

**TROIS AUTEURS D'HISTOIRE:
NELSON MAKENGO, GEORGES SENGA, PAMELA TULIZO**

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Text by Angelica Litta Modignani

Our protagonists are *auteurs d'Histoire* - authors of history - with a certain polyvalence of meaning. They are indeed writers of contemporaneity representing fundamental aspects of it with the vigilant and hypersensitive eye of the artist, but they are also narrators of their own individual history and of the uniqueness of the places where such history has taken all its steps up to present days.

By means of a process of proximity and immersion with and in the reality that surrounds them, they are the narrators of the stories of many others, encountered along their way; unwritten stories that propagate orally in the streets of Congo, thinning year after year in the wireless telephone of memory. Stories taking place in the dark, in the secrecy of a mine or a banlieue without electricity, written with the luminous imprint of photography.

Although they use the same medium differently - Pamela Tulizo is a fictional photographer, Nelson Makengo a video-maker and photographer, Georges Senga an archivist of photography - all three are conceiver of messages that are socio-politically involved with many layers of meanings and readings, which they nevertheless represent with the same acute subtlety. Representations of complex realities that they begin with studying in great detail, with the technique defined by the artist Jean Katambayi Mukendi as an «algorithmic approach to socio-proximity», and later on recount to their deepest pains with the simplicity of the lyrical formal solutions of poetry.

This exhibition is a *triumvirate*, writes Katambayi, in which «three lenses aligned in space and time like constellations or stars present us with the energetic beams of life stories, interacting with the sensibilities that surround them, through the channel of contemplation».

The first life story in the exhibition is dedicated to the intimacy behind the long moonlit nights that follow one another in the absence of electricity in the capital of Kinshasa. Nelson Makengo, in his award-winning video-documentary *Up at Night* (2019) stepped into the darkness of these nights, to knock on people's doors and ask permission to capture their everyday lives, barely illuminated by the cold-bluish lights of LED torches. Makengo captures the authenticity of these nightlife scenes in a work that wonders on how to give voice to a fleeting word and a face in semi-darkness, in a synchronicity of sound and visual narration that is both linear and disconnected, realistic and fantastic. A synchrony between the incessant noise of old power-generators and the images of children's faces illuminated by the glow of small sun-shaped torches.

The video's tripartite format is inspired by the aesthetics of the imposing hydroelectric dams' control station Inga I and II on the Congo River - visited by the artist during the research phase - whose electricity production is mainly destined to neighbouring countries, instead of supplying the population, which benefits less than 9% of it. The political question is therefore at the very heart of the work. *Up at Night* was made to coincide with the first democratic elections in the history of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and its title is inspired by the French social protest movement *Nuit debout*, which the artist came across during his stay in Paris in 2016.

The video is accompanied by a sculptural installation, which recreates the small street



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corner of a street vendor selling old portable chargers with LED lights, a technology that has fallen into disuse in much of the world. Juxtaposed to the video's darkness is the contagious brightness of the rainbow-coloured parasol under which we can easily picture the night-time commercial activity taking place.

Makengo's work goes beyond the objective sorrow behind the story narrated, translating it into a poetic language that glorifies the efforts, sacrifices and difficulties of the many lives awoken in the night, to celebrate their human dignity and instil them hope. It is a hymn to resistance in a nocturnal plot, to the fearless struggle against darkness, or even better, as Makengo himself writes: «to self-enlightenment... at any cost».

The theme of personal resistance is also central to the series of unpublished photographs *Enfer Paradisiaque* (2021) by Pamela Tulizo, winner of last year's Dior Photography & Visual Arts Award. The endless subject that animates all of the photographer's projects is women, in particular the women of her native region Kivu, to whom she dedicates each shot in a long eulogy to Congolese femininity.

In the staging of Tulizo's infernal paradise, the backgrounds to her muse are the places of the artist's childhood, between the street where she grew up, the market, the Kivu Lake that flanks it and the volcanic rock characteristic of the area. This is where the artist returns, to portray her conception of the woman of Goma, constantly divided in a dichotomy, in a game of oppositions between the desire for beauty and the economy of survival, between the Congo seen as a paradise of natural resources and as a "red" zone at high risk, between her own sense of self and the role of "African woman" attributed to her by globalised society.

This woman walks the catwalk for us posing as a real model, with attention to every detail, from nail polish to make-up, referring to the luxurious aesthetics of Western haute couture, but distorting its meaning through the ironic composition of the clothes that are co-protagonists in these visions. *Enfer Paradisiaque* is a parade of hyperscenographic clothes made from basic necessities that tell the story of the population's challenge to meet daily needs: food, water and electricity. Beans, corn, charcoal, matches, electrical sockets, cassava leaves and water tanks become the shimmering lustre of the almost ostentatious elegance of this figure on show.

To produce these very elaborate photographs, Tulizo relies on a team of young make-up artists, set designers and local stylists who work alongside her to help her build the image she has envisioned. The artist considers her first audience to be the people on the streets, where she works en pleine air, whom, passing by, offer a valuable first feedback.

Tulizo's defiant gaze, expressing the courage, determination and pride in the struggle for a better future, questions and denounces the simplistic way in which Congolese women are often portrayed by international press as mere victims, focusing instead on their beauty and aspirations. In a recent interview, Tulizo said: «I want to talk about the strength and power of the Congolese woman, I want to portray her even more beautiful than in my memory».

While Tulizo refers to her own personal memory, Georges Senga's research deals with the notion of memory in the historical-collective sense of the term. Like an archaeologist of photography, or an archivist of imaginary, Senga questions the memory of civilisation manifested in the spaces and objects, by investigating these latter as: «objects that are at the same time the assemblage of an archive, witness to ageing and survival».

The photographic work exhibited, as for all of Senga's projects, carves out a segment of Congo's history that has contributed to the construction of the country's identity and socio-cultural heritage, in order to analyse it under a microscope and question our contemporary reading of the ever-changing image of history. In this case, *Le Vide* (2019) focuses on the history of the mining and commercial exploitation of natural resources in Congo and the abuse of labour. Senga descends into the underworld of Kipushi, Likasi and Kolwezi (formerly Union Minière du Haut Katanga, which became the giant Gécamines in 1966) to, in his own words: «photograph the hands of the diggers and find a way to define this story». There are many different hands that have worked the extracted material in different ways throughout the country's history - Kingdom of Congo, Congo Free State, Belgian Congo and today's DRC - according to the various methods and processes



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of transformation. In his mosaic of hands, Senga seeks to represent all of them and in order to capture the intensity of the subject without being intrusive, he photographs only the wrinkled and tired backs of their hands, safeguarding their hidden intimacy folded in their palms.

The triptych *Le Vide* also depicts the workers' daily lives, portraying the remains left on the ground by their passage, such as cigarette butts, cans, empty batteries burnt out in the sun. While it is on the power of these Chinese batteries that miners survive in the dark and are entertained by the sound of portable radios, the resale of cobalt benefits for the vast majority the Chinese market under the pretext of producing paradoxically "better quality" batteries.

The third and last part of the triptych represents the working tools, which mostly remain underground due to the long vertical descent to the excavated area (about 45 minutes) and the very high temperatures. This is why, for these shots, Senga had to convince some of the miners to bring their tools to the surface. At all hours of the day on the coppery ground, Senga photographs the emptiness - le vide - that remains behind each of these lives deprived of an asset, a resource, with no prospect of a future.

Our protagonists are *auteurs d'Histoire*, by narrating these multiple stories and by being the authors of Congo's contemporaneity. In a lyrical interweaving of politics and poetry, social commentary and artistic fiction, Makengo, Tulizo and Senga describe with sensitivity and accuracy the lives of others and their own, following the socio-proximity method, which allows them to get as close as possible to these stories of survival, to write and describe through the medium of light and with hope.

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Text by Jean Katambayi Mukendi

The current working context is a great turning point that displays living globally in an intersection of multicultural and ecological tumult. Natural responses to certain natural concerns no longer seem sufficient to understand the world to come. Reconfiguration, reinitialization and questioning become modes of operation. The power of fiction even allows us to see the future through lenses that go beyond the linear and the perspective, in order to capture the curves and the gradients. Our recent reference is to colonisation. A colonisation that began with North-North relations before switching exclusively, or almost exclusively, to North-South directions, generating to this day great theories that evoke the "Post-Colonisation", a post in the timeline in which the notions of collaboration, reappropriation, civilisation, culture, future and many other sciences are constantly revisited.

Traditional cultural manifestations that were very articulated have given way to standard organisations to allow, among other things, permanent communication and exchange based on economic and development theories. From oral tradition to written tradition, the novel question of locating the author of the history of a population becomes recurrent. For it is an almost popular assumption that the author of the history of a nation holds the keys to that population. What is important is the score that maintains the integral. "If one speaks, the other listens and vice versa", the illustrations of the score are multiple in order to align with the natural aesthetic.

This time, it is a matter of three objectives aligned in space and time in the image of constellations or stars, to present us with the energetic beams of the life stories in such a way as to react with the sensibilities of the environment through the channel of contemplation. Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, Goma. Three cities that are well known in the political and cultural life of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Kinshasa, the capital, is a city of bureaucracies located in the west of the country. Colonisation wanted to concentrate the official representations there, which led to a pronounced centralisation that made the administration cumbersome, particularly due to the lack of traffic and communication routes in general, whereas most of the material and intellectual production came from the interior of the country. Thus, the destiny of Kinshasa, the hot city, has placed it on the appropriation of "Rumba" music and the style of dress known as "Sape": both of which are icons of the city, so much so that a group of researchers is trying to put together a dossier to have "Rumba" registered as part of the international heritage.

Lubumbashi is the capital of copper. Not only because of the copper veins that surround it as far as Zambia, but also because of the deposits of various mineral ores that have fed and are feeding the industries of great powers through the label of the Générale de Carrières et de Mines (Gécamines SA). And the reality today is that the whole world is one big pool of mineral mutations, some of which are richer in grade compared to others. This is how lithium, which is the ore of the batteries of the future, can be observed in the territory of Manono, north of Lubumbashi, but also in a town lost somewhere in France. After the dry guitar and melancholy of "Masengo" by Jean Bosco Mwenda wa bayeke (note: 1930-1990 he was a pioneer of Congolese acoustic fingerstyle and guitar) and some precursors, Lubumbashi starts to make its own musical style by mixing together southern and western sounds along with those from Kinshasa. In other words, Lubumbashi, the economic city, has



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always remained, from a pedagogical point of view, a culture of production and knowledge.

Goma is a border town on the east coast of Africa, into which it sometimes pours its identity, a town that values the agro-pastoral industry and highlights the work of rural women. Congo was even said to be losing cultural control over the city of Goma at times, as it displayed its autonomy and offered its own processing products to Lubumbashi and Kinshasa.

The common denominator of these cities is therefore Congo, with its monstrous administration weighed down by multiple listed and uncontrolled national and international actors. A stationary precariousness that has given food for thought to artists who will always find expression in the majesty of nature. Electricity, water, artisanal mining, child labour, land disputes, armed conflict, product traceability, civil service - the list is not exhaustive.

It is in this context that Nelson, Georges and Pamela evolved separately before fate aligned them on this triumvirate show. The photographers Makengo, Senga and Tulizo scrutinise society through algorithmic approaches that are declined respectively in social proximity, in temporal investigation and in fiction-gender. Approaches that do not fail to move the objectives for a better outcome.

ARTISTS BIOGRAPHIES

Nelson Makengo

Born in 1990, Nelson Makengo lives and works in Kinshasa. He is a Congolese director, visual artist and producer whose work oscillates between contemporary art and cinema. Makengo participated in the 2020 Berlinale Talents and was a jury member at the 2020 International Documentary Film Festival of Amsterdam. *Up at Night* 2019, his sixth short film has won several awards, including Short documentary IDFA 2019 (Entered for the 2021 Oscars), Award Dérives FIFF, Namur 2020, Award Fidadoc 2020, Best documentary Miradasdoc 2021 and has been screened at more than fifty prestigious international festivals and contemporary art institution, including Sundance, Full Frame Documentary, True/False Film Fest, Cinéma du réel, London Short Film Festival, Encontro De Cinema Negro, Zozimo Bulbul - Brésil, WIELS Art Center, Galerie Imane Fares, Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine Paris. His 2018 short film *E'ville* has been presented at more than 30 festivals around the world, winning several awards, including the Sharjah Art Foundation Residency Prize at the 2019 Videobrasil Biennial and Best Short Documentary at the 2019 Rwanda Film Festival, Grand jury prize St Louis Film Festival, Sénégal.

Georges Senga

Born in 1983 in Lubumbashi, Georges Senga's photographic research is concentrated around history and the stories revealed in "memory, identity and tradition", shedding light on our actions and the present. In 2009 he won the special prize at the second edition of the African Photo Contest in Tarifa, Spain and exhibited his work at the French Cultural Centre in Lubumbashi. In 2010, the series *Empreintes* was selected by curator Simon Djami for the Lubumbashi Biennial. The following year, this series was also presented in Tarifa, Nairobi and Bamako. From 2011 to 2013, Georges participated in the "Master Class" programme organised by the Goethe Institute in Johannesburg in several African cities. *Une vie après la mort* on Patrice Lumumba was exhibited at the Dialogues of the Contemporary Art Gallery of the National Museum of Lubumbashi in 2013, the Kampala Biennial, the ADDIS PHOTO FEST in 2014, the BRASS Cultural Centre in Brussels and the Bamako Biennial where it won the Leon African Award in 2015. From 2015 to 2017, Senga creates another new series *Cette maison n'est pas à vendre et à vendre* between Lubumbashi in DR Congo and Sao Paulo in Brazil. During his career, Senga has received various awards including: the Thamie Mnyeje Prize (Netherlands, 2019), DemoCrasee, Bamako Biennale (Mali 2017), CAP PRIZE - International Contemporary African Photography Award from IAF Basel (Switzerland, 2017), SADC Research Residency Prohelveltia (South Africa, 2017), Special Mention, PHOTOAFRICA (Spain, 2009). From January 2014 to February 2020, Georges Senga has held numerous residencies in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands and in 2020-2021 he was selected for the Villa Médicis - Académie de France residency in Rome.

Pamela Tulizo

Born in 1993 in Bukavu, Pamela Tulizo is a documentary photographer and artist based in Goma. After initially studying journalism, Pamela attended a residency at the Market Photo Workshop photography school in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2019. Her work primarily focuses on expressions of female identity. Her recent series titled *Double Identité*, won the 2020 Dior Photography & Visual Arts Award for Young Talents. Through meeting one of the photographers active in Goma, Martin Lukongo, Pamela learned initial basic photographic techniques, and after months of self-taught artistic practice, Pamela participated in photography training sessions with Yole Africa in Goma, in Senegal with



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Africalia, in Lubumbashi with the Picha Art Center. Her work on women has appeared at the Lubumbashi Biennial, and in various projects such as ELLE equals IL Kinshasa, Congo Harlem in New York, Kinshasa. Further to this, Pamela is also a contributor to Agence France-Presse.