I am writing this endorsement to Michael’s volume presenting his journey of the past fifteen years with a great sense of pride but also with apprehension.

On one hand I am proud that the beauty and stature of my forefathers art will be shared with the world. Some of the works presented here were created by Baga masters which were my father’s bigger brothers ( a term we use for respect & fidelity rather then direct family line ), these artists guidance and everyday presence is part of me. But their works were created for a complete different audience then the one meeting them today.

They were conceived to serve their community, to act as a conduit between us and our ancestors, our history and most important between us as individuals and the guardian spirits. And as such they protected and held our community intact and were responsible for it’s members well-being.

The moment a work of art was delivered by the artist to the client who commissioned it, it was immediately disassociated with it’s worldly creator. Evolved from an object to an entity.

the masters were known to all, regarded as pillars of their communities, respected and loved. Which in a society with no materials assets is everything.

Today this world is long gone.

The proverbs and morals that used to guide our everyday life are forgotten,

Their audience was dragged into a thinner and much poorer world of the present tense, here and now, expelled from the enchanted woods, from the beauty of life in which the ancestors and forest spirits were always present.

I was born in 1950 in KanKan, Guinea.

My father El Hadj laminates Sidime had a gold & silver workshop, he gathered around him wood masters to answer the need of the communities around Kankan. My father became especially known after supplying the medals decorating the KanKan bridge built by the French in 1951.

My most cherished memories are sitting at his feet and sharpening his tools.

My world changed when at around 10, my father died, and the French left, commissions became scarce, I followed my elder brother footsteps to the capital Conakry and there started to work in a Studio responsible to supply the regime with statues and gifts needed for political etiquette.

There I met my Master and mentor Arman Bangoura who introduced me to the beauty and wealth of Baga Art. The times were the hay days of sekou Toure’s socialist revolution, we all sensed that we are living in historical times, expeditions were arranged , scenery to production of the revolutionary African Ballet were produced and we all were carried in the zeal of setting up a new and just society.

I was sent to Sierra Leone and to Liberia to better understand and study the various societies establishing friendships lasting till today.

When the Regime changed with the accent of Lancane Conte to the presidency, I was chosen to represent Guinea in international exhibitions in Lagos,Hanover & New York.

Being affluent in many carving styles I produced the pontiff jean poul the second bast which was presented to him during his visit to Conakry in 1992.

Since then producing catholic liturgical scenes for the Guinea’s Christian communities has been a venue i am constantly being associated with.

more then a decade ago I was introduced to architect Michael Weiss by my best protege’s Abou Kauroma, and since then guided him in his journey. Michael proved to be a quick student with an inquisitive eye accompanied by a craftsman hand. gradually his sense of mission in gathering and documenting the last echoes of our ancestors footprints evolved. and I proudly joined his various endeavors, such as recording the Baga fables which I joyfully illustrated. And documenting the histories of the Masters who stood behind our ancestors images.

I hope that this volume will shed light on our heritage, and will enable a wider audience’s to transcend cultural barriers and pre sieve the beauty, wisdom, moral and faith embedded in each of them.

Yours

Nkai Sidime

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