

MOSHEKWA LANGA

BORN 1975, SOUTH AFRICA; LIVES AND WORKS IN AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS

An artist not afraid to draw from a life lived in-between places—physical, mental, and otherwise—Moshekwa Langa creates drawings, photographs, videos, and installations that are poetic, personal, and deeply engaged with the larger world of art, politics, and popular culture. He often uses materials at his immediate disposal, including plastic bags, colorful yarns, masking tape, cement bags, and paint. In the same way that he layers diverse materials, he piles up meanings and references that are often cryptic and ambivalent yet resonant. The viewer is left to decode his artworks, which intrigue yet deny easy translation or classification.

Langa maps a complex diasporic identity that has taken him from rural South Africa through Johannesburg to his current sojourn in Northern Europe. He sometimes refers to himself as “an inside-outsider,” never truly fitting in anywhere and caught between his self-imposed exile and nostalgia for where he’s been. His color-drenched drawings often include enigmatic riddles related to this in-between life: “no body”; “imagine that you are here”; “uncertainty as your guide.” Each phrase is a reminder that meaning is slippery and we are all on the verge of un-belonging as the world changes around us more quickly than we can acclimatize to it. However fragmented and unstable, Langa’s universe also engages with the realities of daily life, both in his choice of earth-bound materials and in his subject matter. His video installation *Home Movies: Where Do We Begin* (2001) includes a quietly poignant scene showing only the feet of people as they board a public bus in his hometown of Bakenberg. We catch glimpses of a missing sock, a bit of shawl almost dragging on the ground, a bulging shopping bag, a walking stick, and the smart trouser legs of various passengers. Like much of Langa’s work, this scene invites the viewer to spin a narrative of his or her own from the clues the artist provides, each leading to many possible destinations.

Langa has had solo exhibitions at the Centre d’art contemporain, Geneva, Switzerland (1999); The Renaissance Society, Chicago, Illinois (1999); and the Rembrandt van Rijn Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa (1995). He has participated in numerous group exhibitions, including *The Short Century: Movements in Africa, 1945-1994* at Museum Villa Stuck, Munich, Germany (2001); the 2000 Gwangju Biennale, South Korea; the XXIV Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil (1998); and the 1997 Johannesburg Biennial. In 2001 he was awarded the FNB Vita Art Prize in South Africa.

—Olukemi Ilesanmi