

Uzifumana Usehlathini
(You Find Yourself On The Mountain)

Luyanda Bonginkosi Majoka

MJKLUY001

INTRODUCTION

Allow me to open with a brief biography. I was born in Uitenhage, Eastern Cape in a predominantly Xhosa community. My early life is marked with a heavy cultural presence. Being around close friends and family of similar ethnic origins, built the foundation of my identity. The idea of community and identity being interlinked through culture and history. Or rather the influence of culture and community upon one's own sense of identity. Something I further explore in my final year work. After some years I relocated to Pretoria, Gauteng. The most noticeable distinction between the two environments was the cultural differences: the diverse cultures and identities interacting within a neutral space. However, much of Pretoria's cultural norms and heritage are still rooted in the legacy of apartheid and colonialism. Often, I found it easier to find the history of Pretoria from a colonial perspective but never from the indigenous perspective.

Hence, being a young black male, out of his cultural depths, experiencing life in an indistinct and undefined state of identity. That isn't to say I wasn't an individual, although I believe that we all have a true self rooted in culture. As I reflect upon it now, I understand that experience to be the central point of my discussion. Understanding how culture and identity are able to engage with each other. As I have grown up, I had my first cultural encounter, not as a spectator but as the subject. Ulwaluko, The ritual of initiation. To briefly explain, the ritual is a process of leaving behind boyhood and being recognized as a man. the process of change is a closely guarded secret, due to the intimate relationship formed between umkhwetha and his past self. I say past self because the ritual is a state of abjection where one is no longer who they once were however they have no current identity. It is within this liminal space I place my focus for my work. Exploring the state of liminality and identity. The experience is a very personal and private affair, initiates can now form new identities and be recognized on cultural grounds.

The work is a retelling of the ritual. The ritual asks questions about self. Rightfully, as all who embark on this journey as given a space to facilitate this change of self. This change is celebrated and recognized as a significant milestone in the life of the initiate. Hence, my final year work being inspired by this ritual, in some way it's a celebration and a commemoration of that event in my life. However, translating ritual into art has proven to be a challenge. Unfortunately, many of these traditions have been lost and colonial history has often overlooked the importance of these traditions are. The historical context and documentation of a black people before colonization has either been diluted or lost from history. The absence of this identity and history creates a void one that allows for the black individual to lose their own cultural identities.

The inherent lack of identity represents a feeling of 'blackness'; meant to be symbolic of a 'in-between-ness', not yet fully developed self. A metaphor for the still developing state of black people. I felt my work could be a call for black identity. I mean to say that we are often seen in a light of poverty and destitute with European belief structures, such as Christianity, being the only available means of upliftment. It appears we had either lost or abandoned our afro identities and heritage. My main subject was my own body. Learning what we can from the body through is contextual and cultural discourse. By further extend my work to speak on the meaning of 'blackness', I intended to develop an intimate exchange of stories.



UKUBHUYELA EKHAYA

(Homecoming)

.The performance begins with cleansing my body of all toxins and enacting a spiritual prayer asking the ancestors for strength during this time. I continue to cover my body in white clay, a practice meant to protection. Once the body has been fully layered, we continue to thank the ancestors through prayer and sacrifice. Once complete, traditionally the initiate would be taken into his hut (ibhoma) where he is to heal and transition into manhood.

However, I chose to remove the hut. Rendering my subject left to wander aimlessly, seeking a place of solitude and sanctuary where he can transition in peace. The absence of this space leaves our subject in a state of in-between-ness. As if struggling to transition. My intention was to represent the sense of liminality I experienced but its metamorphosized into an exploration into identity politics. Once an initiate enters, they are bound to change, internally as well as physically. Hence, my use of red as my color of choice. Acting as a reference to blood and a symbol of the circumcision process. The blanket helps us understand the politics that most spectators will never understand. Within the ritual, the blanket is meant to provide protection. It is the only visible barrier between the initiate and the outside world, shielding the initiate away from any external influences during this time.

Approaching such a ritual as an artistic performance raising question surrounding the historical context and conceptual nature of native cultures in South Africa.



My work is an intimate narrative about change and identity. As we know, initiates embark on a contemplative experience asking questions revolving around manhood and oneself. Meant to educate the next generation while instilling traditional values and beliefs to be accepted after initiation. However, as much of Africa culture is rooted in spiritual practice, I asked what it would look like if we included the spiritual aspect of the experience. It is believed that those who survive the experience are those blessed or favored by the ancestors. Thus, we can begin to understand the weight of spirituality in these rituals.

My initial approach was a simple retelling of my own story. However, after some introspection, I focused on the metaphysical aspects of the experience. asking questions such as 'how did this experience change me?'. Often, if we look back at these rituals and traditions we find a deep desire for meaning making and self. Proving to be an existential and coming of age ritual.

Hence, the reasoning behind my inclusion of spirituality as a point of focus relates to identity. We understand that culture is a foundational structure in the formation of our identities. Thus, what would become of someone if their culture was to be 'removed'? "When one is forcefully separated from one's culture, people, land and especially religion, one tends to lose one's identity. Such a person becomes disorientated and may subsequently lose the meaning of his or her existence" (Nweke & Okpaleke, 2019).

The reintroduction of culture allows for the recollection of identities.

Conceptual Process

Nomusa Makhubu notes the ability for performance art and the use of the 'Body' as a means of transgression against the dominant social structures. "Performance art allows artists to use their bodies to re-position themselves." (Makhubu, 2013). I wanted to utilise the 'African' identity as aa tool. Confronting and challenging Euro normativity through its transgressions of the 'spiritual'.

South African artists like Nicholas Hlobo, Thando Mama, Zanele Muholi and Buhlebezwe Siwani, just to name a few, challenge their colonial distinctions through their artistic revival and re-enactment of African traditionalism within formal Gallery space. Nicholas Hlobo uses his own cultural background and identity to represent what how the 'actual' social circumstances of black people contradict the perceived and, otherwise, dismantle the narrative of a post-Apartheid South Africa.

The context of post-Apartheid South Africa has been built upon a foundation of 'Blackness'. That is to say that the history, traditions and culture, that existed pre Colonial times was a foundation that was laid to allow for the indiscriminate erasure of the South African Black perspective. In South Africa, the discussion of Post-Apartheid art and African identity continues. The discourse of South Africa has experienced a major shift in normative traditions and social conditions.

Many artists have put into practice their experiences within this new context and how it informs their current context. The ever drastic shifts in culture and social contexts between pre-colonial, colonial and post-Apartheid Southern Africa have created a state where black identity remains in a constant state of flux. Understanding that South Africans, majority Black, need a distinct identity for the marginalised communities. One that is independent of the current European definitions of 'Black' or to be Black. Keeping in mind that South Africa is a nation with its many cultures and histories were majority of stories have been written from the 'spiritual' experiences. That history has now been withered and left alienated without any defining identity or recognition.

The notions of Eurocentric ideologies and beliefs has spearheaded the discourse of a rather exclusive narrative that defined the social narrative that now exist within our post-colonial/ post-Apartheid society. Author Nomusa Makhubu views the current Post-Apartheid era as a way to move forward. A need to retrieve unwritten histories, a revival of obscure histories that need the re-interpretation of existing histories. (Makhubu, 2013). Calling on artists like Nicholas Hlobo explore what it means to breaks free of European distinctions and identities through their work. His ambiguous re-enactment of African traditionalism and culture are a challenge upon the suggested ideology of 'Blackness' within the colonial context.







UKUSHUMAYELA (To Preach)

I experience a spiritual awakening. We see the presence of liminality within the spiritual space allows for a change of self. Removing an ideal or absolute self becomes disconnected from the representation of 'self' and the individual. Allowing, at the least, for an encounter of self reflection. I felt that during this experience a reconnection and an understanding of the deeper aspects of self. Looking back at one's self through a cultural lens and seeing the purpose, which is to be conscious of one's history. a steady procession of history and ancestry, rightfully leading up to the current self.

A series of long exposure images that feature the subject engaging with the spirits. As we know, initiates embark on a contemplative experience asking questions revolving around manhood and oneself. Meant to educate the next generation while instilling traditional values and beliefs to be accepted after initiation. However, as much of Africa culture is rooted in spiritual practice, I asked what it would look like if we included the spiritual aspect of the experience. It is believed that those who survive the experience are those blessed or favored by the ancestors. Thus, we can begin to understand the weight of spirituality in these rituals.









INTSINGISELO YEGAMA

(The meaning of the word)

Sizalwa kweli hlabathi, singenanto. Siva iintlungu njengendlela yokuzalwa ngokutsha. Igazi lihlambulula umhlaba kwaye libonisa utshintsho.

Kwahlulwa kwaye kwahluliwe. Ukuphonononga ukuba kuthetha ukuthini kwaye kuthetha ukuthini ukuba ngumkhwetha. Ngalo lonke eli mava ufumana imbono ethile kubomi bakho kunye namava akho. Ukuqonda okwenzekayo kuwe kunye nefuthe lakho kubudlelwane onabo.

Ukujonga kwixesha elidlulileyo.
uzibone ungomnye umntu. Ukufumana le mbono intsha yesiqu sakho.

Ukubhadula esithubeni. Ukuhamba ngexesha. Ukuzibuza ukuba singoobani. Sijonga esibhakabhakeni. Ukukhangela iimpendulo. Sijonge phezulu nkosi. Ukukhangela iimpendulo. Sijonge kwihlabathi. Ukukhangela intsingiselo.

Sinokuphila ngale nto kuphela. La mava bubomi

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

We are bought into this world, bare and vulnerable. We experience pain as a form of rebirth.
Blood purifies the earth and signifies change. Our journey begins as an initiate.

Isolated and separated. Exploring what it could mean and what it means to be an initiate. Throughout this experience you gain some perspective from your life and your experiences. Understanding what happened to you and your impact on the relationships you have.

Looking to the past and seeing yourself as another person. Experiencing this new perspective of self.

Wandering through space. Wandering through time. Questioning who we are. We look into the sky. Searching for answers. We look up to you. Looking for answers. We look to the world.
Searching for meaning.

We can only live through this. This experience is life.



