

METHODOLOGY

VERSION 1.

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THIS METHODOLOGY IS REVIEWED BIENNIALLY.

PRESENTED BY

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OVERVIEW

'The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.'

- proverbs 4:7

Mabuza Studio was born from a place of inquiry and deep concern over the wealth disparities I witnessed during my gap year visits to Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Bulawayo. The sting of existing in parallel worlds – being both oppressed and privileged – remains with me to this day. Working in a crèche filled with joyous Xhosa children transformed my life, especially after a parent challenged me to consider my responsibility as a child of the diaspora. What was I doing with the privilege of carrying a red passport?

My uncle's wisdom comes to mind. Every time I visit Johannesburg he takes me to the city's impoverished areas, not to witness despair, but to see the ingenuity of communities facing systemic challenges. These experiences have taught me that even in the most challenging circumstances, we retain the power to effect change. This revelation has led me to continue to explore how Black communities in both my adopted home and homeland were being denied basic human dignity, and how creativity might offer a solution.

Imagination, after all, is how we build worlds – it begins with a narrative. What we tell ourselves and others shapes how we see and are seen, ultimately influencing our mobility through society. We often deceive ourselves, assuming the position of being all-knowing, as though we don't judge by outward appearances. It is our gaze that has led us to this apocalyptic post-colonial world, where we're all scrambling to heal, repair, and restore. This working methodology is how Mabuza is contributing to a 'world where many worlds fit', allowing equity to take its course.

RECLAMATION

'The solution to dehumanisation isn't deification.'

- Lisa Victoria Fields, *When Faith Disappoints: The Gap Between What We Believe and What We Experience*

In Western societies, there exists an uncomfortable tension around Black cultural practitioners and thought leaders who challenge dominant narratives of Black experiences. This discomfort often manifests as accusations of nationalism, particularly when confronted with Black-only spaces and platforms.

The shadow of the Berlin Conference (1884-1885) continues to loom large, making it challenging for us to embrace difference, divergent viewpoints, and resistance against hegemony. There is no singular approach to addressing the wounds inflicted by Europe's colonial decisions in Africa. Whether practitioners choose to address them through joy, anger, neutrality, or fantasy – each path holds validity. The broader our collective understanding of the past and its contemporary manifestations, the better equipped we are to reconcile with historical truths. As James Baldwin observed, creative expression builds bridges, allowing observers to better understand themselves through our work.

I first encountered Afrocentrism not through formal education, but on Tumblr. This American social platform opened my eyes to a new way of seeing that captured my imagination. Through its digital corridors, I discovered diverse expressions of Blackness – from fashion and music to beauty, film, architecture, sculpture, and design from around the world. My blog became a curated space where I collected these varied perspectives, spanning Europe, the Caribbean, the American South, Africa, and North America. To me, Afrocentrism isn't about asserting racial superiority – in fact, African philosophies like ubuntu ngabantu explicitly prohibit this: by stripping one's humanity, I cannot express my own. Rather, it's about placing Africans and their diaspora at the centre of their own narratives, documenting how they engage with their worlds and how the world engages with them.

RECLAMATION

My decision to create Mabuza specifically for Black Africans and their diaspora stems not from a desire for exclusivity, but rather from an embrace of diversity. Consider the vastness of the African continent – a tapestry of distinct identities across countries and regions. Then expand this complexity to include the diaspora, from communities shaped by enslavement to those formed through migration. Factor in the intersecting identities within our collective Black experience, and you begin to grasp the profound diversity of our communities. Our journey of self-discovery is neither about deification nor a quest for supremacy – it's about creating space for our multiplicity of voices and experiences.



MEMORY

Cultural institutions holding African collections present a vital opportunity for active inquiry and agency. While archives simultaneously preserve and erase histories, we recognise their potential for transformation through creative interpretation. By engaging with documents and material culture through film and photography, we expand the possibilities for representing and understanding African and diasporic stories. Our work extends beyond institutional walls – we recognise oral traditions and the land itself as crucial repositories of memory. Through this expansive approach, we enrich collective cultural memories, revealing the depth and complexity of African and diasporic histories, traditions, and heritage that have too often been flattened or overlooked.

VISUAL LANGUAGE

'Language has a dual character: it is both means of communication and a carrier of culture.'

- Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *The politics of language in African literature*

In our world, we exist within a universe of languages and words, fundamental tools through which we construct and perceive our realities. Just like verbal communication, visual mediums – photography, cinema, and fashion – serve as powerful languages that navigate the complex space between invisibility and hypervisibility, challenging the distinction between being merely "looked at" and truly "seen." As Ernest Cole poignantly observed in 1968, photography emerged as a universal language, one that could bridge divides and foster understanding in a world fraught with ignorance and fear. These visual languages have evolved through distinct historical periods – colonial, and decolonial – each leaving an indelible mark on how Black identities, experiences, and cultures are processed and consumed by societies. Through the lens of works like "Decolonising the Camera" and "Photography: Race, Rights and Representation," we witness how photography has been wielded as a tool for both oppression and liberation. Similarly Black African filmmaking have carved out their own visual vocabularies and fashion has revealed how clothing and style can articulate resistance against dominant cultural narratives. Together, these visual languages have become powerful instruments in disrupting societal barriers and challenging established power dynamics, creating new ways of seeing that compel us to critically examine our consumption and understanding of Black cultural representations. Hence why photography, film and fashion our choices of mediums to document and platform historical and contemporary cultural expressions from Black communities.

KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Our pursuit of human dignity demands more than isolated efforts - it requires collective action to transform how we are represented and how we represent ourselves. Knowledge sharing emerges not from a singular vision but from the confluence of many voices: the artists who create, the institutions that facilitate, and the communities whose stories we honour. This collaborative approach ensures we move beyond being mere subjects to be "looked at," becoming instead active participants in our own narrative-making.

Dine & Discuss gatherings celebrate the ancient wisdom that truth flows freely when we break bread together. These moments of shared sustenance create space for the kind of transformative dialogue that once shifted my understanding in a South African crèche, where a parent's question illuminated the weight of transnational responsibility. From Bulawayo to Brixton, these gatherings bring together diverse voices over thoughtfully curated meals, exploring what it means to carry multiple identities and inherit complex legacies in our post-colonial world. We welcome not only practitioners but also art enthusiasts and community members, recognising that the path to visibility requires all of us - creators, curators, and witnesses alike.

Cultural Consortiums and our transnational artist community embody our understanding that Black experience cannot be contained within a single story or perspective. Through meticulous research and relationship-building, we are developing a living directory of African institutions for collaboration, while also mapping European institutions that house African collections. Our WhatsApp network serves as a digital gathering place where artists across borders have access to opportunities, and can support each other's practices, and forge connections that transcend geographical boundaries. This digital thread weaves together local creation and international possibilities.

WORKING GLOCALLY

To work glocally is to understand how local wisdom and global connections can nurture each other, contributing to a world where many worlds truly fit. This approach emerges from my lived experience of moving between parallel worlds, witnessing both the particular challenges faced by specific communities and the common threads that bind our struggles and our dreams across continents.

Our collaborative approach grows from the understanding that even in the most challenging circumstances, communities retain the power to effect change. Like those visits to Johannesburg's impoverished areas that revealed not despair but ingenuity, our collaborations begin by recognising the expertise that exists within communities. We work not as saviours but as partners, understanding that true change emerges from the ground up, nurtured by local knowledge and strengthened by global connections.

Our cultural exchange programmes create spaces where different ways of seeing and being meet through exhibitions and immersive projects. These initiatives bring together artists and cultural practitioners from both continents to explore our collective tangible and intangible heritage. Just as my own journey has taught me to embrace difference and divergent viewpoints, these exchanges enable artists and cultural practitioners to express their unique approaches to addressing colonial legacies. Each exchange becomes a step toward healing our collective wounds, not through uniformity but through platforming diverse paths toward liberation and supporting the growth of Black creative economies in Africa and Europe.

TO CONCLUDE

Mabuza Studio is grounded in the wisdom that curiosity is the beginning of understanding. We move forward not with the certainty of claiming to know all, but with the humility that every answer leads to new questions, every discovery opens new horizons for exploration. This is our story, our contribution to the ongoing work of building a more equitable world.

/Mabuzza

Afrocentric Studio rooted in Public History

Every project starts with a conversation.

Simply email us to get the conversation started. info@mabuzastudio.com |

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