

TULI MEKONDJO

Tuli Mekondjo (b. 1982, Namibia) is a self-taught Namibian artist who works with embroidery, collage, paint and resin to create powerful works filled with layers of meaning. Drawing on colonial photographic archives and histories of the loss and erasure of Namibian cultural practices, Mekondjo's work explores history and identity politics. Dissatisfied with the dominant narratives about Namibia's past, she examines the country's troubled history in a quest for understanding, healing, and belonging.

"The Gift" presents the work "Kombada yomeva onda valela / Upon the waters I'm spread out", which was inspired by the appalling events that happened on Shark Island. It was one of the five concentration camps in German South West Africa, where several thousands of Herero and Nama men, women, and children were murdered between 1905 and 1907. In her practice, the artist normally works with archival images of her ancestors. Out of respect for the dignity of the victims of 'Death Island', she has chosen to model herself for this particular work. Tuli Mekondjo thereby channels the pains experienced by her forebearers to share a message of generational trauma. The artist feels a strong connection with the people that died on Shark Island, and explains the title of the work as follows:

"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".

The bright red color of the embroidery stands out against the flat photograph transferred to the earth toned canvas, primed with mahangu grain – a food staple of the Aawambo people. The image of a skull refers to the deceased prisoners whose heads were boiled and skinned so their skulls could be sent to German universities for study. The swirly red threads above are a symbol for the prisoners' chains, while also referring to the umbilical cord. It ends in an embroidered placenta, a reference to our conception, time in the womb and the birthing of intergenerational traumas.

With this heavy, unsettling work, Tuli Mekondjo creates a space for healing. She places herself amongst her ancestors, bringing their story in a most humane manner while embodying the traumas she consciously and subconsciously bears. The sensitively painted floral motives in the background pay tribute to her forebears, while also symbolizing fertility and continuity. These plants call on the presence of the ancestors, for their assistance and guidance in the present. With the cotton threads at the bottom of the work, Mekondjo pays homage to the



ancient tradition of jewelry making of the Aawambo people, which she herself learned from her grandmother and wishes to keep alive. Lastly, confronting psychological and emotional wounds, the artist has stitched the canvas back together after having cut it in two. As an act of metaphorical confrontation with an unhealed past and a therapeutic process of healing, Tuli Mekondjo stitches the past and present back together.

Tuli Mekondjo lives and works in Windhoek. Her work has been exhibited at international fairs including 1:54 London, Investec Cape Town Art Fair and AKAA, Paris. She has participated in group shows in France (2020, 2021) and Germany (2022). Mekondjo recently was included in the much-applauded Phaidon publication "African Artists – From 1882 to Now". In 2022, she has been awarded a prestigious fellowship by the DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Program. Tuli Mekondjo is represented by the South African gallery Guns & Rain. Since 2022 Mekondjo is also represented by the prestigious Hales Gallery in New York, organizing solo exhibitions with the artist in 2022 and 2024, while also showing her work at important international art fairs.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2024 SIDA | ÔANA MÂPA HÂ? WHERE ARE OUR CHILDREN? AN ODE TO THE SPIRITS OF THE SOUTH, Hales Gallery, New York, NY, USA
- 2023 Ousie Martha, Guns & Rain, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2022 Oudjuu wo makipa etu/ The burdens of our Bones, Hales Gallery, New York, NY, USA
- 2019 LIMBADUNGILA, The Project Room, Windhoek, Namibia
- 2016 The Bellowing Mind, Franco-Namibian Cultural Centre, Windhoek, Namibia

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2024 the Wake, L'éveil, le sillage, xàll wi, Biennale de L'Art africain contemporain, Dakar, Senegal
Cantando Bajito, Ford Foundation, New York, NY
The Gift, Duende Art Projects, Antwerp, Belgium
- 2023 O Quilombismo. Of Resiting and Insisting. Of Flight as Fight. Of Other Democratic Egalitarian Political Philosophies, House of World Cultures, Berlin, Germany
Unmourned Bodies, AVA Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
Memoria: Accounts of Another History, Musée National du Cameroun, Yaoundé, Cameroon
To Be-Named, Haus Kunst Mitte, Berlin, Germany
- 2022 UNSETTLED, Duende Art Projects, Zwartusters Monastery, Antwerp, Belgium
Independent, Afrika-Haus Berlin, Germany
- 2021 COUNTER IMAGES | GEGENBILDER, Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum, Cologne, Germany



- 2021 THREADS, Duende Art Projects, Zwartzusters Monastery, Antwerp, Belgium
Un.e Air.e de Famille, Musée d'art et d'histoire Paul Eluard, Saint-Denis, France
Face-to-face, Traversées Africaines, Galerie Anne de Villepoix, Paris, France
Memoria: récits d'une autre Histoire, Frac Nouvelle Aquitaine MÉCA, Bordeaux, France
Finding Memories: Additions to an everyday archive of independence, StArt Art Gallery, Windhoek, Namibia
- 2020 The Borders of Memory, Guns and Rain, Johannesburg, South Africa; The Project Room, Windhoek, Namibia
- 2019 Suffrage, Guns and Rain, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2018 Future Africa Visions in Time, Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies, Iwalewaha Bayreuth and the Goethe-Institut, Namibia

ART FAIRS

- 2021 Guns and Rain, FNB Art Joburg, Johannesburg, South Africa
Guns and Rain, 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, London, UK
- 2020 Guns and Rain, 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, London, UK
Guns and Rain, ARCO Lisboa Online, Portugal
Guns and Rain, Investec Cape Town Art Fair, Cape Town, South Africa
Guns and Rain, Untitled Art Miami Beach, Miami, FL, USA
- 2019 Guns and Rain, 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, London, UK
AKAA (Also Known As Africa) Art & Design Fair, Paris, France
- 2018 FNB Joburg Art Fair, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2016 Collective at the Art Market, Budapest, Hungary

RESIDENCIES

- 2024 Villa Romana Residency, Florence, Italy
- 2022 DAAD Artists-in-Berlin, Germany

COLLECTIONS

- Africa First Collection, Tel-Aviv, Israel
- ARAK Collection, Doha, Qatar
- Baker Library, Harvard Business School, Boston, MA, USA
- Fondation Blachère, France
- Ilham Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- University of South Africa (UNISA), Johannesburg, South Africa