



Kuchu Ndagamuntu (Queer Identity Card)

Leilah Babirye

Not on display

Title/Description: Kuchu Ndagamuntu (Queer Identity Card)

Artist/Maker: Leilah Babirye (Artist)

Born: 2021

Object Type: Painting

Materials: Acrylic, Paper

Measurements: h.840 x w.650

Accession Number: 50928

Production Place: United States

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Credit Line: Purchased with support from the Art Fund, 2024

Artist and activist Leilah Babirye represents the queer communities of her native Uganda and New York, where she lives and works today. In sculpture and on paper, Babirye creates representations of LGBTQI+ people expressing their gender and sexuality freely.

'Kuchu', from the title, is a word of Swahili origin that is used to describe homosexuals in Uganda. 'Ndaga Muntu' is Uganda's biometric ID system, which has been reported to have excluded many Ugandan nationals from registering and thus denying their human rights [1]. Babirye questioned the need for representation in formal identification with plain dress, white backgrounds and blank expressions. Instead, she proposes a freer world, which encourages self-expression through her *Queer Identity Cards*, a series of works on paper depicting people with colourful make up, clothing and hair.

By titling all the works in the series, *Kuchu Ndagamuntu (Queer Identity Card)*, she denotes them as a clan. Babirye's use of clan names stems from the 52 clans that structure Ugandan society which are all named after animals and plants. With this naming, Babirye bestows upon her works and by extension the queer people in Uganda a sense of community and identity.

Babirye is known for her sculpture using found materials, in an act of reclaiming rubbish. This is a reference to the Lugandan slang term 'ebisiyaga', meaning sugar cane husk, that is used as an insult towards LGBTQI+ people. She turned to making her vibrant works on paper when she moved to New York and saw drag queens and queer people living openly for the first time.

Babirye fled Uganda in 2015 due to the homophobic laws after being publicly outed in a local newspaper. In spring 2018 she was granted asylum with support from the African Services Committee and the NYC Anti-Violence Project.

[1]
<https://www.biometricupdate.com/202106/ugandan-id-system-a-national-security-weapon-that-denies-human-rights-report> [accessed 14 January 2025]

Tania Moore

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Exhibitions

London Art Fair, Business Design Centre, London - 22/01/25 - 26/01/25
