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Zanele Muholi, *Aphelile IV*, Durban, 2020 from the *Somnyama Ngonyama* series

In isolation, incubation

The Covid-19 lockdown has provoked shifts in practice for the gallery's artists. We take a look at what's happening in some of their home studios

On 1 June, South Africa entered its 66th day of restricted movement. Instead of our physical galleries, we opened new kinds of spaces, experimenting with audio platforms and producing video material to facilitate access to our

programme, however remote. Similarly, artists adapted to the novel variant of normal life with their own renegotiation of space, skill and time.

Wim Botha and Simphiwe Ndzube evidence materially CONT.->

Simon Gush, *S.G.*, 59 Joubert Street, Johannesburg, 2020, still from HD video

cont.→ domesticated versions of their practices. Ndzube's hybrid, magical-realist creatures shifted from large-scale canvas to paper, while Botha produced maquettes of future sculptures using clay at his improvised studio. This pragmatism is echoed by Zanele Muholi in the creation of a recent self-portrait. About *Aphelile IV, Durban, 2020*, in which their gaze is framed by gloves and masks, they state simply, 'I have to make use of what is at my disposal.'

Steven Cohen describes *fallen sparks of divine light*, a new body of work made in his home studio in Lille, as a process of 'regathering the strewn shards of a shattered world'. His objects are arranged in intimate constellations about which he has written, 'from catastrophe comes creation, and this work – scavenged and assembled from elements I have found in my home during the Covid-19 lockdown – concretises loss, the long-lasting and the short-lived.'

For Simon Gush, the opportunity for reflection presented by loneliness is what informs *S.G.*, 59 Joubert Street, Johannesburg. His new 10-minute film is being shown as part of *Salaio*, the online programme of Mexico's Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC). In a conversation with curator Alejandra Labastida, Gush admits, 'This was supposed to be a different film. But like most of life right now it was overtaken by the pandemic and the questions I wanted to ask became filtered through my experience of this moment ... Making [this] was a way for me not to resolve the problems in my mind but to acknowledge how overwhelming it is.'

Mame-Diarra Niang and Deborah Poynton respectively approached the creation of images as a means to generate and share new forms of solace. Niang travelled via Google Maps to create *Call me when you get there*, a photo series in which they have found 'a

new territory made of memories, real life and short-lived incidences'. Niang adds, 'This is one of the most beautiful trips I have made in my life and it was travelling with my mind and technology.' Poynton, expanding on the impulse behind *Fool's Gold*, a group of new, small-scale works on board, writes, 'All I can think is this: it's OK to take comfort in images. The millions of fleeting smiles are achingly vulnerable. We might as well enjoy the play of light in the sky, or in a painting. We shouldn't be ashamed of sweetness.'

Simon Gush's film *S.G.*, 59 Joubert Street, Johannesburg can be viewed online until 28 June at <https://muac.unam.mx/exposicion/salaio-simon-gush?lang=en>

Stevenson Cape Town and Johannesburg are now open by appointment, with strict Covid-19 safety protocols in place. *Ududlilali* by Mawande Ka Zenzile, in Cape Town, and *Gymnasium* by Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi, in Johannesburg, continue until 27 June

An online imaginarium

Digital archivist
Lemeze Davids dives
into Hylton Nel's world

Hylton Nel's extensive body of work is now live in the form of a website. Dedicated to cataloguing six decades of the artist-potter's work, the site proved to be a healthy challenge when it came to sifting through and uploading countless ceramic objects and paintings to the digital archive. I found the task something akin to opening a treasure chest.

While the idiosyncrasies of Nel's work are both unique and instantly



Hylton Nel, *In the time of the corona virus known as Covid 19*, 2020, set of 12 glazed ceramic stoneware plates

recognisable, there seems to be a sway between the playful and the serious in his subject matter. It's possible for your eye to fall upon a flirtatious plate depicting two lovers; next, a somber societal criticism inscribed on the body of a vase;

and then, an ornament that houses both the playful and the serious. These objects seem to acknowledge memories and ideas in Nel's personal life, while fitting hand-in-hand with global and local moments, including the 2007 Rugby World Cup, Nelson Mandela's birthday, and the election of the USA's 44th president, Barack Obama.

Nel's oeuvre is packed with colourful characters, quirky vases and statement plates. The works have the capacity not only to surprise but to fascinate. It was all too easy to forget I was populating a website with images, and simply get lost in the 'imaginarium' of Hylton Nel.

Visit www.hyltonnel.co.za



Viviane Sassen's *Venus & Mercury*, originally conceived for the Palace of Versailles, has been extended to occupy all 14 rooms and the garden of Huis Marseille in Amsterdam. For the museum's souterrain space, Sassen has constructed a paper sculpture using large prints of images that were shot at Versailles, cut up to symbolise the

downfall of the French monarchy during the French Revolution. 'I wanted to make an animal-like shape that related to the idea of the "Female Harpy" – a nod towards the caricatures that were made to discredit Marie Antoinette,' says Sassen. The exhibition is on view with extended opening hours until 30 August.

Calendar Jun-Aug

Dates are subject to coronavirus-related flux; please check gallery and museum websites before visiting.

From 1 June
Open by appointment
Mawande Ka Zenzile's solo exhibition at Stevenson Cape Town, *Udludlilali*, featuring painting, sculpture, installation, is extended TO 27 JUN

From 1 June
Open by appointment
Gymnasium, Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi's first solo exhibition with the gallery, is on view at Stevenson Johannesburg TO 27 JUN

1 June
Viviane Sassen's *Venus & Mercury*, a body of work born in Versailles, takes over 14 rooms and the garden of Huis Marseille in Amsterdam TO 30 AUG

15 June
Simon Gush's film *S.G., 59 Joubert Street, Johannesburg* premieres online at Mexico's MUAC, <https://muac.unam.mx/exposicion/sala10-simon-gush> TO 28 JUN

15 June
Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi exhibits in *FIVE*, a virtual exhibition curated by Nina Chanel Abney at <http://five.webuygold.wtf> TO 30 JUN

16 June
Youth Day, South Africa

16 June
The 22nd Sydney Biennale, *NIRIN*, reopens; Zanele Muholi's work can be seen at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia; Paulo Nazareth's *Indigenous Lands* is on view at Cockatoo Island TO 6 SEP



17 June
Stevenson presents 9 Works – featuring Jane Alexander, Kamala Ibrahim Ishag, Moshekwa Langa (above), Zanele Muholi, Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi, Viviane Sassen, Claudette Schreuders, Penny Siopis and Portia Zvavahera – on Art Basel's Online Viewing Rooms. The fair previews 17 and 18 June, and opens to the public on 19 June from 1pm at <https://www.artbasel.com/viewing-rooms> TO 26 JUN

25 June
This year's National Arts Festival, usually in Makhanda, is entirely virtual, taking place at <https://www.nationalartsfestival.co.za>. Simon Gush's films are included on two exhibitions, *Sounding the Land* and *Here* TO 5 JUL

30 June
Works by Jo Ractliffe and Guy Tillim are part of *A toi appartient*

le regard ... ('To you belongs the gaze ...'), the first major exhibition at the Musée de quai Branly, Paris, to focus on contemporary images TO 1 NOV

1 July
Memory is the Weapon, Robin Rhode's survey exhibition spanning nearly 20 years of artistic output, travels to Kunsthalle Krems, Austria TO 1 NOV



3 July
Open by appointment
Neo Matloga's first solo show with Stevenson, *Back of the Moon*, opened online in May and now comes to Stevenson Johannesburg TO 22 AUG

Mid-July
Date to be announced
At Stevenson Cape Town, Guy Tillim exhibits *Hotel Universo*, *Second Nature* and *Dar es Salaam and Abidjan*, three artist books and selected prints, alongside extended viewing rooms

9 August
Women's Day, South Africa

11 August
Last days to see collages by Viviane Sassen on *The Tears of Eros*; *Moesman*, *Surrealism and the Sexes*

at Centraal Museum in Utrecht, the Netherlands TO 16 AUG

19 August
Last week to see *Des marches, démarches* (*Walking: ways of thinking, ways of moving*) at Frac Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur in Marseilles, including works by Guy Tillim TO 23 AUG

19 August
Last days to see Mame-Diarra Niang and Viviane Sassen exhibit in *Pictures from Another Wall* at the De Pont Museum in Tilburg, the Netherlands TO 23 AUG

24 August
Last week to see Portia Zvavahera's small survey, *Walk of Life*, at the ICA Indian Ocean, Mauritius TO 28 AUG



25 August
Last week to view Simon Gush's *Welcome to Frontier Country* on *Every Leaf is an Eye* at Göteborgs Konsthall, Sweden TO 30 AUG

To make an appointment to visit Stevenson, please email cpt@stevenson.info in Cape Town or jhb@stevenson.info in Johannesburg.

Don't miss these ongoing shows

→ **Extended to 20 September**
Body Performance features Viviane Sassen at the Helmut Newton Foundation in Berlin

→ **Until 11 October**
Robin Rhode has work in *Come Out!*, an exhibition drawn from the Christen Sveaas Art Foundation, at Kistefos museum in Norway

→ **Until 18 October**
Pieter Hugo's *There's a Place in Hell for Me and My Friends* is included in *Civilisation, Photography, Now* at the Auckland Art Gallery, New Zealand. Next stop for this travelling show is the Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée, Marseille (February to June 2021).

→ **Extended until November**
Nicholas Hlobo, Mawande Ka Zenzile and Nandipha Mntambo are included in *Materality* at the Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town

→ **Until 8 November**
Pieter Hugo exhibits in *Through an African Lens: Sub-Saharan Photography from the Museum's Collection* at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston

→ **Until 20 November**
Portia Zvavahera has work on *Psychic Wounds: On Art & Trauma* at The Warehouse in Dallas, Texas

→ **Extended to 6 December**
Indian Ocean Current at the

McMullen Museum of Art in Boston includes 'artistic narratives' by Penny Siopis and Nicholas Hlobo

→ **Until 3 January 2021**
Zanele Muholi exhibits on *Being Seen*, recent photographic acquisitions at the Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, Florida

→ **Until March 2021**
Wim Botha's *Still Life with Discontent*, previously in Durham, North Carolina, shows at 21C Museum Hotel in Louisville, Kentucky

→ **Until 30 May 2021**
Meleko Mokgosi: Your Trip to Africa is on view at the Pérez Art Museum Miami. And Mokgosi's *Pan-African Pulp* is at the University of Michigan Museum of Art until Fall 2021

→ **Until 3 October 2021**
Dada Khanyisa has work on *Heroes: Principles of African Greatness* at the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC

Upcoming

Dates to be announced soon

Zanele Muholi's first major UK survey exhibition will take place at Tate Modern, London

Global(e) Resistance, at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, looks at contemporary strategies of resistance in the work of artists including Penny Siopis, Kemang Wa Lehuley, Meschac Gaba, Barthélémy Toguo and Paulo Nazareth



Clockwise from top left: Mawande Ka Zenzile, Sinazo Chiya, Nomusa Makhubu and Kabelo Malatsie

'The work showed me the way'

Mawande Ka Zenzile's monograph, *Uhambo luyazilawula*, launched in May with a Zoom discussion between the artist, editor/moderator Sinazo Chiya, and contributors Nomusa Makhubu and Kabelo Malatsie. The panelists discussed the origins of the texts and the broader implications of Ka Zenzile's practice, ultimately questioning institutional thinking and the ideology informing it. Some extracts follow

SC Mawande, how did this text-making process work for you, where you entrust people with your work and allow them the room to formulate their own ways of thinking using your images?

MKZ Let me begin with how I work. I feel like the main thread with my practice goes around the idea of the human condition, and how I navigate that and navigate life. Instead of reading from a book how to navigate this, I think the work itself is the one that showed me the way and I'm sharing my

experience with the audience. It's like sometimes you read a book or a novel and then you find yourself as a character in the narrative. I believe you can find something like that in art. But I think what's stopping us from accessing those kinds of 'antidotes', those kinds of clues, is the way we are conditioned. Education in general has entrapped our understanding of the world based on very materialistic, superficial things. My work taught me to negotiate space and people, engage in ideas – because these ideas are central to the problem we

are experiencing in the world. Based on the engagements that I've had with the authors/writers/curators, there was something that spoke to me. I have a different connection with each of them, but it's a very authentic connection. I think the trust arose from that connection.

SC Nomusa and Kabelo, if Mawande had foreseen in a way what your perspectives would be, how was it actually stepping into and approaching his work? Both of you have long-standing relationships with Mawande. Nomusa, you taught him at Michaelis, and Kabelo, you worked professionally with him for a few years. How was it for you engaging with his work in this way?

NM You've just said that I taught Mawande – in fact, I think Mawande taught me. Reading Mawande's work is always a journey because his work

is an open-ended question. Looking now at work that I've seen a few years back, I can never reach the same conclusion about it. It's pointing out things that are difficult to say, but it also makes you ask, 'Is he saying something against me?' I've always enjoyed that cynicism because with his work, Mawande creates a space for healthy adversarial engagement. One needs that kind of space for intellectual engagement.

KM Like Nomusa, I also learnt a lot from Mawande. The conversation wasn't adversarial as such but it definitely wasn't based on commonality, or that we think the same thing and therefore we can draw similar conclusions. That made it possible for me to think about his work from Johnny Dyani's perspective, because I took the freedom to read what I could from his way of working and thinking. I think it's Mawande's adversarial nature that pushes you. It's challenging, and he doesn't settle for things, so you have to push yourself. I had the room to be open to thinking about many different things. I could be myself, in a sense, while writing about his work.

*

SC In the texts there's an emphasis on the ideas that the work prompts, compared to the formal attributes. I wonder how you balance that, Mawande? And how do you, the writers, understand the work materially, because your texts lean on what it offers more than what it is?

MKZ I believe there's a constant conversation in my head and for some reason it was sort of protected from the outside world, so that it could survive until this day. I remember the time of the shift that happened in my practice, because there are certain insights that come

about as I am making my work. I don't know where they come from. Sometimes it's as if a book fell on my head or something from a dream. They come from somewhere and they are the ones that show me the way. There was a time when I was thinking, 'I am making art and I am not trying to influence the policy-makers to change how things should be.' My work is going to be exhibited in the gallery. I am not in parliament. So as little as I can do, and with my little understanding of how the world is, I remain content with that. I felt like there is someone that I am talking to and that someone understands. It's like that saying, 'those who know, know.'

NM I think Mawande's work functions by what it prompts. The installations themselves – the cladding, the bed, the change in the gallery environment – shift you away from saying, 'Let me look at the formal aspects and read it for that.' Mawande's materials are sort of synecdoches. You have to read them in relation to something else. Otherwise I think one misses the message. The work that we see now where Mawande is sitting [*Ascended Masters*], I can't imagine how I could read that based on its formal aspects only. You are forced to think about the politics of religion, politics of power. Each name has an entire historical luggage that comes with it. It forces you to bring your knowledge, and for some people there are names that one doesn't recognise. So now you are starting to think, 'Wow, is there something wrong in my education where I don't know this part of history?' It's actually like solving a riddle or puzzle.

KM I've never been comfortable with the question of formality. Also, because I am Lobedu, my version of formality doesn't quite feature in

the same way that is does for South Africans whose language is written and understood 'officially'. And my training isn't 'formal'. I don't come with a fine art background. I've gotten into the arts from a self-taught perspective so I am uncomfortable with painting which claims to come with a particular history of making. What Mawande's work has allowed me is to be comfortable with my lack of formal understanding. Some writers can tell you what something specific is referencing but with Mawande's work I can bring my own formality, which is what I know in reading the work. In a sense, I am not trying to understand his work, I am trying to understand my reading of his work. And so I could approach the text in a way that was more liberating because I think my text does not say anything about Mawande, but rather that I want to write in a particular way. Essentially, what the text says is that because he's practicing in this way, I can write however I want to write. That's the kind of formal break it presents – having a relation with other practices versus trying to mediate the understanding of his practice.

The full discussion can be watched at <https://vimeo.com/427666636/461e8f1c4a>



The monograph can be read online via <https://www.stevenson.info/publication/mawande-ka-zenzile/uhambo-luyazilawula>
The printed book is forthcoming from Stevenson

Black Lives Matter

What we're reading, listening to and watching

An issue that has taken precedence during this period has been the Black Lives Matter movement, happening globally. Individually and collectively, our priority has been grappling with our position in this historic moment, thinking through terms such as 'complicity', 'solidarity' and 'systemic injustice', as well as the implications of these for honest action. A reading group formed within the gallery considered the black square circulated during #BlackOutTuesday as a text. Some of their perspectives follow.

LD So the black box, from what I've found out, was started by two black women in the music industry, specifically for the music industry black-out. And then it got co-opted and spread like wildfire as a way to show solidarity. I think it's interesting how it changed from a very specific purpose into people's intentions. It could have been pushed so the movement's hashtag was blank. It's possible to twist something meant as expression into suppression. It makes people accidentally complicit in their own erasure.

SC What does it mean for us to use the black box and the hashtag here? This country has a lot of amnesia as well as extreme transparency. In Cape Town alone the spatial planning spells out centuries of methodical violence.

LJ I understand that this can be a gesture of solidarity from not having the words to say how you feel, or the words you think are useful. But I feel that if you post the black box you

should say more in your captions or share links where people can get information or donate. With the police brutality in South Africa, the only time I've seen people speak out is when they link it to what's happening in the US – which seems like a cop-out. I think we should be doing more, there's too much happening in our communities that we're not speaking about. It's also about educating yourself, really engaging.

LD We've spoken before about how it's easier to look out of a window than into a mirror. America seems to exist sometimes as this imperfect stage. We'll often have the same happenings here but it seems it takes us seeing it on the stage of the US for something to *click*.

SN I am generally wary of telling people they need to do more. As a black woman who is a part of a predominantly white-owned institution you're often told that you're a sell-out by being in a white space without seemingly doing anything to change it. There's a lot you can do that not many people will *see* so for me the most important thing is to show people they *can* do something, as opposed to telling them they *should* do something. Systems of oppression – capitalism, fascism, racism – are so complex that the first person who is often tasked with the 'doing' is the victim. I think we have to acknowledge that *sometimes*, as a person of colour, you are doing a lot by just being alive.

SC If we're all agreed that by luck or by fate, you're born into a

particular body which places you in a community, do you then have a responsibility to 'dismantle' if you're born on the side of those designated the 'oppressors, and do you have another responsibility to do another kind of dismantling if you're designated the 'oppressed'?

DC As someone born into privilege I think there is a responsibility to always educate yourself and never reach the point where you feel certain that when people say 'all white people are racist' they aren't talking to you. You have to keep confronting yourself, other people, even your family. It's not necessarily responsibility but it comes with knowing that you got 'the good deal' – so pass it on. Make sure you don't perpetuate it. Do everything you can to stop it. And whatever you're doing, you need to always do more.

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_za