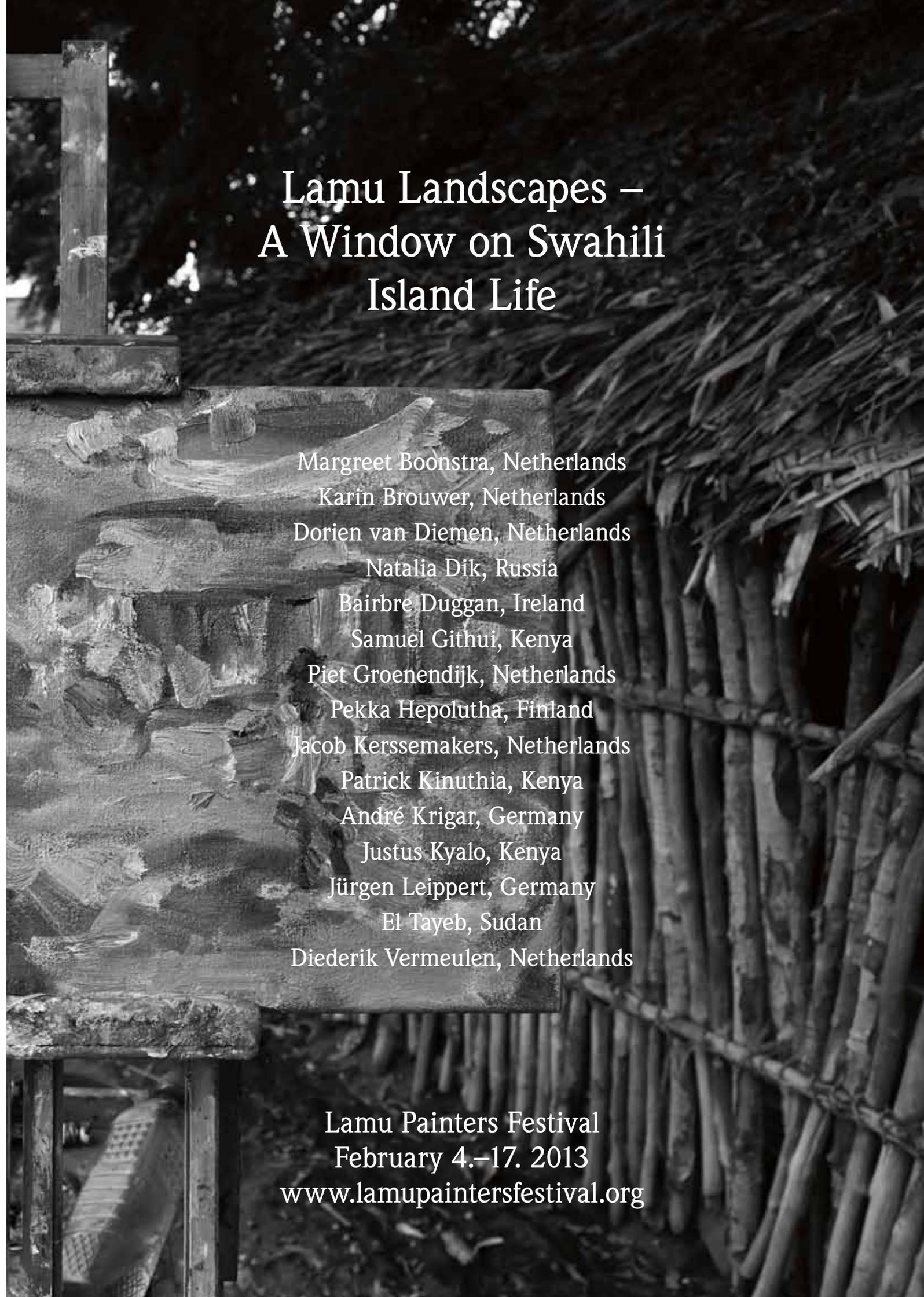


Lamu Landscapes –  
A Window on Swahili  
Island Life





# Lamu Landscapes – A Window on Swahili Island Life

Margreet Boonstra, Netherlands

Karin Brouwer, Netherlands

Dorien van Diemen, Netherlands

Natalia Dik, Russia

Bairbre Duggan, Ireland

Samuel Githui, Kenya

Piet Groenendijk, Netherlands

Pekka Hepolutha, Finland

Jacob Kerssemakers, Netherlands

Patrick Kinuthia, Kenya

André Krigar, Germany

Justus Kyalo, Kenya

Jürgen Leippert, Germany

El Tayeb, Sudan

Diederik Vermeulen, Netherlands

Lamu Painters Festival

February 4.–17. 2013

[www.lamupaintersfestival.org](http://www.lamupaintersfestival.org)







Hadija Ernst

## The Lamu Painters Festival

The Lamu Painters Festival is an event that brings artists from Europe and Africa to the island of Lamu, off the northern coast of Kenya. The participating artists come to paint the landscapes of the island using plein air techniques—figurative paintings that employ abbreviated details and unusual compositions to catch the moment and feeling of a place on canvas. During this year’s festival, 4th to 20th February 2013, 15 artists attended: 11 from Netherlands and Germany and 4 from Nairobi. The 16-day festival provided the artists opportunities to paint Lamu life—from markets to streets scenes and from portraits to landscapes.

Lamu Island has long held the gaze of intrepid artists—writers, painters and photographers—who find the cultural traditions inspiring for their own artistic endeavours. Some of the allure is the layers of history that are apparent in the architecture of the town and the rich artistic traditions that remain vital to continuity of the community, particularly the art of calligraphy, woodcarving, henna painting and music and poetry—all inspired by Islam, the breath of Lamu.

For centuries, Lamu was a major port in the Indian Ocean trade world, where dhows from the Arabian Peninsula and ships from India and China visited, using the monsoon winds to guide their course. A mercantile society developed in Lamu from the trade links of far off lands. But it was more than

goods that were traded; it was also ideas and values. Partnerships developed and intermarriages were common, helping to cement the bonds created by trading. Out of this mix, Lamu emerged with a unique Islamic culture still vibrant in the 21st century. UNESCO has granted Lamu World Heritage status for its contribution to world culture. The natural beauty of the island is inspiring as well—from palms trees to white sand beaches and from fragrant flowers to the turquoise sea. It is here that the Lamu Painters Festival finds a foothold for bringing artists to paint and document daily life and landscapes as well as to celebrate Lamu for its unique cultural heritage.

During the 16-day festival, artists moved around the island daily, sometimes setting up their easels in quirky places—rooftops, alleyways, against chicken coops and displays of tomatoes, workshops and on sailing dhows—to capture on canvas the island life they experienced. More than 220 paintings were completed over the course of the festival—an incredible number of works. They were displayed in Baitl Aman Hotel in Shela village in a public exhibition that continued for the duration of the festival.

Many of the artists were straight off an airplane from wintry Europe. Their eyes had to adjust to the bright equatorial sun and their bodies to the tropical heat. Even artists coming from Nairobi found unfamiliar sights and sounds. Most happily adjusted to the island life style, where shoes are kicked



off, strangers greet each other, donkeys wake you with their braying and prayer call sets the time of day. Yet, in this island paradise, there are challenges facing the community. Poverty is one, easily observed and documented. For many festival artists, Lamu is their first experience in Africa and living in a Moslem community. It is the intention of the festival to create a safe space to enable artists to examine their notions of Africa and Islam against real life situations and with real people. Often the Interactions that occur engender new ways of seeing and being in the world. In turn, these experiences can influence the artists' ideas and observations and how they paint.

The festival organisers chose a variety of places on Lamu and neighbouring Manda Island that they expected would pique the interest of artists during the festival. They visited two sites on Manda, including 17th century ruins of Takwa and the industrious quarry village of Maweni. On Lamu, they visited a farm on the outskirts of town, the bustling Lamu market, Matondoni, a village on the farside of the island and many spots along the seaside. The Painters Festival coincided with the annual Maulid Festival in Lamu, a special Islamic celebration, which provided an opportunity for artists to experience and paint the religious activities of the community. On the final days of the festival, the organisers hosted a dhow race, which brought sailors and boats from other islands to compete in the event, an opportunity for artists at their easels.

Lamu resident Herbert Menzer is the creator and organiser of The Lamu Painters Festival. He describes the festival as a means of celebrating Lamu with artists who can translate the natural and cultural beauty of the island to a wider audience through paintings. This was the second Lamu Painters Festival; the first took place in February 2011. The event is sponsored by the Lamu Painters Festival, a not-for-profit organisation.

2013 Lamu Painters Festival artists: Margreet Boonstra, Netherlands; Karin Brouwer, Netherlands; Dorien van Diemen, Netherlands; Natalia Dik, Russia; Bairbre Duggan, Ireland; Samuel Githui, Kenya; Piet Groenendijk, Netherlands; Pekka Hepolutha, Finland; Jacob Kerssemakers, Netherlands; Patrick Kinuthia, Kenya; André Krigar, Germany; Justus Kyalo, Kenya; Jürgen Leippert, Germany; El Tayeb, Sudan; Diederik Vermeulen, Netherlands





△ Jürgen Leippert. "Dhow Race", 25 x 25 cm (Detail)    ▽ Diederik Vermeulen. "Dhow Race", 40 x 50 cm    △ Natalia Dik. "Dhow Race", 25 x 25 cm





Jürgen Leippert. "Dhow Race", 60 x 80 cm

## Lamu Painters Festival Dhow Race

The whistle blows and, in a rush of movement, a gaggle of hands and bodies heave against the boat's stern to shove off from shore. Competing against 8 other sailboats, Shukriyaa's sailors are moving fast. The 15-member crew jump on board as the boat leaves the shore and they nimbly begin the arduous task of setting sail. No automation here. It is raw strength and muscle as they pull ropes to lift mast and sail into place, much like sailors from earlier centuries. The crowds on the beach shout encouragement. And they're off.

Sailing competitions are popular in Lamu. And competing boats have special racing sails—extra-large—to increase their speed. It is a serious sport for crews and a delight for all who gather on the beach or on higher ground to watch the race. In Shela, they start on the beach in front of Peponi Hotel, a distinct landmark in the village with its old-world charm. Their patio and grounds above the beach becomes a viewing grandstand marked by tourists, expatriates and local patrons. At sea-level, the beach runs wild with kids, donkeys and other onlookers sharing the excitement of the race.

The Lamu Painters Festival artists have scoped out places to set up their easels to document the race, the crowds and the joyous atmosphere. A few choose the Peponi patio to

catch close views of the crowds assembled. Others choose quieter spots beneath sheltering palms for panoramic views of the dhows racing the course. At intervals, the sailboats line up, all moving in one direction with their graceful lateen sails angled to catch as much wind as they can bear. The dhows are filled with crew who shift their weight in the boat for balance against the power of the wind as the boat cuts through the water.

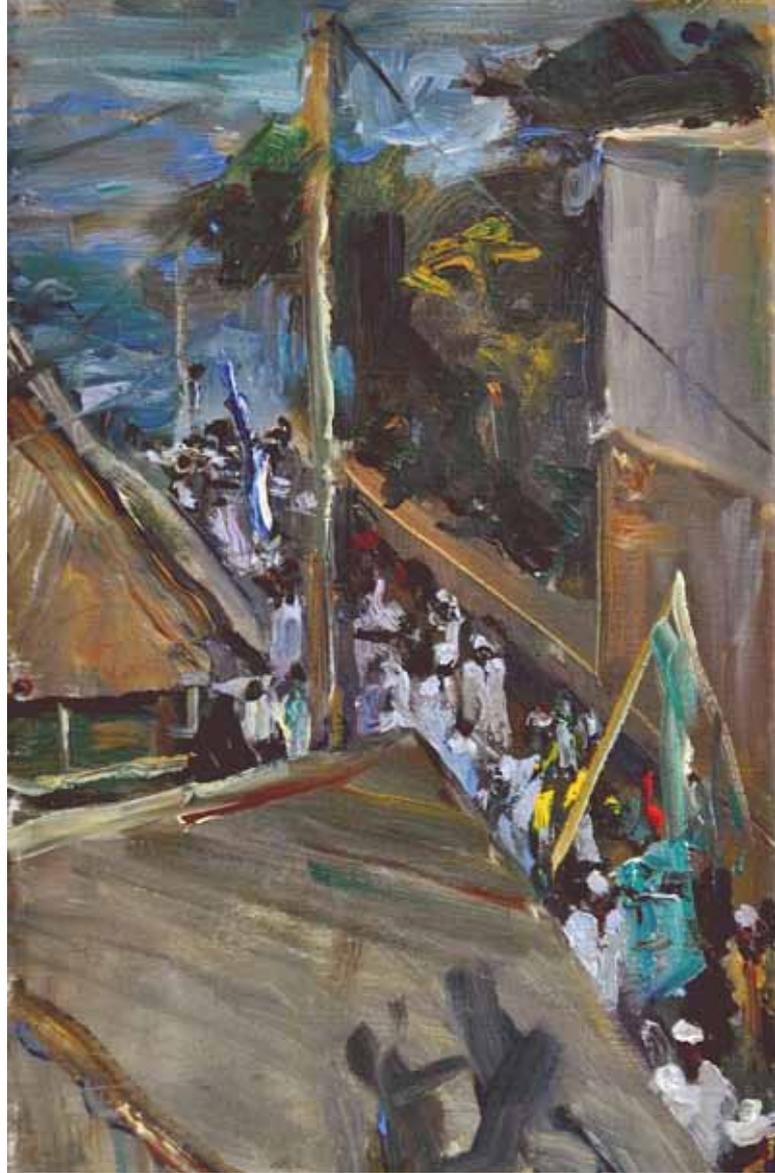
On shore, the crowds follow the boats as they pass and continue the course. Their return accelerates the shouts on the beach. The winning dhow approaches the beach at full speed. Their supporters rush out to meet them, charging through the water. The deadly head-on collision between the winning dhow and the crowds is stopped when the captain drops sail nearing approach. Cheering supporters heave themselves to the deck ululating for the winner. And as is the tradition in Lamu, the winning boat must sink. The crowds cheer as the boat capsizes and goes under. Luckily, the water is shallow and recovering is an easy task with the willing crowds at hand.



△ Jakob Kersemakers. "Procession", 36 x 165 cm (Detail)



△ Jürgen Leippert. "Procession", 18 x 24 cm



▽ Margret Boonstra. "Procession", 40 x 30 cm

△ Dorien van Diemen. "Procession", 45 x 25 cm





△ André Krigar. "Procession", 50 x 50 cm (Detail)

▽ Karin Brouwer. "Procession", 40 x 40 cm

## Maulid Festival in Lamu

Auspiciously, the 2013 Lamu Painters Festival coincided with the community's celebration of Maulid, an annual commemoration of the birth of the Prophet Mohamed. In Lamu, the month-long Maulid celebration culminates in a festival, which attracts Muslim pilgrims from East Africa, India, Europe and America. There are religious celebrations organised by the two largest mosques in town, as well as secular activities that the Lamu Museum sponsors in the 3-day festival, including calligraphy and poetry competition and swimming and donkey races. The festival culminates in a procession or Zefe, as it is known in Lamu, a parade through Lamu Town with the crowds of pilgrims lining the streets. Anticipating this joyous procession, artists gathered on roof tops, ready with easel and canvas to paint the procession as it made its way through town.

◁ Diederik Vermeulen. "Procession", 30 x 24 cm





▽ “Domino”, 40 x 50 cm



▽ “Market”, 30 x 30 cm (Detail)



## Margreet Boonstra

Margreet Boonstra had a difficult decision to make. “Why in heaven’s name should I go to Africa to paint?” she asked herself. Months before the Lamu Painters Festival she was vacillating: “once a week I decided I would not go.” Her indecision was based on news reports about Somalia and memories of the national elections in Kenya that lead to violence in 2008. Besides these political roadblocks to traveling, Margreet also questioned how she would be able to translate in paint on canvas the new sights she would experience and the absolute foreign-ness of Lamu in comparison to her familiar life in the Netherlands. Yet, in spite of these misgivings she came and, according to her, “immediately on landing in Lamu, I felt peaceful.”

She admits that her perceptions of Islam have also been rattled. “I found here a respect and dedication to life” among this Muslim community, she remarks. Margreet compares her findings to rural life in the Netherlands generations ago, when people were more dependent on their neighbours and respectful to the older generation. Driving the point home, she describes walking about in Shela village, where donkeys wan-

der and winding foot paths are the main arteries through the town. “I get lost all the time in the labyrinth,” she laughs unapologetically, “but you always find someone who asks respectfully ‘are you lost?’ and they go out of their way to bring you home.”

In Lamu, Margreet concentrated on the new kinds of light she witnessed. Her palette changed perceptibly to lighter colours, emphasizing the sun’s brightness on the landscape in contrast to the deeper shadows of interiors. But light was not her only challenge. “Lamu is vibrant” she comments. Translating the vibrancy she experienced and sense of connectedness of people became central to her painting goals at the festival.

Margreet Boonstra was born in 1967 in the northern stretches of the Netherlands. She trained in fine arts at the Minerva Academy, Groningen. She is a plein air painter who loves the open space and skies of the landscapes native to her home. Margreet runs a part-time school program for kids in which she teaches them the skills of plein air painting.



Margreet Boonstra. "Matondoni", 40 x 30 cm



△ Margreet Boonstra. "Omar Sailor", 40 x 55 cm    ▽ Margreet Boonstra. "Maweni Carrier", 50 x 64 cm





△ Karin Brouwer. "Shamba", 40 x 55 cm    ▽ Karin Brouwer. "Peponi Beach", 50 x 62 cm





Karin Brouwer. "Maweni", 50 x 40 cm



▽ “Grace”, 100 x 50 cm (Detail)

## Karin Brouwer

Karin Brouwer prefers painting subjects familiar to her and that’s one of the reasons why she repeatedly turned down the invitation to participate in the Lamu Painters Festival. Lamu was a bit too far and too foreign for her. “Herbert Menzer [the organiser of the festival] asked me twice to come to Lamu and I said ‘no,’” she remembers, smiling at herself. Finally, “the third time, I said ‘yes’”. And she’s glad she did. “Lamu is amazing,” she tells me. Her painting experience at the festival has made her ‘stretch’, she says, and moved her outside of her comfort zone – not a bad thing for artists.

In Matondoni, I watched as Karin finished a portrait of a woman busy with domestic chores in front of her home. Karin explained that she liked the intimate space of the home, where neighbour women gather to chat and children to play. “I’m lucky,” Karin remarks, “She has been busy washing clothes for 2 hours so it has given me the opportunity to paint her.” Even as Karin folds her easel and sits to relax in the shade away from the mid-day sun, her host continues with her chores and chatting with other women. Her husband arrives and slides off his donkey in front of our resting

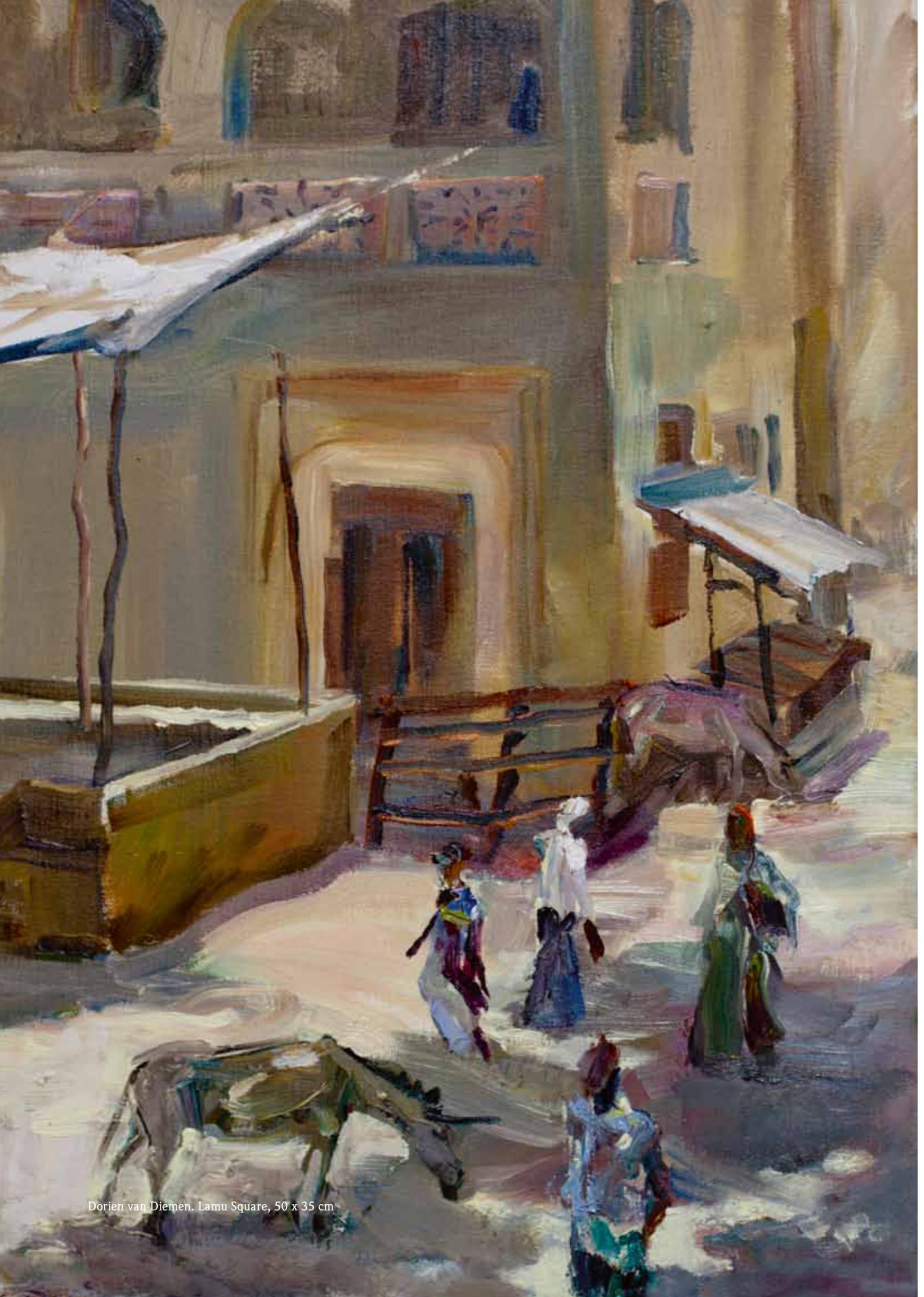
place. He removes a sharp knife from his waist band and begins to cut into the hard surface of a green coconut or madafu, as it is known locally. Slicing off the top, he hands each of us one – a local refreshment from the tree. Karin is humbled by the offer, such grace from her hosts who have little beyond their daily sustenance.

Karin Brouwer was born in 1964 in the Netherlands. She was trained as a visualizer and illustrator and she worked for many years as a make-up artist for television. She began painting as a hobby almost 20 years ago to help her relax from the intense world of TV production. Her participation in the Lamu Painters Festival has opened new vistas for her. Now, she wants to travel more often and paint in new places.



▽ “Matondoni”, 50 x 50 cm





Dorien van Diemen. Lamu Square, 50 x 35 cm



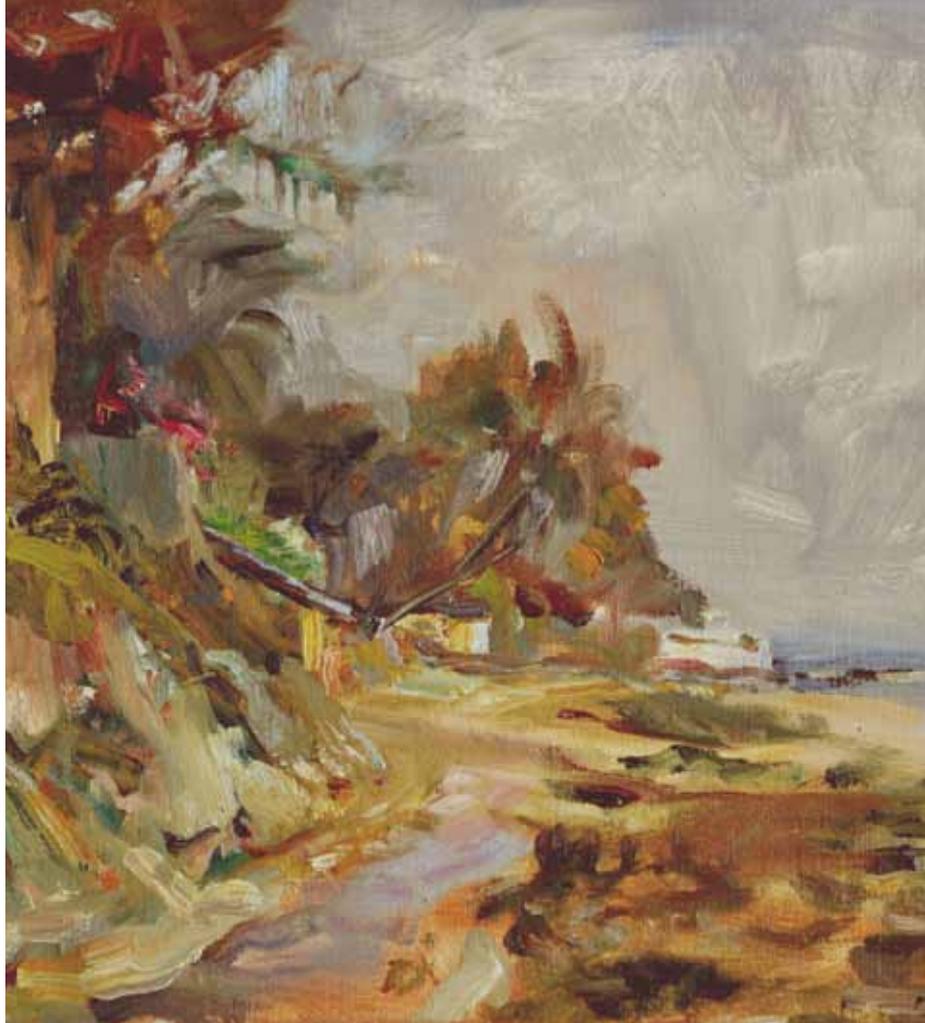
"Sheela", 35 x 55 cm

## Dorien van Diemen

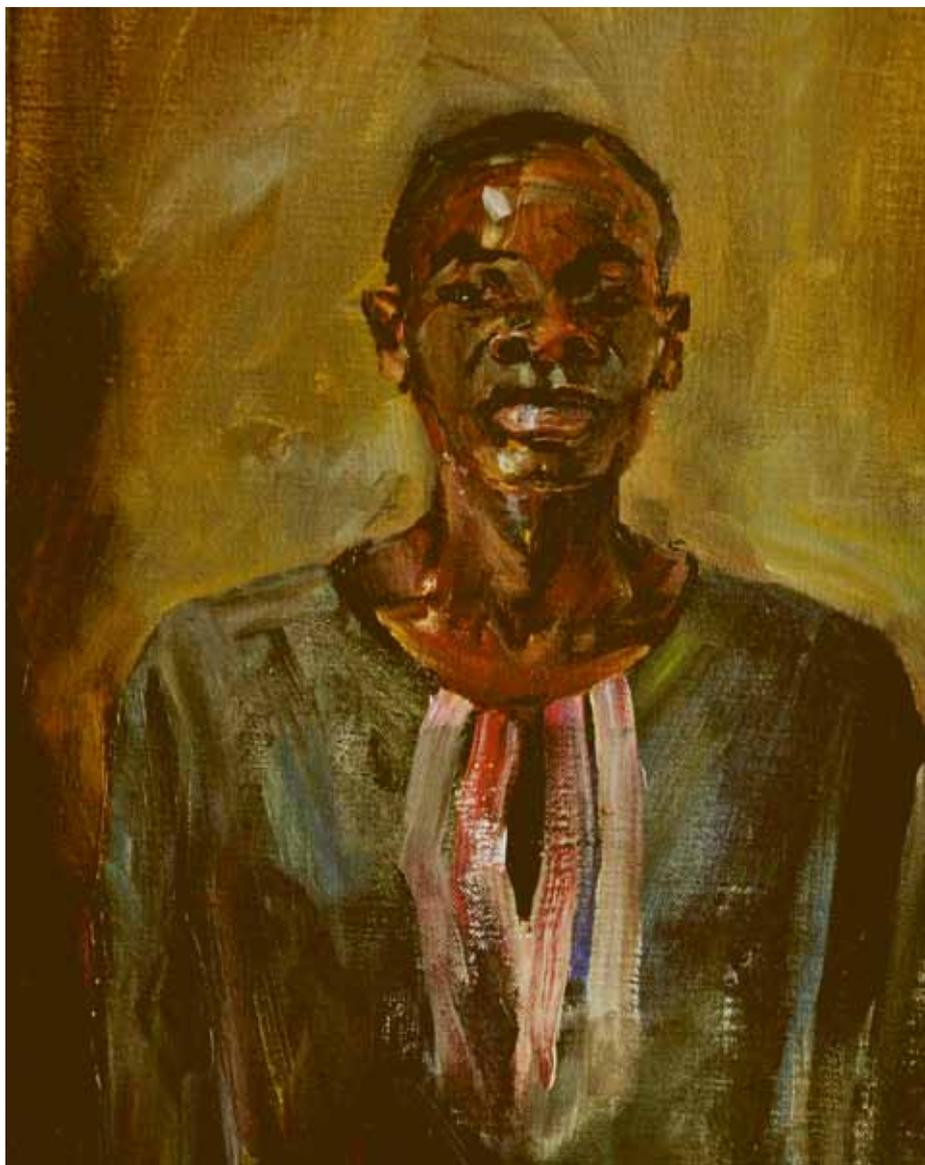
"Nothing is normal for me in Lamu," Dorien van Diemen comments. The light, colours, people, houses are very different from her life in rural Scotland, where she lives with her family or in Amsterdam where she was born. The differences, she concedes, make painting in Lamu a challenge. A challenge that is also ideological in her mind. "We are painting in a place where people can't afford to purchase a painting or even have a place to put one," she comments. Yet, these tangible experiences with things different have inspired and expanded her visual repertoire.

Donning a wide-brim sunhat, Dorien sets up her easel in Lamu's busy market place. She engrosses herself in the activities around her: women selling chickens, donkeys laden with market goods and the busy to and fro of people. Her painting, propped on easel, draws a group of curious onlookers. She smiles at the gathered children then deftly shifts her concentration back to painting. Her eyes hone in on her canvas. She stands back to gauge the accuracy of her picture. She tests it by measures she contrives using her fingers and brush to form angles along a line of sight. Her hands move with concentrated precision and the movements remind me of graceful Tai Chi poses, a signature of her painting style. "When painting, I feel closer to what I see and what is going on," Dorien remarks. It is her way of bringing the experience closer and creating a vivid memory of Lamu.

Dorien van Diemen was born in 1969. She studied graphic design to become an illustrator but later became interested in painting and went back to school for studies in fine arts. She has a knack for painting people at work, an interest that grew out of a desire to document her parents working at their printing press before retirement. She has also painted people at work in a diamond factory and the circus. More recently she has turned her hand to portraits.



△ "Fishermen's Beach", 35 x 40 cm    ▽ "Ngala", 35 x 25 cm

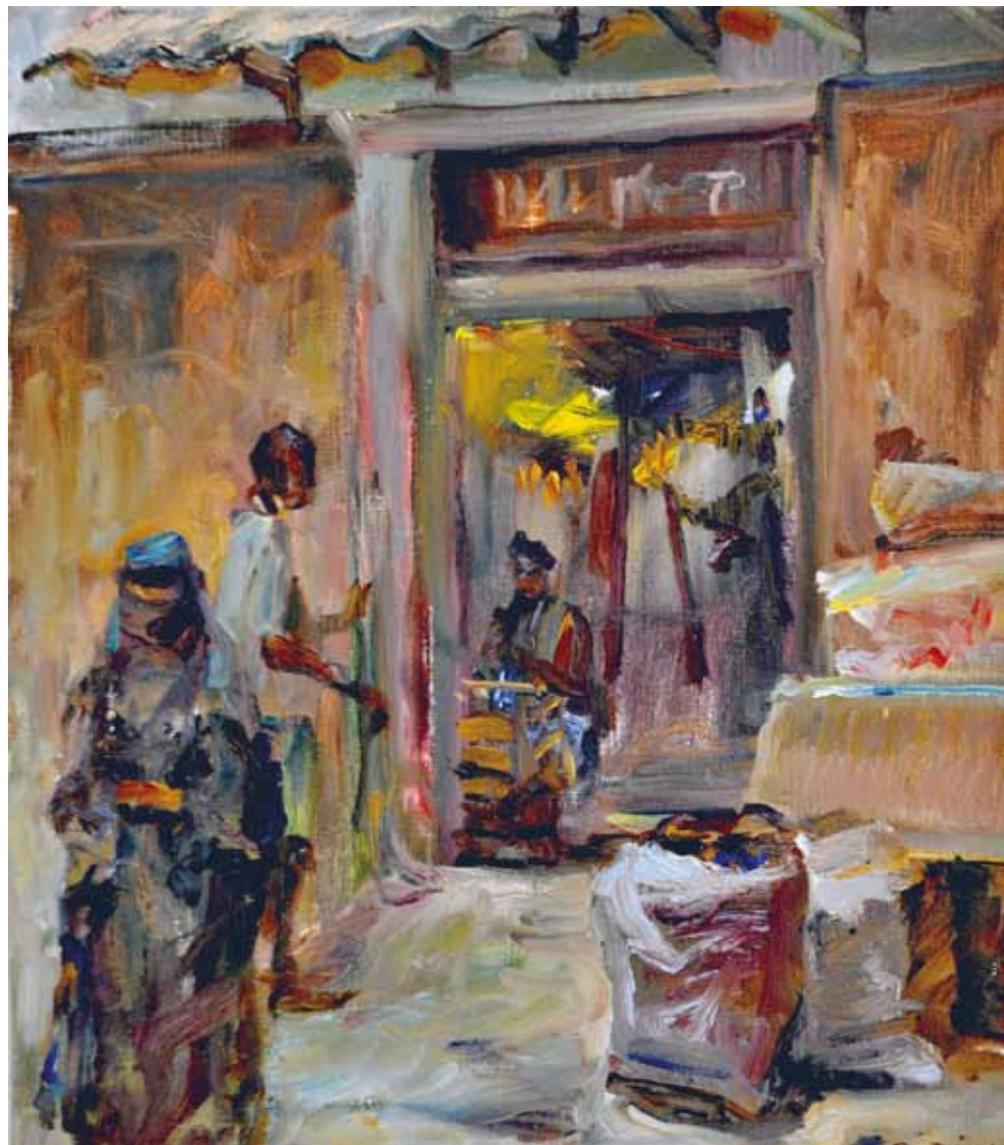




▽ Dorien van Diemen. "Dhow Race", 60 x 30 cm

△ Dorien van Diemen. "Talking Tree", 35 x 55 cm

▽ Dorien van Diemen. "Market", 45 x 40 cm





▽ “Habibti”, 40 x 50 cm

## Samuel Githui

Samuel Githui is known for painting realistic versions of familiar city scapes of Nairobi, his hometown. His city scenes make people smile at the wit, intelligence and capacity of the human spirit and to grimace at the faltering social and political system that necessitates living so precariously. But in Lamu, Githui is always in awe at the tranquillity he experiences, as if the sea washes over him erasing the noise, the hustle and the rough edges of Nairobi from his skin. “The rich culture and the environment in Lamu,” he gently reflects, “is like no other place. It is as life should be.” Githui has visited Lamu numerous times, for art festivals and workshops as well as visiting on his own initiative. That speaks volumes.

What he likes about the Lamu Painters Festival is working in public and on site. “I am used to sketching, then taking the sketches back to my studio to work on them in oils,” he says. “That’s why working in the open air and painting in public is a good experience. You transform the moment into art-work there and then.” In the open, artists do interact with the public, often a group of people stand by watching and making comments, visibly moved by colours creating

forms that are recognizable. Githui enjoys boat rides and visiting villages like Maweni and Matandoni, modes of traveling and places so different from his usual haunts. “When I visit Lamu,” he says, “I am always surprised by the new ideas I have later and how these ideas come out in my work.”

Samuel Githui was born in 1973 in Kenya. He studied visual arts at the Creative Art Centre in Nairobi and survived in the city by painting billboards and signs. Later, Githui won several national competitions including the Kenya Museum Society Art Festival and the Alliance Française and the Goethe Institut Juried Art Competition. He has also participated in the East African Biennale in Bujumbura and Kigale. Githui was selected for an artist in residence program in Venice, Italy and his residency work was exhibited in the show “Art Enclosures” in the same city. This is Githui’s second time to participate in the Lamu Painters Festival.



▽ “Neighbour”, 60 x 50 cm





Samuel Githui. "Shela Seafront", 20 x 50 cm (Detail)

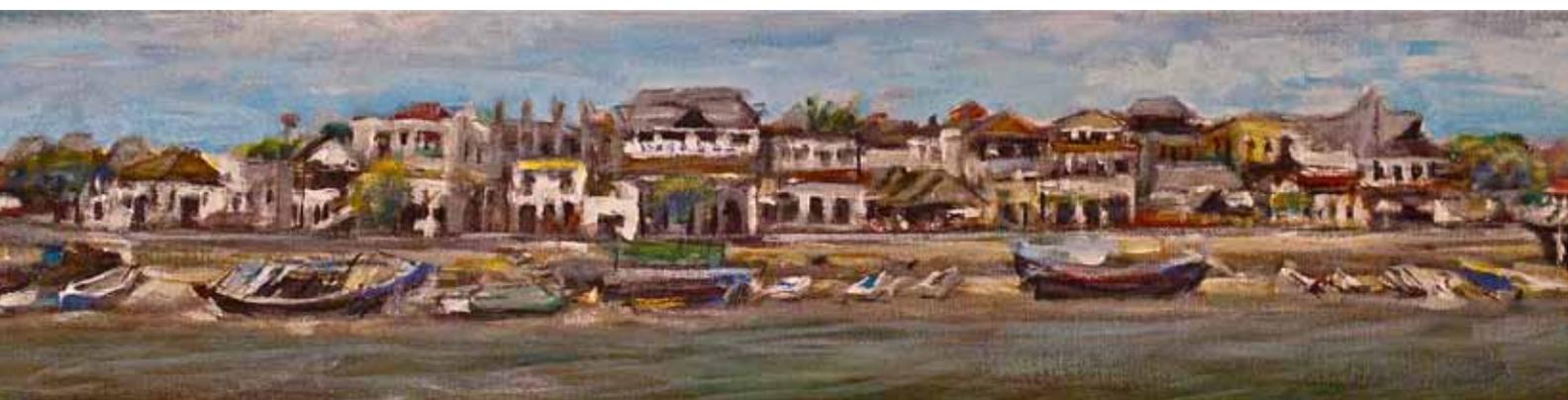


Samuel Githui. "Dhow Race", 20 x 100 cm



△ Samuel Githui. "Seafront Shela", 20 x 100 cm

▽ Samuel Githui. "Seafront Lamu Town", 20 x 100 cm





▽ “Tractor in Lamu”, 40 x 50 cm (Detail)

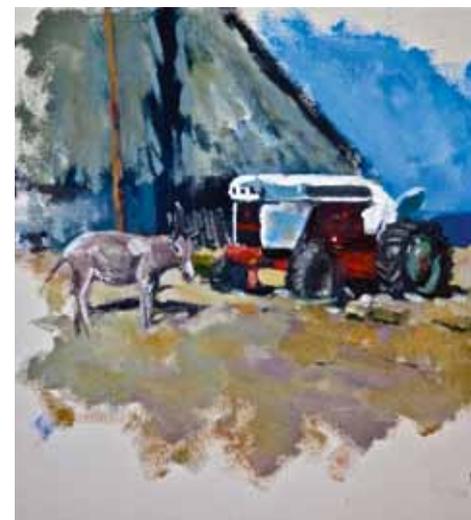
## Patrick Kinuthia

The Lamu Painters Festival gave Kinuthia his first experience of being near the ocean, traveling in boats and seeing Kenya’s coastal life first hand. “I love it,” he tells me. “It is a totally different environment from what I am used to in Nairobi.” First there are no cars and the mode of transportation is by boat. Then, the architecture is so different. “I am used to a gate, a lawn and a house” in that order, says Kinuthia. Here, the homes are walled and in its private space you find a garden or courtyard with flowers and trees. “I was really taken by the buildings here. I had never seen anything like Swahili architecture before. It was one of the first things I shared with my family on return.” Kinuthia also likes the respect that he saw for the many donkeys on the island. “I have witnessed donkeys being mistreated in some areas of Kenya. But here I was glad to see them treated well.”

Kinuthia enjoyed visiting Matandoni, one of the day trips scheduled by the festival organisers. “That trip really stands out,” he tells me. He describes the way the group of artists were received by the villagers and given cut mangoes and madafu (immature coconuts with succulent juice) to drink. “The villagers were incredibly welcoming”

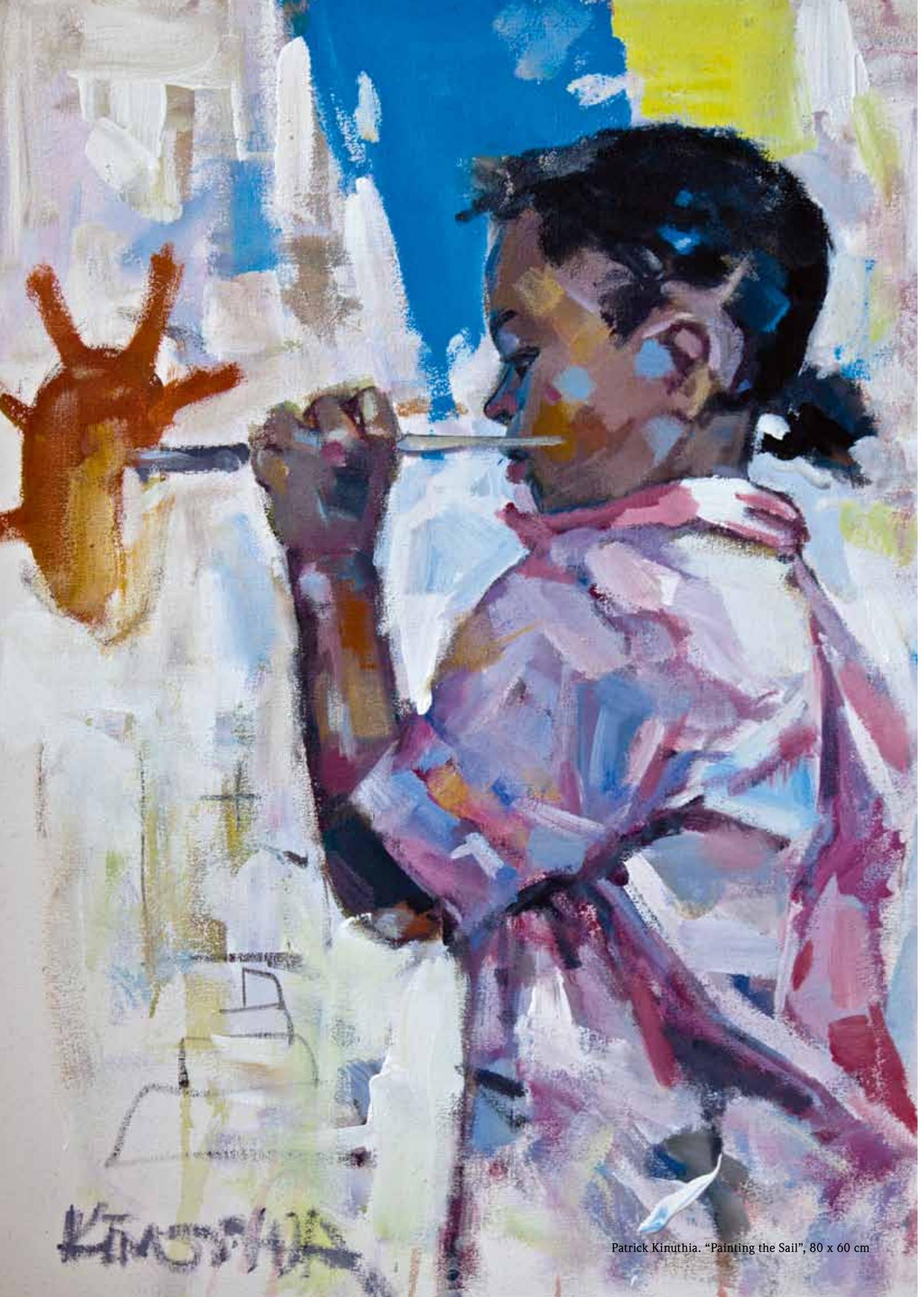
he remembers. “It was a powerful experience for me.” He describes how his guide led him around the village seeking out a scene that caught his interest to paint. When he finally decided on the place, it happened that he had chosen the house and family of his guide. Both were surprised and pleased at the coincidence. Kinuthia also remembers fondly the trip to a farm on the outskirts of Lamu Town. “I remember painting a granary but also I remember the fantastic food we were served sitting on mats under the mango trees.” Afterwards, the artists were given a demonstration of climbing coconut trees without the use of ancillary support. They watched in awe. “He was up that tree in 10 seconds!” Kinuthia exclaims unbelievably.

Patrick Kinuthia was born in 1967 in Jerusalem, Nairobi. He studied graphic design in Nairobi at the Kenya Polytechnic University. After graduating, he worked as an illustrator designing posters and book covers among other things. He turned to painting later working with a local Pakistani artist, Mohamed Rafiq. Kinuthia enjoys painting portraits and he specializes in the many cultural faces of Kenya. The artist lives in Nairobi with his family.



▽ “Baitil Aman”, 50 x 40 cm





Kinuthia

Patrick Kinuthia. "Painting the Sail", 80 x 60 cm



## Justus Kyalo

“I envy the kids growing up in Lamu” Justus Kyalo remarks, as he watches children playing freely in carless streets and riding donkeys for pleasure. The pace of Lamu life works well for him and its landscapes are in inspiration. “I love the ocean, beaches and plants that I see,” he exclaims, all the natural elements that make Lamu a special place. Kyalo’s method of working is to experience the space he is in by sitting and listening to people around him, whether it is the market, the town square, shops, seated in someone’s orchard of mangoes or at the seaside. From these moments he collects the nuances of moods, the buzz, so to speak. Then, back at his work space he begins to translate the sights, sounds and smells with paint on unstretched canvas. Wearing headphones to hear his music, he begins the process. He dyes the canvas in colour and applies further layers with a brush. The effect is colours absorbed, resonating with moods, fragments of memories or suggestive natural elements. Sometimes he scratches the surface, like an etching of calligraphy, which resonates with Arabic writing so prevalent on houses and doorways in Lamu.

Justus Kyalo was born in 1972 in Nairobi, Kenya. He trained at the Creative

Arts Centre and worked as an illustrator briefly. His early paintings were inspired by the world of fashion and dance, often involving his own experiments in performance with music and dancing. This experience slowly transformed his approach to painting. He found himself improvising more and working with his feelings and his painting progressively became non-figurative. Kyalo is one of Nairobi’s acknowledged artists and he has attended workshops in Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Kenya and Cameroon, on the African continent as well as Oxford, in the UK.





Justus Kyalo. "Untitled", 60 x 50 cm



Justus Kyalo. "Untitled", 60 x 50 cm



Justus Kyalo. "Untitled", 60 x 50 cm



Justus Kyalo. "Untitled", 60 x 50 cm



## Jacob Kerssemakers

Jacob Kerssemakers finds similarities between Lamu and Aruba, an island in the southern Caribbean Sea where he grew up. He singles out the personable interactions among islanders and of course the fishing activities that are so important to island cuisine and livelihoods. It is the tempo of island life in Lamu that resonates with his childhood memories in Aruba. Yet, he is quick to point out the differences too. "There are many experiences that are special to Lamu," Jacob insists. For one, Lamu is predominantly Muslim and the rhythms of life are accentuated by the calls to prayer five times a day. Another difference is the depth of Swahili history in Lamu which enriches local culture.

Jacob and I met on one of the twisting alleyways that are a landmark of Lamu Town. His easel was placed in a doorway in the shade of a wikio, an underpass created by connecting houses on opposite sides of the street, a traditional architectural feature in Lamu's historic district. His eyes focused on the sharp vertical lines created by the 3-storied houses lining the narrow alleyway ahead. Meanwhile, I took a look at his equipment. His easel is a specialized homemade concoction that enables him to paint panoramic views of more than 3 metres in length. How? The easel holds a portion of the canvas flat while the remainder is rolled hidden from view. The artist works on a section at a time and when finished rolls up the painted portion and unrolls more unfinished canvas.

"I have it worked out," he remarked as I cautioned him of the donkeys approaching his easel. "If it is a donkey carrying loads on his sides, I have to move my easel. But if it is simply carrying a load on top, I am okay. There is enough space for him to pass." The calculations of space, time and oncoming donkeys as well as easel craftsmanship are an indication of his interests. Jacob is a scientist and works as a bio-physicist, at least part of the time. "Yes, I like to figure things out and I am methodical," Jacob tells me. When he is not painting, he works part time at a university research centre in Amsterdam. His part time status is a choice and it has enabled him to pursue his art interests. Jacob Kerssemakers was born in 1968 in Aruba of Dutch parents. He is a plein air painter with a twist; he creates panoramic views on location, some which reach over 8 metres in length. His subject matter includes landscapes both rural and urban industrial. He studied fine arts in Amsterdam and completed in 2012.





Jacob Kerssemakers. "Shela Dhow Race", 35 x 220 cm



Jacob Kerssemakers. "Race Day at Peponi Beach", 35 x 220 cm



Jacob Kerssemakers. "Shela Shoreline", 35 x 220 cm cm



Jacob Kerssemakers. "Maweni Quarry Harbour", 35 x 220 cm





△ "Procession", 30 x 40 cm



## Natalia Dik

"Wow, what a hard bright light there is in Lamu," Natalia tells me through her friend and interpreter Margreet Boonstra. "And," she laughs, "the moon is upside down." We chuckle together, enjoying the moment on her veranda. The breeze whips up and carries the sounds of children playing on neighbouring balconies. Natalia loves living in the middle of the village. "This is real life," she tells me. "It is pure...and you feel connected to it immediately when you come here." The purity she mentions is an organic quality, a natural composition removed from artifice. She sees this in the way people interact with one another and the informal nature of life in the village. "My apartment in Shela," she tells me, "reminds me of the light from my childhood summers in Siberia." She speaks fondly of her youth and the freedom and the warmth from the sun experienced as a child. She points out that in painting it is similar. "You go back to your core before art studies, before the academy and translate scenes" on canvas. In Lamu, Natalia was inspired by

the atmosphere, particularly the light and wind of the place. She painted several works focusing on these elements. "I mix the light and wind with my emotions and connect it with my experience," she says, trying to explain to me her method of painting. The words are difficult for her to express, especially in a conversation moving from English to German to Russian. But I get it. For her, painting is more than the sum of her vision, rather, it is a deep, gut reaction to her experiences. Describing her attempts to paint the wind, Natalia says, "It is like meditation. You are concentrated, but floating... connected to it. It becomes your state of being."

Natalia Nikolaevna was born in Russia in 1961. She studied fine arts at the Novoaltaysk College of Art and later at the then Leningrad Institute of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. She lives part time in Amsterdam and the rest in St Petersburg, where she is a member of the St Petersburg Union of Artists. This is Natalia's second attendance of the Lamu Painters Festival.



△ "Makuti Weaver", 40 x 55 cm    ▽ "Husna", 30 x 40 cm



△ "After the Rain", 50 x 40 cm



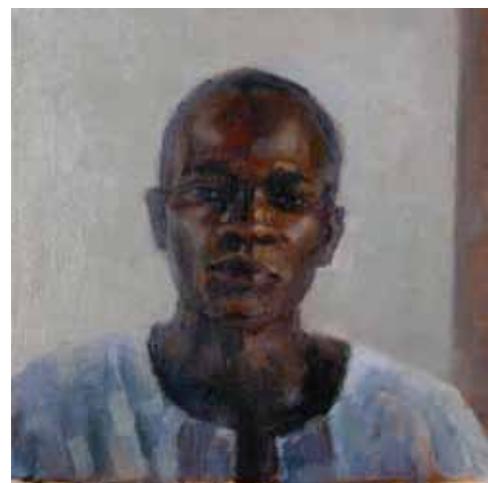


△ Natalia Dik. "Grace", 50 x 60 cm    ▽ Natalia Dik. "Maweni", 50 x 60 cm





▽ “Ngala”, 40 x 40 cm



▽ “Rangaleni”, 35 x 30 cm



## Bairbre Duggan

“I was exhausted, uptight and anxious” says Bairbre reflecting on her state of mind when she left the Netherlands for Kenya. Traveling to Africa for a painters’ festival with people she hardly knew seemed quirky if not downright absurd. Yet, the experience has had a tremendous impact on the artist. “You come here and shed skin,” she explains, referring to her initial anxiety. “Because everything flows.” It flows to a Lamu rhythm where tides and calls to prayer create the tempo. “It’s so sensual,” she remarks, and points out the vibrant colours, floral scents and food spices that she experiences every day. But it is more than that. Her painting techniques have developed as a result of her interaction with the other painters and the local community: “I have learned so much from others at the festival,” she says.

There have been challenges to overcome, however. For one, Bairbre found it difficult to paint on visits to Maweni and Matondoni, two nearby villages accessed by boat, as well as the Festival dhow competition in Shela village. These outings and events require the artist to quickly interpret the moment on canvas as a plein

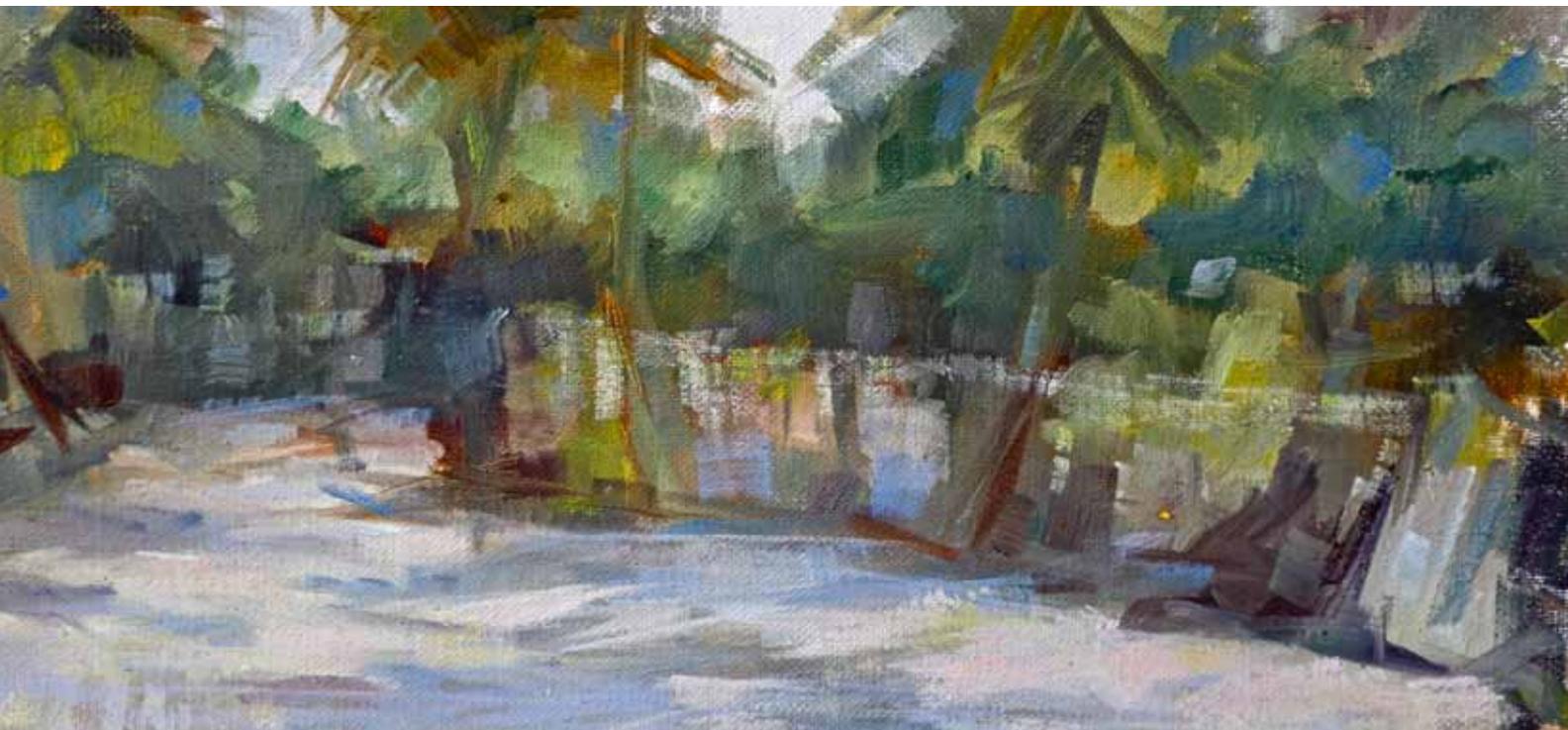
air technique and Bairbre, like others, felt it challenged their normal painting methods. “But it was good for me,” she exclaims, “to test my ability to work fast.”

On unscheduled festival days, Bairbre took the opportunity to do portraits. One portrait she chose to paint was a Masai in his traditional regalia. “It is difficult,” she tells me, “because it is easy to make the painting look kitsch”, like the touristic images of Masai warriors emblematic of Kenya’s tourism market. “I am interested in his stance, his body language... it is loose and suppl... I am less interested in the superficial,” she remarks.

Bairbre Duggan was born in 1968 in Ireland. She lives in the Netherlands with her family. Bairbre has a degree in art history and English from Dublin and later she trained in fine arts in the Netherlands. She describes her route to painting as ‘circuitous’. That is, she has worked at many different jobs including art historian, designer, editor and even yoga teacher until she came back to her initial ambition to paint, which she now does on a full-time basis.



△ Baibre Duggan. "Lamu Pier I", 30 x 60 cm



△ Baibre Duggan. "In the Shamba", 20 x 40 cm    ▽ Baibre Duggan. "Lamu Seafront", 30 x 60 cm

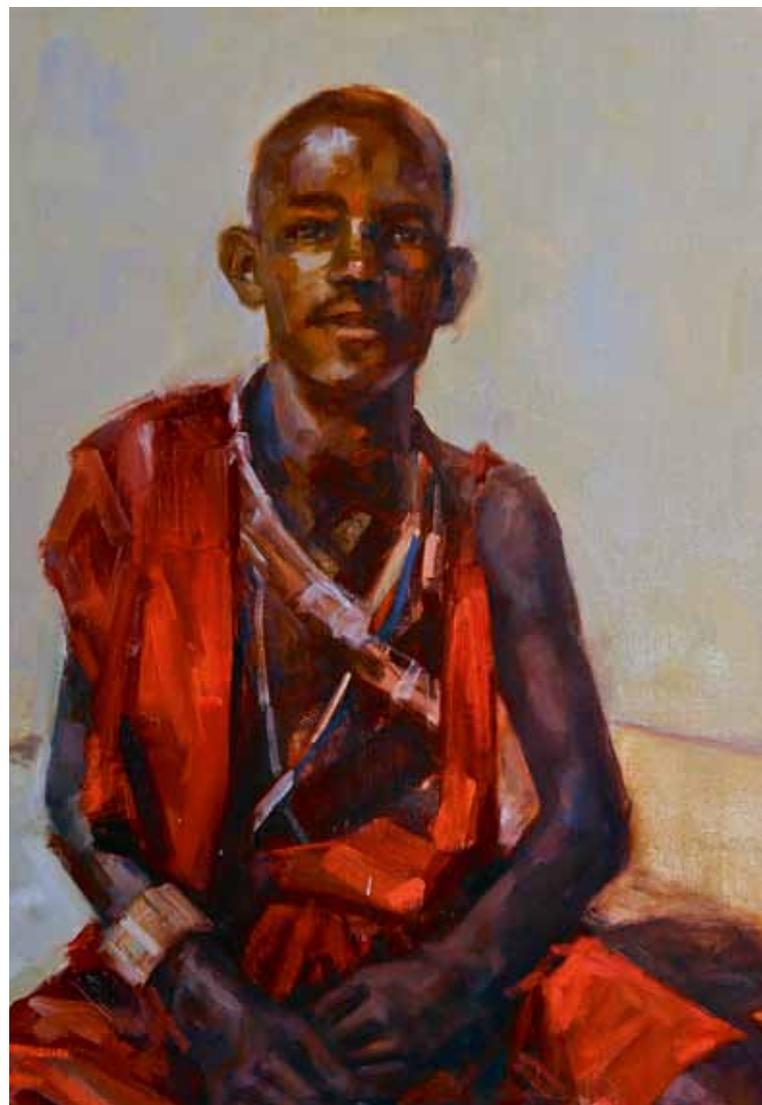




△ Baibre Duggan. "From my Room", 35 x 30 cm  
▽ Baibre Duggan. "Massai I", 40 x 55 cm



△ Baibre Duggan. "Shela Pathway", 35 x 30 cm  
▽ Baibre Duggan. "Massai II", 40 x 55 cm





Piet Groenendijk. "Meat Market", 50 x 40 cm

## Piet Groenendijk

The 2013 Lamu Painters Festival brings Piet Groenendijk to Lamu for the third time. He was in Lamu for the 2011 Festival and returned in 2012 to paint and exhibit in a group show in Shela. He describes Lamu as a place that has “everything you don’t expect”. One big surprise for him is the warmth of the people towards strangers like himself and the fact that “people are joyful and they greet each other in the streets,” he says, reflecting on the contrast between his home in Amsterdam and Lamu. He was also taken aback at the festive reception the artists received when they visited the small village of Matondoni, located on the western shores of the island. “The welcome they gave us was unexpected,” he recounts, describing the dancing and singing party that greeted them on the shores. “It was really a nice atmosphere all because of the people of Matondoni,” says Piet. “Otherwise the place is just grey and dusty.”

“I find it interesting to paint touristic things,” he tells me. It was not what I expected to hear but then I realized he meant things that interest tourists. That makes sense. He liked the market, the dhows, the architecture and the cultural activities

involving people. He was in his element at the Lamu market with its hustle and bustle of people. Standing at his easel before the doors of the market, Piet’s figure is at once recognizable with his trademark brown-checked fedora atop his head. He works calmly, concentrating on his painting and unruffled by people who stop and stare at his work. His painting captures the quieter moment of mid-day when most shoppers have come and gone. There are only a few stragglers about and the market people are hoping to make a sale before the morning ends. The heat is intense and the white plaster façade of the walls accentuate the light while election posters punctuate their surface. Piet’s brush strokes are brief, economized like shorthand writing. They capture vividly the mid-day moment at the market.

Piet Groenendijk was born in 1949 in the Netherlands. He studied medicine and worked as a general practitioner for many years. He began painting as a hobby in 1984 and later returned to school to study fine arts. Piet now dedicates half of his time to his painting career and the other half as a doctor in Amsterdam.



“Dhow Race”, 30 x 40 cm (Detail)



“Fiametta”, 50 x 60 cm





Piet Groenendijk. "Lamu Square", 50 x 40 cm



Pekka Hepolutha. "Lamu Square", 50 x 47 cm (Detail)



▽ “Lazy Club”, 50 x 47 cm



▽ “Shela Morning”, 40 x 40 cm



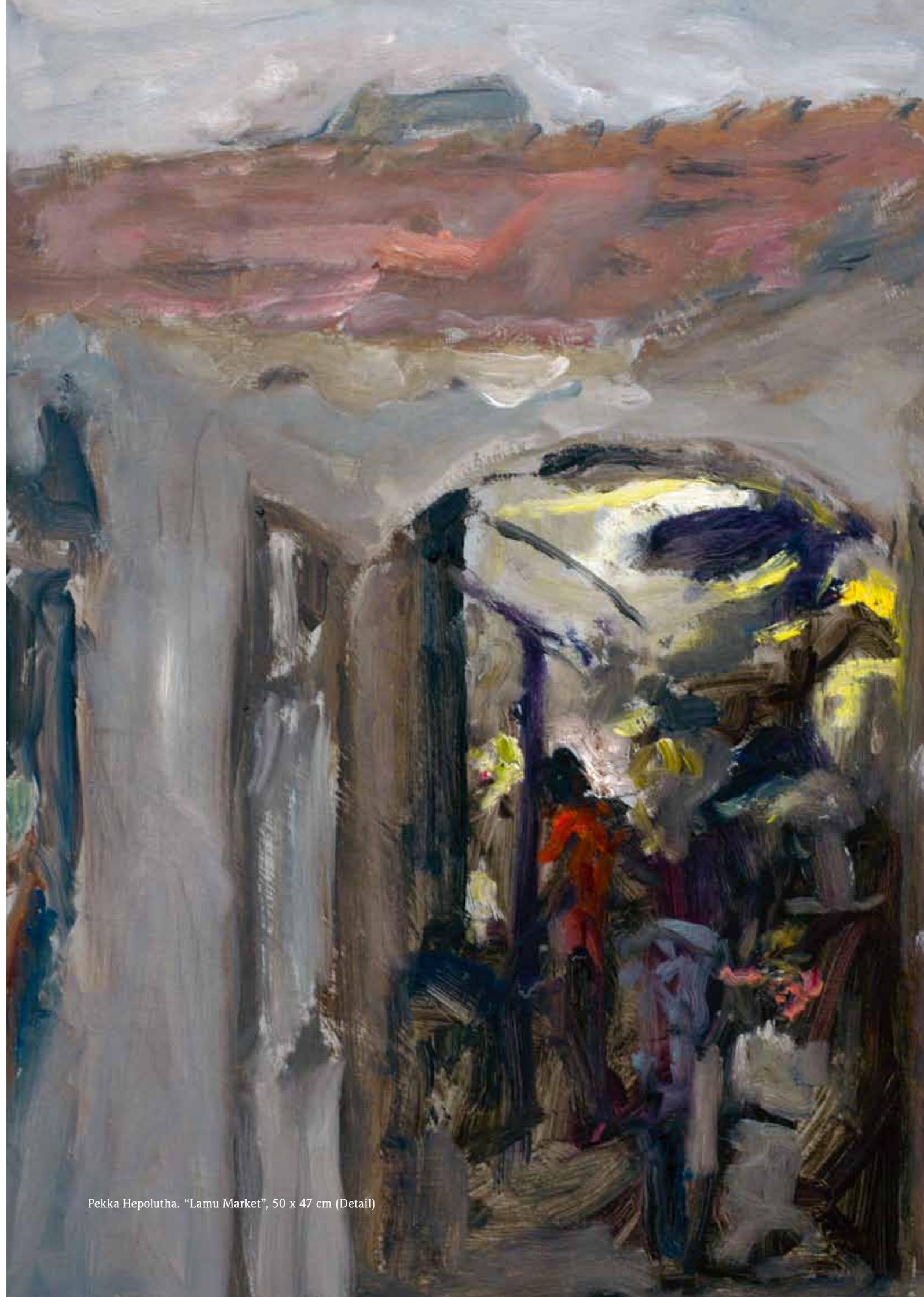
## Pekka Hepoluhta

“Everything is so different here in Lamu,” says Pekka, “nothing is familiar.” He speaks in a soft low voice and searches for words to describe the differences and his fascination with them. “I love how people are close with one another and how they come near when I am painting.” It is a contrast to Finland where Pekka lives. “People live more isolated in Finland” he explains, taking time to think out his words. “People can be alone a lot.” Not in Lamu. Here families are large extended circles interacting and engaging with one another daily. For these people, alone is not an option. Pekka is drawn to this bewildering constellation of connections and interactions as he is to the light of the equatorial sun.

“The African light is not easy to paint” he insists, but so worth trying. He begins to name the kinds of light he has seen here and describes their attributes: “morning light is beautiful, noon is bright and harsh, late afternoon is soft, an easier light to work with but it moves so quickly.” His paintings seek out the light’s exposure of the land-

scape. His palette of colours are dominated by light creams and yellows that accentuate the sun’s saturation on coral walls and sand. “Light is the story being told,” states Pekka describing his paintings. According to the artist, it is not important whether someone looking at the painting recognises the place but whether the light itself is recognised. Painting in Matondoni village is a good example. Pekka stood in front of his easel under the shade of a small overhanging roof. The scene he chose to paint was exposed to the harsh light of the mid-day sun. The landscape in front of him was so bright that the light seemed to wash out its colour. “The light is intense,” he said from the shade of a small overhanging roof. “But not too much; it is interesting to paint.”

Pekka Hepoluhta was born in 1957 in Finland. He was trained at the Free Art School, which focuses on traditional painting techniques. He is the artistic director of the school, a part time position that allows him to devote time to his own painting.



Pekka Hepolutha. "Lamu Market", 50 x 47 cm (Detail)



"Two Boats on the Beach", 50 x 50 cm



"In the Ruins of Takwa", 50 x 50 cm (Detail)



"Woman at the Market", 50 x 40 cm (Detail)



## André Krigar

“Life is more direct here” André Krigar explains when asked why he chooses to travel over 6,000 kilometres to paint landscapes and people. “I know it is crazy,” he remarks, referring to the distance he is willing to go. “But it’s a sign of our time; anything is possible.” The opportunity to experience other ways of life and living is enticing, particularly for plein air artists like André. Yet, perhaps, more important, is the visual dialogue that ensues between painter and subject the interpretation of the moment on canvas. Sometimes, however, these interactions are uncomfortable, pushing artists beyond their comfort zones. For example, André asks, “There are so many problems here, why do we need a painting?” The artist may be referring to the poverty he’s witnessed, particularly in the villages of Matondoni and Maweni where the group travelled to do landscape painting. André’s thoughtful ruminations are a sign of ideological issues in question. “It is a sign of our times,” he says with resignation, “a time of paradox.” For him, the paradox solicits new visual interpretations, an exciting prospect for any artist.

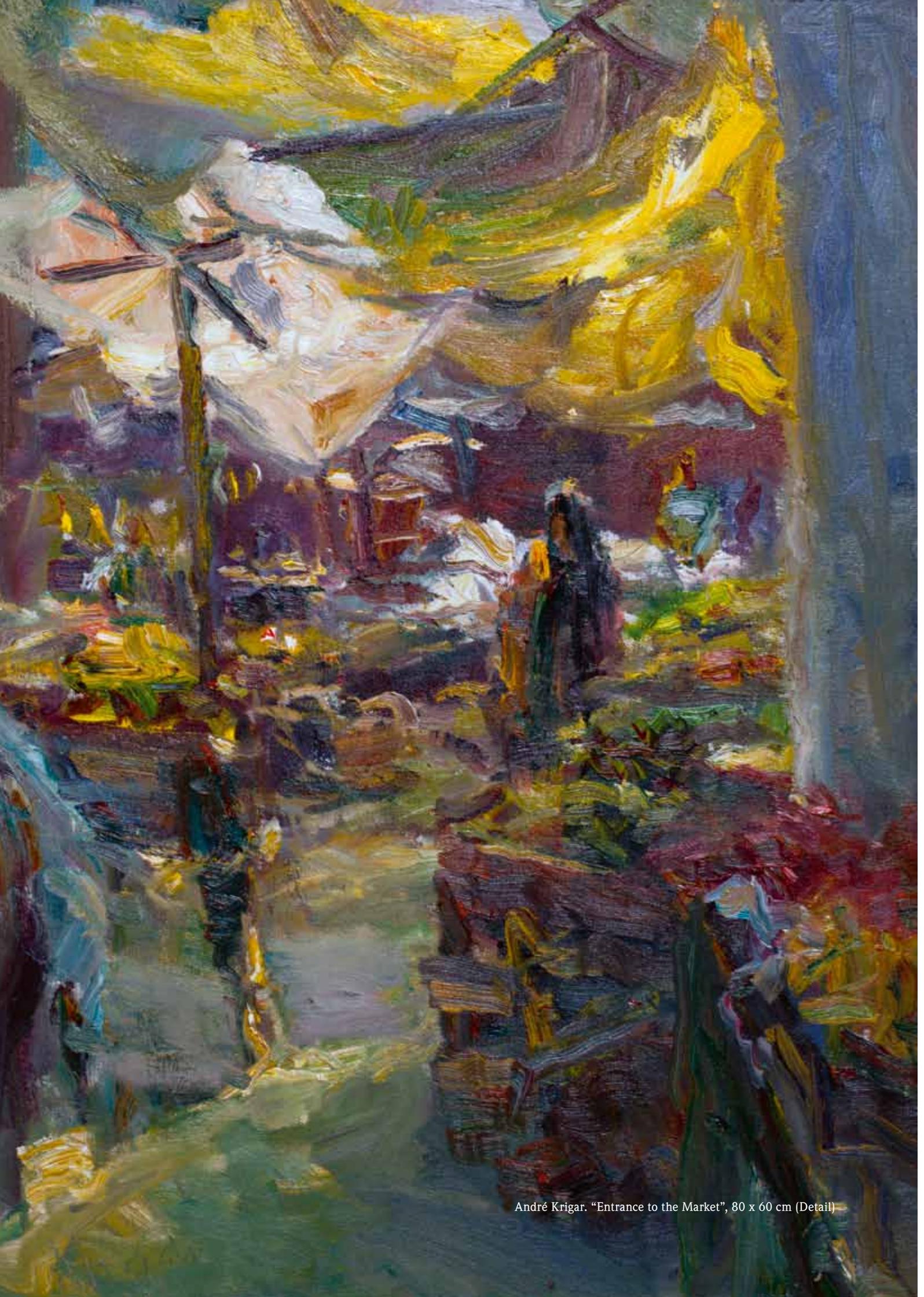
André is as much at home setting up his easel in Lamu’s busy town square and the bustling fruit and vegetable market as he is on a rooftop, a quiet back street or the seaside. “I am not after a wonderful landscape painting,” he comments, “but to show the activity of people here.” André’s sensitivity to the scene is palpable. Referring to his painting methods he explains, “it is all about colour and capturing the living moment”.

André Krigar was born in Berlin in 1952. He studied fine arts from 1972 to 1979 at Berlin University of Fine Arts. Figurative painting was unpopular at the time and André describes this period as a challenge to his painting sensibilities. “I had to find my own way,” the artist reflects, “and the experience made me stronger.” André supplemented his career as a high school teacher for 18 years teaching fine arts and ancient Greek before turning full time to painting. The artist has participated in the 2011 and 2013 Lamu Painters Festival.

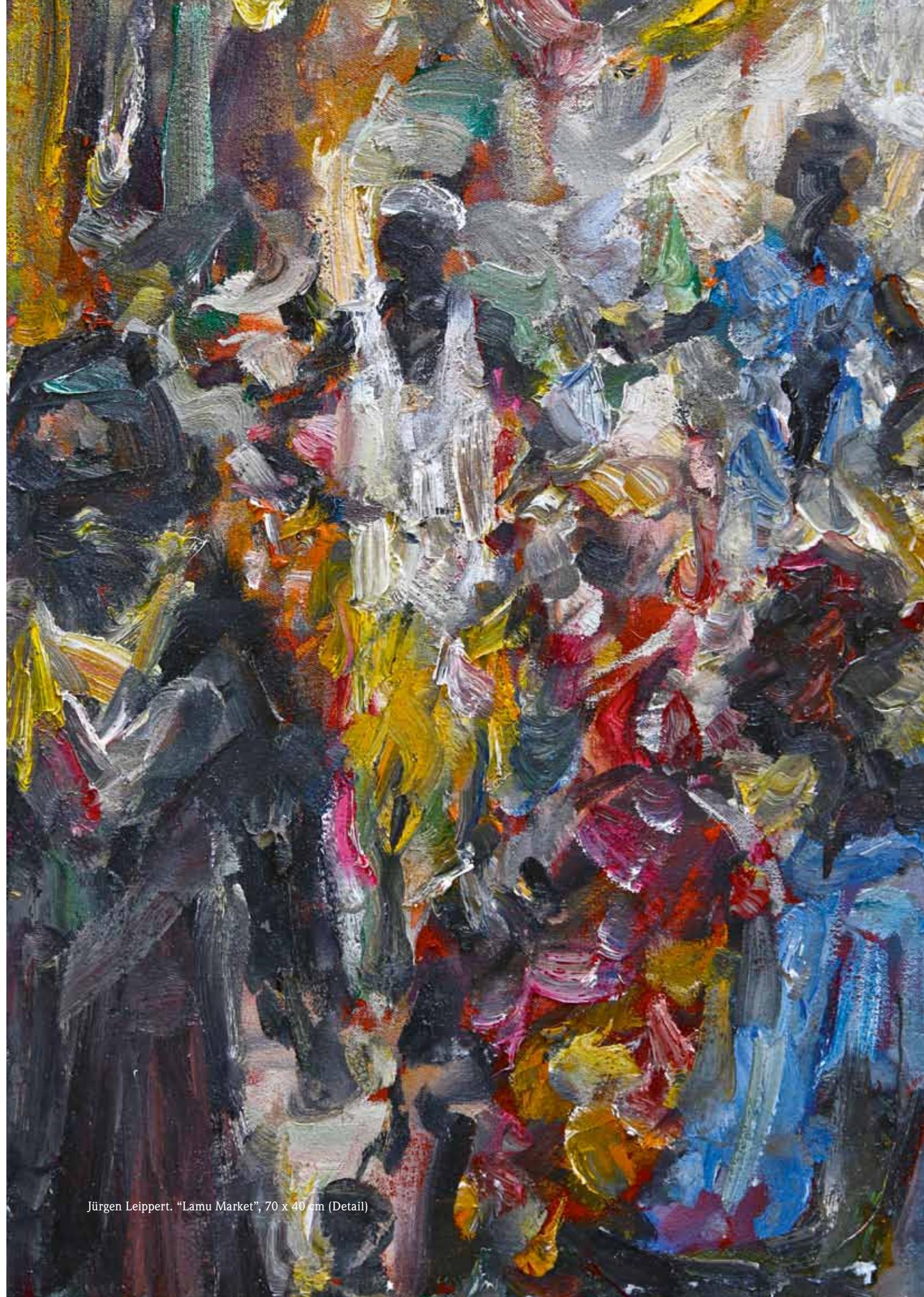


△ “The Weaver”, 50 x 50 cm    ▽ “Green Door”, 50 x 50 cm





André Krigar. "Entrance to the Market", 80 x 60 cm (Detail)



Jürgen Leippert. "Lamu Market", 70 x 40 cm (Detail)



△ "Before the Procession", 30 x 40 cm

## Jürgen Leippert

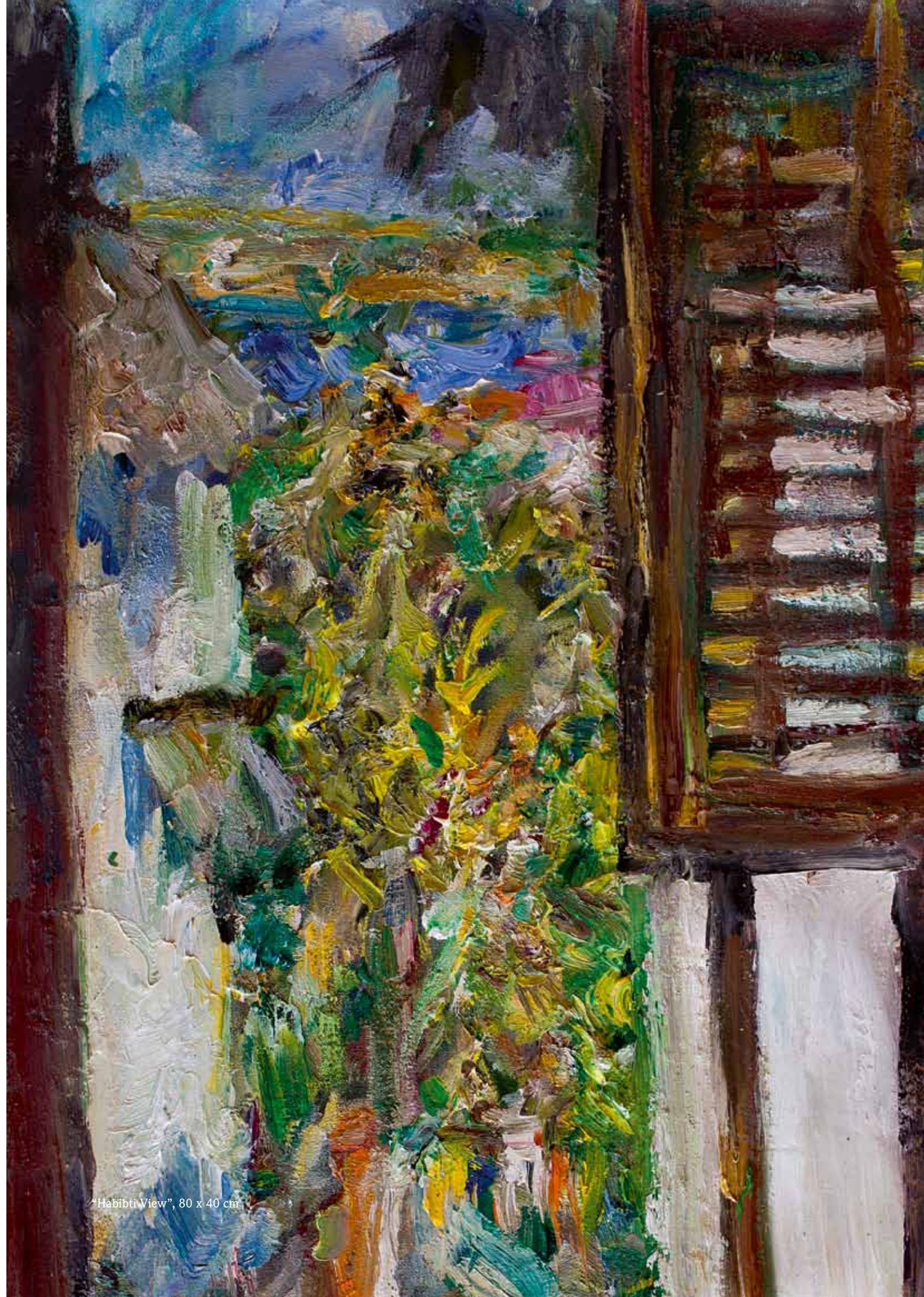


▽ "Lamu Street", 40 x 30 cm

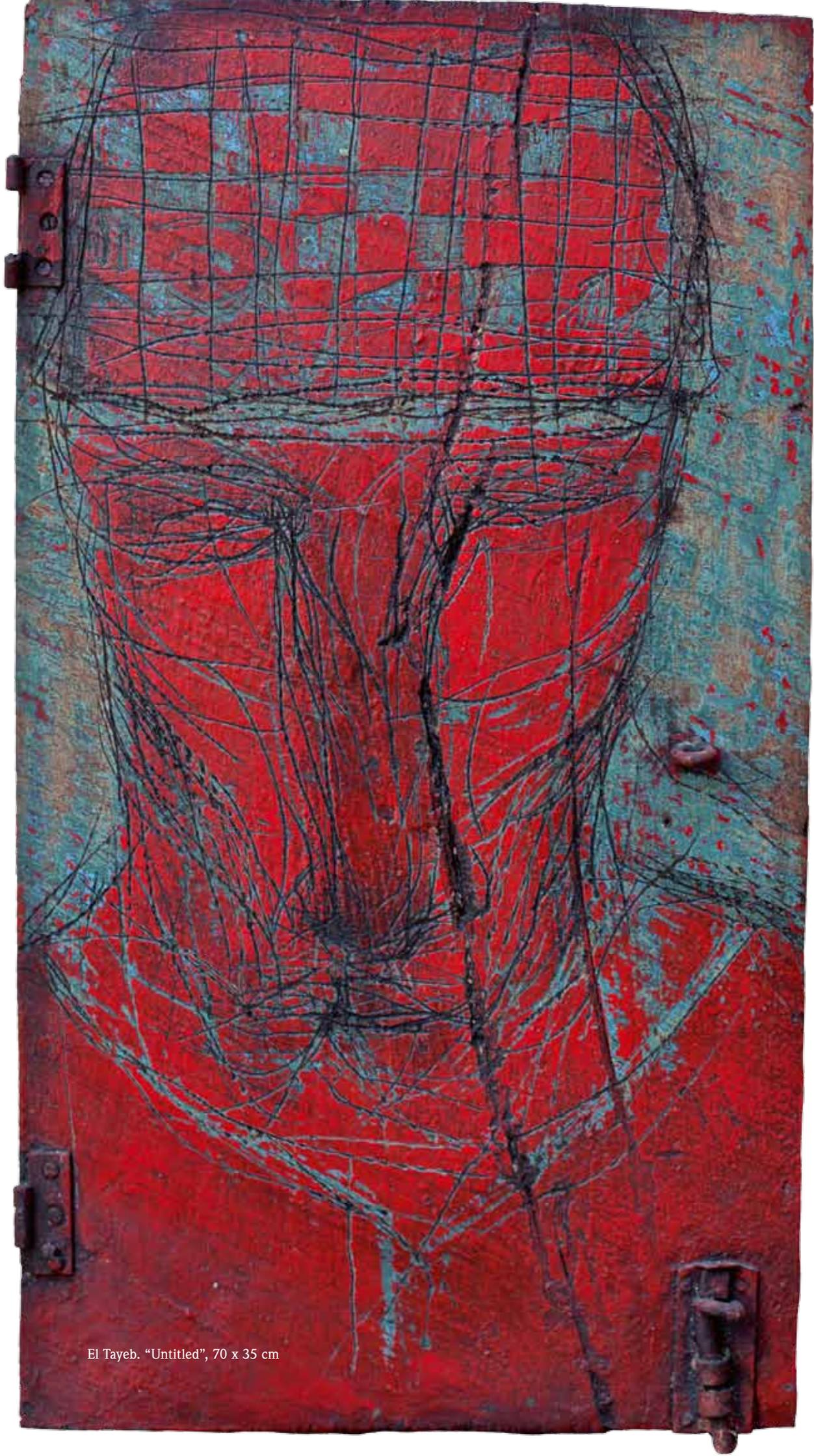


Herbert Menzer, the festival organiser and sponsor, called Jürgen Leippert in Berlin 3 years ago inviting him to participate in the 2011 Lamu Painters Festival. "I told him, I'm not interested," the artist remembers, chuckling. Taking a different tack to woo him, Jürgen was shown photographs of Lamu. "I was totally fascinated when I saw the architecture of Lamu... the houses and I said, 'Wow! I have never seen this before.'" Jürgen attended that year and has returned every year since, a sign of how much Lamu interests him. He enjoys the rhythms of island life and finds many interesting people, objects, landscapes and activities that capture his attention. Jürgen, or 'The Duke' as he is endearingly called, is the most mature artist in the group, gregarious and well liked. Many of the participating artists have mentioned how willing he is to share his experience and discuss painting techniques with others. One fellow artist told me of a technique he learned from "The Duke": "take your painting and place it upside down and see whether it remains a good composition". To Jürgen, the method is a testing of the rhythm of the painting. "It should be balanced both right side up and upside down," he assures me.

Standing in Lamu's market place, Jürgen studies his almost completed painting with an unlit cigarette dangling from his lips. He turns to the people gathered watching him and wipes his thick paint brush with a cloth, wiping off paint. He smiles at the group of people and makes a joke with them then turns towards his painting and roughly applies new paint to his brush. He holds his arm ready like a javelin thrower and in a quick jab the brush makes contact with the canvas at the spot he has already identified. The jab is accentuated with a quick twist of the wrist as he adds emphasis or highlights to his painting. It is a typical Jürgen move, like creating punctuation marks to his canvas. I watched this move more than once and each time it filled me with fascination of his painting technique. The painter was born in Stuttgart in 1944. He trained at the Academy of Fine Arts in Berlin at a time when figurative painting was an unpopular form. Speaking about this time, he says, "It was a lonesome period. It took a long time for me to find others who have similar ideas of painting as I do." Jürgen has lived and painted in New York, Rio, Vienna, Amsterdam and Berlin and now Lamu.



"Habibti View", 80 x 40 cm



El Tayeb. "Untitled", 70 x 35 cm

## El Tayeb

In Matandoni, El Tayeb sits in the shade on a baraza, a public bench built onto the wall near a doorway. The door here leads to a shop, a small room with shelves along the wall, empty except for a few objects. For its lack of things to sell, it is a busy place and people move in and out buying small items matches, chewing gum, sugar. El-Tayeb has open a sketchbook in front of him. He dips a carved wooden implement that he uses as a pen into the jar of ink and begins to draw using quick movements of his wrist. People at the shop ask him in their Swahili language what he's drawing, thinking he can understand them. El Tayeb is often mistaken to be Swahili.



His north Sudanese features are familiar to people in Lamu where there is a long history of Arab - African marriages.

El Tayeb doesn't hear their questions. Instead he concentrates on drawing his subject a dog taking a nap in the shade nearby. The gathering begins to figure it out and they call out to each other "anachora mbwa", he is drawing the dog. Now, they are truly confused. Why the dog? Earlier, he was drawing donkeys and collecting pottery shards just as confusing. "It's not only painting that I am interested in", El Tayeb explains holding out the pottery pieces he's collected, "it's also about Lamu's history and culture." Later, the shards reappear. On them, he has drawn ancient-looking faces resembling those of Mayan, Egyptian and Incan art. They are what El Tayeb refers to as his "archaeology of life". Other works are painted on discarded wood pieces from window shutters, doors and the like. Here he applies paint and etches figures in the pigment. The process ages the piece, invoking the past and excavating the present in an El-Tayeb way.

El Tayeb was born in 1967 in Kosti, Sudan. He trained at Khartoum's University of Science and Technology in the school of fine art. He has lived in Nairobi since the late 1990s. He moved to Nairobi when he went into exile because of the political reforms of the current Sudan government.

"Donkey", 35 x 28 cm



"Flower Tree", 50 x 40 cm



"Lamu Fish", 8 x 18 cm ▽ "Untitled", 40 x 35 cm





Diederik Vermeulen. "Rose House at Fire", 50 x 38 cm



“Dhow Race”, 40 x 50 cm (Detail)

## Diederik Vermeulen

Diederik speaks with fondness about his visit to Matondoni village, one of several destinations the festival artists visited to set up easels to paint landscapes. “When we arrived in Matondoni,” he explains, “we were greeted by a group of villagers singing and dancing welcoming us”. It is their friendliness and gentleness that attracts him to the place. In the village, Diederik chose an intimate ‘spot’ to set up his easel. He sat squarely in the doorway of a home. The family provided a traditional usitu-style stool and other accoutrement for the artist to use for his work. They sat nearby, some working at their chores and others curiously watching Diederik paint. The small children observed quietly until the stillness bored them and they moved away to play with their friends. Life moved on with its own rhythms and the artist was an honorary member of the family, painting at his easel.

Yet, Diederik cannot forget the poverty he saw that day, including the humble homes, the rudimentary furniture and the lack of

electricity and water. “I feel a conflict,” he says quietly, reflecting on his experience. “There is so much poverty, yet people are not depressed about it. Whereas in Europe, the wealthy are on anti-depressants,” he remarks. The paradox is baffling and keeps him alert to other inconsistencies that may appear.

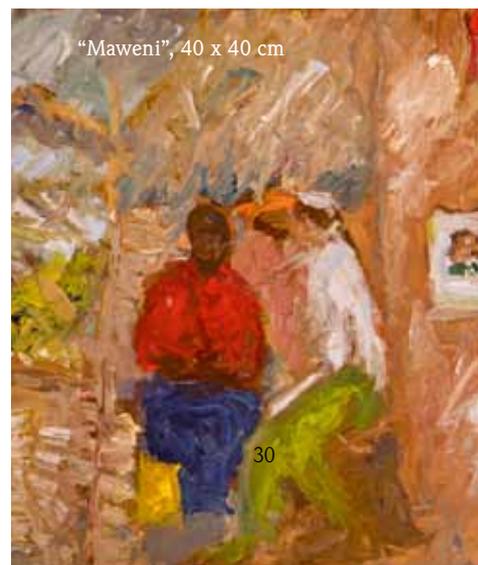
The artist was born in 1942 in the Netherlands. He is a mathematician by training and taught mathematics at university level for many years. “There are similarities with mathematics and art,” he tells me. “Both have to do with imagination and both are impractical,” he jests. His first teaching job was in Lesotho, in southern Africa. In 1987, he left teaching and began to make regular trips to Portugal where he took up painting. “I like the light and landscapes of Portugal” he remarks, “and of course, Lamu.” Diederik was one of three artists who visited Lamu in 2012 and held a group exhibition at Peponi Hotel, Shela.



“Matondoni”, 40 x 50 cm



“Laundry Matondoni”, 50 x 38 cm



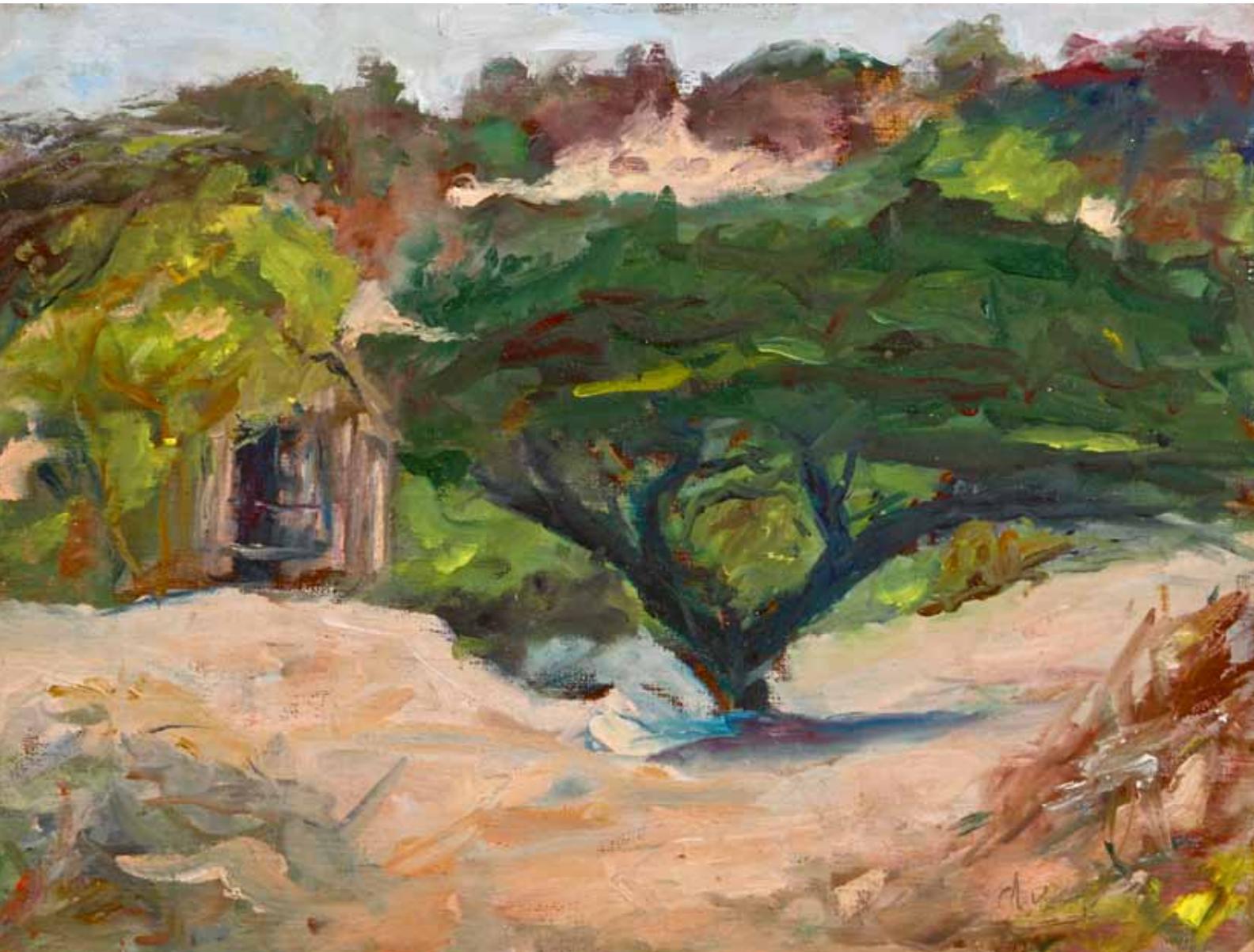
“Maweni”, 40 x 40 cm





△ Diederik Vermeulen. "Shamba of Ebrahim", 40 x 50 cm

▽ Diederik Vermeulen. "Acazia Tree", 38 x 50 cm







## Lamu Painters Festival

February 4<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> 2013

Baitil Aman Hotel, Shela, 80500-Lamu, Kenya

\*

Director – Herbert Menzer

Photographer – Roland Klemp

Author – Hadija Ernst

Field Managers – Salim Mirza & Omar Mafreezer

Baitil Aman – Sidiki Abdulrehman

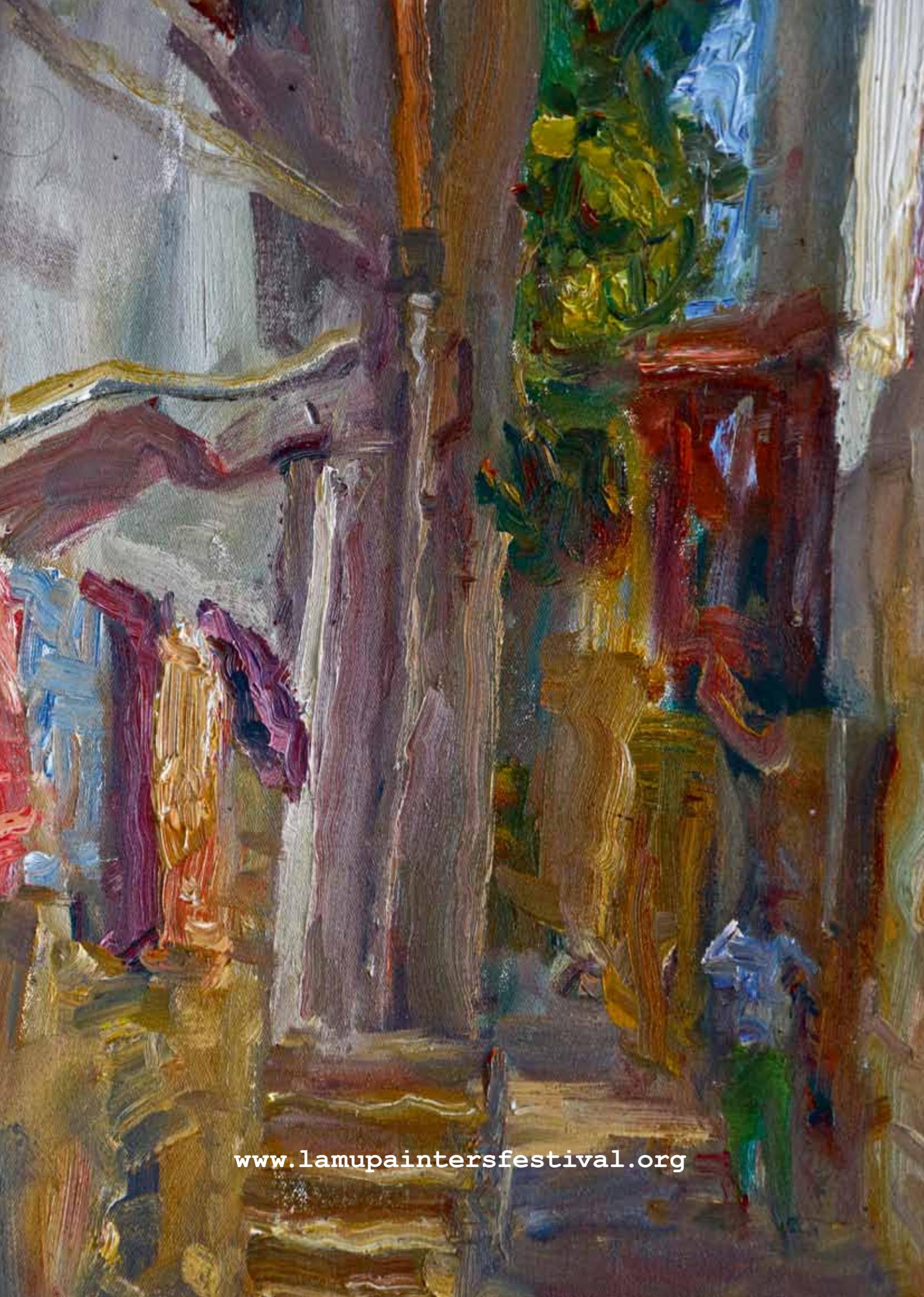
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