

# J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere

J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere est né à Ojomu Emai au Nigéria.

À l'âge de dix-neuf ans, il achète un modeste appareil Brownie D. sur les conseils d'un voisin qui lui apprend les rudiments de la photographie. Son talent lui vaut d'être sollicité par la West Africa Publicity pour laquelle il travaillera à plein temps de 1963 à 1975, date à laquelle il installe son studio *Foto Ojeikere*. Lors d'un festival en 1968, il prend, toujours en noir et blanc au Rolleiflex 6x6, ses premières photographies consacrées à la culture nigériane. Dès lors et pendant quarante ans, il poursuit dans tout le pays ses recherches organisées par thèmes. *Hairstyles*, riche de près de mille clichés, est le plus considérable et le plus abouti. Ojeikere photographie les coiffures des femmes nigérianes chaque jour dans la rue, au bureau, dans les fêtes, de façon systématique, de dos, parfois de profil et plus rarement de face. Son œuvre constitue par delà le projet esthétique, un patrimoine unique à la fois anthropologique, ethnographique et documentaire.

« Dans un sens, *Hairstyles* est une œuvre collective. La coiffeuse exerce tout son talent, la cliente choisit sa coiffure pour elle-même et c'est l'admiration que j'ai pour ces coiffures qui m'a conduit à les photographier... La durée, la méthode, la structure et mon obsession contribuent à l'essence même de ce travail. Il trouve naturellement sa place dans la photographie, la mode, l'ethnographie et franchement tout simplement dans l'art. »<sup>1</sup>

He is born in 1930 in the western part of Nigeria. One of his cousins advises him to buy a camera and teaches him what he needs to know. In his young days Ojeikere incessantly writes the Ministry Of Information, asking them to hire him as an "assistant in the dark room". His tenacity is rewarded when in 1961 the first television station is founded.

At the eve of the decolonisation he is contacted by the West African Publicity agency where he pays his dues; soon after that he opens his own studio "Foto Ojeikere". In 1967 he becomes an active member of the Nigeria Art Council, an organisation in charge of organising a festival of visual and living arts. This is an

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<sup>1</sup> Citation extraite du livre "JD 'Okhai Ojeikere photographs", André Magnin, éd Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain & Scalo, 2000

opportunity for Ojeikere to devote himself to Nigerian culture, to which he is deeply attached.

"Hairstyles" will be his most known collection, involving almost 1000 different hairstyles that give an image of the African woman. He finds these "sculptures for a day" on the street, at a marriage or at work.

« My work has two purposes. The first is to document examples of hairstyles, which I feel are an art form in themselves. One can see an element of ethnography in this. The second purpose is an aesthetic project. I have formed a collection of hairstyles in which the photographs are linked together as a whole. In a way, it's a collective endeavor. The hairstyles are created by one person, worn by another and photographed by a third person. The hairstylist uses all of her talent in her work, the customer chooses her hairstyle for herself and it's my admiration for hairstyles that drove me to photograph them. We put into our work all of our personality ; each of us is searching for beauty (...) The length, method, structure and my obsession contribute to the essence of my work. My work naturally finds its place in photography, in fashion, in ethnography, and, frankly, quite simply in art. »<sup>2</sup>

Opening Saturday 28 January from noon to 7 pm

Exhibition from 31.01 to 24.03.12

With the collaboration of André Magnin, Paris & Courtesy Fifty One Fine Art Photography, Antwerp

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Tuesday – Saturday from 2 pm to 6 pm

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<sup>2</sup> [ibid.](#)