

Amani BODO

Amani Bodo was born in Kinshasa in 1988. Bodo is the youngest son of the late-lamented Pierre Bodo (1953-2015), who was one of the leading representatives of Congolese painting. The young Amani had a great gift for drawing and found his vocation at a very young age. At school, he preferred drawing to coming top of the class. His father quickly grasped the situation and did not insist on Amani concentrating on schoolwork. Instead, his father chose to support his son's artistic vocation. He welcomed his son to his studio and taught him, just like he had taught the elder brother, Bodo fils.

And this is how Amani started painting at the age of 10. He also displayed a great aptitude for sculpture, but opted for painting. Amani sold his first work at the age of 16. Having studied at the Institute of Fine Art, he opted to give the School of Fine Arts a miss and started earning his living as an artist at the age of 20. His works became part of the famous Pigozzi collection of contemporary African art when he was only 21.

Symbols and surrealism

Having tried his hand at the popular style, Amani found his way with a figurative and symbolic style with a surrealist feel, drawing inspiration from the family's artistic world. Bodo quickly displayed great technical skill, which very swiftly led to him being pronounced one of the best Congolese painters of his generation. Bodo depicts his ideas, visions and sometimes even his dreams in his paintings. His works are humanist, sometimes moralizing but always benevolent (for instance, *Cigarette*, 2008, Caacart). Bodo uses symbols and parables and at times composes his works like a rebus puzzle, making them difficult (*Zéro*, 2008, Caacart; and *Emergence*, 2011, Angalia), even impossible to interpret. It doesn't matter. The mystery arouses interest and facilitates all kinds of interpretations. Some works are more explicit. In *Le rêve* (2011), the artist directly expresses his view of Africa's relationship with the world, with this being one of his favourite themes.

Over 2013-2015, Amani imperceptibly developed his work. He firstly produced a handful of well-executed humorous works (*Fesse book*, 2014), albeit without any real artistic depth. He then went back to the world of the Congolese sapeurs; a world he had always liked and in which he had excelled, but not wishing to encroach upon his father's field, he had always kept away..

Tous sapeurs !

For his *Tambola malembe* exhibition, he created an exhilarating series of 10 canvases entitled *Everyone's a sapeur!* in which international celebrities pose as Congolese sapeurs (dandies). The *Tous sapeurs !* series has a light-hearted feel but is a real artistic tour-de-force. Amani has avoided the pitfall of pure extravagance and has instead endeavoured to respect the figures portrayed. Far from disappearing beneath their costumes, the costumes help convey their personalities. There is also something tender in the way that Amani sketches them. Obviously, the poses and get-up bring a smile to the face, but it is restraint that holds sway in these portraits. Some even seem completely plausible (*Pope Francis*, *Stromae* and *George Clooney*).

Backgrounds to the fore

The backgrounds of Amani Bodo's canvases are his artistic hallmark and are easy to spot. The artist calls them *mwangisa*, referring to the rash of flecked colours, a cosmic nebula which immediately grabs the attention and contributes to the dazzling yet mysterious feel of his works.. The background of these works is still shaded with the earth and sky forming a single continuum, just like Velázquez did in his *Portrait of Pablo de Valladolid*, a work which was a source of direct inspiration for Amani for his extraordinary *Chéri Samba* (2015).

By all accounts, his father did not get it wrong. The youngest son was born to be an artist.

Pierre Daubert, extracts from the *Tambola Malembe* catalogue, 2016