

# TO BE young, gifted and black

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American artist Hank Willis Thomas has returned to South Africa to curate **To Be Young, Gifted & Black**.

For the Goodman Gallery's latest blockbuster, Thomas brings together a group of global artists who "investigate critical moments in the interconnected histories of global black life" to create "a global rallying call, unifying humanity around an essential truth".

It's a truth, the show demands, that is not only a reminder but a call to action born of the zeitgeist, of a new generation of people who are demanding their rights - that #BlackLivesMatter.

During a visit to the gallery this week, Thomas told #Trending:

"Having been here [South Africa] several times before, and realising that there are so many ways that the work is in conversation with work that's happening all over the world, I was interested in showing a diversity of cultural and historical perspectives.

"I wanted to expand the idea of who is represented and who has the right to represent ... What is blackness? Is it limited? Whose territory is it?"

One work in particular, *Poderosa de Bom Jesus* - a photograph by Angola-based Kiluanji Kia Henda - really plays with what answers may come out of these questions. The image at first appears as a standard anthropological depiction of an African warrior in the fields.

A closer look reveals it to be a work that layers a fascinating story of Kia Henda's

subject with wit and irony, subtly analysing postcolonialism, identity, politics and modernisation in Angola.

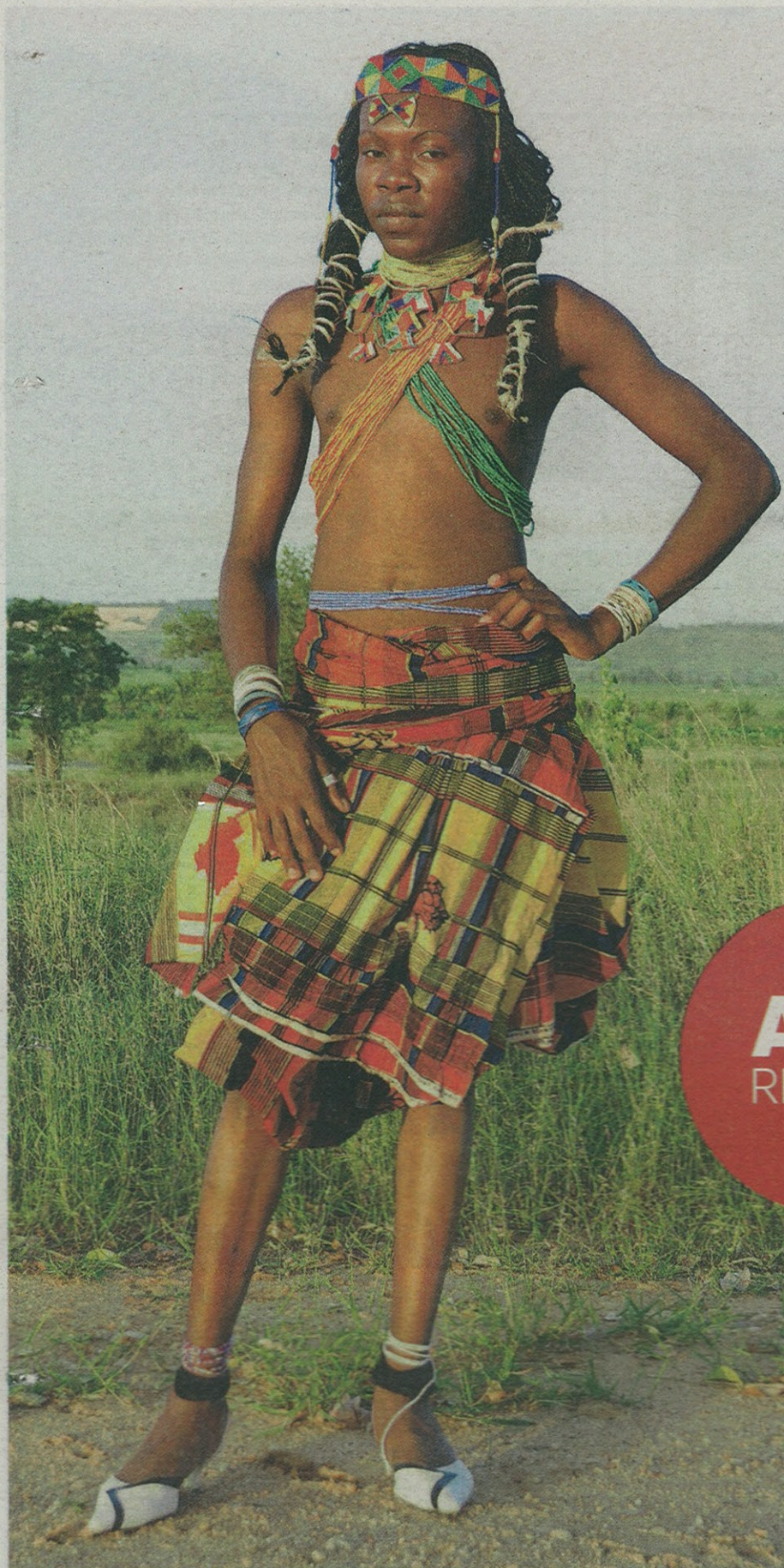
Says the artist: "I visited the Mumuilas in south Angola, a nomadic people who live essentially off their cattle and subsistence farming. The war had already been over for five years. The country was changing and I wanted to look at the effect of the recent economic growth on ancestral cultures, on how the lives of the people in the most isolated areas had been affected ... When I returned from the journey, I sat at a bar one night and drank a beer. While I was there, a group of 10 transvestites with a leader called Poderosa turned up."

In the gallery, I look again at the picture hanging on the wall. The woman has no breasts. Poderosa is a man.

"It was amazing, like a revelation. Normally, you would have thought that transvestites in the middle of such a poor neighbourhood would have been the victims of obvious and violent prejudice. But on the contrary, people of that sexual persuasion live there very freely."

He proposed to Poderosa that she dress up as a Mumuila. "The idea ... was to create a trap, as much for the foreigner and his search for the exotic and 'real' Africa, the person who lives in delirium with ancestral exoticism, as for the national discourse aimed at defending traditions - a discourse adopted by those who, in fact, have no idea what its traditions are and are already imbued with Western culture and capitalism, and at times use this discourse about traditional values as a means of political opportunism."

● *Young, Gifted & Black* runs at the Goodman Gallery in Joburg until November 11



ART  
REVIEW

**PODEROSA DE BOM JESUS** The twist in artist Kiluanji Kia Henda's image is hard to unsee once you see it  
PHOTO: KILUANJI KIA HENDA