

Portia Zvavahera *Ndakaoneswa murima*

November 4–December 18, 2021
525 West 19th Street, New York



Portia Zvavahera, *Ndirikukuona (I can see you)*, 2021. © Portia Zvavahera. Courtesy of the artist and David Zwirner.

David Zwirner is pleased to present *Ndakaoneswa murima*, an exhibition of new work by Zimbabwean artist Portia Zvavahera at the gallery's West 19th Street location in New York. The title translates from Shona to English as "I was made to see the dark side." This will be Zvavahera's first solo presentation in New York and her second exhibition with David Zwirner, and the first since the gallery announced representation of the artist earlier this year.

Zvavahera gives form to emotions that manifest from other realms and dimensions beyond the domains of everyday life and thought. Her vivid imagery is rooted in the cornerstones of our earthly existence—life and death, pain and pleasure, isolation and connection, and love and loss. Zvavahera's compositions draw on particular traditions of figuration in past and present Zimbabwe, first expressed in the work of Thomas Mukarobgwa in the 1960s, while also pointing to postwar artistic practices that probe the nature of the human condition.

In these new works, the Harare-based artist continues to develop her subject matter by joining her carefully charted dream worlds with her lived experience and daily rituals. Zvavahera expands her practice with new motifs and narratives, populated by symbolic creatures that become powerful conduits for interpreting her spiritual visions. This body of work also builds upon her interest in combining vibrant color with varied painting and printmaking techniques to produce intricate designs and delicate lacelike patterns across her vast canvases.

The central work in *Ndakaoneswa murima* elucidates a recurring dream for which Zvavahera sought a resolution in painting. Sitting in a pool of water—in a pattern reminiscent of coral reefs—a mysterious womanly apparition holds a ceramic pot, surrounded by ominous figures and owl-like forms in a begloomed cave. The owls and other beasts reappear in various guises throughout other works, looming the artist and members of her family, while angelic messengers deliver them from danger. Amid coats of richly applied color and batik designs, Zvavahera delineates these specters in oil stick and fine brushwork. Confronting her harrowing visions, she tackles painting as a type of catharsis to transform energies beyond the corporeal realm into curative strengths. As critic Athi Mongezeleli Joja observes, “translation remains a grounding feature of [Zvavahera’s] work, and it takes precedence, not only in the construction of her subject matter, but also in its aesthetics.”¹

Portia Zvavahera was born in 1985 in Harare, Zimbabwe, where she currently lives and works. She studied at the BAT Visual Arts Studio, National Gallery of Zimbabwe, from 2003 to 2005. She then received a diploma in fine arts from Harare Polytechnic in 2006.

The artist has presented several solo exhibitions with Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg (2014–2020), and a solo exhibition with Marc Foxx Gallery, Los Angeles (2017). The National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare, presented her solo exhibition *Under My Skin* in 2010, and in 2020, the Institute of Contemporary Art Indian Ocean, Port Louis, Mauritius, held her solo exhibition *Walk of Life*. She was invited to show her work as part of the Zimbabwean Pavilion exhibition *Dudziro: Interrogating the Visions of Religious Beliefs* at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013.

Zvavahera’s work is held in the collections of the Johannesburg Art Gallery; Minneapolis Institute of Art; National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare; Pérez Art Museum Miami; University of Chicago Booth School of Business; and the Weisman Art Museum, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

Zvavahera joined David Zwirner in 2021. Forthcoming from David Zwirner Books in June 2022 is a fully illustrated monograph featuring a text by Meredith A. Brown and an interview with the artist by Allie Biswas.

For all press inquiries, contact
Julia Lukacher +1 212 727 2070 jlukacher@davidzwirner.com

¹ Athi Mongezeleli Joja, “Portia Zvavahera,” *Artforum* 58, no. 1 (September 2019), accessed online.