

Lungiswa Gqunta

Sleep in Witness, 2023



Installation view Sleep in Witness, AKINCI, 2023

Lungiswa Gqunta | *Sleep in Witness*

Exhibition tour with photos by Peter Tijhuis

We are proud to present our first solo show *Sleep in Witness* by Lungiswa Gqunta (b. 1990) at AKINCI. Gqunta is a sculptor living in Cape Town, South Africa, who works across assemblages, installation, performance and printmaking. The exhibition traces the intangible world of dreams as a space of learning where extraordinary, overlooked and discredited places of knowledge are illuminated. This is reflected in the installations belonging to *Zinodaka*, 2022 and to *Ntabamanzi*, 2022, the mesmerizing video work *Rolling Mountains Dream*, 2021, as well as the textile works *Instigation in waiting I & II*, 2023. A large part of the installation *Ntabamanzi* can be seen this summer in the exhibition *New Horizons* at the Centraal Museum, Utrecht.

‘I like to create environments’ Lungiswa Gqunta states in an interview that was conducted for the occasion of her eponymous solo show *Sleep in Witness* at the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds last year. When visiting one of her shows, it becomes clear what she means. Gqunta transforms a room so that beauty and violence exist simultaneously and history meets the present.

The artist examines the enclosures imposed upon African knowledge systems and sees this deprivation as a symptom of colonial history and conquest. In spite of this, dream worlds, ancestral faith and other belief systems became places where there is room to preserve, guard and create new languages and wisdom. In *Sleep in Witness*, this intangible world becomes visible.

The exhibition opens with *Zinodaka*, an installation that considers the faith and belief systems of Black ancestors as spaces of knowledge and information. Its floor of cracked clay and sand is proof of something living, not necessarily human but something ancient. It investigates how soil interacts with people, how it changes form under people’s weight, how certain paths emerge. This landscape, along with glass rocks that appear like water, offer an appeal to consider sources of knowledge that have often disappeared, been cast aside or discredited as non-existent.

One of the cruel legacies of the apartheid regime is the criminalisation of Black aquatic spiritual practices and the curtailment of water-based ways of acquiring knowledge in South Africa. Throughout history, the ocean shifted from being

a space for cleansing and healing to a geographical location. *Ntabamanzi* is not a reaction to this brutality, but rather a display of a new consciousness and alterity — a state of being different or other — that exists in spite of this historical wound. Made from barbed wire wrapped in fabric, the wall piece *Plant Study II* engages with the gallery like a drawing with wave-like forms. Wire has dual properties and is a familiar material to Gqunta. In her childhood it was found around the house, it was part of a home. She remembers how laundry was draped on the wire to dry. At the same time, razor wire is a very harsh material that is used to demarcate a space, to create exclusive spaces that keep certain people out and keep other people in.

Gqunta positions dreams as a response to the enclosures imposed upon African knowledge systems and a space from which new knowledge for living emerge. She explains how she dreamt about a giant wave, like a tsunami, that she could walk through as if you were walking through mountains. This dream kept coming back and is an inspiration for much of her work in this exhibition. As is the case for the video work *Rolling Mountains Dream*.

The two textile wall hangings *Instigation in waiting I & II* were made during a residency in Dumbarton Oaks, Washington DC where her fascination was seized by an abandoned greenhouse. Only a few Aloe plants were left, clinging strongly to what was there, unwilling to move. The work reflects Gqunta’s thought process during this time. For greenhouses and botanical gardens, plants are removed from their natural habitat and people, to be controlled and possessed by their conqueror. This is another way in which the colonial past reveals itself.

Much can be read in the title *Sleep in Witness*. You don’t have to be awake to witness things. We sleep to acquire knowledge and the world of dreams can be a fruitful source. It also refers to a silent witness embodied as water being the archive of a persisting collective grief. This exhibition invites you to think about our individual and collective presence in this space as a potential moment of reinvention.

This exhibition text was based on the original text by Nombuso Mathibela for *Sleep in Witness* at the Henry Moore Institute.



Lungiswa Gqunta, Zinodaka, 2022, clay, sand, handblown glass, dimensions variable



Lungiswa Gqunta, Zinodaka, 2022, clay, sand, handblown glass, dimensions variable



Lungiswa Gqunta, Zinodaka, 2022, clay, sand, handblown glass, dimensions variable





Lungiswa Gqunta, Zinodaka, 2022, clay, sand, handblown glass, dimensions variable

Sleep in Witness

Lungiswa Gqunta

The works presented in this exhibition interrogate what happens in sleep and its dream state. They challenge us to think of sleep as a space that allows a new way of being, outside and beyond the chronic condition of dispossession and colonial loss.

Zinodaka, is an installation comprised of clay and hand blown glass. The cracked clay is proof of something living, not necessarily human but something ancient, the uncontrollable unknown and messenger of the spirit.

Water and rock matter offer an appeal to consider sources of knowledge that have often disappeared, been cast aside or discredited.

The installation considers the belief systems of Black ancestors as spaces of knowledge and information. In a dream state there is no land but space: it is a conduit to witness things that cannot be understood unless the idea of the terrestrial world as the only generator of useful meaning is unlearned.

In *Intabamanz* the silver coins, wrapped wire and shades of blue are gestures that reveal a return to a ritualistic relationship with aquatic spaces.

One of the cruel legacies of the apartheid regime is the criminalisation of Black aquatic spiritual practices and the curtailment of water-based ways of acquiring knowledge in South Africa. The ocean shifted from being a space for cleansing and healing to a geographical location that signals our alienation from water as a connecting spiritual entity.

The work is not a reaction to this brutality, but rather a display of a new consciousness and alterity – a state of being different or other – that exists in spite of this historical wound. They are prayers, ongoing wishes and gratitude.

The invitation here is to think about our individual and collective presence in this space as a potential moment of reinvention.

The texts accompanying this exhibition have been written by Nombuso Mathibela.



Lungiswa Gqunta, *Zinodaka*, 2022, clay, sand, handblown glass, dimensions variable



Lungiswa Gqunta, Zinodaka, 2022, clay, sand, handblown glass, dimensions variable



Lungiswa Gqunta, Zinodaka, 2022, clay, sand, handblown glass, dimensions variable



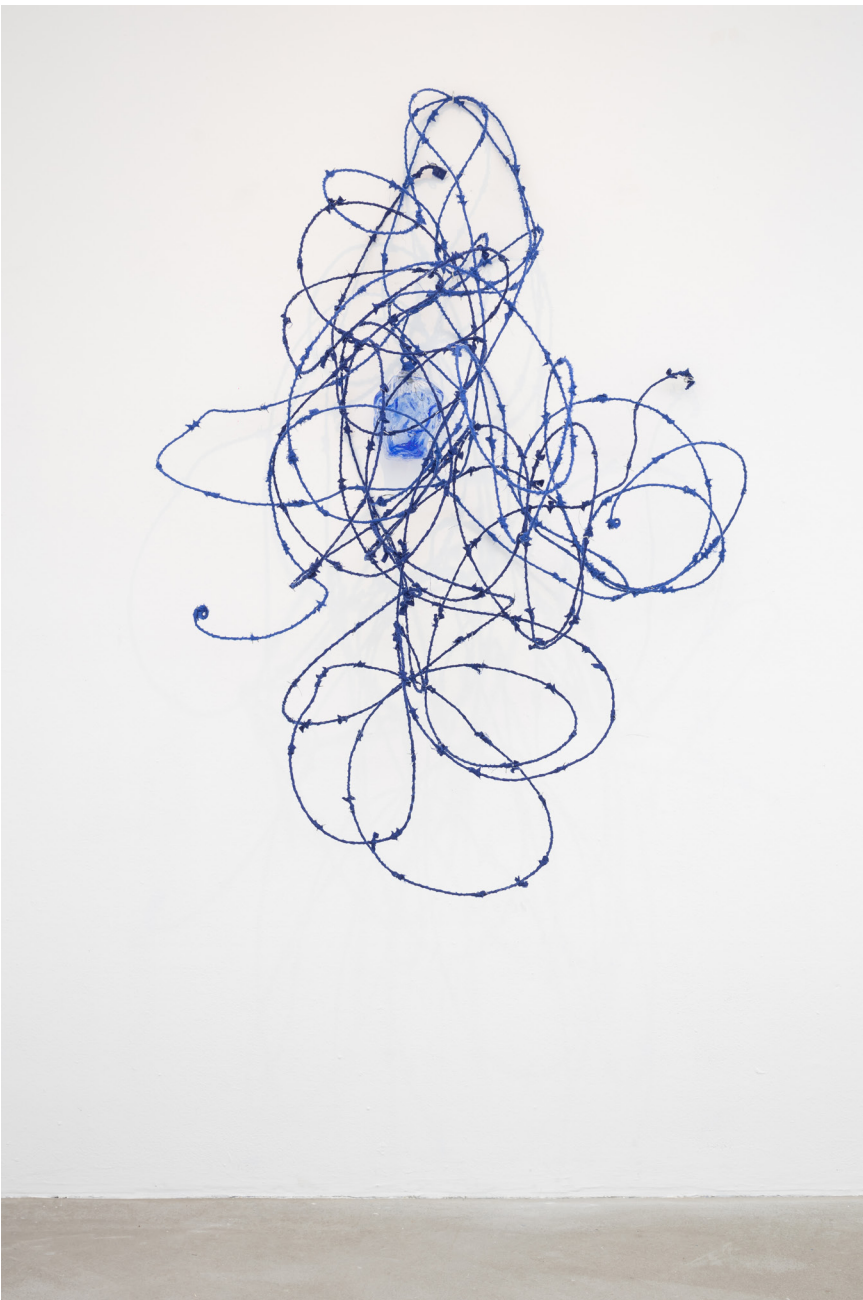
Lungiswa Gqunta, Zinodaka, 2022, clay, sand, handblown glass, dimensions variable



Installation view Sleep in Witness, AKINCI, 2023



Installation view Sleep in Witness, AKINCI, 2023



Lungiswa Gqunta, Plant Study II, 2023, razor wire wrapped in fabric and handblown glass, 170 x 110 x 55 cm



Installation view Sleep in Witness, AKINCI, 2023



Installation view Sleep in Witness, AKINCI, 2023



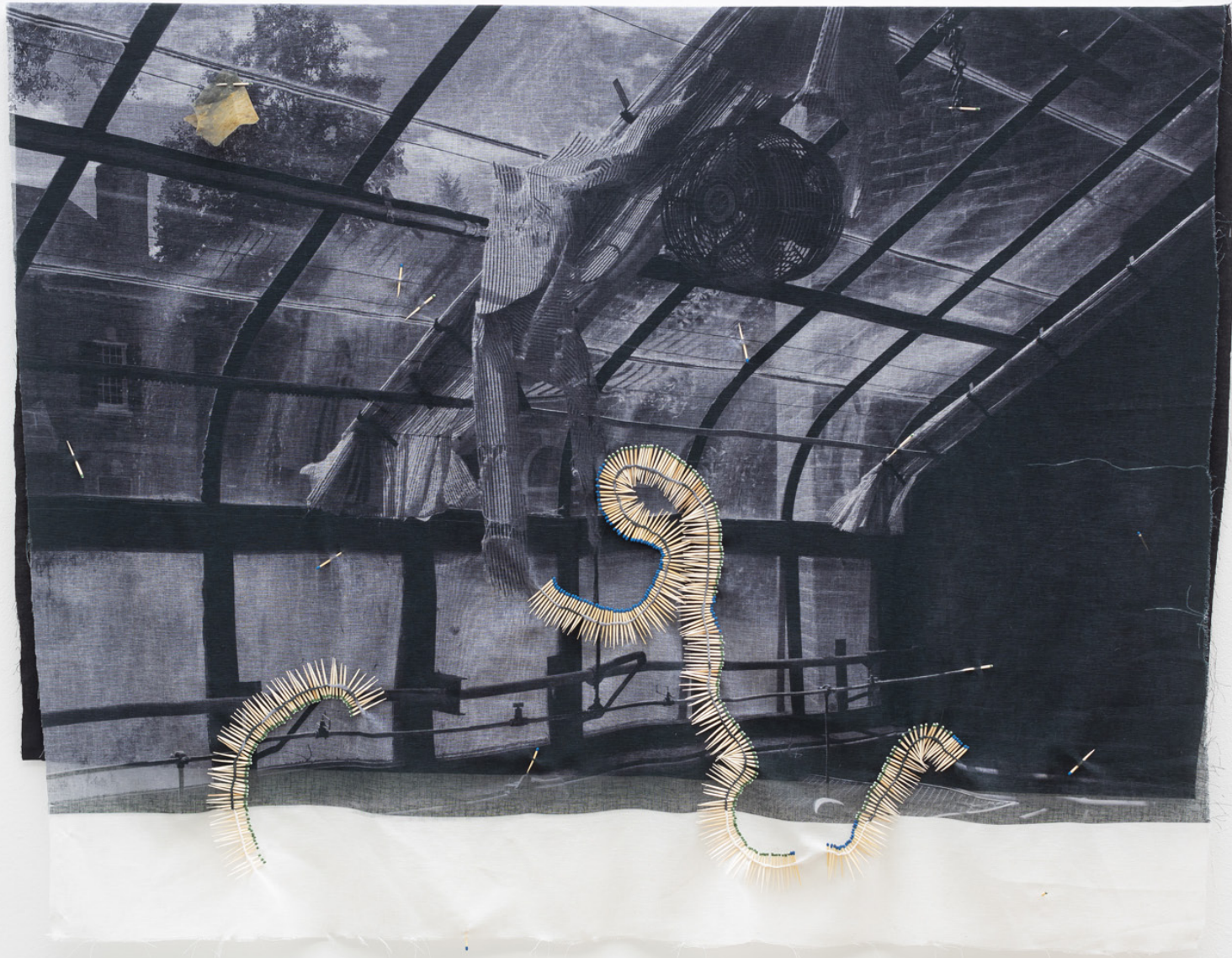
Installation view Sleep in Witness, AKINCI, 2023



Installation view Sleep in Witness, AKINCI, 2023



Installation view Sleep in Witness, AKINCI, 2023



Lungiswa Gqunta, Istigation in Waiting I, 2023, digital print on fabric, cotton thread, matches, 135 x 152 cm



Lungiswa Gqunta, *Istigation in Waiting I*, 2023, digital print on fabric, cotton thread, matches, 135 x 152 cm



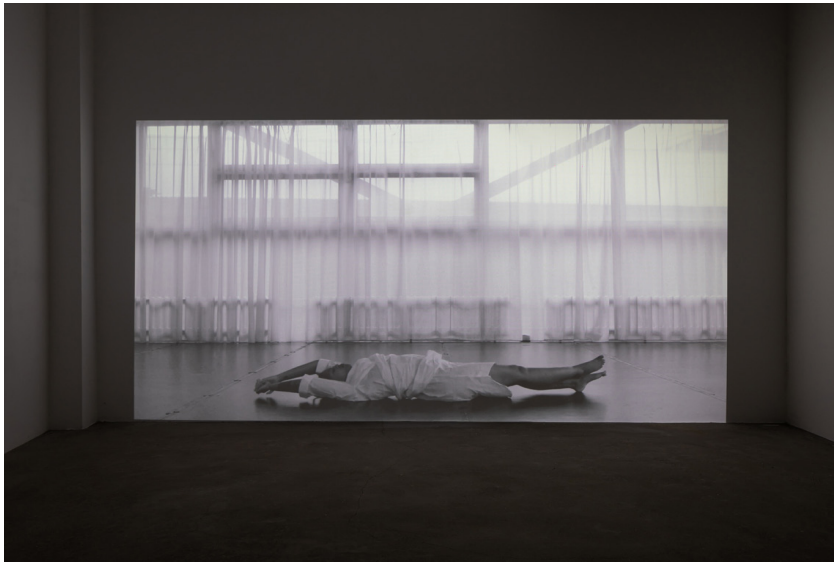
Installation view Sleep in Witness, AKINCI, 2023



Lungiswa Gqunta, *Instigation in Waiting II*, 2023, digital print on fabric and cotton thread, 135 x 152 cm



Lungiswa Gqunta, Instigation in Waiting II, 2023, digital print on fabric and cotton thread, 135 x 152 cm



Lungiswa Gqunta, Rolling Mountains Dream, 2021, HD video film, 3:38 min



Lungiswa Gqunta, Rolling Mountains Dream, 2021, HD video film, 3:38 min



Installation view Sleep in Witness, AKINCI, 2023

Biography

Lungiswa Gqunta (1990, Port Elizabeth) is a visual artist working in performance, printmaking, sculpture and installation. From 2019-2021, Gqunta was in residence at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam. Gqunta has also obtained her undergraduate degree at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in 2012 and her MFA at the Michaelis School of Fine Arts in Cape Town in 2017. In addition to her practice, Gqunta is one of the founding members of iQhiya, with whom she participated in Documenta 14 and Glasgow International. Recently, Gqunta has had a solo exhibition at the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, UK (2022) and at the Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main, DE (2021). Recent group exhibitions have been at Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, IT (2023); Liverpool Biennale (2023); Centraal Museum Utrecht, NL (2023); Palais de Tokyo, Paris, FR (2021), Centraal Museum Utrecht, NL (2021 – 2022) and Marres House for Contemporary Culture, Maastricht, NL (2021). She has participated in the Manifesta 12 (2018) and the 15th Istanbul Biennial (2017) and has also been included in the group exhibition *Not a Single Story II* at the Wanas Konst Museum in Sweden. She has been actively involved in the South African art scene, having exhibited with both the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary African Art and the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG), as well as held two solo exhibitions, *Qwitha* (2018) and *Qokobe* (2016), with WHATIFTHEWORLD gallery in Cape Town, SA. In 2019, AKINCI presented both her installations *Feet under Fire* and *Sleeping Pools* within the exhibition *Heroines Now* (2019). Her work forms part of the public collections of the MMK Frankfurt, Kunsthall Zurich, Centraal Museum Utrecht, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, The University of Cape Town and Zeitz MOCAA.