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BILLIE ZANGEWA

ADUNA, July 2016

BILLIE ZANGEWA: PAINTING THE CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN WOMAN IN SILK

JULY 2016



Billie Zangewa is a Malawian artist who works with silk to create intricate tapestries by hand. Influenced mostly by female empowerment and a sense of identity, her work is often centred on herself. Although the themes are strong and bold, the tapestries themselves are delicate and beautiful.

Her work has been exhibited around the world, from her home town Johannesburg to Paris, Texas and Amsterdam.

We spoke to Billie to find out more about her work, what inspires her and the importance of art in changing the perceptions of Africa:

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How would you define yourself and your work? What messages do you communicate through your creations?

I am a visual artist working with dupion silk. The stories narrated in my work are based on personal experience therefore they are autobiographical. I am a woman in charge of my own stories and I encourage other women to do the same in their own special way.

What are you inspired by?

Life. Its an everyday miracle and a gift that we all need to treasure. Also, my son. The love I feel for him is beyond what I ever imaged I could feel for another person.

When did you realise you wanted to be an artist and have you encountered any difficulties pursuing it as a career?

I knew when I was about 8 or 10 years old and every step that I took from that day was towards realising my dream. It was difficult for me to gain entry into the art world. This led me to other unexpected places where I had incredible experiences and encounters. At the end of the day I've been able to live my dream, regardless of the obstacles.



Billie Zangewa Silk Tapestry

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1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair London **come to many a baobab tree. What does the baobab mean to you?**

The baobab means strength, wisdom and lots of shade! I also love the fruit and have fond memories of working on one for hours as a child. The smell of baobab fruit is comforting.

How important do you see the creative industry in terms of changing perceptions of Africa?

Hugely important. The world can begin to see that Africa and African are just like anyone else. The lingering myths and legends around the continent and its people, which have no relevance in the contemporary age, can finally be dispelled.

Do you feel like anything's changed in terms of how people are seeing and receiving African art globally?

There is ever increasing interest and the number of exhibitions around the world focused on Africa is proof of that. In fact I recently took part in the exhibition *Making Africa* at the Vitra Design Museum in Germany and Guggenheim Bilbao in Spain.

Who are your favourite artists from South Africa?

Marlene Dumas, Lebohang Kganye, Tracey Rose and Jane Alexander are all incredible artists. Picking a favourite artist is like a favourite colour - impossible.

You can see more intricate silk work on [Billie Zangewa's website](#), or catch a glimpse of Billie's tapestries in real life at the [1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair in London October 6-9th](#).