

MARC FOXX is pleased to present, in her first solo exhibition outside of Africa, *I'M WITH YOU*, new paintings by Harare-based artist Portia Zvavahera.

Portia Zvavahera attended the highly regarded BAT Visual Arts Studio under the auspice of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, and obtained a first-class Diploma in Visual Arts from Harare Polytechnic in 2006. Zvavahera was exposed to an artistic pedagogical practice that emphasized technical and formal concerns and the histories of the Western art movements.

Indigenous and imported printmaking techniques have an important historical presence in the region and play a major role in Zvavahera's work. In addition to the artist's expressionistic brushstroke, Zvavahera employs a sophisticated multi layered process using oil based printer's ink, oil bar and incorporating collagraph blockprints into the painting process to build intricate patterns across and within her forms. References and influences from Klimt, Schiele, Munch, and Bacon to textile patterns popular in Harare fashion magazines can be seen in the patterned fields of voluminous clouds of traditional garments enveloping the bodies.

Zvavahera's work is deeply personal, and dreams are integral to her creative practice in combination with women's roles, bodies and issues and reflections of personal relationships. The work is firmly located in Zvavahera's region, culture, and political and economic concerns; however, her sophisticated and bold aesthetic connects the work universally in an undeniably powerful way.

"...I kind of join together the dream and my experiences with my husband and everyone else around me, to make a painting. ... I think that people can relate to what I'm experiencing. You can have dreams and not know that you have them. I think dreams have something to do with the physical world. The dream is like the prophet, telling you about the future, about what's going to happen or what is causing something to happen in the future. We all sleep; we all have dreams. ... For me, the dreams are like future-telling, letting me know what to do next or what's happening in the spirit world that I should be aware of..."

Many of the paintings share a white patterned veiling of the figures' garments that read as ceremonial but operate equally as ghost or spirit forms interacting with the figures and spaces of the dark grey, purple & blue grounds. Zvavahera's paintings offer options of perception, distress or joy, pain or ecstasy. Celebration and mourning are precariously balanced in the powerful compositions. Most of the primary figures are female although importantly many works include a secondary more male form perhaps enveloping, holding, lurking or protecting. In *Handina Runyararo (Not at Peace)*, we see a frontal diminutive figure in white lace where underneath and through the

patterning there are two arms held up to cover another crying face and behind those female figure(s) stands a giant dark masculine ghostly form on whose white face is an almost kindly expression, both figures arms extended. In the large *Vese Vakanddibata (They all gave me strength)* a perhaps sleeping or birthing pregnant woman dressed in scarlet is being held by four specter-like figures whose collective bodies and garb form a white, grey blue cloud.

Zvavahera is the recent recipient of the prestigious Gasworks Residency in London. Selected exhibitions by Portia Zvavahera include Dudziro: *Interrogating the Visions of Religious Beliefs*, Zimbabwean Pavilion, 55th Venice, 2013; *Body Luggage*, Steirischer Herbst Festival, Graz, Austria, 2016; *Exchange*, Galerie Hans Mayer, Düsseldorf, Germany, 2016; *I Love You Sugar Kane*, Institute of Contemporary Art Indian Ocean, Port Louis, Mauritius, 2016; *Shifting Africa – What the Future Holds*, Mediations Biennale, Poznan, Poland; Kunsthalle Faust, Hannover, Germany, 2014; and *Under My Skin*, National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare, 2010 (solo).

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