



AFRICA 1:1

AFRICA 1:1 LAB

Artists' residency program at AKKA Project Venice

Artists in residence

Maina Boniface
Pamela Enyonu
Alexandre Kyungu
Option Nyahunzvi
Ngugi Waweru

Produced by
AKKA Project
Africa First

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AFRICA 1:1

Five African artists at Ca' Pesaro Exhibition

Venice
Ca' Pesaro
International Gallery of Modern Art
20 May – 1 October 2023

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In collaboration with
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Headline



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AFRICA 1:1 LAB, an artists' residency project, sets up a bracing milieu for five young African artists to experience Venice's prolific art scene and breathe in their own creative offering, as the city gets ready for the Laboratory of the Future, the eagerly anticipated 18th Architecture Biennale curated by Lesley Lokko.

Born from the collaborative efforts of AKKA Project and Africa First, with the support of Ca' Pesaro, the International Gallery of Modern Art, AFRICA 1:1 LAB project has invited young artists from Kenya, Uganda, DRC and Zimbabwe to be part of a residency that took place at AKKA Project in Venice.

The project culminated with a large site-specific exhibition at Ca' Pesaro in Venice. The Ca' Pesaro palace is a testament to the strong cultural and artistic momentums of the 19th and 20th centuries. Collections of the museum include masterpieces by Italian artists from different schools of thought as well as international jewels by artists like Gustav Klimt and Auguste Rodin. Some, like Carrà and De Chirico along with other surrealists, have shaped the Art world as we know it today. Five different agents from Africa are introduced to metabolize this rich European substrate through their modes of creation.

Based on AKKA Project's premises, the artists have produced an original body of work inspired by the Ca' Pesaro collection, the palazzo itself and Venice as a whole.

This project features Pamela Enyonu, Alexandre Kyungu and Ngugi Waweru brought a spectrum of reflection on identity, spaces of struggle, trauma and different socio-political spaces in between; Maina Boniface who reunited with the mother surface to his surrealist echo, and Option Nyahunzvi explored new communions and unforeseen senses of spirituality.

Through the contemporary response of these artists, AKKA Project wishes to foster new cultural exchanges and present an innovative palette to the Venetian taste.



Pop-up artists' studio at
AKKA Project

Youth itself had knocked on our door

Elisabetta Barisoni

Head of Ca' Pesaro - International Gallery of Modern Art

When Lidija Kostic and Kristian Khachatourian told me about the idea of inviting some young emerging artists from the African art scene to Venice, developing a residence project in the lagoon city in collaboration with AKKA Project and Africa First, my first thought went to the words of the famous will of our first patron of the arts, Felicita Bevilacqua La Masa.

During 1898, the Duchess worked out her long and articulated will, where she had the chance to "remove a few pebbles from her shoe" against those who had damaged her at a patrimonial and family level and yet managed to shape a far-reaching project for the lagoon city. An exceptional figure, at the center of a crucial period in the Italian history of the Risorgimento and post-unification, Felicita assigned Ca' Pesaro to the Municipality of Venice, indicating for it a vocation for art, especially contemporary art. Starting from this reflection, it emerges how much the goals she achieved in life were balanced by those that, according to her will, the Municipality was then able to carry out in the palace on the Grand Canal. Starting from 1902 in Ca' Pesaro was set up, indeed, the first true factory in the city, with the arrival of the works of the newly erected collection of modern art, coming from the Biennials by purchases and donations, the artists' studios on the third floor of the Palazzo and finally the Exhibitions of the Opera Bevilacqua La Masa. Without Felicita there would be no International Gallery of Modern Art as we know it today and neither would be established the Bevilacqua La Masa Foundation, the institution that organized the first and oldest artist residencies in modern national history.

I immediately found the idea of welcoming five African artists in residence to Venice and Ca' Pesaro a valuable project, if we consider the long tradition that links these places to the living presence of artists, studios and contemporary art. There is also a symbolic aspect of the whole event, which the young artists invited today have grasped since their arrival: Felicita's will expresses her desire to do good to others and to perpetuate this feeling over time, leaving it to future generations, generating a sort of large Bevilacqua La Masa family that welcomes

penniless young artists to Venice, excluded from official exhibitions: "I leave my Venice palace and the house in the fondamenta under perpetual condition not to be sold, transferred or exchanged in whole or in part, and that it must serve the following uses: the top floor for studies of young painters, and poor students, granted free of charge, or with very low rents; the 2nd noble floor to be rented in order to find the means for maintenance costs; the 1st noble floor and the mezzanines will have to be used, in whole or in part, as a permanent exhibition of Venetian arts and industries, for the profit, especially of young artists, who are often forbidden to entry to large exhibitions, so that, unknown and discouraged, they have no means to step forward, and are often forced to give up their artworks to retailers and corneres who are their vampires".

The suggestions of Felicita, the first voice of the fortune of the building, are now joined by the solicitations of Pamela Enyonu, the only woman invited to the Africa 1:1 project. Precisely on a 1:1 scale is the comparison between Pamela and the sumptuousness of the building in her narrative-dress, which welcomes the visitor at the base of the monumental staircase. The references of her work, as well as in the sound work installed in the permanent collection, are to the world of feminine, home and nostalgia, in the Greek sense of etymology as a yearning to return to the mother (the lullaby, the kiss of the good night, childhood memories) and towards what we consider, each in its own way, the homeland and safe haven of the soul. There are many links between Pamela and Felicita's thoughts, both in her philanthropic inspiration and in her fervent patriotic faith. And there are numerous references to the present women, women who represent the home, the domestic, the unwritten law, and caring figures who never rest, as the performance conceived by Pamela for the opening day seems to tell us.

Another actor, equally significant for the history of Ca' Pesaro and for its birth as a factory, is Nino Barbantini, who arrived in 1907 at the Directorship of the Modern Art Gallery of Venice, at the same time in the role of Secretary of the Opera Bevilacqua La Masa.

A great figure of talent scout and art critic, in the first years of his activity Barbantini concentrated on some aspects of contemporary art, insisting on the idea of youth and on the love for the restless young people who animated the Italian cultural scene.



Even today, in the residence that brought five young African authors from different countries and from different artistic and cultural backgrounds to the Museum, rebellion is a distinctive trait of the Ca' Pesaro factory, not only in the fabric and stitched words on Pamela's dress but also in the dramatic transfiguration of Option Nyahunzvi. A foreshortened view of the famous facciata of the Palazzo, with the rusticated ashlar work that distinguishes its constructive and decorative genius, becomes an opportunity for an intimate revisitation of the anxieties that run through the artist's soul. As in the marked and almost engraved line of Arturo Martini's sculpture, Option scores the paint and peels it to reveal the underlying paper. There is therefore a seductive result from a technical and expressive point of view, at the same time destabilizing in the iconography. An improbable gondola welcomes pieces of the body of an African zebra, while the algae rise menacingly from the foreground of the painting and the grotesque masks on the walls of the building become a series of monstrous monkey faces. Barbantini would also have found "youth" in the relationship between the building, in its architectural majesty, and the powerful rendering of the forms created by Alexandre Kyungu. During the months of study, contiguity, research and visits to the rooms of Ca' Pesaro, Alexandre responded to the charm of the decorative elements of the architecture, above all the geometries of the historical floors of the noble floors and the entrance hall. In the project room of the Museum, he exhibits a series of works engraved on rubber, a waste, an industrial commonly used material, and transforms them into precious objects, decorated with the forms discovered at Ca' Pesaro and refracted on the bodies of visitors throughout the light.

As if somehow Ca' Pesaro remained attached to the public's skin, Alexandre mixes, in a fantastic imaginative rendering, the seventeenth-century decorations of the building with the African tradition of decorating the skin. Confirmation that the initial intuitions of the project could yield excellent results also comes from Ngugi Waweru and Maina Boniface, "pure" painters, immersed in dialogue with the Museum's permanent collection and Western visual history.

Ngugi makes magical the appearance of pairs of lovers, generated by flows of energy that envelop each other, against the background of famous Venetian settings. His stitched hearts or, as he expresses it, restitched after the inevitable tears that everyone's life brings with itself, stand out on the chests of imaginary and surreal lovers; the background is Venice which Ngugi interrogates thinking of





On the previous page (from the left): Maina Boniface, Pamela Enyonu and Dr. Elisabetta Barisoni at Ca' Pesaro

Above (from the left): Maina Boniface, Ngugi Waweru, Pamela Enyonu, Lidjia Kostic Khachatourian and Dr. Elisabetta Barisoni at Ca' Pesaro

the ancient history that the stones themselves tell and which leads him to reflect on how many existential events have intersected, over the centuries, between these "calli" and between these canals.

The reminiscences of the female strength in his homeland, Kenya, emerge in other works that Ngugi created during his residence in Venice, according to an energy that once again derives from Western Expressionism, from Edvard Munch, Franz von Stuck and from Early 1900s Secessions. Perhaps Ngugi together with Boniface are the authors who bear the most significant traces of the relationship with the European visual heritage, without this corresponding to a value judgement. Boniface Maina in particular has its roots in the universe of Italian metafisica, establishing a refined and symbolic dialogue with Giorgio de Chirico. His production is characterized by great attention to details, within a composition that plays on the false certainties of our eye: the symbols of piazza San Marco mix with a metaphysical tower, the only orthogonal architectural object of the whole painting, where a masked shaman sits. The position of this religious priest, who represents the removal of traditional African spirituality, is as classic as those of the saints in the great Venetian altarpieces. In the background, the clouds, on the contrary, accompany a landscape that is lost in the infinity of the African savannah, while numerous particulars and details lead us back to the archetypal religious symbols (the cow, the lamb) and to the perspective game of the stroboscopic illusion sought by the artist. Finally, the frame of the painting reveals a further surrealist game, as it recalls the decorative grafts of the ceilings of Ca' Pesaro, the trompe l'oeil made with large canvases framed in the Venetian ceilings. We find ourselves looking at the building, the beauty of its decorations and pictorial foreshortened views.

Each of the five invited artists found their way here. In their works, everything starts from and returns to Ca' Pesaro and its history, from the echoes of those who lived it in the modern era that we have mentioned above: Felicita, Nino, Arturo, Gino, Umberto, Diego, along with many others who will still live it. In the year of an architecture Biennale, that proposes itself as a Laboratory of the Future with the curatorship of Lesley Lokko, we can today confirm that the first intuitions related to the Africa 1:1 residence project have been satisfied and surpassed. Through a new view of the building, its protagonists, the collection, and the exhibition of the five African artists allows us to see things in a different light and with new sensory and symbolic solicitations.





On the previous page (from the left):
Ngugi Waweru and Alexandre Kyungu at Ca' Pesaro

Above (from the left): Ngugi Waweru and
Option Nyahunzvi at AKKA Project pop-up studio

Furthermore, the dialogue with a visual heritage as steeped in history as the Venetian one, and in particular that of Ca' Pesaro, has given rise to sparks that I am sure will give new stimulus to both interlocutors, us and the artists, as well as new reflection cue for the public and visitors.

I also imagine that the old masters exhibited in the permanent collection and the more recent ones arriving with the Gemma De Angelis Testa donation can welcome the five newcomers to the great creative factory of Ca' Pesaro, without fear of comparing themselves, without fear of sharing nor to expose. All together they can celebrate, still today and with ever greater strength, the far-sighted legacy of Felicita Bevilacqua La Masa and at the same time renew the exclamation that Barbantini reserved at the sight of Gino Rossi: youth itself had knocked on our door.

AFRICA 1:1 LAB: Incubating African Artistry in the Venetian Lagoon

Lidija Kostic Khachatourian
Co-founder of AKKA Project

The AFRICA 1:1 LAB is a groundbreaking artist residency program that aims to provide a nurturing environment for five young African artists to explore Venice's thriving art scene and engage in a dialogue with Ca' Pesaro's permanent collection. It offers a unique opportunity for these artists to immerse themselves in Venice's rich cultural heritage and produce art that reflects their own experiences, cultures, and identities.

It is worth noting that AKKA Project was transformed into a shared studio space, following the 18th Architecture Biennale theme curated by Lesley Lokko. The residency posed several challenges for the artists, including working in an unfamiliar environment, sharing the space, and completing their work within a specific time frame. Despite the difficulties, the artists' diverse backgrounds and cultures brought new perspectives and ways of working, highlighting the challenges of human relationships when people come from different places and experiences.

The residency also raised crucial issues about creativity and the environment, as the artists questioned the role of the surrounding context in stimulating or blocking creativity. They explored how breaking the rules of how a space should be used could lead to new ideas and perspectives. Through their work, the artists challenged traditional ways of thinking about space and offered new ways of transforming it.



Above (from the left): Pamela Enyonu and Maina Boniface around Venice

The AFRICA 1:1 LAB was more than just a residency program. It was a platform for African artists to showcase their artistry, engage in a global dialogue, and bring their unique perspectives and experiences to the table. The project has the potential to shift the dominant narratives around African artistry and inspire a new generation of artists to push boundaries and explore new frontiers.

It is truly a remarkable achievement to see Pamela Enyonu, Maina Boniface, Alexandre Kyungu, Ngugi Waweru, and Option Nyahunzvi being exhibited next to the masters like de Chirico, Rodin, and Kandinsky.

Dimensions of Art: A Dual Project Across the Grand Canal

Kristian Khachatourian
Co-founder of AKKA Project

One of the most rewarding aspects of this project was the constant exchange and sharing of energy, thoughts, and perspectives, which made AFRICA 1:1 LAB a hub of ideas for both the artists and all those who worked behind the scenes.

A crucial question arose: how would their work be received? This led to numerous considerations. Through impromptu brainstorming sessions, the artists came to realize that they were working on a dual project: two sides of the Grand Canal (one side hosting the gallery, the other side Ca' Pesaro), two parts of the project - the creation and the exhibition. A dimensional transfer occurred: for the artists, AKKA Project Gallery became a home away from home, a safe space, a comfort zone that served as a studio and a hub for ideas. In this physical and conceptual space, their artworks had unmistakable meanings, definitions, and labels. However, as they left this safe place to be permanently hosted at the Ca' Pesaro International Gallery of Modern Art, it's possible that those meanings and labels could change.

All artworks have their own meaning, but they also receive significance from the context in which they are placed. A recurring circumstance in Italian art history is that artworks produced for devotional purposes, and therefore placed in churches, were then bought and transferred to museums, decontextualizing the work and modifying its purpose and meaning. This is because those devotional artworks are no longer related to other religious symbols but are now beside other artworks. Following this line of thought, we can consider how the artworks at Ca' Pesaro, which have been an inspiration for the African artists, change their contextual definition when put in relation to these new works.



Above (from the left): Option Nyahunzvi, Ngugi Waweru and Alexandre Kyungu around Venice

The overarching aim of the project is to dismantle the lenses, perspectives, and biases inherited by the Western world throughout its history. This initiative highlights African art, showcasing its vibrancy, freshness, elegance, and complexity. We can delve deeper: when African artists create within a project space in Venice, do we classify their work as African or Venetian artifacts? How do they transform once they become part of the Ca' Pesaro collection? These challenging questions are intended to engage visitors as they explore the exhibition.

The residency aspires to foster connections, serve as a transitional space, and provide new opportunities for Venice itself. Historically, this city has been a center of transition; it is this very quality that has allowed it to emerge as one of Europe's most significant hubs for arts and culture. Venice has undeniably served as an ideal host for AFRICA 1:1.

Creativity for Social Change

Tania Ganesin
Co-founder and Board member of Moleskine Foundation

"So, how does the outlaw artist undertake the perfect crime?

What's the first step? What's the recipe?

There is no recipe." (From "Creativity - The perfect crime", Philippe Petit)

Well, when it comes to creativity we are on the same track.

There is no magic formula for creativity. Everyone interprets it in their own way.

But it can be declined, contextualized, and explored from different points of view.

It is often trivialized. It is thought to be an innate talent. Or something abstract.

Something that cannot be "touched".

But if we look at it from an etymological point of view, we discover a curious thing.

Maria Sebreghondi, Co-founder and president of Moleskine Foundation, explores it like this:

Creativity, from the Latin, create (verb), nouns creatio, creator, creativus.

Perhaps an ancient Sanskrit root kra, which then gives rise to the Greek word keir, keiros, the hand.

I particularly like to think of creativity in its connection with the hand, with doing.

The hand is a very complex instrument, it has more than 27 bones, small bones that together produce extraordinary skills. A tool that builds other tools.

In a spiral, growing, infinite movement of creation and transformation. And, by the way, in Latin to create has the same root as to grow.

The hand often symbolizes action, and movement in many writings (Egyptian, Mayan, Aztec hieroglyphs, etc). Its representation is among the first artistic expressions (the Cueva de las manos).

Creativity means triggering a concrete transformation process, it means getting to work.



From the left: Maina Boniface and
Option Nyahunzvi at AKKA Project
popup studio

The creation of hands is linked to wisdom, to know-how, there is no creation without knowledge, which itself relies on exploration. Hands are an exploration tool, they are touch, curiosity, exploring things in a physical way.

For this reason, creativity is within everyone's reach, and it is a collective value, a value to be shared, with many hands, and many skilled tools at work for transformation.

The key point is precisely this: there is no creation without knowledge, which itself relies on exploration. We deduce that to be creative you need to know: explore, study, go deep, and have an iron – constant – stainless discipline.

Just Philippe Petit, a tightrope walker, an artist of the wire, and a "disobedient" figure par excellence, has followed an iron discipline throughout his life. Each of his projects – or crimes as he defines them – was obsessively studied down to the smallest detail. Months, years of study, training, concentration, millimetre calculation.

In addition, there can be no true transformation without contamination. Without "kneading" one's creativity with the leaven of the community.

Borrowing the words of Adama Sanneh (Co-founder and CEO of Moleskine Foundation), "Creativity is ultimately an act of communication; it intrinsically connects us with ourselves and with others. That's why if we think of creativity, we have to think of it as part of a community. Especially nowadays, that we've realized more than ever that our destinies are interconnected. There is a beautiful word that can help us articulate this concept: Ubuntu."

If it literally means "humanity", in practice the meaning is much more articulated and complex.

Ubuntu can be summarized as the philosophical belief that connects all of humanity: what we are is the result of the life of an infinity of other people; each is a hologram of the whole society.

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We can be inspired by those who preceded us, by those who create in the contemporary world at other latitudes, by those who find new solutions to ancient problems because they change their gaze, subvert thinking, turn upside down to see another perspective or look a labyrinth from above to see the way out.

Creativity often lies in a "gap" path, of displacement of perception. It has an implicit nature, often hidden. You can't "see" creativity itself. We can be creative, act creatively, and think creatively. To create an artwork, a project, an artifact to solve a problem, to change the world.

Can Creativity change the world? Perhaps an obvious question. A concrete utopia.

As far as I'm concerned, we can turn it into an affirmation and write: Creativity can change the world.

I believe that every creative act can change our world. Every small, imperceptible action can shift/change our perception of the world and have a concrete impact on our life and the life of our communities. We are all connected. Among humans, animals, plants, the entire ecosystem.

And influencing the community in a creative way allows us to trigger positive, generative, regenerating social change.

The goal may seem too ambitious, and at times, impossible.

But, to get back to our "outlaw" and visionary tightrope walker, "If taking the first step is to face the Impossible, taking the second step is to deceive the Impossible. Whatever I'm doing, the only way I can succeed is not to stop, as if the impossible wasn't watching! I ignore his presence and focus on advancing on the wire" (Philippe Petit).

Maina Boniface



Maina Boniface (b. 1987) is a Kenyan artist based in Nanyuki, where he was born. His primary artistic media are painting and drawing, through which he explores the inconsistencies and conflicts inherent in human interactions within physical space. Maina's work seeks to reconcile traditional art-making techniques with contemporary concerns, resulting in tension and experimentation in his artistic process.

Central to Maina's artistic practice is distorted, often exaggerated figures that embody the anatomical study of the human form. These figures are intricately drawn with interwoven lines, giving them a muscular appearance. By using figures, Maina mirrors the daily decisions of existing within a defined space, inviting the viewer to reflect on their own physical and social interactions.

Maina's process involves layering paint and inks on varied substrates, symbolizing the foundational aspects upon which individuals expose or personalize themselves. This approach allows the artist to converse with the work and explore imaginative possibilities. The backgrounds in his compositions serve as supportive highlights and contributors to the overall depth of the artwork, drawing the viewer's eye and sometimes limiting their perspective.

Through his work, Maina initiates a dialogue that questions the societal constructs of today. His art serves as a medium for exploring the human condition and the tensions that arise within social and physical spaces.

During his residency at AKKA Project, Maina sought to deepen his understanding of the metaphysical influences on art, including the thought processes, use of materials, and execution techniques employed by artists in this movement. His hope was to gain inspiration from the architectural designs of buildings, which he could easily explore using various means of movement within the city.

Upon being selected for the AFRICA 1:1 LAB residency project, Maina felt both excitement and anxiety as he contemplated the significance and potential impact of his work. He found particular interest in the sculptures, paintings, frescoes, and architectural designs of the Ca' Pesaro museum, as well as the works of De Chirico, Ileana Ruggeri, Mario Sironi, and Giacomo Manzù, each room offering its unique ambience.

The prospect of displaying his own work alongside that of such extraordinary artists as De Chirico, Fontana, Rodin, and Kandinsky filled Maina with both pride and anxiety.

The residency posed several challenges, including navigation through Venice's maze-like streets, creating work that reflects the museum space and collection while maintaining his native heritage, and adapting to a city vastly different from his hometown.





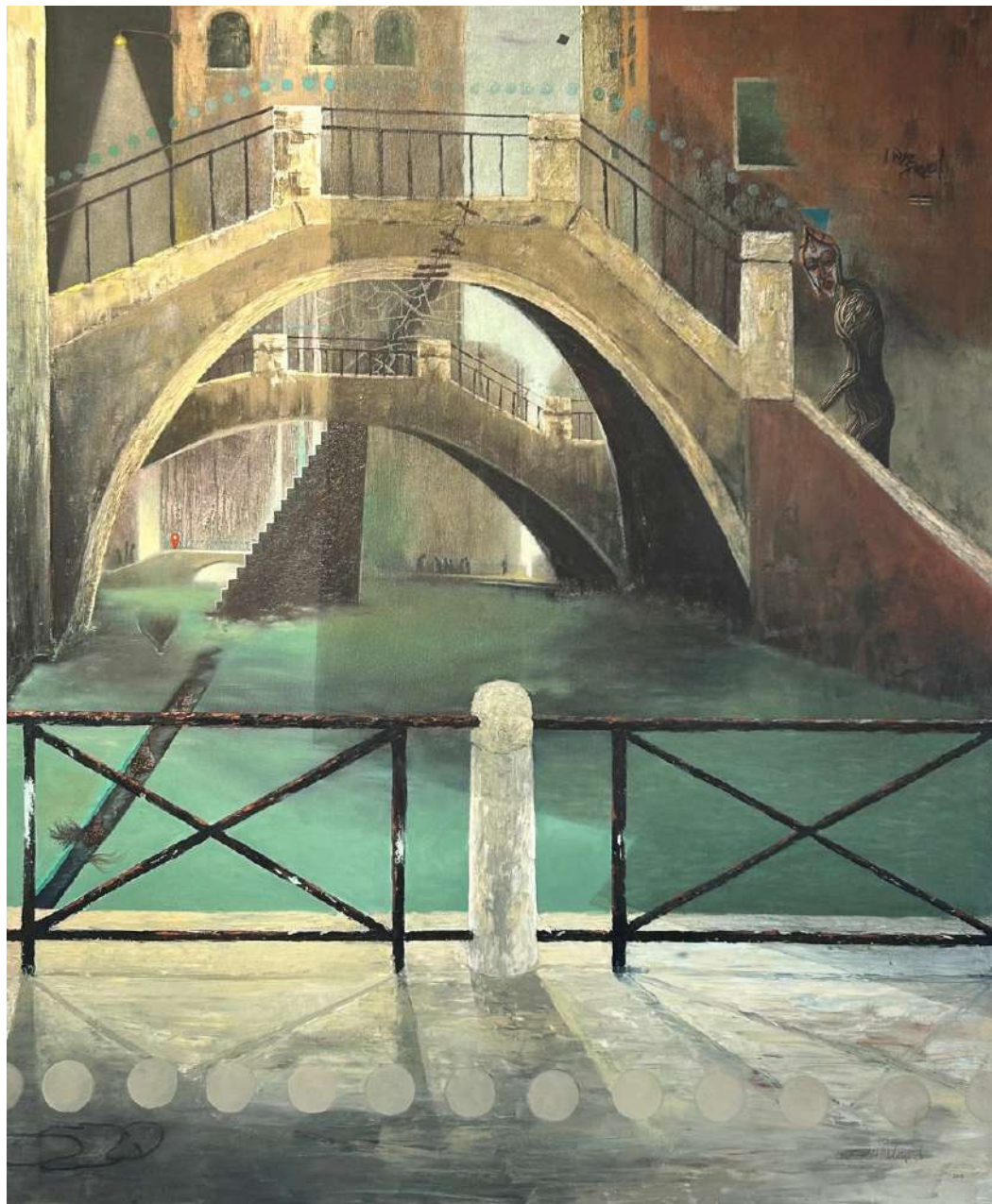
Maina Boniface at AKKA Project
Popup Artists' Studio



Maina Boniface outside Ca' Pesaro

On the following page
Maina Boniface working at AKKA Project





Maina Boniface
Navigating Venice
2023
Oils on canvas
120 x 100 cm



Maina Boniface
San Mùndù Piazza
2023
Oils on canvas
120 x 100 cm

Maina Boniface, San Mündù Piazza, 2023, Oils on canvas, 120 x 100 cm
Ca' Pesaro permanent collection

San: Italian word that translates to saint.

Mündù: Gikũyũ dialect word that translates to man.

Piazza: Italian word that translates to square.

This artistic creation is a meticulously crafted amalgamation of various architectural styles, landscapes, objects and symbols, harmoniously integrated into the form of a ceiling fresco. The primary objective is to initiate a thought-provoking discourse between contrasting concepts such as the old and new, the ideologies and symbolism attached to a space, and the challenge of finding one's own space within a foreign setting.

Furthermore, this artwork is an eloquent expression of the dialogue between the artist's work and that of Giorgio de Chirico, as well as the interior architecture of the Ca' Pesaro museum and the frescoes therein. This carefully curated interplay generates a compelling sense of tension, both in terms of narrative and context.

The composition employs painted cracks that emulate the gradual wear and tear typically observed in the architectural structures of Venetian palazzos, which often extends to the frescoes, imparting a profound sense of the passage of time and changes that occur within the physical environment.

The use of familiar features from both the San Marco Piazza in Venice and the artist's native country, Kenya, enables the artist to weave a compelling story about the sacrosanct aspects of cultural heritage. The objects and symbols used in the fresco are intended to remind us of the importance of preserving such heritage.

Moreover, the artwork stimulates critical thinking about the idealization of saints within the context of religion versus native culture. The central figure, an African traditional saint, is used as a powerful symbol to challenge preconceived notions of what a saint should look like and provoke a deeper exploration of religious ideology.

Pamela Enyonu



Pamela Enyonu is a Ugandan artist who was born in 1985 and currently lives and works in Kampala.

Her style is inspired by stories, materials, and the process it takes to transform them into works of art. Pamela's works explore narratives on gender, identity, empowerment, and self-awareness. She is particularly interested in the "untokenized" experiences that occupy the intersection of empowerment, mental health, and identity, and she engages with different communities through collaborations, workshops, and seminars.

During AFRICA 1:1 LAB residency, Pamela kept an open mind, allowing herself to embrace the different experiences she was exposed to. She was overwhelmed by the colors, textures, sounds, and smells of Venice when she arrived, and navigating the large number of tourists daily was a challenge. As an artist from the global south, negotiating spaces that are predominantly and historically white is always an interesting challenge.

Pamela used the holographic will of the Duchess Felicita Bevilacqua La Masa, where she bequeathed the building to young Venetian artists, as a point of departure to create a dialogue with the history of Ca' Pesaro and its collection. She was intrigued by the feminist undertones of the act of expressing a woman's will and having that will respected, in a time where women did not have or wield such power, and the significance of that act today. Pamela's work engages with these feminist themes, challenging traditional power structures and amplifying the voices of those who have been historically marginalized.

Out of the collection, she was most drawn to the masterpieces "Un Fantasma Percorre L'Europa", "The Thinker", and "Three Triangles".

Pamela hopes that her works will sit comfortably among the thinkers and image makers in Ca' Pesaro and inspire meaningful dialogue that expands the cultural narratives of Venice. The most challenging part of her residency in Venice was the time, access, and language barriers of the archival materials she was interested in.

As an artist who predominantly works alone in her studio, Pamela was pleasantly surprised by the experience of working with other artists during her residency. She was able to form bonds and hold meaningful dialogues with her fellow artists on diverse topics, and it was a privilege to have a front seat into the processes of the people she has come to respect and admire.

Pamela studied Art and Design at Kyambogo University Banda in Kampala, and her artistic career began with a residency at 32 Degrees East in Kampala in 2017, where she focused on identity, trauma, and healing. Her work in Venice builds on this foundation, exploring similar themes through the lens of Black Feminist Thought with a focus on rest as a form of resistance.



Felicità Bevilacqua La Masa's
marble bust at Ca' Pesaro



Pamela Enyonu at AKKA Project
popup artist's studio

HOME IS TO BED
SAFE COMFORTABLE,
(REST)

AND ACCEPT
WHO I AM' ESHER SWEENEY

ERE I
RED
LY AND
-
WEY.

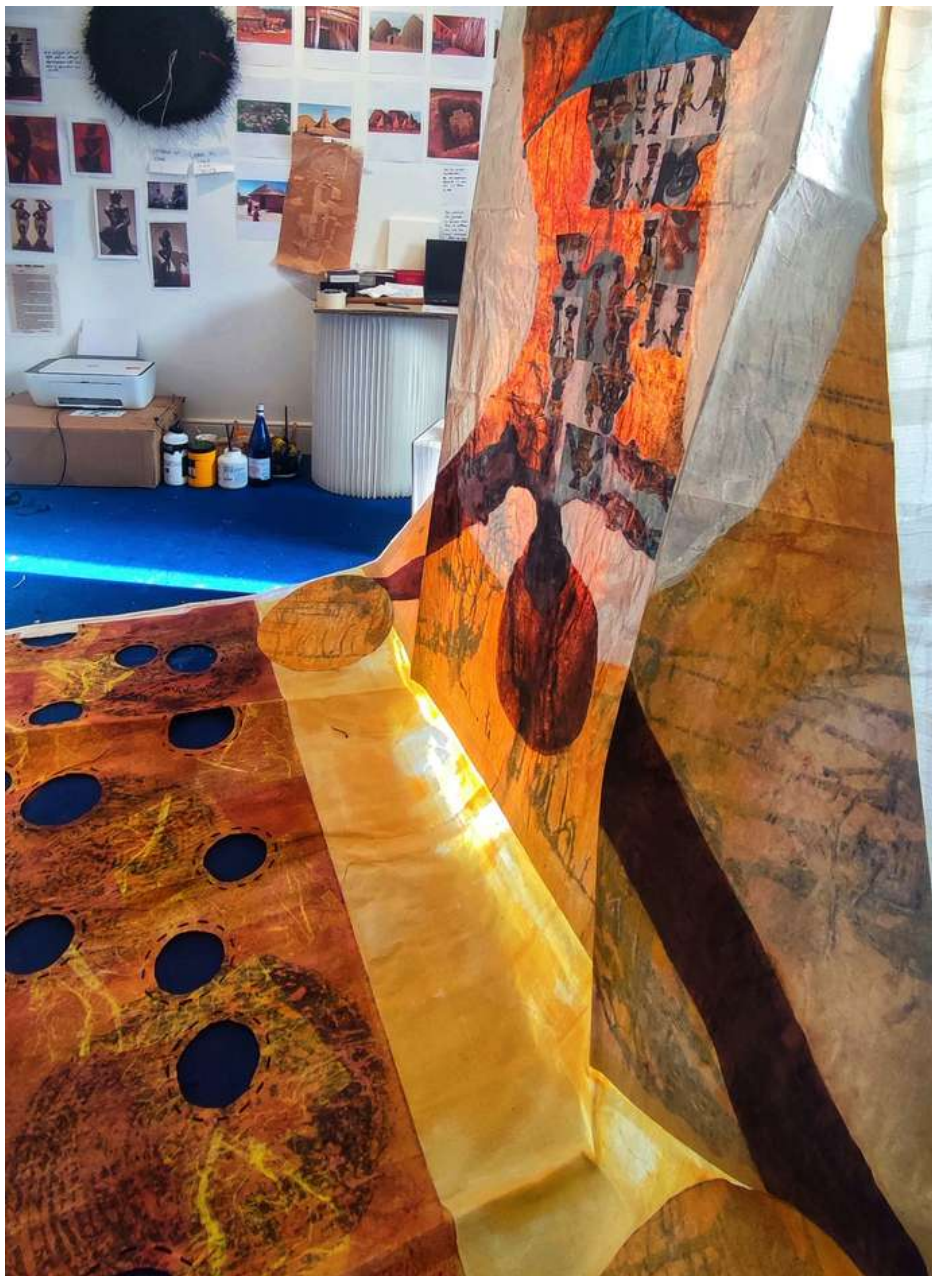
S
5
CUPX

Sound piece
WHAT DO YOU
MISS ABOUT
HOME?

... there's a pain only for your
Creator.
a joy only sweetness
When I left home,
I thought I would
miss you... mhmph...
but even the smell of the
path home is missed
I miss the tall dark grasses
by the fence tree
I miss our two matoke
plants...

On the left:
Pamela Enyonu's popup artist's studio at
AKKA Project

On the following pages
Pamela Enyonu's detail of work in progress



On the previous pages
Pamela Enyonu's details of
work in progress

On the left:
Pamela Enyonu's installation
view of the popup studio

**Pamela Enyonu, Permesso, 2023, Installation, Mixed media and techniques on paper, 450cm x 200cm
Ca' Pesaro permanent collection**

May I enter?
Can I bring all of myself?

Home and Space

This installation delves into the concept of feeling at home, drawing inspiration from the holographic will of Duchess Felicita Bevilacqua La Masa. The duchess bequeathed her home, now the Ca' Pesaro Museum, to young and disadvantaged Venetian artists, aiming to create a more inclusive and equitable art world. As an artist from Africa invited to engage with the history of this space, the work poses questions about what it means to feel at home within such a context.

The installation interrogates the politics of space through the lens of home, exploring the complexities of belonging and the dynamics of taking up space. It asks who has the power to grant access and control over space, and what it means to occupy that space fully. Through this, the work examines the intricacies and tensions of presence, inclusion, and exclusion.

By engaging with the concept of home, the installation seeks to ignite a conversation around the power dynamics that govern our relationships to physical spaces. It challenges assumptions about belonging and opens up a broader dialogue about how social and political structures shape our sense of place. Ultimately, it invites viewers to reflect on their own experiences of space and belonging, urging them to question the unseen forces that influence who feels at home and who does not.



Pamela Enyonu
Red borders
2023
Mixed media, acrylics and
hand-made paper on canvas
110 x 80 cm



Pamela Enyonu
Enough
2023
Mixed media, acrylics and
hand-made paper on canvas
110 x 80 cm

Alexandre Kyungu



Alexandre Kyungu Mwilambwe is a visual artist based in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, whose artistic practice spans painting, drawing, sculpture, and installation. His work delves into themes of migration, identity, borders, space, and symbolism, using his unique perspective to explore these complex ideas.

Central to Alexandre's practice is his use of doors and rubber as both material and metaphor, linking urban cartography with body scarification (Nzoloko). Through this lens, he draws parallels between maps of cities and the marks etched onto the skin, bridging the imaginary and physical realms.

Nzoloko, the Lingala word for scarification, refers to the practice of scratching, etching, burning, or carving designs onto the body. These permanent markings serve as a cultural archive, preserving a person's identity, origin, and history, and acting as an ancestral passport that navigates pre-colonial social, cultural, and political boundaries.

In his work, Alexandre reinterprets scarification as a symbolic connection to his African heritage, weaving it into the concept of cartography. This allows him to address global issues of accessibility, mobility, and encounters across borders.

Ultimately, his artwork functions as a "cartographic essay," where he merges maps of various cities with scarification patterns to create a reimagined global landscape. In doing so, Alexandre challenges the concept of borders, envisioning a world where boundaries between people and places dissolve, giving rise to a new, unified territory in the imagined space of his art.

When he was selected for a residency at AFRICA 1:1 LAB, his goal was to find the link or connection that links his work, the city of Venice and the Ca' Pesaro Museum and also to find the right material for his projects, as he believes that materials and techniques are essential to express himself as an artist. His residency project was oriented towards questioning and exploring the relationship between his artwork and the architecture of the building. During his research on the permanent collection of the Ca' Pesaro Museum, he was inspired by the architecture, the history, the archives, the library and the emblematic artists whose works are on display. He was particularly inspired by the architecture of the museum and believes that his project will create a dialogue with the architecture of the building and bring a new perspective to the museum's collection.

Alexandre Kyungu Mwilambwe was born in 1992 in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, where he currently lives and works. He studied art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kinshasa. He is also a co-founder of the Vision Total group. He has participated in several exhibitions such as in 2023: group show "OFF THE GRID" at Hosfelt Gallery in San Francisco.



Alexandre Kyungu at popup artist's studio at
AKKA Project



Above
Alexandre Kyungu at Ca' Pesaro

On the left
Ca' Pesaro floor's detail some of Alexandre's
inspirations



Alexandre Kyungu
Nzoloko de Venise
2023
Incision on rubber
155 x 156 cm



Alexandre Kyungu
L'Ombre/The Shadow
2023
Incision on rubber
120 x 107 x 20 cm



Alexandre Kyungu
Nzoloko comme reflect à Venise I
2023
Incision on rubber
160 x 113 cm

On the following page
Installation shoot of Alexandre Kyungu's
work at Ca' Pesaro

Alexandre Kyungu, Nzoloko as a Reflection of Venice, 2023, Installation project, Incision on rubber
L'Ombre/The Shadow is part of Ca' Pesaro permanent collection

Alexandre Kyungu envisioned his project as a symbolic dialogue with Ca' Pesaro. While exploring the museum, he discovered parallels between the ancestral African practice of body scarification and certain Venetian architectural elements, prompting him to reflect on their connections. Using incision techniques on rubber, Kyungu designed an interactive installation that casts shadows on both the walls and the bodies of visitors. These symbols form an imagined cartography of Venice, composed of cathedrals, gates, vaults, and doors. Alexandre's intention is for visitors to leave the space with a lasting impression—whether it's an image, a story, an architectural detail, or the city of Venice itself. Through these elements, he creates a bridge between the audience, his artistic vision, and the museum's collection.

Option Nyahunzvi



Option Nyahunzvi is a Zimbabwean artist whose work is deeply rooted in his spiritual beliefs and Shona culture. His art explores the connection between ancestral spirits and the living, while addressing themes of community, tradition, and identity. Through his practice, Option expresses his cultural heritage and spirituality in ways that resonate with a broader, universal audience. His style is characterized by layered, blended colors, intricate contour lines, and a rich sense of texture and depth. The process of pasting and removing strips in his work symbolizes the need to absorb and release energies to maintain inner balance. The scenes he creates invite viewers to imagine not only what could be, but also what might have been.

During the AFRICA 1:1 LAB residency, Option drew inspiration from the rich history and collection of Ca' Pesaro. He immersed himself in the museum's permanent collection, finding particular fascination in its baroque architecture and the 19th- and 20th-century paintings. These elements sparked his creativity, influencing the themes and visual language of his work during the residency.

Although Option found it challenging to not have a private space during the residency due to differing cultural beliefs among his peers, he appreciated the creative environment. Being surrounded by other artists gave him access to new ideas and constructive criticism, though at times it was a bit distracting. He valued the opportunity to share doubts and exchange ideas with his colleagues, finding their input beneficial to his artistic process.

Option was born in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1992 and graduated with a Certificate in Visual Arts and Design from Harare Polytechnic College in 2015.

He has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions, including Art The Hague at Galerie SANAA in Utrecht, NL (2018); Meeting of the Minds, National Art Gallery of Zimbabwe in Harare, ZB (2018); Healing Power at Museum Voor Volkenkunde in Leiden, NL (2019); Kwatinobva Kunoyera (Sacred Origin) at Unit London Gallery in London, UK (2021); Vangurds at Unit London Gallery in London, UK (2022); Face the Nation at Pacers Gallery in Lagos, NG (2022).

He has also completed various artist's residencies.





Above Option Nyahunzvi
at Ca' Pesaro in front of Gino Rossi's
artwork

On the following page
Option Nyahunzvi
at popup artist's studio at AKKA Project



Artists' studio at AKKA Project





Option Nyahunzvi
Black Gondolier
2023
Acrylics, oils and
cutting on canvas
160 x 120 cm

Option Nyahunzvi, Black Gondolier, 2023, Acrylics, oils and cutting on canvas, 160 x 120 cm
Ca' Pesaro permanent collection

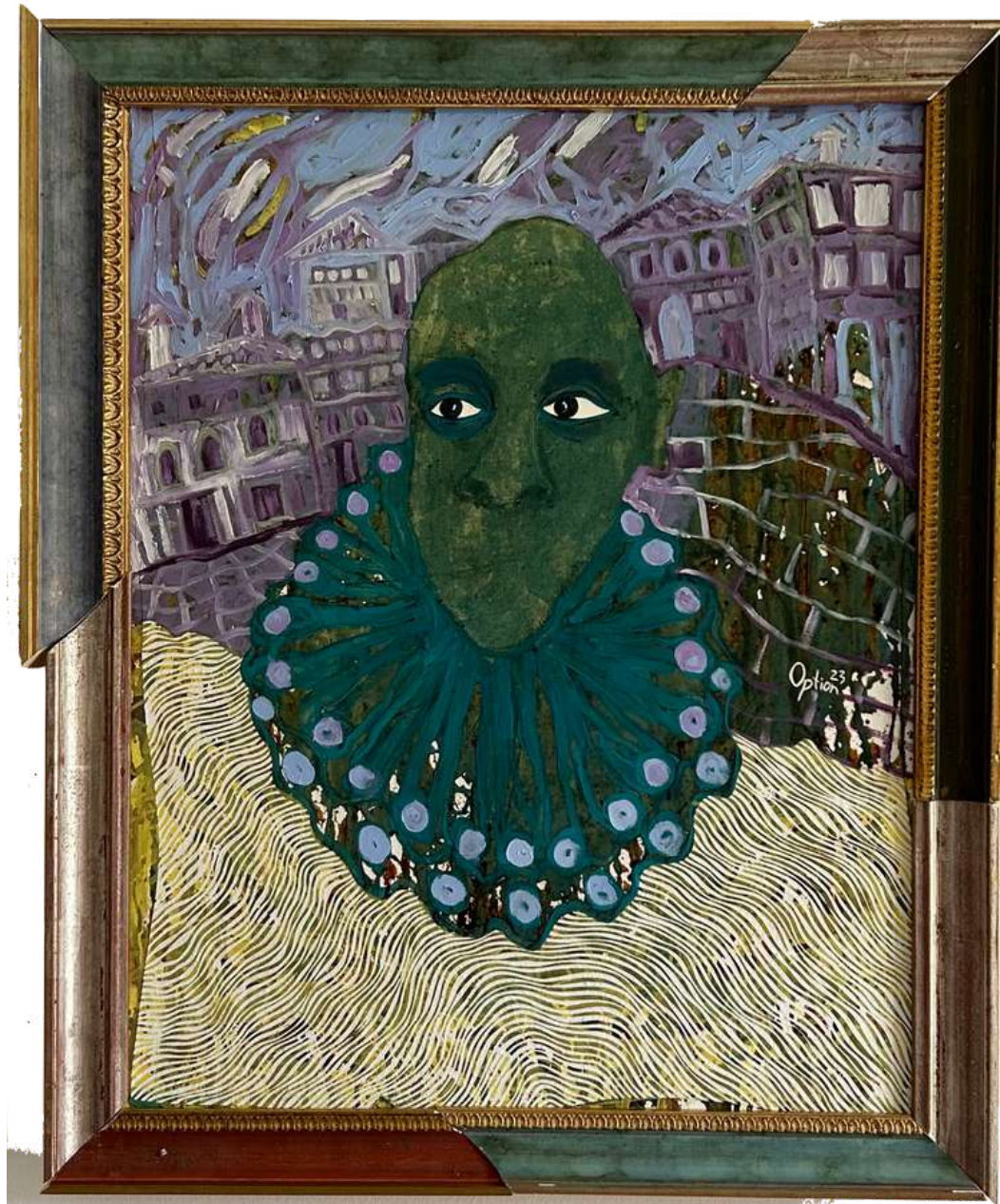
Option Nyahunzvi's painting draws directly from his engagement with Ca' Pesaro's art collection and the distinct architectural elements he encountered during his time in Venice. One of the key features in his work is the imposing "bugnato," a rare architectural detail found on few palazzos in Venice, including Ca' Pesaro and Ca' del Duca Sforza. This rough-hewn stonework, unusual in the city's smoother architectural styles, captivated the artist, and he incorporated it along with the tiny windows and patterns that adorn both the museum and the AKKA Project gallery façades. These details, along with the stone walls rising from the water, create a powerful backdrop in his composition.

At the forefront of the composition is a self-portrait of the artist, depicted as a gondolier navigating the Venetian Lagoon. This metaphor of navigation not only speaks to the physical act of moving through Venice's canals but also symbolizes the artist's journey through foreign cultural spaces. Central to the painting is the zebra motif, representing Option's personal totem, "Mbizi," the Shona word for zebra. This black-and-white-striped animal is a powerful symbol of his identity, rooting him in his Shona heritage even as he navigates new environments.

In a striking element of his process, Option visibly cuts into the canvas before peeling back strips, revealing etched lines beneath. This technique adds a tactile depth to the painting, symbolizing both vulnerability and resilience. It evokes the layers of identity and history that the artist carries with him, with the peeled strips representing the shedding of past energies and the etched lines reflecting the scars and wisdom left behind. Through this work, Option portrays himself guided by the protection of his ancestors as he charts his course through the unfamiliar waters of Venice, blending personal heritage with the rich cultural landscape of the city.



Option Nyahunzvi
Zvirimandiri
2023
Mixed media and oils on Canvas
95 x 120 cm



Option Nyahunzvi
Ndezvemeso
Muromo Zvinyarare II
2023
Mixed media and oils
on Canvas
74 x 58 cm

Ngugi Waweru



Ngugi Waweru is a multimedia artist born in Nakuru and raised in Nairobi. Unlike many artists who discover their talent early in life, Ngugi is a self-taught artist who began experimenting with art after observing friends who had already graduated from art school. His preferred mediums include woodcut prints, art installations, and mixed-media painting on canvas. After developing a passion and skill for art, Ngugi embraced it as a full-time pursuit, viewing it as a means of self-discovery.

His breakthrough came when he won the printing category in a community talent search with a woodcut print artwork. This achievement motivated him to attend more workshops and exhibitions, broadening his understanding of the art world. Around that time, Ngugi and his friends formed the Wajukuu Arts collective, which became a platform for fostering artistic growth. He is also committed to teaching children and young people, helping them nurture the same passion for art that he has.

In 2015, Ngugi was the 2nd runner-up in the Manjano Art Competition, and as a member of Wajukuu, he participated in Documenta 15. His installation was collected by Neue Galerie in Kassel, and the Wajukuu collective was awarded the prestigious Arnold Bode Prize in 2022.

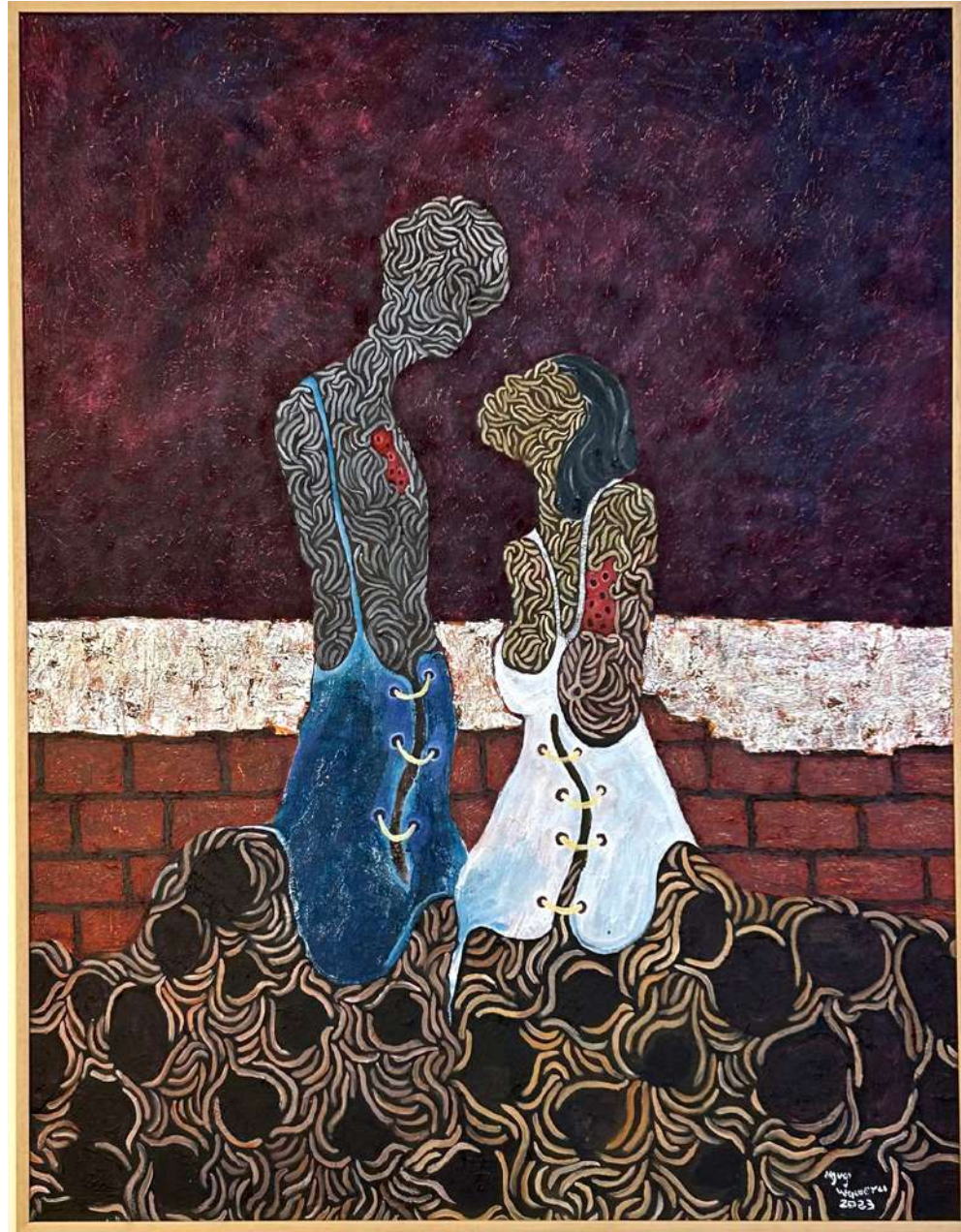
Ngugi took part in the AFRICA 1:1 LAB residency, where he had the opportunity to expand his artistic practice. During his residency, he explored the permanent collection at Ca' Pesaro, and the artwork that stood out most to him was Edward Munch's *Death and the Maiden*. He was particularly moved by the history of Ca' Pesaro as a space dedicated to artists who had nowhere else to work. Reflecting on his own work being displayed alongside masters like De Chirico, Fontana, Rodin, and Kandinsky, Ngugi felt not intimidated but excited and honored to be included among such extraordinary artists.

Ngugi has participated in numerous group exhibitions and art fairs, showcasing his work at notable events such as Paper 2 and Manjano at Village Market in Nairobi (both in 2015), the Kenya Art Fair at Serit Center (2015), and the Wajukuu Art Exhibition at Kuona Trust (2017). He also took part in Young Guns and Review at Circle Art Gallery in Nairobi (2017 and 2018, respectively), the Kenya Art Diary Exhibition at Heinrich Boell Foundation (2018), and Our Stories, Human Stories at InGenio Arte Contemporanea in Turin (2018). More recently, he exhibited and won as the collective in Documenta 15 in Kassel (2022), What if not the world? at Kunstverein Arnseberd (2022-2023), and Informal Digitalization with Wajukuu in Nairobi (2023).



Ngugi Waweru
at Ca' Pesaro





Ngugi Waweru
Filling the holes
2023
Oils and acrylics on canvas
130 x 100 cm

Ngugi Waweru, Filling the holes, 2023, Oils and acrylics on canvas, 130 x 100 cm
Ca' Pesaro permanent collection

"If Walls Could Talk" is the project conceived by Ngugi Waweru, inspired by the untold stories that the walls of Venice and the historic Ca' Pesaro building may have witnessed throughout their long existence. As he wandered through the enchanting streets of Venice, he became captivated by the natural, rough, and aging architecture that surrounded him. This observation sparked a deep meditation on the beauty of imperfection—a quality that imbues the lagoon city with a warm, inviting, and cozy atmosphere, further enhancing its status as a romantic destination.

In his artwork, Ngugi seeks to give voice to the walls that silently bear witness to myriad human experiences, capturing the essence of the stories they conceal. He explores themes of romanticism and eroticism, intertwining sacred love with secular love, as well as the contrasting emotions of pain and joy that arise from these connections. His paintings serve as a canvas for these narratives, allowing the walls to express their hidden tales through visual representation.

One striking element of Ngugi's work depicts two lovers intricately stitched together in a tangle of ropes, symbolizing a unique flow of different energies that bind them. This imagery not only represents their deep connection but also echoes the complexities and interdependencies found in love and relationships. By showcasing these intertwined figures, Ngugi captures the dynamic interplay of emotions that define human experiences, inviting viewers to reflect on the myriad stories that love can encompass. Through "If Walls Could Talk," he transforms the silent witnesses of the city into vibrant storytellers, revealing the rich tapestry of life that permeates Venice's walls.



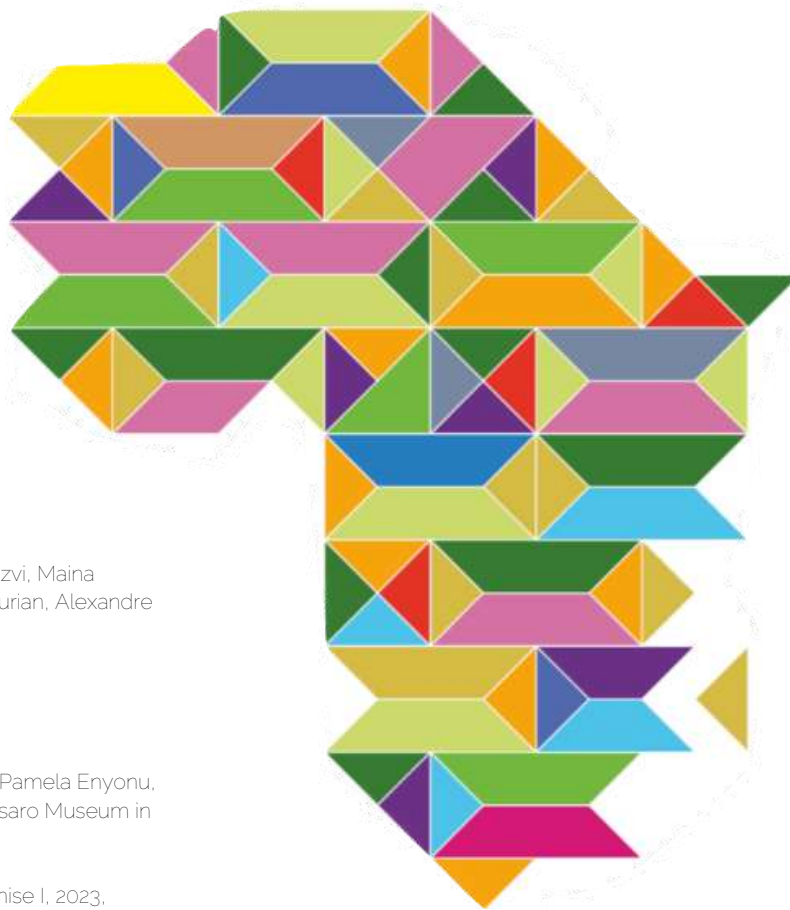
Ngugi Waweru
Conservative bubble
2023
Acrylics on canvas
130 x 100 cm



Ngugi Waweru
If walls could talk
2023
Acrylics on canvas
130 x 100 cm







On the previous pages, from left:
Arianna Ravasini, Ngugi Waweru, Option Nyahunzvi, Maina Boniface, Pamela Enyonu, Lidija Kostic Khachatourian, Alexandre Kyungu, Giulia Spriano, Marta dell'Era

On the following pages:

From left: Option Nyahunzvi, Alexandre Kyungu, Pamela Enyonu, Maina Boniface and Ngugi Waweru at the Ca' Pesaro Museum in Venice

Alexandre Kyungu, Nzoloko Comme Reflet à Venise I, 2023, installation shot in the Project Room, Ca' Pesaro, ground floor

Pamela Enyonu, Permesso, 2023, installation shot, Ca' Pesaro hall, ground floor

Maina Boniface in front of his work, San Mùndù Piazza, 2023, installation shot, Ca' Pesaro first floor

Ngugi Waweru, Filling the Holes, 2023, installation shot, Ca' Pesaro first floor

Option Nyahunzvi, Black Gondolier, 2023, installation shot, Ca' Pesaro first floor









Man and Woman
1950
Oil on canvas
100 x 80 cm
Art Collection, Museum of Modern Art, New York



Two Figures
1950
Oil on canvas
100 x 80 cm
Art Collection, Museum of Modern Art, New York





Small black label with white text, likely providing information about the sculpture.



ABOUT AKKA PROJECT

Established in 2016 in Dubai, AKKA Project has fast become a point of reference for African Art in the region. Lead by a passion for beauty, first as art collectors and then as cultural entrepreneurs, Lidija Kostic Khachatourian and Kristian Khachatourian gave AKKA Project its distinguished nature and the peculiarity of its approach. AKKA project overcomes the traditional gallery programming supporting art collectives, privileging cultural exchanges, hosting art residencies, providing resources to enhance the work of young and experimenting artists, and organizing trips to the major art capitals of Africa. Today, AKKA Project offers a dynamic experience, showcasing unique Contemporary Art from Africa and supporting cultural initiatives, still focused on promoting and supporting artists from the African continent. The galleries in Dubai and Venice are intimate spaces capable of showcasing a rich variety of media carefully selected. The founders make sure that every artwork and project communicates a personal journey, through the unique experiences in exploring the African art scene and its kaleidoscopic diversity.

AKKA relishes the freedom the gallery space offers, to reinvent what "Gallery" can mean, artistically, conceptually, and as a force for change within the wider community.

Thank you note

We are thrilled and honored to have been part of the team that made this residency project possible. We firmly believe that art and culture are essential aspects of human life, providing insights into our past and present, and facilitating cross-cultural understanding.

In these challenging times, with so many complex issues dividing us, it is more important than ever to foster dialogue and exchange ideas. As Dostoevsky once said, "Beauty will save the world." This residency project has enabled us to do just that by bringing together a group of exceptional young artists from Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and the Democratic Republic of Congo to live, create, and engage in dialogue with one of Europe's most important museums.

The residency was marked by several important milestones, including almost the first inclusion of African artists in Ca' Pesaro's permanent collection, including also a female artist among a predominantly white male artist roster. But perhaps the most significant milestone was the opportunity for an African narrative to take center stage in the dialogue, often overshadowed by trends or filtered through a Western lens.

Visitors to the exhibition are taken on a journey through each artist's work, which encompasses reinterpretations and reflections on art and artisanal traditions from the past, as well as interactions with Ca' Pesaro and the city of Venice. The artworks amplify the artists' voices and provide focused insights into crucially important matters such as colonialism and neocolonialism, racial and gender equality, civil rights, and economic and political justice for a continent that boasts 1.6 billion people, the highest growth of middle-class, the youngest population on the planet, and incredibly strong economic growth - all of which is also the focus of this year's Biennale.

Working closely with Pamela Enyonu, Maina Boniface, Alexandre Kyungu, Ngugi Waweru, and Option Nyahunzvi has been an enlightening and refreshing experience, filling us with renewed energy and motivation to support creative minds to express themselves and bridge the cultures of the places we call home: Africa and Venice. Once again, thank you!

Lidija Kostic Khachatourian and
Kristian Khachatourian
Founders of AKKA Project

ABOUT AFRICA FIRST by Serge Tiroche

Africa First was founded by Serge Tiroche in 2017 as a platform to collect, support and promote Contemporary Art from the continent. Via its website, newsletters, digital media, art fairs, gallery collaborations, auctions, a global museum lending program, artist residencies, sponsorships, prizes and commissions, as well as advisory work for a multitude of institutions in the art ecosystem, Africa First has been recognized extensively for its empowerment of African Contemporary Art.

Thank you note

How exciting to be writing this.

I'll start with thanking Lidija and Kristian for the amazing initiative and for inviting me to support it! I couldn't think of a project more aligned with the mission statement of Africa First to "support and promote emerging African artists through innovative collaborations that disseminate their practice to international audiences."

What could be better for 5 promising artists than to have daily access to a variety of mentors including each other, full financial support, the opportunity to find new inspiration in Venice and to showcase their practice in the phenomenal edifice that is Ca' Pesaro, Italy's only national museum for modern and contemporary art in Venice? And to do so in front of such broad audiences during the penultimate summer months when millions of tourists and art lovers are passing through... nothing.

I am grateful to Elisabetta Barisoni, Director of Ca' Pesaro, for entrusting us with this project and for timing it so impeccably with the African theme of the 2023 Architecture Biennale curated by Lesley Lokko, The Laboratory of the Future (that is Africa of course)

Last but not least, I must thank the 5 incredible artists – Option Nyahunzvi, Alexandre Kyungu, Boniface Maina, Ngugi Waweru and Pamela Enyonu - who have taken on the challenge to make their best work ever. Some I have known and collected and some I'm discovering as we go.

Good luck dear friends. I'm sure you will stun them with your ingenuity and talent, and demonstrate how diverse and exciting the African art scene is, and the limitless treasures there are to discover, now and in future.

Serge Tiroche
Founder of Africa First

ABOUT CA' PESARO - INTERNATIONAL GALLERY OF MODERN ART

The Ca' Pesaro International Gallery of Modern Art in Venice is one of the most important baroque palaces in the city, designed by the famous Italian architect Baldassarre Longhena, and one of the vital hotspots for international modern art. Founded on the occasion of the second edition of the Biennale in 1897, the modern art collections of Venice found their definitive home in Ca' Pesaro in 1902. Since its foundation, the Gallery's history has been in a constant state of flux, not only thanks to the succession of Biennales and the new works that constantly entered the collection, coming directly from the international pavilions, but also thanks to the many gifts that have been made over time by artists, patrons, associations and institutions.

The palace became the property of Duchess Felicita Bevilacqua La Masa, who decreed the present usage of the building, bequeathing it to the city in 1898 as a Museum of Modern Art.

The collection was enriched over the years by further acquisitions and donations. The Gemma de Angelis Testa donation, recently inaugurated, and the artworks acquired consequently to the AFRICA 1:1 exhibition both underline that Ca' Pesaro is always eager to enlarge and enrich its permanent collection, also contemplating new genres and origins.

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