

TEMPLON



BILLIE ZANGEWA

REPRESENT.CO.ZA, 2 mai 2007

Represent Interview: Billie Zangewa

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 We remember reading about **Billie Zangewa** when she won the Absa L'Atelier Gerard Sekoto Award Exhibition in 2004 for her gorgeous handbags. We were very envious of her prize – a return ticket to Paris and a few months in the incroyable city d'amour...but at the same time we were delighted for her. Billie has been on quite a journey since then and is now holding a solo exhibit at the Afronova gallery in Newtown from Friday 4 May 07 (opening night) to Saturday 2 June 07. Email afroanova@tiscali.co.za for queries.

Represent caught up with Billie:

So Billie, give us the short version of your backstory if you don't mind... from birth to now, how did you find yourself where you're at?

Born in Malawi. Grew up in Gaborone, Botswana. My dad is Malawian and mom South African (Sotho from Aliwal North). I am somewhere in between. After varsity I moved to Jhb as there are more opportunities for an artist here than in Gaborone.

What inspired you to become an artist? Where did you study and how long did it take?

It's a bit like it was pre-destined because I have known it since I was 9 yrs old. I got my BFA (Bachelor of Fine Art) at Rhodes university and that was a 4 year degree.

How do you define and describe yourself?

I am a visual artist, daughter, sister, aunt, friend, girlfriend....I am a simple person just trying to fulfill my dreams with the support of those that care about me.

Have you been lucky in life, if so, tell us how?

I FEEL as if I have been lucky. Because every time I have been trying to do something the "universe" has sent me an earth angel (or several) to help me.

What was the last exciting thing that happened to you?

This journey in general is really exciting. Being awarded a residency in Antwerp at the Dak'art 2006 was awesome. Being on the ski slopes for the first time this past December was pretty exciting too.

What do you love about Johannesburg?

Jhb CBD, which is full of exciting visuals. The blinding sunlight – even in winter! The level of cuisine – we can find so many kinds (Japanese, thai, Indian etc) and its all extremely good.

What would you change about Jozi if you could?

The crime! It's cramping our style.

What's your ideal city to live in and why?

I am eternally in love with Paris. I spent 5 months there and did not want to leave. I love French culture and you can walk around the city pretty much anytime of day.

Have you travelled – what was your favourite place and why?

I have already mentioned Paris. Dublin was great mainly because the Irish are so warm and genuine. Antwerp also, because the Belgians know how to enjoy life.

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What do you do in the evenings and on weekends? What's your buzz?

For the last few months I have been working! Generally, I like to go out for drinks / dinner with friends. Good food and great company is my buzz.

Do you have any mentors? If so, who are they?

I wouldn't say that I have mentors as such. I have more role models. My friends have each a quality which they have shared with me. Henri Vergon has been very supportive as well. My parents – the way my Dad loved his job; the way my Mom loved us.

Who are your top 5 South Africa artists? Any international?

Sandile Zulu, Karl Gietl, Andrew Tshabangu, Kay Hassan, Vathiswa Ruselo. Internationally, I love Joel Mpah Dooh(Cameroun) and El Anatsui (Ghana).

So tell us about the exhibition and Afronova – we believe you are involved there.

Afronova was an initiative that Henri Vergon and I started. However, at about the same time my career took off and this was something that I could not pass up. I promote the gallery wherever my work takes me so I am like an ambassador.

The exhibition is an untitled solo. It traces my journeys and experiences over the past couple of years.

Can one purchase your art? What kind of range of prices do they go for?

Yes, absolutely. They range from R10 000. – R40 000.

What is your 5 year plan?

I shall come to the end of my 5 years next year October. It was to create a visual language that is uniquely mine. Start to exhibit and gather some recognition. Travel overseas expanding my universe and most importantly to be able to sustain myself with my art.(For 10 years I did not practice and started again October 2003.)

What should I do if I am in high school and I'd like to become a conceptual artist or fashion designer.

What's the best route?

I'd say start drawing / designing and do that relentlessly. Do some research too. Information helps you to visualize more clearly. If you can afford tertiary education this is recommended. If you can't, try to learn on the job. I don't believe that there is a "best route".

Any messages for the youth of South Africa?

Don't give in to peer pressure. In the end your peers admire you for it, even if they may not say so at the time. Have a goal, this gives you a reason to protect yourself and keeps you focused.

Sharpile !

Cool!