

Turiya Magadlela: Reinventing Common Cloths

Description



Sipumelelo 1 / Turiya Magadlela / 2016

âI make my work from my personal life experiences.â

From pantyhose to prison sheets, South African artist Turiya Magadlela masterfully transforms the fabric of daily life. Acts of twisting, stretching, layering and stitching lead to intricately layered, abstract designs pulled over

wooden frames, left free hanging or filling entire rooms, leaving traces of performance that hint at underlying aggression or violence. The fabrics Magadlela explores are loaded with their own social and political narratives, investing layers of socio-political and personal meaning into her art. But she is particularly drawn to the mysticism that evolves through the process of making and continues as viewers bring their own histories into the room. She writes, "if I use form (and) emotive fabric. then I leave blank spaces for the viewer to fill in the gaps, so that the work can speak for itself and is not dictated by me."

Born in 1978 in South Africa, Magadlela grew up in the small, rural town of Mdantsane. Times were hard, as Magadlela remembers, "There were no desks in schools and corporal punishment was rife." When she moved on to Soweto, she was the only black child in her entire school, which was a struggle, but her family's creative leanings towards art, music and literature gave her a much-needed outlet.

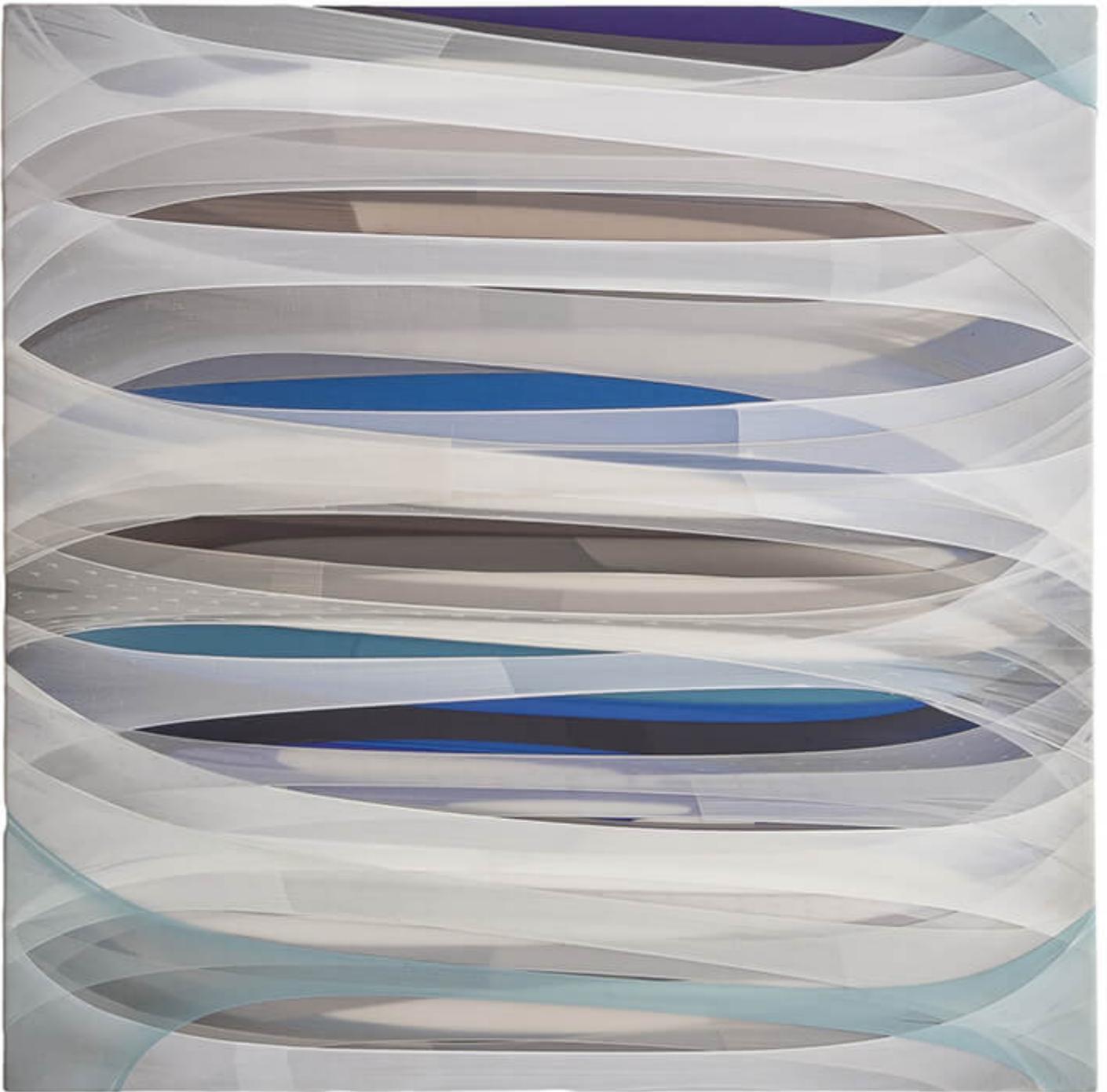


Fat Swan Lake / Turiya Magadlela / 2016

After leaving school Magadlela studied at the University of Johannesburg in 2001, before moving on to the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam. Currently based in Johannesburg, her practice draws on her own life experiences as a woman, mother and black artist living in South Africa. Found fabrics are the

mainstay of her practice, but it is her transformation of tinted tights into multi-layered patterns and grids that has earned her an international reputation. Exploring their inherent associations with women's skin tones and feminine eroticism, she calls pantyhose symbols of "Fragility, transparency, beauty, pain, distortions and liberations of a woman"

The textile series *I Never Made Swan Lake*, 2015, brings cut patches from different coloured tights into mismatched, complex grid formations. Black or brown panels sometimes stand out in a sea of nude tones, hinting at the segregation Madagala experienced growing up in South Africa, while the series title alludes to the pressures on women to conform to idealistic, balletic stereotypes. *My Womb is at Fault*, 2015, hints at deeper, painful wounds from within the artist, as black strands are pulled so tight they begin to rip and fray.



Thula besengiqalile ukulungisa izinto III / Tyriya Magadlela / 2017 / Nylon and cotton pantyhose on canvas

In her ongoing series of gridded designs titled *Kaffersheet*, Magadlela combines traditional white or cream Kaffersheet cloth – once associated with imprisoned kings, chiefs and prophets in South Africa – with more

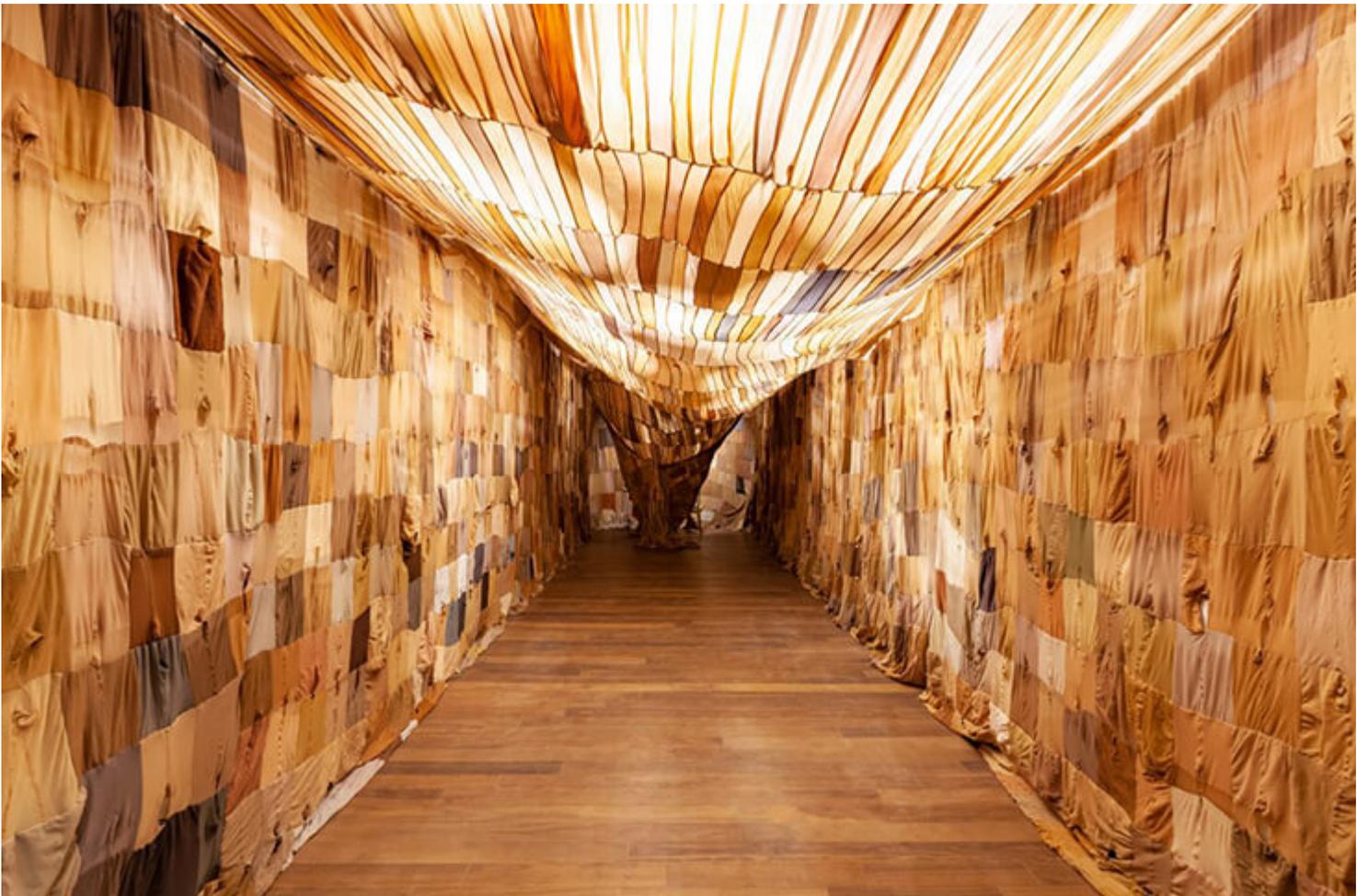
contemporary prison uniform cloths and sheets, sometimes in bright orange tones. Each fabric, both traditional and modern, has its own history of fear, power and control embedded into its fibers. Magadlela likens the series to the incarceration that has blighted South Africa for generations, although she, too, has some experience of prison, when she was held for four hours in solitary confinement, an event that taught her to think universally, "Prison is a reality for everyone. It can dehumanize any individual," adding, "I only know that freedom is not a permanent space."



Yethi Maria II Hail Mary / Turiya Magadlela / 2017 / Nylon and cotton pantyhose, thread, and sealant on canvas

In 2019 Magadlela was selected for the 16th Istanbul Biennial and created one of her most ambitious works yet, a room-sized installation of giant tapestries covering the walls and ceiling. There is a strange beauty to her

sheath-like, suspended grids, which speak as much of patriarchal attempts to oppress and control individual women into order, as the creative tradition of quilting that has been passed through generations for centuries. This complexity is Magadlela at her best, opening up multiple arenas within the same sphere. Magadlela continued to sew in the midst of this womb-like cave, lending the whole space an oppressive atmosphere, while also highlighting the powerful and hard-won freedom in the determined act of stitching, patching and sewing.



Installation view at the Istanbul Biennial in 2019 / Turiya Magadlela

CATEGORY

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2. WOMEN IN ART

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