

## **P R E S S   R E L E A S E**

**UF African Studies Center**

**21 March 2017**

A special collection of comic art produced by a Congolese artist, Papa Mfumu'eto, recently became a treasured part of the special collections holdings of the George A. Smathers Libraries. This unique collection of original drawings, printed comic booklets, and unpublished papers represents the creative work of street artist Papa Jaspé-Saphir Mfumu'eto from 1985 to 2007. It is a treasure trove for those interested in comic art production on a global scale; the history of ex-Zaire, today's Democratic Republic of Congo and its megacity, Kinshasa; and an important African language, Lingala.

Plans are already under way to further study and display the contents of this astonishing collection. In conjunction with the **Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art** (notably director Rebecca Nagy and African arts curator Susan Cooksey), planning for the world's first special exhibition focusing on the comic art of one African artist has begun. It is expected to open at the Museum in Fall 2019. To aid in these preparations, UF invited a group of Congolese and comic specialists have been invited to Gainesville (for 3-10 days each) to evaluate the collection and begin interpretive work. Two are Congolese historians. One is a Congolese filmmaker. One is a global specialist of comic art. And two are Gainesville's own comic artists, Tom Hart and Leela Corman of this city's Sequential Artists Workshop, "the premier place to study comics."

### **T H R E E   P U B L I C   &   F R E E   E V E N T S   I N   G A I N E S V I L L E**

During study visits of these specialists to Gainesville, a trio of public events entitled "Congo-Kinshasa meets Gainesville," will take place from 29-31 March. The events are jointly sponsored by UF's Center for African Studies, the George A. Smathers Libraries, the Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art, UF's Department of History, University Galleries, the UF

France Florida Research Institute and Center for Excellence, and Gainesville's Sequential Artists Workshop. The City of Gainesville Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs Department have taken an interest in the comics aspect and the possible links to the comic or sequential arts in Gainesville.

**Event 1 will be on Wednesday, 29 March, from 6 pm**, downtown at the The Woolly. It will entail a free screening of a film set in Kinshasa and **made by Congolese filmmaker, Djo Munga**. He will discuss the film and the relevance of its themes with the audience afterwards. "Via Riva!" is an award-winning crime film (95 min.) set in Congo's largest city. The screening will be followed by a discussion with this innovative filmmaker about his fictional thriller, released in 2010. The film is a fast-paced rush through the streets of this megacity of at least 10 million, one that uses genre to brilliant effect. Born in Kinshasa and trained at Belgium's National Film School, Djo Munga worked on international TV productions in Kinshasa from 2000. He founded Congo's first film production company, *Suka! Productions*, in 2006; and he co-produced *Congo in Four Acts* in 2010. *Viva Riva!* met widespread acclaim at the Toronto and Berlin International Film Festivals. It won six African Movie Academy Awards and the Best African Movie at the MTV Movie Awards. The film uses the film techniques of a noir crime drama to raise social awareness of economic, sexual, and gender issues in this vibrant city in an often war-torn country, yet without preaching. The hero returns from neighboring Angola with a truckload of stolen oil. When he falls for the girlfriend of a Kinshasa gangster, chaos and violence erupt. The film speaks to machismo, corruption, sexual commodification, troubled kinship, and death.

**Event no. 2, will be on Thursday, 30 March, 3-5 pm**, at UF's Smathers Library (East), rm. 100. This will be an interactive opportunity for the public to witness the presentation of the preliminary results of **an archival and exhibition workshop** focused on the Smathers Library's Department of Special and Area Studies Collections' newest manuscripts collection, the comic archive of the Papa Mfumu'eto Papers, ca. 1985-2007. The some 1000 text-image pages contain much text in the Lingala language, and everything is direct from Kinshasa's streets.

The invited specialists will show and debate preliminary images and ideas for the 2019 Harn Museum of Art exhibition and catalog. Possible themes will embrace the comic arts; Kinshasa's history, street culture, and gender relations; media archaeology and print technologies; vernacular words and linguistics; and future fieldwork and filmmaking. Present will be Gainesville's premier comic artists, **Tom Hart and Leela Corman**; two of Congo's premier historians, Vice- Rector and **Professor Sabakinu Kivilu of the University of Kinshasa** and Professor Didier Gondola of Indianapolis; and the filmmaker Djo Munga. A comic specialist from the University of Michigan, **Elizabeth Nijdam**, will offer a global perspective.

The series will conclude with **Event 3 on Friday 31 March, 3.30-5, 404 Grinter Hall** with a lecture on Kinshasa's history, notably matters of manhood, gangs, and the visual. It will be a UF Center for African Studies baraza talk, "Buffalo Bill in Kinshasa: Westerns, Masculinity, and Violence in the Tropics," delivered by **Professor Ch. Didier Gondola, Chair & Professor of History and Africana Studies, Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis**. It is bound to be a captivating exploration about how one of America's most iconic figures, Buffalo Bill, influenced a postwar generation of Kinshasa youth, notably their flamboyant feats, styles, and aspirations in this bursting colonial city in what was then the Belgian Congo. The lecture will draw from this distinguished, Paris-trained Congolese historian's most recent book, *Tropical Cowboys*.

### **COMIC ARCHIVE FROM THE CONGO ARRIVES IN GAINESVILLE**

Born in 1963 in Matadi, in today's Democratic Republic of Congo, from an early age **Papa Mfumu'eto** began creating the comic art (or in French, *bandes dessinées* or BDs) for which he has become widely known. From the late 1980s, he sold his handmade zines in large numbers on the streets and in the markets of Congo's capital Kinshasa, today one of Africa's third most populated cities, a megacity where he has lived since childhood. The subjects of his comic zines range from politics and ethics, family relations and love, health, disease, sorcery, and spirit mediums. Common themes include life and death, with supernatural themes including ghosts, sorcery, and the invisible. One frequent character,

Bernard Tshilombe, appears as a modern zombie. Other topics relate to daily life on Kinshasa's streets. Written in Lingala, some Kikongo and French words appear. These rich texts, images, and stories reveal much about recent Kinshasa (*Kinois*) urban slang, perceived dangers, and street culture.

Papa Mfumu'eto developed his artistic talent after being exposed to several published BD comics as a youth. Some were graphic novels produced in the Franco-Belgian clean comic style; and he partly took inspiration from while critiquing *Tintin au Congo*, the only graphic novel set in Africa produced by the **celebrated Belgian cartoonist Hergé**. By the late 1980s, Mfumu'eto began to sell his work on the streets, where they enjoyed great success from until 2000 (after which he turned more to producing popular paintings). This highly unusual and large collection documents the materials and techniques used to produce his BD comics, including some diary and journal entries in pencil and ballpoint pen, pencil sketches, pen and ink drawings on drawing and tracing paper, the media used to reproduce them, notably Mylar, and the cut-out photographs and drawings that he pasted into multiple contexts and publications at various times.

UF Professor of History and African Studies **Nancy Rose Hunt** began working with this Congolese artist on preserving this collection from 2001. She identified these papers as historically significant when researching the history of the production and reception of comics in Congo from the time *Tintin au Congo* first appeared in 1929. Mfumu'eto entrusted a large share of the collection to her care in 2001, he gave her additional papers in 2007, when she was a Fulbright Professor at Kinshasa's major public university. In 2015, the collection came to the attention of director Hervé Chandès and curators of the **Cartier Foundation in Paris**, at a time when **André Magnin**, a pioneering curator and collector of contemporary African art was curating a major retrospective on Congolese art for this major Cartier art exhibition space. Magnin had purchased Mfumu'eto zines in the past; these became part of the Pigozzi Collection in Geneva, the largest private collection of contemporary African art in the world and some also were featured – along the new Smathers collection – in the *Beauté Congo* exhibition in the Cartier Foundation in Paris

(July 2015 to January 2016). Professor Hunt assisted UF's African Studies curator **Dan Reboussin** in the successful purchase of this collection directly from the artist in Kinshasa.

For further information, contact UF Professor of History & African Studies, Nancy Rose Hunt, [nrhunt@ufl.edu](mailto:nrhunt@ufl.edu), 734 834 7902

