Afro-futurism: 1900 to 3009 Fall 2024

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| Professor Jennifer Bajorek | Wed 9 am – 11:50 am |
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**READING AND LOOKING QUESTIONS**

**Bodys Isek Kingelez, Selected works (“extreme maquettes”) (1980-2015)**

*Getting started…*

1. Spend as much time as you need to look closely at the installation photographs of Kingelez’s work in both the 1995 and 2018-19 exhibitions (in Paris and in New York, respectively). These are two major solo exhibitions, one at an earlier point in his career and one after his death (in 2015). Write down some questions that arise for you as you engage with this material for the first time. Be prepared to share 1-2 of these questions in class.
2. What do you feel or think about when you see these “maquettes” (the French word for “model,” which is also sometimes used in English to refer to an architectural model)? What is interesting or potentially interesting, to you, about the fact that Kingelez’s sculptures are presented as models? Do you believe, when you look at them, that they will ever be built?
3. The art historian Chika Okeke-Agulu describes Kingelez’s maquettes as “objects that are in excess of what is possible.” What is the point of such an object, in your view?
4. What is interesting or potentially interesting, to you, about the fact that Kingelez’s sculptures are made mostly out of recycled materials? …recycled food packaging, cans, cartons, carved up pieces of cardboard tubes and boxes, scraps of colored paper... How does the nature of the materials the artist uses impact your impression, or interpretation, of the work?
5. Scholars and critics have been fascinated by the array of architectural styles, movements, and structures that are referenced by Kingelez’s work: from Las Vegas casinos to Chinese pagodas. Others note that his structures and cities are situated in, or designed for, cities all over the world: Japan, France, Australia, Holland, Korea, the USA, Spain, Palestine, Canada, the USSR, and Germany all appear in his geography. Why does this seem so surprising or interesting to scholars/critics? Is it possible that their interest/surprise in this diversity of references is biased, Eurocentric, or even racist?

Go the extra mile and know something about the artist and the context in which he is working…

There are “two Congos.” One is, today, sometimes called “Congo-Brazzaville” and the other is called “Congo-Kinshasa” or the Democractic Republic of (the) Congo (DRC).

--Which one was formerly colonized by the French?

--Which one was formerly colonized by the Belgians?

--Which one is Kingelez from?

--Who was King Leopold II and what was his relationship to the Congo that is today called Congo-Kinshasa? Is Leopold remembered as a kind and generous person? If not, how would you characterize his legacy?

--What other names has Congo-Kinshasa had, prior to its current name (one name is closely associated with King Leopold II, another is closely associated with Mobutu)?

--What was the main export of Congo in the colonial period?

--Who was Patrice Lumumba?

--How did Lumumba die?

--Who was Mobutu Sese Seko?

--What mineral indispensable to the chips in your cell phone and laptop almost certainly came from mines that rely on forced labor, child labor, and contemporary slavery in the DRC?

To learn more about mining in the DRC, and how all of our high-end consumer electronics (especially phones and laptops) are fueling armed conflict, funding paramilitary groups, and incentivizing mining/resource extraction that relies on forced labor, child labor, and slavery, start with these links:

<https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/coltan-and-conflict-drc>

<https://issafrica.org/iss-today/child-miners-the-dark-side-of-the-drcs-coltan-wealth>

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-congo-mining-insight/congo-mine-deploys-digital-weapons-in-fight-against-conflict-minerals-idUSKBN1WG2W1/>

(This last one is kind of surreal, given the heavy investment in/creative use of technology to clean up the supply chain, but not, say, to support Congolese people…)

Today, increasingly, the mining of minerals indispensable to EV batteries (not only lithium) are also reproducing “conflict mineral” scenarios in the DRC:

<https://apnews.com/article/congo-mining-human-rights-73b3edcc2d485d07281db34dc3dcad2c>