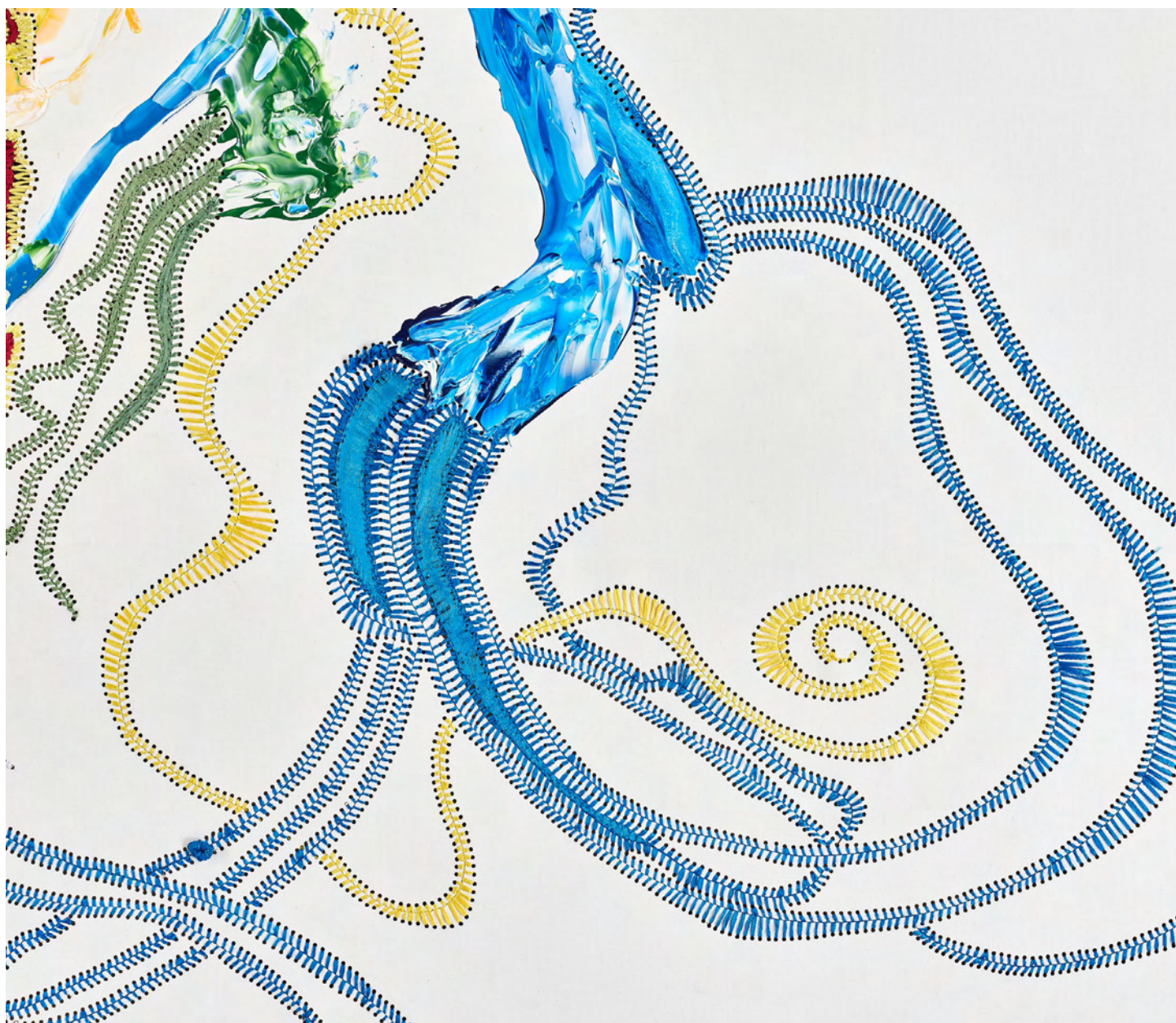


NICHOLAS HLOBO
Elizeni lenkanyiso

March 11–April 30, 2022
London



Nicholas Hlobo, *Mpumlwana*, 2021. Acrylic, leather, and ribbons on linen and cotton canvas, 47.24 x 70.87 x 1.97 inches (120 x 180 x 5 cm)

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Lehmann Maupin presents *Elizeni lenkanyiso*, an exhibition of new paintings by South African artist Nicholas Hlobo. This presentation marks Hlobo's return to London and is the artist's first solo show in the city since his exhibition at Tate Modern in 2008. Best known for his weaving and stitching of metaphorically charged materials, such as colorful ribbon, leather, wood, and copper, Hlobo creates composite objects that are intricate and seductively tactile. The results are highly evocative, and the artist combines anthropomorphic imagery and cultural symbols and traditions to create amalgamated forms that feel at once familiar, alien, and ancient. Hlobo's practice engages themes of self-discovery and explores the intersections of his race, gender, and cultural and sexual identity within the context of his South African heritage. In his newest body of work, the artist introduces colorful acrylic paint for the first time, returning to a classic fine art medium that he has not employed since he was a student. Hlobo's combination of acrylic with his signature leather and satin ribbon interventions unites craft and fine art materials within a single canvas, reflecting his enduring interest in resisting strict dichotomies and hierarchies in favor of fluid hybridity.

The works in *Elizeni lenkanyiso* comprise a menagerie of reptilian and aquatic animals, including turtles, lizards, snakes, and hatchlings. Hlobo described the experience of creating these pieces as a process of "finding joy or warmth" after the effects of the global pandemic, and this sentiment is echoed in these animal's cold-blooded nature and their need to seek heat to survive and flourish. The show's title, which translates from Xhosa to "on the wave of enlightenment" is taken from the only circular canvas in the exhibition. In this work, the artist interprets the abstract forms and swirls as resembling a human-like figure surfing a giant wave. Considering the many metaphorical "waves" of the COVID-19 pandemic, here Hlobo implies recent demands to navigate global uncertainty and hardship and suggests that through traversing these difficult waters we can come to a new, more profound understanding of self and society.

Throughout the exhibition, Hlobo's acrylic, ribbon, and leather abstractions move and shift, seeming to come alive and taking on animalistic qualities. The creatures in the artist's canvases inhabit their own world, and Hlobo has woven myriad relationships between them. One work, *Sondela maCilikishe* (2021), depicts a male lizard calling to its mate for a passionate embrace, while its pair, *Ndange Cilikishe* (2021) looks out of the frame towards her partner, the numerous spirals and ribbon stitching flowing behind her resembling a dress or skirt. Hlobo genders his lizards with an eye towards the animal kingdom, particularly birds, where the most elaborate plumage is

reserved for the male of the species. The two paintings form a type of reptilian family, and the smallest works in the exhibition, *lyuk'welincinci* (2021) and *lyuk'welidala* (2021) represent the children born to the lizard parents. Rendered in a kaleidoscope of acrylic paint with swirls and loops of ribbon that suggest legs or tentacles, these hatchlings are new to the world, naive to its workings and vulnerable to predators—particularly the pair of imagined, meddlesome serpents in *Mpumlwana* (2021).

One of the largest paintings in the exhibition, *Iqokobhe* (2021), depicts a multi-colored turtle swimming in the deep, content in its natural habitat as it soars towards the water's surface with bright blue bubbles of leather flying off its quick fins. *Iqokobhe*, which translates to "the shell," references the protective shell of the turtle, but also evokes the shell of incubation, which must be broken and discarded in the process of growth. Where the turtle's shell offers protection and security, Hlobo's reptilian hatchlings have escaped theirs, reflecting the delicate balance between safety in the familiar and expansion through exploration of the unknown. Taken together, *Elizeni lenkanyiso* comprises its own allegorical animal kingdom, in which human spiritual and psychological experiences are reflected, questioned, and interpreted. After a period in which many felt the sense of losing their bearings, the exhibition offers a place of solace and room for joy. Hlobo's use of rich, jubilant colors throughout creates a positive tone, inspiring visions of a brighter, more enlightened future ahead.



Nicholas Hlobo, *Elizeni lenkanyiso*, 2021. Acrylic, and ribbons on linen and cotton canvas, 51.18 x 51.18 x 1.97 inches (130 x 130 x 5 cm)

Hlobo received a fine art degree from Johannesburg's Technikon Witwatersrand in 2002. Solo exhibitions of his work have been organized at the Center for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv, Israel (2021); Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) Museum of Art, Savannah, GA (2019); The Maitland Institute, Cape Town, South Africa (2018); Zeitz Museum of Contemporary African Art, Cape Town, South Africa (2017); Uppsala Art Museum, Uppsala, Sweden (2017); Museum Beelden aan Zee, The Hague, the Netherlands (2016); Locust Projects, Miami, FL (2013); National Museum of Art, Architecture, and Design, Oslo, Norway (2011); Savannah College of Art and Design, Lacoste, France (2010); Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom (2008); Institute of Contemporary Art / Boston, Boston, MA (2008); and Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD), Savannah, GA (2007).

Recent group exhibitions featuring his work include *Allied with Power: African and African Diaspora Art from the Jorge M. Pérez Collection*, Pérez Art Museum Miami, Miami, FL (2020); *Alpha Crucis*, Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo, Norway (2020); *In the Spotlight of the Night - Life in the Gloom*, Marta Herford Museum for Art, Architecture, Design, Herford, Germany (2019); *Kiss My Genders*, Hayward Gallery, London, United Kingdom (2019); *Queer Abstraction*, Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, IA; Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park, KS (2019); *Material Insanity*, Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden (MACAAL), Marrakesh, Morocco (2019); *Face to Face: From Yesterday to Today, Non-Western Art and Picasso*, The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, Canada (2018); *After the Thrill is Gone: Fashion, Politics, and Culture in Contemporary South African Art*, The Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco, CA (2018); *Art/Afrique, le nouvel atelier*, Fondation Louis Vuitton (2017); *Energy and Process*, Tate Modern, London (2016); *The Divine Comedy: Heaven, Purgatory and Hell Revisited by Contemporary African Artists*, Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, SCAD Museum of Art, GA (2014), and Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Washington, D.C. (2015); *A History (art architecture design, from the 80s to now)*, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2015); *Intense Proximity*, La Triennale 2012, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France (2012); and *Flow*, Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY (2008).

Hlobo has participated in multiple biennials including the 11th Liverpool Biennial (2021); the 18th Biennale of Sydney, Australia (2012); the 54th Venice Biennale (2011); the 6th Liverpool Biennial (2010); and the 3rd Guangzhou Triennial, China (2008).

His work is included in numerous international public and private collections, including the Arquipelago – Centro de Artes Contemporaneas, Azores, Portugal; Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, MI; Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, France; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; The Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum, Port Elizabeth, South Africa; Norval Foundation, Cape Town, South Africa; Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) Museum of Art, Savannah, GA; South African National Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa; Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom; Unisa – University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa; and the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary African Art, Cape Town, South Africa.

Hlobo has received several honors and distinctions such as the Villa Extraordinary Award for Sculpture, The Claire & Edoardo Villa Will Trust, Midrand, South Africa (2016); Rolex Visual Arts Protégé (2010-11); Standard Bank Young Artist Award, Standard Bank of South Africa (2009); and the Tollman Award for Visual Art (2006).



Nicholas Hlobo, 2019. Courtesy of SCAD

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Rachel Lehmann and David Maupin co-founded Lehmann Maupin in 1996 in New York. Since Inception, Lehmann Maupin has served as a leading contemporary art gallery with locations in the U.S., Europe, and Asia. For over 25 years, Lehmann Maupin has been instrumental in introducing international artists in new geographies and building long-lasting curatorial relationships. Known for championing diverse voices, the gallery's program proudly features artists whose work challenges notions of identity, and shapes international culture. Today, the gallery has locations in New York, Hong Kong, Seoul and London, as well as a team in mainland China. In the past year with growing opportunities in new markets, the gallery has opened seasonal spaces in Aspen, Palm Beach, Taipei, and Beijing.



Lehmann Maupin London at Cromwell Place. Photo by Alex Delfanne