

Presenting Theresa Musoke

Refractions, infinite tessellating forms, mirror, repeat and retract in the paintings of Theresa Musoke—one of the most remarkable painters of the African continent. Most visitors may never have heard of **Theresa Musoke** who was born in 1944 in Uganda, where she continues to live and work. Looking at her paintings, which at once conjure estranged topographies, as they do the warmth of the burning sun, a field of questions peak to the surface. As the eye shifts in-between the portals and corridors of her efflorescing bodies, ones which ascend through the shroud of history, suppressed into the skin of the canvas. In other instances, stories are unspooled to the surface, to the pit of violence such as in her series of street dog paintings: in their animism, their growl can be felt. Elsewhere, ghosts haunt and trail cavernous landscapes. Musoke's process with canvas often begins by using various forms of tea and natural dyes to shape and contour her scenes, also offering a primary membrane for each painting. From here, Musoke fashions abundant worlds of engagement, which cleave to the natural environment via myriad techniques—gestural brushstrokes meet the intimate intricacy of the miniature tradition, as well as the liberatory expanses of expressionism.

Musoke's education was exceptional for a woman of her time. The first female to obtain a degree from the School of Fine Art at Makerere University in 1963, she would later teach in its faculty for several years. In 1965, she won a prize to complete a postgraduate diploma in Printmaking at the Royal College of Art in London followed by a scholarship from the Rockefeller Foundation towards an MFA at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. Upon completion, she split much of her working life between Kampala and Nairobi, Kenya, where she was a key figure in its burgeoning contemporary art scene.

Drawing, printmaking and painting, Musoke was recognised for her desire to experiment with hybrid forms. The confluence of her interests—the history of landscape painting, the representation of the African panorama, animal and human life, gendered representation and its meditation—all constellate together in her unremitting commitment to creating abstract folds within the pictorial plane. They create spaces of breathability, sites for pause and reflection for one's imagination to constitute its own semblance of unity with a world which has not always been willing to acknowledge the act of witnessing. I am proud that Sharjah Art Foundation has been able to engage in dialogue with Musoke through a significant acquisition of her work. I hope through nourishing and ongoing conversations that her legacy shall continue to find its air.

- Prof. Dr Omar Kholeif

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