

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge that our stories, dialogues and experiences take place on the lands of the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung and Boonwurrung peoples of the Kulin Nation, and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded; we benefit and live upon stolen lands.

We respect First Nations communities' connections to land, waterways and skies, that we hope to deepen an understanding within our own ancestral pathways and learn from our peer First Nations communities to inform how we all connect with our mother lands.

We come with the intention of our work and this exhibition to share knowledge and stories that hope to celebrate and connect with Southern African figures of our past, future and present. We hope this project can be part of a discourse that speaks to the importance of Bla(c)k voices, experiences and stories.

About

And she was wearing trousers: a call to our heroines brings into focus some of the many women who defined, defied or described Southern African culture from the seventeenth century to today through a series of premieres and new commissions. Installations, film, performance and conversations unearth often-forgotten feminists, exploring ideas of identity, connection, distance and self. The forms of inquiry taken here are as diverse as the experiences of the women behind them.

Working from archives across independent publishers, oral histories, public and private, the academy and the internet, the women Brenda Fassie, Dorothy Masuka, Krotoa, Thenjiwe Lesabe, Queen Lozikeyi and figures alike have served as catalysts into an imagined world by which hope, loss, love and determination are explored.

From the Curators

Roberta Joy Rich and Naomi Velaphi

Archives that speak of copper wire, liberation, teachers, linguists and queens, of women who we should know but don't know, are constructed through colonised frames and histories. The title, translated from lyrics of Dorothy Masuka's song 'Nolishwa,' *And she was wearing trousers* reimagines the possibilities of African heroines in Southern African history through a series of exchanges of text and dialogue between Southern African artists; between those living on the continent and those from the diaspora. How do we hear of them? What do we learn from them?

A culmination of a series of conversations with women of the African diaspora and those on the continent, we examine how female figures in Southern African histories can serve as entry points into reimagining a Bla(c)k female experience in the past and future. These women are often framed as contentious, yet their contributions to society are influential, equivocal and are important African women's voices to platform, share and learn from.

The power of interpretation and nuance creates a space for tension, discovery and continuity and allows us to creatively explore our relationships with these women, and the proximity we share with them.

Public Program

•	Call and Response: Dialogues and making across continents, Roberta Joy Rich in conversation with artists Jabu Nadia Newman, Rara Zulu, Kirsty Marillier and blk banaana	16 July, 5:30pm AEST Online
•	When art meets the music: Reflections on Black archiving, Samira Farah and Zara Julius in conversation	20 July, 6:00pm AEST Online
•	Matriarchs and knowledge systems: Past, present and future, Naomi Velaphi in conversation with artists Sethembile Msezane and Tariro Mavondo	23 July, 5:30pm AEST Online
•	Rara Zulu Live, Join Rara Zulu live for an evening of song with her three piece band.	23 July, 7:30pm AEST Live at Arts House

For bookings visit artshouse.com.au

- (01) Artwork
blk banaana
Cape Town, South Africa
As high as the stars so far unseen (2022)
Single channel video
Duration: 05:00

As high as the stars so far unseen borrows its title from June Jordan's 1978 poem *we are the ones we have been waiting for*. This video collage is a visual landscape dedicated to the hidden, but not silent, women who were active in the struggle against Apartheid. It is a message of recognition to the activists, teachers, workers, mothers, grandmothers, ancestors, sisters and friends whose (her)stories are not recorded or celebrated as part of dominant historical narratives relating to the resistance struggle in South Africa. Like the lives of many of the unnamed women, this piece is nonlinear, chaotic and unpredictable, and gestures toward everyday acts of survival. It takes the viewer on a journey from turmoil to transcendence, and is intended as a portal for continued dreaming toward a shared vision of liberation.

- (02) Kirsty Marillier
Gadigal Country (Sydney)
Slide into my displacement (2021)
Single channel video
Duration: 06:13

Slide into my displacement is a video work unpacking the lack of connection South African women feel within themselves and their so called "Coloured" or Khoi-San identities. As my practice is based in playwriting, I created a dialogue work centring on a fictional internet conversation occurring between myself and Princess Krotoa. The work represents the lack of tangible information there is recorded of the Khoi heroine - and how heavily South African women have had to rely on the internet in order to to make sense of their identities.

I felt the lack of information and representation deeply through her silence, and although upsetting, it's the plight we often connect with. This work is an attempt at rewriting mine and Krotoa's history. Krotoa was never given an opportunity to speak her truth, so inevitably, our modern day DM-ing is fractured.

- (03) Sethembile Msezane
Cape Town, South Africa
ISIMO (2020)
Film
Duration: 16:19

ISIMO is a short film that takes place against the backdrop of Hoerikwaggo, commonly known as Table Mountain in Cape Town, South Africa. An ancestral matriarchal figure feels and holds the pain of the living in her womb. She diagnoses the world as we know it as being ill, disconnected from nature and in need of healing.

The work acknowledges that the world struggled with physical, mental or spiritual wellness before the current pandemic. It also recognises the adverse effects of colonialism that pervades and continues to haunt society.

Through a curriculum of ancient indigenous knowledge that is informed by ideas of the late prophet, sangoma and author Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa, the ancestral matriarch reminds us that even in adversity we need to continue to live. Even through the socio-political adversities located internationally and in Africa, she suggests that the remedy is to filter through the noise and continue to exist in that which is fulfilling.

- (04) Tariro Mavondo
Narrm (Melbourne)
Heroines Walk (2022)
Sound installation
Credits: Reuben Lewis: trumpet, pedals, field recordings and Adam Halliwell: electric percussion and
Composed, recorded, mixed & produced by Reuben Lewis.
Duration: 09:05

As a performance maker, voice is harnessed in this sound installation. Featuring piercing spoken word, the work is a metaphorical *Heroines Walk*. A sonic, light and text ritual, conjoining spiritual initiation to a lineage of brave Zimbabwean heroines like that of Mbuya Nehanda, Thenjiwe Lesabe, Yvonne Vera and Queen Lozikeyi. These women defied the immeasurable odds of Western imperialist and patriarchal forces that continue to influence access to silenced voices of Zimbabwe. The multi-dimensional power of a woman tapped into her indigeneity cannot be beaten.

- (05) Nontsikelelo Mutiti
Zimbabwe / U.S.A
Memeza (2022)
Installation, adhesive vinyl on windows

Singer, songwriter and activist Brenda Fassie was sometimes known as 'the Madonna of the Townships', 'the Queen of African Pop,' and 'Ma Brr'. Hands are taken from images of Brenda Fassie, a Southern African icon, with sources ranging from album covers, posters, music video stills and press photographs, used to present the different modes of the freedom fighter. One time pointing and at other times praying, punching the air, grasping, clapping and caressing, the work is inspired by Fassie's song of the same title, *Memeza*.

The base of the work is typographic, each letterform is built up from a series of modules that carry the motif of cornrows or hair braids or plaits. A major concern of research is how to speak about such modes of production as technologies, drawing parallels between African hair braiding practices and digital image making processes.

- (06) Jabu Nadia Newman
Cape Town, South Africa
A Bedtime Story (2022)
Single channel video
Duration: 04:44

This video is for Krotoa, made of fragments, memories, sentiments, and throw-aways. An ode and a question. I let my mind wander and drift around the imaginations and dreams of Krotoa.

How would she view the world now? Exist in it. Wear a tie-dye crop top and bleached jeans, and sport her natural hair in an up-do?

What did she dream? Did she look up at the sky and tell herself stories of love and lovers? A kaleidoscope of moments lost between time and space.

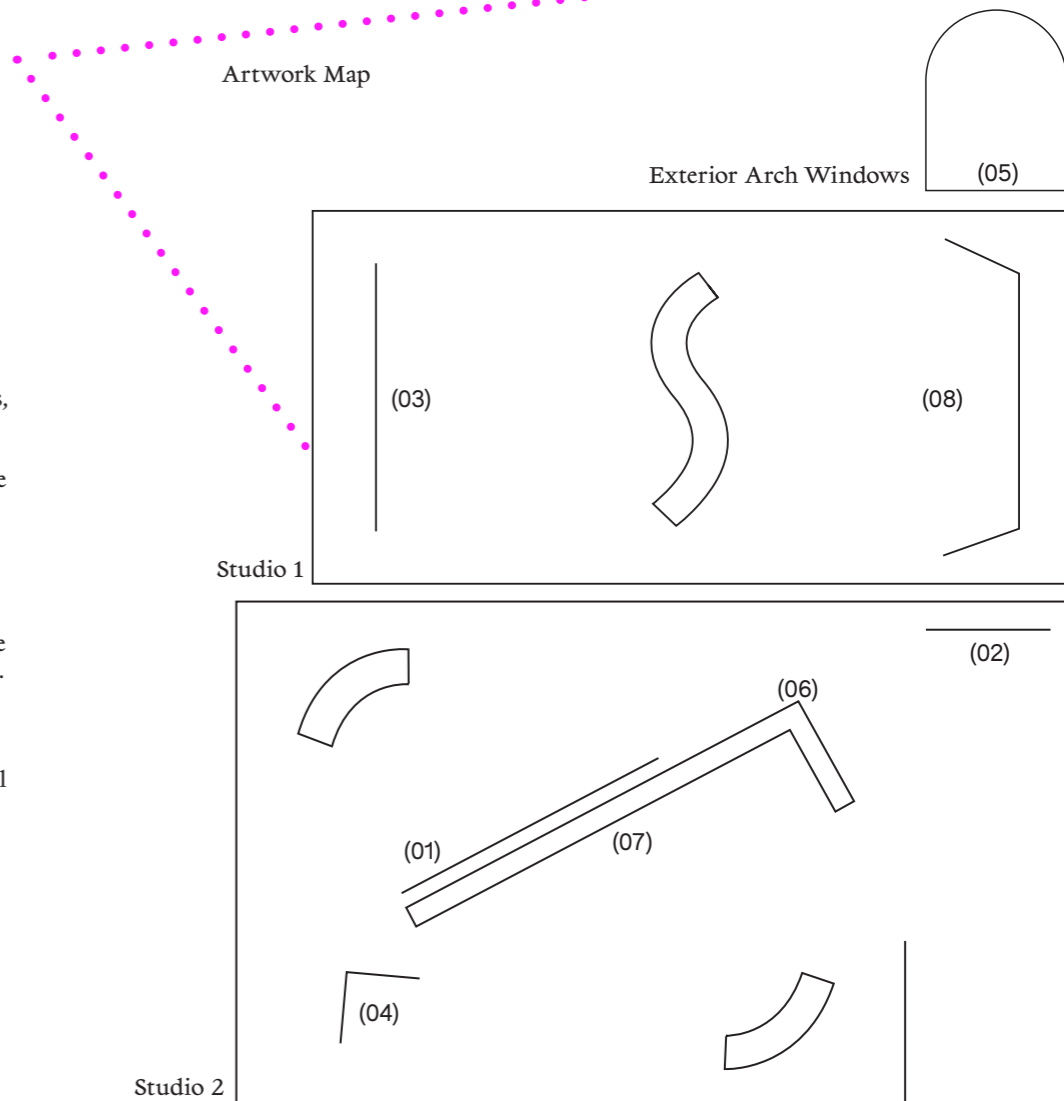
I fantasised about being her. I imagined my text messages as hers. Voice notes from her besties. My camera roll full of pictures and videos she took. My days filled with her looking through my eyes. Out at the world and leaving her mark.

- (07) Rara Zulu
Narrm (Melbourne)
Noli (2022)
Multi-channel sound installation
Duration: 04:37

Inspired by the staunch storytelling and powerful activism of Dorothy Masuka, *Noli* dedicates a homage to the original song 'Nolishwa'. As a multi-channel sound installation, my vocals are layered alongside an original beat, as sound portraits with varying compositions. The soundscape is inspired by my love of dark electronica and polyrhythmic drum patterns. The lyrics include a reprise of the original chorus, a new interpretation of the story of a woman who was gossiped about for her free and strong will. *Noli* is an inspiration to let a bitch be free.

- (08) Roberta Joy Rich and Spacecraft Studios with Zhenya Alvaranga, Claris Ncube, Nita Okoko, Robyn Rich, Tab Sejoe, Phillipa Smith, Vikki Steeneveld and Naomi Velaphi
Aunties Curtain (2022)
Narrm (Melbourne)

Aunties Curtain is an expansive collaborative print project led by Roberta Joy Rich, inspired by African commemorative cloths and fabrics. It's aesthetic and design is rooted in gifts of shweshwe and textile fabrics given to both of the curators by women in their families when visiting their motherlands of southern Africa. Guided by a narrative and process of 'Call and Response', peer Afro diaspora community and artists were called upon to contribute reflections that represent the identity and strength of African women.



What Mam Dorothy taught me

By Santilla Chingaibe

According to family lore, I met Dorothy Masuka when I was just a few days old. My parents were returning to the capital city, Lusaka, after my mother gave birth to me in the tourist town of Livingstone. Mam Dorothy was also travelling and offered to hold me while my parents sorted out the luggage. My parents retell this story with a sense of pride – that I was held by the Queen of southern African music. I like to think that in the few minutes that she held me, some of her magic sprinkled onto me. And although I have no recollection of any of this, I grew up listening to her music, and have always returned to her soothing voice whenever I need comfort.

My intrigue with Dorothy Masuka has grown the older I've become. The way she spoke in a soft but self-assured way; her effortless style and her prolific song writing. She was, as the kids say, goals. Unlike Miriam Makeba who became well known internationally for hits like 'Pata Pata' (which was written by Dorothy Masuka), Mam Dorothy spent much of her time in southern and east Africa. Touring and composing music as well as being a fierce anti-colonial activist. I've always wondered why the emphasis hasn't been on her activism when much of her music was about and engaged with the liberation of African countries. A proud pan-Africanist, her contribution to the struggle is largely overlooked.

The contribution of Black women generally in political movements has historically been erased and undervalued, and Mam Dorothy is no exception. Many narratives centre the experiences and stories of male figures. Ironically, it is through her music that we learn about the lives of Black women in southern Africa. In 'Hamba Notsokolo', she sings about a woman struggling with life and the world around her. Centring the experiences of these women in her music is an archive. Traditionally, archives quantify, list and name people, things, places. But for people from backgrounds historically excluded from history, the archives go further – they can serve as a memory, where we find ourselves and can testify to what we have endured. I've always wondered about who is deemed to be a historical subject. Unremarkable Black women are barely recorded since they are not seen as worthy historical subjects, but Dorothy Masuka shines her light on them for us to see them, hear them, and know them.

Much of the music recorded by Dorothy Masuka is upbeat and yet speaks to the everyday struggles Black people were enduring in the 50s, 60s, 70s, and 80s in southern Africa. Listening to her music as Black woman in the diaspora brings up a few questions: What does it mean to be African and a settler living on colonised land? How does one reflect the experiences of Black African women? Is it possible to capture the experiences of a diverse group of people? And while I might not have the answers, Mam Dorothy's example of activism through art and bearing witness to the experiences of women like herself, presents an opportunity to reimagine what my identity can be.

Santilla Chingaibe is an award-winning journalist, filmmaker and author based in Melbourne, whose work explores colonialism, slavery, and post-colonial migration in Australia.

Artist bios

blk banaana

blk banaana is a South African artist working with collage, video and installation. Her multidisciplinary practice explores speculative reconstruction as a mode of resilience for fragmented identities brought about through colonial, anthropologic and algorithmic violence. Fictionalising time, place, nature, data, identity, being and belonging, her work considers aesthetics and visual narratives that affirm the fugitivity of this fragmentation, while simultaneously exposing the absurdity of colonialism.

Kirsty Marillier

Kirsty Marillier is an actor and playwright who has worked with the Sydney Theatre Company, Griffin Theatre and National Theatre of Parramatta. Her debut award winning work *Orange Thrower*, is a coming of age story about a first generation teen navigating family life between Johannesburg and suburban Western Australia. A romantic comedy touching on mystery, race politics and family drama, it is a poignant love letter to South African women.

Sethembile Msezane

Sethembile Msezane's work has been widely exhibited across South Africa and internationally. She was awarded an MFA from the Michaelis School of Fine Art, at U.C.T. Msezane creates commanding works heavy with spiritual and political symbolism. Exploring issues around spirituality, commemoration and African knowledge systems, she asks questions about the remembrance of ancestry. Part of her work calls attention to the absence of the Black female body in both the narratives and physical spaces of historical commemoration.

Tariro Mavondo

Tariro Mavondo is a multi-disciplinary storyteller, theatre maker, curator, cultural diversity and performance consultant, performance facilitator across performing arts, education, government, mental health, law enforcement and social justice.

Graduating from the Victorian College of the Arts with a Bachelor of Dramatic Arts, Mavondo has co-directed theatre productions, competed in poetry slams and founded collectives and productions such as Africa's Got Talent, Still Waters African Women's Storytelling Collective and Centre of Poetic Justice.

Nontsikelelo Mutiti

Nontsikelelo Mutiti is a Zimbabwean born visual artist and educator. She is invested in elevating the work and practices of Black peoples past, present, and future through a conceptual approach to design, publishing, archiving practices, and institution building. Mutiti holds a diploma in multimedia from the Zimbabwe Institute of Visual Arts (ZIVA) and an MFA from the Yale School of Art, with a concentration in graphic design.

Jabu Nadia Newman

Jabu Nadia Newman is an award-winning photographer and filmmaker that utilises an agenda of pushing intersectional feminism within her work, that is largely based on the different and complex identities of South African women. Her first solo exhibition, *Mokwena, Macquene, Mac quene*, examines issues of 'Coloured' identity in Retreat, Cape Town, the history of forced removals, and the result of her family having to change their surname. Newman's films have been presented internationally in film and documentary festivals and museums across Europe.

Rara Zulu

Rara Zulu is a musician with a wholesome rawness and a unique tendency to pull you into a state of vulnerability through her music. Her sound is heavily influenced by soul, R'n'B and hip hop; made apparent in the rhythm and depth in her voice. Rara has performed in numerous venues across Sydney and Melbourne, and has musically collaborated and supported national and international artists such as Ijale, Horatio Luna, Elle Shimada and Sibusile Xaba.



Access more writing and information about the exhibition at andshewaswearingtrousers.com

With QR code

Credits

Fabrication and Installation: Sarah Garrecht
Sound Support: Marco Cher-Gibard
Graphic Design: Zenobia Ahmed and Nina Gibbes
Web Development: Dennis Grauel

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And she was
wearing trousers:
a call to our heroines

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Kirsty Marillier
Tariro Mavondo
Sethembile Msezane
Nontsikelelo Mutiti
Jabu Nadia Newman
Rara Zulu

An exhibition curated by
Roberta Joy Rich and Naomi Velaphi

30 June–6 August 2022
Arts House, Melbourne

521 Queensberry St North Melbourne, Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm