

When the African National Congress emerged as the parliamentary majority after South Africa's first democratic elections in April 1994, the country was literally reborn overnight. For millions of its previously disenfranchised citizens, the change represented a new political landscape, one of freedom and autonomy. The thirty-one-year-old painter Mustafa Maluka says that although he was born in Cape Town, his experience of growing up under apartheid was one of being an outsider in his own country. When apartheid ended, though, things changed—as if he had arrived in South Africa for the first time. “I feel that my generation of black people in this country, we are immigrants into South Africa. We are the new South Africans, South Africa is a country that already existed, but it was a white country from which we were excluded,” Maluka told arts writer Niren Tolsi in an interview on the *Mail & Guardian* online magazine (April 2006).

Leaving the country of his birth in 1998 to study in Amsterdam at de Ateliers, a highly regarded postgraduate art institute, Maluka has continued to move between countries in pursuit of his career, and is currently based in Berlin.

For some years now, he has been working on an ongoing series of brilliantly hued large-scale portraits that illustrate the hybrid nature and nomadic lifestyle of young people in urban centers around the world. Talking about his work in an interview in *So Joburg* magazine, Maluka said, “My characters have always been physically ambiguous, transracial and intercultural beings and their experience is, by definition, international.”

In 2008 a number of these portraits appeared in the exhibition *Flow* at the Studio Museum in Harlem, which focused on work by a new generation of international artists from Africa. The show attracted favorable critical attention, and noting Maluka's lineup of cosmopolitan youth, Susannah Edelbaum commented in the online magazine *Gen Art Pulse* (May 2008), “Rather than indicating any specific homeland, these stylized pictures are tickets to anywhere.”

Maluka grew up in Bishop Lavis in the economically depressed Cape Flats area on the fringes of Cape Town, and traces of the influences of urban street culture, graffiti, and hip-hop can be seen in his paintings. Abstract shapes are carefully delineated as though the artist was employing the spray can artist's stencil, but on canvas this technique becomes a formal exercise in the interplay of abstract forms, denying his subjects a figurative context. Titles of paintings like *The smell of fear is thicker than you think* (2007) are often derived from rock music lyrics.

All the portraits' subjects gaze directly at the spectator, and when seen gathered together in an exhibition seem to be challenging the position of the viewer in the gallery. Increasingly these viewers can be found in galleries around the world, as Maluka becomes an ever more prominent figure on the international art circuit.

