

UPCOMING EDITOR'S PICK EVENTS

APR 20 **Fort Worth Art Fair**
Sundance Square · Thu, 10:00 AM

APR 20 **Main St. Fort Worth Arts** |
Sundance Square · Thu, 10:00 AM

THIS IS IT!
HIS FINAL TOUR 2023 **APRIL 28**

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Dallas scored a major show of Southern African art. How? Spicy chicken

“If You Look Hard Enough, You Can See Our Future” at the African American Art Museum takes in more than 60 artworks from South Africa to Kenya.



Self-portrait of Zanele Muholi, part of the "Black Lioness" series, being installed Monday at the African



By [Jerome Weeks](#)

5:00 AM on Apr 20, 2023



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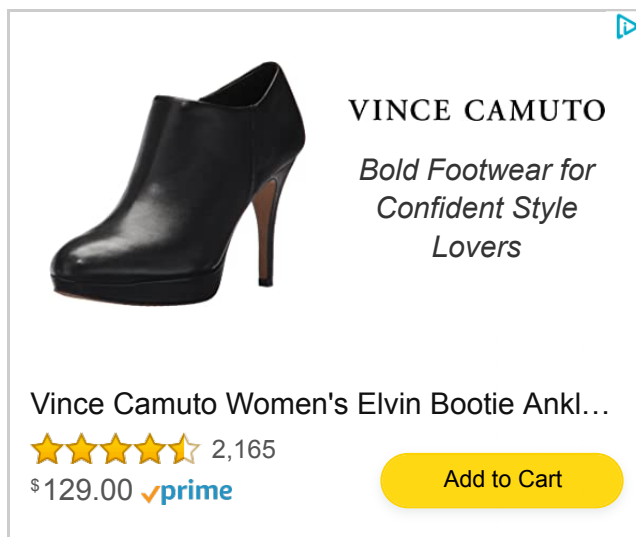
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Curator [Laurie Ann Farrell](#) glances up across the tall, sunlit, central atrium of the [African American Museum](#) in Fair Park.

“You know, this is such a beautiful building,” she said, “and such a beautiful space.”

Not so beautiful this Monday morning, perhaps.



There’s the echoing bustle and clutter of a sizable art show being installed: people moving ladders, people checking computers, giant wooden crates waiting to be unpacked. The exhibition is “If You Look Hard Enough, You Can See Our Future” — the title is borrowed from a [Stephen Hobbs print](#) in the show — which is making its world premiere this week in Dallas with 62 works

from 55 artists. They include photographers, painters, sculptors, printmakers and weavers from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo.



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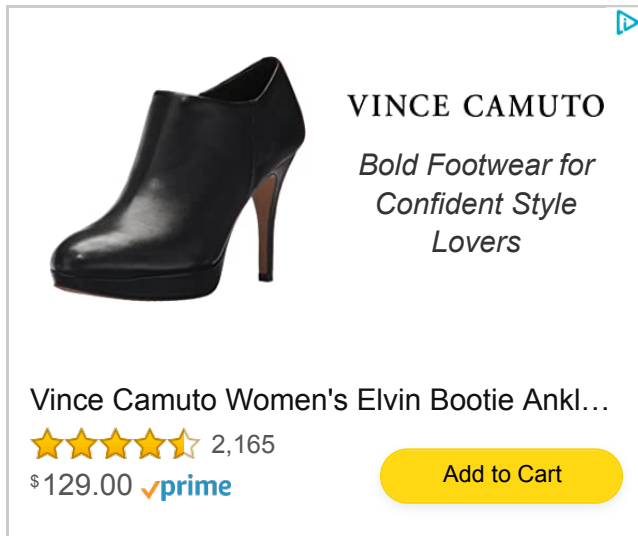
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“These artists are known in South Africa,” Farrell said, “and some of them have broken on into Europe.”





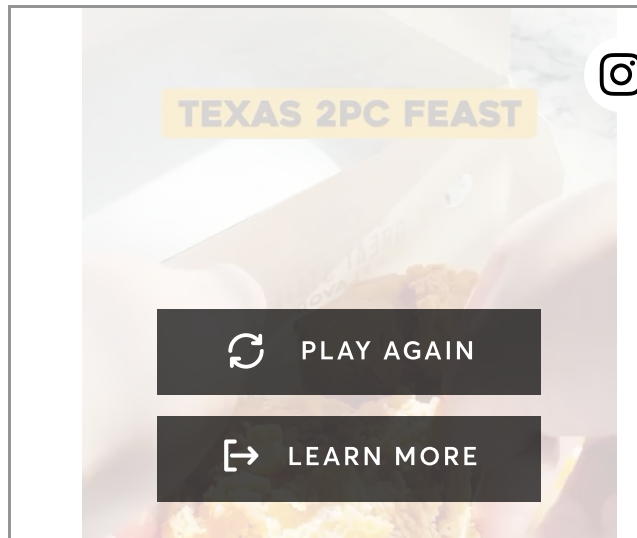
William Kentridge, Untitled, ("Man turning into a tree"), 2001, linocut on rice paper (Nando's Art Collection / Greg Kucera Gallery)



There are world-renowned figures in the show — notably [William Kentridge](#), famous for his prints, drawings and films. But when asked if any of the other artists are actually making their American debut in Dallas, Farrell said, “About 85% of them, if not more. I’m so excited — this is an introduction. And I just think it’s a gift to Dallas.”

At the entrance to one of the two galleries is a big, bold, photographic self-portrait of the Black South African artist [Zanele Muholi](#). It’s being put up like strips of wallpaper, carefully lined up. Muholi sends individual museums the data file and then the museums have it printed locally according to the artist’s instructions. Only one museum at a time can display a particular photo.

Muholi’s face is one of the show’s iconic images.



Muholi, who uses the pronoun they, is “like the hottest thing right now in South African photography,” Farrell said. This particular image is from their “Black Lioness” series.

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Muholi first gained attention photographing Black lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in South Africa. But their striking “Black Lioness” portraits have taken them to a whole new level: They paint themselves entirely in black face against a black background. All that glitters in this example are mostly the whites of Muholi’s eyes, plus their necklace and their headdress of safety pins. The jewelry is like a steel lion’s mane.

Farrell has loosely divided the exhibition into portraits, landscapes, cityscapes and abstraction. But there are also examples of traditional African crafts being used for contemporary purposes — like the intricate, bead-and-textile tapestries of [Igshaan Adams](#).

“You Can See Our Future” is not expressly focused on the history of apartheid and colonialism. But throughout, artworks address the bitter legacies of both.

One collection of black-and-white photographs even includes a picture of a family's eviction notice — evoking the [history of forced removals in South Africa](#), which is so long and so large, arguments over who owns what properties remain deep.

It's hard not to hear echoes of [Fair Park's own history](#) of buying out nearby Black homeowners on the cheap. And the African American Museum itself stands where the [Hall of Negro Life](#) once attracted people during the 1936 Texas Centennial — and then was immediately torn down.

Recently, Fair Park institutions have made [efforts at acknowledging this history](#) and to connect with the local community.



Curator Laurie Anne Farrell with, from the left, Daniella Mooney, "Waihoek in January," 2016, multi-

block woodcut; Catherine Ocholla, "Out of the Blue," 2019, oil on canvas, and Colin Payne, "Pop Goes the Clouds VII," 2010, oil on canvas. (Jerome Weeks / KERA)



Farrell, who lives in Dallas, is not just the curator of “If You Look Hard Enough.” She’s a major reason it’s here.

Farrell’s written [several books on African art](#) and was senior curator at the Dallas Contemporary before COVID-19 hit. Before all that, she worked seven years as a curator at the Museum for African Art in New York (now [The African Center](#)).

That’s how Farrell met the late Dick Enthoven. Enthoven, who died in December, was a billionaire philanthropist and owner of [Nando’s](#), a spicy chicken restaurant chain. He bought it in 2014. The first restaurant was established in 1987 by Robert Brozen and Fernando Duarte (hence, the name Nando’s). It has since become a global franchise, earning more than a billion dollars in revenue last year from 1,200 outlets worldwide.

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Enthoven was a leading collector and supporter of South African artists. (He once said the chief satisfaction of gaining a fortune was spending it wisely). He gave Kentridge the money to make his first film, for instance. But Enthoven supported thousands of other artists — literally, thousands. His collection contains more than 25,000 items. More than just buying their works, Enthoven commissioned them and gave them exposure in international exhibitions.

But also, particularly, in his restaurants.

“They wanted to have a uniquely South African aesthetic,” said Farrell. Every Nando’s is different. In this, they’re a little like the House of Blues or the old Planet Hollywood. But instead of decorating locations with celebrity guitars or movie props, each Nando’s uses real art works, from living artists. The company even has its own curator, who consciously maintains that aesthetic in its restaurants.



PORTRA14 by Kilmany-Jo Liversage, 2014, acrylic, spray point on board (Nando's Art Collection)



“So this has just been a labor of love for me,” said Farrell, who became fascinated by African art as an undergraduate at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

When asked what it was like to carve out a show of fewer than 100 works from a 25,000-piece collection, Farrell laughed and said, “Well, it was during COVID lockdown. But I limited the time I would take to do it. I didn’t want to have art fatigue.”

Still, even though Nando’s has more than a thousand restaurants around the world, fewer than 40 are in the U.S. And most of those are clustered in and around Chicago and Washington, D.C.

So yes, part of the purpose of “If You Look Hard Enough” is to raise public awareness of Nando’s in Texas — because, this year, the company is [opening outlets in North Texas](#) and Houston. These are its first restaurants in any western state in America.



And if you're hungry — or curious — you can even sign up online for [updates](#) as the openings approach.

“If You Look Hard Enough, You Can See Our Future” runs at the [African American Museum](#) through August 13.

IN THIS STORY

African American Museum of Dallas

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