

UNYUKELO

NICHOLAS HLOBO

JAN. 24-JULY 7, 2019

GRADES **6 - 12**
CURRICULUM GUIDE





Nicholas Hlobo, *Mbolombini*, ribbon and leather on canvas, 2018

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

In *Unyukelo*, Nicholas Hlobo responds to historic narratives of the American South to create a poetic and moving installation comprised of large two-dimensional and sculptural works. Produced for the SCAD Museum of Art and inspired by the evocative name of the city of Savannah — with echoes of the rolling fields of grass of the African savanna — Hlobo conceived a project rooted in the search for liberation and escape.

Using tumbleweeds as a metaphor, Hlobo's new artwork explores the materiality of copper piping as both sculptural and linear drawing in space. Small, recognizable objects are attached to larger entangled shapes that shift the original function and meaning to a place outside immediate comprehension.

The artist's interest in language is a deliberate choice. Using his mother tongue, the Xhosa language, to title his work, Hlobo explores the viewer's understanding of translation and legibility, guiding them on a journey. The title of the exhibition, *Unyukelo*, translates directly as "ladder," which also means "ascension." For Hlobo, the connotation is not so much about religion but more broadly refers to a change in consciousness. The artist also articulates an interest in the process of getting lost, seeing it as a means to reach a deeper understanding of one's environment and place within it. An apt metaphor of Hlobo's process in the studio, this idea doubles as a way to navigate and experience his installation.

This exhibition is part of **SCAD deFINE ART 2019**, held Feb. 26–28 at university locations in Atlanta and Savannah, Georgia. Learn more at: scad.edu/defineart2019



Nicholas Hlobo

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Nicholas Hlobo was born in Cape Town, South Africa and lives in Johannesburg. His work has been shown in solo exhibitions at institutions including the Institute of Contemporary Art Indian Ocean, Port Louis, Mauritius; Uppsala Konstmuseum, Uppsala, Sweden; Museum Beelden aan Zee, The Hague, Netherlands; Locust Projects, Miami, Florida; the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo, Norway; Tate Modern, London, England; and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Massachusetts, among others.

In 2011 in Venice, Italy, Hlobo showed newly commissioned work on *ILLUMInations*, the 54th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale. His work also appeared there in *The World Belongs to You*, works from the Pinault Collection at the Palazzo Grassi, and the *Future Generation Art Prize* exhibition at the Palazzo Papadopoli. He has participated in notable group exhibitions, such as Performa 17, New

York, New York; and at institutions such as Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, France; Tate Modern, London, England; the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; Foundation De 11 Lijnen, Oudenburg, Belgium; the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Washington, D.C.; MMK (Museum für Moderne Kunst), Frankfurt, Germany; the SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, Georgia; the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, California; the 18th Biennale of Sydney, Australia; Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France; the Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool, England; the third Guangzhou Triennial, Guangzhou, China; and the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, New York.

Hlobo was the first recipient of the Villa Extraordinary Award for Sculpture in 2016. In addition, he was the Tolman Award winner in 2006, the Standard Bank Young Artist for Visual Art in 2009, and the Rolex Visual Arts Protégé for 2010–11, working with Anish Kapoor as his mentor.



Nicholas Hlobo, *Umnikelo*, ribbon and leather on canvas, 2018

ABOUT SCAD AND SCAD MUSEUM OF ART

Offering more degree programs and specializations than any other art and design university, SCAD is uniquely qualified to prepare talented students for creative professions.

The SCAD Museum of Art is a premier contemporary art museum that features emerging and established international artists through commissioned works and rotating exhibitions; engages local communities with special initiatives reflecting an international scope; and serves as a resource for SCAD students and alumni during their academic careers and beyond.

ABOUT SCAD CURRICULUM GUIDES

SCAD curriculum guides enhance understanding of art and design through investigations that reveal relevant personal, historical and cultural connections while promoting cross-disciplinary links necessary for today's innovative careers. Designed for use within the museum's exhibition spaces and in classrooms, the guides provide learning opportunities that fulfill the requirements of national education standards.

Recognizing the guides' overall design excellence and ingenuity, the American Alliance of Museums' Museum Publications Design Competition and the Southeastern Museums Conference have awarded SCAD curriculum guides first- and second-place prizes, a medal and honorable mentions for three consecutive years. SCAD gives special thanks to The Hodge Foundation for its generous support of the university's award-winning curriculum guides.

This Nicholas Hlobo guide for middle and high school students supports Hlobo's stated goal "to create conversations." Presenting opportunities for discussion and the formulation of evidence-backed theories, the guide promotes sustained observation and reflection, and offers guidance in combining notetaking with annotated drawings.

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All artworks appear courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, Seoul.

Highlighted glossary terms and citations are located at the end of this guide.

1.

“I break stuff down from the source.

In many instances I become the source myself and generate information for others ...”¹

Nicholas Hlobo



Nicholas Hlobo, installation view, SCAD Museum of Art, (foreground) *Iqhawe elingenagama (II)*, copper and brass, 2018

In the above quote, Nicholas Hlobo describes his art-making objective: to arrive at understandings that inform others. Influenced by collective history and personal experience, his works address topics related to race, gender and identity. As a South African, Hlobo uses his pieces to speak of his country's former **apartheid** government and of his pride in his **Xhosa** heritage. This exhibition is also his response to the story of William and Ellen Craft, an enslaved couple who lived in **antebellum** Georgia. The two devised an escape plan — the light-complexioned Ellen disguised herself as a male slave owner, while William took the role of her servant. The Crafts' successful journey north toward freedom took them through the former Savannah railway depot that was transformed into the SCAD Museum of Art.

¹Bosland, J., and Hlobo, N. (2009). Nicholas Hlobo in conversation with Joost Bosland. *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, 24(1), 112.

²Williamson, S. (2006, June). Nicholas Hlobo. Retrieved January 29, 2019; artthrob.co.za/06june/artbio.html



Nicholas Hlobo, *Itsha ntliziyo*, copper, skull and brass, 2018

“

Through my works
I attempt to
create conversations ...

”²

Nicholas Hlobo

Discuss what you know about the sources that inform Hlobo's work. What might he have experienced living in an apartheid society? How is this related to the Crafts' story? Listen to, comment on and contribute theories.

2.

“The materials, the process and the techniques that I use
also are a part of that storytelling.”³

Nicholas Hlobo

The exhibition's Xhosa title, *Unyukelo*, means “ladder,” a metaphor for ascending or transcending a given position, situation or state of mind. In a similar way, Hlobo's materials, processes and techniques also act as metaphors. Consider associations linked with materials such as leather and ribbon, of processes that include slicing apart and rejoining, and of curving line techniques that create wandering paths and **biomorphic** shapes.



Nicholas Hlobo, *Umhlwayeli*, copper, 2018

³Nicholas Hlobo on 'Brilliant Ideas,' Episode 58. (2008, July 25). Retrieved January 29, 2019; [bloomberg.com/news/videos/2017-07-25/nicholas-hlobo-on-brilliant-ideas-video](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/videos/2017-07-25/nicholas-hlobo-on-brilliant-ideas-video)

⁴Ibid.

What stories does Hlobo tell — what information does he generate for others — through his materials, processes and techniques? Share your ideas and continue to take notes as your discussion develops. Make and label sketches of Hlobo's works that are relevant to your thoughts.

— sketch and label —

“I always regard what I do as writing ...”⁴

Nicholas Hlobo

Choose one work and write a statement that makes an evidence-supported case describing the message this piece communicates to you. Illustrate your ideas by including a sketch of the full work, plus a notated study of at least one detail.

statement: _____

— sketch and detail study —

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS

NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS — HIGH SCHOOL

Creating 2.1 **Anchor:** Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
6: Demonstrate openness in trying new ideas, materials, methods and approaches in making works of art and design.
7: Demonstrate persistence in developing skills with various materials, methods and approaches in creating works of art or design.
8: Demonstrate willingness to experiment, innovate and take risks to pursue ideas, forms and meanings that emerge in the process of art-making or designing.
HSI: Shape an artistic investigation of an aspect of present-day life using a contemporary practice of art or design.

Responding 8.1 **Anchor:** Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
6: Interpret art by distinguishing between relevant and non-relevant contextual information and analyzing subject matter, characteristics of form and structure, and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed.
7: Interpret art by analyzing art-making approaches, the characteristics of form and structure, relevant contextual information, subject matter, and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed.
8: Interpret art by analyzing how the interaction of subject matter, characteristics of form and structure, use of media, art-making approaches and relevant contextual information contributes to understanding messages or ideas and mood conveyed.
HSI: Interpret an artwork or collection of works, supported by relevant and sufficient evidence found in the work and its various contexts.
HSII: Identify types of contextual information useful in the process of constructing interpretations of an artwork or collection of works.
HSIII: Analyze differing interpretations of an artwork or collection of works in order to select and defend a plausible critical analysis.

COMMON CORE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.1-8.1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-12.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

GLOSSARY

antebellum *adj.* The period before the American Civil War (1861-1865) and after the War of 1812. It was characterized by increasing division between supporters of slavery and those who wanted to abolish it.

apartheid *n.* An institutionalized system of segregating and discriminating against non-European groups in the Republic of South Africa, formally in place from 1948 to 1993.

biomorphic *adj.* Resembling the curving forms of living organisms.

Xhosa *adj.* Relating to the Xhosa, a South African ethnic group traditionally from the country's provinces of the Eastern and Western Capes.

CONNECTIONS

This narrative illuminates social and historical context surrounding the Crafts' daring escape.

Hall, Megan; Kopp, Kappie; and Snook, Sarah. *The Crafts: An Extraordinary Path to Freedom*. Savannah College of Art and Design. 2016.

Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom, a memoir by William Craft, relates his and his wife Ellen's lives as enslaved, fugitive and finally free persons.

gutenberg.org/ebooks/585

Watch this brief video outline describing the history of apartheid in South Africa, and then build on your understanding with the following more detailed article.

youtube.com/watch?v=2f2k6iDFCL4

thoughtco.com/brief-history-of-south-african-apartheid-2834606

Explore this site for more examples of Hlobo's work.

lehmannmaupin.com/artists/nicholas-hlobo

Witness railroad ruins transform into the world-class SCAD Museum of Art.

youtube.com/watch?v=vvD1-lsJ1al

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The Savannah College of Art and Design is a private, nonprofit, accredited university, offering more than 100 academic degree programs in more than 40 majors across its locations in Atlanta and Savannah, Georgia; Hong Kong; Lacoste, France; and online via SCAD eLearning.

For more information, visit scad.edu.

Cover image: **Nicholas Hlobo**, detail of *Amasuntswana*, installation view, SCAD Museum of Art, copper and brass, 2018



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