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Jabulani Dhlamini *Taba Dimahlong, Mzimhlophe Soweto, 2018. Pigment inks on fiber paper*

Hidden Soliloquys: Jabulani Dhlamini's 'iQhawekazi'

Jabulani Dhlamini

By Nolan Stevens

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Jabulani Dhlamini's 'iQhawekazi', currently on show at the Goodman Gallery, was first released in the Financial Times *Millennials* edition, where he was named one of the best young photographers globally. This was an inclusion which saw him being the only African featured in the list of nine photographers. The series, which was born from moments surrounding Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's funeral, is the most recent example of images by Dhlamini that are as much inspired by contemporary South Africa as they are by his upbringing, but also widens the scope of this photographer's works. This is a broadening which his gallery plans to expand vastly upon when this exhibition travels to Goodman Gallery Cape Town; where it aims at not only showing the series in its entirety, but also to show images from Dhlamini's recent residency.

Where Dhlamini's 'iQhawekazi' differentiates itself from the multitudes of images that were taken during Madikizela-Mandela's funeral, is evident in his approach and processing of her passing. Dhlamini describes his mindset and thought process whilst at the state funeral held at the Orlando Stadium by saying: 'I wanted to collect the ambiance of the event within me, then to pick up my camera continuing to listen to the atmosphere – post funeral, but not post mourning.' By making the decision not to photograph during the funeral itself, and resist taking any photographs during the ceremony, Dhlamini was able to seek out what he felt were the pivotal moments of this historic event. In his *Ngakwa Mam Winnie*, four boys sit outside one of the tents a day before Ma Winnie's funeral. Dhlamini describes it as a kind of self-portrait. Dhlamini explains how the innocence of this setting takes him back to 1994 when the country's first Democratic election was held. In much the same way, Dhlamini remembers feeling that the events of that election day were important whilst simultaneously feeling a disconnect to that day's importance due to his youth and lack of political knowledge.



Jabulani Dhlamini *Ngakwa Mam Winnie, Orlando West. Soweto, 2018.* Pigment inks on fiber paper

In *Taba Dimahlang*, which was taken in Soweto moments after Madikizela-Mandela's body left the funeral, and during the heavy auspicious rain, would at first glance seem to be out of place. This image's shallow depth of field taken of a bare wall seems to have two objectives. The first, and, perhaps, the most obvious of these is to evoke the mood and atmosphere of this moment. Dhlamini brings the droplets of rain on a window pane into focus, which nods to the emotional spiritual weight of that moment. In stark conceptual contrast to this, is the importance of the blurry soft background behind the rain. With the bare wall, Dhlamini seems to reveal Madikizela-Mandela's marginalisation, both as a political figure and as a woman. Dhlamini explained to me, 'Mam Winnie's story is the story of most women who aren't seen or heard in societies and cultures. In most townships there are images or signs of icons like Steve Biko painted on the walls, but here, in her home township there are none.'

The appreciation and accolades that this series has enjoyed are undoubtedly due to this artist's ability to weave silent shudders and echoes of the past into his static unassuming images of the present. Whether in his grappling with the effects of Sharpeville on his family and community or in his recent engagement with the subject of slavery during his residency in the Reunion Islands one can't help but notice the commonality in the photographic projects which Dhlamini presents. He has an affinity for capturing moments which appear at first to be unimportant, but with further scrutiny reveal hidden layers beneath the surface which reverberate with whispers of pain, trauma, reflection and healing. These whisperings are as present in the modest selection of images which make up the 'iQhawekazi' show.



Jabulani Dhlamini *Dube Hostel. Soweto, 2018.* Pigment inks on fiber paper

Another example can be seen in his image of Dube Hostel which was shot a day before the funeral. With these decaying structures Dhlamini references the phrase 'upahla luwile' (when you lose a mother the roof of the house has fallen). It alludes simultaneously to both the political abandonment of the people by those in power, as well as to a patriarchal social abandonment of the female sector of the country. Dhlamini sheds light on the injustices of this country's dark past, by reminding the viewer of the living conditions that were endured by those forced to work far from their homes, but also asks questions of failures of a post-1994 government which saw RDP housing promises not being kept. Both readings of this image show how deep the effects of an unstable political framework can have on its society.

The soliloquys hidden within the perceived mundanity of Jabulani Dhlamini's work have much to say if one listens to the murmurings beneath the surface of these images. By peering a little closer into the scenes you can feel the shudders that ripple out from his works.

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