

Struggle shooter puts the ‘fist and flag’ label to rest

Omar Badsha’s exhibition pursues ways of thinking beyond the prism of politics, writes **Tymon Smith**

OMAR Badsha jokes with two of the gallery assistants at the National Gallery that they are back late from their lunch break, a right he fought for them to have back in the ‘70s when he was involved in the trade union movement.

The assistants are setting up in one of the four rooms set aside for Seedtime, a major ex-

hibition of Badsha’s drawings, woodcuts and photography that opens this week.

In the room where we’re sitting, photos from his series on India, Road to Tadkeshwar, are propped against the wall, awaiting their turn to be prepared.

They’re just a small selection of the almost half a century’s worth of work that Badsha, who turns 70 this year, has produced

since he started making art as a teenager in his hometown of Durban.

Looking back on the environment into which he was born, Badsha reflects: “Because of my upbringing and the community that I lived in, we were all as youngsters highly politicised.

“You grew up in a highly politicised ghetto, so what comes first: your drawing, your photography, or your consciousness of who you are?”

For Badsha, whose father was an activist and artist, political consciousness and artistic output have always gone hand-in-hand.

Self-taught, he began taking photographs in the ‘70s while working in the trade union movement, initially for practical reasons, as a means of gathering material with which to produce slide shows for worker training programmes.

In 1979, he published his first photo book, *Letter to Farzanah*, with Fatima Meer and the Institute for Black Research.

The book was promptly banned by the apartheid government.

Since then he’s published numerous other photo essays and exhibited his work from Durban to New York.

His photos look at the everyday lives of people from Grey Street to India, Ethiopia and Denmark in a distinctive black-and-white style that “makes the ordinary extraordinary”.

Badsha’s political involvement meant that he came to



ALL THE WORLD’S A STAGE: Street performance watched by a crowd

“I needed to learn about my neighbour across colour, language and religious lines

documentary photography in the wake of the rise of the black consciousness movement.

He remembers the debate among many of his friends, including poets Wally Serote and Mafika Gwala (who died last year and from whose poem Badsha has taken the title for the exhibition), and writer James Matthews about “who we were, what we were doing and how to represent what was happening

around us”.

He says: “When I started taking photographs, I already had a clear understanding of my audience and who my audience should be.

“I wasn’t there to say whites must change; that wasn’t the primary motive. I would say to my colleagues that we are black and proud, and we must begin to look at art in a much more sophisticated way and not just trot out the old thinking about struggle.”

In 1982, Badsha was one of the founder members of the photographic collective Afrapix, remembered for their photographs of the increasing struggle against the system.

Although that was part of the work Afrapix produced, Badsha argues that “a large number of journalists, and academics in particular, talk about the ‘fist and flag’ but they forget that, of all the Afrapix members, I was the oldest and the most politically developed. People forget that all of these were young photographers starting out, trying to find ways of seeing and representing. People were evolving and learning from each other.”

Badsha says he’s used this exhibition as an opportunity to create a new, mammoth photographic essay that combines aspects of all his work to focus on new themes and ways of thinking about his output beyond the prism of politics.

He still photographs as much as possible wherever he finds himself and he’s still spurred on by the impulse that has always driven his work — the need to “use my art as a way of exploring, not making a major statement.

“I needed to learn about my neighbour across colour, language and religious lines.”

He’s frequently approached by young photographers looking for advice, encouragement or his opinion of their work, and although he’s “very, very curious and excited about what young people do” and feels that “there’s some incredible energy in the air and there’s so much



HOMELAND DRAMA: An Easter passion play in the Transkei



A WOMAN’S LOT: Collecting mud to plaster a newly built home

happening in this country and it’s incredibly exciting”, he also cautions against the seduction of the art market.

As he sees it, “a lot of young photographers are seduced by the market, but for whom are

they producing if they make editions of five prints? As much as I admire them and their brilliant work, I find that they are selling their souls to the market.”

As we walk through the gallery, Badsha stops to discuss

what should go where with his daughter, Farzanah, a curator in her own right.

He looks around the room in which the prints are waiting to be unwrapped and hung on the walls and wonders: “Have I succeeded in what I tried to do? To look at the everyday but at the same time capture the complexity of life in South Africa or elsewhere?”

“I know that in some instances I succeeded, but in others it’s just been a damn failure. “But so what? Hopefully people can see that Badsha is not just ‘fist and flag’, that there was something more to it than that.”

● *Seedtime is being exhibited at the Iziko South African National Gallery in Cape Town from Friday to August 2*

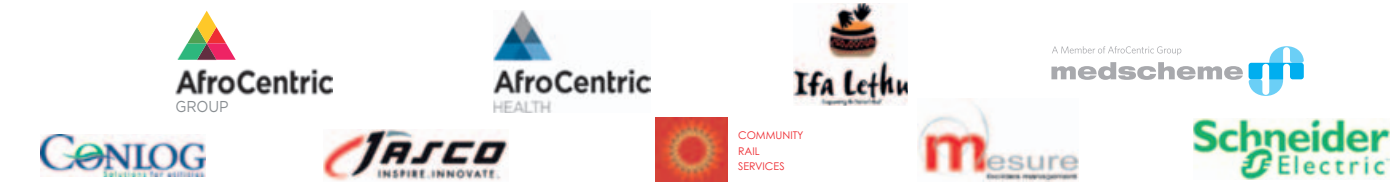
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BURDEN OF TRUTH: Omar Badsha prepares for his exhibition at the Iziko South African National Gallery Picture: ESA ALEXANDER



We congratulate Dr. Anna Mokgokong as the first female recipient of the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2015 South African Premier Business Awards



Just one look and it’s puppy love

Pet owners love dogs like their kids — and the feeling is mutual

DOG owners love their pets in the same way as they do their children — and the feeling is mutual, scientists have found. Researchers discovered that the levels of the hormone oxytocin increases in human and canine brains when a dog is gazing at its owner.

Oxytocin is known to play a strong role in triggering feelings of unconditional love and protection when parents and children look into each other’s eyes or embrace.

The findings suggest owners love their pets in the same way as family members, and dogs return their devoted affection.

“These results suggest that humans may feel affection for their companion dogs similar to that felt towards human family members,” said Dr Miho Nagasawa, of the department of animal science at Azabu University in Sagami, Japan.

“Oxytocin plays a primary role in regulating social bonding between mother and infants and between sexual partners.”

The researchers, of the University of Tokyo and Duke University in the US, believe that oxytocin creates a “neural feedback loop” that has strengthened the bond between humans and dogs for millennia.

To test the theory, researchers put dogs in a room with their owners and documented every interaction between them, such as talking, touching and gazing.



HEAVY PETTING: Oxytocin has strengthened the bond between humans and dogs for millennia Picture: THINKSTOCK

“When dogs are presented with an impossible task, they turn to humans to see what to do

They then measured levels of oxytocin in urine and found that increased eye contact between dogs and humans had driven up hormone levels in both species. However, when they performed the same experiments

on wolves raised by humans, there was no increase in oxytocin, suggesting that the hormone evolved during the domestication of dogs that began 34 000 years ago.

Dr Evan MacLean, a senior research scientist at Duke University, said dogs had learnt to “hijack” the bonding pathway between parents and their children.

“It’s really only in the last couple of thousand years that we have kept dogs as pets, and dogs began to be able to relate to humans in meaningful social

ways,” he said.

“They became attuned to our social cues in the way that young children are. For example, when dogs are presented with an impossible task, they quickly turn to humans to see what to do, just like children do. Wolves don’t do that.

“Our relationships with dogs are very much like parent-child relationships. We respond to our dogs quite a bit like human children,” MacLean added.

“Brain imaging studies have shown that brain networks of mothers respond in the same way to pictures of their own dog and to their own children.

“One evolutionary scenario might be that dogs found a way to hijack these parenting responses and dogs over time may have taken on more childlike and juvenile characteristics to further embed themselves into our lives.”

The researchers say the paper, published in the journal *Science*, shows that dogs feel like a child of the family.

In a second experiment, the researchers sprayed oxytocin into the noses of dogs and put them in a room with their owners and some strangers.

Female dogs responded to the treatment by increasing the amount of time they gazed at their owners.

After 30 minutes, in further evidence of the feedback loop, oxytocin had also increased in owners of the treated dogs. — © *The Daily Telegraph, London*