

*Self-Made*

Kriss Munsya

Curatorial statement from the exhibition at the Deer Lake Gallery, Burnaby, 2024.

Kriss Munsya is a global artist. He was born in Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and raised in Brussels, Belgium. He is now based in Vancouver but has made images on several different continents. The significance of this is that while his artistic practice encompasses a broad thesis of cultural identity in the face of oppression and colonization, it is also a deeply personal query into the nature of the Self; the macro- and microcosmic worlds struggle under the same influence of history, memory and experience.

Munsya's photographs have a fantastical and comfortably absurd tone and act as reconstitutions of personal memory. The images have a cinematic and narrative feel in which the characters are obscured by layers of flowers or mirrored surfaces. The flowers are an archetypal subject in art history, the mirrors a device to reflect the viewer: the identity of the characters, surrogates for the artist himself, are being obscured by inherited paradigms and the viewers' biases. In these images, the Self is an independent entity already in existence and yet still in the process of becoming.

The individual may be in a state of flux in Munsya's world, but the small gestures (hands clasped, a veiled face inclined toward another), feel like intimations toward solidarity. It feels like the Self is undefined but looking for a home. In some ways, the existential query put forward in this exhibition feels distinctly contemporary. Munsya is bringing the viewer into the reckoning of a personal and cultural history that must become a more optimistic future. What feels transcendent though is the notion that the Self forms through communion with another. As a viewer, we bring the humanity and empathy required to complete the picture.

— Shane O'Brien, Vancouver, 2024.