

Flowers for Africa

Kapwani Kiwanga

September 9 – October 14, 2017

Organized by Kathleen Ritter

Tunis, Tunisia, March 1956. The leader of the Neo Destour Party, Habib Bourguiba, on his return from Paris after signing the Franco-Tunisian Common Protocol, addresses a crowded stadium celebrating Tunisia's independence. As he speaks into the microphone, his lapel is decorated by a simple boutonnière, an adornment signaling this as a special occasion. This image is captured on screen from grainy black-and-white footage sourced in the British Pathé newsreel "Tunisia Receives Her Independence".

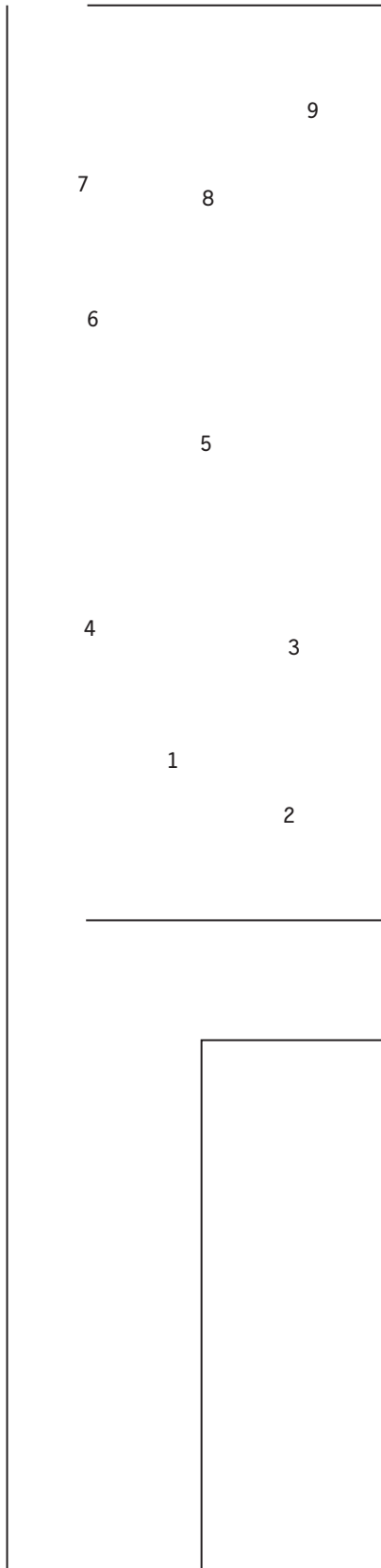
Through extensive research into archives related to decolonization, artist Kapwani Kiwanga locates images such as these representing defining moments of independence in countries throughout the African continent. Each image features, to a greater or lesser extent, a floral arrangement—perhaps the only common element to be sourced across a range of ceremonial occasions recognizing the decolonization of Africa. These arrangements range from a boutonnière to an elaborate bouquet.

Kiwanga then takes these images to a local florist in order to recreate the bouquets as closely as possible to the archival images. The fresh arrangements are displayed in a gallery and left to wilt over the duration of the exhibition, just as the memory of a celebratory moment might fade over time. Titled *Flowers for Africa*, Kiwanga's series is a conceptual project that questions the material from which history is pictured and remembered. These artworks exist in the form of a protocol; they are recreated for each exhibition according to a set of detailed instructions, with differing results based on the interpretation by the florist.

This exhibition at the Or Gallery is the first exhibition of Kiwanga's work in Vancouver, and the first solo exhibition that recreates all of the existing works in her *Flowers for Africa* series, for which there are nine to date. The series is ongoing as Kiwanga continues to source images of all 54 states across the continent. The exhibition is organized by artist and writer, Kathleen Ritter, and accompanied by a conversation between Ritter and Kiwanga on the use of archival research in contemporary cultural production. A publication will be produced after the exhibition.

Working with sound, film, performance, installation, and objects, Kapwani Kiwanga relies on extensive research to transform raw information into investigations of historical narratives and their impact on political, social, and community formation. Her work focuses on untold histories and structures of power, examining how certain events in popular and folk narratives take shape in objects and oral histories. Trained as an anthropologist, Kiwanga performs this role in her artistic practice, using historical information to construct narratives that complexify our understanding of human experiences. Kiwanga is not only invested in the past but also the future, telling Afrofuturist stories and creating speculative dossiers from future civilizations to reflect on the impact of historical events.

Kiwanga was born in 1978 in Hamilton, Canada and lives in Paris, France. She graduated from McGill University, Canada with a degree in Anthropology and Comparative Religions. She has been artist-in-residence at L'Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-arts, Paris; Le Fresnoy: National Contemporary Art Studio (France); MU Foundation, Eindhoven (Netherlands); and Le Manège, Dakar, Senegal. She has exhibited her works internationally, and her film and video works have been nominated for two BAFTAs and have received awards at international film festivals.



Kapwani Kiwanga

Flowers for Africa

Created according to a protocol of assembly and display to guide the reconstruction of a floral arrangement consisting of cut flowers

1. *Flowers for Africa: Tunisia*, 2015
Courtesy of the artist
2. *Flowers for Africa: Ivory Coast*, 2015
Private Collection
3. *Flowers for Africa: Ghana*, 2015
Collection of Fonds régional d'Art contemporain Poitou-Charentes
4. *Flowers for Africa: Algeria*, 2014
Collection of Fonds régional d'Art contemporain Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur
5. *Flowers for Africa: Nigeria*, 2014
Collection Nomas Foundation, Rome
6. *Flowers for Africa: Mozambique*, 2014
Collection of G. Nallet, Grenoble, France
7. *Flowers for Africa: Uganda*, 2014
Collection of Thibault Poutrel Contemporary Art (TPCA)
8. *Flowers for Africa: South Sudan*, 2017
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Tanja Wagner, Berlin
9. *Flowers for Africa: Tanganyika*, 2014
Collection of Fonds régional d'Art contemporain Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur