

PRESS RELEASE

# A Blueprint for Toads and Snakes

## A solo exhibition by Sammy Baloji

Curator: Vincent van Velsen  
Scenographer: Jean Christophe Lanquetin

25 June – 26 August, 2018  
Opening Sunday 24 June, 17:00

*A Blueprint for Toads and Snakes* presents the work of esteemed artist Sammy Baloji, whose practice deals with the cultural, social, architectural and industrial heritage of his home country the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Based in the photographic medium, Baloji employs a research-based practice in which archival material, museological objects and cultural artefacts inform his work. Through questioning their hierarchical imposition and constitutive nature, the artist critically addresses a past of Western colonialism, the subsequent post-colonial disillusionment, and the continuing imperial aftermath.

The exhibition features several new works by Sammy Baloji. Central to these new pieces is the theatre play *Chura na Nyoka* ('The Toad and the Snake'), written by Joseph Kiwele, a Congolese born statesman who later served as minister in the Katanga Region. The play, which holds a metaphorical message of ethnic segregation, was commissioned by the Belgian colonial regime as an 'educational tool' for the population. Baloji relates Kiwele's theatre script to the colonial urban planning of the 'indigenous city' of Lubumbashi, which was also structured according to a politics of segregation. Traces of this segregation are still visible today, for example in the shape of the 'cordon sanitaire' (sanitary corridor), a buffer zone inscribed in the landscape meant to effectively separate the black and white population. It is also reflected in the street names, which refer to different ethnic populations. In addition, the aftermath of this colonial segregation resonates in Congo's contemporary society, which is rife with struggles and ethnic tensions, intensified by economic interests. Both are now used as input for the works in Baloji's solo exhibition.

Also presented in the exhibition is Sammy Baloji's documenta 14 film *Tales of the Copper Cross Garden. Episode 1* (2017) in which the processing of copper is visualised as a choreography of black workers' bodies, as they transform raw material into a product for the global market. This process serves as a metaphor of the colonial endeavour, in which the Congolese population was moulded into a workforce; and shows the ways in which the church played a pivotal role in

reshaping Congolese society. The latter is reflected in the film's soundtrack, containing syncretised ecclesiastical music composed by the same Kiwele, who was assigned to create a piece that fit the catholic codes, but would also suit the Congolese musical taste. It expresses the ubiquitous relationship between the mining industry, cultural manipulation and religion.

*In A Blueprint for Toads and Snakes*, Sammy Baloji presents a highly original commemoration of the painful history of exploitation and cultural formation in Congo. In this way the exhibition offers a critical reflection on the ways in which mineral extraction, and the imposition of cultural structures, have a lasting impact on contemporary life in Congo: the foundations of the metaphorical stage on which the present is taking shape.

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**Sammy Baloji** (1978) lives and works in Brussels and Lubumbashi. He holds a bachelor degree in Literature and Social Sciences. Originally working as a cartoonist, Baloji began photographing scenes as sources for his cartoons with a borrowed camera. He received formal training in photography from Simon Mukunday and Marie-Françoise Plissart.

Baloji participated in amongst others the Bamako African Photography Encounters in 2007, the Lyon Biennale in 2015, the Venice Biennale in 2015, the Dakar Biennale in 2016 and documenta 14 in 2017. He has exhibited at places such as the Royal Museum of Central Africa in Tervuren, the Tate Modern in London, the Africa Center in New York and the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art in Washington DC. Baloji received several awards, including one from the Prince Claus Foundation in The Netherlands. Sammy Baloji is a co-founder of the Picha Encounters, a photography and video biennale in Lubumbashi.

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Galerie Imane Farès

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EXHIBITION SPACE  
Upromenade 2  
1031 KT Amsterdam  
Netherlands

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OFFICE  
Tolhuisweg 1  
1031 CL Amsterdam  
Netherlands

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OPEN  
Tue-Fri 13:00 - 21:00  
Sat-Sun 11:00 - 21:00

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+31 (0)20 763 09 73  
[info@framerframed.nl](mailto:info@framerframed.nl)  
[www.framerframed.nl](http://www.framerframed.nl)  
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