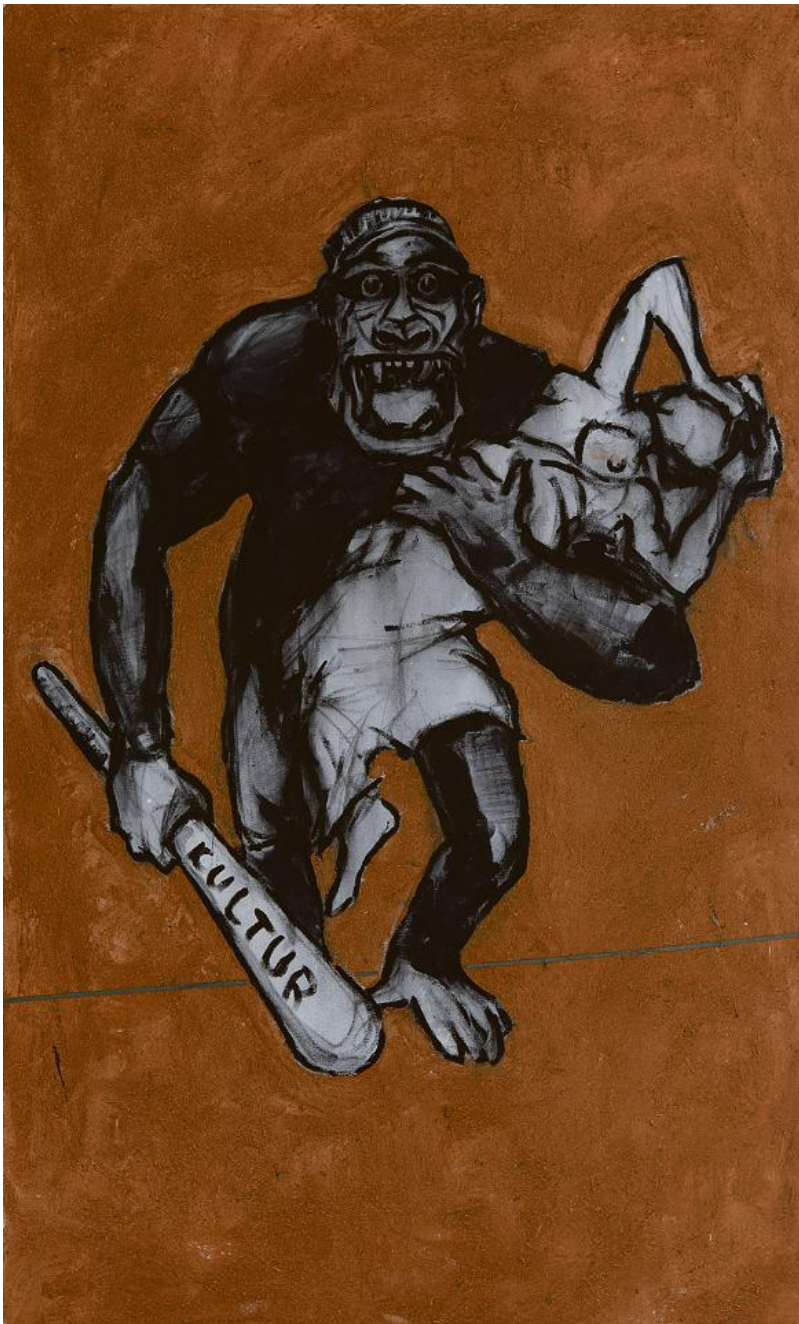


# City Press

<http://www.citypress.co.za/trending-entertainment/the-state-of-our-freedom/>

## The state of our freedom

Lwandile Fikeni @City\_Press #Trending 26 April 2015 10:25

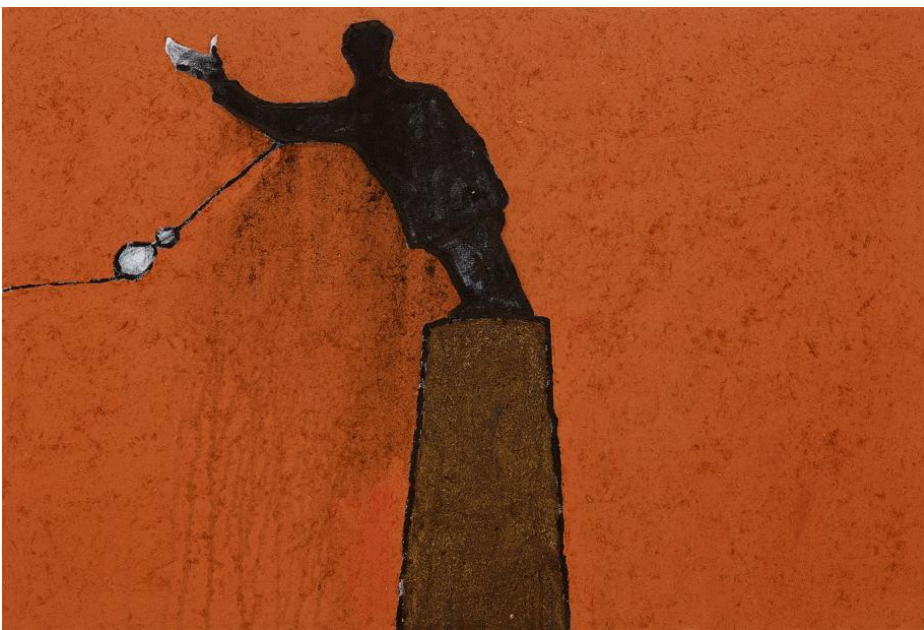


The idea of State is that of a closed system of values. Events and characters in each stage of history seem to move towards a horizon for more, similar, events to take their place within the cycle.

Mawande Ka Zenzile's new solo, *Statecraft*, constructs and deconstructs this repetition of events to instruct the viewer about the interconnectedness of the present and historical order under one dominant value system, that of State.

State in this body of work seems to encompass not only the mechanisations, such as laws and punishment, rights and recourse, the military and executive, but extends to the production of culture as a means through which State takes its true form. In this closed system of values, certain conventions are preserved through repetition. One such convention is violence, which has come to define all of modern history and finds its rightful place at the centre of Ka Zenzile's work.

In the exhibition, history is placed horizontally, its vicissitudes naked to the viewer. The piece *Destroy This Mad Brute* references a World War 1 anti-German propaganda poster depicting Germany as a giant gorilla wielding a club of its kultur (culture), carrying a distressed, half-naked white woman representing the rest of Europe. The composition of the image was later reproduced for the film *King Kong*. Seeing this now, the German empire is not the first thing that comes to mind, but rather the dangerous native coming to rape white women. Propaganda still informs much of the globe's racist imagination.



One of the paintings, as if in conversation with the recent removal of the Cecil John Rhodes statue at the University of Cape Town, depicts the statue of Saddam Hussein as US coalition forces toppled it during the invasion of Iraq in 2003. By juxtaposing this image with that of the Rhodes statue, and the liberal furore that came to the statue's defence, one is pointed to a simple fact that tyranny is still tyranny, in spite of the actors involved.

A repetitive motif of a scarecrow or scarecrow's head is prevalent in most of the works. It abstracts particular actors in history and reproduces them as actors in the repetitive game of the crafting of State ideals.

Most poignant is an image of Congolese revolutionary Patrice Lumumba's last moments before his execution. How many more lives of activists and revolutionaries have been snuffed out for new States to be born? Chris Hani, sadly, comes to mind.

A dark painting of the killing of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 by rebel forces is found next to a painting of the murderous Crusades of the late Middle Ages. The shooting of an unarmed man during the Vietnam War is referenced, but he could easily be an unarmed black man in the US today.

Ka Zenzile doesn't identify the source images in the exhibition, perhaps to indicate that political conflicts and "othering" repeat themselves over time in an ongoing saga of the reproduction of State. In *Statecraft*, money, power and violence – and the violence of power – are ideas that play themselves out over time and we are caught in one particular intersection.



The complexity of the paintings is in the shadowy fading, which points to the repetition of such images over time and how we've become desensitised to the violence of State. This owes largely to the oversupply of violent images in popular culture, which numbs our perception of what is in fact happening around us.

Ka Zenzile seems to suggest we must take ownership of the imagery and the history of this violence, hence the artist uses cow dung as a way of saying: "Although I'm a South African from Transkei, my culture and the State into which I was born bares the hallmarks of the violence of the global State culture."

Statecraft runs at the Stevenson Cape Town until May 30

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