

AFRICAN METROPOLIS

An imaginary city

An exhibition as a journey through a non-existent city capable of recounting the composite, heterogeneous and stratified identity of the contemporary metropolis

22 June – 4 November 2018

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*“The city is a discourse and this discourse is truly a language:
the city speaks to its inhabitants;
we speak our city, the city where we are, simply by living in it,
by wandering through it, by looking at it.”*
(Roland Barthes, *L'aventure sémiologique*)

Rome, 21 June 2018. An exhibition challenging our idea of the metropolis, which uses the intensity and richness of African art to highlight the beauty and the contradictions of the world of today.

Is ***African Metropolis. An imaginary city***, the exhibition curated by **Simon Njami** and co curated by **Elena Motisi** at MAXXI from **22 June to 4 November 2018**.

The exhibition, produced in collaboration with the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation – DGMO**, main partner **Eni**, is part of a broader project strongly supported by **Giovanna Melandri**, President of the Fondazione MAXXI, dedicated to the vitality of the artistic scene of a continent expanding amidst contradictions and open wounds and is also in line with the museum's research that sees art and culture as instruments of dialogue and cultural diplomacy.

The project also features the exhibition ***road to justice*** (22 June – 14 October 2018), curated by Anne Palopoli, a reflection on the complexity of the continent, its suffering, its memory, its possible future scenarios, and a **rich programme** of encounters with artists, architects and writers, film, dance and live music.

As **Melandri** says: “This project is for us an opportunity to meet and work with the African communities present in Rome, to which it is symbolically dedicated: young people from various regions of the continent, Africa-born and second generation, will in fact be the protagonists of an intensive programme of intercultural mediation, interpreting the works on show on the basis of their personal experiences.”

Through the intensity and the richness of African art, the exhibition highlights the beauty and the contradictions of the cities and the world of today.

More than 100 works by **34 African artists** become elements of an imaginary city, of an exploration that through **photography, installations, sculptures, fabrics and videos**, recreates the chaos, the wealth, the multi-faceted nature of the contemporary African and global identity.

Wandering, Belonging, Recognising, Imagining and ***Reconstructing*** are the *metropolitan actions* identified by the curators to describe this imaginary city, and to interpret the **physical space** of the cities we pass through during the course of our existence and the **mental space** defined by the sensations and emotions they reawaken in us.

The artworks are installed as elements of a city skyline, the fruit of a continual stratification of interventions, define a layout in which visitors may lose, recognise and imagine themselves. The exhibition is organized not around a consequential thematic structure, but rather according to a sequence of elements in which **large scale works** alternate with **intimate pieces** and **site-specific reworkings**.

The exhibition winds around works that capture the attention, capable of recreating the sensation of urban space and its dynamics: from the **gigantic installations** realised for the exhibition by **Bili Bidjocka** – who has raised on the museum piazza a sculpture referencing the *Tower of Babel* and the *Pharos of Alexandria* – and by **Youssef Limoud** – who has reproduced a building that has collapsed upon itself – to works like that

of **Amina Zoubir** *Prends le bus e regarde* (2006) which, thanks to a new presentation, gives visitors the sensation of being on a bus. The installations also include *Le salon bibliothèque* by **Hassan Hajjaj**, also realised specifically for this show, which reproduces the space of a bookshop with a Moroccan flavour, in which it is possible to rest, chat and read a selection of books which the curators have asked the artist involved in the exhibition to choose.

The metropolis described in this show is not a “formal” city, of built architecture organized according to planning regulations, but a city built by its inhabitants; hence we encounter works such as *Behind This Ambiguity* (2015/2018) by **Abdulrazaq Awofeso** composed of 120 statues, which literally invade the gallery space like a crowd flooding out of a metro station. The street, this lived-in space so rich in visual stimuli, is also rendered through *566 PROTECTED AREA* and *768 NO POSTERS* (2016) by **Onyis Martin**, works similar to posters, to writings on walls, to the subliminal messages those who traverse the metropolises are constantly subjected to.

Among the other works on show are a number of shots from the photographic series by **Franck Abd-Bakar Fanny** *My Nights are brighter than your Days* (2016), capable of transmitting the idea of that *wandering* and losing oneself that frequently accompanies out experience and knowledge of a new city. Photos born out of the nocturnal walks of an artist rendered insomniac by the jet-lag caused by long flights between Africa, Europe and the United States: the gaze of a traveller whose body is absent. An immersive story of the city is offered by *Symphonie urbaine* (2017-2018) by **Lucas Gabriel**, a bilingual sound piece, set in four different areas of the show: here it is the city itself that speaks, with joyous and provocative accents, a city composed of the sounds of many cities, the personality of which transcends confines and geographies.

African Metropolis is a rollercoaster of images and imaginations, with the *Falling Houses* (2014), the houses suspended upside down by **Pascale Marthine Tayou**, fragile domestic architecture composed of a myriad coloured images, the fabrics of **Abdoulaye Konaté** *Calao* (2016) and *Alep* (2017), symbols of memory and social protest, and the delicate yet monumental installation by **El Anatsui** *Stressed World* (2011), entirely composed of recycled copper.

The exhibition tackles current affairs with *Bureau d'échange* (2014) by **Meschac Gaba**, who denounces the fact that all raw materials deriving from natural resources have become the object of speculation capable of leading society into profound economic crises, or with *World Disorder II* (2017) by **Paul Onditi**, an artist questioning political, structural, social and economic upheavals at local and global levels.

However, there is also room for hope, dreams and new opportunities in the clothes designed by **Lamine Badian Kouyaté (Xuly.Bet)** that overlook the museum piazza like in a shop window, creations that transmit the values of *African modernity* and that demonstrate how any culture may become avant-garde, and in the photographs by **Mimi Cherono Ng'ok** whose gaze transform every place into an *emotive landscape* associated with the artist's life and experiences, or those of **Sarah Waiswa** who in *Ballet in Kibera* (2017), portrays a group of children from an outlying area of a city involved in a classical dance lesson.

Recognising ourselves in the great heterogeneity of Africa is one of the objectives of the exhibition
We ask ourselves whether it is possible to live together in a space seemingly composed of insurmountable differences and whether it is possible to construct a portrait of **a city of which we are all inhabitants while being strangers.**

Exhibiting part of the artistic output of a continent composed of over fifty nations, thousands of cities and millions of inhabitants, **African Metropolis** succeeds in presenting a **universal context.**

In the deviation provoked by our extraneousness to its culture, it provides the necessary distance for an understanding of the **cities of the world**, similar to books to be leafed, impossible to recount but only to live, a *xenopóleis* in which the inhabitant modifies and is modified by the surrounding environment.

This exhibition emerges from one of the strands of research close to MAXXI, exploring the dynamics of the great cities, as was the case with the exhibitions on the creative scene of the Mediterranean dedicated to Istanbul and Beirut; multidisciplinary shows that conjugate artistic research with design, architecture and urban development.

The exhibition has been staged on the occasion of the **Second Italy-Africa Conference** organized in Rome by the *Ministry for Foreign Affairs and International cooperation*, which has contributed to the production and

the new presentations of the works by **Bidjocka, Youssef Limoud, Hassan Hajjaj, Amina Zoubir, Mimi Cherono Ng'ok, James Webb** and **Sammy Baloji**.

Exhibiting artists: **Abdoulaye Konaté, Abdulrazaq Awofeso, Akinbode Akinbiyi, Amina Zoubir, Andrew Tshabangu, Antoine Tempé, Bili Bidjocka, Délio Jasse, El Anatsui, Franck Abd-Bakar Fanny, François-Xavier Gbré, Hassan Hajjaj, Hassan Musa, Heba Y. Amin, James Webb, Kiluanji Kia Henda, Lamine Badian Kouyaté (Xuly.Bet), Lavar Munroe, Lucas Gabriel, PEFURA, Meschac Gaba, Mimi Cherono Ng'ok, Nicholas Hlobo, Onyis Martin, Ouattara Watts, Pascale Marthine Tayou, Paul Onditi, Sammy Baloji, Samson Kambalu, Sarah Waiswa, Simon Gush, Youssef Limoud, Joël Andrianomearisoa Godfried Donkor.**

The **press kit and images of the exhibition** can be downloaded from the Reserved Area of the Fondazione MAXXI's website at <http://www.maxxi.art/en/area-stampa/> by typing in the password **areariservatamaxxi**

MAXXI – National Museum of XXI Century Arts

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opening hours: 11.00 AM – 7.00 PM (Tues, Weds, Fri, Sat, Sun) | 11.00 AM - 10.00 PM (Thursday) | closed Mondays. Admittance free for students of art and architecture from Tuesday to Friday

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African Metropolis. An imaginary city

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VOGUE

