

Kemang Wa Lehulere: In All My Wildest Dreams
Art Institute of Chicago
October 27, 2016–January 16, 2017

reviewed by Caitlin Swindell

The opening of “Kemang Wa Lehulere: In All My Wildest Dreams” at the Art Institute of Chicago marks the first solo exhibition in the United States for South African artist Kemang Wa Lehulere (b. 1984, Cape Town). The show, curated by Kate Nesin, Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, emblemizes Wa Lehulere’s multi-disciplinary approach through its display of objects created in several media, including Polaroid photographs, handwritten letters, annotated sketches, digital video, and sculptures made from salvaged school desks.

Upon entering the Modern Wing of the Art Institute of Chicago, viewers immediately witness “In All My Wildest Dreams,” visible through the glass walls that enclose the front of the exhibition (Fig. 1). In the first gallery space, visitors may ponder the seemingly disparate collection of objects that include several ceramic dog sculptures scattered on the floor, with some shattered and others still intact; these sculptures rest amid closed and opened weathered suitcases



filled with plots of green grass. A depiction of a pencil sharpener resting on a pile of intricately illustrated bones, drawn in white chalk on a large blackboard, serves as a backdrop for this installation and was created on site by the artist (Figs. 2–3).

Though the works are diverse in media and subject matter, several related motifs begin to emerge, gleaned from Wa Lehulere’s mark-making, juxtaposed materials, and inclusion of physical remnants. The incorporation of cassette tapes and depictions of pencil sharpeners may be understood as an ode to relics of the past, but their use remains relevant as both magnetic tape and graphite pencils function to communicate history through the written or spoken word. A

1 Glass panels and doors at the entrance of the exhibition, “Kemang Wa Lehulere: In All My Wildest Dreams.” This space allows visitors to preview the artist’s installation work before entering the show.
Photo: courtesy of the author (2016)

2 Installation image from the Art Institute of Chicago including *When I can’t laugh I can’t write* (2015), chalk on blackboard paint (right wall; this version was created on site by the artist); *In the Neck of Time* (2016), suitcases, earth, grass, and ceramic dogs (center); and *Lefu La Ntate* (2005), single-channel digital video, color, sound: 3:01 min. (left wall).
Photo: courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago

3 Kemang Wa Lehulere, still from *Lefu La Ntate* (2005)
Photo: © Kemang Wa Lehulere; courtesy of STEVENSON, Cape Town and Johannesburg

