

“A new gallery for contemporary and classical African art in Antwerp’s trendy museum quarter.”

“Sibusiso Ngwazi’s first solo exhibition in Europe.”

“Large-scale abstract paintings driven by sensations and emotions.”

“A young self-taught contemporary artist from South Africa, Ngwazi will be present during the opening weekend.”

“Exhibition text by renowned art critic Ashraf Jamal.”

“It’s the gallery’s ambition to give more visibility to art from the African continent.”



“THE BLIND SIDE”

**SIBUSISO NGWAZI
B.1999, SOUTH AFRICA**

11 March - 2 April, 2023
Thu-Sun, 13-18h
and by appointment

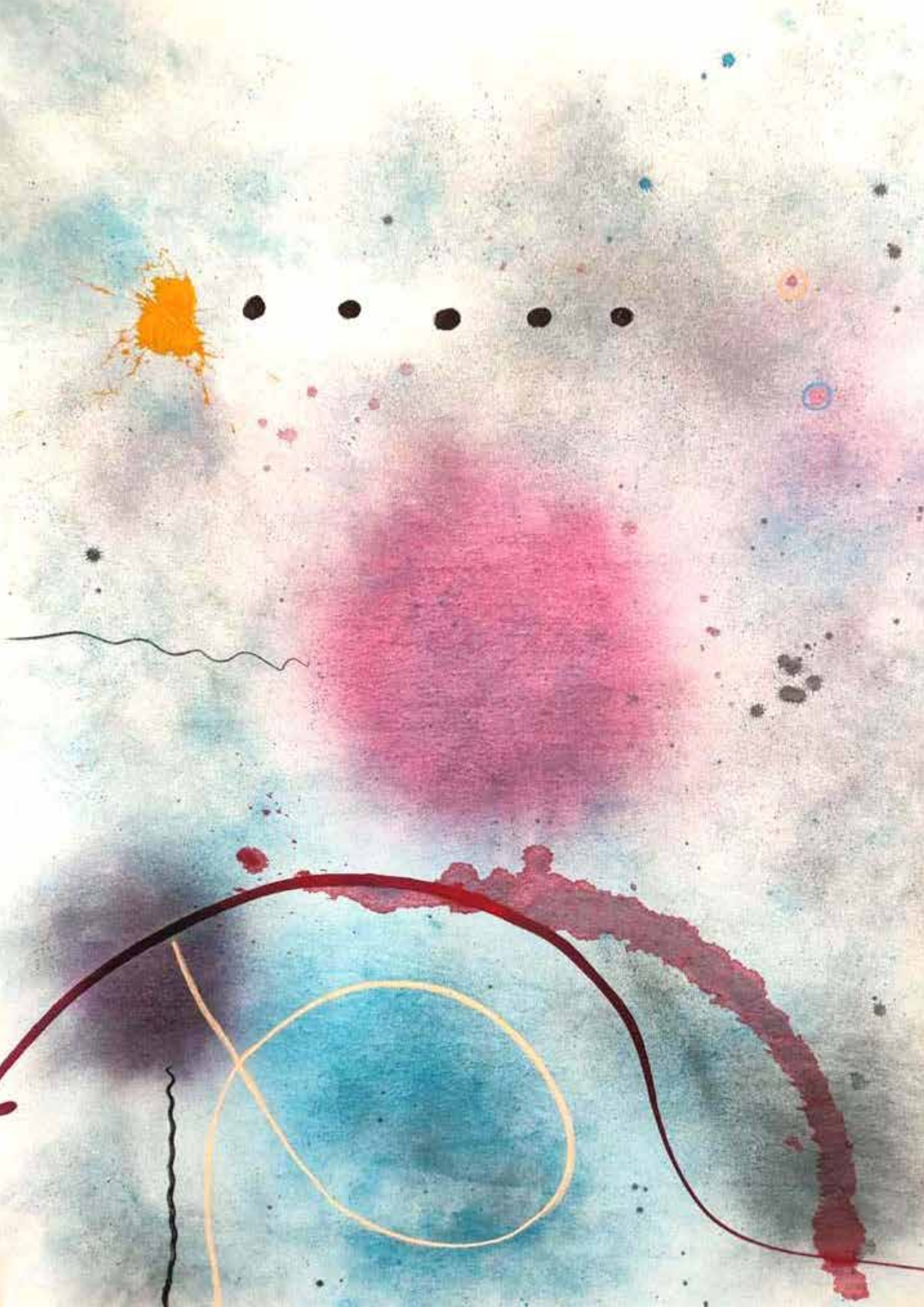
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ABOUT SIBUSISO NGWAZI



Duende Art Projects proudly presents Sibusiso Ngwazi's first solo exhibition in Europe: "Blindside". Born in KwaZulu-Natal in 1999, Ngwazi is a self-taught South-African artist renowned for his nonfigurative paintings.

His practice reflects his desire to break free from the constraints of traditional representational art and explores the limitless possibilities of abstraction. Ngwazi's work is characterized by bold, vibrant colors and fluid lines that create a sense of movement and energy. His sweeping brushstrokes and the use of non-representational shapes are layered to create complex, multi-dimensional compositions. A master of texture, his variety of techniques and paints results in rich and tactile surfaces. Notwithstanding the complexity of his works, Ngwazi always imbues them with harmony and balance.

Revealing his devotion to intuition and strongly influenced by his spiritual beliefs, Ngwazi often starts a painting with his eyes covered. As a fresh take on action-painting, hand and brush, undirected by the eye, freely roam the canvas.

"I cover my eyes, do the strokes, and then, in the middle of the painting, I remove the mask". For Ngwazi, this blindness is integral to his creation process. Like the Spanish surrealist Joan Miró (1893-1983), his painting style can be described as "automatic" or "spontaneous". As Miró, the artist believes in the importance of intuition and the subconscious; his works reflecting the free-flowing nature of the human mind.

Expressing a deep spirituality, Ngwazi's paintings evoke a sense of transcendence. In the artist's vision colors and forms have inherent spiritual properties and can be employed to entice an emotional response in the viewer, without relying on traditional representational imagery. Ngwazi considers himself as a vessel for a greater force – as observed in the confidence of his strokes and the energy that radiates from his abstract works.

Experiencing Ngwazi's paintings is utmost subjective, each work inviting the viewer to explore their own subconscious and emotional landscapes. In his captivating canvases we discover ourselves.

One of South-Africa's foremost emerging artists, Sibusiso Ngwazi has already gained strong recognition for his talent, showcasing his work in galleries and exhibitions across South Africa. After moving to Cape Town in 2013, he has participated in several group exhibitions. In 2017, Ngwazi held his first solo exhibition which was well-received by both critics and art enthusiasts. In early 2021, Sibu started hosting open studio exhibitions at his home in Little Mowbray. His work has caught the attention of key figures in the South African art world, such as the art critic Ashraf Jamal, who writes about him in his upcoming book 'Abstraction and Figure'. Ngwazi has attended several art residencies: in late 2021 at South-Africa's Nirox Foundation, in 2022 at Joseph Awuah-Darko's Noldor Residency in Accra, Ghana, and at the Asisebenze residency in Johannesburg. With his first solo show in Europe, Ngwazi is poised to make a major impact on the international art scene.





ABOUT DUENDE ART PROJECTS

Duende Art Projects' ambition is to inspire people and enrich their lives by sharing our profound passion for the art of the African continent.

Our purpose is to strengthen Africa's visibility and significance within the global and diverse art world through a strong digital presence, curated exhibitions on unique locations and the participation to art fairs such as PAN.

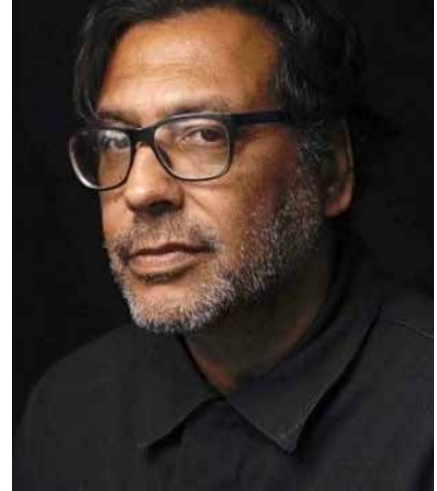
Our mission is to connect people — the curious and interested, aspiring and seasoned collectors, connoisseurs, emerging and renowned artists, art advisors, curators and writers — with art from the African continent.

We facilitate easy access through compelling exhibitions — offline and online, in Antwerp and on location. Our online platform provides insightful educational content and wishes to be a home for ideas, news and stories. We offer a bespoke and discrete art advisory service that covers all aspects of building and managing a collection.

Duende Art Projects was founded in 2021 by Bruno Claessens, a passionate art expert with 15 years of ample experience in the African art market. Previously, he was the European director of the African art department at Christie's for 5 years.

Bruno has published three books on African art (Ere Ibeji (2013), Baule Monkeys (2016) & UNÛ (2021)) and has ran a popular blog on the subject since 2013. Throughout his career, he gained a profound knowledge of art of the African continent, both classical and contemporary, and has developed a great network of collectors, curators and scholars as well as strong institutional ties. The gallery's first year saw two major group exhibitions, "Threads" and "Unsettled" at Zwartzusters Monastery in Antwerp, as well as a first participation to the renowned art fair Parcours des Mondes in Paris and the PAN art fair in Amsterdam.





THE BLIND SIDE BY ASHRAF JAMAL

Braille is a written language devised for the blind, the characters represented by patterns of raised dots which are known and felt with the fingertips. Tactile, haptic, sensuous, it is a language of the body, a Nietzschean 'physiological thought'. Like any other language system, Braille is an abstraction. It is synaesthetic, a blended compound, part logic, part sensation.

Listening to Sibusiso Ngwazi in his studio in the industrial district of Salt River, in Cape Town, the foil covered rooftop glistening, paintings stashed on the criss-cross of wooden beams, the dingy white walls lashed with colour – artworks in themselves – it is this sensation of being blindsided, the concussive contact – physical, visceral – seeming to come out of nowhere, that rings in the head. This is why the paintings read as a kind of braille, conditions, or states, that are sensate. It is not reason that dominates the atmosphere, but sensation. There are large paintings – a mix of royal, azure, ultramarine, cerulean – lashed with yellows, whites, reds, black. Another series is ruled by beige that echoes the Namibian desert the artist visited in 2022, in which inscrutable forms remain richly visible.

'Life is like a line, not a straight line, but one that flows like water', the artist says. It is unsurprising, in the middle of a desert, that Ngwazi dreams of being underwater. Desert and ocean are commonly merged in our psyche and our poetics. The dream structure is an ocean, psychoanalysis tells us. As is the desert, a world composed of eddies and flows. If Paul Klee's remark leaps to mind – 'a drawing is simply a line going for a walk' – it is because it speaks to the dynamism built into abstract painting.

That Ngwazi begins a painting while masked, so the hand, undirected by the eye, assumes the burden of choreography, reveals the artist's adoration for instinct, drawing as an action-painting, as some Heraclitean flux. It is not the eye that takes the line for a walk, but the body.

'My intention is not to understand the stroke. I hide my eyes, do the stroke, then, in the middle of the painting I remove the mask'. Artists pursue any number of strategies to outwit themselves, to override overthinking. For Ngwazi, blindness is integral to creating. When the paintings are revealed, half-way through the process, 'there is a surprise – a new world'.

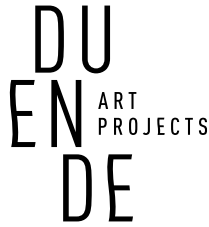
Is Ngwazi a mariner, intrigued by uncharted territories? A mapmaker for an unknown world? A blind man in a world of the narrowly sighted? It certainly seems so. 'I create a system driven by emotion', he says. 'System' is a curious description, 'a system driven by emotion', more so. Does he believe, after Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, that the unconscious possesses a structure? Can one speak of an emotional language that is as gnomish as it is decipherable?

Here we return to Braille, meaning as both interpretation and 'subconscious sensing'. Here, moreover, the desert, a central theme, as is the oceanic, once again impresses upon us the realisation that form is everywhere, and everywhere liquid and atomic, despite our yearning for fixity.

'The texture of the desert is like a human skin', says Ngwazi – 'It is sensual. It has no eye'. Perhaps because a desert will not return our gaze, because it is boundless, or, because it triggers abstract constructions that refuse any desire for containment? Once again, Paul Klee returns. His great inspiration was not the Namib Desert but the vivid streets and walls of Tunisia, which prompted him to declare that 'colour and I are one'. How often we forget the immense influence of Africa on the likes of Klee, Picasso, Rimbaud. And now, from the mouth of a black African artist – Sibusiso Ngwazi – I hear the following: 'When Miro and Malevich died, God made me'.

Influence is reciprocal. South and north interpenetrate. Nietzsche described himself as a 'hyperborean', a lover of the sun who comes from the north. His declared Bizet's opera, Carmen, to be far greater than any work by Wagner, because it was more sensuous, more passionate, more 'African'. In the prejudicial desire to nullify the immense influence of Africa on western art, we forget that geopolitics is infinitely more complex. That Ngwazi can acknowledge Miro and Malevich as his birth-right, reveals the greater openness of the artist. That his paintings are most distinctly influenced by Miro is, perhaps, self-evident.

'I try to apply colours like words that shape poems, like notes that shape music', says Miro. Once again, we return to some synesthetic architecture. Here we have entered the realm of similitude – like. No meaning is ever intrinsic, it is always aggregative. In Ngwazi's paintings, it is this associative yearning that impels us. We venture into his paintings, as though upon an ocean, or a Heraclitean desert, 'trackless and unexplored'. There, in the shapeless-yet-shaping midst of a painting, we find our own coordinates. Because no form is ever quite structured – circular form



reads more like an iridescent blob, a line as something lambently inarticulate – reaffirms the artist’s love for a shaping shapelessness.

At twenty-four, Sibusiso Ngwazi is a shining light. In entering the world blind, like a newborn child, he tells us of how little we are truly able to contain, see, or understand. It is not ignorance he champions, but ‘wonder’. ‘There is a freedom in wearing a mask’, he says, ‘when we remove the mask there is no more freedom’.

Perhaps. Perhaps not. Our vision of the world is not as relentlessly objectifying as we assume it to be. In fact, our lives are saccadic, caught always ‘between two or more phases of fixation in the same direction’. As such, sight is better understood as pulsed – a pulsation – more a reverberatory thrumming. This is the quality of sight which Ngwazi’s paintings afford the viewer. They allow us to sense the throb of life, its fleeting yet also densely sensate nature.

In a second-hand bookshop in the middle of the South African desert – the Karoo – I stumbled upon an abridged collection of John Ruskin’s essays. We know him as the great champion of William Turner, the first great abstract artist. But it was not Ruskin’s reflections on Turner that drew me irresistibly, but his reflection, ‘Of Truth of Space’, in which he notes that ‘nature is never distinct and never vacant, she is always mysterious, but always abundant; you always see something, but you never see all’. This is the sine qua non of abstraction. That he penned these thoughts in the 1830s is all the more remarkable. Long before Modernism, Ruskin understood the deceit of knowledge, the death of the Idea, the irrepressible power of the emotions – art as a psychic geography.

When Ngwazi remarks that ‘When Miro and Malevich died, God made me’, he should have included John Ruskin. As the great art writer notes, ‘Not one line out of the millions there is without meaning, yet there is not one which is not affected and disguised by the dazzle and indecision of distance. No form is made, and yet no form is unknown’.

