



Fresh Voices | 2023

Adrian Fortuin

Kaelo Molefe

24 August - 22 September

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Guns & Rain is pleased to present the sixth edition of ***Fresh Voices***, our annual exhibition dedicated to emerging talent and new ideas. This year we feature the works of **Adrian Fortuin** and **Kaelo Molefe**, two artists who grapple with the construction of subjectivity through archival resources, including biomedical and ethnographic literature, fiction, personal photographs, oral histories and popular films.

For both artists, working through archives has the potential to unsettle sedimented understandings of identity, race and belonging. However, churning up history always carries with it the risk of exposing trauma and loss. In different ways, Fortuin and Molefe confront loss - of language and community, of dignity, of wholeness, of memory - and invite us to think through art as a mode of restoration, and a way of gathering fragments to make new wholes.

A medical doctor by profession, Molefe is interested in the epistemological impact of the racialisation of bodies. His research in recent years has looked at the violence of erasing black subjects from colonial-era accounts of an emergent Johannesburg, and the collusion of this bias with the extractive economy of early capitalism in Africa. For Molefe this topic is inflected by his personal experience working as a biomedical practitioner. He establishes a poetic connection between the fragmentation and recuperation of images of bodies through paper collage, and the restorative attempts (which are often nonetheless violent) of medical intervention into actual bodies. His collages apply a "surgical" precision to deconstructing and reconstructing figures, using negative space to underscore a strongly graphic approach to form. Recent experiments with painterly techniques combine his visual language of archival appropriation with acrylic image transfer and the impasto application of paint, evoking skin and flesh.

Like Molefe, Fortuin draws on archival imagery in his dream-like, symbolically rich paintings, but his seam of references is more autobiographical. Personal and family photographs make up the raw material of several of his new works, and are interspersed with found images from the internet, films and religious iconography. All of these resonate with his experience as a "born free" in post-apartheid South Africa (someone born after the official end of apartheid), upon which he reflects while looking to articulate his identity as a person with roots amongst southern Africa's indigenous Korana people. The hybridity that arises through Fortuin's bringing together of diverse sources and image references is echoed in his combination of abstract and pictorial visual registers. Fortuin is fascinated by "the space between" these registers, suggesting that working between abstraction and figuration allows the viewer to insert herself into the narrative of the painting while being able to latch onto recognisable moments.

Fresh Voices runs until 22 September 2023 and takes place concurrently with our presentation of works by Molefe and Fortuin, together with Tuli Mekondjo, at FNB Art Joburg from 8 - 10 September.



Adrian Fortuin



Adrian Fortuin

Orësen (To Free Oneself): Remember That Your Nose is a Pyramid That Will Face the Sky

2023

Oil paint, cotton and oil pastel on canvas

220cm × 140cm



Adrian Fortuin

To Come Undone I Chained My Wings to the Sky
2023

Oil paint and oil pastel on canvas
130 x 160 cm (diptych)



To Come Undone I Chained My Wings to the Sky (diptych detail).





Adrian Fortuin

Beautiful Boys in the Wake

2023

Oil paint and oil pastel on canvas

140 x 140 cm



Beautiful Boys in the Wake (detail)



Adrian Fortuin

Afterlife of an Unthought

2023

Watercolour, charcoal, ink, gouache,
cotton and oil pastel on paper

70.5 x 50 cm



Adrian Fortuin

Veil of !noa | humma (Heaven)

2023

Oil paint and oil pastel on canvas

40 x 30 cm



Adrian Fortuin

Summer '95

2023

Oil paint and oil pastel on canvas

50 x 50 cm



Adrian Fortuin

An Omen, A Coincidence

2021

Oil paint, sunbeam red polish and oil pastel on canvas

121.5 x 91.5 cm



An Omen, A Coincidence (detail)

Adrian Fortuin (b. 1994) is a Johannesburg-based artist whose work explores the relationship between figuration and abstraction in the context of post-apartheid and post/de-colonial South Africa. Working in a range of media, the scope of which is primarily informed by a conceptual approach, Fortuin is interested in the limits of representation and how personal identity is connected to family, language, ancestry, community, and society more broadly. He draws on personal, public and popular image archives to investigate the role art can play in restitution, memorialising, and narrative-making.

Fortuin graduated from the Wits School of Arts with a Bachelor of Fine Art degree in 2020, and was the recipient of the Wits Young Artist Award and the Martienssen Prize in 2019. He is currently enrolled in the MA Fine Arts programme at Wits University in Johannesburg, where his practice has shifted from a performative and lens-based approach to a transmedia engagement with painting and drawing. His paintings are characterised by an obsessive process of revision, in which paintings are sedimented under newer paintings, so that the painted surface becomes an archive of thought and gestures, and a metaphor for the endurance of personal historical traces in the present.

Fortuin has exhibited his work in group exhibitions in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Kampala, and the roaming African platform Boda Boda Lounge, and in 2022 completed a short residency at the David Krut Print Workshop in Johannesburg. His work will also be presented at FNB Art Joburg with Guns & Rain in September 2023.



Adrian Fortuin **in conversation**

In some of your paintings you have reworked your surfaces compulsively, painting over paintings several times until you arrive at the final work. What does this process mean for you?

For a time I was painting because I wanted to find out what painting can be for me? This meant that I was looking for something, I wasn't exactly sure what it was. The more I painted the more I found certain ways of painting that interested me. This meant that I was painting over paintings several times to arrive at a point where I had a better understanding of my process. This created layers of sedimented paint. The painting carried the history of its transformations in those layers. Now, when I paint there is still a process of layering but it has become more considered. What I mean is, each layer brings me up to the surface and I keep certain aspects and abandon others as I work my way up. This allows me to constantly shift things around and the process allows me to think and feel through the painting with each layer.

By contrast, in your most recent paintings, you seem much more confident in the images and marks you set out with at the beginning of a work. Can you explain this shift in your confidence?

The more I paint the more I realize I am naturally drawn to certain processes and ways of mark making. Before I would make marks intuitively and then respond to them. I was working with the possibility of chance and what can emerge from this in the paintings and drawings.

More recently I have been responding to images, these images are from a personal collection of images which include family photographs, screenshots from films, screenshots from tumblr posts, religious iconography and my previous work on 35mm film. So I would start out with the basic framework of the image and then I would later allow the possibility of chance to transcend the original reference. I have also been working figuratively without referencing the human form. I am interested in what can happen when I paint or draw the human form by intuition. This has also been an interesting process for me and perhaps it does come from the growing confidence in my drawing and painting.

Can you tell us about your interest in language and why or how you use it in your titles?

The title, for me, becomes an entry point into the work. It has also become a way of situating some key words and phrases that I often write down and contemplate during or after the work is made. For the past year I have been learning the !Ora language, which is a very rare Khoe dialect spoken by the Korana people, which I have also learned are my ancestors from my mothers side of the family. Because of this, some of the titles carry the !Ora language with them, perhaps as a way to situate the language in the present. I sometimes imagine it as if these words and phrases had always been part of my lexicon. I am learning the language through painting, which is a strange thing to say. In another sense the language also lives on with the work. It could also possibly be that over time all these !Ora words naming paintings will accumulate into a kind of Pictionary or a reference of words expressed through painting.

What is interesting for you about the relationship between abstraction and figuration, or the pictorial?

For me figuration is rooted and invested in reality. In this sense figuration points to something we can recognise. I find that with abstraction there is the suggestion of something beyond what we can accurately identify but we are still able to sense or 'feel'. I believe that both of these approaches are beneficial for my practice. I want to point to something that we are able to recognise and the moments of abstraction suggest something beyond that or create a relationship that is more nuanced and is able to create a more profound sensory experience. I find it interesting that with abstraction the viewer often inserts themselves, their feelings, associations, history, memories etc in the work for it to be experienced. I think the same happens with figuration but its more relative to the concrete and matter of fact nature of representation. To work in the space between them has always fascinated me because the possibilities become more interesting and I find that the work is more profound and holds an intensity that is able to shift something inside of me.

What can contemporary art bring to the ongoing struggle for the recognition of indigenous languages and cultures in South Africa?

I think contemporary art can bring this particular topic into the larger conversation, it can also provide new and creative ways to archive and preserve languages and culture. Perhaps it can also work against the ongoing erasure and lack of recognition. Other than that I am not sure. I don't claim to be a representative of the revivalism that is taking place. I am just asking questions about my ancestral history, my particular post-apartheid identity/ subjectivity and my cultural and spiritual inheritance.

How does your art relate (or not) to the revivalist groups that have appeared in South Africa in recent years?

Like I said, I don't claim to be a representative of any revivalist groups. I am just asking a number of questions as I want to better understand who I am. These questions are similar to the issues that these revivalist groups are addressing. These are important issues and I will be honoured if there are resonances in my work.

Can you comment on your interest in the film *The Gods must be Crazy* (amongst other 'popular culture' representations of San/Khoisan), and why this reference makes its way into your work?

When I watched *The Gods Must be Crazy* it was the first time I encountered First Nations/ Aboriginal people of South Africa. When I first saw it I found it hilarious and we would joke about it as kids. When looking back, I find the film to be problematic in many ways, and it upholds many of the negative stereotypes of African indigenous tribes and people. During my research I am discovering how advanced these ancient cultures were, and I begin to realize that the profound relationships these ancient and pre-colonial African people had to nature, reality and human spirituality is exactly what we as a collective need in this time. That shift has had a profound effect on me. So perhaps by making that reference I am depicting that shift in my perspective.

What has starting the MA at Wits brought to your practice?

I feel as though the MA has put a lot into perspective for me. It has articulated my research interests in a precise way. Before I started I knew what I wanted to do and explore but I didn't necessarily have the words to accurately describe what that was. Starting the MA has given me a clear sense of what I want to say and why.





Kaelo Molefe



Kaelo Molefe

CXR - AP

2021

Paper collage on Fabriano paper,
glass dome and wooden base

20 x 13 cm



Kaelo Molefe

Seven at The Golden Shovel

2023

Paper collage on Fabriano paper

Ed. 1/3

100 x 70.5 cm



Seven at The Golden Shovel (detail)



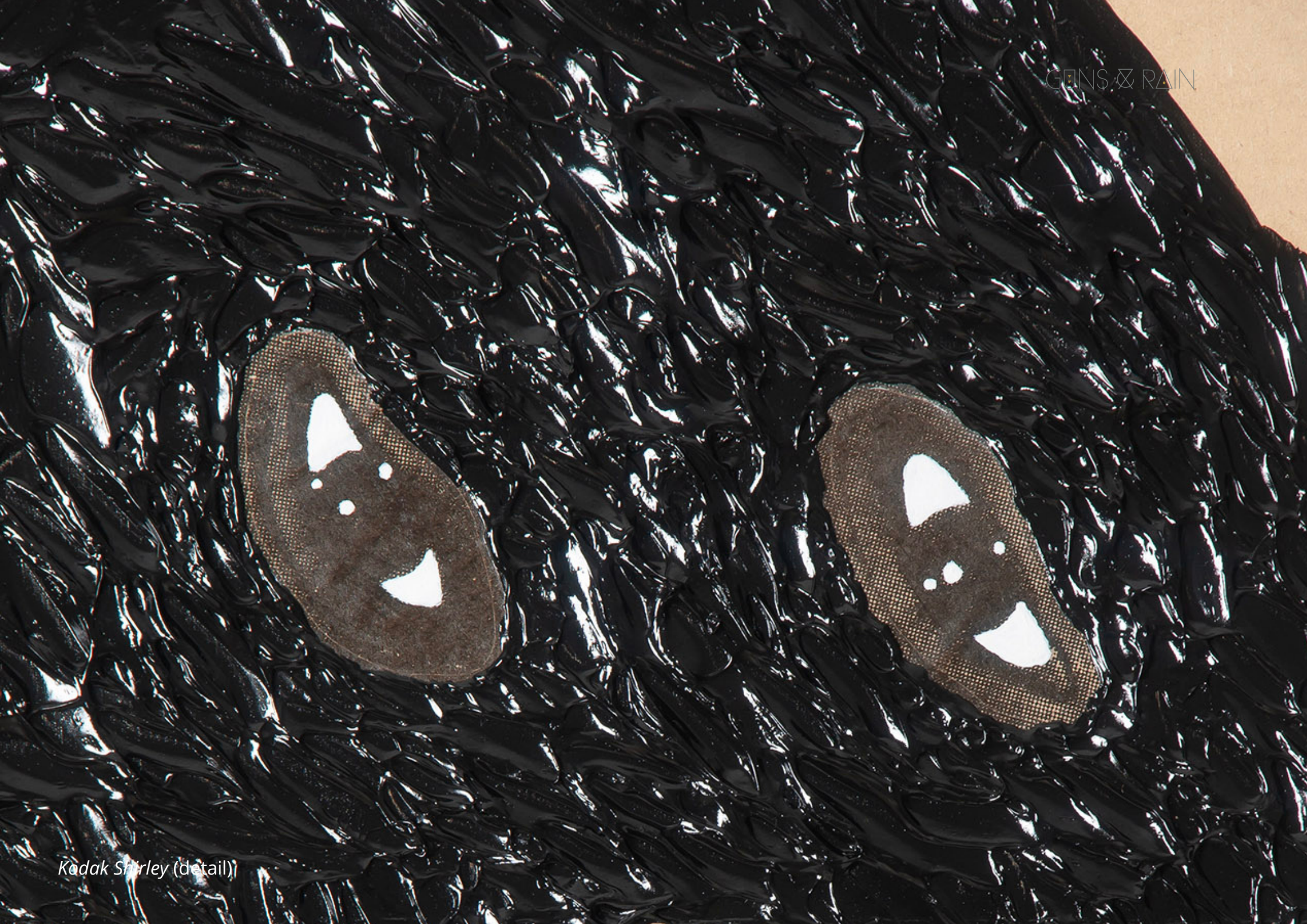
Kaelo Molefe

Kodak Shirley

2023

Acrylic transfer and acrylic paint on wooden board

100.3 x 75.3 x 1 cm





Kaelo Molefe

The Cephalic Index

2021

Paper collage on Fabriano paper

Ed. 3/3

100 x 70.5 cm



Kaelo Molefe

Act No 67 of 1952 (Redacted)

2021

Paper collage on Fabriano paper

Ed. 1/1

100 x 70.5 cm



Kaelo Molefe

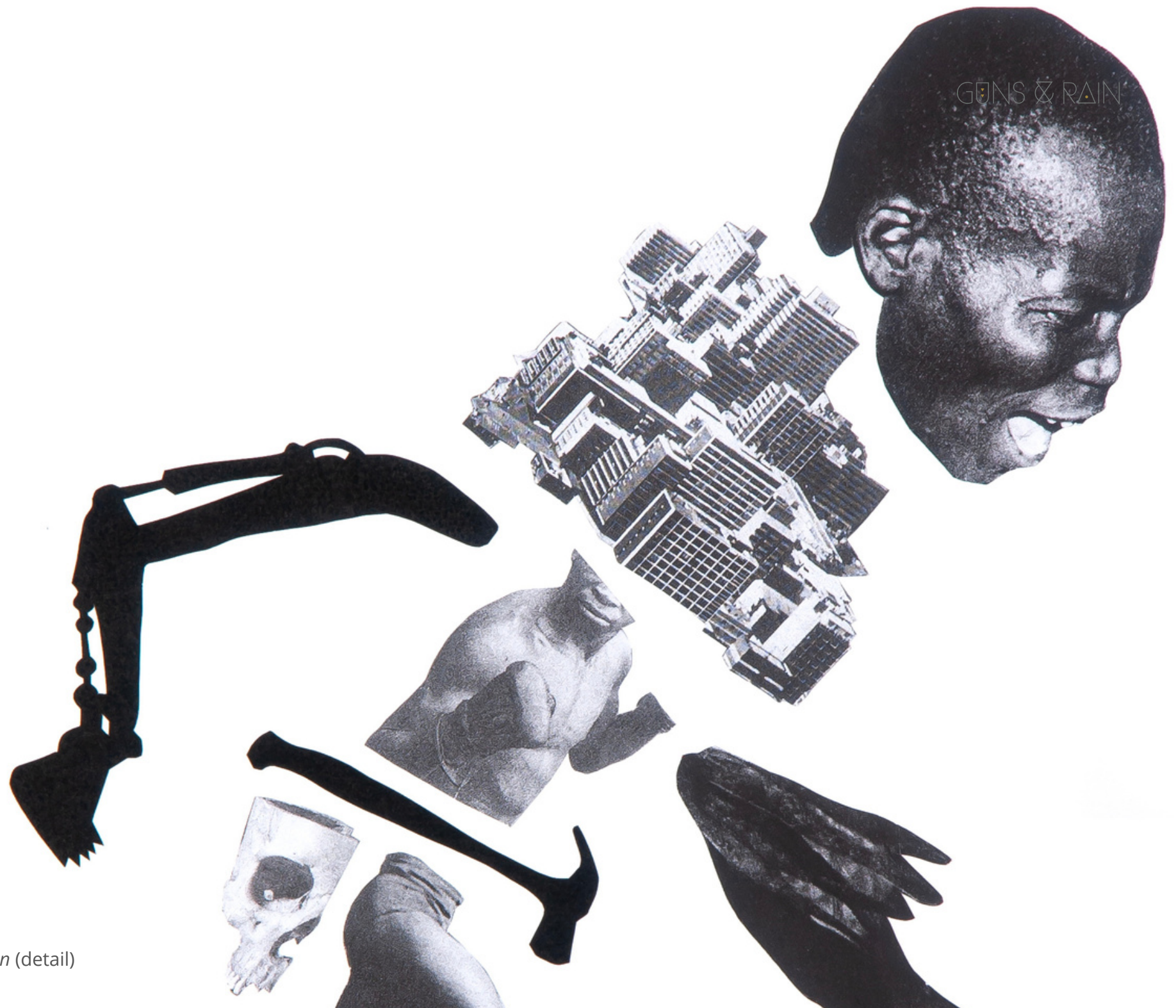
The Running Man

2021

Paper collage on Fabriano paper

Ed. 1/1

100 x 70.5 cm



The Running Man (detail)



Kaelo Molefe

The Necropolis (A Letter to Frida)

2021

Paper collage on Fabriano paper

Ed. 1/1

100 x 70.5 cm



Kaelo Molefe

The American

2021

Paper collage on Fabriano paper

Edition 1/1

Sheet Size: 100 x 70.5 cm



The American (detail)



Kaelo Molefe

The Prophet

2021

Paper collage on Fabriano paper

Ed. 1/1

100 x 70.5 cm



Kaelo Molefe

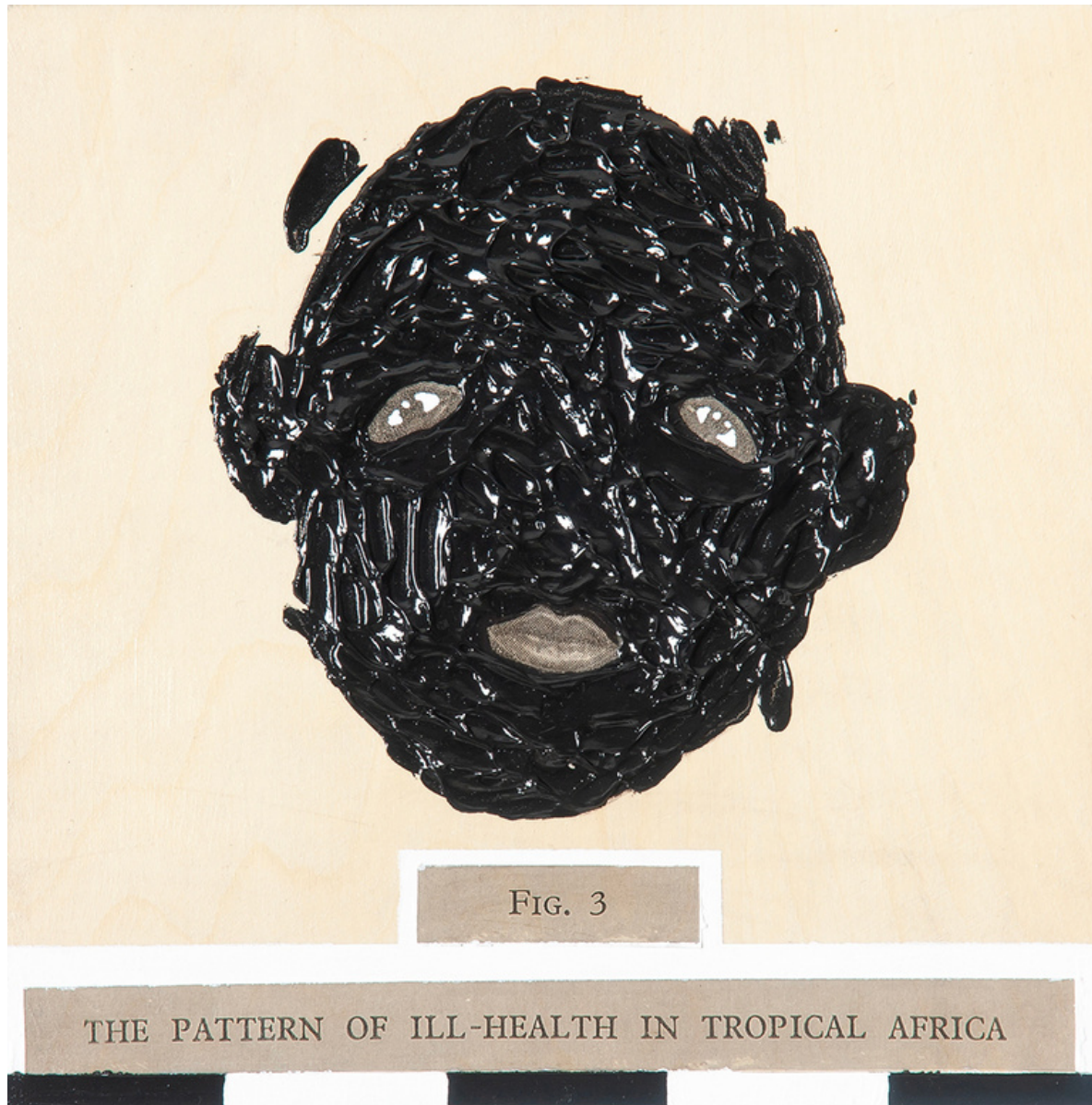
The Fracture Index

2021

Paper collage on Fabriano paper

Ed. 1/1

29.7 x 21 cm



Kaelo Molefe

Figure 3

2023

Acrylic transfer and acrylic paint
on wooden board

30.5 x 30.5 x 2 cm



Kaelo Molefe

The Rubber Hand Illusion

2023

Digital print on canvas

Ed. 3/3

50 x 50 cm



Kaelo Molefe

The Genuflector

2023

Paper collage on Fabriano paper

Ed. 1/1

20 x 20 cm



Kaelo Molefe

The Ground

2023

Paper collage on Fabriano paper

Ed. 1/3

70.5 x 70.5 cm



The Ground (detail)

Kaelo Molefe (b. 1990) is an artist, independent researcher and medical doctor based in Johannesburg, South Africa. His creative practice is informed by a keen interest in historiographies of otherness and the socio-economic histories of the global south, as well as his experiences in clinical medicine.

His work is preoccupied with how the bureaucratization of difference is embedded in historical and contemporary power structures, regimes of representation and notions of normality. He explores these socio-historical phenomena through writing as well as a variety of media including collage, mixed media and moving image.

Molefe has exhibited his work in a solo show at the artist-run space 1004 in Johannesburg (2021), and at the Turbine Art Fair (2022). His research has been published in *Ellipses [...] Journal for Creative Research*. In 2021 he participated in the Correspondence Artist Grant, an online residency hosted by the *Women and Performance Journal*, for which he produced a short film in collaboration with the Kazakh artist Bakhyt Bubicanova. In addition to Fresh Voices, he will show with Guns & Rain in September 2023 at FNB Art Joburg.



Kaelo Molefe **in conversation**

How did you come to start making art, and how long have you been making art? Does this coincide (or not) with particular junctures in your medical career/experience?

I have always had a deep love for the power of art, especially its capacity to activate the affective dimensions of what it means to be a human being. I studied art in high school but was unfortunately unable to pursue creative practice in my tertiary education.

During my training as a medical doctor, I wasn't actively making art in a formal manner but spent a great deal of time as an autodidact - developing my own reading and research into the topics surrounding creative practice, critical theory and historiography that interested me.

I have been making art in an intentional and formal way for 2 to 3 years now and my practice is informed by everything I have experienced - including my time in the clinical space.

You've engaged in a deep critical enquiry into the racial inflections of historical urbanism, particularly in Johannesburg, and constructions of black subjectivity. Would you say that these constructions are ongoing?

Most definitely. My works - even when they reference the historical - are inspired by contemporary phenomena and structures.

My creative practice always starts with a contemporary socio-political phenomenon of interest to me. More often not this involves thinking about current configurations of power - especially those that emanate from histories involved in the making of the global south.

This mode of practice has led me to have a keen interest in history and historiography - especially historiographies of otherness.

I always found myself confused by the ways in which the figure of the black urban subject in Johannesburg seemed to be rendered invisible - in contemporary discourse and in the contours of the official archive. This phenomenon flies in the face of fact - people of colour have inhabited the region we now call Johannesburg for hundreds of years (prior to the establishment of the Transvaal Republic) and inhabited the city in a variety of ways as the city mushroomed in the midst of the mineral revolution of the 19th century.

In order to make sense of this mismatch between the record and socio-historical reality - I began engaging with the official archive - an inescapably fraught record for excavating histories of marginalised or subjugated communities. The gaps in the archive led me to develop new and novel ways of filling in the erasures embedded in it.

These ways were uneven and overlap - sometimes invoking the social meanings of material objects to speak in the face of archival silence; sometimes invoking fragmentation to speak to the physical and metaphysical fragmentation of black being under colonial subjection; sometimes invoking narrative through speculation and critical fabulation.

I intend for the work to simultaneously speak to historical phenomena while suggesting the persistence of these phenomena into the present.

Where do your archival sources come from?

My archival sources come from a variety of places - online open source archives such as the Wellcome collection and print ephemera like old magazines and old books found in second hand stores.

In making the works I have also spent some time in the Wits Historical Papers archive in Johannesburg as well as the Africana library in Kimberley. These excursions helped inform the narrative contours of the works and helped provide windows into the formations of black urbanity in South Africa during the Mineral Revolution.

Why has collage been your entry point to artmaking?

We are living in a moment in which more and more people are being forced to reckon with the legacies of imperialism and colonialism and the ways in which these global processes have defined our current geopolitical configurations.

Collage allows me to directly grapple with the materials that make up these difficult histories (namely historical images and texts) and allows me to stretch them - disrupting, reappropriating and reconfiguring their meaning.

In these ways collage can function as a political medium.

Collage is also so semantically rich. The viewer is compelled to derive their own narrative through the interaction of the components; components that would have otherwise not been brought into conversation with one another. Different people derive different meanings from the works - collage reflects the rhizomatic nature of these histories and their meanings in the contemporary moment.

Can you tell us a bit about your current interest in a more painterly approach to mediating images?

Working with paper and carefully cut images necessitated a kind of surgical delicacy. Paper is very easily stained, crumpled and torn. It also meant a kind of detached hand - where the aura of the human hand was perhaps obscured.

I think it is important to work with materials that allow for more error to creep in and more humanity to enter the materials without necessarily destroying them in the process.

Working on board and with acrylic transfers and paint allows me to do this.

The extreme psychic and physical violence of slavery and colonialism has often been reflected via the removal of black identity/ies, the removal of names, the separation of bodies from identity, the anonymisation of creativity. This dismemberment, to continue on the theme of violence, seems to me to be captured in your work through your silhouettes, limbs, instruments and so on. Can you comment?

The use of fragmentation and construction as a technique in the collage works came from a number of places. Firstly - my experiences in the clinical space were punctuated by difficult moments of encountering broken bodies, dismemberment and physical trauma.

The distribution of risk and injury in our current moment means that these forms of harm are disproportionately experienced by people of colour.

Who experiences harm and who doesn't reflects a very distinct geopolitical power matrix - something that Achille Mbembe describes in his theory of necropolitics.

These experiences continue to stick with me and the ways in which I see the world and experience my own body as a person of colour. I was also inspired by a literary text by the Nigerian writer Amos Tutuola: a book called *The Palm Wine Drinkard*.

In this book, one encounters a figure who the writer calls "The Complete Gentleman in the Marketplace". This figure appears to be a perfect articulation of mercantile grace - he is well-dressed and magnetically attractive. As he departs the marketplace, however, he begins disassembling his body and returning the loaned parts of his body to various creditors until all that is left is a skull.

The Complete Gentleman in the Marketplace is a constructed figure and is compelled to loan and adopt certain parts in order to survive in the mercantile space. This literary figure felt like such a powerful metaphor of the kinds of techniques of survivance deployed by people rendered marginal by the structures of the market and capital.

How does one piece oneself together in the face of the atomising forces of dispossession, migrant labour or the biomedical gaze? As a method of survivance and as a technique of self-making?

The use of fragmentation and assembly are inspired by these experiences.

How do you think art can deal with or mediate violent imagery and narratives without perpetuating them?

I think creative practitioners and researchers attempting to excavate histories of marginalised people face an inescapable challenge when dealing with archives and archival materials.

Archives are not neutral reservoirs of objective historical fact; they are collections established as a result of very specific and complex historical processes - frequently processes that involve violence, erasure, wilful distortion and subjection.

This leaves the artist/researcher/writer in a difficult position with a number of sometimes unresolvable questions.

How does one rehabilitate the humanity of communities of peoples using materials created in a context that sought to negate their very humanity? How does one fill in the gaps left by wilful erasures and distortions? How does one circumvent descriptions of violence when sometimes the only available record is a violent one?

A number of techniques have been proposed by a number of theorists and practitioners to deal with these challenges. In response to the violence of archival erasure, Saidiya Hartman proposes the use of critical fabulation - using a combination of historical research, critical theory and speculative fiction to fill out archival gaps while challenging the authority of this same archive.

In response to the violence of historical distortion, theorists like Cheik Anta Diop propose an Afrocentric reckoning with the historical record and the formation of new archives that revise and rehabilitate the distorted histories of marginalised peoples.

Others theorists and practitioners - such as Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa - eschew the authority of the official written archive altogether and instead use oral histories, transmitted knowledge and intangible archives of indigenous practice and memory as tools to make sense of the past.

All of these techniques are hugely generative and important. But they are still inescapably coloured by archival violence - they are techniques developed to respond to archival violence - either to remedy it, to challenge it or circumvent it.

All considered engagements with histories of marginality are haunted by violence - racial marginality itself exists because of a number of violent historical processes.

I do not think art (or any discipline) engaged with histories of marginality can avoid some or other reckoning with violence. I think that thinking through what this violence is, what it does and the various planes on which it can operate is important. And making sense of how it persists into the present moment is a crucially important practice.

This body of work does not seek to conceal the violence of the processes involved in racialization but seeks to more closely map out its contours.

Finding the balance between speaking about violence and speaking to violence is something I hope to figure out in time.

Lastly, what does your art achieve (for you) that medicine does not or cannot?

Art and biomedicine are two very different forms of practice and knowledge production. However, they are both preoccupied with figuring out techniques for surviving the human experience.

Art deploys a much more affective set of tools while biomedicine deploys a more mechanistic, utilitarian set of tools. I try not to pit the disciplines against one another - they emerge from different epistemologies and serve different functions (in our current social configuration).

My hope is to gradually find ways to bring these two disciplines into closer conversation with each other - and to find ways that allow the tools that each of them use to clarify each of their respective operations. I hope in time to find ways to use art to help make sense of biomedicine and to use biomedicine to make sense of art.



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