

PRESS RELEASE

Fireflies and Ashes: Seeds Beneath the Fire

"It is in your hands to create a better world for all who live in it." - Nelson Mandela

Opening on 18 July 2026, the birthday of Nelson Mandela, *Fireflies and Ashes: Seeds Beneath the Fire* brings together works by Andrew Ntshabele, Morgan Mahape, Steve Maphoso, Percy Maimela, Trevor Aloka, Gift Dlamini, Asanda Kupa and Samantha Maseko in an exhibition that reflects on legacy, inheritance and the ongoing project of imagining South Africa's future.

This exhibition considers the ways in which generations inherit histories, aspirations and unresolved social realities, while simultaneously participating in the active composition of what is yet to come. In this sense, *Fireflies and Ashes* is concerned not only with remembrance, but with futurity: with the proposition that the future is not passively inherited, but continually authored through acts of imagination, agency and collective responsibility.

"Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it." - Frantz Fanon

The exhibition takes its title from three interrelated propositions: ash, seed and firefly. Ash suggests the residues of experience, memory and history that continue to settle within the social and cultural landscape. Yet ash is also generative, creating fertile conditions from which new forms of life may emerge. The seed inhabits this terrain as a figure of latency and potentiality, carrying within it possibilities that may remain unseen for long periods before finding expression. The firefly offers a fragile yet persistent illumination, reminding us that transformation is seldom singular or monumental, but often unfolds through accumulations of small gestures, shared actions and collective acts of becoming.

The artists represented in *Fireflies and Ashes* do not all speak directly to youth as subject matter. Rather, they speak from positions shaped by their own experiences of becoming within a transforming South Africa. Their practices emerge from lived histories, social change and personal negotiations of identity, belonging and visibility. Together, their works articulate a plurality of voices that continue to shape the cultural imagination inherited by younger generations today.

"There is no change without dream, as there is no dream without hope." - Paulo Freire

Andrew Ntshabele and Percy Maimela engage youth most explicitly, placing young figures within narratives of aspiration, memory and possibility. Samantha Maseko's work speaks to the experience of womanhood within contemporary South Africa, reflecting upon the negotiation of agency, self-determination and voice within patriarchal structures. Alongside the practices of Morgan Mahape, Steve Maphoso, Trevor Aloka, Gift Dlamini and Asanda Kupa, the exhibition assembles a constellation of artistic positions that reveal history not as fixed or complete, but as something continually interpreted, contested and renewed.

Opening on Mandela Day provides an opportunity to reflect upon legacy not as commemoration alone, but as responsibility. Mandela's enduring commitment to dignity, equality and human interdependence remains an unfinished proposition, one that successive generations continue to negotiate, reinterpret and expand. As Mandela himself observed, "After climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb."

Fireflies and Ashes ultimately proposes that the future is composed in the present: through memory, through artistic production, through acts of empathy, and through the sustained effort of imagining societies that are more equitable, inclusive and humane.

Like seeds beneath ash, or fireflies illuminating the landscape around them, these artistic practices remind us that even within conditions of uncertainty, possibility remains.

Artists

Andrew Ntshabele
Morgan Mahape
Steve Maphoso
Percy Maimela

Trevor Aloka
Gift Dlamini
Asanda Kupa
Samantha Maseko

Opening Reception

Saturday, 18 July 2026
Artyli Gallery
Nelson Mandela Square, Sandton