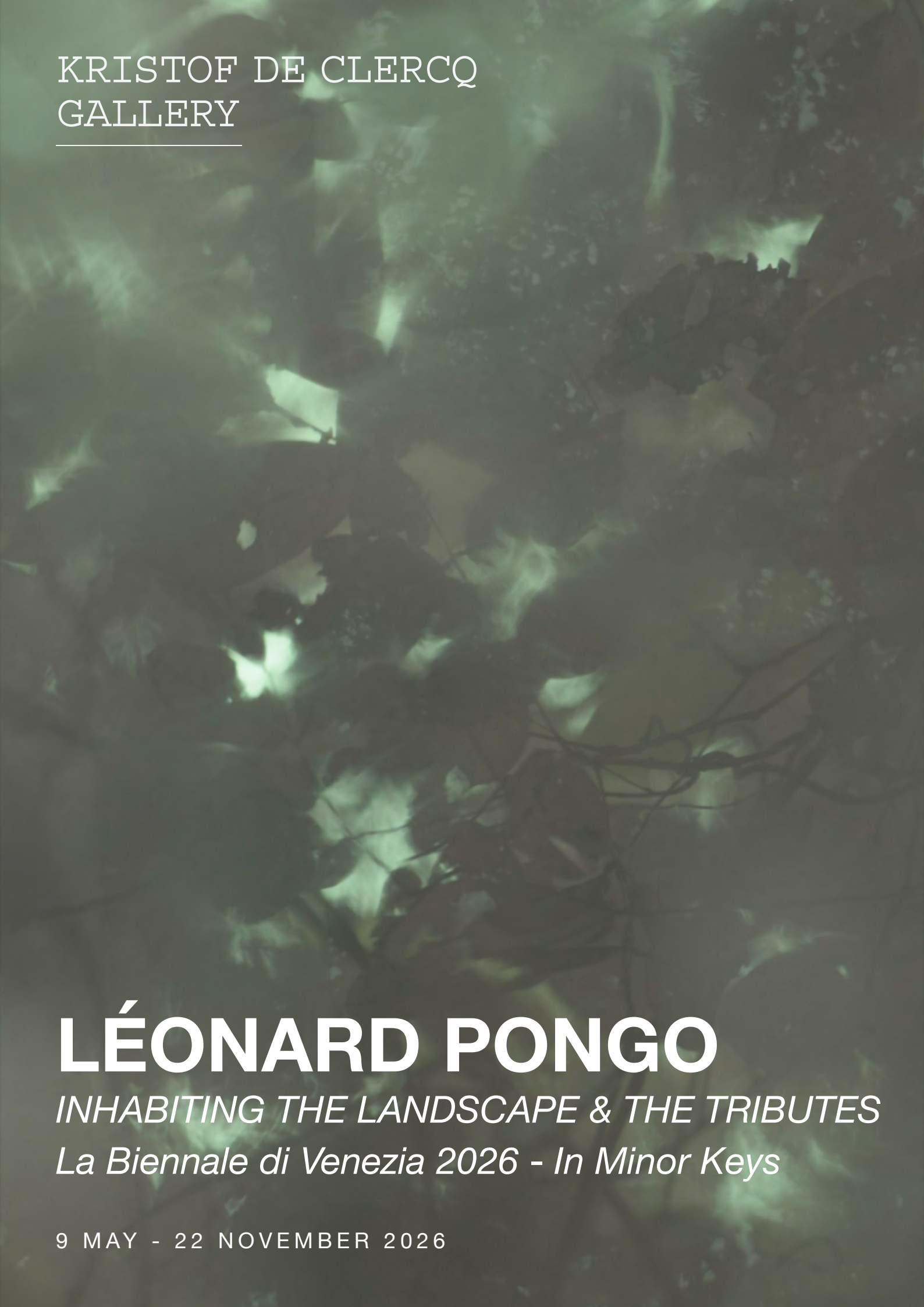




KRISTOF DE CLERCQ
GALLERY

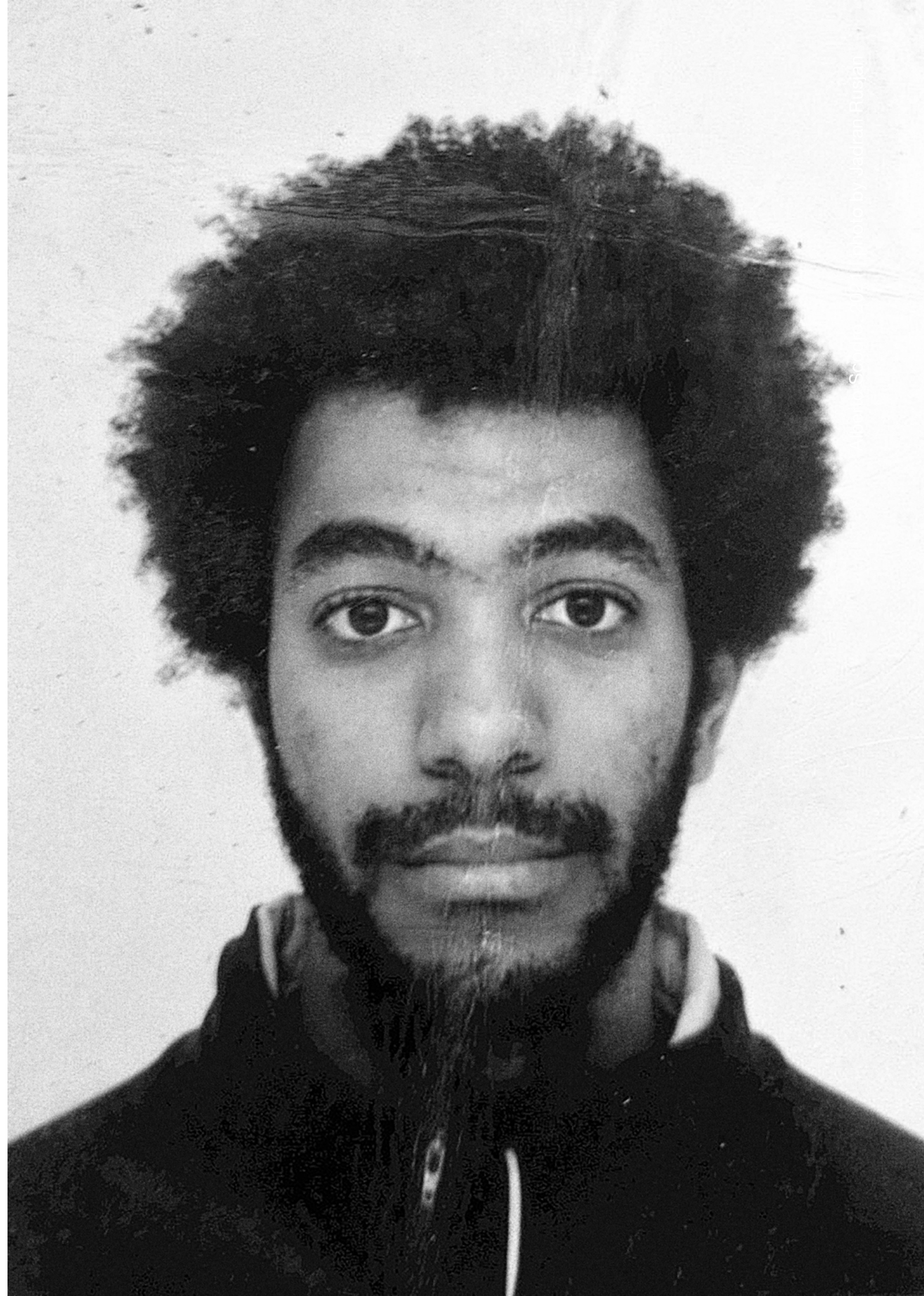
LÉONARD PONGO

INHABITING THE LANDSCAPE & THE TRIBUTES

La Biennale di Venezia 2026 - In Minor Keys

9 MAY - 22 NOVEMBER 2026

LÉONARD PONGO



Léonard Pongo (b. 1988, Liège, Belgium) is a visual artist working between Belgium and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Rooted in the Congolese diaspora, his multidisciplinary practice draws on Congolese land, cultures, philosophies, and crafts — exploring and challenging the complex perceptions of the DRC and the African continent more broadly.

Pongo began his career as a documentary photographer and gradually expanded his approach to incorporate snapshot, diary, and abstract photography, experimenting with printing techniques, moving image, mixed-media installations, and textile. His work weaves allegorical and poetic narratives around identity, place, and transformation. His long-term projects include *The Uncanny*, an exploration of urban Congolese society, and *Primordial Earth*, an ongoing visual and conceptual investigation of the DRC's landscapes that constructs an allegorical narrative about creation, apocalypse, and the enduring power of the natural world.

Primordial Earth received the CAP International Prize for Contemporary African Photography (2023), was shown at Tate Modern as part of *A World in Common* (2023–24), and formed the basis of solo exhibitions at Bozar (Brussels, 2021) and Mu.ZEE (Ostend, 2022), among others. In 2025, his work was shown at the Jeu de Paume (Paris) and at the Cantor Arts Center, Stanford University. Roger Ballen personally selected him as one of the *Future Greats 2025* in *ArtReview*. His first monograph, *The Uncanny*, was published by Gost Books in 2023.

His work is held in public and private collections worldwide, including Mu.ZEE, KANAL – Centre Pompidou, the Cera Collection at M Leuven, FOMU via the collection of the Flemish Community, the Chazen Museum of Art (United States), the Sindika Dokolo Foundation (Angola), Fondation H (Madagascar/France), the Ekard Collection, and the Collection of Friends of S.M.A.K.

Léonard Pongo

Untitled (*The Uncanny*), 2011-17

Archival ink on baryta paper

165 x 110 cm (edition of 3 + 2 AP)

60 x 40 cm (edition of 7 + 2 AP)





Léonard Pongo

Untitled (*The Uncanny*), 2011-17

Archival ink on baryta paper

165 x 110 cm (edition of 3 + 2 AP)

60 x 40 cm (edition of 7 + 2 AP)

Léonard Pongo

Untitled (*Primordial Earth*), 2022

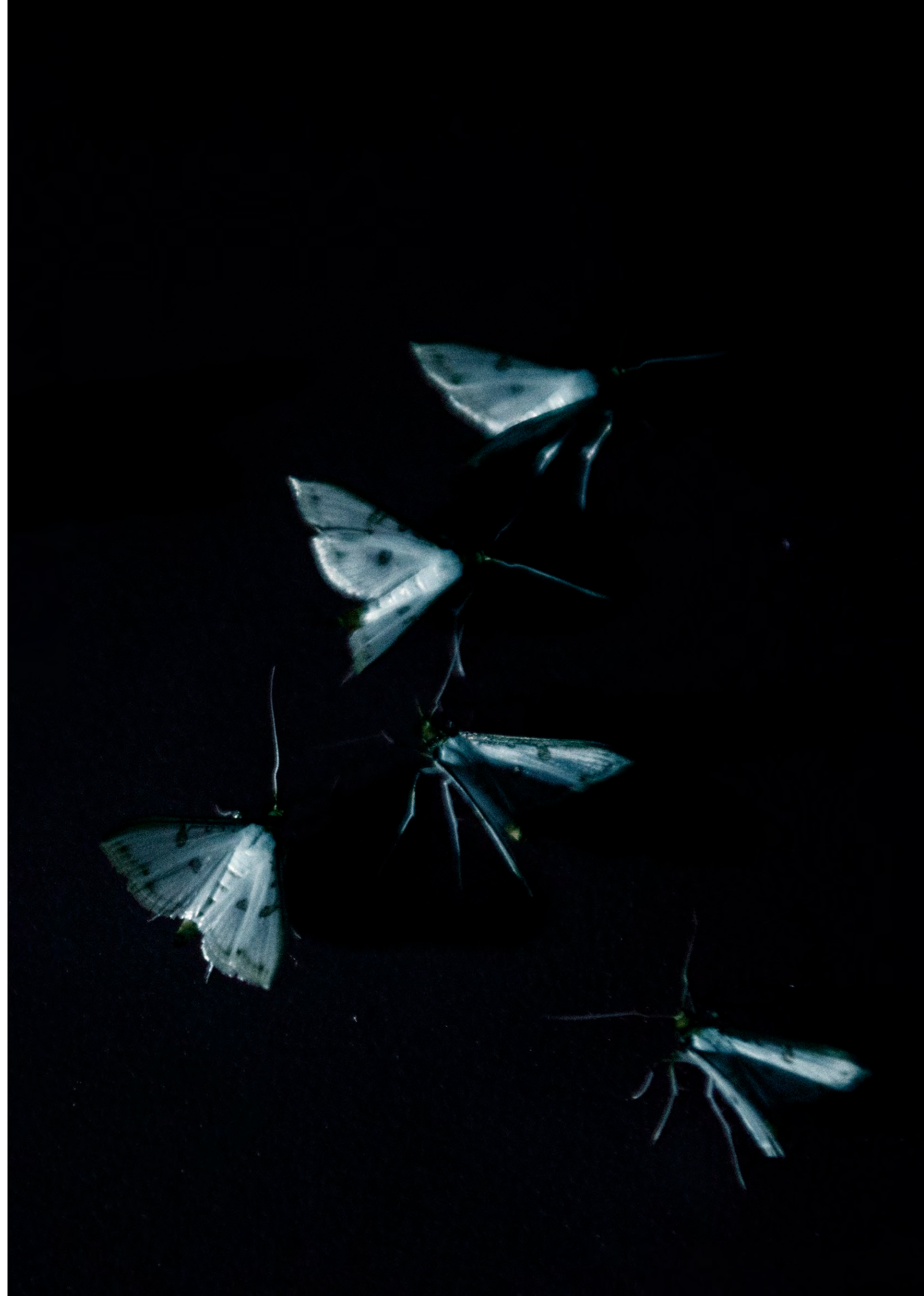
UV print on brushed aluminium glued on dibond

180 x 120 cm (edition of 6 + 2 AP)

Giclée print on Hahnemuhle Fine Art Matt Ultrasmooth

60 x 40 cm (edition of 7 + 2 AP)

45 x 30 cm (edition of 7 + 2 AP)





Léonard Pongo

Untitled (*Primordial Earth*), 2022

Giclée print on Hahnemuhle Fine Art Matt Ultrasmooth

165 x 110 cm (edition of 6 + 2 AP)

105 x 70 cm (edition of 7 + 2 AP)

IN MINOR KEYS



For the *61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia*, Pongo has been invited to *In Minor Keys* — the central exhibition, presented at the Arsenale in Venice from 9 May to 22 November 2026. The exhibition was conceived by the late Cameroonian-Swiss curator Koyo Kouoh (1967–2025), and is being realised in her spirit by the curatorial team she assembled.

In Minor Keys brings together artists whose practices engage with alternative visual genealogies, with the knowledge systems and landscapes that dominant art histories have long rendered inaudible or invisible. Within this context, Pongo's work — rooted in Congolese cosmology, in the relationship between land, memory, and spiritual transmission — resonates deeply with the exhibition's central inquiry: how do we listen to what has been suppressed, and how do we find form for what exceeds the visible?

INHABITING THE LANDSCAPE &
THE TRIBUTES
— ARSENALE



Léonard Pongo, *The Tributes*, 2026, installation for *In Minor Keys* the central exhibition of *La Biennale di Venezia* at Arsenale

Pongo presents two large-scale immersive installations, *Inhabiting the Landscape* and *The Tributes*, at the Arsenale. Together they develop his long-standing research into landscape, memory, and spirituality within Congolese cosmologies — traditions in which the earth is understood not as backdrop but as a living carrier of knowledge, ancestry, and cyclical time.

INHABITING THE LANDSCAPE



The first installation is a black-box environment with prints on aluminum, semi-transparent voile panels and a projected video work moving between visible and invisible Congolese landscapes. The projection reflects across a mirrored floor and onto the aluminum photo prints, so that visitors physically move within the image itself — becoming, in a literal sense, part of the work.

The installation investigates how landscape is experienced not only visually but also bodily and spiritually, and how memory operates within that encounter. Light, material, and movement are orchestrated to produce a state of immersion that refuses the conventional boundary between viewer and image.



Video still from Léonard Pongo, *Primordial Earth: Inhabiting the Landscape*, 2021, HD digital video, colour, 8:26 min / loop, edition of 7 + 3 AP







Léonard Pongo, *Mountain Study #8 (Primordial Earth)*, 2020, UV print on brushed aluminium glued on dibond, 120 x 180 cm, edition of 6 plus 2 AP



Léonard Pongo, *Inhabiting the Landscape*, 2026, installation for *In Minor Keys* the central exhibition of the 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia at Arsenale



Léonard Pongo, *Inhabiting the Landscape*, 2026, installation for *In Minor Keys* the central exhibition of *La Biennale di Venezia* at Arsenale

THE TRIBUTES



Léonard Pongo, *The Tributes*, 2026, installation for *In Minor Keys* the central exhibition of *La Biennale di Venezia* at Arsenale

The second installation draws on Pongo's personal family history — referencing his grandmother, Tshibola — and on the symbolism of the banana tree in Kasai epistemology, where it figures as a marker of cyclical time and ancestral continuity. The work combines a jacquard tapestry, which carries an image on one side and its negative on the reverse, with a sculpture assembled from printed and hand-painted glass mirrors evoking the shape of a banana tree.

All elements depict objects tied to Pongo's ancestral land, yet present them in a fragmented and deliberately unfaithful way. Landscape appears here not as a stable referent but as a living, ever-changing entity — one that simultaneously holds and exceeds personal and collective memory. The installation functions as an interface between the physical and the spiritual, drawing on the Lulua traditions documented by researcher Clémentine Faïk-Nzuji, in which reality exists on multiple simultaneous levels.

Together, the two works position landscape not as setting but as active spiritual presence: something that reflects, transmits, and remembers.



Léonard Pongo, *The Tributes*, 2026; Installation for *In Minor Keys* the central exhibition of *La Biennale di Venezia* at Arsenale



Léonard Pongo

Tribute to Tshibola, 2026

sculptural installation combining 40 printed and handpainted glass mirrors

450 x 250 x 200 cm (installation) / (40x) 30 x 20 cm (mirrors) / 50 kg (edition of 3 plus 2 AP)

260 x 90 x 50 cm (installation) / (40x) 15 x 10 cm (mirrors) / 20 kg (edition of 5 + 2 AP)

Léonard Pongo

Tribute to Upemba, 2026

Tapestry with woven Trevira CS, Techno, Linen, Viscose, Merino Wool, Bio Cotton, Kami Paper Yarn, Elirex Silver, Elirex Gold, Fashion Eco. Produced at TextielLab, Tilburg, Netherlands, 2026.

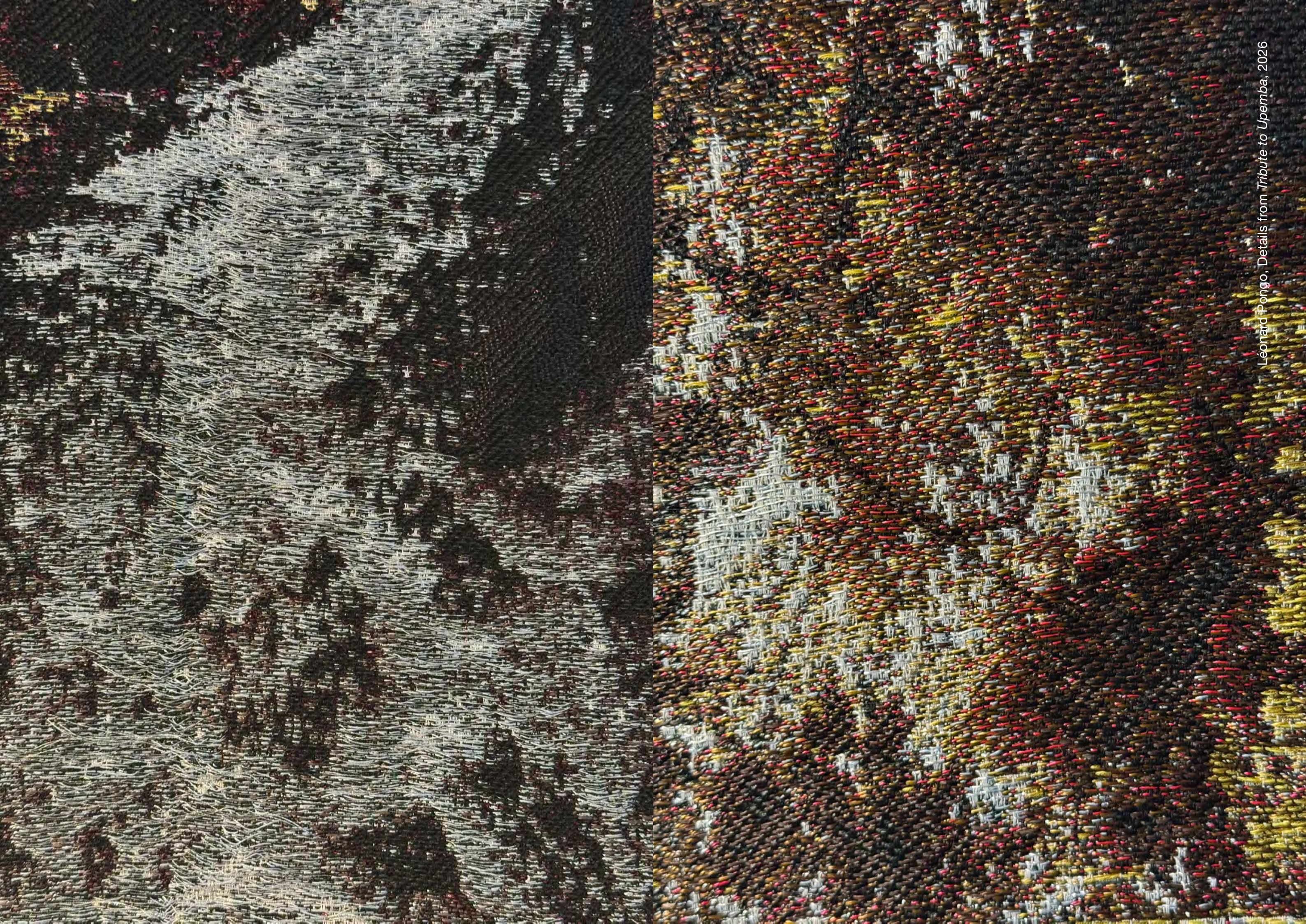
602 x 330 cm (edition of 5 plus 2 AP)

200 x 150 cm (edition of 5 plus 2 AP)



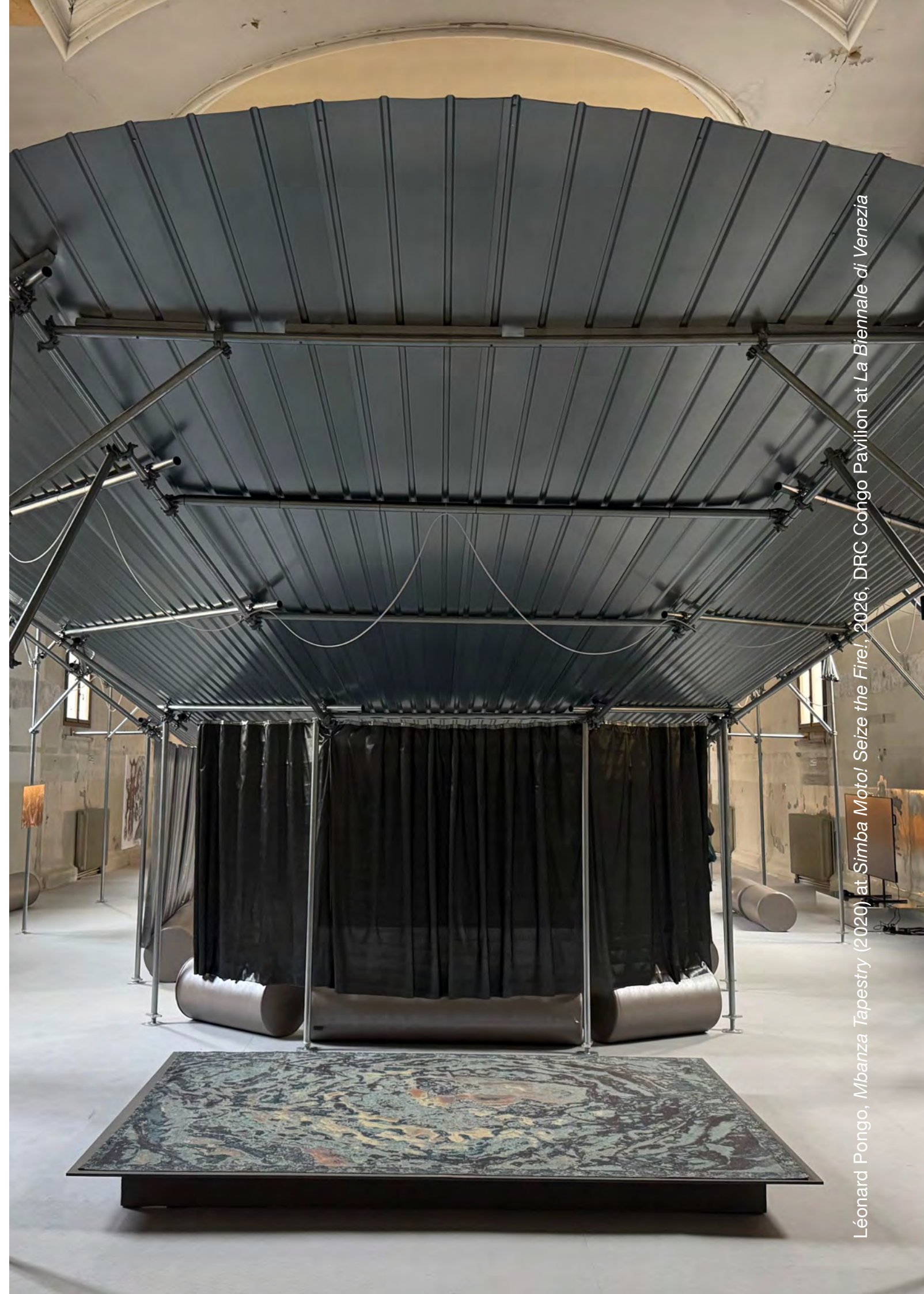


Léonard Pongo working on *Tribute to Upemba* in the TextielLab of TextielMuseum, Tilburg, the Netherlands | photo by Patty van den Elshout commissioned by TextielMuseum



Léonard Pongo, Details from *Tribute to Upemba*, 2026

SIMBA MOTO ! SEIZE THE FIRE !
SAISIS LE FEU !
— DR CONGO PAVILION



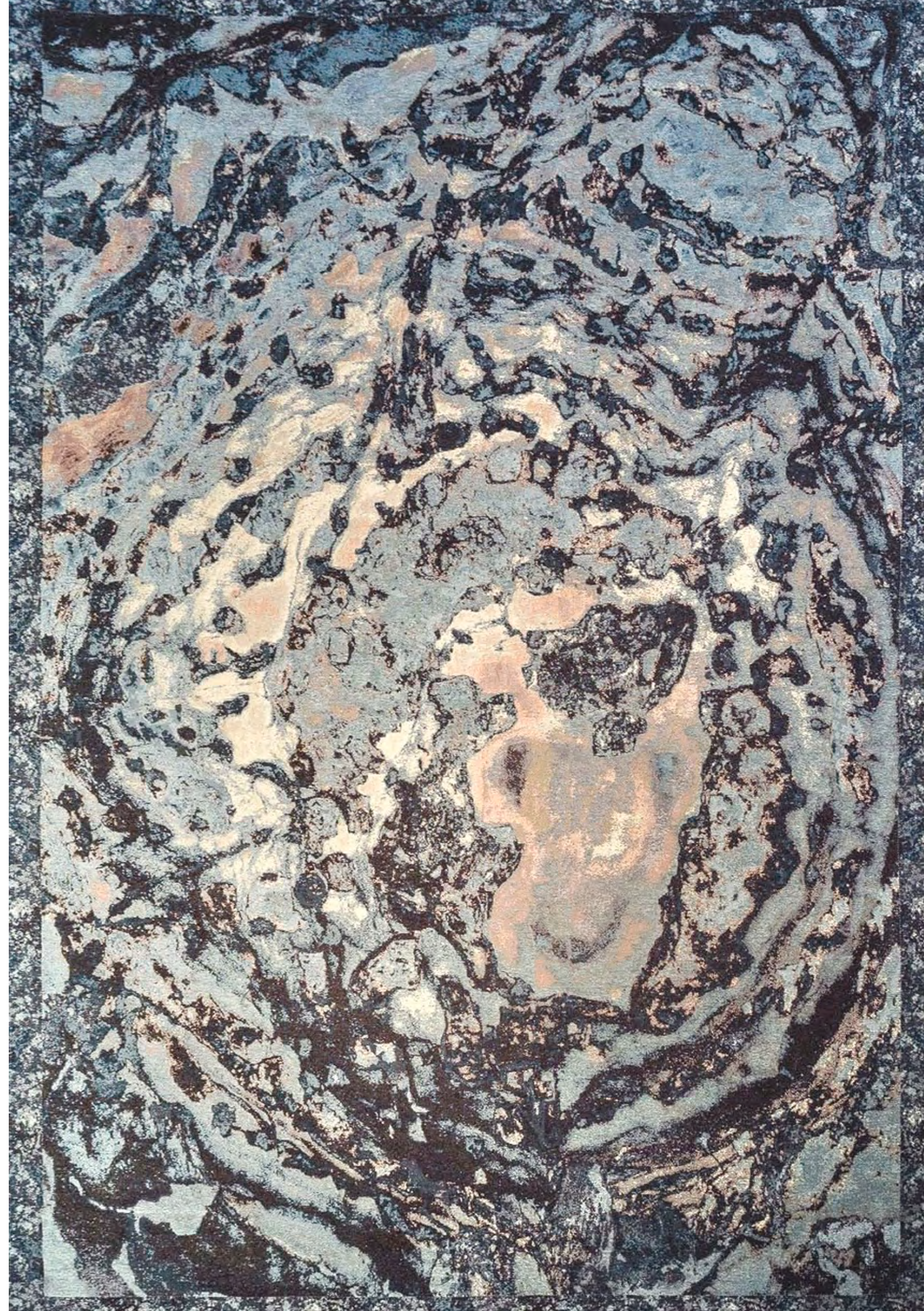
Léonard Pongo, *Mbanza Tapestry* (2020) at *Simba Moto! Seize the Fire!*, 2026, DRC Congo Pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia

Alongside his participation in the central exhibition, Pongo is also included in *Simba Moto ! Seize the Fire ! Saisis le feu !*, the DR Congo Pavilion curated by Nadia Yala Kisukidi. The pavilion is presented at the Antico Refettorio of the Scuola Grande di San Marco, Venice, and brings together Sammy Baloji, Arlette Bashizi, Patrick Bongoy, Damso, Gosette Lubondo, Nelson Makengo, Aimé Mpané, Géraldine Tobé, and others.

This double presence — in the central exhibition at the Arsenale and in the national pavilion at the Scuola Grande di San Marco — is a rare distinction, and marks a powerful new chapter in Pongo's artistic trajectory that has developed steadily over more than a decade at the intersection of photography, installation, and research. His work does not merely document; it constructs cosmological spaces in which the viewer is invited to inhabit a different relationship to land, time, and knowledge.

His research is currently supported by a residency at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp, where he is developing ongoing work on the relationship between image-making, landscape, and memory in postcolonial contexts. A major solo exhibition at FOMU (Antwerp) is planned for autumn 2026 and a new solo at Kristof De Clercq gallery in 2027.

Léonard Pongo
Mbanza Tapestry, 2020
woven polyester, viscose and lurex
233 x 332 cm (edition of 2)
164 x 226 cm (edition of 2)
110,5 x 156 cm (edition of 2)



CREDITS

Artist	Léonard Pongo
Installation	<i>Inhabiting the Landscape & The Tributes</i>
Exhibition	<i>In Minor Keys</i> – central exhibition of the 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia
Dates	9 May – 22 November 2026
Location	Arsenale, Venice
Curators	originally conceived by Koyo Kouoh (1967–2025) and realised by Gabe Beckhurst Feijoo, Marie Hélène Pereira and Rasha Salti (advisors); Siddhartha Mitter (editor-in-chief); and Rory Tsapayi (research assistant)
Support	<i>La Biennale di Venezia</i> , Teiger Foundation, in partnership with American Friends of Zeitz MOCAA, Kristof De Clercq gallery and the Flemish Community

Pongo is also presented at *Simba Moto ! Seize the Fire ! Saisis le feu !* at DR Congo Pavilion in the Antico Refettorio, Scuola Grande di San Marco, curated by Nadia Yala Kisukidi.

CONTACT

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OPENING HOURS

Thu - Fri - Sat, 2 - 6 pm,
and by appointment.

KRISTOF DE CLERCQ
GALLERY



Léonard Pongo working on *Tribute to Upemba* in the TextielLab of TextielMuseum, Tilburg, the Netherlands | photo by Patty van den Elshout commissioned by TextielMuseum