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# Capitalizing Art: The Marketing of Senegalese Bronze Sculpture

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# *Capitalizing Art:*

## The Marketing of Senegalese Bronze Sculpture

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**Abstract**

Bronze sculpture is an art form that, while it did not originate in Senegal, has been a part of the culture for centuries. Unfortunately, since the number of people producing it is so much smaller than for other media, a great deal of the market for bronze, and its support, has come from Westerners. Although there is broad difference between foreign buyers commissioning pieces and tourists buying from small shops in Dakar, both groups have historically impacted the bronze trade. For my project, I sought to learn more about the production of bronze sculpture through creating my own pieces in Issa K. Diop's studio in the Village des Arts, and interviewing a wide spectrum of Senegalese people. The latter research method also facilitated my investigation of the effects that the foreign sector of the market has had on the subject choice, production style, and local perception of bronze. To what extent have foreign buyers altered the development of the bronze art trade, and has their financial support been more positive or negative? By conducting this research, I hoped to better understand the complex tension in bronze sculptors' work between respect for Senegalese history and wariness of presenting, to the global market, an image of a stereotyped, antiquated nation.

**Topic Code 107**

## **Introduction**

### *~~~ Technique ~~~*

Bronze sculpture is created using the *Cire Perdue* method, meaning “loss of wax.” First, the sculpture is molded out of warm wax, and each section of the piece is connected by extra strips of wax, all leading to a funnel. The finished model is covered in a sand-and-plaster mixture, with the funnel opening(s) left uncovered. The plaster is then heated in a fire for 4 to 5 hours until the wax melts and runs out through the funnel(s), leaving a perfect plaster mold behind. That mold is subsequently filled with liquid bronze, which rapidly hardens until solid, and then the plaster shell is broken and the statue emerges, and is cleaned with a brush to remove any final pieces of plaster dust. The inevitable imperfections are removed with a variety of shaping tools. The first, a drill with a blade attached, is used to cut off what used to be the connections between the piece and the funnel, as well as any large bulges, and to smooth off the base so that it balances easily. Next, a smaller rotating cylinder is attached to the drill, and used to smooth the edges of all the surfaces, and give the metal a nice shine. After that, the statue is covered in acid, which strengthens the surface of the metal, and then heated and painted with a potassium mixture that gives the metal a dark brown color. Lastly, melted shoe polish is painted over the sculpture to protect the new brown color, and when it has dried, steel wool is rubbed over the edges to selectively bring out the original golden color as a means of accentuating the color and details of the work.

### *~~~ History ~~~*

Western Africa has had, to put it mildly, a complicated relationship with European commercial interests since the two were first introduced. Although more saleable items like ivory had a larger impact, bronze sculpture is one of the few African products that adapted to suit the

desires of European consumers while at the same time retaining styles traceable to the eighth century AD. Bronze is a metal alloy composed of tin and copper, resulting in a metal that is much harder than either component. However, since tin was very uncommon in Africa, Arabic peoples in Northern Africa combined copper with zinc instead, forming brass. Brass is a softer metal than bronze, making it better for use in sculptures as it can be augmented slightly after the casting process, as well as beforehand. The workshop of Issa Diop in the Village of Arts, for example, melts down old faucets and locks to make brass, with little regard for the actual composition of the alloy so long as the end result is aesthetically pleasing. The term bronze has, through historical misuse, become a blanket term that covers a wide range of copper alloys, including brass, but strictly speaking “brass” sculpture would be a more accurate name for the process. Still, as it is known as “bronze sculpture” in Dakar, that term will be used throughout this paper to refer to this type of art.

It is probable that, after the development of the brass-working technique in Northern Africa, traders and settlers brought the knowledge south through the Sahara and into what is now Benin, where the earliest bronze sculptures have been unearthed<sup>1</sup>. These sculptures were used in a variety of ways, but primarily served as commemorations of recently deceased royalty. The method to make the sculptures was restricted to the royal class in order to amplify the mystical power and wealth demonstrated by commissioning a statue. Yet bronze sculpture spread anyway, and today, in addition to Senegal, it can be found in Mali, Burkina Faso, Ghana, the Central African Republic, and many other neighboring nations. Similar to wooden sculpture, which “in general... dominates black African art,” bronze statues were used as part of elaborate ceremonies

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<sup>1</sup> Earliest sculptures created using the *Cire Perdue* method

of healing<sup>2</sup>. After an artisan completed a work, other members of their village, usually elders, would add a secret combination of herbs to either the outside of the sculpture or in a specially designed recess within it, and subsequently the statue would gain magical healing properties. The herb concoction was the critical part of this process; a statue that had for some reason lost its ingredients devolved into simple decoration. The belief in the steps of this magical method deemphasized the artisan as an artist in their own right, generally necessitating that they create the same subject, or even copy former statues, to allow the same magic to be performed. The true magic came from the secret recipe of the elders, and the bronze sculptures were just the vessel. This process also cemented a sense of the artisans and their work as part of the larger community, serving a specific purpose by generating the needed materials in the manner of a factory. Although there was a European presence in Senegal long before, it was primarily in the nineteenth century that interest in African art, including bronze, began to develop in the Western world. Discoveries in Benin of ancient bronze statues that could rival European Renaissance masters in their physical accuracy of the human form stunned European viewers, who “attributed them to influences from outside Africa” despite the fact that the bronze sculptures could be clearly traced to “preceding ceramic traditions” in the region<sup>3</sup>. The demand for exotic African art skyrocketed, aided by the complete absence of substantial legal barriers to purchases and the accommodating nature of the market. The latter developed as a result of the increase in imports of European brass and copper to Senegal, making bronze sculpture a more affordable business to get into. However, the market also accommodated the tastes of its European consumers, turning the artisanal creation of statues that had been done for village communities into assembly line

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<sup>2</sup> *General History of Africa – IV: Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century* 355

<sup>3</sup> *Encyclopedia of Africa South of the Sahara* 108

style workshops. These workshops would then churn out hundreds of allegedly authentic works of art, some even claiming to contain the previous magic healing properties or to have been used for centuries by a mysterious African village. The popularity of these sculptures among Europeans stemmed more from their otherness than their artistic merit, meaning that the consumers did not reward talent so much as art that fit their expectations. Since, as previously mentioned, there was not a strong culture of artistic individualism in Senegal at the time, many artists adapted their sculptures to suit the market, giving foreign collectors substantial influence in the creation of the African art that they were supposedly seeking. In many cases, European collectors would deliberately alter art in transit, or apply inaccurate contexts to a given piece, creating even more confusion and demonstrating their lack of genuine respect for the cultural artifacts they sought out.

On the other hand, the misguided interest of Europeans provided the capital to expand the reach of bronze sculpture in Western Africa, as well as trading in the raw materials of brass and bronze. It is possible that without the outsider market, bronze sculpture would not still be created in Senegal, since it is not an art native to the country, and it is not very practical economically. The first problem with dealing in bronze is that it takes a substantial amount of effort to complete one piece, and during the casting process there is ample opportunity to damage the work irreparably. After the wax has melted out of the plaster mold, but before the bronze has gone in, is the most precarious time. Anything from dropping and breaking the plaster, to accidentally letting sand get into the mold, to neglecting to sieve the unwanted materials out of the melted bronze, can result in a warped and unsalable item. Bronze sculpture is also heavier than its wooden counterparts, making it more difficult to transfer and limiting its appeal to clients who would need to take it back to their own countries.



~~~ *Modern Perceptions* ~~~

Among the Senegalese today, bronze sculpture has returned to some of its former glory as a symbol of wealth and status. There are almost no artists who will make bronze furniture for sale, and so generally bronze sculpture is bought solely for aesthetic display. Individuals and families with enough wealth might buy a sculpture for a present to a loved one, or as decoration for their house, while organizations and businesses often buy bronze art for their offices. Many vendors will buy used bronze sculptures, making the impermeability of the medium an investment opportunity that is not present with wooden art. Yet the client-artist relationship that large bronze art necessitates, one in which the client brings a specific idea to the artist and may meet with them many times to make adjustments, makes the resale of larger pieces more difficult. There continues to be a perception of bronze art as not native to the country, and many Senegalese vendors emphasize a piece with international origins since the quality of bronzes from Benin or Burkina Faso is deemed better than those produced locally<sup>4</sup>. The production of bronze art is difficult to get off the ground in Senegal, partly due to the limited visibility of the medium, but primarily because of the longer and more complicated process of casting. Unlike with wood or stone, bronze sculptures require two times the material, since every finished bronze piece requires a wax model of the same size, as well as a corresponding amount of plaster. All of these extra materials cost money and time spent on fashioning them. When it is easy to destroy a plaster mold at the last second, all the work that went into creating that mold becomes worthless. It is for this reason in addition to speeding up production, that many bronze artists create and use repeat molds, which are formed over a carefully sculpted wax model, and then can be used again and again to form the same shape. A mold may be a torso or hand, or it could incorporate the

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<sup>4</sup> Interview, Soumbédioune, April 14, 2012

entire piece. These molds are critical to making bronze art practical, but they also contribute to the overwhelming repetitiveness of the bronze art market. Successful styles are recast over and over and often sold to many different vendors, resulting in the same statue of a water-carrier existing in shops from Dakar to Saint-Louis. The assembly-line style of production, however, with several artists working on a given piece and frequently creating the same one many times over, is necessary to keep bronze businesses afloat. To what extent is this related to the limited composition of the market? To what extent is this reflective of the Senegalese perception of sculptors, as artisans performing a community service rather than individual artists creating their own vision? The skill of a bronze artist in Senegal is respected, but in many ways it is the same respect shown to a particularly skilled mechanic or architect. Through my research, I intend to reveal the sources of the production method of Senegalese bronze art, and the influences on subject choice engendered by the demands of the national and international market.

## **Methodology**

### *~~~ Choosing a Topic of Study ~~~*

For my project, I decided to examine the world of Senegalese bronze sculpture from both the interior and the exterior. To do this, I was fortunate enough to have Issa K. Diop as my advisor, who allowed me to work in his studio in the Village des Arts for three weeks. After visiting the studio with two other students for our lessons through SIT, I was intrigued by the uniqueness of Senegalese bronze sculptures, and was driven to learn more about creating them, along with having the chance to make some of my own. Not only did working at this location promise ample time to conduct interviews with Mr. Diop and the other artists, it also would allow me to conduct each step of the bronze-making process myself, rather than commissioning a piece with no knowledge of the methodology behind it.

I then looked at the exterior of the bronze art trade by interviewing vendors and other artists, as well as gallery owners and local Senegalese people of different economic levels. These informal and formal interviews would provide a 360-degree perspective on how bronze art is sold and who is buying it. While the aspects of the trade that occur internationally are understandably difficult to access from Dakar during a one month period, I feel that my methodology was able to present a well-rounded analysis of the national and international influences on bronze art and sale.

### *~~~ Location ~~~*

The primary location for my research project was the Village des Arts in Yoff Parcelles, Dakar, where I worked in Issa K. Diop's studio under his and the other artists' guidance. I also conducted research in several other locations both during and before the ISP period. First, I interviewed bronze artists at the Artisanal Village in Thies, and subsequently the vendors and

gallery owners in Saint-Louis during our scheduled visit to the area. I then interviewed bronze vendors in downtown Dakar, primarily in the area around Sandaga Market, and finally I interviewed people on the street in Ouakam and Mermoz to get their opinions on bronze art as it relates to Senegalese identity.

~~~ *Research Methods* ~~~

The methods that I used were primarily participant observation and interviews, with an informal survey of local people in Ouakam and Mermoz that consisted of gauging their interest in buying bronze art, and their knowledge of it as a medium. By creating my own four bronze sculptures at Mr. Diop's studio, I was able to gain insight into the lengthy process of bronze-casting, and the manner in which their clientele differed from others and in so doing affected the choice of subjects produced. I also took advantage of the chance to create my own bronze sculptures, and chose subjects that were both connected to what I had learned, and contrasts to the stereotypical "tourist art." Finally, I created a list of the most common subjects used in bronze art, either then exact same image or a similar design, and then recorded how many times I saw that design at the various galleries, shops, and studios I visited. The degree of this repetition would demonstrate the commercialized production methods used by national and international sculptors, but also would express the expectations of artists and clients in terms of "African art."

The list is as follows:

- Baobabs
- Water carriers, male.
- Water carriers, female.
- Lutteurs
- Single animals
- Children
- Abstract
- Urban
- Rural

The distinction between the genders of the water carriers is because the style of the masculine version has a stick across the shoulders supporting two buckets, while the feminine version carries a single bucket on her head. The masculine versions also tended to be less finished and slightly shorter and older in appearance than the feminine counterparts, which I saw as an interesting commentary on the buyers of the sculptures. In this study, abstract is simply a catchall for any instances of unrealistic subjects, ranging from a distorted human to a shape with no identifying characteristics whatsoever. Finally, I grouped all the subjects into two larger categories, urban and rural, based off of where their real-world versions would most likely be found.

~~~ *Role of the Researcher* ~~~

I believe that working in an actual bronze casting workshop was a critical part of understanding the perspective of artists on the bronze art that they create, since it allowed me to build up a rapport that would have been difficult to achieve otherwise. By showing that I could do the traditionally masculine activity, and “get my hands dirty,” I was able to remove myself slightly from the category of ignorant tourist, and so glean more accurate answers to questions about money and artistic integrity. I also had more success with finding answers to my questions at other galleries and shops when I could demonstrate some knowledge of the process and the market right off the bat.

I chose to make almost every one of my interviews anonymous for this reason, since, although I recognize that it is unlikely that any harm would come to the people that spoke with me, I would not want their names unjustly connected with other viewpoints that they might not agree with, or wish to have known publicly. I do not think that the decision to make my sources anonymous is any way detrimental to my research, and in fact I found that telling some vendors

that the results would not be published made my interviews with them more informative and friendly.

~~~ *Advantages* ~~~

As stated above, the opportunity to work at the Village des Arts was an enormous aid on gathering information on the process and on the artists themselves. Khadim, Issa, Macky, and Ada, the artists that work at the studio full-time, were happy to answer my questions about their work and their background, as well as providing chances to observe their attitude toward clients and the necessities of marketing. I also was able to obtain from Mr. Diop and his business associates a list of galleries in downtown Dakar to visit and conduct interviews, which sped up my research considerably. A final benefit of working at the Village des Arts, and one of the main reasons that I was interested in conducting this project, is that I was able to create my own artwork. I had learned enough about subject choice, through having researched before the ISP period, that I was able to incorporate that knowledge into my own work without being rushed into creating something unsatisfactory.

The obscurity of bronze art in Senegal was a mixed bag, but overall I feel it was a blessing to my project. Initially it made it difficult to explain to people what I was researching, or what type of art I wanted them to show me. Still, in the end the project was more interesting because the information was less well known, and the challenges that that ignorance presents to the artists and Senegalese people who make a living in the bronze market made my research more appreciated and more beneficial than it would have been for wood or stone.

~~~ *Disadvantages and Limitations* ~~~

One disadvantage was that, although I had a good relationship with the artists at the Village des Arts, I was not able to develop the same relationship with other artists and vendors,

due to time constraints and their initial perception of me as a potential client. While I found that perception helpful where it enabled me to experience their sales techniques, it also made it more difficult to get honest answers in terms of price. I imagine that, similar to Mr. Diop's workshop, it would take at least a couple weeks for the men I interviewed to feel comfortable enough with me to tell me more intimate opinions, which is reasonable considering that they did not know me and I was clearly an outsider. This ties into another significant disadvantage, which was my gender. Out of all the people in the bronze art profession that I talked to, no one knew of a Senegalese female bronze artist. I was not aware of the genderized nature of bronze art, or for that matter most work in Senegal that requires forging, before I selected this project, and I doubt that that knowledge would have forestalled me. Still, I feel I had to work harder to convince the artists at Mr. Diop's workshop to let me actually perform the more messy or dangerous tasks, and although by the end I felt that they treated me as an equal, I think that conclusion would have been reached more quickly if I were not female.

## Results and Analysis

Overall, the culture that I encountered among the artists and vendors was not what I had been expecting. According to more Western concepts of artistic individuality, the assembly line nature of many of the workshops that create bronze art would be detrimental to the preservation of the craft and the artists' psychological wellbeing. Yet that was not the case for the vast majority of the Senegalese people in the bronze art trade that I met. For the first concern, they substituted an emphasis on the importance of tradition that goes beyond what most artists in a given medium share, and that is clearly tied to a tradition that stretches back centuries through many different cultures. There is a clear difference in the atmosphere of Mr. Diop's workshop and the other locations that I visited, however, that seems to be connected to the government funding that the artists in the Village des Arts receive. They are able to have more free time, and are slightly more relaxed when discussing materials and prices. In talking about the difference between bronze as an alloy and brass, one of the artists noted that they occasionally make genuine bronze sculptures with tin, but since it so expensive they have to charge more for the finished product. When I asked if this was a selling point that they could bring up to a client, or an option that the client could select, he noted that the materials were irrelevant "as long as the end thing looks pretty"<sup>5</sup>. It is worth noting that the artists at the Village were more comfortable with me after knowing me for a couple weeks, but even accounting for that there was still a greater level of ease that I did not see with smaller independent vendors.

As I expected, bronze art is not well known among the Senegalese people. Of the people I asked in Ouakam and Mermoz, bronze tended to be the third material that came to their mind when I mentioned sculpture, after wood and stone. A couple insisted that bronze art was not

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<sup>5</sup> Interview at the Village des Arts, Anonymous, April 24



made in Senegal, that it was only created in other nearby countries, and when I said that I had seen it with my own eyes, they both agreed that it was likely “not as good” as international versions<sup>6</sup>. In considering buying bronze art, the top three reasons against it that I encountered were cost, size/weight, and unfamiliarity. The majority of respondents said that they would consider buying a work of bronze as decoration, but I got the sense that they were trying to be polite, and that the actual likelihood of a purchase was far lower.

The artisanal village in Thies, and the vendors in Saint-Louis, surprisingly had the same prices, approximately 15,000 CFA for a 10-inch tall piece. The vast price difference occurs between the vendors and the galleries: 35,000 CFA for one piece in Saint-Louis, and in the artisanal village at Soumbédioune several pieces were priced as high as 40,000 CFA. All of these prices were the lower versions of the ones that I was given before I explained that I was not buying, yet remain very high in comparison to similar wooden works. They are also small pieces, which I chose because the 10-inch works were the most common in all the locations I visited; this implies that the bigger pieces, which would be more useful as decoration, would be correspondingly more expensive. There were two general types of bronze art sales locations that I found during this project, either a general wood shop with a small section devoted to bronzes, or a general metals shop with silver bracelets and ivory pieces as well. I only found one location that dealt exclusively in bronze, a small shop with a variety of sizes, whose owner both bought and made bronze art. One of the methods that he uses to cut costs is buying a marketable piece from a small artist, making molds of the sculpture, and using them to create multiple copies with slightly different features. All of these works are displayed in his shop, which makes it clear that he is not bothering to create an illusion of a long history for his sculptures. In general, I found

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<sup>6</sup> Mermoz survey subject, April 15, 2012

that whatever tendency to falsify the authenticity of African art for Europeans existed in the past is not present in the current Senegalese bronze market. Smaller pieces are sold lined up in matching sets, and larger pieces tend to be commissioned with specifics provided by the clients.

Although the vendors in Soumbédioune, Thiès, and Saint-Louis do sell a great deal to tourists and random passerby, most told me that the clients that commission pieces are a much more reliable source of income. The connections between vendors and clients are incredibly important, and are usually made either through previously made client connections or the Internet. With the latter method, and to a lesser extent the former, vendors can set up international trade in a variety of ways. First, they can acquire an agent, or several for different countries, who will find venues and clients in a given country for a small fee. This method is more popular with established bronze artists or vendors who deal in large pieces; Mr. Diop prefers this method. Second, by sending several works to international exhibitions in big cities like Paris, New York, and London, sellers in Senegal can gain attention and negate for the client the problem of shipping bulky sculptures internationally. Third, with a website, orders can be placed directly with the seller and then shipped over. For artists like Mr. Diop who have traveled and studied with artists in other countries, there is a “tense relationship between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity,’ Africanity and ‘universality’” that makes it challenging to be successful in both national and international markets<sup>7</sup>.

Of the common sculpture subjects that I listed for my survey, the most common were baobabs and water-carriers of both genders, followed in third by *lutteurs* either in motion or standing still<sup>8</sup>. The only examples of abstract art that I found were human forms with abnormally

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<sup>7</sup> *Encyclopedia of Africa South of the Sahara*, 112

<sup>8</sup> Wrestlers

skinny, long arms and legs, none of which originated in Senegal<sup>9</sup>. Finally, rural images vastly outnumbered urban ones, even when *lutteurs* were grouped entirely in the urban category. What I learned from this spread is that the expectations of Senegalese bronze art conform tightly to the Western view of Senegal, and African culture as a whole. The buyers that the artists are eventually selling to look to buy “traditional” images of Senegalese life, ones that can only be found in villages, and do not include modern or urban transformations in their estimation of the country’s culture. This same dichotomy is reflected in the challenges that the artists face when considering whether to glorify the history and traditions of their country or reflect its progress into the future. Tourists “do not want [to buy] what they see” everyday, yet the fact that the “true” Africa they seek is one that is technologically behind the Western world makes that desire problematic<sup>10</sup>. Even in the case of the complex project the artists in Mr. Diop’s studio were working on, a set of children frozen in the motion of playing, the arguably urban children wear simple fabrics without designs or decoration, in direct contrast to the popularity of bright patterns and embroidery that Dakarois children favor. Such children in real life would either be uniquely bland in their tastes, or too poor to afford more fashionable clothing. At the outset, the choice of impoverished children is a noble artistic decision, but when grouped with the animals, water-carriers, and villagers, it becomes part of less than optimistic interpretation of Senegalese society.

Although I did not have the results of my sculpture subject survey when I first came to the Village des Arts to work with Mr. Diop, I had done preliminary research that suggested what would become my final results. I used that knowledge to select three subject ideas that would provide a commentary on the more popular selections. In all, I made four sculptures, but the

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<sup>9</sup> Interview, Soumbédioune Vendor #3, April 14, 2012

<sup>10</sup> Interview, Thies Artisanal Village, March 2012

fourth was the piece I had started when I and two other students visited the Village through SIT, before I knew what my ISP topic would be. Of the three designed during ISP period, the first was a male journalist holding a microphone with his coat flapping in the wind. I intentionally made the size and positioning of the statue resemble an award, reflecting the trials endured by the Senegalese media in covering the recent political protests in Dakar. None of the bronze sculptures that I saw reflected a career other than *lutteur*, and so I chose to immortalize not only a difficult position, but one that is inherently modern and serves to connect the cities of Senegal with the villages. I considered making the journalist a woman, but not doing so sends a stronger message about the options available to women in Senegalese society. This message about women is carried over into my second and most complicated piece, four women featured from the waist up, sitting at a table and playing cards. Their outfits, because they end at the waist and therefore could include pants or skirts, suggest the difficulty of combining a career with a marriage and family and the social perception that women must select one or the other. I also sought to comment on the removal of artistic individuality that the workshop method of bronze casting fosters, by making a portrait of myself and my three sisters playing “Hearts”, a card game that was a large part of my family life growing up. The subject in this case is specific to me, and even if it were bought and made into a mold, it would still be reflective of my background. My initial idea for the piece was to critique the molding process, but after completing it I recognized that each clone would be the same image for me, rather than a dilution. In this way the bronze casting process, with its arduous length, helped clarify for me the dual identity of artist and manufacturer that many of the sculptors I met shared. The final piece, an open flower with a small globe in the center, was entirely abstract. I could not even tell you what I think it means, and that deliberate challenge of the potential buyer, while more reflective of Western artistic traditions, links to the

mild annoyance that some of the vendors I encountered expressed when I asked what they thought of the typical subjects demanded by the tourist trade. All in all, I found the process of choosing and creating my own subjects for bronze art to be a superb means of coalescing my research and gaining insights into the perspectives of the artists and vendors that I interviewed.

## **Conclusion**

The bronze art market in Senegal is small, but complex, and its facets present a fascinating window into the conflict between the reality of Senegal and the version that exists primarily in the Western imagination. While the art is bought by Senegalese people, particularly the larger pieces that are commissioned, the fact that the lion's share of the market is composed of foreigners and tourists has had a powerful impact on the contents of the shops. Surprisingly, although the subjects used and recycled through the bronze vendors are clearly influenced by Western expectations, the methods of production are tied in with Senegalese culture and history to a greater extent than is immediately apparent. Artists are respected as providers of a service that most people cannot provide, rather than as individually creative people, but the degree of respect is the same. In my opinion, if the market for Senegalese bronze art was stronger and pieces moved more quickly, the same diversity, individuality, and experimentation that is evident in Senegalese painting would take hold in bronze. However, until there are more consumers who request art that is original instead of "traditional," and who see bronze pieces as art instead of merely decorative statues, the artists and vendors will have no reason to expand their repertoire. It is a challenging situation, since the international unfamiliarity with Senegalese bronze art makes it harder to find venues that can showcase bronze work, and so keeps the art form more

obscure and difficult to sell. Further research into this subject would hopefully include seeking funding from international NGOs dedicated to preserving art and culture that would be able to support struggling artists in new aesthetic endeavors. Another potentially interesting tie-in is the type and style of the urban art visible in Dakar, particularly the pieces commissioned by the government, and what effect that visibility has on the popularity of bronze sculpture among Senegalese buyers, as well as the connections between art ownership and wealth. Senegalese bronze art pieces are beautiful, complex, and part of a medium that has great potential to expand beyond the traditional and repetitive. Hopefully in the future, they will receive the respect and visibility that they deserve, as will the artists that create them.

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