

SOLY CISSÉ DRAWINGS OUTSIDE THE LINES



Charcoal on paper, 2005, 50 x 150 cm

*Drawing outside the lines. Masterpieces from the Centre Pompidou's collection
December 16, 2025 - March 15, 2026*

Related programming: Drawings Trail through Parisian Art Galleries

Soly Cissé: February 3 → March 15, 2026

Soly Cissé explores paper as a field of multiple experimentations, where collage, cut-outs, imprints, calligraphy, and interwoven signs intersect. The artist distributes symbols and images in sanguine, charcoal, or oil pastel, with a quick brush that bind the temporality of gesture to that of reading.

Deeply marked by a childhood spent in a hunters' village near the Bafing River in Mali—a milieu governed by social conventions akin to secret myths—Soly Cissé populates his works with humans, animals, plants, and spirits, linked by invisible interdependencies.

At the heart of a plural totemic universe, blending secret myths and cosmologies, the artist feeds his drawings (or canvases) with signs, illegible scripts, diagrams, and barcodes that do not yield immediate meaning, except perhaps for the irony and humor inherent in rebuses. At times, format becomes a central issue: a word takes on a determining role, or heterogeneous materials—collage fragments, newspaper integrated without alteration looking for across the clues in the like a ready-made within the fluidity of the paint—come to blur the scene unfolding within.

So many incoherent signs, carried by the speed of the gesture, generate a race of the eye looking for across the clues in the image. By subverting a focal point and asserting the flatness of canvas or paper, Soly Cissé places the viewer at the center of an open interpretative game, revealing the interweaving of space and time within the work.

In the mid-1990s : the graphic series : “The Lost World”

The presentation brings together a group of charcoal drawings made between 1999 and 2006, drawn from the emblematic series *Le Monde Perdu* (*The Lost World*), initiated by Soly Cissé as early as 1996.

One feels a shock at the immediacy of the artist’s gesture, which “tears” his figures from charcoal or sanguine through entangled, superimposed lines, like cave frescoes emerging from suspended time.

These figures evoke the upheavals of vanished cultures: Lascaux, Altamira... the birth of art, missing cults, the dawn of humanity; as well as the striking opening scene of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) by Stanley Kubrick, set to Richard Strauss’s “Thus spoke Zarathustra”, or the Lost Worlds of Jurassic Park (adapted by Spielberg from Michael Crichton’s novels, themselves a homage to Conan Doyle’s novella *The Lost World*, 1912)

Between archaeology and science-fiction, the Lost Worlds traverse the 20th century as a metaphor—almost a parable—of the Human Condition. Beyond past, present, and coming soon struggles, the artist grants his faceless, identity-less figures a universal character.

COLLAGES

CUTTING, FRAMING, MONTAGE



The entire aesthetic of the artist's collages stems from a cinematic framing inspired by his early interest in comics. To the act of reappropriation inherent in gluing is added a precise choice of support: pages from Western art magazines. From this cutting into the pages of an art magazine—reintegrating several elements with no relation to one another—emerges the shock of montage. Of a single magazine format (210 × 297 mm), “small containers with vast contents¹,” these collages stage playful yet unsettling figures.

A challenge and an artistic gesture that overturns the status of the printed image, transforming it into an original work.

“WE TOO HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE IN THIS HISTORY,”

the artist declares to Roxana Azimi, who interviewed him in 2016 for *Le Monde*. “I take images from art magazines and draw over them to impose my own universe.

It's a way of appearing on those pages, within that history.

Critical and Institutional Recognition

In **2001**, art critic and historian Bruno Corà discovered this major body of graphic work in Dakar. He immediately emphasized its transcultural dimension and complexity, describing these charcoal drawings as a “fortunate pictorial invention” exploring themes that are both mythological and anthropological.

For him, *The Lost World* belongs to a tradition of universal allegories, echoing the great struggles of humanity. Bruno Corà draws a parallel with Goya's *Caprichos*, which he considers the only Western precedent for their graphic density, thus placing Soly Cissé within a lineage marked by a dramatic and committed vision of humanity.

In **2005**, the *Lost World* series came to wider attention through an article by Philippe Dagen published in *Le Monde*, during the exhibition *Africa Remix*, organized by Simon Njami and Laurence Bertrand Dorléac, presented at the Centre Pompidou after touring the Kunstpalast in Düsseldorf and the Hayward Gallery in London.

The art historian and critic noted: “The impact of Soly Cissé's work lies in its ability to combine highly singular forms with universal concerns, while offering a new perspective on contemporary artistic production*”

In **2022**, a group of graphic works as well as several paintings by the artist were acquired by the Centre Pompidou, Paris, affirming the institutional recognition of Soly Cissé's work

Notes

**The charcoals of Soly Cissé's Lost World series, Africa Remix, singularities and universal forms*, Philippe Dagen, *Le Monde*, May 25, 2005.

Soly Cissé, dessins, disegni, drawings, 1SSS-2000 – Crise de la conscience traditionnelle et prémonition de la nouvelle Afrique, publié par Bruno Corà, Prato le 25 avril 2002. Édition trilingue, limitée à 36 exemplaires.

Soly Cissé, le Monde perdu, Centro per l'arte contemporanea, Luigi Pecci, 2005, Prato, Italie.