

THE SOUTH AFRICAN PAVILION

**The
stronger
we become**

THE SOUTH AFRICAN PAVILION

The stronger we become

Dineo Seshee Bopape
Tracey Rose
Mawande Ka Zenzile

Curated by
Nkule Mabaso
Nomusa Makhubu

Presented by
The South African Department of Arts and Culture



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Foreword

The 58th Venice Art Biennale organized by La Biennale di Venezia and chaired by Paolo Baratta has become an important part of our national cultural calendar, along with that of the world. This is why our presence and showing at the exhibition through the South African Pavilion is central to our national strategic vision to grow the arts. We see the arts as one of the key drivers of economic growth, through the promotion of our artists, in building international relations and stimulating tourism.

The curatorial duo: **Nkule Mabaso** and **Nomusa Makhubu** have crafted a curatorial vision which astutely captures the zeitgeist of the socio-political context of South Africa especially at this current moment. The vision of the exhibition also best speaks to our loftier characteristic as an evolving and growing society. Their chosen theme, **The stronger we become** is an impressive response to the larger theme of the 58th International Art Exhibition, **May You Live In Interesting Times** by curator, Ralph Rugoff.

This biennale comes in an election year in our country. A time when our shared values as a society come into sharp focus. Our ability to transcend our differences and pull together is often tested as people contest the opportunity to shape the future of our democratic experiment. These are ideas expertly shored up by the theme, **The stronger we become**.

Our national Pavilion will feature the work of three artists whose work will articulate Makhubu and Mabaso's curatorial vision for the South African Pavilion, **Dineo Seshee Bopape**, **Mawande Ka Zenzile** and **Tracey Rose** have remarkable creative pedigree.

They all have shown virtuosity, engaging with the intricacies of South African life, giving visual form to our national discourse and search for social cohesion and common purpose.

Their successful showing at the art Biennale also underscores our strategic focus on developing diverse voices towards transforming the arts industries. They represent different backgrounds, artistic media and modes to make our Pavilion inclusive and truly representative of our national make up.

Our participation at the 58th Venice Art biennale is key to help foster an appreciation of South Africa's artistic heritage, it allows us to grow global awareness, appreciation and demand for South African creativity in the world.

Mr EN Mthethwa, MP
Minister of Arts and Culture, Republic of South Africa

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I'm winning (my dear love)

Gabi Ngcobo

In 1987 South African musician Yvonne Chaka Chaka released a song titled *I'm winning (my dear love)*, a song that became very popular amongst black South Africans and one which has come to symbolise a moment of sonic subversiveness. Chaka Chaka's song was recently re-edited in a mix by Mo Laudi, a Paris-based South African DJ and musician who, whilst going through his archives of records during Nomzamo Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's funeral in April 2018, re-encountered the track and noted that "the song goes; 'I'm winning, winning my dear love' – *but if you listen carefully* (emphasis mine) you will hear that she is actually singing "I'm Winnie, Winnie Mandela."¹

On April 2, 2018, the day Madikizela-Mandela reached the end of her life, something beautiful also happened. As we were witnessing the dark cloud in the aftermath of her death forcefully concealing the untold but unofficially implied meaning of her political struggles – how she had stood in the forefront with grounded intelligence, mighty in her vulnerability – the final nail to her tainted legacy was on the verge of being settled once and for all, to monumentalize her as history's biggest loser. What the local and international media failed to grasp is the defiant spirit of an uncompromising generation of South Africans who, through the unfolding political spectrum of the country, have come to understand even more clearly the complexities surrounding her legacy.

These tenacious voices did not arise out of nowhere. We have witnessed how, over the past five years or so, young South Africans have fought and carved a political space for themselves, disturbing, calling-out and thus refreshing the political vocabulary that has been stagnant for more than two decades. Consequently, they have inspired self-organised movements in the creative sphere and beyond. The louder they speak, the more our declining political grammar was exposed – how voiceless we have been and hopefully how stronger we can still become.

I watched obsessively the active interruption of a narrative set to damage her legacy transform into a story of resilience, a chronicle of self-preservation as method and *the* symbol of resistance, albeit from a distance. I longed to be home in South Africa, to be part of this long overdue moment of truth, to be embraced by the positive light that seemed to shine onto our uncertainties. But alas it seemed impractical to attempt the journey, let alone to be able to articulate to those around me the true meaning of what was unfolding.

1 Cited from Mo Laudi's Instagram page, April 4, 2019.

We were two months away from the opening of the 10th Berlin Biennale (BB10) titled after Tina Turner's song from 1984 *We don't need another hero*. This title signalled an important curatorial position, one that, among other political actions, was inspired by recent student movements in South Africa. To quote from our curatorial statement, our title "... rejects the desire for a savior but instead, explores the political potential of the act of self-preservation, refusing to be seduced by unyielding knowledge systems and historical narratives that contribute to the creation of toxic subjectivities." All the same, we did find ourselves dedicating our biennale catalogue to mam' Winnie, with a very simple tribute: "For Nomzamo." We had, as it appeared, reached a moment of deep recognition; a different meaning of Tina Turner's song had come to instigate the kind of complexities we were in search of, without even knowing it.

The previous year, coincidentally on Madikizela-Mandela's 81st birthday, I travelled by train from Berlin to Köln to present the 2017 film "Winnie," produced and directed by Pascale Lamche, at the Museum Ludwig Afrika Film Festival. In a modestly full auditorium, her story unfolded, albeit amongst a majority of people who, at the time, did not realise the magnitude of what was being revealed before their consciousness, or lack thereof. The understanding that here was a woman whom the apartheid regime had come to recognise as a backbone of the struggle and therefore did everything to destroy her as a means of destroying the struggle. The more they tried, the stronger she became. To use one of her daughter's words in the film, "some people come in and out of history but [Nomzamo] is a constant."

We screened the film again on July 19, 2018, this time at in one of Europe's oldest institution, Akademie der Künste in Berlin, as part of BB10's public program titled "I'm not who you think I'm not." Having established itself, in 1696, as a centre for national cultural renewal and enlightenment, the Akademie has gradually assumed its present-day form as a platform for discussions on art and politics. We felt it was critical for this film to be seen within this historical setting. We wanted to unsettle an existing narrative as well as to signal a proposed desire towards embodying Nomzamo's life and philosophy as a theoretical principle, towards an enabling, even if complex future.

The future is looking towards the horizon with skewed eyes, it is a reality that is always unfolding, always a challenge – it is an ever-open question. It compels us to apply as reference points, the kind of coded vocabulary employed by Winnie during her banishment to the township of Brandfort, South Africa. The kind employed by artists in order to signal and encourage strategies for winning a seemingly losing battle. Looking towards the horizon with skewed eyes is to perform a vigilant but somewhat obscure kind of observation. The kind of looking that inspires steps towards imaginative and liberative actions. Nomzamo's

life as a theoretical principle need not disavow that we don't need yet another hero. It is a proposal in listening carefully in order to decode the countless messages still hidden in our collective unconsciousness. Listening carefully accents a position that can help us avoid problems inherent in the kind of grand commemorative initiatives that have come to define us as a nation. "[...]to celebrate is to solemnify, in practice," as Fred Moten warns.² This proposed theoretical principle need *not* be a forced balance between a thing that has passed and its future as a narrative but rather a continuous writing and re-writing of an ever-emerging story.

Dineo Seshee Bopape's installation titled "*Untitled (Of Occult Instability) [Feelings]* 2016-18, an immersive theatre of ruin and mourning does exactly that. The work departs from three distinct points; Bessie Head's 1974 autobiographical novel "A Question of Power," Nina Simone's live performance of the song "Feelings" at the 1976 Montreux Jazz Festival and Madikizela-Mandela's television interview from the 1970's in which, when asked by a journalist if she would be prepared to take up arms and kill in order to achieve freedom, she, with a clear resolve replied "now I know I can."³ Bopape reenacts Madikizela-Mandela's chilling answer by standing in for her and using her own image and voice to utter her exact words: "[...] when I saw my children mowed down in Soweto in 1976, then I realized that in order to defend that I would have to do exactly the same." To embody such a forceful resolution is to embody that historical motive and theoretical principle I am trying to propose with this text. It is to conceive of a complex way of working against the grain of the terror that produced a condition that demanded a statement like that.⁴ Bopape's reenactment sends a decoded message to a yet unknown destination.

Creative actions such as Bopape's – the ones that excavate from the numerous historical subversive strategies employed by artists from the sonic, literal and visual political fields – are critical in forging a refreshed grammar of speaking to what Mawande Zenzile demarcates as "the

2 Moten, Fred. "Black and Blur," Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.

3 Emphasis based on the fact that she had been asked this question before but had vowed.

4 Bopape's installation features a video from Nina Simone's 1976 live performance in Montreux, in which she stops the performance to ask, "what are the conditions that demanded a song like that?"

problem we didn't create." In order to do so we will have to transform ourselves into tricksters and in that way be able to traverse different spaces of meaning making that speak to our present. Of his artistic practice Zenzile writes "Sometimes in my work I like to confuse people; I intentionally conceal the meaning of the work. I do this by giving the works ambiguous titles that have no obvious links to my 'true' intentions. But sometimes I use titles as clues for the audience to access the work through."

To apply opacity as a strategy for making things differently clear is a way of owning the right to non-imperative clarities. It is a commitment towards the rearrangement of systems for the creation of new knowledge, a way of distributing responsibility for the historical process of unravelling "the problems we didn't create."

Tracey Rose's method in *A Dream Deferred (Mandela Balls)* (2013- ongoing) is slow and calculative and evolves over time. She constructs a narrative that is part fact, part speculative in the unpacking of grand political legacies using the iconic legacy of Nelson Mandela. Inspired by *A Dream Deferred*, a poem by Langston Hughes, a poet writing at the time of the North-American Harlem Renaissance movement in the 1920's, Rose's series of sculptures interprets the question posed by Hughes; "what happens to a dream deferred, does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? The sculptural balls seem to carry with them what has been accumulated over a lifetime. They appear overburdened by uncertainties lugged by a nation still under construction. Though the work makes reference to Mandela's testicles: his real and mythologized legacy, it also alludes to the act of castration or crushing of African males' testicles during the colonial period. The work appears as large disintegrating balls created from unconventional materials such as butcher's paper, chocolate, newspapers, cling wrap, etc – to comment on the slow disintegration of ideas upheld in the construction of a post-apartheid South Africa. *A Dream Deferred* will result in a total of 95 editions, a reference to Nelson Mandela's age at the time of his death.

Rose seems to signal that we will have to split ourselves into many pieces if we desire to relearn how to reassemble only that which we deem critical for winning this war, a war against dying. We start winning when we commit ourselves to creatively working towards rearranging the systems for the creation of new knowledge and understanding that winning is *Us* ending up on the same side of the future.

The stronger we become

Curatorial Statement

The Stronger We Become

The higher you build your barriers
 The taller I become
 The further you take my rights away
 The faster I will run
 You can deny me, you can decide
 To turn your face away
 No matter 'cause there's
 Something inside so strong
 - Labi Siffre (1987)

The stronger we become is a triologue about resilience. The artists, Dineo Seshee Bopape, Tracey Rose and Mawande Ka Zenzile, probe the politics of self-determination, situated-ness, political displacement and epistemic violence. Resilience – in our time – has become conspicuously inexorable. Under the weight of our complex histories, being resilient is the capacity and the will to resist.

In the post-1994 era, that will to resist has not been eroded by the politics of reconciliation. To remain resilient – to carry on – means dealing with the repercussions of historical injustice. It is a measure of strength, but it should not hinder us from recognising persistent iniquities. As barriers rise and intransigent provincialism escalates, it is the simple things in everyday life – laughter, conversation and play – that become powerful forms of resistance, future-orientated disobedience, disruptive aesthetics and agonism. It is through these gestures that we can venture into our unknown but shared histories, our hidden epistemes, and the intricacy of our neglected knowledge systems.

In this triologue, Bopape, Rose and Ka Zenzile interrogate gaps and silences as socially located, political struggles. Entwined in this intimate conversation is a reckoning with the failure, misadventure and

deficiency of postcolonial, post-apartheid democracy in the context of the abiding persistence of divisive plutocracies. The trialogue is a call to excavate the truths and fallacies in the fantastic ruins of history. And with what we find, make sense of the present.

The stronger we become leaves behind the ostentation of the consumerist world to understand the discord of contemporary life as a past haunted by its imminent futures. It is a space for raw, unembellished and frank conversation. It is in carving emancipatory spaces that resilience as resistance becomes possible. Within emancipatory spaces, the illusive becomes real and the concealed contradictions surface.

Based on politics of space and time – historical and geographical expansion and compression – the trialogue tackles the perplexing questions about land, displacement, mobility and, intimately tied to this, rights. It takes on this task through engaging with affective politics, of anger, outrage, exhilaration, optimism and disappointment. And by doing this it points directly to the quest of our struggles: dignity. To refuse to be fragile is to connect the politics of affect with systemic theft of space and time.

With this exhibition we are acknowledging the climate of cynicism and disillusionment in contemporary life. We are also acknowledging what it is that makes us tenaciously human, in the context of a dehumanising history.

The stronger we become reflects the disenchantment and scepticism towards the agendas inherent in national and global discourses. But more importantly, it looks towards the subversiveness of often overlooked intimate spaces where we can laugh and be reminded that there remains something inside so strong.

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Lerole: *Footnotes (The struggle of memory against forgetting)* (detail), 2018.
Mixed media installation view Galerie Sfeir-Semler, Hamburg/Beirut
Image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Sfeir-Semler, Hamburg /Beirut

About the artist

Dineo Seshee Bopape

Dineo Seshee Bopape was born in 1981, on a Sunday. If she were ghanain, her name would be akosua/akos for short. During the same year of her birth, the Brixton riots took place; two people were injured when a bomb exploded in a Durban shopping center; Bobby Sands dies; Umkonto We Sizwe performs numerous underground assaults against the apartheid state. There was an earthquake in China that killed maybe 50 people; an International NGO Conference on Indigenous Populations and the Land is held in Geneva; Hosni Mubarak was elected president of Egypt; there is a coup d'état in Ghana; princess Diana of Britain marries Charles; Bob Marley dies; apartheid SA invades Angola; Salman Rushdie releases his book "Midnight's Children"; the remains of the Titanic are found; Muhamed Ali retires; Winnie Mandela's banishment orders are renewed for another 5 years; the first test tube baby is born; Thomas Sanakara rides a bike to his first cabinet meeting; Machu Pichu is declared a heritage site; the song "endless love" is popular on the airwaves; her paternal grandmother dies affected by dementia; that very year millions of people cried tears (of all sorts), spoke words in many languages and billions of people dreamt.... The world's human population was around 4.529 billion... today Bopape is one amongst 7 billion - occupying multiple adjectives. Her intuitive installations transform spaces into meditative arenas in which historical narrative, fiction, and personal narrative are wittingly interwoven in order to reveal the subjective conditions of being alive.

Bopape is known for her experimental video montages, sculptural installations, paintings and found objects. She graduated at De Ateliers in Amsterdam (2007) and completed an MFA at Columbia University, New York (2010). She is the winner of the Future Generation Prize (2016), and the recipient of Columbia University's Toby Fund Award (2010). Her work has been featured in solo exhibitions at Collective Gallery, Edinburgh (2018); Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg (2018); PinchukArtCentre, Kiev (2018); Art in General, New York (2016); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2016); Hayward Gallery, London (2015); Hordaland Kunstsenter, Bergen (2015); August House, Johannesburg (2014); Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town (2013, 2011); and Mart House Gallery, Amsterdam (2010). Her work has also been included in group exhibitions at the Marrakech Biennale 6, Marrakech (2016); La Biennale de Montréal (2015); Bienal de São Paulo (2016); Tate Modern, London (2015); Center for Visual Art, Denver (2015); Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (2015); The Jewish Museum, New York (2015); Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (2014); Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam (2014); and Biennale de Lyon (2013).

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About the artist

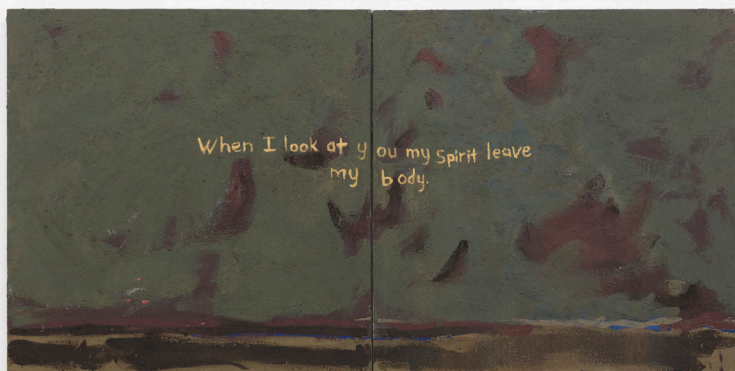
Tracey Rose

Tracey Rose belongs to a generation of artists charged with reinventing the artistic gesture in post-Apartheid South Africa. Within this fold, she has defined a provocative visual world whose complexities reflect those of the task at hand. Refusing to simplify reality for the sake of clarity, the artist creates rich characters that inhabit worlds as interrelated as the many facets of a human personality. Her reference to theatre and the carnival tradition also places her work in the realm of satire. As such, it has consistently questioned and challenged the prevalent aesthetics of international contemporary art, the emergence of a dominant cultural narrative of struggle and reconciliation in South Africa and also post-colonial, racial and feminist issues in the wider world. Working with performance, often for the camera, Tracey Rose places her body at the center of her practice. She inhabits the roles given to Africans, to African women, and to women in a male dominated world, swallowing stereotypes whole. In her quest to understand the source of these cultural meanings that define the human condition, Rose is inevitably led to religious myths of creation. The scope of Rose's work is not limited to the boundaries of South Africa, and it has indeed quickly found a global, humanist resonance

Rose holds a Master of Fine Art from Goldsmiths College, University of London (UK) and received her B.A. in Fine Arts from the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in 1996. She was trained in editing and cinematography at The South African School of Motion Picture Medium and Live Performance in Johannesburg. When Rose graduated in Fine Arts in 1996, her career almost immediately took off with high profile exhibitions that included Hitchhiker at the Generator Art Space, Johannesburg (1996); the Johannesburg Biennial (1997); Cross/ings at the University of South Florida Contemporary Art Museum (1997) and Harald Szeemann's Plateau de l'Humanité at 49th Venice Biennial (2001). More recently Rose has had solo exhibitions at The Project, New York; Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Doualart, Douala; The Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg; Bildmuseet, University of Umea, Umea; Nikolaj Kunsthal, Copenhagen; Dan Gunn, Berlin and Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid.

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When You Look At Me My Spirit Leave My Body (Diptych), 2019
Cow dung, gesso and oil on canvas
Image Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town

About the artist

Mawande Ka Zenzile

In my life time, I have seen the Twin Towers fall, the lynching of Saddam Hussein, the assassination of Osama Bin Laden, and the execution of Muammar Gaddafi. These terrible events were globally broadcast. The so-called 9/11 terrorist attacks were the beginning of a radical paradigm shift, after which we witnessed the rise and fall of nations, new forms of invasions, cultural subversion, new geopolitics, an advancement in military and other technologies, new forms of commerce, colonialisms and universalisms. I have seen the wars that destroyed Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and other Arab nations, leading to displacement and migration from war ridden countries into Europe and North America. Radical legislative shifts in international laws, policies and securities can also be counted as a direct result of 9/11. Nations and their governments, in turn, increased surveillance and this gave rise to a new generation of whistle-blowers, hackers, cyberworld-attackers and social media activists. All this has affected the way we see the world. We are drowning in information or misinformation in the information-era. New world orders have emerged; old politics, ideological paradigms, religious fanaticism and spiritualism have been reinvented. I dedicate my artwork to denouncing and debunking hegemonic ideologies, and explore how these global events contribute to a jaundiced view of the world.

Ka Zenzile gained a BA Fine Art from Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town, in 2014, where he has recently completed his MA Fine Art. He won the Tollman Award for Visual Art in 2014 and the Michaelis Prize in 2013. Solo exhibitions have included *Autobiography of Mawande Ka Zenzile: lingcuka ezombethe iimfele zeegusha* at VANSa, Cape Town (2011); *Crawling Nation* at the AVA Gallery (2009); as well as five solo exhibitions at Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg (2013-18). Group exhibitions include *Tell Freedom, 15 South African Artists* at Kunsthal KAdE, Amsterdam (2018) *Looking After Freedom* at Michaelis Galleries (2017); *I Love You Sugar Kane* (2016) and *Material Matters: New Art from Africa* (2015) at the Institute of Contemporary Art Indian Ocean, Port Louis, Mauritius; *Between the Lines* at the Michaelis Galleries (2013); *Uahluko* at Lookout Hill (as part of Cape 09) and *X Marks the Spot* at the AVA (2008). In 2014 he completed a residency at Nafasi Art Space, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; he was awarded a residency in Norway in 2008 as part of the *Abazobi* project, organised by the Arkivet Foundation and the Robben Island Museum. Ka Zenzile has been a regular participant in academic conferences including *Between the Lines*, Michaelis School of Fine Art and Hochschule für Bildende Künste Braunschweig (2013) to name a few. Many of these projects have been accompanied by his performances.

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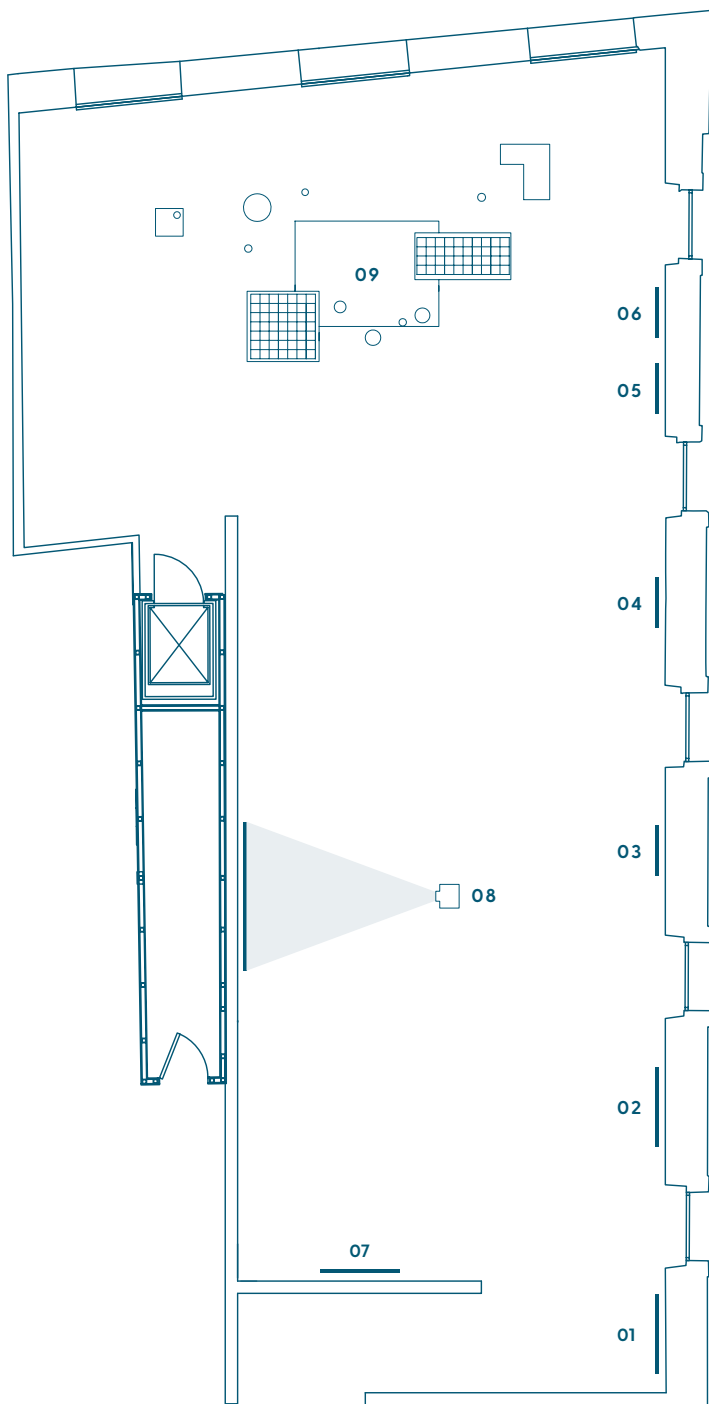
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About the curators

Nkule Mabaso (b. 1988) graduated with a Fine Arts degree from the University of Cape Town (2011) and received a Masters in Curating at the Postgraduate Programme in Curating ZHdK, Zürich (2014). She has worked as contributing editor of the journal *OnCurating.org* and founded the Newcastle Creative Network in Kwazulu Natal (2011). Mabaso is the curator at the Michaelis Galleries, at the university of Cape Town. In 2017 she has also collaborated with the art historian, Manon Braat to towards the realization of the Exhibition and publication *Tell Freedom: 15 South Africa Artist in 2017* at Kunsthall KaDe in Amersfoort, The Netherlands. She has authored articles and reviews in, *Artthrob*, *Africanah*, *Field-Journal*. In 2017, she convened the Third Space symposium in collaboration with the Institute for Creative Arts, Decolonizing Art Institutions, and is co-editing the conference proceedings with Jyoti Mistry. Mabaso works collaboratively and her research interests engage the South Africa and Afro-continental context.

Nomusa Makhubu (b. 1984) graduated with a PhD from Rhodes University. Makhubu is a senior lecturer of art history at the University of Cape Town and an artist. She is the recipient of the ABSA L'Atelier Gerard Sekoto Award (2006), the Prix du Studio National des Arts Contemporain, Le Fresnoy (2014) and the First Runner Up in the Department of Science and Technology (DST) Women in Science Awards (2017). Makhubu was a fellow of the American Council of Learned Societies and an African Studies Association (ASA) Presidential Fellow in 2016. In 2017, she was a Mandela-Mellon fellow at the Hutchins Centre for African and African American Studies, Harvard University. Makhubu is a member of the South African Young Academy of Science (SAYAS) and the deputy chairperson of Africa South Art Initiative (ASAI). In 2015, she co-edited a Third Text Special Issue: 'The Art of Change' (2013) and co-curated with Nkule Mabaso the international exhibition, *Fantastic*. Her research interests include African popular culture and socially-engaged art.



- 01 Mawande Ka Zenzile**
In self-defense, 2016
Cow dung and oil on canvas
73.5 x 74 cm
- 02 Mawande Ka Zenzile**
Leave your mind outside, 2018
Cow dung and oil on canvas
162 x 202 cm
- 03 Mawande Ka Zenzile**
Calling a spade, a spade, 2016
Cow dung and oil on canvas
154 x 172.5 cm
- 04 Mawande Ka Zenzile**
Ubuz'ibasi ibhaliwe, 2019
Cow dung, gesso and oil on canvas
100 x 100 cm
- 05 Mawande Ka Zenzile**
Behaviorism 101, 2018
Cow dung, gesso and oil on canvas
90.5 x 49 cm
- 06 Mawande Ka Zenzile**
Intellectual Convictions, 2018
Cow dung, gesso and oil on canvas
90 x 179 cm
- 07 Mawande Ka Zenzile**
When You Look At Me
My Spirit Leave My Body, 2019
cow dung, gesso and oil on canvas
200 x 100 cm
- 08 Tracey Rose**
Hard black on cotton, 2019
Film
- 09 Dineo Sesee Bopape**
Marapo a yona Dinaledi
(Its bones the stars), Sketch no22, 2019

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