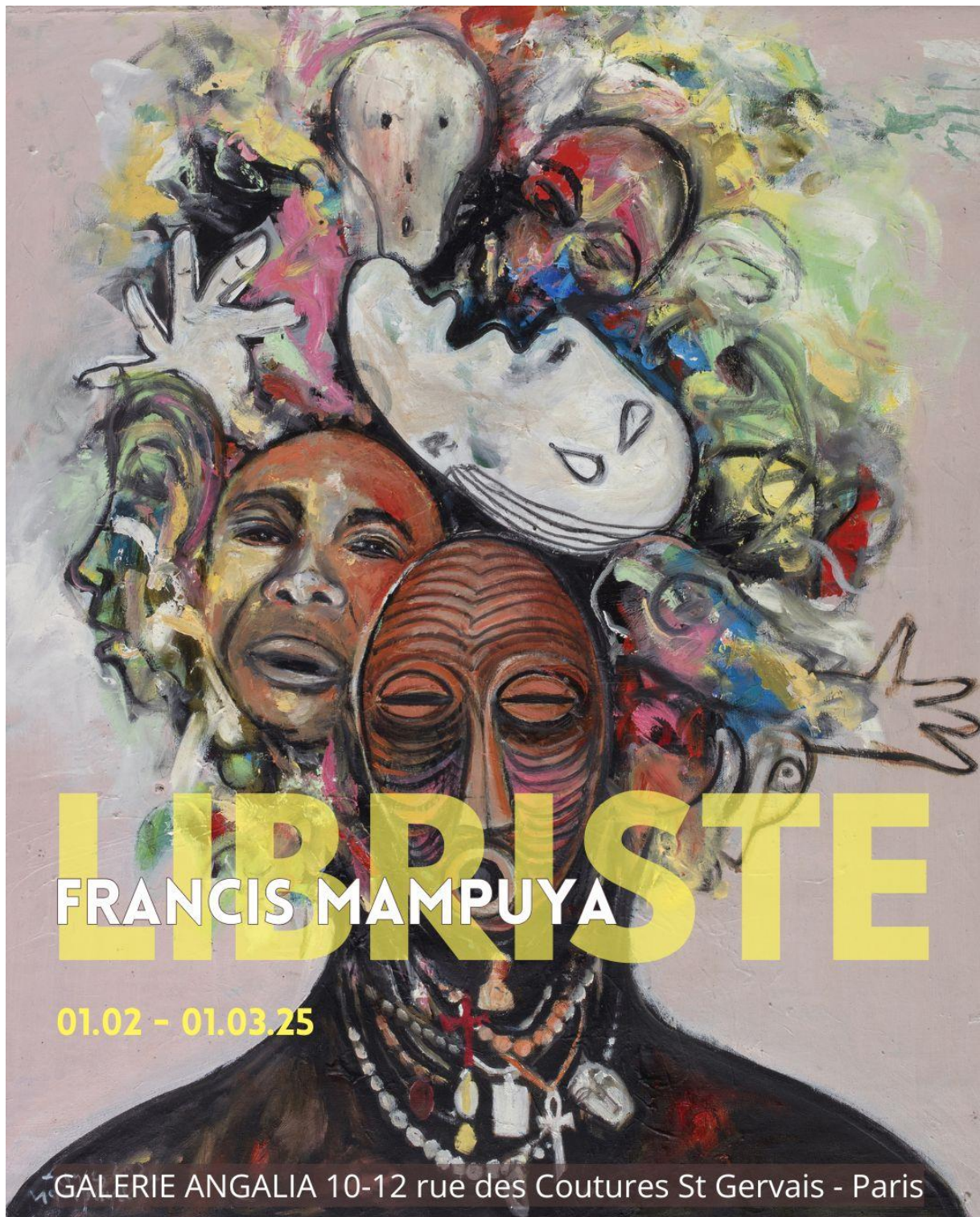


GALERIE ANGALIA

PRESS RELEASE



OPENING
1 February 2025

Solo show
Libriste - Francis Mampuya
1 February - 1 March 2025

FRANCIS MAMPUYA - *Libriste*

Solo show

01.02 - 01.03.2025

Opening on Saturday 1 February
from 5pm to 8pm

The year is 1996 and the place is Kinshasa. Francis Mampuya was still a student at Kinshasa School of Fine Arts when he burst onto the DR Congo art scene. He decided to storm out of the school, along with some fellow students, to flee an academic philosophy that was suffocating him. Together they created a movement that they would later call "*librisme*". They were soon joined by other young artists. They received the backing of the Centre Culturel Français enabling them to exhibit their work.

The *Librisme* movement – a wind of change

The movement disbanded shortly afterwards, and each of the members took their own path. However, *librisme* remained an important milestone in the short history of contemporary art in DR Congo. Indeed, Congolese art was developing in a ponderously conformist fashion in the mid-1990s, apart from popular painting, which was already gaining some recognition, and two or three outstanding and uncategorisable artists. A generational leap and original individuals would be needed to bring about renewal. *Librisme* would crystallize this latent need for modernity. Of course, not everything new was inevitably *libriste*. For instance, Freddy Tsimba, who started his career at the same time, developed outside the movement, although he had a real affinity with it.

The *libristes* unleashed abstraction and expressionism in DR Congo. They also introduced previously artistic practices to DR Congo: collages, installations, artistic performances, and usage of salvage materials.

Following the break-up of the original *libristes*, a new group tried to relaunch the dynamic in 2002-2003, but this collective also disbanded a few years later. However, it didn't matter, as the process of renewal was underway.

In fact, the *Libriste* movement was more about severing links and assertion than an artistic movement; with the artists that were part of it not having developed a shared form of artistic expression. They shared one thing: they rejected constraints and were attracted by modernity. But this is too little to generate artistic consistency. Their artistic identities developed separately.

The human condition at the heart

Mampuya burst onto the art scene by saying no to conventions, and in a way, he has never stopped saying no since that moment. In his paintings, he says no to injustice, arbitrariness, the stranglehold of irresponsible politicians, wrecking of the environment, to Africa being forgotten or shown contempt, to the horror of migrant journeys to Europe. A third of the works in this exhibition are protest works: *Le dictateur* (2007), *Les réfugiés* (2016), *Ange déchû* (2018) and *Leader face à l'indignation* (2024).

His work fluctuates between semi-figurative and abstract. His abstract works always seek to be allusive. The message is most frequently sombre and pain is never far away. Mampuya's silhouettes are blurred because everything is uncertain and confused. He reveals the sheer number of influences that shape and sometimes constrain them: their own culture, arts, beliefs and superstitions (*Multiple*, 2024), or force them into a state of neglect (*Un homme, une chaise, une bière*, 2012).

Strictly speaking, Francis Mampuya is not an activist artist. He has never taken a conscious decision to be one. However, as an artist who shares in his people's suffering, it is unthinkable for him not to bear witness to it in his work.

However, hope is not absent from his artworks. There may be anger, and even despondency at times, but there is no despair. Mampuya also knows that people are brimming with possibilities, despite depravity and injustice. And so, he hopes. Improvement remains possible.

Minimalist portraits

Francis Mampuya likes to paint portraits when between two semi-abstract series. The portraits are always quite rough and ready, generally painted in acrylics and often with his fingers (*Sans titre*, 2015), and sometimes with an ink mix (*La croyance*, 2012). The *Portrait de Mampuya Ferdinand* is a tribute to his father, painted shortly after his death. The exhibition also contains a small self-portrait of 2014. *Portrait de Gastineau* (2024), meanwhile, is a portrait of one of his artist friends, Gastineau Massamba, from the Republic of the Congo.

The former rebel student has become an established name

In his student days, Mampuya went to libraries to learn about art from other continents, taking notes and filling entire exercise books. In 1996, the editors of the mythical *Revue noire*, on a visit to Kinshasa, reported on this in issue 21 of the publication, describing their encounter with the student Francis Mampuya: "in his exercise book, a real feat of intelligence and finesse, he tries his hand at the theory of art in order to try to analyse his own approach, as well as that of others." Nowadays, Francis no longer fills entire exercise books with copious notes, but he still follows the work of other artists. His preference is for Anselm Kieffer, Georg Baselitz and Soulages.

Francis Mampuya has his ardent supporters, because of his work, obviously, but also because of his personal qualities - his simple and sincere consideration, his calm nature and discreet charm. At the age of 57, Mampuya, the former rebel student, has become an all-time favourite of the Congolese art world and an established name. We are delighted to be of-

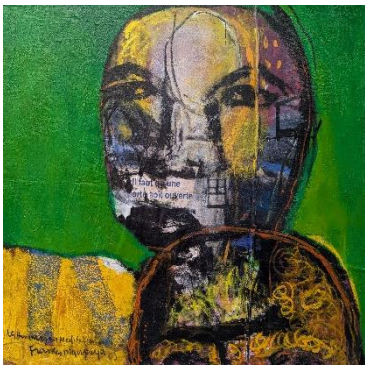
fering an overview of his immense artistic output. The exhibition displays 13 works produced over the 2005-2024 period.



1. Francis Mampuya, *Multiple* (2024)
Acrylic on canvas
86 x 94 cm
© F. Mampuya



2. Francis Mampuya, *Leader face à l'indignation* (2024)
Acrylic on canvas and collage
113 x 98 cm
© F. Mampuya



4. Francis Mampuya, *Les hommes en méditation* (2005)
Oil and acrylic on canvas
150 x 110 cm
© F. Mampuya



3. Francis Mampuya, *Je reviens au pays de Lumumba* (2023)
Acrylic on canvas
125 x 95 cm
© F. Mampuya

Visuals of the works in the exhibition are available on request from:
barlet@galerie-angalia.com.

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