



[rehemachage.com](http://rehemachage.com)

**REHEMA CHACHAGE**

**Portfolio**



## **REHEMA CHACHAGE**

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## **BIO**

Rehema Chachage has an expanded practice which extends to her mother and grandmother through process-based research. Together, they create a 'performative archive' which untraditionally 'collects' and 'organizes' stories, practices, rituals and other oral traditions in different media; performance, photography, olfactory, video, essays and text, as well as physical installations. These have often explored the unearthing of history, space, and the body (how the body and the land remember) by using methods that employ storytelling, the matriline, alternative ways of doing and knowing, as well as other methodologies which are both embodied and instinctual.

In the past, they have focused on rituals that 'othered bodies' have employed as a means of molding, surviving, resisting, and subverting, and how resilience persists through (and despite) a history of erasure. Their collaborations have been exhibited extensively in Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Chachage holds a BA in Fine Art (2009) from the Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town, an MA in Contemporary Art Theory (2018) from Goldsmiths, University of London, and a PhD in Practice from the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna. She has been shortlisted for the Henrike Grohs Art Award (2020), the Vordemberge-Gildewart Award (2022), and the Belvedere Art Award (2024); and she is a recipient of the LIVE WORKS Performance Act Award (2019) and the H13 Lower Austria Prize for Performance (2023).



II. Keki isiyooza (A cake that never spoils)—Bibi Mkunde

Chukua kiasi kikubwa cha 'uchangamfu', changanya kwenye bakuli lililojaa 'ukarimu'. Ongeza kwenye changanya na kijiko cha 'huruma', kisha koroga vyote kwa pamoja na baadae chuja ili kuondoa taka taka. Weka kiungo kiitwacho 'upendo' kisha oka kwenye jiko lenye joto la 'sala', kisha pakua ingali moto, na iweka cha matundu ili kuwzesha mvuke kupenya na kusambaza harufu ya 'upendo'.

**Yee Kididi Kiziha**

[Take a large amount of 'charm' and mix it in a bowl full of 'Generosity.' Add both to a bowl with 'kindness' together using the 'empathy' spoon. Whisk everything well, and run the mix through a sift in order to remove the 'selfishness'. Add an ingredient called 'love' and then bake the cake on a stove heated with 'prayer'. Once out of the stove whilst still hot, and place it on a ventilated container to allow steam to penetrate and spread.]

**Yee Kididi Kiziha**

1. Yee kididi kizi-ha vashu veki-kundana, Vose veki vungana vae mkaza\_\_ Murungu  
 2. Vose vegwiri-shanya ve-kumbuka kujenjanya: Vetasa na ngoro\_mwe nesa va\_vo\_neiwe,  
 3. Na-tu-mtogole\_\_ Mfumwa e-tu-twaie hafuhi, He\_ila\_mbone-angwa\_\_ aka-vusha\_nzo\_yose.

5  
 Niho vose\_\_ ve-irana ha-kwe Yesu\_\_ tu-kundana Mpe\_hongwa\_\_ wakwe niye\_etuo\_shiže va  
 Vose ve-kaza vu-holo na mbonea\_\_ ya-kwe Yesu Iti Ye tekela mma, mi\_ra etu\_kundisha.  
 Mwenye etu-rongo-risa, nesa atu-twae he\_hila, I\_sanga he\_ivunde; na\_tutonjanye\_\_ vose.



## 2. Keki isiyooza (A cake that never spoils)—Bibi Mkunde

Chukua kiasi kikubwa cha 'uchangamfu', changanya kwenye bakuli lililojaa 'ukuzimu'. Ongesha kwenye bakuli hili 'wema', changanya na kijiko cha 'huruma', kiaha koroga vyote kwa pamoja na beadee chuja ili kuondoa taka taka zote za 'ubinafsi'. Weka kilingo kitwacho 'upendo' kiaha oka kwenye jiko lenye joto la 'sala', kiaha pakua ingali moto, na iweke kwenye chombo cha matundu ili kuwezesha mvuke kupenya na kusambaza harufu ya 'upendo'.

**Yee Kididi Kiziba**  
[Take a large amount of 'charm' and mix it in a bowl full of 'Generosity'. Add both to a bowl with 'kindness' and whisk them together using the 'empathy' spoon. Whisk everything well, and run the mix through a sift in order to remove the waste of 'selfishness'. Add an ingredient called 'love' and then bake the cake on a stove heated with 'power'. Once cooked, take it out of the stove whilst still hot, and place it on a ventilated container to allow steam to penetrate and spread the smell of 'love']

1. Yee kididi kizi-ha vanduu vekii-kundana, Vose vekii\_vungana vae\_mkasa\_\_ Murungu  
2. Vose vevyiri-shanya ve-kumbuka kujenjanya: Vetasa na ngoro\_mwe nesa va\_vo\_netwe,  
3. Na-tu-mtogle\_\_ Mfimwa e-tu-twaic hafuhi, He\_ila\_mbone-angwa\_\_ aka-vusha\_nzo\_yose.

5  
Niho vose\_\_ve-irana ha-kve Yesu\_\_tu-kundana Mpe\_hongwa\_\_wakwe niye\_\_etuo\_shize vanduu!  
Vose ve-kaza vu-holo na mbonca\_\_ya-kve Yesu Iiti Ye tekeka mima, mi\_ra etu\_kundisha.  
Mwenye etu-rongo-rita, nesa atu-twae he\_lila, I\_sanga he\_ivunde; na\_tutonjanye\_\_vose.

### Ingredients

- 1 cup of sugar
- 1 cup of butter (if you have access to it, else, use margarine/cooking oil)
- 3 eggs
- 2 cups of baking flour
- 2 tsp of baking powder
- 1 cup of milk (if you have access to it, else, use water)
- For flavor, vanilla (if you have access to it, else, use lemon zest)

### I. Keki ya Bibi (Bibi's Cake)

To make Bibi Mkunde's most famous cake recipe, you need to;

Mix 1 cup of sugar and 1 cup of butter, whisking them well using a fork or a wooden spoon until the sugar is fluffy and soft. This process requires a strong hand. It represented growth and as kids, many of us always wished to grow strong enough to one day whisk sugar and butter as finely as Bibi Mkunde could. Next, gently fold in 3 eggs, one at a time. Before adding the first egg, you have to decide which direction your hand is going to stir – clockwise or anticlockwise. Bibi always insisted that the secret to a good cake is to never change the direction to which your hand is stirring when mixing in the eggs. Needless to say, this process was extremely tiring to a young hand.

Once you have mixed all three eggs, in comes 2 cups of baking flour, also one cup at a time. With each cup, a teaspoon of baking powder is mixed in with the flour first before it is slowly sifted into the bowl. At this stage, we substitute the forks and wooden spoons we were using, for a knife to gently fold in the flour until it mixes well into a thick and consistent batter. Next, 1 cup of milk or water is added to soften the batter. And finally, for flavor, we add some lemon zest or vanilla (if you have access to it). However, vanilla is a luxury she couldn't easily afford, hence lemon zest was always a signature flavoring for Bibi's baking.





# NOTES ON BAKING

## (A recipe for coming together)

Research, Writing, Performative installations, readings, and  
listening session, fabric, text, scent, images, video, audio  
Dimensions vary  
2020 (ongoing)

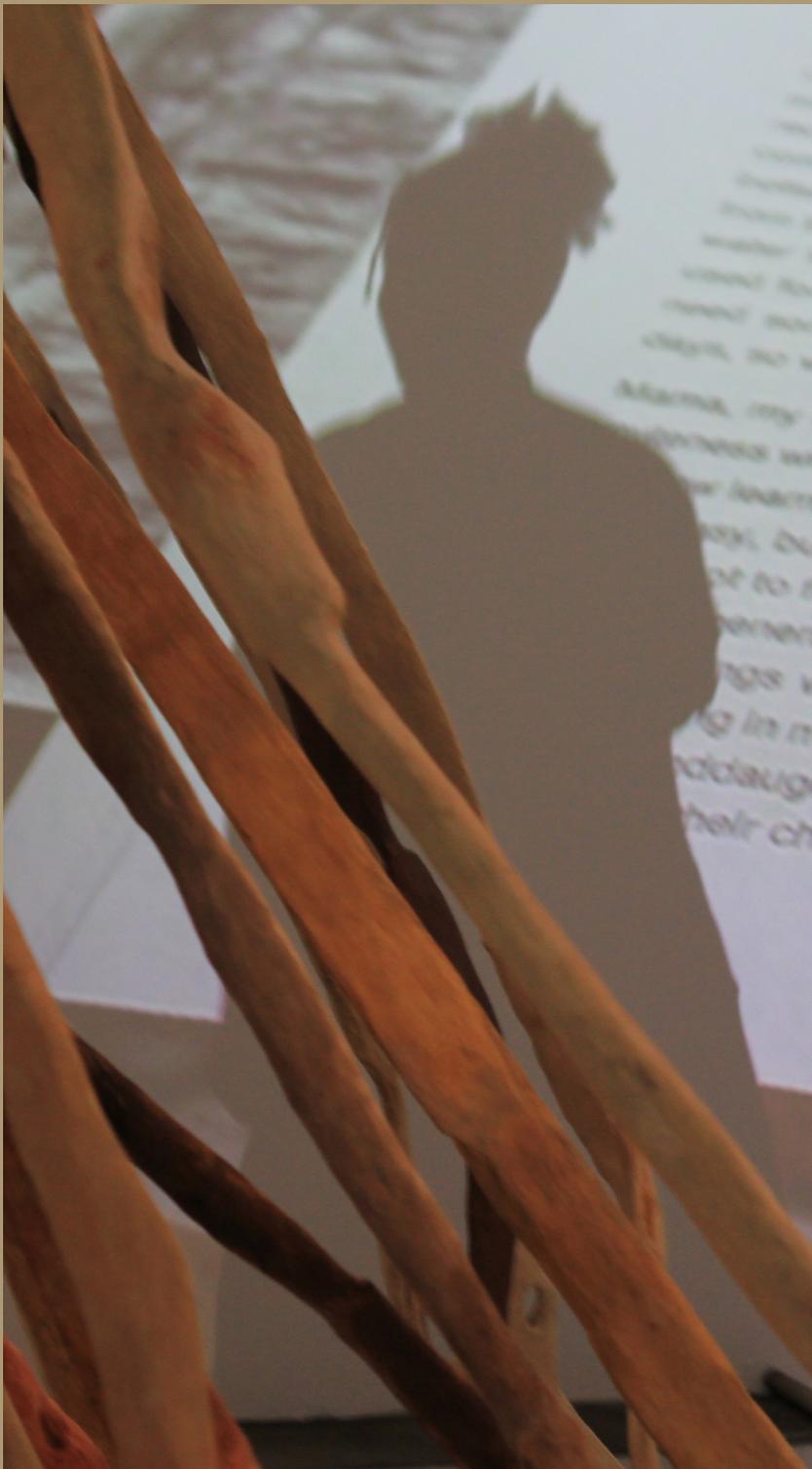
Notes on baking (A recipe for togetherness) takes from my grandmother Bibi Mkunde's baking practice, more specifically her most famous cake recipe, which forms part of her biography in the way that it ties to her history with domestic work during colonial Tanzania (then Tanganyika); but also in the way that she subverted that history by transforming her baking practice first into a means of survival, and later into an exercise of care and love, and a project of community building.

Bibi's cake is made from a mixture of ingredients according to a recipe, but it is also made by the people who gather around it, by the flame that cooks it, and by the stories it tells- be they narratives shaped by centuries of agricultural labor, family histories, migration, and

gentrification (of food); or the more symbolic ones, passing through various episodes of history while at the same time, entangling with our personal biographies.

Bibi's cake is essentially a very simple and plain cake, even generic for some. But for me (and many in my family), it represents so much in a single bite. A single bite of Bibi's cake is a single bite of history, the present, memory, a future, tradition, something special, a delicacy, something priceless, something expected, something anticipated, community, generosity, arrival, a habit, a message, togetherness, love!





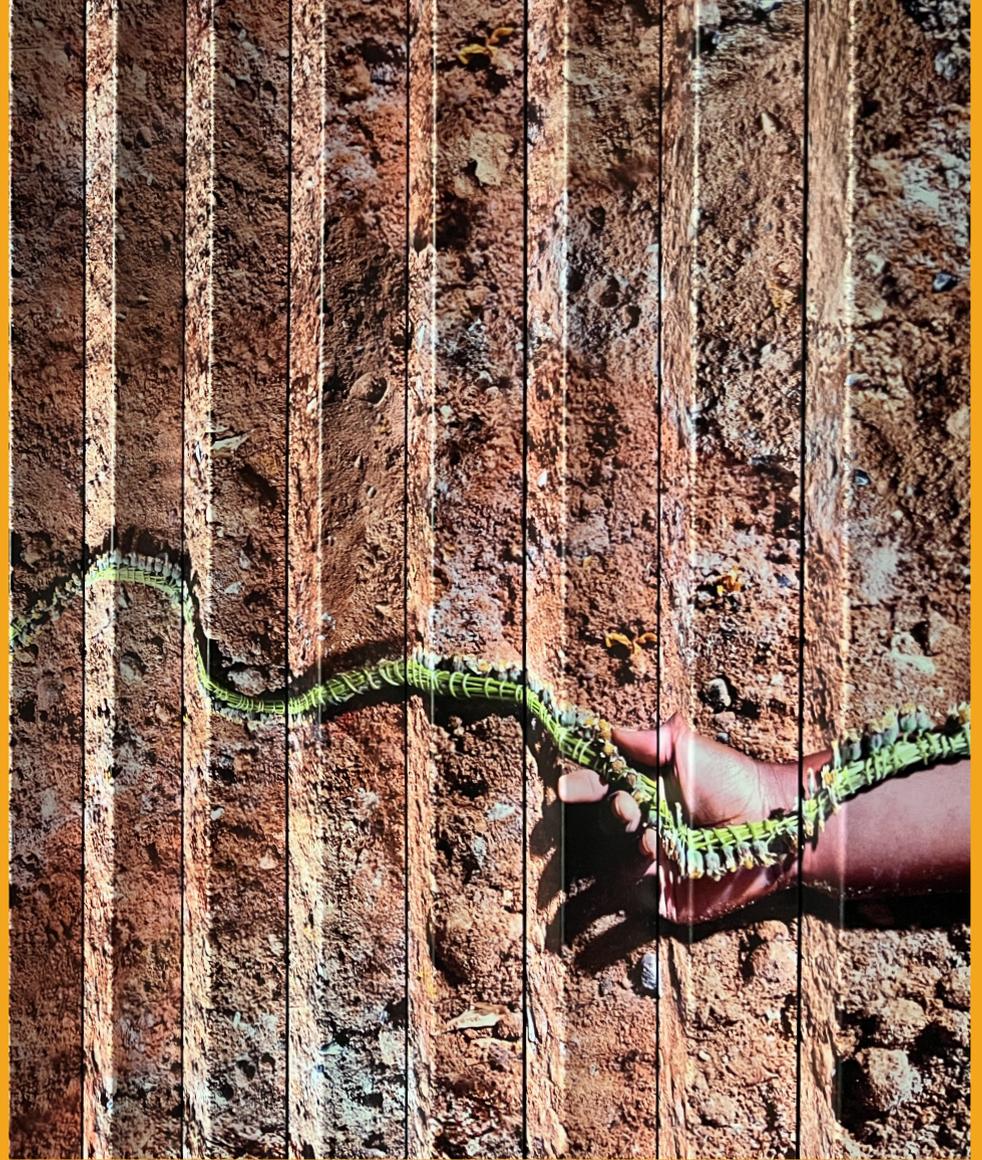
# OUT OF BONE

A Performance  
2025

Out of Bone is a five-part embodied attempt at crafting a counter-institution, one that emerges from the margins—from spaces where bodies historically rendered invisible or excluded from formal institutions such as museums, archives, and libraries have continued to live, labour, remember, and make meaning through what Tina Campt calls “everyday survival practices.”

In conversation with the work *Fifty Hair Bones and Sun Disk (To the students of the Aachener Werkkunstschule)*, 1971 by the sculptor Nancy Graves, and drawing from the materiality and textures of domestic and communal spaces—kitchens darkened by soot, fingers dragging through the ground, waterways that guide our navigation, bones that clatter when stories are silenced—this work proposes a different kind of institution: one that holds space for the untranslatable, the interrupted, the unsayable... an institution made of breath and bone, motion and mark, refusal and return.

Through mark-making, activations, call, movement, and voice, Out of Bone refuses to replicate dominant institutional forms. Instead, it seeks to remember and reanimate other ways of holding and transmitting knowledge—ways that (re)produce life and community through ancestral, cyclical, collective, and living practices.







# WHERE THE ASHES REST, A SINGLE MARIGOLD BLOOMED

An Installation featuring video, sound, image, soot, olfactory elements, weaved and wooden objects, lights.  
2025

In *Where the Ashes Rest, a Single Marigold Bloomed* (2025), I return to stories woven through matrilineal memory, captured in ephemeral gestures, and carried by materials that mark both presence and absence. This installation, an expansion of my ongoing engagement with intergenerational transmissions, considers the marigold as a site of remembrance, displacement, and survival, questioning the limits of what can be held and what inevitably seeps beyond the frame of capture.

A photograph of a marigold meets the visitor at the start of the installation, its vibrant bloom standing against a withered stem—a tension between decay and renewal. This image of the marigold, however, refuses stasis. Projected onto soot paper, the marigold begins to move, swaying in a looped video overlay, unsettling the boundary between stillness and motion, document and apparition. Here, I interrogate the colonial legacy of the lens—the still photograph as a tool of fixation, the moving image as a suggestion of liberation, and the inherent limitations of both. Movement, I contend, does not always equate to freedom; the loop, like history, can be a site of return as much as repetition.

The marigold, introduced to the Usambara region through colonial botany, has since naturalized, embedding itself within local landscapes and memory. My mother, Demere Kitunga, recalls a single marigold blooming at the burial site of her infant sibling—a spectral persistence, a refusal to be forgotten. This flower, uprooted and replanted by colonial hands, finds continuity not merely through biology but through the rituals and remembrances that claim it anew; tending to the flower... tending to history as one tends to a garden. The marigold, in its capacity to reseed itself, speaks to the persistence of memory, sprouting in unexpected places and persisting despite disruption.

Interspersed with the image of the marigold is a two-channel video installation, also projected on soot paper, in which figures sit cross-legged, weaving plucked marigolds into a chain. The mirrored projections play in alternation—when one moves, the other stills—a choreography of reciprocity, a practice passed between bodies and lifetimes. The choice of soot paper as a repeating motif is integral to this work. A material I have developed in collaboration with matriarchs in my family, it is created by suspending

paper in the kitchens of Bibi Mkunde Aroni Mcharo and other women elders, allowing layers of soot to accumulate over time. This practice is not merely about material transformation but about writing with and through them—without translation, without the burden of making their voices legible within academic or artistic frameworks. The soot, an index of fire and sustenance, carries the weight of time spent together, of shared breath, of stories that settle without the need for inscription.

Further into the exhibition, the floral accessory captured in the two-channel video reappears in a pleated photographic work, its undulating form inviting the viewer to follow its path—not across a flat surface, but through folds, creases, and disruptions. These gestures are ways of tending to relation, of inscribing memory through practice rather than text. And, scattered across the installation space are woven ukili objects, their open weave mirroring the porous nature of history—not as a closed narrative, but as one that breathes, shifting and finding new meaning through relation. The weaving itself functions as a temporal and relational act, binding generations together through the repetition of gestures that refuse finality. Embedded within them is a light that pulses in sequences of breath and heartbeat. These objects are not frozen in time; instead, they remain animated, alive through generational hands that continue to weave them into the present. They extend history beyond the rigidity of institutional archiving, refusing enclosure and instead embracing fluidity, transformation, and continued inscription through care and communal touch.

*Where the Ashes Rest, a Single Marigold Bloomed* (2025) inhabits the space between rupture and repair, between capture and the uncontainable. It enacts care, questioning how we cultivate and nurture memory, how we ensure its survival beyond what is easily seen or spoken. It is an offering to the stories that persist in the spaces we cannot fully see, in the breath between words, in the hands that continue to weave.

*A weave is never closed; each thread calls for another - folded into one pulse.*

a practice,  
a brea(d)th,  
a return





# THE OPEN WEAVE

2-Channel video installation on soot paper  
2024

The Open Weave I (2024) is a two-channel video installation that explores intergenerational memory, ritual, and the embodied act of weaving as a means of sustaining relationships across time. It references *Letters to...*, a video I made in 2016, which was paired with a two-part letter by feminist activist and writer Demere Kitunga, who is also my mother. In her letter, my mother recalls the silent intergenerational transmissions that guided her in childhood and makes a plea for speech: “Talking to you is my attempt to find my tongue...” She returns three times to the image of a single marigold growing on the burial site of her infant sibling. Though ephemeral, the marigold flower remains a vivid memory—it marks the site of an enduring family wound and becomes a metonym for speaking the unspeakable, for holding grief within the fragile yet persistent form of a bloom.

In this work, *The Open Weave I*, we encounter cross-legged figures weaving plucked flowers into a long, growing chain—an exaggerated version of the floral accessories I was taught to make as a child, worn as crowns, bracelets, or necklaces. Here, the weave extends far beyond its original form. It is both a gesture of continuity and a meditation on connection—between past and present, individual and collective, earthly and spiritual. The mirrored video frames play in tandem, creating a rhythmic interplay of stillness and motion: as one figure moves, the other follows, resume again and again in a recursive loop. This cyclical rhythm recalls the nature of ritual, where repetition becomes a mode of transmission, and learning is embodied through observation and practice. The act of weaving is thus more than a process of making—it is an embodied way of knowing, a practice of care, and a means of keeping relationships alive even across distances and ruptures.

Interspersed within this act of weaving are frames of hands tending to a barely alive marigold—cupping and gently coaxing it back to life. The image of the marigold here is striking for several reasons: its vivid orange bloom sits atop a gray, withered stem—a zombie flower embodying both death and regeneration. It carries the weight of histories that linger at the edge of disappearance. The act of nurturing it, then, becomes an assertion against forgetting—a conscious refusal against forces of erasure.

[The marigold, or tegete, was introduced to Tanzania, my home country, during German colonial rule, brought through scientific and botanical curiosity that displaced and transplanted hundreds of plant species. Today, it grows rampant in the region. Yet its survival is not reducible to ecological similarities between sites of origin and transplantation alone. As my mother’s text

exemplifies, Tanzanians have woven the flower into memory and ritual. For me, the marigold’s survival is not reducible to biology or ecological similarities between the sites of extraction and transplantation alone. It is also kept alive by the stories and rituals that recoup it from its alienation as a colonial specimen and liberate it into relation.]

The fragile marigold then, reminds us that even in the face of extraction and displacement, stories and practices can root anew, sustained by those who tend to them. *The Open Weave I* therefore invites us to reconsider how our bodies, gestures, and environments remain entangled, and how, through acts of making and remembering, we might continue to weave futures that acknowledge and honor the past.



How can we reinterpret the accumulation of soot on kitchen walls as a type of written language? What does it mean to engage in a situated process of generating and preserving knowledge through a medium that is simultaneously resistant to and accepting of confinement? How does a kitchen space transform into a form of archive, serving as a site for knowledge production, solid yet fluid and porous: a space that both holds and releases unsayable sounds, gestures, and memories... a space for navigation and a portal for bodies seeking to reconnect with, and to, the disjointed process of his/herstory making?



How can soot become a new and hybridized form of language that is not only visually different from scriptocentric/textocentric writing in appearance, but also in the way that it generates meaning in a non-linear way? (Instead of following a linear direction, the language of soot builds up/accumulates with time, it also spreads)



The paper becomes a relic of the performed experiments; but it also becomes an alternative approach to processes of writing. In turn I also have to ask myself (/work through/process the question): What does it mean to publish this paper?

The fire, as a non-human agent, gains some level of agency—where it could decide to devour the paper or produce an expected/hoped for result.

The soot, ashes, stone heaths from where the fire burnt, as well as leftover charcoal logs become both art materials and specimens for installation.





# NOTES ON THE PAPER

## (excerpts from processes of writing with bibi mkunde)

An installation featuring paper, soot, scent, ash, stones, and video  
Paper dimensions vary  
2021 (ongoing)

Notes on writing (Excerpts from processes of writing with Bibi Mkunde) is a continual, intergenerational experiment that reconsiders and reimagines writing processes (and knowledge production). By exploring soot (produced from the kitchen space, and communal fires) as a non-verbal language and system of writing, the project proposes to provide an alternative to the existing and conventional scriptocentric and textocentric forms of writing. Here, I tease out the etymological connections between the idea of mark-making and that of writing, by collaborating with my mother and grandmother in 'making our mark' via processes of 'writing' together a paper. Through a series of experiments which consider the symbolic significance of materiality and explore how to extend its functionality beyond aesthetics; the paper we 'write' remains in an ongoing state of being 'revised', constantly transforming with each encounter.





# NITAKUJENGEA KINYUMBA NA VIKUTA VYA KUPITIA

(a home for you I will create with exit pathways)

Research, Performance, Curatorial project, Community project featuring soil, straw, wood, sisal rope, text

Dimensions vary

2023 (ongoing)



What does it truly mean to feel a sense of belonging in a place? What nurtures this innate connection, this spontaneous harmony between oneself and the environment, and what are the circumstances that give rise to this feeling of being at 'home'?

In "Nitakujengea Kinyumba, na Vikuta Vya Kupitia" (A Home for You I Will Create, with Exit Pathways), these inquiries are at the forefront. Through her project, Chachage delves into the complexity and diversity of the phenomenon of rootedness by performing alongside narratives and memories inherited from her matrilineage—those of Nankondo, Bibi Mkunde, and Mama Demere. Central to the performance is the transient nature of this sensation and its inherently fragile political implications.

The performance space serves as both a stage and a mental nexus: Chachage meticulously crafts an associative environment using a curated selection of natural materials, within which memories from stories, songs, rituals, and oral traditions are etched. Through her performance, Chachage actively engages with this environment, navigating the role of her body and its interactions with others in the quest for a sense of home. Yet, the fleeting nature of performance as a medium underscore the idea that any feeling of belonging is indefinite and susceptible to disruption at any moment.

**Paukwa!  
Pakawa!**

[A make believe!  
Becomes!]

**Katokea chanjagaa,  
kajenga nyumba kaka.**

[Out of the blue a crab sprang,  
And built a house to live in]

**Mwanangu Mwanasiti,  
vijino kama chikichi!**

[Mwanasiti my baby girl,  
(your) teeth akin to a palm nut!]

**Nitakujengea kinyumba,  
na vikuta vya kupitia**

[A home for you I will create,  
with exit pathways]

**What does it mean to create with  
inherited knowledge as your  
guide?**

How can we explore earth/soil as a  
medium for remembering?

**What does it mean to move  
through a structure whose nature  
both resists and affirms  
containment?**

A structure with 'exit pathways'  
solid, yet fluid and porous... a space  
to both hold and release  
unsayable sounds, gestures, and  
memories... a space for navigation,  
a portal for bodies seeking to  
connect with, and to, the processes  
of homemaking and  
historymaking?

I conjured a thought once...

... a thought which my mind  
manifested whilst struggling to  
understand why my matrilineal  
ancestors chose the walls of  
their homes as sites for preservation for  
a child's umbilical cord.

[This Pan-African practice of burying and  
preserving the umbilical cord is meant, in  
some cultures, to connect the child with  
their land, their home and their future  
therein]

**To make sense of this, I thought to  
myself that perhaps the home is not  
necessarily 'where the heart is'... that  
the home is perhaps more of a 'gut  
feeling': that nagging feeling in the gut  
which one cannot ignore... an  
instinct... an intuition... something  
which one feels without logic or  
rationale. Something that has a  
structure but also exit pathways.**

What does form become when  
detached from the constraints of (a)  
structure? Does it dissolve into an  
infinite flow of boundless potential,  
evading the fixed boundaries of  
normative frameworks?

**Can a home exist without a sense of  
community or shared affinities?**

How does one label a structure that  
defies form... that rebels against the  
rigid molds of convention?

**How does an unmoored, untethered  
community exist without the  
grounding of a physical home?  
Does it reimagine its identity,  
seeking alternative spaces from  
where the spirit of community can  
flourish beyond conventional  
boundaries?**

**Ardhi iliona nini?  
Chungu kiliona nini?  
Meko iliona nini?  
Kiuta ziliona nini?**

...

**Na, watu waliona nini?**

**When we were young,  
we were architects of homes,  
we crafted havens from where our  
dreams took flight.**

When we were young,  
our minds conjured worlds,  
with soil in our hands,  
we breathed life into them.

(our hands brought them to life)

**When were young we were creators,  
we wove tapestries from the threads  
of limitless imagination,  
we infused life into the fabric that  
defined our childhood.**

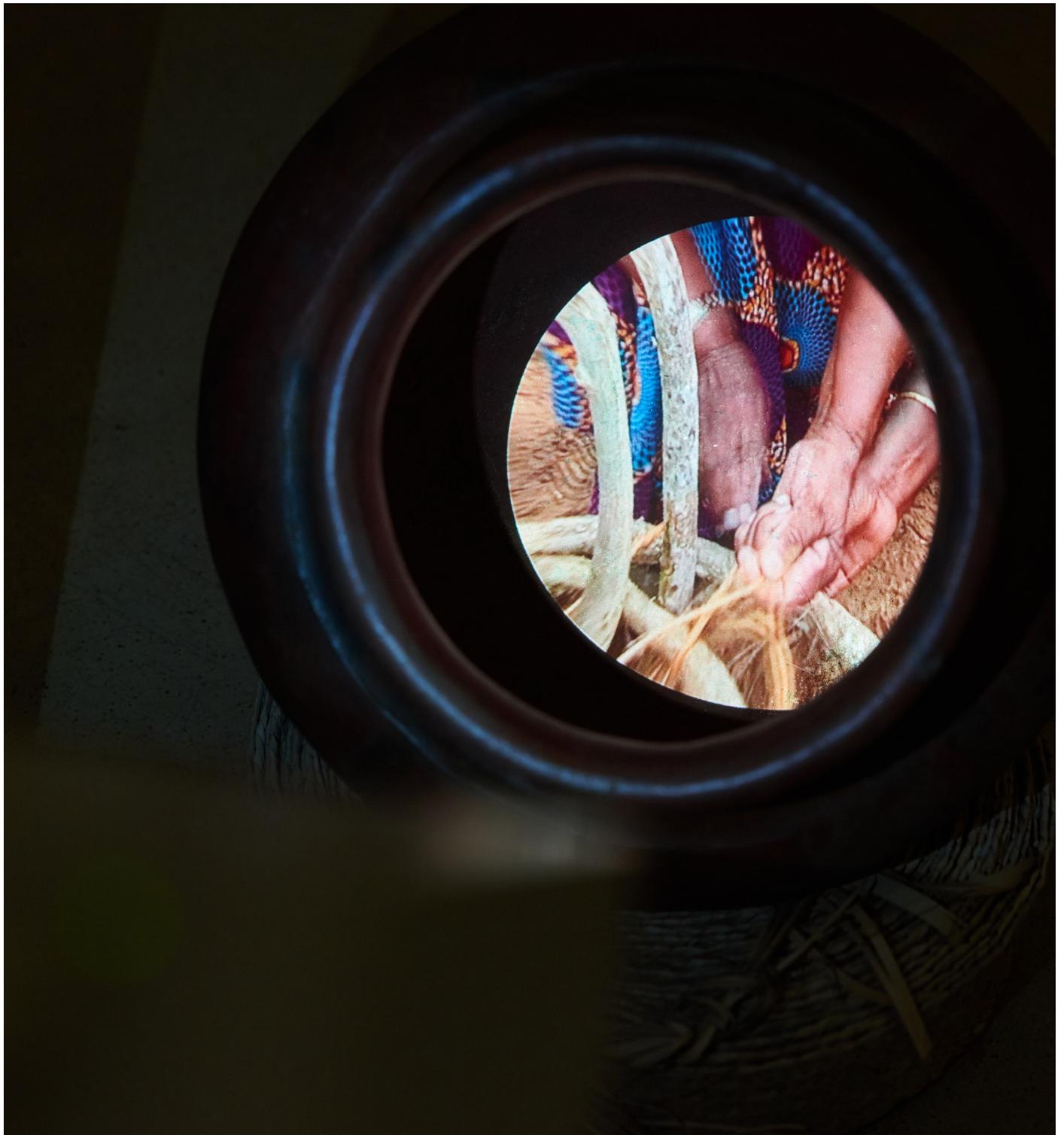
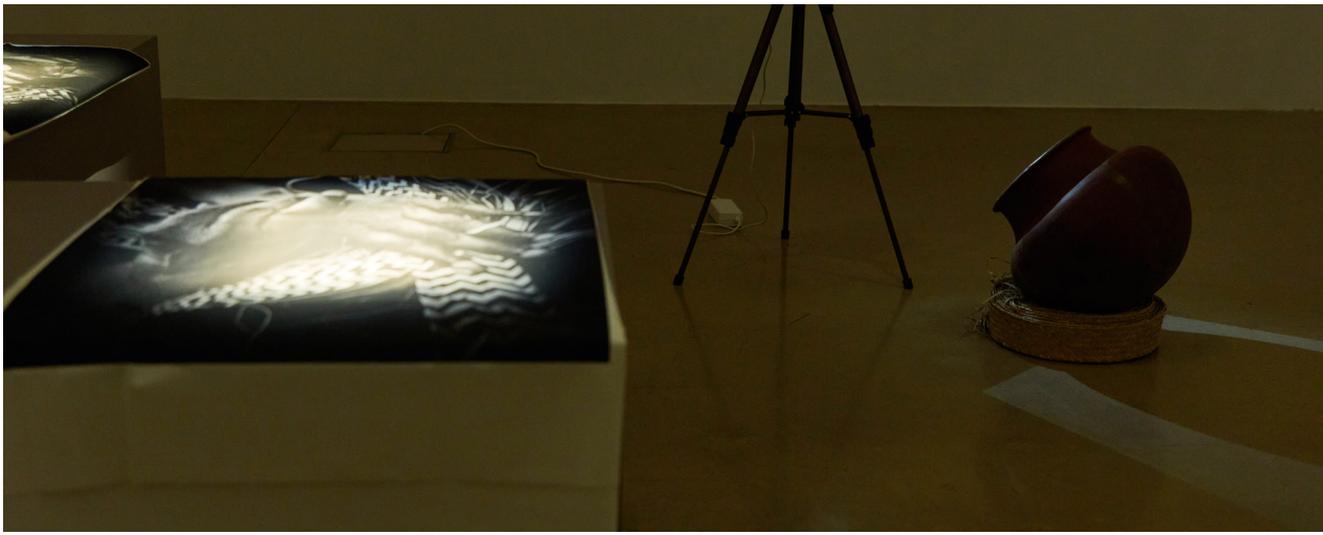
**Building here, becomes both a  
metaphor and a measure. It is not  
limited to material form; what is  
created is intangible but also social.  
Earth is connected to the earth, and  
people to people...A structure is  
constructed, but eventually, it must  
be reconstructed.**

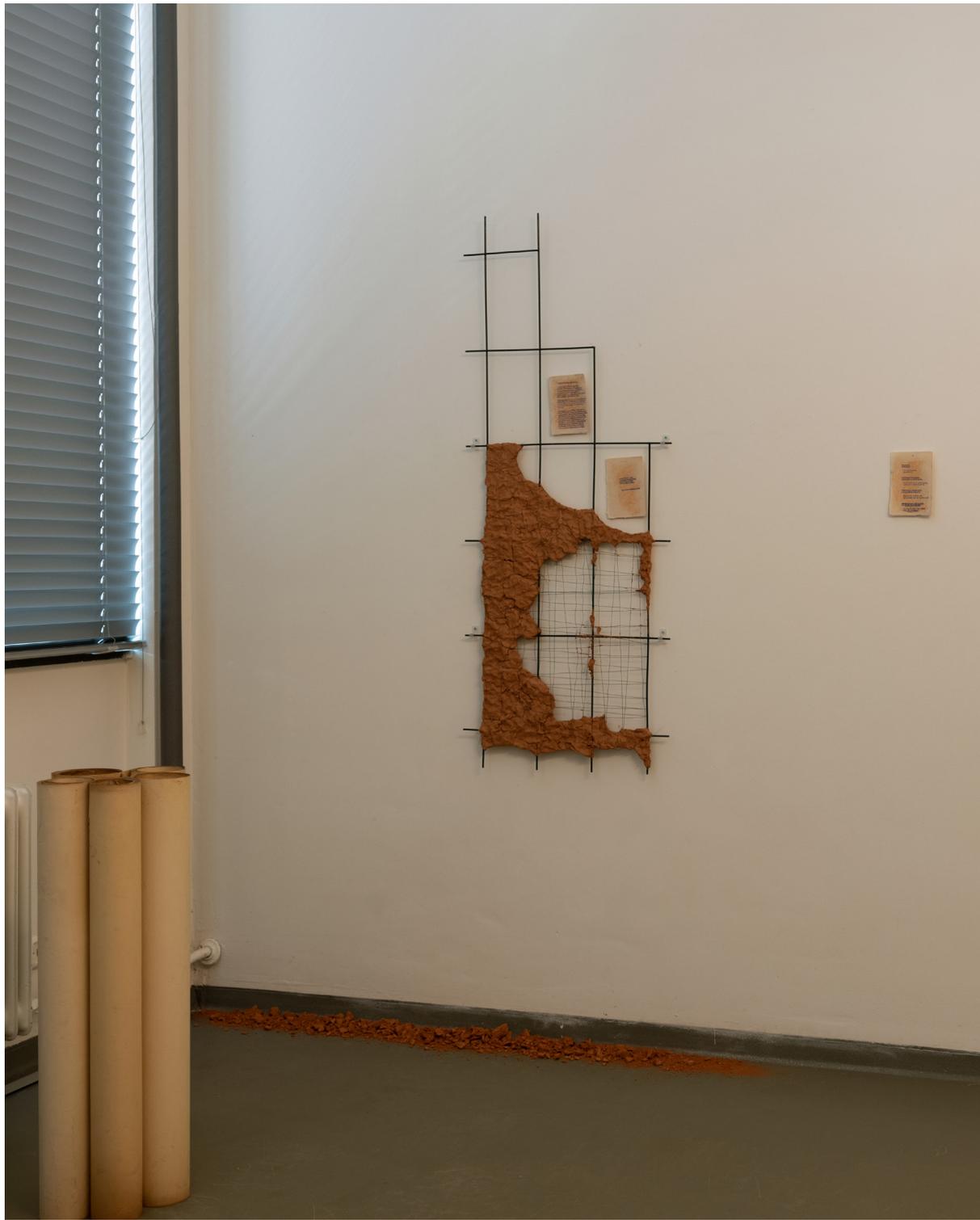
[Structures made from soil lack  
longevity, especially when a  
community is absent to look after  
and maintain them.]

**This is therefore an opportunity for  
continuous connection, in a  
commitment to ongoing creation  
(and care) without an endpoint. It is  
a foundation, a base, and a premise.**









# HOW VILLAGES FORM (experiments)

An installation featuring paper, soot, ash, sisal rope, video, sound, scent, clay, metal, text.  
2023

In Bibi Mkunde's narration, Asu villages emerge as embodiments of interconnectedness, tradition, and communal wisdom. Bibi's storytelling transcends time, transporting us, her listeners, to a historical era when the practice of clanships served as the very foundation for village formation. In this historical context, clans evolved beyond familial units, metamorphosing into fundamental components that shaped entire communities.

At the center of each clan resided a central figure—an esteemed patriarch, a figure whose position we must always seek to problematize, and one whose dwelling served as the genesis of a thriving community, with descendants constructing their homes around it. These homes collectively formed a perimeter from which wisdom flowed, forging an intricate web that connected the past to the present. Every constructed house, shared story, and upheld tradition contributed to this collectivity.

Through the art of storytelling, Bibi Mkunde's voice instills a profound reverence to the interplay between knowledge centers and communal spaces—a domain from which legacies of intergenerational wisdom were passed down. These knowledge centers extended beyond physical confines, reaching into the broader ecosystem. They embraced

rites of passage, spiritual rituals, and apprenticeships in healing and divination, transcending not only spatial but also metaphysical boundaries.

Beyond oral traditions and practices, the preservation of cultural heritage took tangible forms in this context. The burial of umbilical cords within homesteads, for example, symbolized an unbreakable bond between individuals and their birth land, fostering a continuum that traversed time. The very soil beneath the foundations that carry their homes echoes the tales of bygone generations—ancestral wisdom, enduring traditions, and echoes of past struggles ingrained in the earth. The soil bears witness to their journey—a testament to their resilience against the currents of history. Now, it cradles the bodies of those who have transitioned to the spiritual realm, serving as a medium between the living and the dead—an archive and a witness.

Bibi underscores that these practices of building and maintaining homes and communities were not merely survival mechanisms; rather, they represented potent acts of defiance against the forces of erasure.





Two down  
One up  
Two down

Two strands of Ukindu remain on the left

Two down  
One up

Two down

Three strands Ukindu remain on the right

Left to right  
Right to left



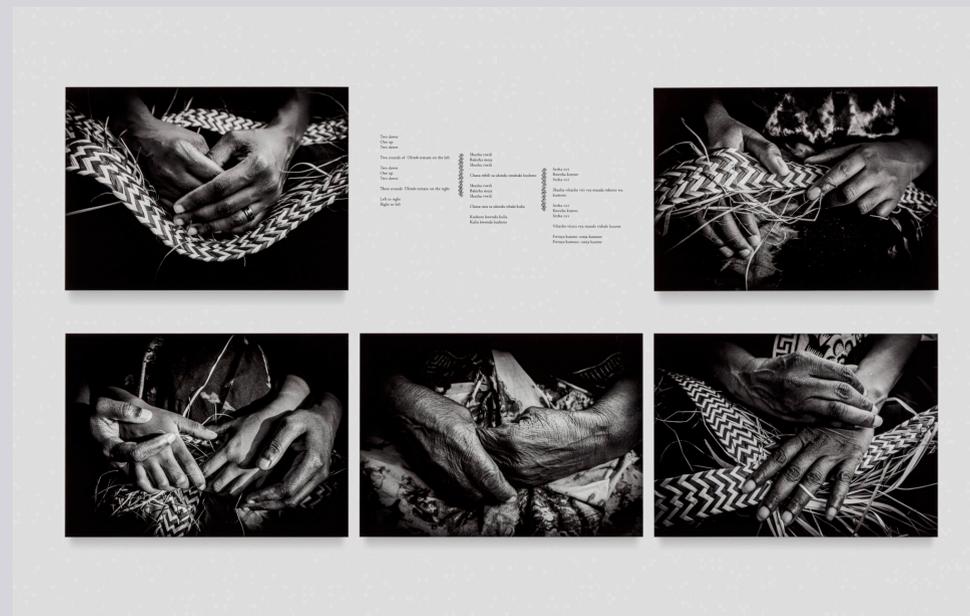
# ONE UP, TWO DOWN

Photography, text  
50 x 70 cm Black Sintra-Mounting  
2021

Shode births...  
Koko Orupa, who births...  
Bibi Mkunde, who births...  
Mama Demere, who births...  
Me

Two down  
One up  
Two down

Shode becomes my daughter...  
Orupa becomes my niece...  
And, Mkunde becomes my sister.



Two down  
One up  
Two down

A pattern emerges, meticulously weaved on a long Ukili

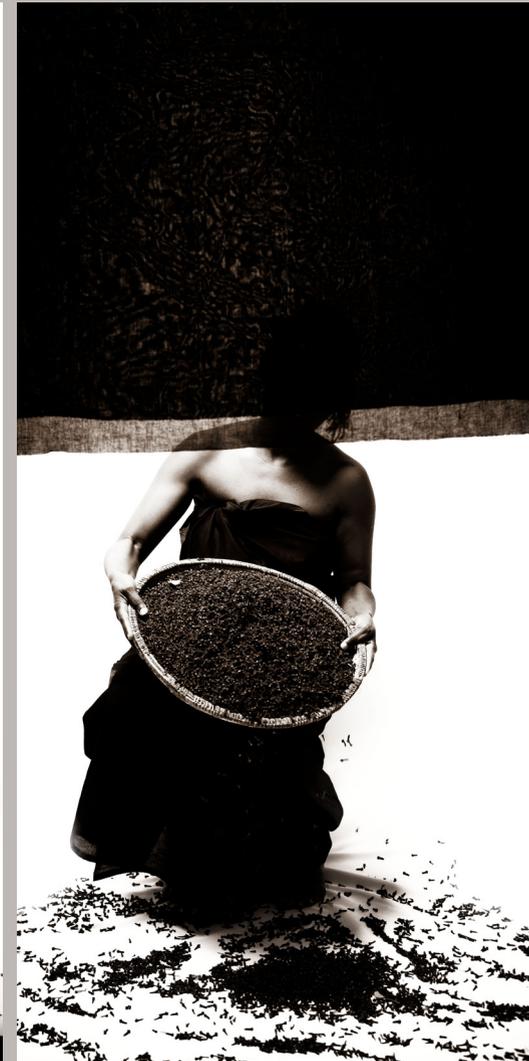
Two down  
One up  
Two down

A thread of history is weaved and carried across generations

An Ode to Mkunde

*A beam of light in my darkest hour  
You arrived at the most unexpected time  
A gift from an untamed force  
Bearing my mother's name  
You bear in part, her nature  
Beloved!*

© Demere Kitunga, 2019





# BELOVED (an ode to mkunde)

A series of 5 photographic prints and a text (text by Demere Kitunga)  
850 X 410 mm (DIBOND)  
2020

In an oft-quoted phrase, Fredric Jameson (1981) wrote that; "History is what hurts". This is a poignant statement which remind us of how much history is an act of necessity; one which is felt, and sometimes, can be felt by individuals decades or even centuries later. History is a kinship, a virtual experience, a form of necromancy, a form of 'negromancy' (Powell, 2016); it is what we believe to be politically, aesthetically, and conceptually legitimate.

Beloved (An Ode to Mkunde) is a depiction of life in the hurts of a history. Romanticized as a love letter to the artist's sister and by extension, to their matrilineal ancestor; the work is an intimate introspective of how the past, present, and the

future are inevitable interlinked and ingrained within us. Featuring five photographs, the work captures Chachage's sister in repertoire, reenacting their matrilineal ancestor's acts of "everyday survival practice" (Campt, 2017) as imagined by the artist.

Accompanying the photos, is a short Ode for Mkunde; a text/love letter composed for Mkunde Chachage, the artist's sister, by Demere Kitunga, the artist's mother.



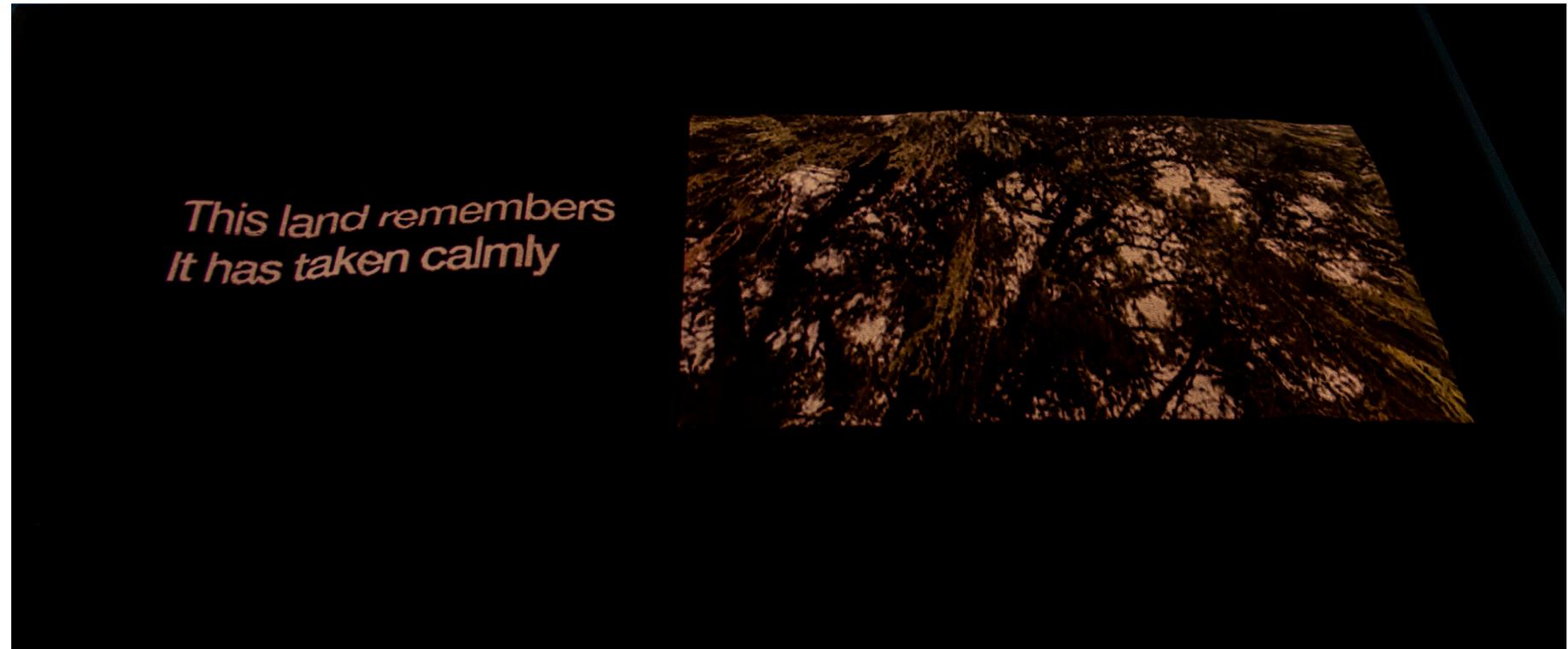
# THE LAND REMEMBERS

An Installation featuring soil, stones, video, text (text by Demere Kitunga), and sound

Video Link: <https://vimeo.com/387162523>

Password: vimeoportfolio

2019



This installation creates a 'fictional land', whose remnants are left to be experienced through sounds, texture, smell, and image. Suspending its audience between the present and past; the installation leaves clues which allude to stories of those who were and those who are. The materials used form part of a greater (hi)story. The soil ground us-holding within it, memories of generations past; while at the same time, pulling us back into a reality of numerous losses, which

are now reduced to 'nameless' figures in a history. Through the work, we experience 'the land' in a time capsule; as a space that was not defined in totality by the troubled histories that it has been witness to; but rather as a space that was and still is a home to many. It is the spirit in the soil, the breath in the wind and the community that will inherit it long after our memory of it disappears completely.





# SCENTS OF IDENTITY

A performance featuring cloves, scents, video, sound, a clay, wooden and a woven prop

You can view the performance excerpt here: <https://vimeo.com/385209563>

Password: vimeoportolio

2019



Our five senses allow us to relive history. They allow us to immerse ourselves into vivid memories of a past we experienced, heard of, read about and/or imagined. Whether triggered by sight, sound, touch, taste or smell, it is our imagination which carry us through time. Scents of identity is a culmination of this sensory 'time-travelling' which is as well an act of unearthing the self. Through this piece, Chachage intimately guides us along the ritualistic performance; using cultural objects to open a historical spiritual gateway to what did or might have happened in the distant past, but intimately connected to her present reality and sense of self. Separated into three parts, the performance takes on a dual personality. The objects act as symbols. Starting at the creation of scent, Chachage introduces us to a broken clay burner ( chetezo ) which could not withstand its displacement away from Tanzania, carrying inside it incense ( udi ). Laying atop is a traditional stand ( shawati ). The history she brings to life is that of her great grandmother, Nankondo and subliminally her own - the scents conversing with the present, at the same time, transporting us to the immemorial past of coastal Tanzania . Chachage examines Nankondo's passage, from a free born into slavery, the digression in hierarchy from person to tool - the fabric she puts back together ( kanga ) can never be the same, bathing in scent, it too remembers once being separated. The ungo , filled with cloves, comes to life - it creates rhythm, a breath of sorts. As she lifts the ungo up and down, some

cloves are displaced. The randomness of what falls and what stays depicts the randomness of dispersion, the lack of care to place a face to a name on all the bodies that were taken away from their homes; bodies becoming currency. The kanga, acting as a historical marker that once distinguished those born free with those in the fields, is then moved, carrying with it the scent of the udi , the sense of home. Subtly our attention is drawn to the text, now disjointed, at the bottom of the Kanga, "Mimi kama Kanga, nafa na uzuri wangu" (I, like the kanga, die in all my beauty). Projected on the kanga are images of women who could have been Nankondo, who could have been Chachage. These women were once souvenirs subjected to the violence of the camera, their captured images turned into postcards without their knowing, without their consent. In its entirety the performance is an exploration of epigenetic inheritance - a way to unroot oneself from the comfort of singularity and self-replant in an ever-evolving intergenerational dialogue. It is a seamless continuation of Chachage's ongoing work that uncovers the intricate and uncomfortable truth in claiming an identity. Although we may have the face of one, we are in fact many people. We are vessels full of narratives known and unknown. With histories (or herstories) stitched within our present memories of being, it seems as if we are constantly healing, constantly searching for healing, from our scars, fresh ones and those inflicted on us through memories of those who came before us.







#### A whisper for Nankondo

Nankondo my great grandmother, I never met you, nor did your grandchildren. But this I know, if your spirit was released from your physical bondage as I believe it did, you must have joined the army of my ancestral spiritual guardians. Thus, I can rightfully commune with you as I do now. I am sure your spirit made its way home, for if spirits earn their release after departing from the bodies they are twinned with in life, where else would yours rather be than among your people; where you are still remembered by offspring of the only daughter you left behind, my grandmother Demere.

I don't have to tell you Demere is my namesake, I being the first daughter of her last born son. Unlike your daughter, I grew up wrapped in the care and guidance of my mother. In contrast, growing up without your motherly guidance your daughter's spirit withered, constantly hungry for news, any news that could help her make sense of what took you from her at such a tender age. She was ready to believe anything people told her, good or bad. In the process, she fed into fables created with evil intent. Don't take it the wrong way, she was only five when you were taken, poor thing. What they said to her then stuck to her, became her shame, gnawed at her heart and generated a loath for herself and the very memory of you. How cruel! This adage that every cloud has a silver lining makes sense however, because the little I now know of you comes from a seed of doubt she planted in my mind, leading me in a quest to get to the bottom of whatever it was that made her think of herself and you the way she did. I figured out that there must be a real story masked beneath the story they gave her as the reason for your abduction. I writing to you now about it so that in your spirit form you may cleanse us from its shame; release us from its guilt; and if you can find it in your heart to forgive us, then heal us from its pain; not the physical one, but its emotional and psychological pain that is leading us to self-loath and spiritual abyss. But I am writing to you not only about that.

I am also writing to you about the brutality of whatever social system it was that snatched people from their families at gun point, severing the bond between mothers and their children, forcing spirits to take flight from their shrines, and uprooting people from their ancestral lands.

I am writing to you not only about that, but also about the cruelty with which it created an episteme and generated a corpus of knowledge and a spiritual realm that made it to look, feel and sound natural for a certain kind of people; my kind of people to languish in servitude for centuries to enrich another kind of people; for a promise of salvation in the thereafter. A system that has continued to pervert the collective psyche of the modern world like an insignia of a heretic world order built on a hierarchy of hues, belief systems and deity; with structures and relations changing only in name and tactics, so entrenched they refuse to relent no matter how much blood is spilt. I am not only writing to you about all that.

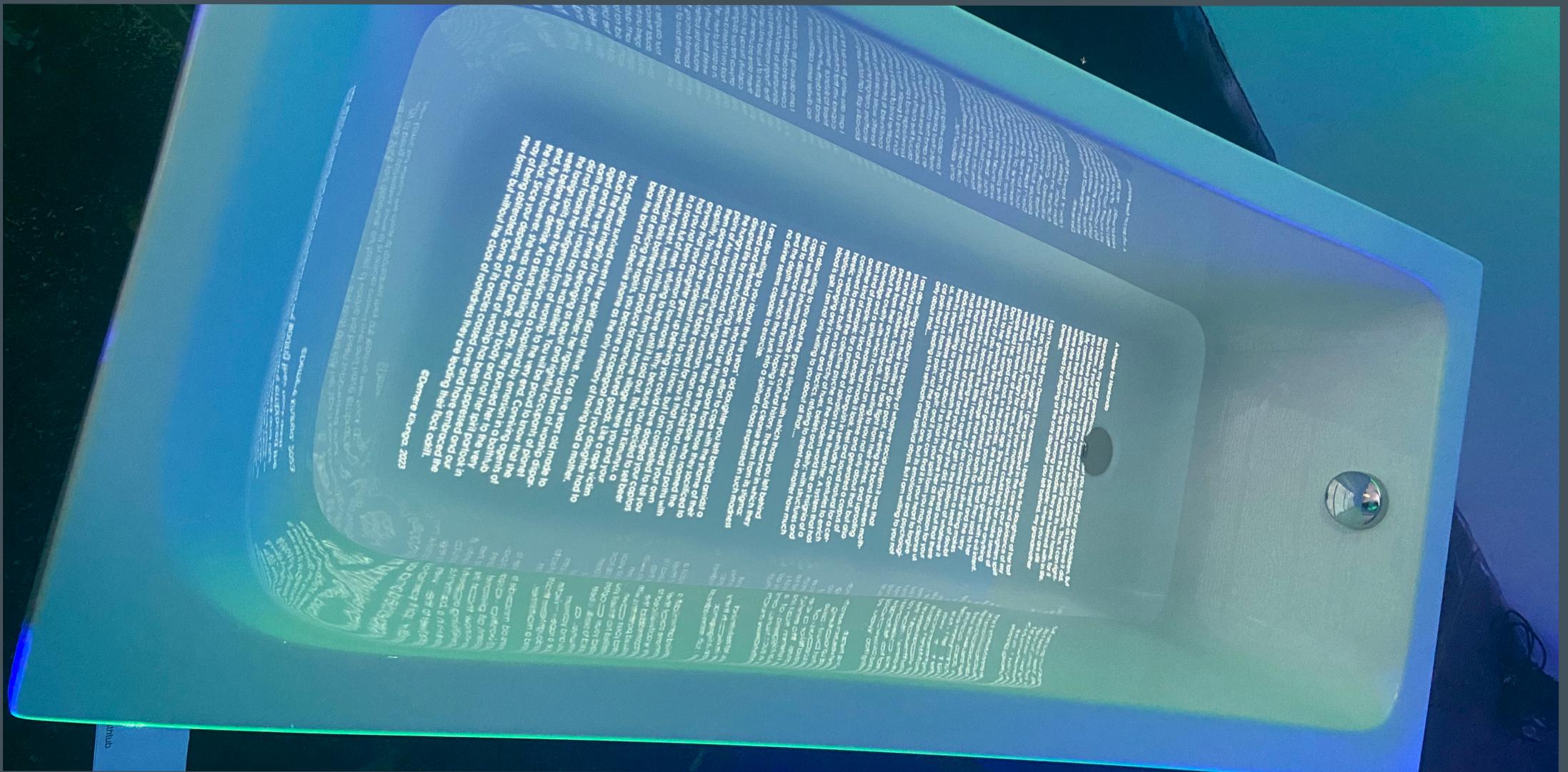
I am also writing to you about the grave silence with which those you left behind used as a way to cope with that inhuman episode in their cultural history. The manner in which they tried to distance themselves from it, hoping that distance would cleanse them from its stigma; and how deep they sunk into a spiritual chaos expressed in such madness no diviner seems capable to exorcize.

I am also writing to you because of what happened to the five years' old daughter you left behind amidst a cowed and defeated people; who made an effort to cope with the shame of their disrupted life by manufacturing myths that set them apart from those they sacrificed to the hungry monsters named Valungwana. These are the people who roamed the plains of Asu land and captured any woman, man and child that crossed paths with them alone and unarmed. As you may recall, your people resisted external affront by living on ragged mountain slopes, armed with poisonous arrows; venturing to the plains only to hunt and trade. The fable created for you is that you caused your own captivity. This may be unpleasant news to you I know, but I am compelled to tell you anyway that your daughter grew up believing you could have dodged your captors had you not been a woman of low morals. Why, because you refused to return home before your sugarcane beer is sold out; the beer brewed to raise money for beads for your only daughters first rite. You ventured to sell to the opulent Valungwana tradesmen who turned out to be your captors. This was in Kimunyu, a weekly market, twenty miles away from your home village where you and your mountain folks battered farm produce for manufactured goods. Like a rape victim blamed of enticing the rapists, you became a scapegoat and your daughter had to bear the brunt of collective shame as the only memory of having had a mother.

I want to tell you that, your daughter survived even if her spirit did not thrive. For a five years old made to doubt the moral integrity of her own mother; her peoples' ngasu and form of worship disparaged and the very sense of belonging as equal and rightful occupants of planet earth questioned, I would say she was resilient. You will be proud to know that she did not forsake her indigenous form of worship to the very end; even if conniving agents of the foreign spirits gave her an ablution and a baptismal by emersion in a bathtub one week before her demise. As a skunk stalking its pray, they pursued her to the very end. By then however, she was too far gone, only body and not her spirit partook in the ritual.

Since your departure, our form of worship has been suppressed and our way of being obliterated. Some of its oracles crossed over and have embraced the new forms; but without the cloak of rootedness they are leading their flock adrift.

© Demere Kitunga 2018



# PART III: NANKONDO

An Installation featuring a bathtub, water, a text projection (text by Demere Kitunga) 2018

Where we were is here  
This must be the place.

There will always be something missing.

Where we once stood            [Here is where we once stood]  
Where we stand now            [Here is where we stand now]

What the soil gave us  
Foundations are built on memory.

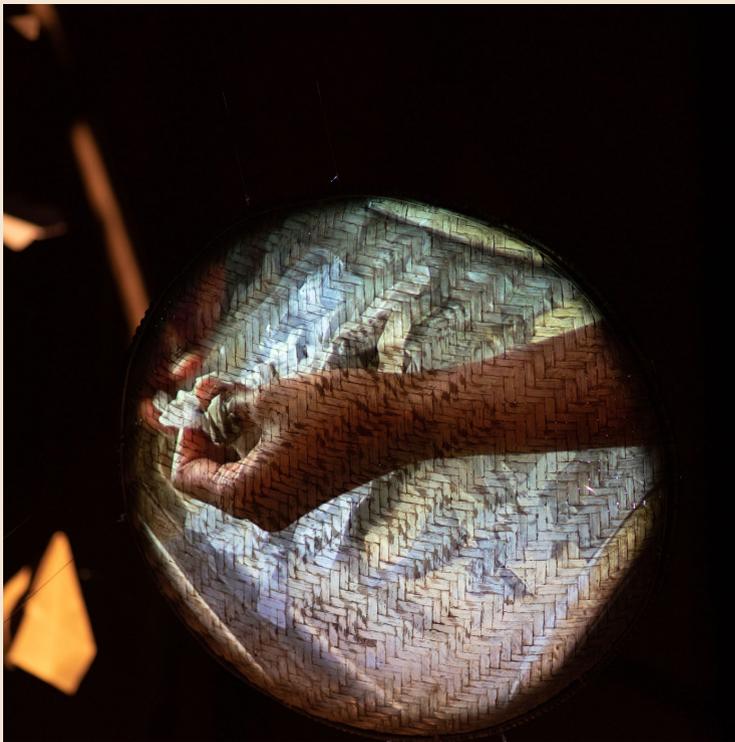




# WHAT THE SOIL GAVE US

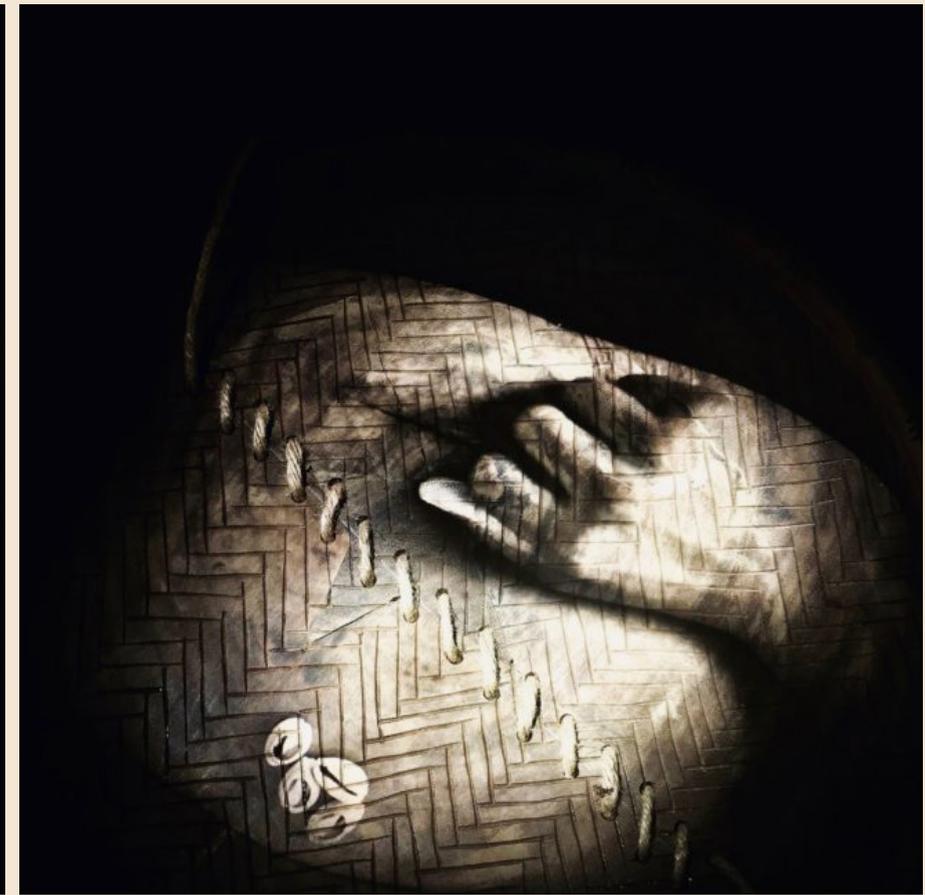
A series of 5 Photographs and a text  
60 x 50cm (DIBOND)  
2023





Watoto wangu eeh..  
Mimi mama yenu,  
Sina nguvu tena,  
Za kuua simba,  
Simba ni mkali,  
Aliua baba,  
Akaua mama,  
Akaua kaka,  
Akaua dada,  
Sasa kimbieni...  
[To my children...  
This is your mother,

I no longer have the strength,  
To fight/kill the lion,  
The lion is stong(er),  
It killed (my) father,  
Then it killed (my) mother,  
Then it killed (my) brother  
Then it killed (my) sister,  
Now run...]



You have been avoiding these questions, I asked you where you took the family tree...

...I still see dead branches in your backyard, and hear names mumbled; of lost tongues from lost wars, and lost recipes from lost widows  
Who sing songs with lost lyrics, while dancing to forgotten rhythms  
Empty graves left unwritten eulogies, casting shadows over restless shrines...

Why are you avoiding me?  
Why are you avoiding these questions?

Why... are you avoiding... these questions?

# UNGO (spaceship)

An installation featuring two wooden sculptures, cloves, video, sound, text (text by Demere Kitunga) and sisal rope

Video Link: <https://vimeo.com/539789769> Password: vimeoportfolio

2020

**REHEMA CHACHAGE**

**Portfolio 2025**

[rehemachachage.com](http://rehemachachage.com)