



Billie

Thread for a Web Begun

Zangewa

Gallery Guide

June 17 – September 11, 2022



Billie Zangewa, *Soldier of Love*, 2020, Embroidered silk, 43.25 x 53.13 inches, Courtesy of Galerie Templon, Paris and Brussels
Title design by Paul T. Plale



Billie Zangewa in her studio. Photo by Andrew Berry Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, Seoul, and London

About the Artist

Billie Zangewa

Billie Zangewa (b. 1973, Blantyre, Malawi), lives and works in Johannesburg, South Africa and creates intricate collages composed of hand-stitched fragments of raw silk. These figurative compositions explore contemporary intersectional identity in an attempt to challenge the historical stereotype, objectification, and exploitation of the black female form. Beginning her career in the fashion and advertising industries, Zangewa employs her understanding of textiles to portray personal and universal experiences through domestic interiors, urban landscapes, and portraiture. Her earliest works were embroideries on found fabrics depicting remembered botanical scenes and animals from Botswana, where the artist was raised, but she soon transitioned to creating cityscapes, focusing on her experience as a woman in the city of Johannesburg and her personal relationships. These works explored her experience of the male gaze, leading her to think more critically about how women view themselves, and what the visualization of the female gaze, through self-portraiture, could look like.

After the birth of her son, Zangewa began making her well-known domestic interiors to explore the shift in focus from self-examination and femininity to motherhood and the home. Often referencing scenes or experiences from everyday life, Zangewa has stated that she is interested in depicting the work done by women that keeps society running smoothly, but which is often overlooked, undervalued, or ignored. Zangewa refers to this as “daily feminism.”

Zangewa received her BFA from Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa. Solo and group exhibitions of her work have been widely featured in galleries and museums around the world including Paris, France; Johannesburg, South Africa; Oslo, Norway; Washington, DC; New York, NY; Barcelona, Spain; Amsterdam, Netherlands and more. Zangewa’s work is held in several public and private collections around the world.



Billie Zangewa, *Mood Indigo*, 2016, Hand-embroidered silk collage, 45.3 x 59 inches, Courtesy of Private Collection, Boston and Lehmann Maupin, New York, London, Hong Kong, Seoul

In *Billie Zangewa: Thread for a Web Begun*, viewers see exquisite works that have been completed over the past 15 years as well as new tapestries that the Malawi-born, Johannesburg-based artist made specifically for the exhibition. This assemblage comes at an important time for Zangewa, whose career has developed primarily in Europe and South Africa. This exhibition has brought her work to audiences across the United States.

Although many of the scenes depicted in Zangewa's layered silk tapestries are autobiographical, there is a relatability that goes beyond her personal journey as an artist. Zangewa's labor-intensive processes recall the historic implications of "women's work" but remain a steadfastly contemporary interpretation of lived experiences.

Zangewa is dealing firstly with identity, as well as socio-politics around gender and skin tone, in a gentle everyday manner. She is also exploring the different roles that women play in society, including motherhood and the impact that it has individually and collectively. The images in her work are deliberately

*“I use fabric and sewing, which traditionally is a female pastime, to **empower myself.**”*

-Billie Zangewa

decontextualized. However, when shown in a group, their fragmentary nature is further emphasized, suggesting they are excerpted from a larger narrative.

Zangewa does not make grand gestures or even overt political statements, but rather, a kind of 'daily feminism' focusing on mundane domestic preoccupations and themes connecting us all. Zangewa states "I use fabric and sewing, which traditionally is a female pastime, to empower myself. I tell my personal story, how it's happening on the home front, and show the intimate life of a woman, which usually we're not encouraged to do." Zangewa views telling her own story in her own voice as a kind of personal empowerment. Historically, this has been very difficult for women in general, but for women of color in particular, with many social obstacles to overcome.



Billie Zangewa, *Return to Innocence*, 2020, Hand-embroidered silk collage, 43.25 x 19.25 inches, Courtesy of Private Collection and Galerie Templon, Paris and Brussels

About the Curator Dexter Wimberly

Dexter Wimberly is an American curator, based in Japan, who has organized exhibitions in galleries and institutions around the world. Wimberly's exhibitions have been featured in leading publications including *The New York Times* and *Artforum*, and have received support from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Wimberly is the co-founder and CEO of Art World Learning, and a Senior Critic at New York Academy of Art.



Above image courtesy of Dexter Wimberly



Billie Zangewa, *Self-Care Sunday*, 2020, Hand-stitched silk collage, 47.64 x 24.41 inches, Courtesy of Private Collection, Boston and Lehmann Maupin, New York, London, Hong Kong, Seoul



Billie Zangewa, *On the Corner*, Hand-embroidered silk collage, 22.4 x 29.1 inches, Courtesy of JPMorgan Chase

About the Center

The Harvey B. Gantt Center for African - American Arts + Culture is a multidisciplinary arts institution located in the heart of Charlotte, North Carolina. Founded in 1974, the Gantt Center's mission is to present, preserve, and celebrate excellence in the art, history, and culture of African-Americans and those of African descent through visual and literary arts, dance, music, film, educational programs, theatre productions, and community outreach. The Gantt Center features fine art exhibitions from around the world and is home to the nationally celebrated John and Vivian Hewitt Collection of African-American Art, which was

generously donated by Bank of America, and is accessible online.

Named for Charlotte civic leader and former mayor Harvey Bernard Gantt, the Gantt Center is housed in an iconic, award-winning structure designed by architect Philip Freelon, co-designer of the Smithsonian National Museum for African American History and Culture (NMAAHC).

For more information about the Gantt Center, visit ganttcenter.org and follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.



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AT LEVINE CENTER FOR THE ARTS
551 S. TRYON ST • CHARLOTTE, NC 28202
704.547.3700 • GANTTCENTER.ORG



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