



Press release

Kapwani Kiwanga. The Length of the Horizon

September 16, 2023 – January 7, 2024

Press Conference: Friday, September 15, 2023, at 11:15 am

Curator: Uta Ruhkamp

Curatorial Assistants: Veronika Mehlhart, Dino Steinhof

From September 16, 2023 to January 7, 2024, the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg will present *Kapwani Kiwanga. The Length of the Horizon*, the first institutional and comprehensive mid-career retrospective of the artist's work worldwide. Research-based, thematically highly topical, and future-oriented—these terms can be used to describe the impressive oeuvre of Kapwani Kiwanga (b. 1978). The Canadian and French artist recently received numerous international awards and will represent Canada at the 60th Biennale di Venezia in 2024. The exhibition brings together works in all media from Kiwanga's artistic beginnings to the present day, including the highly acclaimed installation *Terrarium* (2022), her sixteen-meter-long colored light tunnel *pink-blue* (2017), and her sculptural series *Glow* (2019, ongoing). Kapwani Kiwanga's expansive works come together in the exhibition to create a uniquely aesthetic, insightful, and physical experience.

"We are very excited to present Kapwani Kiwanga's first major survey exhibition, a deeply original voice on the contemporary art scene. Here at the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, her works in our large exhibition hall will condense into a visually fascinating and profound ensemble that will draw the public's attention to investigations of history that resonate with social issues of today. At the same time one is captivated by the aesthetic appearance of Kapwani Kiwanga's works," says Andreas Beitin, Director of the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg.

Uta Ruhkamp, curator of the exhibition, explains: "Kapwani Kiwanga's works are multi-layered. They are extremely complex artistic translations of well-researched situations, conditions, and mechanisms of our society and the world we live in. Her installations, paintings, works on paper, photographs, and video works are captivating in their aesthetics, formal clarity, and reduction. Yet, her sensitive choice of materials and colors is always grounded in deeper levels of meaning that charge her works both historically and socio-politically and break the visual pleasure in terms of content. Kapwani Kiwanga poetically surveys and expands our social horizons. I am particularly pleased that she is developing a new work with shade cloth, one of her 'signature' materials, for her exhibition with us."

Insight into Kapwani Kiwanga's artistic approach

As a graduate anthropologist and scholar of comparative religion, Kapwani Kiwanga has the academic background for her social analytical practice. In her work, she employs so-called exit



strategies: “I’m not trying to restate what one knows. I’m also trying to see what ways to get past what we know. To do that requires very simple things like just looking at it differently, or just even looking at it for the first time. [...] These ‘exit strategies’ are very personal, but they can be collectively experienced as well,” Kapwani Kiwanga summarizes.

The artist searches for a vocabulary to look at existing structures and power relations from new perspectives in order to think about them differently in the future. The visually impressive works initially appeal to the viewer in a very sensual way. At second glance, the historical-political dimensions of her works reveal themselves, some of which surprise and unsettle. Glass, two-way mirrors, shade cloth, stone, sand, sisal, and plants, as well as light and color—for Kapwani Kiwanga, these are not value-neutral materials, but rather materials charged with content. Their choice is never purely aesthetic. Rather, she translates social, geological, ecological, historical, and diasporic themes into powerful artistic statements. She stages material histories in which the material is at once ambassador, metaphor, bearer of experience, and socio-political instrument. In this way, she shakes the foundations of our cultural socialization. She refines our sense for “hidden” social mechanisms, structural injustices, as well as global and everyday power asymmetries.



Kapwani Kiwanga, *pink-blue* (2017)



Kapwani Kiwanga,
The Marias (2020)



Kapwani Kiwanga, *Terrarium* (2022)

Insight into the exhibition

Kapwani Kiwanga. The Length of the Horizon begins for visitors with a surprising spatial and color experience: The walk through the colored light corridor *pink-blue* marks the transition from the entrance area of the museum to the heart of the presentation. The tunnel-like installation not only forces visitors into an austere architecture, but the immersive experience also reveals how light and color are used in everyday urban contexts and disciplinary architectures to control behavior. The work references research on the psychological effects of color. For example, Baker-Miller pink is said to have an aggression-reducing effect on prisoners. For *pink-blue*, Kapwani Kiwanga combines this pink tone with fluorescent blue light, which is also used to regulate behavior and prevent intravenous drug use in public spaces, as veins are difficult to locate in this light. Kapwani Kiwanga raises physical and mental awareness of everyday disciplinary structures.



In the approximately 1,800 m² exhibition hall, the artist's key works come together to form a pointed tour through her oeuvre. It becomes clear how Kapwani Kiwanga uses the effective power of color, light, and material to tell global histories from new perspectives.

While in the powerfully colorful installation *The Marias* (2020) it is the bright yellow of the walls and the pedestals that initially captivates the viewer, Kapwani Kiwanga uses the delicate paper versions of the peacock bush to address the toxic nature of the ornamental plant. As the naturalist Maria Sibylla Merian (1647–1717) described in her famous collection *Metamorphosis insectorum Surinamensium*, the peacock flower was used by enslaved women in Suriname as an abortifacient.

The artist works with a similar visually enticing effect in her installation *Terrarium* (2022), which she developed for the main exhibition *The Milk of Dreams* at the 59th Biennale di Venezia and consists of four semi-transparent fabric panels (*Sunset Horizon*) and three *Hour Glass* sculptures. *Terrarium* explores different uses of natural resources, in this case quartz sand for making glass or shale oil and gas extraction through fracking. The *Hour Glasses* exhibit their own material, evoking the long iconography of the hour glass as a vanitas symbol of human life and transferring this idea of finitude to the state of our planet, to the way its inhabitants deal with raw materials and nature, and thus to the Capitalocene, a sharpened reading of the Anthropocene.

Especially for her exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Kapwani Kiwanga has developed an eight-meter-wide wall piece made of shade cloth. The variably colored fabric nets that Kapwani Kiwanga uses to develop her so-called shade cloth works as wall objects, expansive installations, and sculptural screens are actually used in industrial agriculture to allow plants to thrive better or outside of their original habitat. Metaphorically, the nets with their shading properties can stand for European colonial projects in which ecosystems in the colonies were reshaped to either better suit European ecosystems or to facilitate regional mass cultivation with high yield increases.

The exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive bilingual publication (German/English), edited by Uta Ruhkamp, with installation views of the exhibition, archival material, a conversation between Cecilia Alemani and Kapwani Kiwanga, and essays by Julie Pellegrin and Uta Ruhkamp. Available from late October for €39 at the museum shop or at kunstmuseum.de/shop.



Kapwani Kiwanga. The Length of the Horizon is being realized in cooperation with Copenhagen Contemporary, where it will subsequently be on view from January 25, 2024.

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