

EVERARD READ

TERESA KUTALA FIRMINO

(b. 1993 Pomfret, South Africa)

'We heal by retelling our stories.'

Teresa Kutala Firmino's work negotiates trauma both personal and collective in her everyday life. Her paintings are constructed scenes of the past and present, which are sometimes intertwined. Firmino carefully collects images from magazines, newspapers, historical documents and social media, and places them in colourful, box-like stages. This creates surreally baroque scenes which take place in tightly confined interiors, where the characters have the opportunity to re-enact their stories or construct new ones. This process allows Firmino to create alternative past, present and future narratives of Africa, thus rebuilding her own archive of African history.

Firmino seeks to investigate the trauma that African people in her community and beyond have experienced and continue to experience due to colonisation, civil wars and present day obstacles. Her own stories begin with the collective trauma of Pomfret. Located in the North West Province of South Africa, and the place where she was born, Pomfret is a community of former 32 Battalion soldiers and their families, many of whom settled there after the end of the South African Border War.

Colonial rule and the trauma it induced forced many African people to cling to one another in a common cause, which was to create free and independent countries. Africans, though constantly reminded that they were seen as less than human, held on to what reminded them of their humanity: their communities and their struggles for freedom. Once they achieved a form of independence, though, many civil wars erupted, where the people who fought for the same freedom were caught in a new, raw struggle for power. These civil wars caused a second wave of trauma; suddenly the people one depended on for a sense of community and humanity now turned against each other.

Both the women and men in the Pomfret community experienced these traumas – but it is the women who were subjected to further pain. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is not only experienced by people who have been through a war. Firmino affirms that the women in the community experienced a second wave of trauma: rape, abuse, accidents and torture. The women clung to what gave them a sense of security and humanity, which were their husbands and the community. Many of them experienced abuse, and some were even killed by their partners. Those who survived could not trust the community for support, because society had normalised abuse against women.

Firmino looks at how, despite the trauma they experienced, many of these women had to continue living with their abusers. The artist interrogates what it is about the black female body and mind which, despite trauma, continues to thrive. Is she truly living, or is she in constant melancholy as she exists in the aftermath of colonialism, civil war and betrayal? Is negotiating trauma realising that your abuser is possibly part the bigger of cycle of abuse?

Teresa Kutala Firmino is a multimedia artist, now based in Johannesburg, working with paint, photography and performance. She is part of a collective called Kutala Chopeto, which started as an investigation into their shared history which is linked to the 32 Battalion, the soldiers who were settled in Pomfret after the Border War. She was a finalist for the 2023 and 2024 Norval Sovereign Foundation Art Prize.

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EDUCATION

2018 Masters in Fine Arts – University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2026 Tomorrow, I become a woman, Nagel Draxler, Cologne, Germany
- 2024 Olondavi Viotembo, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
An Economy of Intimacy, Nagel Draxler, Munich, Germany
- 2023 Owners of the Earth IV, Everard Read, London, UK
Owners of the Earth III: Owelema, Nagel Draxler, Berlin, Germany
Owners of the Earth II: Beyond Victims, Villains & Vixens, Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2022 Owners of the Earth I: Vissaquelo, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2021 Manifestation Oku Yongola: Manifestation of Wanting, Everard Read, London, UK
- 2020 Black Melancholy, solo booth, Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2019 Pseudo Restitution, World Art, Cape Town, South Africa
The War at Home, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2026 Does it end in a miracle?, Everard Read, Cape Town, SA
Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, SA
Wait until my sugar melts, curated by Sophie Barford, CP Project Space, New York, USA
- 2025 The Armory Show, with Everard Read, New York, USA
From the surrounds, we build the present, curated by Cindy Sissokho, in collaboration with Galerias Municipais/EGEAC, Galeria do Torreão Nascente da Cordoaria Nacional, Lisbon, Portugal
Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, SA
Motherhood, Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town, SA
Zandile Tshabalala & Teresa Kutala Firmino, Galerie Nagel Draxler @ LEMPERTZ, Brussels, Belgium
EXPO CHICAGO, with Everard Read, Chicago, USA
- 2024 Winter Collection, Everard Read, Franschhoek, South Africa
Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, SA
Norval Sovereign Foundation Art Prize Finalists exhibition, Norval Foundation, Cape Town, South Africa
FNB Art Joburg, with Everard Read, Johannesburg, SA
EXPO CHICAGO, with Everard Read, Chicago, USA
- 2023 What I Feel When I Think About The Cosmos, Everard Read, Franschhoek, SA
Norval Sovereign Foundation Art Prize Finalists exhibition, Norval Foundation, Cape Town, SA
Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, SA
Arte Fiera, with Osart Gallery, Bologna, Italy
- 2022 Art Antwerp with Osart Gallery, Antwerp, Belgium
Spring, group show, Everard Read, Franschhoek, SA
FNB Art Joburg, with Everard Read, Johannesburg SA
ARCOLisboa, with Everard Read, Lisbon, Portugal
Giving Direction: Figuration Past and Present, group exhibition, Strauss & Co, Cape Town, SA
Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, SA
Miaart Fair, with Osart Gallery, Milan, Italy
- 2021 Self-Addressed, curated by Kehinde Wiley, Jeffrey Deitch Gallery, Los Angeles, USA
Territories Between Us, Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town, SA
In Conversation, Everard Read, Cape Town, SA

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- Blessing Ngobeni and Teresa Kutala Firmino, Everard Read, Franschhoek, SA
Oasis, 25th anniversary exhibition, Everard Read, Cape Town, SA
Ubuntu: I Am Because We Are, curated by the Africana Foundation, WTO Ministerial Conference, Geneva, Switzerland
- 2020 Staring Straight to the Future (online), Everard Read, SA & UK
Summer, Everard Read, London, UK
Odyssey, Everard Read, SA & UK
The Portrait Show, Everard Read, Johannesburg, SA
FNB Art Joburg (online), with Everard Read, Johannesburg, SA
- 2019 Taxidermy of the Future, Luanda Museum of Natural History, Angola
Turbine Art Fair, with World Art, Johannesburg, SA
Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, SA
- 2018 Emergence, Mmarthouse, Johannesburg, SA
Pomfret Community Stories, Mmarthouse, Johannesburg, SA
Thou Art Women, Mmarthouse, Johannesburg, SA
The People's Exchange, IDC Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
Now and Then, Trent Gallery, Pretoria, SA
Protagonist: Artists in Response to Sexual Violence, Studio Fracture, Johannesburg, SA
- 2015 14/15 exhibition, The Point of Order, Johannesburg, SA
- 2014 The African Utopia Lecture Series, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, SA

CONFERENCES & RESIDENCIES

- 2025 Forster Gallery Artist Residency, Zanzibar, Tanzania
Hangar Artist Residency, Lisbon, Portugal
- 2023 Angola Air Residency, Luanda, Angola
- 2020 Fynbosch, Everard Read at Leeu Estates Residency, Franschhoek, South Africa
- 2016 The History We Are Told Not to Speak (The History of the Pomfret Community), UNISA School of Arts Conference
The Untold Story of the Pomfret Community, Black Portraits III, Johannesburg

COLLECTIVE EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 Kutala Chopeto, The Point of Order, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2017 Silences in Between, Goodman Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
Nirox Sculpture Winter Fair, Johannesburg, South Africa
The Centre for the Less Good Idea Season 1, Arts on Main, Johannesburg, South Africa
[South-South] Let me begin again, Goodman Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2016 Boda Boda Lounge Project, South Africa
Hybrid Culture, MB Studio, Pretoria, South Africa