

SOUTHERN GUILD

CHUMA MAWENI: ARTIST PROFILE

Born in Port Elizabeth, South Africa in 1976, Chuma Maweni makes meticulously crafted ceramic furniture and vessels. He first drew local attention for his series of teardrop-shaped conical pots, smoke-fired and burnished using traditional Nguni techniques. Their dark, porous surfaces, striking silhouettes and smoky scent established him as a distinctly contemporary ceramicist inspired by the utilitarian forms and techniques of Zulu and Xhosa ceramics.

Maweni traces his craft to his earliest memories making clay figures of bulls and cows on the muddy riverbanks of the Eastern Cape. Amidst the social upheaval of anti-Apartheid riots in the 1980s, he moved to KwaPayne village, just outside Mthatha in the rural Transkei, so he could focus on his schooling. Maweni graduated with a Bachelor of Technology in ceramic design from Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in 2002 and spent a few years teaching ceramics to rural women in a poverty alleviation programme run by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research.

He moved to Cape Town in 2006 to work for the Light From Africa Foundation, which ran the Art in the Forest ceramics studio, gallery and outreach centre. There he mentored and taught other ceramicists while honing his style, opening his own studio in 2016.

Maweni's *Imbizo* table and stool set – the word means “gathering” in isiXhosa – set in motion a more monumental direction and saw him apply his intricate carving skills into wood for the first time. The installation has since developed into an extensive range of stools, which earned him a Design Foundation Award in 2018. Plinths, side-tables and large dining tables came later; each piece with its own combination of shapes, precise incisions and textured patterns.

Maweni's debut solo exhibition, *iMvelaphi*, opened at Southern Guild Cape Town in November 2024 and featured a collection of handcrafted furniture, lighting and vessels. Additionally, he has exhibited widely with Southern Guild and has work in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, where it forms part of *Before Yesterday We Could Fly: An Afrofuturist Period Room* (November 2021). The gallery has presented his work internationally at Expo Chicago, FOG Design+Art (San Francisco), Design Miami, The Salon Art + Design (New York), PAD London and Christie's Design Auction.

He was an artist in residence at the Academy of Ceramics Gmunden (AoCG) in Gmunden, Austria in Summer 2023 and his work is included in *Clay Formes* edited by Olivia Barrell.

Maweni's largest collection of work to date was created for Xigera Safari Lodge in Botswana in 2021. Comprising more than 70 unique pieces in black clay, the selection includes stools, pedestals, tables, lamps and coffee sets that are found throughout the lodge, each one unique in shape, colour and patterning.