

**singapore
biennale
2025**

**pure
intention**



ARTIST FOLIO

(For Educators)

Kapwani Kiwanga

SECONDARY:

Visual Arts

History

THE ARTIST

- Kapwani Kiwanga is a French and Canadian artist, working in Paris and Berlin.
 - Kiwanga studied Anthropology and Comparative Religion at McGill University in Montreal and Art at l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Paris.
 - Awards include: the 2025 Joan Miró Prize, Zurich Art Prize (2022), Marcel Duchamp Prize (2020), as well as the Frieze Artist Award and Sobey Art Award both in 2018.
 - In 2024, she represented Canada at the 60th International Venice Art Biennale with her project “Trinket.”
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THE ARTWORK



Installation view of Kapwani Kiwanga's *Flowers for Africa: Rwanda* (2019), as part of Singapore Biennale 2025: *pure intention*. Image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum. ©Adagp, Paris, 2026

Kapwani Kiwanga

Flowers for Africa: Rwanda

2019

Protocol of assembly, and display including archival iconography to guide the reconstruction of a sculptural arrangement consisting of foliage.

Support structure, wood, water tanks, eucalyptus

Courtesy of the artist; Galerie Poggi, Paris; Galerie Tanja Wagner, Berlin; Goodman Gallery, Cape Town, Johannesburg, London.

THE ARTWORK

- *Flowers for Africa: Rwanda* is a large-scale installation that recreates the triumphal arch erected in Rwanda in 1961 to celebrate the proclamation of the Republic. The artwork is part of Kiwanga's ongoing *Flowers for Africa* series, which recreates floral arrangements from archival photographs of diplomatic meetings and ceremonies related to African independence.
- The arch is covered in fresh eucalyptus. Over the course of the exhibition, the foliage is left to wilt and dry naturally. This intentional process is rich with symbolism:
 - It represents the transient nature of memory and history.
 - It reflects on the initial enthusiasm for independence and how it can gradually fade, overshadowed by subsequent challenges.
 - It prompts viewers to question whose stories are preserved in history and whose are neglected or erased.
- The broader project began in 2011 when Kiwanga, during a residency in Dakar, Senegal, researched archives related to African independence. She focused on the floral arrangements visible at the edges of these historical images.
- By recreating these peripheral flowers, Kiwanga shifts attention away from the diplomats and officials to symbolise the public who, though outside the frame of power, inherited the new political systems.
- The series explores the idea that plants themselves can be archives, serving as living witnesses to history.
- This edition for the Singapore Biennale is sited outside Fort Gate, juxtaposed against the historic masonry. This placement creates a robust dialogue between two significant markers of national identity and the passage of time, further emphasised by Fort Canning Park's own history as an experimental colonial garden where the British cultivated cash crops such as nutmeg and clove.

THE ARTWORK

DID YOU KNOW?

- Kiwanga didn't begin her artistic career until her 30s. An earlier academic focus shaped her path; she studied anthropology and comparative religion at McGill University, which sparked an interest in storytelling through documentary filmmaking. After working as a filmmaker, she felt limited by the format and moved to France to study fine arts. It was there she transitioned into becoming the full-time artist she is today.
- Kiwanga's artistic process remains deeply driven by her background in anthropology. Each project begins as a historical investigation, involving extensive research and reading. She is particularly fascinated by archives, which she sees as complicated spaces where narratives are curated and certain stories are left out. This rigorous research allows her to examine how the past shapes our present societies.
- While Kapwani Kiwanga's work frequently includes themes related to Africa and the African diaspora, she considers this a starting point rather than her sole focus. She investigates historical and social phenomena stemming from these contexts, which then lead her into an "entangled web" of broader global relationships and interests.

ACTIVITIES AND QUESTIONS

PRE-VISIT:

- The title of this artwork is *Flowers for Africa: Rwanda*. What does this title make you think the artwork is about? What questions does it raise for you?
- The arch is a replica of one built for Rwanda's independence. What does an arch often symbolise? Why do you think the artist chose to recreate this specific structure?

DURING YOUR VISIT:

- The following questions can be used to spark student-led discussions and unlock layered meanings within the artwork:
 - Describe the arch in detail. What is its scale? How does it make you feel standing next to it?
 - Observe the plant material (eucalyptus) closely. What is its current state? Is it fresh, wilting or completely dry? Describe its colours, textures and smells.
 - How does knowing the flowers are changing in real time affect your experience of the artwork?
 - Why do you think that eucalyptus was used to construct the artwork? What complicated story does that tell you?
 - The artist says she focuses on things “on the edge of the frame” when she is looking at archives. By making plant material as the main subject, what is she asking us to pay attention to that history might have overlooked?
 - Look at the location. How does the arch interact with the historic Fort Gate behind it?

ACTIVITIES AND QUESTIONS

- Thinking routines: Claim, Support, Question
 - 1. Make a claim
 - Based on your observation, what is one main idea or message you think this artwork is communicating? State your interpretation as a claim.
 - 2. Identify Support
 - What specific things do you see in the artwork that support your claim? Point to the visual evidence.
 - 3. Raise a question
 - What other questions can your interpretation lead to? What are you still wondering about?

POST VISIT:

- After the visit, connect the experience to bigger ideas and personal understanding.
 - What surprised or impacted you most upon seeing this artwork in person? How was it different from just reading about it or seeing a picture?
 - The artwork is about memory and history. What is one “wilted” or forgotten story from history that you think deserves to be “re-activated” and remembered? Why?
 - Kiwanga suggests that plants can be “archives.” Can you think of a plant, tree or natural feature in your own community that holds a story or memory? What is it?
 - The Singapore Biennale features artists from around the world. Why do you think the curators choose to present international stories and histories here in Singapore, and what value does that bring to us as an audience?
 - How can learning about the historical moments of other nations through art help us better understand our own place in the world?

FIND OUT MORE:

ARTIST

- Brienne Walsh, “Conversation | Kapwani Kiwanga,” in *Ocula*, 30 March 2016, <https://ocula.com/magazine/conversations/kapwani-kiwanga/>
- Glesni Trefor Williams, “It Could Be a Political Agenda: Flowers to Investigate African Historical Narratives,” in *Lampoon Magazine*, 22 July 2021, <https://lampoonmagazine.com/kapwani-kiwanga-flowers-for-africa/>
- Makeda Best, “Questions of Remediation: An Interview with Kapwani Kiwanga,” in *Transition Magazine*, accessed 22 October 2025, <https://transitionmagazine.fas.harvard.edu/home/current-issue/questions-of-remediation-an-interview-with-kapwani-kiwanga/>
- Salomé Gómez-Upegui, “The Nature of Archives,” in *Harvard Magazine*, 17 January 2023, <https://www.harvardmagazine.com/2022/10/montage-kapwani-kiwanga>.
- Skye Sherwin, “How I Became an Artist: Kapwani Kiwanga,” in *Art Basel*, Accessed 22 October 2025, <https://www.artbasel.com/stories/how-i-became-an-artist-kapwani-kiwanga?lang=en>.

FIND OUT MORE:

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Learn more about the Fort Gate:
 - https://www.roots.gov.sg/places/places-landing/Places/surveyed-sites/Remnants-of-Former-Gate-and-Wall-of-Fort-Canning-Fort-Canning-Hill_Bukit-Larangan
- Learn more about Fort Canning Park:
 - <https://www.nlb.gov.sg/main/article-detail?cmsuuid=8cdf199f-6771-4997-9d54-c94acf989442>

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