

Kudzanai-Violet Hwami: *When You Need Letters for Your Skin*

Exhibition 3 September–6 November 2021

Victoria Miro, 16 Wharf Road, London N1 7RW



Kudzanai-Violet Hwami, *Expiation*, 2021
Oil, acrylic, oil stick and silkscreen on canvas
127.5 x 119.5 cm
50 1/4 x 47 1/8 in
© Kudzanai-Violet Hwami
Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro

Victoria Miro is delighted to present *When You Need Letters for Your Skin*, the gallery's first solo exhibition of new paintings by Kudzanai-Violet Hwami.

Based in the UK, Kudzanai-Violet Hwami was born in Gutu, Zimbabwe and lived in South Africa from the ages of nine to seventeen. Her paintings combine visual fragments from a myriad of sources, such as online and archival images, and personal photographs, which collapse past and present.

Powerful nudes are a point of departure and in this exhibition of new works, Hwami's first with the gallery, the artist considers existence in a time and space – as much digital as physical – where people are investigating their sexual, spiritual and political identity.

Collage, in which the artist uses sources including family photographs, online archival images and vintage pornographic photographs, is a starting point. Hwami digitally edits and layers her chosen elements with further motifs to build compositions that, freeing the figure from the often-prescribed meanings and assumptions of their original context, create new narratives. For Hwami, the freedom and playfulness that collage allows, where the artist can speculate about and distil different ideas and thoughts in a single still image, is analogous to a contemporary layering of one's interests and activities, which are organised in an almost collage-like format to create an identity, especially through social media platforms. Here, Hwami boldly raises questions about human experience in relation

to spirituality, observing how a spiritual experience might manifest itself in the body and suggesting ways in which, almost diaristically, it might begin to make itself known by leaving marks, letters, and notes on the physical form.

The manner in which the internet shapes the ways we encounter information and each other is referenced directly in a number of works which, redolent of the Zoom interface, introduce multiple screens and juxtapose various personalities and implied voices within a single image. This pictorial framework, often centred around a nude, sets into motion the idea of conversations unfolding around the naked body today, how it is presented, observed, perceived, received or judged, and also, perhaps, how we edit and self-censor as we negotiate new dialogues around concepts of liberty, repression and self-expression.

In these large-scale works, disruptions and distortions to the physical form, sometimes resembling digital glitches or areas of pixelation, signal shifts in consciousness – and perhaps the forging of identities in digital space – while allusions to classical or religious subjects from art history, and motifs such as plants figure as further symbolic gateways. Foregrounded throughout is the power of paint and the medium's ability to capture the power and physicality of flesh as well as the acceleration and fragmentation, nuance and complexity of contemporary experience.

About the artist

Born in Gutu, Zimbabwe in 1993, **Kudzanai-Violet Hwami** currently lives and works in the UK. In 2019, Hwami presented work at the 58th Venice Biennale as part of the Zimbabwe Pavilion, the youngest artist to participate in the Biennale. Also in 2019, Hwami mounted her first institutional solo exhibition, *(15,952km) via Trans – Sahara Hwy N1* at Gasworks, London. Recent group exhibitions include *The Power of My Hands*, Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris (2021); *Les Ateliers de Rennes – Biennale d'Art Contemporain*, Rennes, France (2018); *Five Bhobh – Painting at the End of an Era*, Zeitz MOCAA, Cape Town, South Africa (2018); *Discoloured Margins*, National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe (2017); and *I See You*, Victoria Miro, London, UK (2020). Her work is in collections including Perez Art Museum, Miami, USA, Kadist Foundation, Paris, France, Norval Foundation, Cape Town, South Africa, Zeitz MOCAA, Cape Town, South Africa.

Work by the artist features in *Mixing It Up: Painting Today*, the Hayward Gallery's major contemporary painting survey this autumn (9 September–12 December 2021). Hwami will also have work featured in *Ubuntu: A Lucid Dream* at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris (26 November 2021–20 February 2022).

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