

outs” from nature. With materials recalling the traditional turf structures that housed rural Icelanders prior to urbanization and industrialization, as well as the peat moss that was a necessary source of heat on an island with limited raw materials, the piece evokes the painstaking labor of fashioning a living amid the most unforgiving conditions.

The exhibition also included several re-creations of works from the ongoing “Timescape” series, which Róbertsdóttir has been working on since 2005. Each *Timescape* is a rectangular metal plate, made of silver or bronze, that oxidizes and produces a visible document of its encounter with the elements. In addition to a single silver plate hanging inside the gallery, three bronze plates were temporarily embedded in the sidewalk outside, bringing to mind Carl Andre’s iconic floor installations. Rather than being chosen for their durability, as are the materials in many of Andre’s floor pieces, Róbertsdóttir’s metals are meant to document their process of deterioration. Iceland’s sea air, coupled with its geothermal activity, greatly accelerates metal corrosion, so the location of the work will determine how the metal’s surface will change over time.

Róbertsdóttir similarly incorporates chance and site specificity into the making of a number of works titled *Lava Landscape*, which she has been creating since 1996. These ephemeral wall installations are made of materials such as the black gravel the artist collects from the cooled molten rock of Iceland’s recently active volcanoes. For the approximately ten-foot-tall *Lava Landscape*, 2021, in this exhibition, the artist affixed the material in two rectangular configurations set at right angles in a corner of the gallery. Although Róbertsdóttir refers to this group of works as wall paintings, the spare color composition and graphic precision of the black gravel against the white wall are more akin to the effect of a graphite or charcoal rubbing on textured paper. By designating them paintings Róbertsdóttir might be attempting to distance the works from their parallels to Sol LeWitt’s wall drawings, but again her references to Iceland’s distinctive terrain and its built environment distinguish her work. The wall installations are made through a process similar to that required for pebble dashing, an architectural feature encountered all over Iceland: The granules are first thrown against an adhesive-covered wall to form random arrangements, and the artist then adds to the composition by attaching more gravel by hand. The swirling patterns of lava seem to make a Minimalist intervention into the Romantic painting tradition, as if the dense mist in Caspar David Friedrich’s *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*, 1817, had enveloped and occluded the mountaintops as well as the vista.

The abstraction in Róbertsdóttir’s work aptly evokes the infinitude of the sublime. Her choice of materials, as well as her process of shaping them, whether by hand or by exposing them to the elements over time, points to the ways her fellow citizens have secured their survival by learning how to work in tandem with their island’s peculiar environmental conditions.

—Berin Golonu

LONDON

Kapwani Kiwanga

GOODMAN GALLERY

Both meanings of the word *plot*—a storyline and a parcel of land—overlapped in Kapwani Kiwanga’s complex exhibition “Cache.” Fifty years ago, Jamaican writer Sylvia Wynter brilliantly drew a connection between the two disparate meanings: Both kinds of plots, Wynter observed, were transformed by the founding of a market economy. Small single-family holdings that connected humans to the earth through cultivation, ancestry, and folklore vanished with the rise of vast, single-crop, labor-intensive estates. Around the same time, the

novel innovated literary narratives centering on protagonists freed from the constrictions of nature and ancient truths, able to weave individualized stories that, as Wynter said, made “the world safe for the market economy.”

Colonial legacies connected to both “plots”—histories of displaced plants as well as forgotten life stories and myths—were explored in this formidable exhibition of sculptures, textiles, and ceramic-based wall works. Dominating the ground-floor gallery was *Sisal #1*, 2021: a tall and thin hanging sculpture created from yards upon yards of extraordinary white-gold threads. *Sisal #1* prompts wildly disparate fantasy associations—with everything from unicorn tails to angel hair, from albino yeti to the platinum locks of *Baywatch* or *Game of Thrones*. Sisal is a natural fiber derived from the *Agave sisalana* plant that dominates the agriculture of Tanzania. But when the Canadian-born Paris-based artist visited the East African country, she learned that this plant, native to Mexico, had been introduced to the Tanga landscape by German colonizers around 1891.

Tanzania’s eventual dependence on this monocrop proved catastrophic to the newly independent nation when the bottom fell out of the sisal market after the 1960s. Similarly hollow and seemingly open-bottomed, and with an elongated window on one side, the hollow and columnar *Sisal #1* seems a hiding place for a partially concealed person, combining two meanings for *cache*: in English a stored-up treasure (the colonizers’ golden cash crop), and in French the verb *hide*. “Secretive histories can be found in the *plots*,” scholar Katherine McKittrick has written in reference to Wynter’s overlap of the two meanings of *plot*, adding the potential for both to hide secrets.

Installed downstairs were geometric fabric works in black, white, and gray: *Triangulation: 1, 2, and 3*, all 2021, which refer to the coded patterns stitched into quilts that hung from windows along the Underground Railroad, allegedly giving directions to safe houses. Again, evocative material objects address multiple entwined subjects: plantations and slavery, forms of concealment, individuals attempting to produce their own narratives. On the opposite wall hung *The worlds we tell: Nü Gua, Xevioso, and Dojity and Micha*, three small works, all 2021, created from various earthy materials: clay, wood, and metal. Formed of complex designs, varied textures (bubbled, glossy, polished, in relief), and sumptuous glazes and embroideries in blue, green, gold, black, and red, they refer to creation myths from Africa, Asia, and South America. Appearing as both symbolic illustrations (vertically oriented) and fertile patches of earth (horizontal aerial views), these bright and imaginative compositions contrasted with *Semence*, 2020, the flat, enormous, colorless sculpture at the center of the downstairs gallery, which came across as a sprawling mono plantation pushing vibrant plots to the margins. A roughly sixteen-by-sixteen-foot grid of tiny piles of ceramic rice grains, *Semence* refers to the minuscule provisions of rice that enslaved people supposedly hid in their clothing or braided into their hair. Allegedly, African women secretly preserved these meager supplies in the event they escaped capture and could again cultivate land for themselves and determine their own stories.

Before turning to art, Kiwanga studied anthropology, among other disciplines. Perhaps the two floors of “Cache” rehearsed anthropologist



Kapwani Kiwanga, *Sisal #1*, 2021, sisal fiber on mild steel oval rings, dimensions variable.

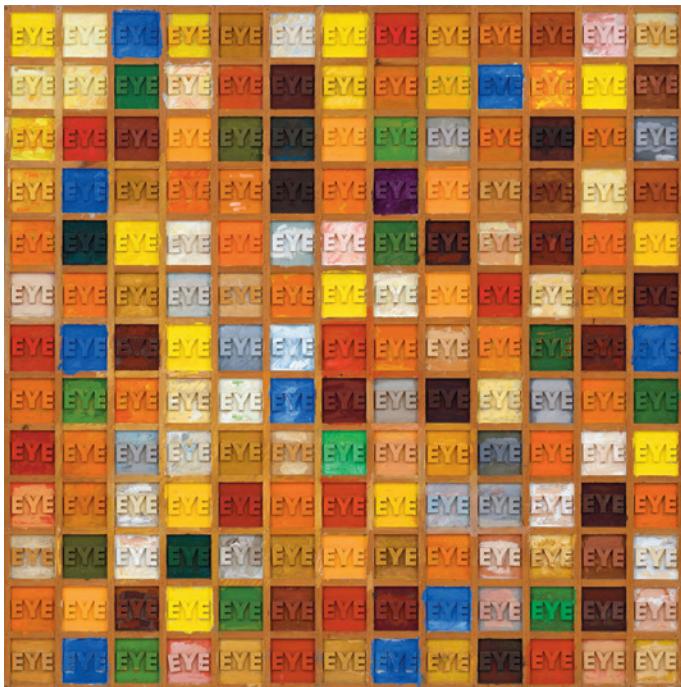
Claude Lévi-Strauss's cultural dichotomy between "raw" (unprocessed vegetation upstairs) and "cooked" (fired ceramic downstairs). But Kiwanga plainly rejects simplistic binaries. Similar to the rich surfaces of *The worlds we tell*, contrasting forces (horizontal/vertical, past/present, earth/sky) magically intersect throughout to tell unresolved, astonishing tales.

—Gilda Williams

Joe Tilson

MARLBOROUGH

Around the time British Pop artist Joe Tilson moved from London to rural Wiltshire in 1972, following time spent in Hannover, Germany, his work underwent a major shift in iconography and style, or so the story goes. Gone were the strategies of mass-media critique that had defined his seminal series "Pages," 1970, which had been nurtured by the countercultural politics of the 1960s and the print revolution at London's famed Kelpra Studio. Instead, Tilson embraced a pastoralist lifestyle—tending the land, growing his own food, and joining peers such as Peter Blake in what amounted to a major exodus of artists from London to the English countryside. Tilson's recent exhibition "Alchera" gave today's public a chance to view exemplary works from his productive years in Wiltshire inspired by his travels to Germany and Italy, as well as by his reading in poetry, philosophy, and anthropology.



Joe Tilson,
Eye Mantra,
1971–72, oil on
wooden relief,
79 1/4 × 79 1/4".

Local flora, Greek mythology, and universal symbols such as spirals and ziggurats come to the fore as primary points of reference in his large-scale mixed-media wood reliefs. Some of the box assemblages have titles that include the word *alchera*, referring to the Australian Aboriginal "dreaming" concept—an important touchstone for Tilson's evolving ideas about the nature of time and memory. Produced (perhaps not coincidentally) in the vicinity of Stonehenge, these works attest to the artist's heart-centered search for kinship with both the earth and humanity, and to his encyclopedic knowledge of literature and world religion.

Despite art-historical gospel that divides his practice into distinct phases, Tilson hadn't exactly abandoned the signature mannerisms of his Pop phase, evident in his use of vibrant color, folksy assemblage techniques, and stenciled lettering à la Robert Indiana or Jasper Johns. But these works do embody a compelling fusion of postmodernism and New Age spirituality. Using the primal element of fire, for instance, he branded stenciled text onto his works' rustic surfaces, spelling out the four elements in his *Alchera* boxes of 1972 or lining the rungs of *Fire Ladder*, 1971, with ecological terms and poetic allusions to Dante and Rilke. Several works, such as the vividly chromatic *Eye Mantra*, *Sea Mantra*, both 1971–72, and *Sky Mantra*, 1972, follow the nonhierarchical logic of the grid, that quintessential structure underlying twentieth-century art, their matrices containing the monosyllabic words of their respective titles (EYE, SEA, SKY—references to perception and landscape) reiterated ad infinitum. While nodding to Conceptualism or Minimalism, such works depart from those movements' distancing techniques and are instead made personal through hand carpentry and textured brushstrokes; the use of repetition invites associations with meditative chanting.

The grid, for Tilson, is also a means of visually organizing the kinds of "universal" oppositions and societal frameworks that are central to structural anthropology and, in particular, to the theories of Claude Lévi-Strauss. Tilson's fascination with taxonomies of nature and culture alike is evident in mixed-media works such as *Chthonic Stele*, 1978, a vertical stack of shallow compartments containing samples of seeds, river stones, and geodes, interspersed with textual fragments and pictographic signs. While its scale and form refer to ancient monuments, the work's labeled compartments are reminiscent of childhood rock collections, not to mention the specimen repositories of natural-history museums. *Tree Alphabet*, 1973, and *Mnemonic Device (Images)*, 1973, feature diagrams, tables, and color samples, emphasizing the processes by which we come to know the world. In the latter, a circular matrix whose four quadrants connect the natural elements of air, fire, earth, and water to the cardinal directions and a range of associated symbols appears, in its visual structure, to be quite rational but is meant to signal a more intuitive and spiritual kind of truth: Akin to a mandala, it represents the artist's interest in nonlinear models of circular time.

—Allison Young

NOTTINGHAM, UK

Erika Verzutti

NOTTINGHAM CONTEMPORARY

"There are fingers everywhere," Erika Verzutti has said of her work. In the Brazilian artist's first solo exhibition in a British museum, which includes more than forty works made between 2003 and 2021, fingers really are everywhere—or have been: fingers impressed, poked, dug, smoothed, caressed; fingers gouged into concrete, Styrofoam, or clay, which is then cast in bronze. Verzutti's bodily work wants to make its processes seen, known, even felt. "For me, that's a desperate need to share the experience," she said in a 2015 interview, "the contact with the clay: wet, smooth, firm, cold, and so on." In *Swan with Work*, 2014, the eponymous bird's crudely shaped neck and head rise in bronze from a pool of concrete. The sculpture's gray base has been scraped, pinched, and pocked so that it appears like some rough cloud from which the curved and elongated animal has emerged. The swan rests its beak on the wooden handle of a double-headed hammer propped vertically beneath. Is its head too heavy? Would the sculpture otherwise collapse? Was this the tool used to give it life?