

DU
EN ART
DE PROJECTS



UNSETTLED



UNSETTLED

AN ODE TO RESTLESSNESS

“Unsettled” is an ode to restlessness. What are humans if not always striving to become a better version of themselves? Restless souls are invariably moving, stretching themselves – and thereby others – in an active pursuit for impalpable aspirations. This continuous chase can go hand in hand with a passionate desire to express this unsettled state.

Artists are ahead of the pack, more sensible to changing norms and societal issues. They feel what’s to come and with their elevated perceptiveness and sensitivity they try to translate these dispositions into works of art. Artists challenge conventions with an open mind, beyond comfort zones, into a disruptive realm.

This exhibition puts art in the limelight that balances at this cutting edge, in line with Duende Art Projects’ ambition to give visibility to the previously unseen, highlighting artists that move art ahead. Art should unsettle, derail, inspire and move, as only in the state of being unsettled one can grow. Works of art thus become rites of passage, transferring newfound perceptions to the public.

“Unsettled” presents an innovative juxtaposition of both anonymous classical works from the African continent, as well as new works from cutting edge contemporary artists.

TEWODROS HAGOS

TEWODROS HAGOS
The Desperate Journey 58 (2022)
Acrylic paint on canvas
120 x 100 cm



Tewodros Hagos' (b. 1974, Ethiopia) striking portraiture explores the way we've become desensitised to depictions of migrants' suffering. The artist uses the classical medium of painting to challenge us to look deeply into the faces of individuals affected by this ongoing humanitarian crisis. Hagos' moving portraits look back at us, appealing to our shared sense of humanity.

With the palpable sense of isolation and displacement that permeates the poignant paintings of Hagos, they resonate deeply with the theme of our exhibition UNSETTLED, which includes five new works of the ongoing series "The Desperate Journey". This series initially started as a response to the artist's increasing realisation of the ineffectiveness of news stories and imagery to convey lived experience or complex truths. While many of the pictures shown by the media may provoke an immediate emotional response, they are often deliberately sensational in order to shock the viewer and over time the overload of such imagery risks normalisation of this tragedy.

Through the classical medium of painting, Tewodros Hagos invites a slower, deeper kind of contemplation that counters the fast-paced consumption of digital media. His works not only elevate the crisis itself, but also the personal emotional experience of the individuals he paints. Significantly, his portraits convey a sense of strength as well as loss and grief. Yet, instead of pleading, the facial expressions are solemn and dignified. Hagos transforms the foil blankets, which are traditionally used in emergencies to keep people warm, into things of beauty, its gold and silver surfaces luminous in the darkness.

With his masterful craftsmanship, Hagos elevates his subjects to active agents of their own destiny. His compositions recall traditional European portrait paintings and the portrayal of grandeur, but instead of a lavish domestic setting, the vast, empty sky conveys an aching sense of isolation and loneliness. In this way, Hagos creates a more complex, layered narrative that demands a deeper level of engagement, while questioning which individuals and events are traditionally recorded by history.

The contrast of the dark landscape with the luminosity of the metallic shine from the rescue blankets further heightens the unsettling atmosphere. Figures appear lost in the empty expanse of an unwelcoming hinterland. And yet, these works also possess an arresting, mournful kind of beauty that appeals strongly to a sense of shared humanity whilst simultaneously making us aware of our privileged position as passive spectators and challenging us to consider the realities that we choose to ignore.

Hagos is widely considered as one of the most promising artists of his generation. His works have been exhibited in Ethiopia, Belgium, Germany, Italy and the US. In 2017, he was awarded the grade of Chevalier of France's Order of the Arts and the Letters. In 2021, Hagos received the second prize award from the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture. The artist is represented by Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, and recently had an acclaimed solo exhibition at her Berlin space.



TEWODROS HAGOS
The Desperate Journey 62 (2022)
Acrylic paint on canvas
60 x 50 cm

**“Throughout the last decade,
the whole world has witnessed the news
and stories of migration atrocities
on a nearly day-to-day basis,
but as we are bombarded with imagery,
it risks becoming normalised when,
in fact, it remains one of the worst
humanitarian crises of our time.
The question is: how long will we watch
this human tragedy?”**

— Tewodros Hagos

TEWODROS HAGOS
The Desperate Journey 58 (2022)
Acrylic paint on canvas
120 x 100 cm



TEWODROS HAGOS
The Desperate Journey 60 (2022)
Acrylic paint on canvas
120 x 100 cm



TEWODROS HAGOS
The Desperate Journey 66 (2022)
Acrylic paint on canvas
60 x 50 cm



EJAGHAM



Among the Ejagham, in the vicinity of the Cross River, social control has been in the hands of secret societies, rather than political leaders. This double-faced mask was associated with a military secret society, the Ekpe, that exercised the political and economic power in the local community. Such masks were performed during burial rituals, public seasonal festivals throughout the year, and the society's initiation rituals. As a designated time, the beating of the village's largest drum, marked the beginning of the soldier's secret society's masquerades. A messenger announced that the society's spiritual being, the Okun, had come to the village, and performances would be held in his honor.

The technique of covering carved wooden helmet masks with skin is unique to the area along the Cross River, which straddles the border between Nigeria and Cameroon. Artists used antelope skin softened by a lengthy soaking in water. The skin was then stretched over the carved wooden form and bound and pegged in place, where it eventually dried and stiffened. A glossy surface was achieved by rubbing the headdress with palm oil prior to its performance. The performer wore a long gown of string netting or cotton cloth. His costume was to impress the uninitiated viewer by creating an aura of mystery and a sense of fear. Between performances, the mask was wrapped and stored with great care.

This exceptional example features two fierce faces in opposing directions, often referred to as a janus face. The term "janus-faced" comes from the Roman god Janus, who was the patron of beginnings and endings. Such a double face has several levels of meaning among the Ejagham peoples. One side shows a light-colored leather symbolizing women, and life in general. The other face has a blackish painted leather, denoting men, death, and the afterlife. It should be noted that only the eyes of the masculine side are open, to allow the wearer to see his surroundings while performing. These awe-inspiring, unsettling double-faced helmet masks also conveyed the ability to simultaneously see what was in front and behind, to discern connections between past and future events, and to observe both the human and spiritual worlds.

A very similar double-faced Ejagham helmet mask can be found in the collection of the British Museum (Af.1911.1016.1).



DOUBLE-FACED HELMET MASK
Anonymous Ejagham artist, Nigeria
Wood, leather, cloth, fiber, hair
33 cm



IJO





This statue depicts the quintessential Ijo warrior. The white kaolin suggests the chalk markings worn by fighters. Indeed, Ijo warriors would go off into battle looking much like this figure, equipped with a medicine gourd around the neck and covered in war paint for protection. The Ijo believed that chalk, like the red camwood powder, had supernatural properties that could protect, purify, transform, and heal. The calabash attached to a necklace contained 'bulletproofing' medicines and associated the statue with masculine aggression. The bared teeth indicated powerful speech and an assertive personality.

Typical for Ijo statuary are the protruding tubular eyes, strengthening the statue's penetrating gaze. The vertical scarification line on the forehead as well as a typical Ijo identity marker. The slender physique and attenuated torso of this forest spirit figure deviate from Ijo stylistic norms. Such idiosyncrasy probably reflects the creativity of a talented individual artist.

This exceptional Ijo bush spirit figure resembles an example photographed by Robin Horton in the south Central Ijo region in the 1950s. A second similar statue is held in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago (#2000.321). The latter misses the raised left arm, which would indicate the supernatural nature of the represented bush spirit. All three statues share remarkably similar proportions. Horton identified the figure he photographed as a forest spirit named Kondou-bara-owei ("Left-Handed One"). People living in the Niger Delta, like many others in and beyond Africa, consider the use of the left hand to be antisocial, so left-handedness might perhaps reinforce the image of forest spirits as uncivilized beings. Almost life-sized, this rare statue surely leaves a lasting impression.

WATER SPIRIT STATUE
Anonymous Ijo artist, Nigeria
Wood
149 cm



MULUGETA TAFESSE



MULUGETA TAFESSE
The Medicine Man 4 - Moments (2022)
Acrylic paint on canvas
150 x 130 cm





MULUGETA TAFESSE
The Medicine Man 2 (2022)
Acrylic paint on canvas
150 x 130 cm

Specially for UNSETTLED, Mulugeta Tafesse (b. 1960, Ethiopia) has created a new series of captivating paintings, called “The medicine man”, in homage to his mother, who passed away at the age of 91 in 2014. Investigating his personal history, the artist revisited treasured memories and transposed these moments onto canvas. Painting an intimate subject, these portraits pay tribute to the single mother who worked hard to support Tafesse in his dreams and ambitions to become an artist. Inspired by Milan Kundera’s novel *Immortality*, he continues to communicate with his mother with every brushstroke. By means of her portraits she stays in close connection with her son. Painting her portrait for the first time since she died was an intense experience. Every work forms part of a process of mourning, missing, and healing.

Tafesse shows his mother in her apartment in Addis Ababa where she spent the last years of her life. Vulnerable and practically immobile, her sequestered existence created a lasting and strong impression on the artist. In this new series of portraits, his mother’s isolation and psychological state are expressed through her posture and position within the interior. The reflective wooden floor increases the dramatic atmosphere and mirrors her fragile state. With these series Tafesse wishes to return the sacrifices she made for him; at the same time paying tribute to mothers in general. With this universal theme, the artist defies the typical categorizations, rejecting being framed as an African artist, as his work is the product of a synergy of cultures and idioms.

The name of the series ‘The medicine man’ refers to the secondary character in these paintings; the artist himself. He paints himself in the act of taking care of his mother. While he lived abroad as an internationally acclaimed artist, Tafesse hired caretakers who brought his mother medication and gave her the care he himself was not able to provide, only visiting her once every 1 or 2 years. Through his paintings Tafesse wants to recreate the memories of his beloved mother, but also to reshape the lost time with her, to express the wish he could have been nearby her in a time of need. By painting himself as the medicine man, he reconstructs the past into a desired state. Simultaneously, this motif skillfully plays with the colonial narrative of the black servant, copying the imagery of similar sculptures that used to welcome visitors at restaurants and other establishments. Tafesse has

“Many people who see my work immediately try to make a connection with my roots, my Ethiopian origins. That sometimes bothers me. The last time I was in Amsterdam I went to the Rijksmuseum. There I studied Rembrandt, Van Eyck and other old masters; they are much more my frame of reference.”

— Mulugeta Tafesse



MULUGETA TAFESSE
The Medicine Man 3 (2022)
Acrylic paint on canvas
150 x 130 cm



MULUGETA TAFESSE
The Medicine Man 1 (2021)
Acrylic paint on canvas
150 x 130 cm

painted the apartment from his memories, including his mother's furniture and decorations, thereby inscribing these works in a longstanding classical tradition of interior portraits.

Having stayed in Europe for a long time, Tafesse is inspired and motivated by the constant exposure to Western painters. He incorporates traces of Western cultural history in his own African roots. The experience of seeing virtuoso works from contemporary artists such as Gerhard Richter and Luc Tuymans pushed him to new heights. Classically trained, old masters such as Vermeer and Van Eyck instructed him about perspective and the geometric division of a space, resulting in an unsettled contemporary take on vanishing points. Whistler's and Rembrandt's portrait of their respective mothers preceded him in his subject choice. The expressionism of artists such as Monet and Caillebotte, impelled him to his own subjective take on the world, without compromise and in full freedom of self-expression. Starting from a strong inner self, the artist sees himself as "a realist with an expressionist heart". Tafesse's canvases are deliberate in their use of space and ephemeral light. His palette, whether he is working in oil, tempera or acrylic is typically muted and soft, drawing the viewer closer to an intimate dialogue with the works. In his portraits, the imagining of the figurative and realistic becomes a suggesting, creating unsettling yet beautiful evocations of lost moments.

Tafesse Mulugeta graduated at the Fine Arts School of Addis Ababa in 1980, where he shortly taught painting before obtaining his Master of Arts at the Higher Institute of Fine Arts in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 1989. He continued his postgraduate studies in painting, between 1992 and 1995, at the Higher Institute for Fine Arts (HISK) in Antwerp. Since then, he has been living in Belgium, with frequent stays in Addis Ababa. In 2012 he received his PhD cum laude from the University of La Laguna in Tenerife. He has written and lectured extensively on modern and contemporary Ethiopian and Eastern African art. Tafesse's paintings have been exhibited in Belgium, Mexico, USA, The Netherlands, Spain, Germany, France, Senegal, Tanzania, Switzerland, and Lithuania. In 2014, he was a R.A.T. artist in residence in Mexico City, and in 2020 artist in residence at the Frans Masereel Center, Kasterlee Belgium. He will have a solo museum show at the Modern Art Museum Gebre Kristos Desta in Addis Ababa later this year.





SENUFO



ORACLE FIGURE (KAFIGELEJO)
Anonymous Senufo artist, Ivory Coast
Wood, fabric, encrusted patina, feathers.
94 cm





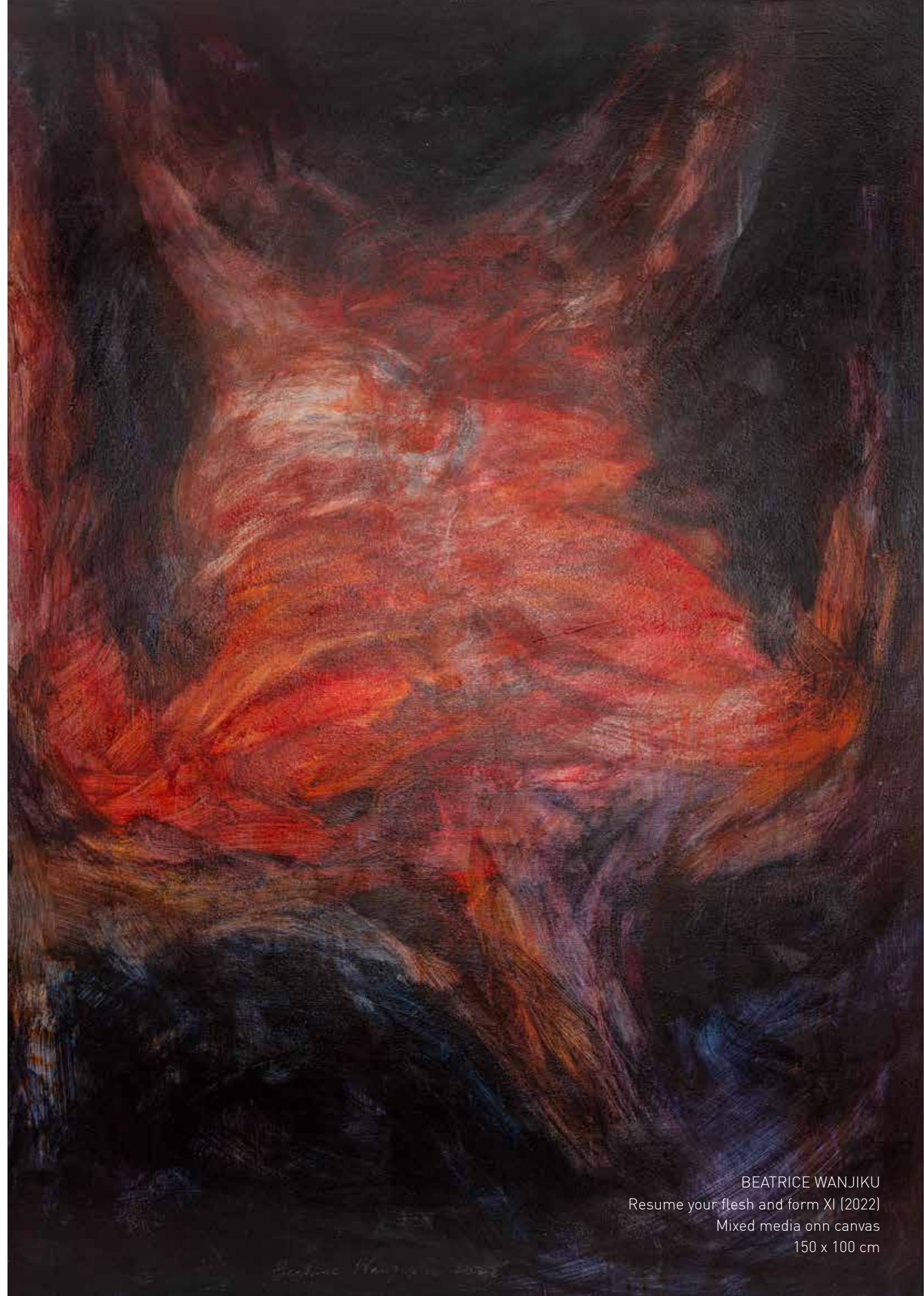
A hybrid creation that lies outside the realm of anything recognizable in nature, this Senufo oracle figure deliberately provokes anxiety through its shrouded anonymity and the sense of suffocation and entrapment it suggests. Such works and the ritual practice in which they were used were both known as kafegeledjo (“he who speaks the truth”).

The figure represents an invisible bush spirit and was used during divination practices. Kafegeledjo divination was used to uncover misdeeds, false testimony, and culpability. This pursuit of truth ultimately sought to preserve and uphold Senufo social guidelines. It did so by unveiling illicit behavior and by punishing with supernatural sanctions those who violated rules pertaining to forbidden sexual relations and exogamous marriage. In essence, a wild force was thus subdued and harnessed through the kafegeledjo as a means for unveiling and punishing transgressions.

Although such works have the potential to affect all members of a Senufo community, access to this oracle figure was restricted to the most senior male and, occasionally, female members, who kept it shrouded in secrecy. In order to harness its power and operate it successfully, the figure received ritual sacrifices, which unevenly cover its surface with crusty matter. A loosely fitting bodysuit made of a coarse fiber textile exposes only the feet of the figural representation within. Above the neck – where the garment is cinched tightly by a cord – the cloth flares out in an inverted cone. The figure’s head is crowned by a row of feathers. The effect of engulfing the figure in a textile sack blurs the boundaries between material and immaterial, playing with the ambiguity between obscured and revealed form.

No documentation exists to provide information of how such works were operated during divinations sessions. The significance of its appearance as well remains unknown. Embodying a wild and unsettling anti-aesthetic, it should be no surprise this enigmatic figure was once owned by the French artist Arman, who at one point possessed five other kafegeledjo (cf. “African Faces, African Figures. The Arman Collection”, New York, The Museum of African Art, 1997, #13).

BEATRICE WANJIKU



BEATRICE WANJIKU
Resume your flesh and form XI (2022)
Mixed media on canvas
150 x 100 cm



BEATRICE WANJIKU
The strangeness of my madness VI (2022)
Mixed media on canvas
160 x 133 cm

Beatrice Wanjiku (b. 1978, Kenya) is one of the foremost Kenyan painters of her generation. For UNSETTLED she has created four new uncompromising works that waver between figuration and abstraction with a provocative rawness. Wanjiku's investigations into the human psyche result in captivating, haunting works that touch everyone.

In her practice Wanjiku examines the times we are living in. With ambiguous feelings, she senses the world is in a phase of self-combustion. Moved by social and political situations, both on a local as global level, her works interrogate their unsettling impact on our lives. Her paintings are not political, but reflect on our journey as human beings, and how we are forced to constantly adapt to navigate our social spaces. Wanjiku's paintings scrutinize the human experience, functioning as a mirror of who we are.

With her paintings, Wanjiku hopes we can return to our true selves, bringing back the completeness that we are searching for. Her work reflects this pursuit for meaning, to make sense of our constantly altering realities.

Exploring the 'condition humaine', Wanjiku displays who we are as human beings, in our genuine entirety. While being masters of our own destiny, she visualizes the duality of our inner selves, constantly battling between choices in a process of doubt while trying to reinvent ourselves. Wanjiku is inspired by the shared experience of the multifaceted persons we are, ever-changing and evolving. The motif of the gaping mouth, omnipresent in many of her paintings, is a metaphor for this constant and consuming search that alters us; it is an insatiable abyss. Wanjiku's portraits deliberately have a certain abstractness, not wanting to portray identifiable persons so they can function as a mirror to each. In the unsettling confrontation with her works, the viewer is challenged to re-evaluate oneself.

With her paintings Wanjiku expresses something that's within. She is on an elusive quest to figure out how our internal functions, trying to represent our

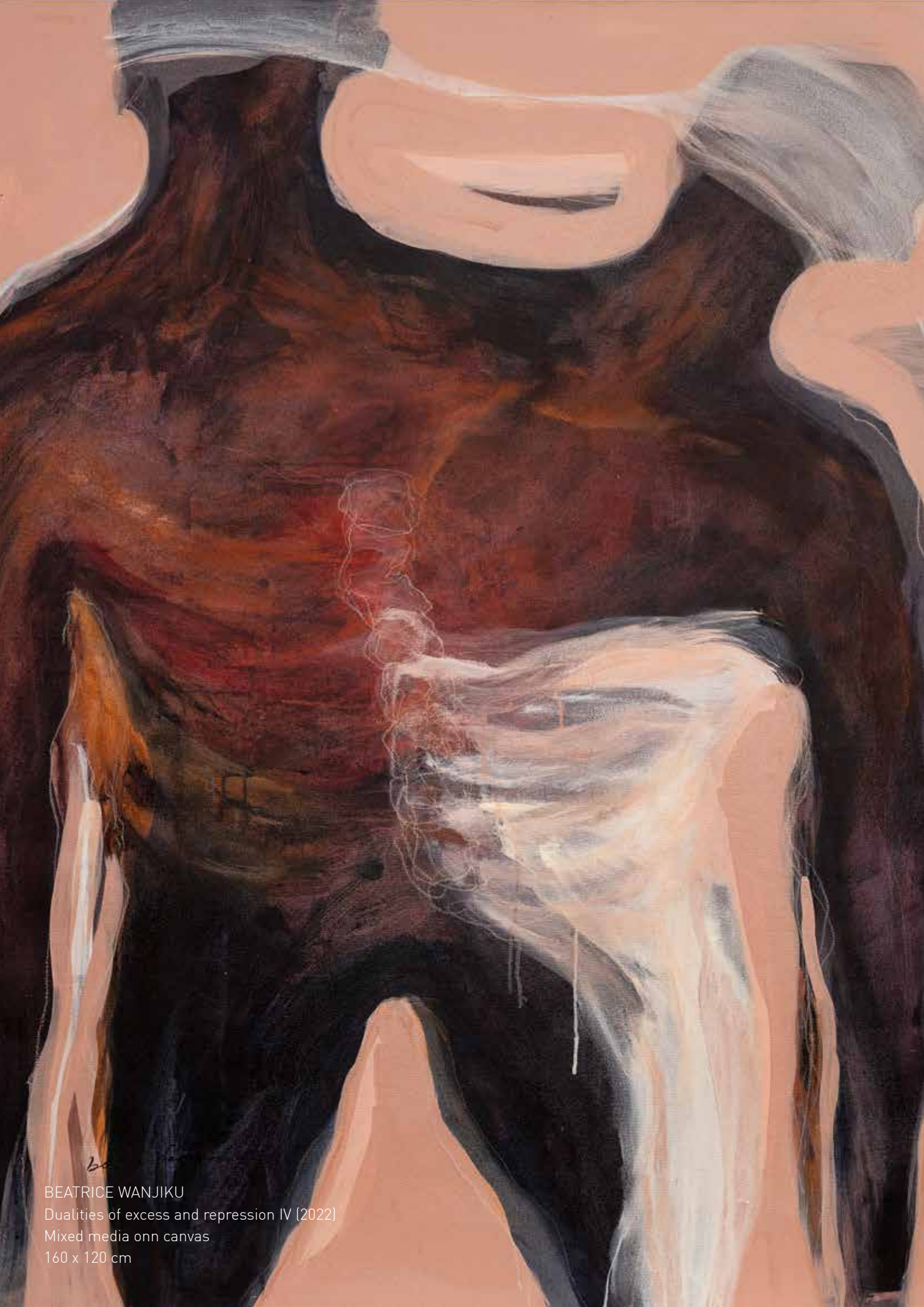
inner selves by peeling away the layers of constituted social norms. Wanjiku goes straight to the core of our being. She bypasses the superficialities and dives into the common features of being human, like bones, blood, veins and other guts. She wants to show the backbone of our human existence. While painting the physicality of the human body, it is our mental interiors she is trying to capture.

A prominent visual element in the featured works is her anatomical deconstruction of the human body, especially the ribcage, protecting the body's essential's guts. For Wanjiku, human bodies are a metaphor for our mental frame of reference. Her art has a larger, more universal message – as our human condition it is shared by all, notwithstanding physical differences in skin color, gender, or age. Wanjiku prefers to work with darkened hues, building up her portraits with a layering of flesh tones and shades of dark blue. The final layer is so thin it becomes see-through. Underneath, a brightness of red hues emerges from a womb like shape – suggesting re-birth. The womb suggests a reclaiming of a life and hope, filled with energy and power. Pregnant of possibilities, her paintings are metaphors for new beginnings, a rebirth within oneself. To peer into a painting of Wanjiku is to lose yourself in questions of being, of belonging and of existence.

Beatrice Wanjiku lives and works in Nairobi. She studied at the Buruburu Institute of Fine Arts from which she graduated in 2000. In 2017 she was part of the exhibition “Personal Structures: Open Borders”, organized by the European Cultural Centre during the 57th Venice Biennale. Her works have been exhibited nationally and internationally. She had solo shows in Nairobi such as “Mourning a Memory” (2018), and “A Wild Infection of the Wildly Shaken Public Mind” (2021), and was one of the five artists selected for the group show “Kesho Kutwa” at the Nairobi National Museum in 2021. Wanjiku has been exhibited at international art fairs such as 1:54 NY (2016), VOLTA NY (2017), and Expo Chicago (2022).



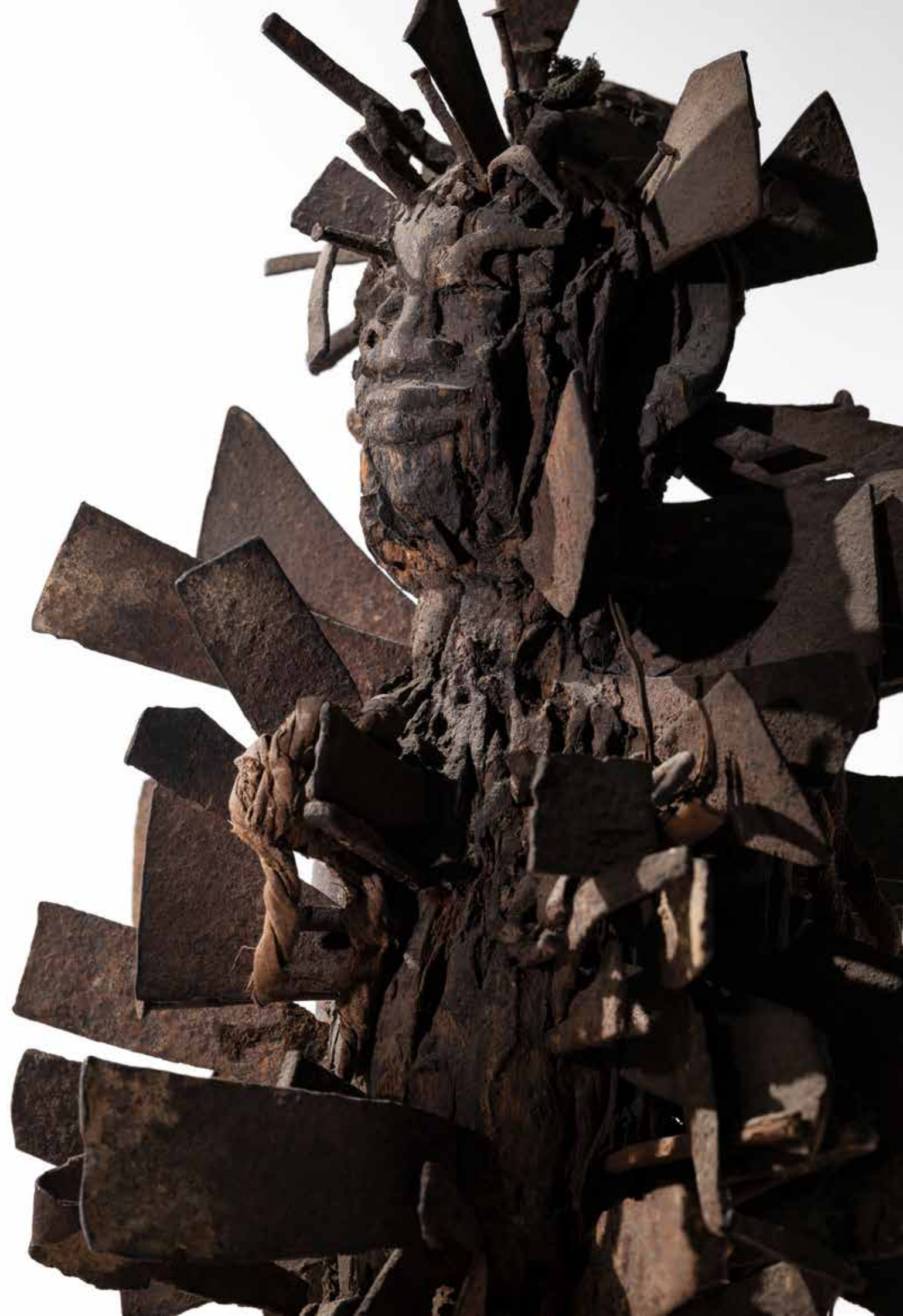
BEATRICE WANJIKU
The sentiment of my flesh VI (2022)
Mixed media on canvas
160 x 133 cm



“To navigate these overwhelming times, the real self gets eroded. We adapt ourselves to fit in particular spaces and structures. The freedom to be yourself is an illusion, while we conform to fit in.”

— Beatrice Wanjiku

NKISI NKONDI





This awe-inspiring statue is known as a nkisi nkondi. The term nkisi has no equivalent in any Western language and should best remain untranslated. Its first and most straightforward meaning is that of a container. The term nkisi was not only given to the statue, but it also referred to the spirit it housed. Rather than representing this spiritual entity, a figurative wooden figure provided a vehicle for it.

However, the statue itself was not yet a nkisi, but only the home for one. It was only when a ritual specialist, known as nganga, activated the wooden figure, it would come to house a nkisi spirit. This power was put into the statue by the accrument of ritual ingredients known as bilongo. It was the responsibility of the nganga to customize it by adding symbolic materials and ritual substances to attract specific spirits to assist with a particular problem. While the basis material for a nkisi figure was wood, an activated figure would be an assemblage of heterogeneous objects and materials, continuously increasing while being ritually used. The bilongo were often packed in a cavity cut into the figure's head or stomach. These 'medicines' were loaded with sacred power. They were often tightly wrapped in knots and nets to give visual expression to the idea of contained forces. The diverse ingredients of the medicines included special earths and stones, leaves and seeds, parts of animals, and feathers, and were specifically combined to attract and direct forces to a desired goal. Consequently, each nkisi was unique, and could be controlled only by the nganga that conceived its creation.

Nkisi are thus the product of the division of the working process between a sculptor and a ritual specialist. The original wooden figure left the carver's hands in an unfinished stage. The nganga's intervention was a ritual one, yet it fundamentally influenced the morphology of the figure and its artistic effect. The sculptor habitually anticipated the ritual activation of his figure. While he delicately finished the face, he did not sculpt the headdress itself. The sculptor often prepared a cylindrical structure on top of the head to accommodate and facilitate the attachment of a power charge. This headdress added by the nganga became an integral part of the figure, interacting with the carved face through its volumes, shapes, and textures. As can be observed on the present power statue, before being sold, nkisi were often desacralized, stripped of their bilongo, exposing a previous stage of non-finito of the statue.

As ritual experts, nganga were approached by clients to address any of a multitude of crises that could emerge in the community, including illness, and social strife. A nkisi was essentially a container of spiritual forces that were directed to investigate the underlying cause of a specific problem. Minkisi were essential to the nganga's profession, creating a focal point from which to draw upon the spirit realm and its powers. Just as minkisi were directed toward specific ends, the nganga that owned



POWER STATUE
Anonymous Kongo artist
D.R. Congo
Wood, metal, cloth, fibers
45 cm

and controlled them was specialized to address specific issues. There existed as many types of *minkisi*, as there were problems.

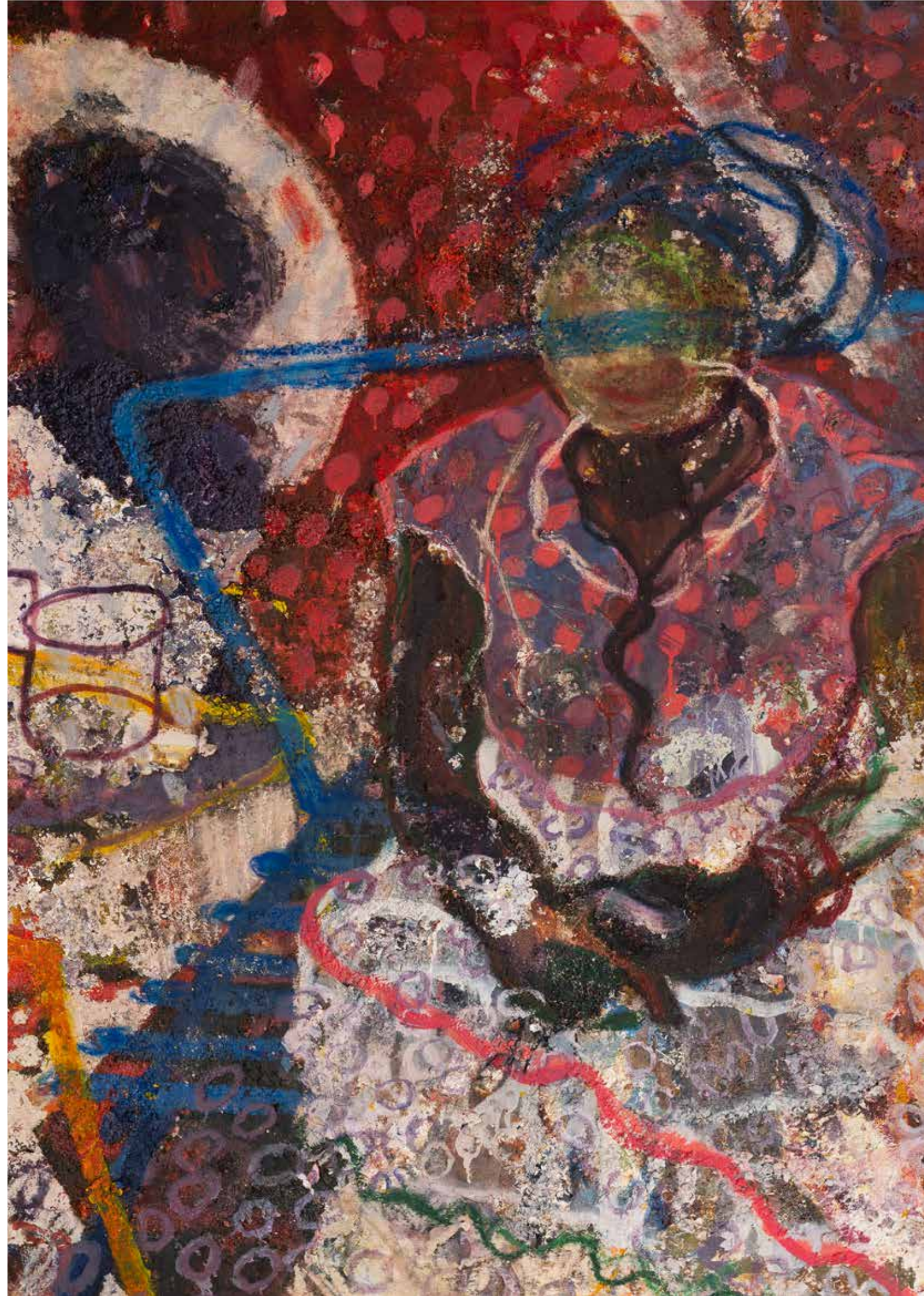
Only the most experienced *nganga* could assume the responsibility of important and powerful *minkisi*; those concerned with political matters and the administration of justice known as *nkisi nkondi*. These large *minkisi* had a communal function, in contrast to the smaller ones which were often devoted to more personal private ends. Such principal *minkisi* were used at the hearings of law cases, acting as a kind of detective who could prove the accused person's guilt, but also as the guardian of public safety, morality, and social order. It was both a policeman who preserved public order, and an executioner who punished offenders. On special occasions this type of *nkisi nkondi* was brought outside in a public setting where judicial procedures took place. The parties involved came before the figure with the *nganga*, and together they investigated the problem at hand. When an agreement was to be made, representatives from both parties took an oath in front of the *nkisi nkondi*. The oath was then sealed by driving a nail or other sharp metal object into the figure to activate its power. According to some sources each party first licked the nail, to render the agreement binding, and by this means informing the *nkondi* of the identities of those for whom it was supposed to act. The *nkisi* swore to observe the engagement and punish anyone breaking the treaty.

An elementary characteristic of *nkisi nkondi* is the large number of bits of metal driven into the figure to activate the spirit it contained. Consequently, this type of power statue is often called a 'nail figure'. Nails and metal wedges have been inserted all over the figure's body. The torso is the usual place for nails because problems were felt in the chest, around the heart. The head, hands, legs and feet are usually kept relatively free of nails. The large quantity of nails driven into the figure shows that this was an important power statue. It was probably frequently used for very significant matters. Each of the nails driven into the figure represents the taking of an oath, the witnessing of an agreement, or some other occasion when the power of the figure was invoked. Beside the head, the statue's belly was another spiritual focal point, usually packed with ritually charged substances and then sealed with resin and a mirror.

This magnificent statue can be attributed to the Dondo, one of the Northeastern Kongo groups. Its style is one of the more realistic of the Lower Congo regio, characterized by a rounded head and big eyes covered with pieces of metal. Unlike the decorative round-headed nails which occur in Songye statuary, the metal wedges on the *nkondi* figures are far more heterogenous in nature. The multitude of origins of these wounding instruments indicates a long ritual life.



MOSTAFF MUCHAWAYA



MOSTAFF MUCHAWAYA
Untitled (2022)
Mixed media on canvas
114,5 x 89 cm



MOSTAFF MUCHAWAYA
Untitled (2022)
Mixed media on canvas
44 x 56 cm

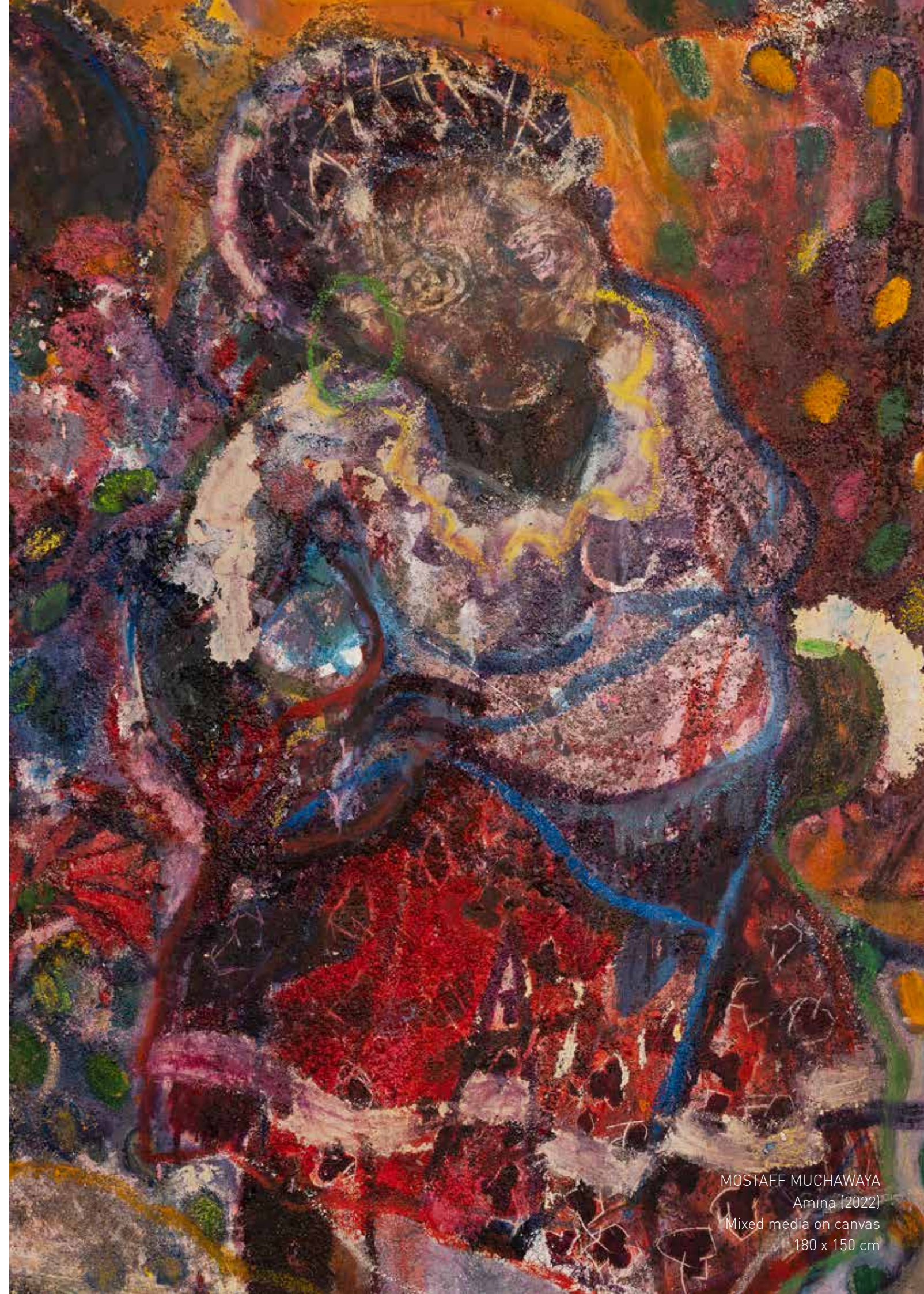
MOSTAFF MUCHAWAYA
Untitled (2022)
Mixed media on canvas
50 x 54 cm



MOSTAFF MUCHAWAYA
Dhaina (2022)
Mixed media on canvas
366 x 215,5 cm

**“I don’t put faces, but you can find
your face. It’s all about perspective.
When I look at the portraits,
I see a face because sometimes
I create a face and then I conceal
it with paint, so I leave room
for the viewer to also find their face.”**

— Mostaff Muchawaya



MOSTAFF MUCHAWAYA
Amina [2022]
Mixed media on canvas
180 x 150 cm



MOSTAFF MUCHAWAYA
Die guns near Nyazura (2022)
Mixed media on canvas
52 x 55 cm

MOSTAFF MUCHAWAYA
Untitled (2022)
Mixed media on canvas
46 x 56 cm

Mostaff Muchawaya (b. 1981, Zimbabwe) is one of the most innovative painters of his generation. Through the medium of paint, Muchawaya creates multi-layered landscapes and portraits of people drawn from memories of his upbringing in the mountainous Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe. Muchawaya's portraits are a complex confluence of portraiture and self-portraiture, autobiography, and fiction. In his work, the artist expresses a deep connection to his memories and experiences, which are inseparable from 'his people' and surroundings. He continuously refers to his rural upbringing; his art serves as a safe space, a home he reverts to.

While the paintings are new in their material form, to Muchawaya they are deep-rooted, remembered renderings. His portraits are a combination of memories, a dream-like flash of faces that shape an impression of a half-remembered experience. As with memories, the works encompass all embellishments and subjectivities layered on top of one another. Muchawaya's method of eroding the surface mirrors the natural process of forgetting. His unsettling, faceless portraits make way for recognition.

Muchawaya's energetic signature style involves the application and erasure of multiple layers of vividly colored paint. Once dry, each generous application of paint is then scraped in parts or removed from the canvas. Household cleaning agents and paint chips from derelict walls are also used to give the impression of erosion. Paint chips from prior works are added to the richly textured surface. Each new piece is thus also part of an old one, creating a very personal sense of continuity throughout his work.

This cycle of application and eradication – almost like an exorcism – continues until each portrait reflects the shifting and uncontrollable nature of memory itself, where the processes of remembering and forgetting converge to form abstract impressions of the women in his life. Once finished, the portrait he presents is one that eerily reminds one of a haunting – a haunting by places, by people and by what used to be or could have been.



Born 1981 in Nyazura, Manicaland, Mostaff Muchawaya works in Harare, Zimbabwe. A 2003 graduate of Zimbabwe's National Gallery School of Visual Art and Design, he joined the artist's collective Village Unhu art studio in 2012 when it was run by Misheck Masamvu, Georgina Maxim and Gareth Nyandoro. Muchawaya presented his first solo exhibition in South Africa "Memory/Ndangariro" at SMAC Gallery in Cape Town in 2017. This exhibition concluded his 2017 residency at Greatmore Studios in Woodstock, South Africa. Earlier solo exhibitions include his debut show, titled "My Entire People and Place"s, in association with Village Unhu and Alliance Française at the Old Mutual Theatre in Harare, Zimbabwe in 2013. In 2018, Muchawaya was included in the exhibition "Five Bhobh – Painting at the End of an Era", curated by Tandazani Dhlakama and featuring twenty-nine artists from Zimbabwe, at the Zeitz MOCAA. The artist had a second solo exhibition at SMAC Gallery in 2018 ("Zviso Zvangu - My Faces") and participated at the 22nd Sydney Biennale in 2020.



MOSTAFF MUCHAWAYA
Rupako (2022)
Mixed media on canvas
72 x 71,5 cm

MOSTAFF MUCHAWAYA
Mhute/summit (2022)
Mixed media on canvas
71 x 85 cm



PENDE

One of the most recognizable of Central Pende masks is the black-and-white Mbangu. Mbangu dances to the song 'We look on (unable to help), the sorcerers have bewitched him'. Mbangu is 'bewitched'; however, since the Pende worldview attributes almost all illness and personal misfortune to the malice of others, what really is at issue is chronic illness or disability and our response to it.

The black-and-white division of Mbangu's face evokes the scars of someone who fell into the fire due to epilepsy or some other medical condition. Indeed, scientists have demonstrated that the flickering flames of night-time campfires are proven triggers for seizures. However, the scars associated with epilepsy are only one of Mbangu's symptoms. He wears a humpback. If he does not carry a bow and arrows, dancers usually avail themselves of a cane to indicate his general physical weakness. Many sculptors depict the traces of smallpox on the black eyelid, and the face distorted by a paralysis of the facial nerve. The multiplication of complaints signals that Mbangu does not represent any one illness. Instead, the sculptor and performer collaborate to make Mbangu a composite sign for illness and disability, of all the misfortunes that might befall someone.

The black-and-white coloration deserves further comment. Color symbolism in the masks is usually positional. While white can have several meanings, the most common one comes through its association with the white kaolin clay used in all healing rites. On the other hand, black is the shade of sorcery and illness and it is striking that all the marks of deformation often fall on the black side. Therefore, the bicolouration depicted may have a secondary meaning in situating Mbangu at the crossroads between healing and illness.

Mbangu displays (according to Pende physiognomic theory) features appropriate to masculine form: assertive forehead, well-articulated cheekbones, and projecting eyes. Facing the challenge of chronic disability, Mbangu is also facing the challenge of bitterness and envy. The artis has gone far beyond the naturalistic representation of a physical complaint to comment on the toll of chronic illness on the psyche. This mask conveys an extraordinary delicacy by contrasting the gentle perfection of the features with their systematic distortion. The sculptor responds to the widespread version of Mbangu's song: 'Do not mock your neighbor, do not laugh at your brother. The sorcerers have bewitched him'. In other words, anyone may fall prey to misfortune. It could happen to you.

Further reading: Strother, Zoé, "Pende", Milan, 2008.



DAN MASK
Anonymous artist
Ivory Coast
Wood, metal
21 cm

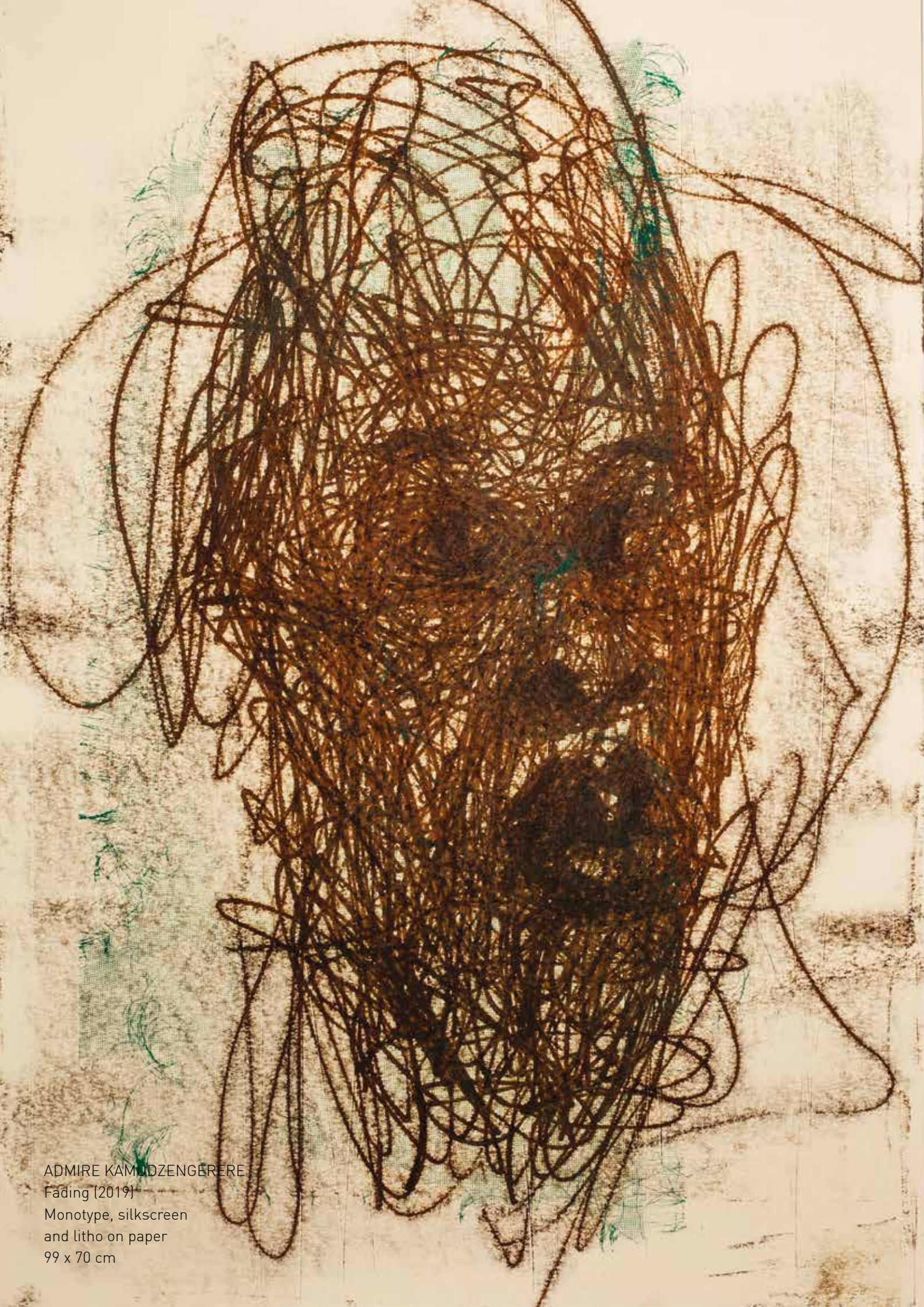


DEFORMITY MASK (MBANGU)
Anonymous Pende artist
D. R. Congo
Wood, pigments
19 cm

ADMIRE KAMUDZEN- GERERE



ADMIRE KAMUDZENERERE
Untitled (2019)
Monotype, silkscreen
and litho on paper
99 x 70 cm



**“(my father) never came to me
in my dreams. Whenever I felt
like I was on to something about
remembering how he looked, I
knew the flash would disappear
as quickly as it came, so I drew
as fast as I could.”**

— Admire Kamudzengerere

ADMIRE KAMUDZENGGERERE
Fading (2019)
Monotype, silkscreen
and litho on paper
99 x 70 cm

Admire Kamudzengerere (b. 1981, Zimbabwe) work explores identity, politics, and society, often informed by the structural and social issues that have marked Zimbabwe's last decades. Kamudzengerere has gone on to create a powerful and broad range of works that consists of painting, drawing, performance, installation, video, and printmaking. His art, intense and indefinable, addresses the political violence and upheaval in his home country while tying into more global and universal themes like father-son relationships, displacement, and the position of an African artist within the global art world.

Kamudzengerere has exhibited his work across the globe and became the second Zimbabwean artist ever to be awarded a residency at Amsterdam's Rijksakademie. In 2017, at the 57th Venice Biennale, his portraits occupied an entire room of the Zimbabwe Pavilion. In the following years, he went on to participate in the 11th Bamako Biennial, the 13th Dakar Biennial, and the 13th Cairo Biennial. He has been included in exhibitions at the Zeitz MoCAA in Cape Town, Kunsthaus Hamburg, the 5th Moscow Biennial, and the new Humboldt Forum in Berlin. His work is part of the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Block Museum at Northwestern University, and the National Gallery of Zimbabwe. He is represented by Catinca Tabacaru Gallery in Bucharest.

UNSETTLED will include several monotype self-portraits from a series the artist started after his father's death in 2012. At the time, Admire was studying in Amsterdam and these works functioned as a sort of mourning, coping with the loss from a distance. He would stare at himself in the mirror for hours, searching for traces of his father's face. When the artist would

recognise an eye, an ear, a smile, he would feverishly attempt to capture the likeness, drawing onto the back of a piece of paper laid on top of an ink stone. They were instinctual, emotional marks, putting down on paper a visual that was rapidly exiting his memory.

His monotype self-portraits address this personal struggle, but are also pieces of a universal puzzle invoking a unifying human thread—the fil rouge of roots and ancestry. With time, Kamudzengerere's search for his father evolved into a new printing language, mixing traditional printing techniques with experimental approaches to silk screening and mark making. Process became the central force behind these works as Kamudzengerere added multiple layers to the prints.

In 2019, Kamudzengerere opened his second solo exhibition in New York City by revealing the next evolution of his printing technique, having added lithography into the mix. These works had taken the medium into a direction not yet reached by another printmaker. Nets and wires were screen printed on top of the self-portraits. Through this practice, Admire challenged preconceptions of identity by responding to ideas of citizenship within the expansive geopolitical landscape. Inspired by his temporary relocation from Zimbabwe to Amsterdam, the silk-screened netting mirrored the boundaries society imposes on us. Even in the post-colonial landscape, effective administrative regulations continue to produce invisible borders. A mesh structure covers the portrait, forming a mask which constitutes the self-imposed identity that enables participation in the global artistic community. Kamudzengerere's self-portraits capture his unsettled state masterfully and glance at us from behind the mask.





DAN

DAN MASK
Anonymous artist
Ivory Coast
Wood, metal
21 cm

At the center of the masking traditions in the Dan region was the survival and thriving of the community. Not a single aspect of village life remained untouched by the interference of masks. Their wooden face masks did not depict ancestors, neither were they portraits. Masked performers impersonated spirits, connecting humans with the supernatural. These beings occasionally left their hideout in the woods to dispel malign forces from the village and to chastise, exhort, educate, or entertain its inhabitants. As every mask could fulfill different roles within the community, it is impossible to identify the function of a mask based solely on its shape. Moreover, the status and function of these masks could change during the life of their owner. Just as a person could climb the social ladder, so too a mask might ascend in rank. Even after the death of their owner, a mask kept fulfilling a ritual role. It would be placed in a shrine and served as a direct link with the ancestor. Living in the afterworld, he was closer to the supernatural and could exert his influence to bless his descendants. The mask would never dance again and as a shrine object would frequently be coated with libations. Through time those sacrifices interacted with the wooden surface of the mask, resulting in the pitted skin the mask now displays.





MANKON

PORCUPINE QUILL DANCE TUNIC (NGOUM)

Anonymous Mankon artist

Cameroon

Fibers, porcupine quills, leather

83 x 71 cm



Rows of long porcupine quills decorate this arresting and dramatic dance tunic which must have rustled and rattled rhythmically when worn in a dance as quills would have swayed and swirled outwards when the dancer twirled around or changed direction. The quills are attached to a loosely woven dark raffia ground that forms fringes at the neck and arm openings. Royalty or notables leading a dance group would wear such a costume along with a hat, also decorated with quills, during ritual performances. Porcupine quills were associated with royal power in the Cameroon Grasslands.

For similar dance tunics see "A Cameroon World: Art and Artifacts from the Marshall Mount Collection" (New York, 2007, p. 71, fig. 21) and "Power Dressing: Men's Fashion and Prestige in Africa" (Newark Museum of Art, 2005, p. 21, fig. 13).





LILIAN MARY NABULIME

All proceeds will be split between the artist and the Njabala Foundation. Founded by Martha Kazungu, this foundation based in Kampala, Uganda, creates safe spaces for female artists to blossom and thrive. Njabala Foundation strives to promote works of art, publications and content, facilitating visibility for women artists in Uganda.

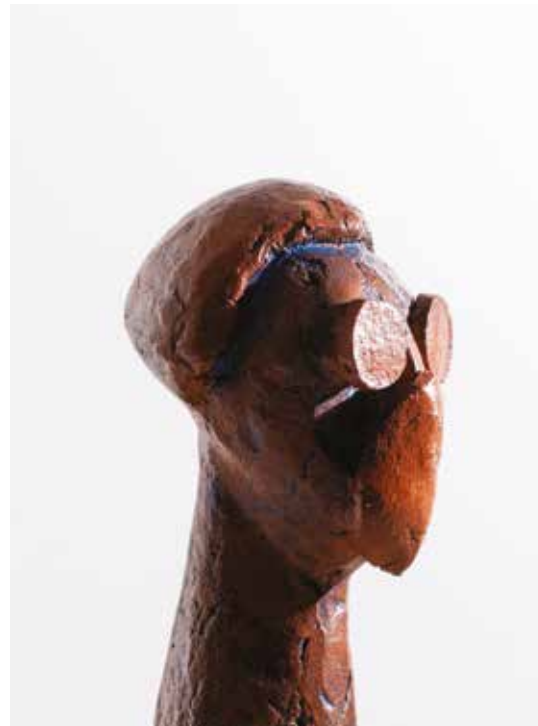
The work of the sculptor Lilian Nabulime (b. 1963, Uganda) wants to raise public awareness of infectious diseases. Over the past two decades, her practice focused on creating sculptures with the intention of addressing and sensitizing people about HIV/AIDS, an epidemic that has cost and disrupted too many lives in Sub Saharan Africa. When Uganda's government set a series of inconsiderate policies to its citizens in the name of combating the virus spread during the recent pandemic, Nabulime voiced her concerns through a new body of work "Keeping Safe From COVID-19". She created a group of terracotta figurines adorned in masks that symbolize the ability to protect oneself from the pandemic. The notion of wearing masks to keep safe from the disease incited a variety of emotions.

Nabulime was interested in how the act of wearing a mask documents the behaviour of people living in the urban areas of Kampala, including the interactions between individuals and law enforcement. The artist observed how the mask became a disguise that changed people's relations to one another. Masks made it more difficult to identify and greet those we pass as they conceal our identity.

In addition to experimenting with the visual elements of the mask through their shape and texture, Nabulime also played with hues of blue to add more depth to the terracotta figures. The bright patina draws the viewer's eye to the sculptural forms and enhances their beauty. These works were first shown to the public in Norway in 2020 during the exhibition "My mother is forgetting my face", curated by Martha Kazungu. In this show several artists addressed the injustices that nations ('the mother' on a metaphorical level in the show's title) render to their citizens ('the face'). The terracotta figures remind viewers to wear a mask for their own safety and the health of those around them. Their collective display evokes the many unsettling emotions that masks may elicit, including confusion, frustration, sadness, and anxiety.

Dr. Lilian M. Nabulime, is a Senior Lecturer and former Head of the Sculpture Department in the School of Industrial and Fine Arts (CEDAT) at Makerere University in Kampala. She was taught by one of Uganda's greatest sculptors, Francis Nnaggenda. Nabulime earned a Ph.D. in Fine Art from Newcastle University in 2007. Her research focused on sculptural forms as a tool of communication for women living with HIV/AIDS in Uganda. Through her work, Nabulime attempts to push the meaning of art beyond its visual quality to raise awareness about issues facing society and promote discussion among viewers. Nabulime has been awarded numerous fellowships throughout her career and has exhibited in both solo and group shows around the world. Her most recent commission by SOAS University of London seeks to raise awareness about the risks and responses to schistosomiasis in Uganda and other communities in the Great Lakes Region.





“Each sculpture features a distinct mask and facial expression as a way of exposing people’s mixed responses to the action of wearing a mask. A few masks cover the entire face of the figurine while others are worn halfway down the face. This discrepancy represents emerging groups of people who have acquired the habit of wearing masks only when they want to or believe that it is necessary.”

— Lilian M. Nabulime





MAKONDE

This unique Makonde face mask in all likelihood represents a very old man. A small number of deformity and sickness masks are known among the Makonde, many fitting into genres or depicting specific character types. Nijale masks (often with with big ears) were originally created to depict the elderly and often showed sunken, hollowed-out faces. Likewise, a mask type that emerged in the 1950s depicted a hunter with a swollen and inflamed eye (due to a hunting accident), while others with twisted features and large toothy mouths may depict witches (personal communication with Alexander Bortolot, 2022). The deformed nature of the face is strengthened by the wear the mask suffered to the nose and forehead. Characteristically for Makonde masks, the coiffure is made of real human hair, as is its moustache. Notwithstanding the sunken planes throughout the face, this exceptional face mask is carved so realistically it almost feels like a portrait.



FACE MASK
Anonymous Makonde artist
Mozambique
Wood, pigments, hair
26 cm

THIERRY OUSSOU



THIERRY OUSSOU
The sound of squirrel (2020)
Mixed media on paper
99,5 x 115 cm



“We are all a reflection of paper. I am developing the concept of the fragility of paper in relation to human beings.

**We are as fragile as paper.
If you do not take care of paper, it tears.
Paper is not flat. I do not mount paper,
I let it live, I let it take shape.
I find it beautiful. It shows that we are
not perfect. We are not straight, neatly
folded. You see the folds, the lines,
it talks about movement, about travel.”**

— Thierry Oussou

UNSETTLED presents three works by Thierry Oussou (b. 1988, Benin) showcasing his distinctively gestural style with drips, splatters, and calligraphic marks. Distorted figures, faces, objects and symbols float freely against a dark paper background in an unsettling universe. Oussou's unique choice for black paper as a medium was inspired by the small slates used by schoolchildren. In 2014 he started to experiment with larger sheets, which are now his standard practice. For him, paper is more than a surface, it is a conceptual medium. The material qualities of the unmounted paper are crucial for his works and Oussou favors it over canvas.

Oussou's grand scale black drawings possess an absorbing quality, forcing the viewer to observe them up close. Another recurring visual element is the presence of white masks glued on the black surface. He explains, "Everyone can hide behind a mask. I don't know your past or present, but perhaps there is something in my pictures that you recognize in yourself. Each mask is a person, an individual composed of several layers. Maybe you can identify with some part of my drawings." The eyes, nostrils and open mouth are burnt into the face with coals, referring burn marks on one's skin – "suffering feels like coals that burn on your skin", the artist states. Oussou sculpts the faces with fire, embers recalling human struggle, in most unsettling expressions.

The large sheets of black paper contrast with the white and colored drawings revolving around a single human figure. This individual seems to float in a universe filled with signs, sketches, and doodles. Each separate element bears a meaning, and the use of vivid colors sharpens the contrasts. Through his distinctively gestural and energetic practice, the artist creates captivating works in an audacious neo-expressionistic style. A constant traveler between places and across continents, Oussou's work captures the unsettled state of being both insider and outsider, resident and visitor. As a self-thought artist, he speaks a unique artistic language with a strong visual, aural, and psychic impact.

Thierry Oussou was born in 1988 in Allada, Benin, and works with drawing, painting, video, installation, and performance. In 2011, he founded Atelier Yè in Benin as an informal art school where artists could assemble and exchange ideas. His practice caught the attention of artists Meschac Gaba and Barthélémy Toguo, who he subsequently assisted. He had a residency at the Rijksakademie, Amsterdam in 2015-2016 and exhibited at the Dakar Biennale in 2014, and at the 10th Berlin Biennial in 2018. Oussou had solo exhibitions at Tiwani Contemporary, London (2018), Stevenson, Johannesburg (2018) and Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam (2019, 2021). The artist was recently featured in the exhibition Benin Art: Yesterday and Today at the Palais de la Marina in Cotonou (February-May 2022).



THIERRY OUSSOU
Amankpo (2020)
Mixed media on paper
151 x 170,5 cm



HORSE-AND-RIDER SHAPED AMULET
(PUTCHU GUINADJI)
Anonymous Kotoko artist
Chad
Metal
5,5 cm



KOTOKO



Kotoko metalworkers in the vicinity of Lake Chad used the lost-wax technique to cast small bronze figurines that were kept as personal amulets. Functioning as protective talismans, they were once worn around an owner's neck or in a small pouch. Held close to the body, they safeguarded their owners against threats outward, and physical, or inward, in the form of anxiety and mental illness. Many of these amulets depict horse riders and are locally known as putchu guinadj. The iconography of the horse and rider originally comes from the Peul warriors who fought and enslaved many of the animistic tribes in the region.

The Kotoko themselves did not ride horses, but were farmers and fishermen living along the Logone and Chari rivers. The word „Putchu“ means horse and „Guinadj“ means demon in the Kotoko language. The „Putchu Guinadj“ are thus the horse and the rider who fight the demons attacking a mad person – in other words they are imbued with implicit hope that ‘Troubles may yet ride away’. The extensive wear, indicative of a long medicinal use, of the present amulet gives the surface a very smooth finish. The elegance and refined beauty of this talisman set it apart as one of the most beautiful examples of the type.





BAULE

FACE MASK
Anonymous Baule artist
Ivory Coast
Wood
29 cm

This mask, carved in a hardwood, depicts a woman's face under four horns, which, in compliance with the dualism typical of Baule culture (starting with the binary opposition of village and wilderness), are no arbitrary adjuncts but signs of a language that extends a being beyond its natural limits. They provide a contrast with the wood's carefully polished, smooth face and almost metallic appearance and glow. The eyes are barely open, but. It was through these thin openings that the dancer was able to see enough to move with confidence. Beyond its perfection as a carved object, this portrait mask also has the interesting feature of bearing all the facial scarifications that once typified the Baule but no longer exist.

Following independence, the government proscribed them in order to eliminate signs of ethnicity and mold the Ivorians into a single people. This exceptional mask is carved with full decorative panoply of curves and counter-curves echoing one another. The Baule are one of the few peoples to have portrait masks appearing at the close of an entertainment dance honoring the person who was supposed to be portrayed and who was present at the event. This type of Baule masks was called ndoma, which means 'double'.

Ndoma were designed as true portraits of real people living in the village and were given their names. However, there was no attempt to depict individual traits. The sculptors made no effort to achieve an accurate likeness. The mask endeavored to provide a transfiguration, rather than identify and individual's distinguishing features. The main object of these masks was to celebrate an ideal image, from both the aesthetic and moral standpoint and answering to Baule canons of beauty.



IBIBIO





SICKNESS MASK
(IDIOK EKPO)
Anonymous Ibibio artist
Nigeria
Wood, pigments
38 cm

Instilling fear is a powerful tool in teaching right from wrong. When someone is told, “You will be haunted for the rest of your life for that,” or “Someday it will come back to haunt you” similar threats are made in order to let someone refrain from a certain type of bad behavior. Among Nigeria’s Ibibio peoples, unsettling face masks were designed to instill fear among the population. They were used by the Ekpo society, a crucial instrument in the hands of the village chiefs that acted as an agent of social control in the absence of a centralized, political state. The duties of this society were to propitiate the ancestors for the welfare of the group, to uphold the authority of the elders, and to maintain order in the village. The enforcement of the rules and regulations affecting every aspect of day-to-day life were given powerful spiritual sanctity through the appearance of the ancestors through wooden face masks. A mask depicting a face ravaged by disfiguring tropical diseases horrified the public, striking them with terror, and proved a most efficient means to instill fear and respect for the Ekpo society.

Ekpo, a person’s soul, either transmigrated to the underworld at death to await reincarnation or to become an evil ghost. Ghosts (ekpo onyon) were the souls of the dead that could not enter the underworld and were doomed to travel the earth forever, homeless, and alone. Such a destiny depended on the person’s earthly activities. For example, if a person was found guilty of a serious crime against the community, he would have been killed and his body thrown into the ‘bad bush’ where ghosts were believed to reside. If a person developed a terrible disfigurement, such as leprosy, smallpox, or gangosa, this would be considered to be divine retribution, in which case, at death, likewise, the body would be thrown into the so-called bad bush.

In Ibibio culture it was said that a doer of evil deeds would become an evil ghost (idiok ekpo). Every village had an Ekpo lodge, where all the society’s regalia, such as its wooden masks, were kept. Each community also had a sacred forest where the ekpo spirits were said to roam. Once a year, at the end of the harvest season, ekpo masks appeared for a period of about three weeks. The masqueraders accompanied the villagers singing and parading throughout the village. Each town had a number of open areas, focal points in the compounds of the main families, which were visited by the ekpo masquerades to pay their respects and perform. Women, children, and non-initiates were excluded from these performances. Additionally, on the first and last days of the harvest season a public performance took

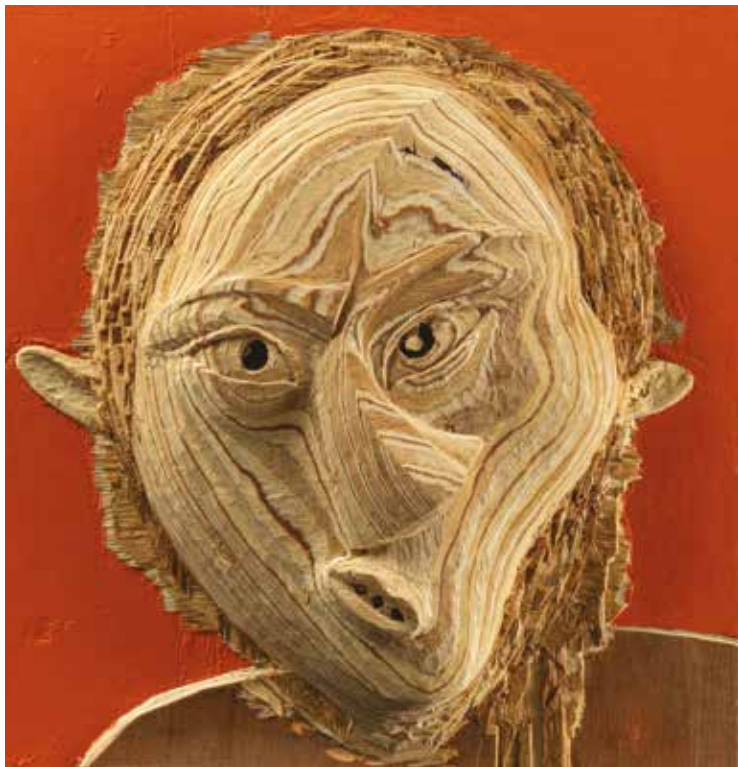
place at the most important marketplace. At this occasion, everyone was allowed to witness the dances. Once the idiok ekpo had arrived, the family leader drew a circle in the sand. Each new masquerader that came near the spot, was lured into the circle before performing – this was to invoke the spirits in the underworld to witness and guide the performance. The idiok ekpo masquerades queued up to perform, one after the other, before joining their fellow members. Eventually the entire group appeared, buzzing around the arena like angry wasps, lunging unpredictably into the crowds, and occasionally fighting each other, jumping, running, swirling with vivacious energy. The Ibibio recognized that once a mbop (mask) was put on, an ancestor's soul (ekpo) possessed the wearer, so that the masquerader could commit any type of havoc without anybody questioning his actions.

The styles of ekpo masquerade costumes and performances varied greatly from village to village. However, throughout the region the overall color for the idiok ekpo ("evil souls") masks and costumes is black, to represent the fact that ghosts come out at nighttime. The masks had to be frightening in order to invoke the threat of force and authority necessary for the ekpo society to maintain order. This face mask portrays a victim of a particular variant of the disease gangosa, which the Ibibio call ibuo-akwanga or "twisted-nose". Gangosa resulted from a severe vitamin deficiency which destroyed the membranes of the nose. Its depiction was a reminder of the diseases sent as punishment to particularly evil lawbreakers. The distorted, deformed, and exaggerated features of this type of masks inspired many artists. The British sculptor Henry Moore owned a very similar mask (Sotheby's, New York, "Henry Moore Artist and Collector", 14 May 1997, lot 333).

The British colonial officer G. I. Jones photographed a very similar mask worn by an Anang Ibibio ekpo dancer in the village of Uzuakoli in the 1930s. Several other masks from this workshop are known: one formerly in the prestigious James Hooper collection (Christie's, London, 14 July 1976, lot 72), another formerly in the Ratner collection (Drewal (Henry J.), "Traditional Art of the Nigerian Peoples", Washington, D.C., 1977, p. 45, #44), one sold at Sotheby's in 1990 (Sotheby's, New York, 21 April 1990, lot 262). Other similar masks with a crooked nose are in the collection of the Antwerp Ethnographic Museum (AE.1959.0055.0037), Parisian Musée du quai Branly (73.1989.3.1), and Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco (#1979-03-06).







AIMÉ MPANE

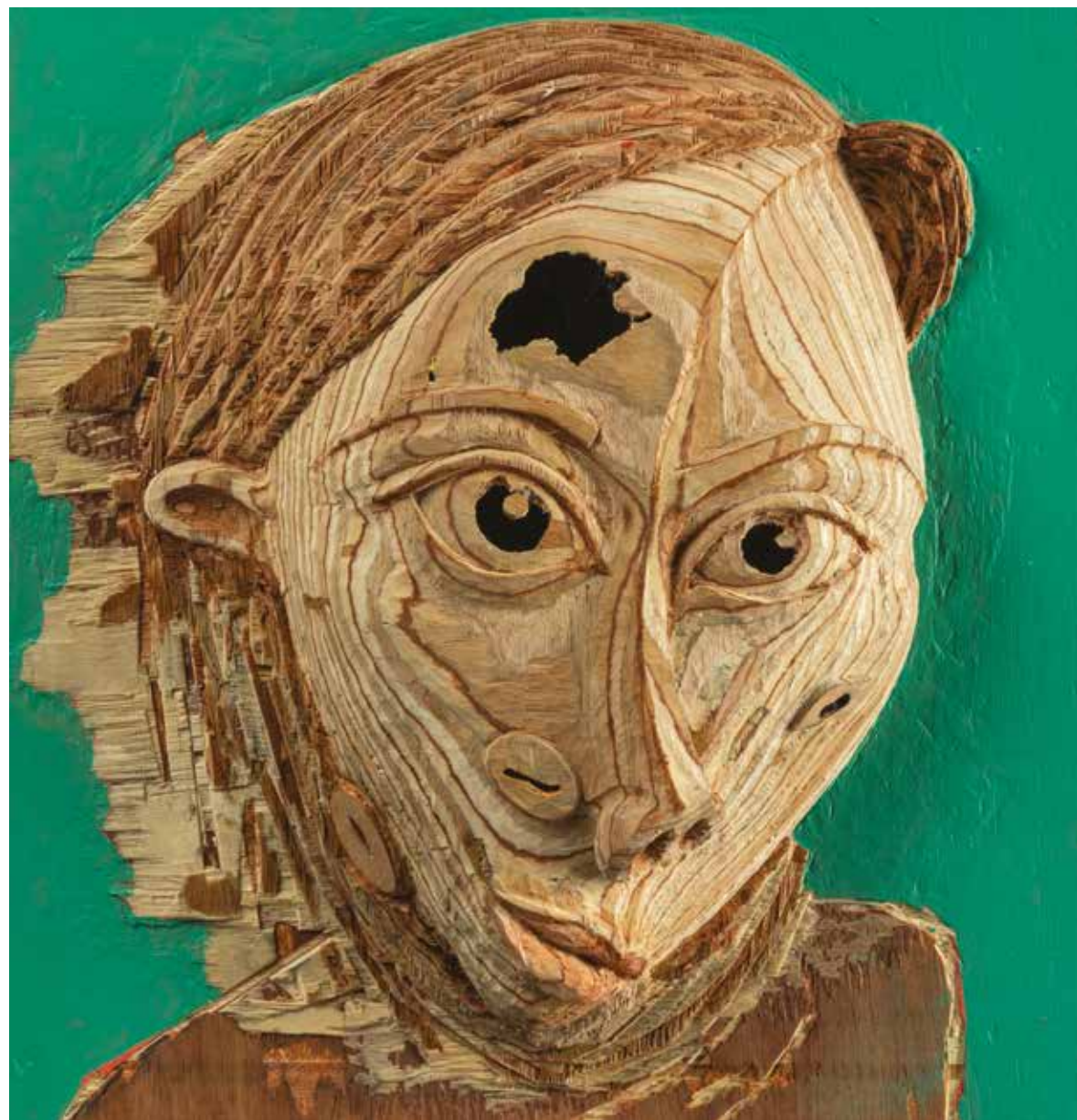


AIMÉ MPANE
Two-sided mask,
Lady Picasso - Mputu (2017)
Adze-cut multiplex
panels and acrylic
31 x 32 x 8 cm

**“The faces evolve, become monstrous.
This is also connected to what I see
as prostitution in politics. I get the
impression that Congolese politicians
also prostitute themselves, and in the
process, they become like monsters.
They also, are copying a Western model.
This connection between Europe and
Africa is always present in my work.
The interaction, the past, the present...
there is a lot of overlap.”**

— Aimé Mpane





AIME MPANE
Two-sided mask,
Lady Picasso - Menso (2018)
Adze-cut multiplex
panels and acrylic
31 x 32 x 8 cm

Aimé Mpane (b. 1968, D.R. Congo) is one of the most prominent Congolese artists of his generation. As a sculptor he has developed a very personal style in which sculpted volumes and painted surfaces constantly interact. Working primarily with wood and an adze - a traditional African woodworking tool - the Belgium-based artist creates sculptures, mosaic-like wall hangings, and portraits carved on wood that explore his personal and artistic experiences in Congo and Belgium's post-colonial worlds. His practice is inspired by contemporary Congo, while demonstrating a deep understanding of its history.

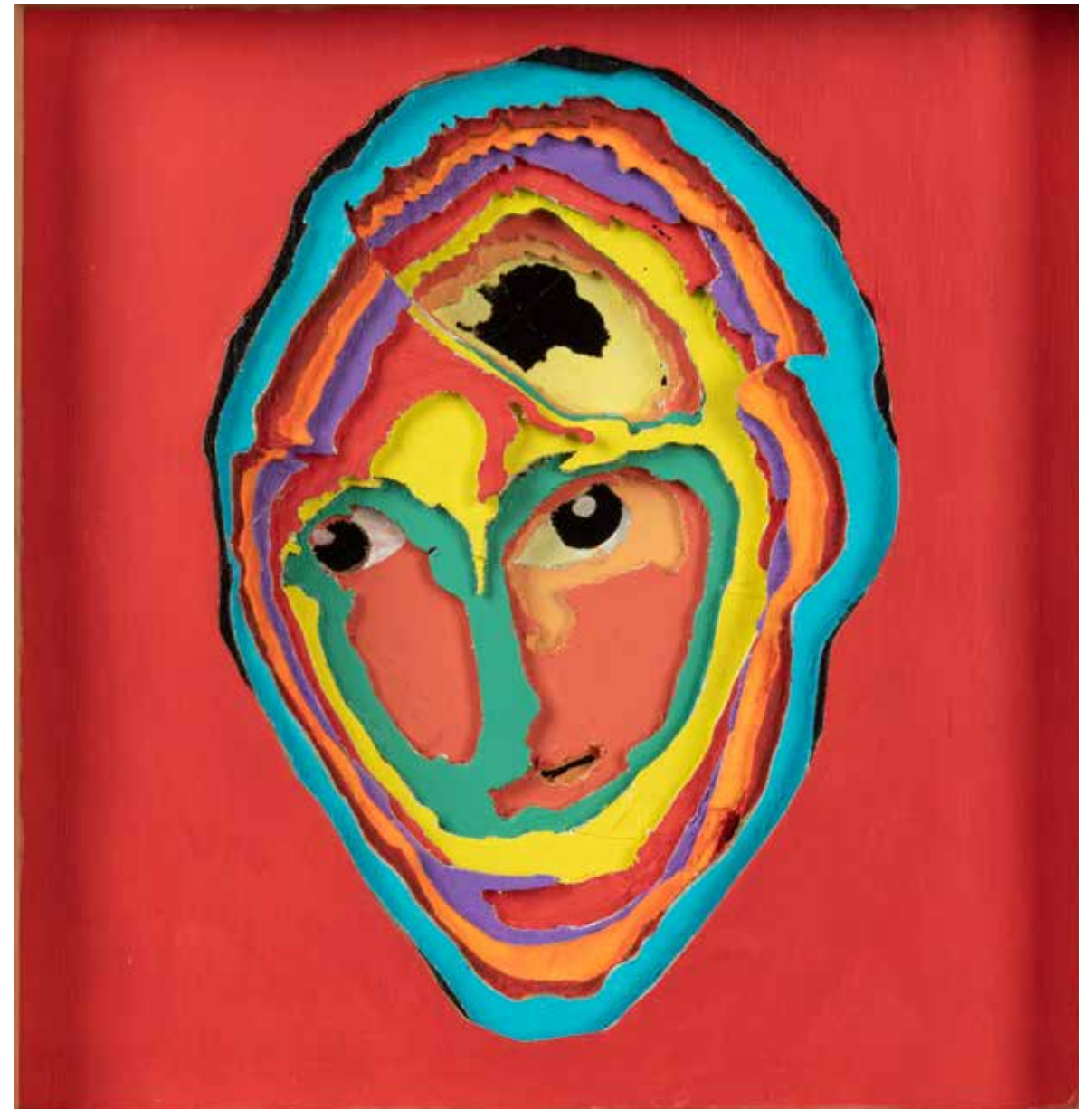
Mpane's sculptures and installations often address the aftermath of Belgian colonialism; while his rough-hewn, brightly painted portraits on wood panels of the people he meets on the streets of Kinshasa give insight into modern Congolese identity. UNSETTLED presents two works from his series "Le Demoiselle Pende/Masque Bi-face". These carved sculptures resemble African sickness masks while also referencing Pablo Picasso's 1907 masterpiece "Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)". This body of work was inspired by a visit of the artist to his grandmother in a village situated some 800 kilometers from Kinshasa. As a lot of diamonds are mined around Tshikapa City, in the Kasai Province, the area is rife with trafficking; a context that fosters the spread of prostitution.

The son of a sculptor, Mpane was brought up in the tradition of carpentry and has a close affinity with wood and its craftsmanship. Mpané's sculpts these deformed faces out of multiple layers of plywood. The backside of each segment is painted in a different color, resembling topographical maps and evoking the strata of memory. The choice for plywood as a material, whose three thin sheets are glued together against the grain, is no coincidence. The material inspires him on several levels. While being a product of the Western consumption industry, its three superimposed layers also recall the three strata of the skin (epidermis, dermis, hypodermis), which the artist cuts away to expose and reveal our deeper, invisible layers. By hacking away the plywood, he exposes the constructed nature of the material as well as the constructs of race and identity. When the artist cuts away the multiplex, the various colors of wood (light brown, white and dark brown wood) evoke the human skin. The multiplex also refers to the precarious structures of the poorest areas of African cities. Yet, through his artworks, this 'poor'

medium acquires an aura of dignity and longevity.

Essential to this biface works is their double-sided nature, with a hollow inside and a protruding relief on the outside, as though memories were getting lost and reappearing on the surface. The artist takes us 'through the looking glass' to the other side, behind the mask. For the back of the work, Mpane was inspired by an early self-portrait by Picasso, as a nod to Western culture and art history. His adze-cut, multicolored works possess an intuitive sense of the burden of humanity and the janus-like nature of our souls. Janus, the Roman god of passages, transition and transformation was a double-faced divinity, turned with one side to the past while facing the future with the other. While one side of the work is sculpted with the traditional adze, the layers on the other side breathe with modernity, being laser-cut. Essentially, this series deals with the problem of lines of demarcation, of borders between cultures. A true humanist and cosmopolite, Mpane proposes a global vision of art.

Born in Kinshasa, today the artist divides his life between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Belgium, where he lives in Brussels. Mpane recently was honored with a solo exhibition, "Remedies", curated by Sophie Hasaerts, at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium in Brussels. He has been the subject of several other solo shows in both Congo, and the United States and was included in significant group exhibitions including "Posing Modernity: The Black Model from Manet and Matisse to Today" at Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, New York, NY (2019); "Black Models: From Gericault to Matisse" at the Musée de Orsay, Paris, France (2019); "Sanctuary", FOR-SITE Foundation, San Francisco, CA (2017) and Aga Khan Museum of Art, Toronto, Canada (2020); "Double Take: African Innovations", Brooklyn Museum, NY (2016); and "Shaping Power: Luba Masterworks from the Royal Museum for Central Africa", Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA (2013). In 2018, Mpane was commissioned to create a sculpture for permanent display at the newly renovated Africa Museum in Tervuren, Belgium. His work is additionally collected by institutions including the National Museum of African Art, Washington, D.C; Brooklyn Museum, NY; Harlem Museum, NY; Detroit Institute of Art, MI; Microsoft Art Collection, Redmond, WA; Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C; and the Embassy of Belgium, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. Aimé Mpane is represented by Walter de Weerd's Nomad Gallery.



AIME MPANE
Two-sided mask,
Lady Picasso - Menso (2018)
Adze-cut multiplex
panels and acrylic
31 x 32 x 8 cm

IBIBIO





SICKNESS MASK
(IDIOK EKPO)
Anonymous Ibibio artist
Nigeria
Wood, pigments
33 cm

Instilling fear is a powerful tool in teaching right from wrong. When someone is told, “You will be haunted for the rest of your life for that,” or “Someday it will come back to haunt you” similar threats are made in order to let someone refrain from a certain type of bad behavior. Among Nigeria’s Ibibio peoples, unsettling face masks were designed to instill fear among the population. They were used by the Ekpo society, a crucial instrument in the hands of the village chiefs that acted as an agent of social control in the absence of a centralized, political state. The duties of this society were to propitiate the ancestors for the welfare of the group, to uphold the authority of the elders, and to maintain order in the village. The enforcement of the rules and regulations affecting every aspect of day-to-day life were given powerful spiritual sanctity through the appearance of the ancestors through wooden face masks. A mask depicting a face ravaged by disfiguring tropical diseases horrified the public, striking them with terror, and proved a most efficient means to instill fear and respect for the Ekpo society.

Ekpo, a person’s soul, either transmigrated to the underworld at death to await reincarnation or to become an evil ghost. Ghosts (ekpo onyon) were the souls of the dead that could not enter the underworld and were doomed to travel the earth forever, homeless, and alone. Such a destiny depended on the person’s earthly activities. For example, if a person was found guilty of a serious crime against the community, he would have been killed and his body thrown into the ‘bad bush’ where ghosts were believed to reside. If a person developed a terrible disfigurement, such as leprosy, smallpox, or gangosa, this would be considered to be divine retribution, in which case, at death, likewise, the body would be thrown into the so-called bad bush. In Ibibio culture it was said that a doer of evil deeds would become an evil ghost (idiok ekpo). Every village had an Ekpo lodge, where all the society’s regalia, such as its wooden masks, were kept. Each community also had a sacred forest where the ekpo spirits were said to roam. Once a year, at the end of the harvest season, ekpo masks appeared for a period of about three weeks. The masqueraders accompanied the villagers singing and parading throughout the village.

Each town had a number of open areas, focal points in the compounds of the main families, which were visited by the ekpo masquerades to pay their respects and perform. Women, children, and non-initiates were excluded from these performances. Additionally, on the first and last days of the harvest season a public performance took place at the most important marketplace. At this occasion, everyone was allowed to witness the dances. Once the idiok ekpo had arrived, the family leader drew a circle in the sand. Each new masquerader that came near the spot, was lured into the circle before performing – this was to invoke the spirits in the underworld to witness and guide the performance. The idiok ekpo masquerades queued up to perform, one after the other, before joining their fellow members. Eventually the entire group appeared, buzzing around the arena like angry wasps, lunging unpredictably into the crowds, and occasionally fighting each other, jumping, running, swirling with vivacious energy. The Ibibio recognized that once a mbop (mask) was put on, an ancestor's soul (ekpo) possessed the wearer, so that the masquerader could commit any type of havoc without anybody questioning his actions.

The styles of ekpo masquerade costumes and performances varied greatly from village to village. However, throughout the region the overall color for the idiok ekpo ("evil souls") masks and costumes is black, to represent the fact that ghosts come out at nighttime. The masks had to be frightening in order to invoke the threat of force and authority necessary for the ekpo society to maintain order. This face mask portrays a victim of a particular variant of the disease gangosa, which the Ibibio call ibuo-akwanga or "twisted-nose". Gangosa resulted from a severe vitamin deficiency which destroyed the membranes of the nose. Its depiction was a reminder of the diseases sent as punishment to particularly evil lawbreakers. The distorted, deformed, and exaggerated features of this type of masks inspired many artists. The French sculptor Arman owned a very similar mask ("African Faces, African Figures. The Arman Collection", New York, The Museum of African Art, 1997, #61), which was exhibited at the BOZAR in 2010 during "GEO-Graphics: a map of art practices in Africa", curated by David Adjaye (p. 214).





EJAGHAM



DOUBLE-FACED HELMET MASK
Anonymous Ejagham artist, Nigeria
Wood, leather, cloth, fiber, hair
50 cm

Among the Ejagham, in the vicinity of the Cross River, social control has been in the hands of secret societies, rather than political leaders. This double-faced mask was associated with a military secret society, the Ekpe, that exercised the political and economic power in the local community. Such masks were performed during burial rituals, public seasonal festivals throughout the year, and the society's initiation rituals. As a designated time, the beating of the village's largest drum, marked the beginning of the soldier's secret society's masquerades. A messenger announced that the society's spiritual being, the Okun, had come to the village, and performances would be held in his honor.

The technique of covering carved wooden helmet masks with skin is unique to the area along the Cross River, which straddles the border between Nigeria and Cameroon. Artists used antelope skin softened by a lengthy soaking in water. The skin was then stretched over the carved wooden form and bound and pegged in place, where it eventually dried and stiffened. A glossy surface was achieved by rubbing the headdress with palm oil prior to its performance. The performer wore a long gown of string netting or cotton cloth. His costume was to impress the uninitiated viewer by creating an aura of mystery and a sense of fear. Between performances, the mask was wrapped and stored with great care.

This exceptional example features two fierce faces in opposing directions, often referred to as a janus face. The term "janus-faced" comes from the Roman god Janus, who was the patron of beginnings and endings. Such a double face has several levels of meaning among the Ejagham peoples. One side shows a light-colored leather symbolizing women, and life in general. The other face has a blackish painted leather, denoting men, death, and the afterlife. It should be noted that only the eyes of the masculine side are open, to allow the wearer to see his surroundings while performing. These awe-inspiring, unsettling double-faced helmet masks also conveyed the ability to simultaneously see what was in front and behind, to discern connections between past and future events, and to observe both the human and spiritual worlds.

A related double-faced helmet mask collected by Alfred Mansfeld between 1904 and 1907, now held by the Berlin Museum (III.C.20.468), shows the feather cap that originally would be worn by the present mask. A helmet mask created by the same anonymous Ejagham artist is owned by the Belgian artist/collector Jan Calmeyn.





TULI MEKONDJO

TULI MEKONDJO
Kombada yomeva onda
valela / Upon the waters
I'm spread out (2021)
Mixed media on canvas
178 x 58 cm

**“Upon the waters I’m spread out”
is in remembrance of the spirits that
are roaming and hovering about Shark
Island. I kept imagining the unknown
souls that are resting beneath the
waters around Shark Island, their bodies
dismembered and in pieces thrown in
their oceanic grave”.**

— Tuli Mekondjo

Tuli Mekondjo lives and works in Windhoek. A self-taught artist, she works with mixed media (embroidery, collage, paint, resin, and mahangu grain – a food staple of the Ovambo people) to create beautiful poetic works filled with layers of meaning. Drawing on photographic archives and histories of the loss and erasure of Namibian cultural practices, she explores history and identity politics from the perspective of those who lived in exile during Namibia’s independence war. Dissatisfied with dominant narratives about the past and confronted with lacunas at both the communal and personal level, she pursued archival and oral history research in a quest for understanding, healing, and belonging. She offers new postcolonial, postfeminist vantage points on a history that has mostly been told by men.

Mekondjo was born in Angola to Namibian parents who joined the South West Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO) in exile in the early 1980s during the Namibian War of Independence (1966-1990). This period in exile was a fundamentally formative experience for the artist. Mekondjo uses photographic images from public as well as personal archives to revisit – and learn about afresh – the wartime context of her early childhood, growing up in the refugee camps of Kwanza-Sul (Angola) and Nyango (Zambia). “It is very much my story”, says Mekondjo, “trying to understand what it was like”. In her current series of works, the archival photographs are a witness to the lives of women and children whose stories have often been overlooked in prevailing masculine and patriotic histories of the war – and a means through which the artist re-engages her past.

Mekondjo states about her use of old images: “There is something about old photographs, they tell a story about a time capsule that is long gone, photographs captures the essence of the souls forever frozen in their poses, gestures and pains, regrets and joys. What were their profound memories of the pasts that they knew? Could any of our very own ancestors be captured in one of these archival images, without us knowing of them? For some people, they’re simply photographs of people, long gone but for me there’s a connection, is almost like a remembrance for me, what if I was there before, before this lifetime.” The sensitively painted botanical vines and plants pay homage to these forebears, while also symbolizing fertility and continuity. These floral motives are an invitation to the ancestors, for their assistance and guidance in the present.

Mekondjo was a participant in the Future Africa Visions in Time exhibition, a 2018 collaboration between the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies, Iwalewahaus Bayreuth and the Goethe-Institut Namibia. She exhibited with the NJE Collective at the Investec Cape Town Art Fair 2019, the FNB Joburg Art Fair 2018. In 2019, she exhibited in the women’s show “Suffrage” at Guns & Rain, at the 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair London, and had a solo show with the Project Room in Windhoek. In February 2021, she exhibited at the Frac Nouvelle Aquitaine (MÉCA) in Bordeaux.



WE



FACE MASK
Anonymous We artist
Ivory Coast
Wood, metal, hair
33 cm



ABOUT

DUENDE ART PROJECTS

Duende Art Projects' ambition is to inspire people and enrich their lives by sharing our profound passion for the art of the African continent. Our purpose is to strengthen Africa's visibility and significance within the global and diverse art world through a strong digital presence and curated exhibitions on unique locations.

Our mission is to connect people — the curious and interested, aspiring and seasoned collectors, connoisseurs, emerging and renowned artists, art advisors, curators and writers — with art from the African continent and its diaspora. We facilitate easy access through compelling exhibitions — offline and online, in Antwerp and on location. Our online platform provides insightful educational content and wishes to be a home for ideas, news and stories. We offer a bespoke and discrete art advisory service that covers all aspects of building and managing a collection.

Duende Art Projects was founded in 2021 by Bruno Claessens, a passionate art expert with 15 years of ample experience in the African art market. Previously, he was the European director of the African art department at Christie's for 5 years. Bruno has published three books on African art (Ere Ibeji (2013), Baule Monkeys (2016) & UNÛ (2021)) and has ran a popular blog on the subject since 2013. Throughout his career, he gained a profound knowledge of art of the African continent, both classical and contemporary, and has developed a great network of collectors, curators and scholars as well as strong institutional ties.



THANK YOU!

Tewodros Hagos
Admire Kamudzengerere
Tuli Mekondjo
Aime Mpane
Mostaff Muchawaya
Thierry Oussou
Mulugeta Tafesse
Beatrice Wanjiku
Lilian Mary Nabulime
Oliver Pollhammer
Marcela Kaljee
Griet Blomme
Peter Claessens
Tina Claessens
Lieven Blomme
Mireille Lammens
Winne Hendrickx
Valentin Clavairolles
Jan Liegeois
Tom Van Camp
Jeroen Provoost
Gert Luts
Wolf Schelkens
Lisa Guldemont
David Zemanek
Walter de Weerd
Martha Kazungu
Diane Hall
Dennis Vanleene
Carlo Pieters
Guy & Titus van Rijn
Jean Louis Danis
Nomad Gallery
Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery
Guns & Rain Gallery
Lumen Travo Gallery
Catinca Tabacaru Gallery

COMING SOON

DU
EN^{ART}
DE PROJECTS



BEAUX RÊVES
—
SWEET DREAMS

PARCOURS DES MONDES
PARIS 6-11 SEP



UNSETTLED

May 26 - July 3, 2022
Thursday-Sunday 11am-6pm
and by appointment.

Zwartzusters Monastery
Zwartzustersstraat 25
Antwerp, Belgium

Bruno@duendeartprojects.com
+32 485 98 20 36
duendeartprojects.com