



BLESSING NJOBENI

A Note From Error

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19 October – 10 November 2018

EVERARD READ
LONDON



A NOTE FROM ERROR

The Capitalists use the people as tools to build their wealth and the corrupt governments give the masses empty promises to win their votes to stay in power. The people watch them scramble for power from the bottom. Their mouths and bellies pregnant with wealth as the people fight for the crumbs that fall from their high towers.

— Blessing Ngobeni

For his debut London exhibition, Blessing Ngobeni reasserts his focus and mixed-media vocabulary to create a compelling new body of work. Using found materials and media-based imagery as rich sources of illustration, the artist creates complex, layered and powerful works that expose the social injustices of post-Apartheid South Africa and reveal the underbelly of contemporary South African life, with its stark reality of the *haves* and the *have nots*.

In *A Note from Error*, Ngobeni continues to dissect and critique the structures of power, overtly addressing the corruption, hypocrisy and greed of the contemporary ruling elite. Indeed, in his series entitled *Modern Puppet*, Ngobeni's procession of surreal figures, with exaggerated bodily forms, dominate the landscape, subjugating the earth beneath their oversized feet while sporting ostentatious symbols of power and wealth. Menacing, often red eyes are a recurring motif in Ngobeni's work and are suggestive of the corrupting nature of power. Another symbol that reoccurs in his work is the flaccid phallus – a manifestation of Ngobeni's and his fellow citizens' impotence in the face of a corrupt and incompetent government.

Ngobeni's *Portraits of the Struggle* series is freighted with symbols of violence which allude both to South Africa's armed struggle against Apartheid, as well as

the daily fight against crime and corruption. There are symbols too of incarceration, which the artist has experienced first-hand, as well as references to colonialism, whose legacy continues to permeate South African society.

The issue of land is a persistent political lightning rod in South Africa and Ngobeni's series of five works entitled *Dancing in My Land* contain overt references to farmland and the sense of belonging. His commentary extends beyond the borders of South Africa to acknowledge the xenophobic tensions that are rife among different cultures and nations on the African continent.

Ngobeni's work has been described as 'borrowing from the language of Surrealism, the anarchy of Dada and the figurative violence of Neo-Expressionism, particularly the work of American artist, Jean-Michel Basquiat'.* With his intense, large format canvases, the artist has created a space to satirize the corruption of his country's elite, to critique and attack 'the machinations of power that continue to hold South Africa in the grip of poverty, violence and the ugly reality of political repression.'*

Blessing Ngobeni's works, with their violent scenes of excess, are also urgent warnings to political leaders to wake from the nightmarish present and begin building a more just and equitable new South Africa.

* *Vitamin P3 New Perspectives in Painting*, Phaidon, 2016

COVER

Modern Puppet I
mixed media on canvas
157 x 105 cm

INSIDE FRONT COVER (DETAIL)

The Power of Caring
mixed media on canvas
157 x 92 cm

INSIDE BACK COVER (DETAIL)

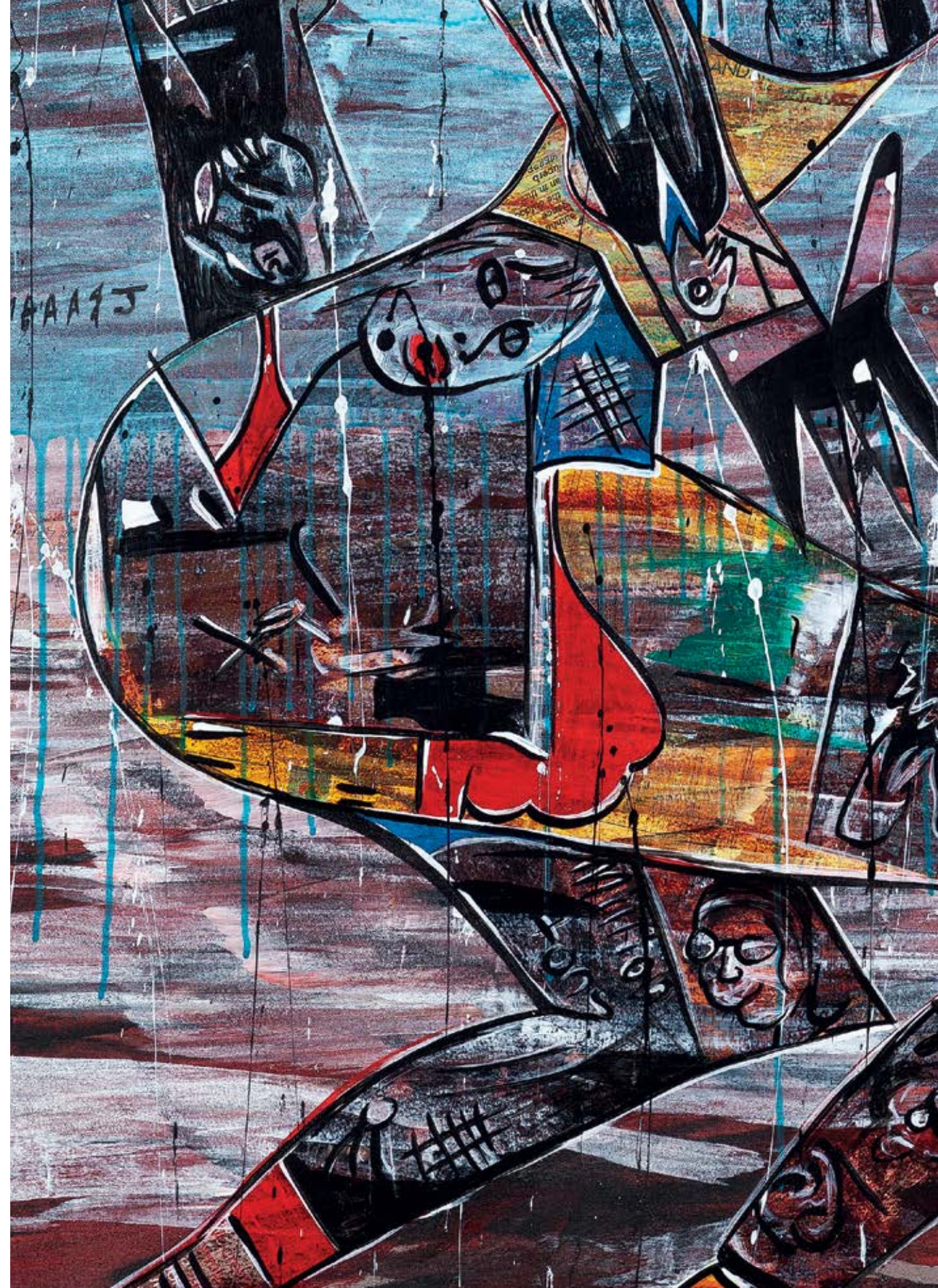
Dancing in My Land II
Mixed media on canvas
160 x 110 cm

LEFT (DETAIL)

Modern Puppet II
mixed media on canvas
157 x 105 cm



ABOVE AND RIGHT (DETAIL)
Dancing in My Land I
 mixed media on canvas
 160 x 110 cm





Dancing in My Land II
Mixed media on canvas
160 x 110 cm



ABOVE AND PAGE 6-7 (DETAIL)
Dancing in My Land IV
Mixed media on canvas
160 x 110 cm



It was
at Free
Land
But



Dancing in My Land V
mixed media on canvas
160 x 110 cm



Dancing in My Land III
mixed media on canvas
160 x 110 cm



Portraits of the Struggle I
mixed media on canvas
104 x 80 cm



ABOVE AND PAGE 12-13 (DETAIL)
Portraits of the Struggle II
mixed media on canvas
104 x 80 cm





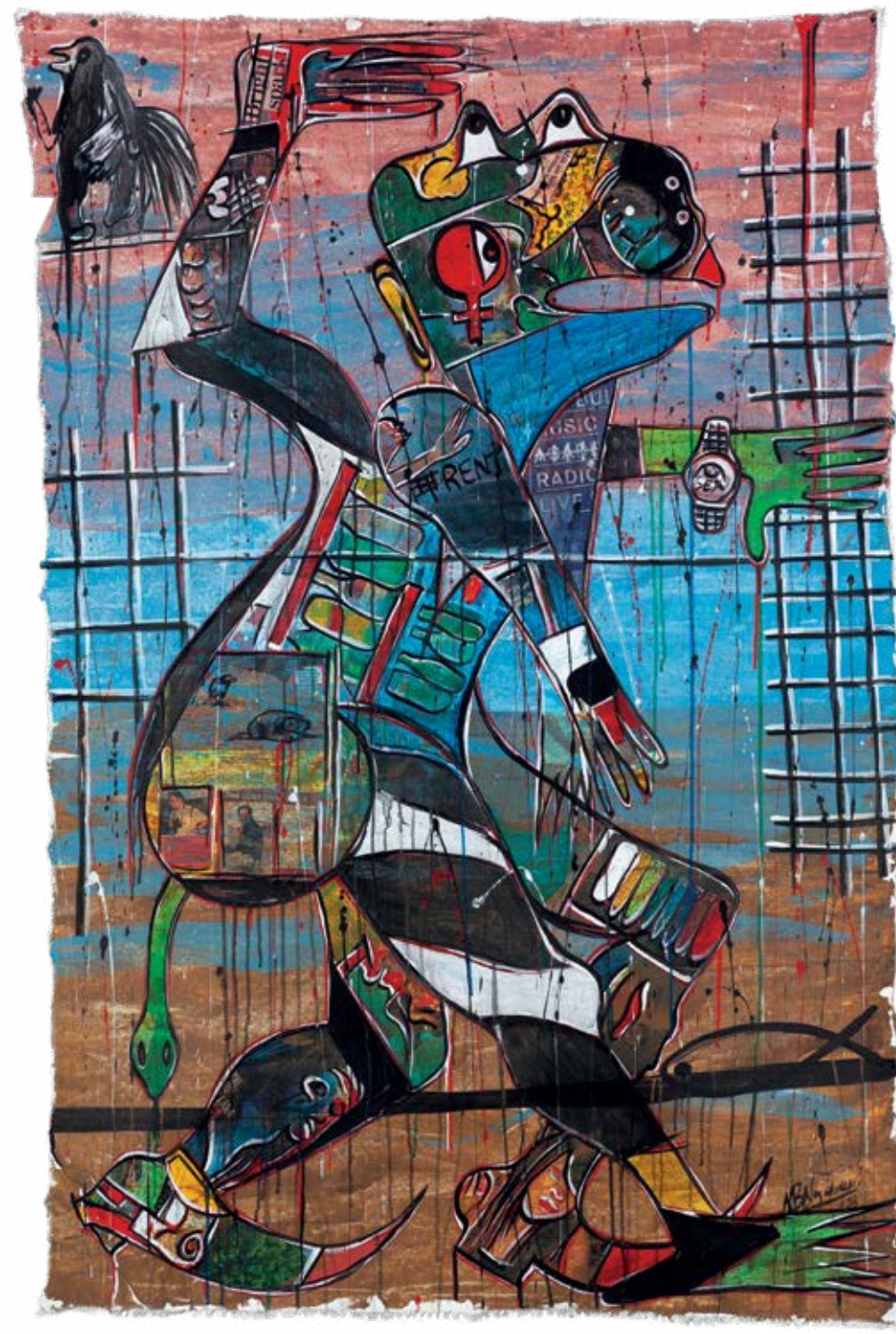
Portraits of the Struggle III
mixed media on canvas
104 x 80 cm



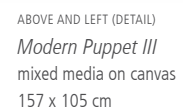
Portraits of the Struggle IV
Mixed media on canvas
104 x 80 cm



Modern Puppet I
mixed media on canvas
157 x 105 cm



Modern Puppet II
mixed media on canvas
157 x 105 cm



ABOVE AND LEFT (DETAIL)
Modern Puppet III
mixed media on canvas
157 x 105 cm



The Power of Caring
mixed media on canvas
157 x 92 cm



BLESSING NGOBENI

B. 1985, TZANEEN, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA

Blessing Ngobeni's personal story is one of triumph over adversity. He left his home for the big city of *eGoli* (Johannesburg) aged 10, fell in with a bad crowd and was soon involved in crime. Five years later he was arrested for robbery and spent close to six years in prison. While incarcerated, Ngobeni took stock of his life and took steps to alter its trajectory. He began studying and was exposed to the Tsoga (Wake Up) Arts Project. With the help of warders and two particular friends who brought him art materials, he began to pursue his art seriously, with impressive results.

Fuelled by the social injustices of post-Apartheid South Africa, Blessing Ngobeni's large-scale mixed media paintings serve as scathing condemnation of the country's political elite and can be read as a direct attack on the structures of power. Borrowing from the

language of Surrealism, the anarchy of Dada and the figurative violence of Neo-Expressionism, Ngobeni's paintings are characterized by obsessive mark making and littered with overt political references.

Ngobeni's large mixed-media canvases incorporate a range of found objects and waste materials, including magazine cuttings and found cardboard canvases. The materials themselves are a comment on the difficulty young artists experience trying to break into the art world without the financial backing that enables them to secure even basic materials. They are also deliberately selected for their content; magazine cuttings are layered to create Ngobeni's textured and powerful works and they often feature the work of artists who have influenced Ngobeni both conceptually and aesthetically.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

2018

A Note from Error, Everard Read London, UK
Enemy of Foe, CIRCA Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa

2017

Masked Reality, CIRCA Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa

2016

Summer Exhibition, Everard Read London, UK
 Everard Read Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa

2015

As If You Care, solo exhibition Gallery MOMO, Cape Town

2014

In His State of Madness, Gallery MOMO, Johannesburg, South Africa

2013

Works on Paper, Gallery MOMO, Johannesburg, South Africa

2012

On This Earth, Gallery MOMO, Johannesburg, South Africa

I Made In Africa, Group Show, Africa Day, Sandton Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa

Exit Emergency, Reinhold Cassier Award, Bag Factory, Johannesburg, South Africa

2011

SANNA Africa Festival, Group Show, Zoo Lake, Johannesburg, South Africa
Wasted, Unity Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa

2010

Collaboration, Unity Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa

2009

Untitled, Unity Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa

2007

Untitled, Museum Africa, Johannesburg, South Africa

2006

Taxi Outreach Project, David Krut Johannesburg, South Africa
 Taxi Outreach Project, Group Show, Michaelis Central Library Johannesburg, South Africa
 Taxi Outreach Project, Group Show, Diepkloof Library Johannesburg, South Africa

This exhibition catalogue is published
 in conjunction with the exhibition
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 at Everard Read London
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CIRCA

Modern and contemporary art from Southern Africa

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