

LILIAN MARY NABULIME

The work of the sculptor Lilian Nabulime (b. 1963, Uganda) wants to raise public awareness of infectious diseases. Over the past two decades, her practice focused on creating sculptures with the intention of addressing and sensitizing people about HIV/AIDS, an epidemic that has cost and disrupted too many lives in Sub Saharan Africa. When Uganda's government set a series of inconsiderate policies to its citizens in the name of combating the virus spread during the recent pandemic, Nabulime voiced her concerns through a new body of work "Keeping Safe From COVID-19". She created a group of terracotta figurines adorned in masks that symbolize the ability to protect oneself from the pandemic. The notion of wearing masks to keep safe from the disease incited a variety of emotions.

"Each sculpture features a distinct mask and facial expression as a way of exposing people's mixed responses to the action of wearing a mask. I designed the masks so that they vary in size and texture. Some of the masks appear as thick and heavy while others are thin and light. On several of the figurines, the mask is worn tight around the face while on others the mask fits more loosely. A few masks cover the entire face of the figurine while others are worn halfway down the face. This discrepancy represents emerging groups of people who have acquired the habit of wearing masks only when they want to or believe that it is necessary."

Nabulime was interested in how the act of wearing a mask documents the behaviour of people living in the urban areas of Kampala, including the interactions between individuals and law enforcement. The artist observed how the mask became a disguise that changed people's relations to one another. Masks made it more difficult to identify and greet those we pass as they conceal our identity.

"I chose terracotta as the medium for this series because of its fragility. Before it is fired, the clay is workable with significant plasticity and can be manipulated to create any type of form. After the clay is fired, the resulting terracotta may last for ages, but it can also break easily if it were to fall on a hard surface. The material's fragility symbolizes the vulnerability of the public to threat of the pandemic. Not only may they fall ill to the disease, but their emotional state — which may already be volatile — can be exploited by those who surround them."

In addition to experimenting with the visual elements of the mask through their shape and texture, Nabulime also played with hues of blue to add more depth to the terracotta figures. The bright patina draws the viewer's eye to the sculptural forms and enhances their beauty. These works were first shown to the public in Norway in 2020 during the exhibition "My



mother is forgetting my face”, curated by Martha Kazungu. In this show several artists addressed the injustices that nations (‘the mother’ on a metaphorical level in the show’s title) render to their citizens (‘the face’). The terracotta figures remind viewers to wear a mask for their own safety and the health of those around them. Their collective display evokes the many unsettling emotions that masks may elicit, including confusion, frustration, sadness, and anxiety.

Dr. Lilian M. Nabulime, is a Senior Lecturer and former Head of the Sculpture Department in the School of Industrial and Fine Arts (CEDAT) at Makerere University in Kampala. She was taught by one of Uganda’s greatest sculptors, Francis Nnaggenda. Nabulime earned a Ph.D. in Fine Art from Newcastle University in 2007. Her research focused on sculptural forms as a tool of communication for women living with HIV/AIDS in Uganda. Through her work, Nabulime attempts to push the meaning of art beyond its visual quality to raise awareness about issues facing society and promote discussion among viewers. Nabulime has been awarded numerous fellowships throughout her career and has exhibited in both solo and group shows around the world. Her most recent commission by SOAS University of London seeks to raise awareness about the risks and responses to schistosomiasis in Uganda and other communities in the Great Lakes Region.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 Campus Girls in view of Womanhood and HIV/AIDS, Makerere Art Gallery, Uganda
- 2016 Art in Open Office, KfW Office, Kampala, Uganda
- 2014 Wood: Artistic Exploration, Makerere Art Gallery, Kampala, Uganda
- 2011 Controversial Art Exhibition, Afriart Gallery, The Netherlands Embassy, Kampala
- 2011 Sculptural Figures Reflected on Daily Experiences, Makerere Art Gallery, Uganda
- 2009 Sculptural Expressions: Women and HIV/AIDS, Makerere Art Gallery, Uganda
- 2006 Sculpture and HIV/AIDS Exhibition, Heddal Welfare, Notedden, Norway
- 2006 Sculptures Exhibition, Samisk Kultursenter, Hattfjelldal, Norway
- 2004 Lilian Nabulime Sculpture, The English Martyrs Art Gallery, Hartlepool, UK
- 1997 Sculpture Exhibition, Glasgow School of Art, Scotland, UK
- 1995 Paintings and Sculptures, Kirinyaga Lounge, Nairobi Safari Club, Nairobi, Kenya

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2019 Seniority First, Afriart Gallery on 7th, Kampala, Uganda
- 2013 2nd International Exhibition, National Art Gallery, Huye, Mutale, Rwanda



2012 Sculptural Forms as a Communication Tool in the Fight against HIV/AIDS, KLA ART, Kampala Contemporary Art Festival, Uganda
2009 2nd Pan African Cultural Festival, Algeria
2007 Art Aid: Embrace – Exhibition and Auction, Newcastle, UK
2007 East African Exhibition, Copenhagen, Denmark
2002 Rhythms, Dots, Stories and Skylines Exhibition, Whitehaven, Cumbria, UK
2000 Women of the World, Flint Institute of Arts, New York, USA
1998 Global Reflections: Nine Women Artists, United Nations, Bonn, Germany
1997 Celebrating Scotland Africa, Royal Scottish Academy, The Mound, Edinburgh, UK
1995 Africus, Johannesburg Biennale, South Africa
1994 Sculptures, Gallery of Contemporary East African Art, National Museum Kenya

EDUCATION & RESIDENCY

Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Art (MTSIFA)
2012 Commonwealth Fellowship Award, UK
2011 Robert Sterling Fellowship, Vermont Studio Center, USA
2011 African Stones Talk Sculpture Symposium (AST), Kenya
2009 British Academy International Visiting Fellowship
2009 ROLS UK
1997 Commonwealth Fellowship Award, UK

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