

# 50 GOLBORNE

## SANAA GATEJA AT COLLECT 2021

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50 GOLBORNE is delighted to present new artworks by Kampala (Uganda)-based artist Sanaa Gateja that continue his series on East African flora inspired by booklets published by the British Crown Agents for Overseas Development and Administration in the 1920s and 1930s.

These surveys of East African botanic species- were widely distributed in all major cities in Britain as well as in the ex-colonies of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Gateja selected some of the mass replicated pen drawings, transforming them into unique works of art, large scale lush wall works that have a material, haptic quality.

Hundreds of conical paper beads have been meticulously stitched on [bark cloth](#)- a material made out of an [East African ficus tree](#) through ancient rituals dating from pre-colonial Ugandan Royalty that involve sacred music and dance. The beads are made by the artist studio's community and are the result of a meticulous process that includes forming, tinting and painting each of them by hand from paper recycled from newspapers, magazines and popular books that are piled up in the studio for that purpose.

"Art questions what we have done in the past, present and what we see as the future on this great planet." says Gateja.

Inverting the colonial narrative- in which botanical taxonomy could be questioned as being part of the political machine that accompanied the appropriation and commodification of African natural resources- the artist re-contextualises humble plants within their land of origin and proceeds to singularise them. The sumptuous botanical tableaux demand that we pay attention to their subject- their sensory, malleable representation even tempting us to touch them.

Gateja says: "I am passionate about bringing value back to what is discarded as waste, our indiscriminate pursuit of gain and the disregard of nature." The acceleration of changes in the East-African landscape due to global heating certainly gives the art works a celebratory value as well as an element of poignancy.

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## ABOUT SANAA GATEJA

Sanaa Gateja (b: 1950) is a multi-media artist based in Kampala (Uganda). His practice includes painting and soft sculpture. How to engage positively in the global dialogue between time and place is one of the questions that preoccupies him. His deeply original practice, rooted in his engagement with local craftsmanship, waste transformation and community cohesion gives elements of answers.

Gateja left Uganda at a 19-year-old, fleeing the civil war, and lived afterwards in Kenya, Italy and the UK where he studied at Goldsmiths University- to return to Kampala only in the late 1990s.

Gateja's work is permanently on display at the National Museums in Uganda and Kenya. It was exhibited among other places in the Cairo International Biennial; Museum of Art and Design, New York; Biennale Gwangju, Korea; Mbari Institute, Washington DC; African Centre, London.