

Sammy Baloji

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Sammy Baloji © Sophie Nuytten, 2018

- 1 “When I started to work on images, I was struck by the erasure of history. [...] My work, it just so happens, consists in borrowing the process of erasure and re-establishing undone connections. It is situated as much in the dissection of the layers of oblivion and in an interest in the methodology of disappearance as in the re-establishment of links”.¹

- 2 Sammy Baloji (born is 1978) is a graduate in the Information and Communication Sciences from the University of Lubumbashi, and from the Haute Ecole des Arts du Rhin. Since September 2019, he has been at work on an art research doctorate at Sint Lucas Antwerpen titled *Contemporary Kasala and Lukasa: towards a Reconfiguration of Identity and Geopolitics*. Since 2005, he has taken part in a large number of exhibitions [the 7th Rencontres de la photographie africaine in Bamako (2007), at the Smithsonian Institution (2012), the 56th Venice Biennale (2015), and documenta 14 (2017)], and has received numerous prizes and awards. He is undertaking research in several directions including the history of the Congo, and the permanence of colonial structures in the globalized world. He proceeds by collecting and accumulating facts, data, histories and visual materials. Photography plays a part as a preferred medium. But his images rarely function in an isolated way. The work *Mémoire* associates fake-panoramic photographs of the Gécamines industrial site—General Quarry and Mining Company of the Democratic Republic of the Congo—with archival images of the same company. Sammy Baloji calls directly upon collage and image editing, with a clarity of ideas which is his personal trademark. This association of two sets of images (made/found, recent/old, personal/anonymous) is also used in *Congo Far West* (2010-2011), and *Kolwezi* (2010-2012). In each instance, the comparison of two images goes beyond a mere binary contrast and creates more complex ramified meanings.
- 3 Over and above photography and its uses, the artist's interest veers towards visualization systems. *Mémoire* showed his attentiveness to the panorama and an enlarged vision of reality, which was displayed earlier in the views of Likasi streets exhibited in 2006 at La Cambre. From 2013 onward, his work has also involved installations incorporating images, sounds and transformed objects. It nevertheless retains this dimension that broadens the vision. *Essay on Urban Planning* (2013), built like a chequerboard of photographs, alternately shows boxes of insects in close up and aerial views of the city of Lubumbashi, associated with an image and an archival text. The grid-like structure conjures up cartographic techniques, and the increased number of viewpoints may call to mind the faceted vision of the fly. The panoptic arrangement comes across even more thoroughly in *Hunting and Collecting* (2015). This piece presents the structure of a diorama by associating it with photographic collages and a list of the NGOs operating in North and South Kiva.
- 4 We may also note, in several other works produced since 2015,² the recurrence of the imprinted form associated with copper, and the reference to the interlacing of textiles. In these different works, the idea of the photographic negative/positive is put back together in new forms of complexity. Sammy Baloji, who is in touch with many researchers,³ is an artist who is part of an active network, but this system does not function just to his advantage. In fact, a large part of his activity is dedicated to several programmes supporting artistic creation, in particular through the Lubumbashi Biennial organized by the association Picha, which he co-founded in 2008.

NOTES

1. “Rétablir les connexions défaites, Sammy Baloji en conversation avec Lotte Arndt”, *Sammy Baloji : arracher quelques bribes précises au vide qui se creuse* (30 March-30 April 2018), Rennes : Galerie Art&Essai, 2019, p. 14
2. *Sociétés Secrètes* (2015), *The Other Memorial* (2015), *That is where, as you heard, the elephant danced the malinga. The place where they now grow flowers* (2016) and *Fragments of Interlaced Dialogues* (2017)
3. See in particular the publications *Suturing the City: Living together in Congo's Urban Worlds* produced with Filip de Boeck, London : Autograph ABP ; Paris : Galerie Imane Farès, 2016 and *Hunting and Collecting*, Ostende : Mu ZEE ; Paris : Galerie Imane Farès, 2016