



# SABC ART

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## Feeling the Rage: Tracey Rose at Zeitz MOCAA



*Regina Coeli*, 2002. lambda photograph. 118 X 118 cm

Internationally acclaimed multi-disciplinary artist Tracey Rose's retrospective *Shooting Down Babylon* opened at Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (MOCAA) in February during the in-person Investec Cape Town International Art Fair since the carnage of COVID-19 and successive lockdowns.

Editions of three major works by Rose featured as part of the exhibition are proudly held within the SABC Art Collection. '[Rose's] versatility in choice of medium and material dexterity is evidenced through her bold performative practice, immersive installation, video, photography, sculpture, painting and drawing,' says Koyo Kouoh, Executive Director and Chief Curator at Zeitz MOCAA. 1

This major exhibition, which spans Rose's practice from 1990 to 2022, is spread across three floors of the Museum. Interrogating post-apartheid legacies and liberation movements, her work delves into the themes of repatriation, recompense and reckoning. Other significant themes in Rose's work include absurdity, religion, spirituality, gender and sexuality, race and the body. She is known and appreciated for her lifelong commitment to pushing the boundaries of freedom of expression.

Rose uses the body—often her own body—as 'a site for protest, outrage, resistance and pertinent discourse' or 'a channel for the demonstration of exasperation, aggravation, disruption and paradox'. The title of the show is drawn from her installation *Shooting Down Babylon (The Art of War)* (2016), which reflects on various exorcist and cleansing rituals.

Supporters and followers of the SABC Art Collection might recognise *Regina Coeli* (2002) from the Collection's *Making Waves* exhibition, which travelled around the country in 2004 and 2007. This iconic image of an African nun standing barefoot and open-armed, eyes raised towards the heavens in apparent exasperation with the dastardly affairs of the Earth, took pride of place on the cover the *Making Waves* exhibition catalogue.



*Lucie's Fur 1:1:1 The Messenger*  
2002  
lambda photograph  
84 x 63cm

Writing about the *Lucie's Fur 1: 1: 1* series, which includes the SABC Art Collection work *The Messenger*, the curators of her mid-career retrospective *Tracey Rose: Waiting for God* (2011) write:

*Rose's references to the traditions of both the theatre and the carnival lend a satirical quality to her works... Her characters take on and challenge the often stereotyped representations of Africans, [African women] and women in general... Her series of images and video, *Lucie's Fur, Version 1: 1: 1* (2003) explores the origin of humankind—from Lucifer to Lucy, the earliest recorded anthropoid ape. 2*

The third photographic work in the SABC Art Collection, *Ciao Bella, Ms Cast: MAQE II*, is at first glance a romantic image of three diaphanous angels hovering in the sky over a South African township. But, as with much of Rose's work, there is more to it.

In February and March 2001, Rose was artist-in-residence at the South African National Gallery (now Iziko SANG) in Cape Town where she developed her work for the Venice Biennale 2001 curated by Harald Szeemann. In the tableau piece *Ciao Bella* (2001), she embodies various caricatures of beauty, from porn star Cicciolina to the European Queen, invoking forms of masking and masquerade that, in their grotesque heightening of contour, colour and symbolism, reveal an essence usually hidden.

At the 49th Venice Biennale in 2001, Rose presented her seminal video work *Ciao Bella*, a 13-minute feminist parody of Leonardo Da Vinci's *Last Supper* in which she plays 12 female 'apostles'.



*MAQE II*  
2002  
lambda photograph  
118 x 118 cm

In addition to these three photographic works, the SABC Art Collection also holds a coloured pencil sketch by the artist. Hundreds of these loose sketches and punk doodles are included in the current Zeitz MOCAA exhibition as a key element of the artist's lexicon. Unrehearsed, subliminal, playful and unapologetic, they assert the cathartic value of direct, unedited, gutsy expression. 'It is important to celebrate the work of black women artists from the continent, and to acknowledge the immense contributions they are making to contemporary art discourse,' says Assistant Curator Tandazani Dhlakama. 'Through this exhibition, visitors will be able to gain in-depth insight into three decades of Rose's practice. The themes in the exhibition, which stem from post-colonial entanglements, are relevant to our present times. Rose's work highlights her critical vision and social commentary.' 3

Zeitz MOCAA will host a two-day symposium centred around Rose's work in June 2022, marking the launch of an extensive monograph on her practice. This 400-page publication will include contributions from Adrienne Edwards, Kellie Jones, Gabi Ngcobo, Khwezi Gule, Simon Njami and others. *Shooting Down Babylon* runs until August this year on Levels 0, 2 and 3 of Zeitz MOCAA. Due to graphic content, which some viewers may find disturbing, viewer discretion is advised. The exhibition is not recommended for persons younger than 16. — Alexandra Dodd

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# ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHY

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Born in Durban, South Africa in 1974, Tracey Rose moved to Johannesburg at the age of seven and considers the city her true home. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Arts from the University of the Witwatersrand and a Master's Degree in Fine Art from Goldsmiths College, University of London. She also trained in editing and cinematography at The South African School of Motion Picture Medium and Live Performance in Johannesburg. She currently teaches at the University of the Witwatersrand's School of Arts.

Rose's mid-career retrospective *Waiting for God* took place at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 2011 and was produced by Johannesburg Art Gallery and Bildmuseet, Umeå University. Her work was featured as part of the South African Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale (2019), curated by Nkule Mabaso and Nomusa Makhubu. It was her third Venice Biennale after a 12-year resistance to participating.

She has exhibited at numerous major international cultural institutions, including New Museum (New York), Centre George Pompidou (Paris), Museum of Contemporary Art (Sydney) and Moderna Museet (Stockholm). –Alexandra Dodd

## SOURCES:

1 Koyo Kouoh, 'Zeitz MOCAA to open long-anticipated Tracey Rose exhibition,' Zeitz MOCAA press release, 22 January 2022.

2 'Tracey Rose: *Waiting for God*,' exhibition statement, Copenhagen: Nikolaj Kunsthal (2012).

3 Tandazani Dhlakama, 'Zeitz MOCAA to open long-anticipated Tracey Rose exhibition,' press release, Cape Town: Zeitz MOCAA (2022).