

Xenson Art Space - Look One Edition 6 - 2026 -PHOTO/COURTESY

# When art is seen through ongoing process lens

Across drawings, paintings, fibres, and reclaimed materials, the artists reflect on personal histories while engaging shared concerns around responsibility, labour, and attention.

BY BAMUTURAKI MUSINGUZI

An exhibition curated by Jacob Joshua Kajebe that opened on February 7, showcasing artworks of one Ethiopian and four Ugandan artists, closes on February 28 at the Xenson Art Space in Kampala. Look One Edition 6 brought together the five artists (Michael Ddungu, Hillary Agaba, Linda Suzan Aliba, Collin Ainomugisha, and Mahilet Afework) whose practices treat memory, time, and lived experience as active and ongoing processes. Rather than viewing archives as fixed records of the past, living archives understand them as something held in bodies, materials, gestures, and everyday acts of care.

Across drawings, paintings, fibres, and reclaimed materials, the artists reflect on personal histories while engaging shared concerns around responsibility, labour, and attention. Memory here is not nostalgic or settled. It appears in layers, fragments, and repetitions, shaped by ordinary moments and long histories, per the curator's statement

## Agaba's paintings

Hillary Agaba, one of the artists, documents natural landscapes and human behaviour as a way of recording change over time. Moving between observed reality and imagined space, his paintings address environmental vulnerability, social justice, and the fragile relationship between people and their surroundings. His six paintings on display include The Edge, Highland Mothers, Visitors from Across, Mudfish Catcher, and The Punishment Island.

The Edge depicts a rural landscape of a terraced hill in Kisoro that overlooks a range of other hills that are covered with thick natural forests striking a sharp contrast between the different highlands. Highland Mothers portrays three Bakiga women of which two are carrying babies on their backs and bags on their head and shoulders respectively. They are confidently marching on a dusty road high up in the highlands with steep hills in the background.

Visitors from Across illustrates two women in long clothes and sweaters, one carrying a baby on her back and both with bamboo woven baskets covered with coloured clothes on their heads. They are in a conversation along a footpath. A narrow serpentine shaped lake extends in the far distant background disappearing among the hills.

Mudfish Catcher depicts a village man in a swampy environment expectantly checking in his traditional fishing basket hoping to find a mudfish. Punishment Island portrays a tiny uninhabited island covered with grass with a dying tree in the tranquil waters of Lake Bunyonyi. This is the infamous Akampene Island with a dark history in the Bakiga societies as girls that got pregnant before marriage would be abandoned there to die.

## Ddungu's two cents

Through carefully built drawings, Michael Ddungu focuses on human presence and emotional states. His repeated lines and unfinished figures speak to patience, attention, and the passage of time. Five of his artworks on display include the Boys Will Be Boys series, Men Playing Chess, Ladies Laughing, and Man and Woman on Couch. The Boys Will Be Boys series shows young men standing and sitting on a couch. According to Ddungu, the series explores the narratives around expectations placed on male vulnerability, equating strength, says Ddungu, "with emotional restraint."

Men Playing Chess depicts two men playing chess with one of them smoking a cigarette in his mouth, a father-son moment, "with the chessboard becoming a metaphor for life lived in calculation rather than fullness."

Ladies Laughing captures a group of women in laughter. According to Ddungu, this artwork celebrates womanhood, and intergenerational memory through a sense of shared belonging.

A man and woman are captured seated on a couch in Man and Woman on Couch. "The piece speaks to unions where separation is not an option," Ddungu, a self-taught visual artist based in Kampala, told Life & Arts.

## Afework's visual palimpsests

Afework presents her ongoing series Frozen Moments where memory and time overlap through symbolic forms and measured compositions. Her work holds distance and closeness at once, echoing the way memory operates in daily life.

"I see my work as 'visual palimpsests' layers of history, emotion, and culture built on top of one another. In this series, I want to capture a specific feeling or a historical memory and 'freeze' it, so the viewer can look through the layers," Afework, who is showcasing five pieces disclosed.

The 'visual palimpsests' technique the Ethiopian deploys builds "many layers of texture and colour, then partially scrape them away." The process mimics, she adds, "how memory works; some things are forgotten, while others remain visible."

In Frozen Moments I: The Foundation, she explores the 'origin' of a memory. It represents the initial layer of history or emotion that we build our lives upon. It is the core moment that starts the story. Frozen Moments II: The Complexity shows the buildup of life and experience. Afework says, "As we grow, our 'moments' become more complex and layered. Here, the textures are deeper, representing how time adds weight and richness to our personal and collective history."

Frozen Moments III: The Dialogue shows how the past and the present are in a constant dialogue. While Frozen Moments IV represents the 'Frozen' aspect most clearly. "It is about the choice to preserve a specific moment before it is completely covered by time."

**Change over time**

One of the artists documents natural landscapes and human behaviour as a way of recording change over time. Moving between observed reality and imagined space, his paintings address environmental vulnerability.

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