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Meet Judith who is behind youth life change through mural Paintings in Rwanda

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Tell us in few words about yourself

My name is Judith Kaine, I'm a 32 year/old American female.

I am an entrepreneur and social change agent, with an interdisciplinary background: for my undergraduate

degree I studied anthropology, sociology and photography, and I also have a Master of International Affairs and a Master of Public Health. I have been working in Africa over the past 8 years and have been living in Rwanda for nearly three years.

What do you do in life and how did you start your project in Rwanda and what inspired you?

I do a lot of things! I am the founder and director of a Public Art social enterprise called Kurema, Kureba, Kwiga, which means 'To Create, To See, To Learn.' In addition to managing the business and our projects, I also do Public Health consulting for private organizations.



Kurema started in fall 2013 after I met a group of talented visual artists working at Ivuka Arts Center in Kacyiru. I had recently returned from an inspiring trip in Europe, in cities where public art and street art are popularly used to express opinions and give voice to social issues. Recognizing the lack of public art within Rwanda, and given some of the social challenges I had discussed with artist friends, I developed the idea of the Kurema project: working with different stakeholders and communities to address social issues through art that was by Rwandans for Rwandans. Specifically this means, working with Rwandan artists to create public pieces of art, in the form of Mural Paintings, that are often painted with members of a community and then owned by the community once the act of creating has concluded.



From the beginning, we wanted to address challenges where our work could make an impact and upon learning that despite Rwanda's many clinical successes in the fight against HIV, that there were still many social challenges linked to stigma about the disease, it seemed we could use the power of art to try and increase dialogue, raise awareness and encourage change. And so, our work began with a focus on tackling HIV related stigma through street art, and after time, we expanded our focus to other social issues while working towards a bigger objective of expanding the creative arts sector, democratizing access to art, and offering new opportunities to artists. In the past 20 months we have created over 20 murals across the country.

What challenges have you faced and How did you solve them?

The biggest challenge to our work is financial - Rwanda is still a developing country and the demand for public art is limited/growing. This means that financial resources to cover the practical expenses for our work (paint, brushes/materials, artist labor/transport, marketing, etc) can be difficult to find. Our solution is to combine both community focused projects where artists volunteer their time, with commercially supported work - bringing together a mix of funding streams.



- Institutional - finding the right stakeholders and believers in the cause is a long process! A lot of work is about driving demand, in addition to providing quality supply. Our solution is to build relationships with our partners - both artists and 'wall-owners' to really develop something that each party will be happy with and will see value within.

- Exposure/inspiration - inspiration to create in new styles and to try new art making approaches comes from exposure to arts and to other sources of creativity – there is a narrow visual arts community within Rwanda, with only one art museum, one private school for the arts, and limited availability of specialty art supplies. Therefore many artists here have limited exposure to new and alternative arts that can serve as sources of inspiration to explore new styles and to take risks within their work. To counteract this, we have brought multiple international artists to Rwanda to lead skill-building workshops focused on technique, ideation, process and marketing. Additionally, we use our digital presence/social media to share inspirational works from around the world with our team and with the creative sector in Rwanda overall.



How do you see your social business in next two years?

It's my hope that over the next two years we can continuously grow our programs and activities, expand our team of artists and network of partners, and to further support the growth of the creative sector by developing the quality of work being produced within Rwanda. It's my hope that we can bring more international artists to Rwanda to co-create with Rwandan artists and communities, and to develop sustainable opportunities for adding color and creativity into every Rwandan's daily life. In the next two years, I hope we can double the number of murals we have created in our first two years!

How is your project impacting young people?



Our project impacts young people in a variety of ways:

- Most of our artists are young people themselves; Kurema presents opportunities for them to showcase their work to a new audience, to develop professionally, and to earn a living
- Young people that participate in our projects consistently express interest in creating art and in using their natural talents to create something beautiful. Our project supports them in expressing themselves.
- Additionally, many of our murals' messages are aimed at young people directly and we hope the messages are well received! We have done work in schools, in libraries, at community centers sharing messages about staying healthy, avoiding drugs, working together, planning for the future etc.

What message can you give to young people

Your ideas matter! Together we can create a more colorful future for Rwanda.

Photos by Judith

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