shaped mezzanine overlooking the ground floor, with sufficient space to host its own displays.

The museum's organizers approved of this design and drew up a budget (Gabus 1963a). UNESCO covered many of the costs related to the Museum's debut, assuming the



3 Building of the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire (IFAN), constructed in 1936. Photographed by Raymond Mauny in 1953. Photo: Archives of the Humathèque Condorcet (Aubervilliers, France)



fees associated with the Swiss museologist's labor and the fabrication of vitrines.⁷ But the expense of building the new museum itself fell upon the Senegalese committee and whatever donors it could cultivate. Gabus estimated that the construction would cost 70 million CFA, a sum well beyond the 50 million CFA that the Senegalese committee had budgeted. But Gabus asserted that this investment would pay off in more ways than one. He wrote, "This exhibition building [...] will allow easy cultural relations, across multiple exhibitions, with African states, as well as with European, American, or Asian ones" ("Proces Verbal" 1963).

Gabus's words reveal that he considered the museum he designed to be a diplomatic tool that was legible across cultures. Indeed, the mere construction of the Dakar museum would be a test of his belief in the design's transcultural appeal. Its floorplan was, in fact, a copy of a recently constructed addition to his home institution, the Neuchâtel Ethnography Museum. The Neuchâtel Museum had originally occupied a Victorian mansion, but ten years after becoming its director in 1945, Gabus inaugurated a new gallery, intended to host temporary exhibitions as a complement to the infrequently-updated display of its permanent collection. Temporary exhibitions, Gabus believed, could fulfill an ethical role distinct from their permanent counterparts. He wrote that the "only true justification of the museum's activities" was to place humans in contact with one another through objects that allowed viewers to "arrive at the summits of a common humanity" (Gabus 1965: 16). Because permanent collection displays could include a limited range of objects, he argued that they could connect visitors to foreign cultures only in unchanging, outdated and partial terms. Gabus thought that temporary displays

could convey a more multifaceted and updated view, and he named the new wing devoted to this task at Neuchâtel the "Musée Dynamique."

In Switzerland, the name of the Musée Dynamique thus referred to the perpetual movement taking place between gallery walls as various displays appeared and were replaced. But the art museum was also dynamic in its own movement throughout the world, as its interior floorplan was copied from the foothills of the Jura mountains and reproduced upon the Senegalese shore. Even its display cases and storage facilities copied those that Gabus had custom designed for Neuchâtel (Fig. 5). Through such wholesale duplication, Gabus asserted that his layout had universal

4 Maquette of Musée Dynamique planned for Dakar by architects Michel Chesneau and Jean Verola, ca. 1963.
Photo: © MEN (Musée d'ethnographie de Neuchâtel), Switzerland

5 Interior view of the Musée Dynamique in Neuchâtel, showing installation of the exhibition *Brésil de la plume au grate-ciel* (1955–56). Photo: Werner Nefflen; © MEN (Musée d'ethnographie de Neuchâtel), Switzerland



currency. He believed his designs were adaptable to audiences in both a lakeside Swiss canton and a burgeoning West African state—and Dakar was only the beginning. Gabus consulted upon the construction of yet another “Musée Dynamique” set to reproduce the Neuchâtel floorplan once more in Nouakchott, where the proposed new gallery was planned as an addition to the National Museum of Mauritania. (This building, however, was never realized; see Knodel 2018: 62.) The Musée Dynamique was, for Gabus, a kind of architectural, museological Esperanto. The repeated application of his floorplan presupposed its deterritorialized, transcultural legibility.

The reproduction of Gabus’s plan testifies to the universalizing ideals that UNESCO identified with contemporary museums. The opening editorial of a 1956 issue of *Museum* advised that curators should play a more active role in designing the museum architecture of tomorrow, prioritizing utilitarianism and flexibility. The ideal museum, the editorial declared, “can be adapted to every change in circumstances and finds its best ally in modern architecture”

(“Architecture Contemporaine” 1956: 70). UNESCO decreed that museum architecture should be well balanced, neither excessive nor clinical in its decor, and “impregnated with humanism” (“Architecture Contemporaine” 1956: 70). A testament to these commitments, the official poster for UNESCO’s International Campaign for Museums featured images not of objects, people, or displays, but rather, was illustrated by a lone spiral: a visual representation of the Fibonacci sequence (Fig. 6). Thus likening the museum to the relationships underlying and interconnecting various elements of nature, science, and art, UNESCO’s promotional materials suggest that the museum’s highest calling is to lend order and unity to the world. And indeed, when describing the ratios through which he divided space in his designs, Gabus referred to Le Corbusier’s Modulor and even the Fibonacci sequence directly, calling upon relationships theorized to have universal resonance due to their basis in nature and anatomy (Gabus 1965: 11).

The design ambitions of UNESCO and Gabus are likely to provoke the kind of earned skepticism that historians

7. INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR MUSEUMS. The poster published by Unesco in the eight official languages of the General Conference.

7. CAMPAGNE INTERNATIONALE DES MUSÉES. Affiche publiée par l'Unesco en huit langues officielles de la Conférence générale.



2. INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR MUSEUMS. Geologisches Museum des Ruhrbergbauens, Bochum. Fossil. More than ninety million years old, the largest known ammonite: *Parrydites Seppenradensis Landis* (diameter 1.90 m).

2. CAMPAGNE INTERNATIONALE DES MUSÉES. Geologisches Museum des Ruhrbergbauens, Bochum. Fossil. Datant de plus de quatre-vingt-dix millions d'années, la plus grosse ammonite connue: *Parrydites Seppenradensis Landis* (diamètre 1,90 m).



6 Page from the UNESCO publication *Museum*, showing the Fibonacci sequence to be the inspiration for the UNESCO-designed poster printed in eight languages to promote the International Campaign for Museums. Source: *Museum* (1953) 11 (1): 2. Photo: Lauren Taylor

have long applied to the aims of modern architecture more broadly. Given that the Musée Dynamique draws upon the conceptual framework of a Swiss ethnographer, the ethical imperatives of UNESCO, and the execution of a French architectural firm, we might wonder whether the building, in the guise of postcolonial liberation and independence-era achievement, represents a kind of neocolonialism: bolstering rather than reducing the reach of European powers in the ostensibly decolonizing continent. Such critiques are important, but they allow for only partial accounts of a building's cultural and political significance, often overlooking the stakes and agency of African actors in postwar cosmopolitanist thought and architecture. As Ayala Levin has argued, in contrast to literature or art, the agency of African actors as makers, users, and interpreters of independence-era architecture has been underexamined, assumed insignificant due to such building's typical reliance upon foreign finances, technology, machinery and/or labor

(Levin 2015: 2). But this assumption, Levin argues, conflates the material and spiritual domains that characterize colonialism, foreclosing the possibility that a building might hold certain forms of intellectual, psychological, and phenomenological significance irrespective of the economic consequences of its construction. An unfortunate effect of this conflation, Levin writes, is to erase the contributions of African governments and people in postcolonial architecture. By doing so, she writes, we “not only divest African governments from any agency in designing their independence, but also rob African societies from their modernity and the hopes that accompanied it” (Levin 2015: 3).

The explicitly collaborative project of the Musée Dynamique makes visible the influence of foreign consultants mediated by members the Senegalese government, who selectively integrated, reframed, or rejected the suggestions placed before them. Senghor and his administration accommodated UNESCO's ideals to an extent. They sought

the organization's aid and signed onto Gabus's interior floorplan and thus, to aspects of the universal humanism emblemized by the Spiral. But as the following section demonstrates, UNESCO's influence was not absolute. Certain of the museum's visual referents, like its formal appeal to the ancient Mediterranean, recalled specific ideals for the Senegalese government and within contemporary transatlantic discourse among African and diasporic intellectuals.

The expanded recognition of agency that underpins this article's claim is foremost geographical and postcolonial, then, gesturing to the empowered but overlooked perspective of a West African administration and its Black liberation philosophy amid the global currents of cosmopolitanism. It

does not, however, make a claim for agency of the majority of resident *dakarois*, whose interests grew apart from Senghor's increasingly authoritarian programs throughout the 1960s. Indeed, major social unrest coincided with the years of the Museum's planning and construction. Though this broader sociopolitical climate is mentioned only briefly here, its recognition helps to temper the utopic rhetoric through which Senghor will posit his own universalizing future, a vision—itsself, also, poised for use as an ideological instrument—that I will call the Crossroads.

THE CROSSROADS

For Senghor's administration, the construction of Dakar's Musée Dynamique was part of a broader investment in arts and culture intended to inaugurate a new national identity in the wake of French colonialism. Colonial architecture and planning had transformed the city over the previous century and especially since 1902, when Dakar replaced Saint-Louis as the capital of French West Africa. Over the next two years, twenty-meter-wide boulevards carved the city into new sections, recalling France through names like "Boulevard de la République" and "Avenue de la Liberté" (on such naming, see Bigon 2008). Newly constructed buildings, like the Government Palace, built in 1907, imparted visible markers of Frenchness upon the city through their highly ornamental, Beaux-Arts facades (Fig. 7) (see Dione 1992: 220–35). The building styles implemented in colonial Dakar changed along with the regimes of its colonial administrators. For example, Governor General Jules Brévié oversaw the construction, throughout the 1930s, of buildings influenced in part by the imitations of West African architecture

7 Postcard, ca. 1920s, showing the Palais du Gouverneur Général, the palace of the colonial government in Dakar.
Photo: collection of the author





built for European worlds' fairs. These reinforced concrete buildings, like the Cathedral of African Memory (1936) and The Institut Pasteur (1937), blended perceived stylistic tropes of Sudano-sahelian earth architecture with those of Art Deco (Fig. 8) (On such "neo-Sudanic" architecture, see Shaw 2006: 87–118). Then, in 1948, Paul Becharad was installed as Governor of French West Africa, inaugurating another stylistic shift in Dakar's colonial architecture. He drew upon aid supplied through the Marshall Plan to initiate a flurry of new buildings and roadways in Dakar. During these years, a new modernist architectural vocabulary was implemented in the city. Unornamented, rectilinear architecture, like the monumental Grand Conseil de Gouvernement (1956, now the Assemblée Nationale) proliferated (Fig. 9).

This variety of architectural modernism was adopted by the Senghor's government following independence. Many of the French architects involved in 1950s construction projects, including Chesneau, the coauthor of the plans for the Musée Dynamique, continued working in Dakar (see Wright 2001: 225–33). Simple, unornamented forms, though technically introduced to the city before independence, became visual markers of the new political era. Architectural historian Marème Dione describes how the colonial Government Palace also became independent Senegal's Presidential Palace, but only after being "unburdened of its Doric, Gothic, Moorish, and Rococo ornaments"

8 Institut Pasteur. Carte de visite in the collection of Vernon McKay, created between 1935 and 1977. 13 x 18 cm.

Photo: courtesy of the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies Vernon McKay Collection, Northwestern University Libraries

(Dione 1992: 222). The Musée Dynamique was also part of a broader boom in modernist building that took place around independence in Dakar. In an essay written for the 1966 Festival's catalogue, Senghor's press secretary, Charles Guy Etcheverry, described such building projects as an earmark of a new era and a "national task":

At a wave of the magic wand of those magicians armed with trowels, gauging-rods, and pneumatic drills, [...] Dakar has been transformed into an enormous building-yard, feverishly throwing off her old mantle of an imperial city in order to adorn herself with the magnificent toga of the large capital of a modern independent state (Etcheverry 1966: 35).

In Etcheverry's portrayal, construction projects performed a kind of sorcery, transfiguring the colonial city into an independent, modern African capital. For the president on whose behalf he spoke, the stylistic choices surrounding projects like the Musée Dynamique represented liberatory ideals. The utopic rhetoric surrounding postcolonial modernism can be explained, in part, by the well-tread claim that such architecture, devoid of local references, promoted a unified national identity. As independence-era administrations inherited the artificial national borders of colonial rule, many adopted federal symbols that appeared neutral in relation to the diverse communities they served. Modernist architecture, as architectural historians Janet Hess (2006) and Nnamdi Elleh (2010) have argued, was often selected to serve this end.

But the ambitions of Senghor and his administration exceeded this domestic purpose, accompanied always by an understanding of Senegal's place in a broader world. As art historian Joshua Cohen discusses, a tourism brochure produced by the Senegalese government in the 1960s identifies Senegal as a "crossroads of the world"—touting the nation as an apex point amid global travel routes and thus as a locus for cosmopolitan exchange (Fig. 10) (Cohen 2018: 20). In addition to attracting the economic rewards of tourism, Cohen explains, increasing the international visibility and presence of Senegal, often using the arts, was a key element of Senghor's diplomatic strategy.

In his inaugural remarks for the 1966 Festival, Senghor underscored the centrality of Senegal's cosmopolitanism to visitors from abroad, explaining, "because Senegal has chosen to be the fatherland of dialog and interchange, Senegal wishes to be your second country" (Senghor 1966a: 10). With respect to the Musée Dynamique, an international audience was considered from the start, since the museum's opening was planned to coincide with the 1966 festival. In fact, press coverage of the festival suggests that museum-going Senegalese were greatly outnumbered by an international crowd in the institution's earliest days (see Tripet 1966; Tassart 1966). Foreign audiences who could not visit the museum in person could have seen it in the pages of their local newspaper, as photos of the museum circulated amid African, European, and North and South American media outlets. Senegalese art historian Ousmane Sow Huchard, the Musée Dynamique's curator-in-chief from 1983 to 1988, emphasized the museum's role on the international stage, describing it as an "invitation

9 Palais du Grand Conseil. Postcard, ca. 1955.
Photo: Photographer unknown





10 “Sénégal: carrefour du monde et porte de l’Afrique noire,” Senegal tourism brochure, Voyage de François Tabard au Sénégal (1966), 30 J 132/7, Fonds Tabard, Archives Départementales de la Creuse, Guéret, France.
Photo: Joshua Cohen

to a cultural dialogue aimed at all nations of the world on the morning of our independence” (Huchard 1989: 54). The Senegalese government of the 1960s portrayed the Musée Dynamique—and the broader architectural transformation of Dakar—as instrumental in reshaping the ways that people of different nations and cultures related to one another.

According to Huchard, the Museum was in part created to offer a “museological framework to foreign countries” through which collaborative exhibitions could be staged in different places according to international cultural agreements (Huchard n.d.). Beyond this practical purpose, Senghor, like UNESCO, framed the Museum as a means through which to advance a more philosophical theory of postwar, postcolonial harmony. To commit to the shared uplift of mankind while correcting the exclusionary assumptions of earlier philosophical movements with similar aims, Senghor proclaimed his pursuit of a “new humanism—which this time will include the totality of humanity on the totality of our planet earth” (Senghor 1966a: 5). His words implicitly indict the exclusionary character of earlier humanisms. They call to mind, for example, the rhetoric of republicanism, deployed in efforts to rationalize the so-called civilizing mission of French colonialism (on the contradictions of colonialism humanism, see Wilder 2005).

In the 1960s, Senghor contextualized his ideas surrounding Négritude as part of a broader mission devoted to the advancement of all of humankind, a project that he called the “Civilization of the Universal.”⁸ He portrayed the

Civilization of the Universal as a world in which networks of intercultural exchange would improve each society, ensuring peaceful relations and allowing all to reach their maximum potential. Senghor cites UNESCO as an influence shaping the ways his thinking about race and ethnicity had changed since his early writing on Négritude in the 1930s, claiming that the organization had shown that:

race is a false myth; that each civilization is a complex of material, technical, cultural, and spiritual values, the fruits of geography, history and a mingling of ethnic characteristics; that the great civilizations of Antiquity—Egypt, Sumeria, India, China, Greece—were born at the meeting points of the world’s roads, and the world’s races (Senghor 1998: 447).

The 1966 Festival and the Musée Dynamique were parts of Senghor’s effort to make Dakar a present-day meeting point to facilitate the kinds of cultural interchange he believed essential to human progress. But the mechanics of Senghor’s version of humanism functioned differently from those of UNESCO. If UNESCO’s humanistic vision of the museum might be emblemized by the form of a spiral—an allusion to humanity’s common denominators—Senghor’s can be visualized as a crossroads: a vision of an interconnected humanity bound less importantly by inherent universals, but foremost by what that which becomes common through the process of intercultural exchange—which philosopher Souleymane Bachir Diagne has called the “universalism of contact” (Diagne 2021).



11 Exterior of Musée Dynamique gallery at the Musée d'ethnographie de Neuchâtel. Photographer and date unknown. Photo: © MEN (Musée d'ethnographie de Neuchâtel)

The divergent exteriors of the Neuchâtel and Dakar Musées Dynamique reflect the differences in the universalist visions of Gabus and Senghor. While the two museum's interiors are roughly identical, their exteriors differ in obvious ways. In Neuchâtel, the front façade of the Musée Dynamique is covered by a seventeen-meter-long fresco by the Swiss artist Hans Erni (Fig. 11). *The Conquests of Man*, as it was titled, cites arts from around the world, including illustrations of Nahua deity Quetzalcoatl and Leonardo's Vitruvian man. Its subjects emblemize regions selected by the artist—Asia, Egypt, Europe, Africa, and the Americas. A triumphalist retelling of an idealized modernity, the

mural suggests that the world's various cultures possess a common human impulse towards God, science, and technology (Fig. 12). Beneath the lone window puncturing the mural's surface, the painting includes a group of children, each one ethnically coded according to the five geographic regions featured elsewhere in the mural. The children join hands in a saccharine allusion to a peaceful future. Erni's mural in Neuchâtel promotes the universalist aspiration to global reconciliation that UNESCO espoused. Gabus wanted these sentiments to feature similarly in the decoration of the Dakar museum. He proposed that Erni should make paintings for Senegal's Musée Dynamique, as well, raving to the Dakar-based committee that the artist "perfectly understood" how to lend the exhibition of African art "an enlargement of humanism" (Gabus 1956: 22).

This suggestion was rejected by the Senegalese organizing committee. In response, one member replied, "If we must have such panels, it could only be those inspired by the African tableaus of Benin or Founban, showing African life" (Mveng 1964). Given the investment of the Festival in Négritude, and especially given the dismissal of Erni's murals in Dakar, one might expect that the differences between the Neuchâtel and Dakar museums would involve the incorporation of African architectural and design motifs—or, perhaps, that the building would adopt the flat façade of Neuchâtel but replace its frescos with murals by one of Senegal's well-known painters. But the exterior of the Dakar Musée Dynamique does not incorporate any form of



12 Hans Erni
Les conquêtes de l'homme (1954)
 Photo: © MEN (Musée d'ethnographie de
 Neuchâtel), Switzerland

painted decoration. In comparison to the Neuchâtel precedent, the Dakar building has been lightened to a stony off-white, and its walls have been offset by a peristyle: modifications that heighten the Dakar building's association with the temples of ancient Greece.

Indeed, the address that Senghor delivered upon the Museum's opening focused largely upon articulating the relationship between Africa and the Mediterranean. He argued that the Greeks admired Egyptian civilization, which in turn drew upon the writing, art, and religion of Nubia.⁹ He declared,

The truth is that the African continent played an important role in the development of Greek civilization. [...] The African continent, and Negritude along with it, were always—despite inevitable lapses—involved in the development of the civilization surrounding the Mediterranean (Senghor 1966b).

Beyond Senghor's remarks on the Museum, discussions of the Festival repeatedly metaphorized Africa and the arts of the continent through references to Mediterranean antiquity. This tendency characterized the words of both the festival's strongest advocates and critics, as Gabus aimed to "evoke the great figures of Socrates, Plato, and Homer," through the inaugural exhibition (Gabus 1963b), while Beninese writer Paulin Joachim called for the permanent repatriation of the exhibition's objects to Africa so that the continent may reclaim "some of the pride of Greece, mother of the arts, herself also despoiled like us" (Joachim 1965).

These references emerged alongside comparable allusions by African politicians and intellectuals, who cited the ancient Mediterranean as they discussed the development

of their own nations. Many of the continent's social elites had been educated in Europe, where classics remained an essential element of one's studies. Senghor himself identified as a classicist, having both studied and taught Greek and Latin in Paris. In the same year as the festival, Kenyan political scientist Ali Al Mazrui delivered a lecture in which he attributed the exaltation of Greco-Roman civilization to the demands posed by racism and the urgencies of postcolonial nation-building.¹⁰ In Mazrui's observation, because a comprehension of the classics was understood as a marker of humanity to colonialists, mastering ancient languages and literature was a method through which Africans showed their racist claims of Black intellectual inferiority to be indefensible. Citing the reverence to ancient Greek philosophy exemplified in Kwame Nkrumah's *Consciencism*



(1964), Mazrui calls the use of classical thought “the dilemma of African cultural nationalism,” in which “in order to establish her intellectuality equality with the West, Africa has to master Western versions of intellectual skills. Africa has to establish that she can be as ‘Greek’ as the next person” (Mazrui 1967: 76).

In addition to confronting racist stereotypes, gesturing to the classical Mediterranean in articulations of African identity was sometimes understood to be politically advantageous in the establishment of postcolonial continental alliances. By identifying with Greco-Roman antiquity and the historical interactions between continental boundaries therein, Africans could frame the relationship between the European and African continents through historical interactions other than nineteenth-century colonialism, and in turn, could identify Africa’s shared cultural ground with Europe somewhere other than in France, England, Belgium, or Portugal.

Throughout the mid-twentieth century, portrayals of the historic exchange linking the histories of the Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Africa proliferated. In Senegal, historian Cheikh Anta Diop argued for Mediterranean Europe’s ancient debts to Black Africans in Egypt, publishing *Negro Nations and Cultures* in 1955. Across the Atlantic, Hale Woodruff’s murals titled *The Art of The Negro* brought to life interactions between the ancient Greeks, Egyptians, and Nubians upon the walls of the Trevor Arnett Library (Fig. 13). In the 1940s, Frank M. Snowden Jr., a professor of Classics at Howard University, theorized the lived experiences of Black people in ancient Greece, arguing that “the Greek society had no color line” (Snowden 1948: 37).

So, while the embrace of the classics among African elites was understood, by some, as a strategic effort to establish Africa’s Greekness, Senghor’s rhetorical tracing of Greece’s debts to Nubia was one push among many to achieve the converse: to demonstrate Greece’s Africanity. The Museum’s architectural allusions to Greece make Africa’s claim upon an ancient cultural crossroads. For Senghor, Greek achievement was not as a symbol of European values, but the product of an intercontinental juncture—a crossroads—in which Africa as a whole held a stake. This worldview would be reflected in the ways Senghor spoke of Greece years after the festival, calling it “Eur-Africaine” (Senghor 1973).

For Senghor, the Museum’s architectural ties to the ancient Mediterranean would have represented the coming-together of African and European contributions, an approximation of the achievements that he proposed were unlocked when each culture contributed its competencies towards the betterment of mankind, stepping onward towards the “Civilization of the Universal” to which he aspired. The museum’s gesture to ancient Greek temples is thus not only a historical reference, but also a symbol of exchange in the present; marking the museum and the city where it resided as a comparable contemporary nexus of cultures.

The history of Dakar’s Musée Dynamique testifies to the interdependence of multiple stakeholders in the formation of a shared rhetoric, both verbal and architectural, for imagining the utopic possibilities of the postwar and the postcolonial. Accommodating both the Spiral and the Crossroads, the Musée Dynamique is an irresolvable homonym; a single form linked to different ideals, its interpretation dependent always upon its context and assumptions held by a viewer.



13 Hale Aspacio Woodruff (African American, 1900–1980)
Art of the Negro: Interchange (1952)
 Oil on canvas; 365.76 cm x 365.76 cm
 Trevor Arnett Library of Clark Atlanta University 1952.013, Clark Atlanta University Art Collection.
 Photo: courtesy of the Clark University Art Collection

Particularly when considering the collaboratively produced architecture of independence-era Africa, it is important to hold both interpretations in tension with one another. This approach usefully denies the kind of political ontology of form that might define, for example, modernism or neoclassicism as either liberatory or oppressive, decolonial or neocolonial, etc., while also offering an alternative to discourses of postcolonial hybridity.

If both models are united by their professed goal to summon a more peaceful and equitable world, they can be distinguished from one another according to the generalizations upon which they rely. While Senghor's paradigm tends towards an essentializing multiculturalism, Gabus's posits a homogenizing universalism. By bringing together the Spiral and the Crossroads, the Musée Dynamique prompts a recognition of the ways that Black internationalist thought and mid-to-late twentieth-century cosmopolitanism informed one another—and illustrates the role of art and architecture in reinforcing their intertwined ideals.

Notes

For their willingness to review previous version of this article, as well as their kind encouragement and collegiality during cowriting sessions, the author thanks Alicia Catitcha, Kathleen James-Chakraborty, Aparna Kumar, Perrin Lathrop, Steven Nelson, Miriam Said, Johanna Sluiter, Ellen Y. Tani, and Rebecca Wolff. She is also grateful to the anonymous reviewers of this essay for their helpful feedback.

All efforts have been made to obtain image permissions; we will be glad to publish missing credits if contacted by the rights holder.

1 Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine. On the centrality of the Musée Dynamique's offerings to the broader First World Festival of Negro Arts, see Vincent 2016. On the international circulation of Festival-related content in the press, see Jaji 2016.

2 Drawings by Leonardo Da Vinci appeared in 1970; *Contemporary Art of Senegal* appeared in 1974. On the history of exhibitions that appeared at the Musée Dynamique, see also Sylla 2007, Huchard 2010, D. Murphy and Vincent 2019, Knodel 2023, and M. Murphy 2023.

3 The West African committee members were Alexandre Adande, Engelbert Mveng, and Salif Diop. The French committee members were

Georges-Henri Rivière, Pierre Meauzé, and Jacqueline Delange. The UNESCO representative was Jean Gabus.

4 Négritude is a theory of Black identity theorized, in part, by Senegal's first president, Léopold Sédar Senghor. Developed in Paris in the 1930s in response to French colonial racism and assimilationist policy, Négritude is defined by Souleymane Bachir Diagne as "the self-affirmation of black peoples" (Diagne 2010).

5 The connection between the independence-era arts of Senegal and Senghor's social, political, philosophical, and economic approaches to nationhood has been examined in detail in numerous works of scholarship, including but not limited to M'Bengue 1973; Huchard 1989, 2010; Ebong 1991; Snipe 1998; Sylla 1998; Harney 2002, 2004; Grabski and Harney 2006; D. Murphy 2016; Cohen 2018, 2021; Diouf and M. Murphy 2020; M. Murphy 2023; and Diouf, Ligner, and Frioux-Salgas 2023.

6 Maureen Murphy underscores perceived insufficiency of the IFAN building in the eyes of French and UNESCO affiliates to the festival, illuminating a discussion of the new museum building was a *sine qua non* for recruiting international leaders to participate in the Dakar exhibition. She writes, "Senghor had no choice"

but to construct the new museum if it hoped to bring together the 1966 exhibition (2023: 185).

7 More specifically, UNESCO funded the creation of custom equipment required for the exhibition, including climate-controlled vitrines, airfare, and translation services for the scholarly colloquium that would accompany the exhibition, and the publication of an *album de prestige*. They also paid for Gabus's work and travel, as well as the training of his intern, Salif Diop. In the end, the value of UNESCO's contributions totaled about US\$98,000. See "Rappel Des Contributions" 1965.

8 From February 7 to November 19, 2023, the exhibition *Senghor et les Arts: Réinventer l'Universel* (Quai Branly Museum–Jacques Chirac) brought together archival and artistic materials in order to examine Senghor's cultural programs and politics, with a focus upon his relationship to the concept of the universal. Many of these materials, as well as new scholarship and interviews, appear in the exhibition book (Diouf, Ligner, and Frioux-Salgas 2023).

9 By ethnically and racially distinguishing the Nubians from the Egyptians, Senghor makes explicit the important ways in which his understanding of the ancient mediterranean diverge from those of his contemporary, Cheikh Anta Diop.

10 After this lecture given at Makerere University College, Mazrui's remarks were published in the journal *Présence Africaine*; see Mazrui 1967.

References cited

- Allais, Lucia. 2018. "Stones Also Die." In *Designs of Destruction: The Making of Monuments in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 173–217. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- "Architecture Contemporaine et les Musées." 1956. *Museum* 9 (2): 69–72.
- Bigon, Liora. 2008. "Names, Norms, and Forms: French and Indigenous Toponyms in Early Colonial Dakar, Senegal." *Planning Perspectives* 23 (4): 479–501.
- Centlivres, Pierre. 1993. "Jean Gabus, 1908–1992." *Bulletin de la Société Neuchâteloise de Géographie* 81: 181–83.
- Cohen, Joshua. 2018. "Locating Senghor's École De Dakar: International and Translational Dimensions to Senegalese Modern Art, ca. 1959–1980." *African Arts* 51 (3): 10–25.
- Cohen, Joshua. 2021. "African Socialist Cultural Policy: Senegal under Senghor." *African Arts* 54 (3): 28–37.
- Dard, Michel. 1960. "Michel Dard to Sankichi Asabuki, November 18." Paris: UNESCO Archives. PHS 3982.
- Diagne, Souleymane Bachir. 2010. "Négritude." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/Négritude/>
- Diagne, Souleymane Bachir, with Caro Fowler. 2021. "A Gesture of Reciprocity." In *The Foreground: Conversations on Art and Writing*, February 23. Podcast audio. <https://www.clarkart.edu/research-academic/podcast/season-2/souleymane-bachir-diagne>
- Dione, Marème. 1992. "Dakar au fil de plans." In Pierre Mardaga (ed.), *Architecture Françaises Outre-Mer*, pp. 220–35. Liège: Institut Français d'Architecture.
- Diop, Alioune. 1960. "Alioune Diop to Vittorino Veronese, November 16." Fonds sur le Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres, 32. Dakar: National Archives of Senegal.
- Diop, Cheikh Anta. 1979. *Nations nègres et culture*. Paris: Présence africaine, Paris.
- Diouf, Mamadou, Sarah Ligner, and Sarah Frioux-Salgas (eds.). 2023. *Senghor et Les Arts: Réinventer L'universel*. Paris: Musée du Quai Branly–Jacques Chirac.
- Diouf, Mamadou, and Maureen Murphy. 2020. *Déborder la Négritude: Arts, politique et société à Dakar*. Dijon: Les Presses du Réel.
- "Dr. Adiseshiah's Mission to Africa: Senegal." (und.) Fonds sur le Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres, 14. Dakar: National Archives of Senegal.
- Ebong, Ima. 1991. "Negritude: Between Mask and Flag: Senegalese Cultural Ideology and the École de Dakar." In Susan Vogel (ed.), *Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art*, pp. 198–209. New York: Center for African Art.
- Elleh, Nnamdi. 2010. "Abuja, the International Congress for Modern Architecture (Ciam), and Global Architectural History." In Udo Kittelmann, Chika Okeke-Agulu, and Britta Schmitz (eds.), *Who Knows Tomorrow*, pp. 469–81. Cologne: Walther König.
- Etcheverry, Charles Guy. 1966. "Le Sénégal." In *World Festival of Negro Arts/Festival Mondial Des Arts Nègres: Dakar 1/24 Avril 1966* (festival program), 26–35. Paris: Impressions André Rousseau, 1966.
- Gabus, Jean. 1956. *Les Fresques De Hans Erni, Ou La Part Du Peintre En Ethnographie*. Neuchâtel: La Baconnière.
- Gabus, Jean. 1963a. "Jean Gabus to M. Chesneau and J. Verola, 17 May." Neuchâtel: Archives of the Musée d'Ethnographie de Neuchâtel.
- Gabus, Jean. 1963b. "Voyage J. Gabus À Dakar." Neuchâtel: Archives of the Musée d'Ethnographie de Neuchâtel.
- Gabus, Jean. 1965. "Principes Esthétiques Et Préparation Des Expositions Didactiques." *Museum* 18 (1): 1–59; 2: 65–97.
- Grabski, Joanna, with Elizabeth Harney. 2006. "Painting Fictions/Painting History: Modernist Pioneers and Senegal's École des Arts." *African Arts* 39 (1): 38–49, 93–94.
- Harney, Elizabeth. 2002. "The École de Dakar: Pan-Africanism in Paint and Textile." *African Arts* 35 (3): 12–31.
- Harney, Elizabeth. 2004. In *Senghor's Shadow: Art, Politics, and the Avant-Garde in Senegal, 1960–1995*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Hess, Janet Berry. 2006. *Art and Architecture in Postcolonial Africa*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Huchard, Ousmane Sow. 1989. "The Musée Dynamique." In Moussa Babacar Sy and Friedrich Axt (eds.), *Bildende Kunst Der Gegenwart in Senegal*, pp. 57–59. Frankfurt am Main: Museum für Volkerkunde.
- Huchard, Ousmane Sow. 2010. *La Culture, Ses Objets-Témoins et L'action Muséologique: Sémiotique et Témoignage d'Un Objet-Témoignage: Le Masque Kanaga Des Dogons de Sanga*. Dakar: Negre International éditions.
- Huchard, Ousmane Sow. n.d. "Le Musée Dynamique." Washington, DC: Smithsonian Libraries and Archives.
- Jaji, Tsitsi. 2016. "'The Next Best Thing to Having Been There': Covering FESMAN and Its Legacy in Black Popular Magazines." In David Murphy (ed.), *The First World Festival of Black and African Culture, Dakar 1966: Contexts and Legacies*, pp. 113–30. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Joachim, Paulin. 1965. "Rendez-Nous L'art Nègre." *Bingo*, p. 7.
- Knodel, Bernard. 2018. *Le Musée Réinventé*. Neuchâtel: Musée d'Ethnographie de Neuchâtel.
- Knodel, Bernard. 2023. "Un espace pour le dialogue des cultures." In Mamadou Diouf, Sarah Frioux-Salgas, and Sarah Ligner (eds.), *Senghor et les Arts: Réinventer l'Universel*, p. 62. Paris: Musée du quai Branly.
- Knodel, Bernard, and Serge Reubi. 2022. "Jean Gabus, Kaboul et la 'croisade des musées.'" *Gradhiva* 34: 56–73.
- Leveillé, André. 1949. "Museums in the Service of All: Crusade for Museums." *Museum* 2 (4): 197–200.
- Leveillé, André. 1956. "International Campaign for Museums." *Museum* 9 (1): 1–2.
- Levin, Ayala. 2015. "Beyond Global vs. Local: Tipping the Scales of Architectural Historiography." *ABE Journal* 8, <http://journals.openedition.org/abe/10869>.
- Mazrui, Ali Al. 1967. "Ancient Greece in African Political Thought." *Présence Africaine* 61: 68–93.
- M'Bengue, Mamadou Seyni. 1973. *Cultural Policy in Senegal*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Murphy, David (ed.). 2016. *The First World Festival of Negro Arts, Dakar 1966: Contexts and Legacies*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Murphy, David, and Cédric Vincent. 2019. "Inside Dakar's Musée Dynamique: Reflections on Culture and the State in Postcolonial Senegal." *World Art* 9 (1): 1–17.
- Murphy, Maureen. 2023. *L'art de la décolonisation: Paris–Dakar 1950–1970*. Dijon: Les Presses du Réel.
- "Museum and Museums." 1948. *Museum* 1 (1): 2–6.
- Mveng, P. Engelbert. 1964. "P. Engelbert Mveng to Jean Gabus." Neuchâtel: Archives of the Musée d'Ethnographie de Neuchâtel, 1435.1438.
- "Proces Verbal De a Réunion De La Commission Financière Par Le Comité Directeur." 1963. Fonds sur le Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres. Dakar: National Archives of Senegal.
- "Rappel Des Contributions Generales De L'UNESCO Au Titre Du Festival Mondial Des Arts Nègres." 1965. Paris, France.: UNESCO Archives.
- Rivière, Georges-Henri. 1966. "Preface." In *L'art Nègre. Sources, Évolution, Expansion*, pp. xxxvi–xxxviii. Paris: Ministère des Affaires Culturelles.
- Senghor, Léopold Sédar. 1966. "The Function and Meaning of the First World Festival of Negro Arts." *African Forum* 1 (4): 5–10.
- Senghor, Léopold Sédar. 1973. "Le Sénégal, Le Latin Et Les Humanités Classiques." *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé* 1: 47–61.
- Senghor, Léopold Sédar. 1998. "Negritude and African Socialism." In P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux (eds.), *The African Philosophy Reader*, pp. 438–48. New York: Routledge. Essay originally published 1961.
- Shaw, Thomas N. 2006. *Irony and Illusion in the Architecture of Imperial Dakar*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Snipe, Tracy D. 1998. *Arts and Politics in Senegal, 1960–1996*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Snowden, Frank M. 1948. "The Negro in Ancient Greece." *American Anthropologist* 50 (1): 31–44.
- Sylla, Abdou. 1998. *Arts Plastiques Et État au Sénégal*. Dakar: IFAN.
- Sylla, Abdou. 2007. "La Tumultueuse Histoire du Musée Dynamique de Dakar." *Africultures* 70: 89.
- Tassart, Maurice. 1966. "À Dakar, Le Festival Mondial Des Arts Nègres (Opération Déficitaire... Mais Payant)." *Carrefour*, April 13.
- Tripet, Lison. 1966. "Le Sens Et La Portée Du Premier Festival Mondial Des Arts Nègres." *Construire*, June 1.
- Vincent, Cédric. 2016. "'The Real Heart of the Festival': The Exhibition of *L'art Nègre* at the Musée Dynamique." In David Murphy (ed.), *The First World Festival of Negro Arts, Dakar 1966: Contexts and Legacies*, pp. 45–63. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Wilder, Gary. 2005. *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Wright, Gwendolyn. 2001. "The Ambiguous Modernisms of African Cities." In Okwui Enwezor, (ed.), *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa*, pp. 225–33. Munich: Prestel Verlag.