



Zangewa in her Johannesburg home studio, 2020  
Photography: Carole Desbois

[Zangewa at Lehmann Maupin gallery](#)

[Zangewa at Galerie Templon](#)

“It’s an incredibly seductive, sumptuous and generous material. I came upon it purely by accident while accompanying an interior designer friend who was sourcing fabrics,” Zangewa reflected in [a 2018 interview](#) about her background, conceptual purpose, and connection with her chosen materials. “I found healing and understanding. The silk that I was seeking was also seeking me.”

[In 2019, Zangewa spoke with avril27](#) about the personal, historical, and cultural roots of her practice and identity as an African woman working with textiles. “Really the spark was necessity and deprivation... Part of my practice is not only to normalize the female experience but also to confront the shame that is associated with different aspects of womanhood.”

“My characters indeed are just living their lives and not looking to the omnipresent audience for a reaction. It’s a part of the personal move from seeing myself in relation to others to self-awareness,” Zangewa [told BOMB Magazine in 2020](#). “I’m also definitely trying to connect on a universal level through depicting shared experiences. I think that when you can relate to someone, their otherness begins to dissolve because you have something in common. This then gives room to look beyond identity to the core message. At the end of the day, we are all one community. My dream is a universality in which we can appreciate difference as a beautiful thing.

Following five years of prominent solo exhibitions at galleries in Johannesburg and a decade of participating in group shows at museums around the world, Zangewa achieved a new state of recognition through two 2020 shows. [Solder of Love](#), at Galerie Templon in Paris took on a new range of themes, both deeply personal and universal, in figurative narratives that transcend daily life. Lehmann Maupin presented the artist’s first solo show in New York, [Wings of Change](#), which displayed seven new silk tapestries exploring personal and professional life during a global pandemic.

“I think the work that I’m doing is really to elevate the place of Black women in the world. Because we are still like the most marginalized sector of our society,” Zangewa reflected in a [2020 Tate Shots interview](#) in which she discussed the feminist, self-reflective core of her mature practice, her development from Botswana to Johannesburg, and the transformation of motherhood. “The ordinary Black woman needs support from society, and by creating images around her intimate, personal life, we are saying *listen, look*, understand this person is having these experiences, that this person exists. She is a woman with everyday struggles.”

She commented further about materials, technique, and process in a [Paris gallery talk](#). “Silk chose me, particularly, because it is a byproduct of transformation and I think subconsciously I’d been trying to find a way to heal from my childhood wounds. On a superficial level, the missing fabric is to bring the viewer to the medium because often when people first see my work, they think it’s a painting. The irregular shapes make it very obvious that it is not a canvas, but also speaks to the wound...it speaks to a kind of transgression, that maybe something from the outside came in and interfered. It also speaks to the perfect and imperfect...there is beauty in the imperfect.”



Zangewa, 2014

Billie Zangewa (Malawian, b. 1973)

**Heart of the Home**, 2020

Hand-stitched silk collage

Collection of Lizzie and Steve Blatt; L2020:131.2

Based in Johannesburg, South Africa, Billie Zangewa employs her prior background in the fashion and advertising industries toward a textile-based artistic practice that aims to subvert historical and contemporary cultural stereotypes of Black women and the Black female form. Found fabric and embroidery marked the artist's early work, which was inspired by the flora, fauna, and architectural landscapes of her childhood home in Botswana. Zangewa grounds her mature practice in collaged compositions of hand-stitched raw silk, in which she materializes visual and conceptual motifs central to her identity and life. The contrast between the male and female gaze (exemplified through self-portraits), femininity, motherhood, and gendered notions of conventional domestic work recur with frequency. Produced in 2020 during the isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic, **Heart of the Home** delivers a timely update on a new chapter in home life, in which domestic spaces are transformed into classrooms and offices, and parents into teachers and tutors. Depicting a mother and child at work at the kitchen table, Zangewa delivers a subtle, touching comment on the renewed significance of family and the breadth of meaning to be found in the label of "home."



*On view February 17 – May 23, 2021*