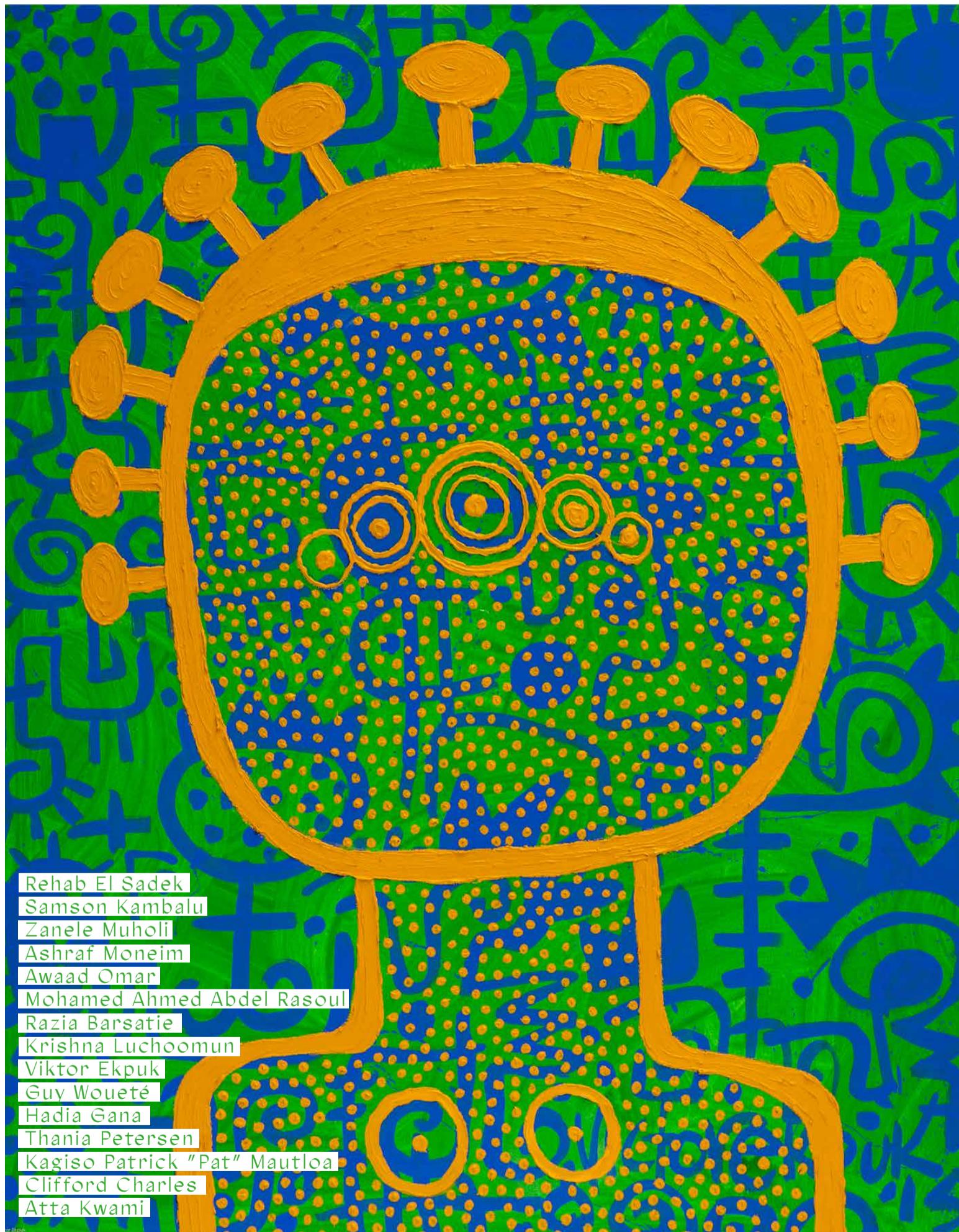


# THE ART MOMENTUM

Thami Mnyele  
Foundation  
Residency Award  
for artists from Africa and Diaspora

30  
YRS



VIKTOR EKPUK | HIP SISTA #11, 2015 | ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 152.4 X 122 CM | COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

PAULINE BURMANN

## FOSTERING THAMI MNYELE'S LEGACY

The idea for this publication emerged before the pandemic to celebrate 30 years of the Thami Mnyele Foundation and the many artists who have spent time with us here in Amsterdam. We are so thankful to all the people who supported us in this endeavour, especially during the challenges that the pandemic presented, and we proudly present the stories that tell part of the history of the Foundation.

The Foundation pays homage to South African activist artist, Thami Mnyele, after whom the Foundation is named. Mnyele utilised art as tool of expression and communication during the struggle for liberation from Apartheid in South Africa. He died in exile in Botswana in 1985 during a military raid as a result of his actions as a member of the MEDU Art Ensemble, the African National Congress' revolutionary anti-apartheid art organisation in Gaborone.

After his death, artists and politicians proposed to the Amsterdam city council that a guest studio be founded in his name. In 1990, while the cultural boycott against Apartheid in South Africa was still in full force, the Foundation was born and, in May 1992, the first artists from South Africa arrived in Amsterdam. Since then, the Foundation has welcomed more than a hundred and twenty honoured artists from the rest of Africa and its diasporas.

*"Whatever artistic indulgence we engage ourselves in", Mnyele writes, 'we [artists] must not be blind to the river of life within and around us, the social stream from which art feeds and is nourished: the community."*

Artist-in-residence programmes give artists the opportunity to live and work outside of their usual environments, providing them with time to reflect, seek cultural exchange, and conduct vital research. For each artist, we create a tailor-made programme that emphasises and encourages direct collaborations between practitioners. Our artist-in-residence programme is a communal product of the cooperation among artists, curators, universities, art academies, cultural agents, and the local people of Amsterdam, who understand its constantly evolving social structure.

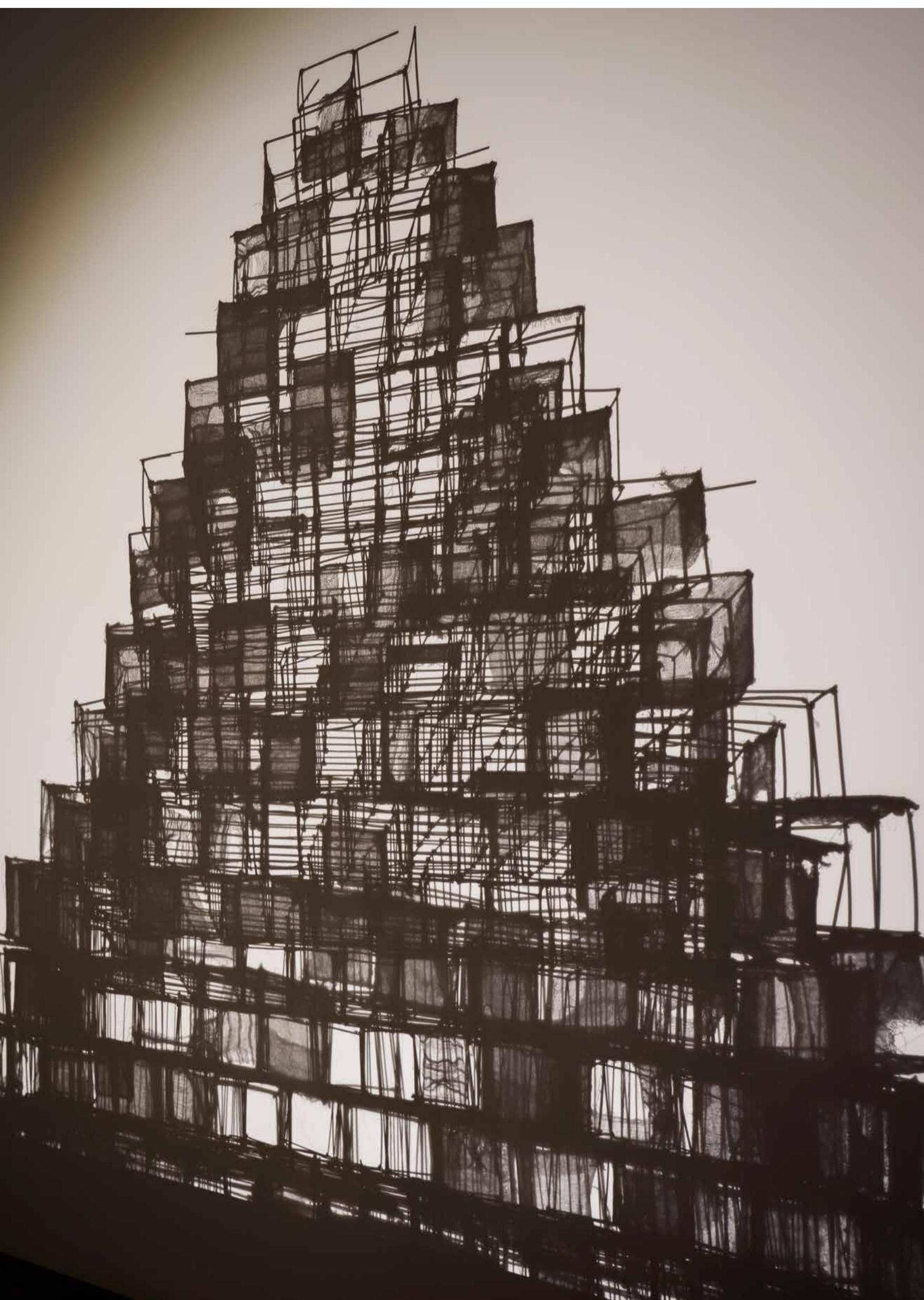
This publication demonstrates that residencies are about such exchanges, and it becomes an important document of the Foundation's legacy, where we are able to draw attention to a multitude of voices from across Africa and its diasporas. It also attests to the artistic practice of an artist in residency, where an exhibition at the end of the programme is not always the goal, where works produced in different cultural contexts bring new awareness and understanding for each other's culture, where the process itself is the core of the cultural exchange.

Friendships and long-standing relationships are built during residency programmes like this at the Foundation, and we have seen wonderful cultural exchanges happening not just in one direction, but from both sides. Artists have become friends. Museums in Amsterdam bought their first work from a living artist from Africa. Dutch artists and curators have been invited by visiting artists to South Africa, New York, and the Venice Biennale, as well as the Bamako Biennale, Lagos Biennale, Dakar Biennale, and Joburg Art Fair.

This publication presents contemporary art from Africa and its diasporas, diverse and rooted in many cultures and histories, charged by the distinct and hybrid forms of today's world. We see enormous global interest in the phenomenal artists who have participated in our residency programme, and it is of crucial importance to mention that the Foundation exists thanks to their passionate pursuit of their practice, their quest to build relationships, create connection, and foster collaboration. We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to the visiting artists, the artists and curators of Amsterdam for their support and interest, and the Amsterdam Fund for the Arts (AFK), who has supported and invested in us from the beginning. We would also like to thank *The Art Momentum* for their resilience in these difficult times to produce this publication with us.

Thank you all for bearing with us.

We would like the Foundation to continue to take the visual arts to limitless heights and, through ongoing collaborations with the artists in residence, continue to honour participating artists in Thami Mnyele's powerful legacy.



→ REHAB EL SADEK | HARAM XAFRA (SHADOW), 2019 | 183 X 183 CM (SCULPTURE) ; 300 X 300 CM (SHADOW). WOODEN DOWELS, GAUZE, PIGMENTS, GLUE, MEMORY, AND SHADOW | PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF SCOTT DAVID GORDON.

LADI'SASHA JONES

## PEOPLE TO PEOPLE

Rehab El Sadek is a multidisciplinary artist with a socially engaged practice that explores the relationship between people and place. Through her work, she aims to surface shared questions around everyday life that draw connections between people, wherein making art is not the end but the start of the conversation. "If it is not conversational, it is dead," she says. Many of her recent projects are directly responsive to the communities she works with.

Artist-in-residence programmes are positioned as sites of professional development. A resourceful offering of time and space to deeply engage processes of research and creation, they give form to the empathy of community building and the support of new ideas.

The Thami Mnyele Foundation understands the value of effecting change within an artist's career. It is not only a platform that connects artists of African descent to Amsterdam, but it also helps to generate deeper engagements across various dimensions of the field. The programme is shaped around the openness of unfixed results, an approach that is not oriented towards an extractive economy in working with artists. Its fundamental asset is to strengthen an artists' global network, driving residency cycles on the cultivation of new social relationships, opening up the city to its artists in a way that stimulates an ecosystem of becoming.

For El Sadek, the residency began with an invitation to Pauline Burmann's home upon arriving in the city. Burmann prepared a personalised mapping of Amsterdam's art community, a list of people and sites that considered the complexities of both entering and navigating a new city and country. The Foundation coordinated an ensemble of communal collisions with artists, gallerists, and supporters that represented the limitless potential of art and culture, outside of the production of discourse and market.

While in residency at the Foundation, El Sadek was able to enter a new creative dialogue within her studio practice. That time represented a big research period as she focused on inhaling the city and the country as a whole. Many new drawings emerged, which developed into sculptural works and a visual language that is threaded across her years of practice. "They were the start of everything else that came later," remarks El Sadek.

As a storyteller and critical observer, much of El Sadek's practice can be characterised as visual meditations on the societal constructions that challenge us. Her project, *Transient* (2019), was developed from discussions with immigrants around questions of home and belonging, and the personal histories that shape and impact these sensibilities. Throughout the project, objects emerge as artifacts as she employs a metamorphic technique of aging those objects to manipulate qualities of time and history, developing illusions of origin and purpose. Encompassing sound, sculpture, and photography, the installation teases the ways in which aesthetico-political histories have implications on the substructures of our imagination and memory.

The Thami Mnyele Foundation has developed a focus on long-lasting support, a place to return to for connection and refuge. El Sadek first returned to the city of Amsterdam months after her residency ended, for an exhibition alongside photographer Simen Johan at Lumen Travo Gallery in 2004. In 2009, she returned to the Netherlands again for the exhibition, *REBELLE: Art and Feminism 1969-2009* at the Museum voor Moderne Kunst in Arnhem, for which she presented at the 7th European Feminist Research Conference, convened at the Universiteit van Utrecht.

These opportunities were ripple effects, seeded from the Foundation's activation of its network. For El Sadek, the Thami Mnyele Foundation remains a pivotal and ubiquitous reference point within her career. Exemplifying how the Foundation centers the long term development of its community members, connecting people to people, in the grand service of advocating for artists and artmaking.

ASHRAF JAMAL

# SHARING AN IDEA WITH THE WORLD

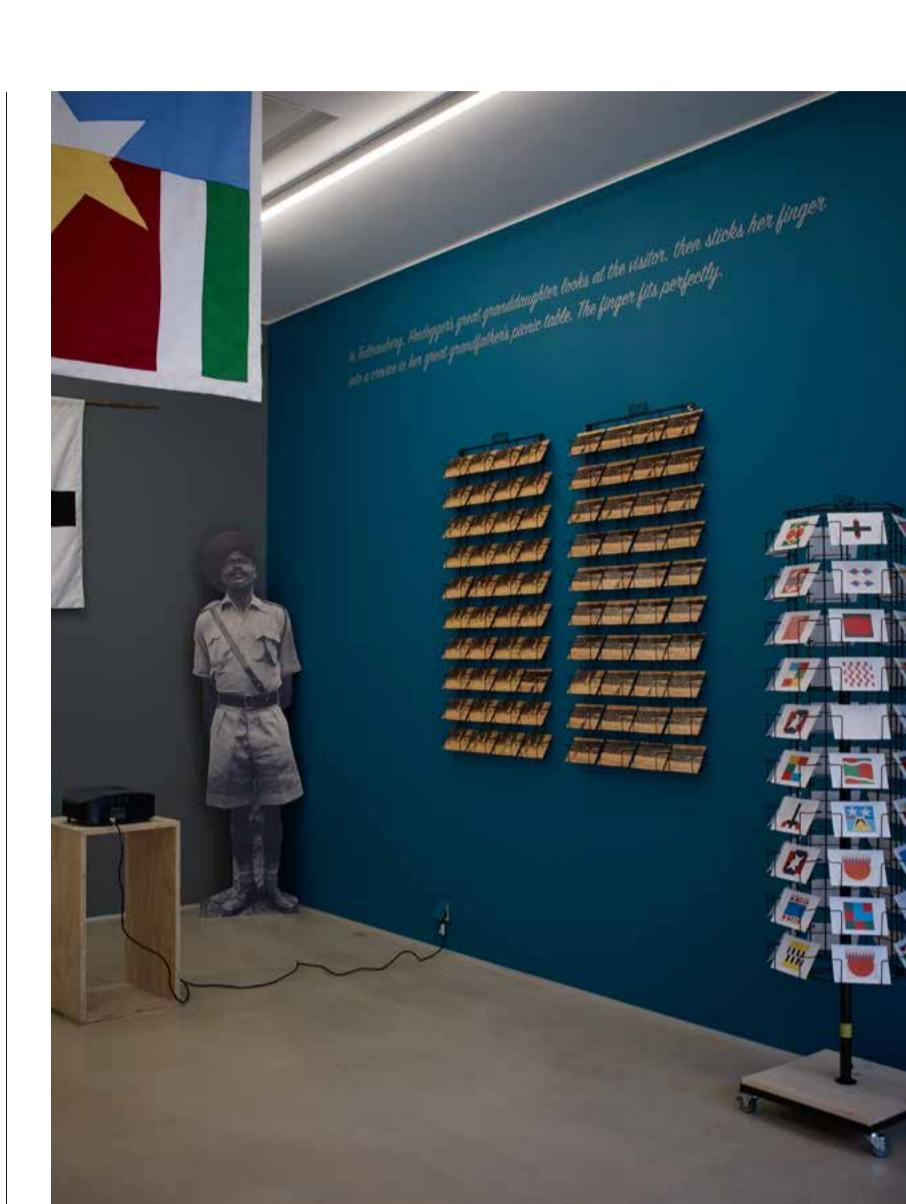
"In Amsterdam, Kambulu found the nexus-trigger-spark that connected African art with the world."

Operational in Amsterdam since 1992, the Thami Mnyele Foundation is named in honour of the South African resistance artist, member of the Medu Art Ensemble and exiled in Botswana, who was murdered by the South African secret police. The backstory is grim, but the foundation's ethos is not. The culture of resistance is anticipatory or, as Mnyele put it, "an eventual ideology."

Mnyele spoke of art as "a vision of how to take a community and a people forward," an "indigenous idiom," a "shelter." The Thami Mnyele Foundation has sustained this vision, which, more than ever in today's global Age of Anger, requires places that shelter, protect, and inspire. In 2020, the struggle continues. Today, the world over, we find the aggravated increase in cultural, political, ideological, and economic conflict. Art remains a vital means through which to transform and better the world. As Mnyele's fellow artist and activist, Dikobe wa Mogale (otherwise known as Ben Martins) noted, "Our art must become a process, a living, growing thing that people can relate to, identify with, be part of, understand."

If art residencies play a crucial role in this regard, it is because they allow for art and artists to seed and experiment. To share ideas, feelings, hunches, intuitions. Work collaboratively, or plumb a solo depth. In an art world as ruthless as it is mercantile, residencies such as that at the Thami Mnyele Foundation remind us that art is not predictive nor so easily monetised, that life and art require a readiness to allow for the inexplicable. After all, as Vaclav Havel reminds us, "Who... can know whether what may seem today to be marginal graphomania might not one day appear to our descendants as the most substantial thing... in our time?"

Samson Kambulu made a football "plastered with pages of the Bible." He is taking a break in Zomba, Malawi. He recalls the ball gleaming in his hand, wanting "to share the idea with the world." If Mnyele was exiled in Botswana, Kambulu's moment is global. Unlike Mnyele, he is free to explore and express his vision in a comparatively more receptive context. However, his football – the image of an earth wrapped in faith – which reveals a hyperconnected world, is also one



→ SAMSON KAMBULU | POSTCARDS FROM THE LAST CENTURY (INSTALLATION VIEW), 2020 | PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF STEPHEN WHITE AND PEER, LONDON.

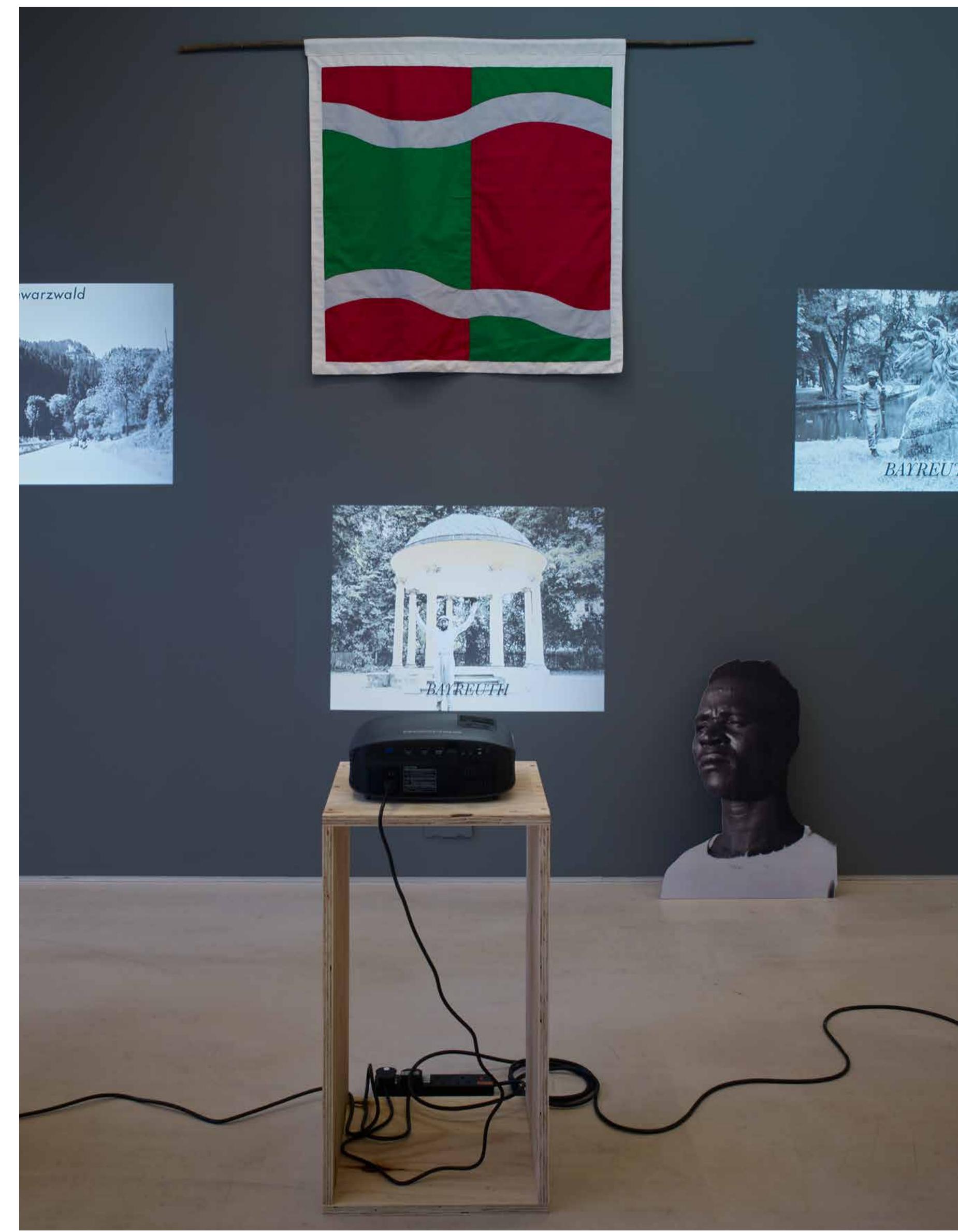
caught in a deadlock. Conflict persists. Faith need not be doctrinal. However, irrespective of its shape or form, faith is vital, especially now that reason is failing us, caught as we are within inconsolable extremes.

"I thought Amsterdam would be a good place to start on this mission," says Kambulu, and a residency at the Thami Mnyele Foundation followed.

"I wasn't prepared for how solitary the residency was going to be," he says. Still, with his holy ball in hand, "connections were made." Marlene Dumas and Moshekwa Langa inspired him, Macha Roesink and Phillip van den Bossche greenlighted shows. Kambulu was on his way as an international artist. While residencies are restorative, they are rarely as influential as the Thami Mnyele Foundation. In Amsterdam, Kambulu found the nexus-trigger-spark that connected African art with the world.

→ [samsonkambulu.com](http://samsonkambulu.com)

For Kambulu, art is personal, it is universal, but it is also emphatically defined by a peculiarly African psychogeography. The Thami Mnyele Foundation shares this vision. In this specific



→ SAMSON KAMBULU | POSTCARDS FROM THE LAST CENTURY (INSTALLATION VIEW), 2020 | PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF STEPHEN WHITE AND PEER, LONDON.



→ ZANELE MUHOLI | MISS LESBIAN II, STUDIO THAMI MNYELE FOUNDATION IN AMSTERDAM, 2009 | C-PRINT, 76.5 X 50.5 CM. EDITION OF 8 + 2AP | © ZANELE MUHOLI. COURTESY OF STEVENSON, AMSTERDAM/CAPE TOWN/JOHANNESBURG, AND YANCEY RICHARDSON, NEW YORK.

NKGOPOLENG MOLOI

# WITNESSING ONESELF IN THE WORLD

In 2006, in response to absences and deficiencies of Black queer and trans visual history in South African archives, Professor Sir Zanele Muholi did not wait for the archive to evolve. They began documenting their seminal series, *Faces and Phases*. Over a decade later, the project has become a rich and profoundly affecting document of over 500 individuals from South Africa's queer community – adding to the existing yet fragile document of Black queer life. By travelling to different parts of the globe, the work has performed the important task of expanding the imaginary of queer representation. Through these acts of sharing and circulation, it has disrupted the suffocating logic of queer erasure.

A spirit of collaboration shows itself within different aspects of Muholi's practice, "I would never have produced my work without being a member of a collective, whether that is based on the shared experience of race or sexuality," the artist says. "Collectivity and collectivism made me whole. Even now, before I get to a new place in the world, I'm connected to structures or people that make that experience generative," explains Muholi who, in 2009, collaborated with photographer Sean Fitzpatrick to create the series, *Miss Black Lesbian and Being (T)here*, as part of their time as an artist-in-residence at the Thami Mnyele Foundation.

In the series, Muholi appears as a beauty pageant queen, complete with high heels, tiara, and blue eye shadow. Through contemplation of studio portraiture and performativity, they complicate notions of class, sex, race, misogyny, and patriarchy, thinking through women's work and the politics of servitude. Reflecting on this work and on their time at the Foundation where the work was produced, Muholi notes that, through the residency, they were able to work with and learn from experienced photographers and artists. "Furthermore, seeing and experiencing the different realities in the city helped my understanding of certain political arrangements," they elaborate. "My best memories are all the images captured during that time. Those moments are memories that will never be erased."

Reflecting on collective experiences within their practice, Muholi notes; "To make images in these spaces means that others can also project themselves and imagine the ways in which they too can exist and belong in them." The work itself is an act of witnessing – witnessing oneself in the world and witnessing others in the world. It is an act of radical self-love and generosity.

As a visual activist with an agenda that goes beyond making art for art's sake, Muholi finds resonance in Mnyele's reflections (recorded in an unpublished autobiography), where he states; "For me, as a craftsman, the act of creating art should complement the act of creating shelter for my family or liberating the country for [my] people." Muholi agrees, "It is important to create communities through the work that we produce," they explain. "To me, sharing personal experiences in order for us to heal is what makes families, and those actions help us come together and socialise better."

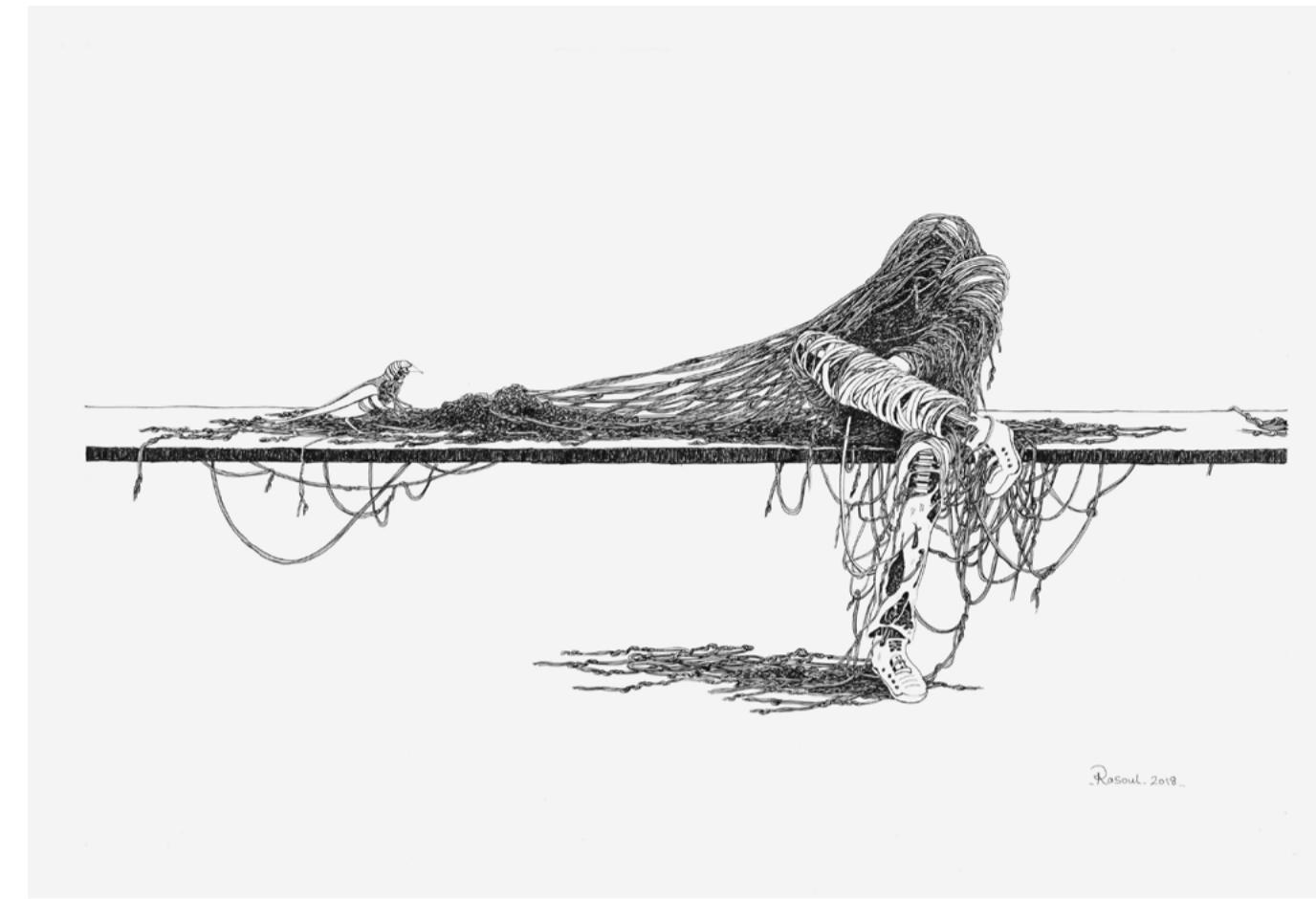
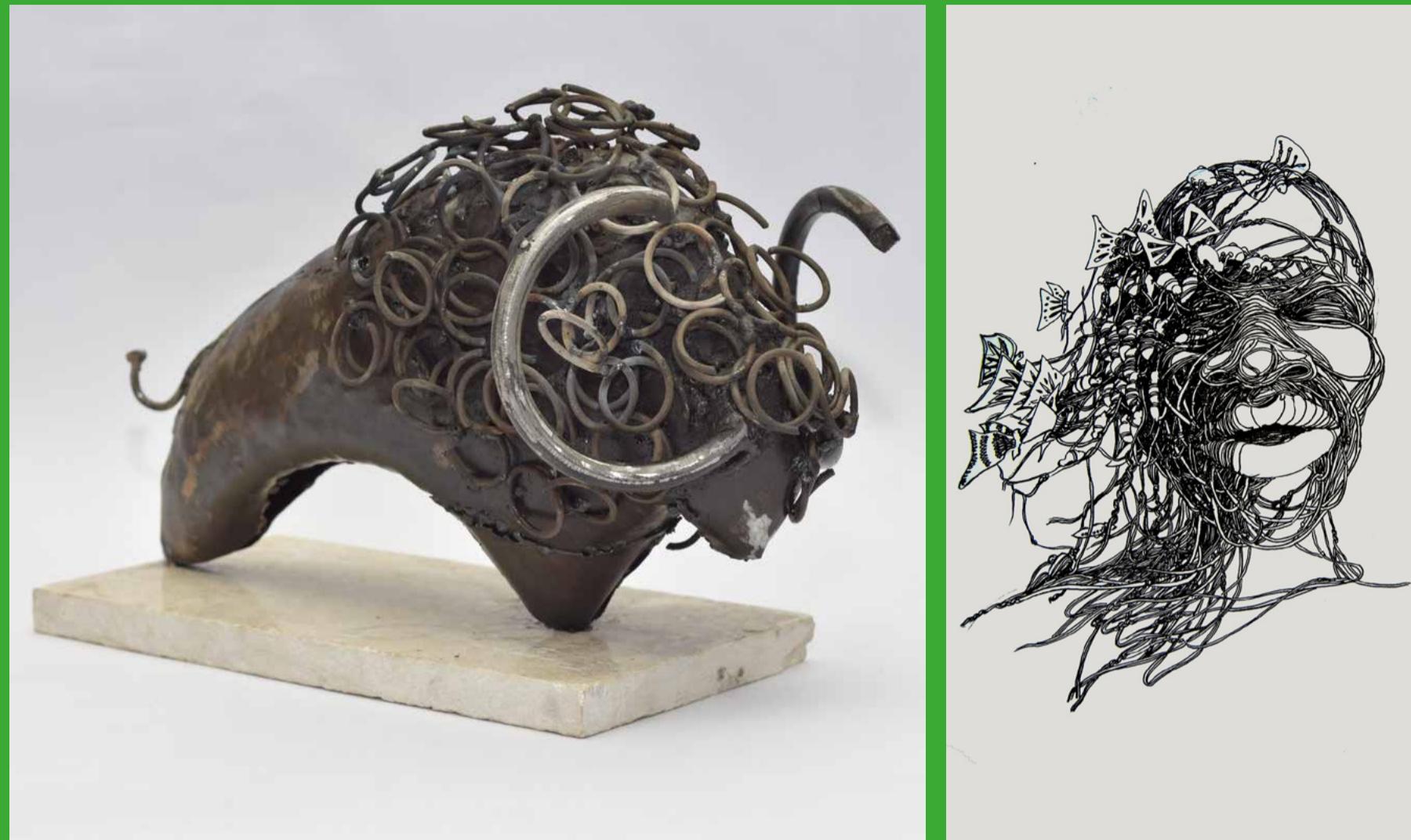
As founder and contributor to various skills-sharing and knowledge distribution organisations, Muholi understands the value of collectivity. Participating in residencies themselves and also taking time to nurture and pave a way for a new generation of artists, they embrace the roles of both teacher and student. "Residencies expose practitioners and artists to different ways of doing and thinking and I believe this is useful in making a healthy practice. I think it is productive to leave your comfort zone," explains the artist, "but with that said, these can also have traumatic implications. It is a personal choice for each artist."

→ [instagram.com/muholizanele](https://instagram.com/muholizanele)



→ ZANELE MUHOLI | BASEL, 2017 | SILVER GELATIN PRINT, 76.5 X 50.5 CM (IMAGE SIZE), 86.5 X 60.5 CM (PAPER SIZE). EDITION OF 8 + 2AP | © ZANELE MUHOLI. COURTESY OF STEVENSON, AMSTERDAM/CAPE TOWN/JOHANNESBURG, AND YANCEY RICHARDSON, NEW YORK.

"I would never have produced my work without being a member of a collective, whether that is based on the shared experience of race or sexuality."



PAGE 8 CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:  
→ AWAAD OMAR | BULL, 2017 | METAL.  
30 X 20 CM | IMAGE COURTESY OF THE  
ARTIST.

→ MOHAMED AHMED ABDEL RASOUL |  
CONFUSION, 2015 | INK ON PAPER. 45 X  
33 CM | IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

→ ASHRAF MONEIM | UNTITLED, 2017 | INK ON  
CHAINES PAPER. 35 X 35 CM | IMAGE COURTESY  
OF THE ARTIST.

→ ASHRAF MONEIM | UNTITLED, 2017 | ACRYLIC  
ON CANVAS. 90 X 100 CM | IMAGE COURTESY OF  
THE ARTIST.

→ AWAAD OMAR | MAMA AFRICA, 2018 |  
METAL. LIFE-SIZE SCULPTURE | IMAGE COURTESY  
OF THE ARTIST.

THIS PAGE  
→ MOHAMED AHMED ABDEL RASOUL |  
V1.10, 2018 | INK ON PAPER. 50 X 60 CM |  
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

QUTOUF YAHIA

## AFRICAN ARTISTS IN ANTI-ART TIMES

It seems the plight and saving grace of the African artist is their proximity to revolution, and Thami Mnyele lived and died by the sword of his resistance. At times unintentionally and at times with great determination, the South African artist remade himself into a soldier of Black liberation and unity. In his name, an Amsterdam-based artist's residency was founded some thirty years ago as an opportunity for South African artists to network, explore, and advance their careers. Since then, the Thami Mnyele Foundation has opened its doors to artists across the continent and its diasporas, including Sudanese artists, Awaad Omar, Ashraf Moneim, and Mohamed Ahmed Abdel Rasoul, in whose work and circumstance we find parallels with Mnyele's own.

What these artists seem to share with the namesake of this residency programme is their feeling of exile. While Mnyele was forced to leave South Africa, Awaad, Ashraf, and Mohamed were not removed from Sudan, but removed within it. Awaad describes himself and his fellow Sudanese artists over the last thirty years as "prisoners of anti-art and extremist mentalities."

Less than a choice, the politicisation of the Sudanese artist is a symptom of the inherent resistance of simply being an artist. There are strings in Mohamed Ahmed Abdel Rasoul's drawings, bordering on shackles, that weave together the stories and faces of cities imagined and brought to life. In his series, *The Khartoum Massacre*, there are bodies laid out on a bed of other bodies, flowers growing in their midst. What is recognisable to the Sudanese eye as the fenced wall of the Military Headquarters and the site of the great sit-in of the December Revolution appears as a cage to the untrained eye. Awaad, Ashraf, and Mohamed are of a generation of creators hindered and oppressed by the tyrannical regime that has ruled Sudan since 1989. Like many Sudanese artists, they have had to work through censorship and opposition within the confines of a creative limbo, generated by policies and politics and, most recently, through a revolution.

While in Amsterdam, these artists were given not much more than what they most wanted: the freedom to practice. They were given the space and resources to create (or not create) unencumbered.

In return, they were not asked for art, nor an exhibition, nor gratitude – an unspoken fee often required by western institutions that are intended to serve the continent. Instead, the programme presented the comprehensive experience of a fully functional "artistic environment," a term Mohamed struggles to apply to the scene in Sudan. "The artistic environment is still very far and closed to itself, despite the openness available on the Internet," he explains, adding that Sudan lacks the galleries, cash flow, and market that might otherwise encourage artistic production.

**"These artists were given not much more than what they most wanted: the freedom to practice."**

Despite their short time spent in the residency programme, all three artists recall their artistic encounters in Amsterdam with great affection. Ashraf refers to the print works of Rembrandt at the Rijksmuseum and Mohamed to the *Body Worlds* exhibition as some

of the most impactful on their craft, applauding the special attention paid to their career needs by the organisers at the Foundation. "It's difficult for me to count the benefits of my experience with the programme," Ashraf says, "but I know that I will reap them as long as my artistic career continues."

Like Mnyele, these artists have hope for the future of their country and, luckily, Awaad, Ashraf, and Mohamed have made it to the other side of their resistance. Awaad refers to Sudan as "a nation that survived catastrophic events," and the same can be said for the artists themselves, who have not only survived but continue to hold out hope for real and tangible change in the art community in Sudan.

→ [facebook.com/ashraf.mohamed.56863](https://facebook.com/ashraf.mohamed.56863)  
→ [instagram.com/rasoul.31](https://instagram.com/rasoul.31)  
→ [facebook.com/awaadissa](https://facebook.com/awaadissa)

VINCENT VAN VELSEN

# THE SWEET SMELL OF HOME

A PROFILE OF RAZIA BARSATIE

Nothing tastes or smells quite like food from one's country of origin. This universal truth lies at the heart of Razia Barsatie's work, which touches on a particular sense of homesickness with a tinge of nostalgia. Barsatie explores ways to evoke the feeling of being at home abroad, of rendering alien environments familiar. For this, she employs fundamental forms of presence that are buried in the everyday, specifically the smells of home cooking and the habits and rhythms of meal times.

She is interested in the components of domesticity as well as the way in which culturally defined power structures dominate daily life. She examines community and kinship from an intimate and personal perspective, and she investigates what is passed on through our upbringing, both intentionally and unknowingly. What structures, rituals, and patterns are handed down from father to son, mother to daughter? These structures are sometimes helpful and sometimes not, manifesting in the latter as bad habits that consciously or unconsciously influence behaviour from one generation to the next.

Barsatie's inquiries revolve around shared experiences, specifically those involving smells, cooking, and eating, as well as family conversation. She tries to find ways to render these visible, to deconstruct the everyday in order to highlight what the everyday conceals in its ordinariness. For instance, she uses the scent of herbs and spices to symbolise the position of women in Indo-Surinamese culture, where women are allowed to run little more than the kitchen and the household. This is in contrast to the men, whose sole responsibility is to provide financial support for the family. While conformity to this clear demarcation of roles is on the wane, it is still a defining feature of many families. Barsatie seeks to make this a topic of public discussion, with the aim of facilitating the liberation of women from gender-based roles and enabling them explore their potential.

→ [raziabarsatie.com](http://raziabarsatie.com)



→ RAZIA BARSATIE | DE ZWERVER IN MIJ - ZELFPORTRAIT, 2016 | CURRY, CLOTH, SEQUIN ACCESSORIES. 100 X 150 X 300 CM. INSTALLATION VIEW, ZUIVER, NIEUW DAKOTA, AMSTERDAM-NOORD | IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

**"Barsatie explores ways to evoke the feeling of being at home abroad, of rendering alien environments familiar."**



→ RAZIA BARSATIE | MATERIAL RESEARCH, (2020-2022) | SPICES INTO 3D HANDS. ARTIST IN RESIDENCY, RIJKSAKADEMIE VAN BEELDONDE KUNSTEN, AMSTERDAM | IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

VALERIE KABOV

# ART IS A LIFE THAT CHOOSES YOU

KRISHNA LUHOOMUN

→ KRISHNA LUHOOMUN | FROM BIRTH TO DEATH, 2015 | CLOTHES. SITE-SPECIFIC INSTALLATION FOR THE VENICE BIENNALE, MAURITIUS PAVILION | COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.



Sometimes a single event or experience can prove seminal in helping one make sense of one's projects, paths, adventures, and circumstances to date and also helps shape the path going forward. Coming to the Thami Mnyele Foundation proved just such an experience for Mauritian artist, Krishna Luhoomun. He arrived at the Thami Mnyele Foundation in 2000 a serious professional artist – with travel and work already under his belt – and yet he credits the three months he spent in Amsterdam as pivotal in his career for two critical reasons: "This was the first time I really encountered contemporary art, and this was the place where I learnt to organise," he says.

This might seem unusual, but Luhoomun's life journey is premised on the path less travelled. He was born in Mauritius in 1962, growing up in a newly independent but still very much divided, multicultural, and multi-religious country, trying to find its path and identity. Inspired by a high school teacher, Luhoomun

decided to break from expectations to become the first artist in his family. He further surprised them when, having completed his undergraduate studies in Mauritius, he turned down a scholarship to study in France and became a witness to the last days of the Soviet Union as a student at the USSR Art Academy in St Petersburg. He ultimately returned to Mauritius to paint and teach with an understanding that, as in most developing countries, the small art sector in Mauritius had gaps in its infrastructure, and he was looking for ways to contribute.

This is where his experience at the Thami Mnyele Foundation proved invaluable. The network of friendships and contacts with artists – not just in the Netherlands but from around the world – inspired Luhoomun with possibilities for collaboration and interconnectedness that spoke strongly to him as both an artist and an activist.

Within three years of returning home, together." While he began as a painter and continues the practice, over the past decade he has been focusing on installations, using clothing as his basic material, building monumental yet fragile and collapsible structures that speak to our interdependence, our differences and our similarities, and our status as human beings in the natural world.

Ordinarily, spending so much time outside of the studio might prove a distraction, but Luhoomun has managed to find synergy between his organising, teaching, and multifaceted personal practice. Working across different spheres is reflective of Mauritius itself and its segmented culture and life. As Luhoomun explains, "because of its colonial past, different cultural groups pretend to live

→ [facebook.com/krishna.luhoomun](http://facebook.com/krishna.luhoomun)

# AWARDED RESIDENCIES

2020 - THAMI MNYELE FOUNDATION  
1990 - 2021

1990

CREATION OF THE THAMI MNYELE FOUNDATION

1992

CLIFFORD CHARLES — SOUTH AFRICA  
DIANSE PAULSE — SOUTH AFRICA  
SARAH TABANE — SOUTH AFRICA

1993

SANDRA KRIEL — SOUTH AFRICA  
DAVID KLOANE — SOUTH AFRICA  
ANDRIES BOTHA — SOUTH AFRICA  
PAT MAUTLOA — SOUTH AFRICA

1994

TITO ZUNGU — SOUTH AFRICA  
NORIA MBABASA — SOUTH AFRICA  
HELEN SEBIDI — SOUTH AFRICA  
SUE WILLIAMSON — SOUTH AFRICA

1995

INA VAN ZYL — SOUTH AFRICA  
PROGRESS MATUBAKO — SOUTH AFRICA

1996

STEPHEN MAQASHELA — SOUTH AFRICA  
SHEPARD MTYSHELWA — SOUTH AFRICA

1997

LIZA DU PLESSIS — SOUTH AFRICA  
ALLINA NDEBELE — SOUTH AFRICA  
GREG STREAK — SOUTH AFRICA  
DOMINIC TSHABANGU — SOUTH AFRICA

1998

MUSTAFA MALUKA — SOUTH AFRICA  
MOSHEKWA LANGA — SOUTH AFRICA  
JEREMY WAFER — SOUTH AFRICA

1999

SALIOU TRAORE — BURKINA FASO  
ALASSANE DRABO — BURKINA FASO  
HARRY MUTASA — ZIMBABWE

2000

MOSS MOGALE — SOUTH AFRICA  
SAMSON KAMBALU — MALAWI  
ABRIE FOURIE — SOUTH AFRICA  
DOMINIQUE FONTAINE — HAITI/CANADA  
ILSE PAHL — SOUTH AFRICA

2001

KRISHNA LUCHOOMUN — MAURITIUS  
SENZINI MARASELA — SOUTH AFRICA

2002

TAREK ZAKI — EGYPT  
KHETO LUALUALI — MOZAMBIQUE  
MESHAC GABA — BENIN  
DARRYL ACCONE — SOUTH AFRICA  
NAWAAL DEANE — SOUTH AFRICA  
HENK ROSSOUW — SOUTH AFRICA  
RAFS MAYET — SOUTH AFRICA  
LOUIS MHLANGA — SOUTH AFRICA

2003

PAPISTO BOY — SENEGAL  
JOHN MURRAY — SOUTH AFRICA  
ISAAC CARLOS — ANGOLA  
ROSE KIRUMIRA — UGANDA  
DOMINIQUE ZINKPÉ — BENIN

2004

REHAB EL SADEK — EGYPT  
ODILI DONALD ODITA — SOUTH AFRICA

2005

NICHOLAS HLOBO — SOUTH AFRICA  
DOREEN SOUTHWOOD — SOUTH AFRICA

2006

GUY WOUETE — CAMEROON  
THULANI SHONGWE — SOUTH AFRICA  
ASSEFA GEBREKIDAN — ETHIOPIA

2007

VICTOR EKPUK — NIGERIA  
DOREEN SOUTHWOOD — SOUTH AFRICA  
CLIFFORD CHARLES — SOUTH AFRICA  
BATOUL SHIMI — MOROCCO  
GABRIEL KEMZO MALOU — SENEGAL  
ODILI DONALD ODITA — SOUTH AFRICA  
NGONE FALL — SENEGAL  
DINEO SESHEE BOPAPE — SOUTH AFRICA

2008

MAHMOUD KHALED — EGYPT  
JAMES IROHA UCHECHUKWU — NIGERIA  
SARAH ERZFINKE — TURKEY/GERMANY  
THIERRY MANDON — FRANCE/NETHERLANDS

2009

ADRIAAN DE VILLIERS — SOUTH AFRICA  
HADIA GANA — LIBYA  
ZANELE MUHOLI — SOUTH AFRICA

2010

AKIRASH — GHANA  
RUAN HOFFMANN — SOUTH AFRICA  
MICHAEL TSEGAYE — ETHIOPIA

2011

AKINTUNDE AKINLEYE — NIGERIA  
LEO LEFORT — ETHIOPIA  
NDIKHUMBULE NGQINAMBI — SOUTH AFRICA  
HASAN AND HUSAIN ESSOP — SOUTH AFRICA

2012

KOYO KOUOH — CAMEROON  
MICHELE TABOR — SOUTH AFRICA  
NISREN ABASHER AHMED — SUDAN  
VIKTOR EKPUK — NIGERIA  
SULTANA HAUKIM — MAURITIUS  
SANTU MOFOKENG — SOUTH AFRICA  
MIHRET KEBEDE — ETHIOPIA  
ADRIAAN DE VILLIERS — SOUTH AFRICA

2013

ASHRAF MONEIM — SUDAN  
AWAAD OMAR — SUDAN  
LARA BOURDIN — CANADA/FRANCE  
ZANELE MUHOLI — SOUTH AFRICA  
LOUIS BOSHOFF — SOUTH AFRICA  
RUAN HOFFMANN — SOUTH AFRICA  
KRISHNA LUCHOOMUN — MAURITIUS  
HELEN ZERU ARAYA — ETHIOPIA  
ADMIRE KAMUDZENGERERE — ZIMBABWE

2014

MOSHEKWA LANGA — SOUTH AFRICA  
BERNARD AKOI-JACKSON — GHANA  
MOHAMED AHMED ABDEL RASOUL — SUDAN

2015

ATEF BERREDJEM — ALGERIA  
MONGEZA NCAPHAYI — SOUTH AFRICA  
REHEMA CHACHAGE — TANZANIA  
EM'KAL EYONGAKPA — CAMEROON

2016

JABU ARNELL — DUTCH WEST INDIES/THE NETHERLANDS  
TIISETSO MOLOBI — SOUTH AFRICA  
LAZI MATHEBULA — SOUTH AFRICA  
PAMELA CLARKSON — GHANA  
ATTA KWAMI — GHANA

2017

NARE MOKGOCHO — SOUTH AFRICA  
MOLEMO GAPARE MOLOA — SOUTH AFRICA  
ATANG TSHIKARE — SOUTH AFRICA  
HAROON GUNN-SALIE — SOUTH AFRICA  
ALINE XAVIER — BRAZIL  
JODY BRAND — SOUTH AFRICA  
ZIYANDA MAJOZI — SOUTH AFRICA  
EMMANUEL IDUMA — NIGERIA  
SIMANGALISO SIBIYA — SOUTH AFRICA  
RAZIA BARSATIE — SURINAME

2018

ADAM BELAROUCHIA — MOROCCO  
NEO IMAGE MATLOGA — SOUTH AFRICA  
SINETHEMBA TWALO — SOUTH AFRICA  
ABDULRAZAQ AWOFESO — NIGERIA  
JABU ARNELL & SINETHEMBA TWALO — SOUTH AFRICA  
OPTION DZIKAMAI NYAHUNZVI — ZIMBABWE  
TERRENCE MUSEKIWA — ZIMBABWE

2019

SHARELLY EMANUELSON — CURAÇAO  
THANIA PETERSEN — SOUTH AFRICA  
GEORGES SENGA — DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO  
ANA KOVARI — CROATIA  
THATO MOGOTSI — SOUTH AFRICA

2020

ABDULRAZAQ AWOFESO — NIGERIA  
ADAM BELAROUCHIA — MOROCCO  
SHARELLY EMANUELSON — CURAÇAO  
ADAM BELAROUCHIA — MOROCCO

2021

RICHARD KOFI — THE NETHERLANDS  
BERNARD AKOI JACKSON — GHANA



→ VICTOR EKPUK | SANCTUARY, C. 2007 | PASTEL AND GRAPHITE ON PAPER. 127 X 127 CM | COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

UGOCHUKWU-SMOOTH NZEWI

## CONTAINERS OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE

During a three-month residency programme at the Thami Mnyele Foundation in the Fall of 2007, Nigerian-American artist Victor Ekpuk created *Amsterdam Central*, a mural that marked an incredible chapter in his career. For the first time, he considered the wall's surface as his canvas, with the audience watching while he created the work. Working in a combination of black, blue, and red poster markers, Ekpuk began to sketch his memories of Amsterdam as place, invoking, in a way, Pierre Nora's notion of *Lieux de Mémoire*; that certain places, objects, or events can have special significance. He articulated the social experiences that the city embodies. In the drawing are depictions of major avatars, such as a cyclist and the Amstel River that courses through the centre of Amsterdam. There are also depictions of figurative and abstract forms to suggest the intensity of the city, a place bustling with people and activity.

Ekpuk has since produced several mural works in the last fourteen years. He refers to the act of making the drawings as a performance, with viewers invited to witness the creation of the work and Ekpuk acting as their conductor. He has described the creation of these murals as a meditative process in which he withdraws into himself, seeking a pathway to a memory bank that he taps into effortlessly and transfers onto the solid surface of the wall as graphic signs.

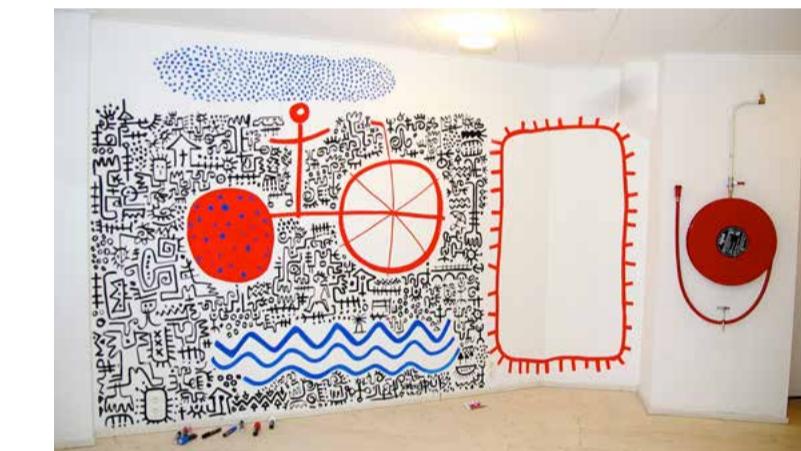
The drawings are produced in specific contexts, mostly on the expanse of gallery or museum walls as part of an exhibition, or as part of a public event involving the artist. They do not require a pre-sketch. Instead, the wall dictates the nature of the composition, which is completed in the space of one or two days. This is in contrast with Ekpuk's studio process, where he spends more time allowing an idea to gestate and coalesce, after which the initial sketch is produced. The sketch is then transferred to a two-dimensional (and more recently three dimensional) surface. At this point, the artist would be certain about the direction of his composition.

The Thami Mnyele Foundation residency programme helped Ekpuk resolve the central role that drawing plays in his practice and, given his investment in graphic signs, how they can be further pushed to address scale, motion, and form. The outcome was several years of devotion to immersive, large-scale drawings that began at the Foundation in 2007 with his *Composition* series and ended during another residency in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 2013. *Sanctuary* (2008), one of the first works in the series, captures the artist's attempt to devise a new approach to his practice and, at the same time, his conceptual acknowledgement of his indebtedness to nsibidi, the pictographic forms largely associated with the Ekpe Secret Society – a trans-ethnic men's association in the Cross River basin of Nigeria and Cameroon – which the artist has drawn upon extensively as an archival resource.

Ekpuk's drawings, paintings, prints, and sculptures don't always offer a single or a cohesive narrative. He composes his forms in a staccato fashion, with repeated symbols or encoded signs ricocheting off each other, carefully amassed on the solid picture surface. For the viewer, this does not always present a formal road map or a logical point of access to comprehend the artist's work. Because of his interest in the ways of memory – the temporal recall of a sequence of events or a careful forgetting – his script-like compositions can be approached as containers of human experiences.

[victorekpuk.com](http://victorekpuk.com)

"He composes his forms in a staccato fashion, with repeated symbols or encoded signs ricocheting off each other."



→ VICTOR EKPUK | AMSTERDAM CENTRAL, C. 2009 | POSTER MARKERS ON WALL. EPHERMAL DRAWING MADE AT MENEER DE WIT GALLERY IN AMSTERDAM | COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.



→ VICTOR EKPUK | DIS AMSTADAM LIFE, C. 2007 | PASTEL ON PAPER. 127 X 127 CM | COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

AUDE CHRISTEL MGBA

# YOU CAN ENJOY IT BUT YOU ARE NEVER GOING TO BE PART OF IT

**"It is inescapable to talk about Woueté without addressing the intrinsic relationship that the "here" – or the local – and the "elsewhere" maintain in his artistic process."**

Guy Woueté is part of a generation of Cameroonian artists that was mentioned during my university years when discussing new artistic disciplines and practices in the visual art scene of Cameroon – video art, performance, and installation. Woueté, a multidisciplinary artist that engages all of the above mediums, was therefore one of the major representative figures of this wave of artists. It is inescapable to talk about Woueté without addressing the intrinsic relationship that the "here" – or the local – and the "elsewhere" maintain in his artistic process. The local, defined as a circumscribed geographical space, can be a source of dynamics as well as stagnation. Dynamic in the sense that the encounters the self makes with others within that defined space can help stimulate inspiration, and stagnation in the sense that locality, when one has travelled through it, when one has looked it over, can produce immobility or become a trigger for a new quest for "elsewhere." The city of Douala is a hub of art and culture in Cameroon. It is home to writers, musicians, poets, photographers, painters, sculptors, and architects with impressive skills who face an insignificant number of exhibition spaces. This leads to plenty of work being imprisoned within studio walls for many years. It was in this agglomeration of artistic productions that reduced the chances of dialogue and critical thinking that Woueté decided to look for a new space, one that would provide an opportunity to grow both artistically and theoretically.

In 2005, he responded to several open calls and was selected to participate in the Bo'lev'Art Festival by Dominique Zinkpè in Benin, a UNESCO residency in Colombia, and the next edition of Dak'art 2006, as well as a three-month residency programme at the Thami Mnyele Foundation in Amsterdam. This three-month period marked the beginning of a great artistic adventure that continues to this day.

→ [instagram.com/guywouete](https://www.instagram.com/guywouete)



→ GUY WOUETÉ | STATE OF NATIONS, 2010-2020 | MULTIMEDIA INSTALLATION, EXHIBITION VIEW, DE BRAKKE GROND, AMSTERDAM | PHOTO CREDIT LNDWSTUDIO.  
→ GUY WOUETÉ | THAMI MNYELE RESIDENCY STUDIO VIEW | COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

NAJLAA ELAJELI

## HADIA GANA: AN IN-BETWEENNESS STATE OF MIND



→ HADIA GANA | PAPER SCRAP, 2014 | SHORT VIDEO | ON THE FLOOR: ZARDA (PIC-NIC), 2012 | CERAMIC INSTALLATION | PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

Versatile, dynamic, and defying all stereotypes, Libyan-French artist Hadia Gana is the first woman in Libya to take on the immense task of building a private cultural foundation in honour of her late father, Ali Gana. Not only is she a prominent and resourceful member of the contemporary Libyan arts scene, but she is uniquely determined to build this institution during a time of political upheaval and conflict.

Coming from an artistic-educational background, Gana originally studied ceramics and glass making at the University of Tripoli, followed by a master's degree in ceramics from the University of Wales. Over the years, she had been awarded a number of important arts residencies, including at the Thami Mnyele Foundation in Amsterdam and the Ashkal Alwan programme in Beirut, Lebanon. With a reputation for signature ceramic installations that tackle some of Libya's most difficult socio-political realities, her work investigates topics such as corruption, greed, and the imbalance of power.

Conversing with Gana, she considers her work to be about "an in-betweenness state of mind," reflecting on both her identity as an artist and its connection with Libya's predicament. When asked how she manages to work between diverse projects with complex implications on the Libyan public while remaining subtle and diplomatic, she replied, "I believe the different projects all have a similar purpose, as they mirror Libyan society and its development. My artistic research is thus based on my surrounding observation, analysis, and translation or transcription," she continues. "I see my work as a dialogue with the society I live in, a way to shed a light on the details of life."

"With the years passing, I have also become more aware of the suffering of Libyan society and regard it as 'a patient,'" she notes, "which helps me to be diplomatic. Aggression and confrontation are not useful tools in a scorched environment. Time and subtle and steady movements have a better long-term impact."

Reflecting on her time at the Thami Mnyele Foundation, Gana says it made her "aware of the 'pause' necessity, a moment where and when thinking deeply takes over working with a sense of emergency." The residency was also synonymous with important encounters with artists, gallerists, and people in the cultural field, all of whom "left a trace."

On how her time in Amsterdam aided her artistic critique later on, Gana remarks that "being a stranger, either physically or morally, depending on the place, is a major trigger of the in-betweenness I always felt." Due to her French-Libyan origins, Gana says she noticed surprise in the eyes of the visitors from the Foundation, as it is a residency specific to African artists. "Being pale and having a European look was always a kind of ice breaker for me to then say, 'Yes I am African,'" she explains. Describing her appearance as a "jacket of disappearance," Gana considers it useful when it comes to observing her surroundings or environment. Thus, her state of in-betweenness becomes a state of doubt where it is okay to be weak, vulnerable, or not knowledgeable. "I use this doubt in my artwork too," she says.

The city of Amsterdam inspired her too. "There was always the feeling of emergency that they might not feel daily but somehow shapes their behaviour," she comments, "strongly anchored to a land they know will one day be submerged." This manner of constant solution seeking, from the best case to the worst, and an "attitude of forward planning may well have influenced my work and behaviour in continuing to do what I do in any given situation," Gana concludes.

→ [instagram.com/hadiagana](https://www.instagram.com/hadiagana)

FAY JANET JACKSON

# DECONSTRUCTING COLONIAL LEGACIES



Connections between African, Asian, and European spaces have defined cultural identities and expressions for centuries. The lineage of multi-disciplinary artist, Thania Petersen, attests to this; born in 1980 into a Muslim community in Cape Town, her ancestry traces the forced migration of European colonial trade routes between Asia and South Africa. Through her work – which constitutes photographic self-portraits, installations, and performance art – Petersen addresses the continuing impact of colonial imperialism, the increasing influence of right-wing, Islamophobic ideologies, and the identity politics of her Cape Malay heritage.

The Cape Malays came to South Africa when they were brought as slaves by the Dutch. They were skilled artisans, political prisoners, and exiles from the Dutch East Indies, known today as Indonesia. As a direct descendant of Tuan Guru, an Indonesian prince brought to South Africa by the Dutch in the late 1700s, Petersen explores her lineage and traces the ancestry of the Cape Malay people back to royal routes in Indonesia. Using ceremonial Malay

adornment as part of her exploration, she returns to sites significant to issues of slavery and forced removals, exploring the universal themes of personal and historical identities by reconstructing and photographing herself in various guises.

One of these guises is the hijab, a traditional veil worn by some Muslim women to cover the head, chest, or face. Petersen notes how many secular societies frown upon the veil, with some even banning it outright – like The Netherlands did in 2019, the same year that Petersen attended the residency programme at the Thami Mnyele Foundation in Amsterdam. While the law was never enforced, it introduced another layer of complexity to her already fraught relationship to the Dutch. "I am historically connected to this country in ways which is painful and traumatic," says the artist. "For my own healing it was important for me to be there and confront this history and landscape."

"What I loved the most was that there was no pressure on me to produce work," says Petersen. She highlights an appreciation and understanding for her creative process, the independence to do nothing but read or explore the city by bicycle. Not only was Petersen free to work at her own pace, she was free to occupy space in Amsterdam without fear for her safety. South Africa can be a dangerous place for women, a country with such a tumultuous history and one of the highest rates of gender-

→ THANIA PETERSEN | I AM ROYAL – LOCATION 4: LATER DISTRICT SIX, 2015 | INKJET PRINT ON EPSON HOTPRESS. EDITION OF 8 + 3AP | IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND WHATIFTHEWORLD.



→ THANIA PETERSEN | I AM ROYAL – LOCATION 3: EARLIER DISTRICT SIX, 2015. INKJET PRINT ON EPSON HOTPRESS. EDITION OF 8 + 3AP | IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND WHATIFTHEWORLD.



→ THANIA PETERSEN | I AM ROYAL – LOCATION 2: BOKAAP, 2015. INKJET PRINT ON EPSON HOTPRESS. EDITION OF 8 + 3AP | IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND WHATIFTHEWORLD.



→ KAGISO "PAT" MAUTLOA | IN STUDIO AT THE BAG FACTORY, JOHANNESBURG, 2020 | PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THYS TAALJARD AND THE ARTIST.

SEAN O'TOOLE

## A REVOLUTION ACROSS BORDERS

In the early 1970s, while still a young man living in Soweto and working in pastel and charcoal, Pat Mautloa befriended a group of likeminded artists, including David Koloane, Fikile Magadela, and Thami Mnyele. The group often met at Magadela's home to listen to jazz and draw. Underpinning the bonhomie was their ambitious drive to revitalise art practice. Looking back to this earlier time, Mautloa, who turns 60 in 2021, remembers these informal get-togethers as "incubators for further creativity." The expeditionary nature and collaborative method of these sessions would prove especially influential on his subsequent career as an artist.

"We were able to meet across regional borders and get to know each other," explains Mautloa. He remembers travelling to Durban, where he met the poet and editor Mafika Gwala, as well as journeying to Pretoria to meet poet and painter Lefifi Tladi, a close friend of Magadela and Mnyele. The rudimentary technologies that enabled and sustained these networks continue to amaze Mautloa. "People coordinated things out of nothing, without telephones," he says. "That became the basis of the revolution. It was amazing."

The revolutionary turmoil of 1976 directly impacted Mautloa: he was assaulted by police and left for dead; his injuries required prolonged hospitalisation. In 1978 he decamped from Johannesburg for the ELC Rorke's Drift Art and Craft Centre, a rural art school and centre of Black creative excellence. Mautloa discovered linocut, etching, and silkscreen, as well as photography. In 1980, back in Johannesburg, he won a competition that landed him a job as graphic designer with supermarket chain OK Bazaars.

There is a delightful coda to Mautloa's lesser-known career as a graphic designer. In the early 1990s, shortly before leaving the national broadcaster after 12 years, he was approached by the Bureau of Heraldry to provide input on the design of a new flag for South Africa. This honour coincided with his decisive transition from part-time to full-time artist.

Mautloa's participation in the Thami Mnyele Foundation's residency was an important moment in this career transition. One of the first artists to participate in the residency named for a friend murdered by apartheid operatives, Mautloa spent a total of six months in Amsterdam. "It was my longest absence ever from South Africa," he recalls.

He arrived in The Netherlands in 1993 with clear sense of the value and function of residencies. He had, in the years before, participated in a number of formalised workshops, notably the Thupelo Workshop series, founded by his artist friends David Koloane and Bill Ainslee. Workshops are expensive logistical exercises, says Mautloa. They are also comparatively short and rely on group dynamics. Residencies, by contrast, afford time to an individual artist to develop their own practice, to interact and learn at a slower, self-directed pace.

The two formats – workshops and residencies – are not mutually exclusive. Mautloa is best known for his ambitious sculptural installations and assemblage works referencing Black urban life. He learnt welding from American painter and sculptor Peter Bradley during the first Thupelo residency. His time away in Amsterdam did not significantly redefine this way of working.

"I simply changed gears," says Mautloa. "After returning from Amsterdam I did one of my biggest-ever pieces, a three-by-three metre shack installation at the Ricky Burnett's Newtown Galleries." Thinking big remains part of Mautloa's urban-inspired working method. In the past decade, he has produced a musically themed wall mosaic measuring thirteen metres at the University of the Free State, *Birth of Rhythm* (2014), and a large-scale linocut series, *Urban Masks* (2017), that uses found plastic containers as the basis for masks. More modestly, he is honouring the memory of his deceased artist friends by hosting informal workshops in the spirit of times past.

→ [instagram.com/kagisopatmautloa](https://instagram.com/kagisopatmautloa)



"People coordinated things out of nothing, without telephones... That became the basis of the revolution."



→ KAGISO PATRICK MAUTLOA | URBAN MASKS, 2016 – (ONGOING SERIES) | MIXED MEDIA AND FOUND OBJECTS. DIMENSION VARIABLE | COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

KEES KEIJER

# THE PSYCHOLOGY OF VIOLENCE AND INNOCENCE

When Clifford Charles first came to the Thami Mnyele Foundation in 1993, it was his first visit to Europe. He enjoyed the ubiquitous water in Amsterdam, but most of all the freedom he experienced when moving around on a bicycle. This incredible sense of safety proved a stark contrast to his life in South Africa, the country he had left behind in the midst of a civil war. The day before Charles got on a plane to Amsterdam, Inkatha protesters had smashed every car in the neighbourhood where he was living. He left a country in chaos and took a sense of complete ambivalence and disorientation with him to Amsterdam.

Charles grew up in Port Shepstone, a town on the east coast of South Africa. In his childhood, he experienced it as a carefree environment, with its warm climate, abundance of fresh fruit, and many beaches. At the same time, he would see glimpses of white flesh in the distance. Other sections of the beach were for white people only. He was an avid draughtsman from an early age and when his uncle, who was involved in theatre, invited him to come to Johannesburg, Charles was introduced to people who worked at the

University of the Witwatersrand. With special permission, he was eventually admitted to the all-white university and, while studying there, Charles became active in the Dhlomo Theatre organisation, South Africa's first Black Theatre company. Its members, mostly visual artists, musicians, writers, and theatre students, shared an interest in pedagogy and questions about liberation and postcolonial struggles.

The group did not have access to theatres. Charles smuggled his pictures to churches and especially funerals, which became important places for cultural exchange. The group was constantly harassed by the military police. Making art had become a collaborative effort, which was very apparent when Charles visited the Thami Mnyele Foundation. In spite of all the people he met and the bustling Ten Katemarket around the corner, he found himself alone in the studio.

He began to appreciate the significance of solitude in the creative process. At first, he made charcoal drawings. He also discovered new materials, like oil bars, and gradually, he used more and more colour. A series of oil paintings depicting human figures emerged.



→ CLIFFORD CHARLES | FRAGMENT OF 'METAMORPHOSIS SERIES', 1985 | COMPRESSED CHARCOAL | COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

**"In South Africa, [Charles] was not permitted to draw policemen, so he stripped them of their uniforms and, at the same time, revealed their vulnerability."**

Some wore gas masks, others were restrained and appeared to have been tortured. In South Africa, he was not permitted to draw policemen, so he stripped them of their uniforms and, at the same time, revealed their vulnerability. This ambivalence between perpetrator and victim was an attempt to understand the psychology of violence and innocence.

Charles shared his interest in the human figure with Marlene Dumas, whom he first met during his stay at the Thami Mnyele Foundation, but his time in residence also steered him away from the figurative. With a different perspective on his artistic practice, he embraced solitude, and his work became more introspective.

After his time at the Thami Mnyele Foundation – he would return for a second stay in 2007 – Charles went back to South Africa with a sense of bravado, but his ambitions were soon washed away by the harsh reality of circumstances in his home country. Euphoria made way for cautious scepticism. He needed to find another way of expressing himself, and his work evolved to focus on a different relation-

ship with the viewer, inviting them to find the narrative in his work rather than presenting it too clearly. "It's like when you look at the horizon line," Charles explains, "There is nothing there, but people always watch the sea. They go to the beach with different energies. When they do, the horizon becomes an important point of focus and reflection. I try to do that within my own work."

→ [cliffordcharles.co.uk](http://cliffordcharles.co.uk)

BARBARA MURRAY

## A TIMELY GODSEND

Rooted in Ghanaian aesthetics – as exemplified, for example, in Ghana's superb textiles – Atta Kwami's paintings express his responses to the geometric abstractions he sees around him. Prior to his residency at the Thami Mnyele Foundation, he had been looking anew at Ghanaian architecture, particularly at the vernacular roofs and how their deceptive simplicity reveals so much about local aesthetics. He had also been seeking a different palette, more muted colours – what he likes to think of as 'unnameable colour'. Now, in the urban landscape of Amsterdam, he had a wide new field for exploration and reflection.

Having free range of the huge studio space with its magical light was a joy and a catalyst for Kwami. There was a generous working space with tables, basic tools, left-over paints, an interesting library, and even a loft for storage, but the main boon was the height: the high ceiling and the vast windows providing consistent bright light and lifting his spirit. Compared to his small workspace in the UK and to his studio in Ghana, challenged by the vagaries of the tropical climate, the residency studio provided an ideal environment to carry out the large-scale works he had been thinking about for some time.

**"In Amsterdam, he felt enlivened and motivated; it was an opportunity, a timely godsend."**

It was a busy month for Kwami and his wife, artist Pamela Clarkson, who accompanied him and worked alongside him on her handprinted linocuts. Outside of the intense studio hours, there was much to experience in the local multicultural community with its thriving market. Old and new friends invited Kwami and Clarkson to their homes and showed them other parts of the city. They visited the Rijksmuseum, the Rembrandt House, the Stedelijk Museum, and many other galleries and, most importantly, met artists, art critics, curators, a town planner, and people from art spaces and cultural institutions, making vital networking contacts.

The city also offered germane materials. On Tuesdays, Amsterdammers leave unwanted items on the pavements, and evening walks along the canals often yielded useful pieces of cardboard and wood, and some large panels, which were hoisted up the stairs to the studio as supports for large canvases. Combined conceptually with new architectural forms, these 'finds' or fragments of the city engendered specificity and added to the sense of purpose. Kwami draws attention to *clèmè*, a word from the Ewe language that translates to 'it is true', 'it is contained' or 'it dwells within'; all routes to a resolution are driven by a compulsion towards truth or rightness within the work. In Amsterdam, he felt enlivened and motivated; it was an opportunity, a timely godsend.

The artist-in-residence programme at the Thami Mnyele Foundation gave Kwami the space and time to consolidate ideas around architecture, temporary-permanent hoardings, urban structures, and vistas. The artworks he created during his time there were exhibited in *Thami* (Howard Scott Gallery, New York) and subsequently included in *It Dwells Within*, part of *Beyond Eurafrica: Encounters in a Globalized World* (Columbia University, New York, Council for European Studies online). His Amsterdam experiences have, since then, been fruitfully linked-up with experiences of diverse urban vistas in the UK and the USA, continuing the work which began in that light-filled studio at the Thami Mnyele Foundation.

→ [attakwami.com](http://attakwami.com)



→ ATTA KWAMI | IN STUDIO AT THE THAMI MNYELE FOUNDATION, AMSTERDAM, 2016 | PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF PAMELA CLARKSON AND THE ARTIST.

→ ATTA KWAMI | THAMI MNYELE 2, 2016 | ACRYLIC ON LINEN, 193 X 149 CM | PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF PAMELA CLARKSON AND THE ARTIST.

## CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

**NAJLAA ELAJELI** is an architect with over twenty years of experience in the profession. Due to a deep interest in art a need to explore its potential, she founded Noon Arts Projects in 2012. A small private arts foundation, its mission was to bring the best of contemporary Libyan art, from both emerging and established artists from Libya and the MENA region, exposing it to the world stage. Noon Arts has organised over 15 successful international exhibitions in the UK, Italy, Spain, Malta, and Libya.

**FAY JANET JACKSON** is an arts writer and editor based in Cape Town, focused on the development and promotion of contemporary creative production from Africa and its diasporas. She contributes to *The Art Momentum* as both writer and editor, and writes regularly for galleries, cultural institutions, and independent artists.

**ASHRAF JAMAL** is an academic, writer, and cultural theorist. He is a research associate at the Research Centre, Visual Identities in Art and Design at the University of Johannesburg and teaches in the media studies programme at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in Cape Town. In 2018, he published *In the World: Essays on Contemporary South African Art* (Skira), in which he explored the challenges of South African artistic practice. Through the work of twenty-four visual artists, he returns to the national narrative of South African art, from identity politics to the boom of "African art" in the global contemporary art market.

**LADI'SASHA JONES** is a freelance writer and curator. She holds a BA in African American Studies from Temple University and an MA in Arts Politics from NYU, Tisch School of the Arts. She has contributed to numerous journals, including *Aperture*, *Avery Review*, *Arts. Black*, *The Art Momentum*, and *Recess*. She is responsible for artists for the Laundromat project, an arts organisation committed to the development of collective and participatory creative initiatives in New York. Her reflections focus in particular on the methods of cultural production and examine the place of archives and digital technology in storytelling processes.

**VALERIE KABOV** is the Cofounder and Director of First Floor Gallery Harare, Zimbabwe's leading contemporary art gallery, Editor at Large of *ART AFRICA* Magazine, and Cofounder of the African Art Galleries Association. As a researcher, writer, and cultural advocate, Kabov is focused on the welfare of artists, decolonial cultural policy, contemporary art history, and cultural economics. She holds a Masters in Curatorship and Modern Art from the University of Sydney, as well as degrees in Law and Economics from the University of Melbourne, Australia.

**KEES KEIJER** is an art historian and art critic based in Amsterdam. He has written about late-nineteenth century, modern, and contemporary art in various art magazines and books. Keijer is an art critic for the Dutch newspaper, *Het Parool*.

**AUDE CHRISTEL MGBA** is an independent curator based between Cameroon and the Netherlands. She was a participant of the De Appel 2018/19 Curatorial Programme. In 2017, Mgba worked as an assistant curator next to Cécile Bourne-Farrell for the SUD2017, an international triennial of art in the public space, organized by doual'art, a center for contemporary art for the city of Douala. She is a member of the Madrassa Collective.

**NKGOPOLENG MOLOI** is a writer and an MA student in contemporary curatorial practices at Wits University. Using archives and exhibition histories, her research explores womxn's mobility. She attempts to understand and draw attention to factors that enhance or inhibit womxn's freedom of movement. Writing is a tool Moloi employs to understand the world around her and to explore the things she is excited and intrigued by, particularly history, art, language, and architecture.

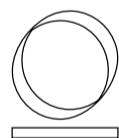
**BARBARA MURRAY** is a writer, editor, curator, and activist for contemporary art in Africa. Born in Zimbabwe, she was Exhibitions Officer at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, founding editor of *Gallery Magazine*, and founding secretary of the Zimbabwe Association of Art Critics. Curatorial experience includes the Dakar Biennale (2006) and Transitions: Botswana Namibia Mozambique Zambia Zimbabwe 1960-2004, Brunei Gallery, SOAS, University of London (2005-06).

**UGOCHUKWU-SMOOTH C. NZEWI** is the Steve and Lisa Tananbaum Curator in Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

**SEAN O'TOOLE** is a writer and editor living in Cape Town. He has published two books, most recently a monograph on painter Irma Stern, as well as edited three books on African art and photography.

**VINCENT VAN VELSEN** is an Amsterdam-based writer and curator with a background in architectural and art history. He regularly writes for different institutions, publications, periodicals, museums, and individual artists, and is contributing editor at Dutch contemporary art magazine, *Metropolis M*. Van Velsen has curated several exhibitions, most recently *Simon(e) van Saarloos, Chapter 4OUR* (Het HEM, 2021) and, together with Alix de Massiac, won the second edition of the curatorial prize of the Vereniging Bedrijfscollecties Nederland (VBCN, Dutch Association of Corporate Collections, 2014). Furthermore, he was a resident at the Van Eyck Academy, a guest resident at the Rijksakademie voor Beeldende Kunsten, and associated to sonsbeek20-24. Van Velsen frequently sits on juries and committees, is a member of the Stadscuratorium Amsterdam and the board of De Appel and, since May 2021, is the curator of photography at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

**QUTOUF YAHIA** is a poet and a writer. She is also one of the Cofounders of Locale, a Sudanese platform for the development of creative efforts and local talent through cultural advocacy.



Thami Mnyele  
Foundation  
Residency Award  
for artists from Africa and Diaspora

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GRAPHIC DESIGN  
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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Thami Mnyele Foundation wants to thank:  
Pauline Burmann - Marlene Dumas - Moshekwa Langa - Martha Reijmers Minout  
van de Ven - Isabelle Vermeij - Oscar Hora Adema - Marnix de Bruyne Michele  
Tabor - Jan-Thomas Kunzett - Francis Bolten - Martine Bolten - Vincent Vaneker  
Yuchen Li - Esther Darley.

AFK Amsterdam Fund for the Arts  
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All the artists and supporters of the Thami Mnyele Foundation who gave energy to  
the artists visiting the foundation. Levievandermeer.nl for creating the foundations'  
logo.

All the residency program awarded artists.

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