

Abstract

This creative studio research investigates the work of Lefifi Tladi (b. 1949). Its significance includes inserting Tladi into the historiography of South African visual art and intellectual life. My study is framed through the theories of Black Consciousness and Afrocentrism to engage portrait painting and biographical writing as a discursive mode into the visual arts discourse. My methodology foregrounds visual forms to interpret Tladi's first name, Lefifi, which implies darkness after light. Portrait painting is key in my research, exploring its potential as both a creative procedure and intellectual activity fusing attributes of likeness, realism, fiction, and imagination. I engage theories of biography by Chabani Manganyi, Hlonipha Mokoena, and Ciraj Rasool to articulate the dynamic and complex portrait of Tladi, who is a visual artist, poet, musician and activist. At the end, I produced a body of portrait paintings and an expansive written text to explore the portrait of Lefifi Tladi. This research attempted to render visible a portrait of Tladi as a creative thinker whose work is peppered with the spirit of Black Consciousness and Afrocentricity, and contributed to decoloniality.

Keywords: Afrocentric, apartheid, Black Consciousness, black experience, Lefifi Tladi, poetry, painting, portraiture