

**Kuba Sugi**

space Un Tokyo

Residency: Yoshino, June - August, 2025

Gallery Talk: Tokyo, 6:30 PM, July 11, 2025

Exhibition: Tokyo, September 6, 2025

*Tokyo* - Malika Leiper and Stephen Burks, of the globally renowned creative practice Stephen Burks Man Made, are pleased to announce their upcoming solo exhibition *Kuba Sugi* at space Un gallery in Tokyo opening on September 6th, 2025.

The show brings together Stephen Burks Man Made's research into the raffia textiles of the Kuba Kingdom, located in present-day Democratic Republic of Congo, with the spiritual traditions of forestry in Japan.

A cultural space and art gallery, space Un is a platform for exchange between African and Japanese culture. Located in the mountainous Nara region celebrated for its shinto shrines, their artist residency program in Yoshino invites African and diasporic artists to live in the *Yoshino Cedar House* designed by Go Hasegawa and engage in cross-cultural collaboration with local artisans.

During their two and a half month residency, Malika and Stephen will give form to figurative and abstract sculptures imbued with the sacred materiality of Japanese cedar and cypress in dialogue with the ceremonial ritual of the Kuba arts. Cowrie shells will hang alongside folded washi paper, and raffia paillettes will mix with silver-painted hinoki beads in an act of cultural transference rather than translation.

The works will be accompanied by a short documentary, *In Search of Kuba*, which follows Malika and Stephen on a journey through the megacity of Kinshasa uncovering threads of cultural heritage.

Characterized by their repetitive geometric pattern language, the prized Kuba textiles originated in the royal courts of the Kuba Kingdom, which flourished in the 16th and 17th centuries.

To this day, they continue to be produced for ceremonial and ritual functions, yet scholars in the West believe it to be a lost art form.

Through encounters with Congolese artisans, professors, curators, and entrepreneurs, the film offers an alternative portrait of the Kuba arts, steeped with vitality and the potential for transformation through design.

Having collaborated with artisans in over 20 countries across 6 continents, these expressions of cultural hybridity are emblematic of Stephen Burks Man Made's critical approach which leads the studio to initiate projects with craftspeople operating at the periphery of Western cultural production.

Complementing the exhibition, Malika and Stephen will be in conversation with space Un gallery director Naoki Nakatani. A small publication will also be produced commemorating both the residency and the exhibition.

### **Stephen Burks Man Made**

As partners in the award-winning studio Stephen Burks Man Made, Malika Leiper and Stephen Burks unite art, community, and industry through a hands-on, workshop-based approach. Their belief that everyone is capable of design has brought them around the world to collaborate with artisans to extend craft traditions into the future while unlocking economic transformation through design. Today, they are pursuing their artistic expressions through residencies and fellowships that bring their hands closer to the act of making.

### **space Un**

space Un is an arts and culture venue in Tokyo focusing on contemporary African art and cultural exchange between Japan and African countries. Established in April 2024 by Ms. Edna Dumas, the space originates from her passion for contemporary African art and her desire to support the artists.

**space Un** (continued)

space Un offers a unique platform in both Japan and beyond to give visibility to contemporary African art, hosting exhibitions showcasing pieces created during our residency program in Yoshino, Nara as well as commercial shows. Co-Founded by actor and artist Yuta Nakano, space Un embraces a cross-disciplinary programming beyond visual arts ranging from music events, readings to movie screenings. As the space solidifies its reputation, activities will expand to include grants, publications, launching limited edition artworks and more.

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Stephen

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