

The Test

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The Test is a sculptural meditation on comparison, surveillance, and the extraction of value from Black identity. Its title reflects the ongoing examination Black bodies face from colonial instruments of measurement to modern policing of natural hair, beauty, and comportment.

The figure's face is layered with flour clay covered in the paper-white fragments from copies of *Fiela se kind*, a book I cut up and preserved from my high school years. Barely having served me then, but profoundly serving this sculpture now. By chance, one of the words from these copies, appearing across her left cheek, happened to be “vergelyking.” The button nose carries the same surface, creating a uniform “blank default” that acknowledges how whiteness claims neutrality while erasing Blackness.

Realistic eyes and lips interrupt this surface, emphasizing the parts of Black identity that see and speak truth.

From the sculpture's neck drapes synthetic hair fibre, a literal and symbolic gesture representing the weight of systemic pressure, the commodification of Black hair, and the physical and social violence it

embodies. The reddish-brown-purple curls crown the figure in living texture, blending type 4c all the way to type 3a hair, a deliberate choice reflecting how historical systems of oppression, such as apartheid, classified and marginalized hair textures differently. The pencils resemble the standard red-and-black Staedtler used across South African schools. Mine come from a china shop, a near imitation. Their presence questions how value and legitimacy are assigned, both in art and in education, and how imitation itself becomes a form of resistance and resourcefulness. From afar, they blend into the sculpture's hair, only visible to those who look closely. Their presence speaks to the endurance of institutionalized violence, the way it lingers quietly within education, beauty standards, and memory.

These pencils never truly left. They remain in South African school rules, in the psyche of those who survived and learned to endure through them.

The figure bears three eyes, referencing ancestral, personal, and societal sight, and drawing on the spiritual symbolism of the third eye: inner vision, intuition, and higher consciousness. This element emphasizes the subject's perception: she sees everything, from systemic oppression to daily judgment, and it hurts her, yet she is powerless to intervene. This tension between awareness and helplessness, heightens the sculpture's uncanny realism.

The silver shoulders, constructed from tinfoil secured with clear tape, glint with the irony of wealth and status extracted through the labour and pain of Black communities. Text fragments discovered on the sculpture, such as “vergelyking,” reinforce the critique of comparison and dehumanization. Combined with the deliberate use of *Field se kind* by reveals how mechanisms of judgment, extraction, and appropriation are embedded in both language and material culture.

The Test confronts the tension between visibility and erasure, beauty and violence, realism and abstraction as well as perception and helplessness. It challenges the viewer to perceive the layers of meaning within Black bodies and Black identity. The historical and modern forces that grade, measure, and commodify, and the inner sight, resilience, and resistance that persist.

This work is both a reflection and a provocation: a meditation on how Black life is constantly tested, observed, and appropriated. How the act of seeing differently, fully, consciously – can reclaim agency, voice, and presence.

Materials Used

Flour clay, paper fragments from *Fiel se kind*, synthetic hair fibre (Expression), poster paint (China shop R20 set), pencil, lace glue hairspray, tinfoil, recycled egg cartons and cardboard (for inner structure), newspaper and chopsticks (head armature), net wig cap, sewing pins, red and black South African school pencils.