

FREDDY TSIMBA CELEBRATES HUMAN RIGHTS IN PARIS

TO CELEBRATE THE 70TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIGNING OF THE DECLARATION OF UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS AT THE CHAILLOT-THÉÂTRE NATIONAL DE LA DANSE ON THE 10TH DECEMBER 1948, THE MANÈGE DE CHAILLOT COMMISSIONED A SCULPTURE BY THE CONGOLESE ARTISTS FREDDY TSIMBA. *ART AFRICA* SPOKE TO FREDDY TSIMBA AND MATTHIAS LERIDON

ART AFRICA: How do you feel when you see your work entitled *Porteuse de Vies* (*Wearer of Lives*) featuring so prominently here at the Chaillot-Théâtre national de la Danse and what kind of impact do you see it having given this context?

Freddy Tsimba: I feel honoured to have the sculpture installed in the grand staircase of the prestigious Chaillot-Théâtre national de la Danse, it is a celebration of my career which spans over 26 years. For many visitors, this may be the first interaction with contemporary work from the Congo, that is a living call for the universal rights of human beings. I hope that this work inspires the younger generation of African artists to realise their dreams of success. I would like to thank Didier Deschamps, the director of this great French cultural institution, and Matthias Leridon of the Manège de Chaillot endowment fund, for commissioning this work.

A significant part of the work is made of spent cartridges from the war which you have often collected under dangerous circumstances. Given the history that these cartridges embody, what effect and influence does working with them have on your creative process?

The use of bullets collected from battlefields is a way of paying tribute to the innocent victims of these endless conflicts in Central Africa. The work comprises of more than 20,000 bullets. The paradox of using weapons of destruction to create a sculpture that symbolises life is not lost on the viewer. I also use found metal

objects such as keys, chains, cutlery and machetes – the symbolism of these found objects echoes the theme of my work.

Tell us about the significance of using the female form in this work.

A woman is the bearer of life. I was raised by my mother and my grandmother and have dedicated this work to these exceptional women. The choice of a woman without a head represents a universal vision of women. She holds an open book, an image that symbolises education, sharing and dreams.

There is a new national museum set to open in your country this year. Can you give us some feedback on the art scene in the DRC and some of the challenges you face as an artist?

Congolese contemporary creation is dynamic and currently enjoys international recognition, this benefits the entire artistic community of this country. However, Congolese people don't have access to the wealth and diversity of these creations due to a lack of art institutions. I hope that the museum will afford all Congolese the experience of viewing art, not only from the Congo but the other 53 African countries too.

What is the purpose of the Manège de Chaillot Foundation that you created eight years ago?

Matthias Leridon: The Foundation was established by eight major groups – Alvarez & Marsal Amundi, Ayming, Dentsu Aegis,

Freddy Tsimba inspecting his sculpture, *Porteuse de Vies* (*Wearer of Lives*), at the unveiling at the Chaillot-Théâtre National de la Danse, Paris.





ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT: Freddy Tsimba poses with his sculpture, *Porteuse de Vies* (Wearer of Lives) during the making of the piece. Freddy Tsimba working in his studio. Freddy Tsimba and Didier Deschamps working on *Porteuse de Vies* (Wearer of Lives) in the artist's studio. **FACING PAGE TOP TO BOTTOM:** Azu Nwagbogu congratulates Freddy Tsimba on the unveiling of his sculpture at Chaillot-Théâtre national de la Danse with Matthias Leridon centre. Freddy Tsimba addressing the crowd at the unveiling.

Groupama, Orange, SNCF Réseau, TILDER – is the endowment fund of Chaillot-Théâtre national de la Danse. This theatre is one of the most critical stages dedicated to contemporary dance in France and internationally. It is committed to developing an inspired dialogue between two, often perceived as opposing, worlds, i.e. business and the creative.

What is the significance in choosing Freddy Tsimba, an African artist, for the commission to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the signature of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which took place in the very building which is now the theatre?

Africa presents a paradox, it is a continent where we find those who fight bravely every day to defend the fundamental rights of every human being and unfortunately, too many who abuse the fundamental rights. Freddy Tsimba's life and work embody this paradox. His country of origin, the Democratic Republic of Congo, is plagued by an ongoing violent conflict that has affected and cost the lives of thousands of people. Through his work, Tsimba turns tragedy into hope. He uses found objects – many of which are used to perpetrate acts of violence against others – and transitions these into works of art. In this sculpture he depicts the female figure, he honours women as the “bearers” of new life.

You have talked about artists using their power of creation. What role do you see artists playing in highlighting social inequality?

Artists are often the first to speak out about human rights abuses and social inequalities. Their ability to think, create and criticise through the medium of art enables them to reach beyond the parameters of these concerns. Through creativity and collaboration, one can promote cultural, racial and religious understanding and tolerance. In 2009, my wife, Gervanne, founded the African Artists for

Development Endowment Fund (AAD) based on the conviction that artistic creation can empower communities economically and socially. The very act of creativity, which is at the heart of the AAD's innovative development programs on the African continent, is an excellent source of emancipation for artists, both individually and collectively.

With your NGO African Artists for Development (AAD) you work extensively around social issues and issues of human rights – what is your view on the rights of the environment?

AAD was created in response to the call by the United Nations to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and has been a member of the UN Economic and Social Council since 2013. We do not believe that one can separate social development from human and environmental rights. Urban sprawl, pollution, and global warming have dramatic consequences on natural ecosystems that are always more fragile than on the human communities that depend on them.

In collaboration with 10 contemporary African artists – Willie Bester, Berry Bickle, Willem Boshoff, Frances Goodman, Dan Halter, Goncalo Mabunda, Monsengo Shula, Mary Sibande, Yadichinma Ukoha-Kalu and Dominique Zinkpe – our AAD incubator team has identified the ‘GrowBox Art Project’ to nurture. Urban farmer and entrepreneur, Renshia Manuel builds wooden planters which she fills with compost made from leftovers from city restaurants. The ‘GrowBox Art Project’ will be presented at Zeitz MOCAA in February and the concept will be sold to companies and partner organizations. The funds will be used by AAD to support Renshia to develop entrepreneurial ventures and initiatives in the townships.

Matthias Leridon, president of TILDER and the Center Pompidou Accélération, is the initiator of the creation of the Manège de Chaillot.

