

Joe Turpin

South Africa

Biography

Joe Turpin (born 1995 in Johannesburg) is a South African visual artist whose artistic research practice focuses on historically charged narratives and semiotics as extensions of painting.

Joe Turpin creates mixed-media installations based on painting that facilitate temporal conversations about identity, memory, and history. His Jewish heritage becomes an important and consequential theme as he explores stories of migration and persecution. These cultural paradigms inform his archival research and artistic production.

Joe Turpin was among the top three finalists for the 2019 Cassirer-Welz Prize and a finalist for the 2021 Sabaa Education Art Award.

Turpin graduated from the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg in 2018 with a BA in Fine Arts and is currently pursuing his MFA at Pratt Institute in New York.

Exhibitions, Artist in Residence (selection)

SOLO:

- 2021 More than we can bear, Bag Factory Artist Studios, Johannesburg.
- 'Complicit Victim: On The Margin Of The Shoah', solo exhibition, Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre, Johannesburg.
- 2017 'POP (T)ART!', solo pop up show, Ants Parkhurst, Johannesburg

GROUP

- 2021, Coexistence, TMRW Gallery (The Mixed Reality Workshop), Johannesburg (Physical)
- 2020, Myopia, William Humphreys Art Gallery (Online)
- 2019, IN:DIALOG Bez Valley, Moon Valley Studio, Johannesburg
- 2018, Late at the Fitzwilliam: Objects in the Round', Meaning Making, Polychromy Revealed, CAMLATES, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, United Kingdom
- 2017, 'Protest Stickers, Metal, Barbapapa et Armistice' Exposition, Continuum espace de projet, Bordeaux, France
- 臺中彩墨藝術節 16th TSAI-MO Art Festival, Taichung Harbor Art Center Exhibition Hall A, Taichung City Tun District Art Centre, Taiwan
- 2016, Art and Fashion, JBA Gallery, Chicago, USA

RESIDENCE

- Studio Artist, Bag Factory, Johannesburg, South Africa

- Artist in Residence, RAW Material Company, Dakar, Senegal
- London Summer Intensive, Wits School of Art & Camden Arts Centre, London, UK

The artwork: aesthetic positions

As a multidisciplinary artist based in Johannesburg, South Africa, I use archival research to locate narratives, allegories, and semiotics that are charged and shaped by historical events or mythologies. These fables influence my current focus on paintings and mixed media installations. I question how these narratives that reflect the past and present also resonate within a larger social context, initiating forms of activism that bring people together.

The Art Works

Johannesburg Elevator 80s

Oil on canvas, silk

2020

Size: 66 x 90 cm

Joe Turpin: "I tried to capture a moment in time, a moment in history. The center of Johannesburg in the 1980s. The last swan song of the apartheid era. The days when it began to crumble. I wanted to paint a nostalgia for a city that was a thorn in the side of the apartheid government, which was based in Pretoria - a neighboring city. I thought a lot about Hillbrow and the nightlife in that area."

Call and Response Communication

Mixed media, oil on canvas, 3 medical masks

2020

Size: 63 x 148 cm / 2020

Joe Turpin: "This was the first work I created after returning from an Artist in Residence residency in March 2020 and during the national lockdown in South Africa in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic. I came up with the composition very quickly in the early days of the lockdown - trying to understand current events - SAA (South African Airways) going broke and bankrupt during this time, although recently in a dangerous situation and its closure was imminent anyway, is depicted in the back of the plane, as well as the reactions of governments, agencies disseminating information to the masses, and the public's

reaction to this global crisis. The dissolution of the airline is a personal disappointment to me, as from a young age I was fascinated by the colors on the tail wings of airplanes, briefly wanted to be a pilot and traveled to visit family members, and as an adult the disappointment of being a proud South African whose country does not currently have its own airline - plus in the past I found the airline's service quality to be better than other airlines. The quoted text is originally from a 2013 reading by news anchor Daniel Makokera, who at the time worked for the corruption-hit news station "ANN7." Although the pandemic had not yet broken out, he recalled his blooper on the air as he painted suits inspired by the official newscasters we see on the news and expect to give us information and updates in this uncertain time.

The three face masks used in this work were already part of my household when my mother bought many of them during her own illness, and were not purchased for use during the current global demand and shortage of face masks and PPE - they have since been removed from the work for general use after this sensitivity was taken into account, and in the future, when demand drops, other masks will be sourced to display the artwork."

Untitled Professional Development Exercise in Painting

Mixed media, oil pencil, oil on silk

2020

Size: 60 x 60 cm

Joe Turpin: "This work was created after I participated in a second "professional development" program, which is more common for emerging African artists. It is somewhat frustrating how many of these "programs" an artist must participate in before he can say he is working professionally. But it is also a result of such programs. That a work of art can emerge after further development. The sphere is a symbol, its color, gold, a reference to the mineral mined in my hometown of Johannesburg."

Work comment by kukutana

Joe Turpin, as a "white" African and artist, is exposed to a tension of his own that we in Europe can hardly measure. The rainbow-nation (Nelson Mandela's wonderful term for South Africa) has problems all its own that determine its course through time: A country full of unbridled hope and disappointment, full of violence, corruption, love and generosity - a dystopia and a utopia at the same time. All this can be found in Turpin's works. He comments on his world, his

surroundings, his time, and likes to draw on the many layers of time: history is a powerful component of his works - as is the desire to paint, to make art. Equally powerful is the invoked object-reality present in many of his works: a real medical mask, a real tassel attached to the painting. They reinforce the documentary character of the works, which, however, do not realistically document an incident, but rather cite a state of mind.

Johannesburg Elevator

A man without a face next to an elevator. He wears a fez, one of the traditional oriental headdresses. At the side hangs down the tassel, which is also found as a real object hanging on the lower right of the painting and integrated into it. A sign above him points to the reception desk. He stands upright, almost rigid. Next to him, in the open elevator: objects, not to be identified. Threatening? In monochrome blue and white, the work remains enigmatic. It fascinates the viewer through the depth of the color and the balanced composition - deliberately hermetic. An introspection for artist and viewer.

Call and Response Communication

Men without faces - similar to the man in "Johannesburg Elevator". Anonymous powers, suits, who stand for the failure of the landing of the cargo? Who stand for the failure of the pandemic opposite? Three bluish medical masks from private collection hang at the bottom of the painting, countering the sky of the upper edge of the picture. An airplane disappears: as does hope? The painting is a bitter commentary on the situation 202 in South Africa - and in the world.

Untitled Professional Development Exercise in Painting

Pure painting: yellowish-orange circle with a small white inner circle on a reddish-brownish ground; a white line crosses the painting and divides it into two upper thirds and a lower third, almost a golden section. A balanced composition, untitled. What for? To name the visible? Or to mark the invisible, the unsaid? Five reddish-brownish tassels hang at the bottom of the painting, taking up the color of the painting. The work exudes a peculiar calm, which is broken by the twilight of the yellowish circle and, when viewed for a longer time, triggers restlessness, not-knowing. Art can do that.