

SAMMY BALOJI

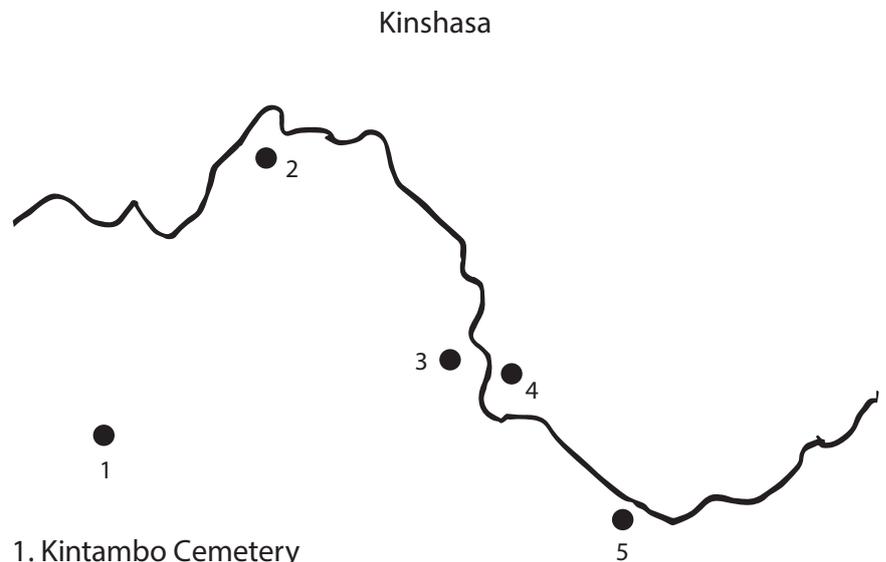
&

URBAN NOW:
CITY LIFE IN CONGO

FILIP DE BOECK

CURATOR Devrim Bayar

galerias
municipais
(ÍNDIA)



1. Kintambo Cemetery
2. Forescom Tower
3. The Doctor's Tower
4. La Cité du Fleuve
5. Cielux OCPT

24/03 ► 17/06/18

Tuesday to Sunday
► 10am-1pm/2pm-6pm

GALERIA AVENIDA DA ÍNDIA
Avenida da Índia, 170
1400-207 Lisboa, Belém



In ongoing discussions about the nature of the African city, architects, urban planners, sociologists, anthropologists and demographers, devote a lot of attention to the built form and to the city's material infrastructure. Architecture has become a central issue in western discourse and in wider reflections on how to plan, engineer, sanitize and transform the urban site and its public spaces. Mirroring that discourse, architecture has also started to occupy an increasingly important place in attempts to come to terms with the specificities of the African urban landscape and to imagine new urban paradigms for the African city of the future. Very often these new urban futures manifest themselves in the form of billboards and advertisements. Through an aesthetic display of modernization as spectacle, inspired by urban models from Dubai and other recent urban hotspots from the Global South, these images foster new dreams and hopes, even though the cities they propose invariably give rise to new geographies of exclusion, as they often take the form of gated communities and luxury satellite towns for a (hypothetical) local upper middle class.

In sharp contrast with these neoliberal re-codings of earlier colonialist modernities, the current infrastructure of Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), is of a rather different kind. The built colonial legacy has largely fallen into disrepair. Its functioning is punctuated by constant breakdown, and the city is replete with disconnected infrastructural fragments, figments, reminders and echoes of a former modernity that continues to exist in a shattered form but without its original material and conceptual content. These fragments are embedded in other historical rhythms and temporalities, in totally different layers of infrastructure and social networks. Failing material infrastructures and an economy of scarcity now physically delineate the limits of the possible in the city, but simultaneously they also generate other possibilities and enable the creation of new social spaces whereby breakdown and exclusion are bypassed and overcome.

The exhibition reflects on these diverse narratives of urban place-making. It offers a visual study of things that defy verbal narration: the city's affective landscapes and moods. As such, the exhibition considers changes in how cities and territories are imagined by different kinds of people in the DRC today.

The ethnographic, photographic, and filmic exploration of the cityscape that visual artist Sammy Baloji and anthropologist Filip De Boeck propose, offers an investigation into the qualities of the 'hole'. Today, the notion of the hole (*libulu* in Lingala, the lingua franca in large parts of Congo) could be said to fully capture the essence of the Congolese city's material quality. It defines the generic form of Congo's postcolonial urban infrastructure. Indeed, the surface of the Congolese city is pockmarked with potholes, while unstoppable erosion points constantly eat away at the urban tissue. Similarly, the surface of the Congolese landscape is disfigured by artisanal mining holes and the holes of (often unmarked) graves. In fact, the concept of the 'hole' has become a kind of metaconcept that people use to reflect upon the material degradation of the city's colonial modernist infrastructure and to rework the closures and often dismal quality of the social life that has followed the material ruination of the colonial city.

What this exhibition reflects upon, then, are the questions of how this 'reworking' is taking place and how this postcolonial hole is being filled in the experience of Congolese urban residents. What possible answers does urban Congo propose in response to the challenge posed by the hole? If the city has transformed into a hole, how can this hole be 'illuminated' to become something that enables living, and living together in the city? For the makers of this exhibition, the notion of living together can only exist where the whole, the assemblage, is not fully formed and is not yet closed. For, living together always implies a contestation about how a social body, a collective, completes itself – it is a process that is never completely closed, summed up, or fully identical with itself.

As family, kinship, and neighbourhood solidarities are often stretched to the limit, and residents search sometimes desperately for a viable experience of being together, the makers of this exhibition try to trace what new forms are emerging, and how to understand these new forms. What is investigated here are the closures and openings through which this living together in the city is made possible or rendered impossible. In this sense, the exhibition can be read as an attempt to discover where and how people stitch their lacks and losses together and suture the folds, gaps, and holes of the city. Sutures here suggest the possibility of closing wounds, generating realignments and opening up alternatives, thereby also pointing to new kinds of creativity with (spatial and temporal) beginnings, and new forms of interactivity and conviviality.

Baloji and De Boeck investigate these gaps and sutures by means of a number of urban acupuncture points, in other words, investigations of specific sites within (and often beyond) the city of Kinshasa – particular buildings, horticultural sites and fields in the city, specific graveyards, mountains, potholes, new city extensions, and so on – into which they stick their analytical needle in order to understand what is happening in all of these places that form important, though sometimes barely materially visible, nodes within the city. These sites are where the city switches on and off, where quickenings and thickenings of goods, people, and publics are generated and the various lines and connections between them become visible.

The Tower

One of the early landmarks of Belgian colonial urban architecture in Leopoldville (now Kinshasa) was the Forescom tower. Built in 1946, it was city's first skyscraper, and one of the first high rise buildings in Central Africa. Pointing towards the sky, it also pointed to the future. It embodied and made tangible new ideas of possible futures, and as such the tower materially translated emblematically visualised colonialist ideologies of progress and modernity.

Today, a stark contrast to the Forescom Tower can be found in the municipality of Limete. Conceived, realized, and owned by the "Docteur," a man who introduces himself as a "doctor in aeronautics and spatial medicine," this still unfinished tower has been under construction since 2003, without the help of professional architects. This postcolonial tower challenges the 1946 Forescom building and everything it exemplified at the time, while

illustrating the various ways in which the colonialist legacy continues to be reformulated and reassembled today. The video featured in this exhibition, titled *The Tower: A Concrete Utopia*, offers a guided tour of this remarkable tower by the “Docteur.”

The OCPT Building

Cielux OCPT (Office Congolais de Poste et Télécommunication), colloquially known as ‘the Building’ (le Bâtiment), is located in the neighbourhood of Sans Fil (‘Wireless’), in the populous municipality of Masina, east of the colonial heart of the city. The Cielux site was constructed in the mid-1950s as one of many branches of the major post office in the central downtown municipality of Gombe. A grand modernist, L-shaped building situated in a large walled compound, it housed a section of the national radio and functioned as an outgoing relay station for international telephone and telegraph communications (hence the neighbourhood’s name, ‘Wireless’). When it served this purpose, the Building literally connected Leopoldville (now Kinshasa) to the outside world, even though the site lay outside the city at the time of its construction. Today, the Building is occupied by several families, totalling more than 300 people. Most of them are still officially employed by the OCPT. In fact, the Ministry of Telecommunications has allowed some of its employees to move into the Building, as an advance for unpaid salaries or as a type of pension provision for retiring employees.

The Cemetery

The cemetery of Kintambo is one of the oldest and largest cemeteries of Kinshasa. Over the years, the city has increasingly invaded the cemetery, and informal settlements have sprung up alongside it. One of these settlements is Camp Luka, also known as ‘the State’. Here, the living and dead exist in close proximity. Although the cemetery was officially closed by urban authorities and abandoned in the late 1980s, the people from Camp Luka and other areas in Kinshasa continue to go there to bury their dead.

La Cité du Fleuve and the Vegetable Gardens of the Malebo Pool

Since the end of the colonial period, the south of Malebo Pool’s – a lake-like expansion of the lower Congo River between the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of the Congo – has steadily transformed into a vast agricultural zone. In the 1980s, a South Korean agricultural company started to develop rice paddies there, but this project was abandoned after the widespread looting that hit Kinshasa in 1991 and 1993. After the Korean company left, local residents quickly moved in to occupy the rice fields. Before long, they started to expand them, often using shovels or bare hands to fill in and reclaim the pool’s marshes.

A large portion of this vast agricultural space will now have to make way for the development of a new satellite city, the Cité du Fleuve, a private development that started in 2008. Built on two artificially created islands in the Malebo Pool, the Cité du Fleuve will be 6 kms² in size, and include over 200 villas and 10,000 luxury apartments, 10,000 offices, a marina, schools, cinemas, restaurants, and conference rooms. It will be connected to the rest of Kinshasa by two bridges and a transit road. Self-sufficient

in water and electricity supply, the Cité du Fleuve is promoted as offering potential buyers a luxurious lifestyle and secure land titles.

Maquette of Kinkole City

Kinkole City is one of the last fully planned zones of Kinshasa. The plan was partly implemented in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Today the maquette gathers dust in a corridor of the municipal house of Nsele.

Land Chiefs

Land chiefs still control large tracts of land, particularly in the more rural parts of Kinshasa province to the southwest of the city in the urban districts of Lukunga, Funa, and Mont Hamba, and to the east in the urban district of Tshangu as well as on the Bateke Plateau. In Kinshasa’s eastern periphery along the Malebo Pool – a lake-like expansion of the lower Congo River between the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of the Congo – important Teke and Banfunu chiefs have been reigning over the same vast areas of land that their ancestors had controlled when Welsh journalist and colonial explorer Henry Stanley arrived and started exploring the region in the 1870s. It is no coincidence that these areas of the city are the ones now undergoing expansion. In this process of rapid urban growth, these land chiefs play a decisive role, even though their administrative function is often not recognized by state institutions. It is simply impossible for an individual, a real estate company, or an industrial investor to obtain a piece of land without first negotiations with them.

Fungurume / Pungulume

The town of Fungurume is in the province of Katanga, between the large mining centres of Kolwezi and Likasi. Home to the Sanga people, Fungurume is surrounded by hills and mountains that form one of the world’s largest copper and cobalt deposits. These mineral resources still remain largely unexploited. People have always engaged in artisanal mining here, and in pre-colonial times, the area was a major centre in a continental copper trading network. Large-scale industrial surface mining is more recent. In the mid-1990s, during the final years of President Mobutu Sese Seko’s reign, the Canadian-Swedish Lundin Group obtained concessionary rights from the government to mine most of the mountains around Fungurume, an area of 1500 kms², but it was not until 2006 and a major change in the holding company’s ownership structure that Tenke Fungurume Mining consortium started up its open-pit and oxide ore processing facilities. Between 2009 and 2015, the consortium was mining multiple deposits concession-wide. The company also started to plan for the construction of a whole new city, an airport, labor camps for the workers, large processing plants, and a number of other industrial facilities. The construction of this new infrastructure would necessitate the further relocation of some 15,000 local Sanga residents, including the Sanga chief, Mpala Swanage Pascal Musenge. In May 2016, however, the Tenke Fungurume Mining consortium unexpectedly changed hands, when China Molybdenum bought the shares of the American group Freeport-McMoran for \$2.6 billion. It is not certain at this point whether China Molybdenum will implement the new infrastructure project.

BIOGRAPHIES

Sammy Baloji (b. 1978, Democratic Republic of Congo; lives and works in Lubumbashi and Brussels). Ethnography, architecture and urbanism are key thematic focuses of Baloji's artistic practice, which brings together photography, video, and archival documents relating to colonial history. His reading of the Congolese past is a way of analysing African identity today, through the prism of the different political systems that our society has experienced. In 2010, Baloji founded the Picha ('Image' in Swahili) non-profit organization as part of a collective initiative, which organizes the Rencontres Picha Biennial in Lubumbashi and supports the development of local artistic practices. Baloji was featured in numerous solo and group exhibitions worldwide. In 2015, his work was presented in the 13th Biennale de Lyon "La Vie Moderne" curated by Ralph Rugoff; the 56th International Exhibition of the Venice Biennale "All the World's Futures" curated by Okwui Enwezor, and "Personne et les autres", curated by Katrina Gregos, for the Belgian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. He has been the recipient of numerous awards including, Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres (2016), the Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship (2015) and the 2014 Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative award, partnering with Olafur Eliasson.

Filip De Boeck (b. 1961, Belgium; lives and works in Brussels). As the research coordinator of the Institute for Anthropological Research in Africa at the University of Leuven, Professor Filip De Boeck is actively involved in teaching, promoting, coordinating and supervising research in and on Africa. Since 1987 he has conducted extensive field research in both rural and urban communities in D.R. Congo (ex-Zaire), starting with years of research in rural communities in the province of Bandundu (1987-1995), followed by long-term research in Kinshasa and other secondary cities such as Kikwit (1995-present). His current theoretical interests include local subjectivities of crisis,

postcolonial memory, youth and the politics of culture, and the transformation of private and public space in the urban context in Africa. He has published extensively on these topics. In 2004, together with architect and critic Koen Van Synghel, De Boeck curated an exhibition, "Kinshasa: The Imaginary City", for the ninth International Architecture Biennial in Venice. This exhibition was awarded a Golden Lion for best installation. In 2010 De Boeck released "Cemetery State", a 70 minute long documentary film which examines urban youth's politics of death in a Kinshasa graveyard.

Devrim Bayar (b. 1980, Belgium; lives and works in Brussels). Devrim Bayar is curator at WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, where she organized the solo exhibitions of Pierre Leguillon, Helena Almeida, Daan van Golden (retrospective), Thomas Bayrle (retrospective), Allen Ruppersberg, Robert Heinecken, as well as group shows such as "Something Stronger Than Me", exploring recent developments in collaborative art practices, or "Un-Scene", focusing on the emerging visual art scene of Belgium. Devrim Bayar is currently curating the René Daniëls's retrospective exhibition "Fragments from an Unfinished Novel", and a mid-career survey of the Belgian artist Benoît Platéus. In 2016 she co-curated the festival Indiscipline at Palais de Tokyo presenting the emerging visual and performing art scene of Brussels. She is the founder of the editorial and curatorial platform Le Salon dedicated to the Brussels art scene.

The exhibition is accompanied by the following publication: *Filip De Boeck and Sammy Baloji, Suturing the City. Living Together in Congo's Urban Worlds*. London: Autograph ABP, 2016. The WIELS Contemporary Art Centre in Brussels originally organized this exhibition. Galerias Municipais/EGEAC in Lisbon presents the exhibition tour, in collaboration with the Open Society Foundations (New York) and The Power Plant (Toronto).

CREDITS

Lisbon Culture Councillor
Catarina Vaz Pinto

EGEAC Board of Directors
Joana Gomes Cardoso
Lucinda Lopes
Manuel Veiga

CITY COUNCIL GALLERIES

Director
Sara Antónia Matos

Assistants to the Direction
Maria da Luz Martins
Pedro Faro [Deputy Artistic Director]

Secretary
Dulce Castro

Architecture Exhibition and Museography
André Maranhã

Communication
João Gerardo
João G. Rapazote
Paula Nascimento
Susana Sena Lopes

Production

Flávia Violante
João G. Rapazote
José Brito
Maria da Luz Martins
Mário Bastos
Paula Nascimento

Editorial Coordination and Investigation

Sara Antónia Matos
Pedro Faro

Coordination of the Educational Service

Assistants
Helena Tavares

Educational Service and Exhibition Assistants

Andreia Frazão Pires
Elisa Aragão
Flávia Violante
João Gaspar
Margarida Rodrigues
Rita Duro
Rita Sá Queiroga
Rita Salgueiro

Exhibition Assembly
António Vieira

EXHIBITION

Artists
Sammy Baloji & Filip De Boeck

Curator
Devrim Bayar

Production
João G. Rapazote (Galerias Municipais)

Communication and Press
Susana Lopes, João G. Rapazote (Galerias Municipais)

Graphic design
Paula Prates

Graphic Line Design
Barbara Says...

Exhibition Assembly
setup (Francisco Soares, Sérgio Gato)

Organization



In collaboration with

