

SORY SANLÉ

Photographer Ibrahima Sory Sanlé was born in 1943 in Nianagara, Burkina Faso. His career in photography came about an ultimately pivotal time for his country: the year of its independence from France in 1960, and the movement from his own city, Bobo-Dioulasso to Haute-Volta's culturally prosperous capital. Sanlé's works have thus come to represent a newfound freedom, both on a personal and societal level; documenting the progression of a country's autonomy and his own photographic expression.

His signature black and white photography in 6 x 6 format is reminiscent of African photographers of his era, readily comparable to the renowned Malian photographer Malick Sidibé. Both photographers likewise promoted the popular culture of their regions, particularly their respective countries' capital cities, rejecting the rigid formalities of official photography, instead offering an overarching inclusiveness, a readiness to photograph whomever and wherever.

Moving from documenting highway wrecks within and around Bobo-Dioulasso to opening his own photo studio, Volta Photo in the mid-1960's, Sanlé's subject matter, style and delivery blossomed alongside his country's cultural and economic richness. Sanlé's works gained fast recognition, discernible by the distinctive chosen background paintings; the beach walkboards, modern cityscapes and airplane figures now appearing candidly kitsch.

Sanlé's presentation and portrayal in his photographs is one that champions agency, from the physical stances of his subjects to his own photographic execution, the finished composition smells of confidence. It is a confidence and pride in a new modern way of life alongside a graceful awareness of the age-old traditions that formed the foundation for Burkina Faso's cultural centre. Bobo-Dioulasso's people are youthfully earnest, not weak and whittled by close to a centennial dependence on France; the energy of each individual personality moving beyond the confines of a studio, a camera, and even the photographer himself.

Sanlé's photographs declare a nostalgia before their time, a want for the possibility of anticipated hope and joy, of replacing the void of creativity amidst colonial formality, and creating an unspoiled narrative of cultural articulation. His subjects as ardent as himself, Sanlé abided by the principle, 'the more you like something, the more you invest yourself in your passion'.

Sanlé was introduced to photography in his youth as an apprentice in Bobo-Dioulasso, working alongside a Ghanaian boss who taught him to process and print his own photographs. He also worked as a record sleeve illustrator, reporter and an official photographer. Unearthed from private collections only in recent times, two decades of Sanlé's works feature in *Sory Sanlé - Volta Photo 1965-1985* a new book alongside his first international solo show at London's Morton Hill Gallery. Sanlé currently lives and works in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso.

words HELENE KLEIH