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EVERARD READ LONDON PRESENTS

AGAINST INTERPRETATION?

**SANELL AGGENBACH | BONITA ALICE | EMALIE BINGHAM | WILMA CRUISE | CLAUDE JAMMET | KILMANY-
JO LIVERSAGE | LADY SKOLLIE | TURIYA MAGADLELA | LUCINDA MUDGE | TANYA POOLE**

3 April – 16 May 2020

Everard Read London brings together 10 artists, living and working in South Africa and the diaspora, from a range of backgrounds, ages, ethnicities and artistic practices, for a group exhibition entitled *Against Interpretation?*

The exhibition takes its title from the 1964 essay by Susan Sontag. In it, Sontag's asserts that "interpretation makes art manageable, comfortable"; that by "reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art." She exhorts us to pay more attention to "form in art", to the appearance of a work of art, and to "experiencing the luminousness of the thing in itself".

Sontag knew that "real art has the capacity to make us nervous." She laments the steady loss of sharpness in our sensory experience resulting from "a culture based on excess, on overproduction". She concludes that "What is important now is to recover our senses. We must learn to see more, hear more, to feel more. Our task is not to find the maximum amount of content in a work of art... Our task is to cut back content so that we can see the thing at all."

In the catalogue essay that accompanies this exhibition, journalist and art critic, Hazel Freidman, argues that in some respects, Sontag's quest is "doomed to magnificent failure"

Friedman considers whether it is possible to embrace a work an artist like **Lady Skollie** or **Turiya Magadlela** "principally from a sensory perspective, without referencing [the artist's] personal history or confronting her depictions of subcultures of sexuality, dispossession and 'otherness'? Can we ignore the current "isms" of interpretation that continue to dog our consciousness of ourselves and our place in the world, like neo-colonialism, feminism, racism, sexism and even neo-liberalism? Can the [art]works really immerse us in their own viscera,

allowing us to simply revel in the formal exuberance of it all, without venturing into the trepidatious terrain of history and identity politics?" asks Friedman. Similarly, she notes that, Magadela's choice of material – "nylon pantyhose - and method - cutting, stretching and stitching - evoke unavoidably loaded, intimately feminine associations, not only of 'women's work' but of skins, eroticised underwear and gender-based violence."

The polarities of wounding and healing are recurring refrains in the works by **Bonita Alice**. Made from woollen dust, they initially appear to mimic a decorative screen or fragment of a patterned tablecloth. Yet on closer examination Friedman observes, "they resemble gauze bandages camouflaging bruises and not-yet-healed wounds. As Alice herself suggests, the screen serves as a confessional, a safe space, a site of remorse, retreat and self-protection." By not allowing ourselves intellectual access to the psycho-social content of Alice's work, examining concepts of intimacy and how these intersect with feminist discourse around sexuality, do we not materially limit our experience of these works?

Tanya Poole's large-scale ink-on-paper works are inspired by the natural environment but Friedman notes that Poole's "intricately hewn weavers' nests and spiders' webs [which] are interwoven with ganglia of branches" go beyond this. Evoking "associations of rootedness, belonging, trees of life, ecosystems, neurology, genealogy and ecological histories... they reinforce the notion of an innate, archetypal nexus between body, mind and all of nature's creatures."

Friedman concedes that **Claude Jammet's** figurative oil paintings provide "more literal pointers to the interconnectedness of all life forms, but also to their potential for destruction. Rendered in luminescent hues, her oil paintings speak of fragility, vulnerability, protection and power."

George Orwell's post-apocalyptic *1984* serves as the backdrop to **Wilma Cruise's** monotypes - the *Eric Arthur Blair Suite*. Friedman describes Cruise's spectral figures inhabiting "an atrophic landscape and appearing amorphous. "They are de-individualised, mute and disconnected forms inhabiting spatial silos, paradoxically in an era defined by globalisation, digital connectivity and a cacophony of social media."

The "loftiness of Sontag's vision, combined with a canny street-eye view, are encapsulated in the works of **Kilmany-Jo Liversage**", says Friedman. Fusing Renaissance portraiture with a strident urban sensibility, "her psychedelic palette is reminiscent of the era in which Sontag's writings flourished. But Liversage's focus is on the

here and now, on inner-city alleyways and sites of both decay and gentrification, where the tag, squiggle and scrawl of graffiti carry as much gravitas and value as the high art of her forebears.”

Friedman feels the pace of history is “amped up to the speed of life” in **Emalie Bingham’s** edgy hand-drawn abstractions. Her canvases seem to “spill over with cryptographic scribbles, and jittery lines, their shapes morphing into mitochondria and nerve endings, evoking both a sensory and semantic network of narratives.” Like Poole and Jammet’s work, Friedman maintains that they suggest “the fundamental interconnectedness of all things, whether through the matrices of botany, biology or geology. And the immediacy of their edgy, energetic brushstrokes harks back to Abstract Expressionism - an art movement that exerted a major influence on Sontag - with its biomorphic imagery transmuted into personal codes.”

Friedman declares that “it is a truism that art - just like our responses to it - cannot be viewed as separate from the prism of its own historical distortions and imposed hegemonies. Through the medium of ceramics, she argues that **Lucinda Mudge** “maximises the metaphoric scope of pottery - inscribing, sometimes scrawling violently onto the medium. Through messages drawn from pop culture and South Africa’s socio-political landscape, Mudge’s vessels see-saw between polish and profanity, humour and hurt, striking in a place where a laugh and gasp are indistinguishable.”

Acknowledging the ubiquity of the posed photograph, “not as truth teller but as a narcissistic tool”, Friedman argues that **Sanell Aggenbach’s** “inverted portraiture” parodies the popularised role of the captured image as a signifier of status and identity. The poses of her subjects, clad in their bikinis, are reminiscent of a specific typology of female visual representation in the history of painting and photography yet they are not presented as overt objects of arousal. Perhaps Aggenbach is suggesting that “because the images are derived from refracted light, they might speak to Sontag’s notion of “experiencing the luminousness of the thing in itself”.

But Friedman identifies a ‘light’ irony to this suggestion. “The negatives have not been fully processed. ... their ‘forms’ rendered in muddy ‘soft -focus’ hues. facial features are smudged. As such, they are depicted as eponyms of femininity and shadows of a sexuality that, rather than sensual, are subdued and as unthreatening as they are anonymous. Blank spaces to be ‘filled in’, these images invite interrogation of the very notion of interpretation itself.”

The genesis of an artwork – why and where it originated as well as the context in which we view it, is impossible to separate from the artwork itself. Still, Sontag was not wrong to argue that this urge to interpret can detract from and diminish an artwork. Its power lies in how art makes us feel; what emotions, images and ideas it evokes for us; what effect it has on “our nervous system”.

In an age of sensory overload, with the relentless pressure to capture the essence of everything in a soundbite, tweet or image post, it may be harder than ever to resist the urge to try and decode art’s meaning, or neatly catalogue it within the #MeToo movement, or make glib assumptions regarding what it says about race or identity or gender politics. But this shouldn’t stop us trying.

It is this exhibition’s hope that we allow ourselves to experience the “luminousness” of the objects in front of us. That we resist the urge to decode their meaning; to resist interpretation which, inevitably, is reductive and often gets in the way of *really* looking, feeling and hearing.

For more information, please contact: info@everardlondon.com, +44 (0)207 590 9991

About Everard Read London

Everard Read galleries are specialists in contemporary art from South Africa and the diaspora.

Established in 1913 in Johannesburg, we are Africa’s oldest and one of its largest commercial art galleries with gallery spaces in London, Johannesburg, Cape Town and Franschhoek.

The galleries each present a year-round programme of solo and group exhibitions, advise both public and private collectors around the world and have an ongoing commitment to nurturing South African talent.

South African artists are part of the global conversation. We seek to make their voices heard.

Everard Read London is located at 80 Fulham Road, London SW3 6HR and is open weekdays, 10am – 6pm and Saturdays, 12pm – 4pm. www.everardlondon.com

Artist Biographies:

Sanell Aggenbach

(b.1975, Cape Town, South Africa)

Sanell Aggenbach's work deals primarily with the intersection of history and private narratives by considering the process of recall and interpretation. Her work displays an accomplished virtuosity as she moves comfortably between the various disciplines of painting, printmaking and sculpture.

Aggenbach's work is focused mainly on subverted feminine tropes and feminist themes. In her solo exhibition, *Bend to Her Will*, she subtly and mischievously reframed the hobbyist art of flower arranging by appropriating the traditionally masculine art of Japanese Ikebana. Her sculptural work, primarily in bronze, parody Western masterpieces from Michelangelo, Henry Moore, and Warhol to Pierneef and take a refreshing look at these pivotal references from a woman's perspective. This can be shown in her latest exhibition *The Heart Has Many Rooms* (2019) where her *Madre Pieta* offers a more playful reimagining of Michaelangelo's original: The Madonna and Child replaced by two plush toys cast in bronze.

Aggenbach states: *'My earlier works relied heavily on processing found imagery, rethinking associations and creating new fictions. These works were often an amalgamation of historic references with private narratives and forms part of a process of investigating pathologies and deconstructing the past. My primary intention is to construct subtle paradoxes by introducing a quite humour, either formally or materially.'*

Born in Cape Town in 1975, Aggenbach currently lives and works in Woodstock, Cape Town. Her explorative work has secured her many achievements including winning the Absa L'Atelier Award in 2003. Her work is represented in numerous public and private collections, including Sasol, Absa, Spier, SABC, Red Bull (Austria), the South African National Gallery, 21C Museum in Kentucky (USA) and Anglo Gold.

Bonita Alice

(b. 1962, Johannesburg, South Africa)

Bonita Alice studied at the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Cape Town in South Africa and taught in several Fine Art Departments until 2003. She spent 12 years in London before moving back to South Africa in 2020.

Alice investigates aspects within psychology and psychoanalysis in her work, which she believes are useful in understanding our relationship with the environment, as well as with animals. Alice's interest in animal studies remains a focus in her thinking and artistic practice. Alice's latest body of work the *Sorry Series* is rooted in the idea of unconscious selective awareness...that *we know only as far as we choose to*. The idea at the heart of psychoanalytic thinking; is that we repress into the unconscious that which hurts us too much. The idea still seems the best route to understanding ourselves, and our species' biggest and smallest struggles.:

Alice further explains 'Our discomfort in this interaction is revealed in our entirely unreliable acceptance of our duty of care for the shared environment, as if we can't bear the weight of our interdependence and at times reject the idea entirely. Our insistence that what we call 'nature' is something existing only outside ourselves reveals a relationship of conflict and anxiety. Any attempt to break with something of which we are so essentially part is inevitably troublesome. The lattice form that gives structure to each image in the Sorry series recalls a decorative screen like those that partially obscure an adjoining space, as in a confessional or harem; both places of theatricalised separation.'

Alice works with delicate fine wool dust on paper. Her visual references include Japanese and Chinese prints, as well as Indian miniatures.

Emalie Bingham

(b. 1985, Cape Town, South Africa)

As a child, Emalie Bingham played with wild clay from the garden, built gyms for her hamsters out of recycled materials, and took every opportunity to draw, whether obsessively decorating schoolbooks or documenting live events.

Although she works across a diverse range of media, drawing has always been a central tool in her creative practice – a survival technique she developed from a young age. For Bingham, drawing provides both refuge and stimulation, detachment from and an intense connection to the world around and within her. She describes it as the ultimate meditation, enabling her to both accept her limitations and use her practice to transcend them.

Bingham uses pattern-making and surface-design as a medium through which she interrogates societal patterns and conventions. Her paintings are striking compositions created from her hand-drawn designs, which are often edgy, satirical, humorous and self-reflexive.

Bingham completed her Fine Arts degree at Rhodes University in South Africa. Her work is represented in the Nando's and the Spier art collections and in many other private collections in South Africa and around the world

Wilma Cruise

(b. 1945, Johannesburg, South Africa)

Wilma Cruise is a South African sculptor and visual artist. She works mainly with fired clay in her renderings of life-sized human and animal figures. Several of her ceramic sculptures have been successfully translated into bronze editions. Her sculpture installations and exhibitions are often accompanied by works on paper – large format drawings. She has also completed several series of print editions.

Themes explored in Cruise's work include the interface between humans and animals and existential conditions of muteness – silent, internal battles in the search for meaning.

Cruise has had over twenty solo exhibitions, curated others and completed several public works including the National Monument to the Women of South Africa at the Union Buildings, Pretoria and The Memorial to the Slaves in Cape Town.

Her work is represented in public, corporate and private collections throughout South Africa. She has participated in the Havana Biennale, the Florence Biennale and the prestigious 7th Gyeonggi International Ceramic Biennale in Seoul, Korea.

Cruise recently completed her doctoral studies at the University of Stellenbosch in the field of art and animal ethics. She is a fellow of Ceramics South Africa and writes extensively in the field of ceramics.

Claude Jammet

(b. 1953, Zimbabwe)

Born in Zimbabwe of French parents, Claude Jammet grew up in Kenya, India, Japan, in addition to long sojourns in France, before settling in South Africa where she began her career as a professional painter. Over the past two decades Jammet has lived and worked in Genoa, Italy.

Jammet is self-taught as an artist. Painting for her is a requirement; the chosen means by which to communicate her experience of the world. Over a career spanning more than four decades, her work has alluded to the perfection of nature and man, from whichever culture. Her subject matter has encompassed portraiture but also still-life and the quotidian. Giving her attention to people and objects, it seems, is a way of carrying with her beloved people, places and things, recording traces of her roots and offering a meditation on the fleeting and transient nature of all things.

Jammet has exhibited in some 20 solo exhibitions, as well as group shows in galleries across South Africa, Europe and Japan. Her work is held in numerous private and corporate collections in South Africa and across Europe.

Kilmany-Jo Liversage

(b. 1973, Cape Town, South Africa)

Kilmany-Jo Liversage lives and works in Cape Town, South Africa. Liversage's expressive portraits blurs the boundary between fine art and street art. Inspired by street culture, she adopts graffiti and other urban art languages, allowing her to update, renew and challenge the conventions of painting, through her rendering of female subjects inspired by Renaissance portraiture. Liversage sources her portrait images from digitised mass production and social media. The portraits are randomly selected although the person portrayed might not be familiar to the viewer it conjures up

a universally recognizable sense of familiarity. The result is a series of vibrant, large-format paintings of portraits exploring urban culture, art history and human connection.

Liversage states: *'During the Machine Age, artists would reduce their compositions to its smallest constituent parts. With my current paintings I manufacture this deconstruction by combining the painting tradition of portraiture with idiosyncrasies from the urban culture of tagging. This enables me to explore the intersection between street art and fine art while reconstructing them into a new genre of portraiture'*

With a list of achievements that include a Sasol New Signatures Award in 2000 and a UNESCO bursary in 2005, as well as an artists' residency in Colombia, Liversage has had the opportunity to explore and interpret the concept of street art in her unique way.

Turiya Magadlela

(b. 1978, Johannesburg, South Africa)

Turiya Magadlela graduated from the University of Johannesburg in 1991 and then studied at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam from 2003-2004. She was awarded the FNB Art Prize (one of South Africa's most prestigious awards) in 2015, and has since participated in numerous group exhibitions, both locally and internationally, including a commissioned immersive installation at the 2019 Istanbul Biennale.

As Magadlela's practice has been shaped by her home city, Johannesburg – its people, politics and violence – so she shapes her artworks by cutting, sewing, stretching, manipulating and translating commonly-found objects and everyday textiles, such as pantyhose, into abstract compositions.

While Magadlela views the interpretation of her work as being open to her audiences, it is impossible to ignore aspects of her work as an allusive exploration of social history, particularly in reference to global labour conditions, consumerism, and the intersections of gendered and racial persecution.

Though her compositions are minimalist abstractions, the compelling material characteristics of the original nylon and cotton fabrics are enhanced, with the ephemeral medium carrying conceptual weight. Magadlela uses the

translucency of tights as they strain, and tear once sewn together to evoke the intimacy, fragility and vulnerability of skin.

The imperfect patched-together surfaces draw on the personal, as well as the collective (and often painful) shared experiences of femininity and motherhood; what Magadlela describes as the 'fragility, transparency, beauty, pain, distortions and liberations of a woman'.

Lucinda Mudge

(b. 1979, Knysna, South Africa)

Lucinda Mudge is a contemporary South African artist working primarily in the medium of ceramics. After graduating from the Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town (1997-2000), she spent the following years between Cape Town and the UK before moving to Keurboomstrand, Plettenberg Bay, where she now lives and works.

Lucinda Mudge's extraordinary vases are captivating with their rich colours and intricate detail. Yet beneath their glimmering surfaces is a world simmering with paranoia and tension. Mudge's vases encompass all of life - its form and content come together in a singular unity that celebrates our abundance and possibilities. It also exists in the world as a three-dimensional object; it can't be taken in at a single glance, but must be circumnavigated until it reveals all its contradictions and riddles. Themes, images and text are replayed and reshuffled, embodying in their very fabric, humanity's ability to carry contradictory impulses.

Mudge has work in major corporate and private collections nationally and internationally, including the United Kingdom, Australia, Guernsey, the Netherlands, Italy and Russia.

Tanya Poole

(b. 1971, St John's, Newfoundland)

Tanya Poole was born in St John's, Newfoundland, and grew up in Bahrain, England and South Africa. She graduated with an MFA from Rhodes University in 1998. Trained primarily as a painter, Poole has also worked with video, performance, installation, theatre design and, most recently, paint animation. She made her solo debut in

1996 at the Standard Bank National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, South Africa followed by five more solo exhibitions from 1998 to 2000.

In addition to exhibitions in South Africa, Poole has also participated in exhibitions abroad including Collection of South African Art, at The Chicago Institute and the South African Embassy, USA (1996); Three Women at the Mattamondo Gallery, Notting Hill, London (2000); Possibilities (curated by the Bell-Roberts Gallery) in Mumbai, India (2007); Juncture: New Paintings from South Africa at the Artspace, Linienstrasse, Berlin, Germany (2010); and Mullinspoole (with Nigel Mullins) in Liemen, Germany in 2011.

Poole's recent work is inspired by entomology, nature and the DNA of trees, with reference to investigating one's own lineage and biological code. In her recent exhibition Ancient Codes at Everard Read Cape Town, Poole explains: 'These paintings are prompted by visual hooks in the natural environment around my family's house and my own and by deep instincts relating to family and partnerships. They are also embellished by thoughts about the ancient codes of genetics and biology, both ours and our environment's. The process of making a painting, the thought of it and the planning of it, the mental and emotional references, the decisions on materials and scale, the construction of it, mark by mark that is like nest making, is to satisfy the urge to construct and the thought of making, to fantasise and to rationalise and this process shimmers like a web attached somewhere between instinct and reason'.

Tanya Poole currently lives and works in France.

Lady Skollie

(b. 1987, Cape Town, South Africa)

Lady Skollie (AKA Laura Windvogel) is a multidisciplinary artist currently working in Johannesburg, South Africa. She graduated with a degree in History of Art and Dutch Literature from the University of Cape Town in 2009. Alive with emotional, political, sexual turmoil and a loud questioning voice, Lady Skollie's work investigates the socio-political climate that we live in. Filled with bold colour, god-like figures and suggestive fruits, Lady Skollie's ink, watercolour and crayon paintings revolve around themes of gender, sex and the politics of lust, consumption, as well as her musings on identity.

The artist's work has been exhibited widely across South Africa, and at several international solo and group exhibitions and fairs. In 2017, along with Tschabalala Self and Abe Odedina, the artist contributed artwork for the

stage design of a gala performance of *The Children's Monologues*, a benefit held by the charitable organisation Dramatic Need, directed by Danny Boyle and held at Carnegie Hall in New York, NY, USA. She has been featured on BBC Africa and CNN International on *African Voices*, as well as on the BBC World Service's online and radio series *In the Studio*. She was also included in the 2018 edition of *OkayAfrica's 100 Women*, an annual list, which honours women across 10 different fields for their achievements and influence. She received the 2019 *Mbokodo Award* for Art and Design, which honours the pioneering spirit of South African women advancing the arts. In 2019, Lady Skollie was commissioned to design the new R5 coin to commemorate 25 years of constitutional democracy in South Africa.