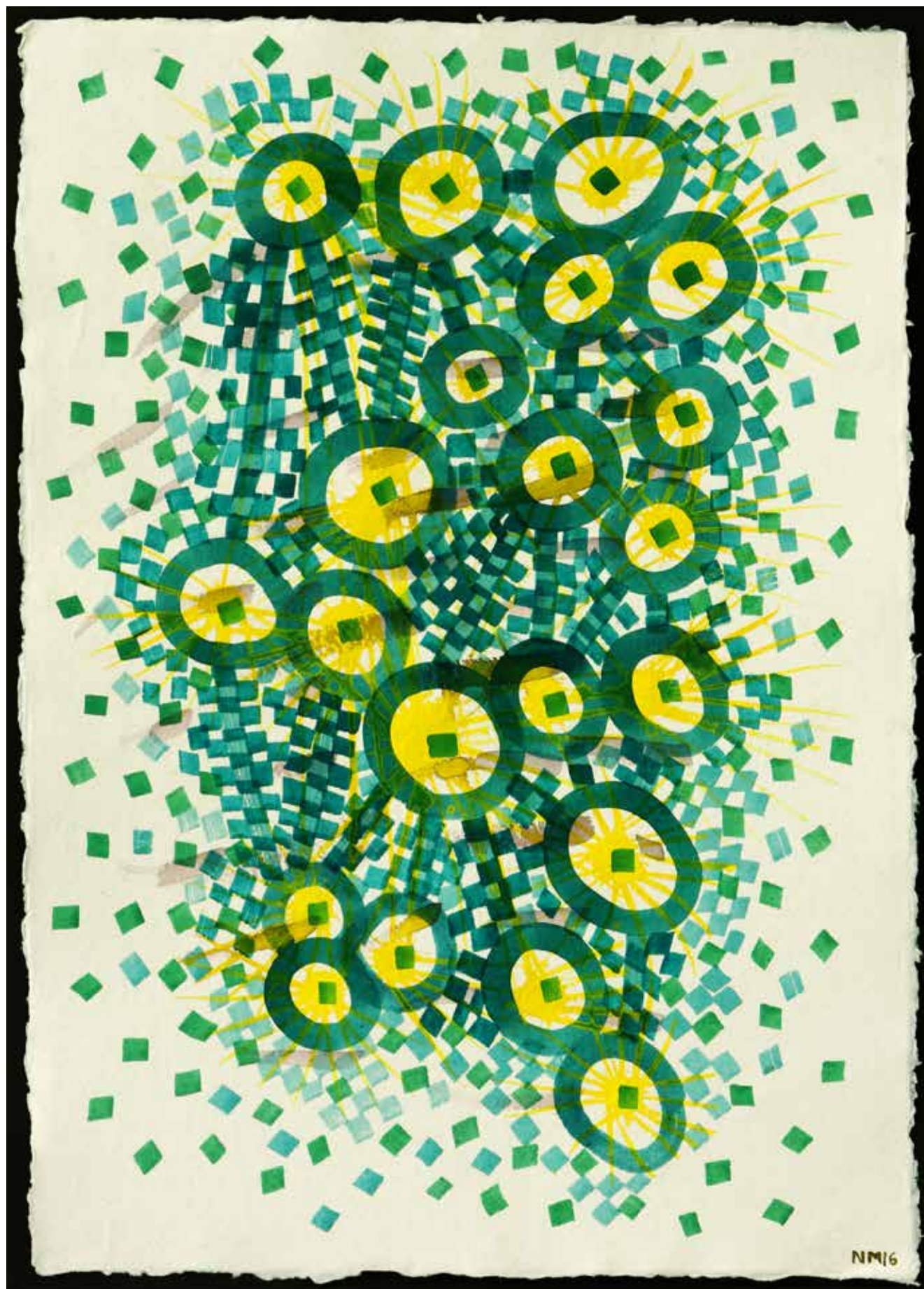


Namibia's Queen of Abstract Art

Artist, activist, and educator Nicky Marais creates bright, bold abstract artwork using an eclectic vocabulary of shapes and patterns. Her work is mostly inspired by the landscape of her home, Namibia, and her interest in the social and political history of the Namibian people, as well as the rich culture that surrounds her. Her paintings bring shapes to life, shimmer with colour, and elicit curiosity in audiences.

Born in a small mining town in South Africa to a geologist father and an artist mother, Marais moved to Namibia when she was seven-years-old. Her parents thrived in the inspiring landscape, which strongly influenced Marais as a young girl. "My mother collected everything, and was interested in everything. She worked extremely hard painting in her studio, as well as outside in the incredible desert landscapes of Namibia. She was a successful painter and illustrator, and was an important role-model for me. Choosing to be an artist just seemed like the best possible life choice. Both my daughters are now also pursuing artistic careers, so it continues to be the best choice."

Marais returned to South Africa for a brief stint, obtaining her degree in Fine Art from



the Port Elizabeth Technikon in 1986, then it was then straight back home to Namibia. Marais, who is directly involved in the growing art network in the country, is making her mark with more than just her paintbrush. Living and working from Windhoek, Marais is the Head of the Department of Visual Arts and Fashion Design at The College of the Arts. Adored by her students, she is the catalyst for many young, upcoming artists, and a major figure in Namibia's art scene. She is also the founder of VA-N (Visual Artists Namibia), a platform to promote Namibian artists and help them pursue their dreams.

Working predominantly with ink and acrylic on paper, as well as oil on canvas, the talented artist's interest and passion for the landscape that she has chosen as her home is a central theme in her work. "I have always been interested in what people do in their environments – the structures, networks, and artefacts created by people socially, politically, and geographically. These relationships inform my work, as well as my life choices. Namibia is an incredibly diverse country, rich in both social and natural history. We have a difficult past, as do most post-colonial countries, and I am inspired by the resilience and creativity of Namibian people, both contemporary and ancient."

Marais' love of people and their environments has drawn her to the wealth of rock art sites scattered around the country. The connection between these ancient paintings and petroglyphs spark massive amounts of inspiration that inform her work. "I have always worked abstractly with patterns and shapes, and constantly search for significant forms to use in my paintings," Marais explains. "The wealth of enigmatic shapes and figures in rock art is exciting, and I am moved by the constant desire manifested in the art of early people to make connections to a spirit world through mark-making."

Marais' striking works always begin with a fascination with a certain shape which she sometimes applies with stencils, but she

also uses sponge rollers and brushes. Then layer upon layer of paint is applied until she is satisfied with the result. "It's an intuitive process which is totally absorbing, almost a meditation." The artist tends to work obsessively with a certain range of colours before moving on to another series of work.

Her most recent exhibition, *Presence in Absence*, ran until 17 June 2017 at the National Art Gallery of Namibia (NAGN) in Windhoek and was a massive success. The subject matter was a homage to her late mother, with the idea of acknowledging both the presence and absence in life. "I am very interested in the way people deal with absence in their lives – the way we connect to the past and the way we connect to intangible beliefs and religious ideas. The title also refers to my relationship with my mother, who died five years ago, but is still very present with me every day in my studio. I used some important shapes in this exhibition, many of which refer to graves, gates, and temples, as well as to more contemporary shapes such as satellites, and ancestral snake-like images. Our presence on Earth as human beings soon becomes an absence, and what we leave behind us may enlighten the future."

Marais' brilliantly bold, dynamic, and vibrant art can be seen at the National Gallery in Namibia where she has a permanent exhibition, confirming her presence as one of Namibia's most iconic artists.

Nicky Marais is represented by Guns & Rain, and her work can be viewed online at www.gunsandrain.com.

Guns & Rain

Guns & Rain is a curated online gallery of contemporary fine art from Southern African artists, both emerging and established. You can order your art online and have it delivered anywhere in the world. If you don't find what you're looking for, Guns & Rain will help you do an "offline" custom search based on your interests and requirements, going beyond what's on the website.

Founder Julie Taylor is an anthropologist, communications guru, and art entrepreneur, and is interested in the intersection of technology, the creative spirit, and the under-representation of African fine art in the global economy.

She was born and raised in Zimbabwe and holds degrees from Oxford and Cambridge. She is author of *Naming the Land*, a book based on her doctoral research about San identity in northern Namibia. Before Guns & Rain, Taylor ran Google's communications for Africa. She is currently studying for a Masters in History of Art at Wits University in Johannesburg.

The name Guns & Rain is used with acknowledgement and thanks. It comes from the acclaimed work of South African-born British anthropologist and playwright David Lan, who wrote about guerrillas and spirit mediums in Zimbabwe's liberation struggle.

Guns & Rain is committed to fair, mindful, and ethical trade.

Text: Julie Graham
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