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| Samba, Chéri (1956--) |
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| Congolese painter Chéri Samba, also known as Samba wa Mbimba N’zinga Nuni Masi Ndo Mbasi, né David Samba, is one of the most well-known contemporary African artists, known for his bright color palette, use of text, and ribald commentary on Congolese and European society and politics. Samba was born in Kinto M’Vuila, a small village in the Bas-Congo province in 1956. In 1972 he left his village for Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Kinshasa, Samba found work as a sign painter and comic strip artist, apprenticing himself to painters who had studios along Avenue Kasa Vubu. He soon opened his own studio on Avenue Kasa Vubu, and befriended other artists and sign painters, such as Moke, Mass, Bodo and Chéri Chérin. This group of artists produced work now known as ‘Zairian Popular Painting’. These painters worked in a direct, figurative style, and prioritised subjects related to everyday life in Kinshasa. In the 1980s Chéri Samba lived and worked in Europe for several short periods of time, broadening his subject from everyday Kinshasa to include European society. Samba frequently addresses gender relations, sexual health, and local policies, acting as a moral commentator on society both in Kinshasa and in Europe. |
| Congolese painter Chéri Samba, also known as Samba wa Mbimba N’zinga Nuni Masi Ndo Mbasi, né David Samba, is one of the most well-known contemporary African artists, known for his bright color palette, use of text, and ribald commentary on Congolese and European society and politics. Samba was born in Kinto M’Vuila, a small village in the Bas-Congo province in 1956. In 1972 he left his village for Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Kinshasa, Samba found work as a sign painter and comic strip artist, apprenticing himself to painters who had studios along Avenue Kasa Vubu. He soon opened his own studio on Avenue Kasa Vubu, and befriended other artists and sign painters, such as Moke, Mass, Bodo and Chéri Chérin. This group of artists produced work now known as ‘Zairian Popular Painting’. These painters worked in a direct, figurative style, and prioritised subjects related to everyday life in Kinshasa. In the 1980s Chéri Samba lived and worked in Europe for several short periods of time, broadening his subject from everyday Kinshasa to include European society. Samba frequently addresses gender relations, sexual health, and local policies, acting as a moral commentator on society both in Kinshasa and in Europe.  File: Samba-Cheri-pigozzi-collection-402.jpg  Figure 1 Quel avenir pour notre art? (N° 1/3). First painting of a triptique. Chéri Samba. (1997)  Acrylic and glitter on canvas  Source: <http://caacart.com/pigozzi-artist.php?i=Samba-Cheri&m=46&s=402>  Samba became especially popular because of his use of text written in both French and Lingala (the two official languages in Kinshasa) in his paintings, influenced by his early work as a comic strip artist. As his career progressed, Samba began to more frequently feature himself in his paintings, positioning himself as a reporter of events rather than as a main character. In his triptych ‘Quel Avenir Pour Notre Art?’ (*What future for our art?*), for example, Samba questions the role of African art and of the African artist in the West. Across three panels Samba shows the parallel trajectories of himself and Picasso, who bring their canvases to the Modern Art Museum (in a building recognisable as the Pompidou Centre). In the third panel, Samba is seen in a crowd outside of the museum still holding a canvas on which is written ‘Cheri Samba’s pop painting will only be accepted here and in other museums starting in 1989’, the year Pompidou hosted *Magiciens de la terre*. With his characteristic bright colors, captions and comic-style text bubbles, Samba critiques the euro-centrality of the art world and its appropriation of African art without fully accepting it into its museums.  File: Samba-Cheri-pigozzi-collection-403.jpg  Figure 2 Quel avenir pour notre art? (N° 2/3). Chéri Samba. (1997) Acrylic and glitter on canvas  Source: <http://caacart.com/pigozzi-artist.php?i=Samba-Cheri&m=46&s=403>  Indeed, Samba began to earn international attention after his paintings were included in the 1989 exhibition *Magiciens de la terre* at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, an exhibition meant to bring attention to contemporary art outside of Europe and the United States. Subsequent international exhibitions included *Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art* at the Center for African Art in New York in 1991, *Africa Remix* in 2005, which traveled to Germany, France, England and Tokyo, and the 2007 Venice Biennale.  File: Samba-Cheri-pigozzi-collection-404.jpg  Figure 3 Quel avenir pour notre art? (N° 3/3). Chéri Samba. (1997) Acrylic and glitter on canvas  Source: <http://caacart.com/pigozzi-artist.php?i=Samba-Cheri&m=46&s=404> |
| Further reading:  (Jewsiewicki)  (Magnin)  (Samba, Chéri Samba: A Restrospective)  (Samba, Chéri Samba: Musée national des arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie, 14 mai-18 août 1997)  (Simon and Duran) |