

Yusuf Ssali

Yusuf Ssali was born in Kampala, Uganda, and migrated to the United States in 2017. He earned an MFA in Industrial Fine Arts and Design at Makerere University, Kampala. He has exhibited in Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, France, Belgium, Holland, New York, Boston, Seattle, Washington DC, and the San Francisco Bay area.

Ssali's paintings and mixed media works are inspired by the riches of African culture. His work includes abstraction, images of women, animals, landscape, and more recently, urban cityscapes around the Bay Area. Aside from the riches of Africa, Ssali's work addresses the challenges the continent faces in the current day. His portraits present regal African women cloaked in richly patterned, traditional fabrics that amplify their power and beauty, in reaction to the pervasive patriarchal culture of his youth. With faces and postures that demand respect, the women are united by Ssali's striking use of color and design.

As a child, Ssali was captivated by the elephants, lions, exotic birds and large game animals that were never more than a short drive away. He grew up painting native animals in plein air, joining millennia of African artists who have included depictions of familiar animals as subject matter. As a young artist he was aware of a tragic elephant massacre by poachers in Nairobi. His work now focuses on the plight of these iconic animals, giving voice to their majesty, intelligence, beauty and migrations.

Ssali began painting landscapes of his new homeland when he first experienced the architecture of cities outside of Africa. Unlike the circular, radiating communities of his home in Uganda, western cities are linear and square, connected through the colors and lights that emanate through thousands of windows after dark.

In his abstract paintings Ssali concentrates on the balance between intentionality and spontaneity, incorporating patterns, leather, tree bark and found objects that literally leap off the canvas in brilliant color.