

[UK]

#ExpoKinshasa
citedelarchitecture.fr

KINSHASA CHRONICLES

14 OCTOBER 2020 – 11 JANUARY 2021

To think the city through the lens of art: drawing on a wide variety of visual media, on sound and on words, 70 artists engage with Kinshasa as they see, experience, question, imagine, hope and contest it. The practice of these creators, most of whom belong to a very young and deeply committed generation, originates in and actively shapes the urban fulcrum. It is a potent, productive force.

This potency is a function of Kinshasa itself. Many a city – in the “North” notably – could learn from “Kin’s” approach to urban place-making. Inspired by the poly-centrality, poly-functionality, contiguity and circular economies that characterize Africa’s third largest megalopolis, they might rethink themselves in terms less rigid, less centralized and more open to experimentation.

Life in Kinshasa is often harsh; to elide this is not the point. But there will be no sense of despair, here, either. Media portraits commonly present Kinshasa as a chaotic wreck; tropes of urban catastrophe abound.

Such portraits are held at arm’s length by the artists present here. Crumbling infrastructure, endemic unemployment, militarization of public space, ordinary violence: these subjects are addressed, but also the city’s poetry, its vitality, its humor and the hope it inspires. Criticism, at time acerbic, goes hand in hand with perceptions of the city as a space of potentiality.

The exhibition is configured around nine chronicles. Intentionally porous, these can be approached as one wishes: a linear itinerary is possible, as are skips, jumps and back and forth trajectories. Performance, sports, looks, music, capital(ism), spirit, DIY, future, memory: multiple themes are addressed. The intent, however, is not to present a panoramic overview of Kinshasa. It is, rather, to suggest pathways, entry points, listening stations: spaces of potentiality.

PERFORMANCE CITY

Worldwide, performance art interrogates the brutality of economic and political systems that ravage lives, spaces and possibilities. In Africa and in its diasporas, since the 1980s a striking performance landscape has taken shape, which critiques these systems and gives rise to powerful forms of resistance. Kinshasa occupies a fundamental place in this landscape.

Performance as it is practiced in Kinshasa is rooted in a deep history: a history of cities, of art, and of intersections between creation and politics. The performance artists encountered here draw extensively on this legacy. They work and rework it in response to teachings, for many of them have studied art formally, to inter-generational knowledge transfers, collaborations with practitioners hailing from different horizons, and joint undertakings. Theirs is an art form premised on shared action, deployed to ends both local and global to tell, imagine and remake the city and, in the process, to remake the world.

SPORT CITY

Sport is a central feature of Kinshasa. From headline arenas to improvised football pitches, a complex history linking sports to power is recalled and unfolds.

Deployed by Belgian colonial authorities to channel youth energies, on the eve of independence sport emerged as a powerful force for freedom. In 1959, at Stade Roi-Beaudoin (so named for the Belgian king), a controversial football match set the city alight; shortly thereafter, the European regime capitulated. On 30 June 1960, in the same stadium, Patrice Lumumba was named Prime Minister of a Congo at last free. Following Lumumba's assassination in January 1961 on orders

from Washington and Brussels, the stadium was taken over by Mobutu Sese Seko. Grandiose spectacles and massive sports events were held there, which he instrumentalized to fearsome political ends. The most famous of these events took place in October 1974: the Muhammad Ali-George Foreman boxing match. Known locally as "the fight of the century", it is etched in the city's collective memory.

LOOK CITY

SAPE is an urban culture whose roots lie in the colonial period. In the early 1900s in Brazzaville, servants working in the homes of European colonists were paid in hand-me-down clothes. These the African employees adopted and adapted with flair and to critical ends. In the 1920s, with the arrival of laborers hailing from Anglophone West Africa, a vast body of practices emerged centering on the quest for elegance. These practices promptly spread to colonial Kinshasa. First under Belgian rule and then following independence, they flourished, both in Kin and in the diaspora. They attract many followers today, as well as writers, musicians, photographers, filmmakers, painters and illustrators who celebrate SAPE's creative drive.

For some, SAPE is an expression of contestation, leveraged to express through looks a refusal of systems that bestow power and rank on the few at the expense of the majority. For others, SAPE's fascination with luxury goods is a capitulation to these very systems.

MUSIC CITY

Rumba, soukous, ndombolo, rap, Christian hymns: in Kinshasa music is everywhere. Structural links between music and politics have long shaped the city. When Patrice Lumumba came to power at independence, he named as Information Secretary one of rumba's founding fathers, Joseph Kabasele. Under Mobutu, who, following Lumumba's assassination ruled Congo for over 30 years, Kabasele was cast aside; for Mobutu, rumba had but one purpose: to celebrate him. Under subsequent leaders, notably Joseph Kabila (2001-2019) and the current president, Etienne Tchisékédi, rumba and ndombolo have continued to serve the interests of the powerful.

Less well known internationally than rumba, Congolese Hip-Hop is often a site of dissent. From Lexus Legal, Bebson de la Rue, Orakle and Alesh (in Kinshasa) to Baloji, Youssoupha and Maître Gims in the diaspora, it broadcasts a trenchant critique of the social order, both in Congo and on a global scale.

CAPITAL(IST) CITY

Kinshasa is torn between misery and opulence. Its economy is one of extremes, born of colonial violence and its post-independence avatars. Still, there is a small middle class whose existence must be taken into account, along with the imaginaries that it engenders.

To speak of the Congolese capital's economy is also to speak of globalization and neoliberalism. Daily, deals are done there in hundreds of millions of dollars, euros and renminbi. At the heart of these transactions are precious metals mined in Eastern Congo by rapacious multinational corporations and massive construction/infrastructure projects run by European and Asian firms.

These business deals, which position Kinshasa as a key node in global high finance networks, intersect with still other transactions tying its markets to cities across Africa, Europe, Asia, the Americas and the Middle East.

SPIRIT CITY

Kinshasa is shot through with spiritual quests. These take a variety of often syncretic forms. Christianity, Islam and Judaism are present, but in no one instance as a monolithic block. Christianity dominates, by way of the Roman Catholic Church.

Then come Protestantism and the Eastern Orthodox Church. The former flourishes, both in its "classic" form and in the form of "charismatic" – that is, Evangelical – churches, which have made powerful inroads in the city's spiritual landscape.

Another variant of Christianity very present in Kinshasa is Kimbanguism, founded in 1921. Its central figure was sentenced to life in prison for spreading the doctrine of equality between Blacks and Whites.

Also noteworthy are movements inspired by the precolonial era. A case in point is Bundu dia Kongo, which draws inspiration from the legendary Kongo Kingdom (14th-19th century). The movement's spokesperson, Ne Muanda Nsemi, prophesies Kongo's rebirth.

DIY CITY

Over the last three decades, DIY resourcefulness has become central to life in Kinshasa. Fewer than 5% of the population has salaried employment and both the State and public services are bankrupt. As a result, people resort to “Article 15: fend for yourself to survive” – an imaginary clause in the Constitution made famous in the 1980s by the singer Pépé Kallé. The clause applies to rich and poor alike: resourcefulness has permeated all social strata.

“Resourcefulness”, writes Sylvie Ayimpam, “is the art of finding solutions to life’s daily problems, inventing complex schemes to get out of difficulties – advancing little by little, using cunning or extortion – but also the art of cooperation, exchange, mutual assistance, solidarity and togetherness. More than a state of mind, it is a way of being that is central to a shared urban culture”.

FUTURE CITY

The theme of the future plays an important role in the work of many Kinois artists. From architectures of the future to future urban lives and ideals of space exploration, it often takes on a science fiction cast.

For the most part, this work is not directly influenced by Afrofuturism, a movement born in the African diaspora. That said, with the very best of Afrofuturist literature, music and art, it shares a vision of possible alternatives steeped in powerful critique. Populated by robots, cyborgs, superheroes and part-human/part-machine cosmonauts, the imaginaries it brings to bear undermine the foundations of hegemonic systems active worldwide.

These imaginaries are fueled by humor, at times ferocious, and, simultaneously, by poetry verging on the oneiric. The resulting work is evocative in the extreme.

MEMORY CITY

During the colonial period and under Mobutu, for its inhabitants the Congolese capital was a source both of pride and of profound physical and psychological violence. At the same time, in these two eras Kinshasa was an immensely vital hub of creativity, home to stunning celebrations of city life and, simultaneously, to finely honed indictments of the status quo.

The entire length of the space occupied by *Kinshasa Chronicles* is lined with a photo mural: a montage/collage/cutout of photographs shot, for the most part in Kinshasa, between the beginning of the 20th century and the 1970s-1980s. This is not a factual overview of the city’s past, but a partial, poetic evocation of this past and of what its memory might signify today for a generation that did not experience it.

The images that constitute the basis of this this montage were collected by a young Kinois artist, Magloire Mpaka Banona.

AROUND THE EXHIBITION

I CATALOGUE

Kinshasa Chroniques, edited by Dominique Malaquais, Institut des mondes africains, CNRS / Éditions de l'Œil, 2019, french and english, 384 pages, 30 €

I UTOPIES URBAINES

Conference cycle
8th and 9th January
Detailed programme on citedelarchitecture.fr

I EVENT

Museum Night

Saturday 14th November - 7pm-11pm
Free entry and activities
Detailed programme on citedelarchitecture.fr

I GUIDED TOURS

Sundays 15th November (tour in french / lingala),
20th December and 10th January (in french)
- 3pm
1h30 / 5€ (entrance fee not included)

I WALKING CITY TOURS

Château Rouge district

Saturdays 24th October, 7th November,
19th December, 9th January - 2pm30
15€ / **Reservation: bastina@bastina.fr**
bastina.fr

I PHOTOGRAPHY

"Autour de Sammy Baloji"

Thursday 12th November - 7pm
Auditorium
2h / Free admission, reservation recommended

I FILM

Conference with Baloji

Sunday 22th Novembre - 5pm
Auditorium
1h30 / Free admission, reservation required
citedelarchitecture.fr

HEAD CURATOR

Dominique Malaquais, art historian and political scientist at Institut des mondes africains (CNRS)

ASSOCIATE CURATORS

Claude Allemand, board member of MIAM
Sébastien Godret, photographer
Éric Androa Mindre Kolo, artist
Fiona Meadows, programme manager at Cité de l'architecture & du patrimoine
Local coordination, **Mega Mingiedi**, artist

Find the complete programme on citedelarchitecture.fr

All activities are only proposed in french.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

CITÉ DE L'ARCHITECTURE & DU PATRIMOINE

Palais de Chaillot


1 place du Trocadéro - 75116 Paris

M° Trocadéro / Iéna

Tel 01 58 51 52 00

citedelarchitecture.fr



Wifi gratuit 

HOURS

Open daily except Tuesdays

11 am - 7 pm

Thursday evenings

until 9 pm

Closed Tuesday, January 1, May 1
and December 25.

EXHIBITIONS

PARIS 1910-1937. PROMENADES THROUGH THE ALBERT-KAHN COLLECTIONS

16 September 2020 to 11 January 2021

The exhibition is a co-production
between the International museum
of modest arts/Musée international
des arts modestes
and the Cité de l'architecture & du patrimoine.

RATES

Permanent Collections

Full price

12€

Reduced rate

9€

Free entry first Sunday of each month

THE MONITEUR BOOKSHOP AND GIFT SHOP

The only bookshop entirely dedicated
to architecture, built heritage and the city.
Opening hours are the same as those
of the Cité.

Tel 01 78 09 03 00

librairie.cite@groupemoniteur.fr

LE LABORATOIRE DU LOGEMENT

Transformer à grande échelle,
nouveau défi de la durabilité

Bordeaux / Amsterdam

16 October 2020 to 25 January 2021



DUPON
PHIDAP

CONGO
PARIS
Général de Gaulle au Congo

Télérama'

inrockuptibles

TROISCOULEURS



philosophie
magazine



TRANSFUCE

NOVA
LE GRAND MIX

PARIS
PREMIÈRE

TV5MONDE