

## Artist Profile – Seydou Keita

b. 1921 Bamako, Mali; d. 2001 Paris, France

Keita was first given a camera by his uncle in 1935 and after mastering shooting and printing he bought himself a large format camera. A large format camera offered higher resolution and allowed for Keita to make high quality contact prints without using an enlarger. Although trained to be a carpenter, Keita began practicing photography by taking pictures of family, friends and neighbors, then in 1948 he opened a studio and specialized in portraiture. His clients were mostly young men dressed in European style clothing; Keita had European clothing and accessories in his studio for subjects to use but they sometimes brought their own. Women wore flowing robes that covered their legs and throats and only began wearing Western clothing in the late 60s.

Keita worked with daylight for economic reasons and only took a single shot for each picture, paying special attention to how the head and hands were positioned and the expression on their faces. In 1962 Keita closed his studio to become the official photographer of the new socialist government, although he remained an active photographer until he retired in 1977. In the 1990s Keita was discovered by the Western world and had his first solo exhibition in Paris.

Keita's black and white images depict Bamako society during its era of transition from a cosmopolitan French colony to an independent capital, showing the emergent sociocultural identities and modes of aesthetic expression at the time. His portraits balanced a sense of formality with intimacy with his subjects, whether he was shooting families, individuals, or professional associations. As mentioned before, Keita had numerous props and clothing choices at his studio, these were changed out every few years which allows viewers to see the chronology for his works. Keita's portraits are untitled and most works have a date range because the specific year is unknown.

Examples:



