

| university  
south africa  
ART GALLERY

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Ben Arnold

Bongi Bengu

Paul Emmanuel  
Rookeya Gardee  
Diana Hyslop  
David Koloane

Pat Mautloa  
Stephen Maqashela  
Sam Nhlengethwa  
tracey Rose  
Joachim Schonfeldt  
Andrew Ishabangu  
Dominic Tshabangu

Bag  
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Artists

## The Bag Factory

This catalogue documents the Unisa Art Gallery exhibition of the Bag Factory Artists held from 6 July to 26 August. The Bag Factory is an artist studio in downtown Johannesburg, consisting of 18 studios, a gallery, a computer facility, a conference room as well as offices. The space houses 15 permanent artists as well as 3 temporary resident artists, providing a home for them to create, converse and collaborate.

The Bag Factory was one of the first international projects established by the Triangle Arts Trust, a British charitable organisation dedicated to the exchange of ideas and practices between artists internationally. When it was established in

1991, the Bag Factory was the only non-racial artist studio in South Africa and has continued to be at the cutting edge of contemporary art in South Africa.

This exhibition displays a variety of art forms by some of the leading practitioners in South Africa: Ben Arnold, Bangi Bengu, Paul Emmanuel, Roakeya Gardee, Diana Hyslop, David Kalaane, Pat Mautlaa, Stephen Magasele, Sam Nhlengethwa, Tracey Rase, Jaachim SchGnfeldt, Andrew Tshabangu and Dominic Tshabangu. Included are photography, multi-media and works that are more traditional in material usage, but contemporary in concept.

The Unisa Art Gallery is pleased to host this exciting exhibition.

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Alf the Artists (and other relevant people,  
at the launch!

Andrew Tshabangu

Andrew Tshabangu presents his suite of photographs on Johannesburg, also titled City Running Scared/Crty tn Transttton. He works in classical documentary style black and white photography. In his considered images, the respect he shows for his subject is undeniable. He seems to present effortlessly a distance between himself and the subject, close enough to be engaged, yet keeping a respectful distance.

In this series of photographs he investigates the transformation of the inhabitants of the city of Johannesburg. With the flight of many businesses out of the CBD, these old corporate buildings have been converted into apartments. As with the businesses, most of the white inhabitants of the city have left, allowing anew set of immigrants from the rest of Africa and black South Africans to move in.

Tshabangu's project examines these two streams: the city as a place abandoned, as well as a place that has transformed itself. One sees those without a definite place trying to make a temporary shelter within the city, towered over by the mass of urbanity. One also sees the hurried rush of people amid a glut of taxis. These exquisite photographs effectively illustrate a city in flux.

inning Scared /City in Transition

lack & white photography â\200\224 2004

Abdussamand Ben Arnold

One of the elder statesmen of South African art, Ben Arnold, trained in Polly Street Art Center in the late 1950s. He has taught at many of Johannesburg's art schools such as FUBA, the Soweto Arts Association, as well as participating in many local community art projects. He regularly meets with young artists, encouraging their progress.

As a Muslim, he does not wish to reproduce the human form, as this form has already been perfected by Allah. While his work still references the human form, Arnold works in what he calls a semi-abstract style. He says: "I am still grappling with those issues and gradually working towards pure abstraction. Ultimately, I am on a spiritual quest towards total abstraction in my work."

The Return is a compact sculpture influenced by the repatriation of the remains of Sarah Baartman, otherwise known as the Hottentot Venus. In 1810, Baartman went to Europe to be displayed as a curiosity for her unusually large genitals and buttocks. After her death her remains went on display at the Musee de l'Homme until 1976, when they were removed from public view. After 10 years of protest, her remains were finally repatriated to South Africa and received a proper burial on Women's Day, 9 August 2002, in the area of her birth in the Eastern Cape. The Return was created in 2001, while Baartman's bones still lay on a forgotten shelf in the museum in Paris.



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Plaster of Paris, paint â\200\224 2001

## Bongi Bengu

Bongi Bengu grew up in exile, returning in 1991. She completed her MFA at the University of Cape Town in 1997, researching aspects of power relations in the representation of contemporary South African women. She has been in the Bag Factory since 2000. Since her arrival there her work has grown in texture and depth, often working with soils, collage and clay.

Talking From Both Sides of the Mouth was created in 2004 after Bengu's return from a residency programme at Sansa, one of the Triangle Arts programmes in Ghana. While there, she began to work with found material. This piece which was created upon her return to Johannesburg explores the rich surface of the old, rusted sign. On the front, she has over-signified it, adding collage and oil paint. On the reverse, Bengu delicately painted faces emerging from the richly patinated surface.

Talking about these faces, Bengu says: "I have long been fascinated by faces. For me these are the faces that express the rich diversity of Johannesburg. The work also talks of a city full of contrasts, on the one hand colourful and vibrant, and yet sometimes cold and bitter."

of the Mouth  
Mixed media â\200\224 2004

David Koloane

The breath of David Koloane's career has been felt throughout the art world in South Africa. His works are found in most prominent collections in South Africa. Through his own work, support for his fellow artists and his promotion of arts in South Africa, Koloane has profoundly shaped the country's art. He has been part of seminal exhibitions. Besides numerous solo shows, his work has been part of seminal shows such as The Neglected Tradition in 1987 at the Johannesburg Art Gallery and Art from South Africa in 1990 at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, UK.

He has expanded possibilities for practicing art in South Africa. He was co-founder of The Gallery (the first black owned art gallery in Johannesburg) from 1977-1979, the Thupelo Art Workshop in 1985 (which sought to promote greater dialogue between artists and particularly black artists in South Africa). He was also a co-founder of the Bag Factory.

His paintings and collages speak directly about the grim realities of the cities. Adeptly handled, exploring the chaos and alienation of the city, the work nevertheless speaks of hope. Koloane created A Pillow to Lay My Head On: a tribute to street children whose livelihood is determined by their survival skills. In its center is an aluminium plate, likened to a sun disc, casting light into what is otherwise squalor.

A Pillow to Lay My Head On  
Mixed media â\200\224 2002

at

Diana Hyslop

Moving her studio downtown in 2002 – the year Diana Hyslop joined the Bag Factory – has liberated her work. Previously, Hyslop's studio was in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg, where a fence and trees were what she saw as she went in and out of its doors. She says that one of the best aspects of working at the Bag Factory studio is being able to walk out the door and be a part of the city.

In this series, Hyslop paints in oil directly onto a small snapshot of the city, the painting becoming part of the urban fabric. She then blows it up digitally, a process which magnifies each brush stroke. The different images Hyslop paints are autobiographical, representing different feelings she has about the city.

Hyslop draws on her past employment in the film, photographic and comic book industries. Using techniques derived from these experiences, she creates a comic-inspired world, in which the mere sight of a woman's legs may stop traffic, or rush-hour becomes an epic migration from the city. The transformation of the snapshots is symbolic of the changes taking place in the city she now inhabits.

Lucky Legs

Mixed media â\200\224 2005

Dominic Tshabangu

Dominic Tshabangu studied art under Sokhaya Charles Nkosi at the Funda Center in Soweto, finishing in 1992. In 1994 he joined the Bag Factory and opened his studio. Working at the Bag Factory inspires Tshabangu, especially the continual dialogue with other artists. His participation in different residency programmes around the world where one gains insight to various visual conversations helps keep ideas fresh.

This work of art, *Jewe/ Coa/ Stove*, is from a series of mixed media paintings of interiors of homes in informal settlements. Here the coal stove is central, especially in winter, when it brings the family together. The interior, which doubles as every other room in the home, is painted life size so that the viewer feels the cramped nature of the space. The lack of privacy is further emphasized by gazing through the window and seeing the surrounding environs.

Tshabangu examines the socio-economic state of townships. His daily travels, which afford him brief glimpses of unknown people, are the source of his subjects. He tries to capture the humanity in its struggle with the difficulties of living in townships today, thereby creating rich tapestries of life.



Jewel Coal Stove  
Mixed media â\200\224 2004

Joachim Schönfeldt

Drive By is a video work after an idea by Joachim Schönfeldt. The visuals were recorded by Catherina Weinek. Schönfeldt then approached two sound artists to interpret the videos. He tried to create the video with enough cues to provide visual stimulation for the aural artists. Each sound artist edited the visuals to their specific requirements.

James French is an accomplished musician and composer. French orchestrates his section like a film score. In James Webb's section, he gives the action a calm, Wimbledon-like commentary. Together, they speak about the construction of narrative and the subjectivity of it, how interpretation affects what one sees. The two halves are relatively the same visuals, yet in French's section one reads the video by the overall energy of the action. In Webb's section the individual action of each object – the cars, booms, and people – are what is seen. In French's, it is the overall composition that gains prominence, a three part symphony working in harmony.

The video work follows a similar theme in the work of Schönfeldt, which explores the interdependence of aural and visual information to create meaning. By viewing the same content, but listening to different audio, the viewer is able to question one's understanding.

Drive By  
Video work â\200\224 2005

Satine

Pat Mautloa

Pat Mautloa's art focuses on the urban environment he inhabits: the material, space and people. His painterly eye depicts the city, carefully articulating the textures. He challenges the viewer on what is seen.

The photograph depicts the remnants of the squatters' lives as ash from the braziers and smoke from the fires (now no longer needed in the light of day) the abandoned building providing some shelter. In his work Mautloa tries to understand his world from a historical perspective.

Brasier Series focuses on a building in Newtown that Mautloa often passes on his way to his studio at the Bag Factory. Having joined the Bag Factory at its inception in 1991, Mautloa has seen the area changed. Abandoned in the 1990s by business, the city was then occupied by people who were previously excluded. These images were taken in 1999. The traces of these people's lives remain only on the surface of the photograph. In a drive to revitalise and transform Newtown into an arts precinct (of which the Bag Factory forms a crucial part), they were forcibly removed by the new government soon after the image was taken.

The Bag Factory is a space which Mautloa has come to cherish as a home for his art. This work is a subtle commentary on this home.

Brasier Series  
Light boxes â\200\224 1999

Paul Emmanuel

Paul Emmanuel's work, *The Lost Men*, is part of a wider critique on memorials. At the onset of the second quarter of the twentieth century, an intense debate began to emerge on how to memorialize war and its soldiers who fought it. *The Lost Men* forms part of a counter-monument movement, which emphasises the impermanence of memory and loss. It is a conceptual artwork, laying bare the impossible goal of an objective memorial.

The photographs document the July 2004 outdoor installation at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, consisting of sheets of silk suspended like washing on 8 lines. On each sheet is a print of different parts of the artist's naked body with the names of the men who died in the Frontier Wars of Grahamstown embossed into his skin.

Emmanuel completed his Fine Arts Honours degree in 1993 at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. He was the recipient of the first Ampersand Fellowship in 1997. Since joining the Bag Factory in 2001, his work has grown more monumental in scale and more conceptually deft. *The Lost Men* will be reinterpreted to local situations and installed in Northern Ireland, France, Germany, and the United States in the next three years.

The Lost Men  
Pigment print on archival paper â\200\224 2004

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Rookeya Gardee

Rookeya Gardee was unable to study art in her youth and only began her art career at age 38, when she enrolled in the fine arts programme at the University of the Witwatersrand. Upon completing her undergraduate degree in 1997 she started her studio at the Bag Factory. Sensitised by the difficulties with which her own desire to study art in her youth was fraught, a strong component of Gardee's art practice is art education, with special relevance to South African Indians.

Gardee's art explores facets of her often conflicting identities: that of being a Woman, a Muslim, an Indian, and a Westerner at one and the same time. Gardee practices her craft with a strong feminist voice.

In reaction to the recent controversy surrounding the wearing of a veil by Muslim women, Hey Grrl Here is Looking at You Too co-opts the stereotypical idea that the hijab is a symbol of oppression. The multiple Muslim heads stare back at the solitary, naked white manikin, dressed only in superficial headlines and symbols. The work employs the postcolonial art practice of reclaiming the gaze.



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Hey Girl He 0  
bric â\200\224 2004

Manneq

Sam Nhlengethwa

Sam Nhlengethwa is a collage artist, one of South Africa's leading photomontage artists . Photo-montage was invented in the 1920's by the Dada movement in Berlin, which used familiar visual material from the world around them as political, often critical, critique. Nhlengethwa rhythmically borrows iconic photographs and refashions it so that one is able to see a wider scope of history in a single visual breath. His work 10 years into the new democratic South Africa heroically remembers the past.

Nhlengethwa's work is often political; at the Unisa Art Gallery he presents a series on Jazz. With his first Jazz series he became the Standard Bank Young Artist for 1994. It is the first time that he returns to this subject.

He often works collaboratively, as in this instance with photographer Zwelethu Mthethwa . Nhlengethwa combines the fragments of Mthethwa's photographs into new syncopated rhythms . Together they explore their mutual passion Jazz. Jimmy Dlodlu was the subject of one of the artist's collaborations. Dlodlu was so impressed after seeing the end result that the artwork formed the basis for his latest CD cover Afrocentric.

TH

ographs â\200\224 2003

## Stephen Maqashela

Stephen Maqashela has been part of the Bag Factory since 1994. Working in this professional environment helped him take the courageous leap of becoming a full-time artist.

He trained in painting and ceramics at the Alexandra Community Arts Centre and graduated in 1992.

Maqashela is also well known for his mosaics and large scale murals. He has created many of the acclaimed mosaics in the Metro Mall in downtown Johannesburg and has won international acclaim.

He is also highly regarded for his heroic portraits of people from Southern Africa.

The Crawling is a large installation work that Maqashela created in 2001 as part of a reciprocal

residency programme between South Africa and the Netherlands. Maqashela sees it as a healing

piece, housing those who are not yet free. The carpet is a strip of cheap gray underfelt, yet is rolled out

to provide passage for the people to walk towards the constitution. The people are crawling before it,

out of the ashes. The viewer, too, is able to walk along the carpet towards the constitution.

The Crawling  
Mixed media â\200\224 2001

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Tracey Rose

Tracey Rose is the most recent member of the Bag Factory, having Joined in May 2005.

Couched in humor, bathed in a profusion of colour, Rose tackles issues around identity: gender, race and religion. She is amember of the first generation of post-apartheid artists. While s till exploring racial and social tensions of South Africa, her work is fresh and vibrant, regularly winning a ccolades from critics and curators alike â\200\224 locally and abroad.

In San Pedro IV: the Hope ! Hope, she brings San Pedro â\200\224 a character first seen in Rose's Ciao Bella series â\200\224 to the wall dividing Israel and Palestine. Subverting traditional vaudeville references, the character has Rose's body covered in a Barbie-doll pink, wearing San Pedro's black fish nets, Wellingtons and tiara. In an unintelligible rendition of the Israeli national anthem â\200\224 alternating between rock and roll poses and child-like playfulness â\200\224 Rose conquers this apartheid-like wall. Illuminating the ludicrous, in arather profound act of desecration, she squats, giggles, then urinates on the wall. Rose then picks up her toys and walks off...

he Hope | Hope  
Video work â\200\224 2005

