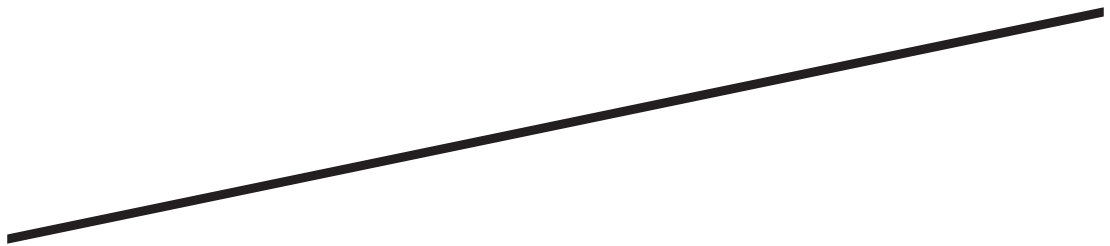




# **HYPERSAMPLING IDENTITIES, JOZI STYLE**



An exhibition of work by young, male fashion designers and design collectives producing mens' wear, as well as the work of stylists, photographers, sartorial groups, and trend setters within their milieu.





# **HYPERSAMPLING IDENTITIES, JOZI STYLE**

21 September 2015 to 6 October 2015

FADA Gallery  
University of Johannesburg

Curated by the Visual Identities in Art & Design Research Centre  
in association with Daniella Goeller and Nicola Cooper







## Hypersampling Identities, Jozi Style

The Visual Identities in Art and Design Research Centre (VIAD), in association with fashion trend analyst, Nicola Cooper and VIAD post-doctoral fellow, Daniela Goeller, presents **Hypersampling Identities, Jozi Style** – an exhibition of work by young, male fashion designers and design collectives producing mens' wear, as well as the work of stylists, photographers, sartorial groups, and trend setters within their milieu. These vibrant, youth-orientated forms of production, currently taking place in the urban Afropolitan environs of Jozi,<sup>1</sup> express a range of ever-changing transnational, transhistorical, transcultural, Afro-urban and Afrofuturist black masculine identities.

The exhibition features performances of fashion(able) and fashion(ed) Jozi identities by contemporary sartorial groups such as the Sbhujwas and Isikothane; young, street-savvy design collectives including the Sartists, -Smarteez, Dear Ribane III and Khumbula; and cultural practitioners such as Dr Pachanga and Jamal Nxedlana. Many of these practitioners reference fashions and styles of more established South African subcultural groups, specifically the Pantsulas and Swenkas. Both of these sub-cultural groups were and are influenced by elements of traditional and contemporary popular culture, and combine these with references from the urban environment in which they are located. As established sub-cultures originating in the 1970s, Pantsula<sup>2</sup> and Swenking<sup>3</sup> have contemporary relevance, not only because they are currently active, but also because both have created particular images of male black identities in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa, two prominent ones being the 'streetwise gangster-with-a-heart' (the Pantsulas) and the 'perfect gentleman' (the Swenkas) (Goeller 2014a:[sp]).

These images of black masculine identities directly inform the work of the Isikothane and Sbhujwa sartorial groups and that of young Jozi-based practitioners. In the exhibition, the fashion styles of the Pantsula and Swenkas – and the sources they draw upon – are therefore positioned as historical references in the work of these practitioners. Following the multi-dimensional, interdisciplinary nature of the practitioners' diverse practices, work on **Hypersampling Identities, Jozi Style** is represented through a range of genres and media.

Significantly, "movement culture" (Miller 2009) – music, dance, posing and other embodied practices (gestures, deportment, mannerisms) – is embedded in these historical and contemporary visual performances of identity. The clothing worn, ways of assembling and wearing clothing (style),<sup>4</sup> and agency (pose and attitude) combined with elements of movement culture comprise what Ann Hollander (1995:27) calls a complex, interactive and ever-evolving "visual narrative". Following Hollander, in the exhibition, emphasis is placed on a conglomerate of fashion, style, movement culture and agency, as manifest in 'the visual'. In selected instances, the integral relationship between these elements are highlighted through strategic references to music, dance and fashions of particular geographic and temporal contexts.

Working within Jozi's seams (the inner-city, Daveyton, Soweto, Alexandra, Tembisa), practitioners manifest the diverse means of leveraging fashion style and movement culture that characterises Generation Z. Distinguished by their engagements with each other across diverse locales and levels of society, they operate in a multidimensional digital realm or 'third space' which enables the "flow[s] and interconnections" (Massey 1991:24-29) that this realm introduces. An underpinning thread of connectivity in this digital network of production, dissemination, promotion and consumption, is the strategy of 'hypersampling': the remixing, re-appropriating, re-integrating, fusing, conjoining, interfacing and mashing-up of often disparate elements gleaned from a multiplicity of sources to produce new fashion styles. Materially, sartorial strategies of hypersampling might involve thrifting; recycling; repurposing; upcycling, as

(Front cover)  
Mack Magagane  
Wanda Lephoto  
& Kabelo Kungwane,  
Sartists  
2014  
Digital pigment print on  
fine art rag  
84.1 x 56 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

(Inside front cover)  
Chris Saunders  
NOTXCS, *Introducing  
Dr Pachanga*  
2014  
Digital pigment print  
on fine art rag  
118.9 x 79.2 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

(Top left)  
Alexia Webster  
Sibusiso Mthembu,  
*Pre-performance  
Preparation, Real  
Actions, Orange Farm*  
2010  
Digital pigment print  
on fine art rag  
16.3 x 24.46 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

(Bottom left)  
Alexia Webster  
Sibusiso Mthembu, *Real  
Actions, Orange Farm*  
2010  
Digital pigment print  
on fine art rag  
16.3 x 24.46 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

well as the combination of differing design elements, fabrics and/or motifs. The term 'hypersampling' goes beyond this, suggesting strategies of utilising diverse digital platforms. With its connectedness to digital technologies and hyperculture, the term 'hypersampling'<sup>5</sup> – as opposed to 'sampling' and other terms that denote the 'cutting, pasting and combining' of visual/design elements, images and styles<sup>6</sup> – is significant.

The focus on hypersampling in the exhibition is positioned in relation, rather than in hierarchical opposition, to sampling. Ted Polhemus (1994:131) describes sampling as a postmodern phenomenon – the "Supermarket of Style" – where "all of history's streetstyles ... are lined up as possible options as if they were cans of soup on supermarket shelves." In "Style World", "'nostalgia mode' is set at full hilt, separate eras are flung together in one stretched, 'synchronic' moment in time, all reality is hype and 'authenticity' seems out of the question". Hypersampling incorporates and extends this consumerist approach, connecting seemingly limitless possibilities and practices as nodes within an already rhizomic matrix of interconnectivity. While it is not the only hypercultural platform employing strategies of hypersampling, the internet operates as a horizonless zone in which "instantaneous, worldwide access to information produces an environment of unlimited possibility" (deepfriedscifi 2013). The internet enables rapid non-hierarchical, non-linear, synchronic, and diachronic interchanges across fields in visual culture (fashion, dance, music, performance, visual art). It enables continuous processes of reworking signifiers and fashion styles, and promotes temporary formations of ever-changing identity constructions.

Hypersampling from potentially limitless combinations of transhistorical, cultural, visual, and material signifiers, styles, and sources, Jozi-based practitioners aspire towards creating new fashion products. A reliance on digital platforms means that the individualised and collective agencies they establish cannot be divorced from the broader spectrum of consumerist visual culture. For Jozi-based practitioners operating within a hypercultural space, platforms such as social media, mobile and online technologies are a vital means of communication, articulation, (self)representation and dissemination. Representations of identities are available for visual consumption by immediate digital markets and being picked up on by bloggers, 'look-creators' and trend-spotters, rapidly increases their potential to create new trends.

Given semiotic links between the construction of identities and their performance, masquerade and articulation through fashion and style, hypersampling is a practice through which newly fashion(ed), emergent identities are imagined and produced within the urban context of an ever-changing Jozi cityscape. Scaffolded by consumerist, marketing and digital technologies, and fed on sound-bytes of apartheid and colonial Southern and South African histories, young practitioners hypersample freely, even playfully, from a range of transhistorical, transcultural, visual, and material sources.

Hypersampling from the past, Jozi-practitioners adopt and adapt vintage and retro style referents, remixing them with contemporary design and materials to 'refashion' garments in ways that signify new meanings. For example, practitioners featured on the exhibition, including the Smarteez, Khumbula, Sartists, Sbhujwas and Isikothane, hypersample from the fashion styles of the Pantsulas and Swenkas.<sup>7</sup> Two photographic works, by the Sartists and Khumbula respectively, demonstrate these complex interwoven transhistorical and transcultural relationships.

In a muted black and white photograph, resembling hand-coloured portraiture, three young black men look towards the camera. Their poses are relaxed: one crosses his arms and rests his leg on his thigh, the second displays what appears to be a friendly attitude towards the viewer, and the central figure looks straight into the lens with a slight smile, a tennis racket between his legs. These are the 'Tennis Boys', or rather, the Sartists donned

DearRibane113  
*Untitled 1*  
2015  
Digital pigment print  
on fine art rag  
79.9 x 59.4 cm  
Courtesy of the artists



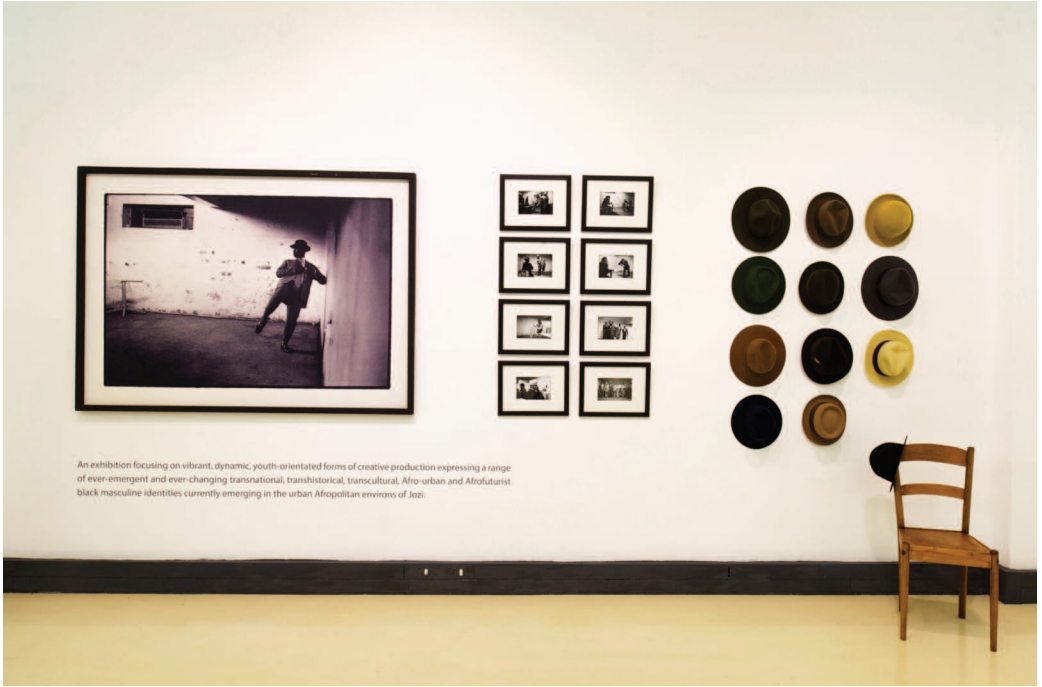














as such. The pristine whites of their clothing and confident demeanour suggests that they are graduates of a quintessentially black Ivy League. In producing this image, the Sartists hypersample from the turn of the century photograph of *Moeti and Lazarus Fume* (1920), which South African photographer Santu Mofokeng includes in his artwork titled *Black Photo Album/Look at Me: 1890-1950* (1997). The Sartists also hypersample from the contemporary Bronx-based design duo, Street Etiquette's (Travis Gumps & Joshua Kissi) preppie line of clothing titled *Black Ivy*. The *Black Ivy* line thumbs its nose at the prestigious, but not necessarily egalitarian schools of the Ivy League, with its references to elitism and 'old money'. This new black varsity chic look challenges clichéd representations of black masculinities as 'gangstas' of the 'hood, and advocates a form of protest through fashion and style.

Juxtaposed, the images of the Tennis Boys and *Moeti and Lazarus Fume* highlight shifting notions of masculinity from a pre-apartheid context to a post-apartheid environment. In the original archival image, the two men adopt stiff, formal stances suggesting a sense of discomfort in front of the camera. In contrast, the Sartists seem at ease – asserting and assuming agency in the designing, masquerading and marketing of their clothing. Their assurance might be because, for them, referencing South Africa's troubled colonial history is a form of paying homage to their grandparents' struggles and a way of expressing pride in their heritage. As they note, "We want to reference styles before apartheid because there are beautiful stories that are not told ... about the black people that lived in those times" (Lephoto & Kungwane cited in Kumalo 2015).

Furthermore, in this image, the Sartists play on the importance of sportswear such as the trademark Converse All Stars 'takkies'<sup>8</sup> in Jozi fashion. Adopted by the Pantsulas from the 1970s onwards, Converse All Stars were later associated with the South African 'tsotsi' or 'skelm'<sup>9</sup> (Ratele 2012:120). The association emerged from an identification with mid to late 1990s American urban 'gangsta' hip hop fashions, where members of the hip hop community on the US East Coast looked to the gangsters of the 1930s and 1940s for inspiration. Mafioso influences, or references to the Italian raggazzo became popular, with many rappers setting aside gang- and prison- inspired clothing (oversized sweatshirts, hoodies, baggy pants, sneakers), in favour of classic gangster fashions such as bowler hats, double-breasted suits, silk shirts, and alligator-skin shoes. A similar combination of expensive garments and criminal activities play out in Pantsula interpretations of the image of the American as a combination of the gangster and the mysterious, impeccable gentleman (Humphrey Bogart), artist (Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, American Jazz), entertainer (Frank Sinatra, Fred Astaire) and political activist (Black Power movement, Malcolm X, Nation of Islam black suits). Signifiers of, and references to, these fashion styles were sampled and translated into Pantsula dress styles to become packaged as the figure of the 'streetwise gangster-with-a-heart', whose outfits comprised hats, suits, shirts, ties and two-tone or plain leather shoes, often combined with a dusk-coat (Goeller 2014a:[sp]).

In the photographic print titled *The three steps of making tea* (2014), Khumbula similarly articulates attributes of the 'perfect gentleman' through hypersampling strategies. Three men, dressed in tailored gentlemen's suits and hats, sip tea from china teacups on the streets of what could be Soweto. The combined Anglicised tea drinking ceremony and elegant formal attire is performative, invoking Hollander's (1995) visual narrative comprising fashion, style, agency and elements of movement culture. Khumbula references the trademark of the international, contemporary phenomenon of black dandyism: the suit as signifier of respectability. For proponents of black dandyism, such as the contemporary UK-based design collective Art Comes First (Sam Lambert & Shaka Maidoh),<sup>10</sup> wearing the suit is a physical and psychological embodiment of black masculinity. Suits convey visual narratives of respectability – dignity,

(Previous spread)  
Harness Hamese  
David Maledimo –  
*Pray to the Winds*  
2014  
Digital pigment print  
on fine art rag  
16.3 x 24.46 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

(Top left)  
Hypersampling  
Identities, Jozi Style  
2015  
Installation view,  
featuring work by Andile  
Buke, TJLemon, Chris  
Saunders, Warren Siebrits  
and Alexia Webster  
Garments supplied  
by City Outfitters  
and Simon & Mary  
Photograph by  
Thys Dullaart

(Bottom left)  
Hypersampling  
Identities, Jozi Style  
2015  
Installation view,  
featuring work by Andile  
Buke, Mack Magagane,  
Jamal Nxedlana  
and Chris Saunders  
Garments supplied  
by the Sartists  
Photograph by  
Thys Dullaart









pride, confidence, self-assurance, elegance and social standing – and portray dressing as a form of self-discipline – imparting a sense of moral rigor, refinement, manners, values and personal codes of conduct.<sup>11</sup> In Monica Miller's (2009:178) rereading of black dandyism as a "cosmopolite self-concept"

A concentration on the dandy's cosmopolitanism establishes the black dandy as a figure with both, European and African and American origins, a figure who expresses with his performative body and dress the fact that modern identity, in both black and white, is necessarily syncretic, or mulatto, but in a liberating rather than constraining way.

Black dandyism as a 'cosmolite self-concept' could similarly be applied to the practice of Swenkas and their counterparts, the Congolese Sapeurs (*La Sape*). Visual narratives enacted in Swenking performances emphasise clothing, its styling on the body, the wearer's agency and elements of movement culture. Swenking is not just about being elegantly dressed, but in all senses of the word, 'being' a gentleman with attendant qualities of respectability, dignity, class and social standing (Goeller 2015). The Congolese Sapeurs, possessing similarly flamboyant performances of 'gentlemanliness', originate from the early twentieth century French colonisation of the Congo. Congolese men working for the French colonisers, or spending time in France, combined French sartorial elegance and aristocratic affects with a 1920s stylistic air of jazz refinement. Their performative 'Afrowaggar' (a form of exaggerated nonchalance and panache), and close attention to personal appearance in fashion and manners resembles that of the historical Black Dandy.

In the Sartists's and Khumbula's works, some of the above-mentioned transhistorical and transcultural referents are digitally mediated. These referents of referents create a mishmash of past and present; they might be remixed or mashed up with images, sounds and ideas globally circulated on the internet, as well as elements from popular, youth, music, virtual, prison and cyber cultures. Additionally, the design groups draw on the specificity of their urban environments and the fluidity of cross-cultural exchanges taking place as a result of cultural migration into South Africa from across the African continent, often fusing global elements with the local to create new 'glocal' identities.

Similar to transgressive strategies utilised by global sartorial groups such as Art Comes First, Jozi-based practitioners deploy hypersampling to refashion the subjectivities and agencies of black masculine identities in ways that interfere with, disrupt and problematise hetero-normativity. Rewinding and fast-forwarding from their positions in the present, they use hypersampling to articulate expressions of simultaneous 'belonging' and 'not belonging'. To borrow Susan Kaiser's (2012:3) phrase, they are "dressing to belong and dressing to differentiate". Fashion and style become signifiers for tensions between expressions of personal and collective identities, and the re-fashioning of contemporary black masculinities in transition.

(Previous spread)  
Andile Buka  
*Untitled V, From the Sartist Sports Project - Part 1*  
2014  
Digital pigment print on fine art rag  
84.1 x 56 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

Chris Saunders  
*Pantsula, Lee Leballo from Intellectuals*  
*Pantsula, Soweto*  
2014  
Digital pigment print on fine art rag  
84.1 x 55.22 cm  
Courtesy of the artist, Daniela Goeller and Impilo Mapantsula

(Following spread, top left)  
Harness Hamese  
*David Maledimo, Lourens Gebhard and Bafana Mthembu - The Three Stages of Preparing Tea*  
2014  
Digital pigment print on fine art rag  
16.3 x 24.46 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

(Following spread, bottom left)  
Harness Hamese  
*Biyana and the Outcasts*  
2013  
Digital pigment print on fine art rag  
16.3 x 24.46 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

(Following spread, top right)  
Harness Hamese  
*When a Black Woman Prays - Andile*  
2013  
Digital pigment print on fine art rag  
16.3 x 24.46 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

(Following spread, bottom right)  
Harness Hamese  
*Yield to Excursions III - The Outcasts*  
2013  
Digital pigment print on fine art rag  
16.3 x 24.46 cm  
Courtesy of the artist



















## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall (2008:1) describe Johannesburg as “the premier African metropolis”; a context in which ‘worldliness’ constitutes “not only the capacity to generate one’s own cultural forms, institutions, and lifeways, but also with the ability to foreground, translate, fragment, and disrupt realities and imaginaries originating elsewhere, and in the process place these forms and processes in the service of one’s own making”.

<sup>2</sup> Pantsula is a sub-culture incorporating political consciousness, life-style, language, dress-code, music and dance. It is rooted in apartheid township culture, specifically the street and shebeen (informal pub) cultures where it developed (Samuel 2001). Pantsula is influenced by the music from the Sophiatown-era (American jazz); fashion and style portrayed in 1950s American gangster films and on jazz record covers; and the structural organisation of American gangster culture.

<sup>3</sup> Swenking is a competition, underpinned by emphasis on fashion, style and good manners. It is an enactment of dandyism and the concept of the ‘perfect gentleman’, and an expression of respect, pride, and refined masculinity (Goeller 2014b:[sp]). Zulu men from Durban and Kwa-Zulu Natal living as migrant workers in the hostels in Johannesburg and surrounding areas, carry out Swenking as a cultural practice (Goeller 2014b:[sp]).

<sup>4</sup> According to Susan Kaiser (2012:1),

Fashion is ... about producing clothes and appearances, working through ideas, negotiating subject positions (e.g., gender, ethnicity, class), and navigating through power positions. It involves mixing, borrowing, belonging, and changing. It is a complex process that entangles multiple perspectives and approaches.

‘Dress’ is a term used predominantly for historical and cultural comparative purposes in global fashion theory to describe the traditional, symbolic, or functional use of clothing, whereas ‘dress style’ refers to the actual items of dress and the way they are combined and worn to create identity and difference (Kaiser 2012:7). Carol Tulloch (2010:276) considers style as a form of agency “in the construction of self through the assemblage of garments, accessories, and beauty regimes that may, or may not, be ‘in fashion’ at the time of use”. She elaborates that style is “part of the process of self-telling, that is, to expound an aspect of autobiography of oneself through narratives”. Tulloch (2010:274) proposes the articulation of style-fashion-dress as a complex system that can be broken down into part- and whole- relations between the parts (individual terms) and the wholes (the system that connects them). The larger articulation of style-fashion-dress locates style in the context of fashion: a social process in which style narratives are “in flux with time” (Riello & McNeil cited in Kaiser 2012:7).

<sup>5</sup> ‘Hypersampling’ may be related to a particular form of eclecticism in fashion that expands into a ‘super-sampling’ of styles in an age of globalisation, communication and endless accessibility (Frankel cited in Theunissen 2005:19). Given its relation to the digital realm, hypersampling differs from postcolonial terminology describing processes of cultural contact, fusion, intrusion, disjunction, crossovers and assimilation occurring due to border crossings by cultures and peoples, and which trigger the forging of “new identities and new ways of being” (Venn 2010:322).

(Previous spread, left)  
Chris Saunders  
*Smarteez, Original  
Shoot Kepi, Soweto*  
2007  
Digital pigment  
print on fine art rag  
59.4 x 39.7 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

(Previous spread, right)  
Chris Saunders  
*Smarteez, Original  
Shoot Lethabo, Soweto*  
2007  
Digital pigment print  
on fine art rag  
59.4 x 39.7 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

(Top left)  
Chris Saunders  
*Izikhote Fight with  
Words, Orange Farm*  
2013  
Digital pigment print  
on fine art rag  
59.4 x 39.7 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

(Bottom left)  
Chris Saunders  
*Izikhote Fight, Two  
Pants, Orange Farm*  
2013  
Digital pigment print  
on fine art rag  
59.4 x 39.7 cm  
Courtesy of the artist



<sup>6</sup> Sampling is a practice that takes place in various cultural fields (art, literature, fashion). Commonly used in relation to fashion history/theory, Djing, Vjaying and with regard to subcultures, sampling occurs when existing elements are decontextualised and re-used in combinations that generate new meanings.

<sup>7</sup> The Isbhujwa and Isikothane are sartorial groups emerging from either Pantsula or Swenking, or a combination of both. According to Goeller (2015),

Isbhujwa (from the French 'bourgeois') 'de-radicalises' Pantsula, in favour of the more polished hustler, or so-called 'black diamond', whereas the Isikothane ... 'radicalise' Swenking into a parody of the icon of the neo-liberal era: the Wall Street banker in red suspenders.

<sup>8</sup> South African colloquialism for 'sneakers'.

<sup>9</sup> South African colloquial terms for 'gangster' or 'thief'.

<sup>10</sup> Art Comes First draws inspiration from the distinctively sharp styles of the 1950s Jamaican Rude Boys (aka 'Rudie'), represented by young rebels wearing Mohair suits, thin ties and pork pie hats. The style was closely connected to the music movements of the time; their initial inspiration derived from American Jazz and R&B musicians as well as some notorious gangsters.

<sup>11</sup> Their self-fashioning of masculinity through projection of image and employment of fashion and style as a form of self-discipline echo the characteristics of both the aesthetic and aesthete dandy. The former is associated with excess, decadence, flamboyance and theatricality; the latter with self-discipline, personal hygiene, deportment, elocution, poise, taste, tailoring and refinement.

Chris Saunders  
*Vusi Kunene swenking  
outside Jeppe Hostel*  
2015  
Digital pigment print  
on fine art rag  
Courtesy of the artist

WOLHUTER  
MENS

HOSTEL



MANS  
KOSHUIS WOLHUTER







VISUAL IDENTITIES  
IN ART AND DESIGN  
RESEARCH CENTRE  
Faculty of Art, Design  
and Architecture



+27 (0)11 559 1210  
[www.viad.co.za](http://www.viad.co.za)  
[www.facebook/viad.fada](https://www.facebook.com/viad.fada)

Rooms 119A & 120, 1st Floor,  
FADA Building, University  
of Johannesburg, Bunting  
Road Campus, Auckland Park,  
Johannesburg, South Africa, 2092

