

# ANCESTRAL INVOCATIONS

## LIZETTE CHIRRIME EXPLORES COMMUNITY, FEMININITY AND SPIRITUAL CONNECTIONS

A conversation with artist Lizette Chirime opens up a kaleidoscope of thoughts, ideas and possibilities. As she discusses her work – you are instantly captivated by the depth of her emotional experiences and relationship she has with her works. In her recent exhibition ‘The forms of the invisible demand’ at WORLDART Gallery in Cape Town she presented an intimate relationship with her past, community, and femininity through her paintings and installations.

Her large-scale paintings are exuberant textile layered works on canvas, consisting of a patchwork of shapes of mystical and intense figures. The abstract forms remind us of flowing water – and are rendered in a collage of printed *Shmashwe* fabrics and other African inspired prints which command your immediate attention. Born and raised in Maputo, Mozambique Chirime received no formal arts education but this was never a deterrent for her. Using her painting and sewing skills she created her own unique medium and art practice.

Her works express her deep connection with both the spiritual world and the surreal – which is paired vividly and vibrantly in her distinct and recognisable style. She believes her ancestry is strongly connected to her dreams, and she is forthcoming in disclosing that the spirits she encounters in her dreams, are incorporated and translated through her work explaining that the spirits come to her as messengers from her ancestors to relay their stories to her. She elaborates “traditionally we belonged to a royal family – but we no longer hold this title. I do believe that my ancestors use me to express whatever they need to say and tell their forgotten stories. Nobody speaks about them, their kingdom, or their royal lineage any longer.” Chirime’s paintings thus become vehicles to communicate the forgotten past.

Consistent themes within her work are the empowerment of women, and the

celebration of their bodies, the healing of the deeper self and her community. Through the journey of trauma healing, self-discovery, and story-telling – Chirime is relaying the narrative of many others who share her challenges and concerns.

She explains “These abstract forms evoke the human body and my identity-responsive practice where I refashion my self-image and transcend a painful upbringing that left me shattered and broken. I have literally ‘re-stitched’ myself together.” Alongside scenes of liberation and dancing, the concerns of African women is what this body of work is concerned with addressing. Using water and the female body I am commenting on the thin line between happiness and sadness.”

Chirime continues to celebrate the empowerment of African women with her woven installation *The book of Ndimande*, a monumental woven panel that covers an entire wall of the gallery. The impressive piece is reminiscent of El Anatsui’s bottlecap tapestries which have had an immense influence on a number of emerging contemporary artists from the continent. Like Anatsui’s art works where he engages communities to help craft his pieces so too has Chirime worked with her own community to painstakingly piece *The book of Ndimande* together.

The work has an ethereal feel to it having been hand knitted with the help of a Zimbabwean assistant and her aunt who

have created fabric used in the work. The emphasis is on color, form, and shape and much like her painting it provides a narrative of a past no longer spoken about.

Chirime’s empathy for the daily struggle of the African woman relates to the fact that despite their vast array of skills and creative talent – which could help them to achieve “bigger things” – they are constraint and burdened by a copus amount of domestic duties. Speaking from personal experience as a single mother Chirime adds “most of the time women put their ideas and skills in a draw to go and wash other people’s clothes, and clean their homes, for peanuts. They have two jobs, because when they have finished their work for someone else they have to go home and look after their own homes and families. For me that’s very painful to watch.”

Healing is a constant theme emphasised in her practice – both physical and emotional. Suffering ill health before embarking on *The book of Ndimande* – Chirime relays how her assistant experienced a considerable amount of healing through the relaxing and therapeutic qualities of plaiting and knitting.

*Lizette Chirime’s ‘The forms of the invisible demands’ was on view at WORLDART Gallery, 6-27 September 2018.*

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Lizette Chirime, *The book of Ndimande*, 2018. Woven wool & fabric, 575 x 425cm. *Dancing spirit*, 2018. Fabric collage & stitched leather rope on canvas, 170 x 133cm. *Flexible Mind*, 2018. Fabric collage & stitched leather rope on canvas, 124 x 163cm. Courtesy of the artist & WORLDART.