

WonderBuhle

Inkunzi Isematholeni

31st August – 15th October 2023, London

Gallery 1957 London is delighted to present a solo exhibition of new works by South African artist WonderBuhle titled '*Inkunzi Isematholeni*' and curated by Azu Nwagbogu. The show takes its name from a Zulu idiom which literally translates as *how the calf is raised will determine the quality of the bull* and metaphorically emphasizes the artist's belief in nurturing the youth and new generations as they become society's future leaders. This is the artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery, and also in the UK.

WonderBuhle's new body of work is an exploration of the artist's questing for self-discovery and personal evolution intertwined with his commitment to the community from which he has emerged. The starting point is a piece from his archive which features plastic spoons used in community events and parties. Through a captivating series of paintings and installation pieces, WonderBuhle reflects on his journey of ordination, emerging from his deep connection to his roots and his acceptance as a leader in his community and beyond. Wonderbuhle does not stay in contemplation but engages with these new pieces with energy and inventiveness to prepare what is his most diverse and revealing aspect to date. There is a vulnerability in *Inkunzi Isematholeni* that is both soothing and disquieting. The artist reveals his impulses and his signature. He presents self-portraits and utilises fashion as a language and medium for time travel.

His introspection transcends his artistic practice, encapsulating the entirety of his existence. The artworks stand as a testament to his realisation that his life experiences serve as the very foundation of his art. For the first time, multiple self-portraits of WonderBuhle appear in a body of work, interwoven into various pieces. The portraits are emblematic of his ongoing process of self-exploration. This introspection, however, reaches deep and beyond mere self-interest, as the artist's reflective journey is imbued with a profound desire to contribute to and uplift his community. WonderBuhle beats his own rhythm and dances to his own tune, but this tune is not devoid of origins. The community rooted in core indigenous matriarchal, feminist ideals has strength and malleability that transcends the surface of the materiality and into the studio and any space where the piece rests. WonderBuhle's portraits are kinetic and have momentum and mass.

At the heart of the exhibition lies the artist's profound recognition of the communal spirit that nurtured his growth and achievements. A striking highlight is the reimagining of a historical image of Marcus Garvey, a figure synonymous with passionate activism and empowerment. Here, WonderBuhle ingeniously replaces Garvey's visage with his own, symbolising that there is yet more to do and leaders are part of a chain of history. It is also a sort of homage to both the community and to the Great Marcus Garvey. The appropriation of colonial military uniform that adorns WonderBuhle underscores his perception of an ongoing collective struggle, echoing a call to action for a harmonious and prosperous future. He also highlights the role of the military as one of the foundations of colonial conquest.

This captivating painting further features two heads gazing in opposing directions. One head looks toward family, while the other is fixed on the community. The liminal space in-between signifies the artist's pivotal role as an unseen leader, embodying the responsibility of guiding and supporting those

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around him, rather than seeking personal acclaim. This duality encapsulates the essence of his connection to both his familial lineage and the broader social fabric. It is a reminder of service, duty, love, and care that is the root of WonderBuhle's practice.

Nature takes on a prominent role in this collection, representing WonderBuhle's deepening exploration of ecological themes, and his renowned use of flower-imprinted skin finds new expression within the context of the environment itself. Notably, his incorporation of hundreds of plastic spoons collected from waste unveils striking murals, serving as a compelling commentary on the necessity of preserving nature's splendour.

WonderBuhle's *Inkunzi Isematholeni* goes beyond a celebration of Wonderbuhle's multifaceted journey of self-discovery toward his unwavering commitment to his community, local and global. It is an acceptance of leadership and his calling. Through introspective self-portraits, reimagined historical references, and powerful ecological narratives, the artist unveils a captivating visual narrative that encapsulates his evolution as both an individual and an artist. The exhibition invites viewers to engage with WonderBuhle's profound contemplations, bridging the gap between self and community, and inspiring collective introspection and positive action.

- Curatorial text by Azu Nwagbogu

About the Artist

WonderBuhle

(b. 1989, South Africa. Lives and works in Durban, South Africa)

WonderBuhle is a South African visual artist from Kwa-Ngcolosi, a village that is still ruled by a chief. The artist received his formal training in 2010 at the BAT Centre in Durban, South Africa, where he currently lives and works. He studied Fine Art under the mentorship of Themba Shibase at the Velobala Apprenticeship Program at the Durban University of Technology (2011-2013).

WonderBuhle's portraits depict spiritually layered visions of Black bodies in restful and contemplative poses, rendered in charcoal and acrylic paint against flat planes of colour. His signature motif is a gold flower-shaped pattern, which he overlays on top of his figures' skin. Poetic and personal, this recurring symbol references a native flower used for ancestral practices in the artist's rural South African village, serving as a reminder of his strong ties to his community.

Solo exhibitions by the artist include *Kubongwa Okukhulu Nokuncane*, BKHz, Johannesburg, South Africa (2023); *uNyezi*, Galerie Ron Mandos, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (2022); *COMFORT*, BKHz, Johannesburg, South Africa (2020); *To Find Me*, Galerie Philippzollinger, Zurich, Switzerland (2019); *Ukumisa insika*, Durban Art Gallery, Durban, South Africa (2018).

WonderBuhle's work has also been included in numerous international group shows, including at: BKHz Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa (2022); Ross-Sutton Gallery, New York, USA (2020); Unit London, UK, (2020); Blank Projects, Cape Town, South Africa (2019), The Art House, Wakefield, UK (2018); Michaelis Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa (2017).

In 2016, he was the recipient of the Bremer Kunststipendium Art Grant (three-month residency in Germany) and in 2020 he took part in the La Brea Studio Artists Residency in L.A., USA.

WonderBuhle's work was featured in the 'Masterpiece' campaign ad by Coca-Cola in 2023.

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About Gallery 1957

Gallery 1957 is a contemporary art gallery with spaces across Accra, Ghana and London, UK.

It dedicates its programme to spearheading international exchanges between art practices from these communities and the rest of the world, presenting artists who interrogate concepts of belonging and identity, cultural exchange, and social history beyond Western narratives.

Launched by Marwan Zakhem in 2016 on Ghanaian Independence Day, Gallery 1957 has since expanded across three gallery spaces in Accra. Originally set up to promote Ghana and West Africa's presence in the arts scene, it now encompasses the Global South and its diaspora. Gallery 1957's London space opened in October 2020, providing a further platform for artists to build dialogues with its growing network of international collaborators.

Gallery 1957 presents exhibitions, installations, and performances by celebrated artists, fostering connections between local and international audiences. The Gallery's global gallery partnerships and ongoing artist residency program have attracted numerous international artists and arts professionals to Ghana. The Gallery's annual Cultural Week in September serves as a platform for encouraging deeper engagement with Ghana's vibrant contemporary art scene.

In 2021, Gallery 1957 launched the Yaa Asantewaa Art Prize for female Ghanaian artists, the first ever dedicated art prize of its kind. The prize aims to further strengthen the gallery's commitment to supporting and promoting emerging and established artists.

Gallery 1957's work expands beyond the gallery walls through a public programme that includes local and international art fairs, talks, off-site projects, and site-specific installations as well as the publication of books and catalogues - continuously supporting cultural initiatives in Ghana, Africa and beyond.

Artist: WonderBuhle

Title: *Inkunzi Isematholeni*

Dates: 31st August – 15th October 2023

Opening Reception: Thursday 31st August, 6-9pm

Address: Gallery 1957, 1 Hyde Park Gate, London SW7 5EW

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