

DOORS OF PERCEPTION

When Shelter Doesn't Have To Have a Concrete Roof

October 18, 2014



Studios Kabako, a dance company from Africa, is the winner of this year's 2014 **Curry Stone Design Prize**, an important international award. Using dance, theater, and music, Studios Kabako help local communities envision positive alternatives in a city that has known devastating armed conflict over many years. The company has pioneered a form of development that is based on social creativity rather than real estate plays.

Based in Kinsangani, the Congolese performance and theater studio was founded by Faustin Linyekula in 2001 to address social memory, fear, and hope in the aftermath of civil war. During a decade of urban interventions and cultural activities, the studio has enabled a flourishing ecosystem of dance activities. Studios Kabako are pioneers of a new way to practice 'rebuilding' that's based far more on human energy than on pouring concrete.

"Many world regions face terrible fratricidal wars" explained Emiliano Gandolfi, director of the Curry Stone Prize. "We must learn to envisage an alternative to the culture of destruction". Faustin Linyekula's work demonstrates the remarkable results that can happen when the transformative power of art is applied to the ways we practically create a sustainable future.

When Linyekula founded the studio young Congolese people, especially, were living without hope - too preoccupied by daily survival to imagine an alternative. As recounted by the renowned theater and opera director, Peter Sellars, "Faustin is training a generation of kids to challenge everything about their surroundings. He has created an energy among youth in Kisangani that insists on moving forward. His work is never self-pitying, there's always this alertness, this awakens, that has the spirit of challenge in it. It refuses to say 'Oh, poor Africa.' It says, 'OK, pull your life together. Lift your own game'."

As a platform, Studios Kabako is light and mobile. Although the studio maintains studios in the city centre, it takes its work to the rural fringes and to vacant areas of Kisangani in the form of mobile performances. Studio Kabako is currently working on plans for more facilities within the city that combine environmentally friendly technologies, communal living systems and new educational models, all of which are unprecedented in this region.

"Culture is one of the most powerful means of providing a shelter for a community. That shelter doesn't have to be a concrete roof." Synthesized Suad Amiry, founder of RIWAQ, winner of the CSDP award in 2012, and member of this year's jury.

(The author, John Thackara, was also a member of the jury).