

Gene Lesouw | Spokes in the wheel

Spokes in the Wheel, a new solo exhibition by Gene Lesouw, tells of the discomfort that results not only from the demands of our day-to-day existence, but also from the disillusionment that comes from interrogating our place within the hierarchical structures that shape who we are.

The familiarity of a stylised room interior recalls the setting of previous works by the artist, with glimpses of framed city views and a curated selection of everyday items. In *The Dance*, it sets the scene for a moment of lightness, a real-life connection between a circle of friends, with a playful wink to Matisse. However, in this series of paintings, the figures start to interact with the room interiors in unexpected and progressively more precarious ways. They become untethered from the ground plane, elongated into exaggerated contortions by elements within (*We Tried Leaving at the Same Time*) as well as unseen powers beyond the room (*Suspension*). As the compositions themselves begin to extend past the spatial limitations of the canvas, there is also a temporal jump in the viewers imagination. One cannot help but think of how the scene could change at any moment if the figures were to let go, resulting in a catastrophic collapse.

Overextended under the tensile stress, the figures start to become abstracted into strong horizontal and vertical lines. This evokes the language and conventions of abstract painting, especially the works of Piet Mondrian. As the setting shifts from the domestic into a limitless, abstracted void space, this reference becomes even more pertinent. Here the looped bodies become static objects, draped over each other, and stoically immobilised by the need to perpetuate the integrity of the structure as a whole. They are disassociated from an individual context, reduced to cogs in a machine - useful shapes that serve a purpose but are insignificantly small parts of a very large system. Only a few eyes dare to dart to the side, but the visual field is purposefully restricted and the extent of the system that holds them into place can never come into view, remaining unknowable, unchangeable. The perpendicular relationship between the figures mean that they are intimately intertwined, yet they face away from each other, leaving a contradictory and bewildering distance between them.

A key theme of this exhibition emerges here, as the viewer is invited to empathise, but also to step back and see themselves mirrored. It becomes a relatable image of slotting into everyday routines, roles, and societal expectations; into jobs, a large company, and into the economy as a whole. The fear of free-falling means that we avoid upsetting this status quo at all costs. And where nearly all aspects of modern life are underpinned by digital infrastructures, we are finding ourselves in echo chambers, our world views and interactions narrowed by algorithms. We become moulded into place.

While vibrant colour motifs weave a unifying thread, there is also a distinct transition in a number of paintings towards a more sombre, evocative palette. Deep purples, reds, and black allude to Mark Rothko's Seagram commissions and the drama in which they became entangled. Rothko disrupted the established cycle of a transaction and put a spoke in the wheel of what he perceived as affected lavish excess. And yet the wheel of capitalism keeps turning, disproportionately benefiting a tightly guarded circle of players.

99 LOOP

Even though the themes explored in this body of work lean towards feelings of powerlessness and exhaustion in the face of the imbalance of our current reality, there is also a glimmer of optimism to be found. As our attention spans become monetised by these tech firms, we can attempt to untangle ourselves from the brutal unsentimentality of the algorithm; we can choose to turn our heads away from what we are being fed and instead seek human connection by turning towards each other. In moments of despair as we confront the inescapable universality of the human tragedy that keeps us in our place, we can gain a distinct sense of comfort in knowing that we are not alone in finding it hard. In our shared experience we can lend dignity and legitimacy to our pains and sorrows. We can grab the hands of our friends and dance together, nurturing and prolonging the moments that actually matter within the larger chaos of it all.

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GENE LESOUW
The Dance, 2025
Gouache on paper
70 x 100 cm, framed: 82.2 x 113 x 3 cm
ZAR 30,000

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GENE LESOUW
Links In The Chain, 2025
Oil on canvas
56 x 70.7 x 3.5 cm
ZAR 26,000

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GENE LESOUW

Desk ornament, 2025

Gouache on paper

42 x 59.4 cm, framed: 58.6 x 75.6 x 3 cm

ZAR 21,000



GENE LESOUW
Links on the chain, 2026
Oil on canvas
76 x 91 x 3.5 cm
ZAR 34,000



GENE LESOUW
Lovers, 2026
Oil on canvas
41 x 40.7 x 3.2 cm
ZAR 16,500

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GENE LESOUW

I've got a lot on my plate, 2025

Gouache on paper

42 x 59.4 cm, framed: 59 x 75.5 x 3 cm

ZAR 21,000

99 LOOP



GENE LESOUW

Get closer to be further away / spokes on the wheel, 2025

Oil on canvas

91 x 75.7 x 3.5 cm

ZAR 34,000

99 LOOP



GENE LESOUW
The nap, 2025
Oil on canvas
84 x 59 x 3 cm
ZAR 30,000

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GENE LESOUW
In Between Jobs, 2025
Oil on canvas
76 x 91.5 x 1.5 cm
ZAR 34,000



GENE LESOUW

The couple in the window, 2025

Gouache on paper

41 x 41 cm, framed: 58 x 58 x 3 cm

ZAR 18,000

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GENE LESOUW
Suspension, 2025
Watercolour on paper
42 x 59.4 cm, framed: 59 x 75.6 x 3 cm
ZAR 21,000

99 LOOP



GENE LESOUW
Between i and c, 2025
Oil on canvas
70.5 x 71 x 3.5 cm
ZAR 30,000

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GENE LESOUW

We Tried Leaving At The Same Time, 2025

Gouache and watercolour on paper

42 x 59.4 cm, framed: 59 x 75.5 x 3 cm

ZAR 21,000

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GENE LESOUW
Triangulating the square, 2026
Oil on canvas
70.5 x 71 x 3.5 cm
ZAR 30,000

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GENE LESOUW
After Rothko, 2026
Oil on canvas
71.5 x 56 x 3.5 cm
ZAR 26,000

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GENE LESOUW
Pick pocket/lady in red, 2026
Oil on canvas
50 x 50 x 3.5 cm
ZAR 21,000

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GENE LESOUW
So it is, 2025
Oil on canvas
71 x 70.5 x 3.5 cm
ZAR 30,000