

FAUBOURG



Courtesy Cassi Namoda/Photo by Nastassia Brückin

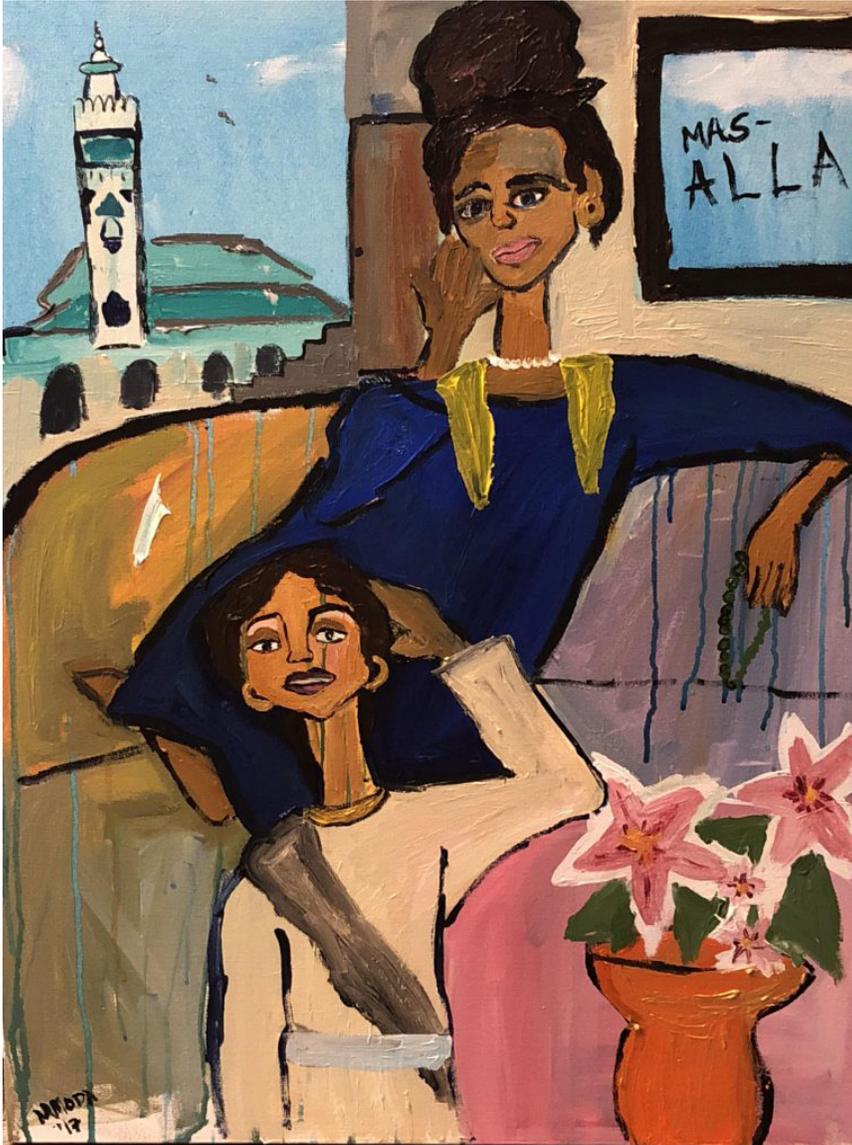
FEBRUARY 22, 2018
BY PRISCILLA DEBAR

MEET: PAINTER CASSI NAMODA

Cassi Namoda is the epitome of the modern creative woman. Independent, intuitive, an avid traveler and learner, she's a woman of the world and an artist. Born in Maputo, Mozambique, the artist grew up "all around Africa" and went on to live in more countries than I can list here. After several years in New York (where we met while she was working in fashion and as a curator) and West Africa, the multi-talented nomad has settled in Los Angeles where she's dedicated to her art. Cassi's paintings explore life through the eyes of everyday women and men in Africa.

She's been told her work – a collection of acrylics on canvas and watercolors on paper – is reminiscent of painters before her: honest, raw and perfectly imperfect shapes and figures against tropical backdrops. These elements, and a sense of romanticism where the female figure clearly understands her power, tease our imagination and take us on a journey in space and time. The young painter doesn't have formal training, confiding with no complex that she "didn't go to school for painting or art history." But she undeniably has a natural gift for storytelling and an appreciation for art in its traditional form, while aptly using social media to share her vision and dreams.

I caught up with Cassi to learn more about her new life as a painter, her multicultural perspective and how conscious living influences her professional and personal life, and of course, her style.



"Hesna with a hand of Hamza while sister Khadija reclines by lily flowers listening to call of Prayer on Jumaah Friday with a view of Hassan II." Acrylic on canvas

Can you tell us a bit about the different places you have lived in and how they inform what you do today?

I think my story is an interesting one. My father is an American white man who travelled to Mozambique and met my mother. They are so culturally different and then [with me] living in many different cultural spaces, I think that experience somehow informs the work in some way. I'm not necessarily sure how yet but I feel I pull from a lot.

The way you explore the self portrait concept is fascinating, allowing us to see how you see yourself: a beautiful, confident woman.

It's funny. Henry [my partner] said to me the other day "when you paint, it comes out so clear and concise. Sometimes it's hard for an artist to do that". And I think a little bit of it - to be honest - is maybe also what I think about my generation, the world I live in, especially here in the West.

When was your first curated show?

I started with Prof. George Preston, an African art collector living in Harlem whom I worked with in my early 20s. He has a very rich history and I've always enjoyed his watercolors and his paintings. I decided it would be wonderful to start the first part of the dialogue that I want to tell as a curation through George. I was always thinking about Negritude and transatlantic stories, and I felt George told it in such a beautiful way. I did a very minimal retrospective of his paintings, and I also supplemented African sculptures. It was a wonderful show and very powerful.

Do you take time to conceptualize what you want to paint, or does it just happen organically?

I just had a studio visit last night, and it's so many different processes. Sometimes I'm thinking about memories, and about what it was like travelling by myself a lot of the time in Mozambique. The stories that came up, the feelings I felt, and even some anxieties I had. And a lot of the time I am thinking about childhood, too. I paint my mother as a topic, also. She is slightly bipolar, and she shows up in the work a lot because my work is not happy work, but it's not sad work either. I feel like the work is layered; it's not about one thing. I am taking bits of everything, and I am also thinking about romance, painters, and settings to put figures in; sometimes magic, ritual and tribalism as well. I painted different Macumba people in my work. There have been multiple points in my life have shown up, and I also paint from memory which is kind of beautiful.



"A man reads 'Works Of Love' by Kierkegaard on a rainy Saturday afternoon, in a long quiet room with an old wooden floor in Paris, at the bedside. And, then on the bed is a beautiful woman." Acrylic on canvas

Can you tell us where your style inspiration comes from?

I've been spending a lot of time in the library; the most colorful things in those rooms are the books I look at; I see orange pop up, and then I want to wear orange. I think it's just a moment of attraction and that comes out in the clothes; that's how I draw my decision to what I put in my closet. Now that I think about it, it's always been a sort of attraction to color, texture, time and place, so it's not like I'm reading fashion magazines - maybe sometimes. I love New York. I have very stylish friends here. In Paris, I only wore black because there's something so classic about the city that it felt nice. Sometimes it's storytelling for me too; it's so many different things it's hard to say about the magazines or what is on trend.

What does sustainability mean to you?

For me, it's always been something I thought about. Some values and morals were ingrained in me at a younger age. I have always had a political mindset in some ways, like when I found out certain things about larger companies and their policies, it turned me off. I feel that I've always been doing the research. I prefer designers that have this kind of slow making process. I love going to small beach towns and seeing how they make leather sandals, and even going to Africa and sitting with the tailor and making some pieces together. It's the idea of making something tailored for an individual. I find haute couture interesting because of that.



Courtesy Cassi Namoda/Instagram



"Beautiful black woman in a transparent dress on a terrace, maybe looking at a man- but, also gazing at a church in Paris"
Acrylic on canvas

What role does social media play when it comes to your art?

I think social media has taken over the world and, in some respects, how we connect to it. I think of social media as a storyboard of my life. I think of printing everything on Instagram and going through the story, and maybe at some point, the photographs were art themselves. When I was in Zanzibar I kept making mental notes, so with the autobiographical aspect, I feel like I'll continue exploring this. I traveled through the villages I've been to in Mozambique, and so some of the watercolors are based on people that live in random towns throughout Mozambique. It's interesting to see how it all translates into color.

Why is this [social media] so important to you?

Because it's representative of culture and time and a reflection of oneself. It's not about the current trends, it's about knowing thyself and then you find your thing. And you are continually exploring the process of where. I also think a lot about the interior, too. Space is a big part of my life, and it all comes from the same place, from interior to the wear. A big part of my shows is like theatre - I like having a particular type of live music, interesting things to eat and good wine to

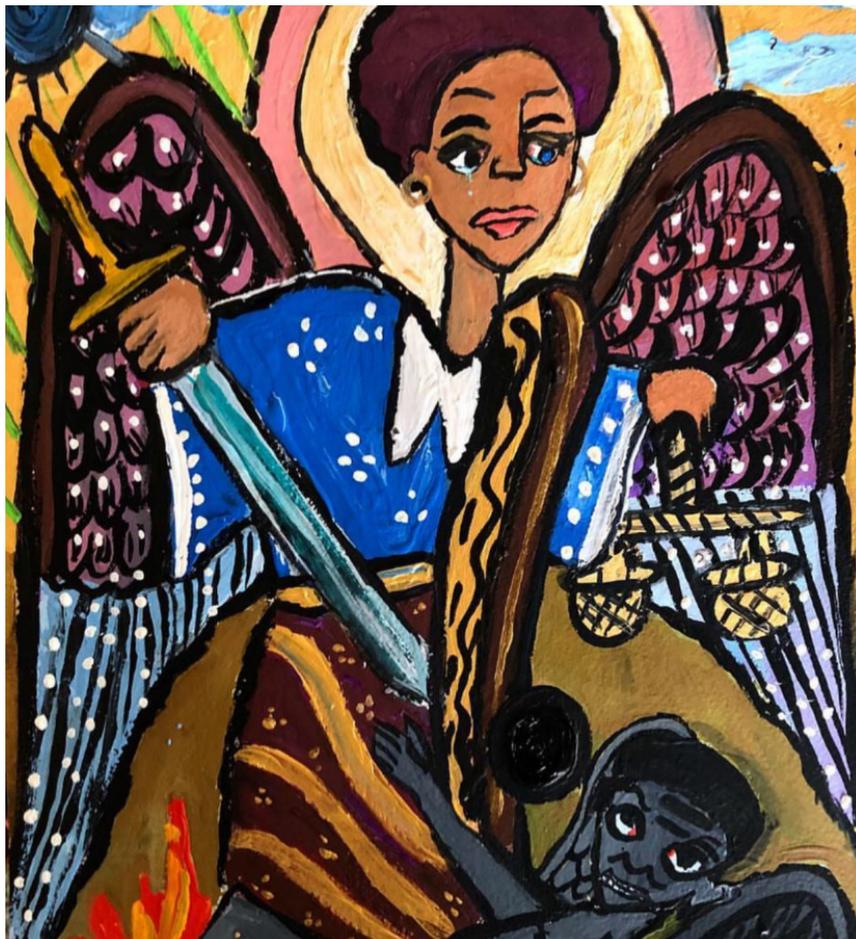
drink. Those things are important to me, and the women in my life also share the same values.

What is your relationship to spirituality and how does it influence your work?

I do believe in ritual, so when someone around me - maybe close to me - is going through something or if I am having a moment of anxiety, or anxiousness, it is usually because it is coming out of the physical environment, so I'll clean or bring sage and light candles. I like burning red candles. I am very attracted to red. I love the womb-like feeling from red, and I feel like good things come from red. I come up with different rituals that I like, and I try to do that every day; even if it is just sprinkling rose water in my hair. When I curated a show for my good friend, Asuka Anastacia Ogawa in Chinatown, the walls were all red and there was this intimacy.

That is very interesting. Do you have a conscious way of doing things?

At the opening I had books, and it was nice to be there and have people come to me and talk about the work. People were referencing painters I admire when talking about my work. That's something special - the idea of revisiting a time. My characters are black African characters; I think of different women at a different time when Mozambique's aim was to be Mozambique.



Courtesy Cassi Namoda/Instagram

Do you go by any rituals that help keep you stay balanced?

I like to take my Chinese herbs in the morning and put it in my coffee so I feel like the coffee/tea part of my morning is very much a big deal and then I try to end every day with a bath and some dry brushing.

What is dry brushing?

Dry brushing is using a brush made from hard natural fiber on your skin - from your feet up. It's supposed to move the circulation, it helps the body's biggest organ. Doing this brushes off dead skin. When I lived in Morocco I would go to the hammam once or twice every week because for them it's just a natural process that you do for the skin. Looking at how cultures handle the body is a very fascinating thing for me.

You are extraordinarily knowledgeable about health and self-care. What has been your journey?

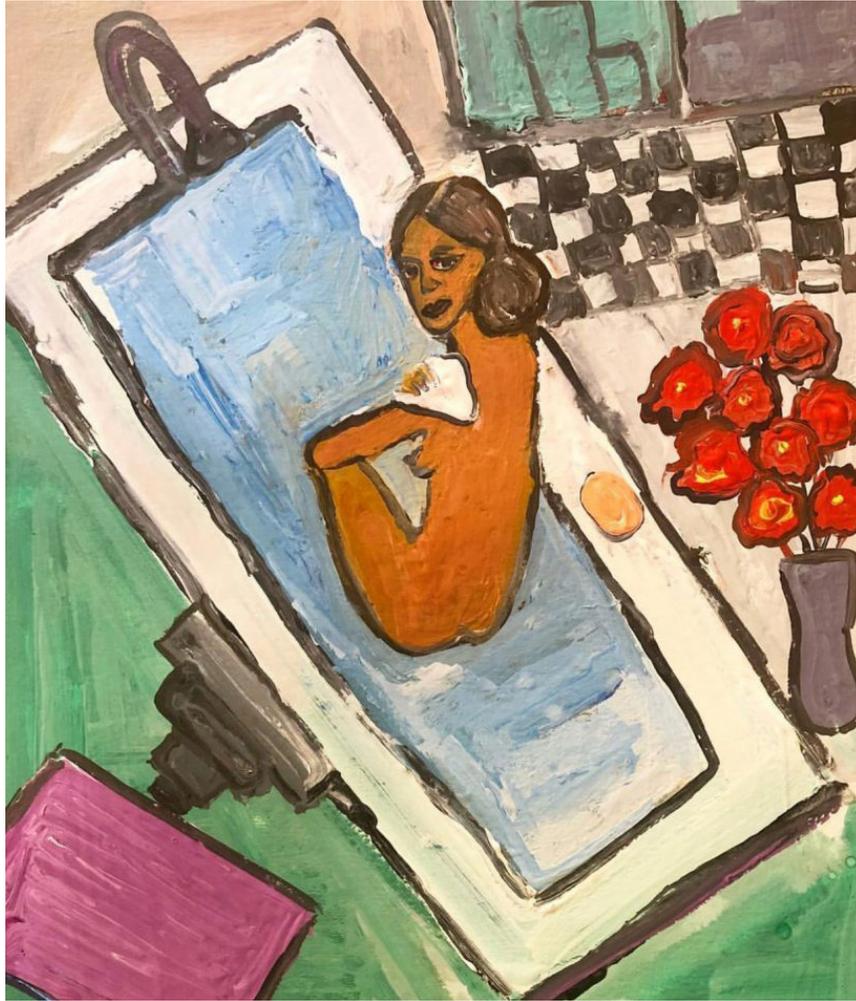
I've always thought I would be working in some natural healing field whether it be Ayurveda or Eastern medicine as it's just so natural for me. I had been vegan for so long, and then I became kind of intolerant to it, and I started wondering why. I discovered your blood type is a big part of who you are. I know that every part of me is very bonded to me, so I started thinking about how the body works. I've always explored herbs and spices, which began in South Africa. I was living in Mozambique at that time, so I would go to markets and explore things. It did take a lot of reading, but I believe when you're passionate about something the work is never done. If you are curious about something, you'll approach it with full intention. For me, it's natural to do this. I have helped so many of my friends too, so that is really what it is all about.

Do you have a moto or something that guides you everyday? Perhaps a mantra?

I think that at the end of the day it all goes down to knowing and loving yourself. I feel like both aspects are part of each other, and it opens the world when you can figure out how to manoeuvre it yourself. It's all about slowing down, and doing things like yoga and reading, and allowing ourselves to be in the stillness.

Interview by our founder & CEO Priscilla Debar.

Safra Ducreay contributed to this story. Safra is a culture writer living in Los Angeles. The Toronto native moved to London before settling in California, where she contributed to Harper's Bazaar UK, ELLE Canada, L'Uomo Vogue, and other large publications. When she's not writing, she's either reading The New Yorker or putting her alchemist skills to good use.



"Woman bather in a quaint apartment in the Marais, Paris. And a group of red peonies." Watercolor on paper



"Maria caught in a vision, Bar Texas, Maputo City 1971" Acrylic on canvas

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<https://hyperallvergi.com/479332/art-movements-288/>