

# *The Map*

Moridja Kitenge Banza

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## Dictated Traces

Originally from Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Moridja Kitenge Banza now lives and works in Montreal. As with many migration stories, the path that led him from the Congo to Canada was a long and winding one. In Kitenge Banza's multidisciplinary practice, situated between reality and fiction, he foregrounds the unfolding of identity over the course of this journey, exploring in particular his African heritage as it has been shaped by the experience of Belgian colonization.

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Kitenge Banza was trained in the visual arts at Kinshasa's Académie des Beaux-arts, where he learned to paint by studying European masters and European art history. Later, in France, he would continue his artistic studies, eventually branching out into Urban Cultural and Political Development. During his travels—a situation he considered temporary, always intending to return home—Kitenge Banza carried his portable studio with him, continuously creating artworks exploring his position and role as a black person outside Africa. In his work, he humorously questions memory and identity through sociopolitical and economic lenses, and this exhibition at OBORO is no exception. *The Map* is the Montreal premiere of two bodies of work that, despite drawing primarily from his own personal history, are uniquely universal.

Moridja Kitenge Banza began his *Chiromancies* series in 2008. On a daily basis, he traces out the three deepest lines in his left hand, examining them closely: sometimes with the palm open, sometimes partially closed, deepening the folds. He transposes these lines as one might mark territorial delineations, well-known pathways. Once this structure is down on paper, Kitenge Banza lets *it* dictate the form, allowing his brush and ink to move freely, drawing out knots, networks and grids—much like a map. Chiromancy, or palmistry, is the art of reading one's future in the lines of the hand, and Kitenge Banza effectively conjures up a unique future, dotted with milestones of his own invention.

Begun in small formats in a cramped bedroom, Kitenge Banza would increase the scale of his *Chiromancies* during a residency in Senegal in 2010, where he had access to a large studio. Back home, he continued in this vein, using his bedroom door as a mount, the dimensions of which would now dictate those of his drawings. Over the course of his relocations, he maintains this format, accumulating an extensive collection of drawings that he stores and transports in rolls, as if they were parchments containing the history of his life, maps of the gateways and resiliencies necessary for constantly going in and out of oneself, for crossing so many divisions and borders.

It is in OBORO's project room that Kitenge Banza now exhibits for the first time his series *Mokili —The Map—Le Monde*, ongoing since 2009. Using invented maps, he retraces his journey, beginning with his departure from the Congo in the early 2000s. Each map presents the world such as Kitenge Banza discovers it over the cycle of an entire year, reappropriating the codes of Western mapmaking, with its sets, its legends and its graphs. In so doing, he resolutely positions himself as a by-product of colonialism, asking, not without irony, if places can indeed exist, even if we haven't actually seen them with our own eyes. He also asks the question of the existence of the other, of the value of this other's experience with respect to our own. This body of work allows him to observe the multiplicity of his own identities over the course of his journey and to reflect, through drawing, on the notion of home. In this way, the map becomes a compass, and Kitenge Banza creates his own map of the world, a map that eschews the artificial borders imposed by history. This series embodies a reflection on borders, memory and territory, and on space as a site of identity, culture and the social. It is also an exercise that structures the artist's world as a young man who he himself is many things: African, Congolese, immigrant and Canadian citizen.

At the bottom of each map, we can read a quote from famed Martinique poet, critic and philosopher Édouard Glissant: "The single root kills everything around it, whereas the rhizome spreads itself out in order to meet other roots." In evoking the rhizome, Kitenge Banza's *Chiromancies* become a key to understanding his geopoetic maps. He effectively proposes a critical reading of his own experience of colonialism by inverting colonialism's logic. Rhizomes here are the complex roots that he himself plants, roots that bind Kitenge Banza to the places he evokes in his works. Although they may sometimes seem far-off, these systems are very present and alive, constantly growing and nourishing each other.

— Claudine Hubert

Translation: Simon Brown