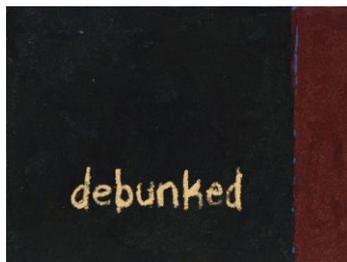


<http://artthrob.co.za/2016/03/22/diary-and-materiality-mawande-ka-zenziles-mawande-ka-zenzile/>



Diary and Materiality: Mawande ka Zenzile's 'Mawande ka Zenzile'

Mawande ka Zenzile

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One of the most gratifying aspects of painting, which makes it a satisfying medium, is its visceral ability to smear the viewer into a picture plane. A conscious painter however will first entice the viewer with a specific palette, deriving a visual language that both invites and repels the gaze.

In his first solo exhibition at the Stevenson Gallery in Johannesburg, Mawande ka Zenzile does this literally by allowing an 'aesthetic dichotomy to unfold.' The self-titled exhibition is as much about self-articulation as it is about the different conceptual and contextual framework he employs to reference 'his heritage.' However the notion of heritage comes across subtly, signalled through the use of material such as cow dung and earth. And although the artist appears to be more concerned with the materiality of paint itself, this tends to be obscured by the enigmatic quality of the work and its placement within the gallery space. Nonetheless it is an aesthetic that ka Zenzile appears to be as conscious of as he is of his selection of the paintings and installations presented for this show. This can be attributed to the fact that he curated the exhibition himself, a unique approach that is not only about self-curating but also a personal account of how current issues such as racism, capitalism and colonialism permeate in one's life.



Mawande ka Zenzile *As nasty as they wanna be*, 2016.

Cow dung and oil on canvas

As a result the show in some sense starts to read like a visual diary of thoughts, ideas and visual symbols. This should not necessarily be viewed as a weakness but rather a curatorial language ka Zenzile is in the process of refining. While each painting requires contemplation and time to analyse, there is an anecdotal quality to each piece that makes it inaccessible because it is too subjective. He allows the viewer access, however through his treatment of certain subject matter, such as his text and sculptural works, which are often treated like history images of moments that seem as though they have simultaneously occurred or are about to occur. The surreal quality of the work is thus enunciated by how his work is often stripped to the bare minimum of colour, contrast and texture. It becomes a symbolic motif where the treatment of the human figure for example is consistently applied in the visual representation of both famous and unknown figures; the human figure is almost always a distant presence, obfuscated by murk of complex readings of both written and visual history.



Mawande ka Zenzile *ingcuka ezambethe ifele legusha*, 2016.

Wood, hessian, fabric, found objects

Although ka Zenzile's work is in some ways difficult to access there is an enjoyable quality about the transforming agent of a substance like cow dung to oil paint as a medium that changes the textual meaning of the work. A visual language that speaks about a preoccupation with the ambiguities of gender, placement, and self-attribution replaces the tradition of painting and its materiality. Works such as *As nasty as they wanna be* (2016) and *debunked* (2016) for instance are examples of how the materiality and content of the painting acts as both a binding agent and emancipatory motif of cultural references that start to make strong statements and declarations about current contestations. On the one hand there is reference to the disruption of history through visual imagery while on the other, there is a sense of resistance to succumb to the accepted notions of how history dictates one's sense of being and interrogation of the world.

In 'Mawande ka Zenzile,' the artist also introduces new symbols that are indicative of his generational struggle with making sense of current readings of history, politics and other social issues. This can be seen in a work such as *ingcuka ezambethe ifele legusha* (2016), where the viewer is presented with a sculptural work of a young boy sitting on a podium and dressed untidily in a school uniform with a sack suffocating his face. It is a recognisable symbol of the complexities of current struggles related to access to education and institutional justice while at the same time carves out a new trajectory for reading history and art history through imagery. The show is thus a bold insertion, one that when followed through the common thread of his stream of consciousness, becomes less random and incongruent but rather a poignant commentary on the nature of our society today.