

It's Nice That



“It’s storytelling, really”: Cassi Namoda on her narrative-driven paintings

With her first UK show currently being held at Pippy Houldsworth Gallery in London, we chat to the artist about her new story-led body of work.

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Functioning like a story, the work of Cassi Namoda is filled with narrative. And now with what is set to be her first UK exhibition held at Pippy Houldsworth Gallery in London, Cassi – who grew up between Mozambique, Haiti and the United States – has released a new set of artworks that explore her multicultural upbringing.

The artist refers to this new show, titled *Little is Enough For Those in Love*, as a “survey of life”, and one that should be “held at the highest currency” – that currency, of course, being love. “I think I wanted to expand on that truth, and I felt that the best way to create this cathartic release was to create a spiritual body of work,” she tells *It’s Nice That*. Cassi spent the most of September last year in East Hampton (where the artist lives and works) in order to create the earlier part of the show. At this time, she was particularly inspired by Helen Frankenthaler, an American abstract expressionist painter whom broadened her ideals of what can be achieved in terms of the “application of paint, landscape and abstraction”. As for the work she produced, Cassi adds: “There was a cohesive tissue that connected all the works – the palette – because every morning I would take walks in nature and that came through in the pinks, soft yellows and bright blues, which sometimes contrast with the meaning of the picture.”

An example of this allegory in context can be seen within the 3 month old lung patient painting – one that Cassi refers to as having an “ethereal beauty” before the audience takes note of what’s actually taking place within the image. This visual double entendre can be applied to many of her works, including a piece titled *Sad Man with Flowers*. At first it appears to be aesthetically pleasing – with a pastel-tinted backdrop and bursts of harmonious hues – yet a longer pause allows you to see past the outer layer and soon you’re delving into the picture’s literal meaning: a sad man sitting there with flowers. A further piece, titled *Untitled (Conjoined Twins)*, has a similar effect; the abstract composition and soft palette appears at first, before the realisation of the subjects conjoined at the head starts to turn the meaning within an instant.



Above

Cassi Namoda: Untitled (Conjoined Twins) 2019; acrylic on canvas;
45.7x45.7cm x 18x18in

The newer works were created during her stay in Red Hook, Brooklyn, and Cassi describes this part as being disparate in terms of its technical skill and emotion. “I used different tools and created a more defined image of life in maputo,” she explains, before pointing to *Little is Enough for Those with Love*, Mimi Nakupenda as a large-scale example of people dancing the “Marrenbanta”. Here, she tells the scene of a typical weekend, where friends and families get together and enjoy each other’s company. “The same happens in Costa Do Sol on Sunday Evening,” she adds, “it’s a long stretch in maputo Bay where friends, lovers and family get together and enjoy the breeze coming off the water. There is kizomba music, people dancing and laughing, and it’s one of the most beautiful experiences. This is a common shared pastime in different bays around Lusophone Africa.”

Evidently, Cassi draws from various anecdotal references in order to create her work. She also cites German Expressionism as a major reference throughout her work, in part due to the movement’s ability to place emphasis on an artist’s “innermost feelings”, she says. “It’s a very authentic expression and it will never grow weary. I love looking at paint-

ings by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Franz Marc, Egon Schiele, Gustav Klimt and Edvard Munch – I’m aware that the names I’ve mentioned are men of a European descent, but I am also aware that these same people have looked to Africa and other indigenous cultures for innovation in a kind of re-wilding of classical training.”

Further inspiration points towards Senegalese filmmakers jibril Diop Mambéty and Ousmane Sembène who ignite a certain “cadence” in her work, as well as Portuguese African writers such as Luis Bernardo Honwana for his “visceral imagery”. Cassi adds: “There is a dovetail here, and this will always be the way as I am always doing research.”

As a whole, Cassi’s main drive is to create works that depict a narrative – paintings that have a story to tell yet bare a hidden meaning. “What is it that I am trying to convey and what will my viewer and I walk away with? It is storytelling, really.”

Little is Enough For Those in Love is on show at Pippy Houldsworth Gallery from 24 January – 7 March 2020



Above
Sad Man with Flowers 2019; acrylic on canvas; 152.4x213.4cm,
60x84in



Above
Sasha and Zamani's Fruitful Earth 2019; acrylic on canvas;
188x152.5cm, 74x60in



Above
Little is Enough for Those with Love/Mimi Nakupenda
2019; acrylic on canvas; 167.6x233.7, 66.92in



Above
Family Portrait in Gurué 2019; acrylic on canvas;
167.6x121.9, 66x48



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<https://www.itsnicethat.com/articles/cassi-namoda-art-050220>