

MIT List Visual Arts Center
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listart.mit.edu

Kapwani Kiwanga: Safe Passage

February 8–April 21, 2019



ABOVE: *Jalousie* (detail), 2018, steel, two-way mirror

Courtesy the artist; Galerie POGGI, Paris; Galerie Tanja Wagner, Berlin; and Goodman Gallery, South Africa



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Hayden Gallery February 8–April 21, 2019

Kapwani Kiwanga's recent work traces the impact of colonialism and its pervasive legacy by considering historical narrative and the archive. Her work is research-driven, instigated by marginalized or forgotten histories, and articulated across a range of materials. At the core of her exhibition at the List Center is an engagement with racialized surveillance and the systems used in monitoring and controlling the movement of bodies in space. Kiwanga follows the lineage of surveillance and positions it in relation to blackness in America, from its roots in slavery to the role that technology performs today.

Kiwanga reacts to architecture and space, and to the power dynamics inherent in seeing and being seen. She obscures and reveals, obstructs and directs movement. In *Jalousie* (2018), for instance, Kiwanga juxtaposes the familiar uses of two-way mirrors in interrogation rooms and corporate settings with angled slats, referencing the ubiquitous domestic window shutters found in homes from tropical climates to New England. Both material and design pose the shifting of power depending on one's position. Reflected in the two-way mirror of *Jalousie* are partitions created from shade cloth, an agricultural textile used in large-scale industrial farming around the world. Kiwanga adopts a material almost exclusively used to cover land in order to augment the yield of organic resources, repurposing it as an architectural screen to refract and filter the other works on view.

Glow (2019), a new body of work commissioned by the List Center, is comprised of four sculptures that take their point of departure from colonial-era "lantern laws." Enacted in Boston and throughout New England in the late 1700s, lantern laws required all slaves to carry a lit candle after sunset if unaccompanied by a white person. As such, any person who appeared not to be white and who failed to carry a lantern at night, slave or not, could be stopped and questioned. This strategic, forced visibility and accompanying suspicion of racialized bodies, and the legal prerogative to engage, endures. Beyond the regional history of New England, *Greenbook (1961)* (2019), continues a project in which Kiwanga sources material from *The Negro Motorist Green Book*. This annual state-by-state listing published from 1936 to 1966 served as a resource to provide safe restaurants, service stations, and lodging for African-American motorists traveling across the United States. Here, Kiwanga pulls from the 1961 edition, the year of the Freedom Riders, a group of civil rights activists who rode public buses from Washington, D.C. into the South to challenge the practice of keeping public buses segregated after having been ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1956.

Kiwanga frames these critical historical moments in her own aesthetic vocabulary while referencing minimalism in both form and material. She inserts a conversation around power dynamics within an artistic tradition that has been broadly defined as anti-representational and working against self-expression. Kiwanga co-opts the canon; she recognizes the system of power and turns it back on itself, in art and in parsing broader cultural histories. In doing so, her work reflects injustice, oppression, resistance, and ultimately, the tension and urgency of the present.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Kapwani Kiwanga (b. 1978, Hamilton, Canada) lives and works in Paris, France.

Kapwani Kiwanga: Safe Passage is organized by Yuri Stone, Assistant Curator, MIT List Visual Arts Center

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Opening Reception

Thursday, February 7, 6-8 PM

All programs are free and open to the general public. RSVPs are required.

For upcoming events and to RSVP, visit: listart.mit.edu/events-programs



SUPPORT

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