

GALERIE ANGALIA

PORTRAITS YA KONGO 01.07 - 09.08.23



10-12 rue des Coutures Saint Gervais - Paris 3e

Opening
6 July 2023

Group show
PORTRAITS YA KONGO
01 July to 09 August 2023

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01.07 - 09.08.23

Opening on Thursday 6 July from 6 to 9pm

The exhibition showcases a selection of portraits by 12 artists from DR Congo, two of whom are being shown for the first time in France and by the gallery.

Portraiture has become central to African contemporary art over the past decade. The artists use it to explore themes related to African culture, history and identity, as well as the challenges being faced by African communities today. The visibility of Black bodies through portraits offers a contrast to the invisibility and marginalisation long suffered by Black communities. A large number of artists make use of it today to question stereotypes, develop a fairer representation, or even assist pro-minority activism.

The artworks shown in *Portraits ya Kongo* differ from this movement to demarginalize and affirm identity; a movement in which Congolese artists have not really got involved. They are more interested in the individual and the singular, and focus more on personal experiences. In any case, these artworks are perpetuating a very old and prolific genre that photography has not exhausted. Portraiture continues to fulfil some of its historic functions in contemporary art.

Celebrating major figures is one. Several of the works on show pay tribute to major popular figures from the visual arts, music and football.

Ngule Freeman, a very young hyperrealist artist, celebrates one of his elders from the DR Congo art scene with a radiant portrait of *JP Mika*, the painter of joy and colour with his legendary floral jackets. This portrait is striking because of its faithfulness to the model. While the history of portraiture shows that resemblance is not an imperative of the genre, and that a portrait may in fact convey a person's character instead of rigorously reproducing their physical appearance, this work brilliantly combines both facets.

Théo Mwamba pays tribute to *Le Grand Kallé*, the father of modern Congolese music, and the singer-songwriter of *Indépendance Cha Cha*, the mythical 1960 hit that became the hymn of African independence.

With *Messi le roi Léo*, depicted in the familiar pose of a great monarch, **Amani Bodo** bridges the gap between the art of the past and contemporary portraiture, by featuring the famous footballer in line with the classic tradition of 17th century full-length portraits. In passing, he highlights football's place in contemporary society, just like an Omar Victor Diop in his *Diaspora* series.

This depiction of a "king" calls to mind the political function of so-called "official" portraits, i.e., the portrait of a head of state. **Steve Bandoma** gives it a fresh twist in *Little Trump* by adhering to the tradition in order to more effectively mock the statesman in question. This work is an example of another genre of portraiture, caricature, which is used to satirise. In contrast, Ngule Freeman's portrait of Patrice Lumumba, DR Congo's first prime minister and a major figure of independence, depicts Lumumba in a moment of relaxation and smiling broadly, far removed from the strictures of protocol.

Autorité morale displays the formal characteristics of political portraits, but here **Kura Shomali** frees himself from representing a given individual, as the subject is not any recognisable leader. He makes use of an Yves Sambu photograph from the *Vanité apparente* series to caricature men in positions of power intoxicated by their power, in an allegory of autocratic power.

The works of Catheris Mondombo, Théo Mwamba, Stanis Mbwanga and Eli Made are truly allegorical. They depict more social or personal subjects, and make use of portraiture to depict the devastating physical and mental effects of toxic environments. In *Réparation*, **Catheris Mondombo** uses portraiture's symbolic function to create a metaphor of the female victim of violence. He makes use of visual beauty to move and interest the person viewing the work in the fate of the depicted subject, and by extension, in female victims of abuse. **Théo Mwamba** takes the same path by denouncing child labour, as symbolised by a barcode placed on his portraits.

Shown for the first time by the gallery, **Stanis Mbwanga's** portraits on ceramic are in keeping

with a long tradition of painting on porcelain, particularly in China (where Stanis trained) and in Europe. A large swathe of his work denounces the greed of aggressive capitalism, particularly taking aim at the new information and communication technology sector, synonymous in his eyes with the abusive exploitation of fossil fuels and raw materials. The characteristic design of motherboards often reproduced in his portraits seeks to raise awareness of this subjection.

With the work *Dans le masque*, created using bleach, the very young artist **Eli Made** (19) wants to emphasize the cultural and spiritual importance of traditional African art by depicting a man absorbed in the contemplation of a mask. This is the first time that Eli's work has been shown in Europe. His unusual technique is used to create a form of artistic expression fuelled by painful personal experience and very impressive resilience.

Portraiture is at the crossroads of social and private lives in the triptychs in the *Tala Ngai* (Look at me) series. Drawing inspiration from classic full-length portraiture, **Gosette Lubondo** has photographed young women from Kinshasa twice over: before and after they put on their makeup and get dressed, in other words, how they are at home, and how they present themselves in public. A third shot depicts some of the woman's living space. This series invites us to reflect on self-perception and the external gaze, and provides a record of the lives of Kinshasa women in 2020. The series will provide a record of this period in future years.

Memory, albeit individual in this case, is all pervasive in the posthumous portraits painted by **Moke fils** (*Moke fils peint Moke père*) and **Francis Mampuya** (*Portrait de Mampuya Ferdinand*) paying tribute to their fathers. In Mampuya's case, introspection seems to hold sway. Stripped of any surrounding environment and peripheral objects, the close-up portrait of his father's face underlines the emotion of the filial bond. The artist painted the portrait in the days following his father's death. These works are undoubtedly the best illustration of portraiture's primary purpose, i.e., "to make the absent present", in the words of Leon Battista Alberti (the author of a treatise on painting during the Renaissance). The portrait painted by Moke fils has this distinctive feature: it doubles up as a self-portrait and evokes the concept of artistic kinship through the *mise en abyme* of the painting in the painting. The

son is paying tribute to both his father and the great painter that he was.

The exhibition also contains two other self-portraits, including **JP Mika's** memorable *Autoportrait à la nature*. A distinct work in the output of the painter known for his vibrant portraits with floral backgrounds, *Autoportrait à la nature* is of course inspired by the work of Giuseppe Arcimboldo. However, while Arcimboldo's compositions are of imaginary subjects, JP Mika accomplishes the feat of self-portraiture by rising to the challenge of creating a likeness. The artist has used the living world of animals, forests and oceans to create his face, rather than the still life compositions used by the Renaissance painter. His self-portrait is just as much a tribute to the abundance of nature..

Artists featured in the exhibition

Steve BANDOMA (1981, RD Congo), lives and works in Kinshasa.

Amani BODO (1988, RD Congo), lives and works in Kinshasa.

Ngule FREEMAN (1999, RD Congo), lives and works in Kinshasa.

Gosette LUBONDO (1993, RD Congo), lives and works in Kinshasa.

Eli MADE (2003, RD Congo), lives and works in Kinshasa.

Francis MAMPUYA (1967, RD Congo), lives and works in Kinshasa.

Stanis MBWANGA (1982, RD Congo), lives and works in Kinshasa.

JP MIKA (1980, RD Congo), lives and works between Kinshasa and France.

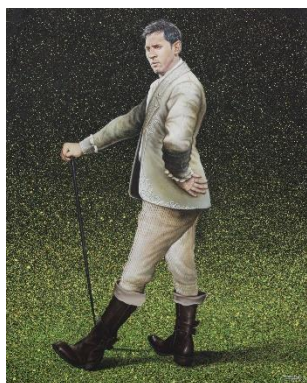
MOKE FILS (1968, RD Congo), lives and works in France.

Catheris MONDOMBO (1992, RD Congo), lives and works in Kinshasa.

Théo MWAMBA (1997, RD Congo), lives and works in Kinshasa.

Kura SHOMALI (1979, RD Congo), lives and works in Kinshasa.

Images available



1. Amani Bodo, *Messi le roi Léo (Série Tous sapeurs !)* (2015)

Acrylic on canvas, 100 x 80 cm
© PCP - Courtesy A. Bodo et Angalia



2. Francis Mampuya, *Portrait de Mampuya Ferdinand* (2022)

Acrylic on canvas, 85 x 63 cm
© PCP - Courtesy F. Mampuya et Angalia



3. Ngule Freeman, *JP Mika* (2022)

Graphite, charcoal and coloured pencil on paper, 127 x 87 cm
© PCP - Courtesy N. Freeman et Angalia



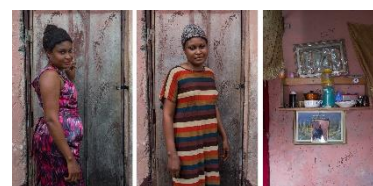
4. Steve Bandoma, *Little Trump (from the Power Series)* (2018)

Mixed media on paper, 140 x 100 cm
© PCP - Courtesy S. Bandoma et Angalia



5. Stanis Mbwanga, *Incredible but true* (2023)

Ceramic paint on porcelain plate, 37 x 37 cm
© Stanis Mbwanga - Courtesy S. Mbwanga et Angalia



Gosette Lubondo, *Mme Djafar (Série Tala Ngai)* (2017)

Inkjet print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag 308 g. paper
Tryptique, 3 x (90 x 60 cm)

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Contact information

Galerie Angalia
10-12 rue des Coutures Saint Gervais
75003 Paris
Open Tuesday to Saturday
Tue. 12h – 19h
Wed. to Sat. 11h – 19h
00 33 (0)7 81 72 30 62
galerie-angalia.com

Contacts :

Pierre Daubert (director)
daubert@galerie-angalia.com
06 32 10 55 80

Karin Barlet
barlet@galerie-angalia.com
06 13 92 18 72