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In the steps of Jia Baoyu

Marc Barben joins Hylton Nel on a trip to China

Artist-potter Hylton Nel began reading *The Story of the Stone*, the 18th-century novel by Cao Xueqin, when he was an antique dealer living in Kent in the early 1970s and the first volume had just been translated by David Hawkes. Every five years or so another volume was published, and it took him 20-odd years to read the full story. For his recent trip to China he took it along to start again from the beginning.

Described to me one evening in Beijing, the narrative begins when the edifices of heaven become dilapidated. Such heavenly things, of course, can only be mended with jade. A surplus block falls to earth and a Taoist monk comes upon it; realising its divine origin, he engraves the novel's story on its surface. Its protagonist, Jia Baoyu, is born with this jade in his mouth, his tale inscribed on the stone.

Shortly after leaving his home in Calitzdorp for this trip, Nel mentioned that he was taking along his 'bearded old man', a jade pendant he believes is from the Han Dynasty (206BC – 220AD). It's abraded on the side; people would prescribe medicine from powdered jade, and so an ancient object is more potent than a new thing. The fish pendant



Nel reviewing his purchases after a day in the antique markets of Beijing

around his neck he's worn for many years; he believes it is 10th century and bestows abundance. He also carried an amulet in his pocket, remarking that 'it feels quite nice in the hand'.

Asked for a reason for this visit when applying for his visa, Nel's answer was simply 'TO ENJOY CHINESE CULTURE'. As experienced, his journey was a multidimensional spiritual pilgrimage, not least to imbue his stones with some of their homeland's energy. It was to retrace the steps of Jia Baoyu, to better understand his character, comparing notes with fellow readers along the way. To see Mr Zhang, his antique dealer in Beijing, and collect some treasures to take home. To hear the chorus of cicadas surging across Shanghai, and behold the sight of lotus upon lotus in full bloom.

Most of all, Nel was there to exercise his life-long passion for Chinese ceramics, high and low, imperial and peasant. For Nel the shapes and glazes, images and brush marks, act like points in a network of breadth of personal experience and depth of knowledge. In China, a place described by one new friend as an 'Empire of Things', Nel was happiest in the antique markets, among a mass of visual and tactile things, which – unlike at the museums – he was able to feel in the hand. Occasionally he'd pull out his 'old man' pendant and watch the trader's expression transform from confusion to veneration.

His favourite purchase? A modern replica of the old man, bought for next to nothing, loosely carved in an opaque white. Now he's back in the hinterland, and we wait impatiently for the kiln to fire!

Pride in New York

Muholi and artist-friends of Stevenson queer the Guggenheim

We take joy in seeing the artist list for the second part of *Implicit Tensions: Mapplethorpe Now* at the Guggenheim in New York.

This instalment of the institution's reflection on Robert Mapplethorpe's legacy features Zanele Muholi, Catherine Opie, Paul Mpagi Sepuya, Glenn Ligon, Rotimi Fani-Kayode and Lyle Ashton Harris, putting the late photographer's opus in conversation with contemporary practitioners. All but one of these artists have featured in our exhibitions, projects and publications over the years.

While Muholi has been part of the gallery for over a decade –

most recently presenting *Faces and Phases 13* at our new space in Parktown North – the works of Sepuya, Ligon, Fani-Kayode and Harris have consistently woven through the constellation of our programming.

Sepuya, Ligon and Fani-Kayode recently featured in our 15-year retrospective, *Both, and* (2018). The previous year Harris exhibited a video installation titled *Black Power*, and contributed an acrylic-on-Kente-cloth work to *A Painting Today*. Sepuya's intimate studio photographs showed as a solo project in 2015 and formed part of *Kings County*, a focus on artists working in Brooklyn, in 2014. Ligon's neon installation *Untitled (Bruise/Blues)* showed in Johannesburg and on *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* in

Cape Town in 2016, and his *Negro Sunshine* paintings featured on *What we talk about when we talk about love* in 2011.

Fani-Kayode's work was part of *Staged Realities: The studio in African photography* in 2004; a solo presentation of black and white photographs showed concurrently with Muholi's first exhibition at the gallery in 2006, and colour works were shown in 2007.

Though polemical – *The New York Times*' Arthur Lubow concludes that Mapplethorpe's moment has passed – the motivating curatorial impulse and the subsequent conversations reflect a cultural deepening around the politics of desire, identity, embodiment and rage.

The exhibition continues until 5 January 2020.

Activism on the coast

Zanele Muholi's particular activism can be seen at A4 Arts Foundation as their *Ikhono LaseNatali* exhibition travels to Cape Town. The show features interpretations of Muholi's *Somnyama Ngonyama* series of self-portraits, commissioned from 25 Durban-based artists in order to showcase the city's creativity. Curated by Bajabulile La Dlamini Sidumzo and Thobeka Bhengu, the exhibition debuted at the KwaZulu-Natal Society of the Arts earlier this year.

In addition to the exhibition, the project entails a wide-reaching exchange with schools in the Western Cape and aims to challenge youths to consider the tenets of inclusivity, creativity and collectivism.

Meanwhile, in Port Louis, Mauritius, the Institute of Contemporary Art Indian Ocean presents *Zanele Muholi*, a solo exhibition of the photographer's work, spanning series including the early *Only Half the Picture*, *Beulahs*, *Mourning*, *Faces and Phases* and recent *Somnyama Ngonyama* prints and wallpapers.

As part of the project Muholi delivered a public lecture on LGBTQI+ rights at the Institut Français de Maurice, a gesture towards broadening perspectives in a country where homosexuality is criminalised by law.

Ikhono LaseNatali continues at A4 Arts Foundation until 7 November. *Zanele Muholi* at the ICAIO runs until 30 November.



A woodcut by Sthenjwa Luthuli, an interpretation of a photographic print from Zanele Muholi's *Somnyama Ngonyama* series

New space, new explorations

Lerato Bereng visits Nandipha Mntambo's newly built studio in Joburg

LB My first question is: why do you do what you do, *right now*?

NM Right now I think I do what I do to not go insane. The time I took off to do other things in life was good and necessary but it also helped me understand that I couldn't live without my work. The fact of being able to feel things and make things has, I think, been highlighted for me.

LB What are you feeling?

NM On a tactile level, the cow hide. I didn't understand how important, how interesting, how integral to my life it is. There was a period when I thought, 'okay Nandipha, how many more cow hide sculptures can you make?' A lot of that was about how *I thought* people were perceiving the work, and not about the fact that I hadn't finished my exploration of the material yet.

LB At some point you were quite certain about the boundary of meaning in relation to the reading of your work. How is your new life phase shifting this definition?

NM I think the shift is about accepting the baggage that comes with everything. The baggage that other people, or society, or our lived experience brings to everything. It's also about accepting my own baggage regarding things that I wanted to either delete or shift. I'm a black woman working with this material – there are going to be associations around the material, around me as a person, how I choose to live. My response to it all now is: 'Yes, I hear you, but



Nandipha Mntambo at her studio, September 2019

I'm not taking on those particular elements of whatever it is you think is happening.' I think taking ownership of what I do and what it means, of the fact that the work is able to travel through social and academic channels that have nothing to do with me, is what being a good artist is about. You can't just put shit out there and think it doesn't matter how it's received. You don't have to agree with everything, but if it does come to your attention, you also need to be like 'oh okay' – for your own sake, for your own studio practice, for your own growth.

LB Are there things you are more aware of now that impact your understanding of your work?

NM I've always had this utopian view that we're all the same – and yes, on some level we are but on others we're not. Having my child Isiuwa – having made a clear decision to have a child who is very, very black – has helped me understand that although I've had a particular upbringing

that has shaped who I believe I am, some things need to shift. Isiuwa comes from a particular lineage – her father is from a bronze-making nation – and that's made me think differently about how I got to my material, how I explained away a lot of events that helped me get to the point of working in this material, how I skirted around certain issues, whether blackness or being female. When I was younger I was interested in understanding how to manoeuvre away or *around* these things and now I'm like, 'actually there's no way around or beyond or sideways', you know?

LB So what's going to be happening here in your new studio?

NM The first thing is that I need to find a new mould-maker.

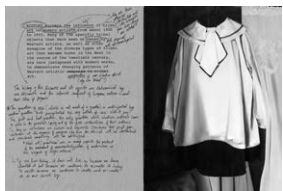
LB What's so funny, and this is a metaphor, is that for the past five years or so, you've been talking about 'breaking the mould'.

NM I've been doing it slowly.

Calendar Sept - Nov

7 September

Join us for the opening of Meleko Mokgosi's first Joburg solo exhibition, *Objects of Desire, Addendum*, at Stevenson Johannesburg 10AM - 1PM; TO 25 OCT



11 September

The Way She Looks: A History of Female Gazes in African Portraiture – photographs from the Walther Collection, including Zanele Muholi's *Beulahs* and *Miss D'vine* – opens at Ryerson Image Centre, Toronto TO 8 DEC

13-15 September

Art Joburg takes place at the Sandton Convention Centre, Johannesburg. FIND US AT BOOTH #1

13 September

A solo show by Wim Botha opens at Feldbusch Wiesner Rudolph, Berlin FROM 6PM; TO 19 OCT

14 September

Walkabout of Meleko Mokgosi's *Objects of Desire, Addendum* at Stevenson Johannesburg with Sinazo Chiya and Dineo Diphofa in conversation 11AM

16 September

Last week to see Ernest Mancoba: *I Shall Dance in a Different Society* at the Centre Pompidou, Paris. Artists including Kemang Wa Lehulere provide 'contemporary echoes'. ENDS 23 SEPT

18 September

Stevenson's Amsterdam office hosts a selection of works from Viviane Sassen's *Hot Mirror*, previously seen at the Hepworth Wakefield in Yorkshire 5-8PM; TO 16 OCT

18 September

The 15th edition of the Lyon Biennale opens with the theme *Where water comes together with other water*. Simphiwe Ndzube is featured TO 5 JAN

19-21 September

As part of the Festival d'Automne, Steven Cohen performs *put your heart under your feet... and walk!* at the Centre Pompidou, Paris NIGHTLY AT 8.30PM

21 September

Hylton Nel is included in *Graphic Pots* at Oxford Ceramics Gallery TO 26 OCT

22 September

Last week to see Pieter Hugo's work in *Here We Are Today: A View of the World in Photography & Video* at the Bucerius Kunst Forum, Hamburg ENDS 29 SEPT

23 September

Last week to see Odili Donald Odita's *Negative Space*, commissioned for outdoor sculpture exhibition *Color Field* at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art ENDS 30 SEPT

24 September

Heritage Day, South Africa

28 September

Robin Rhode's survey exhibition *Memory is the Weapon* – spanning digital animations, photographic series, drawings, sculptural elements and performances – opens at Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg TO 9 FEB

30 September

Last week to see Pieter Hugo's *La Cucaracha* at Stevenson Cape Town ENDS 5 OCT



30 September

Last week to see *IncarNations: African Art as Philosophy* at Bozar, Brussels. Zanele Muholi, Nandipha Mntambo, Edson Chagas, Steven Cohen, Berni Searle, Nicholas Hlobo and Barthélémy Toguo are among the featured artists ENDS 6 OCT

1 October

Last week to see Paulo Nazareth's first US museum solo, *Melee* at the ICA Miami ENDS 6 OCT

2-6 October

Stevenson (booth Go2) presents work by Paulo Nazareth, Simphiwe Ndzube and Zanele Muholi at Frieze London, Regent's Park

10 October

Solo shows by Paulo Nazareth and Simon Gush open at Stevenson Cape Town 6-8PM; TO 23 NOV



14 October

Last week to see Viviane Sassen's commission for *Visible/Invisible* at the Palace of Versailles ENDS 20 OCT

19 October

Meleko Mokgosi: Bread, Butter, and Power travels to the Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago TO 29 DEC

20 October

Dialogue: Portia Zvavahera with drawings by Gustav Klimt opens at Artspace De 11 Lijnen in Oudenburg, Belgium



PHOTO: LERATO DJIMSE

22 October

Zanele Muholi accepts the Lucie Award for Outstanding Achievement in Humanitarian Photography at Carnegie Hall, New York

24 October

The Lubumbashi Biennale, curated by Sandrine Colard, opens. Portia Zvavahera shows work produced during a residency TO 24 NOV

25 October

Stevenson and Andrew Kreps Gallery present new work by Moshekwa Langa, Portia Zvavahera and Viviane Sassen at Kreps' Walker Street space in Tribeca, New York

25 October

Crossing Night: Regional Identities x Global Context opens at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit. Edson Chagas, Nicholas Hlobo, Pieter Hugo, Moshekwa Langa, Zanele Muholi, Robin Rhode, Penny Siopis and Guy Tillim feature TO 19 JAN

25 October

Mame-Diarra Niang, Zanele Muholi and Viviane Sassen have work on the Montevideo Biennale in a show curated by Alfons Hug TO 28 FEB

28 October

Last chance to see *The Cape Town Triennials: Then and Now* at the Rupert Museum, Stellenbosch. Early and recent work by Penny Siopis features ENDS 2 NOV

2 November

A solo show by Kemang Wa Lehulere opens at Stevenson Johannesburg 10AM - 1PM

6-10 November

Stevenson presents a focus on Pieter Hugo, Viviane Sassen and Zanele Muholi at Paris Photo

22 November

Stevenson's Amsterdam office hosts *Jericho*, a new photographic series by Robin Rhode, opening during Amsterdam Art Weekend



28-29 November

Steven Cohen performs *put your heart under your feet... and walk!* at MC93 – Maison de la Culture de Seine-Saint-Denis (Bobigny) as part of the Festival d'Automne, Paris

28 November

A solo show by Moshekwa Langa opens at Stevenson Cape Town 6 - 8PM; TO 18 JAN

Don't miss these ongoing shows

→ Until 3 November

Zanele Muholi's *Somnyama Ngonyama/Hail the Dark Lioness* is on view at Seattle Art Museum

→ Until 7 November

Ikhono LaseNatali, commissioned by Muholi, shows at A4, Cape Town

→ Until 24 November

Kemang Wa Lehulere and Zanele Muholi are among the artists participating in the 58th Venice Biennale's main exhibition, *May You Live in Interesting Times*. Work by Mawande Ka Zenzile is at the South African Pavilion.

→ Until 1 December

Penny Siopis' *Obscure White Messenger* shows as part of *Media Networks* at Tate Modern, London

→ Until 5 January

Zanele Muholi is one of six contemporary photographers in conversation with the work of Robert Mapplethorpe in *Implicit Tensions* at the Guggenheim, New York

→ Until 15 March

Penny Siopis and Zanele Muholi have works on *I Am... Contemporary Women Artists of Africa* at the National Museum of African Art – Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC

→ Until Fall 2021

Pan-African Pulp, a commission by Meleko Mokgosi, is on view at the University of Michigan Museum of Art

Ndzube's Raft sets sail

Simphiwe Ndzube takes part in the 15th edition of the Lyon Contemporary Art Biennale, opening on 18 September. Echoing the French city's specific geography, at the confluence of the rivers Rhône and Saône, the title of the biennale is *Là où les eaux se mêlent* ('Where water comes together with other water'), taken from a poem by Raymond Carver. Ndzube contributes a new site-responsive installation titled *Uhambho*.

Further south, Ndzube's graduate work *Raft* – in the collection of the South African National

Gallery – forms part of the 14th Curitiba International Biennial of Contemporary Art. Of this work Ashraf Jamal has written:

'His raft is not Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* bearing the bodies of the dead and the living, though the memory of that devastating Romantic work nevertheless accompanies it. Rather, after Biko, it is the work of a black body that has come back to itself, the work of a life that moves both inward and outward, listing and jostling on its sea-legs, pumping life always into its empty shell.'



Simphiwe Ndzube's work in progress for the Lyon Biennale

Curated by Tereza de Arruda and Adolfo Montejo Navas, with guidance from Ernestine White regarding the inclusion of South African artists, this iteration of the Curitiba biennial is themed *Open Borders* and runs from 21 September to 1 March.



PHOTO: MARIO TODESCHINI

↑ Wim Botha's *Mieliepap Pietà* – a life-size mirrored replica of Michelangelo's *Pietà* – has found a new home at St George's Cathedral in Cape Town. The work was originally commissioned by Dick Enthoven for the exhibition *Personal Affects: Power and Poetics in Contemporary South African Art*, held in New York in 2004 to commemorate

South Africa's first decade of democracy. It was installed at the Cathedral of St John the Divine, a place of worship that, like St George's, is recognised for its contributions to the social sphere. In this doubly resonant environment, the religious and political implications of Botha's sculpture take on heightened significance.

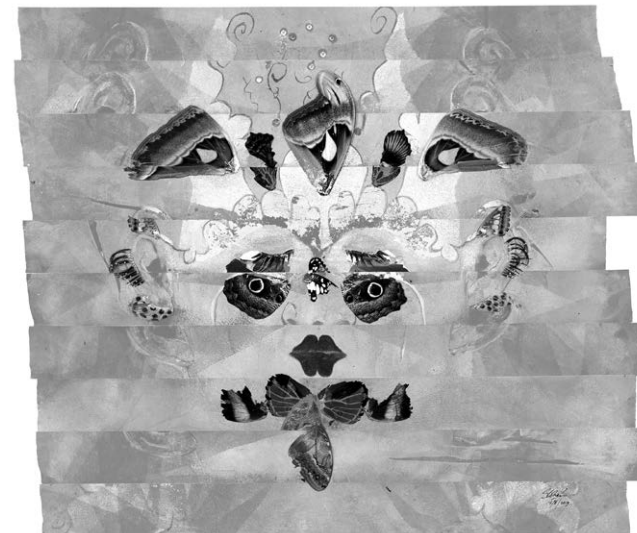
'A place I can never leave'

Steven Cohen performing at the Israel Festival in Jerusalem

i can't communicate at all well how contaminating and detoxifying Israel was. it was sort of like being immersed in holy poison and forced to become instantly immune. or die. it really is life and death at every turn. it's joburg, jews and jacarandas, an infinity of hard-core fur-hats in catholic garb drag, guns, police, soldiers, 14-year-old girls armed and quarrelsome ... everything is constructed of the same white stone (buildings, people) poor and disenfranchised sectioned-off invisible palestinians ... from the ruling class I elicited only scowls and glares, some curses ... killer sun.

i saw myself in every form ... fat, thin, young, old, rich, poor, mad, oblivious, sick, manic, zealous ... i swear i saw myself a thousand times, cloned versions of the nose and ears and physiognomy ... what i could have become and might yet well. it was like a 60s french art film noir, that aspect, all psycho and twisted and poignant. and everyone who wasn't me was a jew i knew – there were aunty Brendas, aunty Eppas, aunty Rontzas, Uncle Reubens, Brodies, Essers, Liebmans, Goodmans, versions of the lot of us ... a million ghosts alive and well as if the holocaust shower scenes had been played back in reverse, and out they streamed, all six million of them, dressed up for Shavuot and celebrating stress!

i saw my work from the outside for the first time, i appear truly maddened. when i made the jewish brochas and ate elu's ashes there was a deafening silent roar, completely physical. the first night was packed



Portrait Series Photoshoot, Lille, 14/8/2019, makeup and mixed media on tape

to the rafters, and the second, in the afternoon, just before shabbat ... about 200, half of the capacity we allow, the buzz was obviously beware. big walkout the first night, fewer the second ... but more than any other country it has been presented in. audience polarised, loved or hated. much reaction to the organisers, they said, no details given.

jerusalem is now a mental place i can never leave, like the abattoir or ICU ... i am still burning at the Wall, or facing police with guns who thought i was a terrorist bomber waiting to happen – all dressed in black from head to toe with a black backpack, black parasol and a huge black hat like Bette Davis in *Now, Voyager*. incomprehensible to them. i very nearly got shot for ignoring repeated shouted commands to stop and identify myself (in Hebrew) but instead sped up pace cause i could see only the pavement in front of me and thought it best to ignore the yelling cause it seemed likely to be

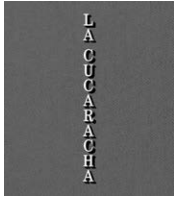
gay bashers. when they grabbed me and threw me around a bit, guns out ... i went ballistic, screaming back at them in shock. a friend said never to do that, even Hamas is polite.

i watched sunrise every day, i was almost always alone, i ate strangely, nuts, seeds, dates, pomegranates ... everything felt ordained and unbearably intense. the french on my team were like tiny squeaky cartoon characters i had never seen before. they fell silent whenever I joined them. they saw my naked jewness and i saw right through them, like transparent plastic toys from disneylandparis. i was always and never afraid, always and never lost. i did research for an intervention in the future. nothing is possible but i will try it nonetheless. and then a life of limping.

Cohen performs *put your heart under your feet ... and walk!* at the Centre Pompidou on 19-21 September, and at MC93 – Maison de La Culture de Seine-Saint-Denis on 28-29 November, as part of the Festival d'Automne, Paris

Reading matter

New additions to our shelves



Pieter Hugo *La Cucaracha*.
Published by Editorial RM,
2019. Book launch at Paris
Photo in November



Gabrielle Guy *Part 1, 2 and 3*.
First instalments in an ongoing
photo book project, self-
published by our designer

From the press

→ Nicole Martinez on Paulo Nazareth's *Melee* at the ICA Miami:
'The Brazilian-born artist's work is grounded in activism and renowned for its durational, performative nature. In *Melee*, his first US retrospective, the extent of his Odyssean investigations are on full display. Whether traversing the Underground Railroad in Louisiana; raiding the tombs of disappeared rebels in Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay; or tracing African influence across Kenya, Nigeria, and Mozambique, Nazareth's is a starkly personal journey to understand the oppressive, exploitative nature of colonial history.'

'Dismantling colonial power', *Contemporary And América Latina*, 8 July.
<http://amlatina.contemporaryand.com/editorial/paulo-nazareth-ica-miami/>

→ Melvyn Minnaar on Berni Searle's exhibition as Featured Artist at the National Arts Festival, Makhanda:

'This year the Monument's Gallery in the Round hosted a new video work, *A Place in the Sun*, commissioned by the festival. And in front of the monument the established flag poles fluttered brightly in another of her projects as addendum to her well-known *Spirit of '76* video. To say she had an eye-catching presence is an understatement. As in much of her previous work, the new art is an engagement with the unexplored obvious, land, memory, history and the rituals of the ordinary, anchored in lingering ethical questions. Hers is a finely crafted sense of the theatrical of place and personality.

'*A Place in the Sun* is a four-channel video installation, taking as point of departure an abandoned public swimming pool in Maitland near her Cape Town studio in which the scars of its disuse triggers contemplation of what it was and is, and how the future of run-down urbanscapes can be meaningfully imagined. [...] The way in which memory is held in the commonplace, the ordinary, and where and how identity is embedded, have from the start powered her sense of the aesthetic.'

'Contemplating the colours of what is and what was', *Business Day*, 2 August.
<https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/life/arts-and-entertainment/2019-08-02-contemplating-the-colours-of-what-is-and-what-was/>

WHAT WE'RE READING

Associate director **Sisipho Ngodwana** is reading *Biography of Mahomah Gardo Baququa* by Robin Law and Paul Lovejoy, the story of a former slave from Brazil, in advance of Paulo Nazareth's solo show in October. Also, Franz Kafka's *The Trial* and *The Paris Review: The Writer's Chapbook*.

WHAT WE'RE LISTENING TO

Dada Khanyisa, whose first Johannesburg solo exhibition at Stevenson opens on 1 February 2020, says:
'My studio playlist consists of Khruangbin, Alfa Mist, Kokoroko, Batsumi and SZA. I can't stop playing Samthing Soweto - *Akulaleki*.'



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