

Translated from the original French

## Libasse KA, painter: «I am what I live»



Photo by Saskia Vanderstichele

By Xavier Flament  
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**Exhibited by Luk Lambrecht and spotted by the director of S.M.A.K., this young Belgian-Senegalese artist who refers to Spinoza and Mondrian delivers a singular exhibition at the Wetsi Art Gallery. A revelation.**

Brussels has never looked so much like Berlin as at Studio Citygate, a vast industrial wasteland planted in a no man's land in Anderlecht, between the Gare du Midi and the expressway to the motorway, and which has been hosting since 2018 a host of entrepreneurs, creatives and artists of all persuasions. You enter through a gate painted in pink which opens onto a collective vegetable garden adjoining a skate track, your nostrils tempted by the bread oven of the Antidote café, which cooks excellent sourdough pizzas...

It is in the extension of its terrace that one reaches the Wetsi Art Gallery (WAG), named after its founder. Anne Wetsi Mpoma opened it a year and a half ago with the support of the Brussels Ministry for Equal Opportunities, in order to welcome Afro-descendant artists in residence who do not have citizenship in the galleries of the beautiful districts. .

An activist for the decolonial doctrine, who made herself heard during the passionate debates that accompanied the reopening of the Tervuren Museum, this art historian does not beat around the bush: «In absolute terms, we should not have no places dedicated to Afro-descendants, but the structural racism, the invisibilization and the subalternization (sic) of African cultures mean that they need support and a space to express themselves and develop their skills.» But the gallery owner is nonetheless looking to broaden her horizons «to attract a slightly more mainstream audience», she says in the preamble.

It is within this framework that she entrusted the first space of her gallery to Luk Lambrecht, the former head researcher of the Cultural Center of Strombeek-Bever (to whom we owe the splendid Jacqueline Mesmaeker exhibition, at Bozar, last year), and who has set his sights on the 22-year-old Belgian-Senegalese artist Libasse KA. The curator had heard about it from the Flemish «anarcho-baroque» painter Jan Van Imschoot who followed him on Instagram.

They are not the only ones to be interested in him: Philippe Van Cauteren, the artistic director of S.M.A.K. from Ghent, would have seen the spark of genius there and Maria Broodthaers, the widow of the famous author of casseroles of mussels, bought him some date pips which he carried around in his pocket during the opening of the exhibition. Date pips at 15 euros, it looks like a «private joke» between him and Luk Lambrecht... «It's not for the money», assures us Libasse KA, with a smirk: «it's a questioning of the value of art from these worthless pips on which I have affixed lines of gold.»

At the entrance to the space dedicated to him, he looks at his self-portrait, which he made with water-diluted charcoal, directly on the wall. «I drew a child with a dog that represents me and a dotted timeline that begins in 1998, when I was born, stops in 2010 with the death of my mother in Senegal, then leaves again. The bones that you see, it's something you're looking for. Everyone is looking for something,» he says.

But it is not always obligatory to say it explicitly. Once inside the exhibition, his works in A3 and A4 formats appear rather abstract with their flat colors, sometimes interspersed with geometric silhouettes, but above all crossed by lines of force which structure the space. He demonstrates this to us by cutting with his finger the solid blue of a painting entitled «Le nageur».

### Question of Balance

It's stronger than him, whether on a sheet of paper, in an innocuous object or a brick pattern on the facade of a house, the ratios of proportions jump out at him. «I see the structure appearing everywhere, but I don't calculate anything. I prefer to talk about rhythm and see what happens when things come together on their own. But there is always this search for a balance, as I seek balance in my life.»

His tastes in art are also eloquent: Piet Mondrian and his checkerboards, and, in the same structured and colorful vein, Mario De Brabandere, whom he discovered during his artistic humanities in Sint-Lukas, then in The Camber.

He also speaks philosophy with his father, a graphic designer, since he joined him in Asse, in 2010, after the death of his mother. «I am what I live», he says in the style of Descartes. And it is no coincidence that he claims to be Spinoza for his rationalist radicalism but open to intuitive knowledge. «I feel like I'm constantly evolving. So I don't have to affirm myself as something but according to what I've been through. So, I can't expect myself- even to act completely like a Senegalese or like a Belgian, because I had both and that gives something else.»

We will therefore wait in vain to recognize an African touch in his production, except perhaps in «Gold Fever» which could denounce the West's hold on Africa. His inspirations range from Bauhaus to African tapestries and oriental color art. «These are filters, a selection from my aspirations at the moment, but ultimately there is this part that I cannot consciously reach and fully control - the inner state I am in, the soul and freedom.»

### Exhibition

«The reality of a reflection»

Libasse KA (curator: Luk Lambrecht)

Until June 6, Wednesday to Saturday, 2 to 6 p.m., or by appointment.

Wetsi Art Gallery, at Studio Citygate, 1A rue de la petite île - Brussels, 1070



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