



*Yesterday is Today IV, 2019*  
polyethylene mesh, rubber, raffia and yarn

Maliza Kiasuwa (b. 1975)

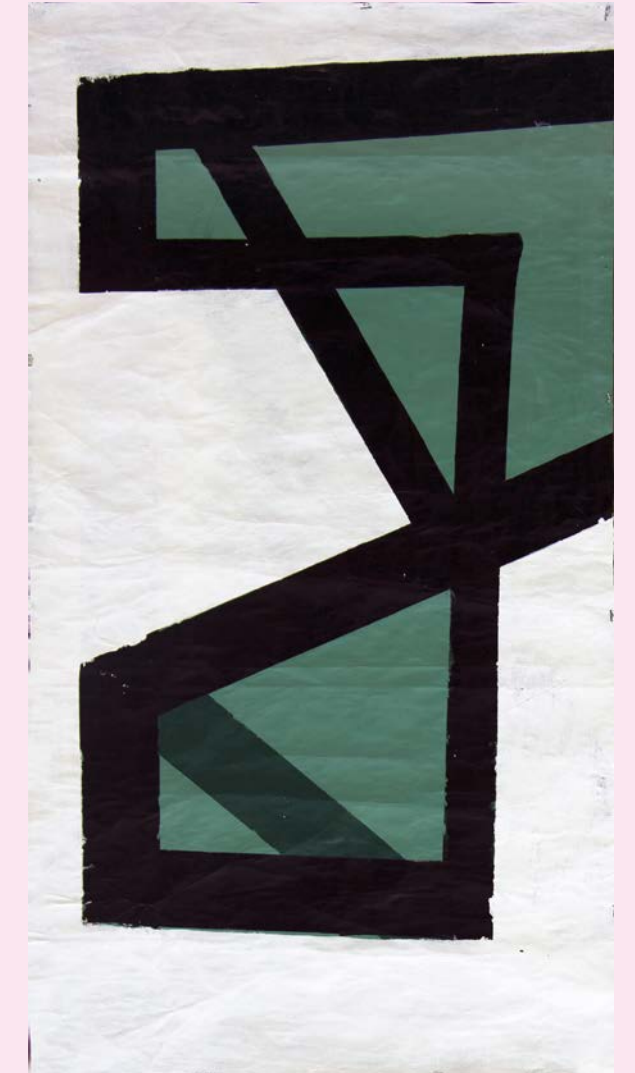
*Yesterday is Today I - IV, 2019*

At the core of Maliza Kiasuwa's practice is a transformation of materials in the eyes of the viewer, achieved by altering the typical state or context in which they appear. Rubber, for example, is the most recent addition to this growing array of materials; a versatile industrial raw material with many vital applications in everyday life. However, behind its commercial significance is a history of violent extraction and exploitation. The cultural and historical associations that these materials bear as a consequence of the global flow of goods and the shifting utility value of these materials, form the basis for a probing of her own personal identity and her relationship to the places she has called home.

Maliza Kiasuwa's abstract sculptures are the next stage in this ongoing exploration of the visual and physical life of materials. Kiasuwa deftly conjures forms that intermingle with the natural and the manmade, working with materials ranging from loofah and raffia to rubber and polyethylene mesh, the latter of which was adopted after observing its use as greenhouse netting in Naivasha, where she lives. Kiasuwa's hybrid forms feature tightly wound bolts of rubber lingering amidst folds of polyethylene mesh from which tufts and fans of raffia emerge. Bright red shots of yarn, like incisions, mark the translucent lightness of the mesh.

Freestanding, suspended from above, or draped over metal rods, these vaguely botanical creations contrast softness and hardness, the formal and the sensual and their ambiguity lends them an air of mystery.

Sidney Mang'ong'o, *Untitled, 2019*  
acrylic and emulsion paint on paper



Sidney Mang'ong'o (b. 1983)

*Untitled, 2019*

The work of Sidney Mang'ong'o has, for a time, been recognizable for its laborious layering, often bringing together collage and painting. Mang'ong'o builds up textured surfaces over which he works with innumerable layers of paint, in a process that moves between masking and peeling, sealing and uncovering. This yields compositions that read, on the one hand, like multi-tone puzzle pieces set adrift in space, the distance between them compressed, almost flattened. Others find a single dominant colour shot through with high contrast pathways within which slivers of other colours still appear. Viewing these, it can feel as though one is looking at the topmost surface of a solid form, incised and hacked away at to reveal the sedimented layers of which it is built.

*Lucid Dreams* features Mang'ong'o's paintings at their most reduced and restrained. Where previously there would be an array of colours, he offers stark white fields over which run solid sharp-edged bars in black. Whether he is tracing pathways through some boundless expanse or erecting barriers to divide up the space is unclear. These extend Mang'ong'o's consideration of structures within the built environment, abstracted and adopted to illustrate personal navigation of both the physical and social and cultural environments. Uniting all these is a sense of mapping, a maneuvering between solids, forms and voids, the ground and the air, boundaries seen and unseen.



*Untitled, 2019*  
acrylic and emulsion paint on paper

Founded in 2012, and based in Nairobi, Kenya, Circle Art Gallery promotes contemporary art from Eastern Africa.

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LUCID DREAMS

11 September - 11 October 2019

Maliza Kiasuwa, Sidney Mang'ong'o, Onyis Martin,  
Prina Shah, Lemek Tompoika, Agnes Waruguru

Curated by Don Handa

Front cover: Maliza Kiasuwa, *Yesterday is Today II, 2019*  
polyethylene mesh, rubber, raffia and yarn

Text by Don Handa. Catalogue designed by Jonathan Gathaara Solarke Fraser. Images courtesy of Circle Art Gallery.



Onyis Martin (b. 1987)

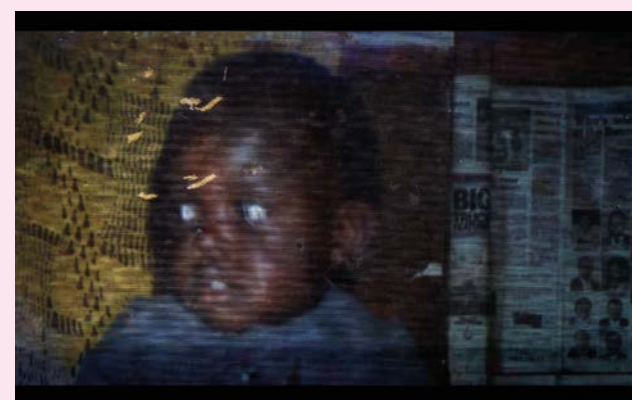
*A Place To Remember, A Place To Make New Memories*, 2019

An interest in personal and shared memory have guided Onyis Martin's engagement with the material remains of people's lives, and the ways they shape our relationship with the present.

In this video, Martin turns his gaze on himself, going into his own remembering of his family and his relationship with them throughout childhood. The work is an attempted recreation, or reconstitution of childhood experience, which exists in memory as a series of (dis)-connected images. Working with old photographs of moments frozen in time, the work has the quality of rifling through a collection of found photographs, some clearly visible, some worn to illegibility by time, others familiar yet completely irreconcilable with any remembered event.

One image in particular, an image of his father sat at a desk at the office, sparked the impulse for this work, yet, and while it appears in the work, one struggles to identify it. Through the course of the three-channel video, the images are interrupted by glitches, and there are moments of the screen when nothing but a single colour appears. Accompanying all this is an interminable static, which is initially intrusive and distracting but then later dissolving into mere background noise, an ever present, almost comforting part of the scenery. In this way, Martin's work mimics the unreliability and indeterminacy of human memory, in which our recollections cannot be separated from the personal readings we attach to them.

Our memories are, often not recollections of actual events as they occurred, but mutable traces of our own experience of them, carried through and coloured by time. Martin opens up portals to a world that he might not know as well as he thought he did, and invites us to come along with him.



*A Place To Remember, A Place To Make New Memories*, 2019  
three channel video, 2 min 34 sec

Lemek Tompoika (b. 1988)

*Parmuain* (One of Many Colours), 2019

In Lemek Tompoika's work, the human figure has appeared, consistently cast as a site for political and cultural debate. His *Duru Za Kuaminika* series comprises of drawings in charcoal and pastel on the pages of local dailies. The more recent *There, In Between* works which saw the figure shown bare and faceless, standing among symbols of the various ideas – philosophical, cultural, religious – to which we look as we attempt to formulate a conception of the world and our place in it. At each of these stages, Tompoika's work has been a series of ruminations on the role that knowledge systems play in the way we make our way through the world.

In *Parmuain*, Tompoika's works on paper – his largest so far – find these same bodies cloaked in pulsating clouds of black which are gradually intruded upon by reds and blues, first as sparks, eventually growing to challenge the dominance of this obscuring darkness. Whilst still concerned with the minefield of conflicting knowledge systems in which we find ourselves today, he doesn't use the text and symbols of his earlier work. Instead, he offers a more urgent depiction of these anonymous individuals, the position and movement of their barely-there limbs hinting at an oscillation between passivity and struggle, as they wrestle with and through the crepuscular no man's land in which they find themselves.

Tompoika draws his colours of choice - reds and blues, and to a lesser extent, browns and yellows – from what he has observed as archetypal depictions of the Maa community to which he belongs, the same community whose cultural ideologies he's interested in reconciling with the tenets of contemporary philosophy. Believing that these two world views are not mutually exclusive, the possible coexistence of the two, and the work of imagining such a world, is the fertile landscape in which Tompoika locates his works.



*Lorok*, 2019  
charcoal, pastel and graphite on paper

Prina Shah (b. 1973)

*Inner Whispers I - XVII*, 2019

Prina Shah's text-based works arrive as clusters of thoughts, memories, beliefs, realizations, and descriptions of various emotional states that radiate outward forming increasingly larger circles whose roll and throb is as visually arresting as it is psychologically charged. Shah writes these concentric lines of text in an indeterminate, stream of consciousness manner, moving back and forth between the centre and the margins, always orienting herself to the center.

Viewed from a distance, Shah's circular forms appear solid and complete; a series of actions and events within a clearly bounded space. However, close inspection reveals countless overlapping lines of text, words and language dissolving into a series of dizzying, barely legible marks against the white of the canvas. The previously solid, complete object becomes porous and undefined, suggesting the boundless quality of the human psyche, through which Shah travels during the deep dive into the self that is the starting point for these works.

The making of this work has been a journey for Shah, delving into her recollections of her life, and how she's become the person that she is today. The process is one of combing through memories of different moments of her life and analysing the choices that have brought her to her present situation and the thinking that guided them. Finally, she looks once more at previously held truths about her self and her place in the world and questions whether these hold up today. Shah adopts a shape often associated with totality, wholeness, and completion and that is further connected to infinity and cyclic movement. The expansion outward, and return to the centre - made more apparent in the various colours in the work - hints at the cycles that mark one's existence, the accumulation of thoughts and experiences that define us, some reappearing at different stages.



*Inner Whispers XVII*, 2019  
acrylic on canvas

Agnes Waruguru (b. 1994)

*Untitled I & II*, 2019

Remixing and acts of improvisation are the central elements of the work of Agnes Waruguru Njoroge. Working predominantly with everyday materials, with particular attention to materials that carry connotations of familiarity and domestic life, Waruguru builds up compositions whose thrust comes from the intimate connection that these materials bare in the personal lives that yielded them. Her work makes use of repetitive, iterative acts of creation and mark making – crocheting, knitting, sewing, and embroidery – whose nature marks the passing of time.

Waruguru's fascination with the notions of landscapes is evident in the works featured in *Lucid Dreams*. Her thinking of landscapes moves beyond literal depictions of the physical world, gravitating further towards abstract depictions of how objects populate and interact within certain, often unbound, spaces. In these paintings, her technique of pouring causes the paint to drift towards and over each other, creating bright, diaphanous fields of colour, the dancing of light made physical on the surface of the cotton fabric. The edges where these fields converge contour a compositional plane and the more concentrated applications of paint and loose pigment scar the "landscape", combined with, repetitive line work, and applied elements to introduce textures and reliefs over the depicted space.



*Untitled I*, 2019  
acrylic, dye, ink and yarn on cotton-linen blend