

EVERARD READ

LONDON

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BLESSING NGOBENI | *A Note From Error*

19 October – 10 November 2018

Everard Read London presents a solo exhibition by South African artist, **Blessing Ngobeni** in October, immediately following Frieze and the 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair in London.

Fuelled by the social injustices of post-Apartheid South Africa, Blessing Ngobeni's large-scale mixed media paintings serve as a 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, particularly the work of American artist, Jean-Michel Basquiat"* , Ngobeni's paintings are characterized by obsessive mark making and littered with overt political references.

Ngobeni's large 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 attempting 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; the cuttings, for example, are layered to create Ngobeni's textured and powerful works and often feature the work of artists who have influenced Ngobeni, both conceptually and aesthetically.

This is Ngobeni's first exhibition in London and follows successful solo shows at Everard Read Cape Town in February this year and Everard Read Johannesburg in 2017. In this London exhibition entitled, *A Note From Error*, the artist reasserts his focus and mixed-media vocabulary to create a compelling body of work. Ngobeni's complex, layered and powerful works expose the social injustices of post-Apartheid South Africa and reveal the underbelly of contemporary South African life, with its stark reality of *haves and have nots*.

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

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Ngobeni dissects and critiques 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 explains further: *"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."*

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 reverberate in 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 identity and 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.

Blessing Ngobeni's works, with their obsessive mark-making and 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.

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Blessing Ngobeni, 2017

About Everard Read London

Everard Read was established in South Africa in 1913, making it Africa's oldest commercial gallery. Everard Read London opened its doors on Fulham Road, Chelsea in March 2016 and presents modern and contemporary art from southern Africa. The gallery also shows contemporary work by exceptional artists from around the world. Everard Read | CIRCA has galleries in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Franschhoek and London.

About 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 ten, 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.

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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.

Ngobeni's intense, large-format canvases serve 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."*

Ngobeni has held several solo exhibitions and participated in numerous group exhibitions in South Africa. He has been selected for artists residencies in the US and his work is held in private collections in South Africa, North America and Europe.

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

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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

Residencies

Cleveland Creative Fusion, Ohio, U.S.A.

Headlands Centre For Art, San Francisco, U.S.A.

Reinhold Cassier Award, Bag factory, Johannesburg, South Africa

Media Nominations

Vitamin P3 New Perspectives in Painting, Phaidon – featuring artists who have made significant and innovative contributions to painting, 2016

200 Young South Africans (Mail & Guardian), 2013

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Artwork, This Political Song, printed as cover for of “Rethinking the South African Crisis: Nationalism, Populism, Hegemony” by Gillian Hart, 2013