

Malick Sidibé Biography

Malick Sidibé was born in 1936 in Soloba, a village 300 kilometres away from Bamako. In 1955 he graduated in drawing and jewellery-making at the Sudanese School of crafts, where he was the first of his course. Young Sidibé became fascinated with photography and decided to stay with Guillaud-Guignard as his apprentice, after having received the assignment to decorate the French photographer's shop. In 1957 he started making his first reportages of parties, christenings and weddings. In 1960 he started his career as a free-lancer and in 1962 he opened the Studio Malick, in the popular neighbourhood of Bagdadji, where he continued his activity as portraitist.

At the same time Sidibé depicted the nights of Bamako and the holiday afternoons spent on the banks of the Niger river: Mali had won its independence just two years before and the Country was full of new energy and enthusiasm. News and information went around, films arrived from Europe, India and the United States, but it was mostly music that brought fast and widespread changes with it in Bamako society.

The photographer attended the parties of young people wearing Western clothes and dancing to the music of record players: his photographs depicted joyful youths, full of zest for life and hopes for their future. Night clubs with exotic names were opening everywhere in town and Sidibé was invited to all big events: his fame was so great that if he could not participate, then they would change the time or even the day of the event. In the late 1970's, Sidibé decided to focus his activity on studio portraits. After having exchanged a few words with the people to make them feel at ease, Sidibé himself would choose their pose for the sitting, succeeding in grasping the essence of their personality in just a few snaps.

In 1994, during the first edition of *Rencontres de la Photographie de Bamako*, his portraits were exhibited for the first time together with Seydou Keita's works (another great author from Bamako who was about ten years his senior and died in 2001). Western authors and critics discovered their talent. Soon after that Sidibé's photographs went to Paris, at first at Fnac Etoile and later at the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporaine; in just a short while museums and galleries from all over the world started exhibiting his works. The author still lives and works in Bamako. Today Sidibé is considered Africa's most important living photographer. In 2007 the Venice Biennale honoured him with the Golden Lion for the career, awarded for the first time to a photographer. In 2003 he won the Hasselblad Prize in Sweden, in 2008 the ICP Award in New York, in 2009 the prize PhotoEspaña-Baume & Mercier in Madrid, and this year the World Press Photo for the Arts and Entertainment Section in Amsterdam. Many publications and books on his work have been printed in Europe, the United States and Africa.