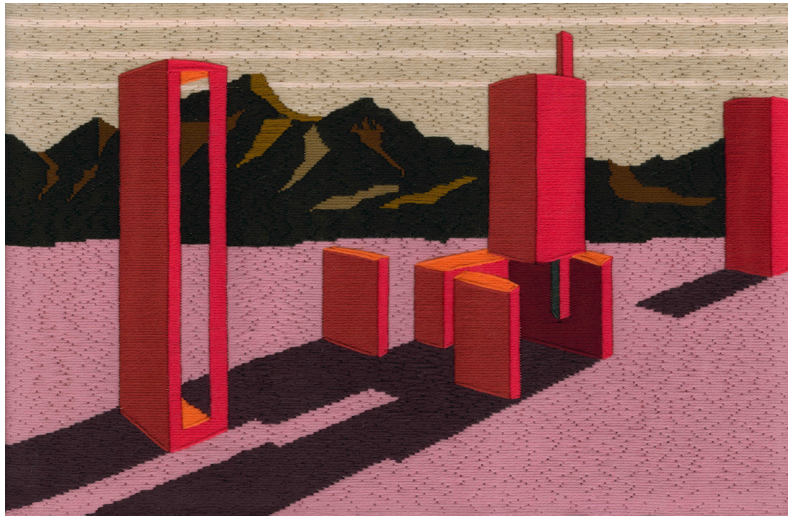


## IMPOSSIBLE THINGS

WORKS BY ABI SALAMI AND MICHA SERRAF

Thursday, January 12 – Saturday, March 11, 2023

**ARTFORUM**  
MUST SEE



Left: Micha Serraf, *What is here is what is here*, 2021, Wool and cotton needlepoint tapestry, Framed Dimensions: 15.55 x 23.82 x 1.38 in.



Right: Abi Salami, *You Need A Savior (Who isn't you and doesn't look like you)*, 2022, Acrylic on canvas, 80 x 67 in.

For our first show of 2023, we are proud to present *Impossible Things*, a two-person exhibition featuring new work by Nigerian-born painter **Abi Salami** and Zimbabwe-born, Cape Town-based artist **Micha Serraf**. In this collection, they've each tracked a personal journey of growth and evolution, using their respective disciplines as tools of resistance to deeply rooted cultural and political obstacles. The editors at *Artforum* recently selected *Impossible Things* as a "Must See" exhibition.

While Salami's large canvases are filled with colorful images symbolizing facets of her path of sexual liberation, Serraf's embroideries evoke the deep sense of serenity that has often eluded him and his family during and after their forced migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa. As Salami and Serraf have made their way towards safety and self-fulfillment, they've both redefined their relationship to the term, "impossible."

In **Abi Salami's** painting, *The Sprint of Blame*, a nude, torsoless, high-heeled woman, the remnants of shackles and ropes still tied around her ankles, navigates a ladder traversing a perilous, alcohol strewn path, a large, hungry tongue waving out from the opening between her legs, leading her on. With a multitude of grinning teeth as a Cheshire Cat-styled background, the work is emblematic of the environment the artist is currently living in, as she recently moved to New York City from her previous home in Dallas, Texas.

*You Need A Savior (Who isn't you and doesn't look like you)* addresses the inadequacy of the institutions of religion and education, which have not provided Salami, as a Black woman, the solace or security they claim to offer. References to unrealistic beauty standards, the transatlantic slave trade and a hypocritical educational system reveal the powerful vulnerability of a figure who is at once being crucified even as she displays herself on a stripper pole.

As in all of her work, Salami's figures convey both vulnerability as well as brazenness, surrounded by cheeky, commercial symbols of fashion and cultural icons as well as more subtle references to the history of slavery and oppression that has marked the movement of Africans to the Americas. Saddled with the particular legacy of being a Nigerian woman, whose life and future would traditionally be limited to the prescribed roles of wife and mother, Salami's graphic depictions of her own sexuality and the limitations placed upon it resonate more broadly for women everywhere who are objectified and sexualized in ways they cannot control.

When he was just nine years old, **Micha Serraf** and his family were made to flee from their home in Zimbabwe to South Africa, where they ultimately settled in Cape Town. His work as an embroidery artist rewrites the trauma of forced migration through a symbolic documentation of this journey. Although the most obvious narrative would be one of violence and trauma, Serraf seeks to balance this perspective with his subjective experience of bonding and childlike fun, fueled by the spirit of adventure his mother managed to maintain throughout their family's relocation odyssey. The tenderness and sense of home she created is represented in the subtle tones and clean lines of his compositions, as well as the visceral feel and domestic connotations of his chosen medium of embroidery, providing him with a multi-layered vehicle to develop his nuanced story.

In the recontextualization of his tale of displacement, Serraf depicts barren landscapes dotted with clouds and other foreboding elements, images derived from dreams and nostalgic memories. His work summons the legacy of his ancestors, migrating through the places that birthed as well as buried parts of his greater identity as a mixed-race man removed from his place of origin.

Sometimes these landscapes are imbued with the fleeting presence of other life, felt in the stillness and silence of ancient totemic structures. The striated topographies Serraf creates draw upon layers of energies that persist through generations, conflating past and present while conjuring a sense of serenity. The seemingly impossible trajectory from violence and despair to hope and the potential for abundance embodied in his work is also mirrored in the process he implements in the creation of his tapestries. Working with an organization that empowers people from the townships with PTSD resulting from acts of violence, he provides paying work to people with both physical and mental disabilities to help him construct his tapestries.

Both Salami and Serraf are African immigrants who have left their places of birth in search of change and prosperity. Through their respective creative practices, they are redefining their identities, providing inspiration and even tangible support to others as they demonstrate complementary pathways to gaining personal success, fulfillment and greater agency in a perilous world.

Please contact [info@c24gallery.com](mailto:info@c24gallery.com) for more information.