

Athenkosi Kwinana breaks the stigma about Persons Living with Albinism (PLWA) through art



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Person Living with Albinism (PLWA) in sub-Saharan Africa face multiple challenges which restrict their daily lives. These include visual impairments, vulnerability to skin infections and a high risk of cancer because of the lack of melanin in their skin. Despite these challenges of the body, people with albinism also face negative attitudes and misunderstandings from their families and communities. Such challenges mean that people with albinism are often excluded from society, including access to education and therefore have limited opportunities to earn a sustainable income.



Athenkosi Kwinana will be exhibiting at the 10th Investec Cape Town Art Fair taking place from 17-19 February 2023 at the Cape Town International Conference Centre. Image supplied.

Athenkosi Kwinana, a visual activist based in Johannesburg, South Africa, felt the discrimination against Person Living with Albinism when growing up. When Kwinana started attending school, she was bullied based on the fact that she has Albinism. Even though she had friends, they would go home early when each school day ended, and she was left in aftercare waiting for her mother to fetch her after work.

"I was isolated. No one wanted to play with me or even touch me. So I turned to drawing as a method of coping. The school centre provided paper and crayons for children, and I used that to my advantage", Kwinana.

This was just the start for Kwinana as she shares her journey, "years later, in high school, I started learning more about art and what techniques were available. I later matriculated from high school and enrolled in university to study fine art. Eight years later, I have a Master's Degree in Fine Art, and now I practice art daily".

Kwinana works in both drawing and printmaking. In 2017, she graduated from the Walter Sisulu University in the Eastern Cape with a National Diploma in Fine Art, earning a Bachelor of Technology in Fine Arts in 2018, before embarking on her Masters in Fine Arts at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), which she completed in 2022.

Athenkosi Kwinana is one of the many artists exhibiting at the 10th Investec Cape Town Art Fair taking place from 17-19 February 2023 at the Cape Town International Conference Centre.

"My art practice inquires how Black PLWA are currently being represented in contemporary South African visual culture, and what this signifies about stigmas and prejudices around PLWA. I therefore explore the visual representation of existing societal issues, my albinotic body, and attitudes around gender, as these pertain to PLWA"



Image supplied

"As an individual living with Albinism, I explore my own experiences and with those of other PLWA. I speak about the trauma and the beauty of living with Albinism. I specialise both in drawing and printmaking, and at the moment I have been working on drawings while improving my printmaking techniques in the background" notes Kwinana.

Kwinana is influenced by a long list of artists, both locally and internationally, but what they have in common is their unique use of colour, contrast, and texture. As the long lists continues, they currently include painters Tusevo Landu and Keita Morimoto.

As a visual activist, Kwinana's artworks and texts explore and challenge the questionable representation of Albinism in the art world. Her aim is to create and maintain constructive representations, constructive dialogues, and archives about PLWA (persons living with Albinism).

"My lack of melanin and poor vision should not justify why I or the next PLWA should be killed, bullied, or excluded from societies; I am human too, and my experiences are valid too." is the message Kwinana hopes to portray through her artwork.

PLWA still experience discrimination and violence in South Africa daily and globally.

Despite being a PLWA, Kwinana believes that artists in South Africa face the challenges of sustainability and marketing. To tackle this, she says, "there needs to be more awareness created around the arts as well as access to financial investors, which is currently limited".

Represented by Berman Contemporary, Kwinana has received very positive feedback and as a result, has received invitations to residencies and galleries to showcase her work. In 2022, Kwinana was invited to join a five-week artist programme with the Admirals Residency in Muizenberg, Cape Town, which she completed in July of the same year. She was awarded the Cultures Resistance Award and was selected for the Tilga Art Fund, an educational scholarship programme. She has also exhibited in The Annual Winter Show and Senses and Lenses at Berman Contemporary, as well as 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair in London.

Talking about the future, Kwinana enthusiastically says, "I have an academic background, and my dreams for the future are to obtain my PhD in Fine Art and publish academic journals as well. I would like to open a space in the near future where art is used as a method of healing and where there are textual sources on disability and art. As an artist, I would love to partake in international and local exhibitions, residencies, and fellowships".

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A post shared by Athenkosi (Athi) Kwinana, (MFA) (@kwinanaaaa)

You can view her latest projects on Instagram ([@kwinanaaaa](#)) where you can find additional links to purchase her works. View her artist portfolio at bermancontemporary.com

Catch Athenkosi Kwinana at the 2023 Investec Cape Town Art Fair's SOLO section, curated by author, critic, journalist, and editor Sean O'Toole (Cape Town, South Africa) and is titled *Time's Pencil*.

The 10th Investec Cape Town Art Fair will run from Friday, 17 February to Sunday, 19 February 2023 at the Cape Town International Conference Centre from 11am to 7pm.

Tickets can be purchased via the Webtickets link on www.investeccapetownartfair.co.za.

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