

Sammy Baloji x Mo Laudi

Johari – Brass Band

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RMN - Le Grand Palais, Paris

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Johari - Brass Band

Courtesy of the artist and Imane Farès, Paris
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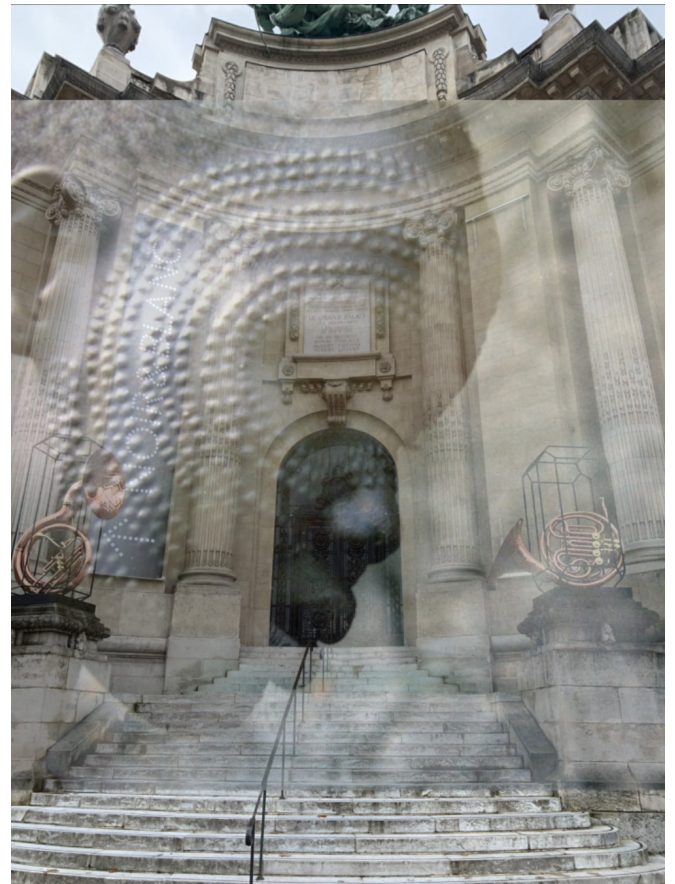


These two sculptures in the shape of a sousaphone and a French horn are inspired by the instruments abandoned in the United States in the 19th century during the defeat of the French expeditionary force. They were then recovered by the slaves to create Brass Bands. The copper is scarified by the artist, echoing traditional Congolese practices eradicated by the colonial presence.

It is incorporated into metal structures that evoke the form of ores from Katanga, a Congolese province with a wealth of mineral resources that have been over-exploited by international companies since 1885. *Johari – Brass Band* is a triumphant symbol of Africa's reappropriation of its own history.

Invited by Sammy Baloji to delve into the preparatory research for *Johari - Brass Band*, Mo Laudi linked historical musical recordings to his own archives to construct a soundscape that forms parallels between Congo and South Africa via New Orleans and France. The result questions the shared pan-African experience of appropriation and exploitation of natural resources and black bodies. Legend has it that once a week, on Sundays, slaves from New Orleans were «allowed» to gather and dance in the Congo square. When the occupying French military rushed to Haiti at the end of the 18th century, it left behind its brass instruments. These were reclaimed by the local communities, who developed innovative and now world-renowned styles of music. Complex syncopated drum patterns, grooves and claps became ingrediency that formulated Jazz.

Mo Laudi recalls that his first experiences of brass bands in South Africa were the local 'Ga Molepo Church' as well as the ZCC, Zion Christian Church: "they performed with gusto and had such a groove about them". His sonic composition references the hybrid spirituality that merged religious celebrations and African traditions such as dinaka/kiba (the traditional music of the Sotho people), the Hip Hop and RnB samplings of the HBCU (Historical Black Colleges and Universities) brass bands as recently highlighted by cultural purveyors such as Beyoncé at her Coachella Homecoming performance.



Congo Square in D# Minor (2021) merges multi-layered influences: how slaves re-appropriated Western wind instruments (the metal of which had often been extracted from African mines), trumpets, tubas, trombones, French horns appear, mixed like a Gumbo dish, with African roots, Black and Creole roots of Jazz inspired by Congo Square, samples from a jazz funeral, a New Orleans tradition of burying the dead by having a 'second line' street procession, found recordings of the Congo river, funeral processions in South Africa, scarification ceremonies in Congo, the horns blowing in a call-and-response unison creating a trance atmosphere capturing collective spirituality. It also includes extracts from a lecture by Dr. Howard Nicholas on the role of economics, how international institutions are under-developing Africa and how rich countries take advantage of poor countries by exploiting raw materials such as copper with no decent retribution.

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Mo Laudi's proposed playlist of 100 tracks attempts a fusion of the plethoric history and currency of brass bands worldwide and the interconnected influence of marching bands, African and European music and performance on popular culture.

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Sousaphone
Copper, brass, steel
316 x 200 x 155 cm; horn diameter: 155 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Imane Farès, Paris
© Didier Plowly for the Rmn – Grand Palais, 2020



French Horn
Copper, brass, steel
266 x 226 x 124 cm; horn diameter: 124 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Imane Farès, Paris
© Didier Plowly for the Rmn – Grand Palais, 2020

"I think I had the idea of the two sculptures because I needed to question history. How do we represent representation and what mechanisms do we create to speak about it? Is representation merely human morphology? What are its underlying writings, in other words its identity mechanisms?"

- Sammy Baloji

« That is the essential question the artist was faced with when he was about to accomplish a memory act that would represent. As he has said, he understood at once the limits of figuration that are often attached to this type of object and the importance of metaphorization. Come to think of it, it obviously operates on several plans. The first is the material chosen to embody his concepts, i.e. copper and music. Copper has a double meaning. As any musician would confirm, it refers to a category of wind instruments (brass instruments), but it is also a raw material that was exploited for a long time in the Congo by local people who were practically enslaved. The music is that of the brass bands that appeared in New Orleans in the early 19th century and were particularly thriving in the Congo Square neighborhood. "The idea was to find an interesting element that could provide a temporal analysis that would go beyond a mere intervention on the Grand Palais's empty pedestals. I wanted to refer to the history of these brass bands, which I discovered through the archives of William Shepard, an African American missionary who arrived in the Congo in the 1890s to contribute to the emancipation of his Congolese brothers. But what I found to be even more interesting is that Shepard also created a brass band movement in the Congo, and I found an image of a group of Congolese musicians with drums and saxophones." We are here at the center of what Pierre Verger called the "ebb and flow", i.e. the way history goes back and forth and revisits in cycles the meaning of the values and symbols it carries. Baloji would agree with me that the trigger was not so much the discovery of Congo Square, which could represent a fictitious Africa, than this archival image of Congolese people marching with drums and saxophones, thus imprinting on the local culture an external element, which comes back with a boomerang effect. The Kimbanguist Church, to mention the most famous Congolese church, immediately seized this phenomenon that combined aspects of celebration, funeral and military organization. »

- Excerpt from *The accidental encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table* a text

by Simon Njami, December 2020



Photo : Sophie Nuytten

Since 2005, Sammy Baloji has been exploring the memory and history of the Democratic Republic of Congo. His work is an ongoing research on the cultural, architectural and industrial heritage of the Katanga region, as well as a questioning of the impact of Belgian colonization. His use of photographic archives allows him to manipulate time and space, comparing ancient colonial narratives with contemporary economic imperialism. His video works, installations and photographic series highlight how identities are shaped, transformed, perverted and reinvented. His critical view of contemporary societies is a warning about how cultural clichés continue to shape collective memories and thus allow social and political power games to continue to dictate human behaviour. As he stated in a recent interview: "I'm not interested in colonialism as nostalgia, or in it as a thing of the past, but in the continuation of that system."

Sammy Baloji (b. 1978 in Lubumbashi, DR Congo) lives and works between Lubumbashi and Brussels. Sammy Baloji received a degree in Information and Communication Sciences from the University of Lubumbashi and a degree from the Haute Ecole des Arts du Rhin. He started in September 2019 his PhD artistic research project "Contemporary Kasala and Lukasa: towards a Reconfiguration of Identity and Geopolitics" at Sint Lucas Antwerpen. A Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres, he has received numerous awards and distinctions, including the Prince Claus Prize, the Spiegel Prize of the African Photography Encounters of Bamako and the Dakar Biennale, and the Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative. For the year 2019-2020, he is a resident of the Académie de France à Rome – Villa Médicis. Since 2018, he teaches each summer at the Sommerakademie in Salzburg. Sammy Baloji co-founded in 2008 the Rencontres Picha/Biennale de Lubumbashi.

His recent personal exhibitions include *Sammy Baloji, Other Tales*, Lund Konsthall and Aarhus Kunsthall (2020); *Congo, Fragments d'une histoire*, Le Point du Jour, Cherbourg (2019); *A Blueprint for Toads and Snakes*, Framers Framed, Amsterdam (2018); *Sven Augustijnen & Sammy Baloji*, Museumcultuur Strombeek (2018); *Urban Now: City Life in Congo*, Sammy Baloji and Filip de Boeck, The Power Plant, Toronto and WIELS, Brussels (2016-2017), and *Hunting and Collecting*, Mu. ZEE Kunstmuseum aan zee, Ostend (2014). He has recently participated in the Sydney Biennial (2020), documenta 14 (Kassel/Athens, 2017), the Lyon Biennial (2015), the Venice Biennial (2015), the Photoquai Festival at the Musée du Quai Branly (Paris, 2015).

His first personal exhibition at Imane Farès, 802. *That is where, as you heard, the elephant danced the malinga. The place where they now grow flowers*, took place in 2016.

Read more on:

<https://imanefares.com/artistes/sammy-baloji/>



Multidisciplinary artist, composer, DJ and producer Mo Laudi proposes new perspectives in the field of sound installations. Informed by his South African roots, he is renowned for his key contributions to Afro-Electronic music in London during the first decade of the millennium and, since then, in Paris. Mo Laudi experiments with sound as material. He creates sonic landscapes, mixing vocals, textures and rhythms, with his core knowledge and experience of video, fashion, dance, design and music as a socio-political critique of society.

His work addresses such topics as race, the postcolonial, mobility and erasure. It deals with spirituality, African knowledge systems, Afrofuturism to form new pathways of understanding multiplicities of cultures. Initially influenced by the art of Gerard Sekoto, Ernest Mancoba, Pablo Picasso and Jean-Michel Basquiat, as well as by the omnipresence of music and dance at home and in the streets of Polokwane, Mo Laudi stays tuned to South Africa and Africa in general, while absorbing countless different approaches and encounters to form his own language.

Follow [@mo_laudi](#) on Instagram
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