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Camden, the new Place to Shop

On creating a modern South African design vernacular.

Camden is a cornerstone of the Richmond Hill community. It's a chic, upmarket brand that embodies the area's revival and reflects on the tastes that have helped to shape it into the trendiest corner of our city.

It carries a signature ensemble range of home-wear and decor personally chosen by sisters Nikki Timm and Donn  Bandey. The ethos of the brand can be found in the high quality merchandise that lines their shelves. Take for instance their range of Mongoose handbags, of which they are exclusive stockists. Each Mongoose bag neatly encapsulates the Camden manifesto. The materials used in its construction are of the highest quality. It is

crafted by hand. All materials used in the bag are manufactured and sourced locally. A fresh new interpretation of what constitutes 'modern Africana', if you will. Designs that evoke a 'South African' feeling without resorting to the stereotypical or kitsch. And of course, excellent aftersales service.

The sisters, both fluent Xhosa speakers, grew up on a farm deep in the Eastern Cape between Bathurst and Grahamstown. They attribute their deep love for all things iconically South African from the extensive time spent immersed in the culture of the rural hinterland.

The origins of the business combines the timelessly classic tales of the search for love, and the

search for wealth. "After 5 years of working in shipping I felt like I had had enough. It wasn't what I wanted to do with my life. I can remember sitting down one day and saying to myself 'now what is it that I REALLY want to do?'. I decided to make a list of the things that I loved to do the most. I remember picking up this piece of advice from a book I read somewhere along the line. It basically stated that in order to be happy, you should always make sure to do 5 things you love to do every day."

"My list included things like decorating my home; shopping; having my own time; relaxing; being able to be creative and to explore. It boiled down to having my own business, basically. Many of those loves translated quite well into me discovering awesome and beautiful new products to sell."

"So I quit my job and started Camden. When we started the shop, my husband and I couldn't afford to rent a house and a business premises. We wouldn't have had the capital to buy stock. So for the first year, we lived on the premises in a little room in the back. Just myself, my husband and our two dogs," she laughs. "Our friends jokingly called us 'the Gypsies'!"

Sister Nikki, meanwhile was working in the insurance industry. "My involvement with Camden began with an article on mosaicing that caught my eye in Essentials magazine," explains Nikki.

"My sister, from the beginning, has always been the creative one. She's always making stuff! If she sees something, she can replicate it," says Donné proudly. "We get our creativity from our Dad, who co-incidentally built the giant pineapple in Bathurst. He was a very talented and creative man who could make just about anything."

"I don't necessarily make things to sell. I just get a huge kick out of being creative. While Donné won't mind buying something, I will get a thrill out of trying to make it myself," says Nikki. "After reading that article I went out and bought some glass; tiles and tile cutters. I started making these little hearts and crosses, which sold like hotcakes! That was the first thing I ever made for Donné."

"I still had my job at the time," said Nikki, "so I would have to make these mosaics in the evening. Donné would then get wholesale orders for like 50 at a time! It took absolutely forever. I'd wake up really tired every morning and I'm still not sure if it was really worth my while to do, but I really enjoyed the challenge of making them."

Soon, however, Camden's sales started to rapidly pick up and help was needed. "Eventually I asked Nikki to just quit her job and come work with me. I need help and a partner I could count on. I just couldn't do it all on my own anymore. We became 50/50 partners the moment Nikki signed up to the business."

"The brand has changed a lot since we started the business. I think the one constant was that it is a representation of all the things we love. It's become 'our collection' of our favourite things," explains Nikki. "Whatever we curate has to look good and it has to have a function. We don't like things that don't do anything apart from sit there!"

One of Camden's signature lines are the Scratch Maps. It is a map of the world with all the countries covered by the foil they use on scratch cards. Every time you travel to a new country, you scratch off the foil. You'll eventually be left with a personalised map of all the countries you've visited.

The brand has undergone an exciting rebranding exercise earlier this year with the launch of their new online store: 'A place to shop'. "Camden is basically grown up and is getting out there to the rest of the country," says Donné.

"We are now having to do drop shipments with some of our suppliers in order to keep up with our online orders," says Nikki. "We send our couriers to pick up products directly from the manufacturer and deliver straight to the client."

"It gets pretty hectic at times dealing with the sheer volume of orders that come in," says Nikki, "but we focus heavily on keeping our clients happy by giving them the levels of service we feel should be the norm in South Africa. We currently only ship within our borders."

"We have definite plans to start an international online store, but one thing at a time. After all these years I still get goose bumps when we get emails from happy customers," smiles Donné. "It's like 'yeah man!' and high fives all around."

Camden

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Slayer of Dragons

Underculture fearlessly explores the dangerous unknown.

"If you look at an arts map of South Africa," explains Underculture Director Cedric Vanderlinden, "you will see what's happening in Bloemfontein, Johannesburg and Cape Town. But the Eastern Cape will just be this vast and desolate empty space on the map. A vast unexplored region labelled 'here be Dragons'."

"That is in fact, what we named our last exhibition because the Eastern Cape has so much talent for the rest of South Africa to discover. 'Here be Dragons' is a travelling exhibition which will move on to the phenomenal Gallery on Leviser in Bloemfontein during March 2015. It's important for the artists of the Eastern Cape to be seen outside of the province. We have such great talent which needs to be brought to the attention of a wider audience in other centres. If there is no buying public for our works, our industry will just fall over and die. The work is taken almost at random and represents a sample of the talent that can be found here. This is an event which we will definitely be planning on holding on a regular basis."

The Underculture contemporary art gallery is a

agent of change that has far exceeded its mandate as a contemporary art gallery. It has gone on to play an important role in educating the public on all matters concerning the arts; as well helping the rest of the country to uncover some of the Eastern Cape's hidden art treasures.

"I think that Underculture fills an important niche in Nelson Mandela Bay," explains Cedric. "Our edge comes from the fact that we are a purely commercial venture. We have to break even in order to continue the mission. Consequently, we have a lot more at stake most other institutions promoting the arts. That being said, we also need to be more than just a business. The whole point of the gallery for me was to do what I love and to address and fill the needs that the niche represents."

"When we first opened our doors I was surprised, and moved, at the enormous amount of support shown for the gallery. I really thought I'd have to fight tooth and nail to get artists and the public to get involved and interact with Underculture. An example is our very first exhibition. We had planned to exhibit some works, and as a brand new and

unknown gallery weren't really expecting anyone to buy anything on our first exhibition. Suddenly on the night someone came up to us and said 'we would like to buy the following pieces'. My assistant Allison and I froze in a moment of shared incredulousness. We didn't have a pricelist or catalogue at hand but managed to get one after scrambling about for a minute or two."

Underculture's very first sale were glass pieces produced by Anva Chiazzari.

"That was the moment I thought to myself, 'Ok, I can do this'."

"The comment I get the biggest kick out of is when people come into the gallery and exclaim: 'It's like I'm not in PE anymore!' It just tickles me pink," he laughs.

As a non-artist, I was never fully able to understand what the difference was between buying a decoration and buying an artwork. It was only through the experience of picking out and buying art that I came to understand how an artwork can bring warmth and character to our studio space in a way that a mass produced knickknack just cannot duplicate.

"Entirely! Entirely!" affirms Cedric. "It says so much

about who you are and what your space is about. On top of that, the artworks are invested with additional emotional value. The same can't be said about something mass produced bought at a store. That's why we're trying to educate the South African public into viewing artworks as a viable wedding gift. What happens quite often in Europe and the United States where a couple which have been living together, and has everything a household will need, decide to get married. Friends and family will gift an envelope of money to the couple to buy an artwork they have fallen in love with, but simply cannot afford. The resulting purchase is then imbued with emotional value because it comes from loved ones. The artwork ceases to be mere decoration. It transcends all that. It becomes a part of the signature of your character."

"Think about this for a second. When we had Derek Erasmus' exhibition, the weather was miserable. It was pouring with rain. And yet the gallery was filled with people. I then thought to myself 'why are people here?', 'Why do they come to galleries?'. I believe it is because an art gallery is one of the few places, one of the very few places left, where you can get a genuine encounter with a unique object. Each object in an art gallery is a unique thing, even prints of a work, which is subject to strictly limited reproduction runs. Where else can you see that apart from going out into nature?"

It is at this time that I suddenly realise why Tretchikoff was so universally hated for so many years. "Opening Underculture has been a huge learning curve and a massive eye opener. The main thing the gallery has taught me on a personal level is what it's like on the other side of the coin. As an artist I was not very mindful of my presentation of my own artworks. I would have stuff that was not in any condition of readiness to hang. I would not have a portfolio on hand to easily display my works to prospective clients. I would not necessarily have an artist's statement prepared. As an artist submitting work I wouldn't have worried too much about framing artworks."

"As a gallery owner this lack of foresight has really highlighted why the little details matter so much. I have often received stuff that was subpar, or still wet and not ready to hang. Or works which were not ready to frame or not particularly presentable. Too many artists have wanted to show me their work off their cellphones in lieu of a proper portfolio. Some don't have online portfolios to refer to, or have methods of emailing prints to you. Professionally it just isn't done. But it is something I understand now, from both sides."

"The big secret of the arts is that those involved in it pretend that it is not a business. Successful artists will do all that is necessary from a business

perspective to get their art out there and sold, but they will pretend that it's not a business. You have to manage yourself, your art as a brand. You can talk as much as you want about all the lofty goals you have and about your art and what it means. But at the end of the day it still has to be presented in a way that is digestible for your public. If your public are the highbrow intelligentsia, well then you need to package it in a way that is digestible for the highbrow intelligentsia. The perception that you're a precious little flower just waiting to be discovered is false. Not being proactive means that it's not going to happen. You've got to get out there and do the legwork. As an example, we worked on a proposal for Jenny Ord to exhibit as part of the main show for the 2015 National Arts Festival. She hadn't built the artwork yet but she had thought about the object and drawn up schematics on how best to dismantle and transport the object. It's little details like that which will enable your work to travel further and be seen by a vastly wider audience."

"I think there is a resistance to considering the practicalities surrounding the work because there is this idea that art aspires to a loftier goal. I think the idea of making art easier to sell somehow cheapens it. Maybe because art, like religion, harkens back to a pre-industrial and pre-con-



sumption society. Those are two very ancient strands. There were things that existed before the consumption state that could not be equated to a monetary value. We now live in a society of mass consumption where everything, everything, has a monetary value. Religion and art then hark back to that age where it didn't have a monetary value. Where art wasn't reduced down to that. So when you say 'cheapens it', then yes. And there then you are dealing with many of the 20th century philosophers such as Jean-François Lyotard and others who talk specifically about what the reproduction of the object is. What does it mean? All that you're dealing with then is reproduction and not the authentic object."

"That being said, the message needs to spread and more people need to be converted into art lovers. We have a million people living in Nelson Mandela Bay. Surely we can get 1% of that million to start visiting art galleries and art museums on a more regular basis?"

Cedric was a part of the team which brought the successful 'Wish you were here' initiative to life. He found it a tiring, but fruitful endeavour. "As I've found this year, it takes an enormous amount of energy to get an initiative off the ground. 'Wish you were here' sapped me."

While the campaign has had its fair share of criticism, there can be no doubt as to the positive and generous public exposure it has generated for the local arts community.

"We'll have 20 artists featured in Intercom, and there's going to be 20 artworks featured in the upcoming Nelson Mandela Business Chamber's 150 Years of Business Book. We've generated a decent portfolio of newspaper articles. We've appeared in publications such as Art South Africa; the Art Times; not to mention all the public foot traffic through the works travelling to public spaces all over Nelson Mandela Bay. We've exposed the featured artworks and made them highly visible to the public. And the response has been positive."

"One of my life's motto's are that the same tide lifts all boats. So it's not a case of that I must only promote contemporary fine arts, that's what the gallery does. The gallery offers a platform for contemporary artists. But for myself I am about promoting ALL the arts whether it's a talented amateur water colourist or cutting edge installation, or performance artist. Art should be a part of everyone's life, all the time. I will talk to anyone who is involved or even remotely interested in the arts industry and just try and get some noise going. I believe when there is enough noise and froth and

momentum generated, people's inherent curiosity will naturally begin to move them in the right direction. Either we fight to make our slices bigger at someone else's expense, or we work together to bake a bigger pie. If we make the pie as big as possible, then the slice for Underculture, for all of us, will naturally grow. We are fortunate to have many in our local art industry that take that attitude, first and foremost among them is Anthony Harris and Robyn Sharwood. There are of course many others in the industry I work with that are not motivated by anything else but the love of art. This is not often seen elsewhere in South Africa."

Underculture is currently hosting a fantastic travelling exhibition from the venerable Bag Factory called 'Fortunes Remixed'. It is an exhibition that considers contextual 'freedom' and 'democracy' as experienced by young South Africans in relation to their elders. This exhibition looks at South Africa's journey, how artists have related to it and what their position is on South African identity and our future.

Underculture Contemporary

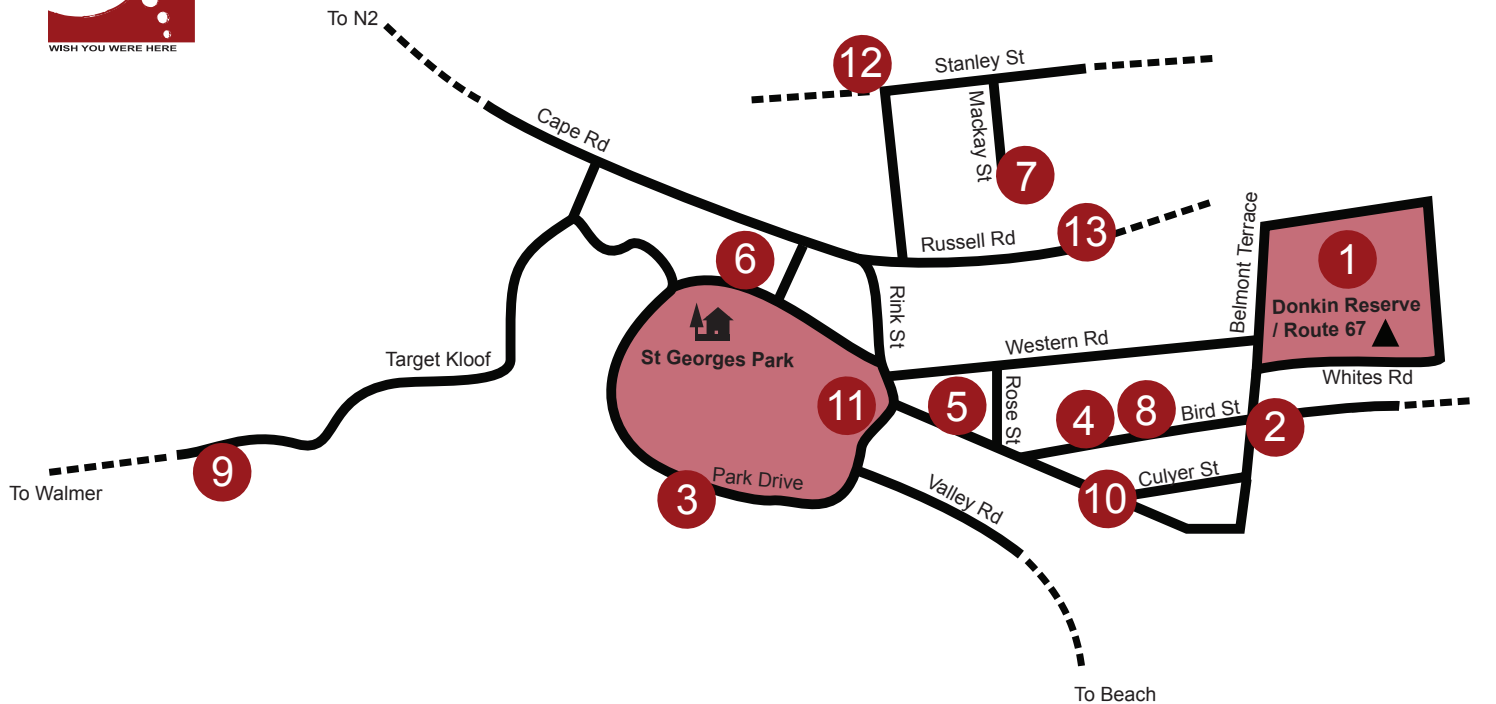
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Art Map Central, Nelson Mandela Bay



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| 1
Route 67
<small>The MBD's Route 67 consists of 67 Public Art Works representing Nelson Mandela's 67 years of work dedicated to the Freedom of South Africa and includes 67 areas leading up the second largest flag in Africa.</small>
http://www.mbd.co.za/ | 2
ATHENAEUM
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Email: atheneump@gmail.com
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ART GALLERY
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UNDERCULTURE CONTEMPORARY
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Website: www.underculturecontemporary.co.za | 7
af Alliance Française
<small>17 Mackay St</small>
Phone: 041 585 7889
Email: portetazeth@alliance.org.za
Website: www.alliance.org.za | 8
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
<small>Makulu School of Music Art and Design, Bldg 800, Central Campus</small>
<small>Postgraduate visual arts students, Jazz Unit and the Music Conservatory for pre-tertiary learners. NMMU Art Gallery opening mid 2015</small>
Website: http://nmmu.ac.za/ | 9
ART ON TAKERS
<small>2 Target Kloof</small>
Phone: 041 373 3334
Email: info@artnetwork.co.za
Website: www.artjourney-nelsonmandelabay.co.za/ | 10 Tin House Gallery,
34 Culver St
11 NMM Art Museum,
1 Park Drive
12 The Art Gallery on Stanley,
Stanley Street
13 Galerie NOKO,
109 - 111 Russell Road |
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The Beckoning Horizon.

Anthony Harris has been a staunch advocate for the development and promotion of the local arts scene and local artists, often at this great talent's personal expense of creative time and energy. January 2015 has seen the closing of Anthony's ART Gallery as he wishes to solely focus on his art, much to the public's dismay and delight of those who follow his work.

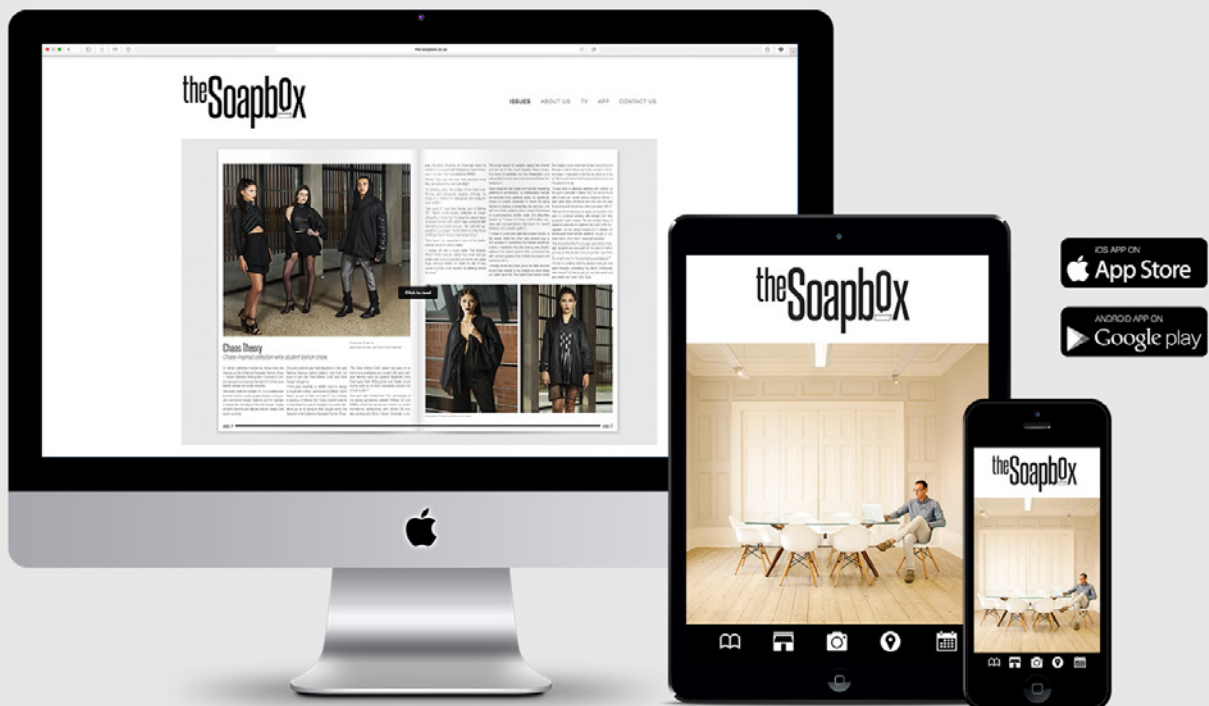
"I have made this decision after 10 years dedicated to assisting the visual arts scene in Nelson Mandela Bay, to close Art Gallery – it is now 'me time'. I have a number of personal projects (including solo exhibitions) lined up for 2015." Said Anthony.

"Of all the people in the city that has done things for the visual arts in Port Elizabeth, I don't think there has been anyone that has done more than Anthony Harris. We will all miss him dearly in that capacity and wish him well in his future projects." Said Cedric Vanderlinden of the Underculture contemporary art gallery.

"We are all, of course, very sorry that Anthony is closing Art Gallery." Said Robyn Sharwood of the GFI. "He truly filled a special niche that none of our other galleries could fulfil. He has a ton of commissions to work on, and he has a busy future ahead of him. We wish him all the best."

"Anthony's monumental vision for the creative industry in our metro has realized many successes in projects and exhibitions." Said Bretten-Anne Moolman of the ART on Target gallery. "Anthony as gallery owner of Art Gallery, invested boundless energy into stepping up exposure for local artists and setting a high standard of professional practice for galleries, a sincere 'Thank You' Anthony, now that the lights have gone out on Art Gallery, I mourn.... in darkness."

New year, new website



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Bone of Contention

The Bag Factory unpacks its stable of talent in PE.

A selection of the Bag Factory's art is currently on display at the Underculture contemporary arts gallery in St. Georges Park.

The Bag Factory is so called because it is based in what used to be an old bag factory. Despite its whimsical name it is a venerable and respected part of the Johannesburg arts scene. As one of the longest lived institutions of its type in South Africa, it is an important incubator of artistic talent.

The Bag Factory is an arts organization that provides studio space for artists. A lot of that space is subsidised but over the last 24 years it has hosted many artist residencies; exhibitions and workshops. It also has numerous award programs and is a part of the international Triangle Network, which was started by Sir Anthony Caro and Robert Loder in 1982.

"The aim of this exhibition," explains Bag Factory Director Sara Hallatt, "is to provoke conversation and to help come up with solutions on how to make our country cooler; better; more interesting; more happening. We were afforded this opportunity by the Department of Arts and Culture to have this exhibition travel around the country and it was important for this exhibition to touch on another part of the country that wasn't Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban. The usual suspects. Cedric

and his Underculture team have been phenomenal in helping us out, and we're hoping that this will lead to more inter-city exchanges going forward."

"This exhibition is aimed at a broad section of society and deals with South Africa in its 20th year of Democracy," explains Aysha Waja, project assistant and curator. "We're trying to bring in new audiences, which is why we brought the exhibition to PE to try and access a broader market instead of the usual places that art goes to."

"We chose to exhibit at Underculture because it is an extremely exciting gallery. You don't hear a lot from PE, but over last couple of months we have seen Underculture doing quite a number of things that has really helped to get PE's name out there." Said Aysha. "It seemed like a perfect fit for the exhibition."

"This travelling exhibition is just a part of the exciting program of events happening under the Bag Factory banner in 2015. We've got some exciting artist residencies lined up. One of them is Blake Daniels, an artist from the USA, who is listed as one of the top 15 artists to look out for. So that's going to be quite exciting and I can't wait for him to arrive. And then going forward we have a number of exciting exhibitions lined up."

I asked Asha, that in light of current events, if she thought that South Africa was moving towards a culture of self-censorship in the name of tolerance. "I don't think so." She replied. "I think that a lot of people are trying to head that way, like people in government for instance. I think they are trying to focus on censorship but I think that the art is never going to allow that, especially here in South Africa. We do have quite a history of protest art and a lot of artists tend to go in that direction. And any artist in any medium around the country is not going to censor themselves, as there is this feeling of 'why should we?' because we fought for our freedom and won. So we should be able to do what we want to, and say what we need to."

"After viewing the exhibition I would like people to consider where our society is currently and how we as young people are shaping the country, and what we can do to guide it. The born free generation needs to start shaking off their apathy and start getting to grips with some of the problems we face. In a couple of years, they will be the ones running the country. There is a lot we still have to overcome. We need to come up with answers to some of those questions."

Underculture Contemporary

📍 Currently exhibiting at Underculture

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🌐 www.bagfactoryart.org.za