

It's About Art

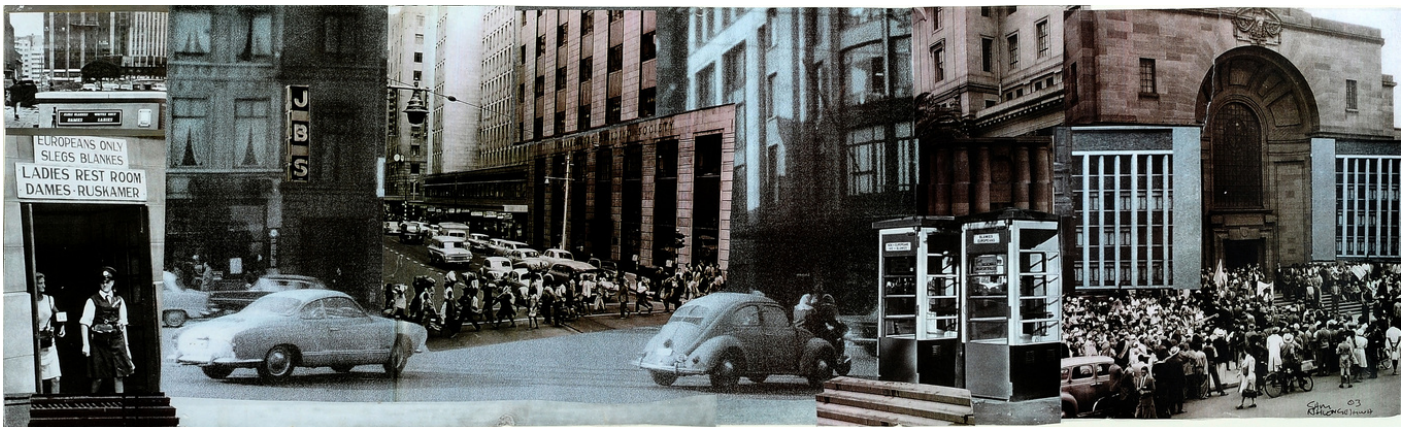
Welcome to It's About Art!

Introducing you to *your* collection.

See you at walkabouts re-opening soon,

Koulla Xinisteris
Curator

SAM NHLENGETHWA (1955 –)



Sam Nhlengethwa, *Johannesburg/Building Society*, 2003, collage on paper, 23 x 77cm.

This large-scale work depicts a busy intersection in downtown Johannesburg, in which the segregated public toilets and telephone booths have been foregrounded through the medium of collage. An iconic Volkswagen Beetle, symbol of the free love and experimentation that defined the *Swinging Sixties* is featured in the foreground and could be read as an ironic nod to those values. Instead, the sprawling street scene depicted here captures the atmosphere of repressiveness, social control and civic unrest that undercut urban life in South Africa at the height of apartheid. The title of the work, *Johannesburg Building Society*, and the focus on the grand buildings that once occupied Johannesburg's downtown financial district, might be understood as a wry critique of the capitalist underpinnings of urban apartheid.

'I sourced material from the Drum magazine archives and I also looked through my own family albums. The use of my own archive was important because I wanted to reflect an intimacy and a familiarity that would make the images accessible... I think I'm lucky in the sense that I have used art as an outlet for the frustrations I encountered during this time. My visual expression through painting was therapeutic and has now been transformed into what I believe to be a historical retrospective.' — Sam Nhlengethwa



Sam Nhlengethwa, *News Time*, 1977, water colour and collage on paper 25 x 38cm.

This early work by Sam Nhlengethwa captures the quintessential 20th-century metropolitan experience of reading a broadsheet newspaper on a city bench – only in this case, form and subject combine; the medium is the message. The newspaper that is being read by the central figure in the scene depicted is actual newsprint – a collage element in a work that combines fragments of torn up newspapers and magazines with painted aspects.

It was at the Bill Ainslie Studios/Johannesburg Art Foundation in the late 1970s that Nhlengethwa took up collage. There was plenty of available material in the form of newspapers and magazines, so I felt comfortable with the collage technique,' he reflects: 'Bill encouraged me to explore the technique further and to work on a larger scale.'

BIOGRAPHY

Sam Nhlengethwa was born in the township of Paynveville, Springs, on Johannesburg's East Rand. He received his artistic training at the Johannesburg Art Foundation and at Rorke's Drift Art Centre in what was then Natal in the 1970s, and has been a participant in the Thupelo workshops. After graduating, he taught part-time at the Federated Union of Black Artists (FUBA) in Johannesburg.

In 1994, he was awarded the *Standard Bank Young Artist Award*. Since then, he has received numerous commissions and awards, and has been invited to participate in many residencies. His work is represented in major public and corporate art collections in South Africa and abroad. His works, which combine collage and painting, deal with everyday human realities, which he infuses with the rhythms and energy of jazz.



Sam Nhlengethwa, *Midnight Blue*, oil & collage on canvas, (triptych) 150 x 360cm.

*'Throughout the years,
all my pieces have dealt with the movement
of people.'*

*'I enjoy paying homage to people and places
through my art.'*

— Sam Nhlengethwa

A major survey exhibition, titled *Life, Jazz and Lots of Other Things*, was hosted by SCAD Museum of Art in Savannah, Georgia in 2014, which was then co-hosted in Atlanta by SCAD and the Carter Center. A large-scale jazz portrait called *Midnight Blue* was loaned out by the SABC Art Collection for inclusion in this exhibition. In 2020, Goodman Gallery, London presented *Interiors Continued*, a series of painting-collages created during the months of lockdown by Nhlengethwa in his home studio in Benoni, an hour outside of Johannesburg.

Nhlengethwa's work has featured on a number of international biennales: in 2003, his work was included in the 8th Havana Biennale, *Southern African Stories: A Print Collection*, the 12th International Cairo Biennale in 2010, the 2013 Venice Biennale as part of the South African pavilion, titled *Imaginary Fact: Contemporary South African Art and the Archive*, and in the 6th Beijing Biennale in 2015. — Alexandra Dodd

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Koulla Xinisteris
Curator

Get in touch

Walkabouts will start up again soon

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