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# *Tender Is the Night*
# Dr Esther Mahlangu and Pia Truscott

**31 October 2026 - 31 December 2026**
**Peffers Fine Art, Cape Town**

Peffers Fine Art is pleased to present *Tender Is the Night*, an exhibition bringing together a focused selection of paintings by Dr Esther Mahlangu with recent wire constructions and assemblage paintings by Cape Town artist Pia Truscott.

The exhibition opens on Saturday, 31 October 2026, and continues until Thursday, 31 December 2026.

Mahlangu and Truscott emerge from profoundly different generations, cultural histories and systems of artistic training. The exhibition does not propose a direct lineage between them, nor does it position Truscott's work as a response to Mahlangu's practice. Instead, it considers how two distinct bodies of work can be placed in relation without being made equivalent.

Both artists use line to organise space. In Mahlangu's paintings, line establishes balance, rhythm and pictorial order through exacting freehand execution. In Truscott's constructions, line becomes provisional and spatial: wire, thread and salvaged materials form incomplete routes, suspended diagrams and speculative maps. These formal correspondences provide an initial point of contact, but the exhibition moves beyond resemblance to consider what a line can hold: form, memory, authority, cultural knowledge and relations between objects and people.

Mahlangu's practice developed through a matrilineal system of teaching. She learned Ndebele mural painting from her mother and grandmother and has extended this embodied knowledge across architectural surfaces, canvas, sculptural forms, public commissions and collaborative projects. Her paintings sustain a relationship with Ndebele visual practice while asserting her individual authorship within international contemporary art.

Truscott's practice has developed through anthropology, university training, mentorship and studio experimentation. Her wire constructions incorporate salvaged and found materials, including ribbons, bottle tops, beads, buttons, plastic fragments and metal fittings. Through their reuse, materials that might otherwise pass unnoticed are gathered into unstable cartographies concerned with movement, uncertainty and the problem of finding one's way.

Their different histories remain central to the exhibition. Mahlangu, born in 1935, developed her practice under segregation and apartheid and has frequently been positioned as a cultural representative rather than considered fully as an individual modern and contemporary artist. Truscott, born in 1999, works within a post-apartheid art world offering different institutional and educational possibilities, although one that remains structured by historical inequality.

*Tender Is the Night* acknowledges these differences rather than attempting to resolve them. The exhibition asks how looking might remain attentive to relation while recognising the limits of comparison and interpretation.

## The exhibition title

The title comes from John Keats's 1819 poem *Ode to a Nightingale*, from which F. Scott Fitzgerald also took the title of his 1934 novel. In Keats, the speaker enters a landscape he cannot see completely. Sound, scent, memory and imagination become ways of apprehending what remains partially concealed.

Within the exhibition, night is not used as an allegory for apartheid, Africa, Black history or trauma. It describes a condition of incomplete visibility that requires another kind of attention. Meaning emerges gradually through movement, proximity and sustained looking.

Tenderness is approached as a method rather than a synonym for femininity, softness or fragility: the care involved in constructing, maintaining, transmitting and reconsidering a form.

This premise extends into the installation. Individual works are illuminated by directed spotlights while the surrounding gallery recedes. Truscott's wire constructions cast shadows that double, distort and extend their physical lines across the walls. Suspended works function as permeable screens, interrupting sightlines without fully obstructing them. Mahlangu's paintings retain their optical concentration and structural clarity within this shifting spatial field.

The exhibition treats looking as an active and necessarily incomplete process. It asks viewers to attend to the formal correspondences between the two practices while recognising the histories and forms of knowledge that cannot be readily translated from one into the other.

## Public programme

The public programme begins on First Thursday, 5 November, with a curator's walkabout led by Ruarc Peffers. The walkabout considers the exhibition's literary title, directed lighting and the ways line, surface and shadow organise the installation.

On Saturday, 21 November, Pia Truscott joins writer and curator Nkgopoleng Moloi and researcher and curator Nessa Leibhammer for *Lines of Transmission: Art, Inheritance and Contemporary Practice*. The conversation considers how artistic knowledge and material practices are transmitted and transformed, with attention to matrilineal knowledge, artistic agency and institutional classification. Audience questions will follow.

On First Thursday, 3 December, *Afterlight* marks the exhibition's final month with drinks, music and extended viewing. Its title refers to the light remaining after sunset and the afterimage retained after looking.

## About Dr Esther Mahlangu

Dr Esther Mahlangu was born in 1935 in Mpumalanga, South Africa. She began learning Ndebele mural painting at the age of ten under the guidance of her mother and grandmother.

Mahlangu received major international attention through *Magiciens de la Terre* at the Centre Pompidou and Grande Halle de la Villette, Paris, in 1989. In 1991, she became the first woman and first African artist commissioned to produce a BMW Art Car. Her subsequent career has encompassed painting, murals, architecture, sculpture and collaborations with international museums, artists and design institutions.

In 2024, her major retrospective, *Then I Knew I Was Good at Painting*, curated by Nontobeko Ntombela, opened at the Iziko South African National Gallery before travelling to Wits Art Museum. Her work was also included in the 60th Venice Biennale that year.

## About Pia Truscott

Pia Truscott was born in 1999 and lives and works in Cape Town. She completed a BA in Anthropology at the University of Cape Town in 2021 and graduated from the Michaelis School of Fine Art in 2022.

Working across sculpture, painting, collage and drawing, Truscott uses wire and salvaged materials to explore mapping, movement and orientation. Her first solo exhibition, *Making My Way*, was presented at the Association for Visual Arts Gallery in Cape Town in 2026. Her work has also appeared in exhibitions at the Iziko South African National Gallery, 99 Loop Gallery, SMAC Gallery, the Investec Cape Town Art Fair and FNB Art Joburg.

## Exhibition programme

**Opening:** Saturday, 31 October 2026, 10:00-14:00

**Curator's Walkabout with Ruarc Peffers:** Thursday, 5 November 2026, 18:00-19:00. First Thursday; gallery open 17:00-20:00.

**Lines of Transmission: Art, Inheritance and Contemporary Practice:** a public conversation with Pia Truscott, Nkgopoleng Moloi and Nessa Leibhammer. Saturday, 21 November 2026, 11:00-12:30. Gallery open 10:00-14:00.

**Afterlight: A Final-Month Gathering for *Tender Is the Night***. Thursday, 3 December 2026, 17:00-21:00. First Thursday.

**Exhibition closes:** Thursday, 31 December 2026. Gallery open 10:00-14:00.

## Venue

Peffers Fine Art, First Floor, Radio House, 92 Loop Street, Cape Town City Centre, 8001.
www.peffersart.com

## Press and image enquiries

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