

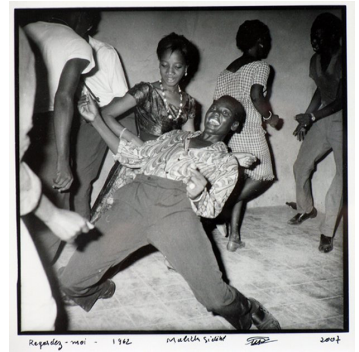
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Malian photographer Malick Sidibé dies aged 80

Photography world pays tribute to the 'Eye of Bamako' and his dynamic black-and-white images of 1960s pop culture after Malian independence

By Nancy Groves
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Malick Sidibé, the Malian photographer who chronicled his country's burgeoning pop culture in the years after independence, has died at the age of 80.

Sidibé's dynamic black-and-white shots captured the energy, hope and nightlife of a generation of young Africans across two decades of social, cultural and political change.

The photographer's nephew Oumar Sidibé confirmed his uncle's death on Friday, saying he had been ill for some time but did not give details of when he died.

"It's a great loss for Mali," said the country's culture minister N'Diaye Ramatoulaye Diallo.

"He was part of our cultural heritage. The whole of Mali is in mourning."

Born in what was then French Sudan in 1936 (or 1935; in interviews he could never remember which), Sidibé only started school at 10, when he could be spared from shepherding duties by his father. He became known among his classmates and teachers as an accomplished artist, and in 1952 won a place at the École des Artisans Soudanais in Bamako.

Sidibé's archive from those years totals tens of thousands of negatives, and his photographs are now held in collections across the world, including New York's Museum of Modern Art and the Getty Museum in California.

In 2007, he became the first photographer – and the first African – to be awarded the Golden Lion lifetime achievement award at the Venice Biennale.

"No African artist has done more to enhance photography's stature in the region, contribute to its history, enrich its image archive or increase our awareness of the textures and transformations of African culture in the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st than Malick Sidibé," said critic and curator Robert Storr of his achievements.

Sidibé was a World Press Photo winner in 2010 for a fashion shoot commissioned by the New York Times. "We're saddened to hear of Malick Sidibé's passing," tweeted the organisation, as other photographers and artists also paid tribute to Mali's master.

In a Guardian interview, also in 2010, Sidibé said a good photographer needed the "talent to observe, and to know what you want" but also to be sympathique, or friendly. "I believe with my heart and soul in the power of the image, but you also have to be sociable. I'm lucky. It's in my nature," he said.

"It's a world, someone's face. When I capture it, I see the future of the world."