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Street art: How murals are changing lives

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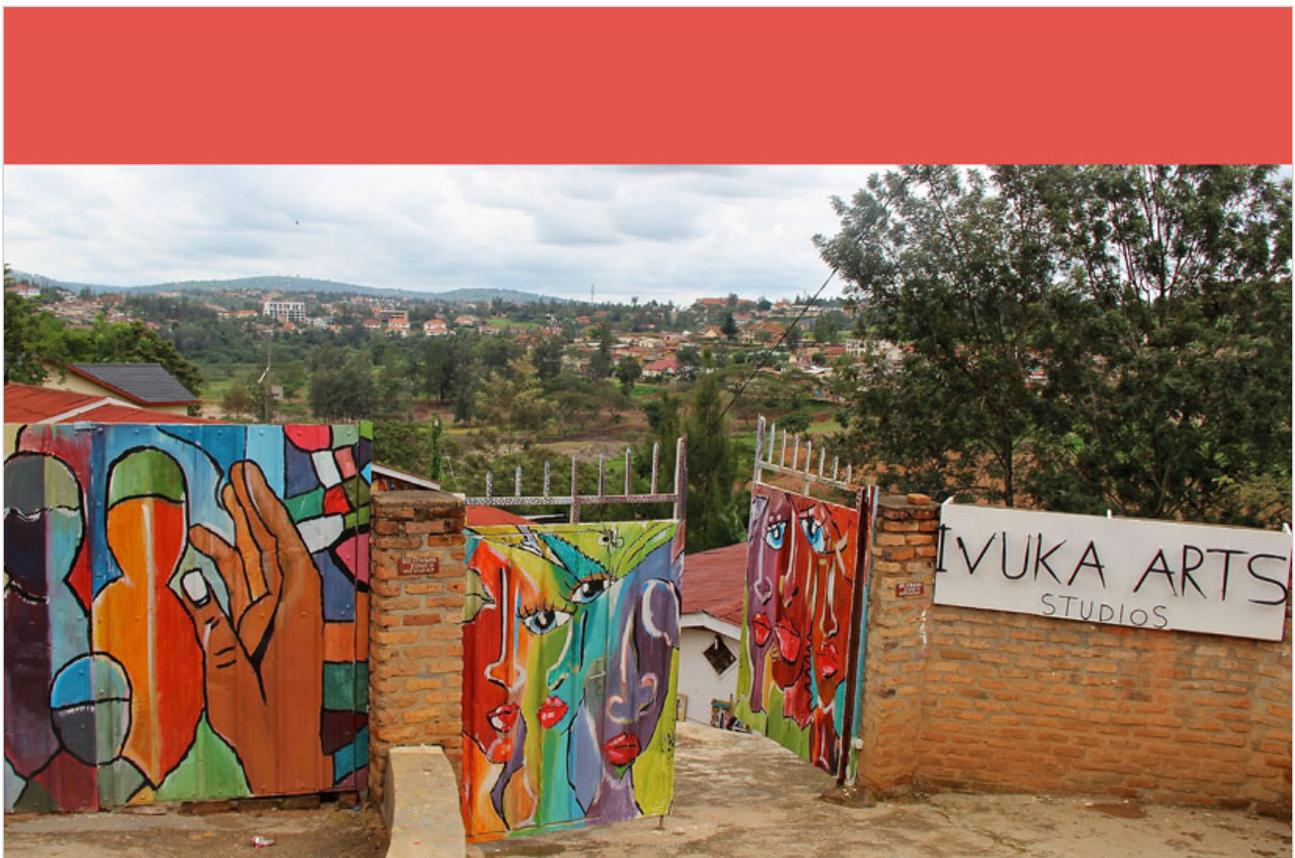
Ngabonziza's paintings and murals revolve around social themes. (Photos by Sarine Arslanian)

Bonfils Ngabonziza is one of Rwanda's most talented young contemporary artists. After finishing high school, he realised that his true passion lay in

the arts and decided to teach himself to become a painter first, then a muralist.

Inspired by children and women he uses art to portray his inner feelings, spreading peaceful, loving and inspiring messages. His paintings and murals most often revolve around social themes and aim to advance human rights for all.

Ngabonziza explains with a lot of enthusiasm that becoming famous was not his goal in life but what he really wished, and still wishes, is to use art as a vehicle for positive change, witnessing its lasting impact on society.



Ngabonziza's works can be found at Ivuka Arts studios.

After meeting Judith Kaine, founder and director of Kurema, Kureba, Kwigira (to create, to see, to learn) a Kigali-based public arts social enterprise, Ngabonziza and fellow artists from Ivuka Arts, the first community arts centre in Rwanda, decided in 2014 to work together with Kurema on creating a series of murals that address the stigma around HIV/AIDS.

Even though Rwanda has had a tremendous success in the fight against HIV, with estimates from 2013 showing that the prevalence amongst those aged 15 to 49 is only 2.9%, stigma around the condition remains. As the

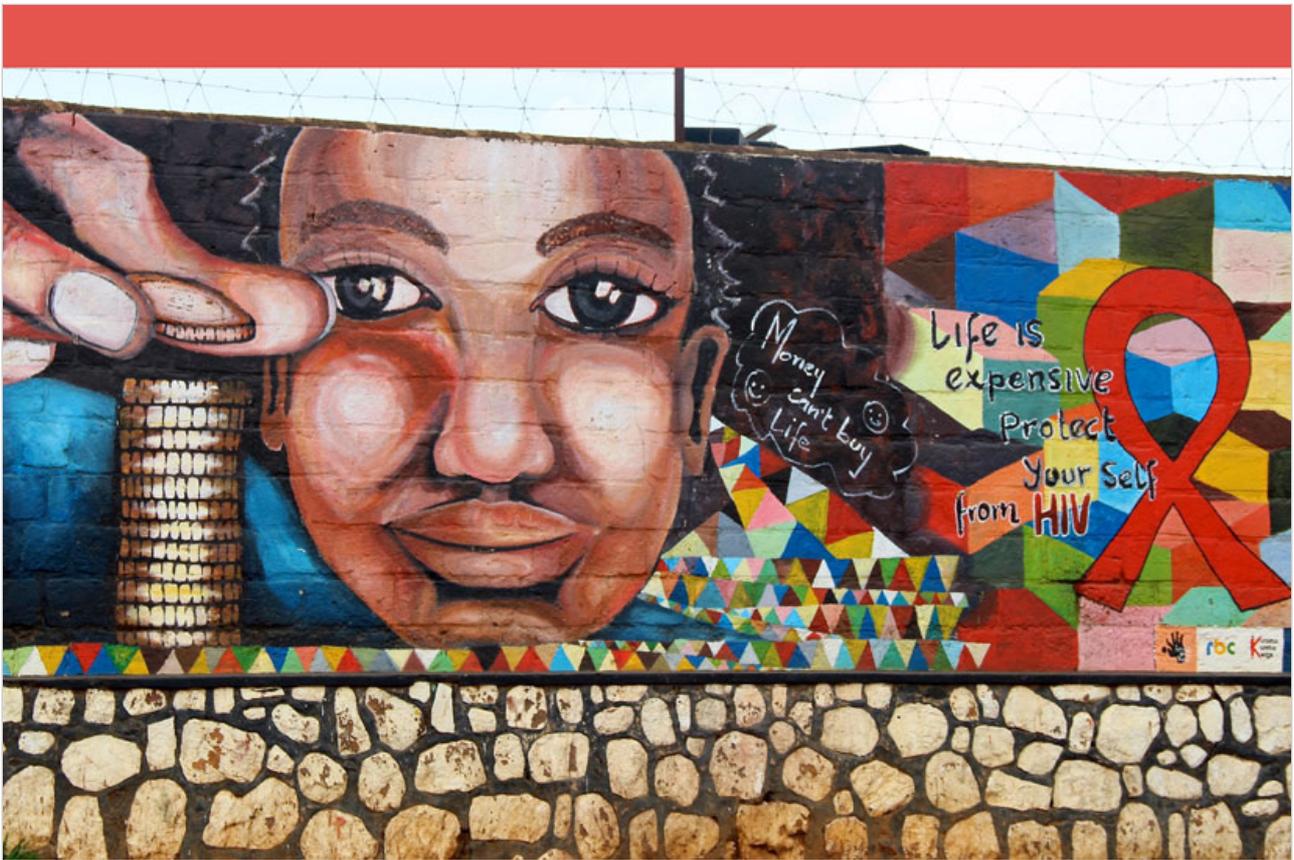
Government of Rwanda leads the HIV response in the country, the collaboration between Kurema and Ivuka artists with the aim of addressing social challenges through a public forum only reinforced the government's work.



These murals are located in busy neighbourhoods of Kigali.

The murals are located in busy neighbourhoods of Kigali, including Remera and Nyamirambo. They embody the idea that street art with a strong public health message helps in sharing important information in an innovative way, while adding vitality to the urban landscape.

“These thought-provoking murals are telling all Rwandans, especially those who haven't gone to school, to fight stigmatisation”, the artist points out while explaining why he felt the urge to participate in the project. “Some Rwandans don't even know much about the arts”, he says, “but by looking at the murals they can identify with what is represented and learn”. The murals are painted in a realist style so that everyone can understand their messages.



Raising awareness about HIV/AIDS through art.

The artist dreams big. “I am also in the process of making a series of murals promoting reconciliation”, he says. Regardless of ethnic background, education level and social status he wants his fellow Rwandans to understand the important concepts of peace, unity, love and life. “That is why I called my project PULL”, Ngabonziza reveals, “I dream that one day, all around the world, we will sing ‘Peace, unity, love, and life’”.

His paintings are now available at Ivuka Arts Kigali. For those wishing to learn more about Rwanda’s contemporary art scene, Vayando, the travel platform that puts local micro-entrepreneurs on the tourism map, connects Ivuka artists with curious travellers.



The murals tell people to fight stigmatisation.

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