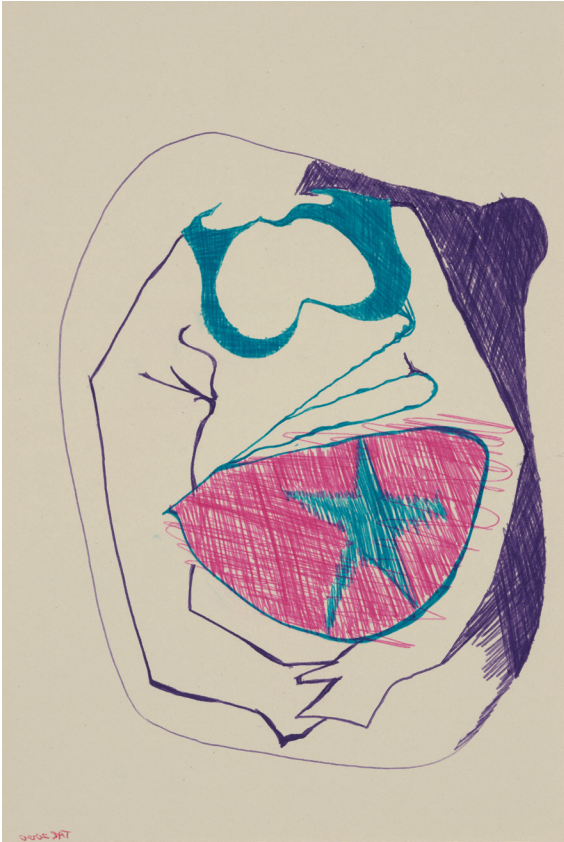


RUBY CITY TRACEY ROSE

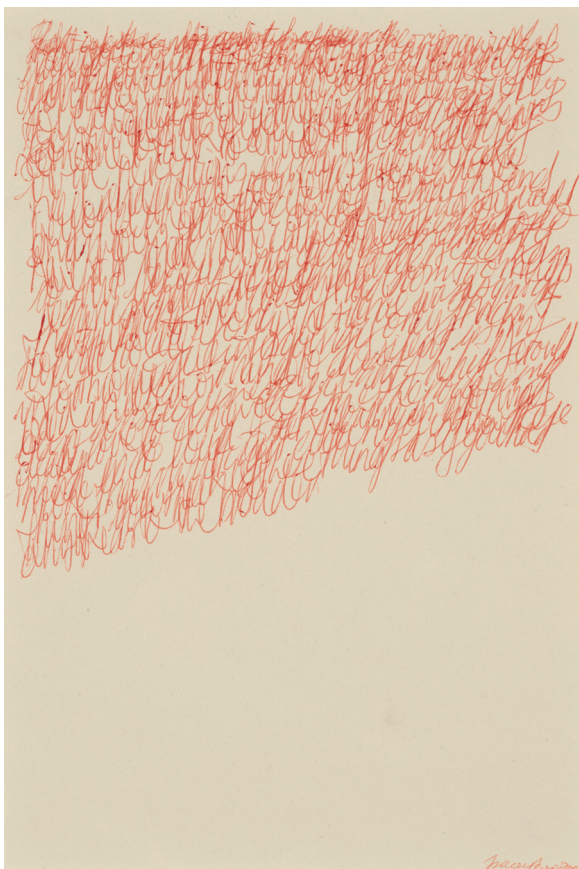


6.6.2026 —
5.9.2027

RUBYCITY.ORG @RUBYCITY

TRACEY ROSE

6.6.2026 —
5.9.2027



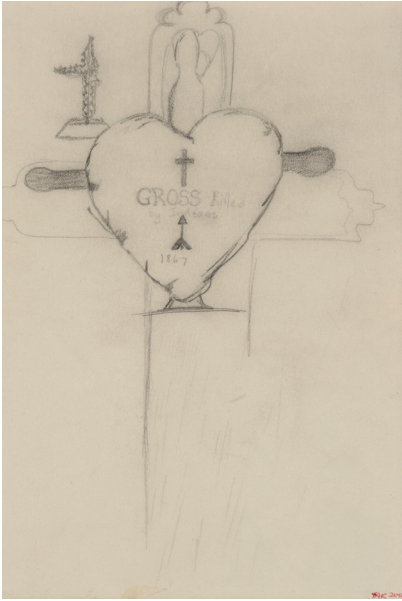
Cover: *Untitled*, 2000
Ink on paper
8 1/8 x 5 1/2 in. (sheet)
2007.1.410.6

Untitled, 2000
Ink on paper
8 1/8 x 5 1/2 in. (sheet)
2007.1.410.35

This exhibition brings together works by South African artist Tracey Rose (b. 1974, Durban; lives, Johannesburg), who is primarily known for her performances and multidisciplinary practice. Her work invites interpretations centered on feminism, violence, body politics, identity, and the realities of postapartheid South Africa. The two works presented here, *TKO* (2000), a video performance, and a significant body of untitled drawings made concurrently, share conceptual underpinnings that rarely factor into discussions of Rose's work. They reflect her interest in testing the limits of human capability and investigating the act of mark making.

The suite of drawings represents a lesser known though equally important facet of her practice. Rose has described drawing as immediate and "straight from your energetic point into the pen onto the page." Using ink and graphite, she created 62 drawings, blending abstract and recognizable elements that reference the body, language, religious iconography, and boxing, among other subjects. Executed spontaneously and loosely, the drawings also reflect her long-term exploration of shamanic practices, including divination. Employing diverse types of marks from sinuous lines and shading to script and notation, Rose worked intuitively, crafting the images to test whether the drawings could predict or cause events to occur. The results were inconclusive. Although an unsuccessful experiment, the drawings serve as a record of her inner life during this period: drafts related to *TKO*, reflections on sexual dynamics, an image of a grave marker in Castroville, Texas, and a cartoonishly large cigarette butt. Shown here in their entirety for the first time, they form a metaphorical self-portrait roiling with fears, ideas, absurdities, anxieties, and humor in equal measure.

TKO conveys a similar sense of immediacy. Just over six minutes long and looping, the video takes its name from the boxing term technical knockout. Filmed using cameras embedded in a punching bag, the grainy footage and soundtrack of her grunts and screams captures the nude artist as she punches until physically spent. Rose trained as a boxer, finding the sport transformative for its ability to let one, as she put it, "surpass yourself with an almost out of body experience."



Although it is most often discussed as a commentary on the psychophysical violence and trauma of apartheid* and its lingering toll, *TKO* also represents Rose's attempt to capture the experience of mark making and the transformative power of creation. Claude Monet, the first artist she admired, factored into her conceptualization of the project, and she drew inspiration from his water lily paintings. Her performance parallels the execution of his canvases "[T]he commitment, the surface—my understanding

of boxing was that it was an art, a passion, like dancing, and the intention was that each punch would be a mark, a gesture, a building up to something."

Rose created both the drawings and the video during her 2000 residency at Artpace, an artist residency and exhibition space in San Antonio, also founded by Linda Pace. At her residency's close, *TKO* was exhibited and the drawings were gifted to Pace in appreciation of her experience. This exhibition marks the first time the two works appear together and the only occasion all the drawings have been on view. From the physical exertion of *TKO* to the psychic intensity of the drawings, this presentation illuminates Rose's commitment to transcending the everyday and investigating the capabilities of literal and metaphorical mark making.

Elyse A. Gonzales, Director

**Apartheid in South Africa, 1948–1994: Apartheid was a series of laws that gave white South Africans more rights than Black, Indian, and mixed-race citizens. Non-white people were forced to live in separate areas, attend different schools, and were denied the right to vote. Many people both inside and outside South Africa protested these unjust laws. This dismantling of apartheid began in the early 1990s, and it was officially over with the writing of a new constitution in 1994 and the democratic election of Nelson Mandela.*



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2007.1.410.10

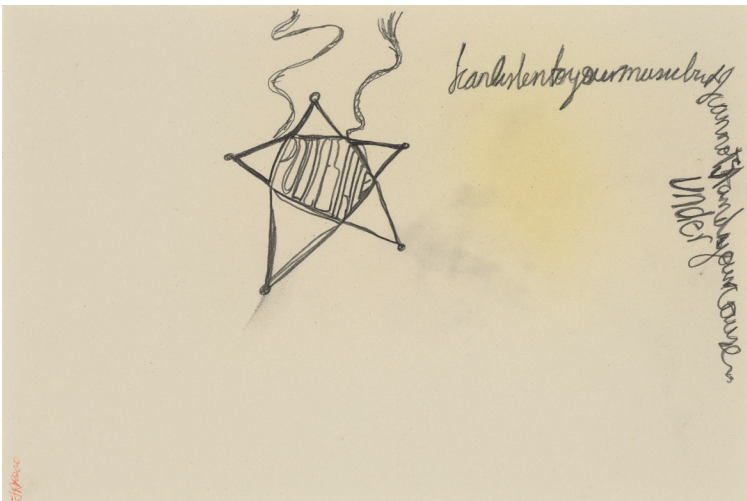
TKO (video stills), 2000
Video installation, artist's proof
6 minutes, 19 seconds
Courtesy of the artist

The following essay by Adilson De Oliveira situates TKO and Rose’s drawings within art historical and sociopolitical contexts.

Tracey Rose did not enter Artpace in 2000 as an artist in residence; she explored the site as a place to be tested, destabilized, and rewritten. By that point, she had already emerged in the mid-1990s as one of the most uncompromising figures of a generation navigating the fraught terrain of postapartheid visibility. South African art was being rapidly absorbed into an international curatorial framework hungry for coherence—hungry, above all, for a story. Transition. Reconciliation. Nation-building. The artist, in this schema, was expected to perform legibility: to translate a violently complex history into forms that could circulate cleanly across biennales and museum walls.

Rose refused this position outright.

Rose’s identification as “Colored”** emerges from a category produced through apartheid’s bureaucratic violence—an imposed position, but one that cohered into a lived community, culture, and history specific to South Africa. Her practice does not stabilize identity; it performs its fracture. The drawings extend this logic. They do not depict identity; they enact its instability.





It is here that a story from her life returns—not as anecdote, but as something closer to Johannesburg folklore, the kind of night that gets retold until it hardens into cultural memory. In the early 2000s, during a

performance by the African American poetry and musical group The Last Poets, Abiodun Oyewole stood before a charged crowd and declared, to cheers, that “Colored people don’t exist.” It landed cleanly—one of those statements that sounds like clarity, like theory distilled for applause. But in South Africa, it struck a deeper fault line: not just the rejection of a category, but the erasure of a people formed through a specific, violent history of naming, mixture, and control. What happened next has been told and retold. Rose, somewhere in the room, refused the ease of it. She erupted—loud enough, insistent enough—that the microphone was eventually handed over, whether as concession or spectacle. And then she tore into it. Not a measured rebuttal, but a refusal in full voice: that they would not arrive in her country and speak her people out of existence. Those who were there remember the shift—the crowd tightening, the air changing, the performance slipping. It carries a kind of dark humor now, the sudden reversal, the mic passed mid-chaos—but the stakes were exact. On one side, a drive toward ideological purification, toward collapsing difference into a singular, legible whole. On the other, Rose holding the line that “Colored” in South Africa names a lived, historical condition—messy, contested, but real—and that to erase it in theory is to repeat, in another register, the violence that produced it.

Facing page: *Untitled*, 2000
Graphite on paper
5 1/2 x 8 1/8 in. (sheet)
2007.1.410.44

Untitled, 2000
Ink on paper
5 1/2 x 8 1/8 in. (sheet)
2007.1.410.49

The room did not resolve it. It couldn't. And maybe that's why the story stuck. In its wake, the reverberation was tangible: At their following show in Cape Town, The Last Poets opened the stage to Colored poets to speak on identity themselves—as if the city, or the moment, had answered back.

By the late 1990s, South African art had been absorbed into global curatorial systems that demanded legibility. Exhibitions positioned themselves as sites of knowledge production. Yet what they often produced was control: difference organized, complexity prestructured.

The rhetoric was depth; the effect was compression.

African artists were asked to signify quickly—to evidence history, to perform context. At its bluntest, this slid into a dependency on what can only be described as trauma porn: pain framed, circulated, consumed as cultural value.



The drawings refuse this economy entirely.

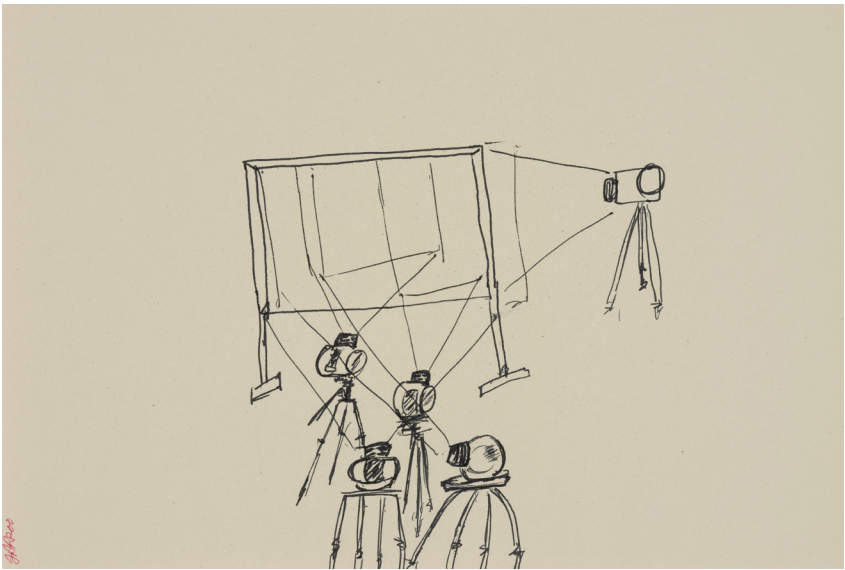
They do not explain. They do not stabilize. They do not offer themselves up as evidence. They remain opaque, excessive, unresolved. Where the exhibition demands clarity, they produce interference.

Her contemporaneous development of *TKO* (2000) offers a parallel logic. The work began as a response to a curatorial framework she found reductive. Her response was escalation.

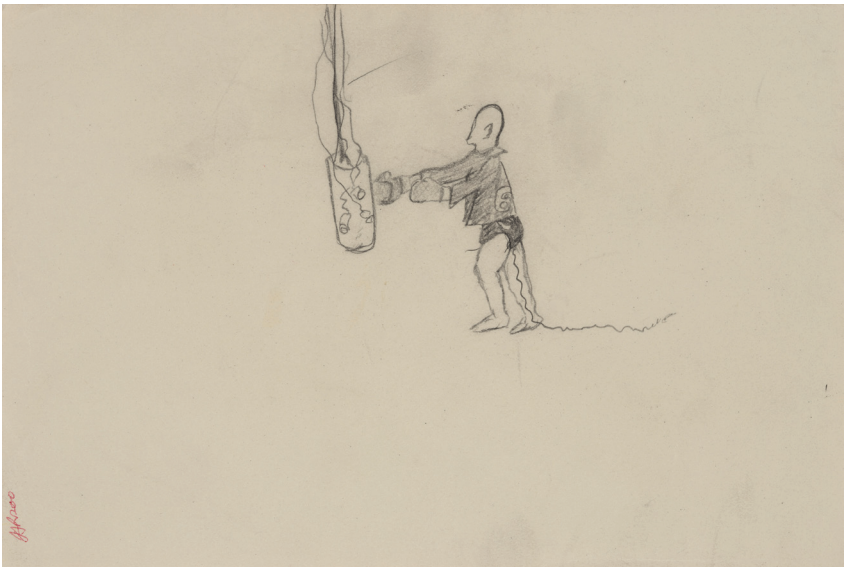


Facing page: *Untitled*, 2000
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Untitled, 2000
Ink on paper
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2007.1.410.61



Untitled, 2000
Ink on paper
5 1/2 x 8 1/8 in. (sheet)
2007.1.410.17



Untitled, 2000
Graphite on paper
5 1/2 x 8 1/8 in. (sheet)
2007.1.410.22

TKO operates as both homage and rupture—drawing on Cubism, Impressionism, and Minimalism, with a pointed nod to *Water Lilies* by Claude Monet. It is equally driven by Rose’s impulse to punch through the suffocating logic of a reductive, racist postapartheid exhibition—a moment of anger translated into form.

Training in boxing for two years at the famed Nicholas Durant’s gym in Johannesburg, Rose entered a regime of endurance that blurred the boundary between art and lived experience. The gym functioned as a crucible—repetition, exhaustion, discipline. The body was pushed beyond its limit.

In *TKO* paint is symbolically applied through impact, each mark indexing the body striking the bag, collapsing a four-sided, sculptural logic onto a two-dimensional surface. The soundtrack functions as chant or prayer. Filmed with four spy cameras embedded in the bag and a contact microphone beneath, one camera was destroyed in the process—leaving three: a fractured trinity of mind, body, spirit.

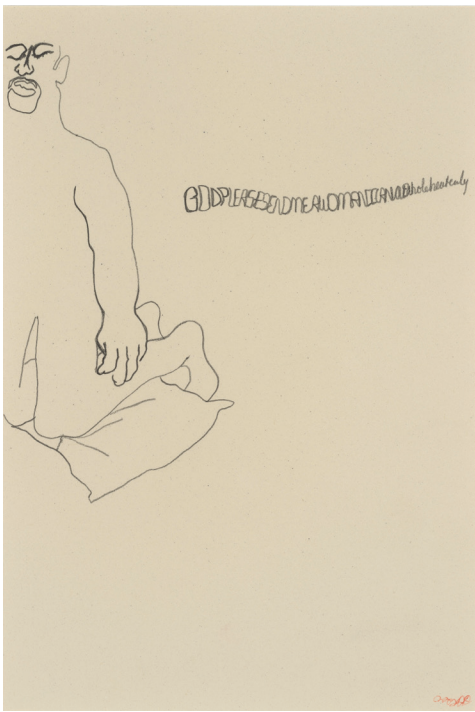
The title *TKO*—technical knockout—marks the moment the body can no longer continue. In the drawings, that moment is extended. The image is not knocked out—it is kept just before resolution, held in suspension.

The drawings operate in the same register. If *TKO* tests the body, the drawings test the image. Each mark is pushed to the point where it can no longer stabilize meaning. Collapse is not failure; it is method.

Materially, they remain modest. Ink and graphite on small sheets of institutional paper. But this modesty intensifies their effect. The viewer must come close. And in doing so, encounters instability at a more intimate scale. These works reveal Rose operating in a mode closer to divination than illustration. They are compressed fields of intuition; images produced at the speed of thought under conditions of emotional and conceptual pressure.

The drawings were produced during Rose’s residency at Artpace. According to Rose’s recollections, the works were not conceived as a formal portfolio at first but emerged through a daily compulsion to produce images during a turbulent moment in her practice. One of the most striking revelations in Rose’s account of these drawings is the role they played in what she describes as a deeply unsettling psychological experience. Rose explains, “Those drawings were predictions. I was trying to come up with a code that would either prevent what they predicted or control the outcome.”

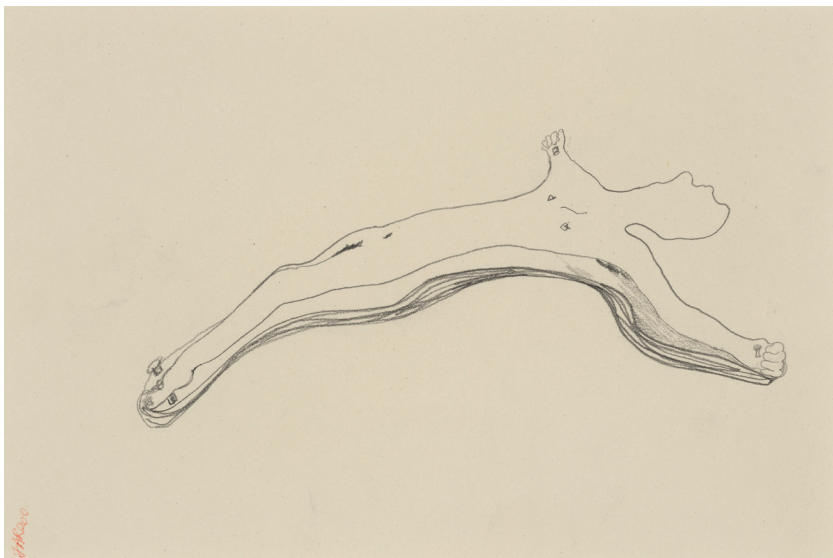
This idea did not emerge suddenly in San Antonio. Rose connects it to an earlier experience during her undergraduate years when she believed a drawing had anticipated a violent event within the family of a partner. The experience left her unsettled by the possibility that drawing might reveal—or even generate—future events.



By the time of the residency, she was attempting to decode the phenomenon. “I was trying to figure out whether drawing caused events, or created them . . . or whether they were just revealing something that was already going to happen.”

The conclusion she reached was bleakly pragmatic: “I succeeded in neither.”

These drawings are not merely representational images; they operate within a conceptual framework in which drawing becomes a tool for reading the future.



Facing page: *Untitled*, 2000
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2007.1.410.58

Untitled, 2000
Graphite on paper
5 1/2 x 8 1/8 in. (sheet)
2007.1.410.38

Untitled, 2000
Ink on paper
5 1/2 x 8 1/8 in. (sheet)
2007.1.410.42



They do not yield meaning.
They resist it.

Seen together, the
drawings form a system—
an accumulation that gains
force through repetition.
Not a sequence, but a field.
Each work feeds into the
next but never resolves it.

The drawings do not stabilize because they are not meant to.
They remain open, unresolved, resistant to capture. They refuse
to behave.

And yet—even here—the logic holds.

The image returns. It is repeated, restaged, pushed past itself.
Rose does not resolve the image—she exhausts it. Not defaced, but
undone through repetition. Not singular, but performed until it slips.

And in that slippage, the drawings hold.

Adilson De Oliveira

****Colored* in South Africa indicates a broad, mixed-race group of individuals descended from Europeans, Africans, and Asians.*

Untitled, 2000
Ink on paper
5 1/2 x 8 1/8 in. (sheet)
2007.1.410.45

Facing page: *Untitled*, 2000
Ink on paper
8 1/8 x 5 1/2 in. (sheet)
2007.1.410.16

Facing page: *Untitled*, 2000
Ink on paper
8 1/8 x 5 1/2 in. (sheet)
2007.1.410.3

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Unless noted otherwise, all works are from the Linda Pace Foundation Collection, Ruby City, San Antonio, Texas.

TKO, 2000

Video installation, artist's proof

6 minutes, 19 seconds

Courtesy of the artist



All drawings are *Untitled*, 2000. Most were made using graphite and/or ink on paper and some were made with crayon and/or marker. They are all executed on the backside of Artpace stationary Rose found in the office during her residency and which she asked to use, attracted by its quality. Oriented vertically or horizontally, each sheet is 8 1/8 x 5 1/2 in.

RUBY CITY CAMPUS

- 1 Sculpture Garden
- 2 Nancy Rubins, *5,000 lbs. of Sonny's Airplane Parts*,
Linda's Place, 550 lbs. of Tie-Wire
- 3 Marina Abramović, *Chair for Man and His Spirit*
- 4 Ken Little, *Boss*
- 5 Stephen Kaltenbach, ART WORKS
(in sidewalk by building entrance)
- 6 Teresita Fernández, *Starfield*
- 7 Teresita Fernández, *Wednesday's Child*
- 8 Teresita Fernández, *Tumble Hill*
- 9 Daniel Joseph Martinez sculpture
- 10 Daniel Joseph Martinez wall painting
- 11 Linda Pace, *Jewels in the Concrete* installation (throughout park)
- 12 Teresita Fernández, *Journal Benches* (throughout park)
- 13 Parking (also available on Camp Street)

RUBY CITY
THUR TO SUN 10AM—6PM
150 CAMP STREET
FREE & OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

