

Sanlé Sory: Colour Years 14 Oct 2026 - 21 Feb 2027

Largely unseen, Sanlé Sory's colour photography will be on show for the first time in the UK at The Photographers' Gallery this autumn in *Sanlé Sory: Colour Years*.

One of West Africa's most prolific photographers, Sanlé Sory (b.1943, Burkina Faso) took an estimated million photographs over six decades, showing the profound social and political changes in Burkina Faso. *Colour Years* captures a lesser-known chapter of his career. His colour prints, meticulously restored from the negatives in his archive, will be on show, alongside Volta Jazz album covers featuring his portraits of the influential bands that flourished after Burkina Faso's independence.

Better known for his black-and-white studio photography of the 1960s and 70s, Sanlé Sory started producing colour portraits in his Volta Photo studio in the mid-1980s. *Colour Years* reveals a dynamic portrait of a rapidly changing community and society in Burkina Faso across decades of political shifts, global exchange and self-expression through fashion, music and attitude.

When asked why he moved over to colour, Sory said, "When you are in a place where everybody dances, you have to try to dance like everyone else!" His clients wanted a new way to see and show themselves, and he gave it to them.

Sanlé Sory first came to photography when he needed an identity photograph. After several years learning his trade as an apprentice, he set up his own studio in 1960 when he was 17. He kitted his studio out with props and hand-painted backdrops to attract clients in his hometown of Bobo-Dioulasso. His clients chose their clothes, hairstyles, props and poses with great care. However, his portraits are about more than fashion and style. They tell a story of everyday life after the huge changes brought by the country's independence from France.

From studio portraits of families, couples and friends, to identity photographs and portraits of traders and shopkeepers in the local market, Sory's photographs are a vivid portrait of a country in transition and a community ready to embrace change.

Sanlé Sory: Colour Years is curated by Taous Dahmani, Curator at The Photographers' Gallery, and produced by The Photographers' Gallery.

With thanks to Florent Mazzoleni and the Sanlé Sory Archive for the generous loan of the works and to Sanlé Sory for his collaboration.

Notes to Editors

For further press information and image requests please contact: Robyn Deane or Alex Finch at Margaret: robyn@margaretlondon.com / alex@margaretlondon.com.

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The Photographers' Gallery Limited
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For general information and enquiries about The Photographers' Gallery, including the archive, Print Sales Gallery or Bookshop contact: press@tpg.org.uk.

About Sanlé Sory

Sanlé Sory (b. 1943, Burkina Faso) is best known for the black and white studio and nightlife photographs he made in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso, from the 1960s. He opened the Volta Photo studio in 1960 - the same year Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) was navigating independence. His photography mixed formal studio portraiture with on-the-street reportage of the city's music, dance halls and youth culture. In response to his clients, he moved over to colour photography in the mid-1980s.

Though his work was little known internationally for decades, Sory's photographs have been the subject of major exhibitions including Volta Photo: Starring Sanlé Sory and the People of Bobo-Dioulasso at the Art Institute of Chicago in 2018 and are now included in museum collections and galleries worldwide.

Prints & publications

Prints of Sanlé Sory's works in the exhibition will be available for sale in the Print Sales Gallery.

Two new books *Sanlé Sory* (Phaidon) and *Volta Colour* (GOST) will also be available in October 2026.

The Photographers' Gallery

The Photographers' Gallery explores how photography is connecting, captivating and radically changing our world today. The Gallery's programme and spaces – from exhibitions, talks, workshops and digital platforms, to the galleries, shop and cafe – all explore the beauty, complexity and future of photography. Right outside the Gallery, the very best of contemporary photography is shown for free, day and night, in Soho Photography Quarter.

tpg.org.uk

Monday – Wednesday & Saturday 10.30am – 6pm

Thursday – Friday 10.30am – 8pm

Saturday 10.30am – 6pm

Sunday & Bank Holidays 11am – 6pm

Also at The Photographers' Gallery:

[William Eggleston: All That Goes Unnoticed](#)

[NINAGAWA Mika: Captive Blooms](#) in Soho Photography Quarter, free

Tickets:

£14 (with £2 donation) / £11 concessions (with £2 donation)

Advance online booking: £12 (with £2 donation) / £9.50 concessions (with £2 donation)

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