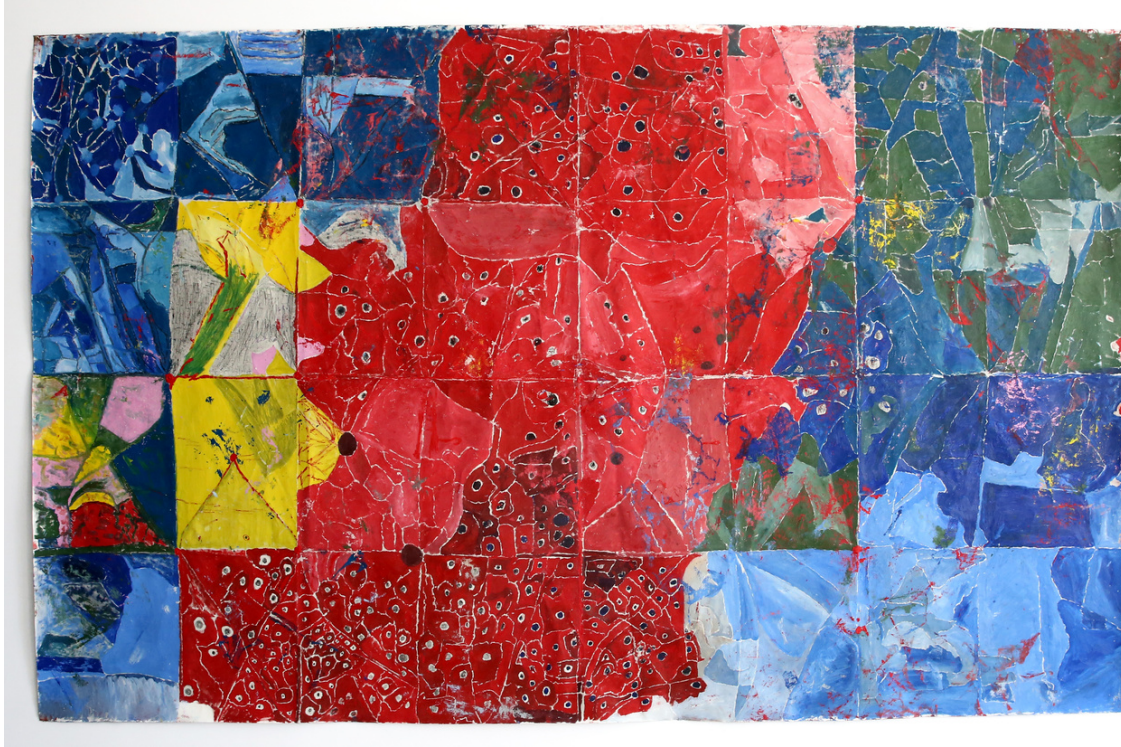


TRAJET NGAMBA

Entangled trajectories of reciprocity



Cerveau 4, Hadassa Ngamba, 2023: The living body of a city



Identity Simulacra, 2021:
Performance during Trajet Ngamba

Hadassa Ngamba's art project "Trajet Ngamba" unravels via artistic journeys throughout the world. Her travels are not merely geographical; they are intellectual and artistic explorations. She traverses the landscapes of history, technology, and knowledge, seeking to interrogate colonial legacy, to uncover hidden connections, and to challenge prevailing narratives. Ngamba's project is not merely a critique of the past; it is also a vision for the future. She envisions a world where technology can be harnessed to promote agency for a generation of young Africans like herself.

At the heart of "Trajet Ngamba" lies the concept of reciprocity. Ngamba seeks to understand how seemingly opposing forces can achieve symbiosis, and how tools of

power, like colonial cartography, can be transformed into instruments of equitable exchange. Through her art—painting, sculpture, installation, performance - and her travels, she aims to incite reciprocal symbiotic relations, focusing particularly on reciprocal commercial interactions.

She draws parallels with the power structures inherent in information technology, showing how the information age's new trajectories—electronic circuits, data-condensing algorithms, information networks, and social media—leave imprints on both minds and landscapes. These trajectories, she argues, weave a timeless mesh connecting past, present, and future, where the future risks echoing the injustices of the past, as exemplified by the conflict in Kivu, Eastern Congo, driven by the struggle for raw materials vital to both the colonial and the current information age.

Ngamba's work is deeply rooted in her familial history, drawing inspiration from the symbiotic relationships found in nature, particularly the interconnectedness of fungal networks and plant life. She uses fungi as a central element in her sculptural creations, symbolising the interconnectedness and entangled identity inherent in reciprocal relationships. Entanglement - a term she became fascinated with in her excursions into the world quantum physics - is becoming another element in her work.

I. UNMASKING HIDDEN STRUCTURES IN THE COLONIAL AND INFORMATION AGE



Copper and Urban Oxidation, 2022
Colonial plan of a linear city like Kinshasa
on beaten copper plate (detail)

Beginning in the late 19th century, colonial powers—specifically Britain, France, Portugal, and Belgium—established rigid state borders and linear city plans that often inadequately reflected identities and economic dynamics. These arbitrarily drawn borders continue to instigate territorial disputes and conflicts over resources, as demonstrated by the recent conflict between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda.

In the Berlin Conference of 1884, King Leopold II of Belgium presented a misleading narrative of bringing “progress” to Africa, referring to the continent as an “empty space” to justify his exploitation of the resource-rich Congo. This humanitarian facade concealed his true intentions of economic control and resource extraction. Leopold II leveraged Henry Morton Stanley’s explorations and detailed cartography of the Congo to further his exploitative agenda. Ngamba aims to deconstruct this imposed colonial cartography, reinterpreting territorial memory, exposing the lasting impact of colonial power structures, and revealing the hidden agendas behind seemingly neutral maps.

These hidden intentions persist in the information age through practices like astroturfing on social media, where the true motives are masked by an apparent humanitarian emergency. Similarly, AI systems often contain concealed biases that undermine their potential, mirroring Stanley’s dual role as both an important explorer and an instrument for Leopold II’s exploitation. Ngamba advocates for the deconstruction of AI systems to reveal implicit choices and dominant power structures, exposing what is hidden behind appearances of neutrality [1].



Copper and Urban Oxidation, beaten copper plate and model of a city, 2022
Opposing a colonial linear city to a ‘organic’ city imagined by the artist and students at university of Lubumbashi.

But her work proposes potential solutions and ways forward. Very much like Stanley’s maps, which indeed facilitated exploitation but also inspired the Congolese to rethink their future, the information age offers possibilities for empowerment and reconstruction. For example, Ngamba herself utilizes extended reality (XR) to address

African youth by helping them reappropriate colonial spaces which were inaccessible to Congolese at the time. She even contemplates a “poetic quantum computer” to empower African youth in envisioning and shaping their future.

[1] see <https://anatomyof.ai/> for an interesting complementary account

II. INCITING RECIPROCITY IN TRADE AND BEYOND

'A new generation of Africans, born several decades after independence, care a lot more about their careers than they do about colonialism.'
(The Economist, Jan. 9th, 2025).

"Trajet Ngamba" is a long-term project that aims to construct reciprocal trajectories between Africa, Europe, and beyond. Through a 40-day journey across Kongo-Central in 2019, Ngamba engaged with diverse communities, gathering personal and historical narratives that revealed a legacy of sophisticated trade networks established by Congolese pioneers, including her own father. These networks revitalized pre-colonial routes like the National Route Number 1 (RN1) and facilitated international trade in various commodities.

These Congolese trade pioneers fostered a vibrant, reciprocal economy. However, the crucial transmission of this knowledge to future generations was overlooked, leading to a gradual erosion of control and the rise of foreign dominance by former colonial powers and new global players like China.

Trajet Ngamba seeks to counter this trend by preserving the memory of these pioneers and by inspiring a new generation of African entrepreneurs to establish mutually beneficial reciprocal trade relationships. She does so through collaborations with traditional leaders and customary chiefs across the continent.

Trajet Ngamba Éditions: She creates art-driven editions of diverse products to enhance branding and facilitate global sales. A Trajet Ngamba coffee edition is an early example.



Perspective 2, Hadassa Ngamba, 2018
Turning the page on colonialism

III. WORKS AND PERFORMANCES

A. THE “CERVEAU” SERIES: MAPPING THE MIND AND THE LAND



Cerveau 2 (detail), Hadassa Ngamba, 2019

Hadassa Ngamba's "Cerveau" series of paintings (2018-2023) provides a visual critique of colonial legacies and the impact of imposed cartographies, while also suggesting a future where Congolese people can reclaim their agency. Ngamba contrasts the rigid configuration of colonial space, characterized by arbitrary grids imposed by colonial powers, with textures and colors derived from raw minerals abundant in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The rigid grid, once a tool of domination in colonial conquest, is transformed into a flexible support open to deformation and becomes an instrument of emancipation. Modulating the imposed structure on the canvas becomes an act of apprehension.

Inspired by her first journey trajet Ngamba across Kongo-Central in 2019, Cerveau 2, is a cotton canvas dyed with coffee and divided into 32 spaces by white lines, representing different ores and resources found in the Congo. The painting is an abstract map of a space that is both mind and land, devoid of geographical references, inviting viewers to explore the intricate connections between the land and its resources with human agency. The green dots of malachite scattered across the canvas symbolise people, in particular, all the people she met during her journey in 2019. Thus, far from representing an 'empty space', as Leopold II described Congo, the canvas is now populated by agents that collectively occupy the space.



Cerveau 2, Hadassa Ngamba, 2019



In her series 'Perspectives' she continues to reflect on colonialism while at the same time insisting on her own perspective, her own grip on her life.

Perspective 1 and 2 (image page 3), while exposing one of the curses of colonialism by painting anonymous cut hands, also show that the eyes - her eyes - are turned towards new perspectives and to her and her family's life.

In Perspective 4, the encircled points evoke the cells composing the organic body of a city but they also remind us of the many artisanal mines, clearly visible on satellite images, nibbling entire neighborhoods in Katangese cities.

Perspective 1, Hadassa Ngamba, 2018



Perspective 4, Hadassa Ngamba, 2023

The "Cerveau" and "Perspective" series draw also a link between colonial exploitation and contemporary technologies. The raw materials used in these paintings form the foundation of artificial intelligence systems. Ngamba exposes how these technologies, built upon colonial legacies, continue to influence the production of knowledge and shape social dynamics.



Cerveau 1 (detail) Hadassa Ngamba, 2018

B. XR FUTURE CITIES AND A POETIC QUANTUM COMPUTER: ENTANGLED FUTURES



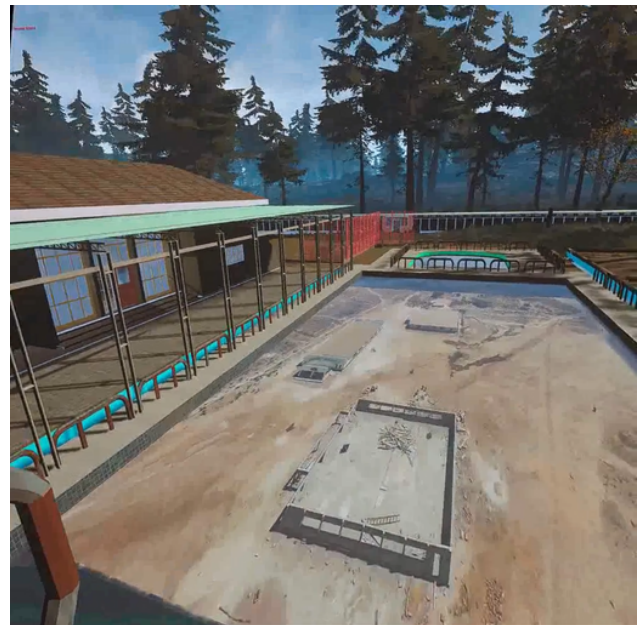
Gecamines swimming pool, Lubumbashi, Hadassa Ngamba, 2024

Building on this foundation, Ngamba envisions the creation of a **Poetic Quantum Computer**. This provocative concept proposes a tool that moves beyond the deterministic and potentially oppressive nature of traditional computing (as exemplified in Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville*). Instead, it embraces a more nuanced and empathetic approach, capable of simultaneously exploring multiple potential futures - "entangled" states - and layering them over the colonial past. This metaphorical "quantum" capacity allows for a more holistic and imaginative approach to urban planning, empowering African youth to actively participate in shaping their own futures. By collecting and structuring diverse urban data—encompassing architecture, infrastructure, ancestral memory, and environmental factors—this "poetic quantum computer" could generate immersive XR experiences of possible urban trajectories that allow citizens, decision-makers, and especially young people to explore alternative pathways, fostering a sense of agency and ownership.

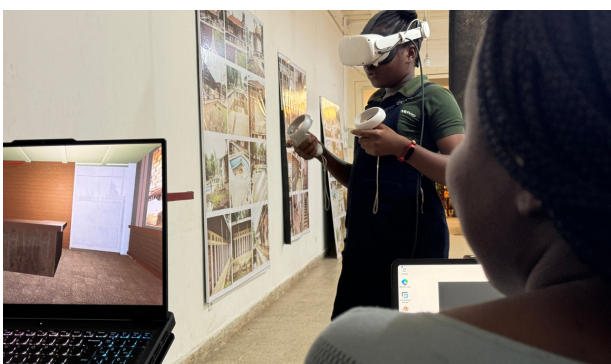
Recognizing the unequal access to computational power as a key manifestation of this power imbalance, Ngamba actively involves Congolese scientists in her work. She aims to leverage her artistic platform to make a case for greater access to these essential resources for African researchers, potentially leading to the establishment of cross-cutting laboratories dedicated to data science, AI, and the human-centered development of urban futures.

Ngamba's solo exhibition, "Copper & Urban Oxidation: XR Future Cities," explores the intersection of art and digital technology. Using Extended Reality (XR) and data science, Ngamba creates an immersive experience centered on Lubumbashi, a Congolese city indelibly marked by its colonial mining history. This exhibition goes beyond simply visualizing the past; it seeks to foster a dynamic dialogue between art, technology, and ancestral practices to reimagine the city's future.

Participants in this immersive experience can virtually explore iconic locations associated with Gécamines, a mining company emblematic of colonial resource exploitation. Sites like the Gécamines recreation center, while embodying the extractive industries' legacy of inequality and environmental damage, also hold a complex place in local memory, contributing to an idealized or even fantastical vision of the region's past. She is juxtaposing these virtual explorations with reflections on pre-colonial metallurgical practices and is therefore collaborating with traditional copper artisans. She thus transforms this metal—a source of both economic power and social disparity—into a medium for artistic expression and education.



View of the XR experience



A pupil experiencing XR the first time

[video of XR experience](#)

TABLE SEREINE DE LA SAINTE THESE

The above extends Ngamba's earlier exploration of resource extraction and its impact on society in "*The Serene Table of the Holy Thesis*", which analyses the extraction networks orchestrated by Société Générale de Belgique. It serves as a starting point for a broader dialogue about the complex relationship between resource exploitation, labor, technological advancement, and the ongoing struggle for power and agency in the information age.

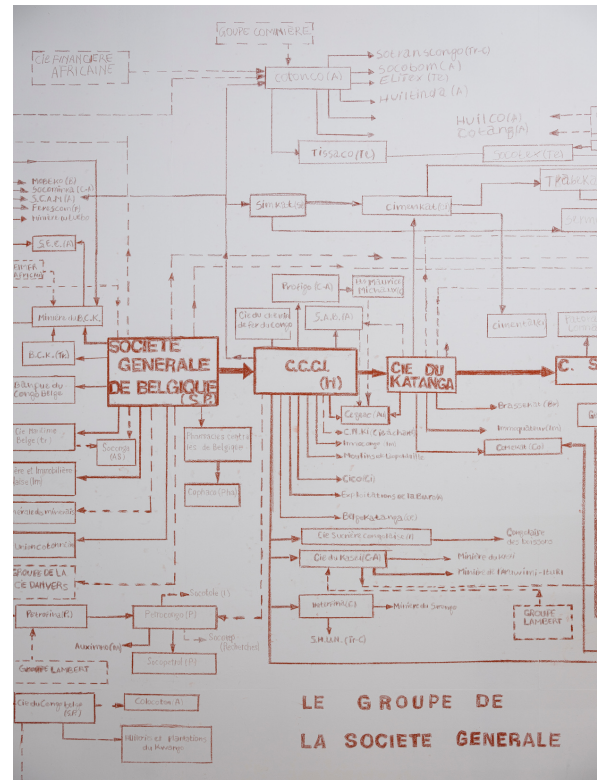


Table sereine de la Sainte These
(detail & full view),
Hadassa Ngamba, 2021





Fungi miniature sculptures in ceramics and crystal, Hadassa Ngamba, 2023

C. TRAJET NGAMBA EDITION CAFE AND THE FANTASTIC FOREST



Monumental fungi sculptures in bronze and wood

The "Trajet Ngamba Edition Cafe," launched during Ngamba's residency at Bandjoun Station in Cameroon, is a first attempt to foster reciprocal trade across Africa via her artistic journeys.

Featuring distinct packaging and branding, this cafe edition promotes the distribution of Congolese coffee across Africa. By engaging with ancestral dignitaries in Cameroon like the Bamileke, renowned for their successful trade practices, Trajet Ngamba Éditions aims to connect with and revitalize trade traditions across Africa.

As she uses fungi as a powerful symbol for her strive for symbiotic reciprocal relationships she started working on fungi sculptures already in 2021. During her residency she started creating large fungi sculptures and put stamps (from the coffee edition) on them signifying the essential, entangled identity inherent in reciprocal relationships.

She currently envisions a monumental "fantastic forest" full of fungi sculptures - possibly extended via AR - to further reinforce the message of symbiosis and reciprocity.



'Edition' stamps on the fungi sculptures, Hadassa Ngamba, 2024



Performance identity simulacre, Biennial Sonsbeek, 2021

D. PATHWAY NGAMBA IN LIVERPOOL: RECLAIMING ANCESTRAL RITUALS, AN UPCOMING PERFORMANCE (JUNE 2025)

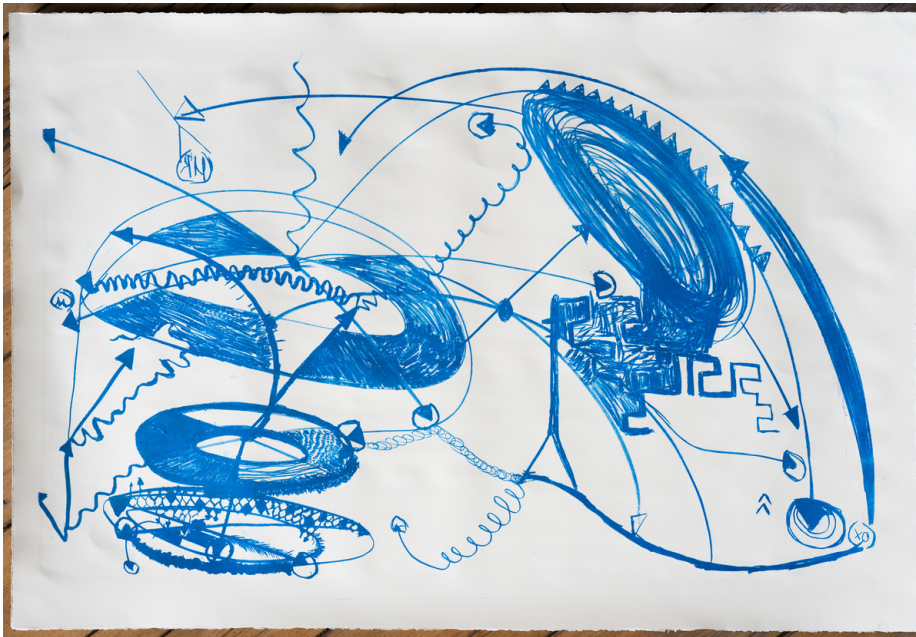


"Pathway Ngamba," a performance conceived for the Liverpool Biennale 2025 and Tate, reimagines the ancestral Kikumbi ritual, a Congolese rite of passage for young women entering menstruation. This performance, staged over two days in iconic Liverpool locations including the Liverpool Cathedral, confronts the gradual erasure of this tradition due to the pervasive influence of Christianity.

Ngamba's reinterpretation of the Kikumbi ritual challenges the suppression of these vital spiritual, health-related, and knowledge-based practices by reasserting their relevance in a contemporary context. The artwork creates a symbolic fusion using palm oil, Liverpool sandstone (a material closely linked to the multinational palm oil trade, notably of Unilever, and to the city's architectural heritage, particularly the cathedral), and carefully chosen aromatics. This potent blend evokes themes of fertility and the transmission of life, bridging ancestral Congolese practices and the urban landscape of Liverpool.

Through direct interaction with passersby, Ngamba fosters a dynamic dialogue between the reinvented ritual and its urban setting. The performance concludes with an exchange with the public that encourages reflection on the memory and social implications of Kikumbi, questioning the interplay between ancestral Congolese knowledge and contemporary practices.

E. FEYNMAN DIAGRAMS AND ROYAL HAIRDRESSES: REALITIES AND SYMBOLS



Feynman lithography
Hadassa Ngamba, 2024
'Hadassa bleu' ink
mixture of cobalt and palm oil

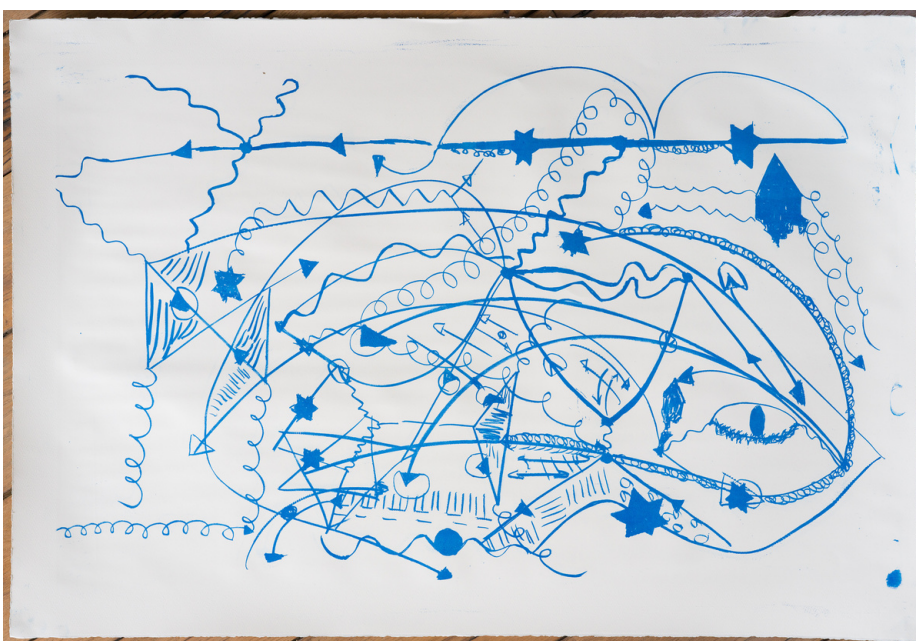
This series of lithographies - created at centre Frans Masereel - combines Feynman diagrams - known from elementary particle physics - with the symbols of ancient Kongo kingdoms.

The diagrams and the royal headdresses are both representing an existing reality and are creating their own narratives of reality.

Feynman diagrams represent elements of equations describing elementary particles as studied for example at CERN in Geneva. While on the one hand a shortcut to write equations

that allow to calculate precisely experimental outcomes, these diagrams can also be seen as representing real physical processes like collision/creation of elementary particles.

The symbols of ancient Kongo kingdoms - especially the royal "Mphoo" headdresses - are a composite element of a power that has now disappeared. These headdresses once embodied and structured authority in this kingdom and even today some local leaders in Kongo rely on such symbols to affirm their power.



Feynman lithography
Hadassa Ngamba, 2024
'Hadassa bleu' ink
mixture of cobalt and palm oil

BIOGRAPHIE HADASSA NGAMBA



Hadassa Ngamba is a visual artist known for her work addressing social and environmental issues in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in diverse media - paintings, photography, sculptures, performances and with use of digital technologies like XR.

Education:

Born in 1993 in Kizu, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

She holds a degree in criminology from the University of Lubumbashi. In 2019 she chose a career in art. She first developed her artistic practice at Ateliers Picha in 2017 and exhibited her first textile works at the Lubumbashi Biennale. She became a resident at the WIELS Art Center in Brussels and then studied art at HISK (Institut Supérieur des Beaux-Arts) in Ghent, Belgium.

In 2024-2025 she is guest artist at TATE Modern Liverpool and the 13th Liverpool Biennial.

Selected exhibitions:

- “Configurations”, CC Strombeek, Brussels, 2021-2022
- “Identity Simulacre”, Biennial of Sonsbeek, 2020-2024
- “Cerveau 2”, Kunsthalle Mainz, 2023
- “COPPER AND URBAN OXIDATION EDITION 2024 XR FUTURE CITIES”, Institut Francais/ Lubumbashi Biennial, 2024
- “Routes and Navigations”, Tate Liverpool, 2024
- Exhibition, Tate and at Liverpool Biennial, 2025.

Her works are now part of prestigious collections, including those of S.M.A.K. in Ghent (BE), IKOB in Eupen (BE), Banque Nationale de Belgique in Brussels (BE) and Morgan Stanley Bank in New York, as well as international private collections.

She won the Prix Laurent Moonens in 2019 and the Fintro prize in 2022.

She has made cartography a central element of her practice. She extends to the present and addresses a new generation of Congolese that want to see beyond their colonial history. Now she is experimenting in a multiplicity of media such as painting, drawing, installation, performance, extended reality (XR) and video.

Credit photo : Ralph Dum, Bruno Claessens, Phillip Aguirre, Eldad Bin, Hadassa Ngamba Studio, Dani Gherca, Banque de la Belgique, and Alain Nsenga.