



Portrait of Jean Depara

Jean Depara

Biography

Born in 1928, Kboklolo, Angola

Died in 1997, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, where he lived and worked

Depara came to photography almost by accident. To record his wedding in 1950 he bought himself a small Adox camera—after which he never ceased to seek out new subjects for his lens. Settling in Kinshasa in 1951, Depara first combined his photography with various small jobs: repairing bicycles and cameras, dealing in scrap metal. In 1954 the celebrated Zairian singer Franco invited him to become his official photographer, launching Depara's career as a chronicler of Kinshasa social life in the era when the Rumba and the Cha Cha defined the city's rhythm. He set up a studio under the name Jean Whisky Depara and spent his days in bars like the Kwist, the OK Bar, or the Sarma Congo. At night he hung out at such clubs as the Afro Mogenbo, the Champs-Elysées, the DjamboDjambu, the Oui, the Fifi, the Show Boat. Night owls particularly fascinated him and with his flash Depara captured an Africa stripped of conventional social codes. Interracial couples, hipsters, and those who in imitation of James Dean chose to "Live fast, die young" became both his subjects and his clients.

Among Depara's themes in his photographs are the Miziki who have such a powerful role in Kinshasa society. These associations of women were rooted in pre-independence traditions, and a Moziki (singular form of Miziki) could act as a banker within her social circle. In the 1950s and 1960s, Miziki associations took such names as La Pause and La Mode, and commissioned famous bands to compose songs for their annual events.

Depara died leaving his archive of hundreds negatives untitled; with the permission of the artist's family, his close friend Oscar Mbemba has titled the works in the spirit of this era.

GROUP SHOWS

2017

Autophoto, Fondation Cartier, Paris, France

Festival Photo La Gacilly, Morbihan, Bretagne, France

Studio Africa!, Galerie Tristan Hoare, London, UK

2016

Portrait(s), Festival, Vichy, France

2015

Beauté Congo - Congo Kitoko, Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain, Paris - France
(curator: André Magnin)

2011

JapanCongo, Double regard de Carsten Höller sur la collection de Jean Pigozzi (curator: Yves Aupetitallot)

Le Magasin, Grenoble, France ; The Garage Center for Contemporary Culture, Moscow, Russia

2010

Un rêve utile. Photographie africaine 1960-2010, Palais des Beaux-arts, Brussels, Belgium

2008

Zoom sur la femme congolaise, Espace "Art de vivre", Kinshasa, DRC

2007

Le rituel de la pose, Musée des Arts derniers, Paris, France

2006/2007

100% Africa, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain (curator: André Magnin)

2005/2006

African Art Now: Masterpieces from the Jean Pigozzi Collection (curator: André Magnin)
Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Houston, USA ; National Museum of African Art,
Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, USA

2005

Arts of Africa, The Contemporary collection of Jean Pigozzi, Grimaldi Forum, Monaco
(curator: André Magnin)

2004

E la Nave Va, Jours tranquilles à Kinshasa, MAMCO, Geneva, Switzerland

2001

Photographes de Kinshasa, Rencontres africaines, Biennale de la Photographie, Bamako, Mali

2000

Noorderlicht 2000 Photo Festival,

Fries Museum, Leeuwarden, Netherlands ; Anacostia Museum, Washington, USA
New African Museum, New York, USA ; Africa Past-Present: Seydou Keita, P.K. Apagya, Depara, C.A. Azaglo and Ojeikere, Fifty One Fine Art Photography Gallery, Antwerp, Belgium

1998/1999

Eye Africa: African photography 1840-1998, Festival of African photography, South African National Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa

EXPOSITIONS INDIVIDUELLES

2011/2012

Depara, night and day in Kinshasa, 1955-1965, Maison Revue Noire, Paris, France

2009

Les nuits de Kinshasa, Jean Depara, 1955 à 1975, Rencontres africaines, Biennale de la Photographie, Bamako, Mali

2002

Depara, Centre de la Photographie, Geneva, Switzerland

2000

Exposition individuelle, Bologna, Italy

Artists of Africa and the diaspora - in pictures

Fotofest in Houston is one of the major photography events in the world, and its central show this year was to have been *African Cosmologies: Photography, Time and the Other*. Curated by Mark Sealy of Autograph ABP, London, the show has been postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic. However, the work of the 31 featured artists, looking at the intersection between the African diaspora, contemporary life and issues of colonialism and representation, can be seen in a companion book published by Schilt

Sarah Gilbert

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A bodybuilder with his girlfriends in Léopoldville-Kinshasa. From the series *Athletes, 1955-65*, by the Angolan photographer Jean Depara.
Photograph: Jean Depara/Courtesy of the Jean Depara Estate and Revue Noir, Paris

