



Syowia Kyambi

Concave (2024 / 2025)
soil, dung, straw bales
200 x 18 x 500cm approx.

A gently curved wall constructed from straw bales, manure, and soil. A small window punctuates the top left corner. The convex side reveals the exposed bales, while the concave surface becomes my canvas for a performance lecture. This sculpture emulates the essence of home; not as a fixed space, but as a process in flux. Through the lecture performance, I share fragments of my life and the various spaces, both real and imagined, that I've built. Grounded in raw, organic materials, this form remains an open vessel, embodying a continuous desire to keep building and evolving.

2024 *Decolonial Feminist Ecologies: On Body and Land* Lahore Biennial, was commissioned by Art Forum Pakistan and curated by Abdullah Quershi. The collateral exhibition explores the intersection of environmentalism, gender, and colonial history, focusing on how bodily and territorial landscapes are affected by systems of domination.

2025 *Le Sel Noir: Perspectives of Black Contemporary Art* Städtische Galerie, Villingen Schwenningen, Germany. Curated by Dr Alejandro Perdomo Daniels the exhibition presents artistic positions that deal with Black subjectivity, self-empowerment and the complexity of identity in the field of tension between self-perception and external perception. Inspired by the thinking of Édouard Glissant, it reflects on mechanisms of power and representation as well as colonial continuities and habitualised paternalism.



Worlding (2025)

assortment of ceramics, speakers, sisal, feathers, maize husks
variable dimensions

A rough, harsh to the touch, orange-red cone, bigger than most torsos. Nothing is exactly even in these forms. The one I just described reminds me of the anthills and termite mounds at my home in Ongata Rongai, Kenya and the upscale, architectural and engineering wonders that dot the landscape of the seemingly endless road from my home to Olorgesailie Gorge, where I explore my interest in Neolithic history.

There is a thickness to these anthill and termite-inspired forms, a heaviness in their weight which contrasts with a visual lightness to them when suspended in space. Others are much smaller and smooth. They all hold the form of a vessel. I think about these vessel sculptures not as passive objects but as entities. They are each imbued with their different kinds of energies running within them, individual presences, with interweaving resonances. Historically, vessels have been associated with femininity and receptivity, symbols of containment and nurturing. I do not situate these forms inside of this old school frame of reference; for me, they are full and active participants in space. Most of them hang the way bells would, and hold sound works that weave together multiple temporalities and rhythms.

The forms were influenced initially by my Interlocutory Agency trip to Dakar, Senegal, in May 2024. I was inspired by the shape of the mosque loudspeakers as well as massive vessels from China that we encountered while visiting the house of a collector. My students and I took turns placing our heads inside of these, and the moment we did, an alternate space was created. The sound resonated through space, through our bodies, through each other.

Not only is there strength in the number of vessels present, but rather strength in them being fluid. The strength that they hold is in different types of sound works that can stand on their own, which are also interlinked. There are multiple temporalities. Different sound works hold their own tempo. They hold their own rhythm. The worlding vessel entities situate themselves within the framework of holding, a natural and direct connection to my current interests in holding space.

2025 *Worlding: Syowia Kyambi & Interlocutory Agency* taking place in the atelier und Galeriehaus Defet in conjunction with the Institute for Modern Art, Nuremberg is a exhibition project that was not a static display of finished works but a continuously growing process where the installation changed over time. Visitors returning at different times would encounter a new state of the space and new opportunities for exchange.



Origins (2022)

digital collage print on flag fabric, oil pastel drawings on silk screen printing mesh & sound
dimensions variable / 36 panels each 350 by 145 cm & 7 different Kaspale Ancestor drawings

Origins evolves as part of a series of work involving an avatar named Kaspale (both male and female and neither); a socially critical trickster character used to intervene or inscribe themselves in different political and cultural contexts, architectures and activities. Developed as an external instrument by Syowia Kyambi in 2018, it has continued to grow into multiple iterations and narrative forms. Kaspale destabilizes not only presumed ideas of home and origin, unsettling temporal taxonomies heavily reliant on binary genealogies. Kaspale is both ancestor and descendant; intruder and native; anthropomorphic and zoomorphic; alive and dead. At once trickster and truth teller, Kaspale emerges at different points on a map that in many ways leads to deterritorialization. In this work, Kyambi continues to explore the many lives of Kaspale now directed inwards, towards the origin of the character and persona with whom she has been building a make-believe world of past-futures and intricate (im)possibilities. Kyambi invites her audiences into a world that is metaphoric where mangroves offer themselves to both Kaspale and the audience as a pointer to the multi-dimensional nature of both time and space. Mangroves, at once boundaries and extra-territorial map-nodes, are an exemplary indexing to a move away from a singular root-identity and implore us to instead follow the multiplicities, interconnections and assemblages that rhizomatous root-systems offer. Kaspale's ancestors emerge as pastel drawings on transparent fabric suspended within the immersive installation in which the digital collages of mangroves form kaleidoscopic scenes along the route. While not present in the space, Kaspale breathes through as a reminder of both aliveness and rest. Kaspale is an ever-growing and changing organism seen here as a descendant in search of old family histories that seem to lead into worlds that refute a single origin story. Kyambi's Origins invites us to think-with and think-like the mangrove; in this world, everything is extra-territorial. There are no limits to what might happen here. Neo Musangi.

2022 *Contact Zones* Museum of Applied Art, Frankfurt am Main, Germany. Curated by Eike Walkenhorst are a series of collaborative projects created through the INHABIT artist-in-residence program of the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics. These exhibitions explore the intersection of art and science, featuring works that emerge from dialogues between guest artists and researchers Inhabit.

2023 *Kaspale* Nairobi Contemporary Art Institute curated by Don Handa the solo exhibition challenged dominant historical narratives and focused on themes of Kenyan identity and the body as a site of memory.



Parts of the Brothers (2020)

earthenware ceramics, red ochre and graphite powder

45 x 40 x 65cm

Kaspale needed some company. The trickster figure I developed to navigate complex and challenging subjects continues to be a methodology I use for intervening in spaces and places, offering mostly satirical commentary on burdensome or difficult-to-digest matters. Over time, however, the work was becoming harder to bear and process, and I found myself thinking more about multidimensional time and communal support structures and as a result started to create Kaspale's ancestors kin that exist across all time dimensions and can offer a form of support when Kaspale is tired or simply wants more fun and company. This ongoing process has grown into a fictional archive in which I craft mythological family members, currently including the Ancient Ones, Primordial I, II, III, and Parts of the Twins, Parts of the Brothers, Parts of the Sisters and the Distant Cousins. This imaginative journey prompts me to ask questions about time, the timeless nature of these characters, their companionship, and the presence of family or kinship. My exploration of Kaspale's Ancestors continues through the use of ceramics, aluminium, and recycled dhow wood.

2023 *Kaspale* Nairobi Contemporary Art Institute. Solo exhibition. Curated by Don Handa



Parts of the Sisters (2020)

earthenware ceramics

50 by 50 by 55cm



Primordial I (2023)
Earthenware ceramics and red ochre
44 x 34 x 29cm



Kaspale’s Playground (2020)
projections, mosquito net material Kaunda suit costume, white cotton dress, children’s chair, Kenyan flag, metal bucket, water,
Kaspale’s puppet, yellow yard wooden suitcase, earthenware ceramic mask, red ochre, golden glitter, string, sound.
work exists in form of, film, performance, installation & multiple channel video
dimensions variable

Towards the end of 2019, I was reflecting on my upbringing in Kenya and the experience of growing up under Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi’s 24-year presidency. It struck me that Nyayo House, the government office for Immigration services was conceived in the year of my birth, 1979 and subsequently constructed in 1983. Nyayo House holds dual significance as the site for obtaining identification documents and managing immigration matters, as well as a harrowing symbol of the Kenyan government’s use of torture during Moi’s regime. I revisit this history through my work Kaspale’s Playground. The performance installation seeks to reclaim both the remembrance and the narrative of this history, free from the constraints of a purported collective national memory. Kaspale the playful trickster character, a tool of intervention alongside their puppet and shadows, symbolically deconstructs Nyayo House and its history while paying homage to the poignant mothers’ protest of 1992. In a desperate bid to secure the release of their sons detained in Nyayo House, these brave mothers resorted to stripping naked in Uhuru Park – a space that continues to serve as a hub for contemporary protests. The symbolic power of this act rendered the police present powerless, as it is a curse in Kenyan society to see a woman who is a mother naked.



- 2024 **Broken Time: And the World is Made Again by What it Forgets** Museum of Contemporary Art Skopje
- 2023 **Kaspale** Nairobi Contemporary Art Institute. Solo exhibition. Curated by Don Handa
- 2022 **The Ordinary Lives of Women** Unfinished ? Spazju Kreattiv, Valletta
- 2022 **Afro Vibes Festival** Fracatti Theater, Amsterdam / Kikker Theater, Utrecht
- 2022 **Live ArtFestival** ICA Cape Town

Kaspale’s Archive Instusion / The Post Card Series (I-IX) (2019)

digital photo collage using MARKK Museum archive photographs

15.24 by 10cm

The idea of Kaspale was birthed during a residency at the MARKK Museum am Rothenbaum, Hamburg in 2018 in connection to an exhibition, Amani: Auf den Spuren einer kolonialen Forschungsstation/ Amani: In the footsteps of a colonial research station (2019-2020). The project facilitated a residency in Amani Tanzania, a colonial research station that is still operational today which I visited. However I also asked and thankfully received time at the ethnographic museum in Hamburg as I was reluctant to reproduce violence by extracting material from Tanzania for this exhibition project without tackling the problematic treatment of contemporary African art, its position and relationship with ethnographic museums, a European construct. In the Markk Museum there is a lecture room still in use for teaching and what was used to teach the first lessons in ethnography and race classification in the early 1800. The images used in the front cover of this document is when I first created Kaspale and ‘we’ were snooping around in the lecture hall climbing on desks, lying around, ‘playing’ while I was exploring the character, where Kaspale’s cheekiness and coy witty gestures were developed. I had to ‘produce something’ for the exhibition and I was allowed to duplicate photographs from the museum’s archive as a result Kaspale intruded into this archive, reinserting themselves inside of photographs produced by zoologists, Julius Vossler and Dr. Stuhlmann in the late 1800 and early 1900 during their time in Amani Tanzania. Kaspale’s Archive Intrusion is reinserted into the MARKK museum archive. Kaspale disturbs these images, disrupting the urge for the audience to be nostalgic over this period.

View [link](#) to evolution of Kaspale map created for my solo exhibition at NCAI in 2023.

2019 *AMANI: Traces of a Colonial Research Centre* Museum am Rothenbaum – Kulturen und Künste der Welt, Hamburg, examines the legacy of a 1902 German colonial scientific station in Tanzania’s Usambara Highlands. The group exhibition highlights colonial history, botany, and its lingering impact through artistic, ethnographic, and historical lense.



Kaspale's Archive Instusion / The Vortex I-IV (2019)

digital photo collage

62 by 122cm (I) / 78 by 122cm (II-IV)

The Vortex series connects to a deeper realm of the archive. No longer able to see the zoologists' photographs, Kaspale's Archive Intrusion, The Vortex goes beyond the archive and arrives to a space of timelessness. Kaspale exists in a realm not bound by time nor space, it's neither here nor there, neither present nor past.

2022 **Índaffa / Forger out of the Fire** 14th edition of the Dak'Art Biennale. Curated by Senegalese art historian and curator El Hadji Malick Ndiaye

2023 **Kaspale** Nairobi Contemporary Art Institute. Solo exhibition. Curated by Don Handa



The Green Gold (2019)
 rusted mild steel, sisal, paper, ink, glass bottle, nails, video projection with sound
 157 by 54 by 7.5cm

A triangular, corked glass container holds hair-like fibrous strands of the Sansevieria trifasciata, commonly known as the “mother-in-law’s tongue” which shares familial ties within the Asparagaceae family. I extracted the fiber confined in a plant pot in the front entrance of an art gallery in Mérida, Mexico, 14,800 kilometers (9,200 miles) away from Machakos County, Kenya, where my great-grandmother wove her wares, mats and baskets, with rope made from this particular family of plants. Its counterpart, the braided sisal rope, also part of the Asparagaceae family, was transported between 1892 to 1893 by Richard Hindorf, a German colonial agricultural scientist, who brought 1,000 sisal plants from Yucatán, Mexico to Tanga, Tanzania. Establishing colonial sisal plantations in East Africa. The title of the work, The Green Gold, references the immense economic value sisal once held in Mexico, where it was known as “l’oro verde”, weaves together themes of colonialism, labour, power, the enduring presence of ancestral and ecological influences, and the entangled relationships between plants, people, and the forces that shape our shared histories.

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2022 - 2024 *All Hands On: Basketry* Museum European Cultures, Berlin curated by Judith Schühle and Sofia Botvinnik with Tina Peschel and Andrea Aßinger. The exhibition focuses on the fascinating skill of weaving and reveals the interconnections between historically evolved knowledge and modern innovations.

2024 - 2025 *Das ist kolonial. Westfalens (un)sichtbares Erbe* Landesmuseum, Dortmund, explored the lasting impacts of colonialism in Westphalia through audio stations and artistic works. The exhibition examines four main areas: economic ties, local actors, everyday life, and resistance/remembrance.



1964-2018 (2018)
two Kaunda suits, wood, ash glue, push pins
200 by 189 by 5.5cm

The Kaunda suit represents an idea around how an ideology has been shifted over time, and how an identity changes. What interests me is the transformation of this uniform/suit/costume. The Kaunda suit used to represent ideas around the independence era on the African continent. It was an expression of freedom. An expression of being able to be a businessman. A way for upper-class citizens to share their roots with the working class. A way for presidents to say to the people that they are part of their people, or that they are together with the people. The Kaunda suit was a powerful symbol that spoke of leanings toward socialistic ideologies. It was a way to say, “Here I am! I am free! Here I am and I am my own man! Here I am, I am my own country now; here I am, I am with my own people now; I am together with my people!” The name Kaunda suit was coined after Kenneth Kaunda, the first president from Zambia, which gained independence in 1964. A lot of the first presidents on the African continent wore this suit as a symbol. Fast track to 2018 and the Kaunda suit is reduced to a uniform. A status of employment. Employees of shopkeepers in downtown Nairobi wear it and it has become a bus driver’s uniform for private schools. The grey Kaunda suit is no longer rivered, the Kaunda suit of 2018 is a symbol of indentured servitude. The sociological significance of the Kaunda suit from 1964 to the Kaunda suit of 2018 is miles apart. The sad reality is that the grip of colonialism is still awake and at work.

2018 *Double Consiousness* Galarie Mitte im Kubo, Bremen. Solo Exhibiton.

2022 - 2023 *Unraveling the (under-) development complex or towards a post- (under-) development interdependence SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin, Germany* SAVVY Contemporanry, Berlin, Group Exhibition.



