



GUNS & RAIN

**1-54 Contemporary African
Art Fair**

Thurs 8th-Sat 10th October 2020

Tuli Mekondjo
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About *Oikalunga* (Pagan Gods) by Tuli Mekondjo

Self-taught artist Tuli Mekondjo works with mixed media (embroidery, collage, paint, resin and *mahangu* grain – a Namibian food staple), extending these textured media into performance, and vice versa. Extending her commitment to exploring history, identity and spirituality, Mekondjo's new body of work attempts to re-remember what pre-colonial life might have been like in a typical village in OuKwanyama, northern Namibia, before the arrival of Finnish missionaries in 1870.

The themes of change, resistance and erasure take centre stage - in relation to both cultural practices and religion - as the rise of Christianity deeply reshapes the contours of Aawambo life. From naming practices and indigenous hairstyles to sacrificial rites, Mekondjo urges the lost past back to life with an abundant demonstration of cultural symbols. In parallel, her performance practice is also related to time-travel and spirituality: in recent performances, she has invited traditional healers to perform rituals to connect with the ancestors.

Living and working in Windhoek, Mekondjo first exhibited with the NJE Collective at the Investec Cape Town Art Fair 2019, the FNB Joburg Art Fair 2018, and Art Market Budapest 2016. In 2019, she exhibited in the all-women's show "Suffrage" at Guns & Rain, 1-54 Art Fair London, AKAA Paris, and had a solo show with the Project Room, Windhoek. Recent exhibitions include "The Borders of Memory" with Helena Uambembe at Guns & Rain (April 2020) and ARCO Lisboa 2020. Her work sits in collections across multiple countries.

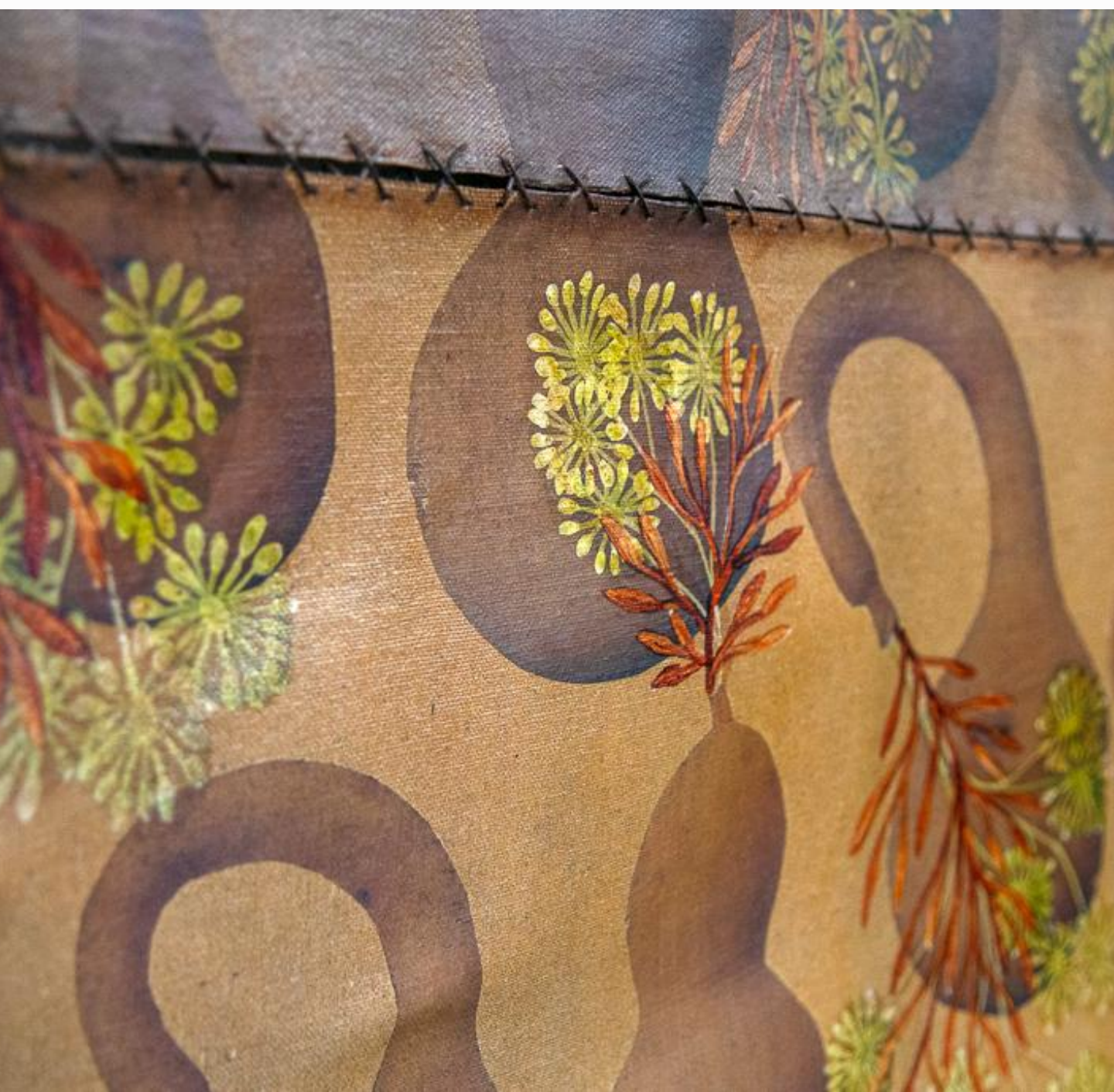


Tambula oshixupaela omalodu etu naa ende nawa (Receive this malt from our beer, so that the beer will flow freely through our sieve), 2020

Mixed Media on Canvas (photo transfer, collage, acrylic, millet grain and resin on canvas)
182 x 69 cm



*Tambula oshixupaela omalodu etu naa ende nawa
(detail)*



*Tambula oshixupaela omalodu etu naa ende nawa
(detail)*



Vakwamhungu vaushilo tambuleni, fye ohatu li oilya yetu (Spirits of the east, take this, now let us eat our grain), 2020

Mixed Media on Canvas (photo transfer, collage, acrylic, millet grain and resin on canvas)
174,4 x 68 cm



*Vakwamhungu vaushilo tambuleni, fye ohatu li oilya yetu
(detail)*



*Vakwamhungu vaushilo tambuleni,
fye ohatu li oilya yetu (detail)*

"In Oukwanyama pre-colonial Ovambo it is the first grey of morning and Kambungu of the cattle clan (*Ovakwanangobe*) erected a stone, a single stone of the country (emanya l'oshilongo) in central Oukwanyama, where the king was the link between the living and the ancestors, carrying out sacrificial rites to secure blessings for his people and country from the supreme being - Kalunga ka Nangobe. Kalunga the supernatural figure possesses power over fertility, rain, growth of cultivated plants and rich harvest.

It is the season of the sorghum harvest (*Oshipe shomalodu*) and the head of the homestead offers some of the malt to the spirits of the east while his wives are preparing to go on a pilgrimage to the graves, to pour malt over them, whispering a prayer, asking for blessings for a good brew. The little clay pot of brew at the *olupale* (homestead) is a symbol of the children's share in the good fortune that the new harvest brings to the homestead, and the head of the homestead blesses his children with clay and a prayer to the ancestors. His daughters would play under the canopy of the *omwandi* tree, pay attention to their fertility dolls, their "*ounona*" (children) made from pieces of wood or eendunga, decorated with blue, white and metal beads and tassels of hair. If a homestead burns down, these precious dolls are the first objects rescued from the hut. While the children play with their dolls, the second wife inspects the chicken roost (*oshikuku sheexuxwa*), for it is a breeding ground of chickens to be used as offerings in sacrifices when the sick are brought to be cured and their ailments are believed to depart with the setting sun. Sometimes, the onganga (healer) would come to the homestead, and with his gourd rattles he would dance, while performing a ritual that can remove "evil spirits" from the homestead. The pubescent girls in Oukwanyama are preparing for their *Efundula* (coming of age) ceremony: they are all sitting at the olupale, while the women unravel their individual *elende* headdresses, for they are becoming women now and would acquire a "woman's headdress."

It is the first grey of morning and the roosters are crowing half-heartedly and in Oukwanyama they are awakening into a new realm of existence. The head of the homestead, has met the "ovakiriste" (Christians) at the mission station, painted white with a thatched roof. He is now "*omukiriste*" and christened Veiko, "edina lo shi Suomi" (a Finnish name). The young girls would step into the missions with their elende coiffures only to emerge with clean shaven heads, clothed in white cotton dresses, and having acquired new names such as "Mary" and "Saima." The king urges his people to convert and to do away with their paganism. Their "*Oikalunga*" are burned to ashes, their rituals and fertility dolls trampled upon in the dust and their significance tarnished with evil. The spirit of the east will never be worshiped and the knowledge of the "rain-fetcher" is lost within the worshiping of a new "*Kalunga*".

Text by Tuli Mekondjo



*Uhen a oshongo ito ka lya,uhe na oshixwifo itoka velela omukaa
(Without fishtraps you will not eat,
without fishing gear you will not eat fish), 2020*

Mixed Media on Canvas (photo transfer, collage, acrylic, millet grain
and resin on canvas)
180,5 x 69 cm



*Uhena oshongo ito ka Iya,uhe na oshixwifo
itoka velela omukaa (detail)*



*Uhen a oshongo ito ka lya,uhe na oshixwifo itoka velela omukaa
(detail)*



Kululako elende loye, ove omuKriste paife (Shave off your Elende hairstyle, you are a Christian now), 2020

Mixed Media on Canvas (photo transfer, collage, acrylic,
millet grain and resin on canvas)
180,4 x 69 cm



Kululako elende loye, ove omuKriste paife (detail)



Kululako elende loye, ove omuKriste paife (detail)



Oilya oihapu, neengobe dihapu, noludalo lihapu (May we have much grain, many cattle and many births), 2020

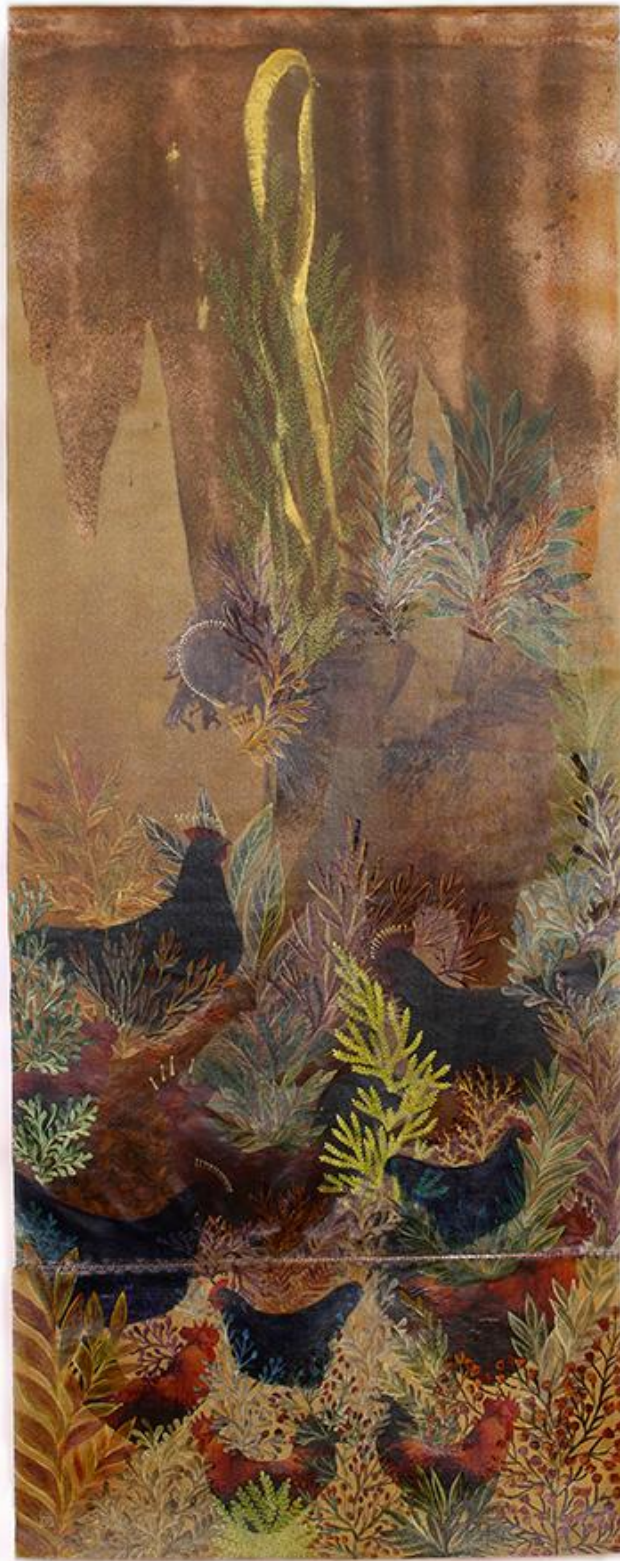
Mixed Media on Canvas (photo transfer, collage, acrylic, millet grain and resin on canvas)
176,5 x 67 cm



Oilya oihapu, neengobe dihapu, noludalo lihapu (detail)

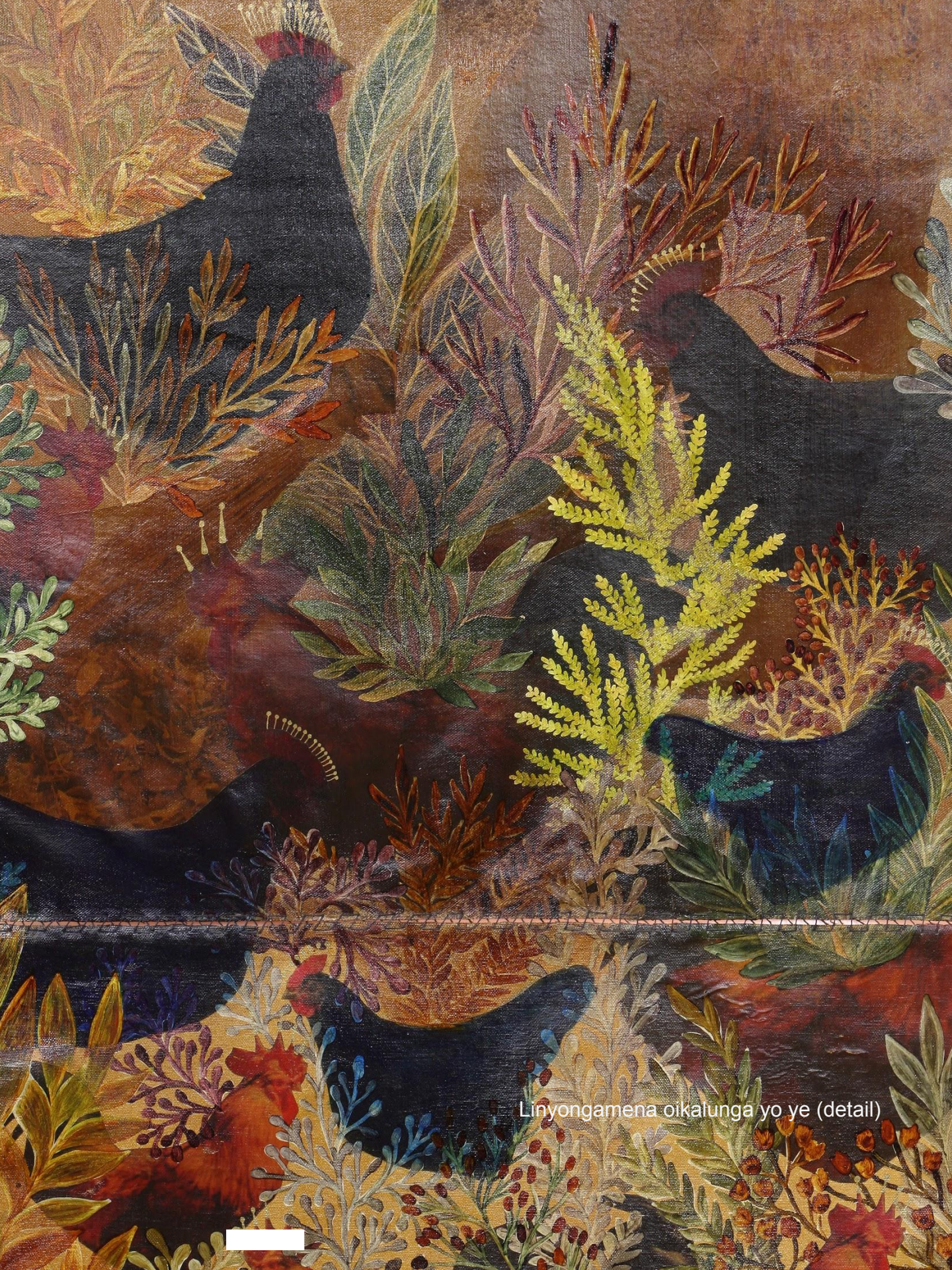


Oilya oihapu, neengobe dihapu, noludalo lihapu (detail)



Linyongamena oikalunga yo ye (Bow down to your pagan gods), 2020

Mixed Media on Canvas (photo transfer, collage, acrylic, millet grain and resin on canvas)
181 x 69 cm



Linyongamena oikalunga yo ye (detail)



Eluwa ola tende, exuxua oda lila, no va Suomi oveya (It is the first gray of morning, the Roosters crowed, and the arrival of the Finnish), 2020

Mixed Media on Canvas (photo transfer, collage, acrylic, millet grain and resin on canvas)
180 x 70 cm



Eluwa ola tende, exuxua oda lila, no va Suomi oveya
(detail)



Kalunga ka Nangobe, Kalunga ko pombada, Kalunga ka Jesus Kristus? (God of Namgobe, God of the heavens or God of Jesus Christ?), 2020

Mixed Media on Canvas (photo transfer, collage, acrylic, millet grain and resin on canvas)
180 x 71 cm



Kalunga ka Nangobe, Kalunga ko pombada, Kalunga ka Jesus Kristus? (detail)



*Kalunga ka Nangobe, Kalunga ko pombada, Kalunga ka Jesus
Kristus? (detail)*