

EVERARD READ

TERESA KUTALA FIRMINO

(b. 1993 Pomfret, South Africa)

'We heal by retelling our stories.'

Teresa Kutala Firmino's work negotiates trauma both personal and collective in her everyday life. Her paintings are constructed scenes of the past and present, which are sometimes intertwined. Firmino carefully collects images from magazines, newspapers, historical documents and social media, and places them in colourful, box-like stages. This creates surreally baroque scenes which take place in tightly confined interiors, where the characters have the opportunity to re-enact their stories or construct new ones. This process allows Firmino to create alternative past, present and future narratives of Africa, thus rebuilding her own archive of African history.

Firmino seeks to investigate the trauma that African people in her community and beyond have experienced and continue to experience due to colonisation, civil wars and present day obstacles. Her own stories begin with the collective trauma of Pomfret. Located in the North West Province of South Africa, and the place where she was born, Pomfret is a community of former 32 Battalion soldiers and their families, many of whom settled there after the end of the South African Border War.

Colonial rule and the trauma it induced forced many African people to cling to one another in a common cause, which was to create free and independent countries. Africans, though constantly reminded that they were seen as less than human, held on to what reminded them of their humanity: their communities and their struggles for freedom. Once they achieved a form of independence, though, many civil wars erupted, where the people who fought for the same freedom were caught in a new, raw struggle for power. These civil wars caused a second wave of trauma; suddenly the people one depended on for a sense of community and humanity now turned against each other.

Both the women and men in the Pomfret community experienced these traumas – but it is the women who were subjected to further pain. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is not only experienced by people who have been through a war. Firmino affirms that the women in the community experienced a second wave of trauma: rape, abuse, accidents and torture. The women clung to what gave them a sense of security and humanity, which were their husbands and the community. Many of them experienced abuse, and some were even killed by their partners. Those who survived could not trust the community for support, because society had normalised abuse against women.

Firmino looks at how, despite the trauma they experienced, many of these women had to continue living with their abusers. The artist interrogates what it is about the black female body and mind which, despite trauma, continues to thrive. Is she truly living, or is she in constant melancholy as she exists in the aftermath of colonialism, civil war and betrayal? Is negotiating trauma realising that your abuser is possibly part the bigger of cycle of abuse?

Teresa Kutala Firmino is a multimedia artist, now based in Johannesburg, working with paint, photography and performance. She is part of a collective called Kutala Chopeto, which started as an investigation into their shared history which is linked to the 32 Battalion, the soldiers who were settled in Pomfret after the Border War. She was a finalist for the 2023 and 2024 Norval Sovereign Foundation Art Prize.

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EDUCATION

2018 Masters in Fine Arts – University of the Witwatersrand

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2024 Olondavi Viotembo, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
2023 Owners of the Earth IV, Everard Read, London, UK
Owners of the Earth III: Owelema, Nagel Draxler, Berlin, Germany
Owners of the Earth II: Beyond Victims, Villains & Vixens, Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
2022 Owners of the Earth I: Vissaquelo, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
2021 Manifestation Oku Yongola: Manifestation of Wanting, Everard Read, London, UK
2020 Black Melancholy, solo booth, Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
2019 Pseudo Restitution, World Art, Cape Town, South Africa
The War at Home, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2025 Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
Motherhood, Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
Zandile Tshabalala & Teresa Kutala Firmino, Galerie Nagel Draxler @ LEMPertz, Brussels, Belgium
2024 Winter Collection, Everard Read, Franschhoek, South Africa
Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
Norval Sovereign Foundation Art Prize Finalists exhibition, Norval Foundation, Cape Town, South Africa
FNB Art Joburg, with Everard Read, Johannesburg South Africa
EXPO CHICAGO, with Everard Read, Chicago, USA
2023 What I Feel When I Think About The Cosmos, Everard Read, Franschhoek, South Africa
Norval Sovereign Foundation Art Prize Finalists exhibition, Norval Foundation, Cape Town, South Africa
Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
Arte Fiera, with Osart Gallery, Bologna, Italy
2022 Art Antwerp with Osart Gallery, Antwerp, Belgium
Spring, group show, Everard Read, Franschhoek, South Africa
FNB Art Joburg, with Everard Read, Johannesburg South Africa
ARCOLisboa, with Everard Read, Lisbon, Portugal
Giving Direction: Figuration Past and Present, group exhibition, Strauss & Co, Cape Town, South Africa
Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
Miart Fair, with Osart Gallery, Milan, Italy
2021 Self-Addressed, curated by Kehinde Wiley, Jeffrey Deitch Gallery, Los Angeles, USA
Territories Between Us, Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
In Conversation, Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
Blessing Ngobeni and Teresa Kutala Firmino, Everard Read, Franschhoek, South Africa
Oasis, 25th anniversary exhibition, Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
Ubuntu: I Am Because We Are, curated by the Africana Foundation, WTO Ministerial Conference, Geneva, Switzerland
2020 Staring Straight to the Future (online), Everard Read, South Africa & UK
Summer, Everard Read, London, UK
Odyssey, Everard Read, South Africa & UK
The Portrait Show, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa

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- 2019 FNB Art Joburg (online), with Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2019 Taxidermy of the Future, Luanda Museum of Natural History, Angola
- Turbine Art Fair, with World Art, Johannesburg, South Africa
- Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2018 Emergence, Mmarthouse, Johannesburg, South Africa
- Pomfret Community Stories, Mmarthouse, Johannesburg, South Africa
- Thou Art Women, Mmarthouse, Johannesburg, South Africa
- The People's Exchange, IDC Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
- Now and Then, Trent Gallery, Pretoria, South Africa
- Protagonist: Artists in Response to Sexual Violence, Studio Fracture, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2015 14/15 exhibition, The Point of Order, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2014 The African Utopia Lecture Series, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

CONFERENCES & RESIDENCIES

- 2025 Forster Gallery Artist Residency, Zanzibar, Tanzania
- 2023 Angola Air Residency, Luanda, Angola
- 2020 Fynbosch, Everard Read at Leeu Estates Residency, Franschoek, South Africa
- 2016 The History We Are Told Not to Speak (The History of the Pomfret Community), UNISA School of Arts Conference
- The Untold Story of the Pomfret Community, Black Portraits III, Johannesburg

COLLECTIVE EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 Kutala Chopeto, The Point of Order, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2017 Silences in Between, Goodman Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
- Nirox Sculpture Winter Fair, Johannesburg, South Africa
- The Centre for the Less Good Idea Season 1, Arts on Main, Johannesburg, South Africa
- [South-South] Let me begin again, Goodman Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2016 Boda Boda Lounge Project, South Africa
- Hybrid Culture, MB Studio, Pretoria, South Africa