



AMASAKA GALLERY

ALLEGIANCE TO THEE

Amidst all that is going on in Uganda today, one thing that can't be missed is the speed at which the local art scene is growing.

Take the example of Masaka – a town turned city with an overlooked rich history of craftsmanship and art making. Here, stories of modern painting and sculpting can be traced back to when Catholic missionaries arrived in Masaka through the southern border with Tanzania in 1879.

In the late 1800s, the kingdom of Buganda, in current day central Uganda, was perceived as adaptive and receptive to change by the outside world. King Mutesa of Buganda and his new foreign guests triggered interest in imported aesthetics and decor. From the Arab interior patterns to portraits of Christian saints, the king's youthful subjects started imitating both cultures through drawing, painting, pottery, and wood carving. Since then, Buganda's historiography alone has subconsciously been a great source of inspiration for art in the region.

Besides rivalry between the world's two most significant religions, through their pre-existing trade routes Arabs were also unintentionally paving the way for Christian missionaries to deliver their well-articulated messages to King Mutesa's court. It was a battle for dominance that would later become an influential component of cultural evolution for East Africa's most powerful kingdom. By the 1800s, Arab traders introduced literacy to their target converts and Christianity brought formal schooling and skilling, and created vocational training centers that later became secondary schools and community colleges. These adopted art and crafts as well as sports to advance personal development and self-expression among their trainees.

St. Henry's college Kitovu was already playing a key role in setting standards for art teaching at secondary school level. And two decades after industrial arts were introduced at the then Makerere College by Margaret Trowell, the 1950s saw a wave of interest in the arts especially in Central Uganda. In the 1960s, it was time for the newly independent Pearl of Africa to decide

whether Margaret Trowell's intentions were truly emancipatory for the youth or just leverage for the colonialists' extension of power and control. Her methodology for teaching art was contested by a sizable number of local educationists but one can argue that the death of art's indigenous curriculum gave birth to what many of us embrace as modern art today. In the recent past there has been wide criticism for the British scholar's allegedly expired teaching methods on which art education at Makerere University is still based. However, to date the School of Industrial and Fine Arts at Makerere still survives and thrives through various means.

With good art education or not, local artists share a responsibility for creating art to propel Ugandan art to international standards and greater heights.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:

With the lack of sufficient quality art materials and funding, local artists have endured multiple challenges while thinking, visualizing, creating, and making what is expected to pass as "good" art. What is good art? This is a question to be answered by my elitist friends or foes – and my bourgeois acquaintances, whereas the neutral shall remain the artists who are subjected to their demagoguery.

The artist's role is to make art, and keep making, regardless. And according to the universe, it's good art.

Christine Nyatho, Carson Buka, Florence Nanteza, Frank Ssuuna, Nabir Yo, Martin Jjunju and Kato BC come to you with new energies and visions. Their sole mission is to bring the best out of themselves by expressing their emotions, interpretations of life, and their abilities as Ugandan artists. The philosophies and stories embedded in their art practice are representative of who they are and their beliefs. Their commitment to change how contemporary art is perceived locally and tell unique Ugandan stories through their work is an embodiment of what Amasaka Gallery selected to present to you as a group show entitled ALLEGIANCE TO THEE.

Welcome to the show.

Collin Sekajugo