

# Malick Sidibé

## receives the Hasselblad Foundation International Award in Photography, 2003

The Erna and Victor Hasselblad Foundation has selected Malian photographer Malick Sidibé as the winner of the 2003 Hasselblad Foundation International Award in Photography. The prize, consisting of SEK 500,000 and a gold medal, will be presented at a ceremony held in Göteborg, Sweden, on October 25, 2003. A new exhibition of Malick Sidibé's work, curated and organized by the Hasselblad Center, will be opened in conjunction with the ceremony.

The Foundation's decision to award the 2003 prize to Malick Sidibé was motivated with the following statement:

*Malick Sidibé has documented an important period of West African history with great feeling, enthusiasm and commitment. In his portraits and documentary photography, he has uniquely captured the atmosphere and vitality of an African capital in a period of great effervescence. From the very beginnings of the postcolonial period, he has been a privileged witness to a period of tremendous, euphoric cultural change. As a young but already well-reputed photographer, Malick Sidibé captured a time of paradigm shift and youthful insouciance, curiosity about the rest of the world, pride, and confidence in the future. The work of Malick Sidibé, largely devoted to Malian youth in the 1950s and 60s, is a unique memoir and testimony. These photographs, originally intended for an African audience, are now available for the admiration of all.*

This year's prize committee, which submitted its proposal to the Foundation's board of directors, comprised:

Mr. Sune Nordgren (chairman) director, BALTIC, Gateshead, England, Mr. Salah Hassan, professor and curator, Cornell University, Ithaca, USA, Mr. Hans Hedberg, professor, Göteborg University, Göteborg, Sweden, Mr. Hou Hanru, curator, Paris, France, and Mr. Filippo Maggia, curator, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, Italy.

Malick Sidibé was born in 1936 in Soloba in southern French Sudan (now Mali). His drawing ability was noted at an early age, which resulted in his being accepted for an advanced artistic education in Bamako, where he moved in 1952 to study at the School for Sudanese Arts (now the National Institute of Art). He graduated in jewelry production in 1955. French photographer Gérard Guillat had heard about his drawing skills and asked him to do the interior design for his studio 'Photo Service'. Later he was taken on as an apprentice by Gérard Guillat and had the opportunity to learn the basic skills of studio photography, after which he began taking portraits of African customers. Since then, Malick Sidibé has been dedicated to photography. He has divided his time between portrait photography and documentary photography (both public and private assignments). In 1962, he opened his own 'Studio Malick' in eastern Bamako and he is still working there.

Until the 1940s, Africans traditionally avoided being photographed, especially in the rural areas. Many people believed the photographer could see them nude through his lens, which would result in the loss of their souls. Thanks to indigenous photographers like Malick Sidibé, photography has since become accepted throughout Africa.

Over a period of several decades of work in his studio, Malick Sidibé has "snapped portraits" of everyone who is anyone in Bamako, capturing their expressions and clothing, and working in harmony and understanding with his models. His portraits and documentary photos now bear witness to the cultural and social development of post-colonial Mali. In them, we see joy, hope, beauty and power. These are psychologically captivating images as well.

Sidibé's early portraits are solemn and serene in the extreme. Gradually, he began to break with traditional portrait photography and photographic convention. The approach he developed reflected the spirit of the times, the independence and youth movements of the 1960s.

Malick Sidibé is famous for his documentation of social life in Bamako from the end of the 1950s to the mid-1970s. He has documented the weddings, celebrations, sports events and recreational activities. He liaised with the young people, and gradually he became the self-evident "photographing guest" at their parties. His incomparable work made him the individual in his time who was able to portray young people at leisure.

The thousands of photographs in which Sidibé documented postcolonial Africa provide us with a description of a very special and important period in history, both political and cultural. His amazing work reflects significant social change, and the spirit of a proud

people, confident about their future of their nation. It is also closely linked to Malian history and society.

During the 1980s, when color photography made its appearance, along with one-hour developing and inexpensive photo services, Malick Sidibé devoted an increasing amount of time to camera repairs. However 'Studio Malick' remained an active portrait studio and an important local meeting place in Bamako, where Sidibé's friends and colleagues could discuss local events and politics over a glass of tea. As African photography came into its own, 'Studio Malick' was also revitalized. Today people are once again queuing to have their portraits taken there. Today, Malick Sidibé also does both black and white and color photography for the French fashion magazines *Vogue*, *Elle*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Double*.

Together with his colleague Seydou Keïta, Malick Sidibé was a guest of honor at the first 'Rencontres Photographiques de Bamako' in 1994. Sidibé's first major retrospective was presented at the Fondation Cartier in Paris in 1995. Since then, he has attained large-scale recognition outside Africa and his work has been shown in solo exhibitions at major art museums and photography centers all over the world. In 1998, a comprehensive monograph, *Malick Sidibé*, compiled by André Magnin, Paris, was published by Scalo Verlag.

## The Erna and Victor Hasselblad Foundation

The Erna and Victor Hasselblad Foundation was instituted by a bequest from Erna and Victor Hasselblad. The purpose of the Foundation is to promote scientific education and research in the natural sciences and photography. A number of projects are granted funds annually, amounting to approximately SEK 16 million. One of the awards, the annual international award for outstanding achievement in photography, which is being given this year to Malick Sidibé, has come to attract a great deal of media attention.

In 1989, the Foundation opened the Erna and Victor Hasselblad Photographic Center (the Hasselblad Center) in Göteborg, Sweden. The Center maintains an ongoing exhibition and lecture program. In January 1996, the new exhibition hall housed within the Göteborg Museum of Art was inaugurated. A photographic research and reference library, open to researchers and students, is in the process of being established, as is a collection of photographs including photos by all the Hasselblad Award winners and others. The exhibit of Malick Sidibé's work to be opened on the occasion of the award ceremony on October 25, 2003 will be organized by the Hasselblad Center.

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