THONTON KABEYA
(b. 1983 Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo)

Thonton Kabeya captures the essence of African cosmopolitanism through his constructions of contemporary urban life in paint and sculpted canvas. Having travelled across the African continent extensively, living and working as an artist between Senegal, Paris and the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kabeya has been settled in Johannesburg since 2014. Kabeya challenges the medium of paint and canvas, pursuing new and experimental ways to create texture, depth and balance of colour. He glues layers of canvas together which he then cuts, carves and sculpts before painting. The works are finished with transfers of ink from newspaper, carefully positioned to indicate the folds of moving fabric, and the application of a deep brown walnut powder (an old method of staining wooden furniture) to render skin, as well as balance the tonality of the work.

Inspired by Congolese architecture and design, as well as its Rumba dance, Kabeya's practice seeks balance in composition, line and colour. In his three-dimensional work, he creates portraits of people and cities alike: bustling street scenes and tender exchanges between individuals. His recent works have focused on the Rumba, inspired by the culture around this phenomenon. Rumba music and dance originated primarily in Congo, then developed further in Cuba and Colombia, Cuba having an important historical link to Africa through the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The Rumba gained enormous popularity in the rest of the world after Cuban Independence in 1960; it was recently added to UNESCO's intangible heritage list.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2025 Missile Blues, Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
Introspect II, UNISA Gallery, Pretoria, SA
2023 FNB Art Joburg, with Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
Introspect, Wits Art Museum, Johannesburg, South Africa
A Sunny Day, Everard Read Franschhoek, South Africa
2022 Pasada, Everard Read Johannesburg, South Africa
La Rumba Rosa 2, Bonne Espérance Gallery, Paris, France
Galerie Bilembo, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo
2021 La Rumba Rosa, One Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
2019 Galerie Bilembo, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo
2018 ODA Gallery, Franschhoek, South Africa
2017 ODA Gallery, Franschhoek, South Africa
2015 Cry Smile Dream, S Art Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
2014 New Voices, Lizamore and Associates Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
2010 Médiathèque Woluwe, st Pierre, Bruxelles, Belgium
Galerie dialogue, National Museum of Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo
2009 Métamorphose, Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris, France
Métamorphose, Arte kalao galeria, Bilbao, Spain

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2026 Winter Collection, Everard Read, Franschhoek, SA
Matereality V2, Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town, SA
ArtParis, with Everard Read, Paris, France
2025 EXPO CHICAGO, with Everard Read, Chicago, USA
Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa

10 Years | Summer Show, Everard Read, London, UK
2024 Inner Sanctum, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
Winter Collection, Everard Read, Franschhoek, South Africa
Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
Dakar Biennale, Dakar, Senegal
EXPO CHICAGO, with Everard Read, Chicago, USA
2023 Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
The Other's Warmth, Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
110 Year Anniversary, Everard Read, London, UK
2022 Spring, group show, Everard Read, Franschhoek, South Africa
UCCLE / Brussels, Belgium
Winter, Everard Read, London, UK
2021 A Cloud, Gallery 2, Johannesburg, South Africa
Salon Globalisto, Bonne Esperance Gallery, Paris, France
Work on Paper, Art Voice Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Turbine Art Fair, with One Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
2020 Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Eclectica Contemporary, Cape Town, South Africa
2018 Turbine Art Fair, with One Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
2017 The Gravity of Things, Museum of Contemporary Art of the Basque Country, Alava, Spain
2015 FNB Joburg Art Fair, with Bag Factory, Johannesburg, South Africa
2012 Institut Francais of Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo
2011 International Contemporary Art Fair, Casablanca, Morocco
2008 Vision for Africa, Archelle, Germany
Midi Libre, Mas de grille, Montpellier, France
Rencontres Picha Biennale De Lubumbashi, Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo
Dakar Biennale (Off Biennale), Gallery LS Senghor, Dakar, Senegal
2007 Yambi, Museum of Modern & Contemporary Art (MAMAC), Liège, Belgium
Burogest, Business Centre, Namur, Belgium
French Institute, Democratic Republic of Congo
2006 Memling Hotel, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo
Belgium Consulate, Democratic Republic of Congo
National Museum of Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo
2005 French Institute of Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo
National Museum of Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo

RESIDENCIES & WORKSHOPS

2024 Noldor Artist Residency, Accra, Ghana
2022 Everard Read at Leeu Estates, Franschhoek, South Africa
Texaf Bilembo, Democratic Republic of Congo
2019 Texaf Bilembo, Democratic Republic of Congo
2014 Thupelo, Prince Albert, South Africa
2013 Institut Francais of Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo
2010 Galerie d'art contemporain Workshop, Musée de Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo
2009 Cité internationale universitaire de Paris, France
2008 Village des arts, Sénégal
2006 The fine art of Kinshasa Workshop, Centre Wallonie Bruxelles, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo
2003 Ecole de beaux arts, Workshop, Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo

COLLECTIONS

University of South Africa Art Collection, Pretoria

Artium Basque Museum Center of Contemporary Art of Vitoria-Gasteiz, Alava, Spain
George Forest Art Collection, Lubumbashi
Sanaa Art Collection, Johannesburg
Erick Vellard Art Collection, Paris

AWARDS

2024 Ampersand Fellowship Award (Residency), New York, USA
2006 UNIADS Award
Belgium Council Award