



City artist Haroon Gunn-Salie features in CNN programme

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South African sculptor Haroon Gunn-Salie, who sets out to further social change through his art, appears in an episode of the CNN International programme African Voices, which is to be aired today at 12.30pm EAT. Photo: Supplied

Cape Town – In this week’s episode of the CNN International programme African Voices, Cape Town-born artist and activist Haroon Gunn-Salie talks about furthering social change through his art installations.

Gunn-Salie grew up in Cape Town in a family of anti-apartheid activists, who have influenced his work.

“Growing up, I always thought I was going to become an activist... a lawyer. But, somehow, I got pulled to graffiti and ended up studying art.

"And in my professional life afterwards, I have always looked back to the principles of what makes graffiti so unique and so special, and try to use (them) in my work, which includes trying to communicate large and complex issues in society to mass audiences," he says in African Voices.

Gunn-Salie was announced as this year’s recipient of the coveted FNB Art Prize, which enabled him to exhibit his work at the FNB Joburg Art Fair, held at the Sandton Convention Centre.

He gained international exposure this year when his installation of sculptures, called Senzenina, which depicts the mineworkers who were slain in the Marikana Massacre, was displayed in London’s Regent’s Park alongside the work of renowned artists.

The Marikana mineworkers in the installation crouch on the ground, appearing vulnerable, before being fired on by police. Thirty-four mineworkers were shot dead, and at least 78 wounded, in the massacre on August 16, 2012.





going through in society.

“What I do, the work I really do, that’s on the ground. That’s with people. And somehow, I found no better way than using art as a communication device...

“It is what’s at the core of each project, and action, and ongoing dialogue, that I do. It’s social activism,” he says in African Voices.

“Personally, I think art is everything. I don’t believe art is so special. I believe every single human being on this planet is an artist.

“When we decide to do something, it always requires the other. That’s collaboration. Art is expression. Art is freedom. Art is being unburdened by chains. Art is not on a wall. Art is in real life.”

Gunn-Salie said Senzenina was “a reflection space, presenting the Marikana massacre. The installation really tries to combine archival and site recordings, and put together an experiential space that transports viewers to the scene on the fateful day”.

“I think I won the prize because the work is much bigger than me. I didn’t put forward a collection of artworks. I put forward an experience.”

While his work is hard-hitting, Gunn-Salie tells African Voices that it is also about hope.

“I believe Africa is overcoming its past... we have centuries and centuries of baggage that we have to not only do away with, but we actually have to lose that baggage to build something.

“And that puts us in a very liberating position, somehow, where we can make this Africa what it needs to be. As long as we are not perpetually reminded about our inferiority in that past, I think we can achieve an Africa for all.”

On his hopes for the future, Gunn-Salie says he plans to engage with more diverse audiences.

“What’s next is to go deeper... particularly to cause more trouble. I think that we need more loud democracies, we need more activism, and that’s what I want to do. I want to keep going.”

