



# PERSPECTIVES 3

10 OCTOBER - 14 NOVEMBER 2015

**PERSPECTIVES 3**

STEVENSON presents *Perspectives 3*, an exhibition of painting and photography from the 1930s to the early 2000s that traverses the changing representations of the human form across racial, cultural and sexual lines. With the leitmotif of figuration threading itself through the exhibition the select grouping of images offers multiple viewpoints towards the image of the body, rotating the gaze from one work to the next. Paintings and photographs by both black and white artists at times share formal qualities yet similar subjects are often approached with contrasting intent and to differing ends.

These double counterpoints, in a manner of speaking, start with a group of four early paintings with George Pemba of Xhosa-speaking subjects from the 1940s and 1950s seen in close relation to vintage photographs of rural black subjects by Constance Stuart Larrabee, the Magnum photographer George Rodger, and the complete series of publications by Duggan Cronin. The more expressive positions taken by Dumile Feni and Ephraim Ngatane in the 1960s in their figurative work stand in contrast to the sensibility of documentation of the earlier group of works.

The political consciousness that imbued figuration in South Africa and across the continent from the 1970s through to the 1990s is exemplified by three early paintings by Penny Siopis, a still life by Keith Dietrich, and two photographs by Rotimi Fani-Kayode. The last group of works, dating from the early 2000s, celebrates the sheer spectacle of the nude with two large paintings by Moshekwa Langa and Deborah Poynton. Spanning a period of over half a century the works in *Perspectives 3* evidence changing sensibilities towards the body, the artists own those of others, with each finding new ways of perceiving and representing its form.



**JOHANNES MEINTJES  
(1923-1980)**

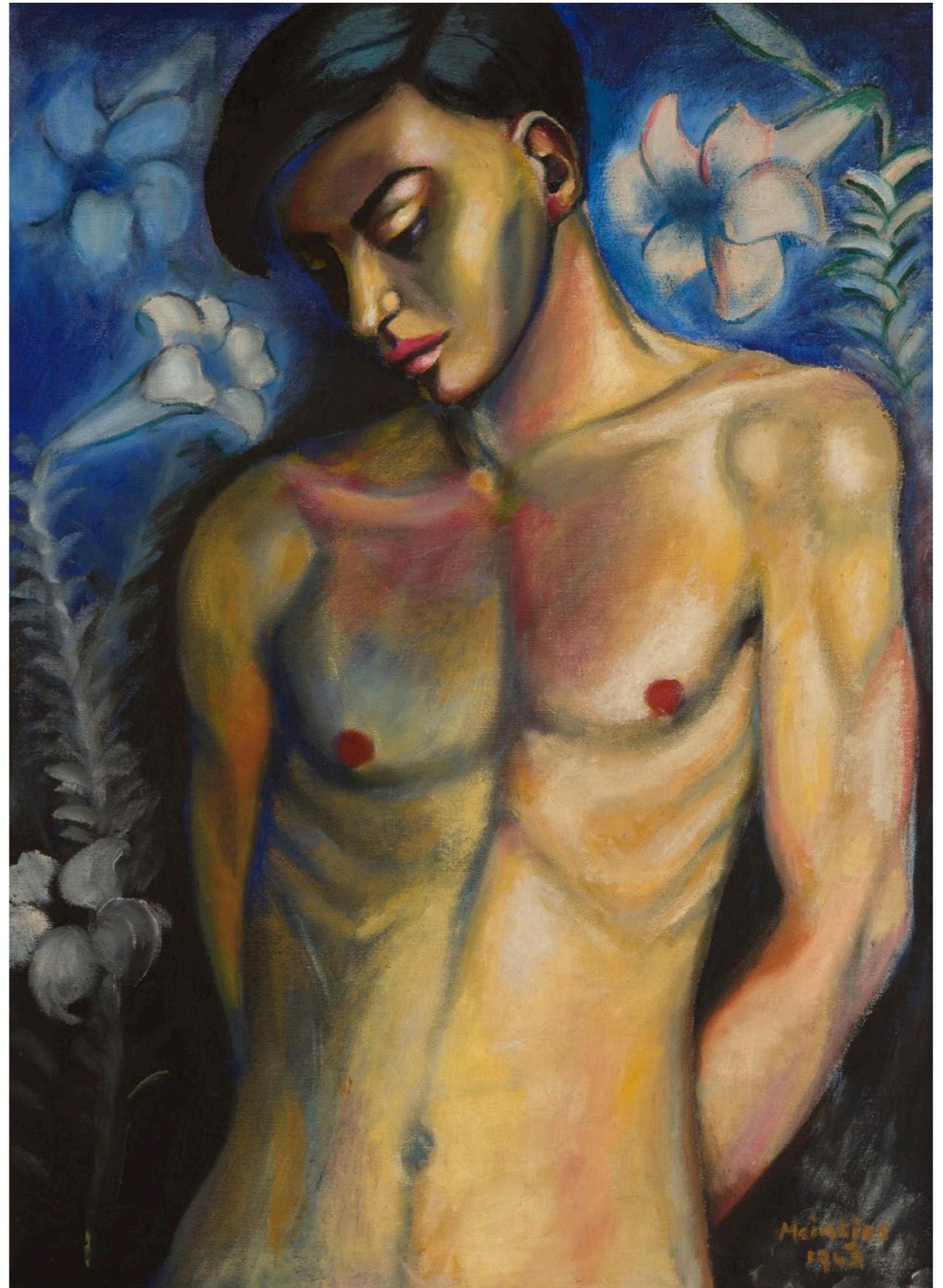
*Sebastiaan*

1945

Oil on canvas

81 x 57.5cm

Signed and dated bottom right 'Meintjes 1945'



EXHIBITED  
Constantia Art Gallery, Johannesburg, 1945

Johannes Meintjes was a prodigy and held his first solo exhibitions in Johannesburg and Cape Town in 1944 when he was only 21, the same year he wrote a book on Maggie Laubser. A successful exhibition in 1945 raised sufficient funds for him to study abroad, and from late 1945 to 1947 he attended the Central School in London.

Even when Meintjes painted from a model, his subject invariably took the appearance of a self-portrait. He was conscious of this inclination to self-representation and in a diary entry for 17 April 1945, referring to the painting in this exhibition, he noted: "My groot nuwe werk, *Sebastiaan*, is nou voltooi. Iemand het daarvoor geposeer, maar dit lyk soos 'n selfportret" ["My large new work, *Sebastiaan*, has now been completed. Someone posed for it, but it looks like a self-portrait"].<sup>1</sup> His diaries affirm that he lived in a world intensely focused around his sense of self, as well as his art. As Pieter Marinowitz writes in *Johannes Meintjes: Lyrical Work*, a monograph published in 1948 when the artist was 25, Meintjes lived an introspective and solitary life:

Solitary only because of extreme shyness and the resultant difficulty in establishing friendships, and private because his extraordinary sensitivity precluded the sharing of dreams with those who might not have understood his enthusiasm for the indiscernible purity of something as commonplace as an arum lily ...<sup>2</sup>

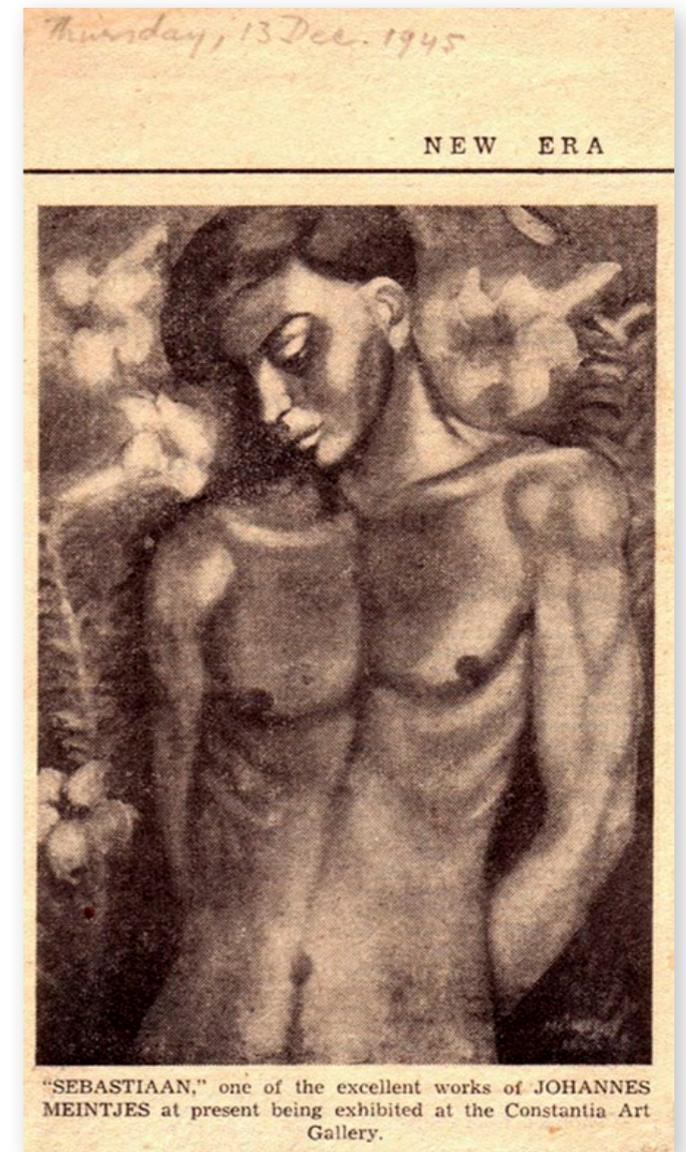
In the mid-20th century South African context where homosexuality was illegal and punishable by law, Meintjes – like his contemporary and friend Alexis Preller – was forced to keep the nature of his sexuality hidden from public view. In this large and important work, painted in what is arguably the most visually compelling period of his art, directly before leaving for London, the melancholic and introspective elements of illicit sexual desire are immediately evident. The naked subject is seductive yet coy, his gaze downward and inward, absorbed with the self and the senses – represented by the beauty and fragrance of the St Joseph's lilies that surround him.

With a mature vision, evidenced in *Sebastiaan*, Meintjes "expresses the dreams, the unknown stirrings and indefinable longings of adolescence".<sup>3</sup>

1 *Dagboek van Johannes Meintjes*, vol 1, Molteno, 1961, p106

2 Pieter Marinowitz, *Johannes Meintjes: Lyrical Works*, Anreith Press, 1948, p12

3 *Ibid*, p16



**GEORGE MILWA MNYALUZA PEMBA  
(1912-2001)**

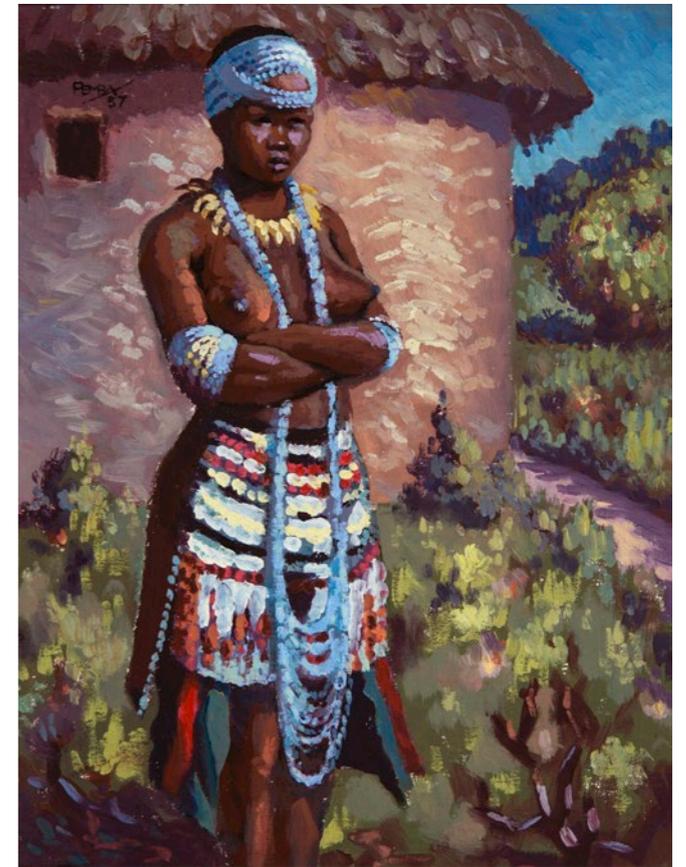
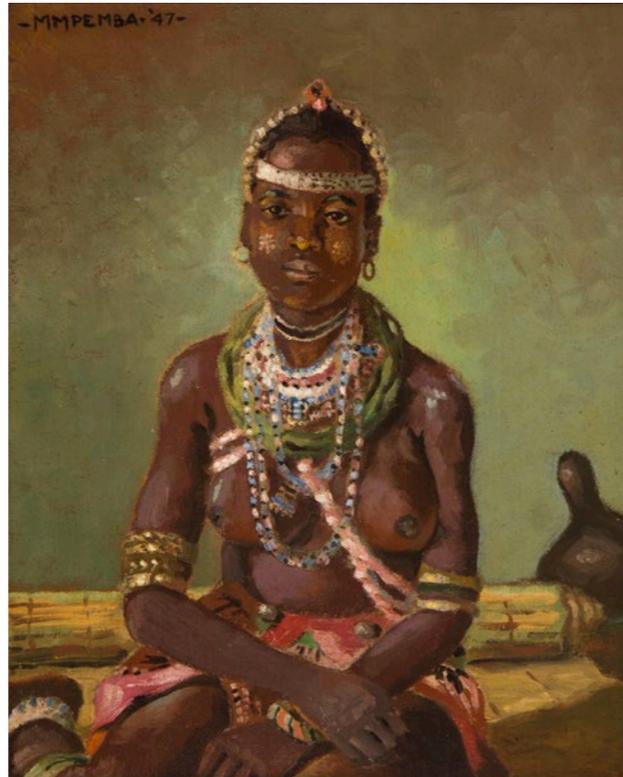
FOUR PAINTINGS FROM THE 1940s & 1950s

*Girl wearing striped jersey*

*Ready for the dance*

*Xhosa woman with headscarf*

*Xhosa maiden*



**GEORGE MILWA MNYALUZA PEMBA  
(1912-2001)**

*Girl wearing striped jersey*

1944

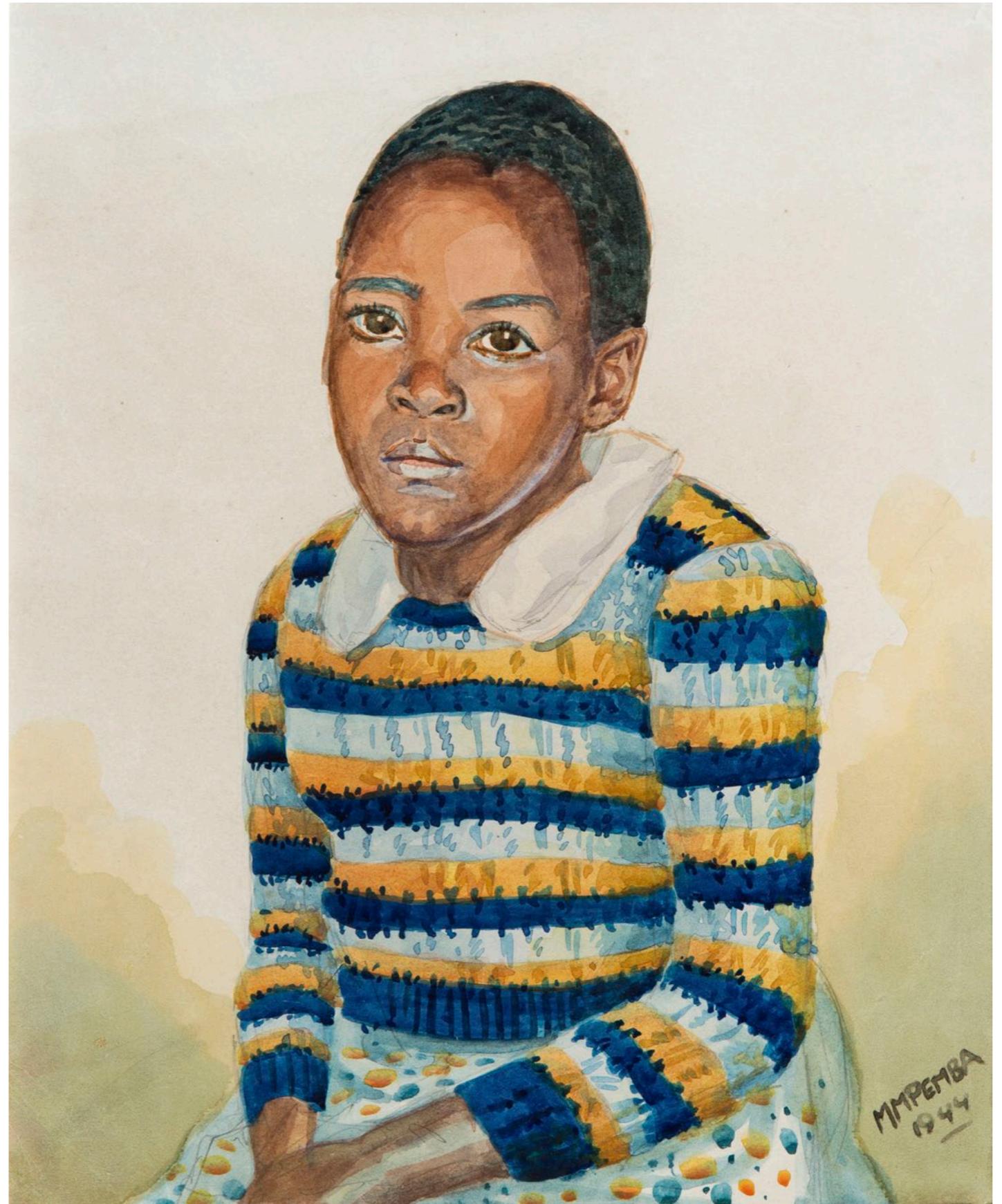
Watercolour

30.5 x 24.5cm

Signed

George Pemba was profoundly influenced by his Christian education and upbringing in a Xhosa-speaking household which was also influenced by and aspired to the values of Victorian colonialism in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. Pemba initially painted in watercolour but when he met Gerard Sekoto in Cape Town in 1942, Sekoto persuaded him to instead paint in oils - arguing that the "English" medium of watercolour was "too delicate" for the South African image.

With an ideological progression toward African nationalism, artists like Ernest Mancoba, Sekoto and Pemba undertook field trips to rural areas to counteract an increasing sense of alienation from traditionalism, seeking to recover pride in their African heritage. The art historian Elza Miles describes how Sekoto and Mancoba undertook 'pilgrimages' to Mandebele villages to obtain a better understanding of traditional African ways of life.<sup>1</sup> Pemba was awarded a loan from the Bantu Welfare Trust supporting "an



<sup>1</sup> Elza Miles, *Land and Lives*, 1997, p77

**GEORGE MILWA MNYALUZA PEMBA  
(1912-2001)**

*Ready for the dance*

1947

Oil on canvas

36 x 28.5cm

Signed

Title on verso

On verso: "Lent by E. Cooper, 36 Golf Road, Walmer"

Framer's stamp: "Framed at the Art Shop, Howard Shaw pty,  
ltd. 122 Oxford Street, East London"

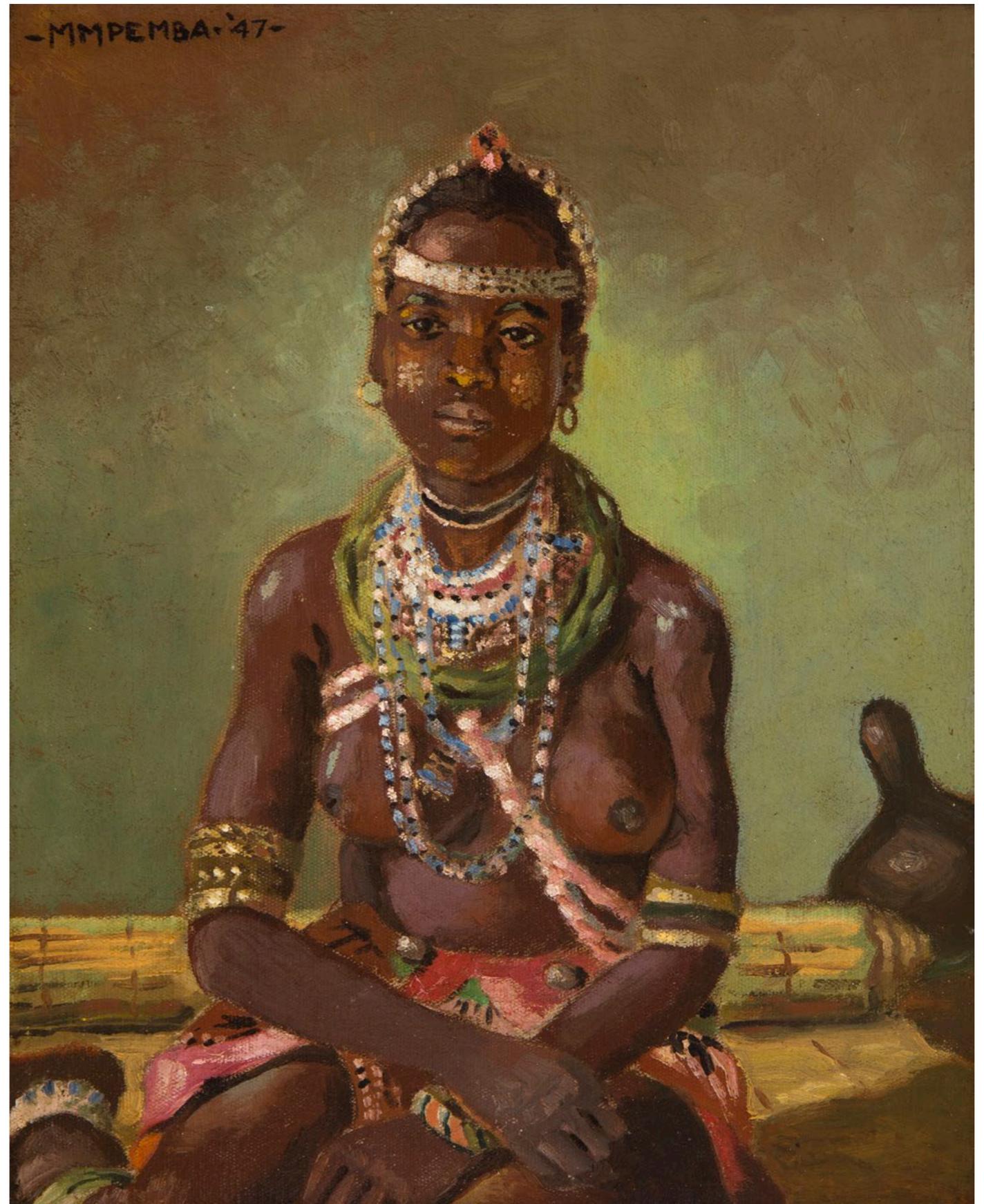
extensive journey to record the life-styles and traditions of South Africa's rural population".<sup>2</sup> He motivated his application by insisting that he needed to live "for a short while with my people in the plains and bush of my country" in order to maintain his integrity as "an artist of my own nation".<sup>3</sup> A passage from Pemba's diary is wonderfully revealing of the impact of this experience:

The kraal was as primitive as I could wish. No modern comfort, nothing reminding one of a European house was in this structure of trees and branches ... The old Pemba was forgotten, and another one, a very much stronger and happier Pemba took his place.<sup>4</sup>

2 Van Robbroeck, "The Magnificent Generation", in *Visual Century: South African Art in Context*, 2011, p125

3 Hans J. Cohn. 'The Magic Brush (Unpublished biography)', Elza Miles, *Land and lives*, Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1997, p71

4 Ibid, p72



**GEORGE MILWA MNYALUZA PEMBA  
(1912-2001)**

*Xhosa woman with headscarf*

1953

Oil on board, signed

28.5 x 24cm

Under the influence of Xhosa imbongi Samuel Mqhayi, whose poetry enthused pride in indigenous heritages, languages and cultures, Pemba later founded 'Roots' - an organisation that introduced black youths to African traditionalism "to encourage pride in custom and tradition ... and to aim for a common Africanism that could bring the different ethnic groups together in a common culture".<sup>5</sup>

The four paintings on exhibition represent important aspects of Pemba's artistic development, in their engagement with the political and social implications of modernisation in South Africa, and in their illustration of Pemba's distinct painterly persuasions. The watercolour *Girl in a striped jersey*, the earliest of the group, is exemplary of Pemba's virtuosity in using a medium that he later abandoned; and the three sensitively rendered portraits in oils - of Xhosa-speaking women in traditional settings - poignantly convey his feeling of pride and dignity in renewing his own heritage.

<sup>5</sup> 'The Weekend Post, 23 January 1980', Elza Miles, *Land and lives*, Cape Town and Johannesburg 1997. p75



**GEORGE MILWA MNYALUZA PEMBA  
(1912-2001)**

*Xhosa maiden*

1957

Oil on board

40 x 30cm

Signed



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**GEORGE RODGER  
(1908-1995)**

*Xhosa-speaking women seated and a horse and rider*

1948

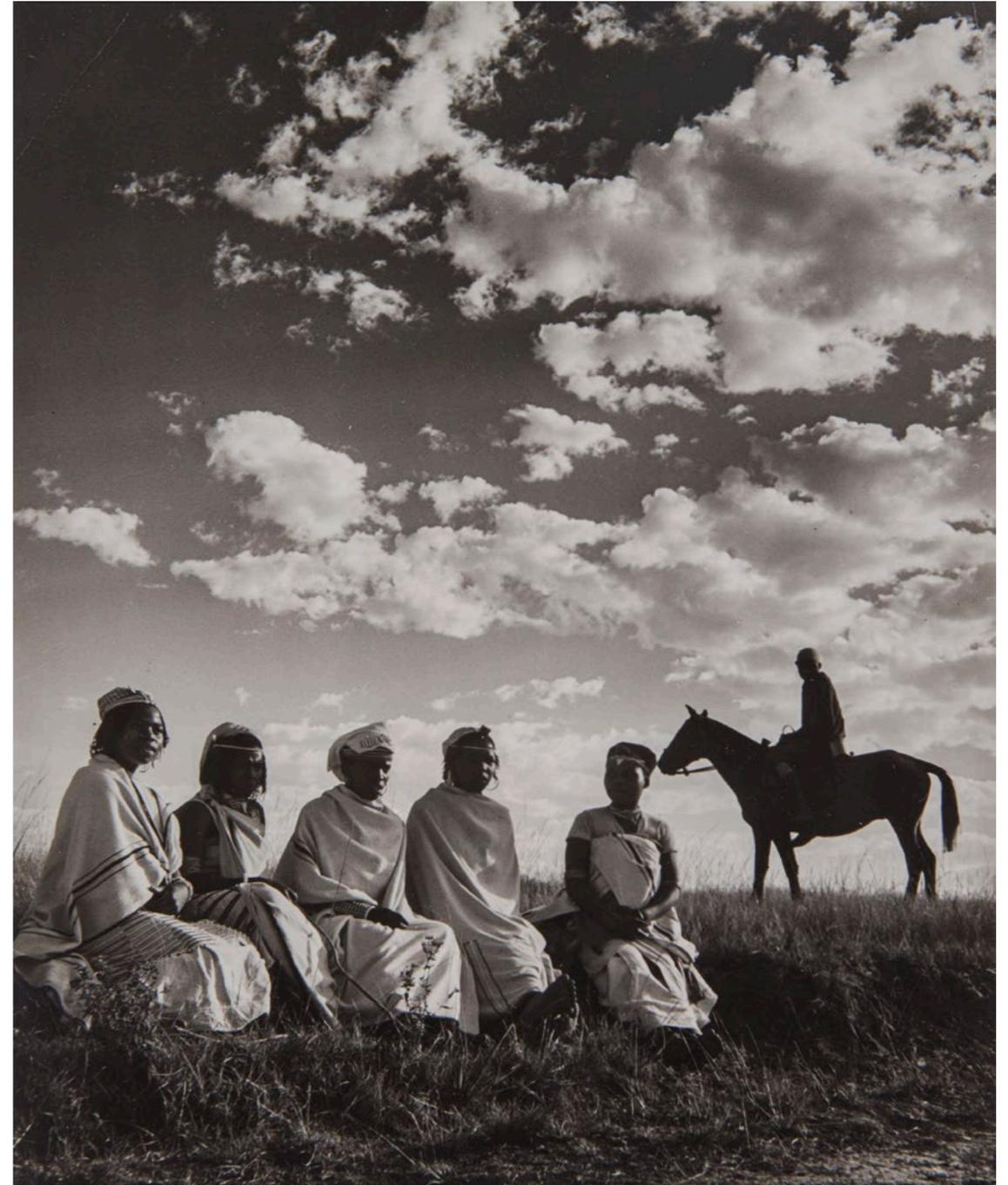
Vintage silver gelatin print

30 x 25cm

Signed on reverse and stamped 'George Rodger Magnum Photos',  
'AF1.2.1.' and inscribed '25'

George Rodger is perhaps best known as a founding member of Magnum, the world's first co-operative photographic agency, in 1947 along with Robert Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson and David Seymour. Rodger had a close affinity with Africa to which he returned 15 times over four decades. He visited South Africa once in 1948, on his second trip to the continent, after the four founders of Magnum 'divided' the regions of the world into four sections and Rodger was allocated the Middle East and Africa.

Rodger undertook a self-financed trip from Cape to Cairo with his wife, and they set out from Cape Town in an adapted station wagon. The photograph in this exhibition was taken in the Eastern Cape prior to the Rodgers' departure from the Union just after the watershed 1948 elections. It was on this Cape-to-Cairo expedition that Rodger also photographed the Nuba people in southern Sudan in 1949, which remain among his most recognisable images.



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## CONSTANCE STUART LARRABEE (1915-2000)

*Ndebele, Pretoria*

1940

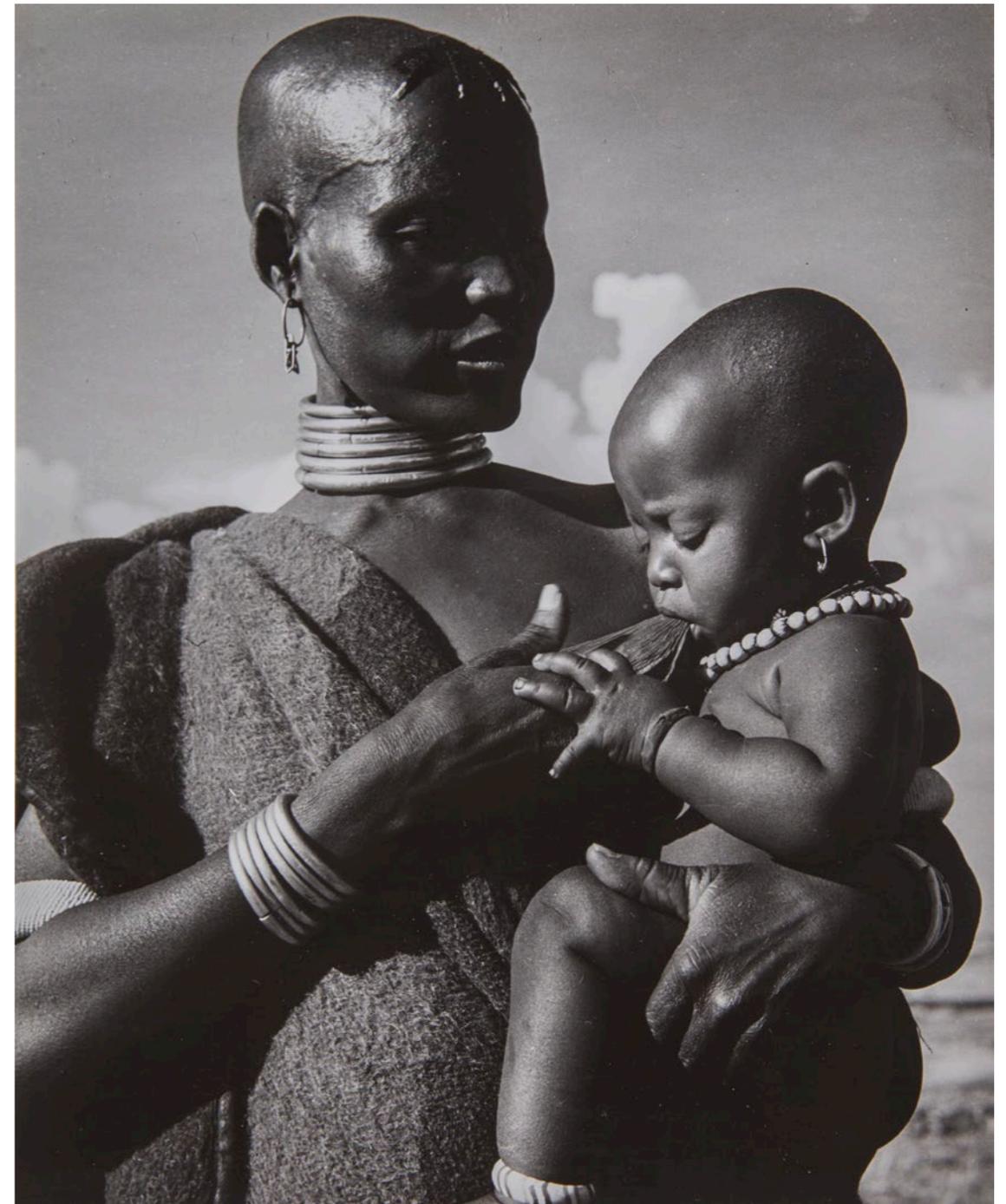
Vintage silver gelatin print

36.5 x 28cm

Signed bottom right 'Constan Stuart', inscribed on reverse with the title and '1940' and stamped with a studio stamp, 'Chestertown, Maryland, USA'

Constance Stuart Larrabee grew up in South Africa and, after studying photography abroad, returned in 1936 at the age of 21. She set up a studio in Pretoria and another in Johannesburg, and gained fame as a portraitist. However, she was also deeply interested in depicting South Africa's indigenous peoples, and in the following 13 years produced an extraordinary oeuvre of images. She initially visited the Ndebele near Pretoria and later she travelled further afield in South Africa, and also in Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland. She was a close friend of Alexis Preller, who regularly accompanied her on photographic expeditions and used her photographs as visual references.<sup>1</sup> Her vivid photographs of people in both rural and urban environments display, as Christraud Geary remarked, her "attentiveness to human expression and her ability to capture poignant moments".<sup>2</sup> Geary observed that Larrabee's photographs were "striking for their purity, sharp definition and contrasting light and shadow", which was the product of the modernist and Bauhaus aesthetics that she encountered in her two years of study in Germany in the mid-1930s.

In 1997 she presented her collection of approximately 3 000 photographs and related material to the National Museum of African Art in Washington, which exhibited part of the collection in 1998.



1 Frieda Harmsen, *Looking at South African Art*, Pretoria, 1985, pp 268-269

2 Christraud Geary, *South Africa 1936-1949: Photographs by Constance Stuart Larrabee*, Washington, 1998

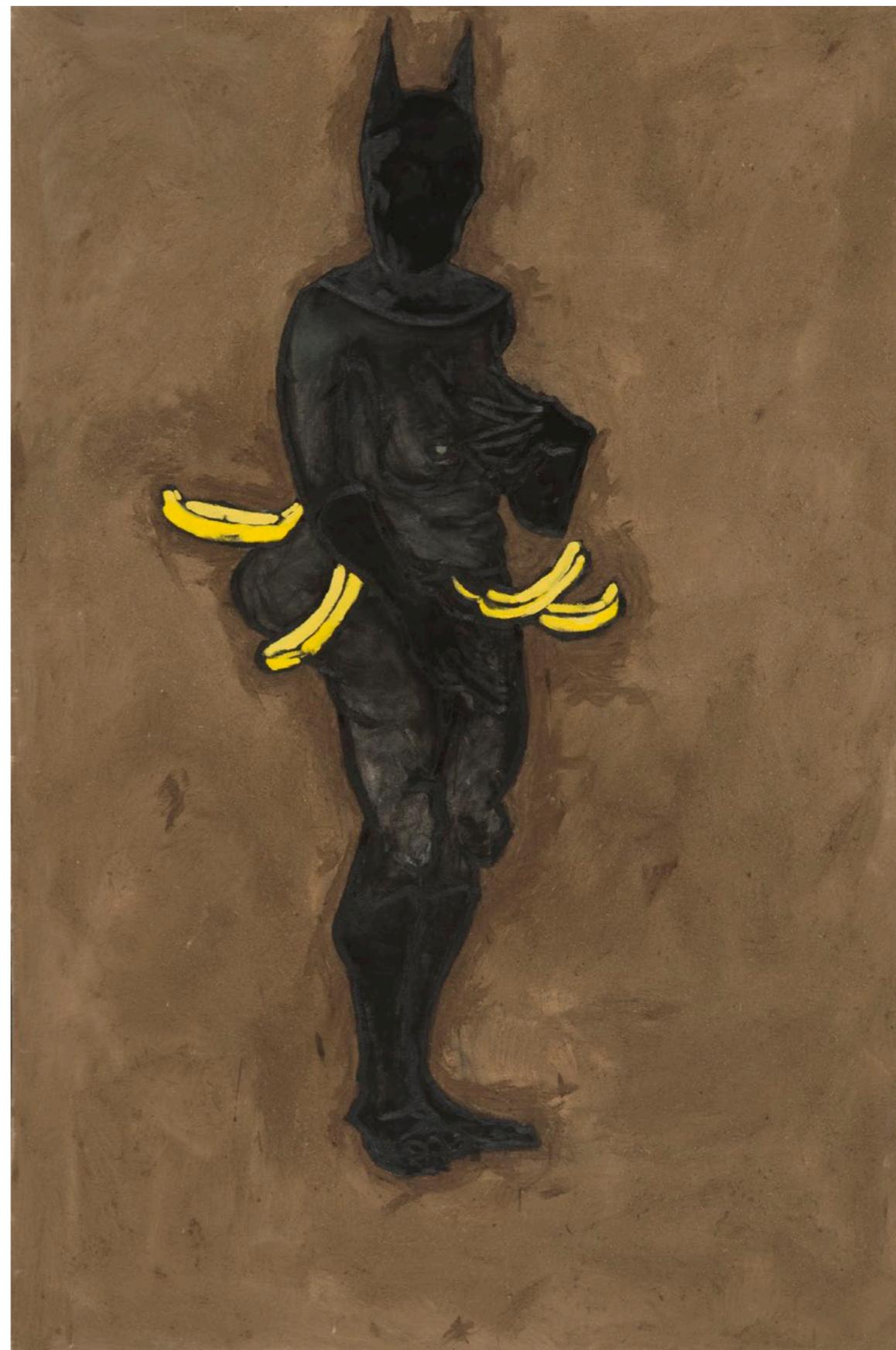
**MAWANDE KA ZENZILE  
(1986-)**

*Letter for Sarah batman to Josephine Baker*

2011

Cow dung and oil on canvas

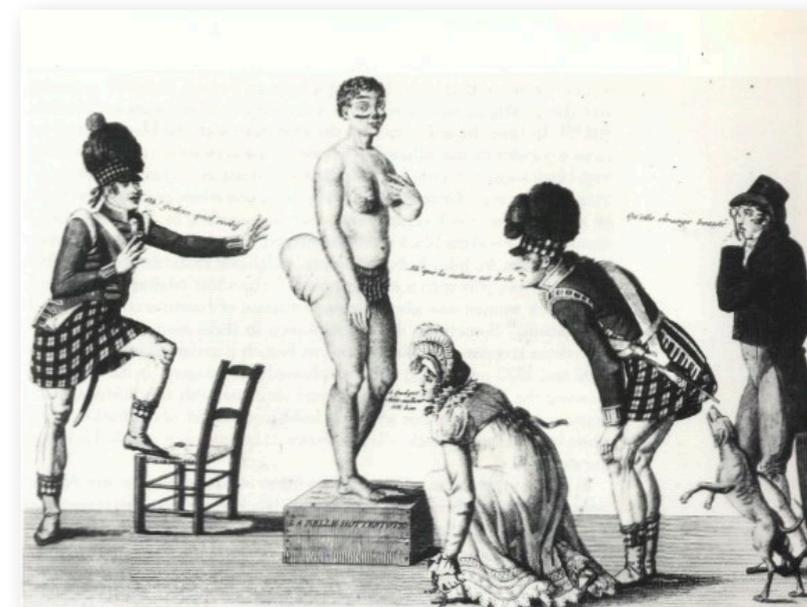
180 x 119cm



In Mawande Ka Zenzile's *Letter for Sarah batman to Josephine Baker* (2011), a black figure stands semi-naked in the centre of the canvas, her large buttocks, breasts and legs exposed. A gloved hand reaches up to cover her nipple. Feet are hidden by opaque black socks and no facial features are discernible as her head and shoulders are covered by a black mask. Around her waist four bright yellow bananas swing, decorating her hips. One is protruding from her groin.

By bringing together iconic forms associated with Saartjie Baartman, Josephine Baker and the fictional superhero Batman in one image, *Letter for Sarah batman to Josephine Baker* confronts power and the politics of representation relating to the sexualised black feminine body. In the artist's own words:

Who didn't grow up watching cartoons? Marvel Comics is assimilated in my memory, heroic figures such as Power Man, Black Panther. My interest in blackface and blackface caricatures comes from Warner Bros and Disney. My main interest in these sources is in the "representation of blackness in the white imagination" (Wayne Martin Mellinger, 1992), something I wasn't aware of growing up watching these simulations. I have used blackface aesthetics in my work as a way to contest or subvert the politics of representation and stereotypes enforced by such images. Batman and Baartman sounded very poetic to me and there was something ambiguous about what they both stand for. Similar to Josephine Baker's banana skirt juxtaposed with the iconographic silhouette of Sarah Baartman. That sort of creates a third persona, a fictional heroic figure. The central figure in that painting becomes ambiguous because it resembles both Baker and Baartman, and because the figure's identity is hidden behind the mask, one can't really tell whether it is Baartman or Baker. That's what I'm interested in. The central figure, which might be representing both Baker and Baartman, takes on a heroic persona in relation to these two iconic figures, who have been portrayed in history as victims or outcasts. Other than that, the material plus the painting has a lot to tell. Baartman and Baker have a lot in common apart from the fact that they are both black women. They have been central to topics of black sexuality, black exoticism, issues of the gaze towards black women, "black is beautiful" and black pornography. They were both sexually exploited and dehumanised by white patriarchy.<sup>1</sup>



1 Sean O'Toole interview with Mawande Ka Zenzile. 'Maybe if you made this video it would be more technically resolved!' *ArtThrob.co.za*, 2 May 2014

**A.M. DUGGAN-CRONIN  
(1874-1954)**

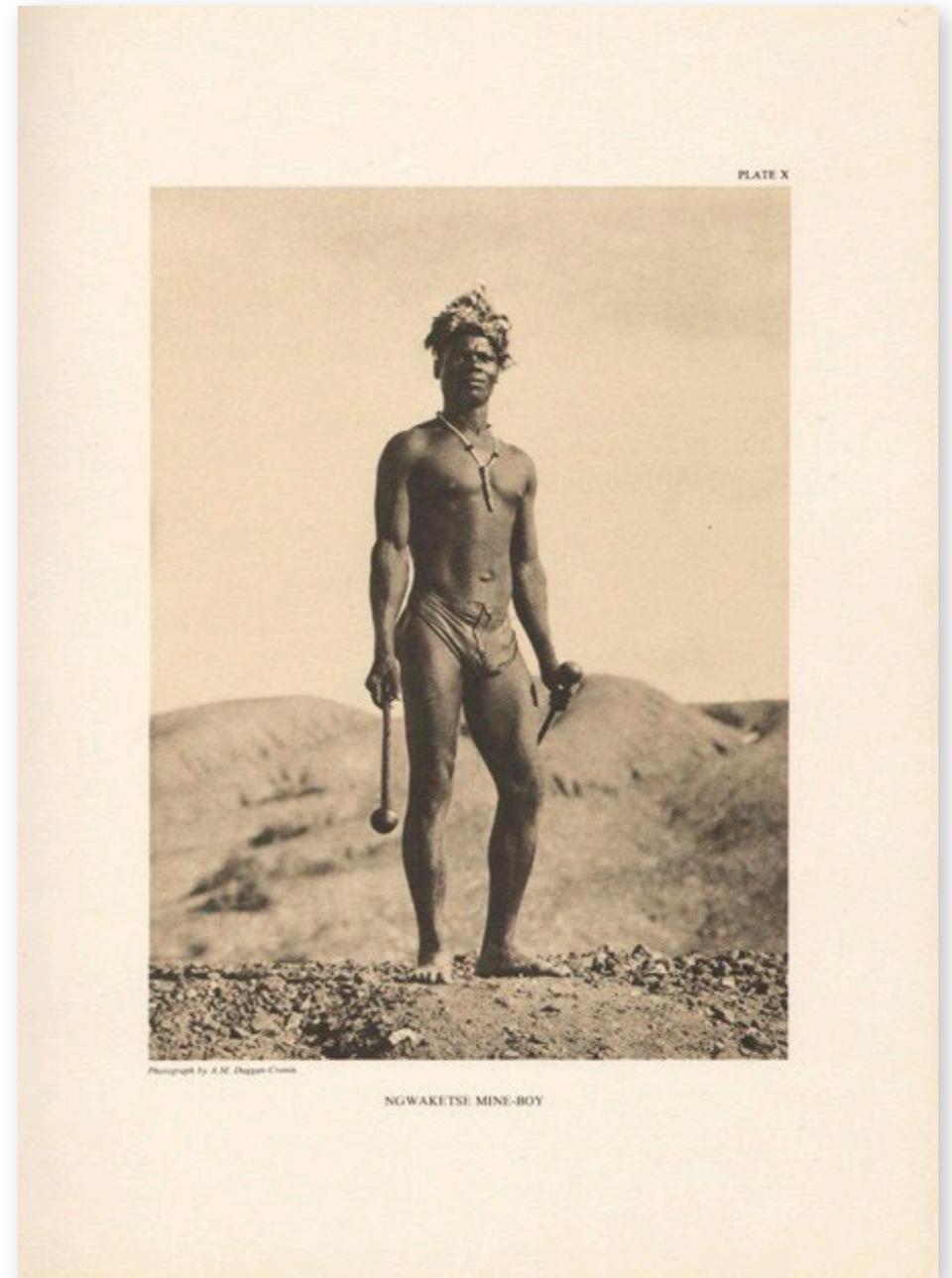
*The Bantu Tribes of South Africa*

1928 - 1936

Four volumes in 11 parts

A RARE COMPLETE SET OF THE 11 PARTS IN GOOD CONDITION

Vol. I	Section I	Plates I - XX	The Bavenda (1928)
Vol. II	Section I	Plates I - XXVI	The Bechuana (1928)
Vol. II	Section II	Plates XXVII - LII	The Bapedi (1931)
Vol. III	Section III	Plates LIII - LXXVIII	The Southern Basutu (1933)
Vol. III	Section I	Plates I - XL	The Ciskei and Southern Transkei Tribes (1939)
Vol. III	Section II	Plates XLI - LXXX	The Mpondo and Mpondomise (1949)
Vol. III	Section III	Plates LXXXI - CXX	The Zulu (1938)
Vol. III	Section IV	Plates CXXI - CLII	The Swazi (1941)
Vol. III	Section V	Plates CLIII - CXCVIII	Baca, Hlubi and Xesibe (1954)
Vol. IV	Section I	Plates I - XL	The Vathonga (1935)
Vol. IV	Section II	Plates XLI - LXXX	The Vachopie of Portuguese East Africa (1936)



**PETER CLARKE  
(1929-2014)**

*Please don't do that*

1975

Acrylic on card

48 x 63cm

Signed and dated



Peter Clarke was a ships' painter on the docks of Simon's Town until 1956, when he decided to paint and write professionally. He studied at the Michaelis School of Fine Art in 1961 and at the Rijksakademie, Amsterdam, in 1962-63.

When Clarke returned from Amsterdam in the autumn of 1963, the implications of apartheid became clear as the Nationalist government enforced the Group Areas Act which was relentlessly executed by advertisement and then proclamation, area by area. Proposals to declare Simon's Town, where he lived, a 'White Group Area' had appeared in 1959, with amendments following in 1960 and 1964. In September 1967 the final proclamation was made, which declared the entire town an area for whites exclusively, with no provision made for any other group. He and his family were moved to Ocean View, where he lived until his passing in 2014.

Throughout his career, despite the hardships of apartheid, Clarke remained adept at seeing and expressing the joy and vitality of community life, with vibrancy in colour and optimism in form. This is

exemplified by *Please don't do that*, painted in 1975, which captures a light-hearted intimate moment: a man rocks the hammock in which a woman rests, startling her to the sudden injunction 'Please don't do that!' It is a portrait of play, leisure and excitement, and yet it was painted a year before the 1976 Soweto student uprising.

Movement is suggested through the repeated brushstrokes around the hammock and the prankster, creating a visual blur. With its vivid complementary hues - yellow and purple, orange and blue - the work reflects Clarke's reputation as a master colourist. As Lize van Robbroeck has remarked, Clarke's best paintings are "vibrant, glowing with strong colour and a dynamic thrust ... This contrast between idyllic subject matter and restless, almost violent formal language makes for particularly engaging and compelling viewing."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lize Van Robbroeck, 'Listening to distant thunder: The art of Peter Clarke', *South African Journal of Science*, (Volume 108, 2012, pp.5-6)

**EPHRAIM MOJALEFA NGATANE  
(1938-1971)**

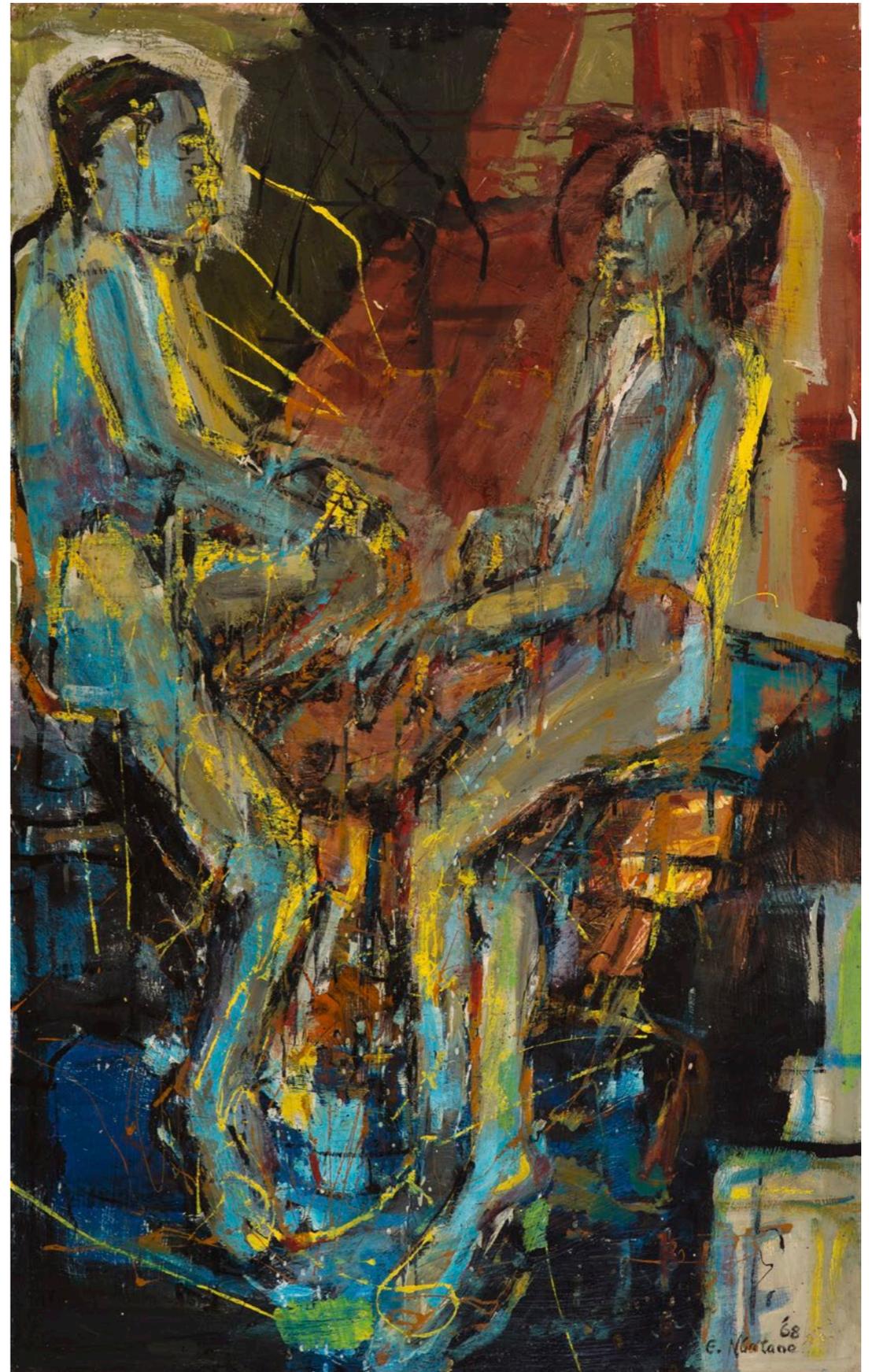
*Honeymoon*

1968

Oil on board

122 x 75.5cm

Signed and dated '68 / E. Ngatane' (lower right) and bears  
inscription 'Honeymoon / '68 / E. Ngatane' (verso)



Ephraim Ngatane grew up in Soweto in Johannesburg, where during the 1950s a number of artists emerged who captured the everyday aspects of township life. Like many of the young black artists of his generation Ngatane attended the Polly Street Art Centre in downtown Johannesburg, where between 1952 and 1954 he was mentored by Cecil Skotnes and Durant Sihlali.

In an interview from 2008, Skotnes recalled his impression of Ngatane arriving at the centre:

We didn't turn anyone away from Polly Street, but the challenge was always to identify those students that stood out from the rest. Ephraim was such an eager learner, always ready to experiment and try something new. We soon discovered that painting was not just a hobby for him, but rather a way of life.<sup>1</sup>

There were two stylistic directions employed by the artists who studied at Polly Street: a 'neo-African' style, which was inspired by traditional African sculptures, and a 'township' style, which featured a range of artistic approaches to the 'township scene'. According to Skotnes, the incorporation of abstraction into his paintings, at the time considered 'taboo' for black artists, made Ngatane distinct from many of the other 'township artists':

He was part of a surge amongst artists to create more than just a simple, pictorial record of the difficult times in the townships.<sup>2</sup>

Ngatane was a "non-conformist who navigated the uncharted territory of abstraction" in the representation of township life, setting himself apart from most of his Polly Street contemporaries.<sup>3</sup> While many of his compositions are busy, crowded with activity, the painting on exhibition has an unusual stillness and intimacy about it. In *Honeymoon*, the artist renders the nude, recently wed couple locked in each other's gaze in colourful and kaleidoscopic vividness, with energetic paintwork that conveys the intensity of the encounter.

1 Cecil Skotnes in *Ephraim Ngatane: A Setting Apart*, Johannesburg, 2009, p7

2 Ibid, p9

3 Rory Bester, Natalie Knight and David Koloane, *Ephraim Ngatane: A Setting Apart*, Johannesburg, 2009, p9

**DUMILE FENI  
(1942-1991)**

*Who Gets It?*

1966

Conté and charcoal on paper

75 x 54cm

Signed



The feeling of unease sparked by Dumile Feni's depictions of suffering - here showing two men carrying a lamb to the slaughter - eventually lent him the appellation 'Goya of the Townships'. In the monograph published alongside his retrospective exhibitions at the Johannesburg Art Gallery and South African National Gallery in 2005, Sherene Timol Seedat reflects on the metaphors of his figuration:

Dumile's sculptures and drawings are powerful and dominated by the figure. The strong use of line in his drawings creates an atmosphere of devastating intensity. It is impossible for the viewer not to absorb the message in the piece. Of his work, Dumile said: 'My meaning or message is universal, human suffering and the state of humanity is universal; only the locations are specific.'<sup>1</sup>

*Who gets it* was first shown in Feni's seminal exhibition at the Durban Art Gallery, two years before he left South Africa for exile. A reviewer pronounced the exhibition as "one of the most graphic examples of the cultural revolution of the African people" and described Feni as "without a doubt the biggest rising star in the entire South African world of art".<sup>2</sup>

1 Sherene Timol Seedat, 'Dumile Feni: "Human suffering and the state of humanity is universal, only the locations are specific"' in *Dumile Feni Retrospective*, 2006, p41

2 Staff Writer, *The Sunday Tribune*, 21 August 1966

# THE NAME'S DUMILE

Staff Reporter

**OUT** of the shanties of Johannesburg's Sophiatown and Newclare have come boiling some of the most dynamic and evocative artistic inspirations of our generation.

This week-end and for the next few weeks, Durban has a chance to view one of the most graphic examples of the cultural revolution of the African people which began in those townships.

It is the work of a brilliant young artist with the almost unpronounceable name of Mslaba Zwelidumile Mxasi — better known simply as Dumile — which is now on show at the Durban Art Gallery.

Completely untrained as an artist and with virtually no academic education, Dumile is without a doubt the brightest rising star in the entire South African world of art.

In the words of Madam Z. Wisznicka-Kleczynska, curator of Durban Art Gallery: "As an artist there is absolutely nothing we can teach him."

## MODEST

Dumile himself is modest about his technical ability as a painter and as a sculptor, but he has learned almost everything.

It is this knowledge of the many nuances of life that his work streets above that of his contemporaries.

He has been criticised for trying to seek sympathy because of things and the people I portray," Dumile told me.

"But it is not so. My subjects are Africans because they are my people, but my message, the idea I am trying to put across, is nothing to do with racialism — I am not interested in politics. "My situations are human ones, that is all."

In the short space of about 23 years — not even Dumile himself knows exactly how old he is — he has lived through many tragic situations.

Without identification papers, he remained for many years in constant fear of arrest. He has been beaten up by thugs and tsotsis and today his body bears the scars of several stabbings and coshings.

"You would not believe it, but for a whole day once I lay on a mortuary slab. They thought I was dead," he told me.

In 1962 came the final blow when he went into the National Tuberculosis Association hospital in Johannesburg. His lungs were infected, as were those of countless others in the townships.

But out of this came his first public recognition. In his three months at the hospital, he was encouraged to paint. He was supplied with materials and ended up by decorating vast areas of the building with impressive murals.

Released from hospital after three months' treatment, he was taken under the wing of Johannesburg art gallery owner, Mrs. F. F. Haenggi, who encouraged him to prepare for his first exhibition.

Exhibited at Gallery 101 earlier this year, his work took Johannesburg by storm. Now, through the efforts of Madame Wisznicka-Kleczynska, Durban has become the venue of his second exhibition.

## FELLOWSHIP

A brief look at his work — charcoal on paper — conjure up a thousand memories of masters such as Daumier, Goya, Bosch, even perhaps Breughel.

Yet they are all convincingly Dumile. It is only the thought that is the same when one comes to closer examination.

Critics have described his work as bitter, but there is more humour, open laughter and warmth in every work than there is bitterness or pain.

An early example of his work, "Policeman's Bottle," is perhaps the warmest commentary, I have ever seen upon the fellow-

ship of the people of the townships.

An hysterical woman is slumped at the feet of an African policeman, who offers his index finger to her to suck in an effort to give comfort.

The anomaly of the situation is emphasised by the worry lines on the woman's face — no child this, despite the foetal position of her limbs and childlike expression.

One can understand how Dumile has earned the label of a cynic when one looks at his "I Am Not a Donkey."

A barefooted man in tattered clothes gestures emphatically and perhaps hopelessly with three fingers of his left hand. But his head is twisted into the features of a donkey.

This exhibition will make you laugh and it will make you cry. But above all it will take you into the mind of a young boy from the townships of Johannesburg.

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**A.M. DUGGAN-CRONIN  
(1874-1954)**

*African Manhood*

c1930

Albumen silver gelatin print

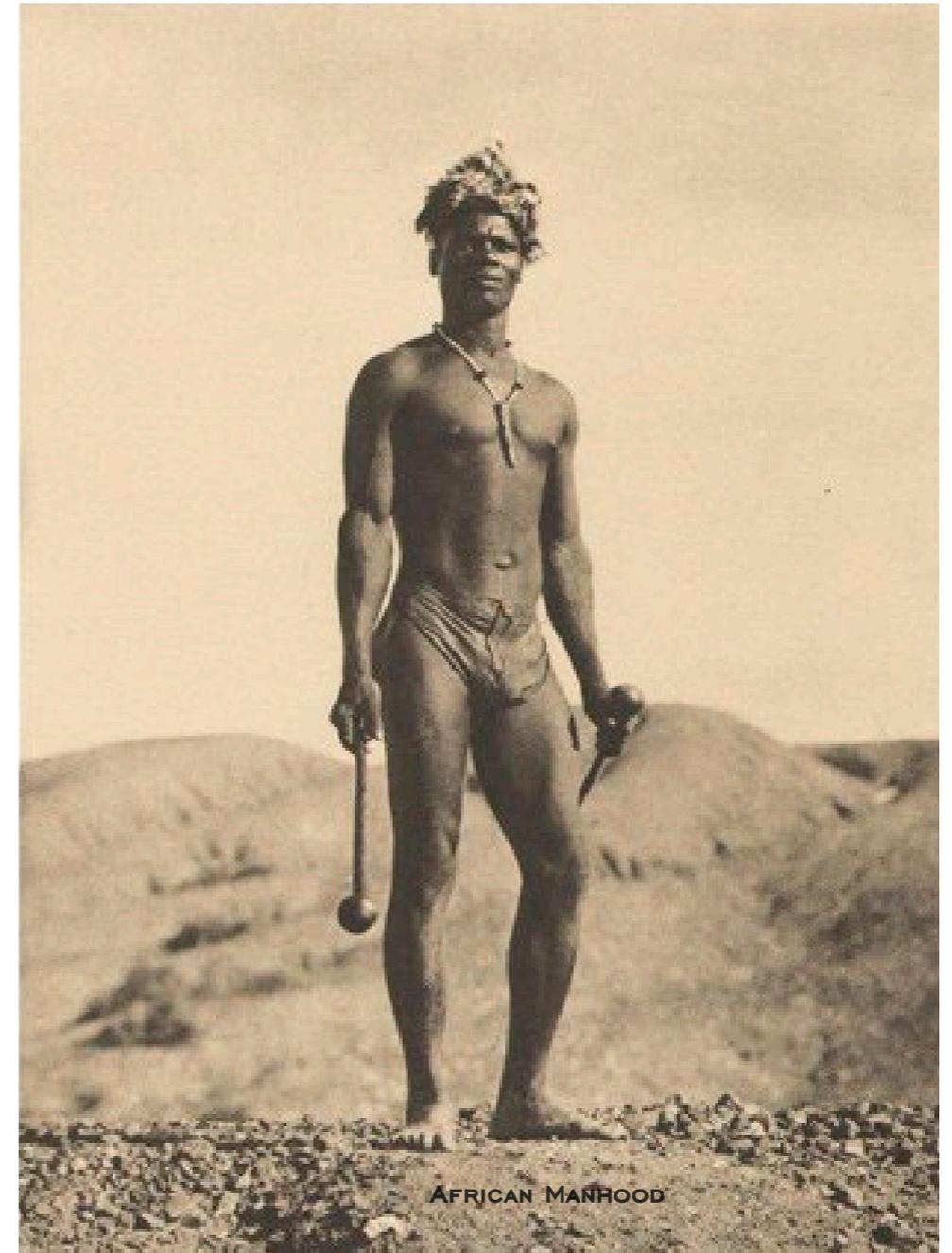
64 x 46cm

Signed bottom left and inscribed with the title below

A RARE LARGE FORMAT PRINT SIGNED AND TITLED BY THE ARTIST

Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin was born in 1874 in Ireland, and educated at St Mary's College in Derbyshire, England. He came to South Africa in 1897 and worked as a compound guard for De Beers mine in Kimberley, where he bought his first box camera in 1904. After his participation in the South West African and East African campaigns in the First World War he moved back to South Africa and undertook his first photographic expedition to the Langeberg to photograph the San people.

Duggan-Cronin realised that the traditional way of life of the rural communities in southern Africa was fast evolving because of the ramifications of migrant labour for the mines, and the repercussions of the Natives Land Act of 1913 that dispossessed many black citizens of their land. Encouraged by Maria Wilman, first director of the McGregor Museum in Kimberley, he systematically set about photographically documenting traditional customs, albeit guided by his own perceptions and notions of his subjects' lives. In the period between the World Wars, Duggan-Cronin travelled across southern Africa, to Victoria Falls, Namibia, Mozambique and the Indian Ocean coastline of South Africa, to photograph indigenous peoples. After 1932, when he retired, Duggan-Cronin devoted himself to 'better understanding' the indigenous peoples of southern Africa. His life's work of images is preserved in the McGregor Museum and was published as *Bantu Tribes of South Africa*. This extensive work comprises 376 large-format collotype prints, which are individually divided by annotated tissue sheets that provide tribal information, names, titles and points of location. It was co-authored with well-known ethnologist scholars such as Schapera, Warmelo, Hammond-Tooke and Henri Junod, who provided introductory essays to the various sections.



*Thandabantu: A photographic journey through southern Africa.* McGregor Museum, Kimberley, 2007

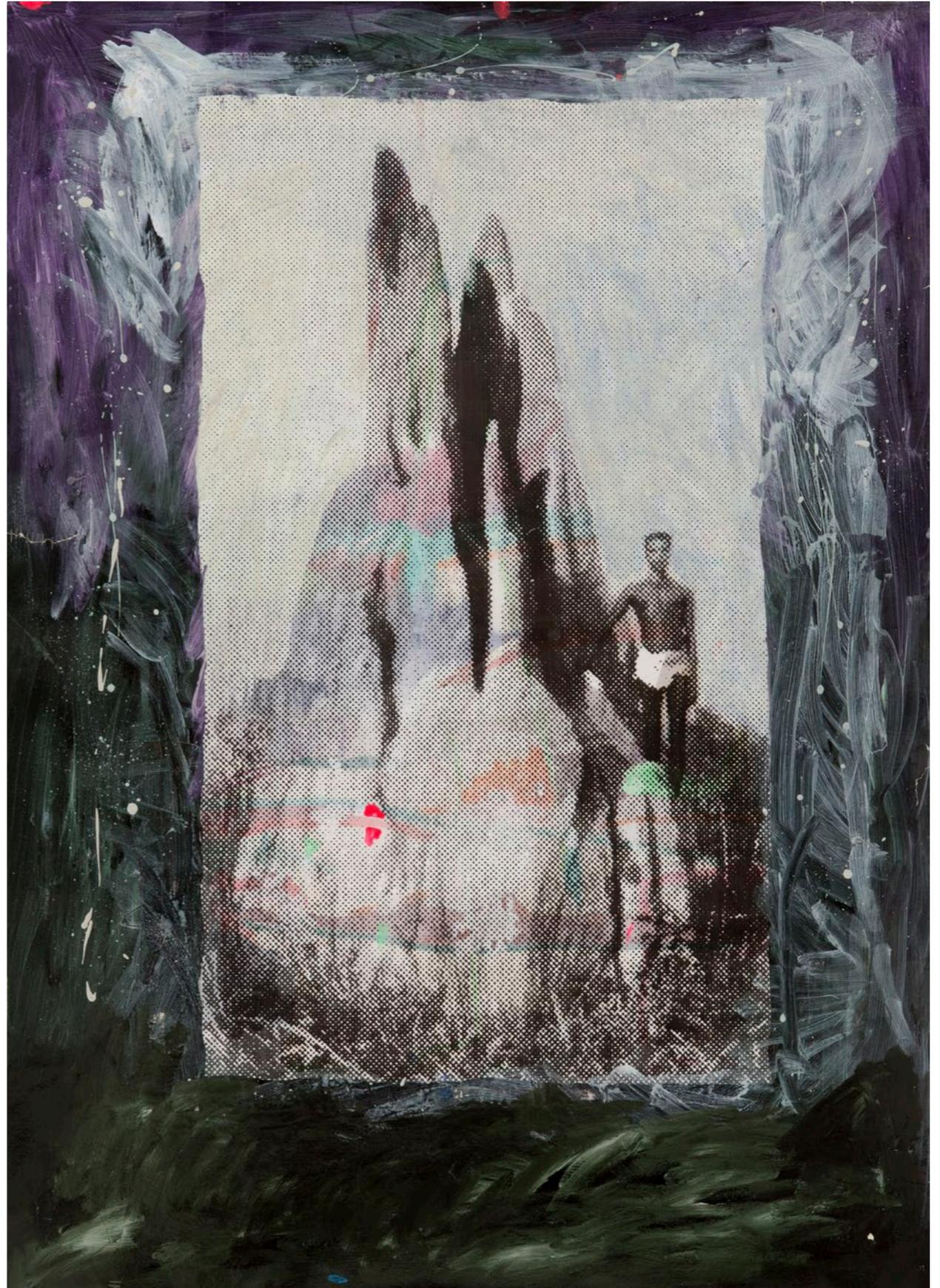
**MOSHEKWA LANGA  
(1975-)**

*Untitled*

2002/2010

Mixed media on paper

140 x 100cm



Moshekwa Langa rose to prominence in the early 1990s to become one of the South Africa's foremost contemporary artists. Over the last 20 years Langa has developed a visual language that oscillates between abstraction and representation, conveying personal, psychological or political narratives in a range of media spanning installation, collage, drawing, painting, photography and video.

Langa's early career was characterised by a series of physical relocations in quick succession, from his experiments in his rural KwaMhlanga studio to the city of Johannesburg, where he had his first solo exhibition at Rembrandt van Rijn Art Gallery in 1995; and on to Amsterdam, where he was resident at the Rijksakademie voor Beeldende Kunst in 1997, and continues to live and work. While a sense of physical movement from place to place, between two points on a map, is present in his work from this period, so too is an approach to the psychological impact of moving through different spaces. His paintings and works on paper depict dream worlds in which images emerge and dissipate, not always in full view and not bound by the same structures of comprehension as waking life. Here Langa creates a space to evoke the nuances and emotions of dislocation through migration.

Like Odysseus aboard his ship, in the work of Langa an invisible central figure goes wandering through the world, with always in view the coasts of South Africa, from which this perpetual journey began and will always begin again, a contemporary Grand Tour in which travel and movement are both physical and virtual, crossing frontiers that are at once harrowing and imperceptible...The artist is therefore the traveller and also the weaver: on his way from place to place he weaves the threads and creates a greater world that transcends the representation of the known universe, becoming a fictitious model displayed on the white wall.<sup>1</sup>

The figure appears in Langa's work in many different forms, among them silhouette, outline and collaged printed image. In the three works on display a spectrum of Langa's techniques, stylistic devices and thematics are evident. In *Untitled* (2002/2010) visible brush strokes of midnight purple, green and white border the central rectangular collaged print. Here the male figure takes on a persona, with facial and bodily features discernible. This mystic messenger stands on the mountainside in his underwear as if expecting to receive the viewer, his posture and gaze expectant.

<sup>1</sup> Rita Kersting, *Moshekwa Langa*, MAXXI, Museo Nazionale Delle Arti Del XXI Secolo, pp76-79, p76

**PENNY SIOPIS  
(1953-)**

*Bonne Esperance*  
1988  
Pastel on paper  
100 x 130cm



The first European to reach the southern cape of Africa was the Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias in March 1488, who named it Cabo das Tormentas, the Cape of Storms. When John II of Portugal recognised the optimism engendered by the new sea route to India and the East, and the Cape's strategic positioning within this enterprise, the area was renamed the Cabo da Boa Esperança, the Cape of Good Hope.

In the late 1980s Penny Siopis began working on a series of 'history paintings' incorporating references to the European history of exploration and colonisation. Like *Exempli Gratia* (opposite), which was painted the following year, *Bonne Esperance* reflects on the historical violence related to European notions of the 'Cape of Good Hope'. In both paintings the map of the new frontier is etched into the back of a woman. Siopis describes *Bonne Esperance*:

The reference for the figure is my own body. The drawing was the result of a process that involved Colin [Richards, Siopis' husband] drawing colonial maps of the Cape of so-called Good Hope on my back, and me in turn drawing his drawings using the photograph he took of my inscribed body as reference. I placed the figure in a landscape sourced from another colonial map of the Cape and framed the whole scene within an ornate frontispiece taken from yet another map of the Cape. Combining different modes of representation in this way I hoped to put something of a strain on the logic of perspective and system of cartography that we usually associate with colonial conquest and the Enlightenment.

The work reflects my interest at the time in history written on the body, specifically the female body, and what this says about the colonial conquest and the Enlightenment. Like my video *Per Kind Permission: Field Work* which came much later (1994), I saw these drawings as performative events even though this aspect is not evident in the final product (something that is manifest in the video). In addition, my layering of the pastel was strongly process-based. I'd draw and then sand off part of the drawn surface, then draw again, fix the drawing, sand it, draw and then fix. So the pastel is never a direct depiction but the accumulation of bits of pigment that survive the abraded surface, the drawn surface itself an analogy for the skin of the body.

*Bonne Esperance* was exhibited on Siopis' solo show, *History Paintings*, at the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, in 1990.



## KEITH DIETRICH (1950-)

*Hercules Doctor*

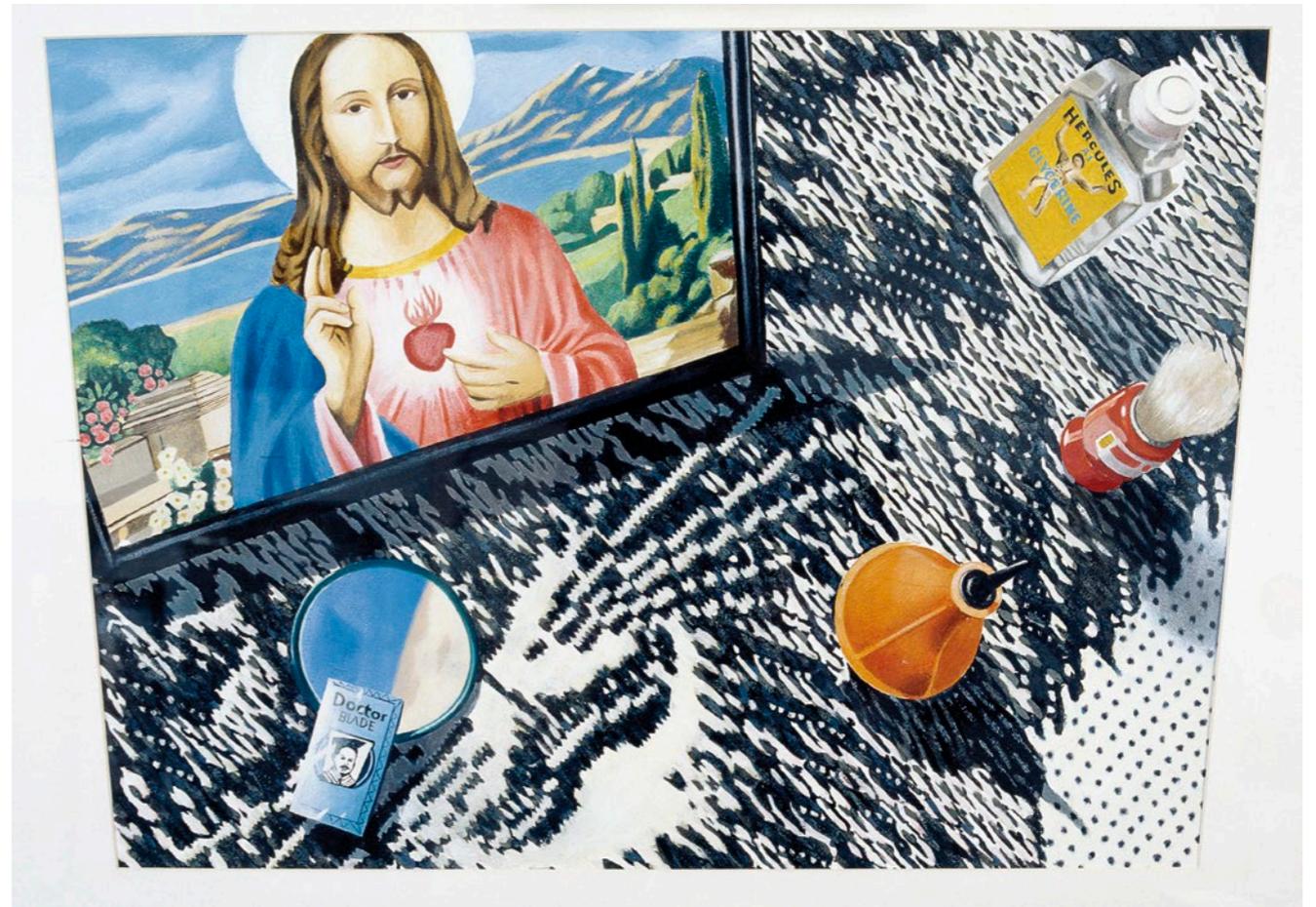
1988

Egg tempera on paper

45 x 60cm

The painting *Hercules Doctor* formed part of Keith Dietrich's solo exhibition at the Goodman Gallery in 1988, the same year that he won a merit award at the Cape Town Triennial. For this exhibition, Dietrich purchased about 24 miscellaneous objects from shops in Diagonal Street, Johannesburg, and divided them randomly into four groups. As Dietrich describes this body of work:

All the compositions accentuated looking down into the arrangement of objects, thereby eliminating a horizon and references to horizontals and verticals. Most of the objects came from China and I arranged each group on a plastic mat, and what emanated was that in each composition there were a number of correspondences regarding the sign values of the objects, such as a candle and candle holder, a torch, a picture of Jesus (all standing for 'light'), and so on. There [are] no intentional symbolic references to the objects, yet such a relationship grew unintentionally from the objects themselves. The titles grew from the objects, such as the words *Hercules* and *Doctor* coming from the bottle of Hercules glycerine and packet of doctor shaving blades. Christ was also sometimes referred to as the 'Divine Physician'.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Email correspondence, October 2015

**DEBORAH POYNTON  
(1970-)**

*Traders*  
2003  
Oil on canvas  
200 x 300cm



EXHIBITED  
Michael Stevenson, Deborah Poynton *Recent paintings*, 4 August - 11 September 2004

In this large painting from 2003, Poynton constructs a composite scene that incorporates many elements from everyday South African life. She brings together the spectrum of society, under a freeway, around the themes of trade and exchange. We all have no choice but to consume, whether the staples or the luxuries of life. And, if we are in the fortunate position to make choices, consumption is integral to defining our identity. In a society such as South Africa where identity is particularly complex, the patterns of consumption are diverse, as can be seen in this market scene where cows and chicks are gathered amid Teletubbies, mannequins and refuse.

The artist has placed the figures in ambiguous juxtapositions, instilling an uneasiness in the pictorial space and establishing awkward connections between individuals. Her manipulation of perspective and scale creates a magical realism, seducing the viewer with recognisable rich textures and colours, yet confusing them with the distortions and unlikely associations. Poynton's work, in some respects, recalls the Baroque tradition of painting with its layered allegories and metaphors which could be endlessly analysed and debated. As always with her work, there is an element of wit in her imagery: here she parodies her role as observer and commentator by positioning herself as a 'Sunday painter', out to capture some quaint scenery in a harsh urban environment.

The inclusion of the mirror in the opposite bottom corner could be a very literal reference to the reflective intent of the painting. As Poynton has written, when her painting has a tautness of surface and also of meaning and contradiction, then it resounds and reflects:

I think every painting of mine is about the fear of death. It is about longing. About my longing, my fear. But we recognise these things in each other. Throw humour, passion, beauty, intricacy into it, allow a dream into it, and it will start to sing. When heart and mind are working together, it starts to sing. This is what I wish for, and I am always coming closer or getting further away. Beyond all the small decisions and considerations that go into a painting, is the driving question - does this feel right?<sup>1</sup>

1 Deborah Poynton in conversation with Michael Stevenson, *Deborah Poynton*, Cape Town: Michael Stevenson, 2004

**MOSHEKWA LANGA  
(1975-)**

*Phantasmagoria*

1999/2010

Mixed media on paper

140 x 100cm

In *Phantasmagoria* Langa introduces text in the form of a headline with the painting's title scrawled in red line across the top of the image. The handwritten script is unsteady and shrinks towards the top right-hand corner, disappearing into the distance. The central silhouetted stick figure, rendered in uneven grey pencil, also appears to be running in that direction, against a background washed with brown paint. The composition gives the sense of a vignette, a snapshot of a larger event, or a fleeting message that appears in a dream.



**ROTIMI FANI-KAYODE  
(1955-1989)**

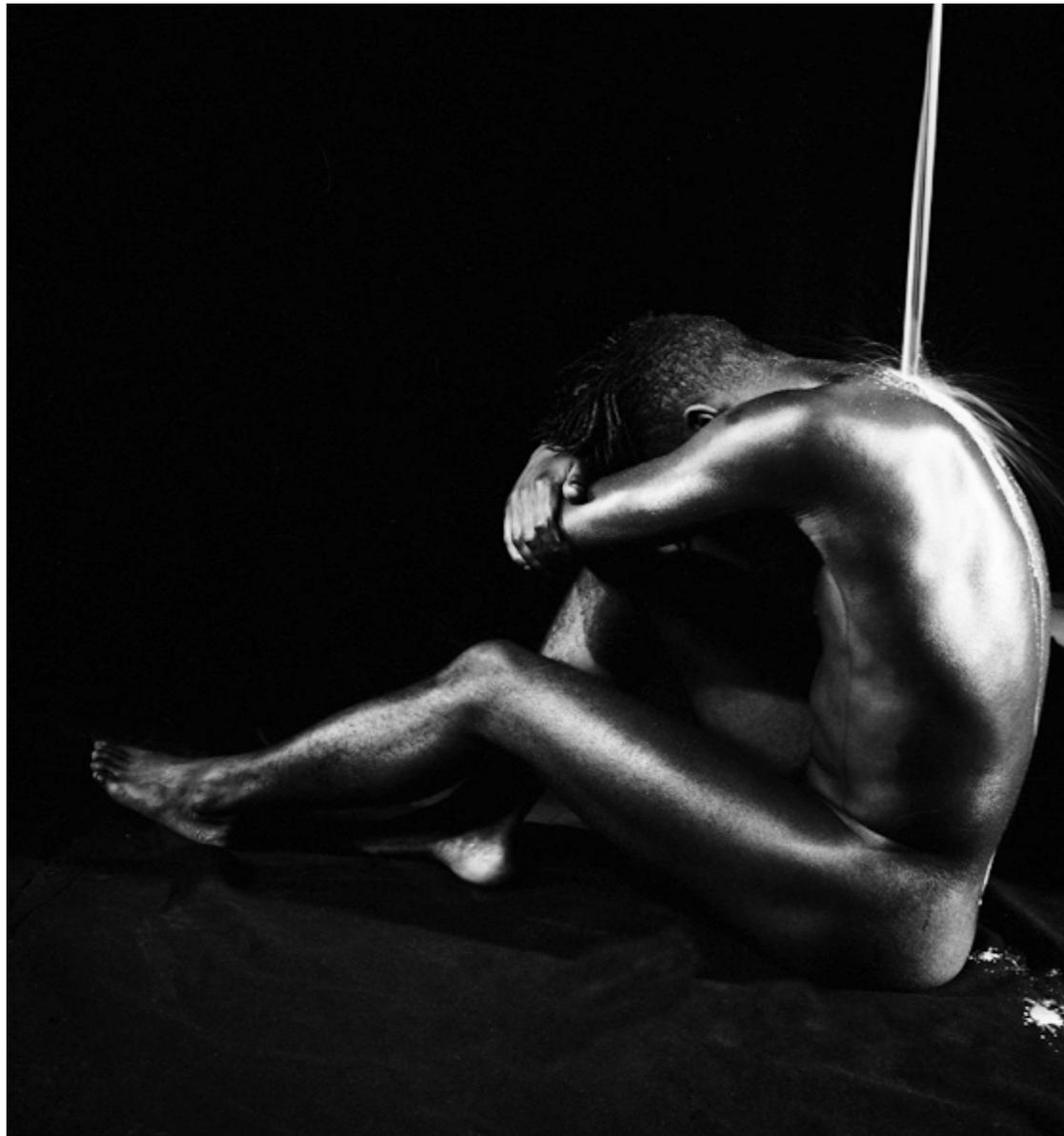
*Maternal milk*

1983

Gelatinsilver print

41.5 x 41.5 cm

1/10



*Under the Surplice*

Undated

Gelatinsilver print

53 x 28.5 cm

3/10



Rotimi Fani-Kayode was born in Nigeria in 1955 to a prominent Yoruba family. In 1966, at the outbreak of the Biafran war, they left the country as refugees and settled in England. Fani-Kayode gained his MFA in Fine Arts and Photography at the Pratt Institute, New York, before returning to London in 1983, where he died from AIDS-related complications at the age of 34.

In a career that lasted just six years, Fani-Kayode distinctively altered the way in which photography of the black body could be made and discussed, at a time when black subjects in the West were rarely the authors of their own images. By depicting his own body and those of his close friends, Fani-Kayode's photography opened up a counter-narrative against the objectifying images of the sexualised black male body that dominated both straight and gay visual culture.

London in the early 1980s was a city facing the harsh realities of Thatcherite conservative rule, where conflict between Britain's young black communities and the Metropolitan Police erupted into race riots in Brixton (1981) and other inner-city districts. The city that Fani-Kayode returned to was one fraught with racial, socio-economic and political tension, reaching fever pitch around issues of sexuality and race.

During his lifetime Fani-Kayode found it very difficult to get his work published or exhibited. Rejected on account of both his race and sexuality, shut out of the mainstream museum and gallery circuits, and at the margins of more conservative black discourses. However, he has become a seminal figure in 1980s black British and African contemporary art, whose photographic oeuvre constitutes a profoundly personal and political exploration of sexuality, spiritual belief and the multiple identities of the diasporic condition.

On three accounts I am an outsider: in matters of sexuality; in terms of geographical and cultural dislocation; and in the sense of not having become the sort of respectably married professional my parents might have hoped for.<sup>1</sup>

Through the medium of photography, and often in collaboration with his partner Alex Hirst, Fani-Kayode produced a body of work in the 1980s that was not only aesthetically seductive but also groundbreaking in terms of his portrayal of black homosexuality. His images

are visually and conceptually provocative in their exploration of sex and intimacy between men, Yoruba and Christian iconography, and the conventions of the image of 'Africa' in the West.

In *Under the Surplice* Fani-Kayode's sense of hybridity and contradiction is at play as he draws together Christian iconography, alongside Nigerian cultural symbols, both of which are thrown into discord by the presence of a naked male body. In the centre of the image a man stands in prayer - hands held together under bowed head. His traditional Nigerian robe that would normally be worn for formal occasions is lifted at the left corner, concealing the head of a naked man who kneels at his feet. Fani-Kayode's choice of title prompts the question of what lies beneath the surface. The image also evokes notions of purity and belief.

*Maternal Milk* depicts a naked man sitting on the floor with his legs bent in and his head resting on his arms, his face hidden against his chest. From the top right-hand corner of the image white milk pours from a height down onto his shoulders, drips down his back and forms small puddles on the floor. With his back turned against the flow of liquid the sitter appears to be shielding himself. The mother's milk that should be nutritious and comforting appears to be rejected. Perhaps here the maternal milk can be read as surrogate for motherland. This work speaks to Fani-Kayode as a man of the diaspora, caught between worlds.

Marking the 25th anniversary of his death, in 2014 the South African National Gallery mounted Fani-Kayode's retrospective exhibition *Traces of Ecstasy*.

1 Rotimi Fani-Kayode, 'Traces of Ecstasy', *Ten* 8 No 28, Birmingham: Rage & Desire, 1988

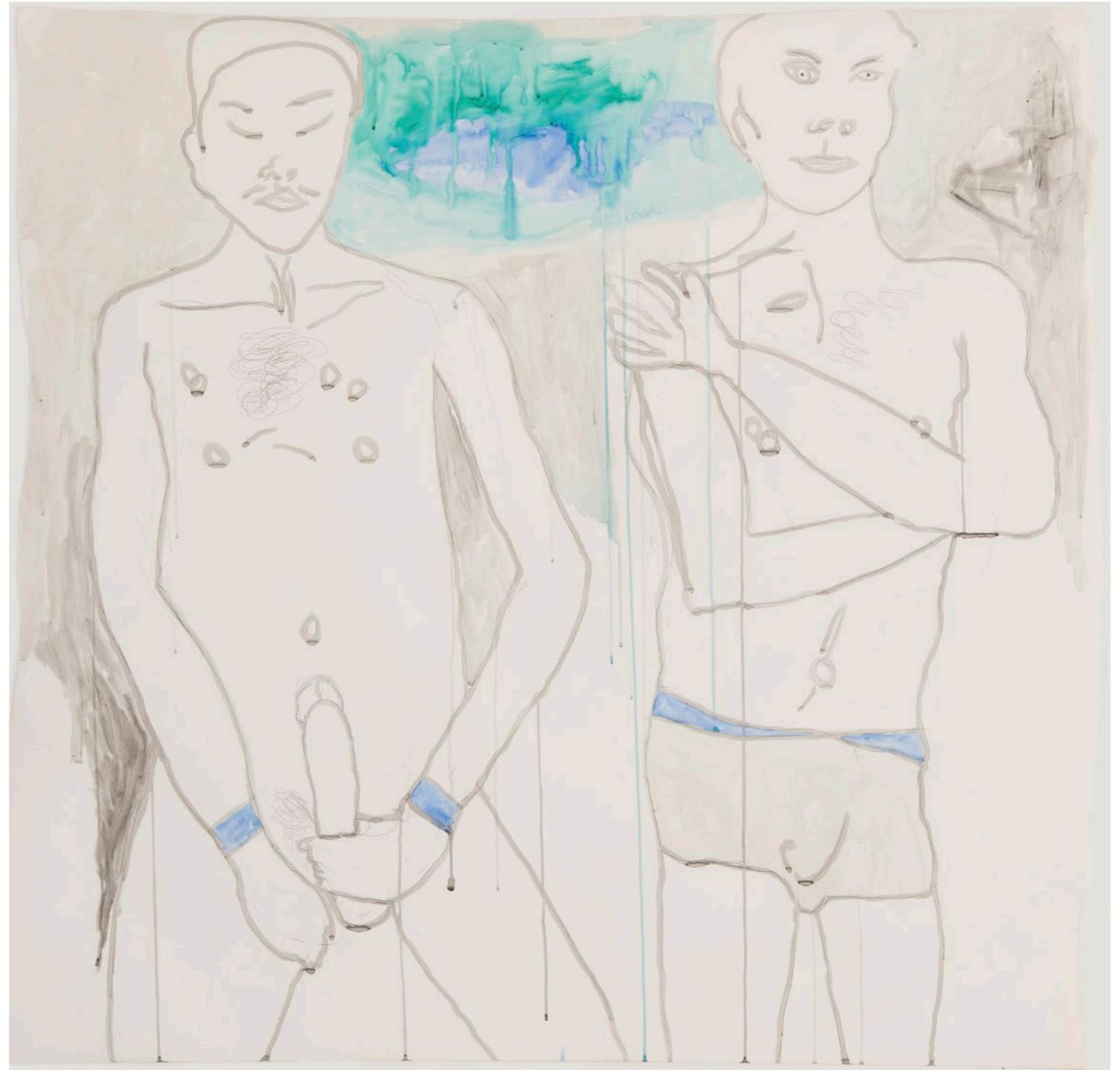
**MOSHEKWA LANGA  
(1975-)**

*Untitled*

2007

Mixed media on paper

150 x 150cm



In *Untitled* (2007), simple lines trace the forms of two men lying side by side, the sparseness lending a sense of quiet intimacy to the homoerotic scene. One is at the climax of self-pleasure with his penis in his hand; next to him his partner lies with arms folded across his chest perhaps in embrace, self-consolation or protection, his hands rendered useless.

## DEBORAH POYNTON (1970-)

*Candidates*

2006

Oil on canvas

250 x 200cm

This large painting of four frontal nudes was first shown in the exhibition *What lies beneath: New art from South Africa* at Galerie Mikael Andersen, Copenhagen, in 2004. Photographer David Goldblatt writing in her 2009 exhibition catalogue describes Poynton's painting process:

Those worlds depict situations that have the quality of being 'true to life' and yet abstracted from it. This is not painterly abstraction, a blurring of reality. On the contrary, there is remarkable care and accuracy of depiction in all the parts and details of her 'worlds'. It is difficult to pin down the cause and even the quality of this abstraction, and yet it is at the heart of her work. I think it is an emotional quality having to do with removal and absence, which, for lack of a better word, I call sadness. It is the sadness of lives truly seen, in all the pain and joy of recognition, that is brought to the canvas with remarkable verisimilitude and intimacy, while remaining remote, unreachable. It is as though Poynton stretches out, passionately and with consummate care, to touch and enter those lives, but she, like the viewers, is not released. It is partly the tension between what she can do and what she cannot do that gives her paintings such power.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> David Goldblatt, 'Deborah Poynton Observed', in *Deborah Poynton: Everything Matters*, 2009, p9





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