

# The New York Times

## What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

May 31, 2018 | By Will Heinrich, Martha Schwendener and Jillian Steinhauer

### Sanlé Sory

Through June 23. Yossi Milo, 245  
10th Avenue, Manhattan; 212-414-  
0370, [yossimilo.com](http://yossimilo.com).

When Sanlé Sory wanted to move from the countryside to the city in French-controlled West Africa in the 1950s, the colonial government required photographic identification. But these pictures were prohibitively expensive, and the photo shops were generally owned by people from neighboring Mali. So, when Mr. Sory started his own studio in Bobo-Dioulasso in 1960, after apprenticing for another photographer, he called it Volta Photo after Upper Volta, the name of his newly independent nation, now called Burkina Faso.



“Volta Photo,” at [Yossi Milo](http://Yossi Milo), is Mr. Sory’s first exhibition in New York (he also has an [exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago](#)), and it includes more than 90 black-and-white photographs made from 1960 to ’80. The images, blown up larger than their original print sizes, show Fula, Malian and Voltaic teenagers and twentysomethings posing and wielding props in a studio decorated with backdrops painted by artists from Ghana. A man jokingly “climbs” into a painted plane; hipsters in sunglasses imitate the postures of James Brown and Elvis Presley; ladies lounge in elegant, traditional finery. Radios, record players, telephones or flight bags with airline logos are held up to signal Volta’s new, modern identity.

Mr. Sory’s portraits are often as captivating as his better-known Malian peers, like Seydou Keita or Malick Sidibé. His subjects pose with ease but also surprising intimacy — particularly those kissing or caressing one another before the camera in conservative ’60s Volta. There are generally more men than women here and most would be elderly citizens today. Gathered together in this impressive show, however, they are an electrifying group, representing the optimism and energy of youth, but also a new, hopeful nation. *MARTHA SCHWENDENER*