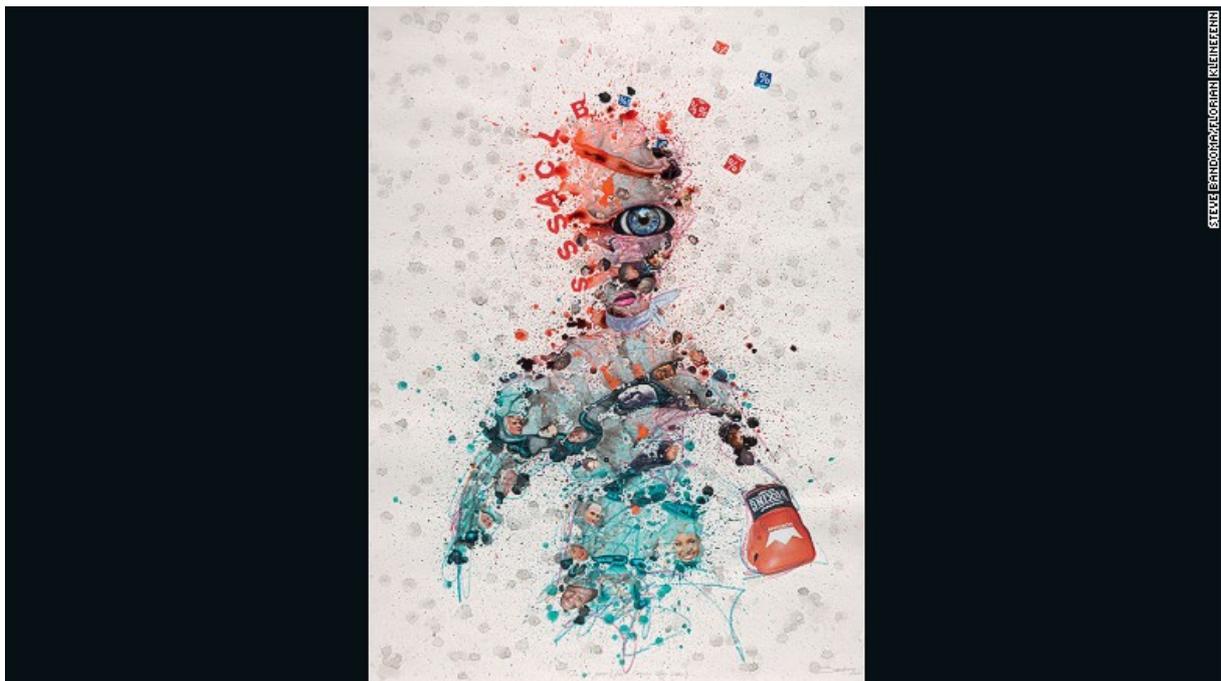


CNN

Congo artists are creating some really exciting work

By [Eliza Anyangwe](#), for CNN

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(CNN)The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) used to bring to mind images of civil war and conflict. Lately, the country is conjuring another image: that of trendsetters. The [sapeur](#) fashion movement has inspired designers from around the world, including, most recently, [British designer Paul Smith](#), and homegrown musicians, like [Papa Wemba](#) and [Koffi Olomide](#), have become global sensations. Now, the international art world is also turning to the DRC.

Paris' [Fondation Cartier](#) is currently hosting *Beaute Congo*, one of the largest retrospectives of contemporary art from the DRC to date. The exhibit, which ends November 15, spans 90 years, 350 works and 41 different artists who have mastered mediums ranging from comic books to collage. The exhibit was curated by Andre Magnin, a Frenchman whose commitment to connecting contemporary African art with European audiences is unwavering.

"These artists, who had begun as billboard painters, decorators and illustrators, had set up their studio on the busy streets of Kinshasa so that their canvases would be seen by everyone," he says about his draw to the artwork he chose.

"I was struck by the freedom, variety, humor, and beauty of the paintings that were passing before my eyes." His message to the public, he says, is:

"Here are wonders. Look at things we've never seen."

A bitter-sweet display?

Some artists, however, have expressed frustration that their success in the international arena seems dependent on the efforts of Western enthusiasts.

"We want to combat stereotypes of African artists," says Steve Bandoma, one of the exhibition's emerging artists who incorporates found objects in his paintings.

"Though we travel and are exposed overseas, there are always limitations. We don't have access to the market. Why did we have to go to Andre Magnin to get this space?"

Other artists expressed the need for those in the art world to experience African art from within the continent. In a brochure for the exhibit, Magnin interviewed self-taught sculptor Bodys Isek Kingelez, who noted that:

"Most often art critics and western or even African curators neither see nor understand Africa from Africa's perspective. They work with their ears. They need to go to Kinshasa."

<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/07/22/arts/congo-contemporary-art-exhibition-paris/>