

Press Release

ZOLLAMT^{MMK}, 21 August–14 November 2021

Opening: Friday, 20 August 2021, 7 pm

LUNGISWA GQUNTA TENDING TO THE HARVEST OF DREAMS



Image: Lungiswa Gqunta, *Nompumelelo; Kholiswa*, 2021 (detail), photo: Axel Schneider

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. 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, Brentthurst 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.”

Tending to the harvest of dreams is the first institutional solo exhibition to feature the artist worldwide.

Press photos

Press photos can be downloaded here
www.mmk.art/en/about/press

Press contact

Leonore Schubert
Phone +49 69 212 46722
presse.mmk@stadt-frankfurt.de

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