



GALLERIA CONTINUA

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LA MATIÈRE VIVANTE

curated by Simon Njami

Opening Saturday 29th May 2021, via del Castello 11, 3pm-9pm

Until 31st August 2021, Monday to Sunday, 10am-1pm, 2-7pm, by appointment only

In order to respect safety regulations, it's necessary to book your visit via the appropriate form on galleriacontinua.com

Galleria Continua is pleased to host, in its exhibition spaces for the first time, two protagonists of the contemporary art scene, **Donna Kukama** and **Nandipha Mntambo**, with the exhibition entitled *La Matière vivante*, curated by Simon Njami.

“Donna Kukama and Nandipha Mntambo are two South African artists that, each in their own way, put material into discussion. The *matera prima*, is the starting point in alchemy, after which one eventually arrives at the *rubedo*, or the final distillation. Bronze, copper, steel, plaster, wood, animal furs, and horns are the starting elements for the composition of their stories. What's unique about the material is that it's alive. It's anchored in the present, by its materiality, but it contains a memory that dates back to eternity. The work of these two artists is firmly anchored in a memory with which they play at will. Donna Kukama interrogates this through writing and performances in which she evokes ancient times to confront them with present ones, putting them in parallel, evaluating them and taking lessons for the future from them.

Nandipha Mntambo, who also uses performance as a mode of expression, puts herself at the forefront of her sculptures, using her body as a model. The language of the body has rules that sometimes escape the performer herself. In the theatre of representation, Mntambo's work interrogates the codes of representation and the ancestral distribution of the division between man and woman that she puts back into discussion, as in the video where she interprets a matador without an opponent. I might have forgotten to mention, but it is time to correct this omission; Kukama and Mntambo are black women and both were born in Apartheid South Africa. This implies a political dimension that is more or less attached to their work.

The memory from which Kukama elaborates is a livid and choleric memory, as one can understand in a piece like *How powerful you must have been to be wanted bloody dead dead dead* (2020). I will not dwell on the message contained in this work, whose title is sufficiently self-explanatory, if not to highlight the materials claimed by the artist, including 'Black Anger'. In *The walls refused to forget their bright bullet-shatters and loud-blood-spatters* (2019), we also find materials that are rarely mentioned in such a direct way: heat and memory. The writing that she uses is illegible for everyone. You would have to close your eyes for it to penetrate you. Trying to decipher it would be useless for whomever hadn't undergone some form of initiation.

It is still a question of initiation when Mntambo dresses herself in animal skins (cow) or when she shreds them to make sculptures. What is evoked is our animality and the shamanic power of those who speak with the invisible. Objects are never what they seem but they are invested with a new meaning, the subtlety of which intends to escape from conventional codes. Here, the story is no longer about Africa, but a universality that transcends geography and culture because it is anchored in a land like no other. A land where material remains what we must begin with.”

(Simon Njami)

Donna Kukama was born in 1981 in Mafikeng in South Africa. She lives and works between Berlin and Johannesburg. In 2008, she acquired a Masters in Art in the Public Sphere from Ecole Cantonale Arts du Valais in Switzerland and is currently a PhD student at the Transart Institute and Liverpool John Moores University. She has exhibited in numerous prestigious institutions and museums: Tate Modern in London, Nottingham Contemporary in Nottingham, Kunsthal KaDe in Amersfoort, PAC Milan Contemporary Art Pavilion in Milan, South African National Gallery in Cape Town, Museum of Modern Art in Antwerp, nGbK in Berlin, New Museum in New York. She took part in the 8th and 10th Berlin Biennale, the 57th Belgardo Biennial, the 12th Lyon Biennial, the 6th Biennial of Contemporary Art in Moscow, the 32nd São Paulo Biennial, the 55th Venice Biennale inside the South Africa Pavilion. She recently was a guest professor at HBK Braunschweig (2019-2020), and since 2001 she has been a professor at the Visual Arts Department of the Wits School of Arts (University of Witwatersrand).

Nandipha Mntambo was born in 1982 in Mbabane, eSwatini. She lives in Johannesburg. In 2007, she graduated with a Masters in Fine Arts from Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town. In 2017 she created a solo exhibition at the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa entitled *Material Value*. In 201, she won the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for the visual arts which gave way to the national traveling exhibition *Faena*. She has had seven solo shows in Stevenson Cape Town and Johannesburg (2007-17) and two in Andréhn-Schiptjenko, Stockholm (2013-15). Among her main group exhibitions, we mention: Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town (2020); Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg (2019); BOZAR Palais de Beaux Arts, Brussels (2019); Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2019); Norval Foundation, Cape Town (2018); Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv (2017); Seattle Art Museum (2015) and Brooklyn Museum, New York (2016); South Africa Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale (2015); MMK Frankfurt, SCAD Museum of Art and Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Washington DC (2014-15); Maison Rouge, Paris and Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (2013); 3rd Moscow International Biennial for Young Art, Moscow (2012); 17th Sydney Biennial (2010); 9th and 12th Dakar Biennial (2010 and 2016); Biennial of African Photography (2009). She was selected for AIMIA | AGO Photography Prize in Canada in 2014, and she won the Civitella Ranieri prize in 2013.

In compliance with the measures in place to contain the spread of Covid-19, admission to the exhibition will be limited.

For further information about the show and for photos:
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