

# Two times the talent

Louis Jansen van Vuuren and Zwelethu Mthethwa are a daring double art act

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tgw **sunday**

In a fluent tour de force of collaborative artistic flair and skilled application, two artists, an Afrikaner and a Zulu, are exhibiting a duet for the eye entitled *entre nous/ between ourselves/ pakathi kwethu* at i art in Loop Street until January 15.

The gallery is another of the new breed worldwide "that has leapt the species barrier to become what money men call a new asset class", linked as it is to Coronation Fund Managers, the investment advisers.

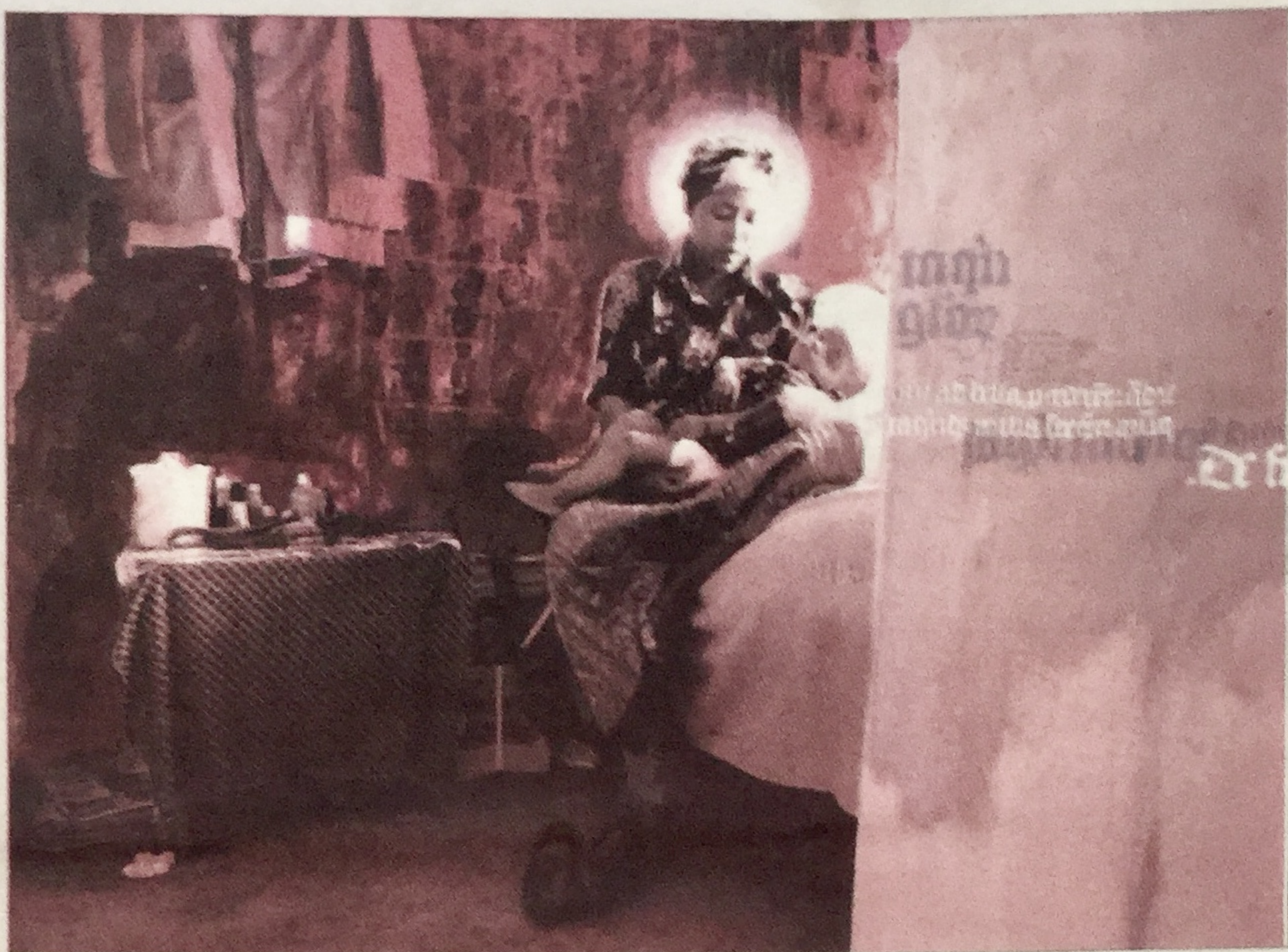
The best part about the exhibition is the fact that the works combine the talents of two established and successful artists recontextualising their subject matter. Zwelethu Mthethwa took photographs of members of the Paarl, Strand and Somerset West communities in their homes, some

in informal settlements. This acquaints the viewer with cultural practices like the use of a bedroom or kitchen as a church for worship and the subsequent pride and dignity that the transformation confers on the ordinary people.

These digital prints on cotton paper and canvas compliment the edition of 35 litho prints entitled *Bag Ladies* and the hand-woven Aubusson tapestry entitled *The sky binds us together* as part of the exhibition.

Artists like Dufy, Braque and Picasso were invited to the Aubusson studios to work in the medium of wool during a comeback of traditional tapestry methods in the 1930s.

Louis Jansen van Vuuren received Mthethwa's digital prints in France before transforming and enhancing the surfaces with marks, colours, custom-crafted fragments of textiles and other elements to create the works on display. The fluent fusion of communication on a sophisticated level informs and



**MATERNAL:** *Madonna and Child* resonates with religious influence and references

questions viewers.

Three works consist of strips of one of Mthethwa's photographs interwoven with Jansen van Vuuren's pastel work, another with a 19th century Aubusson carton in gouache on paper and the third with black satin.

Jansen van Vuuren and his partner Hardy Olivier bought a Napoleon III chateau, La Creuzette,

371km south of Paris seven years ago and make annual visits to South Africa. They are "living their dream" in terms of creative engagement which includes the stimulation of visitors who attend painting courses at the chateau.

As one would expect from an artist who taught at the University of Stellenbosch and UCT's Michaelis School of Art, the courses are structured. Two are for advanced practitioners and one for beginners. Ten to twelve participants ensure that no one is neglected and a highlight is the art history lecture Jansen Van Vuuren delivers to his group at the Musée de l'Orangerie in the Tuileries Gardens, Paris.

Mthethwa and Jansen van Vuuren have been close friends and colleagues for many years. Arriving a little early for my interview with the artists, Jansen van Vuuren tells me about his recent show in London and says he is glad to be back in the Cape reassociating with friends and colleagues.

He says his and Mthethwa's current works are a cross-inspirational oeuvre. He is prolific, usually working on more than one image at a time. He jokingly refers to Monet as being the first "serial painter". Monet's wife and staff would place his unfinished paintings outside so he could determine what and where his next brush strokes should be with the aid of natural light.

Mthethwa arrives a little late, coughing and languidly crumpling into a well-upholstered chair next to me. He has unusually soft hands ("the cream I use") and a keen sense

of humour. He informs me that "artists draw from contemporary culture – every person should be able to interpret it".

He stopped teaching at the Michaelis School of Art nine years ago and is now full-time artist. His work is in South African and overseas collections and he has exhibited locally and internationally. Explaining his photograph of a bare-bellied pregnant woman, he tells me that the picture was taken to show the baby where it came from after it was born.

We look at *Angel 11*, an image where an inner sanctum has been created by the combination of marks and effect; with almost erotically charged lettering that reminds me of the contemporary artist Cy Twombly's mark making. These are marks that became a mantra, says Jansen van Vuuren.

Moving on to *Gracious Moments*, a photograph of a Somerset West woman sitting on a bed, a background of gold leaf has been applied, awarding an iconic status to the former drab interior. *Madonna and Child* also resonates with religious influence and references to images regarded as sacred.

This is a welcome departure from the harsh and gritty reality of the tabloids and sensational representations we see on daily televised news reports.

● The gallery, at 77 Loop Street, is open from 10am to 5pm on weekdays and from 10am to 2pm on Saturdays. For more information call 021 424 5150 or visit [www.iart.co.za](http://www.iart.co.za).



**INTERIOR:** gold leaf lends an iconic status to *Gracious Moments*