

Zurich Art Prize 2022

Kapwani Kiwanga

Worldmaking

Oct 27, 2022 –
Jan 15, 2023

MEDIA ORIENTATION
Oct 25, 2022, 11 am

OPENING
Oct 26, 2022, from 6 pm

curated by Sabine Schaschl

In 2022, the *Zurich Art Prize*, awarded annually by Museum Haus Konstruktiv and Zurich Insurance Company Ltd., goes to Kapwani Kiwanga (b. 1978 in Hamilton, Canada, lives and works in Paris). This Canadian-French artist is the 15th winner of the renowned award. Endowed with CHF 100,000, the prize consists of an CHF 80,000 budget for the production of a solo exhibition at Museum Haus Konstruktiv and CHF 20,000 in prize money.

Before devoting herself to art, Kapwani Kiwanga studied anthropology and comparative religion in Canada. Her artistic practice, which began in the mid-2000s, is also rooted in extensive research relating to the humanities and social sciences, and comprises complex installations, sculptures, videos and performances. Kiwanga's projects take her to archives. She focuses on the periphery of narratives on underrepresented histories and is particularly interested in issues involving historical and contemporary power imbalances, as well as in knowledge systems. The resulting works are captivating, due to the materials selected on the basis of their socio-historical importance and physical properties, such as selected woods, stones, ceramics or textiles, but also due to their lean aesthetics and clear language of forms.

Kiwanga's exhibition at Haus Konstruktiv begins with the floor piece *The worlds we tell: Threshold* (2022), whose imposing format has been specially tailored by the artist to suit the hall on the museum's first floor. It consists of colored wooden panels that frame a layered image made of gravel, mirror glass, ceramics, Kandla-gray sandstone, marble, and steel tubes. Three spheres of ficus wood add accents to the abstract geometric linear composition. In view of its material richness, the arrangement is strikingly precise. It belongs to a group of works with the same main title: smaller wall reliefs from 2021, in which the artist explores specific creation myths from various regions around the world. Kiwanga is interested in how worlds are brought forth, ordered, and understood within, and by means of, these cosmogonies, and how world-making languages and architectures can be translated into an aesthetic experience via the use of specific materials in the exhibition space.

The floor relief at Haus Konstruktiv refers to Bantu myths about the creation of the world both physical and spiritual. A line of light glazed ceramics, longitudinally dividing the installation into two halves, symbolizes the separation of the material and spiritual worlds. White clay is often associated with death. The lines of marble and black mirror glass running parallel to the ceramics on one side, and of light sandstone and mirror on the other, indicate the different habitats of the two spheres, which interrelate, in that they are reflected in each other – in both the myth and the exhibition space. The four cut steel tubes refer to the four iron shafts that, in the cosmogony of the Congo, support the Earth (with a ficus tree at its center) and the celestial canopy. Like all the presented architecture of this mythological world, the pillars have been transferred to the horizontal for the installation. As the observer walks around

the large-format relief, the orientation and order of this image of the world – above and below, darkness and light – becomes a matter of perspective and interconnectedness. Thus, spatial and social structures are not taken for granted, but shown as an active process, which is also reflected in the exhibition's title, *Worldmaking*.

In the corridor on the second floor, visitors are acoustically welcomed by the twelve-minute two-channel sound installation *500 ft.* (2017). The voice of Kiwanga herself can be heard talking, in a manner that is as sober as it is engaging, about the disciplinary architecture of institutions such as prisons or hospitals, about the social hygiene movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Europe, and about color theory and color experiments. She mentions Baker-Miller pink, for example, a hue that was studied in the 1970s by US psychologist Alexander Schauss, and which is said to have a calming effect on people by lowering their heart rate and pulse. Baker-Miller pink was first used for a specific purpose in 1979, in a military prison in Seattle, where particularly aggressive prisoners were confined in a cell painted entirely in this shade of pink. The artist also addresses the 500 feet (152.4 meters) that give the work its title: This was the minimum distance that, according to a proposal made in Paris at the 1931 International Congress of Urbanism in the Colonies, was to be maintained between Europeans and the colonized population. Played in a loop, these and other anecdotes, quotations, and rumors combine in the sound installation, producing a meandering narrative that highlights the connecting lines between stories of surveillance and exclusion – stories that are (supposedly) disparate in terms of both time and space.

A wall painting in rich green and light yellow accompanies the acoustic backdrop. Its color change at a height of 160 centimeters refers to a proposal made at the 1905 International Congress on Tuberculosis, held in Paris: As a means of curbing the bacterial infectious disease, German architect Heino Schmieden suggested coating hospital walls with a washable paint, up to this exact height. Kiwanga also mentions that episode in *500 ft.* and expands on it in the exhibition space with a presentation of works from the series *Linear Paintings* (2017). In total, eleven of these two-tone paintings on drywall are on display at Haus Konstruktiv. Like the aforementioned hospital walls, the space is split into two halves by the constant height of the color change throughout – just as society is divided by categories such as 'healthy' and 'sick' or 'free' and 'unfree'. Kiwanga's works demonstrate that the power imbalances entrenched in such categorizations, which order our world spatially and socially, did not always exist, but have grown, and indeed been made, over the course of history.

Along with social hygiene movements and hospital reforms, the colors chosen for the *Linear Paintings* also reflect the work of US color theorist Faber Birren. From the 1930s onward, Birren worked as an industrial color consultant, advising his clients, including the US military, on the psychological effects of color with regard to safety, workplace morale, productivity and sales. The color schemes and proportions used by Kiwanga reproduce specific institutions researched by the artist, as indicated in each work's subtitle. The combination of light gray and yellow that Birren suggested for a Chicago printing factory, for example, was intended to reduce the workers' visual fatigue and increase the efficiency of the production facility, while the light turquoise from a Canadian psychiatric hospital was meant to have a calming effect on the patients. As the works are painted directly onto plaster, they create the impression that the original walls have been cut out and transferred to the exhibition space as direct material testimony to these stories. An overlaying of different spaces, which are intended to influence and regulate our behavior, thus takes place in the exhibition space. This ultimately also includes the museum setting and the institutionalized exhibiting of works of minimal and conceptual art, as incorporated by Kiwanga into the formal design and presentation of the *Linear Paintings*. Here though, there is a difference, in that the effects of the disciplining interior designs are not only to be made intellectually comprehensible, but also physically perceptible.

In 2002, Kapwani Kiwanga completed her studies in anthropology and comparative religion at McGill University in Montreal. From 2005 to 2007, she participated in the renowned La Seine program at École Nationale des Beaux-Arts de Paris, and from 2007 to 2009 she completed further postgraduate studies at Le Fresnoy, Studio national des arts contemporains, in Tourcoing (FR).

Kiwanga can look back on numerous institutional solo exhibitions, including *Off-Grid*, New Museum, New York City (2022); *Flowers for Africa*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Toronto (2021); *The Sand Recalls the Moon's Shadow*, Moody Center for the Arts, Rice University, Houston (2021); *Plot*, Haus der Kunst, Munich (2020); *Kapwani Kiwanga*, Kunsthaus Centre d'art Pasquart, Biel/Bienne (2020); *Safe Passage*, MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts (2019); *A wall is just a wall (and nothing more at all)*, Esker Foundation, Calgary (2018); *Afrogalactica*, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin (2017); and *Maji Maji*, Jeu de Paume, Paris (2014).

In addition, she has participated in numerous group exhibitions, such as *The Milk of Dreams*, 59. Biennale di Venezia (2022), *Liminal Identities in the Global South*, Joburg Contemporary Art Foundation, Johannesburg (2021); *On the Threshold*, Fondation LUMA, Arles (2020); *Things Entangling*, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo (2020); *Undefined Territories: Reflections on Colonial Legacies*, MACBA – Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (2019); and *Stories of Almost Everyone*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2018).

As of September 2022, Kiwanga is an Elizabeth S. and Richard M. Cashin Fellow Independent Artist for one year at Harvard University's Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In 2020, she won the prestigious Prix Marcel Duchamp. In 2018, she received both the Sobey Art Award from the National Gallery of Canada and the Frieze Artist Award.

MEDIATION PROGRAM

NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM

November 2, 6.15 pm

A special kind of guided tour: we turn off the lights and explore the museum together with you. Please bring your own flashlight! (in German)

ROUNDTABLE

November 9, 6.15 pm

A talk between Melanie Boehi (historian), Chanelle Adams (science researcher), Andile Magengelele (curator), and Percy Zvomuya (journalist) about history, knowledge systems, and postcolonial entanglements in the work of Kapwani Kiwanga.

PUBLIC GUIDED TOUR IN ENGLISH

Sunday, December 4, 11.45 am

Further guided tours in German: Wednesdays at 6.15 pm and Sundays at 11.45 am

For more information and events, visit: hauskonstruktiv.ch

The digital program and the mediation offered on site are constantly being updated and adapted to the current situation.

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ZURICH ART PRIZE

The *Zurich Art Prize* was set up in 2007 by Museum Haus Konstruktiv together with Zurich Insurance Company Ltd., patron partner of the museum, and now has a strong international presence. Each year, an independent artist is honored, who operates at the interfaces where the cultural heritage of constructivist-concrete and conceptual art, on one hand, meets contemporary trends on the other hand. Since 2017, the prize donated by Zurich Insurance Company Ltd. has consisted of an CHF 80,000 budget for the production of a solo exhibition at Museum Haus Konstruktiv and CHF 20,000 in prize money for the artist.

NOMINATION PROCEDURE

Each year, Sabine Schaschl, director of Museum Haus Konstruktiv, invites six curators, critics and art experts to each nominate one artist, who has already made an impression as a visible force on the international art scene, and who demonstrates an intellectual extrapolation of the constructivist-concrete and conceptual heritage within contemporary art. The nominations for this year's award came from: Andreas Fiedler, freelance curator and art critic; Ulrike Groos, director of Kunstmuseum Stuttgart; Fanni Fetzer, director of Kunstmuseum Lucerne; Judith Welter, head of the Master of Fine Arts program, ZHdK; Simone Schimpf, director of Neues Museum Nuremberg; and Hans Ulrich Obrist, curator and artistic director at Serpentine Galleries, London.

SHORTLIST

Alongside Kapwani Kiwanga, the following were also nominated for the *Zurich Art Prize 2022*: Florina Leinß (b. 1984 in Stuttgart, Germany), Haris Epaminonda (b. 1980 in Nicosia, Cyprus), Ima-Abasi Okon (b. 1981 in London, UK), Chloé Quenum (b. 1983 in Paris, France) and Tarek Lakhrissi (b. 1992 in Châtellerauld, France).

JURY

The composition of the jury for the *Zurich Art Prize 2022* was as follows: Sabine Schaschl, director of Museum Haus Konstruktiv (chairperson); Tobia Bezzola, director of Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana in Lugano; Carin Gantenbein, head of professional liability at Zurich Insurance Company Ltd. in Zurich; Friedemann Malsch, former director of Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein in Vaduz; Matthias Mühlhling, director of Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich; and Stella Rollig, general director and scientific director at the museum Belvedere, Vienna.

Previous prizewinners

- 2021: Sonia Kacem (b. 1985 in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 2020: Amalia Pica (b. 1978 in Neuquén, Argentina)
- 2019: Leonor Antunes (b. 1972 in Lisbon, Portugal)
- 2018: Robin Rhode (b. 1976 in Cape Town, South Africa)
- 2017: Marguerite Humeau (b. 1986 in Cholet, France)
- 2016: Nairy Baghramian (b. 1971 in Isfahan, Iran)
- 2015: Latifa Echakhch (b. 1974 in El Khnassa, Morocco)
- 2014: Haroon Mirza (b. 1977 in London, UK)
- 2013: Adrián Villar Rojas (b. 1980 in Rosario, Argentina)
- 2012: Mariana Castillo Deball (b. 1975 in Mexico City)
- 2011: Mai-Thu Perret (b. 1976 in Geneva)
- 2010: Ryan Gander (b. 1976 in Chester, UK)
- 2009: Tino Sehgal (b. 1976 in London)
- 2007: Carsten Nicolai (b. 1965 in Karl-Marx-Stadt, now Chemnitz, Germany)