



Tree of Knowledge (of Good and Evil), 2024, Paper, pen, gold leaf, acrylic paint on canvas, 129 x 110 cm. Courtesy of the Artist.

### **Ateker, ijasi biyayi? - Greetings from the road (A dedication)**

**Pamela Enyonu**

Opening: March 23, 2024, 2 pm at Amasaka Gallery (Plot 12, Birch Avenue, Masaka)

Exhibition dates: March 24 – April 21, 2024

*“Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reverse-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word ‘silence’... In one another we will never be lacking.” (The Laugh of the Medusa, Hélène Cixous, 1976)*

The exhibition *Ateker, ijasi biyayi? - Greetings from the road (A dedication)* marks a homecoming for Pamela Enyonu, showcasing her works to a Ugandan audience in her first solo exhibition in the country. Enyonu’s practice is best known for her interrogation of womanhood, exploring the ways women negotiate social landscapes, and the environments that shape them and are

shaped by them in turn. Drawing from the artist's archive the exhibition includes older pieces with a completely new body of work that sets out to explore Ugandan history and self-understanding narrated through Enyonu's particular gaze and against the backdrop of her diverse background in a country whose borders were drawn in someone else's sketchbook and whose cohesion is a constant matter of negotiation. Based on readings as diverse as Okot p'Bitek's "Songs of Lawino" through Maya Angelou, Chinua Achebe and Frantz Fanon (to only name a few) the artist's works drift through the floating anchors of Ugandan identity, from its social interactions to its foundational myths.

Spiritually akin to Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi's novel *Kintu*, Enyonu doesn't return to those myths to reconstruct them, but instead summons them in the Now to explore their ruptures and continuities. Her Goddess Nambi cuts through the hazy threshold of the divine and earthly planes with a handful of golden seeds, wearing a blue tank top, piercing her eyes into the spectator. Next to her: The Tree of Knowledge (of Good and Evil) with its golden fruits evoking another creational myth whose intrusion into the lives of the people now known as Ugandans has redirected its trajectory onto a questionable timeline leading from an alien past to an unknown future.

Interrogating community-making and the open question of collective identity in the aftermath of colonization, Enyonu's works turn their observation towards the subtleties that add up to a sense of *home* and act as loopholes from the deeply personal into the heart of the collective.

Enyonu's tapestries with botanical drawings of Matooke – in what the artist calls "Social Nature Studies" – can be read as a love letter to the foods that construct community. A lonely pair of slippers in front of a lit TV and the absence of people in the image, evoke the distant chatter of the family that might have just watched the latest news together and now left the scene for other chores. Observing her neighborhood in the outskirts of Kampala, Enyonu's gaze wonders across roof tops that appear behind high fences crowned with barbed wire that is meant to provide a sense of security yet cuts across the community which constitutes home.

"Home" in Enyonu's work is treated as both a source of belonging and alienation. In a world that has grown strange and proves its hostility towards life, Enyonu seeks out storytelling and serene observation as a way of mending. In an overflowing act of *female writing*, she spins her narration openly, without providing a certain direction, weary of forming *discourse*, speaking truths in many tongues. Sensuous, exuberant in color, rich in textures and transparencies, each work of Enyonu's hand is a story to explore.

This exhibition is but the first part of a multi-chapter epos that will unfold in the future delving deeper and deeper into the subjects introduced here. We begin with the dedication: A dedication to Ugandans and Ugandanness in all its multiplicity and its contradictory self that doesn't owe anyone an explanation. It echoes the sentiments of Wole Soyinka: "A tiger does not proclaim its tigrity. It pounces." Through the visual and narrative exploration, the exhibition embodies a reclaiming of tigrity. From there, the field is open for further forays.

Curated by Julia Gyemant

Curatorial consultant: Trevor Mukholi