	<p style="text-align: right;">Date : 09/08/2007</p> <p>The ArtAfrica Project</p> <p>Ana Barata Reference librarian Gulbenkian Foundation Art library Lisbon Portugal</p>
Meeting:	92 Art Libraries
Simultaneous Interpretation:	No
<p style="text-align: center;">WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 73RD IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL 19-23 August 2007, Durban, South Africa http://www.ifla.org/iv/ifla73/index.htm</p>	

Abstract

*The website artafrica.gulbenkian.pt is the first public outcome of the many-faceted, innovative ArtAfrica Project, which began in 2001. It was launched by the Fine Arts Department of the **Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation** within the framework of the Foundation's policy of development aid in January 2005. It was created to promote and to stimulate knowledge and understanding of the work of contemporary African artists or artists of African descent residing in African Portuguese-speaking countries - Angola, Cabo Verde, Guiné-Bissau, Mozambique and S.Tomé e Príncipe. The work done by similar diasporic communities based in Portugal, Europe and elsewhere was also included. The ArtAfrica goals are to create opportunities for dialogue, collaboration and exchange of information about the artistic practices in those five countries, and on the other hand, another of its intentions is to provide a platform from which to launch widespread debates on the post-colonial in local contexts.*

1. The ArtAfrica Project : Presentation

Initially thought during 2000, the *ArtAfrica* project was officially born in the following year in the institutional context of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation¹ (www.gulbenkian.pt). This transversal and innovative project was developed in the scope of the activities of the *Serviço of Belas-Artes* of the Foundation in the sphere of its politics of support to the development. The founding idea of the *ArtAfrica* was born of a double verification of the anthropologist and professor of the College of Fine Arts of the University of Lisbon, José António Fernandes Dias - whom has come to develop a regular contribution with the *Serviço of Belas-Artes* of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in the fields of contemporary art -, and of the director of this service, the painter Manuel da Costa Cabral. On one hand they had evidenced that from the beginning of the decade of 1990 the presence of contemporary artists of African origin in great international art events became more frequent and so did the number of very ambitious exhibits dedicated to them. Parallel, the number of total or partial publications

¹ The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation celebrated in 2006 its 50th anniversary. It was established in 1956, for testamentary will of Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian (1869-1955) an Armenian business-oriented and art collector, that lived the last years of its life in the Portuguese capital.

dedicated to history, critical and theory of African contemporary art also increased of significant form². Examples like the *Revue Noire* publication initiated in 1991 in whose pages diverse aspects related with the contemporary artistic creation in Africa are approached and the *Reading anthology the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Marketplace*³ edited in 1999, where the critics and art curators Olu Oguibe and Okwui Enzor had congregated a set of important texts about different aesthetic perspectives, socio-politics and historical aspects related to modern and contemporary artists of African origin. While this the number of African authors continuing to grow.

On the other hand, José Fernandes Dias and Manuel da Costa Cabral had evidenced that in the same way that this international recognition of the African contemporary artistic works privileged artists from Anglophone and Francophone countries and usually left of part artists from the African Portuguese-speaking countries - Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and S.Tomé and Príncipe -, except for those pertaining to a handful of already renowned celebrities. Some hypotheses were placed to understand and to help to explain the reasons for this unfamiliarity/invisibility. Some were directly related with the recent historical past of each one of these five countries like the late independence date to Portugal's colonialist government - 1974 for Guinea-Bissau and 1975 for the remains -, the civil war (in Angola and Mozambique), the political instability (specially in the Guinea-Bissau) and the economical difficulties that had followed. This conjuncture should have conditioned the artistic creation. Another possible reason was the absence of initiatives in order to promote and diffuse the artistic activities of each one of these countries.

The idea of *ArtAfrica* project was born of the desire to give visibility and to contribute for the recognition in the context of the international circuit of the contemporary artistic creation of the production of the artists from five countries of Portuguese official speaking-language - Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and S. Tomé and Príncipe - as well as of those of the Diasporas living in Portugal but also in other countries. The artistic production was faced according to two complementary perspectives: one local integrating the works of art in the contexts where they are produced and used, that is in the native countries but also in the communities of emigrants out of the African continent; and on the perspective to the context of the international contemporary art that in recent years has adopted transcultural boarding's of opening to other ways to think, to feel and to interpret the world.

The *ArtAfrica* project was developed between 2001 and the beginning of 2005. In January 25th of 2005 it was officially presented to the public for occasion of the opening in the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation of the international exhibition of African contemporary art *Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora*, that congregated works of twelve deriving artists of the North and South and the Occidental and Oriental Africa⁴ as well as those who live and work outside of their native countries. In accordance with the words of Laurie Ann Farrell curator of the Museum of African Art of New York, this exhibition pointed "the increasing globalization of the African Diaspora" and looked for to give of it "a vision from an international perspective, disclosing it through the art and personal ways of each artist"⁵. The inclusion of works of African artists from Portuguese speaking countries - one of the artists presented was the Angolan Fernando Alvim - and the presentation of this exhibition in Lisbon had been the result of a co-production developed between the Museum of African Art of New York where it was inaugurated in November of 2003 and the *Serviço de Belas-Artes* of Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. This cooperation was one of the results of the contacts that the team of *ArtAfrica* had established and the recognition of the relevance of the project in the international context. During the years where *ArtAfrica* project had been developed several contacts

² The list of exhibitions of visual arts where the creations of African artists had visibility is already long, for example: *Les Magiciens de la Terre* (Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1989), *Contemporary African Artists, changing traditions* (Nova Iorque, The Studio Museum of Harlem, 1990), *Big City, artists from Africa* (Londres, Serpentine Gallery, 1995), *Africa Remix: Contemporary art of a Continent* (showed first at Museum Kunst Palast of Dusseldorf and after at other Europeans museums and galleries), *Authentic/ Ex-centric: Africa in and out Africa* (49^a Bienal de Veneza, 2005), *Réplica e rebeldia: Artistas de Angola, Brasil, Cabo Verde e Moçambique* (this exhibition was organized by Instituto Camões - Lisboa, first showed at Museu de Arte Nacional of Maputo in 2006 and in 2007 it will be showed in other African countries, in Brazil and Europe).

³ OGUIBE, Olu; ENWEZOR, Okwui (eds.) - *Reading the contemporary: African art from theory to the marketplace*. London: INIVA, 1999. O. Enwezor was also the artistic director for *Documenta 11*, (Kassel, 1998-2002), and the editor of *Documenta 11 Platforms*.

⁴The exhibition presented artistic works of Fernando Alvim, Ghada Amer, Oladé A. Bamgboyé, Allan deSouza, Kendell Geers, Moshekwa Lang, Hassan Musa, N'Dilo Mutima, Wanguechi Mutu, Ingrid Mwangi, Zineb Sedira e Yinks Shonibare.

⁵ FARRELL, Laurie Ann – "Introdução". *Das Esquinas do olhar: Looking both ways*. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2005; p.5

with other foreign institutions that keep related activities had been established. For example, the Gulbenkian Foundation was one of the sponsors of the *Tangencya Project 2004* (translation for Portuguese) . Tangencya is a multi-media, interdisciplinary, arts-based, public cultural project with site-specific events located throughout the eThekweni Metro precinct (<http://www.cas.org.za/about/about.htm>).

1.1. Goals of ArtAfrica

The creation and development of the *ArtAfrica* intended to reach the following general goals:

- stimulate knowledge and understanding of these artistic practices
- promote and diffuse the work of artists, curators and scholars
- broaden the intellectual, social and geographical boundaries of debate on contemporary art by both African artists and Lusophone African descendents
- provide opportunities for dialogue, collaboration, and for the exchange of information and ideas among our countries
- integrate the current artistic activities of Lusophone Africans into the international circuit .

1.2. Work methodology and criteria of selection and organization of the information

To reach the considered goals a work methodology was established. Starting from a situation characterized for the absence of a systematization of the artistic production in the last few decades of 20th century in the African Portuguese official speaking countries, as well as in the respective Diasporas, it was delineated a process of information survey in order to identify the artists and the institutions and the respective mapping. A team of three members was set - the scientific coordinator, one assistant and a secretary for administrative support - to who fit the treatment and organization of the collected information about the artists and their work. For this inventory a sheet was elaborated called "*Ficha de artista*" whose fields allowed a set of options contemplating, among others: IDENTIFICATION; FORMATION (school, workshops, cooperatives, self-taught); TECHNIQUES (drawing, painting, sculpture, crafts, photograph, video/cinema, installation, architecture); TIPOLOGY (contemporary, modern, popular or ritual/religious art); PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY; EXHIBITIONS (collective and individual); COLLECTIONS.

The main form of collecting the information was established through the contacts carried at the several work trips made between 2001 and 2005 to Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and S.Tomé and Príncipe. These trips were made by three project team members: the scientific coordinator, the Professor Fernandes Dias, the director of the *Serviço de Belas-Artes* of the Foundation, Manuel da Costa Cabral, and one assistant⁶. It was intended with these trips to gather a necessary set of information and data for a deeper knowledge of the current situation of the artistic creation in these countries. The contacts with the local institutions had been privileged specially with those related to cultural activities and to visual arts - museums, galleries, libraries -, to education and formation - schools and other training institutions. To all these institutions the presentation of *ArtAfrica* was carried through. The project team also asked for the contribution in the gathering of information and in the establishment of a widened net of contacts for future use. Public and private collections, exhibitions and artists studios had been visited as well. At the studios it was possible to talk with the artists and to observe and made visual records of their works. In some countries the members of the *ArtAfrica* project team had also participated at sessions of reflection and discussion with the local community on the current state of the contemporary artistic production. Parallel the these trips the team had established contact with artists who being of nationality of these countries inhabit outside of the African continent, in Portugal with priority given to those in the Lisbon metropolitan area, but also in countries where the African-Lusophone Diaspora is significant as the United States, Holland, Belgium, France, Italy, Germany, Luxemburg and England. The information was collected through contacts established with the embassies, the city councils, the associations of emigrants and the galleries of art that have exhibited works of African artists and/or afro-descendants.

The final result of all this process was the constitution of a database constructed from the organization of the written information – biographical and C.V of the artists, addresses of institutions – obtained through the fulfilling of the artist time-sheets and also through out the contacts. The database has also visual information with images of artistic works and was made available to a widened universe of potential users through the creation of a site WEB. Throughout the time where the *ArtAfrica* was developed the Art Library of the Foundation collaborated with the project team specially with bibliographical support acquiring for publications that fit inside of the thematic area of the project.

Since the beginning it was intended that the *ArtAfrica* should be relatively extensive and including a wide panorama of the visual arts of the countries in analysis. So the criteria employed for

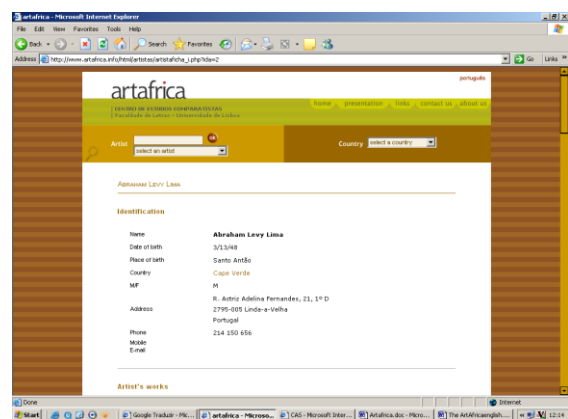
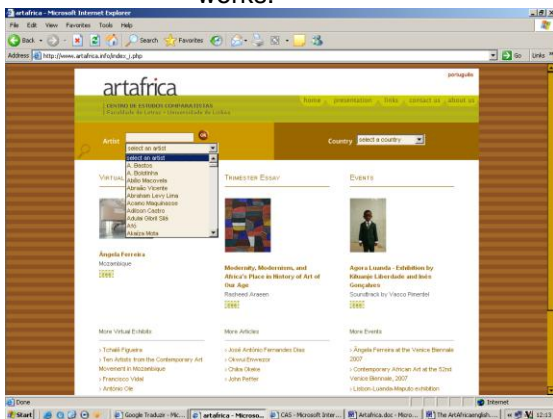
⁶ This team member was not the same during the Project.

inclusion in the inventory is reflexive; that is to say, those who consider themselves as “artists” or that are recognized as well for the communities where they work were included. There were not made any qualitative judgments in relation to the artists and respective works to include in the database. In some cases a certain ambiguity can be observed and some works that can be pointed out in the border between Art and Crafts. This ambiguity was however assumed by the project team. The database users will take care of evaluation and selection; as will the renowned curators who will select an artist every trimester to showcase in what its called the “virtual exhibit.”

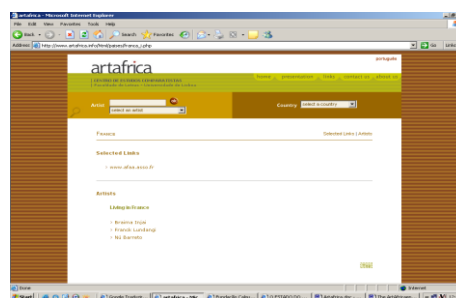
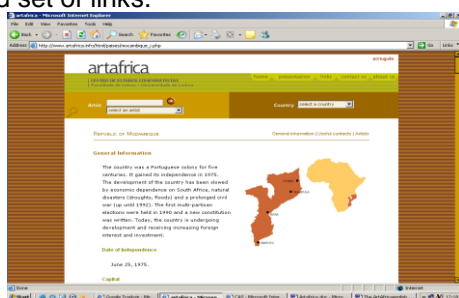
1.3. Structure of the site www.artafrica.info

The site www.artafrica.info was the result of the *ArtAfrica* project and presents to the users its contents on a structuralized and easy form to research. The organization of the database allows the option of research by *artist* with a sheet for each one with all the data - bio-bibliographical information - as well as images of some works and contacts. The artists are ranged in alphabetical order in a list with all the names. After the selection of an artist the user has two possibilities of visualization:

- a shortened sheet, where they consist only the name, the place where the artist lives and works and an image of one work⁷;
- a complete sheet of the profile of the artist, as well as several images of his/hers works.



Another research option is by *country*. A list is presented with the five African Portuguese speaking countries as well as those where the Diaspora is more representative: South Africa, Germany, Belgium, United States, France, Holland, Italy, Portugal and the United Kingdom. Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and S.Tomé and Príncipe have a more complete sheet where the user can find useful information on the geographic profile - with a small map - historical and socio-political data as well as the contacts of the main institutions - public and private – on the cultural and artistic fields. For each country it exist a list of the born artists and the residents. The information given for the Diasporic countries is shortened with only the names of the resident artists and a selected set of links.



The contents of *ArtAfrica* website to be updated every trimester also include:

⁷ The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation has undertaken reasonable efforts to identify and localize all the authors of the "materials" (information, text video, artwork, animation and picture files, and images) contained and comprised in the website, to obtain full consent to publish their works and materials. This site has been created and is still in performance according to the Portuguese laws and is protected by internationally recognized laws of the copyright and intellectual property.

- general information and contacts regarding the major cultural institutions related to the visual arts in each of these five countries;
- a programme of events related to contemporary Africa art and other Diaspora art practices publication of relevant texts concerning the same topic;
- The publication of an essay: texts of authors with relevance in the context of the critical history and of contemporary art, translated for the Portuguese language. The purpose is to facilitate the access to this type of information in the African Portuguese speaking-countries where this kind of information is not easy available and to constitute a documentation archive;
- a “virtual exhibit” showcasing an artist chosen by different renowned curators in the area of contemporary African art;
- links to other sites dealing with the same topics;
- the *ArtAfrica* contact

2. Current situation and future perspectives

At the end of the year 2006 the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation transferred the responsibility of the continuation of the *ArtAfrica* to the Centre of Comparative Studies of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Lisbon, through the signature of a protocol where the endowment of a destined amount of money was foreseen to guarantee the financial viability of project during the year of 2007. This decision is the result of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation’s aim to ensure the continuity and development of the final result of the *ArtAfrica* - the site web - initiative through its association with an academic institution involved with a kindred project.

From 2007 the *ArtAfrica* website - whose current address is www.artafrica.info - started to be associated to the project *Dislocating Europe* run by the Centre of Comparative Studies in the scope of its pos-colonial studies. Both initiatives have been thought with a twofold goal. On the one hand, *ArtAfrica* was set up in order to promote the work of African artists or artists of African descent residing in African Portuguese-speaking countries. The work done by similar diasporic communities based in Portugal, Europe and elsewhere was also included. On the other hand, another of its intentions was to provide a platform from which to launch widespread debates on the post-colonial in local contexts. A similar aim lay behind setting up *Dislocating Europe*. Here, the goal was to encourage the diffusion of different approaches to the post colonial as developed by anthropological, artistic, historical and literary studies, and translate them into precise local contexts.

ArtAfrica’s migration to the Centre for Comparative Studies and its articulation with *Dislocating Europe* therefore not only opens a new stage for both projects but also provides an opportunity for a more multifaceted framing. At the same time, it allows for the translational element at the basis of both projects.

By using this new framework, the new team – now with the research coordination of Manuela Ribeiro Sanches, Professor of Faculty of Arts - hope to build upon and expand the important work which *ArtAfrica* has done to date. They will be taking advantage of the unique possibilities offered by the Internet to foster institutional and personal links through the mediating role of the website. In doing so, they also hope to promote contemporary plastic artists working in the Portuguese-speaking African countries or in the Diaspora. In this way, their aim is to bring together the threads of the debate going on about them and place them at the fore of dominant cultural affairs. The www.artafrica.info website relies on the effort of everyone, both individuals and institutions, for its survival.

So, it is a new phase in the life of the *ArtAfrica* that now is initiated. The *ArtAfrica* has already received funds from the Foundation for Science and the Technology (institution that promote the academic studies and scientific investigation) which is a recognition of its relevance. And its contents are now updated (last updated April 2007).