

HELD IN TIME EXHIBITION

By Esther Litali



Nothing to Hide

Acrylic on Canvas 120cm by 70cm

SATURDAY 23 MAY, 2026

2:00 PM - 7:00 PM

The Holmes à Court
Gallery



The Holmes à Court Gallery

Presents

The opening of Held in Time Exhibition on 23rd May 2026,
at Afrika House, Hardy

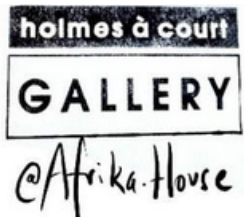
Curated by Peter Holmes á Court

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Artist's Statement

My work centers on classic and vintage automobiles as vessels of craftsmanship, elegance, and personal history. While these vehicles reference a 20th century era marked by refined making and attention to detail, my process begins with the people who own them. Through conversation and visits, I learn why these cars matter—how they are loved, remembered, and carried through family and personal histories.

Each painting is informed by these exchanges. Elements drawn from the owner's life—such as landscapes tied to memory, architectural details, or patterns from domestic spaces—are subtly embedded into the composition. These details are not meant to be immediately legible. For the owner, they hold quiet recognition; for the wider audience, they exist as natural parts of the image, reinforcing a sense of inevitability rather than illustration.

By combining precise depiction with personal narrative, the work positions the automobile as both a designed object and a bearer of lived experience. The paintings operate in a space between public elegance and private memory, allowing viewers to engage with the work intuitively, without needing to know its origins.

In this way, the work honors craftsmanship not only in objects, but in relationships, memory, and the act of careful observation.

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Curator's Statement

Held In Time refuses to dance around the tension at its centre. The exhibition asks whether Africans are allowed nostalgia without it immediately being interpreted as political regression or colonial longing. Can objects, machines, and symbols from previous eras retain emotional or aesthetic power in a modern African context, or must they be discarded because of the worlds they once moved through?

And once we've asked that question, consider who we unconsciously included in our definition of 'Africans' — and then ask it again for those we didn't. (I drive a Land Rover and often wonder if I look a tad colonial behind the wheel; yet with every passing Land Rover a friendly flash of lights or a hand wave out the window — invariably a black hand — tells me I may be being over-sensitive.)

Can we define a post-colonial future without planting the word "colonial" at the centre? Must "Africa Rising" always imply that Africa was somehow down? Must Afrofuturism become the only acceptable direction of cultural legitimacy, as though the continent is only permitted to look forward and never sideways or backwards? And never right here, right now?

Would it not be more reasonable for Africa to be understood — as other regions are — as a complex present? A rich, layered weave of contradictions and continuities — the good and the bad, the progress and the mistakes, the stunning beauty and the beleaguered social infrastructure, the welcomed rains but also the dust, the innovation and elegance alongside the exhaustion — all existing simultaneously, without anyone being allowed to claim a single definitive narrative?

The answer is, I do not know. But I think it is worth testing.

It's one of the reasons I like art. It forces me to ask myself questions I hadn't before, and upon reaching a conclusion, that finding is mine. Just as you are entitled to yours.

Curator's Statement Cont.

An old Mercedes here. An ageing Peugeot there. A Land Rover still somehow alive decades beyond what its makers intended. These vehicles may have started as foreign interruptions to the African landscape; but they have subsequently been made part of it. They are now woven into the visual and emotional fabric of the continent — repaired endlessly, adapted creatively, personalised, overloaded once again, cherished, exhausted, and kept alive through lots of care and extraordinary ingenuity.

Yes, these vehicles emerged from a complicated and, at times, deeply troubling era. Some undoubtedly drove through brutally colonial cities; windows up, doors locked, radio turned high. Some previous owners might not have been the nicest chaps. You might lose your log book, but you can't erase that history. But does that prevent us from seeing other truths layered within them: craftsmanship, durability, beauty, repair culture, individuality, and design?

It could be argued that the new relationships that have been built with these machines reflect something essential about the continent itself — the ability to inherit difficult histories without letting anyone define it by them, and to transform what arrives from elsewhere into something local, lived, and distinctly African.

The exhibition, for me, exists to ask whether there is room for preservation alongside progress. It asks what must genuinely be discarded in the pursuit of modernity, and what might still endure, evolve, and be carried forward.



Milk and Honey
Rolls Royce boat tail
Acrylic on canvas
120cm by 100
\$630/ KES. 80,000

Used to carry milk in the lush landscapes of Kiambu but transformed into one of the most elegant cars in the country. Grass to grace? There's hope for you too.



Night Cruiser
Fordson pickup E83W
Acrylic on canvas
100cm by 80cm
\$394/ KES. 50,000

It looks heavy but it's such a series drifter, a customized hot rod. Rides at night when there are no rules and you can see all its glory



Fig and Olive
1928 Ford Model A Tudor sedan
100cm by 120cm
Acrylic on canvas
\$630/ KES. 80,000

“Inspired by the patterns at fig and olive hotel. Where your eyes can’t stop moving because of how each item is uniquely designed that even having a car inside the restaurant does not seem out of place, but part of the decor



Altiora Peto
Jaguar E Type
Acrylic on canvas
100cm by 80cm
\$552/ KES. 70,000

Excellence is a way of life. And that's how generational wealth is built. Heirlooms don't have to be only in jewelry.



Nothing to Hide
MG Roadster
Acrylic on canvas
120cm by 70cm
\$473/ KES. 60,000

Elegant on the outside, but also sparkling clean on the inside. One of the world's best selling sports car.



Wars Behind Us

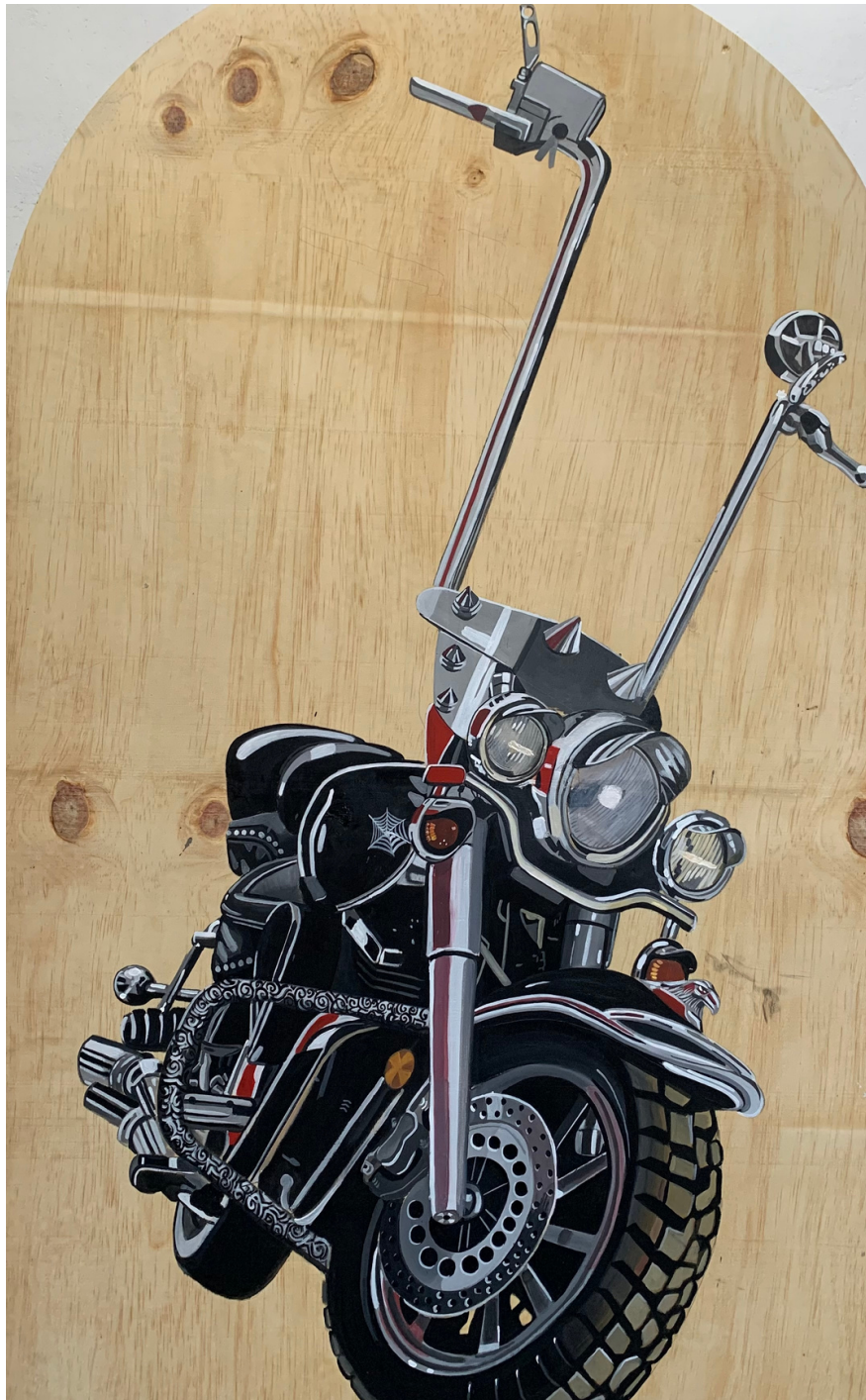
Mg T

Acrylic on canvas

100cm by 100cm

\$630/ KES. 80,000

Assembled after World War Two, time to forget the trouble and look to new things
to come



For the Fam
Harley-Davidson Road King motorcycle
Acrylic on wood
120cm by 70cm
\$552/ KES. 70,000

Honey I'd like to get a motorcycle
Okay babe, as so long as we all ride in it. To the world, it looks dangerous in the best way possible ,



The Alfa Club
Alfa Romeo
Acrylic on canvas
80cm by 60cm
\$394/ KES. 50,000

The chairman of the Alfa Romeo club leads by example, clean smart and sleek is his second name



The Legendary Spider
Alfa Romeo Spider
Acrylic on canvas
100cm by 100cm
\$591/ KES. 75,000

Passed from one legend to another, only a line of people who understand the mission of keeping the show of elegance alive.



Red Bull Gives You Wings

VW Combi

Acrylic on canvas

70cm by 50cm

\$315/ KES. 40,000

The sports drink energizes everyone including the van, and if it gives you wings, the petrol station is in the clouds.



The Watcher
1950 Jaguar Mark V saloon
100cm by 120cm
Acrylic on canvas
\$630/ KES. 80,000

Only a cat could be allowed to seat on the beautiful jaguar, because elegance knows elegance. And to ward off those who do not recognize its value.



Roadtrips
Volkswagen combi
Acrylic on canvas
70cm by 50cm
\$315/ KES. 40,000

Are you even Kenyan if you don't take that yearly trip to shagz? But at least it's
in a cool van.



Rare
Indian Scout motorcycle
Acrylic on wood
150cm by 50cm
\$552/ KES. 70,000

Rare because it is the only one in the country, it travels to the loneliest parts of this country to help the weak ones



Jaguar in the Wild
Jaguar Sedan
Acrylic on canvas
100cm by 100cm
\$552/ KES. 70,000

Once known as the ideal getaway car, now known as sophisticated driving car



Oasis
Land Rover Series
Acrylic on canvas
100cm by 80cm
\$750/ KES. 95,250

Faces every tough terrain and conquers them all, the flower in the desert. Gives hope. Aircraft-grade aluminum for its body panels. This choice actually becomes signature feature because it made the vehicles exceptionally resistant to rust.



Sunday Drives
Mercedes-Benz W114
Acrylic on canvas
80cm by 80cm
SOLD

Sunday afternoons are for family, slow eating and chilling. What better place to do it than at Shamba cafe?



Royalty
Rolls Royce
Acrylic on canvas
120cm by 120cm
\$630/ KES. 80,000

Purple signifies luxury, and this limousine says it better.



For Girls, by Girls
Suzuki Jimny
Acrylic on canvas
100cm by 70cm
\$394/ KES. 50,000

Pink house, pink clothes, why not pink car? Not conforming to the standard colors of the modern car. But don't let the blush fool you, this Barbie will take you places your SUVs cannot reach.



Fig and Olive 2
Volkswagen Beetle
Acrylic on canvas
90cm by 90cm
\$394/ KES. 50,000

This beautiful cozy restaurant makes you not want to leave. Everything you look at is therapy, the beetle acts as a Centre piece as your eyes always slowly go back to it.



New Beginnings
Volkswagen Beetle
Acrylic on canvas
40cm by 40cm
NOT FOR SALE

Dedicated to my daughter, who brought in a new season for us. An even brighter chapter

Thank You for Visiting The Holmes à Court Tiny Gallery

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