



# MAMA

ZANDILE  
TSHABALALA

REACH FOR  
THE STARS



# MOËT & CHANDON







Hasan Masiyison from the series 'A Leap into a Dream' 2022 Archival pigment print, 50 x 45 cm Edition 1/15. Courtesy of the artist.

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1-54.com

## ED'S LETTER



### Reach for The Stars

This issue is grounded in a belief that shapes how we move, dream, and create: Reach for the Stars. It's more than a theme. It's a mindset. A call to imagine without limits. To rise higher. To claim space. To believe that as Africans, our lives are worthy of brilliance, beauty, and boundless success.

Our cover star, Zandile Tshabalala, embodies this truth. After a two-year journey through the sacred rites of motherhood, she returns—grounded, radiant, and renewed. Her re-emergence reminds us: reaching for the stars isn't always about movement. Sometimes it's about stillness. Becoming. Trusting the timing. This issue is an ode to dreaming again. To rising slowly, and on your own terms. To knowing the stars are not far—they live within us.

TREVOR STUURMAN  
Founder & Editor-in-Chief



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## SPECIAL THANKS TO

Zandile Tshabalala our cover star, Cow  
Mash, Teresa Kutala Firmino and Togo  
Langa.

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Zandile Tshabalala's art is defined by confidence. The Soweto-born artist paints Black women with dignity, joy, posture and poise — but also softness, intimacy, and layered emotional depth.

In a global art world that too often exoticises or misrepresents African identity, Tshabalala's practice is a mélange of reclamation and reimagination, a new way of seeing.

Her rise was swift but never rushed. Her visual language is rooted in texture, pattern, memory, and the celebration of Black femininity, all speaking to something both personal and universal: a longing to be seen in full colour, on one's own terms.

Words by Shai Rama

# REACH FOR THE STARS

ZANDILE  
TSHABALALA





Zandile Tshabalala  
 Feel so good  
 Acrylic, Glitter, and Acrylic  
 Rhinestones on canvas  
 150 x 150 cm  
 2025  
 Photo by Tatenda Chidora



Zandile Tshabalala  
 Life of the Party  
 Acrylic, Glitter, Acrylic  
 Rhinestones on canvas  
 150 x 150 cm  
 2025  
 Photo by Tatenda Chidora







Blue dress: The Pansy  
Midi by Desiree Iyama,  
sourced from R'FRIQUE



The most pivotal moment in my very short but colourful career was the 'When We See Us' exhibition at Zeitz MOCAA," she reflects. "It's quite recent, but it affirmed my practice and the direction I had taken in representing blackness, womanhood, and drawing from the everyday experience. To top it off, having the work be the cover of the entire exhibition is one of those life-changing moments that i will never forget."





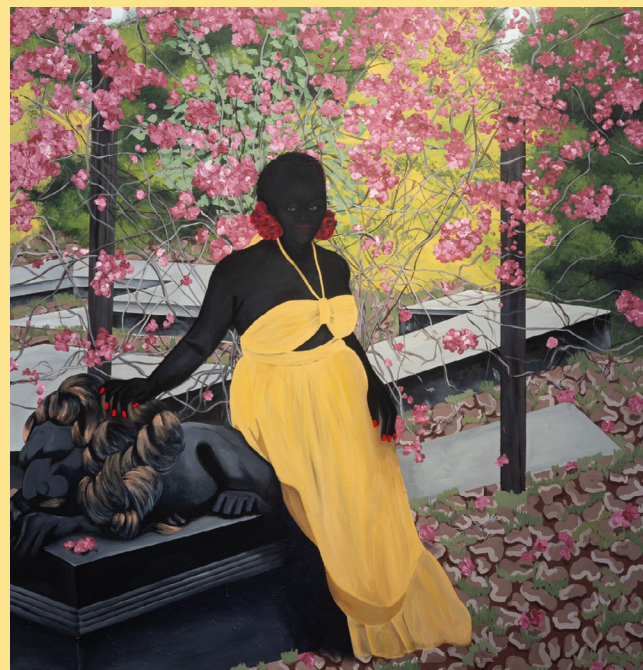


Tshabalala has never let external pressures dictate the direction of her work. As a young Black woman artist, she's all too familiar with the weighty expectations that come with visibility and the pressures of speaking for an entire group or upholding specific narratives. "There always are expectations of representing yourself, your people, a group, a part of the minority – representing it in such a particular way," she says. "I've always been anti-following the norm of what Black womanhood looks like because it's so vast and so diverse. I don't subscribe to expectations and I don't think about them. When I'm in the studio, it's between me and the work, I cannot control what the work does when it leaves the studio."

While her paintings often centre powerful depictions of Black women, Tshabalala understands that even her work should not be definitive. Instead of bending to outside expectations, Tshabalala focuses on the integrity of her own storytelling. "I don't know what is expected of me, but I do know what I expect of myself, which is to tell narratives close to my heart," she shares. These include personal reflections on growth, journeys of self-discovery, the intimacy of family life, and most recently, the transformative experience of motherhood



Zandile Tshabalala  
Yellow Blossoms  
Acrylic on canvas  
200 x 200 cm  
2024  
Photo by Sascha Herrmann



Zandile Tshabalala  
Pink Blossoms  
Acrylic on canvas  
200 x 200 cm  
2024  
Photo by Sascha Herrmann



Stripped dress: The Adure  
by Hertnunba, sourced  
from R'FRIQUE.







(Left)

Zandile Tshabalala  
Two Loungers  
Acrylic, glitter, acrylic rhinestones,  
metallic pen on canvas  
150 x 150 cm  
2025  
Photo by Tatenda Chidora



(Right)

Zandile Tshabalala  
And So Shall It Be  
Acrylic, glitter, glass crystals,  
metallic pen on canvas  
150 x 150cm  
2025  
Photo by Tatenda Chidora





Yellow dress by Thebe Magugu  
Sartjie Baartman Silk Caftan,  
and Leopard print wedge  
sandal by Cooshel Lifestyle.





“I expect myself to tell these narratives in the most honest, transparent way, but also in a way that leaves me feeling whole, rather than taking away from me.”





Motherhood marked a profound shift in Tshabalala's personal life and artistic journey. Where once there had been pressure, pace, and the ever-present anxiety of being left behind by a transient art world, motherhood introduced a slower rhythm, a deepened sense of self, and a new source of creative energy. "I slowed down a lot," she reflects. "Motherhood gave me new confidence in my practice, in fact, it revived my practice in ways I didn't think I needed. Now, I'm not afraid to experiment or go against whatever I thought defined me, I'm just doing my own thing, living my creative dream."

With this newfound assurance came a willingness to take risks, to play, to break the rules she once thought defined her. Her recent works are colourful, more experimental, and more intuitively joyful.



Coat by Fruché Ife Baba,  
sourced from R'FRIQUE  
and necklace sourced  
from Cooshell Lifestyles









Zandile Tshabalala  
Two Reclining Women  
Acrylic on canvas  
90 x 120 cm  
2020  
Photo by Zandile Tshabalala

“I currently feel like I have all the time in the world,” Tshabalala concludes. “I don't actually, but I feel like I do, and that's the gift of motherhood for me.”



Zandile Tshabalala  
Mother's Bloom  
Acrylic, Glitter and Acrylic Rhinestones on canvas  
90 x 120 cm  
2025  
Photo by Tatenda Chidora













# MOTHERHOOD IN THE ART WORLD



In this intimate conversation, artists Zandile Tshabalala, Cow Mash, and Teresa Kutala Firmino reflect on how becoming mothers reshaped their practices, their perceptions of time, and their personal boundaries. What begins as a discussion about life before children unfolds into a rich exchange about nesting, the power of female lineage, and the pressure of making a comeback in an art world that often fails to accommodate caregiving.

Zandile Tshabalala  
L.O.V.E  
Acrylic and Pastels on canvas  
200cm x 200cm  
2024  
Photo: Tatenda Chidora







Zandile Tshabalala:

Before we get started, let's talk briefly about our lives before the kids. I can start, it was mostly studio, studio, studio. I feel at some point, I used to actually reside in the studio because I was just on that treadmill 24/7. I didn't see anything wrong with being in this constant state of creating and trying to push the artworks out. But after getting off the treadmill, I think my perspective had changed a lot. I think also my desires had changed a lot. I was operating in a way, that worked at the time, but I was crossing a lot of my boundaries without even realising it, and allowing for other people to cross my boundaries too. But I did have my fun creating before the arrival of my little one. I'm still having fun, but we're gonna talk about that. I'm happy to be off the treadmill. I'm happy to have a bit more boundaries around my practice and my life generally. I feel more in touch with my humanness more than before.

Cow Mash:

I feel the same. You don't realise you're on the treadmill until you finally have a reason to not be. Realising your human needs beyond becoming a mother, there's just this time clock. I think that there's a pressure of "I'm a female artist," and at some stage, I might decide to have children. So there's this continuous pressure of when I decide to have that transition, I know people are not going to be supportive of those choices. So, how do I speed up what's happening in my life? I feel like after having a kid, I felt as though there was a good calm that happened, that I didn't realise would happen. It's not that big a change that dooms your whole life that you can't continue to be and create and make and still be a source of good.

Teresa Kutala Firmino:

For me, it was a big change, more than I anticipated. I also stayed in my studio for a while as my life was all about art. I was very excited, and I was just grateful to get opportunities. So, I'm glad we're speaking about boundaries and allowing boundaries to be crossed because I'd rather be here. After all, not many of us get the opportunity to be here, especially as young black female artists to be given the platform to be represented by a gallery, to be in the big group shows, to be part of the publications, sometimes not getting paid for showing up. When I had a premature baby my life was at a standstill. I was not creating. I was mostly just taking care of myself and my baby. I wasn't even thinking about art, and then it allowed me to see the gaps in art. For example, as I said in the beginning, I was just happy to show up. I was just grateful to be given the opportunity.

# LIFE BEFORE KIDS



# THE NESTING JOURNEY

Zandile Tshabalala:

How was nesting for you knowing that you have this reality of “you’re on a clock,” you have this amount of time to put in your best work because soon you won’t be able to lift an arm or something. How was that for you guys?

Cow Mash:

I almost didn’t accept that I was going into a maternity period, and I was working til’ literally the last minute of the night of labour. I put in all the work. I think for me, I’m also balancing being in an academic space as well as being an artist and then already balancing that with being a mother. I was like, “Okay, I need to work my little butt off until I can’t and then probably jump straight back into work straight after that.” And I think I was only humbled to the calm postpartum, realising that I actually physically can’t push myself to do all the crazy amount of things I did pre-pregnancy or pre-having a kid. The calm was forced on me and I’m so glad it happened. I needed that to happen because probably would have been a burnt-out little girlie. For me, it didn’t clock in immediately that I needed to step back and nest. I wasn’t nesting. I’m going to have to work because the work is going to be what creates the nest. I need to get it out. I need to do so much. I don’t know when I’ll get another opportunity to make again. I need to make as much as possible.

Cow Mash  
Lesea  
Material one(resin), acrylic wool  
130 x 25 x 25 cm  
2025  
Courtesy of Cow Mash









Cow Mash  
ka mmotsa, ka mmotsa, ka mmotsa, ka mmotsa, ka mmotsa, ka mmotsa, ka mmotsa,  
ka mmotsa, ka mmotsa, ka mmotsa, ka mmotsa, ka mmotsa, ka mmotsa, ka mmotsa,  
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ka mmotsa, ka mmotsa, ka mmotsa, ka mmotsa,  
Mixed media  
130 x 25 x 25 cm  
2023  
Courtesy of Cow Mash

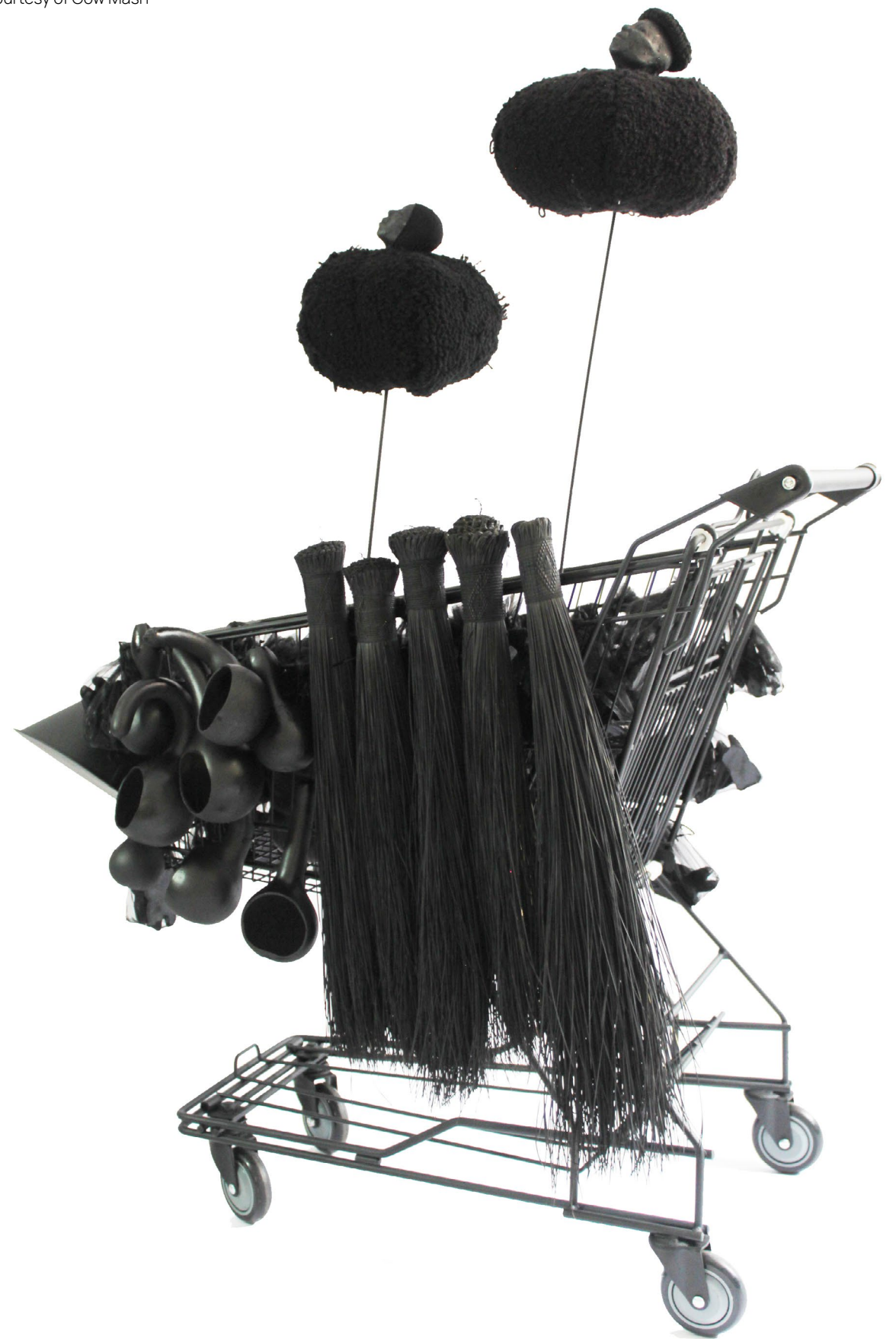


Cow Mash  
Unknown specie- function unidentified -  
Prediction: Bohadi  
Powder coated tin, material one(resin)  
35 x 17 x 16 cm  
2025  
Courtesy of Cow Mash





Cow Mash  
 di tšwatshemong  
 Found objects & mixed medium  
 Variable  
 2025  
 Courtesy of Cow Mash







# THE NAVY BLUE ROOM

Teresa Kutala Firmino:

The best thing that can happen to an artist is trauma. Previously my work was about the history of my family and looking in the archives of African history, especially Southern Africa and the complexities of your family being naturalised into South Africa when things are as heated in terms of who belongs and who doesn't belong. So, my work was mostly about that. And then after I gave birth, my work became completely about the women in my family and how amazing they are. It was about my journey and how profound and spiritual it was. Although, there were points where it felt like I was thrown into a navy blue room where the ceiling, the walls, the floor, everything was navy blue, it was suffocating. I've watched so many mummies lose their babies and thought that might be me next, like you're in a nightmare basically.

When I came out of it, my baby was super healthy, really beautiful. You won't even see that he was a preemie baby. A year or two later, I poured everything into the first series of works. I was invited to an art fair in Portugal and those works were amazing. The colours, the characters, the subject matter, and then showing it to a European audience at an art fair and realising they're not getting it was devastating, thinking at the time that this work was not meant for these people. But, I gave everything afterwards. I felt like I couldn't make work during that time at all. When my baby was here for, like, six months, I couldn't work. But when I had the opportunity to make work, I poured everything into those pieces. And I would wish that the art industry would have received the work, the way I anticipated for them to receive it, but it's the art industry, so obviously it did not.

So, having to be okay with that, like, you can't explain really what you went through to these types of people. My experience was a lot all at once and the work has become richer and brighter and a lot more daring and confronting.





Teresa is wearing a  
Fruché lfe Baba coat  
sourced from R'FRIQUE

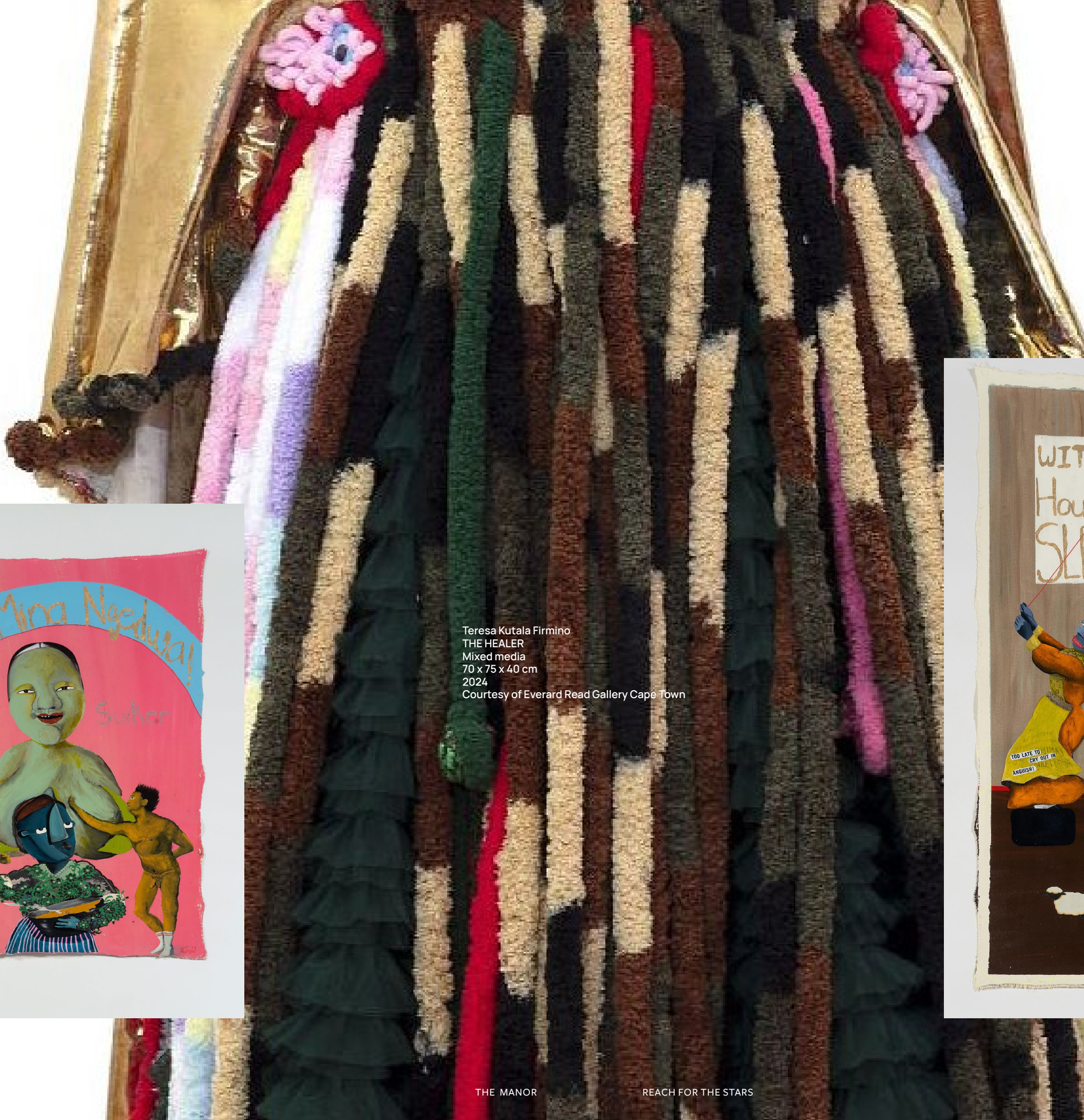




Teresa Kutala Firmino  
Bheka Mina Ngedwa  
Mixed media on Canvas  
128 x 80 cm  
2024  
Photo by Sascha-Herrmann



Teresa Kutala Firmino  
White Men Love Bad Wigs  
Mixed media on Canvas  
126.5 x 62 cm  
2024  
Photo by Sascha-Herrmann



Teresa Kutala Firmino  
THE HEALER  
Mixed media  
70 x 75 x 40 cm  
2024  
Courtesy of Everard Read Gallery Cape Town





**Zandile Tshabalala:** Pula gave me a gift: permission to reinvent myself, redefine my practice, and to do whatever it is that I want. When I think about how I got from point A to point B, it was because I did whatever I wanted, but when I was on the treadmill, I forgot how to do that. I had so many people saying, "Do you mind doing this or that?" But having Pula, slowing down, taking that, almost two-year maternity leave, falling into oblivion, because people forget about you. I think that's another thing about motherhood. The world is continuing. "You're going to be a mother. Okay cool, we don't know that!"

**Teresa Kutala Firmino:** And the judgement!

**Cow Mash:** You think that everybody will forget about you. You're also in a little bit of a bubble of isolation. And I think that's also what makes it sadder. Also, being an artist, I don't have artist mother friends and I could bounce off.

**Zandile Tshabalala:** Girl, what about me!? But seriously, in the beginning, in the very first just-had-a stages, it was just my partner and I, my mother wasn't going to get it. As much as I appreciated her being around and helping, it was like "Who am I going to speak to about the industry?" I don't know who to reach out to, you know. I felt isolated in that way.



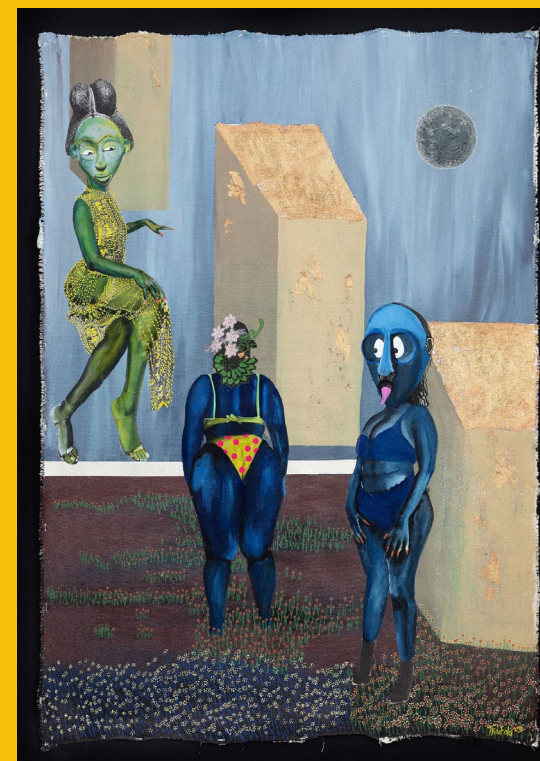
Zandile Tshabalala  
Umcimbi: uNana  
Acrylic and Pastels on canvas  
200 x 200 cm  
2023  
Photo by Tatenda Chidora

# THE GIFT THAT PULA GAVE ME

# EROTICISM

**Teresa Kutala Firmino:**

I did a four-part series called "The Owners of the Earth", specifically speaking about the different women in my family. One thing they've taught me is eroticism is not only sexual. It's this idea of completely immersing yourself in your passion, in your work. So they taught me about eroticism. When we're cooking, we're cooking with all kinds of flavours and you're putting everything you can into it. I have this series called the "Bathhouse Series," my mum was my doula after I gave birth. In the morning, she had to go to work, she's a working woman, she would wake me up at 5am in the morning, and then she'd boil eucalyptus because I had to steam. And then, I'm under the blanket completely naked, steaming, and then you can hear her putting on her makeup because my mom is that girl. She's a double-tone lip gloss, black liner with a bright pink lip girl. So, I would hear her humming and putting on her makeup, and then she would open up the blanket and put me in hot water and salt. And then she would speak life into me and massage my body because I was swollen because of high blood pressure. She literally poured life into me when I was in that navy blue and then called out to me and was like, "You're doing great. You're so amazing. I can't wait till you're back to work." And then she's like fully dressed. Her nails are like this long. Her hair is big. She's everything. My mom is everything, guys. So those women really taught me about how I don't have to lose that eroticism in terms of how I take care of myself, in terms of my work, even like motherhood and enjoying motherhood.



Teresa Kutala Firmino  
Sea Salt Crystals  
Mixed media on Canvas  
1144 x 81 cm  
2023  
Courtesy of Teresa Kutala Studio



Teresa Kutala Firmino  
Midnight Prayers (03:00am)  
Mixed media on Canvas  
137 x 167 cm  
2022  
Courtesy of Everard Read Gallery Cape Town





# MOTHERHOOD AND CULTURE

Teresa Kutala Firmino:

There were times when you're drowning and you hate it, and then the moments that were really beautiful, and I'm still making work about it until now. Motherhood has been an exciting process for me.

Cow Mash:

I was opening up all the female relationships. For me, that was so important, even for my work, realising just how female-centred my work is, but then also being able to angle it into speaking about my grandmother and her role in the postpartum, her presence, and her passing away shortly after. Seeing the matrilineal lineage coming and being there and just how available they are to what's happening next and even in their makeup and their long nails it's just like the contemporary gogo type, like their way of being present as well, like "we've been here, we'll make it, we've been there." I really appreciate, besides just becoming a mother, but how our female family members open themselves up to us. And you really do come into a new world of "I've been initiated!"

Teresa Kutala Firmino:

This was a big culture shock for me. During my traditional wedding, in my culture, Mbundu, there's a week where I have to be with the woman in the family and they have to teach me how to take care of a man. Watching my mom and my aunts showing me a certain sex position and all the women just laughed. We always laughed so much. And I've never seen them laughing that much before. So, it was a very beautiful experience just seeing those women in their element and being excited for me.



Cow Mash  
unknown specie-function unidentified  
-Prediction: go kgahla ga madi  
Powder-coated tin, material one(resin),  
acrylic wool  
20 x 13 x 13 cm  
2025  
Courtesy of Cow Mash



Teresa Kutala Firmino  
Kizaka  
Mixed media on Canvas  
127 x 98 cm  
2024  
Courtesy of Teresa Kutala Studio



# THE COMEBACK



Teresa Kutala Firmino  
Paw Paw II  
Mixed media on Canvas  
79 x 82 cm  
2024  
Courtesy of Teresa Kutala Studio

Zandile Tshabalala:

Did you guys feel the pressure to have a comeback? Was that a thing for you?

Cow Mash:

I definitely still do. There's the feeling of having to be in a global or international conversation with everything that I'm making as well. The pressure of having to leave my kid for some time is still too much for me. I feel like it's almost as if it's another initiation step that you have to go through. I'll just leave them for the first time, and then you'll be fine. But, I will not be! I know he will be fine, but I will not be physically okay having to be away for that long, and at the same time you're like these are the sacrifices I have to make because I want to be a mother and then I want to be an artist. You also ask yourself why is the industry like this.

This many years of people giving birth, this many years of women being artists, and why aren't they accommodating people who are parents, never mind just being a mother because it can also be like fathers who are supposed to be there for their kids. Why aren't they more accommodating? So, it's been painful to look at. How do you make a good comeback when the support structures are not there for us?

Cow Mash  
Go ya rona (close up)  
Polycarbonate sheets, material one, polyester resin, ink,  
acrylic on canvas  
125 x 67 x 35 cm  
2021  
Courtesy of Cow Mash





A tribute to the visionary curator Koyo Kouoh, tracing her profound impact on African contemporary art and the enduring echoes of her legacy at next year's Venice Biennale.

# Remembering Koyo Kouoh





Born in Cameroon and raised in Switzerland, Koyo Kouoh was a cultural bridge long before she became one of the most influential curators of her generation. It is no small feat to shift the centre, but that's precisely what Kouoh did: in life, in thought, and in the persistent unearthing of African and diasporic art histories that too often lived in the footnotes of global art discourse.

As we remember her today, we do not simply mourn a prominent figure in the art world, we reflect on a life that reshaped the very architecture of African visibility. To recognise her global impact, we have to start in Dakar, where Kouoh served as the founding artistic director of RAW Material Company from 2008 to 2019, an artist's residency, exhibition space, and academy. This space of critical exchange became a nucleus for contemporary art in Africa where Kouoh proved that excellence and experimentation didn't need European validation to thrive.

More recently, as Executive Director and Chief Curator of the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (Zeitz MOCAA) in Cape Town, Kouoh brought rigour, resonance, and restorative justice to the museum space that needed reinvigoration. She undertook the challenging task of reimagining what an African museum could be, not a place that merely held art, but one that encompassed memory, dissent, joy, and refusal. She was a curator of exhibitions, yes, but also of possibility.

This year, Kouoh was appointed curator for the 2026 Venice Biennale: a prestigious role made all the more significant by her identity as an African woman. Before her untimely passing, Kouoh had written for The Guardian in a posthumously published article where she said, "Ultimately, my role as the first African woman to curate the biennale is not about personal legacy. While I recognise the significance of being the first African woman to hold this position, I hope my appointment sets a precedent rather than becoming an exception. My vision is for a future where such milestones are no longer remarkable, simply because so many others have followed. The real measure of progress is not in being first but in ensuring the door remains wide open for those who come next."







This sums up Kouoh's Weltanschauung where paving the way for others supersedes personal achievement. She hoped her appointment would become a norm rather than a rarity, and believes true progress lies in creating lasting opportunities for future generations, not just in breaking barriers, but in keeping them open.

In remembering Koyo Kouoh, we remember an intellectual insurgent. A reader of the room and the archive. A pan-Africanist whose feminism was implicit in her every move. A globalist with her feet firmly rooted in the soil of the continent. Her absence is immeasurable. But so is her legacy.



“People are more  
important than things”.

— Koyo Kouoh



# An interview with 1-54 Founder Touria El Glaoui

**Can you tell us about your early encounters with African art and the moment you realised there was a need for a platform like 1-54?**

My exposure to African art began quite organically, through travels and personal encounters with artists and creatives across the continent and in the diaspora. Over time, I noticed a disconnect between the extraordinary talent I was seeing and the lack of visibility or access these artists had within the global art market. There were very few platforms committed to presenting contemporary art from Africa in all its complexity and diversity. That's when the idea for 1-54 started to take shape, out of a desire to create space, visibility, and recognition for artists whose work deserved to be part of the global conversation.

**How has 1-54 evolved over the past decade?**

When we launched in 2013, 1-54 was a much smaller endeavour, just 17 galleries at our first edition in London. Since then, we've grown into a multi-city fair with annual editions in London, New York, and Marrakech, and Special Projects in places like Paris and Hong Kong. But more than the scale, it's the ecosystem that's grown with us, galleries, collectors, curators, and institutions that now actively engage with and support artists from Africa and its diasporas. The evolution has also been internal: our programming, talks, partnerships, and publications have all deepened in scope and ambition.

**The name "1-54" reflects the 54 countries of Africa. How do you maintain that pan-African vision while navigating different local art ecosystems and markets?**

From the outset, the vision was to reflect the multiplicity of the continent: 54 countries, countless cultures, languages, and histories. Of course, no single platform can fully encompass that, but we aim to be a connector. Each edition of the fair includes artists and galleries from diverse regions: Lusophone, Francophone, Anglophone, North, South, East, West Africa and beyond. At the same time, we're aware of local contexts and dynamics, which is why it's crucial to work closely with galleries, curators, and cultural workers who are embedded in those communities. It's a balancing act, but the pan-African vision is always at the core.

**What shifts have you noticed in how collectors, institutions, and audiences engage with contemporary African art today compared to a decade ago?**

There's been a remarkable shift. A decade ago, many collectors were hesitant or simply unfamiliar with the artists we were presenting. Today, there's a much stronger appetite and a deeper commitment, not just to acquiring works but to supporting artists' careers, attending exhibitions, funding residencies, and engaging intellectually with the art. Institutions are also taking greater responsibility for representation, with more acquisitions, solo shows, and scholarly attention. And critically, there's been a growth in local collectors and patrons within the continent, which is a vital development for long-term sustainability.



**Women artists, curators, and gallerists are increasingly at the forefront of the African art scene. How is this particular shift transforming the art ecosystem?**

It's one of the most powerful and inspiring developments of the past decade. We've always made a point to platform women artists and gallerists, and today we're seeing them not just participating but leading. They're shaping narratives, founding institutions, and mentoring the next generation. This shift is transforming how stories are told, whose voices are heard, and how communities are represented. It's also pushing the industry to reconsider entrenched hierarchies and power dynamics. The result is a more vibrant, inclusive, and forward-looking art world.

**And finally, what continues to excite you most about African art today? What keeps you coming back, season after season, with the same sense of purpose and possibility?**

It's the constant sense of renewal, the way artists across the continent and in the diaspora are reimagining form, language, and identity on their own terms. There's a boldness and an urgency in the work that's both deeply local and globally resonant.

"What keeps me going is witnessing that transformation, seeing how art becomes a vehicle for dialogue, resistance, beauty, and possibility. And knowing that we can play a small role in helping that reach wider audiences, that continues to be the most rewarding part."



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# MAMA

ZANDILE  
TSHABALALA



# REACH FOR THE STARS