



Figures and Fictions: Contemporary South African Photography

Sponsored by Standard Bank

12 April – 17 July 2011

The first UK exhibition of contemporary South African photography from the last ten years will be shown at the V&A this spring. *Figures and Fictions: Contemporary South African Photography* will feature over 150 works by some of the most exciting and inventive photographers living and working in South Africa today.

The exhibition will present the vibrant and sophisticated photographic culture that has emerged in post-apartheid South Africa. The works on display respond to the country's powerful rethinking of issues of identity across race, gender, class and politics. The photographs depict people within their individual, family and community lives, practicing religious customs, observing social rituals, wearing street fashion or existing on the fringes of society. All the photographers question what it is to be human at this time in South Africa.

The 17 photographers in the exhibition range from established practitioners David Goldblatt and Santu Mofokeng, mid-career stars Pieter Hugo and Zwelethu Mthethwa to a new generation, fresh to the international stage, including Zanele Muholi and Hassan and Husain Essop. Each photographer will be represented by one or more series that imaginatively question the conventions of portraiture, ethnographic studies or documentary photography.

Co-curator Martin Barnes said: “*This exhibition will show the range and variety of politically-engaged fine art photography arising from a captivating period in South Africa’s history. These photographers are at the forefront of photography emerging anywhere in the world today and we are delighted to gather them all together for this first major exhibition showcase of the contemporary South African scene.*”

All aspects of life including sex, ethnicity, race, gender, religion, occupation and class were regulated by law until the end of Apartheid rule in South Africa in 1994. For nearly 50 years the separation of races was enforced, with people categorised into 'black', 'white' and 'coloured'. As the first wave of post-apartheid euphoria has begun to fade, the country's photographers are responding to the challenges of establishing a pure democracy in South Africa's fascinating and fraught political context. Many of the works represent subjects who compose themselves for the camera, asserting new-found dignity and distinction.

Some works in the exhibition reference the types of anthropological study that was historically used to classify people into fixed racial and ethnic groups after photography arrived in South Africa in 1840. In the struggle against Apartheid, photography was used by activists as a documentary medium and contemporary South African photographers self-consciously engage with this history by documenting South African life but also inviting the viewer to read their own stories into the works.

Figures and Fictions: Contemporary South African Photography is co-curated by Tamar Garb, Professor of Art History at University College London and Martin Barnes, Senior Curator of Photographs at the V&A.

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors

- The exhibition takes place at the V&A from 12 April – 17 July 2011 in the Porter Gallery, the V&A's gallery for contemporary exhibitions and installations
- It is open daily 10.00 – 17.45 and until 22.00 every Friday
- The exhibition co-curators are Professor Tamar Garb from University College London and Martin Barnes, Senior Curator of Photographs at the V&A
- The V&A has the oldest museum photography collection in the world and holds the UK's national collection of photography
- From 8 April – October 2011, the V&A Photography Gallery will display around 70 black and white photographs by David Goldblatt made during the Apartheid era from the Museum's permanent collection

Ticket Information

Tickets: £5 (concessions £4)

For advance bookings visit www.vam.ac.uk (booking fee applies) or call 020 7907 7073

Exhibition Publication

To coincide with the opening of the exhibition, Steidl has produced a hardback book authored by Tamar Garb. For further press information about the book contact Poppy Melzack on 0208 299 8847 or email poppy@steidlville.com (not for publication).

Exhibition Sponsor – Standard Bank

Standard Bank is a leading African banking group focused on emerging markets globally which spans seventeen countries across Africa and fifteen countries outside - including Brazil, Russia and China. Standard Bank was founded in 1862 and now has one of the most significant and representative corporate collections in South Africa , committed to introducing audiences to emerging artists and reflecting the diversity of the arts in Africa. Three of the previous winners of the *Standard Bank Young Artist Awards* are featured in the exhibition, namely Nontsikelelo Veleko (2008), Pieter Hugo (2007) and Berni Searle (2003).

For further PRESS information about the exhibition please contact Zoë Franklin or Amelia MacGregor in the V&A press office on 020 7942 2497 / 2500 or email z.franklin@vam.ac.uk / a.macgregor@vam.ac.uk (not for publication).

A selection of high resolution images is available to download from pressimages.vam.ac.uk

Sponsored by

