DITAOLA DI A ITLHATHOLA

The Oracles are Self-Deciphering

LEFIFI TLADI'S

PAINTINGS * POETRY * PROVERBS * COLLAGES

Editor: Bridget Thompson

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"BATAKI KE DITAOLA TSA SECHABA"
Artists are the Shells of the Nation

Lefifi Tladi

This book is dedicated, by Lefifi to his friend the artist,

MOTLHABANE MASHIANGWAKO

Motlhabane Mashiangwako, friend and artistic comrade of Lefifi Tladi, said that the Conch or Seashell is the symbol of all artists because artists are the seashells of society. Through the shells, soothsayers and izangoma can dip into the future. Therefore, artists are the shells of the nation.

ART AND UBUNTU TRUST

Art and Ubuntu Trust Series: Artist's Speak

DITAOLA DI A ITLHATHOLA / The Oracles are Self-Deciphering
Lefifi Tladi
Paintings * Poetry * Proverbs * Collages

Project Director/Series Editor: Bridget Thompson
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Scanning of collages: Abdulcadir Ahmed Said, Cape Town
Front page digital portrait of Lefifi Tladi: Abdulcadir Ahmed (2015)

Designer: Anina Joubert
Publisher: University of Johannesburg

978-0-639710-58-7 (PDF)
978-0-639895-96-3 (Paperback)

Image Of Shell: https://bit.ly/3O2NQDq
Front Cover Image: *Untitled 39, Untitled Paper and Ink on Paper* 42 x 29.7cm
Back Cover Poem: *An extract from Through the Chameleon's Eye,* Lefifi Tladi 1971

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FUNDED BY: Department of Sports, Arts and Culture (DSAC), National Lotteries Commission (NLC) and the Presidential Stimulus Fund for the Arts (PESP) administered by the National Arts Council (NAC).

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Lerato Kuzwayo

Collages curated by:
Woody Oliphant

Proverbs curated by:
Lerato Kuzwayo

Essays by:
Lerato Kuzwayo
Woody Oliphant
Kgomotso Ramushu

2019

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Opposite: Untitled 23, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

oasis

(a tribute to the art of lefifi tladi)

on a morning burdened
with skies besmirched
by memories too dark
for the sun to illuminate
and too heavy for the
inflated clouds to bear
a child who could utter poetry
before he could speak
about the mundane events
of a life of imposed realities
emerged from the ensnared vertices
of the cosmos

he had been told by the deities
who inscribed the heavens
with coded embossments
that the ensuing rains
would wash away all the pain
that smudges the jubilation
that is bestowed upon all the rivers
that promise tidings
of insuperable currents

he was told that this act of beauty
would become his testament
an indelible incision
into the tendons of his flow
against the upstream current
of all odds

and so hereafter
he vowed to wake up
with the sun each morning
and salute it with the unwavering devotion
of the mantis meditation of his forebears
for it was they
who bore the stars on their heads
to shine the pulse of time into existence
and from that moment
the boy's ancestors required him
to enact this eternal gift to them
through a ceremonial oblation
that would determine the
sunset of a heart in every locus
of the unfolding earth

and thus was marked
the daily affirmation of the sun
through postures of beauty
until the telling of time
was reckoned through the pointing
of mechanical hands
fashioned through a hammer
and anvil applied to our
molten blood in the fire
enunciated by our ancestral spirits

yes
and the sun has never been so shy
as after it had revealed
your erudition to the gasping world
in the origination of a new dawn

eugene skeef

Visceral Vivid Visions of the Vivific Graphic Lyricism

Lerato Kuzwayo

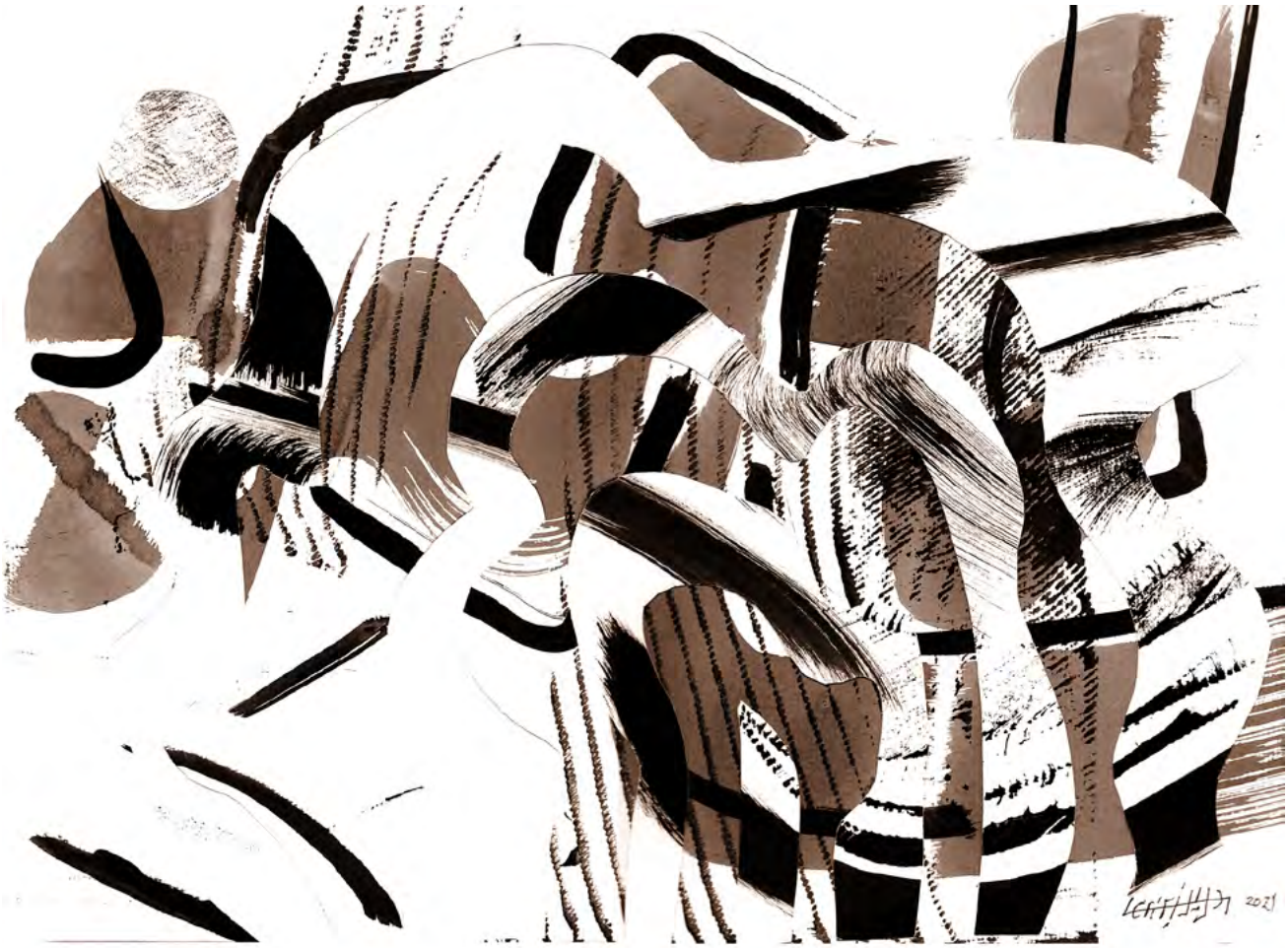
Leswika la boleta le apeilweng mpeng ya dithaba mollo, Meetsi a tille a kgatlileng sefubeng sa leru leo le kgwang Tladi Lefifing. Pakeng tsa bopaki sebakabakeng difako difakaselang disafafatse… Marumo Fatshe. Ga re Itshebeng, re itsebeng, ka mamello ya mello e thuntsang misi ditsebeng… Tsebe e re go kwa leoto la thunsha lerole lerwele "leloba la maloba a lwetse". Maphusese a ditlou ga a lebalege… A thalathala a fetola botalatala ba legodimo, lerothodi le fepang ditlhare le bojang botala bo bonwang masedi a letsatsi. The soft stone cooked in the belly of volcanis hills. Solid waters frozen in the chest of a cloud that spits thunder out of darkness. Witnessing in space and time hailstorms that do not drizzle. Spears down. Let us commune in secrecy, to know ourselves (better), with the patience of fires/cries that blow smoke out the ears. Upon the ears hearing, the foot raises the dust carrying, "a petal of a spring flower". The dust from elephants' feet is indelible… it streaks upward in strokes changing the blueness of sky, into droplets that feed unto the trees and the grass, the color that drinks sunrays.

Marothodi a imileng dipono di imetsang makalana ka melaetsa methalakutung e lpontshange ge melora le mashala di kopana le matlakala a tlhatshitweng ka setshwano ba bosweu ba leru. Letsogong la Lefifi, le imetsang lesedi ka methalo ka melora e lorang ditoro tsa bo thalabodiba… sego sa hlago se kgile pula. Lefifi le kgile Tladi, gwa sala go nkga methalo. Letsatsi leleng mollo seiponeng sa sa botala ba bophara ba mawatle. Droplets, pregnant with visions that weigh heavily on the branches with messages relayed in tree trunk rings, that appear when the coal and ash collide with white tree pulp cleansed to reflect the whiteness of clouds. In the hands of Darkness, that burdens light with lines and ashes that dream the dreams of a dragonfly hovering over lakes, or the natural calabashes that reservoirs the rain. Darkness has reserved lightning, leaving only the scent of line. The sun being fires in the blue mirror that is the vastness of the oceans.

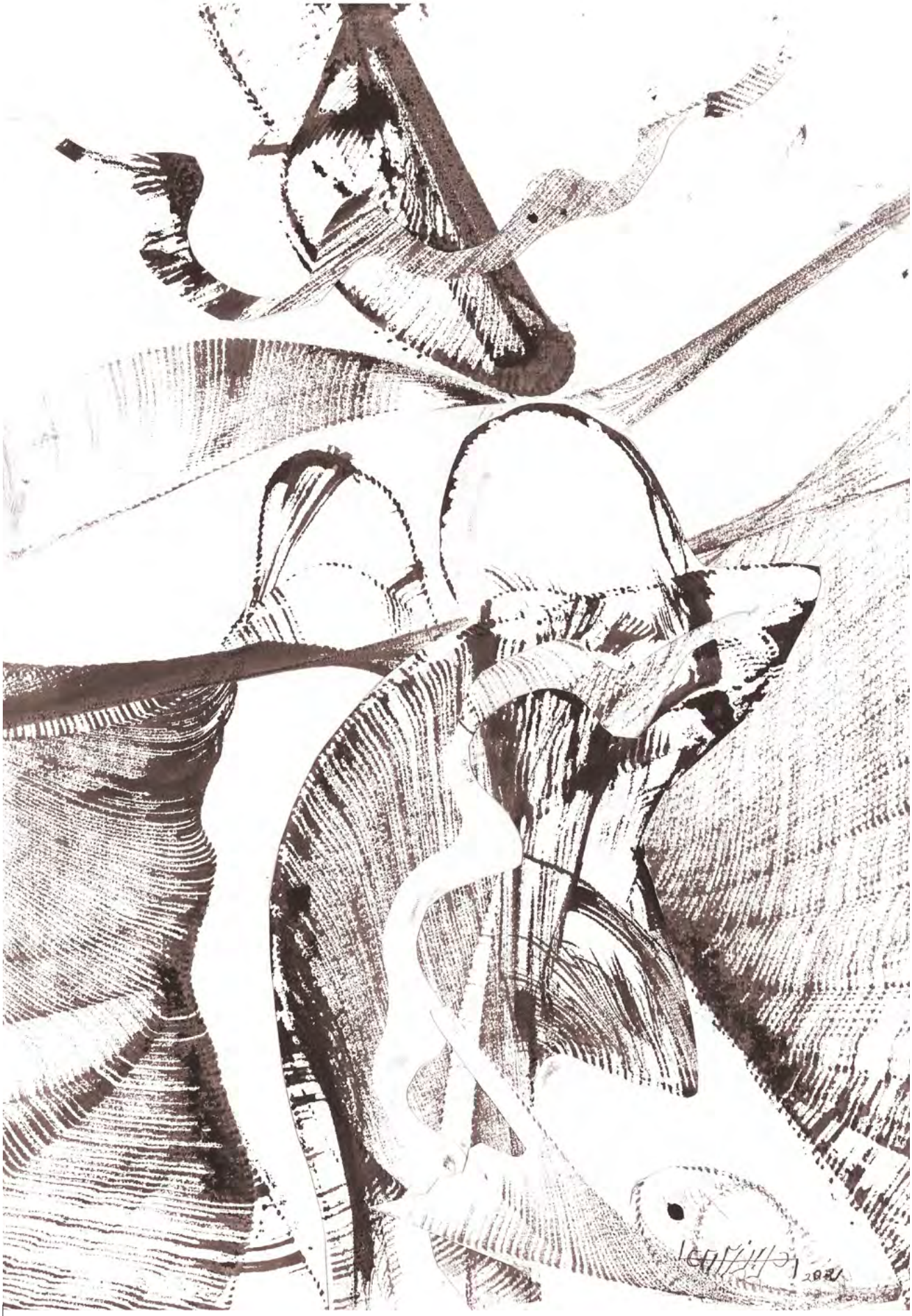
The heart beats Malombo melodies, and to hear the songbird's freedom, one jumps to catch the spirit in midair… chasing the elephant dust in skywards ascension to smell the visions, to smell the lines imprinted in the midst of a tree trunk. Liner notes spelled out by stricken thin skin on a Malopo drum, as thunder follows lightening… and the tips of the toes are the songs of the rain in tow with the spirit. *Ngwana a se nang thari o lletse ruri. Ngwana a ditshego o tshegofatsa thari ka melodi. Marama a dikoti ga a hupi sello sa selo, ke madiba a tlatsang ke dikeledi tsa lethabo*. (A child without community is ever wailing. A child that laughs lays melodic blessings onto the community. Dimpled cheeks harbor no cries, they are lakes filled with joyful tears.)

Extra sensory perplexion of axiomatic lines with an aromatic depth, that smells like the dust of dancing elephants that move with a lightness that leaves a subtle trace, that is never to be seen but always remembered. The fluidity of muscular memory sipped from ancient rivers. Spatial fibers dipped and rooted in dark matter and swiftly thrust on to thin strips of light and droplets like asteroids that crater the moon that cradles them into an explosive demise… genetic devices like seeded missiles that lay still life in stripes like white on a black equine… *Pitsi ka mebala*. 'A Zebra in all its color' The proof of this artistic brilliance is detected in each line,[1] Nomkhubulwane's ecliptic shadow on the moon during the equinox, and an equine's healing step.

[1] The Sesotho saying *Re tla re ke dipitsi ra bona ka mebala*, is the same expression as the proof being in the pudding. The proof of the artistic brilliance is in the work . Literal tranlsation would be, A zebra in all it's colour.



Above: Untitled 38, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 42 x 29.7 cm.



FOREWORD

Vusi Mchunu

Lefifi Tladi's writing and spoken word sling piercing wisdoms of "word consciousness" and scalding impatience, through his existential harangues, cracking with literary fireworks and intellectual rigor-the-hammer. He floats above like the Mapungubwe Hill bearded eagle, lending wings to Malopo Spirit, Malombo, Dashiki Poets, Malopoets, Last Poets, Ujebe Masokoane, Ingoapele Madingoane, Lesego Rampolokeng, Kgafela Oa Magogodi, Mutabaruka in Jamaica and Malik in Trinidad. He peers unflinching into the abyss of our hesitant times, testifies to its brutal histories with their shameful, salt-less tears and bewildering predicaments. Lefifi is sepoko-the-ghost-come-back dragging a bloody three legged and sooty cast iron cauldron, over-spilling with our brutal past, peering with his red third eye into this present of fake news. His sePedi and seTswana aphorisms and tongue-twisting proverbs, his yawning alliterations, demanding a price for us to pay, to access the bounty of his divine love that leaves us blushing, clutching the rosary at his blasphemous humour. Our comforts may be hidden elsewhere, but please we must listen to his unnerving, his undeniable truths, and bask in the timelessness, in the seeding-words of Lefifi Tladi.

UNESCO's Poet Laureate for Afrika, Mazisi Kunene (1930-2006) exhorts us to never forget that:

> Words in sayings and proverbs are selected to express the true meaning. Sayings and proverbs borrow from the ancient language, in the manner it was expressed when telling tales in a relaxed mood. They are shared slowly, as no one can advise another in a hurry. They have a speed that fits the content of their visions. The few words applied are for easy reception. Sayings and proverbs cannot simply be blurted out as they speak directly to the discussion at hand.[2]

In the Nguni context, proverbs project truth across the ages, truth for all the nations of the world. Proverbs are a prized cloth woven in wisdom. Adorned by knowledge that will not be altered by trends. How striking and beautiful to listen to the criss-cross of echoes between the older and the younger master of the poetic word, Mazisi Kunene and Lefifi Tladi. Lefifi Tladi has taught us that poetry is the ability to perceive. That what makes poetry in seTswana and sePedi, is the meaning of proverbs. Every line being a saying, a proverb, an aphorism, an axiom and a metaphor. Every line informing and "wisening" the reader and the listener. All who tap into these proverbs, can see the beauty of dynamic thought. For Mazisi Kunene and Lefifi Tladi, writing/reading in isiZulu and sePedi languages, opens the grooves into much deeper concepts. Especially on the level of abstract thinking. Of imagination without barriers.

Lefifi Tladi unapologetically premises his proverbs, his poems, his Jazz poems and songs, his drawings and his oil paintings on the philosophy of Black Consciousness. And all associated movements for Black Freedom: Pan Africanism, Afro-Centricism, Afro-Futurism. Since they dip into the treasure of old African languages, before the conquest of Apartheid, they bequeath the contemporary poet with words created in African sovereignty, unchained expressions from the independent African polity. Writing, chanting and reciting in the vernacular languages. Within their cultural context, history, cosmology and vision. A visitation to our linguistic ancestry. Black Consciousness co-founder, Steve Biko embraced this indigenous poetry and drums and chants by Lefifi Tladi's Dashiki Poets, and took them to the Black Universities of Turfloop, University of Natal Medical School and Fort Hare. And the poets of the 1970s enhanced their poetry performance in indigenous languages, whose beauty, whose entertaining aspects were driven by proverbs, tongue-twisting wisdoms, hilarious rhymes and alliterations. Instead of the arts, as Lefifi Tladi, constantly criticizes, coming forth as "township art of lamentations", they became a celebration of a re-discovered dignity, of humanity and visions of Freedom.

Returning to the old language's proverbs, creating new, contemporary, hybrid language in the context of the flux of sePedi, Setswana, siNdebele, siZulu, Afrikaans and seTshangaan languages of Greater Pretoria, between the 1970s and 2022, provides an effective conveyor belt to transcend the imposed fear of the Apartheid and post-Apartheid Systems. This syncretic language-mix is today popularly known as "sePitori". Lefifi says that once he was on this road, he threw from his back the chains and limitations of "township art". His poetic language was unshackled, and he could fly, soar and transcend all chains of the mind. A very universal quest and driver for African and Diaspora African movements and new expressions for Freedom, Afro-Futurism and

[2] Kunene, M.K. 1994. Impepho. *Via Afrika*. August 1994, p. 3.

Opposite: Untitled 29, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm..

Afro-Transcendence. The centrality of language as the preserver of heritage, the conveyor of evolving freedom consciousness and the spaceship carrying visions of the cosmos and the future, is widely discussed by the African Brasilian creative and activist community and expressed as Afro-Transcendence[3] in a ground-breaking gathering for the promotion of contemporary Afro-Brazilian culture, which took place in 2015, in São Paulo.[4]

The consummate wordsmith, painter, philosopher and master that Lefifi Tladi is, sits on no comfort zones, his antennae are always up for new directions. He says for his word consciousness, "Write and recite poetry. Don't explain it!" Poets must be a poem. Writers must become words, become language and its many possible applications. Stop being word blind, even word deaf and become the feeling, time, and breath of a word. They must borrow from our indigenous poetic rendition of the Praise singer-poet, the Imbongi, and the drums, handclapping and dance. Rehabilitating and giving the rightful place of respect, to the African oral traditions.

Of the 5600 proverbs Lefifi has written, this book will focus on about 20. I'd like to highlight some that, in addition to those that are in this book that: "*Mphemphe yalapisa, motho o kgona kesagagwe* – Begging is tiring, it is better to have your own." "*Mehlala ya dikhudu e yatswa kgotsa e labile lelwatle* – The patterns on tortoises head out for the sea." "*Go bala go gaisa go balabala* – Reading is better than speaking without purpose."

Lefifi's painting mentor in Stockholm, Harvey Cropper[5] reminds us:

> Lefifi could be called a modern traditionalist. We are more and more African artists of this persuasion. Artists not simply looking backwards and collecting outer forms and fragments for an intellectual pseudo-historical art. His aesthetic is a search for ethic norms, the revitalization of ancient forms, as a serious process of healing and restoring those links in the chain of tradition that have been broken, buried and mangled by centuries of colonialism, with its aftermath of doubt and self-mistrust.[6]

Cropper saw his protégé being on the verge of a new phase of African art. The forging of strong contemporary links from a worthy past.

In the tradition and in further improvisations, Lefifi Tladi with his collages/montages is dipping from the past, from his contemporaries, with trajectories into the future. The Cuban Modern Art maestro, Wilfredo Lam, Romaro Bearden, the African American montage master, South African artists like Louis Khehla Maqhubela, Durant Sihlali, Kay Hassan, David Koloane, the African Jazz collages master, Sam Nhlengethwa, Peter Clarke, photographer and painter, Zwelethu Mthethwa and Bongi Bhengu.

> The artist plays between negative blacks and negative whites, sometimes cutting out to reveal the background, sometimes adding strips from old works which are occasionally pulled forward into 3d becoming like a shimmering mirage. Then he adds distinctive line and brush strokes… The holism of an African philosophical perspective is expressed in the layers of the work, which integrate past and present. The dynamism of the lines enlivens the eye and stimulates the brain.[76]

Lefifi's ecological preservation consciousness, is always with him as he recycles, cuts strips from his older sketches and pastes his vision on canvas. He emphasises that it is not the eye that beholds, but the art piece is the beholder that can be appreciated by a visually trained eye. So, it is with the hesitant steps of the chameleon that I share what I discern in collages through a proxy reading, lacking the tactility of the originals.

I see many Japanese drawings/calligrapies in these collages, as in untitled 7,21. I see a recurring theme of the mystical Bird-Man in untitled 14, 29, 41,31. This series could relate to, "*Ba kgongang go lora ka mogare ga ditoro, baitse botelle ba nako di senang mathomo*" Those who can dream within dreams know the infinity of time. They know it has no beginning." Drawings of a child, a human figure hesitating to come out of the eggshell and face this insecure world. There are also abstracted figures of the royal warrior-conqueror in untitled 17, 19, 27, 28, 31. This perhaps vaguely relates to, "*Leina*

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3 The ideas of Afro Transcendence are rooted in anti-slavery legacy and heritage, African ancestry, the Black United Movement of the 1980s-1990s, Candomble and Umbanda beliefs from the Nigerian/Benin Yoruba Orishas, the content and legacy of the martial art, Capoeira, the necessity of the Pan African network between the Africa and its Diaspora at large. It is about transcending the shabby treatment and reality of Black people all over the world. About imagining a free Black cosmology.

4 The October 2015 event covered lectures, laboratories, workshops and artistic experiences and had an immersion program in creative processes. The co-creator and curator of the meeting was the designer, Diane Lima. It was the bold face and voice of anti-racism activists, creatives, academics and students aligned to Black Consciousness.

5 Harvey Cropper, the influential African American painter and philosopher living in Stockholm in the 1980s and the 1990s. His studio offered art classes and Black philosophy teachings, and became a central gathering space for progressive artists in Stockholm. Lefifi Tladi attended these sessions.

6 Philogène, C. 2019. *LEFIFI TLADI's Third-Brain Calligraphy, Preamble, Harvey Cropper*. Stockholm, Sweden: Nôka Publishing. p. 14.

7 Thompson, B. in conversation with the artist and author.

kelebe, keseromo – A name has influence, it shapes the character of its bearer." He also picks up the narrative of the protective parents with a child, in untitled 9, 11. Others are sheer play with the calligraphy of the body, of the inner dimensions as in untitled 24, 28. The latter may relate to, "*Mantswe a kgabisa ditoro le dipono tsa bareti* – Words embellish the dreams and visions of poets."

Lefifi Tladi's proverbs, collages, drawings, poems, songs and oil paintings are of the high standard, that he has been urging African artists to strive towards. In the vein of one of my mentors, the African American blues poet, Sterling Plumpp, who said," There is only one standard for literature, and that is the production of a manuscript at the highest level, that would be in print one day. The idea that literature has to be simple is wrong, as people do not need bad food!"

Lefifi Tladi has the energy and the sense of purpose to create for his own joy and for the benefit of all humankind.

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"Instead of the arts, as Lefifi Tladi, constantly criticizes, coming forth as "township art of lamentations", they became a celebration of a re-discovered dignity, of humanity and visions of Freedom."

2021

INTRODUCTION

Bridget Thompson

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this selection of Lefifi Tladi's art and words, providing a portal into the artist's larger body of work. Presenting this work is a significant opportunity for the Art and Ubuntu Trust in its quest to make art informed by indigenous knowledge more accessible.

Over decades and across continents Lefifi Tladi has kept a flame of African centred consciousness alive in music, art and poetry, spurring many on to deeper awareness and their own more conscious artistic practice. His efforts recall the words of another artist, Ernest Mancoba (1904-2002), also exiled in Europe for more than half a century, who nurtured a flame of memory through artistic practice.[8]

> "Some of my political friends told me that the artistic activity was not the most important thing to concentrate upon, when my people were undergoing such a terrible plight, but I believed, that Art was precisely also a means to produce a higher consciousness in Man, without which any practical achievement would probably sooner or later deviate and miss its point. Therefore, making art, I thought, was as urgent as working for the political evolution."[9]

The collages and proverbs on the arts, together with the scintillating paintings and poems dedicated to nature, represent some of Tladi's output in 2021. Whilst the art is 'abstract' it is rooted in an African world view and brings a new, yet ancient perspective to world arts. Similarly, the words dig deep into the past and at the same time innovate.

African poetry is premised on proverbs and metaphors and the artist, realising that he needed more than he could find in Sepedi and Setswana, wrote his own. Yet, these languages are already rich with proverbs and metaphors. It is notable that in the introduction to Sol Plaatje's 1916 collection of Setswana proverbs and their equivalents in European languages, Bishop Colenso is quoted saying that the average Setswana speaking herder then, had a vocabulary of 3000 words whereas an English peasant at that time had merely 300.[10]

The selection of sayings (proverbs) on artists and art from more than one hundred was curated by Lerato Kuzwayo with the aim of providing a diagnosis for the arts. These proverbs, from a larger body of thousands, accompanied by many similarly numerous palindromes, were produced by Tladi to deepen the oases from which poets drink.

Working with the artist in Stockholm, Woody Oliphant curated a selection of collages from another 100 or more. She also recorded the artist speaking the proverbs. Her evocative description of the process gives one an insight into the artist's practice and studio space, far away in Sweden, yet dedicated to Africa.

Although as Woody confirms, collages and proverbs were not produced together nor ever intended to be 'matched', the complementarity of work and words was an editorial approach endorsed by the artist and highlighted as an exhibition in one of the Trust's ArtSAT online art education sessions in 2021. As the year progressed Tladi turned to colour paintings on nature and we selected from these, feeling that we needed to somehow keep up with this prodigious output.

The book is centred in Tladi's artistic collective through these curatorial contributions as well as the dedication to the artist, Motlhabane Mashiangwako and the participation by poets: Vusi Mchunu and Eugene Skeef. Lerato Kuzwayo's prose poem is informed by Tladi's mentoring and his and Kgomotso Ramushu's writing alerts a new generation to the knowledge sources … the tradition continues. The twenty proverbs in the book inspired two dynamic artist workshops in Gauteng and Limpopo respectively – A record of which can be seen on our web-site: www.artubuntu.org

A fine body of work preceded this collection: brilliantly coloured abstract paintings with brush strokes that suggest the sculptors adze, distilled graphic depictions of musical notes and or people, relief works where the paper rises so you can touch it, charcoal drawings that depict a world of pain and paintings that break out of the rectangular frame into an amoeba like shape signifying origins, Africa as the source of life/humanity.

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8 This concept of retaining memory through practice was put forward by Dr Sazi Dlamini, musician and musicologist in the first ArtSAT session hosted by the Art and Ubuntu Trust on 31 July 2021see further www.artubuntu.org

9 Mancoba. 2003. In Obrist H.U JCA 18 Spring/Summer.

10 Plaatje, S.T. 1916. *Sechuana proverbs with Literal translations and their European Equivalents.*

Opposite: Untitled 6, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

This selection of 2021 work seems to distil the artist's prior message/s in dynamic, confident, celebratory, tactile, and multi-facetted works, some of which lift off from the constraints of 2d. The collages appear to be like living, dancing musical notes or bodies in movement. Each is strong and communicative, depicting an arrival point in the artist's journey. The paintings appear to suggest the essence of the sensual organic beauty of nature. Inspired by mappings made in nature, painted partially by hand in a way which is akin to the method used by women decorating huts with significant symbols, they also suggest knowledge sources in nature, reminding us of the key role of the fractals observed in nature and found in African art, design and architecture.[11]

Although Lefifi Tladi's oeuvre far outstrips this small selection, here we have enough brain teasers and sensory provocations to begin thinking and feeling towards deeper understandings of Lefifi Tladi's work, and African art in general. The work gives us the task of wrestling with its challenging meanings in search of a heightened consciousness. The words respond to the call of the art and vice versa and provoke us to navigate the essential features of the artist's visual and verbal expressions, the multiple layers of meaning, surface and deep, and the many shifting viewpoints which allow the viewer /reader to participate in meaning making by joining the dialogue between images and words and language and language, and back to images again.

The artist, through his Artist's Statement and article, Art for Life's Sake, Some Thoughts on Abstract Expressionism, provides insight into his rationale for his art. Further unpacking the deeper societal meanings of the collages and proverbs is done by two innovative writers: Working from within the sensibility of Lefifi Tladi's cultural, linguistic and artistic influences, Kgomotso Ramushu and Lerato Kuzwayo provide appreciations of Lefifi Tladi's art and writing in writing as multi-layered as the work it addresses.

Lerato Kuzwayo explains the multi-dimensional nature of African arts as expressed in these works by referring to the meanings of Malopo ritual, the Khoesan artistic trance and the participatory nature of viewership to centre the artist's sensorial reach to the viewers of his art within these collective practices. He refers to how the paper strip collages of previous works evoke the geometry of origami suggesting indigenous knowledge sources, which inform African artistic practice. His writing whilst dense and challenging, is also lyrical, like the art it describes

Kgomotso Ramushu, in a burst of fresh and profound insights, distills the significance of Lefifi Tladi's proverbs. She explains his revival of a dynamic Sesotho poetic language informed by life, arguing that Sesotho had been stultified through being kept in a colonial orthographic and interpretive strait jacket for a century. She explains how Tladi's linguistically dexterous and imaginative creation of new proverbs, idioms and adages for our times breaks free, reclaiming complexity, dynamism and contemporary relevance. She shows how it defies the constraints of a manufactured tribalism imposed on language by colonial and apartheid processes[12] whilst drinking from and affirming ancient sources of knowledge.

It is a special pleasure to publish this writing because it provides a new approach to understanding African Art and Language. Editing was a thrilling experience, also a learning experience, indicating how much knowledge is alive in our society but not yet coded into our educational systems. Yet, there is no doubt that across Africa at least, if not wider into the diaspora and within other societies who still hold onto communal values underneath the ravages of colonialism's distortions, the rituals and human systems from which this knowledge is drawn are well understood.[13]

It is telling that Lerato Kuzwayo, in writing about Lefifi Tladi's art, refers to his words and Kgomotso Ramushu, writing about his words, refers to his art – implying they can't be separated. This leads us to the core sensory challenge of Lefifi Tladi's work and the core message of these readings: that African art is holistic, integrated across mediums, with multiple layers of meaning. It is dynamically responsive to indigenous knowledge sources and rituals, and it is participatory, ultimately evoking a spiritual place of Botho.

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[12] See further Vail, L. (ed.) .1989. *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*. London: James Currey.

[13] See Falola, T. 2018. Ritual Archives. In: *The Toyin Falola Reader*. Austin: Pan African University.

Opposite: *Nature Blooms 2021*, Hand Painted Acrylic on Canvas, 192 x 156 cm.

ONE

Go Hlabologa Ke Go Loga Le Hlago

To be civilized is
to weave in harmony with nature

Artist's Statement

We moved out of Township Art and went to *Malopo* Arts. Along the way the mother of my children asked me why my art didn't express the beauty in me and my culture. This was an important question. *Malopo* means the spirit or soul. A soulful person is simply one who is in touch with their senses.

I'm concerned with reparations of the senses. I believe every child should be educated in sight, sound, taste, touch and smell. In this way their senses, perception and consciousness will be elevated and their extra sensory perception will become enlightened.

My work is about restoration of our perception. Artists are soothsayers, prophets, mediums and visionaries. The only way to come close to this perception is to be in touch with your own senses. This will bring you closer to nature. Ultimately artists will not be needed because everything we need for consciousness can be found in nature. Art and nature meet in the first abstract expression by human beings.

> Shell beads newly unearthed from four sites in Morocco confirm early humans were consistently wearing and potentially trading symbolic jewelry as early as 80,000 years ago. These beads add significantly to similar finds dating back as far as 110,000 in Algeria, Morocco, Israel and South Africa, confirming these as the oldest form of personal ornaments.'[1]

These finds indicate how humanity began to think i.e. to be human. It started in Africa.

Throughout Africa the fractals in nature are the basis of design and architecture. Don't let anyone tell you our forefathers and five mothers didn't know geometry. Remember the Africans who made great leaps in developing mathematical knowledge, Euclid and Pythagoras.

I am therefore more concerned with African consciousness than Black consciousness, black is just a colour but Africa means more to me, you and the world.

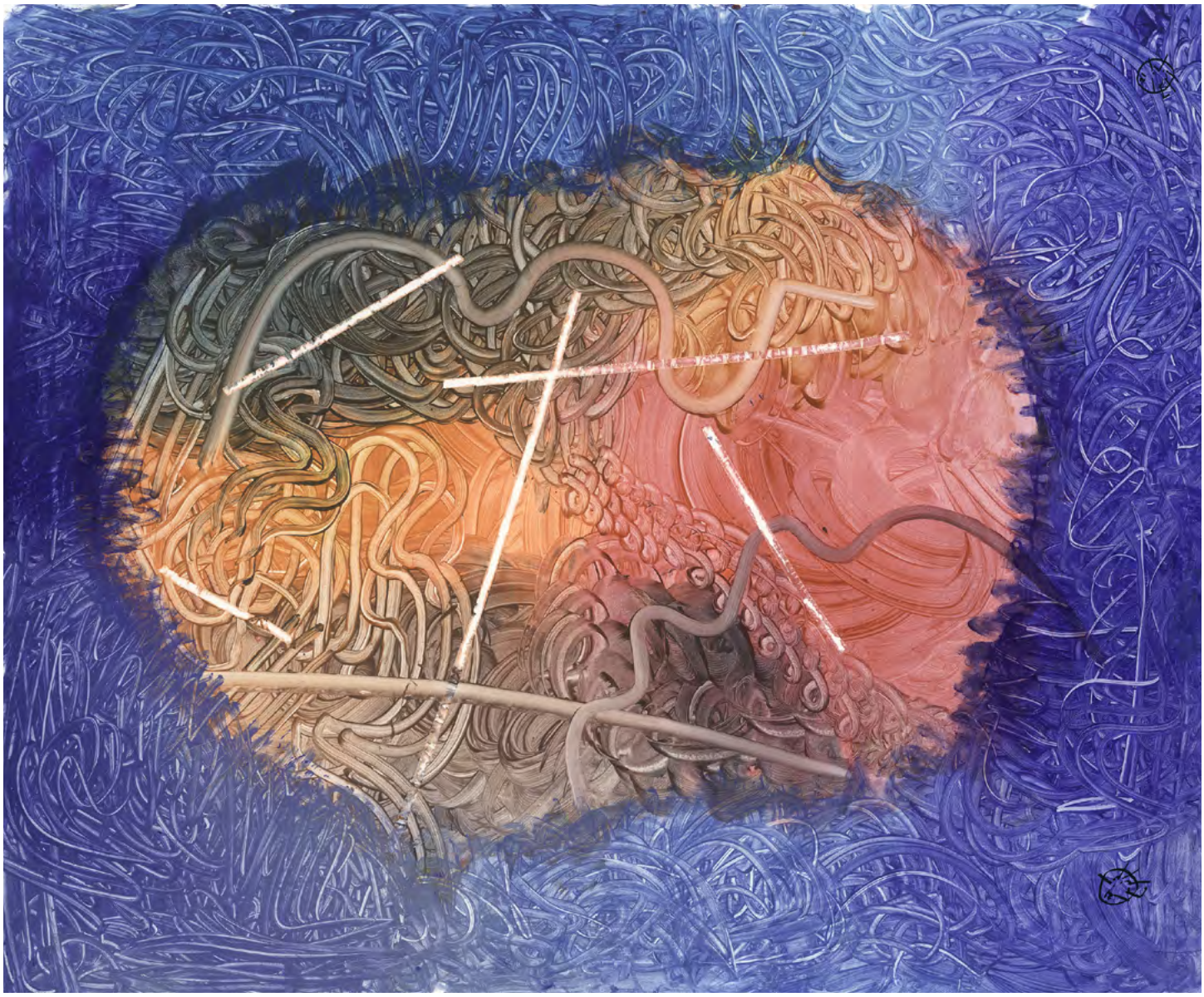
The symbol of an artist should be a seashell, as the shape of a seashell expresses the essence of the golden number, also known as Divine Proportion, which is also a fractal. Divine Proportion:

> is found everywhere in nature and for 2500 years has been an aesthetic guide in art and architecture… it is a perpetual reminder that our hope for regeneration and continuity lies in realizing the meaningful and harmonious relationship of all the parts to the whole.'[2]

This is the true meaning of interdependence between people and people and nature.

Izangoma (healer/medium) use seashells to tap into a deep ancient knowledge. Artists too tap into deep ancient knowledge. We need to identify the graves of artists with seashells.

[1] SCIENCE DAILY. Available online: https://bit.ly/3PUSqVI
[2] Priya Hemenway. 2008. *The Secret Code: The Mysterious Formula that rules Art, Nature and Science, Evergreen.*



Above: *The Sangoma's Carpet 2021*, Hand Painted Acrylic on Canvas, 156 x192cm.

Now Nature Sings out of Tune

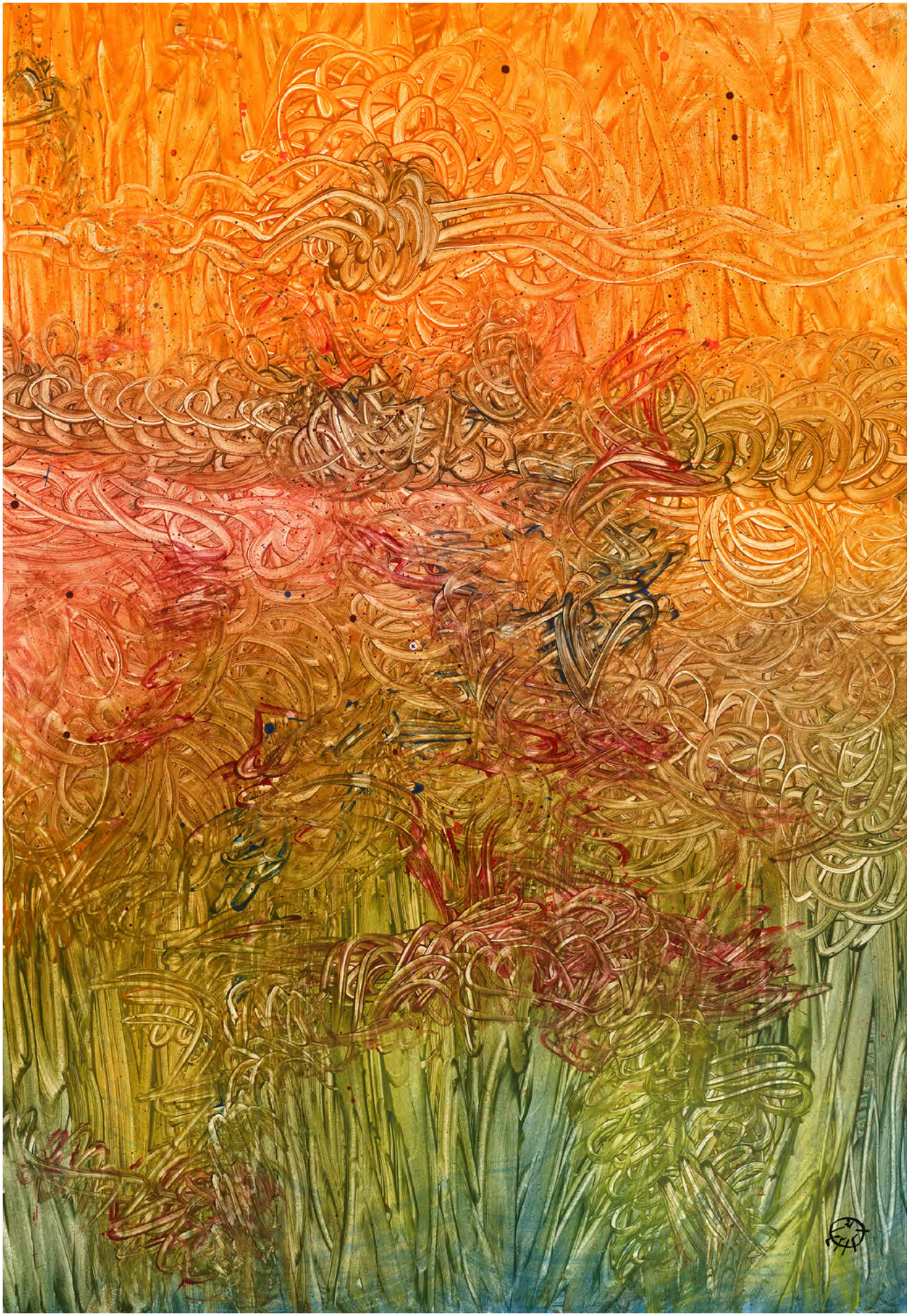
Eternity the scoresheet on which the notes of nature are placed
The cosmos is the essence essential.
Sound, harmony, the placidness of isness, a painting of morbidezza
Sensitivity, pride, beauty at the nerve end of light's delight.

The ether a stage for a theatre of the universe where the nodes of
isness are a song, a dance, a dance, a dance, a vibrant Kinetic movement
of intergalactic theatrics of isness.
The spirit of joyfulness at the pitch and zenith, excellence.

Immemorial splendor infinite latus naturae be dead the ether capacious with song, pomp.
Bordering, the perfection of nothingness the embryo of creation in which that which is and is not becomes and becometh.
The music of the universe becomes partially cacophonic with the
belated introduction of a poltergeist notochord on the scoresheet of the eternal,
that is visible in the echo of light and the spectre of the universe is
manifested on earth in the ether as Mannaman. Nature's Micro wound, oboe unsustained,a stained cosmic umpah.

To bring down Solarbound songs and earth is now out of tune as a soloist
In the solar ensemble a vocally wounded member of the milky way orchestra.
The sygygy fails the earthbound notes, I flotsam jetsam, some cord waste floating on the wings of a bleeding moon and once more the amphisbaena bites its tail to spite its own face and it now moves along headless into oblivion.
Our reality.

Opposite: *Past and Future Dreams 2021*, Hand Painted Acrylic on Canvas, 192 x 156cm.

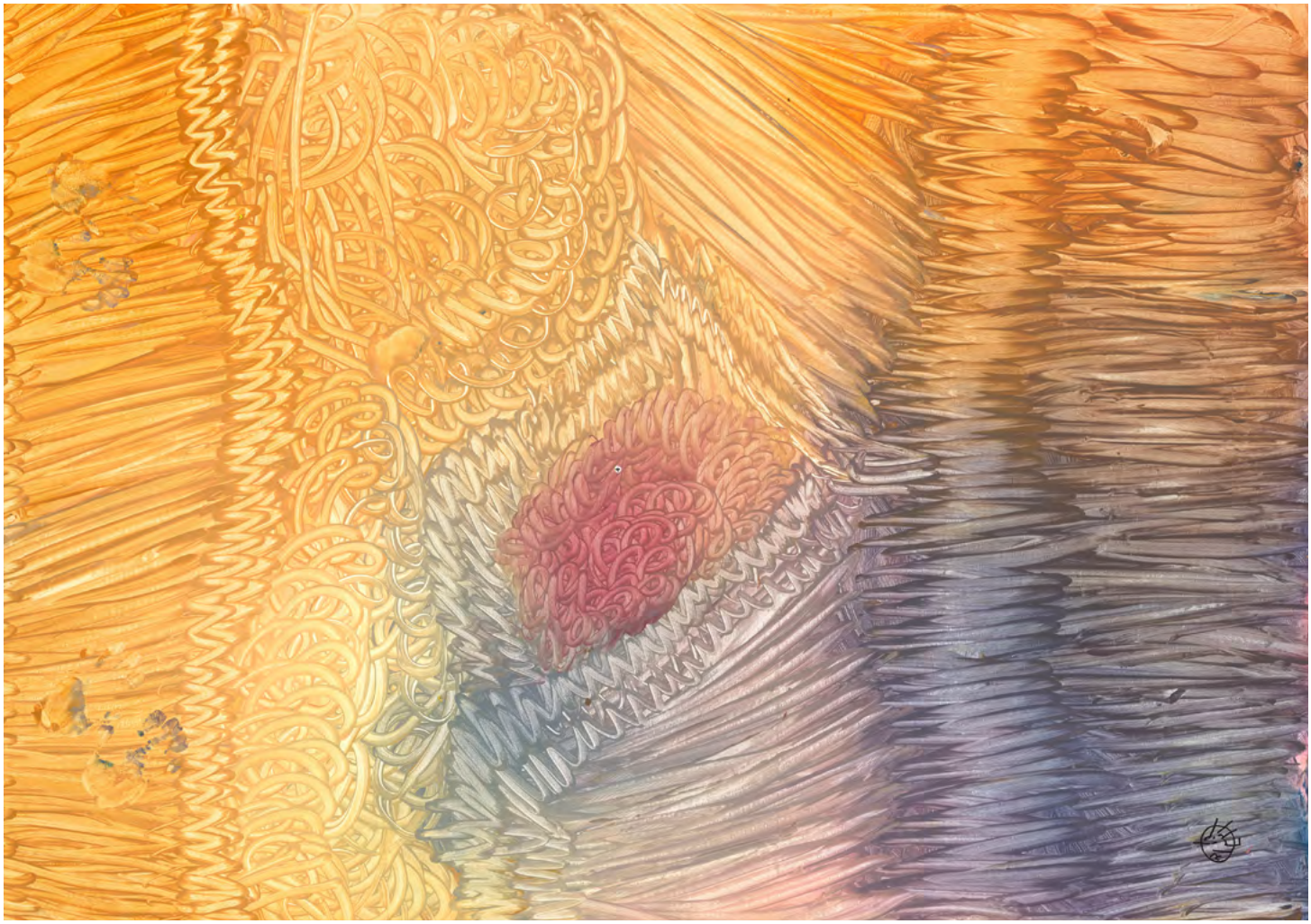


Whispering to the 3rd Ear (for Lefifi)

A procession of saintly sane saints
Serenely dancing to the magic of nature
Unspoiled polyphonic rhythms that are
Conducted by the whiskers of the hunter cat (in time with the cicada)
The sacred scarab has finished it's cosmic orbit around the pyramid's base.

The golden number is a melody of light's speed
Indaba le imnandi mtwanani
(this talk is beautiful my child)
Only now do I understand
My mother's whisper to my third ear

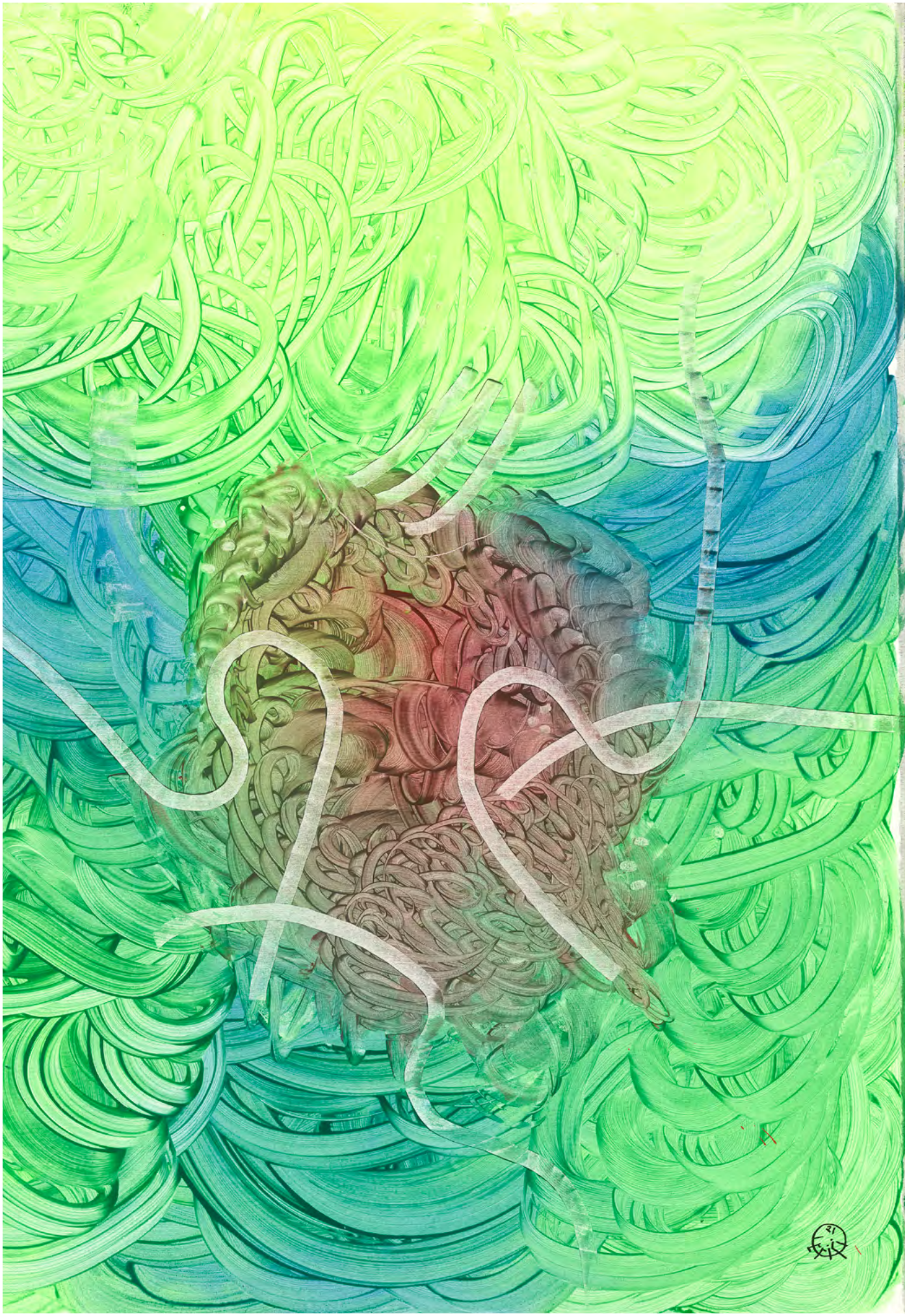
Opposite: *The Source of Origins 2021*, Hand Painted Acrylic on Canvas, 192 x 156cm.



One More Poem for Lefifi

The alphabets of water are written between
molecular lines without the n ....
and the salty sand of my oceanic beloved drives
my inner moisture
soothing my x-ray frog eyes and the
blur in the mist of my interrupted drops like hail
in the wounded eye of a chameleon
that constellation has turned into a palimpsest on our Dogon calendar

Opposite: *Within the Mask 2021*, Hand Painted Acrylic on Canvas, 192 x 156cm.



TWO

Dika Le DiemA, Mothewo Wa Leihlo La Bataki Le Botaki

Sayings, Proverbs and Optic Foundations (Collages) for Artists and Art

Bataki ba kosha ke mantjomana

Artists of song embody the ritual dance

Opposite: Untitled 28, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

Bataki ba go fetlha ga se gore ke bo 'ntwa dumela'

Artists that raise controversy, are not necessarily provocative

Opposite: Untitled 9, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

Hlabollogo e e idibetse

This civilisation is unconscious

Opposite: Untitled 1, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

Bataki ba ke maraga, ga ba gamege

These artists are muddy wells, you can't drink from them

Opposite: Untitled 22, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

2021
ALCHEMY OF PLASMA

Metswedi e ga e ete 'kgamelo di tletse maraga

These oases are barren, the water carriers are muddy

Opposite: Untitled 24, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

Botaki bo mo sediding, bo tshwere ke bokidi

This art is dizzy and numb

Opposite: Untitled 17, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

Botaki bo bo kgomaretse tharing

This art is attached to the womb

Opposite: Untitled 19, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

Botaki bo bo abuletse ruri

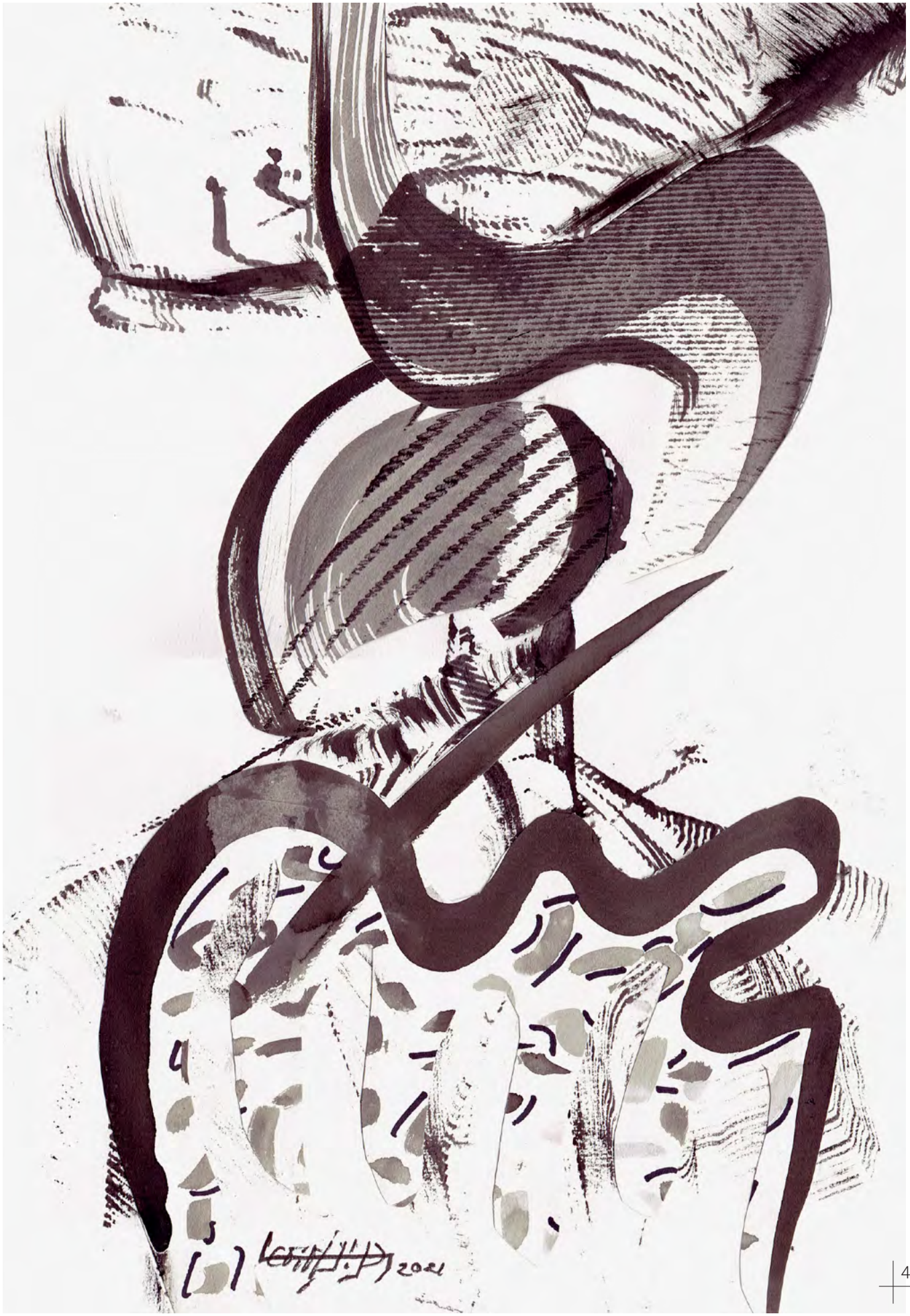
This art is forever crawling

Opposite: Untitled 16, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

Babetli ba, ba re betlela bodidi

These sculptors carve our poverty, they sculpt for poverty's sake

Opposite: Untitled 20, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.



Go fagola Bataki ke go nwelletsa sechaba

To castrate artists is to drown a nation

Opposite: Untitled 13, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

Maboko a ga ana sebete a fagotswe

These poets have no guts they have been castrated

Opposite: Untitled 15, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

Ga re busetse bataki ba komeng, ba fagotswe ka phoso

Let us re-initiate the artists, they have been mistakenly castrated

Opposite: Untitled 25, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

Ke nako ya go alafa bahlodi ba re hlollang

It is time to heal creatives who create misfortune

Opposite: Untitled 7, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

2021

Bataki ga re eteleng metswedi

Artists need to visit their oasis

Opposite: Untitled 11, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

Lefitt 2021

Ke nako ya go itseyela serithi le bontle

It is time to reclaim our dignity and beauty

Opposite: Untitled 40, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

Ke nako ya go takela Masega

It is time to create for the newborns

Opposite: Untitled 31, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

Ke nako ya go taka ka leleme la setso

It is time to create in our indigenous tongues

Opposite: Untitled 14, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

2021

Ke nako ya gore metswedi e ete

It is time for the oasis to meander into streams

Opposite: Untitled 8, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

Botaki bo bo tlo alafiwa ke nako e sa thathaseleng

This art will be healed by unwavering time

Opposite: Untitled 41, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

Ga re ngwalleng Badimo

Let us write for the Gods

Opposite: Untitled 21, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

2021

THREE

Ke Nako Ya Gore Metswedi E Ete

It is Time for The Oases to Wander into Streams

The Paper Weaver

Woody Oliphant

When tasked with the mission of selecting collages from Lefifi Tladi's collection I felt uncertain. Despite us both being South African and living in the same city for decades, he seemed not to remember our past brief encounters at various African forums in Stockholm. Added to this I had only seen a few of his graphic works in an earlier publication, Claude Philogene's Third brain Calligraphy.[1]

Nevertheless, on a winter afternoon in an apartment complex in a northern suburb of Stockholm, known for its high population of immigrants, a short, lean, well-groomed somewhat elderly gentleman in a beret and well-worn house slippers welcomed me into a warm flat cum studio. A space that was sparsely furnished with only the essentials required for each room. The tungsten lit hallway housed two large built in cupboards. The fitted kitchen had the mandatory table and chairs, the bedroom, a bed and the living room, a couch and TV table with said tv. What stood out was that all the rooms, save for the kitchen and bathroom served a function for the business of his art.

There were rolls upon rolls of finished canvases meticulously stored in the bedroom. The living room hosted a table holding evidence of collage work in progress. It was kitted out with a cutting mat, glue, black ink, cutting knives, shop-made and home-made brushes, pens and tape. On the floor, a neat pile of paper cut outs from what once where his intact ink drawings gathered to be used or discarded, I was unsure. In the air, African jazz. On the short wall a large, solitary, dancing, bright pastel abstract painting and on the long wall, nothing. This was the wall for all current work, a wall for reflection and perspective. In all of this I saw no obvious home for the finished collages I was commissioned to select and document. After we had made recordings of Tladi speaking the proverbs, I was casually led back to the hallway with the large built-in cupboards. Instead of warm jerseys and folded t-shirts, the Ikea wire pull out draws revealed pile upon pile of neatly stacked A3 collages, in not one but both cupboards. It was then that it became clear that here was a body of work and the body of a worker driven by insatiable deep knowing and a well-practiced hand.

The artist stressed that his proverbs did not belong to any specific collage. They, in parallel with the proverbs, derived their meaning and relevance through the passing of time, the labour of process and reframing the past. They reflect personal and universal truths to the viewer and the maker due to deconstructing, repositioning, juxtaposing, revealing, hiding, tearing, ultimately weaving old ideas into new ones. The result is a simultaneous contemporary and ancestral glimpse into one's current consciousness. The sheer volume of work spoke to me of a desire to make visible the vastness of memory to make it tangible and relevant to the present lest we forget or need a compass.

On a later visit, attempting to understand and decode this extensive body of work, I ,with another South African, Rene Abrahams, tried to organise the works stylistically and according to motifs. Collages that were dominated by fine parallel lines in semi circles were grouped together, as were those that made use of a sparse brush technique in combination with bolder lush strokes. There were works with a clear central figure and works that tended to spill off the page unhinged. Then there were works that clearly contained whispers of ancestral figures, or as the artist pointed out, mother and child. References to natural and physical phenomena such as water, trees and movement were also grouped together. For Rene it was the artist's musical touch that announced itself loudest as we became increasingly immersed in the works finding it harder to separate real space from the paper woven world of Lefifi Tladi's creation.

I am wary of placing too concrete an interpretation on these rich paper tapestries because I feel their meanings to be as relative as time and as fleeting as memory, where some matters come into focus because they are poignant for today only to lose their gravitas on another day. Some works sit comfortably and balanced on the page at first only to not be so comfortable on a second viewing. What I have tried to do is to lasso in examples that best represent the stylistic and thematic breadth of Lefifi Tladi's collages to allow you to gain a glimpse of the whole and to reflect my expanded understanding of the artist. That he, like his collages is mutable, insightful, sometimes uncomfortably challenging but always empathetic to the warmer and greater side of the human experience thereby creating a visual oasis in this that is our effective, efficient and resounding northern landscape that we both call home.

[1] Philogène, C. 2019. *LEFIFI TLADI's Third-Brain Calligraphy*. Stockholm, Sweden: Noka Publishing.

Opposite: Untitled 10, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

2021

Dipono tša Lefifi: Tladi's Illuminating Musings

Kgomotso Ramushu

Leina ke lebe, ke seromo – A name has influence, it shapes the character of its bearer. This loosely translated maxim is common in Sesotho, Setswana and Sepedi [2] parlance. It is enlivened and challenged by Lefifi Tladi. *Lefifi Tladi ke leina le le matlafatšang, pitso e phatsimišang. Lefifi o phela leina la gae. Ka botaki bja hae, Lefifi o re bontša phapang le kopano.* (Lefifi Tladi – Dark Lightning – is a calling. A name which strengthens, a calling which illuminates. Lefifi lives up to his name. With his artistry, he shows us contrast and convergence.)

Lefifi Tladi has archived African visual, literary, and sonic arts for over five decades. His recent work, a collection of *dika le diema*[3] is illuminating. Lefifi Tladi's writing is a monument to the beauty of language. His *dika le diema* are not simply idioms, they are an amalgam of poems, ideas, and riddles. His prose stitches simple words into compound ideas, it is rhythmic, and melodic. He builds worlds with text. A word artiste, he stitches words into lavish pictures. Using 'sound power', Tladi uncovers the depth and scope of words. His writing paints soundscapes, sounds shape ideas like the measured blending of hues in his visual art.

Lefifi Tladi's *dika le diema* are written in *tlhakantsuke*, a mixture or combination of languages spoken in and around Tshwane (formerly Pretoria), a language which evolved and recently acquired the name of Sepitori. This dialect gave Tladi a world of possibilities, remixing, and improvisation. It recalls the streets of Marabastad and Lady Selbourne where he was born. Lefifi Tladi's writings document it for posterity, a delightful revisioning of the poesy and possibilities of places the apartheid government termed 'Black Spots,' places of linguistic, cultural, and aesthetic hybridity. Places where the *tlhatantsuke* of life was made visible through stylistic practices. Lefifi Tladi's prose hums Lady Selbourne's tune, melodies that reverberate the memories and tongues of far – flung places like Nyasaland (now Malawi), North and South Rhodesia (present day Zambia and Zimbabwe) and South Africa's homelands.[4] Lefifi Tladi's writing carries traces of star dust and debris from demolished places, reconstituted into artworks that span the globe. His poetry recalls generations who spoke melodically, invoking song in daily language.

Lady Selbourne's streets gave the poet language which he transmits to canvas and stage.

Initially, Lady Selbourne survived the Union of South Africa's mass removals due to its proximity to Pretoria which needed the labour of its residents. In 1949, the year of Lefifi Tladi's birth, the National Party Government undertook mass removals and dispossession which shaped the artist/poet's life trajectory, as an artist in the struggle for self-determination. This era sought to deepen the 'Bantustan' project, pigeonholing Africans into tribal identities. These narrow classifications were first promoted by the missionaries and later by state funded orthographies that gave us the languages we presently refer to as Sepedi, Northern Sesotho, Southern Sesotho, Sesotho sa Lebowa and Setswana. Reading Lefifi's *dika le diema* is a meditation on these tongues, their meeting and splitting. Here, ageless words which stir a depth of familiarity, sit next to new-found expressions.

"Go bala go gaisa go balabala." – Reading is better than speaking without purpose.

This expression is the meeting of old and contemporary language. The choice of word '*gaisa*' is not as commonly used as its equivalents, '*phala*' or '*feta*'. *Go balabala* is a Scamtho[5] expression for wasting time or speaking without purpose. Worlds and words meet effortlessly on Lefifi Tladi's page. He implores us to elevate our perception to see this possibility, to blur the boundaries of the imagined and actuality.

> *Ba kgonang go lora ka mo gare ga ditoro ba itse botelle ba nako di senang mathomo.*

Those who can dream within dreams know the infinity of time, they know it has no beginning.

Dika le diema as reimagined by Lefifi Tladi fuse his gifts: painting, music, and writing.

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2 Sesotho is the language umbrella under which Sesotho, Setswana and Sepedi sit for the purposes of this piece.

3 *Dika le diema* – proverbs and idioms.

4 Homelands – also known as 'Bantustans'. These were territories established by the National Party administration. Homelands were allocated to Africans, the administrators claimed they were partitioned along lines of ethnicity.

5 Scamtho – also known as 'tsotsitaal'. This is an urban dialect which fuses Afrikaans, English, isiZulu, Setswana and splices of Arabic. Some words in this dialect were conjured in South Africa's urban locales by migrant labourers and township residents.

Opposite: Untitled 27, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

Words are artfully daubed onto paper, creating landscapes the reader can see, touch and hear.

"Go bona molalatladi lerothoding la dikeledi." – Seeing a rainbow in the drop of a teardrop.

The ethereal and mathematical co-exist in Lefifi Tladi's art. This world is represented in pattern and poetry. *Hlago*, nature, is at the heart of this artistry. Nature provides Tladi with geometric reference, style, and technique. Nature is at the heart of the rituals which he learnt from his forebears. This abundance inspired his words; *"Hlago ke boitsanape"* – Nature is expert.

This reverence is also seen in Tladi's etchings and paitings, borrowing from the practices *tsa go gapa boloko* building and decorating homes with a mixture of cow dung, clay and straw. Tladi's images reference the artful mundane, at times suggesting sweeping motions of women cleaning yards in the mornings, cutting patterns into the earth with straw brooms. Each day brings a distinct pattern, each hand etches unique strokes into soil. Lefifi Tladi's forebears welcomed visitors to the homestead with art. *Hlago*, nature is the original canvas. The source of all art, Lefifi teaches us.

"Mehlala ya dikhudu e ya tswa kgotsa e labile lewatle." –The patterns on tortoises come out or head for the sea.

With this proverb, Lefifi Tladi draws our attention to nature's geometry, displayed on a tortoise shell. The inimitable shapes, effortless art like the curving of waves. Fractal yet whole, nebulous yet purposeful. The music of language is celebrated in Lefifi Tladi's *dika le diema*. Cycles of reading alter meaning. The reader is encouraged to revisit this poesy, to find new images and hear new rhythms each time they ponder Tladi's depictions of his world.

Dika le diema, interlace tongues and stitch words together. They are melodic, they compose pictures. Symbols and proverbs enrich language, Lefifi Tladi teaches us. Word play, in scribal and non-scribal forms, can be enjoyed by people of all ages, playing with synonyms and images. Tladi's writings expand the reader's vocabulary and repertoire of word games. Idioms, riddles, and poems showcase the beauty of language, its boundless sonic and visual capabilities.

Idioms, riddles, and poems aid in the growth of language, *go nontša puo*. They empower us to create new words and make use of our existing vocabulary. They help us to deepen our understanding of languages. These gems grow language and feed the imagination. Tladi reminds us that idioms, riddles, and poems are an ageless form of entertainment and education. He reminds us of the pleasure of word play. Tladi tells us, *"Mantswe a kgabisa ditoro le dipono tsa bareti."* – Words beautify (or elevate) the dreams and visions of poets.

Dipono tša bareti, artistic visions, are centered in Tladi's understanding of language and its creative function. Wordplay is essential to the survival of a society. Through our daily poetry, we assert ourselves, we project our visions. Lefifi Tladi revives the long-standing traditions of the poetry of the everyday, contributing to centuries old repositories. His pen sings the songs that anchor our rituals, echoes the chants, dirges, rites and verses we recite. Tladi invites us into the vast archive of what Okot p'Bitek terms "the oral literature of African people" (p'Bitek 1974: vii) With his writing, Lefifi Tladi reveals that compound meanings of words and idiomatic expressions are like the printmakers' shadows. Each reading has new meaning. Different angles can be perceived differently by readers, lighting changes acuity.

His literary art reminds us of the weight which languages are laden with. Languages are compelled to convey emotion, to translate aesthetic values, to carry the history of their speakers. So much incumbrance can rob language of its beauty. The search for a language in which people can express and project their highest selves is an enduring quest in exile and the post-colony. Perhaps, Tladi's *dika le diema* give us artistic, academic, and everyday language to portray, or transcend, our realities. Lefifi Tladi's *dika le diema* are written in exile. He writes of the alienation and angst of separation from the land that fed his art.

Lefifi Tladi's *dika le diema* are a contribution to Africa's wealth of shared wisdom, they are an essential component of the public consciousness. Like *Malopo/Malombo* rituals, *dika le diema* keep a record of lives past and present, they are alive and fluid. Public life abounds with ritual and poetry is woven through communal rites. When families and communities connect with higher powers and meet their divine selves, it is referred to as *go phasa/uku phahla*. Poetry is the basis of divination. Rituals are rhythmic, shrouded in poetry, propelled by words, encoded lyrically. This 'folk' poetry plays the role of spiritual intercession, diction, and recording the conditions of the day, importantly it paints the artist's imagined reality.

All sacraments, from birth, regular rites of passage, cleansings, and the rituals of transcendence are shrouded in verse. Herbal decoctions carry lyrical names, their strength reinforced by words. Medicine is activated by music. *Malopo/Malombo* has rhythm as its essence, from the circle around which we gather, to the drumming patterns painted by percussionists and the etchings of dancers' feet in the earth.

Some ante -and post-colonial proverbs are accepted as social convention and norms though they should be problematised. This is the malady which Tladi subjects to *Malopo*, a diagnosis through word, sound, and

pictorial power. *Dika le diema* hold endless possibilities in the pursuit of African terms, concepts, and definitions. Tladi's *dika le diema* challenge language planning and orthographic ideals. They range from expressions which contain age-old language to contemporaneous verses.

An expression which the artist invites us to challenge is, *"Mphe mphe ya lapisa, motho o kgona ke sa gagwe"* – Asking is tiring, it is better to have your own.

This expression is common in the Southern African lexis. Zimbabweans use the Chishona equivalent *chisi chako masimba mashoma*. Tladi revisions this as *"mphe mphe ga e lapise, motho o kgona ke se gae."* – Asking is not tiring, it is better to have community. Tladi is prepared to disrupt established wisdom, breaking new ground with *dika le diema.* He does not just revisit words but thought.

Lefifi Tladi's writing challenges us to widen the literary imagination and to revel in the endless possibilities of wordplay. What can be termed philosophy, what we know and how we exist in the world, lies in the curves of sound. This knowledge can be found in the oral poetry forgotten at the altars of scribal culture. Apart from their poetic and artistic function, *dika le diema* challenge orthography and ideas about the purity of African languages.

It is necessary to place Lefifi Tladi's *dika le diema* in historical context. In 1916, Sol Tshekiso Plaatje published a book of 'Sechuana' proverbs or maxims. Plaatje refers to the colonial formation 'Sechuana' which would later take shape through different institutional interventions. There were Anglican, Lutheran, Wesleyan, Congregational and Native systems of spelling and orthography. (Plaatje 1916: xii) These were supported by the efforts of individuals like Robert Moffat whom Plaatje refers to as the "Apostle to the Bechuana." Moffat printed the first Sechuana Holy bible and was a central figure in creating "the language from a literary point of view." (Plaatje 1916: x) The Native Affairs Department and University of the Witwatersrand also feature in Plaatje's account of Sechuana's entry into scribal record. They were part of the Union of South Africa's delegation to the Central Orthography Committee. This body made contributions to the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures which studied orthographies across early twentieth century Africa. (Plaatje 1930)

Plaatje was an active proponent for the inclusion of 'Native language speakers' in the deliberations on orthography. He went to great efforts in print media to encourage "Bechuana readers…. to acquaint themselves with the use of phonetics, if only to retain a correct pronunciation of their mother- tongue." (Jones & Plaatje, 1916: x)

Plaatje's writings are an early account of the development of Sechuana orthography and offer a glimpse into the journeys taken by languages. Apart from the bible and these publications, hymn books were the institutional archives of these growing languages. A look into the annals of linguistic history reveals the classist and tribalist tendencies of attempts to create and encode linguistic purity.

Lefifi Tladi offers us an unofficial challenge to the centuries' long project of assimilation and linguicide. Interestingly reading the writings of Naboth Mokgatle, H.I.E. Dhlomo and Esk'ia Mphahlele, whose seminal works followed, the descriptors Bapedi/Basotho/Batswana are absent, and the authors refer to themselves as 'Basotho.' M.O.M. Seboni refers to "Basotho ba Lebowa le ba ga Moshoeshoe." (Seboni, 1980: v) Lefifi Tladi centres African cosmology and experience in the use and growth of language. Tladi's use of artistic imagery and choice of writing in *tlhakantsuke* has aesthetic and social function.

Orthography and dialect collide on the tongue, people bend their tongues to abide to the rules of orthography. Whose orthographies are these and what are the implications? Language does not just serve practical purposes; orthography has the danger of flattening terrain and *dika le diema* remind us of the complexity of African languages as tools of creative and intellectual expression.

Lefifi Tladi reminds us that the artist is not just a conduit but creator of language. In his attempts to create a new poetic lexicon, he returns us to the river which quenched our ancestors' thirst for prose.

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Enlightening Strokes

Lerato Kuzwayo

When we speak about Afrikan abstract expressionism from the heart of Limpopo River vernacularities, then we speak about the spiritual influences of Malombo as an improvisation art form, whose polyrhythms, when perceived in their full multi-dimensionality, can heal. Lefifi Tladi's work in this collection is Malombo calligraphic origami performing the transient ritual of making the unseen visible. Ntate Tladi's work beckons us to raise our perceptions, by thinking with clearer intention about culture making as knowledge creation, and how sustainable it can be as a living heritage, through creative ritual. He contests that "beauty beholds the elevated senses" as opposed to beauty being subject to the "eye of the beholder" who might not look beyond the surface of their own perceptions, or imagine, beyond memory, what new thought can emerge. In extending our perceptions we can improve and improvise our ways of perception. *Seema se a ikemela* The poetic essence of a metaphor is in its ability to stand for itself. Whether one chooses to understand, overstand or innerstand is entirely up to the elevated state of one's sensibilities.

Throughout his artistic pursuits Lefifi Tladi has sought to centre his work around embracing and elevating the human senses. This is evident in how he would name bodies of work after sensory bodily functions. *Monkgo wa Mothalo 2015* – The scent of line. This suggests that the viewer needs a level of intuitiveness in order to grasp or interpret the meaning of the line. Perceiving scent in SeTswana is usually referred to as *go dupella*, the same word used when defining an intuitive sense often associated with healers, clairvoyants and prophets, *DiDupi*. This intuitive sense is also needed to grasp and interpret proverbs and metaphors. The creativity here is not in how we can remember the familiar words, but how we can imagine and use the familiar words in ever more poetic ways.

Mphophole 2009, which can be loosely translated to 'lay hands on me', is part of a series of works by Lefifi Tladi that dealt with what is felt through touch or through the skin. The idea spawned a large volume of carved Masonite boards, engraved with lines in order to create abstract artworks that could be perceived by a blindfolded audience and more interestingly, by people who are visually impaired, allowing the aesthetic of the work to interact with the sensory experience of touch, thereby opening new routes to artistic consciousness. This 'viewing' becomes a kind of communal ritual in which the viewer directly experiences the marks made by the artist.

These and other works by Lefifi Tladi approach and engage the senses of the viewer with the intent to heighten them beyond simply seeing. In conversations about art, he has been known to say that:

> Art, as a matter of fact, that accomplishes its true purpose makes itself obsolete. The more elevated one's sense of hearing becomes, the less one needs art, for you will be able to hear the music that is in nature. One can then listen to the songs in the wind as the most uplifting classical music overtures, the sounds of water and the ocean waves, would be all the music one needs.[6]

Confirming the dynamism and fluidity of cultures Lefifi Tladi reminds us that we have to think deeper about nature, the universe and our place in it as co-creators in the becoming of past, present and future time. He takes his lead from Malombo rituals.

Malombo/Malopo is an abstract expressionist improvisation in the visual, literary and musical forms associated with Malombo rituals. These are not styles; these are solid forms of ritual thought. Through attempts to make them audible, visible and expressed in proverbs the artist seeks to speak in ritual tongues. To make what has become profane sacred. In the ways of a healer, the proverbs make diagnostic commentaries on various social conditions and can be paired with prescriptive solutions. In preparing collages the artist is enthralled in an elongated ritual of reassembling bits and pieces of a tree. The burnt bark that creates charcoal with the pulp turned to sheets of paper.

> …*Malopo* rituals are aimed at enriching the personal and social life of the Pedi community. Through *malopo ritual*, the Pedi culture's socially significant occupations are practised. Through the procedures of music learning and teaching, the Pedi culture's values are reflected. One finds information in the content of its material, which reveals the identity and interests of the community. The community's ways are exposed in its inherent processes. The ethos and significance of the Pedi community are expressed from its role in the community's existence. Despite the impact of modernisation,

[6] Tladi L in conversation with the author.

Opposite: Untitled 30, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm..

> *Malopo* music is still regarded as a means whereby Pedi people perceive the present and reflect on their past experience, while projecting into the future."

In our pursuit to grasp and derive the required messages from Ntate Tladi's work our ways of reading have to be extended into a holistic perception and conscious unravelling of what we perceive, We must dance in anticipation of the beat of the Malombo drum, because we have to first dance to its mythmaking abilities before we can stamp our feet on the ground to raise the elephant dust, whose lines are to be etched onto our genetic memories. Ritual concepts of mystic ideals about life in its ecological entirety assist us in seeing subtle connections between man and nature through various poetic links.

As a rule in reading and communication the reader and the writer have a shared codex, founded in socio-cultural norms developed and learnt over time. By any measure, all civilisations are defined by a linguistic consensus that can unite people in a common cause, that shapes values and philosophies of a people. In an interview Keorapetse Kgositsile noted that "No writer has ever created a language, any language you can think of is a product of a people's collective genius. It means, whatever language you write in, makes you accountable to the people that created that language". It is only from the lived experience of the speakers of that language, that the writer is made noteworthy. This communal sense of creation refers to the timeless dialectic of Botho as a collective principle that elevates the individual without neglecting the collective, and through which the individual's prowess in creativity elevates forms of collective understanding. This is highlighted by the richness of Afrikan proverbs, adages and storytelling traditions.

In the art of storytelling, the narrative fulfillment depends on the ability of people to imagine and read between the lines, as to what might have happened in the untold bits that perhaps would seem uninteresting and too lengthy if the storyteller were to mention every detail. We fill in the details through our imagination, as well as through memory of a particular point in the story, be it an animal, a common tree, river, or mountain. As we see in modern technological advancements, the speed through which we can transmit thoughts, ideas and messages propels the march of civilisation through time, thus there are constantly improvising ways of using the written and spoken word.

Lefifi Tladi's appreciation of different artistic expressions allows him to perceive improvised virtuosity across artforms. This inter-dimensionality is depicted in his visual expressions. A simplified form elevates our understanding of complex realism, as it requires elevated states of comprehension. In some of his works from the 1990's a moving dancing body is seen and decipherable out of no more than 20 poetic lines, that are not strictly representational. In these works, the artist expressed a dynamic contemporary typographic interpretation of the KhoenKhoen wall and cave art, created in an effortless Malopo trance.

"Go loga leano." In seSotho is an expression that can literally mean to "weave an idea", it implies that in African thought processes ideas are a combination of various strands of thought that can be woven into a single thread, or a mat with a message, as in the ancient practice where maidens would spend time weaving love mats to suitors to profess their love. At a distance the mat might seem like a two-dimensional form. If one were to touch and feel the mat they would sense messages of a third dimension, as a blind person could read braille. In seSotho we speak of the senses as "*go utlwa*" a sensory perception of the skin and the ear as well as the ethereal sense of feelings and emotions. One imagines that a skilled weaver could communicate with the blind through the textures of woven mats and beadings. To delve deeper into this etymological river of thought, we also know this to be the root of the word denoting understanding, *"Go utlwisisa/kutlwisiso"*. Implying that one senses the core, or the depth of the message being conveyed, or one truly feels it, and through common understanding we can reach consensus *"kutlwano"*.

Tladi has torn and cut up two dimensions of a piece of paper and ushered them into a new extruded and transcendental three-dimensional form meant not only to be seen but to be felt by the mind's eye like the way dancing feet feel the clay, mud and cow dung tapestry that pave the indigenous courtyards. The handprints of the paver are always tasked with leaving lines that could be traced by careful sweeping eyes. Like *methalakutu*, the rings on the trunk of the tree that tell the story and age of a tree, these lines relay tales of the home and messages to visitors.

The shifting of dimensions of paper brings one to the discipline of origami, which in its essence is often Euclidian in its geometric approach to imagining reality. It is in fact a realist artform sharply approaching abstraction. Lefifi Tladi turns the forms to fluid

expressionistic waves, that if they were to be heard would give off the polyrhythmic beats at the heart of a Malopo ritual, polyphones of semitone harmonies that interweave themselves in longitudinal and latitudinal attitudes that polar shift our cardinal understandings of geo-forms into hyper terrestrial quantum fields tethered to dark matter, periodically amassed into brilliant explosions of cosmic lightning. *"Bitso le letle ke seromo"* A name given to one in Afrika denotes purpose. The philosopher, poet lives true to his name in constant revelation, for it has always been that from the darkest cloud emerges the brightest sparks of lightning. From a time that may have seemed dismal for indigenous art forms Lefifi Tladi has truly been enlightening.[7]

End Notes

Malopo/Malombo: The Sepedi word Malopo, which could be translated to the spirit of artistic cultural expressions, commonly used for "the Music of the spirits". It is the seed of inspiration to the South African Artistic movements and is used here in to denote the visual aspects that came forth that could be said are of an abstract expressionist nature, and most importantly work that is spiritual in nature.

The use of the letter "K" in the place of 'c' in the word Afrika, is inspired by Prof: Eskia Mphahlele, who called on us to "Always affirm Afrika." The naming of the space points to the fact that the bulk of the writing here in is centred in Afrikan Language as a vehicle of accurately deciphering the philosophies behind artistic aesthetics. This bedrock and center of thought seeks to continue the afffimative spirit by referring to phenomenon using their correct names. The translation to the colonial stream of thought and language is often reductive of the true meaning. . In SeSotho and Kemetic (Egyptian) cosmologies the KA! has emphatic spiritual implications.

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Kgositsile, K. 2015. *longstorySHORT AfricaReads*. Prof K. Kgositsile shares some wisdom with young writers:© Kajeno Media Johannesburg. Available online: https://bit.ly/3NcVQ3e

[7] In the SeSotho languages, Lefifi means darkness and Tladi means lightning.

"Confirming the dynamism and fluidity of cultures, Lefifi Tladi reminds us that we have to think deeper about nature, the universe and our place in it as co-creators in the becoming of past, present and future time. He takes his lead from Malombo rituals."

"Art, as a matter of fact, that accomplishes its true purpose makes itself obsolete. The more elevated one's sense of hearing becomes, the less one needs art, for you will be able to hear the music that is in nature. One can then listen to the songs in the wind as the most uplifting classical music overtures, the sounds of water and the ocean waves, would be all the music one needs."

Lefifi Tladi

FOUR

Art for Life's Sake

Next page: *The Roads of Bees* 2021, Hand & Brush Painted Acrylic On Canvas, 192cm x156 cm.

Some Comments on Abstract Expressionism

Lefifi Tladi

Abstract expressionism is a field of action for the creative artist, where she/he can display inner pied vistas that are only visible to the open-eyed soul. The artists connect geometric and organic forms into a whirlpool and whirl-storm of elating perceptional recesses. That is where the eye is commanded by the id and the whirl is frozen and manifests aesthetic pleasure for the sagacious observer. Here and now the canvas is transformed into an arena, or a workshop of scintillating soul flow. As the invisible rainbow is transformed into orbs and large microforms as though one was looking through the faceted eye of the house fly. A feast for the enlightened eye, as it enjoys lush poetic forms that are only prose to the willing to learn novice.

Colour and composition become optic koans that are coated with anthropomorphic vitality. This is the manifestation of inner vision in motion. At this point in time, in space within the universe, the artist's struggles in her/his effort to harness the stores of her/his unstained riches, are translated for the eyes of the welcoming keen observer.

The artist is a medium, in this closed peaceful encounter, at the same time being cogent and cognisant of the fact that good intentions can be harmful some of the time and not all of the time because good paintings, as art, are concentrated statements of vital impetus exacted within the limited area of Euclidian space, the canvas. As Leo Stienbank would say "It is from an analysis of what the picture does to him that the critic learns what the picture actually succeeds in doing, and this knowledge alone leads to the definition of what problem is solved." This understanding helps understand the content of the big question: "What does abstract art mean?" The meaning lies in the You in you if you can communicate with the you in you. Because, as a basic, the aestheticism contains and makes the content, as Tumi Lesoai would say "Art looks at you and defines you well and clear". But Kant the philosopher expresses it in this way " The weightless dove feeling the resistance of the air through which it flies, could get the idea that it could do even better in a vacuum." This statement brings us closer to understanding the artist's cohesive oasis and centre. That near altered state of willing yourself to an orgasm and feeling it could even be better if one was not dreaming.

Now we enter the broken realm of the rainbow and transpose painting into the echelon of music or rather sound harmonies that are trapped in the unconscious of the artist's psyche. It's like listening to silence and transposing the silence into colour densities of textures that give eloquence to autumn leaves or snowflakes and sunshine and speed of zero-knots. Come exquisite, placid tempest that dances behind a curtain of shimmering luke-warm light, that fades as the eye fails to cope with the depth and breadth of these colour densities and textures, whose inner dynamics continue their kinetic extension in the third eye. As Claude Phylogene would say "Third brain calligraphy" or rather should we call these forms majuscule of those alphabets that are great symbols for- those languages that are undeciphered as what in Swedish is called *dadasprok* (children's language).

I think now is the appropriate time to quote Hendrik Nicholas Werkman "In front of a work of abstract art, constructed art never say, 'I can make nothing of it'. It is not your intellect that is being appealed to but your sensibility. This is true whether you feel it or not. If, however you want to treat yourself to the luxury of understanding it as well, you had better be more demanding of your intellect." Don't ask "What does it mean?" A piece of art is not a piece of wizardry, a painting cannot speak. That is to say (isi)Zulu, KiSwahili, Bambara, (isi)Xhosa, let alone German, French, English or Chinese. Paintings have their own complex language that the artist creates and also struggles to comprehend, just like other creations in this life that just goes on. But as Rudyard Kipling would say "That is another story". At least one not full of sound and fury, signifying bugger all.

World arts in general have the same alphabets but cultural backgrounds stifle their vocabulary and that is why abstract expressionism has become the avante-garde of visual arts as painting. This form of expression transcends and coheres world arts into a pan-planet visual vehicle. It is a major element in the arts for life's sake. That is to say it gives meaning to being. Therefore to be or not be is no longer a question, as Miriam Makeba would say "To be is the answer". Because abstract expressionism is not a form of visual onomatopoeia or xenoglosia tentinebulating from a charlatan's brush, but an expression of what Jean Paul Sartre calls "Being or nothingness".

Next page: *The Roads of Bees* 2021, Hand & Brush Painted Acrylic On Canvas, 192cm x156 cm

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LEFIFI TLADI EXHIBITIONS

1980

"Mosima Motlhaela" at Thupa National Museum, Gaborone, Botswana
"Black Art" at Endekooi, and at Werelds Winkel, Amsterdam, Holland
"Schwarze Kunst aus Sud Afrika – The Blues in Me" at PRO Gallery, Stuttgart, West Germany
"Black Art" at West Gallery-Volkskas Centrum, Pretoria, South-Africa
"Witches and Spirits" at Y.W.CA. Gaborone, Botswana
"Qhamada" at Y.W.CA. Gaborone, Botswana

1981

"Tredje-års eleverna från Gerleborgsskolan" at Konstnärscentrum, Stockholm, Sweden
"Jazz i Färg" at Växjö Cathedral, Växjö, Sweden
"Soweto Flames of Resistance" at Oslo House, Norway

1982

"Ting-Ting-Pere Krag" at Africa Centre, London, England
"Culture and Resistance Festival" in Gaborone Townhall, Botswana
"Från ingenting till någonting" at Invandrarverket, Norrköping, Sweden
"Afrika Tage" at Pavillion, Hannover, West Germany
"Portretter og Minner" at Club 7, Oslo, Norway

1983

"ANC 70th Anniversary" at Folkets Hus, Stockholm, Sweden
"ANC Exhibition" at Trossen, Stockholm, Sweden
"Mahlo Ntebe Malerier" at Albertslund Rådhus, Denmark
"Malerier" at Midsommargården, Stockholm, Sweden
"Movements through an Ndebele Village" at Africa Center, Stockholm, Sweden
"Schwarze Kunst aus Sud Afrika", touring West Germany
"Boomerang to the Source" at Battersea Arts Centre, London, England
"Metaphorhythms for the South-African Liberation Dance" at Oval House, London, England
"Pula" at National Art Gallery, Gaborone, Botswana
"Lefifi with Egyptian Painters" at African Centre, Stockholm, Sweden

1984

"Contemporary African Artists in Sweden" at Lund Konsthall, Sweden
"Afrikanischer November" at Markthalle, Hamburg, West Germany
"Ndebele's" at Nôka International Theatre, Stockholm, Sweden

1985

"Sepoko not Sepuku" at Africa Centre, Stockholm, Sweden
"Konstnärer mot apartheid" at SIDA U-Forum, Stockholm, Sweden
"Ndebele Echoes" at Club Kilimanjaro, Stockholm, Sweden
"Khole Comes Home" at Africa Centre, Stockholm, Sweden
"Zizi" at Big-Boys Café, Stockholm, Sweden
"Legaga" at Akalla Bibliotek, Stockholm, Sweden
"Kunstenmarks in Ballingschap" at Mozes Huis, Mozes-Aäron, Kerk, Amsterdam, Holland
"Art Against Apartheid" at Nieuwe Kerk. Dam, Amsterdam, Holland
"Freeing Free Music" at Kulturhuset, Stockholm, Sweden
"End White Rule in Black South-Africa" at SIDA U-Forum, Stockholm, Sweden
"Images in Black" at De Butcht, Leiden, Holland
"Drawings" at Boemen Gallery, Germany

1986

"Musik och Bilder" at Multi-Kulti, Stockholm, Sweden
"Khole kommer hem" at Bibilioteket, Dalens träffcentrum, Stockholm, Sweden
"Mahlo Ntebe" at Rinkeby Folkets Hus, Stockholm, Sweden
"Pele-Pele – Before Colonialism" at Centrum kyrkan, Farsta, Stockholm, Sweden
"Munti Wa Marumo – Boomerang to the Source" at Brixton Art Gallery, London, England
"Exil" at Haus 3, Germany
"Wir sind die Elefanten" and "Bilder und Skulpturen aus Azania" at Solidarische Welt, C.U.B.A., Münster, Germany
"Bilder från Sydafrika" at Barnkulturforum, Stockholm, Sweden
"Boycot Outspan" at Leiden Centrum, Holland
"Wole Soyinka Nobel Prize Exhibition" at Puck Teatern, Stockholm, Sweden

1987

"Legaga" at Biblioteket i Akalla, Stockholm, Sweden
"Black Art From Azania" at Kunstkeller Kreuzberg, Berlin, Germany
"ANC 75" at Forshaga Bibliotek, Sweden
"We Wear the Mask" Blå Ställets Museihall, Sweden
"Voices From Exile" at The Peace Museum Union Art Gallery, Sweden
"A Travelling Exhibition" at Union Art Gallery, Morgen State University
"Alphabets of Fire" at Capitol Cost Graphic Gallery, Washington DC
"Bilder från Sydafrika" at Restaurang Jungfru Lona, Sweden

1988

"C/O Africa" at Konstnärscentrum, Stockholm, Sweden
"Art for Africa" at Blå Stället, Angereds Kulturhus, Gothenburg, Sweden
"As We Are" at Övedskolans Ateljé Gallery, Sweden
"Rhythm" at Evangelische Akademie, Bad Boll, Germany

1989

"Världsbilder – Bildvärldar" at Taxinge, Näsby Slott, Sweden

1990

"Möt Världen" at ABF-Huset, Stockholm, Sweden
"Konstens Vecka 90" at Tibro Bibliotek, Sweden

1992

"Fanisana – Third-Brain Calligraphy" at Hallonbergens Bibliotek, Stockholm, Sweden

1994

"Image" at Afrika Forum, Stockholm, Sweden

1995

"Kemang" at Rinkeby Folkets Hus, Stockholm, Sweden
"Sexhexhexhe" at Unisa Art Gallery, South-Africa

1996

Group Exhibition at Unisa Art Gallery, South-Africa
"Plates" at Folkets Museum – Etnografiska, Stockholm, Sweden
"African Convention" at Afrika Forum, Stockholm, Sweden
"The African Prize for Leadership" at Folkens Museum Etnografiska, Stockholm, Sweden
"Ledumo" at Huset, Rinkeby, Stockholm, Sweden
"Moments = Afro-Viking" for the South-African Independence Celebrations, Stockholm, Sweden

1997

"Södra Afrika efter apartheid" at Folkens Museum Etnografiska, Stockholm, Sweden
"The Eye" for the South-African Independence Celebration at Folkens Museum Etnografiska, Stockholm, Sweden
"Poetry of the Eye" at Roxy Centre, Gotland, Sweden...

Since 1997, Lefifi Tladi has been travelling extensively, and has ceaselessly continued to produce a great amount of art work, which BY 2019 included some 7000 pieces. In South-Africa, Lefifi Tladi has organized several exhibitions throughout the early years of the 21st century. He has gathered young scholars, interested in the arts and has assisted them to develop their craft and to make it more accessible to a larger public.

Opposite: Untitled 18, 2021, paper collage and paint on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm.

ENTRUDERS / NANODRONES
2021

CONTRIBUTORS

Lerato Kuzwayo is a multimedia and multi-disciplinary artist. Formally trained as a multimedia designer at the Open Window Art Academy, he is currently focussed on working in the documentary arts of photography and film. All art is unified in this creative mind and his images and videos are influenced by music and fine arts. Born and raised in Pretoria/Tshwane's western neighbourhood of Atteridgeville he drinks from the Capital's fountains and their blatant love for jazz music evident in his 2013 series of photography and film work, focussed on documenting the jazz and art world in Gauteng.

Vusi Mchunu a.k.a. Macingwane, has a Master of Arts degree from the Free University of Berlin. In Berlin (1982-1994) he co-published AWA FINNABA and ISIVIVANE Pan-Africanist Journals. In Johannesburg, he has been Executive Chairman of House of Memory (2007-2014), a heritage consultancy provided professional solutions to clients in the heritage, museums, exhibitions sector. And in Pretoria/Tshwane, he has been Chairperson of the Freedom Park Council (2013-2015) and Chief Director Heritage for the Department of Military Veterans. His books are Stronger Souls, Pipe Dreams (with Mazisi Kunene) Pleiades-Isilimela and Isibaya saPhakade – Kraal to Eternity (with Sandile Ngidi). His fifth book of poetry, "Poems in Stone" is scheduled for release in December 2022. He is co-founding Director at Sausage Films, and a cancer survivor.

Woody Oliphant has resided in Sweden for the past 19 years where she works as a children's librarian. Her academic career begun at Michalis School of Fine Art in Cape Town, South Africa, where she majored in painting. Later she completed courses in graphic design, art communication and video production specialising in documentary making. She has a bachelor's degree in Communication Science from the University of South Africa and a master's degree in Digital Libraries and Information Services from Högskolan i Borås (Sweden). Her Master's thesis concerned Western representational bias of African culture with the American based online platform, The World Digital Library. In her spare-time she advocates for the representation of Afro-Swedish culture within Scandinavia specifically in the field of children's literature.

Kgomotso Ramushu is a writer, researcher and project co-ordinator based in Johannesburg, South Africa. An affiliate of the Africa Open Institute, she is devoted to the preservation and promotion of African art. Kgomotso is the Artistic Director at Swart Gevaar Productions which produced Chilahaebolae, the Lentswe Playwrights Programme, and upcoming publication Zuhoyihoyi among others. An advocate for African art and literature, she consults as a Media strategist and Researcher for organisations including the Puku Children's Literature Foundation, Capital Arts Revolution, Funda Community College and Artist HelpDesk. Kgomotso's interest in the production of knowledge was shaped by a decade in education policy and grants administration.

Abdulcadir Ahmed Said is a filmmaker, designer and photographer born in Mogadishu and based there until the outbreak of civil war in the early 1990's. He trained in the Soviet Union and Italy and has been an active member of FEPACI (Federation of Pan African Cineastes) for many decades. He co-founded MOGPAAFIIS (Mogadishu Pan African and Arab Film Symposium) and is known for his two classic silent films GEEDKA NOLOSHA (Tree of Life) and LA CONCHIGLIA (Seashell). His videoart READING THE ANCESTOR was recently acquired by the Constitutional Court Art Trust (South Africa). With Bridget Thompson he co-produced and co-directed the prize-winning RHYTHMS FROM AFRICA documentary series which has been shown in Europe, Asia, Australia, Africa and North and South America.

Eugene Skeef is a percussionist, composer, poet, educationalist and animator living in London since 1980. He also works in conflict resolution, acts as a consultant on cultural development, teaches creative leadership and is a broadcaster. In 2003 he founded Umoya Creations; a charity set up to facilitate this international work. Eugene is at the forefront of the contemporary music scene, collaborating with innovative artists like Anthony Tidd, Brian Eno, Bheki Mseleku, Tunde Jegede and Eddie Parker. He has brought his extensive experience, as an advisor, to the Contemporary Music Network. He has also been instrumental in developing the education programmes of some of the major classical orchestras in the United Kingdom, including the London Philharmonic Orchestra (LPO), the London Sinfonietta and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. Eugene's roots are firmly established in his cultural work with Steve Biko, the late South African civil rights leader. As a young activist he co-led a nationwide literacy campaign teaching in schools, colleges and communities across apartheid South Africa. Eugene is part of an international peace-building initiative called Quartet of Peace, initiated by Brian Lisus, a South African luthier. He has composed uxolo (meaning forgiveness, in the Zulu language), specially commissioned for Brian's string quartet of instruments in honour of South Africa's 4 Nobel laureates.

Bridget Thompson is a documentary filmmaker and educationist who made a short film on Ernest Mancoba 'Ernest Mancoba at Home' in 1995. In 2006 she curated an exhibition to commemorate the 100th anniversary of his birth, 'In the Name of All Humanity, The African Spiritual Expression of Ernest Mancoba'. This led to her founding, together with Somali filmmaker, Abdulcadir Ahmed Said, the Art and Ubuntu Trust, a project, dedicated to art education and research into indigenous knowledge in the arts. She has curated several other exhibitions: inter alia, A hot and Quiet Evening, a retrospective of Peter Clarke in Barbados and Ihubo Lengabadi – The Song of the Soil, a collection of Sbonelo Tau Luthuli's ceramic art in Cape Town and Johannesburg. She has conceived and run several national alternative art education projects from the 1980s until now. She makes films on South African art, social history, music and literature and writes on African Cinema and art.

THANKS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to all who contributed to making this publication possible.

Lerato Kuzwayo and Kgomotso Ramushu, both associated with the Lefifi Tladi Archive Project and introduced to the Trust by Jessica Rucell, bring a new pathbreaking intellectual artistic appreciation which, like the best artistic criticism, is a vehicle for learning in and around the subject.

ArtSAT exhibition designer and producer of the final images of the art, Abdulcadir Ahmed Said, brings a sensibility to the choice and juxtaposition of the work which is akin to the artist's as does Lerato Kuzwayo in his thoughtful curation of the sayings/proverbs to accompany the art. Woody Oliphant recorded Lefifi Tladi speaking the proverbs, and curated them together with him. We deeply appreciate her thoughtful contributions.

In Sweden a number of people provided vital help: Anna Kilander photographed the art so it could be selected, Modou Sarho, Nunu Ngema, Anna Kilander and Mbongi Tladi provided much appreciated communications assistance.

We also thank Eugene Skeef, fellow poet and artist, friend of Lefifi Tladi.

We express our deep gratitude to Ezekiel Budeli, master printmaker and a warrior for art, who played a central role together with Lerato Kuzwayo in coordinating the artist's workshops in 2021, which were inspired by Tladi's proverbs, and who passed away in July 2021. We also acknowledge each of the artists who participated in the workshops: Sokhaya Charles Nkosi doyenne of art teachers in South Africa, Justice Mokoena, Muziwakhe Ndlhovu, Tumelo Mokpakgosi, leading paper maker, Grace Tshikuvhe and stalwart of Thohoyandou art teaching Avhashoni Mainganye.

Thanks are due to Art and Ubuntu Trust board members, Zubeida Jaffer (chair) Ben Mokoena, Nyanisile Jack and Vusi Mchunu. Vusi Mchunu urged the Trust in 2017 to do a retrospective exhibition on Lefifi Tladi. A full retrospective is needed, but this modest step towards fulfilling his encouragement was made immensely pleasurable through the contact it afforded with Lefifi Tladi himself to whom the greatest thanks are owed.

We gratefully acknowledge Yonelisa Jacobs, Lydia Dreyer and Wendy Smidt in the Art Ubuntu office.

Thanks to Mongane Wally Serote and Shekesh Sirkar for inestimable assistance.

Finally, it was a quest to find saxophonist Ezra Ngcukana's friend, with whom Lefifi Tladi had performed in Dashiki and who performed a poem for Ezra at his funeral that led us to Lefifi Tladi in Mabopane. Thank you gentle, genius Ezra for introducing us to Lefifi Tladi.

DITAOLA DI A ITLHATHOLA

The Oracles are Self-Deciphering

An Art and Ubuntu Trust (AUT) Publication

ART AND UBUNTU TRUST

Produced as part of:

ArtSAT Programme
ARTS EDUCATION ONLINE

With funding support from:

sport, arts & culture
Department:
Sport, Arts and Culture
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

PRESIDENTIAL
EMPLOYMENT
STIMULUS

National
Arts Council
an Agency of the Department of Sport, Arts & Culture

My people we are pure nature
Civilisations that cause nature to bleed are inhuman
Today nature vomits us
By nature, nature is not evil
Nature is humane by nature
Nature, by its own nature, has no scars
Nature is a refined sculptor

Lefifi Tladi

ISBN 978-0-639710-58-7
9 780639 710587

Art and Ubuntu Trust