

A SCULPTOR'S ENCOUNTER WITH HIV



Nabulime explaining the meaning of the soap sculptures which she uses to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS. Some critics have said her works are obscene, but she says the art pieces convey the messages effectively



When Lilian's husband died of HIV 22 years ago, she could not think of a better way to immortalise the father of her only child than to dedicate her career as a visual artist to raising awareness about the pandemic and supporting the vulnerable.

For Nabulime, the HIV/AIDS experience is deep. First, the disease claimed her father's life in 1987, the year she completed university. Then her husband, Edward Kitaka, 18 years later. Kitaka and Nabulime started out in 1981 as high school sweethearts at Makerere College School. He, in Senior Five. She was in Senior Two.

"When I made a decision to be his girlfriend, it was because he was friendly and caring — the kind of guy who would share the food his mother packed for him with me."

Most importantly, she says he looked out for her.

"He was muscular. He supported and protected me from anyone that would want to hurt me," she recalls.

AS UGANDA PREPARES TO COMMEMORATE THE WORLD AIDS DAY ON DECEMBER 1, VISION GROUP IS SPEARHEADING THE DRIVE TO GET EVERYBODY BACK AND INVOLVED IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HIV/AIDS. FOR THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER, NEW VISION WILL PUBLISH A SERIES OF STORIES TO HIGHLIGHT KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION. TODAY, **STEPHEN SSENKAABA** PROFILES **LILIAN NABULIME**, A VISUAL ARTIST, WHO LOST HER HUSBAND TO HIV AND HAS SINCE DEDICATED HER CAREER TO RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT THE DISEASE

In 2004 when Kitaka lay on his deathbed, Nabulime was there to support and protect him: Not only with expensive medication and hospital trips, but also with the best gift she could give — her art.

EMBRACING THE STRUGGLE

As her husband grew weaker, his friends abandoned him, some doctors rejected them. Kitaka himself became withdrawn and depressed. This called for strength on Nabulime's part. Thankfully, their daughter, Sharon Namubiru, only 14 then, understood and stood by her parents.

Nabulime enrolled for a doctorate at Newcastle University in the UK, a few years into Kitaka's sickness. This opened up her eyes. "I had initially set out to research on using sculpture to



Nabulime's 'Mortar and Pestle' piece that depicts sex

communicate to women. But while reading about women and HIV in the library one day, I realised that my struggle was shared by many other women," she says. I changed

my topic to the role of sculptural forms as a communication tool in the lives and experiences of women with HIV/AIDS in Uganda.

Twelve years later, Nabulime is still using sculpture to tell the HIV/AIDS story and to change the lives of women and children living with HIV in Uganda.

Nabulime's living room at her Makerere University flat is a sculptor's studio. There is only a single simple red sofa for visitors. The remaining space is filled with tree logs, wooden sculptures and artistic paraphernalia.

The walls team with colourful paintings and the floor is littered with bits of her installation pieces: raffia bowls, cowrie shells, paperwork and carvings of different shapes and sizes. It is here on the peeling red cement floor that she plans her art projects.

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INTRIGUING PIECES

One such project is a recently concluded art exhibition at Makerere University's school of industrial and fine art. In the exhibition titled, *Dreams and Consequences: Makerere Campus Women Views of Womanhood*

and HIV/AIDS, Nabulime used her sculptures to stimulate debate on HIV/AIDS among young female university students.

"As a lecturer at Makerere University, I am privileged to interact with many students, both inside and outside the classroom. After talking with many young women about womanhood, I started making sculptures which reflect their fragile responses," Nabulime said of her exhibition.

The exhibition carried a series of sculptures, including 15 miniature fired clay portraits entitled *Expressions*; 15 found wood sculptures entitled *Uniqueness of Campus Girls*; 10 flat reliefs entitled *Dreams and Consequences*. Others are 10 wood reliefs with nailed aluminium cans and metal nuts entitled *Campus Women Lifestyles*; and huge sculptures entitled *Courage, Empowered and Confident*.

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