

## Fifty Sounds

*Min-min*: ‘the sound of air screaming’. *Boro-boro*: ‘the important sound of things falling apart’. *Ba’sari*: ‘the sound of nevermore and how it comes when you least expect it’. These imaginary onomatopoeic words make up *Fifty Sounds*, a collection of essays by Japanese literary translator, Polly Barton.<sup>1</sup> The essay collection operates as an intimate, personal dictionary of invented language and sounds rooted in Barton’s everyday life as an outsider in Japan. As its title suggests, this exhibition takes its cue from the translator’s dictionary, considering onomatopoeias as inherently mimetic of the world we live in. As sounds translated into linguistic form, they have the power to evoke vivid images that can place the listener and speaker alike immediately ‘at the scene’, encompassing both visual and aural, linguistic and bodily, abstract and mimetic aspects all at once.

It is upon Barton’s understanding of the mimetic action of onomatopoeia that this exhibition considers works by three South African, Cape Town-based artists: Mongezi Ncaphayi, Georgina Gratrix, and Gabrielle Kruger. It engages with their paintings as reproductions and expressions of the artists’ environments, as transpositions of realities into visual languages of paint, color, and material qualities. Each work can be considered a sensitive verbalization of the ambient world of the artist, attentively interacting with their reality in their own unique way. It is with this approach, that we lean to hear each painting’s invocation of the worlds from which they came, their onomatopoeic expression.

1 Polly Barton, *Fifty Sounds* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2021)

The improvised paintings on paper by Mongezi Ncaphayi, a painter and saxophonist, invite viewers to listen as much as they observe. For Ncaphayi, considering ‘different ways of listening’ is an integral part of his artistic practice. This does not mean, however, that the works are a reaction to music. Instead, paintings including *Serpents and Visions and Sanctified blues II* are the result of his feelings. Attentively listening and responding to the sound of inner thoughts and emotions, the artist translates them into explosive, yet dream-like, abstract landscapes. Blotches of ink, paint strokes, and the varying planes within each painting become visual verbalizations of Ncaphayi’s inner state.

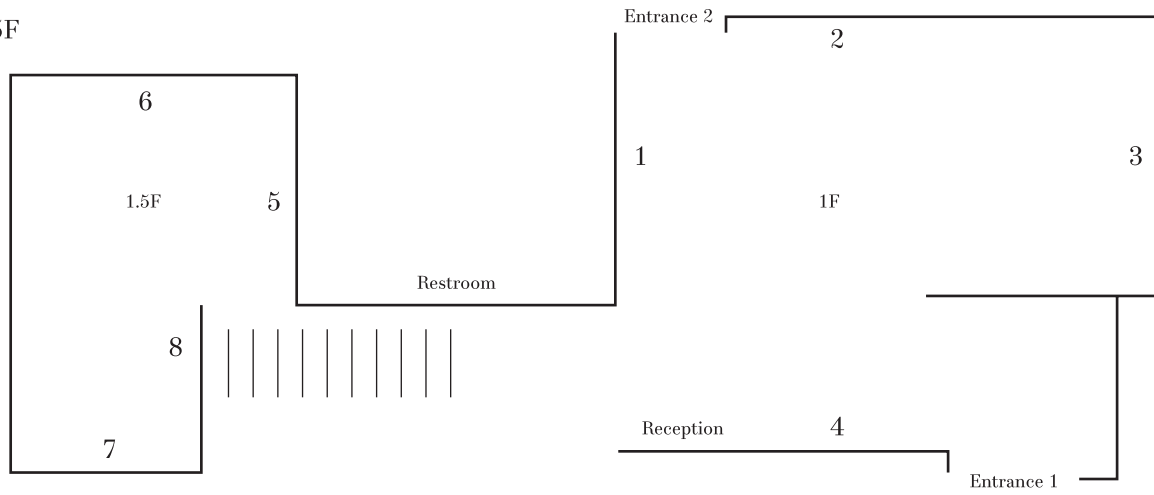
For Georgina Gratrix, repeated encounters with scenes, gestures, symbols, or words form an important component of her practice. During the pandemic, Georgina was able to explore this theme of revisitation and repetition more intensely, contemplating the comforts and anxieties attached to the notion of home, an environment that is intimately connected to the repetitiveness of daily life. In contrast to her previous works (characterized by thick layers of colorful oil paint emphasizing the *matière*), the monochrome paintings displayed in this exhibition, including *Common Time 2*, demonstrate Gratrix’s experimentation with representing raw images using a subdued color palette. Composed of identically sized rectangular canvases and displayed in a grid format, each painting bears recurring visual motifs found throughout Gratrix’s works, namely birds, flowers, dogs, faces, and figures in swimsuits. This mechanism of repetition is also present in the inclusion of familiar onomatopoeias, such as ‘knock knock’ (an example of her fascination with single words that repeat to the point of becoming a mere sound), or in the case of *Notes from Fashion 1, 2, 3*, through the serial rendition of an identical image taken from a fashion magazine.

Turning the gaze outwards, away from domestic surroundings, Gabrielle Kruger draws on the natural landscapes of Cape Town. For the artist,

paintings are about durations as much as they are about materiality and technique. She creates what could be described as ‘painting-sculptures’, stacking, scraping, cutting, and weaving sheets of dried acrylic paints which mimic the malleable quality of plastic. Through this time-based process of layering paint, Kruger has been capturing the city’s transforming natural environments. For example, the latest work by the artist, *Coral Carnation*, draws its inspiration from bits and pieces of kelp and seaweed washed ashore at the Sea Point Promenade. Encountering this scene during the country’s COVID-19 lockdown, she was reminded of pieces of paint left over at the studio. Mimicking the cyclical pattern of the ocean and nature as a whole, Kruger’s paintings whisper the silent movement of what has been discarded, piled up, washed away, and what circles back.

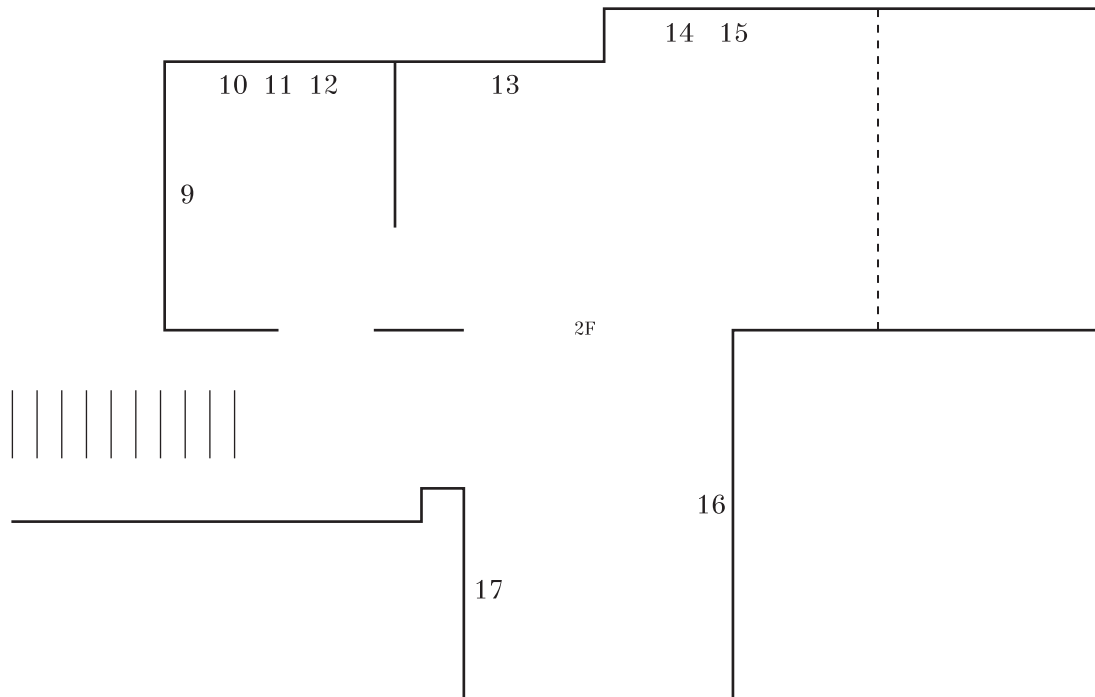
While the title ‘Fifty Sounds’ conjures polyphonic diversity, it also indicates a fixed number of possible sounds. However, this finite number does not need to signify a limit on creativity. Just as new words can be conceived within the existing language system, the exhibited works by the three artists also find new, imaginative combinations and possibilities within the existing visual and material language of painting.

1F & 1.5F



- 1 Mongezi Ncaphayi, *Ode To The Afflicted Ones*, 2021, Indian ink and Watercolour on Fabriano, 115×100cm
- 2 Mongezi Ncaphayi, *Sanctified blues II*, 2019, Indian ink and Watercolour on Cotton paper, 199×140cm
- 3 Mongezi Ncaphayi, *Serpents and Visions*, 2021, Indian Ink and Watercolour on Fabriano, 140.5×140cm
- 4 Mongezi Ncaphayi, *I forget to remember*, 2021, Indian Ink and Watercolour on Fabriano, 76×57cm
- 5 Georgina Gratrix, *Lilo Lady*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 23.5×30.5cm
- 6 Georgina Gratrix, *Common Time (Part Two)*, 2021, Oil on Belgian Linen and Canvas 23.5×30.5cm(each)
- 7 Georgina Gratrix, *Self Portrait (Parrot)*, 2021, Oil on canvas, 60×50cm
- 8 Georgina Gratrix, *The Swimmer*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 23.5×30.5cm

2F



- 9 Georgina Gratrix, *Active People*, 2021, Oil on Belgian Linen, 70×60cm
- 10 Georgina Gratrix, *Notes from Fashion 1*, 2021, Oil on canvas, 60×50cm
- 11 Georgina Gratrix, *Notes from Fashion 2*, 2021, Oil on canvas, 60×50cm
- 12 Georgina Gratrix, *Notes from Fashion 3*, 2021, Oil on canvas, 60×50cm
- 13 Gabrielle Kruger, *Coral Carnation*, 2022, Acrylic on Board, 140×90cm
- 14 Gabrielle Kruger, *Sea Meadow I*, 2022, Acrylic on Board, 85×65cm
- 15 Gabrielle Kruger, *Sea Meadow II*, 2022, Acrylic on Board, 85×65cm
- 16 Gabrielle Kruger, *Scrawlings*, 2020, Acrylic on Board, 85×65cm
- 17 Gabrielle Kruger, *Looping Around*, 2020, Acrylic on Board, 85×65cm

## Mongezi Ncaphayi

Mongezi Ncaphayi was born in 1983 in Benoni, South Africa, and currently lives and works in Cape Town, South Africa. Following his graduation with a Diploma in Art and Design from the Ekurhuleni East College Benoni in 2005, Ncaphayi completed a Professional Printmaking Course at Artist Proof Studio in 2008. In 2012, he obtained a Certificate in Advanced Studies from School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, USA. Ncaphayi was the recipient of the prestigious Absa L'atelier Gerard Sekoto Award in 2013, earning him a three-month residency at the Cite Des Arts in Paris, France. In 2011, Ncaphayi received the Ampersand Foundation Fellowship in New York City, USA, and in 2016 he was awarded a grant from the Prince Claus Fund Grant in Amsterdam, Netherlands. In 2019, Ncaphayi received the Africa First Art Prize. Ncaphayi has had a number of important solo exhibition with SMAC, and in 2020, the artist participated in the first Stellenbosch Triennale, curated by Khanyisile Mbongwa, in the group exhibition, *Tomorrow there will be more of us*. Further notable group exhibitions include: *Filling in the Gaps and Print Promises*, both at the Iziko South African National Gallery in Cape Town; and *The Ampersand Foundation Award 21 years Celebration Exhibition* at the University of Johannesburg Art Gallery in Johannesburg. Ncaphayi has work in The Smithsonian National Museum of African Art Collection, Washington DC, USA and The Iziko South African National Gallery Collection, Cape Town, South Africa, amongst others.

## Georgina Gratrix

Georgina Gratrix was born in Mexico City in 1982 and grew up in Durban, South Africa. She studied at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town, and graduated in 2005, specialising in painting. In 2018, Gratrix was awarded the Discovery Prize at the 50th Anniversary edition of Art Brussels, for her presentation with SMAC Gallery in Brussels, Belgium. Gratrix is a recipient of the Ampersand

Fellowship Award and completed a residency at the Ampersand Foundation in New York City, USA in 2018. She completed a residency in Oaxaca, Mexico, in association with a Centro de las Artes Agustín (CASA) culminating in an exhibition entitled *Crossing Night* in the same year.

Most recently, Gratrix was included in the following group exhibitions: *Punch*, curated by Nina Chanel Abney, at Jeffrey Deitch Gallery in Los Angeles, USA; *Skin Stealers* at Nicodim Gallery in Los Angeles; the *Ampersand Foundation Award 21 years celebration exhibition* curated by Gordon Froud at the University of Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) in Johannesburg, South Africa, all in 2019. Solo exhibitions include: *On Repeat*, at SMAC Gallery in Johannesburg, in 2018; *Puppy Love*, at SMAC Gallery in Cape Town, in 2016; *The Berlin Paintings at Die Tankstelle* in association with Nolan Judin Gallery in Berlin, Germany, in 2013; *My Show* in 2012 at SMAC Gallery in Stellenbosch; and *Everything Ecstatic*, at Ten Haaf Projects in Amsterdam, Netherlands, in 2010.

### Gabrielle Kruger

Gabrielle Kruger was born in 1993 in Cape Town, South Africa, where she currently lives and works. After graduating from Stellenbosch University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 2015, she earned her Masters in Fine Arts from Michaelis School of Fine Art at University of Cape Town in 2018. In the same year, Kruger was awarded a Certificate of Excellence from the 33rd Chelsea International Fine Art Competition and participated in the collective exhibition at Agora Gallery in New York City, USA. In 2019, Kruger was the Artist-in-Residence at the Nirox Sculpture Park at the Cradle of Humankind in Johannesburg, South Africa, which culminated in a collaborative project between Kruger, The National School of the Arts and Nitrox Foundation to present a 'Painting Performance,' titled *An African*.

Kruger's solo exhibitions include: *For Paint to Dry* at SMAC Gallery

in Stellenbosch, South Africa and *Overgrowth* at Marta Moriarty Art Window in Madrid, Spain; both in 2019. Her group show participations includes: *Unfair Weather* at Lychee One in London, UK; *Weekend Special* at SMAC Gallery in Johannesburg, South Africa; *THE LONG TABLE* at SMAC Gallery in Stellenbosch, South Africa; and *Space and Place*, curated by Khanya Mashabela at Galerie EIGEN + ART in Leipzig, Germany; all in 2021. Kruger presented numerous 'Painting Performances' in 2019, including *Gucci Garden of Eden*, curated by Elana Brundyn and Louw Kotze and performed at the Norval Foundation in Cape Town, South Africa, as well as *arteBOTANICA*, curated by Manthe Ribane and performed at the Nirox Sculpture Park in Johannesburg.