

# MAGOLIDE MOON LANDING



## **A CONVERSATION WITH MAGOLIDE COLLECTIVE**

Nisha Merit is an independent curator based between Johannesburg and Berlin.

*"Formed in 2019 by Adilson De Oliveira and Mzoxolo Mayongo, the Magolide Collective is concerned with transforming a barrage of collected reference material – historical narratives, cultural events, and academic texts – into visual renderings that incorporate performance, digital and video media, and more traditional disciplines like printmaking. The duo names this act 'visual alchemy', a notion related to their moniker: 'Magolide' is a colloquial Xhosa term describing someone with gold (teeth, chains, watches) and also references the socio-political histories of Johannesburg, a city literally built on gold – and on the labour of black migrant workers."*

### **Nisha Merit**

...speaking of creative processes, what is your relationship to art and art-making? How did it all start?

### **Mzoxolo Mayongo**

My impetus was always based on resistance in art. Figuring out how to incorporate intellectual stimulation – my curiosity in the human experience and the human condition meant looking at my own relation to what I see. Trying to understand and exploring what it means to be human in these different faculties of our existence, whether it be through spirituality, through the socio-political landscape that informs how we experience our daily life, you know – being. All these different dynamics of sexuality, mental issues, self-identification and breaking away from what we were told to and engaging with

the autonomy of Self. It's in many ways the same thinking processes that my peers are engaging with, but we often don't have the language, we don't necessarily have the spaces to own it.

For me it made sense to find a common ground between the left brain and the right brain, the creative sensibility with intellectual curiosity. But also: how do you take human sciences and how does human sciences live through us? That became my practice and my surrender into the arts was the composition of the two.

### **Adilson De Oliveira**

I'm the son of Portuguese immigrants. My dad is from the Açores, an island off Portugal and my maternal grandmother came from Lisbon, and then subsequently to South Africa. I come from an artistic background, both my grandfathers, as well as most of the men in my family were carpenters or masons. But they would never call it art, because they wouldn't categorise it as that. But the idea of the technician or blue collar worker fits into my practice. Mzoxolo and I met in 2017, but didn't really engage other than on a cigarette break in the [university] courtyard. But we appreciated each other's practices from afar. I worked predominantly as a printmaking technician for quite a few artists. And at the beginning of third year, Mzoxolo said: "I'm going down to the Design Indaba in Cape Town, can we collaborate on transposing my photo-series, 'Ubhuko Be Ndoda' into screen-prints?" It ended up being a crazy five days, lots of Red Bull, chocolates, Coca Cola and cigarette smoke. Usually a print technician goes unrecognised even though you've probably spent hours and contributed to 90% of the production of the work. But then Mzoxolo sent me a picture of the installed work and the placard next to it read Mzoxolo Mayongo and Adilson De Oliveria. That was an amazing moment, because this never really happened before. And he sold the work and split the cash with me. After that in the studio we were: last week was awesome, let's keep doing things together.

**NM**

And Magolide Collective was born...

**MM**

Collaborating has always been present in our individual practices. And I was already, without me noticing, grappling with this idea of the white-male-genius trope within Art History. Because I worked in multiple mediums like performance mediated through photography, sculpture, video art (to name a few), so creating work has never been insular. The idea itself might have been birthed by or channelled through me but the processes from conceptualization to the materialisation of the work is a collaborative effort. But: what does it mean outside of the studio? Does our collective only exist in the conceptualization of the work? Our existence as a collective is throughout, we always work and move as a unit, even though we might not be physically in the same space but our thinking and our practice is always from a collective's point of view.

**ADO**

It wasn't easy to be recognized as a collective within the university system and also institutions often have a hesitancy to work with collectives - how to categorise them or what if they split up? [Magolide Collective] consists of our unique and individual voices and characters within the canon of our collective, but the work is made in unison. We worked even through lockdown, where we could only see each other on Zoom calls, or using WhatsApp to bounce ideas with each other. I just went to Salzburg, Austria, for a Summer Academy and Mzoxolo wasn't able to come. But the work that we produced there was a result of lessons learnt from the pandemic - on how we can work remotely. This is based on physical and geographical limitations we had encountered during that time of the pandemic, subsequently, we have learnt to carry our practice through the digital realm.

**NM**

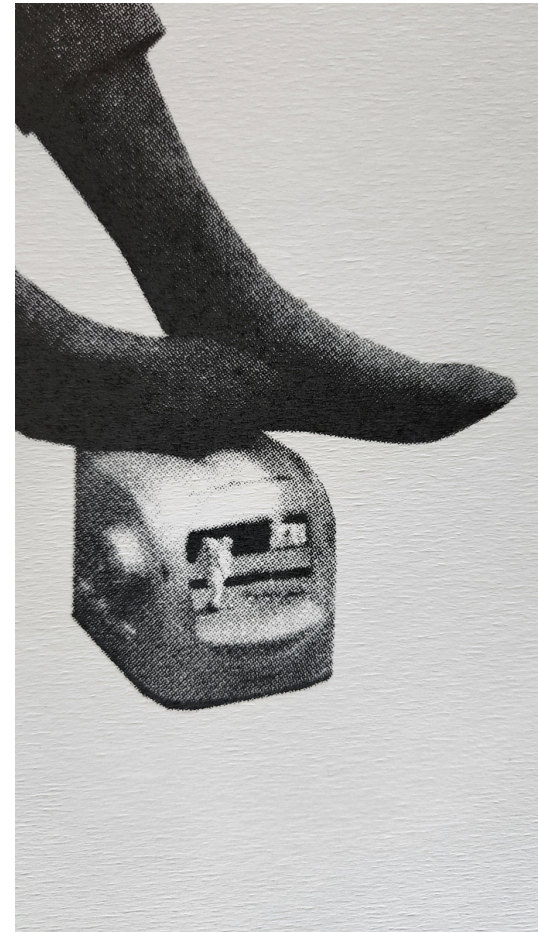
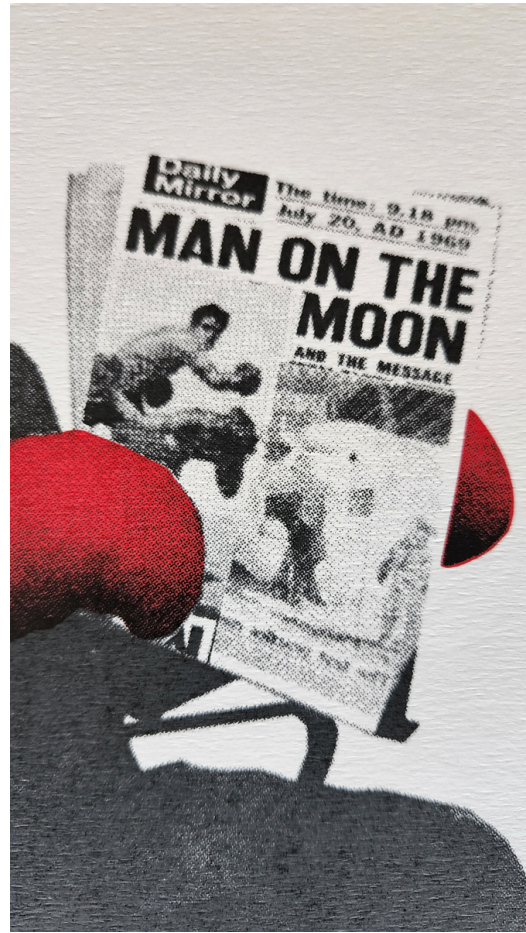
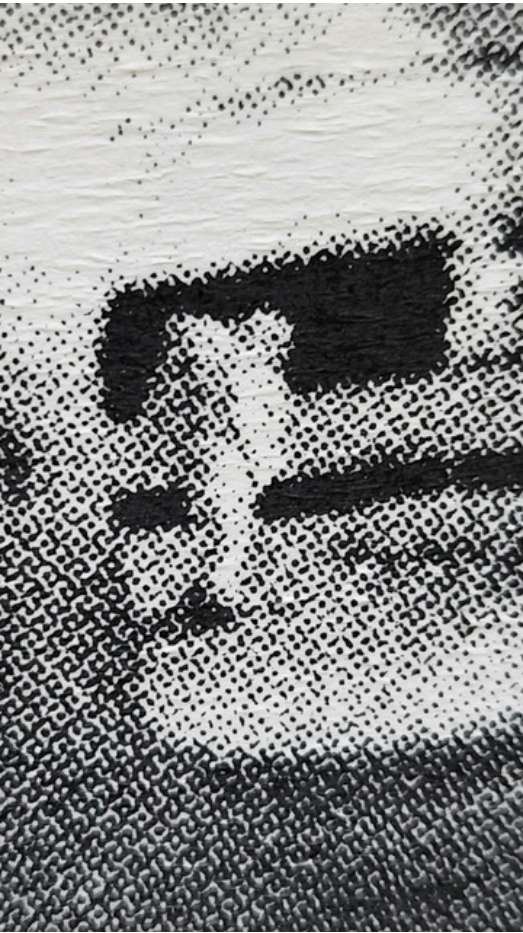
What is your collective practice like, what is the process behind the unified work?

**MM**

We have a system that cannot be properly defined, to a point where you can't really separate a section of the work to say: this is according to this person, because at any point in time we both give input. And because we have various strengths, we are able to pour into each other as well as to bring a balance to the collective and how we practice it. It is a space of connection, not only through the creative perspectives and ways of making but also in terms of how we are as individuals. We respect each other equally. As much as we are both different, we have a common ground and understanding that the collective comes first. So it's engaging with those two spaces of the individual and the collective.

**ADO**

Something really interesting happened in Salzburg, Austria. [South African artist] Tracey Rose, an amazing human being and mentor, was running a course called, 'Provocation and Magical Terrorism'. And you can imagine Tracey in a room with very uptight Europeans, who like structure and order. Part of the provocation was that she would purposely rock up late and start the course at twelve in the afternoon and run until seven pm. Two people left the course because they couldn't deal with it. At the end she was like: we're going to have a lesson at this stream out of Salzburg, which is very beautiful, and we're going to swim. We all went and met there and she just didn't come - on purpose. It was amazing because by the end of the day we had all gotten to know each other on such a unique level that we just inevitably started discussing art and our practices and where we come from and so on. Tracey created that space for us. When the final show happened the following week, it was like this seamless group show in which everybody within the course had a unique understanding



of each other's work and how we could all curate a show which spoke to each other's practice. That in itself was a form of collective practice, and a testament to Tracey's act of, 'Provocation and Magical Terrosim'. And that's what we are saying with collective practice, you don't have to be in the studio to make something happen.

### **MM**

Our practice allowed us to understand that the studio work is us. We can take it anywhere. It's not necessarily the physical space that you inhabit as a creator. And I guess that also prepared us for the pandemic, where we had to negotiate how we work isolated from each other and the fact that we use technology in our practice pushed us even more (Digital Alchemy). It's about implementing systems and ways of how to navigate working outside of the studio and still staying connected. How to exercise creative practice, collective practice by using technology outside of geographical, physical spaces that could be a constriction and turn that into a strategy.

### **ADO**

Art still requires a physical element. So a huge challenge to our practice is finding a way to merge the digital with the physical. For example the artwork we are creating now renders in a physical object (The Wheat-Paste) mediated through augmented reality performance. You got a print up on a wall, but we want to do a performance. All you need is a note that says download the app, scan the artwork and you have a hidden performance in your hands.

### **MM**

In some way that itself becomes a decolonial process of how within the space of performance arts, work has been exhibited and how it's seen conventionally in a particular space where there's safety and security measures. And the question was: how do you take art and put it in people's hands? And the one thing that everybody has is a phone, right? And in art spaces like art fairs or

galleries, there is often a distance that the audience has to the work. But having AR (Augmented Reality) as a new medium in the arts has allowed us to interact with the audience in a more direct way - using their personal devices as part of an act to engage with the work.

### **NM**

For COSMOS you are creating a site specific work that offers a counter reading to the event of the Moon Landing in 1969. What's it about?

### **MM**

'Magolide Moon Landing', is premised on what was happening in 1969, US America, which obviously has become a historical event for all humanity. While it was centred as universal it was imposed on everything else, negating what was happening in Africa at the time. Our work becomes a contestation of centering Euro-American historical events as universal and rather looking at events from the Global South that never made it into the universality of our history. The articles are added as a way to counteract that universality of the moon landing and to engage with the audience in terms of what else was happening not only in South Africa, but in Africa as a whole. Especially within the institutions of knowledge systems, where the tendency is towards what is happening in the global north rather than what is happening in the global south. And that speaks to even the dynamic of contemporary South Africa, we are more likely to know what's going on in US America than what is happening here.

### **ADO**

And then also the element of the space race and the ideas of the Cold War, we have taken issue with the terminology of the Cold War because in African states there was nothing cold about it. Those proxy wars were very much heated in the Global South. So we researched other important moments that had happened within the continent during that time. Historical accounts, but also funny things that come out of it, for example:

- 1: LUSAKA MANIFESTO: AFRICA SHOUTED NOT ARGUED!
- 2: ERNEST MANCOBA AND JACKSON POLLOCK GET INTO FISTICUFFS AT DOWNTOWN BAR...AND THAT'S ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM FOR YOU!
- 3: MARRUECOS GANÓ! ¡HASTA NUNCA ESPAÑA!

## NM

Your piece speaks about the power of stories and what gets seen, archived and remembered and what not. Questioning the hierarchy of media and collective memory through tough and witty ways of engaging our global connectedness, especially through the digital.

## ADO

Also the idea of censorship is a recurring theme. One of the things that hit the headlines is a poster from an Egyptian film made in 1969 called, 'The Taste of Fear'. And the director's cut was some-what heavily edited because it was so critical of the regimes of power in Egypt implicated in police brutality, censorship, cover-ups etc.. But we also play with parody and give the audience something to laugh about. It gets people comfortable, and that's when you can start hitting them with the hard truths that exist between laughter and shock. In terms of aesthetics, MTV taught me how to draw through their music videos, and late night programming of 'Liquid Television'. This world of pop culture was stunning for me, and that became like my visual code and language.

## MM

It is quite an important part of our practice to bring in satire and parody. Using the space between satire and pop culture, and that's why we reference quite a lot, using codes to instigate familiarity to the audience while drawing their attention to what we are trying to engage them with. These are important devices because sometimes history can become very dense and being bombarded by the daily events can overwhelm one. And the people disengage.

We incorporate these different elements into our practice, from the visual language of pop culture into modified representations. There's a thin line of finding ways on how to engage with these bodies, most specifically, politically, socio-culturally charged things and bring that space of mediation to the audience .



'Magolide Moon Landing', Limited Edition Poster's.  
2 colour screen-print on Bohem Off White 285 GSM  
paper, with an AR intervention (2022)

Magolide