



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**AS PART OF GAY PRIDE MONTH, VISITING KENYAN MINISTER TO ADDRESS  
CHALLENGES OF SERVING LGBT COMMUNITY IN EAST AFRICA AT AMAZWI**

**Visit Coincides With Opening of “Can Ya Kenya?” Exhibition Featuring Newly Framed Work By  
Popular Kenyan Painters**

SAUGATUCK, Mich., May 27, 2011 – On June 4, in recognition of June being Gay Pride Month, Amazwi Contemporary Art will welcome Rev. John Makokha, a Methodist minister from Kenya, who along with his wife Anne Baraza is courageously working to promote acceptance and respect for gays and lesbians in that country. This visit will coincide with the opening of the gallery’s “Can Ya Kenya?” exhibition featuring newly custom-framed paintings by three of the gallery’s most popular artists: Shake Makelele, John Ndambo and Stephen Njenga, each of whom live and work in Nairobi.

“The art of Kenya, a good portion of which focuses on the majestic Maasai people, has struck a deep chord with our customers going back to our 2004 opening, and we have returned to that country several times to meet with the artists we represent,” said Amazwi gallery director Michael Tischleder, who most recently returned from a trip to South Africa and Namibia with partner Wally Petersen.

“In our travels, we are very aware that the gay rights movement is at vastly different stages depending upon the country, ranging from South Africa where gay marriage is legal, to Uganda where a proposed bill to impose the death penalty on gays has resulted in widespread condemnation from the international community. That is why we were so interested in meeting and supporting Rev. Makokha during his visit to West Michigan,” added Petersen.

The gallery owners first learned of Rev. Makokha from customers David and Susan Hoekema of West Olive, Michigan, who spent Spring semester 2010 in Kenya where David, a professor of Philosophy, was a Fulbright scholar.

“This incredibly courageous couple is working to combat homophobia and welcome the participation of gay and lesbians in the Christian community at great cost to themselves,” said David Hoekema. “We encouraged John to visit us here in the States so that we could introduce him to friends and colleagues who might support his ministry. Joyfully, he and Anne just welcomed their fourth child – though that meant she was unable to travel here with him.”

(more)



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In addition to the LGBT work they have been doing (find out more at [http://www.othersheep.org/OSEA\\_CL\\_Other\\_Sheep\\_Kenya.html](http://www.othersheep.org/OSEA_CL_Other_Sheep_Kenya.html)), this energetic and fearless couple started a church in one of the slums of Nairobi, as well as a school with members of their congregation for neighborhood children who could not enroll in public school for lack of funds. Many of these kids are AIDs orphans.

“We were stunned to learn that their bishop has cut off funding to the church and school due to their LGBT work. He even refused to forward funds raised in the States specifically for that purpose. Anne also lost her job as an instructor in counseling at a theological seminary because of their LGBT work, but still they soldier on,” said Susan Hoekema, herself a lawyer and ceramicist. “One of the reasons we were in Kenya was to lead a course on the ethics of development with a group of students. The work John and Anne are doing and the way they are doing it impressed us mightily—it’s local, indigenous, courageous, addressing real needs, and, in both the church and school, empowering women.”

Rev. Makokha will visit Amazwi on June 4 and talk about his life’s work beginning at 1 p.m. All are welcome, and refreshments will be served.

Amazwi will donate 10 percent of all sales that day to Rev. Makokha’s school.

Amazwi is located at 249 Culver St. (at the corner of Griffith) in downtown Saugatuck. Call 269-857-5551 or visit [www.amazwi.com](http://www.amazwi.com) for more information.

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Att. Images: “Wild Beauty” by Shake Makelele, Kenya  
“Travel Through Taupe” by Stephen Njenga, Kenya