

FRIEDMAN BENDA  
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# designboom

## Andile Dyalvane on ancestry, community and his sculptural ceramic seating for Friedman Benda's 'Design in Dialogue'

By Nina Azzarello  
December 22, 2020



on april 1, 2020, new york gallery [friedman benda](#) initiated a series of online interviews aimed at connecting individuals across the world with leading voices in the creative field. [design in dialogue](#) is a conversational program hosted alternately by curator and historian glenn adamson and designer stephen burks that engages with designers, makers, critics, and curators as they reflect on their careers and creative processes. against the backdrop of [COVID-19](#) and global lockdowns, the conversations are held virtually on zoom for 1 hour for anyone in the world to tune in to, and include a participatory Q&A with the audience in attendance. friedman benda has since presented more than 40 episodes, and will continue with a lineup of future guests, each offering unparalleled insight into the sensibilities, musings, and memories of today's creative protagonists. see our recent feature of the 3-part interview with [andrea branzi on his origins, ideas and influential career](#), and [marcel wanders on his early experiences and entrepreneurial life](#).

on december 9 2020, [design in dialogue](#) welcomed andile dyalvane, the south african ceramic artist currently engaged in one of his most ambitious undertakings: a series of sculptural stools inspired by his lexicon of symbols entitled iThongo (ancestral dreamscapes). dyalvane describes this resonant project – which draws on his work as a community healer of the amaxhosa tribe – as 'a gathering of dreams – seated in the soul, held by the spirits of our ancestors.' in a conversation with glenn

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adamson, dyalvane explored the artistic background and influences leading up to this major project, which is on view at [southern guild](#) in cape town until february 5, and which will travel to friedman benda in may 2021.

watch the full video interview at the top of the page and stay tuned as designboom continues to share design in dialogue features. see all past episodes – and RSVP for upcoming ones – [here](#).



Exhibition view of 'andile dyalvane: camagu' at friedman benda in 2016

dyalvane kicked off the conversation by discussing his early interest in ceramics, which started as an instinctual attraction to playing with clay as a child. without any guidance or background in the arts, and having never seen clay used as an artistic or sculptural medium, dyalvane was nevertheless naturally drawn to the craft, and eventually went on to peruse art in college. 'the first time I actually professionally touched clay was in 1996,' dyalvane recalls. 'before that, having grown up in the eastern cape (of south africa) in the countryside, I grew up as a sort of farmer – a head boy, the one that's a shepherd. those were my duties. you have livestock, you have land, you have everything that, as a child, is assigned to you as a chore. during that time, I would find time go and take clay, and it was child's play. you shouldn't be doing that as a child, because your job should be doing A, B, and C – you shouldn't be playing with clay. but, I found myself drawn into this medium and fascinated by the clay – even without knowing the technological aspects or even seeing anyone making objects, artifacts, or pots.'

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exhibition view of 'andile dyalvane: camagu' at friedman benda in 2016

before professionally working with ceramics, dyalvane describes a love of drawing. he explained how his sketches come to inform larger projects and ideas – including the series of sculptural stools to be presented at iThongo, an exhibition at friedman benda in april, 2021. 'a vivid vision comes, a split second vision,' he describes. 'it could happen when i'm sleeping, when i'm talking to someone, listening to music, or busy with another piece. if i'm not in the studio, the only way to let that pressure out is to use my sketchbook, just so i can document it and have it down. it's a way of mediation. during university, there was an exercise called 'drawing for design', where they asked us to draw realistically – something like a still life – and then take it and simplify it to one, two, or three lines, so you can't really tell what it is. i've been practicing that, and i thought it was quite an amazing exercise. throughout all the collections i've created over time, i would create a symbol for each collection, which i would create a stamp for, and put under that piece. i then started practicing my brushmanship, which i was exposed to in taiwan, and i had an intense vision of symbols, without really knowing what they meant. i had visions of groups of people sitting, or certain characters in my family or community – someone who performs a certain duty. i realized what these messages were about – i took them as reminders from my ancestors that i need to document this, and create these symbols, and give them a meaning and name'.



(left) gudu II (medium), clan of my mother, 2016 / (right) ngwanya II, praise name series, 2016

iThongo comprises an extensive collection of sculptural ceramic seating that pays homage to his ancestors. meaning 'ancestral dreamscape' in xhosa, iThongo refers to the medium through which messages are transmitted from the ancestors. the sculptural stools, chairs and benches are exhibited in the custom of xhosa ceremonial gatherings, in a circular arrangement around a fire hearth and herbal offerings. the intricate form of each object is based on a single pictogram or glyph from a series of nearly 200 symbols that dyalvane has created to denote important words in xhosa life – such as entshonalanga (sunset), igubu (drum), umalusi (herdsman) and izilo (totem animals). taking their inspiration from both dyalvane's personal memories and various african artefacts, the seating objects sit close to the earth, as the ground is revered as an ancient portal for ancestral communion.

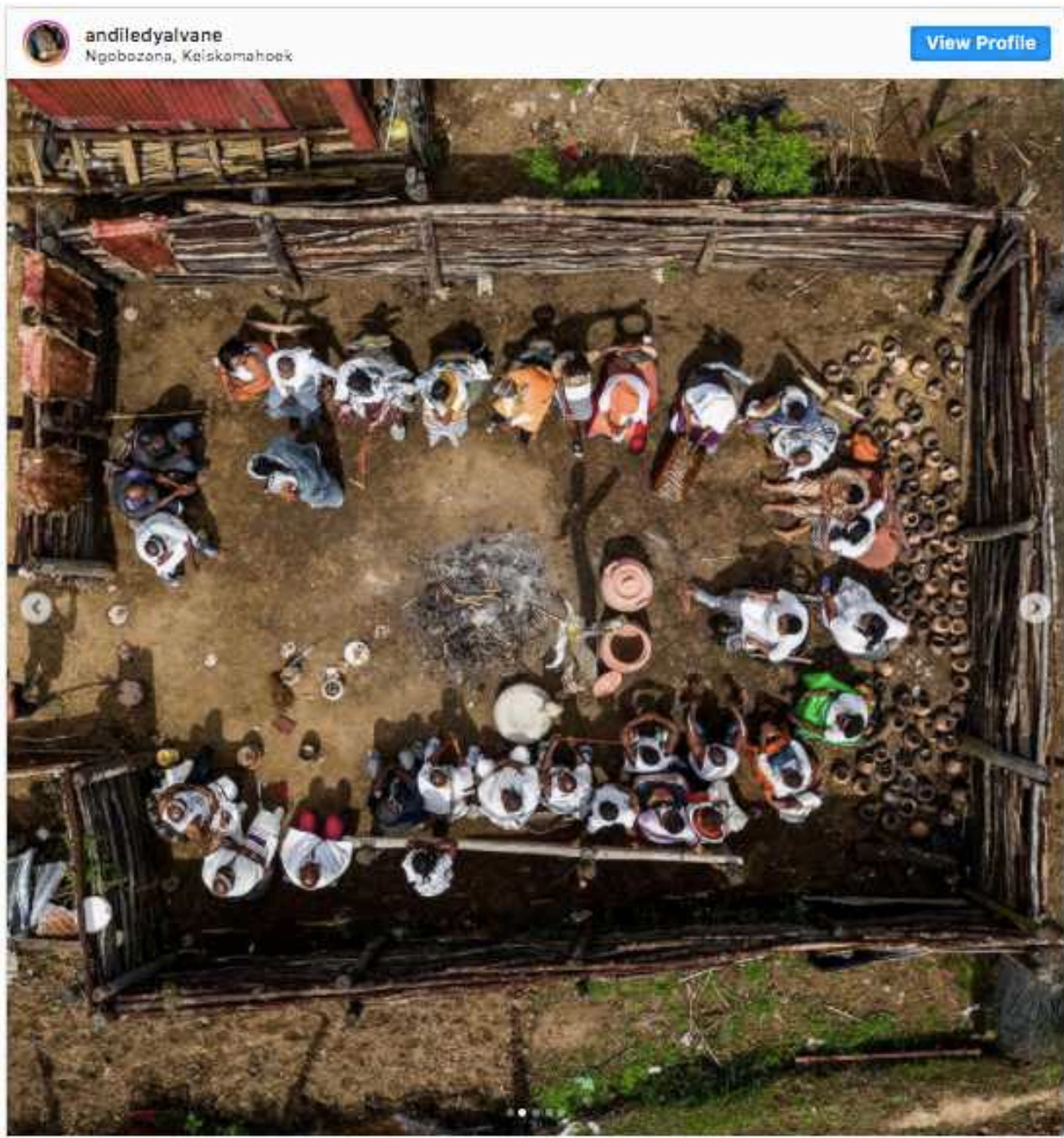


all images by adriaan louw, courtesy of friedman benda, southern guild, and andile dyalvane

the body of work traveled in its entirety to dyalvane's rural homestead in ngobozana, eastern cape, where his family and extended community had the opportunity to view it in november. 'what these stools are carrying for me is a way of home, a way of restoring what was lost from my community. i'm the only one in my community creating such work, but i'm not the

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only one capable of doing it. it's only because I've been exposed, I've answered to the call, and been privileged enough to be able to learn. my bringing them back home is to say – remember who you are, remember what you have lost'.



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uMnga, iNkomo, and iZilo



uTyani, iMpepho, and uMalusi



uMama (mother)



uMama (mother) detail

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uMama and uMpumalanga



iMpepho (clary sage)



iMpepho (clary sage) detail

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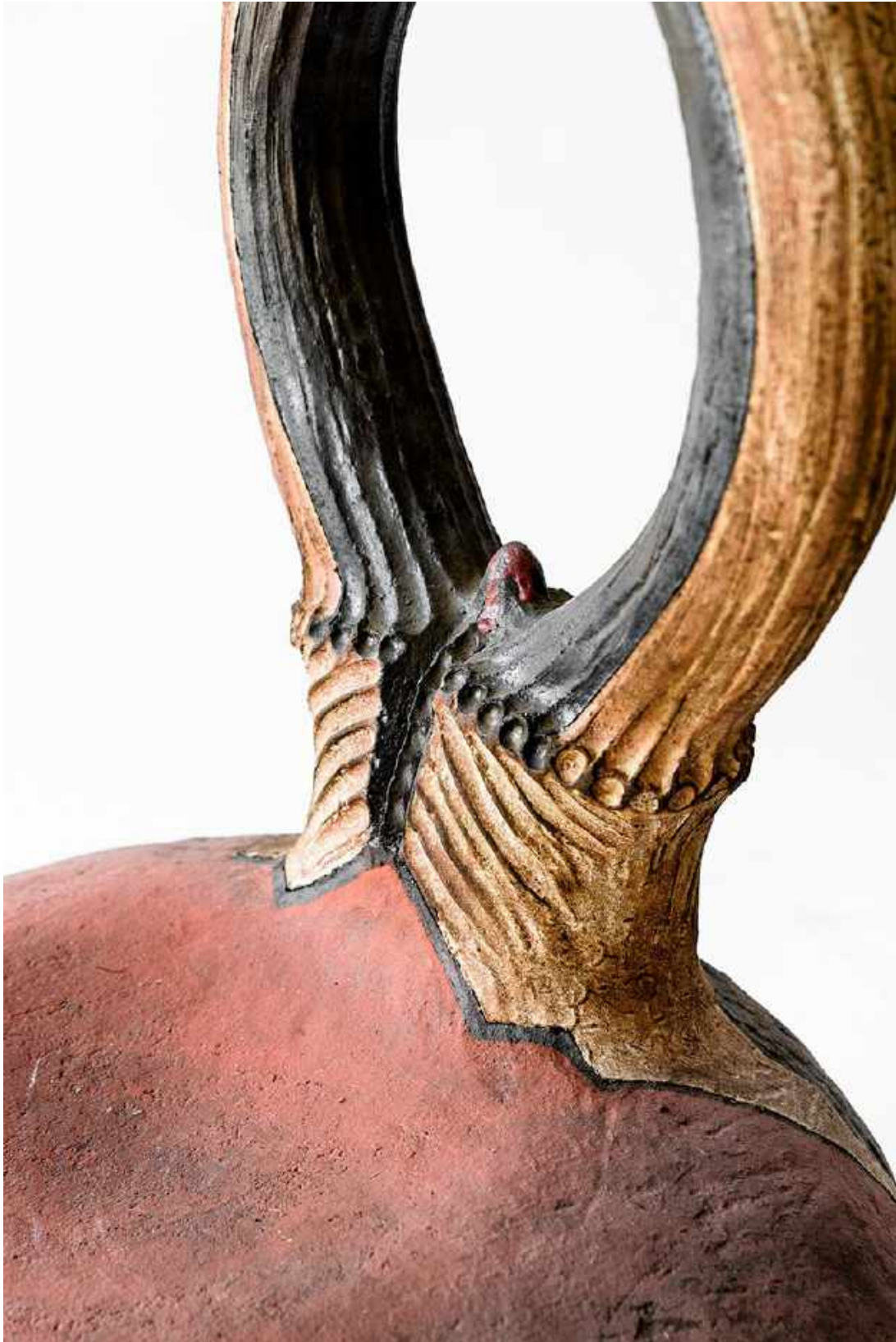


ngobozana and uYalezo



iGubu (drum) II

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iGubu (drum) II detail

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portrait of andile dyalvane

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