

Libasse Ka

Notes on Shape Shifting

visitor guide

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21.09.25 – 21.12.25



Libasse Ka - Notes on Shape Shifting

September 21 – December 21 2025

Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens

Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens presents *Notes on Shape Shifting*, the first institutional solo exhibition of Libasse Ka. The exhibition introduces a series of new paintings, realized in 2025, in which Ka continues his ongoing quest for the essence of painting and explores the boundaries of his personal painting process. His practice is rooted in movement, repetition of forms and metamorphosis – a method at once intuitive and reflective, physical and conceptual.

Notes on Shape Shifting

For Libasse Ka, painting is a process of layered transformation. His works emerge through formal reiterations, delays and reformulations. He tends to revisit older or unfinished canvases, reworking them in an attempt to tackle unresolved pictorial questions or revise passages left open. This cyclical process does not give way to snapshots but paintings constructed over time – visual timelines unfolding, erasing, and recasting thoughts.

His compositions exude rhythm: shapes shift, connect and merge. They seem to invoke a primordial unity, preceding the canvas itself, suggesting a visual language beyond stasis – one constantly in the making. Color is essential: the way a musician seeks out notes, Ka composes with contrast, repetition, and variation. A sensory experience that balances between order and improvisation ensues.

Matter, Color, Gesture

Pressing, rubbing, wiping, splattering, overpainting – Libasse Ka's paintings are defined by an intense synthesis of physical gesture and material experimentation. He applies pigment with unconventional tools such as ropes or plastic, turning the canvas into an archive of actions, a memory of body and mind, a visual mind map.

On his large-scale canvases Ka rarely resorts to a brush, except to finalize a detail. He paints by pouring, rubbing, or scratching. He lets a cord whip across the canvas while applying pressure with sheets of plastic. Shifting the emphasis away from the classical brushstroke, Ka develops a more direct, even performative relation to the canvas – painting as a physical and almost ritual practice, a balancing act of chance and control, intuition and strategy.

In his recent work, he often leaves the raw linen deliberately exposed, with the unpainted areas letting the pictorial surface breathe, lending a sense of openness. Some of his most recent paintings, created especially for this exhibition, seem to even anticipate a formal dissolution. In its fluidity and near-transparency, paint becomes a material metaphor for change.

An idiosyncratic palette – shades of blue, pale yellow, ochre, and pink – marks movement, suggests depth, and ultimately allows the process to reveal itself.

Intuition: A Method

Despite his paintings' intuitive or improvised appearance, Ka characterizes his process as a subtle interplay of conscious and unconscious decisions. His art historical affinity, technical savvy, and personal experiences provide a solid foundation from which to invite accidents, digressions and plot twists. Intuition is less a sudden impulse than a deliberate strategy for Ka, an open way of working that remains consciously receptive to detours and reflection.

The same openness generates meaning in the work. Not seeking to fix the viewer's interpretation, Ka avoids explanatory titles, encouraging individual, associative and felt readings instead. Each painting becomes an opportunity for encounter: a space in which subjectivity, memory and the viewer's projection are allowed to roam freely.

This interplay of discipline and freedom, knowledge and intuition keeps Ka's work alive. It preserves ambiguity and resonance in the viewer's experience, inviting them again and again to engage with its meaning. His work thus relates to what might be called a "hidden reserve" of painting. A domain beyond merely gestural expression, where painting is allowed to become a semiotic trace – a sign, a memory, an invitation to interpretation.

Ka looks up to the painterly strategies developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s by artists such as Joan Mitchell and Cy Twombly. They too liberated the painterly gesture from pure expressivity, exploring how a brushstroke, a stain or a scratch can be both a material trace and a bearer of meaning. Whereas Mitchell spoke of "memory working" and Twombly imbued his gestures with semiotic and mythical connotations, Ka refers to this line of inquiry through a contemporary, hybrid language rooted in both his African background and Western art history.

Hybrid Positioning

Libasse Ka (b. 1998, Cambérène, Senegal) lives and works in Brussels, having spent his childhood in Senegal. His biography is reflected in his artistic practice, navigating various cultural and artistic contexts without ever fully identifying.

Incorporating an intimate knowledge of Western art history, Ka's practice aligns with Josef Albers' color theory or Francis Picabia's experimental visual language. Key here is his long-standing friendship with the painter Jan Van Imschoot, a consistent interlocutor on questions of painting for many years. His African background, however, lingers – especially in the intensity and layering of pigment.

The resulting visual language cannot be reduced to a single origin or tradition, emerging from the tension between both instead. Between continents, styles, narratives and systems, this in-between position lends his oeuvre its hybridity and distinct personality. The work takes viewers beyond binary thinking. It presents an opportunity to engage with the transformative power of multiplicity.

In dialogue with Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker

Especially for this exhibition, Libasse Ka engaged in a dialogue with choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, an exceptionally influential figure in contemporary dance, with whom he has developed an enriching friendship over the past few years. Preparing for *Notes on Shape Shifting*, the two artists conversed about movement, rhythm, space and form; an exchange that filmmaker Evi Cats turned into a poetic film, which is on view throughout the exhibition.

Clapping Music

On 21 September, Libasse Ka's exhibition will form the environment for the performance *Clapping Music* by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and Laura Maria Poletti, an intense rhythmic dialogue unfolding through minimal variations, set to the music of American composer Steve Reich. Reich's iconic composition, *Clapping Music* (1972), rests on a simple premise: two musicians clap the same twelve-eighth-note pattern, with one gradually shifting the rhythm until the two reconverge. These phase shifts lie at the heart of Reich's minimalist compositions and have been a lasting source of inspiration for De Keersmaeker. *Fase* (1982), the choreography that earned

her international recognition, was set to four of Reich's early compositions. Rather than illustrating the music, she developed a logic of autonomous movement, deepening and revealing Reich's repetitive structures. Dance and music challenged one another in layered patterns of parallel and circular manoeuvres, emphasized by minimal shifts in movement and tempo. At the same time, the light-footed choice of movement vocabulary subtly echoes the classical dance tradition — a playful nod that links the shifts in form and rhythm to broader histories of dance and art.

Notes on Shape Shifting thus ventures beyond an exhibition of paintings, becoming a space in which image, movement, sound and thought vibrate, inviting transformation not only in form but also in perspective.

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Notes on Shape Shifting

from 21.09.25 to 21.12.25

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Performance: Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker, Laura Maria Poletti

Video: Evi Cats

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