

NEWS RELEASE

Remembering Rwanda: combating apathy with art

Against a backdrop of an increasingly turbulent political climate, events of terrorism, war and violence have become more frequent, and people have grown less affected by them in the process – particularly international events.

In an attempt to counter this growing social apathy an Oxford University academic has created an art exhibition around one of the most brutal examples of genocide in international history, the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. The installation is focused on helping people to tap into their empathy, by understanding how a specific culture deals with grief and trauma.

Over just 100 days in 1994 more than one million people were brutally murdered in Rwanda when Hutu extremists carried out plans to exterminate the Tutsi ethnic minority. 24 years later, the atrocity remains one of the worst genocides that the world has ever seen.

Kwibuka Rwanda (Remember Rwanda) supports awareness and understanding of these events by illustrating how creating memorials to commemorate victims is helping survivors' to come to terms with their loss and trauma.

It demonstrates the role that preserving human remains and honouring them at memorial sites, plays in the society's grief process and gives voice to the 'care-takers' who work in these spaces, honouring the dead by cleaning and preserving their remains.

The creator of the exhibition, Dr Julia Viebach of the Oxford Law Faculty explains: 'During the genocide people were killed in unthinkable ways, and this process of commemoration and caring for the bodies of the dead allows survivors working at the genocide memorials to give victims their dignity back after death, at least symbolically.'

Of the motivation behind her exhibition, she adds: 'Given the overflow of atrocities that we see today, people can come to be indifferent to other's pain – particularly those that do not look like ourselves or who live in parts of the world distant to us. Kwibuka means 'remember' in Kinyarwanda, Rwanda's national language. I hope that the commemoration and exhibition raise further awareness of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda and what we, as fellow human beings, can learn from it.'

It is hoped that the exhibition, which will run from 21st April - 28 September at Pitt Rivers Museum will raise awareness of the Genocide, so that it resonates with audiences young and old.

The exhibition's launch will coincide with a commemoration event held at Mansfield College, Oxford and in partnership with the Ishami Foundation, National Association of Rwandese Communities in UK and Oxford Rwandese Community Association, which will bring together members of the Rwandan and wider local community to remember the lives of those who perished during the 1994 genocide.

The day will include candle-lighting, prayers, survivor testimony and a panel discussion, followed by a reception which will take place at the Pitt Rivers Museum and include performances including the Oxford Rwandan Choir.

'Theirs was a cry never heard,' says John Binama, Chairman of The National Association of Rwandese Communities in UK. 'Through the commemoration and the *Kwibuka Rwanda* exhibition, we remember them and are united in our resolve to act against those who seek to bury the horror of the crime of genocide in revisionism.'

While for some of the organisers, their understanding of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi is secondary, for others it is much more personal; 'My brother, Irankunda Jean-Paul, was killed aged 7 and was denied the chance to grow up and live his dreams and show the world what he could do,' shares Eric Murangwa Eugene MBE, Founder and Executive Managing Officer of Ishami Foundation and Survivor of the Genocide against the Tutsi.

'We were not able to bury him, as his remains were lost and scattered. Memorials in Rwanda bear witness both to the victims buried there and to the others, like Jean-Paul, whose body was never found. They serve as evidence of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. This is why I believe that memorials are essential and offer one of the crucial mechanisms the world needs to keep the memories alive.

We are pleased to support such an important project. It is in line with our philosophy of using stories and other means such as memorials as tools for raising awareness, education and keeping memories alive.'

Of the artistic significance of the project, Laura Van Broekhoven, Director of Pitt Rivers Museum, said: 'I feel this is a moving exhibition about cultured practices of coping with genocide and incomprehensible loss and death through remembrance and ritual cleansing.'

Professor Laura Peers, Curator of the Americas and Professor of Museum Anthropology, added: 'Museums are spaces for learning about living cultures, about how humans deal with their realities through cultural activity. All human societies have ways of mourning their dead and of dealing with the remains of their ancestors. Kwibuka Rwanda helps us to consider the legacies of genocide and how Rwandans have extended older forms of mourning to commemorate and honour the dead, activities that help survivors to cope and to heal.'

Dr Viebach added: 'Even if something feels far removed from today's world or apparent status quo, history has shown us that it can always be repeated – and I say that as a German. Countering the increasing social apathy by stimulating peoples' – particularly youth, empathy for others, is key to preventing these atrocities from happening again. Even if one person comes away from the exhibition and googles the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda for further information that will be a step in the right direction.'

The exhibition will run from 21st April – 28 Sept and will include guided tours for secondary school groups.

Notes to editors:

Images:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/gqtf6v0o0n2es3h/AADUGgrdr8x_DF7cxbgAFmyVa?dl=0

Image 1: Depicting the blue door is the lead image of the exhibit. This is Nyange Genocide Memorial, Western Province.

Image 2: Showing the white rose is the same memorial.

Image 3: Gisenyi Genocide Memorial (inside), Western Province.

Event details:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/kwibuka-rwanda-launch-and-commemoration-event-tickets-44371996837>

The service will be followed by a reception with light refreshments at Pitt Rivers Museum. Please note that guests are required to be seated in the Mansfield College chapel by 2.45pm and the chapel doors will be closed to allow for the smooth running of the event.

Programme

3-5pm, Mansfield College:

- Opening prayers
- Panel discussion
- Survivor testimony
- Candle lighting

From 5-6pm, Pitt Rivers Museum:

Join us at Pitt Rivers Museum (5 mins walk from Mansfield College) for refreshments and to view the new Kwibuka Rwanda exhibition.

Further information about commemorating the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda can be found here: <http://kwibuka.rw>

Information about the Kwibuka Rwanda exhibition can be found here: <https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/exhibitions-and-case-displays>

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