

Gosette Lubondo: Imaginary Trip

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Los Angeles—The Fowler Museum at UCLA presents ***Gosette Lubondo: Imaginary Trip***—the first U.S. solo exhibition of work by Congolese artist Gosette Lubondo (b. 1993, Kinshasa, DRC). Lubondo’s captivating photographs offer a probing and poetic look at the intersections of space and memory, and the tensions between Democratic Republic of Congo’s problematic past and complicated present. Sensory and elusive in their storytelling, her pictures bear the traces of postcolonial neglect, while setting the stage to envision a different future. Lubondo is a rising force who has earned critical acclaim for her work; she won the Maison Ruinart Prize in 2021 and the Contemporary African Photography (CAP) Prize in 2020.

“The way Lubondo plays with density, depicting some figures as firmly present and others as spectral, creates a tension in her work, and elegantly evokes the imaginary she references in the title of the series,” says **Erica P. Jones**, the Fowler’s curator of African arts. Jones cocurated the exhibition with **Elaine Ericksen Sullivan**, Andrew W. Mellon postdoctoral curatorial fellow at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art.



The two-part series on view unfolds in abandoned structures: a train car and a school. The train network and schooling system were once integral components of the Belgian colonial enterprise (1908–1960) used to extract the DRC’s financial wealth and mobilize generations of colonial subjects. But the rail system slowly fell into disrepair in the decades after DRC won its independence, and today travel by train has largely ceased. In *Imaginary Trip I* (2016), Lubondo meditates on her country’s past, present and future, as she infuses a decommissioned train car with renewed life.

Imaginary Trip I (2016) depicts travelers represented by Lubondo in different guises. A character named Elikia (which means “hope” in Lingala, one of Congo’s four national languages), clad in a red dress, serves as the viewer’s guide, moving between the past, present, and future. At first Elikia is alone in the car. With each successive photograph, the train car appears increasingly populated by passengers whose clothing styles make them hard to place in a particular time period. They read books, drink tea, carry shopping bags, sleep, and stare out the window. In the final image the car is empty again, though littered with photographs of faces.

With the rapid urbanization in the postindependence era, the number of students in rural schools dwindled and campuses were left to decay. *Imaginary Trip II* (2019) takes place in a partly abandoned and deteriorating rural school, which once educated hundreds of children. Observed by Elikia, spectral pupils engage with tangible ones in a variety of activities: lining up before the school doors, attending classes, and playing in the yard during recess. The more transparent figures exist out of time: Perhaps they are students of the past, or students of a future when these classrooms are repopulated; the corporeal ones serve as reminders that the school is still active, if much diminished.



The exhibition also includes a digital installation of *Trophées Oubliées*, a companion to *Imaginary Trip II*. It consists of student documents, degraded by time, which Lubondo found at the school site and scanned. She has added portraits of students, photographed from behind, to animate these vestiges of past lives, and remind the viewer that these documents belonged to real students who had passed through these halls at some point in the school's history. Printed copies of these "trophées" are available as a takeaways for visitors.

Student Contributions: Photography at the Académie des Beaux Arts

To add another dimension to the exhibition, curators invited students of photography instructor Arsène Mpiana at Kinshasa's Académie des Beaux Arts (the College of Fine Arts) to share their responses to Lubondo's work. After meeting with the artist and hearing her reflections on her creative process, the students selected one photograph each from the series and provided creative responses informed by their perspectives as Congolese citizens and young artists. Their thoughts appear in texts below the corresponding images.

About the Artist

Gosette Lubondo (b. 1993, Kinshasa, DRC) is a Congolese photographer and visual artist based in Kinshasa. She graduated with a degree in Visual Communication from the Academy of Fine Arts Kinshasa. Inspired by the work of her father, a professional photographer, she participated from a young age in photography workshops and projects. Lubondo was recipient of the Maison Ruinat Prize, awarded during Paris Photo 2021, and of the Contemporary African Photography (CAP) Prize in 2020 for her series *Talangai* (2017). She is a laureate of the Photographic Residency of the Musée du quai Branly, which she held in 2017, and finalist of the Goethe Institut Masterclass. She has presented her work in several group exhibitions, including:

Seven Hills, Kampala Biennale, 2016; *Heliotropism*, Collection si Particulière, Arles, 2017; *Kinshasa Chronique*, Musée International des Arts Modestes, Sète, 2018; and *Congo Stars*, Joanneum Museum, Austria, 2018. In 2019, Lubondo participated in the Lubumbashi Biennale 6th Edition and the Congo Biennale, Kinshasa. Lubondo was featured in Musée du quai Branly's exhibition *Who is gazing/À toi appartient le regard et (...) la liaison infinie entres les choses* in 2020, and *Memoria: récits d'une autre Histoire*, FRAC Nouvelle-Aquitaine MÉCA, Bordeaux, France, in 2021.

All photographs on view are by Gosette Lubondo from her series *Imaginary Trip*, © Gosette Lubondo, Courtesy Axis Gallery, NY & NJ

Credits

Gosette Lubondo: Imaginary Trip is organized by the Fowler Museum at UCLA and co-curated by Erica P. Jones, the Fowler's curator of African arts, and Elaine Ericksen Sullivan, Andrew W. Mellon post-doctoral curatorial fellow at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY. Support comes from the Fowler Contemporary Council Fund.

About the Fowler

The Fowler Museum at UCLA explores global arts and cultures with an emphasis on Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and the Indigenous Americas—past and present. The Fowler enhances understanding of world cultures through dynamic exhibitions, publications, and public programs, informed by interdisciplinary approaches and the perspectives of the cultures represented. The work of international contemporary artists is presented within complex frameworks of politics, culture, and social action.

Museum Information

308 Charles E Young Dr N | Los Angeles, CA 90024 | fowler.ucla.edu
Parking in UCLA Lot 4, 198 Westwood Plaza at Sunset Blvd, \$3/hr or \$14 max/day
Rideshare drop-off address: 305 Charles E Young Dr N

Hours: Wed–Sun, 12–5pm

Admission to the Fowler is free

Complete guidelines are listed at fowler.ucla.edu/visit

CAPTIONS

Page 1: Image: Gosette Lubondo (b. 1993, Kinshasa, DRC), *Imaginary Trip I*, 2016; © Gosette Lubondo, Courtesy Axis Gallery, NY & NJ.

Page 2: Image: Gosette Lubondo (b. 1993, Kinshasa, DRC), *Imaginary Trip I*, 2016; © Gosette Lubondo, Courtesy Axis Gallery, NY & NJ.

Page 3: Image: Gosette Lubondo (b. 1993, Kinshasa, DRC), *Imaginary Trip II*, 2019; © Gosette Lubondo, Courtesy Axis Gallery, NY & NJ.