

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 Ntsumi Ya Vutomi, Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
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



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- Spirit of Water Dancing, FNB Art Joburg, with Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
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

- 2025 Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
2024 Inner Sanctum, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
FNB Art Joburg, with Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
Winter Collection, Everard Read, Franschhoek, South Africa
Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
EXPO CHICAGO, with Everard Read, Chicago, USA
2023 What I Feel When I Think About The Cosmos, Everard Read, Franschhoek, South Africa
Cyclical Bloom, Jenkins Johnson, New York, USA
FNB Art Joburg, with Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
25th Anniversary Exhibition, Knysna Fine Art, Knysna, South Africa
Natural Habitat, 16 on Leretholi, 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 Franschhoek, 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



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- 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
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