

Shaun Motsi
Art Basel Paris 2024

Booth K40
Emergence
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Martin Scorsese once said, "Cinema is a matter of what's in the frame and what's out." Perhaps the same could be said about the law: that in preparing for a trial, or crafting a lawsuit, it is as much about what you include as what you choose to exclude. Told in heavily annotated and humorous fragments, *Masters* by Shaun Motsi takes place in the frame of a fictitious "Masters" program, similar to real edutainment 'Masterclass' programs that feature experts/influential figures sharing knowledge and skill sets (for a profit of course). In *Masters*, the protagonist, Mr. Clarke, a retired Black independent filmmaker, receives an invitation to spearhead the "Black Masters" edutainment initiative—an extension of *Masters* (and an attempt to make history yield up a morally satisfying result that it did not the first time around). At one point, Mr. Clarke remarks that "it feels like the Black subject-position gets lost after the first two lines," only for a masked producer to reassuringly dismiss the concern. This story may sound familiar, and thus, seemingly harmless. When telling stories and classifying the world, we invest those classifications with meaning and consequences, whilst also positioning ourselves in relation to them. Why did you come to Art Basel in Paris? And how does that sit with - or against the work, *Masters*?

The interaction between art, law, language, and moral judgments is more pronounced when being about people. The prints, titled *Masters (Prompt)*, capture unshown moments from the monologue for *Masters*. One of the prints reads, "How do we (...) satisfy the innate human desire to step inside somebody else's skin?" Like a moth to a flame, the prints invite or prompt the viewer to step inside the frame and read the words aloud, like puppets pulling their own strings. *Masters (Prompt)* is not a work of psychological realism but one of masterful stirring symbolism masquerading as naturalism, with the first symbols it sets in motion being the viewers themselves. The prints have a self-assertive tone that speak to the relationship to hegemonic regimes that shape representations of Black individuals in pop culture. Mr. Clarke says: "I think of myself as an independent filmmaker, I think of myself as fiercely independent" While framed as a creator of his own terms, the narrative of independence is crafted within—and co-opted by—systems that commodify (black) identity for consumption. In the struggle for self-description, we are often caught by society at large, whose language we share, even if we resist the words used by others to describe us.

The narrative of *Masters* holds particular significance at Art Basel, especially regarding knowledge and law. The actors' contracts had to be revised for the presentation, originally stating they "may not reproduce or commercialize any element of the Work without the Artist's prior written permission." This raises key questions: why the need for protection and subsequent revision? In today's world, what can't you own? Besides people, there isn't much. How do we do justice to both the work and the actors(agents)? Rather than take up these concrete questions in the abstract, we have constructed a clause for moral protection. The moral clause may not have any practical legal consequences, but the missing threads and losing battles it embodies provide a sense of direction that strengthens both *Masters*, Motsi's and the actors' integrity in a political landscape practically devoid of it.

1. Moral Clause

In consideration of the potential acquisition of *Masters* by Visual artist and filmmaker Shaun Motsi, both the Purchaser and the Artist agree to uphold the following moral and ethical standards in relation to the artwork. The Purchaser acknowledges the unique social, political, and cultural context of the artwork *Masters*, and agrees to respect and preserve the artistic intent of the artwork.

1.1. Prohibition of Exploitation

The Purchaser agrees that *Masters* shall not be used, displayed, or reproduced in any context that promotes racial injustice, social inequity, or cultural exploitation. The Purchaser further agrees not to align the Work with commercial ventures or endorsements that contradict the moral and ethical stance expressed within the Work itself.

1.2. Consultation with the Artist

Any significant alteration, reinterpretation, or use of the Work beyond its original exhibition context, including but not limited to commercial or art institutional displays, must involve prior consultation with the Artist or the Artist's designated representative. The Purchaser agrees to respect the Artist's input and collaborate in good faith to ensure that the Work remains ethically aligned with its initial creation.

1.3. Protection of the Actors' Representation

As *Masters* involves the portrayal of individuals whose performances are integral to the narrative, the Purchaser agrees not to exploit or misrepresent the actors' roles. Any use or reproduction of the Work must preserve the dignity and integrity of those involved in its production, and no image or likeness of the actors may be used for commercial purposes without their explicit consent from artist and actors.

1.4. Non-commercialization Without Consent

The Purchaser acknowledges that the Artist retains moral rights over *Masters*, and no commercial use or reproduction of the Work may take place without the prior written consent of the Artist. The Artist reserves the right to refuse any commercial use that conflicts with the values, message, or integrity of the Work.

Signature, artist (Shaun Motsi)

Signature, purchaser

Text by Fafaya Dewornu Mogensen