

Gary Stephens B R A I D



Soweto Spiral Braid, 2011. Mixed Media (charcoal on folded paper and string), 153cm x 153cm

P R E S S R E L E A S E

Gallery MOMO is proud to present **Gary Stephens BRAID**, opening **Thursday 2 June 2011 @ 18h00 – 20h00** and **concluding 27 June 2011**.

Monumental in scale and elaborately folded into stripes, Gary Stephens' new portraits pay homage to the African traditions of hair braiding and urban style. The drawings, showing a back view of the model, focus on the iconic power of the subject's braiding pattern instead of their facial features. He also explores the uniquely African sense of how to wear a hat: rolled, sitting high, at a certain angle, or with sunglasses on top. Stephens' drawings are an expression of his positive experiences as a newcomer living in South Africa and make "everyday heroes" of the people he interacts with and observes in his daily life.

The original inspiration for this series of works came during a residency in Cape Town in 2009, when a friend with an elaborately braided hairstyle visited his studio. By starting to photograph and draw his artist friends, Stephens began a creative search that has gone on for three years. His focus on the intricacy of braiding and dreadlocks honors the expertise and artistry required to create these elaborate hairstyles. The artist mirrors this dedication by meticulously drawing the interwoven patterns of each plaited strand of hair. His attention to detail in the work becomes an affirmation of the care and sense of style people put into how they present themselves in a contemporary African setting.

These fractured and shifting portraits are part of Stephens' artistic search into how to keep drawing vital in an era where we are constantly bombarded with modern digital imagery. Exposure to television and computer media has created more sophisticated tastes and higher expectations in terms of movement and rapidly shifting images. For Stephens, the use of string screens, vertical lines, pleats and stripes reflect his attempt to bring motion and energy into traditional drawing.

From a purely visual perspective, Stephens is constantly attracted to patterns and visual rhythms, such as geometric repetitions in architecture, textile patterns, or palm fronds in the sunlight. He is captivated by these non-verbal, hypnotic visual moments. Be it a brimmed hat, braid spiral or a hand-crocheted beanie, his textures and intricate vertical lines draw the viewer in, engaging them in a rich visual experience. The folds and pleats in the paper repeat and emphasize the three dimensional quality of the weave patterns in the knitting and braided hair.

Please feel free to contact Gallery MOMO on +27 11 327 3247, or e-mail karen@gallerymomo.com. High resolution images and more information on the artist are available on request.