



Up to scratch

Johannesburg artist Themba Khumalo ingrains his themes on observers' psyches



For more information about Themba Khumalo or his work, go to www.gunsandrain.com

What sort of training have you received and how important do you think it is to seek training, in terms of learning first principles and refining technique?

I'm a self-taught artist from Orange Farm. I did my formal training at Artist Proof Studio – in printmaking. Formal training helped me in terms of learning how to portray ideas and how to think more conceptually. I also learned about art history.

What is your principal medium, and why did you choose it?

Etching was my first choice of medium, but nowadays I'm venturing into other techniques such as dry-point, charcoal drawing and painting. I like these because I'm able to achieve intense, dark markings and subtle texture that evoke specific moods and emotions.

Describe the techniques you use most. How complicated are your methods, and why is each step necessary?

The technique I use most is etching – onto metal plates. It's a very difficult, long process and I work with acids, which sometimes can be very unpredictable. It is very challenging controlling the contrast of blacks and

whites. First you have to get the steel, copper or zinc plates and clean them until they smile. Then you hard-grind the drawing onto the plate by scraping it with a sharp needle to create grooves in the metal. Then you further alter the plate and develop the image with acid.

Who is the single other artist whose style you most admire, and why?

My work is influenced by South African artists like David Koloane, Philemon Hlungwane and Nelson Makamo, because of how they use their materials – especially charcoal – and because of their engaging subject matter.

Galleries and other traditional means are only one way of marketing art. What do you believe are the most important other routes, and what is the most important insight you have gained in that area in your career?

Galleries still play an important role in an artist's career, because they give a platform to artists to showcase their work at local and international art fairs and other events like that.

Why do you create? What are your stated goals in producing art?

I have loved art from a young age and I'm inspired by everyday life. My visuals are stimulated by events that I witness daily in the city of Johannesburg and the feelings and desires they inspire in me. In particular, I explore feelings of connectivity and isolation within the city.

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