

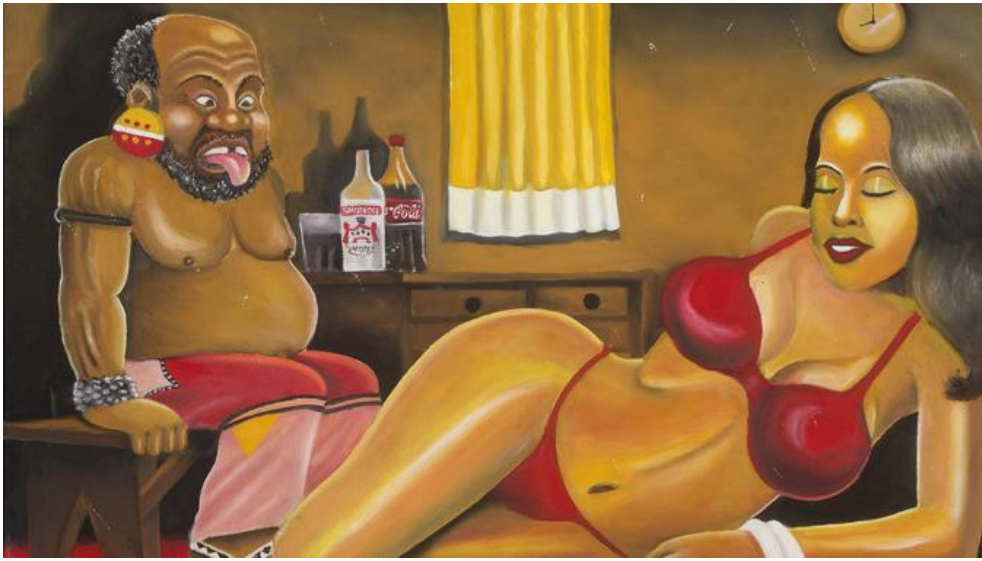
Art and Design

Stevenson Gallery curates **SEX** in the city

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The **SEX** exhibition attempts to unpack sex through a timeline of events that took place in South Africa in the past decade.



Porn shops became a library for curator Lerato Bereng while she was preparing for the Stevenson Gallery's latest group exhibition, *SEX*.

She didn't want the show to treat sex as another academic paper but for it to explore the act of sex and everything that comes with it — both the fun and the serious aspects.

These include pornography, language, sensuality and even the law. Yes, there is a connection between these aspects, and the multidisciplinary exhibition is a response to questions relating to sexual intercourse.

Bereng played around with a title for the show and eventually settled for the three-letter word.

"I chose this as my departure point for this show to offer sex as a curatorial proposition to artists. If I call the show anything else, it's already a position. I decided that the word sex is where I would like to begin and see how it is unpacked through various artistic positions," she said.

After visiting the Museum of Sex in New York two years ago, Bereng decided to research the way sex is viewed, reported on and discussed in South Africa, drawing on the past decade, which was marked by several significant events.

They include President Jacob Zuma's rape trial in 2006 and the release of *Mapona Volume 1*, the first all-black South African porn film in 2010.



Mitchell Gilbert Messina's "Popped" 2016. (Courtesy Stevenson Cape Town)

Bereng's experience with the exhibition changed her perspective on sex and inspired her to take the subject further. The Museum of Sex's exhibition included notes on the reproductive sex organs and a screening of the 1970s United States porn film, *Deep Throat*.

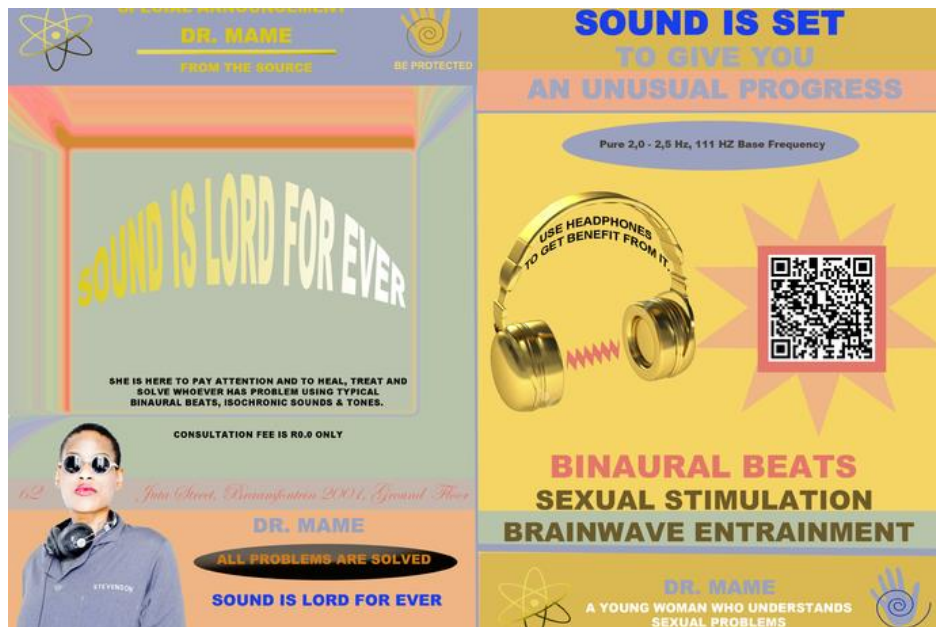
"I felt like for a sex show it could have been more. I wanted the subject to be explored more. The Sex Museum had information on the reproductive organs and a few photographic works but it wasn't really art, which is fine because I don't think it models itself as an art museum, but the works still titillated my interest in the subject."

She didn't give a detailed brief of the exhibition to the featured artists, but instead said to them: "Let's talk about sex." The response?

Artist Simon Gush worked with activist organisations such as Sisonke Sex Workers Movement to create a performative installation that speaks about sex workers' rights. French-Ivorian-Senegalese artist Mame-Diarra Niang used the "sex-solution" flyers, which are found on the streets, to explore sexual vibrations, and the art duo persona Artu Peatoo, which consists of Robyn and Richard Penn, showcases paintings that speak to the "sexually explicit trends in art history".

The Jo'burg collective FAKA are restaging a scene from a men's-only sex club, The Factory, and Steven Cohen's work consists of sex notes written on toilet paper that were passed around the men's bathrooms at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Most of the artists featured in *SEX* are based in Jo'burg, which worked well for Bereng's idea of looking at Jo'burg as a sex city.



Mame-Diarra Niang's "Proverbs 4:2 (I give you sound learning, so do not forsake my teaching)". (Courtesy Stevenson Cape Town)

"While working on the show, the work became contextual sex — sex in the context of this city. Some artists responded to this and others didn't."

Sculptor Mitchell Gilbert Messina's work consists of sculptures that Bereng describes as champagne explosions that feel celebratory and that allude to ejaculation.

"This work ties in with how popping bottles of champagne in Jo'burg is seen as a sign that you've made it. It was not an intentional link by the artist but I think it's just a nice association to the city," said Bereng.

The Stevenson Gallery is in the hub of the creative and busy Juta Street in Braamfontein, in walking distance from Mandela Bridge, Wits University and Pikitup's head office.

"It's been great to curate in Jo'burg. I think where we are located inspires me to do the things that I do. It's an interesting space and it feels like we are a part of a city that is active and that informs a lot of things that I look at and things I like to play with," said Bereng.

The performative elements of *SEX* are on the ground floor of the gallery, and the fifth floor of the building has been transformed into a reading and viewing room dedicated to literary works and films that speak to sex.



Lady Skollie's "The Woman made me DO IT", which she refers to as a "phallic ode to the Blame Game we were born into Contractually bound by Genesis 3: 12-14, if you are into the Bible and stuff". (Courtesy Stevenson Cape Town)

Working on the show has opened Bereng up to various dynamics of intercourse. It's a multifaceted subject that we all relate to differently. *SEX* offers artistic voices that draw us to issues that we often overlook or issues that don't even cross our minds. The aim of the show is not to shock but to unpack the topic. According Bereng, this is just the beginning of a greater project that might grow into a *SEX Part 2* but for now she would like audiences to keep talking about the different shades of sex.

SEX opened on April 21 and will run until June 3. No under 18s will be allowed into the show because of the explicit content.