

Mother's Story of Resistance

I am Gertrude Alex Malizeni, an experimental multi-disciplinary artist based in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania. Much of my practice is based on sharing stories of women from my family and society. I focus on this, because I want to raise awareness on issues, such as the limitations placed on the kind of jobs a woman is able to do, the pressure on how a woman should live her life to fit the qualities of a woman, and the expectations on how she acts before men, as well as many more issues that affect women in East African societies, which need to be addressed and changed. These limits and boundaries are mostly upheld by religious leaders and our culture as it connects to political rule, which exerts so much control over women.

Due to the authoritarian manifestation of the patriarchy, I have faced challenges in exhibiting this work. My artistic language was seen as offensive to society, since a woman's body is perceived to be sexually provocative. I find it offensive that a body would be so uncomfortable to the audience because of who has the authority in our society.

This artwork is about my mother who suffered in her marriage, its patriarchal nature being the cause of her young death. My mom became pregnant with me when she was in high school, at the age of 17. Her parents broke the bond with her out of disappointment. Once they found out she was pregnant, she was no longer allowed in the family. She then went to live with my father, who was working and a few years her elder. As days went by, this man

started treating her like trash. Her future was doomed: she had no more connection with her parents and was being treated badly at her young age. Her life was miserable. When I was born, the situation got worse. Her man started bringing different women home, knowing my mother had nowhere else to go. She had to live through all that, just to keep going. She tried giving her daughter the kind of life she thought was best for her, until she was not able to take it anymore and she attempted suicide when I was two years old. After this attempt, she continued to be strong for me and kept up with whatever treatment my father was inflicting on her.

This empowered the man to become more comfortable in his ways, which resulted in him infecting her with HIV/AIDS, leading to both their deaths. Before she died, my mother went through a lot of hardship with her parents-in-law on the question of inheritance, fighting for her daughter's well-being. Later on, she was shamed for having been infected with the disease. Despite all of this, she managed to smile and to look so happy and fresh. My mother is the best thing that ever happened to me. I see situations like my mother's around me today and it makes me sick. I want to raise my voice to the highest, to speak against situations like these.

Gertrude
Malizeni

