

Challenging stereotypes, Q&A with artist Billie Zangewa



By [Ruth Cooper](#)

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Malawian-born yet Joburg-residing Billie Zangewa is the featured artist for the upcoming FNB Joburg Art Fair, which will be held at the Sandton Convention Centre in Johannesburg from 6-9 September 2018.

Using the medium of raw silk offcuts, Zangewa creates intricate and vibrant hand-stitched collages, often depicting herself as the protagonist of the scene, be it quietly at home or against a gritty Joburg city backdrop. Her work explores how women are often disadvantaged by multiple sources of oppression: race, class, and gender identity and aims to challenge the historical stereotyping, objectification, and exploitation of the black female body.





The rebirth of the black Venus - silk-tapestry, 127x103cm,
2010

[click to enlarge](#)

“Over the past year, when much of the world’s discourse has centred on gender inequality and violation of women’s rights, Zangewa’s work represents the historical narrative of women and the implications of inhabiting a female form - the struggles

and strengths as well as the perseverance, triumphs, potency, and majesty.”

We got in touch with her this #WomensMonth to chat about her career highlights, the FNB Joburg Art Fair and women in the arts.



Billie Zangewa is 2018 FNB JoburgArtFair's featured artist

25 Jun 2018



■ ***What was it like being selected as the featured artist for the 2018 edition of the FNB Joburg Art Fair?***

It was very exciting and affirming too. It took me completely by surprise. I'm looking forward to sharing my intervention with the public.

■ ***What are the overarching themes behind your work?***

Identity, gender, socio-politics, everyday life and connection.



Great Expectations - silk tapestry, 102 x 94 cm, 2017

■ ***What have been some of your career highlights?***

Winning the Absa L'Atelier Gerard Sekoto Award, having my work on an Air France bus circulating the city of Paris, the recent Sunday Times ZA Lifestyle cover. I have been so lucky and there have been so many highlights.

■ ***What African women artists do you admire?***

Ethiopian abstract painter Julie Mehretu, Kenyan artist Wangechi Mutu who was also an FNB Joburg Art Fair featured artist a couple of years ago and Marlene Dumas.

■ ***What does Women's Month mean to you?***

I think it's great that there are 30 days a year dedicated to women and that's a start, but honestly, every day should be Women's Day. I guess I have mixed feelings about it. It's great to put a focus on women but that we need to show our society is still failing the fairer sex.



Date night - silk tapestry, 101 x 110 cm, 2017

■ ***How would you like to see the support of women in the arts progress?***

I think that women who chose to be mothers as well as artists should be supported and the commitment of parenting taken into consideration. For instance, longer deadlines with an understanding that things happen in families that need immediate attention and precede art. Open up the possibility of women to travel with their children and have the cost included in the budget. There are already organisations doing this, but it would alleviate so much stress if it was an across the board norm. I speak of these things as they are challenges that I've experienced as a woman in the arts.

■ ***What's next?***

There are projects coming up that still need to be confirmed. My work will be at Art Basel Miami Beach with my gallery blank projects in December.

ABOUT RUTH COOPER

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