



Mohau Modisakeng

|                     |     |
|---------------------|-----|
| Introduction        | 4   |
| Qhatha              | 9   |
| Untitled Frames     | 15  |
| Ga Bose Gangwe      | 47  |
| Ditaola             | 51  |
| Untitled            | 61  |
| Inzilo              | 67  |
| Metamorphosis       | 79  |
| Ke Kgomo Ya Moshate | 93  |
| To Move Mountains   | 99  |
| Endabeni            | 121 |
| Ga Etsho            | 137 |
| Artist Biography    | 147 |
| Index               | 155 |



“Isidwaba yini na?”<sup>1</sup>

*What is that pleated leather skirt?*

HLONIPHA MOKOENA

As the machete alternates with the axe to graze and grind the pebbled mountain, I am reminded of growing up in a Soweto in which around 5pm in the afternoon (as if by some collective agreement) coal stoves would be lit. The ritual involved both the chopping of wood (hence the axe) and the bringing of the coal from a coal box outside. It is not the glow and warmth of a coal stove, though, that Mohau Modisakeng’s *To Move Mountains* reminds me of. It is the soot-faced “coal boys” who used to deliver the coal that suddenly came to my recollection as I watch the crystalline mountain in his video glisten. Their clothes, hair, faces and hands were covered in coal soot. They would carry the 50kg or so of coal in sacks on their shoulders hunched forward with arms holding the bag spreadeagle like a surrendering army of coal-faced combatants. Your job was to open the coal box so they would tip the contents of the sack into it and do an about-turn back to their horse-driven coal cart. The latter was itself a township invention – half car, half cart. And, if the owner of the coal yard had a sense of humour, the wheels were often capped with a VW Volkswagen wheelcap. These were young boys, some not even teenagers and they looked liked they had been born on a heap of coal. The horses were emaciated and bony and every afternoon one would see them compete with the traffic on tar roads as they returned empty to their coal yards somewhere in Mzimhlophe or Meadowlands or Orlando. The blinkers that Modisakeng wears in his videos and photographs remind me of these anomalous creatures – aristocratic yet quotidian – used to deliver coal and their equally frightening riders, the soot-faced teenagers with fraying jerseys and pants, loading and offloading bags of coal for our fires. Beyond this world of memories, Modisakeng’s work relies on the sootiness of charcoal and charcoal dust. Its tarnishing of the skin; the lightness of its flight as it is released from a bulbous and ballooned skirt; the messiness of the stains on white surfaces and the

1. This is a line from Busi Mhlongo’s song ‘Woman from Abroad’ from the album *Babhemu* (Youngsters). In isiZulu (the Zulu language), the question is a kind of double entendre: it asks for a factual definition, “what is a woman’s pleated leather skirt?” and simultaneously it also asks, “what are you up to in that pleated leather skirt?” The allusion to an *isidwaba* (a Zulu matron’s pleated leather skirt) in the title of this essay was inspired by Mohau Modisakeng’s use of the skirt in works such as *Untitled*, 2014 from the *Untitled Series*.

smokiness of the puff created by its dispersal could be the fetching and winning qualities. But maybe, like me, Modisakeng remembers the coal faces of those township urchins and teens delivering sacks of coal to sundry backyards. The transposition of animal and human, horse and coal boy is embodied in Modisakeng’s own choice to wear the blinkers.

Of late, the black body has once more become a topic of conversation. From the Black Lives Matter movement to the natural hair choice of a Victoria’s Secret model, the place of the “black body” as an image and as a casualty is eliciting much speculation about what has changed or not changed in the manner in which brown and black-skinned people are treated by media and cultural institutions which they don’t often control. In the case of South Africa, the year 2015 has, via the various hashtag revolutions and movements, revived discourses about black consciousness and blackness *tout court*. It would be unfortunate to read Modisakeng’s work purely from this contemporary lens. There is more to his work than just blackness (the symbolic) and sootiness (the literal). A better framing would place him, like many of his contemporaries, at the end of apartheid and the beginning of an era which has not yet been given its own moniker (‘the post-apartheid’ being an awkward temporality). From this position, the archive of South African photography, as collated recently in the magnificent exhibition and catalogue *Rise and Fall of Apartheid: The Bureaucracy of Everyday Life* (2013), is a touchstone for the artist and the audience. In his description of the legacy of what has been called “struggle photography”, Okwui Enwezor prefaces this kind of photography with a definition of what he terms “engaged photography”, that is, “a photography operating with a critical awareness of apartheid that seeks to represent and understand it, against the idiom of struggle photography, whose explicit mission is to delegitimize apartheid.”<sup>2</sup> Modisakeng has certainly inherited this legacy of engaged photography. The only difference is the object of engagement. Rather than range his focus solely on the forty-six odd years of apartheid rule, his purview covers the pre-colonial and colonial eras. Again, these are unstable

2. Okwui Enwezor, *Rise and Fall of Apartheid: The Bureaucracy of Everyday Life* (2013), 35..

temporalities: the leopard print vest of the Qhatha series and the sjambok (leather whip) of the *Untitled* series are both indexes of the “colonial” but they point to two separate trajectories of that period. The vest, with its evocation of migrant Zulu workers, leopard hides, muthi markets and the divinatory powers of the sangoma (diviner) stands for the ambiguity of substitutions. For Africans seeking the kingly power represented by the actual leopard skin, the manufactured item is an inadequate but convenient substitute. It represents the loss of African autonomy while also opening up the terrain of self-fashioning. The whip on the hand evokes the brutality of apartheid policing which continued to use the whip to humiliate and herd protesters (as well as flog prisoners). But here, too, ambiguity is the rule since many vigilante groups (in rural and urban areas) have often resorted to using this whip to discipline and punish suspected offenders. These complexities mean that although ‘engaged’ and fulfilling his role as a scion of the older generation of photographers, Mohau Modisakeng’s self-portraiture is mapping a different path wherein he uses the corporeality and vulnerability of his body to express the untenability of distinctions such as colonial-postcolonial / traditional-modern / male-female / image-reality / human-animal. By placing his body in close proximity with the whip, the gun, the machete, the axe and the blinkers, Modisakeng signals that the list of the tools of oppression is limitless; and so is the list of the tools of liberation.

Whereas his photography may be thought of as part of the continuum of South African images that have ‘engaged’ the past and the present, Modisakeng’s video works play with reversals. In *Inzilo*, for example, the artist, sitting in the curved back armchair, begins to peel and slough off the hardened glove of black wax from his hands, a minute or more after the camera has started rolling, while the music amplifies what would be the fall and thud of the wax pieces. For his feet, the artist’s motions go in reverse. The hardened wax shards are being picked up off the floor and put back on the feet. This jigsaw puzzle effect can be read as extending the meaning of the word *inzilo* (mourning weeds), to encompass not just the loss occasioned by death but the comfort and arrest of time that is often extended to widows in mourning. By embodying this dual meaning of

mourning, Modisakeng opens up the affective space within which such mourning takes place: it is not just the widow’s garb (the black dress or skirt) that symbolises the loss but the fact that widows often have to live in a world of reversals (having to do their laundry at night rather than during the day for example). This unwinding is also present in *To Move Mountains* and *Ga bose gangwe*. In the former, cupped hands seem to be seeping a slick of oil or black paint when in fact the black oily substance is being un-poured and returned to its source. In the latter, the bodies of a dozen men dressed in white voluminous skirts are raising themselves from the ground in haphazard motions. Before they can stand erect, their bodies begin to descend back to the floor in arched movements. This kinetic propulsion of bodies, wax, substances and dust expresses itself most profoundly when Modisakeng’s body is dragged by an invisible force up a slope like a sled in *To Move Mountains*. The neatness of the ascend obviously belies the fact that the video is running in reverse even while it pulls the artist out of the frame of the screen.

As a symbol of the matronly status of a married woman, the Zulu leather skirt (*isidwaba*) appears in Modisakeng’s work as a playful prop but also as apparel. Whereas in *Untitled* (2014) the skirt is wound around the neck like a playful Elizabethan ruff or collar, in his latest work *Ditaola*, Modisakeng wears the skirt, accessorised with a cow bell, as apparel. Beyond the gender bending obviousness of a male artist wearing a skirt, there is again a space for memories. As part of its cultural onslaught, the apartheid state not only delayed the arrival of television in South Africa until the 1970s, it also imported mostly martial arts films and manga and anime cartoons and broadcast these on television and screened the films in cinemas. Thus, at iconic township movie houses such as Eyethu in Soweto, where mostly young men would go, there were constant re-runs of Bruce Lee films. Every township kid therefore grew up surrounded by wushu and samurai fantasies. The hakama-type skirts that Modisakeng wears for his self-portraits and videos could therefore be read as a consequence of this influence. The *isidwaba* however, needs explanation. The anthropologist Melville Herskovits popularised the term ‘cattle complex’ which was

meant to explain the intimate relations that exist between pastoral African men and societies and livestock, especially cattle. The term was quickly used by white settlers and colonial psychoanalysts to explain everything from stock theft to the continued attraction of *ukulobola* (the offering of bridewealth). Whether consciously or unconsciously, South African artists such as Modisakeng and Nandipha Mntambo are returning the anthropological favour by turning the cattle complex on its head. Thus, in *Ditaola (Frame VIII)* Modisakeng’s combination of the *isidwaba* and the cow bell returns the cattle to the kraal, as it were, by affirming the life and meaning of livestock in Zulu society. The skirt therefore represents both the enduring power of pastoralism while also inserting women, as does Mntambo, into a world which has conventionally been thought of as masculine. This is of course not to underplay the aesthetic tactility represented by the ruffles of the skirt; it is a beautiful object to look at. It is merely to underscore that it is not just a skirt but a symbol of the power that married Zulu women used to wield vis-à-vis their husbands (since the skirt could and was renewed several times in a woman’s married life) and also the liminal potency of the transition that they made from nubile maiden to married matron.

And then finally, violence. The *Ditaola* (divination bones) series of photographs combines the above pleated leather skirt with a white dove and Modisakeng wielding a flintlock rifle (which one reviewer mistakenly called an AK-47). In the catalogue that accompanies the exhibition, the issue of violence is named as one of the chosen themes of the artist’s work. However, as with other ambiguities, Modisakeng is not an advocate of violence. Rather, if we take seriously the divinatory and prophetic title of the photographic series, then it could be inferred that the figure represented in *Ditaola I-XVI* is futuristic rather than atavistic. Although it is tempting to read him (especially because of the rifle) as belonging to the past, Modisakeng’s prophet / prophetess may be a figure of the future. This is because the often cited ‘prophet of violence’, Frantz Fanon, ends his *The Wretched of the Earth*, with a futuristic projection that I think aptly captures and explains the presence in one frame of a gun and a white dove. The last sentence of Fanon’s

book reads: “For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man.”<sup>3</sup> Modisakeng’s *Ditaola* tableau of photographs is therefore not just an engagement, to repeat that word, with the violence of colonial and postcolonial Africa but also an engagement with the future of violence. In Fanon’s formulation the ‘new man’ distances himself from the genocidal history of Europe’s subjugation of Africa, while of course acknowledging the instrumental reason inherent in violence. He does not shy away from the work that violence has done, but also does not want to reflect Europe back to itself by imitating this violent history. If Modisakeng’s work deals with violence then it is to put its modern and European connection to rest, while giving birth to a warrior ethic that embodies but does not glorify the gratuitous violence of the past.

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3. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1990 [1963]), 255.











# Untitled Frames

2012 - 2013









































Ga Bose Gangwe  
2014



Ditaola  
2014













Untitled

2014







Inzilo  
2013

# Performing Stillness In Order To Move

## Mohau Modisakeng’s Becoming

RUTH SIMBAO

A number of Mohau Modisakeng’s works appear to represent typically masculine actions – the flicking of knives, the clutching of guns, and the lashing of sjamboks. Titles such as *Qhatha* (let’s start a fight) and *iButho* (a military regiment) suggest powerful and potentially violent action in a South African context in which “violence was long the prominent, if not the main part of defining masculinities...”<sup>1</sup> While the representation of actions, potential violence, and the male body could be read in a facile way that emphasises formulaic notions of masculinity, I am drawn to a deeper consideration of the ways in which Modisakeng stops time, hovers in liminal spaces, and experiences ‘being’ without prematurely imagining an end result. As such, a “movement-centered approach”<sup>2</sup> to masculinities can be interpreted in his work, in which there is no ‘masculine being’ calculated simply in opposition to femininity, but rather a series of becomings of a “man who is in the process of constructing or creating himself.”<sup>3</sup>

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1. Klein, Melanie. 2008. *Masculinity Contested: Strategies of Resistance in Art from South Africa and the Oeuvre of Wim Botha*. PhD Dissertation, 104.
  2. Reeser, Todd W. 2010. *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: John Wiley and Sons, 48.
  3. Ibid, 123.



This emphasis on a movement-centred approach plays a critical role in opening up readings of “racially tagged”<sup>4</sup> bodies that tend to be fixed in terms of gender due to false assumptions that certain ‘races’ have particular quantities of masculinity or femininity. The black male body, for example, is often stereotyped as hypermasculine<sup>5</sup> (Brown, 1999: 28), and as Bell Hooks points out, this assumption is largely driven by white-supremacist, capitalist systems that posit white men as possessing the ‘right’ quantity of masculinity – strong enough, but not too bodily.<sup>6</sup>

Through representations of subtly becoming masculinities that agilely flow from militant exploits to the embodiment of women’s widowhood, Modisakeng moves beyond stagnated, racialised notions of gender. While in relation to Modisakeng’s ‘becoming figures’, this notion of perpetual movement can be viewed as transformational. Movement itself is a complex concept, for facile movement that proceeds too fast usually ends up going nowhere. In this brief reflection on

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4. Ibid, 164.
  5. Brown, J.A. “Comic book masculinity and the new black superhero”. *African American Review*, 33 (1): 8.
  6. Hooks, Bell. 2004. *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*. New York: Routledge, 13.

Modisakeng’s work, I read moments of stillness as measured attempts to move forward. By comparing a movement-centred approach to gender, to Modisakeng’s interrogation of South Africa’s socio-political efforts to move beyond apartheid and the everyday effects of a discriminatory system and society, I argue that Modisakeng’s moments of stillness are poised to radically transform. In my analysis I interpret his video titled *Inzilo* (2013) and engage with his own opinions expressed in various interviews.

### Stopping Time

*I want to bring time to a halt.*  
Mohau Modisakeng<sup>7</sup>

*People seem more committed to keeping things as they are, as opposed to opening...space up to more diverse people, with more diverse ideas and influences. The level of complacency...has reached the point where it smells immoral.*  
Mohau Modisakeng<sup>8</sup>

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7. Mohau Modisakeng in conversation with Percy Mabandu. 2011. “Chit Chat: Mohau Modisakeng”, *City Press*, 9 September 2011.
  8. Ibid.





In the above two statements, Modisakeng refers to two very different forms of stopping time. In the latter, he critiques fine art academic institutions in South Africa, arguing that inertia in this case is a form of stagnation in which people appear to be actively committed to upholding the status quo, as if afraid of meaningful diversity. Stopping time in this sense is a resistance to change, whereas Modisakeng’s own desire to stop time is a quest for radical change a quest to go back and reconsider the past that “has been left behind by

all of us...[but] has not been dealt with properly.”<sup>9</sup> Through representations that allude to “conflict, aggression and disorder,”<sup>10</sup> he attempts to dig up the “suppressed trauma that people are forgetting about”, pointing out that the media pushes certain

9. Mohau Modisakeng in conversation with Thembinkosi Goniwe. FNB Joburg Art Fair Artists Talks 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upsc9A-SFs>. Accessed April 2014.

10. “VOLTA NY: Impressive New Works by Emerging Artists” in *Arts Observer*. 2013. [www.artsobserver.com](http://www.artsobserver.com). Accessed April 2014.

ideas about ourselves that encourage us “not to pay attention to the past.”<sup>11</sup>

“It was Maya Angelou, who set it straight for me when she said prejudice is a burden that confuses the past, threatens the future and renders the present inaccessible. The prejudice of apartheid and colonialism has effectively espoused our collective histories and left whatever remains severely distorted.”<sup>12</sup> In attempting to reclaim history for himself, Modisakeng realises that his “memory doesn’t exist on its own...but is also controlled [and] mediated to a large extent,” and he argues that an idea such as nationalism “basically encourages people to forget certain things.”<sup>13</sup> As a way of remembering, we need to hover, to spend time considering how we have failed. This is the frozen moment in much of Modisakeng’s work; a state of limbo situated between the horrors of our apartheid past and the ideals of the future which we have failed to obtain. Writing in 2010 about our lack of significant transformation in the South African artworld, I relayed Gordon Metz’s lament: “it is sad that twenty years later there is even a need to talk about transformation, but as he [Metz] suggests, little has changed and we are left in a state of limbo in which our ability to grapple with real social and political issues exposes our efforts as merely quaint.”<sup>14</sup> It is this limbo that Modisakeng recognises as he wrestles with ways to go back into history in order to proceed, and it is through the work *Inzilo* (meaning widowhood) that he effectively captures this liminal state.

*Hovering*

As Mamphela Ramphele<sup>15</sup> writes in “Political Widowhood in South Africa: The Embodiment of Ambiguity”, a widow, particularly a political

11. Mohau Modisakeng in conversation with Thembinkosi Goniwe. FNB Joburg Art Fair Artists Talks 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upsc9A-SFs>. Accessed April 2014.

12. Mohau Modisakeng. 2011. *An Odyssey of a Confused Past*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBC5T4FdJ4k>. Accessed May 2004.

13. Ibid.

14. Simbao, Ruth. 2010. “Doing it for Comfort”. *Artthrob*. <http://www.artthrob.co.za/Reviews/Doing-it-for-Comfort.aspx>. Accessed April 2014.

15. Ramphele, Mamphela. 1996. “Political Widowhood in South Africa: The Embodiment of Ambiguity.” *Daedalus* 125 (1), 100.

widow, is in a “liminal status”. Still considered to be married, she is forced to hover, perpetuating the idea that “[w]omen and children mourn and men carry on” (Kotzé, Els and Rajuili-Masilo, 2012: 747).<sup>16</sup>

In *Inzilo*, Modisakeng uses his own body to engage performatively with the limbo of widowhood. What does it mean for a male artist to use his body to represent a woman’s ritual in which her body is marked, sometimes by smearing ground charcoal on her body, or by her dress and demeanour, and in which she is considered to be contaminated and dangerous (Rosenblatt & Nkosi 2007:78)?<sup>17</sup> What happens to the male body as the figure ‘becomes woman’ in a ritual context deeply divided by gender? A woman mourns for longer than a man, and she is bound largely to the home. A man, on the other hand, may engage more freely due to the belief that he “belongs to the public arena by virtue of his manhood.”<sup>18</sup> The widow incorporates loss broader than her own, becoming the “embodiment of loss and pain” as she “becomes a metaphor for suffering”, rendered as both object and subject of the mourning ritual.<sup>19</sup> In *Inzilo*, the male/female figure begins seated, as if performing a ‘sitting’ during the observance of *ukuzila*. During this ritual the furniture is often removed from the house and the widow sits on a mat or mattress facing the wall and is not supposed to stand unless absolutely necessary.<sup>20</sup> In *Inzilo*, the subject is surrounded by emptiness. There is no clear-cut distinction between foreground and background and the white ground begins to shift, creating the perception of a floating figure, emphasising the liminality of this state. While fellow mourners usually “rally around to lend support and share the pain and grief,” as mourning “rituals are, by their very nature, collective processes,”<sup>21</sup> the figure in *Inzilo* is isolated. This seclusion is emphasised by the vacuous background, creating an

16. Kotze, Elmarie; Els, Lishje and Rajuili-Masilo, Ntsiki. 2012. “Women... Mourn and Men Carry On’: African Women Storying Mourning Practices: A South African Example”. *Death Studies*. 36 (8), 747.

17. Rosenblatt, Paul and Nkosi, Catherine. 2007. “South African Zulu widows in a time of poverty and social change”. *Death Studies*, 31 (1), 67- 85.

18. Ramphele, 100.

19. Ibid, 99.

20. Kotze, Els and Rajuili-Masilo, 253 – 254.

21. Ramphele, 105.



image that Modisekeng says is deliberately stripped of “unnecessary signifiers.”<sup>22</sup>

Connecting the process of mourning to our socio-political context, Modisakeng explains, “I decided to perform these gestures in front of the camera and when you piece them together they reveal a narrative about mourning and the process of starting over... .As soon as the reenactment of something that is supposed to be very private and personal...is reenacted publically it becomes a political issue.”<sup>23</sup> In order to start over, this figure peels back what looks like charred, cracked layers of scarred skin from his (or her) crusted hands. Slowly, as if with spiritual power, the discarded pieces then float back to the subject and are drawn in via the feet, which are planted firmly on the white ground covered with charcoal marks. These marks hover midway between traces of violence and beautifully sketched gestures. Eventually the figure stands up, shaking off the charcoal pieces, and the charcoal dust that marked the mourning body now magically rises up as if in a puff of smoke.

For Modisakeng, there is still a need to mourn; to grieve for that which apartheid robbed South Africans of. Despite the fact that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission attempted to deal with our past, “that past is still very much haunting us ... we see it in the horror stories in South Africa and all the things that happen in the news.”<sup>24</sup>

The ambiguity in this video reveals what Modisakeng views as a current state of limbo – the figure can be read as being at once male and female; the body is physically grounded in a gritty way yet is intangibly spiritual, and the background and foreround merge. This ambiguity makes straightforward explanation hard to pin down. There’s no singular cause and no singularly identifiable moment of pain, for the violence and violation symbolised in Modisakeng’s work is insiduously pervasive: “The violence that threads through most of my work is deeply personal and

22. Mohau Modisakeng in conversation with Thembinkosi Goniwe. FNB Joburg Art Fair Artists Talks 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upsc9A-SFs>. Accessed April 2014.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

largely symbolic. This is because black people in this country didn’t only experience violence as a physical threat, but also on a political, economic, psychological and spiritual level. My work responds to the complexities that have come from such a history.”<sup>25</sup>

In relation to the ambiguous process of mourning, Modisakeng says, “The narrative of the video reveals an ambiguous transitional process ... it’s a process you are stuck with for a period of 6 to 12 months. In that process there is no real result, there is no result you can imagine, it’s just a process you have to go through. If you think of where South Africa is or where South Africa has been in the last 20 years, it’s stuck in this process where it’s supposed to be transitioning, but we cannot imagine to what end.”<sup>26</sup> Judith Butler suggests that “perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say submitting to transformation) the full result of which one cannot know in advance.”<sup>27</sup> It seems as if the reason we are still in limbo is that as a society at large we have not readily submitted to transformation through a process of mourning.

*Moving*

While Modisakeng states that his “work deals with a number of issues which revolve around questions of violence as a mediator of history,”<sup>28</sup> it becomes evident in *Inzilo* that his body becomes the mediator of the pain of this history. As Ramphele explains, when a widow mourns, her body becomes “the channel for the expulsion of the polluting elements through mourning.”<sup>29</sup> She becomes a dangerous being, and her body is marked with charcoal, items of clothing and sometimes the shaving of her head, partly to warn others of her ‘contaminated’ status. Taking on this role of a conduit for pain is

25. Mohau Modisakeng in conversation with Percy Mabandu. 2011. “Chit Chat: Mohau Modisakeng”, *City Press*, 9 September 2011.

26. Mohau Modisakeng in conversation with Thembinkosi Goniwe. FNB Joburg Art Fair Artists Talks 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upsc9A-SFs>. Accessed April 2014.

27. Butler, Judith. 2004. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verson, 21.

28. VOLTA NY: Impressive New Works by Emerging Artists” in *Arts Observer*. 2013. [www.artsobserver.com](http://www.artsobserver.com). Accessed April 2014.

29. Ramphele, 103.



no easy task. “It’s a sacrifice I am making to make these images of myself,” says Modisakeng, “because they are not comfortable to me.”<sup>30</sup> The journey back in time comes with no guarantee:

“Often I get there, and sometimes I don’t ... and even when I don’t it’s still a victory because it speaks to me. It speaks to me of the far reaching facts of politics.”<sup>31</sup>

Reflecting a movement-centered approach to gender that goes beyond simply moving up and down a line between the dichotomised poles of masculinity and femininity, this journey into history is far from linear, and a restorative future is never certain. Through a moment of stillness, though, it’s an attempt to move; to renderthe present accessible so that the future can be imagined as less threatening. This movement is not rushed glossing over of pain that Modisakeng suggests tends to mark our post-apartheid society, but it is a considered performance of stillness in order to move.

30. Mohau Modisakeng in conversation with Thembinkosi Goniwe. FNB Joburg Art Fair Artists Talks 2013.

31. Mohau Modisekeng. 2011. *An Odyssey of a Confused Past*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBC5T4FdJ4k>. Accessed May 2004.







# Metamorphosis

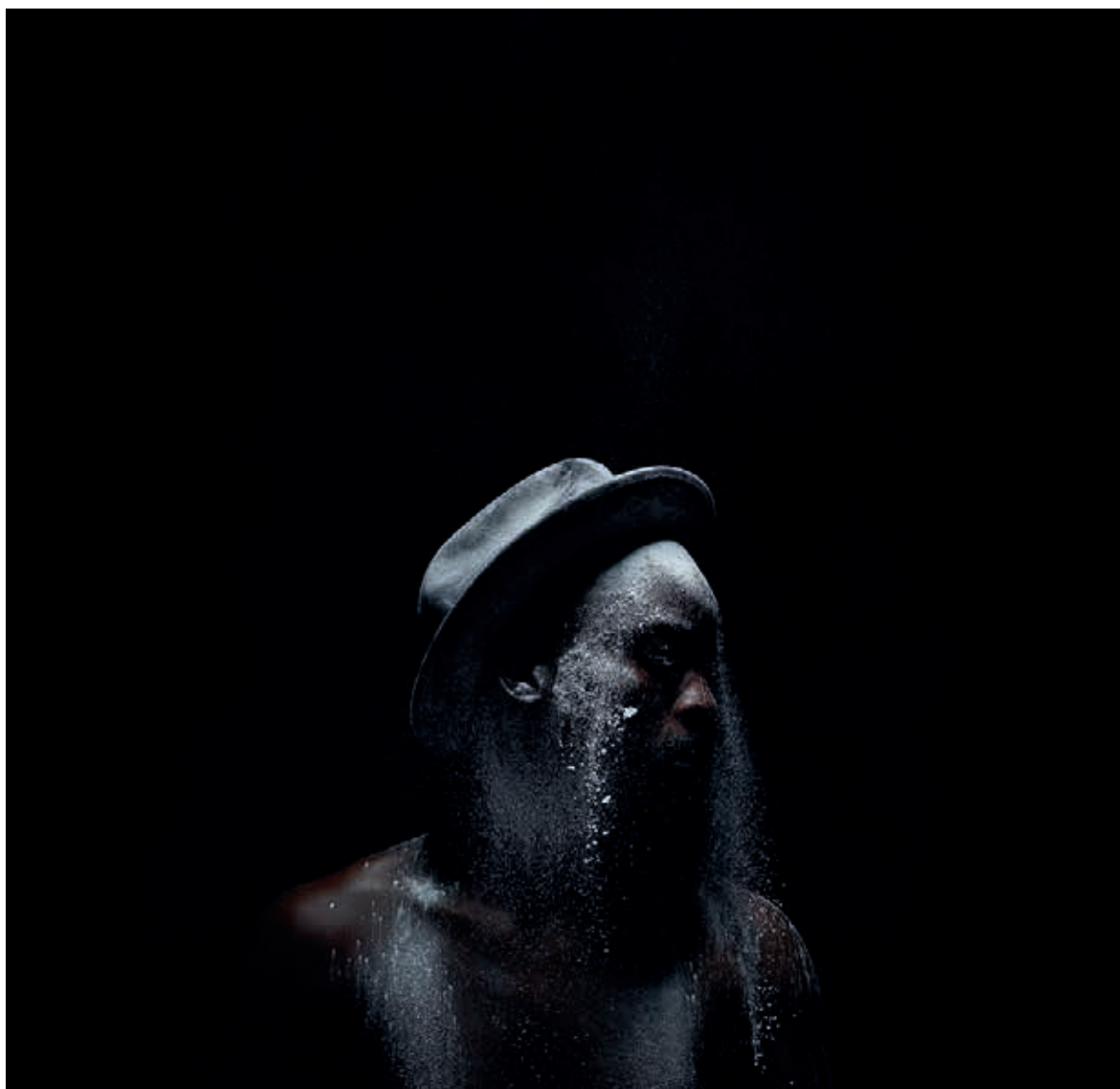
2015























Ke Kgomo Ya Moshate

2015







To Move Mountains

2015 - 2016

# Mohau Modisakeng Occupation

ASHRAF JAMAL

This is a raw, charred, brutal time, a time of violent extremes, crude divisions, distrust, disaffection, in which democracy gives way to civil unrest, reason to unreason and terror. In 2006 Archbishop Desmond Tutu saw it coming, but then again perhaps this time – 2016 – was encrypted in the hallucinatory changeover from Apartheid to ANC rule. “What has happened to us?” Tutu inquired in his 2006 Steve Biko Memorial Lecture at the University of Cape Town, “It seems as if we have perverted our freedom, our rights into licence, into being irresponsible.”

Stepping onto the Steve Biko Memorial Lecture podium in 2007, Thabo Mbeki reiterated the charge against ANC rule and corporate malfeasance. “Our society has been captured by a rapacious individualism which is corroding our social cohesion, which is repudiating the value and practice of human solidarity, and which totally rejects the fundamental precept of *Ubuntu* - *umntu ngumntu nbgabanye*.”

Shadowing this call for a return to humanity – to simple human decency, fairness, and compassion is the inspiration for the lecture series and for many the great spirit behind the drive for unity, Biko – who himself declared, “The first step... is to make the black man come to himself; to pump back life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity, to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth.”

This defining spirit of the Black Consciousness movement, shaped in turn by the Martiniquan psychiatrist and fighter for the FLN, Frantz Fanon, is one which recognised the profound need to reclaim the black body, mind, and imagination from a ‘*zone of non-being*’. The battle, therefore, was never only political and economic – it was psychological. And it is here, immersed in the damaged psychic wiring of the oppressed, that the battle within the arts would be most profoundly fought.

“We believe that in the long run, the special contribution to the world by Africa will be in this field of human relationships. The great powers of the world may have done wonders in giving the world an industrial and military look, but the great gift still



has to come from Africa – giving the world a more human face”, Biko famously stated in what, today, remains a seminal text on resistance culture – and the most avidly desirous object of theft from libraries across the country – *I write what I like*.

It is telling that Biko is concerned not only with South Africa’s liberation but with the liberatory power of the continent. It is Africa as a cipher for the human, for a state of grace in a globally militarised and industrialised complex, which Biko holds most dear. While caught in a violent battle for freedom it was always Africa’s spirituality, its ability to refashion the earth and bind it to goodness, which mattered the more. And today, at this tipping point between violence and grace, Biko, like Tutu and Mbeki, finds his deepest yearning echoed by the Nigerian poet and novelist Ben Okri. It was Okri, in his 2012 Steve Biko Memorial lecture, who would move beyond

moral outrage and celebrate the nurturing power of the continent: “Pass it on that there are three Africas”, he reminded us, “The one that we see every day; the one that they talk about and the real magical Africa that we don’t see unfolding through all the difficulties of our time, like a quiet miracle.”

Like Ben Okri, Mohau Modisakeng knows well that “the most authentic thing about us is our capacity to create, to overcome, to endure, to transform, to love and to be greater than our suffering.” So while Modisakeng must immerse himself in the difficulties of our time, he must also never lose sight of some abiding state of grace. As an artist, therefore, he has unstintingly conjured a psycho-geography that is visceral, all-too-human, yet inescapably sublime. More seismograph than interpreter, medium than advocate, Modisakeng has through the still and moving image understood that the greatest power



of photography and film lies in the fact that it is a ghosting.

“The true content of a photograph is invisible, for it derives from a play not with form, but with time,” John Berger observed. “One might argue that photography is as close to music as to painting ... witness to a human choice being exercised.” That ‘choice’ in the case of Modisakeng is one that at its core is always enigmatic. And here perhaps his most profound inspiration stems from Santu Mofokeng, a photographer haunted by the divine, whose portrait of his ailing brother captures the threshold between living and dying, the brother’s eyes at once glazed with sleep yet utterly wakeful.

It is this indissoluble instant between times – the rupture in time itself – which gives the finest photographs their power. And it seems that it is this time *between* times – this “sting, speck, cut, little hole” which Roland Barthes would name the photograph’s *punctum* – that, for Modisakeng, is an image’s greatest lure. For how else could one return the oppressed body to itself? How capture that transfiguring moment in a zone of non-being?

It is this ineffable lacuna, this ‘sting, speck, cut’, which Geoff Dyer describes as the *ongoing moment*; a moment that never ceases, which gives the greatest photographs their *breath*. One senses this subtle turbulence, this fixation upon the ineffable, when gazing upon Modisakeng’s still and moving images. Nothing, it seems, is allowed to repose as though it were immune to time and to life – for as Berger further states, “the language in which photography deals is the language of events,” a viewpoint which Barthes eloquently reiterates: “A photograph is always invisible. It is not it that we see ... photographs are signs which don’t *take*, which *turn*, as milk does.”

A certain mystique – even mysticism – clings to the still and moving image. The image is not something the artist commandeers or controls. It is a moment, an *event*, in which the artist finds himself bound. And it is this sense of being caught in the moment, ensnared and shaped in turn by that moment, which makes Modisakeng’s artworks all the more compelling, for here we find an artist who is

profoundly aware that he too must *turn*, shift, quaver, dissolve, regroup, the better to bind himself to a moment as magnetic as it is liquid.

Modisakeng interprets himself, interprets the world, not by stating his claim but by giving himself up to the moment. After George Steiner, “he is a translator between languages, between cultures and between performative conventions.” “This translation out of the inarticulate and the private into the general matter of human recognition requires the utmost crystallisation and investment of introspection and control.” And here, I think, we find the artistry at the root of Modisakeng’s adventure, for while it would seem that Modisakeng has released his being, it is also his ability to *enact* the moment of release that is critical. His gift to us is a controlled exorcism.

I say this, however, with an acute sense of *not* knowing just how exactly to account for the Modisakeng moment. For in truth it is difficult, if not impossible, to explain it. In his reflection upon a similar enigma, Steiner concurs. “We lack the right word for the extreme energising and governance of instinct, or the ordered enlistment of intuition, which mark the artist,” he says. And here we return to what I’ve dubbed the enigmatic or sublime nature of Modisakeng’s art. Perhaps this is because, after



Steiner, Modisakeng seeks “the immunities of indirection” which allow his still and moving images to *hover*.

As Steiner concludes, “The aesthetic is the making formal of epiphany. There is a ‘shining through’.” Is this, then, the distinctive quality of Modisakeng’s art? If, after Berger, it is not so much form as time which best distinguishes a still or moving image, then is it an epiphanic moment which Modisakeng is drawn to? Is this where the mystique and mysticism of the works accretes? For it is certainly true, after Okri, that Modisakeng is far less concerned with showing us a world – Africa – as it is typically perceived to be; a place of unreason, terror, horror, a nightmare from which we cannot awaken.

This bleak if all-too-real vision is pervasive, informing and defining a pathological optic which Achille Mbembe darkly sums up as follows: “We must speak of Africa only as a chimera on which we all work blindly, a nightmare we produce and from which we make a living – and which we sometimes enjoy, but which somewhere deeply repels us, to the

point that we evince toward it the kind of disgust we feel on seeing a cadaver.”

This pervasive and damning view is, I feel, one which is never formost in Modisakeng’s heart, mind, and soul. Rather, after Okri, he would return us to what is most “authentic” in us, the “capacity to create, to overcome ... to be greater than our suffering”. Therefore, while never blind to horror, Modisakeng must always shift the burden and move vision toward a more enabling horizon. His signature – his enigmatic pull as it were – stems from some infinitely gentle and subtle grasp of what it means to be human in Africa. If he understands the power of the epiphanic he also knows the inescapability of shadows. And here the Catholic poet, T.S. Eliot, arrives upon the crux of Modisakeng’s vision:



Between the idea  
And the reality  
Between the motion  
And the act  
Falls the Shadow  
...  
Between the conception  
And the creation  
Between the emotion  
And the response  
Falls the shadow  
...  
Between the desire  
And the spasm  
Between the potency  
And the existence  
Between the essence  
And the descent  
Falls the shadow

That Modisakeng has won the Standard Bank Artist of the Year Award for 2016 is fitting. In this uncertain and violent time he has given us artworks that powerfully connect with our fraught psyches and impassioned hopes. His is an art of yearning. Rather than state the obvious – the on-going grotesquerie of inequality, human indignity and cruelty, the rot of prejudice, the ruthlessness of self-interest and greed – Modisakeng has chosen to implicate us in a battle on behalf of grace.

Contra Mbembe – in *On the Postcolony* - and J.M. Coetzee – in his 1987 ‘Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech’ – South Africa, and Africa as a whole, is not a singularly morbid force-field. As Coetzee bracingly states, “The *crudity* of life in South Africa, the naked force of its appeals, not only at the physical level but at the moral level too, its callousness and its brutalities, its hungers and its rages, its greed and its lies, make it as irresistible as it is unlovable.” For Modisakeng, however, this country, this continent, is as *resistible as it is lovable*.

Over thirty years have passed since Coetzee’s dark prognosis, and it would seem from this bleak standpoint that he has been proven right. And yet, then and now, this bleak truth was never the whole truth. Indeed, in his ‘Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech’ Coetzee too sought to overcome this dark



optic and embrace the body of Africa’, for ours is a corrosive world in which the arts has much to offer if we are ‘to transform, to love’. In Modisakeng’s artworks it is not “the *crudity* of life” which dominates the vision but transfiguration.

In his four interlinked films we find the artist caught between worlds, haunted. He is masked, muzzled, blinkered, as though to protect himself from the toxicity of a gouged and blackened earth. Clothed in a white shift, his soiled and granular fists – more stone than flesh – clasping two glistening blades, the artist gazes at us. The mood is still, the figure barely moves. It is the impregnable moment – a moment suspended in time – which sticks with us before the cut when, in a close up, we now see the artist’s hands opened, scalloped to gather the glutinous spill of oil.

There is much in these two sequences to make us reflect upon the despoiling of our earth, the lust for its hidden resources, the enslavement of the black body to that resource, the despair and violence that stems from such exploitation. But this short film is not solely a political tract. In the opened palms, dripping with their moat of oil, a flame momentarily flickers before the camera shifts back to the artist’s muzzled face from which plumes of thin white smoke emerge.

What Modisakeng has shown us is not only the visible horror of indentured labour but its psychic undertow – the human and spiritual cost of such an ungodly abuse of life. The fusion of flesh, mortar, oil slick, and smoke, conjures an immersion in hell. William Blake’s vision of damnation in the coal mines of England shadows this infernal vision, and stays with us as we watch the artist’s feet painted white, a white axe at their side, scale the blackened, shattered earth. Is this the Grim Reaper returned to haunt us? And what are we to make of the plunge back into this blackened maw?

It would seem that there is no redemption in this series of haunting evocations, and yet, unlike the poet John Milton, the author of *Paradise Lost* who Blake declared to be on the side of the devil, what I think Modisakeng is doing, by pulling us back into this infernal and unforgiving world, is performing an exorcism – he has internalised a poison to inoculate himself, supped from the skull of night to free himself. In the final sequence the camera takes flight, away from the darkness and blight, as if in its silent withdrawal asking us to flee in turn, remove ourselves from this intractable hell.

If as J.M. Coetzee declares at the close of his ‘Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech’, “in South Africa there is now too much truth for art to hold, truth by the bucketful, truth that overwhelms and swamps every act of the imagination,” it should also be reasserted that Coetzee yearned for a time when we would “quit a world of pathological attachments and abstract forces, of anger and violence, and take up residence in a world where a living play of feelings and ideas is possible, a world where we truly have an occupation.”

Decades have passed since Coetzee’s yearning. But it seems that one artist has truly heeded his call, for if Modisakeng knows the crushing power of a brutal truth that would destroy ‘every act of the imagination’, he also knows that without imagination we are nought. His gift lies in his will to step into night to find succour, and like Friedrich Nietzsche’s *ubermensch*, pass *through* decadence. In so doing Modisakeng has achieved what Coetzee profoundly longed for – a world and a time asynchronous with this time in which art has truly found *an occupation*.

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# Mohau Modisakeng in conversation with Ashraf Jamal

Ashraf Jamal: George Steiner, a critic of the arts, was not a fan of critical commentary – dubbing it “the regimen of the parasitic”. Artists learn best from other artists he says. Can you talk about the art or the artists that have most inspired you?

Mohau Modisakeng: I think there are artists that I admire and some that influence me in different ways. There are also artworks that I have encountered and have been arrested by ever since seeing them.

I used to take a taxi from Soweto to visit exhibitions at the Johannesburg Art Gallery while I was in high school. I would get off at the Noord Taxi rank in Johannesburg and after walking through the chaos of traffic and street vendors I would arrive to be greeted by a crucifixion depicted in stone and wood in Jackson Hlongwane’s sculpture.

In this one place I could enter into another room and discover a lexicon of signs and symbols, lines and forms, people and animals, ghosts, and contorted lovers depicted in incredible scenes in the charcoal drawings of Dumile Feni. Dark and graceful. I would walk through rooms that sometimes felt like ancient tombs that housed strange beings, like the ghostly man dressed like a miner standing in rubber boots and overalls, pale skin that looked like it had never seen the sun, dark marble eyes that make the creature seem strangely alive. This was my first experience seeing the work of Jane Alexander.

At the South African National Gallery in Cape Town, in a dimly lit room, brown cement bags hung like hides drying on a washing line. The hides hung in rows that crossed the gallery from wall to wall. This was a work by Moshekwa Langa. This work made such an impression on me that I went to find out about the artist and discovered that Moshekwa used his own body in order to confront and engage his audience. Artists such as Moshewa Langa and Cameroonian-born Samuel Fosso made me appreciate the idea of performance as process. I am excited about the potential for an idea to be evoked, performed and documented/framed into a photograph that can then embody ideas or emotions. My own use of the body in my photographs is informed by these possibilities in casting new

constructions of ‘self’ that can evoke and embody different narratives.

AJ: You seem particularly inspired by your adventure in filmmaking. How does still photography differ from the moving image? Do the formal challenges differ?

MM: I was trained as a sculptor, though my interest is in the idea of how objects function within a given space. It seemed a natural progression to consider how the same ideas in my sculptures could translate in a two dimensional format. I have always been interested in the body, even in my sculptures. When I started working with a camera I could cast my own body into these moments that are frozen in time. The photograph itself also became a body, present in the frame. The idea of the frame is important to how I think about my work. I think of the relationship between the still and moving image in the same sense that it is expressed in the work of artist and inventor Eadweard Muybridge, who developed experiments and techniques to capture motion in a sequence of shots. His discoveries inform how we understand and appreciate motion-picture films.

I find that the challenge is often in how an artist uses a particular medium to carry an idea, narrative or emotion across. Some ideas are best expressed by stillness, some ideas demand continuity and repetition; some ideas are best expressed as fleeting moments. I think the ideas remain the same but the process of making meaning may shift according to how the idea is recorded or presented.

AJ: The films you’ve made were shot on a site called Ndabeni, an industrial area outside Cape Town. I’m told that you were drawn to the site because of ‘the emotional feeling of desolation’ it triggered in you. But it seems this site came with a rather dark history, can you please talk about this.

MM: Sometimes it is not apparent how ideas are conceived, where they come from and what determines when and why they are conceived. I think that many of the decisions we make about the creative process as artists are rooted in the functions of our subconscious mind. Things may enter your

mind subliminally and resurface when triggered by some unknown action or encounter.

I first had the idea of a filmic work that would focus on terrain. I knew that I wanted the idea of landscape/topography to be prominent but I also kept coming back to an image of an arid, extraterrestrial, post apocalyptic, BLACK landscape. Perhaps the idea was inspired by the fact that when I started to conceptualise the work I was in New York during the winter where it had been snowing. During this time I took a two-hour bus ride to a small town in the country, and looking through the window I could see a vast landscape of hills and forests all covered in snow. Everything white.

I then proceeded to research locations that would serve a backdrop to a narrative that would revolve around a character that traverses the vast pitch-black landscape. The image of an all white landscape in my imagination translated into a negative of the same image in the work. It is this possibility that creates a mystery around the strange landscape of black asphalt mounds that looks like dark colossal mountains in the film.

One afternoon while driving to my studio in Maitland I happened to catch a glimpse of black hilltops peaking from behind industrial buildings. I visited the site for a closer look and happened upon what became the location for my shoot. After I had made the film I decided to research the history of the location where the work was realised. Ndabeni (place of debate), is an industrial suburb in Cape Town and comes with a dark and weighted history.

This location was established in 1902 by the civil authorities as a field hospital and isolation camp for victims after an outbreak of the bubonic plague in Cape Town which spread due to the importation of Argentine horses by the British military during the course of the South African War. It was this outbreak that justified and made way for the mass removal of black people from Cape Town’s urban centers to what became the first permanent location for the black labouring class. Ndabeni is therefore at the center at the genesis or the origins of the segregated settlements of the Apartheid system.



AJ: Ngugi wa Thiongo has stated “there is no such thing as an Abstract African”. Any thoughts on the matter? It seems to me at least that your vision is inspired by qualities that are not easily codified, that there is a certain yen for the ‘abstract’ in what you do.

MM: My vision is inspired by dreams. Dreams are always abstract and subliminal. But dreams are visual projections in the form of flickering pictures. The challenge is in translating these subliminal projections from the subconscious mind into a coherent codified visual language through the creative process. So there certainly is a yearning for the ‘abstract’ in my work. There is a yearning for the subliminal and the spiritual.

AJ: Issues of race invariably crop up in talk today about art. What is your view on the centrality of race-based conversation in the art world, and in the world in general? Is your work informed by the factor of race? By gender? By identity politics?

MM: The question of race is inevitable when you are not blind to the sociopolitical history of South Africa. The long struggle for liberation that defines so much of the South African collective consciousness today is founded on fighting a system of racial segregation. Apartheid was a prime example of institutionalised white supremacy. So with the burden of that kind of history still weighing heavy on most South Africans, race is inevitably central to every part of our lives, whether social, political, economical or cultural.

In that sense my work is informed by my experiences growing up in a South African township, where the issue of race dominated every aspect of life. Race determined which hospital you were born in, where your home would be, whether you would even have a home, where you went to school, where your parents worked, and what kind of work they did and so on.

Questions around my identity inevitably come from my preoccupation with understanding how the history of racial discrimination and exploitation has imprinted itself on me and other black South Africans.

AJ: CLR James notes “To neglect the racial factor as merely incidental is an error only less grave than to make it fundamental”. I find his qualification intriguing, do you?

MM: I think I agree with this statement but I also think that the question of race is inescapable in South Africa. We have a history of a system of racial classification that defined people according to the colour of their skin. The entire social experience was engineered to separate races in all spheres of the society. That kind of history is deeply imbedded in our collective memory.

In South Africa the subject of race is inherently complex. In the last two decades the subject of race dominated nation-building efforts, South Africans were encouraged by the new government to partake in a convenient myth/fiction founded on the ideal of non-racialism and equality. So at once we are aware of the economic disparities between different races, which we agree exist due to a legacy of apartheid, but we also partake in undermining the significance of a racist past on shaping our lived experiences.

AJ: Interest in your work is rapidly growing both domestically and internationally. Can you please talk about what it is that draws people to your work? Is the response the same domestically and nationally? Is this a ridiculous over-simplification?

MM: I have thought about that question. I think it is impossible to know what draws people to my work. It is many things and different for each pair of eyes. So people might relate to the work on a visceral level, they feel a connection to the images and partake to suspend the narrative. Every viewer brings a new reading to the work and in that has contributed to giving meaning to the work.

AJ: You are always at the center of your art. Is it a kind of self-portraiture? Are you you in the frame? Do you adopt a persona?

I think of my photography as an extended self-portraiture series. The photograph is like a reflection that can be captured and made still... so in that sense my photographs function as reflections,

glimpses into different personas, characters, and representations of a plural self.

AJ: Lastly I wish to congratulate you on winning the Standard Bank Young Artist’s Award. Could you please tell us what it means to you? How you see yourself moving forward?

MM: The award has already started changing the way I am thinking about my career as an artist. The process of not just making work to present for the award but also making and building an exhibition that includes photographs, film, performance and installation. This would be the first occasion for me to present the various modes of my work in the same context and space. The hope is that the series of exhibitions that will tour the country will come to represent a shift in my work towards building installations that disrupt the autonomy of the art object in favor for the multilayered spacial experience.



Endabeni

2015



























Ga Etsho  
2015













Artist Biography

In Modisakeng’s work the personal is political. Informed by his experience as a young boy in Soweto at the cross roads of a violent political transition, Modisakeng uses memory as a portal between past and present to explore themes of history, body and place within the post-apartheid context. His photography, films, performance and installation grapple with the conflicting politics of leadership and nationhood, whilst also attempting to unpack the legacy of inequality, capital, labour and extraction of mineral wealth in contemporary South Africa.

Modisakeng’s Oeuvre represents a poignant moment of grieving, catharsis and critical response to the historical legacy of exploitation and current lived experience of many black South Africans. Through his work Modisakeng critically engages with the complex mechanisms of violence, power and subjugation as propagated and to some extent internalized through the course of the successive colonial, apartheid and post apartheid regimes.

Modisakeng uses a personal lexicon of ritual and symbolism in which his physical form becomes both a vessel and a signifier. His use of his own body is a significant shift away from the problematic depiction of the other and is a gesture of self-actualization and acknowledgment of subjective experience.

Mohau Modisakeng (b.1986) was born and grew up in Soweto, Johannesburg. He currently lives and works between Johannesburg and Cape Town South Africa. Modisakeng completed his undergraduate degree at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, Cape Town in 2009.

His work has been exhibited at the 55th Venice Biennale (2015), MOCADA, Brooklyn New York (2015), Kunstraum Innsbruck, Austria (2015), the Museum of Fine Art, Boston (2014); 21C Museum, Kentucky, Massachusetts (2014); IZIKO South African National Gallery, Cape Town (2014); Saatchi Gallery, London (2012); and the Dak’Art Biennale, Dakar (2012). His work has been placed in numerous private collections both locally and internationally. Public Collections include the Johannesburg Art Gallery, IZIKO South African National Gallery, Saatchi Gallery and Zeitz MOCAA.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

| YEAR                                               | EXHIBITION                 | VENUE                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2017                                               | <i>Lefa le Ntate</i>       | Johannes Stegmann Art Gallery, University of the Free State                            |
|                                                    |                            | Tatham Art Gallery Pietermaritzburg, Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa |
| 2016                                               | <i>Endabeni</i>            | Galerie Ron Mandos, Amsterdam                                                          |
|                                                    | <i>Bophirima</i>           | Tyburn Gallery London                                                                  |
|                                                    | <i>Mohau Modisakeng</i>    | Laumeier Sculpture Park, Saint Louis, Missouri                                         |
|                                                    | <i>Lefa le Ntate</i>       | Monument Gallery, Grahamstown, South Africa                                            |
|                                                    |                            | Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum, Port Elizabeth, South Africa                   |
| IZIKO South African National Gallery, South Africa |                            |                                                                                        |
| 2015                                               | <i>Ke Kgomo Ya Moshate</i> | Kunstrum, Innsbruck, Austria                                                           |
|                                                    |                            | Mohau Modisakeng, Big Pond Artworks, Munich, Germany                                   |
| 2014                                               | <i>Ditaola</i>             | BRUNDYN+, Cape Town                                                                    |
|                                                    | <i>Mohau Modisakeng</i>    | Chavonnes Battery Museum, Cape Town in partnership with Zeitz MOCAA                    |
| 2012                                               | <i>Sera</i>                | Master of Fine Art Exhibition, Michaelis School of Fine Art, Cape Town                 |
|                                                    | <i>Untitled</i>            | Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria                                                          |
| 2010                                               | <i>Ibutho</i>              | Side Gallery, Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town                                             |

| SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS | YEAR | EXHIBITION                                                                       | VENUE                                                                                             |
|----------------------------|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                            | 2016 | <i>After The Thrill has Gone</i>                                                 | Richmond Center for Visual Arts, USA                                                              |
|                            | 2015 | <i>When Tomorrow Comes</i>                                                       | Wits Art Museum, Johannesburg / Michaelis Galleries, Cape Town                                    |
|                            |      | <i>DIS/PLACE</i>                                                                 | MoCADA, Brooklyn, USA                                                                             |
|                            |      | <i>AFIRI</i> perFOMA                                                             | Lagos, Nigeria.                                                                                   |
|                            |      | <i>What Remains is Tomorrow</i>                                                  | South African Pavilion, Venice Biennial                                                           |
|                            |      | <i>La Fabrique De L'Homme Moderne</i>                                            | in association with the Lyon Biennale, La Fabric, Solomon Foundation for Contemporary Art, Annecy |
|                            |      | <i>Foreign Bodies</i>                                                            | WHATIFTHEWORLD, Cape Town                                                                         |
|                            |      | <i>Broken English</i>                                                            | Tyburn Gallery, London                                                                            |
|                            | 2014 | <i>Brave New World... 20 Years of Democracy</i>                                  | IZIKO South African National Gallery, Cape Town                                                   |
|                            |      | <i>!Kauru 2014: Rerouting Dialogue 1994- 2014,</i>                               | UNISA Gallery, Pretoria                                                                           |
|                            |      | <i>Art Against the Wall: An Artist Response to Civil Wars</i>                    | Gallery 72, Atlanta, Georgia                                                                      |
|                            |      | <i>GIPCA Live Art Festival</i>                                                   | City Hall, Cape Town                                                                              |
|                            |      | <i>Fearless Renewal</i>                                                          | MC Theatre, Amsterdam                                                                             |
|                            |      | <i>Performing Portraiture</i>                                                    | Museum of Fine Arts, Boston                                                                       |
|                            | 2013 | <i>Am I not a Man and a Brother? Am I not a Woman and a Sister?</i>              | James Harris Gallery, Seattle                                                                     |
|                            |      | <i>Personal and Political</i>                                                    | 21C Museum Kentucky USA                                                                           |
|                            |      | <i>Biennale Internationa d'Art Contemporain (BIAC)</i>                           | Fort de France, Martinique                                                                        |
|                            | 2012 | <i>Out of Focus</i>                                                              | Saatchi Gallery, London                                                                           |
|                            |      | <i>Unevenness</i>                                                                | National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare                                                              |
|                            |      | <i>Newsfeed: Anonymity &amp; Social Media in African Revolutions and Beyond,</i> | MoCADA, New York                                                                                  |
|                            |      | <i>Dak'Art Biennale</i>                                                          | Dakar, Senegal                                                                                    |
|                            | 2011 | <i>Material Representation</i>                                                   | BRUNDYN +, Cape Town                                                                              |
|                            |      | <i>Implemented Environments</i>                                                  | BRUNDYN+, Cape Town                                                                               |
|                            | 2010 | <i>A RE FANO</i>                                                                 | Blank Projects, Cape Town                                                                         |

AWARD NOMINATIONS

2016 Standard Bank Young Artist Award  
2011 Sasol New Signitures Award  
2010 MTN New Contemporaries

SELECTED ARTICLES AND REVIEWS

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Klawansky, Gillian, <i>Mohau Modisakeng: Abstract Made Real</i> , Destiny Man, 2016<br>http://www.destinyman.com/2016/02/23/145244/                                                                                                                                                                           | O'toole, Sean, <i>Mohau Modisakeng</i> , Frieze, 2014<br>https://www.frieze.com/article/mohau-modisakeng                                                                           |
| Mqombothi, Liduduma'lingani, <i>Artist Mohau Modisakeng: Probing Subliminal Violence</i> , Africa is a Country, 2016<br>http://africasacountry.com/2014/06/82023/                                                                                                                                             | Soudien, Amie, <i>Ditaola</i> , Artthrob, 2014<br>http://artthrob.co.za/Reviews/Amie_Soudien_reviews_Ditaola_by_Mohau_Modisakeng_at_Brundyn_Plus.aspx                              |
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Professor Ruth Simbao

Ruth Simbao is a Professor in the Fine Art Department at Rhodes University and the National Research Foundation SARCHI Chair in ‘Geopolitics and the Arts of Africa’. She received her PhD from Harvard University’s History of Art and Architecture Department in 2008. Simbao was the recipient of the Vice-Chancellor’s Distinguished Research Award at Rhodes University in 2009, and an American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) postdoctoral fellow as part of the Humanities in Africa programme in 2010.

Simbao has published in various journals including African Arts, Art South Africa, NKA: Journal of Contemporary African Art, JACANA: Journal of African Culture and New Approaches, Third Text, Kronos: Southern African Histories, Parachute, Mix, Lola, De Arte, Image & Text, Social Dynamics and the International Journal of African Historical Studies.

Recent curatorial projects include ‘Consuming Us’ (with Azu Nwagbogu) (2016); ‘SLIP: Mbali Khoza and Igshaan Adams’ (2014); the performance art programme ‘BLIND SPOT’ at the National Arts Festival (2014), and ‘Making Way: Contemporary Art from South Africa and China’ at the Standard Bank Gallery in Johannesburg (2013) and the National Arts Festival (2012).

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Professor Hlonipha Mokoena

Hlonipha Mokoena is currently an Associate Professor at WISER. Prior to this she worked in the Anthropology Department at Columbia University. She is the author of ‘Magemma Fuze: The Making of a Kholwa Intellectual’ and has a strong research interest in South African intellectual history. Her new research is on the figure of the Zulu policeman, which she explores across the visual historical archive. Hlonipha is a multitalented public intellectual, well known for her work in many different parts of the world, and very strongly placed to both write and speak about the complex entanglements as well as the striking differences between South African and US cultures.

Ashraf Jamal

Ashraf Jamal is a cultural analyst, arts consultant, writer, editor, and teacher at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. He is the author of ‘Love Themes for the Wilderness’ (Kwela/Random House), ‘Predicaments of Culture in South Africa’ (UNISA/Brill), ‘100 Good Ideas Celebrating 20 Years of Democracy’ (Umuzi). He is the co-author of ‘Art in South Africa: The Future Present’ (David Philip), and the co-editor of ‘Indian Ocean Studies: Social, Cultural, Political Perspectives’ (Routledge). His forthcoming collection of essays on contemporary South African Art is entitled ‘In This World..’

PHOTOGRAPHY  
CREDITS

ARTIST  
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Performance Documentation: *Ke Kgomo Ya Moshate*: Flo Schneider

My heartfelt gratitude to my constant source of love and support, my family, Mme Thokozile Modisakeng and Martin Mckenzie. Thank you for your prayers and your guidance through all my dreams.

This book is dedicated to the spirit of my late brother, Neo.

Many thanks to the people whose work and vision contributed to the work contained in this book.

PREVIOUS  
STANDARD BANK  
YOUNG ARTIST AWARDS  
FOR VISUAL ART

|      |                       |      |                                               |
|------|-----------------------|------|-----------------------------------------------|
| 2015 | Kemang Wa Lehure      | 1998 | Nhlanhla Xaba                                 |
| 2014 | Hasan and Husain Esop | 1997 | Lien Botha                                    |
| 2013 | Mary Sibande          | 1996 | Trevor Makhoba                                |
| 2012 | Mikheal Subotzky      | 1995 | Jane Alexander                                |
| 2011 | Nandipha Ntambo       | 1994 | Sam Nhlengethwa                               |
| 2010 | Michael MacGarry      | 1993 | Pippa Skotnes                                 |
| 2009 | Nicholas Hlobo        | 1992 | Tommy Motswai                                 |
| 2008 | Nontsikelelo Veleko   | 1991 | Andries Botha                                 |
| 2007 | Pieter Hugo           | 1990 | Bonnie Ntshalintshali<br>& Fee Halsted-bernin |
| 2006 | Churchill Madikida    |      |                                               |
| 2005 | Wim Botha             | 1989 | Helen Sebidi                                  |
| 2004 | Kathryn Smith         | 1988 | Margret Vorster                               |
| 2003 | Berni Searle          | 1987 | William Kentridge                             |
| 2002 | Brett Murray          | 1986 | Gavin Younge                                  |
| 2001 | Walter Oltmann        | 1985 | Marion Arnold                                 |
| 2000 | Alan Albourough       | 1984 | Peter Schutz                                  |
|      |                       | 1983 | Malcom payne                                  |
|      |                       | 1982 | Neil Rodger                                   |
|      |                       | 1981 | Jules Van de Vijver                           |

EXHIBITION DATES

|                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Lefa La Ntate</b><br>Standard Bank Young Artist Award 2016                       |
| 30 June -<br>National Arts Festival, Grahamstown                                    |
| 27 July - 2 September 2016<br>Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum, Port Eliabeth |
| 20 October - 29 January 2017<br>IZIKO South African National Gallery, Cape Town     |
| 22 February - 31 March 2017<br>Johannes Stegmann Art Gallery, Bloemfontein          |
| April - May 2017<br>Tatham Art Gallery, Pietermaritzburg                            |
| 26 May 2017 - 8 July 2017<br>Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg                    |

Index

| PAGE  | TITLE                  | YEAR        | MEDIA                              | SIZE                     | EDITION  |
|-------|------------------------|-------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| 10-11 | Qhatha                 | 2010 - 2011 | Ink-jet on Watercolour paper       | Each panel: 170 x 108 cm |          |
| 12-13 | Qhatha                 | 2010 - 2011 | Ink-jet on Watercolour paper       | Each panel: 170 x 108 cm |          |
| 16    | Untitled (Frame II)    | 2012        | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm             | 3 + 2 AP |
| 18    | Untitled (Frame XXIII) | 2013        | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm             | 3 + 2 AP |
| 19    | Untitled (Frame VI)    | 2012        | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm             | 3 + 2 AP |
| 20    | Untitled (Frame XXV)   | 2013        | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm             | 3 + 2 AP |
| 21    | Untitled (Frame XXVI)  | 2013        | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm             | 3 + 2 AP |
| 22    | Untitled (Frame X)     | 2012        | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm             | 3 + 2 AP |
| 23    | Untitled (Frame XIX)   | 2013        | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm             | 3 + 2 AP |
| 24    | Untitled (Frame VIII)  | 2012        | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm             | 3 + 2 AP |
| 26    | Untitled (Frame XXII)  | 2013        | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm             | 3 + 2 AP |
| 27    | Untitled (Frame XIV)   | 2013        | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm             | 3 + 2 AP |
| 28    | Untitled (Frame III)   | 2012        | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm             | 3 + 2 AP |
| 29    | Untitled (Frame IX)    | 2012        | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm             | 3 + 2 AP |
| 30    | Untitled (Frame V)     | 2012        | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm             | 3 + 2 AP |
| 31    | Untitled (Frame XIII)  | 2012        | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm             | 3 + 2 AP |
| 33    | Untitled (Frame VII)   | 2012        | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm             | 3 + 2 AP |
| 34    | Untitled (Frame XVI)   | 2013        | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm             | 3 + 2 AP |
| 35    | Untitled (Frame XI)    | 2012        | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm             | 3 + 2 AP |
| 36    | Untitled (Frame XV)    | 2013        | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm             | 3 + 2 AP |
| 37    | Untitled (Frame XVII)  | 2013        | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm             | 3 + 2 AP |
| 38    | Untitled (Frame XVIII) | 2013        | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm             | 3 + 2 AP |
| 40    | Untitled (Frame I)     | 2012        | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm             | 3 + 2 AP |
| 41    | Untitled (Frame XXIV)  | 2013        | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm             | 3 + 2 AP |

| PAGE  | TITLE                         | YEAR | MEDIA                              | SIZE         | EDITION   |
|-------|-------------------------------|------|------------------------------------|--------------|-----------|
| 42    | Untitled (Frame XX)           | 2013 | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm | 3 + 2 AP  |
| 43    | Untitled (Frame XXI)          | 2013 | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm | 3 + 2 AP  |
| 44    | Untitled (Frame XII)          | 2012 | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm | 3 + 2 AP  |
| 45    | Untitled (Frame IV)           | 2012 | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm | 3 + 2 AP  |
| 48-49 | Ga Bose Gangwe (Video Stills) | 2014 | Single Channel HD video            | 2 min 15 sec | 10 + 2AP  |
| 52-53 | Ditaola III                   | 2014 | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm | 5 + 2AP   |
| 54    | Ditaola VI                    | 2014 | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 150 x 200 cm | 5 + 2AP   |
| 54    | Ditaola VII                   | 2014 | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 150 x 200 cm | 5 + 2AP   |
| 55    | Ditaola XII                   | 2014 | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm | 5 + 2AP   |
| 56    | Ditaola XV                    | 2014 | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm | 5 + 2AP   |
| 57    | Ditaola XVI                   | 2014 | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm | 5 + 2AP   |
| 59    | Ditaola VIII                  | 2014 | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 200 x 150 cm | 5 + 2AP   |
| 62    | Untitled                      | 2014 | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 150 x 200 cm | 3 + 2AP   |
| 64-65 | Untitled                      | 2014 | Ink-jet print on Epson UltraSmooth | 150 x 200 cm | 3 + 2AP   |
| 68-77 | Inzilo (Video Stills)         | 2013 | Digital video (Blu-ray)            | 4 min 57 sec | 10 + 2 AP |
| 80-81 | Untitled (Metamorphosis 7)    | 2015 | Ink-jet print on Epson Ultrasmooth | 120 x 120 cm | 5 + 2 AP  |
| 82    | Untitled (Metamorphosis 1)    | 2015 | Ink-jet print on Epson Ultrasmooth | 120 x 120 cm | 5 + 2 AP  |
| 83    | Untitled (Metamorphosis 2)    | 2015 | Ink-jet print on Epson Ultrasmooth | 120 x 120 cm | 5 + 2 AP  |
| 84    | Untitled (Metamorphosis 6)    | 2015 | Ink-jet print on Epson Ultrasmooth | 120 x 120 cm | 5 + 2 AP  |
| 85    | Untitled (Metamorphosis 5)    | 2015 | Ink-jet print on Epson Ultrasmooth | 120 x 120 cm | 5 + 2 AP  |
| 86-87 | Untitled (Metamorphosis 3)    | 2015 | Ink-jet print on Epson Ultrasmooth | 120 x 120 cm | 5 + 2 AP  |
| 88    | Untitled (Metamorphosis 9)    | 2015 | Ink-jet print on Epson Ultrasmooth | 120 x 120 cm | 5 + 2 AP  |
| 89    | Untitled (Metamorphosis 8)    | 2015 | Ink-jet print on Epson Ultrasmooth | 120 x 120 cm | 5 + 2 AP  |
| 90    | Untitled (Metamorphosis 10)   | 2015 | Ink-jet print on Epson Ultrasmooth | 120 x 120 cm | 5 + 2 AP  |



| PAGE    | TITLE                                      | YEAR        | MEDIA                              | SIZE             | EDITION   |
|---------|--------------------------------------------|-------------|------------------------------------|------------------|-----------|
| 91      | Untitled (Metamorphosis 11)                | 2015        | Ink-jet print on Epson Ultrasmooth | 120 x 120 cm     | 5 + 2 AP  |
| 94-97   | Ke Kgomo Ya Moshate (Performance Stills)   | 2016        |                                    |                  |           |
| 101     | To Move Mountains Chapter 1 (Video Stills) | 2015 - 2016 | Four Channel HD video              | 2 min 2 sec      | 6 + 2AP   |
| 102     | To Move Mountains Chapter 2 (Video Stills) | 2015 - 2016 | Four Channel HD video              | 2 min 2 sec      | 6 + 2AP   |
| 103     | To Move Mountains Chapter 4 (Video Stills) | 2015 - 2016 | Four Channel HD video              | 2 min 2 sec      | 6 + 2AP   |
| 104     | To Move Mountains Chapter 2 (Video Stills) | 2015 - 2016 | Four Channel HD video              | 2 min 2 sec      | 6 + 2AP   |
| 106-107 | To Move Mountains Chapter 1 (Video Stills) | 2015 - 2016 | Four Channel HD video              | 2 min 2 sec      | 6 + 2AP   |
| 108-109 | To Move Mountains Chapter 2 (Video Stills) | 2015 - 2016 | Four Channel HD video              | 2 min 2 sec      | 6 + 2AP   |
| 110-111 | To Move Mountains Chapter 3 (Video Stills) | 2015 - 2016 | Four Channel HD video              | 2 min 2 sec      | 6 + 2AP   |
| 114     | To Move Mountains Chapter 1 (Video Stills) | 2015 - 2016 | Four Channel HD video              | 2 min 2 sec      | 6 + 2AP   |
| 114     | To Move Mountains Chapter 3 (Video Stills) | 2015 - 2016 | Four Channel HD video              | 2 min 2 sec      | 6 + 2AP   |
| 115     | To Move Mountains Chapter 2 (Video Stills) | 2015 - 2016 | Four Channel HD video              | 2 min 2 sec      | 6 + 2AP   |
| 115     | To Move Mountains Chapter 2 (Video Stills) | 2015 - 2016 | Four Channel HD video              | 2 min 2 sec      | 6 + 2AP   |
| 122     | Endabeni 9                                 | 2015        | Ink-jet print on Epson Ultrasmooth | 200 x 150 cm     | 6 + 2AP   |
| 125     | Endabeni 1                                 | 2015        | Ink-jet print on Epson Ultrasmooth | 200 x 150 cm     | 6 + 2AP   |
| 126     | Endabeni 8                                 | 2015        | Ink-jet print on Epson Ultrasmooth | 200 x 150 cm     | 6 + 2AP   |
| 127     | Endabeni 7                                 | 2015        | Ink-jet print on Epson Ultrasmooth | 200 x 150 cm     | 6 + 2AP   |
| 128-129 | Endabeni 2                                 | 2015        | Ink-jet print on Epson Ultrasmooth | 200 x 150 cm     | 6 + 2AP   |
| 130-131 | Endabeni 6                                 | 2015        | Ink-jet print on Epson Ultrasmooth | 200 x 150 cm     | 6 + 2AP   |
| 132     | Endabeni 3                                 | 2015        | Ink-jet print on Epson Ultrasmooth | 200 x 150 cm     | 6 + 2AP   |
| 133     | Endabeni 4                                 | 2015        | Ink-jet print on Epson Ultrasmooth | 200 x 150 cm     | 6 + 2AP   |
| 134-135 | Endabeni 10                                | 2015        | Ink-jet print on EpsonUltrasmooth  | 200 x 150 cm     | 6 + 2AP   |
| 138-139 | Ga Etsho 2                                 | 2015        | Ink-jet print on Epson Ultrasmooth | 112.5 x 150.2 cm | 6 + 2 APS |
| 140     | Ga Etsho 1                                 | 2015        | Ink-jet print on Epson Ultrasmooth | 112.5 x 150.2 cm | 6 + 2 APS |

| PAGE | TITLE      | YEAR | MEDIA                              | SIZE             | EDITION   |
|------|------------|------|------------------------------------|------------------|-----------|
| 141  | Ga Etsho 5 | 2015 | Ink-jet print on Epson Ultrasmooth | 112.5 x 150.2 cm | 6 + 2 APS |
| 143  | Ga Etsho 4 | 2015 | Ink-jet print on Epson Ultrasmooth | 112.5 x 150.2 cm | 6 + 2 APS |
| 144  | Ga Etsho 3 | 2015 | Ink-jet print on Epson Ultrasmooth | 112.5 x 150.2 cm | 6 + 2 APS |



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