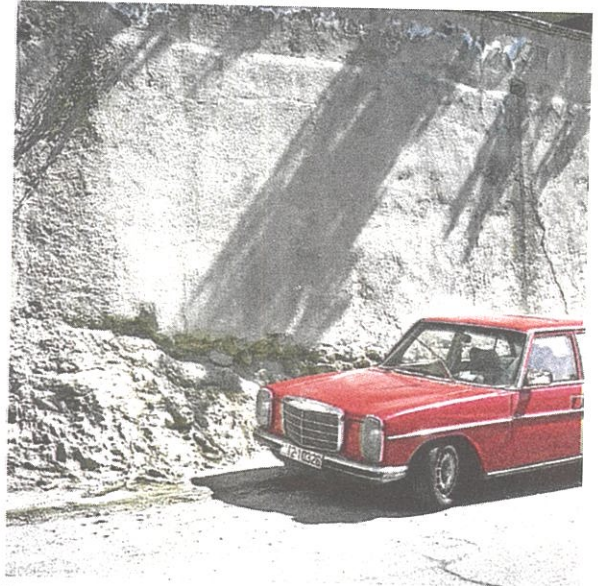
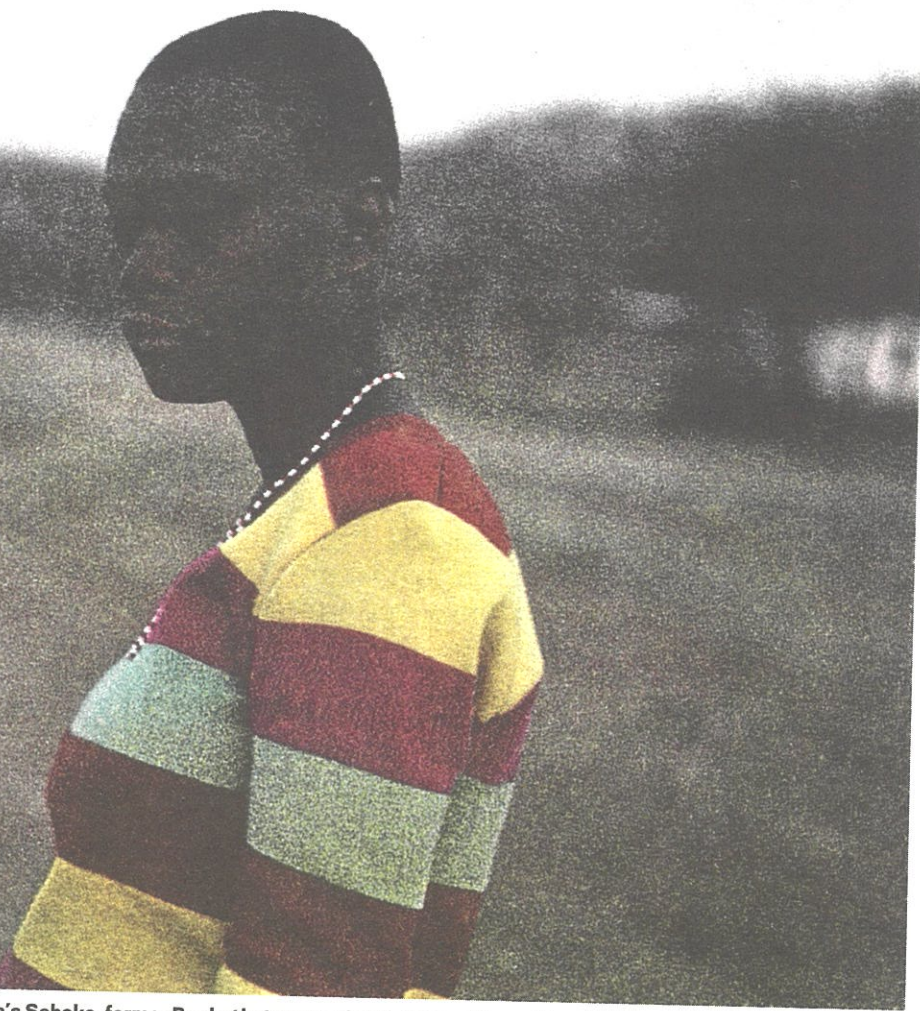


REVIEW
Sunday Times



Clockwise from above: Thabiso Sekgala's *Sehoko*, former Bophuthatswana, 2010; *Second Transition*; *Lady in Red*, Mara Camp, Amman, 2013.

ART CONVO

Two curators talk about two exhibitions in Joburg and the different issues they raise

While everything that's anything art-related seems to be taking place in Cape Town this month, two different yet equally refreshing shows are on at Joburg's major commercial art spaces. Goodman Gallery hosts *Bôna*, their first exhibition by late photographer Thabiso Sekgala since his death in 2014. Sculptural painter Dada Khanyisa presents *Good Feelings* at Stevenson, their first solo show in Joburg. Despite how disparate these two shows are, they both speak to ways of seeing and being seen.

On this page, Londi Modiko and Lara Koseff exchange views on notions of visibility. Modiko is a curator and art adviser with a decade of industry experience including at Goodman Gallery, WHATIFTHEWORLD and David Krut. She runs an art advisory, specialising in contemporary art from southern Africa.

Koseff is a curator and writer based in Joburg. After eight years at Goodman Gallery she began an independent career with a research interest in art and ideology in the Global South. The two work to establish platforms for independent projects, including last year's *UNDERLINE* show at the Museum of African Design.

Lara Koseff (LK): Let's start with Dada – their work has been seen in public spaces in the city. They've also shown internationally on platforms like Art Basel Miami Beach. They've collaborated with major brands. What's different about a solo show at Stevenson?

Londi Modiko (LM): Dada doesn't have a narrow view of how their work should be seen. Regarding appropriate places for work to be viewed, I've always thought, who makes these rules, who are they for? The benefit of a commercial gallery is that a represented artist has the freedom to share their voice without the concern of censorship. A commissioned mural has to tick boxes that fit the commissioning institution's mandate but an exhibition in a gallery space is limited to a

certain demographic. With this in mind, it's wonderful that Dada is open to showing in a variety of contexts.

LK: Yet art censorship has played out remarkably here. Do you think that a gallery show still allows Dada to face more subversive subject matter?

LM: Yes, this is where Dada can go wild. **LK:** This notion of showing everywhere is interesting in relation to Grada Kilomba's first exhibition with Goodman. People questioned what it meant for an artist tackling post-colonialism to show in a "white cube". Kilomba explained that her aim was to disrupt context, to redefine spaces, politics and language. In the case of Sekgala, though, decisions on where and when his work is shown have to be made on his behalf, he's not around to answer questions. But if his estate weren't being handled by an entity such as Goodman, would his work be shown at all?

LM: The visibility of a late artist's work being controlled by other people can be problematic if not handled carefully. In Sekgala's case it's a necessity. Fortunately, in this instance the curator, Teboho Ralesai, is a black man. He hasn't necessarily lived the same experiences as Sekgala but has some form of commonality with the artist.

LK: When I spoke to Ralesai about the show he said he used his first language for the title, *Bôna* (which has dual meaning in Sesotho: either "see" or "them"), even though Sekgala was Pedi. He admitted to taking a subjective approach towards putting on the show.

LM: He's close enough to it and is able to handle the work with the right sensibility.

LK: At the time Sekgala died there was already an awareness of his work internationally. The art world mourned his loss. His way of tackling issues of homelands, the second economic transition and movement between constructed borders was unique. The Walther Collection in New York and Neu-Ulm and the Hayward Gallery in London



Top to bottom: *Untitled [WiFi Daisy]*, *Untitled [O Grand Joh]*, *What a Prick*. Images © Dada Khanyisa. Courtesy of Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg

subsequently hosted posthumous exhibitions. But although these shows gave Sekgala's work global visibility, he wasn't there to advise on how they were put together. What's happening at Goodman, with a show curated by someone more intimately linked to the artist's lived experience, is not happening at major spaces in the West, where the curators are relatively detached from various contexts.

LM: Ralesai had input from other curators such as Justin Davy as well as Sekgala's friends and family. He made compelling choices. Rather than presenting work according to distinct essays, he drew out themes of social borders, inherited barriers that are ideologically outdated but still have a devastating impact, creating an environment of othering and inequality. Sometimes, the point of art is to educate. That's why these subjectivities need to be visible in different contexts. The entry point to Dada's work is beauty, they draw you in by presenting technically complex, formally exquisite work which is captivating. And then you look closer: there are queer characters, people who are not subscribing to gender binary. These are people who are black, beautiful but who are also complicated. Dada opens up this world, black kids having fun and existing on their own terms, being consumed by the Internet and navigating this new world.

LK: But there's a layer underneath this? **LM:** Yes, Dada has always brought up associations with Gerard Sekoto for me. They both make beautiful work and share with the world the lives of black people in a very particular way. Sekoto chose a vibrant colour palette, which wasn't expected in the era of apartheid. His work was a depiction of the black experience, its joys, trauma and darkness. Dada often does this as well. If you look closer there's a complicated narrative. This adds to the way in which all of their works are open to interpretation. They want you to make up your own story by following the nuances, saying something about how we all individually see things, what associations we have, what we can learn from each other. **LK:** You need to look closer to learn anything.