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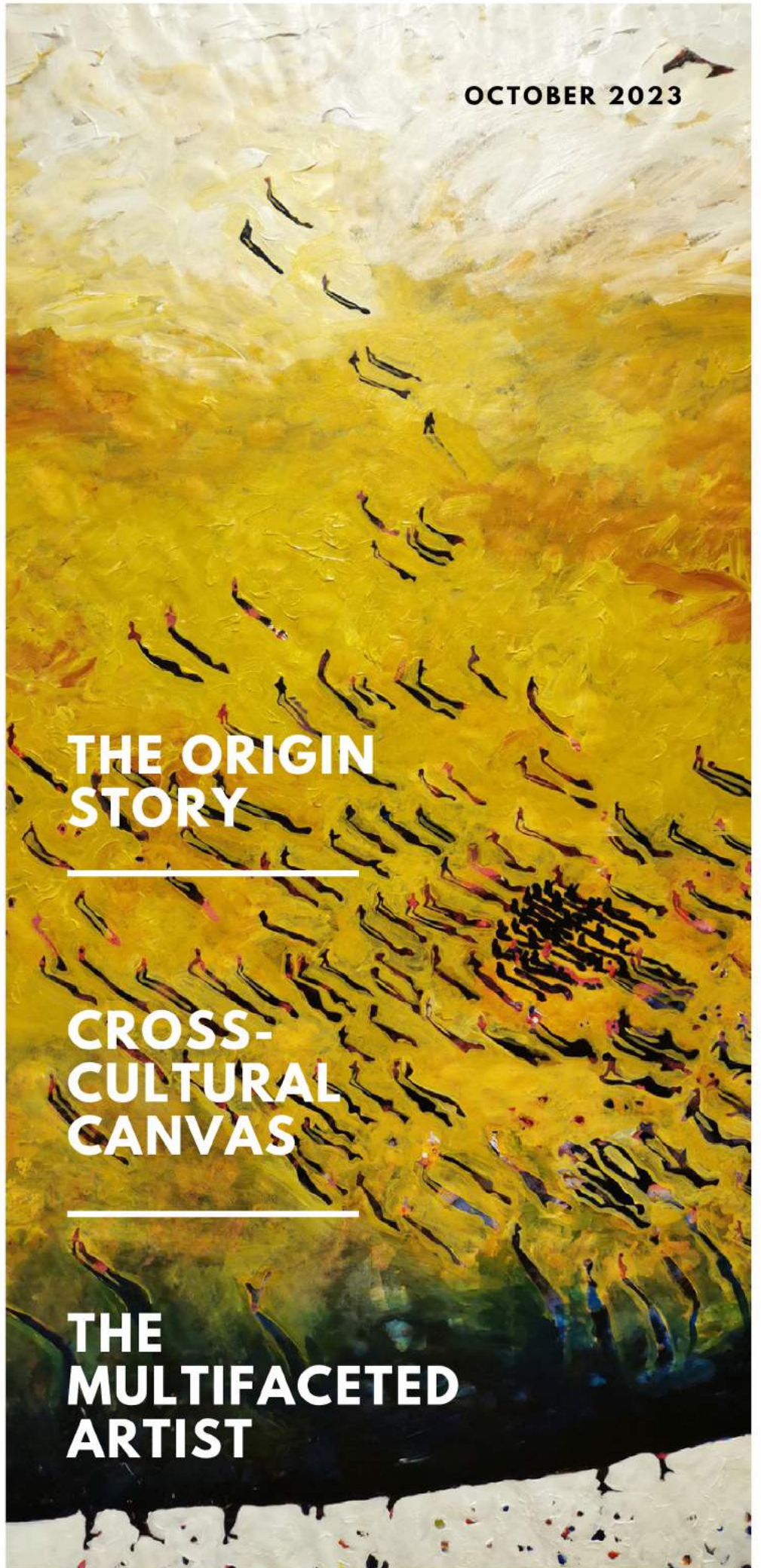
BLOOM

JOHAN

THE ORIGIN
STORY

CROSS-
CULTURAL
CANVAS

THE
MULTIFACETED
ARTIST



UNVEILING THE CANVAS

Daniela Mondlane in conversation with Johan Bloom.

Embark on a unique artistic journey as Daniela Mondlane, a curator of stories, engages in a vibrant conversation with the eclectic Johan Bloom. In this dialogue, Daniela's lens goes beyond conventional interviews, capturing the essence of Johan's narrative strokes. Join them in a dance of ideas, where questions become an art form, and the interview transcends into a canvas of shared creativity.

Please note that the visual representations of Johan Bloom's artwork within this document may not accurately reflect their original dimensions. Some images have been resized or cropped for the purpose of fitting into the article's format. For an authentic appreciation of the artwork's scale and detail, we recommend referring to the artist's official portfolio or gallery representations.

THE ORIGIN STORY

Take us back to the very beginning of your artistic journey. What was the moment or experience that first compelled you to pick up a brush or engage with art?

Well, it all started with me and my friend in my early teens, 12,13 something. I remember we had some competition with each other. We both wanted to become the technically best bird book illustrator as the ultimate goal. So when our classmates were busy playing soccer and starting to chase girls, we went out on long walks in the forest and made bird sketches, we were real nerds haha.

By the time we got quite skilled and just at the beginning of secondary school, we were good enough to illustrate any bird book. And I recall this pivotal, defining moment when me and my friend were standing next to a fence outside our school, and he said to me: you know Johan soon we are as good as any of our heroes when it comes to bird book illustrations. What are we going to do now? What's next? An abyss, a big hole of dark nothing opened in front of me. We, or at least me, were in total shock! The end was near! Me and my friend parted after that and I moved to Botswana with my parents as aid workers. I continued with bird and wildlife drawing.



The move to Gaborone, pure heaven.

By 1979 Gaborone was a small place and the diamonds were yet to be found. I used to bike out into the bush, which was around the corner. Many weekends were spent in the Kalahari, with an abundance of wildlife.

The afternoons were spent with a taxidermist at the national museum. It was pure heaven for a boy like me! But something was about to change.



“So, when our classmates were busy playing soccer and starting to chase girls, we went out on long walks in the forest and made bird sketches”

How has your artistic journey evolved from those early bird book illustrations to the diverse range of art forms you work on today?

Moving back to Sweden from the Kalahari and entering high school and adolescence, were turbulent times for me, trying to find a foothold and defining myself.

I continued to paint and went into human figure drawing. They became technically quite good and I even taught anatomy drawing at evening classes.

“trying to find a foothold and defining myself”

From being an innocent, blue-eyed romantic naturalist who was painting birds I became, and still am, interested in humans and the human condition. What does it mean to be a human on this planet? How did we end up here? Why do we behave like we do as a collective, more than on a personal level?



CROSS-CULTURAL CANVAS

How does living and working in both South Africa and Sweden influence your artistic perspective and the themes you explore in your work?

Being brought up in Botswana, Mozambique, and Sweden I have been somewhat caught between two very different mindsets. Two hemispheres. It has enabled me on the other hand to experience multiple perspectives on life.

It has always been a possibility for contemplation and comparison between the two hemispheres. The global South-North perspective, with all its colonial and self-centered ideas of Europe and the West, contrasts the diverse melting pot of ideas, traditions, religions, languages, and energy of the South. Facing its challenges of poverty and distribution of wealth, it has energy and a lot to teach the rest of the world when it comes to being a human, and the human condition.



Landscape of Awe.



Time and Again.



“All my art of significance has come out of Southern Africa.”

Counted in days I have spent more time in Sweden because it is a practical place to earn your money and raise and educate your children. I feel that Europe sometimes lacks energy. A bit like a museum and I have felt Southern Africa has a different vibe and energy. I feel more alive and at home when out in the African bush, or discussing politics in a chief's hut in Eastern Cape or a bar in Maputo.

The Motherland to us all.

Being the Motherland to us all, where the cradle of humankind lies and we all migrated from. Because of that, the discussion around the Human condition is somewhat always present or close. I have been a long-distance commuter all my life with Southern Africa as my source of inspiration and driving force. I have hardly produced any new art in Sweden, or Europe.

All my art of significance has always been somewhat connected to Southern Africa.



Can you share a specific instance where the cultural duality of your life significantly impacted your artistic process?

Apart from colorful paintings telling a vibrant story of southern Africa, I have done several illustrations and photos addressing racism, ignorance, and colonial thinking. Like highlighting the fact that the only so-called “skin-colored” band-aid that was available in South Africa and Europe, until recently, were white. I turned the tables and used my own portrait with a brown band-aid all over my face. With underlining text: We Africans like skin-colored band-aid. It was on display at an art fair in Denmark, all visitors of white complexion did not react at all whilst visitors of complexion laughed their heads off and could totally relate.

I realized then, the uneducated, ignorant West still has a long way to go.



**Vi afrikaner gillar
hudfärgade plåster.**

**“I realized then, the uneducated, ignorant
West still has a long way to go.”**

Can you share a specific instance where the cultural duality of your life significantly impacted your artistic process?

Yes, another defining moment for me was just after high school when I had done one painting that really felt like I was on to something, technically not a masterpiece but a lot of bodies, and people entangled and joined together, like woven together. Lots of color. Somewhat a painting of life itself, I thought. Shortly after I moved to Mozambique.

My parents had relocated to Maputo, Mozambique six months prior. At the time I knew nothing about the art in Mozambique.

And one big red painting of Malangatana completely got me! I spent one hour just staring! Wow! Bodies, people, birds, monsters woven together and forming so much energy and life! I had come home, I felt. I saw so much of my own painting, That was what I have been looking for!



Walk of life. Acrylic on board.



Waiting for rain. Litography print.



Malangatana. Oil on canvas.

The next day I went to find Malangatana. He was working on a big sculpture outside town. A very nice, gentle, and soft-spoken man. I got invited to his studio and was all in awe! He recognized me as a young artist eager to know more about African art. He also helped and curated my first show at the local gallery, Nucleo de Arte.

Painting between Makhanda and Skärhamn must offer diverse stimuli. Could you narrate a specific instance where the environment influenced a piece in a way you hadn't anticipated?



A glitch in time. Acrylic on canvas.

At one time in the late 1990s, I thought I had to find a common ground, a pictorial language that brings North and South together. A starting point for my exploration of the human condition. I was visiting one of the larger panels of petroglyphs we have here in Scandinavia and was suddenly struck by the similarities of the rock art in South Africa. The human figures have a lot in common as if we as humans were closer to each other than some 4000 years ago. And this despite the vast physical distance.

I started to elaborate and joined the pictures, and figures from the two hemispheres. When displaying, the Scandinavians felt at home in my pictures seeing all these figures inspired by the local petroglyphs which in fact were closer to copies of the rock art of Africa! And when bringing the paintings to a show in South Africa they all could easily relate to the Drakensberg rock paintings, not knowing they were figures from petroglyphs in Scandinavia. I felt I was on to something... These human figures I have now developed into my own, not as copies of existing rock art but a mix of the two hemispheres or rather a pictorial language where most people feel at home irrespective of background.



Bridging the Gap. Acrylic on canvas.

BRUSHSTROKES OF EVOLUTION

Being largely self-taught, what challenges did you face, and how did they shape your unique artistic style?

As with everything, there are pros and cons. As a largely self-taught artist you are always on the downside when it comes to network and who is who. Gallerists and institutions like to have an official “stamp” on their artwork and career, a diploma, a degree, and a commercially easily recognizable artistic style.

My approach has always been to only follow my own heart and ideas, to really be free in what I do. When done, I am open to marketing, valuing, and selling, but that is another art form that others are way better at than myself. I never think about if “it” will sell or asked myself if I become famous, if it happens it's meant to be.



*Contemplation on contemporary Rainbow.
Acrylic on canvas..*

Can you share a breakthrough moment or realization in your self-directed artistic education?

During my formative years, I went to a 1-year, pre-university course in art after which I applied for fine art at the university in Sweden, but turned it down because having just left school with a bad taste I didn't want to get institutionalized yet again. I went to Maputo instead and decided to learn from great artists there, Zimbabwe and South Africa. Malangatana, Chissano, Naguib, Pancho Guedes, and the Shona stone sculptures from Zim, Walter Battiss, Cecil Skotnes, and others from the region, all became my inspirations, heroes, and tutors instead of Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Picasso, Matisse, and Warhol. As it happened, I got to know one of my parents' neighbors, an upcoming artist; Naguib. He took me under his wing for a couple of years during which I returned several times to learn and paint with him in his studio. I have never regretted that decision but have realized that has affected me in terms of possibilities to make a living out of it.

THE MULTIFACETED ARTIST

How does creating public art differ from your work in galleries, and what considerations do you take into account when designing for public spaces?

The permanent public is often a one-off piece designed specifically for that particular space. It is also supposed to be there for some time. But I love working with larger pieces! Where one has to take the surroundings into account. A painting on a wall in a gallery is more often a question of being a nice fit for the private buyer.

I have done several wall paintings with kids and youngsters, great fun!



Can you share a public art project that left a lasting impression on you?

One fun project was to make a Walkway pointer to guide people into a square that tourists found a bit difficult to locate. I worked with white traffic lines painted on the tarmac and colored aluminum plates on the wall. The ordinary lines continued into wobbly, curvy lines going all over and ending up on the wall with a figure resembling a dartboard's bullseye with legs and a long arm, hand pointing in that direction. Joyful and happy expression. I named it YES! As a reminder that we can only change things if we bring forward and focus on what we want to have. Change never comes from saying no to things in life.

Walking past myself I was surprised at how people reacted to the piece with joy and happiness. Adults laughing, kids and dogs following, running along the wobbly lines. It is a place where people stop for a short while. Some were irritated by the lack of straight lines and square boxes they are used to, but nevertheless something to contemplate.

As a painter, sculptor, and someone who has explored various forms of art, could you narrate a moment where these different facets of your artistic identity intersected or complemented each other in a surprising way?



Converting 2D painting into 3D sculpture has its challenges, but when starting to use steel plates I was surprised how well a flat sheet of metal can work in 3 dimensions, depending on how you let it interact with space around it and other shapes.

Like the sculpture EWA, a larger piece. The figure stands rotated in front of cut out piece and placed correctly, the shadow from the sun creates a third dimension that wanders over the surface as if there are three persons in dialogue with each other.

“depending on how you let it interact with space around it and other shapes.”

CANVAS CONVERSATIONS

If your paintings could speak, what stories would they tell about the places they've been, the people they've met, and the emotions they've captured?

Stay positive, it is the only way to go! Although some of my paintings tell darker stories and have multiple layers, most people express their happy feelings by looking at my art. That is inspiring!



Landscape of Awe.



Landscape of Awe.

How do you produce a new body of work? For an exhibition or a show?

Well, given a decent time frame, producing and delivering art on time has never been a problem for me. I just have to start up my painting tornado! From time to time, in between shows and galleries like where I am now, a lot of things are floating about in my head that eventually form a new starting point for a new body of art.

No longer a young gun, what benefits do you see as a more mature artist?

Like a good wine, my art gets better and better over time. All stages in life have their advantages and are important contributors in terms of artistic expression. As more mature one tends to contemplate more on a holistic view of life. When young and full of energy it is more of just doing stuff. I also think artistic expression and pictorial language mature.

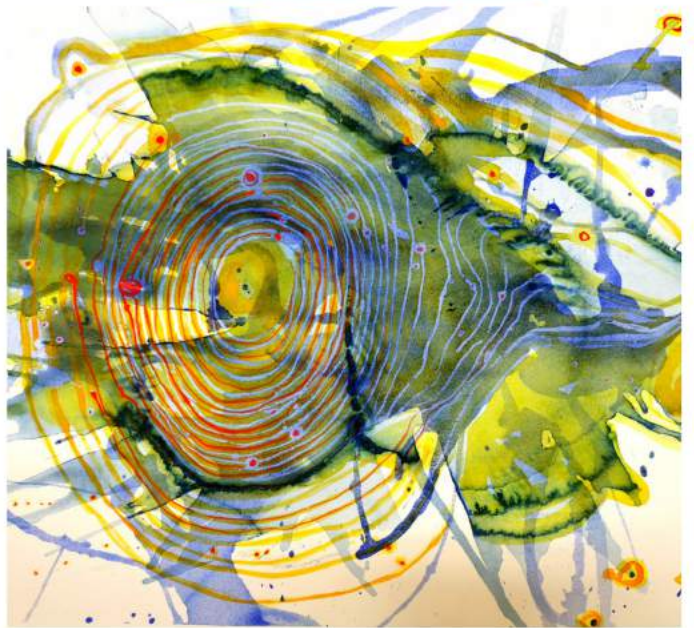
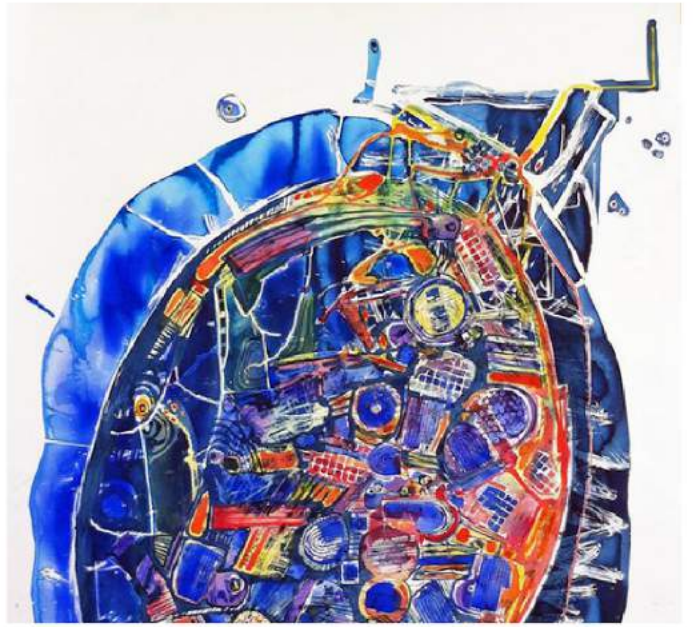
Why return to South Africa and Johannesburg to put up an exhibition?

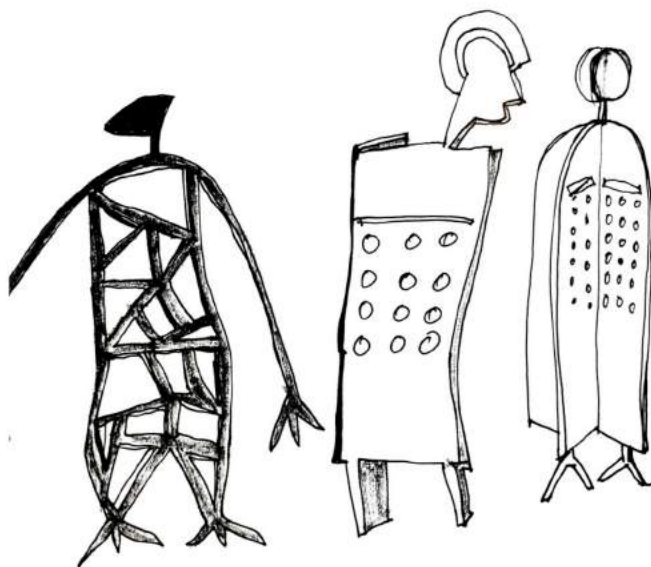
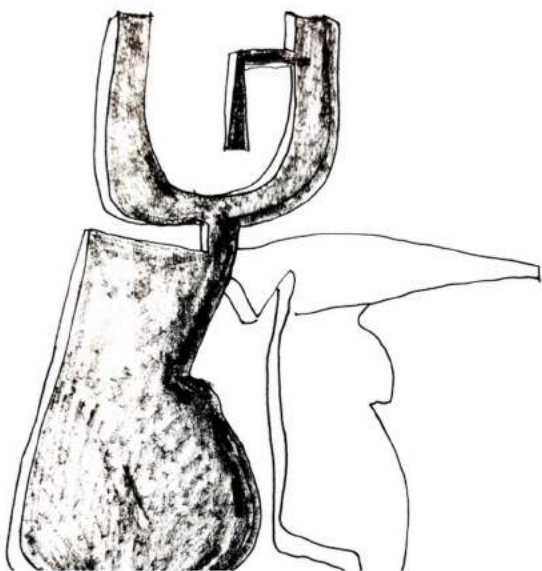
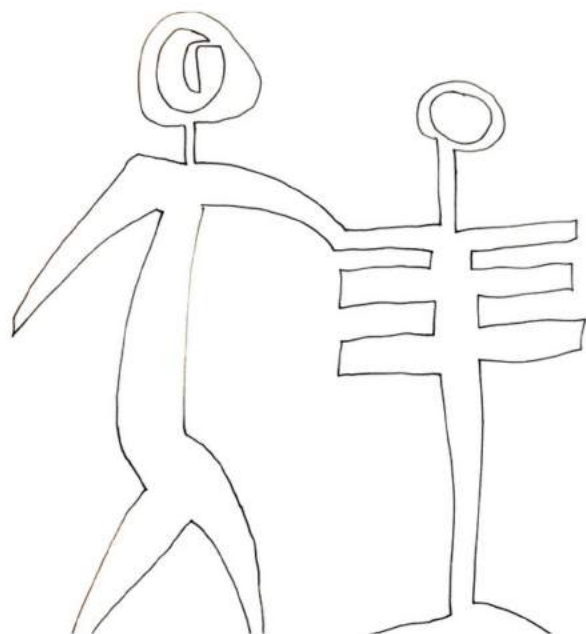
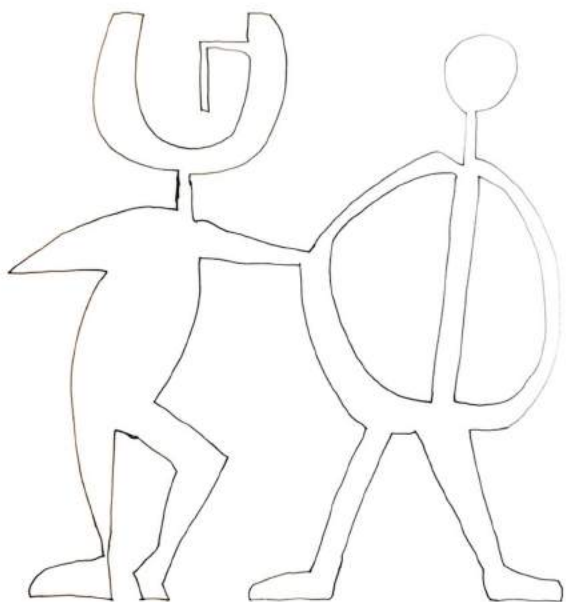
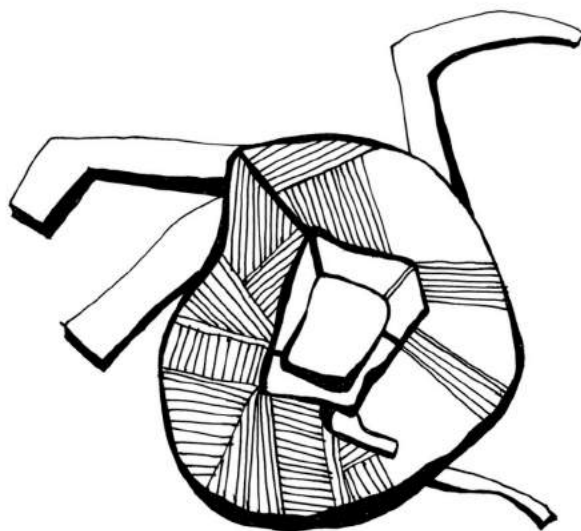
I had a few exhibitions going but covid put everything on hold and I haven't had the possibility to come back until now. Myself not very much of a city person but Joburg is the cosmopolitan melting pot of contemporary African art, ideas, and business centers. The art market is also very much part of the global art market with collectors flying in from all around. So as much as a business opportunity as for inspirational reasons, I tend to come back to the "city of gold".

What is your next body of work going to tell us or be?

I am working on more abstract pictures where I want to capture us as humans, and our relationship with nature. The human condition is part of nature. Many seem to like to see us as superior to and separate from nature. We don't visit or destroy nature, we are nature! I like to capture the feeling of awe when we in humbleness see our own small part in this vast universe but also the beauty within.









Sea U Later. Installation for the HOPE conference, EU Headquarter, Bruxelles.

FINAL REMARKS

Daniela Mondlane in Conversation with Johan Bloom.

As we conclude our conversation with Johan Bloom, the canvas of his narrative unfolds, revealing layers of creativity, resilience, and boundless expression. The interview captures a snapshot of his artistic odyssey, yet the palette of possibilities remains infinite. Here's to the ongoing exploration of art, life, and the vibrant hues that connect them.

