

## **JACKIE KARUTI**

### THERE ARE WORLDS OUT THERE THEY NEVER TOLD YOU ABOUT

If the present exists in a way that isn't necessarily one in which you have agency, you can fly away to another time and space. It would be comforting telling this to someone fleeing their country because of war, disease, drought, gender and racial discrimination or even because of economic reasons. When it comes to reimagining the future in an alternate universe we always, more often than not, imagine a world up in the sky. This body of work, consisting of drawings and an installation, depicts evidence of other worlds out there in space, among the stars and perhaps even in the ocean. There exists a myth about an underwater civilization descended from slaves thrown overboard during the middle passage from Africa to the Americas. The drawings feature recurring images of ladders, atoms, watchtowers, satellites and crows haphazardly placed. There is an undercurrent of constant transmission and movement. I'm trying to imagine alternative migratory patterns to other worlds out there as opposed to what we constantly hear of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers dying while trying to enter countries that deny them entry. It might not seem real or ideal but in many ways already, I'd like to believe that we live in one of the alternative tomorrows somebody once imagined.

#### ARTIST BIO

Jackie Karuti was born in 1987 in Nairobi and has in recent years gained positive attention for her experimental, conceptual work using new media. She explores themes of death, sexuality, identity, space and urban culture using installation, video and performance art as well as mixed-media work. Jackie has exhibited and participated in workshops and residencies in Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Sweden, The Netherlands, Uganda and the USA. She has also collaborated with other artists in various film, photography and academic projects. She is based in Nairobi.

## **LONGINOS NAGILA**

New Explorers looks at two friends (immigrants) moving from one European country to another without documents, with no luggage to carry and no hotels to sleep in, European streets are the only places that welcome them with open arms.

Migration is not a modern concept, it has occurred since humans existed. As different countries tighten border security to discourage the flow of immigrants, they encourage the rise of human traffickers who expose immigrants to dangerous adventure. Every individual makes this journey with a single purpose to search for a better life.

This work reflects a long lost dream of the world being a home for all of us, it is the artist's hope for a world without boundaries and discrimination.

#### ARTIST BIO

Longinos Nagila is a Kenyan visual artist, born in 1986. He held his first solo exhibition in Lecce, Italy in 2009-2010, since then he has continued to exhibit in Italy. In 2012-2013 he was one of the artists who exhibited at the Museo Africano in Verona, Italy. He also attended a film-making workshop organized by the Apulia Film Commission in Bari, Italy. In 2014 he held a first solo exhibition at the Shifteye Gallery in Nairobi, Kenya.

He currently lives and works in Nairobi, Kenya where he has a studio at Kuona Trust, Centre for Visual Art.

## **RAY PIWI**

Piwi aims through this work, to evoke a parenthesis, the space that is often untold in the narrative of migration. Everyone talks only about the outcome, it becomes headline news only when people have drowned or been deported in large numbers. We are less aware of the space where other, lesser dramas play out before things get picked up by the media and become sensational.

The story of migration and its cause is well documented. Our human tragedy is our inability to learn the lessons of the past and avoid its terrible repetition. We continue to ignore past mistakes, concerned only with the present.

Human nature is driven by the desire to belong and this need dictates our behaviour. We must have a place where we belong, where we are important, where people care about us. We are not meant to be alone and we are not meant to be completely self-sufficient.

## **ARTIST BIO**

Ray (Piwi) Ochieng was born in 1992 in Kenya. He uses photography to portray everyday life. His reportage often sheds light on untold personal narratives and evokes global, social and economic shifts. He studied at the Market Photo workshop in South Africa. Exhibitions include the upcoming Reinterpreting Historical Photographs, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Cameroon, 2016 as well as group exhibitions in Kenya and South Africa.

## **ONYIS MARTIN**

Martin's work is an attempt to give voice to inner psychological and spiritual states of being. He uses the human form to depict aspects of our vulnerability which he then acts as mirrors to the viewer.

In this series, the artist studies freedom as an abstract person who is affected by time and place. His characters have different masks, they are prisoners of circumstance and of hope, they might think they are free but they are restricted in so many different ways.

## ARTIST BIO

Onyis Martin was born in 1987 in Kenya and has had no formal art education. He has won awards to exhibit in Taiwan at the Taipei international art competition in 2014 and 2015, the Kenya Art Fair, 2015, Circle Art Gallery's exhibition *Paper II*, 2015, the Simama group show, Germany, 2013 and is participating in That Art Fair in Cape Town in 2016.

## SHABU MWANGI

'Fugitive at the frontier' is a series of work that focuses on human movement due to instability in the land they call home. In a quest, they search, sailing through the dark hoping dawn will bring new lands far away from home where the sound of gun shot echoes. They choose to risk the deeper silence and depth of the ocean than the dying beauty of home. In their thirst for freedom they hope their journey will bring them fortune. On the open hillsides of home their thoughts of freedom turned to dust and everything became impermanent. It is with empty hands that they long for acceptance in a home where they can rest their bodies, gather their thoughts and cherish being alive, for they now choose not what this season brings, but what they can eventually become for all seasons.

## ARTIST BIO

Mwangi was born in 1985 and began practicing art in 2003. He lives and works in Mukuru slum where he established the Wajukuu Art Project in 2013 with a deep conviction that his work could highlight the lives of the disadvantaged minorities in his community. Deeply concerned by society's inequality and our lack of empathy for people with different social, political, ethnic and religious beliefs, his work seeks to examine human behaviour and our collective amnesia. He has worked with art2be and Hope Worldwide and exhibitions include Pop-Up Africa, 2014, GAFRA, London; Out of the Slum, 2012 Essen, Germany and various group and solo exhibitions in Nairobi.

## SIDNEY MANG'ONG'O

Bantu River is a mixed media series on cardboard cartons. This body of work is the beginning of Mang'ong'o's exploration of the historical movement of the Bantu people across the African continent. Using his distinctive style of collage on found materials to develop a proverbial and figurative visual form of expression, the artist examines the continuing movement of the Bantu people today.

## ARTIST BIO

Born in 1983 in Nairobi, Mang'ong'o worked for three years at KuonaTrust before setting up his studio near Ngong Town. His use of unusual materials, collage, cardboard, paper and urban

imagery has been gaining interest amongst Kenyan and international collectors. Exhibitions include Beyond Borders and Emerging artists at Kuona Trust and Paper, Xtract.Subtract.Abstract and East African Encounters at Circle Art Gallery, Nairobi

## SITAWA NAMWALIE

God's Favourite by Sitawa Namwalie

and then we divided the world up with our stories,

desolate,  
truth,  
collides.

in my story, God had a favourite, and it was me!

not you,  
not you,  
not you.

## ARTIST BIO

Sitawa Namwalie is a poet, writer and performer interested in how Africans are defining themselves in today's world. In writing she finds her expression. In 2008 her first dramatised poetry show by the name *Cut Off My Tongue* was successfully performed in different venues in Nairobi. In 2009, her first book of poetry, *Cut Off My Tongue* was published. Later the same year, the show was performed at the prestigious Hay Festival in the UK. And in 2012 it was performed in Uganda. She was nominated for the Freedom to Create Prize in 2010 for the courage and positive social influence of her poetry.

In 2011, her second show of dramatised poetry called *Homecoming* was performed in Nairobi to rave reviews. In April 2012 *Cut off my Tongue* was selected by TED Talks on a global search for the new and undiscovered as a performance worth spreading.

Sitawa has worked in the development sector for many years with NGOs and with UNDP, USAID and IUCN. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Botany and Zoology from the University of Nairobi and a Master of Arts degree in Environment, Society and Technology from Clark University in Massachusetts, USA. She works as a development consultant in the areas of environment, gender and governance.

## YVONNE ADHIAMBO OWUOR

"Another week, another letter:"....when is your flight arriving?"

....

I have joined the sentinels of the cemetery; an assorted collection of life's creatures, through which life gazes at life. Devoted dogs, gypsy cats, two birds which perch over certain graves, an hundred unobtrusive trees and of course spirits caught between worlds. Living gargoyles guarding entry points through which humans pass, dreaming in the day about shy, wise, night shadows with which conversations broken off at dawn can resume.

The discovery of listening...

Catching landscape in its surreptitious gestures – patterns which point to meaning...

Waiting for the return of a name set ablaze when fire made dust out of two presidents' bodies...

I live in the silence-scope and perform the rituals of return, for life. Where I am, the bereaved know they will find, if they visit, that the reminder of their beloved's existence - the grave - is safe, that life watches and leaves signs on tombs; mostly flowers, sometimes trees.

I prefer trees.

Soon now, the wind-borne whispers will fall silent."

*excerpt from Weight of Whispers, Kwani, 2004*

## AUTHOR'S BIO

Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor is an author from Kenya. She won the 2003 Caine Prize for African writing, for her short story, *Weight of Whispers*, a reflection on African exile, belonging, identity and its discontents, an excerpt of which she will read at the exhibition's opening. Her debut novel, 'Dust', published in 2014, was received to critical international acclaim. Her new book, 'The Dragonfly Sea' will be released later this year. Her creative work delves into themes she is passionate about, which include landscape, nature, belonging, maps, exile, African liminality, moral wounds, social trauma, and society-in-becoming.