

МУЗЕЙ СОВРЕМЕННОГО ИСКУССТВА ГАРАЖ

GARAGE

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

**GARAGE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART PRESENTS:
CONGO ART WORKS: POPULAR PAINTING**

May 20—August 13, 2017

In summer 2017, Garage Museum of Contemporary Art presents Congo Art Works: Popular Painting, a survey of Congolese art over the last fifty years, developed by the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA), Tervuren in collaboration with BOZAR, Brussels.

Six years after showing Carsten Holler and Jean Pigozzi's acclaimed overview of art from two important and wildly different cultures—JapanCongo—Garage revisits the Democratic Republic of Congo, a former Belgian colony that has become a hotbed of contemporary artistic production. This time, the angle is quite different: paintings by prominent Congolese artists are presented not as exotic objects, but as depictions of everyday reality which aim to make sense of the country's present and its history. Congo Art Works: Popular Painting draws from the collection of the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) and tells the story of art in the Mobutu Sese Seko era and beyond. The exhibition is curated by Bambi Ceuppens of RMCA and Congolese artist Sammy Baloji, who places his compatriots' works within a dense net of colonial memories, personal documents, and hard facts. Congo Art Works: Popular Painting is, in many ways, a continuation of Baloji's investigation of the history of his home country that has developed through research, installations, and curatorial projects since 2006.

The phenomenon of popular painting emerged in the aftermath of Congo's independence from Belgian rule, in 1960. Initially generating little interest outside the country, it gained international recognition in the early 2000s. The exhibition opens with a selection of film posters, books, and photography from the colonial period that seeks to challenge the established way of looking at African peoples as "underdeveloped" or "uncivilized," and therefore excluded from Western modernity or progress. Private art schools established in Congo in the colonial period as part of an institutional outreach program that aimed to present Belgium as a benevolent ruler bringing progress have tried to exoticise local artists by training them to follow the traditional forms of expression.

The popular painting works in the exhibition were originally collected by Bogumil Jewsiewicki, a Polish anthropologist who started buying in the 1970s, while working in Congo. He did not see his activities as amassing an art collection, but as gathering an archive that preserves the history of painting and the social process surrounding its creation and dissemination. Initially, Jewsiewicki regarded the painters as naive artists, similar to those labeled "outsider artists" in the West, but over time came to regard them as purveyors of a highly-organized and self-conscious mass culture. Popular painting is ingrained in the everyday life of the people of Democratic Republic of Congo: showing local heroes, reminding the viewer of recent colonial history, and offering satire and humorous fables about the human condition, all rendered in a colorful, conversational style that speaks to society directly, without any institutional go-betweens. The paintings are exhibited alongside historical objects from the RMCA collection in order to demonstrate that what we call colonial, traditional, ethnographic, modern, or contemporary all belongs to the same history of art, with popular painting being part of a continuum of image making that precedes the colonization of Congo.

Congo Art Works: Popular Painting also includes two archival projects that underline contemporary uses of traditional Congolese art and its instrumentalization. Sammy Baloji addresses these

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questions with a conceptual intervention in the exhibition space. Based on the painted facade of a traditional courthouse made by the Mangbetu people—whose forms were highly appreciated by late-nineteenth-century colonists—Baloji's work addresses questions of authenticity and the exoticization of Africans, as practiced by the Belgian colonial administration. A selection of advertisements, developed by artist Djo Bolankoko and based on the RMCA archives, demonstrates how popular painting as a practice is deeply inscribed in the urban fabric of Kinshasa.

In order to connect the exhibition and its exploration of colonialism and the post-colonial condition to the Russian context, Garage has developed a show within a show, which examines the art of Chukotka, a region in the Far East of the country that became part of the Soviet Union in 1920. With this investigation of a markedly different type of interaction between the metropolis and the margins, Garage seeks to address an important, but rarely examined topic.

Congo Art Works: Popular Painting is the third in a series of exhibitions at Garage that explores the significance of collecting in relation to the broader activities of a contemporary museum, particularly through identifying the diversity of processes in which collectors and institutions engage. Developed alongside Garage Archive Collection and intended to instigate public debate, the exhibition series asks: if a museum is a repository of a wide variety of knowledge and experience, what are the relevant approaches to building and presenting a collection? Past exhibitions in the series include *Personal Choice* (2014), a selection of work from Russian private collections of contemporary art, and *Grammar of Freedom* (2015), a survey of eastern European art from the ArtEast 2000+ collection at Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Congo Art Works: Popular Painting is curated by Bambi Ceuppens and Sammy Baloji. The exhibition at Garage is organized by curator Valentin Diaconov and assistant curator Iaroslav Volovod.

GARAGE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Garage Museum of Contemporary Art is a place for people, art, and ideas to create history. Through an extensive program of exhibitions, events, education, research, and publishing, the institution reflects on current developments in Russian and international culture, creating opportunities for public dialogue, as well as the production of new work and ideas in Moscow. At the center of all these activities is the Museum's collection, which is the first archive in the country related to the development of Russian contemporary art from the 1950s through the present. Founded in 2008 by Dasha Zhukova and Roman Abramovich, Garage is the first philanthropic organization in Russia to create a comprehensive public mandate for contemporary art and culture. Open seven days a week, it was initially housed in the renowned Bakhmetevsky Bus Garage in Moscow, designed by the Constructivist architect Konstantin Melnikov. In 2012 Garage relocated to a temporary pavilion in Gorky Park, specifically commissioned from award-winning architect Shigeru Ban. A year later, a purpose-built Education Center was opened next to the Pavilion. On June 12, 2015, Garage welcomed visitors to its first permanent home. Designed by Rem Koolhaas and his OMA studio, this groundbreaking preservation project transformed the famous Vremena Goda (Seasons of the Year) Soviet Modernist restaurant, built in 1968 in Gorky Park, into a contemporary museum.

Garage is a non-profit project of The IRIS Foundation.

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About UNIQLO and Fast Retailing

UNIQLO is a brand of Fast Retailing Co., Ltd., a leading global Japanese retail holding company that designs, manufactures and sells clothing under seven main brands: Comptoir des Cottonniers, GU, Helmut Lang, J Brand, Princesse tam.tam, Theory, and UNIQLO. With global sales of approximately 1.7864 trillion yen for the 2016 fiscal year ending August 31, 2016 (US \$17.31 billion, calculated in yen using the end of August 2016 rate of \$1 = 103.2 yen), Fast Retailing is one of the world's largest apparel retail companies, and UNIQLO is Japan's leading specialty retailer. UNIQLO continues to open large-scale stores in some of the world's most important cities and locations, as part of its ongoing efforts to solidify its status as a truly global brand. Today the company has around 1,800 stores in 18 markets worldwide including Japan, Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, U.K. and the U.S. In addition, Grameen UNIQLO, a social business established in Bangladesh in September 2010, currently operates several Grameen UNIQLO stores in Dhaka. UNIQLO manages an integrated business model under which it designs, manufactures, markets and sells high-quality, casual apparel. The company believes that truly great clothes should be supremely comfortable, feature universal designs, are of high quality and offer a superb fit to everyone who wears them. With a corporate statement committed to changing clothes, changing conventional wisdom and change the world, Fast Retailing is dedicated to creating great clothing with new and unique value to enrich the lives of people everywhere. For more information about UNIQLO and Fast Retailing, please visit www.uniqlo.com and www.fastretailing.com.

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