

ARTFORUM
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Wallen Mapondera

Galerie Mitterrand
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Known for symbolic wall-hangings and sculptures made with salvaged materials like those shown at the Zimbabwean pavilion at the 2022 Venice Biennale, Wallen Mapondera has recently been working with egg cartons, shipping boxes, red wax string, and palm tree seeds. As these primary materials and the show's title, "Manzwi Akazvitakura/Pregnant Words," suggest, the artist's latest works explore themes of gestation, delivery, and rebirth.

Circular shapes that appear throughout the show evoke wombs, eggs, and the life cycle. Some of the most elaborate spiral and bull's-eye forms were inspired by doilies Mapondera's mother made and sold while the artist was growing up. In *Dhoiri n°35 (Doily n°35)*, 2023, red thread and cut-up egg cartons create a filigree effect at the center of a square of dingy canvas. This raw, unstretched support has been marked by what the artist describes as "sweat"—a mix of paint, glue, dirt, and other kinds of circumstantial studio splatter. In addition to describing the beauty, strength, and labor he associates with crochet—both as a craftwork and a livelihood—Mapondera acknowledges its precarity. The bottom quadrant of his otherwise glorious doily is loose and tattered, signifying how easily a doily, and the economic security that comes with it, can come undone.

A similar sense of power and impotence is conveyed by three wall-mounted sculptures. *Collar 2*, *Collar 3*, and *Collar 4* (all 2023) feature nestled egg cartons and colorful tiles of cardboard that have been bonded together with brightly colored silicone to form wide brims around hollow centers. The forms evoke ceremonial collars worn by judges and priests, but also shackles suffered by slaves and prisoners. Impregnated with such obvious opposing references, these works deliver a powerful message about justice and equality.