

**Cinga SAMSON**

*Established Africa*

*April 2018*

# **Ichule: a portrait of Cinga Samson**

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**From being a boy who made clay cows by a riverside in the Eastern Cape, to having an exhibition in the Armory Art Fair in New York City, Cinga Samson has come a long way since 2007.**



*Cinga in his studio in Cape Town's Bo Kaap.*

He was 20 that year and stumbled upon an art studio in F-section in Khayelitsha. It was the first time he'd ever seen a studio. In fact, he had been unaware such a thing existed. Standing in that space, littered with an array of art tools and occupied by three local artists, Cinga knew exactly what he wanted to become. He then enrolled at the Stellenbosch Academy of Design and Photography the following year.



*Cinga's studio and area where he produces his work.*

Today Cinga has exhibited at the AVA Gallery in Cape Town, the Stevenson Gallery in Johannesburg and last year won a Tollman Award. His first show at Blank Projects Gallery, which has represented him for the past two years, was held in 2015.

Most recently Cinga exhibited at the [Armory Art Fair](#) in New York last month, where he shared a booth with fellow Blank Projects artist, Igshaan Adams.

**“I didn’t know art was something that could be sold, that came later in my life. But I knew from there and then this is what I want to do, and I followed that,” he says.**

From a young age, Cinga was exposed to art. He used to watch local men making sculptures in the streets, and would draw, bend wires and make molds. There was no specific word for art in his language, isiXhosa, and no awareness of art’s value as a form of business.



*Cinga alongside one of his latest artworks.*

Since his parents were unmarried, his childhood years were spent moving between parents. He lived in various towns in the Eastern Cape, mainly due to his father being in insurance sales, until he returned to his birthplace, Cape Town, to redo his matric year.

**“I’m from a very superstitious background,” he said, referring to the tradition of rituals within the Xhosa culture. “Everyone is running away from the idea of superstition, I don’t want to run away from it... it makes me more complex, richer as a human being. I want my work to have that sense and feel as well.”**



*Looking ahead. Cinga Samson in his studio in Cape Town*

The contrasting ideologies behind Cinga's pieces before and after 2015 show his evolution. At first his focus was social dynamics, power, politics and racial issues. Since he has found more value in his own journey and now paints self-portraits.

**“I could've focused on so many negative things. I just chose a different attitude towards it as a young person and it made sense,” he says.**

His collection of self-portraits, which was exhibited in New York, was titled *Ubuhle Benkwenkwezi* named after a song by Rick Ross, Wale and Drake about luxury and excess.

When he posed for the portraits, he wanted to showcase an upstanding man who is sensual and beautiful. By depicting “the beautiful black man” he challenged the national perception of what a black man is, he says.

“Whatever I share is to celebrate that I am in my prime. I'm young. There's no better time to be a black person in our history.”



**Looking ahead, Cinga wants to restore the dignity of Africans through his art and hopes to exhibit at Freeze in London later this year.**

**“It’s been a beautiful experience that I’m still curious to see and intend to push forward,” he said.**