



Who remembers Jean-Baptiste Belley, born in 1746 in Gorée, Senegal, sold as a slave in the French West Indies, arrived in France during the Revolution, and then became a member of the Convention? Probably not many of you. However, Omar Victor Diop, a 35-year-old artist from Dakar brings to life the long but often forgotten history of the African descent. He does it in his series of [self-portraits called Diaspora](#). Heir to a tradition initiated by the masters of the African portraits such as Seydou Keita, Mama Casset or Malick Sidibé, the artist knows how to catch the moment and tame the light, but he is especially endowed with a keen sense of direction and scenery.

You started your career in Dakar in the business world, how do you go from a finance employee to an African star of photography?

The transition from the corporate world to the arts was a calculated risk, to tell the truth. It really stemmed from my frustration as a full-time employee with missing out on excellent the opportunities that were offered to me as a photographer. And those opportunities really started multiplying when my photography became known through publications in the press, exhibitions and advertising campaigns. I was 30 years old and had a good resume for my age. I thought to myself I would shift gears and pursue my career as a professional photographer. I set a one-year test for myself and decided I would stay in photography if at the end of this year my results were conclusive enough. Fortunately, I did not have to look for a finance job after the year passed...

In your series of self-portraits, titled Diaspora, you play the famous but often forgotten characters of the African Diaspora, who have become notable personalities in Europe at the time of the colonies. What message do you want to pass? And why this anachronistic reference to the soccer ball?

Diaspora is a photographic series which starts from unknown episodes in the history of Africans outside Africa to reveal ties that allow people to look at each other differently. It is important for Africans today to be better informed about the contributions their ancestors have made to universal civilization, as much as it is necessary for the rest of the world to perceive African migrants and travelers as Contributors to the advancement of the companies they integrate.

The issue of migration from the African continent is too often treated with a very contemporary and simplistic approach, whereas it requires a historical perspective dating back centuries. The reference to the imagery of the soccer game is a trait of humor, but also a way to invite the characters to whom I pay tribute in a contemporaneity where Africans outside Africa still suffer from racism and rejection, even in fields where their contribution is paradoxically of inestimable value.

You are now part of the closed circle of African artists recognized on the international scene. How do you look at the artistic scene in Africa?

The artistic scene on the continent is in full development and sees the birth of an economy supported by the multiplication of independent and audacious initiatives. Events, such as the Lagos Photo Festival or the Addis Foto Fest, are palliatives to institutional meetings, such as the Bamako Encounters. African Art also benefits from the support of the media, notably from the international press and the Diaspora who found a discourse and a practice of a new kind in the African artistic scene.

What do you expect people to feel when they look at your photographs? The beauty and richness of Africa is at the heart of your work. When you publish an image or a photographic series, it is important to know that you don't really own it anymore. All we can expect is to question, to inform and to arouse interest in the public and hoping they will want to see more of it, to discover a plural Africa, a rich continent of 54 nations and a society that has given enormously to the world.

What are your plans for 2017?

I keep doing some research to complete the *Liberty* series, which is a pictorial chronology on the protest movements of black people in Africa and within the diaspora. It is a series featuring highlights of the black protests in the history of Africa (Soweto, Thiaroye, etc.) and America (Haiti, Selma, etc.)

Do you have a message for the employees of the World Bank Africa who read us?

A message of encouragement in the Bank's efforts to frame and strengthen the progress made by the countries of the continent.