

Strauss & Co's upcoming auction of contemporary art includes works by Banksy, Mr Brainwash

Strauss & Co's upcoming auction of contemporary art, which will be up for sale on 13 April 2021, includes original works by Banksy and Mr Brainwash as well as an early assemblage work by Simphiwe Ndzube.

In a first for the South African auction house, Strauss & Co is offering an early silkscreen by the famously anonymous English artist Banksy, as well as original works by Mr Brainwash and Ndzube, two high-profile expatriate artists resident in Los Angeles.



Banksy - "Happy Choppers"



Mr Brainwash - "Madonna"

The emergence of street art as a desirable contemporary collectable is strongly tied to a series of exhibitions held in Los Angeles in the 2000s. In 2006, Banksy, then already a cult figure in his native England, held his first large-scale exhibition in the US. Titled *Barely Legal* and presented in a disused Los Angeles warehouse, the exhibition attracted a who's who of Hollywood's elite.

Banksy's *Happy Choppers* (estimate R900,000 – R1.2m), an editioned silkscreen with an anti-war message, dates from this early period of emergence. The work portrays a stencilled helicopter gunship with a feminine pink bow. *Happy Choppers* first appeared in 2002 as a sprayed mural at the Whitecross Street Market in central London. The silkscreen is accompanied by a certificate of authenticity issued by the Pest Control Office, the only source of authentication of works by Banksy.

Banksy first crossed paths with Mr Brainwash, aka French-born Thierry Guetta, in Los Angeles. Guetta, the owner of a vintage clothing store, had a deep interest in street art. His close association with Banksy culminated in *Life Is Beautiful*, Guetta's 2008 debut solo show under his Mr Brainwash alter ego, held in a former television studio in Hollywood.

Mr Brainwash's *Madonna* (estimate R900,000 – R1.2m) dates from this seminal period. Produced in 2009 when Guetta was completing his celebrated documentary film *Exit Through the Gift Shop* (2010), this unique silkscreen and spray-paint on canvas work portray the pop singer Madonna, of *Like a Virgin* fame. The work explicitly references Andy Warhol's celebrated 1964 pop portrait of actor Elizabeth Taylor.

"Mr Brainwash astutely and cheekily raises questions about originality in this important and also original work," says Matthew Partridge, a senior art specialist at Strauss & Co. "*Madonna* is original in that it is a unique work, not an editioned multiple. The work dates from a crucial renaissance period for the Los Angeles art scene. In the last decade, Los Angeles has emerged as an important platform for South African artists. In recent years, painters Simphiwe Ndzube and Georgina Gratrix have both presented well-received solo shows in Los Angeles."

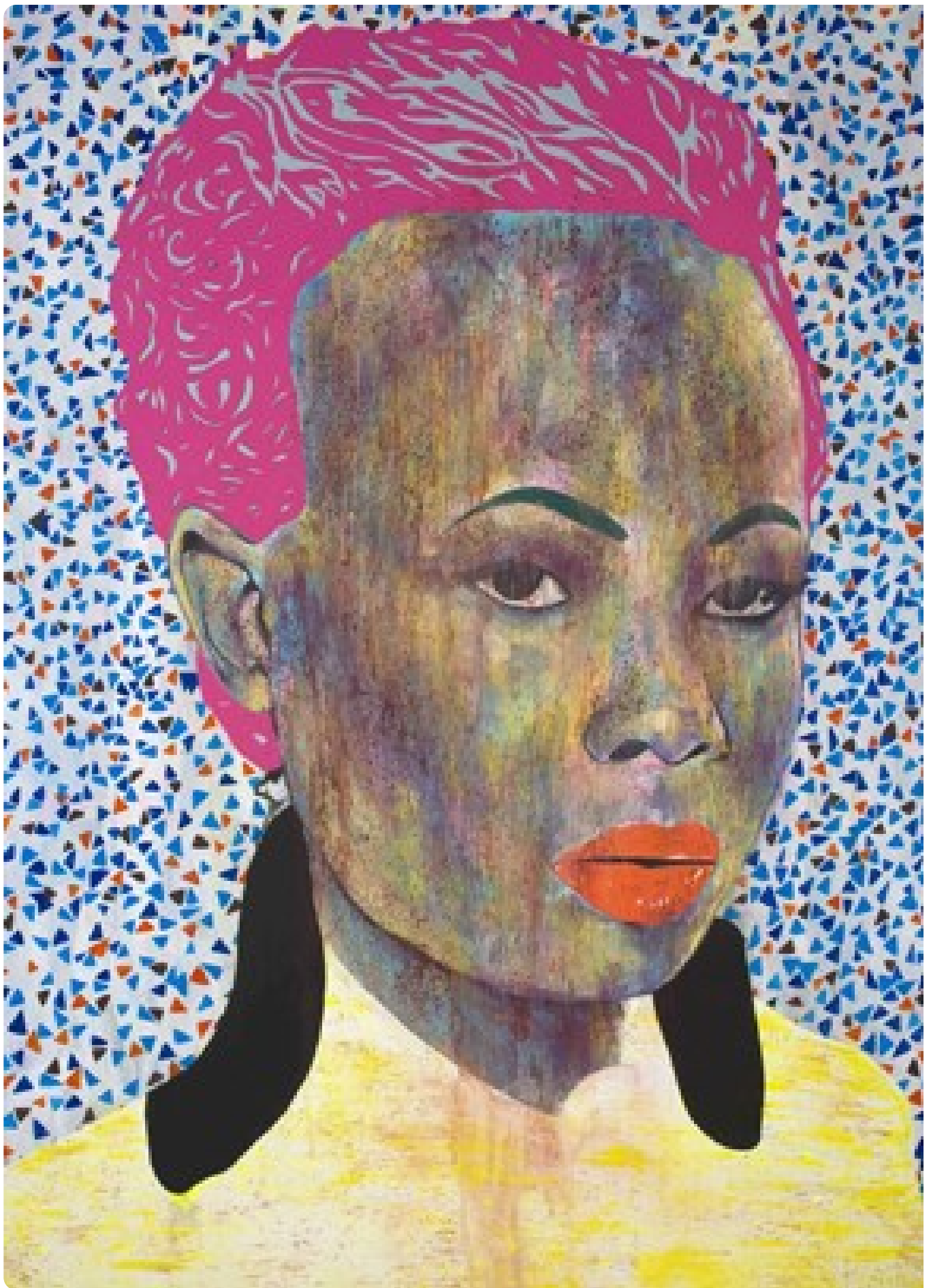
Strauss & Co's April catalogue includes a 2016 mixed-media work by Simphiwe Ndzube, *Inevitable Journey to Mars IV* (estimate R150,000 – R200,000), that is a precursor of his current 'yin and yang' assemblages portraying, in the artist's words: "the fantastical, the magical, versus the historical, the real". In 2019, Ndzube was the subject of a video profile by *Vanity Fair*, an elite magazine focusing on culture and society.



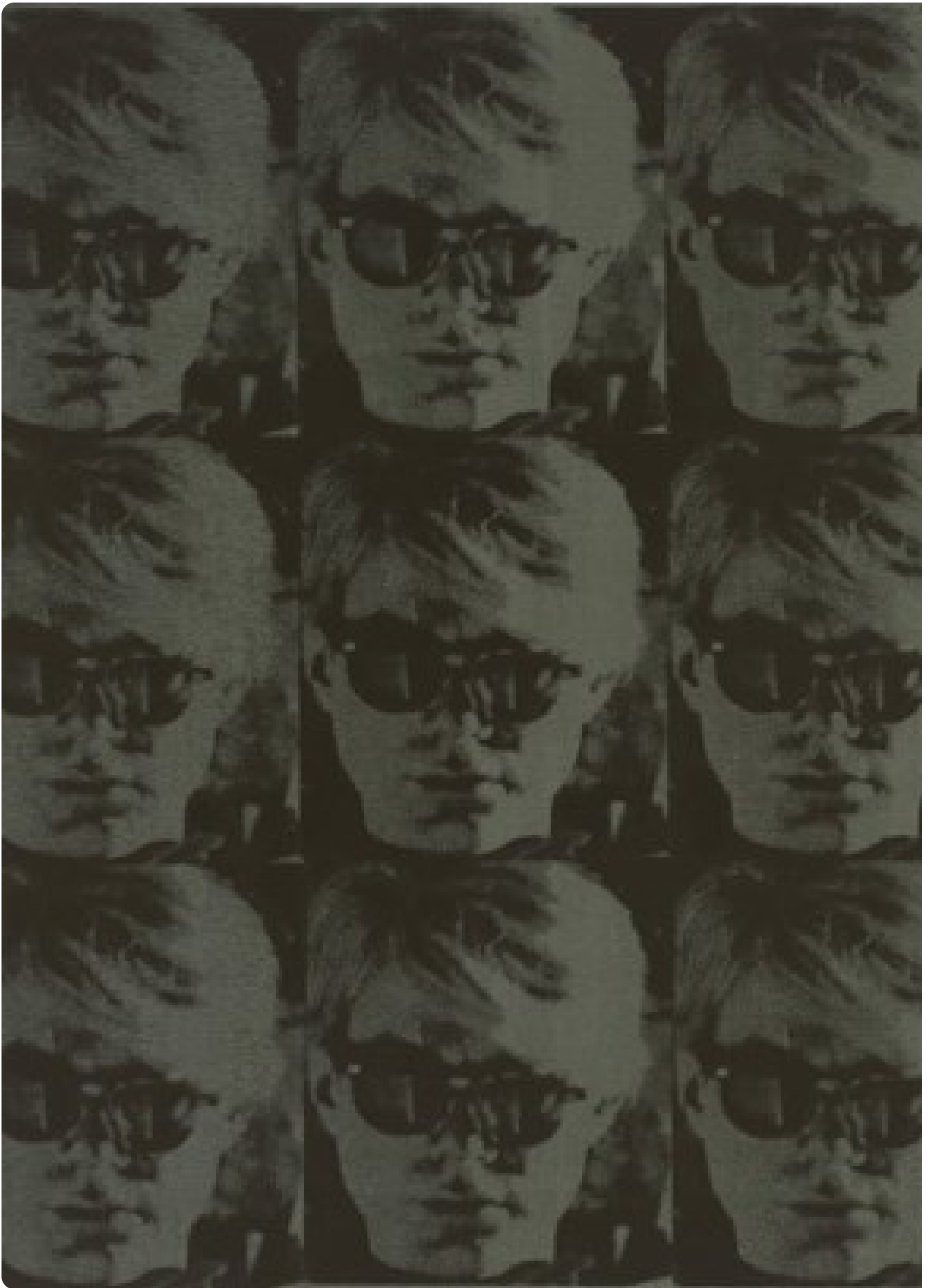
Simphiwe Ndzube - "Inevitable Journey to Mars IV"

The bold tonalities and reduced figuration of street art have noticeably influenced contemporary South African painters like Ayanda Mabulu, Mustafa Maluka and Lionel Smit. Strauss & Co's April catalogue includes a 2009 portrait from Smit's much-copied *Fragment Series* (estimate R80,000 – R120,000), as well as Maluka's bold head-and-shoulder portraits *They Have Got to Hate What They Fear* and *You Say You Know How We Feel* (estimate R200,000 – R300,000 each) from 2007–08.

Produced a decade later, Mabulu's agit-prop canvas *Remember Marikana* shares with Banksy an affinity for welding political statements to pop iconography. The influence of especially pop art on South African artists is longstanding, as is evidenced by Malcolm Payne's 1969 screen print *Portrait of Andy Warhol* (estimate R15,000 – R20,000).



Mustafa Maluka - "They have got to Hate what they Fear"



Malcolm Payne - "Portrait of Andy Warhol"

The printed multiple has been especially influential in the dissemination of pop art and latterly street art. Strauss & Co's catalogue includes Mr Brainwash's *Tom Spray Can* (estimate R20,000 – R30,000), an

editioned screenprint that references Warhol's 1962 canvases *Campbell's Soup Cans*, and *Portrait of Martin Luther King* (estimate R23,000 – R35,000), an op-art facial portrait of the civil rights leader. Strauss & Co has sold several Mr Brainwash lots, including a unique 2016 portrait of model Kate Moss that went for R175,875 in a June 2020 sale. The forthcoming Mr Brainwash depicting Madonna was made a decade earlier.

“There is a long history of South African collectors buying the work of international artists,” says Ian Hunter senior art specialist at Strauss & Co. “Strauss & Co has also successfully traded British and continental artists from the post-war period onwards. Our recent live sales included important works by mid-century British sculptors like Kenneth Armitage, Lynn Chadwick and Henry Moore. South African collectors are comfortable consigning works by established artists like Banksy and Mr Brainwash with us because of our large list of serious collectors and impressive international reach.”

The sale of *Happy Choppers* by Banksy, *Madonna* by Mr Brainwash and *Inevitable Journey to Mars IV* by Simphiwe Ndzube will take place on Tuesday, 13 April 2021 at 3pm. The lots form part of Strauss & Co's exceptional catalogue of modern, post-war and contemporary art, decorative arts, jewellery and fine wine due to be auctioned live over three days from 11 to 13 April.

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