

STUDIO MALICK, BAMAKO

Photographs by Malick Sidibé
curated by Laura Incardona and Laura Serani

At the Galleria del Cembalo (Sept 26th - Nov 8th) an unreleased exhibition shows the work of Malick Sidibé, artist from Mali, who in 2007 deserved the Golden Lion to the career at the Biennale of Venice, a lifetime achievement award.

The exhibition is curated by Laura Incardona and Laura Serani with about 50 images, from the beginning of the 60s to the 70s. They are mainly portraits realized in his studio, a kind of photography of which he became a true expert, but also images taken during the parties in the nights of Bamako, Mali's capital city. Malick moved to Bamako when he was young, as a student. Some peculiar pieces in the exhibition are the *Chemises*, the cardboards on which Malick used to stick the selected artist's proof of the photos taken at the parties: this way, his clients were able to choose the images they liked to buy.

"Europeans thought that we lived naked on the trees. Instead, from my photographs one can see that we were absolutely *à la page*, just like the westerners", says the author amused. In his images we see very elegant boys and girls, in their occidental clothes, as well as in their traditional ones. The photos by Sidibé have a captivating strength, for he's very accurate in the composition and is able to "catch the soul" of his subject. "Men have always been looking for immortality through painting, poetry and writing, but once only kings or very rich people could afford to have a portrait done", tells Sidibé. "My father saw his own image reflected in the water. Photography is a sort of long-lasting living, even after death. I believe in the power of the images: that's why I spent all my life trying to take portraits at their best, returning all the beauty I could see in the subjects."

Galleria del Cembalo

Malick Sidibé was born in Mali in 1936, in a village about 300 kilometres from Bamako. In the capital city he studies figure drawing and jewel design, resulting one of the best students in his course. After the degree, he was asked to decorate the shop of the famous photographer Gérard Guillat-Guignard, also known as *Gégé la pellicule*. It is 1955 and Malick gets really fund of photography. He sticks with Gégé as a trainée and in 1962 opens his own atelier, **Studio Malick**, in the working-class district ok Bamako called Bagdadji.

If the other big name of African photography - Seydou Keita - is famous for the portraits taken in his studio, Malick tells us about the nights in Bamako: Mali is independent since two years and the capital wants to celebrate with happiness and dancing.

Malick goes to the parties where all the young people are dressed up in the occidental way and dance at the sound of a record player: his images show us joyful youth full of lust for life.

In the middle of the 70s he decides to stop taking pictures downtown or along the river, and turns back to the work in his studio, leaving us as a result an exhaustive and fundamental memory of his Country and of his age.

During the first edition of the *Rencontres de la Photographie de Bamako* in 1994 (the most important photography event in Africa) his talent is discovered by authors and reviewers and for Malick it's the beginning of a second youth, this time in Europe and in the Usa and it's always a great success.

Today Sidibé is considered the most important African photographer. In 2007 the Biennale of Venice blessed him with the Golden Lion for the career, award particularly important, because it was the first time that the price was assigned to a photographer. Anyway, the list of his awards is long: the Hasselblad Award in 2003, the ICP Award in 2008, the Photo PhotoEspaña Baume & Mercier, in 2010 the World Press Photo in the section *Arts and Entertainment*.

The artist nowadays lives and works in Bamako.