

Public art

THE PORTFOLIO

neuf-3

I arrived in Paris in April 2018 via the Institut Français for a residency at Cité Internationale des Arts. In September 2019, Le 6b — the artist residency in Saint-Denis — approached me to discuss the possibility of curating a drawing exhibition at its exhibition space. On the 10km train ride from Paris to Saint-Denis to meet them, I was greeted with a diverse population. There was a distinctly African presence, especially from North and West Africa.

Two months later, I conceptualised a project, *neuf-3*, and persuaded Le 6b to accompany me on a new adventure.

neuf-3 is a socially engaged public art project, very much focused on the local context of Paris and Saint-Denis: the socioeconomic issues, the politics, and taking consideration of the history of Africans in Paris. In the last century, the French capital was home to black intellectuals from across the globe.

Figures such as Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé and Suzanne Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Maryse Condé, James Baldwin, Chester Himes, and many others made Paris their home from the 1920s onwards.

Visual artists — such as African American Henry Ossawa Tanner, Nigerian Aina Onabulu, South Africans Ernest Mancoba and Gerard Sekoto, Cuban Wilfredo Lam — contributed to the Parisian artistic scene alongside the modern avant-gardes. Despite this, many of the African artists who came to Paris then, and



African spirits: Samuel Fosso, *Untitled (Kwame Nkrumah)*. Fosso is one of the artists who participated in *neuf-3*. Photo: Gustavo Gelmini/Riason Naidoo

since, have gained recognition more easily elsewhere; the city's institutions remained closed to them.

So, *neuf-3* is also about paying homage to Paris's African communities and acknowledging the con-

temporary African art scene. It is particularly aimed at the residents of Saint-Denis with its high percentage of immigrants of African origin.

Many of the suburb's citizens don't frequent Paris's elite museums, so

I selected work by eminent artists with a particular focus on issues of African representation, memory, history and identity that would engage the Dionysiens — as the residents of Saint-Denis are often referred to.

And I, too, am now a resident of the suburb, since December last year.

Riason Naidoo is the curator of *neuf-3*. The show can be viewed here www.le6b.fr