



Art Stories

## Nolan Oswald Dennis embraces misreading and misinterpretation

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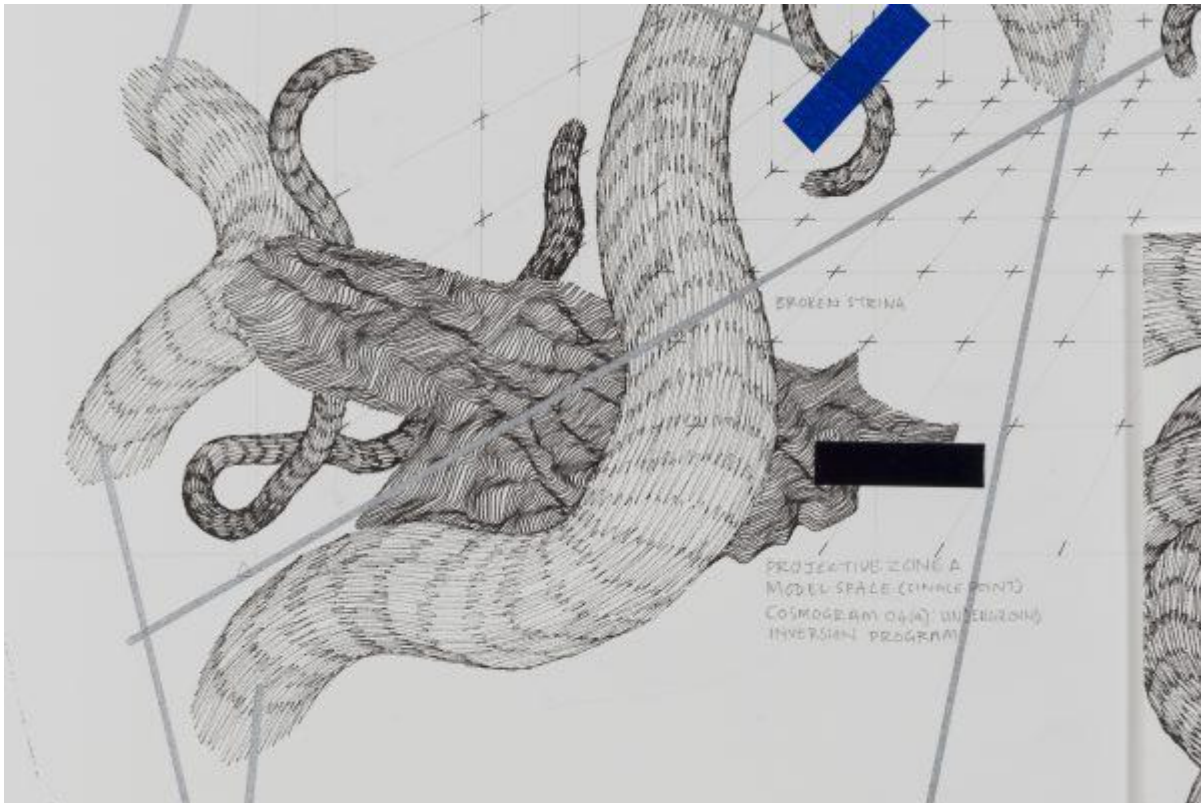
[Nkgopoleng Moloji](#) / 2019-03-12

7 min read

*Interdisciplinary artist Nolan Oswald Dennis traverses across black consciousness of space; immersing himself in the material and metaphysical conditions of decoloniality –journeying through the politics of space and time.*

Dennis recently presented his second solo show with the Goodman Gallery in Cape Town; “*Options*” (24th January – 9th March 2019), comprising a new series of drawings and installations. These drawings convey an intense process of gesturing and mark making —incisions revealing complex patterns and points moving in space.

*One is not quite certain what is depicted in Dennis’ drawings; are these intestine, worms or unspecified worm-like shapes ?*



Nolan Oswald Dennis

The artist complicates iconography, notions of “finished work” as well as the one-directional nature of the art making process (with artist as teacher and viewer as learner). His work is open but not hollow—this openness of the work exposes itself to misreading and misinterpretation. Dennis uses the work’s vulnerability to misinterpretation as an opportunity for new knowledge to enter the space; where the viewer/interpreter takes on the role of “completing” the artworks. In this sense, the work’s impact can only be multiplied as each new set of eyes creates a possibility for a new narrative to emerge.

**I had the opportunity to briefly interview the artist about his process as well as his reflections on the recent show.**

**Nkgopoleng Moloi:** *I'm interested in this idea of using drawing as a way to think about something else, while simultaneously being the actual thing. What is your relationship with different mediums, how you approach them and how you use them to say (or not say) different things ?*

**Nolan Oswald Dennis:** I was thinking about Audre Lorde's idea — the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. And I was thinking about when a tool stops being the master's tool and becomes your tool? What kind of transformation must happen to give these tools the capacity to dismantle houses ? I think of the media I work with in similar ways. Who does this belong to? What can it do ? What do I need to do for it do something else ?

This is mostly an unspectacular process, and in my practice consists mostly of small gestures for holding secrets: marks, notations, clues. I want the work to be open to misreading as both a tactic for concealing things in the work (world) as well as a way of revealing things in the viewer.



Nolan Oswald Dennis  
No compensation is possible (working diagram), 2018  
Wallpaper, chalk and found objects  
Courtesy of Goodman Gallery

**NM:** *I have read a couple of articles of your last show; “Options”, each one is different and interprets the work differently. What is your view on this openness with which we are reading your work?*

**NOD:** I think the work is only halfway done until it is read —the question is always who is reading, and therefore who is doing the other half of the work?

It's actually a huge responsibility to put on a reader/viewer, to demand that they put themselves into the work. I'm all about leaving some space which demands filling — the idea that to “see” the work requires you to first put something of yourself into the work. The viewer must start with an interpretation before they can “see” the work, not after they see it. I think what you see is also an invitation to share the labour of making this art work.



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