



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**April 2025**

### ***Hlukanisa uHlanganise* - In Conversation with Dr Esther Mahlangu**

**Curated by Mpumi Mayisa**

**Exhibition Dates:** 13 April 2025 – 23 May 2025

**Exhibition Venue:** The Melrose Gallery, Melrose Arch Johannesburg

The Melrose Gallery is pleased to present *Hlukanisa, uHlanganise*, a group exhibition curated by Mpumi Mayisa, opening on 13 April 2025. The exhibition brings together works by Dr. Esther Mahlangu, Charity Vilakazi, Tinyiko Makwakwa, Nikiwe Dlova, Puleng Mongale, and Nwabisa Ntlokwana. Artists whose practices unravel, reconstruct, and extend matrilineal transmissions through material and conceptual interventions. The show includes paintings, sculpture, textiles, photography, and digital media.

The title, *Hlukanisa, uHlanganise*, which translates to “take apart (deconstruct) in order to reconstruct/create anew,” gestures toward a curatorial premise rooted in African epistemologies, where knowledge is encoded in form, gesture, and materiality. Across generations, these artists engage with alternative modes of inscription - *umgwalo* (cosmic writing), hair as a cartography of lineage, ochre as a site of memory, beadwork as a language system, and garments as archival touchstones. In doing so, they resist the erasure of African knowledge systems, asserting that learning does not need to be didactic to be legitimate.

Dr. Esther Mahlangu’s iconic Ndebele mural painting practice, understood as *umgwalo*, anchors the exhibition. She inscribes familial histories onto the surfaces of homes, using geometry and color to construct a visual language that extends beyond aesthetics into the metaphysical. Building on this lineage, the participating artists explore acts of *ukulanda* - the process of fetching and retrieving ancestral knowledge - through a range of material engagements.

Puleng Mongale photographs herself in garments passed down through generations, layering her own body as a way to reconstruct a lineage made absent in photographic archives. Nikiwe Dlova traces the histories of hair as a site of resistance and identity, recalling how braiding patterns once encoded pathways to freedom. She expands this further by exploring the ways shapes within hair function as communicative symbols, mapping histories and relationships onto the scalp. Charity Vilakazi works with intricate line work and ochre, referencing Zulu beadwork as a mode of storytelling, while Tinyiko Makwakwa interrogates indigenous architectural principles and their alignment with celestial rhythms. She extends this by incorporating natural dyes, reinforcing the relationship between African sciences and the earth’s organic intelligence.



Nwabisa Ntlokwana's sculptures subvert material expectations, using paper-mâché and leather to question strength, fragility, and ritual. Her works engage with the unseen, gesturing toward the ways in which language and meaning extend beyond the physical realm.

Together, these artists assert that African histories have always been written; onto walls, woven into braids, shaped into clay, inscribed in ochre. *Hlukanisa, uHlanganise* is not a thesis of preservation alone but of continuation, where acts of remembering, reshaping, and reimagining reveal that the archive is not fixed. Instead, it is always in flux - constantly being remade in the present.

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### **About The Melrose Gallery**

The Melrose Gallery is a leading Pan African Contemporary gallery in Johannesburg, South Africa. The gallery represents established and emerging artists whose voices speak to issues of significance to the Continent of Africa globally. We are passionate about ensuring that the elders who have contributed to African Contemporary Art are recognised and continue to be heard. These inspiring stalwarts provide a stable foundation to an exciting young guard of artists swiftly emerging from the African Continent and Diaspora to establish themselves globally. We run a curated programme of exhibitions, participate in respected art fairs, support many of our artists in their participation at Biennales and conceptualise and implement significant non-commercial exhibitions in association with leading museums.

### **For further details, please contact**

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### **About Charity Vilakazi**

Born in Ethekwini, KZN, Charity is a multidisciplinary artist and visual orator whose work has been showcased both locally and internationally. She uses *ibomvu* (red clay) with acrylic paints to highlight the beauty of her characters, drawing inspiration from African folktales and traditional storytelling through a matriarchal lens. Influenced by her grandmothers, who instilled



values of equality and shared tales with strong female protagonists, Charity's art celebrates the role of women in preserving cultural heritage and fostering a sense of belonging.

### **About Nikiwe Dlova**

Nikiwe Dlova, born on March 3, 1988, in Diepkloof (Soweto), South Africa, is a multidisciplinary artist inspired by African braiding and weaving. She creates hairstyles, headpieces, and textured artworks using synthetic hair extensions, acrylic paint, impasto, and modeling paste. Nikiwe holds a National Diploma in Clothing Management from the University of Johannesburg (2013). Her work, which preserves African identity and culture, has been spotlighted by Design Indaba and showcased in her solo exhibition, "The Royal Hair Salon" (2021). In 2023, she began exploring printmaking techniques. Her creations have been worn by notable musicians and featured in various group exhibitions, including:

- Creatress Mashumi Art Project, Johannesburg (2022)
- The Thread That Binds, Affinity Gallery, Nigeria (2023)
- 76/23 Linocut Print Exhibition, Constitution Hill, Johannesburg (2023)
- Women of Substance Print Exhibition, Johannesburg (2023)
- Thread by Thread Trio Exhibition, Johannesburg (2024)
- FNB Art Fair, Johannesburg (2024)

### **About Nwabisa Ntlokwana**

Born in Durban, Nwabisa Ntlokwana is a Johannesburg-based visual artist whose work explores themes of motherhood, identity, and the transformative power of materials. Drawing inspiration from Africa's vibrant energy and rich cultural heritage, she creates captivating sculptures using innovative materials like paper mache, leather, and wood. Her work reflects a deep connection to nature and a commitment to sustainability, repurposing discarded materials to challenge conventional notions of waste. Nwabisa's sculptures merge conceptual depth with visual elegance, celebrating the resilience and creativity of African cultures. Her art invites viewers to reconsider their relationship with the environment and the objects around them, resonating with both personal and universal significance.

### **About Puleng Mongale**

Puleng Mongale is a visual artist exploring identity, spirituality, and womanhood through photography and digital collage. Inspired by the women in her life, she creates imagined realms where past and present converge. Her digital collages blend self-portraiture, landscapes, and archival textures, evoking a sense of temporal fluidity. Central to her work is the concept of "home," explored through familial objects and oral histories. Mongale's art has been featured in numerous group exhibitions, including Africa Foto Fair (2023) and The Fold Group Show (2021).



As a black woman in South Africa, she views art as both a political act and a spiritual practice, using creativity for resistance and healing.

### **About Tinyiko Makwakwa**

Born in 1984 in Tzaneen, South Africa, Tinyiko Makwakwa is a self-taught textile and fiber artist with a Bachelor's in Applied Social Science from the University of Brighton, UK. Raised in Tzaneen, her rural upbringing deeply influenced her connection to nature and organic matter. Her experimental studio practice respects the interwoven narratives of materials, plants, and landscapes. Using various needlework techniques, she repurposes found textiles and fabrics, creating compositions colored with handmade dyes from organic and inorganic pigments.

Tinyiko's exhibitions and projects include:

- "Mow Down the Lawn," Ithuba Gallery, Johannesburg (2018)
- Africa Textile Talks, MUS (2022)
- "Waste Not Want Not," Shade Gallery, Johannesburg (2022)
- "New Signings," Kalashnikovv Gallery, Johannesburg (2022)
- "Cosmos & Community," Turbine Art Fair, Johannesburg (2022) and Cape Town Art Fair (2023)
- Latitudes Fair, Johannesburg (2023)