

NIROX

INDIFFERENCE

10 SEPTEMBER – 10 OCTOBER 2022

Indifference is a satellite exhibition of *Good Neighbours*, co-curated by Ndeenda Shivute-Nakapunda and Sven Christian. The exhibition is held in collaboration with the National Art Gallery of Namibia (NAGN), who generously supported a month-long residency for Kambezunda Ngavee in July 2022.

It is the second exhibition within the *Good Neighbours* ambit. Held across NIROX's Covered Space, Screening Room, and Boule Court, it features works by Saima Iita, Ismael Shivute, Phillipus Sheehama, Kambezunda Ngavee, Edoardo Villa, and Nicola Brandt. Their works cover a range of media, from film, marble, soapstone, and steel to quartz, makalani nuts and wire.

In contrast to its predecessor *Afropolitanism* (7 May – 28 August), which explored the workings of South Africa's largest metropole, *Indifference* focuses on the sparsely-populated region of Namibia. Its title is drawn from Nicola Brandt's film. Originally shown as a multichannel triptych, it focuses on the lives of two women who live in Swakopmund, one Herero and one German. As described by the artist, the first 'makes her living from tourists taking photos of her in traditional dress. On her way to work, she walks past Ovaherero, Nama and San mass graves.' The second, a ninety-year-old German-Namibian woman, 'tries to maintain her illusions about the Second World War and the events leading up to it, recalling a romantic encounter in the cemetery near her home, adjacent to the unmarked graves.' In both it is the proximity of their everyday to sites of genocide that is unnerving.

Much like the other works on show, Brandt's film prompts a series of questions about the nature of indifference, in particular its relation to time and space. How is nostalgia possible in a place marked by such violence? What is it about the passage of time that enables historical amnesia? How do two people who live in relative proximity end up with such varied life experiences? And how can we grapple with the kinds of indifference borne of colonialism and apartheid's dehumanising segregationist policies?

In *Living with Indifference* (2007), Charles E. Scott writes that part of the difficulty in comprehending the nature of indifference is that, as a signifier, it lacks a defined or 'fixed shape'; its prefix (*in-*) functioning as a negation that inhibits any sense of relation. To be indifferent is to be unmoved, unaffected, untethered. Nothing binds. In this way, the term might imply both 'neutrality' and 'impartiality' – 'an absence of interest, care, or intention.' At the same time it can describe an 'indifferent matter or quality... [suggesting] a lack of feeling for or against anything: the vast indifference of the universe, for example.' This understanding is inherent the country's name, which stems from the Namib (translated from Nama into 'vast place'). In the global imaginary, Namibia is a country of ghost towns and shipwrecks, prehistoric-looking

plants and monolithic sand dunes; an ancient, shifting landscape that could be described as austere, barren, stark, sublime. The six soapstone works of Ismael Shivute retain something of this quality. They conjure a range of associations, from calcified coral and elephant hide to the world of sci-fi, mining, and natural weathering processes.

Drawing inspiration from the desert roses of Namibia¹, Edoardo Villa's larger-than-life steelwork (c. 1979) – on loan from Minky Lidchi – could be said to contrast the permanence of the industrialised world with the fragility of nature. Unlike its source of inspiration, it is an infallible, weighty, and immobile work, untainted by processes of weathering and decay. It points to a certain level of resilience mirrored in the works of Saima lita and Kambezunda Ngavee. Where Shivute and Villa's works appear eternally patient, however, the figurative works of lita and Ngavee body forth a sense of urgency. Produced from metal, fire, and engine oil, lita's muscular figure lunges forward, her liberated shackles transformed into whip-like forms. In its dynamism, lita's figure is anything but indifferent. Similarly, while Ngavee's two anthropomorphic marble works seem relatively subdued – the wings in *High Hope* (2022) pinned to the figure's sides, the figure in *Sitting Bird* (2022) biding its time – their blend of vulture and human is suggestive. Providing a backdrop to his work while in residency, Ngavee observed how:

In Namibia, the world only moves fast for a small minority – those who have the ocean view – but at large, people in Namibia are suffering. We're put in a position that we have no control over, economically. Now we are fighting to get back to a land which we no longer have ownership of. Left out in the desert, you will die of thirst. People push you towards the edge. But mentally, you have to persevere.

Such concerns are also apparent in the large-scale hanging works of Phillipus Sheehama, most notably the artist's choice of titles: *Collapsing Identity* (2020), *Rural transformation* (2021), and *Elephant in the room* (2020). Comprised of makalani nut piths, wire, and Tafel bottle caps, Sheehama's materials speak to the economics of northern Namibia, where makalani nuts are used to brew Ombike/Owalende, in the manufacture of sugar, and carved to sell to tourists. In playing with their various textures and tones, Sheehama creates a series of tapestries that both define and blur the boundaries between individual and collective experience. Read within the context of this exhibition, his work asks to whom we are accountable, and to what end?

1. Otherwise known as the gypsum rose: 'an intricate rose-like formation' produced through processes of evaporation in 'arid sandy conditions.'



SAIMA IITA COVERED SPACE

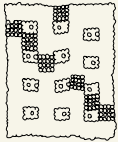


The Woman's Feelings
2021
Metal, fire, engine oil
165 x 125 x 63 cm

FILLIPUS SHEEHAMA COVERED SPACE



Collapsing identity
2020
Mixed media, makalani nut piths, animal bone, and wire
211 x 117 x 3 cm



Rural transformation
2021
Makalani nut piths and wire
147.5 x 120 x 3 cm



Elephant in the room
2020
Makalani nut piths and wire
214 x 168 x 3 cm

KAMBEZUNDA NGAVEE COVERED SPACE



Sitting Bird
2022
Marble
20 x 28 x 33.5 cm



High Hope
2022
Marble
62 x 22 x 9 cm



Weathering the Odds
2022
Quartz and Dolomite
50 x 51 x 35 cm

ISMAEL SHIVUTE COVERED SPACE



Circle of tomorrow
2022
Namibian soapstone
67 x 41 x 23 cm



Follow the circle
2022
Namibian soapstone
53 x 38 x 12 cm



My identity
2022
Namibian soapstone
69 x 68 x 25 cm



I see the future
2022
Namibian soapstone
85 x 55 x 19 cm



Our universe
2022
Namibian soapstone
66 x 45 x 34 cm



The music I dance to
2022
Namibian soapstone
42.5 x 23 x 14 cm

EDOARDO VILLA BOULE COURT



Desert Rose
c. 1979
Steel
140 x 95 x 80 cm
On loan from Minky Lidchi Collection

NICOLA BRANDT SCREENING ROOM



Indifference
2014
HD video installation
14 minutes 09 seconds (continuous loop)