

ANDILE DYALVANE  
ITHONGO



*iThongo* installation view,  
Southern Guild, Cape Town.

# *iThongo*

Andile Dyalvane

My intentions with developing an extended body of work under the title *iThongo* (Ancestral Dreamscape) is to highlight a gathering of dreams – seated in the soul, held by the spirits of our ancestors.

Symbols are visual tools harnessed to impart more effectively meanings within messages – code, if you will – that aid stories. The language of dreams is symbolic and therefore realised as *uYalezo*, messages from our ancestral spirits.

These stools, taking inspiration from both memories and African artefacts, are low, close to the earth, the ground revered as an ancient portal for our ancestral communion.



## Foreword

With *iThongo*, Andile Dyalvane offers an entire worldview. Early on, the artist discovered clay as a tool to chronicle his life, channel memory, honour his ancestors, and express aspirations both aesthetically and spiritually. Dyalvane's work is remarkable not only for how it communicates and how it triggers individuals, but how it evolves and involves community. It offers healing and redemption.

*iThongo* was created in 2020; each work the embodiment of an invented symbol carrying messages endemic to Dyalvane, his village and the Xhosa people. Over the course of the year, as drawings in Dyalvane's sketchbooks begot powerful sculptures, it became clear that vital universal ideas were embedded within them: communal values, societal challenges, celebrations, collective loss, trauma and rebirth. We realised that *iThongo* had the potential to communicate far beyond what we had imagined and as such, it should be widely shared.

*iThongo* was first shown in Dyalvane's home village in the Eastern Cape, where the artist conducted a ceremony with his community and gifted a single work in perpetuity to heal his people's displacement. Re-assembled in Cape Town at the end of 2020, a further ceremony and configuration brought out a new audience. The work entreats and invites for a third time in New York this Spring, where the circle will be metaphorically enlarged again. *iThongo* lives in our times. *iThongo* advances in our times. *iThongo* redefines our times.

Jennifer Olshin and Marc Benda, Friedman Benda  
Trevyn and Julian McGowan, Southern Guild



# Where the Heart Is

## Glenn Adamson

Home – *ikhaya*. For Andile Dyalvane, it is not just the subject, not just the purpose of his art, but its ultimate destination. Even as he travels the world, he carries *ikhaya* with him, drawing on it as his source and feeding it in return. “Home is in essence familiarity,” Dyalvane has written. “Feelings of a greater extension of yourself.” Simple words, but like all that he has to say, profound. For they point to an understanding easily lost track of these days. A home truth: Individual expression is important only when a living community is there to receive it.

Dyalvane is from a place called Ngobozana, in the countryside of the Eastern Cape, in South Africa. In his growing-up years there, he had little experience of art, or even of fired ceramics; the beer pots and other clay vessels traditionally used by the Xhosa people had been displaced by plastic containers. He was taught to observe what was around him, though, and once put to the task of herding livestock, like the other boys of the village, he often found his attention wandering. His playgrounds were the dongas, eroded riverbeds where deposits of raw clay were exposed on the sloping banks. With this found material, he would shape little figures and herds of cattle, then leave them there to be washed away.

Already Dyalvane was forging a connection to his forebears, working with the very soil on which they had walked in generations past. But it would take him some years to “hear the whisper of the ancestors in the clay,” in his beautiful phrase. To give himself fully to home, he first had to leave it. Initially that meant Cape Town, where Dyalvane

earned a diploma in fine art; he then went on to Port Elizabeth, to formally study ceramics. Early in his artistic development, his explorations gravitated to a recognisably Xhosa vocabulary; he ornamented the skin of his forms with patterns based on scarification, or *bhaca*. Traditionally this practice serves many purposes: healing, marking a certain stage of one’s life, clan identification. Once transposed to Dyalvane’s work, “it’s still about identity,” he says, “and a way of documenting: the language of the surface and the colours speak.”

A culminating moment in his development of this vocabulary was the exhibition *Camagu* (“I am grateful”), held at Friedman Benda in 2016. The first time he made work of large scale in his Cape Town workshop, the show also served as a platform for his use of symbolism, including a signature stamp that he uses to this day, and his distinctive methods of building. While initially coiled, as is typical of hand-built African ceramics, Dyalvane then cuts and reshapes his vessels, giving them sharply defined facets – literally making them articulate. This fragmentation of the continuous, circular rhythm of the coiled form transforms the pot, rendering it a disjunctive canvas for his imagery (reminiscent, perhaps, of the Cubists’ fragmentation of the object into multiple aspects).

Each pot declares the importance of maintaining integrity in the face of disruption. The history of ceramics is thick with assertions of tradition, of course; but Dyalvane is not simply a revivalist, reiterating the values of the past. He is making those

values his own, while acknowledging the difficulty of preserving cultural heritage, the struggle and indeed the innovation required to hold it together.

A breakthrough project for Dyalvane was his 2017 exhibition at Southern Guild, *Idladla*, in which he presented an impressive range of crested and crenellated forms. They were set out on plinths of stacked bricks, a vivid juxtaposition that suggested a rural occupation of the urban. *Idladla* is the isiXhosa word for grain silo, a collective architectural form: another sort of container, which holds the sustenance for the community (including its livestock) from one harvest season to the next. No metaphor could be more appropriate for Dyalvane’s work, which is itself a repository of essential cultural property, holding it in store for the future.

Yet in this analogy, there is also a sense of tragic urgency: like *bhaca* scarification and the Xhosa language itself – kids these days use emoji fluently, but are losing traditional vocabulary – the use of grain silos is in decline in the Eastern Cape. Fewer and fewer people cultivate the land, or engage in the celebrations that used to punctuate the agricultural calendar. Many of Dyalvane’s generation and younger have migrated to the cities. Those who remain at home are left “dependent on continuous buying,” as he puts it, no longer living in a self-sufficient way. In this context, his work is a passionate and persuasive case for the ongoing relevance of *ikhaya*. “You’re sold the idea that the city is everything,” he muses, “but there’s so much wealth back at home.”

These ideas have coalesced with new power and resonance in *iThongo*, a series of 19 seating forms, each based on a Xhosa pictogram. (These symbols are no longer in wide use; Dyalvane adapted them from sources such as Credo Mutwa’s book *Indaba, My Children*, a collection of African folk tales first published in 1964.) The project exemplifies his deep sense of responsibility: “My duty is to use my platform, and my skills, and my gifts to let the next generation know what these practices were.”

It is telling, however, that Dyalvane made his way to this monumental achievement via places far from the Cape, far from South Africa. The story begins in the summer of 2019, when he conducted a residency at the famed Leach Pottery, in St. Ives, a beautiful town perched on the north coast of Cornwall. For two months he immersed himself in the place, using the studio’s clay, tenmoku and shino glazes, and gas-fired kilns. The pots he made over the course of his residency reflect the legacy of Bernard Leach, the great traditionalist of 20th century British ceramics; indeed, it’s a shame that Leach did not live to see Dyalvane working at his studio, for few contemporary makers are more fully connected to the cultural “taproot” that he saw as necessary to the creation of vital work.

Yet what most fired Dyalvane’s imagination, during his residency, was not ceramics, but the Cornish landscape. His pots took on the shapes of the region’s geology: crags defining a ridgeline over the sea, sheaves of rocks slipping into one another’s crevices. They called to mind the rolling hills and dongas of his home. He was also mesmerised by the standing stones that can be seen in Cornwall, remnants of ancient inhabitation, which echoed the circular configurations of traditional Xhosa gatherings. “I could sense the people that erected these stones,” Dyalvane says. “They danced, did rituals and celebrations on this land. They understood the celebration of rain, the solstice, the harvest, just as my own ancestors did.”

Had Dyalvane not had this experience in Cornwall, would he have developed his series of sculptural stools which convey even when unoccupied the idea of a sacred congregation, a shared current of energies? Would he have been able to design them in the way that he did, without first falling in love with East Asian ink painting – a medium he encountered in an exhibition in London (it was also avidly practiced by Leach), and then used to create the symbols for *iThongo* in his sketchbook? Who knows. But one thing is for certain: as much as the works reflect these far-flung influences, they took on their full meaning only once brought to Ngobozana.



Preparatory drawings for *iThongo* from Andile Dyalvane's sketchbook.

Dyalvane began shaping the forms while under lockdown, on the balcony of his small Cape Town apartment. Autumn was turning to winter, and with that change of the seasons came storms and rain. He kept right on working, “fighting the elements, but the energy that I got just from knowing that I was giving back to these pieces – it was intense.” It was an appropriately dramatic prelude to the main act, the transporting of the stools to his village. He knew that this pilgrimage was necessary; that the works would only be complete if they rested on his home ground, were used and understood by his family and people.

Indeed, if *iThongo* is best understood as a physical poem, then its last lines can truly be said to have been written in Ngobozana. Here, the works were spiritually cleansed by Dyalvane and his older brother Madoda, an elder in the community, through the application of purifying herbs (*isalawu*, represented in one of the stools) and burning of sage (*impepho*). Even the accumulation of bits of Ngobozana soil on the works' surfaces came to seem important: the low seats brought Dyalvane and his creativity right in contact with his origins, his home ground.

An especially important moment was the conveyance of one stool to the site of the old village, from which the people of Ngobozana were displaced, and where their ancestors are still buried. The work chosen for this important moment was *uMalusi* (Shepherd) – which he describes as “a metaphor for all of us to prosper,” and a way of rectifying the traumas that the ancestors have gone through. This makes sense, given that his people have always been herders of livestock, but it is also tempting to see this stool as a kind of self-portrait, or at any rate, an allegory of Dyalvane's experience. After all, this was his task, growing up. And he remains a custodian of his people. (This idea finds correspondence in Christian traditions, incidentally; the word “pastor” derives from the Greek term for a shepherd).

“I’ve been chosen,” Dyalvane says matter-of-factly. “I am the one who is to restore dignity to my people. This is not a title I have given myself; the elders spoke.”

At time of writing, the *iThongo* seats are on display at Southern Guild. Next year, they will make their way to New York City, where they’ll be shown at Friedman Benda. None can say where fate may take them after that, but they are sure to carry their message with them. It is a message intended first and foremost for the people of Ngobozana, but one that we could all stand to meditate upon: “Remember who you are, remember what you have lost.” Dyalvane's extraordinary inventive force derives from a past beyond easy reckoning, generation upon generation of creative souls like himself. In that sense, he is a great inheritor, a man who looks back for guidance and wisdom. Yet *iThongo* is also a project directed squarely at the future, that of Dyalvane himself, and all his people. “I promise you,” he says. “It’s a beginning.”

– Glenn Adamson is an independent writer and curator based in New York. His latest book, *Craft: An American History*, was published by Bloomsbury in January 2021.

## *iThongo* in Ngobozana, Eastern Cape

### A Photo Essay

Situated at the foot of the great Amathole Mountains in South Africa's Eastern Cape province is the village of Ngobozana, about 100 kms from the city of East London. Here, for two days in November 2020, residents gathered at Andile Dyalvane's family homestead to celebrate the launch of *iThongo* and its historic homecoming to the artist's birthplace.

The entire collection of 19 ceramic sculptures went on view in his family's kraal, a sacred site with a direct link to the spirits of the ancestors. Arranged in a circle, they were used as seats for the duration of various traditional Xhosa ceremonies, literally melding with the soil and animal dung lining the kraal floor. Dyalvane presented the people of Ngobozana with 100 terracotta beer pots – one for every household – to use for drinking home-brewed beer.

Wearing traditional Xhosa beadwork and wrapped in patterned blankets, Dyalvane and his family members paid their respects to their ancestors' spirits in a solemn procession across the valley and up the hill to the site of the old village, which had been forcibly removed by the Apartheid government in 1965. There they installed *uMalusi* (Shepherd) from the *iThongo* collection on a cement plinth overlooking ancestral burial grounds, recited blessings and performed cleansing rites with traditional herbs. *uMalusi* is on permanent display there – an offering from the artist to all of the surrounding villages and a place to grieve what was lost, come together in song and heal the scars of displacement.













## CATALOGUE OF WORKS



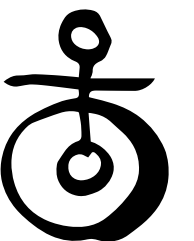
## IGUBU (DRUM) I

Terracotta clay

63 x 58 x 85 cm / 25 x 23 x 33.5 in

One-off

“Music is important in my own creative process. The vibration of sound is essential to ceremonial healing practices, particularly the sound produced by the *iGubu* drum (a cattle skin stretched tightly over two sides of circular metal plates creating a hollow centre), coined the “Xhosa drum”. It connects you to your own truth, having travelled the sonic landscapes of your mother’s heart from her womb. The vibrations of her heart enable the song of your heart to join in a unified presence, welcoming your arrival into the great energy of being transformed. My family and the village community I grew up in incorporate the transformative vibrational energy of the *iGubu* drumbeat when we gather to remember our ancestral heartbeat and ancient belonging.”



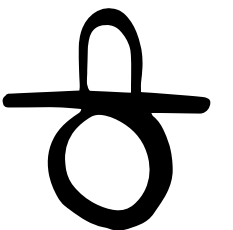




## ISILAWU (PURIFYING HERB)

Terracotta clay  
63 x 63 x 74 cm / 25 x 25 x 29 in  
One-off

“The protective herb of the home. A plant only, Saponin-rich herbal mixture is orally ingested by family members accompanied by vocalised intentional calls for guidance and protection. This cleansing foamy medicinal broth is rubbed onto various parts of the external body exposed to public environments. Cleansing in this way helps to acknowledge the effects of spiritual disconnection and brings our attention to re-evaluating our actions and renewing our shared vision. A call for protection from what we may not have been able to articulate clearly, protecting us from negativity or lifting what weighs heavily on our being. An important aspect for the well-being of family. “







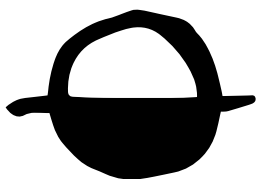
## ENTSHONALANGA (SUNSET)

Terracotta clay

63 x 60 x 71 cm / 25 x 23.75 x 28 in

One-off

“Commercial time is viewed by many as linear, yet our forebears navigated via solar and celestial movements, through seasons that guided migration, diets, spiritual senses and healing practices that connected us cosmically to a greater awareness of purpose. We witness spectacular sunsets from my village situated atop a hill, whose shape like an “upside-down little basket” gives the village its name – Ngobozana. It’s a place where families sit outside on warm days to reflect and give thanks.”





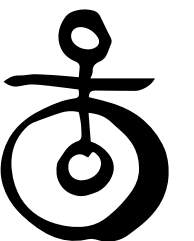




## IGUBU (DRUM) II

Terracotta clay  
59 x 57 x 85 cm / 23.25 x 22.5 x 33.5 in  
One-off

“Music is important in my own creative process. The vibration of sound is essential to ceremonial healing practices, particularly the sound produced by the *iGubu* drum (a cattle skin stretched tightly over two sides of circular metal plates creating a hollow centre), coined the “Xhosa drum”. It connects you to your own truth, having travelled the sonic landscapes of your mother’s heart from her womb. The vibrations of her heart enable the song of your heart to join in a unified presence, welcoming your arrival into the great energy of being transformed. My family and the village community I grew up in incorporate the transformative vibrational energy of the *iGubu* drumbeat when we gather to remember our ancestral heartbeat and ancient belonging.”







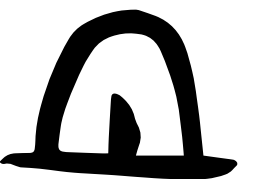
## IKHAYA (HOME)

Terracotta clay

63 x 37 x 55 cm / 25 x 14.5 x 21.75 in

One-off

“Home is in essence familiarity. Feelings of a greater extension of yourself as part of an important energy. My family, community and various creative callings guided by my ancestry have gifted me with a sense of home. Ngobozana village is where the earth will receive me into her womb and where I dance with heart to a familiar drumbeat.”







## IMPEPHO (CLARY SAGE)

Terracotta clay  
62 x 61 x 89 cm / 24.5 x 24 x 35 in  
One-off

“To practice within healing disciplines often requires a tool for mental focus, calling all those present to undertake a unified journey of cleansing. Burning *impepho* helps us unburden from the noise of fluttering thoughts, opening up space for quiet, attentive acknowledgement of our own breath and senses. I use it with great intent to request balance and announce my presence in the ceremonies I take part in at home, the spaces I am present to daily and all the places I travel to. This ritual has gifted me with an undeniable awareness and focus in my creative practice of healing through clay. For this I proclaim ‘Camagu’ with deepest gratitude.”



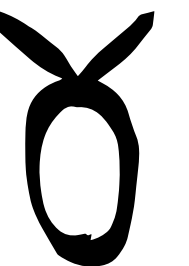




## INKOMO (CATTLE)

Terracotta clay  
70 x 63 x 79 cm / 27.5 x 25 x 31 in  
One-off

“Cattle heads traditionally connote wealth, status and influence. Symbolically, they suggest strength, fortitude and resilience and are associated with masculinity in both presence and passing into the realm of ancestral purpose. Cattle as beasts of burden are given sacred roles. They are important for the success of ceremony and the sowing and reaping of harvests, and are of utmost importance in dream interpretation.”





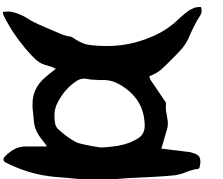




## ITHONGO (ANCESTRAL DREAMSCAPE)

Terracotta clay  
63 x 37 x 53 cm / 25 x 14.5 x 21 in  
One-off

“Symbolic pathways of remembering carry resounding messages often latent in one’s spiritual blueprint. These messages pertain to ancestral guides or energies requiring action, manifesting forms of what is viewed by some as phenomena gifted to one’s lineage in current physical form to resolve, present and relay or express with great humility those voices that still yearn to be heard and acknowledged. These symbols are a language that live in the land of dreams, often shared during family gatherings or healing consultations, or actualised through understanding as part of initiation within healer tutorage.”



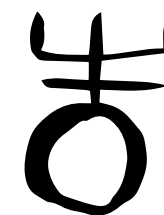




## IZILO (TOTEM ANIMALS)

Terracotta clay  
51 x 49 x 67 cm / 20 x 19.25 x 26.5 in  
One-off

“The importance of animal and human cohabitation has long been depicted within traditional oral folklore, myth and visual chronicling stories. Beliefs established to represent and create distinctions between groups of people could be recognised through association with animal symbolisms that announce clan and home. These two-fold connections emphasise a greater belonging and an assigned group of livestock to aid the homestead throughout clan-specific ceremonies.”







## NGOBOZANA

Terracotta clay  
103 x 53 x 60 cm / 40.5 x 21 x 23.75 in  
One-off

“Ngobozana, directly translated, means “little basket” yet descriptively understood by villages to be shaped like a little basket turned upside-down. Its content of human beings, interestingly enough, were moved from a different hillside to the village’s current location 50 or so years ago to make way for colonial pine plantations. I still visit the grave of my grandfather in a place known to a previous generation as home. My arrival, formative years and upbringing ground me in Ngobozana, where my father’s *kraal* and resting place is. My memories resonate from various perspectives of this particular village and my place and part in its heritage.”







## UBUHLANTI (KRAAL)

Terracotta clay  
106 x 67 x 62 cm / 41.75 x 26.5 x 24.5 in  
One-off

“A common sight in the rural Eastern Cape, land of my people, is that of a *kraal* (enclosure) on every homestead’s plot. Traditionally circular, its importance resides in the ancestral transcendent energy of the home. A *kraal* is the first address on arrival, announcing your presence, gratitude, intentions, undertakings and departures. Important activities are assigned to various areas within the *kraal*, respect shown by taking one’s shoes off to connect with the ground, covered in the dung from livestock, relaying your purist intention to honour this sacred space.”









## ULWAZI (KNOWLEDGE)

Terracotta clay

56 x 58 x 65 cm / 22 x 23 x 25.5 in

One-off

“*uLwazi* is a fundamental connecting artery in founding character, identity and belonging in this material, physical plane as an energised body/ being recognised by families, community, clan and earth. Transmissions of knowledge in folklore (orally, depicted on cave walls, carved on temple walls, scribed onto papyrus etc) are saturated with symbology. Engaging with culturally applied knowledge systems extends our energy via spiritual practice and ceremony, transmitting communications between various ancestral realms. In dreamscapes, symbols are where directives, aids and messaging can be received and decipherable conversions toward greater wisdom distilled. For me, imparting of knowledge begins with stories told by my elders underneath an acacia tree. We continue to drink from the well and vessel of what has and is being imparted to us, to better acknowledge, accept and gift the wisdom of our purpose, contributing further knowledge to the vast collective.”







## UMNGA (ACACIA TREE)

Terracotta clay

83 x 63 x 77 cm / 32.5 x 25 x 30.25 in

One-off

“The leaves of the *uMnga* tree are a delicacy to giraffes and their distinctive thorns are used by the shrike bird to impale and store their prey. The tree has a complex system of chemical communication, which it uses to warn other acacia trees when an animal begins to eat its leaves. My elder aunt and father would tell me about my great-grandfather, who after eating a hearty meal would narrate stories while sitting under his favourite *uMnga* tree, a thorn in hand to claim tidbits between his teeth. The shady span of this herbal, medicinal canopy held social interactions of a contemplative nature. For me, the tree resonates with great significance of place, time and symbolism.”



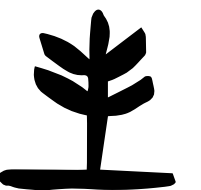




## UTYANI (VEGETATION)

Terracotta clay  
60 x 65 x 89 cm / 23.75 x 25.5 x 35 in  
One-off

“As the *iGubu* drum heals any potential disturbance of a spiritual disconnect through sonic vibration, so does vegetation. Imperative to every facet of life, plants are administered for the health of the foetus, infant, adult and family, and for animal raising, protection, illness prevention and remedy, including spiritual re-alignment and connectivity to those symbolic messages from the great ancestral spirit of well-being. During my childhood until today, various traditional herbal tinctures are used in ceremony to aid unified health and protection of families.”



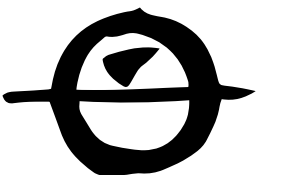




## MPUMALANGA (SUNRISE)

Terracotta clay  
72 x 61 x 58 cm / 28.5 x 24 x 23 in  
One-off

“The sunrise is a reminder of our consistent trajectory and momentum as active participants in the cosmos. The gravity and appreciation I have for these moments witnessing dawn over the hilltops of Ngobozana extends my deep gratitude shared with those in my community. To recognise the economy of daylight and rest together, beyond neighbourly greetings but towards greater cause, is affirming of the sun rising on and for generations to come.”









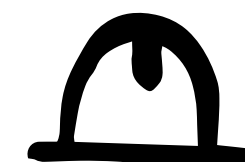
## UYALEZO (MESSAGES)

Terracotta clay

63 x 60 x 70 cm / 25 x 23.75 x 27.5 in

One-off

“*uYalezo ulwimi lwabaphantsi* – the language of our ancestral spirits – is the medium through which messages are relayed to offer guidance. This can be experienced as the language of ancestral guardians or stewards of wisdom to remind, restore and guide, giving strength to those seeking truth. Guardians as messengers impart these codes, depositing into the now imperative keys from spirit realms encompassing energies from a time beyond time. Through us, our ancestors are able to traverse our dreams, visions and metaphysical engagements in order to channel these messages through. In practice, we utter responses so that these messages are dually and safely passaged into this physical realm. My expressions of *Ithongo* encompassed through symbols shown as they are present in forms, embossings and sketches are deeply embedded in the energy we put into each process of making. Open to channelling, from *eThongweni* – place of spirits, a time before time – from where my guides utter into the present what has been, what is and what will be.”







## UMALUSI (SHEPHERD)

Terracotta clay

60 x 68 x 81 cm / 23.75 x 26.75 x 32 in

One-off

“amaXhosa clans are historically associated with cattle/livestock herding, moving across terrains according to the seasons as they understood them, grazing patterns and various vegetational opportunities, all crucial for survival and growth. This responsibility lay on the expertise of the herdsmen who learned all they need to know to successfully care, trade and grow the health and wealth of their families. Growing up, I too had dutifully learnt how to herd my father’s and the homestead’s cattle stock, along with the other young boys my age. This led to spending time in the *dongas* (dried ravines) or eroded riverbeds and cattle crossings, exposing me to clay deposits that I scooped up to make miniature cattleherds of my own.”



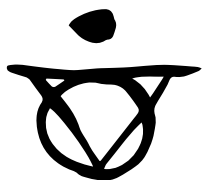




## UMAMA (MOTHER)

Terracotta clay  
104 x 58 x 68 cm / 41 x 23 x 26.75 in  
One-off

“Central to the organisation of family and home, mothers bring a wealth of knowledge gained from their own maternal and social learnings. The strength and pride of family resides with her capacity to harness all efforts from members of the family clan and the community. She brings success and peace to proceedings undertaken for various ritualistic, traditional or ceremonial purposes and is therefore seen as the knowledge keeper and heart of the home. Her efforts are always rewarded, even more so if she played a similar contributing or participatory role for other mothers and women in her family and community. The raising of her children, often a communal effort, allows her to partake in this exchange of services to others.”







## UMTSHAYELO (BROOM)

Terracotta clay

62 x 64 x 82 cm / 24.5 x 25.25 x 32.25 in

One-off

“Brooms tend to be assigned a feminine energy, being a tool for both cleaning and cleansing the home. My introduction to their vast number of uses came about primarily because tools are fascinating to me. Using them to texture my clay vessels honours my memories of the women in my family and community who made the brooms from dried grass. As objects, they symbolise to me both the consolidation of gratitude and the preparation to receive once again.”







iThongo: Dreams, Time and the Cosmic Blueprint of Our Identity  
Sisonkepapu (Khnyisa)

The cultural system of amaXhosa is an ancient system whose conceptualisation can be traced to the legacy of the ancient Egyptian, Kemetic / KMT<sup>1</sup> code in terms of how knowledge, truth and cosmic wisdom are structured. Many of our great master teachers and Izanusi (traditional healers who are the custodians of cosmological knowledge) have reminded us that KMT is not bound to a particular ethnic definition and, especially, a geographic position. The continent currently named Africa is known to be the birthplace through which this ancient civilisation thrived, and therefore spread its knowledge and wisdom throughout the world, informing various systems now in place today.

This is important for us because it allows for the engagement and appreciation of *iThongo* (the ancestral dreamscape) via *uYalezo* – *uLwimi LwabaPhantsi* (the medium through which messages are transmitted) as a means and method of structuring *ulwazi lwabaPhantsi* (the wisdom of the ancestors), since it is our ancestors who guard the sacred knowledge of the cosmos.

Within *uYalezo* is encoded the varying degrees and cycles of the development of consciousness from an elemental, plant, animal, human and cosmic level. This cosmology maps the flow and movement of time and cosmic energy, as well as their effects on *isimo sentlalo*. *Isimo* from *imo/ -mo* in isiXhosa relates to the states or modes of being, and *se/-intlalo* refers to the personal, familial and communal, as

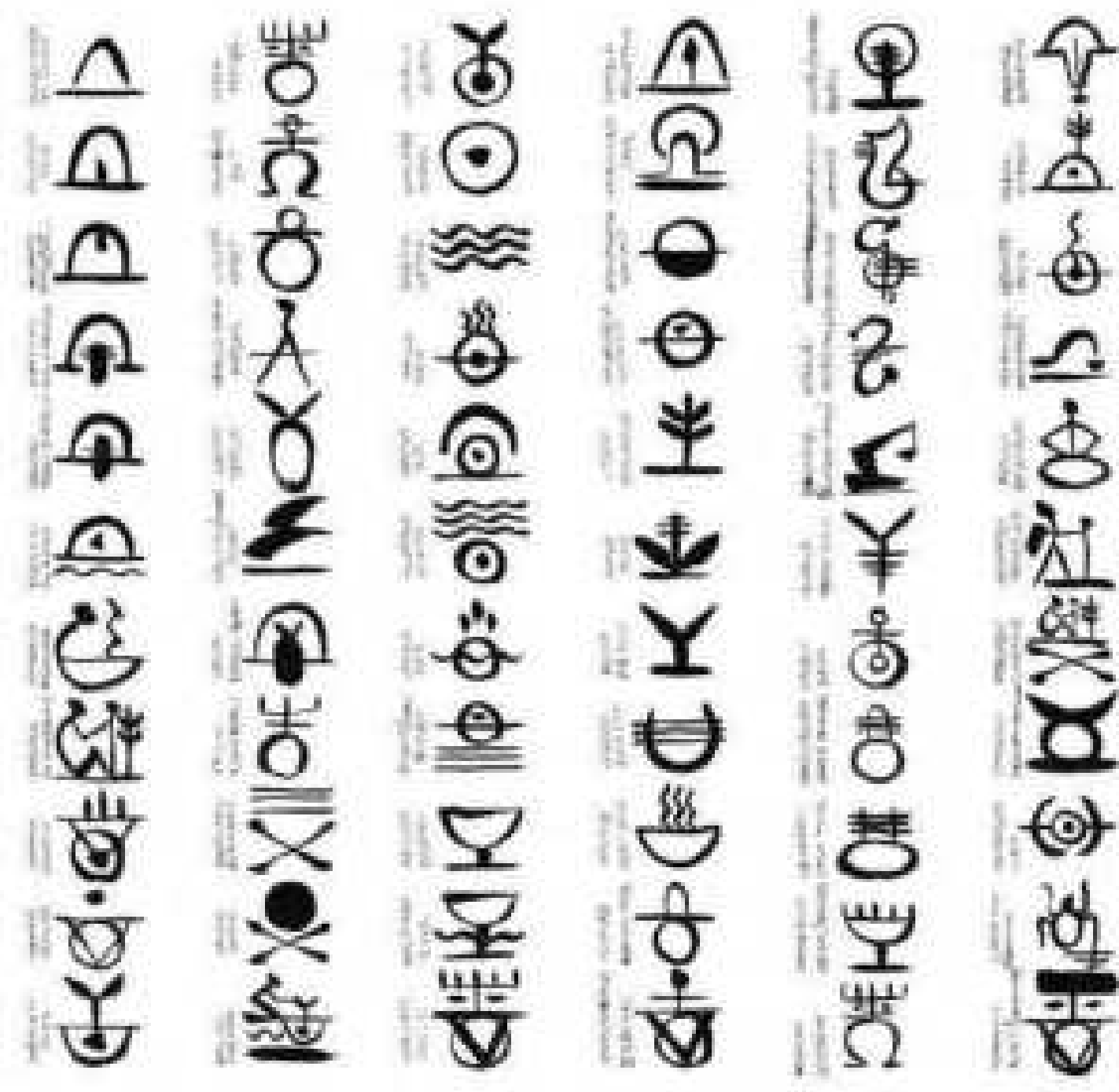
1. Kemet is an ancient name for the country we call Egypt. It is a vocalisation of the hieroglyphic values translated as KMT, which means “black land”, likely referring to the fertile black soils of Africa.

well as physical, mental and spiritual well+being. It is in this way that everyday life is ever+linked with the changing physical elements found on the planet, but also intricately connected with the cycles of the moon, the sun and other celestial bodies as they make their orbits throughout the universe and within us.

*uYalezo* therefore invites us to collectively dream and meditate on *iThongo* and time. Due to global imperial design that has been put in place for more than five centuries, we have been introduced to mechanical time – and the patterns of our everyday lives have become accustomed to and determined by it. With the advent of the Coronavirus, as well as many other events that have occurred throughout time, our very notions of time – past, present and future – have been destabilised.

These messages being communicated by our ancestors in this moment, and *uYalezo* being a mnemonic device that maps *ulwimi lwabaPhantsi*, bring into our consciousness the urgent need to reconnect with our cosmological and metaphysical time, so that we can re+connect with self as well as the various dimensions of existence as our ancestors learnt through *INDALO*, the cosmic blueprint of our identity.

*uYalezo* is a sacred art and science premised on divination and spi+ritual technology, which is a necessary tool to shift us from mechanical time and into cosmic time through *iThongo*. This cosmic language therefore re+aligns our beings and



uYalezo – uLwimi LwabaPhantsi (Ancestral Language) – a selection of the symbols created by Andile Dyalvane.



From left to right:  
Andile Dyalvane, Sisonke  
Papu and Nkuthazo Dyalvane,  
Ngobozana, Eastern Cape.

consciousness beyond the matrices of power and distortion that limit our experience of our selves and *amaThongo* – higher dimensional planes.

As such, *uYalezo* becomes a portal to re+connect us with *INDALO*. We are able to access these dimensions because of the energy encoded in each of *mkhulu* Andile Dyalvane’s symbols and ceramic stools and through *iThongo* as an intra-experience of the divine expressed through each of us. In other words, everything that happens inside of us is a manifestation of what is occurring on an external and higher plane – *emaThongweni*: we receive energy from the cosmos and it is grounded in our physical body; we access that energy as information through the plasma in our blood; and in turn, as light codes in the structures of our DNA, thus making our ancestors present with+in us through our gifts, thoughts, sensations, dreams and many other forms.

Since *INDALO* is a vast energy grid or network that is constantly flowing and vibrating with all

things in the manifested and unmanifested planes of existence, our ancestors communicate through this telepathic link. We are able to simultaneously access information and knowledge that does not yet exist in this time line (future) or that has been forgotten (past).

It is in this way then that *sithonga sihleli*, *sithonge silele* (we access the ancestral dreamscape while asleep and awake) as there is no discontinuity between the physical and ancestral / spiritual realm. It is through this awareness that our consciousness is guided into the more subtle dimensions of existence and experience. Our ancestors knew this and communicated telepathically without the need for sound-speech-language.

However, sound and language are some of the various forms in which the sacred art and science of divination manifests. The first sounds and language – *ulwimi* – that our ancestors used are vibrationally linked to physical and energetic parts in our bodies, the planet and cosmos, thus enabling

communication / manifestation to occur. The isiXhosa maxim ‘*umlomo uyadala*’ attests to this metaphysical truth that *uMzi+Mba* is the primary technological interface we use to navigate this dimension. Since we are infinitely connected with *INDALO*, we have the power to create or destroy by virtue of our intention.

If we can consider clay as the ancestral blueprint for the materiality of our bodies or *uMzi+Mba*, we are brought into the appreciation of the divine unity that clay exhibits through its union with water, earth, air and fire, and how the birth of each body as a vessel is dependent on the balance and harmony between these elements. The human body is also a device that is born out of cosmic harmony between these elements and many other forces that flow in varying degrees within the bio-rhythmic and cosmic energy fields.

This reveals to us that what we are, internally and externally, is an interface between various elements, frequencies, and energies, and that it is the dynamic interplay and interrelation between all of them that allows for the possibility of new forms, new beings, and new worlds to come into manifestation. This is the realm of consciousness that *iThongo* guides us into as the originary operating system in alignment with the cosmic laws of this interplanetary system we are experiencing ourselves in collectively in this moment.

Through the use of clay as a device that holds information and memory, *mkhulu* Andile Dyalvane encodes the messages received *emaThongweni*, the memories from childhood life and the consciousness in which his village of Ngobozana operates in, thus allowing each of us to locate and access individual self as a unique part of the divine whole.

As with each stroke that makes up each individual symbol and chair of the *iThongo* collection, *INDALO* also operates on the principle of flow (motion), connectivity and communication forming a dynamic whole. This could be attributed to the harmonious relationship between our body, mind

and spirit; past, present, future; ancestors, us, the unborn; as well as the masculine, feminine and androgynous states of being. The fluidity between these elements create the conditions for *iThongo* to co+operate and assist in maintaining balance between the personal, familial, communal and cosmic life cycles.

It is in this way that *mkhulu* Dyalvane is entranced in a cosmic dance while birthing each symbol, stool and universe. It is through this spi+ritual technology that organic matter, consciousness and spirit become key entities used in the communication process. Through, with and by touching clay, *Nyang’ iyangqungqa*<sup>2</sup> interfaces with the collective field and collapses time. If *abaPhantsi* (the ancestors) are the consciousness that lives within the earth, then clay carries their energetic essence and becomes the technological and cultural dream to manifest *iThongo*.

The mode by which *Nyang’ iyangqungqa* encodes the symbolical knowledge and wisdom of amaXhosa allows for a shift from the English – and its Latin, Greek and other cultures’ symbolic influences on how we see and know ourselves – and enables us to tap into the geometry and consciousness of *ulwazi lwabaPhantsi*. In so doing, *Nyang’ iyangqungqa* transforms into *uMalusi* (a shepherd, and the title of the work installed as an offering of appeasement to his ancestors on the site of their previous village), which guides this generation and the next towards holistic healing through gentleness, song and wisdom. The vast knowledge of the natural and metaphysical worlds that *uMalusi* acquires by being immersed in the everchanging landscape, received *emaThongweni* or activated in the DNA, are manifested as *uYalezo*.

2. “Dancing Moon”, a Native American name that Dyalvane was given by a shaman in Maine in the US.

–  
Sisonkepapu (KHNYSA) is a traditional healer, poet and storyteller based in Mthatha in the Eastern Cape. He is the founder and director of ISPILI Network, which fosters dialogue, collaboration, innovation, and entrepreneurship among young creatives in the Eastern Cape.



Nkuthazo Dyalvane and the artist's mother, Nofezile Dyalvane, Ngobozana, Eastern Cape.

## Language, Sound, Clay and Thread Nkuthazo Dyalvane

From the outset, Andile Dyalvane's vision for *iThongo* was holistic and expansive, encompassing collaborations with practitioners from other creative disciplines. His interests in sound, language and spiritual symbology have seen him forge connections with others – as far afield as Taipei, Cornwall and New Mexico – who draw on the wisdom of ancient knowledge systems to bring about healing.

These clay structures with their circular bases and sculptured symbolic back rests, as supports, connect to worlds beyond our perceived linear time. We enter cosmic ancestral and spiritual dreamtime (*iThongo*) when we enter Dyalvane's circle of channelled symbols. We commune with active ancestors, who have us utter and call their names, striving to plug us into their messages (*uyalezo*) to aid remembering who we truly are.

In the process of making the *iThongo* works, Dyalvane called upon Sisonke Khanyisa Papu – traditional healer, writer and multi-media storyteller based in Mthatha in the Eastern Cape – to share his understanding of structures of African knowledge, reflected in the isiXhosa language. Papu introduced the tools of home (*umzi*) + sound (*mba*) = *umzimba* (body). Systems of language are encoded manifestations of spirit and nature's symbology, meeting with external geometric space and internal spheres, where universal spiritual and scientific elements unify in the body. The four elements can be viewed as portals, paramount constituents of creation: fire (*umlilo*) as blood and heart; earth (*umhlaba*) as magnetic, muscle and organ function

and active structural communication; water (*amanzi*) as intention, flows of thought and consciousness; and air (*umoya*) as life in spirited breath.

Dyalvane's circle of collaborators reverberated with the sonic vibrations of Nkosenathi Ernie Koela (Mtana.WeXhwele), an indigenous instrumentalist and sound healer. In music, conversation and ceremony, he enfolded us once again into the womb of our origins, the source, *ethongweni* – a place of great spirit. The resonant sound of the round *igubu* drum took us back to our mother's heartbeat.

The painted symbols that birthed Dyalvane's stools found a new life as gestural marks painted in indigo dye onto wearable artworks by Onesimo Bam, a conceptual textile designer in Cape Town. The process of making opened Bam up to his own ancestral story. Like many other Westernised black South Africans of his generation, he has only vague memories of his home village.

Wherever we are on our journey, *iThongo* welcomes us into a collaborative network of healing. Those who sit here, in this circle, engage with *ethongweni* – the great spirit of belonging, the place within all of us called home.

–  
Nkuthazo Dyalvane is a multi-disciplinary visual artist, exploring different modalities of expression toward personal, spiritual and social transformation.

Andile Dyalvane

Biography



Present Lives and works in Cape Town, South Africa

2003 Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, National Diploma in Ceramic Design

1999 Sivuyile Technical College, National Diploma in Art and Design

1978 Born in Ngobozana, Eastern Cape, South Africa

SELECT AWARDS

2019 Caroline Winn Regional/National Ceramic Ambassador Award, Ceramics South Africa

2015 Icon Award, Design Foundation

2014 Second Runner Up, Ceramics South Africa National Exhibition

2011 Top 200 Young South Africans, Mail & Guardian

2009 Artist of the Year, VISI Magazine

2008 Gold Award, Best Stand (Displays) Decorex Johannesburg

2006 Design Icon in the Western Cape, Cape Craft and Design Institute (CCDI)

EDIDA International Award in Ceramics, Elle Decoration South Africa

2003 Second Prize, Cape Craft Design Institute, 10 Years of Democracy

2001 FNB Vita Award, Best Decorated Piece

1999 FNB Vita Award, Best Exhibition Piece from the Western Cape

SELECT EXHIBITIONS

2020 *What Would Have Been*, Friedman Benda, New York, USA

*Selected Works from the Leach Pottery Residency*, Southern Guild, Cape Town, South Africa

*Solace*, Southern Guild, Cape Town, South Africa

*Intersect Aspen* (virtual fair), Southern Guild

*Intersect Chicago* (virtual fair), Southern Guild

Design Miami (virtual fair), Southern Guild

*Closer, Still* (online exhibition), Southern Guild, Cape Town, South Africa

2019 *Communion*, Southern Guild, Cape Town, South Africa

*Mess – Expressionism and Experimentation in Contemporary Ceramics*, Future Perfect, New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles, USA

*Iidonga Collection*, Feature Designer of the Year, 100% Design South Africa

*Our Cultures in Constant Collaboration*, Leach Pottery, St. Ives, UK

2017 *Idadla* (solo), Southern Guild, Cape Town, South Africa

2016 *Camagu* (solo), Friedman Benda, New York, USA

*Gebak*, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa

2015 *Homecoming*, Southern Guild, Cape Town, South Africa

2014 Central Saint Martins University of the Arts, London, UK

*Making Africa: A Continent of Contemporary Design*, Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein, Germany

*Terra Nova*, New Taipei City Yingge Ceramic Museum Biennale, Taiwan

D-Street Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa

2013 *The Craft of Ubuntu: An Exploration of Collaboration through Making*, Iziko Heritage Museum, Cape Town, South Africa

Southern Guild 2013 Collection, Museum of African Design, Johannesburg, South Africa

*Heavy Metal*, Southern Guild, Cape Town, South Africa

2012 *Long Table 101 Place Settings and Retrospective*, Iziko Heritage Museum, Cape Town, South Africa

*ReCollect*, Southern Guild Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa

Southern Guild 2012 Collection, Everard Read, Johannesburg South Africa

*Everyday Discoveries: Tradition Reinterpreted*, International Design House, Helsinki, Finland

South African Pavilion, Royal Festival Hall for the Olympics, London, UK

KKNK Festival Exhibition, MOOOI Art Gallery, Oudtshoorn, South Africa

2011 *Conversations*, AMARIDIAN Gallery, New York, USA

2009 *Brotherhood*, RED BLACK & WHITE Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa

2006 *Picasso and Africa*, Iziko Museum, Cape Town, South Africa

2003 Solo Exhibition, UCT Irma Stern Museum, Cape Town, South Africa

SELECT RESIDENCIES & WORKSHOPS

2019 Artist-in-Residence, Leach Pottery Studio, St. Ives, UK

Summer Workshop Programme, Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Maine, USA

Clay Adventures with Andile Dyalvane, Master Class Touring Series, South Africa

2018 Clay Gulgong, Clay Festival Ceramics Master Demonstrations & Lecture, Australia

2015 Artist-in-Residence, Palo Alto Art Center, California, USA

2014 New Taipei City Yingge Ceramic Museum, Taipei, Taiwan

SELECT COLLECTIONS

Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein, Germany

Iziko National Museum, Cape Town, South Africa

Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum, Port Elizabeth, South Africa

New Taipei City Yingge Ceramic Museum, Taipei, Taiwan



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The short documentary film *iThongo*, produced by Southern Guild and Friedman Benda, can be seen at [southernguild.co.za/journal/ithongo-the-movie](http://southernguild.co.za/journal/ithongo-the-movie). The music album, titled *Embo – Ethongweni*, composed and produced by Mntana.WeXhwele for *iThongo*, can be found on iTunes or Spotify.

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