



## Duende Art Projects presents **THREADS**

2 October - 14 November  
 Open Thursday-Sunday 10am - 6pm and by appointment.  
 Zwartzustersklooster  
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*Exhibited Artists: El Anatsui, Abdoulaye Konaté, Tuli Mekondjo, Saïdou Dicko, Sizwe Sama, Kimathi Mafafo, Georgina Maxim and anonymous artists from Mali, Ivory Coast, the Republic of Benin, D.R. Congo, Mozambique, and Ghana.*

For its inaugural exhibition **THREADS**, Duende Art Projects presents an empowering juxtaposition of both classical and contemporary art from the African continent. Rarely exhibited together, and generally considered to be different collecting categories, Duende Art Projects brings both old and new works from the African continent together in a unique setting: a 14th century monastery in the historic city centre of Antwerp that has never been open to the public before.

A work of art often begins with a stray thread; the artist pulls, and waits to see what will happen when he explores a certain idea. The artist dares to go beyond the known, challenge the idea over and over again, until one string succeeds in becoming a patchwork of threads bound together into a masterpiece. Artworks are collisions of ideas. Multiple threads may be floating in the artist's consciousness, and, in just a single moment, these ideas come together and form a work of art. Artists weave together seemingly disparate threads into a rich and coherent work of art with a multitude of layers loaded with meaning and symbolism. Some of these threads may be easily identifiable and explicit, while others are not so obvious, they might be invisible to the naked eye,

yet they unconsciously nest themselves under one's skin. These invisible threads are perhaps the strongest ties, but the hardest to grasp.

Unraveling the threads of a work of art can be a challenging undertaking, especially when the creator remains anonymous, as is the case with most classical African art. Ritually, traditional objects served a specific purpose and functioned within a well-defined context. As conveyed by the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss', looking at the single elements is critical to get an understanding of a system as a whole. As such, traditional African art could be a key to unlocking a better understanding of the contemporary art landscape.

THREADS brings together a group of masterpieces, both old and new, with a shared sensibility and a powerful message. The works in the exhibition create an invisible thread between the object and the looker. With THREADS Duende Art Projects aims to create feelings of profound awe through a careful curation and tight selection of an exceptional group of works.

THREADS will bring together a selection of both classical and contemporary art of the African continent. The classical section features an important rediscovered Kongolese trumpet in ivory and silver with an exceptional provenance. The trumpet was in the collection of the Antwerp-based Moretus-Le Grelle family for three centuries. Given the inscription in old Swedish in the silverwork on top of the trumpet, the object incorrectly was considered to be Swedish in origin. The inscribed date, 1699, does indicate the trumpet was in Sweden at the end of the 17th century when it was converted into a recipient. Besides this newly discovered example, only 10 other Kongolese trumpets have been inventorised. Besides the one currently exhibited, only 2 others remain in private collections, while the other 8 are held by European museums. This early 16th-century trumpet counts among the earliest art works known from the Kongo Kingdom. It is an honour for Duende Art Projects to exhibit this rediscovered masterpiece to the public for the very first time.

The classical section also features two important groups of a single type of anonymous works of art. Firstly, a group of eight early 20th century Asafo flags from Ghana – textiles loaded with symbolism and meaning, will be exhibited. Inspired by the European heraldic tradition, these beautiful textile works show a rich visual imagery with many layers of meaning. Secondly, six complete traditional Egungun costumes from the Yoruba in the Republic of Benin will be exhibited. This elaborate masquerade costumes are composed of cotton panels featuring a multitude of animal motifs, each with a specific ritual connotation. Either sequined or patchwork patterned, the colourful lappets that build up the visible and hidden layers of the costume wonderfully exemplify traditional African embroidery techniques.

The contemporary section exhibits artists that are redefining textile art through different mediums and create works with a strong narrative. One of the anchors of the exhibition will be an important and monumental tapestry by **El Anatsui**. In his "Man's Cloth II" from 2006, Anatsui effectively created a contemporary work of art inspired by traditional royal cloths, connecting the individual and collective threads of the African continent while referencing its history, consumption and globalisation. Another anchor of the contemporary section will be two significant works by Bamako-based artist **Abdoulaye Konaté**. Konaté's large-scale compositions are created using local Malian fabrics. Traditionally woven and dyed by women, these colourful



cloths play an important role in the identity politics of the region and the diaspora. Konaté's works breathe fresh life into West Africa's rich and dynamic textile traditions. These works are placed in dialogue with a number of intricate textile works by self-taught artists **Tuli Mekondjo**, **Saïdou Dicko** and **Sizwe Sama**. A new work by **Kimathi Mafafo** also takes centerstage. In her work, Mafafo explores themes of womanhood in contemporary South Africa, commenting on the rigidity of cultural expectations. Through her poetic, female-centered works she questions historical stereotypes around gender inequality. A similar perspective can be discovered in the two works by Zimbabwean artist **Georgina Maxim** for whom textiles, and in particularly pieces of clothes, have been a consistent feature throughout her practice







Duende Art Projects was founded in 2021 by Bruno Claessens, a passionate art expert with 15 years of 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 two books on African art (*Ere Ibeji* (2013) & *Baule Monkeys* (2016)) 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.

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.

*Duende* is a Spanish word that is difficult to translate; it is a concept related to flamenco, referring to a magical moment of inspiration and genius. It is the heightened state of emotion when encountering a moving work of art, a sudden experience that can't be captured, a moment of goosebumps. While Spanish in origin, the word has an African ring to it - indeed it is a universal concept, and indicative of the gallery's ambitions. Duende Art Projects goes beyond labels and reveals the art's multiplicity of layers.