



Between the Seen and Unseen:

The world, the flesh and the Spirit

“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal”

II Corinthians 4: 18

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Vukani (*Awaken*)

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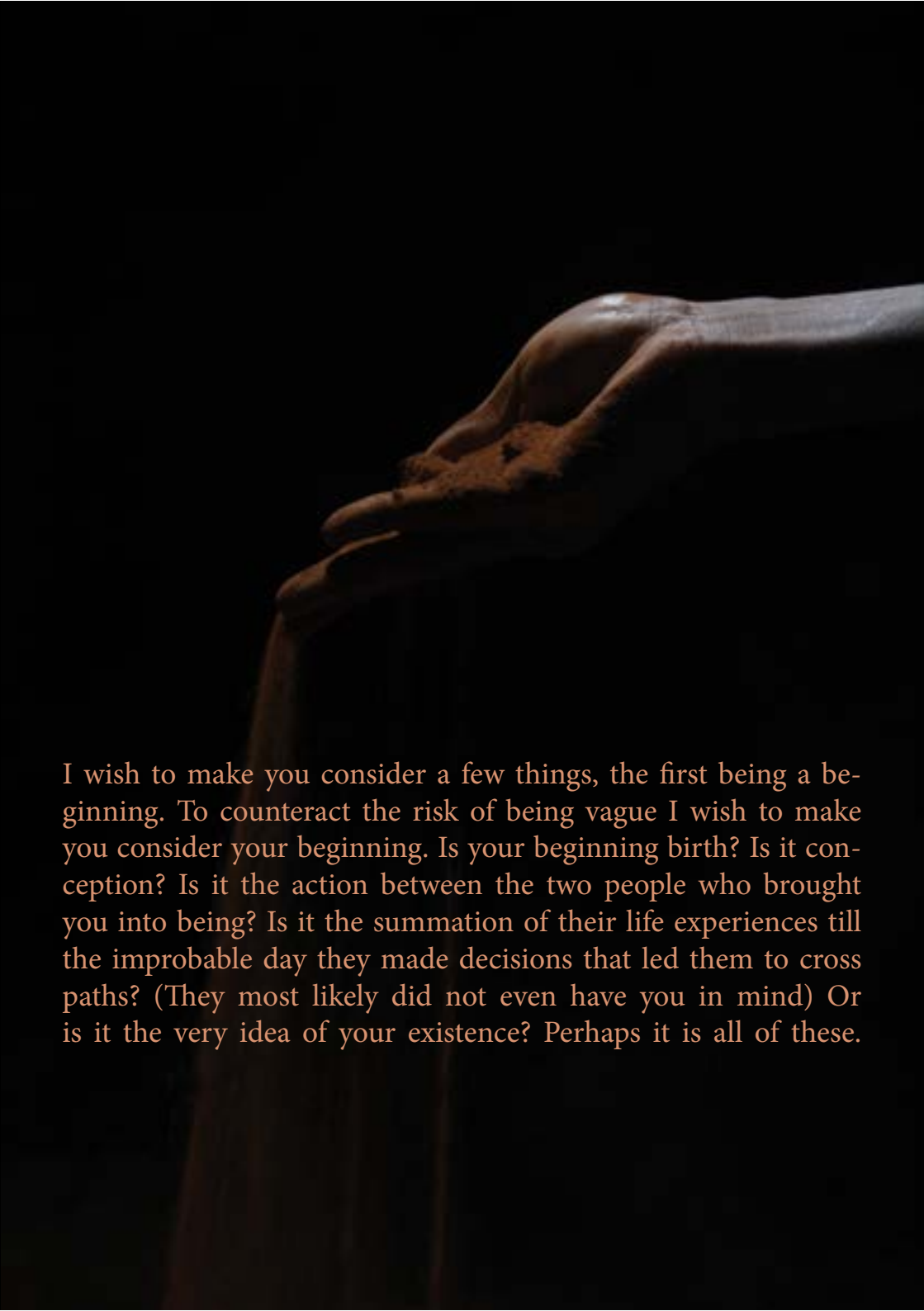
Umntu obomvu

Part Three

The Union

Part One

VUKANI
Awaken



I wish to make you consider a few things, the first being a beginning. To counteract the risk of being vague I wish to make you consider your beginning. Is your beginning birth? Is it conception? Is it the action between the two people who brought you into being? Is it the summation of their life experiences till the improbable day they made decisions that led them to cross paths? (They most likely did not even have you in mind) Or is it the very idea of your existence? Perhaps it is all of these.



Regardless of what you choose to believe, you had absolutely no contribution to the inception of your being. You find yourself surrounded by people that you learnt to love in a world that you persistently have to decipher. To do this, there are certain tools that you are born with and there are some that you pick up along the way. Through the process of deconstruction, my work considers how the knowledge systems we use to make sense of the world are created, disseminated and sustained over time. For this particular body of work, I explore faith, the self, the body as a sensorial tool, language as a tool of expression, culture as a means of collective sense-making. My body of work is an act of resistance.

Faith

“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for
and assurance about what we do not see.”

Hebrews 11: 1 [NIV]

For the sake of clarity, I should state that the faith I am referring to is not of a particular religion. Faith precedes religion, and religion is then certain practices based on faith. The faith I am referring to is the idea of aligning oneself, their attitude and their actions towards any future uncertain event. It precedes creation because for anything to exist which did not exist before, at least one person has to have confidence and assurance and then align their actions towards realising that creation. With all the major developments we have had over time, from the light bulb to the electric vehicle, at least one person had faith while mostly being ridiculed and without that faith, the creation would not have been possible.

For example, whenever we go to sleep, there is absolutely no guarantee that we will wake up the next morning and yet we plan and prepare as though we will live to see it. This is an act of faith and it describes the faith I refer to as being foundational. If a person has no faith, it is impossible for them to look forward to the future and act in a way that will bring into fruition a desired outcome.

There is a common misconception that faith is the absence of evidence. It would be more accurate to describe faith as the absence of doubt. We often think of the future as a multitude of possibilities and yet only one of those possibilities eventually happens. This is evidence that no matter how many possibilities there may seem to be, only one is reality and the rest are illusions. If this is not the case and all possibilities have equal weighting then it all the more proves that it is indeed faith that allows a person to pull an idea from the realm of possibility to the realm of reality.

“Have faith in God”, Jesus answered. “Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

Mark 11: 22-24[NIV]



The Self

“So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.”

Genesis 1:27 [NIV]

The self is one of the most elusive things to comprehend and define. It eludes psychologists, philosophers and neuroscientists alike. However, I would like to make a distinction on the knowledge systems that precede our understanding of even ourselves. In Western philosophy, Descartes is foundational in understanding how the subsequent understanding of the self came to be. He proposed the famous statement “Cogito, ergo sum” - “I think, therefore I am” implying that the thinking self precedes and is independent of even occupying a body. Descartes was fundamental in advancing not only the understanding of the self but of existence itself as he developed the Cartesian coordinate system of mapping space without which modern science and mathematics would not exist. This is the foundational ideology behind the self-proclaimed supremacy of the Western knowledge system.

The African way of thinking about the self is significantly different to that which was proposed by Descartes and went on to shape Western thought. African societies are founded on the principle of ubuntu which is encapsulated by the phrase “I am because we are” (Manganyi, 2019). It is this idea of unity that lays the foundation for functional African society, the idea that whatever your uniqueness is, it does not exist without the uniqueness of another. Eastern philosophy posits the self as an interconnected part of the entirety of existence. What I seek to highlight here is that the isolation of the self from the rest of existence is a uniquely

Western idea. It is so ingrained into Western thought that it has resulted in the compartmentalisation of knowledge, and this is evident across all Western and Western-influenced societies.

It is particularly important for me as an African, Xhosa, Christian man to be aware of totalitarian knowledge systems that seek to define the self in its entirety. In Biblical terms the self consists of the mind, heart and soul, a trinity that reflects the oneness of the Godhead (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit). This idea of a triune self is not uniquely Christian as Freud (2018) proposes a trinity in describing personality which is contained within the self namely the id, the ego and the superego. In essence the self is what makes you uniquely you. It is the mechanism through which the personality, impulses, memory, emotions and imagination are born and processed (Freud, 2018).

The Body

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,
1 Corinthians 6:19 [NIV]

The body is the first tool we use to interact with the world outside of ourselves. Even though a baby's thinking faculties have not fully developed, the baby is aware enough of the need for warmth and food for example. The body is the container of our being as it holds the genes of our ancestors and also holds within the heart and the brain.

The human body can be conceptualised as a complex and intricate system of knowledge, a living encyclopaedia that stores and reveals information about our physical, emotional, and cognitive experiences. Each physiological function, cellular process, and sensory perception represents a wealth of knowledge about human biology and existence. Moreover, the body's responses to external stimuli, its adaptability, and the intricate feedback mechanisms all contribute to its function as a reservoir of experiential wisdom. This embodiment of knowledge is not confined to the biological realm; it extends to cultural, historical, and sociological dimensions as well. The body's interactions with society, the imprints of culture on its structure and behaviour, and the understanding of one's own identity through the body all add layers to this system of knowledge. Through a comprehensive exploration of the body's physiology, behaviour, and societal interactions, we can unlock a profound understanding of ourselves and the world we inhabit. More importantly, the body is a living temple of God.



Language

“To speak means being able to use a certain syntax and possessing the morphology of such and such a language, but it means above all assuming a culture and bearing the weight of a civilization”
Fanon (2016)

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”
John 1:1[NIV]

Language is a profound knowledge system that serves as the scaffolding of our understanding and interaction with the world. It's not merely a tool for communication; it's the medium through which we articulate thoughts, emotions, and perceptions, shaping our cognitive landscape. Through language, we codify complex ideas, construct narratives, and share experiences. Each word carries a universe of meanings, and grammar provides the structure to convey relationships and concepts. The richness of language allows us to categorise, analyse, and synthesise the vast array of information and stimuli we encounter daily. It not only helps us interpret reality but also influences how we perceive it. Language is the key to unlocking knowledge, representing a remarkable fusion of culture, thought, and communication, enabling us to make sense of the intricacies of the human experience and the world around us.

Culture

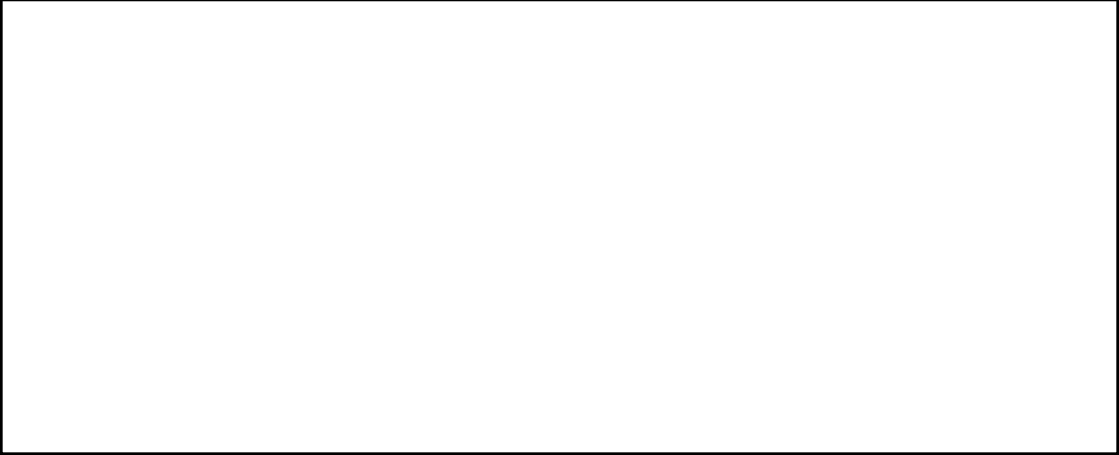
Culture is the collective sense-making mechanism that binds a community or society, weaving a shared tapestry of beliefs, values, traditions, and behaviours. It forms a lens through which individuals perceive and interpret the world around them, providing a framework for understanding their existence and navigating social interactions. Culture encapsulates the accumulated wisdom, experiences, and norms of a community, passed down through generations. It shapes how people make sense of their identity, their place in society, and their relationship with others and the environment. Through rituals, language, art, and customs, culture offers a structured system for expressing ideas, emotions, and beliefs, fostering unity and a sense of belonging. In essence, culture is the collective narrative, the common repository of knowledge that allows individuals to comprehend, interpret, and respond to the complexities of life in a meaningful and cohesive manner.

In the Xhosa culture, most knowledge has been passed down orally from one generation to another and as a result there is a significance placed on listening as a skill. This is why in my exhibition I use sound and speech as an artistic outlet. I also link this to the Biblical idea that the world was created through voice. Voice is intangible yet it has tangible consequences. It is a vibration that is able to create tangible change. I use sculpture for two reasons, the first being that it comes naturally to me. As a child, I would play with clay and make objects from wood way before I ever knew about art as a discipline. Secondly, it is the act of deconstructing nature and refining it, whether it is a log of wood or a lump of clay, the act of deconstruction provides new possibilities for the material. With my photography and drawing, I seek to tell stories as this was the primary way in which

oral knowledge would be told in order to be memorable. This would normally be done by older women and my sculpture Vukani which is the main piece of my exhibition seeks to honour and remember my grandmother and the women who have carried the Xhosa culture and passed it onto the next generations.

Part Two

UMNTU OBOMVU



I was born in the Eastern Cape in a town called Dutywa. My mother tongue is IsiXhosa¹ and for most of my life I have been accustomed to a Xhosa² way of living. I only mention this because beyond the language, IsiXhosa³ is integrated and embedded into my worldview, my conduct in my daily life and my outlook onto the future. However, my surname Qwaqwa comes from a traceable lineage that originates in Lesotho. My ancestors migrated to the Eastern Cape where they eventually settled at least 50 generations ago. This is not my point of interest as I have explored this in a photographic series titled Exodus. I do not consider myself a Sotho person because I can barely speak the language and have no experience of the Sotho culture except on a few occasions while visiting the Free State. Nevertheless, part of the DNA and the genes that I carry come from baSotho even though I do not speak the language nor share the culture. I will let the biologist debate the sociologist as to which has more influence.

As I stated above, I deconstruct the way that knowledge is constructed and throughout my project, I adopt and propose a self-outward approach. I am no historian nor am I interested in history, at least not more than I am in the future. My interest in history is to the extent that it affects both the present and the fu-

1 IsiXhosa is one of the 11 official languages in South Africa and is predominantly spoken in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa.

2 Even though it is mostly used when referring to the language, the root word Xhosa can be used to refer to anything that is related to Xhosa people depending on the prefix used. The prefixes include um- which refers to one person, ama- which refers to many people, isi- which refers to an object (in this case both the language and way of life) and ubu- which refers to Xhosa-ness.

3 IsiXhosa in this case refers to cultural knowledge, conduct and the way of life.

ture, of which it is in its totality for without history both do not exist. It is worth highlighting then that inasmuch as history is a recording of past events, it is not neutral and has never sought to be, at least not sincerely. Because of my subjectivity, I will first highlight an incident which has become ubiquitous within the history of the Xhosa people, this is the prophecy of Nongqawuse in 1856 and the subsequent genocide, cattle-killing and famine. This prophecy is mostly viewed as the root cause of the subsequent events with the violence and guerrilla tactics employed by the British and the Dutch overwhelmingly understated. I highlight this specific event in history because it was the first major cause of division among the people of the Xhosa nation and only after this incident were the British able to successfully subject the people to colonial rule. Some people chose to ignore the prophecy and all those whose cattle and crops were destroyed bore a suffering so severe that it had never been seen before. The famine was so severe that many people died and even the ones who had rejected the prophecy were struck by a wave of cattle disease and were subjected to the same famine (Peires, 1989). This opened a loophole for the colonisers who, for years, had been at war with the Xhosa nation for their land. Although I will not dwell on the atrocities that followed till present day, a sincere narration and reconstruction of such history is paramount to future generations

It would be naive and significantly erroneous of me to understate the role that the Christianisation and Westernisation of the Xhosa nation, hand in hand with the colonisation project, played in dividing the people amongst themselves. It divided the people mainly into two categories, amaqaba and amagqobhoka. Amaqaba⁴ are the

4 This is a colloquial and mostly demeaning name derived from ukuqaba, the process of smearing red ochre on the skin. As a result umntu obomvu (the red person) is used synonymously with iqaba(singular).

people who rejected all forms of westernisation including health-care, Christianity and education while amagqobhoka⁵ embraced education and mostly became Christian converts. As the people became more divided amongst themselves, the colonialists used this opportunity to undermine traditional leaders and vitiate the knowledge systems that had brought people together. Throughout the exhibition, I refer to myself as umntu obomvu, a normatively derogatory term for one who rejects knowledge. It is worth noting that I am both educated and a Christian but the reason I refer to myself this way is because I refuse to adopt knowledge systems that are insincere and prove themselves not to be based on truth. With all this considered, the role that freemasonry played in colonisation is astonishingly understated in mainstream history as Cooper (1980) states that it was the unifying factor between British and Dutch settlers in South Africa. Cooper (1980) states that freemasonry played a significant role in shaping and influencing various aspects of society including education and politics as masons were governors, lawyers, doctors and tradesmen. I mention this because Christianity along with colonisation have borne the brunt and been used as a mask for the expansion of freemasonry, which remains exonerated till present day because of its secrecy.

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.”

Matthew 7:15-18[NIV]

5 The name derives from ukugqobhoka, being pierced. In this case symbolising being crucified along with Christ.

Cooper (1980) highlights the congruence of imperialism with the expansion of freemasonry. If indeed freemasonry had intentions of benevolence and charity (Cooper, 1983, p.1), the result of its actions would not be the destruction and annihilation that people have faced under its agents. Lushaba and Lategan (2018) explain the construction of the Black persona as a non-human and the dilemma it produces as it ends up being a symbol of oppression and emancipation simultaneously. As the Bible verse above states, if the West who brought Christianity to Africa had good intentions then the fruit of their actions would show it. There is no evidence that even the Christian missionaries were acting in accordance with what they were preaching. In addition, there is no evidence that the doctrines presented by the West promote good for society or the individual, or that they have ever had that intention. From the destruction of the unity of the family structure which is the foundation of the African way of life to the deterioration of the individual's mental health amongst others, Western doctrines produce fruits of destruction.

The question arises then: Why do I accept the Bible as the sovereign Word of God if I do not accept the people who brought it as agents of God? Firstly the actions of the people who brought the word contradict what is written completely. Secondly, historical evidence shows that the Bible was not written by the colonisers but they merely used it as a tool for their own selfish gain⁶. Thirdly, the values promoted within the Bible consistently promote what is good for both the individual and society in accordance with traditional Xhosa values. Lushaba and Lategan (2018) emphasise how the Western worldview presents itself as both central and neutral yet it is a system of knowledge that simply exists alongside others and not above as it claims itself to be. This hy-

pocrisy is evident in the way that knowledge coming from outside of it is excluded or treated as insignificant. A practical example is the categorisation of entire systems of knowledge as indigenous. While knowledge within the Western way of thinking is divided into silos of disciplines, African knowledge is simply reduced to indigenous. Even in universities, African studies regardless of the specific knowledge, is a separate discipline yet there is no European studies or American studies, their knowledge system is regarded as central and assumed as the truth. The destruction of knowledge systems aimed at disarming the person and removing any tools with which they make sense of the world. Through processes such as slavery and colonisation, the faith of a person is attacked and they cannot hope for the future. In addition to that the body is subjected to restrictions such that the person does not view themselves as autonomous. They are finally stripped of their personhood through the removal of their language and culture so that they do not relate with those around them.

Most importantly for me, I refer to myself as *umntu obomvu* because I do not claim to know it all but I am a life-long learner who is relentless in making sense of the world while questioning the people and structures which claim to know.

Part Three

THE UNION



Blood, sweat and tears I

Drawing on Hessian

170cm x 100cm



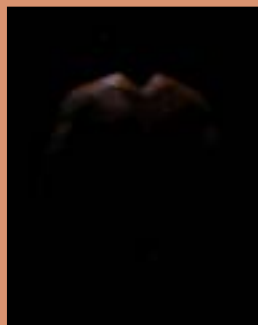


The Weight of Knowledge

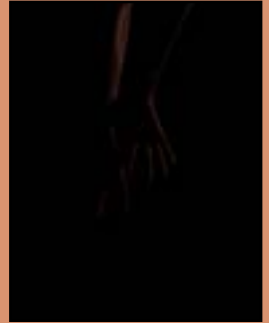
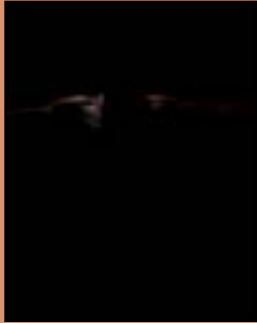
Clay



Umnt'obomvu
Clay



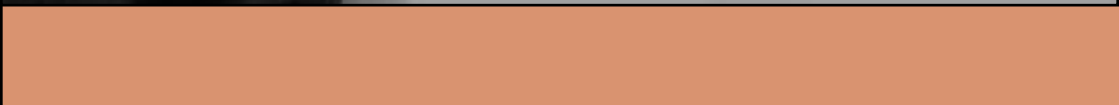
iTempile ka Yehova
Photographic series





He is Risen, so YOU will

Video (stills)





Vukani (*Awaken*)

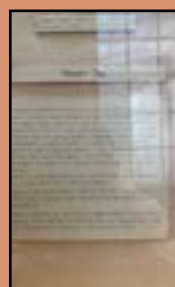
wood



My journey was filled with ups and downs but it was a fruitful adventure. Some of the knowledge I was finding throughout my research did not make me happy by any stretch but it was enormously useful in informing the output of this body of work.

From countless visits to the slave lodge, to visiting !Khwa Tuu to learn about the erasure of their knowledge systems, to learning about the history of dispossession and exploitation of diamonds in Kimberley, Northern Cape to learning deeper about my own family history, their migration from Quthing, Lesotho and to learning about how knowledge systems that govern the world operate.

Below are some of the images from the inception of this project to what it has become.



Acknowledgements

This body of work would not have been possible without the kind and empowering feedback from my supervisor Dr. George Tebogo Mahashe.

I would like to extend a deep gratitude to my mentor Coby McGinty who guided me in my journey throughout the entire year.

I would like to thank Dr. Lwazi Lushaba for his relentless work on decolonial thought and his wisdom on which I leaned during the production of this body of work.

I have eternal gratitude for my dear friend and brother in Christ, Thabani Dube, who appears on the cover of this catalogue and in some areas of the photographic series. His support, prayers and counsel truly kept me on my feet even when I felt like I had no strength.

There are many people who contributed significantly to this body of work in one way or another, this includes external supervisors, my family, friends and classmates.

Most importantly, I'm grateful to God for carrying me through and deepening my connection with Him through this process of making this body of work.

Artist statement

I am a multidisciplinary artist born in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. My practice mainly involves the interplay between sculpture, photography, film and drawing. At the heart of my practice lies a profound fascination with the human experience and a relentless commitment to deconstructing the very fabric of knowledge: how it is conceived, communicated and preserved throughout time.

This naturally leads me to explore themes such as faith, the self, the body, language and culture. Inspired by the storytelling and oral tradition of the Xhosa culture, my work weaves narratives as a means of giving form to the intangible aspects of being human.

As a result of my faith in God, central to my work is the exploration of the human, first as a spirit then as a being that coexists with and within society. Through my art, I prompt viewers to critically reflect on the knowledge systems that inform their understanding of themselves and the society they exist within - their genesis, dissemination and impact in a world that overflows with information.

My work then becomes a dialogue, with the audience playing an active role in the process of meaning-making. It is a journey of exploration through which the viewer unravels the complexities that exist within themselves and within the broader society. Through the tactile process of deconstruction, I transform the intangible into the tangible, inviting viewers to engage with the physicality of knowledge production.