

# Dance in the village, Dance in the city: A Fluid Dichotomy of Rural & Urban Talented Space



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## Reconfiguring Acholi Cultural Dance: A Visual Arts Mediation of Bwola Dance in a Performative Space of Kampala City



African Urbanities Project  
Entanglement, Mobility and  
Improvisation: Culture and  
Arts in Contemporary African  
Urbanism and its Hinterlands.

## **Abstract**

This paper presentation and art exhibition emerged out of the persuasion that cultural performances like Bwola dance can transform and mitigate employment challenges as more people in Africa embrace urbanization (Collier, 2016). This research segment applied cultural lens in interrogating the urban identities of Kampala city through dance performative. The study also examined the dwindling creative space as more land is being re-allocated for the building of shops, arcades and other infrastructures that the Kampala City Council Authority (KCCA) considers development. The study straddled two axes of investigations; objective (ii): To interrogate the emergence of a liberal rural and urban creative space by studying the subtle nuances that exist between the traditional Bwola dance and the variety being performed in Kampala city, and objective (iii), to examine the reconfiguration of Bwola dance and how it is negotiating the performative space and the socio-political hierarchy in Kampala city. Although Bwola dance traverses the village and the city, it's traditional performance in celebrating, commemorating, marrying, memorializing and mourning among others is largely unchanged.

Key words: Cultural, Dance, Bwola, Talented space, Performative, Reconfiguration, Infrastructure

## Background Information

Pre-colonial Acholi community was made of clans who share related values, Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and belief systems. The knowledge of these clans were directly linked to, (Amegago, 2006) contextual experiences based on age, sex/gender, socialization, occupation, religion/rituals, politics and individuality. The arts were integral to these experiences, which were preserved through apprenticeship and performatives like poetry, recitals and dance among others. Bwola dance in the chiefs' (Rwodi) homesteads and outside the royal jurisdictions facilitated social interaction. A holistic integration of the physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual (Amegago, 2006) human values among the Acholi were realized during the performances.

The creation of the Acholi person consists of both physical and spiritual links. The physical existence of an Acholi is believed to begin at fetal stage (Amegago, 2006). Pregnant mothers would participate in music and dance performances with the belief that the unborn child has the capacity to absorb the cultural music and dance right from the fetal stage, not a far cry from some modern antenatal beliefs. The act of singing and dancing at every event and opportunity is meant to partly ingrain the transmitted values to children and youth. At the adolescent or puberty stage, children are inducted into the various roles of adulthood, which include initiation into the different dance genres of the Acholi. Some Acholi scholars and opinion leaders place the Acholi dance high on its cultural identity podium. The physical is cemented by the deliberate emphasis on kinship both at home, in other parts of the country in what came to be called Acholi quarters, and in the diaspora. The opportunity to dance was divine. The performers embraced it with passion and commitment. Amongst the Acholi, dance represents a fundamental part of the cultural heritage (Steinhauer, 2016).



## Preface



**Assoc. Prof. George Kyeyune**

### **The Bwola Dance re-envisioned in the urban space**

When Mr. Gwoktcho asked me to write something about his “Bwola dance in the city” exhibition, I hesitated, because my exposure to Bwola dance is rather superficial. When he insisted, I realized that I could find a thread connecting history, culture and modernization. The trio, I believe, are intricately interwoven and analysing them as a group would help us to isolate art (in a broad sense) as a medium that supports unification of communities. On 9th October 2022, Uganda

celebrated six decades of independence. In the independence message, the president, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, reiterated his stand of ensuring that Ugandans become more competitive in world trade, by adding value to their produce. His message was pertinent—it however lacked one important ingredient ... that the premium to value addition is the Ugandan flavor.

The essential features of Uganda as a country are its people, languages and cultures and therein lies its identity. Lest we forget, yet relevant.....upon the advent of Christianity and colonialism the turn of the 19th century, local cultures were quickly subjected to Western interpretation and misinterpretation. Placing itself at the centre, the West assigned itself the duty to liberate Africa from ignorance. Modernization which entailed evangelization, formal education and a market economy, relegated the local systems of knowledge to a status of the ‘traditional’. What this meant was that the technical and intangible achievements of our forefathers were interpreted as inferior to that of the colonizing powers. Moreover, many of them were considered to be anchors of heathen worship regarded as antipathetic to modernization and progress.

The disparaging attitude towards traditions inherited from the past, by the West however, did little to subdue the enthusiasm of local communities towards their cultures. Even when monarchies were banished from Uganda’s politics in the 1960s, cultures remained strong (albeit reviewed because of Western intervention) and functioned as, in some cases, the only way to maintain social cohesion and identity within the country’s distinctive ethnic groups. The expressions manifested in dances for example provide a window into understanding peoples aspirations, hopes and fears. As the world changes, politically and socially, so have the cultures and in the dynamics of loss and gain new cultural manifestations have emerged.

I am particularly interested in the Bwola dance that Mr. Gwoktcho is investigating in his PhD research. Gwoktcho is telling us that there is a fluid dichotomy between the rural and the urban ‘talented’ space within the performances of Bwola dance. With increasing urbanization, Bwola dance has claimed a platform in cities and given that the dynamics of the city space are different from those in the rural, a new hybrid of dance has emerged. Cities are melting pots of different communities from the different parts of Uganda who, in various ways, partake in the city cultural engagements. Bwola dance performers in cities are not unaware of other ‘traditional’ dances in their neighborhood and I reckon a reciprocal relationship has emerged between them. The City Bwola dance therefore is an example of complex narrative of new traditions that have come to define modern cities in Uganda. Tourists flock to Uganda to experience a different world, a world that those who wish to add value to their produce should reflect on take advantage of, for increased marketability. By transferring the urban Bwola dance into visual imagery, Gwoktcho is helping us not only to appreciate the value of Bwola dance as resource for development, but also to be aware of the intricate entanglements within its urban unfoldings.

I congratulate him upon reaching this milestone and I wish him the best in the next phase of his research.

George Kyeyune (Assoc. Prof.)

# The Notion of Dance in the Village & the City.

A Reflexive, Visual Arts Mediation & Subjective Interpretation.



## *DANCING WITH KIN*

Acrylic On Canvas, 102x93cm. 2022.



The word Village in Acholi is gang. Gang is multilayered, it can mean Acholi sub-region, home, homestead, or enclosure. The city dwellers expressed their travel to the village as 'woru ii gang'- travelling home or to the place where one belonged. The strong sense of belonging is well preserved and demonstrated in dances like Bwola. Dancing to Bwola at the court of an Acholi chief (Rwot) was an integral part of celebration one's sense of belonging. The chiefly institution represented an 'enclosure', gang kal or gang ker, a place every Acholi ascribed to.

The Acholi also nurtured unwavering belief in the supernatural, the supremacy of god (lubanga) and where he is located (polo). The cultural dance more often than not, mediated the relationship between lubanga and the people in times of adversity like death (see the painting, Burying Oulanyah), draught, famine, or war. This would be done with an intercessory appeal for god's intervention. Similarly, dances would be performed in praise and adoration in good times including a peaceful monarchical transition, royal birth, betrothal, marriage and in a season of bountiful harvest. Having contextualized Bwola dance in it's rural settings, the dance reconfiguration in the city is largely a 'chip from the old block.' Much of it's cultural protocol remain unchanged as illustrated in the painting below.



## LET MYEL BWOLA BEGIN

Oil on Canvas. 150x150cm. 2022.

Let Myel Bwola begin is a painting derived from a scene in a city performance of Bwola dance where the dance protocol is well configured and regimental. The arrival on the performative space is sequential. First, the lead drummer takes his place on a makeshift wooden chair with the two lead, medium size drums. Then a female performer is closely followed by the team leader. The presence of the three is the official start of the Bwola dance. The lead drums are played and the accompanying song by the trio is echoed in chorus by the rest of the team in their formation a few distance away. The dance is performed by both men and women. The male performers carry small drums and drumsticks and rhythmically play them at synchronized intervals. The women alongside the men dance to the melody by shaking their long necks and chests while making a forward and backwards movements. In the movement the men perform foot work which is enhanced by the ankle bells producing a beautiful rhythmic sound. During Bwola Dance, a big drum called min bul (mother drum) usually stationed at the centre of the performance (see painting, Dancing in Diapers and the Marabou Stork Mockery) is beaten and synchronises with the lead drums to produce a seamless audio-dialogue. The men wear ostrich feathers on the heads that depict royalty and leopard, or other animal skin or animal print fabric on their backs and or waist. Sometimes there is an arm band made of skin fastener and a band of whiskers, see the painting, Getting ready below.



## GETTING READY

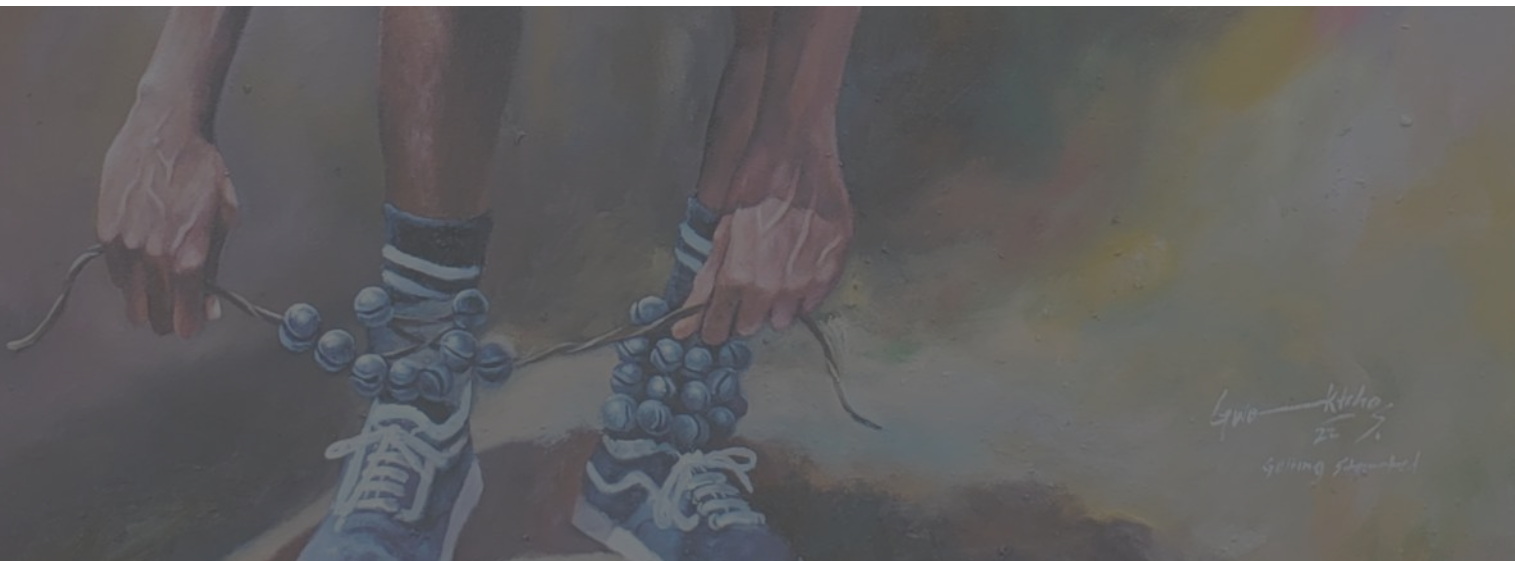
Oil on Canvas. 60 x 90cm. 2022.

The women wear waist beads and fold cloth into pleats which is tied around the waist. The city version of Bwola dance described above is not any different from the Acholi traditional one. The study of Bwola dance in the city is being looked at as a flagship research for cultural dances and their connectedness to emerging cities in Uganda.

As Thomas Gieryn explains, the city is both the subject and the venue of study. Scholars in urban studies constitute the city both as the empirical referent of analysis and the physical site where investigation takes place (Gieryn, 2006, 6). Across significant strands of the social sciences and the design disciplines, the urban is treated as a fixed, unchanging entity, as a universal form, settlement type or bounded spatial unit ('the' city) that is being replicated across the globe (Brenner & Schmid 2015). Arguably for a social or cultural study to be credible, perhaps urban research needs to 'freeze' such a space, work with a less dynamic but stable data resource as a necessary evil. By contrast, following Lefebvre's ([1970] 2003) methodological injunction, we interpret the urban as a multi-scalar process of socio-spatial transformation. The study of specific urban forms, types or units must thus be superseded by investigations of the relentless 'churning' of urban configurations at all spatial scales.

Brenner & Schmid posit:

First, the urban can no longer be understood as a universal form. Apparently stabilized urban sites are in fact merely temporary materializations of ongoing socio-spatial transformations. Such processes of creative destruction do not simply unfold within fixed or stable urban 'containers', but actively produce, unsettle and rework them, and thus constantly engender new urban configurations. Simply put, the urban is not a (fixed) form but a process; as such, it is dynamic, historically evolving and variegated. It is materialized within built environments and socio-spatial arrangements at all scales; and yet it also continually creatively destroys the latter to produce new patterns of socio-spatial organization (Harvey 1985). There is thus no singular morphology of the urban; there are, rather, many processes of urban transformation that crystallize across the world at various spatial scales, with wide-ranging, often unpredictable consequences for inherited socio-spatial arrangements.





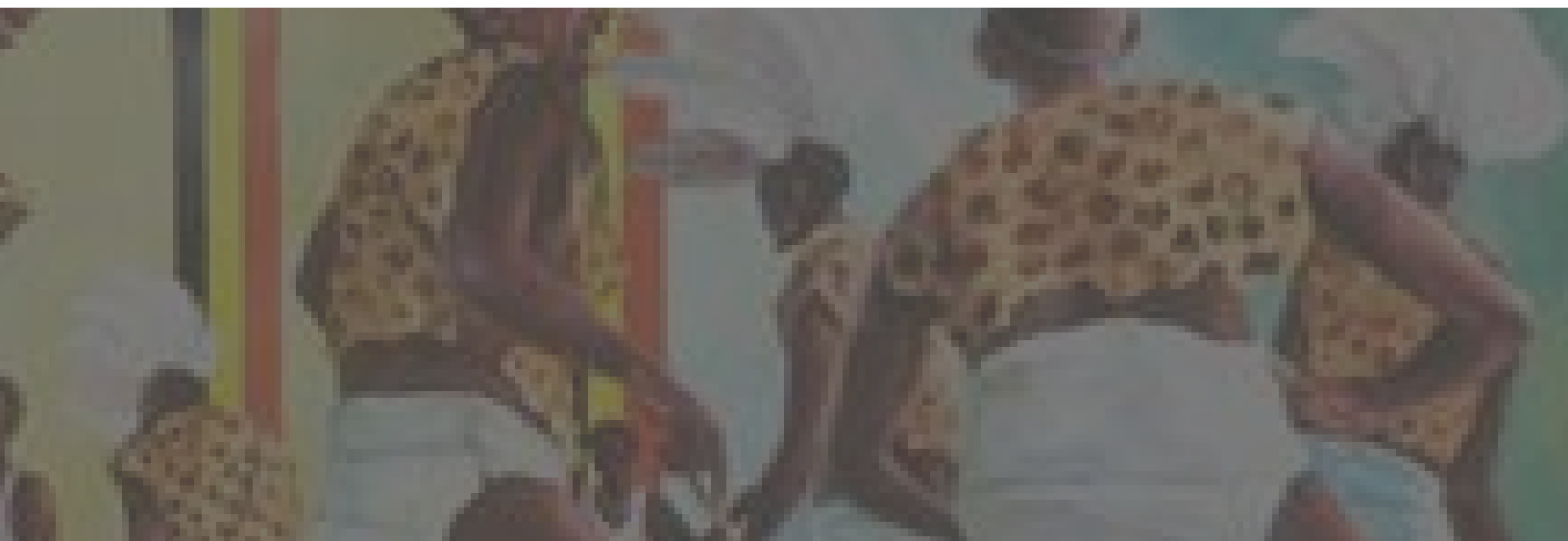
The above extract presupposes that the urban configuration should be looked at not as isolated settlement, not even a stable entity, but as chains of relationships site of socio-spatial structuring and re-structuring or a process of makeover, a temporary materialization. Which then means any urban environment being studied should be looked at as a 'territorial inheritance' of earlier rounds of restructuring and the socio-spatial lenses through which the future urban discourse can be rationalized. The urban, and or the emerging city is a work in process and not a finished good. Modern approaches to urban theory by late 19th century had associated the urban with the growth of cities. This can only be partially true. The growth of urban centres into cities in the case of Uganda have numerous undertones including availability of capital resources for growth and sustenance, and political good will. Cities like Mbale and Jinja in the East of Uganda have stagnated with only their colonial infrastructure to show for their cityness. Mbale, the Eastern Uganda colonial capital and the then reverberating industrial city of Jinja have attracted very little attention politically in decades. The thinking that what is urban will result into a city has saturated mainstream urban research and is being patronized by the United Nations, the World Bank and other international bodies in the debates on global urbanism. From the submissions of Brenner & Schmid, a city like Kampala will inevitable present it's unique set of identities, which findings can inform the general direction of African scholarship. Mediating the study with a synergy of cultural dance and visual arts, for lack of better word, is a different approach to urban studies, and or Kampala city, from methods that pursue inherited understanding of cityness nurtured by the North stereotype. This approach is significant as a non-traditional method in an investigation and also as a methodological shift in studying the urban across the uneven landscapes (Brenner & Schmid, 2015). It is hoped that visual arts alongside other emerging methods will reorient urban research, especially it's accommodation and debates on the contribution to the city by arts and culture.

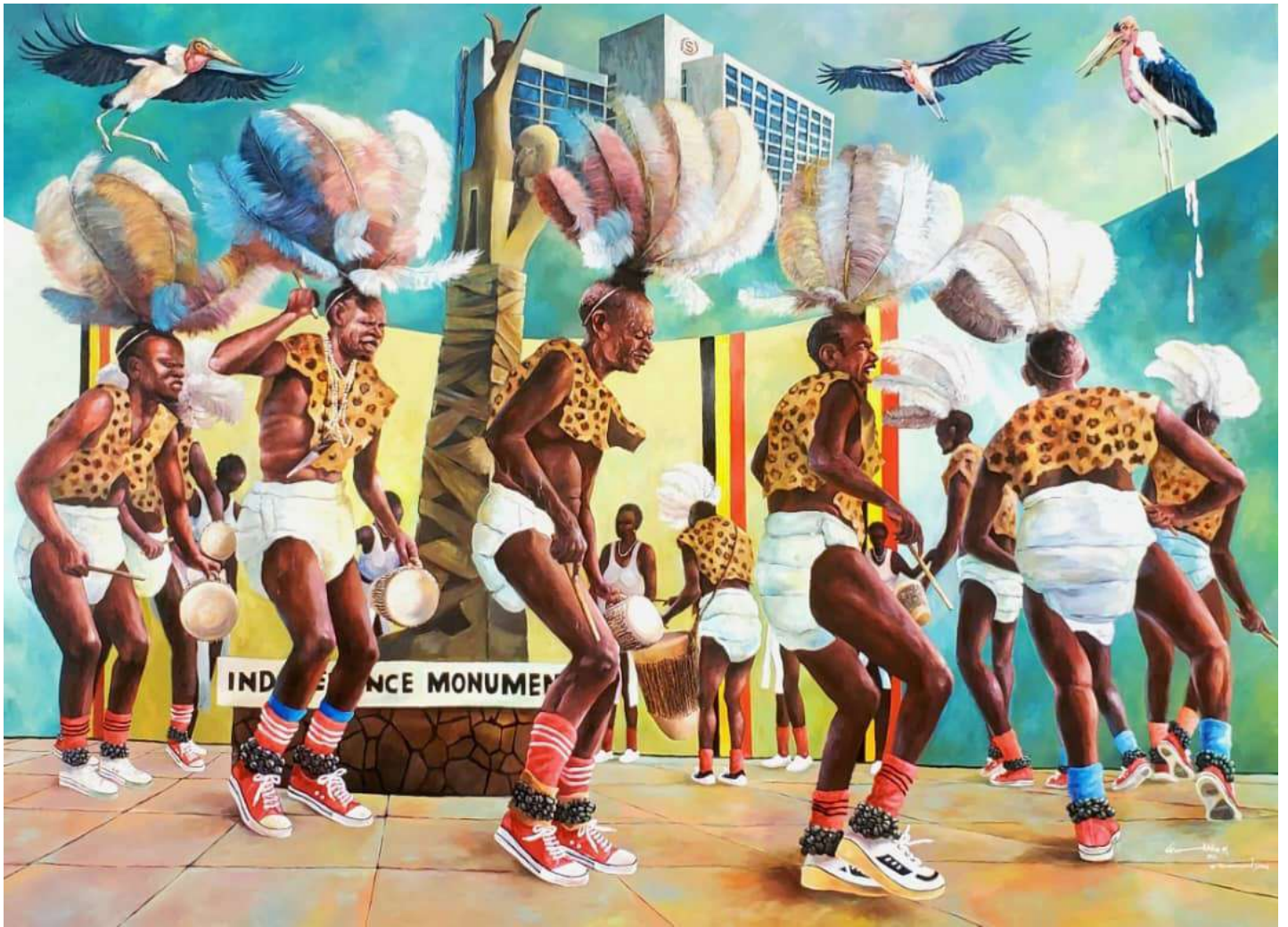
In this segment, by teasing out the arts and culture-people connectedness, it is apparent that what happens in a Ugandan village is exported to the cities and vice versa as people traverse the rural and the urban spaces. The ritual of bringing a piece of the village to the city is not peculiar to Uganda. Worldwide migration patterns and trails have shown evidence of 'little china' or 'china town' or 'Acholi quarters' whenever people migrated to a new land in search of better living conditions. The movement of Ugandans from the hinterlands to the cities is attributed to the imagination of a place where limitless opportunities do present for self fulfilment through interaction, employment and or, creating employability by vending one's talent. The idea of reconfiguring Bwola dance, a subgenre of the Acholi cultural dance in Kampala city is borne out of the quest for survival by the performers. The researcher derived the question of what identities distinguish an African city from the other cities of the world by interrogating this vital sector, the creative arts.



The inquiry established that the city of Kampala is a melting pot of innovation (reconfigurations) and inventiveness. From street vending (see Prof. Dipio's essay on Kampala city, 2021) to the creative industry, the informal sector players in Kampala city are hasslers with uncertain future. The Nekolela Byange (I am minding my business) category, sometimes called the business of Omuntu wa wansi (the ordinary person's business) is where Bwola dance belong. It could be said of Kampala that both the city and the Bwola dance variety are creations of survival. Both denote human endeavour to construct a liveable society. The 'work in progress' of Kampala city and the performative innovations has remoulded the city since the post-colonial era.

The present day Kampala is in many respect different from its previous 'habitat for the Impalas,' and the legendary seven hills. The size and infrastructural growth of Kampala city means the colonial blue print of zoning is a relic of the past. The zoning was for the colonial administrative convenience to the extent that creative spaces were clearly located for close monitoring of activities deemed deviant to the status quo. However, the new landscape of Kampala city is more accommodative despite the contradictions observed in the text. There are diverse socio-economic activities with the traditional capital investments taking the lion share. The 'investor' mindset continues to etch into the dwindling creative spaces and the dance performers negotiating their agencies where there is demand. The survival mentality of the performative industry means the city will remain a relevant, though highly contested place for arts and human expressions depicted in the painting, *Dancing in Diapers* and the *Marabou Stork Mockery*.





## *DANCING IN DIAPERS AND THE MARABOU STORK MOCKERY*

Acrylic on Canvas. 180 x 130cm. 2022.



The painting depicts the Independence Monument space as a contested space. Placed in the centre of a triangulated Standard Chartered Bank, the Grand Imperial and the Sheraton hotels, the independence monument vainly attempts to tower in the middle of economic liberalisation. The monument is subjectively and in real life, portrayed as having been dwarfed by the imposing wall and towering buildings in the neighbourhood which until recently was not in the vicinity (see unsolicited photographs below).



*OLD PICTURE, OF THE INDEPENDENCE MONUMENT*

(author unknown)

The location of the monument is what would be a public and performative space. Performative in the context of public accessibility and recreation (see the amphitheatre-like layout Plate. 5 above). In the minds of the author(s) of this monument, its location is a talented space. Erected a few months to the October 9th 1962 independence event, it is supposedly one of the most outstanding relics of Uganda freedom from bondage of colonialism. The illusive masterpiece was designed by Gregory Maloba a Luhya sculptor from Kenya who studied and taught art at Makerere University from 1939-1965. This project came at a time when Makerere university has just gained its stature as the leading art school in East Africa. For its historic importance, (see it's current rebrand figure 3. below) the monument is still an abstract concept in the minds of Kampala's citizens and arguable many Ugandans.

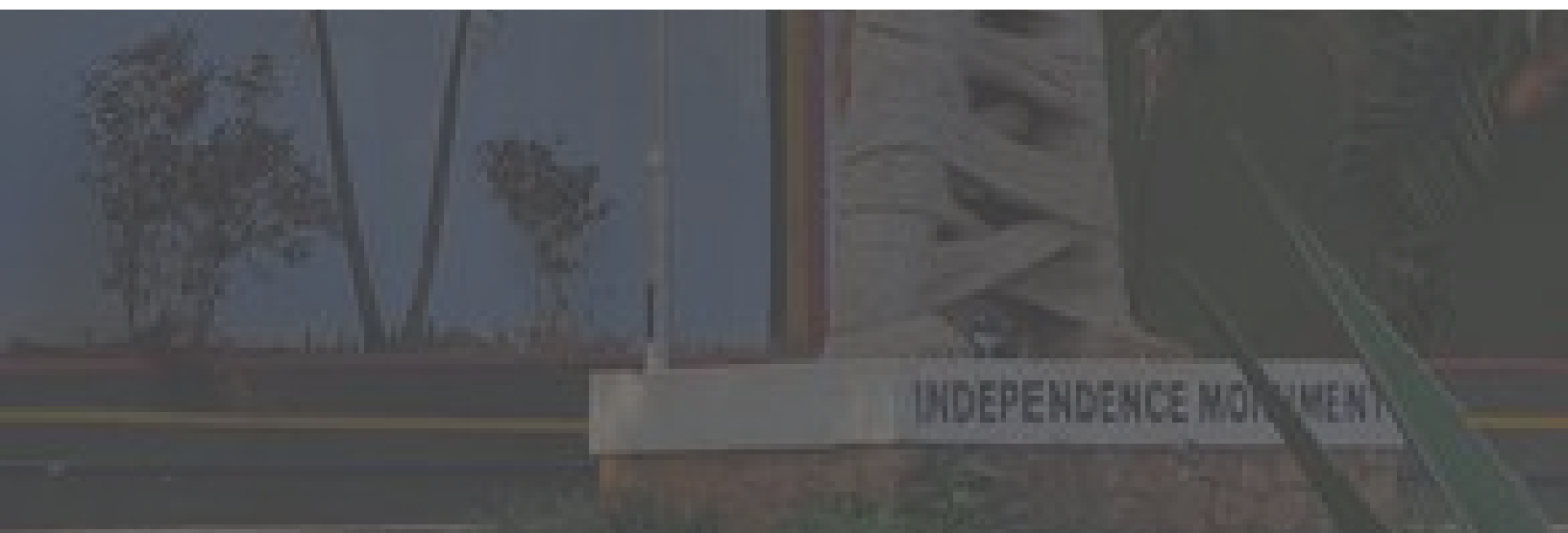


## *THE INDEPENDENCE MONUMENT AND SHERATON HOTEL IN THE BACKGROUND*

Photo by the researcher

The isolated symbol of freedom is in essence drowned by the emerging metropolitan city of Kampala. The emergence of the new Kampala overshadows the intended grandeur of the Monument coupled with the illusive energy it's presence exudes both as material aesthetics and historical landmark located at the heart of the city. An article in the Independence website dated 10th October, 2019, described the monument as a complete stranger to a section of citizens both the old and the young alike in the cityscape. Dancing in Diapers and the Marabou Stork Mockery continues the narrative of contradictions. The stork's ridicule, from the depiction, is not limited to the precarity of cultural dance in the city. Ato Quanyson in his article, Oxford Street, Accra City Life and the Itineraries of Transformation introduces the reflections of 'next door' performances. The filth of Kampala city and it's marabou stork habitat have generated socio-political, health and hygiene debates for decades. The storks in the city among other things is argued to have been behind the creation of a state-city. The power dualism puts the opposition on the side of elective politics and the ruling government appointed Kampala City Council Authority (KCCA) technocrats on the other. The two opposing forces is part of the contradictions of the city landscape dividing the city hall between the alleged people representatives and the state representatives. The victims are the people. The city is polarised depriving the ordinary citizens the voice to engender their aspirations. Transnationalism (Quayson, 2014) here becomes in handy as the voice of the oppressed, to air out their views through social media platforms. The civil sentiments are expressed by the re[imagination] of, (Kakande, 2017) the next door neighbours; the clean city of Kigali Rwanda, the upgraded and completed standard gauge railway that links the cities of Nairobi and Mombasa in the neighbouring Kenya to mention but a few. The contested space in this painting is enacted as a curtain raiser for a multidimensional debate on the identities that form the African city, it's internal outlook on indigenous cultures, cultural shocks and interactions in the city space. Dancing in Diapers and the Marabou Stork Mockery is a semi-nude [re]presentation of the male dancers with the female folks obviously sheltered. The 'openness' of the body in a traditional Acholi dance does not present a taboo subject. Okot p'Bitek conceives the performative space as an open arena. It was an outdoor space and a space where the dancers are in the spotlight. He describes the open arena as a tense and brutal arena. It's a stage where men with ringworms on their backs and scabies on their buttocks are exposed. David Pier begins his essay on The Branded Arena: Ugandan 'Traditional' Dance in the Marketing Era with an epigraph extract from Song of Lawino (2011:413):

It is danced in broad daylight  
In the open  
You cannot hide anything  
Bad stomachs that have swollen up  
Skin diseases on the buttocks....



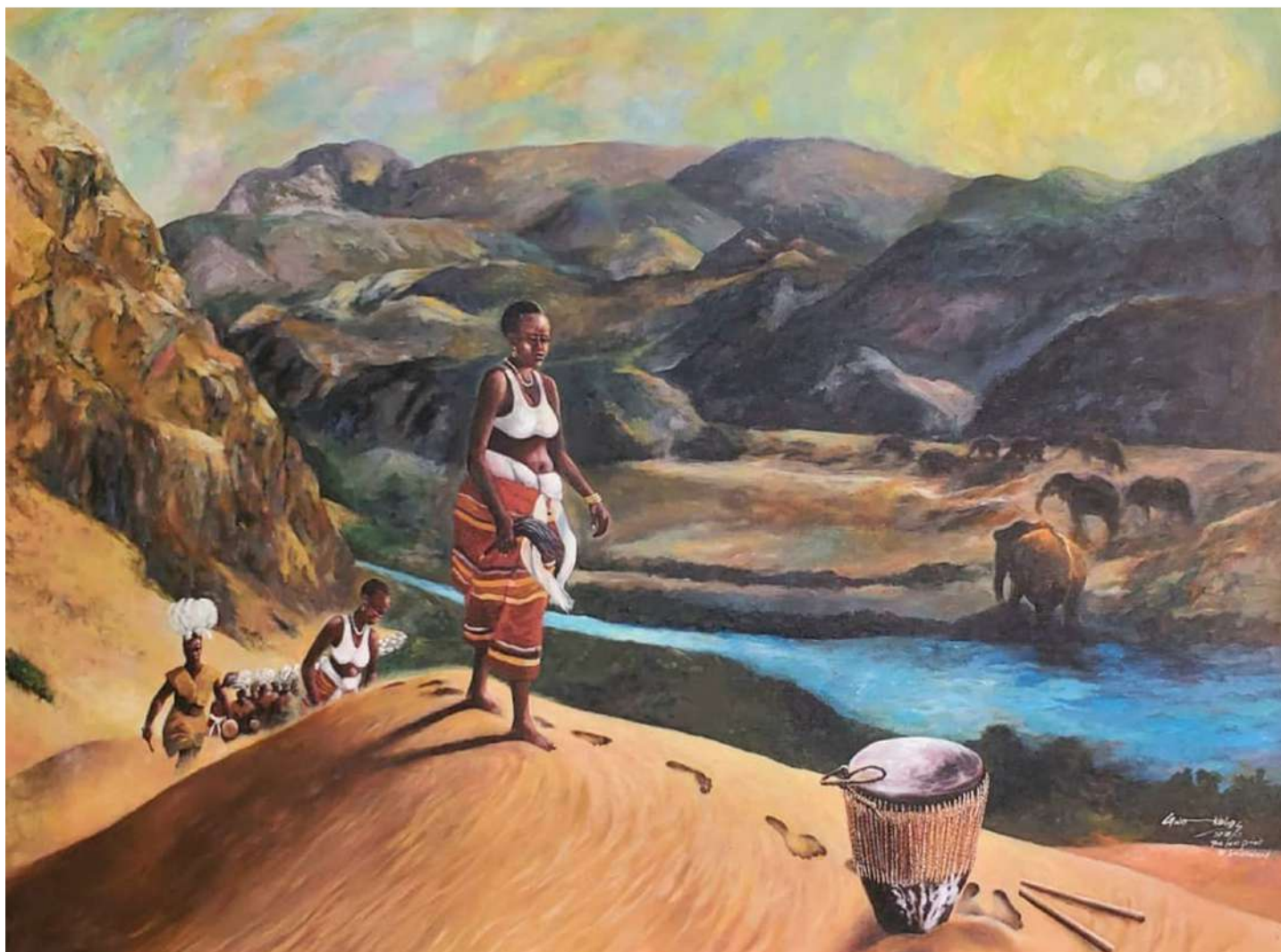


All parts of the body  
Are shown in the arena!  
Health and liveliness Are shown in the arena!

As an Acholi Okot p'Bitek advocates for a strong and perfect body without blemish (see Acholi, the Marshal Race of Uganda and Sir Samuel Baker's memoir). The parallel of such ideal body audit is found in Alur marriage rituals, another of Luo subgroup. The 'anena' marriage culture literally translated as the 'seeing event' precedes betrothal. The groom presents himself to be seen by the bridal team. He is expected to bare much of his body for inspection for any abnormality. The Acholi and Alur both cherished a perfect body. Dancing bare is an Acholi colonisation of the performative space. Yet to colonise you also asserted your independence (Pier, 2011:415) by bodily expressing your very existence and health in society. The baring of the body is also of aesthetic relevance (Pier, 2011) among other ranges of display in a dance performative. The researcher juxtaposes the cultural predisposition of the Luo portrait of a healthy person with the subjectively portrayed satirical wearing of diapers. In 2021 the Monitor Publications ran an article, City Public toilet shortage sparks health crisis. The article by Amos Ngwomoya in part read: 'With more than 4.5m people traversing Kampala daily, the scarcity of public toilets predisposes the burgeoning population to health risks.' Dr Charles Niwagaba, he continued, 'a lecturer at Makerere University's department of civil and environmental engineering noted in an interview for a story that this newspaper published in March, this year, that 46 per cent of Kampala's faecal sludge remains uncollected.'

The article asserts that "in downtown Kampala, there is a cacophony of activity and thousands of humans mill in the fast-paced business hubs with urgency in their steps that creates tension and disorder." The city currently has only 16 public toilets, mostly located near markets, worship and public open spaces like the constitution square, Uganda Railways Park gardens, Jinja road Yard to mention a few. There are no official figures from the janitors on the number of urban dwellers and daily city trekkers who use the public toilets each day. In 2022 the metro population of Kampala is 3,652,000 according to United Nations-World Population Project (<https://www.macrotrends.net>). Deductively 228, 250 people use one public bathroom while in the city's public space! Lack of adequate infrastructural investment and planning by KCCA spells doom for the usability of public space making it inaccessible to cultural dance performance. Coupled with a relatively huge and unplanned for population means the city is cast as an intolerant work space for especially the informal sector. In the next section, the study envisages a hostile reception for dance performative and dwindling talented space in the city.





## *THE JOURNEY SOUTHWARD*

Acrylic On Canvas, 110 x 86cm, 2022.



The notion of migration has been part of cultural dance performances from the precolonial era to this day. Before dance groups like Watmon came to establish their homes in Kampala, dance troupes journeyed from the hinterlands to perform especially in Kampala and other cities where Government hosted it's official or state functions. The Government of Uganda through it's Ministry of Culture and Community Development promotes cultural interaction by organising annual galas in the cities, making cultural dance visible in the urban centres. The interaction between culture and the people in the urban space is now embraced by the private sector as a business.

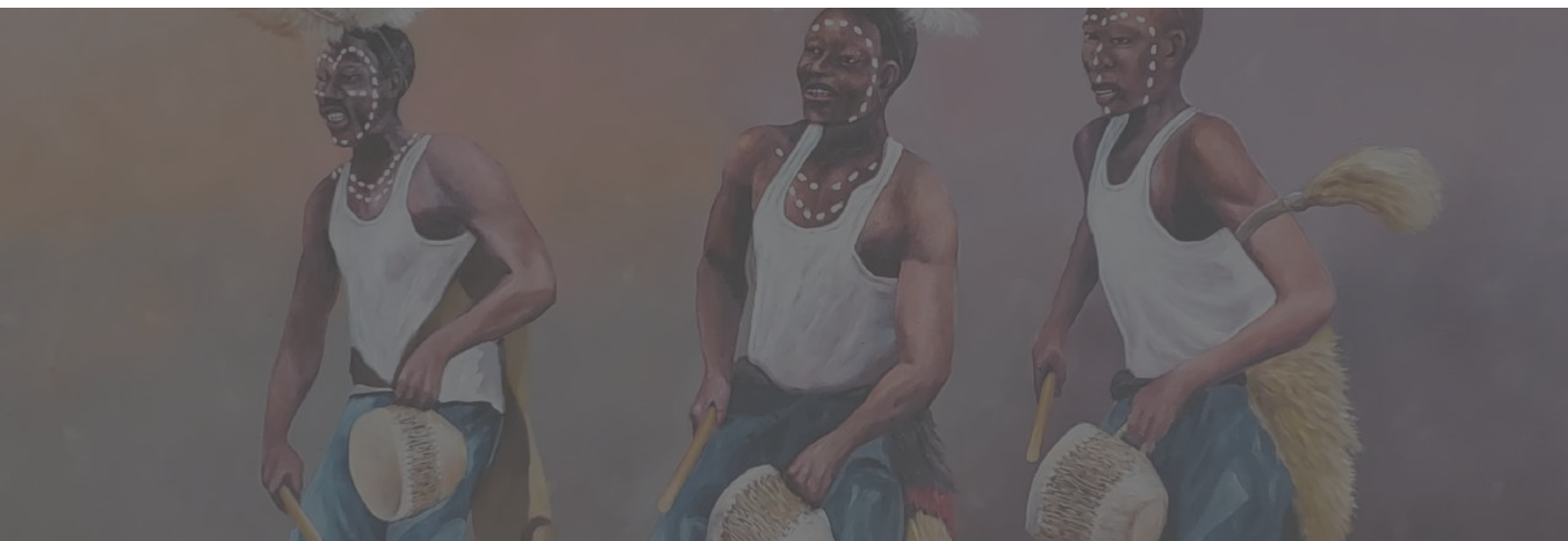
In the countryside, dancers performed in local or regional competitions. These competitions traversed the rural and urban geographies. Regional competitions culminated into national cultural festivals in line with the government policy of cultural sustainability (see the Uganda National cultural policy 2006) though critics thinking that the posturing of Government is a mere belly tickle. Despite the enactment of the National Cultural Policy 2006 into law, cultural or traditional dance continues to exist at the periphery of socio-economic activities in Uganda. The education system locates cultural dance and music competitions as extra-curricular activity. Meaning its contribution to the national growth or identity is peripheral to the other mainstream activities. The painting, *The Journey Southward* takes a divergent view, and premises cultural interface between Uganda's people as key to growth and development. The studio work infers cultural dance as a movement of human/people expressions from a source of production to the arena where it is consumed. This movement enriches knowledge sharing and interaction between kin and other people. *The Journey Southward* is adopted from Tony Park's (2017) photograph, *Walking the Dunes, Himba women on the banks of the Kunene river*. The photographer reflects on the life, survival skills, beliefs and how the Himba of Northern Namibia are coping in a modern world (see photo below).



*WALKING THE DUNES, HIMBA WOMEN ON THE BANKS OF THE KUNENE RIVER.*



The scenic and contextual parallels inspired the production of this painting. The Bwola dance like other dance genres from the region of Northern Uganda has interfaced with its Southern counterparts predating the colonial era. In a previous paper presentation, I postulated that bilateral or multilateral interactions among Uganda's ethnicity could have existed long before colonialism. The painting depicts the rallying of a Southward movement of Bwola dance as a subjective interpretation. A symbolic drum seems to be placed ahead of the traveling lot. The symbolism of the drum as a voice among the different tribes in Uganda is well contextualized. The drum among the Baganda takes the human persona. Engoma enene bevuga, entono esirika; literally translated as when the big drum is sounded the small drums are not played. It means when a big person has spoken, the small person should defer his/her thoughts. This adage can further be read into to mean leadership and hierarchical principles which African societies cherished. On the other hand, it embellishes the spirit of domination where the dominant force takes the day. The Okot p'Bitek approaches the drum from a philosophical standpoint of functionality. He debates that the drum, the rattle gourd (p'Bitek, 1994, pg.23) each in its distinct and unique way, contributes to the meaningfulness of the whole society and of the individual person. He corroborates the Luganda proverb by asserting that these artefacts cannot communicate to strangers, reintroducing the human character of 'things.' The painting further portrays a precarious terrain, enduring landscape, a river and a silhouetted herd of elephants in the distance. The inclusion of the animals is informed by oral literature that names Acholi sub-region as the land of the elephants which totem is also depicted on the Ker Kwaro emblem of the Acholi cultural institution. The elephant embeds a significant narrative in the creation of the Acholi and the Alur people. The Luo oral literature posits that Nyipir throws his brother, Labongo's royal spear at a stray elephant wounding it but the mammal gets away with the royal spear sparking a family feud that causes the split between the two brothers. Labongo crossed the river Nile to create the Acholi in the present Acholi sub region of North Central Uganda while Nyipir or Gipir in Acholi dialect, the father of the Alur remained in the West Nile region extending to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The adornment of the dancers in the forefront is modern and more Baganda than Acholi. The imagination supports the field observation of borrowing and lending among neighbouring tribes and across ethnicity. The habit of borrowing and lending has become part and partial of dance performance in the city. The paintings, Dancing to Bwola and the hybridity of the city, and The Crane performers instrumentalists below respectively attest to this new trend.





## *DANCING TO BWOLA AND THE HYBRIDITY OF THE CITY*

Oil On Canvas, 102 x 92cm. 2022 (work in progress)

The city imagination of Bwola dance in some performances comprises a cocktail and hybrid of ideas that assembles artefacts across cultures. In the painting, the waist shakers are adopted from the South. The Baganda, Basoga and the Runyakitara cultures use waist shakers in their dances as material aesthetics and also functionally dramatizes the body movement especially around the waist. The facial marking is borrowed from the Bagisu. The Bagisu Imbalu dance is characterized by body adornment using pigments that are both decorative and also believed to have charms. The latter is to help the circumcision candidates cope while facing the knife. The consortium of costumes across cultures may imply that the chances of Bwola dance surviving in the city is greatly enhanced by what Theodore Trefon describes as 'despair solidarity' (Trefon, 2009 p. 23). Bwola and other cultural dance groups support each other and are negotiating their agency as informal performative sector players into the heart and spaces of Kampala city. The city dance performers innovate by looking at a cultural dance performance as a collective representation of culture. The assumption is that the city audience is a blend of different ethnicities being represented within a common space. This way the patrons can resonate with the performance even when it does not, in a specific way, address their individual cultures.



## *THE CRANE PERFORMERS INSTRUMENTALISTS*

Oil On Canvas, 150 x 150cm. 2022.



The multiculturalism of the city has led to the inevitable interaction between cultural dances as well. The painting, *Bwola dance and the Bakisimba nexus* below is created as a visual interpretation of two royal dances from Acholi and Buganda respectively.

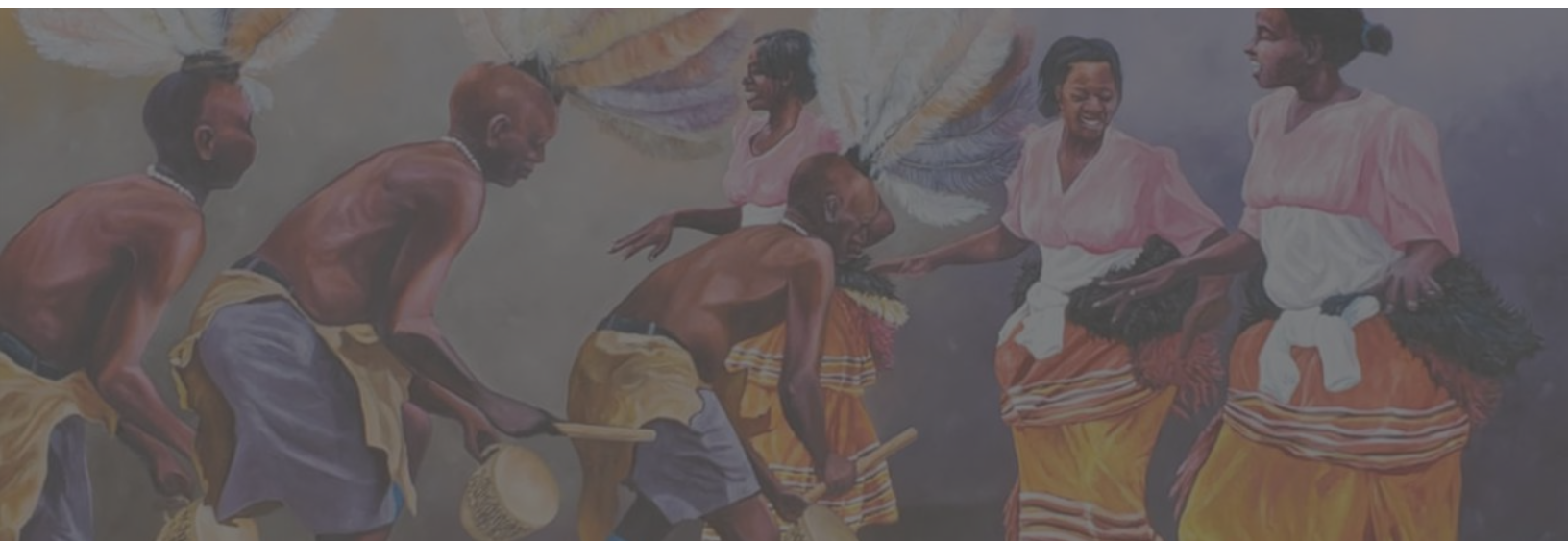


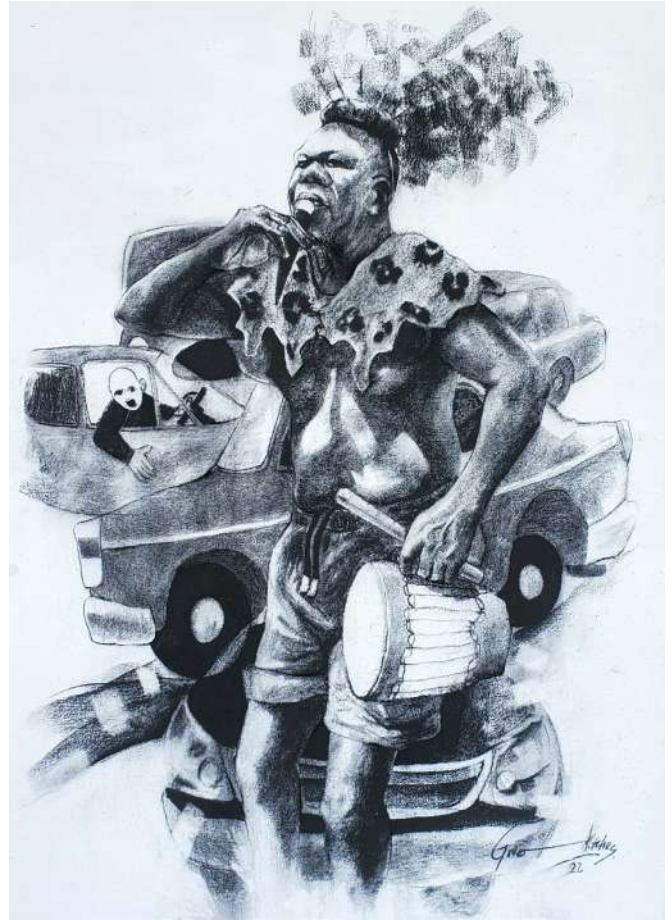
## *BWOLA DANCE AND THE BAKISIMBA NEXUS*

Oil On Canvas, 180 x 130cm. 2022.

Bakisimba is a traditional dance of the court of Buganda, the largest ethnic group of Uganda. Originally performed only by women, it celebrates the creation of banana wine for the king according to Peter Kasule, the Artistic Director, Spirit of Uganda music production (2012). The drummers' rhythms and the dancers' movements mirror the king's words of thanks, "speaking" for him and reflecting his increasingly celebratory mood. A former Buganda king (Kabaka) greatly enjoyed the local beer, tonto omwenge which derives its name from tonotomera, 'Don't knock me down.' The king drank too much of the tonto beer and became drunk. In Buganda the king can't be drunk; you can only say he is happy. To insinuate that the Kabaka is drunk was a taboo. In his tonto-induced happiness he started praising the brewers, saying abaakisiimba, meaning those who planted the bananas, the main ingredient in the brewing of tonto, bebaakiwoomya, they made it great! Baakisimba since then was associated with the courts of the Kabaka. Similarly, Bwola is also a court dance. It is performed in the royal court to symbolize how men can protect all the people in their communities from evils that might attack them. The dance is performed in a circular configuration with dancers and singers, both young and old in the inside ring. The outer circle would be composed of strong men who performed movements of bravery, shouting utterances of war nature with the determination to engage the enemy of their community. The interaction between Buganda and Acholi has a historical link (Stonehouse, 2012). Besides 'Despair solidarity,' (Trefon, 2016), and the sharing of the performative stage, by 18th century the Acholi presence in Buganda has reached the Lukiko. David Ocheng an Acholi, is believed to have attained membership to the legislative arm of Buganda government through his close association with the Buganda kingdom. The interaction between people and cultures of Uganda seems to find its way into the main arguments of the research. From similarities to behavioural patterns, there are parallels that can be drawn between the Acholi cultural practices, and others including what is categorized as urban culture (read city culture).

Horn Blowing is a snip attempt at demonstrating how behavioural culture that is rural is enacted in the city in another form.





The researcher uses self-portrait to create a visual impression of horn blowing and its role as a versatile artefact in communication among Acholi communities. By using a poetic approach, the researcher draws similarities in the habits and rituals of horn blowing in the rural Acholi and Kampala city:

## *THE HORN BLOWER*

Charcoal On Canvas. 100x80cm. 2022



Horn Blowing, is it rural or urban?  
Acholi blows it's horn helu helu helu  
On a hunting expedition,  
The hunting of game? The hunting of a wife?  
Helu helu helu, it's an annunciation of let the  
dance begin,  
Bwola the once royal dance.

The horn blares it's a declaration of a son,  
the heir apparent,  
the coming to life of a baby girl,  
the one who brings many cows.  
The horn blows, announcing the royalty,  
the coming of Rwot  
the meeting call,  
the gathering of the elders.

The horn sounds,  
to the good health of the clan Rwot  
or to the failing mortal body.  
at the death of a chief,  
or elder  
or child  
or an important person.  
It recently blared at the death of Lokech,  
at the death of Oulanyah it sounded  
and those before them.

Helu helu helu –  
the Acholi colonizes Kampala  
announcing the arrival of Bwola,  
it's cultural interaction,  
a cultural diversity,  
exchange of knowledge,  
the dance consortium,  
the interface,  
the cocktails of our diverse cultures.

Kampala blows it's horn,  
Pee Pee Pee...  
announcing the arrival of a bride,  
the arrival of something new,  
the arrival of a big man,  
a big person has arrived,  
give way,  
drive to the side.  
The contestation, the contradictions.  
The big man is on a hunting expedition.  
Is it game as well?  
No, he is hunting for  
power, sex and money.  
The horn blares,  
make way  
I have business to attend to,  
I have a flight to catch says the horn.

Pee pee pee,  
you are in my way!  
You are cutting in my lane.  
Are you nuts!  
Peee... goes the horn.

Then comes nonee nonee nonee –  
the important person is not well,  
the Mulago rush,  
the Nakasero rush,  
charter a plane to Agakhan Nairobi,  
South Africa is waiting.  
Oh no! the big man is dead,  
the horn blares. It's the return of a lifeless  
body.  
The return of the son of the soil  
The return of the son of Acholi  
The Acholi horn, the Kampala horn,  
the tale of sameness.



Horn blowing and honking as a language in this context is envisaged as a shared habit and ritual. This particular creation supports the argument that migration of people and ideas do colonize new territories and minds respectively. The representation of a culture may change it's form with the environment but it's core value is sustained. The Ugandan traditional cultures are constantly moving, growing and changing according to Peter Kasule. Together, he argues, they reveal the African life and soul.

Dance, in the painting Burying Oulanyah below immortalizes the earthly and spiritual being of the former Speaker of the 11th Parliament of the Republic of Uganda, the Right Honourable Jacob L'Okori Oulanyah (23March-20th March 2022). Honourable Jacob Oulanyah, as he was always referred to, was a Ugandan agricultural economist, lawyer, politician and an Acholi opinion leader who served as the Speaker of the 11th Parliament since 2021 until his death on the 20th March, 2022 in a Seattle hospital, USA.



## *BURYING OULANYAH*

Acrylic/Oil On Canvas, 180 x 130cm. 2022. (work in progress).

He was elected to the position of the Speaker on 24th May, 2021, after defeating his arch rival the then incumbent Speaker, the Right Honourable Rebecca Alitwala Kadaga. Hon. Jacob Oulanyah had served as a Deputy Speaker from May 2011 until May 2021. At the time of his death he was also a Member of Parliament (MP) for the Omoro County Constituency now being represented in Parliament by his biological son. Oulanyah's legacy locates him as a prominent person in both, the Government of Uganda and among the Acholi community. During the vigil and burial, the mediation of Bwola dance performed in Kampala (the city), and in the events that led to the burial on 8th of April, 2022 at Ayom Lony village in Lalogi, Omoro District was the Acholi cultural sendoff accorded to a prominent person. The meaning for it's performance in the city and the village remained unchanged, a clear demonstration of the fluidity of the talented space in the two geographies.

According to Honourable Anthony Akol, Member of Parliament for Kilak North Constituency (NBS Live at 9 interview, 31st March, 2022), Acholi cultural dances like Otole and Bwola are multi-layered with meanings that can be appropriated depending on the event. Otole, a war dance, on such an occasion is performed and the allegorical context is the waging of war against death. The utterances would include the pronouncement of defeat to death. On the other hand, the performance of Bwola dance in the two spaces was a cultural mandate, a traditional gesture of defiance embedded with ritual and spiritual symbolism. According to the Acholi customs, a person who have had a significant contribution in society lives on through his deeds and his spirit. The notion of eternity embraced by many African beliefs, that a dead person lives on as an ancestral spirit was subtly displayed especially at the burial in Omoro through the ritualization of the Speaker. The Bwola dance performance was also thematically aligned to portray mourning and triumph. The traditional belief of the Acholi seems to resonate with the Christian belief in eternal life which the late Speaker subscribed to as a practicing Christian. The Archbishop of the Church of Uganda Dr. Steven Kaziimba Mugalu on the day of interment re-captures the theme of eternity:

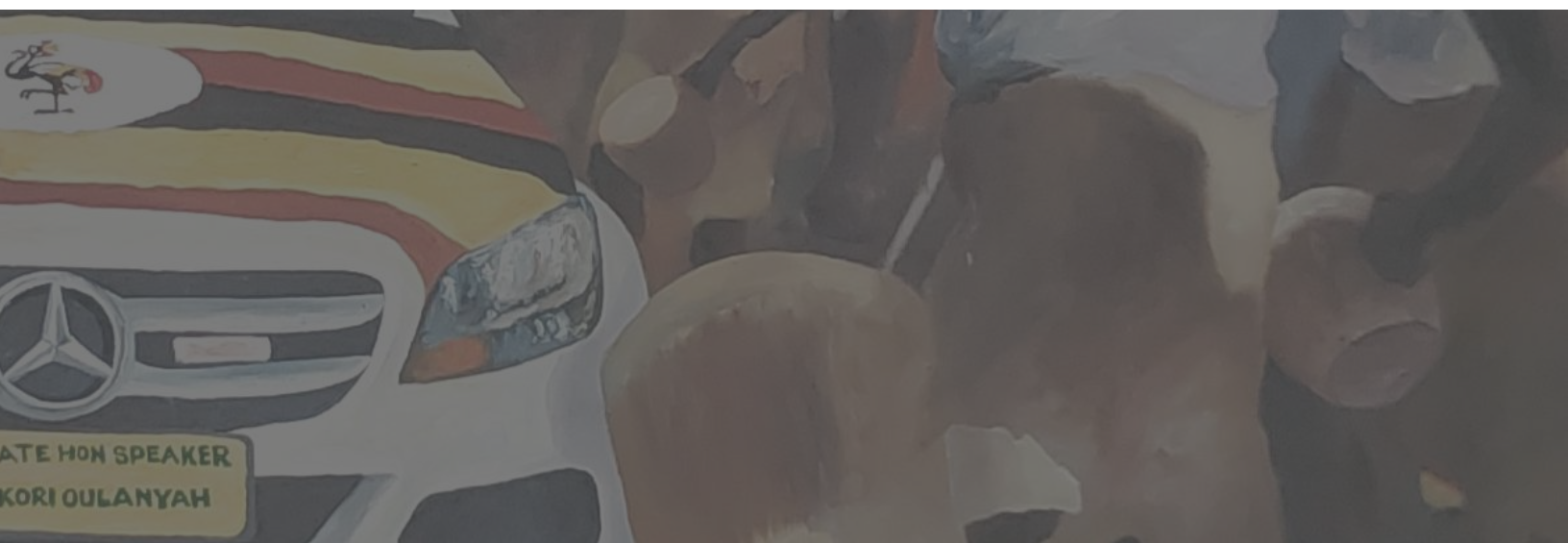
We have entrusted our brother Jacob L'Okori Oulanyah to God's merciful keeping, and we now commit his body to the ground: earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died, was buried and rose again to us. To him be the glory for ever and ever.

The Christian perspective is that, though someone dies physically, they will rise again like Jesus Christ did. The graveside pronouncements of His Grace, the Anglican Archbishop and the Acholi traditional religion seem to strike a common cord. The notion of eschatology (Okeke, 2019) in African traditional religion and that of Christianity have some similarities. Life on earth is seen as a prerequisite to the places you transition to thereafter. Life did not end at death. The Acholi cultural view is, death can be fought and defeated just like Christians believe that Jesus Christ defeated death by coming back to life. The physical expression and movements in the Bwola dance was meant to defy the sorrows that death brings to society.





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# Conclusion

This segment of the research established that there is strong affinity between cultural dance and the people of Uganda in general. The consumption of cultural or traditional dance in rural and urban spaces means dance performance can be a viable source of emotional resonance, entertainment and income. However, the need to sustainably harness the cultural potential, knowledge and understanding of traditional dances should be deliberate. Promotion of cultural galas, training of trainers and experts on Uganda's dance Culture will go a long way in achieving this. The educational institutions should move cultural dance from the category of extra curriculum activity to core courses so that intellectual as well as cultural knowledge is passed on to the learners and the next generation of Ugandans who will, by default inhabit both the rural and the urban geographies, particularly the cities in the case of the latter.

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# Biographies



## Kanyike Tom

Kanyike Tom a passionate Visual artist born in 1993 based in Kampala Uganda, holding a bachelor's degree in industrial and fine arts from Makerere University (Margaret Trowel school of industrial and fine art) with over 5 years working experience. He runs a private art studio located in Zana off Entebbe road which he refers to as his "free space of creation." He also works with CTA Space, a marketing agency as the lead Creative designer besides other various freelance gigs.

He enjoys painting especially wildlife, human anatomy and portraiture. He has featured in a number of group art exhibitions in Uganda. He derives his inspiration from colorful images in books and other primary sources to create new ideas.

He is currently pursuing a course in UI/UX design for iOS, Android and Windows at Cousera using Figma and Adobe XD as another way of working well with software developers and expanding his design playground.



## Jonathan Mutabazi

Jonathan Mutabazi is a graduate of Margaret Trowel School of Industrial and Fine Arts, Makerere University. He is a draftsman, painter and sculptor. Jonathan's recent projects include commissioned portraits, studying the effects of shattered glass on paintings and drawings. He is a devote Christian who derives inspiration from his faith in God.



## Gwoktcho Emmanuel

Is a graduate of Margaret Trowel School of Industrial and Fine Arts, Makerere University. He is an artist with a strong passion in automotive design. He specializes in developing creative vehicle concepts through conceptual analysis, sketching, rendering and creating 3D CAD models using Rhino and Blender. He is currently working with Kiira Motors Corporation as a research assistant under the Product Design division. His job mandate is developing vehicle concepts sketches and renders for the company.

Besides automotive design, he is a graphics designer and does traditional fine art like charcoal drawings and painting. He does side jobs, contracts and commissions in form of developing graphics and doing portrait art for clients.

# Acknowledgements

*Dance in the Village, Dance in the City: A fluid Dichotomy of the Rural and Urban Talented Space.*

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**Stephen Gwotcho.** A contemporary African artist who depicts Africa's intricate flora, fauna, culture, heritage, history and her people through paintings and drawings. He holds a Masters' Degree from Margaret Trowel School of Industrial and Fine Arts in the College of Engineering, Design, Art and Technology (CEDAT) of Makerere University and currently pursuing his PhD in the same university. He Lectures in the Department of Visual Communication Design and Multimedia (VCDM) at Margaret Trowel School of Industrial and Fine Arts (MTSIFA). He trained as a specialist in drawing. He is also a painter and a self-taught sculptor.

Some of his notable achievements as a professional artist cited below:

- 19th-20th March, 2018 showcased/donated Four paintings toward the "Great Apes Conservation project" championed by the French Embassy in Kampala during the French-Uganda friendship week that highlighted Wildlife Conservation and Tourism.
- 2nd March, 2018 appeared in a 194-page Lighthouse Television 20th anniversary Commemorative book, a journey of National Transformation Through Christian Television.
- 5th-6th October, 2017 showcased 10 paintings at the "Space for Giants" Tourism investment summit graced by H.E. President of Uganda Yoweri Kaguta Museveni at Serena L. Victoria Hotel Kampala.
- 19th-20th April, 2017 showcased 10 paintings in collaboration with Uganda Tourism Board and Ministry of Tourism wildlife and Antiquities at the World Bank Springs Meeting in Washington DC.
- 9th to 11th September 2015, Stephen exhibited 10 paintings at the United Nations alongside Bart Walter (US. Sculptor), Nuwa Nyanzi (Batik artist from Uganda) and D. Nsereko (Photographer from Uganda). Organized in collaboration with the Uganda Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife & Antiquities and the Uganda Tourism Board (UTB). The -Exhibition titled "Uganda, the Pearl" was hosted by the UN. Headquarters, New York under the auspices of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa, President of the Sixty-Ninth session of the General Assembly. Hon. Dr. Maria Lubega Mutagamba (RIP), Uganda's former Minister of Tourism Wildlife and Antiquities. The Guest of Honour was the then UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

