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Biennale de Lubumbashi — #9 — 2026 — manger la terre

#9

Recreating the soil

15.10 - 15.11 - 2026
Lubumbashi / DRC

BIENNALE DE
LUBUMBASHI

A Picha initiative

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9th Biennale de Lubumbashi Proposes "Eating the Soil" to Re-imagine Global Extractivism, Memory, and Ecological Crisis

LUBUMBASHI, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) — September 29, 2029 — The Biennale de Lubumbashi proudly announces its 9th edition, unfolding under the profound and provocative theme: **"Eating the Soil / Manger la terre" (*Kukuria bulongo*)**. Under the artistic direction of **Sorana Munsya**, this year's program positions the Biennale as a critical testing ground for artistic "indiscipline" and fugitivity—discovering alternative paths for existence, creativity, and transcendence from present-day global challenges.

Our soil, water, bodies, and imaginations carry the heavy remnants of history and industrial impact. Rather than focusing on an impossible return to a pure state, this edition explores our collective ability to generate new knowledge, memory, and life forms from an already altered environment. The thematic concept draws deeply from the profound legacy of the late Congolese philosopher **Valentin-Yves Mudimbe**.

Over its 18-year history, the Biennale has grown into one of the most vital, independent spaces for contemporary artistic reflection on the African continent. Its vibrant nature stems precisely from the dialogue generated between local realities and international perspectives.

Artists from diverse backgrounds have been invited to take part in this edition, including **Soñ Gweha, Chimurenga, Félix Shumba, Kris Verdonck, Christ Mukenge, Lydia Schellhammer, Sandra Mujinga, Victor Gama, Carl Kabila, Melisa Kayowa, William Kentridge, and Kevin Kabambi**, among others.

Activating the Archives: A Space for Knowledge Production

Artistic Director **Sorana Munsya** reflects on how accessing Valentin-Yves Mudimbe's personal library at the University of Lubumbashi shifted the structural intent of the event.

"Mudimbe became an important interlocutor for the Biennale because his work asks a fundamental question: through which categories has Africa been made knowable? The library encouraged us to think of the Biennale itself as a space of knowledge production, rather than simply a space for presenting artworks. The artists in this edition approach territory, history, memory, extraction, bodies and archives from very different positions. They do not offer one new definition of Africa. Instead, they complicate inherited ways of seeing and create other forms of knowledge."

Munsya also stresses the significance of the city of Lubumbashi to the biennale and the Picha Collective.

“The significance of Lubumbashi is precisely that the Biennale has been built from within the city, by artists and cultural workers, and has sustained itself independently over almost two decades. Picha has not only organized exhibitions; it has gradually built an ecosystem of artists, producers, technicians, curators, researchers and other cultural practitioners. This creates a perspective that is deeply rooted in Lubumbashi while remaining connected to international artistic conversations. For me, the question is what becomes possible when international networks encounter an artistic ecosystem that has developed on its own terms, from its own territory and histories.”

A Milestone 18 Years: Launch of the *Catalogue Raisonné*

Marking nearly two decades of independent cultural production, **Sammy Baloji**, Congolese artist and co-founder of the Lubumbashi Biennale and the Picha collective, announced a landmark publication. “Indeed, the 9th edition of the Lubumbashi Biennale marks 18 years in which the Lubumbashi Biennale and the Picha collective have been working to foster creative, critical and structural synergies between the local and international scenes,” said Baloji. “To mark this occasion, in collaboration with the University Press of KU Leuven, researchers Aude Tournaye, Filip De Boeck and the Picha collective have just published a ‘catalogue raisonné’ entitled: *A City in Practice: The Lubumbashi Biennale 2008–2024*.”

Baloji emphasizes that the edition takes the literal and metaphorical “hole” caused by the region’s mining industry as a starting point for a restorative relationship with the environment. The theme aligns directly with major global crises, including extraction, resource wars, neo-capitalist expansion, xenophobia, and racism.

Moving Beyond the “Epistemology of the Hole”

The historical context of *Kukuria bulongo* traces back centuries to the region’s **Copper Eaters**—communities that cultivated an intimate, spiritual, and cosmological relationship with mineral deposits long before colonial extraction. In this context, taking from the earth was an act of ingestion and continuity; the earth enters the body to become memory. While a century of industrial mining has left behind a landscape of craters, contaminated soils, and poisoned waters, the Biennale challenges the global art world to look beyond an “**epistemology of the hole**”—a regime of knowledge that defines the Congo only by its lacks, absences, and what has been violently stolen from it.

Co-founder of the biennale and the Picha Collective and artist **Jean Katambayi** addresses this paradoxical extraction through his own artistic practice with electricity, technology, and personal history:

“We are trying as the Biennale of Lubumbashi to keep that contact between the landscape of Lubumbashi and the rest of the world. Congo and Lubumbashi, we were providing a lot of material to the world for deployment—copper, cobalt, coltan, lithium, gold, diamond—without ourselves profiting. It is a scandal. We are just eating maybe not only the earth, but the dust from the earth because the real earth is providing research, wealth, and technology to other people. Maybe after we find the right organization, philosophy, and good sense for ourselves, we could easily eat the *bulongo* (the earth) in a sense of positivity.”

By asking what grows around, circulates through, and remains beyond the mining craters and environmental poison, the 9th Biennale de Lubumbashi stands as a resilient ecosystem of artists, producers, technicians, and researchers deeply rooted in the DRC while leading international contemporary art conversations

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About the Biennale de Lubumbashi & Picha:

Founded as an independent grassroots initiative in **2008**, the Biennale de Lubumbashi and the **Picha** collective—also established in **2008**—support and showcase artistic creation in the Democratic Republic of Congo. By building a sustainable local ecosystem of curators, researchers, and practitioners, Picha connects local realities with global networks, establishing crucial reflections on urban spaces, colonial legacies, and contemporary ecological realities

