

»My Life Began Several Centuries Ago«

AN ECOSYSTEM OF CIRCULATING IMAGES
The title of this exhibition, »My Life Began Several Centuries Ago,« a quote by Bouba Touré – photographer, chronicler, migrant worker, farmer, activist, projectionist and co-founder of the agricultural cooperative Somankidi Coura – alludes to the dissolution of temporal boundaries and linearities that are so inherent in Western systems of knowledge. A radical phrase, that sets the present in relation to the past, bending time to show that we carry in us the traces of the past into the future. Just as Bouba Touré explained that he was the reincarnation of his grandfather, a Tirailleur who was forced to fight in the fields of Verdun. This relationality critically illuminates the effects of colonialism, tracing how they are perpetuated through a neo-liberal capitalist world system.

Bouba Touré was a chronicler. He meticulously documented each moment of his lived realities, moving between France and Mali and creating a generative archive that countered dominant representations which rendered migrant bodies invisible and irrelevant. He created a blueprint, an ecosystem of images that would be circulated through a transnational network based on solidarity, friendship, and care, by companions such as the artist and filmmaker Raphaël Grisey, who continues the activist practice of circulation, reactivating the archive through the filmic medium, ensuring its vitality. Their collaborative films, referencing the archive and alluding to the utopian vision of Somankidi Coura, have become translocal platforms of exchange, sowing imaginaries that nurture alternative ways of living.

SOMANKIDI COURA

The farming cooperative of Somankidi Coura in Mali was established in 1977 by 14 people with a militant and migrant workers' background. The group first met in Paris in the collective ACTAF (Cultural Association of African Workers in France) initiated to support the ongoing migrant workers movement in France and the liberation struggles in Cabo Verde, Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea Bissau. After the repeated Sahel droughts and famines of the early 1970s, the collective composed of hundreds of members started to think of alternative economic and farming practices in the villages to challenge the neocolonial agriculture and living conditions in the countryside. After agricultural internships in the Marne and Haute-Marne in 1975 and 1976 in France, the group made their militant return to the Senegal River near the city of Kayes – a crossroad of migration – in order to establish a farming cooperative. The cooperative still exists to this day, implementing a subsistence economy through the farming of multiple crops (onions, bananas, okra, millet, sorgo, chilli, etc.), which are sold on the local markets, and seed production (onions

Violet de Galmy and okra), using regenerative methods that connect agro-pastoral farming in the rainy seasons and irrigated gardening throughout the year. The co-op Somankidi Coura co-founded the free radio Radio Rurale de Kayes, the Association of the Women of Somankidi Coura, the URCAK, the Kayes Regional Union of Agricultural Cooperatives, and the association of regional seed producers COPROSEM.

ABOUT SOWING SOMANKIDI COURA, A GENERATIVE ARCHIVE

Sowing Somankidi Coura is a long-term research endeavor and collaboration between Raphaël Grisey and Bouba Touré around the permacultures and archives of Somankidi Coura, a self-organized cooperative along the Senegal river founded by a group of former African migrant workers and activists in France in 1977 after the Sahel droughts and famines of the early 1970s. *Sowing Somankidi Coura* unfolds and generates cine-geographies that reveal the boundaries between the radical tradition of migrant workers struggles in France, the Pan-African history of the cooperative and potentialities of agroecology. Through a practice of film, archiving, publication, workshop and theatre, the militant visual essays presented in the exhibition engage in the articulation of liberation narratives, collective care and peasant alliances.

The aim of the project is the denaturalization and decolonization of migratory and developmental politics. By telling the story of a generation of migrant workers in Europe soon after the decolonization, the numerous visual materials presented in the exhibition, which includes Bouba Touré's photographs of the collective's early steps in the making of the cooperative, presents an historiography missing from national narratives that contradicts the idea of the migrant as a passive subject of history while reversing the north-south relations.
www.semersomankidicoura.net

BOUBA TOURÉ'S ARCHIVE

Bouba Touré (1948–2022), Bouba Touré (1948–2022), militant, photographer, filmmaker, writer, farmer, film projectionist, and storyteller passed away in January 2022. He left a rich and unique archive, documenting from the 1970s the life and struggles of so-called »migrant workers« living in the foyers (»migrant worker« housings) in France and his contemporaries in Mali, the rise of the *Sans-papiers* movement, as well as other Pan-African and internationalist solidarity and social movements at large. The archive also contains numerous works commissioned in the respective local communities (of events, celebrations, concerts, portraits) by individuals, families, or associations from the diaspora and in the many villages along the Senegal River. They reveal his daily practice as a chronicler, which was not bound merely to photographic documentation but also incorporated written diaries. Another fundamental part of the archive is the

decades-long documentation of the activities of the farming co-op and village Somankidi Coura in Mali, that he co-founded in 1977. The personal archive of Bouba Touré is composed of negatives, photographs, hundreds of DV video tapes, slides, manuscripts and various other documents. Most works of his archive, which fill over 30 carton boxes, have been transferred to the Departmental Archives of Seine-Saint-Denis in France in the Spring of 2023, following his will as close as possible.

In order to make the archive quickly accessible to the public – be it to community members, relatives, activists, researchers, or friends – 20 000 negatives and 2000 slides have already been digitized since the summer of 2022. Simultaneously, the expanded family of Bouba Touré started the long-term work of creating a pre-inventory of the documents and each set of negatives (around 80 000 negatives in total that Bouba Touré thoughtfully dated and captioned all throughout his life) to offer the possibility of navigating his archives and eventually completing the inventory in a participatory communal process.

A first partial digitization of negatives has been made possible with the awards received for the film *Xaraasi Xanne* (Crossing Voices, co-realized by Bouba Touré) at the Festival du Réel in France, at the FCAT (African Cinema Festival of Tarifa-Tanger), the Archivio Aperto Festival in Italia, and with the help of institutions that have supported the work of Bouba Touré in the past two years (Art Explora-Cité des arts, Arbeitsmuseum Hamburg, AdKdW Köln). A network of friends of Bouba Touré has initiated a crowdfunding campaign to proceed with the digitalization of a second batch of around 10 000 negatives. The goal is to digitize all negatives and slides of Bouba Touré, covering the period from 1975 to 2000. The consolidation of the archives and the pre-inventory will allow for a multi-thematic systemization of the archive.

The expanded family and community of friends of Bouba Touré (including Demba Diawara, Raphaël Grisey, Olivier Marboeuf, Aïssatou Mbodj-Pouye, Shela Sheikh, members of the Co-op Somankidi Coura such as Goundo Kamissokho Niakhaté, Mady Niakhaté, Dado Niangané, Ousmane Sinaré and Dramane Diaby, as well as relatives of Bouba Touré's such as Martine Pifre, Thomas Touré, Laurent Franc, Gassama Touré, Soso Soumaré, and many others), together with the team of the Departemental Archive of Seine Saint Denis, will aim to work together to spread awareness about Bouba Touré's archive by organizing presentations, discussions, workshops, research residencies and screenings, driven by the desire to follow his path of sharing the archive and relational practice of image circulation in order to pursue the purpose of the generative archive of *Sowing Somankidi Coura*.

CROWDFUNDING

This crowdfunding campaign will make it possible through your support to finance the digitization of the second batch of negatives from the analog archive. The lab TRIBVN based in Châtillon (France), which offers high quality archival scans, will be commissioned to digitize the negatives. Even the smallest donation will help us to reach our goal of creating a digital archive of Bouba Touré's work. You do not need to create an account or register, it is fast, and credit card payments are 100% secure. And even if you can't participate by donating, you can help us by sharing our crowdfunding campaign with your friends and networks. THANK YOU! (Bouba's friends)
www.cotizup.com/archives-bouba-toure

WERKE

Xaraasi Xanne (Crossing Voices)
A film by Raphaël Grisey and Bouba Touré, 2022, 123'

Xaraasi Xanne (Crossing Voices) recounts from a rare film, photographic and sound archive the exemplary adventure of Bouba Touré and of Somankidi Coura, an agricultural cooperative founded in Mali, in 1977, by migrant workers from West Africa living in France in hostels and slums. The story of this improbable utopia of returning to the country follows a tortuous path that sheds light, from the 1970s, on the ecological stakes and struggles on the African continent today.

Produced by:

Spectre Productions
(Olivier Marboeuf)

Coproduced by: Weltfilm GmbH
(Kristina Konrad),
The Dark (Cédric Walter)

Editing:

Raphaël Grisey, Chaghig Arzoumanian
Cinematography and sound:
Raphaël Grisey and Bouba Touré
Voice-over: Bouba Touré

Singers:

Mah Damba, Sira Dramé

Music:

Jessica Ekomane

Speakers:

Mariam Sissoko, Mamadou Sow
(Radio Rural de Kayes)

Photographs:

Bouba Touré

Archival research:

Léa Morin, Raphael Grisey

Sound editing and mix:

Jochen Jezussek poleposition d.c.

Color grading:

Sebastian Bodirsky

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- CNAP Image/Mouvement, Norwegian Artistic Research Program
- NTNU Trondheim, 9th Contour Biennale, HKW – Anthropocene Curriculum, Fondation des artistes, Parco Arte Vivente, Région Ile-de-France.

En association avec ARTE France – La Lucarne

Traana (Temporary Migrant),
2017 Video, 27 Min
Raphaël Grisey, Kaddu Yaraax,
Bouba Touré

The theatre script of *Traana* was written in 1977 after Bouba Touré and 13 other members of the Cultural Association of African Workers in France decided to resettle back to West Africa. They settled along the Senegal river (a region typically experiencing massive emigration to the north), in order to promote a cooperative model and new forms of doing permaculture, the main source of income in the area, and to reconsider disvalued farming technologies and practices. The play tells a story of rural exodus, from the countryside to the city, from the city to Europe. This story of migration from the 1960's and 1970's indexes the failure of the liberation movements in Senegal and Mali to change the neo-colonial conditions for peasants after independence. The adaptation of *Traana* by Raphaël Grisey and Kaddu Yaraax, a company operated through the method of the Theatre of the Oppressed which has existed since the 1990's, is the result of a ten-day workshop with 8 actors coming from Yaraax or other suburbs of Dakar. Many of the fishermen of Yaraax eventually became smugglers in the 1990's for the people who sought to migrate to Spain, using their navigation skills on their huge pirogues.

BIOGRAPHIES

Raphaël Grisey

Born in 1979, lives in Berlin. Grisey uses film, editorial and photographic works in his artistic research practice to address politics of memory, architecture, migration and agriculture.
www.raphaelgrisey.net

Bouba Touré

1948-2022, lived in Paris and Somankidi Coura, Mali. He lived in France in the Foyer Pinel from 1965 and worked at the metal factory Chausson until 1969. He studied at the Vincennes University and was a projectionist at Cinema 14 Juillet and L'entrepôt, Paris. Photographer since the 1970s, he documented the lives and struggles of migrant workers and peasants in France and Mali. Touré co-founded the Co-op of Somankidi Coura in 1977. In 2015, he published the book *Notre case est à Saint Denis*, Xérogaphes Publishers. Since the 1980s, Touré has exhibited works and given talks in associative and foyer's circles and more recently in art institutions. His photographic work has been presented amongst other places at the Bamako Encounters 2019 and in the Hamburg photography Triennale in 2022.

Since 2006 Touré and Grisey worked together on collaborative projects with the current name of *Sowing Somankidi Coura, a Generative Archive since 2015*. It lead to various workshops, film making practice and theatre production with the theatre of the oppressed company Kaddu Yaraax in 2017 and 2019, as well as publications and texts, such as *Sowing Somankidi Coura, a Generative Archive* (2017, Archives Book publishers) Their works were

shown amongst other venue at Kaddu Yaraax Theatre Forum Festival (SN), Kunsthall Trondheim (NO), Archive Kabinett, Savvy Contemporary, HKW, Neue Berliner Kunstverein (DE), Den Fries (DK), 9th Contour Biennale (BE), Parco Arte Vivente (IT), Un Lieu pour Respirer, Centre Pompidou (FR), Dhaka Art Summit (BD), Open Justice (CA), Konsthall Göteborg (SE), Reina Sofia museum (SP). Their long feature film *Xaraasi Xanne (Crossing Voices)* released in 2022 was shown in many festivals and venues such as Festival du Réel (FR), FIDADOC(MA), Hotdocs Festival (CA), Forumdoc (BR), FCAT (SP), TRUE/FALSE (US), Stlouisdoc (SE), FESPACO (BF) amongst others, and received various awards.