



**“What kind of person tries to extinguish a fire with water sachets? Fools or pioneers? Maybe the message is that these young people found themselves in a difficult situation and dealt with it with the scarce resources they had,” says Sika.**



**“Another ability of Asana Diallo is to disassemble and reassemble her body. Some children in London thought she was an angel who came to save the children around her,” says Sika. “They noticed that some of the children are in the dark and others in the light. In Abidjan, one interpretation was that Asana was a genie or spirit and that the children represent people in different stages of spiritual advancement. What you see is up to you!”**

I feel I’m going a certain way, I follow that path and I know it is going to create things that will be logical and will have a message. It’s a process I can’t put into words.”

He credits this process for producing one of his most outstanding bodies of work, the *Africa Series*, which celebrates the continent’s culture and spirit. Sika used young people from his home country to create a series of stories about

Africa. “Africa is the environment that I’m in and it surrounds me, so I think my hopes and feelings for Africa translated into those photos. Hopes of a cheerful Africa, a colourful Africa, a beautiful Africa ... they are joyful people in those photos,” he says.

Sika does not want to give meanings to his images because that might limit viewers’ interpretations or, in his words “crystallise the multiple interpretations that emanate through the different personalities they embody”.

However, he shared some insights with *The Africa Report* on the context in which the photographs taken in the Paillet neighbourhood of Abidjan, featured above, were originated and formed (see captions).

Sika is working on his first photo book, due out early this year. He also has a fellowship with the Chinua Achebe Centre in New York, which he hopes to take up later in the year.

With the world at his feet, you would expect that Sika’s next dream is for his work to be seen at some of the world’s most prestigious exhibitions like Art Basel or the Venice Biennale. But he says the place he would most like to see his work is in “the collective heart of the planet”.

“It’s a more utopian way of saying I would like my work to be in the heart of everybody so that they can remember it and don’t have to go somewhere to see it again and again because it is so close to them, they just know it.” ●

**PAUL SIKA BIOGRAPHY**

**1985** Born in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire

**2003-7** Studies for a bachelor’s degree in software engineering at University of Westminster, United Kingdom

**2008** Starts work as a freelance photographer

**November 2008** Has his first exhibition, hosted at Galerie Le Lab, Abidjan

**2009** Works as a consultant and project manager with National Basketball Federation of Benin

**October 2009** Launches an exhibition at the Chinua Achebe Center, New York

**2010** Nearing completion of his first book containing a collection of his photography. Entitled *At the Heart of Me*, the book is due out early this year

