

EVERARD READ

BLESSING NGOBENI

(b.1985 Tzaneen, South Africa)

"I'm working to find the inner part of the human being. So I am stripping that person out...taking the clothes, the skin, the bones.

I'm trying to see what can come out of this person. Then I rebuild.

I call it the lust of the heart. It is never satisfied." – Blessing Ngobeni, 2019

Blessing Ngobeni was born in the small town of Tzaneen, located in the largely rural Limpopo province of South Africa. He moved to the Johannesburg metropolis at a very young age, where he experienced many hardships, from living on the streets, to serving time in prison – what he describes as "the usual South African story". He has since then built an exceptional and unique career in the South African art industry. Bringing with him a unique style and a critique of political regimes, Ngobeni made the corruption, incompetence and duplicity of current South African ruling elite the subjects of his art. He tackles the disconcerting consequences of betraying democratic ideals, the failure to learn from historical tragedies and the expanding gap between the rich and poor. This critique is informed by Ngobeni's own experience, the hardships and challenges he had to confront as a child and adolescent. As a result of his exceptional work and dedication to his practice, Ngobeni received the highly-prestigious Standard Bank Young Artist Award for the Visual Arts in 2020.

Ngobeni is known for his distinctive style, created with layers of acrylic washes, exaggerated figures and collage, accompanied by unapologetic titles such as 'Democracy is a Dust Bin', or 'A Study of Corruption'. He uses his expressionist paintings not only to overtly critique the current status quo, but to ask uncomfortable questions about the African's experience of the world. His languages also draw inspiration from various movements, including Surrealism and Neo-Expressionism. He re-examines and re-imagines working ideas by artists including Jean-Michel Basquiat, David Koloane and Pablo Picasso.

Ngobeni confronts his own experiences, and challenges them in the often nightmarishly absurd and violent scenes of his paintings. These scenes, though brutal and honest, are also a display of the artist's visual sensitivities to line, image and the power of colour.

In his recent bodies of work, Ngobeni engages with the idea of a haunting past – specifically with regards to African history, in a scathing condemnation of the continent's current political and socio-economic status as a result of our colonial past. This engagement does not lie only in his conceptual foundations, but in his process of making, of carefully and laboriously constructing artworks from extant imagery as well as his own imagination. His distorted figures are often pregnant, their bulging bellies heavy with collected collage pieces which are sourced from local and international press, newspaper clippings, glossy magazines and social media.

For Ngobeni the past, or history, never left us; it defines our everyday lives.

EVERARD READ

In addition to the Standard Bank Young Artist Award, Ngobeni is the recipient of a number of awards, including the Reinhold Cassirer Art Award by Nadine Gordimer (2012), the Mail and Guardian '200 Young South Africans' and the Arts & Culture Trust Young Professional ImpACT award (2013). His work has been included in the most recent Phaidon publication in the P series, 'Vitamin P3: New Perspectives in Painting' (2016).

It is of importance to note that Ngobeni is an artist focusing on more than his own evolving career. His efforts in mentoring young artists have lead him to form two projects which support young artists who are transitioning from their training to their careers as full-time practitioners. The first, in collaboration with the Bag Factory, is the 'Blessing Ngobeni Studio Art Award' established in 2017. The second is called 'Initiative' and introduces young artists to the art industry through a series of workshops, culminating in an opportunity for them to participate in a group show. This empowering work attests to Ngobeni's personal and professional contribution to the art world and society at large.

EDUCATION

Artist Proof Studio in Newtown, Johannesburg, South Africa

EXHIBITIONS

- 2021** ARCOLisboa, with Everard Read, Lisbon, Portugal
- 2020** *Chaotic Pleasure*, 2020 Standard Bank Young Artist Award, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
Frieze New York, with Jenkins Johnson Gallery, Chicago, USA
The Armory Show, with Jenkins Johnson Gallery, Chicago, USA
Replica Ever Sang, solo, Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
Study Song of Chicotte, solo, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2019** CONTEXT Art Miami, with Everard Read, Miami, USA
ArtX Lagos, with Everard Read, Lagos, Nigeria
'Personal Structures: Identities', Legate Lithography Editions, Venice Art Biennale, Venice, Italy
Southern Aspect, group exhibition, Everard Read, London, UK
Investec Cape Town Art Fair, Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2018** *A Note from Error*, solo, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa & London, UK
Enemy of Foe, solo, Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
EXPO CHICAGO 2018, Jenkins Johnson Gallery, Chicago, USA
The Photography Show 2018, presented by AIPAD, Jenkins Johnson Gallery, New York, USA
Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
FNB Joburg Art Fair 2018, with Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
In the Forests of the Night, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2017** *Masked Reality*, solo, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
PULSE Miami Beach, Jenkins Johnson Gallery, Miami, USA
EXPO CHICAGO, Jenkins Johnson Gallery, Chicago, USA
Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
FNB Joburg Art Fair, with Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
Viewpoints, group exhibition, Jenkins Johnson Gallery, San Francisco, USA
Art Miami, Jenkins Johnson Gallery, Miami, FL, USA
Off the wall: A Group Sculpture Show, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2016** *Song of the Chicotte*, solo, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
In Unknown Space, Cleveland Print Room in conjunction with Hedge Gallery Cleveland, United States

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Summer Exhibition, Everard Read, London, UK

Art Miami, Jenkins Johnson Gallery, Miami, USA

2015 *As If You Care*, solo, Gallery MOMO, Cape Town & Johannesburg, South Africa

2014 *In His State of Madness*, solo, Gallery MOMO, Johannesburg, South Africa

2013 FNB Joburg Art Fair, Johannesburg, South Africa

2012 *On This Earth*, Gallery MOMO, Johannesburg, South Africa

Made in Africa, group exhibition, Africa Day, Sandton Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa

Exit Emergency, Reinhold Cassirer Award, Bag Factory, Johannesburg, South Africa

2011 SANNA Africa Festival, Group Show, Zoo Lake, Johannesburg, South Africa

Wasted, Unity Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa

2010 Collaboration, Unity Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa

2009 Unity Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa

2007 Museum Africa, Johannesburg, South Africa

2006 Taxi Outreach Project, David Krut Johannesburg, South Africa; Michaelis Central Library, Johannesburg, South Africa; Diepkloof Library Johannesburg, South Africa

RESIDENCIES

Cleveland Creative Fusion, Ohio, USA

Headlands Centre For Art, San Francisco, USA

Reinhold Cassirer Award, Bag Factory, Johannesburg, South Africa

ARTICLES

SOUTH AFRICA

Mongezeleli Joja A., 'Art and politics: Blessing Ngobeni brings us back to the reality', August 2015, in *Mail & Guardian*

Hunkin J. 'Layered with Meaning: Blessing Ngobeni's Mixed Media Collages', July 2015, in *Between 10 and 5*

Jolly L., 'Testament of an Afro-Picasso', July 2015, in *Cape Times*

Nkuna K. 'Blessing Ngobeni explores power and destruction', April 2014, in *The Citizen*

'Blessing Ngobeni, 200 Young South Africans Archive', 2013, in *Mail & Guardian*

'Blessing's beasts of our nation', November 2012, in *News 24*

'Blessed by dreams', June 2012, in *News 24*

De Waal M. 'No disguise in Blessing's work', April 2012, in *Daily Maverick*

Sassen R. 'Artist forged by pain', April 2012, in *Sunday Times*

'Painting Joburg in Art', March 2012, in *Joburg.org.za*

UNITED STATES

Taylor D., 'Traumatic Past Fuels Work of South African Artist Blessing Ngobeni', September 2013, in *Voice of America*

Schwabsky, Barry & Phaidon Editors, 'Vitamin P3: New Perspectives in Painting', October 2016, Phaidon Press

FILM

'Blessing's Art Fair Performance', 2014, 11:39 minutes, Blessing Ngobeni

Bless Footage 2', 2014, 5:46 minutes, Blessing Ngobeni

'100% Youth: Blessing Ngobeni', 2014, 6:14 minutes, Gallery MOMO, The Bag Factory, Rena Le Lona Creative Centre, for SABC 1

Born prepared: Blessing Ngobeni for the 2013 FNB Joburg Art Fair', 2013, 4:44 minutes, producer: Nicola Hellmann, for FNB TV

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AWARDS

- 2019** Winnder of the Standard Bank Young Artist Award (2020) for Visual Arts in South Africa
- 2013** *Mail & Guardian* 200 Young South Africans
Art & Culture Trust, Johannesburg, South Africa, ACT Lifetime Achievement Awards and ImpACT
Awards for Young Professionals: Blessing Ngobeni for Visual Arts
- 2011** Reinhold Cassirer Art Award