

# NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier  
University



## **Artist explores impact of tourism on culture and identity**

**For Immediate Release**

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WATERLOO – The Robert Langen Art Gallery at Wilfrid Laurier University will feature the works of artist Brendan Fernandes in an exhibition titled *Matter of Fact*, from Oct. 17 to Nov.10.

This body of work focuses on how current practices of tourism contribute to the exploitation of societies and their cultures, transforming them into a form of entertainment that is reinforced by the sensationalized experience of vacationing.

“My current work represents an investigation into the concept of authenticity, as an ideological construct that both dominant and subordinate cultures use to their own ends,” explains Fernandes. “It is a word that shapes cultural experience, and thus also shapes concepts and the formation of identity.”

As a Goan-Kenyan who has lived the greater portion of his life in Canada, Fernandes finds himself caught between a habituated respect for the cultural traditions of his ancestors, and an understanding of culture from the perspective of a “native” as well as from the point of view of a westerner and tourist.

Many of his works incorporate Kenyan artifacts juxtaposed against stereotypical “African” souvenirs, contemporary packing boxes, crates, and ready made objects that become symbols that re-stage the importation/exportation of a homogenized and touristic

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version of “African” culture — “the Heart of Darkness made light and accessible,” says Fernandes.

“In many of my installations I attempt to expose stereotypical notions of African-as-cultural-monolith and to question the ways in which ‘Africa’ continues to be depicted as a land where the exotic and the primitive still exist, like animals at a zoo.”

Fernandes immigrated to Canada in the 1990s. He earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from York University and his Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Western Ontario in London. He has received multiple grants from the Ontario and Canada Councils for the Arts, including the prestigious International Residency in Trinidad and Tobago.

In 2007, Fernandes will have three solo shows across Canada and has been invited to exhibit in the Western New York Biennial at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo. For more information, please visit [www.brendanfernandes.ca](http://www.brendanfernandes.ca).

As Wilfrid Laurier University’s visual arts centre since 1989, the Robert Langen Art Gallery provides knowledge, stewardship, appreciation and enjoyment of Canadian art and culture to the local community. The gallery is located in the John Aird Centre and is open noon to 5 p.m. from Wednesdays to Saturdays. Admission is free.