



Makerere Art Gallery  
presents

# MATHIAS TUSIIME'S

art exhibition

Opening Friday 30<sup>th</sup> April 2010 at 5:30pm  
Closing 30<sup>th</sup> May 2010



**MATHIAS TUSIIME**  
Solo Painting Exhibition



## Acknowledgement

I am grateful to the following people for the support rendered during my art exhibition. The guest of honour Mr. Pietro Averono the cultural attaché from the Italian embassy, Margaret Nagawa the Curator at the Makerere University Art Gallery.

The Dean Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Arts Assoc. Prof. George Kyeyune has been supportive in many ways –financial and non financial.

I am indebted to Joyce. R. Gottlieb from Los Angeles - California, USA for furnishing me with art material supplies and providing other support.

Tom Herriman the director Uganda Art Consortium is an avid promoter of my work in the USA. I greatly appreciate this support.

To Mr.Kanuge John Bosco and Assoc. Prof. Phillip Kwesiga I am grateful for the logistical support you accorded to me.

Many thanks go to the people who contributed articles for this catalogue and to those who supported me in one way or another.

May God Bless You All.

Tusiime Mathias

Artist

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## Foreword

It is my pleasure to make a few comments regarding the artist Tusiime Mathias and his art on the occasion of his solo exhibition to be held at the Makerere university art gallery in Kampala, Uganda, May 2010.

I had the joy of meeting Tusiime while my husband and I were volunteering in Kampala for six weeks in November of 2008. As an art lover and a person who has studied art history in graduate school, i immediately felt a resonance with Tusiime's raw talent. Talent, passion, and inspiration are very manifest in his art. With a personal iconography of a story telling, informing his art. Displayed with great bursts of color, with a striking and expressionistic vision, I find Tusiime's art to be riveting, with great imagination, denoting the joy of children coupled with an awareness of an inner and outside world, with all of its attendant contradictions.

Tusiime, has an emotional necessity to express himself through his art, truly the soul of an artist.

We have the privilege of having four of his paintings in our home in Los Angeles, California, which provide us with endless pleasure.

Joyce. R. Gottlieb

Los Angeles, California

The work of Mathias Tusiime is receiving growing recognition in the U.S. art market following the Uganda Art Consortium Exhibition in Washington DC in February, 2010. Art patrons snapped up several of his works from the show including oil paintings and wood block prints. Tusiime's techniques, especially his use of coarse hand-made paper gives his work an immediacy and vitality that attracted the eyes of virtually everyone who visited the show. He also has a unique style of applying acrylic paint with brush and palette knife in bold strokes that add depth and structure to wood block prints.

Many viewers automatically reached out to touch the colorful variegated surfaces of the paintings, intrigued by the deep spatial patterns. His bold use of primary colors and earth tones also received widespread interest and approval. Thematically his work shows strong evidence of traditional influences from his childhood home in rural Western Uganda. Some of his human figures seem like they could be derived from the distant past, but many of the themes he pursues are very modern and illustrate contemporary political and social issues.

Tom Herriman  
Uganda Art Consortium  
<http://www.ugandart.com>

Mathias Tusiime is a self-taught artist who paints with oils and acrylics on his own handmade paper, as well as on commercially produced paper and canvas. This is his 2nd solo exhibition at the Makerere Art Gallery. The first was in 2005 organized by art historian Maria Alawua.

Tusiime's day job is being a Cleaner at the Makerere art school. In this creativity-charged environment, Tusiime's keen and observant eye has earned him a place of respect in the art community and he has exhibited in Uganda, Kenya, Denmark and the USA. He converts waste that he cleans up like discarded paints, paper and sugarcane pulp into bright joyous artworks. His subjects are often children with large, bright-eyed stares. He can be compared to Jack Katarikawe a self-taught Ugandan artist based in Nairobi, Kenya, whose artistic career started at the Makerere Art School when he too was not a student, rather a driver.

Tusiime is a good example of careful time management, genuine environmental awareness and protection, as well as careful use of limited resources to make profound artistic statements.

**Exhibition organizer:** Margaret Nagawa,  
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## Articles

### **Climax in Art: Taming childhood experiences**

Prof Philip Kwesiga, Makerere University

Tusiime Mathias has always astonished viewers and art lovers alike and for the last two decades, his art can be seen to echo what every artist's dreams of. Tusiime's art has been more like taming the dynamics of societies' own narrative and practice but more specifically refining his childhood experiences. What else would you label someone who has seen and been viewed by tourist gazers, art fanatics, art lovers and the community's expanse of hungry art space visitors. These mostly art lovers have been able to identify and pick on the rather untamed talent. In Tusiime's community, the local name for talent is 'omwoga' a largely western Uganda word to refer to people with peculiar exposition into what they express either artistically but more specifically craft persons.

Tusiime's talent and involvement art narrative can be traced back two decade ago in 1999. This is the time when he came into contact with what one could call a sheer pleasure but also as a result of working or like some writers have put it, labouring at one of the oldest East African Art Schools – The Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Arts.

Like the ever 'upcoming' artist in Uganda's diverse community, one can refer to Tusiime as a seasoned artist in the community. Yet for the greater part of his life, it has not been easy going. In this case the divide between the university job and the ever increasing number of his family – with now five children, the going has not been smooth sailing. But I should hesitate to say that it has been a blessing on the artist's side. While he stayed in the university quarters

since 1995, he managed to raise funds from art to put up his own humble accommodation in Wamala – Katooke, Nansana a suburb of Kampala city.

Even when the banal art realities of trying to market his work has been the major drive in his art work, the mere simplicity and naïve[ity] in execution has been central in this work. One dares to say that the pleasures and pressures of good living have been critical in directing some of the extraordinary dispensations of the unique art. Tusiime does not seem to want to climb on any of the grand masters per se as most trained artist find themselves yet he has been able to grapple with his style and genre as a kind of experience and experiment.

Yet the underlying factors and issues on the success of this artist in question has been his art buyers and to some minimal extent mentors in the art school. Right from his maiden works of art to present, Tusiime's art has always competed very positively in terms of sales, his pricing not withstanding.

The story of Tusiime provokes many questions about why things or institutions like the Makerere Art School should train and continue to exist. Yet Tusiime's success story has something to tell of the success and mission of the art school itself. The art school has over the time mentored raw art talent into full fledged professionals. Drawing from a large list some few people like Sekweyama (RIP) and Hebert as earlier mentees, Tusiime has slowly but surely proved his worth.

His proof of success has gone a long way from originally exhibiting work in joint international exhibitions and shows to a more recent solo exhibit organised by Uganda Art consortium based in the US. With the kind assistance from Tom Herriman its executive director and Joyce Gottlieb art lover from Los Angeles, California, Tusiime has been able to make a mark that is hard to ignore.

When we return to what makes his work tick one can't avoid to mention, love of nature and childhood experiences in western Uganda that makes Tusiime the artist to reckon with. In the present solo exhibition organised at the Makerere Art Gallery and Margaret Nagawa as curator, Tusiime's love of nature comes up once again. Inherent in each of the artworks is the child as the main icon as a theme of the exhibits. One can not ignore that the fact that some of the painting surfaces are Tusiime's own hand made paper that remain his other passion. The Makerere Art Gallery is located at the Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Arts, Makerere University, Kampala – Uganda.



# **Mathias Tusiime**

## **By Maria Alawua, MA Art History**

He needs no lengthy introduction.

From the moment Mathias Tusiime created a niche for himself among the visual artists of our time, numerous articles in newspapers, magazines, catalogues and journals have been written about his walk in life as an artist and also about his quest to advocate for a cleaner and greener environment through recycling waste material into 'paper' for art expression.

He has also featured in live talk shows aired with Uganda Broadcasting Corporation (UBC), Record Television and Wava Broadcasting Services (WBS). Because of his soft spoken nature, a first impression of him may amount to one assuming that he is no more than a grounds man, who helps maintain the neatly kept gardens of the Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Arts, Makerere University.

One should not be deceived by this first impression.

Tusiime Mathias is 'crusader' that has incessantly advocated for self-worth, albeit the challenges he faces while climbing the ladder that has made him what he is today- a self made artist who has exhibited artworks in several solo and joint exhibitions both in Uganda and abroad.

The Makerere University Art Gallery in May 2010 has curated a solo art exhibition whose primary purpose is to showcase paintings and prints that have been executed by Mathias Tusiime over a period of four years since 2006. Of particular interest in this exhibition is Tusiime's practical demonstration of environmental concerns through the use of paper that he recycled from waste material. This is his second solo art exhibition; the first took place in 2005.

Destiny has made him the first self- taught artist privileged to exhibit in this historic Gallery which to my mind has the greatest collection of contemporary art in Uganda comprising art works that were produced as far back as the 1950's.

Tusiime should be encouraged and supported as much as possible so that he can pass on, especially to young people the love and effort to preserve the natural beauty and cleanliness of our environment.

# Cleaner-cum-artist

By ISAAC KHISA

Daily Monitor Posted Saturday, May 22 2010 at 00:00

<http://www.monitor.co.ug/LifeStyle/Reviews/-/691232/923114/-/gboj2ez/-/index.html>

He is a self-taught artist who paints with oils and acrylics on his own handmade paper, as well as on commercially produced paper and canvas. His art work is viewed abroad, where he has never been and has no hope of ever going.

Mr Mathias Tusiime, a cleaner at the Faculty of Industrial Fine Art, Makerere University for a decade now, has no regrets for his job as it has earned him additional knowledge.

Born in Bushenyi district in 1975, Mr Tusiime studied up to senior four and moved to Kampala in search for greener pastures. It was at this time that he secured a job as a cleaner at Makerere University in 1998. With his keen observation of what students of industrial fine art were doing, Mr Tusiime picked interest and started his small drawing and paintings using disposed paints. "I used to paint my work using disposed paints," Mr Tusiime says with a smile adding that he no longer regrets working as a cleaner.

He converts waste that he cleans up like discarded paints, paper and sugarcane pulp into bright joyous artworks. His subjects are often children with large, bright-eyed stares. He can be compared to Jack Katarikawe a self-taught Ugandan artist based in Nairobi, Kenya, whose artistic career started at the Makerere Art School when he too was not a student, but rather a driver.

Tusiime is a good example of careful time management, genuine environmental awareness and protection, as well as careful use of limited resources to make profound artistic statements.

Prof Philip Kwesiga, a lecturer at Makerere University, Faculty of Industrial and Fine Art, says he wonders why the school should continue to train fine artists yet people can teach themselves. He says Mr Tusiime's art has been more like taming the dynamics of society's own narrative and specifically refining his childhood experiences.

Despite staying in the university quarters since 1995, Mr Tusiime has managed to raise funds from art and put up his own humble accommodation in Wamala, Katooke and Nansaana, Kampala suburbs. Mr Tusiime's art has been exhibited in New York, Netherlands and Kenya among other countries.

The Makerere University Art Gallery in May 2010 has curated a solo art exhibition whose primary purpose is to showcase paintings and prints that have been executed by Mr Tusiime over a period of four years since 2006. This is his second solo art exhibition, the first having been in 2005.

“Mr Tusiime has been the first self-taught artist privileged to exhibit in this gallery which, in my opinion, has the greatest collection of contemporary art in Uganda comprising of art works that were produced as far back as the 1950’s,” Ms Maria Alawau, a lecturer at Makerere University, School of Industrial and Fine Arts, says. “He should be encouraged and supported as much as possible so that he can pass on, especially to young people, the love and effort to preserve the natural beauty and cleanliness of our environment.”

## Casual Labourer Makes Mark With Art



Vivian Craddock Williams and Tusiime at the art exhibition at Makerere University

**By Vision Reporter** Thursday, 13th May, 2010

<http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/9/44/719373>

It is interesting when you meet an artist who has more credibility for his work in a foreign land than at home. Mathias Tusiime is one sort of artist who is mildly known home, but has sold out his art in Europe and America.

In his exhibition that started on the May 8 at Makerere Art Gallery, the self-taught artist who also doubles as a cleaner at the gallery made an impression on many guests

His style is children with large bright-eyed stares which pervade his paintings. This simple style of the artist bears a resemblance with Jack Katarikawe a self-taught Ugandan artist based in Kenya who too uses simplicity as a constant theme of his paintings

Tusiime fuses this with his technique of bold bright colours. The colours I use are influenced with the way I feel inside, says Tusiime.



His mediums include acrylics, oil, and recycled paper. The latter makes him more intriguing as he insists it is his own creation. He mixes sugar cane pulp, sisal, grass and paper into one to form his own canvas.

With this raw talent, the artist is set on a higher plane of success and has escaped the common trap of mediocrity.

## **Art that heals souls**

Wednesday, 03 February 2010 10:13 by Nathan Kiwere

<http://www.independent.co.ug/index.php/society/society/37-society/2454-art-that-heals-souls-+Tusiime+Mathias&cd=7&hl=en&ct=clink&gl=ug>

That art is one of the most wonderful experiences that have complimented human existence is an indisputable fact. Because of its significance as a close companion, art is said to have been 'founded' more than 30,000 years ago by cave men in south eastern France, according to the 2004 discoveries by Jean Marie Chauvet and company. These cave paintings that have persisted to date, in their unadulterated form, tell the story of how art has transcended all ancient civilizations, including Egypt. Today, the countless transformations that have typified the history of art notwithstanding, art remains inextricably intertwined with world cultures. In some countries such as Italy and France, art remains the embodiment of national pride and identity.

Be that as it may, one question will continue to dog many: what kind of power does art wield over human existence? Does that purported power exist in the first place? If so, to what measure has it affected human emotion?

The advent of modern art has seen the emergence of terminologies such art therapy. This term insinuates the use of art for psychosocial rehabilitation. Art therapy has indeed become a big industry in modern medicine, particularly in the field of psychiatry. In Uganda the practice is taking root in both hospitals and civil society organisations.

One such organisation is Wipe the Tears Africa (WITA) that is based on Balintuma Road, Nakulabye in Kampala. It deals with rehabilitation of prisoners, ex-convicts and street children. A look at their portfolio of work shows juveniles in Naguru Remand Home, inmates in Kasangati Prison as well as street kids based in Kisenyi slums ostensibly responding to their therapeutic overtures. And there the question comes again: can art actually wipe away tears from the eyes of case-hardened convicts or street rogues? If so, how many tears have been wiped through the efforts of WITA?

Doreen Ruranga who works with WITA attests that there is a power latent in art to transform mindsets, attitudes and behaviours. Although they had hitherto been accustomed to using other conventional tools, particularly counseling, their discovery of art has since proved a magic wand for the therapy. Their chief artist, **Tusiime Mathias**, is no stranger in the local art fraternity. His rather novice art form still baffles many artists and collectors alike, from far and wide. His approach is unlike the conventional; he treats the subject with utmost blithe. His casually rendered figures, colours and media in turn elicit an unfussy feeling from the viewer.

Much more, it is difficult to understand why WITA chose **Tusiime** and/or his art to be at the forefront of their campaign. Whatever the answers to those rhetoric questions, one thing is clear: art remains one of the biggest mysteries the world has born. From the prisoner in Kasangati, the street scoundrel in Kisenyi to the young scalawag in Naguru Remand Home, art has a boundless aptitude to soothe the emotions of the rich and to tame the madness of the wretched.

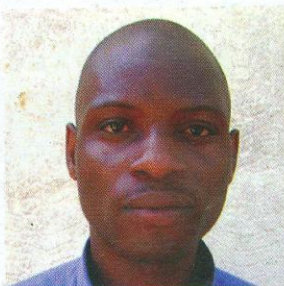


## Outsider artist challenges profession

By Nathan Kiwere

**M**athias Tusiime started out as a grounds man (read cleaner) at the Makerere Art school in 1997. Today, the 30-year old is an accomplished artist whose work is exhibited at the Makerere art gallery, Uganda German Cultural Society, galleries in Copenhagen, Amsterdam, and Texas. Despite joining the art profession by default and raising the bar in artistic style and perception, Tusiime continues to faithfully serve at his original job as a grounds man.

Tusiime's art journey started in 1999, about one and a half years after he had been hired as grounds man at Makerere. He had been keenly observing students and lecturers making different works of art at the school. Out of curiosity, he decided to try his hand at painting and sculpture. He had limitations; from his limited education background in art and lack of money to buy art materials. So he invented a way of making his own paper, using found objects like grass, sticks, sugarcane husks, sisal and sawdust. In the same year, he got an opportunity to participate in a group art exhibition organised by the Nommo Gallery in Kampala. His was



Mathias Tusiime

clearly the "lowest" art work. To the utter amazement of everyone, his first painting, a mumble jumble of colour applied on a jagged piece of paper, was the first to be sold.

Tusiime is not the first of his kind to emerge on the art scene. Yet the emergence of artists like him continually raises questions about the nature of this rather eccentric discipline. Many trained artists struggle to make a mark, their high credentials notwithstanding but others like

### SOCIETY

Tusiime, without formal training, not only sell but capture the attention of international collectors and galleries. These are known as *outsider artists*.

The term has come into common use only recently. *Folk*, *naïve*, *intuitive*, *primitive* and *art brut* (French for "raw art") have also been used over the past century to categorise work by nonprofessional artists.

The first and most prominent Ugandan to suit that description is Jak Katarikawe, a Nairobi-based artist from Kigezi, who has assumed a larger-than-life reputation, especially in Kenya and some parts of Europe.

Unlike Tusiime, who gained some education to secondary level, Jak Katarikawe never had such a privilege. It took years for him to learn to sign his works and to communicate with his foreign collectors in a coherent way.

The common factor between Tusiime and

Many trained artists struggle to make a mark, their high credentials notwithstanding but others like Tusiime, without formal training,

Katarikawe is their defiance of the technical dexterity so popular with modern art. Their works lack such visual elements and principles like proportions, precise picture construction, and balance.

In substance, their works are a far cry from the conformist definition of beauty. Beauty is deeply linked to our thinking about art. Many people assume that a work of art should be beautiful, and even that art's entire purpose is to be beautiful. But some artists may question this. In other words; is all art intended to fulfill beauty? What is the yardstick for what is beautiful art and what isn't? And who determines that standard?

As we grapple with these endless questions about art, Tusiime and Katarikawe's art continues to make it to choice destinations that some graduate artists may never even dream of reaching. It is such incidents that give art an enigma and one that will forever be misunderstood. However, to partially respond to some of these questions, it is safe to posit that the popularity of outsider art today is a result of the most progressive aspect of our modernity. The emergence and validation of difference within culture, the collapse of the distinction between "high" and "low" art, the great proliferation of the popular arts – these are all part of the democratisation of culture brought about by modernism. ■



Tusiime got inspiration from watching Fine Art students at Makerere

By Nathan Kiwera

**T**HERE is a biblical proverb that goes: "The race is not only for the swift, wise or the strong, but time and chance happens to them all".

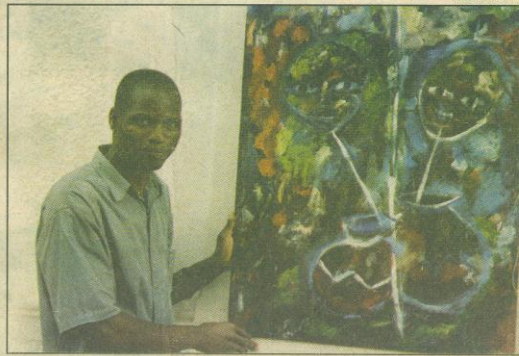
Matthias Tusiime seems to fit in quite well considering his latest exploit. Having worked as a casual worker at the Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Art, Makerere University, for more than half a decade, he only recently pulled a very extraordinary stunt when he unveiled a repertoire of artworks that were consequently exhibited at the Makerere University gallery.

This unprecedented move made him the first informally trained artist to hold a solo art exhibition since the inception of the university gallery 35 years ago. The exhibition that commenced two weeks ago and is still going on, was officially opened by batik art legend, Nuwa Nyanzi, an informally trained artist and one of the most successful art personalities Ugandan has produced.

Tusiime works with oils on canvas and prints in mixed media. His greatest strength is printing. Even the leading print-makers have acknowledged that Tusiime is a class apart. Any one who asks him how he started this new career, the soft-spoken and extremely

## From sweeper to art exhibitor

NATHAN KIWERE



TALENTED ARTIST, Tusiime's print. He displays the *Malwa Drinkers* painting

nervous young man says, "I have been working here as a sweeper since 1988 and have been watching students and lecturers doing their art work. In the process, I got inspired." He tried to

get recognition as a budding artist and was allowed to showcase in one of the leading art galleries, where mostly lecturers exhibit. He has set a record and indeed a big challenge for other

wanabe artists to come out and test the waters. His paintings mostly depict an array of themes centred on social comment especially, his environment, for instance *Malwa*

*Drinkers*, in which he summarises the two liquor patrons in two round heads and two straws descending into pots. This, he achieves by using lines and a lucid application of colour.

The background colours give the impression of an incoherent mumble jumble at first glance and yet, with careful observation, one can discern a nimble variation of complimentary colour harmony.

The prints take on a diversity of subject matter, including human figures and an expedition to the animal and bird kingdoms. Using his characteristic lines and subtle colours, he prints on paper, banana fibre and other materials.

Impressed by this magnificent display of originality and unadulterated proficiency, the management of Alliance Françoise, a major exhibition hub in Kampala, have offered to exhibit his works in the coming month to further herald his grand entry into the art world.

When this happens, Tusiime's life will obviously not remain the same - he might rethink his current job description as a grounds man to probably concentrate on his new love.

He is participating in an ongoing printmakers exhibition in Texas USA in which he has contributed works.

An expatriate offered Tusiime a chance to work in Canada, which he rejected

Dr Philip Kweriga

**A** while ago, Matthias Tusiime emerged from the corridors of Makerere's School of Fine Art to become a celebrity. From a humble background, Tusiime joined Makerere University community in 1988 as his mother toiled to support the family. Tusiime's mother works at the university as a support staff.

Tusiime, the second-born, shared a small accommodation with his eight siblings. Although he didn't make it to the university, studying remained one of his dreams.

The closest he could relate to the community was to secure a job with the university.

As a young man, he had hoped to work in an office, but all this was to remain a dream. With his qualifications, perhaps a diploma in business administration, Tusiime's dream job was not forthcoming.

However, these were not the circumstances to deter him. In 1988, the university took him on as a groundsman.

It bothered me that I had to recommend him for the job knowing very well his qualification. However, Tusiime made it clear that all he wanted was a job.

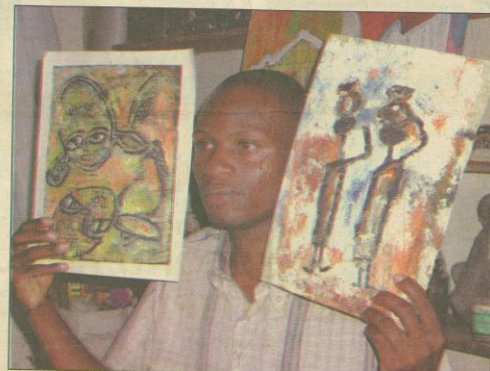
He wanted to relieve his mother of the financial burden, but also as a way of creating his own independence. For I later learnt that he had gotten married. He now has two daughters.

His new family made him think further than the small time job at the School of Industrial and Fine Arts.

Tusiime got a chance to work as a studio assistant when the person in that position went for further studies.

This gave him an opportunity to interact with the students and lecturers, but above all the art materials.

Tusiime's contact with art materials started as he assisted students to prepare their modelling clay, curve their wood, paper



TALENTED: Matthias Tusiime displays some of his work on hand-made paper. It has made him an authority

mash, stretch their painting canvases and make some block prints. It was the latter two that took his admiration.

Tusiime rubbed shoulders with foreign visitors to Makerere art school and other art galleries who liked 'unrefined art'.

Unrefined art, they believed, could be achieved by people who had not had formal training in art. This 'crude art' represents

the original thoughts in art (pictures) form of that community. Tusiime says he gets his ideas from nature, especially trees and mud structures in our local architecture.

His family has also been a source of inspiration, especially the playful children.

In 2004, as Tusiime tended to grass at the art school compound, he uncovered a mash of

papers that had been soaked during the rainy season. By instinct, he found out that the mashed paper could be recycled to make beautiful crafted hand made paper with a lot of artistic value. He says he has worked in paper mash over the years.

However, Tusiime had not thought about it as form of paper recycling.

He has now mastered his trade

in hand paper making. Not only did he make the beautiful crafted paper, he also used them as his ground for painting and print making.

Indeed, his print works and paintings on hand-made paper have made him an authority.

For his work, an expatriate offered Tusiime an opportunity to work in Canada. However, Tusiime is not about to take up Ayevo in another country.

Tusiime struggles to explain his success. He is a soft-spoken and an extremely nervous person. His development would have gotten to a higher level if he was outgoing and able to defend his art.

Tusiime seems to be overwhelmed by the public response towards his art. He believes he is the first non-formally trained artist to have exhibited at Makerere University gallery.

While this could be contested, it should not stop him from continuous search for improving his art.

Tusiime needs to emulate the community he lives in, where some particular canons are followed. The use of art materials should not be sacrificed for the understanding of his subject which he has slowly but surely developed.

Tusiime should be able to appreciate and celebrate his material and endeavour to make a professional presentation of his work, which is critical to his growth. It is then that he shall take pleasure in the new label as a celebrity. He needs the support of everyone.

The writer is a senior lecturer at the School of Industrial and Fine Art at Makerere University

## Artworks



Title: Save Me

Media: Acrylic on Handmade paper



Title: Spies

Media: Acrylic on Handmade paper





Title: The Poor Cannot Win  
Media: Oil on Canvas



Title: Wisdom  
Media: Oil on Canvas



Title: Plan for the Future  
Media: Acrylic Print on Canvas