

Siwa Mgoboza

Siwa Mgoboza explores notions of difference and belonging as informed by his personal experiences of prejudice and assimilation. Growing up abroad and subsequently returning to South Africa as a young man, Mgoboza was profoundly struck by the difference between his expectation of an egalitarian South Africa and the stark contrast of its reality.

As response to this, Mgoboza has created Africadia – a means to transcend – if only momentarily – prejudice based on preconceived notions of gender, race, religion, class and nationality. Hybridity is at the core of the Africadian experiment and Mgoboza imagines a world where absolutes become fluid and open to debate. A utopic intermingling of notions of an unspoilt Africa and Arcadia – as referenced in Greek mythology and the painting of Renaissance artist Nicolas Poussin, Africadia represents an alternative – a space where in Mgoboza's words, "we stop talking about the 'other' and start talking to one another."

In creating the hybrid beings that populate the Africadian dimension, Mgoboza has drawn on his Hlubi heritage by incorporating the bright and densely patterned Isishweshwe cloth into his photographic, sculptural and textile work. Traditionally worn by women, Mgoboza references a motif that is immediately recognizable as "African" but on closer investigation, has truly global roots having arrived in Southern Africa from India via Dutch trade routes. It became widely embraced when introduced to Southern Africa by German settlers in the mid 1800s. Isishweshwe is a symbol embedded with the ethos of Africadia – of cultural interchanges across continents, of indigenization and cultural revitalization.

As visual device Mgoboza offers the viewer Isishweshwe as an accepted African signifier, but it is simultaneously reconstituted as a question that undermines its very "Africaness". By subverting both geographical and gender specific assumptions, Mgoboza opens up alternative readings of what it is to be an African.

Mgoboza was a finalist in Sasol New Signatures (2015), Barclay's L'Atelier top 100 (2016), and SA Taxi Awards top 30 finalist at Lizamore & Associates Gallery. He was featured at the PGH Photo Fair at the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh, USA and his work was included in the ! Kauru Contemporary African Art Project: Being and Becoming, at the UNISA Art Gallery in Pretoria, South Africa.

Siwa Mgoboza holds a BA Fine Art from Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town, where he graduated with a distinction and dean's list in 2015. He was awarded the Eduard Louis Laden Art Bursary at The Michaelis School of Fine Art and the Cecil Skotnes Award for most promising artist from the school (both 2015). He was named the 2015 Young + African Visual Artist of the Year by Creative Nestlings.

Mgoboza exhibited his first solo project at WHATIFTHWORLD Gallery (Cape Town) in June 2016 and first international solo at Semaphore Gallery in Switzerland. He has exhibited in Istanbul with NoLab Gallery, Lagos Photo Festival in Lagos, Nigeria; the first edition of AKAA (Also Known As Africa) in Paris, France; Nanjing International Arts Festival in Nanking, China in the 2016, the Iziko National Gallery in Cape Town and the first edition of Art Africa Fair 2017.

Mgoboza's work is in several private and public collections; the University of Cape Town, The Friends of the National Gallery of Israel, Cape Town; The University of South Africa (UNISA) Permanent Art Collection; the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh, USA; The Stack Bar, Cape Town; the Laureate International Universities Collection, USA; Wedge Curatorial Projects in Canada; Pick N Pay Art Collection, South Africa and BONHÔTE Foundation for Contemporary Art, Switzerland.