



# Bulumko Mbete

## Like the sky, I've been too quiet

*A solo exhibition by Bulumko Mbete,  
our 2023 Absa L'Atelier Gerard Sekoto winner.*



Your story matters







# Bulumko Mbete

## Exhibition Statement

Hands dialogue with the spirit as earth meets their embrace. Clay surrenders to touch, transforming into beads that contemplate ornament. This medium, drawn from our planet, undergoes metamorphosis. It evolves and echoes the forms in nature's intricate patterns.

In 1997, Mbete's grandfather embarked on a road trip along the eastern and central parts of South Africa. Mbete reflects on this guided route, and on the experiences, memories and inheritances that remain from a life lived. She ponders nature's ability to conform to the narratives that we conjure and contemplates an intangible human voice. Geological echoes of time, memory and material encounter her gestures, which aim to bridge worlds. Through four installations, Mbete contemplates the terrain of familial memory and narrative.

In Sojourning, a collaborative sound installation with Kamil Hassim, Mbete uses the act of rememory to reconstruct the sonic landscape of her grandfather's journey. The piece was developed through conversations with her mother and aunt, their anecdotes and recollections serving as fragments from which a past is reassembled. Sound is the vessel through which loss is made present.

In Our Mother's Gardens engages with the 2021 documentary of the same name. The work explores the intricate relationships Black women navigate with maternal figures. It examines the architecture of closeness, vulnerability and struggle that forms the tethers of mother-daughter bonds, and reveals both tenderness and resilience in these intimate connections. The installation contains a collaboration with The Herd Designs.

Earthsong, Earth's Time performs choreography with nature. Mbete contemplates what alchemy nature may offer in return for the act of performing generational traditions of embodied knowledge, labour and exchange with the natural world.

Reciting Memory turns toward iconography and gesture in ceramic forms, marking Mbete's exploration of a new material language in her practice. Earth transformed by hands renders memory tangible through the traces left on it.

# Artist Statement

## Bulumko Mbete

Born in 1995 on a serendipitous Saturday, Mbete is a creative practitioner with a multicultural heritage. She is based in liminal spaces.

Mbete undertakes research in different forms of craft and design methodologies that are predominantly performed by women in Southern Africa. Her current research focuses on these forms of craft and design as indigenous knowledge systems and archives. Her work is influenced by this mode of storytelling and production.

She creates a framework to communicate generational traditions and gestures of love using textile, beading, natural dyeing and weaving. Furthermore, she explores the geographic connections and synchronicities of South African history alongside the country's contemporary realities.

Mbete completed her Bachelor of Arts in Fine Arts at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town. She received both the Absa L'Atelier Gerard Sekoto Award and the Cassirer Welz Award in 2023, and was a 2022-2023 Creative Knowledge Resources fellow at the University of Cape Town. Mbete is currently a second-year Master of Fine Arts candidate at Carnegie Mellon University, USA, where she is the recipient of the Regina and Marlin Miller Award.







### In our mother's gardens I

Ceramics, glass beads, hand dyed cotton, wood and mirrors  
 Dimensions variable  
 2025

R50,000



### In our mother's gardens II

Ceramics, glass beads, hand dyed cotton, wood and mirrors  
 Dimensions variable  
 2025

R50,000





**In our mother's gardens III**

Ceramics, glass beads, hand dyed cotton, wood and mirrors  
Dimensions variable  
2025

**R50,000**





## In our mother's gardens IV

Ceramics, glass beads  
Dimensions variable  
2025

R50,000



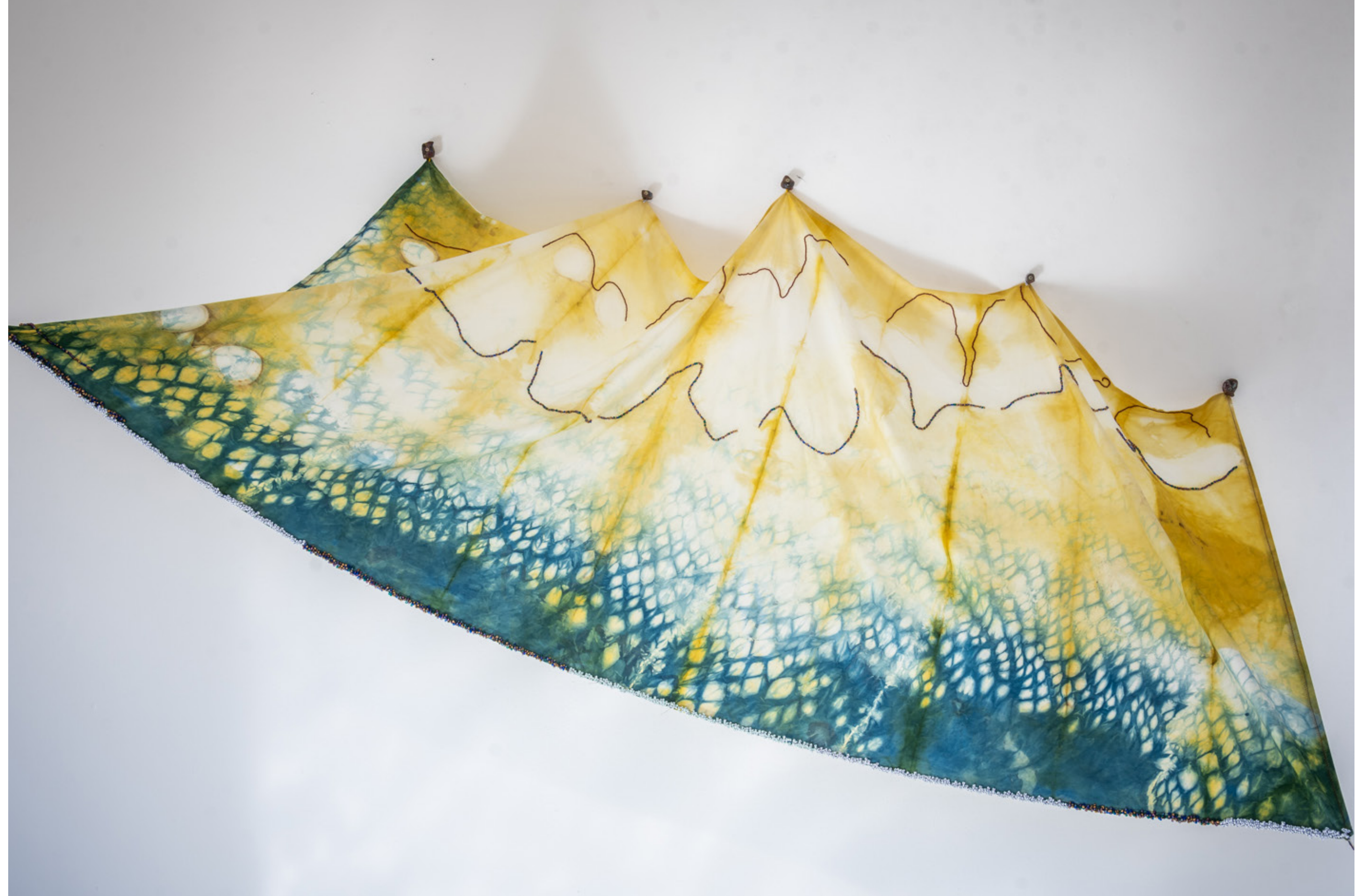


**In our mother's gardens V**

Ceramics, glass beads

2025

**R50,000**



**Earthsong, earth's time I**

Ceramic, glass beads, Weld and Indigo dyed cotton

2025

**R70,000**





**Earthsong, earth's time II**

Glass beads, cotton thread, Weld and Indigo dyed linen  
46 cm x 103 cm  
2025

NFS



**Earthsong, earth's time III**

Glass beads, cotton thread, Weld and Indigo dyed linen,  
54 cm x 107 cm2025

NFS





**Earthsong, earth's time IV**

Glass beads, cotton thread and found fabric  
64 cm x 120 cm  
2025

R35 000



**Reciting memory I**

Bazin brocade, glass beads, ceramics, cotton thread and dye  
81 cm x 396 cm  
2025

R95,000





**Reciting memory II**

Bazin brocade, glass beads, ceramics, cotton thread and dye  
81 cm x 396 cm  
2025

R95,000



**Reciting memory III**

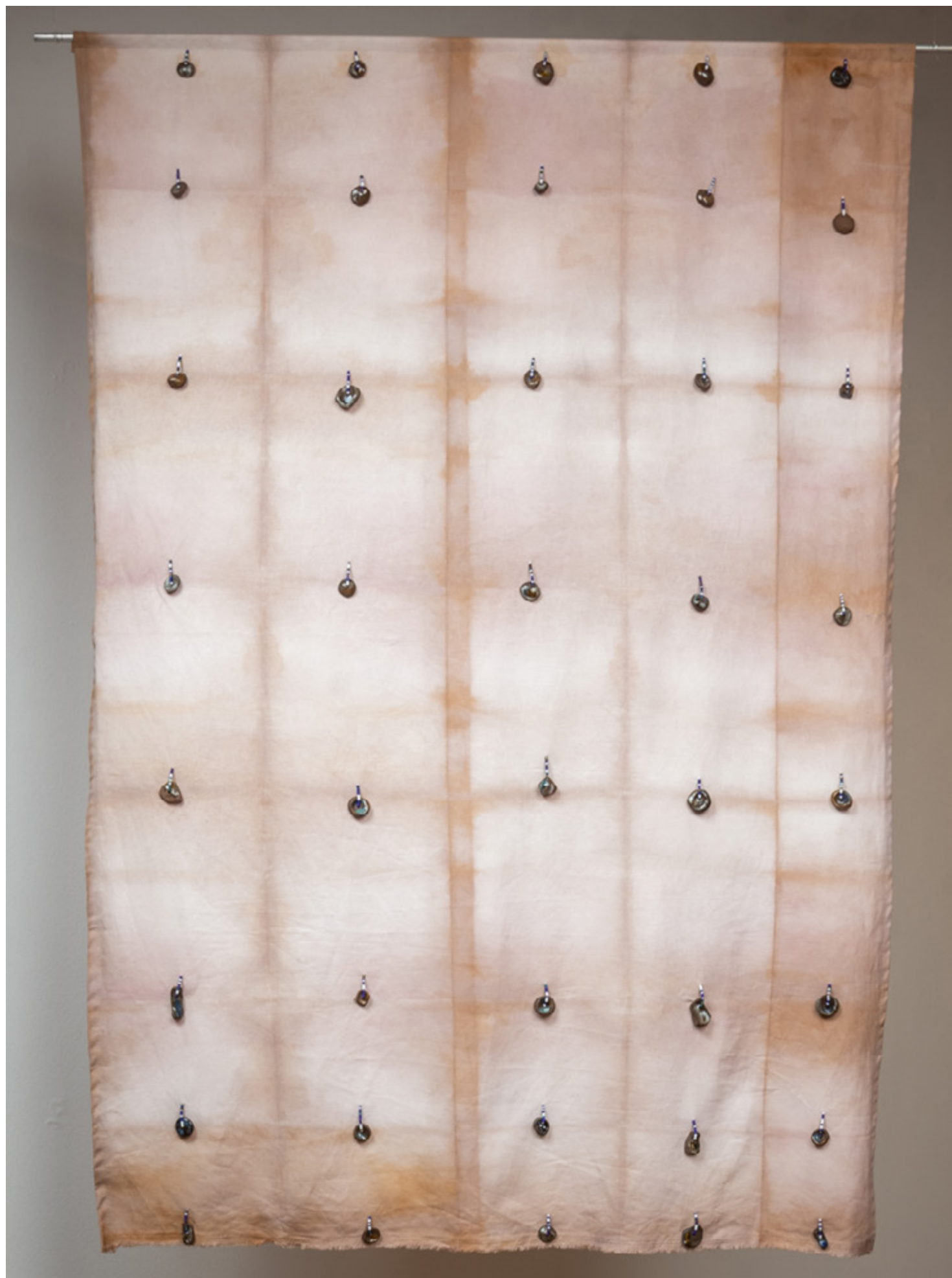
Bazin brocade, glass beads, ceramics, cotton thread and dye  
81 cm x 396 cm  
2025

R95,000









**Reciting memory IV**

Bull denim, Manjistha natural dye, clay and glass beads  
150 cm x 100 cm  
2025

R55,000



**Reciting memory V**

Bull denim, Manjistha natural dye, clay and glass beads  
150 cm x 100 cm  
2025

R55,000



**Reciting memory VI**

Bull denim, Manjistha natural dye, clay and glass beads  
150 cm x 100 cm  
2025

R55,000







# Bulumko Mbete CV

## Awards, fellowships and grants

- Absa L’Atelier Gerard Sekoto Award 2023
- Cassirer Welz Award 2023
- Creative Knowledge Resources Fellowship 2022–2023
- Memory Proceeding: A pop-up exhibition project, curated by Bulumko Mbete
- Event Horizon, March 2023: An exhibition project with transdisciplinary practitioner Kamil Hassim (Wherewithal Grant)
- Education
- MFA candidate, Carnegie Mellon University (2023–), Regina and Marlin Miller Award
- BFA, Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town, sculpture major (2019)
- Advanced level in Portuguese (NEPPE), University of Brasilia, Brazil (2014)
- Matriculated from Lyttelton Manor High School, Pretoria (2013)

## Work experience

- Learnership: Contemporary craft, Pittsburgh, spring 2024
- Gallery assistant, Miller ICA, Pittsburgh, spring 2024
- Wherewithal Curatorial Grant for Event Horizon, a collaborative project with artist Kamil Hassim
- Corporate artwork commission for JP Morgan, Abadali Art Project (July–November 2022)
- Creative Knowledge Resources (UCT) Fellowship: Memory Proceeding (2022–)
- Programme associate at the Joburg Contemporary Art Foundation (February 2020– August 2022)
- Independent project managing for Defunct Context (George Mahashe) (2021)
- Curatorial assistant at Goodman Gallery Johannesburg (2019–2020)
- Production assistant to Dineo Seshee Bopape (2019)
- Assistant and production lead to Buhlebezwe Siwani (2018–2019)
- Production assistant to Lhola Amira, Sankofa Studios (2018–2019)
- Intern at A4 Arts Foundation (2017)
- Production assistant/intern at Kemang Wa Lehulere’s studio (2016)
- Solo exhibitions

## 2023

I’ve Known Rivers. Bag Factory, Johannesburg (July)

## 2022

Does a Kite Leave a Trace? Curated by Lemeeze Davids. Under Projects, Cape Town (December)

## 2019

A Thousand Things. Curated by Amogelang Maledu. 99 On Loop, Cape Town (November)  
Mbete’s artwork has been collected by IZIKO South African National Gallery, JP Morgan, UCT Works of Art Committee, artists, curators and private collections.





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