

# Ninety years of Congolese modernism

*A large-scale exhibition at the Fondation Cartier includes almost 300 works of art*

## AFRICAN ART

Paris. In 1946, a French soldier and painter named Pierre Romain-Desfossés moved to the African city of Elisabethville (now called Lubumbashi) in the Belgian Congo and set up an art studio called Atelier du Hangar. For nine years, until his death in 1954, Desfossés worked with local artists, such as Mwenze Kibwanga and Pili Pili Mulongoi and helped them get their work into galleries in Paris, London and Rome. Their work was even exhibited

in venues as far away as the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The Hangar was later integrated into Lubumbashi's art school, but an independent streak cut through all the art the atelier produced. As Desfossés once said: "We must speak forthrightly against all attempts to abolish the personality in favour of a uniform aesthetic according to the standards of white masters."

This is just one episode in the history of art from what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo that will be explored in a landmark exhibition

opening at the Fondation Cartier in Paris in July. The show surveys 90 years of art from the African nation and includes nearly 300 pieces (mostly painting, but also photography, comics and music) by more than 40 artists. "There is a vitality to all of the work, even if there is not much continuity between the first painters included and those who came after the Second World War," says Leanne Sarramone, a curator at the foundation who worked with the show's chief organiser, André Magnin.

The earliest work included comes from the 1920s, when Congolese artists were encouraged by Belgian colonial officials such as Georges Thiry to make art on paper. The show then follows through the "popular artists" of the late 1970s and ends with work from the past 15 years. The exhibition is sponsored by the museum, and will include a programme of events, such as dance performances.

**Pac POBHC**

• *Beauté Congo, 1926-2015, Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris, 11 July-15 November*



J.P. Milka, *Happiness and Joy* (2014)