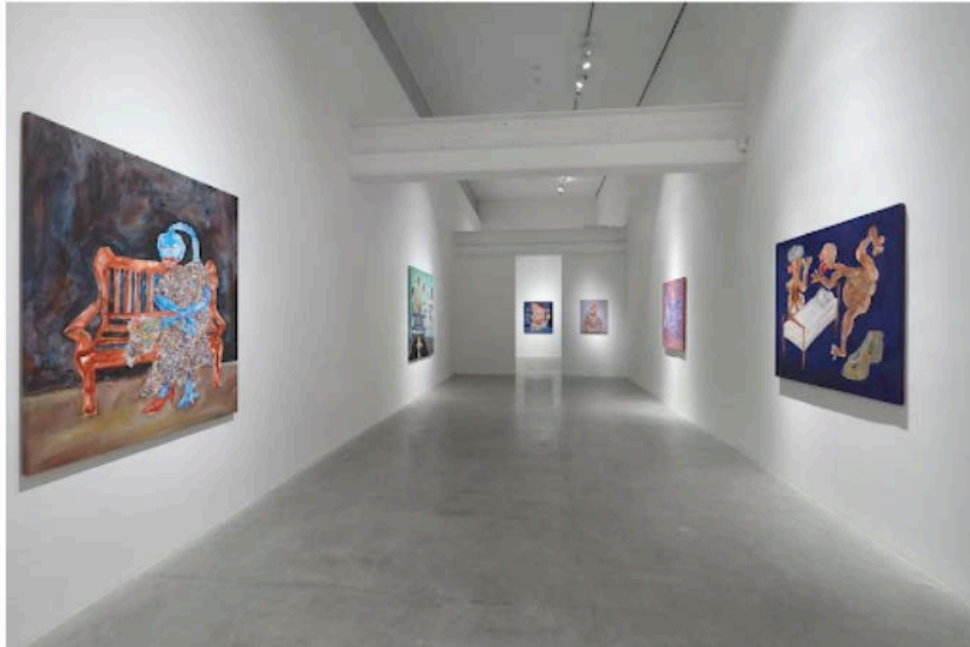


## Three Exhibitions in New York City of Seven Western African Artists

La Mama Galleria, albertz benda and Allouche galleries are all exhibiting Western African artist creating a vibrant and talented scene.

By [Farah Abdessamad](#) · 02/23/22 1:02pm



"Famakan Magassa: Soifs." albertz benda, New York. January 27, 2022 – February 26, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and albertz benda, New York. Photo: Thomas Mueller

Over in Chelsea, albertz benda presents Famakan Magassa's first US solo show titled "Soifs" which questions the plurality of thirst, desire and vitality. Magassa previously exhibited his works in Mali, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and France. "Soifs" includes a body of works centering on anthropomorphic motifs that interrogate loneliness, addiction and friendship, inspired by the aesthetics and spiritual significance of traditional dancers from Magassa's home country of Mali, Kôrêdugaw (or kourédougas), connected to spiritual and shamanistic initiations.

"Soifs" articulates the polymorphic nature of being thirsty—from the intimate to the more public and institutional. For instance, *Soif de tendresse* (2021) underlines tenderness, sorrow and comfort in an embrace between two characters whose silhouettes remind of a woman and a child. *Soif de connaissance* (2021) praises books as an object and gateway, the determined act of reading, intellectual curiosity and learning in a playful interaction between three figures and piles of books.

Soif de pouvoir (2021) eerily resonates in depicting a character in a formal uniform sitting on a red velvet-like accent chair, feeding an apple core to a hungry figure which carries the former. Playing on power dynamics, abuse and authoritarian themes, Soif de pouvoir also addresses issues of inequality and corruption. On a similar vein, Soif de justice (2021) calls for fairness and accountability, a tenuous aspiration as two characters awkwardly seek balance on a symbolic scale of justice.

Magassa's acrylic on canvas paintings introduce a theatrical world reminiscent of puppet shows, comic boards or the popular caricature of the Commedia dell'arte. They relate the everyday in social frescos, moral dilemmas and societal satire. In "Soifs", artworks are designed as self-supported vignettes. Comedy saturates "Soifs" such as in the attentive inclusion of inclusion of a single shoe (sports shoes or stilettos), symbols of mobility, protection and freedom. "The shoes are also meant to be humorous, I like to make people laugh through my paintings. Laughter is a medicine in life. I've always loved [this saying] 'Laugh, and make people laugh, because too serious is not very serious,'" Magassa (b.1997) told Observer.

Magassa excels in conveying non-verbal expression—lusty gazes, seducing pouts, punishing frowns. The diversity of his cast confirms that Magassa is foremost a keen witness of the family unit and we sense through the recurrence of feminine figures an appreciation if not an homage to the influential women in his life.

While tackling heavy subjects such as addiction, the artist also captures unquenchable emotions such as moments of bliss, ecstasy, joy and conviviality, wholesomeness conveyed in solid blue, pink, red backgrounds. As such, the visitor basks in an unknown-yet-familiar landscape of friends. Magassa underlines what brings people together across different cultures in the derisory nature of the human condition.