

a colourful
presence in a
monotonous
environment



When people think about South Africa, they think about apartheid. They think about poverty and they think about the animals and the landscapes. All of that is part of South Africa, but it is not all of it. There is a creative industry here that is bold, intelligent, and ahead of its time. That industry is what this zine is about. I was born in Johannesburg. I now live in London, but Joburg is still home. South Africa is my favourite place in the world. I cannot pretend to introduce it to you the way an outsider would. What I can do is say what I see, and bring you closer to the people whose work makes me see it. It is responding to the country as it actually is, with all of its contradictions. The title of this zine comes from a conversation with Chevy Noir. He talks about colour as defiance, about being a colourful presence in a monotonous environment. That phrase stayed with me because it is what every person in this zine is doing in their own way. They are the colour. The monotony is everything that wants to flatten South Africa into a single story. What follows are six South African creatives, in their own words, on their own terms. I have not written about them. I have asked them to speak for themselves.

**A JOHANNESBURG-BASED
FASHION DESIGNER AND
MULTI- DISCIPLINARY ARTIST
WHO GRADUATED WITH AN
ADVANCED DIPLOMA IN
FASHION & DESIGN
TECHNOLOGY. DINEO IS THE
FOUNDER AND CREATIVE
DIRECTOR OF ARTELIER, A
SOUTH AFRICAN PREMIUM
ARCHIVE FASHION LABEL
SPECIALISING IN WORKWEAR
AND UTILITY.**

**DINEO
RAMOTHWALA**



**interviewed & photographed in
Johannesburg, South Africa**

Does your personal history, upbringing or current environment influence your work at all?

Yeah, of course. More than anything, it's the environment I'm currently in — but also where the world is right now. I'm really responding to climate change. It influences me every day in how I approach design.

I find myself designing more for protection because of how unpredictable the weather has become. In Joburg at the moment, we're experiencing really unusual patterns — it's darker, there's more rainfall, and it's not typical for this time of year. So I'm constantly thinking about how garments can function beyond just looking good. They need to protect you — from the environment, from the conditions you're moving through — while still holding that sense of fashion.

What is the biggest challenge you face as a creative in South Africa?

I think the biggest challenge is infrastructure. As a country, we're still catching up in terms of the systems that support the industries we work in.

In apparel and manufacturing, we used to have so many factories — especially in the 70s, 80s and 90s. But a lot of those have shut down due to the economy, job losses and a broader decline in industry. So now we're in a position where we don't really have the infrastructure to produce locally at scale, whether that's for the local market or internationally.

As a result, many designers end up relying on neighbouring countries for production, instead of being able to make work within South Africa itself.

What do you think people outside of South Africa misunderstand about South African creativity?

I think what people are still catching up on is the depth of storytelling. South African creatives have really mastered that.

If you look at the fine artists, or the narratives behind fashion collections — from established designers to emerging ones — there's always a strong sense of story. There's meaning, context, intention. Every piece carries something with it.

I don't think it's necessarily misunderstood — I just think the rest of the world is still catching up. Because every South African creative story deserves to be heard.





A CONTEMPORARY EXPRESSIONIST FROM JOHANNESBURG, DISCUSSES HIS MULTIDISCIPLINARY ART JOURNEY, FOCUSING ON WATERCOLOR AND BURNT LINO. INSPIRED BY ADHD, ANIME, FAMILY, MUSIC, LITERATURE, MYTHOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY, AND PSYCHOLOGY, NOIR EXPLORES THEMES OF IDENTITY, TRAUMA, AND EXISTENTIALISM. HIS UNIQUE STYLE, CHARACTERISED BY UNCONVENTIONAL MEDIUMS AND VIBRANT COLOURS, IS REFLECTED IN HIS NAME, CHEVY NOIR, MEANING A COLOURFUL PRESENCE IN A MONOTONOUS ENVIRONMENT.

**CHEVY
NOIR**



**interviewed & photographed in
Johannesburg, South Africa**

What does being a South African creative mean to you?

South Africa has some of the most talented artists out there, and I feel proud to be part of that. For me, it comes back to freedom of expression. When I first started in the arts, we were always told to go to the Constitution, find a right that resonates with you, and explore it creatively. That idea really stayed with me. I kept coming back to questions around what freedom of expression actually means. The Constitution still informs my work. Being South African means you have the space to be whoever you want to be, and to express yourself however you choose. That freedom is something I value, and something I try to push as far as I can in my practice.

Where do you find your inspiration?

Lots of places. It's something I don't always know how to explain, but for me, especially navigating ADHD, art becomes a way of processing everything. My mind moves quickly, there's a lot happening at once, and I can get overstimulated – but I've come to see that as a kind of superpower. Where some people think in a straight line, I'm thinking across multiple things at the same time, pulling from different directions. So my inspiration comes from everywhere – anime, family, music, literature. A lot of my work is also rooted in mythology, philosophy and psychology. Those alone open up so many worlds, and I'm constantly drawing from them.





A PAINTER BASED IN JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA. HIS WORK IS INFLUENCED BY HIS OWN JOURNEY OF MIGRATION, MOVING FROM MPUMALANGA TO PRETORIA TO JOHANNESBURG, AND THE EXPERIENCES OF COMMUNITY, SPIRITUALITY AND MEMORY THAT CAME WITH IT.

MICHAEL SELEKANE



interviewed & photographed in Johannesburg, South Africa

Are there any recurring themes or messages in your art?

There are themes, but I'd rather call them influences. My work is influenced by moving from Mpumalanga to Pretoria, and then from Pretoria to Johannesburg. I was trying to capture what you go through when you migrate — the challenges, the hardships, but also the joy of it. Through that I saw how people in new areas try to form new communities. People coming from different places, trying to recreate something together. Spirituality also plays a huge role in my work. My father was a pastor, so that background is always there.



Is there anything your work expresses that you struggle to say in words?

Yeah, there's a lot. When I make an artwork, I'm trying to create an awareness of what's going on around me, or to solve some kind of problem. It's more like an everyday documentary, but also dealing with memories. Some things I won't say out loud – I put them on canvas instead. That's also why I work with layers. I make a mark, come back, rework it. I'm trying to say something through that process too.

What are your strengths as an artist from South Africa?

I think I'm trying to tell the real story about our people. I see a lot of artists who aren't being honest when they create – they don't tell the truth. I paint what I see. I paint what's going on in my surroundings, in the community, in South Africa. My work is more like journalism or documentary. I think about what David Koloane and Sam Nhlengethwa did in the 70s and 80s, and I'm trying to reflect that same honesty but for right now, for this time.



A PHOTOGRAPHER AND VIDEOGRAPHER FROM JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA, DISCUSSES HIS JOURNEY IN VISUAL STORYTELLING, INFLUENCED BY HIS UPBRINGING AND EXPERIENCES. HE LEARNED PHOTOGRAPHY AT THE MARKET PHOTO WORKSHOP AND SPECIALISES IN CONCEPTUAL PORTRAITURE, INSPIRED BY THE CITY'S CONTRASTING ELEMENTS. KABELO EMPHASISES THE IMPORTANCE OF CAPTURING THE BRIGHTER SIDE OF JOHANNESBURG BEYOND THE PREVALENT POVERTY NARRATIVE.

**KABELO
MATSILE**



**interviewed & photographed in
Johannesburg, South Africa**

Where do you find your inspiration?

People, life, the city I'm in – everything that comes with it. I'm drawn to Johannesburg in a really specific way. Not just the grimness or the darkness people often focus on, but the brightness within it.

The people, the textures, the energy – there's a kind of joy in the city that isn't always visible. That's what I'm interested in. That's what I try to hold onto and translate into my work.



What do you hope your audience takes away from engaging with your work?

That there's more. There's more to the city than what we're usually shown. A lot of what we see, especially in Johannesburg, leans into what I'd call "poverty porn" — this constant focus on decay, struggle, turmoil. And while those realities exist, they're not the full picture. I want people to see that there's also light, possibility, beauty. That the city holds more than just its hardships. And beyond that, I want people to feel like they can create whatever they want to create — that it's possible for them too.

What do you think people outside of South Africa misunderstand about South African creativity?

That everything comes from a place of lack or pain. That's probably the biggest misconception. Not every artist comes from an impoverished background, and not every piece of work is rooted in struggle. There's a much wider spectrum than that. Especially now, with our generation, we're showing that South African creatives operate with a lot of depth. We're drawing from both local and global references, and that combination gives us something really unique. In many ways, it makes the work even richer.



**A DENIM COUTURE DESIGNER
FROM JOHANNESBURG. SELF-
TAUGHT THROUGH YOUTUBE
AND LATER TRAINED AT
FADISA, HER WORK IS
TECHNICAL, PERSONAL, AND
BUILT AROUND A SIGNATURE
USE OF SAFETY PINS. SHE
TALKS ABOUT THE
GATEKEEPING THAT HOLDS
CREATIVES BACK IN SOUTH
AFRICA, AND WHAT THE REST
OF THE WORLD KEEPS
GETTING WRONG ABOUT US.**

**MIHLALI
MADIKANE**



**interviewed & photographed in
Johannesburg, South Africa**



What is the biggest challenge you face as a creative in South Africa?

I won't speak for myself, because I would consider myself very blessed. I think I have it easier than most. But judging from what I see around the people I interact with, what we lack is mentorship. In South Africa, if you don't know someone who knows someone, it's very hard to navigate your way through the fashion industry. It's hard to find the people who will place you exactly where you need to be – who will connect you to funding for your business ideas, or to other creatives who can help you refine your craft. There's definitely a lack of mentorship if you don't know the right people and you're just starting out with no one to guide you. We need more people who are willing to help and stop gatekeeping.



What do people outside of South Africa misunderstand about South African creativity?

I think they always assume that South African creatives have to make things rooted in a struggle story, or that it always has to be an African print – and there's nothing wrong with that, but they don't understand the versatility within our country. There are so many talented people here. In my humble opinion, people from international countries could learn a lot from South Africans. We have a very deep sense of spirituality when it comes to our craft, and I think that's what makes us stand out. The level of talent in this country is impeccable. It's also very unfortunate that not everyone is afforded a platform to share their work. There are many underground creatives out there.





A PAINTER FROM CAPE TOWN. SHE SPENT TEN YEARS AS A TATTOO ARTIST BEFORE TRANSITIONING TO PAINTING FULL-TIME, AND HER WORK CENTRES ON ANIMALS AND SYMBOLISM. SHE TALKS ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A SOUTH AFRICAN ARTIST TODAY, AND WHY USING YOUR VOICE MATTERS.

**DOMINIQUE
OTTO**



**interviewed & photographed in Cape
Town, South Africa**

nobody else

can go for you



Doige 2000



What are your strengths as a South African artist?

I think as a South African in general, we're exposed to so many dynamics – culturally, socially, naturally. I think it creates a level of awareness and depth in us, sort of inherently, if you're paying attention. And I think what it's given me is the ability to look deeper, to analyse, to feel on a deeper level, to empathise and observe. I think I bring that quality into my work.

I think as South Africans, we have an inherent responsibility to speak out for unjust causes. Because of our history, I think as a white South African, we have extra responsibility to speak out when we see an unjust thing happening in the world. We've naturally benefited from an unjust system. And I think there's a strange rift happening in the art world where there's this notion of "keep your politics out of your art" – which to me is totally incongruous with being an artist, because art is the original social commentary, and always has been.

I think artists in general have a responsibility, on some level, to have meaning in their work. Maybe not extremely political, and maybe not everyone wants to hang extremely political work in their house – I understand that. But to imply that artists don't have the voice, or the right, or the space to be political isn't right. As South Africans, I think we're deeply aware of the importance of using our voices to speak out.

contributors

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understanding
the creative
industry in
South Africa