

## MEDIA RELEASE

Artist: Papytsho Mafolo  
Exhibition Title: The Whispering of the Stars  
Venue: The Melrose Gallery, Melrose Arch, Johannesburg and online  
on a viewing room on [www.themelrosegallery.com](http://www.themelrosegallery.com)  
Dates: 4 February to 6 March 2022

### For Immediate Release:

The Melrose Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition by Papytsho Mafolo titled *The Whispering of the Stars*. The exhibition will be Mafolo's first solo exhibition in South Africa which will run from 4 February to 6 March 2022 at The Melrose Gallery in Johannesburg.

The exhibition explores traditional African mythology and belief, that views the sky, the moon, and the stars as part of the Earth. In African mythology it was believed that celestial phenomena were natural signs united with the Earth in harmonious synchronicity.

This new body of work, created in 2021, continues to explore the realities of an African culture fragmented by foreign hegemony via figures half human and half animal dancing across his canvases.

These figures work to shift and mirror life in constant dialogue with the sacred, each passing moment becomes a call to listen to the whispers of the invisible lips of the spiritual world. What emerges is a view of nature as something imbued with a rich spiritual significance.

Born Congolese and now based in Belgium, Papytsho has spent a considerable amount of time living and working in Europe. The exhibition aims to question European-made identities and their influence on and relevance to those who are indigenous to Africa.

Seeing everything as relationally in conversation, Mafolo evokes this by collaging gold leaf, printed images, acrylic but also oil paint and unfinished lines on a canvas. These unfinished lines, according to Mafolo, evoke an infinite world but are also a self-reminder that artistically, he has not arrived yet.

Symbolically this represents how European identities were imposed on Africans by the colonisers to the detriment of the indigenous identities. African philosophy emphasizes this as it is based upon the belief that life is a vital unity and that the human being is only a point on the cosmic circle of life. The distinguishing features of this philosophy are its welfarism, altruism, universalism, and its utilitarian outlook.

Central to this is the near-universal lessons that 'to be human is to affirm one's humanity by affirming the humanity of others. Thus, individualism is what threatens humanity and the lines left unfinished in Mafolo's work leave room for another, his spiritual self or you to finish.

This cultural mix from which our time has inherited, must be seen as an opportunity towards perfection and not as an element of destruction of our values, because in this meeting of give and take everyone makes their contribution.

The exhibition will also be presented online on a viewing room which will allow a deeper and more personal insight into the artist through text, photography, and a recent video interview between Papytsho and Ayoko Mensah, Artistic Officer at the BOZAR in Belgium.

### **Papytsho Mafolo (1977)**

Pitsho Mafolo's work depicts questions about the relativity between cultural identity and human behaviour.

His practice explores cultural identity crises and the historical heritage of human societies, with a particular emphasis on African culture.

Fragments of bodies half man and half animal often appear in his painting, which narrate the realities of an African culture fragmented by foreign hegemony. Although Congolese by birth, Papytsho currently lives and works in Belgium and has spent considerable time in Europe.

In practice, his techniques usually involve a collage of golden leaves, printed images, acrylic but also oil paint and unfinished lines on a canvas. These unfinished lines, according to Papytsho, evoke an infinite world but are also a self-reminder that artistically, he has not yet arrived.

Papytsho's work is included in the permanent collections of the UNESCO collection (France), Rotary Club Collection (Kinshasa), Shell Collection (Kinshasa), King of Jordan private Collection and the D.R. Congolese Presidential Collection amongst numerous others.

### **The Melrose Gallery**

The Melrose Gallery is a leading Pan African Contemporary Gallery located in Johannesburg and Cape Town. The gallery represents established and emerging artists whose voices speak to issues of significance to the Continent of Africa on a global basis.

We are passionate about ensuring that the elders who have made a valuable contribution to African Contemporary Art are recognized and that their important voices continue to be heard. Our stable includes iconic names of the likes of Dr Esther Mahlangu, Professor Pitika Ntuli, Mam Noria Mabasa, Dr Willie Bester, Paul Weinberg, Arlene Amaler-Raviv and Regi Bardavid.

These stalwarts provide a stable foundation to an exciting young guard of artists who are swiftly emerging from the African Continent and Diaspora to establish themselves globally.

These include the likes of Ronald Muchatuta, Christiaan Diedericks, Philiswa Lila, Mederic Turay, Gerald Chukwuma, Senzo Shabangu, Restone Maambo, Papytsho Mafolo, Clint Strydom, Aza Mansongi, Denis Mubiru, and others.

We run a curated programme of exhibitions, participate in respected art fairs, support many of our artists in their participation at Biennales and conceptualize and implement significant non-commercial exhibitions in association with leading museums

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