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## Abstract Art: Langa finds hidden voice

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The collection of new abstract works in mixed media that define this show reveal Langa to be revelling in and evolving his abstract vocabulary. File photo

**It is a rare thing when an exhibition makes the hairs on your arms stand on end. It is also a surprise that Moshekwa Langa's work would have this impact.**

Since the hype around his entry into the art world in the late 1990s, he has not exactly been leading the pack.

His last exhibition, at the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg in 2013, was disappointing with no focus. At the time it seemed that Langa was doing what he had come to do best: avoid being pigeonholed.

Ellipsis, his new exhibition, which opened at Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town last week, is in complete contrast. It does not present the work of an artist who is holding on to what he has done before and grappling to move forward, but one in his prime who has made the work he was meant to make all along.

The collection of new abstract works in mixed media that define this show reveal Langa to be revelling in and evolving his abstract vocabulary.

His art no longer appears to be the product of chaos, or appear chaotic. The works are cleanly rendered, though they are the result of an assemblage of painting; busy lines, torn pieces of paper and masking tape.

These were always his preferred materials, but in these new abstract works they don't evoke a makeshift or survivalist vocabulary. Rather the origins of these materials is overwritten by the pleasing abstract compositions and function as art materials rather than as substitutes or evoking a visual or aesthetic discombobulating sensation. In this way he transforms the ordinary.

Langa's triumphant return can probably be attributed to all sorts of things, like experience, time and his obvious talent coming into full bloom.

It might also have something to do with the abstraction turn in South African art, which has given him the freedom to immerse himself in his art.

The conceptualist label pinned to him at the beginning of his career was always an odd fit. At the time the local art world was hungry for a conceptual artist who was black. This may have suffocated his potential.

*Ellipsis* reveals him to be an adept abstract artist. Some cynical observers might suggest he has simply adapted to the times, that he is an art chameleon, but the strength of the art at this exhibition in no way suggests imitation.

Langa has found his voice and it is a joy to observe him sing.

- *Ellipsis by Moshekwa Langa runs until May 28 at Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town*