

Community Over Clout

Artists: Effen Munguanzo, Helena Uambembe, Maritea Dæhlin, Rudy Nzongo, Thania Petersen

Hosted by: Patrick Bongoy and Rafiki



Main Gallery / Mezzanine - 25.04.24 - 06.06.24



Detail of (Clockwise)

Maritea Dæhlin - *I want to be TRADITIONAL*, 2020
Helena Uambembe - *Here Lies the Unknown*, 2018
Patrick Bongoy - *GHOST MEMORY*, 2022
Rudy Nzongo - *Bosendjeti*, 2024

Community Over Clout

In the era of social media, an opportunity to create content and gain celebrity status is available to virtually anyone, anywhere. Provided that they have access to smartphones, power sources, and the ability to read of course. The ever-influential Black vernacular of hip-hop directed the meaning of the word 'clout' to define this kind of fame that could easily lift one from existential obscurity, poverty, and misery to wealth and admiration through a large following (seemingly) overnight. Now that anyone can quickly gain visibility and monetise their online presence, the question for all of us is not so much how to become influential in the world, but rather, what kind of influence one has, on whom, and for what purpose.

Similarly, African art has risen from the shadows of the colonial global creative economy to widespread acknowledgment and rising value within markets that are increasingly rooted on the continent. Seeing the growth of multiple dynamic African art scenes, from Marrakech to Lagos and Cape Town, the question is no longer whether art made by African artists is considered authentic artistic expression by Western standards, but rather what kind of influence the acknowledgment of African art in the global North provides for African and diasporic artists, who profits from the commodification of African art and culture, which audiences are catered to and to what end.

Social media and business are inseparable, and as with any other relationship, it comes with some complications. In the world of internet celebrities, content makers, and influencers, 'clout chasing' has emerged as the ultimate vice. Cardi B, the US rapper of Trinidadian and Dominican heritage, comments on this in her cameo in the Offset song 'Clout' (2019) when she says 'everybody wanna be lit, everybody wanna be rich' and 'they using my name for clickbait'. She talks about being used by social media outlets and their content makers for marketing purposes. One could argue that 'everyone' wants a piece of the African art pie, but are they willing to pay equitably for it?

Despite the possibilities presented by rapid growth in the contemporary African art market, African artists are still facing an emerging, elitist and somewhat inaccessible singular financial model as a source of revenue and valorisation for their work. Without the existence of artists' trade unions or other forms of support systems, African artists are often isolated and vulnerable in negotiations about wages, copyright, visas and other fundamental rights.

As much as social media fame has contributed to the dismantling of power hierarchies in the accessibility of art, many have sadly discovered that internet fame does not always translate into art sales. Although social media has contributed greatly to connecting local and international audiences with art made by Africans and people of African descent globally, artists have come to understand that fame does not automatically equate to a fair share of income in the art ecosystem.

Following their legitimisation in the West, African artists are rightfully drawn into global discourses on art's relevance in the face of environmental crisis, political conflicts, and war amidst massive digital innovation. However, there can be a discrepancy of interest that often marginalises African artists whose voices sing a different tune or, rather, who draw a different (unapologetically African) picture. While the Western art world is preoccupied with the reckoning of multiple systemic faux pas of the past, African and diasporic art ecosystems are faced with local and regional challenges relating to the psychological boundaries that are still isolating communities via ethnic, religious, social and economic barriers.

Do contemporary art institutions empower African and diasporic artists to shape multiple narratives of Africanness, or are we compelled to go along with Western-centric notions of our continent and its development? Can the continental philosophy known by its various names – including Ubuntu in isiXhosa, Kimuntu in Kikongo, or Utu in Kiswahili – and the values embedded within it, provide an alternative foundation on which individual and collective needs can be built simultaneously and equitably? Can 'community building' in the spirit of Ubuntu become the antithesis of 'clout chasing'?

The exhibition presents the works of artists of African heritage based on the continent and its diasporas. This project insists on the need to seek out modes to conserve various communities' beliefs, practices, and traditions, and to promote their model of sustainable preservation. The offering in this exhibition emerged as a collaborative effort through a series of conversations between the participating artists and the exhibition hosts, Rafiki and Patrick Bongoy, pre-, during and post-pandemic. The artists shared thoughts on a range of topics, including the politicisation of identity, cultural and identity transformations, global interconnectedness, and the role of artists in contemporary inter-African social awareness, solidarity, and community building across African and Afro-diasporic localities.

Effo Munguanzo

Effo Munguanzo's work includes a variety of mediums ranging from painting to working with found objects and mixed media, using resin and wood. Hailing from Kinshasa, DR Congo, Munguanzo's work is informed by the day-to-day challenges he and his people have faced. Fascinated by the devastating effects of human greed and its impact, his work explores alternative forms of life and urban realities. "I wonder about human survival mechanisms in a continent ravaged by social and economic problems." Munguanzo currently lives and works in Cape Town, South Africa.



Effe Munguanzo
Jeux de Ponts I, 2024
Mixed media sculpture
67 x 50.3 x 26.3 cm
R 37630 (Inc. VAT)



Effe Munguanzo
Jeux de Ponts II, 2023
Mixed media sculpture
53.5 x 34.5 x 64.5 cm
R 42930 (Inc. VAT)



Effe Munguanzo
Connection, 2024
Mixed media sculpture
30 x 42.5 x 57 cm
R 48230 (Inc. VAT)



Effo Munguanzo
Lance Pierre, 2024
Mixed media sculpture
42.5 x 30 x 57 cm
R 30210 (Inc. VAT)

Helena Uambembe

Helena Uambembe is a storyteller or, as she describes herself, a keeper of (hi) stories. The 32nd Battalion of the South African Defense Force and her Angolan heritage are predominant themes in her work, exploring narratives surrounding history, place, and time, and interweaving symbolic elements, archival material, and fiction. Her recent work moves towards notions of repair, restitution, and collective healing, emerging from silences and voids. Each piece, whether a video, drawing, or installation, functions as a frame taken from a more comprehensive narrative that confronts the fractures and erasures resulting from unspoken legacies of war that still shadow the present.



Helena Uambembe
Here Lies the Unknown, 2018
Digital print on baryta paper
118,9 x 46,26 cm
NFS



Helena Uambembe

Eu Vou Morrer em Angola, 2018

Photographic print on baryta paper

118,9 x 88,07 cm

NFS



Helena Uambembe

Toil, 2021

Video

NFS

Maritea Dæhlin

Maritea Dæhlin is an interdisciplinary artist who lives and works in Norway and Mexico. She is interested in human behaviors, emotions, rituals and encounters. Her work spans devised theater, video performance, performance art and text. Her art comes off as playful, non-linear and sometimes absurd. Being a Nordic artist of Norwegian and Cameroonian heritage, who calls Mexico home and works internationally, has been a recurrent theme in our conversations. Her offering in this group exhibition will bring some insight into that.



Maritea Dæhlin

I want to be TRADITIONAL, 2020

Video performance and poems

NFS

Patrick Bongoy

Patrick Bongoy has built a multi-disciplinary practice whose central feature is his industrious and highly textural reuse of rubber from the inner tubes of tyres. Mixing this with other waste products such as hessian sacking, industrial packaging and textiles, he cuts and weaves his materials together to create complex, layered sculptures and three-dimensional reliefs. His painstaking process draws on traditional basket-making skills while referencing the physical labour that defines day-to-day life in DR Congo.



Patrick Bongoy

GHOST MEMORY, 2022

Installation: wood panel, repurposed
rubber inner tube, acrylic paint

498 x 245 cm

R 265530 (Inc. VAT)

Rafiki

Rafiki is based in Oslo. Her interdisciplinary artworks find their starting point between photography and bead work, textiles, waste materials, and the use of objects imbued with memorial capacities. With a process-based practice, Rafiki's artworks are not 'final', and hold healing, remembrance, and cultural analysis as central. Artistic strategies in her works often avoid Western, anthropological gazes. Incorporating symbolism, fables, and tools from visual storytelling and oral history in her pictures, she invokes themes such as forced displacement, war, racialized understandings of Blackness and femininity, and burdened colonial traditions to control place and obliterate temporality.



Rafki

Badass, 2024

Mixed media: found material, repurposed door,
beads, fishing line, threads

60 x 4 x 60 cm

R 55650 (Inc. VAT)



Rafiki

*when life gives you pepper, make
Peppersoup, 2024*

Mixed media: found material, repurposed
window, beads, fishing line, threads

32 x 4 x 85 cm

R51940 (Inc. VAT)



Rafki

Wombman is King, 2024

Mixed media: beaded embroidery, fishing line,
threads, raffia, repurposed window

53 x 58 x 62 cm

R 62010 (Inc. VAT)

Rudy Nzongo

Rudy Nzongo is a visual artist born in Kinshasa, DR Congo, where he lives and works. He completed a Fine Arts degree at the Academie de Beaux Arts in Kinshasa (2012) where he specialised in sculpture. The leading theme in Nzongo's work is music, notably Congolese rumba. His recent work is characterised by his versatility in the choice of mediums including twigs and paint. Nzongo is the founder of an artist collective called "ZAYI KIA MVANGULU" (the wisdom of creation).



Rudy Nzongo
Untitled, 2024
Mixed media
143 x 124 cm
R 50752.8



Rudy Nzongo
Bosendjeli, 2024
Mixed media
86 x 44 cm
R 50752, 8



Rudy Nzongo
Ngangu, 2023
Mixed media
87 x 72 cm
R 41552

Thania Petersen

Thania Petersen is a multi-disciplinary artist who uses photography, performance and installation to address the intricacies and complexities of her identity in contemporary South Africa. Petersen's reference points sit largely in Islam and in creating awareness about its religious, cultural and traditional practices. She attempts to unpack contemporary trends of Islamophobia through her analysis of the continuing impact of colonialism, European and American imperialism, and the increasing influence of right-wing ideologies. Threads in her work include the history of colonialist imperialism in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, as well as the social and cultural impact of westernised consumer culture. Her work is also informed by her Cape Malay heritage, and the practice of Sufi Islamic religious ceremonies.



Thania Petersen
Free the DRC, 2024
Public artwork
NFS



Rafki & Thania Petersen

when it rains, it drips from everyone's roof. On Thania Petersen's Free the DRC taxi, 2024

Video

NFS



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