



## THE QUICK + THE BRAVE

### TRANSCRIPT:

#### Inspired Flight 004

#### Aristote Mago

You're listening to the podcast The Quick + The Brave.  
Welcome to Inspired Flight. The podcast is in French.

In collaboration with the Prince Claus Fund, the Inspired Flight series tells the stories of hundreds of contemporary artists from around the world who have received the Prince Claus Seed Awards.

Recorded live at the Gashouder in Amsterdam, we talk to five Seed Awards exhibitors at the Unfair22 art festival about their work and performance on the art scene.

#### TQTB:

Hello, everyone. Welcome to The Quick + The Brave podcast.

I am Marie-Anne and today we are at Unfair22, it is a festival in Amsterdam that brings together contemporary artists from all over the world. For the occasion we are here for the Inspired Flight series in collaboration with the Prince Claus Fund.

I have the great pleasure of introducing Aristote MAGO. Today he talks to us about his art and the representation in art as a visual artist from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

So welcome, Aristote, it's a pleasure to have you here today.

**Aristote:** Thank you very much. I'm also happy to introduce myself in this space.

**TQTB:** Perfect, then Aristote, you are a visual artist and you work mainly with the textile. I really want to talk to you about your art and your development as an artist. Let's start. How did you develop your craft as an artist in the beginning?

**Aristote:** As they say... you don't become an artist, you are born an artist. While I was small, passionate about art, passionate about drawing classes, I finally after my primary school education, it was necessary for me to go to an art school to learn a certain art language, and its codes in its generality.

**TQTB:** How did you start? Now you work mostly with textiles, but has that always been the case?



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**Aristote:** Yes, actually the problem is that during my studies at the Academy of Fine Arts, I was a sculptor by training. It was a question for me to be able to put something new in the space of art since one must mark one's time, one's time.

I think when I was a kid, there was looting in the capital of Zaire today, Democratic Republic of Congo. When I finished my studies, I remembered my past and I revived my history. During the looting the crisis really hit my family, so my grandmother sold bags just for the survival of the family and I accompanied her to the market. When she was no longer strong, I had to take over to continue the same rhythm of survival, to take care of the family.

When I came of age after the Academy of Fine Arts, I said no, my story is quite interesting, I have to recharge my batteries, reconnect to my story to raise awareness about the world as a whole. It should not be forgotten that at the moment we live there are people who live with great difficulty.

They can't figure out a way out, they can't even think about a solution for their survival. My case was the same. I fought hard to find a way to support my family.

And that's how I took the bag that was really the building block for my family's survival. I am doing it today to question society as well, which is botched by import and export. These are issues that really concern my artistic approach.

**TQTB:** Thank you very much for sharing a little of your story. So it has to come from there this motivation to actually create? Can you describe your work to me and what makes you create?

**Aristote:** Yes, creating a work of art is first of all a feeling. If we start creating it, it's because there's a question that needs to be answered visually. I always think to myself in my studio, which is to me like a laboratory that every time an artist commits to create, it's like someone who's researching to develop a drug that's going to treat some disease. My works convey several messages. But in every room, there is a particularity to a need, a question that is posed in society. There's a lot of diversity in my work.

My main themes are based on import and export. I am part of the African continent, where there are several multinationals that come to do their trading, especially for the import and export of raw materials. As an artist and an architect of society, I join this elite to review business codes and our society in general.

Africa has a lot of wealth and we need to know that no one can develop on their own but we will always need the other. When multinationals come to exploit Africa, we must review our codes to find a balance with this export of raw materials.



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Today, multinationals take materials and leave with them, while Africa remains as poor, and that must be said. The population is suffering. And through our art, we try to bring back hope.

We're trying to get this message across all over the world. In a way, our works raise a strong enough alarm that the whole world knows that we Africans are aware that the materials belong to us, and that we must be the first to benefit from them.

**TQTB:** At this festival, you exhibit several pieces of your work. So did you exhibit anywhere other than Unfair22? Can you tell me a little bit of the story behind the works that are here at the festival today?

**Aristote:** Yes many! In addition to this time. I have already exhibited twice at an ACAA fair in Paris. A fair currently led by an artistic director Armelle DAKOUO. We know each other very well because she has one of my pieces in her collection. It was really thanks to her that I was introduced, and also thanks to the collaboration between the fair and the institution in which I am currently working in Kinshasa entitled "Kin Artstudio".

Unfair is really a great opportunity for me as an artist because there, I can say there are several looks, where there are other artists who come from Brazil and so on. This interbreeding is a really good motivation for me. And in relation to the works that are presented here, I think there are some pieces such as one entitled "Overwhelming Throne".

It is also a concern for balance of power and for our African leaders and for Europe in general. I'm trying to see how it works between the two partners. You know that there are some decisions that are being made in Africa. These decisions come from elsewhere. Many people in Africa see that our leaders are really shadows. They're just doing what their superior recommends. And that's how I called this play "Crashing Trone." There you'll see a visual of a gentleman sitting in a chair next to it, a few little chairs being toppled over, telling you that there's a spirit in place that's making sure that Africans are in the position that they're in today.

The other piece I called "Effort." "Effort" is always another way of life in Africa, since survival is not always easy. You have to get up very early to get something to eat. So it's not easy. It's a piece, representing a ball. I see life as a football field to fight for survival in general.

Many people fight every day to find the best for their lives and their descendants. When you look at what's happening around the world and in Africa in particular, you'll see that there are people who are desperate about politics today.



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**TQTB:** Thank you for sharing this explanation of the works because it is really impressive that you mix the jute with the logos of the multinationals that are present in the country. Yes, we can see the presence of these organizations in everyday life.

**Aristote:** It's important, not to lie to you, when you look at Africa in its entirety, you'll see that there are several agencies that are sitting down to deliver aid to Africa.

Africa does not need the aid. Because Africa has fertile soil. We can plant rice, we can plant corn. If we have to eat rice, why bring it from somewhere else?

Know that in life, unless you're extending your hand, that hand that gives you is always dominant over yours.

**TQTB:** Of course, it's an imbalance of power.

Next question: historically excluded communities lack representation in the art scene and in art institutions, so is this lack of representation something you recognize? Is it something that has impacted your ability to create and grow?

**Aristote:** No, in me it has no influence but for other people there has been quite a strong influence. I will speak in my country. Previously, it was 9 years ago 15 years 20 years ago. We didn't really have enough institutions that could showcase the artists.

The institution I entered is an institution run or run by an alumnus of the Academy based here in Holland. This spirit that has it, in itself, has revolutionized a lot of things. And now here, we have a fairly normalized space for creation. We had spaces for the presentation that was more for expatriates, notably the French Institute in Kinshasa for French institutions, there was Wallonia-Brussels for Belgians, and we as Congolese, having local institutions was not easily accessible.

So we tried to change that picture a little bit, it wasn't easy. It was really a great war between these people who come to Africa to set up their institutions, so reversing that spirit was not easy. But we dared anyway. I will tell you the truth sincerely, I never exhibited at the French Institute which was like a space of dreams for all black artists like me.

In the spaces where I'm exhibiting, it's beyond the French Institute. We still refused some offers, which were not bad too, but since we had a goal that was one day to change things, to change the game...

I'm here because of this institute that showed me the way of Prince Claus, and I applied.

I didn't go through a French institution or any other foreign institution; I went through a Congolese institution.



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**TQTB:** Yes, and you actually work with them. I just realized I'm tutoring you in this interview, so I hope it works for you. In fact, for several years now, you've been developing with a community, an organization for local artists. Can you tell me more about that?

**Aristote:** To talk a bit about Kin Artstudio." The Institute has been in existence for 10 years. It used to be in a virtual space, in our dream. It was between 2010-2011 that the institute had a physical space. Since then, several artists have now been there, including Eddy KAMUANGA, who collaborates with "October Gallery" in London.

There is also Francis who has a very beautiful approach. He's a really promising artist because he's here for a reason to study at the Rex Academy. I'm very happy because we were mentored by some of the people we met at the institute.

Today, we do the same work, because there are several people, especially students who come from the Academy to spend their internship. We're trying to give them a little bit of a hand with their experiences. It is a truly renowned structure and one of the great institutions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We have already organized several exhibition projects, such as "Young Congo" which took place in 2017. The aim was to bring together Congolese artists living in the country and its diaspora on the same artistic scene. It was the very first time. We had several successes, we had to write such a strong catalog.

Through this project we told ourselves how to expand it. This is how we came up with the idea of creating a biennial exhibition "Congo Biennale".

"Congo Biennale", the first edition took place in 2019. It was sponsored by a former member of the Academy of Fine Arts. First student of the Academy of Fine Arts of Kinshasa.

**TQTB:** Wow! That's impressive.

**Aristote:** I think he's been dead for about two years. We invited about fifty artists from all over the world. It was for the first edition. It was a really nice experience. We also wrote a catalogue of 2,500 copies. We are now preparing for the second edition.

**TQTB:** Yes, I wanted to ask you how the preparations are progressing and when will it be?

**Aristote:** The second edition will take place between September/October.

The first edition was an observatory edition for some institutions and partners. Since then, several partners have trusted us, because they have seen quality work done by the Congolese. We have catalogs in our libraries that are written by expatriates who have their own eyes. A look that was not that of the Congolese. I am proud to be able to write this



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catalogue with our own eyes, our own identity, as I would like us to be represented in the world.

**TQTB:** It's important. When does the second edition begin?

**Aristote:** It will start on September 16 until October 23.

**TQTB:** Great! So where can we find more information about the Biennale?

**Aristote:** On Instagram, you type "Congo Biennale" and you will have all the information.

**TQTB:** Great! Let's look at Instagram.

So I'm going to move on to the next question. Thank you so much for sharing this story because

building an event from the ground up, a project like that, it's really a form of community. So I wanted to ask you based on the Unfair22 festival we're in now, how do you compare your experience with other shows you've done elsewhere in the past?

**Aristote:** A very beautiful experience. Such a professional experience, as grand as I could imagine. As an artist, you never neglect an invitation. You must be here.

I was very surprised to be able to be present during the construction of the stand. I've seen how technicians work professionally. It's a very beautiful experience for my memory, my career. It's a time I'll never forget. So my name will be inscribed in the thoughts of the Dutch, that there is a Congolese who has passed by here. It's a print that's been marked. And I loved it very much despite the difference of the language, I am happy since my works have spoken a lot in my place. I didn't even have to talk. They understood the codes and developed their reflections by decoding the numbers and elements that were in my paintings.

**TQTB:** it shows the power of art.

**Aristote:** Right. It made me feel confident that art has no boundaries, art has no language. Art has a universal language. Even if the play comes from Bangladesh, for example, because it is presented to a Chinese, he can easily understand it.

**TQTB:** It's important. That's why we connect with art. It's amazing.

My final question for you: as a recipient of the Prince Claus Seed Awards, your work touches on social and political issues. What do you want people to understand about the impact of your work on your own community?



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**Aristote:** Yes, you actually know, on this issue, the community in general and especially Africa in particular know that this is a serious time. We need to be aware of our matter. Especially I insist on this point, that thanks to art, you have the possibility to travel the world and if you are told that this work was created by a material coming from a certain country in Africa, that's really shocking. Africa must develop on its own.

And that's why I didn't look for other mediums or other media. I use the classic canals especially the canvas in general painting. That's normal for me.

In life you have to know how to amaze people in relation to what they already know.

People know about bags, they know about the importance of bags.

And that's mostly a way for me to talk about the importance of protecting our environment. There's plastics being thrown around here, so we really need to be aware of this. Now, I'm talking about the community at large. We need to be aware of the maintenance of plastic for the protection of our environment. There's also something called global warming, which is having a negative effect on our environment.

We need to be aware of that. We need to maintain our environment . If you buy something with the packaging, you have to take good care of it. You can't throw them all over. That would be a pity. As regards the structure, I have not yet given his name. It's called Kin Artstudio. "Kin Artstudio" why? "Kin" for Kinshasa, as Congolese capital, "Art" as art and Studio as artist workshop.

**TQTB:** So it's really day-to-day.

**Aristote:** The institute is led by a former Rex Académie \*\*\*\*\*. Thanks to him, we have benefited from his experience. I was able to have all the experiences he gained at Rex, without being there.

All the strategies seen elsewhere, it allowed him to act, to work professionally. That's what influenced us, too.

**TQTB:** Aristote, Thank you very much. I appreciate having learned a little more about your history and the motivations behind your work, your works too. So if people want to find out more about your work, they can go to Instagram Aristote MAGO. After if you have the opportunity to go to Kinshasa for the "Congo Biennale" in September. I'm jealous. Go ahead and take in all this art.

Thank you again to Aristote for this interview today.



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**Aristote:** It's my turn to thank you. Because it was exciting to be invited into your lab and secretly recount everything that we said in that interview, before we shared it with the media, in print or by video or other media.

They'll understand who Aristote is, and why his presence here. Thank you very much for having me.

**TQTB:** With pleasure.

**TQTB:** Thank you for listening to this first edition of the TQTB podcast in French. I wish you a good day and see you soon.

**Aristote:** Thank you very much Marie-Anne.

Special thanks to Unfair Amsterdam.

Discover contemporary artists at [@unfair\\_amsterdam](#) on Instagram.

Thanks to the Prince Claus Fund for its support of the Inspired Flight series.

Follow the journey on Instagram [@princeclausfund](#) and [@thequickandthebrave](#).

### About TQTB

[The Quick + The Brave](#) is a BIPOC-founded media platform based in Amsterdam that represents, inspires and celebrates community. Our content intentionally centres historical excluded perspectives on culture, inclusivity, sustainability and self-care.

You can call us TQTB for short.

Our mission is to bridge cultural gaps and create fertile ground for creative minds and lives to take root.

TQTB is built to reflect the complex, beautiful, nuanced and intersectional experiences of Black people, people of colour, women and the LGBTQ+ community. We're intentional about centring these perspectives because greater representation in the media gives us the freedom to share our stories. All our content centres on culture, inclusivity, sustainability and self-care.

The Quick + The Brave is an initiative by [The Study Group Foundation](#).