

"ART HAS A SPECIAL PLACE IN OUR HEARTS BECAUSE OF WHAT IT MAKES US FEEL: IT HAS A POWER TO HEAL PAIN, TO CONSOLE, TO GIVE HOPE, TO SOOTH..."



Ismael'seye

a profile of the artist

ISMAEL KATEREGGA IS 28 YEARS OLD. BORN AND RAISED IN KAMPALA, HE STUDIED INDUSTRIAL AND FINE ARTS AT MAKERERE UNIVERSITY BEFORE BEGINNING TO FORGE HIS CAREER AS A PAINTER.

In March 2009, he will bring his works to the RCS. The display – Uganda through an artist's eye – will be the first time that Ismael has exhibited in the UK.

Working with a combination of oils, acrylics and egg tempera, his paintings depict bustling scenes of everyday life in Kampala. He adopts an impressionistic approach, saying that his art is "the work of the eye and the mind: what the eye sees and how the mind perceives it".

Market stalls, slums, taxi ranks and shopping centres – Ismael's exploration of his city is a voyage filled with colour, passion and imagination. His sense of perspective and careful use of space is captivating and his application of visible brush strokes, open composition and an emphasis on the changing qualities of light, lend an appealing dimension to his ordinary subject matter. David Ives, an RCS member who has collected several pieces of Ismael's work, says "the paintings are so evocative of Uganda and the atmosphere in its capital city."

In his studio, Ismael paints "primarily for self-satisfaction". Yet when he displays his work for public

viewing, "it involves many other minds...It is amazing how art can bring together people from different backgrounds and ethnicities for a common purpose." It is in this ability to unite people across ethnic, religious and social barriers that Ismael measures the success of his art: "being the architect behind this feels like 'a mission accomplished'".

His work has been described as, "speaking of the conscience of Uganda and its people". Indeed, Ismael sees a close link between art and social cohesion. "I paint to share my feelings with the world around me", he says. "Art may not solve a problem directly, but it can highlight an issue of concern and open it up to public debate." Through his art, he has been actively involved in community projects aimed at lifting the disadvantaged out of poverty. He also spends time teaching younger art students, efforts which he believes will be rewarded in the laying of strong foundations for future Ugandan art.

Ismael has held five solo exhibitions in Kampala, as well as participating in the Commonwealth Arts & Crafts Awards of 2007. His work has been featured at the East African Art Biennale in Dar Es Salaam. His exhibition at the Commonwealth Club will be his first in the UK.



A Ugandan Rolex

is a precision instrument. It encases a fluffy, light omelette seasoned with salt, sliced onion, tomato and cabbage within a robust chapatti exterior. The collected works are rolled into a tight cylinder, sealed with cooking oil of questionable origin and served straight-out-the-pan in flimsy plastic bags or old newspaper.

'Roll-eggs' are emblematic of everyday Uganda: a country sandwiched between much larger neighbours and enfolded by layers of tumultuous history and culture. A Uganda that lives quite apart from the mythic land depicted by tourist brochures: tree-climbing lions, the source of the Nile, the glaciated equatorial Rwenzori mountains, wide-eyed gorillas and placid Lake Victoria.

Most Ugandan citizens have never seen a lion in the wild. The lower slopes of the Rwenzori are terraced fields of tea worked by farmers whose vegetable plots are occasionally trampled by buffalo, and who have learned to preserve gorillas for lucrative eco-tourism. Lake Victoria is over-fished and its water contaminated by industrial effluent. Northern Uganda's vast swamps and fertile plains ought to be East Africa's breadbasket but it is barely recovering from 20 years of rebel insurgency that have denuded the land and embittered its people. Though blessed by natural resources and regularly dosed with international donor funding, Uganda struggles to meet its citizens' basic aspirations, increasingly strained by population pressures on land, water and employment.

But it all changes as you step off a crowded bus at Kampala's Old Taxi



Park. Having survived hours of bone-jarring potholes, retching babies, and assaults by sellers of roasted goat meat and cassava, you feel the heartbeat of the capital. The tarmac streets are an orderly flow of 4x4s and crazily veering motorbike taxis. Students throng famous Makerere University's lecture halls and neat lawns, and swell the workforce of a burgeoning service and IT sector. Beer barons, property sharks, sugar kings and telecom princes make deals in between rounds at the golf course and lunch at Fang Fang. Media-savvy politicians of all ideological hues vie with Big Brother Africa celebrities for a spot on the radio talk-shows, as ubiquitous NGOs host endless workshops on HIV/Aids, or good governance.

Of an evening, the whiff of grilled pork wafts in the evening air, past the drooping silhouettes of sinister marabou cranes that inhabit the rooftops. The Afrigo Band keys-up at Club Obligato where avant-garde artists, bureaucrats, supermodels and expats make time for Tusker beer. And when the party's over, by the dim flare of hurricane lamps, the Rolex vendor is still hard at work.

Uganda is a country of stark human and geographic contrasts, full of a restless energy that has an amazing ability to accommodate and compromise. Best of all, it's a place where everyone can have their own Rolex.

DEVAPRIYO DAS

Dev worked in the Public Affairs team at the RCS until March 2008. He now lives in Northern Uganda, working as a freelance journalist and writer.

UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS

Scottish Art Exhibition: Jan 5 – Feb 6

To coincide with the RCS's 'Scottish month' in January, a collection of artists from the Highlands of Scotland will be exhibiting their work in the gallery. They include landscape painter, Andrew Stewart, recently awarded the City of Glasgow prize at the Royal Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts annual show; and internationally renowned Cara McKinnon Crawford who recaptures the vibrancy of the Scottish colourist's style. Work by figurative artist Andrew Sinclair, photo-realist landscape painter, Jamie Hageman and painter Gavin Young will also be featured. *This exhibition is sponsored by Scots Care.*

ScotsCare
The charity for Scots in London



Commonwealth Flowers: Feb 6 – March 4

Photographer, Carlos Magalhaes-Bastos, brings the beauty of nature to life in this display. In a macro-photographic exhibition, he captures the intricate delicacy of 12 different flowers, representing two countries from each continent of the Commonwealth.

