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EMNEORD: *Babirye Leilah / When Things Fall Apart / DCCD*

Images 2016 Ugandan LGBT activist current at an exhibition in Kolding

"The government will wipe us out and expel us from society," said the Ugandan lesbian artist and LGTB activist Babirye Leilah in an interview with the Center for Culture and Development (CKU). From February 11, Babirye Leilah is currently in the exhibition 'When Things Fall Apart'

Af Kathrine Storgaard Carlsen - CKU

COPENHAGEN, February 2016 (CKU): In February 2014, Uganda's President Museveni, under great international media attention, signs the anti-homo law, which requires imprisonment for lifetime to homosexuals. On a white note pad, the Ugandan artist Babirye Leilah paints a few days later with brush and watercolor black smoke columns rising from a hole filled with blood and ash.

"I have painted the homosexuals tomb. That is how we are. We can not breathe. The government will wipe us out and expel us from society," says the lesbian artist and LGBT activist before she gets up and disappears.

A few minutes later, Babirye Leilah returns with a chop, a spade and a stack of old newspapers. With a hard hug she opens the ground in front of her with her heel and digs a several meters wide and deep hole. She gathers a pile of twigs and spliced plywood slabs, curls the newspapers together and throws it all in the hole. With a lighter, she turns everything into an orange flaming sea that sends black smoke columns several meters above the grave. While sweat droplets peel from her forehead and overlap, she uses the spade to cover the fire with soil. Several hours later, the smoke is still rising from the cracks of the earth as a bullet metaphor for the oppression and fear she and other homosexuals in Uganda live with.

Ever since Babirye Leilah in 2008 told her Facebook wall that she is a lesbian, she has regularly received death threats. Like the rest of the country's LGBT activists, she risks life by fighting for the sexual minorities in Uganda, which belongs to one of the world's most homophobic countries. Both in spite of the death threats and widespread homophobia in Uganda, she continues to express herself through art.

"Through art, I can indirectly criticize homophobia and the oppression the LGBT environment suffers. I also use the art of expressing the love that the government and large parts of society forbid us to live. In this way, I create a free space and a platform where I express myself on behalf of the LGBT environment," says Babirye Leilah, who works with installations, performances and sculptures.

In many of her works she uses chains and padlocks to expose the oppression and imprisonment she experiences to live in. In the Universal Education work she has wound up chains about a chartered bill and criticizes the highly educated lawyers and parliamentarians who in the name of the law, homosexuals discriminate against defending them.

With the work 'Safe Here', depicting a closed door obsessed with bars and a heavy padlock, she delivers a sarcastic comment to the many homosexuals who are imprisoned because of their sexuality.

From 11 February to 28 November, Babirye Leilah, together with 11 other artists from Asia, Africa and the Middle East, is present in the exhibition 'When Things Fall Apart' in Trapholt, Kolding. The exhibition is part of CKU's returning festival Images.