

# Reply to Yinka Shonibare

Clementine Deliss

'Tenq', the first 'Africa 95' event, was a visual arts workshop which took place in Senegal for two weeks in September 1994. It was initiated by a group of Senegalese artists in a spirit of connection with colleagues from other parts of Africa and the UK as a temporary operational site, an attempt to articulate a new space of art around process, medium and visual language. Yinka Shonibare was invited to take part in 'Tenq' by the 'organisers'. As one of the 'organisers' he alludes to in his text, I would like to explain Tenq's relationship to 'Africa 95'.

'Africa 95' is a season of events which will take place between August and December 1995. Unlike the 'Japan Festival' of 1992 or other large-scale cultural festivals, 'Africa 95' is not a centralised operation selecting artists and providing funds from a main kitty. Each event in the 'Africa 95' programme, be it a workshop or an exhibition, is motored by whichever producers or institutions have decided to run with it, whether this be a group of artists in Senegal, a theatre collective in Zimbabwe, or a public-funded gallery in the UK. The format of the workshop reflects 'Africa 95's objective which is to increase opportunities for long-term collaborations between artists, venues and producers in the UK and Africa. Three such workshops in different art forms will take place in a similarly decentralised manner in Africa over the course of 1995 in Zimbabwe, Ghana and Senegal.

'Tenq' was not controlled from London. The organisation, coordination and fundraising was set up by the self-appointed 'Tenq' committee which consisted of Senegalese artists El Hadji Sy, Souleymane Keita, Fodé Camara, Djibril N'Diaye and Mustapha Dimé. They were assisted by Anna Kindersley who has worked for similar artist-led initiatives in southern Africa which have been inspired by the 'Triangle' model but are indepen-

dent of it. Together the 'Tenq' group raised local sponsorship to the total of £15,000 to pay for the artists' international and local transport, their accommodation, materials, press releases, posters and t-shirts. No funds whatsoever came from 'Africa 95'. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office paid for Djibril Sy, a leading Senegalese photographer, to shoot a reportage of the entire two weeks of the workshop, and for James Hall from *The Guardian* and myself to travel out to 'Tenq' in its final days.

Twenty-six artists were invited to take part from ten countries in Africa. Three came from the UK including Shonibare who had not been back to Africa for nearly fifteen years. The selection of artists was made by the 'Tenq' group and reflected the beginnings of an axis of exchange between South Africa, London and Dakar which the artists David Koloane and El Hadji Sy had set up in London in October, 1993, and which was announced to the Senegalese press at a conference in Dakar on December 9th, 1993. In addition, the data bank of 'Africa 95' was made available to the 'Tenq' group and certain artists such as Yacouba Touré from Côte d'Ivoire and Ndidi Dike from Nigeria were selected from slides and information collated over the last three years. Equally, Atta Kwami from Ghana, Anna Best from the UK, and El Hadji Sy from Senegal had all participated in 'Shave', the artists' workshop in Somerset which took place in the summer of 1994.

Of the twelve Senegalese artists with the 'Tenq' group, Souleymane Keita, Fodé Camara, Mustapha Dimé, El Hadji Sy and Babacar Traoré in particular were conscious of coming from a powerful domestic history of producing new art within a complex aesthetic and intellectual discourse. Since the 1960s, the Senegalese state had established art schools, museums, galleries and industrial opportunities for artists. Tension

had always existed within this relationship between artist and state providing fertile ground for alternative actions in the form of collectives such as the 'Laboratoire Agit-Art' set up by artists in 1974 as an open house for those interested in confronting the institutional packaging of their practice with a counter-discourse of ephemeral performances and individual statements.

'Tenq' also had a more specific precedent in Senegal, the 'Village des Arts' in Dakar. In 1977, together with an independent group of artists working in different media, the artists El Hadji Sy and Ali Traoré squatted the empty Lat Dior army barracks on the Corniche and turned this old colonial building into studios with a gallery called 'Tenq' which became an important space for new work to be shown with four exhibitions running each year.

'Tenq' offered a temporary meeting ground for artists by artists and was described by those involved as a '*workshop*', '*mise-en-loge*' and '*espace operatoire*'. Given that artists came from both francophone and anglophone African countries, verbal discussion could not be the primary vehicle for communication. With the overlapping routes of experience which came together at 'Tenq', it was the actual practice of art in the limitations of space and time which provided the point of contact rather than an art-critical forum. Shonibare clearly felt frustrated by the fact that the 'Tenq' group did not provide artists with the safety net of common critical discourse within which he could intervene most easily. Whereas Shonibare wished to talk, show slides and thus expected the 'organisers' to provide a schedule for this type of forum, the host artists from Senegal were concerned with maintaining the tentative, and potentially more demanding, atmosphere of working together. 'Tenq' was not a seminar series, a conference gathering or a straight international exhibition: it was a site of operational activity and as such was an environment where all these questions were open to different frames of definition and could only be as articulate as the actors wished to make them. This includes Shonibare and his ability to engage successfully with the limitations of the situation.

The new 'Tenq' referenced a far earlier mission than 'Triangle' generated by artists in Senegal and centred around building a long-term site for articulation without the constraint of the state. The workshop aimed to help solder professional contacts between artists in different parts of Africa on the basis of short-term creative exchange — no more, no less. The role of the artist as instigator of the situation outweighed that of a pre-fabricated

organisational structure such that there was little or no press during the event, and very few purchases of work at the public Open Day. The donation of works by artists to the 'Tenq' group was a voluntary act to ensure continuity of the model. It offered the possibility of generating overhead costs for the next workshop which might take place the following year.

The new 'Tenq' in the shape of the St Louis workshop had several histories within it which Shonibare failed to grasp. It is unfortunate that he felt unable to communicate both in the workshop and in the environment of St Louis.

---

'Tenq' took place from 15-30th September, 1994, at St Louis du Senegal. The invited artists were Musaa Baydi (Senegal); Anna Best (UK); Flinto Chandia (Zambia); Paul Clarkson (UK); Ndidi Dike (Nigeria); Gulbril André Diop (Senegal); Mohamed Kacimi (Morocco); David Koloane (South Africa); Atta Kwami (Ghana); Khady Lette (Senegal); Amédy Kré M'baye (Senegal); Sam Nhlengethwa (South Africa); Agnes Nianhongo (Zimbabwe); Pape Macoumba Seck (Senegal); Dasunye Shikongo (Namibia); Yinka Shonibare (UK); Damy Théra (Mali); Yacouba Touré (Côte d'Ivoire); Babacar Sédikh Traoré (Senegal); Jacob Yacuba (Senegal).

---