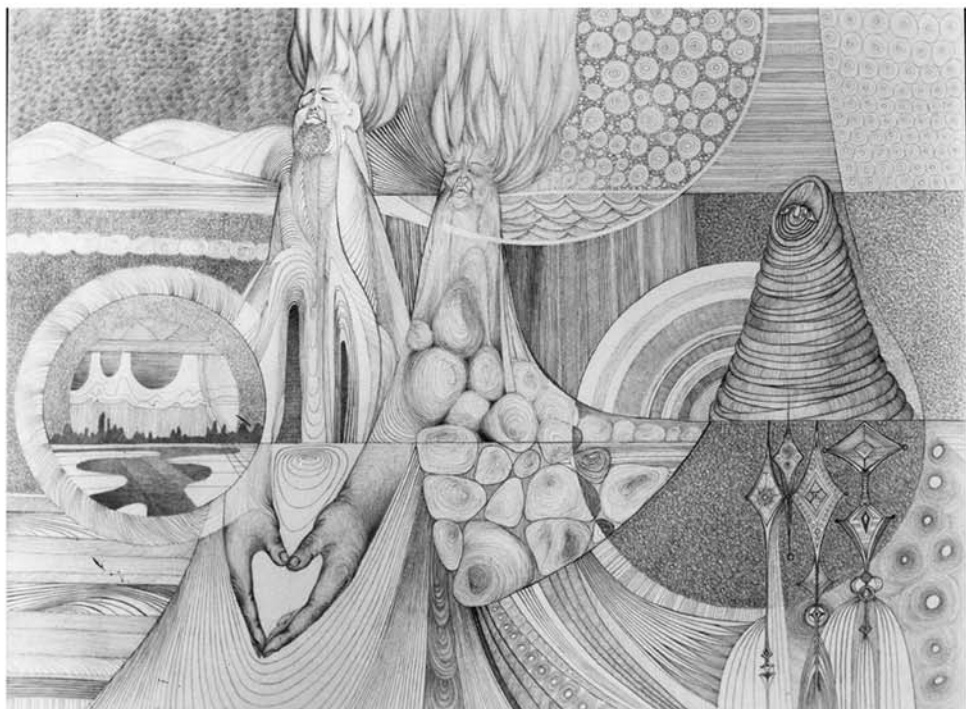


Papa Ibra Taal
 Zimbazania
 Pencil drawing 25.5cm x 19
 cm, 1976

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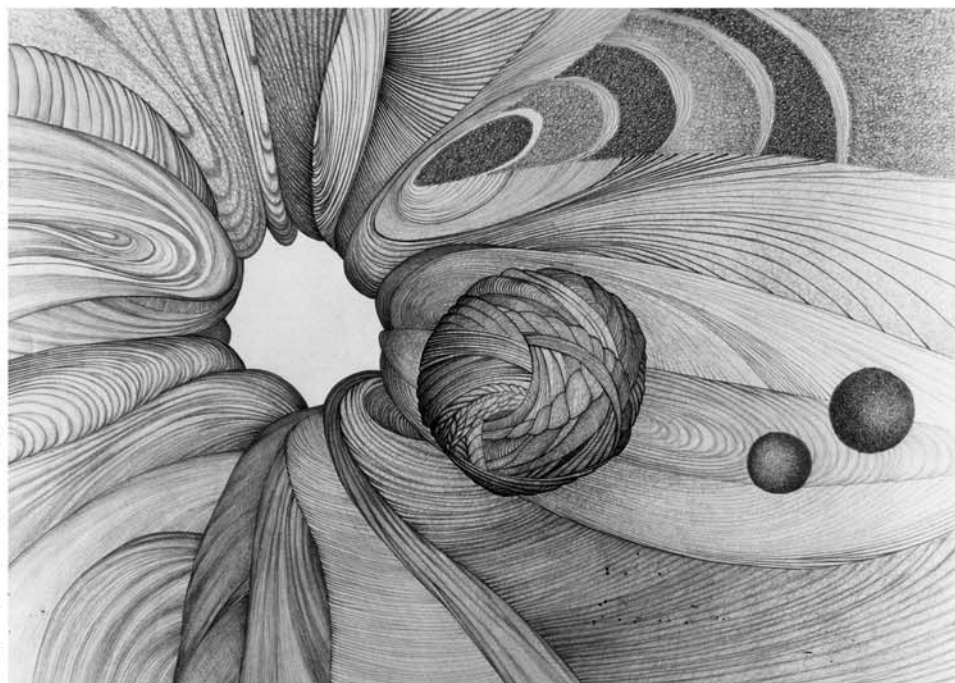
PAPA IBRA TAAL
The Best of Africa, Toronto
 May 25-June 18, 1977

The sixteen pencil drawings that composed this exhibition were the fruit of Papa Ibra Taal's year and a half of "freedom" since leaving the Manufacture Nationale de Tapisseries in December 1975. As Taal (the spelling has been changed from Tall to conform to the new official Senegalese orthography) readily admits, the burden of his administrative responsibilities was blocking his artistic development, and ten years of being known as "the tapestry weaver" had finally become stultifying. He now works out of his own studio in Dakar.

It seems that Taal's new pencil drawings represent a personal back-to-basics movement, away from the commercial demands for monumental, colorful works. As he says, "Design is the basis of all art work. Sculptors, for instance, are constantly going back, working out ideas in drawings. Painters must do the same." These works demonstrate his mastery of design.

One need not understand Taal's background, cosmology, or intentions to appreciate the hand of the master. Taal rarely consents to analyze his own works. "If I were to explain everything to you I might as well become a writer," he says. "And besides, if everything is 'explained' to you, then you discover nothing for yourself, you stop right there. Look and explore, fantasize. Perhaps you will see things that flowed subconsciously from my hand."

His works at *The Best of Africa* fall into two very loose categories: the figurative and the abstract. Yet both are linked by the artist's sense of the world as something to be touched or felt, to be physically as well as intellectually explored. *Zimbazania* may well allude to



PAPA IBRA TAAL, *PROJECTION SPACIALE*. PENCIL DRAWING. 65 x 49.5 cm

the conflagration in Zimbabwe and Anzania (South Africa), but at an apolitical level one senses the silent, reproachful landscape bearing witness to the stoic-heroic sufferings of its inhabitants. Three versions of *Prospection Spaciale* invite one into organic tissue-like surroundings and galactic space.

The impact of Taal's Toronto exhibition was heightened by his presence at the opening. He and his works were well received. He is, along with Iba N'Diaye, one of Senegal's (and Africa's) premier artists, as well as founder and former long-time director of the Manufacture Nationale de Tapisseries at Thiès, artistic advisor for the African-Senegalese pavillion at Expo '67 in Montreal, and much-traveled lecturer and teacher. Yet,

as has been the case with other African artists, Papa Taal arrived in Canada a virtual unknown: in terms of awareness of African art, Canada is a good ten years behind the U.S.

One hopes the State Department will pursue a plan of having various African artists accompany the exhibition of African contemporary art recently at Howard University, in which Papa Ibra Taal is represented by four works, as it tours the United States. This should go a long way toward creating a greater understanding of the changes taking place within Africa—changes that are producing new and exciting forms of artistic expression.

Bob Barde
The Best of Africa