

Portia Zvavahera: Zvakazarurwa**22 October 2024 – 16 February 2025****Press view: 21 October 2024,
10.45am – 1pm****Curated by Tamar Garb.****Organised by Kettle's Yard in collaboration
with Fruitmarket, Edinburgh.**

Portia Zvavahera, *Untitled*, 2024. Oil based printing ink and oil bar on linen. Photo: Jack Hems. Courtesy Stevenson and David Zwirner.

Kettle's Yard is delighted to present 'Zvakazarurwa', Portia Zvavahera's (b. 1985, Zimbabwe) first solo exhibition at a public gallery in Europe. Running from 22 October 2024 – 16 February 2025, the exhibition will comprise new and recent works, drawing from the cosmologies of Shona culture, Christian faith, personal experience and esoteric dream-worlds. The title of the exhibition is in Shona and translates to 'Revelations'.

Mediated via an engagement with paint and print, and drawn from both European and African traditions of making, Zvavahera's innovative surfaces combine lino and cardboard printing, wax resist and oil bar drawing, fluid brushwork and washes of printer's ink. The result produces a unique, multi-layered effect in which patterns, shapes and forms register worlds both real and imagined.

Zvavahera's work is always autobiographical. Her own surrogate self appears alongside figures representing family members, apparitions and hybrid animal creatures informed by her dreams, as well as the spiritual and metaphysical traditions with which she was surrounded as a child. Working from her studio in Harare, Zimbabwe, the artist tells stories that are drawn from sleeping and waking life, creating works that are not illustrative, but rather 'repositories' for visions and feelings associated with life and death, pain and

pleasure, love, loss and connection.

The act of painting, which is closely tied to Zvavahera's Christian beliefs and desire to comprehend the metaphysical through her dreams, involves working through the potential prophecies and messages they encode. The connections between conscious and unconscious states, and between painting and praying, have been key from the start of her career. 'Zvakazarurwa' will open with a selection of early works made between 2012-2016, which focus on the female body and its role in various rites of spiritual and secular passage: walking in wedding processions, kneeling in prayer and giving birth. As its title suggests, *Labour Pains* (2012) depicts a woman writhing in discomfort, her head arched back, her mouth agape and limbs askew. Similarly, *Labour Ward* (2012) shows a group of vibrantly painted bodies, tightly packed together to propose childbirth as a collective endeavour. These scenes will be shown alongside *His Presence* (2013) and *Embraced and Protected in You* (2016), one of Zvavahera's larger works which suggests two female figures in the comforting company of a veiled entity.

The exhibition will continue with a pair of large paintings from 2022-2023 that explore a recurring dream in which rats, embodying harm and danger, need

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to be contained and withstood in order to protect herself and loved ones from harm. An example from this period, *Pane rima rakakomba [There's too much darkness]* (2023), created while the artist was pregnant, will illustrate the ominous creatures from which she needed to protect her unborn child. The canvas will be shown alongside a new work from 2024 showing a menacing picture of demonic, shape-shifting beings clawing after a woman in white. 'Zvakazarurwa' will then culminate in six large new works, all of which reference this nightmare, distilling it in layers of shape and form through patterns and motifs that have been pressed in lace, scraped in wax, washed in ink and delineated over huge colour-saturated expanses of canvas.

Despite the beasts and spectres that populate these images, the exhibition will also be filled with angelic cyphers that promise both respite and triumph. For Zvavahera, the act of art making can help identify both warning signs and positive divinations, as suggested in a new painting in which five huddled siblings appear to float towards the heavens together.

'Zvakazarurwa' is organised by Kettle's Yard, University of Cambridge, in collaboration with Fruitmarket, Edinburgh, where it will travel from 1 March – 25 May 2025. It is curated by Tamar Garb, Durning Lawrence Professor in History of Art at University College London. A new publication will accompany the exhibition, featuring an essay by Tamar Garb and a conversation between the curator and Sinazo Chiya, Tandazani Dhlakama and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela.

Kettle's Yard thanks David Zwirner and the Portia Zvavahera Exhibition Supporters Circle for their support.



Portia Zvavahera, *This is Where I Travelled (4)*, 2020. Purchased with funds provided by Simon Nixon and family, 2022. Courtesy Tate Images.



Portia Zvavahera, *Labour Ward*, 2012. Oil based printing ink on paper. Courtesy Stevenson and David Zwirner.

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Portia Zvavahera, *His Presence*, 2013. Oil based printing ink on paper.



Portia Zvavahera, *Kudonhedzwa kwevanhu (Fallen People)*, 2022. Oil based printing ink and oil bar on canvas. Photo: Mario Todeschini. Courtesy Stevenson and David Zwirner.

Notes to Editors

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About Portia Zvavahera

Portia Zvavahera was born in 1985 in Harare, Zimbabwe, where she lives and works. From 2003-2005 she studied at the BAT Visual Arts Studio, National Gallery of Zimbabwe before receiving a diploma in Fine Arts from Harare Polytechnic in 2006.

Zvavahera has presented several solo exhibitions with David Zwirner, New York; STEVENSON, Cape Town and Johannesburg; and Marc Foxx Gallery, Los Angeles. The National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare, presented her solo exhibition 'Under My Skin' in 2010, and in 2020, the Institute of Contemporary Art Indian Ocean, Port Louis, Mauritius, held her solo exhibition 'Walk of Life'. She was invited to show her work as part of the Zimbabwean Pavilion exhibition 'Dudziro: Interrogating the Visions of Religious Beliefs' at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013. In 2022, her work was included in the 59th Venice Biennale. The exhibition at Kettle's Yard and Fruitmarket marks Zvavahera's first public gallery solo presentation in Europe.

About Kettle's Yard

Kettle's Yard, part of the University of Cambridge, is a leading gallery and unique house with a remarkable collection of 20th-century art. Its founders Jim and Helen Ede believed in art's ability to transform lives, a vision upheld today through critically acclaimed exhibitions, pioneering community and learning programmes, and research of the highest quality. Our aim is to offer an inspiring and enriching experience for everyone who visits. Find out more and get involved at: www.kettlesyard.cam.uk

About Fruitmarket

Fruitmarket is a free, public space for culture in the heart of Edinburgh, which provides inspiration and opportunity for artists and audiences. We programme, develop and present world-class exhibitions, commissions, publications, performances, events and engagement activities, opening up the artistic process. Creativity makes space for meaning, and we create a welcoming space for people to think with contemporary art and culture in ways that are helpful to them – for free. Further information at fruitmarket.co.uk. Follow us on [X](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) or [TikTok](#).

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