

MEET JANET GOLDNER

New-York-based sculptor “with a gift for wielding the blow torch”, Janet Goldner has a passion for Mali. Born June 1952 in Washington, D.C, Janet graduated in Art from Antioch College and New York University. Her thirty-year cultural journey began when she first traveled to Africa in 1973. This journey ignited her life-long fascination with the continent and particularly West Africa. She returned to Mali as a Fulbright fellow in 1994-95, working with potters, metalsmiths, and contemporary Malian artists. The later gave her a Malian name, Miriam Kane, as a way of welcoming her into their community. Since then, she has been combining images and ideas from Africa and the West in her work. Janet’s recent works often take distinctly Malian forms as their point of genesis. In the summer of 2002, she returned to Mali as the director of a semester study abroad program through Antioch College, accompanied by ten American college students. An ongoing program, she will continue with. Her next visit to Mali is planned for the fall of 2003.

The Unbearable Attraction of Being in Mali

What was your first impression when you came to Mali? In 1973, I participated in The Experiment in International Living Program --now called World Learning-- and spent nearly a year in West Africa, traveling to Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Niger in addition to Mali. There, I traveled by road from Ouagadougou to Mopti. I also visited Djenne, the Dogon country and then went to Gao. The road wasn’t yet paved and what was supposed to be a two-day journey took ten days because the truck I was riding in kept breaking down. Although it was frustrating, the slow pace allowed me to explore villages along the way and experience the overwhelming Malian hospitality.

What did you learn in Mali that you did not know already? When I returned to Mali in 1994, my Fulbright research involved a series of residencies with artists and artisans. I spent two months working with women potters in a small village near Segou. Then I was fortunate to be able to work with blacksmiths in Dioro and tinsmiths in Segou. I spent the

last two months of my Fulbright research in Bamako, doing my own artwork and working with Malian contemporary artists. Since then, my projects in Mali have included co-curating an exhibition of Malian contemporary art in the US, co-producing a short documentary video about Mali in English, and administering a small fabric dyeing project.

How do you think you can help your fellow Malian artists? Cultural exchange is very important for Malian as well as American artists. I see my role as helping to build a bridge that goes in both directions. American and Malian artists should have the opportunity to see each other’s work and work together through exhibitions and exchanges both in Mali and in the US.

Interviewed by Christine Madison

For more information, **visit the website** <http://www.janetgoldner.com> **or e-mail:** art@janetgoldner.com

