

Wallace Juma

Kenya

Biography

Wallace Juma was born in 1987 on the shores of Lake Victoria in western Kenya and spent his early years there before moving to Nairobi. After graduating from high school, he entered the Buruburu Institute of Fine Art in 2010, where he studied art and design. Two years later, he began a full-time career as a visual artist, working closely with his communities in Nairobi and the countryside. In his art, he uses a variety of materials and techniques to visualize his messages and thoughts.

Wallace uses recycled materials to create his conversation. In a world where so much is thrown away, he questions the intrinsic value of what is portrayed in glossy magazines and the like. The homo sapiens portrayed in these magazines, what is it actually about? What do we actually see when we look at this? Are these faces real? Are these bodies permeable? Is there more than meets the eye? When we peel back the layers of superficial reality and throw away the masks, is there another reality?

In his works, Wallace seems to disguise the figures depicted with the real meaning that might lie behind them, and in this way reveal the real value of these "luxury stories." He seeks to create works of art that unfailingly express the poetry and drama of the human condition - works of art that evoke the full range of emotions in those who stand before the works. What's more, the real story is perhaps less glamorous, but more human.

His works have been exhibited in East Africa, Nigeria, Germany, Belgium, the United States, and Australia, and are in numerous private collections and art publications. He participated in the Art Kathatica Artist Residency in Rusinga Rusinga, Kenya and won first prize at the Manjano Art Competition in Nairobi and second prize at Artist View Schramberg in Germany for a collaboration with his artistic mentor in 2015. Most recently, he won an artist grant and residency at home from Africalia Belgium in 2020 and a special mention from #ensemble art award 2021.

The artwork: aesthetic positions

Wallace Juma about himself:

"Wallace, who grew up near one of Nairobi's largest landfills, uses recycled materials to create his art and engage with viewers in conversations about the

nature of modern consumerism by exploring human desire and the way products are marketed to people. In his work "Concealment and Revelation," Wallace uses pictorial portraits of models from consumer magazines found in the same landfill as source material.

Inspired by the fires that are lit over the landfill to burn the garbage, Wallace has heavily stained the pages themselves with soot and charcoal. By studying the models' facial expressions and features, and then using a variety of mixed media techniques such as paint, ink, and the scratching and burning of the pages themselves, Wallace transforms these faces and gives them his interpretation of their deeper emotional reality. In some paintings, this raw state leaps out of the page; in others, it is more subtly hidden. But regardless, each image has its own power and seems to make a deeply personal, direct connection with the viewer the longer you look at it.

In a world where so much is thrown away, Wallace seems to be asking us questions about the intrinsic value of what is represented by these models, and also about their own role in the process.

I use recycled materials to shape the conversation between me, my work, and its viewer. In a world where so much is thrown away, I question the intrinsic value of what is represented in glossy materials and the like. I went to Dandora to the landfill, talked to garbage collectors and collected magazines together. I've brought them into my studio with fire and smoke, I've burned and darkened the surfaces of these magazines and etched away the soot to show the rich colors while drawing thoughts and moods of ghostly lungs and faces from these communities, now with Covid-19, the struggle is twofold."

Artworks

Untitled VI - vessels and passengers

Mixed media on PVC film

2020

Size: 80 x 100 cm

Self Portrait - concealment and revelation

Mixed media on PVC foil

2018

size: 30,5 x 35,5 cm

Untitled I - vessels and passengers

Mixed media on PVC foil

2021

size: 70 x 90 cm

Untitled - blossoms in orbit

Mixed media on recycled found magazine paper

2020

size: 32 x 38 cm

Untitled - the one you know

Mixed media on PVC film

2021

size: 80 x 110 cm

Work comment by kukutana

Wallace Juma works - among other things - with garbage. At Pandora in Nairobi, Kenya, the city's large garbage dump (30 hectares, operated as an open pit to be filled in the middle of residential areas), he collected old magazines with garbage collectors there. From these, further processed, emerged his works "Concealment and Revelation" and "Blossoms in Orbit". This revelation, or revelation after concealment or out of concealment, shows two filigree lungs, whose execution is reminiscent of topographical maps. Ghostly, the schemes of the lungs appear on a black ground - the virus reveals the hidden interior of the body, reveals the need for air to breathe (but also recalls, through the work on the dump, the necessary protection of the population from toxic gases and waste). Also appearing on a black charred ground is another shadow, another ghost (Self-Portrait): a head, hatched in a muted yellow-brown tonality peels out from the background. The eye sockets are empty, an earring dangles from the earlobe, perhaps remnants of clothing visible on the neck. Has the mouth opened to scream? Has decay set in? Do we see human garbage? Or yet beauty as "blossoms in orbit"? Does the orbit stand for the cycle of life from emergence and decay? The spirit from the garbage dump appears to us in its own dignity, its own beauty - can we endure this reflection of ourselves?

The series "Vessels and Passengers" shows colorful, almost cheerful and yet threatening schemes, which as organic forms remind us of cells, bacteria, viruses.

Are these the vehicles or the passengers for something else? Is there a THEN hidden in them that, at least for humans, holds nothing good? Or are these "slipper animal forms" dancers in a round dance, which takes place without beginning and without end, always giving birth to something new, but also destroying?

Finally, another man-self-portrait (the one you know). The one you know means as a counterpart mostly, often, always this: oneself. In this other and nevertheless same one recognizes only oneself. This head looks at you, with it you look at yourself. The eyes are clear, this head looks curiously. The mouth is hidden, the brain coils visible and colorful against the dark background. This head will not say anything, we already must do that - he looks at us, that's enough.

His work is an essential, multifaceted, necessary commentary on the conditionalities of human life in general and in his Kenyan homeland.