

ARTLabAfrica

Peterson Kamwathi is a Nairobi based artist whose substantial body of work has established him as one of the most radical and aesthetically compelling artists in East Africa. Though rooted in figurative tradition, Kamwathi's works are highly conceptual, created over long periods of time focusing on distinct topics and executed with technical mastery. The themes, formatted in series, are social, political and cultural, rooted in the Kenyan context that surrounds him but treating global phenomena. In 2009 he produced a work that cemented his already widespread reputation: *Sitting Allowance*, a fiercely dark comment on the deep political crisis that engulfed Kenya in 2008. His recent artistic practice has focused on interrogating social, economic and cultural spaces in a post-colonial context. His work, rendered in carefully constructed, thick layers of charcoal and pastel on thick watercolour paper, is informed by his obsession with the psychology of everyday human action and rituals: the anatomy of queues, weddings and masquerades amongst others. Kamwathi is constantly exploring the place, role, symbolism and meaning of processions and groupings within contemporary ceremonies and political protocol. Taking on the role of an observer, he extracts modes of behavior, staging scenarios that express the farcical nature of masquerade inherent to social conventions and imposed political norms – norms that are both inherited from colonial rule and re-appropriated. In his most recent body of work, Peterson's practice has focused on rituals within organized religions, exploring positions of prayer, his research originating from the ever-present tension between Christianity and Islam.

Kamwathi's work has been exhibited in numerous venues around the world including Kenya, the UK, the USA, Holland, Austria, El Salvador and Finland.

He has participated in several residencies, including the Fontys Academie Kenya-Holland Exchange in 2003, Artists in Residence at the University of Kentucky, USA in 2005, printmaking residencies at the London Print Studio and Bath Spa University College in 2006, the Thupelo International Artist workshop in South Africa 2006, and Art Omi 2009 International Artists Residency, New York. He was part of the Nairobi Art Trusts' Amnesia Project and the Jet-Lag experiment project in 2008 and 2009 and exhibited at the 2010 and 2014 Dakar Biennale, Senegal. He continues to participate in several residencies in Europe and the US.

Selected Solo Exhibitions:

Sitting Allowance, The Goethe Institut, Nairobi, Kenya, 2009

Solo Exhibition, Le Rustique, Nairobi, Kenya, 2007

Solo Exhibition, The GoDown Arts Centre, Nairobi, Kenya, 2006

Solo Exhibition, University of Kentucky, Tuska Center for Contemporary Art, Kentucky, USA, 2005

Selected Group Exhibitions:

Six Degrees of Separate Nations, The Frost Art Museum, Miami, USA, 2013

Hymn for a Republic, Hilger Contemporary, Vienna, Austria, 2012

Sanaa ya makartasi, Nairobi National Museum, Nairobi, Kenya, 2012

Nairobi: A state of mind, Kunshaus Bregenz, Bregenz, Austria, 2011

Coca-colonized, Marte Museum, San Salvador, El Salvador, 2011

ARS11 Africa in Kouvola, Kouvola, Finland, 2011

Ordinary Rendition, Iwalewa Haus, Bayreuth, Germany, 2010

...matter of record, Hive Projects: Ed Cross Fine Art, London, 2010

IFAN, "DAK'ART 2010" Biennale, Dakar, Senegal, 2010

SPEACE: Currencies in contemporary African art, Museum Africa, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2010

Stereotype III project, Old Law Courts, Mombasa, Kenya, 2010

Coca-colonized, BrotKunsthalle, Vienna, Austria, 2009

Liverpool, Liverpool World Museum, 2008

Africa Now: emerging talent from a continent on the move, World Bank Headquarters, Washington DC, USA, 2008

Amnesia platform IV "the jetlag experiment", Nairobi Arts Trust, Nairobi, Kenya, 2007

Printmaking Exhibition, RaMOMA, Nairobi, Kenya, 2005

Kenyan prints, Africa '05, Bankside Gallery, London, 2005

Kenya Art, Selena Gallery, University of Long Island, New York, USA, 2004

Monographs & Solo Exhibition Catalogues:

Hymn for a Republic, Exhibition Catalogue, Hilger Contemporary, Vienna, Austria, 2012

Peterson Kamwathi, The Goethe Institut-Nairobi, Iwalewa Haus- Bayreuth and Modern Kunst Verlag, Contact Zones project, Nairobi, Kenya, 2011

...matter of record, Exhibition catalogue, Ed Cross Fine Art, London, United Kingdom, 2010

Books & Group Exhibition Catalogues:

SPEACE: Currencies in contemporary African art, Exhibition Catalogue, Museum Africa, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2012

Coca-colonized, Exhibition catalogue, Hilger Contemporary, Vienna, Austria, 2009

Africa Now: emerging talent from a continent on the move, Exhibition catalogue, The World Bank, Washington D.C., USA, 2008

Amnesia platform IV, "the jetlag experiment", Project publication by Nairobi Arts Trust, Nairobi, Kenya, 2007