

Art

A Contemporary Take on Bosch's "Garden of Earthly Delights"

Simphiwe Ndzube masterly weaves Bosch's iconography into his macabre landscapes that reflect water scarcity.



Kealey Boyd September 1, 2021



Simphiwe Ndzube, "The Blossom of the Corpse Flower" (2020), acrylic on canvas and mixed media (image courtesy the artist, Nicodim Gallery and Marten Elder)

DENVER — The book of Genesis describes the location of Eden as a paradise from which four rivers flow. The painting [“The Garden of Earthly Delights” \(1490-1500\)](#) by artist [Hieronymus Bosch](#) represents the geographic landmarks with a pink baptismal fountain and fantastical blue orbs with spires and spikes. Five-hundred years later, one of these symbolic orbs is being carted away in artist [Simphiwe Ndzube’s new series *Oracles of the Pink Universe*](#) — Eden is now wherever water springs.

Ndzube was raised in Masiphumelele, South Africa, a township that battled for safe water since its establishment in the 1980s. Today, after six years of drought, water shortages have threatened to turn off taps from Johannesburg to Nelson Mandela Bay. [Most dams are nearly empty](#), like the Kouga dam which is at 3.98% capacity, the lowest level since construction completed in 1969. The second largest dam in the Eastern Cape, Impofu, can hold 100 million liters of water, but sits at 16.6% full. The artist told Hyperallergic that he returned home this year to build a well and filtration system for his family. “Most of the white families around that area had wells to maintain gardens, and some were converting well water into drinkable water. I took that as inspiration.” Now, the artist lives in Los Angeles, California, a state perennially on fire. “[In California] people use water as if it is abundant. Cape Town almost ran out of water, and it taught people how to conserve.”



Simphiwe Ndzube, “Dondolo, the Witch Doctor’s Assistant” (2020), mixed media on canvas (image courtesy Denver Art Museum)

The artist expresses water as a blue ripple pattern, achieved through preprinted duct tape, a material used to fix anything in a pinch. This design returns frequently in his paintings, but the water is always in retreat, such as in “When Grass Meets Fire” (2020). A thick orange substance replaces the water and abundantly pours from a fish’s mouth. A stoic person in a bucket hat resigns to a puddle. Similarly, Bosch used dirty canals to communicate the boundaries of hell in contrast with the sky-blue waters that drew Eden’s edge.

The dense symbolism of Ndzube’s paintings and sculptures makes them tempting to hunt for meaning, but the dualities are many. A corpse flower, which robs noses from faces with its stench, adopts the same color as the rose fountain in “The Garden of Earthly Delights,” which served as a symbol of fertility at the time. And while the gestures of the paintings’ inhabitants are reminiscent of Christian illustrated manuscripts used by Bosch, the hand signals are a different language: curse words performed by South African youth. Ndzube masterly weaves Bosch’s iconography into his own landscapes, as both artists address the destruction of creation.

Most unique to Ndzube’s work are the figures that physically emerge from the canvas with actual, sewn-on clothing and strange limbs. They do more than theoretically trouble the space between real and imagined, sculpture and painting. When the feet and arms of Ndzube’s figures share air with the gallery visitor, they position water scarcity as a problem here and now, not elsewhere or in the future. Ndzube’s macabre imagery exists an ocean away, in the subconscious and in your backyard.



Simphiwe Ndzube, "When Grass Meets Fire" (2020), mixed media on canvas (image courtesy Denver Art Museum)

Simphiwe Ndzube: Oracles of the Pink Universe *continues at the Denver Art Museum (100 West 14th Avenue Pkwy, Denver, CO) through October 10.* The exhibition is curated by Laura F. Almeida, curatorial fellow of modern and contemporary art.

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Artist Simphiwe Ndzube Embraces Mystery as a Key Ingredient

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A self-portrait by Simphiwe Ndzube (2020).

In 2015, Simphiwe Ndzube graduated from Michaelis School of Fine Art in South Africa into an art world that he understood to be newly consumed by a long-overdue discussion about race and representation. “As important as that conversation” was, he says he “personally felt very constricted” by the sudden expectation that artists of color “say something about Blackness and subjugation.” Ndzube, who is as tenacious as he is independent, puts it simply: “I always prefer to have a conversation of my own.”

Ndzube’s work is like a kaleidoscope in which harsh reality enmeshes with hallucination and worlds weave in and out of each other, fantastic color exploding at their intersections. At once flamboyant and mystical, his practice is populated by evanescent figures that sprawl out in his paintings and strut through his exhibitions as sculptures. Sometimes these buoyant bodies are caught diving between the two realms—an

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Ndzube's chimeric assemblages have a material humility that underscores the magic they emanate. These objects also play key roles in grand narratives that the artist constructs. Inspired by mythology, Ndzube metabolizes experiences of migration, exploitation and precarity through fictive worlds like that of the "mine moon," a far off celestial body plagued by colonizers, the invented history of which structured his most recent show with Nicodim Gallery in Los Angeles, "In the Order of Elephants After the Rain."

Like that of a psychedelic Hieronymus Bosch, his work is inlaid with visual symbols that repeat across exhibitions and often appear as both objects and images. Perhaps the most striking of these is the umbrella, but there are also birds, traffic cones, sand, rafts and dinghies. When I sheepishly admit to Ndzube that, even after much deliberation, the iconographic order in his work remains impenetrable to me, he replies excitedly and with a laugh, "it's impenetrable to me too!" It's rare to find an artist so driven by the ongoing mystery of the things they make and this energy is what makes his work so immediately pleasurable. With a number of international solo exhibitions on the horizon, Ndzube will no doubt be creating for years to come.

BLUM GALLERY | TOM ANHOLT, SIMPHIWE NDZUBE, AND SAM MOYER

THREE EXHIBITIONS RUN
CONCURRENTLY AT BLUM IN LOS
ANGELES THROUGH DECEMBER 16TH

Written by Annie Bush



Simphiwe Ndzube: *Chorus*. Installation view, 2023. BLUM, Los Angeles. © Simphiwe Ndzube; Courtesy of the artist and BLUM Los Angeles, Tokyo, New York. Photo: Evan Walsh

This season, three shows are running concurrently at BLUM Gallery in Los Angeles. From November 4 through December 16th, BLUM presents: Tom Anholt: *Sticks and Stones*, Simphiwe Ndzube: *Chorus*, and Sam Moyer: *Circle of Confusion*. Formerly Blum & Poe, the newly rebranded BLUM gallery continues to serve as a steward of the international arts community by putting a series of diverse artists in conversation with one another within the gallery space— all of whom are presenting their first solo exhibitions with the gallery.



Simphiwe Ndzube: *Chorus*. Installation view, 2023. BLUM, Los Angeles. © Simphiwe Ndzube; Courtesy of the artist and BLUM Los Angeles, Tokyo, New York. Photo: Evan Walsh

Los Angeles-based and Cape Town-born artist, **Simphiwe Ndzube**, has long sketched out a fictional surrealist universe known as *Mine Moon*. In the past, Ndzube's *Mine Moon* has been constructed with multimedia materials adhered to acrylic on canvas; *Chorus* expands the universe multilaterally— *Chorus* uses oil paint, carving, and sometimes sand to achieve a pointillist effect, exploring the capacity of material and subject to act as vessels for the inspection of tradition. Honoring Black choral music traditions in South Africa (particularly Amakwaya, a traditional Zulu choir that

promotes Zulu culture), *Chorus* is the first installment in a new series that Ndzube has titled *Amakwaya*, as it takes the culture and imagery associated with musical stylings of the same name as its subject matter.



Tom Anholt: *Sticks and Stones*. Installation view, 2023. BLUM, Los Angeles. © Tom Anholt, 2023 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn; Courtesy of the artist and BLUM Los Angeles, Tokyo, New York. Photo: Evan Walsh.

Tom Anholt's *Sticks and Stones* is a series of vignettes on linen. Toying with formal styles of depth and of medium, Anholt worked on the series concurrent with his twin sister, Maddy's diagnosis and subsequent struggle with brain cancer. As such, the endeavor of recognizability comes to the forefront of the series— while *Sticks and Stones* manifested, Maddy's condition deteriorated— the longer Anholt painted, the less recognizable his sister became. Maddy passed as Anholt was finishing the exhibition's concluding work, *Drifting Away* (2023). The series honors her life. Anholt imbues images of the natural world with unique palettes and symbols distinctly tied to his own intimate experience of loss, interweaving universal human experience with his own iteration of sorrow. In *Sticks and Stones*, the Berlin-based artist communicates loss in a visual language unique to his own hand, but translatable to all.



Tom Anholt: *Sticks and Stones*. Installation view, 2023. BLUM, Los Angeles. © Tom Anholt, 2023 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn; Courtesy of the artist and BLUM Los Angeles, Tokyo, New York. Photo: Evan Walsh.



Sam Moyer: *Circle of Confusion*. Installation view, 2023. BLUM, Los Angeles. © Sam Moyer; Courtesy of the artist and BLUM Los Angeles, Tokyo, New York. Photo: Evan Walsh

Sam Moyer never studied painting. The Brooklyn-based artist, known for her multimedia works, is exhibiting a series of paintings and photographs titled *Circle of Confusion*, named for a photography term that defines the area of focus within an image; an area where a point of light develops into a sharp, well-defined circle. Moyer began *Circle of Confusion* in 2020 as a solution to a problem, and, as the project took shape, so too did the problem: the work dilates, reforms, and slips in and out of focus, using the flattened, cold, “Payne’s Gray” color to invoke the moment after sunset before total darkness. In addition to the paintings, Moyer is displaying seven new photographic works, all images of the eroded sea walls built on the beaches of Gardiners Bay on Long Island. Melancholy and provocative, *Circle of Confusion* harkens the liminal space between focus and periphery, between solution and schematic.



Sam Moyer: *Circle of Confusion*. Installation view, 2023. BLUM, Los Angeles. © Sam Moyer; Courtesy of the artist and BLUM Los Angeles, Tokyo, New York. Photo: Evan Walsh

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Art, BLUM, Annie Bush, Tom Anholt, Simphiwe Ndzube, Sam Moyer, Flaunt Magazine

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MATTERS OF OBSESSION

Simphiwe Ndzube's magical, borderless world of celebration



📷 *Entering the House of Spirits. Photograph Simphiwe Ndzube, courtesy of Stevenson, Amsterdam, Cape Town and Johannesburg*

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Ndzube's work is an alternative reality in which the boundaries between the possible and impossible, the visible and the invisible, and fact and fiction dissolve to reveal a transformative imaginary world.

"Any space where you are able to stop and recreate your own reality in whatever way is an act of resistance," Simphiwe Ndzube told Lindsay Preston Zappas on the [Carla project podcast](https://contemporaryartreview.la/interview-with-simphiwe-ndzube/) (<https://contemporaryartreview.la/interview-with-simphiwe-ndzube/>).

A "born-free", raised in post-apartheid South Africa, Ndzube's reality is that of a South African immigrant and artist who has been living and creating in Los Angeles for several years. The art he makes is a reimagining of epic proportions; Ndzube begets an entire world that he is "constantly in the process of expanding and creating as a way to allow imagination and opportunities to come to life".

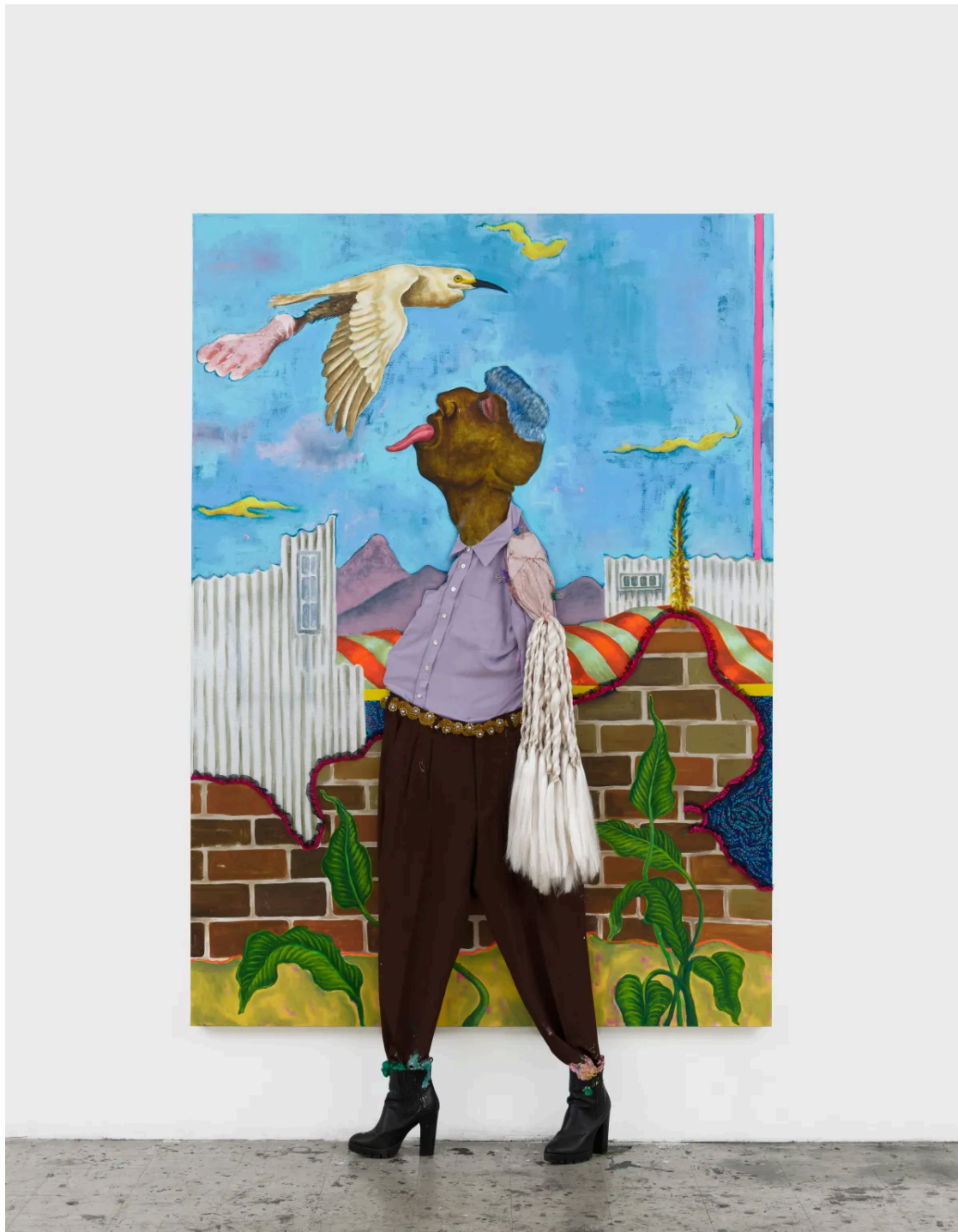
Based in a fictional landscape named Mine Moon, Ndzube's world takes its name from "the space that has characterised the apartheid geographical layout of South Africa". It stems from the postcolonial reality of an exploited land and people, stripped of natural resources, devalued and shoved into tiny, limiting boxes so as to further the colonial mission.

The characters that populate Mine Moon are a reimagining of the bodies of colour that were so brutalised by the apartheid regime, limited in all aspects of their lives. These are the bodies that were told where they could go and where they couldn't, where they must live and where they mustn't, who they were allowed to love, what they were able to achieve and what they could believe in.

The Mine Moon that Ndzube cultivates, however, takes these oppressive boundaries and tramples them in its dynamism. It is an ever-morphing, fluid and limitless place. The characters who inhabit it are shifting, fantastic and complex – almost grotesque in their genderless ambiguity. Their forms, free from any restriction, exist half on the canvas and half off; they crawl or roll across the gallery floor and swing from ropes attached to the ceiling.

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Tender Song of Melodies Set Free, 2020. The Fantastic Ride to Gwadana at Stevenson Gallery; Photograph Simphiwe Ndzube, courtesy of Stevenson, Amsterdam, Cape Town and Johannesburg

Mine Moon “offers new possibilities of being and becoming for the shack dwellers of South Africa. It reimagines the borders created to limit movement and imagination,” Ndzube explains. The fantastical world acknowledges the “betrayal and broken promise” of a new and democratic South Africa that continues to plague South Africans of today in the form of blatant and racially divided inequality and poverty. But it also imagines an alternative reality, in which the lines between fiction and fact, the visible and the invisible, and the thinkable and unthinkable are continually traversed.

Ndzube takes significant inspiration from the literary genre of magical realism, naming Gabriel García Márquez, Zakes Mda, and David Lynch among the influential figures for his work. The genre, which incorporates fantastic or mythical elements into otherwise realistic fiction, blurs the already thin line between reported fact and the imagined.



As They Rode Along the Edge. The Fantastic Ride to Gwadana at Stevenson Gallery; Photograph Simphiwe Ndzube, courtesy of Stevenson, Amsterdam, Cape Town and Johannesburg

In an [essay about Marquez](https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/vo4/n17/salman-rushdie/angel-gabriel) (<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/vo4/n17/salman-rushdie/angel-gabriel>), the British/Indian novelist Salman Rushdie wrote that magical realism is a “development of surrealism that expresses a genuinely ‘Third World’ consciousness”. The genre “deals with what Naipaul [the late Trinidad and Tobago-born British writer] has called ‘half-made’ societies, in which the impossibly old struggles against the appallingly new, in which public corruptions and private anguishes are more garish and extreme than they ever get in the so-called ‘North’, where centuries of wealth and power have formed thick layers over the surface of what’s really going on”.

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Post-apartheid South Africa is a great example of Rushdie's "Third World consciousness". The ghosts of past traumas haunt and clash with the national myths (<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-01-06-no-country-for-old-myths/>), surrounding our new democracy. How can we call independent South Africa a "rainbow nation" when so many of its towns are still shadowed by poorer twin townships whose populations overwhelmingly comprise people of colour? Or when most private schools have a student body that is disproportionately white? Wealth disparity is just one of the many aspects of contemporary South African life that continue to be clearly and heartbreakingly racialised.



Abagula Ngenqondo Abayolwanga by Simphiwe Ndudze; Photograph Simphiwe Ndube, courtesy of Stevenson, Amsterdam, Cape Town and Johannesburg

The break between what we are told to believe and what is true opens up an ambiguous space in which things that happen do not really make sense: the absurdity of some political truths, the unsolved mysteries/deaths/disappearances that occurred during apartheid, the nonsensical rules arbitrarily enforced by racist policing systems; all of these things leave us in a kind of twilight zone, in a "half-made" space where crazy events do happen.

Mine Moon lives in this crack between reality and fantasy, but instead of letting the nation's slippery grasp on truth weigh him down, Ndube takes matters into his own hands. His work imagines a different reality, a space of celebration rather than degradation, of inclusivity in its wildest form. It's a space of fantastical protest, a space of play.

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“My work is so much based on openness. I bring to it what happens naturally, and I allow it to be what it wants to be.” Expanding on the importance of play in his work, Ndzube states, “play is imperative to holding onto innocence and the hopeful perceptions that you have as a child. Play – not in its naivety, but its adult form – much like stand-up comedy, gives space to discuss with humour and compassion what is otherwise extremely difficult to talk about. After play, there is space for experimentation, trial, error and failure as important strategies for how we make sense of the world.”

The fluorescent landscapes and acrobatic movement of Ndzube's exhibition at the Stevenson Gallery in Johannesburg embody the type of boundary-pushing play he speaks of. Called *The Fantastic Ride to Gwadana* (<https://www.stevenson.info/exhibition/5483/installation-views>), this iteration of Mine Moon is loosely based on the real Gwadana, a region in the Eastern Cape known as a mecca for witchcraft.



Once Upon a Time, Mine-Moon, 2020. Like the Snake that Fed the Chameleon at Nicodim Gallery, Los Angeles; Photograph Lee Tyler Thompson, courtesy of the artist and Nicodim Gallery, Los Angeles and Bucharest.

“Legend has it that Gwadana is a place to be feared,” Ndzube explains. “It is a place that young Christians and priests speak about only when they are associating it with evil.”

Witch-hunting is an age-old and international phenomenon that often results in the harassment, persecution or execution of wrongfully accused community members, generally women. Ndzube's playful rendition of Gwadana “sought to transcend the oppressive qualities within this legend and offer an alternative imagined scenario”.

The characters frolic among multicoloured plants and run-down but cheerful-looking buildings. In *As They Rode Along the Edge* a creature rides on the back of another creature which does a handstand on a wheel that rolls along an arcane crack. *A Tender Song of Melodies Set Free* depicts a human-like inhabitant of Mine Moon with an arm of rope that protrudes from the canvas looking like a feathered wing. It sticks its tongue into the sky, licking (or serenading?) a bird flying overhead that sports a human foot instead of claws.

"The Mine Moon characters in this exhibition celebrate their own oddities and vulnerabilities, depicting the fictionalised Gwadana as a type of utopia wherein the societally persecuted are finally celebrated as equals. These characters are beautiful outcasts exposing the irrationality within supposedly rational post-apartheid societal structures," reads Ndzube's description of the exhibition.

Ndzube takes a harmful myth and turns it on its head, celebrating otherness rather than shaming it. Importantly, *The Fantastic Ride to Gwadana* doesn't shun the myth on which its inception is based (in the exhibition Gwadana it is still a mecca of witchcraft), it simply expands the myth to include a more positive and empathetic view of the outsider. The persecuted are "celebrated as equals", not as better or worse than the persecutors.



I am a Bird Now, 2021. Like the Snake that Fed the Chameleon at Nicodim Gallery; Photograph courtesy of the artist and Nicodim Gallery



Secrets of the Fields, 2021. Like the Snake that Fed the Chameleon at Nicodim Gallery; Photograph courtesy of the artist and Nicodim Gallery

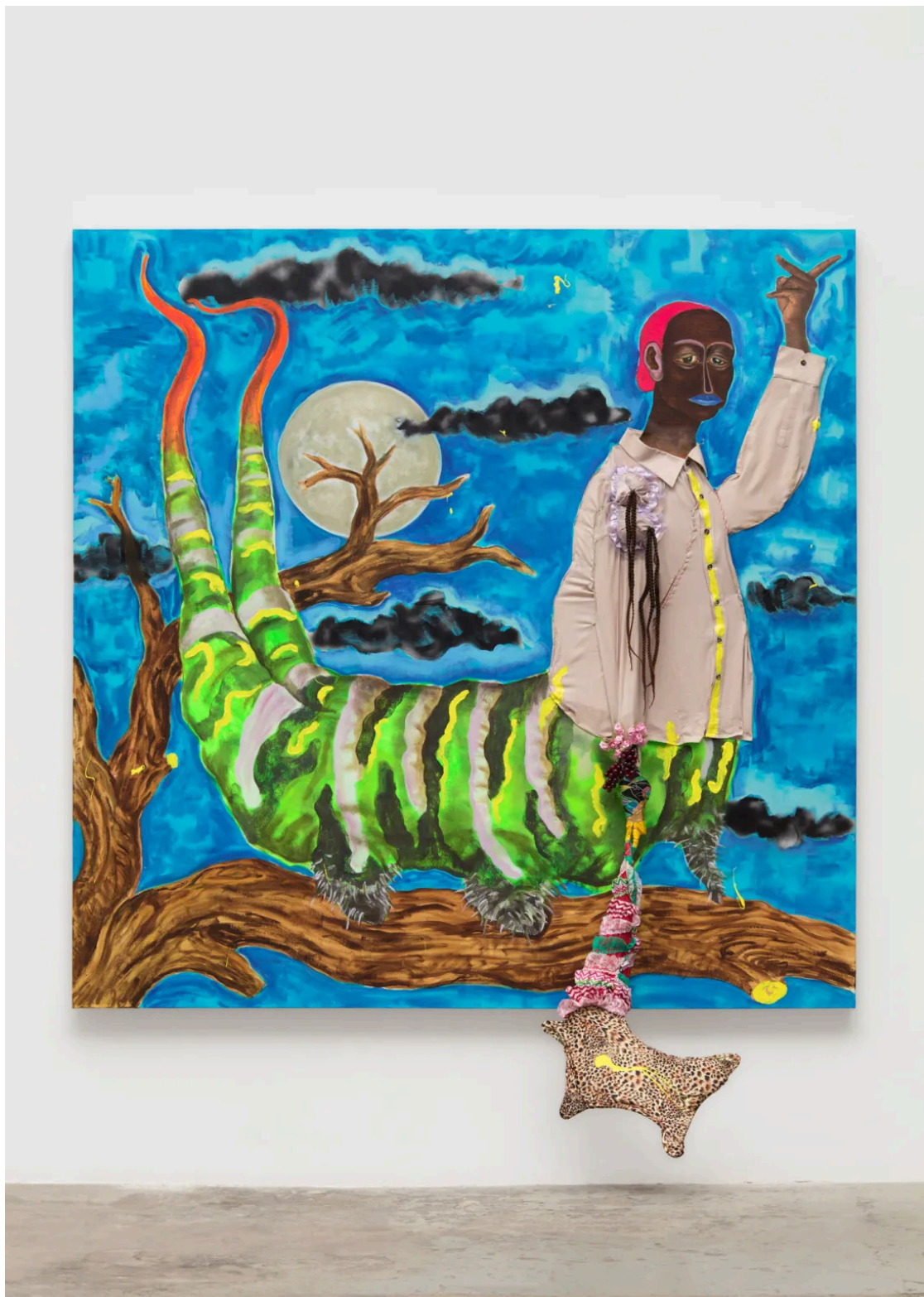
In a continuation of this inclusive celebration, Ndzube opened his most recent exhibition, *Like the Snake That Fed the Chameleon*, at Nicodim Gallery in Los Angeles a few weeks ago. Taking its title from [Solstice](https://twitter.com/rapturemyles/status/1229844965716570112?lang=en) (<https://twitter.com/rapturemyles/status/1229844965716570112?lang=en>), an Audre Lorde poem about leaving the past behind and becoming a better version of herself, the exhibition makes use of strong symbols of transformation. The snake that sheds and the chameleon that changes colour are, like the characters of Mine Moon, perpetually changing/moving/morphing.



Rainbow Nation of God, Cities on the Sky. Like the Snake that Fed the Chameleon at Nicodim Gallery; Photograph courtesy of the artist and Nicodim Gallery



TaBhiza, The Flâneur, 2021. Like the Snake that Fed the Chameleon at Nicodim Gallery; Photograph courtesy of the artist and Nicodim Gallery



Individuation, Manifest, 2021. Like the Snake that Fed the Chameleon at Nicodim Gallery; Photograph courtesy of the artist and Nicodim Gallery

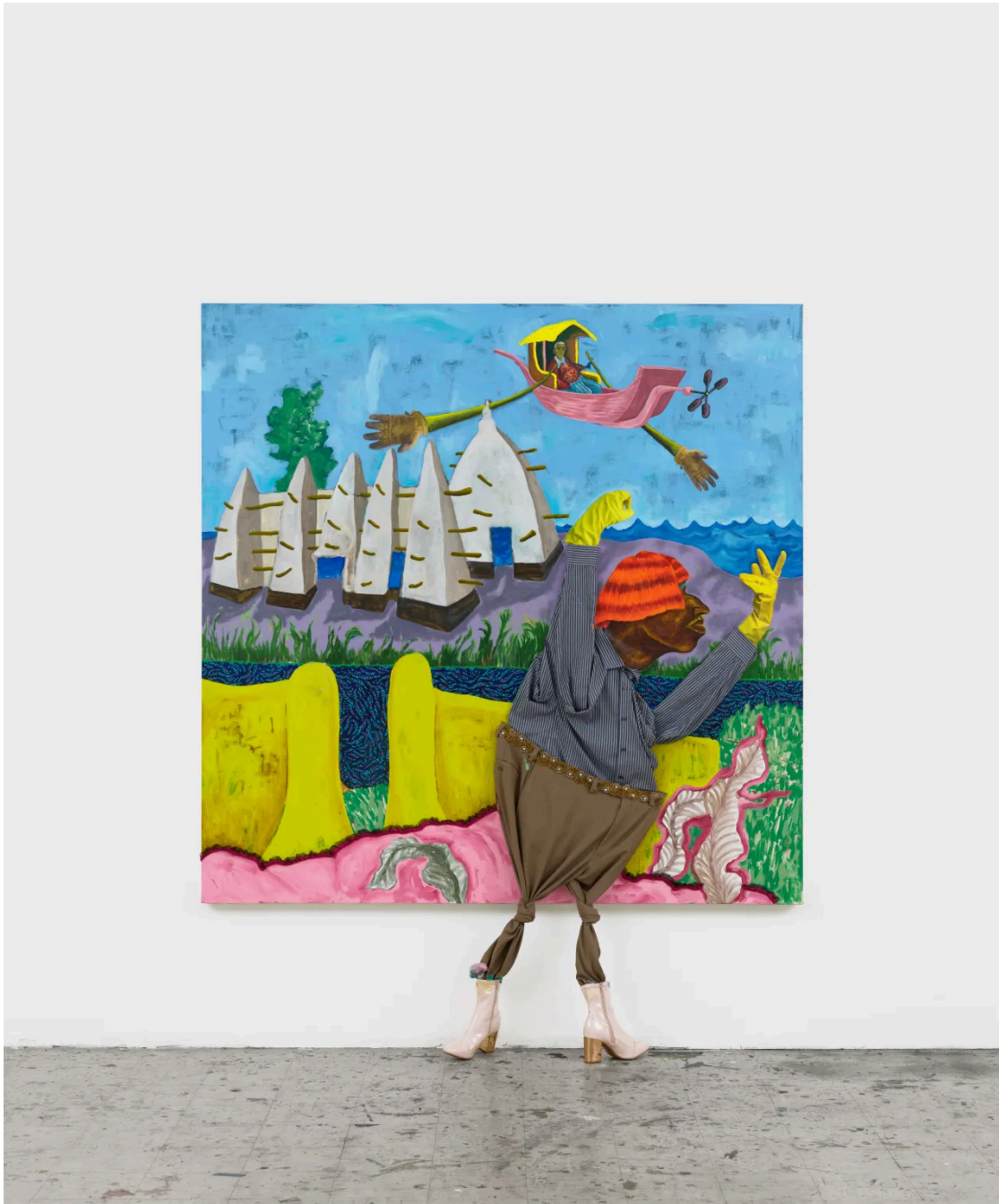


The Return from Heaven, 2021. Like the Snake that Fed the Chameleon at Nicodim Gallery; Photograph courtesy of the artist and Nicodim Gallery

The exhibition explores beauty in the erotic and the grotesque, “landscapes are transformed into sexual innuendos where water and blooming flowers suggest a season of spring and becoming”. This exhibition was Ndzube’s answer to the collective suffering and growth caused by the pandemic: “It is a declaration of a new season to come.”

But Ndzube also reminds us that time is cyclical, even in fantastical worlds. In thinking about the future, we must remember the past. The faces of the characters that now inhabit *Mine Moon* “are becoming the faces of the people that made up my adolescent world.”

Ndzube’s move to Los Angeles a few years ago “gave me a clean slate to reflect on what I thought home was. My reality of South Africa is based on my memory [...] It’s like this play between how you remember and what you remember, and the more you remember it, the more real that story becomes.” Just like old myths, memories are malleable and fragile. They can be manipulated for the good or the bad. “In missing my African people, the tension between remembering and forgetting is being explored in the faces of these [characters.]” How we memorialise things, and how we cannot allow even our memories to become stagnant or oppressive, become central parts of Ndzube’s work. Like the shedding snake in Lorde’s poem, weaknesses and trauma of the past must be recognised, consumed and turned into something new.



The Grand Entrance. The Fantastic Ride to Gwadana at Stevenson Gallery; Photograph Simphiwe Ndzube, courtesy of Stevenson, Amsterdam, Cape Town and Johannesburg



The Fantastic Ride to Gwadana. The Fantastic Ride to Gwadana at Stevenson Gallery; Photograph Simphiwe Ndzube, courtesy of Stevenson, Amsterdam, Cape Town and Johannesburg

Ndzube's work is not finished growing either. His characters have a "strong desire to adapt, transform and begin to take up space beyond the canvas". They go "far beyond the visual zone that they inhabit. This isn't necessarily limited to the gallery space."



Magwaza, 2021. Like the Snake that Fed the Chameleon at Nicodim Gallery; Photograph courtesy of the artist and Nicodim Gallery



Notumato, 2021. Like the Snake that Fed the Chameleon at Nicodim Gallery; Photograph courtesy of the artist and Nicodim Gallery

With the recent inclusion of a soundscape by Thabo K Makgolo and Zimbini Makwethu in *The Fantastic Ride to Gwadana*, Ndzube's world is fast expanding. Invoking the sonic version of "sorcery, witch-hunting and creatures that fly at night", the addition of sound further envelopes gallery visitors in the inclusive, playful world of Mine Moon.

Ndzube spoke on the Carla podcast about his next move: trying his hand at the moving image, in the form of video art. Who knows what kind of playful protest Ndzube's world will introduce us to next?

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Simphiwe Ndzube's first solo exhibition at the Cc Foundation in Shanghai

Comte de Lautreamont once wrote that surrealism is "as beautiful as the chance encounter of an umbrella and a sewing machine on an operating table." His account resonated with many of Simphiwe Ndzube's works in his first solo show in Asia. Ndzube depicts the antics of a cast of strange headless figures in erratic spaces. Umbrellas are often featured and incorporated alongside other incongruous objects, both real and depicted, including discarded clothing sewn onto the canvas, lamp shades and traffic cones. For the LA-based South African's exhibition, the Cc Foundation gallery was painted livid pink. The gallery is based in Shanghai's grey M50 art zone, a cluster of renovated industrial buildings. The works combined painting, collage and assemblage. Wearing their hybridity on their sleeve, they seemed to be born of a mix of historic surrealism reaching back to Hieronymus Bosch's nasty visions of hell, psychedelic funk, and Kwaito style.



Simphiwe Ndzube, *Untitled*, 2017. Acrylic on canvas, 253 x 411.50 cm. Image courtesy of Andrew Stooke.

In *Eclipse* (2017), a large painting spreading over two canvases, headless figures clad in a wardrobe of mismatched clothing cavort on a golden boat against a rosy sky. A contrasting green umbrella is tied to the prow and black birds circle the titular solar eclipse. Another faceless character is evoked with just a pink polka dot shirt, an aloof witness, so closely in the foreground that elements of their disheveled dress spill over the canvas' edge and into the viewers' space. Beyond the 'bling' of the exuberant pallet, the jazzy lilt to the composition and the reckless cartoonish quality, a sombre mood prevails. The boat, chocked up on dry land, is redundant. The eclipse and the wheeling black birds are ominous. On closer inspection, the figures, too, appear like the dismembered cadavers in Goya's *Disasters of War*. Their legs are bound tight at the ankles and end in serpentine whips, suggesting cruelty and oppression.

Similar features appear in *Waiting for Mulungu 3* (2017). The boat is supplanted by a swanky red car, but it too is merely a chassis balanced on bricks. It has clearly caused a stir; three figures elatedly somersault over it. They too are without heads, and presumably, do not realize that they are going nowhere. *Untitled, Levitated* (2018) was an assemblage in two parts. Suspended from the ceiling, the bundle of old clothing vaguely resembles a life-size yet bloated figure. Turned gently with its own momentum above a soiled traffic cone, it rests on a similarly grimy wooden pallet upon the floor. Without a recognizable head, the dangling object is nevertheless identified as a supine figure by a hand hanging at the end of a long white shirtsleeve and a shoe. An ostentatious parasol protruded at a jaunty angle from the 'sculpture'. An illuminated bulb on top of the cone seemed like a warning beacon, keeping the audience at bay. In common with works on canvas, the upbeat look of haphazard bricolage camouflaged other uneasy interpretations. In this case, the limp arm and bundled bulk bore a disturbing resemblance to the dying body of Hector Pieterse, carried by Mbuyisa Makhubu in Sam Nzima's iconic image of the June 16 Soweto uprising.



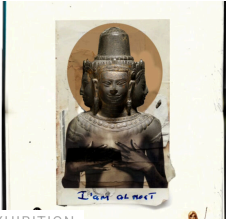
Simphiwe Ndzube, *The Stroller*, 2017. Installation view at Cc Foundation Art Centre, Shanghai. Image courtesy of Andrew Stooke.

In likeness to the surrealists, who turned to absurd and fantastical symbolic imagery as a purgative answer to the gruesome folly of industrialized warfare, Ndzube employs bizarre scenarios, and the juxtaposition of incongruous elements extracted from everyday life, to respond to more recent chapters of violence and injustice. The results are both optimistic and cathartic: an eclipse is a moment of change and a lamp a sign of enlightenment. Even a traffic cone gently directs a new route.

Andrew Stooke is a freelance writer for ART AFRICA.

FEATURED IMAGE: Simphiwe Ndzube, *Waiting for Mulungu*, 2018. Installation view. Image courtesy of Andrew Stooke.

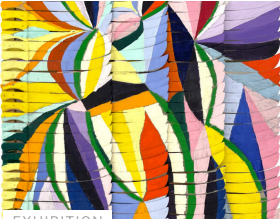
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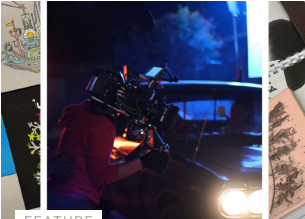
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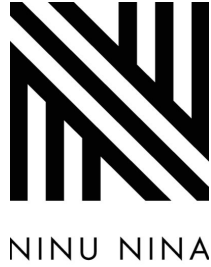
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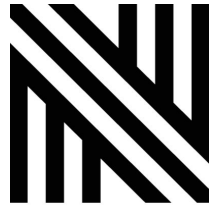


SIMPHIWE NDZUBE: PAINTING THE COSMOS

ART (/HOME/CATEGORY/ART), CREATIVE PEOPLE
(/HOME/CATEGORY/CREATIVE+PEOPLE), CULTURE
(/HOME/CATEGORY/CULTURE)

SIMPHIWE NDZUBE—A
VISIONARY ARTIST WHOSE
CANVASES PULSE WITH
THE RHYTHM OF MYTH,
MIGRATION, AND MAGIC.
FROM THE SUN-KISSED
SHORES OF POST-
APARTHEID CAPE TOWN
TO THE BUSTLING STREETS
OF LOS ANGELES,
NDZUBE'S JOURNEY IS A
TESTAMENT TO THE
POWER OF IMAGINATION
AND THE RESILIENCE OF
THE HUMAN SPIRIT.

BORN IN THE EASTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA,
NDZUBE'S ARTISTIC ODYSSEY BEGAN AGAINST THE
BACKDROP OF A NATION IN TRANSITION—A
LANDSCAPE FRAUGHT WITH BOTH PROMISE AND



NINU NINA

PERIL. BUT RATHER THAN SUCCUMB TO THE SHADOWS OF **OPPRESSION**, NDZUBE CHOSE TO ILLUMINATE THE VOICES OF THE UNHEARD, THE FORGOTTEN, AND THE MARGINALIZED. IN NDZUBE'S UNIVERSE, REALITY AND HALLUCINATION INTERTWINE, WEAVING A TAPESTRY OF COLOR, CHAOS, AND COSMIC WONDER. HIS CANVASES BURST FORTH WITH EVANESCENT FIGURES—ETHEREAL BEINGS CAUGHT BETWEEN WORLDS, THEIR FORMS SHIFTING AND CONTORTING IN A DANCE OF CREATION AND DESTRUCTION.

BUT IT'S NOT JUST THE IMAGERY THAT CAPTIVATES—IT'S THE NARRATIVE THAT UNDERPINS IT. INSPIRED BY MYTHOLOGY AND MAGICAL REALISM, NDZUBE CONSTRUCTS GRAND NARRATIVES THAT TRANSCEND TIME AND SPACE. FROM THE MYTHICAL REALMS OF THE "MINE MOON" TO THE UNCHARTED LANDS OF THE UNKNOWN, HIS ART INVITES VIEWERS ON A JOURNEY OF EXPLORATION AND DISCOVERY. AT THE HEART OF NDZUBE'S PRACTICE LIES A FUNDAMENTAL INTERACTION BETWEEN MEDIA, OBJECTS, AND TWO-DIMENSIONAL SURFACES—A DIALOGUE THAT GIVES VOICE TO THE BLACK EXPERIENCE IN PAST AND PRESENT-DAY SOUTH AFRICA. THROUGH PAINTING, SCULPTURE, AND SPATIAL INTERVENTION, HE CONSTRUCTS A COSMOLOGY THAT SPEAKS TO THE COMPLEXITIES OF IDENTITY, MIGRATION, AND RESILIENCE.

BUT PERHAPS MOST STRIKING OF ALL IS NDZUBE'S CELEBRATION OF THE HUMAN FORM—A CELEBRATION THAT FINDS EXPRESSION IN THE DANCES OF "**SWENKING**" AND "**PANTSULA**." THE SWENKAS, EXCLUSIVELY MALE, PEACOCK AGAINST ONE ANOTHER, PERFORMING ELABORATE DANCES TO CALL ATTENTION TO THE DETAILS OF THEIR FLAMBOYANT WESTERN-STYLE OUTFITS AND ACCESSORIES AS AN EXTENSION OF THEIR MASCULINITY AND DIGNITY. DRAWING INSPIRATION FROM SOUTH AFRICA'S WORKING-CLASS TRADITION OF PAGEANTRY, HIS ART PULSATES WITH THE ENERGY OF RAZZLE-DAZZLE MOTIFS, EVOKING RHYTHMS, MOTIONS, AND PERFORMATIVITY THAT TRANSCEND BOUNDARIES AND DEFY CATEGORIZATION.

IN 2015, SIMPHIWE NDZUBE GRADUATED FROM MICHAELIS SCHOOL OF FINE ART IN SOUTH AFRICA INTO AN ART WORLD THAT HE UNDERSTOOD TO BE NEWLY CONSUMED BY A LONG-OVERDUE DISCUSSION ABOUT RACE AND REPRESENTATION. "AS IMPORTANT AS THAT CONVERSATION" WAS, HE SAYS HE "PERSONALLY FELT VERY CONSTRICTED" BY THE SUDDEN EXPECTATION THAT ARTISTS OF COLOR "SAY



NINU NINA

SOMETHING ABOUT BLACKNESS AND SUBJUGATION.”

AS NDZUBE CONTINUES TO SHUTTLE BETWEEN CONTINENTS, HIS ART SERVES AS A BEACON OF HOPE, RESILIENCE, AND OF UNYIELDING CREATIVITY IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY.

SIMPHIWE NDZUBE (@NDZUBE_STUDIO) ·

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A VISIT TO THE MINE MOON (2018) © SIMPHIWE NDZUBE.
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND STEVENSON GALLERY, CAPE TOWN.



EAST WEST LIFESTYLE

Agnes Lew Interviews South Africa-born Contemporary Artist Simphiwe Ndzube

September 24, 2020 By [Agnes Lew](#)

“Simphiwe Ndzube’s work just captivated my interest, and I knew that I had to interview him,” says Agnes Lew, East West Bank’s senior vice president and head of private banking. “As an appreciator of art, I can say that everything Ndzube uses, from the bold colors to how he applies different dimensions, transports you to a mystical world.”

In collaboration with the Gallery Association Los Angeles, Lew is exclusively interviewing a variety of prominent artists in the LA art scene during the pandemic to contextualize and showcase their work. To date, 81 galleries have united to create an online space called [Gallery Platform LA](#) during the shutdown to provide art aficionados around the world a way to enjoy and engage with art. Gallery Platform LA features 10 gallery “viewing rooms” along with a selected project on a rotating basis every eight weeks. East West Bank is a proud sponsor of Gallery Platform LA.

In this edition of Lew’s artist series, she talks with South African artist Simphiwe Ndzube who has been receiving a lot of attention in LA. From a video interview with [Vanity Fair](#), to his most recent exhibition at the [Nicodim Gallery](#) in Los Angeles, Ndzube’s unique collection has traveled and received wide attention around the world. Inspired by moments in his childhood and his experience in post-apartheid South Africa, Ndzube’s work tells a story that is distinctly relevant in today’s world.

[More about Agnes](#)



Q: Funny how no interviewer has ever asked you this monumentally important question. Why did you live in Arcadia when you first moved to LA? And do you have a favorite restaurant there?

At the time, I was seeing someone who grew up and lived in Arcadia, so we lived in her apartment. We experimented with a bunch of the local restaurants; my favorite was Din Tai Fung whenever we could afford it.



(Left): "The Orator," 2018. (Right): "In Search of the Sacred Stone," 2018. (Photo credit): Courtesy of the artist

Q: Your work is often stitched together through many different dimensions that are really brought to life from your experience in South Africa. Narratives of post-apartheid South Africa and African mythologies have often been found in your work. How has the black experience in LA influenced your work?

Similar to Thelma Golden's concept of post-blackness, the concept of the black experience in Los Angeles is something that I am able to both embrace and challenge through my person. I identify strongly with the immigrant experience in Los Angeles and find that the black American experience affects me in a way that is likely different than some. To be in a place where black people are not the majority population has been an interesting adjustment for me. I'm becoming more aware of my own blackness, which I wasn't aware of until I went to college outside of my community. I am learning as I find my peer group; the history and complexities here go beyond just having black skin. Here, I am both an insider and an outsider to the black experience and to the American experience.



"Bhekizwe, The Alligator Rider," 2020. (Photo credit): Courtesy of the artist, LACMA and Nicodim Gallery

Q: I know this is a corny question, but I really want to know. Who are your art heroes?

I could point out incredible artists like Francis Bacon, Dumile Feni and Wangechi Mutu, but the one that is really close to me as a mentor and father figure is the South African late poet and painter Peter E. Clarke. He helped me to see how the artist creates productive habits and takes care of others. He took care of a lot of us black kids forging art careers in the absurdities of the townships. I believe in my practice in large part because of him.

Q: What are some of your dream projects?

I have a dream project of working with a group of primarily black dancers, contortionists, a dance group of differently abled people, and opera singers to create a play that activates my paintings and sculptures. I had the chance to see William Kentridge's theatre performance in collaboration with Dada Masilo and many other South African artists. It had such a profound impact on me; in South Africa, we could see that work probably because of the complexities and cost of production. I had also seen the exhibition at the [LA County Museum of Art](#) of Marc Chagall's costumes and set designs. It ignited a spark for me to pursue my own project of this sort.



"Waiting for Mlungu," 2017. (Photo credit): Courtesy of the artist, CC Foundation and Nicodim Gallery

Q: What is your most prized possession from your foraging?

The answer is that I am communicating something meant to open up the imagination and feelings. You can allow yourself to feel the work without necessarily having to logically attach to it. The art industry is a system that has viewed logic as a dominant cypher; this prioritizes emotional intelligence as lesser than logic. I want to encourage people to trust their emotional intelligence as an equally valid entryway to understanding my work.

Q: English is a second language to both you and me. I don't ever remember learning the word "discourse" in school, and it is not a vocabulary word that people use in day-to-day conversations. Yet, everyone in the art world seems to use that word all the time to sound serious. What does "discourse" mean to you and how is it relevant in your work?

"Discourse" is a word that I encountered in art school, engaged with, and then left in art school.



"In the Order of Elephants After the Rain," 2019. (Photo credit): Courtesy of the artist and Nicodim Gallery

Q: For us who have close families overseas, it is particularly challenging during the pandemic, as we can't visit with them as easily as we wish. When you get to travel again to see your family in South Africa, what would you pack in your suitcase to bring them?

I have a massive family. For the little babies, I always bring candy, coloring books and little toys. For the high school boys, I usually bring school supplies and cool souvenir clothing from the places that I've been. For the adults, like my aunts and cousins that have kids, I'll bring them envelopes of cash so that they can convert the dollar to the local currency, be surprised by the conversion rate, and get the things that they feel they need.

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