

MUSIC

Second coming

Amidst the local backlash over his starring role in *Inxeba*, actor, singer and author Nakhane remains steadfast in the name of his art – and himself

Words by
Bernd Fischer

GQ: Congratulations on the critical acclaim following the release of *You Will Not Die*. How does it feel now that the album is finally out?

NAKHANE: Thank you very much. It took a year to release, so it's surreal having people listen to it. My drama teacher always said: 'Once you've released the work, it's no longer yours.' I'm trying to remember that and to have a distant relationship with it, but I don't know how possible that is. >>



GQ: Tell us more about the album artwork.

N: Initially I wanted a cover that either didn't have my face on it, or something that obscured it, somehow. And maybe that's because I felt quite 'exposed' by the music. Tarryn Hatchett, my photographer, played to my vanity, and I went back home and cancelled all ideas of obfuscation. I'm an extremist, so I thought, well if I'm going to be on the cover then let's be on the cover. Let's use this moment as one of power and visibility. I wanted colour, I wanted sensuality, I wanted there to be something a little bit discomfiting. And also to leave enough room for the audience to come up with their own interpretation.

It's influenced by Ren Hang and Rotimi Fani-Kayode's photography and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

GQ: Your sound has been compared to the likes of David Bowie and Frank Ocean, but which musicians inspire you?

N: Every time I say to my boyfriend that something is a favourite, he always says: 'But you have hundreds of favourites.' And it's true. I'm a stan. If I love something, I love it obsessively. For this album, the list of musicians that inspired me include Busi Mhlongo, Can, TKZee, David Bowie, Grace Jones, Prince, Rachmaninoff, Mbongwana Star, Simphiwe Dana and Thandiswa Mazwai.

'When the process begins, I shut out the world and allow the ideas to use me... I don't particularly think much of the audience when I'm creating work'

GQ: Sexuality and religion are clear themes throughout the album, and are very much part of your own personal story. How did you hope this would translate to listeners?

N: To be honest, when the process of ideation begins, I shut out the world and allow the ideas to use me. It's always after the work is almost done, and I'm starting to come up for air that I see patterns. It's at this point that I see what I've been writing about. Yes, there's agency, but I also allow something else to be at work. Something more atemporal. This means that I don't particularly think much of the audience when I'm creating the work. Yes, there are moments when the songwriting is going really well, and I get excited for the world to hear a melody or a lyric. It may sound selfish, but art is selfish. That selfishness becomes generosity when the audience inserts itself into your story and makes it theirs.

GQ: The music video for 'Interloper' is shot pretty straightforward, but is quite heavy on symbolism. Or are we reading into it too much?

N: It's seething with symbolism. My director Mark Middlewick and I were having so much fun putting these things together. It felt like we were creating our own

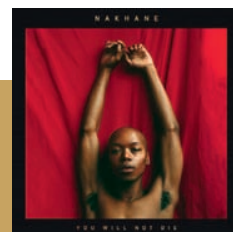
occult language, and we were the only ones who had access to it. We always have many ideas when we decide to create a music video, but then the end result is always a much more stripped-back version of what we had on paper. This time around, we wanted to have fun.

GQ: The video for 'Clairvoyant' depicts a love story between two men, a rarity not only in the global entertainment industry, but especially in South Africa. What's the response to the video been like?

N: Except for it having an age restriction on YouTube – which is a suspicious move – it has been really positive. I love that video. Working with Tebogo Malope was incredible, and easy. The positive feedback has been a blessing. It's a beautiful video that nods heavily to Wong Kar-Wai's *Happy Together*.

GQ: There seems to have been a surge in toxic masculinity globally. How do you think we can combat this in 2018?

N: It's up to us men. We are the problem. We are toxic. So we must change. I do think that men pretend that this is rocket science. It's really not. It's simple. We just need to stop.



The album cover here of 'You Will Not Die' by Nakhane, photographed by Tarryn Hatchett