

NEW
235 BOWERY
NEW YORK NY
10002 USA
MUSEUM

PRESS CONTACTS:
Sarah Morris
212-219-1222 ext. 217
press@newmuseum.org

Andrea Schwan
917.371.5023
info@andreaschwan.com

New Museum Presents First New York Solo Show of Kapwani Kiwanga



New York, NY...From June 30 to October 16, the New Museum will present “Kapwani Kiwanga: Off-Grid,” the first New York solo show of work by Kapwani Kiwanga (b. 1978, Hamilton, Canada). Over the past decade, the Paris-based artist has created complex installations, sculptures, performance lectures, and films that consider myriad subjects including marginalized histories and systems of power. Drawing on her training in anthropology and the social sciences, Kiwanga’s rigorously researched projects often take the form of installations that stage new spatial environments while exposing the ways in which bodies physically experience and inhabit structures of authority and control.

Stemming from archival investigations that range from the history of decolonization to the migration of plants across continents, Kiwanga’s artworks bring attention to the backstories of systems of authority and their embodied effects. Through this research process, her installations articulate a type of historical imagination, but they do so by constructing unique perceptual encounters with fluidity and estrangement.

Installed in the New Museum’s Fourth Floor gallery, the exhibition debuts new commissions alongside recent work, which together bridge historical research with a site-specific spatial

intervention. Invoking the use of police floodlights in targeted urban areas and, by extension, the New York legal codes known as “lantern laws”—early eighteenth-century ordinances that required all enslaved individuals over the age of fourteen to carry lanterns or lit candles after dark—Kiwanga’s installation continues the artist’s investigation into disciplinary architectures and complex regimes of visibility.

The central piece in the exhibition is a metallic veil, which has been sprayed with pulverized aluminum obtained by melting down police floodlights. This scrim acts in conjunction with a large wall work nearby, which serves as both a screen and a reflective surface. Also sprayed with the remains of the transformed floodlights, this piece synthesizes the artist’s ongoing interest in revealing social and political contents hidden within materials. Taking a different physical approach, the imposing mass of *Maya-Bantu* (2019), also on view, is achieved by accumulating layers of sisal, a fiber native to Central America and later cultivated by German settlers in Tanzania, where it became a staple of the local economy both under colonial rule and the country’s early years of independence.

Kiwanga’s use of fiber, metal and repurposed materials highlights complex histories of exchange and exploitation, and woven together, they maintain a rich texture characterized by different layers of opacity and transparency. This tension between visibility and obscurity is amplified by the artist’s decision to present the exhibition solely in natural light, subverting the use of artificial illumination as a means of social control.

Amid the shifting patterns of natural light throughout the day, the exhibition stages a type of speculative scenario, evoking both the sudden closure of cultural institutions during the Covid-19 pandemic and a not-so-distant future when museums and society will have to operate with limited access to power.

“Kapwani Kiwanga: Off-Grid” is curated by Massimiliano Gioni, *Edlis Neeson Artistic Director*, and Madeline Weisburg, Curatorial Assistant, and is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue published by the New Museum. The catalogue includes a conversation between the artist and Massimiliano Gioni, a conversation between Simone Browne and Madeline Weisburg, and texts by Glenn Adamson, Rashid Johnson, Kathleen Ritter, and Yesomi Umolu.

ABOUT NEW MUSEUM

The New Museum is the only museum in New York City exclusively devoted to contemporary art. Founded in 1977, the New Museum is a center for exhibitions, information, and documentation about living artists from around the world. From its beginnings as a one-room office on Hudson Street to the inauguration of its first freestanding building on the Bowery in 2007, the New Museum continues to be a place of experimentation and a hub of new art and new ideas.

SUPPORT

This exhibition is part of a three-year initiative, launched in collaboration with Kvadrat, to premiere ambitious new productions by emerging artists.

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Support for this exhibition is provided by the Toby Devan Lewis Emerging Artists Exhibitions Fund.

Artist commissions are generously supported by the Neeson / Edlis Artist Commissions Fund.

Generous support is provided by:
Shelley Fox Aarons and Phil Aarons
Kaleta A. Doolin Foundation

We gratefully acknowledge the Artemis Council of the New Museum.

Additional support is provided by Liza Mauer and Andrew Sheiner, and Nicoletta Fiorucci.

Education and community programs are supported, in part by the American Chai Trust.

Special thanks to Goodman Gallery, Cape Town/Johannesburg/London; Galerie Poggi, Paris; and Galerie Tanja Wagner, Berlin.

Thanks to the Bowery Hotel.

Support for the publication has been provided by the J. McSweeney and G. Mills Publications Fund at the New Museum.

Image: Exhibition view: Kapwani Kiwanga, "Plot," Haus der Kunst, Munich, 2020. Courtesy the artist and galerie Tanja Wagner, Berlin. Photo: Dominik Gigler