

CONTACT(S) ZONE

Think of the National
Museum as a place of
link and of relationship

COLLECTIVE EXHIBITION

12th January - 30th April 2022

A temporary exhibition presented by the National
Museum in partnership with the International centre
for the Artistic and Cultural Heritage (CIPCA)

Curators

Dr HUGUES HEUMEN TCHANA (Director of the National Museum)

Ms FABIOLA ECOT AYISSI (Director of CIPCA)

Venue : National Museum of Cameroon. Former Presidential Palace, Yaounde.



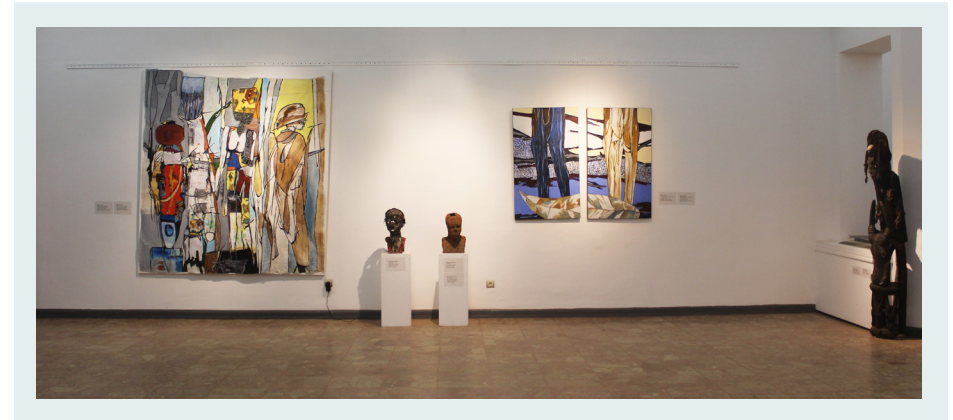
CONTACT(S) ZONE

Think of the National Museum as a place of link and of relationship.

This new temporary exhibition that we wish to showcase to the Cameroonian public as well as the international level prior to the celebration of the African cup of Nations is an initiative of the National Museum. It is the continuation of the recent monthly conferences in the museum which had to deal with a subject on cultural heritage and contemporary arts. *Contact (s) Zone: Think of the National Museum as a place of link and of relationship* is a project realized in partnership with the International Centre of Artistic and Cultural Heritage - CIPCA (Yaounde).

The exhibition gives a new life to the focal point of national identity in Cameroon which is the National Museum and encourages fervent commitment with its audiences. The idea is to establish dynamism within the national territory and the world at large, thus restore a permanent link with the actors of contemporary creations in the country, and also render possible its development.

The National Museum of Cameroon, opening its space to the contemporary art practices, acknowledges the powerful presence of contemporary creations produced by Cameroonians both at the national and international level. The museum provides a showcase for contemporary heritage while given honour to the emblematic figures of the national art, hence the excellence that the solicited artists actually represent.



Through this exhibition, which will serve as a platform for the current artistic expressions, we wish to promote the notable artists of the generation born after independence and who have built their career while in their country. Artists who at the same time have developed a very promising work and came up with specific techniques to their creativity which allows them to think and draw reflections at the dimension of the National Museum as a place for contact and relations in the societal and political level, the historical, artistic or interdisciplinary level.

CURATORIAL PROJECT

“It’s an apocalypse in slow motion (...) We had inward-looking societies. They have had sufficient tolerance not to be eradicated in large simplifying packages. Today they are fragile cultures, because they are not based on writing. Their wealth has not been stored in reliable and durable documents, so they are likely to disappear without a trace.”¹

This bitter observation formulated less than ten years ago by the Burkinabe historian Josep Ki-Zerbo is far from defeatist. Contrary to appearances, it invites the reader to a start, to seize the tools and spaces that are within his reach, to perpetuate his knowledge, his culture. Is the museum’s space, although a legacy of Western cultural practice, not the place par excellence, conducive for such a rescue? Or, on the contrary, is this ambition linked to an exogenous cultural element a utopia?

The purpose of the exhibition project *Contact(s) Zone* is as follows : to open a field of reflection and exploration making the National Museum of Cameroon a space that, thanks to its exhibitions and the objects in its collection, would make it possible to think about the link that unites people, cultures, disciplines, actors, their relationship to power. This postulation poses culture as a determining element of common reflection. Culture and art as ways to think about the future.

The contemporary artists who have been called upon testify to the dynamism that characterizes artistic production in Cameroon. In a context where we are confronted with historical and ideological conflicts, disjunctions, attempts at ruptures, rejection, artists are naturally called to engage and express themselves. Thus, the museum opens its doors to eight leading artists representative of the contemporary Cameroonian scene. The solicited creators took up the reflection that was proposed to them and developed visual, sound and immersive proposals. The resulting strength of the works shows that art and culture are a possible and necessary support for political and social thought that is both constructive and hopeful.

In the exhibition, an important place was given to sculpture, installation and assembly, as these are artistic practices that naturally express themselves forcefully in Cameroon. Max Lyonga’s work is there to testify to the powerful imagination that can be conveyed through painting. The arrangement of contemporary works in the museum space is the first interaction implemented. Ruth Belinga creates an installation consisting of burlap ropes, an evocation of vines and a chair of disproportionate dimensions, such is the setting evoking a majestic forest, the whole is intended to accommodate the performance which aims to establish direct contact with the public.

The installations and some works call on artisanal knowledge mastered by the artists themselves as is the case of Salifou Lindou, Dieudonné Fokou, or Jean Michel Dissake who are masters in metal work. Other artists, in order to enhance their skills, have teamed up with traditional artisans. This is the case for the realization of Hervé Youmbi’s Totems which called on woodcarvers and traditional pearl trees. Alioum Moussa highlights the use of craftsmen who create the stools that make up his installation, the know-how that gives rise to the cultivation of cotton in the northern zone, and the weaving process of course.

¹ Joseph Ki-Zerbo, *A quand l’Afrique*, Editions d’en bas, 2013, p. 182.

As curators, we propose an interaction between the works delivered by the artists and the permanent collection of the National Museum. Some works have been taken out of the museum's reserve so that they can interact with contemporary works. These are pieces rarely shown in the past such as the Sawa canoe or the two Beti totem.

The documents room (orange room) is located at the heart of the exhibition and presents certain works related to the exhibited works, conducive to feeding the creative work of the exhibited artists and part of the creative process. In the same logic, a tale collected in the forest of Dja, among the Baka, is proposed to the visitor as an extension of ruth Belinga's installation. Thus have been woven cultural links that we hope have made the boundaries between disciplines (plastic arts, crafts, theatre), between ancient art and contemporaneity more porous.



ROOM 1

The room n°1, exhibits Dieudonne Fokou, Max Lyonga and Ruth Belinga. The installation of Ruth Belinga, composed of large lianas starting from the ceiling introduced by two Babungo statues which serve as guardians of the temple and are permanent collection of the National Museum. Through direct allusions to the temple that nature can represent, Ruth Belinga invite visitors to reflect on current issues like: deforestation, the spiritual link with the spirits of nature, the role of man its preservation. The preservation of knowledge, nature and our memory is the powerful message intended by the artists.



Dieudonné Fokou, *Standop*, 162x160cm, copper, iron, 2021, Private collection.

A decorative border composed of various teal-colored geometric shapes, including rectangles, squares, and lines, arranged in a pattern that frames the left and top portions of the page.

DIEUDONNÉ FOKOU

The great-grandson of the sculptor with the credo “build bridges to others,” Dieudonné Fokou was born in 1971 at Bamendjou, West Cameroon. He combines sculpture, painting and music by perfecting himself beside two great masters like the painter Jean Kouam Tawadje and the sculptor Joseph Francis Sumégné.

Dieudonné Fokou registers himself in a sustainable recovery and recycling, thus sublimating obsolete objects. His varied themes are peace, justice or human identity. In the framework of some training, he lectures in some Cameroonian and German schools with a hybrid teaching methodology that draws both on his professional experience and also approaches observed from other artists. His works are exhibited in many public and private institutions in Cameroon (CIPCA, AFD Yaounde, Doual’art) and at the international level (Germany, France, U.S.A, Egypt and South Africa,)



Max Lyonga, *Book of covenants*, mixing techniques, 150x150cm, 2021, National Museum Collection.

MAX LYONGA

Born on the 12 June 1968 at Tiko, Max Lyonga is based in Buea and has opened a gallery. His contact with German artists practicing abstract art contributed much to his career. He received training during workshops organised by the Cameroon French Franco-Alliances in Buea as well as the diverse French cultural centres in Cameroon. His numerous competitions at the national level has made him to earn a 'Silver spike' in 2002. Max Lyonga constantly auctions his paintings to finance humanitarian works like; the fight against HIV/Aids, construction of schools for the disabled children, teaching of painting to street children and school dropout.

Concerning his artworks, he states:

"Think of the National Museum as a place of link and of relationship," he quotes "I thought of this theme as a sequence of events linked within time and space. Hence, I got inspired from the past, present and future. Everything intertwines and coexists harmoniously. Reason why I talk of Preserve your cultural heritage. Culture being the only thing left when all is lost, I plead for the preservation of our values. Thereto, our practices and customs that make out our wealth are these cultural heritage bequeathed by enlightened people who have lived in the past; our ancestors. We further have the Book of Covenant, which is the book of alliance, a tacit agreement of parents advocating the perpetuation of their culture to the present generation as well as the future generation. This preservation also requires the involvement of youths hence, Firm Decision. In effect, the latter has to be responsible for their identity by promoting activities that involves youths from all over the country hence prodding unity We Are One".



Ruth Belinga, *The Barber chair*, mixing techniques, (performance, installation, jute fabrics, video), 2021.

RUTH BELINGA

Invested since the beginning in the artistic arena of Cameroonian, Ruth Belinga is a researcher in the history of pictorial art. She is holder of PhD in the history of art and lectures at the Insitute of Fine Arts in Foumban (university of Dschang) and likewise curating exhibitions. She also works as a painter, does videos, performe and has participated in several exhibitions in Cameroon, Algeria, Mali, France, Brazil, the Netherlands and the Republic of Congo (Congo Brazaville), Senegal and Canada.

The performance *La Chaise du barbier* takes place around an installation of a temple where the genius of the forest reign. It is a sacred forest, luxuriant, and surrounded by two Babungo sculptures from the National Museum Collection who are guardian of the temple. A woman/nature bruised by the action of man becomes the voice of her community.

She invokes the geniuses of this sacred place with gestures and cries. Her mission is trying and frightening. There is a strong link between her and nature, the forest etc. Like her, the forest provides to us food, health, protection, affection etc. She is aware of this and so will brave all the trials for the sake of nature and her community. The background music, the nature of the recitation and the blowing of the wind with the help of a powerful fan will permit the spectator to live the emotion that accompanies the body of the missionary woman.

ROOM 2

Room 2 is a room that invites the visitor to listen to the intangible memory of the Baka people through the archives of CIPCA. The Baka people believe in god the creator called Komba who is a supreme being who created the universe where humans dwell. A god of the forest exist and is called Edjengui. The Baka believe in an afterlife. The mes (spirit) populate the forest in a sanctuary in which they can reincarnate in the form of an animal or tree. Their beliefs are totemic, with the existence of taboos which brings forth prohibitions like eating certain animals and cutting certain trees considered as totems. The Jengi, whose mask presented is part of the collections of the National Museum, gives the men and the community access to the protection of the forest as well as power to preserve the spirit of the Jengi family that walk close to elephants and guide the prey towards the hunters.



CIPCA sound archives.

Baka mask (Edzengui mask of the pygmies), raffia, wood, National Museum Collection.
Donated by the CHEGAMYS Association to the National Museum in 2021.

PRESENTATION OF THE UNIVERSE OF THE BAKA TALES



The religious Robert Brisson (who lived 40 years with the Baka) collect and present The mythology and believes of the Baka people in the book *Mythologie des Pygmées Baka* (Robert Brison, ed. Peeters, 1999, Volume and 2, 403p.)

The author mentions the demigods of the early times: Komba and his nephew Waiot are not creators but organisers of a fundamental pre-existence. Komba structures through prehumanity, a set of human beings, animals and plants. Waito is the holder of all vital goods such as water, food, fire...and knowledge; he is the civilized hero and the father of humans who usurps such goods for the benefits of humans.

“At the beginning of everything, there is the jungle. Inhabited by many camps of disperse Baka people. In this jungle, there was the village of the god Komba “Master” of the forest, like others, he also had his family: his father and mother of which little knowledge is known. He also has his wife and sisters but no brother. Komba and his wife are the parents of two twins; Mokoaku, the male, Jeo a female.

According to the Baka, Komba created all beings, but in the tales the Baka existed already. and explanatory stories of the Baka already exist. Komba’s sister, Njelo, gives birth and Waito is born/ The same Waito will marry his two sisters and will have as children the primordial twins. Therefore, Waito will be the son and brother of his mother. It is a hermaphroditic entity, with multiple facets, that auto-fertilises and begets all humanity.”

According to the author, “The stories collected are in fact myths of origins and explanatory stories that rationalizes the mysteries of nature while projecting a collective imaginary traditional organization of society. They transmit the great moral principles that governs the social life of the Baka people and constitutes and oral book the knowledge of the world.

ROOM 3

As part of the exhibition *Contact(s) Zone*, the National Museum is highlighting the diversity of media used by Cameroonian artists. For nearly ten years, Martin Ambara has been using the mvet instrument as an object for various choreographic, linguistic and material creations. His works are inspired by physical, philosophical and material point of view, give the instrument a new intellectual dimension. His work follows "Mvet Beyeme" artwork (2020). Martin Ambara's motto is to stand our mind, through the spirit and practice of art.



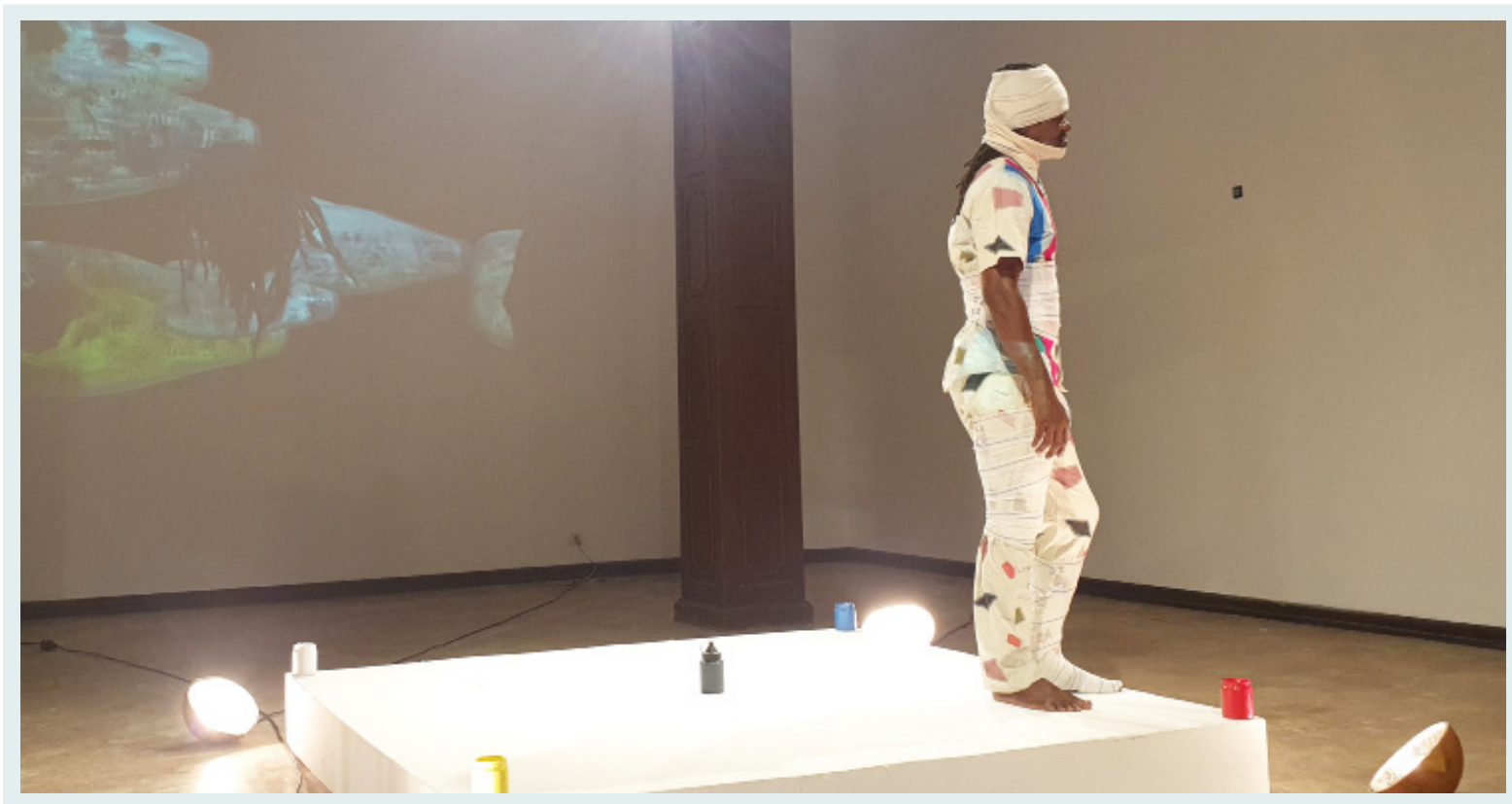
Martin Ambara, accompanied by : Bertrand Moadia Yakana (choreographer and dancer), Yvon Ngassam (video artist), **Mvett Genesis**, mixed techniques (installation, video), 2021.

MARTIN AMBARA

Martin Ambara was born on 11 February 1970 in Yaoundé. As a versatile artist, he is an actor, director and storyteller, and is passionate about Mvet, the age-old epic poetry of the Beti and Bantu ethnic groups. At the beginning of 2001, he directed one of his texts “Jusqu’au bout de l’absurde” during a creative residency at the Alliance franco-camerounaise in Dschang. In 2002, he took part in a training course in directing organised by the Francophonies en Limousin in Benin, led by Georges Banu and Patrick Le Mauff, as well as in a theatre workshop with Roland Fichet, organised by the “Théâtre de la Folle Pensée” in Yaounde and in Benin in partnership with Africreations.

Martin Ambara is the founder and Director of the troupe “Les Ménestrels” to which the young actors of the Yaounde Theatre Laboratory (Othni) belong and which takes care of them. It was in 1999 that he came up with the idea of setting up this troupe, before opening the Othni eleven years later. The Othni is located in the Titi garage neighborhood of Yaoundé. This place questions contemporary artistic forms (dance, sculpture, painting, photography, cinema, video) as creative spaces likely to participate in the renewal of theatrical aesthetics today. It encourages the exploration of contemporary theatrical writing and what it induces in terms of language and forms of transcription on a stage. Martin Ambara draws on African founding myths, tales and legends on which Cameroon can really rely to invent new theatrical forms. This new paradigm will be used to determine a specifically Cameroonian theatrical identity.

Mvett Genesis explores the twelve levels of Mvett Eka-ng. Each level synthesises the conflicts narrated in epic stories, opposing the Ekang immortals whose Ascendant is Ekokomo Mba, to the Okü mortals whose Ascendant is Mebege me Nkwa.



Shooting of **Mvett Genesis**, National Museum of Cameroon, January 2022.

SALLE 4

Sharing our languages, our cultures, our memory. The room n°4 exhibits four renowned contemporary artists: Hervé Youmbi, Jean-Michel Dissake, Alioum Moussa and Salifou Lindou. A chimpanzee reliquary sculpture echoes Youmbi's totems, while tikar spiders interact with Dissake's paintings. Alioum Moussa invites visitors to sit on armchairs from different cultural areas around calabashes filled with cotton. These calabashes are also to be found in the Museum's collection. Jean-Michel Dissake reveals to us what "sharing" on the canvas means. The collective memory of Cameroon is represented, allegorically, through the work of Salidou Lindou.



Hervé Youmbi, *Totems 0234/12-21*, Installation, 2021.



Fang-Beti reliquary figure
Statuette representing a sacred
chimpanzee
Wire, nails, wood
National Museum Collection.

HERVÉ YOUNBI

Hervé Youmbi is a Cameroonian artist (born in Bangui, 1973) known at the international level. He works in Douala. Graduate from HEAR (Haute Ecole des arts du Rhin) in 2011. Of recent, his works dwell essentially on the production of hybrid masks. He works on wood sculptures decorated with beads and multicoloured buttons characterized by a mixture of elements that overlooks the traditional canons of African Americans.

Produced under the framework of the exhibition titled *Contact Zone(s)* hosted by the National Museum, the installation Totem 0234/12 – 21 illustrates a place where cultures meet, relate and dialogue in the image of the National Museum. Arranged in a triangular manner on the socle, each totem is a singular universe with regard to its volume and the rhythm of the layout of the masks that it constitutes.

The first totem has the structure of a rectangular prism with compartments, and is overhung by two masks. The two masks mentioned above and four Janus masks represented in both sides of the rectangular prism. From the base to the top, we have a Bembe (Congo) mask conducted during the circumcision ceremony. It represents adolescence. The second totem is made up of five sculptural pieces, including four masks and a stool in the centre. From bottom to top, we have an elephant mask from Dschang (Cameroon), a Kifwebe mask (DRC), the stool with the effigy of the Baga snake (Guinea Bisau), another Kifwebe mask (DRC) and finally, a Bobo Bwa buffalo mask (Burkina Faso) at the top of the totem. The third and last totem has a more simple structure than the others. It is made up of two Janus masks at its base, a two-sided blade enriched with graphic representations and is topped by a majestic bird.

A chimpanzee reliquary sculpture from the National Museum's collections echoes these totems. The latter have always had a preponderant role in the cultural role in the cultural and religious life of certain communities throughout the world. Funerary or reception monuments funeral monuments, pillars of royal concessions, they are an open book on the culture and beliefs of those who made them.



Jean-Michel Dissake, Sacrifice, *Dindo*, aluminium and copper, picto-sculpture, 5x3m, 2019-2022.



Sawa pirogue, wood, 600x45cm
National Museum Collection.

JEAN-MICHEL DISSAKE

Born in 1983 in Yaoundé, Jean Michel Dissake is a self-taught Cameroonian visual artist from the Littoral region. While studying in the Faculty of Science and Management at the University of Douala, Dissake met the painter François Epoh who gave him two brushes and gouaches. This act marked his entry into the artistic profession. In the course of his research, Jean-Michel Dissake explored disciplines such as geology, anthropology, metaphysics and philosophy.

Shown for the first time to the public at the National Museum and its audiences, the works presented approach societal issues from a mystical and spiritual perspective. The artwork *Dindo* presents the man who, after causing damage, chaos and suffering to his fellow man, needs redemption and purification to regenerate himself. ***The market of souls*** is a metaphor for the interconnectedness of the world's souls, and for artificial intelligence. These masks, both mesmerizing and frightening, embody our digital identities, the traces of our duplicated and multiple "selves" left on the web. Browsing is the cultural element of the Sawa people, as we speak of internet browsing, of this "digital culture", which is becoming indispensable today in order to be in the world.

The spider webs symbolise the internet, where inventors exploit our knowledge to invent technological devices. In reference to the different cultures of Cameroon, some say that spiders are like prisons, others say that they can predict the future. The art technique called moudiki meaning picto-sculpture which is a link between painting and sculpture. Dissake's artistic style is based on forms, sounds, materials and movements.



Alioum Moussa, *Proverbe peul, Bandol Poullo*, mixing techniques (cotton, calabashes), variables dimensions, 2021.

ALIOUM MOUSSA

Alioum Moussa was born in 1977 in Maroua. Visual artist, also graphic designer and designer, his art is at the crossroads of social art and arte povera.

Initially the people of Cameroon are one, they share similar customs and traditions. During migrations, the indigenous people displaced themselves both with tangible and intangible cultures. Wherever they found refuge, they settled and vehiculated their customs and traditions.

Alioum Moussa out of these rich varieties of cultural experiences in Cameroon, decides to emphasise on the strong links between the Tikar tribes (Tikar people of Cameroon hail from the Adamawa plateau and western highlands. We find them therefore in the northern part and grassfields of Cameroon) by showcasing the roots of one of the most trending traditional outfit worn today in Cameroon : the ndop fabric. The local material used to weave the ndop dress is obtained from farmers and weavers of cotton in the northern part of the country. One of the prime economic activities of the northern part is cotton plantation. They produce tons of cottons to the entire country and the world at large. This is evidence to unity in the economic aspects, leading us back to the bond shared between Cameroon tribes.

Calabashes are equally lucrative business in the northern part of the country, used as the bond between the ten regions of Cameroon. Calabashes represent hospitality and refreshment. Stools represent hospitality too because it is a sign of welcome and comfort in every home.

The contemporary art of installation is primordial today because most at times it is a collective effort of many artists. Alioum Moussa for instance bought stools, calabashes and cotton thread from craftsmen who are also artists in their numbers. There is a strong bond between people, artists and hence, the credibility of the theme *Contact(s) Zone* because the works of craftsmen would equally be valourised in the National Museum.



Salifou Lindou, *Fleurs de Décombres*, installation, rusty iron and bronze, variable dimensions, 2021.

SALIFOU LINDOU

Born in 1965, Salifou Lindou lives and works in Douala. As a committed artist, he is founding member of the Cercle Kapsiki, a group of five fine artists from Douala. From childhood, the numerous masks and statues that he has been seeing from craftsmen at the Foun-ban Palace Museum has been part of his day to day livelihood. Salifou Lindou experiments constantly on new materials, sometimes recycle, shapes, and structures and destructures the materials.

Regarding the political landscape, this work of art, created from 2013, makes reference to the operation sparrow hawk that shakes Cameroon in 2012. Likewise, it is the title of one of the poems of the famous Charles Baudelaire and the presidential plane bearing the same name.

The artwork *Fleurs de décombres* evoked the current state of abandonment the deteriorating state of the presidential plane *Albatros* on which plants are presently growing on. It becomes a symbol of forgetfulness. The masks on its part evoke the diverse nature of Cameroonians and incarnates hope. The Cameroonian society therefore has to remember the past so as to learn.

EXHIBITION TEAM

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Mr MAMOUDOU NASSIR (MN).

Ms ABENA MARTINE (MN).

Mr BELINGA MARTIN (MN).

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Secretariat :

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Cultural mediators of the National Museum of Cameroon.

MINAC technical team :

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Mr OYONO VALERE (Inspector n°1).

Mr ABANDA ARMAND (Director of the Development and Promotion of Arts).


The exhibition is open from Tuesday to Sunday, 10am- 5pm.




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