



6th of May till the 5th of July

Collective exhibition: Boris Anje, Carson Buka, Kansime Brian Lister, Christine Nyatho, Florence Nanteza, Collin Sekajugo

Curated by Celine Azem

T: +971 55 228 6475
E: info@firtticontemporary.com
W: www.firtticontemporary.com

Al Quoz 1, Street 8
Alserkal Avenue, Unit 29
Dubai, UAE

An Odyssey of Identity features the work of six artists who explore the complexity and multifaceted nature of oneself. Drawing on the influential theories of bell hooks, the exhibition explores the importance of compartmentalizing existence and acknowledging the ever-evolving construct of individuality. These works reflect the interplay of diverse cultural and social spectrums that shape individual experiences.

The artists not only showcase their unique perspectives on the concept of identity but also invite critical exploration of the nuanced and multidisciplinary nature of their African heritage. The works highlight the intersectionality of existentialism, illustrating how various aspects of the self, intersect and interact with one another in intricate and intertwined ways.

Boris Anje's work explores concepts of identity by focusing on the representation and celebration of black bodies and culture. Anne portrays stylish young men and women of African descent in his paintings. He modifies their outfits and uses Adinkra symbols, which are contemporary ways of writing some of the languages spoken in Ghana and Ivory Coast, to contextualize his subjects in global consumerist culture and African symbolism. This mixture of traditional and modern elements reflects the complex and diverse identities of black people, who often have to navigate different cultural and societal expectations. Anje's work challenges stereotypes and celebrates the diversity and beauty of black culture, presenting a vision of identity that is both inclusive and empowering.

In contrast, **Collin Sekajugo's** mixed media works delve into the complex interplay of social, cultural, economic, and political factors that shape individual and collective identities. Sekajugo draws on multiple cultural sources to create images that engage the viewer with a sense of familiarity and strangeness. His collages challenge the cliché that Africa does not produce art by recycling locally sourced materials like polypropylene bags, denim fabrics, and waste paper. These materials serve as a metaphor for sustainability and durability, inviting conversation about the relationship between art and community. Sekajugo believes that art can be used to catalyze

change and promote hope for the future, and his work reflects his social conscience and his commitment to creating a more inclusive and equitable world.

Kansiime Brian Lister's paintings stand out for their exceptional use of oil and acrylic paint to capture the raw emotions of African men and women in society. He tells the incomplete story of African men and women, highlighting their experiences and emotions through his artistry. Through his use of color and symbolism, Lister creates a powerful connection between the history of Africa and modern-day Africa, normalizing modern black luxury and celebrating the progress that has been made. Additionally, his representation of the sentiment of sisterhood and brotherhood shared between black women and men emphasizes their special bond, which is recognized not by blood but through understanding.

Christine Nyatho's fascination with the moon and its symbolism highlights how culture and beliefs shape our identities. Her interest in lunar cycles and their influence on human behavior and culture speaks to the idea that identity is not just shaped by our upbringing and surroundings, but also by external forces such as celestial bodies. By using locally found materials such as bark-cloth, discarded paper, and fabrics, Nyatho also highlights the importance of using materials that are connected to one's cultural identity and heritage.

Meanwhile, **Florence Nanteza's** focus on the healing properties of plants and herbs speaks to a broader sense of identity, specifically the relationship between humans and the natural world. Her use of banana fiber collages, a traditional material in Uganda, reflects her cultural identity and upbringing. Through her art, Nanteza emphasizes the importance of traditional knowledge and practices, and how they can be used to promote wellness and positive health.

Carson Buka's portraits depict individuals in intimate interactions, often avoiding direct eye contact with the viewer. This technique subverts the typical power dynamic between subject and viewer, causing the viewer to feel like a voyeur rather than an active participant. Buka employs

traditional bark cloth from Masaka alongside white canvas, effectively blending tradition and modernity. The use of Pop-art inspired figures in bright colors also comments on how dominant markets create a simplistic portrayal of identity and difference. Instead of presenting a linear narrative of a person, Buka's paintings celebrate the diverse communities and languages of his subjects. By portraying private moments, Buka emphasizes the intricate nature of individual identity and how social norms shape it.

Through their thought-provoking works, the artists encourage viewers to question the conventional definitions of “identity” and embrace the diversity and ever-changing nature of our identities. *An Odyssey of Identity* celebrates this diversity in art and highlights the power of visual storytelling to inspire critical reflection and promote social change. As bell hooks has noted,

“Beloved community is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation, by each of us claiming the identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world.”

The exhibition reminds us that, as we journey on the path of self-discovery, we must always be open to the ways in which our identities are constantly evolving and being shaped by the world around us.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

BORIS ANJE



Anje is a Cameroonian artist who has gained recognition for his vibrant and sophisticated portrait paintings. He was already considered a talented artist before completing his Masters in Drawing and Painting from the Fouban Institute of Fine Arts in Cameroon in 2018. In 2016, he was an artist-in-residence at the prestigious Les Ateliers Sahm in Brazzaville, Congo, where he became fascinated with the city's celebrated

dandies and began making them the primary subjects of his work.

Anje has always been interested in figurative art and started drawing characters from comic books at the age of nine. As the president of his secondary school's art club at sixteen, he became deeply interested in the history of art. His teacher at university taught him the importance of perseverance in his practice and consistency in his work, which he has put to great use.

Anje's Neo-Pop Art paintings provide spirited insights into his stylish models while pointing out the pervasive influence of consumer culture. In his earlier works, he filled the black bodies of his models with logos from famous fashion brands, while in recent works, he portrays them on logo-

T: +971 55 228 6475
E: info@firetticontemporary.com
W: www.firetticontemporary.com

Al Quoz 1, Street 8
Alserkal Avenue, Unit 29
Dubai, UAE

layered backgrounds. Anjel's art has been exhibited in several galleries across the world, including his first solo show, "Black is Beautiful," at Barcelona's OOA Gallery, which discovered his artistic talent and organized his initial European exhibition in 2017.

Anje's paintings capture the essence of the African dandies, known throughout Africa as sapeurs, who spend all their money on fashion. Anjel portrays them as religious figures, following their own rules to maintain respect within the community. In his recent works, Anjel depicts voguish female dandies and tackles current social issues such as the coronavirus pandemic and racial injustice.

Highly informed about contemporary art, Anje acknowledges the influence of Andy Warhol's Pop culture and his admiration for painters like Tim Okamura, Fahamu Pecou, Amy Sherald, and Kehinde Wiley, who treat the black body in their work. Anje makes his work uniquely his own by conceptually playing with the content and adding metaphors and ideas that take his paintings beyond mere physical realism into a magical realm.

CARSON BUKA



Buka was born in Masaka and holds a diploma in food science and culinary art. After his graduation in 2012 Carson Buka moved back to Masaka where he worked with Weaver Bird (Now Ndegeya) Foundation where he used his natural artistic talent to participate in various art projects and workshops that propelled him into the mixed media artist that he is today. Since then he has been working tirelessly, switching between different media such as painting, sculpturing and installations with a strong presence of materials. His work has been exhibited in Nairobi,

Kenya, Kampala and Masaka in Uganda.

Today Buka mainly works with bark-cloth and paper and works under Ndege Ya Akili, an artists' collective based in Masaka and is very instrumental in Weaver Bird Residency's MAKE MASAKA public art project. His artwork can be found at Umoja Art Gallery and Masaka Gallery.

KANSIIME BRIAN LISTER



Kansiime Brian Lister is a highly regarded Ugandan artist with over a decade of experience in painting. Born on September 24th, 1995 in Kampala, his work is recognized both within and beyond the African continent.

Lister's strength lies in figurative painting alongside visual art, using exceptional skills with oil and acrylic paints to bring to life the rawest and most unfiltered human emotions in his artwork. He tells the incomplete story of African men and women in society, emphasizing their unspoken words and capturing their

emotions through artistry. Through his use of color and symbolism, Lister creates a powerful connection between the history of Africa and modern-day Africa, normalizing modern black luxury while highlighting the progress that has been made.

Lister's style represents the sentiment of sisterhood and brotherhood shared between black women and men, and it is a special bond recognized not by blood but through understanding. It is a recognition of the tragedies endured by black individuals in a world that thrives off their oppression.

Lister graduated with a Bachelor's degree in international Business from Makerere University Business School in 2019. He has won numerous awards, including the 2019-2020 African Bic Art Master people's choice award.

Lister has worked with various galleries, including Alexis galleries Nigeria, Gumbo art gallery Chicago, Taag gallery USA, ImbaYaSarai gallery South Africa, La Bic collection gallery Kenya, Sons of art gallery Uganda, and Wonder art gallery Uganda. He has also participated in several

residencies, including Sons of art gallery Kampala Uganda in 2019, Gumbo art gallery st Harvey Illinois in 2020, Alexis galleries Lagos Nigeria in 2021, and Alexis galleries Lagos Nigeria in 2022.

Lister's artwork has been exhibited in various exhibitions, including Sons of art gallery Kampala Uganda in 2019, Wonder art gallery Kampala Uganda in 2019, La Bic collection gallery Nairobi in 2019, Gumbo art gallery st Harvey Illinois in 2020, Wonder art gallery Kampala Uganda in 2021, Alexis galleries Lagos Nigeria in 2022, Serena Hotel private viewing in 2022, and Taag gallery New York online exhibition in 2022 and 2023.

CHRISTINE NYATHO



Christine Nyatho was born and raised in Kampala, her father originally came from Nebbi and her mother is from Masaka. She is a mixed media artist working with locally found materials such as bark-cloth, discarded paper and fabrics. Nyatho is fascinated by lunar cycles and how the moon influences human behavior and culture. Her work explores imagery and symbolism created around lunar bodies, her interest in art dates back in 2015 when she worked with Weaver Bird Foundation and later when she worked as a studio assistant for artist Collin Sekajugo.

Along the way she attended his mentorship programs that involved other young aspiring artists. It's through his assistance and guidance that her interest in contemporary art piqued.

Nyatho has been involved in different Weaver Bird Residency programs including the Art camp that takes in Masaka every month and the ongoing MAKE MASAKA public art project.

FLORENCE NANTEZA



Florence Nanteza, who was born in Masaka, Uganda in 1995, currently resides and works in the same location. As the youngest among her siblings, Nanteza discovered drawing as a way of expressing her emotions and experiences at a young age. Growing up in a family that was inclined towards the arts, she was inspired by her father's love of art and subsequently developed her own artistic skills. Following her high school graduation, she fully embraced art as a powerful means of self-expression.

Her distinctive banana fiber collages rapidly gained attention and

appreciation from the local expatriates and art enthusiasts in the Masaka region. In 2020, she joined "Ndege Ya Akili," a creative incubator that supports young Ugandan artists in Masaka. This platform gave her the freedom and confidence to further explore her artistic abilities.

Nanteza is deeply passionate about wellness and the positive impact of plants on one's health and wellbeing. She has previously worked with a traditional medicine clinic in Masaka, gaining valuable knowledge and experience in the field of herbal medicine. This influence is evident in her artwork, which merges childhood memories and dreams with a focus on the healing properties of herbs and plants.

COLLIN SEKAJUGO



Collin Sekajugo was born 1980 in Masaka, Uganda. In 2007 after traveling around Eastern and Southern Africa on a series of study tours, Sekajugo returned to Rwanda with a vision of “Using Art to Change Lives”. This mission led him to open the first visual arts space in Kigali under the name Ivuka. During this time, Rwanda was seen as a newborn baby struggling to reconcile its turbulent past and reconstruct itself. Ivuka, whose name connotes re-birth, became a center of hope for ambitious youth eager to explore life’s meaning through the arts. An incubator for creative activities, Ivuka includes a joint studio space for aspiring visual artists and a

children traditional dance troupe, Rwamakondera (Rwandan horns) that brings together disadvantaged children and teaches them dance as a means of healing, educating and instilling in them a sense of hope for their future.

Inspired by the success of Ivuka and eager to extend this vision of using arts to catalyze change in his father’s birthplace, Masaka, Uganda, this self-taught artist expanded his scope to the village of Ndegeya. In 2010 Sekajugo started transforming the village into an arts destination under an initiative that he named Ndegeya Foundation. Ironically, Ndegeya, is the local name for a Weaver Bird, which is recognized for its artistically elaborate nests, reinforcing the image of this environment as a birthplace of creativity and innovation. Today Ndegeya village boasts a sculpture park with camping facilities; a village art gallery; children’s library and a youth development center. Additionally, Sekajugo runs an artists-in-residency program called Weaver Bird Residency for creatives that are eager to enjoy and seek inspirations from this special village while developing their artistic practices.

Utilizing elements of collage, precisely defined by colour, and sweeping, energetic hand-drawn lines in his works, Sekajugo proposes a conversation with the viewer; literally producing communicative art. As a passionate critic of ethnocentrism in all its forms, he draws on multiple cultural sources to create images that engage the viewer simultaneously with a sense of familiarity

and strangeness in their composition. Each work is a plea for tolerance, a statement against racism, violence and discrimination; each is also an ambiguous entrance into the artist's uncompromising view of the world, whether it be a chat or an argument.

The artist's technique of recycling locally sourced material like Polypropylene bags in his work is a response to the inclusion of contemporary consumer materials in his art. Conversely, Sekajugo's collage paintings are symbolic of his relationship with the community: to create a narrative that the public can relate to through working with found objects like denim fabrics and waste paper. Ultimately, his collages invite conversation on durability and sustainability as a metaphor to the cliché Africa does not produce art.

In 2017, Ivuka Arts Kigali celebrated its 10th anniversary. This important milestone has given Collin Sekajugo pause to sit back and reflect on how his humble initiative has inspired its alumni to open similar spaces such as the Uburanga Arts Studio, Inema Art Centre, Yego Art Centre and Niyo Arts Gallery.

Sekajugo's own artwork reflects on his social conscience, highlighting the link between art and community in Africa. Sekajugo has travelled extensively in Africa, Europe and North America, participating in international artists' conferences, workshops and residencies through which he is quickly gaining international name recognition. His artwork holds the distinction of being a part of the permanent collection at the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art in Washington, DC, as well as other notable private and corporate collections in the US, Europe, Africa and Asia.

Collin Sekajugo is winner of the 2019 Human Rights Award Uganda.