

## **ARTLabAfrica**

Beatrice Wanjiku, born in Nairobi in 1978, is one of Kenya's most exciting and original conceptual artists. Her distinctive canvases and works on paper constantly probe the human condition, delving into psychological issues and repeatedly questioning our reality and the space we occupy. Always beginning from a personal perspective, informed by her environment and society's perceptions that surround her, Wanjiku's practice scratches away at the superficial images we project in daily life, peeling away the layers that constitute social norm and revealing haunting, abstract figures that mirror our personal, inner self. Existentialism and the shifting nature of human beings are a constant concern in her practice. She repeatedly interrogates our capacity for self-awareness and our ability to transform, offering an insight into our eternal quest to understand our realities.

Her most recent series of paintings and collages take the image and connotation of the Straightjacket as a departing point to explore the idea of boundaries and imposed systems of thought. The works delve into how we are anchored by social conditioning and expectation, always bound at the expense of what we desire. There is tension and restlessness in these intriguing group of works which explore repression, want, and other emotions through a rich, unsettling tapestry of abstract figures set against unadorned, monochrome backdrops. Haunting, shadowy and dramatic, Wanjiku's figures float onto the picture plane, sometimes alone, sometimes grouped in clusters blending into each other. Their powerful, abstract forms function as mirrors, leaving the viewer to project and question his own personal experience.

Wanjiku received her diploma from Nairobi's Buruburu Institute of Fine Arts in 2000 and lives and works in Nairobi, Kenya. Her recent exhibitions include *The OSTRALE 2015*, Dresden, Germany (2015) and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, Richard Taittinger Gallery, New York, USA (2015) curated by Ugochukwu Smooth Nzewi. She is a recipient of the UNESCO Aschberg Bursary (2013); Lava Thomas and Peter Danzig Fellowship Award (2013); Robert Sterling Clarke Foundation Fellowship (2011); and Alliance Francaise's and Goethe-Institut's Most Promising Female Artist Award (2006). Her recent international artists' residencies include the Iwalewa Haus Artist Residency Program, Bayreuth, Germany (2015), Djerassi Resident Artist Program, Woodside, CA (2013), and Vermont Studio Center Program, Johnson, VT (2011).

### **Selected Group Exhibitions:**

*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, Richard Taittinger Gallery, New York, USA, 2015

*The African Tree*, Ostrale Centre for Contemporary Art, Dresden, Germany, 2015

*KunstRAI*, Edition 31, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2015

Creativity Gallery, Nairobi National Museum, Nairobi, Kenya, 2015

BLOOM/ART FAIR, Koelnmesse, Cologne, Germany, 2014

*Africa III*, DeVearts, Utrecht, Netherlands, 2014

*Afrikadag*, Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2014

*Funika-Fufuka/Cover-Recover*, Belgian Embassy, Nairobi, Kenya, 2012

*Africa: The Mother of Us All*, Columbia City Gallery, Seattle, USA, 2011

*Politics of art and the art of politics*, video Installation, Nairobi, Kenya, 2010

*Artist without Borders*, Triangle exhibition, Nairobi, Kenya, 2009

*Africa Now*, World Bank Washington DC, USA, 2008

*Africa Within: Many Eyes One Soul*, The Royal Commonwealth Society, London, UK, 2006

### **Residencies:**

2013: Djerassi Residency Artist Program, San Francisco, USA

2011: The Vermont Studio Center Johnson, Vermont, USA

2006: Kuona Trust (10th international artist residence) Nairobi, Kenya

**Selected Workshops:**

2010: Economy of Creativity "Money and Meaning"

2008: Wasanii International workshop, Mombasa, Kenya  
Writer's Art Critic workshop

2007: The Kuona Trust International Women's Workshop  
Shatana Triangle International Artist Workshop (Jordan)  
Rafiki Triangle International Artist Workshop (Tanzania)

**Awards:**

2013: The Lava Thomas and Peter Danzig Fellowship

UNESCO Aschberg Bursary Djerassi Artist Program USA

2012: Dak'Art Biennale Moving Art Africa (Goethe Institut) Senegal

2011: Robert Sterling Clark Fellowship (Vermont Studio Center)

2006: The Most Promising Female Artist Award 2006, The French Cultural Centre,  
Alliance Française, Nairobi, Kenya