

**Ngimbi (Luve) Bakambana** was born in Kinshasa, DRC in 1977 and trained at L'Academie des Beaux Arts, Kinshasa. He is also educated in music at the Conservatoire de Nanterre, France. He lives and works in Paris, France.

Bakambana is among the first of his generation to have exhibited with the 'masters' of Congolese art such as Mavinga, Chéri Samba, Nginamau, Lema Kusa, Liyolo, Botembe, François Tamba Ndembe in DRC and in Germany. François Tamba Ndembe, one of the foremost Congolese sculptors, forward thinker and the most affecting artist by the shapes and mastery of his composition, was his mentor in art.

In his expressionistic approach to art, Bakambana leverages colour to intimate what words express in verbal communication. He is inspired by the social context of his native Congo which serves to express his thoughts and understanding of the world through colours.

Bakambana's paintings are a form of pictorial sociology of the *SAPE*<sup>1</sup> culture centred in the two Congos, and which is reminiscent of Dandy and Rudeboy cultures found elsewhere. Sapology is a state of mind and a set of behaviours and attitudes rooted in urbanity, and embodied in the "*Kitendi Religion*", a concept that links the principles of religion to the social uses of fabrics and fashion – 'a religion of fabrics and fashions' in other words. In the difficult context of war and hardship, Sapology offers a window of hope and joy, of rehabilitating oneself through fabrics and fashion that are worn to be seen. It is a sort of social exorcism characterised by eccentricity.

In his creative process, Bakambana borrows from various sources that allow him to venture in a chromatic universe, at once philosophical and historical, intertwining pictorial finds from ancient Egypt to Jazz, and parsing them through the expressionist world view of the Sapologues, who are themselves inspired by their environment, including advertisement posters and everything that is imbued with colour. The Sapologues speak of a trilogy of completed and uncompleted colours (Red, Yellow and Blue), which are the three primary colours from a painter's point of view. They look for a harmony of colours and build a harmony of passions, they speak of 'feasts' that constitute a reconciliation and joy. Their clothing in turn reflects a conciliation of colours and aspirations. As an Expressionist himself, Bakambana considers the Sapologues to be *Fabric Expressionists*.

Central to his work is a sense of revolt against the conventions of the art world. Here Bakambana models his thinking on his music hero Thelonious Monk - someone well versed in the formalisms of jazz, yet with a preference for compositions that go beyond convention, and for seeking the aesthetics of chaos in his music. Similarly Bakambana's paintings are a harmony of chaos, because we live in a chaotic world and art is therapy for the artist and the viewer, with the aim to recreate harmony between man and the universe.

Bakambana pays close attention to the line and anamorphosis of forms and defends Kongo art; which he considers to be a spiritual art, whose particularity is to link gesture and intention in the work. He does not conceive any boundaries between the various disciplines of art, instead the body is at the centre of the expression and the medium depends on the temperament. According to Bakambana, art is "a way of giving body to an idea despite the medium, in Kongo art, it is the ethics in the aesthetics. The gesture is part of the artist's daily life, it is a ritual, and the Nsoneki (artist) dialogues with the body".

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<sup>1</sup> an abbreviation of Society of Ambience-Makers and Elegant People