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FAUSTIN LINYEKULA/MAMU TSHI
Mamu Tshi, portrait pour Amandine
(working title)

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Mamu Tshi, portrait pour Amandine
(working title)

Solo

Creation in April 2023

Concept and choreography

Faustin Linyekula

Mamu Tshi (Amandine Tshijanu Ngindu)

Performer

Mamu Tshi (Amandine Tshijanu Ngindu)

Production

Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne ▼

By Éric Vautrin, dramaturg of the Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne

Faustin Linyekula, a choreographer based in Kisangani, meets Mamu Tshi, a prominent krump dancer from Lausanne. Together they journeyed to the Kasai province in the summer of 2022. It is the region where one of their grandmothers lives, and the land of the Luba culture, which is essential to the history of this immense country, the Congo, but which the other knows little about. The journey to this imaginary country leads them to explore the “home” of the diaspora, where Mamu Tshi finds a grandmother with whom she has no common language and an aunt she hardly knows, as well as a hidden, fragile and broken piece of the Congo that Faustin Linyekula never stops exploring. Upon returning from this journey into themselves, they create a danced portrait together.

THE SEARCH FOR THE LOST CONGO

For the past 30 years, Faustin Linyekula has envisaged his body and his dance as a means of searching for the Congo, his country and that of his ancestors, a country of endless wars and daily tragedies. The Congo appears to him as a mirror broken by past and present colonisations, and the choreographer patiently searches for the scattered pieces. His body, his voice and his breath, his own name and his encounters are for him living and *engrammed* archives of this country. Based in Kisangani, he knows little about the Kasai province, a region in central Congo, 1000 km east of the capital. The Kasai is the home of one of the oldest cultures in Central Africa and the birthplace of Mutuashi, a form of music and dance which went mainstream in the 1960s, and became as popular as Congolese rumba.

NAME AS A MEMORY

Krump is an urban dance derived from “clowning”, a style which appeared in the ghettos of Los Angeles as a celebration of life and a way to exorcise social violence. Based in Lausanne, Mamu Tshi is now one of the leading figures in this field at an international level, and this is what drives her life and her choices today. But she grew up immersed in Congolese culture, and in particular that of the Luba. Mamu Tshi is the name given to her by her mother, which speaks of her inclusion in her culture and family: an aunt to dozens of nephews and nieces, she is regarded as a “little mother” (Mamu mwakunyi); Tshi is a contraction of Tshijanu, her middle name - and that of her aunt, of whom she is considered to be the twin (Ndoyi).

Her parents’ mother tongue is Tshiluba, but Mamu Tshi learned Lingala: she has no language in common with the grandmother she will meet in the Kasai. Another aunt, almost unknown to the dancer until recently, will no doubt be able to act as an interpreter between the two.

In choosing her stage name, Mamu Tshi was looking towards the Kasai - because a name

allows us to situate ourselves, it identifies us while linking us to an experience and a history, and thus prevents us from navel-gazing, says Faustin Linyekula. “My dance is an attempt to remember my name,” the choreographer has often said.

RECIPROCAL HOSPITALITY

Faustin Linyekula thus guides Mamu Tshi through this country that he has never ceased to explore, like Virgil accompanying the poet Dante on his initiatory journey towards the light. As for Mamu Tshi, she welcomes Faustin Linyekula into her family and her culture, and introduces him to her female lineage. This exchange of mutual hospitality results in the encounter of three women of Congolese origin, a grandmother, an aunt and a young woman - recalling, Faustin notes, the history of his own clan, which he has struggled to reconstitute in recent years... and which is composed only of male names.

After meeting in Lausanne in the autumn of 2021, Faustin Linyekula and Mamu Tshi share their dances with each other, as well as their quests for the broken country that shapes them both. Through a physical as well as symbolic and imaginary journey between tradition and modernity, between dance and buried memories, a choreographer and a dancer compose together a danced portrait; the choreographer rediscovers himself in a dancer whose path is so different from his own, and the dancer opens her art to the history of her own body. The piece can be danced in various contexts, theatrical or not.

By Éric Vautrin

*Would you like me to blindfold you?/
Why?/
To take you home*

Quoted in *The Dialogue Series: III. Dinozord*, choreography by Faustin Linyekula (2006)

The door to the invisible should be visible.
René Daumal, *Le Mont Analogue* (1944)

A meeting in Switzerland, and the search for a passage between Europe and the Congo via the United States

In the autumn of 2021, Vidy invites the Congolese choreographer Faustin Linyekula to meet the krump dancer Amandine Tshijanu Ngindu, known as Mamu Tshi. At 47, the former is considered one of the most important African artists of his generation. His dance is a search for his country, its history, its memories, its sensitive presence. He perceives his body as an archive of knowledge (sensitive, familial, traditional) and of a history he does not know. Sixteen years his junior, the latter was born in the Congo, which she left for Lausanne, where she has lived and worked ever since. Under the name of Mamu Tshi, she practices krump, an American urban dance form developed in the ghettos of Los Angeles to offer young people living in the ghetto a means of expressing themselves in a healthy and positive way, in an environment and system where violence is omnipresent. While krump may appear to be an aggressive dance, due to the extreme liveliness of its movements and the expressiveness of the dancers' faces, it expresses no conflict, but is rather a celebration of life and its powers. Today, under the name of her dance character, Mubulu ("agitated" in Lingala, one of the languages of the Congo), Mamu Tshi is one of the most renowned and awarded krump dancers in the world. A dialogue opens up between the two, about dance and their respective practices. Amandine Tshijanu Ngindu's dance is a balance between interiority and exteriority, control and letting go, and it is close to African dance in its spiritual and community dimension. Listening to the body, turned towards the Congo, Faustin Linyekula alternates rhythmic and accelerated contortions, traditional songs and moments of slowness. Their dialogue is based on a common history, on a possible passage from Europe to the Congo and back, and on their different ages, paths, experiences and legacies.

A journey to the Kasai in the summer of 2022

A few days after their meeting, Faustin Linyekula asks Amandine Tshijanu Ngindu to accompany him to the Congo, and more precisely to the Kasai, a province in the centre of the Democratic Republic of Congo, 1000 km east of the capital Kinshasa, where the choreographer lives. Mamu Tshi's grandmother came from Kananga, the capital of Kasai-Central. And Faustin knows little about this region. It is, however, the birthplace of the Luba Kingdom, the oldest known in the Congo (their territory was a kingdom as early as the 2nd century, and an empire in the 15th century). Many Congolese elites, both political and artistic, are descended from the Luba people; although the area's subsoil is rich in minerals, infrastructure remains underdeveloped, and today the Kasai provinces are poor. The influence of the Luba can be seen everywhere in the political and cultural life of the Congo, notably through Mutuashi, a Luba dance and musical style that appeared in the 1960s and became as popular as Congolese rumba in the 1980s, both in Central Africa and beyond.

Amandine and Faustin leave together in the summer of 2022.

A danced portrait

Finding a passage between Switzerland and the Congo, between Mamu Tshi's krump and Faustin's contemporary dance, in order to travel together through a territory to which they are both linked but which they do not know. One becomes the Virgil, the initiator, the path of the other in a land that they are discovering together. One passes on to the other a part of their history. Thanks to Amandine, Faustin adds something to his knowledge of the imaginary of the Congo, which he has been searching for for thirty years through his dance practice. Thanks to Faustin, Amandine reconnects with her family and the spirit of her origins. Faustin opens the invisible door to the Congo, and Amandine that of the Kasai, of the Baluba ethnic group and of her art. Upon their return, they choreograph a portrait of Mamu Tshi, which she performs herself. Loaded with their personal stories and their journey, with what they have received from each other, their dance is like a choreographic drawing of the door to the imaginary country, the "home", the "where I come from" of the diaspora. A distant country which, through krump and Mamu Tshi, will have transited through the United States. A body is an archive; a centuries-long history - even if fragile,

By Eric Vautrin

*Not everything that is faced can be changed.
But nothing can be changed until it is faced.*

James Baldwin

As Faustin Linyekula often says, the circle should never be taken for granted. Attempting to form one is to shoulder a responsibility. The responsibility of connecting times, histories, beings, the individual and the collective, the destroyed and the new, in the spirit of a shared human history.

Krump is a lively, unbridled dance, filled with a combative, willful energy. It is danced in the centre of a circle formed by dancers and spectators during short sequences lasting a few minutes. Can it reveal the forces that nourish and haunt it? Can it listen to the ghosts of the cultures, histories, and violence of which it is the expression? Can it open itself up to the deep time of the memories that fuel it? Faustin Linyekula asks: can this struggle with life, for life, take the form of a caress?

This project is a gesture of invitation, of transmission, of handover between the two dancers. To complete it, the circle must be closed again – the circle of krump, of the community of the living, the circle that connects past, present and future. One must accept that a performance is the expression of a foreign language that one speaks through oneself, from oneself, and whose translation is never finished or certain.

Text adapted from the article by Brian Seibert, "Faustin Linyekula: Remember His Name (and Country and Past)", published in the *New York Times* on September 5th 2017.

Inventing the future

Talking to dancers one day, Faustin Linyekula briskly summarizes his home country as "quite a messy place" beset by massacres and wars that never really end, where "if 100 people die, it is not news." In such a place, imagining any future, much less a better one, is an exercise of extreme will. "I have to fight for it," he says. "I have to invent it."

His choreographic practice is not a physical technique so much as "a way of thinking about who we are", a form of poetry and storytelling written with the body. "My dance is about who I am," he says.

Fixing the broken circle

Mr. Linyekula grew up in Kisangani, his country's third largest city and the probable model for *A Bend in the River*, V. S. Naipaul's 1979 novel of hellish post-colonial chaos. When Mr. Linyekula was old enough to attend college, Mobutu Sese Seko's government shut down the universities, so he studied in Kenya, tried theater in England, and was introduced to dance-theater by a choreographer from the Ivory Coast.

His worldview is cleareyed about the most terrible facts yet not despairing. "Back in Congo", he says, "we make a circle when we dance." Circles, called cyphers, are the favorite configuration of hip-hop dancers as well, as opposed to that of the proscenium theater, in what the Congolese choreographer calls "the colonial relationship." Circles create and express community, he says. "But that is not the world we live in. The circle is broken, and if we want to make the circle again, we must take responsibility."

Finding history

This idea of responsibility often returns in Faustin Linyekula's declarations. "What do we receive from those who walked here before us, and what do we pass on?" he asks.

"When you look at the history of my country," he says, "it seems that because of the rupture of colonialism, all the old ways of recording history were broken. And the Western way — written history — doesn't go back very far."

So when Mr. Linyekula enters a museum, he is "in search of a broken piece of history." Earlier this year [2017], invited by the Metropolitan to interact with its collection of art from the Kingdom of Kongo (a historical category broader than current borders), he discovered a

piece that had never been exhibited. It was from the Lengola people, his mother's tribe. This discovery prompted him to make a journey with his mother to her father's village, where she had not been since 1975. "I didn't know the history of my family past my grandfather, but now we know seven generations back," he says. "It's about putting my body where it will say what it knows, the things in my genes that connect me to generations past. That history may be broken, but it's not lost, either."

The responsibility of beauty

"My name is Dinozord," says a young dancer whose solo ends one of Faustin Linyekula's pieces, *Sur les traces de Dinozord* (2012). The solo makes space for the individual; it dreams of the future. The hip-hop in it speaks to the genre's global reach, but it's not a coincidence that the section resembles the choreographer's method, his mission, showcasing his performers through what they are, what they know and what they carry inside them. "It's about building an army of people who question and are ready to take responsibility," says Faustin Linyekula. "It's about those who can take over, those who can continue."

The article can be read in full [here](#).

Text adapted from the urban dance dictionary of [Sans Luxe](#).

Krump is a dance that derives from clowning, a hip hop dance movement started by Tommy the Clown in the 1990s. Tommy used to perform at birthday parties in the ghettos of Los Angeles. His mission was to encourage children to dance, in order to preserve them from street gangs and drug-related violence in the wake of the 1992 race riots.

Around 1999-2000, a group of clowning practitioners created a new dance inspired by their practice. They called it “krump”, which stands for *Kingdom Radically Uplifted Mighty Praise*. The emergence of this movement and dance was chronicled by David La Chapelle in the acclaimed documentary *Rize*.

Krump is a dance inspired by the highly expressive and energetic movements of clowning, African dances and rituals, and the frenetic body language of certain MCs such as Busta Rhymes. The dancers use passion and emotion to tell a story, mainly by using their arms (*talking hand, jab, swing, etc.*), their feet (*stomp*), their chest (*chest pop*) and their posture. The way in which these movements are arranged depends mainly on the style of the dancer. In fact, it is common for krumpers to create several characters who each dance in a specific style. Although krump was originally danced to hip hop music, several DJs (J-Squad, MORFMUZIK, Big Rulez, etc.) started to create music with repeating loops, which are easier for krumpers to work with. An element particular to krump is animosity. It is common and accepted in krump events for there to be physical contact between participants. However, even though krump seems to be an aggressive dance, it is in fact a way of expressing emotions and resolving conflicts without the need to resort to aggression or violence.

ABOUT FAUSTIN LINYEKULA



Mal nommer les choses (2007), a documentary by Benjamin Bibas, produced by Radiofonies Europe. An attempt to showcase Faustin Linyekula's dance in his own words.



My Body, My Archive (2020), an online performance from the Tate Modern in London.



Danser sur un tas de ruines: portrait de Faustin Linyekula, chorégraphe congolais, a radio portrait by Guillaume Baldy, France Culture, Sur les Docks, 2010.



Interview with Faustin Linyekula, nespecially concerning his show Banata, for the Festival de Marseille, 2021.



Artist talk examining the overarching themes of Faustin Linyekula's work, followed by a performance by the artist, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 2011.



An interview about the future, from the Livable Futures series, by Nora Zuniga Shaw, 2021.

[And a bibliography](#) on the work of Faustin Linyekula and “postcolonial African performance” by New York University.

ABOUT MAMU TSHI



Portrait de Mamu Tshi in Néo Géo Nova, a podcast by Radio Nova, 2021.



Portrait de Mamu Tshi in MOVES by Tataki on the RTS, 2019.



Krump Dance Video (2021) by Mamu Tshi, on Mo Money Mo Problems by Notorious B.I.G., Puff Daddy and Mase.



Motherland (2020) by Mamu Tshi.

[And a portrait of Mamu Tshi on Heidi News, 2021](#): « La danse urbaine n'a pas attendu la crise pour souffrir d'un manque de revenus. »

FAUSTIN LINYEKULA

A dancer, choreographer and director, Faustin Linyekula lives and works in Kisangani (Democratic Republic of Congo). After training in literature and theatre in Kisangani, he moved to Nairobi in 1993, and in 1997 founded the first contemporary dance company in Kenya, the Gàara Company. Back in Kinshasa in June 2001, he set up a structure for dance and visual theatre, a place for exchange, research and creation: the Kabako Studios. With his company, Linyekula is the author of more than fifteen plays that have been presented on the biggest stages and festivals in Europe, North and South America, Australia and Africa. His collaborations include a production for the Comédie Française (*Bérénice*, 2009), a creation for the Ballet de Lorraine (*La Création du monde 1923-2012*, 2012), and a solo for a dancer of the National Ballet of Portugal. Linyekula has also created performances for museums: the MOMA in New York (2012), the MUCEM in Marseille (2016), the Metropolitan Museum (2017) or the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren (2018). He regularly teaches in Africa and the United States. In 2007, Linyekula was awarded the Grand Prize of the Prince Claus Foundation for Culture and Development. Since 2007, Linyekula's work and approach have been based in the city of Kisangani, where Kabako Studios supports the training, production and touring of young Congolese artists in the field of performing arts, but also in video and music. In 2014, Linyekula and Kabako Studios were awarded the first prize of the American Curry Stone Foundation for the work developed in Kisangani and in particular in the Lubunga district among its different communities. In 2016, within the framework of the Artista Na Cidade biennial, Linyekula was an associate artist of the city of Lisbon, for which he received the medal of artistic merit. From September 2018 and for three seasons, he was associated with Le Manège - Scène nationale de Reims in France. In 2019, he was associate artist of the Holland Festival in Amsterdam. In Vidy, he presented *Congo*, a trio for singer, actor and dancer based on the book of the same name by Éric Vuillard in 2019. A series of films about young African artists, *Lettres du continent*, which he created with Virginie Dupray during the 2020 pandemic, was presented by Vidy in autumn 2020. In 21/22, he led the cycle *Imaginaires des futurs possibles* with the dramaturg Claire de Ribaupierre, an initiative bringing together artists, scientists and audiences, instigated by Vidy and the Centre in Sustainability of the University of Lausanne.



I am known as a dancer and choreographer, but I like to say that I am a storyteller, telling my stories through words, dance, still and moving images. I live and work in Kisangani, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, ex-Zaire, ex-Belgian Congo, ex-Congo Free State, private property of Leopold II, King of the Belgians. In 2001, after eight years of travelling and working around the world, I returned to the ruins of my country and founded Kabako Studios in Kinshasa, initially as a space for theatre and dance. When, six years later, we moved to Kisangani, in the east of the DRC, Kabako Studios opened up to music and film, because freeing ourselves from the colonial gaze to shape our lives in our own way is the first step towards a future our children can be proud of. And for this, no creative energy should be left behind, whatever its artistic form. Kabako Studios has therefore become a refuge for young Congolese and African artists, offering them long-term support, from training to production and touring.

-Faustin Linyekula

MAMU TSHI

Mamu Tshi was born in the Congo and moved from there to Lausanne, where she now lives and works. She was attracted to urban dance from an early age and is now one of the world's elite krump dancers: in 2020 and 2021, she was awarded the title of "Dancer of the Year" in this discipline. Freestyle dance, which is powerful, expressive and liberating, is part of the street dance movement and is considered, among other things, as an artistic response to the systematic oppression of certain groups and their ensuing frustration. These energetic, hip-hop influenced battles are usually performed in public spaces by different crews. Mamu Tshi has been involved in urban dance for a long time, before performing for the first time in 2019 at the Théâtre Sévelin 36 as part of the "Quarts d'Heure", a platform for young choreographers. The same theatre then invited her to develop her solo *Womb: Entrailles* as an associate artist, for a premiere in spring 2023. With her piece *L'Héritière*, Mamu Tshi also completes the international trio Portraits in Otherness commissioned by the Akram Khan Company for a tour in Switzerland (Steps festival). In parallel and together with the "Swiss Krump Movement" collective and the Warriorz, pioneers of krump in Switzerland, she transmits this culture by organising workshops and other community events. However, a lack of resources has led her to initiate a project for the inclusion of urban and underground artistic cultures and practices in the Swiss cultural landscape, CAaUSE, Centre d'Arts Alternatif et Urbain Suisse Émergent (Centre for Swiss Emerging Alternative and Urban Arts). At Vidy, she was assistant choreographer on, and performer in, *Sous influence* by Nina Negri in 2021.



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