

Crèveœur

Ladji Diaby: On the Afterlife of Matter,
Mistura Allison, Mousse Magazine, 27 April 2026

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by Mistura Allison

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Ladji Diaby, *June 19*, 2025. Courtesy: the artist

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Ladji Diaby's installations begin at the point where disposal stops—not as a metaphor, but as a condition. They take shape at the perimeter of a persistent fiction: that things can end. Use, discard, disappear. This sequence organizes not only consumption, but perception itself. What no longer needs to exist is removed from view, and with that removal comes a quiet assurance that matter exits the world once its function is exhausted. But nothing actually exits. What is tossed out does not vanish; it's picked up, tucked away, held at the margins.

It is from this persistence that the work unfolds. Diaby, born in 2000 with French-Malian genealogy, sets out installations as sites of encounter where found objects, images, and video do not merely overlap, but co-conspire. What the artist describes as a "mode of writing" resists becoming language: there is no syntax to follow, no fixed order to inhabit. Materials draw into proximity until something registers, not as meaning, but as intensity. Relation precedes legibility. Across a developing body of work, each arrangement extends and tests the conditions of the last, attuned to what materials can do in proximity.

This is particularly evident in his paper works, where Diaby's use of photo transfer onto graph paper foregrounds a tension between a mechanical aspect and a fluid one: the grid implying measurement and control, and the transferred image suggesting malleability. In *Untitled (OJ Jackson)* (2024), American football player O.J. Simpson appears centered as a sideline reporter during a game, while singer Michael Jackson is inset, both rendered grainy. This juxtaposition isn't accidental but structural. For Diaby, the internet functions as both source and subject. Figures such as Simpson and Jackson occupy charged positions in the visual and cultural memory of African American life, mediated through spectacle and controversy. In meme culture, their images often function as shorthand, divorced from the complexity of their histories.

Diaby is not attempting to rescue any one single story. Instead, he situates stories in relation, allowing them and their possible meanings to crash into one another. A comparable strategy is at work with the likeness of television host Steve Harvey and a white pharaoh. In *Untitled (Pharaoh)* (2025), the ruler occupies the upper register, while a distorted AI-generated portrait of Harvey, below, holds a drink mid-gesture, his features exaggerated by digital noise. This juxtaposition exists both temporally and ideologically. The image of the white pharaoh evokes longstanding attempts to appropriate and recode African history, while Harvey, portrayed living his best life, filters widely through contemporary meme culture, acting like a site of humor and hyperbole. The work further reveals how histories of erasure and present modes of representation inform each other. For the Diasporic body, these dynamics resound on a lived scale.

In his solo show *No One Has Ever Called Their Child Hunger* at Kunstverein Nürnberg (2024–25), Diaby expanded his artistic vocabulary. What emerged from this gesture was not just a collection of objects, but a redefinition of what it means to come within reach of anything. In our conversation, Diaby discusses collecting not as an aesthetic decision but as a necessity, almost a moral posture, stemming from a place of refusal—a refusal to participate in the typical economy of art making, but rather working with what's nearby and already circulating within one's lived environment. Close proximity matters. The object being collected is not neutral; it is already imbued with social life, memory, and use. Collecting in this sense works less as archiving and more as sampling. Here, it makes contact with Diasporic logic, where the world is already seen through a world of discontinuous parts: cultural, linguistic, historical.

Diaby's Parisian studio is a place of maintenance and sampling rather than manufacturing. Items arrive with remnants of relations that do not disappear. The artist doesn't impose coherence on them, so that authorship disperses. He thrives in a field formed by the materials themselves. The viewer shifts from an interpreter extracting meaning to a participant in a system of relations and relationships.

Disposability is never neutral, but a system of decisions about what stays out or gets shoved aside. Yet this is not a romantic celebration of garbage. The discarded object always carries the violence of its abandonment. To throw something away is also to attempt erasing the network of relations that produced it. Modern consumer culture depends on this erasure: waste must disappear so that the cycle of production can continue uninterrupted. Diaby refuses that disappearance. By returning discarded or overlooked materials to visibility, he reveals the ideological mechanisms that sustain disposability itself. Objects become witnesses to the economies that produced them. They testify to domestic life, migration, spirituality, consumption, and loss—all condensed into material form. In this sense, Diaby's installations operate like ecosystems of memory. Remove one element and the entire constellation shifts. Meaning is not fixed but relational, constantly recalibrated by the viewer's movement through the space.

In the fictional world of the Japanese manga series *Gachiakuta* (2022), waste is cast into an abyss meant to secure finality. The protagonist, Rudo Surebrec, becomes able to activate these objects precisely because he recognizes what others refuse to see: the afterlife of matter. Like Surebrec, Diaby treats discarded materials as repositories of latent agency. The artist does not redeem the object through aesthetic refinement; he simply allows it to continue speaking. In the face of the push for legibility, Diaby's oeuvre refuses complete translation. What his body of work provides is duration: the need to sit in, to stay with, that which does not resolve. In *Who's Gonna Save the World?* at Lafayette Anticipations, Paris (2026), the works remain contingent: everyday objects waiting in a state of continued negotiation with one another and the space.

There is no clear boundary between making and living in Diaby's practice, which rather emerges from conditions of improvisation. If there is any optimism here, it is minimal. Attention, then, becomes the only viable ethic. Not interpretation, which resolves, but attention, which stays.

Ladji Diaby (b. 2000, Saint-Denis) is a multidisciplinary artist based in Ivry-sur-Seine. His work has been exhibited at No One Has Ever Called Their Child Hunger, Kunstverein Nürnberg (2024–25); Partenaires Particulières, Fondation CAB, Saint-Paul-de-Vence (2024); it was a hot day, a day that was blue all through, Galerie Crèveœur, Paris (2024); Autohistorias, Palais des expositions des Beaux-Arts, Paris (2023); Gold Plated Prophecies, FORDE Art Center, Geneva (2023); Is Missing Something, FRAC Corsica, Corti (2023); Target Group Show, Braunsfelder, Cologne (2023); and solo exhibitions at Lafayette Anticipations, Paris, opening in April 2026, and Galerie Crèveœur, Paris, opening in September 2026.

Mistura Allison is a researcher, curator, and art historian. She is the founder of ashiko., a visually driven research platform inspired by Africa and its Diaspora. Currently, she serves as a curator and project coordinator at Villa Romana in Florence, engaging in transnational artistic practices with a focus on contemporary art and advancing methodologies of decentralized exhibition making. Her work focuses on research-based practices engaging with the plurality of contemporary Diasporic visual and oral productions.