

Self exploration through photographic expression

 By [Robin Fredericks](#)

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Artistic expression comes forth in many forms, be it through dancing, singing, writing and drawing - it lives and its breathes. Cape Town has become renowned for its artistic expression through up and coming artists who express themselves through their art work, exploring narratives behind it.

Photography is one such art form which does just that. It changes the way in which you view reality and the things you may overlook. It expresses sadness, joy, beauty and depth through a focused lens.

In early August, Earl Abrahams and Wandie Mesatywa, second residency photographers of [Amplify Studio in Cape Town](#) were featured in a residency photographic exhibition titled, *My Identity* which explored these young, talented South African photographer's identities.



From left to right: Wandie Mesatywa, Earl Abrahams and Koketso Mbuli.

Abrahams' project, *Coloured In*, explored spatial and racial segregation passed on through the Group Areas Act under the Apartheid Regime, which gave way to exploration of his identity and community.

Mesatywa's project, *Iqhiya* captured the beauty of *Iqhiya*, also known as the doek or head wrap, declaring her pride in being a Xhosa woman.

Here, Abrahams and Mesatywa share with us what the project meant to them, their love of photography and their plans moving forward.

■ ***Can you tell us more about what this project meant to you as an individual?***

Abrahams: My project 'Coloured In' was a deeply personal and explorative one that forced me to confront myself and my identity as a so called 'coloured man'. It steered me into a reflective space, forcing me to ask really hard questions about my community, people, space and current state of the City in which I had lived for so long.



Photography by [Earl Abrahams](#).

My project allowed me to pause for a moment, to tackle issues in my head and heart - and I feel that 'Coloured In' has given me the foundations to continue creating...

Mesatywa: The project meant I had to open up to strangers and people I already know. And that was hard for me. I am a private person and I like my own space. This project opened room for people to interrogate me, my beliefs, and the culture I was born into. It has certainly brought me closer to my inner self...

■ ***In which ways has the project amplified your own identity?***

Abrahams: It has amplified my own identity through granting me clarity of understanding of my own views and the views of those around me in relation to our community spaces and their challenges. The understanding of how complex and increasingly involved it would be to dismantle the inculcated systems that still reign within society today.

Mesatywa: I wouldn't say amplified but it made me more aware of how further away I am to my true identity as a Xhosa speaking person. In relation to and with my culture. So the venture to self-exploration continues until my identity is amplified:).

■ ***What has it meant to you to be a part of the Amplify Studio's residency photographic exhibition?***

Abrahams: It has truly been an honour to be a part of the Amplify residency programme/exhibition. This programme has given me the opportunity to develop as an artist and has given me a clearer focus of my future artistic endeavours.

Mesatywa: It meant breaking boundaries in the industry of art as a professional and recent graduate. As well as not conforming to expectations but realising the true potential of what I could achieve as an artist and a black young woman.



Photography by [Wandie Mesatywa](#).

■ **Has photography always been a passion of yours? What is it about this art form that you love?**

Abrahams: Inline skating was always my first love/passion (and I've been inline skating for more than 20 years). I got introduced to photography through inline skating and I generally only use to engage with it in that space. It is only within the last four years that I decided to venture out of the confines of the inline skating world and develop a new found love and passion for the story telling prowess that photography gives me access to.

What I love about this art form is that it allows me the freedom to share my worldview with others - I also love the diversity that photography offers - whether it be street, wildlife, fashion, conceptual photography - this art form has room for anyone and everyone.

Mesatywa: It is hard to say that it has always been a passion of mine, as it was a strange finding - when I realised it was something I loved, it was more of the freedom it gave me and satisfaction that I fell in love with. Only later I started appreciating and loving the artistic side of it.

■ **What are your plans moving forward? Are there any other projects and/ or exhibitions that you're currently involved in/ planning?**

Abrahams: I've recently relocated up to Johannesburg, so I plan to showcase the work in Jozi before the end of the year. I also have a part two of *Coloured In* that I have started working on and will hopefully be showcasing this body of work sometime next year. I've also started a new video series called TALK which showcases various individuals in the creative and other industries.

Mesatywa: I plan on producing more work around the same theme of identity. I am also involved in a group exhibition *We Cannot Be Silent*, which is currently showing at the Castle of Good Hope until 24 September. I am also part of a group show launching in September at Everard Read Gallery at the V&A Waterfront, as well as another group show in Hamburg, Germany also launching in September.

■ **Do you have any message for those exploring their own artistic creativity or expression?**

Abrahams: Believe in yourself and your abilities - start your own projects, even if you don't have everything mapped out yet. You'll be amazed at how a concept can lead you to other opportunities. Most importantly, tell your story - it's those stories that have the ability to shift perspectives and help others to believe in themselves.

Mesatywa: Staying true to who you are is what adds depth and authenticity to one's creativity. Therefore, I would say never lose touch with who you.

Abrahams and Mesatywa's photography exhibits at Amplify Studios until the end of September.

ABOUT ROBIN FREDERICKS

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