

Freddy Tsimba

Freddy Tsimba is a Congolese visual artist who was born on 22 August 1967 in Kinshasa (DRC). Having studied large-scale sculpture at the city's *Académie des Beaux-arts* (1989), Tsimba spent five years alongside master blacksmiths and master casters to learn their trade.

His most emblematic works are made by collecting cartridge cases from conflict areas in DR Congo, and painstakingly welding them together to create sculptures. These *silhouettes effacées* (anonymous silhouettes), the nameless victims of human folly, are mainly women who are pregnant and bear the traces of mutilation. Tsimba's works are bleak but they are not designed to shock. His intention is to depict and denounce war, and its atrocious and absurd repetition, both in DR Congo and all other conflicts. The depiction of pregnant women conveys a message of hope, as Tsimba tells us that despite everything, "life always prevails."

Freddy Tsimba does not limit himself to using cartridge cases. He works with plenty of other collected metal items, which for some symbolize death (machetes and mousetraps), for others oppression (chains), and addiction (capsules). In fact, the symbolism of the works is very frequently two-fold, as the message behind the works is never hopeless. For instance, keys express imprisonment but also the idea of opening the door to freedom, while spoons convey both hunger and subsistence, and machetes are first and foremost agricultural tools, and therefore an everyday item. The Machete House, built from machetes, is one of his flagship works. It seeks to emphasize that machetes are designed for construction and not killing.

The harsh nature of the message does not exclude beauty. The fullness of the shapes and their sensual nature thwarts the fear of the materials used, ensuring that life triumphs over death. Tsimba uses cartridge cases, scissors and chains to sculpt busts and moving female backs, with generous and reassuring figures. Beauty is everywhere, but we need to seek it out.

Freddy Tsimba is an internationally renowned artist who has exhibited widely around the world. One of his works, *Au-delà de l'espoir*, depicting a cartridge case woman holding a child, with an arm raised to the skies, stands in the famous district of Matonge in Brussels. Tsimba also created the set for the stunning baroque opera-ballet *Coup Fatal* using cartridge cases. In 2018, the *Manège de Chaillot* endowment fund acquired *Porteuse de vies*, a large-scale sculpture given to the Théâtre de Chaillot to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 2021, the Africa Museum in Tervuren in Belgium is devoting a major solo exhibition to Tsimba. Always on the move and willing to chat, drawing inspiration from opportunities and encounters, Freddy Tsimba just keeps on creating.

Freddy Tsimba is friendly, cheerful and positive, and is as gentle as his work is harsh. It only looks like a paradox: great sensitivity is required to tenaciously pay tribute over time to anonymous suffering. There is something extremely heartening in his work and journey.