

## Haze In Remembrance



Igshaan Adams, *Hoek Onder Die Trappe (corner beneath the staircase)*, 2022. Wooden, acrylic painted beads, plastic, glass, stone, bone and shell beads, polyester and nylon rope, mix braided rope, 93 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 118 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches (238 × 300 cm). Photo: Kyle Morland

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Igshaan Adams' large hanging tapestry *Hoek Onder Die Trappe* is composed of beads and woven together with rope. Upon initial observation, there is no immediate identifier for what the piece could represent. However, Adams combines meticulous detail with abstraction, and in doing so he creates a memory out of materials while preserving its historical authenticity.

When first observing the artwork, before you notice the structure, you will see the color. Moving close to the artwork you can see that more colors reveal themselves. The rope itself is extremely vibrant, revealing in small amounts powerful blues and bright oranges. When stepping back you are able to see how prominent the earthy pinks, reds, grays, and dark greens are in the work – so much so that the smaller, brighter colors disappear. The structure of the artwork is made of these planes of color; it's immediately visible from afar that the work is split into two sections vertically. On the right side of the division, there is a very clear square-diamond shape that is cut off nearly down the middle, while on the left side there is a full diamond that is slightly harder to make out but remains visible due to the orange beads held within its shape. The artwork's length is almost twice that of an average person, hanging at about 7.8 by 9.8 feet. This substantial size allows the viewer to see the artwork from a distance, while pulling them closer to see its intricacies. This allows an extended transition to occur between the smallest details and the piece as a whole.

Igshaan Adams (b. 1982) is a man of mixed race and mixed religion who grew up in Cape Town, South Africa in the final decade of apartheid. During this time, a person of mixed race was considered “second class.”<sup>1</sup> Much of Adams' work explores religion, sexuality, and

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<sup>1</sup> Hendrik Folkerts, "About the Rose: Igshaan Adams and Hendrik Folkerts in Conversation," Art Institute of Chicago, last modified July 19, 2022. <https://www.artic.edu/articles/1000/about-the-rose-igshaan-adams-and-hendrik-folkerts-in-conversation>

community. In the Hill Art Foundation's exhibition *I've been here all along, I've been waiting* Adams' commitment to community and how it relates to his spiritual and artistic expression is the focal point. In fact, the community that he grew up in helps to produce these labor intensive hanging tapestries with over fifteen local weavers, embroiderers, and technicians including his own family. The phrase "Hoek Onder Die Trappe" translates directly to "corner beneath the staircase" in Afrikaans, the language of Adams' upbringing in Cape Town. The title unveils slightly more about the subject of this artwork, a corner beneath a staircase, that is domestic and familiar.

The use of linoleum as a subject is common in Adams' work, as it is deeply intertwined with his community and his own life experience. In her article "The Importance of Ritual: A Conversation with Igshaan Adams," Erin Jane Nelson writes, "both the artist and the floors have themselves witnessed the frenetic and violent reality of the racially oppressed communities that endured Apartheid and its residual cultural impacts."<sup>2</sup> In order to make these woven tapestries Adams observed the linoleum tiles from a patch of ground taken from a childhood friend or neighbor's home. The tiles were a signifier of poverty or the working class and would wear down within a year, families would replace them every Christmas time. They would erode under the everyday foot traffic through the home, developing what Ishaan Adams refers to as a "diaristic cartography," meaning that the erosion would map out the daily movements and lives of the people.<sup>3</sup> In *Hoek Onder Die Trappe*, we see a very magnified view of the tiles, with every mark and patch of wear and tear being replicated in its own form through the variety of beads, showing an immense attention to detail. It was the artist's intention to "track the daily movements of

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<sup>2</sup> Erin Jane Nelson, "The Importance of Ritual: A Conversation with Igshaan Adams," *Burnaway*, February 21, 2020, <https://burnaway.org/magazine/igshaan-adams/>.

<sup>3</sup> Rosie Lesso, "Making Tracks: The Textile Art of Igshaan Adams," *Fabrics-Store.com*, May 28, 2024, <https://blog.fabrics-store.com/2024/05/28/making-tracks-the-textile-art-of-igshaan-adams/>.

families and stored memories embedded in the materials.”<sup>4</sup> With this attention to nuances, Adams faithfully and meticulously pays homage to his community and the history they leave embedded where they walk.

The piece is obscured with its size. The original subject is so magnified that the piece as a whole feels abstracted through its lens. In the massive tapestry you can see only one whole diamond shape representing a tile. When first observing the work it doesn't reveal itself to be the tiles of someone's home. Only after the description can you understand the subject. In many ways this mirrors the interaction one has with an old memory. Memory fades and augments itself after years gone but it still retains its message and influence. Adams implies with *Hoek Onder Die Trappe* that he does not just copy the tracks in the linoleum tiles – that on their own carry significant weight and meaning – but shows the subject in a haze of memory. Adams wants to extend this work of art to his spirit, memory, and community. In order to do so he created this magnificent tapestry with the help of a community that resembles a specific but distorted essence of a long past memory.

When I first saw the work I thought extensively about the materials. The use of many different kinds of beads was common among the other artworks in the show. This brought up in me the feeling that the materials are one of the most significant aspects of the body of work. While researching, I learned that Adams uses the rope because it “represents childhood memories of washing lines in the Cape Flats where he grew up.”<sup>5</sup> This brought me to a conclusion about how I see the artwork: not just as a representation of community, but also of the passage of memory.

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<sup>4</sup> “Igshaan Adams at the Hill Art Foundation,” *Hill Art Foundation*, July 16, 2025,

<https://hillartfoundation.org/art/exhibitions/view/igshaan-adams-at-the-hill-art-foundation>.

<sup>5</sup> Jessica Hemmings, “Igshaan Adams,” January 23, 2019, <https://www.jessicahemmings.com/igshaan-adams>.

In *Hoek Onder Die Trappe*, Igshaan Adams bridges past memory and community through the medium of tapestry. Though at first sight it is abstract, through research it reveals itself to be a composition of extreme detail in dreamy hues. The work perfectly captures the haze in remembrance of things long past, and still remains a beautiful accurate document of Ishaan's life.

## **Works Cited**

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