

Commissioner : CINDY MAKIANA ON BEHALF OF THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE, ARTS AND HERITAGE OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Curator : NADIA YALA KISUKIDI

Curatorial team : JEAN KAMBA, AIMÉ MPANÉ, JOHNNY LEYA

Exhibitors :

SAMMY BALOJI, ARLETTE BASHIZI, PATRICK BONGOY, DAMSO, GOSETTE LUBONDO, NELSON MAKENGO, AIMÉ MPANÉ, LÉONARD PONGO, GÉRALDINE TOBÉ

"Simba Moto ! Seize the fire ! Saisis le feu !"

PAVILION OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO
61 ST VENICE BIENNALE OF CONTEMPORARY ART



Location:
Antico Refettorio - Scuola Grande di San Marco
Venice, Italy

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Simba Moto ! Seize the fire ! Saisis le feu !

The spark is a beginning.

In the Congolese cosmologies - just as in the spiritual notions that, beginning in central Africa, have traversed the Atlantic - the spark rips open the void, kindles primordial heat, and forges the universe - celestial bodies, stars, and the sun.

The sun's rays, a physical force and vital symbol, can initiate combustion and provide the energy to ignite matter. In a forge, a space of gestation, the blacksmith works iron, takes hold of fire, and imitates, on a human scale, the creative power of the sun.

This triad - fire, sun, and forge - constitutes the archetype of creation, destruction, and rebirth. It nourishes imaginaries, past and present. For the Luba, Songye, Kuba, and Kongo, the blacksmith, who works fire and iron, legitimizes political authority, bringing about the "earthly sun." In the first decades of Congo's independence, the heat of the sun symbolized the hope of a new day or the "burning rays" of dignity evoked by the leader of Congolese independence Patrice Emery Lumumba. The fire burning in the earthly forge incarnates the power of creation.

Seize fire! And bring forth the world.

The imperative to create - to bring into existence - unites nine artists from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (the DRC) and its diaspora in the inaugural Pavilion of the DRC for the 61st edition of the Venice Biennale. The aesthetic installation "Seize the Fire!" presents as a luminous forge where, from Kinshasa nights to the streets of Goma, artists abolish the power of obscurity.

"Wake up, your nest is of flames. Be worthy, and do not turn your back on it!" writes the poet Matala Mukadi. To be in flame is to disappear. To be of flames is to carry a force that must be maintained. In the pavilion-forge, these verses become a call to kindle a collective fire: that of the imaginary, of mutual care, of the visible and invisible presences that persist, resisting their disavowal. At the heart of a pan-African space of dreams and shared emotions that transcends the

border of Congo-Kinshasa and of the continent itself.

The "Seize the fire!" installation calls for new stories, which, confronted with contemporary crises, conjure up discourses of lack, of pain, and of death. They draw their strength from ancient worldviews, radical Congolese imaginations of the 20th and 21st centuries, black freedom libraries born in the modern era and in constant dialogue with Africa.

The DRC's pavilion-forge constitutes a living archive of this contemporary circulation of sensibilities, ideas, and imaginaries. Not all flames are destructive; often, they fertilize. In the forge, each individual, by learning to take hold of these flames, commits to transforming the very matter of the world.

Nadia Yala Kisukidi

For the MOKO collective

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Curator : Nadia Yala Kisukidi Associate professor, New York University,
lead curator (independant)

Curatorial team :

Jean Kamba, Art critic (independant)

Johnny Leya, Architect, set designer (independant)

Aimé Mpané, Artist (independant)

MOKO collective,
a curatorial collective :

The Moko collective (One/Unity in Lingala) is a curatorial collective founded in June 2025 for the curatorial work of the first DRC Pavilion at the 61st Venice Biennale in 2026. Supported by the commitment of the DRC Ministry of Culture, arts and heritage and the initiatives of Cindy Makiana, the Moko collective aims to promote, within the Congolese Pavilion, the Congolese art scene, both national and diasporic, in all its geographical, historical, and aesthetic diversity, in accordance with its curatorial vision.

It is attuned to the continuities, ruptures, and reinventions that permeate Congolese artistic practices. Its aim is less to freeze a narrative than to reveal its vitality, its multiple voices, and its internal dynamics.

It actively draws upon Congolese thought (humanities, literature, poetry), both national and diasporic, past and present. This curatorial work constitutes a living archive of a constantly evolving creative process, shaped by its heritage and its future development, and intended to be shared with the world.

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Arlette Bashizi, DRC, photography, 1999

Patrick Bongoy, DRC, sculpture, 1980

Damso, Belgium, installation, 1992

Gosette Lubondo, DRC, photography, 1993

Nelson Makengo, DRC, photography, video, installation, 1990

Aimé Mpané, Belgium, sculpture, painting, 1968

Sammy Baloji, DRC, Sculpture, Video, installation, 1978

Léonard Pongo, Belgium, photography, video, installation, 1988

Géraldine Tobé, DRC, painting, 1992

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Arlette Bashizi, was born in Goma in 1999. She lives and works there as a photojournalist and documentary photographer. Her documentary approach focuses on capturing events related to her region, located in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, which has been plagued by violence for decades. Her body of work comprises images illustrating the health, economic, environmental, political, and security situation in her region, highlighting the hardships faced by women and children, the exploitation of the region's abundant natural resources, the challenges of climate change, and the daily lives of its inhabitants.

She's an active contributor to several international media outlets. She has exhibited her photographs in numerous countries and won awards such as the Carmignac Photojournalism Award and the World Press Photo Contes

Artwork: Arlette Bashizi, “ Price of technology”, 2023,
Technique : Digital, size : 8256×5504
©Arlette Bashizi for Washington Post



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Patrick Bongoy, born in Kinshasa in 1980, graduated from the Kinshasa Academy of Fine Arts. He has lived in Cape Town since 2013 and creates sculptures from recycled rubber. His works address the themes of fire, pollution, and environmental degradation. Rubber, a material sensitive to extreme temperatures, burns, releasing harmful smoke similar to that produced by vulcanization, a process emblematic of a deadly industry. The inspiration for his work comes from the history of DRC and the absurdity of destructive progress. He thus combines memories, political engagement, and advocacy for environmental justice.

Patrick Bongoy has participated in numerous Group Exhibitions, including contemporary art fairs such as 1-54 Contemporary (London and Paris), AKAA (Paris), ARCO (Lisbon)... Furthermore, Bongoy has held Solo Shows at THIS IS NOT A WHITE CUBE art gallery (Lisbon and Angola), Gallery MOMO, Ebony/Curated, and the Association of Visual Arts (AVA) in Cape Town.

Artwork: Patrick Bongoy, The revenants I, 2026, recycled rubber tubes on fibreglass, 46 x 56 x 176 cm, ©Patrick Bongoy



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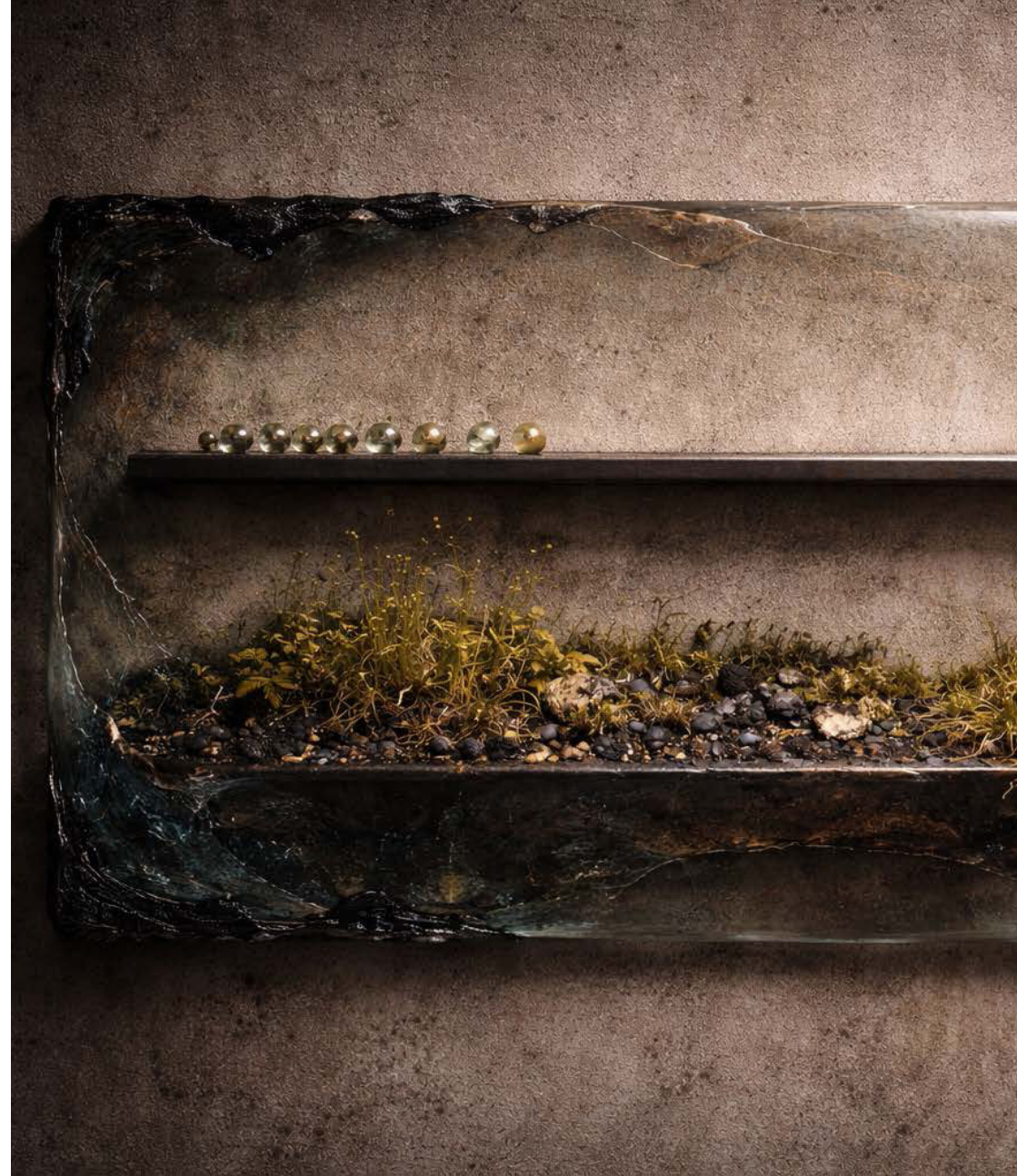
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Damso, born in Kinshasa in 1992, left the country for Belgium when he was nine. Passionate about music, he spent most of his secondary years in recording studios, causing his academic performance to suffer. This resulted in conflicts with his parents, ultimately leading to Damso being kicked out of his home. Struggling to make ends meet, Damso resorted to living in squats and engaging in illegal activities for financial survival, driven by his refusal to tolerate racism and mistreatment in traditional workplaces. These are some of the common themes in his music as well as his reflections on love, life, and death. Stimulated by experimentation, he is always pushing the envelope and working with different artists to push the sound forward. Throughout his career, he has craved his own lane and is supported by an audience hungry for substance beyond rap standards.

On July 8, 2016, he released his first studio album, *Batterie Faible*. His second and third album, *Ipséité* and *Lithopedion*, were released respectively in 2017 and 2018. The same year, he won the Best Musician Award. His latest album, *QALF*, was released in 2020. The artist Damso explores a new visual language for the DRC Pavilion.

Artwork: Damso, *Le bureau des futurs ajournés*, 2026, Installation ©Damso



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Gosette Lubondo, DRC, Photography, 1993

was born in 1993 in Kinshasa, where she lives and works.

After graduating from the Academy of Fine Arts in 2014, Gosette Lubondo created the series Imaginary Trip I in 2016. Exploring the abandoned spaces of Kinshasa, she transformed an old train into a space in which she staged imaginary travelers.

Two years later, the series Imaginary Trip II extended this «imaginary journey» to an old, abandoned school. This series, acquired by the Musée du Quai Branly Jacques Chirac in Paris, was exhibited in 2020 in the group exhibition «« À toi appartient le regard et (...) la liaison infinie entre les choses ».»

In 2020, she received the Cap Prize for her series Tala Ngai, and in 2021, the Maison Ruinart Prize, which is awarded annually to an emerging artist exhibiting at Paris Photo.

Artwork: Gosette Lubondo, KUFKA, Please carry it!, 2026, Photography
©Gosette Lubondo studio



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Nelson Makengo, is a visual artist and filmmaker based in Kinshasa. He graduated from the Kinshasa Academy of Fine Arts (2015) and is a former participant in La Fémis Summer School (2016). He develops a body of work at the intersection of film, video, and installation.

Makengo composes fragmented narratives where collective memory, spirituality, political utopias, and intimate experiences converge in a dreamlike and sensory exploration of urban spaces. His films *E'ville* (2018), *Nuit Debout / Up at Night* (2019), and his first feature-length documentary, *Tongo Saa / Rising Up at Night* (2024), attest to his international reach.

His work has been presented and awarded at major film festivals — Berlinale, Sundance, IDFA, Visions du Réel, HotDocs, BFI London Film Festival, FESPACO, IndieLisboa — and at important contemporary art venues such as the Palais de Tokyo (Paris), WIELS (Brussels), BOZAR (Brussels), etc.

Artwork: Nelson Makengo, NTEMO NKENGO, 2026, Video installation, 10 min ©Nelson Makengo



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Aimé Mpané, was born in 1968 in Kinshasa into a family of woodcarvers and cabinetmakers. He studied painting and sculpture at the Kinshasa Academy of Fine Arts, then at La Cambre in Brussels.

He lives between Belgium and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In 2003, he curated the exhibition Africa for Africa at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, and then the exhibition Dialogue Lubumbashi-Kinshasa-Liège in 2007 at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Liège (MAMAC).

Aimé Mpane is a multidisciplinary artist who works in painting, sculpture, and installations.

His work explores his origins, denounces the legacy of colonization as well as social injustices, particularly those affecting children, notably in works such as Don't Touch Me, Le rêve brisé, Délaissage ou bombe à retardement.

Aimé Mpane is represented by the Haines Gallery, in San Francisco, and the Nomad Gallery, in Brussels.

Artwork: Aimé Mpané, “Le souffle”, 2026, Technique : stems of matches, mixed media, size: 220x310x60 cm ©Agneskena Visuals



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Sammy Baloji, was born in 1978 in Lubumbashi, DR Congo

His work investigates the entangled histories of colonialism, modernity, and extraction in Central Africa. Working across photography, video, installation, and archival research, he juxtaposes contemporary urban landscapes with historical documents to reveal how images, infrastructures, and bodies have been shaped by mining economies and imperial power.

Baloji's practice operates at the intersection of art and historiography, combining visual poetics with critical analysis. He has exhibited internationally, including at the Venice Biennale and major institutions worldwide. Based between Lubumbashi and Brussels, he is also a co-founder of the Lubumbashi Biennale (Rencontres Picha), actively contributing to the development of critical artistic platforms in Africa

Artwork: Sammy Baloji, Katharina, 2026, Tapestry + Video Installation, 2 x 3 m ©Sammy Baloji



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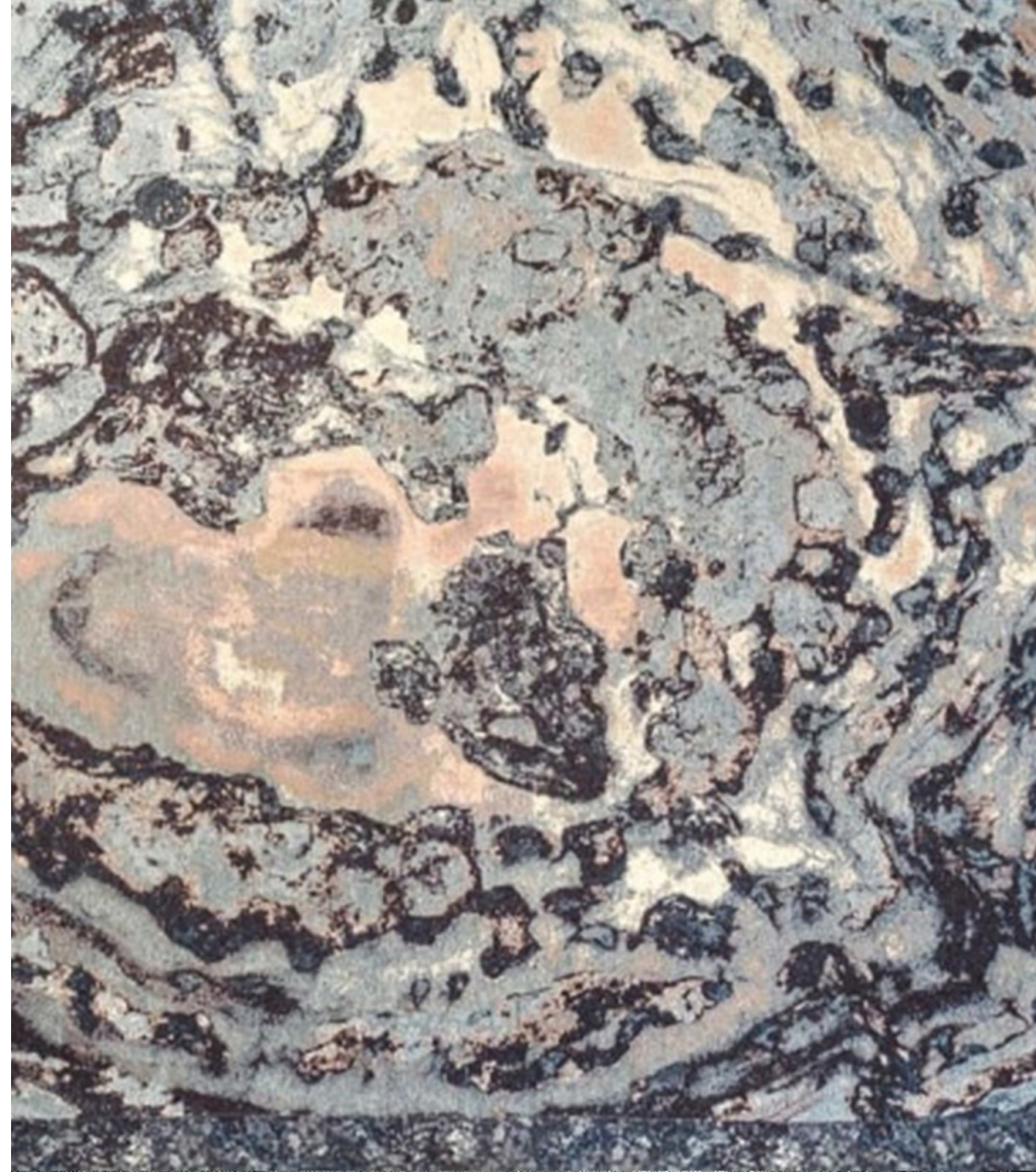
Léonard Pongo, Belgium, photography, video, installation, 1988

Leonard Pongo is a visual artist based in Belgium and working between Belgium and Congo. Trained as a photographer, he began his career through photojournalistic assignments in Congo, documenting elections, riots, and evangelical churches. Through this work, he came to realize that something essential was eluding the traditional boundaries of photography—something that demanded another mode of attention. Since then, his practice has focused on making visible what is often unseen yet lies at the very core of living cultures. Spending extended periods in Congo's national parks, Pongo developed a seminal body of work combining photography and moving image, articulating narratives “from the source” and questioning dominant representations of place, belief, and territory.

His work has been exhibited in major institutions and venues, including the Jeu de Paume (2025) , Mu.ZEE (2022), BOZAR (2021), and Contretype (2015), as well as in numerous international exhibitions such as the Dak'Art Biennale (Senegal, 2022), Lagos Photo Festival (Nigeria, 2020), and the 6th Biennale de Lubumbashi, among others.

Galery : Kristof De Clercq Gallery, Benelux

Artwork : Léonard Pongo, Mbanza Tapestry, Tapestry, 2020 Woven polyester, viscose and lurex, 233 x 332 cm



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Géraldine tobé, DRC, painting, 1992.

Géraldine Tobé lives and works in Kinshasa, where she was born in 1992. As a visual artist, she creates her paintings by using a black smoke. It emanates exclusively from a handcrafted kerosene lamp made from small, recycled metal cans. Through this technique, the artist subtly explores her own traumatic experiences. Labeled a witch during her childhood, it was only after obtaining her diploma in painting in 2012 from the Kinshasa Institute of Fine Arts that she began to explore the violence of the exorcism she experienced following this accusation of witchcraft. From the smoke, produced by the incense used by the exorcist, emerges an artistic and metaphorical material. With her typically surreal, dreamlike, and psychedelic characters, the artist now explores themes related to ancestral African heritage.

Géraldine Tobe's work was exhibited internationally at the Dakar Biennale in 2018. She has also had several solo exhibitions in Brussels, Kinshasa, Madagascar, Paris, Germany, and Switzerland.

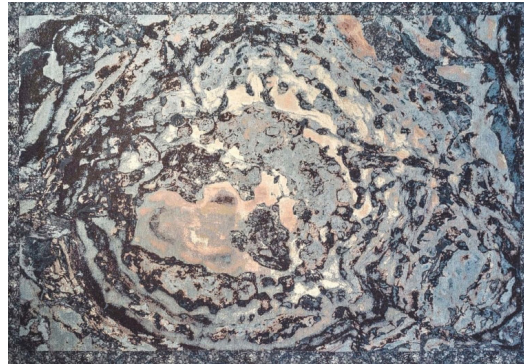
Artwork : Géraldine Tobé, Le Chemin de la mémoire, 2028, Smoke on Canvas, 150 x 150 cm



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I Aimé Mpané, "Le souffle", 2026, Technique : stems of matches, mixed media, size: 220x310x60 cm



II Léonard Pongo, Mbanza Tapestry, Tapestry, 2020 Woven polyester, viscose and lurex, 233 x 332 cm



III Gosette Lubondo, KUFKA, Please carry it!, 2026, Photography



IV Nelson Makengo, NTEMO NKENGO, 2026, Video installation, 10 min



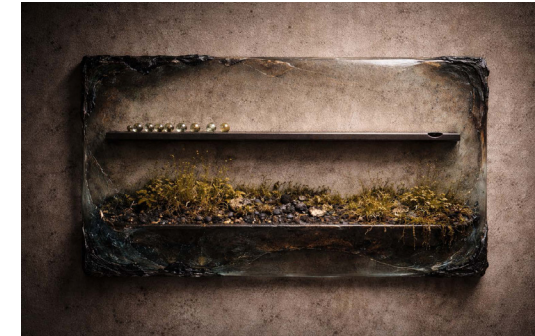
V Sammy Baloji, Katharina, 2026, Tapestry + Video Installation, 2 x 3 m



VI Patrick Bongoy, The revenants I, 2026, recycled rubber tubes on fibreglass, 46 x 56 x 176 cm, ©Patrick Bongoy



VII Arlette Bashizi, "Price of technology", 2023, Technique : Digital, size : 8256 x 5504



VIII Damso, installation
Le bureau des futurs ajournés



VIII Géraldine Tobé, Chemin de la mémoire, 2018, Smoke on Canvas

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Antico Refettorio - Scuola Grande di San Marco Venice Italy

The Fondazione Scuola Grande di San Marco proudly safeguards the Ancient Refectory of Ss. Giovanni e Paolo and announces the launch of the feasibility process for the restoration of this authentic forgotten treasure, the protagonist of incredible stories. It will be a restoration project at the service of museum culture, art, history, medicine, and the humanities that are reflected in Venice, also welcoming every public and private contribution, thanks as well to hosting the National Pavilion of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the Biennale Arte 2026.

Scenography by Traumnovelle

Breathe, breathe, breathe and Seize the fire!

At the center of the space, sculptural bodies lie on a breathing pillow. The surface gently rises and falls, setting a shared rhythm, slow, audible, almost tactile. Air circulates. The fire is not violent; it is sustained, cared for, kept alive. The pulse of the device aligns with the presence of bodies around it: seated, standing, watching, waiting. Breath becomes a common measure.

The space functions as an echo chamber. Footsteps resonate on metal, shadows stretch along curved walls, smoke drifts and dissolves. Movements are amplified, not by sound alone, but by reflection. The architecture listens. Visitors are invited to follow the traces , smoke, light, reflection and to sense the energy circulating between presence and absence, between what is here and what is slipping away.

Along the perimeter, images hang like fragments of rituals. They depict gestures, fires, faces, and ceremonies that feel familiar yet unplaceable, relics of a past that never happened, or a future still forming. Some bodies appear solid, others ghost-like, almost evaporating. They bear witness to the fragile balance between creation and destruction, care and loss. The fire burns; the fire heals. Memory does not settle it breathes.

The architecture is an oblong cylinder, entirely sheathed in metal. Its reflective surface gathers light, bodies, and flames into a continuous field. Above, a large circular opening punctures the ceiling, allowing air to flow, smoke to rise, and daylight to enter. The forge is open to the sky. Four smaller apertures mark thresholds to the ground, anchoring the space to

the earth and recalling an elemental cycle of above and below, ascent and excavation.

Human-sized figures stand along the edges.

Ageless, genderless, made of rubber and recycled materials, they act as quiet guardians. Draped fabrics, heavy and mineral, line the walls, whispering that this land is not neutral, that matter itself carries history. The figures do not speak; they watch. They hold the threshold.

Within the space, ordinary objects appear: a bookshelf, a table, a hearth-like focus.

They ground the ritual in everyday gestures, reading, gathering, sitting together. The fire becomes less a spectacle than a condition. Whispers, laughter, and distant cries seem to rise from the flames. The air carries both what has been forgotten and what is still possible.

Here, to seize the fire is not to dominate it.

It is to breathe with it. To accept its cycles. To participate through presence, movement, and attention in a shared process of transformation. The forge is alive: a luminous crucible where bodies, images, smoke, and light converge, inviting each visitor to enter the collective flame of imagination, care, and resistance.

Traumnovelle

“Simba moto ! Seize the fire ! Saisis le feu !”



“Simba moto ! Seize the fire ! Saisis le feu !”



“Simba moto ! Seize the fire ! Saisis le feu !”



“Simba moto ! Seize the fire ! Saisis le feu !”



“Simba moto ! Seize the fire ! Saisis le feu !”

