

## Press Release

### **Shifting Narratives A Pan African Contemporary Photography Exhibition**

The Photography Legacy Project and The Melrose Gallery present 'Shifting Narratives', an exciting group exhibition of photographic works from across the African continent. Over 40 photographers are participating in the exhibition which is to be presented online on a viewing room on [www.themelrosegallery.com](http://www.themelrosegallery.com) from 1 March to 3 April.

This exhibition follows on from the well received inaugural PLP auction last year.

The exhibition brings together an exciting diversity of subject matter ranging from social and physical landscapes to the private interiors, from gender-based issues to surfing culture.

The exhibition reflects the ingenuity and commitment of African photographers who continue to practice their craft despite extreme challenges.

Award-winning Zimbabwean, Tamary Kudita's project, African Victorian that won the Open Photographer of the Year, at the 2021 Sony World Photography Awards is featured. Her work explores and disrupts stereotypical representations of African identity. "Subversion is implicit in my elected mode of practice and my choice of representation demonstrates a subject position congruent with that of Santu Mofokeng, who seeks to tell a transparent narrative about black lives by constantly unsettling the comfort zones of racial and cultural memory," she told Contemporary Art magazine.



It is self-evident and well documented that photography in Africa has had a troubled past. It fluctuated as the late Okwui Enwezor has pointed out between 'Afropessimism' to 'Afroromanticism,' both intrinsically related, and flip sides of the same coin. The tropes of Africa as a warzone, famine-ridden, breadbasket or a place where 'natives' continue to practice age-old traditions, devoid of any social or political context, as if time has stood still, have been well and truly disavowed. Since the 1990's and the exposure of African photography to an international audience through a number of seminal exhibitions and publications, a flood of imagery has found its way to countless international (and some African) biennales, galleries and museums. What exactly is 'African photography', remains an elusive, multifaceted and engaging meditation.

The enduring concept suggested by Sabrina Zanier that African photography is a laboratory of collective consciousness remains appealing. Added to this, author Ekow Eshun in his recent book, *Africa State of Mind: Contemporary Photography Reimagines a Continent* (2020), observes a new movement while speaking back to their colonial past, "...African photographers claim the creative freedom to look inwards."

One of the highlights represented is the creative response of photographers to the Covid 19 pandemic. The inventive portraits and theatrical performative imagery of Raissa Karama Rwizibuka are tempered by Lindokuhle Sobokwe and Marc Shoul's social documentary interventions.

A large group of emerging photographers share their photographic endeavours. Self-reflexive imagery on Youth culture range from the documentary works of Nigeria's Etinosa Yvonne's and Algeria's Abdo Shanan.

Gordwin Odhiambo is a photographer born and raised in Nairobi. His photography critically explores the lives of young people and how they navigate the realities around them in one of Africa's biggest cities. His work nuances reductive stereotypes, offering alternative images from Kenya's urban slum communities.

An older generation of established names like Alf Kumalo, Michael Meyersfeld, David Lurie, legendary *Drum* photographers like Bob Gosani and a host of award-winning photographers rub shoulders with the past. A rare collection of endangered and disappearing South African vernacular photography is also represented by studio portraitist Ronald Ngilima and William Matlala. While this genre from West Africa has been widely seen in recent times, less exposure has been given to the South African version and its contribution to this part of world visual heritage.

Sales of images will go towards supporting the PLP whose mission is to digitize endangered and significant collections across the continent. Last year through sales, the PLP was able to digitize a new group of photographers from South Africa, Sudan and Kenya, some of whom are represented in the exhibition. The archive of Ralph Ndawo, a peer of Peter Magubane and Alf Kumalo who worked for *Drum* and the *Rand Daily Mail* has been kept by his

daughter Rachel for decades since his untimely death in 1980. It is now digitized and available for the world to see. Henion Han, a Chinese born South African who documented the Chinese community, as well work from the archive of Lindeka Qampi are in the auction. The efforts of photographers and the archives represented underlie the vision and spirit of the PLP to continue the digital preservation of photographic heritage much of which is perilously endangered so that African photographic collections and archives may remain on the continent, be accessible and researchable for future generations. The virtual exhibition links the archive with contemporary practice and cumulatively it is a celebration of the continent's creative imagery.

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