

Fall 2010

Did You Make That? : Wood Carving, Apprenticeships, and Collective Art in Senegal

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Did You Make That? : Wood Carving, Apprenticeships, and Collective Art in Senegal

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Art

Africa, Senegal, Dakar

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Senegal Arts and Culture,
SIT Study Abroad, Fall 2010

To the community I come from for allowing me to partake in such a rare adventure, and the to the community that has, for four short months, taken me into their home and taught me that one is nothing without the others.

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Abstract:

Defining the term “artist” in one’s own culture is challenging and can be even more difficult in a foreign culture. In Senegal, the practice of wood sculpture can be both artistic and practical. Because of this, Senegalese artists who work with wood sculpture end up asserting their identity as artists through their collective actions. In this study, I follow the life and craft of a Senegalese wood sculptor, Serigne Mor Gueye, by making my own sculptures and listening to his anecdotes about life as an artist in hopes of discovering how the Senegalese define such ambiguous terms, “art” and “artist”.

Introduction:

Very few people can claim to completely understand the complicated construct that is art. In fact, artists themselves have a difficult time defining who they are, what constitutes a work of art, and who ideas belong to. My experience as an artist and student creating work in the United States, causes me to define an artist as someone who has their own ideas and the capacity to turn those ideas into visual material. This definition is vague, but still reflects the individuality expected and cherished by Western society. If my definition reflects my society, it is possible that each culture views their artists in a different manner than any other culture. The art world of Senegal is no exception.

As a student of art in the United States studying the culture and art of Senegal, I was interested in determining what life as an artist is like in a different culture and if that might explain how the Senegalese define “artist”.

My first goal in doing this study was to learn the art of wood sculpture. My interest in this topic stems from my own artistic background as an art student. I make my own sculptures in the United States in which I use wood, but I have never learned to carve it. I wanted to acquire a skill that I could add to my artistic practices, but also a skill that is unique to Senegal.

Along with acquiring the skill of wood sculpting, I also aimed to understand the life and practice of Senegalese wood sculptors. To accomplish this, I chose to analyze the information I gathered through a lens of being a foreigner and an apprentice. By exploring this topic, I hoped to better understand the system in which fine arts operate and how the Senegalese define “artist”.

To explore these questions, I chose to participate in an apprenticeship with Serigne Mor Gueye, a well-known Senegalese wood sculptor whose practice is housed at the Village des Arts in Dakar. Through my experience, I not only learned the actual techniques of wood sculpture

and created my own works, but I also looked into the structure, function and role of apprenticeship in teaching, practicing and defining wood sculpture.

This study will describe my time spent with Serigne in his studio and the techniques I learned as well as the significance and importance of the hands-on learning I did under his watch. I will also present my impression of the life of a Senegalese artist as I observed under my apprenticeship with Serigne and my interactions with him.

I will begin my discussion of apprenticeships and artistic practices by defining the three types of wood carvings that are made in Senegal today. Following that, I will discuss the basic structure of an apprenticeship in wood sculpture by looking at the relationship between apprentice and master and how my experience varied from that of Serigne's other apprentices. Within this framework, I will examine the idea of collaboration and artistic authorship between artists and their apprentices and artists and other artists. In exploring collaboration, I will explain my findings on the Senegalese views of artistic expression and motivation of apprentices who learn the trade.

Throughout my discussion of Senegalese wood sculpture, I will compare and contrast my experience and beliefs brought to the apprenticeship with what is practiced by the Senegalese. I will analyze what I found to be common themes prevalent not only in Senegalese sculpture, but more broadly in Senegalese society in general.

At present, Senegalese wood carvers produce two types of figurative wood sculpture. Not only are there artists creating works that grow from their own imagination—what I will refer to as fine arts—but there is also a large group of artisans creating sculptures to sell to tourists that exemplify traditional African sculpture: these works I will refer to as artisanal sculpture. Historically, however, Senegal lacks a tradition of figurative wood sculpture. The style of masks

and figurines that are sold today in marketplaces and airports in Senegal originated outside of the country. Traditionally, the only creators of wooden objects in Senegal were members of the *lawbe* caste, a group considered inferior to other members of society but whose role is the mastery of wood carving. This practice continues today as they carve domestic objects, tools for fishing and agriculture, and musical instruments. In more recent times, the craft has developed to incorporate the design and production of artisanal sculptures which are sold primarily to tourists (Sylla 1998, 119-120; Diop 1981, 49; Harney 2004, 157).

These everyday sculptural practices are still prominent in Senegal but in more contemporary times, a new practice of fine arts sculpture has appeared. These artists practice in a studio setting, sell their artworks to the general public, and exhibit their works in galleries or museums. The population of Senegalese sculptors, and more specifically wood sculptors, is significantly smaller than that of any other type of fine artist in Senegal; this is due to the fact that they face a number of problems that their counterparts do not encounter. First, sculpture has not been endorsed by the government with the same fervor as painting, theater, literature, or tapestry. Beginning in 1960 and continuing until 1980, Leopold Sedar Senghor, the first president of Senegal, endorsed a number of artistic practices through government funding. Sculpture was included in Senghor's art school, but other arts were emphasized over the three dimensional practice. Because of this, sculpture today began its foundations later than easel painting or tapestry. For this reason, sculpture in Senegal is less developed and less widely-practiced (Harney 2004, 156; Sylla 1998, 121).

Another reason the population of wood carvers is so small in comparison to other artists is that the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Dakar, a four-year art school that is the main body for training fine artists in Senegal, provides a less-than-desirable education in sculpture. The school has a

poorly-equipped program in sculpture and the average number of graduates hovers around six students a year. Additionally, both the school and practicing Senegalese sculptors lack a number of resources that make teaching and producing sculpture difficult.

This small population of artists is also restricted by the strict Wolof caste system which causes difficulties for non-caste individuals interested in pursuing a career in wood sculpture. In Wolof society, each family is associated with a caste which delineate the social rank of the individuals within each group. The caste of carvers, known as the *lawbe*, is one of the lowest classes of craftsmen, which are ranked under nobles. Individuals of the noble caste who wish to pursue wood sculpture find opposition from their families in changing occupations. Furthermore, the caste system attaches a stigma to the artist and their art that is associated with the production of practical, everyday items and tourist art. (Harney 2004, 158-159; Sylla 1998, 121-122; Diop 1981, 49).

Another challenge faced by fine artists working in wood sculpture is the denunciation by Islam of sculpted forms. In an interview with Serigne, I asked him to describe what he thought of as the biggest challenge facing sculptors today. He responded by saying that Islam's rejection of sculpted forms eliminated many Senegalese from the pool of potential buyers. Selling one's sculptural works in a culture that condemns the creation of sculpted forms proves difficult if there is little interest from outside buyers (Gueye 2010; Sylla 1998, 121)

Methodologies:

I conducted my study at the Village des Arts (VDA) in Grand Yoff, on the outskirts of Dakar, Senegal. The Village des Arts is a government-funded locale that houses the studios of more than fifty artists. The artists are mostly Senegalese however the VDA also has open

studios they rent out to visiting foreign artists for short- and long-term time periods. I chose to lodge at the VDA with two friends so that I would be close to the workshop where I would be working and therefore could better immerse myself in what was going on there.

To answer my objectives, I chose to follow the manner in which the Senegalese learn wood sculpture by participating in an apprenticeship with wood sculptor, Serigne Mor Gueye. Serigne is an accomplished artist who has shown his work widely within Senegal. Within the apprenticeship, I wanted to make my own sculptures but also observe the going-ons of the studio. I also interviewed Serigne, although our spontaneous conversation in the studio was more informative and interesting.

I chose an apprenticeship as my main method because of its holistic nature. I wanted to absorb every aspect of the life of this sculptor, and found intense observation and participation to be the best method by which to do that. Observation allowed me an opportunity to see parts of the daily life of an artist that I would not be exposed to through interviews only. My participation in the making of my own sculptures and the learning of techniques allowed me to acquire wood carving skills but also experience what a Senegalese artist experiences on an everyday basis.

These methods were limited by the fact that my information was provided by one single person. Although it was very effective to immerse myself in one artist's life, the limits of one person's views on a single subject definitely shade the information and experience I gathered. Additionally, the schedule of my apprenticeship did not allow me much time for contact with other sources. By immersing myself in a single medium with a single artist, I was denied the opportunity to do broad research.

My reception into the community of the Village des Arts was accepting and welcoming. Because the VDA houses a lot of visiting artists, I was received by the community at the Village with the acceptance offered to any other artist that came there to work. By living at the VDA, I quickly acquainted myself with the people who lived and worked there and was easily assimilated into the community.

Although I had a very close relationship with Serigne, I was, at first, received with more apprehension in his workshop than by the community as a whole. Because of the physical nature of the work, I was judged and treated based on my gender and outsider status—I was told that I couldn't carve like a girl; I needed to carve like a man. Other than that, I was regarded as a practicing artist who was working at the Village and other artists made inquiries about my work at home and school which helped me feel assimilated into the community.

Findings:

I: Wood Sculpture Techniques

An essential element of discovering how Senegalese learn and practice wood sculpture was exactly that: learning the craft. I created five sculptures during the twenty-two days I spent at Serigne's studio and although I did not personally do every step, I was around to observe every step of the process. I made two small figurines (see Appendix, Figures 1 & 2) both of the same design: a woman with a canary on her head and one in her hand. These figures were used to learn the techniques. After completing these sculptures, I created two small abstract sculptures (see Appendix, Figures 3 & 4). They are both voluminous sculptures with rounded forms. The third abstract sculpture (see Appendix, Figure 5) I created was larger, about five feet tall. This log was naturally curvy, so its original shape plays into the form I created.

I began my apprenticeship with a trip to the market where I bought wood by the kilogram. Households around Dakar burn the same type of wood for cooking that I used for my sculptures: *bois du veine* and *bois de dimbu*.

To begin sculpting the form, the outside layer of bark must first be removed. This is done by using a traditional wood sculpting tool, the *sowtah*. The *sowtah* I used were made by a blacksmith I visited on the first day of my study. They are a large metal blade with a flattened or curved head on one end; each is used for a different purpose. I ordered three flat-headed *sowtah* with heads ranging from one centimeter to three centimeters, and two rounded ones within the same range. The metal heads are then pounded into a wooden shaft, which acts as the handle to the tool.

To remove wood from the log, the *sowtah* must strike the log so that the blade hits at an angle nearly parallel to the wood. At first it was very difficult to strike the log with accuracy and force at the same time. Removing all of the bark to an even surface is important because if there are large dents in the wood, they can affect the overall form of the sculpture.

Once all of the bark is removed, a drawing is made with chalk on the outside of the form. The wood I used for my first two sculptures was rectangular, so I drew the front view of the female figure (see Appendix, Figure 1 & 2) only and left the back and sides clear. For my abstract pieces (see Appendix, Figures 3, 4, & 5), I drew on all sides of the log, as it was round and it was the nature of my abstract pieces to lack a front or back. In both cases, I drew where the outline of the forms would be, then marked the areas to be chopped away with an X. These lines were useful for the figurative sculptures to plan where forms would be before I started sculpting; however, for my abstract sculptures I found them to be less useful as I worked on the forms as I went along.

After all the chalk lines are drawn, the lines are marked on the wood with light taps of the *sowtah* so that the guiding lines are visible when the chalk wipes away. After the form is drawn, the carving of the form begins. To carve the forms I wanted, I would begin by chopping straight into the log along the line I had drawn. When this fissure was about a quarter-centimeter deep, I would chop at the opposite angle to remove the wood. This process changes for varying forms and becomes difficult if the sculpture involves convex areas, holes, small details or tight, enclosed areas. The creation of the form is, therefore, something to be experienced and practiced, as seeing in a three-dimensional plane and being able to manipulate such a large, awkward tool was one of the hardest parts of learning to sculpt wood. Not only was it physically tiring, but it also demanded difficult visualization skills.

After the form is created, the process of finishing the piece (here I will use the French word *finissions*) begins. First, the *raab*, a double-sided file with large teeth, is used to define the edges and smooth the surfaces of the sculpture. Following that, a knife is used to scrape off the texture left by the *raab*. Finally, three different grits of sandpaper are used to make the surface of the wood extremely smooth. The *finissions* are by far the most physically taxing part of making a wood sculpture. Each tool much be used correctly and effectively or else the next step will be very challenging and will show the errors made by the previous step. Along with this, these processes take an enormous amount of patience: I spent over eight hours sanding and using the knife on each sculpture.

After the sculpture has been sanded to its desired smoothness it is either mounted on a base or leveled so that it sits correctly. To make the base, I made a cut of wood; the size and thickness depended on the size of the sculpture. The piece of wood was then finished in the

same manner as the sculptures. Then, the outline of the bottom of the sculpture was traced onto the stand and a hole was made in that shape with a hammer and chisel.

To attach the two pieces, glue was placed in the hole and the sculpture was positioned with the use of small wood bits to fill in the gaps between the sculpture and the side of the hole. The remaining space was filled with a mixture of glue and sawdust which was then covered with more sawdust. When the glue was dry, the *raab*, knife, and sandpaper were used once again to smooth the seam between the sculpture and the stand. Finally, the sculpture was finished with a coat of neutral shoe polish and a signature carved into the base.

II: Defining “Art”

Although I practiced wood sculpture under the label of fine arts, the majority of wood sculpture in Senegal is not of that variety. Through my discussions with Serigne, I have been able to construct three categories of sculpture that are produced by wood sculptors in Senegal.

The category which I practiced with Serigne in his studio can be categorized under the label of fine arts. Wood sculpture as fine art is, for the purpose of this study, carvings that do not satisfy a functional purpose and reflect the creative intent, ideas, and imagination of the carver. The population of fine artists makes up only a small part of the entire population of wood carvers in Senegal. As mentioned in the background research of this study, there are a number of reasons for this. Art schools are poorly equipped to teach sculpture; there is, historically, no sculptural tradition in Senegal; plus, sculpture is considered taboo under the pillars of Islam. For these reasons, fine arts sculptures are bought most frequently by expatriates, visitors and tourists, and wealthy Senegalese, although the market is narrower than that of artisanal sculpture because sculptures considered to be “artworks” tend to be more expensive than tourist art.

Conversely, artisanal sculptures—a second type of wood sculpture practiced in Senegal—are far more widely crafted as they are more economically fruitful. Widely regarded as tourist art, these products are often a more convenient size, more “traditionally African”, and more widely available. Artisanal sculptors are taught how to create certain forms rather than how to work with a material and are proficient at creating a given form in a record amount of time. These sculptures are repeated forms and subjects and do not require a lot of imagination or creativity however, producing tourist carvings is a comparatively steadier job than being a fine artist working in wood sculpture.

Even farther from carvers who practice figurative sculpture are carvers who make practical domestic objects such as mortars and pestles. These craftsmen are frequently people from the *lawbe* caste who pass their knowledge down from family members. They create objects that Senegalese people use on an everyday basis; for this reason, this type of wood carving is considered a profession that has a steady income and clientele.

Although there are different uses for wood carving in Senegal, the manner of learning such a craft does not differ greatly among the three. The Ecole des Beaux Arts in Dakar does not teach wood sculpture as part of its sculpture curriculum; therefore, any artist who wants to work with wood must do an apprenticeship. There is some variance within this structure—for example, an carver who makes domestic objects would learn to make mortars and pestles instead of learning how to mount a sculpture—but they follow a similar model of following the lead of a master artist and they learn the same techniques that I learned in my apprenticeship.

III. Apprenticeships and Defining “Artist”.

Working in Serigne’s workshop, I was able to observe this structure while at the same time participate in an apprenticeship of my own. This situation allowed me numerous opportunities to compare my experience with the experience of Serigne’s current apprentice, Jupiter Baba. I found that my identity as a student of art in the United States shaded my experience and acceptance of the apprenticeship system. Also, my gender, status as an outsider, time restraints, and motivation made my experience very different from Jupiter’s or any other apprentice’s experience.

I was able to observe the workings of apprenticeships through observation of Jupiter and Serigne, but also through listening to Serigne explain the history of other apprentices, his own apprenticeship, and how he goes about teaching his art to others.

Jupiter’s role in the workshop was limited to whatever Serigne needed done. For the most part, Jupiter did *finissions*, mounted works, ran errands, and helped Serigne with projects that required two people. He has been working under Serigne for about six months but Serigne noted that he still would not be able to carve a sculpture. Because most of his work is concentrated on finishing pieces, he has not yet learned to carve. Serigne also had another apprentice when he first began his own art practice in 2003. This apprentice was taught in the same way that Jupiter was taught but left Serigne’s workshop before he had learned how to sculpt. Today, this apprentice finishes pieces for other sculptors but does not make his own sculptures.

Serigne learned his trade in an apprenticeship with his older brother, Tafser Momar Gueye, a well-known wood sculptor. He began by learning *finissions* and working on his brother’s sculptures. Serigne, however, grew fascinated with the art form and decided to try it

for himself before his brother permitted him to. He was praised for his own style in these works and eventually left Tafser's workshop to start his own practice with another brother. In discussions with Serigne, he told me that he and the brother who worked under Tafser were never given the chance to make their own works in his studio, but that Serigne tried the craft because he thought he could do just as well as his brother.

My apprenticeship was different from these examples as my circumstances and identity altered what I was taught and how limited I was in regard to artistic expression. For one, my education as an artist in the United States—the identity that education has imposed upon me—and the time constraints of my project changed the structure of my apprenticeship with Serigne. Instead of mastering *finissions* then learning how to sculpt, I did the opposite. On my first day of work, I began to sculpt my first sculpture; I learned *finissions* almost three days later. My gender also changed what was expected of me, and even what I was allowed to do. Serigne would repeatedly tell me that, were I Senegalese, I would be the one of few female sculptors. He would also stress how physically difficult the process was and that I needed to carve like a man, not like a woman.

I found the greatest different between my experience in an apprenticeship and the experience of Senegalese youth in apprenticeships was the difference in our motivation. My reason for pursuing an apprenticeship with a wood sculptor was to learn a new practice to apply to my own art-making and absorb anything I could about being a fine artist in Senegal. In my work with Serigne, my motivation to make art was evident and it made Serigne very pleased to be working with me. He regularly made comparisons between me and his Senegalese apprentices, saying that I had imagination and voluntary drive, where the others had not.

I came to realize that the majority of apprentices are not driven by a desire to make art but instead by a wish to acquire a skill that will aide them in finding a job in the future. Serigne's first apprentice falls under this category, as he did not continue to learn how to sculpt and instead found a steady job doing *finissions*. This is a widely acceptable thing to do, as wood sculpture is not merely viewed as an art form in Senegal. Wood sculpture is a useful practice within Senegalese society and the people who chose to learn it are rarely motivated by artistic expression; in the majority of situations, it is regarded purely as a way to make a living.

During the time I spent with Jupiter, I asked him his reasons for pursuing an education in wood sculpture and what he planned to do with his skill when he left Serigne's workshop. He simply told me that he wanted to learn to carve wood to have the skill and added with uncertainty that perhaps he would make guitars when he became experienced enough. I asked the same question to Serigne, who thought that Jupiter would become an artist, although Serigne doubted that Jupiter's was motivated by artistic interest.

Regardless, there is a small population of students from the Ecole des Beaux Arts who seek out apprenticeship in order to learn wood sculpting, a technique that is not taught at art school. These students have a different motivation than those interested in becoming artisanal or practical sculptors—they have already decided to pursue the life of a fine artist and now need the skills to build or create what they have planned out on paper.

This disparity between my own motivations and the motivations of other sculptors in Senegal challenged my personal belief that sculptors must have a certain type of inspiration. In Serigne's case, he was not motivated by individual expression before he learned to sculpt but found that inspiration within himself as he learned the skill. Others, like the fine arts students,

come into an apprenticeship with a desire to learn a trade so that they can express their artistic ideas.

Although my apprenticeship was significantly different than the apprenticeship of a Senegalese apprentice, it was also similar to the traditional model in various ways. I learned how to sculpt wood under the watch of a single artist and I was regarded as inexperienced when I began. As I was a beginner, I was treated as one. The piece I was working on was regularly taken away from me to be improved or corrected. The subject of my first two sculptures was also decided for me and Serigne himself even drew the form. Because I was very new to the process, Serigne ended up correcting a lot of my forms and doing difficult parts for me. I did not ask him to do this; it was merely a natural way for him to teach. I also noticed that this is how Serigne would teach Jupiter—if he was doing something incorrectly, Serigne would take over. In this way, I believe the sculptures I produced during my stay at the Village des Arts were almost as telling of Serigne's practice as of my own artistic intentions.

This was a very challenging element of the apprenticeship for me. My education in art in the United States has ingrained me with the belief that art should be crafted by a single individual. During the first few days of working with Serigne and growing frustrated with the fact that someone else was imposing their style on me, I noted in my journal: “[I] wonder whether, or how, an apprenticeship like this ever works out. If I never try to make the arms [of the woman], I'll never fail and never learn.” In reflecting on this reaction, I realized that it is because of my Western art education that I found Serigne's guidance so frustrating. I am used to struggling with a process, not having things done for me.

After I had finished my first figurine of the woman, I was asked by another artist at the Village if I had made the sculpture. In my mind, I had not made it because Serigne had

intervened in my work, but Serigne answered the question for me by affirming my authorship of the sculpture. My second sculpture, a copy of the first—which I made almost entirely myself—made me realize that this system of teaching is successful in educating: I was able to make a form that I couldn't three days earlier.

I noticed that this style of teaching was popular among other artists at the Village, even though in the Western mind it calls into question the idea of shared artistic authorship. Apprentices who work under a master are not recognized as one of the collaborating artists on pieces they finish and when an apprentice leaves the watch of their master there can be issues of authorship as well. For example, Serigne, who left his brother's practice, was accused of stealing his brother's style. However, because of the communal nature of an apprenticeship, it only seems natural that their works would be similar, as Serigne learned his craft from his brother.

There were multiple other instances of shared artistic authorship among artists that I came across in talking with Serigne. He often collaborates with other artists; for example, he has made sculptures for Séa Diallo, a well-known glass painter at the Village des Arts. Séa draws a sculpture that he would like made and pays Serigne to create the form. Séa then adds any additions he wants before exhibiting the piece and his own artwork. This practice is judged as appropriate on both sides, and Serigne does not find that he is being denied credit for his work.

When I first heard of this situation between Serigne and Séa, I thought of Séa as dishonest in his manner of working. This significantly challenged my notion of what it means to be the artist of an artwork. Although the problem of someone other than the artist fabricating a work exists in Western art history, this was still unsettling for me because neither party found it to be controversial. Yet, I found that collaborative artworks not labeled as such are common and

accepted ways of producing work. If one person has an idea but does not have the skills, they can rely on the community around them to help them create their artwork.

In another example, Serigne talked about students from the fine arts school who bring a drawing to be made into a sculpture. Serigne didn't comment on the unfairness of such a project, because to him it is not dishonest. Instead, he finds the situation a pity because these students can't learn these techniques in school.

Even in my own experience as an apprentice I felt my idea of artistic authorship being challenged. I learned the craft from Serigne and in his style, I used his expertise when I needed help with a form, and he made adjustments to my pieces without deliberately asking me. Yet, in the end, these pieces are mine. I was the one who had come up with the idea and I was the one who spent the most time on the pieces. When I continue my work with wood sculpture in the United States, my pieces will not just be the products of my individual skill, but instead a reflection on my entire experience with Serigne. I feel that I owe recognition to Serigne because, even though I view art as an individual pursuit and the result of the intentions of a single person, my education and inspiration must have been generated outside of myself.

Analysis:

The evidence I collected through observation and through participation in wood sculpture has led me to the accumulation of a large body of work that speaks of multiple themes within the practice of wood sculpture and Senegalese sculpture as a whole.

The clearest theme that appeared to me through my own production of sculptures was the patience, physical strength, and determination it takes to be a wood sculptor. The work is truly tiring, both mentally and physically. Anyone who works on wood sculpture attests to the fact

that it is hard work and numerous times I had outsiders mention the difficulty of the work I was doing. The perseverance that it takes to work with such a craft exemplifies the Wolof value of *muñ*. *Muñ* can be described as patience, tolerance, and endurance in the face of adversity and is repeatedly seen in the work of wood sculptors not only in their physical efforts, but also in their perseverance in the face of opposition to the practice of sculpture. In Senegal, the practice of sculpture shaded by its prohibition by Islam, the lack of resources for artists, the association with tourist art, and the lack of support from the community. However, sculptors persist in what they do in order to uphold their integrity and pursue their artistic interests.

Along similar lines is a common acceptance of ambiguity. Fine artist wood sculptors must accept an ambiguity of the relationship between their art and artisanal figurines. Some fine artists create art tailored to tourists on the side to fund their more personal pieces. By producing both of these products, the artist creates an identity that exists in the realm of artisanal and fine arts sculpture. Because of the intertwined relationship between artisanal and fine arts sculpture, fine artists must deal with the ambiguity of the identity of their works.

This ambiguity, however, does not cross over into the realm of artistic authorship. It seems that, even though a number of people may work on a single artwork, to the Senegalese, it is still clear who the artist is. This in itself is telling of the way Senegalese artists view their community and the skills held by members of that community. Séa and Serigne don't regard their work together as dishonest; instead, they view it as collaboration. My original reaction to this collaboration was affected by my upbringing in an individual society, and Séa and Serigne's reaction was likely affected by their view of art as a communal practice.

Sharing skills does not exist in the art world I know because in Western art practices, the artist is thought to be a wielder of all skills, and if they aren't, they work in a single medium. In

Senegal, individual skills are valued within the context of the community. The Senegalese seem to view the artist not as a single entity, but as a piece of a functioning community working towards a common goal.

The prevalence of a communal society is also evidence in the way in which knowledge is passed to students of wood sculpture. Knowledge of a craft is transmitted through apprenticeships, but the master's style and the cultural significance it brings with it are transmitted as well. This unavoidable sharing of styles and skills is accepted and even encouraged in such instances as artisanal sculpture.

Conclusion:

Over the course of this study, I examined the life of a Senegalese artist to find out how he made his works but also to understand how he is defined as an artist in his community. In exploring these realms, I was able to learn the craft of wood carving by creating my own works under the guidance of a practicing artist. I was also able to observe and participate in the life of this artist to gain knowledge of how they define themselves in their community and how their community defines them.

Many common themes appeared among the information I gathered. First, I was surprised by the physical strength and patience that it took to complete my sculptures. This was a common theme that ran through Serigne's practice as well. Senegalese sculptors face many challenges that they must persevere through, practicing the quality of *muñ* that is a recognized value in Senegalese culture. Not only that, but wood sculptors must deal with the ambiguity of defining sculpture in Senegalese society. In this way, the patience and tolerance in the practice of Senegalese wood sculpture exemplifies the Senegalese value of working with what you have.

The practice of wood sculptors in Senegal also highlights the way in which art is held as a communal practice. In the Western eye, this seems counter to the definition of an artist as an individual with individual thoughts. The art practiced in Senegal does not adhere to this idea but instead latches to the idea that the artist is an individual with an identity that originates from the community. This difference in views doesn't mean that either definition of "artist" is right or wrong, it merely points to the possibility that art is not, at its core, a reflection of an individual, but instead a reflection of an entire society.

In discovering this, it is relevant to point out that knowing the identity of art and artists in another culture can aide in the understanding of the art of another culture. In this way, I believe that my research and experience will help me to discover the role of my community in my own artwork and the artwork of my colleagues. This evidence could be further supported by an exploration into the subject matter of Senegalese artists or the involvement of a longer, truer wood sculpture apprenticeship, both of which might provide insight into the role of community in the world of Senegalese art. My understanding of my own definition of art, however, will only become clearer by continuing to strive for an understanding of the relationship between my identity as an individual and my identity as a member of a whole.

Glossary

finissions: all the processes included in finishing a wood sculpture; includes the use of the *raab*, the knife, and three grits of sandpaper.

lawbe: A caste group in Wolof society that includes all craftsmen that work with wood.

muñ: Wolof word and Senegalese value exemplifying patience, perseverance, and tolerance.

raab: tool used by wood sculptors to smooth harsh edges made by the *sowtah*. It is a large file 12 inches in length and has two sides: one flat and one round. Both sides are covered in large teeth.

sowtah: the traditional tool used by wood carvers to cut away parts of the wood and bring out a form. It is a slightly curved piece of metal that is flattened or curved at one end and attached to a handle on the other.

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