

Exhibition Guide

Manthia Diawara *Maison Tropicale*

4 February – 29 March 2009

Tower Room

Yet another utopian project, comparable to the Bubble House in Andrade Tudela's film, is the *Maison Tropicale*, a house designed by architect and designer Jean Prouvé between 1949 and 1951. The prefabricated aluminium structures were modular, made to be flat-packed, constructed and dismantled with ease. They were intended to address the shortage of housing in the French colonies of West Africa, but only three prototypes were ever made.

The filmmaker Manthia Diawara's 58-minute documentary *Maison Tropicale* (2008) takes its starting point in another artist's work: Ângela Ferreira's project about these buildings, shown in the Portuguese Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2007. Through interviews with Ferreira, the people she meets, government officials, residents and former owners of the properties in the Republic of the Congo and Niger, Diawara examines notions of cultural patrimony and illuminates issues surrounding African identity and art within the context of post-colonial debate and the legacy of Modernism.

Les Maisons Tropicales were removed from Africa in 2000, bearing the scars of general neglect and civil war. Subsequently returned to France, restored, then exhibited in the USA and Europe, they were sold for millions of dollars, a far cry from their original utopian function and social context.

Manthia Diawara was born in Mali. He is Professor of Comparative Literature and Film, and Director of the Institute of African-American Affairs, at New York University.