

ARTLabAfrica

Born in Kisumu, Kenya in 1987, Onyis Martin is a young painter and mixed media artist living and working in Nairobi whose practice is rapidly gaining national and international recognition.

Deeply connected to contemporary urban society, Martin's paintings, sculptures and works on paper explore, portray and reflect on current issues affecting not only the African continent but the world as a whole. Delving into global concerns such as human trafficking, migration, political and institutional corruption, repressive environments and displacement, Martin's works also explore issues of freedom, communication, rapidly evolving technological information and consumerism.

Martin's approach to and investigation of the themes central to his practice is a complex and articulated process, often using his private experience as a departure point. Interweaving individual with collective experiences of human displacement and migration, through his work he questions our understanding and engagement with human trafficking and its catastrophic consequences, reflecting on the often intimate, personal reasons why people migrate.

Linked by questioning and exploring several concepts and issues at any one time, Martin's work is often presented as an interconnected series. In his most recent group of works, *Talking Walls* (2016), Martin extended his exploration of how information depends on and is influenced by freedom and social structure towards investigating the rise of consumerism.

Fascinated by the visual power of the contemporary urban wall, with its eclectic collage of mainstream advertising and superimposed underground street imagery, in these works Martin reflects on branding and visual communication, focusing on the constant manipulation and destruction of language that individuals operate.

Whilst advertising and posting in public places has been replaced by new media by 21st Century's technological shifts, paper posters still provide a powerful visual reflection of any urban space and as a means of communications posters personify the walls where they are placed and affect how the viewer relates to it.

From large posters advertising global brands to small, intimate offerings of personal, medical and "voodoo" services to a rapidly urbanising population, in *Talking Walls* Martin collages disparate images, superimposing them with thick layers of acrylic paint and creating wire-mesh, impenetrable backgrounds. Sometimes adding an ironic figure to the combination of messages and visuals that coexist on the same wall the artist is questioning what we consume daily and how free is the information we are subliminally subjected to.

Onyis Martin currently works with kids in Mathare and Kibera slums in Nairobi, teaching art and crafts as part of giving back to the community.

ARTLabAfrica

Selected Solo Exhibitions:

Graduation, Talisman, Nairobi, Kenya, 2014

Selected Group Exhibitions:

Critical Conversations, Goethe Institut & Alliance Française, Nairobi, Kenya, 2016

Art Against Human Trafficking, British Institute, Nairobi, Kenya, 2016

error:X, Ostrale, Dresden, Germany, 2016

L'Atelier, National Museum of Art, Nairobi, Kenya, 2016

Manjano – Nairobi County Visual Arts Exhibition, Village Market, Nairobi, Kenya, 2016

Misty Fields, The Netherlands, 2014

Art Revolution, Taipei, Taiwan, 2014

Press & Other Links:

[Gacheru, Margaretta Wa. "The re-birth of art with social themes in Kenya" Business Daily Africa, 3 June 2015](#)

[Owino, Anjellah. "Exhibition showcases plight of displaced persons and migrants" 21 February 2016](#)

[Spooner, Samantha. "Circle Art gallery's 'Paper' exhibition heralds the rise of exciting new African artists" Mail and Guardian Africa, 13 December 2015](#)

[Waweru, Nduta, "The 'Look into Our Own Souls' exhibition" 11 April 2015](#)