

## Boda Boda and the Bacchus



RICHARD KETLEY

A collection



This series of drawings and paintings arose from my continued response to the Africa cities which I visit and the vibrant and salubrious life of these cities.

The title of the series brings together a number of current themes and interests.

Bacchus – the Roman god of wine captures the essential theme of the series, boisterous nightlife which contrasts with the idea of the African city as a scene of poverty and alienation. By choosing a classical figure I am further locating this work and my self as a European, but who moves through African cities crowded with (and on ) boda boda motorcycle taxis.

Boda Boda is a Ugandan term that describes the ubiquitous motorbike taxi's that are such a common feature of African cities, and represents the spirit of youth thrusting themselves into an economy which seemingly presents them with few opportunities.

Bacchus or his Greek precedent Dionysus has a deeper philosophical positioning. Nietzsche's divides the Greek traditions of music, song and dance into two tendencies, the Apollonian and the Dionysian. The Apollonian follows the principle of individuation, stressing the gentle reign of reason and intellect, pushing life to a somewhat unnatural ordering. The Dionysian is its exact opposite—it is governed by emotions and particularly passions, sometimes whipped to a self-destructive frenzy of excess. The Dionysian suppresses his intellect to live as one with nature, and wine plays an essential role in his cult. For Nietzsche the age of Aeschylus marks an important synthesis between these Apollonian and Dionysian tendencies—a synthesis that dissolved with the rise of Euripides and Socrates, with their elevation of the Apollonian over the Dionysian. Nietzsche views the totality of European intellectual and artistic tradition as the product of interaction between the Apollonian and Dionysian tendencies—the greater the friction between them, the greater the art which results (Source: Scott Horton, Harper, 2017). These are the themes that underlie these paintings

These paintings are not literal representations, but abstract responses rendered in oil and charcoal on translucent mediums, which allow the drawing to remain within the painting.

For me drawing is rather like my presence in the cities I capture; a rough and immediate and intermediary means of expressing – a flick of the hand, an instance, and observation of a line or movement, the visual equivalence of the sudden clatter of a bottle knocked over against the background of laughter.

The painting on the other hand captures the more sonorous moments of such evenings, interspersed with the clutter of horns and boda boda's racing through the streets.

Although not inspired by such work it would be wrong not to also locate the work in reference to Cy Twombly's series of the same title. Twombly was defining his abstract work in relationship to classical European themes. I am trying to locate my European heritage in the dusty bursting bars of Kampala.



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**Awakening**  
Charcoal and oil on drafting  
film

800 x 600





**Bacchus and the Boda Boda.**

Oxides and oil paint on tracing paper

2 panels

1100 x 1400





**Bacchus**  
Oxides and oil on  
tracing paper  
900 x 1100





**Blood Lilies of the Nile Hotel\***

Charcoal and oil on tracing  
paper

2 panels

1100 x 1400

\*see explanatory note at end



**Venus**  
Oxides and oil on  
tracing paper  
1000 x 1500





**Boda Boda repose**

Charcoal on tracing paper  
1000 x 1500



**Boda Boda repose II**  
Charcoal on drafting film  
800 x 600





**Bacchus collage**

Oil on tracing paper collage

2 panels

150 x 240 each





**The Bacchus**

Oxides & oil paint on  
drafting film  
800 x 600





**Boda Boda and the Bacchus**

Charcoal, & oil paint on  
drafting film  
1000 x 1500



**Mpesa**

Oil and charcoal on tracing  
paper

1100 x 1300





**Night street**

Oil and oxides, varnish, tracing  
paper mounted on canvas  
1400 x1100





**Boda Boda training**  
Charcoal on tracing paper  
800 x 1400





**Streetlife**  
Oxides & oil paint on  
drafting film  
1200 x 800





**Boda Boda and the Bacchus**

Oil paint on drafting film

840 x 1300





**Street life**

Oil on tracing paper  
collage, photomontage

350 x 240



**The white rabbit of  
Kigali**

Oil and oxides on  
tracing paper

840 x 1200







**The Bacchus**

Oil and oxides on drafting film

840 x 1200





**Pages from sketchbook**  
Crayon and charcoal on stone  
paper, various sizes





**Pages from sketchbook**  
Crayon and charcoal on stone  
paper, various sizes

### Notes and sources

The main inspiration for this series came from a visit to Kampala.

The images are not representational but reflect the sight and sounds of the city at night. The image below could represent any number of spots in the city – but is a scene of Kabalagala



The image Blood Lilies of the Nile Hotel is a reference to the Nile Hotel in Kampala, Uganda which was used by Idi Amin to both entertain diplomats and torture his opponents. Today the hotel has been refurbished as the Serena Kampala and the laws replaced with beautify lily ponds.

My image draws on this history and obliquely reference other famous lily ponds – Monet and Cy Twombly's flower paintings.



Photographs by the artist





Richard Ketley

#### **Artist's statement**

I am interested in formal elements of painting and drawing inspired by the world around me and the many countries I visit. I am also interested in finding meaning where others do not - in the fall of light on oil tankers off Barr Beach, in the chaos of the shacks of Kampala and in crowded taxi parks. My art is a search for perfection not often found in life.

I am fortunate enough to travel widely in the Middle East and Africa, but I have not found aTahiti , a landscape populated with Venuses and primary colours. Instead I have found landscapes covered in construction sites and tin-roofed shacks, and peopled by humanity sweating as trucks are loaded with voluminous bundles. But within these spaces there is balance and form and structure - all elements that are abstracted in my paintings.

#### **Profile**

Born in 1964, Richard Ketley has painted since he was at school and held his first solo exhibition while still a student at Hyde Park High School. During his early career, he exhibited at Artists in the Sun and at the Sandton Gallery, Johannesburg, and participated in a joint exhibition at the National Galley in Kampala, Uganda. Some of his most recent work has been shortlisted for the SA Taxi Art Award (2015 and 2016). During 2016 he held a joint exhibitions of his work in Lagos and Johannesburg and featured in the Joburg Fringe, and in 2017 the Art Africa Fair.

Richard is currently completing his MFA in Fine Art at the University of the Witwatersrand .