



**Suburbia
Contemporary**

Musa N. Nxumalo

Carrer de Valencia 345, 08009, Barcelona, Spain.
Leipzig | Spinnereistraße 7, Halle 4B, 04179 Leipzig, Germany

www.suburbiacontemporary.com
@suburbiacontemporary

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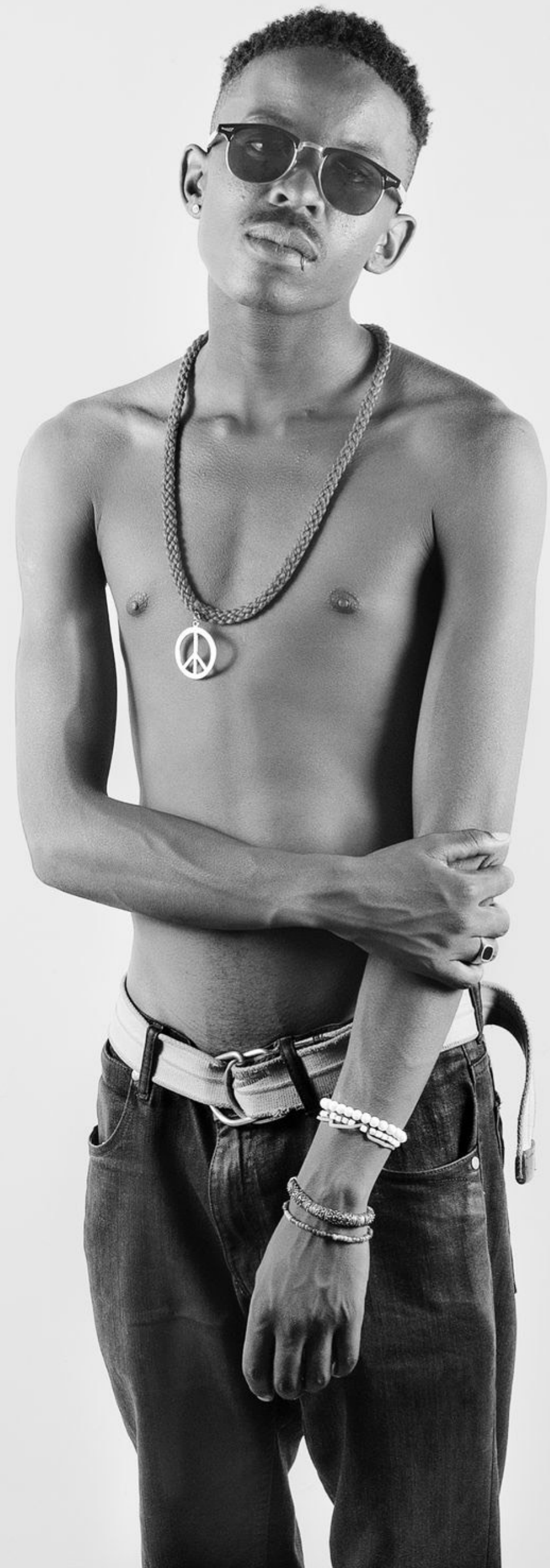
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Musa N. Nxumalo

B. 1986, Soweto, currently lives and works in Johannesburg, South Africa. Musa N. Nxumalo is a photographer, artist and podcaster, currently living and working in Johannesburg, South Africa. Nxumalo considers himself a wanderer who is currently interested in the concept of photography and art making as a form of traveling, discovering and writing.

Nxumalo has been steadily developing a unique visual vocabulary that delicately balances his interests in social documentary photography and fine art. To this end, he astutely employs the black and white 'film' construct in images that courageously consider and capture the appearances and experiences of contemporary black South Africans. This results in a photographic oeuvre that oscillates between great empathetic intimacy and journalistic distance with unmissable humanity.



I can't say I've never knelt before God and asked for
better cards at times to no avail. But I never sat back
feelin' sorry for myself. If you don't give me heaven,
I'll raise hell 'Til it's heaven - S. Carter



*Steve Simelane
(After Sean Carter)*

2025

Sublimation print on white gabardine
and Dtf on black bull denim,
assembled using over locker finishing.
160 x 140 cm
Ed. 1 of 5 + 1 Ap

R 75.000
€ 4000



I told my brother Jung', "Fuck 'em, they gon' go through Hell with us. They don't have the history in the streets that compare with us". Hood niggas, they wanna be us, thugs in the St. Regis - N. Jones



*Morapedi Floyd Manotoana
(After Nasier Jones)*

2025

Sublimation print on white gabardine
and Dtf on black bull denim,
assembled using over locker finishing.
160 x 140 cm
Ed. 1 of 5 + 1 Ap

R 75.000
€ 4000



You dey go your way, the jeje way.
Somebody come bring original trouble.
You no talk, you no act. You say you be gentleman!
You go suffer. You go tire. You go quench!
Me I no be gentleman like that - F. Kuti



*Sanele Moya
(After Fela Kuti)*

2025

Sublimation print on white gabardine
and Dtf on black bull denim,
assembled using over locker finishing.
160 x 140 cm
Ed. 1 of 5 + 1 Ap

R 75.000
€ 4000

Discover a new body of work by photographer, **Musa N. Nxumalo**; a collection of portraits fashioned in the form of flags and pennants. These new photographic works are an expansion and refinement of ideas Nxumalo began exploring around 2020; the work stretches Nxumalo's interest in alternative ways of presenting his photographs, along with his long conceptual explorations around the complexities of the contemporary condition on black boyhood as it struggles to mature into manhood.

Nxumalo continues to hold up images of young black men marred by, and wrestling with how they are seen and shaped by the biases of the popular gaze. Just as he did with earlier work, Nxumalo presents us with select portraits of young black men standing semi-nude with only their sagging pants on, an occasional hat, but no shirts.

He insists on composition and exposure of meaningful skin and flesh. It's at once code of performed bravado as it is a mark of unguarded vulnerability. The picture's symbolic energy carries resonance with jailhouse mugshots in one part, while also flagging the visual grammar of pop cultural iconography with its propensity to fetishize black male figures like these.

Nxumalo, is a photographer who deals in ideas well articulated by African-American academic of black male studies, Tommy Curry who has written about the need for a genre study of "black male death and dying"; To the extent that Nxumalo's flags sign post an invitation for viewers to become "interested in the process of what it means to lose one's life in the course of living". This is to say, what it means to lose one's humanity by being reduced, reified into a shorthand symbol for the specific missteps or failures in one's life - to be made a meme and reduced to a flag.

If we begin with Indian writer, Arundhati Roy's instructive cynical view of flags as bits of colored cloth that power uses first to shrink-wrap people's minds; then as ceremonial shrouds to bury the dead, we find fitting convergence for Nxumalo's metaphor with Curry's call to a humanising ethical and critical engagement. One way to understand Nxumalo's governing trope, is by observing the way it implicates the reductive speak of the social media age to emphasise his conceptual concerns. But first, we need to attend to some of the building blocks of his discourse. The flag, as a symbol along with its myriad uses, the functions of photography in regimes of surveillance, and ideas black manhood wrestling to articulate itself in an increasingly misandrist world burdened with a heritage of anti-blackness.

The flag, and its function in the heraldic codes across the world, is created and deployed to mean and to signal. The flag is shorthand for power's acquisitive capacity. The flag, like border lines, is an instrument by which power delineates included persons and excluded subjects. To be under a flag also means to be subject to its authority, and therefore covered by the meanings it signals.

In social media speak, the flag functions with a comparable reductive shorthand; often deployed accompanied by phrases describing tropes or behavior by which individuals should be flagged as suspicious, avoided, or excluded; and even marked for potential cancellation.

"If he listens to podcasts about high value and alpha this and that... #RedFlag" or "if he grew up in Voslo and drives a GTI... #RedFlag"

In this latest iteration of his work on flags, Nxumalo is also exploring the ways in which shared effort is a kind of performative identity. For instance, he has brought in Anthony Kobane of Sir Anthony Jeans co to share in the efforts to realize the work.. This convergence is not without meaning. For instance, it also codes the symbolic and cultural history of denim as a fabric associated with labour and work.

The laborious process of stitching and patching in the production process is invoked as code for the street vernacular of township brotherhood and the constant need work or produce; Hence to the standard heraldic greeting phrase: *ng'sa pesha-pesha*, or I am still patching things together.

This collaboration has evolved Nxumalos form from the flag as banner to something closer to pennants. The work carries his portraits on one side and quotes and pieces of lyrics by hyper masculine black musicians. Fela Kuti, Jay-Z, Nas and others whose creative practices have emerged over the years as examples of black men publicly wrestling with the how to form themselves into healthy functioning beings; this while also demanding exceptional sexiness, authentic street hard-to-unfuck-with-money-getters, vulnerability romantics at the same time. Hence, to be a young black male in Nxumalo's lens is also about wrestling with a being in a world that keeps sending you mixed messages and crossed flags. — **Percy Mabandu**