

An abstract artwork featuring large, irregular sections of color. A prominent yellow section is at the top, a large black section with white speckles is in the middle, and a green section is at the bottom. The sections are separated by white, torn-paper-like edges.

Sidney Mang'ong'o

IMAGINED STRUCTURES

16 May - 9 June 2018

circle art gallery



Sidney Mang'ong'o: IMAGINED STRUCTURES

A comprehensive description of Sidney Mang'ong'o's recent work would have to be a long one. It would have to account for the limitless possible readings of these eloquent compositions, most of which start from modest observations – a room corner, the meeting point of two walls and a floor – the voids and planes, dips and rises, approaches and retreats, the agitation and the repose, and a myriad of overlapping perspectives.

In observing Mang'ong'o's art, one needs to be attentive and I would ask the viewer to take time, to look slowly and carefully, which is what his art deserves.

Untitled XXI, 2017: bars of colour crisscross like the intertwined fibres of plant tissue seen under a microscope.

Untitled XII, 2018: a meeting of three planes, a corner, an axis, a point of focus.

Untitled XIII, XIV, XV, 2018: essays on constrained and open spaces, like rooms in a building, or plateaus and furrows.

These are just some of the many possible interpretations of the relationships between the fields and bars and strips of colour that make up the work in this exhibition, *Imagined Structures*. Imagined because while Mang'ong'o takes the

built environment and the structures existing in nature as his starting point; the resulting works are extrapolations, combinations of multiple views, extensions and truncations of space and perspective.

In these spartan yet lucid compositions, forms (typically bars and geometric fields) interact in ways that echo many models that we encounter every day. In three earlier works the logic of warps and wefts goes awry; strips of colour jostle for space across rippling surfaces built up from multiple glued-together sheets of discarded flour sacks. This energetic use of space is later given over to quieter works in which single-colour geometric shapes are demarcated by bars where the paint is stripped away revealing the brown paper underneath like bluffs cutting across water, and solid fields of colour alternate. In each instance, Mang'ong'o sets up careful configurations which riff on a single idea, what happens at the meeting point of two or more planes?

The work included in this exhibition has developed over the course of the last two years, occurring in what Mang'ong'o has described as alternating bursts of creative energy, and slow, almost inert periods where a single work could take weeks to complete. There have been extended periods when nothing gets done at all.



Bantu River 005, 2016
Bantu River 003, 2016
Bantu River 008, 2016
Freedom | Flight | Refuge 2016

The choice of material, discarded brown paper sacks of flour, is informed by Mang'ong'o's own view of his art-making as an absolutely essential process which he likens to nourishment, hence the relationship of the material to food. In the resulting work, there is no requirement that the flour sacks be visible in their original state, instead they are present simply as a connection, on the artist's part, between the art as it exists in the world, and its origins and personal value.

The making of this work takes place as a kind of figuring out, an attempt at conjuring a calm spot, a quiet moment amid the incongruities and frictions of everyday life. The compositions occur in sequence, but need not be read as such, and none of them represents an end point. From the minute textures of intercellular matrices, to the everyday forms of built structures, and the myriad moments in between (and beyond), Mang'ong'o's work unfolds outwards. Each composition stands as a proposition and an invitation to the viewer to enter and inhabit the depicted spaces and structures.

Don Handa, May 2018

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Sidney Mang'ong'o (b. 1983), Nairobi, started practising art at the age of 25. Whilst he was never a member of the Kibera-based Maasai Mbilli Collective, a meeting with artist, Kota Otieno, and encounters with this group of artists were significant in those initial years. Kota Otieno would go on to become an important mentor and an enduring influence in the evolution of Mang'ong'o's practice.

Mang'ong'o moved into a studio at the Kuona Trust in 2011, where he remained for three years. A lot of time was spent observing the work of other artists, including a participation in the 2012 *Wasanii Workshop* along artists such as Ephrem Solomon (Ethiopia), Wanja Kimani (Kenya/UK), and Dennis Muraguri (Kenya). Mang'ong'o cites Dennis Muraguri and Omosh Kindeh as strong influences at Kuona. Following the move from Kuona, Mang'ong'o, for a time, shared a studio with Kota Otieno in Ngong Town, before moving his studio to his home in Matasia.

Mang'ong'o's practice has been marked by experimentation, working primarily in the mediums of painting and collage, often combining of the two. Much of his work over the past few years has relied on laborious layering of found imagery on paper and board, using textures, colours, and political jargon to explore notions of socio-political degradation.

His work has evolved from the figurative and representational to take on a more abstract quality. He has, however, maintained his deployment of colours in vivid combinations and an attentiveness to texture. His most recent work relies on fields of colour, geometric shapes, and textures to explore forms as they appear in architecture and man-made forms.

Previous exhibitions include: *Ziba Ufa* (Seal the Crack) at the Kuona Trust (2011); *X-tract, Subtract, Abstract*, Circle Art Agency (2013); *Paper II*, Circle Art Agency (2015); and *Freedom Flight Refuge*, Circle Art Agency (2016). In 2017, Mang'ong'o was one of four artists presented by Circle Art Agency at the Jo'burg Art Fair. *Imagined Structures* is Sidney Mang'ong'o's first solo exhibition.



Untitled IV & VI, 2018

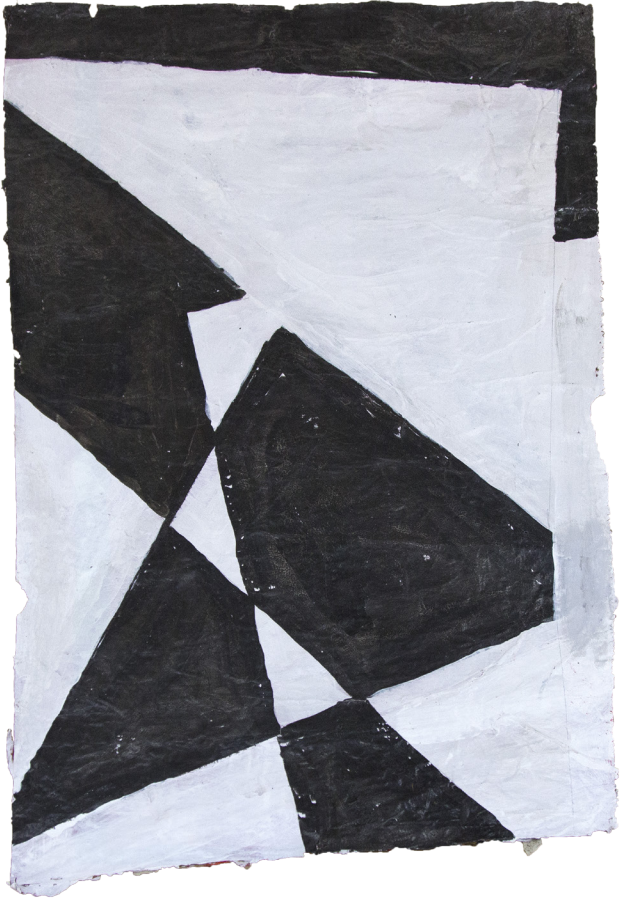




Untitled XIII, XIV & XV, 2018



Untitled XII & X, 2018

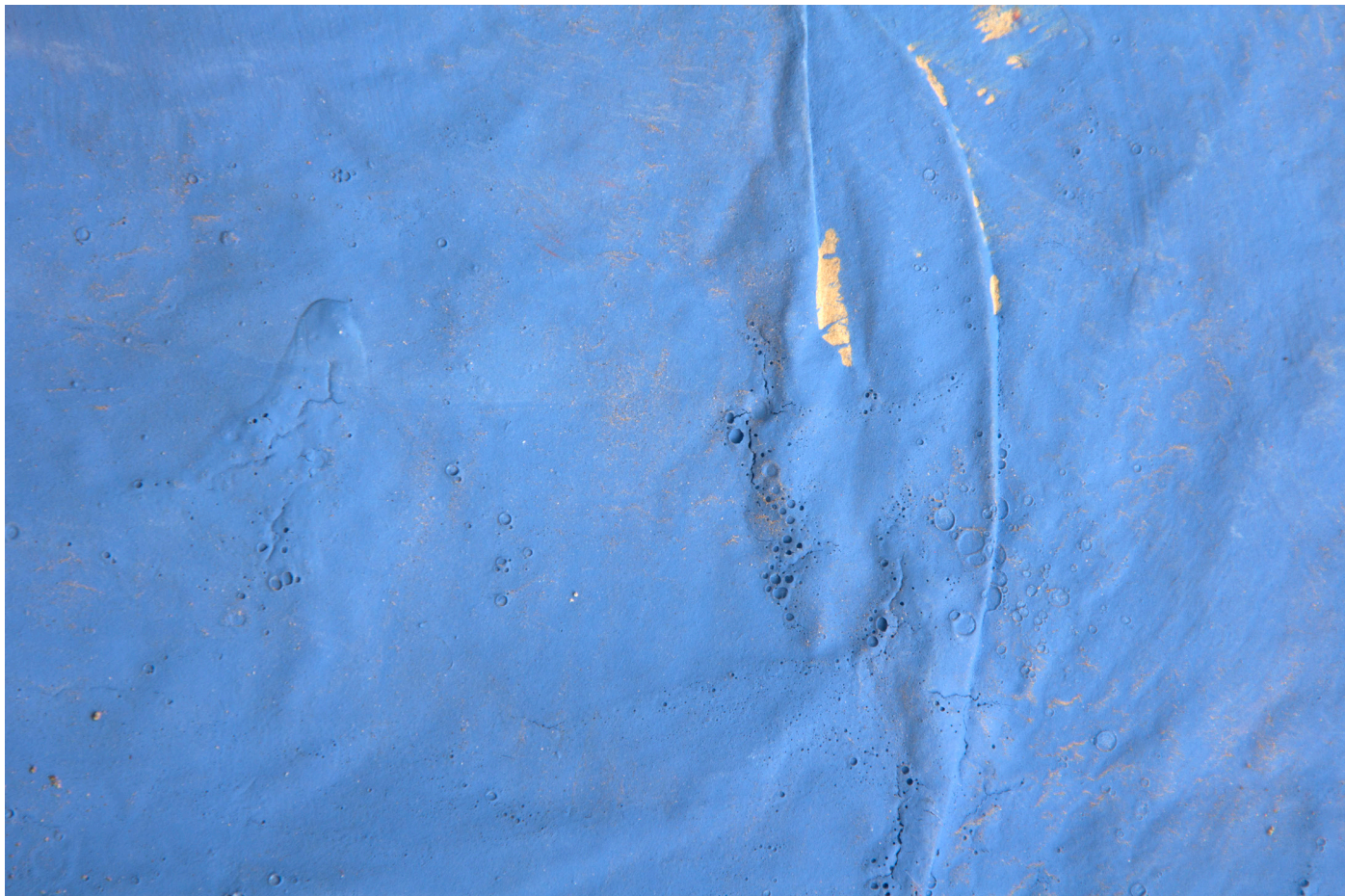


Untitled VII & IX, 2018





Untitled XVIII & XXI, 2017



Untitled X (detail), 2018

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

Through group and solo exhibitions, as well as participation in various international art fairs, the gallery has increased local and international visibility for established and emerging artists. Working closely with local and international collectors, curators, we are building a strong and sustainable market for East African artists.

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Front cover: *Untitled I* (detail), 2018 | Inside front cover: *Untitled III & II*, 2018 | Back cover: *Untitled III*, verso (detail), 2018

Text by Don Handa. Catalogue designed by Jonathan Gathaara Sölanke Fraser. Images courtesy of Circle Art Gallery and the artist.



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