

# ARTLabAfrica

Born in 1985 in Nakuru, Kenya, David Thuku is a painter and mixed media artist currently living and working in Nairobi. A recipient of the Langalanga Scholarship Fund, David graduated from the BuruBuru Institute of Fine Arts in Nairobi in 2009. In 2013 he co-founded Brush-Tu, a creative arts collective providing artists with studio space and collaborative exchange and in 2016 he joined the prestigious Kuona Art Institute.

Whilst primarily known for his oils on canvas, design sets for drama festivals and public commissions, Thuku has been privately working with paper for years and first showed this group of works in 2015. Using the 'sgraffito' technique - normally associated with applying layers of plaster tinted in contrasting colors to a moistened surface and then scratching material away to reveal parts of the underlying layer - Thuku superimposes several sheets of paper, carefully tested and selected for physical properties and color, and then cuts and peels them away to reveal carefully constructed images.

Marking a major departure in his practice, Thuku's current works on paper are an intense, private exercise that explores the nature of social structure, identity and urban migration through the staging of semi-abstract portraits. The figures presented are types of people – archetypes not individuals – developed with indicators such as a tie, a pair of smart shoes, or a workman's helmet. They analyze the everyday space we occupy, peeling layers off the paper to delve and uncover hidden issues that are often uncomfortable: corruption, scenes of private domestic space, personal decisions.

Throughout his compositions Thuku uses repeated motifs to indicate spatial environment and character. Pattern has particular significance in these works, creating an anonymous sense of space and perspective but most importantly, as one pattern appears from piece of work to another signifying continuity and comparison.

Thuku is very interested in the iconography of figuration and his subjects are often portrayed in very distinctive poses, reminiscent of iconic imagery. In his current group of works, Thuku has begun exploring themes of consumerism, labeling and identity.

Thuku tutors young artists from the Kenya Youth Empowerment Program, The Buruburu and Kenyatta Universities as well as teaching art students under the Langalanga Scholars Association project.

## **Selected Group Exhibitions:**

*Group Show*, Wajukuu Art Project, Kenya Cultural Center, Nairobi, 2008 *Group Show*, Discovered Artistic Talents (DARTS), G23 Youth Summit, UN H.Quarters Nairobi, Kenya September 2011  
*Untitled Group Show*, DARTS, National Museums of Kenya, Nairobi, August 2012

A collection of works, UN Recreational Centre Nairobi, July 2013

*Paper II Exhibition*, Circle Art Gallery, Nairobi, Nov 2015

*Essence - A portraiture showcase*, Michael Joseph Centre, Nairobi, Jan-February 2016

*This for That*, The Art Space, Nairobi, March-April 2016 | [here](#)

## **Selected Workshops, Residencies and Awards:**

2016: Artist in Residence, Kuona Trust, Nairobi, Kenya

Recipient of Langalanga Scholarship Fund

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[http://www.langalanga.org.uk/enrolment\\_at\\_langalanga\\_gallery\\_images.html](http://www.langalanga.org.uk/enrolment_at_langalanga_gallery_images.html)

<http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/magazine/Seated-Figures-are-cut-above-the-rest/-/434746/3133396/-/uoxm8j/-/index.html>