

## BLACKNESS IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN ART PRACTICE

ONLINE EVENT, ZOOM

TUESDAY 1 JUNE 2021, 16.00—17.45 BST

**Explore how contemporary African artists deal with the question of Blackness**

This panel considers ways in which contemporary African artists, curators and writers deal with the question of Blackness in their work. It asks how an African experience of Blackness differs from that of the diaspora and from country to country.

The presentations will consider a continent-specific account of Blackness through relationships with spirituality, ancestry, (settler) colonialism and Black womanhood. Speakers include Nomusa Makhubu, Minna Salami and Suzana Sousa.

The panel will be chaired by Portia Malatjie, Adjunct Curator of Africa and African Diaspora at the [Hyundai Tate Research Centre: Transnational](#), and will include an opportunity for questions and contributions from the audience.

### PROGRAMME

**Tuesday 1 June 2021, 16.00—17.45 (BST)**

16.00—16.05 Introduction by **Portia Malatjie**, Adjunct Curator of Africa and African Diaspora at the [Hyundai Tate Research Centre: Transnational](#)

16.05—16.25 **Nomusa Makhubu**, Associate Professor of Art History & Deputy Dean of Transformation in Humanities, University of Cape Town

**'I sell the shadow to support the substance': Reflections on recurrence and resistance in contemporary art**

Is it possible to escape the confining circulation of demeaning images representing Black life? And would such an exit still enable the creative arts to explore oppositional political articulations about recurring historical trauma? I discuss the exchange of values between demeaning historical images and their recurrence in contemporary art. Within an economy of images, in which past forms of representation are quoted, parodied and reworked, there is a transfiguration, a transformation, a conversion. This discussion seeks to reflect on changing approaches to representing Black life in contemporary art and whether the spaces of production and consumption impact on Black creative work. Taking its cue from

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Sojourner Truth's inscription of her postcard photograph: 'I sell the shadow to support the substance', which declared that the image was being sold to support her activist work, this presentation focuses on agentic creative works geared towards social solidarity and justice.

16.25—16.45 **Suzana Sousa**, Independent Curator, Writer and Researcher

### **Village, kin, ethnicities: The construction of self in the work of Reinata Sadimba and Ana Silva**

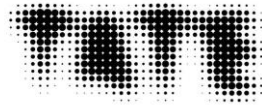
Drawing from the work of Reinata Sadimba and Ana Silva, this talk will interrogate the construction of identity and race in their art practice and consider these issues within an African experience. The experience of race in the continent is distinct from that of the diaspora, as issues of representation and the construction of personal identities engage other elements such as ethnicity and kinship, placing race in a different power structure. Reinata Sadimba's work exists around her Maconde identity, one that supersedes national identity or even race. Ana Silva similarly takes us back to the village although with a new set of elements relating to identity. For these artists, race is not an afterthought but rather an element exterior to the work and its production. How then to consider it in our contemporary art world?

16.45—17.05 **Minna Salami**, Author and Researcher

### **The responsibility of the Black artist to time**

Concerning its relation to power, politics often changes name and place but is otherwise static. Aesthetics (art, language, literature, poetry etc.) is on the other hand by nature always in flux. The aesthetic world, in which the Black artist creates her work, is a world that also grapples with power but at its most expanding it moulds power rather than exacts it. Significantly, therefore, the difference between politics and aesthetics is time, the static and the mouldable. The word Black in today's world is increasingly, statically, political. The word artist is on the other hand, as always, aesthetic. What does that mean then for the Black artist? Discussing the dangers in inflexibly politicising Blackness, my talk explores the role and responsibilities of the Black artist toward time, and the opportunities of new worlds.

17.05—17.45 **Panel Discussion & Q&A**



## Biographies

**Nomusa Makhubu** is Associate Professor in Art History and Deputy Dean of Transformation in Humanities at the University of Cape Town. She was the recipient of the ABSA L'Atelier Gerard Sekoto Award in 2006 and the Prix du Studio National des Arts Contemporain, Le Fresnoy in 2014. She received the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) African Humanities Program fellowship award and was an African Studies Association (ASA) Presidential fellow in 2016. In 2017, she was also a UCT-Harvard Mandela fellow at the Hutchins Centre for African and African American Research, Harvard University. Recognising the need for mentorship and collaborative practice in socially responsive arts, she founded the Creative Knowledge Resources project. She co-edited a *Third Text* Special Issue: 'The Art of Change' (2013) and co-curated with Nkule Mabaso the international exhibition, *Fantastic*, in 2015 and *The stronger we become* in 2019 at the 58th Venice Biennale in Italy.

**Portia Malatjie** is Adjunct Curator of Africa and African Diaspora at the Hyundai Tate Research Centre: Transnational, Tate Modern. She is a Senior Lecturer in Visual Cultures at the University of Cape Town. Malatjie holds a PhD in Visual Cultures from Goldsmiths, University of London. Her research looks at African conceptions of Blackness through Africa sonic and spiritual praxes.

**Minna Salami** is a multiple award-winning blogger and founder of MsAfropolitan, author, feminist theorist and lecturer. She is the author of the internationally acclaimed book *Sensuous Knowledge: A Black Feminist Approach for Everyone*, a critical book exploring universal ideas with an Africa-centred, decolonial and feminist perspective and translated into several languages. She is co-director of the feminist movement, *Activate*, and a Senior Research Associate at *Perspectiva*. She sits on the advisory board of the African Feminist Initiative at Pennsylvania State University and the editorial board of the *Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the Sahel* and the *Emerge* platform.

**Suzana Sousa** is an independent curator and writer. She is a Fellow at the Centre for Humanities Research at the UWC and at the [africaasacountry.com](http://africaasacountry.com) researching Angolan cultural policy. She is co-curator of the exhibition *Kiximbi: meditations on the middle passage and other Atlantic phantoms* for the South South Veza platform and *The Power of My Hands* currently at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris, part of the Saison Africa 2020. She also developed the podcast [Concepts of Love](#) with Dana Whabira and Njelele Art Station.