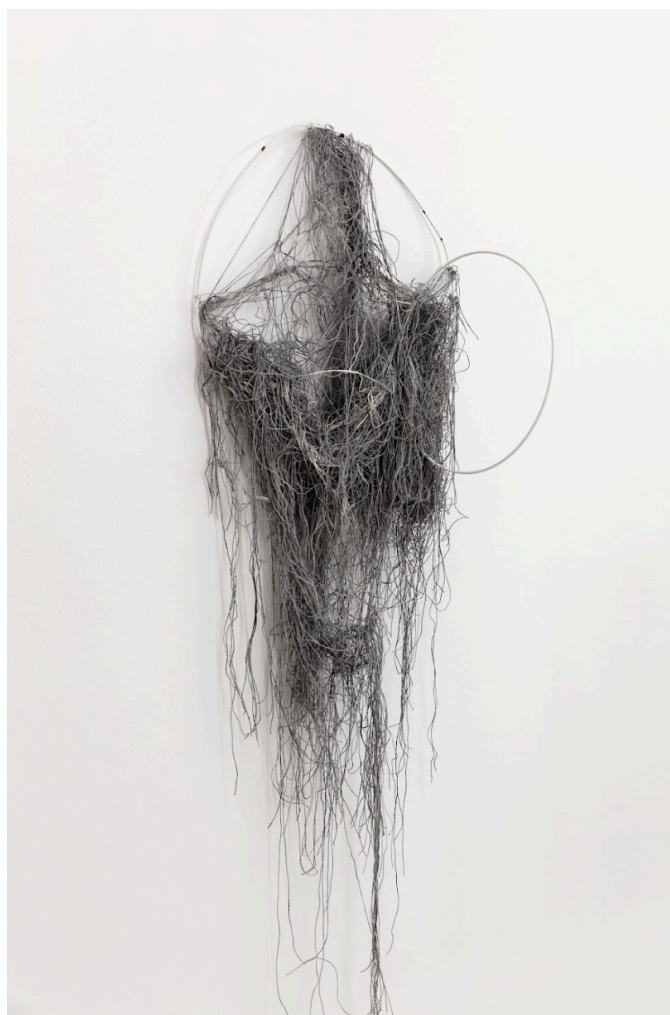


Between the Seen and Unseen: The Spirituality Behind Igshaan Adam's *La*



Igshaan Adams, *La*, 2013. Steel ring, string curtain, acrylic glue, 85 ½ × 21 × 15 ⅞ inches (217.2 × 53.3 × 38.4 cm).
© Igshaan Adams, courtesy the artist and blank projects, Cape Town. Photo: Mario Todeschini.

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La (2013) by South African artist Igshaan Adams is a mixed media sculpture composed of steel rings, a string curtain, and acrylic glue. The form of the piece is bleak yet lively, with the structure of the ring contrasting the droopiness of the string. While there are elements of the piece seemingly holding it up, the string persistently hangs low. The work portrays a haunting, ghostly figure emerging through a ring structure, suspended between our reality and its own. Adams' *La* represents a troubled soul caught between life and death by using fragile materials to explore the tension between the physical and spiritual. Through fabric, shadow, and form, the artist turns ordinary material into a portal between worlds.

The top is approximately at eye level and the figure is slightly off center. It resembles a human form with shoulders, arms, a torso, and head. The string creates an uneven texture that catches light variably, creating darker areas where the layers overlap, and lighter places where the material thins, forming ghostly highlights. The bent ring at the top suggests both fragility and motion, while the knotted lower section grounds the form. From afar it looks like a shadow or apparition; up close, the intricate knots and threads are a demonstration of Adams' craftsmanship. The piece seems suspended and somehow stuck between dimensions. The way it hovers close to the ground enhances its spiritual tension.

Igshaan Adams (born in 1982, Cape Town, South Africa) is known for textile based installations that merge craft traditions with themes of identity, spirituality, and transformation. He uses rope, wire, beads, and fabric, drawing from his upbringing in a racially and religiously mixed community in Bonteheuwel. Adams' process involves weaving, knotting, and layering to blend domestic craft with conceptual depth.

La reflects Adams' exploration of the material world and spiritual plane, embodying liminality. The delicacy of the string, along with the way it drapes, suggests a spirit or memory

struggling to take form, symbolizing human fragility and longing for transcendence. According to the *Art Institute of Chicago*, Adams transforms everyday materials into woven works that reveal “the material aspects of lived spaces along with the personal stories held within them,” showing how common materials take on deep symbolic meaning.¹ *La* in particular can be seen as a ghostly form that captures the human experience of being between worlds. In Adams’ story specifically, this seems to have manifested as his internal battle with his relationship to Islam. The bent metal ring and sagging posture suggest collapse and exhaustion. The rough texture conveys struggle, a body enduring transformation. Adams’ use of fabric to create both mass and transparency makes the sculpture feel both present and fading. The string follows a haunting light pattern where a portion around the neck and chest is missing a mass of fabric, giving it a fading appearance. In a 2024 interview, Adams describes his work as “a search for balance between the physical and the unseen,” reinforcing that *La* symbolizes transition and the human desire to connect with what lies beyond what is visible.²

At first, I saw *La* as eerie and unsettling, a ghost-like shape reaching outward. But after putting the piece in the context of Adams’ life, I began to see it as tender and introspective, not purely grim. The work captures vulnerability and transformation through materials that seem to breathe. Adams’ use of ordinary fabrics evokes deep emotional and spiritual resonance; it makes the piece both accessible and profound.

Through texture, structure, and tension, the work visualizes the fragile connection between body and spirit. Adams’ exploration of the unseen, the soul, memory, and transformation lies at the heart of his practice, making *La* not just a haunting sculpture, but a meditation on the persistence of life after form. It confronts the viewer with a presence that feels

¹ Igshaan Adams: *Desire Lines*, Art Institute of Chicago, <https://www.artic.edu/exhibitions/9626>.

² Igshaan Adams, interview by *The Hepworth Wakefield*, *Igshaan Adams: Weerhoud Audio Guide*, The Hepworth Wakefield, <https://hepworthwakefield.org/whats-on/igshaan-adams-weerhoud/>.

both intimate and unreachable, asking them to consider their own relationship to loss, faith, and transformation.

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