



THE  
MELROSE  
GALLERY

### **Ayanda Mabulu — Biography**

Ayanda Mabulu (b. 1981, King William's Town, South Africa) is one of the country's most uncompromising and outspoken contemporary painters. Entirely self-taught, Mabulu has developed a distinctive visual language that fuses satire, allegory, and symbolism to interrogate power, corruption, race, gender, and the legacies of colonialism. His works are dense with layered iconography drawn from oral traditions, historical archives, and spiritual references, forming provocative tableaux that confront systems of domination while reclaiming African narratives of resilience and survival.

Mabulu rose to prominence through fearless works that directly addressed South Africa's political establishment, sparking national and international debate. While widely recognised for these unflinching critiques, his practice extends beyond political portraiture. His large-scale paintings probe themes of land dispossession, capitalism, gender-based violence, and the spiritual cost of erasure. By drawing on ancestral prophecy, oral storytelling, Christian iconography, and cultural motifs, he positions his work as both deeply local and profoundly universal.

Storytelling is at the core of Mabulu's practice. By juxtaposing figures such as Nongqawuse, the 19th-century Xhosa prophetess vilified during the cattle-killing tragedy, with images of Christ as *Salvator Mundi*, he destabilises Western narratives that have long defined African history. These interventions challenge cultural erasure, reframing "false prophets" and other marginalised figures as symbols of sacrifice, resistance, and resilience.

Mabulu works primarily in oil paint, often enriched with the use of gold leaf. His brushwork combines expressive mark-making with meticulous detail, building layered surfaces that carry both symbolic and emotional weight. Recurring motifs, such as birds, regalia, painted blankets, and body fragments, serve as metaphors for heritage, spirituality, and power.

His work has been presented in prominent solo and group exhibitions, and featured by leading galleries and art fairs across South Africa and abroad. Mabulu's work has attracted significant critical attention, appearing in international art press and South African media alike. His paintings are housed in major collections including The New Church Museum (Cape Town) and the Leridon Collection (Paris), as well as numerous private collections worldwide.

Today, Ayanda Mabulu stands as a leading figure in contemporary African art. His practice is unapologetic in its demand for truth and justice, yet equally rooted in acts of healing; affirming the power of storytelling, spirituality, and cultural identity to resist erasure and to reimagine new futures.

## Curriculum Vitae

### Education

- Self-taught (no formal art-school training).
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### Solo Exhibitions

- **2022** — *The Healers*, Everard Read / CIRCA, Johannesburg.
  - **2023** — *A Collection of Works from the Studio of Ayanda Mabulu*, Everard Read, Johannesburg.
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### Selected Group Exhibitions

- **2024** — 33.55°S, Kalashnikovv Gallery, Johannesburg.
  - **2024** — *The Un-Turning Wheel*, Kalashnikovv Gallery, Johannesburg.
  - **2024** — *The Agitation to Regain... The Regeneration of Africa*, The Melrose Gallery, Johannesburg.
  - **2013** — *Our Fathers*, AVA Gallery, Cape Town.
  - Various early projects with WORLDART and Kalashnikovv Gallery.
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### Art Fairs

- **2025** — *EXPO CHICAGO*, The Melrose Gallery, Galleries section “Contrast” curated by Lauren Hayes, Navy Pier, Chicago.
  - **2025** — *Atlanta Art Fair*, The Melrose Gallery.
  - **2017** — *Cape Town Art Fair*, HAZARD Gallery.
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### Collections (Selected)

- The New Church Museum, Cape Town.
  - Leridon Collection, Paris.
  - Numerous private and corporate collections in South Africa, Europe, and North America.
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### Press & Media (Selected)

- *Sugarcane Magazine* (2025) — Coverage of South Africa’s presentation at EXPO CHICAGO, featuring Mabulu’s *Made in Africa*.
  - *Bubblegum Club* — “Could *The Kiss* Be Ayanda Mabulu’s Saving Grace?” (critical feature on his Everard Read presentation).
  - *Nataal* — Artist profile and feature on his practice.
  - Everard Read press releases: *The Healers* (2022), *A Collection of Works* (2023).
  - Coverage in South African national press for politically charged works.
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### Auction & Secondary Market

- Works have appeared at auction through Strauss & Co, Aspire Art Auctions, MutualArt listings, and international platforms including Invaluable and Artcurial, reflecting strong collector interest.