

THE
WALTHER COLLECTION

The Lay of the Land: New Photography from Africa
Edson Chagas, François-Xavier Gbré, and Mame-Diarra Niang

September 10, 2015–January 16, 2016



Mame-Diarra Niang, *Satellite I*, from *Metropolis*, 2015

Opening Reception: Thursday, September 10, from 6pm-8pm

The Walther Collection Project Space
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The Walther Collection is pleased to inaugurate a new multi-year exhibition series on contemporary photography and video art from Africa, to be presented in thematic exhibitions in New York from 2015 to 2017. Expanding the collection's longstanding focus on African photography, this program features a diverse range of emerging artists who are exploring new visions of social identity in Africa and the African Diaspora. The first exhibition, *The Lay of the Land*, opens on Thursday, September 10, 2015 at The Walther Collection Project Space in New York.

The Lay of the Land brings together three young artists who are examining the effects of the built environment on contemporary African landscapes. Born after the liberation movements that swept Africa in the 1960s, Edson Chagas, François-Xavier Gbré, and Mame-Diarra Niang investigate the promises and failures of the postcolonial city. Uniting their works is a vivid attention to color and form. The artists systematically portray monumental civic buildings or banal apartment complexes, imposing avenues or lonely corners, profiling spaces discovered on travels within the African continent and abroad. Their images of physical structures—in progress, in ruins, or incomplete—are encoded with the values, dreams, contradictions, and politics of urban life. In *The Lay of the Land*, rather than providing purely documentary statements, Chagas, Gbré, and Niang pose open-ended questions about the changing visual narratives of the environment.

Edson Chagas (b. 1977, Luanda, Angola; lives and works in Luanda) creates abstract compositions deeply rooted in the specific social contexts of Luanda in his ongoing series *Found Not Taken*. Chagas often conjures the vibrant palette of color-field painting as he stages a subtle critique of globalized consumerism. Through his quiet, uniformly framed images of city streets and fragments of architecture, Chagas transforms mundane objects into mysterious icons or talismans.

François-Xavier Gbré (b. 1978, Lille, France; lives and works in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire) studies the buildings, monuments, and infrastructure of cities in West Africa, France, and the Middle East. In *The Lay of the Land*, Gbré creates a site-specific installation of sixty-three intricately linked images, chronicling structures from the former governor's palace in Lomé, Togo, to the National Printing House of Porto-Novo, Benin. Gbré's highly detailed photographs of West African capitals are devoid of people, but dense with information about the connections between architecture and national consciousness.

Mame Diarra Niang (b. 1982 Lyon, France; lives and works in Paris and Dakar) explores the plasticity of territory in three photographic series, *Sahel Gris*, *At the Wall*, and *Metropolis*. Central to these works is the idea of the citadel, which contains those within its walls. Niang uses flat color planes, rhythmic geometrical patterns, and ambiguous perspectives as the raw material to construct her images. Through the juxtaposition of images shot in Dakar and Johannesburg, Niang re-draws the lines of the map of a new city, reframing it within a mythological landscape.

The Walther Collection is dedicated to researching, collecting, exhibiting, and publishing modern and contemporary photography and video art across historical periods and geographic regions. The collection comprises a four-gallery museum campus in Neu-Ulm, Germany, and a project space in New York City. Initially centered on the practices of early twentieth-century German photographers, the collection has expanded to become one of the most important private holdings of contemporary African and Asian photography and video art. The collection's extensive publishing program includes *African Photography from The Walther Collection*, a three volume set dedicated to portraiture, landscape, and the archive; *The Order of Things*, investigating serial and typological images across geographical regions and time periods; and the monographs *Santu Mofokeng: The Black Photo Album*, *Martina Bacigalupo: Gulu Real Art Studio*, *Zanele Muholi: Faces and Phases*, *Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse: Ponte City*, and *Guy Tillim: O Futuro Certo*.

The Lay of the Land
Selected Images



Edson Chagas, Found Not Taken, Luanda, 2013
Courtesy The Walther Collection and Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg



Edson Chagas, Found Not Taken, Luanda, 2009
Courtesy The Walther Collection and Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg



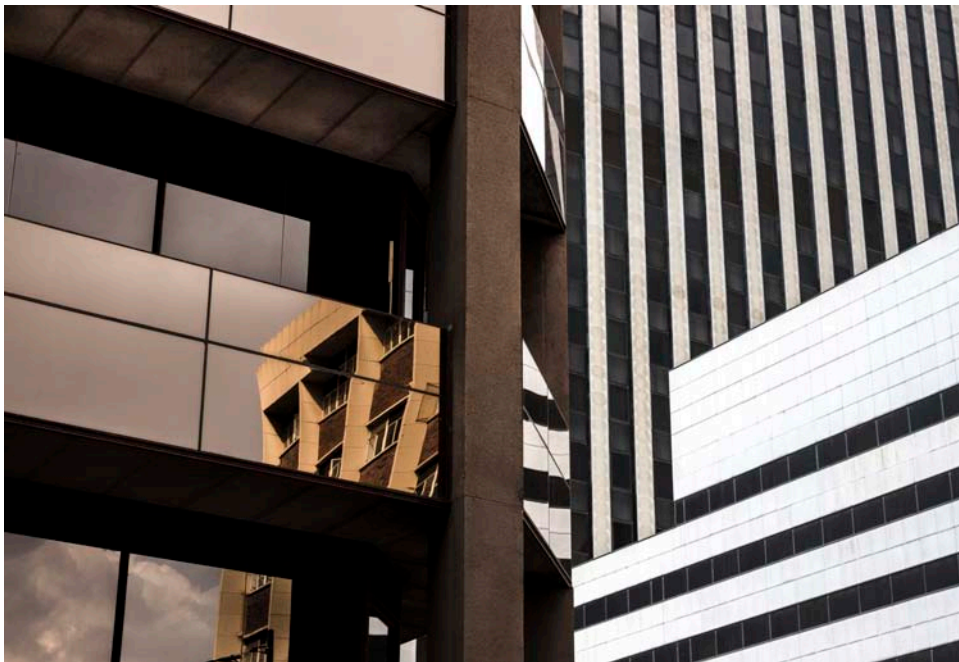
François-Xavier Gbré, Station CIDP #2, Segou, Mali, février 2012
Courtesy The Walther Collection and Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, Abidjan



François-Xavier Gbré, Station Petro Hanne #2, Ségou, Mali, février 2012
Courtesy The Walther Collection and Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, Abidjan



Mame-Diarra Niang, Glitch 1, from "Metropolis," 2015
Courtesy The Walther Collection and Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg



Mame-Diarra Niang, Vivencia, from "Metropolis," 2015
Courtesy The Walther Collection and Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg