

Lungiswa Gqunta

Portfolio

About

Through her work, Lungiswa Gqunta grapples with the complexities of the South African post-colonial cultural and political landscape. Focusing on creating multi-sensory experiences that attempt to articulate the social imbalances that persist as a legacy of both patriarchal dominance and colonialism, Gqunta exposes different forms of violence and the systemic inequality in South Africa. Informed by her upbringing in a shebeen household in the suburb of New Brighton, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, Gqunta is no stranger to the economic legacy of the apartheid regime. Issues of inequality, gender violence and substance abuse as cultivated through the South African Dop system, are all subjects that come under Gqunta's scrutiny. Working primarily with found materials; empty beer bottles, petrol, torn bed sheets and worn wooden bed frames, Gqunta's work confronts the viewer with a series of uncomfortable negotiations. Between masculine and feminine, the revolutionary and the oppressed and the haves and the have nots, her work unflinchingly cuts through idealized notions of domestic space, enclaves of privilege and political apathy. Gqunta's media of choice: broken glass, razor wire and concrete, are all ubiquitous to an urban township landscape and Gqunta utilizes these emotionally loaded materials to great effect, so that both the potential threat of violence and its aftermath are deftly balanced in her work. Her installations combine these elements with 'softer' materials like cotton sheets and soft spoken voices, which in turn carry layers of meaning, history; a contrast of violence and warmth.



Divider, 2016, Mixed media installation (knotted fabric, and beer bottles), 210 × 700 × 340 cm

Rolling Mountains Dream



“Between the rolling mountains and the riverbeds lies a place of healing and remembering. With the body rolling through the land trying to remember while in a dream, the river offers a place of pause and healing to the body and its continuous labour. These bodies of water that exist as a river and a bath with healing qualities in the form of oils and or plants are there to create a presence of calmness within the space and a moment of stillness for the viewer. This multi sensory landscape is a look into the labour of remembering in a place that is intangible and continuously evolving.”

Building Mountains

It was a dream within a dream where I was walking around the Cederberg mountains,
I can't for the life of me remember what I was wearing but I think I was carrying two
long sticks, they don't have names but we walk together a lot
I woke up trying hard to remember this journey to the mountains and who or what
was calling me there,

but I didn't manage.

Oh well maybe it wasn't that important.

Here we go again though, within mountains and building mountains

I've lost so many songs to dreams

One must put their ear to the ground slowly to hear what it is so you don't miss any-
thing.

Hopefully you remember all that is said /shared.

These mountains have news, they have stories and they bare witness to histories.
These rocks came all the way down from the top to tell you something or perhaps
share a song that you can sing back to them

Building Mountains, clay, rusted iron, size variable, at Rijksacademie Open Studios 2021





According to Gqunta 'Building Mountains' is celebrating the quiet moments of black revolt nestled in homes and in the many places our eyes can't reach. This is an ongoing site of excavating different methods of collective healing and resistance and acknowledging different spaces of knowledge sharing and production.

Building Mountains, clay, rusted iron, size variable, at Rijksacademie Open Studios 2021



Building Mountains (detail), clay, rusted iron, size variable, at Rijksacademie Open Studios 2021

Benisiya Ndawoni

In her work, Benisiya Ndawoni, 2018, issues of access and security are brought to the forefront. Through this wall drawing sketched in razor wire, a constellation of violent and delicate sentiments are made tangible. Recalling the act of laying down laundry on the razor wire surrounding her childhood home, Gqunta's wall installation is populated with fragments of fabric that map out memories of beds made, beds lain in and dreams yet to come to fruition. Unveiling a sense of discomfort, Gqunta contrasts her township experiences with those of the suburbs, and the objects associated with these spaces.

Her intention is, "Purely to point out, to exaggerate, what is clear for me and may not be very clear for somebody else." Demonstrating to her audience her constant reconsideration of environments she inhabits, the artist enters into the gallery aware of the spatial and racial dynamics which pervade it, and reflects on her own experiences as a means of cultural translation. This is necessary, "So that white people have a glimpse of one of the many experiences that cause us blacks discomfort." Gqunta translates across racialized cultural systems, such that the world and all of its spaces and homes can be re-imagined as radically heterogeneous.



Benisiya Ndawoni, 2018, razorwire and found fabric at Apalazzo, Brescia, Italy 2019



Benisiya Ndawoni, 2018, razorwire and found fabric at Apalazzo, Brescia, Italy 2019

Riotous Assembly

The body of work coming together in Riotous Assembly has been presented at Rijksakademie Open studios Amsterdam in 2019. The title refers to the Riotous Assemblies Act of 1956 that prohibited gatherings in open-air public places if the Minister of Justice considered they could endanger the public peace. With this work Gqunta explores ways of healing through the tradition of communal unity and gathering by women.

A photographic and video series which documents the activity of folding sheets as a site of unearthing and intergenerational knowledge exchange. This moment of archiving stems from a larger project titled Riotous Assembly which celebrates black revolt and collective healing and resistance focusing on the often overlooked importance of women within these narratives. Gathering (video work) is about an action that goes beyond domestic labour, it is that moment when you get to learn about your family's history of survival and resistance. It's the moment when a young girl gets to understand how her mother keeps all her strength throughout the hardships and what her aunt's methods of healing are. This body of work is a continuous collective conversation.

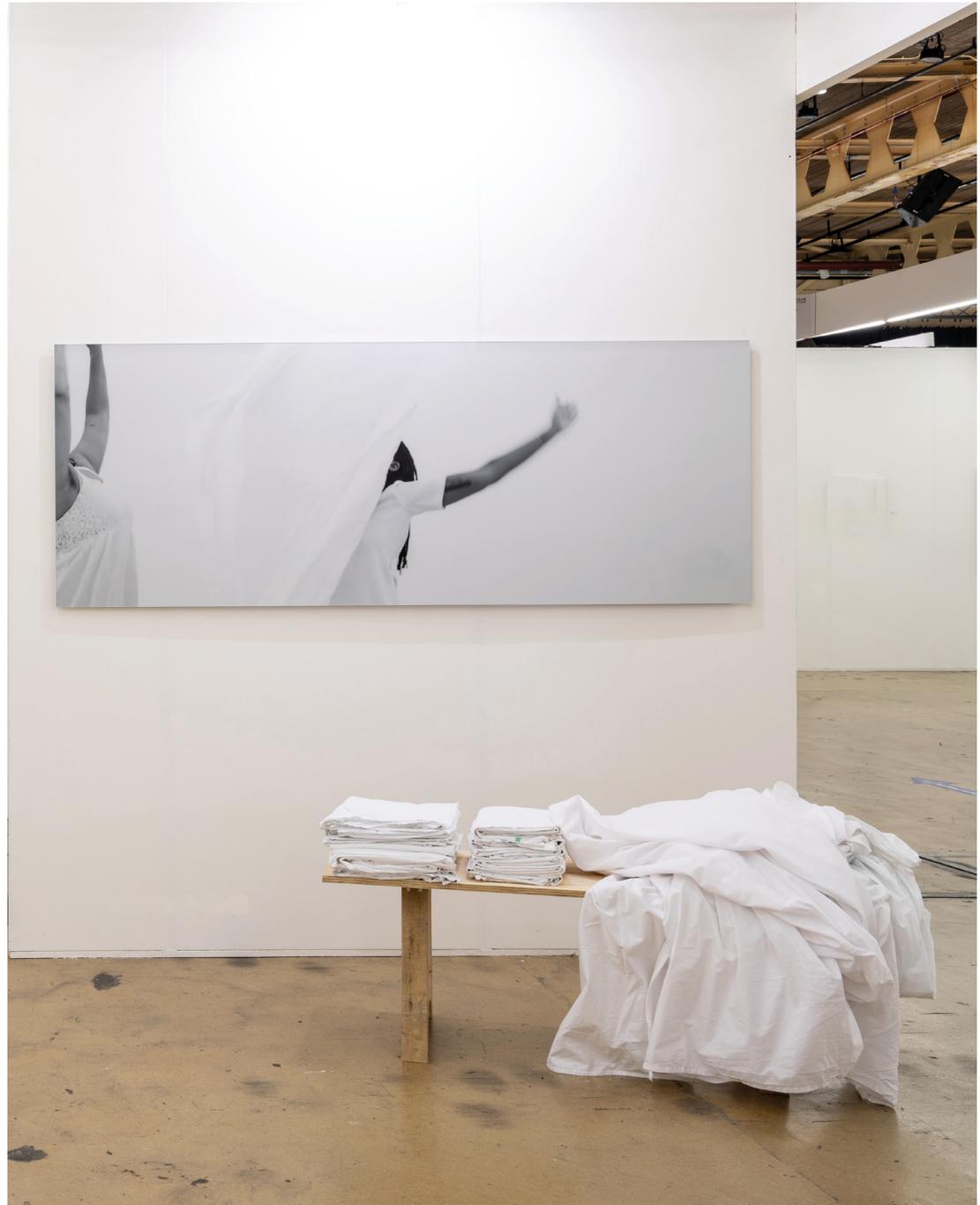
Click [here](#) for a video of Riotous Assembly.





Riotous Assembly, 2019, installation mixed materials and techniques, Open Studio, Rijksakademie, photo by G.J. v. Rooij

Gathering



Gathering installation, 2021, photo, bench, sheets, size variable



Gathering 5.11.19 #1, Epson premium, perspex, dibond, 82,5x220 cm

Lawn



In *Lawn*, Gqunta creates a 'lawn' out of broken bottles that have been inverted and placed on the top of a wooden plate. In apartheid South Africa, only affluent whites had lawns, which were tied to their prosperity and notions of domesticity, security and racial privilege. Upright, broken bottles are placed on garden fences to deter outsiders. Aside from connoting capitalism and globalisation, the bottles in Gqunta's works evoke those used to make petrol bombs during riots in recent years in South Africa. Bottles are also suggestive of alcohol, which the artist notes first came to Africa through Europe as a result of the slave trade. Thus the work responds to the corrosive legacy and social divisions produced by commodities, alcoholism, the destructive delineation of property, and the proximity of violence to borders and policing.

Lawn, 2016, wood, broken bottles and petrol, 242 X 122 X 28 cm, Gropius Bau Garten, photo by Mathias Voelzke

HORSE MEMORIAL



HORSE MEMORIAL I, 2017, paper, paste, paint and pen, dimensions variable



Sleeping Pools

The installation 'Sleeping Pools', is an illuminated metal bed frame filled with a pool of petrol. Gqunta combines the luxury of the swimming pool in a South African suburb with the perceived threat of a township represented by the petrol. The installation is presented together with the video 'Feet under Fire', in which Gqunta's lower legs swing in and out of frame, wearing scrubbing brushes as shoes. The video is accompanied by the sound of voices singing the childhood nursery rhyme, 'Umzi Watsha', which translates from isiXhosa as "The house is burning". The bed, in combination with the video, speaks to us about the concept of 'home' in the townships of Africa. In recalling the flawlessly polished doorstep at the home of her grandmother's sister, Gqunta has adapted the tools of domesticity by replacing the bristles of the scrubbing brushes with matchsticks. In the film, an echoed voice calls out: "Go look there; there is a fire, pour water" An instruction for survival to those living in the close confines of South Africa's informal settlements, where accidental fires unite the community to put out the flames. This element of fire is seared into Gqunta's practice as a both a metaphor and catalyst for change. "Our house, as in our whole country, is on fire, and who is gonna put it out? We have to collectively come together to put it out, as Black people. Not even just South Africans, but the entire continent.

Feet under Fire, 2017, HD Video, 14:54 min & Sleeping Pools, 2017, metal bed frame, led lights, perspex, petrol, water and ink, 160 x 180 x 35 cm, installation view at AKINCI, photo by Peter Tijhuis





Feet under Fire, 2017, HD Video, 14:54 min & Sleeping Pools, 2017, metal bed frame, led lights, perspex, petrol, water and ink, 160 x 180 x 35 cm, installation view at AKINCI, photo by Peter Tijhuis



Tending to the harvest of dreams

Centimeter after centimeter, green, orange, and purple strips of cloth are tightly wound around the shiny, cold wire. Only the barbs pierce the cloth cladding from within again and again like clear and brutal rays. Distributed throughout the room, the colored tangles of steel form an expansive green garden landscape from which purple and orange fields sprout here and there. Round and geometric basins ending in rust spread out amongst them like lakes on a wide, parched plain. Above them hovers the sweet and tangy fragrance of burnt imphepho. Words sound out—rhythmic, soft, muted, chirruping, clicking, and clacking—in a still-drowsy attempt to describe the nocturnal dream in isiXhosa.

In *Tending to the harvest of dreams*, the South African artist Lungiswa Gqunta poses the question of colonialism's continued impact thirty years after the supposed end of apartheid. How can one pick up the thread of one's own relationship to nature, the centuries-old traditions and knowledge that lie within one but speak to one only in dreams? How can one find and carry on one's identity, of which one was robbed bit by bit, also through land seizure?

Slowly and subtly, like the scent and effect of imphepho, the violence that comes forth from this work only on closer inspection seeps into us and stays there. The barbed wire restricts our movements and gives us a sense of what it's like to be in a place where you could feel lighthearted if you had the right to. After centuries of colonial influence and violence, it is difficult to change these places. Two-thirds of the country are still in white ownership. Ninety percent of the wealth belongs to 10 percent of the population. In a country so rich in natural resources, the question of land is crucial and the demands for restitution ubiquitous.

The history of barbed wire began with the colonial conquest of the North American West, the prairie, and the systematic expulsion of the indigenous peoples (by way of the Homestead Act). It was during the Second Boer War that it first came into use for military purposes. The British stretched it between rapidly erected blockhouses to protect strategic points such as railway tracks and severely limit the Boers in their freedom of movement. Barbed wire also surrounded the concentration camps subsequently built for the imprisoned population.

Tending to the harvest of dreams, 2021, installation view ZOLLAMT MMK, photo by Diana Pfammatter

Under apartheid, it helped enforce segregation. And today it is still as typical of the South African landscape as the countless colonial gardens and parks that dot the entire country: Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden, Company's Garden, Brenthurst Gardens, to name just a few. Despite its tremendously rich flora—South Africa has the greatest number of endemic plant species in the world—the Dutch and British introduced “native” plants and formed the conquered landscape according to their own tastes.

To this day, the gardens and parks are planted and cultivated primarily by Black South Africans who were prohibited from visiting them under apartheid. “They lavish their care and love on these gardens even though both are denied them in these landscapes of oppression and exploitation,” the artist observes. Hedges, walls, fences, and wires also enclose the gardens, parks, and entire landscapes of the present. “Parks are one of the many places in which you can see this segregation structurally, and it also exists in terms of gardens and natural spaces of leisure. It may seem crazy, but this green grass really becomes a physical manifestation of how people are treated and how an area is treated because of the people who live in it,” Lungiswa Gqunta comments. “Even just navigating Cape Town, which is filled with these kinds of colonial landscapes, reminds you that you are slightly out of place or always being watched, sometimes in very obvious ways and other times in very subtle ways. Being in spaces where you’re made to feel as if you don’t belong always brought up a specific reaction in me: I own the space in the way that I move across it, and I walk as if this were mine. I move with the thought that this is my inheritance, not to feel small or to constantly be faced with all the politics about that particular space. I don’t know if it’s reclaiming... but trying to reassociate myself in a space that has been made to feel alien to me.”

Click [here](#) to download the booklet of the exhibition.



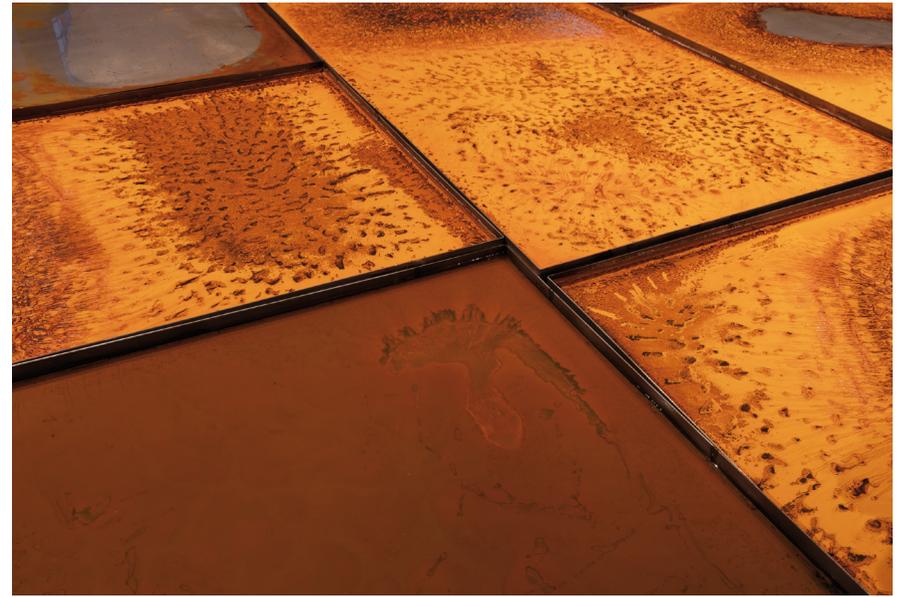
Lungiswa Gqunta at Tending to the harvest of dreams, 2021, installation view ZOLLAMT MMK, photo by Diana Pfammatter



Tending to the harvest of dreams, 2021, installation view ZOLLAMT MMK, photo by Diana Pfammatter



Tending to the harvest of dreams, 2021, installation view ZOLLAMT MMK, photo by Diana Pfammatter



Noluthando; Kholiswa; River beds, 2021 (detail), photos by Diana Pfammatter



Lungiswa Gqunta (b.1990) is a visual artist working in performance, printmaking, sculpture and installation. Gqunta has been in residence at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam (2019-2021). In 2019, AKINCI presented both her installations 'Feet under Fire' and 'Sleeping Pools' within the exhibition 'Heroinas Now'. Gqunta has also obtained her undergraduate degree at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in 2012 and her MFA at the Michaelis School of Fine Arts in Cape Town in 2017. In addition to her practice, Gqunta is one of the founding members of iQhiya, with whom she participated in Documenta 14 and Glasgow International. She has participated in the Manifesta 12 (2018) and the 15th Istanbul Biennial (2017) and has also been included in the group exhibition 'Not a Single Story II' at the Wanas Konst Museum in Sweden. She has been actively involved in the South African art scene, having exhibited with both the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary African Art and the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG), as well as held two solo exhibitions, Qwitha (2018) and Qokobe (2016), with WHATIFTHEWORLD gallery in Cape Town, SA. Her work forms part of the public collections of the Kunsthall Zurich, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, The University of Cape Town and Zeitz MOCAA and Centraal Museum Utrecht (NL). In 2021, Lungiswa Gqunta has a solo exhibition 'Tending to the harvest of dreams' at the Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main, DE. She will also exhibit in Marres, Maastricht (NL) and in Centraal Museum Utrecht (NL) in 2021. Lungiswa Gqunta is represented by WHATIFTHEWORLD, Cape Town and AKINCI, Amsterdam.

Nompumelelo; Kholiswa, 2021 (detail), photo by Diana Pfammatter

CV Lungiswa Gqunta**Selected solo exhibitions**

- 2021 Tending to the harvest of dreams, ZOLLAMT, MMK Museum of Modern Art, Frankfurt
- 2019 Lungiswa Gqunta, Apalazzo Gallery, Brescia, Italy
- 2018 Qwitha - WHATIFTHEWORLD, Cape Town
- 2017 Poolside Conversations, Kelder Projects, London
Stranger's Location, Michaelis Galleries, Cape Town
- 2016 Qokobe - WHATIFTHEWORLD, Cape Town

Selected group exhibitions

- 2021 History's Footnote: on Love and Freedom, Marres, Maastricht, The Netherlands
The Botanical Revolution, Centraal Museum Utrecht, The Netherlands
Rijksakademie Open Studios, Rijks Academy, Amsterdam
Not Angels or Algorithms, Only Human Error - WHATIFTHEWORLD, Cape Town
OVERVIEW EFFECT, Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade
- 2020 Ubuntu a Lucid Dream, Palais de Tokyo, Paris
Overview Effect, Museum of Contemporary Art Belgrade, Serbia
Living Forgiving Remembering, Museum Arnheim, Netherlands
Bienal 12, Porto Alegre, Brazil
Faculty of Seeing Thinking With, Through, and By Anton Wilhelm Amo, Kunstverein, Braunschweig, Germany
- 2019 Garden of Earthly Delights, Gropius Bau, Berlin
Heroines Now, AKINCI, Amsterdam
Not a Single Story II, Wanas Konst Museum, Sweden
- 2018 iQhiya, Transmission Gallery, Glasgow International
Unframed, Cape Town Art Fair, Cape Town
The Planetary Garden, Cultivating Coexistence, Manifesta Biennial 12, Palermo, Italy
Not a Single Story, Nirox Sculpture Park, Cradle of Humankind
CLOSE: Proximity/Intimacy/Tension, Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG), Johannesburg
- 2017 All Things Being Equal..., Zeitz MOCAA, Cape Town
iQhiya, Documenta 14
15th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey
Everyday Anomaly - WHATIFTHEWORLD, Cape Town
- 2016 Negative Space - WHATIFTHEWORLD, Cape Town
iQhiya, The AVA Gallery, Cape Town
New Monuments, Commune.1, Cape Town

Permanent Collections

Zeitz MOCAA, Cape Town (South Africa)

Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth (South Africa)

University of Cape Town, Cape Town (South Africa)

Kunsthaus, Zurich (Switzerland)