

Malick Sidibé Is The Best Free Exhibition In London

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The Malian photographer redefined beauty and style with his [images of post-independence leisure](#).

Somerset House is a grand, neoclassical building on the Strand, right next to King's College University and just across the river from the South Bank. It's best known to Londoners for having an ice skating rink in winter – [open from now until 16 January](#) – but what is less well known is its excellent artistic programming. At the moment, there's a free photography exhibition that you'd be a fool to miss.

Malick Sidibé was one of the most renowned photographers of post-Independence Africa, documenting the ludic pleasures of nightlife and popular culture in 1960s Bamako, Mali. The "eye of Bamako", as he was known, saw the dancing, beauty, and party styles in a country recently freed from the yoke of French colonialism. Also, since it was the 1960s, everyone was up for a party. From elegant women in traditional clothing to sweaty, grooving men in Western suits on the dance floor, his photographs document a decade of freedom, allowing us to see a continent that, in the West, is too often viewed through the eyes of outsiders.



Malick Sidibé *Combat des amis avec pierres*, 1976 © Malick Sidibé Courtesy Galerie MAGNIN Magnin-A, Paris

The exhibition is divided into three rooms: Nightlife, Next To The River and In The Studio. The first shows his most famous photographs – men and women waltzing like graceful swans. The hand-written captions underneath will help you practise your GCSE French: “Dansez Le Twist, 1965.” The most fascinating and revealing images come in the second room, as it shows teenagers playing on the banks of the Niger river, peacocking for Sidibé’s lens. The final room shows how skilled he was at portraiture, something which would gain him global acclaim in the 1990s when he finally received the recognition of the international photography community.

A nice touch in the exhibition is that there's a soundtrack of Malian music that plays throughout, you can listen to the Spotify playlist [here](#) you get you in the mood.

Malick Sidibé: The Eye Of Modern Mali runs in the Terrace Rooms, South Wing, Somerset House until 15 January 2017. It's open from 10.00 – 18.00 on Mon, Tue, Sat & Sun; 11,00 - 20.00 from Wed to Fri. Entrance is free. It's a 20-minute journey from Generator London; take the Northern line from Euston to Charing Cross and walk.

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