

# TRACES OF TIME

FROM GRAFFITI MURALS TO THE RUNWAY, CYRIL KONGO HAS NEVER BEEN A PAINTER CONFINED TO A SINGLE SURFACE, AND TODAY THE SUBVERSIVE ARTIST CONTINUES TO TAKE CREATIVITY TO NEW HEIGHTS

BY EMMA FLOYD

**A**s an artist, Cyril Kongo, born Cyril Phan, refuses to be defined by a single medium. His artistic journey is a testament to the fluidity of street art and its ability to transcend urban landscapes, entering the most refined realms of luxury and high fashion. Born to a Vietnamese father and a French mother, Kongo spent his early years in Vietnam until the fall of Saigon in 1975. His adolescence took him to Brazzaville in the Republic of the Congo, a place that would later inspire his artistic name. Rooted in graffiti, Kongo honed his skills on the streets, cultivating a unique graphic vocabulary that he continues to refine in his studio work today.

A defining moment in Kongo's career came in 2011 when the esteemed house of Hermès granted him an unprecedented opportunity to create its autumn-winter collection. This collaboration marked a historic intersection of luxury craftsmanship and urban artistry. The journey began a year prior in the streets of Hong Kong, where a chance encounter altered the course of his career. While painting in public, Kongo caught the attention of a passerby – a father admiring the artist's work alongside his son. The father requested a custom painting on his son's cap, compensating Kongo with a beer. What seemed like an ordinary street interaction soon evolved into something extraordinary. That man would later invite Kongo to paint the window display of Hermès' Hong Kong airport boutique, a project that would introduce Kongo's artistry to the world of high fashion.

Kongo's work encapsulates a dynamic fusion of street culture and luxury, exemplifying the Parisian identity through his collaborations. His involvement with Hermès led him to the revered workshops of Rue Cambon, where his vibrant graffiti-inspired canvases were transformed into intricate, mesmerizing silk prints. His designs captured the admiration of elegant women across the globe, seamlessly merging the rebellious nature of graffiti with the refined elegance of luxury fashion. Beyond Hermès, Kongo has collaborated with Karl Lagerfeld, staying in the designer's home and working in his studio for months. Chanel acquired a taste for his paintings, which inspired the many pieces in the collection *Metiers d'Art* showcased at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2018. These ventures solidified Kongo's reputation as an artist who effortlessly bridges the gap between



urban expression and haute couture.

In 2021, he designed the interior and exterior of the Airbus ACJ TwoTwenty business jet, proving that his artistry knows no bounds. From the streets of Paris to the ateliers of Chanel and the skies above, Cyril Kongo continues to redefine the boundaries of contemporary art. His work is not merely an evolution of graffiti but a celebration of its power to inspire, disrupt, and elevate. With each stroke, Kongo ensures that his artistic voice – bold, colorful, and unmistakably his – remains indelible across every surface he touches. **1**

Cyril Kongo  
cyrilkongo.art