

Gaël Maski

Born in 1990 in Kalemie in DR Congo, Gaël Maski now lives and works in Kinshasa.

Right from his time spent studying at the Kinshasa *Académie des Beaux-arts* (ABA) in the painting department, Maski has taken part in several themed masterclasses (in particular run by the artist Aimé Mpane), and co-founded the Vi.to group with the young artists Hilaire Balu and Alexandre Kyungu. He graduated from ABA in 2014. He then took time to mull over and research his work in order to find the medium that would most closely reflect his aims.

Having used canvas until then, with a partiality for depicting psychological states, he firstly switched to a new format, scrap wood, in order to more closely link his work with real life in Kinshasa. He collected boards, for example those used by some families for home schooling, on which he created figurative and symbolic figures with a surrealist tone, mixing collages and painting.

In late 2016, he joined the Kin Artstudio (KAS) in Kinshasa for three years. KAS was founded in 2011 by the established artist Vitshois Mwilambwe to offer studio space for young visual artists, foster interaction between artists, help them to make a living from their art, and offer artist-in-residency opportunities. In 2017, he exhibited in *Young Congo*, a KAS group exhibition with a published catalogue.

In the same year, he took part in the Picha residency-masterclass, coordinated by Samy Baloji in Lubumbashi, and exhibited his work at the Lubumbashi Biennial. Upon his return from the biennial in 2017, he decided to systematically use photography to more effectively capture snapshots of the lives of his subjects and their environment. He focuses on marginalised and voiceless people. In particular, Maski forged a relationship with the stone-breakers in a Kinshasa neighbourhood and offered to convey their message on one of his artworks. He interviewed and photographed them and then printed out the photos on plain paper and cut them up. Then came the “recreation” phase: he used fragments of real life to create new scenes. In this series, he uses blackboards to symbolise the education denied to these families’ children, who dream of going to school.

In 2018, he took part in the *I had a dream* AtWork Tour 2018 masterclass organised by the Moleskine Foundation and led by Simon Njami in Kampala, Uganda. During the same year, he took part in the joint *Politics of Return* residency programme run by the 32° East Ugandan Arts Trust, the London School of Economics (LSE), and the LSE’s Firoz Lalji Institute for Africa, curated by Kara Blackmore. This programme explores the dynamics of return and reintegration of refugees in Central and Eastern Africa. He worked in a Congolese refugee camp in Uganda. Maski produced *Three ladies in the lake*, a work in which he uses the daily lives of the refugee camp women as the starting point, and then reenchants their world, reintroducing the power of imagination and hope.

The imaginary dimension is clear in his works. Maski does not seek to hide real life, instead he endeavours to repair and reconstruct it to bring forth another dimension. Hence the importance of using photos as the starting point, i.e., physical reality, which he enriches with symbols and allegories. “In Kinshasa, a lot of people, including myself, need to escape into an imaginary world in order to

survive. You need to draw strength from another reality in order to cope with daily life." As collages now comprise the whole of the background of his works, wood no longer has a place and is replaced by canvas.

Gaël Maski has taken part in group exhibitions annually since 2011, in Kinshasa (centre Wallonie Bruxelles, TMB Bank, Kin ArtStudio, Centre Texaf-Bilembo), Lubumbashi (Biennale), Kampala (Makerere Art Gallery, Uganda Museum, Institut français) and London (London School of Economics). His work was shown at AKA (Also Known as Africa) in Paris in November 2019.

He has been represented by Angalia since February 2019.

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