

THE SOUTH AFRICAN PAVILION

**The  
stronger  
we become**

## **The stronger we become** **The South African Pavilion**

**58th La Biennale Di Venezia**  
**Sale D'Armi, Arsenale, Venice, Italy**  
**11 May - 24 November 2019**

**Curators:** Nkule Mabaso, Nomusa Makhubu

**Artists:** Dineo Seshee Bopape, Tracey Rose, and Mawande Ka Zenzile

The South African Department of Arts and Culture and commissioner, Consul-General Titi Nxumalo, have appointed curators Nkule Mabaso and Nomusa Makhubu to curate the South African Pavilion at the 58th International Art Exhibition in Venice. **The stronger we become** proudly features artists Dineo Seshee Bopape, Tracey Rose and Mawande Ka Zenzile in a three-person exhibition running from 11 May to 24 November 2019 in Venice, Italy.

Premised on notions of resilience and resistance, set within historically-centered themes of land, dispossession, and institutional knowledge and power – **The stronger we become** is a reflection on political transition in the context of post-1994 South Africa. The title of the exhibition references the song (*Something Inside*) *So Strong*, written by Labi Siffre in 1984 in response to the crises of Apartheid South Africa. More than three decades later, ascendant social resistance has unearthed and offers anew, intricate historical narratives of social injustice. This exhibition, is presented as an active prompt to inspire critical engagement with South Africa's collective past, present and future.

The 58th International Art Exhibition – curated by Ralph Rugoff – is titled *May You Live In Interesting Times* – drawing on a phrase of English invention that has long been mistakenly cited as an ancient Chinese curse that invokes periods of uncertainty, crisis and turmoil. The creative concept of the South African Pavilion responds to Rugoff's suggestion that "uncertainty, crisis and turmoil" necessitates focusing on "art's social function as embracing both pleasure and critical thinking". **The stronger we become** is about reflection and interaction. Each of the three selected artists – **Dineo Seshee Bopape, Tracey Rose, Mawande Ka Zenzile** – bring unique perspectives to the multifaceted predicaments of contemporary South African life through humour and satire. The exhibition asks: How are social disparities mediated? How are certain conditions overcome? How does continuous social engagement reinforce social resilience? Through the artworks of the selected artists, the exhibition seeks to show the many sides to a story and a plurality of knowledge.

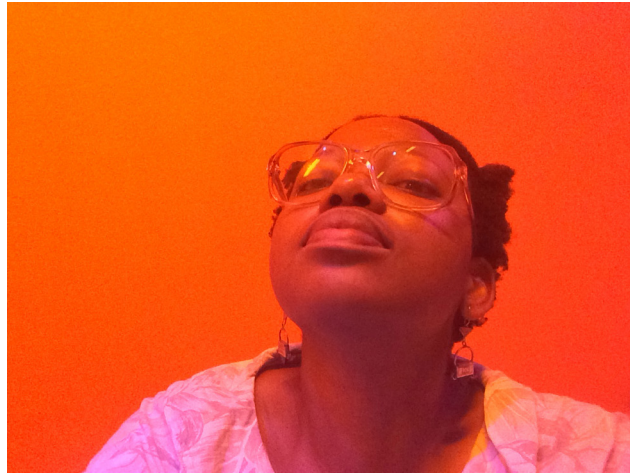
**Dineo Bopape's** immersive installations show how politics shape our perceptions of place and time. Her work captures the discord of displacement through land dispossession. It navigates geo-politics and territorialisation. In Bopape's installations, land is a repository of histories and memories that are entrenched, excavated and lived. In this way, she engages with geographic *situatedness* as the root of politics. While Bopape's installations stage intricate scenes of history and myth, they also facilitate interaction and play.

**Tracey Rose's** performance and multimedia art confronts the absurdities of contemporary life. Taking on current political affairs and historical narratives, Rose deploys humour as a way to rebel against habitual political dominance. Her satirical tongue-in-cheek performances in which she tackles gender, race and sexuality subvert the established social order. Through her references to specific historical figures, she questions canonical history and parodies authoritative knowledge.

**Mawande Ka Zenzile's** creative practice engages with how knowledge operates. Using riddles, idioms and proverbs, Ka Zenzile probes different world views, epistemologies or ways of knowing and modes of living. His paintings are anchored in African intellectual heritage and the effects of its suppression through colonial domination. Ka Zenzile's work divulges the disenchantment and cynicism of youth who are disillusioned with the promise of liberty. Ka Zenzile's work invites mind game-like engagement.

## MORE ABOUT THE ARTISTS

### THE SOUTH AFRICAN PAVILION **The stronger we become**



**Dineo Seshee Bopape** (b. 1981, Polokwane, South Africa) 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).



*Lerole: Foonoes (The struggle of memory against forgetting) (detail) 2018*  
Mixed media installation view Galerie Sfeir-Semler, Hamburg/Beirut  
Courtesy Galerie Sfeir-Semler, Hamburg/Beirut

## The stronger we become



**Tracey Rose** (b. 1974, Durban, South Africa) 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. Rose's work reflects the cultural, economic and political differences that mark the contemporary world and in particular post-apartheid South Africa, along with identity-related and ethnic issues. She investigates questions of gender and colour through the visual motifs of her own body. She uses multiple media, with a preference for performance, video and drawing. 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.



Art Thou Not Fair, KriggerKniff/Khron aka 'KKK', 2014-2017  
copyright the artist, courtesy Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg and Dan Gunn Gallery London

## The stronger we become



**Mawande Ka Zenzile** (b. 1986, Lady Frere, South Africa) 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 VANSAs, 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); *Umahluko* 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.



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

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## ABOUT THE CURATORS

Nkule Mabaso and Nomusa Makhubu have curated “*Fantastic*”, a touring international group exhibition in 2015; and “*There are mechanisms in Place*”, a solo exhibition of the work of Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum in 2018, and are currently working on a creative publication of the same title.



Nkule Mabaso and Nomusa Makhubu, 2019. Photo by Masiimba Sosa.

**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 Kunsthal 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.

#### ABOUT CORPORATE ICONS

**Corporate Icons Media** is an African Cultural and Creative consulting company that seeks to develop audiences by centering African narratives. Founded by Lala Tuku, a major function of the company is to create platforms that facilitate and nurture collaboration of African artists both locally and internationally.

#### ABOUT THE SOUTH AFRICAN DEPARTMENT OF ARTS AND CULTURE

**The Department of Arts and Culture** promotes, supports, develops and protects the arts, culture and heritage of South Africa. The South African Pavilion at the La Biennale di Venezia is of strategic importance in establishing this goal locally within the sector and promoting South African Arts, Culture and Heritage on an international level.

#### ABOUT LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

**The Venice Biennale** dates back to 1895, when the first International Art Exhibition was organised. It is one of the pre-eminent international biennales and cultural institutions in the world, introducing hundreds of thousands of visitors to exciting new art every two years. The 58th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia (11 May - 24 November 2019) is curated by Ralph Rugoff, currently the director of the Hayward Gallery in London.

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