

Kemang Wa Lehulere *Untitled (Amarhoqololo)*

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"The language of Amarhoqololo is either (1) mobilised as a slur thrown unfairly at children (sometimes by other children) when they fail to write and draw, or (2) commonly used to refer to a general failure at symbolic representation, that is, representation as it pertains to language and the visual domain. Amarhoqololo then marks a point of failure to live up to convention or points to one's perceived susceptibility to error. Its relation to language (and speech) signals a certain psychic investment in legibility; the burden of the rational modern subject whose faculties for thought must align with one's conscious enunciation".

- Vusi Nkomo - [The legitimacy of illegibility: Kemang Wa Lehulere's indeterminate marks] -
excerpt from an upcoming monograph.

Kemang Wa Lehulere's latest body of work consisting of abstract paintings delves into the profound weight of "Amarhoqololo," a term that marks a failure to live up to convention in symbolic representations, as ascribed to critic and artist Vusi Nkomo in the citation above – whether in the scrawl of a child's drawing or the perceived misstep of language itself, "Amarhoqololo" speaks to a deep and continuing societal preoccupation, interest and impulse to forge and make meaning, and in the face of our contemporary moment; forging meaning against a backdrop that refuses to cohere.

It is precisely within this charged terrain of competing historical narratives; overlooked narratives; and the collapse of consensus that the persistent desire for legibility in the work of Wa Lehulere finds its vital pulse. "Maybe it is a rehearsal for sense-making that I am involved with", as Wa Lehulere says in one of his letter exchanges discussing these works with Pehr Mårtens, dated March 2025. "Each painting a baton from one painting to the other, perhaps allowing for the works to be easily read as a suite". A notated jazz composition, an idiom that has not been uncommon in Wa Lehulere's oeuvre.

In an unsurprising act of borrowing from his vast visual language, some of the paintings in this *suite* are sub-lain in black paint, reminiscent of his use of black school boards. What follows are layers of abstract marks and strokes and (notes) in bewildering colour and rhythm. Acts of improvisation and spontaneous combustions of free-form composition so essential in the jazz art form, a form which Wa Lehulere is so deeply imbued with and deftly draws from.

Through these paintings, much like his use of drawing, performance, installation, and salvaged objects, Wa Lehulere champions the "susceptibility to error" not as a flaw, but as a rich ground for exploration. He gives voice to the unspoken and visible form to the intangible, often inviting collaborators to fill in the gaps that emerge from the passage of time or to grant his own memory a higher fidelity.

Wa Lehulere's art continues to be a powerful meditation on how we make sense of the present (meaning the past) when its records are incomplete, and how, in the face of imposed legibility, new forms of symbolic representation can emerge, even if they bear the beautiful, complex marks of what was once deemed "Amarhoqololo."