

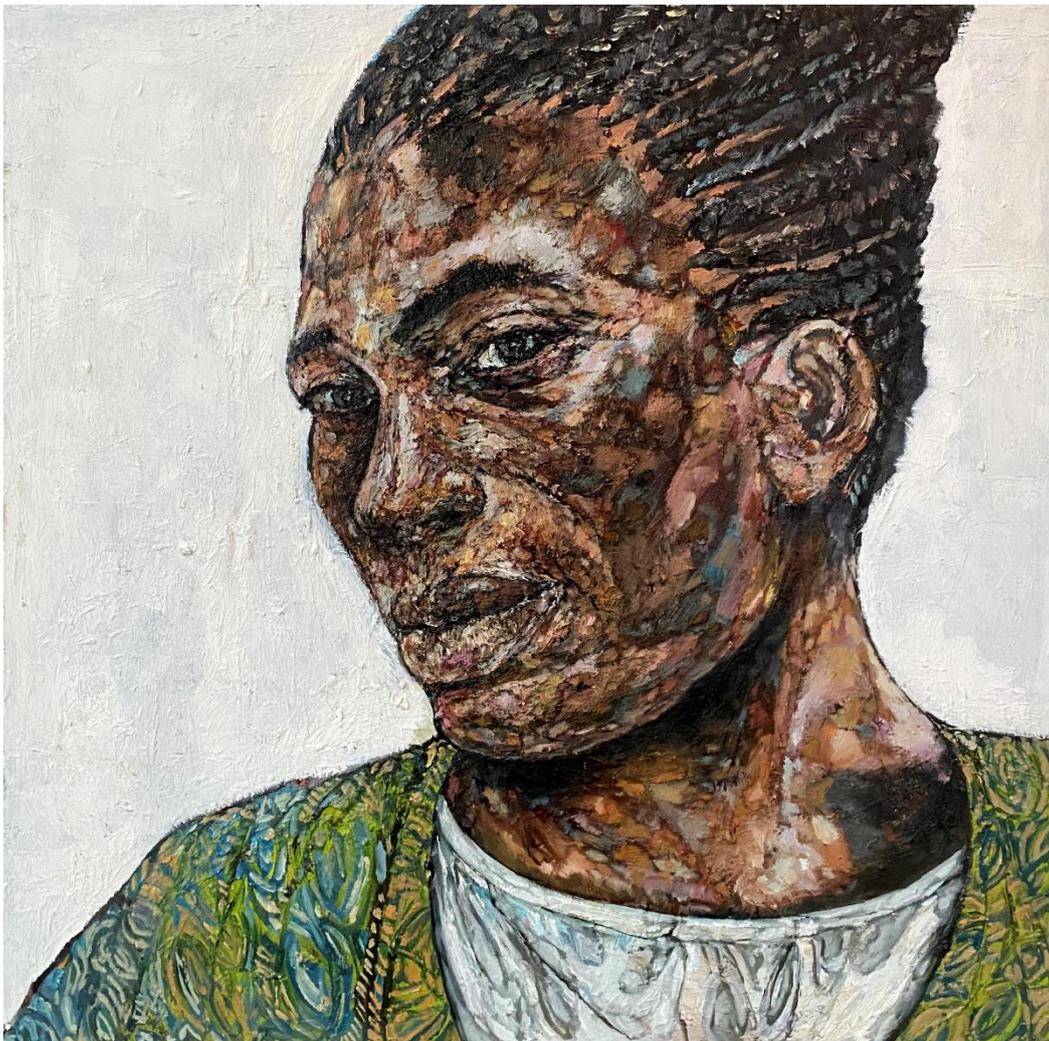


BAYUNGA KIALEUKA

THE SILENT VIOLENCE OF SOULS

(WORK IN PROGRESS)

April 8th to June 30th 2021



BAYUNGA KIALEUKA

(DRC / USA, 1974)

A Congolese born narrative painter, curator, and mural artist, Bayunga Kialeuka grew up in Miami (USA), where he worked as an artist before moving to other US cities, all the while variably travelling to DRC. His work focuses on themes of social realism, investigating society through the prismatic lenses of economic ecosystems, race and cultural identity.

While in the USA, the artist started working along the lines of classicism and modernism to represent his immediate urban surroundings, focusing on the African American context. From his point of view as a perpetual immigrant, Kialeuka's work translates how Black America is still subdued by these three dimensions of poverty, racism, and communitarianism. In this light, his paintings strive to restore the pride of those he sees as inescapably second-class citizens.

Bayunga Kialeuka currently works on an ensemble of portraits and figurative depictions of protest, domestication, and status in Kinshasa (DRC). This expanded series further compares the hierarchical temperament of Kinois (indigenous Kinshasa residents) at home and abroad to scale concepts of escapism and utopia in the face of pauperisation's stigmas. Currently living and working in Brussels (Belgium), the artist's drawings and paintings now start shaping a triangular representation of contemporary pan-Africanism aiming to deconstruct our accepted understanding of wider African history to make place for new perspectives into how Africans and Afro descendants are shaping a truly global society.

Having painted numerous large murals as a way to engage with contemporary history and local society in the USA, Kialeuka also worked as a curator and producer of art exhibitions. His compositions are technically influenced by various painters, photographers, filmmakers, writers, musicians, and philosophers alike. Among them are Palmer Hayden, Moké, Tupac Shakur, Claude Brown, Franco Luambo, Lucian Freud, Romare Bearden and Eric Monte.

THE SILENT VIOLENCE OF SOULS

(Work in Progress)

Watching a work by Bayunga Kialeuka, you are inevitably in flux.

Born in Kinshasa (DRC), the now Brussels-based painter, who until recently grew up and worked in the USA (mostly in Miami, but also in Gainsville, New York, New Jersey, Atlanta and New Orleans) is himself constantly travelling between his own imaginary memories, his life's (trans)formative episodes and the aspirations of an ever more cosmopolitan tomorrow, where all boundaries have vanished.

Until such a time, his work anchors itself along contemporary concerns of black identity, dignity, and individuality. At first sight, his painterly approach resides in a very personal rendering of black skin texture and thus expression, peculiarly placing him along the tradition of German expressionism, or almost. Yet after digested observations, his most recent body of work seems to invite a more explosive blend of visual and artistic references, ranging from the disproportionality and skin textures found in works by Lucian Freud, Philippe Pasqua, and at times even Jenny Saville, to compositions profoundly under the spell of photographers Colin Jones and John H. White, who documented black lives in 1970's U.K. & USA respectively.

Kialeuka's objective is to capture life as he sees it. Nothing more complicated.

As I enter his realm, my readings take on other dimensions. I can't help but imagine connections between his lively café scenes and those of the Congolese *Peinture Populaire* master Moké, or go well beyond and be reminded of the roaring 20s, when a new world was being born far from the ashes of the past. Each of the painter's protagonists tells us at least part of a story. Those looking straight at us seem to hide a deeper, more complex narrative. Behind proud smiles and escaping gazes, one can feel what I call the silent violence of souls, for lack of a shorter expression.

From dandy terrace scenes to velvety nightclubs, Kialeuka's bigger than life characters, in all their meaningful disproportions, epitomize modern daily life, its fake stereotypes and mostly the universal themes of brotherhood, love and betrayal – to put a word on the three most recurring emotional colours of the artist's palette. For there is a silent violence gently boiling under these seemingly peaceful poses. This silent violence can be imagined as a conceptual group portrait of contemporary human dynamics, in an imaginary urban panorama built on American social landscapes, but mostly rhythmized by Central African protagonists. On each side of the spectrum, we can see the same quest for a dignified self.

By disrupting the contemporary impulses of black portraiture with his symbolic and provokingly subtle disproportions, Bayunga Kialeuka challenges the notions of beauty and harmony by sketching a deeper layer of unease, of wounds in need of healing. If his Africans or African-Americans (who can tell?) appear in front of us proud and strong, their fuller humanity is hidden behind their eyes.

Under his brush, the focus drifts away from the African American experience towards a more Pan-African one that transcends the long history of social portraiture and aims to expand beyond racially

charged current affairs and issues of resistance like BLM, to venture into the fundamental world of daily life and the essence of individuality.

In this show, we present about as many single portraits as there are group scenes. The latter are meticulously orchestrated compositions of foreground and background, of choreographed encounters and contradicting body positions. The artist is fond of suggesting hierarchy in his images, of creating false connections to exacerbate what could be conflict or remorse as a result of colliding human interactions.

Whether on paper or canvas, his black and white paintings make me think of great scenes of the recently released *Malcolm & Mary*, in which a man and a woman vacillate between love and hate, covering every corner of a rented remote one-floor villa. As in this Netflix co-production, Bayunga's fictional canvas relationships can be deciphered by the way bodies imbricate.

First started in the USA, Bayunga Kialeuka's body of work can now almost be re-imagined as a triangular relationship between growing up in Miami and becoming an artist in the States on the one hand, and his personal childhood memories and later episodic visits in Kinshasa on the other. The third reference point is yet to be represented in images but promises to be centred around the life of a black diaspora artist in Brussels. And rather than being focused on what makes these three focal points so intrinsically different, the work will exacerbate how their inhabitants resemble each other.

Some of his paintings like *Espace Ave Bandundu*, throw me back into archival memories of the *entre deux guerres* period in France when the Surrealists were gathering in cafés around Paris to rethink the world. Other works like *Black House No.1*, *Chez Nenette* or *Love Twins* remind me of scenes in some films by John Cassavetes in which the notion of point of view becomes crucial to look at the work. Bayunga told me that: "The title *Black House* is an homage to British photographer Colin Jones, who is among my favourite photographers documenting urban life in 1970s North London. Jones is most proud about the images he took of 'The Black House', a hostel for black youth on Holloway Road. These pictures were originally commissioned by the *Sunday Times* in 1973, but Jones was invited back by residents and he continued to document their lives for the rest of the decade."

The characters in the drama unfolding in *Makambo*, where a proud and pregnant woman sit in the foreground, a giant hand covering her belly, symbolise universal family tensions in a lower middle-class context. In Lingala, the word *Makambo* refers to the personal or business affairs of an individual, a couple or a group. This large oil on canvas includes influences from American photojournalist John H. White, who was hired by the E.P.A. (*Environmental Protection Agency*) commission *DOCUMERICA*, to photograph Chicago's African American community between 1973 and 1974. White's photographs show the difficulties facing residents as well as their spirit and pride.

The man wearing glasses, who fills half the canvas in *A Rainbow Park Procession* could be a headmaster or simply symbolize a figure of power, in a more universal sense. Male portraits in the exhibition are mostly stern and dark, like *Ned the Saint* or *Papa Michel*, except for the smiling man in *Ngwaka No.17*, which is a semi-self-portrait of the artist. Female portraits are more colourful, but just as strong. *Mama Leki* and *Nnekka* are revealed by warm and sensual yellows, while *Mama Leki ya Kitambo* embodies the technical prowess of the artist. Here, Kialeuka's textures are brought to their most detailed arrangement, which I would describe as almost impressionist.

For the first time at the gallery, Bayunga and I decided to show works which are *in progress*. Not only to document the process of creation, which we will do by positing pictures of the evolution of the paintings on social media, but also to engage the audience with the blurry notion of a work being finished. I honestly believe that Bayunga's works are only finished when they are sold, else he would

keep on painting them. Perhaps less true of his creations on paper, for technical reasons, why would most compositions not keep on evolving in an undertone along the life experience of their creator?

Some will wonder whether Kialeuka is an American artist. Or if he is genuinely African? To me this is rather irrelevant. Although profoundly modern under many lenses, his work is truly innovative in its consideration of African heritage and history in portraiture. He depicts African women and men in their day to day lives without ever imprisoning them in any overwhelming social context. Through his iconography, we are invited to expand our understanding of modern-day African diasporas and how they came to be and look beyond the last four centuries into how globalized Africans and African Americans are reshaping our societies.

For what are a few hundred years in our millennial history on this planet? The idea of cultural transfer is often at the core of the greatest art. Art is indeed still the most universal and efficient way to instantly communicate our deepest and often abstract feelings. In his recent book "*The World Before Us: How Science is Revealing a New Story of Our Human Origins*", Tom Higham suggests that art and creativity were not exclusive to Homo Sapiens, but that the finest primitive examples present in cave paintings and ornaments might be the results of exchanges of ideas and knowledge between Sapiens and some of its cousin species like Neanderthals or Denisovans. It was true then, and it still is today. Art is the truest common language, the materialization of our souls.

Klaus Pas

April 2021



Mama Leki (2021)

Oil on Wood Panel

123 x 61 cm



Papa Michel (2021)

Oil on Canvas

115 x 75 cm



Makamba (2020)

Oil on Canvas

209 x 188 cm



Ned the Saint (2020)

Charcoal on Canvas

115 x 75 cm



Freddy (2019)

Oil on Wood Panel

91 x 61 cm



Ndumba ya Biso No.1 (2018)

Acrylic on Paper (framed)

100 x 80 cm



Combatant (2020)

Acrylic on Paper (framed)

160 x 120 cm



Ngwaka No.17 (2020)

Oil on Canvas

115 x 97 cm



Black House No.1 (2020)

Oil and Charcoal on Paper

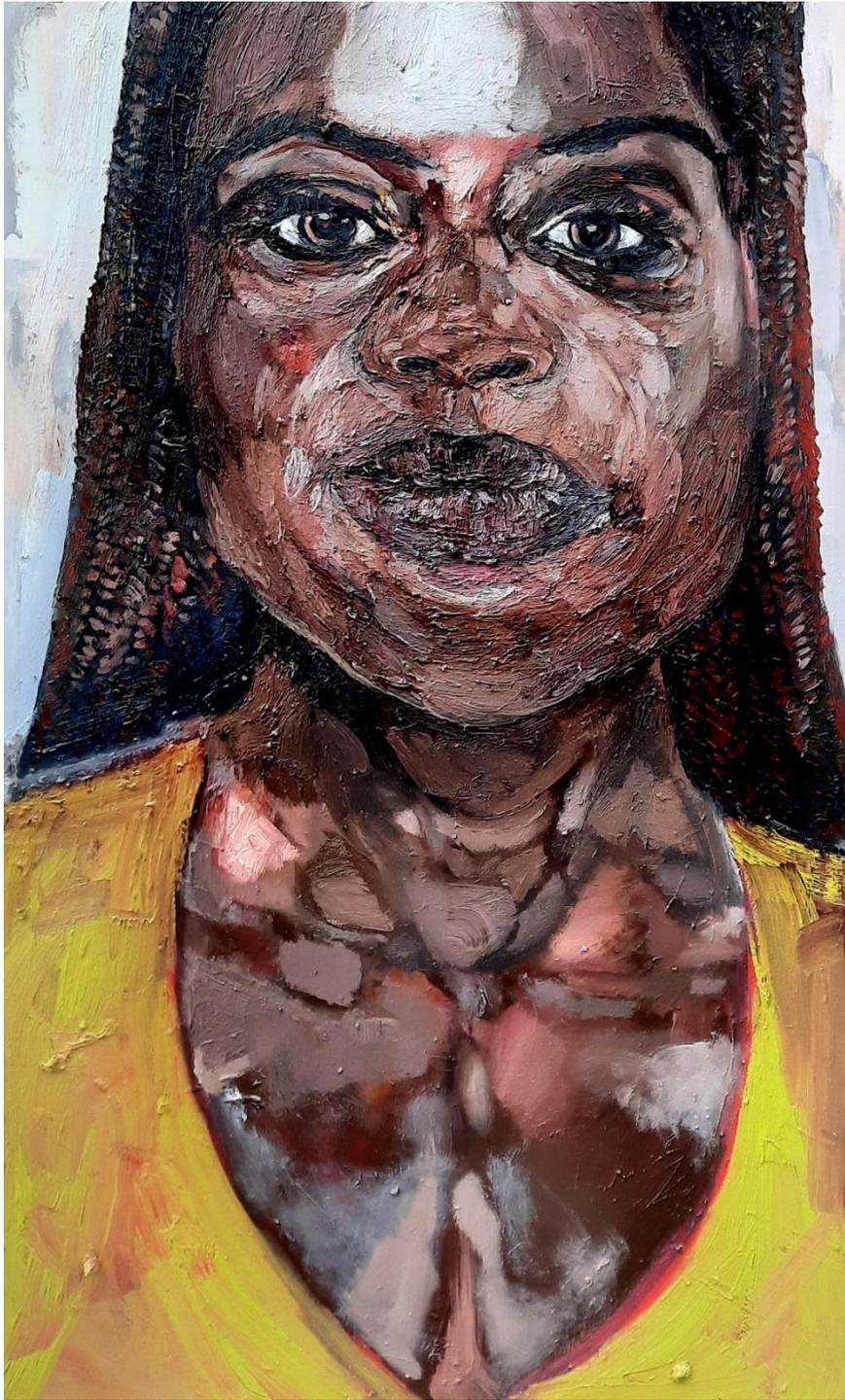
160 x 99 cm



Mama Leki ya Kitambo (2019)

Oil on Canvas

90 x 90 cm



Nneka (2021)

Oil on Wood Panel

136 x 82 cm

*This work is still being painted, and we will update social networks and our website with the evolution of the work throughout the exhibition.



Love Twins (2021)

Acrylic on Canvas

205 x 140 cm

*This work is still being painted, and we will update social networks and our website with the evolution of the work throughout the exhibition.

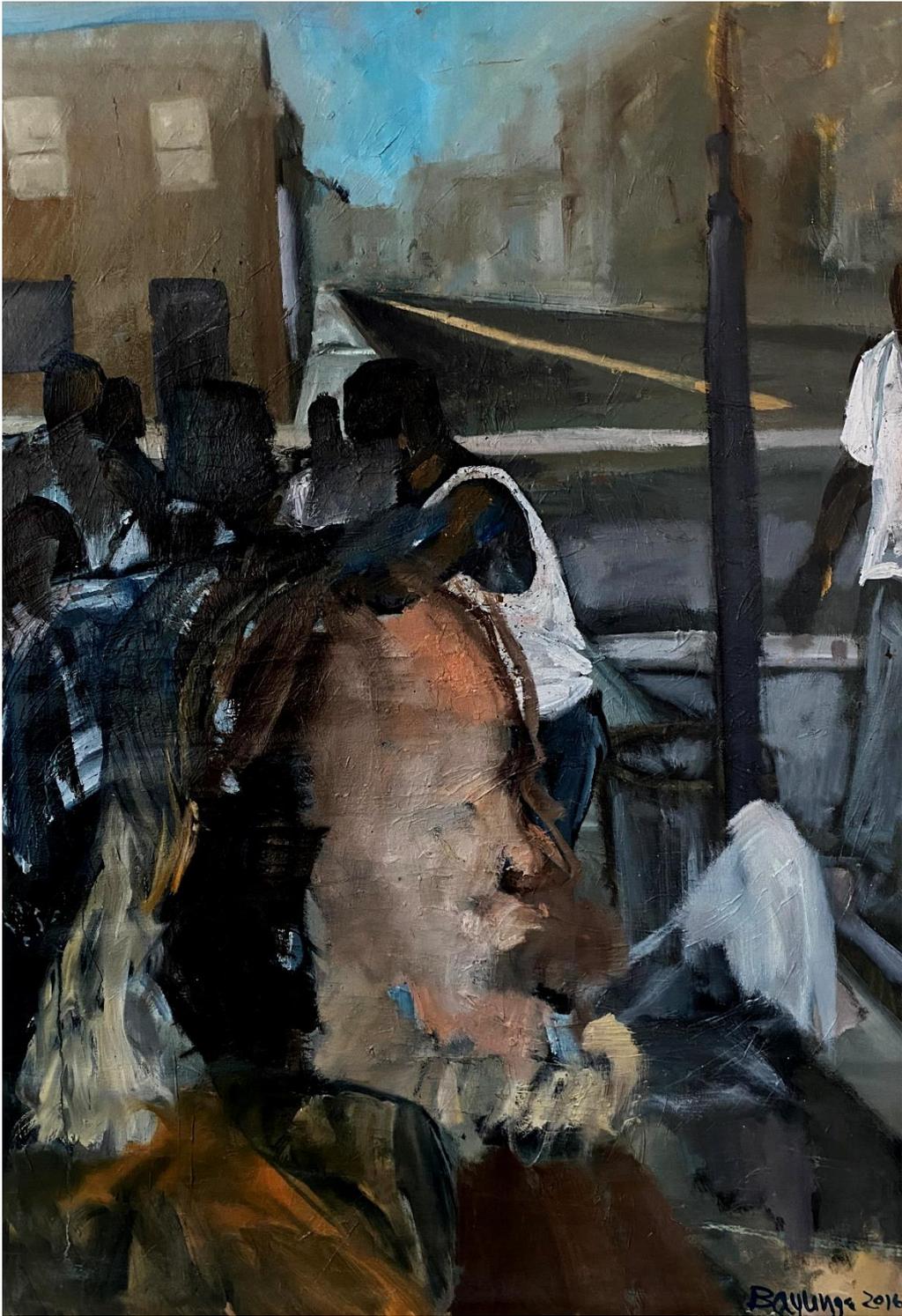


A Rainbow Park Procession (2021)

Oil on Canvas

133 x 106 cm

*This work is still being painted, and we will update social networks and our website with the evolution of the work throughout the exhibition.

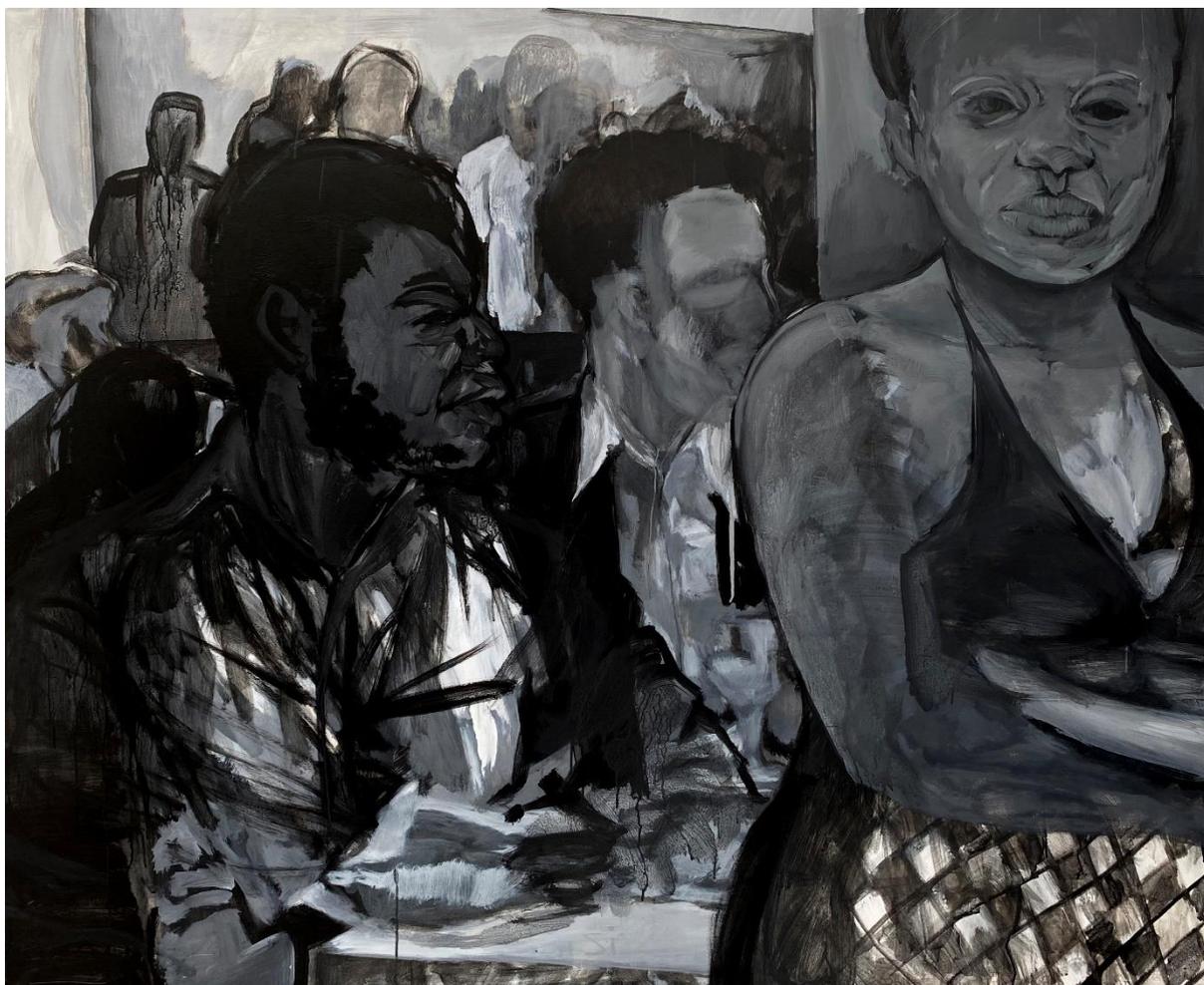


Rules of East Orange Courts (2021)

Oil on Canvas

130 x 90 cm

*This work is still being painted, and we will update social networks and our website with the evolution of the work throughout the exhibition.

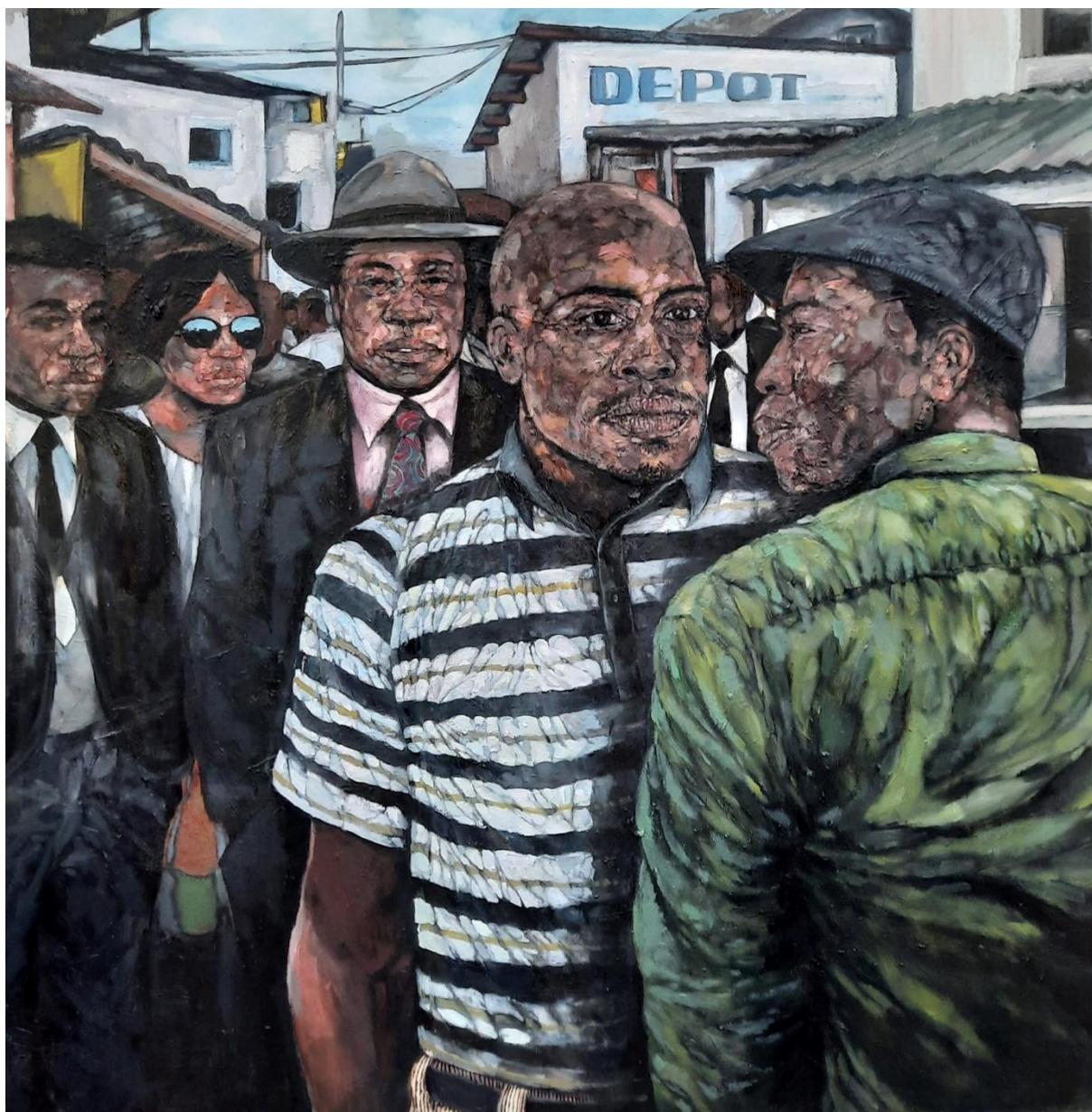


Chez Nenette (2021)

Acrylic on Canvas

198 x 162 cm

*This work is still being painted, and we will update social networks and our website with the evolution of the work throughout the exhibition.



Panopticon (2021)

Oil on Canvas

195 x 192 cm



Espace Ave Bandundu (2021)

Oil on Canvas

188 x 163 cm

*This work is still being painted, and we will update social networks and our website with the evolution of the work throughout the exhibition.

TO THE EXHIBITION

ASK FOR PRICE LIST



BAYUNGA KIALEUKA

(DRC / USA, 1974)

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

The Silent Violence of Souls, Kloser Contemporary Art | Antwerp, BE 2021
WAY STATION by Bayunga Kialeuka, Chapelle Boondael | Brussels, BE 2020
BKS Pop-Up, Urban Collective Gallery - The Moore Building | Miami, FL, USA 2016
Stingy Brim, Old Dillard Museum | Ft Lauderdale, FL, USA, 2014
Before Nights Falls, WDNA Jazz Gallery | Miami, FL, USA, 2011
The Tree, Stash Gallery | Miami, FL, USA, 2010
Bayunga Kialeuka, North Dade Regional Library | Miami, FL, USA, 2006
Urban Knights, The Gallery @ AHCAC | Miami, FL 2001

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Arts Congo Eza Parc de Bruxelles | Brussels, BE 2020.

Congolisation, Pianofabriek | Brussels, BE 2019.

Art for Rights - Canvases of Courage, Convention Center | New Orleans, LA, USA, 2016

Jazz in the Gardens, Dolphin Stadium | Miami, FL, USA, 2015

Rostros, Galleria Decap | Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 2015

Trespass, Mar Mar Arts Studio | Miami, FL, USA, 2008

A Day in the Life, Mar Mar Arts Studio | Miami, FL, USA, 2006

The Low Down + Dirty Art Show, Objex Art Space | Macon, GA, USA, 2005

Night of a Thousand Arts, Artopia Gallery and Studios | Miami, FL, USA, 2003

Salon Noir, Saint Thomas University Gallery | Miami, FL, USA 2003

Outlaw Art, Gallery 21 | Miami, FL, USA, 2002

Oscar Thomas Memorial Exhibition, The Gallery @ AHCAC | Miami, FL, USA, 2000

A Tribute to Jackson Pollock, The Schacknow Museum of Fine Arts | Fort Lauderdale, FL, USA, 2000

CURATORIAL PROJECTS

ART on PAPER African Heritage Cultur Arts Center | Miami, FL, USA, 2017.

Reconstruction, BKS Curatorial Project, Miami Dade Main Library | Miami, FL, USA, 2016

A Bike Ride with Purvis Young, BKS Curatorial Project, Amadlozi Gallery | Miami, FL, USA, 2016

DragonFly, BKS Curatorial Project, Amadlozi Gallery | Miami, FL, USA, 2015

Beside the District, BKS Curatorial Project and Mar Mar Arts, |Miami, FL, USA, 2010

KIN-Art, BKS Curatorial Project, | Miami, FL, USA 2014

Art Africa, BKS Curatorial Project, Urban Collective, | Miami, FL, USA, 2011

Trespass, BKS Curatorial Project and Mar Mar Arts, | Miami, FL, USA, 2008

Praise House, The Gallery @ AHCAC | Miami, FL, USA 2004

Night of a Thousand Arts, Artopia Gallery and Studios | Miami, FL, USA 2003

MURALS

The Privilege of History Law Studies High School | Brooklyn, NY, USA, 2010.

Social Traps Law Studies High School | Brooklyn, NY, USA, 2010.

All Services Entail Tender Loving Care and A Listening Ear Black Veterans for Social Justice | Brooklyn, NY, USA, 2010.

Turning Point MS 219s | Miami, FL, USA, 2009

This Too Shall Pass Rickers Island Correctional Facility | Brooklyn, NY, USA, 2009.

The Perfect Equilibrium of Nature Tillary Park Foundation & The Urban Assembly School of Music | Brooklyn, NY, USA 2009.

Don't Trash NYC Container Project Mos Carting | New York City, NY, USA, 2008.

South Brooklyn Brooklyn Youth Consortium, Coney Island | Brooklyn, NY, USA, 2008.

Reaching New Heights Trust for Public Land | Brooklyn, NY, USA, 2008.

Incarcerated Minds Rickers Island Correctional Facility | Brooklyn, NY, USA, 2008.

NOTABLE COLLECTIONS

Richard K. Shafer, Neil Hall (The Urban Collective)

The Pas-Chaudoir Collection of Contemporary Art from Africa and the Diaspora

Miami Dade County Public Library Collections

Villa Paula Museum

Mapo Kinnard (Xavier University)

Rafael V. Santana

Erik Tucker Estate (New Orleans)

Arles Carballo (Miami Herald)

BIBLIOGRAPHY & MEDIA

Miami Contemporary Artist, Schiffer Publishing 2007

6th Annual Oscar Thomas Memorial Exhibition, Miami Art Exchange 2006

Celebration of 19th Century African American Church, Non-Duality Press 2004

Best of Arts and Entertainment, Miami Sun Post 2004

Out of the Elevators and Into Wynwood, Ignore Magazine 2005

Overtown, Miami Herald 2002

Artist Bout with Polio, Miami Herald 2001

<https://www.amberroblesgordon.com/press/tag/Bayunga+Kialeuka>

<https://www.groundswell.nyc/people/bayunga-kialeuka>

<https://www.gettyimages.be/detail/nieuwsfoto%27s/recording-artist-usher-and-bayunga-kialeuka-pose-for-a-nieuwsfotos/501142142>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DswDafUc6k>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=692oZYDg0-I>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFcbfjIDXmM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IeMNQGfHLKI>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0c47zDa-vvc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BiMZh20QtqA>

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