



circle art gallery

KOTA OTIENO & MICHAEL WAFULA

The Mavericks

29 April - 22 May 2015



Circle Art Gallery

Circle Art Gallery aims to be the foremost exhibition space in East Africa.

We exhibit carefully curated, challenging and thought-provoking contemporary art, and provide a venue for presentations from local and international artists, curators, art critics, collectors and academics.

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Opening times:

weekdays 10am – 5pm, weekends 11am – 4pm

or by appointment outside these hours, closed on public holidays

Artists' text by Mbutia Maina, Kenyan artist and curator

front cover: **Kota Otieno**, Survivor series (detail), stitched metal, 100 x 100 cm - Private collection

inside front cover: **Michael Wafula**, Untitled(Freedom series), 2014, mixed media on canvas, 94 x 71 cm



KOTA OTIENO

When Kota sets his mind on making an artwork, it absorbs his whole being and can be an agonizing and soul searching process that needs to be done in solitude. Somehow he always finds ways and means of becoming such a part of this process that the separation between art and life becomes blurred.

Kota lives dangerously, working tirelessly using sharp, rough materials with the minimum equipment, sometimes only a pair of broken scissors, a rusty nail and a homemade hammer are forced to do his bidding, giving junk and other people's detritus a new life as an extraordinary artwork.

Kota's ingenuity can surprise and engage you time and time again, it seems that he has never found a material he can't use, mostly the cast-offs of daily human existence. Old clothes, discarded shoes and slippers, food, mabati, stone, concrete, plastic, paper, earth, kitchen utensils, cow dung and vehicle spare parts. You mention it and he can turn it into art!

In his practice, there seems to be no apparent order or preference for what goes with what, and no clear reason is ever given by him for the use of the materials. Sometimes his mood will change and the work will be altered accordingly - or be completely destroyed.

His fascination for re-fabricating found materials began during his time in Kibera. Every day mountains of waste from neighbouring estates were dumped there to be sorted before recycling. Some of it never leaves the slum, being used to do everything from building houses and fashioning walls to making furniture and tools. Kota highlights the abuse and misuse of these materials in his art. The result is stimulating visual and textural effects that not only celebrate the waste material but also entice viewers into unraveling the composition and assemblage of his work.

Mbuthia Maina, 2015

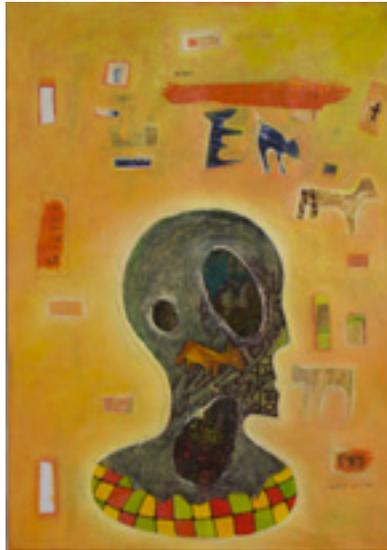


Kota Otieno, Untitled, mixed media on canvas, 100 x 100 cm - Private collection

Biography

Kota studied Art and Design at school in Homa Bay until it was removed from the curriculum. After school he moved to Nairobi to follow his passion for art and meeting artist Otieno Gomba they co-founded Maasai Mbili Art Studio in Kibera slum, a community based art space supporting over 10 resident artists.

In 2006, he won second prize at the Goethe Institut/Alliance Francaise art Competition and in 2007 he joined Kuona Trust Centre for Visual Arts to develop his practice further. He now lives and works in a private studio on the outskirts of Nairobi. He has held several solo exhibitions in Nairobi, at the Goethe Institut, Le Rustique restaurant, Ramoma and Kuona Trust and he has a strong following with local and international collectors.



Kota Otieno
Vitu tuliona movie tukiwa watoi, saa hii ni real I, II, III & IV, 2015
Mixed media on paper
60 x 42 cm each



Michael Wafula
Xenophobia IV, 2015
Mixed media on canvas
128 x 100 cm



MICHAEL WAFULA

Mike is the quiet professional. All his activities, his manner and his art practice are calm, cool and collected, everything he does is layered with evidence of careful deliberation. He observes society – the word he uses to describe the country, the city, the art world, the community, his neighbours and even the youths that he trains at Kijiji Arts in Komarock. Mike has a quiet detachment that must come from years of experience growing up and working in Nairobi's ganglands, the oldest residential part of Nairobi which is really a slum.

His new series of paintings carry a lot of that too. At first you see them and think, 'this time he's gone really abstract' but then on further study and after hearing him explain how he came to make them, it becomes clear that they are not abstract at all.

In most, you can see at least four layers of colour and sometimes a fifth layer made out of text from recycled stencils. Sometimes the words are in sheng (the street slang used by most of Kenya's urban youth) and only a section of a word can be deciphered or part of a short poem.

When we first saw Mike's new paintings at Kijiji Arts at the beginning of this year, we were immediately convinced they were special and when they arrived in the gallery and were put up on the white walls under good lighting, none of us could believe the effect! The colours, the layers and the texture are enhanced in this setting.

But what do they mean? The fact is that they are the most abstract series that we have seen by him, yet they are the simplest to understand. Mike calls them 'Dents in society', he says, in a poor community such as Kayole, many youths are unemployed and the level of social vice is very high and the government does not do much for these people. All these dents or scars are similar to the walls of the ghetto, which are rarely clean or made of a consistent material. Imagine election posters and the many layers of poor quality or recycled paint being revealed in our harsh climate.

Mbuthia Maina, 2015



Michael Wafula, Plaque Island, 2014, mixed media on canvas, 102 x 103cm

Biography

Mike has been painting for many years and is also a graphic designer, a master printer and a teacher. After receiving a diploma in graphics design and painting at the Creative Art Centre in 1992, he began designing and printing billboards, digital car stickers, banners, corporate t-shirts and election branding, among other things. In 1997, he joined the Kuona Trust Museum Art Studio at Nairobi National Museum where he participated in numerous artists' workshops and forums. In 2007, he founded Kijiji Art Studio in Kayole, the studio has since moved to Komarock at the main county market. He also has a private studio at Kitengela and has recently opened a new art centre in his rural home of Kakamega.

His work has been exhibited locally and abroad in Kenya, Tanzania, Spain, Italy and China and most recently a travelling exhibition in San Francisco, USA.

Circle Art Gallery

Circle is an art agency set-up to provide a highly professional consultancy service for art institutions and the contemporary art market. We are passionate about contemporary East African art.

Through our gallery, advisory service and annual auction we aim to give the region's most talented artists greater visibility and opportunities, ultimately increasing access to the region's lively and fast-developing art scene.

Collecting Art

Circle offers individuals and corporations advice on creating, presenting and managing an art collection. We source appropriate works of art and give curatorial advice on the installation, presentation, storage and cataloguing of a collection. We are able to advise clients on art philanthropy and sponsorship of the arts.

We spend time with clients gaining an understanding of their particular taste and requirements, introducing them to artists, exhibitions and events that they might not otherwise encounter. We act on a client's behalf in negotiations to ensure prices are at market value and act in the strictest confidence on the dispersal of whole collections or individual works.

Commissioning Art

Circle is the first company in Kenya to provide an advisory and management service for commissioning art. We believe that urban and domestic environments should be enhanced by well-considered artworks that relate to the social and cultural experiences of the viewer. Circle supports artists creating landmark pieces for our clients that provide interest and entertainment to locals, visitors and workers.

Artists

Circle works with both emerging and established artists across East Africa. We have a large artist database, wide networks across the region and have shown over 150 artists in the last 2 years.

We are always looking for new and exciting research-based art, visiting artists' studios regularly, attending regional and international events that relate to contemporary African art exhibitions. We are currently working with artists in the East African region: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Sudan, Rwanda and Burundi.



inside back cover: **Otieno Kota**, Untitled I & II, 2015, mixed media, 91 × 46cm(LH) 95 × 49cm(RH)

back cover: **Michael Wafula**, Scars of Westgate Mall, 2014, mixed media on canvas, 130 × 100 cm



Michael Wafarwa