



Portia Zvavahera

Text by Meredith A. Brown
Interview with the artist by Allie Biswas

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Expressive and rich paintings by the Zimbabwean artist Portia Zvavahera—made during a time of intense solitude and collective struggle across the globe.

In her paintings, Zvavahera gives form to emotions that manifest from other realms and dimensions beyond the domains of everyday life and thought. Her vivid imagery is rooted in the cornerstones of our earthly existence—life and death, pain and pleasure, isolation and connection, and love and loss.

Zvavahera draws from a powerful visual vocabulary comprising women, her family, and shape-shifting animals, in scenes both metaphorical and fantastical. In several paintings, she makes use of intricate patterns taken from her own floral or classical Zimbabwean designs. Her particular process of alternating painting and printing results in images that communicate complex emotions in a play of tension and release. The result is a deeply personal body of work that probes the nature of the human condition. As Zvavahera states, “It is me in the paintings.... I can only speak about myself.”

In addition to gorgeous reproductions of twenty-four paintings, including up-close details and installation views, this catalogue also features a new essay by the curator Meredith Brown and an interview with the artist by the writer Allie Biswas. This catalogue surveys work made since 2017.

Portia Zvavahera was born in 1985 in Harare, Zimbabwe, where she currently lives and works. She studied at the BAT Visual Arts Studio, National Gallery of Zimbabwe, from 2003 to 2005. She then received a diploma in visual arts from Harare Polytechnic in 2006.

Allie Biswas is a writer and researcher based in London. She is coeditor of *The Soul of a Nation Reader: Writings by and about Black American Artists, 1960–1980* (2021). She has published interviews with artists including Rashid Johnson, Julie Mehretu, Meleko Mokgosi, Zanele Muholi, Adam Pendleton, and Wolfgang Tillmans. She has written catalogue essays for monographs on the work of Rina Banerjee, Arcmanoro Niles, Serge Alain Nitegeka, and Hannah van Bart. Forthcoming publications include a catalogue about the US Embassy’s art collection in London and interviews with Lubna Chowdhary, Theaster Gates, and Ibrahim Mahama.

Meredith A. Brown serves as the director of museum affairs and chief curator at Planting Fields Foundation in Oyster Bay, New York, where she oversees all collection and exhibition initiatives. Her research focuses on the histories of gender and social activism as they intersect with art in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and has been supported by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Smithsonian Institution, the Terra Foundation for American Art, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and Stanford University. Prior to joining Planting Fields, she worked as a senior research associate in modern and contemporary art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Brown earned her MA and PhD in art history from The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, and holds a BA in art and art history from Stanford University.