

Highly Personal

South African Artists
and Their HandPrint Portraits

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Curated by Gary Schneider

South African Artists

Hasan and Husain Essop	Nandipha Mntambo
David Goldblatt	Zanele Muholi
Pieter Hugo	Cedric Nunn
Donna Kukama	Jo Ractliffe
Terry Kurgan	Mikhael Subotzky
Senzeni Marasela	Andrew Tshabangu

...and Their HandPrint Portraits

Gary Schneider

I left South Africa in 1977 at the age of 23. In 2011, I returned for my first exhibition there, “Skin,” at David Krut Projects in Johannesburg. At that time, I began making handprint portraits of South African artists. A Guggenheim Fellowship allowed me to continue the project through 2013.

I have been making handprint portraits since 1996. I began with the history of hand imprints in mind, especially those found in the ancient caves of Chauvet-Pont-d’Arc (the earliest known examples of handprint self-identification).

The handprints all follow the same format. I set up a process in which the person is responsible for the information deposited in the film emulsion – it is an assisted self-portrait. The variables are their performance and gesture, the physical shape of the hand, their body chemistry, and their relationship to me. The darkroom is a private space, with just the two of us, where something very personal is exposed, to be revealed later: the sweat and heat imprinted into the film are forensic.

The reading of this information is, however, not scientific but metaphorical. These handprints do not reveal race, economic status, gender or age. They are, to me, as expressive as any portrait of a face, but more private, and perhaps more revealing. They allow me to explore the marriage of art and science, identity and obscurity, figuration and abstraction, the carnal and the spiritual.

I embarked on the project and traveled widely in order to meet artists and, through them, understand what it means to be a South African artist two decades after the end of apartheid.

For this exhibition at Stephen Daiter Gallery I have selected the work of thirteen artists – who are all photographers, or artists who use photography – to be exhibited along with their handprint. This is a very small group from the seventy-seven artists in the book, which is itself a subset of the more than two hundred handprint portraits I made in South Africa over the three years I spent there.

All of the artworks in this exhibition are self-portraits or set-ups in which the artists are using some part of themselves, or documenting the result of a highly personal journey. There were artists whose handprint I unfortunately was not able to make, but the communications with them made the journey enormously rewarding nonetheless. A book of the project, *HandPrints: South African Artists*, was edited and published by Bronwyn Law-Viljoen of Fourthwall Books, Johannesburg, in 2015.

In the early planning stages, a selection of photographs by David Goldblatt and Zanele Muholi were available through the gallery. Goldblatt, who died last year, was the great ethical conscience of white South Africa, chronicling the inequalities he found around him in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. Paul Weinberg, in an interview with his friend, asked Goldblatt about the purpose of his photographs. He replied:

“I was asking myself how it was possible to be so apparently normal, moral, upright – which almost all those citizens were – in such an appallingly abnormal, immoral, bizarre situation. I hoped we would see ourselves revealed by a mirror held up to ourselves.”

I was introduced to Zanele Muholi’s powerful LGBTQ activist art in 2011, while making handprints at The University of the Witwatersrand, not far from Muholi’s exhibition at Stevenson Gallery in Johannesburg. Muholi’s photograph in the Stephen Daiter Gallery exhibition transports me back to a sadly familiar South Africa where I grew up white, privileged, and gay under apartheid. Muholi has written of this work and I excerpt:

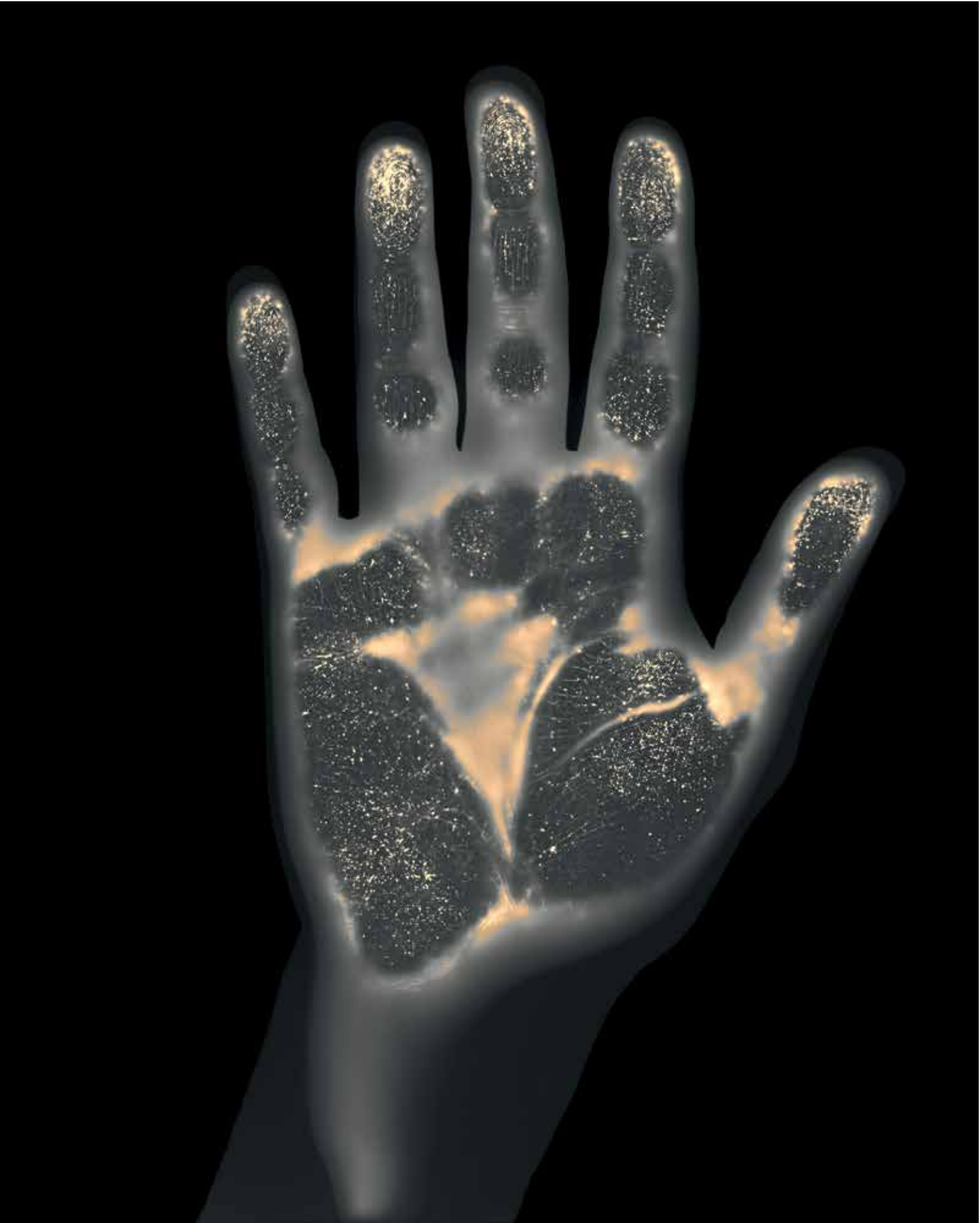
“In *“Massa” and Mina(h)* (2008), I turn my own black body into a subject of art. I allow various photographers to capture my image as directed by me. I use performativity to deal with the still racialized issues of female domesticity – black women doing house work for white families. The project is based on the life and story of my mother. I draw on my own memories, and pay tribute to her domesticated role as a (domestic) worker for the same family for 42 years...”

It is my hope that the work of each artist in this exhibition covers as broad an approach as possible to the experience of living and working in South Africa, and that this small group represents some of the diversity of practice, gender, ethnicity, and generation that enriches our visual culture.

Short statements submitted by the artists attest to the personal nature of the work they have contributed to this project.

-Gary Schneider

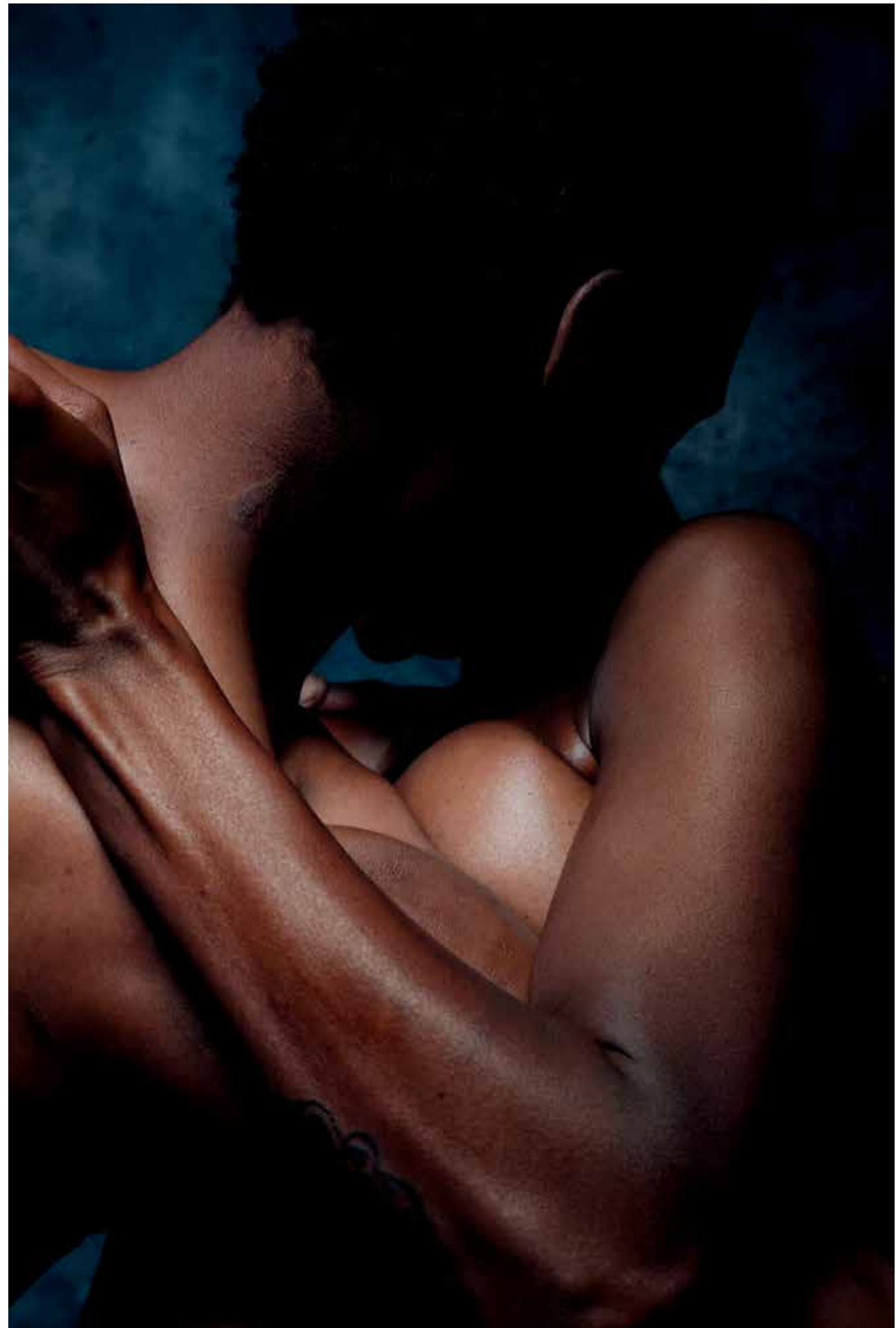
Gary Schneider
Genetic Self-Portrait
Hand, 1997

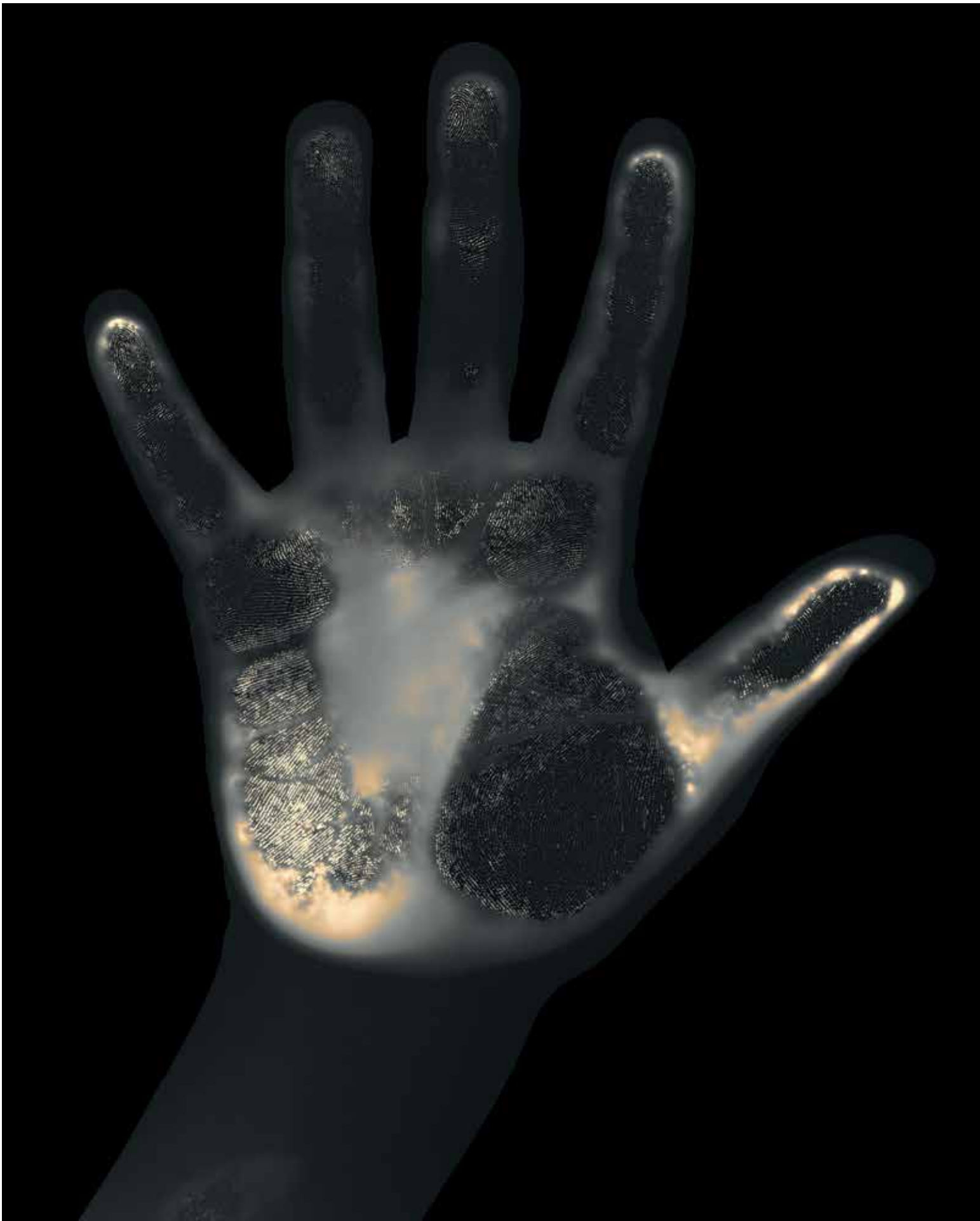




Nandipha Mntambo, 2013

Nandipha Mntambo,
...everyone carries a shadow II, 2013





Andrew Tshabangu, 2011



*Andrew Tshabangu
Portrait of a Young Twasa, 2008*



Mikhael Subotzky, 2011



Mikhael Subotzky
Blood (or Flesh Fur Faeces), 2019

...everyone carries a shadow II, 2013

“My desire for this project was to find a male double who was similar in build, height and complexion to me so that, in a performance and in images, we would appear interchangeable. Choreographer and dancer Mpho Masilela acts as my double, a mirror and shadow. Then, using myself as the primary object of the photographic series, the camera functions not only as a device for documenting movement, but simultaneously occupies the roles of performance stage and audience.”
← ← ← -Nandipha Mntambo

Portrait of a Young Twasa, 2008

“My ‘Bridges’ series explores the different religious practices in South Africa: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Ancestors worship, Hinduism and a multitude of others. This portrait is of a young Twasa (initiate) becoming a Sangoma, a Zulu word for a Spiritual healer. This photograph is important to me because it is central to who I am. The rituals practiced by Sangomas have been a source of inspiration to most Africans for many decades and it is my belief that these practices will continue to be performed for many years to come. In essence I am what I am because of my culture. It has taught me many values and also to appreciate and tolerate the differences in others. There is a popular saying in IsiZulu ‘Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu’ loosely translates to ‘I am because you are.’”
← ← -Andrew Tshabangu

Blood (or Flesh Fur Faeces), 2019

“Blood (or Flesh Fur Faeces), 2019 was inspired by a description in a Jorge Luis Borges short story, ‘The Immortal,’ where the protagonist encounters a troglodyte who has drank from the stream of immortality and fallen into a state of indifference so deep that a bird has built its nest on his chest. The artist I associates the immortal’s expectation that life will continue this way indefinitely with those who live with the benefit of white male privilege.”
← -Mikhael Subotzky

Three Imams, Dakar, Senegal, 2010

“Husain and I explored Goree Island looking for locations that had historical significance. We chose this site because it was the only mural located on the island. The island is Located just off the coast of Dakar and it is known for its role in the 15th to 19th century Atlantic slave trade. The mural represents three very important Imams who played an integral role in spreading Islam within Senegal. We included our bodies as we represent the modern influence or the reincarnation of a culture that started so many years ago. Mimicking their poses, we remember and pay tribute to these iconic figures that are unknown in the Western world but are role models within Islam.”
→ -Hasan and Husain Essop

Se Sa Feleng... (3), 2012

Outside of linear-time:

Se sa feleng se a tlhola- A SeTswana idiom that indirecly translates to “Anything that doesn’t end is an anomaly in a society that has its own means, and accepts its mysteries as real”.

1900’s:

We shall overcome- Rev. Dr. Charles Albert Tindley (USA).

1965:

We shall overcome- A key protest song for the civil rights movement (USA).

2012: **Se sa feleng...**

A photography-based series of monuments and protests that employed a shortened version of the original SeTswana idiom to say “That which does not end/die/fall is an anomaly to nature, and a vibe that we will not accept, for the sake of our survival.”

2015: **#FeesMustFall (personal)**
#RhodesMustFall (personal)

Kendrick Lamar releases “*Alright!*” (USA).
“We gon’ be alright”
“We gon’ be alright”
“We gon’ be alright” (personally re-translates to **se sa feleng se a tlhola**)
“We gon’ be alright” becomes a key protest song for the **#BlackLivesMatter** movement(personal)

Real-Time:

This will forever be deeply personal.

-Donna Kukama
→ →



Hasan and Husain Essop
Three Imams, Dakar, Senegal, 2010



Hasan Essop, 2013

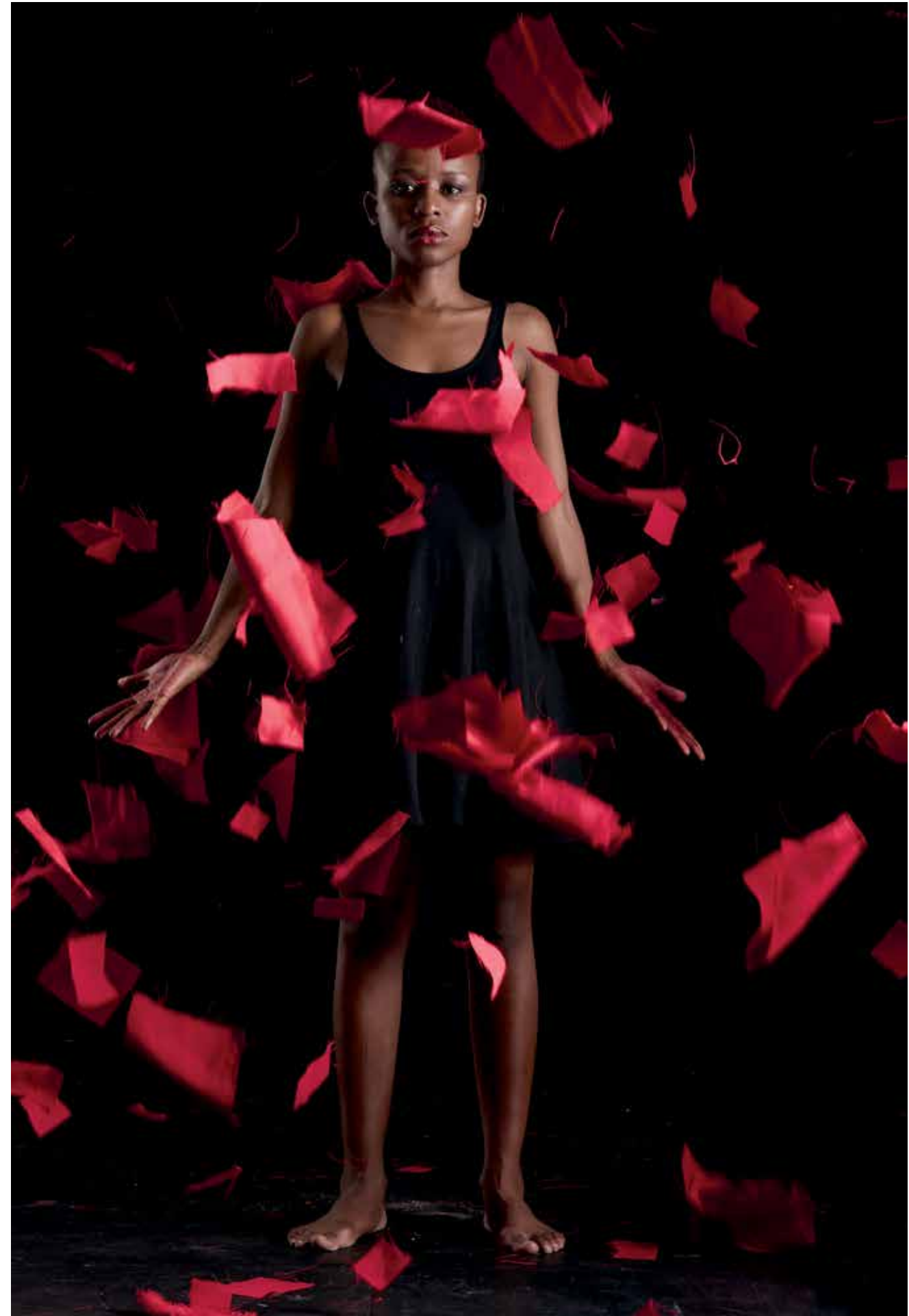


Husain Essop, 2013



Donna Kukama, 2013

Donna Kukama
Se Sa Feleng... (3), 2012





David Goldblatt, 2011



David Goldblatt
Dining Room Detail, Randburg, Gauteng, 1974



Pieter Hugo, 2013



Pieter Hugo
Pieter Hugo 1, Cape Town, 2015



Jo Ractliffe, 2011



Jo Ractliffe
St Helena mermaid, 2018

Pieter Hugo I, Cape Town, 2015

Well, my friends are gone and my hair is grey
I ache in the places where I used to play
And I’m crazy for love but I’m not coming on
I’m just paying my rent every day in the Tower of Song
-Leonard Cohen. ‘The Tower of Song’

“It’s comforting to know that as middle age approaches and my looks
start to wither, inside of me is a fabulous, attractive and trashy woman
who demands to get her airtime.” -Pieter Hugo
← ←

St Helena mermaid, 2018

“In 2015 I sustained an injury that altered my life and the way I see
things. It also forced a change in the way I work. This photograph came
about during a trip up the West Coast one stormy winter weekend in 2018.
It was the first photographic trip I had made independently, on my own,
since my injury. I found the mermaid at an abandoned seaside bar in St
Helena Bay. I liked that there was a ship on the horizon; it was a sign
of life.” -Jo Ractliffe
←

Izithombe Zendawo Esizithandayo, 2017
(Photographs of places that we love - direct translation)

“The work centers around personal narratives of migrant women. My
persona Theodora, my mother, embodies all these women whose families
disintegrated because of forced migration in South Africa. Her journey
is about seeking the self as well as answers from the system. I am
wearing the red dress as both a marker of her identity as a rural woman
and a symbol of her suffering.” -Senzeni Marasela
→

Everyone is Present, 2018

What haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets
of others.
-Nicolas Abraham, ‘Notes on the Phantom’, 1975

“My book engages with what I have come to understand as
intergenerational transmission. What the psychoanalysts Abraham and
Turok called ‘The Phantom’. I understand this to mean what I have
inherited unconsciously. At a cellular level. I haven’t personally
suffered the great loss that my grandparents and my mother did, but they
lived with buried and repressed unspeakable acts and memories, about
which they never spoke. I believe much of this was delivered into my
unconscious and has been there for as long as I can remember,
inflecting my own experience of the world, which was complicated further
by the complicity of growing up white in apartheid South Africa.”
-Terry Kurgan
→ →

Interior to My Great-Grandfather’s House, Mangete KwaZulu-Natal, 1982

“This image is of one of his many houses, and yet the last remaining
one, which I set out to visit and explore as a beginning photographer,
setting out to look at roots and this thing called ‘coloured’,
hybridised South African. The image looks into this murky space with
indistinct figures, a rabbit hole of sorts. It was the beginning really
of the project ‘Blood Relatives’. This house, along with anything
John Dunn ever built, part of five residences and compounds, that he
occupied as a white Chief of the Zulu’s in the late 1800s, is all gone,
destroyed.” -Cedric Nunn
→ → → →



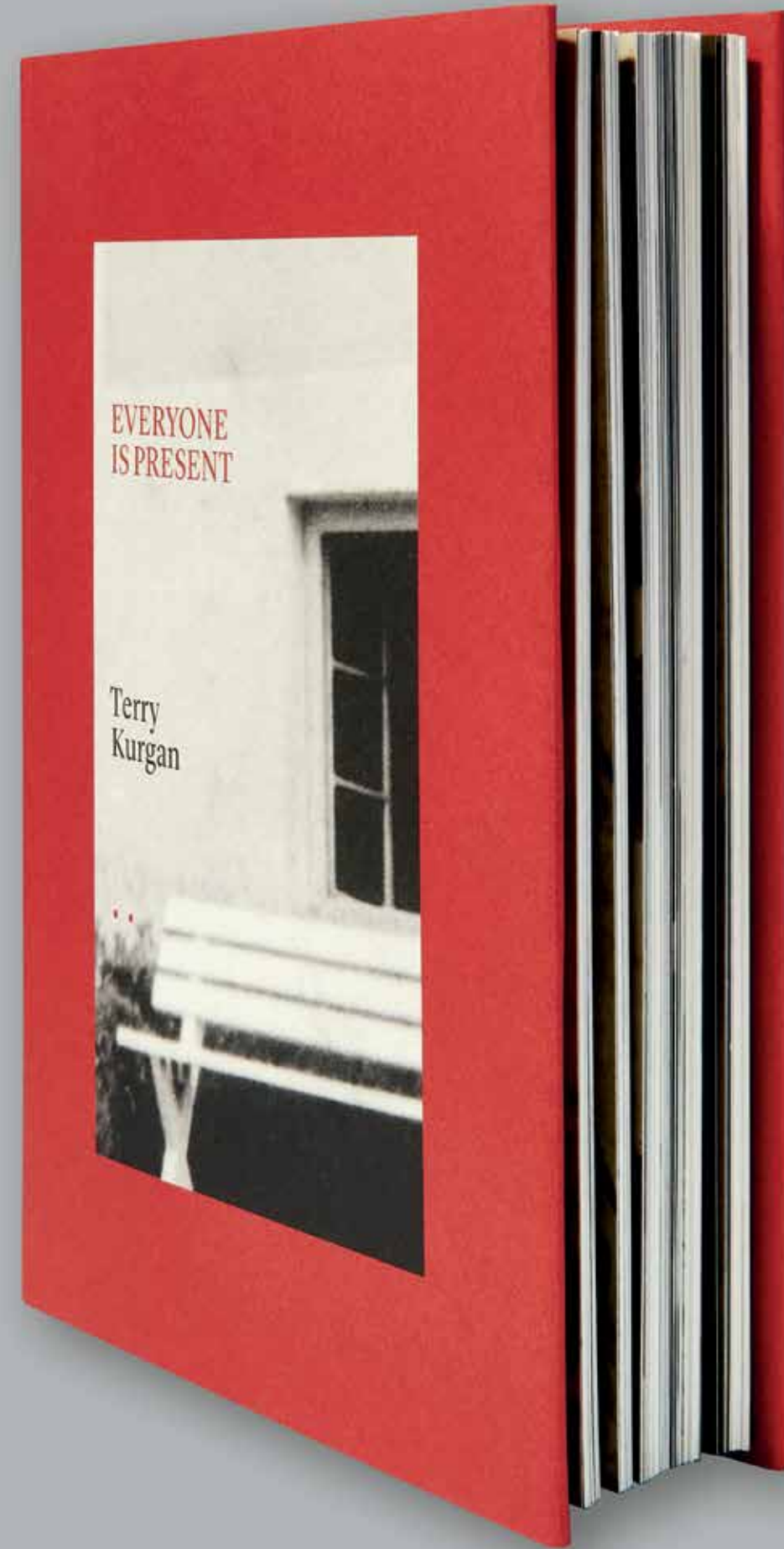
Senzeni Marasela, 2011



Senzeni Marasela
Izithombe Zendawo Esizithandayo, 2017



Terry Kurgan, 2013



Terry Kurgan
Everyone is Present, 2018



Zanele Muholi, 2013



Zanele Muholi
Massa and Mina(h) II, 2008



Cedric Nunn, 2011

Cedric Nunn
Interior to My Great-Grandfather's House,
Mangete KwaZulu-Natal, 1982



Gary Schneider
HandPrint Portraits, dates variable
Pigmented ink on paper
10 x 8 inches; 25 x 20 cm:
Each in an Edition of 7 + 2AP

Nandipha Mntambo
...everyone carries a shadow II, 2013
Archival pigment ink on Semi- matte photo paper, 300gm
Image: 39.4 x 26.25 in; 100 x 66.7cm
Paper: 41.3 x 27.8 in; 104 x 70.7cm
Edition of 5 + 2AP
Copyright Nandipha Mntambo. Courtesy of Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg.

Andrew Tshabangu
Portrait of a Young Twasa, 2008
Archival print
47.24 x 33 in; 120 x 84 cm
Edition: 3/5
Courtesy the artist and Gallery MOMO.

Mikhael Subotzky
Blood (or Flesh Fur Faeces), 2019
Photogravure and digital print
Image: 8.25 x 13.75 in; 21.8 x 34.9 cm
Paper: 19 x 28 in; 48 x 71.3 cm
Edition of 9 with 2 AP
Courtesy of the artist and Goodman Gallery.
Printed by David Krut Workshop.

Hasan and Husain Essop
Three Imams, Dakar, Senegal, 2010
Pigment ink on cotton rag paper
Image: 26.6 x 40.2 in; 67.5 x 102cm
Paper: 30.5 x 44 in; 77.5 x 112cm
Edition of 5
Courtesy the artists and Goodman Gallery.

Donna Kukama
Se Sa Feleng... (3), 2012
LightJet C-print on Fuji Crystal Archive paper
31.5 x 21 in; 80 x 53.5 cm
Edition 2/3 (final edition available)
Courtesy the artist and blank projects.

David Goldblatt
Dining Room Detail, Randburg, Gauteng, 1974
Gelatin Silver Print
16.15 x 19.23 in; 41 x 49 cm
Courtesy Goodman Gallery and Pace/MacGill Gallery.

Pieter Hugo
Pieter Hugo 1, Cape Town, 2015
C-print
31.5 x 23.6 in; 80 x 60 cm
Edition: 7 + 2AP
Copyright Pieter Hugo. Courtesy of Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg; Yossi Milo, New York; and Priska Pasquer, Cologne.

Jo Ractliffe
St Helena mermaid, 2018
Silver gelatin print
15.75 x 19.7 in; 40 x 50cm
Edition of 3 + 1AP
Copyright Jo Ractliffe. Courtesy of Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg.

Senzeni Marasela
Izithombe Zendawo Esizithandayo, 2017
Photomontage and pen on photocopy
6.3 x 8.25 in; 16 x 21 cm
Unique print
Copyright SENZENI MARASELA.
Courtesy AFRONOVA GALLERY.

Terry Kurgan
Everyone is Present, 2018
Courtesy Fourthwall Books, Johannesburg.

Zanele Muholi
Massa and Mina(h) II, 2008
C-print
15.7 x 23.6 in; 40 x 60 cm
Edition: 5 + 2AP
Copyright Zanele Muholi. Courtesy of Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg; and Yancey Richardson, New York.

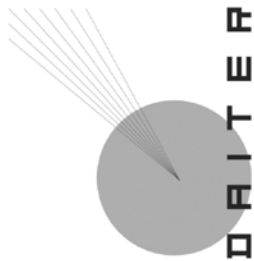
Cedric Nunn
Interior to My Great-Grandfather's House, Mangete KwaZulu-Natal, 1982
Silver gelatin print
18.125 x 12.25 in; 46 x 31cm
Courtesy the artist.

Gary Schneider and Stephen Daiter Gallery would like to express their sincere gratitude to all of the participating Artists, as well as their Assistants, and Gallery Representatives without whom this catalog and exhibition would not have been possible.

This catalog coincides with the exhibition **Highly Personal, South African Artists and Their HandPrint Portraits** on view from September 6 through November 16, 2019.

All images illustrated are available for purchase, subject to prior sale. For more information on individual prints please contact Stephen Daiter Gallery.

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