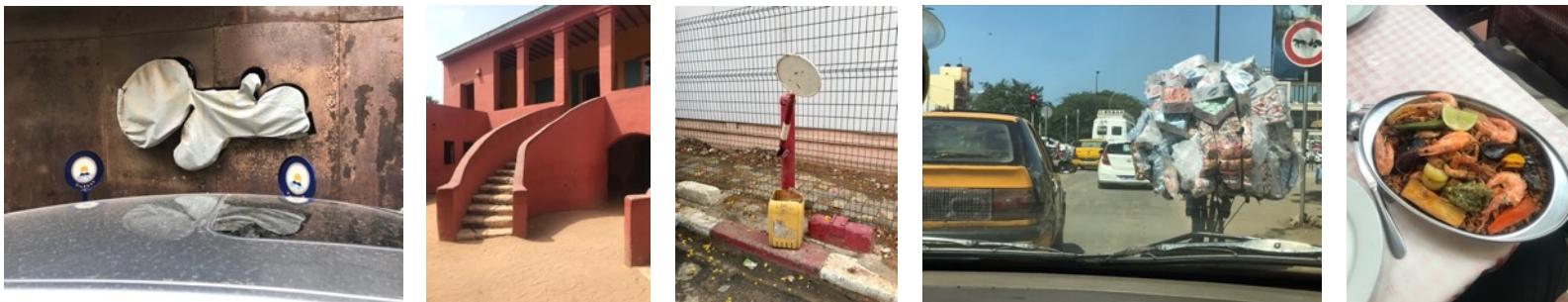


Report on my stay in Sinthian, Senegal

@ Thread, artist-in-residence program

by The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation



Summer 2024

The year has been quite hectic so far. I didn't know exactly what to expect from the Senegalese countryside, but I was looking forward to being amidst nature and being remote in the broadest sense during my stay in August 2024.

You make assumptions, you prepare yourself, you look at your agenda, you write mails and all of the sudden you find yourself in the airplane to Senegal – it feels both unreal and exciting. To acclimatize, I spend a few days in Dakar where I've visited some interesting galleries and musea, and of course also Île de Gorée, the largest slave-trading center on the African coast from 15th to 19th century. All these impressions were intense, as was the climate and buzzing city.



After a few days, I was heading from Dakar to Sinthian via Kaolack and the provincial capital Tambacounda. It was a long 8 hour drive but somehow it felt good to just sit in the car, look outside, let the time pass and shake off the previous hectic time and city life.

We had a short stop before heading further for another 1 hour drive on a dirt road to get to [The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation-residency](#) called *Thread*. This is a cultural center and artist's residency program in Sintian, a remote village near Gambia and the city Tambacounda in Southeastern Senegal. In close collaboration with the NGO [Le Korsa](#), which is devoted

to improving life via agricultural, environmental, educational, sports, and cultural projects, it enables artists from around the world to advance their work in an exceptional setting. Truly special in the sense of nature, culture and the generous local community.

At that moment we were three residents: the painter Jason Karolak from New York, designer/artist Jean-Louis Pouillès from Paris and myself from Amsterdam. Director Moussa Sene gave us an introduction to the practicalities. Moreover, he introduced us to Cissé Kanté, who is running the place on a daily basis as the project/residency manager. He was there all along and help us with his good-hearted generosity and with great patience. Each day *Thread*'s cooks and housekeepers Angelique and Mariama cooked us lunch and dinner. We would meet up, sit and eat together and bespeak our day activities and plans. Cissé, Jason, Jean-Louis and I were a good and enriching match. In Senegal, meals are not eaten alone but is shared together. It strengthens ties and builds community and was an important part of our daily residency rhythm. Traditional food from Thieboudienne to the ancient millet Fonio was served.



We had our own beautiful space to live and work within the residency building, designed by architect Toshiko Mori. It's a gem in which local materials and building customs with an innovative design and specific geometry are beautifully combined. The architecture is hard to grasp in pictures but when you are there it works beautifully - the looping inner yards, the apertures regarding air drafts and open space to meet and greet. The usage and movement felt naturally and was used by both the residents and local community.



First days, I looked around the grounds and went for long walks to explore the natural surroundings mainly bush and fields with scattered reddish, high, odd-looking termite hills. In the mornings in-between 6-9 am or in the evenings shortly before dinner 5-7 pm, it was best to go outside because the sun wasn't that strong and intense yet. It's also the time when you can see the villagers go to work, spot more birds, hear frogs and see beautiful light-color play in the air due to sun-rise/set. Around the residency there were a lot of small trails used by the locals to get to the fields or to guide their cattle or goats to grassing fields. I just followed some randomly and walked into the bush.

Following one of these trails, I found myself at a brim and looking over a fruitful plain with fields of different crops and trees. This brim with its red Laterite rocks and bordering shrubs overlooking the plain became my favorite spot to which I returned daily.

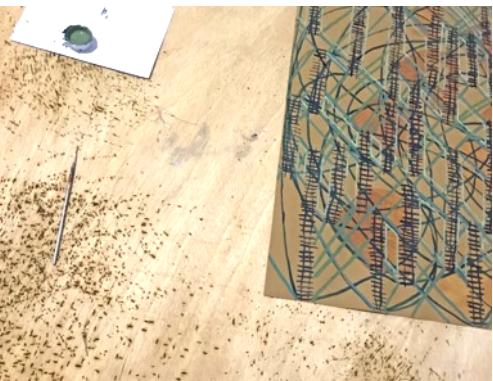
In the beginning of my stay, it was the rain season, the grass was short and yellowish and later after every rainfall everything was growing rapidly and the landscape became lush and greener, different animals were taking it over like the strange croaking *Kassina senegalensis* frogs. Mesmerized I felt by the vegetation, growth, geology, especially the big old trees with wide spreading crowns standing about everywhere in the landscape touched and surprised me. They had something welcoming, like a snug hug.

Being temporarily part of this life in Senegal, which is so different from mine back in Amsterdam, plus experiencing the climate, special light and all the structures surrounding me, had a big impact on me.

The impressions from outside, were reflected inwards and then brought to the studio and slowly while developing my new body of work getting a form. As described in my initial project plan, I'm interested in tactile surfaces, materials and patterns and all this returned in layers on my paper works. Even though, I've also made a few objects with found natural materials, which I left as traces at the residency. I mainly focused on paper works.

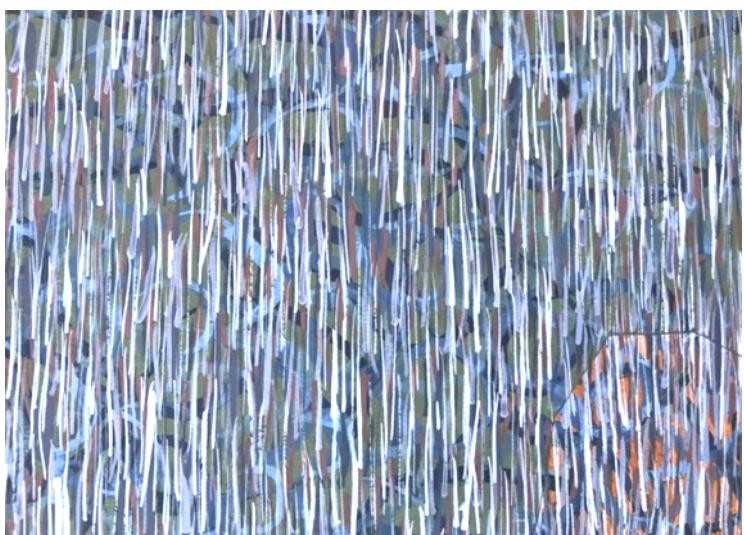
I brought some high-quality paper, lightfast paint and a Pyrography pen with me, not knowing yet for what. Just in case and to be able to start without being dependent on others. Having the paper felt like a low-threshold entrance and then became quite a driving force.





As a start, I brought some of the beautiful and typical red soil to my studio, I mixed it with glue and applied the earthy pigment on paper. Just as another paint matter, I found it too obvious and also a cliché. Therefore, I took the papers into pieces ending in cut-outs. For each piece of paper I decided on a repetition of the same abstracted form referring to e.g. termite hills, laterite rocks, branches, trees, huts, and puddles. Each shape was standing for an impression and an echo of thought and emotion. These cut-outs I mounted in turn on another sheet of paper. Thereupon, I applied in long meditative hours and in uncountable layers a net of different lines that referred to the content and condensed idea of the cut-out.

The lines as irregular but regular rhythm of form, colors and layers inhere the condensed content material through abstraction. This painted not-graspable network through repetition and colors is a reflection of the flickering and shimmering impressions in nature or when looking at the stars. You see a whole – a tree, a field, a termite hill, a night sky but it's not possible to focus on a single element like a single leave, a blade of grass, a sand grain, a star. Instead it becomes blurry, you lose yourself, the picture disappears. However while staring, all these layers open up and you fall into a three-dimensional space.



This pattern network of layers are esthetically and methodically a content carrier. Intrinsically they evoke thoughts around stability vs. dissolution, singularity vs. conformity, fore- vs. background, focus vs. grasping, rhythms. What is the whole picture? Does the whole exists if you can't even see the single elements forming it? Do you create another spatial dimension while looking, feeling the effects, and reflecting upon it?

These pondering thoughts and impressions, I tried to bring on paper, I underwent this process for hours and hours, line per line, mixing and thinning the color. This to the point that the paper background with the cutouts on top, the different shades of color as well as all the handpainted lines became one flickering, diffuse effect in its entirety. In total, I created 11 of these interwoven and layered paintings.

As a final step/layer, I chose one of these paintings, collected my thoughts around it and made a drawing to interpret the process and the form of that specific sheet of paper. The drawings became almost a bit cosmologic in the sense that it forms its own cosmos for this painterly environment. These drawings were made with a pyrography/wood burning tool, which you can use as a pen to draw. I didn't use it on wood but instead on very thin white paper. Sometimes it felt contradictory to do this in the almost unbearing heat but I really liked the flow and irregularity of the line through stronger or lighter burns. The look has something archaic, both fragile and intense. These papers again, I glued carefully to the corresponding painting. Not in the middle but were I intuitively felt it was right. It's almost like a window, a crack in the network where you see another world unfolding or an enlargement of the microscopic scale of the painted pattern.



At 'Thread' I regained a new focus and pleasure in the making process. That made it a very productive stay. Besides, I also became more enthusiastic again to formulate new ideas and visions in situ but also for the future.

Time is a strange thing, it's slow, it's fast, it rewinds, expands and stumbles and all of a sudden you have to depart. I had the feeling I just arrived and got somewhat used to the pace and my life at *Thread*. It made me sad to leave and I sense withdrawal.

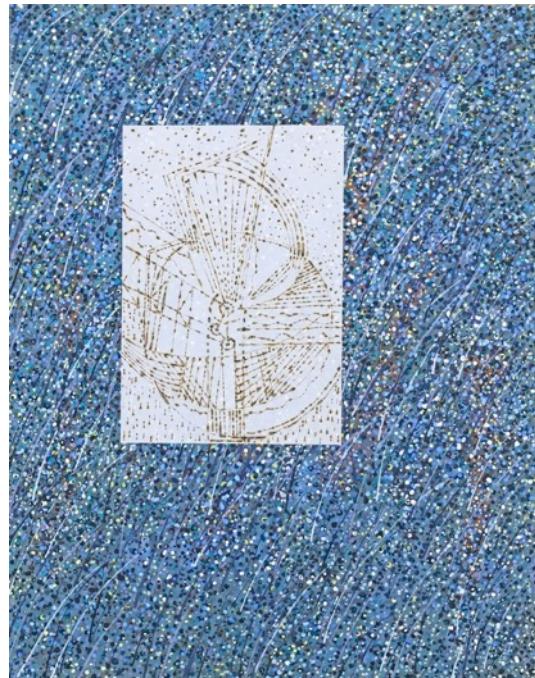
Falling from world to the other, I feel the urge to process this special time and give it a place. My residence was intense, too short, I want to build on it to make it long-lasting. Who knows maybe I have the chance to return at some point?

Initially, I also had the intention to cooperate with other art or educative institutions in Senegal but during the rainfall period it's off-season and schools and other places were closed and on holiday. Also, it would have been too much for within this time-span. But there was sports-clinic teaching tennis, basketball and lacrosse to the kids from the villages around. There, we as residents mingled, played and just enjoyed watching the kids having fun.

My initial plan included that I wanted to develop a small artist's book while I was at the residency. I've hardly touched my computer due to the unstable network but also since my emphasis was to be more in the real physical world instead of in front of the digital screen. This helped me to focus better and be in the here and now. But I'll work on it in the coming months. It's a good method to analyze my works and reflect on my stay, and a good vehicle to bring me back to the place I'm longing for – Sinthian, Senegal. Last but not least, it's dear to me to do so.

Much appreciation for Cissé Kanté and his constant care, anticipating our every wish and being so interested. Also very grateful for the director Moussa for how he orchestrates the complexity of the programs and shares his knowledge. And for the best residence companions I could wish for: Jason Karolak and Jean-Louis Pouillès.

A jaarama - Sinthian: Moussa, Cissé, Boubacar, Angelique and Mariama, Augustin, Habib. Jérejéf - Dakar: Moustapha, Saliou,





Thank you: Mathias Vico Persson for all the support for the preparation and organisation. And of course, Allegra Itsoga for running all this with care and compiling such a special team both professional and warm-hearted.

Merci, Le Korsa for the visionary work you do for and with the people in the Tambacounda region and beyond. Thank you Albers Foundation for making all these activities possible and long lasting.

Hartelijk dank: Stichting Gerbrandy Cultuurfonds for supporting my travel and making this possible.

