



European
Dancehouse
Network

EDN ATELIER: MEETING GROUNDS

summary

Text by Alexandra Tindall

This report highlights the focal points of the EDN Atelier **Meeting Grounds** organised organized in close co-operation between EDN, Mercat de les Flors casa de la dansa and Graner creation center for dance and live arts, in the context of Grec festival of Barcelona. For further information, please contact info@ednetwork.eu.

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Conference by Raw Material Company

The event opened with a conference presented by Fatima Bintou Rassoul Sy, who contextualised Raw Material Company in Dakar and the foundation of Senegal's contemporary art scene. She highlighted the presidency of Léopold Sédar Senghor and the establishment of several key cultural institutions and events in Dakar (such as the Biennale of Contemporary African Art and the Laboratoire Agit'Art) that have given the city a special ambience on the African continent.

Raw Material is a centre for art, knowledge and society. Its rich and varied programme includes:

- RAW base: a specialist library on Black contemporary art.
- The Ker Issa residency programme for local and international artists.
- The Condition Report symposiums centred on Diaspora practitioners.
- RAW Académie: an experimental residential programme.
- Local engagement events, such as Fridays @RAW, vox-ARTIS, Parlons sénégalaiseries, RAW Ciné-club, and Citéologies.
- The Morning After The Crisis, a podcast reflecting on the aftermath of the pandemic.
- A publishing arm for critical reflections on contemporary art and topics in Dakar and Senegal.

Panel 1: Sustainability, visibility, adaptability

This event's first panel was presented by Dulcie Abrahams Altass of Raw Material Company, who invited a discussion on the scale of change, what 'sustainability' means for artists and institutions, and the tension between sustainability and adaptability.

A key theme among the panellists was public space and how they use it to engage with their communities. For Fatou Cissé, public space is essential for encouraging participation in the realisation of art and engagement between artist and community and is a setting for education.

In discussions of sustainability, the panellists talked about how their practices and institutions had to undergo adaption to achieve expression. Bruno Leitão spoke about the need to put aside political views and ideology in order to secure financing for artists' work. Salim M'ze Hamad also spoke about the need to adapt his work to fit Francophone criteria as a result of his company's reliance on funding from the French government. For Fatou Cissé, she sees adaptation in terms of achieving visibility for her work according to the space and conditions available.

A call for solidarity and alliance across creators and institutions emerged from the discussion, with Gabriel Panaibra citing an example of collaboration between Southern African artists amidst pandemic restrictions. The panellists also exchanged on how they had maintained relationships and connections

during the pandemic through virtual channels, with Gabriel Panaibra commenting that the absence of the burden of physical displacement had been positive for such an under-funded sector. Bruno Leitão agreed that the pandemic had forced them to refocus their attention away from travel to the work itself. The panel closed with reflections on how sustainability implies a critical look at history and change, and how notions of tradition and aesthetics are merely tools for making art, rather than the focal point.

Panel 2: Gathering, community, animism

The second panel was presented by Qudus Onikeku, who launched the discussion with the themes of community and gathering. A common thread among the panellists was the inextricable link between the two, and the interpretation of gathering as not only a physical event but a meeting of minds and practice. With contrast to the connected notion of community and gathering on the one hand, Qudus Onikeku reflected on the separation between artist and community in Europe on the other. He cited his foundation of the Afro/Parisian Network in Paris, a non-hierarchical community of artists and audience, as a response to the culture's individualistic approach to being an artist.

The panellists reflected on their own connections to animism, from early childhood to their artistic practice today. As a practising sangoma and artist, Albert Ibokwe Khoza spoke about how his practice is innately animist, using onflow to produce work that flows directly from his ancestors and through his body, to bring together art and healing. For Qudus Onikeku, animism is about bringing life to inanimate objects, which means the practice is intrinsic to all types of art and artist.

The non-alignment of the panellists' work with traditional performance spaces was a recurring theme. Albert Ibokwe Khoza commented that this non-alignment has led him to move away from the theatre to pursue different types of spaces and audiences. Aïda Colmenero Díaz concurred that finding the right space for Africa Moment had been a problem too, as the categorised spaces for music, theatre and dance do not align with her multidisciplinary work. She believes that an artist's work should not adapt to the space but enter into a dialogue with it.

In a discussion on interactions with their communities, the panellists spoke about using memory and emotion as a way into expression through dance. Qudus Onikeku described using his performances to trigger body memory, both in active performers and passive audience members. Albert Ibokwe Khoza spoke about holding a mirror up to his audience by confronting them with familiar images in a new context, or by presenting private acts on stage.

Finally, Nelisiwe Xaba raised the question of reconciling creating art with the economics of running a centre. Qudus Onikeku spoke about his current initiative, which seeks to generate its own funds. For him, non-mainstream initiatives should return to the simple principle of creating spaces and inviting people to join them.

Panel 3: Trauma, memory, repair, identity

The event's final panel was hosted by Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja, who opened the session with a reflection on colonial archives and bodily archives as stores of trauma. The other panellists responded to this theme with examples of personal trauma, community trauma, and generational trauma, all of which are archived within their bodies and carried through their lives. They also discussed the complexity of their bodies as being both oppressed and implicated in colonialism.

Moya Michel raised the topic of decolonising the mindset in the context of European dance training conventions and the white gaze. The panel questioned the language and tools required by artists to speak about recovery, which led to a discussion of self-authorisation, illustrated by Ana Pi through the gesture of raising and rolling her shoulders. This idea was understood as stubbornness, but also as finding joy and care in reactions to trauma.

The theme of fire as a response to trauma emerged in the discussion. Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja spoke of fire as an archive of trauma and healing and António Tavares introduced the idea of a circle, which was taken to symbolise both the reflective and forward-looking nature of trauma response.

A common thread through the panel was the interconnection between the personal and the communal, between global and personal traumas. The panel's main themes spoke of using transgression to break expectations put on artists, and finding care and joy, as well as criticism, in discussion.