

Conotou, Benin

Chakaia Booker

(music)

SOPPELSA: It's our first visit to Benin, we are basically introducing ourselves to a number of artist who we hope we can include in the connection we're building for the new American embassy which will open officially in 2015. We also brought the American sculptor, Chakaia Booker, who's been commissioned to create a major sculptural piece specifically for the embassy.

BOOKER: I work with found materials but one of the primary materials I work with are automobile tires, truck tires, bicycle tires that I deconstruct and transform these materials into works of art.

(music, honking)

SOPPELSA: There's nothing like person to person contact, direct person to person contact, in which you are either in the studio or in a space that the artist knows and the artist is relaxed and comfortable and really opens up about talking about the work.

OKEFOLAHAN: (speaking French)

SOPPELSA: He says that when he went to Paris the first time, it was cold, it was wintertime, and everybody was dressed in black from head to foot and he said, where's the color, where's the life here. He says he's always chosen to show his work in Paris during the cold months because that way people will sense heat through his work.

OKEFOLAHAN: (speaking French)

SOPPELSA: (speaking French)

(laughter)

CAMERAMAN: What, what'd he say?

SOPPELSA: He said, without color there is no life, he says it's for this that he appreciates Chakaia because she's so full of color.

BOOKER: The inspiration, yes, of being here has been fantastic. Haven't quite figured out how it will all mix in together but I think that there has been enough of the exchanges to make a great start.

SOPPELSA: Art the world over and artists the world over understand each other in ways the rest of us don't quite can't quite imagine, but we appreciate it. And in this way, in placing American art and in this case Beninese art, together on the walls of the new American embassy what we hope is that we will create a diplomatic conversation through art.

(music)