

Biography

Buhlebezwe Siwani, born 1987 in Johannesburg, South Africa.

She lives and works in Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Buhlebezwe Siwani is a multimedia artist working in performance, photography, sculpture and installation. She uses art and performance to explore themes as varied as religion, African spirituality, and womanhood, among others.

In addition to her independent practice, Siwani is one of the founding members of the influential collective iQhiya, which was formed as an activist response to the lack of exhibition opportunity and underrepresentation of black female artists in the South African art world.

Siwani's vocation as an artist is far more than just something she does for fun; it's her way of exploring herself, interrogating the world around her, and interpreting her experience of living as both a creative and a sangoma (traditional healer). Engaging with human journeys in all of their complexities, she uses different types of media to touch on these multiple facets of her consciousness – parts of herself she comfortably acknowledges as inextricable from one another. Based on her background as sangoma, Siwani has also used her artistic practice to delve into religious subjects and the often-perplexing relationship between Christianity and African spirituality.

Thematically Siwanis' work interrogates the patriarchal framing of the black female body and black female experience within the South African context. As both an artist and sangoma, Siwani is constantly working within this paradox where, on one hand, her work as iSangoma demands that a lot be concealed, while, as an artist, her practice is concerned with revelation.

As an artist, one of the ways Siwani chooses to explore her experiences is through using her own body as a means of communication. She understands these experiences better than anyone else and were she to use another's physicality – one with it's own stories – she would need to be sure of what that story is. "This is why I put myself in. Who better understands my own experiences, my own memories and my own journey than myself?"

From her mesmerising live performance pieces and dazzling sculptural creations, to the inspired visual documentation of her art, Siwani's body of work touches on difficult subjects without shying away from their complexity. Topics like race, colonisation, apartheid, gender, sex, language, and anthropology all emerge in her work, encouraging viewers to ask questions rather than simply providing them with answers.

It is these disparities and connections that Siwani continues to artistically explore, discovering unique parallels within each space she moves into. With each piece of imagery she creates, she feeds her audience particular social signs and symbols, leaving it up to them to decipher. "I've always said if art doesn't engage socially what are you making it for? If it doesn't engage with the social economics of our time, with the political economics of our time then why are you making it?"

She uses Preem green bar soap, with its instantly recognizable lemon scent, as a recurrent motif and material. During Apartheid, the soap came to present hardship and indignity across racial divides - soap was not always available to purchase in the general dealers supplying designated black

areas, and it was not always affordable for families living on meagre wages, even as one of the cheapest soap brands on the market. As a result, strong body odour and poor hygiene was a stigma enforced on black people as one more marker of their racial inferiority.

Education

2015 M.A. Fine Arts, Michaelis School of Fine Arts, Cape Town, ZA

2011 B.A. Fine Arts (Hons), Wits School of Arts, Johannesburg, ZA

Solo exhibitions

2018 *Qab'Imbola*, WHATIFTHEWORLD, Cape Town, ZA

Investec Cape Town Art Fair, Solo booth, Cape Town, ZA

2016 *Ingxowa yegqwirhakazi*, WHATIFTHEWORLD, Cape Town, ZA

2015 *Imfihlo*, Graduate Exhibition, Michaelis Galleries, Cape Town, ZA

Selected Group exhibitions

2018 *17/18*, LKB/G, Hamburg, DE

The Eye Sees Not Itself, Nicodim Gallery, Los Angeles, US

White Blood Blue Night, CAC La Traverse, Alfortville, FR

Tell Freedom, KaDE museum, Amersfoort, NL

Condo at Madroga, Sadie Cole's HQ, London, UK

2017 *Encima*, Galeria Madragora, Lisbon, PT

ano zero'17 biennale, Coimbra, PT

Michaelis Master's Show, Michaelis Galleries, Cape Town, ZA

O Ceu Dos Obliques, Galeria Madragora, Lisbon, PT

Uktshona kuka Mendi, Center for African Studies Gallery, Cape Town, ZA

Dear History: It's Not Me, It's You, LKB/G, Hamburg, DE

Deep Memory, Kalmar Art Museum, Kalmar, SE

Being There, Louis Vuitton Foundation, Paris, FR

2016 *iQhiya Group Show*, AVA, Cape Town, ZA

Figure, Blank Projects, Cape Town, ZA

Rote Fabrik, Pro Helevetia, Zurich, CH

Quiet Violence of Dreams, Stevenson, Cape Town, ZA

Indlovukazi, Njelele Art Station, Harare, ZW

Imfihlo, Worldart, Cape Town, SA

2015 *Revisiting the Latent Archibe In Sites*, Greatmore Studios, Cape Town, ZA

2014 *Scintilla, A show on Alchemy*, Commune 1, Cape Town, ZA

Between Subject and Object, Michaelis Galleries, Cape Town, ZA

2012 *Just Do It! Creative strategies of survival*, Alexandra Township, Johannesburg, ZA

2010 Martienssen Prize Award, Museum Africa, Johannesburg, ZA

2007 *Domestomorphosis*, Wits School of Arts, Johannesburg, ZA

Selected Performances

2017 *uKhongolose*, Appleton Square, Lisbon, PT

Those ghels, Spielart Festival, Munich, DE

- Jikijela*, iQhiya, Documenta 14, Kassel, DE
Africa Raccontare un Mondo, Milan, IT
The Portrait, iQhiya, Documenta 14, Athens, GR
Black Madonna, ICA Live Arts Festival, Cape Town, ZA
- 2016** *Busuku benzolo*, Labor Zero Labor, Triangle Arts, Marseilles, FR
Reparations, Theater Spektakel, Zurich, CH
The Portrait, iQhiya, V&A, Cape Town, SA
Qunusa!Buhle, Any Given Sunday, Khayelitsha, Cape Town, ZA
The Incantation of the Disquieting Muse - On Divinity, Parallel and Suprerealities Or The Exorcisement of Witchery, Savvy Contemporary, Berlin, DE
The Commute 2, iQhiya, ICA, Cape Town, ZA
The Commute, iQhiya, Iziko National Museum, Cape Town, ZA
- 2015** *Beyond the line*, Finnisage, Gallery MOMO, Cape Town, ZA
iQhiya Elimnyama, Infecting the city, Cape Town, ZA
Ramp, Stevenson, Cape Town, ZA
Spill, Baxter Theatre Complex, Cape Town, ZA
Towards Intersections; Negotiating Subjects, Objects and Contexts, Museum Africa, Johannesburg, ZA
- 2014** *Scintilla, A show on Alchemy*, Commune 1, Cape Town, ZA
Chroma, Part of Mawande Ka Zenzile's portraits, Stevenson, Cape Town, ZA
iQhiya Elimnyama, Makukhanye Arts Room, Khayelitsha, Cape Town, ZA
Between Subject and Object, Michaelis Galleries, Cape Town, ZA
- 2013** *Inkululeko*, Theatre Arts Admin Collective, Cape Town, ZA

Residencies

- 2017** Het Vijfde Seizoen, Amersfoort, NL
2016 Rote Fabrik, Pro Helevetia residency, Zurich, CH
2015 Watch and talk, Theater Spektakel, Zurich, CH

Awards

- 2015** Katarine Harries Print Cabinet Purchase Award
2010 Martienssen Prize Award

Collections

Spier Collection
 Uthengisa Unokwrecre elunxwemene