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PRESS RELEASE

Malick Sidibé, *La vie en rose*

17 August – 1 December 2013 at Marabouparken Art Gallery
in Sundbyberg, Sweden.

Opening: Friday August 16th.

Curated by: Laura Serani and Laura Incardona. The exhibition is
made in collaboration with Collezione Maramotti.

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La vie en rose presents a selection of over 50 photographs taken in Mali's capital Bamako, in the 1960s-1970s by the internationally acclaimed Malian photographer Malick Sidibé. The exhibition includes the iconic black and white photographs that have made Sidibé's world famous: the parties in the 1960's, studio portraits and a selection of photographs from his archive. Presented is also a reconstruction of Sidibé's legendary studio, which he set up in 1962 and continues to run with the help of his sons.

Recently, Mali has been wracked by a military coup and ethnic unrest, but in the 1960s, Mali was experiencing a burst of energy and optimism that followed upon its liberation from French colonialism. Malick Sidibé's images unveil the magic and excitement of Bamako in those years when the desire to be together, of being part of history in its making seemed imperative. Positioned at the junction of Malian independence and a period of rapid modernization, the works bears witness to the joy, insouciance, and confidence of Africa's youth revolution.

The youths in Sidibés photographs are in contradiction not only with colonial-era studio photography, but also with the patterns of life that one would expect in a decolonized state. Many African independence leaders at the time criticised the youths for alienating themselves from the teachings of the national state, mimicking and assimilating the culture of the colonizer. What might not have been visible then is that through popular culture – by seizing upon their own individuality, looking like the modern black image deincarnated from nation and tribe – important connections were made beyond national frontiers with the black diaspora and international youth movements.

Although a small sampling of Sidibé's oeuvre, *La vie en rose* captures the excitement of a generation who were free to deviate from social norms through a mixing of traditional and Western clothes and music.

Born in 1936 in Soloba, a village outside of Bamako, Malick Sidibé began his career as an apprentice to the French photographer Guillat-Guinard for whom he in 1957 started making

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his first reportages of parties, christenings and weddings. In 1962 he opened the Studio Malick, in the popular neighbourhood of Bagadadji, where he continued his activity as portraitist. At the same time Sidibé depicted the outdoor life of Bamako: people in nightclubs with exotic names that were opening everywhere in town and house parties spinning the latest James Brown album as well as picnics on the banks of the river Niger. 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 an interview with John Henley of The Guardian in 2010, Sidibé reflected on the burgeoning nightlife in Bamako:

“We were entering a new era, and people wanted to dance, music freed us. Suddenly, young men could get close to young women, hold them in their hands. Before it was not allowed. And everyone wanted to be photographed dancing up close. They had to see it!”

In Sidibé’s studio portraits his subjects are often dressed in their finest clothes and accessories, including jewellery, purses, hats and occasionally props as Vespas and motorcycles, exuding a cool, hip, macho or seductive attitude. His photographs at parties capture a similar ambience, although the snapshots are constructed more formally.

Although many of Sidibé’s iconic images were taken almost fifty years ago, it is only recently that he has achieved acclaim. Since 2000, he has been the recipient of the Hasselblad Award (2003), the International Center of Photography Award for Lifetime Achievement (2009), as well as the Venice Biennale Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement (2007).

The exhibition *La vie en rose* is curated by Laura Serani and Laura Incardona and is made in collaboration with *Collezione Maramotti*, where it was first shown in 2010.

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