



iNgqikithi { Weaving yokuPhica { Meanings

TELEPHONE WIRE ART from
SOUTH AFRICA



INTERNATIONAL
ARTS AND ARTISTS

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TELEPHONE WIRE ART from SOUTH AFRICA

Weaving Meanings: Telephone Wire Art from South Africa explores the rich history and cultural significance of a uniquely South African art form. This project marks the first major museum exhibition in North America to focus exclusively on the art of telephone wire weaving. It traces the journey of wire as an artistic medium from its emergence as a symbol of social status in the 16th century to the innovative use of recycled telephone wire by Zulu-speaking communities today.

This exhibition is a testament to cultural resilience, ingenuity, and creative expression. As Indigenous Knowledge Experts Muziwandile Hadebe and Ntuthuko Khuzwayo note, “In the face of adversity and resource scarcity, telephone wire artists dared to imagine new possibilities...leaving behind a legacy that inspires us to rethink waste, challenge conventions, and celebrate the ingenuity of the human spirit.” Each basket, plate, and sculpture tells a story of heritage, identity, and tradition, embodying the artist’s ability to transform everyday materials into powerful works of art.

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1. Khethayiphi Ndwandwe, Basket, 2003. Telephone wire, wire. KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Gift of David Arment and Jim Rimelspach, David Arment Southern African Collection, IFAF Collection, Museum of International Folk Art, FA.2024.12.45.



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The exhibition is made possible by the generous donation of David Arment and Jim Rimelspach, and support from the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs, International Folk Art Foundation, Friends of Folk Art, a grant from the William H. and Mattie Wattis Harris Foundation, and donors to the Museum of New Mexico Foundation exhibit development fund. In close collaboration with a team of South African Indigenous Knowledge Experts, this exhibition is curated by Dr. Elizabeth Perrill, an expert on Zulu ceramics, and Muziwandile Gigaba, an artist and lecturer at Nelson Mandela University.

2. Goodman Thembinkosi Maphumulo, Basket (detail), 2023. Telephone wire, wire. Siyanda, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. IFAF purchase, Museum of International Folk Art, P.2024.4.20.
3. Bheki Dlamini, *UdWENdWE LUKAKOTO (The Wedding Party of Koto)* (detail), 2002. Telephone wire, wire. KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Gift of David Arment and Jim Rimelspach, David Arment Southern African Collection, IFAF Collection, Museum of International Folk Art, FA.2024.12.12.
4. Simon Mavundla, Basket (detail), 2015. Telephone wire, wire. Siyanda, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Gift of David Arment and Jim Rimelspach, David Arment Southern African Collection, IFAF Collection, Museum of International Folk Art, FA.2024.12.176.
5. Vincent Sithole, Basket, 2003. Telephone wire, wire. KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Gift of David Arment and Jim Rimelspach, David Arment Southern African Collection, IFAF Collection, Museum of International Folk Art, FA.2024.12.214.
6. Zodwa Maphumulo, *School Children*, 2003. Telephone wire, wire. Siyanda, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Gift of David Arment and Jim Rimelspach, David Arment Southern African Collection, IFAF Collection, Museum of International Folk Art, FA.2024.12.241.
7. Elliot Mkhize, Basket (detail), 2003. Telephone wire, wire. KwaMashu, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Gift of David Arment and Jim Rimelspach, David Arment Southern African Collection, IFAF Collection, Museum of International Folk Art, FA.2024.12.32.
8. Bheki Dlamini, Basket (detail), 1990s. Telephone wire, wire. Siyanda, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Gift of David Arment and Jim Rimelspach, David Arment Southern African Collection, IFAF Collection, Museum of International Folk Art, FA.2024.12.11. Image courtesy of Radius Books and Brad Trone.

Exhibition Themes

The exhibition narrative is thoughtfully designed to echo the traditional layout of a Zulu homestead, with a central hub that introduces the art form to visitors. From this central point, visitors are invited to explore seven thematic sections, each offering a distinct perspective on the history and evolution of telephone wire weaving. These sections include:

OF WEALTH AND NIGHTWATCHMEN: WIRE'S EARLY USE

This section explores the historical role of wire as a marker of wealth and the early use of improvisation and adaptation by Zulu-speaking men, who carried on their cultural forms while working as night guards in urban spaces.

ROOTS AND RESISTANCE: BEER CULTURE AND THE APARTHEID YEARS

Focusing on the crucial genre of imbenge (beer pot covers), this section examines the transition from grass to wire weaving. It contextualizes this art within the rich tradition of beer drinking, a spiritually and politically significant act during the Apartheid era.

WHY THE WIRE PLATES: GAUGING THE MARKET

This section recognizes pioneering artists of telephone wire weaving and showcases the expanding range of forms and styles artists create for rural, urban, and international audiences.

MAKING HARD-WIRE AND SOFT-WIRE

Illustrations teach the audience about the technical distinctions between hard-wire and soft-wire weaving.

HANDS-ON AREA

Printed materials and templates allow visitors to create their own wire art drawings.

"THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA"

This section highlights the post-Apartheid era's political optimism (1994–present). It features artistic works from the 1990s that incorporated patriotic imagery, with subjects such as the new South African flag, as well as popular political and athletic figures. Works were also made to raise consciousness for issues like HIV/AIDS awareness, COVID relief, and environmentalism.

NEW DIRECTIONS

The final section illustrates the symbiotic relationship between South African wire weavers and the international art scene, demonstrating how they both influence and are inspired by global art trends.



9. Bheki Sibiya, Basket, 2000. Telephone wire, wire. Siyanda, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Gift of David Arment and Jim Rimelspach, David Arment Southern African Collection, IFAF Collection, Museum of International Folk Art, FA.2024.12.13.



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Focus on Artists

A key component of *Weaving Meanings* is its commitment to foregrounding the voices of the artists themselves. The exhibition features a rich multimedia presentation, including original video interviews and weaving demonstrations. These materials, developed by a team of South African filmmakers led by Zamo Mkhize of Gone Fishing Productions, Muziwandile Gigaba, and Dr. Perrill, offer an intimate look into the creative process and the personal stories behind the art.

As co-curator and Lead Indigenous Knowledge Expert Muziwandile Gigaba notes, "The exhibition is a contribution towards the self-empowerment of Zulu artists and communities, reinforcing a strong sense of togetherness and humanity." This project is

a collaboration that honors the artistry and cultural heritage of the weavers, sharing their stories with a broader audience.

10. Ntombifuthi (Magwaza) Sibiya demonstrating hard-wire weaving in her home, July 2023. Siyanda, eThekweni Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Image courtesy of Zamo Mkhize and Gone Fishing Productions.
11. Ntombifuthi (Maphumulo) Mwimule demonstrating hard-wire weaving, July 2023. Siyanda, eThekweni Municipality, South Africa. Image courtesy of Zamo Mkhize and Gone Fishing Productions.
12. Artist Not Recorded. Imbenge (beer pot lid), early to mid-twentieth century. Palm fiber, grass, beads, thread. KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Gift of David Arment and Jim Rimelspach, David Arment Southern African Collection, IFAF Collection, Museum of International Folk Art, FA.2024.12.203.



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13. Richard Shange, Bust of Nelson Mandela (side view), 2004. Telephone wire, wire. KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Gift of David Arment and Jim Rimelspach, David Arment Southern African Collection, IFAF Collection, Museum of International Folk Art, FA.2024.12.59.
14. Artist Not Recorded. Iwisa (knobbed sparring stick) (detail), early to mid-twentieth century. Wood, telephone wire, brass or copper. KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Gift of David Arment and Jim Rimelspach, David Arment Southern African Collection, IFAF Collection, Museum of International Folk Art, FA.2024.12.74.
15. Artist Not Recorded, Ishungu (snuff container), early to mid-twentieth century. Horn, wood, copper wire, telephone wire. KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Gift of David Arment and Jim Rimelspach, David Arment Southern African Collection, IFAF Collection, Museum of International Folk Art, FA.2024.12.79.
16. Mgongo Ngubane, Threads of Africa Project. Basket, 2015. Copper wire, glass beads. Msinga, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Gift of David Arment and Jim Rimelspach, David Arment Southern African Collection, IFAF Collection, Museum of International Folk Art, FA.2024.12.257.

Museum of International Folk Art

Located in Santa Fe, New Mexico, The Museum of International Folk Art (MOIFA) shapes a humane world by connecting people through creative expression and artistic traditions. Since its founding in 1953 by Florence Dibell Bartlett (1881–1953), the museum has grown to include the Hispanic Heritage Wing and Contemporary Hispanic Gallery, the Girard Wing, the Neutrogena Wing, and the Mark Naylor and Dale Gunn Gallery of Conscience. MOIFA's vast and unique collections now number more than 163,000 examples of folk and traditional arts from around the world. As one of the few museums in the United States dedicated to global folk art, MOIFA expands the understanding of folk art and encourages dialogue about traditions, cultural identity,

community, and aesthetics. The museum is a dynamic, multidimensional, and collaborative learning environment that is an integral part of community life.

17. Alfred Ntuli, Basket with lid, 2011. Telephone wire, wire. Maphumulo, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Gift of David Arment and Jim Rimelspach, David Arment Southern African Collection, IFAF Collection, Museum of International Folk Art, FA.2024.12.3.

18. Zodwa Maphumulo discussing her career, July 2023. Siyanda, eThekweni Municipality, South Africa. Image courtesy of Zamo Mkhize and Gone Fishing Productions.

19. Sipho Mhlongo weaving while working as a night guard, July 2023. Killie Campbell Collection Archives, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Image courtesy of Zamo Mkhize and Gone Fishing Productions.

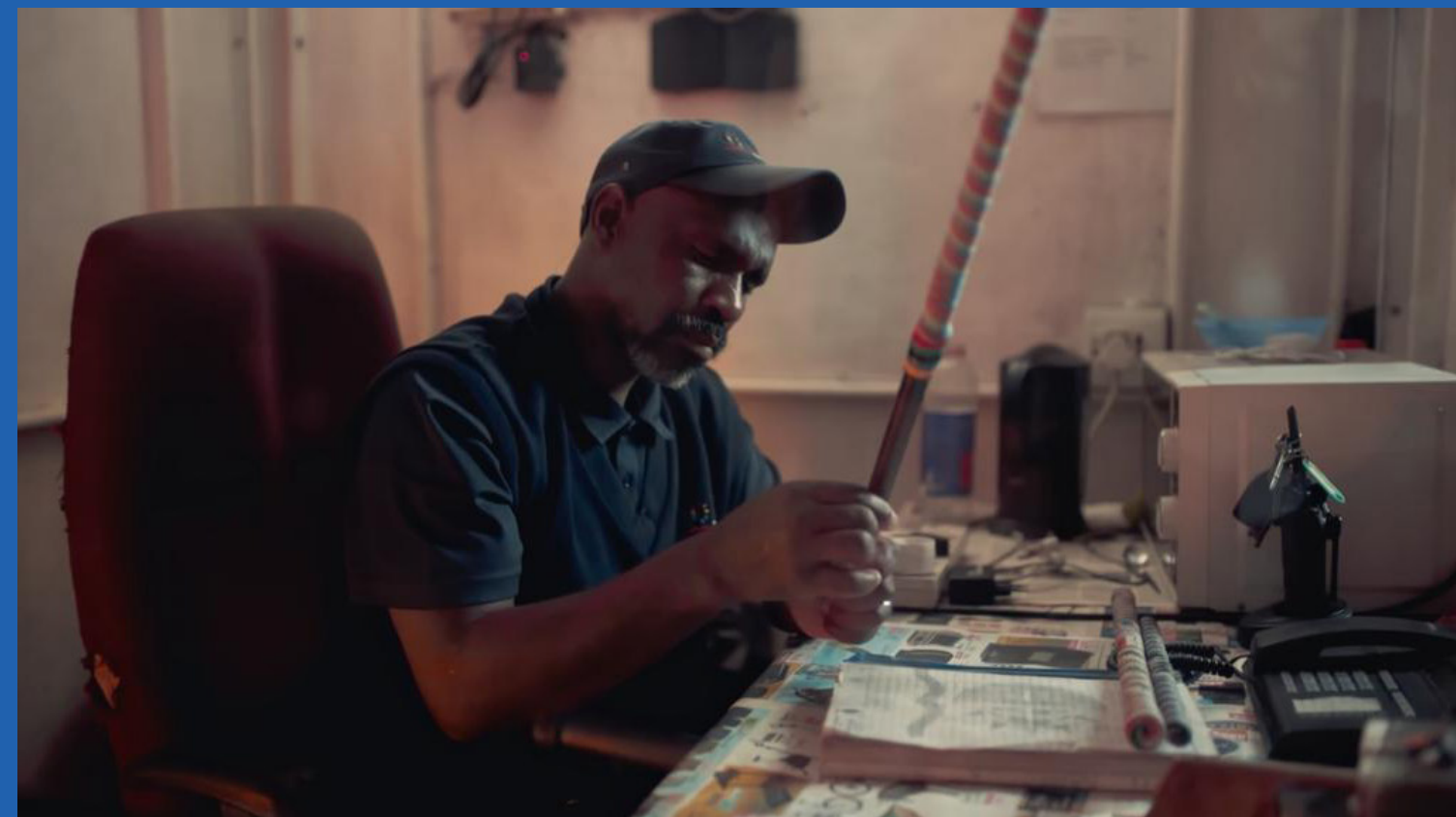


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INGQIKITHI YOKUPHICA / WEAVING MEANINGS



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TELEPHONE WIRE ART FROM SOUTH AFRICA

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FRONT Simon Mavundla, Basket (detail), 2000s. Telephone wire, wire. Siyanda, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Gift of David Arment and Jim Rimelspach, David Arment Southern African Collection, IFAF Collection, Museum of International Folk Art, FA.2024.12.65.

BACK Vincent Sithole, Basket (detail), 2005. Telephone wire, wire. Siyanda, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. David Arment and Jim Rimelspach, David Arment Southern African Collection, IFAF Collection, Museum of International Folk Art, FA.2024.12.232.

EXHIBITION SPECIFICATIONS

Number of Works

247 objects

Organized by

International Arts & Artists,
Washington, DC

In Collaboration with

Museum of International Folk Art

Curated by

Elizabeth Perrill, PhD and
Muizwandile Gigaba for MOIFA
with Carrie Hertz, PhD, Curator
of Textiles and Dress, MOIFA

Tour

2027 – 2031

Booking Period

12 weeks

Requirements

Moderate security;
3,500 square feet

Shipping

Exhibitors pay outgoing shipping
costs within the contiguous U.S.

Participation fee

Please inquire

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