



Hilary Balu

Biography

Born in Kinshasa in 1992

Lives and works in Kinshasa

The desire to be an artist begins very early in Hilary Balu. He copies images from cinemas, trailers, posters but also drawings from his father, the later used to occupy his free time by recreating objects from his house. With the help of his aunts and oncles, he gets from his father the permission to follow an artistic training. He studies at the Académie des Beaux-Arts of Kinshasa.

Young graduate, in the course of a conversation during a varnishing of the artist Vitshois MwilambweBondo in Kinshasa, Hilary Balu sees his academic convictions shaken up. He emancipates himself from westerner codes and techniques learned in school and search an aesthetic to which he can identify as a Congolese but also as an African.

The paintings of Hilary Balu reveal an African society transformed by globalization and consumer society. The "brutal mutation" that the Democratic Republic of the Congo has known in its cultural, political, economic and spiritual identity is represented through a symbolism of the object. The artist erects the object as a collective memory. So the leitmotif of Nkisi Mangaaka, an ancestral divinatory sculpture, comes back in its work in contrast with capitalism newsymbols. Between tourist bags and flip flops, the traditional statuette is also a reminder of the imbalances of the DRC in its international relations.

Thanks to the technique of scratching on acrylic, technique that the artist has used since he was a student, he relays the experience of black skin. The point is to express its deterioration over time, in reference to the poet Léopold Sedar Senghor according whom « Fuma diar kouffa diar takeu ban » in English « Where I went, the one who will follow my path will be covered in soil »

In his last series Voyage vers Mars Hilary Balu shows in a metaphorical way the contemporary migration of a population. Real escape from a continent to another just like an alternative planet, cosmonauts allegory of the migrant, leave an inhabitable land in prey with war or economic difficulties. Ironically these forced travelers have for luggage touristic bags showing decors from global capitals.

EDUCATION

2014

Fine art degree, Académie des Beaux-Arts de Kinshasa, DRC

GROUP SHOWS

2020

Galerie MAGNIN-A, Paris, France

Kinshasa Chroniques, Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, Paris, France (curators: Dominique Malaquais, Claude Allemand, Sébastien Godret, Eric Androa Minde Kolo, Fiona Meadows)

In-discipline, presented by the Fondation Montresso at 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair, Marrakech, Morocco

2019

Fiction Congo, Museum Rietberg, Switzerland (curators: Michaela Oberhofer, Nanina Guyer)

2018

Megalopolis, les voix de Kinshasa, Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, Germany (curators: Freddy Tsimba, Eddy Ekete)

Congo Stars, Kunsthaus Graz, Austria (curators: Sammy Baloji, Bambi Ceuppens, Fiston Mwanza Mujila, Günther Holler-Schuster and Barbara Steiner)

Kinshasa Chroniques, Musée International des Arts Modestes, Sète, France (curators: Dominique Malaquais, Claude Allemand, Sébastien Godret, Eric Androa Minde Kolo, Fiona Meadows)

2017

Exposition et résidence Young Congo, Kin ArtStudio Kinshasa, RDC

Kinshasa 2050, Institut Français de Kinshasa, halle de la Gombe, France

2014 - 2015

Exhibition arts? pro Congo, Place des évolués, Kinshasa, DRC

2014

« Détermina-tion qui crée la liberté », exposition du groupe vision totale « vi.to », restaurant the Rives, Kinshasa/ Gombe, DRC

2013

« Les vécues », exhibition of the groupe vision totale « vi.to », private residency, Kinshasa / pigeon.

2012

Contest and exhibition Gouvern'art organised by the European Union
Art Pro Congo (2nd edition), British Embassy, Kinshasa, DRC

RESIDENCIES

2021

Black Rock, Dakar, Senegal

2019 - 2020

Fondation Montresso, Marrakech, Morocco

2019

Atelier Solar, Madrid, Spain

Pro Helvetia, Embassy of Foreign Artist, Geneva, Switzerland

2018

Faculté des arts de Wits, département d'histoire de l'art, Johannesburg, South Africa

Festival KLA ART, Ouganda

Vivre sur le seuil. Rencontre Congolaise, Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici Università della Calabria, Italy, in collaboration with the cityhall of Cosenza, Italy.

2017

Young Congo, Kin ArtStudio(KAS), Kinshasa, animated by the artist vitshois Mwilambwe Bondo

2013 - 2014

MASTER ART de Kin Art Studio (KAS), animated by the artist Mwilambwe Bondo Vitshois

COLLABORATION

Kin art studio (kas projet) Kinshasa, DRC



Exhibition Hilary Balu-Joseph Obanubi, gallery Magnin-A, Paris, 2021, ©Gregory Copitet



Exhibition Hilary Balu-Joseph Obanubi, gallery Magnin-A, Paris, 2021, ©Gregory Copitet

Kehinde Wiley's Black Rock Resident Artists Are Named

Members of the global group share the painter's passion for using art to explore social change.



By Dionne Searcey

Feb. 2, 2021

A Congolese painter whose art reflects how globalization and consumerism have transformed African society. A Nigerian-American filmmaker whose work focuses on cultures and experiences of Africans and the diaspora. A visual activist from Texas who forces her viewers to confront issues that are deemed difficult to tackle.

These are among the 16 artists selected for the 2021 residency at Black Rock Senegal, the seaside studio in the West African capital city of Dakar belonging to Kehinde Wiley, the painter best known for his portrait of former President Barack Obama.

The artists, who will spend several weeks at the lavish studio along a volcanic-rock-lined shore, express themselves in a variety of formats and come from across the globe. But many in this year's group share Wiley's passion for using art to explore social change.

His most recent works include the stained glass fresco of breakdancers in the Moynihan Train Hall and his "Rumors of War" statue in Richmond, Va. — a Black man with ponytailed dreadlocks on horseback in the style of monuments to Confederate war generals. Wiley is not part of the Black Rock selection committee, which aims to consider the class of artists as a whole and tries to pick a diverse group of residents, including personal identities and nationalities and the medium they work in.

Among the residents is Hilary Balu, from Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, whose recent brightly colored yet sorrowful series "Voyage vers Mars" explores the tragedy of contemporary migration — in this case the flight of a population to another continent, like astronauts leaving a destroyed earth for another planet.



Hilary Balu's "Voyage vers Mars 5," explores the flight of populations to other continents. MAGNIN-A

Abbesi Akhamie, who lives in Washington, is a Nigerian-American writer, director and producer whose latest short film, "The Couple Next Door" from last year, premiered at the Aspen Shortsfest and won the Audience Choice Award at the Reel Sisters of the Diaspora Film Festival.

Irene Antonia Diane Reece from Houston uses her family archives as a form of activism and liberation, with some of her work exploring family history and racial identity.

Other residents include Delali Ayivor, a Ghanaian-American writer; Mbali Dhlamini, a multidisciplinary artist, and Arinze Ifeakandu, a Nigerian writer who recently graduated from the Iowa Writers' Workshop and writes about queer male intimacy. The residents will each spend several weeks at a time in the studio, with coronavirus restrictions in place, in staggered stages, beginning this month.

Some might overlap with Wiley, who has spent much of the past year in Dakar, using the global pandemic as an opportunity to pause and paint, sometimes working with Black Rock residents who have helped him in his work.

“I’m learning to view, discuss, and critique art that often depicts the Black body from a range of perspectives that span the globe,” Wiley said in an email exchange. “There’s an unending variety of rubrics through which artists are pushing the possibilities of representation.”



Vision Totale

How an Art Collective Determines its Modes of Production

The Kinshasa based collective Vi.To shares a common practice and an understanding of contemporary art in their local context.

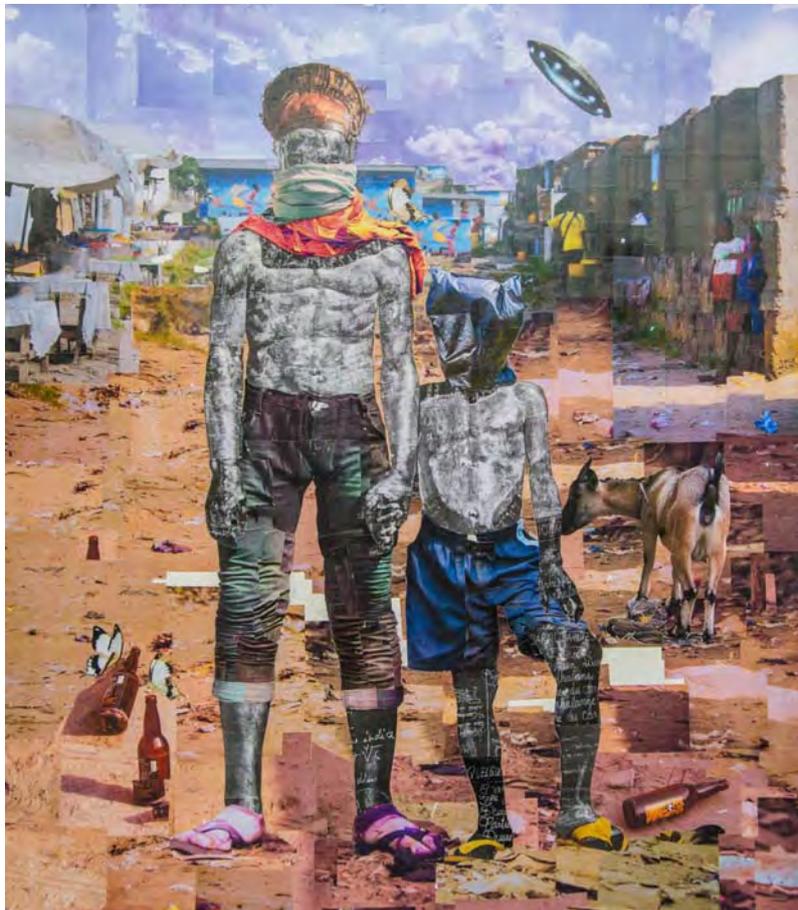


Hilaire Balu Kuyangiko. Diagnostic de nos Consciences (Detail), 2019. Courtesy of the Artist.

BY JEAN-SYLVAIN TSHILUMBA
MUKENDI
15. juillet 2020

In 2016, Alexandre Kyungu introduced me to his collective Vi.To – an abbreviation for *Vision Totale* (Total Vision) – that he, Hilaire Balu Kuyangiko and Gaël Maski Kusa Kusa founded in DRC's capital shortly after their graduation. Vi.To, self-proclaimed union of these three artists, is innovating in the field of visual art, acting against the tide of expectations by drawing from the rich creative resources and realities that Kinshasa offers. With no specific mandate or outreach program, they seek to infuse their works with all the social concerns and realities that characterise their direct environment. Collectives have formed and existed in the history of contemporary art for a long time, but they also carry out a vital socio-cultural function. Most art collectives in Kinshasa mean to empower their members, working under a common vision and impulse.

Back in 2016 the members of Vi.To. told me how their introduction to international contemporary art practices – through self-documentation or workshops – had been the impetus to reflect further on a practice in their own context. "It was a shock to discover contemporary art, which appeared as a sort of follow-up of what we had", says Gaël Maski, reflecting on the abruptness of such a discovery. Being part of a collective has been an emancipative gesture in reaction to a rigid art education for many in Kinshasa. Naturally, birds of a feather flock together.



Gaël Kusa Kusa Masky. *La Main de l'Homme*. 2019. Courtesy of the Artist.

The three artists of Vi.To are especially concerned with their practice's legacy, a collective and collaborative idea that shall be very tangible one day. They want to "create something that will benefit coming generations, something that is addressed to the public, the local population", Alexandre Kyungu had said in 2016. Gaël also stressed the importance to reach a Kinshasa-based audience: "how can we reach them?" It seems necessary to find channels to popularize or rather root visual art practices into the informative and cultural lines of Kinshasa's urban fabric so that visual art does not stay a vague idea instilled by 'colonial dis-acculturation'. Part of the motivation to establish Vi.To was to grasp and define the relevance and legitimacy of their work at a community level.

"The population should be bound by any ideology that comes from its culture" insists Gaël Maski. In his recent body of work, Hilaire Balu Kyungu also makes a visual diagnosis of our consciousnesses, that strive to anchor despite the waves of imperial and destabilizing 'éblouissements'. He points to the problem that our imagination has been colonized. As a collective Vi.To. addresses this diagnosis and makes it a key concern in their philosophy – through visual compositions.

Imperialism in a post-colonial era has much to do with the severe imprints left by hegemonic globalized and consuming societies. Vi.To. has been adamant that the colonization of our imaginaries has to be addressed and subverted. Their creation had less to do with the establishment of an art group or the drawing up of a creative manifesto than with collective enabling, with the conviction that visual art, if practiced collectively, critically and rigorously, can help raise local and African voices in the strive for cultural change and social justice.



Alexandre Kyungu, Ebonga Sit Down – C'est notre Espace, 2017. Courtesy of the Artist.

Vision Totale's leitmotiv is engagement, whatever the challenges, obstacles and setbacks they are confronted with. Their engagement is sustained by their strong will to work and establish themselves as artists. Their faith in such achievement is a binding one. However, individuals sometimes neglect the fact that collectivism is a prerequisite if visual art practices are to have a real and consequential community relevance and impact. Their personal aspirations are inextricably tied to the idea and belief that their art and practice encourage change in the socio-cultural and political status quo in which their countries live.

Alexandre Kyungu prefers the notion of contemporary vision instead of contemporary art. More than three years after our initial conversation, a common vision seems to have taken over Kinshasa and the DRC's visual art scene and begins to establish among the art community and local cultural actors. As a case in point, recent events such as La Biennale de Lubumbashi VI – *Future Genealogies Tales From the Equatorial Line*, the first edition of the (Young) Congo Biennale entitled *Transition*, the *KINACT* Performance Festival or the upcoming second edition of *Yango Biennale* are willing to collaborate with all the active artists, actors and forces in the field to set the foundations for new approaches, visions and methodologies of art-making, outreach and appreciation. Alexandre Kyungu firmly believes in: "creating something while ideology is spreading everywhere – to organize conferences, meetings and dialogues between each other and to bring more artists/creatives to the visual side of things, of reality".

Aware and convinced of the social and critical dimension of contemporary art, Vi.To's respective work carries a message or a call for cultural reassessment and renewal. If there is a greater collaborative mission in the field of visual arts, it certainly relates to the contemporary notions of African reviviscence, self-definition and mythological/imaginary uprising. The collective's vision shows an uncompromising will to question, unveil and re-imagine our human global condition and its socio-cultural rootedness. "We should question ourselves as people creating a new world in which the tensions we experience today should not exist" says Gaël. In a time when global and socio-economic realities are entangled with the research and new formations of African cultural benchmarks, the ability to relate to a collective mind spirit is essential.