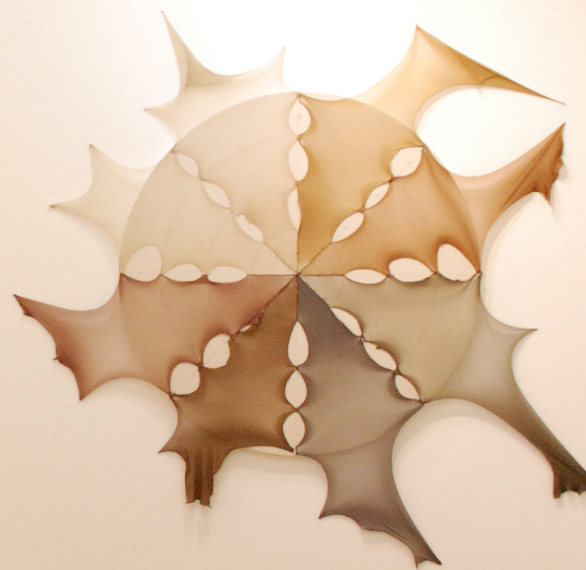


Kim Karabo Makin  
*Colour Theory*



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN  
IYUNIVESITHI YASEKAPA • UNIVERSITEIT VAN KAAPSTAD

Kim Karabo Makin, *Colour Theory* (series), 2020-2021,  
Installation view at Michaelis Galleries, Cape Town.

Kim Karabo Makin (b.1994) is a Motswana artist from Gaborone, Botswana, and Cape Town, South Africa. She navigates her national and transnational identity between both spaces since the socio-historical and cultural significance of these landscapes implicate her. Her artistic practice is a vehicle of disruption, negotiation, contention, and agreement through symbolic strategy.

Colour Theory is visually derived from the concept of a colour wheel, in which colour relationships are determined in relation to each other. These materials hold symbolism and are transformed into an object charged with cultural meaning, implying racial skin tone. Adjoining neutral tones, or skin tones, allude to the relationship of one race to another. The colours in Makin's work are shades of the in-between hues of commercially available pantyhose (a racial and feminised commodity)—available predominantly in bare beige, beach bronze, Mexican silver, and blackmail—the colour codes that exist in the middle of black and white.

Pantyhose is stitched together at the centre, contrasting its neat confines into a pattern held together and separated by adjacent gaps. The material mutates into an arbitrary, less controlled organic shape. Spilling into uncontained territory, it extends outward to complicate its intended form, as it becomes, or is in the state of becoming, an elaboration, a web of allusion, unable to exist only within the neat confines prescribed at its origins any longer, needing to stretch, to reach. The borders that contain it no longer constrain it. It is a dynamic, spatial invasion of fabric. Colour Theory echoes some of Makin's earlier work of ceramic Basotho baskets through its suggestive pattern.

Drawing on Snyder's suggestion that 'identity is linked to a symbolic system of sorts'<sup>1</sup>, in which identities are mutually exclusive, or move beyond the limitations of the hegemonic group, Makin manipulates pantyhose by turning it into an object that becomes a cultural marker

1 Kim Karabo Makin, Grey Area// What Are You? Exhibition catalogue, University of Cape Town. (2018): 7

of race. She has said, on her previous exhibition Grey Area//What Are You? (2018) that she 'confronts object identity by confronting the symbolic materially, taking particular symbols of cultural value out of their original context and altering their physical form'. In this way, Makin says, 'the body of work stretches 'symbolic boundaries', presenting a collection of cultural symbols that have undergone new 'regimes of value'<sup>2</sup>.

This, too, is evident in Colour Theory, where the object is removed from its purpose into a new regime of value. This work invokes the ability of identity and culture to move, morph, mutate, abstract from its intended form, defying a neat summary. Such is the nature of transnational identity, multiculturalism, or the grey area: its inability to be pinned down and fixed. Evidently, the incompleteness of the aesthetic employed, and its translucent, temporal nature point to this ambivalence and a non-fixed state.

Makin was born in 1994 when apartheid's laws ended, to a white South African father and a black Motswana mother. Botswana is a neighbour to South Africa, and there are aspects of shared history, yet there are still divisions. The Citizenship Act of 1984 meant that Botswana would not recognise her as a citizen, rendering her stateless<sup>3</sup>. She says,

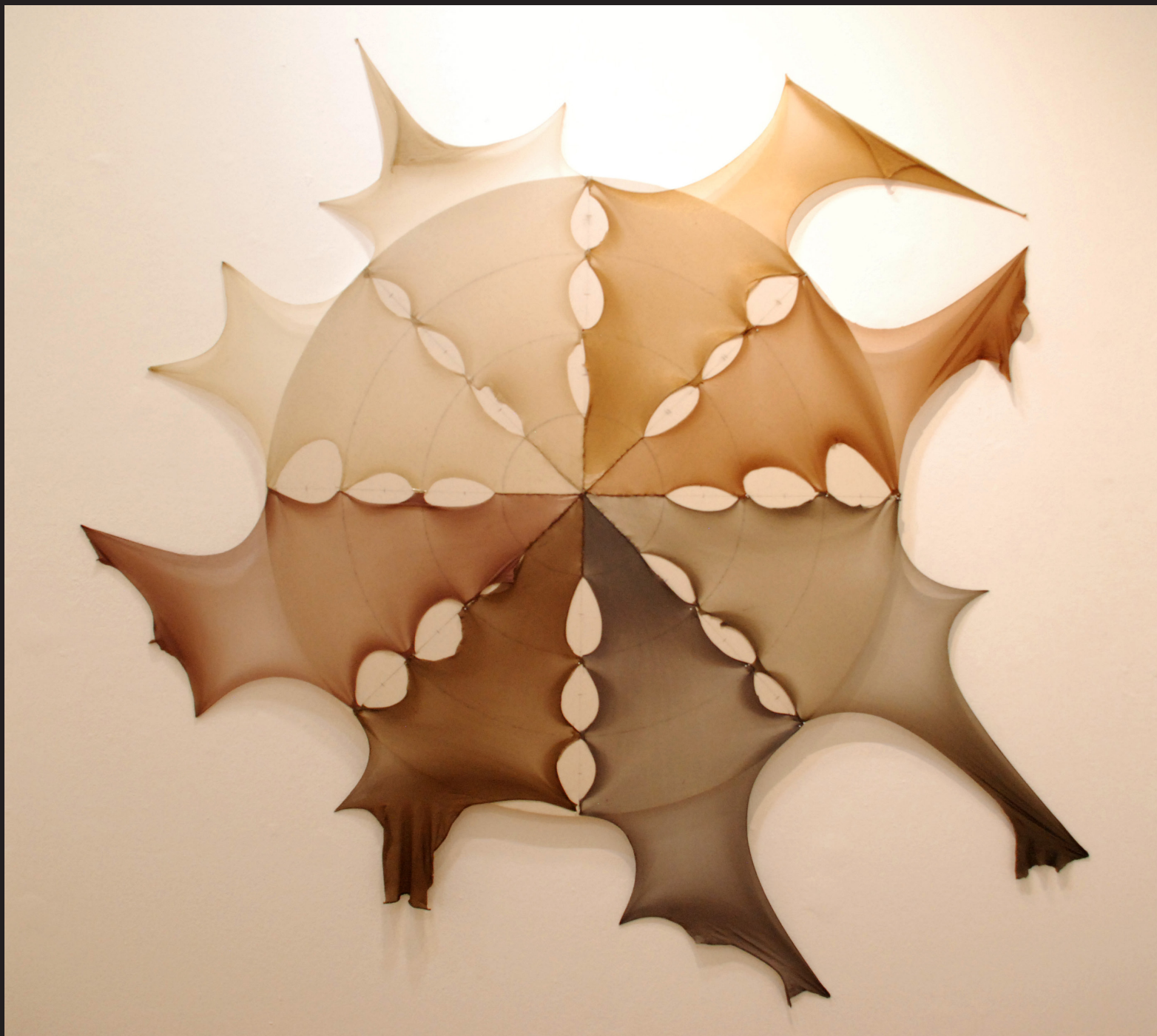
*An 'alien' in the place of my birth and 'home'. Ironically in believing myself to be a Motswana, I have had to simultaneously accept that culturally I am not, or am, only to some extent - by Setswana's patrilineal custom which disacknowledges my membership into the Ngwato tribe by my matrilineality. I believe that this outlines the disconnect in my national and cultural identities as a Motswana.*<sup>4</sup>

2 Kim Karabo Makin, Grey Area// What Are You? Exhibition catalogue, University of Cape Town. (2018): 8

3 Kim Karabo Makin, Grey Area// What Are You? Exhibition catalogue, University of Cape Town. (2018): 11

4 Kim Karabo Makin, Grey Area// What Are You? Exhibition

Kim Karabo Makin  
*Colour Theory*  
Hand-stitched pantyhose  
on canvas,  
approx. 121cm in diameter,  
installation dimensions  
variable.  
2021



Her Motswana identity is intertwined with her South African roots, which she describes as ‘being racialised as coloured until I speak’.<sup>5</sup>

Being from Gaborone, Botswana, and Cape Town, South Africa, Makin contends this double identity through her work, as both these landscapes influence her belonging and being. She describes a ‘push and pull’ that she experiences as a transnational (foreign) body. It is by artistic practice through the symbolic which this definition reveals itself.

*Colour Theory* becomes a visual representation of this cultural hybridity, defined by Homi Bhabha as a process, giving rise to something different and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation<sup>6</sup>. The negotiation is visually present in this sculpture which appears as though it is being shaped and manipulated by a force. Is it being naturalised? Or taken apart? Mutating? Evidently it is changing and no longer is as clear-cut and simple as its inner circle, its origin. It is as if each confined shade develops inability to join to its neighbouring colour, and stretches beyond its allocated area, in search of something further. It alludes to the temporal journey of dis/placement, migration, and a shifting spatial-temporality, and has a creature-like quality. The dynamism of the object makes it feel like it is on the move.

This work forms part of the collection belonging to the University of Cape Town, a historically white colonial institution whose past colonises the present, and by extension, where the aftermath of segregationist apartheid is transcribed. Thinking of *Colour Theory* in the context of this country (and, more specifically, Cape Town, where the reality of segregation is ever present, post-apartheid), the artwork connotes rife historical racial relations through separate

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catalogue, University of Cape Town. (2018): 12

5 Kim Karabo Makin, *Grey Area// What Are You?* Exhibition catalogue, University of Cape Town. (2018): 12

6 Homi Bhabha, 1949. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

development and the Group Areas Act, constrained identity versus freedom, and how laws based on race shaped the lives of many, which in turn shapes the way we see each other and how we see ourselves through the lenses of each other. South African inhabitants are not alien to the idea of categorisation and classification, when, in fact, identity is more complex than that— it is transient, transcendent, and stretches beyond, much like the material, and *Colour Theory* can be read in this context as exemplifying the defiance in being fixed, whilst having to determine how to navigate collective identity in relation to our personal identities, in a landscape that is racially wrought with not only national racial relations, but transnational and xenophobic ones, too.

*Colour Theory* invokes the speculative, an inquisition into the artist’s being and belonging within the whole, and how the whole shapes the individual.

Written by Cheriese Dilrajh.

## References

1. Kim Karabo Makin, 2018. *Grey Area// What Are You?* Exhibition catalogue, University of Cape Town.
2. Homi Bhabha, 1949. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.



Kim Karabo Makin, Colour Theory (series), 2021, Installation view at 'the doors of culture shall be opened', 2021, Michaelis Galleries, Cape Town.