

THEY TOO ARE THE EARTH

A SOLO EXHIBITION BY **SANAA GATEJA** (B. 1950, UGANDA) AT **AFRIART GALLERY, KAMPALA**

19 September - 21 November 2026

Afriart Gallery, Plot 110-112, 7th Street, Industrial Area, Kampala, Uganda | www.afriartgallery.org

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This exhibition brings Sanaa Gateja's practice into renewed focus through an intimate and expansive exploration of material. Across his renowned paper-bead tapestries on bark cloth, new works on banana fibre, and found root sculptures shaped by time and nature, Gateja returns to the materials and processes that have long defined his artistic language, while opening them to new sculptural and spatial possibilities.



Sanaa Gateja, *Queen Mother*, 2025
Paperbeads on Barkcloth, 178x121cm

Borrowing its title from Niyi Osundare's poem "**They Too Are the Earth**," the exhibition asks what becomes possible when we look again at the things we have been taught to overlook. In Osundare's poem, the earth is not only soil, landscape, or resource; it is also the lives, labour, wounds, and forgotten presences that sustain the world while remaining unseen. Gateja extends this proposition into material form. Discarded paper, banana fibre, bark cloth, raffia, roots, and weathered wood are not passive matter in his hands. They too are the earth: carriers of memory, history, injury, beauty, and renewed value.

At the centre of the exhibition is the idea of materiality: not simply as texture, colour, or surface, but as a way of seeing, remembering, and transforming the world. Gateja works with ordinary materials found in the environment, materials that are familiar within Ugandan and African life, yet often overlooked. Banana fibre, bark cloth, raffia, discarded paper, and weathered wood are not treated as raw matter alone. They are carriers of memory, labour, history, and possibility. In his hands, they become evidence of how value can be created from what already surrounds us.

This transformation is slow, physical, and deeply attentive. Gateja's practice is built through acts of stitching, threading, joining, binding, cutting, rolling, and assembling. Paper is cut and rolled into beads; beads are threaded and stitched into surfaces; fibres are joined and layered; bark cloth becomes both ground and memory-bearing skin; found roots are recognised, positioned, and allowed to speak as sculptural forms. The work