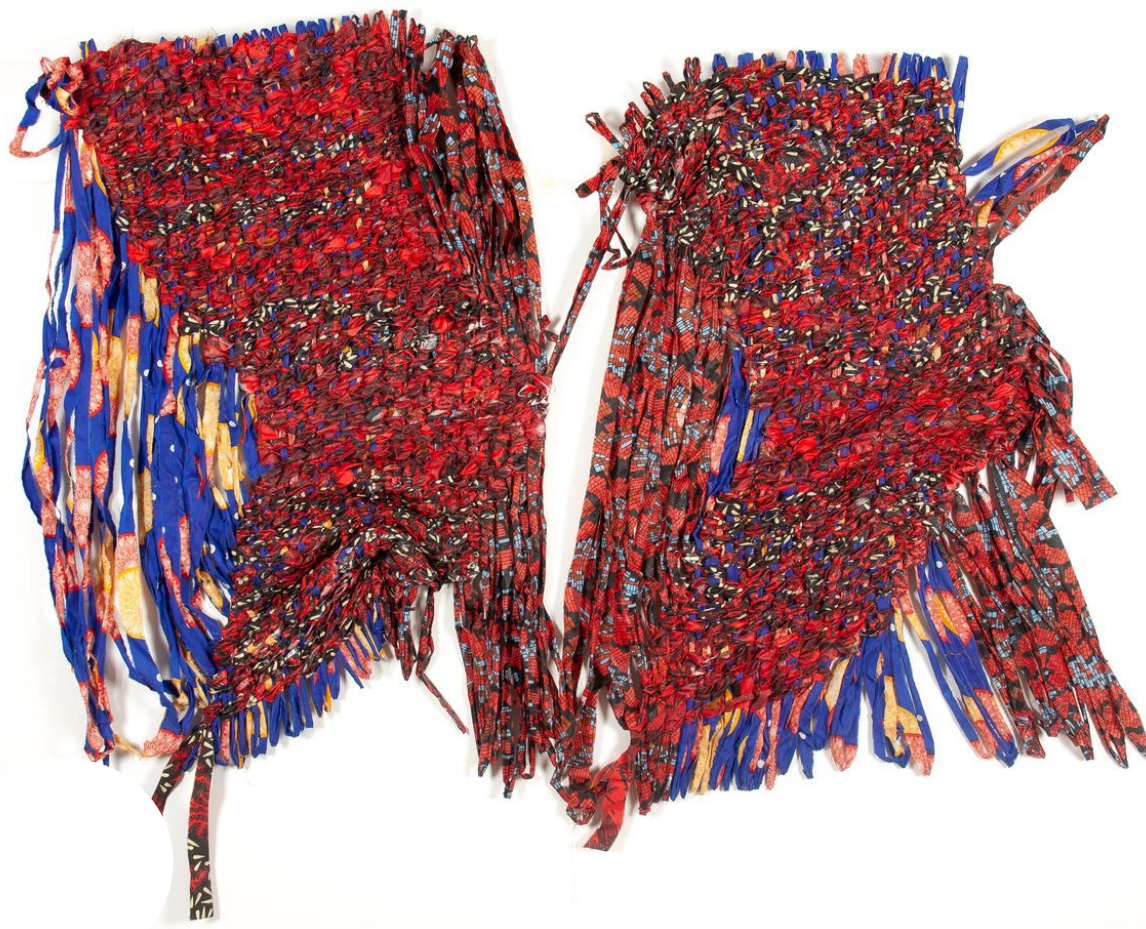




You're a Bird, Sing a Song

Sizwe Sama
Princia Matungulu

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What do kinship and community mean in contemporary South Africa? How do stories and identities travel from the past to the future, and who cares for them? What role do women play in all this? In this two-person exhibition of textile works, artists Sizwe Sama and Princia Matungulu give visual and tactile form to their own connections to family and community. Both artists feel a strong sense of kinship with their mothers, and see them as the custodians of the knowledge, culture, stories and practical skills that inform their artmaking today. The matriarchal orientation of their works challenges the cis-male domination of culture and society, and offers us a far more contingent, improvisatory and supple lens through which to experience the world.

The title of the exhibition is a translation of a Kiswahili saying of Matungulu's mother's – *Uko ndege, Imba mwimbo* – an exhortation to embody a positive attitude towards the world, to “sing a song”, regardless of one's circumstances. Born in Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo in 1999, Matungulu uses modes of weaving to deconstruct and reconstruct her sense of identity as a BaLuba Congolese woman. Her large woven artworks are made using fabrics traditionally gifted by Congolese mothers to their daughters when they begin menstruating, a marker of their coming of age.

The patterns that Matungulu weaves into her works are based on the regionally unique engravings found on traditional mortar and pestles (kinu), which are also passed down through the family's women. Inspired by the cultural teaching and learning that occurs when generations of women gather to pound cassava using the kinu, Matungulu both honours and challenges her relationship to cultural history.

Her works disrupt these traditions, albeit without rejecting them, offering the viewer insight into the processes of self-reflection, unmaking and remaking that are essential to Matungulu's identity as a young Congolese woman living in South Africa.

Like Matungulu, Sama's self-taught artistic process has its origins in his connection with his mother, who taught him the hand-stitching techniques that he uses in his large-scale collaged tapestries. Born and raised in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, Sama sees his works as celebratory monuments to the physical, emotional, and economic labour undertaken by women in society. Single mothers in South Africa are particularly important figures for Sama because of the significant role they play in society as caregivers. He symbolically honours them with the recurring semi-circular motifs in his work, which represent pregnant bellies as well as the shape with which his mother used to mend his childhood clothes.

The works play with notions of camp that were once strongly associated with the gay community, but are now understood to be much more complex and plural as signifiers of non-cis sexuality. Sama's visual iconography often includes bird imagery, and he sees different birds as symbols of peace, resilience and freedom. He is a colourist, and is committed to the idea that, beyond its formal importance, working with colour is personally therapeutic.

Sizwe Sama

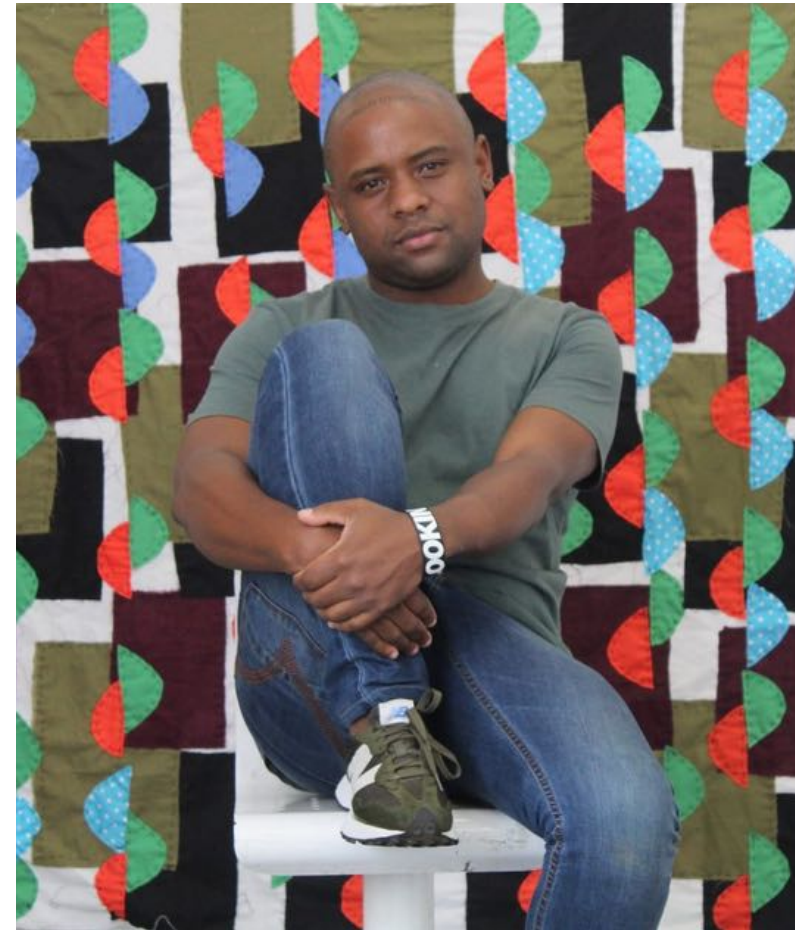
Sizwe Sama (b.1986) is a self-taught visual artist from Kwa-Zulu Natal, who learned about art from his local library in Pietermaritzburg and from visiting the Tatham Art Gallery.

The fabrics he uses in his tapestries are sometimes recycled from his own closet, or acquired for their specific visual impact and cultural references. The imitation tartans and Kente cloths used in these works draw attention to the intercultural translation of visual languages, and the ease with which cultural forms are appropriated and cross-pollinated in a globalised world.

For Sama, this plurality is always proudly celebrated. He sees his work as a tribute to the LGBTQI+ community, as calls to freedom and self-expression, just as art-making has allowed him to express his own queer identity.

As much as his work is a highly visible outward celebration of queer personhood, it is also deeply rooted in his personal experiences and memories. Sama learned sewing by hand from his mother, a seamstress who raised him and his brother alone, and who mended their clothes in particular ways.

Sama has exhibited in multiple group shows with Guns & Rain and had his first solo with the gallery in 2022. He has also recently shown work at Galerie Christophe Person in Paris, and at the KZNSA Gallery in Durban, as well as at Duende Art Projects in Antwerp, Belgium, MOV'ART in Lisbon, Portugal, and by Africa First/Gordon Gallery in Tel Aviv, Israel. His work already sits in multiple international and local collections, including the AMAWAL (Spain), ARAK (Qatar) and Africa First (Israel) Collections.





Sizwe Sama

Every fibre counts...

2023

Grovine, linen, shweshwe cotton and
Ankara fabric hand stitched on felt

196 x 147 cm



Sizwe Sama
Every fibre counts...
2023 (detail)



Sizwe Sama

Stitching tribes together

2023

Grovine, assorted cotton fabrics, linen and
Ankara fabric hand stitched on felt

196 x 146 cm



Sizwe Sama
Stitching Tribes Together
2023 (detail)



Sizwe Sama

Torn From the Same Cloth

2023

Grovine, linen, cotton, polyester and
Ankara fabric on cotton blend

233 x 204 cm



Sizwe Sama
Torn From the Same Cloth
2023 (detail)



Sizwe Sama

Tranquility

2022

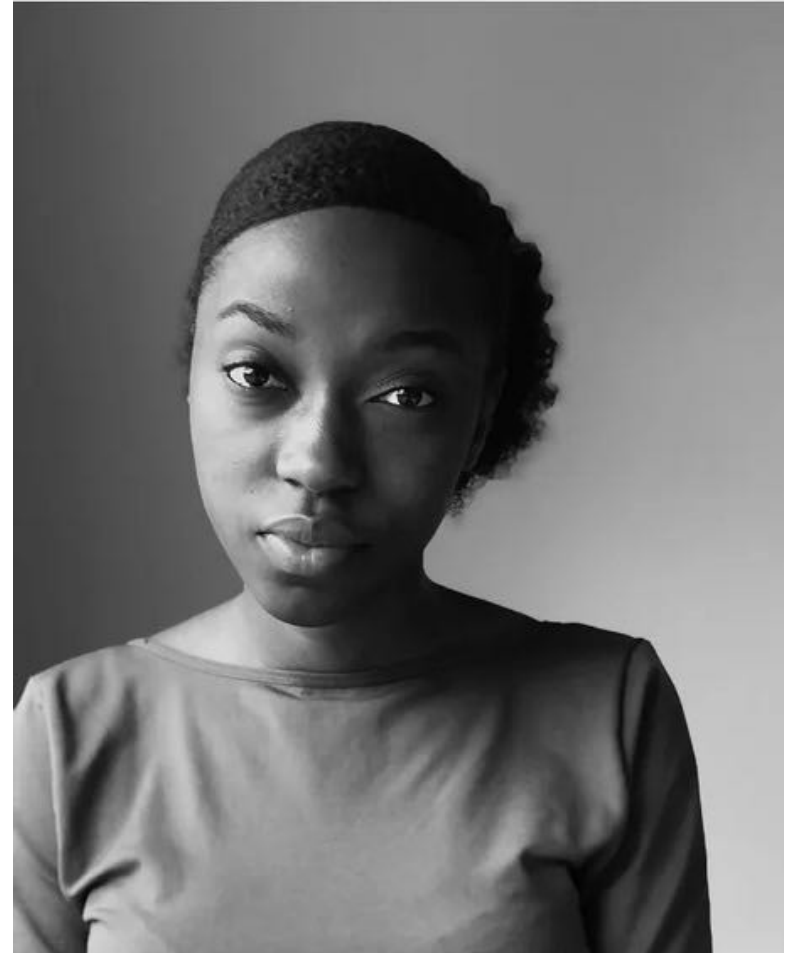
Wax fabric, shweshwe,
cotton, linen, corduroy,
tassels

110 x 189 cm

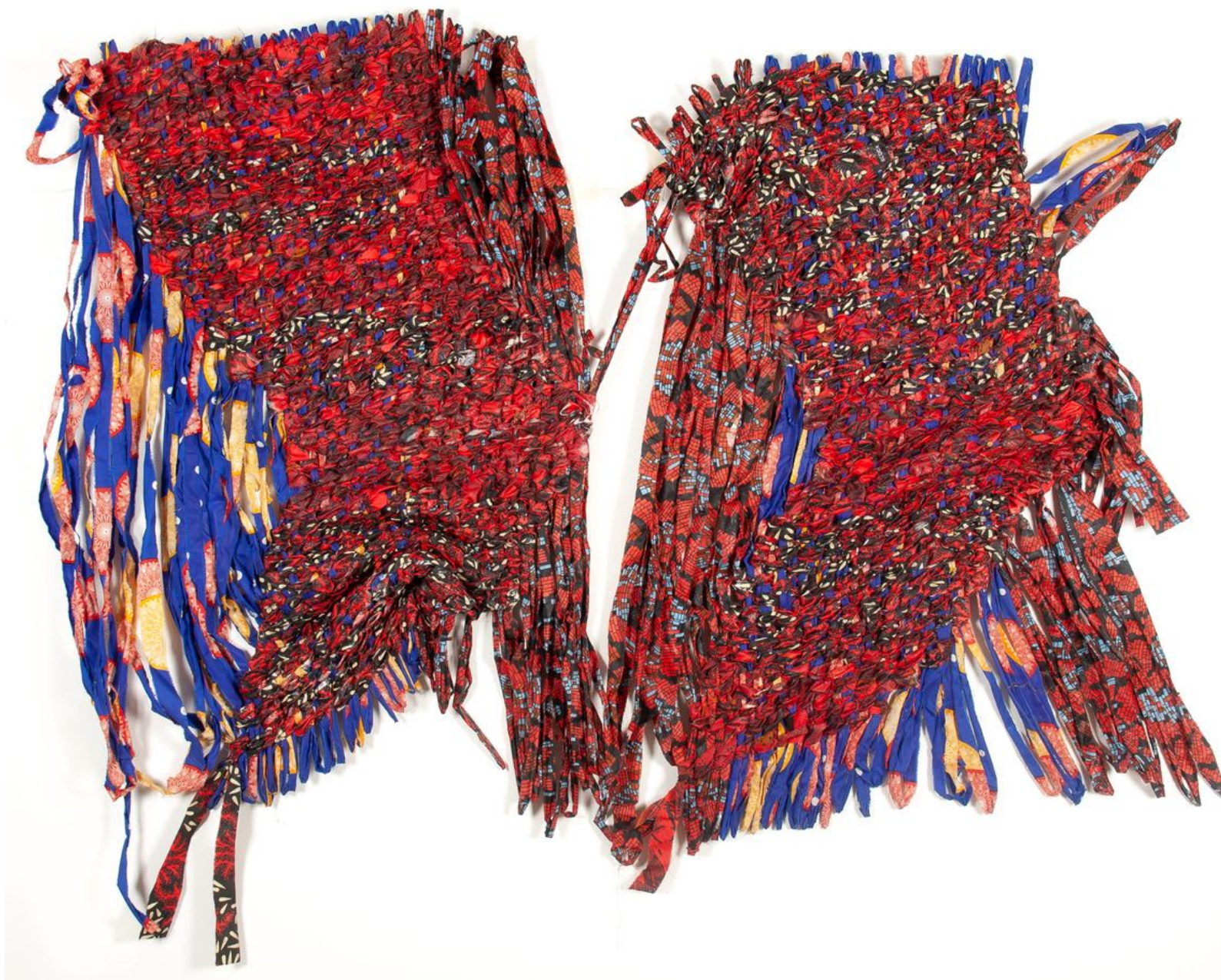
Princia Matungulu

Born in 1999 in Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Princia Matungulu is a Johannesburg based artist who graduated from the University of the Witwatersrand with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Hons) degree. Being a Congolese born immigrant navigating the South African cultural landscape, she draws from her background and identity through shared processes and conversations with her mother. Matungulu's practice is a combination of weaving, sculpture and storytelling. Her approach to the materiality, the intricacy of the weaving process and the resulting sculptures are a record of personal and imagined histories. She employs weaving processes as a means of understanding Congolese traditions, norms and values of 'proper' womanhood, which sometimes overlap and intersect with those of women from the African diaspora. Her work explores themes such as intimacy, sacredness, dress and labour.

Matungulu was awarded the Young Womxn Studio Bursary for 2021-2022 at the Bag factory Artists' Studios, and held her joint exhibition with Kutlwano Monyai, *Botsalano le Megopolo: En nous entre nous*, from August to September 2022. She participated and was a finalist in the Wits Young Artist Award (2021), and exhibited at The Point of Order in a joint exhibition in partial fulfilment of her degree (2021). She has also exhibited work at the Holy Art Gallery in London, UK (2020), and her series of work *Nouveaux Mémoire Vieux Pagne (New Memory Old Cloth)* was part of the group exhibition *Archive of Forgetfulness* at the Goethe-Institut, Johannesburg (2020).





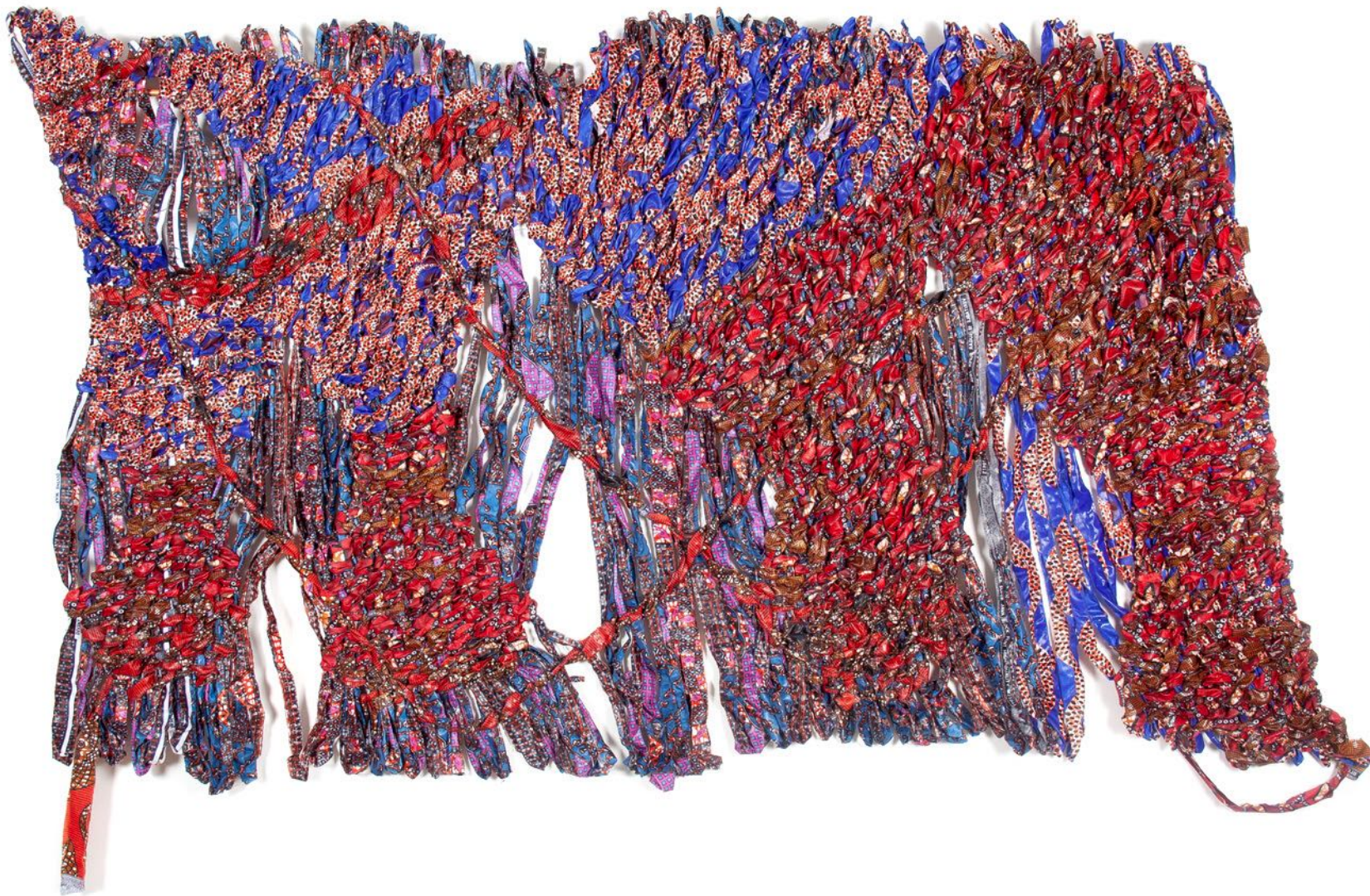


Princia Matungulu

*Uko ndege, Imba
mwimbo (You're a bird,
sing a song)*

2022

African wax print
fabric, thread and glue
136 x 190 x 24 cm



Princia Matungulu

*Ninachofanya,
Ninachosema, Mimi ni
nini (What I do, What I
say, Who am I?)*

2022

African wax print, thread
and wood glue
145 x 252 x 8 cm



Princia Matungulu
Ninachafanya,
Ninachosema, Mimi ni
nini. (detail)



Princia Matungulu

*Mdomo wa manjano: Mpito I (Yellow Beak:
Transition I)*

2023

African wax fabric, cotton thread and
wood glue

73 x 57.5 cm



Princia Matungulu

*Mdomo wa manjano: Mpito II (Yellow Beak:
transition II)*

2023

African wax fabric and wood glue

71 x 42 cm

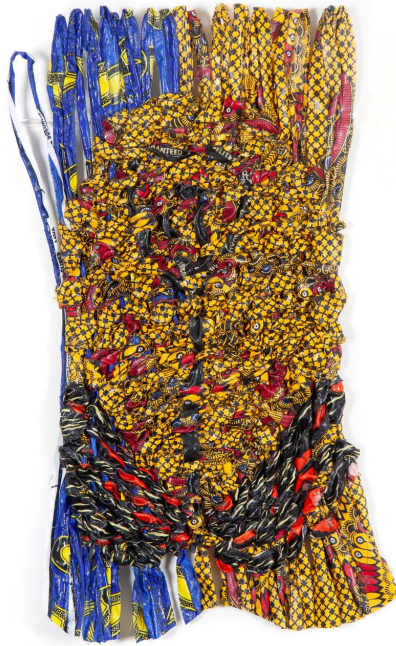


Princia Matungulu

*Mdomo wa manjano: Mpito III (Yellow Beak:
Transition III)*

2023

African wax fabric, cotton thread and wood glue
66 x 41 cm



Princia Matungulu

Mdomo wa manjano: Mpito I, II, III (Yellow Beak: Transition I, II, III)

2023

African wax fabric, cotton thread and wood glue

73 x 57.5 cm

/

(set)



Princia Matungulu

Mstari unaofuata I (Next in line I)

2022

Cotton lining, African wax print
fabric and wood glue

119,4 cm x 96 x 7 cm



Princia Matungulu

*Kupita kwenye milima (Passage
through the mountains)*

2023

African wax print fabric, cotton
thread and glue

155.5 x 77 cm



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