

EVERARD READ

BLESSING NGOBENI

(b.1985 Tzaneen, South Africa)

'I'm working to find the inner part of the human being. So I am stripping that person out...taking the clothes, the skin, the bones.

I'm trying to see what can come out of this person. Then I rebuild.

I call it the lust of the heart. It is never satisfied.' – Blessing Ngobeni, 2019

Blessing Ngobeni has made the corruption, incompetence and duplicity of South Africa's current ruling elite the subjects of his art. He tackles the disconcerting consequences of betraying democratic ideals, the failure to learn from historical tragedies, and the expanding gap between the rich and poor. This critique is informed by Ngobeni's own experience, the hardships and challenges he had to confront as a child and adolescent. As a result of his exceptional work and dedication to his practice, Ngobeni received the highly prestigious Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Visual Arts in 2020.

Ngobeni is known for his distinctive style, created with layers of acrylic washes over exaggerated collaged figures, accompanied by unapologetic titles such as 'Democracy is a Dust Bin', or 'A Study of Corruption'. He uses his expressionist paintings not only to overtly critique the current status quo, but to ask uncomfortable questions about the African's experience of the world. Ngobeni confronts his own experiences and challenges them in the often nightmarishly absurd and violent scenes of his paintings. These scenes, though brutal and honest, are also a display of the artist's visual sensitivities to line, image and the power of colour.

In recent bodies of work, Ngobeni engages with the idea of a haunting past – specifically with regards to African history, in a scathing condemnation of the continent's current political and socio-economic status as a result of its colonial legacy. This engagement does not only lie in the concepts behind his art, but in his process of making, of carefully and laboriously constructing artworks from extant imagery as well as his own imagination. His distorted figures are often depicted with bulging bellies heavy with collected collage pieces sourced from local and international press, glossy magazines and social media. Ngobeni introduces other materials to his work; fur, cotton wool, gift wrap and textiles expand the artist's storytelling palette, allowing him to delve into different narratives and visual metaphors.

For Ngobeni the past, or history, never leaves us; it defines our everyday lives.

In addition to the Standard Bank Young Artist Award, Ngobeni is the recipient of several awards, including the Reinhold Cassirer Art Award by Nadine Gordimer (2012), and the Arts & Culture Trust Young Professional ImpACT award (2013). He is a 2024 Finalist in the Norval Sovereign African Art Prize. His work was also included in the Phaidon publication, 'Vitamin P3: New Perspectives in Painting' (2016).

EDUCATION

Artist Proof Studio, Newtown, Johannesburg, South Africa

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2024 Oppressor of the Oppressed, Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
The Mirrored Soft Life, Frieze, with Jenkins Johnson, LA, USA
- 2023 Ntsumi Ya Vutomi, Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
Coming of the Unknown, Everard Read, London, UK
- 2022 Fragility of Time, Everard Read Cape Town, South Africa
Spirit of Water Dancing, FNB Art Joburg, with Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa



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- 2021 Skeletons at Work, Everard Read Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2020 Chaotic Pleasure, 2020 Standard Bank Young Artist Award, Everard Read Johannesburg, South Africa
 - Replica Ever Sang, Everard Read Cape Town, South Africa
 - Study Song of Chicotte, Everard Read Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2018 A Note from Error, Everard Read Johannesburg, South Africa and London, UK
 - Enemy of Foe, Everard Read Cape Town, South Africa
- 2017 Masked Reality, Everard Read Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2016 Song of the Chicotte, Everard Read Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2015 As If You Care, Gallery MOMO, Cape Town and Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2014 In His State of Madness, Gallery MOMO, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2012 Exit Emergency, Reinhold Cassirer Award, Bag Factory, Johannesburg, South Africa

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2024 Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2023 What I Feel When I Think About The Cosmos, Everard Read, Franschoek, South Africa
 - Cyclical Bloom, Jenkins Johnson, New York, USA
 - FNB Art Joburg, with Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
 - Natural Habitat, 16 on Lerotholi, Cape Town, South Africa
 - 110 Year Anniversary, Everard Read, London, UK
 - Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2022 Transcontinental Dialogues, Jenkins Johnson, New York, USA
 - 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, with Everard Read, Paris, France
 - Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
 - Things I'd like to remember, Everard Read Cape Town, South Africa
 - 3D in 2022: South African Contemporary Sculpture, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2021 Spring Show, Everard Read Johannesburg, South Africa
 - Blessing Ngobeni and Teresa Kutala Firmino, Everard Read Franschoek, South Africa
 - Oasis, 25th Anniversary Exhibition, Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2020 Frieze New York, with Jenkins Johnson Gallery, New York, USA
 - Pink, Everard Read Johannesburg, South Africa
 - The Armory Show, with Jenkins Johnson Gallery, Chicago, USA
 - Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
 - Masterpiece online, with Everard Read London, UK
- 2019 CONTEXT Art Miami, with Everard Read, Miami, USA
 - ArtX Lagos, with Everard Read, Lagos, Nigeria
 - 'Personal Structures: Identities', Legate Lithography Editions, Venice Biennale, Italy
 - Southern Aspect, Everard Read London, UK
 - Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2018 EXPO CHICAGO, with Jenkins Johnson Gallery, Chicago, USA
 - The Photography Show 2018, presented by AIPAD, Jenkins Johnson, New York, USA
 - Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
 - FNB Joburg Art Fair, with Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
 - In the Forests of the Night, Everard Read Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2017 PULSE Miami Beach, Jenkins Johnson Gallery, Miami, USA
 - Humanity Today, Jenkins Johnson, New York, USA
 - EXPO CHICAGO, with Jenkins Johnson, Chicago, USA
 - Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
 - FNB Joburg Art Fair, with Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
 - Viewpoints, Jenkins Johnson, San Francisco, USA
 - Art Miami, with Jenkins Johnson, Miami, USA
 - Off the wall, Everard Read Johannesburg, South Africa
 - Viewpoints, Jenkins Johnson, New York, USA



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- 2016 In Unknown Space, Cleveland Print Room in conjunction with Hedge Gallery, Cleveland, USA
Summer Exhibition, Everard Read London, UK
Art Miami, with Jenkins Johnson, Miami, USA
- 2013 FNB Art Joburg, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2012 On This Earth, Gallery MOMO, Johannesburg, South Africa
Made in Africa, Africa Day, Sandton Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2011 SANNA Africa Festival, Zoo Lake, Johannesburg, South Africa
Wasted, Unity Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2010 Collaboration, Unity Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2009 Unity Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2007 Museum Africa, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2006 Taxi Outreach Project, David Krut; Michaelis Central Library; Diepkloof Library, Johannesburg, South Africa

RESIDENCIES

- Cleveland Creative Fusion, Ohio, USA
- Headlands Centre For Art, San Francisco, USA
- Reinhold Cassirer Award, Bag Factory, Johannesburg, South Africa

AWARDS

- 2024 Finalist - Norval Sovereign African Art Prize
- 2019 Standard Bank Young Artist Award (2020) for Visual Arts in South Africa
- 2013 Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans
Art & Culture Trust, Johannesburg, South Africa, ACT Lifetime Achievement Awards and
ImpACT Awards for Young Professionals: Blessing Ngobeni for Visual Arts
- 2011 Reinhold Cassirer Art Award