



HEVIOSSO/ Blackégun, 2025
Textile sculpture. Beads, sequins, synthetic feathers,
cotton, screen printing, polyester - 2m15 / 1m18 / 51 cm

Galerie Dix9 is pleased to introduce

BLACK ÉGUNS

Smaïl Kanouté

Curated by Chris Cyrille

November 21, 2025 - January 17, 2026

Opening Thursday November 20 / 5-9 PM

GALERIE DIX9 Hélène Lacharmoise

19, rue des Filles du Calvaire 75003 Paris - M° Filles du Calvaire
open from Tuesday to Friday: 14h - 19h, Saturday 11h - 19h
Tél : +33 (0)1 42 78 91 77 - mobile +33 (0)6 33 62 94 07
website : www.galeriedix9.com

BLACK ÉGUNS

It all begins in New Orleans, with the induction of artist Smaïl Kanouté into the community of Black Indians *Yellow Pocahontas Hunters* (YPH). It is from this story, intimately linked to the famous Mardi Gras and their carnival, made emblematic by figures like the musician Louis Armstrong (himself inducted by a community), that Smaïl Kanouté chose to exhibit several of his costumes and works inspired by this experience.

Smaïl Kanouté brings with him a dual experience, both European and African, which enriches and moves the single American lens. To complete this network, he also mixes Japanese references, notably that of the black samurai Yasuke Kurosai, a historical figure still largely marginalized in contemporary Japan. In addition to summoning the history of the transatlantic crossing between Europe, Africa and America, Smaïl highlights, through his work, the black presence in Japan from the 16th century, long invisibilized. Thus, from Château-Rouge, he extends cultural dialogues on a world scale. The exhibition *Black Éguns* is therefore neither limited to a journey to New Orleans, nor to a trip to Benin with the culture of the Egunguns (the returnees in the Yoruba tradition), but also constitutes a reflection on a postcolonial Europe and on a postcolonial Africa — an essential actor of what the Martinican thinker Édouard Glissant called, very carefully and with critical intent, *creolization*.

(It would be urgent today to retrace the history of this term, oh so disfigured. This notion first refers to an experience of violence. It then refers to an experience of creation, of what, within violence itself, has succeeded in constituting itself from fragments. But this creation carries with it, always, the memory of violence, but also that of forgetting, which then allows unpredictable meshing. Let's listen to Édouard Glissant—excerpt from the book *Introduction à une poétique du divers*:

«In Louisiana for example: the creation of zydeco music is an application to traditional Cajun music of the rhythms and powers of jazz and even rock. In Louisiana, we find Black Indians, who are tribes born from mixtures between escaped black slaves and Indians. I attended in New Orleans the parade of Black Indian ethnicities, there is something absolutely unpredictable about them that goes beyond the mere fact of interbreeding. These cultural and linguistic microclimates that creolization creates in the Americas are decisive because they are the very signs of what is really happening in the world.»

It is not a question of praising, blind and naive, the creation within territories whose history is that of colonial slavery. It is rather a matter of accounting for the active principle that allows bodies to be in the world, that is to say, to be in the world with the other, this active principle being the relationship; memory of the earth, archive of the sacred).

The exhibition you are about to see is therefore a story of modernity, where the black presence becomes one of the foundations of modern entrelacs. The exhibition is therefore a journey, but of the world, from Château-Rouge — this *place-monde*.

From the entrance, next to the presentation text, we discover a screen print entitled *Spy Boy - Eggun* (2024), representing a ritual figure derived from Yoruba traditions, transmitted to the Americas and integrated into the culture of Mardi Gras in New Orleans. While climbing, several paintings representing masks are hung, each occupying a separate wall. The first, titled *Bantu Knight* (2024), or 'chevalier bantou', is followed a little further north by *Big Queen - Eggun* (2024). The latter makes the connection with the figure of the Big Chief. At the very top, a canvas entitled *Big Chief Tootie* (2024) resonates with that of the *Big Queen - Eggun*. At the back of the gallery, visible from the entrance, unfolds a series of costumes titled *Heviosso* (2024), *Zakpata* (2024) and *Watta* (2024). *Heviosso* is the deity of thunder and justice in the vodoun culture of Benin, *Zakpata* (or *Sakpata*) is a deity present in Benin, Brazil, and in Haitian voodoo. Finally, *Watta* embodies an aquatic divinity that is found in the Americas under various names. Next to it, several other paintings present emblematic figures: *Flag Boy* (2024), *Chief* (2024), and, further down, *Medicine Man* (2024). Finally, at the bottom of the staircase, *Gambada Boy - Eggun* (2024) welcomes visitors.

The exhibition of Smaïl Kanouté (an artist trained in graphic, visual and performance arts) is, as mentioned, a journey: from Europe to Africa, from the Americas to Europe. It bears witness to a postcolonial Europe with African, American and Asian histories. This Europe of diasporas can be an opportunity to rethink the contemporary situation in Europe, in order to think of a Europe-world (no longer melancholic of its former empires, but desirous of relationship, desirous of decentring itself to think other, otherwise, differently, from other shores, because Europe has no defined limits in the imagination).

But will this chance be seized?

Will we be able to hear this sacred without messianism, this sacred without the Law, without Scripture, this sacred that belongs to no one because it belongs to everyone, this sacred on a world scale, in the measure of the world, the one carried by the word *relation*, like this other word invented for the occasion: *Blackegun*?

Perhaps not.

The relationship is also a story of failures. But, fortunately, creation always knows how to deal with them.

Chris Cyrille

BLACK ÉGUNS

«Creolization requires that the heterogeneous elements put in relation 'become more and more apart', that is to say that there is no degradation or diminution of being, either from within or from without, in this contact and in this mixture. And why creolization and not interbreeding? Because creolization is unpredictable whereas one could calculate the effects of a mix. One can calculate the effects of a mixture of plants by cuttings or animals by crosses, one can calculate that red peas and white peas mixed by grafting will give you to such-and-such generation this, such-and-such generation that. But creolization is mixing with an added value that is unpredictability. Similarly, it was absolutely unpredictable that the thoughts of the trace inclined populations in the Americas to create such unprecedented languages or forms of art. Creolization governs the unpredictable in relation to interbreeding; it creates in the Americas absolutely unexpected cultural and linguistic microclimates, places where the repercussions of languages on one another or cultures on one another are abrupt. In Louisiana for example: the creation of zydeco music is an application to traditional Cajun music of the rhythms and powers of jazz and even rock. In Louisiana, we find Black Indians, who are tribes born from mixtures between escaped black slaves and Indians. I attended in New Orleans the parade of Black Indian ethnic groups, there is something absolutely unpredictable and that goes beyond the mere fact of interbreeding. These cultural and linguistic microclimates created by creolization in the Americas are decisive because they are the very signs of what is really happening in the world.»

Edouard Glissant



Spy Boy - Égun
Acrylic, Silk Screen, Indian Ink - Unique piece on canvas
1m29 / 97cm

BIOGRAPHY

Graduated in graphic design at ENSAD in 2012, Smail Kanouté is a multidisciplinary artist who mixes dance and visual arts. Self-taught in dance, he is inspired by his travels in France, Brazil, Mali and across Europe to create performances where choreography becomes a means of visual expression. His work explores themes of identity and social narratives, combining aesthetics and reflection.

In **2016**, he founded the Compagnie Vivons, with which he develops works such as *Never Twenty One* (**2021**), a piece that questions the violence suffered by young African-Americans, and *Yasuke Kurosai* (**2022**), inspired by the story of the first black samurai. These works are supported and presented in prestigious institutions such as the Museum of Contemporary Art in Lyon, the European House of Photography in Paris, and the Institute of Cultures of Islam in Paris.

Smail is co-curator of the exhibition *Détours d'un Quartier Monde* at the Institut des Cultures d'Islam in **2022**, dedicated to the Goutte d'Or district in Paris, as part of the Mondes Nouveaux project. He exhibits serigraphs of his series *Afronippon* and presents performances during the Nuit Blanche and at the Centre Pompidou, notably with the *Yasuke Walks* performance show.

Artist in residence at the Ateliers Médicis, at the Centquatre-Paris, and at the MC93, Smail Kanouté continues to evolve his artistic approach, seeking to engage the public on beauty, humanity, and multicultural narratives that nourish his work.

2024 - 2025 Exhibition of a short dance film in the collective exhibition «Dance Worlds» at the Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn.

2023 - 2024 Exhibition of a short dance film in the collective exhibition «Incarnations» from the MAC collection in Lyon at this same museum.

2023 Exhibition of plastic works and short dance films in the collective exhibition «Goutte d'Or: Détours d'un Quartier Monde» at the Institute of Cultures of Islam, as part of the government program Mondes Nouveaux, as an artist and curator.

2022 Exhibition of the triptych of short films at the Festival Sequence Danse Paris du Centquatre.

2021 Exhibition of dance short films in the collective exhibition «Beings» by BACKSLASH GALLERY.

2021 Exhibition of an installation in the collective exhibition «Zone Franche» at the Institute of Islamic Culture (AFRICA 2020).

2020 - 2021 Exhibition of a short dance film in the collective exhibition "Daïdo Moriyama and Shomei Tomatsu: Tokyo" at the MEP. Acquisition of the film *YASUKE KUROSAI* by the MEP in its video collection.

2020 - 2021 Exhibition of a short dance film in the collective exhibition «Comme un parfum d'aventure» at the MAC in Lyon. Acquisition of the film *NEVER TWENTY ONE* by the MAC of Lyon in its collection.

2020 Exhibition of plastic works in the collective exhibition at KATART Global Art Fair in Doha, Qatar.

2020 Exhibition of plastic works in the DDESSIN fair in Paris. Acquisition of works by a private collector.

2016 Exhibition of plastic works in the collective exhibition at the Contemporary Art Fair of Rouen «ART UP» with AGNEZ ART GALLERY.

2025 Exhibition of plastic works in the collective exhibition «THE OTHER VISION EXPERIENCE» at the Headquarters.

2014 Exhibition of plastic works in the collective exhibition «IN/OUT» at the gallery «I Comme Phénix».

2004 Collective exhibition on the theme of 'Guernica' at the Atelier Picasso in Paris with the Association Méharées.



AFRICOLOR

Presented as part of the AFRICOLOR festival in the Paris region, the performance "BLACK INDIANS TO THE CASAMANCE RIVER" is featured in the festival's off-site program.

Appointed Chief Scout by the legendary Yellow Pocahontas Hunters Tribe in New Orleans in 2023, multidisciplinary artist Smail Kanouté continues his research into Black Indian culture.

For this performance, he invites Ibaaku, a creator of sonic universes.

This collaboration intertwines the heritage of the Black Indians with African traditions, drawing inspiration from the traditional masks of Casamance and the distinctive sounds of Ibaaku, who himself hails from this region of Senegal.

DATES AND VENUES:

11.28.2025 – Salle Jacques Brel, Pantin (8:00 p.m.)

12.03.2025 – Université Sorbonne Paris Nord, Villetaneuse (1:00 p.m.)

12.04.2025 – Université Sorbonne Paris Nord, Bobigny (12:45 p.m.)

12.04.2025 – Université Paris 8, Saint-Denis (6:00 p.m.)

12.05.2025 – Maison Populaire, Montreuil (9:00 p.m.)

