

**Artwork | Light coming through darkness...  
Hope seeps in...**

INNOCENT NKURUNZIZA

*Light coming through darkness... Hope seeps in...*

Rwanda is a beautiful country. Anyone who has visited will attest to this. Lush, rolling green hills reaching skyward at every chance they get and pristine vistas that wouldn't be out of place in an alpine meadow or in the Tyrol. But Rwanda is also a poor and very densely populated country. A country with grand—and valid—ambitions, eager to thrust itself into modernity. Crucially, Rwanda is a country with the will and ability to do so. So, while commendable efforts have been made to balance the pursuit of development with the environmental concerns of our day, nature is inevitably paying the price for my country's development.

My installation is a critical reflection of the wounds we inflict upon our planet, physical manifestations of our desire for more, ever more, as we overlook the embarrassment of riches offered freely to us by nature, scarring the earth in the process. To me, this is very much a story about opposing elements: the sacred natural against the artificial and profane.

I usually work with soft, pliable materials, but these felt inappropriate to convey the imposing and enduring nature of the desolation wrought by man. Steel tar drums sourced from a construction site were therefore converted into a canvas for this piece. Already imbued with a relevant history and purpose, possessing the latent unnatural and noxious intent of their past, the drums were confectioned into metal sheets and exposed to the elements. The process resulted in a rough, cracked and uneven surface, testament to the staying power of mankind's festering handiwork, but also bearing the marks of nature's retaliation, a rebellion which may yet bear fruit.

**Innocent Nkurunziza** (born September 1986 in Uganda) is a Rwandan contemporary practicing artist who lives and works in Kigali, Rwanda. Driven by a desire to change lives through art, Nkurunziza, together with his brother Emmanuel Nkuranga, co-founded Inema Arts Center in 2012. Nkurunziza is a prominent force in the development and promotion of fine art in Rwanda and continues to lead efforts to bring art from Rwanda to international audiences. He hopes to inspire viewers to experiment and live out their dreams just as he feels he is able to do every day working as an artist. Nkurunziza is a painter, sculptor, and installation artist, employing an abstract style that is both highly expressive and methodical. He imbues his work with many interlacing colors, using handmade ficus tree barkcloth, fig tree barkcloth earth pigments, mud, clay, bleach, wax, and glue—materials and textures that he derives from the people and landscapes that surround him.

His work has been featured in solo and group exhibitions throughout Rwanda, at university institutions in the U.S., including Columbia University, Babson College, the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, and the University of Virginia, and at galleries in Canada, Scotland, Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands. Nkurunziza has completed artist residencies at Semillas de Esperanza in Oaxaca, Mexico, and No Boundaries International Art Colony at Bald Head Island, North Carolina. In 2019, his work was exhibited in the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Dance Africa Festival in New York and in *Afrique Nouvelle Vague: Bullets, Fetishes, Paintings, Graffiti* at Ethan Cohen Gallery in 2020.



Innocent Nkurunziza, *Light coming through darkness... Hope seeps in...* (No. 1/8), 2020. Mixed media on metal, 190 × 96 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Innocent Nkurunziza, *Light coming through darkness... Hope seeps in...* (No. 2/8), 2020. Mixed media on metal, 190 × 96 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Innocent Nkurunziza, *Light coming through darkness... Hope seeps in...* (No. 3/8), 2020. Mixed media on metal, 190 × 96 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Innocent Nkurunziza, *Light coming through darkness... Hope seeps in...* (No. 4/8), 2020. Mixed media on metal, 190 × 96 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Innocent Nkurunziza, *Light coming through darkness...Hope seeps in...* (No. 5/8), 2020. Mixed media on metal, 190 × 96 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Innocent Nkurunziza, *Light coming through darkness...Hope seeps in...* (No. 6/8), 2020. Mixed media on metal, 190 × 96 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Innocent Nkurunziza, *Light coming through darkness...Hope seeps in...* (No. 7/8), 2020. Mixed media on metal, 190 × 96 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Innocent Nkurunziza, *Light coming through darkness...Hope seeps in...* (No. 8/8), 2020. Mixed media on metal, 190 × 96 cm. Courtesy of the artist.