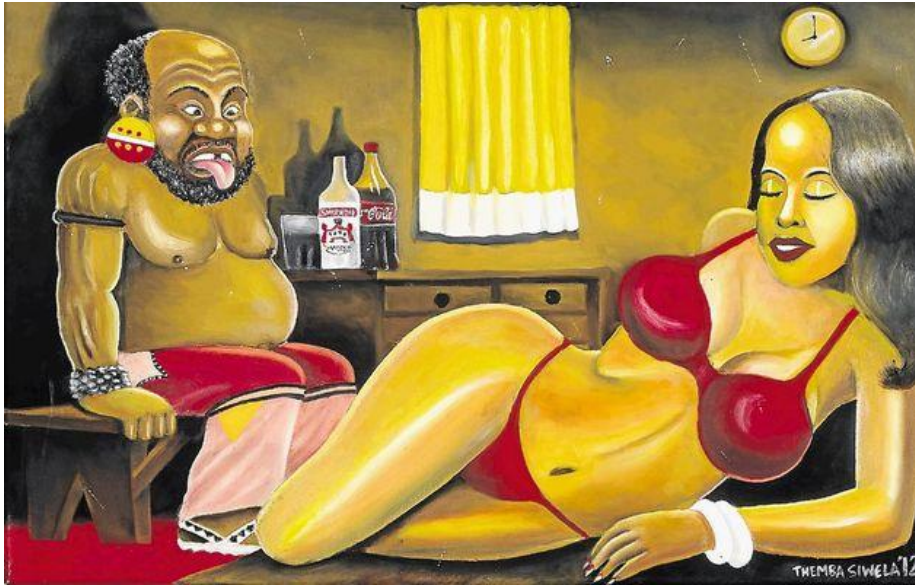


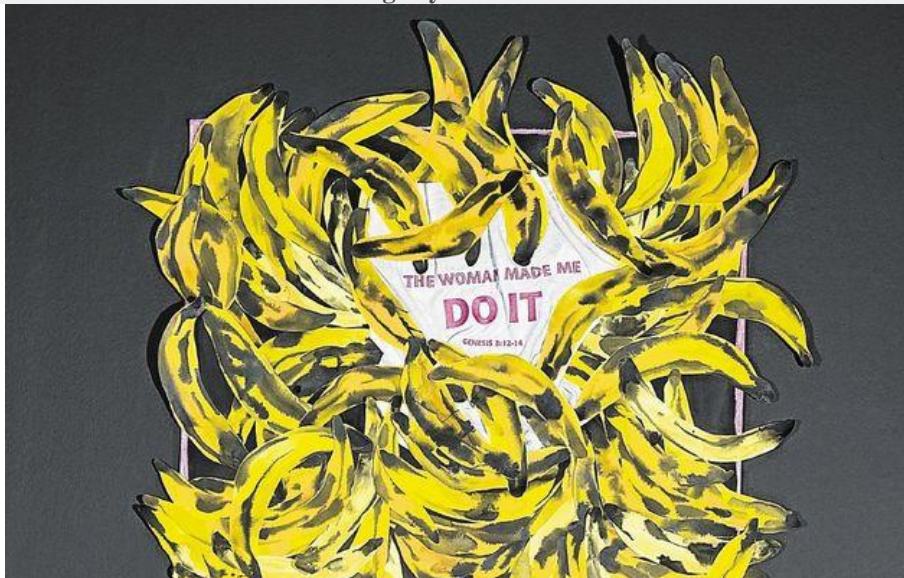
Sexing up the art scene

Mary Corrigan | 26 April, 2016 00:28



BRING IT ON: Themba Siwela's 'Temptations On Madala's Pension Day' (2012) focuses on patriarchal attitudes surrounding sex in African society

Image by: SUPPLIED



RIDDLE: Lady Skollie's 'The Woman Made Me Do It' puts a weird spin on sin

Image by: SUPPLIED



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Never has the content of an art exhibition been more explicit than in the Stevenson Gallery's Sex show.

Curated by Lerato Bereng, this exhibition is not only centred on the idea of sex, as its title implies, but on the explicit depiction of it. There's a porn smorgasbord on display with footage of men on men, women on women and a big heterosexual orgy. Mostly, you feel like you've accidentally wandered into an Adult World outlet.

This is particularly the case when you go into the dark booth built around a screening of gay men shagging. In front of the screen are mattresses to lie on and condoms and lube on offer.

On the opening night this area was the set for a live performance by a collective dubbed FAKA, who performed sex acts you might expect to see in a gay men's club.

The exhibition is all about shattering taboos, not only by placing pornography in a gallery but also by showing it alongside works depicting sex made by the gallery's stable and artists like Lady Skollie and Artu Peatoo - a pseudonym under which husband and wife duo Robyn and Richard Penn make their collaborative art.

Showing art alongside porn doesn't elevate the latter to art, but there's a blurring or challenging of the pornography term especially when the material is created by an artist like Zanele Muholi.

Her contribution, *Being Scene*, is a video depicting two women getting hot and heavy. According to Stevenson Gallery's website, "this moment of unhinged ecstasy speaks of a kind of sexual liberation that on paper, South Africa has honed, but in reality is met by brutal homophobic hate crimes and gender violence".

Muholi will exhibit a hate-crime timeline in the gallery's fifth-floor space detailing over a decade of murdered lesbians in SA.

Viewing the works is titillating. The exhibition offers stimulation for the body, not just the mind (the art setting usually demands that you think about the works rather than respond to them physically).

For many, the relevance of this show is simple: placing homosexual sex in a public space helps challenge entrenched prejudice. It's also significant that the sex acts are all between black people, situating a discourse on black sexuality in the open in ways that's not been attempted before.

The Stevenson gallery management team have attempted to position their galleries as "museums" and this show presents a gesture in this direction.

A notable element is Sabelo Mlangeni's series depicting spaces in which illicit sex acts have taken place in public.

Sex is on at Stevenson Gallery in Joburg until June 3.

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