

Untethered Magic / Portfolio



Untethered Magic, formed in August 2019 by Syowia Kyambi, Kibe Wangunyu and Kiberu Dennis, is a home as well as a sanctuary; a safe space for creatives focusing on supporting the process for research based conceptual contemporary arts. Our oasis is a self-made space which hosts and grows residencies and individual practices for occupants and visitors. It's a space that encourages growth and independence, learning, unlearning and relearning space, process, life and art. Untethered Magic is a re-imagination of living human relationships, a supportive communal space while also being defiant to the normal societal structure specific to the context of Kenya. Untethered Magic is an organic, self-sustaining abode that provides an array of facilities. The space has numerous shared open air spaces, which foster workshops, residencies, exhibitions, documentation and other collaborative projects.

The space can cater to up to 40 people, as it's fully equipped with catering facilities and a contemporary kitchen. Among other facilities include a digital amenities, where the residents and visitors can broadcast, document, record music, shoot vlogs & cinematic videos that can be edited and processed on Untethered Magic's workstation. The space also provides art studio and small library that make it possible to research, conceptualize and produce.

Syowia Kyambi is the main concept and curatorial creator of Untethered Magic. She builds networks and facilitates exchange in support of research and process based practices. Syowia is particularly interested in knowledge building through the merger of different disciplines. Often bringing together different age groups, areas of study as well as merging artists with creatives in the field of humanities and sciences.

Dennis Kiberu is the project & administrative manager of Untethered Magic.

He is a radio presenter, PR practitioner, music producer, disc jockey and photographer originating from and based in Nairobi, Kenya.

Kibe Wangunyu runs oversight as well as being a concept creator and a jack-of-all-trades for the space's needs. He is a cinematographer and photographer originating from and based in Nairobi, Kenya. He is also the resident chef.

Artist in Residency I / Wakianda Virginia
6 Week Program
2019



Wakianda is a freelance visual artist and a fashion designer. She has gone out of her way to merge both distinctive fields to create mind-blowing pieces. Born and raised in Nairobi, Wakianda has become conversant with the day-to-day urban lifestyle. Pursuing her degree in B.A. in Fashion Design and Marketing at Kenyatta University has enabled her to acquire the required skills in creating and designing. Moreover, Wakianda was part of the Art Collective Ziwa Zambarau and gradually became an independent artist. She has used various mediums to create artworks: acrylics, graphite, mixed media, sculptor and art photography. She has also worked with fabrics as a mixed media and created profound art pieces.

Wakianda has participated in the Kenya Art Fair 2017; with her art collective Ziwa Zambarau. She has as well taken part in the Kenya Fashion Awards Next Gen Weekend 2018 in showcasing her creative wear. Wakianda will be holding a solo exhibiting at the Goethe Institute KE for the Sasa Nairobi Series in November 2020.

During the month of April Wakianda was keen to escape her city environs and the distractions of her daily life. We offered her respite and time to herself to develop new body of works with a focus on her fashion designs.

Artist in Residency II / Nikomambo
6 Month Program
2019



Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Series), Graphite on Paper, 2018

Born in Kisumu, Kenya, Nicholas Odhiambo, also known as 'Nikomambo', earned a diploma in arts and design from Mwangza Art School in 2014.

He uses graphite, mixed media and found objects, creating imagery that is both real and surreal, laced in ideology.

“Art for me is a way to tell a story and evoke a feeling. I use paper, graphite and mixed media as a tool to create imagery that is both real and surreal, laced in ideology. In an attempt to create an allegory I combine my ideas and observance of daily social activities and behavioral changes, reactions on war and conflicts, questioning the actions of politicians and society all along. I put all this experiences into a new context – demanding the viewer to think and interpret for him- or herself what the image implies. The story continues to grow as I explore more and more of my consciousness and subconscious.” Nikomambo

In 2019 Nikomambo was in the process of joining art school in Hamburg, Germany to further his studies fine arts. Untethered Magic supported him by hosting a six month stay in Nairobi which opened up the opportunity to explore the local art scene further and re-examine his process before entering school, also providing a footing into being able to re-locate himself back into the city when and if he returns to Kenya.

De/Archive East Africa

Collaboration with the Centre for Art, Design & Social Research
U.S.A/ Finland
Facilitated International Residency Program
January 2020



Residency participants involved in a sound recording nature expedition

Co-designed and led with distinguished artist and curator Syowia Kyambi in collaboration with Untethered Magic, DE/ARCHIVE EAST AFRICA convened an interdisciplinary group of scholars, artists, curators, and activists in Nairobi, Kenya exploring the politics, meaning, and rethinking of the archive.

The modern archive is both an instrument and artifact of power, no more dramatically apparent than in the recent history of East Africa, where Britain and Germany used archives as an essential foundation of colonial power. More than half a century after independence, the meaning of these colonial archives remains an area of important social contestation, one which offers the possibility of radically new understandings of the past and even more radical imaginings of the future.

How have artists, writers, thinkers, and activists addressed this tension to rethink the role of archives in the East African context? How might we rethink both knowledge and memory in relation to an official record based on exclusion and silence? What might a radical archive be?

In this seven-day intensive residency, January 18 - 25, thirty four participants - including, artists, researchers, and technologists – interrogated both the meaning found within archival materials, and the notion of the archives themselves from a post-colonial and decolonizing perspective. The research residency convened the Center's 2019-2020 cohort of Research Fellows, who are based in Brazil, China, France, Haiti, Italy, Kenya, Russia, Turkey, and the US, and the De/Archive East Africa Research Fellows in/of East African

communities. During the research residency, the focus is on collective dialogue and individual work time, as well as exchanges with visiting artists and scholars and the Center's Faculty Fellows. The Center encourages each participant to address their ongoing research as part of the dialogue and explore new collaborations with other participants.



Residency participants in workshop discussion

Womanlsm

Residency & Exhibition

Ostrale Centre for Contemporary Art, Germany & Circle Art Gallery
Kenya

March 2020

(cancelled due to COVID Pandemic)



Digital Collage by Ramona Seyfarth, I Am, 2020



Artist Usha Seejarim and curator Syowia Kyambi in discussion with refugee womens group during Ostrale Biennale Isms.

Womanlsm is an international project consisting of exhibitions, workshops, artist residencies and artistic cooperation, aiming to examine and encourage the dialogue on women's rights and women's position in the art world and in society in general. It is the joint endeavor of curators and organizers Syowia Kyambi (Nairobi, Kenya), Antka Hofmann and Andrea Hilger from the OSTRALE Center for Contemporary Arts (Dresden, Germany). The project kick started with a residency during the Ostrale Biennale Isms in June 2019 in Dresden, Germany.

The second residency was scheduled to take place in Nairobi at Untethered Magic residency space based in Ongata Rongai curated by Untethered Magic. The artists participating in this residency and exhibition at Circle Art Gallery titled Get Your Foot Off My Neck include, Sonia E. Barrett (UK/DE/JA), Frenzy Höhne (DE) Ramona Seyfarth (DE), Carolin Koss (HKI/DE), Immy Mali (UG), Hanna Nitsch (DE) and Usha Seejarim (SA). Our program was cut short due to the COVID Pandemic.

Kaspale's Playground

Pre & Post Film Production

April & June 2020



Video still, Kaspale's Playground, 24 mins, 46 sec, 2020

Kaspale's Playground grapples with public memory, parts of which are not (yet) so public. Revisiting Kenya's recent history, Syowia Kyambi brings to the fore the many layers of violence that underpinned former President Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi's 24 year rule in Kenya. The work came about as a need to engage with Kenya's post-independence era and a desire to dismantle a symbol of fear and oppression. To investigate the oppressive nature of a regime in which Kyambi grew up in and which informed her sense of self during her most formative years. She selected Nyayo House as a focus as it is a strong symbol not only in her memories but also in today's time. Kaspale's Playground seeks to publicly claim both the remembering and the telling of this history in ways that are not mediated by a supposed shared national memory. With Moi's recent passing this history has been white washed and made to appear like a peaceful and unproblematic President.

This film is in remembrance of the victims of the Nyayo House torture chambers and honours the power and strength of the mothers involved in the 1992 protest.

Untethered Magic undertook the production of Kaspale's Playground from the cinematography, editing, colour grading, sound mixing and mastering for the film.

Nakufeel

Collaboration with Smallz Magix Enga

Pre & Post Production music video, 3 mins, 2 seconds

October 2020



Video still, Nakufeel, 2020

Jivu is an Afro fusion musical outfit made up of the multitalented duo of Uncle K.(Keragori Johnson) & Chege Anderson. Part of the Untethered Magic crew, Kibe Wangunyu & Dennis Kiberu came together to conceptualize and actualize visuals for their upcoming single 'Nakufeel' which translates to 'I feel you' in English with a connotation of love and assurance in an externally demanding world. The project involved pre-production stage which encompassed storytelling, location scouting, talent scouting among others. Production and post-production were also undertaken by Untethered Magic.

Third Nature

Collaboration with Third Nature members
Elena Marchevska, Sebastian Aguirre
Syowia Kyambi and Carolyn Defrin
supported by Performing Borders & LADA
South London Bank University, UK
Post Production Video, 5 mins, 50 seconds.
September 2020



Video still, Third Nature, 5 min, 50 sec 2020

Third Nature is an open-ended series of digital discussions: a riot of short reflections on lived, precarious, migrant experience patched onto bigger discussions on feminism and care. Our approach to the project felt borderless – without boundaries, In a creatively nurturing way.

The title of the discussion ‘Third nature,’ is borrowed from Anna Tsing. She argues that the term ‘first nature’ is based on established ecological relations (including humans) and ‘second nature’ refers to capitalist transformations of the environment. However, when she talks about “third nature”, she addresses the entities that manage to live despite capitalism. To even notice third nature, Tsing says, we must evade assumptions that the future is that singular direction ahead.

Commissioned by performingborders and Live Art Development Agency for performingbordersLIVE20 supported by the Centre for Research in Digital Story-making at London South Bank University, funded by Arts Council England.

Untethered Magic worked in collaboration with Third Nature members in the postproduction process of creating a film to present their collaborative experience and conversations.

Monday Grooves
Collaboration with
Alternative African Music Archive
Radio Production, Archiving Playlists
2019 - ongoing

Monday Grooves playlists is created by the collective NotAnArtist, which includes Alté/ Alternative African music. Alternative music is classified as anything that is eclectic, original, or challenging than most popular music. Lyrically, Alte/Alternative African music addresses introspective and emotive topics; it delves into areas that are unconventional or taboo.



Since 2019 the collective has been creating Alté playlists across all music streaming platforms creating awareness of African music that goes beyond tribal drumming, the punchy computerized beats and catchy-lyrics. This way of thinking is driving young African artists to push for their music to be recognized as 'alternative'.

Untethered Stories: 10 Conversations
Kenyan Contemporary Art Photographers
Collaborators: Project Legacy Africa, South Africa
Research/ Pre & Post Production video
Archive database development
2021 (to be confirmed)



Rose's Relocation, Syowia Kyambi, Digital Collage Print, 2015

Photography in Kenya was born out of an ethnographic space, mainly through zoologists documenting the conquest of new space, its nature and indigenous tribes. Post independence external interests continue to fuel the perspective about the narrative with a focus on wildlife and indigenous culture documentaries. Shifting the photographic focus and interest to a documentary style of photography and a wildlife centred focus, in recent times the global focus on Kenya has led to a high demand for photojournalistic work from within the country giving rise to a budding market locally and internationally.

Contemporary art photography has however been side lined throughout Kenya's art history. There is little to no focus on contemporary photography from an educational standpoint to the job market itself. We have no universities locally offering fine arts photography and the major focus on photography still lies within photojournalism. In the job market there are no galleries or spaces dedicated to showcasing, developing and or igniting debate with, for and among contemporary art photographers in Kenya.

We want to focus on contemporary art photographers and shine a light on their practices, their processes and showcase their works, this is where the archives comes in handy, creating a platform accessible by the masses and invoking conversations which shift the narrative of photography scene from the more cliché wildlife, fashion and commercial photography.

Our deliveries include the traditional archive process of digitization, metadata and an overview text on each artist in addition to three to five minute short films about each of the ten photographs. These films will be key to making the archive accessible to the masses giving a unique insight into the photographer's environment, their work and facilitating a deeper understanding of the Kenyan context.

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