

first side room of the Giardini venue (Fig. 1). They are based, according to the *Short Guide* (Mugatti et al. 2022), on photos and sound recordings of funerals and weddings she took on a recent trip to Zimbabwe but also on images taken from the internet.<sup>4</sup>

At the very far end of the Arsenale tunnels, Sandra Mujinga had suspended fragments of coarsely woven costumes at different heights with thin wires, a quartet of sculptures called *Mókó, Libwé, Zómi, and Nkama* (Fig. 2). They seemed to dissolve, ripple apart, as loose ends indicated. The even, low-level, green light enhanced the sensation of “things falling apart” (to evoke Achebe 1958). Mujinga’s sculptures reminded me of Egungun costumes, which I have seen in Benin during consultation rituals.

Even further down, almost at the rear exit of the extended Arsenale grounds, the U.S.-born artist and transgender activist Tourmaline showed a multiple-screen video installation called *Mary of Ill Fame* (2020–2021) a portrait of a Black woman in Seneca Village (now Central Park in New York City) around 1830, who was forced to be a sex worker, accused to have stolen a White man’s wallet, unjustly incarcerated, yet succeeded in freeing herself and her companions by reconnecting to her African ancestors’ magical powers (Fig. 3). The continuity of prejudice and racial and (trans)gender discrimination over centuries came across through the intense contrasts

of images and soundscapes Tourmaline had created between the ruling bourgeois lifestyle of the masters and the misery of the Black enslaved population.

I had chance to participate in the opening ceremony of the Kenya Pavilion in a modified factory (Fig. 4). Speeches by Dr. Amina Mohamed, the minister of culture, the commissioner, were questioned in a spontaneous intervention by Simon Njami, who insisted that political support for art must be unconditional and full hearted. Almost forgotten, curator Jimmy Ogonga and the artists represented in the Pavilion were given space to speak at the end of the session. The very diverse paintings and sculptures by Dickens Otieno, Syowia Kyambi, Kaloki Nyamai, and Wanja Kimani harmonized and showed that they practiced the stipulation of their exhibition’s title, *Exercises in Conversation*.

South Africa and Ghana rented (as at the 2019 edition) sections of the Arsenale as the location for their national pavilions. Several countries signed twenty-year contracts with the Biennale for space in this former rope factory and marine depot, which cost, according to unofficial information from the team of the South African Pavilion, around €20 million for ten editions. While the South Africa exhibition was on the second floor of the renovated Sale d’Armi building that hosts about a dozen national presentations, Ghana’s was situated on the ground floor at

the far end of the rope-making halls (Fig. 5). *Black Star—The Museum as Freedom* was the title of Ghana’s show, curated again by Nana Oforiatta Ayim, who invited three artists to explore processes of decolonization and pan-Africanism. Na Chainka Reindorf presented paintings of Black figures in abstract spaces framed by textile patterns, Afroscope an installation of 1,024 doodles of faces on 8 cm x 8 cm papers and NFTs,<sup>5</sup> and Diego Arauja a sound installation. Instead of using elaborate architecture like David Adjaye did in 2019 with his mudwalls, Oseo Asare used the unlit space of the industrial building as black backdrop by placing the artworks on a modular grid of thin wooden bars.

The debut Pavilion of Uganda<sup>6</sup> and veteran Côte d’Ivoire had distinct curatorial strategies. Shaheen Merali, curator of *Radiance—They Dream in Time*, had chosen only two artists to represent Uganda in Palazzo Palumbo Fossati’s historic space (Fig. 6). Acaye Kerunen’s sculptural work derived from techniques of traditional basket-making by deconstructing utilitarian forms, and let them grow all over the Palazzo’s walls, while Collin Sekajugo’s paintings reinterpreted from an African perspective stock photos sold on the internet promoting consumer ideals and played with the momentum of large, colorful canvases. A limited selection of artists might have had a better chance to imprint afterimages on the visual memory of

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*African Arts* (ISSN 0001-9933 print, 1937-2108 online) is published quarterly by the University of California, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1310, in spring, summer, autumn, and winter. For editorial information consult our websites at <http://www.international.ucla.edu/africa/africanarts/> and <https://direct.mit.edu/afar> or email *African Arts* at [afaritsedit@international.ucla.edu](mailto:afaritsedit@international.ucla.edu) (editorial); [afaritsbus@international.ucla.edu](mailto:afaritsbus@international.ucla.edu) (operations).

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Printed in China

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