

“Too great oppression for a tender thing.” – Andile Buka’s *Untitled (2016)*
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It’s a Friday afternoon in May, 2016.

Desire and Fela, of [FAKA fame](#), meet with the photographer, Andile Buka, in Johannesburg’s Gandhi Square. Warm weather, and sunlight. Concrete, steel, litter and glass. The city’s tar, warming itself under wheels. Bowing beneath the relentless mass of pedestrian life.

Andile, Fela and Desire travel by taxi to Maponya Mall. They then switch directions, heading straight to Nancefield Hostel – the location for their first shoot.

The poet’s work, to refashion Seamus Heaney’s beloved aphorism, is to be a custodian of language. Our work is brittle work: the reluctant lifting of tiny words of impossible weight, only to unmake them one layer at a time. A vocation of delamination and inquiry, the peeling and shedding of the tough and the tender.

I understand Buka’s work in kinship with this brittle work. As a photographer, he is a custodian of light, refashioning his machinery’s promise to “capture” an image into something else entirely. Buka doesn’t capture images, he invites them in. I get the impression that light bends for him, while he fiddles diligently, waits patiently, for meaning to make and unmake itself in layers.

Listen to him describe this image for the *Mail & Guardian*’s [Portfolio](#):

What’s really interesting to me in this photo, is the old Mazda van in the background, the bootlegged pants, the chain, polo neck, the fur coat, Desire’s nails and hands. The colour of the nail polish is burgundy, if I recall. I chose this image because it is multilayered; it feels like everything is stacked up on top of one another.

Untitled (2016) is a poem about texture, and time. The Mazda’s rust, its chipped paint, its age, and metallic clasp. Metal and un-motion. Perhaps its memory. Nancefield’s Hostel blurred shadow expressed only through a window’s tangential suggestion. Masculinity’s four-paned eye, always watching, ever-present, dim with its own fuzzy present-past of violence in monochrome. Desire’s exquisite hands, veins as raised rivers crossing each other, alive. Nails gleaming, burgundy remade as obsidian – precious stones. Light running its hands all over Desire’s flat links of gold, their chest a breathing foundation of shadow. And the fur. Good Lorde! The fur. Armour and invitation. Armour as invitation? Black poetry.

Both photography and poetry are impossible without mirrors. Both mimetic. It’s no wonder why I draw close to photography whenever I lose sight of myself & my pen’s ability to reflect. That I don’t have to capture anything. All I have to do is wait, fiddle, and invite the light in.