

Blessing Ngobeni opens up studio in celebration of SBYAA

JOBURG – Renowned visual artist, Blessing Ngobeni, celebrates 2020 Standard Bank Young Artist Award and print exhibition with intimate party at his studio.

February 17, 2020



Mpho Moloto

2 minutes read



Thebe Ikalafeng goes one-on-one with Blessing Ngobeni. Photo: Jerri Mokgofe

2020 Standard Bank Young Artist Award for the Visual Arts recipient, Blessing Ngobeni is one of South Africa's most innovative and talented artistic individuals – changing the face of South Africa's creative industry.

Over the weekend, the renowned visual artist celebrated his artistic journey at an intimate party at his studio in Victoria Yards. The celebration does not only coincide with his 2020 Standard Bank Young Artist Award for the Visual Arts but also his print exhibition, *Study Song of Chicotte*, a re-imagining of his 2016 exhibition of the same name.

Conversing with renowned brand builder and thought leader, Thebe Ikalafeng, Ngobeni revisited his journey to being one of the country's acclaimed visual artists and the courage it takes to showcase what goes in his head in the form of colourful and conjectural works that speak on the human condition – socially, politically, and economically.

"I've stayed a lot in townships, I've looked at the life in townships, especially Alexandra – it's a life of a maze – where people try to get through all these passages to get to work or to get home. That confusion is similar to life and if you can't position your way to get through then you're stuck in the same place," Ngobeni said.

In the 2016 exhibition, the visual artist used the chicotte (a French word used to describe a whip used by colonialists in the 19th century) as a metaphor for slavery and not just historical slavery but slavery of the mind, the spirit – in the country, our relationships, and ourselves.

Through the new series of hand-coloured linocuts, Ngobeni revisits the metaphor through the use of linocuts which offer a graphic re-interpretation of the artist's large, bold, and complex collages on canvas – rendering the familiar images in softer tones of blues, purples and greys.

The linocuts offer an intimate conversation with Ngobeni, a quiet moment to reflect on his past statements, future ambitions and immediate realities.

"We tend to neglect unity. What I'm dying to do through my work is to rewrite the idea of unity – as Africans we need to unite and protect our economy, finances and having a sense of food security amongst us and be able to share," said Ngobeni.

Speaking on the multiple layers innate in Ngobeni's work, Ikalafeng said the artist's unpretentious, deep and unmatched talent speaks boldly to the power and reflection of our times and hopes.

"The multi-layers are really the diversity of us. He speaks beyond South Africa and embraces the whole continent in his work," Ikalafeng said.

This year marks 36 years of Standard Bank's sponsorship of the SBYAA and sees each of the young artists receiving a cash incentive, as well as a commission to premier a new work or exhibit on the Main Programme of the 46th National Arts Festival, taking place in Makhanda (formerly Grahamstown) from 25 June to 5 July.

"My message is getting across. Getting that recognition shows that I'm stretching my muscles and I'm becoming part of the art dialogue in a bigger platform and I'll use that to my advantage and showcase my best," Ngobeni said.

Browse below for a glimpse of what went down at Blessing Ngobeni's VIP Studio party: