

AIMÉ MPANE

Aimé Mpane (b. 1968, D.R. Congo) is one of the most prominent Congolese artists of his generation. As a sculptor he has developed a very personal style in which sculpted volumes and painted surfaces constantly interact. Working primarily with wood and an adze - a traditional African woodworking tool - the Belgium-based artist creates sculptures, mosaic-like wall hangings, and portraits carved on wood that explore his personal and artistic experiences in Congo and Belgium's post-colonial worlds. His practice is inspired by contemporary Congo, while demonstrating a deep understanding of its history.

Mpane's sculptures and installations often address the aftermath of Belgian colonialism; while his rough-hewn, brightly painted portraits on wood panels of the people he meets on the streets of Kinshasa give insight into modern Congolese identity. UNSETTLED presents two works from his series "Le Demoiselle Pende/Masque Bi-face". These carved sculptures resemble African sickness masks while also referencing Pablo Picasso's 1907 masterpiece "Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)". This body of work was inspired by a visit of the artist to his grandmother in a village situated some 800 kilometers from Kinshasa. As a lot of diamonds are mined around Tshikapa City, in the Kasai Province, the area is rife with trafficking; a context that fosters the spread of prostitution.

"It was night-time, and I could see clients walking up to prostitutes and using the light of their mobile phones to assess them, as though they were mere objects. Interestingly, these young girls were mainly from the Pende tribe - the same tribe that produced the sculptures that inspired Picasso to create Les Femmes d'Alger, a picture depicting prostitutes. This is therefore a juxtaposition of the image produced by Picasso and of these Pende women reduced to mere objects. This cultural and political dimension fascinates me."

This series is also imbued with a second symbolic layer:

"The faces evolve, become monstrous. This is also connected to what I see as prostitution in politics. I get the impression that Congolese politicians also prostitute themselves, and in the process, they become like monsters. They also, are copying a Western model. It is interesting, these two cultures that intersect around prostitution, becoming monstrous. This connection between Europe and Africa is always present in my work. The interaction, the past, the present... there is a lot of overlap."

The son of a sculptor, Mpane was brought up in the tradition of carpentry and has a close affinity with wood and its craftsmanship. Mpane's sculpts these deformed faces out of multiple layers of plywood. The backside of each segment is painted in a different color, resembling



topographical maps and evoking the strata of memory. The choice for plywood as a material, whose three thin sheets are glued together against the grain, is no coincidence. The material inspires him on several levels. While being a product of the Western consumption industry, its three superimposed layers also recall the three strata of the skin (epidermis, dermis, hypodermis), which the artist cuts away to expose and reveal our deeper, invisible layers. By hacking away the plywood, he exposes the constructed nature of the material as well as the constructs of race and identity. When the artist cuts away the multiplex, the various colors of wood (light brown, white and dark brown wood) evoke the human skin. The multiplex also refers to the precarious structures of the poorest areas of African cities. Yet, through his artworks, this 'poor' medium acquires an aura of dignity and longevity.

Essential to this bifacial works is their double-sided nature, with a hollow inside and a protruding relief on the outside, as though memories were getting lost and reappearing on the surface. The artist takes us 'through the looking glass' to the other side, behind the mask. For the back of the work, Mpane was inspired by an early self-portrait by Picasso, as a nod to Western culture and art history. His adze-cut, multicolored works possess an intuitive sense of the burden of humanity and the janus-like nature of our souls. Janus, the Roman god of passages, transition and transformation was a double-faced divinity, turned with one side to the past while facing the future with the other. While one side of the work is sculpted with the traditional adze, the layers on the other side breathe with modernity, being laser-cut. Essentially, this series deals with the problem of lines of demarcation, of borders between cultures. A true humanist and cosmopolite, Mpane proposes a global vision of art.

Born in Kinshasa, today the artist divides his life between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Belgium, where he lives in Brussels. Mpane recently was honored with a solo exhibition, "Remedies", curated by Sophie Hasaerts, at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium in Brussels. He has been the subject of several other solo shows in both Congo, and the United States and was included in significant group exhibitions including "Posing Modernity: The Black Model from Manet and Matisse to Today" at Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, New York, NY (2019); "Black Models: From Gericault to Matisse" at the Musée de Orsay, Paris, France (2019); "Sanctuary", FOR-SITE Foundation, San Francisco, CA (2017) and Aga Khan Museum of Art, Toronto, Canada (2020); "Double Take: African Innovations", Brooklyn Museum, NY (2016); and "Shaping Power: Luba Masterworks from the Royal Museum for Central Africa", Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA (2013). In 2018, Mpane was commissioned to create a sculpture for permanent display at the newly renovated Africa Museum in Tervuren, Belgium. His work is additionally collected by institutions including the National Museum of African Art, Washington, D.C; Brooklyn Museum, NY; Harlem Museum, NY; Detroit Institute of Art, MI; Microsoft Art Collection, Redmond, WA; Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C; and the Embassy of Belgium, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. Aimé Mpane is represented by Walter de Weerd's Nomad Gallery.



SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2021 Remedies, Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels, Belgium
- 2017 Aimé Mpane: J'ai oublié de rêver, Mill – Musée Ianchelevici, La Louvière, Belgium
- 2016 Aimé Mpane, University of Wyoming Art Museum, Laramie, WY
- 2013 A Dual Perspective, Haines Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 2013 The Rape/Le Viol, Skoto Gallery, New York, NY
- 2012 Médiatine, Brussels, Belgium
- 2011 Une image n'est jamais seule, la Vénérie, Brussels, Belgium
- 2011 Ekoma bongo, Museum of Katanga. Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo
- 2011 Erased, Skoto Gallery, New York, NY
- 2010 Ekoma bongo, Centre Culturel Français, Halle de la Gombé, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo
- 2009 Faces, Skoto Gallery, New York, NY
- 2007 One-Man Exhibition: Aime Mpane, Station Museum of Contemporary Art, Houston, TX
- 2007 Mises à nu, Médiatine, Brussels, Belgium
- 2007 Médiatine, Brussels, Belgium
- 2006 Bach to Congo, Skoto Gallery, New York, NY
- 2006 DAK'ART, Biennale de Dakar, Senegal
- 2003 Havana Biennial, Cuba
- 2002 Museum of Katanga, Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo
- 1997 Rops Centre, Brussels, Belgium
- 1993 Riviera Hotel, Pointe Noire, Democratic Republic of Congo

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2021 Europa, Oxalá, Mucem, Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée, Marseille, France
- 2021 Re-création, Fondation Jean-Paul Blanchère, Apt, France
- 2021 Seeing Differently: The Phillips Collects for a New Century, The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC
- 2020 Good Trouble, WhiteBox-Harlem, New York, NY
- 2020 Sanctuary, Aga Khan Museum of Art, Toronto, Canada
- 2019 Likenesses, Haines Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 2019 ARTZUID, 2019 Amsterdam Sculpture Biennial, The Netherlands
- 2019 Black Models: From Gericault to Matisse, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France
- 2018 Posing Modernity: The Black Model from Manet and Matisse to Today, Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, New York, NY
- 2017 Sanctuary, FOR-SITE Foundation, San Francisco, CA



- 2017 To See Is to Have: Navigating Today's Art Ecosystem, McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX
- 2016 Double Take: African Innovations, Brooklyn Museum, NY
- 2015 Piece by Piece: Building a Collection, Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO
- 2014 DAK'ART Biennale de Dakar, Senegal
- 2014 Fundamental Abstraction III, Haines Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 2013 Shaping Power: Luba Masterworks from the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA
- 2013 Carnaval, Fondation d'art contemporain Francès, Paris, France
- 2013 Empire, FiveMyles, Brooklyn, NY
- 2012 Thrown Together, NOMAD, Brussels, Belgium
- 2011 Escaut. Rives, Derives: Festival International de Sculpture Contemporaine, Escaudoevres, France
- 2011 Summer Show, Skoto Gallery, New York, NY
- 2010 Liverpool Biennial, UK
- 2010 Selections, Skoto Gallery, New York, NY
- 2010 Exploitation et Deforestation, Faculté de Gembloux, Belgium
- 2010 Perceptions, ZET Foundation, Glazenhuis, Amstelpark, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- 2010 L'art Actuel de l'Afrique, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Chartres, France
- 2010 Terra Incognita-Part II, NOMAD Gallery, Brussels, Belgium
- 2010 Nous et les autres, Tour et taxis, Brussels, Belgium
- 2009 New Voices in Dialogue, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC
- 2009 Persona, Royal Museum of Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium
- 2009 Animal, Anima, Centre d'Art, Fondation Jean-Paul Blachère, Apt, France
- 2009 Terra Incognita-Part I, NOMAD Gallery, Brussels, Belgium
- 2008 Art Brussels 26, Foire d'art Contemporain, Brussels, Belgium
- 2008 Black Paris Black Bruxelles, Musée d'Ixelles, Brussels, Belgium
- 2007 Congo Contemporain, Monos Art Gallery, Liège, Belgium
- 2007 Congo en Marche, Botanique, Brussels, Belgium
- 2007 Dialogue Lubumbashi-Kinshasa-Liège, Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain de la Ville de Liège, Belgium
- 2007 L'art dans la ville, Centre d'Art, Fondation Jean-Paul Blachère, Apt, France
- 2009 The National Museum of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo
- 2009 Impression Noir, Maison de la culture, Namur, Belgium
- 2009 Group Show, Skoto Gallery, New York, NY
- 2006 DAK' ART, Biennale de Dakar, Senegal
- 2006 Centre d'Art, Fondation Jean-Paul Blachère, Apt, France
- 2005 Les couleurs d'Afrique, Gallery Group 2, Brussels, Belgium



2004 Noirs et Blancs en Couleur, Maison Pelgrims, Brussels, Belgium
2004 Bikeko, Sonnenenergieforum der RWE, Dortmund, Germany
2004 L'homme en 5 regards, la Madeleine, Brussels, Belgium
2003 Africa for Africa, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, Belgium
2003 Havana Biennial off, Wifredo Lam Center, Havana, Cuba
2003 Love Zones, Gallery Barnoud, Dijon, France
2002 Paysages, Galerie Sabine Wachtters Fine Arts, Knokke, Belgium
2002 Symbol in African Contemporary Art, Université Libre de Brussels, Belgium
2001 Africa Sana, quai Antoine-1er, Monaco
2000 Messages of Modern Art, ISELP, Brussels, Belgium
1999 Peinture de voyage of Reunion Island, Abbaye de la Cambre, Brussels, Belgium
1998 Un échange, Montréal-Bruxelles, Galerie Simon Blais, Montréal, Canada
1997 Un Homage à Marie Callas, Rops Centre, Brussels, Belgium
1996 Libr' Art, Halle aux Foires, Libramont, Belgium
1994 Fifth Biennale of Contemporary Bantou Art, Democratic Republic of Congo

AWARDS

2020 Golden Afro Artistic Awards, Brussels, Belgium
2012 The Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Prize, The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC
2006 The Jean Paul Blachère Foundation's Critics Prize for DAK'ART Biennale de Dakar
1996 First Prize, Congolese government, CICIBA, Fifth Biennial of Art,
Democratic Republic of Congo
1994 First Prize, libr'art, Halle aux foires, Libramont, Belgium

EDUCATION & RESIDENCIES

2019 Cité internationale des arts, Paris, France
2013 Residency, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC
2000 MFA, Painting and tri-dimensional Research, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des
Arts Visuels, La Cambre, Brussels, Belgium
1990 BFA, Monumental painting, Académie des Beaux-Arts, Kinshasa,
Democratic Republic of Congo
1987 Sculpture, Institut des Beaux-Arts, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo

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