

**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Points of Departure**  
**Photography from Senegal by Mamadou Gomis and Judith Quax**

Points of Departure, a new photography exhibition, opens in the Long Gallery at the Museum on 12 May 2014.

This exhibition examines the phenomenon of migration, by placing the transatlantic slave trade and contemporary migration from West Africa in a single frame. Photographers Mamadou Gomis and Judith Quax work in Senegal, a West African nation from which many young men have migrated to France, Italy, and the United States.

Migration is a major political concern of our time. With increased access to transport, more people than ever are on the move for work, leisure, or in pursuit of a better future. It is the latter category, sometimes referred to as economic migrants, whose travel is perceived with some ambiguity. In search of jobs, they are seen as a potential threat. Governments and media document their impact on the destination economies in order 'to tackle the problem'.

Rarely, however, do the media examine the reasons why people from low-income countries migrate to high-income countries. And we really know very little about the lives these migrants have given up, the families they have left behind, the hardship experienced whilst on the move. Of course, we have all seen the images of economic refugees, risking their lives by crossing the Mediterranean in small vessels in an attempt to reach fortress Europe. Such images convey their determination to make it. But where have their journeys started? In this exhibition, the photographs by Judith Quax document the migrants' absences – as they are felt by the families they left behind in pursuit of a livelihood.

Historically, migration has been part and parcel of the ways African societies coped with political instability, droughts and economic misfortune. The social instability experienced in African societies was partly produced by the transatlantic slave trade in which millions of Africans were enslaved and shipped to the plantation economies of the New World. Many Africans view the social and economic upheavals this trade produced as a major reason for Africa's current under-development.

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Historically, Senegal has also been a point of departure for the Middle Passage. The historic House of Slaves serves as a memorial to that trade, visited by tourists and descendants of slaves. In his work, Mamadou Gomis documents the visitors of the House of Slaves, and the ways in which they explore the site as a place haunted by the spirits of the departed. The work exhibited in Points of Departure documents the places where absence is present.

### **Notes for Editors**

- Mamadou Gomis started his career as a studio photographer in a small Senegalese town. Establishing himself in the national capital, Dakar, he began documenting everyday life in the big city. The newspaper *Le Journal* published his series of daily snapshots, and he has photographed for AFP and Reuters. His work was included in the international exhibition *Snap Judgments* (2006), and has been shown in New York, Lagos, Cape Town, Johannesburg and Berlin.
- Judith Quax studied at the Photo Academy of Amsterdam. After several other projects in Senegal, she then focused on the phenomenon of international migration. Her work has been published in *Nka* and *African Arts* and exhibited in Dakar, Lagos, Berlin and Amsterdam. Her current work focuses on the role of photograph albums in sustaining relations between migrants and their families back home. Working for Amnesty International, she continues to document international migration.
- The exhibition is curated by Ferdinand de Jong, Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at the School of Art History and World Art Studies, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK.
- The financial support of the British Academy is gratefully acknowledged.
- The Pitt Rivers Museum is one of Oxford's most popular attractions, famous for its period atmosphere and outstanding collections from many cultures around the world, past and present. Admission, exhibitions and events are FREE.
- The Pitt Rivers Museum was founded in 1884 when General Pitt Rivers, an influential figure in the development of archaeology and evolutionary anthropology, gave his personal collection of 20,000 items to the University on condition that a museum was built to house the material, and that a post was created to lecture in anthropology. Today the collection numbers some 600,000 items, and the Museum remains an active department of Oxford University doing and supporting research and teaching in archaeology and anthropology.

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