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The Rwanda Art Museum, Haunted By Its Past

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
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in Art History

by

Talia Lieber

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2019

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Rwanda Art Museum, Haunted By Its Past

by

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Master of Arts in Art History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor Saloni Mathur, Co-Chair

Professor Allen Fraleigh Roberts, Co-Chair

The Rwanda Art Museum houses Rwanda's largest collection of contemporary art comprised of primarily paintings and sculptures made by Rwandan artists after the 1994 genocide. This paper questions how Rwanda's traumatic past haunts the institution and how the museum responds to this history through its display of contemporary art. Not only is the museum's collection made up of artwork that grapples with the events of the genocide, it is now housed within a mansion that was the official residence for the former Rwandan president, Juvénal Habyarimana. This paper, which builds on recent interventions in museology and postcolonial theories, examines the Rwanda Art Museum's repurposing of such a space—a site that symbolizes the violence, fear, and extravagance of the former president's regime—for the display of contemporary art.

The thesis of Talia Lieber is approved.

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2019

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The Rwanda Art Museum, situated in the small, land-locked country of Rwanda in the Great Lakes Region of eastern Africa, houses the nation's largest collection of contemporary art, primarily paintings and sculptures made by Rwandan artists after the 1994 genocide. Featured prominently in the center of the museum's main gallery is Jean Claude Sekijege's *Cycle of Life*, or *Uruziga rw'ubuzima* in Kinyarwanda, a sizeable four-foot tall sculpture of an ostrich (fig. 1). Sekijege, a Rwandan artist born in Kigali in 1977, sculpted the bird's nearly life-sized body out of recyclable materials, including papier-mâché, tree fiber, metal wire, and glass. The sculpture depicts a once powerful, but flightless bird attempting to escape its capture. The bird's feet are tied with twine to a wooden platform below; its legs bend with strain while its head and body tilt downward from the burden of their weight. A hole lodged inside the bird's head and encircled by rough edges forms two swollen eyes that amplify the work's sense of fatigue. Tragically, Sekijege committed suicide at the age of thirty in 2007, one year after completing this work. The work's evocation of trauma and expression of individual struggle against violent surroundings foregrounds key questions at the heart of this study concerned with the unique situation of the art museum in postcolonial Rwanda; I ask, in particular, how Rwanda's traumatic past haunts this institution, the Rwanda Art Museum, and how the museum responds to this history through its display of contemporary art.

The location of the Rwanda Art Museum on a site of past violence ties the collection's artwork to the apocalyptic events of the genocide and entangles the institution's role with the complex commemorative concerns of a memorial museum. Not only is the museum's collection made up of artwork that grapples with the events of the genocide, it is now housed within a mansion that was the official residence for the former Rwandan president, Juvénal Habyarimana (fig. 2). In May 2018 the Rwanda Art Museum moved its collection from the palace built for

Rwanda's last king in Nyanza, where it had been located since the museum's establishment in 2006, to the former presidential mansion at Kanombe. The building signifies the power and wealth of those who inhabited the space, maintained control of the state, and incited hateful propaganda against Rwandans of Tutsi ethnicity.¹ On April 6, 1994, Habyarimana's presidential plane was shot down by an underdetermined source: dramatically, its remnants fell onto the mansion's grounds (fig. 3). The event resulted in the deaths of Habyarimana and those accompanying him on the flight and instigated a genocide against the Tutsi minority group by extremist members of the Hutu majority, itself under planning for several years prior. In the one hundred days following Habyarimana's death, almost one million Rwandans—Tutsis and Hutus—were murdered. In addition to the mass killings, thousands of women—many of whom were victims of rape or sexual assault—became widows, tens of thousands of people were tortured or mutilated largely by machete, hundreds of thousands of children were orphaned, and millions of people became refugees.²

In this paper, I examine the Rwanda Art Museum's repurposing of a space—a site that symbolizes the violence, fear, and extravagance of the former president's regime—for the display of contemporary art. Drawing from multiple visits to the site in August and September 2019, significantly the 25th anniversary of the genocide, as well as numerous visits to the

¹Although Habyarimana was considered to be somewhat of a moderate Hutu by his extremist family and peers, he instituted a party that enacted strict control over people's livelihoods and movement. The regime under Habyarimana, for example, required Rwandans to carry identity cards that listed their ethnicity and place of residence; in order to move houses, Rwandan had to be granted official permission from governmental officials. In 1993, Habyarimana signed the peace agreement that was the Arusha Accords, a decision which Hutu extremists vehemently opposed. See Martin Meredith, *The Fate of Africa, A History of Fifty Years of Independence* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), 489.

² See Phillip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*, (London: Picador, 1999), 180, 201; Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 204; "Aftermath," label text, Kigali Genocide Memorial, Kigali, Rwanda, August 24, 2019.

museum's initial location in Nyanza and interviews with contemporary Rwandan artists and museum staff between 2012 and 2019, my analysis builds on emerging global perspectives within museology and brings postcolonial methodologies to bear on the existing literature related to Rwanda's thriving museum-building culture. In the pages that follow, I highlight the impact of international paradigms for Holocaust commemoration on Rwanda's memorial museums, specifically the Kigali Genocide Memorial in Gisozi, and examine the colonial past of the first museum established in Rwanda, the Ethnographic Museum in Huye (formerly the National Museum in Butare).

Evaluating these existing museological models—memorial and ethnographic—I will argue that the Rwanda Art Museum represents a new and exemplary paradigm in which contemporary Rwandan art has intervened in ways that have enabled Rwandans to re-conceptualize the trauma of the 1994 genocide. Although still an institution in progress, the museum is grappling with the complexities of its past and the challenges of its present and future in highly self-conscious ways. This paper suggests that the Rwanda Art Museum is a prime institution for fostering collaboration between artists and museum practitioners to create and display site-specific work that critically examines the role of contemporary art in commemorating the events of the genocide in 21st-century Rwanda.

MUSEOLOGY AND THE COLONY: RE-CONSTRUCTING THE FIELD

It is well known that the museum as an institution with both expansionist and pedagogical ambitions has its intellectual and physical origins in Europe. Additionally, museology, or the study of museum history, including its motivating philosophies, policies, and effects on audiences through the social, political, and educational roles it maintains, has been a largely Eurocentric affair. Scholarly re-examinations of museums under the field of inquiry termed “the

new museology” from the late 1980s on have shown how Western museums served as democratizing spaces for study, education, and entertainment, and exposed their larger role in preserving state power and spreading imperial knowledge.³ However, these studies have overwhelmingly focused on the historical circumstances and societal conditions that led to the founding of museums in Europe.⁴

As Tony Bennett has argued, the “birth” of the museum within public space in the late-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries was bound up in its function as a tool for European governments and their exercises of imperial power.⁵ The museum was established as a modern institution for social training, where behaviors considered to be “civilized” could be learned and disseminated throughout the visiting population.⁶ While museums portrayed the future as developing without bounds, they also presented a rational order to the past, and sought to develop hierarchical systems of classification for arranging the heterogenous objects housed within their collections. Such systems of categorization enabled museums to maintain control over the narratives of human progress over time and outlined pathways for their visitors that privileged certain styles and influences of art over others. While art institutions embraced the position that art is timeless, universal, and autonomous, they often failed to acknowledge the role

³ Peter Vergo, “Introduction,” In *The New Museology*, (London: Reaktion Books, 1989), 3.

⁴ Relevant studies include Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, London: Routledge, 1995; Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum’s Ruins*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993; Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth Century Paris*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994; Donald Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth’s Body: Art Museums and the Phantasms of Modernity*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003; Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narrative of the Miniature the Gigantic, the Souvenir, and the Collection*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1993; Stephen Weil, *Rethinking the Museum and Other Meditations*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990.

⁵ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 19.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

they played as authoritative bodies in determining what work is created and displayed, leading to the prioritization of certain narratives over others.⁷

By exposing the deep cultural hierarchies at stake in the practices of Western museums, new critical scholarship reveals how the history of museums has been written with biases and reductions that privilege Western definitions and contexts. James Clifford's conception of the museum as a "contact zone," for example, reconceives the asymmetrical power dynamics that arise through the interaction of objects in collections or exhibitions, and foregrounds the agency of the many players who participate in these unbalanced encounters.⁸ Similarly, Carol Duncan, in her examination of the "civilizing rituals" of the modern museum, shows how a select group of museums from Western democracies helped to serve the secular nationalist ideologies of Western societies.⁹ While such studies suggest museums can be dynamic sites overflowing with productive confrontations and ritual activities, they also unveil the limits of a Euro-centric understanding of museums and the problems that emerge from studying only a subset of their forms.

Postcolonial analyses of non-Western museums, by contrast, have sought to deconstruct existing frameworks and provide an alternative account of museums through analyses of

⁷ Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins*, 1.

⁸ Clifford's terminology is indebted to that of Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession*, 1991, 33-40. Clifford defines "contact zones" as places of consultation or research and sites of conflict, negotiation, exclusion, and struggle. According to Clifford, "contact zones" enable the simultaneous presence of historically or geographically disparate objects and function as in-between areas of transit for objects and people where ongoing communications and identity-making occurs. See James Clifford, "Museums as Contact Zones," in *Representing the Nation: A Reader*, David Boswell and Jessica Evans, eds., (London: Routledge, 1999), 446-451.

⁹ Duncan recognizes the challenge of analyzing ritual practice, typically associated with sacred or royal spaces, in the context of Western museums when ritual is abundant and significant in many non-Western traditions. See Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, London: Routledge, 1995.

institutional forms located outside the societies of Europe and North America.¹⁰ In such studies, generally published within the past decade, scholars have defined a postcolonial analysis as one that involves a critical examination of imperial powers of the past and an investigation of the legacies that endure in the present.¹¹ Accordingly, researchers of museums in non-Western societies have studied the capacity of such museums to conform to national goals and local needs in response to the residual effects of Western constructs instituted by colonial authorities. They have also addressed the gap in scholarship on non-Western museums by presenting more nuanced histories of the museums' development from within the story of their colonial relationships.

Unlike museums in South Asia that attracted masses of Indians as well as elites, many museums on the African continent emerged as national institutions after independence as spaces primarily for foreign tourists and wealthy elites.¹² The study of museums and art exhibitions on the African continent are wide-ranging in scope as well as geography, and they reveal different scenarios for patronage, viewership, collecting, and display than those that have been analyzed

¹⁰ See, for instance, Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003; Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden, and Ruth B. Phillips, eds., *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture*, Oxford, New York: Berg Publishers, 2006; Moira G. Simpson, *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

¹¹ Alessandra De Angelis, Celeste Ianniciello, Mariangela Orabona, and Michaela Quadraro, "Introduction: Disruptive Encounters—Museums, Arts and Postcoloniality," in *The Postcolonial Museum: The Arts of Memory and the Pressures of History*, eds. Iain Chambers, Alessandra De Angelis, Celeste Ianniciello, Mariangela Orabona, and Michaela Quadraro, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 2.

¹² See S. Van Beurden, "Culture, Artifacts, and Independent Africa: The Cultural Politics of Museums and Heritage," in *The Palgrave Handbook of African Colonial and Postcolonial History*, eds. Toyin Falola and Martin S. Shanguhyia (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 1195; Saloni Mathur and Kavita Singh, eds., *No Touching, No Spitting, No Praying: The Museum in South Asia*, London, New York, and New Delhi: Routledge, 2015.

within the context of British India.¹³ The Italian scholar of Africa, Itala Vivan, has suggested that despite these variations, museums on the continent play a critical role in nation-building and in confronting divisive pasts resulting from imperial hegemonies.¹⁴ Vivan warns of the challenges African museums face in re-imagining themselves as postcolonial spaces, arguing that they must situate themselves according to local customs and needs rather than import foreign models for collecting and displaying material heritage.¹⁵ She advocates for museums in Africa to present their nation's culture through the display of their immaterial belongings, primarily oral histories, a model that departs from several Western assumptions about collection and display.¹⁶

Notably, art historian Annie E. Coombes has investigated such museological models in South Africa, pointing to the dilemmas museums face in attempting to avoid replicating colonial structures of knowledge while developing independent strategies for representation.¹⁷ Coombes

¹³ Such studies include those examining the first museums in Africa introduced by the British and Portuguese invested in collecting geological specimens, the emergence of “tourist art” through exhibitions and displays in Côte d'Ivoire, the centrality of ritual practice to the identity of museums in the Cameroon Grassfields, and the museum's role in “imagining” modernity and cultural production in Morocco. See Anne Gague, “Museums and Colonization in Tropical Africa,” *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 39, no. 155/156 (1999): 727-745; Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner, eds., *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999; Michael Rowlands, “Africa on Display: Curating Postcolonial Pasts in the Cameroon Grassfields,” in *Postcolonial Archaeologies in Africa*, ed. Peter R. Schmidt, Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research, 2009; Katarzyna Pieprzak, *Imagined Museums: Art and Modernity in Postcolonial Morocco*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

¹⁴ Itala Vivan, “What Museum for Africa?,” in *The Postcolonial Museum: The Arts of Memory and the Pressures of History*, eds. Iain Chambers, Alessandra De Angelis, Celeste Ianniciello, Mariangela Orabona, and Michaela Quadraro (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 203.

¹⁵ Itala Vivan, “What Museum for Africa?,” 196, 204.

¹⁶ Other types of immaterial culture include sounds, voices, and gestures. See Alessandra De Angelis, Celeste Ianniciello, Mariangela Orabona, and Michaela Quadraro, “Introduction: Disruptive Encounters—Museums, Arts and Postcoloniality,” 18.

¹⁷ See Annie E. Coombes, *History after Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa*, Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003; Annie E. Coombes, “The Object of Translation: Notes on ‘Art’ and Autonomy in a Postcolonial Context,” in *The Empire of Things: Regimes of Value and Material Culture*, ed. Fred R. Myers (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2001), 233-256; Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.

challenges the presumed postcolonial consciousness of museum exhibitions that present objects as celebrations of cross-cultural exchange between Western centers and non-Western peripheries.¹⁸ Instead, she locates the recent revival of museums in South Africa within broader efforts to re-imagine existing heritage sites, and to decolonize public culture itself, in the aftermath of apartheid.¹⁹ Turning to the exemplary model of the District Six Museum in Cape Town, initiated by residents who were forcibly removed from their homes under apartheid rule, Coombes shows the capacity of the museum to both commemorate a traumatic past and galvanize a diverse community in the present.²⁰ In addition to presenting former resident testimonies and visual remnants of the neighborhood in a non-linear manner, the museum hosted the negotiation of land claims that formalized the transfer of power from the state to the community.²¹ Coombes argues that the museum thus serves as the public face of the district's memory by exposing its contradictions rather than by erasing underlying tensions with nostalgic remembering.²² The museum's innovative storytelling initiatives embrace conflicting narratives and immaterial evidence that, in combination with the specificity of the museum's site, facilitates more nuanced understandings of the nation's violent past.

¹⁸ Coombes argues that such presentations as celebrations of hybridity disempower postcolonial displays of visual culture by reinforcing exhibition methods of hegemonic authorities. Understanding the hybridity of an object relies on public interpretation of text, classifications, and installation techniques generated by museum authorities. See Annie E. Coombes, "Conclusion," in *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 217-18.

¹⁹ S. Van Beurden, "Culture, Artifacts, and Independent Africa: The Cultural Politics of Museums and Heritage," 1200.

²⁰ See Valmont Layne, "The District Six Museum: An Ordinary People's Place," *The Public Historian* 30, no. 1 (2008): 53-62.

²¹ See Annie Coombes, "The Archeology of Memory," in *History After Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa*, 116-148.

²² Annie Coombes, "The Archeology of Memory," 147.

These postcolonial analyses of non-Western museum sites provide a backdrop for my understanding of the phenomenon that is the Rwanda Art Museum because they illuminate how experimental methods of display in historically significant spaces can facilitate public negotiation of a nation's turbulence. They highlight how museums operate in postcolonial states; how they develop new strategies for engaging local populations; and how they are engaged in the construction of national narratives. In the next section, I examine how certain Western paradigms continue to shape Rwanda's museums, in particular Holocaust memorial models and the remnants of Belgian colonial knowledge. Ultimately, I will show how the Rwanda Art Museum also emerges from these frameworks, but simultaneously diverges from the functions of these other institutions, and foregrounds the role of contemporary art and artists in mediating a site haunted by its past.

THE MEMORIAL MUSEUM PARADIGM AND PROBLEMS OF A COLONIAL INHERITANCE IN RWANDA

The emergence and proliferation of memorial museums in Rwanda is related to the government's sustained effort to construct a national narrative aimed at remembering the events of the 1994 genocide. Rather than building a single museum, the Rwandan government constructed a network of museums and memorials throughout the country to commemorate the genocide. There are dozens of such sites including churches, schools, and other community spaces where Rwandans, primarily Tutsis and moderate Hutus, had fled with the false hope that they would be protected.²³ At first, the state's effort to establish these spaces as memorial museums was met with resistance, particularly from leaders within the Catholic church who

²³ Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Invisible Again: Rwanda and Representation after Genocide," *African Arts* 38, no. 3 (2005): 89.

wished to return the churches to their liturgical functions. In early 2000, however, the latter ceded to governmental pressure, and many churches were converted into museums.²⁴ Some of Rwanda's memorial museums are located on the site of mass graves; others display the unburied or exhumed bones of victims. At the Murambi Genocide Memorial Centre located about 100 miles southwest of Kigali, for example, the bodies and bones of thousands of victims are preserved in lime and displayed within the classrooms of the former technical school.

In addition to these rural sites, the Kigali Genocide Memorial was established by the government in 2004 in the Gisozi neighborhood of Kigali following models of Holocaust memorial museums.²⁵ Distinct for its urban location, the Kigali Genocide Memorial was not chosen because of any specific violence that occurred there during the genocide. The museum, instead, houses mass graves for victims who were killed in and nearby Kigali and whose remains were brought to the museum as part of its establishment. Moreover, in its blend of public and private interests, the museum follows global models of Holocaust museum commemoration, specifically the Beth Shalom Holocaust Centre in the United Kingdom and Yad Vashem in Israel, that memorialize the atrocities committed during World War II.²⁶ The Kigali Genocide Memorial further employs methods borrowed from these (and other) Holocaust museums, including the display of evidence and survivor testimonials to affirm Rwandan experiences of

²⁴ Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Invisible Again: Rwanda and Representation after Genocide," 90.

²⁵ Under the leadership of then-Kigali mayor Theoneste Mutsindashyaka, the Kigali City Council donated the land in the neighborhood of Gisozi in Kigali for the establishment of a national site of genocide remembrance. Mutsindashyaka, in collaboration with the Rwandan Minister of Culture at the time, selected Aegis Trust, led by the British brothers James and Stephen Smith, to raise money to build and operate a museum and education center that is now the Kigali Genocide Memorial Center. See Amy Sodaro, "The Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre: Building a 'Lasting Peace,'" in *Exhibiting Atrocity: Memorial Museums and Politics of Past Violence*, (Newark, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 90-93.

²⁶ The institution received funds and resources not only from the Rwandan government and Aegis Trust, but also from the Belgian and Swedish governments, as well as contributions from the Clinton Global Initiative. See Amy Sodaro, "The Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre," 85, 190.

trauma, narrative formats that incorporate film and photography to facilitate historical understanding, and techniques that create spaces for visitor reflection and the continued study of history and its lessons.

The museum itself acknowledges the limitations of linking the commemoration of the Holocaust with that of the Rwandan genocide. On one hand, the shared strategies for displaying historical narratives converge to convey a powerful message about the brutality of the genocide and the international community's failure to stop violence at an earlier stage. On the other hand, as Nicholas Mirzoeff has argued, "the Rwandan genocide is now being, as it were, dragged over the Holocaust to persuade Western audiences of its importance, even though it is itself evidence of the failure of memorialization inspired by the Holocaust."²⁷ At the same time, as Andreas Huyssen has cautioned, the desire to articulate memory through memorials can lead to excess or "historical amnesia," involving ossification or the forgetting of the past that struggles to integrate notions of conflict that exist in the present moment.²⁸ Amy Sodaro warns how by setting the 1994 genocide's precedent in the Holocaust and other 20th-century genocides, the Kigali Genocide Memorial "erases any urgency or historical connection with what is happening in the region and country today."²⁹ Although the Kigali Genocide Memorial draws attention to parallel experiences of genocide across different societies and borrows display methods from Holocaust memorial museums in Europe and America, its exhibits also work to critique the instrumentalization of Holocaust memory within the space of the museum. A question posed by

²⁷ Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Invisible Again," 91.

²⁸ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 159.

²⁹ Amy Sodaro, "The Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre," 108.

genocide survivor Apollon Kabahizi displayed in the Kigali Genocide Memorial's central exhibition captures the spirit of this problem and points to the museum's own negotiation of these dilemmas. Kabahizi asks: "When they said 'never again' after the Holocaust, was it meant for some people and not for others?" (fig. 4).

The country's memorial museums share similarities with the development of Rwanda's eight national museums and the narratives they present. The latter are also operated by the state and located throughout the country; however, they are managed by the Institute of National Museums of Rwanda (INMR), a government organization within the Ministry of Sports and Culture (MINISPOC). Even though Rwanda's memorial museums were created decades after the country's independence, they were developed, in large part, from foreign funds and international initiatives. Rwanda's national museums, by contrast, are rooted in the colonial past. While the Rwandan government funds the majority of the museums' operations, including staff salaries and facilities maintenance, many of the museum exhibitions and programs are supported by partnerships with foreign governments and sponsors. Despite the relatively large number of museums in Rwanda, little scholarship exists on the history of their development, with the exception of a single institution: the Ethnographic Museum at Huye (formerly the National Museum of Rwanda in Butare), the first museum built in Rwanda which has been represented in a catalogue by architect Lode Van Pee and the museum's former director Célestin Kanimba Misago and documented, researched, and analyzed in published articles by art historians Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen and Laura De Becker.³⁰

³⁰ See Laura De Becker, "Imagining the Post-Colonial and Post-Genocidal Nation in the National Museum of Rwanda, Butare," *Critical Interventions* 10, no. 3 (2016): 293-308, Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen, "The Musée National du Rwanda: Surviving the War," *African Arts* 28, no. 3 (1995): 62-63, 92; and Célestin Kanimba Misago and Thierry Mesas, *Rwanda: A Journey Through the National Museum Collection*, Paris: Maisonneuve et LaRose, 2003.

The story of the Ethnographic Museum's collection begins in the colonial era in the years leading to Rwanda's independence. Initiated under Belgian colonial guidance through the Institute for Scientific Research in Central Africa (IRSAC) in 1947, the museum's collection was assembled for ethnographic research in its first decade of operation. The collection was housed on the first floor of the IRSAC research headquarters in Huye province (formerly Butare).³¹ The return of King Baudouin of Belgium to the province in 1987 to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Rwanda's independence spurred the construction of a new museum building that he had promised years earlier. This building, designed by Belgian architect Lode Van Pee, opened to the public in September 1989 as a project under the Rwanda Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, *l'Institut National de Recherche Scientifique* (formerly IRSAC), and the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren.³²

The Ethnographic Museum's collection is also shaped by the violence that occurred in Rwanda after Belgian colonial rule. For the short period between the opening of the new museum building and 1990, museum staff expanded the collections by acquiring objects from various regions in Rwanda and documenting the works. This period of collecting ended when violence broke out across Rwanda in October 1990. Almost all of the museum's documents from this era, including primary research, recordings, inventories, and catalogue records, were destroyed during the 1994 genocide.³³ At this time, equipment and supplies from the museum's

³¹ De Becker, "Imagining the Post-Colonial and Post-Genocidal Nation in the National Museum of Rwanda, Butare," 293-294.

³² Lode Van Pee studied the history of Rwandan dwellings in preparation for his design; the architecture is thus not only symbolic of vernacular forms, it also followed local practices for construction within the landscape. See De Becker, "Imagining the Post-Colonial and Post-Genocidal Nation in the National Museum of Rwanda, Butare," 295; Lode Van Pee and Célestin Kanimba Misago, *Rwanda: Urugo rwa Kinyarwanda (Traditional Dwelling)*, Belgium: Africalia, 2008.

³³ Kauenhoven Janzen, "The Musée National du Rwanda," 63.

laboratories and offices were taken, and the museum's cars were stolen. And yet, the physical structure of the new building remained largely intact and only a few objects, such as small utensils, were looted or destroyed.³⁴ The forest just beyond the original museum site, however, was a site of extreme violence during the genocide. On April 20, 1994 seven people were seized from their homes and executed there at gunpoint. Among them was Rosalie Gicanda, the last queen of Rwanda who was married to the king Mutara III Rudahigwa until his death in 1959.³⁵ Today, the Ethnographic Museum at Huye's physical exhibits mostly remain as they had been since they were installed before the genocide.³⁶ As De Becker writes, the museum's survival despite its surrounding violence has become part of Rwanda's nation-building narrative, a symbol of pride for the country, and thus an important vehicle for Rwandan nationalism.³⁷

The Rwanda Art Museum, to which I turn in the next section of this paper, shares many similarities with the Ethnographic Museum, including its operation under the leadership of the same Director General of INMR. More importantly, both museums are shaped by Rwanda's history of violence with collections comprised of objects that symbolize the strength and history of Rwandan artisanship. While the objects in the Ethnographic Museum were acquired as a result of colonial interests and in the wake of Rwandan independence, the objects in the Rwanda Art Museum were collected after the genocide in response to the violence. In both cases, the

³⁴ Kauenhoven Janzen, "The Musée National du Rwanda," 62.

³⁵ De Becker, "Imagining the Post-Colonial and Post-Genocidal Nation in the National Museum of Rwanda, Butare," 301.

³⁶ In 2008, after the election of President Paul Kagame, museum staff removed a few photographs, including one depicting a crucifix, and changed label text to eliminate mention of Tutsi and Hutu ethnicities as identifiers for objects. Jerome Karangwa, Kigali, Rwanda, interview by author, September 5, 2019.

³⁷ De Becker, "Imagining the Post-Colonial and Post-Genocidal Nation in the National Museum of Rwanda, Butare," 303.

narratives of the museum and its objects are inseparable from the violence that occurred in its physical spaces. Rwanda's national museums are thus keepers of memories through the durability of their structures and the narratives they continue to construct. The Rwanda Art Museum, as I will show, has the added potential to formulate new narratives through dynamic engagements with contemporary art, especially through artists' interpretations of the violence of the past in relation to the possibilities of the present and future.

THE RWANDA ART MUSEUM IN ITS NEW HOME

A key aspect of the Rwanda Art Museum relates to the building's original function as a presidential mansion. The significance of such a location extends beyond the practical need to situate the museum within an urban center in order to attract visitors and generate revenues from their entrance fees. It is such pragmatism that led Robert Masozera, the former Ambassador of Rwanda to Belgium who has served as the Director General of INMR since 2016, to spearhead the move of the Rwanda Art Museum to the former presidential mansion in May 2018. I argue, however, that the relationship between the site and the artwork enables the museum to commemorate the country's past violence and present a future for Rwanda that includes artistic innovation and expression. In this section, I first review the history of the Rwanda Art Museum as an institution with active exhibition, acquisition, and educational programs. I then examine the history of the building in which it is currently housed, noting elements of the structure that make it a compelling but complicated space for the display of art. Finally, I point to several promising new initiatives, including site-specific installations and programs, that enable artists to critically engage with the charged space in ways that present new directions for the future.

I. The Institution's Establishment

Before the Rwanda Art Museum opened in the former presidential mansion under its current title, the institution was named the Arts Museum at Rwesero followed by the title “The National Art Gallery.” The museum was established as a result of collaborations between a delegation from the province of East-Flanders and Joseph Habineza, the former Minister of Youth, Culture, and Sports. From 2009 until May 2018, the museum was located in Nyanza district in the southern province of Rwanda in a palace built for the king *Mwami* Mutara II Rudahingwa, who never lived in the space (fig. 5). Because of its location on Rwesero hill, each gallery room looked out onto incredible vistas of rolling hills and lush greenery. Célestin Kanimba Misago, who served as Director General of INMR at the time of the National Art Gallery's inauguration in 2006, wrote in the catalogue's introduction, published on the occasion of the museum's inauguration, that “the palace itself is a work of art, and its splendor and architecture function well to support the requirements of an art museum.”³⁸ Announcing the museum's future projects, Kanimba Misago stressed not only the importance of the museum's exquisite location, but also its potential for facilitating creative dialogue among artists.

Since its founding, the museum's acquisition, exhibition, and educational programs have contributed to this stated mission of collaboration among artists of different nationalities. From 2006 to 2009, the museum hosted a series of exhibitions consisting of works submitted by artists to an annual competition and selected by a committee of Rwandan and international jurors. The submissions, which relate to the exhibitions' chosen themes of peace and tolerance, remembrance, education, and youth, were subsequently acquired for the museum's permanent

³⁸ Célestin Kanimba Misago, *Arts Museum at Rwesero, Nyanza*, (Ghent, Belgium: Provincie Oost-Vlaanderen, 2006), 17.

collection. The majority of works acquired during this time are multimedia sculptures and paintings made by artists born in Rwanda between 1952 and 1990. In addition, several artists from outside Rwanda are represented primarily from other eastern Africa countries including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, and Burundi. From 2012 to 2013, under the direction of the museum's former curator Lia Gieling, the museum hosted a series of photography exhibitions with works by international figures, including renowned African artists Sammy Baloji, Uche James Iroha, Santu Mofokeng, and Pieter Hugo. In tandem with these exhibitions, the museum organized workshops led by international sculptors, printmakers, and photographers for Rwandan artists and students.³⁹ Since its founding, the Rwanda Art Museum has thus served as a site for Rwandan and international artists to exhibit their work and share knowledge and ideas regarding their practice. In its new location, however, the museum is faced with the challenge of displaying works and fostering these types of exchanges in a building with a checkered history and architectural eccentricities that distract from the artworks on view.

II. The Building's Original Use

As noted at the outset, the Rwanda Art Museum now occupies the former presidential mansion, a four-story building that dates back to the late 1970s, in the period after the abolition of the Tutsi monarchy when Rwanda became an independent nation free from Belgian colonial rule. In 1973, Habyarimana, an army general from the town of Gisenyi in northern Rwanda, led a military coup that ousted from power the Hutu party leader Grégoire Kayibanda, the first elected president of Rwanda since 1962. Habyarimana instituted a one-party dictatorship under the

³⁹ Lia Gieling, "The National Art Gallery, A Shining Gem On Rwesero Hill," *Rozenberg Quarterly*, 2013, <<http://rozenbergquarterly.com/the-national-art-gallery-a-shining-gem-on-rwesero-hill/>>.

Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement (MRND) party.⁴⁰ In 1976, Habyarimana commissioned French architects, whose identities are unknown, to design a modern international style villa in the Kanombe district of Kigali, less than three miles from Rwanda's main airport on military land next to the house where Habyarimana lived before his presidency.⁴¹ The president and his immediate family, including his wife and eight children, moved to the new residence in 1980. The house also served as a meeting place for the president's intimate group of advisors that was spearheaded by the president's wife, Agathe Habyarimana. The group, which included members of the first lady's family and senior military officials, was referred to by critics as *akazu*, or "little house." The designation signified the clandestine nature of the group's efforts, which were to develop Hutu Power ideology and spread resentment against Tutsi people in Rwanda.⁴²

The *akazu* functioned, in reality, out of a large mansion with many rooms, each with their own function. As the floor plans for the house indicate, the mansion's first floor contained a living room, dining room, office for the president, entertaining room for the president's wife, bathrooms, and a kitchen (fig. 6). The second level was comprised of a master suite for the president and his wife, bedrooms and bathrooms for their children, and an additional office space for the president. The top level features a hair salon for the president's wife, a study room for their children, a bathroom, and two worship rooms, including a chapel for Catholic services and a shrine area used for traditional medicine and sacrifices. The basement level, accessible only

⁴⁰ Meredith, *The Fate of Africa*, 489.

⁴¹ The house is believed to have been constructed by Antoine Sebera, a Rwandan architect who trained in Germany, who was killed during the genocide and Rwandan builders whose identities are unknown. Vivaldi Ngenzi, Rwanda Art Museum, Kigali, Rwanda, interview by author, August 23, 2019.

⁴² Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families*, 81.

from the building's exterior, contained an enclosed space that was formerly used as a bar and dance area for playing music and entertaining guests. The home was designed for the specific purpose of hosting the president, his family, and the political elite.

In addition to its large size and numerous rooms, the house signified the president's wealth through its luxurious architectural elements and design. The house was conceived to be a space of comfort through its prioritization of air circulation, natural light, and access to the outside with multiple terraces. For example, the building is pierced with small openings that allow for breezes to flow throughout the house, keeping the spaces cool despite the sunlight that pours in through the house's large windows. The house features several verandas on both its front and back sides and on various levels of the house, enabling the president and his family to move easily between the house's outdoor and indoor spaces and overlook the surrounding compound. The rooms also contained elaborate decorative arts and design that amplified the sense of luxury and enhanced the elegance of the space. Chandeliers with numerous glass branches hung throughout the ceilings, including over the central staircase that winds from the first to the second floor. In addition to the European furniture that was imported from other countries, the president's bedroom featured a wooden table topped with glass, covered in reptile skin, and supported by legs made from the feet of an elephant collected by a friend of the president during a hunting expedition, a gift to display the spoils of the pastime.⁴³ The house projected the former president's opulence and privilege despite the heightened economic difficulties that Rwandans were experiencing under his regime.⁴⁴

⁴³ Andrew Wallis, *Stepp'd in Blood: Akazu and the Architects of the Rwandan Genocide Against the Tutsi*, (Winchester, U.K.: Zero Books, 2018), 100.

⁴⁴ Meredith, *The Fate of Africa*, 490.

While the house exuded grandeur, it concomitantly operated as a fortress for the president and was intended to assuage his paranoia and fears. A wall layered with bricks encircled the house's compound, providing an additional layer of security to an area already protected by guards and military personnel. The interior of the home also contained defense mechanisms. Attached to the bedrooms on the second level are concealed spaces where the president and his family could hide. Secret hallways and exits throughout the house serve as escape routes. The confined rooms and narrow hallways were carefully designed to control people's movement and prevent large gatherings. Details, such as the positioning of security sensors on the main stairway, reveal the president's caution. In the second-level bedroom of the presidents' sons, a wooden cabinet disguised to hold a television once concealed weapons and contained a hidden stairway that gave the president and his family access to the top level of the house. The rigorous safety mechanisms situated throughout Habyarimana's home demonstrate the former president's concerns at a time when resentment about his alleged corruption grew and calls to end his power were initiated.⁴⁵

On April 6, 1994 at around 8:30 pm, the residence turned from a space of luxury and protection to a death site. Habyarimana's wife, three of his children, and five of his nieces and nephews were inside the presidential complex that evening. The plane carrying Habyarimana, the Burundian president Cyprien Ntaryamira, and their aides exploded in the air just above the residence's grounds. Fragments of the plane and several of the bodies plummeted onto the complex and its surrounding groves of banana trees. Habyarimana's mangled body is said to have fallen in the bushes just outside his wife's private lounge located in the back of the house.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Meredith, *The Fate of Africa*, 490-491.

⁴⁶ Wallis, *Stepp'd in Blood*, 374.

In the hours after the crash, the bodies of the passengers were recovered and brought into the central living room area of the house. To accommodate the bodies in the space, the family's furniture were moved to the side. As Andrew Wallis writes “the room became a temporary morgue.”⁴⁷ In the years following this event, the space remained continually occupied. Pasteur Bizimungu, who became president of Rwanda in July 1994 after the genocide, lived in the Kanombe house until the end of his presidency in 2000. The building was then converted into the former Presidential Palace Museum, operated by INMR, holding the personal collections of the former presidents, until 2018 when it became home to the Rwanda Art Museum. Today, the same room that once held the deceased passengers' bodies at the start of the genocide now serves as the main exhibition space for displaying the work of Rwandan artists from the permanent collection of the Rwanda Art Museum.

III. The Display of Art in the Space

What does it mean to turn such a space into a pristine environment for viewing art? After paying an entrance fee at the main reception area and passing through the main gate, visitors walk a few hundred feet to the front of the main house. In order to preserve the historic site, a sign on the front of the house lists the museum's rules, prohibiting visitors from wearing shoes, handling artwork, sitting on furniture, and touching walls. Once visitors remove their shoes, they walk either barefoot or with socks through the front entrance of the house, feeling the floors—formerly walked on by the president, his family, and close acquaintances—under their feet with every step. The white tile floors of the former living room are spotless and sparkle—museum staff wash the tile floors two to three times per week and clean the carpets almost every two months depending on the season. The floors reflect the natural light entering through the room's

⁴⁷ Wallis, *Stepp'd in Blood*, 375.

large windows and doorway. In addition, the walls of the living room are white, painted this color per Habyarimana's request, which contribute to the space's clean appearance. The former living room provides a quiet and clean space for visitors to view and reflect on the works on view.

Several works on display in the living room were commissioned by Habyarimana for his personal enjoyment, and these do not carry an accompanying label text. They are either directly installed into the building's architecture or remain on view as part of the original décor of the home. Twelve plaques made of *libuyu*, or mahogany wood, decorate the sides of the grooved interior columns in the living room (fig. 7). Each plaque depicts a different village scene, including farmers working in the fields and women cooking in front of their homes. The dining room, where the presidential family ate together at a long table, is separated from the living room by a series of large ceramic planters, each decorated with colorful scenes (fig. 8). The scenes, believed to have been created *in situ* by an unknown artist, are the most remarkable images left in the house from the era of Habyarimana's presidency. On the sides of the planters, long-horned cattle are depicted grazing in fields, figures of herders lounge across the ground, and fishermen in boats are shown casting nets into water. These pastoral works maintain the presence of the former president and illustrate his preference for scenes of daily life for the humble, rural population of Rwanda living outside the mansion's walls.

In May 2018, following changes in leadership at MINISPOC and INMR in 2016, the staff at the Rwanda Art Museum packed 117 artworks and loaded them onto two covered trucks, where they were transported on a two-and-a-half-hour journey via Rwanda's mountainous roads from southern Rwanda to Kanombe. As a temporary solution to the mansion's limited storage areas, museum staff moved a portion of Habyarimana's furniture to the bathrooms and basement

of the house in order to make room for the artwork; they hung the paintings on walls and mounted sculptures on pedestals throughout the house's main level and second floor. Together all the works on view from the permanent collection make up the exhibition titled "Art for Peace," a theme selected to reflect the hopeful subject matter of the works. This theme, although somewhat vague, announces the museum's quest for peace within a space ridden with memories of violence.

Mirror Of Our History (2018), a recent museum acquisition and the first work museum visitors encounter in the former living room, exemplifies the museum's desire to recast the space as one that responds to Rwanda's past (fig. 9). The young Rwandan artist Maximilien Muhawenimana conveys the country's turbulent history through a mesh of jagged wires that jut out from a framed glass mirror. The mirror presents viewers with their own reflection, as well as that of the surrounding space of the former mansion, and compels visitors to consider their own subject positions. A plastic bottle full of water and a web of salvaged bottle caps installed on the floor connect to, and symbolically fuel, a fantastical figure sculpted out of twisted wires. The winged figure emerging from the mirror sprints forward in a powerful gesture that stands to symbolize the determination of Rwandan youth running toward the future. Through its central position in the gallery, the work's message is undeniably amplified: Muhawenimana's imagining of Rwanda's future is in direct dialogue with a visual image of the past regime and invites the viewer to see themselves as a part of the space's progression.

The repurposed materials and innovative design of Muhawenimana's work stands out against the sculptures and paintings made by Rwandan artists of earlier generations and acquired by the museum between 2006 and 2009. Several of these artists attended Ecole D'Art De Nyundo, the country's only art school in northern Rwanda, where they were trained to make

work with locally available materials, albeit in a similar style. Laurent Hategekimana's 2002 sculpture carved from jacaranda wood, *A Couple* or *Umugore n'umugabo* (fig. 10), is one striking example, conveying through its smooth textures and subtle curves a sense of movement within the couple's embrace. Many of the paintings in the collection, like the sculptures, explore themes related to "traditional" Rwandan music and dance. In addition, there are several works using a technique developed by Rwanda's prominent artist Pascal Bushayija, which consists of applying sawdust and acrylic paint on canvas to create an image of figural silhouettes in motion, as evidenced in Bushayija's 2006 *Women Dancing*, or *Abagore b'ababyinnyi* (fig. 11). The figures, depicted in traditional Rwandan attire made of bark cloth, extend their arms in a manner that evokes the undulating movements (intended to mirror the swaying motion of cows' horns) of a traditional Rwandan dance. Such works tend to glorify Rwanda's past with subject matters and styles articulated through Rwandan cultural symbols and materials. Unlike Muhawenimana's installation that engages viewers to reflect on the surrounding space, the majority of the museum's initial acquisitions, which hang more conventionally on the walls or stand isolated on pedestals, celebrate the beauty of Rwanda's traditions with a nostalgia that elides recognition of past violence.

In contrast to the display of permanent collections in these downstairs galleries, the upstairs galleries boast temporary exhibitions within the difficult spaces that previously functioned as the bedrooms of the former president and his family. A German organization sponsored the first temporary exhibition in 2019 featuring work by contemporary international designers based in Rwanda.⁴⁸ The project included photographic displays on moveable partitions

⁴⁸ The German organization is identified as Partnership Rhineland-Palatinate/Rwanda (Jumelage).

that were recycled from an earlier exhibition elsewhere in Kigali, and now re-positioned in the center of each bedroom. Although simple in their design and material, the size of these partitions, which almost touched the ceilings, overwhelmed the small spaces of the bedrooms, while their multi-sided angles pointed visitors in different directions that were ultimately confusing. Moreover, the exhibition's lack of introductory label text made the non-linear narrative even more difficult to follow. At the same time, however, this awkward arrangement effectively exposed the idiosyncratic spaces of the former president's home and highlighted some of the incongruencies between the exhibition and its physical home.

IV. New Kinds of Initiatives

The museum has ambitious plans for the future: it hopes to re-vamp its exterior spaces, which contain an emptied pool and recreational area. The museum aspires to convert the recreational area into a functional, high-end tennis court and transform the pool into a resort-like destination where visitors can swim, lounge, and purchase food and drinks in addition to their museum tour. Significantly, this vision seeks to transform the Rwanda Art Museum, within three decades of the genocide, into much more than a permanent collection featuring temporary exhibitions within its walls: the goal is to realize a multi-purpose center and destination for tourists and Rwandans alike—to become a site of entertainment and luxury rather than a site of fear and violence.

If the museum's proposal for amusement-oriented additions to the site is intended to re-write its violent history, the commissioning of site-specific works by contemporary Rwandan artists may offer a more successful approach. One such work, for instance, is *The Crown*, or *Inkamba*, a dance performance about Rwanda's lineage of queens that presents narratives about the struggles for power and the overcoming of fears. Conceptualized by Rwandan choreographer

Wesley Ruzibiza, this project, which was performed twice since 2018 in two different Kigali locations, is designed to be danced at night inside an emptied pool painted with abstract murals by Feline Ntabangana, another Rwandan artist, who has created works in emptied pools to overcome her fear of drowning as a non-swimmer (fig. 12).⁴⁹ This collaboration between choreographers, dancers, and visual artists has the potential to re-activate the space of the pool—and by extension, the museum itself—in more pronounced and experimental ways than the commercially driven plan that is currently in place. Moreover, the work’s allegorical message of conquering fears is ideally suited to the museum’s location, and points to the agency and creativity of artists in redefining the spaces once under the control of the former regime. These kinds of strategies—site-specific, collaborative, performative, and poetic—suggest possible directions for the museum and ways to confront the ghosts of the contemporary site, most notably, with the help of artists themselves.

In addition to commissioning site-specific works, exhibiting works that engage with the issue of enduring violence in Rwanda might further expose the embedded complexities of the space. For example, the photographic prints by South African artist Pieter Hugo housed in the museum’s permanent collection offer one such opportunity and potential. The photographs from Hugo’s *Rwanda 2004: Vestiges of a Genocide*, depict rural sites across Rwanda, such as former hotels, stadiums, or roadblocks, that retain marks of the genocide’s violence ten years later. Similarly, the 2018 film, *Sometimes It Was Beautiful*, by the Dutch artist Christian Nyampeta, who was born in Rwanda, discusses visible traces of Rwanda’s past through the medium of documentary film. Nyampeta questions the ambivalent legacies of film itself and asks

⁴⁹ Wesley Ruzibiza and Feline Ntabangana, interview by author, electronic correspondence, September 2, 2019.

(indirectly) whether it is best to erase traces of a crime or be faced with their damaging imprints.⁵⁰ In addition, his imagery of a motorcycle leaving marks on the earth evokes the enduring traces of Belgian colonialism in Rwanda. Through both metaphorical and physical renderings of scars inscribing the Rwandan landscape, these works invite the viewer to be more conscious of representations of memory. The works signify departures from affirmations of tradition that uphold the process of heritage construction. Instead, their imagery engages in critical self-reflection and provides bitter acknowledgement that the past engraves and, in many cases, mutilates the present.

Lastly, a transformation of children's programming within the museum would allow for more direct engagement with the artworks on view. Specifically, the current function of the space defined as the "Kids' Studio," featuring artwork made by children who visit the museum with their families or school groups, could be expanded. Here, the museum provides drawing materials for children and, when a child completes a drawing, it is taped to the room's curved brick wall—this same wall was once part of the former sitting room of Agathe Habyarimana. By enabling children to make and display their works without criteria, the Kids' Studio reverses the room's previous authoritarian function and cultivates creativity; however, the museum's educational programming could include more direct analysis of the artworks on view in the galleries and temporary exhibitions so that they become the focus of the school-group visit.

Although the Rwanda Art Museum has enacted displays and programming that engage with the site in which it is situated, the museum is in the position to take further action in order to revise the site's history with artistic interventions. Commissioning and installing site-specific

⁵⁰ Louisa Elderton, "Christian Nyampeta's Study of the Cultural Acts of Colonial Violence," *Frieze*, September 3, 2019, <<https://frieze.com/article/christian-nyampetas-study-cultural-acts-colonial-violence>>.

works and facilitating discussions among Rwandan artists, children, and visitors within the space invite a more critical engagement with the country's recent past. Together these kinds of strategies, which serve both artistic and pedagogic needs, can help the museum to confront its built legacy through strategic engagements with contemporary art, rather than mask the edifice with acquisitions that reproduce conservative forms of cultural nationalism.

CONCLUSION

Rwanda is an exceptional case-study within the global expansion of museums in recent decades, one that exposes the role and possibilities of the art museum within the postcolonial complexities of the 21st century. My study of the Rwanda Art Museum builds on existing literature examining how non-Western museums in postcolonial societies negotiate turbulent pasts by reclaiming historically significant spaces. The relocation of the Rwanda Art Museum, its appropriation of a site haunted by violence, and its presentation of artwork is, I have suggested, a significant departure from existing museum models in Rwanda, which declare themselves as keepers of history and culture, but remain attached to Western paradigms and colonial constructs. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Rwandan government's investment in the institutional forms of the memorial and cultural museum has been bound up in a desire to maintain its own authority and a singular narrative regarding the country's development. The Rwanda Art Museum, in contrast, shifts its storytelling powers to artists and visitors by challenging them to make sense of the scarred space through its provocative juxtaposition with artists' works on view. While the Rwanda Art Museum denotes the end of an era that was Habyarimana's presidency and the violence of the genocide, it also introduces the beginning of a chapter with a narrative that is still unfolding.

The mission of this particular museum at its founding was to not only respond to Rwanda's past, but to also adapt the site to promote the arts and serve the public for the future. On the occasion of the museum's opening, the former director Célestin Kanimba Misago wrote that the museum "marks a step towards a new era: an era full of inspiration, creativity, and originality in the fine arts."⁵¹ The museum should, in other words, facilitate the process not only of remembering Rwanda's history, including its cultural traditions and the traumas of civil war and genocide, but also create something out of all that came before. Although intended for display at the museum's original location at the palace in Nyanza, the works in the collection now counter the more traumatic aspects of the presidential mansion's legacy by exhibiting examples of Rwandan creativity and capacity for cultural renewal. At its new location, the Rwanda Art Museum hopes to function, above all, as a space for artists to "meet and exchange ideas."⁵² This stated purpose of the museum attests to its immense transition from a private meeting place for the masterminds of the genocide to a public site for artistic collaboration with the goal of overcoming that violence.

⁵¹ Kanimba Misago, *Arts Museum at Rwesero, Nyanza*, 18.

⁵² "Rwanda Art Museum," Institute of National Museums of Rwanda, <<https://museum.gov.rw/index.php?id=74>>, accessed August 26, 2019.

[Image Redacted]

Figure 1: Installation view, *Cycle of Life* (2006), Jean Claude Sekijege, wood, papier-mâché, glass, wire, tree fiber, and twine, 125 x 110 x 95 cm, acquired in 2006, Rwanda Art Museum, August 2019 (Photo: Talia Lieber)

[Image Redacted]

Figure 2: Exterior view of front entrance, Rwanda Art Museum, August 2019 (Photo: Talia Lieber)

[Image Redacted]

Figure 3: Remnants of Habyarimana's presidential plane, Rwanda Art Museum, August 2019
(Photo: Talia Lieber)

[Image Redacted]

Figure 4: Quote by Apollon Kabahizi in Kinyarwanda and English, Central Exhibition, Kigali Genocide Memorial, August 2019 (Photo: Talia Lieber)

[Image Redacted]

Figure 5: Former National Art Gallery, Nyanza, Rwanda, December 2014 (Photo: Talia Lieber)

[Image Redacted]

Figure 6: Floor plans, Rwanda Art Museum, drafted by Joselyne Uwineza, September 2019

[Image Redacted]

Figure 7: Wooden panels on pillars, Rwanda Art Museum, August 2019 (Photo: Talia Lieber)

[Image Redacted]

Figure 8: Ceramic planter between former dining room and living room, Rwanda Art Museum, August 2019 (Photo: Talia Lieber)

[Image Redacted]

Figure 9: Installation view, *Mirror Of Our History* (2018), Maximilien Muhawenimana, plastic, wire, paper, and glass, acquired in 2019, Rwanda Art Museum, August 2019 (Photo: Talia Lieber)

[Image Redacted]

Figure 10; Installation View, *A Couple (Umugore n'umugabo)*, 2002, Laurent Hategekimana, jacaranda wood, 117 x 27 x 26 cm, acquired in 2002, Rwanda Art Museum, September 2019 (Photo: Talia Lieber)

[Image Redacted]

Figure 11: Installation View, *Women Dancing (Abagore b'ababyinnyi)*, 2006, Pascal Bushayija, acrylic and sawdust on canvas, 92 x 62 cm, acquired in 2006, Rwanda Art Museum, September 2019 (Photo: Talia Lieber)

[Image Redacted]

Figure 12: Still image from video recording of *The Crown (Inkamba)* dance performance, *Shine Through: Women Fine Art Exhibition*, private home, Kigali, Rwanda, August 29, 2019 (Photo: Talia Lieber)

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