

Agnes Achola **Leftover, 2010, wire mesh and textiles, 150 cm, exhibited during the project and book presentation at Secession, Vienna.** The leitmotif of this artwork is the idea of *defining oneself*, which can be viewed as a process of self-definition and self-empowerment of *women, women artists, women migrants*. This proceeded in collective continuous discussions, wherein reminiscing about experiences, strategies and detours of one's own life and that of the migrant communities in Vienna – in parallel with reflecting one's own creative work – played the most important role. The questions posed in the background of this retrospective view were: What does migration mean to female artists – who have migrated – in their work practice and everyday experiences? What role do social and cultural background and gender play in the distribution of power and access to resources? How much power do female artists have for a representative political impact? Dealing with the term *migrant* was also given a priority: How much is defined and by whom? The definition involves complex socio-political power relations, because *the migrant* is a constructed identity that indicates the inequality concerning civil rights and (daily) discrimination in the conditions of the nation state.

The project's basic aim is to lead this debate on a democratic and participatory level. This approach aims to dissociate from the frequent practice of exploiting *far away* and *exotic* cultures for the amusement of mainstream society. In the field of culture there is in fact often the need for specific attributes based on one's origin or background which leads to the reproduction and consolidation of clichés and stereotypes. As a counter position, this project is willing to create its own cultural space and develop strategies against exoticism, discrimination and inequality.

My work, titled *Leftover*, refers to the mechanism of *othering* and concepts of alterity: *Leftover*, a figurative sculpture made completely out of rags of second-hand clothing, not only makes an issue of the *lived experience of black people* - the confrontation with everyday racism, which I address. But materiality also points to the globalised economies



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and the western domination of and threat to local markets, for example in Uganda. Thus the European textile leftovers, which are exported to be re-used in Africa increasingly drive out the traditional clothing producers and have a long-term damaging effect on whole industries. This continuation of colonial rule and exploitation relationships expresses itself both in Africa and Europe in view of tightened border regime and asylum policy.

In my artistic practice, I react with forms of making-visible and forms of resistance through the identity of the post-colonial subject.

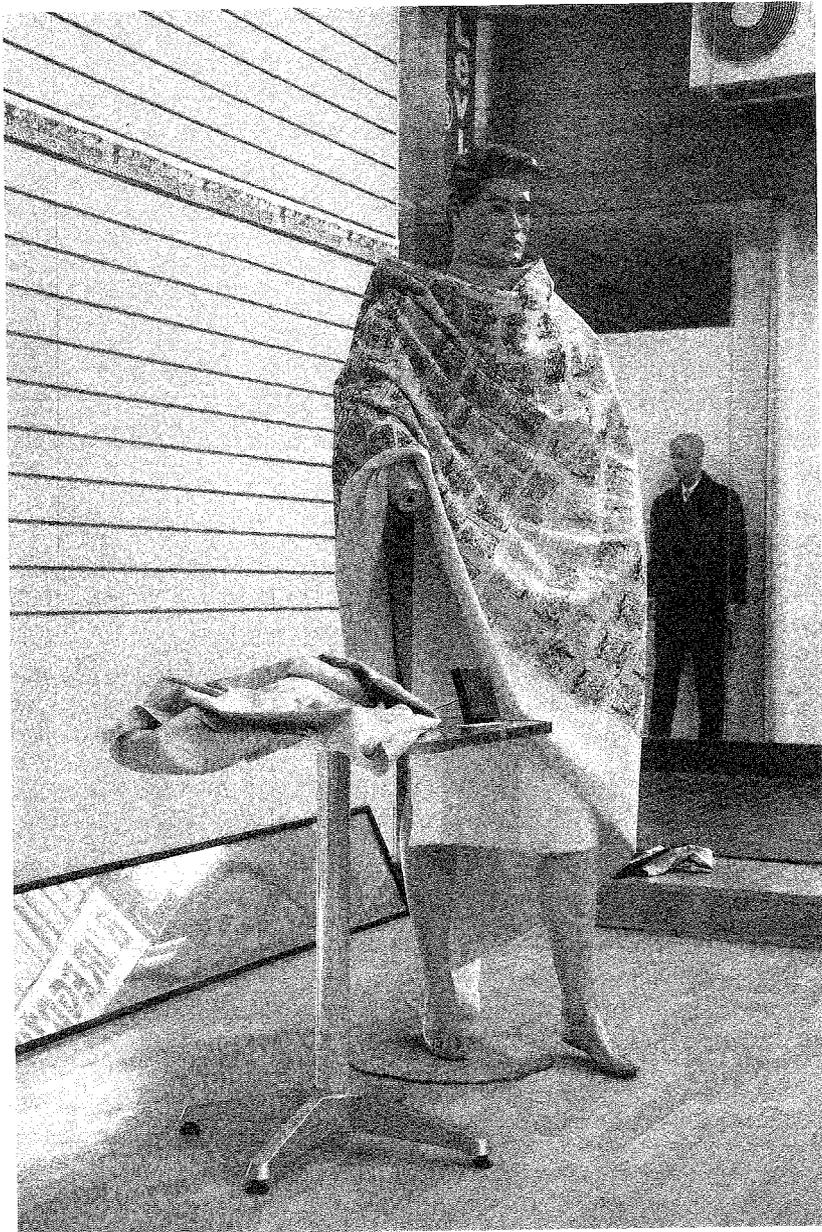
Agnes Achola **Ornamental Structures – Figure and Ground Installation, hand stamp print on khaki textile, 250 cm, exhibition 12.02.2011 – 15.02.2011 in the Charlama Depot Gallery, Sarajevo**

My intention of using the khaki fabric and the printing stamp is that, first, the khaki fabric reminds me of Ugandan prisons because my father worked as a prison officer and we lived with him in the barracks. I was confronted with the situation of seeing prisoners in their daily activities, for example, working in the farms dressed in the khaki fabric. This reminds me of the history of colonisation in East Africa; the *Askari* is a Swahili word that originates from the Arab slave traders. Back then, it was used to refer to the soldiers, but it is still in use. The khaki uniform worn by the regular German *Schutztruppe* on an active service in South Africa, East Africa and Cameroon was originally issued in 1896.

The stamp print I used to create the Sarajevo-Project (see page 107) was found by myself at the flea market *Naschmarkt* in Vienna. This type of stamp was used between 1930 and 1950 for newspapers or books; at the same time it reminds me of the Yoruba textiles created by stamping the Adinkra cloth. The symbols in these clothes are linked to proverbs, stories, songs, beliefs and everyday expressions, including insults.

In my pictorial work, the information and the circumstances that I bring forward represents the *minority people* in general and the situation in our world today. In the work, one sees that – where the stamps are boldly or strongly visible and some parts not clearly printed – this was intentional. There are certain situations that as human beings we do not want to be confronted with. There are things that we should take action upon and react immediately upon. Unfortunately, these situations become so normal that we become used to them in our daily lives, or is it too unpleasant to talk about them? So it is placed swept under the rug, hidden because we do not want to face reality.

In the stamp print, body language plays an important role as well as human interaction, the permanent discussions about human race, discriminations and gender. Such



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drama! There has always been repeated suppression of Africans that dates back to history of slavery, colonization and Christian missionaries in Africa. And not to mention the gender part! The women were completely invisible during these times. In my work one recognizes how times have changed. We are now on a different level of discussions but still facing the past, the communication or discussion going between the two men of different origin and the topless woman looking surprised or in shock like the man on the far right with a similar expression on his face. The surroundings in the picture look like a typical African homestead with the hut, palm trees and a fence made out of wooden sticks. Moreover, the three topless people are all barefoot and the man dressed in black is wearing shoes. Both men have swords besides them, this reminds me of the history of the Scramble for Africa. The dominance of other races over the Africans since the time of slavery has taken another level but these situations are still alive.