

# TEMPLON



ALIOUNE DIAGNE

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## Meet the Artists Reinventing Pointillism, the 19th-Century Technique

Maxwell Rabb

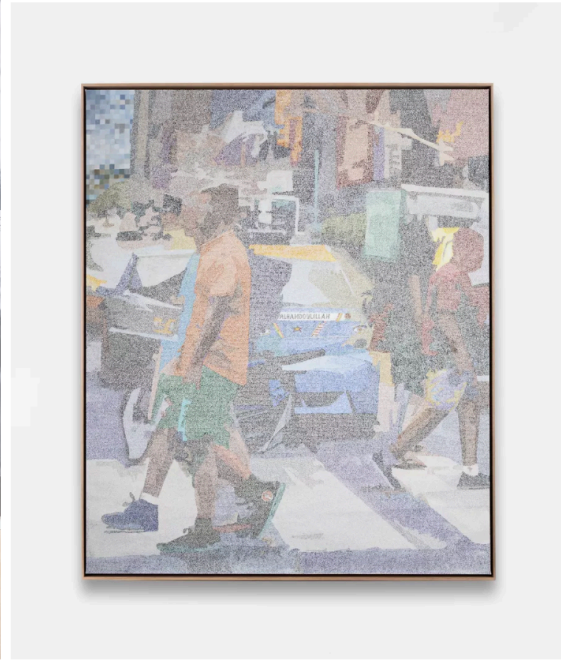
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When Georges Seurat debuted *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* at the 1886 Impressionist exhibition in Paris, the reaction was far from positive. Art critic Arsène Alexandre coined the term “Pointillism” with a sneer, mocking the artist’s obsessive application of tiny dots of color. To skeptics, Seurat’s bathers and bourgeois strollers seemed stiff, even lifeless — as if his precision had drained the painting of humanity.

Yet Pointillism has always been more than the sum of its parts. Seurat and fellow Neo-Impressionist Paul Signac were responding to new color theories and ideas about visual perception, proposing a style that imposed order on the loose, spontaneous brushstrokes of their Impressionist predecessors. Rather than blending colors, they split images up into discrete, unmixed points of pigment, allowing the viewer’s eye to do the mixing. The effect, when successful, increased the paintings’ luminosity: Dots of pure colors, when juxtaposed, mutually reinforced the others’ brilliance. Perception, these painters seemed to suggest, was subjective and fragmentary.



Portrait of Alioune Diagne. Portrait by Charles Roussel. Courtesy of Templon



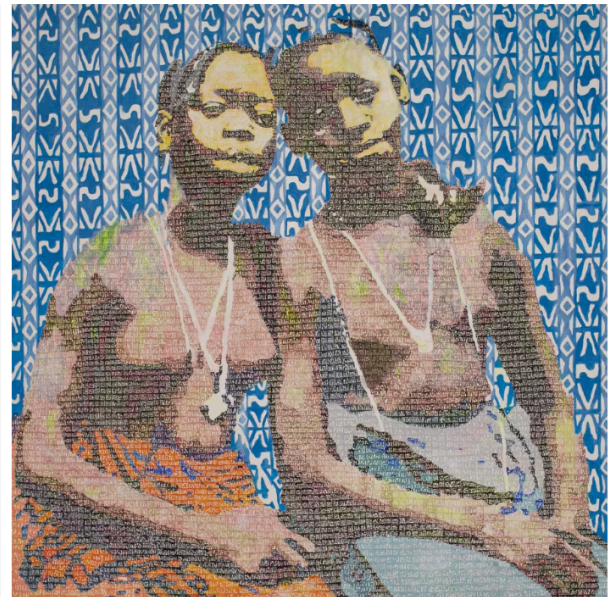
Alioune Diagne, *New York - Kaar Rapide*, 2024. © Laurent Edeline. Courtesy of Templon.

Today, a new generation of artists is revisiting Pointillism, embracing its visual language and expanding its conceptual underpinnings. No longer solely about the science of perception, Pointillism has become a tool for exploring identity, memory, history, and materiality. These Neo-Pointillists have adapted the techniques used by Seurat and his peers in service of more layered and wide-ranging meanings, breaking down their images as a means of inquiry.

One such artist is Alioune Diagne, a 39-year-old Senegalese painter who borrows methods learned from his grandfather, a teacher of the Quran, to transform scenes of everyday life into meditations on history and culture. Instead of dots, Diagne's works use small, meticulously painted calligraphic symbols as building blocks for large-scale figurative depictions of Black communities. At a distance, his painting *All Voices (manifestations)* (2024), for instance, depicts a crowd of protesters calling for "power to the people." Up close, it dissolves into an impenetrable codex of signs that represent no specific language while evoking written letters. "These signs convey emotions, memories — everything intangible," Diagne told Artsy.



Alioune Diagne  
*All Voices (manifestations)*, 2024  
 Templan  
 Price on request



Alioune Diagne  
*Filles de Dakar*, 2019  
 We Art Partners  
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By depicting *modou-modou*—Senegalese workers who have moved away from the countryside and settled in major cities to support families they left behind—and moments of everyday life in Dakar, the artist creates a “living archive” that captures the complexity of cultural identity. His Pointillist forms aren’t about visual illusion, but about bearing witness. He combines his meticulous abstract symbols with “other, more explicit forms of writing: protest slogans on placards, inscriptions, newspaper collage, or symbols drawn from Senegalese culture,” he said. “Everything carries meaning. Nothing is there by chance. It’s my way of saying that behind every detail, every sign, lies a message or a fragment of memory.”

If Diagne employs Pointillist techniques to preserve living histories, Indigenous Australian artist Danielle Boyd uses them to reexamine the past. His paintings, often based on archival imagery, are made up of protruding dots of clear glue layered on top of oil paintings. “Each point is a transparent lens,” Boyd told Artsy. “It’s about perception and multiple points of view...an opportunity to give the audience a different sense of authorship when they stand in front of the works.”