

## NOTRE PEAU by Maurice Mbikayi

Artsit Maurice Mbikayi, born in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1974, brought a curious and unique vision of our world to art viewers in South Africa when he moved here in 2004. Mbikayi's work is visceral and hard-hitting and incorporates well-known brand labels and recognisable symbols to comment visually on his concerns for the future of his home country and of Africa. The relentless pursuit of mining wealth and the inevitable ramifications of rampant capitalism have had a devastating effect on his people, their culture and the environment. Mbikayi takes these ideas as his departure point as he overlaps material with meaning in a potent body of work.

Mbikayi's imagery and methods are direct and hark back to his studies in Graphic Design and Visual Communication. He begins with a layer of patterning overlaid with paper, plastic or found-object collage. His symbols may, at first glance, seem quite literal – computer components, the Apple Mac logo and other brand labels. But when juxtaposed against the silhouetted outlines of what appear to be Africa's scourge of child soldiers they become menacing signifiers. Mbikayi has entitled this body of work "Notre Peau", or "Our Skin" believing that skin offers an apt metaphor for the African response to the impact capitalism, technology and consumerism have had on the continent. Skin is fragile and vulnerable to injury but is also extraordinarily resilient, showing an enormous capacity to regenerate and heal. Similarly, Africa and its people have learnt to resist, adapt to or absorb the damage inflicted on them.

In a work entitled *Measuring the Impact* (2010), the face of a male portrait is composed of black computer keys disturbingly punctured by rolls of red and white measuring tapes in the area of the brain. In others, the human eye is used, Cyclops-like, pasted onto the foreheads of child soldiers or, as is the case in *Untitled* (2010), multitudinous eyes are used to build up the entire figure itself. It is a disarming strategy. The eyes draw the viewer in, seducing with their artificially made-up beauty but they are menacing and probing – reminding the viewer that all this man-made beauty is really only skin deep.

Two small sculptural works entitled *Anti-social Network I & II* comprise life-sized skulls, one created from white computer keys and one from black. Cyborgian in nature, the pieces speak to a future in which technology appears to have gained the upper hand while mankind has relinquished control to an external, albeit manmade force. They also convey the many ways in which Africa has been subjected to injury: e-waste and the cast-off detritus of obsolete technology have found their way into the continent in the guise of generous donations from first-world powers. As Mbikayi puts it: "These works speak of the human in Africa, and yet again question, what price is being paid by Africa for being the 'dark' continent in the globalised world." 2011



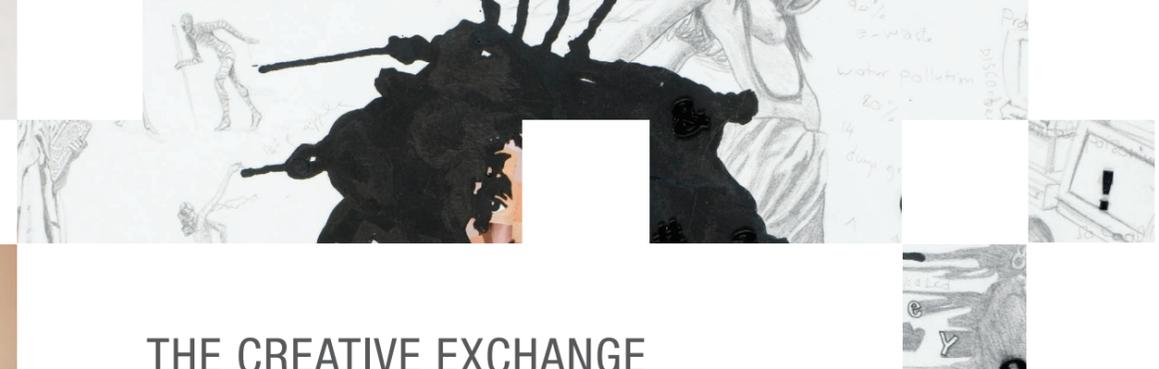
Maurice Mbikayi | 06 September – 23 September 2011

Villa Arcadia, Hollard Campus, 22 Oxford Road Parktown, Johannesburg

Both Hollard and Artinsure are authorised financial services providers.



# MAURICE MBIKAYI THE CREATIVE EXCHANGE



## THE CREATIVE EXCHANGE

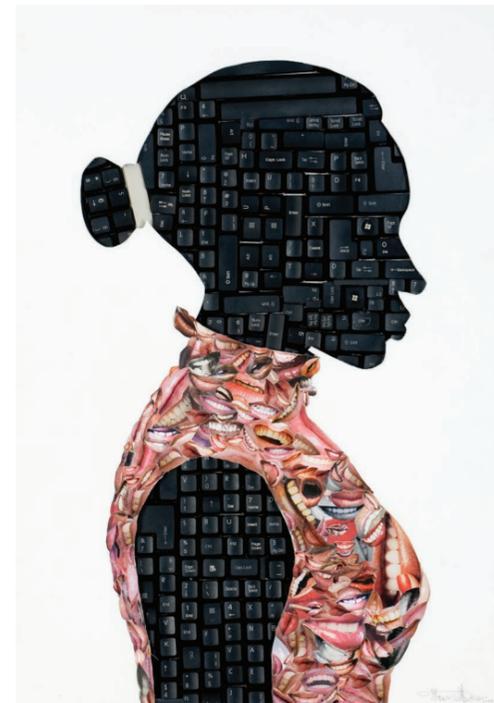
The Creative Exchange Programme was established to recognise emerging, African fine artists who demonstrate exceptional ability. The Creative Exchange is a partnership involving Hollard, Artinsure, Business and Arts South Africa and the Creative Block and creates exhibition and meaningful mentorship opportunities to emerging artists. The programme is presented annually to nominated artists, affording them and their work exposure in the local and global arts community.

An exchange programme, rather than an arts sponsorship, the initiative offers select artists financial support and exhibition opportunities for up to 12 months to benefit their work and career development.

Nominees are encouraged to create a comprehensive body of work, which is exhibited at Hollard's Villa Arcadia in Johannesburg. In exchange, the Hollard Collection acquires artworks from each of the artists' exhibitions to the value of the agreed-upon investment. The artists also create a series of artworks that are made available for sale to the public.

During the time that the Creative Exchange artists work on their exhibitions, a mentor from the Creative Block supervises the career development, providing curatorial advice and publicity to raise awareness. The artists also participate in a Business Mentorship Programme with sessions conducted by Artinsure. These sessions introduce the artists to a host of business expertise within the arts sector – ranging from marketing to financial planning and cash flow management.

It is with great pleasure that we announce Maurice Mbikayi as one of the Creative Exchange artists for 2011.



Untitled, 2010

Computer keyboard and collage on cardboard  
35 x 25cm



Anti-social Network I & II, 2010

Computer keyboard and resin  
20 x 15 x 25cm each



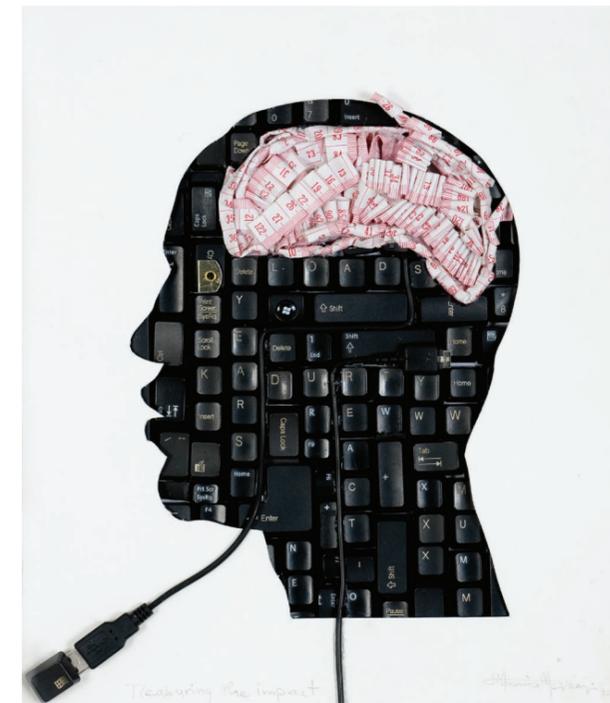
Untitled III, 2010

Plastic cut and mixed media collage on paper  
100 x 70cm



Untitled, 2010

Ink and collage on paper  
35 x 25cm



Measuring the Impact, 2010

Computer keyboard on paper  
35 x 30cm