

## **CCAC Interview with Richard ‘Specs’ Ndimande on 10 June 2022**

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**Location of interview:** Bag Factory Artists’ Studios

**Language of interview:** English

**Length of interview:** 51:21

**Interviewer name (and acronym):** Micayla Mohamadie (MKM)

**Interviewee name (and acronym):** Richard ‘Specs’ Ndimande (RN)

**Name of translator, if applicable:** N/A

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**Audio file name(s) of interview:** CCAC - Specs Interview on 10/06/22

**List of acronyms:**

**CCAC:** Constitutional Court Art Collection

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### **START OF INTERVIEW: 00:00:32**

**MKM:** Where did you grow up?

**RN:** I grew up in all four corners of Soweto, basically. My parents and my family, we used to, like, move from Orlando, Indeni, Zola, Diepkloof. So we lived in all those places. And yeah, we finally stayed permanently in Orlando East, which is where I still stay now.

**MKM:** What made you decide to become an artist?

**RN:** Well, I always knew that I wanted to be an artist from a young age. It was either singing or being an artist, but I can't sing. So it had to be art. When I was young, my dad would also buy me [things] like watercolour paints and colour pencils and stuff to draw and make art and also clay to model and make sculptures. So I always made art from a young age. And when I got to high school, I chose art as a subject. Then in varsity, I studied art. So yeah, I always knew that I wanted to be an artist from a very young age.

**MKM:** Your dad gave you clay, what made you decide to go with animals?

**RN:** In my work, I basically work around the themes of exploitation and oppression, and servitude. And I use animals as a metaphor for the exploitation of the human body and I use

mostly exploited animals. But in my work, I also hide who is truly in power. And I don't make it obvious that this is the offender or the victim, in the sense that when you look at my work, you'd see these beasts that you would think would do something horrible to you, but at the same time, they are also victims. And in that, I also address that when someone exploits you or oppresses you or offends you, they don't come to you and say, "I'm gonna do this to you, I'm gonna offend...". They come in disguise. So that's what my work speaks about. And in that also, my work highlights who's the victim and the offender, and I have both in one body.

**TIME ON RECORDING: 00:02:56**

**MKM:** So can you tell us more about how, when and why *Inkunzi Yenkabi* (2019), *Conversations I* and *III* (2018) were made.

**RN:** So *Inkunzi Yenkabi* (2019) and the series of *Conversation* (2018) at that time between 2018 and 19 [sic]. At that time, it was the younger generation, they were having controversial conversations about our politics and the current state of South Africa - the new South Africa - and also the Rhodes Must Fall, the Fees Must Fall and it was happening around those times. And the *Conversation* (2018) was basically about those conversations that are happening at that time. And *Inkunzi Yenkabi* (2019) was more about the conversation I was having with my father. So we have two animals; the other one is a human-animal hybrid, which is 'Inkunzi', and the hyenas standing next to it. And the hyena is a scavenger animal that a bull can be a victim to, but then they sitting next to each other and they looking at something far from their reach. And what they're looking at could be something that could be threatening their lives. But the hyena could also threaten the bull's life. The title *Inkunzi Yenkabi* (2019) comes from that. 'Yenkabi' is a hitman. So yeah, there's also the power dynamics between like the hyena, the bull, and what they are looking at.

**MKM:** To which historical and current day themes, would you say that your artworks speak to?

**RN:** My work is drawn from history. And basically, before I do my work, I research history; world history, and particularly South African history. And for instance, the painting that's behind me, the big one, speaks about South African history, but then it's divided into different canvases. And there's a pre colonial history during colonialism, apartheid history, and post apartheid history. And I divided them and basically painted objects that shaped those histories instead of painting events, because by painting these objects, they can be digestible rather than painting the events. And my work also speaks to those themes. And if you look at each panel in this painting, it has similar themes like violence, arrays and some events that go into one another in different times, but then similar themes.

**MKM:** What inspired the titles of *Inkunzi Yenkabi* (2019), *Conversations I* and *III* (2018)?

**RN:** So what inspired the title *Inkunzi Yenkabi* (2019) was 'Inkunzi Yenkabi' is a hitman. And this term is also mostly used in the Zulu culture like the taxi ranks as well. But then in that, they use it not to refer to a hitman, it can be 'my brother' or 'my homie' or something like that. But then in this work, 'Inkunzi Yenkabi' could be the hitman that could be the offender to the hyena that is standing next to it. And 'Yenkabi' is a bull. So 'Inkunzi Yenkabi' is a bull of a hitman. So this bull of a hitman that is sitting, which could be the victim of the hyenas sitting next to it. They could be victims of each other, but the 'Inkunzi Yenkabi' could be a hitman and be the offender of this hyena. They could be both looking at something that is far from their reach, and they can be protecting each other or be threatened by this thing they're looking at.

**TIME ON RECORDING: 00:11:15**

**MKM:** Please tell us about your father's history with the site known as Constitution Hill.

**RN:** On the site that's known as Constitutional Hill now used to be a fort, a prison - and my father was in prison there at the Number Four prison and he would tell me stories about his experiences when he was there. And I remember the first time going there after him briefly telling me about the story. It was a school trip in primary school and it was a totally different experience for me than my other pupils because it was rather personal for me to be in this space where my father was kept in and the talk I had when he was telling us how they would treat them and how they would dish their food and all the rest of it. It was rather emotional for me and it touched me. But yeah, it's a space where my father was basically a resident and it's going to be a residence for my artworks for a couple of months.

**MKM:** So like, since you were a kid, have you been thinking about that intergenerational conversation? Or did it come up as something later during your art career?

**RN:** Well it came up later in my art career. When I was a kid, I didn't know I was gonna make art like this. I probably thought I'll paint paintings like landscapes and trees and what have you. But then when my father was telling me these stories as a kid, he wasn't telling me just so I know. He was sort of telling me to warn me and sort of preparing me to lead a good life and he was telling me where he came from so that I lead a better life than he had, in a sense.

**MKM:** What is your experience or relationship with Constitution Hill today?

**RN:** My experience with Constitution Hill today is rather personal and emotional every time I revisit that space, like memories of what my dad told me and what he went through come to my head and I get emotional most of the time and some of the works when I speak about them that were influenced by what my dad told me about his experiences, I get emotional as well. So it's rather personal and emotional.

**MKM:** How do you feel about your art being exhibited where your father was imprisoned?

**TIME ON RECORDING: 00:17:13**

**RN:** The feeling I get about my work being exhibited where my father was imprisoned is a weird feeling and an interesting one because my work speaks about the psychological conditioning and the lack of change in where we are. And that also comes from the lack of being free psychologically. And my dad would mention that when he was released from prison, he would be physically free but then psychologically, he would still be imprisoned by the traumas and the scars caused by the space. So that's where I feel I am as a young person, we are mostly psychologically imprisoned, and hence the high rates of anxieties and psychological conditions we face and in today's time.

**MKM:** You said it was kind of emotional. Is that why you kind of want to install your artworks on your own and you don't really want help?

**RN:** Yeah, with installing the work and also making the work for me, I prefer doing it on my own because I enjoy the process. And I'd rather make it a personal involvement and I want to be fully involved, rather than getting help from someone else. So most of my work, I don't have an assistant, I do them by myself. Even the complex ones, I do them alone at night when it's quiet and everyone is sleeping.

**MKM:** Why do you think it is important for the youth to remember the past? And what role does it play in the present and future?

**RN:** I think for me, the past is important to a certain point. We can use the past as something to learn from. But I think it's unnecessary to a point where we are conditioned by it and the past becomes a modified continuation of the present. For instance, my dad would say 'ufuze mina' which means 'be like me when you grow up'. And in that, even his mistakes, that means I should be a modified continuation of what he was, even if it's bad or positive. So I think the past is important to a certain point, but we should learn from it so that we don't repeat the mistakes.

**MKM:** So you were born in 1994, the year apartheid came to an official end, yet many challenges persist in South Africa. What are the challenges the youth of today face and what can they do to achieve their constitutional goals of freedom, dignity and equality?

**RN:** The challenges that the youth is facing today, I think the youth is mostly seeking to be helped. And they want mostly outward help, but they're not looking within and helping themselves and healing first before they get outward help. So in that, we want to change things in society, but we forget that we are a society and by changing ourselves, we are

contributing and changing society. So I think the youth should look within themselves and focus on changing themselves. And if they focus mostly on changing things that are outside, the lack of change will be limited because of the change... it would be hypocritical, they will change something outside but within themselves they will still be the same.

**MKM:** Could you tell us the story of why you decided to donate your artworks to the Constitutional Court Trust?

**TIME ON RECORDING: 00:27:20**

**RN:** I donated my work to the CCAC in 2020 and that was shortly after I visited the collection and saw what they had. And having conversations with Thina and Francois, we decided I would donate the work. And also because the work speaks about what my father was telling me about the site at the Constitution Hill. And yeah, from there, we had conversations and I decided to donate.

**MKM:** What does the art collection represent to you? Like you've been on a tour, right? So when you went down, what do you see? What did it represent as you were walking around and decided you wanted to donate?

**RN:** For me, the art collection at CCAC represents justice and equality. And it also gives a voice to the voiceless. And many people that go there and view the work can get what the artists are really seeing through their works. And I feel that most artists speak through their works. And they give a voice through their works and it's like a visual language. So if only we would give them a look and listen. And that, for me, the collection gives that sense of like, justice and equality and a voice for people who don't have a voice.

**MKM:** How do you see art as being connected to justice or human rights in South Africa or more universally?

**RN:** I see art as connected to human rights in a sense that they could reach to places where help could be given. For instance, in 1976 when Hector Pieterse was shot, that photograph that was taken influenced a global view of what is happening in South Africa and other countries were aware because of that photograph. And that photograph could be an artwork on its own. And I feel like art is connected to justice in that sense that it could reach to places where it needs to and where relevant.

**MKM:** Are you mindful of conservation when making artworks?

**RN:** I am very mindful about conservation when I'm making my work because I want my work to have longevity and to last for generations and generations to come. I'm also particular with the framing of my work and I use the specific framing like kiasat. And when it's floated, the backing board should be archival. And even the papers I use to draw on, they

are archival. But I'm not so sure about my sculptures because it's basically taxidermy so the hair pieces might fall off or something like that.

**MKM:** Do you have any specific recommendations for the conservation of your works in the future?

**RN:** I personally don't have specific rules set out when my work leaves the studio. But then I would recommend when someone frames the work, they frame it in kiasat if it's a drawing or print or a painting.

**TIME ON RECORDING: 00:36:14**

**MKM:** How do you keep them preserved like that?

**RN:** Like this one [36:51], I recently took the drills off and on to get them cleaned. But then if it was at a collector or something, they will not do that. So I don't have much control when it leaves the studio. So I can only maybe have suggestions. But yeah, I don't have full control of what happens when it leaves my studio.

**MKM:** Do your sculptures scare you?

**RN:** They don't. But then when I reposition them in my studio, sometimes when I walk in my studio, and I look at it, and I'm like "hey man, I remember. Oh, I made you". My sculptures don't scare me because I made them, but I did once dream of one of my sculptures coming to life; and it was in my studio and it just ruined – everything was up and down. Before I woke up, I tied it down on the chair. And I was actually working in the studio taking a nap and when I woke up, I looked at it and it was still there and not living. It was such a relief. So yeah, they don't really scare me because I made them.

**MKM:** Can you please tell us about the significance of your sculptures compared to your 2D works. How do you decide to make sculptural works out of these specific ideas?

**RN:** So my sculptures began in 2017 or 2016 when — they began with a two dimensional work like painting and drawing, and I wanted to make my drawings come to life. So I made sculptures from my drawings. So I would draw human-animal hybrids and my drawings and that led to sculptures. So the relation between sculptures and two dimensional work is that I begin my sculptures by drawing and in 2017/16 when I was making my sculptures, I began with drawings and I would do a two-dimensional work drawings and paintings. And I wanted to make my drawings come to life. So that gave birth to my sculpture. It's basically my drawings coming to life in a sense.

**MKM:** Do you have any recommendations on the curatorial presentation of your artworks? I think instead of that, speak to how you curated your current solo exhibition. What are the considerations that went into why you selected these works?

**RN:** So for this solo exhibition, how I curated my work and how I selected them - I have three bodies of work that speaks of exploitation of the human body and relationships, which is the bull and the bear series. And the ones that I selected for this exhibition speaks mainly on South African history, and the lack of change in the New South Africa that is conditioned by the past. I selected mainly works that are produced that shaped South Africa and from the conversation I had with my father. And in the room, you see, I created this field that...

**MKM:** And how do you want the youth to respond to your exhibition?

**RN:** When I curated the work in the exhibition, I wanted to create this feeling that when you walk in the room, you become a part of the installation rather than the viewer of the work. So you will see as you walk in, you will feel like you are part of the exhibition. I don't want to create this viewer-work division, and I want to create a relationship between the work and the viewer.

**TIME ON RECORDING: 00:43:02**

**MKM:** So just as a side question, there are going to be kids coming. Are you kind of worried that they might touch it? Are they allowed to? Do you have ideas of barricades?

**RN:** Well, I don't necessarily want to put, like boundaries and lines, where people cannot cross because I want them to feel engaged with the work. But I'm not worried about kids touching. Or if they do, then it will be part of the experience and what have you. So I don't I'm not really worried about that.

**MKM:** Alright, is there anything you would like to add to be recorded in the interview?

**MKM:** How is your work significant in terms of youth day, since we're pairing this exhibition with youth day?

**RN:** So the significance of having this exhibition on Youth Day is, pretty much also speaks to how I created the work and the work is basically an examination of a younger generation being manipulated by the older generation to carry their sins and be conditioned by them to be a continuation of what they were up by the modified one. It speaks mostly to the youth. And it's asking them to inquire and question what freedom means to them. Does it mean to be free and a totally free generation? Or does it mean to be modified and be a continuation of what was happening? Which I mostly see, or think that's what's happening right now. The title of the exhibition also speaks to the responsibility that the youth has today. So the title is *Freedom and Responsibility*, and we got our freedom, post apartheid and the exhibition also



questions, then what is our responsibility now that we are free? And like the youth of June 16 1976, they had the — responsibility for me is the ability to respond; and when they were told that they were going to be taught in like Bantu education, their ability to respond was through striking and saying 'we don't want Bantu education, we want better education'. And for me, this exhibition is also inquiring and asking the youth of today 'how are we responding to being free and where are we taking this freedom that we so called have?'

**MKM:** Please tell us about how you know Kagiso Pat Mautloa and how it came about that you wanted to enter into this discussion with him about your exhibition.

**TIME ON RECORDING: 00:49:00**

**RN:** My relationship with Pat is more like a father and mentor. And he's been a good guide here since I've been here at the studio, at Bag Factory Artist Studio since 2017. And he's been like, a good person to chat with, and we also have similarities like we came from the same township, and we enjoy each other's artworks. And yeah, he's just an amazing chap to have around.

**END OF INTERVIEW: 00:51:21**