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PHOTO: JO MUNNICK

Individuals yet part of a larger world: Penny Siopis's *Atlas* paintings at the National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens

'The purpose is discourse'

From the politics of the body to disputes over territory, exhibitions by gallery artists are engaged in pressing conversations

The title of *.info's* 17th edition is lifted from the name of a series of activations initiated by the newest members of the gallery team, Aza Mbovane and Mosa Molapo. More generally, however, it fits the unstated aims of recent and upcoming projects by some of our artists at home and elsewhere.

For *Dear Life*, Penny Siopis's retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art Athens (EMΣT), converges discourse with other

purposes. Beyond bringing together over four decades of Siopis's practice, curator and EMΣT director Katerina Gregos has lent deeper emphasis to the Greek threads that weave across Siopis's work, providing new insight into the confluence of thought and historical context that underlies her prolific output. In her preface to the catalogue, Gregos writes:

Born in South Africa in 1953 to Greek parents, Siopis came to prominence in the 1980s and 1990s with her historically and culturally charged paintings that exercised critique against colonialism, apartheid, racism and sexism. She went on to experiment with other media such as installation and film, in the

process creating a rich, incisive and poignant body of work which, whilst diverse, remained coherent in its conceptual, political and ethical positioning.

The show is the flagship event of the third part of *What If Women Ruled the World?*, a cycle of exhibitions borrowing its title from a work by Yael Bartana, and centred on artists who identify as female, prompting larger conversations around the origins and assumptions of the canon.

Seeming to provide a photographic response to this question is another retrospective, Viviane Sassen's *Phosphor: Art and Fashion*. Following its opening at Paris's Maison Européenne de la Photographie, it was re-imagined →

→ for the 12th Kyotographie and recurred within the Kyoto Shimibun, a former printing-house. The festival's choice of this scenographic structure formed part of a larger goal around facilitation – making sure works remain able to 'address difficult topics in a way that resonates with, and does not come across as too direct for, local audiences'. The show travels to Fotografiska Shanghai next, and then to Amsterdam's Foam photography museum in September as a homecoming.

Paulo Nazareth's projects in the Portuguese-speaking world offer language to the connectedness of global concerns. The former, *ESCONJURO (CONJURATION)*, at Inhotim in Minas Gerais, shifts conventional exhibition processes by happening variously across time and place. Nazareth occupies different areas of the museum for 18 months over four seasons, 'establishing [it] as a living, dynamic presence', in his exploration of our contested relationship to the earth and its resources. This is echoed in Lisbon, where he presents *ALFÂNDEGA (CUSTOMS)* at Hangar, a centre for artistic research. The key work consists of a cardboard box transported by plane from Confins International Airport (Minas Gerais) to Lisbon International Airport. Its contents are a transparent plastic bag filled with air exhaled by Nazareth in the middle of the old Estrada Real, a colonial hub used to transport gold and other resources from Brazil to the ports of the Portuguese Metropole.

Closer to home, the year's programming kicked off with the Amsterdam gallery becoming first a site for solidarity through the group show *Can't We All Just Get Along?*, then an atelier with Unathi Mkonto's *In place*. Both existed as on-growing projects, and the former, by its close,



PHOTO: MOSA MOLAPO

Inspiring: Georgina Gratrix held a colouring workshop for young learners to kick off her exhibition

featured the works and writings of over 30 practitioners, spanning poems, video and underpants, installed across the gallery's walls, ceilings and columns.

During the 2023 Art Joburg fair, Georgina Gratrix received the Most Inspiring Artist award from the children of Gauteng Art for Public Schools. Fittingly, when she returned to the city for her gallery debut, *Between Two Palms: Paintings from Durban*, it was these youngest of art lovers that inaugurated the show with a walkabout and colouring workshop with Gratrix.

Disappearing Bodies, the first activation of *The Purpose is Discourse*, occurred during the installation of Gratrix's show, and took the form

of a screening of films by gallery and other artists, as well as a lecture and panel discussion with Russel Hlongwane, Jabu Nadia Newman, Palesa Shongwe, Ntokozo Mlaba, and Hallie Haller. To frame this joint questioning of the somatic dimension of existence, the curators wrote:

Even in its absence or disappearance does the body make itself known, its presence hovering and standing behind everything we do – akin to that prickly sensation at the back of one's neck. The films shown here flitter and oscillate between visibility and invisibility, finding space in an (un)comfortable middle.

<https://www.instagram.com/thepurposeisdiscourse/>

Collect Call: Moshekwa Langa

THE 5TH IN OUR SERIES OF
Q&AS WITH COLLECTORS

When did you first realise you were a 'collector'? The first or second time I went to the coast the air was heavy and felt like glycerine on my skin. I walked past sailing ships caked with rust that was falling off the side. I collected bits of rust from the different ships and catalogued them and transported them inland. When they were thrown away in a big clean-up I was most upset about the loss of those hunks of rust. Later on, I realised that when I want or need things I might get many varieties in different quantities. At that moment of collecting I am totally impassioned.

Art fairs: love them or hate them? I used to be curious

about art fairs. I went to a few and was exhausted and over-stimulated. I did not like that sensation. Nevertheless, seeing things in that agglomeration made me commit certain things to memory and look carefully over time.

What was the first work you bought from us and why art? It would appear that the first work was from *Garage-ism* by Zander Blom. Every work that I've acquired appealed to me in some specific way that was far removed from preciousness. For example, when offered to be the custodian of a painting titled *Moshekwa* by Marlene Dumas, I could not put my head around it because I found myself thinking about cooking smells, cigarettes, insurance liabilities. As well as exposure. Of course it was an honour, but when I looked at *Garage-ism* I felt comfortable and confronted and excited in a different way. The subsequent works of art I've gotten were also not necessarily from anyone related



PHOTO: YAMANDU ROOS

to me – I found myself piqued by what the artist did.

I suppose art is not like succulents nor pets nor children that need constant care and attention. The works can very well live without me and can live beyond me and give other people moments to ponder and reflect. I would not say, for example, that I am a book collector, but I get a lot of books multiple times because sometimes people borrow and never return them. I may need a simple passage from a thousand page book and that would be a reason enough to buy it again and again.



PHOTO: J DE WAART

In place: Unathi Mkonto furthered his self-directed exploration of 'anti-architecture' during a three-month open-studio residency at Stevenson Amsterdam

Calendar Jun-Sep

1 June

Robin Rhode features in *Stories Written: Zurich Art Prize Winners 2007-2023*, an exhibition of works by previous winners of the prize, at Haus Konstruktiv in Zürich TO 8 SEP

6 June

Viviane Sassen's acclaimed survey *Phosphor: Art and Fashion 1990-2023* travels to Fotografiska Shanghai TO 25 AUG

7 June

Last days to see Jo Ractliffe's *Landscaping* as part of the 19th Fotografia Europea festival in Reggio Emilia TO 9 JUN



8 June

At Stevenson Amsterdam, Simphiwe Ndzube presents *After Rain Songs*, a solo exhibition of oil paintings with new experiments in colour and texture TO 27 JUL

12 June

A solo exhibition by Paulo Nazareth, *ALFÂNDEGA (CUSTOMS)*, opens at Hangar in Lisbon

13-16 June

Stevenson shows work by gallery artists at Art Basel; find us at Hall 2.1, stand J.11. Moshekwa Langa's installation *Mogalakwena* is on view in Clarastrasse as part of the site-specific section Parcours

15 June

Revered and Feared: Feminine Power in Art and Belief, a collaboration with the British Museum, comes to a close at CaixaForum Barcelona; a painting by Portia Zvavahera is included TO 16 JUN

16 June

Youth Day

18 June

Last days to view Ruth Ige's solo exhibition of new paintings, *And you are of the heavens and of the earth*, at Stevenson Cape Town TO 22 JUN

20 June

As part of Penny Siopis's retrospective exhibition *For Dear Life*, an evening devoted to her films kicks off a series of rooftop screenings at the National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens

24 June

Last week to see Georgina Gratrix's solo exhibition *Between Two Palms: New works from Durban* at Stevenson Johannesburg TO 29 JUN

25 June

Last week to see video by Simon Gush in *Vertigo, Visual Stories and Studies of Rapid Change* at the Fondazione MAST in Bologna TO 30 JUN

28 June

The travelling exhibition *Civilization* draws to a close at the Jut Art Museum in Taipei; work by Pieter Hugo is included TO 30 JUN

29 June

A solo exhibition by Hylton Nel opens at Stevenson Cape Town, featuring plates, bowls, vases and figurines made over five decades TO 10 AUG



1 July

Last week to see *Self as a Forgotten Monument*, a survey of Mame-Diarra Niang's lens-based work, at Zeitz MOCAA in Cape Town TO 7 JUL

6 July

Meleko Mokgosi's first exhibition on the continent since 2019 opens at Stevenson Johannesburg TO 16 AUG



7 July

Last day to see *Giants: Art from the Dean Collection of Swizz Beatz*

and Alicia Keys at the Brooklyn Museum; Odili Donald Odita, Meleko Mokgosi, and Frida Orupabo are included

18 July

Mandela Day

21 July

Final days of *Unbound: Performance as Rupture*, with work by Mame-Diarra Niang, at the Julia Stoschek Foundation, Berlin TO 28 JUL

27 July

Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi's *The Same Track* is screened in *Power Plays*, part of the 2024 Film Series at the Carnegie Museum of Art

30 July

Stevenson Amsterdam closes for the summer

5 August

Last week to see Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi's site-specific installation in the lobby of the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles TO 11 AUG

9 August

Women's Day, South Africa

9 August

Money Talks: Art, Society and Power, featuring work from Meschac Gaba's *Bank or Economy* series, opens at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford TO 5 JAN

17 August

Paulo Nazareth presents his fourth solo exhibition with the gallery at Stevenson Cape Town TO 28 SEP

26 August

Last weeks to see *My Last Will* at Casino Luxembourg – Forum d'art contemporain; Portia Zvavahera is featured TO 8 SEP



24 August

At Stevenson Johannesburg, a solo exhibition by Robin Rhode opens, concurrent with a presentation at Everard Read's CIRCA Gallery TO 18 OCT

28 August

Frida Orupabo's first institutional solo in Sweden opens at Bonniers Konsthall, Stockholm; the show travels to the Astrup Fearnley Museet next year TO 10 NOV

6-8 September

At Art Joburg, Stevenson shows work by gallery artists, including Edson Chagas who will be featured in the photography section

7 September

Edson Chagas shows work from his *Tipo Passe* series at Vevey Festival in Switzerland TO 29 SEP

7 September

Frida Orupabo is included in the 15th Gwangju Biennale, titled *Pansori: A Soundscape of the 21st Century* TO 1 DEC

18 September

Stevenson Amsterdam reopens with a group exhibition of photography, including work by Moshekwa Langa, Edson Chagas, Pieter Hugo, Jo Ractliffe, Robin Rhode, Viviane Sassen, Guy Tillim and Bruno Boudjellal TO 26 OCT

19-22 September

Stevenson presents a solo booth by Viviane Sassen at Unseen, the Amsterdam photographic art fair

20 September

Viviane Sassen's *Phosphor: Art and Fashion* opens during Unseen at Foam photography museum, Amsterdam TO 12 JAN

24 September

Heritage Day

30 September

Simphiwe Ndzube is among the artists featured in *Singular Views: 25 Artists* at the Rubell Museum in Washington, DC TO OCT

Ongoing shows

→ Until 20 October

Deborah Poynton is included in the group exhibition *Dream with Open Eyes* at Fondation WhiteSpaceBlackBox in Neuchâtel, Switzerland.

→ Until 27 October

When We See Us: A century in Black figuration, at Kunstmuseum Basel in Switzerland, features work by Neo Matloga and Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi.

→ Until 10 November

Penny Siopis's first retrospective in Europe, *For Dear Life*, takes place at EMST, the National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens.

→ Through 2025

Paul Nazareth's *ESCONJURO (CONJURATION)* occupies various parts of Inhotim in Brazil over 18 months, divided into seasons.

A portal into another place

With two exhibitions upcoming in Johannesburg, Robin Rhode speaks to Joost Bosland about his long love of the city's walls, in an extract from the forthcoming *9 Weeks Around the World*

JOOST BOSLAND: We're sitting here on your balcony in Berlin, where you have lived since 2002. Do you remember your first visit?

ROBIN RHODE: I came for a three-month residency in 2001. I didn't come with the intention of making any art. I came with the intention of meeting girls. I had a gorgeous studio but never used it ...

JB: Did you already have a feeling that this would be where you would spend the next twenty years?

RR: It was about having access to great art, both historical and current – shows that I would never see in South Africa. I spent a lot of time collecting press releases, and just absorbing as much as I could. The idea that art was in dialogue with the history of ideas, with philosophy, classical music, architecture, blew my mind, and has affected the way I work to this day. It was also about freedom. There were moments that I experienced in Berlin that I thought I would have never been able to replicate

in South Africa. There was a bohemian culture here that I had desired in South Africa, but never truly experienced. I felt safe, and I remember thinking, 'oh shit I like being here'. Then I met Sabina, and our first son was born, so the decision to stay became an easy one.

JB: A lot has changed since those early days ... When did you first get an operational studio here?

RR: That must have been around 2008. I developed a system where I would use Berlin as my laboratory of ideas, and then work on the walls of Joburg. I was basically working 9 to 5 when I was at home, working on certain concepts and references, accumulating ideas. That way, when the right conditions did appear, I knew exactly what to do.

JB: The model has always been to be very private in Berlin, and very public when you're on the road. Why was that?

RR: My strategy was to keep a low profile in Berlin, so that I could

spend more time with my family without the obligation to attend dinners and events. But there was more to it. I would go to shows or go to openings and I'd be the only person of colour. Or I'd be the only foreigner there, you know, and my German wasn't really good. I got tired of always being the odd one out and decided I'm going to work and let my work speak for me. There was always a parallel life in Joburg.

JB: Which is a life centred around the wall, right? You can recognise that wall in your pictures because there's a very particular crack that runs down, the left of the wall from the top, and you can almost date works based on the length of the cracks.

RR: The wall ... It has taken me more than ten years to realise the wall is a portal into another space. And that portal exists in this most dangerous area in Johannesburg, a place with drug dens and gang warfare and youth unemployment of almost 100 percent. I found it



From Joburg to the Cederberg: Robin Rhode's *Rock Vignette 1*. Work from the series will be included on a group show at Stevenson Amsterdam in September

through my mother's hairdresser, Fadiyah, a very colourful, flamboyant character. She also did my hair as a kid. She was at my mother's house cutting my mom's hair and she overheard me talking about how I was looking for a wall. And she said, 'Yeah, you know, I know this amazing wall but it's owned by Mr Mills.' It turns out Fadiya also did the hair of Mr Mills's wife, and offered to arrange an introduction. Soon after I started working there, it piqued the interest of some local youth. They started to ask me for employment and then they brought a cousin, a friend. Over the years I created this little crew of rebels, probably about twenty of

us at the wall's peak. It's the same as with my assistants in Berlin – I've always wanted to be part of a crew, a collective, that instinctively understood each other. In matric I had a very close relationship to the boys in my class. We did everything together. We showed up to each other's matches. We shared our sandwiches. We put money together to buy bread and slap chips or polony so we can eat and watch the guys. I guess I've subconsciously been trying to replicate that ever since.

JB: The *Art21* documentary captures this process of working with your crew on that specific wall, under

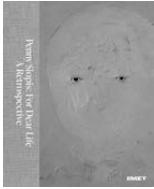
those conditions, very beautifully. There's something very specific about the contrast with Berlin, that wouldn't be the same if the wall was in Maboneng, or wouldn't be the same if the wall was in Rosebank. Even if the cost of production were the same. There really is something about all the stuff that's not in the photograph.

– Robin Rhode has a solo exhibition at Stevenson Johannesburg opening 24 August and running to 18 October; a show at Everard Read's CIRCA Gallery takes place alongside, opening 15 August.

– *9 Weeks Around the World*, featuring Joost Bosland's interviews with Rhode and other artists, is due on our shelves in the coming months.

Reading matter

New additions to our shelves



Penny Siopis: For Dear Life. A Retrospective. Published by EM&T, 2024. Essays by Katerina Gregos, Olga Speakes, Griselda Pollock, Sinazo Chiya, Pumla Dineo Gqola, Laura Rascaroli, Penny Siopis and others.



Viviane Sassen: Phosphor. Published by Prestel, 2023. Essays by Dawn Ades, Clothilde Morette, Simon Baker, Damarice Amao and Dan Thawley.

WHAT WE'RE WATCHING

Aza Mbovane writes:
In the local art scene, there has been an ignited desire for film and video art in response to a newly evident and disconcerting absence of video works by young artists. Within a South African context, video has been a vehicle of political commentary. As artists broaden the scope of their emotive expression and move away from politics, the moving image has found itself renegotiating its purpose and place in contemporary art making.

A recent fave video artist of mine is Tshepiso Moropa, who's based in Johannesburg. She uses collage, stop-motion video and voiceover to exhume indigenous oral histories that draw from SeTswana folklore told during her childhood. Moropa mines images from free online academic archives, and references stories taken from a mini dissertation by Julia Jakoentle Motshwari titled 'Magic and its Significance in Tswana Folktales' (1998). *Monna le basadi ba bapedi II (the man with two wives II)*, the second part of an ongoing series, tells the tale of tragedy that ensues after a man's wives eat forbidden fruit. The first part of this series of stories is available on her Instagram [@tshepisoMoropa](https://www.instagram.com/tshepisoMoropa).

From the press

→ Gloria Oladipo spoke to Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi about her site-specific installation in the lobby of the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles:

In Nkosi's mural *Arena V*, six athletes gather 'between, after or before' gymnastics events, the artist says, sharing a moment of relaxation. Each figure is faceless. "They don't owe you a moment of regard. They don't owe you a moment of performance," Nkosi says. "For me, [*Arena V*] is a flat-out and loving refusal of any of that."

Several of Nkosi's previous works focus on the minutiae of athletes' routines – gymnasts stretching or runners strolling in their warm-up gear – to explore questions of what intimate community looks like for those who are constantly observed by spectators. "I'm interested in bodily storytelling, like where a hand is, the [implied] directionality of somebody's gaze," she says, "how much I can convey without using a face."

Arena V is Nkosi's largest work to date, spanning several walls. Over two weeks, she and a group of collaborators – including Andrew Nobbs, Zena Zendajas, Chris Martoccia and Adam Peña – drew and painted it, based on scaled-down versions. The installation also includes an audio recording of announcers' voices and applause, co-designed by the artist and music producer Dion Monti, to "re-create the reverberation and sounds of the gymnasium," Nkosi says. "A gymnast is surrounded by people who help them become the best that they can be. I feel the same way about art making. All of my studio partners and community members have contributed to the work that I do."

'On View: A Mural That Honors Black Performers at Rest', The New York Times Style Magazine, 21 May 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/mrynhanr>

STEVENSON

Buchanan Building
160 Sir Lowry Road
7925 Cape Town
+27 21 462 1500

46 7th Avenue
Parktown North
2193 Johannesburg
+27 11 403 1055

Prinsengracht 371B
1016HK Amsterdam
+31 62 532 1380

info@stevenson.info
www.stevenson.info
[@stevenson_z](https://www.instagram.com/stevenson_z)