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O 23 - May  
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I 23 - May  
N 16 June  
G 2017

C Nkule Mabaso  
U Rael Jero Salley  
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A Buhle Mbambo  
R Dineo Seshee Bopape  
T Gabrielle Goliath  
I Kemang Wa Lehulere  
S Kitso Lynn Lelliott  
T MadeYouLook  
S Mawande Ka Zenzile  
Sharlene Khan  
Sikhumbuzo Makhandula  
Sugar-Free///Pungwe  
Thembinkosi Goniwe

The Michaelis Galleries present *Looking After Freedom*. The exhibition is realised with the support of the British Council in South Africa. This groundbreaking exhibition constitutes a history of experimental, “decolonizing” art practices by contemporary African artists, and reflects on their influence internationally. Addressing an art critical vacuum, *Looking After Freedom* will give visibility to artistic practices that escape the grasp of art history—where it is located, how, by whom, and for what reasons. The last twenty years marks a key period in South African history and in the development of contemporary art.

In this exhibition, *Looking After Freedom* offers a sampling of artists working in photography, video, and other experimental media. Among the artists included are acknowledged figures such as Dineo Seshee Bopape, Thembinkosi Goniwe and Kemang Wa Lehulere, alongside artists on the rise such as Skhumbuzo Makhandula and MadeYouLook. The exhibition is curated by Nkule Mabaso and Raél Jero Salley as part of the project of “Decolonization and the Scopic Regime.”

Many of the artists featured in this exhibition have helped shape a more complex, expanded, and inclusive field of conceptual, video, performance and installation art in South Africa and beyond. Beyond this, these artists share a commitment to invent, through artistic practice, more human, more workable visual, material, and conceptual tools and spaces. The exhibition features artworks that embrace Africana existence, and approach intense struggles for liberation that vibrate between the imaginary and the real.

*Looking After Freedom* brings overdue scholarly attention to the extraordinary contributions artworks make to shape new forms of socio-political imagination. “Our point of return is that artists (makers) are always already doing the work of nurturing our imaginations for everyday life, mediating the paradoxes built into recent struggles for freedom,” says co-curator Raél Jero Salley. “Looking After Freedom is a way of describing a dynamic creativity that goes *beyond* reflecting spectacular moments of injustice, inequality and violence. We look beyond in order to make new tools and methods for transforming our shared experience of the everyday.”

This exhibition presents the argument that *Looking After Freedom* is possible via recent works of Africana art. The curators do not see these works of art as mere illustrations of a struggle for freedom happening in a separate political reality. Their central proposition is this: each artist, each work of art is already “looking after freedom,” in singular and various ways. That is to say, these artists construct, for themselves and for others, paths through struggle to freedom.

The artists invited to participate have been selected because their practices evoke events, histories, and geographies that exceed fleeting representations of Africana life after slavery, colonialism or apartheid. Their work moves out of the past tense, away from artificially idealized representations of Africana being. By drawing this work into this shared space, the curators open an inquiry into the feelings and logics of creative practices now. As these actors and activities look after freedom, they do so actively, rejecting the passivity of waiting for a freedom somehow given or found.

New imaginings may work to disentangle, decolonize, and emancipate looking. This exhibition intends to offer a sense of what such a project of emancipated looking means in practice, how it functions interpretively, and what it might mean in concrete terms. In the context of “decolonizing” practices, it is a space/time to look at struggle and against freedom, while expanding upon the contexts, methods and structures of such engagements.

The research undertaken in preparation for this exhibition does not argue for a straightforward battle for space on the same “playing field,” nor for a reconciled compromise for the “colonial environment as it was.” Instead, *Looking After Freedom* opens new areas of critical inquiry about ongoing and unfinished attempts at establishing new histories, different logics, and expanded points of view. Says Salley, “Artworks enunciate both the restrictions and freedoms that shape specific, modern, and active imaginations. They are a present that delivers new futures.”

*Looking After Freedom* will form part of the core project at the Michaelis Galleries at the University of Cape Town for discussions around the issues of decolonization and the scopic regime.

Opening hours:  
Tuesday to Friday  
11h00 - 16h00

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