

Kambui Olujimi

# Madison magazine

‘Zulu Time’ exhibit speaks truth to  
invisible power

By Joel Patenaude  
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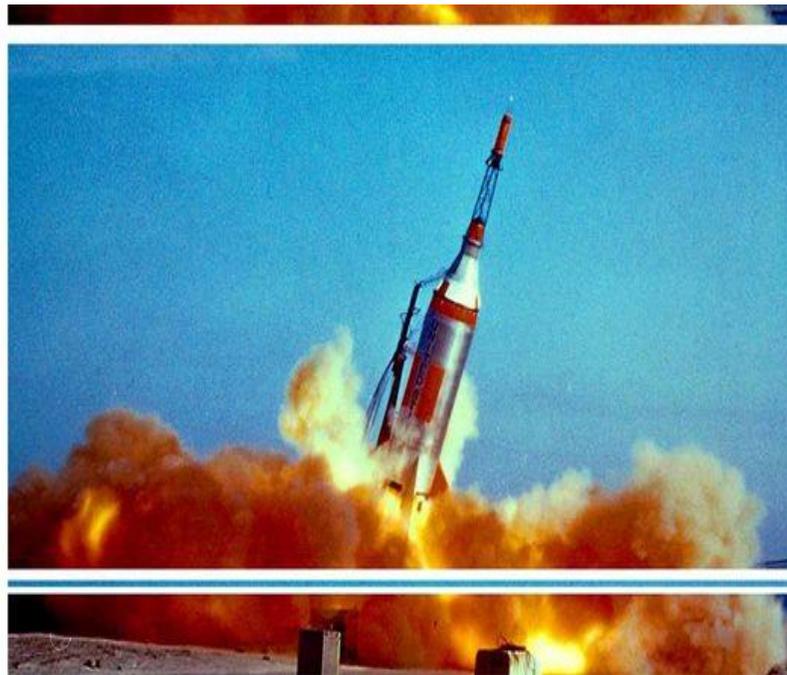
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One of 13 failed rocket launch images which appear on flags in the series "T-Minus Ø" included in the "Kambui Olujimi: Zulu Time" exhibit at the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art.

For all the complaining about running out of time to complete our tasks or marveling at how time stands still at dramatic moments, we understand on some level that time is a precise and unceasing human construct.

But while our individual lives are ruled by time—and digital displays of its passage—we may not be aware that the measure of time is a reflection of societal control, power and even empire.

“Time is just a symptom of a power dynamic that goes unchecked,” says Kambui Olujimi, a Brooklyn, New York, artist whose provocative exhibit **“Kambui Olujimi: Zulu Time”** opens at the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art in conjunction with Gallery Night on Friday, May 5.

Through textiles, blown glass, wheat paste and found objects, Olujimi posits that the imposition of time has disadvantaged large groups of people. Military grandstanding is suggested by wall-mounted flags with images of failed rocket launches. A disastrous policy of social engineering is depicted by a large and layered photo of a collapsing housing project. And handcuffs connected by strings of costume jewelry, he says, “suggest flight patterns; the trafficking of bodies and mass incarceration.”

Four hourglass-shaped glass sculptures resemble icebergs. Water condensing and dripping from within them bring to mind the effect of global warming on the polar ice caps. But like icebergs, there may be more hidden beneath the surface of these hand-blown pieces than is apparent.

Taking a break from installation of the exhibit earlier this week, Olujimi said it isn’t solely the imposition of authority over the less powerful that he means to depict with his art.

“It’s not oppositional,” he says. “The multiplicity and hybridity is what’s complicated about living. There’s never just one thing [going on].”

There is much going on in “Zulu Time.” In one corner, the wreckage of chandeliers piled on a wood palette atop inflated inner tubes surprises when the bulbs alight. And set into a wall-sized poster of a distant galaxy, old digital clocks will blink unsynchronized times to illustrate that “billions of stars don’t care” how humans keep track of time.

“I’m referencing the historic and the future,” Olujimi says.

“Zulu Time,” the title of the exhibit, has a historic meaning that underpins the exhibit as a whole.

Time zones came into being in the late 1800s with the introduction of latitude and longitude and the designation of the prime meridian at the Royal Greenwich Observatory in Greenwich, England, southeast of London.

As the leading maritime power in the world, Great Britain was positioned to set the world’s clocks. Greenwich Mean Time, as it became known, has been replaced by Coordinated Universal Time as a more accurate measure of the rotation of the earth.

Yet English-speaking military and civilian pilots still refer phonetically to the prime meridian, or zero degrees, as “Zulu time.” While the modern idea of time “began” at the center of the British Empire, there’s irony in that casual reference to an African ethnicity.

“The British Empire was the biggest bully on the block,” Olujimi argues as he questions invisible hierarchies that affect daily life.

Olujimi will return to the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art to discuss his work on June 2 at 6:30 p.m. The exhibit in the State Street Galley runs through August 13 and admission is free.

*Joel Patenaude is associate editor of Madison Magazine.*