



JAHMEK
CONTEMPORARY
ART

**N'GOLA CINE,
THE COUNTRY WE LIVE IN**
On the subject of the exhibition by Yonamine

At the beginning of 1975, N'gola Cine still existed. I remember seeing double-decker buses, of the kind you still see today on the streets of London, stop in front of the cinema. Today, N'gola Cine is no longer what it was. All that remains is the building where it stood, turned into a large wholesale and retail warehouse: now, it is the Toyota Hiaces of the *candongueiros*, or private minivan drivers, who, like ants, congregate around the square.

But N'gola Cine was a country apart: we would leave our family home – the country of our childhood – to see the matinées, any film, *They Call Me Trinity* was one, and dream of adventure – the country of the future. Dinis Canhanga – the pioneer who hoisted the Angolan flag on the day of independence – was a regular visitor to N'gola Cine.

All of us – Dinis and the kids from the Cês e Bês, the casas redondas and the Simão Toco and Caputo buildings, including those who lived beside Rua D. João II (Rua Lino Amezaga, today) – lived close to N'gola Cine without realising that the one film that would never be shown there was the one which, to some extent, we were part of. In fact, we were and continue to be participants in another film, the one we create in our everyday lives: it is this never-ending story that Yonamine invites us to revisit critically, placing the installation *Roupa suja lava-se em casa* at the heart of his reflections.

Roupa suja lava-se em casa is also the expression of a principle of cultural sovereignty that can be read in accordance with the complexity of the social and political transition underway in our country. The world has changed and the encroachment and over exposure to the symbolic ecosystems and artistic and historic practices that once could have been seen as exogenous are today, in an increasingly global world, part of us all and the idea of “home” is no longer what it was. To demand an indigenous, inward-looking reading is not without its dangers and this is a risk the artist runs.

In his exhibition at the Jahmek Contemporary Art gallery, Yonamine uses N'gola Cine as a sarcastic metaphor to analyse, with common sense and an emancipated gaze, Angola's most recent history. This wide-ranging and sharp demarche, presented in his own inimitable and stripped-down style, is something we have become accustomed to since his installation *Pão nosso de cada dia* (2017), even if, according to Suzana Sousa, in her work *Dipóló* (2010) and exhibition “Luz Veio” (2013), it already contains many of the elements he uses to great impact on another scale.

There is no doubt that the collages – ripped, interfered with, glued, scratched, overlapped – are today one of the distinctive hallmarks of the first important phase of Yonamine's artistic career. In *Pão nosso de cada dia*, the artist goes from a more effective creative dimension in terms of the message – salvaging, subverting and embellishing a structure similar to that of tiles, those emblems of an important segment of the colonial visual narrative – to, paradoxically, question post-colonialism, post-independence and the cult of personality it gave rise to.

With *Roupa suja lava-se em casa*, his work undergoes another strategic change, but this time in the opposite direction: where once he accumulated, he now empties; where once he organised in the form of grids, he now does so by uniting the irregularity of the shapes and forms the words and phrases cause; where once he glued to the wall, he now hangs, extends or “hoists by rope” – like Dinis Canhanga with the flag – as if he had already washed and purified everything, as if reality were no longer a corrupted and demented sheet.

Ultimately, “N'gola Cine” is a major exhibition/installation that represents the history of forty-three years (1975-2018) of *estendida* – in the colloquial sense used in Luanda to mean “endlessly



JAHMEK
CONTEMPORARY
ART

criticised” – national independence with no deference except for that imposed by the limits of aesthetics and political reflection.

Although we are now in 2018 and Yonamine has undergone a shift in creative strategy, he continues to use the *“interaction of the means of artistic production”* which, according to João Silvério, he had already used in his exhibition *“Só China”* (2012) and, to some extent, continues to rage against the *“idea of erasure”* that Paulo Cunha and Silva spoke of at the time of his exhibition *“Tuga Suave”* (2008) that has been so common in his work over the last ten years.

From 2008 to 2018, in contrast with *“the idea of erasure”* and through intense *“interaction of the means of artistic production”*, Yonamine joined the artists of the Angolan avant-garde, a group involved in one of the most tense struggles for historical and identifying self-representation and self-referentialisation in an attempt to define and distinguish themselves both with regard to local artistic practices and in terms of breaking on to the international art scene, without bias or diffidence.

In truth, the challenge faced by the artist and those of his generation was to escape commonplaces, to deviate from the well-worn paths and nationalistic clichés of the 1980s and ‘90s to return to them at will with another gaze; to deal with subject matter never addressed before or to reflect on current themes that concern the common man.

The cult of personality, the socialist past, social injustice, the errors of the rhetoric and pseudo-communist political slogans and the failure of the dictatorship of the proletariat in Angola, but also in whichever *“country we live in and in which we want to live in”*, are themes explored with irony, sarcasm, criticism and humour in many of Yonamine’s works.

And if, this time, it is N’gola Cine that interests Yonamine, it is because, like all those of us who live in that country of our childhood, he also clearly remembers the atmosphere before and during the matinées. As he confessed, nobody could forget those moments when it was possible to:

“Feel the emotion of the film without being inside the cinema, of buying tickets in the candonga [black market], when they were already sold out at the ticket office, and of the long queues to buy tickets to see films that were shown for months on end until the reel was all scratched.”

If, before, we were not sure where this impulse to scratch everything came from, perhaps now we are closer to discovering.

But *“N’gola Cine”* involves the re-use of the wall and clothes line as a medium, on occasion real and on others evoked, to talk both about the shadows of history and the light of creative independence. In reality or in fiction, on the street or in the cinema, inside or outside the art gallery, what we cannot lose sight of is that all of Yonamine’s artwork is proof of an engaged artistic, political and social citizenship that is conscious of the main concerns of his age, of the place of his identity and of their individual mythology, in Angola and the world.

Adriano Mixinge (Historian and Art Critic) April de 2018