

*IN THE FOREGROUND: CONVERSATIONS ON ART & WRITING*  
A Podcast from the Research and Academic Program (RAP) at the Clark Art Institute

**“A Gesture of Reciprocity”: Souleymane Bachir Diagne  
on Translation & Restitution**

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Transcript

**Caro Fowler**

Welcome to *In the Foreground: Conversations on Art & Writing*. I am Caro Fowler, your host and director of the Research and Academic Program at the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts. In this series of conversations, I talk with art historians and artists about what it means to write history and make art, and the ways in which making informs how we create not only our world, but also ourselves. In this episode, I speak with Lorraine O’Grady, an artist and critic whose installations, performances, and writings address issues of hybridity and Black female subjectivity, particularly the role these have played in the history of modernism. Lorraine discusses her long standing research into the relation of Charles Baudelaire and Jeanne Duval, the omissions of art historical scholarship and intersectional feminism, and the entanglement of personal and social histories in her work.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

*The translator, when she's dealing with two languages, and trying to give clarity to a meaning from a language to another language, that is this way of putting them in touch, to create an encounter between these two languages is an ethical gesture, it is a gesture of reciprocity.*

**Caro Fowler**

Thank you for joining me today, Bachir. It's really nice to talk to you. I'm looking forward to it.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

My pleasure.

**Caro Fowler**

[Laughs] Often we begin these conversations by talking about important teachers or the role of pedagogy and learning within the person's life, and creative work and thinking and practice. And so I've read quite a bit about your education in Paris, and from when you moved to Paris and went through the Sorbonne and the system there. But I'd like to start earlier and to hear

about your earlier education in Senegal and if there were any really important teachers there that were formative for you as you move forward in your career.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

I did my, all my education, up to the end of high school, when I graduated from high school, in Senegal. I started my studies in the south of Senegal in a region known as Casamance, in the city of Ziguinchor. That's where my parents were sent to, to work at the post office there, and I was a child, and I, we moved to Dakar just on time for me, time for me to go to high school. And that's what I, what I did in Dakar. And I would say that I remember my philosophy professor. Obviously, he was a very important man in my life, because he made me decide to follow a path in philosophy and to major in philosophy. Because up to that point, I was planning more to go towards STEM-

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

- to do, to become an engineer. I was doing mathematics, I was good at that. I was doing physics, I was good at that. And I discovered philosophy thanks to this professor of mine. His name was [unclear]. And after high school, I went to Paris where I did all my higher education. And so the one professor who really consolidated, I would say, my desire to major in philosophy, his name was André Pessel. A great philosopher who hasn't written much-

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

- but he is highly, highly praised by all the students he trained in the discipline of philosophy. He basically taught generations and generations of philosophers how to read philosophical text.

**Caro Fowler**

What do you, what did you learn specifically from Althusser versus Derrida? I mean, what were their different pedagogies and what did you take away that you still carry with you and your thinking and work?

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

You know, Derrida is obviously known for deconstruction, that is probably the main concept that would come to any, I mean anyone's mind when talking about Derrida. And I am among the people who knows what it meant to use deconstruction pedagogically, in a way.

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

In other words, Derrida trained us in one particular, for one particular exercise and gave us one particular skill, which is to prepare a lecture. He trained us for a very French test called "agrégation."

**Caro Fowler**

Mhm.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

And one of the tests that you take when you are taking agrégation is you're supposed to be able to - in six hours you are in the library, you can have every single book you have, and you have six hours basically to prepare a lecture, a 45 minute lecture. So we would, we would, we would prepare, we would deliver our lecture as a trainee, and he would let us know what went well, what didn't go as well. And this is something he was wonderful at doing. In other words, what he will do is show you clearly what your own intention was, what it is that you wanted to do.

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

How well you did it, and what went wrong, and when. Exactly where did you miss the path you were supposed to take to bring home, the point you wanted to make. It was different [than] Louis Althusser. Louis Althusser was famous for his, his ideas, the way in which he wanted to, to read Marx.

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

So, uh, so that was, that was really what attracted us in the first place when we were being trained at École Normale [Supérieure], to his, to the lectures he gave. I remember he gave a wonderful, wonderful lecture on the notion of beginning. What does it mean to begin?

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

And we apply that to the notion of beginning in Marx. So you see, you would be, you would be... When I think of the training I received from Althusser, I would think about certain lectures he gave.

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

And when I think about Derrida, I would think more about that kind of training, and the type of deconstructive skills he taught us, and that we can apply it in our own pedagogy in our own teaching of philosophy.

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah, well, it certainly comes across in your lectures. One reason why I became familiar with your work is because you're here at the Clark and working on the Sahel exhibition with Alisa. And I've also seen you, you were part of a "New York Times" discussion on the restitution of arts in Africa. And, and I would just be curious to hear what were your, how did your understanding of African art as a topic and as a theoretical engagement - when did that begin for you? And I would also be curious to understand how living in Paris maybe changed a perspective for you on, what was it like going to the museums in Paris that hold many colonial artifacts and how that might have changed or impacted your perception on, on African arts more widely than just the new hand when you grew up in Senegal.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

Yeah, well, let me start with my interest in an African art. Actually, that was not my training at all

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

My, my training, my background, and my first books were in a very specialized field of philosophy, which is logic, the history of mathematical logic. And, but I had always had an interest in, in [Léopold Sédar] Senghor's philosophy, obviously, for reasons having to do with the fact that I was, I read Senghor as a kid. And I mean he was the president of Senegal. He was obviously this great man that, I knew his poetry and so on, so forth. What I found out is that if you want to look at one overarching aspect of Senghor's thought - he from start, from beginning to end, he has always been a philosopher of African art. And I thought that this was really the best entry point into the thought of Senghor. When he first came to France, we know through his biographers that Senghor would very often go to the Museum of Trocadéro, at that time.

**Caro Fowler**

Mhm.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

We are talking about the late 1920s, early 1930s, to see African artifacts that were in that ethnographic museum. My idea was that this is really what, what's stuck with him. At the center of Senghor's thinking is this notion that the African objects themselves are a language for African philosophy and African cosmology, and that you could access African philosophy through the language, the visual language of these objects. And this is the starting point of my

own interest in African art. And to speak more personally about this, somehow I discovered African art the way Senghor discovered it, which is to say in French-

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

- because the place where you can actually go to a museum and see African art, paradoxically, would be France in this-

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

- in this case. So I followed the discussion around the transfer of objects from that museum, Trocadéro, to the Museum of Quai Branly today.

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

And I follow the discussion around the question of the significance, the meaning of these, on these objects. Are they ethnographical objects? Are they aesthetic, artistic objects? They are probably not. And the transfer from Trocadéro to Musée du Quai Branly meant at one point that these objects were now considered from this aesthetic perspective and their meaning, the emphasis was on the, on the language, precisely. What it is that they are saying, reads their own visual language. Why are they the way they are? Why are they turning their back? Right? Why is African art in general - which is not, it's not true all the time and everywhere, we have to be careful about generalizing - but one common denominator, in African sculptures, mass, etcetera, wherever you go, is that they seem to be turning their back to, to the masses, simple invitation.

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

Reality as it appears, to, and they seem to be looking for something else to be expressed visually. Something that is underneath the sheer appearance of the object, and this is what Senghor called the subreality of the object. So the decision to create the museum Museum of Quai Branly, was in a way the decision to take these objects from one meaning of ethnographic curiosity, basically, and bringing them to a place where they would be manifesting themselves as objects of art.

**Caro Fowler**

Is it correct that you were also the cultural adviser to Senghor's successor and throughout the 90s? Is that correct?

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

It is correct. While I was teaching - because I started my career as a professor at the University of Dakar.

**Caro Fowler**

Mhm.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

This is before it was named Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar. And in the, starting in 1990, from 1993 to actually 1999, I was the cultural adviser to the then socialist president, Abdou Diouf. And in that position, I was able to contribute to a certain number of decisions made in the field of culture and education. And among those decisions was the creation of the Dakar, Dakar Biennale, actually -

**Caro Fowler**

Oh, oh okay!

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

I am proud to say that I conceived the role in the creation of the biennale

**Caro Fowler**

[Laughs]

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

I'm very, very happy and proud to see that it is one of the big events, artistic events -

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah!

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

- on the African continent.

**Caro Fowler**

What was clear to you about, about the biennale as an important cultural step in the 90s for Dakar.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

Well the idea at first was to, what... As you know, Senegal, under Senghor, has been the place where it was organized for the first time, this huge Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres, World Festival of Black Arts. And this was really - in the mind Senghor - this was the highlight of his

presidency, because Senghor was really, really about... everything with him was about culture. So it was a big event, very important event, cultural event for which Senegal was, was well known as a country where arts is at home. What do we do with this heritage, and the legacy of the World Festival of Black Arts? We thought about something that would be happening periodically. Because the idea - when the festival, the first festival was organized in Senegal - the idea was that it would be periodically organized in different African countries.

**Caro Fowler**

Mhm.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

This did not happen. There was one event in Algiers. There was another event in Nigeria. And that was it. So the idea was that, to have something organized periodically, we have really to organize it in one country. Senegal has to take the decision, to make the decision that it was going to organize something around the arts on the African continent. Every, and so we decided that every other year, would be a good periodicity.

**Caro Fowler**

What have the topics of some of the past philosophical workshops been? I don't think many biennales always have a philosophical workshop involved. So I...

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

Yes, well, I... there was a discussion about restitution -

**Caro Fowler**

Mhm.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

- in the first place, the meaning of restitution, and also what it means. There is an aspect of restitution, which is really, I would say, philosophical, which is, what does it mean for an object to have traveled abroad?

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

And for decades being absent, what does it mean for it, for that object, to be back? Does it make sense to say that something is bad in the sense... meaning by that, that it was just a matter of being taken from your original location and taken back to the, to the original location, which is not the case?

**Caro Fowler**

And what do you think are some of the productive ways or models by which objects... Because obviously one of the things that makes - from my own understanding - that makes restitution

complicated within Africa, is it assumes an easy geography or a nation state by which objects can be returned and yet, borders are often changing and where objects came from is often not clear, due to the fact that they were often taken by missionaries who, who didn't keep great records always or who are a little ambiguous in terms of where they got things. So I'd be curious to hear what do you think is a possible model for thinking about how these objects who traveled and obtained other lives and obtained other resonances and meanings can then come home and, and perhaps also retain that narrative and, and then be placed within new narratives so they can then embody forth new, new histories of art within different places within Africa?

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

Yes. Well, let's first address the question of the new narrative and the new meanings that these objects are now charged with. And I'm using charged in the sense of the new energy they acquired.

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

To give you an example, obviously, we know how these objects have been very, very influential when it comes to the development of modern art.

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

I mean, we know the relationship - to just take that example - that an artist like Picasso had with these African artists. What he has said about, about them, even if at one point he became really patient with, you know, being always asked about Black art and saying, oh, Black art, I don't know about it.

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

But we know that the kind of meaning that these objects, these objects acquired, when they were translated into the works of modern artists such as Picasso and others. So, one cannot pretend that these objects have spoken that particular language, as they were translated, in the, into the visual experiments of many modern artists. At the same time, you don't want to just say that they acquired meaning and value because they played that role for artists such as Picasso, etc., etc. At first they did have - back home in their own in the homeland where they were born - they had a certain meaning in connection with the local cosmology, the local religion. So, not to say that they were shear-, only defined by their religious function they would play in ceremonies, etc. I don't agree with the idea that they were not at all -



**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

- because they were, they were playing a religious function. The way they were actually created, designed, was already an aesthetic gesture. They were not designed, I mean, you could, you could worship a tree, you could say that the tree plays a religious function because it has a religious meaning. But to carve the mask is to say something beyond simply the fact that the mask is going to appear in this or that religious ceremony. The carving itself is an aesthetic gesture that is incorporated in that artistic meaning, is incorporated in the object. But that being said, the object by simply traveling, by undergoing that process of translation - and I'm using this word translation purpose-, on purpose, because I want to say that it is really that. Something similar to taking a significance from a given language -

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

- and giving to it hospitality in another language, and I believe that this is what these artists did. So, when the object returns, it returns with all these meanings embedded in it.

**Caro Fowler**

Mhm.

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

You cannot see now a mask, an African mask, without seeing the way in which it was also used by Picasso to, as the face of *Les Femmes d'Alger* at MoMA. It is part of it. It is important. Now, what kind of new meanings are they going to produce? Once they are back, and back where? - which brings me to your, the question you pose, which was, which is an open ended question that Bénédicte Savoy and Felwine Sarr had to face in their report.

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

To say that a missionary, or an ethnographer, or a military for that matter actually - an object from a given group, from a given place with their own local culture, with their own cosmology. And then that object traveled abroad. Now to return it, what does it mean? Are you going to return it to that same particular group? That group might not exist anymore, in a way, in the sense that it is now part of state, a given state?

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

And the cosmology in which that object was created, may have disappeared. Suppose these people were following some form of traditional African religion and now they are Muslims, or they are Christians, and so on. So this is why Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy decided - and I think that was, that is the wise decision - to say, well, let's take into account the world as it is. We are living in a world of nation states. If restitution happens, it has to happen between the nation state of France and African nation states.

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

Now, it will be up to a given African state to say okay, maybe it is better for this particular object for me to help create an École Museum in this particular part of the country, where the people who created this object are living. So maybe this is a way of me incorporating the object into some form of its ancient environment, to an École Museum. For other objects, you may say, well, they will be fine in the capital in the National Museum - like in Senegal, we have this huge, now, Museum of Black Civilizations, etc. So you have to decide it that way, to have the policy. In other words, you have to have a plan, a policy of restitution, which should show knowledge and respect for the objects that are being restituted. One thing, which is important, though, this kind of discussion has been used by directors who definitely did not want to talk about restitution at all. Who are we going to retribute it to?

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

Why are we going to give it to the state? Maybe that state is not a very democratic state. Who are they to decide that?

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

And that will... just give it back to states who asked for them, and they will be dealing with these real and serious questions, because they are real questions, they are serious questions. And that's how the, the discussion should be, should be, should be moving.

**Caro Fowler**

Fair enough. And I appreciated what you said about translation earlier and thinking about it as a term of hospitality. And that, that makes me think about the importance of translation as a theory within your work and, and the extensive work you've done on translation and arguing for translation as kind of an ethical practice of lateralization as, as kind of a way in which to

think globally and laterally, that acknowledges loss but also acknowledges the generation of something within that mode of translation. And so I would love to just hear a little bit about the different languages that you yourself work in and think in and, and the ways in which working among those different languages has taught you something about language itself and the abilities of certain languages to convey certain ideas that others don't.

### **Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

[unintelligible] - Thank you for that question, because you're absolutely right. Translation is really at the core of what I try to do in my, in my work. First of all, translation is important, because when we talk about translation, we talk about many languages. This looks like, uh, kind of self-evident and if you will a tautological statement. But, but it is a, it is a very important point in a world that is coming out of colonialism. Because what is colonialism? What is imperialism? It takes many different forms. But one of the forms it takes is to say, I am coming with the true language, the language that reflects reason, beauty, etc., all the good things, while your own language is barely a language, it is incomplete, it lacks this part, it lacks that. So to acknowledge that there is a plurality of languages is a decolonizing gesture in a way, because you are saying that all human languages are equivalent, and equal. There is not such a thing as an incomplete language. No language lacks of anything. Colonial anthropology invented this notion of African languages, for example, lacking abstract terms or lacking the verb "to be" - or lacking future tense. It is absurd. You are just saying that these languages do not function in the same way your own Indo-European language is functioning. Now, if you have a world of the multitude of languages and, and all of them equivalent, how do you have some encounter? How, what is the relationship between them? Are you just going to juxtapose them? Well, you can say that they, you have encounters in translation. And this is where the importance of translation comes, for me. The shimmer of universality, in a world of equivalent cultures and languages, is a universality which is a universality of encounter. That is why it is the horizontal universality and not an overarching universality dictated by somebody who says, I am the universal, follow my, my lead, and I'm coming from there. This is the importance of translation. Now, one doesn't need to be naive, because, you know that when you look at the politics of translation, the sociology of translation, obviously languages do not have the same weight. What is being translated, if you do some, if you look at the data, you will see that English comes on top, obviously, and other languages come afterwards. And African languages when it comes to translation would be at the bottom, of course. But when you bracket out this kind of general political perception of it, and you just focus on the very gesture of translation, the translator... when the translator, when she's dealing with two languages and trying to give hospitality to a meaning from a language to another language, that is this way of putting them in touch. To create the encounter between these two languages is an ethical gesture, it is a gesture of reciprocity. And this is why I am not naive, I have a very optimistic view of translation because I focus on the ethical meaning of that hospitality, as I call it.

### **Caro Fowler**

Mhm, yes.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

And that is where the true meaning of translation is. Obviously, yes, you do have an untranslatable. You do have opacity for my language to another one. But, as my good friend Barbara Cassin has said, the untranslatable which is not what one cannot translate; it is what one has to continuously work on translating.

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

In other words, "translatable" itself is a kind of invitation to go further, to try again, to circle around the meaning that you are trying to transfer from a language to another one. And this is why weight works at trans-, retranslate it again, again. There are times where you have new translations of Shakespeare's. You are not actually saying that the older translations are not good. You are even paying homage to them by retranslating the work again, because your own time your own expectations, in a way give new meaning to a work of the past. So that relationship is very important. I know that we are living in a time when one would say, if I say, oh, Picasso translated the language of the African masks into the language of his own work and his own research. One would say oh, you're just talking about Picasso, so appropriating -

**Caro Fowler**

Mhm.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

- the mask. The language of appropriation is the language we are using because we are very - actually we have this anxiety about any kind of translation being appropriation, some kind of imperial gesture. Yeah, well, I understand that. But I think that translation, on the contrary, unlike appropriation, is respect. Because you are saying, okay, this is important, and I want to share it with people speaking my own language.

**Caro Fowler**

Right.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

That is why I'm using the word "hospitality." Giving hospitality to it, you are calling attention, you are saying pay attention to this in our own language. And in the way you translate, you show respect to it. You, at the same time you are saying, okay, it contains this universal meaning that I bring in our language, but pay attention also to its own opacity, something that is beyond, that escapes my own translation. And this is where the philosopher and the writer and the poet, such Édouard Glissant, is important.

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

Édouard Glissant has this couple, opacity and relation. Saying that the poetics of relation and the politics of relation is not a politics or a poetics of appropriation, it is not that you are appropriating the object, you are actually acknowledging its opacity as well. And paying homage in your translation to what you cannot translate. Paying homage to its own opacity, and showing respect and admiration for it. And this is why I don't think that my use of translation and my exploration of the ethics of translation, is that naive. It is up to me. I am an optimist for translation...

**Caro Fowler**

I think it's wonderful. I mean one thing that I was really interested in that you were discussing in your essay that you wrote for the *Sahel* catalog [at the Metropolitan Museum of Art] - and I was also interested because I've seen in your work that you've advocated for a long time about thinking of the Sahel as a really important geographic region for re-understanding kind of the geography of Africa and then doing the parameters on it that Hegel put on in his philosophy. But I was curious, in the catalog essay, you discuss the ways in which the introduction of Arabic into the Sahel introduced a new means by which to conceptualize time or temporality. And, and I would just be curious to hear more about that, about how Arabic and the introduction of that language restructured worldviews within the Sahel.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

Right. Actually, I'm glad you mention, you mention Hegel, because Hegel's lectures on the history of philosophy that he gave in the early 19th century in Berlin, have, have been the ultimate expression of this way in which the African continent has been taken out of history. I mean, Hegel famously decided that the, the location, the space of the universal history, is necessarily Europe.

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

The rest of the world doesn't count. And Africa, in particular, for him is forever trapped in the what he called the - poetic in a way - the dark mental of nights, the nights of the spirit. Now, this is total ignorance of the history of West Africa. And this is where it is important to understand that the Sahara has never been a wall separating radically two different worlds.

**Caro Fowler**

Right.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

The Sahara - you have all these trans-Saharan routes that go places like Timbuktu, the heart of West Africa, all the way to Northern Africa, and from there to southern Spain. Because one has to remember that the Islamic world, at one point, included also the southern part of the, you

know, the peninsula, including part of Spain and part of today Portugal. So, so you have this civilization, this Muslim globalization, as it could be called, of which Africa was a part.

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

I mentioned the city of Timbuktu. Timbuktu did not just exist when it was discovered by this French dropout, René Caillié, who happened to have traveled there.

**Caro Fowler**

[Laughs] Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

I mean, Timbuktu was a well-known intellectual center. For centuries, this was the intellectual capital of the empire of Mali. The King of Mali is se-, famous one of them Kankou [Mansa] Musa is famous for the pilgrimage he account, he achieved. He was ready to make a way through Egypt. So, Timbuktu was part of a global world.

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

And so, to look at Islamization of West Africa is important not just on political terms. You could think, okay, this region become Islamic, but Islamized. But what it meant also was this intellectual incorporation of the region in the Islamic world. Timbuktu was a place where Aristotelian logic, for example, was taught and discussed, prior to the arrival of any European in that, in that region. So the history, the intellectual history of Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa needs to be rediscovered and rethought and examined. In, for example, this association, immediate association of African cultures with orality. It's true that orality is very important for African cultures, that you also have a tradition of written erudition in West Africa that started very early. When it comes to art - because this was the main point that was being discussed during the wonderful, wonderful Sahel exhibition actually at the Metropolitan - the reflection was about what happened to African art in that context.

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

Does Islamization mean that the traditional cosmologies that produced African art, for example, having now in a way disappeared, or were translated - to use that word again - translated into the new Islamic cosmology... what did it mean, for the tradition of African art? And I, with other colleagues, we examine the way in which actually, Islamization did not mean the destruction of African art, but somehow there is that, there is some continuity between -

**Caro Fowler**

Yeah.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

- the traditional cosmologies, which were so much based on, on life.

**Caro Fowler**

Mhm.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

And then they were really a cosmology of the force of life, the force of living. Prayer for life is probably the most common type of traditional prayer that you find in African cultures. And in a way this was continued in the, through the new Islamic cosmology. And I think that the exhibition really, really shows it very well. It was important to insist on that aspect.

**Caro Fowler**

Thank you so much for Bachir. This has been a wonderful conversation, and I've learned so much. It's always the case when I talk to you. And thank you for talking to me today.

**Souleymane Bachir Diagne**

It's been a pleasure. Thank you for having me.

**Caro Fowler**

Thank you for listening to *In the Foreground: Conversations on Art & Writing*. For more information about this episode and links to the books, articles and artworks discussed, please consult [clarkart.edu/rap/podcast](http://clarkart.edu/rap/podcast). This program was produced by Caitlin Woolsey, Samantha Page and myself, with music by lightchaser, editing by John Buteyn, and additional support provided by Jessie Sentivan and Alice Matthews.