
ART & CULTURE

Thokozani Mthiyane



Perhaps you sit in an office with tasks waiting to be tackled, maybe you are doom scrolling, or boredom scrolling, couch potatoing or in a coffee shop that offers respite during a busy day... no matter where you find yourself, it is more than likely Thokozani Mthiyane will be engaged in a frenzy of painting. Thokozani's painting is as consistent as the many bright stars that shine in Baviaanskloof night sky, whether you are there to see them, or not.

Thokozani Mthiyane
(Johannesburg, Ellis
House, Jan 2023)

He paints without paintbrushes, rather using hands, palms, fingers, nails, shoulders, feet, movement, gestures and the propulsion of throwing and dripping paints; he even uses his knowledge of the drying times of liquids.

A few canvases lie on the floor of his studio. They might have been there for days, maybe months. They are thick with paint and the footprints of visitors, because Thokozani believes, "they hold the gestures and energy of those who walk a path over them".

At one point Thokozani's hands are bathed in paint and he kneels in front of a canvas already thick with textures. He parts his hands running them across

the cloth to form diagonal lines from the bottom centre of the canvas to the opposite corners. This motion brings his chest down low into a posture that feels humble.

He stands up, dusts off his hands, looks around, breathes heavily with sweat gathering on his forehead. He hunts for colours, looks into vials of liquids, and settles on a small bucket. He holds it, looks inside, swirls the liquid, and flings it onto the canvas, all while moving in time to loud music.

He seems lost in something, like a deer raising its beautiful head lost to a scent. He walks through layers of himself moving further and further down an invisible path, and I begin to question whether he is a painter, or a performer, or both? His voice joins in as he puts sounds to his gestures, and am curious whether those who have his paintings know that his voice is interwoven into their canvas.



Tension seems to escalate. A fierce sound of frustration comes out as he flings paint down like it is something awful on his hands. The paint hits the canvas like an expelled vile thing, and he is further lost to singing and dancing, smudging and patting, as he works on three pieces simultaneously.



With pointed focus, he picks up one canvas, carries it to the wall and nails it up. He then drags another canvas parallel to the hanging one, and stands on it. The canvas on the floor catches excesses of paint on its folds. He continues flinging and tossing and throwing paint, even slapping and beating, and punishing the cloth... it is as if says, "Here! Hold this, hold this, of my life and understanding... take it, take all of it." Then there is scratching, caressing, and slowly the workings of a circle takes shape.

Its excruciating to watch layers of beautiful visuals disappear slowly like footprints swallowed by the sea. Thokozani seems emotionally unattached to the layers he sets down, beautiful colour combinations and visuals disappear as he rather focuses on his rituals of starting, clearing, praying and imagining.





I am completely caught up in it all when it dawns on me that his frenzy of movement, singing and flinging might not be his alone, but could be ours collectively? He might be driven by what we all feel, see and sense, but have no temple of time and place to record it in, or even courage to do so. Life folds in on itself, it folds through and over itself. In Thokozani's studio, life is capturing life; this is Thokozani's life and how he chooses to live it. This is who he is, how he has lived, and how he is lost to paint and canvas and movements, daily. I look around the space and see scores of painted canvases piled high everywhere. They mark consistency, rituals. His space does have the air of a cathedral. It is a cathedral of Thokozani's life, and his paintings are the stained glass windows that allow us to peer in.

