The visionary artist Bodys Isek Kingelez created utopian propositions for cities in a peaceful and prosperous tomorrow. Born in the Belgian Congo in 1948, Kingelez came of age in a period of tremendous change, as his country evolved in the complex years following Independence. He made his first artworks in the late 1970s in Kinshasa, the capital of the newly renamed nation of Zaire, transforming modest materials—paper, cardboard, plastic, and commercial packaging—into dazzling and intricate sculptures. Inspired in large part by the life and architecture of the capital (where he lived until his death in 2015), his works depict civic buildings, public monuments, national pavilions, and skyscrapers, both singly and combined into fantastical and expansive cities.

Kingelez gained international renown through his participation in the landmark 1989 exhibition Magiciens de la terre, at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, and his sculptures have since been shown around the world. Published to accompany an exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art, New York—the first-ever full retrospective of Kingelez’s practice—this catalogue traces the span of the artist’s thirty-year career, from his rarely seen early works to the large-scale cities of his later decades. Featuring stunning new photography, this is the most comprehensive volume on the artist to date.

Allianz

The exhibition is made possible by Allianz, a partner of contemporary art at MoMA.

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An artist of tremendous and enduring vision, Bodys Isek Kingelez believed that art-making was “the grandest adventure of all”—a vocation with the power to serve his community, bridge civilizations, and contribute to the progress of science and the pursuit of a better life. Born in 1948 in what was then the Belgian Congo, Kingelez moved in 1970 from his home village to the city of Kinshasa, the capital of the newly independent Democratic Republic of the Congo (soon renamed Zaire). It was against the backdrop of this complex city, rapidly redefining itself in the years after Independence, that he would realize his artistic aspirations, creating fantastic paper sculptures that suggest utopian possibilities for global urban sites.

We are thrilled to present the first full retrospective of Kingelez’s work, tracing the arc of his practice in its entirety. While he has long been included in important exhibitions of contemporary art, from Magiciens de la terre, at the Centre Pompidou in 1989, to the landmark documenta 11, in 2002, he has been the subject of very few solo presentations. We are thrilled to present the first full retrospective of Kingelez’s work, tracing the arc of his practice in its entirety. While he has long been included in important exhibitions of contemporary art, from Magiciens de la terre, at the Centre Pompidou in 1989, to the landmark documenta 11, in 2002, he has been the subject of very few solo presentations.

Bodys Isek Kingelez unfolds as a chronological display of the artist’s three-decade career, capturing the transformation of his work as it grows in scale and complexity from the early single-building architectural sculptures to the sprawling, futuristic cities of his later production. It is moving to see so many of Kingelez’s extrêmes maquettes, as he called them, assembled in one place for the first time. Although Kingelez was part of the group exhibition Projects 59: Architecture as Metaphor at The Museum of Modern Art in 1997, this retrospective may be for many of our visitors their first encounter with his work. His imagined metropolises offer a prescient articulation of the multivalent realities and potentials of the contemporary city, and his utopic, joyous vision for a global society—for a “better, more peaceful world”—seems pointedly relevant today. His distinctive voice adds immeasurably to the global story of modern and contemporary art we seek to tell at MoMA.

The success of our exhibitions relies on so many, beginning with my peerless colleagues at MoMA. Sarah Suzuki, Curator, and Hillary Reder, Curatorial Assistant, both in the Department of Drawings and Prints, have overseen every aspect of this project with enthusiasm and care. We owe particular thanks to Allianz for its significant contribution to realizing this exhibition. We are also grateful for the essential contributions of The International Council and The Friends of Education of The Museum of Modern Art. Additional support was provided by the Annual Exhibition Fund. Jean Pigozzi of CAAC—The Pigozzi Collection deserves my special thanks, not only for his loan of artworks but also for the ideas and enthusiasm he brought to our project. Lastly, on behalf of the Trustees and staff of The Museum of Modern Art, I extend my profound thanks to all the lenders who have entrusted us with their works by Kingelez, making this exhibition possible.

Glenn D. Lowry
Director, The Museum of Modern Art

As a partner of contemporary art at The Museum of Modern Art, Allianz is proud to celebrate the first major retrospective of the work of the Congolese sculptor Bodys Isek Kingelez and the first substantial monographic presentation of his work in the United States. Allianz believes that people want to live with courage rather than fear, remaining curious and exploring their world with an open mind and an abundance of imagination. Our engagement with the art of today reflects this belief, and we are honored to support exhibitions by contemporary artists who push the limits of their disciplines and challenge expectations and conventions.

Both as a company and as individuals, we are moved by the question of how people can live better lives in the future. With his infinite curiosity, imagination, and skill, Kingelez has shown himself to be an explorer of a new era. His spectacular, visionary sculptures shape a fantastical urban landscape that is prosperous and peaceful. They are powerful representations of the “city of tomorrow.”

This unprecedented exhibition is accompanied by a virtual reality component that transports visitors into Kingelez’s imagined tomorrow and enables them to see the future through his eyes. We hope that visitors will be inspired by this extraordinary artist and his vision of a better world.
Untitled. c. 1980
32 1/16 x 14 1/8 x 9 5/8"
(83.6 x 37.8 x 24.5 cm)
Private collection, Paris
Untitled. 1980
15 3/8 x 17 3/8 x 12 1/2" (39 x 44.2 x 31.5 cm)
Private collection, Paris

Maryland University USA. 1981
26 x 5 1/4 x 7 1/2" (66 x 14.2 x 19.1 cm)
Private collection, Paris
Approche de l’Échangeur de Limete Kin. 1981
32 ⅝ x 13 ⅞ x 16 ⅝" (82 x 35.2 x 42.6 cm)
Private collection, Paris

Untitled. 1982
12 ¼ x 7 ¼ x 7 ⅜" (31.4 x 18 x 18.2 cm)
Private collection, Paris
Allemagne An 2000: 1988
33 7⁄8 x 24 3⁄16 x 24 3⁄16" (86 x 61.5 x 61.5 cm)
Long-term loan from the Centre National des Arts Plastiques, France, to the Château d’Oiron, France
Paris Nouvel. 1989
33 1/16 x 24 x 27 9/16” (85 x 61 x 70 cm)
Long-term loan from the Centre National des Arts Plastiques, France, to the Château d’Orion, France
Mongolique Sovietique, 1989
24 7/16 x 15 1/16 x 24 7/16" (62 x 40 x 62 cm)
CAAC—The Pigozzi Collection, Geneva
Étoile Rouge Congolaise  1990
33⅜ x 36 ½ x 19 ⅜" (85 x 92 x 50 cm)
CAAC—The Pigozzi Collection, Geneva
CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Kingston’s sculpture is composed of amalgamations of materials, and there has not yet been an opportunity for exhaustive scientific study of the mediums of the individual objects in this exhibition. In his early years, the artist primarily used paper, paperboard, and commercial packaging, over time, as he gained access to more materials, he began to incorporate plastic, metallic foil, and a range of found objects. This list compiles the materials for definitively identified in the works by conservators and curators, roughly organized from most to least prevalent:

- Conservators and curators, roughly organized from most to least prevalent:
  - styrofoam, and foamcore; ink, pencil, colored pencil, paper, and metallic foil cardboard; rubber foam, printed commercial packaging; wood; acrylic and plastic cardboard, paperboard and printed paperboard, and wrapping paper and tissue paper); corrugated paper, colored paper, and printed paper (including colored tape and metallic tape); and astonished fabrics (including mesh fabric), paper, string (including colored string), thread (including metallic thread), and helico, beeds (paper, wood, and plastic), balls (plastic, foam, and thread-wrapped), paper and plastic sleeves, copper wire, taped wire, and metal grommets; toothpicks, pins, thumbtacks, and other metal pins), and nato, aluminum cans, plastic bottles, and plastic and other bottle caps; and mirrors, plastic figurines, 35mm film, plastic slide mounts, ballpoint pen shafts, circuit-board adhesives, and electric lights.

For the dimensions of the works in the checklist below, height precedes width preceded depth. Many of the titles are French. Kingston’s prolific, idiosyncratic, and often playfully pairing and splicing makes their spirit difficult to capture in translation, and, in most cases, the titles given below are those written directly on the works by the artist himself.

Untitled. 1980 39 x 50 x 15 " (99 x 128 x 38 cm)
Private collection, Paris
Plate 1

Untitled. 1988 13" x 10" x 9" (33 x 25 x 23 cm)
Private collection, Paris
Plate 2

Untitled. 1993 15 7⁄16 x 12 7⁄16 x 5 1⁄2" (40 x 32 x 14 cm)
Private collection, Paris
Plate 3

Approche de l’Événement de Limone. 1991 32" x 16 1⁄2 x 10" (81 x 42 x 25 cm)
Private collection, Paris
Plate 4

Untitled. 1982 12" x 7 1⁄2 x 7" (31 4 x 19 x 18 cm)
Private collection, Paris
Plate 5

Allemagne Av-2000. 1986 39 1⁄2 x 24 1⁄4 x 24" (100 x 62 x 61 cm)
Long-term loan from the Centre National des Arts Plastiques, France, to the Château d’Oiron, France
Plate 6

Papi Monnaie. 1988 39 x 34 1⁄4 x 27" (99 x 87 x 69 cm)
Long-term loan from the Centre National des Arts Plastiques, France, to the Château d’Oiron, France
Plate 7

Beau Gest. 1989 39 x 34 1⁄4 x 27" (99 x 87 x 69 cm)
Private collection, Paris
Plate 8

Stor Patrej. Bouguje. 1989 30 x 15 x 15" (76 x 38 x 38 cm)
Santé De Santé/Africa Collection
Plate 9

Mongolique Sovietique. 1990 24 x 15 1⁄2 x 24" (61 x 40 x 62 cm)
CAAC-The Pigozzi Collection, Geneva
Plate 10

École Roue Congolaise. 1990 39 x 26 x 15 1⁄2" (99 x 66 x 40 cm)
CAAC-The Pigozzi Collection, Geneva
Plate 11

Air Force, 1991 31 1⁄2 x 30" x 16 1⁄2" (80 x 76 x 42 cm)
CAAC-The Pigozzi Collection, Geneva
Plate 12

Africa NEED. 1991 31 x 30 x 5 1⁄2" (78 x 76 x 14 cm)
CAAC-The Pigozzi Collection, Geneva
Plate 13

Kinshasa de Belle. 1991 24 1⁄2 x 31 1⁄2 x 10 1⁄2" (62 x 80 x 27 cm)
CAAC-The Pigozzi Collection, Geneva
Plate 14

Pallas d’Alchimia. 1991 18 x 30 1⁄2 x 16 1⁄2" (46 x 77 x 42 cm)
CAAC-The Pigozzi Collection, Geneva
Plate 15

Bel Atlas. 1991 20 1⁄2 x 31 x 14" (52 x 80 x 35 cm)
CAAC-The Pigozzi Collection, Geneva
Plate 16

The Scientific Center of Hospitalisation the SIDM. 1991 16 x 20 1⁄2 x 9" (41 x 52 x 23 cm)
Groninger Museum, Groningen, Netherlands
Plate 17

Mongolique Sovietique. 1991 5 1⁄2 x 32 1⁄2 x 24 1⁄2" (14 x 82 x 62 cm)
Groninger Museum, Groningen, Netherlands
Plate 18

Coll. José Dey. 1991 20 x 31 x 21" (50 x 80 x 53 cm)
CAAC-The Pigozzi Collection, Geneva
Plate 19

Aéromode (Aéroport Moderne). 1991 32 1⁄2 x 22 1⁄2 x 15" (82 x 57 x 38 cm)
Groninger Museum, Groningen, Netherlands
Plate 20

Centrale Palestinienne. 1991 11 1⁄2 x 19 1⁄2 x 7" (29 x 50 x 18 cm)
Groninger Museum, Groningen, Netherlands
Plate 21

Réveillon Fédéral. 1991 11 1⁄2 x 19 1⁄2 x 7" (29 x 50 x 18 cm)
Groninger Museum, Groningen, Netherlands
Plate 22

Colonne de l’Échiquier. 1991 11 1⁄2 x 19 1⁄2 x 7" (29 x 50 x 18 cm)
Groninger Museum, Groningen, Netherlands
Plate 23

Industria da Pharmacia. 1992 14 1⁄2 x 31 x 21 1⁄2" (37 x 80 x 55 cm)
CAAC-The Pigozzi Collection, Geneva
Plate 24

Reveillon Fédéral. 1992 11 1⁄2 x 19 1⁄2 x 7" (29 x 50 x 18 cm)
Groninger Museum, Groningen, Netherlands
Plate 25

Miss Hotel Brussels. 1992 14 1⁄2 x 31 x 21" (37 x 80 x 55 cm)
CAAC-The Pigozzi Collection, Geneva
Plate 26

Vivaldi Hotel. Brussels 1992 14 1⁄2 x 31 x 21" (37 x 80 x 55 cm)
CAAC-The Pigozzi Collection, Geneva
Plate 27

Lucien Bilodeau Collection, Brussels/Milan
Plate 19

Rivoli Hotel. 1992 21 1⁄2 x 31 x 20" (55 x 80 x 50 cm)
CAAC-The Pigozzi Collection, Geneva
Plate 28

Collection Musée International des Arts Modestes (CAAC—The Pigozzi Collection, Geneva)
Plate 29

Ville de Sète 3009. 2000 31 1⁄2 x 9 10 1⁄2 x 6 15 1⁄2" (80 x 240 x 165 cm)
Collection Maxime des Arts Modestes (CAAC—The Pigozzi Collection, Geneva)
Plate 30

Bessel Tewar. 2005 26 x 13 x 9 1⁄2" (66 x 34 x 24 cm)
Art Gallery of Western Australia
Plate 31

Kimbentale (Hunga). 2005 20 x 40" x 20" (51 x 102 x 51 cm)
DMM (Development Australian Bank). 2007 31 1⁄2 x 15 1⁄2 x 20" (80 x 40 x 51 cm)
Collection LSO Plate 32

Donato. 2007 28 x 24 x 19 " (71 x 60 x 50 cm)
Groninger Museum, Groningen, Netherlands
Plate 33

Groninger Museum, Groningen, Netherlands
Plate 33

Kimbentale (Hunga). 1994 51 x 9 7⁄16 x 10 1⁄8" (130 x 185 x 260 cm)
CAAC-The Pigozzi Collection, Geneva
Plate 24

U.S. 1995 35 x 22 1⁄4 x 20 1⁄4 (90 x 57 x 51 cm)
Imag CAAC-The Pigozzi Collection, Geneva
Plate 25

Ville de Sète 1999 47 x 4 11⁄16 x 3" (119 x 119 x 78 cm)
CAAC-The Pigozzi Collection, Geneva
Plate 29

Kalmar International 1997 35 x 20 x 9 1⁄8" (90 x 53 x 23 cm)
Imag Purchased 2013 with funds from Tim Fairfax, AM through the Queensland Art Gallery: Gallery of Modern Art Foundation. Collection Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
Plate 29

The Museum of Everything

Purchased 2013 with funds from Tim Fairfax, AM through the Queensland Art Gallery: Gallery of Modern Art Foundation. Collection Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
Plate 29
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This exhilarating undertaking—the first retrospective of the work of Bodys Isek Kingelez—would have been impossible without the generosity, expertise, and support of a long roster of colleagues, scholars, and friends. First and foremost, our lenders, many of whom shared their knowledge, expertise, and experience of the artist, and the contributions of David Adjaye, Sammy Queen, and others private collections. The support of CAAC—The Museum of Everything; and Chris Metais, Sète, France; James Brett, Rosario Gallo, and the staff at the Groninger Museum, Groningen, Netherlands; Vincent and Henriëtta Rose, Sylvie Côte, and Pascale Grégoire at the Musée International des Arts Noirs, Sète, France; Franco Cosenza, Curatorial Assistant in the Department of Painting and Sculpture, whose advice and suggestions have been critical to its success; in the Department of Drawings and Prints; Hillary Reder, Curatorial Assistant, has been an extraordinary partner, and her intellect, enthusiasm, and tenacity inflect every aspect of the catalogue and exhibition. Hanna Girma, Curatorial Fellow, has been an adroit researcher and invaluable sounding board. Heidi Hornich, former Curatorial Assistant, helped organize the project in the earlier phases. Heather Vickers, former Laureates BDV Post-War and Contemporary Curator and Editorial Assistant, provided critical and exploratory research, and Charlotte Barat, Curatorial Assistant in the Department of Painting and Sculpture, kindly made her available for all manner of research queries. Jennifer Talbot, Librarian, helped us locate many volumes that have informed our research. Roger Griffiths, Associate Sculpture Curator, and Elki Moerter, Paper Conservator, explored Kingelez’s materials with enthusiasm.

The catalogue has been realized under the guidance of Don Wolhart, Editorial Director, and Christian Hudson, Publisher. In the Department of Publications, Rebecca Roberts, Editor, had the support it needed. Erik Patton, Director, and Sarah Wisch, Senior Publicist, helped us publicize the catalogue and exhibition; respectively, Nancy Addington, Deputy General Counsel, navigated rights issues with diligence and sensitivity. My thanks to Naomi Masaki of Supermarket for her inspired catalogue design. Ugochukwu-Smooth Nzewi commented on an earlier draft of my essay and helped it take shape. One of the great contributions of this catalogue is the beautiful new photography it contains, which allows for an enhanced understanding of the artist’s oeuvre. For this, I owe a debt of gratitude to Maurice Assenmacher, Vincent Everarts, Genevieve Hanson, Thierry Kleinert, Martin de Leuven, Frédéric Pignoux, and Pierre Schwartz.

Ramona Baterek, Senior Deputy Director, Exhibitions and Collections, ensured that the exhibition had the support it needed. Eric Patterson, Director, and Christine Capdeville, Assistant Curator, coordinated the Planning and Administration, and Susan Palamara, Deputy General Counsel, navigated the legal issues with characteristic care and attention to detail. Hannah Kim, Senior Marketing and Production Coordinator, and Sara Bunt, Senior Publisher, helped us publicize the catalogue and exhibition; respectively, Nancy Addington, Deputy General Counsel, navigated rights issues with diligence and sensitivity. My thanks to Naomi Masaki of Supermarket for her inspired catalogue design. Ugochukwu-Smooth Nzewi commented on an earlier draft of my essay and helped it take shape. One of the great contributions of this catalogue is the beautiful new photography it contains, which allows for an enhanced understanding of the artist’s oeuvre. For this, I owe a debt of gratitude to Maurice Assenmacher, Vincent Everarts, Genevieve Hanson, Thierry Kleinert, Martin de Leuven, Frédéric Pignoux, and Pierre Schwartz.

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