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# Rael Jero Salley

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It can be said that the history of painting is a history of flowers. Flowers in paintings are elusive—and in a way, empty—signifiers, fluctuating constantly in meaning and value. To use the cliché, *what's in a name? A rose by any other...* A flower can be whatever the viewer wants it to be. The metaphor can be extended to Salley's paintings in general, which inhabit worlds both familiar and uncanny, inspiring multiple possible imaginaries:

A woman in Victorian garb seems the subject of a withered, lost-and-found photograph, the painting a restoration of all those forgotten-but-not-gone. She could have been a poet, or a student, or a domestic worker, or a matriarch, or a singer, or a criminal, or an intellectual. Identity and meaning reside in the unknown. Another black-and-white painting features two mustachioed men in suits. One wonders if they were lovers, or brothers, or colleagues, and what can be made legible of the monochrome orchid dripping seductively at the edge of the frame? The couple on the park bench by the rosebush, are they drawing towards each other, or pushing away? Is it longing or dismay in his face? Temptation or distrust in hers? What do we make of the monuments in the background; what structures or histories might be looming over this scene? Salley has a way of rendering these ordinary scenes and characters opaque, and reveling in that opacity, celebrating the frayed ends between what the artist creates and what the viewer interprets.

*War of the Roses* is not about flowers, but flowers, as Salley says, "show up." In other words, flowers promise to thread together the otherwise disparate narratives of Salley's paintings, to varying degrees of fruition. Ultimately, Salley's flowers invite the viewer to attune themselves to that which is liminal, marginal, or misunderstood, crafting an experience of seeing and empathising based not on consumption, nor recognition, per se, but radical imagination.

Raél Jero Salley (b. 1979, USA) is an artist, cultural theorist, and art historian. He holds degrees from The Rhode Island School of Design (BFA), The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (MFA), and The University of Chicago (PhD). His research interests include modern and contemporary art and visual culture, with a focus on Blackness and the African Diaspora. Currently serving as Chair and Professor of Art History, Theory and Criticism at the Maryland Institute College of Art, Visiting Professor at UCLA (African American Studies), and a Research Associate at Stellenbosch University, Salley previously served as Senior Lecturer at the University of Cape Town. Salley is a contributing editor to *The Postcolonialist Journal*, and his words have appeared in *The Queer Africa Reader*; *Kerry James Marshall: Who's Afraid of Red, Black, and Green*; *Third Text*; *Social Dynamics*; *African Arts*, and other media. He has won numerous grants and awards, including the Knowledge Interchange and Collaboration Grant (National Research Foundation) and a Fellowship at the Gordon Institute for the Fine and Performing Arts. Salley's work has been featured in various solo and group exhibitions in South Africa, the USA, and Japan, to name a few.



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*Flower Sale*  
2019  
Oil on canvas  
91,5 x 76,5 cm  
R 65 000 ex VAT





*Happy Hour*  
2019  
Oil on canvas  
81 x 91 cm  
R 65 000 ex VAT



*Abuela*  
2019  
Oil on canvas  
60.5 x 76.5 cm  
R 55 000 ex VAT





*Sunday Dress*  
2019  
Oil on canvas  
91 x 61 cm  
R 55 000 ex VAT



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*Partners*  
2019  
Oil on canvas  
91 x 61 cm  
R 55 000 ex VAT



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*Still Life I*  
2019  
Oil on canvas  
63 x 54 cm  
R 45 000 ex VAT



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*Still Life II*  
2019  
Oil on canvas  
76.5 x 61 cm  
R 55 000 ex VAT



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*Untitled (Brothas)*  
2017  
Acrylic on canvas  
61 x 61  
R 50 000





*Untitled (Dinner Party)*  
2017  
Acrylic on canvas  
59 x 83  
R 55 000



*Untitled (Glorias)*  
2017  
Acrylic on canvas  
61 x 61  
R 50 000





*Garden Wedding*  
2017  
Acrylic on canvas  
59 x 83  
R 55 000



*Gloria*  
2017  
Acrylic on canvas  
63 x 54  
R 45 000

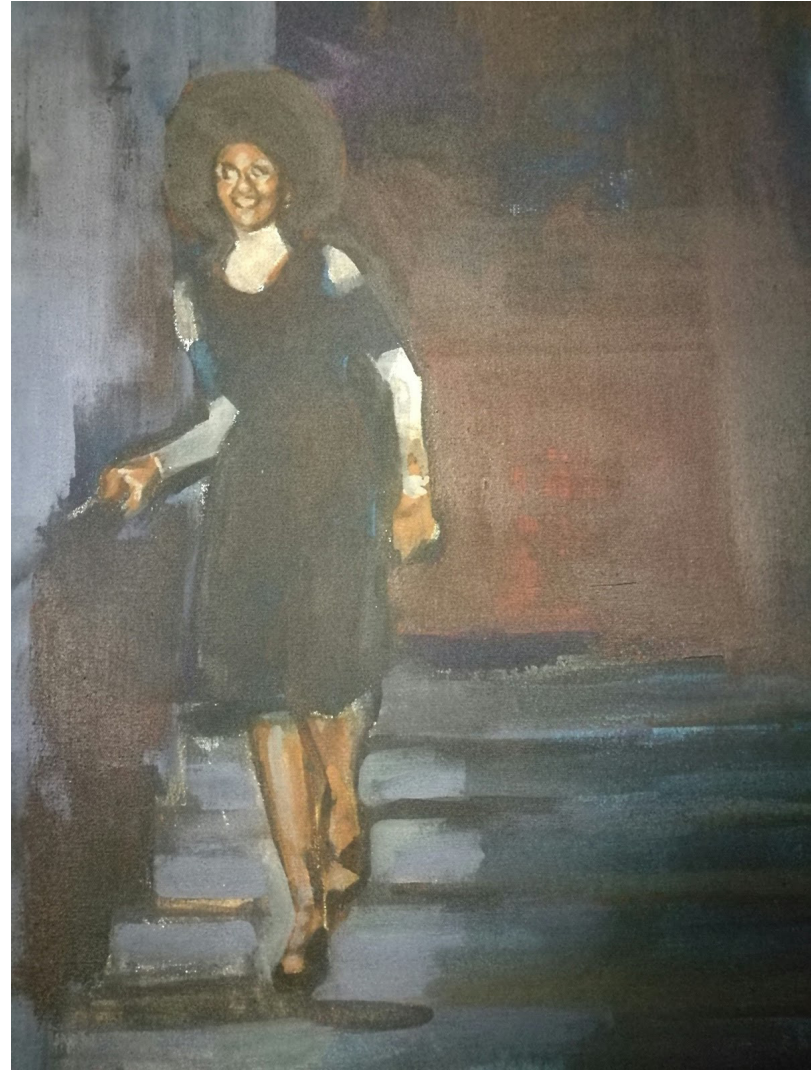






*Happy Hours*  
2017  
Acrylic on canvas  
83 x 59 cm  
R 55 000

*Gloria (2)*  
2017  
Acrylic on canvas  
42 x 59  
R 40 000





*Untitled (Double)*  
2017  
Acrylic on canvas  
59 x 42  
R 40 000





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