

Gallery

VUYO MABHEKA

by JOSH LUSTIG

The South African artist Vuyo Mabheka spent his early years mostly in the care of his grandmother. After her death, and with his father absent, Mabheka, his mother and younger sister moved around as his mother searched for work. When friends came over, they often played a game of doll's house, taking refuge in a fantasy world of childhood imagination.

Popihuse, the title of Mabheka's first book, is the Xhosa version of the Afrikaans word for doll's house, "pophuis". The book contains collages inspired by these retreats into a world of play. "My work threads between memory and fantasy," Mabheka tells me. "In a way, creating an archive for the part of my life that wasn't, or couldn't be, photographed, such as my emotions and fantasies."

Taking the few images he has of himself as a child, Mabheka places this young self within a naively constructed adolescent world. Many of the collages depict household interiors, with aspirational furniture and possessions cut out of magazines. Others take place on the streets, and it's in these images, like "Skorokoro", shown here, where the tensions between fantasy and reality come to the fore. The faceless, retreating young men represent both Mabheka's absent father and insecure friendships. "Skorokoro is a slang term for something that's not functioning very well," he says. "As much as I have never met or seen my father, I have never felt like I didn't have one. I have always had a father in my imagination." **FT**

Vuyo Mabheka's "Popihuse" is published by Chose Commune; chosecommune.com



'Skorokoro'