

Farago, Jason. "Bogosi Sekhukhuni," *The New York Times*. 30 Mar. 2018: C15. Print.

The New York Times

Bogosi Sekhukhuni

Through May 6. Foxy Production, 2 East Broadway, Suite 200, Manhattan; 212-239-2758, foxyproduction.com.

The globe is ever more networked, and has reduced unfathomable distances to the breadth of a screen; the globe is ever more riven, and political and social identities have solidified into stereotypes and dogmas. These two statements are no contradiction for the young South African artist Bogosi Sekhukhuni, whose New York debut, following on promising appearances in a number of international biennials, plumbs the shortcomings of digital technologies, neoliberal economics and multiracial democracy through videos, drawings, sculpture and a single painting.

Mr. Sekhukhuni, born in Johannesburg in 1991, has a particular interest in how spirituality fills the gaps in lives pitted by economic hardship or technological isolation. For some, that takes the form of evangelical Christianity — the video “Thus Saith the Lord (Overunity)” (2015) introduces a real-life Zimbabwean entrepreneur who relies on divine guidance, rather than scientific know-how, to build helicopters and electric cars. Or it can take the form of post-apartheid New Age ancestor worship, which the artist delivers in the character of a deadpan talk show host.

The emotional wages of technology also inform the two psychedelically colored videos of “Consciousness Engine 2: absentblackfatherbot” (2013), in which disembodied heads voice a series of Facebook chats between Mr. Sekhukhuni and his estranged father. (His father went on to block him on the app.) Their conversation is rendered via a text-to-speech engine that strips away both personality and cultural specificity; the artist’s “Howzit?” — a common South African greeting — sounds clanging when the software voices it in white-boy Americanese. When Mr. Sekhukhuni asks his father for help with tuition fees, the anonymizing software makes him a stand-in for the current generation of protesting South African students.

In purely visual terms, Mr. Sekhukhuni has ample room to mature; his videos rely too heavily on plug-and-play personal computing software, and need to stand further from a million Tumblr memes. But his art already displays a sensitivity to the confluence of personal circumstances and political systems that would be the envy of artists twice his tender age.

JASON FARAGO