

AFIKARIS

PRESS RELEASE

JEAN DAVID NKOT THÉÂTRE DES CORPS - DRAME DE LA MATIÈRE

FROM 22 MAY TO 21 JUNE, 2025



JEAN DAVID NKOT

THÉÂTRE DES CORPS - DRAME DE LA MATIÈRE

EXHIBITION FROM 22 MAY TO 21 JUNE, 2025

7 RUE NOTRE-DAME-DE-NAZARETH, 75003 PARIS, FRANCE

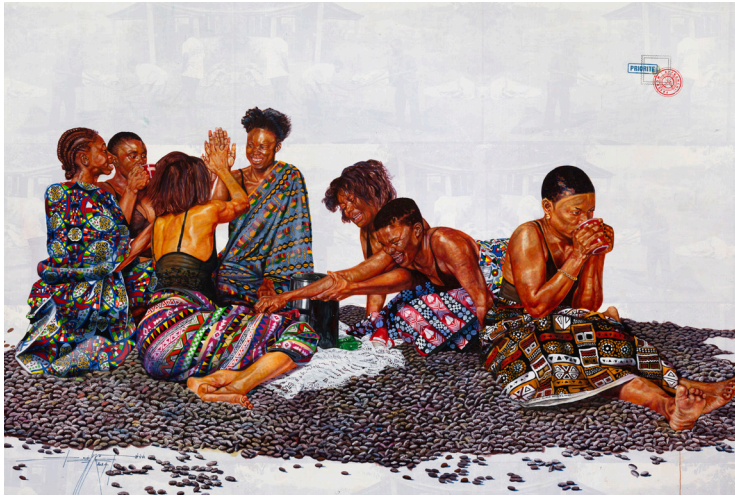
AFIKARIS Gallery is pleased to present *Théâtre des Corps – Drame de la Matière*, the fourth solo exhibition by Cameroonian artist Jean David Nkot, curated by Christine Eyene. As the concluding chapter of a project developed between Douala and Paris, this exhibition signals a significant shift in the artist's practice, marking his first foray into sculpture and installation. Through this new sculptural dimension, Nkot continues his critical engagement with extractivist logics and forms of human exploitation that have shaped both the history and present of the African continent.



Above. Jean David Nkot, *BP.the-story-of-a-treasure@fr.com*, 2025.
Acrylic, silkscreen printing and archival photographs silkscreen printed on canvas. 200x280 cm.
Courtesy of AFIKARIS Gallery and the artist.

The artist first approaches the subject through the human figure, with a painting depicting a worker cutting a cacao pod with a machete (*BP.the-story-of-a-treasure@fr.com*, 2025). The realism of this work is revealed in the meticulous detail, the treatment of shapes, volumes, and shadows — from the folds in the clothing and the ridges of the cacao pods, to the moss growing on the branches of the cacao tree. The vivid colors immerse us in the immediacy and contemporary reality of agricultural labor in Cameroon today and, by extension, in other countries across Africa and the Global South. In the background of this painting, as if in watermark, appears a series of black-and-white images repeated in a Warholian manner. Referencing archival photography, these images seem to link the colonial past — where industrial plantations originated — with the present-day extractive practices driven by capitalism and globalization.

A similar treatment is found in other paintings, notably in scenes of female figures dressed in predominantly blue pagnes with detailed geometric patterns. Gathered on a mound of brightly colored cocoa beans, reminiscent of M&Ms, the scenes they inhabit depict moments of intimacy and sisterhood around the enjoyment of a cup of coffee or chocolate. Yet the artist allows a shadow to emerge. In *Po.box.pain-and-false-laughter.org* (2024), one sees a figure sitting away from the group to enjoy her drink, bearing a far more subdued and reserved expression.



Above. Jean David Nkoti, *Po.box.pain-and-false-laughter.org*, 2024. Acrylic, silkscreen printing and archival photographs silkscreen printed on canvas. 205x305 cm. Courtesy of AFIKARIS Gallery and the artist.

This expression reappears on the central figure in *www.corps-en-corps.cm* (2024), whose gaze engages us and prompts reflection on the bodies surrounding her — interwoven bodies with torsos revealing lingerie. Sensual and voluptuous at first glance, a prolonged look reveals the sadness and exhaustion they carry.

For Nkoti, women also symbolize the African land, whose fertility is exploited — or alternatively, the often-invisible female workers. He depicts them with a theatricality that evokes both classical naturalist painting traditions — reminiscent of Théodore Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* (1818–19) — and a contemporary aesthetic rooted in Africa's reality.



EXHIBITION VIEW
Théâtre des corps - Drame de la matière, AFIKARIS gallery, Paris, France
May 2025

Courtesy of AFIKARIS Gallery. Photo credit: Studio Vanssay.

Another sensitive topic addressed by the artist at the exhibition's entrance is child labor, with a series of mixed-media works depicting hands against an imaginary cartography (*#@l'origine de nos délices.fr*, 2025). On these are inscribed major chocolate manufacturers' contractual commitments to the Convention on the worst forms of Child Labor, ratified in 1999 by the International Labour Organization. Here, the artist implicitly invites us to acknowledge the impotence of international law in the face of ongoing child mistreatment and exploitation.



Above. Jean David Nkoti, *#@l'origine de nos délices.fr*, 2025.
Mixed media on canvas. 82x53 cm (each)

Courtesy of AFIKARIS Gallery and the artist.

This theme recurs throughout the exhibition, with ceramic busts and heads (*Blue Bodies*, 2024), and a series of portraits on jute canvas (*Corps//matière.cm.org*, 2025). The fusion between body and material is reflected in the ceramics, which blue tone and texture simulate a patina marked by time. Their color evokes cobalt drawn from the earth, coating the miners' skin, and their aesthetic recalls ancient ceramics. Displayed like relics unearthed from an archaeological dig, the busts and heads of women, men, and children embody souls whose past, present, and future are tied to the fate of these exploited lands. The positions of the busts suggest they were seized in the midst of labor, the tools now vanished from their hands.

The jute canvas portraits in the second room contribute to a similar narrative. The artist presents us with the paradox of a childhood both joyful and powerless in the face of a burdensome existence. The posture of two portraits curiously evokes the image of the *Muzzled Slave* published in *Souvenirs d'un aveugle, voyage autour du monde* (1839) by Jacques Arago, as well as Caravaggio's *Young Sick Bacchus* (1593–94), seen from a reversed angle.



Above. Jean David Nkoti, *Corps//matière.cm.org*, 2025.
Acrylic painting on jute bag. 107x62 cm.

Courtesy of AFIKARIS Gallery and the artist.

Once again, the gaze takes us as witnesses and urges us to reflect on our lifestyles, our daily consumption, and their impact on the innocent lives caught in the gears of the capitalist machine. Here, the jute canvas is more than just a surface — it becomes a stand-in for worn clothing, leaving no doubt about the children's condition. Yet, the artist portrays them without stripping them of their dignity or the hope for a better future. To deliver this ever-relevant message, Nkot employs a visual signature unique to his aesthetic: a seal, a postal stamp imprint, or, in his titles, the at-sign of an email address.

Finally, *Map of Resources* (2025) immerses us again in the notion of fertile ground, with an installation transforming the gallery's final room into a mining site. Embedded in the ground, mud-covered pipes emerge like pruned trunks in a stripped forest. At their top sits a glass jar containing sculpted forms simulating precious minerals: aluminum, silver, bauxite, cobalt, coltan, lithium, manganese, platinum, and more — all treasures from a fertile land caught in the grip of greed.

Above the jars are small anthropomorphic figurines with contorted, marked forms. These are inspired by Kota reliquaries — statues that protect the precious remains of a deceased elder, serving as an intermediary between the visible and invisible worlds. Their blue helmets symbolize this protective role, while also alluding to the ambiguity of military presence on African soil. Tools and traces of labor — such as a shovel or an abandoned sandal — are scattered throughout, resembling curious still lifes encountered while wandering this rugged terrain. Littered across the ground are small pouches of various alcohol brands — spirits whose power lies in their ability to dull the pain of labor, completing the cast of this *mise-en-scène*.

Lastly, a soundscape evoking the atmosphere of a mine rounds out this installation.



Above. Jean David Nkot, *Blue Bodies*, 2024.
Glazed clay sculpture, solid form technique (unique piece).
Around 35x25x25cm + pipe pillar

Courtesy of AFIKARIS Gallery and the artist.

Théâtre des corps – Drame de la matière (*Theatre of Bodies – Drama of Matter*) marks a decisive turning point in Jean David Nkot's work, transporting us from the two-dimensional space for which he is well known, into the three-dimensional field of an imaginary world imbued with realism — conveyed through painting, sculpture, and found objects. These objects bear the imprint of economic and social realities which impact stretches far beyond Cameroon, and affects us on a global scale.



EXHIBITION VIEW

Théâtre des corps - Drame de la matière, AFIKARIS gallery, Paris, France
May 2025

Courtesy of AFIKARIS Gallery. Photo credit: Studio Vanssay.

22 MAY — 21 JUNE, 2025

Jean David Nkot, *Théâtre des corps - Drame de la matière*

AFIKARIS Gallery

7 rue Notre-Dame-de-Nazareth, 75003 Paris, France

ABOUT JEAN DAVID NKOT

B. in 1989
Douala, Cameroon

SÉLECTION D'EXPOSITIONS PERSONNELLES

2025
Théâtre des corps - drame de la matière, galerie AFIKARIS, Paris, France
Épigraphie des corps, centre d'art Annie Kadji, Douala, Cameroun
Map of Resources, Espace doual'art, Douala, Cameroun

2023
Les Dompteurs de nuages, galerie AFIKARIS, Paris, France

2022
Corps de P@ge, galerie The Melrose, Johannesburg, Afrique du Sud
Les pommes de la discorde, galerie AFIKARIS, Paris, France

2021
Untitled Miami Art Fair, galerie AFIKARIS, Miami, États-unis
État des lieux, galerie Jack Bell, Londres, Royaume-Uni
Human@Condition, galerie AFIKARIS, Paris, France
Le dessous des cartes, Espace Bolo, Douala, Cameroun
Corps et Espace, Espace doual'art, Douala, Cameroun

2020
Esprit rêveur, galerie Jack Bell, Londres, Royaume-Uni
1-54 Marrakech Art Fair, galerie AFIKARIS, Marrakech, Maroc

2018
Cartographies mentales, galerie Jack Bell, Londres, Royaume-Uni

2016
À fleur de peau, Espace Doual'art, Douala, Cameroun

SÉLECTION D'EXPOSITIONS COLLECTIVES

2024
Il était une fois, la naissance du Staat Kamerun 1884-1914, Musée National de Yaoundé, Cameroun
Resilience, Galerie Sanaa, Utrecht, Pays-Bas
Inhabiting the World, Galerie AFIKARIS, Paris, France
1-54 NY, Galerie AFIKARIS, New York, États-unis
Miart, Galerie AFIKARIS, Milan, Italie
1-54 Marrakech, Galerie AFIKARIS, Marrakech, Maroc

2023
Africa Supernova : the contemporary African painting collection of Carla and Pieter Schulting, Kunsthall KAdE, Amersfoort, Pays-Bas
1-54 London Art Fair, galerie AFIKARIS, Londres, Royaume-Uni
Ce que nous donne la terre, galerie AFIKARIS, Paris, France
Art Brussels, galerie AFIKARIS, Bruxelles, Belgique



L'Art dans la Cité, La Rotonde des arts, Fondation Dapper, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
ZonaMaco, galerie AFIKARIS, Mexico, Mexique

2022
Shout Plenty, African Artists' Foundation, Lagos, Nigeria
Classique !, galerie AFIKARIS, Paris, France
The New African Portraiture. Shariat Collections, Musée Kunsthalle Krems, Vienne, Autriche
One song is very much like another, and the boat is always from afar, Times Museum de Guangdong, Chine
Investec Cape Town Art Fair, galerie AFIKARIS, Le Cap, Afrique du Sud

2020
Raupe-nimmersattism, SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin, Allemagne
Art Paris, Galerie AFIKARIS, Paris, France
We Paint Humans, Galerie AFIKARIS, Paris, France

2018
La Banque mondiale, Yaoundé, Cameroun

2017
SUD, Salon Urbain de Douala, Douala, Cameroun
Mémoires Libérées, Musée National du Cameroun, Yaoundé, Cameroun
Behind the portal, Bandjoun Station, Bandjoun, Cameroun
Our Wishes, Musée Léopold, Vienne, Autriche

2016
Congo – Cameroun : Esthétique en partage au-delà des Géographies, Dakar Biennale, Dakar, Sénégal
BIND : Images contemporaines, Dakar Biennale, Dakar, Sénégal

COLLECTIONS

FRAC Sud Cité de l'art contemporain, Marseille, France
Fondation H, Madagascar & France
Almas Foundation, Royaume-Uni
West Collection, États-Unis
Jean Pigozzi Collection, Suisse
Fondation Blachère, France
Collezione Genesi, Italie
Collection Amir Shariat, Autriche

ABOUT AFIKARIS

Founded in 2018 by Florian Azzopardi, to promote emerging and established artists from Africa and its diaspora, AFIKARIS Gallery opened a dedicated Paris-based gallery space in 2021. Engaged in promoting cross-cultural and disciplinary exchange, AFIKARIS acts as a platform for artists to engage with the wider public. A mirror and space for reflection on the contemporary African art scene, it provides artists with a space to address the topical local and international issues at the heart of their art. By extending its range of artists to the Middle East, the gallery is confirming its commitment to highlighting artists who have little visibility on a global scale.

AFIKARIS' programme includes group and solo exhibitions, art fairs, publications and institutional partnerships. In 2023, the gallery opened its artist residency on the outskirts of Paris. The residency is a place dedicated to creation, at the disposal of the artists working with the gallery or who wish to develop a project for a future presentation with the gallery.



Above. View of the AFIKARIS gallery located at 7 rue Notre-Dame-de-Nazareth.
Courtesy of the AFIKARIS gallery.
Photo credit: Studio Vanssay

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

AFIKARIS Gallery
7 rue Notre-Dame-de-Nazareth
75003 Paris, France

Tuesday – Saturday
11 AM — 7 PM

PRESS CONTACT

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