

**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE INDIGENOUS WOODCARVING TRADITION
IN THE NORTHERN PROVINCE: INFLUENCES AND INTERVENTIONS (1985-
2000) WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO SELECTED CARVERS.**

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I declare that this dissertation is my own work and has not been submitted for any degree or exam at any other institution.

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DEDICATION

To the memory of three dear friends, artists and activists: Helen Green (7th April 1964- 31st July 1987), Simon Tseko Nkoli (26th November 1957- 30th November 1998) and Dirk Wouter Ackermann (April 1961-24th March 1997).

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ABSTRACT.

This dissertation examines the influences and interventions affecting five selected woodcarvers working in the Northern Province over a period of fifteen years.

Chapter One is divided into three sections. The first section explores the emergence of the woodcarving tradition through the watershed exhibition of *Tributaries* (1985), which claimed the 'discovery' of the master woodcarvers from the region. Shortly following on from this was the *Neglected Tradition* exhibition (1988) whose role defined a turning point in the exhibiting and documentation of black artists within a changing art historical perspective.

The second section critically examines the role of private art dealers, collectors and gallery curators who have had working relationships with the selected woodcarvers.

Chapter Two documents the lives and works of the selected woodcarvers in the light of the influences and interventions created by the predominantly urban-based art market, and examines their responses.

Chapter Three evolved throughout the process of researching this body of work. The candidate's own experience with the artists within the province led to the curating of several exhibitions. The *Hayani/Crossings* exhibition (2000), in particular, is explored as a curatorial exercise in providing a documented and interactive approach often lacking in exhibitions of the work of rural artists. The possible outcomes do not necessarily form clear solutions, but nonetheless challenge modes of exhibiting.

The **Conclusion** summarizes the problems which the woodcarvers have experienced and

notes their own attempts at finding solutions to these problems. Solutions noted are a shift in the mind-set of the existing art market's modus operandi in general and a proactive approach from local and national government bodies in their various arts projects.

In the candidate's opinion very little has changed for these artists since 1985, and the woodcarvers of the region are only able to become empowered if the tools and resources are put in place for them to empower themselves.

Since the private art market sector is governed by marketability and financial gain, it is unlikely that it will be a major role player in supporting the re-emergence of the woodcarving tradition, which has been on the decline in the past decade.

The candidate feels that it is the responsibility of the relevant national and provincial government departments to take the initiative, to define their roles and, of primary importance, to work from within the Northern Province, as opposed to making Gauteng the focus.

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Glossary of *Tshivenda* terms.

<i>Domba</i>	The Python dance performed by young female initiates.
<i>Dzingoma</i>	Plural of <i>ngoma</i> , the spherical drum used by the chief for special occasions and sacred rituals. In the plural, it can also cover a broader range of special objects and 'secrets' relating to Venda rituals.
<i>Halwa</i>	Maize beer produced for sacred rituals.
<i>Hayani</i>	Home
<i>Khosi</i>	Chief
<i>u Losha</i>	A posture performed by young girls by prostrating themselves, kneeling or sitting with hands together. A gesture of respect, usually to men.
<i>Makhadzi</i>	The eldest woman in a family, on the father's side.
<i>Malombo</i>	A sect of traditional religion, linked to the ancestors and traditional healing. Literally spirit or wind.
<i>Marimba</i>	Zylophone type percussion instrument using wood for the keys or beats.
<i>Mbira (shona)</i>	A smaller version of the <i>marimba</i> used by the Shona of Zimbabwe.
<i>Murumba</i> (pl. <i>mirumba</i>)	Narrow waisted drum without sacred or ritual status, used for everyday purposed.
<i>Musanda</i>	Headman.
<i>Ngoma</i>	Round drum used for sacred rituals and occasions linked to the chieftaincy.
<i>Ngomalungundu</i>	The first sacred drum in Venda mythology, played to defeat their enemies.

<i>Nwenda</i> (pl. <i>minwenda</i>)	The traditional cloth and dress of vha Venda women. It consist of two brightly coloured striped cloths, appliquéd with strips of cloth. One is worn around the waist, the other tied on the shoulder by the strips of cloth.
<i>Nanga</i>	A traditional healer.
<i>Phapana</i>	A calabash used for drinking.
<i>Phasa madi</i>	Ritual use of spitting water or squirting from a calabash as an act of propitiation to ones ancestors.
<i>Sangoma</i>	A traditional healer with psychic powers.
<i>Thangu</i>	Divining dice or 'bones' used by the <i>sangoma</i> .
<i>Tshikona</i>	Circular dance with horn blowing performed by males of all ages.
<i>Tshigombela</i>	Dance performed by women.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this dissertation is to critically examine the influences and interventions affecting the life and work of the following woodcarvers located in the Northern Province:

Samson Mudzunga (b.1934-)

Avhashoni Mainganye (b.1957-)

Noriah Mabasa (b. 1938-)

Phillip Rikhotso (b.1945-)

Albert Munyai (b.1958-)

This case study examines the effects of the metropolitan artworld on the working lives of the selected woodcarvers.

In the Introduction the candidate will briefly explore the historical context of the woodcarving tradition of the indigenous woodcarvers of the Northern Province. They are often referred to collectively by art dealers, gallerists and academics as the Venda carvers, despite the fact that this term includes woodcarvers from the former homelands of Lebowa, Gazankulu and Venda. The candidate noted during her time in the region, that the majority of the woodcarvers hail from former Venda. A possible reason for this inaccurate adoption of the collective term is the fact that Venda is the name of the tribe, as well as the language and the place. By way of contrast, the Northern Sotho speaking people lived in Lebowa and the Xitsonga speaking Shangaan people lived in Gazankulu.

Chapter One, Section One will trace the shift in the role of the woodcarver into a fine art domain. This shift is marked by a specific event that claimed to 'discover' the artists in the then Northern Transvaal; namely the *Tributaries* exhibition, curated by Ricky Burnett for B.M.W. (South Africa) in 1985. It was followed by a wave of excitement from national and international art dealers, curators and academics, and acted as a catalyst for further

developments. One of these was the exhibition titled the *Neglected Tradition* curated by Steven Sack in 1988 for the Johannesburg Art Gallery.

The candidate will explore the possible interventions and influences, both positive and negative, which emanated from these exhibitions and which affected the life and work of the selected woodcarvers. The period 1985-2000 has been chosen to include the candidate's personal attempts at seeking solutions to the currently waning woodcarving industry in the Northern Province. The candidate has interviewed government and private gallery curators, art collectors and local role players in the marketing of the work of the woodcarvers (Chapter One, Sections Two and Three). In addition, the candidate has interviewed the artists and documented their work (Chapter 2).

What the candidate has attempted to achieve in this study, is to look more closely at the way in which the selected artists have attempted to find diverse and innovative ways of producing their art, in order to survive in an extremely fickle mainstream art market. Interpretive analysis of issues surrounding the emergence of the Northern Province woodcarvers in the fine art market place is based largely on the candidate's own experiences working with the selected artists and her involvement in the curatorial exercises of the first *Johannesburg Biennale* (1995), the *Venda Woodcarvers* exhibition at the South African Association of Arts, Pretoria (1997) and the *Hayani/Crossings* (2000) collaborative exhibitions held at the NSA Gallery in Durban (Chapter Three).

The Conclusion contains possible solutions put forward by the candidate based on her own experiences and dealings with the woodcarvers. However, they cannot be seen as a guarantee for a revival of the woodcarving tradition or the upliftment of the artists themselves.

Since this study dates from 1985 (the former homelands were incorporated into South Africa after the 1994 elections), it is necessary to mention that Rikhotso comes from what was

formerly Gazankulu, and is a Shangaan, whilst the remaining four woodcarvers are from the former homeland of Venda. In terms of the emergence of the above-mentioned woodcarvers during the period of the homeland system, there is significance in the fact that Rikhotso was isolated from the Venda woodcarvers. This isolation was not entirely geographical. The effects of the homeland system are clearly noted in Jane Duncan's thesis dealing with factors affecting the positive public reception of artworks by sculptors of the region.

Duncan (1996: 16) states:

The above-mentioned artists have not become well known simply because they produce good art: a whole range of factors coalesced in the late 1980's to allow the art world to project the works as worthy of attention. For a start, this exposure would not have been possible without the wholesale destruction of the historical means of subsistence. In fact, the market could only really penetrate these areas consistently once the homeland system was enforced, setting in place institutions that could extend their reach into previously inaccessible areas. It will be argued that these political and economic changes provided the general framework for the development of an art and craft industry, using (and reshaping) "traditional" skills and materials.

Traditionally, the woodcarvers of the Northern Province have played a distinct role in their community, and have been described as: ...part sculptor, part shaman, part curiomaker, part utensil carver, these artists work inside and for the community to which they belong (Powell, I. 1986).

Until approximately the 1950's, artifacts produced by the carvers within their community were usually drums and carved figurines such as the *matano*. These are simplified, carved wooden figures representing both male and female and displayed during the *domba*, or python dance, a female initiation ritual.

The *matano* were displayed during the final part of the *domba* (Fig. 1.) initiation ritual, and according to woodcarver Azwhimpeleli Magoro (April 1998), they were obtained from the woodcarvers through bartering with beer and *mealies*.



Fig. 1 THE DOMBA DANCE c. 1986. Postcard produced by the Venda Development Corporation: purchased at The Ditike Arts and Craft Centre.

The two chief drum shapes are the *ngoma* and the *murumba*. The *ngoma* takes a larger, rounder form, with the height of an average table, whilst the *murumba* is taller and narrower, with a tapered waist. It is usually played raised from the ground and held between the knees and thighs, to allow the sound to resonate through its hollow bottom. The *murumba* is usually used for everyday events, and is less ornate whilst the *ngoma*, considered sacred by the Venda, is used by royalty, at special events and for ritual purposes. It is carved with various repetitive designs and entwined handles. These are of particular reference to the house of the chief or *musanda*.

It is the hemispherical drums (*dzingoma*), which are of greatest interest in this discussion as they are specifically associated with chieftainship and bear this decoration whereas the tall mortar-like drums are undecorated and unrestricted in their use (Nettleton, 1984: 184).

The Shangaan equivalent of the *ngoma* is called *macomani* or *tingomani*, and is associated with a traditional healing practice called *malombo*.

In contrast to Venda tradition, the Shangaan equivalent of the *marumba* is the *mzumba*, which is used for rituals and celebration (Rikhotso, April 1998).

The sacred drum of the Venda, *ngoma lungundu*, had specific powers to overcome the enemies of the Venda people (Khodoba, September 1995 and Magoro, April 1998). As the legend goes, the drum maintained its powers providing it never touched the ground. Alternating groups of women carried *ngoma lungundu* and were relieved when tired. Upon hearing *ngoma lungundu*, the 'enemy' was overcome with sleepiness or ran away in fear.

Among all their musical instruments, however, the greatest and that which was most feared and revered by all the people was the instrument of the royal ancestral spirits, the Drum of Mwari, the ancestor god of the Vha-Senzi (Singo) and VhaKalanga. This drum was called the voice of the great god, Mambo ya Denga (king of heaven), lord of all the ancestor spirits.....and amongst the drums again the greatest one of all was called Ngoma Lungundu, or Thundundu.
(Van Warmelo cited in Nettleton 1981: 254).

Khodoba (October 1995) claims that the original drum was covered with human skin, and beaten with a human arm. It was considered to be an honour to donate one's limb for this purpose. Many *ngoma* drums today are found with carved wooden arms used as drum sticks. Walking sticks with a similar motif are common.

All of the woodcarvers whom the candidate consulted regarding the location of the *ngoma lungundu* claim that this drum does exist. Their belief is that it is secreted in one of the large art collections in Pretoria, collected during the post-colonial period of apartheid.

Jurgen Witt (April 1998), curator of the Tzaneen Museum, refers to other kinds of staffs used in Sotho female initiation ceremonies. One was a guardian figure placed behind the door of the place (*kraal*) where the initiates were held. This contained *muti* (traditional medicine) in the head of the pole. Another carved pole was a dance staff used by the teacher of the initiation school. Each initiate had a smaller stick used to beat another carved figure. This figure represented a promiscuous young woman suspected to be pregnant.

The girl who has been sleeping with the boys is beaten by the initiates and thrown over the fence (Witt, April 1998).

Other objects of significance in the early history of woodcarving were the Venda doors, or *vothi*, used to decorate and protect the entrance to the *kraal* of the *musanda*, or chief.

Utensils and other utility objects such as headrests (now very rarely produced in this region) and walking sticks (Figs. 2.1-2.2) were also made by woodcarvers for their community, as well as being commissioned by their chief and his family (Munyai, April 1999, Rikhotso, April 1998).

Utensils included drinking vessels, stamping blocks, beer vessels and spoons. Some were decoratively carved whilst others were simple. Most men undertook some form of carving to give to their intended bride before marriage, and to add to *lobola*, or bride price (Munyai, April 1999).



Figure 2.1. Albert Munyai. BIG FIVE WALKING STICKS 1998 Wood Location Unknown.



Figure 2.2. Albert Munyai. BIG FIVE WALKING STICKS 1998 Wood Collection of the artist.

Local *sangomas* (traditional healers) brought their orders to the woodcarvers to produce a variety of objects.

As previously stated, the role of shaman was synonymous with the activities of the woodcarver. However, some claimed that woodcarving was only appropriate for the old or young people who were inclined to be lazy (Mogoro, March 1999). The local community often considered the woodcarvers, in particular those who depicted the human form in their work, to be madmen or practitioners of witchcraft (ibid). The experiences of Albert Munyai and Noriah Mabasa in this respect will be explored in Chapter Two.

CHAPTER ONE

FACTORS AFFECTING THE EMERGENCE OF THE WOODCARVING TRADITION IN THE NORTHERN PROVINCE SINCE 1985.

In Section 1 of this chapter the candidate will explore the impact, and attempt to analyse the long-term effects, that two major exhibitions had upon the selected woodcarvers.

These are the **Tributaries Exhibition** of 1985 and the **Neglected Tradition Exhibition** of 1988, curated by Ricky Burnett and Steven Sack respectively.

In Section Two of this chapter the attitude of public galleries and museums, with reference to exhibitions and acquisitions policies, will be examined.

Section Three of this chapter will interrogate the role of the private sector, including art galleries and private collectors, in promoting and supporting the selected woodcarvers and the woodcarving tradition in general.

SECTION ONE

THE IMPACT OF THE TRIBUTARIES AND NEGLECTED TRADITIONS EXHIBITIONS ON THE WORK AND LIVES OF THE SELECTED WOODCARVERS.

TRIBUTARIES 1985: AN EXHIBITION CURATED BY RICKY BURNETT FOR B.M.W. (SOUTH AFRICA AND GERMANY).

The **Tributaries Exhibition**, curated by Ricky Burnett, laid claim to the discovery of a new autonomous artistic tradition (Burnett, 1985 no pagination). In this section, the candidate will present an argument that attributes the creation of such a tradition in equal part to the urban-based artworld and to the impetus of the artists in question.

In attempting to understand the impact of the **Tributaries** exhibition on the woodcarvers from the then Northern Transvaal, it is important to note that the timing of such an event was crucial to that particular period of South Africa's cultural history and the art world's

reception of black South African artists.

Of particular concern is the effect of *Tributaries, Neglected Traditions* and other such exhibitions on the lives of the artists involved, both at the time of the exhibitions and thereafter. The candidate intends to present extracts from memories of some of the artists involved, and in retrospect to ascertain whether the effects, both positive and negative, had a lasting effect.

In an essay entitled *Transitional Sculpture*, Elizabeth Dell (1989: 45) introduced the topic with the following observation:

Certain parameters have always dictated the definition and appreciation of art in South Africa: Art galleries exhibited work according to a Western tradition: museums quarantined African artifacts for ethnographical appreciation.

The *Tributaries* exhibition which took place in February 1985, questioned these parameters. It assessed South African art in its entirety. Social and contextual references were unashamedly acknowledged (Burnett, 1985). For the first time an attempt was made at a pluralist definition of existing culture. The ensuing exhibition incorporated works of "Urban White, Urban Black, Rural Traditional and Rural Transitional" artists (Burnett 1985: press release). It is, as Ivor Powell wrote, "a measure of how bizarre this country really is that this should have been such a revolutionary thing to have attempted" (Powell 1986: 19).

In presenting this exhibition in 1985, it is clear that the above definitions of rural art and artists as 'Traditional' and 'Transitional' can now be seen to be problematic. The act of defining these terms demonstrates the euro-centric need to clarify differences. It is necessary then briefly to explore some of these definitions in the context of the period under discussion (1985-2000) and consider ways in which these definitions have changed or become invalid.

Colin Richards (1990: 38) questions the act of defining an artwork as 'transitional' thus:

Is not the "transitional" a construction fashioned to serve the economic and cultural interests of a constellation of high art institutions-the galleries, the public and private collectors, corporate patrons, the custodians of taste, the salon keepers?

Duncan (1994: 23) notes that when Ricky Burnett began collecting work in the area for

Tributaries, he found that the carvers were already in the process of adapting their skills to metropolitan audiences.

In Duncan's research (1994), the selected group of artists included Noriah Mabasa, Dr. Phuthuma Seoka, Jackson Hlungwani, Johannes Maswanganye, Owen and Goldwin Ndou, Paul Tavhana and Albert Munyai. Referring to the above-mentioned artists, Duncan (1994: 23) explodes the term 'transitional art' as a fallacy when she says:

...it points to both a continuity and a change from what was produced in the past. As can be seen, only four learned to make 'traditional objects'; another learned to carve curios. One learned both and the remainder were self-taught, so the term simplifies a production situation which in reality is characterized not only by continuity, but by rupture.

In Matsemela Manaka's essay on Traditional Sculpture (1988), there seems to be a clear connection between the traditional and the rural. The question arises as to whether this divide is geographical, cultural, or both.

In a separate chapter, of the same essay, Manaka (1998: 11) defines contemporary South African art as eclectic, drawing its influences from traditional art and European Art.

Manaka states (1988:11):

The fact that South Africa suffered from settler colonialism means two main cultures came into contact. I interpret acculturation to be a voluntary fusion of two cultures without any force or any form of domination determining the fusion. Any cultural fusion determined by domination leads merely to an imposition of foreign cultural values which amounts to cultural imperialism. An artist should not be denied the influences or inspiration of his or her environment.

Tra bi Goh (May 1999) of Cote d'Ivoire, a doctoral linguist student at the University of Natal, explained that the transference of meaning is difficult when transposing Western values onto African understanding. The meaning of democracy, for example, may be translatable into the local language, but the understanding of democracy is rooted in the behaviour and culture of the group, whether expressed in Venda or Shangaan or Guro (Goh's

language group in Cote d'Ivoire).

Colin Richard's (1990:35, citing James Clifford, 1988: 16-17), highlights the need to be more specific in terminologies:

Many traditions, languages, cosmologies, and values are lost, some literally murdered: but much has simultaneously been invented and revived in complex oppositional context.

With this in mind, Richards examines the interventions of certain terminologies. It is clear that many are problematic. Referring to the term 'transitional', Richards (1990: 35) goes on to say:

Transitional art' is often sculpture, though the term has also been applied to pictures. It is usually produced in rural or semi-rural contexts: its material include indigenous wood, wire, tin, plastics, beads, urban debris, reflectors, animal skins, feathers...surfaces may be left "raw" or coloured with enamel paint. Subjects range from prominent political figures, news events, media celebrities, mythic beings of other kinds, sundry spirits-sublime and ridiculous - planes, cars, toys, telephones...

When looking at this definition in relation to the five selected carvers, all of whom can be seen to ascribe to it, there exists a contradiction when attempting to analyze the very nature of "transitional" as a context, in particular when seen across a period of time. The question thus arises; how long is the period covered by 'transitional'?

With the *Tributaries* exhibition, Richards notes (1990:37):

The single, most dramatic coming out of the "transitional" was the 1985 BMW *Tributaries* exhibition. Curator Ricky Burnett noted that 'in compiling this exhibition we have not felt bound by the demands of anthropology. Our brief was to allow for images and items to come our way through a living traffic'.

That "living traffic" delivered Noriah Mabasa, Dr. Phutuma Seoka, the late Nelson Mukhuba, Jackson Hlungwane, Johannes Maswanganye, others - named and anonymous-, assorted dolls, a windmill, satan...into the gallery and the public eye. The fine art world noticed.

An incongruous mix of subject matter, materials and non 'fine art' artists became significant when defining 'transitional'. Richards' analysis (1990: 39) refers specifically to the situation shortly after the opening of *Tributaries*:

Cut back by the selective Cultural Boycott, the State has, with the help of important art world figures, been instrumental in sending a number of South African art exhibitions to the Valparaíso Biennial in Chile. Noteworthy here was the conspicuous “transitional” presence in the 1987 contribution.

In this context the BMW *Tributaries* exhibition, which traveled to Europe, also raised difficult questions. It was in some ways a courageous affair. Yet perhaps, because of structural /institutional factors and the needs of fine art culture – a pluralist cultural *mélange* was, as autonomous “art”, effectively detached from pragmatic history. Perhaps it is in the nature of such exhibitions that they become displays of culture ‘cut and dried’.

The adjective ‘autonomous’ had already been attached to the woodcarver’s art in the *Tributaries* catalogue (Burnett, 1985: no pagination).

There is a process, which has a life of its own, when the selection, exhibition and sale of artworks termed as ‘transitional’ are concerned. The question arises: to what extent does this process benefit the artist? Often, as with other forms of cultural colonization, selection is based on assumption rather than actual consultation with the artists.

Ricky Burnett, curator of *Tributaries*, acknowledges (1985: no pagination) that the definition of predominantly ‘white’ art as ‘mainstream’ is also problematic:

- it (mainstream) implies a universal consciousness, a global teleology that ignores the topography of local conditions. Work from this country is neither simply parochial nor simply mainstream; at its best it explores the rivers and tributaries appropriate to its own terrain. Local conditions are infecting the work with a sense of local colour.

Of the five artists researched in this dissertation, only two were included in the *Tributaries* exhibition. These were Noriah Mabasa and Avhashoni Mainganye, although other artists from the then Northern Transvaal were represented. The ‘highlight’ of the show was undoubtedly the work of Jackson Hlungwani, a Shangaan woodcarver living and working at Mbhokota, on the Elim to Giyani road.

Other artists from the region included the late Nelson Mukhuba, the late Dr. Phutuma Seoka, Johannes Maswanganye and Paul Tavhana. In addition, pole carvings and dolls of unnamed

artists were provided by Jurgen Witt, a German art collector who had established his own museum in Tzaneen.

The exposure of otherwise 'unknown' artists had a powerful impact which was to engender a wave of interest in the woodcarvers of the then Northern Transvaal.

It is difficult to gauge, since a period of fifteen years has elapsed since the *Tributaries* exhibition was mounted, the effect of this exhibition on the lives of the artists in question. It is however, possible to trace the emergence of the woodcarving tradition at this point, and observe consequent high points that map out a wave of extreme interest in the artists of the region. It is also relevant to assess the decline of this tradition in terms of responses from the art market. The highpoints are the *Neglected Tradition* exhibition curated by Steven Sack in 1987, *Images of Wood*, curated by Professor Elizabeth Rankin and the *No Limits, No Frontiers* exhibition which represented a regional exhibition at the first Johannesburg Biennale, curated by Ruphus Mathibe and the candidate. The second Johannesburg Biennale will briefly be discussed in terms of its failure to represent the 'black, rural artist', and indeed many other South African artists.

When asked as to the relevance of the timing of *Tributaries*, Burnett (April 1998) says:

The cultural climate in 1985 was such that there was a new style of thinking which, if one were to do it again, there would simply be no newness. If you re-styled your thinking or re-thought the thing and the material, then perhaps it could be new again.

Burnett (ibid) was asked to identify the gains achieved by the Northern Province woodcarvers following *Tributaries*. He found it difficult to assess:

When we did *Tributaries* in eighty-five, our whole motive behind the exhibition and the way we framed it was to debunk the simplicity of officially defined culture.... who the artists were, where they came from, what their lives were like by showing that art was a much more complex phenomenon in the country, and that artists came from a variety of different places and a huge appetite developed in the relatively short aftermath of *Tributaries*, for a lot of the stuff. Which, until then had been unfamiliar. They were the rural carvers, particularly carvers who were from the then Northern Transvaal area. That

appetite was firstly expressed by official collections, the university collections, and museums, then by corporate collections and by individual collectors.

THE NEGLECTED TRADITION

As with *Tributaries*, of the selected woodcarvers only Avhashoni Mainganye and Noriah Mabasa were selected to exhibit on the *Neglected Tradition* exhibition. Mabasa (April: 2000) recollects nothing significant about these exhibitions as she said that it was too long ago.

Mainganye (October 2000) was impressed by both exhibitions in the sense that they showed new ideas, versatility and also incorporated abstract art with representative art. Mainganye did not attribute great significance to the fact that *Tributaries* was a first in that all racial groups of South Africa were represented in one exhibition. When asked to evaluate the value that these two major shows had in promoting his career, Mainganye was non-committal. He found art competitions, such as the Vita Art Now Awards¹ more beneficial to the rural artists. Mainganye recalls in particular the 1994 show where he was a nominee. In addition, he was impressed by the *Africa '95* show which traveled to London, overlapping with the first South African Biennale.

The *Neglected Tradition* exhibition had a massive media response, which acclaimed the show as bringing together the work of 'all South Africa's black artists' (Sunday Times, author unknown, November 28th 1988).

John Dewar wrote (date and pagination unknown) that he had hoped that the rich tradition and beliefs of African people could well have sparked contemporary art forms completely outside of western influence. He felt that one or two had leaned towards this, though was of

¹ The Vita Art Now Awards, funded by A.A. Life, is an annual award started in 1986 in conjunction with the Johannesburg Art Gallery. Four awards are granted per year (one per quarter, one of whom is awarded an overall annual prize. Merit awards are also awarded).

the opinion that too few artists had managed to achieve it, due to the need to make a living and producing what 'western thinking can more easily understand'.

The Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) director, Christopher Till, said that the exhibition was the fulfillment of a five-year goal set by him. In an article on the exhibition, the author discusses Till's reaction to the term 'black art':

Till gets a quirky little frown when the words "black art" are used because, like many people, he is wary of the racial slur and the patronizing attitude contained in such a label. He is also obviously aware of how zealously the new custodians of black political attitudes guard against that kind of assumption in an approach to community art (The Sunday Times, 27th November 1988).

A critique from the Weekly Mail (Ozinsky, 1988: pagination unknown) further questions the definition of black art:

Here, black art is fully assimilated to the Western formalist tradition. Is this good, is it bad, is it avoidable or inevitable, is it a strength or a weakness? The answer to this can only be made by moving right out of the black/white categories. The question should be: at this point in our history, does the artist have a responsibility to enter the fray in concert with other progressive forces, or has he/she been magically licensed to exist on a plane transcending such matters?

The media hardly referred to individual woodcarvers from the Northern Province or the pioneer artists (such as Gerard Sekoto, John Koenakeefe Mohl, and Samuel Makoanyane). Emerging urban artists (such as Durant Sihlali, David Koloane and Helen Sebidi) seemed to have had more exposure. However, Ozinsky (1988) had made mention of the rural carvers, and said:

Sculpture, surprisingly enough, forms a very strong part of the exhibition. The rural carvers whose work has been shaped by traditional culture and recent urban influences, bring a note of free imaginative vigour, sometimes in the form of fantasy, sometimes in fresh, direct realism. Sometimes both work wonderfully well together, as in *Head* by Dr. Phutuma Seoka. Noriah Mabasa's large dreamlike sculpture of figures drifting with their eyes closed as they are being eaten by a lion, a crocodile and a snake is quite remarkable.

The *Neglected Tradition* had a different focus to the *Tributaries* show. *Tributaries* was part of a public relations exercise of a large corporate entity (B.M.W.) aimed at expressing its social responsibility at a time when it was expedient to do so.

The *Neglected Tradition* aimed to re-educate an exclusively white arts community by presenting the work of a predominantly black group of artists produced over a period of more than thirty years. The few white artists on the show were included because of their commitment to the promotion and education of black South African artists. Examples of such artists were Bill Ainslee and Cecil Skotnes.

It therefore also had a political and historical focus, when South African institutions were in a position to re-write their own histories.

The seed for this important exhibition was sown by an exhibition held at the Alliance Francaise, Pretoria in 1986, as part of a seminar entitled 'Historical perspective of black art in South Africa'. After attending this event, and having seen the work on exhibition, the decision was taken to re-examine the written history of South African art and to address the questions posed by that first small collection of works. Why was there such a paucity of information available on the many black artists who have been active over the years, and where were the works produced by these artists? The title of this exhibition: *The Neglected Tradition* acknowledges that part of the art history of South Africa has been overlooked. This watershed exhibition continues the re-evaluation process and places these black artists in perspective, thereby correcting any distortion that may exist (Till, C.M. 1988: 5).

Through the profoundly thorough research of curator Steven Sack, 1255 bibliographical entries were made in the catalogue and were made available to scholars, students and researchers through Brendan Bell, then an education officer at the Johannesburg Art Gallery. The gallery's library houses copies of these research materials.

Nettleton (1995: 65), acknowledging that very few public art institutions in South Africa had significant or even representative collections of art by black South Africans in their permanent collections (see Carmen, 1988, and Nettleton, 1993) and very few black artists'

works had been documented and included in the overview histories of South African art (see Berman, 1970, 1974, and 1983; Fransen 1982; Harmsen, 1985; Jeppe, 1963; and Ogilvie, 1988). Nettleton stated that:

The Neglected Tradition show was intended to redress this lack in a giant leap of affirmative action. The exhibition focused, although not absolutely, on work by artists whose skin colour was black or brown. Sack acknowledged, in a personal communication that this racial exclusivity was not ideal for selecting works for such an exhibition. The artists were almost all twentieth century practitioners working for a market catering for largely white patrons. While the exhibition's purpose was essentially reparatory, it was nevertheless framed within a specifically Modern, 'Western' understanding of 'art'. Thus the exhibition was organized in terms of significant works by 'named' artists whose places within a mainstream were thus acknowledged (1995: 65).

Nettleton made no reference to the *Tributaries* exhibition although she acknowledges its importance through a footnote, to the effect that:

...the story really began with the *Tributaries* exhibition of 1985, where for the first time in the history of fine art exhibitions in South Africa, works were shown together with total disregard for both racial segregation and hierarchies of material.

In evaluating the effects of the *Neglected Tradition* Exhibition on the lives and work of the selected and other woodcarvers of the Northern Province, Steven Sack (April 1998) was unable to respond, stating that 'you are the experts' (referring to the candidate and others in the Northern Province working closely with the woodcarvers).

In the catalogue, which had been entitled The Neglected Tradition: Towards a New History of South African Art (1930-1988), a section was devoted to New Generation Sculpture.

Included in this discussion were issues attempting to define the woodcarvings of Gazankulu, Venda and other rural regions of South Africa, as part of a 'fine-art' sculptural tradition that

arose out of the Polly Street² era such as the work of Sydney Khumalo, Lucas Sithole, Ezrom Legae and others.

The term 'transitional' is questioned (Sack. 1988:27):

The sculpture produced in Gazankulu and Venda has been referred to as 'transitional art' implying a transition from one cultural context into another, a cross fertilization between western and African modes. However this phenomenon has been noted on many occasions in the history of the art of black South Africans. In what sense might this art be any more a transition or a synthesis of cultural forms?

Sack emphasizes this through quoting Marylin Martin, director of the South African National Gallery when she says:

Irma Stern included a funerary figure from Bakota in a painting, Walter Battis arranged a number of identical carved birds from Swaziland across a canvas... no one would dream of describing these as "transitional" (Martin, 1987: 21).

In conclusion, the candidate acknowledges that both *Tributaries* and the *Neglected Tradition* exhibitions, though perhaps not obviously affecting the individual lives of the selected woodcarvers, had a considerable affect in alerting the mainstream art world in urban centres in South Africa and overseas, to a 'new' and fresh art tradition which caught their attention for a number of years. The label 'transitional', implicitly tied to these exhibitions like an umbilical cord, was ultimately severed and withered away.

The term 'transitional' outgrew its own lifespan, which by its own definition was limited. The surge of interest, once in decline, was not clearly understood by many of the woodcarvers, who as individuals experienced feelings of abandonment and bitterness from which some never fully recovered.

These exhibitions, and subsequent exhibitions and art competitions created access to an art world that had previously been denied the woodcarvers of the Northern Province.

² The Polly Street Art Centre in Johannesburg where artist Cecil Skotnes taught from 1952 was initiated by the Johannesburg Local Committee for Non-European Adult education as part of the Johannesburg City Council. It was documented by Sack in the *Neglected Tradition* exhibition catalogue.

Opportunities and achievements, such as having artworks acquired by national and international art collections, were prestigious. However, the number of art works purchased over a period of fifteen years has been erratic, and made little impact on the economic lives of the selected woodcarvers, except perhaps for Noriah Mabasa.

IMAGES OF WOOD

An article in the *Citizen* (author unknown, 1988), noted the Hans Merensky's Foundation's plans to replace their wood sculpture competition, with which it had been involved for the previous three years, with a researched exhibition of both historical and contemporary wood sculptures which would be documented by a catalogue. This was to be guest-curated by Elizabeth Rankin, and entitled *Images of Wood*.

The review described the exhibition as dealing with the history of South African wood sculpture as a fine art, focusing on the European and African influence of the specifically South African aesthetic existing today (ibid).

It also indicated the success of the Johannesburg Art Gallery's transformation of art history education in their mission of setting a trend through the *Neglected Tradition* exhibition and catalogue.

Images of Wood included more woodcarvers from the Northern Province than had appeared in *Tributaries* or *Neglected Traditions*. These included Albert Munyai, Meshak Raphalalani and Richard Mangoma. Most of the woodcarvers who had participated in both *Tributaries* and *Neglected Tradition* from the Northern Province were also included in *Images of Wood*, with the exception of Jackson Hlungwani and Avhashoni Mainganye.

SECTION TWO

POLICIES OF PUBLIC MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES RELATING TO THE EXHIBITION AND ACQUISITION OF ARTWORKS.

The role of state-funded galleries and museums.

In this section, the candidate intends to critically evaluate the role of state-funded art galleries and museums in the acquisition and presentation of art-works produced by the indigenous woodcarvers from the Northern Province. This will include interviews with gallery and museum personnel as well as an analysis of their policies.

Through interviewing the selected woodcarvers, their experiences with regard to the exhibition and purchase of their work by galleries may be gauged.

These institutions vary in their view of the artists concerned, in particular when issues of policy relating to economic power and control (or lack thereof) of the director or curator in question, as well as the mission of the gallery or museum are concerned. The museum that has a limited budget and stringent controls will represent a different view of the artist than a commercial gallery whose chief purpose is to sell the art as a commodity.

The more prominent galleries in urban areas of South Africa have shown support of rural black art and fall into the category of 'white patrons' (private galleries, dealers and collectors). In addition there are government-funded galleries and museums in the mainstream art world, as well as art collections of universities and other academic institutions, which show the same support.

Although these institutions have begun the process of addressing the imbalance of their collections through renewed policies in recent years, the bulk of their collections were established during the apartheid era. This raises questions related to prices attached to the works at the time of purchase and the involvement and the identity of the artists represented

in these collections. Many of these questions will remain unanswered.

Firstly, in an attempt to evaluate the role of the public gallery as being significant in the emergence and support of the woodcarvers from the Northern Province, the candidate has selected three public galleries to interrogate regarding their acquisition and purchase policies. These are the Johannesburg Art Gallery, the Pietersburg/Polokwane Art Museum and the South African National Gallery in Cape Town.

Burnett (November 2000), in attempting to identify the thinking of public galleries and buying trends, made the following observation:

Take for example the Johannesburg Art Gallery. Lets assume that they have money, which they don't, as you would find in a fairly normal environment. They have one piece by Noriah Mabasa in their collection and they are considering purchasing a second. They will consider the first piece when purchasing the second. The question is twofold. They will ask themselves:

- a. We do have a Noriah Mabasa, do we need to collect another one?
- b. There are shifts in the career of Mabasa and we need to follow that process, or is it a repetition of what's been seen before? If they don't see the second, then there's a simple answer to the first. Then it doesn't matter how good the work is, they simply won't buy it. And to a degree the art market follows that line of thinking.

THE JOHANNESBURG ART GALLERY ACQUISITIONS POLICY

The collecting policy of the Johannesburg Gallery (1994:1) defines art as:

Consisting of "objects of aesthetic merit irrespective of media, function or geographical origin".

As with most South African public collections, very few black South African artists were represented at the Johannesburg Art Gallery until the 1980's. In 1987, the gallery acquired the Jaques collection of headrests and it is noted in the gallery's policy document (1994: 3) that works by historically neglected and contemporary black artists began to be more actively collected.

In 1988, the gallery acquired the Brenthurst collection on a long-term loan basis and the **Neglected Tradition** exhibition was hosted.

Burnett (1997: 6) suggests that **Tributaries** played a significant role in shifts in the thinking, and therefore the policies, of the gallery.

At a conference held at the Centre for African Studies (Edinburgh University), Burnett strategically placed side-by-side two statements based on events separated by forty-five years. Burnett made the following statement:

The Johannesburg Art Gallery, established through the efforts of one Lady Phillips and officially opened in 1915, acquired its first work by a black artist in the year 1940. It was a painting by the late Gerard Sekoto. 32 years were to elapse before the institution was to acquire another work by a black artist! Within the same minutes as the resolution to make the 1940 purchase, indeed on the same page, the following observations, made by one Councillor Freeman are recorded, "...it should be realized," he says, "that there was a strong feeling against natives being admitted at any time to the art gallery for the purpose of inspecting pictures and particularly pictures of European women."

(You may now raise your eyes to heaven).

Burnett continues:

Against this historically entrenched poverty of the spirit, then, the eclectic, iconoclastic **Tributaries** of 1985 was well received.

And...

Only three years after **Tributaries** it was possible for the Johannesburg Art Gallery to become the home of a fine collection of traditional South African material now known as the Brenthurst collection. Of course, it would be improper and imprecise to say that **Tributaries** was solely responsible for the shifts in thinking that occurred in the eighties, but where it was not directly influential it was part of, and a very visible part of, a broader process.

In particular, though, an engagement with the rural artists, more especially carvers, was one of the exhibition's prime attractions and one of its most enduring legacies. It is something of a delicious irony to ponder that it may well have been the sudden visibility of the contemporary rural carver and a recognition of their qualities that allowed the august Johannesburg Art Gallery to embrace the Brenthurst collection of traditional material. The past being somehow redeemed by the present.

These statements implied not only that *Tributaries* emerged from a climate of intolerance such as occurred at the meeting at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 1940, but also that it was influential in changing not only the mindset of the Johannesburg Art Gallery committee, but also the metropolitan artworld, thus adding more weight in convincing the participants at the Edinburgh conference of the value of the impact that *Tributaries* had on South African art history.

The Johannesburg Art Gallery is now part of the complex of Johannesburg City Council museums. As part of the pool of council museum resources, including the Museum Africa, the Bernberg Museum of Costume, the Bensusan Museum of photography and the James Hall Transport Museum, the Johannesburg Art Gallery is able to draw on collections of other museums: 'To utilize effectively limited resources, every effort is made not to duplicate objects and collections in other museums' (1994: 2,3.).

Affirming Burnett's comments at the beginning of this section, the Johannesburg Art Gallery has noted that it has minimized its collection of the works of the selected carvers.

In addition, the Johannesburg Art Gallery has a good foundation collection of figurative carvings and will continue to extend this (1994: 10, 1.2.1).

However, because wood carving is a traditionally male preserve which complements the Western idea of "fine art", this medium has been collected to the detriment of other media and collecting policies should not be limited to woodcarving.

Figurative carvings were also categorized in the gallery's policy document as 'Traditional' southern African – contemporary, along with utilitarian objects, dolls, baskets, clay and beadwork (1994: 11, 1.3). The complex issue of categorization is explained in the introduction to the policy document (1994: p.2-3):

However, the increasing use of non-traditional media by contemporary artists and the shifts in notions about who makes art has resulted in the intellectual blurring of the divisions between “art”, “craft” and “ethnological” objects.

The non-selling aspect of the gallery’s exhibitions, make the public gallery, as a whole an ineffective outlet for the woodcarvers of the Northern Province. The gallery also finds difficulty in acquiring more than one work by an artist due to budgetary constraints. Artists’ works are usually collected once their reputations are beginning to be established through exhibitions, competitions and awards (1994: 13).

At the time of the publication of this policy document, the Johannesburg Art Gallery was actively collecting works of artists identified in the *Neglected Tradition* and subsequent related exhibitions. It was also seeking work from former Rorke’s Drift students and overtly political work.

Senior curator at the gallery, Themba Mabaso explained (August 2001), that emphasis is now on repatriating South African and other African works. Mabaso says that the funds for acquiring works in the gallery are no longer allocated by the Johannesburg Municipality, but come from the private sector. Anglo-American provides 14 million rands for the acquisition of artworks per annum, and Mabaso estimates that R500.000 of this is used to buy local works.

Mabaso acknowledges that the major South African galleries are now competing for a stake in private sector funding. He says that a major shift in the way the public perceives the gallery has caused problems, particularly with the onslaught of the entertainment industry.

Mabaso feels there is a need to make a business study of the gallery, and that feasible plans should be made to accommodate guest artists in the studio programme. He says that black people are no longer in the minority as visitors to the gallery.

He suggests that a move away from Fine Art related activities to more practical activities such as screen-printing and sign writing would bring in more people. Considering the proximity to Joubert Park taxi rank, the candidate believes that a successful taxi- painting project would be feasible. The Joubert Park Public Art Project,³ which takes the gallery closer to the 'people', utilizes skills building through street photography, performance and other media.

However stimulating these ideas are, the rural artists are hardly visible in this scenario.

The gallery has an educational role to play in presenting art works, which appears to have strengthened over the years.

Apart from artworks which are representative of South African and international trends, important data, housed in the gallery's library (for example the *Neglected Tradition* referencing material) are invaluable resources for academics, students and school learners.

Again, it is unlikely that the rural artists themselves are aware of, or need to use, these resources. It is understood that the gallery intends reviving its residency programme.

(Mabaso, T. August 2001). Interactive workshops with the rural artists and exchange visits to rural areas is one proposal which could extend the role of the gallery outside of the city limits (see Conclusion).

PRESENTATION OF ARTWORKS.

Art galleries play a role in the acceleration of change in the meaning of the works of the woodcarvers, simply by the removal of works from their original contexts.

This is more pertinent when the context of the work is from a distant rural area, and in some cases where sacred sites with long histories are featured.

The installation of Jackson Hlungwani's work at the Johannesburg Art Gallery is a case in point. Several woodcarvings and The Altar to God by Hlungwani were removed from New Jerusalem, Hlungwani's church for men, constructed by Hlungwani on a pre-historic site at Mbhokota, in the Northern Province. The installation of the works into the gallery space by Ricky Burnett and Christopher Till (then director of the gallery) involved very little consultation with the artist regarding the placement of objects in this 'installation' (Spiro, 1992: 67). When discussing Hlungwani's position, in particular concerning the removal of much of Hlungwani's work to the Johannesburg Art Gallery, Burnett claimed that Hlungwani was 'very much behind the idea' and wanted his altar to come to the 'people in the city' (April 1998).

Spiro (ibid) remarks that the museum itself provides a physical context which markedly affects how we encounter the objects:

Simply because they are housed at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, the museum visitor brings expectations of the nature and significance of the objects to be found inside. To see Hlungwani's works at New Jerusalem required a prior knowledge of its existence and a conscious 'pilgrimage' which itself determined the nature of the encounter. The casual visitor to the Gallery simply 'comes upon' the objects, often with no prior knowledge of the maker or his 'sculptures'. The works also relate very differently to their space in the two contexts. Despite the monumental proportions of, for example, the Adam and the Birth of Eve, the works are easily accommodated in the space in which they are exhibited at the Gallery which was designed in the grand museum tradition of the western temples of art. This, in contrast to the fact that the works could never be accommodated inside traditional structures which exist in the Northern Transvaal. Clearly, the impact of sheer scale is somewhat diluted by the current context.

The candidate experienced an encounter related to this duality of environment in 1999, during a visit by a Belgian linguist, Pierre Noel to South Africa. Noel requested to visit some of the local (to Giyani) artists and crafters. The candidate took Noel to Hlungwani's house.

³ The Joubert Park Public Art Project initiated by a group of Johannesburg artists works with residents of the area around the park, including unemployed youth and the homeless. Activities include street photography, kereoke, dance therapy, leadership and HIV/AIDS education (The JAG Newsletter: Sept.-Oct. 2001).

There was very little work of Hlungwani's to see, though the powerful character of Hlungwani prevailed, despite his obvious material poverty.

Back in Johannesburg, the candidate arranged to meet with Noel again, before he flew back to Brussels. He and the candidate arranged to meet at the Johannesburg Art Gallery. Whilst there, the candidate showed him the Hlungwani installation. Coming from a culture soaked in medieval Europe, it was clearly a shock for Noel to connect the two realities, the shrine of High Art in South Africa housing in such a grand manner the work of a poor old man 'from the bush'.

Although these two issues differ, the one dealing with perceptions of space around the works, the other with psychological perceptions and assumptions, the overall resultant incongruity prevails.

The *Hayani/ Crossings* exhibitions' attempted to communicate to the viewer in the gallery aspects of the maker and his environment (see Chapter Three).

THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL GALLERY (SANG).

The South African National Gallery in the Company Gardens, Cape Town, contextualised its collection of South African Art into an extensive exhibition in 1996, curated by Emma Bedford.

The catalogue produced for this exhibition, also houses the gallery's policy.

Contemporary South African Art 1985-1995 (SANG, 1997-9) from the South African National Gallery Permanent Collection, opens with the vision and mission of the SANG.

An extract from it states:

We provide a cultural and educational resource, encourage involvement in the visual arts, and nurture a culturally diverse but shared national identity.

In the director's introduction, Marilyn Martin makes a strong argument for a policy of focusing on South African Art:

In the last fifteen years important shifts have taken place in the Acquisitions Policy, which stated that art from the European founder countries, Africa and South Africa be purchased. But already by 1980 it was becoming difficult to make significant additions to the modern Western or the older European collections. Since the mid-1980's the financial situation of the national art museum worsened. Inadequate Government subsidies, unsympathetic tax laws, the low value of the South African currency and the high prices of artworks on the international market combined to put the institution in an unenviable position. The realities and the extraordinary vitality and power of the art which began to emerge in South Africa during the 1980's, brought about a decided shift in the direction of the SANG's acquisitions policy - from buying internationally and focusing on established South African artists to an open-ended and pluralistic approach which means, for example, that work originating in rural and other 'peripheral' contexts began to be acquired alongside art which is influenced by the Western mainstream. Increasingly diversified cultural production stimulated the evolution of a policy of inclusivity rather than exclusivity. This resulted in the termination, in 1991 of the Friends Choice Collection, with a view to acquiring works by young, lesser-known or unknown artists. Many works were taken into the SANG Permanent Collection, a major show was held in 1992, and those created after 1985 can be seen on this exhibition (Martin 1996: 18).

This lengthy document cannot be analyzed entirely, though the above are indicators of Martin's Introduction to the exhibition and the issues involving shifts in gallery policy. The Acquisitions Policy documents themselves are lengthy and technical, on similar lines to those of the JAG, discussed earlier. One main difference which seems relevant to the woodcarvers of the Northern Province is the willingness of the SANG to incorporate works by unestablished artists into their collection. Specific reference is made to woodcarvers, whose 'techniques and skills have been harnessed by some to create intensely personal visual testimonies' (Martin, 1996: 20).

Martin acknowledges the immense contribution made by black artists, teachers and administrators who have stimulated and encouraged a process of redefining black art making,

challenging market demands and prescriptions (which often focus on ethnicity and exoticism) and white preconceptions (Martin 1996: 20).

In an interview (December 1998), Martin noted that the gallery was in the throes of yet another major shift, combining five institutions into one, as JAG has done. In a sense this scenario reduces the sense of insecurity, as the burden of responsibility is less, when shared. Martin says that the flagship does away with the colonial past, creates one monumental collection and has possibilities for marvellous solutions in choices of exhibition themes. A more valid justification to exist, says Martin.

The new Executive Officer of the collective of Cape Town museums, Jack Lohman (Bedford, 2001: 11) has dedicated himself to change, including new projects to change the public perception of museums. Lohman plans a new approach to exhibitions, refocused displays and dramatic programmes set to attract a greater black population, young people and children.

For the SANG, the pressing need to aggressively fund-raise has taken away much valuable time from its curators, and the research base has deteriorated considerably.

There is a fair representation of the woodcarvers' works in the gallery's collection. These include Noriah Mabasa, Jackson Hlungwani, Samson Mudzunga, Owen and Goldwin Ndou, Nelson Mukhuba and Johannes Maswanganye.

In the late 1990's, a sponsor from Holland offered to buy an artwork of a female South African artist for the SANG.

Through Emma Bedford, Head of the Curatorial Department, the candidate was requested to source a large piece of Noriah Mabasa's woodcarving. The Flood (1993-4) (Fig. 3) was in progress at the time. It was one of the largest woodcarvings that Mabasa had produced.

Concerns at the SANG were that it would not fit through their doors, large as they are, and to

hire a crane to hoist the piece over the façade into the open courtyard would have been financially prohibitive. The candidate had measured the work and sought advice from Avhashoni Mainganye and Bruce Arnott at the Michaelis School of Fine Art.

Considering the outreaching projections of the work, it did seem a feasible option to manoeuvre The Flood (1993-4) through the doors. Communications with the gallery were lengthy and eventually the idea was abandoned as too risky. This piece is now part of the collection at the Sandton Convention Centre (Fig. 3).

Despite fairly desperate cutbacks in government subsidy, the SANG seems to have a more secure future in achieving its mission than its streetwise Johannesburg counterpart. Described as being caught in the 'liminal zones' by Burnett, JAG, in the true 'African city' into which Johannesburg has evolved, does not bring in the customers.

Caught in an organic mass of taxis, railway line, waste, street traders and a park notorious for muggers and vagrants, JAG's geography contrasts dramatically with the peaceful and tranquil setting of SANG under Table Mountain in the Company Gardens. SANG has the added advantage of being situated in the tourist haven of South Africa.

THE PIETERSBURG/ POLOKWANE ART MUSEUM.

The Pietersburg /Polokwane Art Museum, situated in the library complex in Pietersburg, is the only state- funded art museum in the Northern Province.

The art collection housed at the museum was initiated in 1972 by Jack Botes, a prominent resident of Pietersburg. Botes has built the collection largely through donations from the private sector.

In an interview with Anrieth van der Venter (April 1999), who took up the post of curator/ director in 1993 at the art museum, she acknowledged that to date there is no specific



Figure 3. Noriah Mabasa THE FLOOD 1993-4. Wood. Sandton Convention Centre.

museum policy, although there is a proposal document for an outreach programme, which she produced recently.

Van der Venter explained that it was difficult to set up any programmes outside of the gallery, since there is a staff of only two and their budget is limited. An annual budget is allocated and managed by a selection committee. This limits her mobility and she is barely able to visit local artists.

Van der Venter (1999) defines the role of the museum, in contrast to that of an art gallery thus:

A museum is a social force, and by focusing on interpretation, and on involving the visitor it constitutes a major cultural asset.

This rather vague statement was embroidered on when van der Venter added that the museum's main responsibility was to the public and to be open to all art genres. Although she said that it was not a business venture, one of the museum's objectives was to promote and sell artworks for the artists and to 'strike a balance between economic and social objectives' (ibid).

Artworks of black artists in the museum's permanent collection still seem to be very limited, considering the local population statistics, quoted as 97 % Black and 3% white (van der Venter's statistics).

A random analysis of three exhibitions of selected works from the Pietersburg/Polokwane TLC Art Collection shows the following statistics, clearly unrepresentative of the black community. This data, extracted from exhibition pamphlets, gives acquisition dates for the majority of works.

Most artworks in these exhibitions were acquired in the 1980's and 1990's. A few were purchased in the 1970's. Two were purchased in 2000. In this random analysis most of the works by black artists were purchased in 1995, the first piece in 1993, a woodcarving by

Avhashoni Mainganye. This was not the first purchase of a work by a black artist. The candidate has seen other works by black artists at the museum prior to this.

A Never Ending Story

5th December 1998 – 1st May 1999:

Total artworks on exhibition: 36

Total number of artworks by black artists: 1 woodcarving.

Dangerous Etcetera

28th February 2000 - 31st January 2001

Total number of artworks on exhibition: 68

Total number of artworks by black artists: 12

3 were two- dimensional works

9 were sculptures (7 wood carvings, 1 papier mache, 1 metal sculpture.)

Open Spaces

Total number of artworks on exhibition: 54

Total number of artworks by black artists: 8

All of the above are woodcarvings.

The museum, funded by the Polokwane Municipality, has two floors. The upper mezzanine, about half the size of the downstairs space is where exhibitions are usually held.

Generally, due to limited funds, exhibitions take the form of either a rotation of the permanent collection (on the ground floor), or new exhibitions of local artists (in the mezzanine space). These local exhibitions are usually a showcase for any aspiring artist, and

artists are able to sell their work, on a 'bring and buy' basis.

Occasionally, a more high profile exhibition is mounted, though these are few and far between. Avhashoni Mainganye held a solo show there in 1998, which he claims was fairly successful. The works on show were mostly re-cycled metal sculpture.

The 'Far North' exhibition, *No Limits, No Frontiers*, of the first *Johannesburg Biennale: Africus '95*, travelled to the Pietersburg Art Museum, before moving on to Pretoria.

Van der Venter showed some interest in purchasing certain works from the *Biennale*, including Heindrick Nekhofe's *Ox Wagon*⁴ (1992), an artwork by Tshingwala Mukhuba (name and date unknown), Richard Mangoma's *Riiteni* (1994) and *The Old Hurt Fish From The War* (date unknown) of Wilson Raphalalani.

The candidate however, declined to negotiate these sales with the woodcarvers due to the very low prices offered by the museum (about a third of the asking price). In addition, van der Venter explained that it was the museum's policy to request a donation of another artwork from each artist whose work was purchased.

Van der Venter said that this was a decision made by the purchasing committee and was outside of her control.

When Marilyn Martin (December 1998) was asked to comment on the acceptability of this policy, she informed the candidate that it was not usual museum practice. Martin explained that it is entirely the artist's choice if they wish to donate an artwork, and that part of the public gallery's role was to be aware that the artist has to make a living.

The Pietersburg/Polokwane Art Museum later acquired the works of Mangoma and Raphalalani through direct negotiation with the artists. More recently (2001), the candidate

⁴ Nekhofe's *Ox Wagon* was bought by Marc Smalle after this exhibition (date unknown). The price is likely to be below the market price. The candidate's opinion is that it should be housed in a public collection.

has noted a marked increase in the purchase of local black artists, especially woocarvings.

The donation policy has been abandoned.

The Pietersburg/Polokwane Art Museum has a steady stream of visitors, on average 1000 to 1800 per month. This includes overseas visitors and school learners.

The Pietersburg/ Polokwane Art Museum gives a valuable service to school learners in the area. Particularly important are the art projects on local artists set for matriculants. Van der Venter keeps files documenting individual artists which she makes available to learners.

The candidate feels that despite the 'openness' of the museums' policies to exhibitors and learners, more needs to be done to promote indigenous art of the region.

In particular, the buying policy needs to be formulated, and guidance from other art museums sought (such as JAG and SANG).

The candidate suggested to van der Venter that she start a volunteer curator training programme, drawing on high school learners or unemployed graduates. Van der Venter agreed with the idea and said that she had made some attempts at developing such a programme.

Van der Venter feels that a lot more effort must be made by the woodcarvers to come into the gallery and bring their work. She feels that the artists tend to sit back and wait for things to happen.

SECTION THREE

THE URBAN ART MARKET: ITS OFTEN FLUCTUATING RESPONSES TO, AND INCONSISTENT RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE WOODCARVERS FROM THE NORTHERN PROVINCE.

In this section, a selection of major commercial galleries, private art dealers and collectors will be interrogated as to their considerable roles played during the emergence, and equally the demise, of the selected woodcarvers. Views of the artists will also be sought.

Image has a role to play, particularly since the image of corporate and commercial ventures is to be seen as part of a trend supporting indigenous (black South African) artists in affirmative action policies. In addition, the role and history of the Ditike Art and Craft Centre in Thohoyandou will be examined, particularly in the light of recent developments.

Certain galleries and institutions, some loosely categorized as non-governmental organizations (NGO's) who played a role of resistance in the apartheid era and who have promoted cross-cultural interactions, educational issues and the inclusion of black artists, will be acknowledged.

They were predominantly managed by black artists and art administrators and, in the pre-1994 era, largely funded by outside sources (non-South African). In effect, though the Market Theatre Gallery, FUBA (Federated Union of Black Artists), the Funda Centre, the Thupelo Workshop, and art centres such as the Alexandra Art Centre in Johannesburg and the Community Arts Project in Cape Town (CAP), may have had the concerns of black artists more at heart than the white establishments previously mentioned, they were largely patronized by 'white' funds from 'progressive' sources such as the Kagiso Trust, the Social Change Assistance Trust (SCAT) and the Equal Opportunities Foundation (EOF).

Today, these agencies still exist, though arts funding in South Africa is predominantly in the hands of the National Arts Council (NAC), the Arts and Culture Trust of the President (ACT)

and Business and Arts for South Africa (BASA). The National Lottery Fund is dealt with in Chapter Three.

These institutions were generally controlled by specific criteria set out by their sponsors, such as having a direct impact on the upliftment of the formerly disadvantaged community, educational or economic value (as in job creation), and often had time limits set.

One of these criteria, which still impacts on individual artists, is that groups were given priority over individuals. Funding applied for by steering committees comprising prominent members in the community and various office bearers with management skills was more likely to be granted.

Artists in rural communities, particularly during the earlier part of the period of this research, had not yet become organized into such groupings as had happened in urban areas.

It is the candidate's view that this was due to the impact of poverty, lack of education, training facilities and the artists' geographical isolation.

RICKY BURNETT

Following on from *Tributaries*, the focus of Ricky Burnett's career was as Jackson Hlungwani's agent. Burnett also opened the Newtown Galleries (1990) and exhibited the work of many other artists including some of the woodcarvers of the Northern Province. Following the Newtown Gallery's closure, Burnett continued to deal in buying and selling art until he emigrated to the United States in 2001.

In an interview with Ricky Burnett (April 1998), he defines the role of the gallery as 'a collective memory, which has by its nature the capacity to freeze off blocks of time'. Burnett feels that the location and architecture of the gallery need to change places constantly. He compares this movement to the common practice of changing places for church services.

What happens inside the gallery is the phenomenology of memory, a suspended animation with ritualistic implications (ibid).

Given the context of the Johannesburg Art Gallery in Joubert Park, Burnett feels strongly that with the change of the city this grand piece of colonial architecture appears to be surrounded by another Africa. The varied inhabitants of Joubert Park create a line of defence, as a city wall. This appears metaphoric of an institution in decline.

Commenting on the work of the selected artists, Burnett noted that Mabasa, out of all of the woodcarvers, had made a comfortable living from her art.

When looking at the development of Phillip Rikhotso's work, Burnett feels that he has lost much of the 'quaintness' of his work, and that he lacks spiritual essence.

To illustrate this point, Burnett picked up a small Rikhotso (a carving of a chameleon), and compared it to a carved portrait by Nelson Mukhuba, claiming that there was no comparison, and that this one has it (the Mukhuba) and this one doesn't (the Rikhotso). The candidate was inclined to agree, though in Rikhotso's defense, considered the chameleon not to represent his better work. It again raised the issue of comparing works by artists of completely different genres as a notion related to a Western understanding of art.

THE GOODMAN GALLERY

The candidate was unable to secure an interview with Linda Givon, owner of the Goodman Gallery. Givon referred the candidate to Trent Read of the Everard Read Gallery since she said that he dealt with the artists from the Northern Province.

The candidate was informed by Susan Glanville (April 2000), a former employee at the Goodman Gallery, that Givon had exhibited some of the Northern Province woodcarvers work in earlier years. However, in more recent years she had only dealt with Johannes Segogela, a woodcarver from Sekhukhuneland, formerly Lebowa.

Givon became acquainted with the work of the Northern Province woodcarvers following the *Tributaries* exhibition.

One major show held at the Goodman Gallery shortly after *Tributaries*, was an exhibition called *Parade* (1985), which consisted of large numbers of Noriah Mabasa's clay figures of policemen, politicians and Venda business men, in the same genre as her work exhibited on *Tributaries*. Givon commissioned a large number of the figures in order to create a powerful political statement (Fig.4), shortly after the State of Emergency had been declared in 1985, by the Nationalist government. In an interview with Jane Duncan (1994: 43), Givon describes her thinking behind the exhibition:

I looked at the policemen and I saw a marvelous statement about now and I thought to myself, the only way to show these things is to actually make a rave about it. It was like a wonderful kind of political statement on now and the lovely thing about it was that it wasn't a great success but what happened is that Peter Magubane was here at the time and said he had to photograph it as he thought it was phenomenal. I just thought, here is this woman sitting in Vendaland and she's making this incredible political statement. The way we set it up here was this whole crowd of citizens watching and it was a very moving exhibition. We made a parade ground and we had all these figures lined up, blacks and whites and P.W. leading them with all these citizens around them. I wanted her to do the whole South African cabinet for me. I would love her to do that for me but we have a very big problem, they are so fragile, if you touched them they would break. If I didn't have that problem, I would market them all over the world. With the idea of work being repeated, with the parade ground, we needed a lot of policemen otherwise it wouldn't make a statement. I've still got a lot of them. I wanted to make that statement so I paid her for them.

One gets the sense of two factors. The issue of manipulation on the part of the art gallery to its own advantage, though understandably at this point in South Africa's history political statements were coveted in improving the bourgeois image that was attached to the Goodman Gallery and its Rosebank clientele. Givon contradicts the ownership of this political statement when earlier on in the interview she attributes it to 'this woman sitting in Vendaland' and later on claiming it as her own. The ownership clearly belonged to the



Figure 4. Noriah Mabasa. PARADE 1985 The Goodman Gallery
Invitation for **Parade** Exhibition. Photograph Peter Magubane.

gallery.

The second factor was that it gave the artist the idea that mass production was acceptable in the fine art world, a factor for which Mabasa, Dr. Phutuma Seoka and Johannes Maswanganye were to be criticised (all of these artists exhibited at the Goodman Gallery).

Gavin Young (1988: 40) noted this phenomenon when he said:

The bourgeois concept of the work of art as a unique object, wrested from the tortured imagination of the lonely artist, has no application to either Seoka or Mabasa. Seoka has said, 'When you sit under a tree, you feel cool. When I sit under a tree, I feel hot because I look up and see money! There is a snake. There is a baboon'. Both artists reject the status of sculpture as a unique object. Since their work sells for the price of a print, few people will blame them.

Although considered 'death' in the high art world (Nettleton, November 2001), the acquisitions policy of the Johannesburg Art Gallery (1994:12) states: 'the fact that objects are made in large numbers for sale does not affect their eligibility for purchase'.

This statement was made in the context of works defined as ' "traditional" southern African – contemporary' (ibid: 11, 1.3).

This mass production would later on change for Mabasa following her transition into woodcarving and further interactions with art dealers from the city.

THE EVERARD READ GALLERY

In an interview with Trent Read (December 1998), he attempted to define his history as an art dealer working with the majority of the woodcarvers from the Northern Province. Read, prior to setting up a new gallery in Knysna in 1998 had been based at the Everard Read Gallery in Rosebank, Johannesburg.

Currently, Read rarely deals with the woodcarvers from the north since he encountered problems when communicating over finances.

Earlier visits to the Northern Province were often undertaken by the late Everard Read, who had a particularly close relationship with Noriah Mabasa, claiming her as a 'wife'. Trent Read's wife Bridget had preceded both of them in making earlier visits, in the late 1980's.

Of the selected woodcarvers, Read favours the work of Phillip Rikhotso and Noriah Mabasa.

The system adopted by Read, apart from exhibiting the artist's work, was to pay a retainer to some of the woodcarvers. It gave him an advantage over other art buyers, and allowed him to 'earmark' works of his choosing.

Read assumed a role of patron/agent, which was not always acknowledged by the woodcarvers. Often a work earmarked by Read would later be sold to another buyer with ready cash, or appear in an exhibition at another gallery.

One such example is the large drum by Albert Munyai, called Thohoyandou (1994) (Fig.5).

According to Read he paid three deposits in advance, totaling three thousand rands. The drum was sold to Neill van Kraayenburg of the Mukondeni Gallery.

Samson Mudzunga reneged on another 'promise' of two drums which Read claims to have paid a retainer for. Upon completion they were put on exhibition at the Gallery on the Tyrone in Johannesburg and sold. Read (ibid) felt particularly bitter because he had made a special speech on the occasion of Mudzunga's 60th birthday, in which he described Mudzunga as "one of the most important artists in the world."

The rift with Mabasa was a particularly painful one for Read. Following on from his father he had developed closer bonds with her than with the other woodcarvers.

They disagreed over the arrangements for a workshop which Read had facilitated. Mabasa had participated in a workshop at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park in Britain. Upon her return, she was angered by the fact that the work produced there was not returned to her, and made it Read's responsibility to resolve the problem. The conveners of the event said Mabasa could



Figure 5. Albert Munyai. THOHOYANDOU DRUM (*Mandamaswa a Tikwa Ngamalama- The Old Supports the New*) 1994 Wood, paint, fabric. Mukondeni Gallery.

have the work returned though the cost of shipping was her responsibility.

Read claims to have experienced a similar situation with the Namibian Workshop (1996) attended by Mabasa. Although he was not involved in the event itself he had facilitated some of the arrangements.

Ultimately, Read found that his trips to the Northern Province became more and more financially taxing, futile and frustrating. The costs involved in making the trips were considerable, and often artworks which he had ordered would be unfinished or sold to other buyers.

The Everard Read Galleries, and a subsidiary, the Sanderling Gallery also based in Rosebank, exhibited for three consecutive years (1989, 1990 and 1991) showcasing the work of several of the woodcarvers. A solo show of Phillip Rikhotso's works was mounted in 1992 (Fig.6). In addition, other exhibitions such as Town and Country (1991) North by North East (1993) The State of the Art (1994) catered for the needs of some of the Northern Province woodcarvers.

Read visited the woodcarvers with Dave Rossouw, who had consequently managed to bring works from several of the carvers to Johannesburg. Rossouw was at the time employed at Ditike Arts and Craft Centre in Thohoyandou. On one particular visit, Albert Munyai chased Rossouw and Read with an axe. According to Read, Munyai was angry because they had visited him on a Sunday. Read discontinued his dealings with Munyai, saying he was 'too crazy to deal with.' Rossouw's own particular favourites, whom he calls the 'masters' were Jackson Hlungwani, Phillip Rikhotso and Albert Munyai (December 1998). Art subject advisor to the Department of Education, Douglas Walker, had also sourced and brought work to the Everard Read Gallery during the 1990's, in particular the work of Phillip Rikhotso. The most popular items purchased directly from Rikhotso by Trent Read were his 'ghetto



Figure 6. Phillip Rikhotso. JHELANI, JHELANI 1991
Painted marula wood and electric wires. Height: 93cm.
Invitation to exhibition of Phillip Rikhotso at the Everard Read Gallery 25th February 1992.

blaster' covers and speakers (1992-3) (Figs. 7-9). Rikhotso had made many covers and speakers housed in carvings in his unique style of semi human, semi animal figures, emitting music from their piano key-like teeth (Fig.10). When Walker moved to Pietersburg and opened his own guesthouse, he continued to collect works by Rikhotso, though usually to sell through his own contacts and to tourists who came to stay at the guesthouse. The evident disappointment felt by Read eventually led to his retraction of support to the woodcarvers as their dealer, except for occasional exhibitions, such as the 2000 show of Johannes Maswanganye in the Knysna Gallery of Fine Art.

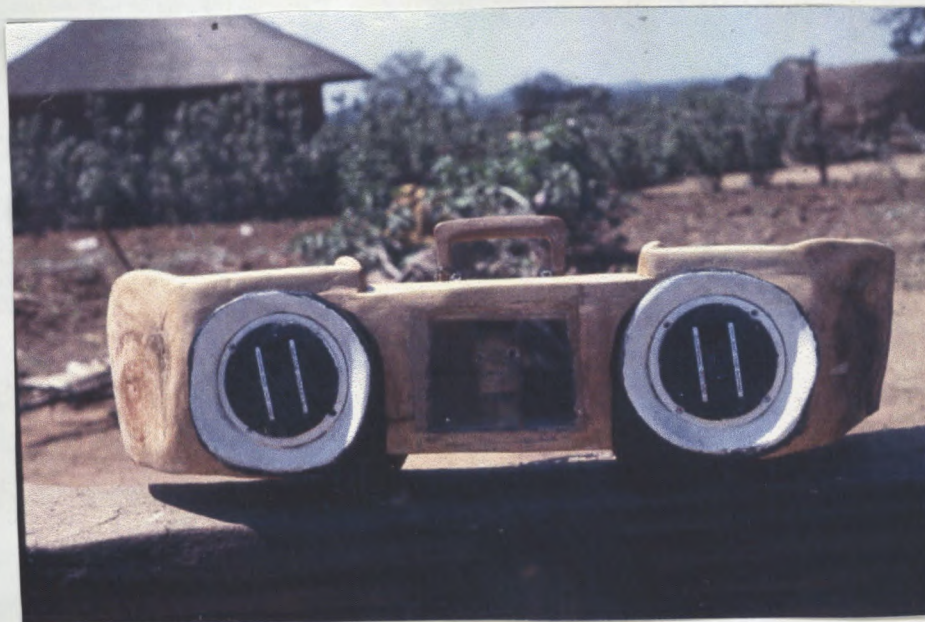


Figure 7 Phillip Rikhotso 'GHETTO BLASTER WITH T.V.' 1991 Wood, electric wires and perspex.
Location not known.



Figure 8. Phillip Rikhotso 'GHETTO BLASTER' 1991 Wood, electric wires.
Location not known.



Figure 9. Phillip Rikhotso 'GHETTO BLASTER WITH T.V.' 1991 Wood, electric wires and perspex.
Location not known.

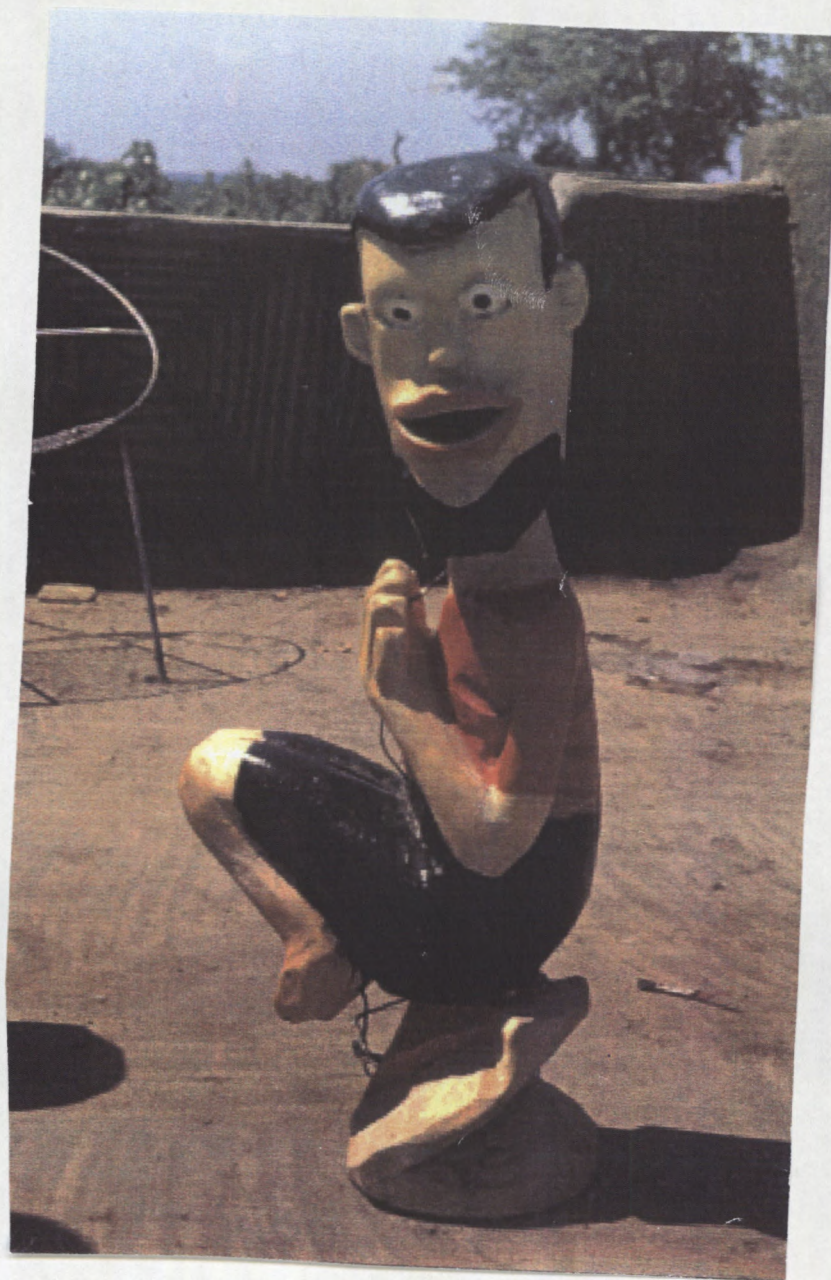


Figure 10. Phillip Rikhotso MAN SPEAKER 1994 Wood, electric wires. Location not known.

THE GERTRUDE POSEL GALLERY

The following discussion with Rayda Becker (August 1999), Head Curator of the Gertrude Posel Gallery at the University of the Witwatersrand is more of a reflection of the curator/artist relationship than an analysis of the role which the Gertrude Posel Gallery has played. Becker (ibid) expressed the concern that black rural artists have a completely misguided assumption that all whites are rich. She exemplifies Mudzunga in this regard, with reference to expectations of the artist in seeking financial assistance from galleries and individuals in the art community. Becker recalled (ibid) discussing the issue with Catherine Schneider during Becker's doctoral research in the Northern Province. Schneider, with her husband Theo, worked as a missionary in the Northern Transvaal. She observed that for black rural people most of the basic material to survive comes from the land. Food is grown, livestock graze, huts are made from mud and grass. Only 'luxuries' such as shoes, radios, home improvements and sending children to school were provided for when money was available. The significance of this observation is that it verifies a divide in approach where finances are concerned between black rural artists and white curators in urban galleries. Becker referred to experiences with Dr. Phutuma Seoka (1922-1996) and Nelson Mukhuba (1925- 1987) as having no understanding of the 'hard capitalist society', where gallery mark-ups could be as much as 400 %. When the Schneiders and Sandy and Ricky Burnett (between 1979-1989) (ibid) had attempted to manage Hlungwani's money, this had created a minefield that was highly criticized. However, Becker said that when she had offered basic business training in entrepreneurship and the workings of the art market to the woodcarvers she had been met with disinterest. Another issue upon which Becker had attempted to advise the woodcarvers was that of 'mass production' of pieces which had been 'best-sellers',

particularly in the wake of the *Tributaries* exhibition. Becker said that few of the rural carvers understood the notion of the 'individual hand' creating a unique object. Becker was of the opinion that the Venda government treated the artists badly and did not understand them. The architect Peter Rich who had worked in the region had referred to this attitude as 'a fish called Venda' (a play on the title of the popular film 'A Fish Called Wanda', the fish being a recurring motif in the work of many of the Venda woodcarvers. Rich was alluding to the flippancy with which the Venda administration often viewed local artists. Becker explained that the Venda artists had a far deeper meaning in their inspiration and approach to their art that was often not understood. She explained that works could be inspired by dreams, God or television and media with equal validity. Similar to the lack of hierarchies of objects in African artmaking, unlike Western notions of artmaking, inspiration to produce objects was not vested with the same hierarchical limitations. Nettleton (1989: 22) referred to this notion as follows:

Further we must challenge the notion of 'art' as a class of objects without function in one way or another and all of them can be used as a means of communication, as can the human body, its gestures and its vestments. Any visual image may thus be the legitimate focus of study for an art historian in search of the 'meaning' of visual languages.

Becker believes that the period when Ditike Arts and Crafts Centre thrived was the height of ease in working relationships with the woodcarvers since it facilitated avenues of communication (see section on Ditike).

FUBA (Federated Union of Black Artists).

As with Becker's experience, the following section serves rather as an insight into David Koloane's relationship to the woodcarvers, with whom he associated during his period of curatorship at the FUBA gallery, rather than as an analysis of the functions of the gallery itself.

Koloane had worked as a curator from 1985 to 1990, after studying museumology at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), at The University of London, between 1983 and 1985.

Koloane (November 1999) says that during his period as curator at the FUBA Gallery, black artists found it easy to confide in him when they had problems concerning the marketing of their work. Situated in the Johannesburg Central Business District in what has become the Newtown Cultural Precinct, FUBA was ideally situated to be accessible to black artists.

During this time, Samson Mudzunga, Dr. Phutuma Seoka, Avhashoni Mainganye and Johannes Maswanganye were regular visitors to the gallery. Mudzunga had his first one-man show there (see Chapter Two). The artists also exhibited a great deal at the Everard Read Gallery, and sometimes at the Goodman, though FUBA was a very different kind of gallery, says Koloane (ibid). Artists would bring work to leave on consignment at FUBA, leave it for two months or so, then come back to see if sales had taken place.

After the *Tributaries* exhibition, there was a lot of debate about the definition of the Venda artists and the label 'transitional'. Many people made field trips to the North to buy directly from the artists. Koloane speaks of exploitation, saying that many visitors were 'cashing in' on the surge of interest in the work of the Northern Province woodcarvers. Koloane explained that the rural artists, having a spirit of hospitality, would often give away 'bonus' pieces. Sometimes woodcarvings would be sold for less than a hundred rands. Koloane noted that even 'big sales' were usually underpriced, such as Noriah Mabasa's sale of *Carnage II* (1988) (Fig.11), which was bought by the Johannesburg Art Gallery for ten thousand rands. Koloane feels that a more realistic value would be between fifty and sixty thousand rands.

Describing the period as a 'Flash in the Pan' phase, when everyone was buying, Koloane



Figure 11. Noriah Mabasa CARNAGE II 1988 Wood 79 x 197 x 218.5 cm. The Johannesburg Art Gallery. Photograph : Incroci del Sud Affinities. Contemporary South African Art XVI Venice Biennale 1993: 41.

explained that buyers would sometimes come to the gallery and buy up all of somebody's work. Koloane (ibid) recalls this happening: 'When a lady came and bought eight or ten pieces of Dr. Phutuma Seoka's work'.

This problem, highlighted by Koloane, was due to the individual way the artists priced their work. Koloane (ibid) said:

Artists at the Bag Factory never work together on pricing their work. It is a deeply personal thing. Artists have different personalities but they will never tell you if they have been ripped off. They don't want to lose a sale, but will not go to others because the price is too low. Some artists work well and others spend everything. Then you run into problems when you are stranded, when the work was only sold last week. We used to live that kind of life.

Koloane admits that the rural artists (in the 1980's) were never successful in dealing commercially with the harsh urban art market.

However, Avhashoni Mainganye was held in admiration by Koloane because of his ability to cherish and value his work, hold a personal attachment to it, and never rely entirely on the artwork for survival.

After the Venda excitement had died down, most of the woodcarvers were left with nothing more than the transitional label.

Koloane (ibid) refers to an attitude of buyers who made the rural artist seem inferior. He says that a gifted artist such as Heindrick Nekhofe (b.1956-) should have collectors coming to him and if he had been Eduardo Villa (b.1920-), and not black and Venda, then he would have had no problem at all.

Koloane sees hope for the future through many options (see Conclusion), though emphasizes the need for more funding and opportunities for rural artists to participate in urban-based arts festivals such as the Grahamstown Festival. Opportunities for the rural artists were marred by their lack of infrastructure and education. Koloane referred to the Bag Factory residency

programme in which priority was usually given to overseas artists, but was open to South African artists, including those from the Northern Province.

Koloane also noted that although government support was important, it should not 'come in and impose'.

THE MARKET THEATRE GALLERY

The Market Theatre Gallery was re-named the Rembrandt van Rijn Gallery following a large naming right sponsorship in the form of R180,000.00 from the Transatlantic Tobacco Company in 1996 (Hobbs, 2001: 4).

In its early days the Market Theatre Gallery had a reputation for taking an anti-apartheid stance. It is situated in the Newtown Cultural Precinct of Johannesburg, close to the FUBA and Thupelo galleries and in the Market Theatre complex which was at the centre of both Johannesburg Biennales. Following the 1994 elections, which coincided with the time that Stephen Hobbs took up the post of gallery director, there was a policy shift towards a more 'internationalist' style. Hobbs (ibid) noted that:

No rules or guidelines had exactly been put in place to dictate what new contemporary work in South Africa might be like. South Africa's re-entry into the global arena had a stimulating but confusing effect on the types of production to emerge from the local art schools and on the country's artists, who were now more frequently participating in shows abroad. While installation, video and conceptual or neo-conceptual work had already been in production in spite of our cultural isolation during the seventies and eighties, it was infinitely more possible now for young artists to start accessing such modes of practice. The critics at the time, however, argued about what was authentic experience and expression in the works of young artists as opposed to that which seemed to be internationalist. These debates formed an important basis from which the Market Galleries attempted to define its own sense of the contemporary in Johannesburg and the country at large, as well as the terms by which it would debate such issues within the international arena.

With the focus being on engagement around these debates, the 'traditional' or even 'transitional' artworks of the Northern Province woodcarvers did not form part of the

equation. The exception was Hobb's interest in the work of Samson Mudzunga, which straddled the worlds of contemporary and traditional, through the medium of performance art.

Hobbs (June 1999), questions the role of the gallery, making specific reference to the work of Mudzunga in saying that the 'longevity of art in this country will not be in the museums or the galleries'. Hobbs was referring here to the site-specific nature of Mudzunga's work, and was highlighting the necessity for 'the gallery' to recognize its role outside of the physical space and to question the nature of 'the artwork'.

Hobbs (ibid) gave the example of exhibiting Christo's land installations in the 'gallery' by taking fragments of the material, the drawings, the models, the plans, the people involved, notes made, film documentation and elements which one would traditionally not consider to be 'the artwork'.

It is necessary to refer to the section on Samson Mudzunga in Chapter Two when contextualizing the following questions posed by Hobbs (ibid).

Is it the idea in its own right? Is it Samson's concept of retaining his own kind of familial and ancestral pride in respect of his mother, who we know passed away without his being told about it and having been buried in the wrong place. Is that the artwork? Is it the museum or the mausoleum or the act that the gallery has with him, that's also an added element. He buries himself and later opens up and shows off his family history. Is that the artwork?

Hobbs found that the proposed interaction with Mudzunga, had come at a very strategic time for the Market Theatre Gallery.

Hobbs felt that of the greatest interest to the gallery was the concept of Mudzunga's 'burial' in his home in Venda and the illusion of his resurrection, shortly after, in the Newtown Precinct where the Market Theatre Gallery is located.

Although the gallery was enthusiastic to participate in the function of the resurrection (see the funding proposal, Appendix 3), the event did not take place at the Market Theatre due to

the timing of Mudzunga's re-incarceration a few days before the proposed burial performance (October 9th 1999).

A diluted impromptu version of the resurrection took place at the opening of the *Hayani/Crossings* exhibitions at the NSA Gallery in Durban (August 13th 2000) (Fig. 155).

The Market Theatre Gallery closed its doors in 2001 as a result of lack of funds. Hobbs attributes the closure of the Market Galleries, and other galleries, to the shift in emphasis described earlier. Prior to the 1994 elections there was a great deal of financial support, especially from institutions that aligned themselves to resistance politics.

Having said this, Hobbs claims that a positive outcome of the closure of the Market galleries and other spaces is the emergence of 'alternatives to the gallery system' (2001: 6).

Clearly the non- commercial art gallery system in South Africa is going through a major crisis.

Arts critic/writer, Kathryn Smith (2000), states:

Given the lack of privately-run galleries and spaces in South Africa, and the imminent closure of several institutions and civic spaces in Johannesburg, it can be assumed that the gallery system as we know it is not functioning effectively. Years of cultural boycott and a dispensation that could politely be termed oppressive have resulted in a situation where arts and culture are not foremost on the agenda and we do not have a museum culture to speak of.

In summary, the closure of not-for-profit art spaces impacts by limiting opportunities for artists on the periphery, as is the case with the woodcarvers of the Northern Province. The possibilities of the woodcarvers to achieve 'alternatives to the gallery system' are limited. These are addressed in Chapters Two and Three. The effect of South Africa's re-entry into an international arts arena following the 1994 elections and global influences have marginalised the woodcarvers in terms of the 'non-contemporary' nature of their medium.

ART COLLECTOR: MARK SMALLE

A medical doctor of Belgian descent, living close to Louis Trichardt where his practice is situated, Mark Smalle houses a large art collection at his home which overflows into his rooms and his wife's clothing shop adjacent to them.

Smalle has been an avid collector since the age of five, and by his own admission, an obsessive one. He says (August 1998) that collecting has become an addiction for him and he cannot stop. Smalle's collection includes European antiques and Greek and Roman artifacts, displayed in separate wings of his home. For the past thirty years he has focused his attention on African art, including southern and, more recently, west and central African art. The collection from the Northern Province is comparable with good museum collections.

Smalle is aware of the value of the works, and unlike art gallery owners Burnett and Read, prefers the more finished, highly polished works of Heindrick Nekhofe and Azwhimpelele Magoro. He prides himself on the fact that he has picked up some of the works at very low prices, usually when a woodcarver is in dire need of money. He attempts to justify this practice, by saying that at least it is a clean sale and that he doesn't keep an artist hanging on with consignments and deposits.

THE MUKONDENI FINE ARTS GALLERY.

The Mukondeni Fine Arts Gallery began operating from the home of Neill van Kraayenburg in Kya Sands, Randburg in 1995. Van Kraayenburg had become acquainted with the artists in the Northern Province during 1994. His father had obtained the tender to run the 1994 elections there and van Kraayenburg was assisting him.

Van Kraayenburg named the gallery after Mukondeni, a village close to Elim, which has a large pottery industry, run by local women, for whom van Kraayenburg has acted as an outlet.

The mission statement (from the publicity pamphlet, n.d.) of the project is:

By recognizing the heritage resources of our continent and its people, and forging links with like-minded individuals, communities and organizations, our vision is to stimulate sustainable art and craft activities, which will contribute towards the African Renaissance.

Van Kraayenburg collected work of many of the artists, often on a consignment basis, or with a small deposit being paid. Van Kraayenburg soon became the most prominent art dealer to represent the artists of the Northern Province, following the lapse in interest of Read, Burnett and Givon.

Rossouw (January 1999) was of the opinion that van Kraayenburg could provide a solution to the problems faced by the woodcarvers of the Northern Province in terms of the dilemma of the marketing of their work.

Burnett (November 2000) was of the opinion that van Kraayenburg was not bringing anything new to the role played by himself, Read and Givon, except for a kind of naivety. Burnett had said in a previous interview (April 1998) that 'it would take a very strong person to bring the woodcarvers back into the art market'.

Albert Munyai was one artist whom van Kraayenburg attempted to develop an artist/agent relationship. In 1999, Munyai had agreed to exchange some art works with van Kraayenburg for a tractor that he needed to facilitate collecting larger pieces of wood. Before purchasing the tractor, van Kraayenburg came to Munyai's house and loaded onto his bakkie the Giant Murumba (1999) (Fig. 12) the Thohoyandou Drum (1994) (Fig.6), The Crocodile Marimba (1999) (Fig. 13), The Fish Chair (1999) (Figs.14.1- 14.2) and a small stone knife. The knife was a sacred family heirloom which, according to Munyai (June 1999), had been brought to

Venda by Munyai's great-grandfather from central Africa. Apart from the knife, which Munyai loaned to van Kraayenburg for safe keeping, all the artworks were given to van Kraayenburg in exchange for the tractor. According to Munyai (ibid), The Cow Marimba (1998) (Fig. 15) was already 'sold' to van Kraayenburg, for a sum of R2800.00, a transaction which consisted of an exchange of partly cash, partly materials and partly repairs to Munyai's chain saw which van Kraayenburg had undertaken. As it was late, van Kraayenburg stayed to sleep the night at Munyai's home. In the middle of the night Pedi, Munyai's wife, woke Munyai and relayed her fears about allowing the artwork, which was the total amount of finished work in Munyai's stock, to leave with van Kraayenburg. Munyai and his wife unpacked the bakkie in the middle of the night.

After a few months, van Kraayenburg returned to Venda with a second-hand tractor and trailer and retrieved the above-mentioned artworks, returning with them to Johannesburg.

Van Kraayenburg's first major exhibition (held at the The Watercolour Society, Johannesburg, 2000) was a huge success. A large group of works, including several by Albert Munyai, was bought by the newly built Sandton Convention Centre. These included the Fish Chair (Fig.14.1-14.2), the Crying Man Marimba, the Crocodile Marimba (Fig.13) and the Giant Marumba Drum (Fig.12). A large woodcarving of Noriah Mabasa's entitled The Flood (Fig.4), a woodcarving by Owen and Goldwyn Ndou and several Mukondeni clay pots were bought from van Kraayenburg for the centre. Following the opening, van Kraayenburg indicated to the candidate (telephonic conversation) that he had sold the works for very high prices.

From the proceeds of these sales, van Kraayenburg moved to a new gallery in 2001 and created the current Mukondeni Art Gallery (sometimes called the Fine Art Gallery, or the African Art Gallery). The house and several outhouses are set in three hectares of land. The



Figure 12. Albert Munyai GIANT MARUMBA DRUM 1999 Wood
The Sandton Convention Centre.

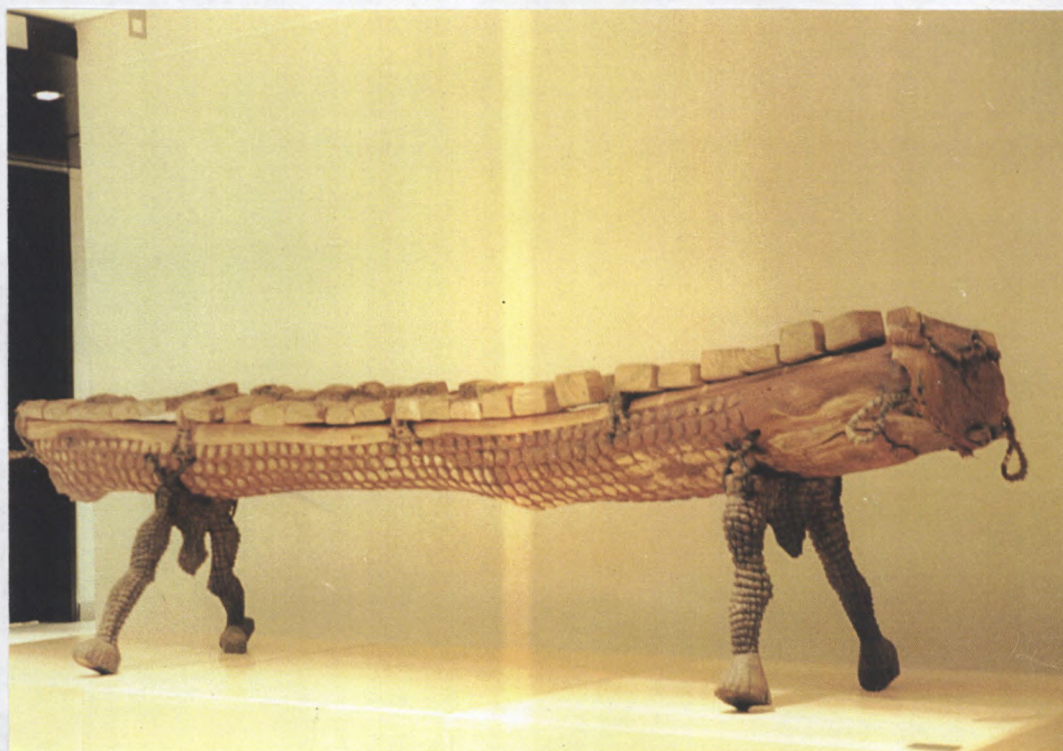


Fig. 13. Albert Munyai CROCODILE MARIMBA 1999 Kiaat wood, gourds, leather.
Sandton Convention Centre.



Figure 14.1 Albert Munyai FISH CHAIR (in progress) 1999 Kiaat wood. Sandton Convention Centre.



Figure 14.2 Albert Munyai FISH CHAIR 1999 Kiaat wood. Sandton Convention Centre.



Figure 15. Albert Munyai COW MARIMBA 1998 Hide and bones of cow, kiaat wood, gourds,leather. Mukondeni Art Gallery.

move has afforded van Kraayenburg the space to host his exhibitions there, house a vast quantity of woodcarvings, as well as musical instruments, beadwork, traditional drums, *djembe* drums (he has trained a local drum maker to make them) and claywork. Van Kraayenburg has hosted several artists there in an artist in residence capacity, who make or finish their works *in situ*. These have included Noriah Mabasa, Albert Munyai, John Baloyi, David Murati, Azwhimpelele Magoro and Meshak Raphalalani. Renowned potter Lillian Munyai and other potters from Mukondeni in the Northern Province have also worked in residence at the Kya Sands gallery to complete a large commission for a hotel group procured by van Kraayenburg. In providing a platform for 'living artists' Van Kraayenburg claims to be 'bringing Venda to Johannesburg' (June 2000).

But their idea to create what they term an 'authentic Venda village' at Kya Sands should be quashed immediately. While their hearts seem to be in the right place, it is this kind of action that starts to perpetuate all kinds of problems, not least of all objectify the very people that they aim to support, both creatively and financially (Smith, K. 2001: 7).

Van Kraayenburg claims to represent thirty-five woodcarvers (and many more crafters) and advertises aggressively. He has a website, work on permanent displays in the Sandton Convention Centre and is ideally situated to draw on delegates and guests through marketing the gallery at Africam and Buy Africa at Sandton Square.

Despite van Kraayenburg's gallery and assets and a stable of many carvers he claims (August 2002) that it is necessary to operate with a consignment system as he is struggling to survive through sales made at the gallery. Van Kraayenburg said (*ibid*) that his main source of income was his legal literature business.

Munyai had made three trips to Johannesburg to participate in workshops at the Mukondeni Gallery between 1998 and 2000. He also participated in one exhibition opening. Following this he said (July 2001) that his business relationship with van Kraayenburg has finally

broken down. Although this has been the case in the past, Munyai has returned to van Kraayenburg when times are economically difficult. It appears that by tightly controlling the purse strings, van Kraayenburg keeps power over the woodcarvers.

In 1999, van Kraayenburg spent much time in the Northern Province, renting accommodation in Sibasa. At this stage he was intent on settling there. During this time, van Kraayenburg negotiated a partnership in the Ditike Art and Craft Centre (see next section).

Other projects to van Kraayenburg's credit are the establishment of John Baloyi's studio at Mashamba named the Mashamba Gallery. He also has plans to create a Venda Village (Craft Centre) at Vuwani, close to the home of Mabasa. According to current information this has not yet materialized.

DITIKE: A TROUBLED HISTORY.

The Ditike Arts and Crafts Centre is situated close to the main intersection at Thohoyandou, the capital of former Venda. It is situated on the main road from Louis Trichardt to the Punda Maria gate of the Kruger National Park.

The development of the arts and craft centre in the former homeland of Venda came from an initiative of Fiona Nicholson, who was at the time employed in the tourism sector of the Venda Development Corporation (VDC). Research carried out in 1983 by the V.D.C. (Nicholson: 2) identified 3400 people as being directly involved in the production of arts and crafts in the Venda region alone. These statistics inspired Nicholson to motivate for the opening of an arts and crafts centre.

Opened in 1985, the Ditike Arts and Crafts Centre formed a marketing outlet and exhibition display space for the many local artists and crafters.

Given the location of the centre and the fact that it was opened at the time of the *Tributaries* exhibition, Ditike held every expectation of success. Funding was made available by the VDC. It flourished in its first few years, through Nicholson's management⁵.

Nicholson was joined by sculptor David Rossouw towards the end of the first year of Ditike's history. Rossouw worked specifically as a product advisor to the woodcarvers.

In a report made by Nicholson (n.d.) written after Ditike's second year of operation, she made certain recommendations to improve the running of the project. Whilst sales had exceeded expectations (Nicholson, n.d.) in its second year of operation, (forecast gross turnover: R237 700, actual: R242 000), Nicholson raised the issues of difficulties in running the project as a viable business venture. Nicholson noted in the above-mentioned report to the VDC, that the 'cumbersome and time-consuming administrative, accounting and stock control systems make it impossible to effectively meet the major, external demand'.

In addition, Rossouw's task of visiting the vast number of crafters was overwhelming. Nicholson had calculated that if he were to visit two artists/crafters per day, it would take more than a year to see all of them.

Although Ditike was initially designed to cater for passing trade from tourists, Nicholson (P.2) noted that this was negligible.

Through her and Rossouw's contacts with art dealers and galleries in the city, and overseas, an external market flourished during this period.

Issues such as transport to major urban centres, transport for artists to bring their artworks to Ditike and lack of secure storage space were identified in Nicholson's reports to VDC.

A request for adequate storage, packing and dispatch facilities was addressed by VDC, by

⁵ The early history of Ditike has been thoroughly documented by Duncan (1994: 46-50). The candidate has focused on more recent developments following VDC's relinquishing management of Ditike in 1992.

loaning Ditike a vacant factory at Shayandima. This created a further logistical problem: the transportation of artists, staff and goods between the two venues was time consuming and costly.

Nicholson and Rossouw had worked closely with the woodcarvers and crafters and Nicholson was one of the co-founders of the VhaVenda Art Foundation, together with Avhashoni Mainganye. Mainganye (June 1998) said that the VDC did not consult with the artists about ways of operating, even though they claimed that it was built 'for the artists'. He said that mark-ups agreed upon by the VDC to be no more than 20% changed to 50% without any prior negotiation with the artists.

However, following a second report by Nicholson to the VDC (n.d.) echoing similar concerns, VDC 'leased' Ditike to Metropolitan Life. Although the VDC still maintained ownership, they had abdicated control over Ditike's administration. They became the 'landlord'. Duncan's research (1994), noted that VDC's focus was rather different than Nicholson's:

It soon became clear that the VDC wanted to take Ditike in rather a different direction. The corporation's development sector began to plan a factory for a community of woodcarvers based at Thengwe, complete with power tools: this was just one of a number of incidents that made Nicholson realize that the VDC was aiming to industrialize craft production, and was assuming that Ditike would then market the mass-produced items.

Avhashoni Mainganye, who was completing his studies at Rorke's Drift when the building of Ditike was underway, had already formed the vha Venda Art Foundation. Mainganye's chief reason to initiate the foundation was to protect the interests of the artists. Of particular concern was maintaining consistent and fair pricing of artworks. Mainganye said he was sometimes seen by the artists to be supporting the VDC. This was possibly due to his close liaison with Nicholson, and his personal access to successful networking skills, having had experience through his travels and education (see Chapter Two on Mainganye). However, the

situation created conflict of a competitive nature with some of the woodcarvers. According to Mainganye, when Ditike changed hands in 1988, no consultation with the artists, and very little with Nicholson and Rossouw took place before the transaction became a *fait accompli*. Rossouw had left Ditike in 1987. Not long after this Nicholson, who had become disillusioned by the *modus operandi* of the VDC and in protest at their decision to privatize Ditike, resigned to take up a clothing business in Shayandima. Mainganye (June 1998) noted that because Metropolitan Life saw Ditike as a business venture, and no longer received additional funding from the VDC, it became very difficult to maintain the ethos of the vhaVenda Art Foundation. Whereas the VDC's mandate, as a quasi-government organization, was to develop the arts and crafts sector in Venda, the Metropolitan Life management found it difficult to maintain the centre as a financially viable business venture.

At this stage, woodcarvers and crafters would leave their work on consignment or sell at very low prices through their need to survive. The last manager for Metropolitan Life, according to Mainganye (*ibid*), 'collapsed' and Elias Nengwenani, a local businessman who had an interest in the local craft production took over. Nengwenani also failed to keep Ditike viable and, when he failed to pay the rent, was bound to give up the project in December 1994.

Ditike is constructed in a traditional Venda format with four thatched rondavels built in a circular plan around a central open 'garden area' (performing a similar function to a courtyard). Mabasa's clay policemen, although weathered and broken, lean over and 'keep watch' from the roadside wall. The Venda Tourism Board operates from one rondavel. A covered area on one side has seating space for a small restaurant.

When the candidate first visited Ditike in March 1991, it appeared to be a vibrant Arts and Craft Centre. It was during the period when Metropolitan Life was in control. Joyce Mabasa, Noriah's daughter, was managing the shop and exhibition area. The larger of the rondavels

was subdivided for this purpose. Through Ditike, the candidate arranged field trips with her students to Mabasa's home (Fig. 16) and to the homes of other woodcarvers, with the assistance of Joyce Mabasa and Ditike's guide, Reckson Sadiki.

When Nengwenani took over in 1992, he replaced the staff, including Sadiki and Mabasa, who became redundant.

Mainganye (June 1998), who had attempted to continue the Vha Venda Foundation through the support of a small group of concerned artists such as Azwhimpeleli Magoro, Heindrick Nekhofe, Noriah Mabasa, Meshak Raphalalani, Richard Mangoma and architect Hendry Ndou, approached the VDC to negotiate the taking over of Ditike as a collective. Mainganye's intention was to form a management committee who would share the costs of the rent and run the Centre.

The VDC agreed to the proposal and gave a small storage space of one rondavel to display their works, without payment of rent, for a trial period. Mainganye (ibid) called a meeting of the artists. His intention was to encourage them to use the space productively, impress the VDC and eventually re-acclaim the space as a whole.

Ditike had been empty for a while, and desperately needed some maintenance. Some art works housed at Ditike had been left in storage, whilst others had been removed from the gallery to the vacant factory at Shayandima. The candidate had been there to collect artworks which had been on exhibition at the **Johannesburg Biennale: Africus '95** (The drop-off and collection point had been Ditike). The factory was a storeroom for a vast amount of artworks and crafts many of which were damaged. The storeroom itself was in an appalling state of neglect. Many artworks were being eaten by woodborer.

Mangoma was appointed to manage Ditike. Ndou took a small space as a base for his architect's practice.

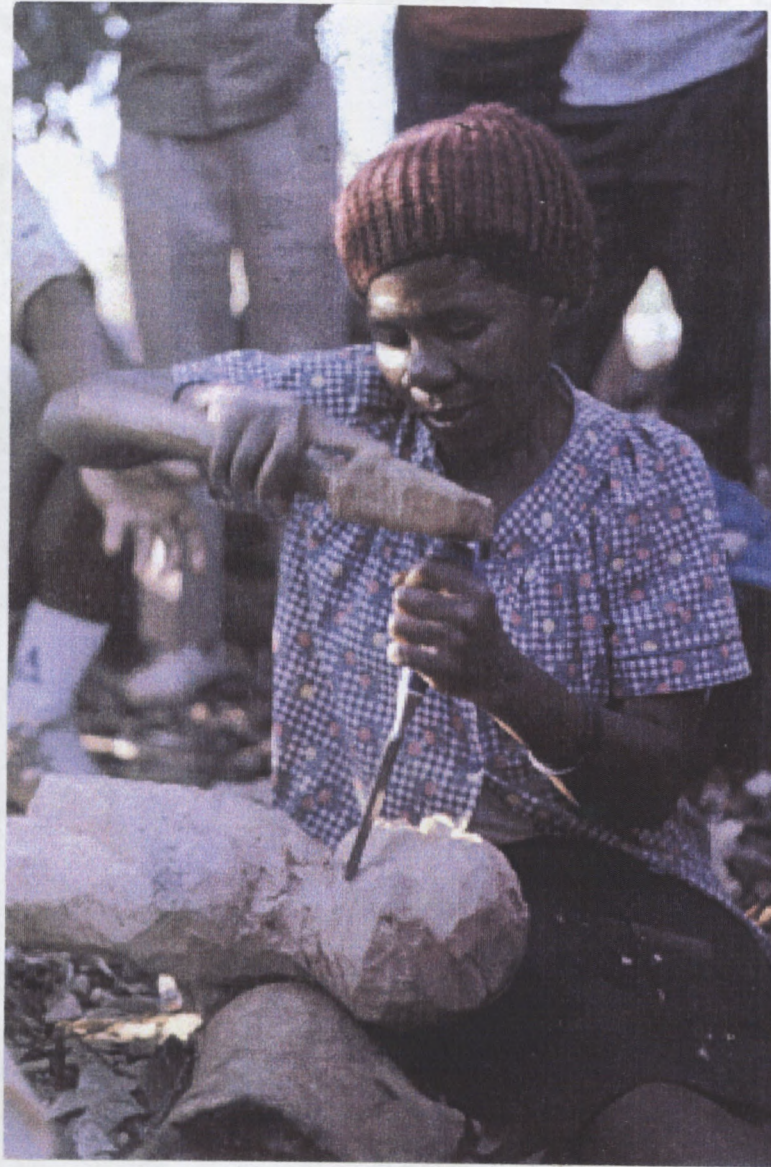


Figure 16. Noriah Mabasa demonstrates carving to students from Giyani College of Education. 1991. Vuwani.

This phase of Ditike was also one of extreme conflict for the artists. Mainganye and Mangoma fought bitterly over the management portfolio and there were disagreements amongst other artists. According to Isaac Rambauli, (July 1998) a former employee of the VDC, some artists 'came to blows'. Rambauli was of the opinion that 'artists cannot run a business, cannot work together, they must just stick to making their art'.

Mainganye had been away for part of this period, as he often was, attending exhibitions and visiting galleries. He claimed that the artists did not make an effort to make Ditike work. The candidate had visited a few times during this period and found very little work available. She often found Mangoma carving outside, with no one to attend to the artists 'space' that was little more than a storeroom. This was during 1996, when the candidate was in the process of collecting woodcarvings for the Venda Carvers exhibition to be held at the South African Association of Arts, Pretoria (see Chapter Three). In 1997 the conflict came to a head. Arlette Franks, from Pietersburg, in her capacity as chairperson of the Northern Province Provincial Arts Council (NOPAC) was asked to mediate. Mainganye called a meeting of artists and requested representatives from the VDC to attend the meeting. Discussions were held to try to resolve the conflict. Franks (Telephonic communication: July 1998) said that there was little that NOPAC could do apart from make recommendations. NOPAC itself was experiencing problems due to not having been officially promulgated, having neither a budget nor powers. Franks said that the VDC was not prepared to continue allowing the artists access to Ditike.

As a result, Ditike closed its doors yet again. In 1999 Nicholson (Telephonic communication: May 1999), who had closed her clothing factory and was unemployed, apart from administering the Matongoni Mountain Studio, made a bid to take back Ditike as a marketing outlet for the Matongoni Project. In a funding proposal for the Muenda Arts & Crafts Revival

Project to the National Arts Council (1999) she motivated for this. A background to Ditike, and Nicholson's involvement were included. Nicholson described the current situation:

Since the closure of both Ditike and Vuwa,⁶ our artists and craftspeople have been without any selling outlet whatsoever. Most live in extremely remote, areas, without "passing traffic", so cannot even take advantage of roadside sales. Dealers on the other hand, are not prepared to travel those distances on the off chance that sufficient crafts are available to make the trip viable. Consequently, craftspeople are dropping their traditional crafts, and looking (without much success) for ways of earning a living.

Despite Nicholson's extensive experience with Ditike and relationships built over many years with the artists, her application to the VDC was turned down, in favour of their former employee, Isaac Rambauli, whose interest was to manage the restaurant section.

Rambauli sublet the arts and craft outlet to art dealer van Kraayenburg of the Mukondeni African Art Gallery in Johannesburg. This was despite the fact that subletting was contrary to VDC's policy, a point on which Nicholson challenged the VDC. Nicholson was also critical of van Kraayenburg's importation of cheaper art goods from Zimbabwe. Former manager of Ditike, Elias Nengwenani (Telephonic communication: 2001) commented that local woodcarvers were not in a position to compete with these prices, or to mass - produce such goods.

Van Kraayenburg, who had set up a shop and a section for a gallery space, which was considerably smaller than the previous gallery space, reinstated Joyce Mabasa to manage the shop. At this time (December 1999- January 2000) van Kraayenburg was enthusiastic to permanently settle in Venda and had rented accommodation in Sibasa. His plans had changed by the end of 2000, especially following his purchase of the Kya Sands gallery and its extended property. Van Kraayenburg's main motivation (June 1999) was to use Ditike as a

⁶ Vuwa was another Art and Craft outlet, on the road to Tshakhuma (the main road past Ditike to Louis Trichardt). It was opened by Elias Nengwenani during his management of Ditike and was run by his wife.

base for 'goods' to be stored, and later to be transported to Johannesburg for exhibition.

After he provided Albert Munyai with a *bakkie* in exchange for some artworks, van Kraayenburg told the candidate (June 2000) that Munyai would collect art works for him. Munyai later refused (see Chapter Two on Albert Munyai and the previous section on the Mukondeni Art Gallery).

Van Kraayenburg still makes many buying trips to Venda, though he gave up his partnership with Rambauli, and left Ditike in 2001.

Following van Kraayenburg's departure, Joyce and Noriah Mabasa continued to manage Ditike's art section. They open up for visitors, though inconsistently. According to several sources (specifically visitors or tourists interested in purchasing authentic crafts), Ditike no longer has much to offer.

Recently (2002) people collecting works for the National Craft Council for an upcoming major exhibition, found the shop closed. Continuing from there to Mabasa's home in Vuwani, they found Joyce Mabasa at home who informed them that her mother was out teaching. The potential of Ditike as an art outlet seems bleak. Neither Nicholson nor Maingainye have pursued their former interest in the venture.

THE TZANEEN MUSEUM.

The Tzaneen Museum, established in June 1995, forms the private collection of German born Jurgen Witt. Although housed in an extremely small building in the grounds of the local Library and Municipality, it is a very important collection which consists primarily of ethnological artifacts of the local Tsonga and North Sotho (Tzaneen Museum, n.d: 1).

The pamphlet handed out to visitors describes the museum's collection:

These include weapons, pottery, basketry, beadwork, Sotho sacred drums, Tsonga drums, royal drums of the Rain Queen Modjadji as well as utensils as used in everyday life. We also have the world's largest collection of pole-

carvings from this region. At present, more than 100 items are on loan to other museums, such as the only known wooden initiation mask in South Africa, initiation figures and a sacred drum too big to fit through our doors. Many items have also been on exhibition abroad.

It is undoubtedly an important collection, including early pole carvings and early twentieth century writings on the life and oral history of the Tsonga, which Witt has drawn upon in his research on local myths and legends, some produced by missionaries (such as Junod, H.A., 1906, 1940; Berthoud, Henri, 1930, 1931 and 1932). These pole carvings have a direct link to the royal kraal of the Modjadji, or rain queen of the Balovedu. Reference to these carvings and the *matano* mentioned in the Introduction is to be found in the *Tributaries* exhibition and catalogue (Burnett: 24-25).

Witt (Telephonic communication: 2001) explained that he has been collecting since the 1960's: '...before any one else came along, and even before there were any roads.'

During this period, Witt came across his first Tsonga story - teller during a visit to a Shangaan village. The encounter had a profound effect on Witt, converting a somewhat romantic whim into a lifetime of collecting. Not, as he claims, to make money, but to preserve an important part of the heritage of the region, with an emphasis on art, artefacts and historical writings and photographs.

Witt funds the museum himself and charges no entrance fee, though he does request donations from visitors and school groups.

The guide (Tzaneen Museum, n.d.: 1) continues:

Tsonga legends and tales have been documented by ourselves and well known local sculptors were commissioned to carve representational characters of these tales. We have recorded 36 stories so far and have 114 carved figures.

The name of the artists and narrators of the stories are excluded, contrary to contemporary museum practice. The "unknown artist" is synonymous with older collections of African art, often gathered through barter or bought at very low prices by missionaries and colonisers.

A further entry in the guide again excludes the artists' identity, though highlights their importance through participation in overseas exhibitions:

The development of sculptural art within the last 100 years is also documented. Part of the museum's collection of about 30 sculptures is on exhibit at the Library. At least 4 of the sculptors have had exhibitions abroad and a number of galleries have obtained their works (Tzaneen Museum, n.d.: 1).

The greater part of Witt's collection is the work of Phillip Rikhotso (see Chapter Two). Most of these were commissioned in groups to reflect the Tsonga myths related to Witt by Rikhotso's daughter, Thandi (Witt: April 1998).

Witt (Telephonic conversation: 2001) expressed concern and shock that other art collectors, gallery owners and their agents were no longer buying Rikhotso's work.

Witt's personal funds have now dried up, and he no longer buys as a result. He is uncertain of the future of the museum.

In conversations with Rikhotso (April 1998) regarding the sales of work to the Tzaneen Museum, he claims that prices paid were very low. For the first large group of sculptures, approximately 20-30 pieces, he said that he was paid about R200.00. He complained that food was used as barter for his artworks, which he had accepted when he was desperate.

Rikhotso (November 2000) remarked that things had improved with the prices paid by Witt, though the candidate noted that as little as R30.00 was being asked for a walking stick. This was the museum's price (2000), including their commission.

In the case of the artists located more closely in the Venda area, they have more interaction with each other and with the urban art world in general, and have found a way of pricing artworks according to a consistent standard. Avhashoni Mainganye has played a particular role in this regard, initiated when he founded the vhaVenda Foundation in 1983.

The candidate, who is aware of the predicament of Rikhotso, who receives no support from other artists, has played a role in encouraging Rikhotso to increase his prices.

Unfortunately, unlike Maingainye and Mabasa, Rikhotso often finds himself bringing down his prices when sales are not good.

ARTS AND CULTURE CENTRES IN THE NORTHERN PROVINCE:

The new white elephants?

Several arts and culture centres which are part of a national Department of Arts and Culture project have been built at a cost of two million rands each.

Two were earmarked for the Northern Province, one in Giyani and the other in Thohoyandou, as well as a library in Jane Furse. The candidate followed the process of the building of the Arts and Culture Centre in Giyani, which, prior to its opening in 2001, was known as the Multi-Purpose Centre.

A company of architects in Tzaneen designed the building. No consultation was made with local artists or the Creative and Expressive Arts Division of the Giyani College of Education.

Built in 1998 and opened only at the end of 2001, the Giyani Sports, Arts and Culture Centre (as it was renamed at the opening) remains a dysfunctional building. Maintenance staff and a few domestic animals seem to be the only inhabitants, without a manager or other staff to effectively run it.

The TLC commissioned the candidate's mural group to paint the façade of the Arts and Culture Centre in preparation for the opening. Despite a lavish opening event, which took several months to plan and included an exhibition of local arts and crafts and several performances of local *xibelani* dance groups, speeches and the unveiling of the requisite commemorative plaque, little advancement in the role of the centre seems to have taken place.

The purpose of these centres was described as follows:

Cultural Community development is about people doing things together, an activity which expands awareness and understanding of the meaning life has

for them, creating images and symbols which illuminate meaning and which express a vision of themselves, their relationships to each other and the world in which they live. Community Arts centres are a powerful incubator for this power (DACST Conference proceedings: 1998).

The Thohoyandou Arts and Culture Centre fared a little better. Avhashoni Mainganye (2000) told the candidate that he had been asked to consult for the Arts and Culture Centre in Thohoyandou, in its initial planning stage, though said that the request was never pursued.

The Centre for Scientific and Industrial Research (the CSIR) had initiated a textile project called Ifa, which held initial training workshops at the Arts and Culture Centre with local women. Prior to the opening, some artists boycotted the centre. The reason, according to Mainganye (July 1999), was a continued lack of consultation with the local arts community from the building plans to daily functions. Mainganye added that it would have been more appropriate to plan with the artists as to their space requirements. Fiona Nicholson (1999) described the building's function as more suitable for a fruit market. After the opening, some local artists, including Mainganye started to use the space to store their work and meet there occasionally.

At the Arts and Culture Centre Management Conference, held in Port Elizabeth in October 1999, the candidate raised the issue at a question and answer session, which was being chaired by a senior official from the Department of Arts and Culture in the Northern Province. She asked why there was no consultation with local artists or the art department at the Giyani College of Education, prior to, or during, the process of the construction of the Giyani Arts and Culture Centre. The chairperson argued that too much consultation could prevent progress. Despite attempts by other role players from the Northern Province to get clarity on this point, the question remained unanswered.

In a report (Charles, 1999: 16) on the conference it was stated:

Applicability, viability and relevance are fundamental concepts in the construction of a building with a social function. All this becomes questionable when the "quote" of the conference was "Over-consultation destroys plans" declared by a civil servant when questioned about accountability.

Charles had raised the issue in his report as to whether the concept of Arts Centres is a dated phenomenon and questions these structures' adequacy for a post apartheid South Africa or whether they service the needs of the original target group.

Charles (1999: 16) continues the debate on the validity of this initiative:

While there is an urgent need to build communities for the "betterment of all," we have to ask: at whose detriment? Our cultural history has shown the tenacity of artists and communities, who were able to build projects with little help from Government. Why is there a need to initiate new projects when community programmes that have a long history in our struggle are not supported? FUBA, one of the oldest community arts projects, is at the moment threatened with closure (as is Funda Centre).

This point could be applicable when considering the Ditike Arts and Craft Centre, of whose existence the Department of Arts and Culture should have been aware. If an existing cultural centre recognized and developed by the local community exists, surely it would seem more cost effective and viable in terms of a potential success factor to build on these existing structures than to construct a new one at a cost of two million rands. The location of the Thohoyandou Arts and Culture Centre is about a kilometre from Ditike.

At the time of the opening of the Giyani Centre for Art, Sport and Culture, the candidate questioned the validity of the centre, when meeting with the Giyani Town manager and members of the Transitional Local Council's (TLC's) 'opening' committee.

In addition, the issue of the management of the centre was questioned. Two members of the Giyani community from the department of Arts and Culture and the TLC had been present at the conference in Port Elizabeth. The candidate was told by the Town Manager that 'we don't really know how to run these centres and we hope you will help us'.

A recurring question arises, how do so many employees of local government find themselves in posts for which they have not been trained?

A suggestion was made to the town manager to train one of the art graduates from the Giyani College of Education into a managerial position. To date no manager has been appointed.

CHAPTER TWO

THE WORK AND LIVES OF THE SELECTED WOODCARVERS AND THEIR RESPONSES TO THE WORKINGS OF THE PREDOMINANTLY URBAN-BASED ART MARKET.

RATSHIMELA SAMSON MUDZUNGA

The candidate co-wrote a book on Samson Mudzunga as part of the Taxi series published by David Krut (2001). Since her text in this monograph was based on her own experiences and involvement with the performances and incarceration of Mudzunga, the candidate wishes to submit it together with the educational supplement to which she contributed, as part of this body of work (Appendices Four and Five).

In this section, the candidate will provide additional details which were omitted in the text of the monograph, and evaluate Mudzunga's work within the specific focus of this research.

The two performances attended by the candidate are the Marriage Performance (March 8th 1997) and the Burial Alive Performance (30-31st July 2000), in which she participated. Video extracts from these performances are attached (Appendix 6). The latter performance extended to the *Hayani/Crossings* exhibitions at the opening at the NSA gallery in Durban, two weeks after the event in Shanzha, where Mudzunga's 'resurrection' took place. The account of this performance rendered in the book is a parallel text, written by co-author Stephen Hobbs, from a gallery curator's perspective.

The candidate refers to previous performances through the research of Oren Kaplan for his Master's degree in Anthropology through the University of the Witwatersrand (1998). In addition, the issues following on from the last performance (2000) and future plans of Mudzunga will be discussed.

SAMSON MUDZUNGA: A BIOGRAPHY OF CONFLICT

Samson Ratshilumela Mudzunga was born in 1938 in Shanzha, Dopeni, in the Nzhelele district of the former Venda 'homeland'. Although Mudzunga began playing with clay as a child, it wasn't until much later on in life that he became a self-sustaining artist. Like so many of his generation, he was convinced that one had to move to an urban area to make a living. Whilst working in Johannesburg as a messenger for a company named Kohler, Mudzunga had a premonition that he might be made redundant, and decided to renew his artistic pursuits after a lapse of thirty- two years. He carved occasional pieces which he attempted to sell on the streets. Finally, he produced enough work to mount an exhibition at the FUBA gallery, curated by David Koloane in 1988. This was followed closely by an exhibition at the Zona Gallery, then in Norwood, Johannesburg.

This led to confrontation with his bosses, who had been to view the exhibition. Mudzunga was accused of earning two salaries and of stealing company time for his sculpting. About a year later he was made redundant.

He later claimed:

I was always worried what would happen to me if I were to lose my job. Sanctions were causing retrenchments and I knew I did not have any trade (New Nation, 1991:8).

When reading Mudzunga's autobiography, a one-page compilation, one is compelled by the inclusion of his dismissal as a driver in Johannesburg as a turning point in his career. It is also apparent from a press release for an exhibition held shortly afterwards, and a statement from the Steel Engineering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (SEAWUSA) on unfair dismissal, that Mudzunga's career thrived on conflict.

The following is extracted from Mudzunga's biography (n.d.):

After some years I left J.C.I. and join [sic] Kohler Limited in 1980 at Pybus road No.4 Sandton. I was expelled from the company because of management's jealousy for I was involved in artist's exhibition. Their main

reason for my expulsion was that I was doing double job because of my artistic job. These led to the termination of my service in that company in 1989. After my expulsion from Kohler Limited, I decided to concentrate in my artistic job until 1998 when Mr. Netshavha Samuel started to be against me and my work.

Mudzunga's statement takes up about half of the autobiography.

An extract from the SEAWUSA statement on Mudzunga's retrenchment by Kohler Ltd.

reads as follows:

Mr. Samson Mudzunga, an active member of Steel Engineering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (SEAWUSA) was 'retrenched' on 31st May 1989, by Kohler Ltd. where he was employed for eight years as a driver. Mr. Mudzunga was handed a letter by management on 18th May 1989, declaring him redundant and 'kindly' informing him that he would be allowed to leave immediately in order to secure other employment. To SEWUSA, this event is a farce and will most certainly be successfully challenged. Since the beginning of last year, Mr. Mudzunga had begun to experience various forms of harassment. This harassment began at a time when Mr. Mudzunga's hobby, craft- work became publicised and he became involved with FUBA gallery.

Mudzunga's third successful exhibition was hosted by the Zona Gallery, which also released a press statement referring to his dismissal from Kohler, and his attempt to support his family through his art – an obvious ploy to help make sales and gain publicity. Confrontation began to be a central part of Mudzunga's work and, combined with his love of publicity or 'fame', was later to become something of an obsession in his performances.

The candidate's relationship with Mudzunga has shifted over the past eight or so years, becoming more entwined in his performances since she began researching them in 1997. As a resident of, and educator in, the Northern Province for the last 10 years, she is something of an 'insider' to his environment, although not entirely. The candidate's background in what is an essentially eurocentric domain of the urban-based mainstream art market in South Africa led her to be involved in Mudzunga's 'web'.

Since the candidate's relationship with Mudzunga began in 1993 she observed that

Mudzunga was inclined to move in and out of the city from his home in Shanzha to attend

his own exhibition openings and network with his many contacts in the urban art world.

This is also perhaps because his artistic successes had begun in the city. This was not the case with many of the other rural woodcarvers.

Mudzunga, who is primarily a drum maker, began to combine the idea of incorporating the drum as a central aspect of performances with Venda rituals, which he began to produce in 1996. Although most of Mudzunga's drums are based on the round, hemispherical drum known as the *ngoma* his designs are very different from the traditional *dzingoma* carved for events linked to the chieftainship. Examples are the first Coffin Drum (1994) and the Arm and Leg Drum (1995) (Figs.17-20). Mudzunga evolved the *ngoma* design for the purpose of his earlier performances. The drums were carved with doors and became known as coffin drums. Through the carving of symbolic male and female forms and other elements, they were transformed into symbols of birth, death and the human body, both male and female. The drum became the central vehicle in conveying meaning in Mudzunga's performances. Apart from Mudzunga's drums, his other woodcarvings are less monumental (such as the Tshikona Player (2000) Fig. 21). David Rossouw noted that Mudzunga is an innovative drum maker, though is no carver of great merit (December 1998).

Following Mudzunga's first performance, the candidate's contact with Mudzunga increased, and by 1996 the candidate decided to include his work in an area of research, to start in 1997, for her Master's Degree. The fact that interest in the woodcarvers had decidedly cooled by the time the candidate began her research resulted in her choice to focus on artists who were attempting to find alternative means of survival.

She selected Mudzunga due to his engagement in a new art form, contemporary in its nature, though engaged in both exploding and exploring myth and ritual in the Venda tradition.

Mudzunga was also self-initiating his projects which had an empowering effect in his life,



Figure 17. Samson Mudzunga COFFIN DRUM (Detail) Wood, cow hide and bitumen.
Collection: Technikon of the Witwatersrand.



Figure 18. Samson Mudzunga COFFIN DRUM (Detail) 1994. Wood, cow- hide and
bitumen. Collection: Technikon of the Witwatersrand.



Figure 19. Samson Mudzunga ARM AND LEG DRUM. 1995 Wood, cow-hide, hair, bitumen.



Figure 20. Samson Mudzunga ARM AND LEG DRUM. 1995 Wood, cow-hide, hair, bitumen.



Figure 21. Samson Mudzungu. TSHIKONA PLAYER 2000 Wood. Collection of the artist.

since his performances were based locally and initially had little or no outside intervention. This gave them a durable quality. The combination of the traditional and contemporary nature of these performances was seductive.

THE PERFORMANCES

THE FIRST FUNERAL EVENT: June 29th, 1996.

The invitation to the first important event in the spate of performances by Samson Mudzunga has a formal ring to it. It begins: "TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN", and goes on:

I hereby wish to make it known that I, Samson Mudzunga, sculptor and carver from Dopeni Shanzha, Northern Province plans to stage an exhibition using a drum that I have personally carved as a coffin. The ceremony would include showing the public a Venda funeral. The drum-coffin is the first to be made in the Northern Province and I believe in the whole country. The exhibition/funeral ceremony is scheduled to take place on Saturday, 29th June 1997 (Mudzunga, 1996:1).

The event was conducted by a master of ceremonies, a Mr. Netshiomvani, a retired school principal and a member of the Holy Evangelical Church. A significant elevator of his status was the fact that he and his wife had made a trip overseas, to Israel. Apart from Mudzunga's closer friends and family and one or two local politicians, not many local people attended the event. The group was largely made up of 'outsiders' from the Gauteng art world, including artists and academics, and was heavily represented by the media. In addition to television coverage, Mr. Mandanna, a friend of Mudzunga, filmed the event at his request.

According to Oren Kaplan (1998: 29), a researcher of the event (though not a spectator), the opening of the ceremony, conducted by Mr. Netshiomvani, focussed on Venda tradition:

We are gathering here to see just that – how things are done by us, the Venda people, in the olden days right from the beginning. Therefore we will not open this function by prayer, because this is a demonstration of our culture. *Tshikona* will give us an opening item. (Kaplan 1998: 30).

The *tshikona* dancers were employed at the event and held a significant symbolic relationship to Mudzunga and his performances in that their presence denoted bestowing honour on Mudzunga, as if he were a chief or *khosi*. Blowing their horns, they heralded the beginning of the event. The girls from the *tshikona*, wearing the traditional apron or *shedu*, together with initiates of puberty, arranged themselves in a position of respect, lying down in a humble position. This gesture also has a special association with the chief. The elder women, including Mudzunga's mother (Fig.22), Vho Munzhedzi (then 95 years old), the *makhadzi* (the oldest woman from the father's side), Vho Mulondo, and one other family elder, came and sat in silence for some time next to the drum. Mr. Netshiomvani then called for the paying of last respects:

This is the second part, paying of the last respects. Please remain quiet. Remain quiet because traditionally, this is what people did. This was long even before whites came here, when the cows' hides were used. The cow's hide was used as a coffin (Kaplan 1998: 32).

The spectators then became participants in the event, a tool which Mudzunga would repeatedly use in other performances.

In Mudzunga's first funeral performance, people passed by the drum to the softened tones of the *tshikona*, with all the solemnity of a group of mourners paying last respects to the actual deceased. The "corpse" enacted by Mudzunga was observed not from the open lid of a coffin but through a door carved into the side of the coffin-drum. Mudzunga wore a white cotton cloth, called a *masila* – a piece of fabric usually used to cover the corpse of a chief (Kaplan 1998: 33).

The ritual, known as *mbeu*, is a central part of Venda funerals. Seeds are thrown onto the coffin to denote the passing of the deceased. Mudzunga instructed the *makhadzi* and other members of his family to perform the ritual. The drum became the coffin through the enactment of this and other rituals, such as *ulosha*.



Figure 22. Vho Netshisevhe with Mudzunga's *makhadzi* (eldest female relative): Vho Mulondo; and Samson Mudzunga's mother: Vho Munzhedzi next to the Coffin Drum and young initiates (*vhatei vha vhusha*) Burial performance, Shantzha 1996.

Ulosha is a ritual performed by young girls who, dressed traditionally in the *shedu* or apron and covered with a *nwenda* (a brightly coloured striped cloth) adopt a reclining posture which indicates respect shown to an elder (See last page of funding proposal: Appendix 3).

The young girls performed this inside and around the drum.

The climax of the event was when Mudzunga emerged from the drum, rushed off and threw himself into the self-made swimming pool while the *tshikona* played and the women ululated with joy. He surfaced on the far side of the pool and disappeared into his rondavel.

The performance part of the programme completed, the day continued with formal speeches.

Steven Sack, who was then at the Johannesburg Art Foundation, represented the art community from Johannesburg. Other speakers noted were local woodcarver Richard Mangoma, architect Henry Mudau, and the newly elected councillor, Lufuno Mulaudzi.

Mudzunga spoke briefly at the very end of the programme, which included further performances by the *tshikona* and *tshigombela*. A meal was served, and the guests from out of town were ushered to eat inside the house, whilst the rest of the guests ate outside.

In The Politics of Performance, Baz Kershaw (1992: 18) writes that performance can be most usefully described as an ideological transaction between a company of performers and the community of their audience. 'Ideology' in this context is the source of the collective ability of performers and audience to make sense of the signs used in the performance. He states that the spectator is engaged fundamentally in the active construction of meaning as the performance event proceeds. In this sense performance is 'about' the transaction of meaning. In a similar vein, Richard Schechner, who was engaged with ritualistic performance in India, wrote that the various complex relationships among players, spectators, performers, authors and directors could be pictured as a rectangle, a performance 'quadrilogue' (1993: pp.37-38).

The candidate will refer to this issue specifically later on when discussing the structure of Mudzunga's most recent performance, which was filmed, and where the act of filming became a dominant element in the interactions of the audience and performers.

In this first performance, Mudzunga can be credited with recognising the basic needs of a performance artist, though it is unlikely that he had become aware of the links and inroads he was making with the contemporary understanding of performance art as rooted in the 'fringe' or avante-garde of the 1960s and 1970s. He understood the need for an audience, and particularly one from outside Venda, consisting predominantly of whites and foreigners. Mudzunga had procured this metropolitan audience through tireless networking since his early days working in Johannesburg.

Although Mudzunga's first performance was construed by some locals and outsiders as a form of game-playing or play-acting, Mudzunga himself took it very seriously, so much so that his preparations created a sense of dread among some of the closer members of his family. As Kaplan has noted in his research on Mudzunga and Venda culture, 'playing death' is regarded by some as an omen which could bring about real death:

Vho-Mudzunga's brother, Vho Wilson Mudzunga, was genuinely concerned for the safety of his brother. He believed that Vho-Mudzunga might not emerge from his 'coffin' alive – that the play-death would result in real death. After Vho-Wilson's short speech, he reached into the coffin-drum to feel if his brother had gone cold. Vho-Mudzunga's relative, Vho-Netshisevhe, who was seated next to Vho-Mudzunga's mother during the drama, performed *phasa madi*, a supplication to her ancestors, before leaving her home to attend the 'funeral'. Although she had little regard for the importance of Vho-Mudzunga's actions, she recognised a danger in them and requested ancestral protection for her relative (Kaplan 1998:38).

The *makadzi* Mulondo stated (Kaplan 1998: 38) that people who attended the function accepted it as a play (*vhutombo*), but for Mudzunga and those who took it more seriously it was an attempt to demonstrate how he wanted to be buried when he died. People who expressed this view assumed that Mudzunga had received a message from the ancestors

in his dreams to pursue the drama. The dream legitimated the practice and, as a result, those who held this view did not associate the drama with danger. Rather they described it as knowledge and wisdom. It was mostly the older women who referred to the performance in this way.

A formal programme was grafted onto the performance itself, in part framing it as a traditional funeral (which would have included speeches and a written programme), but introducing a conscious attempt to create mystery, a sense of wonder and suspense reminiscent of a circus magician's act. The inclusion in the performance of symbolic elements, such as the plunge into the pool, or the use of the drum as a coffin, were completely alien to local tradition, although they may have had their roots there.

Entertainment in the form of *tshikona*, the dance of the males (Fig. 23) and *tshigombela*, the dance of the women – as well as the playing of the *ngoma* drum – would have been included traditionally in the burial of a chief. Mudzunga's incorporation of ritual elements traditionally associated with chiefs was controversial enough to contribute to his later incarceration, as well as a certain amount of confusion. Although the media made much of the fact that Mudzunga is a commoner, he is in fact related to the headman (*musanda*) Netshiavha.

The drum itself has great significance for the Venda. The sacred drum, *ngoma lungundu*, was used to defeat the enemy (see the Introduction). According to Mudzunga, the drum is the symbol of the body of a person.

It is my mother on the left side with the *mukunda*. The right side is a man-this is my father. The bottom side is the buttocks (gestures to his buttocks) and the top is the woman's head (Kaplan 1998: 48).

In research done by Nettleton (1984: 264), this iconography is confirmed as representing fertility, as does the pool. The churning of the water in the pool represents the womb of a



Figure 23. Tshikona dance at The Red Sea Performance in 2001, Shanzha.

pregnant woman, and Nettleton (1984: 266) has interpreted the drum itself as a pool, the symbol of creation in the creation myth.

Woodcarver Meshak Raphalalani (May 1993) explains that the traditional Venda symbol denoting pregnancy is that of a coiled snake inside the womb, which uncoils at the time of birth. This image is usually found in the carving on the surface of the *ngoma* drum, though not in Mudzunga's drum. Given Mudzunga's plunge from the drum into the pool, one possible interpretation of Mudzunga's symbology could be a rebirthing. Since Venda traditional belief holds that the Venda nation was birthed by emerging from Lake Fundudzi, another symbol links to the pool and to the acquisition of power. The link to the sacred lake also shows an ability to draw on the magical powers of the VhaVenda ancestors from the very source, or from the most ancient generation of ancestors, hence giving the most potent form to their power. In his first performance, Mudzunga was clearly aware of this connection to the power of the lake.

THE LAKE FUNDUDZI PERFORMANCE: September 28th, 1996

In his second performance later that year, Mudzunga elevated himself to the status of a god. As with the previous event and others to follow, an announcement was circulated in advance. It read:

This idea is arising specially at this time because I am still very much rooted to my traditions and proud thereof. As a traditionalist I happen to have been called back home where I came from by *makhadzi* Vho Mulondo herself. She has made it known to me that the 'gods of Fundudzi would like to see me'. They say if I am one of them, I must come personally within the drum I have made, chief will open it up and let me get into Lake Fundudzi to take a bath. It is then that the gods will acknowledge whether I am one of them or not. As a sacred lake if I happen to bath in there and I being not one of them I shall never come back (something awful will happen) but if I am one of them nothing will happen to me.

The performance was carried out at Lake Fundudzi. Mudzunga, although linking his ritual performance to a traditional belief system, also scorned some of the myth and superstitions which had become attached to the lake. Mudzunga was of the opinion that Fundudzi had special powers, but felt that the *zwidudwane* (zombies or spirits) purported to inhabit the lake did not exist. These myths could also have been put in place to maintain a mystique which gave the lake a special appeal for tourists. Mudzunga theorised that they had been created to prevent people from visiting the lake without permission from the headman (*musanda*) Netshiavha, who had jurisdiction over Fundudzi. Despite the conflict with the headman, chief Tshivhasa, who is superior to the *musanda* had, according to Mudzunga, given approval of his performances. Ironically, plans are going ahead to develop Lake Fundudzi as a tourist destination and resort. Mudzunga explained (June 2001) that the headmanship of Fundudzi has been removed from Netshiavha, and the lake is now under the control of the Department of Tourism.

In the event of the funeral of 1996, Mudzunga saw an opportunity to heighten his presence in the mainstream art world in South Africa – an art world which had shifted its attitudes in favour of the inclusion of ‘the black rural artist’ living on its periphery.

As outlined earlier, a stream of visitors to Venda by art buyers, collectors and academics injected the region with a much needed fusion of economic upliftment and acknowledged the creative skills of many of the artists. This interest was defined by art critic and academic Colin Richards (1987: 21) as ‘a take-away African spirit for the culturally needy’.

As with the nature of the art market, this interest had its day, and was inevitably bound to wane. However, Mudzunga’s performances had a new edge to them which re-captured that interest: while his performances were based on traditional rituals, he also engaged in processes which had an artistically contemporary feel, particularly through his use of site

specific, and probably time specific, locations. In this way the Fundudzi performance, held on September 28th 1996, was well supported by the media and an 'outsider' group of academics and artists.

In closing his anthropological research thesis, Kaplan (1998: 259) summarises Mudzunga's performances thus:

Vho-Mudzunga's performances were part of a new "space of intervention" that emerged in a post-apartheid moment. They revisited apartheid history⁷ and attempted to redress its dislocative disruptions; but they also addressed an unfolding history of marginality in the face of a new 'African' nationalism. From this post-apartheid stance, both engagements used tradition in "a spirit of revision and reconstruction".

The need to redress the imbalances of the apartheid era through a form of affirmative action was on the agenda of some gallery owners, who hoped to align themselves with a 'relevant' or politically correct perspective – one that would, or so they hoped, ensure their place as instruments of change in the cultural context of transformation.

In a local context, Mudzunga had not only challenged the established authority over the lake, but also the gods and ancestral belief systems. Having made claims that he was returning 'home' after being called by the gods to undergo immersion in the waters of the lake, he set the scene for a performance which would function as a kind of test of his own supernatural powers and status.

Artist Richard Mangoma, a strong supporter of Mudzunga, would often meet the candidate (1998-9) at the Magistrates Court to observe the progress of Mudzunga's trial. During one of these visits, he told the candidate his version of another source of the conflict. Around the time of the planning of the first (funeral) performance, Mudzunga visited Netshiavha to ask for his permission to go to the lake with his visitors. Netshiavha refused, although it is not quite clear what reasons, if any, were given. Mangoma explained that prior to Mudzunga's

⁷ Kaplan's emphasis.

involvement, one of the employees of the then Venda Development Corporation (VDC) would conduct tours with visitors, including international visitors and white people from Johannesburg. It was a custom of the tour guide to take the visitors to Lake Fundudzi, and to stop at Netshiavha's house on the way. The guide would already have primed the guests that it was an act of courtesy to give a donation to the headman, who in return granted them permission to continue to the sacred lake. With the arrival of many interested parties at Mudzunga's events, along with visits from Johannesburg artists and press members, Netshiavha was denied his token entrance fee to the lake. In addition, Mudzunga carried out his plans without having obtained permission, claiming that the lake belongs to God, not to Netshiavha (December 1998).

Although a family feud had developed between the Mudzunga and Netshiavha families some years earlier (Kaplan, 1998: 65), the conflict with headman Netshiavha came to a head with the Lake Fundudzi event. Initially, Mudzunga claimed to have sought permission from the headman, asking him to open the performance by opening the door of the drum. However, at some stage negotiations broke down and Mudzunga decided to go ahead anyway, without Netshiavha's support. Mudzunga was to be the first to take *Tshikona* to the lake, with a *Tshikona* group from another area (Kaplan 1998: 83). This group, the *Philiyamavu Tshikona*, had won many competitions, defeating the group favoured by Netshiavha. On the morning before the performance, Netshiavha arrived at Mudzunga's home, demanding that he postpone the performance since arrangements had not been completed. Mudzunga refused. Later that day local government representatives tried to persuade Mudzunga to inform Netshiavha about the event in advance, by sending the headman a portion of the maize beer brewed specially for the event, known as a *musumo of halwa*. Mudzunga, however, had no intention of sending a peace offering. Early on the day of the performance, he instead sent his

emissaries to the headman Shavhani, of Shanzha, Mudzunga's own village.

The performance commenced at Mudzunga's homestead with Mudzunga entering the drum wearing a T-shirt he had hand-painted with the words *Sukhalifhalale Fundudzi*. He exited wearing a shirt and shorts of the colourful striped Venda fabric specially tailored for the event (Fig. 24). *Sukhalifhalale* was a term originally used as the title of the drum, and was later adopted as a title for Mudzunga's project (August 2000). The term 'invented' by Mudzunga means: 'do not break down that which is being built up' and relates literally to Mudzunga's sense that he was being targeted by jealousy. A mixed assembly who were now arriving included a television crew, some local dignitaries, Mudzunga's master of ceremonies, Netshiomvani and his friend Mabannda, Venda artists Richard Mangoma and Avhashoni Mainganye, and architect Hendry Mudau. Finally a government *bakkie* and two four-wheel drive vehicles arrived shortly before the entourage was preparing to leave for the lake. This group, from the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, agreed to transport the drum to the lake heading the procession with Mudzunga in the passenger seat (Kaplan 1998: 96).

A large crowd, including the Philayamavu *tshikona* dancers, were met by a road block of vehicles belonging to Netshiavha, a short distance from Lake Fundudzi. In the tense interaction that followed, the government officials were shocked to discover that Mudzunga had omitted to go through the agreed procedure of presenting Netshiavha his *musumo* of *halwa*. Mudzunga's response was dismissive. He claimed that Netshiavha had come to make his demands too late, and that he was motivated by jealousy. As the crowd became more agitated, the government officials managed to appease the headman, after Mudzunga promised that he would apologise in the traditional way, privately before the elders. Always evasive, Mudzunga made this promise not personally, but through selected representatives present who were elders themselves. Netshiavha, perhaps to regain some high



Figure 24. Samson Mudzunga at the tailor's shop (Peter Madavha) where his suit of *mwenda* cloth was made for the Lake Fundudzi Performance, 1996.

ground, insisted on scolding Mudzunga publically, claiming that he had 'wronged the very ancestors that he was going to meet at the lake' (Kaplan 1998:100).

Netshiavha was persuaded to remain at the event, provided he could act as head of his clan and as Fundudzi's custodian. In his speech, he commended Mudzunga's bravery whilst insinuating that, having offended the ancestors of the lake, Mudzunga would not return from it (Kaplan 1998: 101).

Whilst the *Tshikona* played, Mudzunga headed for the lakeside. The young girls who had performed *ulosha* followed closely behind, as did the rest of the audience. Instead of entering the lake however, Mudzunga took a special hand-carved container or *phaphana*, and filled it with water from the lake. Before drinking from it, he announced:

'This is the water from Lake Fundudzi. I live by this water. None of you knows this. This is the water that strengthens and protects me... I have to drink this and finish the whole *phaphana* (water container)'. He then drank the full container, but told the crowd to go back. Apparently affected by Netshiavha's words, Mudzunga failed to go through with the promised performance of bathing in the lake, although he challenged the disappointed crowd, asking them to swim themselves. When the crowd demanded that he swim, Mudzunga claimed that in essence he had done just that, and that the lake was now inside him. This did not convince or appease the audience. As they made to leave, the truck transporting the Philiyamavu *Tshikona* dancers got stuck in the mud, and it was necessary to hire a tractor to pull it out. Netshiavha was to claim later that this was a sign from the gods that Mudzunga had shown disrespect for their privacy (Kaplan 1998:101).

Seen as a story, this event reflects the myth of precautionary tales, whereby warnings, if ignored, create disaster, though in this case Mudzunga took precautions to protect his own life. However, the audience felt cheated of an 'execution' – as one outraged local matric pupil put it:

Today we expected miracles, but nothing happened. He drank the water, but that doesn't matter ... we expected something rare, but nothing has happened (Kaplan 1998: 102).

It is clear, then, that although symbolic references to death are played out in the two connected performances, when 'real' death seems possible, the performer withdraws to a safe

alternative drama which maintains links to the symbolism of the lake without overtly challenging the traditional forces of Netshiavha's leadership, or the authority of the ancestors.

In 1997, the candidate attended the third performance at Shanzha marking Mudzunga's marriage to his fourth wife.

THE MARRIAGE PERFORMANCE: March 8th 1997.

On March 8th 1997, another performance took place, which celebrated the marriage between Mudzunga and Ntanganedzeni, a new young wife. Mudzunga was marrying for a fourth time at the suggestion of his mother, much to the disapproval of Dorcas, his third wife who resides in Johannesburg. Mudzunga was still staying with his first wife Tshinakaho, but had been estranged from his second wife Muvhulawa, the mother of Lufuno (with whom he was later to engage in a great conflict). The conflict with Muvhulawa is directly associated with that between Mudzunga and Netshiavha: Muvhulawa had allegedly had a child by a close relative of Netshiavha. As a result, Muvhulawa and the child become outcasts from the Mudzunga family.

Mudzunga made the Aeroplane Drum (1996-7) (Figs. 25.1 and 25.2) as it has become known, especially for the occasion of his fourth wedding. The drum is monumental in proportion, almost the length and width of a taxi, and exquisitely carved and polished to a high sheen.

The drum was carved from a massive *jackalbessie* tree (Fig. 26), which Mudzunga found near to his home. He was required to request permission from the local chief to cut the tree, which was granted at no cost. The candidate accompanied Mudzunga in 1996 to observe the initial stages of carving. Mudzunga had employed two young boys whom he referred to as



Figure 25.1. Samson Mudzunga AEROPLANE DRUM 1996-7 Jackalbessie wood, cow hide, *nwenda* cloth, rubber and bitumen. Collection of the artist.



Figure 25.2. Samson Mudzunga AEROPLANE DRUM 1996-7 Jackalbessie wood, cow hide, *nwenda* cloth, rubber and bitumen. Collection of the artist.



Figure 26. Samson Mudzunga inside the jackalbessie tree from which the AEROPLANE DRUM was carved. 1996.

picanins to work on digging out the tree. Mudzunga explained that the carving of a drum is the only form of carving which requires one to work from a live tree, whilst the wood is wet. It is the biggest drum that Mudzunga has ever carved and is inscribed with his full name – Ratshilumela Samson Mudzunga – with the additional name of *Mavu*, another reference to a chief, on one side of the tail. This is another example of Mudzunga's granting himself the status of a chief. Turned on its side, the drum moves on wheels (also handcarved), and has a door at the back, decorated with the *nwenda* fabric to match Mudzunga's outfit (Fig. 24). The finishing touch, a hand-made number plate, plays on the identity of the artist like an ID number and the ability to transport itself. Mudzunga wanted this drum to travel the whole world. Stephen Hobbs (2001) says:

Mudzunga's aeroplane drum is remarkable not only in its attention to detail, but in its scale and form. It reads not unlike a caricature of an early 20th – century biplane. The broad protruding vellum façade supports target like markings. The body is flanked by wings fashioned into two figures, with no apparent joining. The back of the sculpture is covered in the traditional white, black, red and blue-striped Venda cloth.

As with previous performances, there was a handful of 'outsiders' present, including sculptor David Rousseau and anthropologists Godfried Dideron and Oren Kaplan. A television cameraman was there, as was Mudzunga's personal video cameraman. A couple of German tourists had arrived to witness the event and were given special treatment and often referred to during the speeches at the event.

Mudzunga's favourite *tshikona* group, the Philiyamavu, played as usual, traditionally heralding the opening of the event. They encircled the lower 'driveway', winding their way up the sharp incline to Mudzunga's entrance as they played. The 'bride', positioned about halfway up the incline, off the path as if 'hidden', was traditionally covered with a blanket and escorted by an entourage of older women, led by one of Mudzunga's older wives.

The *tshigombela* dancers from Tshihehi danced to accept the new wife at the ceremony.

According to custom, the bride was to refuse to enter the house until 'bribes' were made by observers. These bribes consisted of bracelets (*mukunda*) and coins. At this stage the 'husband' was not in sight, as is the case in traditional ceremonies. After the dance performances, the women entered the house. The candidate was encouraged to follow, but the men were not allowed to enter. The bride was instructed by the women and performed the *ulosha* position of respect and humility. After the bride and her attendants left the house, the formal part of the ceremony began. Several speeches were then made, interspersed by dance performance by the *tshigombela* group.

The drum was unveiled, as was Mudzunga's bride, who was inside it. The three other wives and two additional women – whom Mudzunga referred to as "girlfriends" – posed in traditional Venda dress for the camera. Some stood next to the drum, others climbed inside. After the meal, the entourage set off to Lake Fundudzi in several cars. As before, Netshiavha had put up a roadblock to prevent access to the lake. The candidate who was travelling with Oren Kaplan in his *bakkie* and several other local participants was forced to turn around, since Mudzunga was behind in another vehicle. As Kaplan passed the car Mudzunga was travelling in he motioned to Kaplan to turn around again, which he did. By the time the vehicle arrived at the roadblock, the *bakkie* used for the purpose had been moved aside. An argument ensued between several supporters on both sides, but eventually Netshiavha allowed the vehicles through.

The ensuing performance at Lake Fundudzi was a diluted version of the event at the house – some of the *tshikona* had stayed away, having been affected by the ill omen, which lingered from the previous performance. According to Kaplan (1998:257) Netshiavha had also visited the *Philiyamavu tshikona* group to discourage their participation in the performance, and had

tried to get a court order to prevent its going ahead at all. Apparently, the magistrate, in response to Netshiava's application replied that theoretically this was a possible intervention, but that it would not be possible in this case because Vho-Mudzunga was an 'artist' (Kaplan 1998: 257).

The power of the lake's symbolism seems to have been marginalised by the power struggles between Netshiavha and Mudzunga. Unlike the Coffin Drum, the Aeroplane Drum had not been transported to the lake. It sits as a powerful if ambiguous symbol, on the one hand as a means of entry into the artworld, and on the other as an out of place artefact in an invented ritual: there is no such drum container used either for burial or for marriage in vha-Venda tradition. These contradictions arise in every performance event.

In 1998 Mudzunga was arrested and imprisoned on charges of arson and damage to the property of local headman Samuel Netshiavha. This began a new relationship between Mudzunga and the candidate, based on court and prison visits.

Mudzunga's zealous approach to his art was never diminished by the miserable conditions inside prison. He told the candidate (Matashe Prison visit: October 1998), with the subversive sense of humour reserved for discussion of his performances, that the event he planned for his release from prison would be 'the biggest and best ever yet, and don't you worry you will also be famous.' He also claimed to have 'a very big plan to make something, but it is still a secret, you will see it very soon.' He steered the conversation towards his wish that the candidate secure an urban gallery as a venue for a follow-up exhibition to his next performance, and to publicise it widely. A provisional date for the event was set for 29th May 1999.

The candidate wrote a brief proposal (November 1999) to three galleries, highlighting the concerns she had in her interpretations of Mudzunga's intentions, and doubts as to what the

gallery could achieve from such a venture. She outlined a process that she envisaged in connecting the two events, and possible ways of extending these into a gallery space. The performances were outlined as follows:

Part 1: a performance *in situ* in Venda, at Shanzha and Lake Fundudzi where Mudzunga would enact the corpse in a burial, then 'disappear' for seven days.

Part 2: Mudzunga would reappear in an urban gallery, bringing the drum, the *tshigombela* and the *tshikona* dancers from Venda to stage a street procession in the area of the gallery. He would be transported, invisible inside his drum, into the gallery. Upon arrival at the gallery he would appear, 'as though resurrected'.

The candidate was conscious of the need to be as transparent as possible regarding the potential dangers attached. She emphasised that although Mudzunga was engaged in conflict with Netshiava, his motive was to achieve an impression of his own invincibility, thereby simply spiting Netshiavha. A sense of a Shakespearean comedy/tragedy was beginning to emerge.

Stephen Hobbs, of the Market Theatre Gallery, was the only gallery director to respond. This began a new relationship involving Hobbs, Mudzunga and the candidate. Shortly after the candidate's first meeting with Hobbs (June 1999), Mudzunga was released from prison, having secured the help of a new lawyer who managed to get bail reduced to R5.000. It was only then that Mudzunga learned of the death of his mother, aged 110, whilst he had been incarcerated. She had been buried in a nearby cemetery by his brother Wilson, and not at his home in Shanzha as Mudzunga had wished. He was also to learn that two of his drums were sold 'for next to nothing' by his son Lufuno to art dealer van Kraayenburg. These events had a profound effect on Mudzunga, and led to a serious conflict with both Wilson and Lufuno Mudzunga.

After a couple of meetings, Hobbs, Storm van Rensburg of the Market Theatre Gallery, and Mthunzi Ndimande, a member of the Market Theatre Gallery steering committee, visited the Northern Province to review the scenario *in situ*. For the visit to Mudzunga's house, his third wife Dorcas was installed to act as hostess to the group, having travelled from Johannesburg at her husband's request. Mudzunga enjoyed the opportunity to show off the Aeroplane Drum to his guests, climbing in and out of it and offering his guests to do likewise (Figs. 27-28).

The following day the group travelled together with Mudzunga to the candidate's house in Giyani. During the course of the weekend, the decision, without being verbalised, became a reality: the team had decided to take the project forward. The date of the next performance was debated at length to ensure that everyone could participate.

Plans were in place for the performance to proceed as planned on October 9th 1999 when Mudzunga was rearrested. Police had been to his house on October 6th, to inform Mudzunga that his next appearance in court had been brought forward. At the hearing, bail was withdrawn when a claim was made that the accused had threatened the lives of two of Netshiavha's many witnesses, including his son Lufuno. Although attempts were made to have bail reinstated at a hearing in the Supreme Court on October 8th, this was unsuccessful. It seemed that this was an attempt to sabotage the performance, and it succeeded. Mudzunga immediately removed the young lawyer Madiga from the case (calling him a schoolboy), and appointed another. He was later to exchange the third lawyer for a Mr. Klaaf from Louis Trichardt, shortly before his release in 2000.

After this period of reincarceration, Mudzunga's son Lufuno made a claim to a Sunday Times reporter that Mudzunga was "plotting to murder Netshiavha" with the "burial alive for seven days" as an alibi. Lufuno reported in an article entitled Murder Most Strange



Figure 27. Samson Mudzunga posing inside the AEROPLANE DRUM. Shanzha, 1999.



Figure 28. Samson Mudzunga posing inside the AEROPLANE DRUM. Shanzha, 1999.

(September 10th 1999) that Mudzunga would crawl from his grave, unseen, perform the murder and return to 'base', underground, like a latter-day vampire. Shortly afterwards, in court, the candidate observed that Netshiavha was expanding his number of witnesses, now thirteen, including Lufuno Mudzunga and Mudzunga's fourth wife (of the marriage performance) Ntanganedzeni. On this occasion, the candidate approached Netshiavha in an attempt to conduct an interview for the purposes of academic research. Initially he was prepared to cooperate, though when he learnt that she had been present at the wedding ceremony, became aggressive, saying to the candidate that: "you are making me as a fool since you know everything already". The candidate assured him that she wanted to hear his side of the story. Later, outside of the court with several of his "witnesses" surrounding him, Netshiavha pointed at the candidate and said: 'you'd better drop this thing, lady, or you'll end up in a dish'. This was the last conversation between Netshiavha and the candidate.

'THE FIRST MAN TO BE BURIED ALIVE' PERFORMANCE. JULY 29TH -30TH 2000.

The second release from prison led finally to the staging of the burial 'alive' performance on July 29th and 30th 2000. Mudzunga had agreed to send the Aeroplane Drum to the *Hayani/Crossings* exhibitions in Durban, shortly after the performance, and to be there himself to perform a resurrection. Straight after the burial, the candidate transported the drum in a friend's *bakkie*, on the first stage of its journey to Durban, from Shanzha to Louis Trichardt. The 'burial alive' performance itself had left the candidate with many misgivings as to the future of Mudzunga's performances. The attached video (Appendix 6) shows an edited version of the event and a brief extract from the marriage performance.

The wedding performance had a clear programme and agenda. Mudzunga created the

Aeroplane Drum for the purpose and it held a central position as the means of transport for the bride. It also contained Mudzunga's other wives during parts of the performance. The event was documented by at least three video cameras and one television camera. At that stage, however, the cameras were still observing and documenting a process that proceeded uninterrupted by them (the two previous main performances had proceeded in the same vein).

By contrast, the burial performance was enacted – and in large part directed – by the supervisory eye of the camera. When guests and the film crew arrived on the Saturday morning there was a sense of uncertainty from Mudzunga as to the order of events. This was not intended to create a sense of mystery, as had been the case in previous performances. It was clearly his own reliance on the director, Susan Glanville, to give him the cue. During the course of events some “shots” were stopped and repeated, such as the drinking of water at Lake Fundudzi, and the ‘final’ kiss between Mudzunga and his third wife Dorcas. Mudzunga ‘played up’ to the camera, clearly excited by ‘acting his drama’ for the documentary crew. For example, when the candidate suggested, after lunch on the first day of the performance that the performance should continue at Lake Fundudzi in order to be back in time for the ‘burial’, Mudzunga agreed. However, the progress was delayed when the film crew had to fetch more film. As a result, there was insufficient light for filming to take place by the time the group returned from the lake and the burial was postponed till dawn the following day. This was in direct contradiction to Mudzunga's earlier emphatic statement that a man of his age and stature must be buried at dusk.

The performance shifted its order of events which, according to the programme, would comprise the following sequence: ‘At 8 a.m. I, Mudzunga and a white woman shall be drinking thirst-quenching Lake Fundudzi water.’ The *tshigombela* dance group, who would also ‘collect my heritage left by my mother’ and the ritual heritage or *thevhele* which was to

be taken to the 'grave'. The *tshikona* Philiyamavu was to remove the coffin from storage at 11 a.m. Following the programme, the burial would have taken place at precisely 3.33 p.m. following Mudzunga's goodbye kiss from his wife Dorcas at 3 p.m. The unveiling of the tombstone was to be performed by S.S. Mudzunga, Mudzunga's son. As it happened, neither the *tshigombela* nor *tshikona* dancers were present. Mudzunga claimed that the police forbade them to perform. The local police visited Mudzunga on the previous day to ask him to cancel the performance. On the Saturday morning, several local police came to request Mudzunga to take down his hand-painted sign, which denounced local police from Siloam Police Station. The sign also denounced Netshiavha and Lufuno Mudzunga (Fig. 29). Mudzunga had added additional signs, such as *Sukhalifhalale* at his home (Fig. 30). The sign on the roadside pointing up to Mudzunga's home: *Lake Fundudzi: Sukalifhalale* had been there since the performance at Lake Fundudzi in 1996.

The police had been informed on the previous day that Lufuno Mudzunga had attempted to set fire to Mudzunga's home. Mudzunga showed them the charred door of his sitting room. Eventually the police left after about an hour.

The beginning of the event was delayed to conduct interviews and photo-shoots with a team from the Sunday Times, who had to leave after lunch.

Mudzunga charged all 'outside' participants, including the film crew and members of the press, fifteen rands entrance fee (the programme had said five rands). These 'entrance fees' were placed in a slot in the Aeroplane Drum that led to a padlocked box in its interior.

Mudzunga recorded the payments in a ledger. Those present were Susan Glanville and two film crew, a journalist and photographer from the Sunday Times, representatives from the Institute Francaise, Rayda Becker of the Gertrude Posel Gallery, Stephen Hobbs and Kathryn Smith from Johannesburg. Shaka Redmond and Hy Vu, two American Peace Corps volunteers accompanied the candidate from Giyani. Others of Mudzunga's family were his

first wife Tshinakayo and third wife Dorcas, some of their children and a few other family members and neighbours. Mudzunga had indicated previously (2000) that the local community would stay away after having been warned by the local police and Netshiavha to do so. The limited number of paying guests would have prohibited him from paying the dancers to perform.

The candidate had been requested by Mudzunga to dress in white for the 'drinking of water at Fundudzi'. At other times in the planning he had referred to the presence of a German archbishop performing a baptism. This had been written on one of the many publication leaflets, which varied in such details. At one stage the French government were alluded to as 'coming to bury him'. Members of the French Institute and the Alliance Francaise were present because of their involvement with Mudzunga's monograph (Hobbs and Coates: 2001).

The gathering of his mother's ritual heritage involved a long trek to, and around, the local cemetery. Unable to locate his mother's grave, the ritual began at the wrong grave, which was unmarked. Mudzunga proclaimed that the 'grave had been vandalized by his enemies'. Eventually, with cries of excitement a second grave was identified, with a broken headstone displaying the name Mudzunga (Fig.31).

Smith (August 2000:2) observed:

With her help, he located what he thought was the right one, accusing the powers-that-be of desecrating the grave and stealing the headstone.

Hobbs (2001: 69) observed:

After some time, the search party found an unmarked grave, which they took to be Mudzunga's mother. Dust and gravel from the grave was gathered into a small basket, remnants that would later serve as relics in the mausoleum. Quite ironically, the somber tone of the procedure was subverted when one of the younger members of the family happened upon a broken granite headpost bearing the Mudzunga name. Mudzunga failed to acknowledge any of the absurdity of the moment: once he had perceived his error, he simply re-enacted the procedure (this time with the 'correct' tombstone) for the benefit



Figure 29. Samson Mudzungu with his hand-painted sign. The burial performance. Shanzha, 2000.



Figure 30. *SUKHALIFHALALE* painted on the steps at Samson Mudzungu's home.

of the film crew. The camera and sound crew further exacerbated the confusion surrounding the structure of events. Given that this was the one and only time that this event would take place, it was crucial to get the correct shots. Mudzunga's complicity in this task implied a self-consciousness, which blurred the boundaries between autobiographical accuracy on the one hand, and on the other a constructedness to the sequence of events which would tell, perhaps an entirely different story.

Mudzunga had visibly shifted his priorities from his own direction of events, however dependent upon external elements, to direct intervention and interplay with the 'audience' who began to determine the flow of the event.

Following on from the cemetery ritual, Mudzunga carried the basket containing the stones gathered from the grave by Dorcas and himself (Fig.32) back to the house with the procession following. At the house the 'coffin' in the absence of the *tshikhona*, was carried out of its storage space in a passageway behind his 'office' by Mudzunga and his guests (Fig. 33).

After positioning the coffin next to the 'grave' (Fig. 34), it was decided to eat lunch before the journey to Lake Fundudzi. The flood-damaged road was hazardous, the last part covered on foot. The procession observed a brief ceremony with Mudzunga and the candidate sharing a drink of water from the lake. Hobbs (2001: 73) described Mudzunga's mood as becoming 'noticeably more excited as he and Kathy Coates prepared for the illicit baptism ritual at the sacred lake'. Being the source of the Venda people (Mudzunga, 1996) according to local mythology, the belief is perpetuated that if one drinks the water, one will become 'possessed' by the spirits of the lake (where the Venda are believed to return after death) known as *zwidudwane*. Although Mudzunga denied their existence by saying in almost every pamphlet publicizing his performances that: 'There are no *zwidudwane* at Lake Fundudzi', Netshiavha (Musetha, May 18th 2001) supports their existence as part of his ancestral lineage when he says:



Figure 31. Samson Mudzunga's discovers his mother's grave, Shanzha graveyard. 2000.



Figure 32. Samson and Dorcas Mudzunga at Mudzunga's mother's grave, Shanzha, 2000.

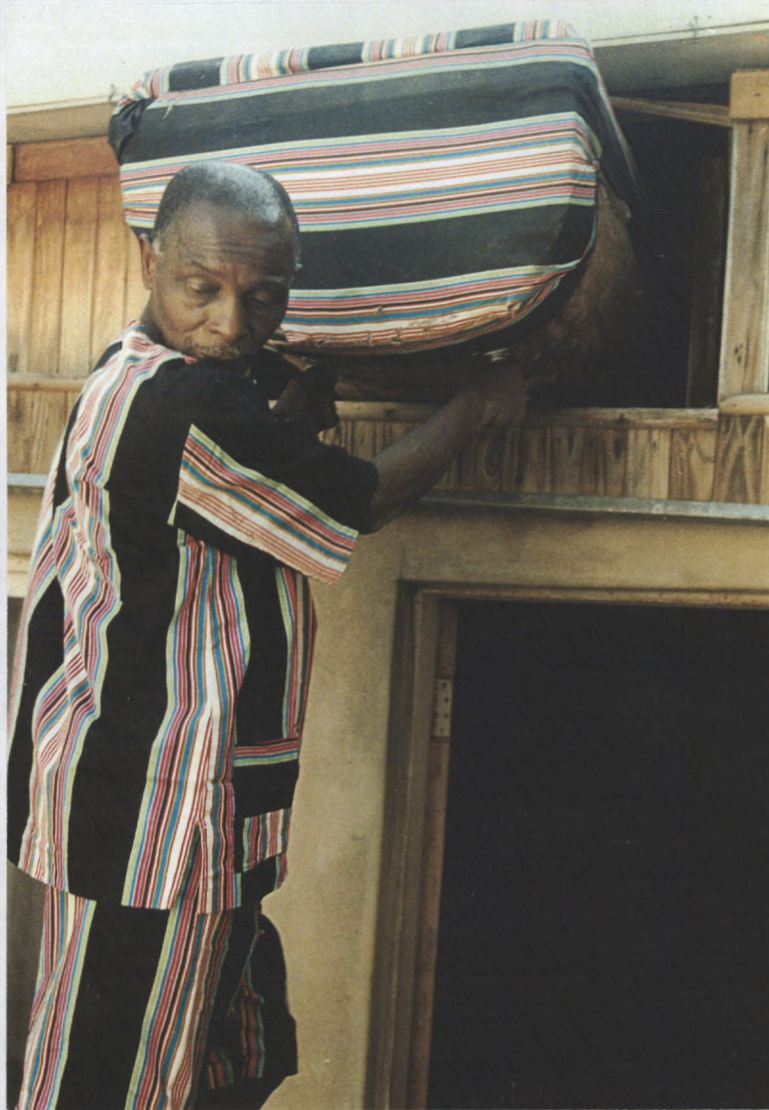


Figure 33. Samson Mudzunga removes the coffin from its storage space above his 'office'.
Shanzha 2000.

The ancestors of Vhavhatsindi (*zwidudwane*) have been staying at the lake Since the 18th century. They (Vhavhatsindi) stayed there with Vhakwevho where they protected and preserved the lake.

Mudzunga (ibid) claims that the small zombie-like creatures were invented by Netshiavha to scare people away.

After the lake event, and the journey back to Shanzha further filming was impossible. The burial was planned for dawn of the following day (30th July 2000). It was some time after dawn that the slightly diminished group returned to the home of Mudzunga and the 'graveside'. The grave had been dug at the site indicated behind the house (Fig. 34).

Mudzunga, still in high spirits, posed in his coffin (Fig. 35), lined with the *nwenda* cloth of his costume. After kissing Dorcas goodbye, the stones from Mudzunga's mother's grave and the accoutrements of her craft of *sangoma* were thrown into the grave before the coffin was lowered. All the while Mudzunga had been praising her and bidding her farewell. Only afterwards Mudzunga climbed into the grave and got into the coffin for all to see. Donald Mudzunga, the first-born son placed a colourful blanket on top of the coffin and bade his father farewell. The grave was then covered with a zinc board, bricks and cement. A few minutes after the grave was completed, whilst Donald performed the eulogy, a scuffling sound was heard from the adjacent garage. After the speech ended, Dorcas Mudzunga opened the garage which contained the Aeroplane Drum. Upon opening the door of the drum, she discovered her 'ressurrected' husband. To bring the event to completion amidst laughter from the spectators and giggles of relief from the young children, Mudzunga and Dorcas were driven off in Hobbs car on their 'honeymoon', returning after a few minutes. The next stage would be to complete the illusion of Mudzunga's burial and 'mock' resurrection by removing him and the Aeroplane Drum (Figs.25.1-25.2) from Shantzha to an urban gallery.



Figure 34. The original 'grave site' at Samson Mudzunga's home, Shanzha.



Figure 35. Samson Mudzunga in his coffin. Shanzha, 2000.

The candidate noticed that the absence of a local audience – who in past performances had been drawn into participatory roles – was a factor in the shift of control to an extra-local group from the urban centre, identifiable not only by skin colour but as co-conspirators in sensationalising the event. The leading characters were Mudzunga, his son Donald and two of Mudzunga's wives: Dorcas and Tshinakaho.

This brings in the third relationship explored in this section, namely that of Mudzunga to his network of Johannesburg contacts (ultimately his audience), and the symbiotic relationships which have evolved in that sphere.

Aside from the complexities of Mudzunga's critical engagement with his local terrain, the history of his relationship with the white Johannesburg milieu is also marked with examples of racial and cultural cross-purposes.

Those involved with Mudzunga at this level tend to express ambivalence regarding the artist, whom they consider to be both charismatic and manipulative.

In a conversation with Rossouw (Telephonic communication: May 2000) his long association with Mudzunga was discussed. Rossouw has worked often with Mudzunga at his Johannesburg studio, but worries that the artist's focus and energy are expended less on producing work for his performances than on chasing money to fund them. With assistance from the candidate and others, Mudzunga had been able to secure some funds from the National Arts Council for his November 2000 performance, when he intended to open his underground museum. Mudzunga tends to make plans to include people in these events without prior negotiations. He had, for example, told Roussouw that he planned to tour the country in December 2000 with a group of dancers, using Rossouw and his *bakkie* to transport them. Rossouw thinks Mudzunga sees him as an organiser of big events, which is not the case, and feels that the artist needs to re-focus and centre himself as an artist before repeating similar events, which start to lose credibility.

While researching in Shanzha for his Masters in Anthropology thesis, Oren Kaplan (1998: 4) was nicknamed "*Mukhuwa-ya Mudzunga*", or "Mudzunga's White". He too had his own personal conflict with Mudzunga. After the Lake Fundudzi performance, Kaplan had driven Mudzunga to Johannesburg and dropped him in town to get transport to his wife's house. Mudzunga, having hosted Kaplan for some months, felt snubbed because Kaplan had not returned the invitation. Shortly afterwards, Kaplan received a letter from Mudzunga in which he withdrew any further support. As Kaplan (1998: 247) describes it:

This moment of self-assertion was phrased in the following 'traditional' manner: 'I [have] had many sleepless nights because at the time I welcomed you into my home, I had not asked permission from my ancestors. My forefathers have now told me, that I made a big mistake in keeping you in this house'.

Mudzunga later accused Kaplan of racism, claiming that it was quite typical of the Jews. He threatened to beat Kaplan and later sent several lawyers letters to him, claiming that 'fines' should be paid (1998: 248).

Kaplan (1998: 246) refers to Mudzunga's attitude to his whiteness:

Vho-Mudzunga meanwhile was aware how I was positioned as a white person in his local context. He would comment that certain prominent persons only spoke to me or treated me in certain ways, because I was a white person. He knew people talked about him because a white man was staying at his home. He sometimes opposed this privileging. At the government offices in Louis Trichardt a man walked in and called me 'sir'. Vho-Mudzunga reprimanded him for giving me a title because of my skin colour. The man turned out to be a chief. Yet Vho-Mudzunga also used my presence to motivate for government support for his performance at the lake. In his characteristic contradictory style Vho-Mudzunga both used access to and resisted my 'whiteness'.

The candidate's own relationship with Mudzunga is a reciprocal one – he has aided her with her research and they have travelled together in Venda, Johannesburg and to Durban, during the first Biennale for the *Hayani/Crossings* exhibition at the NSA gallery in August 2000. Mudzunga stayed there for a week to run a workshop together with Avhashoni Mainganye and the candidate (see Chapter Three).

At the time of the burial, Mudzunga had not yet built the tombstone, constructing it at a later stage, towards the end of 2000. It was first covered with stones (Fig.36.1), and later with the date of the burial painted on it (Fig. 36.2). Mudzunga reveals the tombstone by unveiling it (Fig. 37) for any visitor who comes along. The requisite donation is asked for. The opening of the underground museum had been planned for November 25th 2000. Mudzunga decided on the date and details of the publicity leaflet. Unfortunately, at this stage, he did not consult, and had included the candidate in the programme to conduct the official opening. She was unable to attend. Susan Glanville of the Project Room was also unavailable and it was suggested that Mudzunga move the date. He refused, though towards the time, reversed the decision. However, Glanville had already published a press release inviting the public to Mudzunga's new performance. It included extensive information on accommodation and directions to Shanzha. Glanville persuaded Mudzunga to keep the original date since it was impossible to change the press release. Unfortunately, the timing became a dilemma for Mudzunga. He had applied for funding from the National Arts Council (NAC), which had been approved. Due to an administrative error, the NAC was under the impression that the date of the performance was December 25th 2000. When Mudzunga arrived at the NAC offices two days before the event, and despite attempts to speed up the process, Mudzunga only received the NAC's cheque on the eve of the event, 24th November. Being Friday, Mudzunga realized that all north-bound taxis had left Johannesburg. He boarded the overnight train to Louis Trichardt, which arrived at six thirty a.m. on the Saturday morning. From there he proceeded by taxi, to arrive in Shanzha after eleven a.m. Mudzunga's brother, Wilson, who was in a state of anxiety met him at the gate. He explained that the local press and the *tshikona* and *tshigombela* dancers had just left. It was of great disappointment to Mudzunga that the performance had failed and he tried to re-stage the event in 2001, also without success.

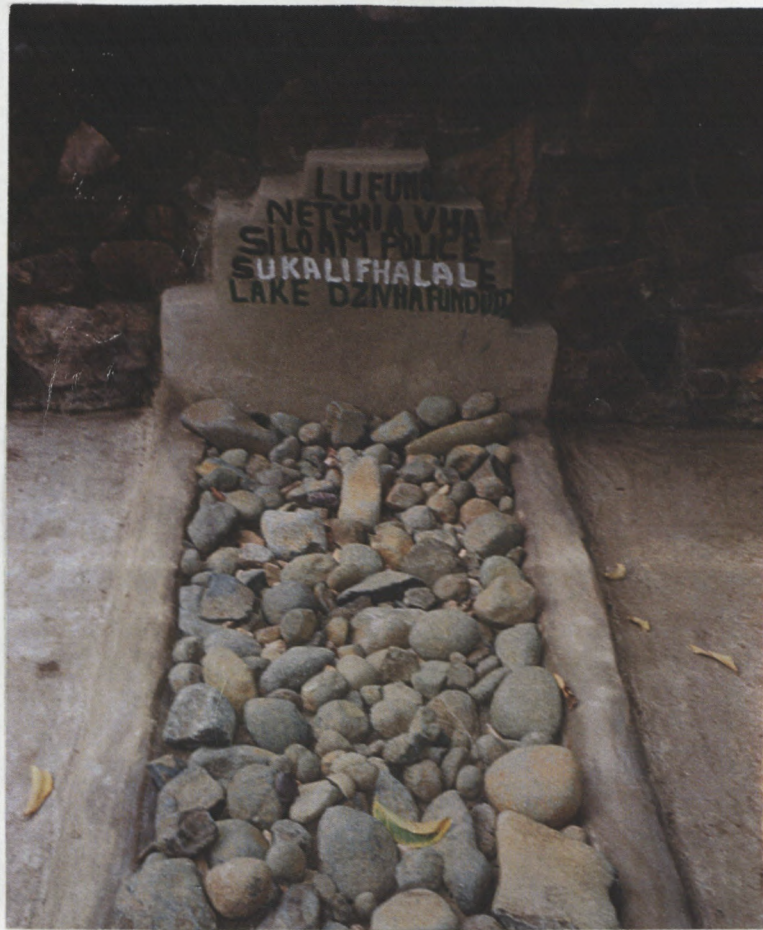


Figure 36.1. Samson Mudzunga. The grave at Shanzha, 2000.

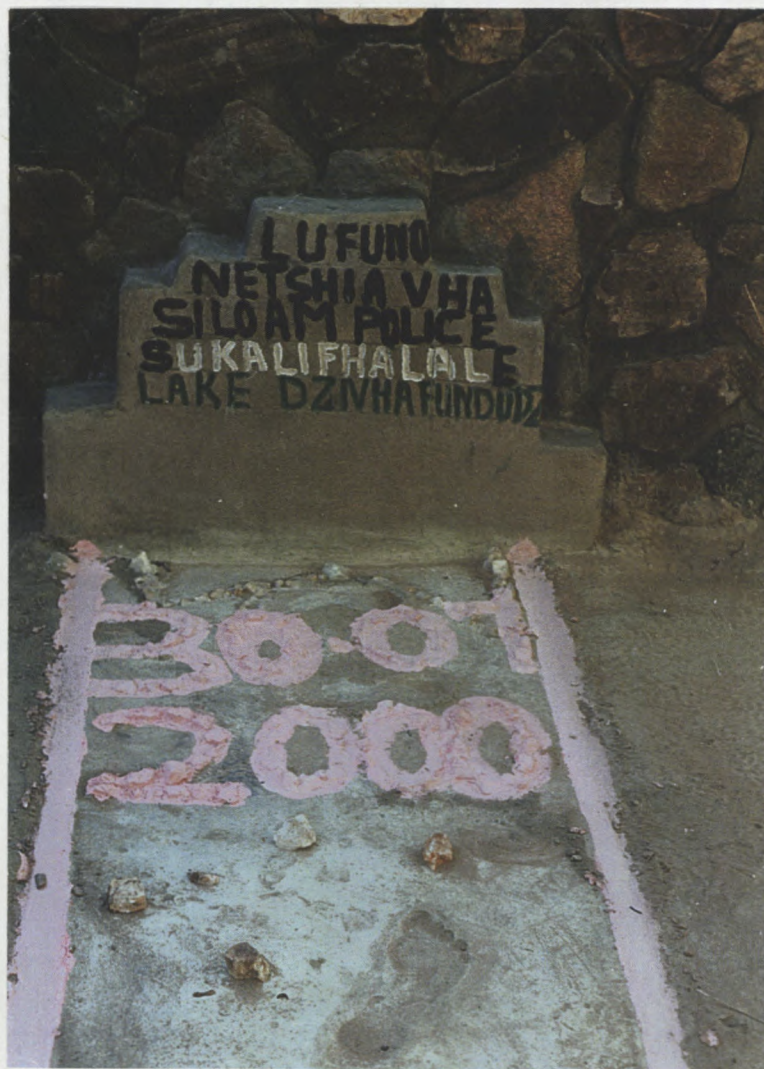


Figure 36.2. Samson Mudzunga. The grave after painting. Shanzha 2001.



Figure 37. Samson Mudzunga. The unveiling of the grave. Shanzha 2001.

None of the Johannesburg supporters were present. The candidate is of the opinion that the consistent changes to plans and the repetitive nature of Mudzunga's performances are partly responsible.

The arrangement of the underground museum was painstakingly executed as an intimate reminder of Mudzunga's deceased mother. One has to crawl through a tunnel, which had connected Mudzunga's grave to the garage to observe the exquisite display of his mother's dresses and other objects. Lit by a single light bulb, the coffin lies on the earth floor, at exactly the spot of the burial. Mudzunga charges visitors to view the museum. He enjoys teasing them about the smell of the 'corpse'.

A new drum entitled Air Venda (2001) (Figs. 38.1-38.2) has replaced the Aeroplane Drum (Fig. 25.1-25.2). Air Venda is large in scale though lacks the power, monumentality and finish of the Aeroplane Drum. The Aeroplane Drum is currently in Soweto, after having been on exhibition twice in Johannesburg. It has not been purchased, despite the fact that Mudzunga has reduced the price from one hundred thousand to thirty thousand rands.

The case between Netshiavha was resolved eventually when Mudzunga was acquitted in 2001. Netshiavha still claims 'guardianship' over the lake, as he claims his family had done since the seventeenth century. Netshiavha expressed (Musetha: May 18th 2001) unhappiness over the way the lake is being treated, especially now that it has been made an international heritage site and was likely to be developed. He said: 'There are just too many hands now' (Musetha: May 18th 2001).

Pointing to the lake (Musetha: May 18th 2001) (Fig.39) Netshiavha said:

Although I lost everything when my house burnt down, I still feel I was doing the right thing by protecting my family and our ancestors who are in that sacred lake. If anything happens in that lake, nobody will feel the consequence except my family.

Mudzunga has had one other performance, in 2001, since his failed attempt at the opening



Figure 38.1. Samson Mudzunga. THE AIR VENDA DRUM 2001. Wood, bitumen, rubber.
Collection of the artist.



Figure 38.2. Samson Mudzunga. THE AIR VENDA DRUM 2001. Wood, bitumen, rubber.
Collection of the artist.



Chief Tondani Ntsandeni Zwontangana Sam Netshiavha (59) the Chief of Tshiavha, the area which is around the sacred lake, is not happy about the interference at Lake Divhafundudzi. His exclusive interview with *Mirror* will appear in next week's edition.

Figure 39. Samuel Netshiavha. Newspaper photograph: The Mirror, Thohoyandou. 2001.

ceremony for the underground museum. The candidate attended the performance with a group of students from Giyani College of Education. The theme was a Baptism in the Red Sea. Mudzunga added red dye to his swimming pool to create the effect.

Of interest to note is that this performance was planned in collaboration with Avhashoni Mainganye. The performance was documented on video and stills camera by Mainganye. The performance included the new Air Venda (Fig.38.1-38.2) drum and the *tshikona* (Fig. 23) and *tshigombela* dancers. None of the Johannesburg 'network' or other media were invited. Mudzunga has maintained his belief in himself as an artist, despite a downward shift of interest in his work shown by the urban artworld.

Mudzunga says of himself:

If I have a dream or an idea, I must do it because no-one else will.
Some of it is Western, some of it Venda and some of it out of my mind
(Sudheim, August 2000).

And at his 60th birthday:

Some people are afraid of dying. There are witches. They are there.
People fear buying cars or building houses, they said they would be
bewitched. Witchcraft is there. If you are afraid of doing your own
thing you will not grow. (Kaplan 1998: 166).

RATSHIMELA SAMSON MUDZUNGA CHRONOLOGY

1934. Samson Ratshimela Mudzunga born in Mulamboni.

1939. Moved to Thonondo. Attended Thonondo primary school, achieving standard 5.

1946. Attended circumcision school at Khakhu village.

1956-9. Employed as a domestic worker/gardener in Johannesburg.

1966 –1980. Employed as a driver at J.C.I., Johannesburg.

1976. Established a family home in Shanzha, Venda.

1980- 1989. Employed by Kohler Limited, Johannesburg.

1988. Solo exhibition at the FUBA gallery, Newtown, Johannesburg, curated by David Koloane.

1989. Dismissed from Kohler.

1989. Returned to Shanzha, in the Dopeni area of Venda, to continue artistic career.

1989. Second solo exhibition, Thupelo Gallery, Newtown, Johannesburg.

1990. Solo exhibition, Zona Gallery, Norwood, Johannesburg.

1994. Sixtieth birthday party, guest speaker, Trent Read, son of Everard Read. Shanzha.

1995. Participated in group exhibition, 'No limits, No Frontiers', Far North Exhibition of the first Johannesburg 'Africus' Biennale, curated by Ruphus Mathibe and Kathy Coates.

1996. Solo Exhibition at the Gallery on the Tyrone, Johannesburg.

1996. June 29th. Funeral Performance: Shanzha, Dopeni Venda.

1996. September 28th. Lake Fundudzi Performance

1997. May 8th. Marriage Performance.

1997. Arrested on charges of arson and damage to property of Headman Samuel Netshiavha.

1999. March. Released from Matatshe Prison, Sibasa, former Venda, after 13 months in prison.

1999. October 9th. Proposed date for the Burial Performance.

1999. October 6th. Bail removed, re-incarcerated after court hearing.

1999. October 8th. Attempt to have bail re-instated in the Supreme Court failed.

2000. Released from prison.

2000. July 29th-30th. Burial Performances enacted at Shanzha and Lake Fundudzi, former Venda.

2000. August 13th. Resurrection Performance at the opening of *Hayani/Crossings* exhibitions, the NSA Gallery, Durban.

2000. August 14th – 19th. Woodcarving workshop conducted with Avhashoni Mainganye at the Technikon Natal, Durban.

2000. December 9th Opening of the underground museum at the burial site, Mudzunga's home, Shanzha, Dopeni, former Venda.

AVHASHONI FREDERICK MAINGANYE (b. 1957-)**A BIOGRAPHY OF DIVERSITY.**

Avhashoni Mainganye was born in 1957 at Phiphidi, a sacred site in former Venda. As early as 1981 Mainganye made decisions to pursue his artistic career outside of his native Venda, where he felt opportunities were limited. Unlike many of his counterparts, Mainganye sought stimulation through interaction with diverse artists, teachers and artistic experiences.

Mainganye enrolled as a student at the renowned Rorke's Drift Art and Craft Centre in Kwa-Zulu-Natal between 1981 and 1982, specialising in the mediums of lino-cut and watercolour.

Mainganye later went on to study art at the Funda Centre in Soweto between 1985 and 1988, whilst simultaneously registering for a Fine Art Degree course through the University of South Africa, which he has not completed.

From the beginning of Mainganye's growth as an artist his vision was to return to Venda. In 1983 he established the vhaVenda Art Foundation. One of its chief objectives was to promote and develop the indigenous art of the vhaVenda. In addition he hoped to mobilise artists to work together in exhibiting and pricing their work in a cooperative manner, as opposed to the haphazard and arbitrary process which had been the norm, and which according to Mainganye undermined the value of the artists' work.

A staunch principle, which has guided Mainganye over the years, is to retain one's work until the right price has been offered, regardless of one's financial need at the time. He recalls that his initial attempts to discuss and negotiate with his fellow artists were a difficult process. Mainganye gave an example of one of his artworks. Speaking passionately about a painting entitled I am the Key, 1985 (Fig. 40), Mainganye expressed his determination to hang onto the work until the right price was offered (March 1998).



Figure 40. Avhashoni Mainganye. I AM THE KEY 1985. Oil on board. The University of Venda.

This painting, originally exhibited at the Venda Sun at a very low price, was sold in 1999 to the University of Venda for a market related price. This was a process which led Mainganye through economically meagre times. His watchword has been:

A sense of pride and the knowledge of the value of the work has been my guide (June 1999).

Largely through Mainganye's persistence, and the initiative of local arts administrator Fiona Nicholson, the Venda Development Corporation (VDC), established the Ditike Arts and Craft Centre. The history of the centre, Mainganye's involvement and the centre's role in the development and marketing of the artist's work is dealt with in more detail in Chapter 1, Section 3.

Mainganye co-curated several art exhibitions in the Venda region between 1983 and 1985 and was a participant in the Thupelo Workshops in 1985, 1986, 1987 and 1990.⁸

A significant breakthrough in Mainganye's career occurred in 1990 during his involvement with the Soweto Action Group, which was initiated by Kay Hassan and the late playwright Matsemela Manaka. Through a cultural exchange programme, Mainganye was invited by the late surrealist painter Theo Gerber to spend four months working in Switzerland and France with Gerber, Luke Ganser and Stefan Kofmehl.

During this time, Mainganye became influenced by the surrealist style of his patron whilst developing his own painting style. An example in oil pastel is Feelings 11, 1993 (Fig. 41).

During this period Mainganye also learnt to carve marble in Italy, which gave rise to experimentation in local stone after his return to Venda. Mainganye stated (Bristowe 1993: 4) that he was aware of Gerber's influence and exorcises this by including figures in his

⁸ The Thupelo workshops were established by the late Bill Ainslie through negotiation with American artist Graham Peacock. The aim of the workshops was to unite artists worldwide by enabling them to participate in weeklong workshops held annually at different international venues. The project also aimed to promote disadvantaged artists who otherwise would not have afforded the opportunity of such an interaction.

AVHASHONI

MAINGANYE

creation

March 13 - March 31, 2000

Avhashoni Mainganye, a native of Venda, South Africa and visiting artist at Coker College, combines his interest in European Surrealism with his love for the figure. "I see my work as visual poetry... I want the viewer to walk the distance with me, to explore the surface of the canvas, to gaze into the depths of this imagined space."

A. Mainganye



Mainganye 25.07.2000
To Kathy Coker

Feelings II, Oil Pastel, 1993

Figure 41. Avhashoni Mainganye. FEELINGS II 1993. Oil pastel. Collection of the artist.

paintings. Mainganye claimed (Bristowe 1993: 4) that this was something Gerber rigorously denied:

It is immensely difficult to control the influence of one's mentors, but one starts, like Mainganye, by being aware of their influence.

However, in an interview with Hazel Friedman (1992), Mainganye held the view that, despite interaction with European artists and intellectual stimulation, the visit did not provide him with the inspiration he sought. He states:

I was disappointed by much of what I saw. Perhaps the only style that had a strong influence on me was Surrealism.

Mainganye (June 1998) later explains this influence as being strongly linked with the vhaVenda traditional belief system, where the dream world has a connection to the ancestors. In Europe, Mainganye (July 1998) was both excited and surprised to find parallels, not only in art forms, but also in mediums of the spiritualist movement. He compared their practices to those of the *sangoma* in South Africa.

During his time spent in Europe, there was a heightening of Mainganye's connectiveness to his native Venda, and it was evident in the themes of his work executed in Europe. Many of these had Venda titles, such as the 1989 work: Mulinda Vvhavha ndi Mulindha Govha (He Who Guards the Mountain Guards the Valley).

Although influenced by Surrealism, Mainganye found a way to synchronise his style with the spirituality of Venda tradition, which places much emphasis on communication through dreams.

When speaking of his own woodcarving style Mainganye's approach to the wood suggests a reverence towards his materials.

Like Noriah (Mabasa), I follow the natural contours of the wood. In a way, the wood itself dictates the forms (Friedman, H. 1992).

In a later interview Mainganye discusses this relationship further. He talks of 'window shopping' in the forests of Venda:

It is not like working from a block of wood. There you have to create something from nothing. The fact that you select a particular piece from the ocean of pieces available in the forest means very often you have brought a sculpture home even before you have put a chisel in the wood. The difficulty with wood is you can destroy a lot if you do not look carefully (Bristowe: 1993).

An example of Mainganye's wood carving is Woman (date not known) (Figure 42).

Of the five woodcarvers explored in this dissertation, Avhashoni Mainganye has had the greatest exposure to educational and cultural influences and travel in his artistic career. Mainganye is not only a woodcarver, but has developed his skills in the fields of stonecarving, metal 'junk' sculpture (Fig.43), printing (Fig. 44.1-2), painting (Fig.45), mural painting (Fig. 46), photography (Fig. 47), performance and poetry.

Mainganye acknowledges that as an artist he is diverse, and could therefore be accused of not having his own essential style.

However, Mainganye feels that a gallery does not have the right to impose on an artist's style as this disturbs the creative process (July 1999). He gives an example of a recent visit to the Johannesburg galleries who have in the past supported his work. His recent body of work (1999-2000) is largely divided into two mediums. The first is watercolour landscapes, inspired by the Matongoni Mountain Studio where he now lives. The second is a series of collages reminiscent of the work of Sam Nhlengetwa, which focus on humorous portrayals of the candidates of the 1999 elections.

The Everard Read Gallery and the Goodman Gallery openly rejected his new work. Mainganye (July 1999) acknowledges the gallery's freedom of choice, but feels that often the 'rural indigenous' artists have a style imposed on them by the urban galleries. This 'African' style should include 'ethnic' or 'exotic' imagery and ideally be produced in materials seen as



Figure 42. Avhashoni Mainganye. WOMAN. Wood. Date and location unknown.



Figure 43. Avhashoni Mainganye. METAL 'JUNK' SCULPTURES 1998 At his home in Muledane.



Fig. 44.1 Avhashoni Mainganye. Untitled print. 1991. Mainganye describes his work to students from Giyani College of Education. Muledane, 1992.



Figure 44.2 Avhashoni Mainganye. HEART IN THE OVEN. Woodblock Print 1982.



Nature Under Threat, Watercolour, 35,5 x 51,5cm

Figure 45. Avhashoni Mainganye. NATURE UNDER THREAT. Watercolour 1998. 35.5 X 51.5cm. Used for invitation to exhibition at the South African Association of Arts, Pretoria. Collection of the artist.



Figure 46. Avhashoni Mainganye and Kathy Coates. MABUNDA MURAL
1998. Sponsored by Joko Tea.



Figure 47. Avhashoni Mainganye. Photograph of Jackson Hlungwani. Date unknown.
Collection Kathy Coates.

more traditional in nature or 'natural'. Examples are wood, clay and lino cut prints, which have become synonymous with black artists. Mainganye (July 1999) says: "we are expected to produce in materials which are 'natural' or 'expressive of the land'".

Mainganye (ibid) claims that he cannot but help feeling trapped in this categorization as a rural artist where he is expected to fit into the stereotype on a permanent basis. This expectation of what Mainganye terms as the 'Johannesburg Art Scene' has led to feelings of disillusionment. Those who had once supported him now reject his work.

Referring to an exhibition at the South African Association of Arts in Pretoria (1998), Mainganye claims he was given an inferior space in which to exhibit. The exhibition was shared by artist Leon Muller who was exhibiting a body of wildlife paintings entitled: Making Life into Art. Mainganye (ibid) claimed that Muller's space took up the greater part of the gallery, whilst his own work was confined to a smaller space.

The fact that Mainganye had been invited by the gallery to exhibit seems to have heightened his feeling which he described as 'being 'put in a can'.

Mainganye has reacted to the feeling of disconnection to the art world in urban centres of South Africa by directing his focus to a major educational project in his native Venda, as well as continuing to explore possibilities abroad in education and as an exhibiting artist.

He has also been involved in community mural painting projects in Giyani in 1998 (Fig. 46) and in Thohoyandou in 2000 and has participated in a woodcarving workshop at Technikon Natal in 2000 as part of the *Hayani/Crossings* exhibitions.

THE MATONGONI MOUNTAIN STUDIO.

Mainganye's current focus is a long-term dream now beginning to materialise: the Matongoni Mountain Studio. Derived from the word 'dongo' meaning 'broken pot', 'Matongoni' is the

name given to a place in central Africa vacated by the vhaVenda after it was destroyed by fire, and thus 'the pots were broken'. A pot is also used locally to symbolize generations of ancestors in sacred sites for ritualistic purposes. One pot symbolizes one ancestor and when broken, communication is disturbed. Poets also use the word to mean 'heaven' or 'shrine'.

Mainganye acquired the piece of land, which is the site of Matongoni in 1987 from Chief NeVondo, who shares many of Mainganye's ideals to develop a local art centre. The site is situated on the Tshanowa Mountain, which forms part of the Soutspansberg in the Northern Province. Situated approximately 10 kilometres from Sibasa, the terrain is rough and heavily wooded with indigenous trees. A small stream borders the property, which, according to local inhabitants, has never run dry. This adds great value to the site. The view of, and from, the mountain is spectacular (Figs.48-50). Mainganye has produced an information postcard from a photograph of one of these views (Fig. 51).

From the outset, it was Mainganye's aim to establish a retreat where local, national and international artists could make art and share creative ideas in a residential setting.

It is intended that the Matongoni Mountain Studio will eventually house a museum with art works from the region and further afield, a library and a resource centre. In addition there will be studios for local students and visiting artists. Mainganye feels that too many artists are selling their work in the cities and overseas, and wishes to build a representative collection of these rapidly disappearing art works and artefacts.

Mainganye also wishes to encourage and nurture the growth of local skills, to encourage job creation and other spin-off activities. These will include catering for, and accommodating, guests in the neighbouring village when artists are in residence.

The chief purpose of the project focuses on Mainganye's desire to find a real solution to the dilemma of the rural artist, who is dependent on the urban market for survival.



Figure 48. View from Matongoni Mountain Studio. 1999.



Figure 49. View from Matongoni Mountain Studio. 1999.

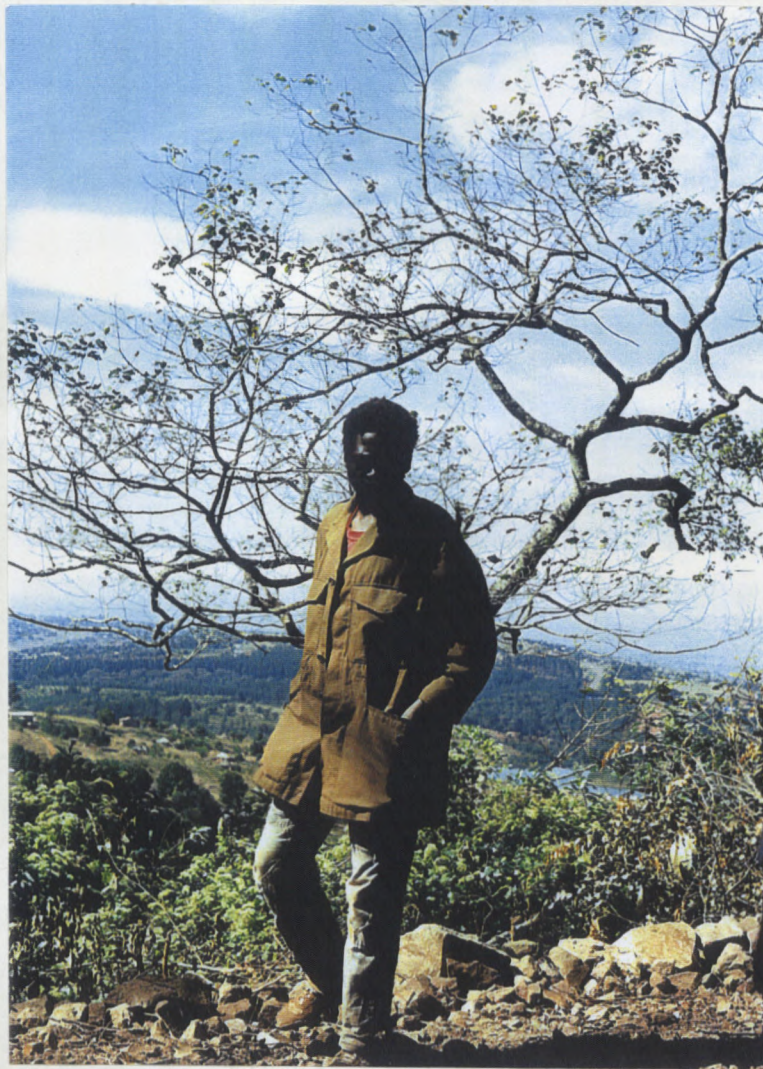


Figure 50. Avhashoni Mainganye at the Matongoni Mountain Studio. 1999.



When approaching from Sibasa: Turn RIGHT at Phiphidi 3-way stop onto dirt road; travel past waterfall, over bridge, and past school on LEFT. At 1,6km the road forks - take the narrow road to the LEFT and continue for another 1,6km. Mantongoni is on the RIGHT, after the "Border Spa".

Figure 51. Avhashoni Mainganye. Postcard with view up to and map of the Matongoni Mountain Studio. 1999.

The initial launch of the project is to take the form of a month long residential artmaking workshop involving international, national and local sculptors which will culminate in an exhibition. The sculptors will be required to donate an artwork, which will either be sold to help support the project, or become part of the Matongoni Museum collection. The artists' expenses will be sponsored by the project.

It is hoped that this will be an annual event which will bring with it exposure to the indigenous skills of the region and boost the image of artists in the Northern Province.

The suggested theme for the first workshop is 'Alternative Materials' for sculptural production, such as recycled materials and paper. Indigenous woodcarving skills will also be shared.

Added to this, Mainganye is in the process of replanting indigenous trees to conserve the landscape with respect to the cycle of planting and cutting of trees for artmaking.

In a funding proposal (1999: 1) for the sculpture workshop (then intended for 10th –23rd September 2000, but since postponed), Mainganye and coordinator Fiona Nicholson motivated for the workshop as follows:

After reaching a high point of popularity between 1984-1989, the "Vha-Venda Art" momentum slacked off with the privatisation of Ditike, a para-statal marketing outlet funded by the former homeland government. Our sculptors now lack the means to market their own work and are extremely demotivated. They need the experience of a workshop environment, where they can exchange ideas with sculptors from other regions and countries, share skills and learn new techniques. We believe that a Workshop will help restore the energy and vitality essential to generate the Revival so desperately needed in our region.

The Matongoni Mountain Studio has been partially funded by the National Arts Council in its first stage of development. The amount of R100.000 received from the National Arts Council constituted one third of the amount requested. An additional, smaller donation from art patron Irene Mennel assisted with the provision of art materials and stationary. Irene

Mennel is the widow of Clive Menell, who had supported Mainganye for many years by collecting his work until his death in 2000.

The funds however have not been sufficient to fund the workshop and have gone into developing the site. Although construction of basic studios and accommodation for Mainganye began in early 2000, the process has been slow. This has been partly as a result of the isolation of the site and weather conditions. The floods of 2000 caused severe landslides in the region. But, according to Nicholson (December 2000), lack of progress is due to Mainganye's repeated absence from the mountain site to take on other projects.

Nicholson, who has a long relationship with the Venda artists through her establishment of the Ditike Arts and Craft Centre, has reservations when assessing the future of Matongoni. Nicholson feels that, whilst recognizing the diverse interests of Mainganye as an artist, this is the time to focus on the project and not to divert to other, more periphery pursuits. Mainganye has already postponed the international sculpture workshop twice to accept other invitations related to his artistic career, such as the community murals and the woodcarving workshop included in the *Hayani/ Crossings* exhibitions.

In addition, Mainganye, through an invitation from African-American academic Dr. Ronald Carter, taught at the Coker College in South Carolina in the United States in the first semester of 2000. He is preparing to exhibit in Belgium in July 2001.

While at Coker College it was Mainganye's aim to continue his fund-raising drive in the United States. He found that limited access to people outside of the institution prevented him from making much headway.

Mainganye had the opportunity to exhibit his own work, a collection of prints, paintings and collages, at the end of his stay in the U.S.A. from March 13th – March 31st, at the Cecilia Coker Bell Gallery on the Coker College Campus (Fig.52).

Mainganye is one of South Africa's leading artists.
His work commonly deals with socio-realist themes, much of it
influenced by his youth in South Africa's former apartheid regime.



Avhashoni Mainganye poses with examples of his paintings.

Painter, sculptor exhibits his boldest, brightest works

By LAURA EDWARDS

Staff Writer

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HARTSVILLE — Some things you just have to see in person.

Avhashoni Mainganye's paintings are one of those things. Painted with bright, bold strokes, the paintings comment on life, religion, nature and poetry. With their multi-layered images, one could stare at them for hours.

Fortunately, people in the Pee Dee now have a chance to do just that.

From March 13-31 Mainganye will exhibit a selection of his works in Coker College's Cecelia Coker Bell Gallery. This will be the first time Mainganye has shown anywhere in the U.S.

A painter, sculptor and graphic artist, Mainganye is one of South Africa's leading artists. His work commonly deals with socio-realist themes, much of it influenced by his youth in South Africa's former apartheid regime.

Although he has had limited exposure in the U.S. and no formal gallery showings until now, Mainganye has exhibited in Canada, Europe, South Africa, Taiwan and Chile and has received wide acclaim.

Born in 1960 in Venda, South Africa, Mainganye studied art at the Rorkes Drift Art Centre and the University of South Africa, where he also studied photography and the performing arts.

In 1990 he moved to France to take lessons



from the late surrealist Theo Gerber. Mainganye is now active in the South African arts community and is working to preserve traditional art forms and nurture new artists.

Mainganye has been at Coker since early February, teaching in the college's Evening and Extended Studies Program.

An opening reception will be offered to the general public to meet the artist on Monday, March 13 from 7-8 p.m. at the Cecelia Coker Bell Gallery.

The Cecelia Coker Bell Gallery is located in the Gladys C. Fort Art Building on campus at Coker College. Gallery hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Admission is free.

Figure 52. Exhibition review. The Coker Bell Gallery. Hartsville, South Carolina 2000. Avhashoni Mainganye with *THE VOICE OF THE MASTER*. 1994. Acrylic and oil on canvas. Painted in France and Switzerland.

In a news item in the local Messenger newspaper (date unknown), Mainganye is described as one of South Africa's leading artists, active in the South African arts community and working to preserve traditional art forms and nurture new artists.

Reviewing the same exhibition, Edwards (2000) describes Mainganye as an artist whose work commonly deals with socio-realist themes, much of it influenced by his youth in South Africa's former apartheid regime. Mainganye's vision is as an artist whose priorities make a contribution to the rural community from where he originated.

Mainganye feels the need to keep his profile as an artist as strong as possible in the community, in the urban market and in the international art world. He feels that this will ultimately add to the credibility of the Matongoni Mountain Studio, and help access fund-raising possibilities.

Whilst negotiations to start building on the mountain site were in the process of being initiated in 1998, Mainganye moved onto the site, residing in a tent and keeping his art materials in a second tent (Fig. 53). Much of that year was spent working on preparing the site by leveling certain areas (Fig. 54) and clearing a path, which winds up the mountain. This path intersperses with terraces leveled to accommodate the various facilities intended for the studio.

Mainganye started his first arts education programme, initially with six young people local to the area. The programme was conducted in the open air, on the first levelled space furnished with a makeshift bench (Fig. 55). The art programme was designed to include drawing, painting, printing, collage and other mixed media and sculpture (Fig. 56 -58). Mainganye produces and exhibits his own work at the site (Figs. 59-60).

A fee is payable for attending the classes, though Mainganye has waived this in cases of financial hardship. The student would then be expected to make a contribution of work on the site in lieu of fees.



Figure 53. Avhashoni Mainganye's 'temporary residence'. Matongoni Mountain Studio. 1999.



Figure 54. Avhashoni Mainganye describes the process of making paths. Matongoni Mountain Studio. 1999.



Figure 55. Avhashoni Mainganye's outside studio. Matongoni Mountain Studio. 1999.



Figure 56. Student work. Woodcarvings in progress. Matongoni Mountain Studio. 1999.



Figure 57. Student at work. Matongoni Mountain Studio. 2000



Figure 58. Student woodcarving. Matongoni Mountain Studio. 2000



Figure 59. Avhashoni Mainganye. Woodcarving in progress. Matongoni Mountain Studio.
1999.



Figure 60. Avhashoni Mainganye. Painting and metal sculpture. Matongoni Mountain Studio. 2000

Mainganye sees this aspect of the project evolving into a more formalized art education facility. Although negotiations have been initiated since 1998 with the candidate (as head of the art department at the Giyani College of Education) to assist in developing a more formal programme, until now this has not yet become a reality. The purpose of these links was to assist Mainganye in developing a more formal work programme relevant to the learners, to work out evaluation criteria and to establish links with the University of the Witwatersrand as a means of exploring possibilities of accrediting the students. Giyani College of Education had offered the Higher Diploma in Education, jointly with the University of the Witwatersrand since its inception in 1989, until the incorporation of the College into the University of Venda in January 2001.

The external examiner for the Giyani College of Education art department, David Andrew, has pledged full support to the education programme of the Matongoni Mountain Studio. Penny Siopis at the University of the Witwatersrand has suggested that an exchange programme with some of her students and the Matongoni students could be developed.

The candidate had suggested, during the initial period of this discussion with Mainganye, that a system of exchanging workshops between the Giyani campus and the Matongoni Mountain Studio would be beneficial. Following another request from Fiona Nicholson (1999) to assist with drawing up an evaluation document, Mainganye was invited to participate in the end of year evaluation process with David Andrew (1999) to gain some insight into basic evaluation. Mainganye was unable to attend.

The candidate proposed a three-way relationship with the Matongoni Mountain Studio, the Giyani College of Education and the University of the Witwatersrand. This is no longer an option since the University of Venda is phasing out the art department on the Giyani Campus, and does not have one on its Thohoyandou Campus.

The candidate last visited the mountain site in March 2001. The construction process was behind schedule (Fig. 61) and Mainganye explained that if he is absent then any problems relating to the process tend to be compounded and there is a tendency to postpone construction until his return. For example, prior to traveling to Durban to the *Hayani/Crossings* exhibitions and workshop, Mainganye had to arrange for building materials to be delivered, as he feared that a consequence of his absence would be a further delay in building.

As the main driver of the project, Mainganye is aware of the fragmentation of the building schedules when he takes long leaves of absence, though he is strong in his belief that the project will eventually come into being.

The teaching programme seems to also be declining. In an interview (Mokoena, 2000) Mainganye explained that he is now only able to conduct classes on weekends.

According to Mainganye (Mokoena, 2000) only one student enrolled in 1999. He said:

Although a bit disillusioned I didn't see any reason to turn the poor student away. The classes went on for the whole year.

The candidate supports the notion that Mainganye needs to take up opportunities, which will benefit his artistic career. However she is also aware that the impetus associated with the first thrust to get the Matongoni Mountain Studio off the ground is rapidly ebbing. In addition, funds not utilised in the delayed building process have become devalued.

The candidate is unable to set any valid future plans to assist with the educational programme. Any initial commitment from the School of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand would need to be renewed as they are in the throws of restructuring. Mainganye has not made any further requests for assistance from the candidate since the earlier discussions.



Figure 61. Building under construction. Matongoni Mountain Studio. 2001

Mainganye has been defined by his diversity as an artist. To describe him as a 'woodcarver' is thus not entirely accurate.

This aspect of Mainganye's personality has created obstructions to making headway, in particular with relation to the Matongoni Mountain Studio. With these issues at stake, the candidate feels that Mainganye needs to reassess the aims and objectives of the Matongoni Mountain Studio, and take the process in smaller stages, which would be more easily digested by the small team administering the project. This would enable Mainganye to continue his personal artistic career without disabling the project's progress.

**NORIAH MABASA (b. 1938).
A BIOGRAPHY OF SUSTENANCE**

In the context of the Northern Province, Noriah Mabasa stands out as a woman in a predominantly male domain of woodcarving. Her entry into this profession initiated accusations of witchcraft, resulting in a certain amount of ostracization.

As a woman, Mabasa initially started her career as a producer of functional clay objects such as pots and beer vessels.

Producing utilitarian objects from clay, fabric weaving, embroidery and the decoration of houses are defined as women's work. This gender separation is described by Matsemela Manaka (1987: 10), when he says:

African women artists, like other traditional artists, produce utilitarian art. Even though some of them produce ornamental art, which is for decorative purposes, their creative impulse is often sensitised by the utilitarian value of the artwork. Some people's understanding of what art is has led to the claim that there are few African women in art. Their definition of art excludes traditional art.

After listing the various art forms mentioned above, Manaka (1987: 10), maintains that:

...there are some people who still look at these artworks as curios or "art for tourists". They would claim by implication that a work of art ceases to be art if the artist is not identified as an individual but seen through the collective name of a group. Whether the women artist (sic) remains anonymous or not that is not the question. The issue is what criterion is used to qualify an object as art or craft or curio.

After grappling with defining the categories of 'traditional', 'utilitarian' (as craft) and 'Fine Art', Manaka (1987: 10) includes a reference to Noriah Mabasa's work, without defining her in either category:

Noriah Mabasa, well known for her figurines, has a strong traditional background, and is inspired by the gods to do her work. In her late thirties she was regarded as the only black female wood carver in Africa. The high demand for her painted sculptures led her to the mass production of painted clay sculptures, depicting traditional and modern lifestyle of the people in Venda, in the northern Transvaal.

Although referring to her popularity as a producer of painted claywork, Manaka makes no reference to the stylistic attributes of her woodcarving. Mabasa (February 1998) made her first attempts at woodcarving during the late nineteen seventies and early nineteen eighties, though when asked for specific dates, Mabasa cannot clearly remember.

Avhashoni Mainganye (May 1998) said that he had helped Mabasa to learn to carve, following an exhibition at the Venda Sun, Thohoyandou (1983) when Mabasa had had little success in the sale of her work. Mainganye lent her some carving tools and offered to teach her. Woodcarver Meshak Raphalalani (b. 1950-) (February 1995) also claims that he and the late woodcarver Nelson Mukhuba (1925-1987) were influential in guiding Mabasa in her woodcarving career. In the majority of earlier literary references to her work, Mabasa's clay images are the focus of discussion. Gavin Younge (1987: 38-40), for example, makes no reference to Mabasa's woodcarving. During an interview with Mabasa (September 1992), she related her entry into the profession of making clay objects, and its transition into the woodcarving discipline. She had been experiencing recurring dreams where her late father was trying to persuade her to make peace with her sister. There existed a long-term animosity between the two sisters. Mabasa ignored her father's advice, and shortly afterwards became paralysed in both legs. After consultation with a *sangoma* (traditional healer), she was advised to begin making clay dolls and refrain from cutting her hair. After following this advice, Mabasa consequently regained the use of her legs and continued to make clay dolls.

Later on, continues Mabasa:

I had a dream about the old woman again. She told me in the dream that I should go to the river and fetch a piece of wood, take it home and carve it. The next day, when I awoke, I went down to the Levubu River and I found that piece of wood. I immediately started to carve it into a crocodile.

Mabasa explained to the candidate (ibid) that the old woman became a frequent visitor in her dreams and, although she did not know her, saw her as a spirit guide from her ancestors.

To reconcile with her Christian beliefs, Mabasa also sees the old woman as an angel or a messenger from God.

The reason for this is explained thus:

God has many ways by which he appears to people. God has seen my poverty and has made a way for me to live (Amato, H. 1997: 26-27).

Amato refers to the significance of the fact that Mabasa, whilst unaware of the gender implications on a theoretical level, communicates with a female 'messenger', rather than the traditional male God of Christianity.

In another version of the story the event is described slightly differently:

As early as 1965, Noriah had a visitation from her late grandmother, in a dream. In the dream, her grandmother urged her to mould figurines in clay. There was no reason for this. Noriah ignored the instruction. The dream persisted and her continuous denial of it led her to becoming sick. Her experience is not an isolated one but a common experience in a society whose traditions are deeply rooted in the ancestral cult. Dreams are one of several ways in which the spirits of the dead reveal themselves to the living. Mabasa's stubbornness led to a turbulent dream where one of her late parents hit her with a stick. Noriah woke up the next morning feeling ill. That illness was the second way in which the dead expressed themselves (Mabaso, T. 1993).

In yet another version of this story, the first dream occurred when she was still living in Soweto, where she was sent at the age of thirteen to look after her brother's blind wife.

Mabasa claims that she was miraculously guided by a series of ancestral dreams to become the art phenomenon that she is today.

'The first dream occurred while I was in Soweto,' says Noriah. 'In the dream my late father instructed me to bring him a calabash of water to the graveyard. Naturally this confused me- but the dream kept on coming back until it was becoming a vivid nightmare. Eventually, I plucked up the courage to tell my brother about the dream. He said I should do exactly as I had been instructed so the next morning I followed a morning star on my way to the cemetery' (Nawa, 1991: 89.).

The nightmare subsided and some years later after having married and relocated to Venda, another event occurred which led to a powerfully religious experience:

'One night I was busy reading by candlelight when I suddenly saw, like a mirage, a dog lying in front of me, gazing at the book. I was afraid of the dog, so I took it outside then carried on reading. There was a deafening thud on the thatched roof then a huge fireball roared into the room through the thatch, circled around where the dog had been and went out at the same place it had entered. Strangely enough, nothing was burned but it was all too much for me, and I fainted'.

According to Noriah it was then that she heard herself bargaining with God to spare her life. When Noriah came around she was paralysed, and remained so for about three years despite a number of consultations with sangomas and prophets. Her condition drove her husband and her apart. 'His sisters told him weird things about me', says Noriah, 'so we eventually went our different ways' (Nawa, 1991:19).

In the 1950's, Mabasa had lived and worked as a domestic worker in White City in Soweto.

After her marriage, she returned to Vuwani in Venda. Mabasa had already separated from her husband when he was murdered in Alexandra Township.

MABASA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH HER DOMESTIC ENVIRONMENT

Mabasa draws a lot of inspiration from her working environment which is also her home, in Tshino village in the Vuwani district of Venda. The architectural space and surrounding gardens of her homestead reflect her approach and relationship to her domestic environment and her increasing prowess as an artist.

Mabasa lives in her house with her son, daughter and grandchildren. Although Mabasa had attempted to apprentice her son, Edward, to train him as a carver, she felt that he lacked the skills (September 1992) to become an artist. Her daughter Joyce, who currently work at the Ditike Arts and Craft Centre (see Chapter One, Section Three on Ditike) began to produce small clay figures, under the tutelage of her mother, and is beginning to make a steady income from them.

When asked whether she prefers to carve or to tend her garden, Mabasa says that she loves them equally since gardening was her late father's profession (May 1998). The garden

surrounding her homestead is well tended and reflects the lush and verdant terrain of the region, which borders the Soutspansberg Mountains.

Orchards of guava, *naartjie* and mango trees border the property, whilst spinach, *morogo* and *mealies* flank the path from the main gate to the lapa entrance. The L-shaped rectangular house was built in later years when Mabasa's successes with art dealers gave her a degree of financial security. The rectangular "western" shape of the house is a status symbol of increased wealth. Adjacent to the house is a more traditional, painted rondavel, which is used to display artwork and receive visitors (Fig.62). Other store-rooms are at the rear of the house and near to the entrance gate. These house clay figures and *blompots* (Mabasa favours the Afrikaans version).

At the rear of the homestead flows the Levubu River. Through the rear gate, on a levelled piece of ground is the open pit for firing Mabasa's clay sculpture and pots (Fig. 63).

Other larger clay figures (Fig. 64-5) are stored outside, adjacent to the walls at the rear of the house. Because of the low heat used in the firing process many pieces have begun to deteriorate and sit or lie amongst the foliage in varying degrees of disrepair (Figs.66-7).

The exquisitely decorated lapa walls, with an entrance flanked by two life-size female figures modelled in painted, unfired clay, are replaced every few years. They are unable to resist the weather conditions, which fluctuate between severe heat and drought, and more recently (2000-1), heavy rains and floods.

Gavin Younge (1988:38), describes the importance of the courtyard space, relating specifically to Mabasa's homestead:

The social organisation of this village is given visual expression in the intricate lacings of hedges and low lapa walls which mark off private and public space. In Noriah Mabasa's homestead the lapa walls are embellished with bas-relief sculpture and the entrance is flanked by male and female figures modelled in unfired clay. These figures do not fulfil a purely decorative function. They face inwards and give symbolic expression to the roles that courtyards, as social units of space, play in regulating social intercourse and maintaining social equilibrium.



Figure 62. Noriah Mabasa at home. Vuwani. 1996.

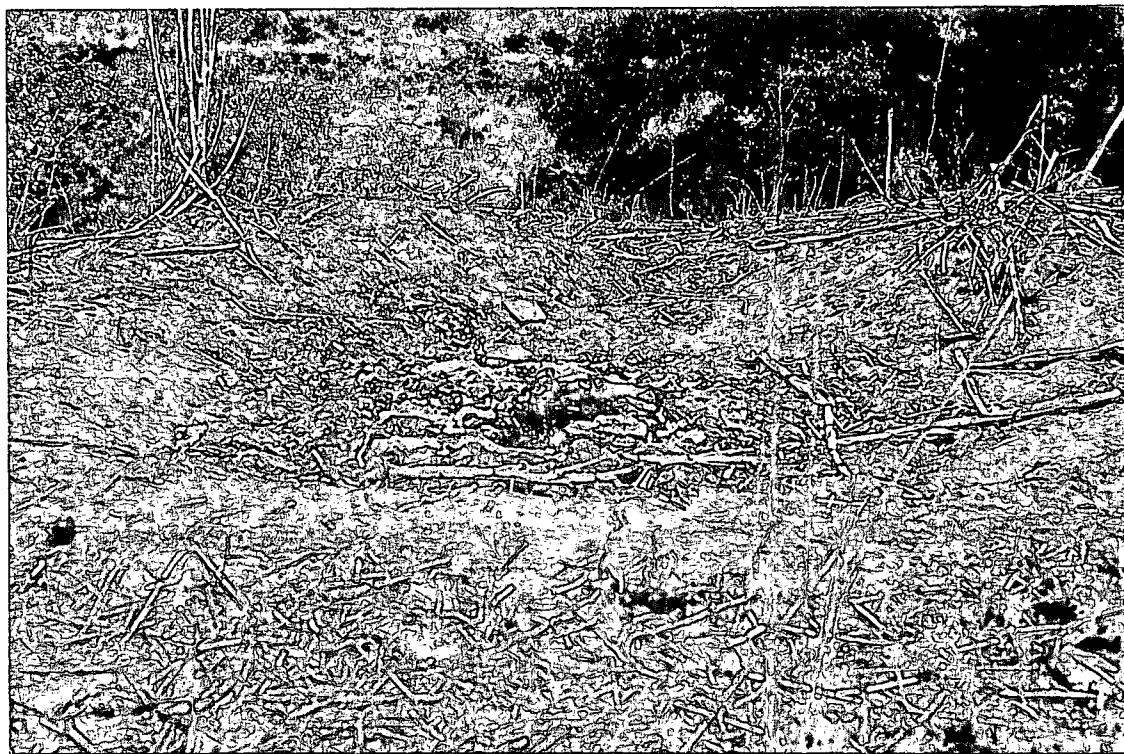


Figure 63. Noriah Mabasa. Pit for firing clay sculpture. Vuwani.



Figure 64. Noriah Mabasa. Clay figures. 1999. Vuwani



Figure 65. Noriah Mabasa. Clay figure 'BLOMPOT'. 1999 Vuwani.



Figure 66. Noriah Mabasa. Broken Clay figures. 1999 Vuwani.



Figure 67. Noriah Mabasa. Broken Clay figures. 1999 Vuwani.

The two figures of which Younge speaks are the first of three arrangements flanking the entrance to the homestead produced by Mabasa between 1989 and 2000.

The first two installations (1989 and 1993) represented a male and female figure (Figs. 68-69). In both cases, the woman is dressed in the short skirt (*shedu*) worn by young unmarried girls, and adorned with wire bracelets and anklets (*lukunda*) whilst the male figure is dressed in western clothing. The first male figure is of an adult male, dressed in a suit, tie and a hat, ready to leave for the city, whilst the second depicts a young herd boy in shirt and shorts (Fig. 70). The candidate recalls that the right arm of the herdboys deteriorated and was provided with a crudely fashioned wooden one, which added both humour and pathos to his presence.

The third duo to adorn the entrance are two women (1999-2000) (Figs. 71.1; 71.2; 71.3) seen here unpainted, except for the vibrant red oxide used for some other details, such as the lower edge of the lapa wall and the incongruous protruding buttocks adjacent to the left figure (Fig. 72-73).

Other images on the walls included a dog climbing over the wall, seen on both sides, a portrait of Mabasa's own pet and eyes on the upper edge. The figures were later painted (Figs. 74.1-74.3), and in the candidate's opinion lost the fresh, earthy quality of the material though the treatment serves to prolong the longevity of the figures.

A water feature installed in the past two years (1998), surrounded by a newly planted garden, are interspersed with Mabasa's headless, full-breasted, female *blom* pots and other figures.

CLAY PRODUCTION

As discussed in the previous chapter (see Goodman Gallery) the **Parade** exhibition was a highly successful installation of works, which also earned some criticism.



Figure 68. Noriah Mabasa. Figures flanking lapa walls. 1989.



Figure 69. Noriah Mabasa. Figures flanking lapa walls. 1993. Vuwani.



Figure 70. Noriah Mabasa. Herdboy, lapa walls. 1993. Vuwani.



Figure 71.1. Noriah Mabasa. Figure flanking lapa walls. 2000 Vuwani.



Figure 71.2. Noriah Mabasa. Figure flanking lapa walls. 2000 Vuwani.



Figure 71.3. Noriah Mabasa. Figures flanking lapa walls. 2000 Vuwani.



Figure 72. Noriah Mabasa. Buttocks adorning lapa walls. 2000 Vuwani.



Figure 73. Noriah Mabasa. Details adorning lapa walls. 2000 Vuwani.



Figure 74.1. Noriah Mabasa. Figures after painting, lapa walls. 2000 Vuwani.



Figure 74.2. Noriah Mabasa. Figures after painting, lapa walls. 2000 Vuwani.



Figure 74.3. Noriah Mabasa. Figures after painting, lapa walls. 2000 Vuwani.

As well as being a producer of functional clay pots, which have a strong decorative style distinctive to Mabasa, she is a prolific clay sculptor, producing works which reflect the domestic life of women in particular. Earlier clay works focus on more socio-political themes: e.g. Mpho Mphonyane (Fig.75) (the Siamese Twins) (1989), which was influenced by the media when Siamese twins were born in 1986; The Child Spilling Food (1993) (Fig.76), precautions mothers and children of dangers at home; and her now famous Venda Policemen exhibited on the **Parade** exhibition at the Goodman Gallery in 1986 (Fig. 4). When asked why she produced the policemen, she said: 'they are the protectors of the white people' (Younge 1988: 39).

These themes were replicated, with no adherence to the 'western' high art uniqueness attributed to an artwork. This worked well for Givon, whose **Parade** exhibition was powerful in its repetitive use of figures. Critics' responses fluctuated between political and humourous interpretations, but overall it was Givon's intervention which stole the show, or came under criticism:

This array of soldiers, policemen and functionaries is wholly delightful. They look simple, but study them closely and note the sly individualities of character of their painted faces. You may never view the administration of Venda with quite the same esteem again (Coulson, 1986).

and... Consider Mabasa's 1986 exhibition at the Goodman Gallery. Goodman saw the potential for the individual clay figures as a group which together could manifest a strong socio-political statement. The result was a parade ground of pristine policemen led by a clay-footed P.W. Botha. A political statement certainly, but one emanating from the insights of the choreographer, and not the creator (Dell 1989 :50).

and.... In the same way that a photograph of an armed police vehicle in a protest poster may achieve a liberatory as opposed to a placatory effect, so too her ubiquitous policemen have made their way into the homes of people who actively oppose apartheid (Younge, 1988 :40).



Figure 75. Noriah Mabasa. MPHO MPHONYANE (THE SIAMESE TWINS) 1989
Painted clay. Ht. 39cm. Base 40 x 22 cm. Collection of Kathy Coates.



Figure 76. Noriah Mabasa. CHILD SPILLING FOOD. 1999. Painted clay. Location unknown.

Mabasa has produced a few relief works on a two dimensional format. The Ages of Women (Fig.77) explores the phases from childhood to old age, including initiation rituals. She has produced a few colour drawings in pastel.

Mabasa was commissioned to produce several public sculptures based on the clay modelling process. She mixes clay with cement and grass for larger exterior works. Examples of these are figures depicting Venda dignitaries in Mphephu's Cabinet (Fig.78) (c.1983) at the Venda Showground in Thohoyandou and more recently (c.1998) a commission for a larger monument depicting *ngoma lungundu* (the sacred drum) (Fig. 79.1-79.2) outside the Post Office in Thohoyandou. There were technical problems with the process and materials, which caused the head of one of the figures to break off. Mainganye (August 2000) feels that the method employed by Mabasa to give structural support to larger works is not adequate and needs some type of armature. His feelings were that, if Mabasa had stronger technical skills, she would have been accepted as the commissioned artist to build the women's monument at the Union Buildings, Pretoria. Mainganye stated in this discussion (ibid) that he was prepared to advise her, as he had in the past.

THE WOMEN'S MONUMENT: The Union Buildings, Pretoria.

Mabasa informed the candidate, on a visit in 1998 that she had been asked to build the Women's Monument, at the Union Buildings in Pretoria. Mabasa explained that she and her daughter Joyce had been flown to Pretoria to see the place and discuss the matter. Krishna Ranchod (Telephonic communication: 2000) a member of the Northern Province Heritage Committee verified Mabasa's commission to build the Women's Monument. However, upon later inquiry from Mabasa, she had not been informed of the outcome of her visit to the Union Buildings.



Figure 77. Noriah Mabasa. THE AGES OF WOMEN. 1998. Painted clay relief on masonite.



Figure 78. Mphephu's Cabinet Noriah Mabasa.. 1983. Painted clay. Thohoyandou showgrounds.



Figure 79.1 Noriah Mabasa. *NGOMALUNGUNDU*. 1998. Cement and grass. Mvusundzo Centre, Thohoyandou.



Figure 79.2 Noriah Mabasa. *NGOMALUNGUNDU*. 1998. Cement and grass. Mvusundzo Centre, Thohoyandou.

It was later announced that the Womens Monument was to be erected by artist Wilma Cruise and Architect Marcus Holmes (Smith 2000:2). Criticism was levelled at the Department of Arts and Culture, Science and Technology (DACST) around their lack of 'enablement of disadvantaged artists', as mentioned in the competition brief. Rayda Becker who had been an advisor for the project accused DACST of not showing enough enthusiasm in encouraging new emerging talent (Smith 2000: 2). DACST had held workshops to encourage and train historically disadvantaged artists to put together professional proposals, and the competition had been open to all.

Mabasa accepted that this is the way that things happen. When the candidate queried this decision with Krishna Ranchod of the Northern Province Heritage Committee (2000) he said that he had not been informed of the change in the decision to commission Mabasa despite the fact that she resides in the Northern Province.

MABASA'S SHIFT TO THE WOODCARVING MEDIUM.

An important stylistic shift in Mabasa's woodcarving developed around the late nineteen eighties, in the form of a circular style of carving. Mabasa began to carve intricate narrative works around the bole of the tree after hollowing out the centre.

These pieces vary in size and format, depending on the tree. Most are large in scale, and in some cases multi-directional, in contrast to her earlier works of predominantly vertical, repetitive clay figures. She continues, however to produce clay works, alternating when the mood takes her. Mabasa (February 1995) cannot be certain why she developed this style, though maintains that her dreams inspire her work.

An early example of this style is *Inkatha* (circa 1992) (Fig.80.1-80.3) exhibited on the *Hayani/Crossings* exhibitions. It is a contained sculpture of a medium scale, slightly higher



Figure 80.1 Noriah Mabasa . *INKATHA*. 1992. Wood. At the *Hayani/Crossings* exhibition Walkabout, August 2000. Collection South African Broadcasting Corporation.



Figure 80.2-3. Noriah Mabasa. *INKATHA*. (Details) 1992. Wood. Collection South African Broadcasting Corporation.

than an average person. The carving was inspired by radio, television and media reportage on the violence in Natal during the pre-election period.

Other works which are thematically and stylistically connected by the narrative theme based on traditional, historical or news events are Carnage II (1988) (Fig.11); The Natal Flood Disaster; The Flood (Fig. 3); The Bushman and Union Buildings (2000- 1) (Figs.81.1-81.3).

As with her clay works, themes related to women are recurrent in Mabasa's woodcarvings.

Such woodcarvings on a vertical format portray stories of The Travelling Mother (Fig.82.1-82.2); Suffering (1996); (Fig.83) and The Call (Fig 84). Suffering, which was exhibited on the Dutch exhibition, <<Rewind>> Fast Forward. Za depicts an old woman who has had to leave home, due to domestic conflict with her new daughter-in-law. According to Mabasa (June 1999), it is Venda tradition, when a young couple come to live in the house of the mother, that she is the one who has to leave when problems arise. The old woman turns to look back, as she leaves, carrying only a blanket.

In the exhibiting and sale of her work, and the gaining of exposure, Mabasa has been fortunate.

Like Mainganye, Mabasa exhibited in both the Tributaries and Neglected Traditions exhibitions. In addition, Mabasa was invited to exhibit in the CapeTown Triennale of 1988 alongside Jackson Hlungwani, has exhibited nationally and internationally and is represented in the major collections of South Africa. Mabasa has produced prolifically and many of her works were sold to overseas buyers. She is represented in the Mahlakasela Collection in the United States and has participated in residential workshops in England (The Humberside Sculpture Park) and Namibia.

Of the five selected artists, Mabasa has been shrewd in her approach to business. Although she talks of having very lean years (January 2000), she is now managing her affairs well and has become a self-sustaining artist. Mabasa refuses to travel unless being flown 'in style' and



Figure 81.1. Noriah Mabasa. THE UNION BUILDINGS. 2000-2001. Wood. The artist's collection.

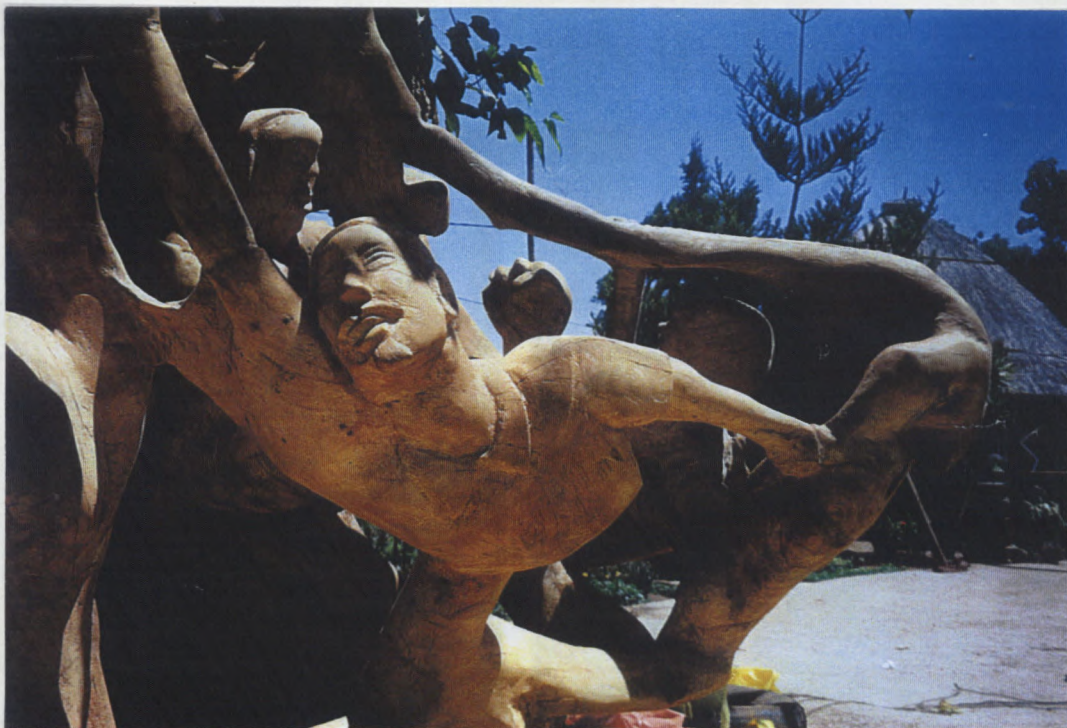
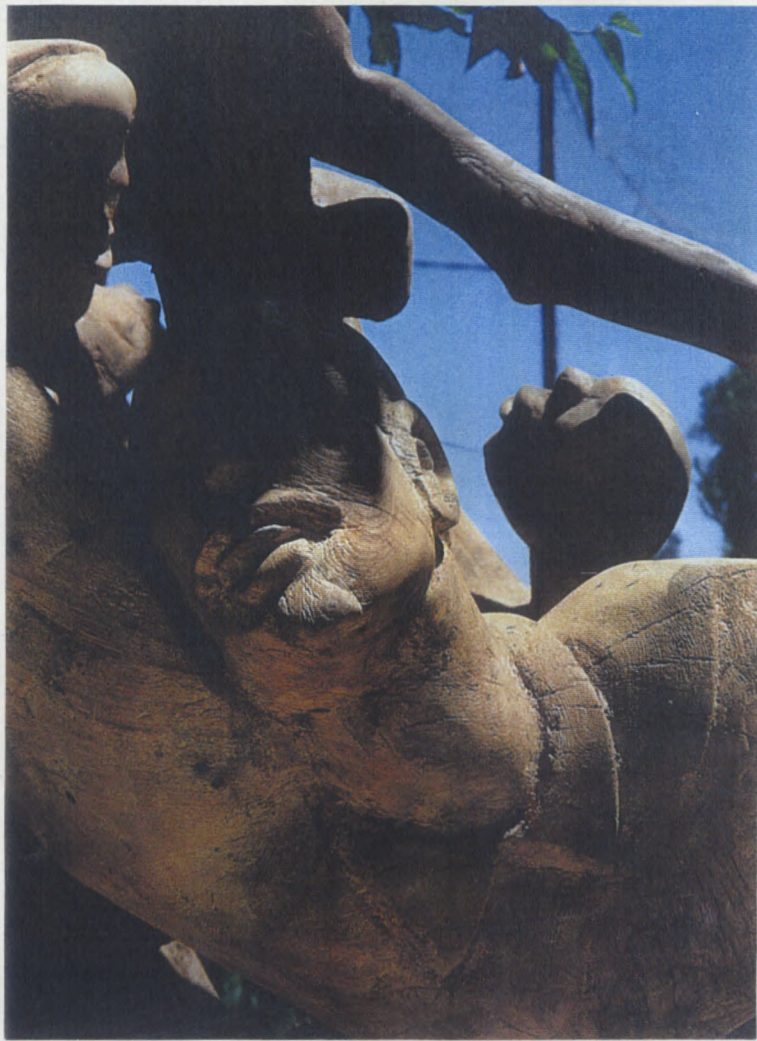


Figure 81.2-3. Noriah Mabasa. THE UNION BUILDINGS. 2000-2001. Wood. The artist's collection.



Figure 82.1. Noriah Mabasa. TRAVELLING MOTHER. Date unknown. Ironwood.
Collection of Kathy Coates.



Figure 82.2. Noriah Mabasa. TRAVELLING MOTHER. Date unknown. Ironwood.
Collection of Kathy Coates.



Figure 83. Noriah Mabasa. SUFFERING. 1996. Wood. Sold on the << Rewind >>Fast Forward.Za. exhibition, Appledorn, Holland.

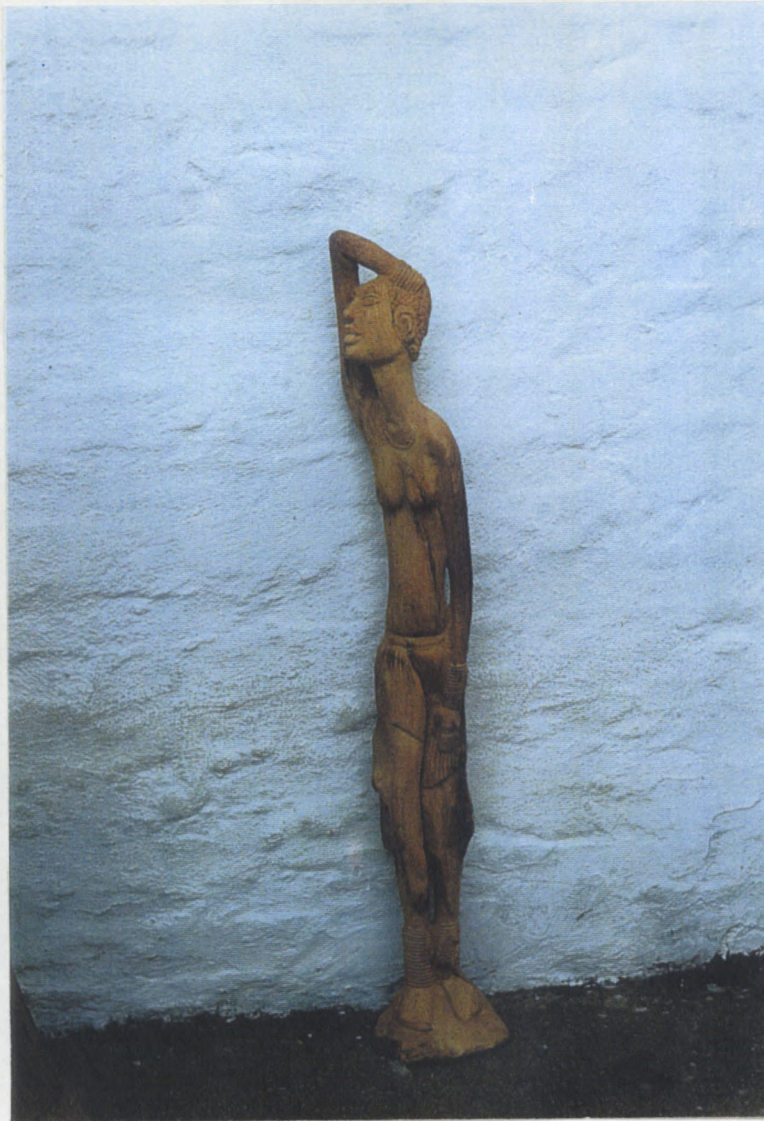


Figure 84. Noriah Mabasa. THE CALL. Date unknown. *Mutanga* wood. The Gordon Institute of Business Science, Johannesburg.

prefers to stay at home to work, tend her garden, extend her home and produce art. She declined an invitation to participate in the *Hayani/Crossings* exhibition and workshop.

In her business dealings she is professional, employing the services of a lawyer where necessary. The candidate on one occasion received a lawyers letter (see overleaf), after some misunderstanding over an amount of money to be paid to Mabasa prior to her departure for Holland for the <<Rewind>> Fast Forward.ZA exhibition.

The organisers, who had requested the candidate to assist with some of Mabasa's arrangements, had paid Mabasa an amount of R1500.00 to cover incidentals related to her trip, including visa costs. When the visa was applied for, Mabasa refused to pay for it, sending a letter from her lawyer's office in Sibasa, with words to that effect. As a result, the organisers agreed to pay her visa costs to facilitate her departure.

Mabasa no longer allows her work to leave her yard without being paid for. The works on the <<Rewind>> Fast Forward.ZA exhibition were sent without prior purchase though a post-dated cheque was issued by the organisers as a deposit.

Mabasa agreed to part with the woodcarving *Inkatha* (Fig. 80.1-80.2), after a written, signed agreement between herself and the candidate had been concluded. This stipulated that the piece would be returned within three months, or the candidate would have deemed to have purchased the work. A post-dated cheque was used as a guarantee. At the time (August 2000), all of Mabasa's large woodcarvings had been earmarked for the inaugural exhibition of the Mukondeni Gallery in Kya Sands, Johannesburg by Neill van Kraayenburg, who requested that no woodcarvings be sold to other buyers. Fortunately, on the day of collecting work for the *Hayani/Crossings* exhibition, Mabasa had that day retrieved *Inkatha* from art dealer Trent Read, which had been in his possession for many years. The candidate was able to take it to the Durban exhibition.

tel: (015) 9621206
fax (015) 9624818

Ramashia | AT | B. 341

17/05/99

Cathy

ATTENTION: CATHY

Dear Madam

Re: ARTWORKS: NORIA RAMASHIA

Kindly note that we act on behalf of our client Mrs Noria Mabasa.

Our client informs us that you paid her an amount of R1500.00 for taking her sculpture to Holland for exhibition.

Please note that you have to pay our client for Visa expenses and she is not to pay Visa for herself.

Further note that all benefits with regard to exhibition of her ~~art~~ artwork at Holland accrue to our client.

Should you have queries please contact Mr Ramashia.

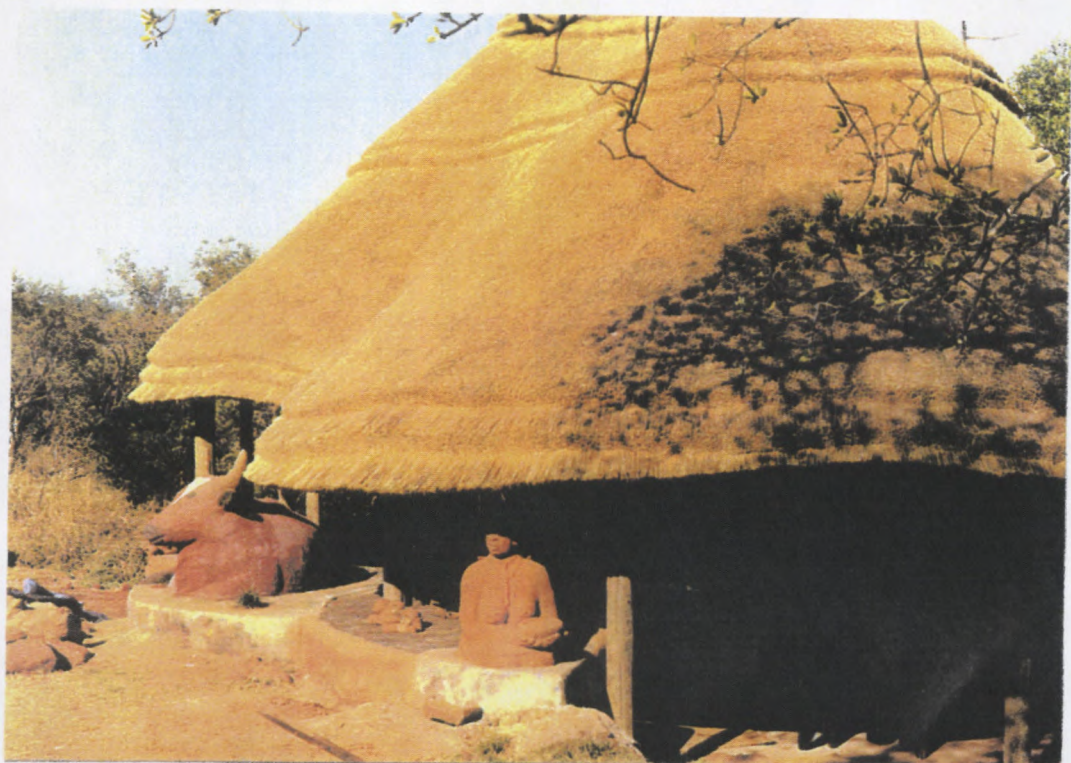
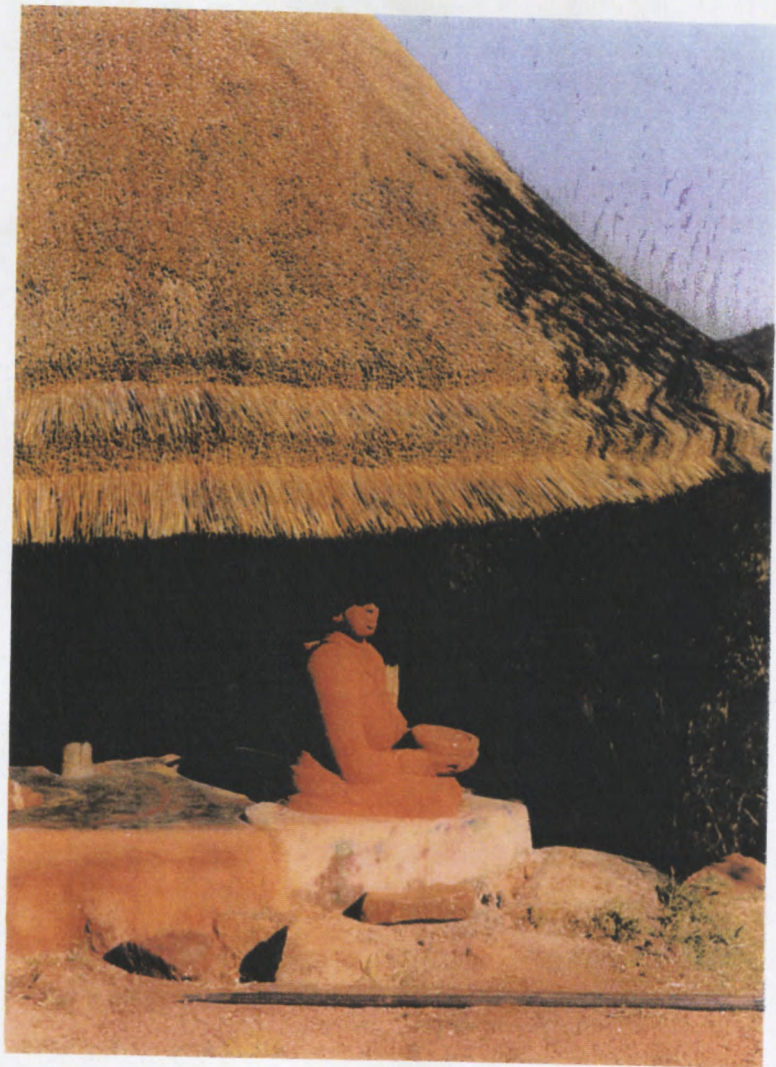
Yours faithfully
~~ONE~~ ~~Resistant~~ & Co.

Mabasa now has considerable control over the affairs at Ditike, especially since it has changed hands (see Chapter One) and her daughter Joyce has been managing the small gallery/shop.

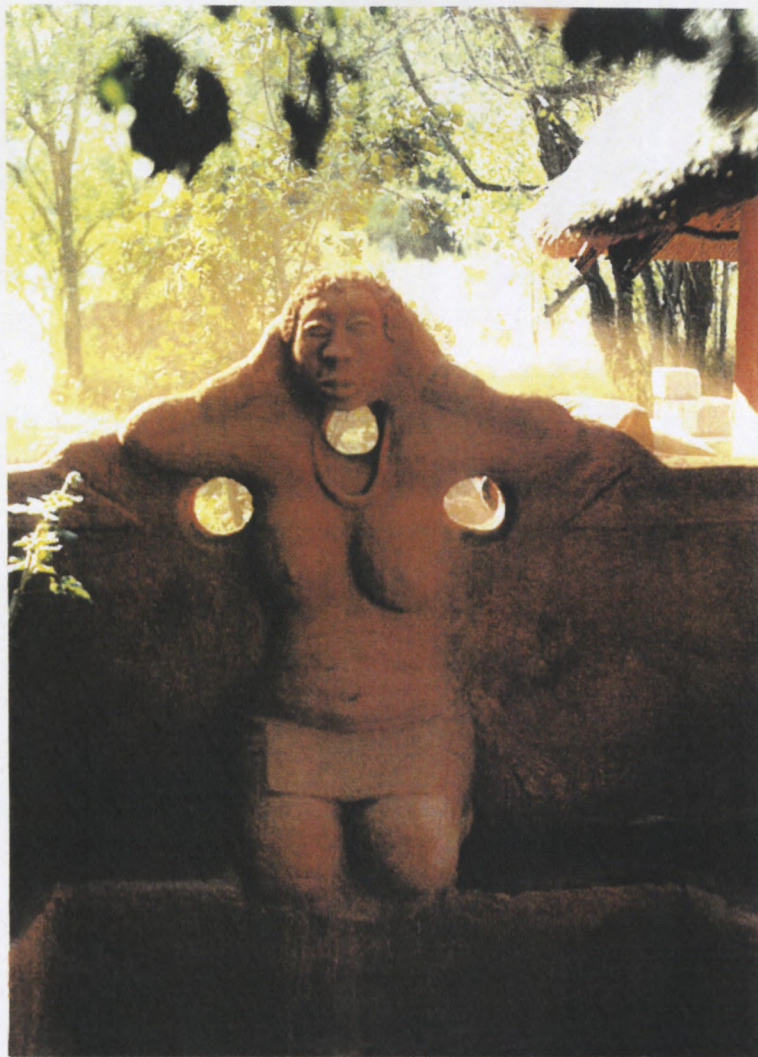
A recent commission at Lesheba Wilderness Game Reserve has been a motivating opportunity for Mabasa. Lesheba, in the Soutspansberg Mountains near Louis Trichardt is owned by John and Cathy Rossmarine and has several small residential camps. One of these is restored as a Venda village. Mabasa was commissioned by the Rossmarines (2001) to embellish the walls and courtyards (Figs. 85-92) and build upon existing facilities, such as the outside shower and bathrooms (Figs. 93-95).

This led to Mabasa conducting teaching workshops in the nature reserve. This project, sponsored by de Beers, has continued into 2002, and together with woodcarvers Owen Ndou and Paul Tavhana, a workshop is underway for a period of three months. The students are younger carvers such as David Murati, Thomas Kubayi and other young people from the region. The Rossmarines have also commissioned Mabasa to teach her methods of clay sculpture, interacting with local school learners to participate on a regular basis, in both woodcarving and claywork. They plan to hold an exhibition in late 2002 (Telephonic communication with Cathy Rossmarine: April 2002).

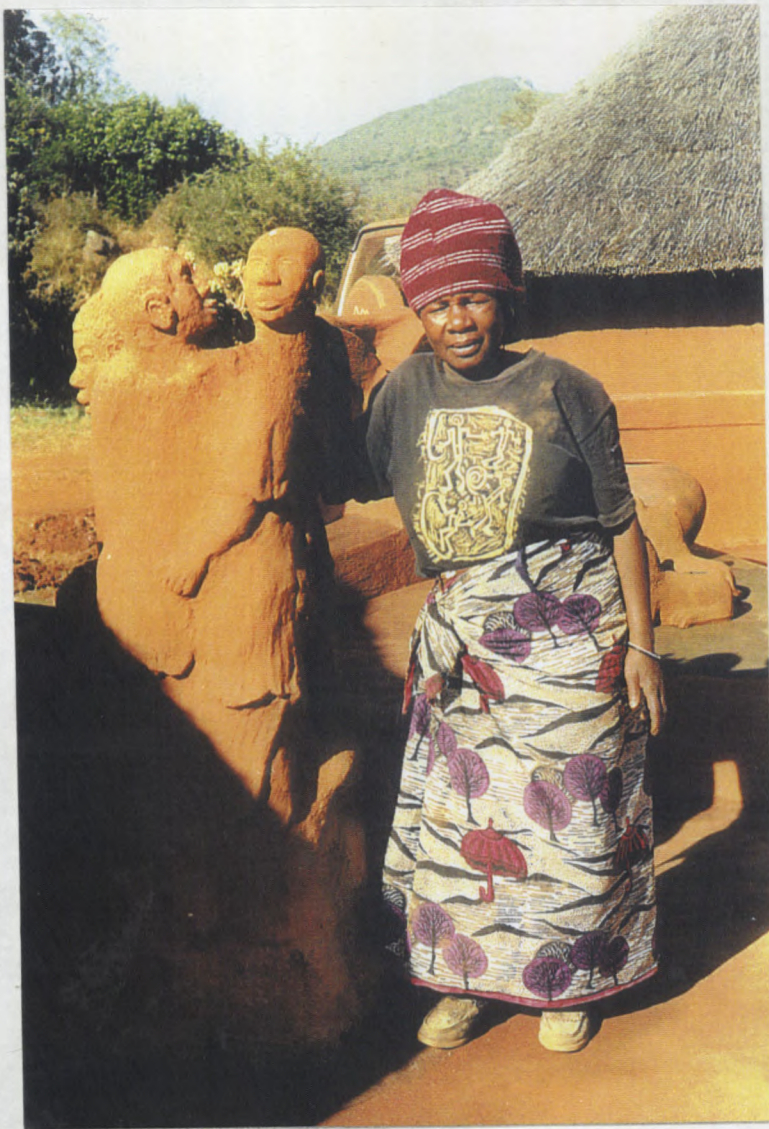
This is a new direction for Mabasa, who is very positive about teaching. With Mabasa's shrewd management of her own affairs, and her diligence in domestic matters, she has provided herself and her family with a comfortable lifestyle.



Figures 85-86. Noriah Mabasa Sculptural walls at the Lesheba Wilderness Game Reserve, 2001-2. Near Louis Trichardt.



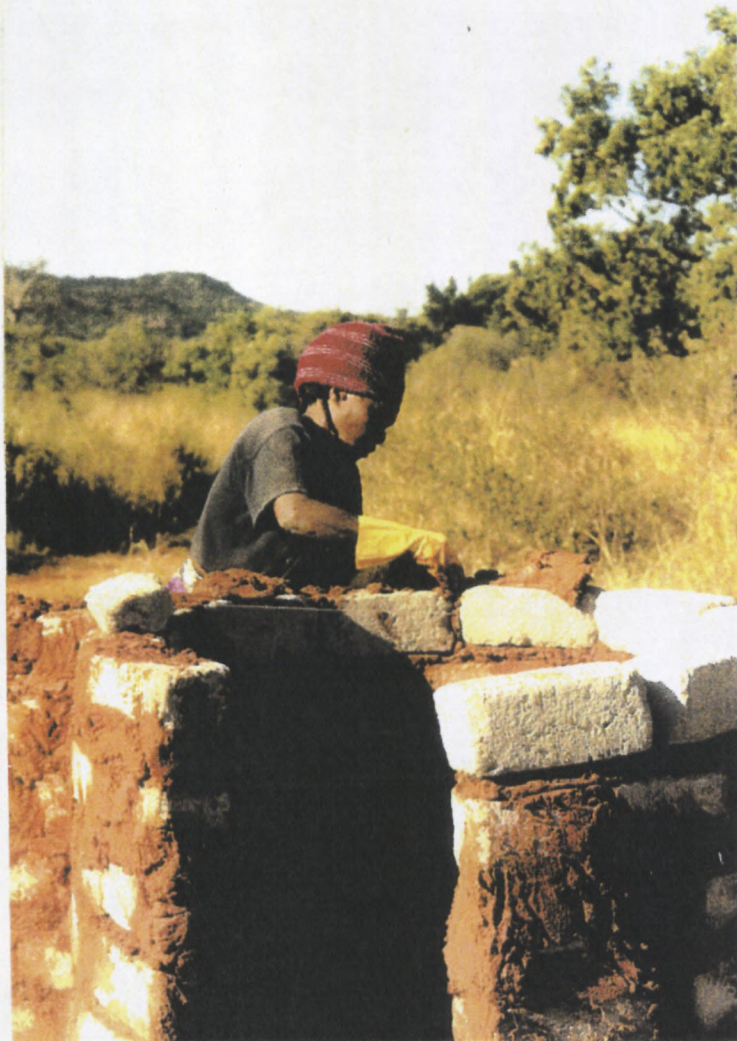
Figures 87-88. Noriah Mabasa. Sculptural walls at the 'Venda Village' camp. Lesheba Wilderness Game Reserve, 2001-2. Near Louis Trichardt.



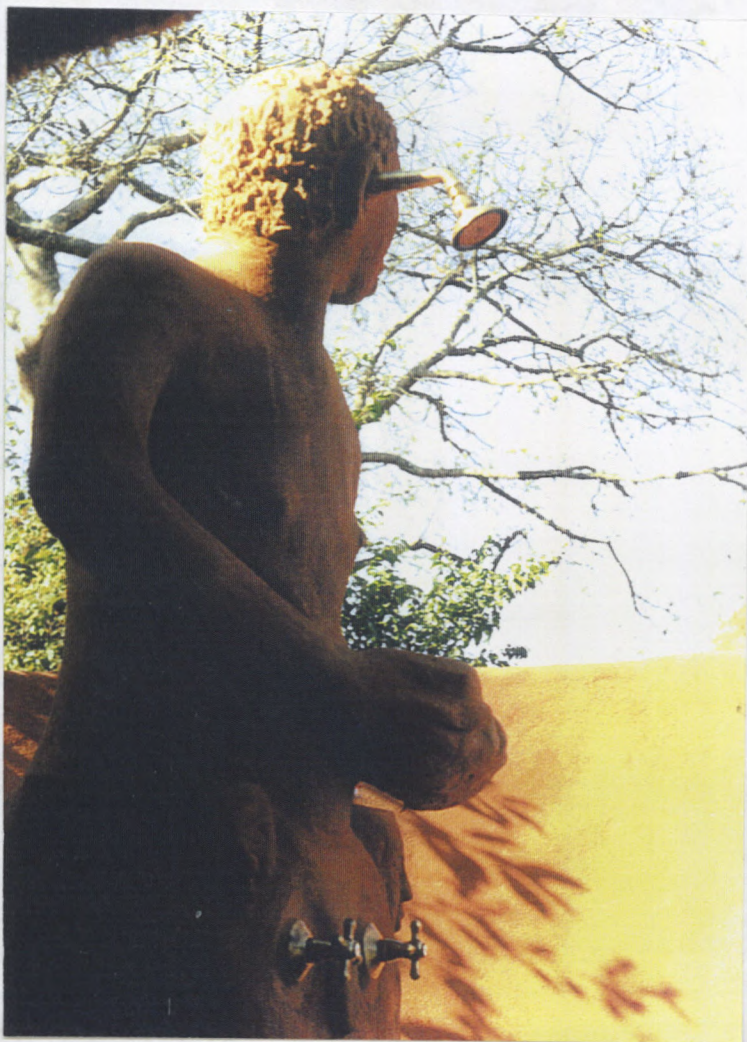
Figures 89-90. Noriah Mabasa. Sculptural walls at the 'Venda Village' camp. Lesheba Wilderness Game Reserve, 2001-2. Near Louis Trichardt.



Figures 91. Noriah Mabasa. Sculpture on wall at the 'Venda Village' camp. Clay. Lesheba Wilderness Game Reserve, 2001-2. Near Louis Trichardt.



Figures 92. Noriah Mabasa building the entrance sign for the 'Venda Village camp' at the Lesheba Wilderness Game Reserve, 2001-2. Near Louis Trichardt.



Figures 93. Noriah Mabasa. Outside shower at the 'Venda Village camp'. Lesheba Wilderness Game Reserve, 2001-2. Near Louis Trichardt.



Figures 94-95. Noriah Mabasa. Outside shower (detail) and bathroom at the 'Venda Village camp'. Lesheba Wilderness Game Reserve, 2001-2. Near Louis Trichardt.

**PHILLIP RIKHOTSO (b.1945-)
A BIOGRAPHY OF ISOLATION.**

Phillip Rikhotso was born in Mamitwa in 1945 and currently resides at nearby Daniel village, close to Dzumeri on the road from Giyani to Tzaneen. Rikhotso worked as a miner on the Main Reef and for some time tended the roses at Westpark Cemetary in Johannesburg, before ill health forced him to return to the former Gazankulu.

Rikhotso is a Shangaan, unlike the other four selected carvers who are Venda. He has little contact with other artists in the region. Rikhotso took up woodcarving in 1977. He (April: 1998) related the following story regarding his decision to take up woodcarving:

I was sick, and sent a young child to chop down a stick so that I could lean on it. The boy chose a thorny stick and removed all the thorns, unfortunately missing one. The thorn pierced me right through my hand. After the wound had healed, I decided to cut a stick and made my own walking stick. Many people noticed my stick and wanted one too. Even government officials who came to buy marula beer bought them.

Rikhotso claims (April 1998) that there are two kinds of woodcarvers. The first copies by watching (either a father or a grandfather), learning and then doing; the second, is given as a gift by the ancestors, who then direct the artist during the day to complete the physical task of producing the work. Rikhotso goes on to explain that the night is used to receive direction concerning the conceptual aspects of the work, through dreams and visions, which in turn are reflected in the occupation of the daytime work. Rikhotso's grandfather had been a carver of birds and headrests, which were intricately carved on both sides. Rikhotso considers himself to fall into the former category of woodcarvers as one who follows, watches and copies, as opposed to one led by visions and dreams.

The candidate has a different view. There is credence in the notion of a previous generation having motivated Rikhotso in the conventional manner of following in his father's footsteps, though this appears to be where the connection ends. Rikhotso's works are predominantly

based on his own highly original interpretations of local myths and legends. In addition, an occasional possible influence could come from the media, such as the images bearing a strong resemblance to 'bugs bunny' and E.T. (Figs.96-97) adorning his yard. Rikhotso, like Mabasa decorates the entrance to his home (Figs. 98-99) with figures carved from wood. In the centre of his yard is a metal *stabile* with balancing acrobatic figures, a gift from David Rossouw.

Rikhotso has no television, only a radio, and certainly has no access to cinema. The sculptures of Rikhotso are brightly coloured and bizarre combinations of animal and human forms, and are often functional items such as carved speakers for 'ghetto-blasters' (Figs.7-9). The speakers are often inserted into the beast's bellies with the sound coming out of their piano key- like teeth (Fig.10). Other functional items include ashtrays, money- boxes (Fig. 100) and walking sticks.

Rikhotso works in softer woods, which are easier to carve, such as marula, mopane and quinine. He uses hand-made traditional tools such as the adze, chisels and scoops.

Rikhotso (October 1998) believes that much of the imagery in his work is influenced by the past, where he believes that people,

...for example witches, were often required to turn themselves into another form, such as a dog, a snake or an anthill, in times of war, or attack from another tribe. For example during Shaka's reign, and those people didn't want to die, they would turn themselves into other forms in order to be invisible. Then a lot of people had the powers, unlike today where people are much more westernised. This is why a lot of my work looks half- human and half- animal.

Animals feature strongly in Rikhotso's work, because of their frequent occurrence in Tsonga myths (Figs. 101-103). Rikhotso believes that traditional Tsonga rituals such as the naming ceremony inspire him in his work. A small tree called the *xitsala* tree is cut and decorated with bracelets and placed in a hut (*ndhumba*). It is designated for the purpose of communicating with the ancestors.



Figure 96. Phillip Rikhotso. BUGS BUNNY. Wood.2000. Location unknown.



Figure 97. Phillip Rikhotso Figures at gateway of artist's home. Wood. c.1992-3
Daniel village

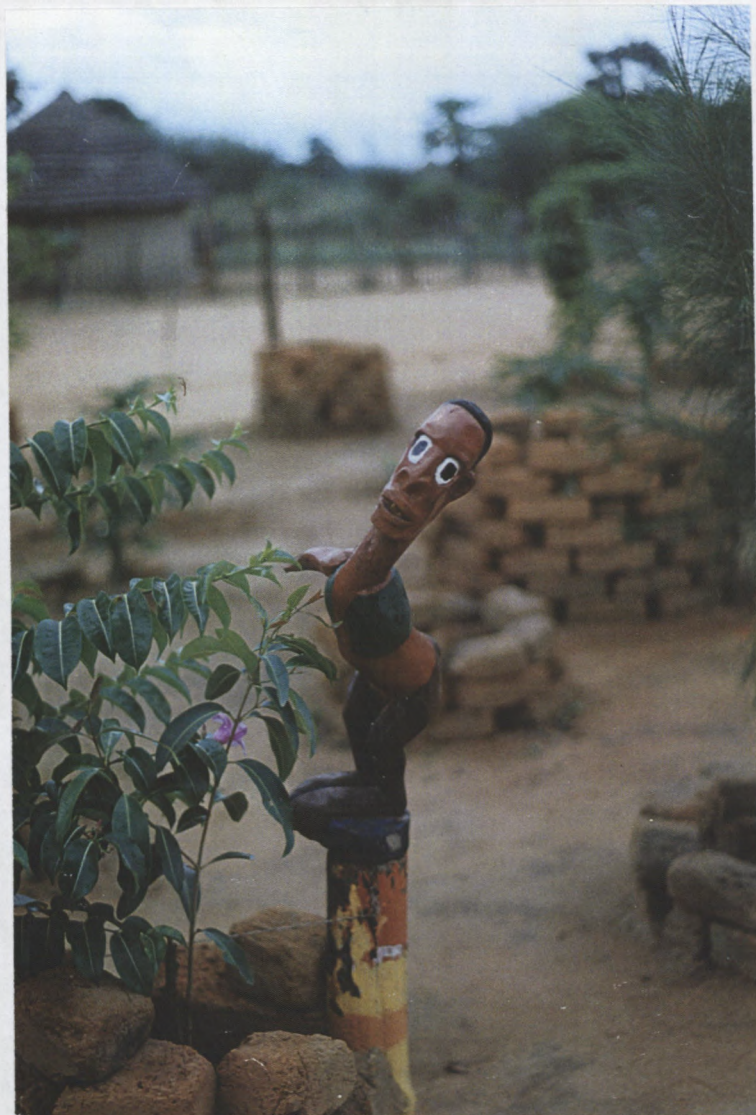


Figure 98. Phillip Rikhotso. Figures at gateway of artist's home. Wood. c. 1992-3 Daniel village.

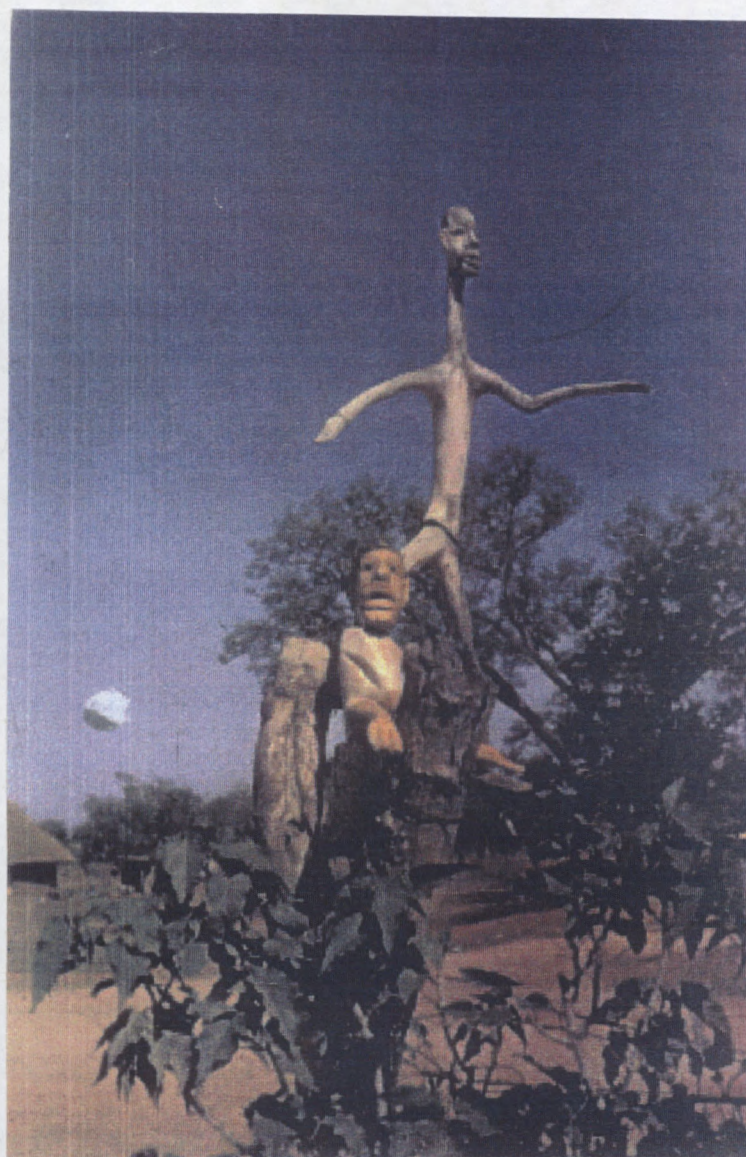


Figure 99. Phillip Rikhotso Figures at gateway of artist's home. Wood. 2000. Daniel village.



Figure 100. Phillip Rikhotso ANT EATER money box. Marula wood. Exhibited and sold at the 'No Limits, no, frontiers' exhibition, **Johannesburg Biennale Africus '95** (Pietersburg). Location unknown.



Figure 101. Phillip Rikhotso. BIRD. Marula wood 1996. Location unknown.



Figure 102. Phillip Rikhotso. BIRD. Marula wood 2001. Collection Kathy Coates.



Figure 103. Phillip Rikhotso. Animals. Marula wood. Date unknown. The Tzaneen Museum.

Rikhotso (October 1998) cites the following description of a naming ceremony:

Anyone is allowed to perform the ritual, provided they are in possession of ancestral names. The naming ritual usually takes place seven days after the birth of a child. If the baby cried all through that night, the *sangoma* (traditional healer) would be called in to assist. A powder is mixed with water and given to the baby through spitting on the child's mouth. Simultaneously the *sangoma* (or designated person) would call out the name. 'Are you Jackson, are you Khazamula?' and so on until there is a sign, such as the baby ceasing to cry. This then is the name chosen, through the intervention of the ancestors.

Tsonga stories have been documented by Jurgen Witt, founder of the Tzaneen Museum, assisted by Rikhotso's daughter Thandi. The sculptures are produced in groups of three or more to represent the characters in the stories. These are told to groups of local schoolchildren by museum assistant and vibrant story-teller, Phillip Mafetsa. Most of these stories are precautionary tales to frighten children into staying at home. The recurring animal imagery in stories sheds more light on the issues of metamorphosis and transformation from people into animals as described by Rikhotso earlier.

The following is an example of a Tsonga story (Witt, J. 1998, no page numbering), being told through Rikhotso's woodcarvings by story-teller Phillip Mafetsa (see Fig. 104-5) at the Haenertsburg Arts Festival, 1999.

BRIMAMBO MANJENGENJE

It came to pass that there was a man in that country. Bejani was his name. Bejani had two sons named Matimba and Solani. Bejani was suffering from painful ears. He consulted many people who claimed to be able to heal all types of ailments with no avail. He remained a sufferer for many years.

One day a man came to Bejani's house. This man told Bejani that he knew of a famous medicine man. The medicine man was called Brimambo. He stayed up on the mountain. He also recommended that one of the sons should be sent to go and call the herbalist.

There was a song to be sung at the entrance to the medicine man's dwelling place. This man taught the two sons how to sing this song:

Brimambo Manjengenje
It's my father who sent me



Figure 104. Phillip Mafetsa storytelling with sculptures of Phillip Rikhotso at the Haenertsburg Festival. 1999.



Figure 105. Phillip Mafetsa tells the story of *Brimambo Manjengenje* with sculptures of Phillip Rikhotso at the Haenertsburg Festival. 1999.

Brimambo Manjengenje
 My father who is ill
 Brimambo Manjengenje
 He is suffering due to wild groundnuts
 Brimambo Manjengenje

'The medicine man will respond. Be brave and bring him along. You may see something frightening, but be brave' said the man. The first son was sent to the mountain. When Matimba came to the entrance he knelt down and started singing. There came a voice from the cave:

I am getting ready
 Brimambo Manjengenje
 I am packing my medicine calabashes
 Brimambo Manjengenje.

A big python crawled out of the cave. It asked Matimba to draw near so that it could wind itself around him to be carried along. Matimba turned around and ran home as fast as his legs would carry him. Matimba fell on his father's feet and related his encounter with the python. He was in a shock.

Solani the younger son, volunteered to go and call the medicine man. Solani had suspicion that Matimba was interested in their father's death so as to inherit all the possessions of their father. Solani ran to the mountain. On his arrival he knelt by the entrance to the cave and started singing: Brimambo Manjengenje. A voice replied, 'I will not be long don't be afraid.'

The python came out of the cave clad in beautiful beads. He carried small calabashes of medicine. The python approached Solani and wound itself around him so that they could go home together. Solani willingly carried the medicine man home. The python wound itself around Bejani and started licking him. The medicine man was singing as it went around its work. After a long while the medicine man went back to Solani who took him back to the mountain.

Back home, Solani found his father singing and walking about by the cattle kraal. He was healed. 'Solani', he said 'take two goats, and two sheep and two heads of cattle. Go to the mountain and offer these to the medicine man as my token of thanksgiving.' Solani followed his father's instructions and took the animals to the mountain.

To his great surprise, Solani found a man sitting by the entrance. He sat on a rock. Solani spoke to him and asked to see the python. Brimambo told him that he was the python who healed Bejani. The man went on to tell how some cruel people had turned him into a python. Because of Solani's kindness he was now a man again. Solani gave the thanksgiving gifts from his father, Bejani. 'Come here' said Brimambo, 'let us thank God for all of this'. He crowned Solani.

Pthu choyoyoo, Xa mina I xitimela.⁹

THE MARKETING OF RIKHOTSO'S WORK.

In earlier days, between the late 1980's and the early 1990's, Trent Read of the Everard Read Gallery collected sculptures and speaker/ "ghetto-blaster" covers carved in wood. Rossouw, who lived in the region during most of the 1980's assisted in the collection of work for Read (Figs. 7-10). A solo exhibition was mounted at the Everard Read gallery in 1993 (Fig.6).

In the mid 1990's, Jurgen Witt of the Tzaneen Museum commissioned most of Rikhotso's work. Rikhotso says (November 2000) that Witt has purchased only one artwork for the museum lately as he refuses to pay the higher prices asked for. According to Witt (Telephonic communication: November 2001) this is due to the fact that his funds have dried up.

However, Rikhotso remains an artist who has always relied on outside support, mostly from art dealers or collector Jurgen Witt. These have been reduced to a minimum. Passing trade is minimal.

Trent Read no longer visits, nor does he collect through Walker or Rossouw.

In earlier days, as well as assisting Read, Rossouw had bought works from Rikhotso for the art shop at the Johannesburg Art Gallery. In comparison to other woodcarvers, Rikhotso's prices are very low.

The recent works purchased for the *Hayani/Crossings* (Fig.106) and *Golelanwali* (2001) (Fig.107) exhibitions have enabled Rikhotso to extend his homestead (which consisted of two small rondavels) and move into a dry shelter. He has bought more chickens and goats (Fig.108).

His original rondavel was leaking badly after the floods of 2000. Works acquired in 2001 for the South African Broadcasting Corporation collection will enable him to complete his building programme before expected heavier rains (Fig.109).

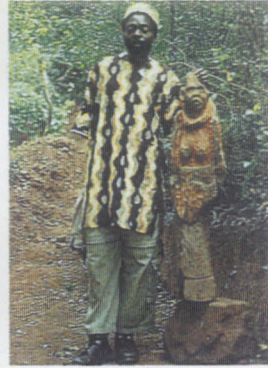
⁹ Being a traditional ending to a Tsonga story, meaning 'let the ancestor's spirit be mine'.



Figure 106. Phillip Rikhotso's work on the Hayani/Crossings exhibition. 2000.
BEARDED MAN and PREACHER (PREACHER: Collection: Terri-Anne Stevenson).
BEARDED MAN: Collection: Kathy Coates.



Jackson Hlungwani



Avhashoni Mainganye



Noriah Mabasa



Albert Munyai



Azwhimpeleli Magoro
and Kathy Coates



Phillip Rikhotso



Samson Mudzunga

Figure 107 *Golelanwali* exhibition invitation. Alliance francaise.2001.Curated by Kathy Coates.

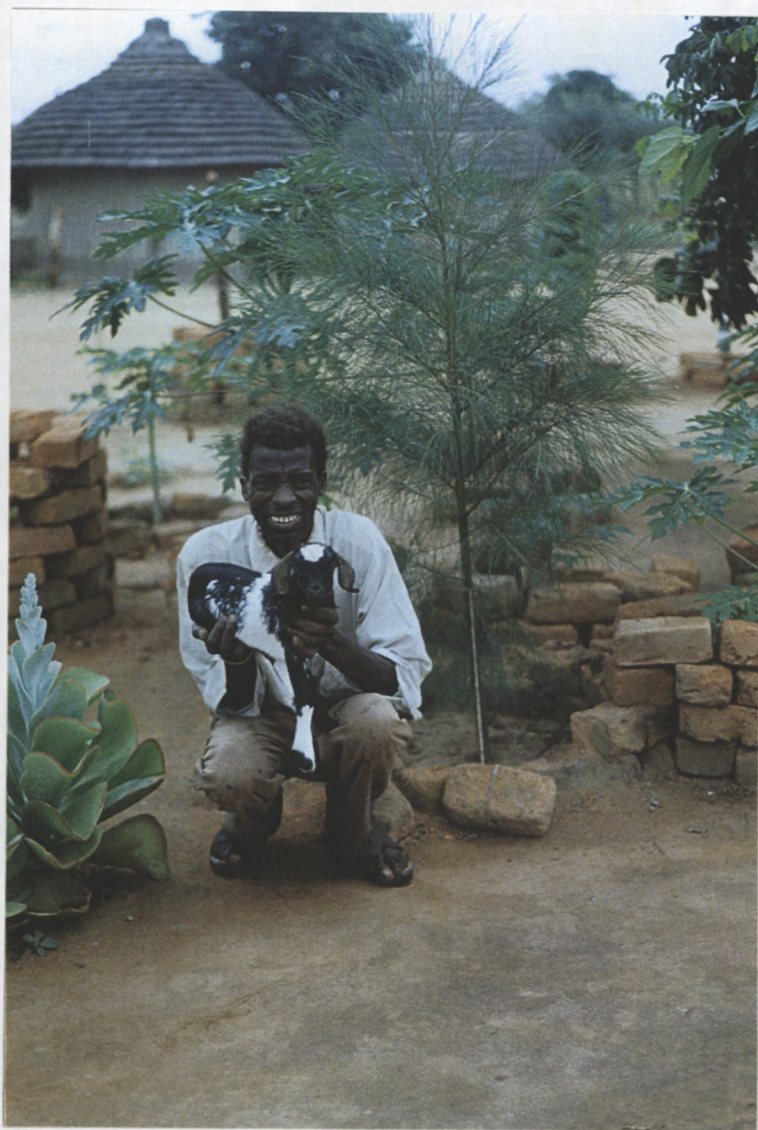


Figure 108. Phillip Rikhotso and his goat.2001.



Figure 109. Phillip Rikhotso. MINER. 2001. Collection South African Broadcasting Corporation.

Passing trade is non-existent as Rikhotso's village is two villages west of the Dzumeri crossroads on the Giyani – Tzaneen road. Rikhotso's dilemma is increased by being geographically isolated from his fellow woodcarvers in Venda, or even having contact with other Shangaan artists such as Jackson Hlungwani and John Baloyi who live closer.

Rikhotso's limited education has not only made it difficult for him to market himself, but has disempowered him in many other ways. His isolated circumstances have led to periods of despondency in which his creative output suffers.

Rikhotso's lacks understanding of the ways of the art world. For example when Burnett took him to Johannesburg to the *Habitat* exhibition at the Newtown Gallery, the prices of his artworks astounded Rikhotso. He felt that the gallery was cheating him. He did not understand the percentage mark-up clause which galleries adopt (Walker, February 2000).

Walker has complained of the fluctuating quality of Rikhotso's work and says that when he has asked Rikhotso to complete commissions, he is unable to repeat orders based on previous designs. Walker (ibid) has tried to support Rikhotso with orders through his African Roots Guesthouse, and has taken visitors to see the artist. Walker feels that one of the most successful 'lines' that Rikhotso has produced are the speaker and 'ghetto blaster' covers, of which Trent Read had purchased many. Rikhotso is unable to produce these often due to the cost of speakers and wires. The candidate commissioned a speaker after having provided Rikhotso with the speaker parts (*The Dog Speaker* (2001) Fig.110).

The candidate feels that the work of Rikhotso has spurts of quality combined with his quirky originality often producing works which converse (Figs.111-113) as a group. Separate pieces are grouped together when the stories are narrated (Figs.114-116) as with the commissioned pieces for the Tzaneen Museum.

Despite Rikhotso's commissions around local mythology, many of his works defy



Figure 110. Phillip Rikhotso.DOG SPEAKER.2001.



Figure 111. Phillip Rikhotso.FAMILY. 2000.Collection Kathy Coates.



Figure 112. Phillip Rikhotso.FRIENDS 2001.Marula wood .1.: Ht.62cm base 17cm. 2.:Ht. 77cm base 16cm. Collection Kathy Coates.

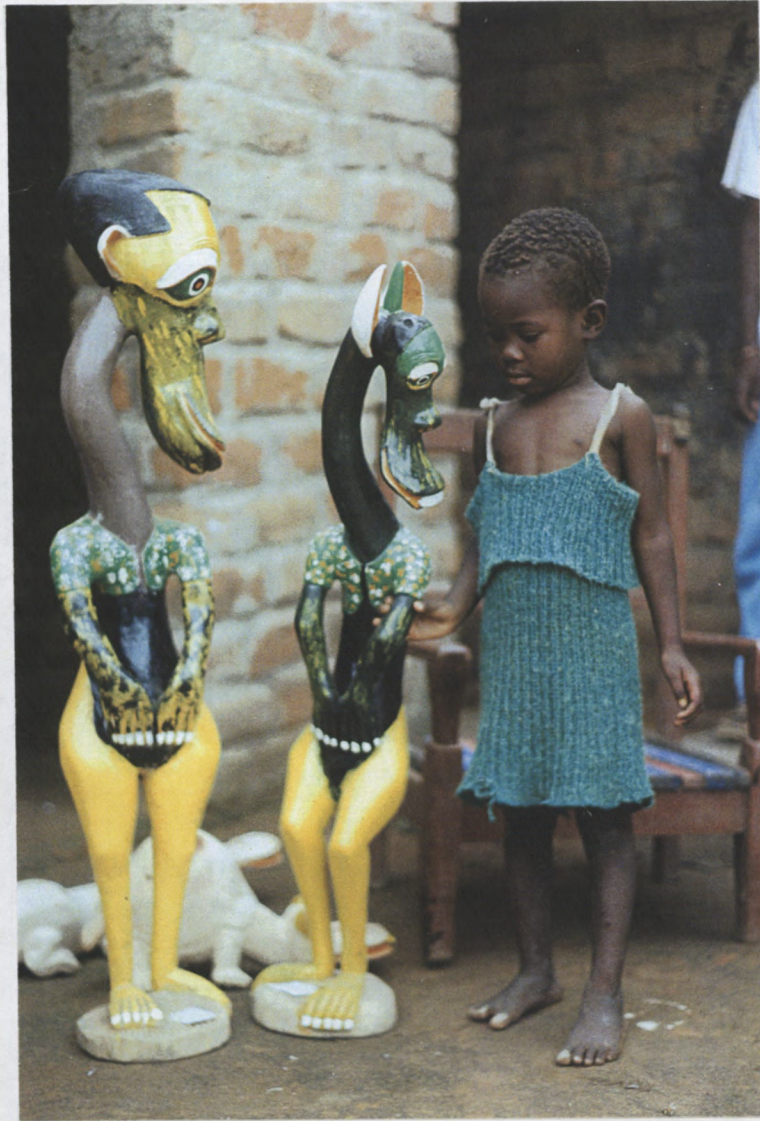


Figure 113. Phillip Rikhotso. SHY BEASTS 2001 Painted marula wood.



Figure 114-116. Groups of Phillip Rikhotso's sculpture at the Tzaneen Museum. The larger figure of MANDELA is by Johannes Maswanganye. Another version of a group representing *Brimambo Manjengenje* can be seen (see Figure 104).



Figure 114-116. Groups of Phillip Rikhotso's sculpture at the Tzaneen Museum. The larger figure of MANDELA is by Johannes Maswanganye. Another version of a group representing *Brimambo Manjengenje* can be seen (see Figure 104).

explanation and: ‘ Just come out of my head’ (May 2001). Examples of these are the ‘horned beasts’ exhibited on the *Golelanwali* exhibition (2001) (Figs.117-122). Rikhotso rarely makes political comment. One figure entitled: No Apartheid (Fig. 123) (2001) has the words ‘No Apartheid’ carved around the base, though no symbolism of this statement is evident in the work. The expressive face of a man is rendered in the style of many of Rikhotso’s other works.

Rikhotso declined two invitations from the candidate to two exhibitions, (*Hayani/ Crossings* and *Golelanwali*). This was due to his wife’s ill health, a factor which has occasionally limited Rikhotso’s production.

When Rikhotso does produce, his works are highly original and often humorous, a factor which belies his inner sense of desperation.

Of the five selected woodcarvers, the candidate feels that Rikhotso has the most difficulties to face and that it would not be easy for him to ‘fit in’ with any mainstream interaction with the art market, even if it became more accessible to him. The candidate feels that he would benefit a great deal from more interaction with other artists. However, the candidate would also like to see the originality in his work maintained. Whether this originality in Rikhotso’s image making is related to his isolation is difficult to say.



Figure 117. Phillip Rikhotso. UNTITLED. Painted wood. Collection Kathy Coates.



Figure 118. Phillip Rikhotso. HORNED BEAST I. Painted wood. Collection Kathy Coates.



Figure 119. Phillip Rikhotso. ONE HORNED BEAST. Painted wood. Collection Kathy Coates



Figure 120. Phillip Rikhotso. FISH TRANSPORT Painted wood. Collection Kathy Coates.



Figure 121. Phillip Rikhotso. HORNED BEAST II. Painted wood. Collection Catherine Blondeau.



Figure 122. Phillip Rikhotso. SMALL BEAST. Painted wood. Collection Alliance Francaise.



Figure 123. Phillip Rikhotso NO APARTHEID. 2001 Painted wood. Collection Kathy Coates.

ALBERT MMBUDZENI MUNYAI (1958-)

A BIOGRAPHY OF STRUGGLE

Albert Mmbudzeni Munyai was born in 1958 at Pile village in the far north of Venda, where he still lives with his wife, Pedi, and their five children.

Munyai's father and grandfather had been woodcarvers in their youth, although this occupation changed when they sought employment as migrant labourers in Johannesburg.

After attending school in the Pile area, Munyai was taken by his father to Johannesburg. Munyai explained to the candidate (March 2001) that his removal to Johannesburg was to protect him from danger, since his family held some claim to chieftaincy. At the time, his relocation was kept a secret.

In Johannesburg Munyai lived with his father. He attended school at Mambo High School in Tshawalo, a location in Johannesburg largely populated by the Venda. However, due to his political activities, which were the cause of many arrests, Munyai left school after finishing standard two. This was in 1976, some time after the June 16 uprising, which left youth ungovernable and education in black schools in a state of chaos and violence. Munyai is reluctant to divulge much information of this period of his life.

During the 1970's, Munyai, still residing with his father, moved from job to job in Johannesburg. He worked for a Jewish family business, for Escom and finally at the Rand Daily Mail newspaper, which at the time also published the World magazine. Being restless, he stayed only briefly in each position, which were all labouring jobs.

MUNYAI'S RELOCATION TO VENDA: MATERIAL SURVIVAL IN A HOMELAND SOCIAL CONTEXT.

In the early 1980's, Munyai returned to Venda and married in 1983. He set about settling his home and raising a family with Pedi, his young wife. At this time Munyai had little chance of employment in the homeland of Venda. However, he had been allocated a piece of land and was able to carry out some planting and harvesting of fruit and vegetables. This was not viable to sustain his family considering the persistent annual drought.

In addition, although the barter system was still partly in place, a monetary system for many commodities had replaced the old system many years earlier. This included taxes payable to the tribal authorities, making reliance on the land unsustainable for a man with a growing family.

Munyai, in an interview with Duncan (1994: 145) noted this factor:

I think about my living situation and I look up there at the residential. I was up there (pointing to the hill). I think where we were before. We got the friends like the Shangaans, we were both together here. They change us up to divide us. You know, I tell you we were living very good. Houses, you can find them, here is my house like that, another man's house over there, you could live where you like. They push us by the residential area, they push us up there. It's there where we live. There where there is no soil. It's there where we are supposed to live.

If I went anywhere, they'll ask what standard I got. I got only Standard Four. They'll say 'what do you know about soil?' Such questions like that. I must know the soil I'm from the soil. I must know the tree because I've been living with the tree. This spirit, people they want to kill it.

Hence, Munyai chose to return to woodcarving to try to earn a living. The work he was producing at this stage was largely functional; utensils and other household objects.

Munyai (March 1998) maintains that most Venda men are required to do some woodcarving at some time in their lives, usually as part of their courtship. It is an advantage for the suitor to present his future wife with a stamping block carved by his own hand. This is an object as crucial as the blanket, brought by the new bride when she enters the home of her husband. Other utility objects such as bowls, spoons and walking sticks were carved by Venda males in addition to the stamping block (Figs.2.1-2.2).

In this way, Munyai began to carve, though his first object, a wooden spoon, was carved around the age of ten, long before he sought a bride.

According to Elizabeth Rankin (1989: 135) Munyai started to carve in 1985. Munyai (July 2001) confirms this date by explaining that it was the year that he had first been noticed as an artist. Following the initial utility objects made in his earlier years, he had also produced ritual objects which were made mostly for initiation purposes. Apart from the *matano* mentioned earlier, relating to the *domba* initiation rites for young girls, other circumcision rituals for both men and women were described by Munyai as *tshitapmbo* for men and *museveto* and *tshikanda* for women (March 1998). Each of these rituals had different carved wooden or clay objects which were ascribed to them.

According to Nettleton's doctoral thesis (1984: 187) there is no mention of *museveto* and *tshitapmbo* as initiation rituals. However the *matano* of the *domba*, and the *tshikanda* are explained thus:

The figures involved (both wood and clay) are used in female initiation, the wooden ones being used in the school called *Domba*. Both wooden and clay figures belong to the category of *matano* (shows, from *tano*: to show) which includes other non-figurative objects as well. The figurines are also referred to as *dzingoma* as they form part of the 'mysteries' of the *Domba*. But stylistically the Venda initiation figures belong to a larger group of sculpture in the Venda and Shona traditions which includes the clay figures used in the puberty ritual of *Vhusha*, and possibly in the *Tshikanda*, both Venda female initiation institutions.

Nettleton adds (1984:187-8), that the *matano*, in particular, are peculiar to the Venda within the context of female initiation rituals in Southern Africa.

Dzingoma is the collective term of the *ngoma*, a large spherical drum associated with the chieftaincy.

In the context of these initiation rites, the term *dzingoma* also included other objects used in the ritual. As with the *matano*, further discussion is undertaken in the Introduction. There is extensive discussion on the *ngoma* in Chapter One, on Samson Mudzunga.

During these early years of developing his craft, Munyai rarely travelled from his home except to gather wood and visit his 'secret place' to consult with the ancestors. His land extends below the Pile Mountain upon which he resides. When the candidate first visited Munyai at his home in 1994, he was then residing lower down amongst his extensive mango groves. When questioned about the move, Munyai (July, 1996) explained that he had enemies who wished him harm and he felt safer on higher ground, away from the village. As a member of the *malombo* cult, a branch of traditional healing rooted in ancestral worship Munyai has earned feelings of respect and fear from his neighbours.

MUNYAI: HIS SOURCES OF INSPIRATION.

With an artist as complex and multi-faceted as Munyai, it is very difficult to categorize his mentors and sources of inspiration. There has been extensive reference in this dissertation to the world of dreams and visions, in relation to Munyai and the other selected carvers. This world is difficult to define, having its roots in traditional religion. Ancestral worship is its central force. In Munyai's world the specific roles of ritual object maker, shaman, and practitioner of traditional medicine arise. Again, with traditional medicine, various roles linked to different sects co-exist.

The two main categories most people are familiar with are the *sangoma*, or traditional healer and the *nyanga*. The *sangoma* predicts the future through various means and prescribes remedies according to what she/he 'sees'. The *nyanga* is a herbalist who treats a patient with *muti*, traditional remedies made up of wild herbs, roots barks and animal sources. These are simplified definitions which require an entirely separate study to explain in depth.

MUNYAI AS A TRADITIONAL HEALER AND VISIONARY.

In much the same way as Munyai practices his art by deriving meaning and interpretation from his connectedness to the world of ancestral communication, whether through dreams or

waking visions, his ability to heal requires a similar kind of 'learning'.

Munyai explains this in an interview (April 2001):

You can't put a medical thing into healing, because healing is something where you have to be inspired. If you came into practice you are someone who's been taught to do something so you always need that practice. But something that is inside of you, you don't have to do that practice.

While you are asleep, the teacher will come and tell you to go and take that type of tree, take the branch or the bark or take the roots. You kept it, he will come again and tell you what is the use of that. So we don't practice.

In Munyai's belief system, known as the *malombo* cult, a baby at the time of its birth must be very well protected as this is considered to be a time of great vulnerability. According to Munyai, twelve 'soldiers' or good spirits wait to reside in the new 'frame' of a human. The danger lies whereby the twelve spaces are not occupied, leaving the infant open to possession by 'bad soldiers'.

Munyai (April 2001) continues with the explanation:

That's the way of starting off, because what I believe is that, when I first came out of my mothers womb I first screamed. When I say 'Waaah' I'm opening up my whole everything so that the spirit must get in. So twelve of them, the angels and the demons they are waiting, it's a war. You see?

There are people today who go to school to get education, and they end up not using that education. You know why? The day they're born they didn't get enough 'soldiers', some other people they see, that instead of twelve, he has say, four.

They must go to get some big trees and they let you eat that in the manner that you get those remaining soldiers which you don't have.

There are twelve of each, yes, twelve of good energy and twelve demonic energy, just waiting to get in.

This philosophy can be linked with Munyai's *modus operandi* when attempting to analyse the drive behind his art production. In the same interview (April 2001) Munyai describes this phenomena in terms of his creativity which can only function when:

Those twelve soldiers are looking for my one single nerve. Which this nerve runs to my brain and through down to my eye which I would say that it's nice to accept into a left hand, and balance it into a right hand which means that

everything will get into me and work and used and stay until I understand what does it mean. And not like I think of something and when I think of that the other one goes away, no. But of course there is always a check that that soldier leaves, he always reminds me “you never finished that *chana*”¹⁰. So always you have to repeat and repeat and sometimes if you don’t understand it you run mad.

In the creative process Munyai also describes ‘being there’ as a spiritual process. He sees the role of an artist as an angel or avatar. He says (April 2001):

We were going to inspire that there couldn’t be all this violence, there couldn’t be all this hatred because in art it’s where I believe we got a special people who can inspire us about tomorrow. Especially people who can record things from before. I mean I think that art is a voice of God, art is a voice of law, because with art you got a straight line to communicate with the Creator Himself. Because with Him, you don’t have to go to the place to ask for power, being an artist you reach into that nature, world of art. He had used His hand to just create anyhow. It was just to phe phe (makes a blowing sound) to work and move, you see. So that we not lacking nowhere because the computers are now there we can communicate with the whole world, that’s all about art, you know (laughing).

An observation made by Dudley Moloi (1999: 7), whilst interviewing Munyai, seems to sum up the properties of Munyai’s world, which finds layers and borders of different consciousness melting into a unity of its own: ‘For in Munyai’s world, the fantastic, physical and cultural-spiritual realms disturbingly merge into one, bordering on ‘madness’.

Munyai (April 2001) attempts to describe the feeling of the multi-dimensional space within which he works:

I believe that this piece can rather stay in my room, and I can rather sleep on the floor there and put my piece in the bed. I can rather die today and be buried and my art will remain for public. I couldn’t mind that. I’m just here as a very small little thing. When I talk a word out itself, it’s very big, that’s my name. So I believe that to each and every moment that I touch a piece of wood, I feel like its Sunday to me. It’s my time to pray, because you know I will be talking with my little tool. I just stand away from everything because I don’t just believe it. It’s when I sweat, it’s then that I feel alive. For my high breathing, when I push my tool, it’s where I feel the best of the bones feeling. You feel something into your bone, it runs through into your nerve through to

¹⁰ *Chana* is Venda for friend.

your mind and you feel peaceful. That's what I always need, I need those moments.

MUNYAI'S NETWORK: THE MARKETING OF HIMSELF AND HIS WORK

Munyai has admitted that in his working life, there is a sense of self-discovery which has been his constant guide, in particular in recent years. However, he feels that he still has not succeeded in the area of marketing his work.

Munyai is of the opinion that artists needs a 'chain' of support, from other artists, representatives of the art market and members of government departments, in particular the Department of Arts and Culture.

Munyai claimed (June 1998) that,

I didn't think that deeply about my art until 1988 when I met people like Fiona (Nicholson), Lorna (Ferguson), Godfried (Dideron) and Kathy (Coates). I wasn't making any money till then, but I grew strong and ended up living like I am. Art becomes my answer.

In earlier years, during the 1980's, Munyai was one of the carvers who brought his work to Ditike Arts and Craft Centre in Thohoyandou to try to market his work. Nicholson who ran the centre, and Rossouw, took responsibility in advising the artists and crafters regarding the marketability of their work.

Nicholson (March 1999) recalls that Munyai's work was inferior to many of the other carvers and of a poor quality. Both Nicholson and Rossouw spoke to Munyai, suggesting that he change direction. Nicholson (ibid) recalls asking Munyai whether he really had a desire to be a carver, because he did not seem to have his heart in what he was doing. Nicholson (ibid) says that the very next piece, following this conversation, transcended all his previous works. It marked a turning point in Munyai's work which became original, of a refined finish technically, and had more focus in terms of its theme.

Rossouw was elevated to the status of a father figure during this period. Munyai (May 1999) recalls how Rossouw and he came across a woman cutting down a big gum tree for firewood.

Rossouw, encouraging Munyai, bought the piece of wood from the woman for R10 and took it to Martin Kenneally's yard. The two sculptors often worked together. Munyai had some experience working with Martin Kenneally, a furniture maker who owns a timber company in Sibasa.

Munyai (April 2001) also speaks in awe of his friendship with Godfried Dideron, an anthropology lecturer at the University of Venda.

I would love the way Godfried is. That person is a very wonderful person. He understands what art is. He can always tells, Albert this price is not enough. I tell him, what I think is that if this piece can go into public, in time, if I can manage to save the spirit of five people, its worth millions. If five people can go around and look at my piece and that piece talk with them, that's worth more than a price. So we need people like that. Because if we can talk about money, in all this field, we are going to destroy lots of things. Kathy, I don't want to go stand next to the road and sell my work. I don't want to do that. I'm not a *vetkoek* baker. I don't want to do that. I do art.

Trent Read had supported Munyai by buying his work, though found him too crazy to deal with. According to Read (October 1995), Munyai had chased Rossouw around his yard with an axe because he had visited him on a Sunday.

The most complex relationship with which Munyai has had to grapple with, in both positive and negative ways, is with art dealer Neill van Kraayenburg. Spanning at least four years, the issues are dealt with separately in Chapter One, Section Three.

TRANSITIONS AND SHIFTS: FROM 'CRAFTER' TO 'FINE ARTIST'.

At this point a major shift occurred in Munyai's work. He realised that his motivation to work could not be led by a desire to sell it. At the time (c.1987), Munyai had been working

with a group of local crafters and in particular with the local drum makers living close to his village. This was organised by his brother-in law Samuel Nethengwe. Munyai (July 2000) recalls that repeating artworks as marketable objects was killing his creativity. Munyai changed direction, and vowed never to reproduce a sculpture.

Occasionally, Munyai has replicated a theme in his work such as his Big Five walking sticks (Fig. 2.1-2.2) made specifically for the tourist market, and Pap and Mopane Worms (Fig.124-125), though he explains (ibid) that he sees these as his bread and butter, and consciously imbues each piece with an individuality of its own.

Although Munyai was not part of the Tributaries or the Neglected Tradition exhibitions, he is considered as part of the second wave of artists to emerge from the far north.

In an article entitled Not to be Neglected, Michael Markovitz (1989: 26), interviewing Munyai for Spark magazine noted Munyai's lack of inclusion in the Neglected Traditions exhibition and Younge's book: Art of the South African Townships.

This led Markovitz to the conclusion that there was a deliberate exclusion of Munyai from the fine art world, which had recognised so many other woodcarvers.

The candidate is of the opinion that there was a time of exposure which followed in the wake of the 'discovery' of certain artists following the above exhibitions, which had to run its course. This does not prove a deliberate exclusion of some artists in preference to others. It is more likely that some artists enjoyed the initial exposure due to having the right contacts. There is a tendency in Markovitz's writing to sensationalise the link between the 'crazy' side so often associated with Munyai, and this exclusion.

For example (Markovitz 1989: 26) says: 'Today Munyai is a bitter man but he still continues to carve wood with maniac energy'.

and :



Figure 124. Albert Munyai. PAP AND MOPANI WORMS. Wood. Collection Dr. Marc Smalle. Loaned for *Hayani/Crossings* exhibition. 2000.

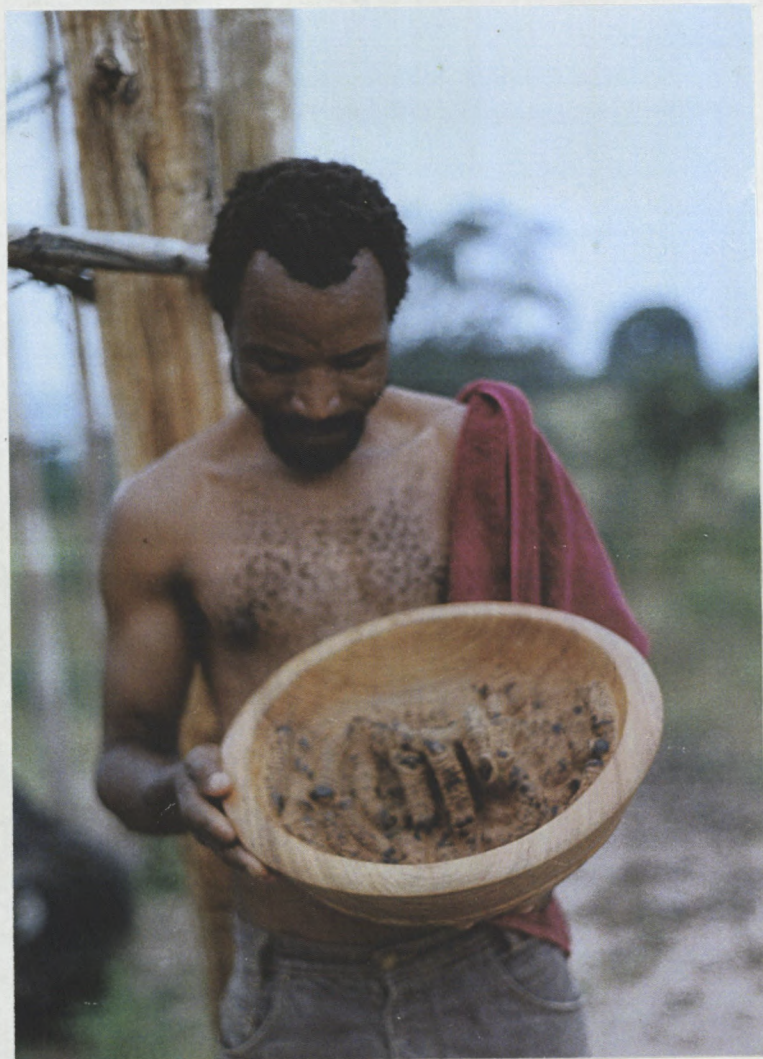


Figure 125. Albert Munyai with BOWL OF MOPANI WORMS. Kiaat wood.2001.
Ht. 11cm.Diameter 42cm. Collection Kathy Coates.

Munyai says that he has some kind of chemical imbalance for which he is being treated at Mutale hospital: 'I've still got a lot of fucking tablets to suck and they are not working'.

Munyai's preferred material is the harder wood, *kiaat*, and other hard woods such as leadwood and mahogany. Munyai's love for *kiaat* is also rooted in its function as a remedy for traditional healing. Munyai, as a *sangoma*, says that *kiaat* is used to induce menstruation and other related problems, since the wood ouzes a sap resembling blood.

Munyai (April 2001) explains:

When you cut the *kiaat* tree alive, it bleeds a red blood like human blood, which heals to the daughters. If I plant my more special things which need production from the ground, like potatoes or peanuts, and you must have a stick that you put it, or maybe four sides, or maybe the pumpkins, it heals those flowers. It also is like when the little daughter starts menstruating, and she gets into bed, and we believe that the flower will be losed, so that the *kiaat* tree will help her, and then yet again, when she doesn't get the menstruation, the medicine that is more stronger is the blood of this- (pointing to the *kiaat*). You give it to the child included with the other little spices there and she drinks it and then she will definitely menstruate.

In another interview (May 1999) Munyai speaks of the qualities of the wood as a material of excellence.

I know that I can use different kinds of wood, but I haven't changed the wood, because by knowledge I know that *kiaat* is the best, because with *kiaat*, the tree get the strongest, the beautiful grains and also medicine. The *kiaat* object can stay for life. You keep it in the water, you dump it in the pool for 50 years. You pick it up another day, water goes off, *kiaat* tree lives again.

In collecting wood Munyai also experienced severe hardships, even imprisonment. He claims (April 1998), that he was arrested in his own yard for chopping down a tree without having paid for a permit.

Wood has given me a lot of problems. I still don't have the money to buy a permit. But I haven't stopped working since the age of twelve. At the moment I'm feeling crazy. If I stop for a moment I might just die. The *pampoens* in the village are cutting down the trees. It is a big problem because all the good forms are broken up for firewood. *Pampoens*! I had to pay a fine because of a piece of tree. (*Die Vrye Weekblad*, 1989: 9).

Markovitz (1989: 26) reported in an interview that in around 1987, all of Munyai's sculpture was destroyed when nature conservation officials confiscated and burnt them due to his lack of payment for a permit to cut wood:

Venda's Nature Conservation and National Parks Acts provides protection for over 110 indigenous tree-types. Traditionally, a carver could obtain wood through his headman or chief. However, along with 'independence' in Venda came a department of agriculture and forestry incorporating its own department of nature conservation. Forestry officials have since been trying to replace the traditional system of payment. According to Roussouw 'very few woodcarvers in Venda have permits. Most of those people who have permits are in the timber business'.

The permit system is not strictly enforced, as there are only 11 nature conservation officials in the whole of Venda. However, in Munyai's case, there were more powerful forces at work. Although Albert was articulate and calm, the magistrate found that he and his wife were faulty witnesses. All Albert's work was confiscated and he was given a R200 fine for carving wood without a permit. His sculpture was placed in a storeroom and earmarked for burning. Six months later all the works were discovered –ready for sale –at a rival sculptors workshop. Albert's rival happened to be the magistrate's brother-in-law. Roussouw collected the works and took them to the magistrate. Nature conservation officials were called and eventually a story was constructed. It was claimed that the night watchman at the storeroom had given them away to be burned for firewood 'because he didn't know that they were sculptures'. Despite Roussouw's attempts to save Munyai's work, it was duly re-confiscated and burned. Munyai now refuses to talk about his arrest and the subsequent burning of all his work because 'it breaks up my mind'.

It is clear from the above that Munyai was extremely disturbed to be accused and convicted of an offence such as this, in particular because of his belief in preserving the environment. Munyai was very aware that with overpopulation and homeland legislation the landscape was becoming denuded of its indigenous trees, and soil erosion was causing serious problems. Munyai had initiated, as part of a long-term plan for his property, a project to plant new indigenous trees. In this respect he (March 2000) said:

When I stayed on the other side, remember that this is my fourth move around here, already here in this place, we have planted many indigenous trees because while it rains like last year, even before, I had started to protect this place. Everywhere I go, I go with a scissor in my pocket. When I see a place in the middle of the rocks I plant the seed and then close it. When the rains come, the plants will grow. You no longer see the big bush around here, you see the little bush, I want to plant a little forest.

And I would love to cultivate a big piece of land because I think it will be very healthy for us. Trees make secrets.

One way in which Munyai was able to develop in his working technique was by means of increasing the variety of tools at his disposal. Munyai (March 2001) speaks of tools and wood with equal reverence:

So many things have really shifted, yes you must remember that when I started I was using only 2 piece of iron to produce art, you see when I first started I was using only a knife and a small axe when I produced a sculpture. So now I have some clever tools, the 'v' tools you know, those gauges, they mean a lot.

Munyai's working experience with Kenneally introduced the use of power tools as attractive labour-saving devices to Munyai's mind. Unfortunately, this period of employment was curtailed when an accident caused Munyai to lose the top of a finger.

Munyai has accessed some power tools of his own, including a chain saw, a table saw and a band saw, though he craves a fully- equipped workshop of his own where he can hang up his tools.

The plan for his own workshop has been underway since 1999, with a physical framework for a large circular structure built over a period of several months. It remains incomplete (2001) (Figs. 126-127).

Much of Munyai's work and his tools are crammed into his small workspace at the back of his single rondavel and in the rondavel itself. Munyai (July 2000) expresses his anxiety thus:

For me that studio, I want to say to the world 'I'm going to die, but my spirit will live forever and ever'. So I'm just dying to get a chance to complete that little vision which had acted upon my mind for long time ago. You know, I never built up my room for myself as a special thing. If you get into my room, there are less clothes but more tools. I'd love to see my tools hanged on a wall and I want to see where my little tool had scratched, and keep that lines together and bring about something like a bible, because, I would love to see my collections from previous years and in the end of my lifetime together, and look at them. I'm sorry to say I wouldn't like to sell my pieces, but it was the way of sharing to survive in that years in that months.



Figure 126-7. Building the workshop at Albert Munyai's home, Pile. 2000

The workshop development was curtailed due to lack of funds and Munyai's more urgent need to build a separate dwelling for his oldest daughter, who, having reached puberty, 'has now reached an age where it is strictly not allowed that she sleeps in the same room as her father' (March 2001).

The *rondavel* provides the only shelter for Munyai, his wife Pedi and their five children. A smaller square hut below the homestead is used for cooking.

Munyai, although his career has been a mix of ebb and flow, had begun to develop a style which was intrinsically his own. Rankin (1989: 51) termed his style as 'visionary expressiveness' and even 'grotesque'.

The complex forms of the carvings of Albert Munyai and Richard Mabaso (b.1950) have, for the eye accustomed to historical western notions of beauty, a demonic appearance.

However demonic, his work began to enjoy international and national acclaim by the late 1980's with works such as Face to Face (1989) (Fig: 128) now in the Mahlakasela Collection in the United States and Dreams and Clouds (1986-7) (Fig: 129) in The Tatham Gallery collection.

Dongola and Sky (1995) produced for the first Johannesburg Biennale were both earmarked for the exhibition Dreams and Clouds, an exhibition of eighteen South African artists in Stockholm, Sweden (October 3rd 1998-January 10th 1999).

Face to Face was one of the groundbreaking pieces in Munyai's thematic works with an educational content. Munyai calls them the 'classroom works.'

The sculpture, carved from *kiaat* and *mutondona* wood, is in a vertical format, 90.1 centimetres in height. The piece was bought for the Mahlakasela Collection by Professor Ronald Carter, an African-American professor at Coker College in the United States, who had taken a specific interest in the woodcarving tradition of the Northern Province, and had

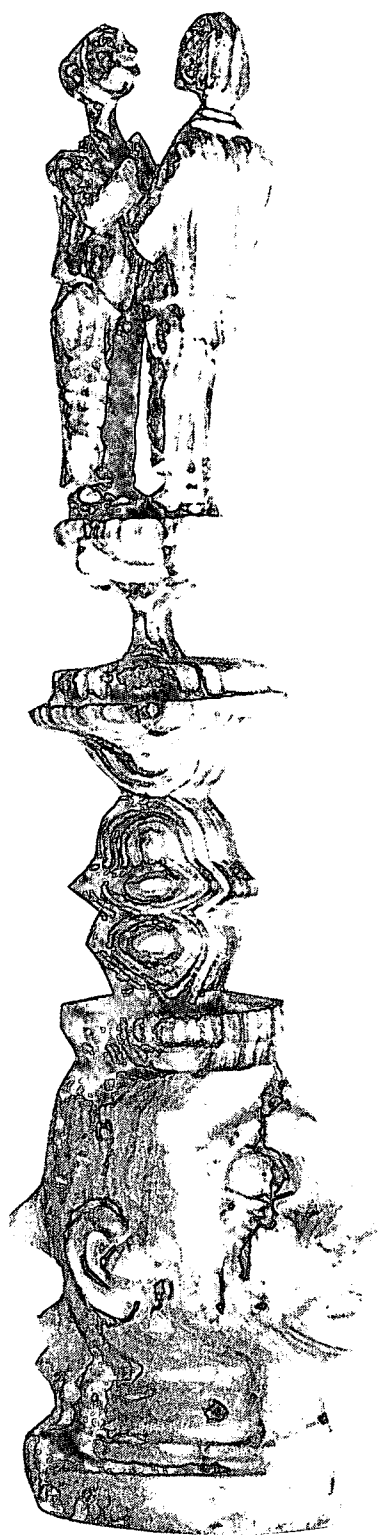


Figure 128. Albert Munyai. FACE TO FACE. 1989. *Kiaat* and *mutondona* wood. Ht. 90.1 cm. Mahlakasela Collection, Hartville, South Carolina, U.S.A.

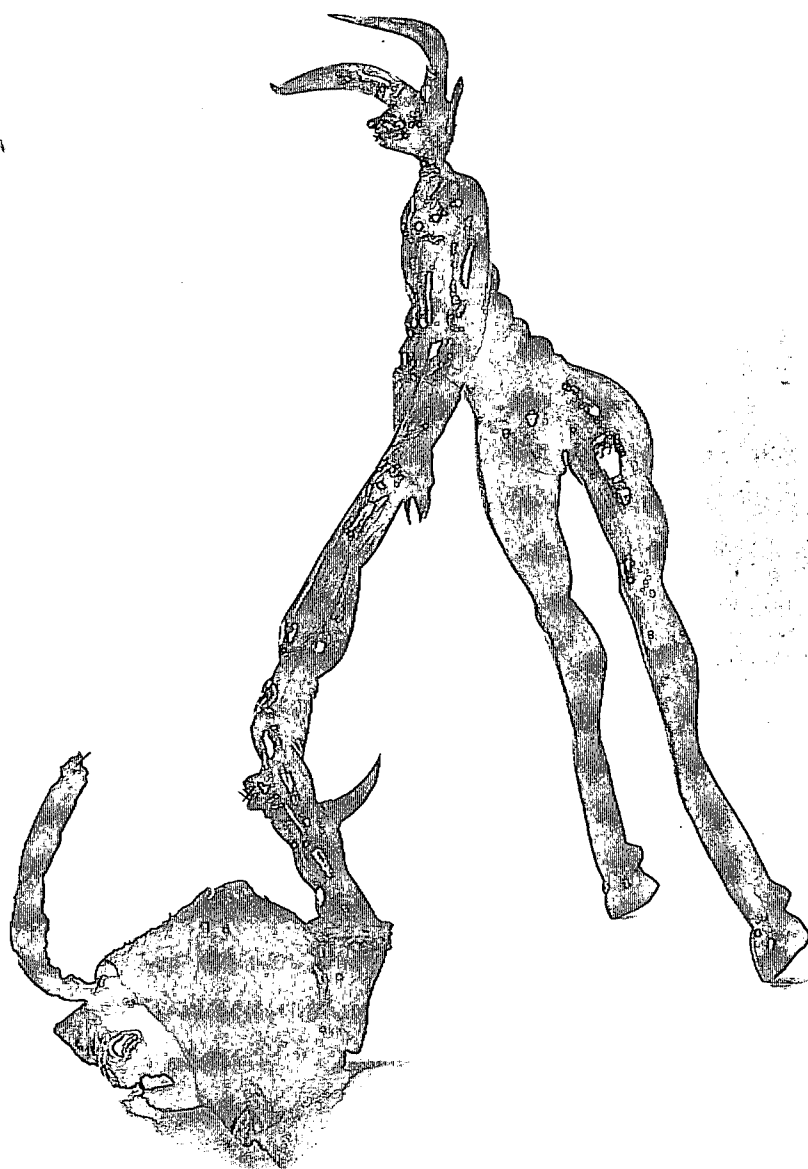


Figure 129. Albert Munyai. DREAMS AND CLOUDS. 1986-7. Wood, varnish, hide, horn. 117 x 119.8 x 157cm. Tatham Art Gallery permanent collection.

worked closely with Avhashoni Mainganye to build up his collection. Face to Face is a statement about the realities concerning educational division in South Africa and the racial divide.

It is interesting to note that the most traditional of woodcarvings, the *matano*, were also considered as teaching aids for the *domba* female initiation school. As may have been supposed, the title for the exhibition in Stockholm had been derived from Munyai's sculpture, Dreams and Clouds (sub-titled From a New South Africa). It had as a post-apartheid theme, the juxtaposition of two positive and negative elements.

Dreams dwell in our thoughts and aid us on our journey to attain balance, understanding and optimism. Clouds can darken and obstruct these perceptions, but simultaneously free our fantasies through their flexibility and constant change. A vantage point for our reflections on the changed cultural climate in South Africa can be founded on this illusive contemplation of dreams and clouds (Exhibition information package provided to the exhibiting artists from the Kulturhuset, Stockholm, 1998).

In the exhibition catalogue's summary (1999) the choice of title in relationship to Munyai's piece is further explored:

In 1986, Albert Munyai used the illusory character of clouds as inspiration for his sculpture 'Dreams and Clouds'. This sculpture articulated dreams about liberation during the dark apartheid days. An anthropomorphic cow-like figure, commanding fecundity through its powerful legs and mighty horns pulls the yet unformed nation from underneath a cowhide by its umbilical cord.

According to Munyai (June 1998), 'the 'Dream and Cloud' situation represented a time that was very strong and tight' and describes it thus:

It was the dream and it came very strong. I ran in the bush to finish it as quickly as possible. The situation was very bad and it was difficult to work. The lady with a horn doesn't have eyes, but has one big titty like the map of the continent of Africa which the sculpture was supporting (feeding). The living humans must be there but there is a powerful dragon animal which represents the demons. No man is standing up in Africa and the woman is angry.

Dreams and Clouds had been intended for the exhibition, though due to the fragile nature of the sculpture, a decision was taken not to risk transporting it to Sweden.

Sky (the artist's collection) was produced for the first Johannesburg Biennale and Dongola replaced Dreams and Clouds, for the Swedish Exhibition.

'Dongola' refers to tasting something with your finger. It was created one year after the election and confronts the disordered confluence of hope and disillusion. 'Dongola' is also a toponymical reference to a series of sacred ancestral sites in Vendloland (a northerly region in South Africa). The central part of the sculpture, a donkey, is built around a small log which once housed a swarm of mopani flies. This breed of fly produces a very sweet honey. Munyai collected the piece of wood in the Dongola vicinity and kept it as a memento of his travels to this sacred site. A tree, with a cross fixed onto it, and a coffin completes the assemblage. 'Dongola' contains references to a particular period in the sacred past of Venda, but it also evokes associations beyond the limits of the immediate spatial and temporal references. On a broader level the assemblage transcribes universal messages about appropriation and colonialism. The donkey and mopani flies refer to the abuse of the colonised worker. Constructed out of food providing remnants from the sacred land, it supports and carries a coffin. Its severed head stares to the sky. Landscape fragments relate to the agricultural power of the native land. For Albert Munyai, the ardent nature conservator, it underlines the economic and politico-religious importance of the land in the sustenance of a living (Dreams and Clouds exhibition catalogue, 1999).

The candidate recalls the renewed energy which had animated Munyai to create installations (including Sky) in situ at the Flanders exhibition where he was guest artist during the first Johannesburg Biennale. Munyai expressed admiration for artist Honore d'O with whom he collaborated in this installation saying (June 1998) that 'he packed the subject matter'.

Sky (1995) was an impromptu installation which overhung a section of the exhibition space, consisting of a piece of black shade cloth with cut out stars, a single carved figure hanging from each star shape. The 'sky' symbolizing the dawning of a new era with the first democratic election recently held, and the clarity and hope for the future, which is perhaps as yet uncertain in Dreams and Clouds.

Ironically enough *Dongola*, which prior to the *Dreams and Clouds* exhibition, had been in the possession of art dealer Burnett, was exported without Munyai's knowledge. The *mopani* flies, and the piece of wood in which they were housed were of great significance to Munyai.

Firstly, because the *mopani* flies were still alive, and secondly because of their connection to the sacred site. Munyai broke down in tears when he was informed of their transportation overseas¹¹ as he was aware that this would have killed *Dongola's* inhabitants.

A SECOND STYLISTIC SHIFT: A 'MIDDLE AGE' FOR MUNYAI.

In the candidate's opinion, the most prolific and powerful body of work produced by Munyai was executed between 1998-2000.

Munyai had carved drums before, in particular in the earlier years, when he worked with Nethengwe and several local drum-makers.

An example of an earlier drum is the *Thohoyandou* or *Mandamaswa a Tikwa Ngamala: The Old Supports the New* (Fig.5). The work was made from a tree which had been cut down to make way for power lines and comments on traditional and 'modern' trends working together. In part, it is a representation of the *ngoma lungundu*, with the three pillars supporting *Thohoyandou* (meaning elephants head) who is depicted as a reclining elephant. *Thohoyandou* was, according to legend, the last leader of the united Venda tribe who mysteriously disappeared at the end of the eighteenth century. The three pillars (half human) and one metal support at the base are symbolic of the four carriers required to prevent *ngoma lungundu* from touching the ground, which would cause it to lose its power (see The

¹¹ The candidate is aware that Munyai received an information package several months prior to the exhibition, including a letter requesting that *Dongola* travel to Sweden, and noting that Burnett had agreed to loan the work. The candidate made copies of these communications.

Introduction). The traditional huts at the base of the sculpture represent the homestead made up of a kitchen, a bedroom and a storeroom. An old stone lies at the heart of the work, which, according to Munyai, was brought from Central Africa by his great, great-grandfather. The ancestors are therefore connected to the drum. The 'new' or youth of the nation are represented by the stick structure around the base. The base itself is on wheels, resembling the toy *guntkulu*, which symbolises children. The new is also expressed in the symbolic cutting of the tree to make way for electricity (technical advancement) and comments on the Venda Electrical Company and the Venda Development Corporation (Munyai, Mukondeni Art Gallery, 2001).

The elephant motif is repeated on the painted bowl of the *ngoma* drum, which is protected by a colourful cloth woven in wool on plastic bags made by Munyai.

In 1998, Munyai embarked on the production of several *marimbas* or *mbilas* and one giant *marumba* drum (Figs.12-15).

This shift in style, although not new as such, represented a major shift in Munyai's thematic approach with its narrative and educational content.

The production of marimbas and the giant *marumba* drum (Figs.12-15) is explained by Munyai as being part of a time which is linked to the year 2000. Munyai called this 'another middle age', after the 'cleaning up' period of 1999 (October 1999). Munyai describes the purpose of music and the choice to go into the production of *marimbas* as the most powerful means of communication and says:

The sound produced by music takes every direction of songs to all nations (ibid).

Munyai's decision to turn to the production of musical instruments was governed by the same spiritual force.

As he maintains in an interview (April 2001):

Albert Munyai: So I think we got that energy, the only thing is that we are not used enough. I can say like me I'm doing in wood way, that certain spirit that been forced to expand into my life, to make a musical instrument that's where I were to reach into a 'blue'. I was turned into a blue, and I now realised that I have to talk something.

The candidate: What do you mean by a blue?

Albert Munyai: You know there are certain stages in our life, you see? Yes it's also a very good question, you know in life its like when you start from twelve, you see? You've got the inspiration of tomorrow, but you don't know what it is. You see it's a journey. When you reach into a certain stage, I think you will no longer ask me blue. Blue is a colour that's all about energy, the spiritual energy that makes the man to stand or maybe to move or either to speak, either to be a best of his own profession, given an example like crucifying. He didn't deny that he's the King of Jewish. The man he was turned to be a blue colour.

The candidate: Do you mean colours as defining levels of spirituality, as in Hindu and other Eastern philosophy? Where each level which attained a specific level of spiritually represents a colour, as with the *chakras*. One starts off with red and orange, the higher states represented by violet and blue.

Albert Munyai: Yes, yes, exactly. They also have the mark here (points to the mid-brow represented in eastern philosophy as the inner eye). So that certain energy, if you could be the best artist, you could be the best leader, either. If you are a teacher you'll be the best teacher, because one thing for sure is that it's not about learning but about finding.

Munyai (April 2001) describes his educational focus as 'a piece of blackboard upon which the artist writes his subject matter'. In other words, the messages projected through the medium of Munyai's sculpture are compounded with the additional elements, spiritual, physical and metaphorical which the medium of music imbues in the works.

A *marimba* is, like the *ngoma* drum, linked to the chieftaincy and has special uses related to rituals. The iconography, symbolism and functions of the Venda *mbila* are described by Nettleton (1984: 278-303) at great length. Nettleton also makes connections with the *mbira* of the Shona and the Venda counterparts, referred to as 'thumb pianos'. Nettleton accounts for the use of the *mbila* in a similar vein with that of the *ngoma* and the *ngomalungundu* as

having the role of playing battle songs (see the role of *ngoma lungundu* in the Introduction and the symbolism of the *ngoma* drum in the section on Samson Mudzunga in Chapter Two).

In the opening to her chapter on the *mbila* (xylophone) and related instruments, Nettleton (1984: 278) cites Kirby, with a description of the *mbila* being identical to those of Munyai's *marimba*'s (as he identifies them). It should be noted that the 'whim of the maker' also prevails, as far as the sculptural forms of the keys are concerned, in keeping with Munyai's intentions.

The *mbila* of the Venda is a large instrument consisting of a strong, though light frame called *magomate* (constructed with handles by which the instrument may be carried), over which is stretched, two *riems* or bark cords, twenty-one or twenty-two slabs of wood called collectively *mbile*. These slabs, cut from the wood of the *mutondo* tree, are dark brown in colour, and of different sizes, the smaller ones providing the higher sounds and the larger ones the lower. Below all the slabs except a few of the highest-pitched, are placed cucumber-shaped calabashes, called *mikhumbu*, each of which has an opening cut at the stalk end; they are lashed to the under part so that they shall remain firmly in position, each with its opening directly under the appropriate slab.

The function of these calabashes is to amplify the sound of the slab... The two raised ends of the slabs are ornamented with carving, and various designs are in use. But there is no significance in the choice of design for any particular note; this is governed only by the whim of the maker. (Kirby 1968: 50-51).

The candidate has extracted the following from diagrams drawn up by Nettleton (1984: 285 and 298), to illustrate the background from which Munyai selected his imagery, with specific reference to gender.

The design motifs of the Venda and the interpretation on the *mbila* are as follows:

The Python image marked by chevrons symbolizes the young male or female.

The Python image combined with herringbone motifs symbolises the young male.

The Python combined with ridged diamonds and cowrie shell motifs, signifies the young female.

The Crocodile (which can be combined with the Python), symbolizes the old female.

When the Python is present he would signify the young male.

When the Crocodile appears with the concentric circles and dots, which are motifs for the eyes of the crocodile, this could signify old female or old male.

When the combination of Crocodile image and superimposed transverse chevrons, these signify the old male (Crocodile) with either young male or young female (Python).

If the combination includes cross-shaped interlace motifs with the Crocodile, or the ridged diamonds and cowrie shells the old female is represented with the young female.

Nettleton (drawing on studies made by Roumeguere-Eberhard 1963: 71) analyses the complexities of the numerology in the context of the Venda mbila as follows:

The *mbila* keys usually number 22, which is also the number of the Venda clans.

The number 22 accounts for the number of mountains (in Venda).

The keys or notes on the left are 7 female + 4 male = 11

The keys on the right are 8 male + 3 female = 11

Whether Munyai refers to the complex combinations in their exactitude is unclear. In the candidate's opinion, it is likely that Munyai has knowledge of these aspects of traditional musical instruments (*Dende Legumbi*) though he probably plays around with the connotations to suit the purpose of his intended message, which holds priority in his art.

One recurring theme with the keys of Munyai's *marimbas* is the crying faces on one side, with alternating male and female genitals on the opposite side (Fig.130.1-130.2).

In the work Crying Man Mbila, one of Munyai's first Marimbas (*Mbila*), the meaning is synonymous with the pain of transition (October 1999).

Munyai's humour is prevalent in much of his work. It symbolises this transition, in the form of the image of a man with a thorn in his foot. The man cries, though if he had 'watched where he was going' the 'accident' (of stepping on a thorn) could have been avoided.

The message suggests the need for humankind to increase in consciousness.

The Cow Marimba (Fig.15) depicts the giving of a dignified death to a cow, whose decaying carcass was found by Munyai in the bush. The Cow Marimba (Fig.15) was based on the reconstruction of the corpse.

According to Munyai, the cow had met an undignified end. This death was considered to disable the cow's spirit, since no blood was spilt. She is feminine and the universal symbol of nourishment.

After reassembling the head and hide, Munyai combined the beast with the calabashes, hide string and wooden keys required to reconstruct the *marimba* (the bones were re-arranged in their original sequence).

The resurrected cow would then be milked, and ceremonially slaughtered so that the 'blood' is spilt to celebrate the spirits of the dead cow (Moloi 1999: 7).

Other themes used in Munyai's *marimbas* are the Crocodile (1999) (Fig.13) (old female and male) the Fish (1999) representing life and transformation and a new series of three *marimba*'s, two of which are still unassembled. The completed one has the theme of HIV/AIDS (2000-2001) (Fig.131.1-131.2).

It is entitled Mufhirifhiri, which means 'things which go in one direction'. Carved in *kiaat*, the *marimba* has twenty-one keys or beats as Munyai calls them. The beats are carved to represent open and closed 'bones'. These bones are the *thangu* which the *sangoma* throws. The meaning of closed bones is when the carved side with the 'eyes' lands face down, revealing the smooth surface. When a supplicant consulting a *sangoma* is presented with all the bones closed, this symbolises an irreversible situation: as with a diagnosis of HIV/AIDS.

Munyai describes the significance of his personal *thangu*. He carves them from baboon bones to represent the male, that is, Munyai, his father's side, and elephant bones to represent his mother's side, Masingo.



Figure 130.1 Albert Munyai Keys of CROCODILE MARIMBA. Detail. *Kiaat* wood. 1999. Sandton Convention Centre.



Figure 130.2 Albert Munyai playing CROCODILE MARIMBA. Detail. *Kiaat*, gourds leather. 1999. Sandton Convention Centre.



Figure 131.1-131.2. Albert Munyai. *MUFHIRIFHIRI MARIMBA*.2000-2001. *Kiaat*, gourds leather.1999.collection of the artist.

AIDS ribbons are burnt onto the sides below the keys. The marimba has legs and a base which slot into each other. The legs are all different; two are female and two male. They are inlaid with red 'lucky beans'. The dominant feature of the base is a giant penis, turning outwards and on the other side a carved vagina.

This marimba was exhibited recently on the Golelanwali exhibition (2001), along with the Crucifixion Table (2000-2001) (Fig. 132.1-132.2) and the Strength of a Woman (2000-2001) (Fig. 133.1-133.2).

Another marimba (incomplete) has the macabre theme of a straight jacket, as a form of torture, with a human head protruding.

In Nettleton's doctoral research (1984: 278-303) she describes the *marimba* as *mbila*, giving the name *marimba* to what the candidate has found to be termed the *marumba*, the drum with a tapered waist. The *mbira*, described by Nettleton refers to the instrument used by the Shona of Zimbabwe to describe the smaller, handheld keyboard instruments with metal keys, often housed in a gourd to create resonance.

Munyai believes that the messages of music are educational and are taking us into the future.

WHERE THE FUTURE LIES BREAKING DEPENDENCY

Of his future, Munyai (2001) says:

How now to inspire people, I think it's my responsibility now, to go and get the piece of wood and carve something so that in that manner we could be doing better. If I could say I could write a book, yes I was just going to say, 'Yes, I'll write some books and tell people. But I'm just a wood carver you know, which I think is also a wonderful gift because there are so many things that had happened and it now pushes me in a level that I feel I don't have so much to do about myself, but I've got so much to do about art.

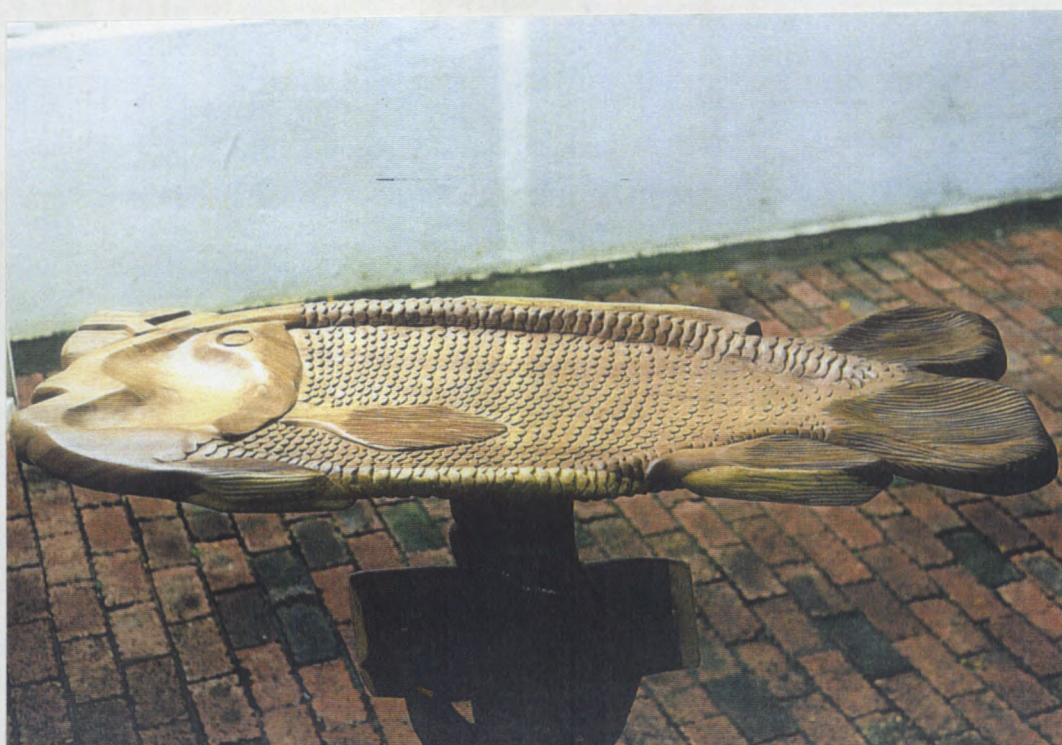


Figure 132.1-132.2. Albert Munyai. CRUCIFIXION TABLE. (2000-2001). *Kiaat* wood. Collection Kathy Coates.



Figure 133.1 Albert Munyai STRENGTH OF A WOMAN. 2000-2001. *Kiaat* wood.
Collection of the artist.



Figure 133.2 Albert Munyai STRENGTH OF A WOMAN. 2000-2001. *Kiaat* wood.
Collection of the artist.

According to Munyai, his future is reliant on finding a way out of his financial difficulties by creating alternatives. However, on occasions when opportunities have arisen, such as exhibiting at (and attending) the *Hayani/Crossings* exhibitions or taking up an artist's residency at the Fordsburg Artists Studio in Johannesburg, Munyai retracts from these offers

(In consultation with David Koloane, an artist at the studio, Munyai was selected for the residency of July –September 2001) preferring to work in Venda.

What is evident when looking at Munyai's work, and when observing him work, is that he has found a niche for himself. His style of working and great passion for his craft may have transcended his earlier problems. Certainly, the quality of Munyai's work is of a high standard.

The subject matter, which is of utmost importance for Munyai, has a very sophisticated educational content which few other woodcarvers have attained. The symbolism explored in Munyai's work has become less overt, less of a cliché. For example the metaphors arising in Munyai's Dreams and Clouds and his more recent *marimbas*, however strongly rooted in Venda cultural symbolism, work with metaphors rather than the obvious political messages dominant in the eighties, as seen in Face to Face (Fig. 128).

The difficulties of dependency on art dealers, which have plagued Munyai throughout his artistic career, remain unresolved despite a period of prolific output. The minimal financial gain has not been enough to sustain Munyai and his family.

CHAPTER THREE

OBSERVATIONS AND ALTERNATIVES IN THE EXHIBITING AND MARKETING OF THE ART OF THE WOODCARVERS OF THE NORTHERN PROVINCE.

In Sections One and Two of the third chapter, the candidate will present alternatives to existing presentations of artworks by the selected woodcarvers which arose from her own experience of curating exhibitions of the woodcarver's work. These exhibitions were *No Limits, No Frontiers* (1995), the regional exhibition of the former Northern Transvaal for the first *Johannesburg Biennale: Africus '95* which travelled to two other venues, the Pietersburg/Polokwane Art Museum and the South African Association of Arts in Pretoria, *The Venda Woodcarvers* (The South African Association of Arts, Pretoria, 1997), *The Right to Hope* (Johannesburg 1996) and the *Hayani/Crossings* exhibitions (The NSA Gallery, Durban 2000).

Although the candidate did not participate in the second *Johannesburg Biennale* of 1997, a comparative view of the two shows will be briefly reviewed and analysed.

Following in the wake of the *Johannesburg Biennale*, *The Right to Hope* exhibition was co-ordinated by Katherine Thick. The initiative specifically focused on young emerging artists nationally. The candidate selected work of the younger generation of the woodcarvers who had participated in the first *Johannesburg Biennale*, as well as sculptures produced by her students.

Other attempts to showcase the artists' work within the Northern Province, at the Pietersburg/Polokwane Art Museum and at events such as the Haenertsburg Festival, will be briefly documented.

As an embodiment of what was a profound learning experience on behalf of the candidate as a curator within and outside of the Northern Province, the candidate chose to present two exhibitions in the submission of this Master of Technology Degree. These exhibitions,

exhibitions entitled *Hayani /Crossings*, which should be viewed in conjunction with each other and in part as direct collaborations with some of the exhibiting artists and the candidate. Additional collaborations are explored or alluded to where significant in this study. In Section Three of Chapter Three the candidate analyses the Northern Province Special Project initiated by the national Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology. A critique of the project's culminating exhibition entitled: *Motho Ke Motho Ka Batho: The Crafts Cross a Divide* curated by Rayda Becker, is included in terms of its impact on the selected woodcarvers.

SECTION ONE

THE JOHANNESBURG BIENNALE, 1995 AND THE 2ND JOHANNESBURG BIENNALE, 1997.

The candidate will discuss her role in the inaugural Biennale in South Africa as curator of the *No Limits, No Frontiers* exhibition which represented the artists of the then far Northern Transvaal. This was the candidate's first experience as a curator.

The title of this exhibition is a contradiction in terms since the exhibition was defined by specific geographical borders and other less definable though perhaps more visible, social, political, cultural, economic, spiritual and psychological borders which affected the artist on the periphery of the mainstream art world in South Africa. This issue becomes even further contradictory when considering the themes of the Biennale, *Africus '95*, which were: Volatile Alliances and Decolonising Our Minds.

No Limits, No Frontiers included a wider group of art makers (both men and women), than the smaller group under discussion in this body of research. The candidate prefers to use the term "artmaker" in an attempt to avoid the imposition of a divisionist attitude implied when applying the terms 'artist' and 'crafter'.

However, it should be noted that these divisions of "art" and "craft" are also predominantly divided in relationship to gender. An example is the male dominated tradition of woodcarving (considered as 'art') and the female traditions of clay production, embroidery and beadwork (categorised as 'craft'). In the Northern Province this division of labour according to gender is particularly entrenched, especially in the more rural regions.

The candidate's involvement in the Biennale project began in March 1994 when approached by Bongi Dhlomo-Mautlau, Outreach and Development Project Coordinator of the Johannesburg Biennale, to make a slide presentation to a group of international curators at the Venda Sun Hotel in Thohoyandou. Included in the group were Lorna Ferguson, Biennale Co-ordinator, and twelve trainee curators. The group of curators had been travelling to main centres in South Africa to establish links with practicing artists. Their collective aim was to engage with South African artists and select artists who would collaborate with their show in terms of certain criteria, which seemed to be loosely defined under the umbrella of the themes of Volatile Alliances and Decolonising Our Minds. Several collaborations were made with artists from the far north. Artists who were selected were invited to exhibit under the main exhibition as presented by that particular country. Noriah Mabasa was selected to collaborate with the United States, Albert Munyai was included in the Flanders exhibition, Freddy Ramabulana (b.1930-) with Israel and Jackson Hlungwani with Cote d'Ivoire.

The candidate believes that some collaborations were more effective than others in terms of conscious decisions by the curators subject to their experience and knowledge of the artists they chose.

However, the artists selected for such collaborations, whether they themselves were conscious of it or not, were afforded a completely different status to the artists who formed part of the regional exhibitions.

The *No Limits, No Frontiers* exhibition was part of the Outreach and Development Project which seemed to be subsidiary in nature, compared to mainstream exhibitions. Most of the exhibitions put together were from Community Arts Projects such as the Funda Centre, the Katlehong Art Centre and the Soweto Outreach Project; or alternately were collaborations with tertiary institutions, such as Pelmama Academy of Art and Music, Independent Visual Arts of South Africa (IVASA) and the Johannesburg Art Foundation.

In a review of the *Johannesburg Biennale*, David Koloane (1996: 52) noted the division of the 'mainstream' exhibitions and the Community-based exhibitions. He compared (1996: 53) the spaces allocated to many of the outreach exhibitions as reminiscent of 'nooks and crannies', 'like an ominous corner of some township'. As it happened, this metaphor was, according to Koloane, the current label attached to their art.

The *No Limits, No Frontiers*, seemingly under the same label, fared better than most, placed in a prestigious position on the fourth floor of the Museum Africa between the exhibitions from the United States, the Netherlands and New Zealand. Koloane (1996:53) pointed out in this review that the appointment of coordinator of the Outreach and Development programme, Bongi Dhlomo-Mautlau, had been strategic though directly due to an action of racial tokenism. Dhlomo-Mautlau (1995: 26) preferred to use the term Outreach and Development rather than 'Community Arts' as she associated it with yet another 'newly-coined' term to define black South African artists who yet again find themselves labelled, checked, re-labelled and re-checked in a process that would seem to have no end.

The 'Outreach and Development' exhibitions were allocated a smaller share of the *Biennale* budget, which resulted in a limited degree of 'professional image' attached to their works. The process of these presentations was further undermined by the late payment of allocated funds. Some works were unframed, unfinished and as Koloane (1996: 3) put it: 'despite the

many titles and themes of breaking down boundaries, they were still clearly in place'.

Fortunately, the budget for *No Limits, No Frontiers*, although small, had received a greater allocation than other outreach exhibitions (Dhlomo 1995), due to the appreciable distance and the nature of the artworks to be transported. During the days leading up to the opening of the *Biennale*, the candidate observed the installing of many of the exhibitions and interactions of the various role-players in the event.

The entry in the *Biennale* catalogue (1995), explained the connections which the artists from the United States made with Mabasa as follows:

Noria Mabasa's large sculptures were selected to be exhibited with the work of Betye Saar and John Outterbridge because her work, like theirs, is an extension of an art process that emanates and embraces many aspects of the domestic domain.

Her environment consists of cattle, a small fruit grove and a garden with clay figures and carved crocodiles placed at gate or courtyard entries. She grows standard kitchen crops such as yam and corn but also has potted plants that are used for healing.

Mabasa, Saar and Outterbridge have a supersensible relationship with their work which evokes a deep sense of spirituality. Much has been made of Mabasa's dreams as an impetus for the content of her work. However, the carving process is also crucial to the direction that her work will eventually take. The most ambitious works exhibit a metamorphosis of exploding forms that appear to reach out and corral the space around them. In these works she reveals a consciousness of pre-existing forms and possibilities for their manipulation.

This type of consciousness is often referred to when discussing the work of academically trained artists, while self or community-trained artists have been contextualised in an intuitive framework. Exhibiting works by the three artists together fosters viewing experience where forms may be read without references to categorisation. It also fosters respect for varied bodies of knowledge, especially knowledge gained within the domestic space.

The issues raised in this article are very valid, though this revered appraisal of Mabasa's life and work seemed not to be reflected in the relationships as perceived by the viewer in the exhibition of which it speaks.

The candidate is of the opinion that Mabasa's sculpture was marginalised in the U.S. show.

The main exhibition space contained a small alcove. The large woodcarving entitled The

Flood (Fig.3) was inconspicuously placed in an alcove which disconnected it from the other exhibits. This view is consistent with Koloane's (1996) and raises questions as to the effectiveness of such collaborations.

In addition, there had been some technical oversight in the delivery of Mabasa's piece to the Museum Africa. Two days before the opening of the *Biennale* and after the works of Saar and Outterbridge had been positioned, Ruphus Mathibe, a trainee curator and co-curator of *No Limits, No Frontiers* was sent to Mabasa's home in Venda to collect the work. It appeared that Mabasa's work came as an afterthought.

In the Israeli Exhibition, entitled *Invisible Borders*, curator Meir Ahronson (one of the group of curators who ventured to the north in 1994) having selected a sculptural work of Venda artist Freddy Ramabulana titled Nebuchadnezzar (1994), makes no mention of him in his two- page catalogue entry.

The Israeli artists' works are described as representative of Israeli art. However, reflecting on the theme "invisible borders" which provides the context and title of the show, and the greater theme of the *Biennale*, 'decolonising our minds' Ahronson provides an explanation of his intentions that borders do not demand constant definition and examination. He also challenges the need to make connections between artworks sharing the same physical space, declaring that due to the *Biennale*'s layout, there need not be any physical contact between the works.

He writes:

Contact, comprehension and experience will be manifested when the viewer sees all four exhibits, each in its place each as its own part of a whole. Decolonisation of our cultural concept need not mean entrenchment in localism. Perhaps it is more fitting to perceive it as a balanced integration of internationalism and localism, as a kind of connection that does not detract from either. (1995: 162).

Despite this proclamation of intent to re-define contact in the juxtaposition of artworks as irrelevant, and by so doing, allowing the viewer the choice of making connections, one is bound to ask whether the omission of any reference to Ramabulana's work was part of Ahronson's strategy.

The Ivory Coast exhibit included a large installation of Shangaan woodcarver Jackson Hlungwani, centrally positioned in their exhibition, mounted on rocks brought from Mbhokota, Hlungwani's residence. Not unlike the Israeli show, the Ivory Coast's submission in the Biennale catalogue omitted any mention of Hlungwani or his work.

This is not a specifically South African phenomena according to Njami, (quoted by Dhlomo-Mautlau 1995:26):

I find it useless to remind people of the extent to which the situation of Black artists – for let's make no mistake, we are talking about them- is the same everywhere in the world.

Whether they live in London, in New York, in Bamako or in Port-au-Prince, Black artists are struck with invisibility. Social invisibility of course, but also, and this is the more painful of the two, artistic invisibility. (Njami, 1992: 14).

One could speculate that this is not an intentional slight on Hlungwani when collaborating with another African country.

One vibrant collaboration was that of the Flanders exhibition. Prior to the Biennale's opening, the candidate spent long hours at the Museum Africa waiting for delivery of art works. This afforded her the opportunity to interact with some of the artists and curators. The installation in the Flanders exhibition consisted of one existing piece: Peace in Your Heart (1990) (Fig.134), a woodcarving by Albert Munyai, whilst the remainder of the exhibition was installed *in situ*, in collaboration with Rik Moens, Honore d'O and Billy Mandindi.

With the playfulness with which Munyai is renowned, he produced a spontaneous installation from a piece of shade cloth, with small carved figures hanging from a painted rainbow, in response to the newly coined "rainbow nation". This piece was named Sky and was later to



Figure 134. Albert Muniyai PEACE IN YOUR HEART 1990. Wood. Photograph: the Johannesburg Biennale catalogue: Africus '95. Location unknown.

be exhibited in the Swedish exhibition: *Dreams and Clouds* (Chapter Two, section on Albert Munyai).

Munyai recalls (March 2001) the special kind of energy collaborating with Honore d'O, Billy Mandindi and Rik Moens:

What I discovered at the Biennale time people may live in different continents, but we all mostly talk one language and that is something that I think people they had forgotten that really, the Babylon spirit is still alive, and I think that we've missed a few things behind us. The boundaries which we've put as a cycle, for us to live, for us to move it brings our minds to think very shortly. The Biennale energy, the first Biennale in a new South African Democratic movement, you look at the whole thing, you know. You can really, really feel that you were there before. And it's where that I believe that a human being, he never dies, its just only that this, from in, it's a new frame. I call a body a frame. Our spirit it was there before. You know I was feeling that much. At the time of Biennale, I saw and I feel the beginning of the attachment of the ground where the creator God Himself creates this world. I never saw those buildings in Jo'burg at that time. I didn't see them. It was such a wonderful time. I was seeing it as existing in every moment and every time. It's only we people who are not doing enough about it. You know we are focussing on redevelopment, on what we think is good, and whether human beings should live or survive, and we forgotten that if we can live spiritually peaceful, everything can happen in very possible ways. Because the creator Himself when He create us either ...the world itself or the earth. He didn't make any obstacles or putting any walls in the way life through, so that we can live in a difficult situation, we had create all these difficult situations, to the whole world as well. You know like what is happening in the Middle East, what is happening again in the middle of Africa. That certain energy it becomes through existing shortly, moment. It becomes difficult for the special people to not get a good chance to teach people. You know we are like fingers. If everyone has got five fingers you look at those fingers and they are all not on the same size. But they always do one thing. When you pick up something like a cup, you never hear that little finger say 'no, man, you're not carrying enough'. So you see if we can learn about that feeling, and share through to our kids, even to our leaders through, because I think that even our leaders, they must turn their lives to be our kids. Because they can't be the leaders if they don't have people to lead. So those people who are leaded, they are the pages of a leader to read about it everyday. Every second. So I suppose that the Biennale took a very long time to be gathered because it's all mostly happening after two years. Which is very long, you know because if you can imagine a human being to be alive, about a month is a week, it's a week is a month and a month is a year, and a year it becomes about ten years, you know. If we were to do this abroad, like they are doing with the soccer now, I think its very good, because South Africa can go in some other countries and that would be really good to go and play there So I think it can also happen in art- if we were to form a certain body.

In between the panels partitioning off the exhibition from its neighbours, the collaborators had installed a miniature exhibition labelled as their own “fringe” exhibition, an exhibition within an exhibition. Munyai gained a lot from the exercise, in particular the possibility of working with other artists and exploring new materials.

The enthusiasm of curator Bart de Baere, who was particularly passionate about the work of the woodcarvers from the north, was a strong guiding force in this show.

In the catalogue entry (1995:144) no text was inserted to present any intention, except for:

‘The artists will produce an exhibition on site, resulting from a collaborative exchange’.

This collaboration however, was one of Biennale coordinator Ferguson’s favourites: (Gevisser, 1995: 2)

One of her favourite projects is that of Flemish curator Bart de Baere, who went to Venda with two Belgian artists: ‘In my opinion they played like little boys, and they’re still playing’, she says with approval.

To the claim that the exhibition is ‘recolonising’ rather than ‘decolonising our minds’, she counters: ‘South Africans seem to me to be too scared about that. I look at an artist like Honore d’O, the Belgian, and I can most decidedly say that he has been colonised by Venda art and not the other way around’ (Gevisser, 1995: 2).

The curatorship of the far northern exhibition was one which was fraught with difficulties and logistical problems. The responsibility of the show lay largely in the hands of the candidate, since the other selected curator withdrew his involvement from the outset. Ruphus Matibe, a trainee curator for the Australian exhibition was asked to assist, though he was committed to the Australian exhibition.

Due to information getting through to the candidate very close to deadline, such as a request for biographical details of the artists, much valuable researched information was omitted from the catalogue.

On the brink of the opening, the candidate found the technical support, supposedly allocated to each floor, lacking, as was also the case for some foreign curators. The candidate hired her own assistants. When assistance was required from Ruphus Mathibe he was sent to Venda to collect the Noriah Mabasa piece: The Flood (Fig. 3), which had been omitted from the American show.

The candidate was clearly aware of the vast proportions of pulling together the entire project of which *No Limits, No Frontiers* was a drop in the ocean by comparison. When one observed the machinations of the nearing birth of what, as Ivor Powell (1995:1) described as the Biennale monster, 'whose gestation was both painful and messy', there was much to be proud of and much to feel concern about.

Powell astutely observed, as had Koloane, that although the Biennale came to fruition in a post-election new South Africa, and was presented under the auspices of the non-racial Transitional Metropolitan Chamber, its conception and most of its gestation belonged in the old South Africa and the essentially white Johannesburg City Council.

These experiences however, had a positive learning value for the candidate. They highlighted the lack of understanding on the part of the urban art world, in relation to the location of, and physical conditions in which one is required to operate when curating a show of rural artists. As far as the artists involved were concerned, they were still a distant curiosity. Being part of an outreach programme extended the psychological distance although several other exhibitions under the 'outreach' banner were situated close to central Johannesburg.

One of the highlights for the candidate in curating the *No Limits, No Frontiers* exhibition, was the presence of the artists at the opening event.

Through support from the University of the North, a twenty-five seater bus was made available. Almost all the woodcarvers on exhibition and representatives from several womens' cooperatives travelled to Johannesburg from at least five different locations.

The candidate travelled with woodcarvers Phillip Rikhotso and Lazarus Seoka. The experience for the twenty-five artists who were accommodated for three days after the opening was invigorating. To be in a post-apartheid city interacting with artists from all corners of the globe, including seven other African countries was seen as a great opportunity for interaction. The women's collectives (bead workers, potters and textile workers) represented in the Johannesburg Biennale joined the fringe exhibition and traded outside the Newtown Gallery, staying on for an extra week.

Unfortunately, neither Noriah Mabasa nor Jackson Hlungwani was invited. The candidate called at Mbhokota to enquire as to whether Hlungwani had need of transport. Hlungwani said that things had been arranged for him to come, though he was not present at the event.

The candidate believes that the interaction amongst the artists was the most empowering aspect for all concerned.

When Preller (1998: 32) analysed the impact of the first Biennale she noted that critics were questioning as to whether it had in fact succeeded in reflecting intercultural influences, diversity and intermingling, or whether it still operated within a Western paradigm, in actuality confirming exactly that which it was trying to negate: bringing the mainstream to Johannesburg's urban margin, instead of the other way around. Preller (1998: 33) was also critical of some of 'the presentation of works by 'previously' marginalized artists'. *No Limits, No Frontiers* had been included in this criticism, when she said:

Most of the sculptures on this exhibition were exhibited on uniform, square, black bases – very much in the Western tradition. No attempt was made to exhibit them in any credible context, resulting in the exhibition coming across more like an ethnographic exhibition of African artefacts rather than art works in their own right.

The candidate agrees with this comment and believes that attempts at solutions to this

problem, such as Hlungwani's installation built on rocks from the village of Mbhokota, or the Africa Earthed surrounded by soil, tend to pander to 'exotic ethnicity' which ultimately holds no genuine solution. The issue is the gallery space itself. The use of display techniques can be improved upon, though they will never replace the landscape in which these artworks were created.

Preller suggests that it must be borne in mind that some of the works on *No Limits, No Frontiers* initially formed part of 'installations', but not in the Western sense of the term. In terms of this show, twenty-nine artists were represented and forming 'installations' was not feasible, nor the artists' intention. The original suggestion of Dhlomo- Mautlau was to construct round walls within the exhibition space. The intention was to imitate the *rondavel*, upon which the canvas wall paintings, produced by Shangaan and Venda women, would be hung. The financial and time constraints did not allow for this although the paintings were part of the exhibition. The resulting effect could have been that of a 'tourist village' appearing as a token of our newly fledged casino culture.

THE SECOND JOHANNESBURG BIENNALE 1997

The 2nd Johannesburg Biennale (1997) had a completely different approach, image and political focus than the First Johannesburg Biennale (1995). Entitled *Trade Routes: History and Geography* it employed Nigerian born Okwui Enwezor as its artistic director.

Bongi Dhlomo- Mautlau (telephonic communication, 2002) who was then the director of AICA (Africus Institute of Contemporary Art)¹² and had shed her label of Outreach and Development Coordinator, held the view that the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale was more successful than the first, in terms of its 'political will', in that it was better supported by the

¹² AICA was launched in June 1996 to take forward the staging of the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale.

government. Dhlomo-Mautlau said that it was a great pity that a third Biennale did not materialise as she felt that this would have 'pulled all issues together'. Dhlomo-Mautlau added (ibid): 'of course it was not so good for you people', referring to the artists from the Northern Province.

In trying to make sense of this statement it is important to revisit Dhlomo-Mautlau's Preface in the catalogue for the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale, which concludes:

It is not amazing therefore that dependency on the white minority by the black majority in South Africa is following the continent's example and is creating confusion as the changing of roles takes firm root.

The staging of the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale 1997 will not only bring together the nations of the world, but attempt to bring together the disparate groupings of the South African art community. If we succeed, we will all be able to look back together and say to ourselves indeed it is a good route to have chosen and then look forward in readiness for a new journey together (1997: 11).

In the 2nd Biennale the rural artists were not included on any level, a point which perpetuated the feelings of exclusion by woodcarvers Heindrick Nekhofe, Azwhimpelele Magoro, Albert Munyai and Avhashoni Mainganye. Noriah Mabasa, Phillip Rikhotso and Samson Mudzunga were unaware of its existence (the candidate sought the opinion of the above-mentioned woodcarvers in early 1998).

The candidate recalls a visit by Enwezor and Clive Kellner, then Projects Coordinator for AICA, to Technikon Natal in 1997. Their purpose was to inform staff and students of the concept of the 1997 Biennale and to call for proposals for exhibitions, or applications from students to assist in the event.

Enwezor made it clear that he had no intention of following on in the style of the previous Biennale of 1995, implying that its intention to 'include anyone and everyone' had created a sort of shabbiness with which he would not be associated. His personal artistic vision alluded to an exhibition of professional excellence, with fewer participants and very few South

African curators in order to achieve international standards. This goal was achieved and many participating artists whom the candidate questioned found the event stimulating, innovative, technically exciting and professionally managed.

Okwui Enwezor (1997:7) commented on his vision when he said:

This project comes at a time when the entire notion of history is being constantly questioned and revisited. Hence, the elaboration of the debates in which the Biennale is necessarily enmeshed, could be seen as a kind of open network of exchange involving different levels of cultural significations, translations, transcriptions, phenomenological and social encounters, mobility of ideas, contestations of political methodologies, etc. My interest in globalisation, and what the critic Saskia Sassen would term its strategic agents, is to respond to the evolving nature of contemporary culture today as transmitted from a very limited enclosure of eurocentrism. This response further narrows in a strip of territory we all refer to as contemporary art in the age of hyper-consumerism, ethnographic travel, cultural tourism, the Hollywoodisation of mass culture. This necessitates attention to exploring the emergent forms of practice and conditions in the evolving culture of the image within contemporary art today; from the real to the hyper-real, from various aspects of social portraiture to fugitive acts of aesthetic decomposition and transgression.

If an exhibition's success is judged by the response from the general public then it was a failure. The Johannesburg Metro Council tried to close the Biennale early (1998: 51). The Biennale staff raised funds to prevent this happening, noting that more financial support came from overseas donors such as USIS, the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, the British Council and Prins Claus Fonds than from our own department of Arts and Culture. Kellner noted that the total funding for the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale was less than the money received by one artist in the Sao Paulo Biennale. Local support for education was under criticism; the Department of Education did not get involved with educational programmes as it had in the first Biennale, denying a larger audience through education in schools, brochures and internships (Kellner, 1998: 51).

Critic Rasheed Araeen (2000:13) felt that South Africa, with its struggle and achievement against the tyranny of the white supremacist ideology had something very special to offer the

world, which Araeen would have hoped was on the agenda for Enwezor, as an African (Araeen's emphasis).

Instead, noted Araeen, Enwezor's presumption was that South Africa needed to learn from the 'international art community'. Araeen criticised the arrogance of paternalistic European curators at the first Biennale who 'came to help 'ignorant' South Africa to know what was happening outside their country', accusing Enwezor of the same attitude.

Araeen defines the issue of today as:

not just representation, of the lack of presence and visibility of African and Asian artists, but about the nature of their presence and visibility within the western institutional structures. These structures still carry colonial ideas about 'others', which cannot therefore recognise the fact that we have contributed – and are contributing – to the mainstream of 20th century art not as Africans or Asians with cultural identity tags around our necks but as modernists who, by being liberated from colonialism and becoming subjects of history, have thus redefined modernism beyond its eurocentric framework. (Araeen's emphasis) (2000:14).

Araeen noted that under the benevolent framework of multiculturalism these 'others' would be accommodated as artists in such a way that these structures would not be challenged or questioned by them.

The candidate questions the value of an event which excluded black South African artists as a whole.

Preller (1997: 43) questions the exclusion:

What happened to artists like Philippa Hobbs, Keith Deitrich, Leora Farber, Bonnie Ntshalinshali, Diane Victor, Jane Alexander, Jackson Hlungwani, Noria Mabasa, John Clarke, Helen Sebidi and others too numerous to mention? And what about the artists included in 'No Limits-No Frontiers', 'Africa Earthed', Beyond Boundaries', 'Cavewall to Canvas' – not to mention artists who participated in the community projects? Why, were African curators, with the exception of Colin Richards, not included? This is even more perplexing if one remembers that one of the stated aims of the 1995 Biennale was to train curators for future events.

THE VENDA CARVERS EXHIBITION, SOUTH AFRICAN ASSOCIATION OF ARTS, PRETORIA, 1998.

During 1996, the candidate had been requested by Roena Griesels, the director of the South African Association of Arts in Pretoria, to curate a second exhibition of 'Venda' artists (the first had been the *Biennale: No Limits, No Frontiers* exhibition) to open in 1998.

At that stage of Ditike's history, a committee of artists had been elected to attempt to run the centre. The centre manager position was allocated to woodcarver Richard Mangoma.

The candidate communicated to Griesels that she would be absent from the Northern Province in 1997. Griesels assured her that provided her role of selecting art works had been completed by the end of 1996, she would be satisfied. The candidate drafted a budget and submitted a comprehensive lists of artworks, the bulk of which were either already at Ditike, or delivered to Ditike by the candidate before she left for Durban. The artists who had unfinished works selected for the exhibition had promised to deliver them to Ditike. To assist the artists who had transport problems, the candidate arranged with woodcarver Azwhimpheleli Magoro, who owns a bakkie, to collect and deliver the outstanding artworks. This service was paid for, in advance.

Whilst the candidate was in Durban, Griesels sent a truck to collect the art works. Mangoma refused to allow the works to leave Ditike. This was during the period that Mangoma was challenged on his management role (Chapter One, Section on Ditike). The candidate was informed about the problem and after several telephone conversations between Durban, Pretoria and Thohoyandou, the issue was resolved. It appeared that some of the listed works had been sold and several works were still at the homes of the artists. The exhibition travelled to Pretoria and CapeTown, and was commercially a big success, with most of the work being sold.

However, the candidate, despite her role in curating the show and solving the problems at Ditike, was neither informed of the opening dates nor invited. Neither were any of the artists on the exhibition. Prior to leaving for Durban, the candidate had requested Griessels to assist in bringing the artists to Pretoria, at least for the opening. The candidate had been able to find very reasonable rates with a taxi driver who is a relative of Magoro. Griessels said that funds were not available. In summary this experience exemplifies some of the logistical problems in seeking to exhibit outside of the Province and to organise from a distance.

The press reviews were mixed. Kendell Geers stated in a review (The Star, February 27th 1997: 5) that

Little has changed since 1985 as Venda artists continue to be exploited. Galleries and dealers care only about their own pseudo liberal image and profit margins.

Geers appears to contradict himself when he says:

A problem arises when, as Muffin Stevens does in her review for a Pretoria newspaper, comparisons are drawn between Massacio, medieval Romanesque cathedral sculpture, Rodin and the Venda Carvers.

Geers then goes on to say:

The Venda Carvers are part of our national heritage. They are, however, not the same as great artists like Dumile, Sihlale, Kentridge or Hodgins. The Venda Carvers are part of a strong tradition of craft, which will probably outlive art. It is time that we use the same standards and criteria for black artists as we do for white, rural and urban artists.

SECTION TWO

THE *HAYANI*/CROSSINGS EXHIBITIONS: A CURATORIAL EXPERIENCE.

Hayani, the Venda word for home, was the name chosen for the exhibition curated by the candidate as an additional component towards her Master's degree submission.

As such, the exhibition complements the information in this dissertation and explores the direct relationship of the selected artists with their domestic environment and its

surroundings. Since her involvement in this field of research the candidate has been aware of the impact of the immediate environment on the work produced by the selected woodcarvers working in the Northern Province. These relationships and observations were suggested in the photographic presentations in the exhibition.

The idea was born as an attempt by the candidate to present the work of the woodcarvers in a more accessible manner as part of her practical submission.

It also provided an opportunity to contextualise the written and audio-visual material collected in a way which would ensure a more honest and informed view of the artists and factors influencing their work. It additionally fulfilled the need to find ways of presenting the work of the rural artists to whom the urban gallery is often a remote and disconnected location.

Crossings, the exhibition of the candidate's work, represented the practical component of this Master's degree. It took the form of three sculptural installations and one collaborative piece with woodcarver Azwhimpeleli Magoro. The essence of this exhibition was to explore the possibilities of using ritual as a healing process in our society. The rituals were embodied in everyday events such as transportation and food.

The two exhibitions were presented together and in some cases artworks of the carvers were consciously juxtaposed with elements in the candidate's installations.

Additionally, the candidate was attempting to present a possible model for a different kind of exhibition, which focussed more on an educational approach in terms of contextualizing the artists' work.

A weeklong workshop in the Technikon Natal sculpture department and an exhibition walkabout, following the opening, provided opportunities for two of the Northern Province artists to engage with artists based in Kwa-Zulu-Natal.

It has been hypothesised in this dissertation that rural artists have been marginalised due to geographical and socio-economic conditions, as well as aspects affecting their access, or lack thereof, to infrastructures in the Northern Province.

Although some of the artists researched in this study, and other artists in the region, have exhibited overseas or are represented in international collections, art collectors and gallerists often neglect to contextualise the artists in terms of their place of origin, whether physical, spiritual, or intellectual. One could argue that this is the case with any artist, whether black, white, urban or rural.

Urban artists in South Africa are privy to a language, which goes further than the realm of words and includes issues of understanding. Many examples and references to this problem are apparent in this study, such as Mudzunga's misunderstanding of the issues of sales/deposits on artworks as in his dealings with Read (Chapter Two), or Munyai's differing understanding with van Kraayenberg regarding the role of his truck in their sales agreement (Chapter One).

A colonisation of choices and decisions in the presentation of artworks is often assumed as the right of a curator in installing artworks in venues under their control. Two examples which spring to mind are the wilful and sometimes playful rearrangement of carefully curated installations.

The first example is that of Jackson Hlungwani's major installation (1983-4) which was installed at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 1991 (see Chapter One) by Ricky Burnett and gallery director Christopher Till, with little or no consultation with the artist.

The installation itself had had a great deal of controversy surrounding it. Of particular concern was the fact that some of the artworks installed had been removed from the site of New Jerusalem, which was considered sacred. It was the site of Hlungwani's church of

"Yesu Galeliya One Aosto In Yoni Alt And Omega". In addition, the notion of an installation is that the artist's installing or arrangement of the many components which comprise an installation, is generally considered to be part of the process and therefore control over intent or meaning is maintained by the artist throughout the process.

Lesley Spiro (1992: 65-72) not only explores the issue of removal of artworks from their environment as paramount to a major shift in meaning, but also explores the possible loss of meaning of the artwork when they are transported from a site-specific venue and enclosed in a gallery space.

According to Spiro (ibid), Hlungwani arrived at the gallery shortly after the prestigious installation was presented to the Johannesburg public, and: 'out of the blue hung a small star onto the Large Crucifix'.

As well as a change in meaning, or the interpretation of the works as a whole in the context of arrangement, a more complex issue was addressed by Hlungwani on a later visit when he suggested some division between the male and female elements. When Hlungwani preaches, as head of his congregation, he divides men and women. New Jerusalem was the site of the male church and New Canaan for the women. The installation devised by Burnett and Till exhibited elements of both churches together. Hlungwani resolved this problem on a later visit to the gallery in May 1992 when he suggested that stones removed from the New Jerusalem site would be used to divide Adam and Birth of Eve and God and Christ, representing New Jerusalem and male, and Michael Star and the Large Crucifix, representing New Canaan on the female side. These works were mostly made between 1983-4 (Burnett 1989: 38-40).

The second example occurred during the first Johannesburg Biennale: *Africus'95* where the candidate observed another two interventions, related to the *No Limits, No Frontiers*

exhibition, in which a misinterpretation of an artwork created another dimension of meaning to that work. The candidate, taking responsibility for the acquisition of most of the work for the exhibition, and the arrangement of the work, discovered that one of Samson Mudzunga's drum's, the *ngoma*: the Arm and Leg Drum contained intricately carved objects which related to the craft of the traditional healer or *sangoma*. These included an exquisitely detailed razor blade. These objects were placed by the candidate alongside the open door at the rear of the drum (See Fig. 19-20).

This action constituted a major shift in the meaning of the object. The candidate made her own 'aesthetic' decisions without consultation with the artist. It was three or four years after the event that Samson Mudzunga informed the candidate that the objects were randomly stored in the drum and forgotten when transported to the Biennale.

During this same exhibition, woodcarver Wilson Raphalalani picked up one of his carvings, The Old Hurt Fish From the War (1989) and took it downstairs to an entirely different location to join another exhibition which altered the meaning of both the work and the exhibits to which it had been attached.

Yet another example, in the first Johannesburg Biennale, was a request from one of the exhibiting Angolan artists to place an artwork, in this case an artificial limb representative of war, in the **No Limits, No Frontiers** space with the other sculptural works. The motivation offered by the artist was that it was a gesture to South Africa, a symbol of destruction moving towards peace and reconciliation. The placing of the piece perhaps reflected the notion expressed by Adriano Mixinge (1995: 106) the Angolan exhibition's curator, that:

Angolan plastic arts, in its aesthetic of autonomy (in the period 1930-1995), is familiar with suffering and paradise, roughness and gentleness, (in)tolerance and the beauty of hope. The arts have always had a reason to 'sui generis' where the autochthon, the expression of the authority and the individual and the dialogue with the ecumenical, have the same objective.

Although the candidate, as the curator of *No Limits, No Frontiers* exhibition, agreed with this collaboration, it appeared that the Biennale's authorities decided that they did not 'share the same objective'. After the relocation of the Angolan artwork to the *No Limits, No Frontiers* exhibition, it was mysteriously relocated to a venue considerably less visible, on the stairs leading out of the exhibition, next to the women's toilets.

HAYANI/CROSSINGS: MOTIVATIONS BEHIND THE COLLABORATIONS.

In various ways, both overtly and subtly, the sculptural installations in *Crossings* contained collaborative elements.

The connection between the two exhibitions, *Hayani* and *Crossings*, is based on geographical and social aspects of ritual. The title *Crossings* was chosen to indicate a crossing over between the two exhibitions and the intention of the candidate to highlight the separation often imposed between contemporary art forms and 'traditional' artworks. A deliberate intention of the candidate in the *Crossings* installations was to combine elements pertinent to the issues at stake in the two exhibitions.

The guiding proposal submitted to Technikon Natal for these installations was:

A body of multi-media work, in the context of a spiritual reconstruction process in South Africa's damaged society, with emphasis on ritual as an essential part of life (Coates, 1997: 4 of 8.3).

The candidate developed the concept of collaboration as an extension of her own creative impulse for two reasons. Firstly, the experiences gained from the first Johannesburg Biennale had encouraged reflection on the interactive nature of particular collaborations as innovations, towards a new kind of artmaking beyond the highly personal and often aloof 'fine art' concept. Secondly, the candidate's own experience as an art educator at Giyani College of Education had been one which encouraged interaction on many levels. This was

achieved through visiting the woodcarvers, creating teaching opportunities with them and developing other ways of working collaboratively.

In Crossings, an installation in two parts entitled: Traces 1 and 2 (Fig.135-7), reflected upon Durban's history. The work investigated ways of commodifying elements of different cultural groups in the city and their need to transport these elements through migration.

Traces 1 used packaging as the vehicle of transportation of objects set in Agar (a bi-product of seaweed) sealed in plastic packets like convenience foods. These objects included *muti* (African herbs used by traditional healers), Hindu religious objects and old Victorian postcards sent between Durban and Europe.

Traces 2 consisted of packaged sea-water and soil, labelled with dates significant to Durban's history. These comment on the way the land and sea have been commodified through colonisation and settlement.

Photographs of decorated buses, transporting images of religious figures and places such as Mecca were juxtaposed with those of African wildlife, presented in icon-like format, bound in bright floral plastic.

Once There Was, Once There Was Not (Figs.138-144) looks at relationships, trust-building and hope within a damaged group of young women, teenage inhabitants of The Wylie House Children's home in Durban. The installation draws on research undertaken during eight months in 1997 (this installation was first produced in 1997 and exhibited at the BAT Centre (see Appendix: 8). It was however re-created in a different way).

According to the statistics of that year, admission to the home was predominantly due to physical and/or sexual abuse. Of the residents about 83% were victims of abuse from perpetrators within the family unit.

The candidate met with thirteen of the girls on a weekly basis, and explored the therapeutic

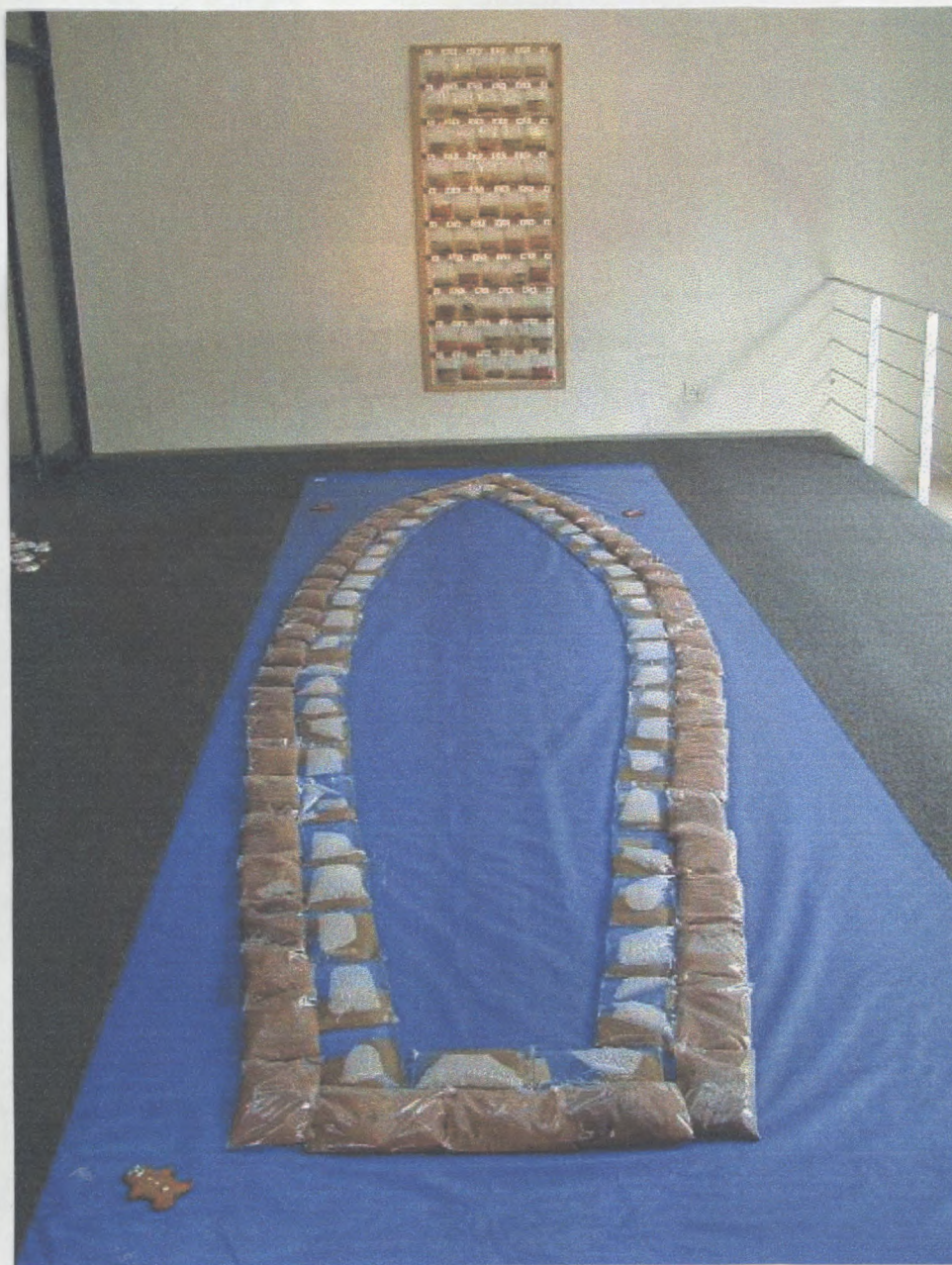


Figure 135. Kathy Coates. *TRACES I & II*. Sculptural installation on floor and wall. 2000. Mixed media. *Hayani/Crossings* exhibitions. The NSA Gallery, Durban.

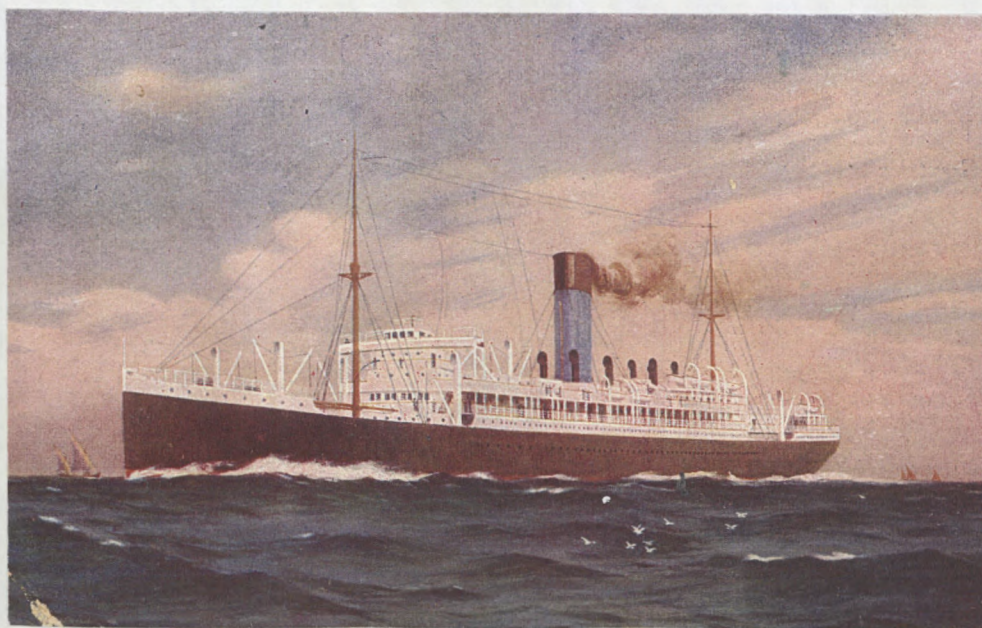


Figure 137. Kathy Coates. TRACES I & II. Additional images on wall. Postcards. 2000.
Hayani/Crossings exhibitions. The NSA Gallery, Durban.



Figure 136. Kathy Coates. TRACES I & II. Floor installation. Mixed media. 2000



Figure 138. Kathy Coates. *ONCE THERE WAS, ONCE THERE WAS NOT*. Sculptural installation in collaboration with thirteen teenage girls from Wylie House, Durban. Mixed media. *Hayani/Crossings* exhibitions. The NSA Gallery, Durban.



Figure 139. Kathy Coates. *ONCE THERE WAS, ONCE THERE WAS NOT*. Sculptural installation in collaboration with thirteen teenage girls from Wylie House, Durban. Mixed media. *Hayani/Crossings* exhibitions. The NSA Gallery, Durban.



Figure 140. Kathy Coates. ONCE THERE WAS, ONCE THERE WAS NOT. Sculptural installation in collaboration with thirteen teenage girls from Wylie House, Durban. Mixed media. *Hayani/Crossings* exhibitions. The NSA Gallery, Durban.



Figure 141. Kathy Coates. *ONCE THERE WAS, ONCE THERE WAS NOT*. Sculptural installation in collaboration with thirteen teenage girls from Wylie House, Durban. Mixed media. *Hayani/Crossings* exhibitions. The NSA Gallery, Durban.



Figure 142. Kathy Coates. *ONCE THERE WAS, ONCE THERE WAS NOT*. Sculptural installation in collaboration with thirteen teenage girls from Wylie House, Durban. Mixed media. *Hayani/Crossings* exhibitions. The NSA Gallery, Durban.



Figure 143. Kathy Coates. *ONCE THERE WAS, ONCE THERE WAS NOT*. Sculptural installation in collaboration with thirteen teenage girls from Wylie House, Durban. Mixed media. *Hayani/Crossings* exhibitions. The NSA Gallery, Durban.



Figure 144. Kathy Coates. ONCE THERE WAS, ONCE THERE WAS NOT. Sculptural installation in collaboration with thirteen teenage girls from Wylie House, Durban. Mixed media. *Hayani/Crossings* exhibitions. The NSA Gallery, Durban.

potential of mask making, story telling, claywork, paper sculpture, movement, dramatisation, drawing and creative writing. Objects and photographs were borrowed from the girls to present an intimate history. Paper and raku-fired masks housed in a broken pot, reflected the fragility of their existence.

The woodcarving entitled Child Abuse at the entrance to the Once There Was, Once There Was Not installation, was by a relatively unknown carver from the Northern Province, Thomas Kubayi. Kubayi's piece was added to the installation when the candidate came across it in the private collection of Smalle in Louis Trichardt. The intention of juxtaposing pieces made in different contexts, but linked by common themes, developed throughout the process of curating the *Hayani /Crossings* exhibition.

Responses to the woodcarving Child Abuse during the walkabout were varied, showing a mixture of mirth and shock.

A comment by the lecturer of a group of students who participated, prompted much discussion. It was suggested by the lecturer that the faces of both the child and adult figures in the piece showed no expression, and therefore the question of whether sexual abuse was being condemned or condoned, was unclear.

Although Kubayi was not present to explain his work, it was clear from the immediate responses of Mainganye, as well as local black artists, that there could be no doubt that this rather grotesque figure with oversized genitals was in itself a statement condemning the act.

The candidate believes that uninformed responses to art works, where there is either no reference to their history or the artist's location, local belief systems and culture, or where the artist is not present to convey his/her intention, causes assumptions and interpretations which veer from the truth of the artists' intentions. In the performances of Mudzunga for example, the power of the artworks becomes diluted through distance and dislocation. In addition, the

euro-centric ambiance of the gallery poses questions which the artist had not even considered.

The installation This Is Your Day explored food and its ritual presentation, from the staple ‘mealie-meal’ wearing its “Sunday best” to the paper and steel table resonating an appearance of opulence with no food in sight. Although a playful piece, its underlying meaning suggests an economic disjunctive of hunger and excess in South Africa (Figs.145-7).

Juxtaposed alongside this installation are the crudely carved Sambal 1 (2000) and Sambal 2 (2000) by Jackson Hlungwani (Figs.148-149). His *sambals* are used as food containers. The additional bowls are the incongruous though exquisitely carved Pap and Mopani Worms (Fig. 124) carved by Albert Munyai. The struggle to feed his family is very much at the heart of Munyai’s work. The combination of *mopani* worms and *mealie* meal is also considered by Munyai (2000) to be the ultimate spiritual diet, since it contains ‘everything a person needs and comes from nature (God).’

The candidate chose these artworks, commissioning the *sambals* from Hlungwani to juxtapose with her own installation This is Your Day, since the issue of ritualistic connections in the works and the installations were apparent.

The Time Capsule (Fig.150) was conceived as a ‘millennium’ project and produced in collaboration with Venda carver Azwhimpeleli Magoro. It aimed to present a miniature museum preserving time-locked artifacts, as with the time capsules launched into space to preserve artefacts of the 20th century. The candidate conceived the idea behind the Time Capsule in 1997. The decision to use wood as a material was chosen because of its incongruous element. The candidate’s aim in terms of both material and subject matter was to play with a personal response to the turn of the millennium, and contradictions posed in



Figure 145. Kathy Coates. *THIS IS YOUR DAY*. Sculptural installation. Mixed media.
Hayani/Crossings exhibitions. The NSA Gallery, Durban.



Figure 146. Kathy Coates. *THIS IS YOUR DAY*. Sculptural installation. Mixed media.
Hayani/Crossings exhibitions. The NSA Gallery, Durban.



Figure 147. Kathy Coates. THIS IS YOUR DAY. Sculptural installation. Mixed media.
Hayani/Crossings exhibitions. The NSA Gallery, Durban.



Figure 148. Jackson Hlungwani. SAMBAL I Wood. 2000. Collection Kathy Coates. *Hayani/Crossings* exhibitions. The NSA Gallery, Durban.



Figure 149. Jackson Hlungwani. SAMBAL II. Teak wood. 2000. Collection Kathy Coates. *Hayani/Crossings* exhibitions. The NSA Gallery, Durban.



Figure 150. Azwhimpeleli Magoro and Kathy Coates. TIME CAPSULE. 2000. Teak wood.
Hayani/Crossings exhibitions. The NSA Gallery, Durban.
Collection Kathy Coates.

the context of the predominantly rural Northern Province and a new technological era.

The wood itself denied the purpose of the object, to travel in space.

The candidate had intended making several small objects, which technically represented the 21st century (such as a calculator, lap-top, cellphone etc.) The candidate then came across the sculpture of Collen Maswanganye which played with contradictory elements related to gender roles. Two of these pieces seemed to fit the play on tradition and technology. These were Woman with LapTop (1999) (a Shangaan woman using a laptop on a pile of rocks) and the Man Cleaning the Floor (1999) (a man dressed in a suit scrubbing the floor). Other small sculptures were 'discovered' and over a period of approximately a year, all the pieces were collected. The candidate produced a small bronze: Teenage Pregnancy (1998) at the workshop of Dave Rossouw and added one which he had produced entitled Fish Man (1998). The bronzes utilised the 'cuttle-fish' method of casting. Other pieces included: Man with a Beard (Phillip Rikhotso: 2000); Lazy Angel (Albert Munyai: 1999); Fish (Joseph Rhangani: 1999); Crucifixion in a bottle of water (unknown artist, purchased at the Tzaneen Museum) and a stone (found object). The candidate feels that the collection of objects is representative of culture and religion in the Northern Province.

THE COLLABORATION WITH AZWHIMPELELE MAGORO ON THE TIME CAPSULE.

The process of collaboration was fairly straightforward. The candidate had worked with Azwhimpelele Magoro previously and was met with enthusiasm at the idea of producing a collaborative work. Mogoro is a meticulous woodcarver and an easy communicator. The decision was taken in December 1999 to work during the Easter vacation in April 2000. The candidate had made drawings (the woodcarvers very rarely work from drawings). Magoro suggested that the search for wood begin at Munyai's house at Pile. The reason being that

Magoro's chain saw was broken and Munyai owned one. Upon arrival at Munyai's home, Magoro and the candidate found him beginning the construction of his workshop (see Figs. 126-127). Munyai said that he knew of a large tree nearby, which had been cut down to make way for electricity. Before going to find the tree, Magoro and the candidate were obliged to assist with the erection of several gumpoles, which formed supports for the circular structure of Munyai's workshop. Towards dusk, Magoro, Munyai and the candidate went on foot and found the tree close to Munyai's home (Figs. 151-154). The tree was tested in several places. One part was rotting from rain. The discussion initially focused on how to fit the design of the space ship into the shape of the wood. Eventually, the cutting began. Each of the 'team' took their turn to cut. At nightfall, Magoro and the candidate returned home. They worked together for two consecutive weekends producing the basic form, using the chain saw and an axe. They were accommodated at Munyai's home. After the second weekend, the sculpture was transported to Magoro's home at Muledane near Thohoyandou. There the finer details were added. At times Magoro worked alone, at others with the candidate. Since the truck was to collect the artworks for the *Hayani/ Crossings* exhibitions from Smalles rooms in Louis Trichardt, Munyai and Magoro assisted with the transportation of the Time Capsule and other art works. The Time Capsule was signed outside Dr. Smalle's storeroom, in the dark. The candidate completed the sanding and polishing in Durban.

The *Hayani/Crossings* exhibition attempted to achieve the following goals as outlined in the gallery press release (van Rensburg, Coates 2000:1):

The exhibition explores the direct relationship of these artists with their domestic environment. Also paramount in this investigation is the context of the South African and international art markets, and the way this has affected and influenced the production and living conditions of these artists. This includes the effects of their environment, where historical, economic, geographical and socio-political factors have come into play.

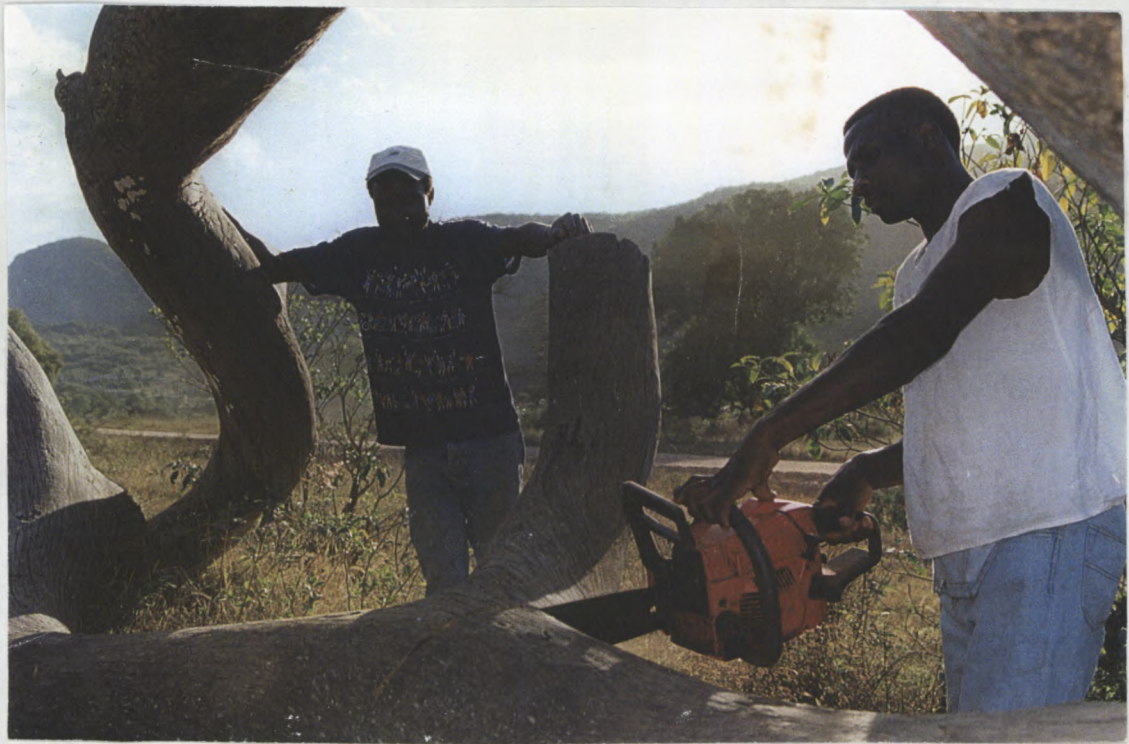
The exhibition will also focus on the individual responses of these artists to their environment and the market with which they have all struggled, and in their degrees of success or failure in negotiating this fraught system of the



Figure 126-7. Building the workshop at Albert Munyai's home, Pile. 2000.



Figures 151-152. Azwhimpeleli Magoro, Albert Munyai and Kathy Coates. Cutting the tree for TIME CAPSULE, Pile Village. 2000.



Figures 153-154. Azwhimpeleli Magoro, Albert Munyai and Kathy Coates. Cutting the tree for TIME CAPSULE, Pile Village. 2000.

consumption of their art. In the past, art exhibitions, in particular those in urban areas which present work from rural areas, have either not been able to, or have been reluctant to show much of the context within which these artists function, whether physically, spiritually or intellectually.

The phenomenon of "African exotic" is sometimes deliberately perpetuated. This exhibition involved the artists as much as possible in the process of curating and for some to be able to participate in workshops for the first week of the opening.

The question needs to be asked; taking into account the Northern Province woodcarving tradition, and a shift over the years from that of ritual object/ utensil maker to artmaker, is the urban gallery a suitable venue for such work? As with Hlungwani's 'installation' at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, are we again imposing western-based values and therefore an analytical eye on the artworks of indigenous rural-based artists, which removes us further from their meaning? What would be possible solutions? Mainganye is in the process of attempting to create a sculpture centre in former Venda at the Matongoni Mountain Studio. Mudzunga locates his performances site-specifically at his home in Shanzha and at nearby Lake Fundudzi.

Stephen Hobbs (June 1999), Director of the Rembrandt van Ryjn (Market Theatre) Gallery until December 2000, claims that it is time for the role of the gallery to change. Hobbs states this rather in the light of the work of Samson Mudzunga than in the work of other artists of the region (see Chapter Two) The Market Theatre Gallery had been approached by Mudzunga, who had requested assistance from the candidate during his period of incarceration, to find an urban gallery for a spectacle to follow on from his burial performance. Hobbs says that, because Mudzunga's site for his performance is usually Dopeni and Lake Fundudzi, he questions the validity of the gallery in excluding the artmaker from his environment:

What has a white curator and a gallery space got in common with the artist (in this case Mudzunga) who comes with a work that is in some

way politically specific to literally a piece of land and then galleries attempt to turn that into exhibition discourse (October 1999)

On the day of Mudzunga's "burial performance" (July 30th) staged two weeks before the exhibition opening at the NSA Gallery, the candidate secured the loan of the aeroplane drum. Mudzunga was adamant that it was important that he 'travel' with the drum, and suggested that the timing would be right to convey the message of the 'resurrection' to an urban audience. However, the removal from the location of the performance: that is Shanzha and Lake Fundudzi, to an urban gallery seemed to diminish the impact of the event (Fig.155).

Artist and critic MacKenny (2000): responds to Mudzunga's resurrection as follows:

Given the mythology and media hype that was created around the performance artist from Venda, the unspectacular nature of his rebirth was somewhat surprising. Mudzunga was buried at the sacred Lake Fundudzi and was purported to remain underground, buried alive until his renaissance, whilst media have focused on the spiritual and physical endurance of such an act Mudzunga now acknowledges the purely symbolic nature of his piece and pops in and out of the rocket for any interested party. Whilst this might disappoint many seeking a cathartic response from an authentic ritual, the real power of the work lies in the drum itself. Monumental in its form and presence it resonates an indisputable strength missing from the actual performance.

Alexander Sudheim saw the humour in Mudzunga's performance, when he reported on the event:

'Sukhalifhalale Lake Fundudzi: World First Man Buried Alive 2000' is the handwritten inscription on the back of Samson Mudzunga's shirt which becomes visible as he emerges from the bowels of an enormous wooden drum like some latter-day Jonah.

The tone of the shirt's slogan captures the 66 year- old artist's singular dialectic between innocence and insouciance, while today's symbolic resurrection in Durban's NSA gallery brings to an end a bizarre and complex saga which leads like a cross between Crime and punishment and Days of Our Lives (2000:1)



Figure 155. Samson Mudzunga's 'Resurrection'.
Hayani/Crossings exhibitions. The NSA Gallery, Durban. August 13th 2000.

Andries Botha (August 2000) was also amused when asked to comment on the brevity of the 'resurrection' at the NSA: 'How long should a resurrection take anyway? The first one was just a flash of light'.

Hobbs (October 1999) comments on the concept of Mudzunga's resurrection:

Digesting the concepts that the public does not have privy to is a prominent issue that we are dealing with when presented with the work of Samson Mudzunga. Probably the most interesting thing for us (the gallery), and it comes at a most strategic time, is that because Mudzunga is working site specific to Venda, and has created the illusion that he will be resurrected as an essential part of that work.

For that reason, and Hobbs's view that there should be a shift in emphasis as regards to the location of the 'gallery', he was enthusiastic to participate in Mudzunga's projects.

Considering the *Hayani/Crossings* exhibition, the candidate feels that although these exhibitions, the opening events and workshops had a positive reception in the Durban art world, they failed to make an impact, which had any effect on the lives of the woodcarvers who exhibited.

However the workshop created a platform for creative expression on an educational level and an opportunity for a valid cultural exchange between woodcarvers from the two Provinces where woodcarving dominates in South Africa (Fig.156).

SECTION THREE

THE URBAN/RURAL DIVIDE: PRESENT PROBLEMS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS.

In the opening paragraph in the *Tributaries* catalogue, Burnett (1985) outlines his intentions thus:

The idea of assembling a collection of contemporary South African art for a European tour presented us with a unique prospect in which we saw the opportunity to add energy to the creative forces at work in this country and to enhance our understanding of these forces.



Figure 156. Samson Mudzunga at the woodcarving workshop as part of the *Hayani/Crossings* exhibitions. The NSA Gallery, Durban. August 14th–18th 2000. Technikon Natal Sculpture Department.

The candidate, in this summary and in an evaluation of this and other major exhibitions, concludes that the emphasis in terms of any value of a long-term nature is on our understanding of 'these forces'. Assuming that 'adding energy to the creative forces at work in this country' means that the artists are uplifted in some way, either through personal empowerment or material gain in order to sustain themselves, then these major exhibitions have mostly failed. It has been argued that any artist, regardless of either race, geographical or economic circumstances, struggles to survive solely on their production. (Van Rensburg, October 1999, Nettleton, November 2001). Urban-based artists, however, with a degree of formal training, are in a better position to survive than their rural counterpart. Many urban artists are obliged to supplement their income through employment, usually in the teaching profession. In addition, it is likely that urban-based artists would have easier access to skills and information regarding art awards, competitions, entrance to exhibitions and fund-raising possibilities.

Through various interviews, it has been suggested that the overall quality of the woodcarvings from the Northern Province has deteriorated (see Burnett, Walker, Read, Smalle).

Anitra Nettleton (November 2001) sees that the challenge of the rural artist is to find a way to explore their environment conceptually, using the imagery that exists, without overtly hanging on to the rural label.

Art historian, Elza Miles (April 1998), feels that there is a decline in the quality of some of the woodcarvings, and feels uncertain of a revival.

Art Educator, Helene Smuts (telephonic communication, 2000), worked closely with Erna Beumers, curator of African Art at the Worldmuseum of Rotterdam, the Netherlands ¹³. She noted that Beumers had remarked that during a period of ten years or so, since her previous visit to South Africa in the 1980's, that the standards of quality of the woodcarvings from the Northern Province had declined considerably.

The candidate is of the opinion that there is some truth in the contention. However in many cases, there are reasons for this decline and these are symptomatic of the broader factors of education and communication, which will be explored shortly.

A factor that can be attributed to the decline in quality is the driving imperative to make art which sells and a 'playing up' to the woodcarvers' own interpretations of what the art market wants, often through repetition of themes and even production of multiples of the same artwork.

The softer woods such as marula, quinine and wild fig are prey to woodborer. (Figs.157-158). Of the five selected woodcarvers, only Phillip Rikhotso favours such wood as it is easy to carve. Another tendency of Rikhotso's is to carve the untreated wood while it is slightly wet, causing cracking (see Fig.159).

Often the issue of communication can cause ill feeling and there is a tendency for artists to be replaced for those with more compliant natures. Clearly, Munyai chasing Rossouw and Read around his plot with an axe was an extreme example, which was bound to sever Read's ties with Munyai as his art dealer.

Another problem, which has been discussed, is the difficulties the woodcarvers have with

¹³ In September 1999, Erna Beumers, curator of African Art at the Worldmuseum, Rotterdam, the Netherlands, a museum of ethonology, brought an exhibition of objects of west, central and southern African cultural expression to South Africa. Called *Africa meets Africa*, exhibitions were held at The South African National Gallery in CapeTown and The African Window Cultural History Museum in Pretoria and included an education resource. (Smuts, H. 2000). Helene Smuts had produced the resource materials.



Figure 157. Phillip Rikhotso MONKEY AND CHILD. 1998. Painted marula wood. Collection Kathy Coates.



Figure 158. Phillip Rikhotso. GIRL IN A GREEN DRESS. 1998. Painted marula wood.
Collection: Kathy Coates.



Figure 159. Phillip Rikhotso. FAT BELLIED BEAST 1999. Painted marula wood.
Collection Kathy Coates.

regard to their lack of formal training. Of the five selected woodcarvers, only Mainganye has had any formal art training, and has been fortunate to have traveled widely and find patronage and sponsorship for many of his projects. His networking skills and experience have made it possible for him to make career choices, and to maintain the prices asked for the work.

THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE COMMERCIAL ART WORLD.

There are preconceptions on the part of the art world, which need to be challenged.

Mainganye, for example, experienced problems when his work shifted too far away from what is defined as an 'african artist', who would be expected to work in natural materials and not collage and abstraction in his paintings. There is still a tendency in the art world to romanticise 'for the take-away African spirit for the culturally needy' (Richards 1987: 21) and to categorise in that sense.

Bozzy Rabie, curator of the << Rewind>>Fast Forward.za exhibition of South African art held at the Van Reekum Museum in Apeldoorn, Holland in 1999, wrote in the catalogue that:

In their work, artists Esther Mahlangu and Noria Mabasa both draw upon venerable cultural practices. Mahlangu works in the Ndebele tradition handed down from her mother and grandmother. The brilliantly coloured geometric designs used to enliven the walls of homes are the source of her motifs. Moving from murals to canvases, Mahlangu retains the intuitive directness of Ndebele art. The clarity and energy of her blackbanded images resonates with Western modernism. Noria Mabasa's art, like Mahlangu's is deeply intuitive, yet closely in touch with the social milieu out of which it grows.

The candidate notes that Rabie has conveniently taken the obvious route of comparing the only two black, rural women in the show, despite the fact that they work in different mediums, style, discipline and geographical area. It could have been more challenging, or perhaps equally inappropriate, to compare Esther Mahlangu's murals with Kevin Brand's

photographic murals. Rabie does go on to draw comparisons with the work of Robert Hodgins and Zwelethu Mthethwa with equal incongruity, explaining that both 'create images that acutely reflect how politics shapes lives'. The candidate believes that any South African artist, including Mahlangu and Mabasa, could sit under the same umbrella that this statement encompasses.

Nettleton (November 2001) says that part of the appeal of the rural artist was the physical distance which existed between the artist working in 'unspoiled Africa' and the metropolitan centre, and that 'they' would lose their identity by moving into the city. The art world preferred to keep the rural artist 'out there'. The woodcarvers' view of themselves had little to do with this appeal.

Nettleton proposes that to break down these misconceptions there is a need to stop making distinctions between rural and urban. How this change is to come about is a difficult question.

BREAKING DOWN MISCONCEPTIONS

As identified by Albert Munyai (July 2000):

We need to stop having regional (Venda Art) exhibitions. We should rather choose themes and mix artists from all over.

Stephen Hobbs (June 1999), made the point that practicing artists should experience first-hand the art of rural artists by visiting them in the context of their working environment and if possible to spend some time working there.

The candidate is in full agreement with this statement, though acknowledges that unless there is a major injection of funding to support this idea, and shifts in the mind set of urban artists, it is not likely to happen on any significant level.

The challenge of the art world in a post-apartheid era is to acknowledge the past, and even the current mindset, of imposing an identity on the rural artist, whilst at the same time acknowledging the existence of 'traditional/rural art' as an integral part of mainstream South Africa contemporary art. Interactive and cross-cultural collaborations are possible solutions. Whilst not negating cultural exchange internationally, much could be established towards achieving this integration within our own borders, through the development of an interactive programme.

Residency programmes, student exchanges and interactive exhibitions of a cross-cultural nature would break more ground than yet another regional 'showcase' exhibition where the artists are often an afterthought, or not even included (see the Northern Province Special Project, Chapter Three). On a small scale, the workshop following the *Hayani/Crossings* exhibition attempted to address this need. The interactions between sculpture students from the Natal Technikon and the African Art students from the Sida Project who have a base there¹⁴ was a starting point in an educational exchange.

The Matongoni Mountain Studio, initiated by Mainganye gives hope. However, as mentioned earlier, it is having difficulty taking off. The communications between Mainganye and Nicholson in 1999, requesting the candidate to assist with art evaluation processes, and the possible interventions through members of the School of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, have not been taken up.

¹⁴ An ongoing collaboration between Technikon Natal Sculpture Department and the African Art Centre, largely through the initiative of Andries Botha and Anthea Martin, and funding via the Sida Project of the African Art Centre. An annex structure was made available to 'informal' students (the majority, self-trained artists), to have a permanent base to work. In the outside carpark of the sculpture department, it offers a working space and access to workshops of the sculpture department. The main advantage of the project is the interactions between 'formal' and 'informal' students.

LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS.

Art gallery owners, dealers, government officials and curators have all encountered difficulties when attempting to 'create exposure' for the work and the artists of the Northern Province.

When organising an exhibition from a distance, one cannot deny the logistical problems that exist. Some of these problems have been described in the first part of this chapter, through the candidate's own curatorial experiences. Read and Burnett have outlined their own difficulties (Chapter One).

Claire Tracy (September 1999), director of London's Art First gallery, has a stable of South African artists. She has given up trying to take on any major South African art exhibitions from the Northern Province, after a bad experience trying to collaborate with Burnett on an exhibition of woodcarvings. Tracy said that the show had to be cancelled at the last minute due to a lack of organisation. The only South African show which she had in the pipeline, was a Christmas (1999) show of the sculpture of Johannes Segogela which had been curated by Linda Givon of the Goodman Gallery.

THE ROLE OF PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT.

The candidate will present a case for more support from government, both regionally and nationally, the primary data again drawn from her own experience.

Where assistance has been solicited from the local department of Arts and Culture (DACST) by the candidate, in matters associated with the promotion of the arts, or art education, response has been very limited. Examples of this are the Haenertsburg Arts Festival (1999 & 2000), the various arts and culture weeks in the province, activities connected to the Giyani College of Education and exhibitions organized by the candidate. In some cases, written requests, either for support or to arrange meetings, received no response. The following

extract of a newspaper report (Memela, 1999:7) on the lack of support by provincial government for the first winter festival at Haenertsburg emphasizes this lack:

But the failure of government officials like Ramathlodi himself, MEC for Arts, Culture, Sports and Recreation Elias Nong and MEC for Education Dr. Joe Phaahla, to honour the event left a bitter taste in the mouths of the organizers, audiences and artists. Although MEC Elias Nong again, failed to receive the symbolic keys to the village and declare the cultural carnival open, the ordinary folks did rise to the occasion. To fill the conspicuous absence and disappointing acts of the government officials, it was Transnet director for social investment Ria Phiyega and Standard Bank's Mandie van der Spuy who acted as midwives in the birth of this historic festival.

THE ROLE OF NATIONAL GOVERNMENT. The Northern Province Special Project.

In an interview with Steven Sack (April 1998) of DACST, the candidate was informed that there would be an injection of funding into training projects in the Northern Province and that 'we (those active in attempting to work towards the upliftment of the artists of the region) should get our act together and come up with proposals'. The projected date was April 2000. According to Sack, this would culminate in a trade expo, which would coincide with a major exhibition simultaneously to be mounted in Pietersburg, Johannesburg and Cape Town. According to Sack, the exhibitions would give a historical perspective to the art of the region.

At the end of 1999, at the Art Centre Management Conference jointly staged by the national Department of Arts and Culture, Science and Technology (DACST) and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Development (CSIR) in Port Elizabeth,¹⁵ the candidate learned from Steven Sack that this project, with a focus on poverty alleviation was to exhibit and showcase the arts and crafts of the Northern Province. Two other provinces, the Eastern Cape and Kwa

¹⁵ The conference was designed to look at the management of the newly built or refurbished Arts and Culture Centres as part of a national DACST project. Three such Centres were built in the Northern Province. (See also Chap 2 on Art Centres). The conference was also an opportunity for the CSIR to showcase their training programmes.

Zulu Natal had been identified because of their large unemployed population and their reliance on home industries for survival. This was to have a two-pronged approach. One was to focus on the craft industry in training producers to produce marketable goods. This project was put in the hands of the CSIR. The second phase was to be the exhibitions, referred to above. Shortly after this conference, the appointed co-ordinator of the exhibition project, Joseph Mathye of DACST, visited the candidate to express an interest in involving her in the project.

During this discussion, the candidate expressed a lack of confidence in the success of the project if it were to be spearheaded by the local DACST staff based in Pietersburg. Mathye emphasized that other channels were being sought, and that NGO's in the region would be brought in to participate in the process. Shortly following this discussion, (around the end of May 1999) a meeting was called in Pietersburg by the CSIR and DACST to outline the training programme in the craft sector. Local stakeholders, including the candidate, were invited. This meeting called for proposals to implement projects for which funds had been allocated for poverty alleviation and job creation. Steven Sack, chairing the meeting, announced that these projects were aimed to form part of the Northern Province Special Project to include the major exhibition.

During the discussion, Fiona Nicholson challenged local DACST, to commit t the support of the process, when requested to be a channel for information. The candidate's personal stance was that people actively engaged in the arts and craft sector in the province should be involved, since in the past, when projects were run from Gauteng, they invariably failed.

Stakeholders present, included the following: Petra Terblanche of the Department of Arts and Culture based in Giyani; Arlette Franks, a Pietersburg arts administrator involved in many projects; Fiona Nicholson, of the Venda region, initiator of Ditike Arts and Craft Centre and

administrator of Avhashoni Mainganye's Matongoni Mountain Studio; Denise Toolley, one of the coordinators of the Haenertsburg Arts Festival and herself managing two local craft initiatives; Francina Motjoadi, director of the Basadi ba ba Pedi Traditional Arts Project with a doctorate on local beadwork and the candidate, in her capacity of an arts educator, though also representing the local woodcarvers. Proposals were presented for various initiatives based on local crafts. The candidate's own proposal included craft initiatives with trainers drawn from former students who were unable to find teaching posts and who had four years of training in the arts.

The focus intended here is the attempt made by local N.G.O.'s and active groups in the region to participate in the process.

This is pertinent when analysing the process as a whole. The candidate learned some time later that Rayda Becker, chief curator of the Gertrude Posel Gallery of the University of the Witwatersrand, was appointed to curate the exhibitions.

During a visit to the Gertrude Posel Gallery related to this research, Becker mentioned that she would appreciate assistance with the proposed exhibition.

The exhibition was curated by Becker and her staff at the Gertrude Posel Gallery, largely through drawing on the University's collection and that of the National Cultural History Museum in Pretoria. A trainee curator at the Gertrude Posel gallery, Amos Letsoalo, from Pietersburg, was part of the initial planning of curating the exhibition. He withdrew at a further stage, due to disagreements linked to the process. Arlette Franks, who had been a teacher of Letsoalo, indicated that he had been a central figure in the initial organization of the project and withdrew when he was not acknowledged for this.

Apart from the local Department of Arts and Culture, Science and Technology in Pietersburg, no other parties were ultimately involved. The only function requested of the

candidate by Joseph Mathye was to organize the Giya Marimba Band to perform at the opening.

The candidate is aware that there has been friction between Franks and the Department of Arts and Culture in the past, on a local and national level. This is largely due to Frank's overt criticisms of the activities with matters pertaining to the arts and craft sector of the Northern Province, in particular the modes of delivery and budgetary matters.

It is necessary at this stage that a brief background of this exhibition, and its *modus operandi*, should be given when investigating the approaches employed by DACST.

The issue of the problematic functioning of the local DACST office had been strongly emphasized at the Arts Centre Management conference. It had been communicated overtly to Steven Sack on this occasion, at the Northern Province Special Project meeting and in other personal communications with the organizers. Both Sack and Becker mentioned after the opening, that they had only now realized the difficulties of working in the Province. The candidate suggests that networking by DACST (national and local) with role-players in the province, who have experience and an understanding of its issues, would have been beneficial when mounting this exhibition.

At the opening of the exhibition, at the Irish House Museum on June 7th 2001, the candidate noted two things lacking in the quality of the exhibition.

The first was that none of the artists on exhibition were present. The crafters who were part of the CSIR initiatives were there in full force, selling their products outside the museum, market-style.

The second was that none of the artwork, gleaned from public and private collections, was for sale. The craft products, of varying quality, were all for sale as part of the poverty alleviation / job creation scheme.

The candidate asked Becker why the artists were not present. Her answer was that this was the role of the local DACST to organise. They had not arranged this, due to the fact that the department has very little connection to the artists, which the national department and Becker were informed of on many occasions. The guests at the opening were largely local dignitaries and members of local and national DACST who gave speeches from a raised mezzanine gallery. The entourage continued on to the mayors banquet hall where lavish refreshments were provided. After packing up their products and equipment, the crafters and performers were invited to attend.

Becker went on to say that during the course of the show, plans were underway to host educational workshops for schools, which would be another way to bring the artists to the exhibition. This did not happen, again due to difficulties between local DACST and interested parties from Gauteng. Arts educator Helene Smuts, having previously worked with the candidate, contacted the candidate during the course of 2001 to express interest in participating in an interactive arts education programme. Her intention was to document the exhibition at Irish House and host a workshop with the exhibiting artists, through text and video.

However, following a meeting held in Gauteng, attended by Smuts, Ruth Sack and other arts educators, it was clear that any programme to be pursued would need to be initiated the local DACST in the Northern Province, as a matter of protocol.

Discussion with Joseph Mathye (2001) at the DACST offices in Pretoria showed that there were uncertainties regarding the success of the exhibition. Mathye said that there were plans to take the exhibition to the African Window Gallery in Pretoria, to CapeTown and possibly overseas if a budget allowed.

Towards the end of the exhibition, (which had been extended to March 31st 2002) it seems

that a workshop was planned for school children, and an information booklet was designed through the collaboration with the Gertrude Posel gallery, the Art History Department of the University of the Witwatersrand and national DACST. During a telephone conversation (February 26th 2002), with Linda Swart, a professional officer who manages the collection at Irish House, little information had been given to her regarding its format or the booklet which would provide information on the exhibition. Swart thought that the date of the workshop was set for 19th March 2002. Swart acknowledged that these plans and the information booklet were untimely since the exhibition had already been running for nine months.

The candidate had asked several of the artists, prior to the exhibition's opening, if they had any knowledge of the event. None had. Several of the artists did learn about the exhibition after the opening. If concerns regarding the development of the artists in the province were valid, it should have been essential that the artists be present at the opening, to experience pride in their work and to network with other artists, government officials and members of the Department of Arts and Culture.

If a combined contemporary and historic showcase of the woodcarvers of the province were exhibited, surely this would have been appropriate to 'illustrate the link between contemporary art and craft' and to 'contribute to development within the relevant communities', as outlined in the press release below (2001)

The candidate proposes that if funds were allocated to employ one part-time person within the province, for the duration of this exhibition, both the presence of the artists and the sale of their work would have been possible.

Press Release

Arts and Craft Heritage Exhibition

Pietersburg

MOTHO KE MOTHO KA BATHO -The crafts cross a divide

7 June - 30 November 2001

The craft industry stands to gain from a major financial boost, which will be facilitated by government. New techniques for product development are being explored to enable rural woman to compete in a global economy.

Government has prioritised the crafts as one of the industries that has the ability to contribute to job creation and economic empowerment.

The Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST), with initial financial support from the National Department of Environmental Affairs & Tourism (DEAT) commissioned the Council for Industrial and Scientific Research (CSIR) to spearhead a craft development project in the Northern Province (NP). The training covered by the project focuses on product development and design,

business and administration skills, as well as market access and marketing. Five projects were identified in various areas of the NP.

An exhibition in Pietersburg will showcase a range of products that have been developed using new scientific techniques. The Art and Crafts Heritage Exhibition at Irish House in Pietersburg is designed to illustrate the link between contemporary art and craft and the rich cultural heritage in the Province. Cultural heritage, when properly understood, preserved and developed can contribute to development within the relevant communities.

Dr. Rayda Becker of the Wits Gallery is the head curator of the exhibition and works closely with the National Cultural History Museum in Pretoria.

The exhibition will provide an additional tourist attraction in the Province over the next six months. It will serve to promote talented artists, crafters and performers and help to develop a sense of self-appreciation on the part of the people involved.

A shop will be opened at Irish House, where visitors will be able to purchase a variety of crafts as well as products from the CSIR projects.

Giya Marimba, a traditional marimba group from the Giyani College of Education will perform on the opening day.

Issued by Andile Xaba, Head of Communications, Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST)

For more information please call Mack Lewle @ 012 337 8313/ 082

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FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS IN THE LIGHT OF LAUNCHING FURTHER INITIATIVES

The public art galleries have aligned their policies towards a more educational perspective, but still relate more to their immediate urban constituency than a broader audience. A recent example is the educational project called the Joubert Park Project to which a group of Johannesburg artists have dedicated themselves. The group have worked with a group of youth, in the immediate surrounds of the Johannesburg Art Gallery in the Joubert Park area, where many homeless live.

Again the issue of financial support tends to limit the implementation of taking these concepts out of the city.

Linda Givon, owner of the Goodman Gallery (1999:16) speaking on the issue of important contemporary works leaving the country enforces the point that:

Museums in South Africa are in crisis, not only for their lack of maintenance, but also through lack of funding. It is impossible to sustain cultural growth without the acquisition of new works.

Givon suggests that if government cannot provide, then the private sector needs to be more involved and, as in other countries, tax concessions must be made available as an incentive to invest.¹⁶ Givon proclaims that the next generation of South Africans will not have read, nor

¹⁶ Sponsorship from the private sector, via Business and Arts South Africa (BASA) qualifies as a deduction for tax purposes.

stepped into a museum or gallery, and that this should send a direct message to government who are lobotomising art and culture.

The issue of investing in art when a large percentage of our population, both urban and rural is struggling with poverty, disease and illiteracy, can be fraught with contradictions. These are factors which will not be changed overnight.

Thus, the spaciality of an African Renaissance must be tempered by some hard African realities related to prospects for the poor. There is an acute urban/rural split within Africa that may be accentuated as whole regions will not benefit from globalization. Some 80% of the Southern African population reside in rural areas where on average the nearest telephone is 50km. away (Holman 1998). All of Africa has access to just 2% of the world's telephone lines, less than New York City or Tokyo (Finance Africa 1997).

On the other hand, African cities conduct more telephone traffic per subscriber than the United States or Japan (Finance Africa 1997). This suggests that urban elites will plug into the global network of relations at a much faster rate than poor rural people. While African elites are connected to cyberspace in the cities, rural areas will remain far removed from such technology owing to far more immediate priorities: health, sanitation, water and electrification.

Another factor that helps to confine the real renaissance to the urban centres are low educational levels. Many rural residents cannot even read or write. This means that there is a woefully poor supply of adequately trained workers. Although this is being addressed in some countries like Tanzania, the educational dimension of the renaissance is a trans-generational project. The pattern of an urban educated elite dominating the African space economy will continue for an appreciable time. (Griggs 1998: 19).

Smith (2001) notes that the corporate sector's financial support of the arts is probably the only option, and offers potential for advertising and branding. BASA (Business and Arts for South Africa)¹⁷ tries to encourage this.

STATE FUNDING FOR THE ARTS.

Avenues open to the Northern Province Woodcarvers?

Although the National Arts Council does offer assistance to artists who have no training in fund-raising, many artists are unaware that such possibilities exist. The majority of rural carvers again are at a disadvantage when having access to gaining business support because they are faced with a lack of business/administrative and networking skills.

In addition, the issue of the arts receiving funding through the National Lottery was a matter for concern in Smith's paper. She refers to an initiative called NACLI, which was initiated to support a fair share of Lottery Funds. NACLI was launched in the Northern Province, following a meeting hosted by Bongi-Dhlomo Mautlau at the Pietersburg Art Museum in 1999. The meeting called on those present to sign a petition to lobby for a larger slice of lottery allocated funding. The arts (including visual, audio and performing arts) was sharing the smaller portion with another sector, and competing again with the sports sector which was getting a large proportion of lottery funding.

Smith had shed some light on the situation, though expressed little hope for an increase in state lottery funding:

I don't know how many of you came across a pamphlet issued by NACLI close to the time of the launch of the National Lottery. NACLI was initiated by Mike van Graan's arts consultancy Article 27, and stood for the National Arts and Culture Lottery Initiative, intended to lobby public support to ensure that arts and culture got their fair share of the pie. That I hadn't heard a thing since was jolted by the increasingly loud rumblings in the press recently about the disbursing of lottery funds to charities- that they simply are not getting there. At that stage not sure whether NACLI was intended as an independent lottery to benefit the arts, or whether proceedings were to be gleaned

¹⁷ BASA's requirements are that, prior to application the applicant must secure a donation from a business in South Africa, which they will then consider matching.

from the Lotto, I wrote first to van Graan in October this year, asking who the intended beneficiaries were, and if an independent lottery was in the pipeline, why had it been squashed? He responded:

‘Would suggest you speak to Steven Sack at DACST for the latest on the lottery...NACLI floundered on DACST’s pig-headed attitude that it knew best about what to do with lottery funds (ho hum), and declined to really engage with NACLI (representing BASA, ACT and the NAC). From what I gather, nominations were to be made of an independent distribution agency, but this has not been set up, and DACST was not happy with the names coming from the sector, so Steven Sack now represents DACST on whatever interim body is dealing with the dispensing of funds. Good luck in finding out. When you know more, please let me know.’ (October 15th, 2000).

Sending the same questions to Steven Sack, he responded thus:

“The National Lottery Distribution Agencies (DA) for the support of good causes, ie. Welfare, Sports, Arts Heritage and Environment, will be in place soon. I cannot give you an exact date as this is handled by the DTI. The Arts, Culture and Heritage allocation will be shared with National Heritage (Environmental Affairs). The Department will set broad criteria- these still need to be agreed and will be done within the coming weeks. The members of the DA will determine the beneficiaries and decide to whom money should be disbursed based on the criteria set by DACST. The names of the DA members have to my knowledge not been made public” (October 20th, 2000).

The most recent information which the candidate has, in terms of published information of lottery funds allocated to the Northern Province, is that one project:

The Rivoni Workshop for the Blind at Elim is receiving funds.

FURTHER LEADERSHIP POSSIBILITIES

The need to redress the imbalances of the apartheid era through a form of cultural affirmative action was on the agenda of some gallery owners after 1994. They hoped to align themselves with a ‘relevant’ or politically correct perspective – one that would, or so they hoped, ensure their place as instruments of change in the cultural context of transformation. Often these overtures were largely ‘white-washing’, particularly in the case of private, urban galleries where financial gain was the priority.

The candidate believes that there are problems with regard to the issues of quality of work, organisational and marketing skills, fund-raising and communication skills required by the artists, though they are not insurmountable.

The candidate is of the opinion that the urban- based art market is not likely to support the artists in attaining these skills, indeed it is not their responsibility to do so. As indicated, in the role of the community centres a new style of management and ethos needs to replace the old modes of 'black artist, white patron'.

In the opinion of the candidate, an additional requirement for support of the artists' educational upgrading is the setting up of a cultural base, in the Northern Province, as opposed to projects being managed from Gauteng and further afield, as occurred with the Northern Province Special Project. The exhibition was curated from Gauteng, whilst training was conducted from the CSIR based in the Eastern Cape.

We have seen that centralised blueprints do not enjoy a huge success rate in the euphoria of newly liberated countries.
(Charles. 1999: 16).

The experiences of groups and individuals, including the candidate, who have sought support from the provincial Department of Arts and Culture have encountered a lack of interest and expertise. A possible route to take would be the setting up of a state- funded N.G.O. to work with local artists and provincial DACST to address the needs of the woodcarvers and other artists, through consultation and educational programmes. In the past, there have been committees /organisations set up and dismantled regularly in the province. The chief reason for their failure has been lack of funds. However, due to an imbalance of skills, which the historically, educationally advantaged white population hold, white organisers are essentially still initiators and administrators of events, lobbying committees, buyers of artworks and therefore perpetuating a racial divide. With time, this imbalance needs to change, especially in a province with such a small white population, particularly outside of the larger towns.

In an interview with Jan Storm van Rensburg (1999) curator of the N.S.A. Gallery in Durban, he was of the opinion that the ownership of power in any field is that of the dominant language:

It's not just the object the artist is making, it's about who owns the language. I own the language, I sell the art work, I decide how to place it etc. Once again it comes back to dialogue and access.

David Koloane (July 1999) suggests that a union of artists would be problematic, since, in his own experience, these endeavours have ended in political in-fighting. Koloane quotes Ditike as such an example. The solution, he feels is in finding someone in the area, whom the artists trust completely, who could handle the sales of their work. Koloane feels that since the artists trust Mainganye, he is in a position to take this role. He finds Mainganye to be an artist of integrity who respects and cherishes his own work and would rather turn down a sale than allow himself to be undercut. Koloane acknowledges that the woodcarvers fall into different camps, and have differing skills and personalities, a scenario one would find in any community of artists. Koloane claims that, throughout history (talking here about the black South African arts community) no group has ever been successful enough to counter what he defines as a harsh art market.

The candidate would agree with Koloane in considering Mainganye as an ideal choice, except for two factors which could prove to be problematic. Mainganye certainly has the skills to fulfill this role and has shown initiative in forming the vhaVenda Art Foundation.

However, the candidate feels that this role would not be successfully filled by Mainganye considering his history of conflict amongst some of the artists. Examples of such situations are: conflict with Mangoma over the running of Ditike and with Munyai, who holds Mainganye responsible for art work not being returned from the Bertrams V.O. Art of Africa Awards. The conflict seems to have been resolved between Mainganye and Mudzunga following their joint participation in the *Hayani/Crossings* exhibitions in Durban.

The second reservation is that Mainganye is overextended as far as the delays in the planning and implementation of the Matongoni Mountain Studio are concerned. This has caused additional tensions in his partnership with administrator, Fiona Nicholson. As Munyai (April 1999) has emphasised:

Artists cannot do two jobs, if he did, they would both suffer (the creating and the paperwork) (March 1998).

To summarise, this chapter hoped to emphasise the realities and difficulties of working in the Northern Province. Of the greatest importance is the pressing need to close not only the rural/urban divide as far as promoting the work of the Northern Province woodcarvers, but also to look critically at re-structuring the support systems available to them in the Province itself. The main focus has been the Department of Arts and Culture, both nationally and provincially. If acknowledgement is made by DACST of the needs of the artists, based on existing structures, then more headway can be achieved at less expense. The candidate has explored the effect of the Northern Province Special Project on the lives of the woodcarvers and found it to be negligible.

In the Conclusion the candidate will put forward her own recommendations in light of the above.

CONCLUSION

The intention of the candidate in writing this dissertation was to examine and evaluate the impact of specific influences and interventions on the lives of five selected woodcarvers from the Northern Province over a period of fifteen years. These influences and interventions were largely connected to the functions of the predominantly urban-based art market.

The beginning of the period of this study was marked by two major exhibitions, *Tributaries* (1985) and *The Neglected Tradition* (1988).

Since then the woodcarving tradition of the Northern Province as a whole would have appeared to have benefited from a surge of interest from various sectors of the art market, including curators, collectors, the media, writers and academics.

Several of the woodcarvers of the region have exhibited locally, nationally and abroad. The candidate has been involved in some of these exhibitions.

The *Hayani / Crossings* exhibitions, put together to complement this body of writing, was an exercise in presenting a show which attempted a different approach from other exhibitions from *Tributaries* onwards. *Hayani/Crossings* involved the artists more closely and documented photographically, and through video material, the domestic environment of the artists on exhibition. Some works were direct collaborations with specific artists. In addition, Mainganye and Mudzunga accompanied the candidate to Durban to run a weeklong woodcarving workshop with students from the Technikon Natal Sculpture Department and the African Art Centre. Midway during the workshop, they conducted a walkabout with the candidate, at the NSA Gallery, for students and the general public, to offer insights into their work, and that of other artists represented in the exhibition.

As an exercise, *Hayani/Crossings* had positive, immediate responses from the media, though economically it benefited only two of the artists through sales of their work (Noriah Mabasa and Phillip Rikhotso). For the candidate, despite some funding from BASA, Stutterfords Van Lines, Alchemy Publishing, Technikon Natal and the African Art Centre, it was an expensive exercise.

As a long - term measure, it is clear that regular showcasing of work by rural artists is one possible scenario which would be nearing a solution to difficulties, already outlined, of sustaining the woodcarving industry.

A direct offshoot of the candidate's involvement with the woodcarvers of the Northern

Province has been requests for her to write a monograph on Samson Mudzunga (Part 02 of the Taxi series, published by David Krut, 2001) and sections of other publications such as The Matongoni Mountain Studio (The Art Paper, 1998: Journal published for the Art Educators Association and Africa Meets Africa, compiled by Helene Smuts, 2001).

Exposure in the form of exhibiting, media coverage and published articles/books is beneficial for the woodcarvers working in the Northern Province. However, these tend to be short-lived benefits.

Unless the woodcarvers are able to pick up on the impetus created by these forms of exposure, and through an educational process of learning the ways of the cosmopolitan art world in order to take initiatives to continue the process, the likelihood of attaining self-sufficiency will be slim. Even were the process successful, it would be long and involved. Apart from this, an ability to raise funds would be essential in terms of mounting such exhibitions considering physical distances and gallery costs.

Mudzunga and Maingainye have both benefited from funding from the National Arts Council to support their projects, though this has been due to assistance in applications from trained art administrators such as Fiona Nicholson, Stephen Hobbs, Susan Glanville and the candidate.

A summary of these conclusions in the following points represent the candidate's view, as solutions to the marginalisation of the woodcarvers of the Northern Province:

1. An injection of government and private sector funding into 'internally initiated' projects, as opposed to those initiated from outside. This would ideally involve an initial assessment of the needs of the woodcarvers and other artists in the region. Use of existing facilities, such as the arts and culture centres, would be more cost-effective than creating new ones.

2. An immediate call for the Arts and Culture Centres in the Northern Province to become active according to a common philosophy of their function (as defined in documents from the National Conference for the Management of Arts and Culture Centres).

3. Government support (financial and practical) for cultural exchange amongst arts practitioners and educators/students/ school learners for field trips and residencies. A shift towards a 'living museum' of artists as an essential part of South African cultural heritage.

This is already proposed through a team of former Giyani College of Education lecturers intending to devote the Giyani campus to the development of a Multi-Purpose Centre to be implemented in 2003.

4. Symposia and conferences designed to disarm negative categorization of marginalised art forms, including the woodcarving tradition. Such forums should promote inclusivity and participation from all sectors of the arts community thereby embracing South African art as a unified entity. This would essentially make:

headway in the struggle for the recognition of African art as art, and at the same time repair some of the rifts that have resulted from its resultant conceptual marginalisation – or at least avoid deepening them (Wilkinson, 1998 : 385).

The fruits of this discussion would hopefully look at new modes of exhibiting and working, with consideration for standardization of quality and pricing criteria.

5. A mutual acknowledgement on the part of the woodcarvers to work together towards the upliftment and re-vitalization of their profession.

6. Educational programmes for the artists, such as arts administration, fund-raising, basic financial management and a link-up with adult basic education agencies.

7. More visible interaction with local government departments, such as the Departments of Trade and Industry, Tourism, Environment, and Arts and Culture, Science and Technology.

8. A need for a new body of cultural activists, with a project leader and a working committee, including an experienced fund-raiser, appropriately placed within the arts community.

Although the candidate acknowledges that these may be high ideals to work towards, the funds which have already been used on the Northern Province Special Project and the Arts and Culture Centres would have covered a great deal of these expenses. The above proposals call for a re-invention of the 'art centre' responding to real needs identified by its constituency. Although the candidate, according to this brief, has emphasised the needs of the woodcarvers, this proposal, if put into effect, would embrace all art forms of the region, inclusive of performance arts.

If one looks at international art practice, South Africa lags way behind in support of its own artists.

The following quote (Javier Perez de Cuellar: n.d.: front cover, BASA Information Booklet) sums up the hopes of the candidate for the future of cultural support in South Africa:

If culture becomes the lodestar of development, if it becomes one of the top priorities on national and international agendas, we shall have preserved the only part of our human heritage that is as yet unspoiled-the virgin lands of the future.

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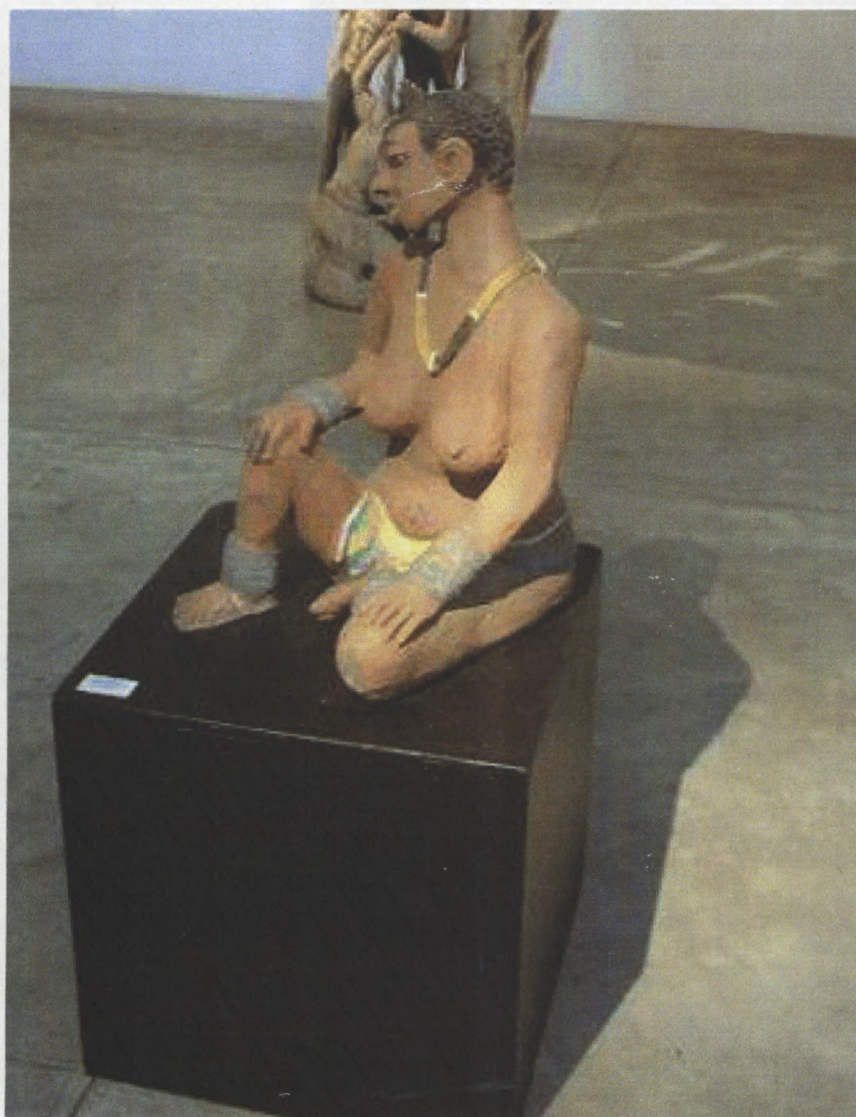
Zona Gallery. April 1990. Press Release on exhibition of Samson Mudzunga.

APPENDIX 1

ADDITIONAL IMAGES FROM *HAYANI*// CROSSINGS EXHIBITION.



Jackson Hlungwani. ARCHANGEL GABRIEL (1998), GOD RUNNING LOOKING FOR FOOD (1998), MAN (1999), LION (1999)& RHINO (2000). Woodcarvings on exhibition *Hayani/Crossings* exhibition at NSA Gallery. August 2000



Noriah Mabasa. VENDA WOMAN 1998. Painted Clay. The *Hayani/Crossings* exhibition.
NSA Gallery. August 2000. Collection Eric and Caron Watson.





**KING OF THE
BLACKS.**

—
Mr. H. HAYWOOD,
70, Castle Street,
Barnsley,

And some of the Prizes
won by his
famous Self Black Mice
during 1911.









43 Kaptein Str.
Hospital Hill
Joh'burg.
30.4.11

POST CARD

Dear Gladys,
We all arrived safely
& had a very nice journey.
Joh'burg is not so cold
as we imagined it to be
from reports, but everything
looks very dusty. It is
raining to-night. Funny
weather for July, isn't it?
With love to your Mother
& self, from Dolly.

The Address only to be
written here



Miss E. Beatty
Grey Str.

Durban

Natal.

184824

R2



MY AIN FOLK (1).

Far frae my hame I wander, but still my thoughts return
To my ain folk ower yonder in the sheiling by the burn.
I see the cosy ingle and the mist abune the brae,
And joy and sadness mingle as I list some auld world lay.

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HOLMFIRTH
BAMFORTH & CO. LTD., PUBLISHERS (ENGLAND) AND NEW YORK, SERIES NO. 2275.
PRINTED IN ENGLAND



Miss L. Wake.
N^o 84 Bay Terrace
Durban Natal
S Africa



Just a card to
show we have not
forgot where
we are to
from. Love & Peace





S C E N E S **T** H A T **A** R E **B** R I G H T E S T . (2)

W O R D S cannot scatter the thoughts we fear,
 For though they flatter, they mock the ear;
 Hopes will still deceive us with tearful cost,
 And when they leave us the heart is lost!
 And when they leave us the heart is lost!

BAMFORTH COPYRIGHT.

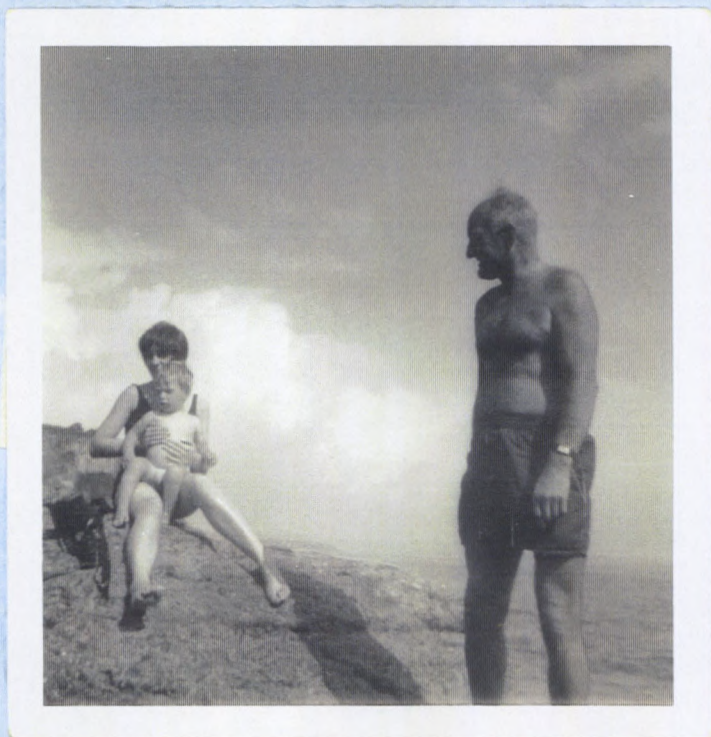
POST CARD.

ADDRESS ONLY TO BE WRITTEN ON THIS SIDE



Mrs Beattie
Prince of Wales Hotel
Smith St
Durban
Natal













"When all the World is Young."



POST CARD

THE ADDRESS TO BE WRITTEN ON THIS SIDE



Write here for Inland Postage only

Pope
 Sheba P. M. Co.
 Eureka City
 N^o Barberton
 Transvaal
 South Africa.



SE
D Dearest Ol. all good wishes to you all
for this & the coming year - Es. L. A. D.

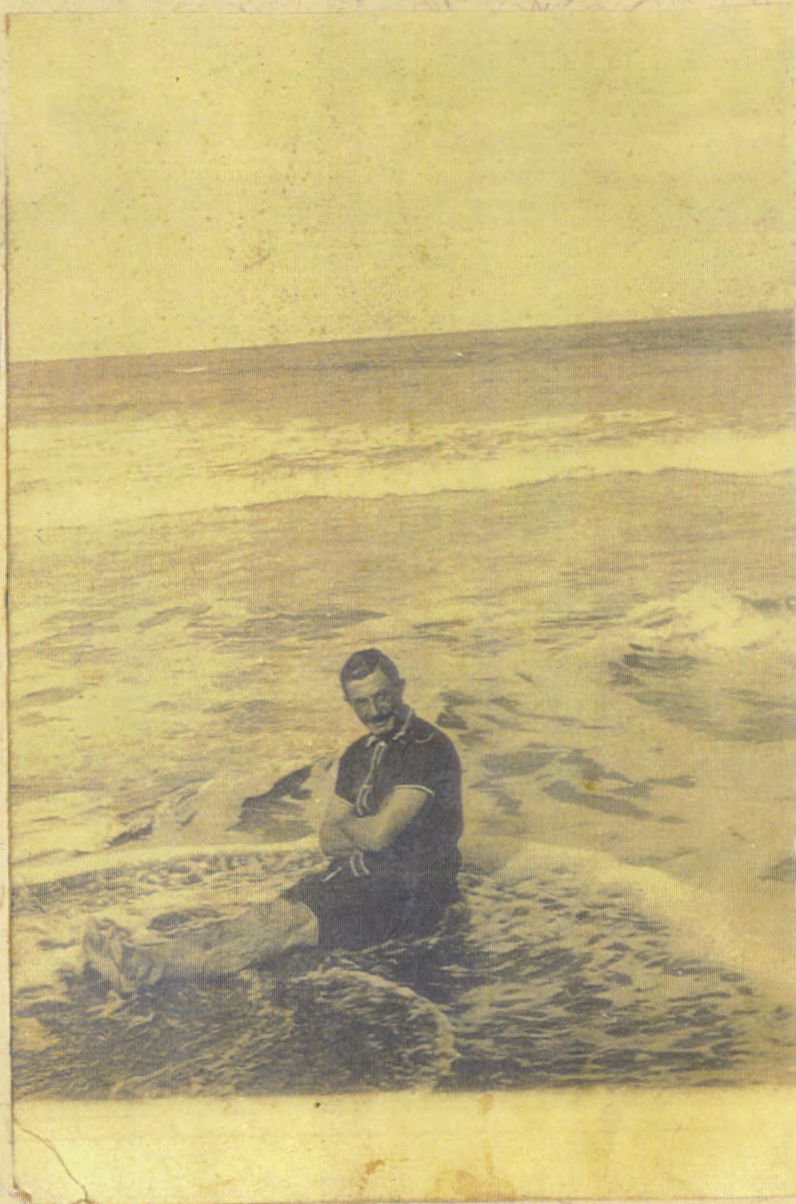


POST CARD.

THE ADDRESS TO BE WRITTEN ON THIS SIDE



Miss G. Pope
Ardale
Strangways Place
Buxton



POST CARD.

THE ADDRESS TO BE WRITTEN ON THIS SIDE.



O. Pope.
Shelia G. M. Co.
Eureka City.
Barlerton.
Transvaal.
South Africa.



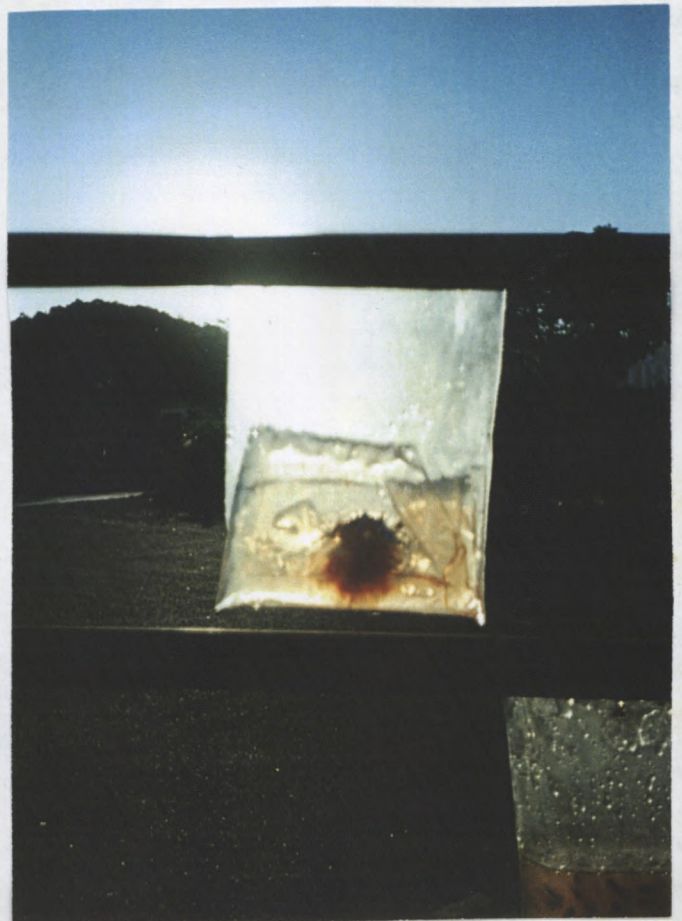
POST CARD

Mrs W. J. Pope

Box 667

Johannesburg
Transvaal



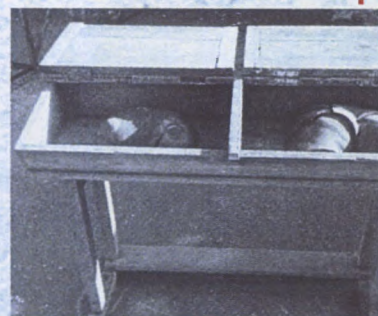


APPENDIX 11

HAYANI/CROSSINGS EXHIBITIONS PAMPHLET 2000.



CROSSINGS



HAYANI



ALCHEMY
PUBLISHING

STUTTFORD
VAN LINES



We would like to thank our sponsors

BASA for bringing the artists to Durban

Alchemy Publishing for producing the invitation
the catalogue

Stutterfords Van Lines for funding transport

The African Art Centre for funding the workshop

Technikon Natal for funding the research and the
workshops

The Human Sciences Research Council for funding
the research

The Northern Province Department of Education
Giyani College of Education for granting study leave

Albert Munyai plays his crying Marimba



TWO EXHIBITIONS

HAYANI

SIX ARTISTS FROM THE NORTHERN PROVINCE

Noriah Mabasa • Samson Mudzunga
Avhashoni Mainganye • Phillip Rikhotso
Jackson Hlungwane • Albert Munyai

CROSSINGS

Kathy Coates

As part submission for her Masters Degree in
Technology (Fine Art) through
Technikon Natal
NSA Gallery, Durban 13 – 31 Aug. 2000

The two exhibitions are connected in that the Northern Province artists are subjects of informal research conducted by Kathy Coates, through working in the region over the past few years, and more recently, five of these artists have been the subject of a more formal study towards a Master's degree through Technikon Natal.

It has long been debated that rural artists have been marginalised due to geographical and social conditions, as well as a lack of infrastructure in the region. Although some of the artists have travelled overseas and are all represented in international collections, art collectors and gallery curators often neglect to contextualise the artists in terms of their place of origin, whether physical, spiritual or intellectual.

The phenomenon of 'African exotic' is sometimes deliberately perpetuated, and the essential spirit of the artwork is lost in the process of removing the art from a context.

'Hayani' is the Venda word for 'home'. Hayani therefore seeks to provide a context for the artists and the artworks through documentation in images, on video and as text. Through available funding, most of the artists will attend the opening and conduct workshops and walkabouts for the first week of the exhibition.

Crossings, a series of multi-media sculptural installations by Kathy Coates, explores the need, in a South African context, to use ritual as a healing process in our society.

Packaging and containment are a recurring element which

reflect a sense of identification and therefore contain an otherwise dissipating and fluctuating sense of who we are. Some artworks in the Hayani exhibition are juxtaposed, where appropriate, with an installation. The installation related to rituals around food called 'This is your day', Munyai's pap and mopane worms carved in wood, are placed in the same space as Hlungwane's sambals.

'The Time Capsule', a carved wooden space ship, is a collaborative work done by Kathy Coates and Venda artist Azwhimpeleli Magoro, containing small sculptures by artists Collen Maswanganye, Albert Munyai, Kathy Coates and Dave Rosseauw. The objects contained are connected to the region and reflect a need to preserve the elements of a time and place, for example, the popular and contradictory belief in the importance of the new millennium as the arrival of another era as well as a desire to preserve the old one.

Materials and image are sometimes playful and incongruous, such as Maswanganye's 'Woman with laptop' – a traditionally dressed Shangaan woman working on a wooden laptop with a pile of rocks for a desk.



N**ORIAH MABASA** produces clay and wooden sculptures which have a direct relationship to her domestic and social environment, as well as being an expression of Venda traditions. Her own homestead is decorated with clay figures, although the gateway of the lapa wall has been rebuilt several times due to the effects the weather has had on the fragile clay figures. Mabasa's woodcarving career ostracised her from the community, and she was even accused of witchcraft, since she was

entering a traditionally male profession. Mabasa, when asked which type of work she prefers, producing art or working in her expansive garden, finds it difficult to decide. Both are equally important to her, she says, especially since gardening was her late father's occupation.

On the exhibition is a woodcarving called 'Inkatha', a large piece in Mabasa's typical style – a story being told through a circular format of convoluted figures carved around the bole of the tree. A smaller piece, 'What are you doing for Mandela' in painted wood, which is unusual for Mabasa, was produced during a workshop in Namibia in 1996. The work depicts the world listening for news of Mandela's situation prior to his release from prison.

Other works in clay are a painted clay relief of the Nonyana (different age of young girls), the 'Muwira', traditional flute player, and the Khomba, an initiation ritual related to the Domba Dance.



SAMSON MUDZUNGA has developed his own brand of performance art, which as a contemporary art form, bridges two worlds, the urban and rural, through his site-specific acting out of traditional rituals. He acts out these events at his home in Shanzha at Dopeni, Venda, and then moves on to the sacred Lake Fundudzi, to which Mudzunga has had a special connection for as long as he can remember.

On 29 June 1996, Mudzunga staged his first performance, which represented his own funeral based on traditional Venda mythology. The fundamental difference was that the artist, primarily a drum-maker, was placed in a drum and not a coffin. Mudzunga, playing the role of the deceased, was placed in the drum, and his bereaved family, having bade him farewell, carried him to the sacred lake followed by his entourage of

mourners. In addition, the events were marked by the celebration of the Tshikona and Tshigombela, the ritual music and dance performed at events where the chief is present. On 8 March 1997, Mudzunga performed a marriage event, where he married his fourth wife with similar rituals. Both performances, due to the celebration of Tshikona and Tshigombela, received a good deal of media coverage. Added to the fact that permission was not requested to access lake Fundudzi, this was enough to cause a confrontation between Netshiavha (the headman who controls the lake) and Mudzunga's party. Although the party proceeded on both occasions, shortly after the wedding performance, Mudzunga was accused of arson by Netshiavha, and was arrested. After 13 months in jail, the trial had not yet begun and Mudzunga was eventually granted bail. He had already made considerable plans for his next performance during his incarceration, and intended to bring this event to an urban audience. The recent performance, in which Mudzunga plans to bury himself alive, was intended to take place in October 1999, postponed when a court hearing withdrew his bail status. This occurred a few days before the scheduled event was to take place. Again, in March 2000, bail was reinstated, and plans are going ahead to hold a new performance at the end of July 2000. The wedding drum and documentation of the event is part of the Hayani Exhibition.

Avhashoni Mainganye at the Matongoni Mountain Studio



A **VHASHONI MAINGANYE** is a Venda artist who has studied and travelled extensively outside Venda, although Mainganye seeks his creative and spiritual inspiration at home, and has returned there

to develop a project – The Matongoni Mountain Studio, which has been his dream for many years.

The project became a full-time occupation this year, when some funds were made available to build a basic infrastructure for the beginnings of what will become an art school, museum, library, and artist's retreat. The launch of the project is intended to take place with a residential workshop, inviting local, national and international sculptors to attend. He has been teaching the local youth who have shown a commitment to helping him achieve his dream, and feels that as an artist he has many skills to pass on. Mainganye's creative work is very diverse – he is a painter, poet, printmaker, photographer and sculptor. He uses his marble-carving skills, learnt in Italy, to carve in stone found in South Africa. He carves wood and makes recycled metal sculptures. His more recent body of work, however, has been collage (recent election billboards), and landscapes inspired by the mountain which has become his home.

This recent change in style has not been well received by the Johannesburg galleries which supported him in the past. He feels that there is a need to maintain his creative freedom and will not be 'put in a can', as he claims this will be the death of his creative spirit. A representative body of Mainganye's work and documentation of the process of developing the studio are part of the exhibition.

Jackson Hlungwane in his workshop



JACKSON HLUNGWANE lives at Mbhokota on the Elim road from Giyani. Hlungwane, founder of his own religious movement 'Yesu galeliya one aposto in yoni alt and omega', bases much of his work on

religious themes. 'Jekiseni' as he is more commonly known locally, believes that we have now entered a new world which holds woman as being the focus of energy and power, claiming that the age of man has ended.

The fish, the symbol of Christianity, is a recurring theme in his work. He has also created two churches at Mbhokota: Kanana, the church of the women, and New Jerusalem, the church for men. Except for the 'Ariel to God', all of his woodcarvings from New Jerusalem are installed at the Johannesburg Art Gallery. This has caused a great deal of controversy in the art world, with some claiming that his work should be seen by more people in urban areas, whilst others feel that this has been a desecration of a sacred site and his work should be preserved as a national heritage site in its original surroundings.

On the exhibition, the larger piece 'Eva' depicts Eve with a fish tail. She is half on earth and half in water. The smaller pieces, 'Sambals', are eating bowls, of which Hlungwane has produced many, allowing the form of the wood to predict the theme or format of the vessel.



PHILLIP RIKHOTSO lives at Daniel Village in the Northern Province, close to Giyani. He is a Shangaan sculptor, drawing on local myths and stories of the Tsonga people. He creates bizarre images, usually painted in bright colours and his figures are often a combination of animals and humans. In the past, he made pieces by scooping out the bellies of his figures to house speakers for ghetto blasters, with the sound coming out of their piano key teeth, or he made carved covers for them.

The demand for these figures has declined as the art market has changed.

More recently he was commissioned to create sculptures around stories for the Tzaneen Museum. These are used to tell the stories to groups from schools and other visitors to the museum. The stories are vividly portrayed by story teller Phillip Mafetsa, who works at the museum. Phillip claims that the one who knows all the local stories is Thandi Rikhotso, his daughter. Phillip lives in Daniel with his wife, Mamayile, and their eight children. He has very little contact with the other artists in the region.



ALBERT MUNYAI is a woodcarver and is known locally as a visionary and traditional healer. He lives in Pile Village next to Pile Mountain in the far north of Venda, with his wife, Pedi, and his five children. As a drum-maker he recently made a marimba (a tall narrow-waisted drum) which he claims is the biggest in the world. He has also produced an extraordinarily beautiful series of marimbas, his cow, crocodile and fish marimbas.

Munyai describes his experience as an artist as an often painful one. He claims that the RDP has not yet visited the artists in Venda, and compares himself to 'an unused axe left under the bed to get blunt'.

He is greatly concerned about the future of children and has been involved with childrens projects in the community. Munyai is currently working on erecting a workshop next to his house and, through a recent exhibition, has managed to get a tractor to make it easier to collect wood. Conscious of his environment, Munyai has planted new trees to replace those that have been cut down and will never willingly chop down a living tree.

Avhashoni Maingainye and Kathy Coates working on a Giyani mural



KATHY COATES has been art lecturer at Giyani College of Education since 1991. She has developed close relationships with artists in the region and created interactive workshops with some of the artists, primarily woodcarvers and her students. During the first Johannesburg Biennale she was curator for the far northern exhibition which was part of the community projects. The artists participated in the programme and were present for the first three days of the event. Coates has since realised the need for more interactive exhibitions and workshops, in particular with artists on the periphery of the urban-based art world in South Africa, and for a repositioning of rural artists, where academics, art curators and other artists can move away from urban centres and engage with the work of rural artists whose sense of place is critical to their production. This is the idea behind the Hayani exhibition.

Crossings, her own multi-media sculptural installations, has links in some cases with the works of the artists in the Hayani exhibition. For instance, 'This is your day' looks at rituals relating to food and links thematically to some of Munyai's and Hlungwane's pieces. The installations explore the need to use ritual as a healing process, specifically in a South African context. In 'Traces' one and two, she is concerned with issues recalling elements of Durban's history through packaging and process. "My aim is to talk about the need for different cultures to transport their ritual objects through migration and immigration. The packaging of sea and soil comments on the way the

land and sea have been turned into commodities through colonisation, settlement and resettlement", she comments. For Coates, working collaboratively on issues is very important. During her time in Durban in 1997, Coates established a project with the Wylie House Children's Home. From this interactive process the 'Once there was, once there was not' installation was produced. The group of thirteen teenage girls came together on a weekly basis over a period of eight months to complete it. Through facilitating story-telling, mask-making and dramatisation, a process was evolved to create a documentary installation. In addition, objects and photographs were used, some describing the past and others the present, others alluding to future dreams. New identity numbers and surnames were created by the girls, since many have 'place of safety' status. The production of Raku-fired masks and paper heads produced from casts emphasise the fragility and uncertainty of the lives of the children.

Similar processes have been used in an institution in Giyani called Iris House, which is also a place of safety. These are represented on the exhibition on a smaller scale. The slides on exhibition and some of the other images are related to sexual abuse cases from the Northern Province, juxtaposed with sentimental Victorian postcards of love and duty. The school desk and its contents are the artist's personal reflections on corporal punishment from childhood, and are an observation of other forms of harassment still prevalent in many schools, often imposed in the name of authoritarian religious values.

As mentioned in the introduction, the time capsule also evolved over a period of time, in collaboration with woodcarver Azwhimpelele Magoro, at Pile village and Muledane.

Albert Munyaí, Kathy Coates, Azwhimpelele Magoro planning the cutting of the wood





**GREAT MANY THANKS GO
TO A GREAT MANY PEOPLE**

in the putting together of this exhibition, the catalogue and the workshop. To the artists, Noriah, Samson, Albert, Jackson, Shoni, Azwhimpelele and Phillip. To the Marimba Band, Giya, headed by Sipho. To Martin for the songs. To Eric, Caron and Marike for endless patience with the catalogue, and so much more. To Shaun from Bowens Bureau for doing all the reprographic work. To Guy, Julie and Magda from Stutterfords. To Lorraine from BASA. To staff and others at Techikon Natal, especially Jeremy, Tony, Andries, John, Nirmi and Lorraine. To Stavros and Jody, Jason, Lindelani and Langa. To Anthea from the African Art Centre for her help with the workshop. To the NSA gallery, Storm, Nathi and Peter. To Anriet for the computer, and Arlette for her home and moral support. To Dr. Smalle for the loan of artworks. To Terry-anne for home with an Irish touch. To Petra for the solid friendship and wisdom. To Hy, Sharka and Ernest, always ready to work. To Pat and the Wylie House girls. To Phangi and Jan for help with Iris House and media related to child abuse. And of course, to Grace and Kalila who forever amaze me with their love. And thanks to all those others that I haven't mentioned.

THANK YOU ALL,
Kathy

ALL THE PHOTOS AND TEXT: KATHY COATES
except Samson drinking water from lake Fundudzi:
Stephen Hobbs
Albert Munyai: milking his cow Marimba: Neill van
Kraayenburg
Avhashoni Mainganye and Kathy Coates working
on a Giyani mural: Terry-anne Stevenson
Munyai, Coates and Mogoro planning the cutting
of the wood: Sharka Redmond.

APPENDIX 111

**FUNDING PROPOSAL (1999) FOR SAMSON MUDZUNGA'S BURIAL
PERFORMANCE 2000.**

APPENDIX 111

FUNDING PROPOSAL (1999) FOR SAMSON MUDZUNGA'S BURIAL PERFORMANCE 2000.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Since these were unnumbered in the original document, the illustrations follow sequentially.

1. THE BURIAL PERFORMANCE OF SAMSON MUDZUNGA. JUNE 29TH 1996 SHANZHA.
Young girls perform ulosha, an act of respect.
2. THE LAKE FUNDUDZI PERFORMANCE OF SAMSON MUDZUNGA.
SEPTEMBER 28TH 1996. LAKE FUNDUDZI.
3. SAMSON MUDZUNGA INSIDE THE JACKALBESSIE TREE USED TO
CARVE THE AEROPLANE DRUM. SHANZHA. 1996.
- 4.1 THE AEROPLANE DRUM. SHANZHA. 1999.
- 4.2 SAMSON MUDZUNGA ENTERING THE AEROPLANE DRUM. SHANZHA.
1999.
5. KATHY COATES DRINKS WATER FROM LAKE FUNDUDZI 1999.
- 5.1 THE AEROPLANE DRUM. SHANZHA. 1999.
- 6.1 LAKE FUNDUDZI 1999.
- 6.2 SAMSON MUDZUNGA DRINKS WATER FROM LAKE FUNDUDZI 1999.

Photographs.

Figures 1-3. Oren Kaplan.

Figures 4.1-6.2. Stephen Hobbs.

Press release

Press Release

A MAN WHO WILL BE THE FIRST IN THE WORLD TO BE BURIED ALIVE!

SUKALIFHALALE LAKE FUNDUDZI – VENDA CULTURE AND TRADITION.

**THERE ARE NO ZWIDUDWANE (SUPERNATURAL SMALL HUMAN BEINGS)
AT LAKE FUNDUDZI.**

9 OCTOBER 1999

**Dopeni / Shanzha Villages,
Northern Province,
Republic of South Africa.**

At 8am: I, Samson Mudzunga and Kathy Coates shall be drinking (madi a shothodzo) thirst quenching Lake Fundudzi Water.

At 10am: the Tshilapfene women traditional dance group-Tshigombela will collect my heritage left by my late mother with my elder brother as well as thevhele (ritual heritage). These will be taken to my grave, which will become a family museum.

At 11am: the Tshikona from Tshilapfene called Philiyamava will collect my coffin from its storage for the Funeral.

At 3pm: my wife Dorkas Mudzunga will give me a goodbye kiss just before the funeral.

At 3.30pm: Mudzunga S.S. will unveil my tombstone.

Samson Mudzunga will live in his grave for 6 Days and on 16 October will be seen at Wits University Galleries where the press will be allowed.

*

On Saturday 9 October Samson Mudzunga, sculptor and carver from Dopeni Shanzha, Northern Province plans to stage a performance art and exhibition piece using a drum that he has personally carved as a coffin. The performance piece itself involves showing the public a Venda funeral.

The drum-coffin is the first to be made in the Northern Province and very possibly in the entire country. For the event Mudzunga will act the part of the deceased and will be carried into the drum-coffin in the traditional way. The drum-coffin will then be closed. At some point the artists' older brother will open the drum-coffin for the closest relatives to act the part of the bereaved family paying their last respects.

The artists' clan's funeral ceremonies are marked by the playing and dancing known as the Tshikona. These traditional players and dancers will be present at the ceremony and will act their part as well. Everyone who wants to witness the ceremony is invited to come.

Attendance fee will be R15 Adults and R5 Children.

Project co-ordinators:

◦ **Stephen Hobbs & Storm van Rensburg**
(Market Theatre Galleries, Newtown Johannesburg)
P.O. Box 8656, Johannesburg 2000

Tel: (011) 832 1641 / Fax: (011) 492 1235

Email: hobbs@market.theatre.co.za

Email: gallery@market.theatre.co.za

- **Kathy Coates (Giyani, Northern Province) 082 200 4622 / Fax (015) 8124 283**
- **Samson Mudzunga 082 635 7341**
- **Dorkas Mudzunga (011) 984 9418**

MOTIVATION FOR PERFORMANCE

Mr. Ratshilumela Samson Mudzunga, is planning to be buried alive as part of a protest against his arrest for allegedly burning down the kraal belonging to the Headman of Netshiavha two years ago.

Mr. Mudzunga, a resident of Shanzha Village in Nzhelele, is out on R5000 bail following his arrest last year for allegedly causing a fire that raised the residence of Headman Netshiavha in 1997. After his arrest he was incarcerated at Matatshe Prison, until he was recently released on bail.

Apart from expressing his bitterness towards Headman Netshiavha, whose accusations allegedly led to his arrest, Mudzunga said he is also angry with his brother, whom he said did not inform him about their mother's death. She was buried while he was behind bars. He said she died of a heart attack at the age of 110 on January 20 1999. According to Mudzunga who is also known for his disapproval of most traditional myths and beliefs, he is going to stage a funeral ceremony where he will be buried alive. He said the ceremony will involve the traditional Tshikona dance where the people will also see the "biggest" drum in existence. He said the drum is so big that it can accommodate more than four grown adults in its cavity.

In a written statement, Mr Mudzunga views Headman Netshiavha's actions as a sign of jealousy. He stated that the headman also differed with him on matters surrounding Lake Fundudzi. Since time immemorial, the Tshiavha leadership are said to have declared themselves guardians of the lake. They are said to have created the belief that the lake is a sacred place where the ancestral gods displayed their presence through the Tshikona which was said to be heard playing from within the depths of the lake.

"There are no zombies at Lake Fundudzi." Mr Mudzunga stressed in his statement. He further discarded the Tshikona music as a superstitious belief that was formulated by narrow-minded individuals during the past. He said the same could be said by the belief of the existence of zombies at the forest next to the Phiphidi waterfalls. (Extracts from The Mirror, 9 March 1999)

MOTIVATION FOR EXHIBITION

The monies presented in the budget that follows are to go towards staging the event, which has been described as a mock burial. The exhibition component of the project consists of the grave in which Mudzunga will be buried. The grave functions not only as part of the illusion of the artists burial but will be opened to the public after the artist has been resurrected. It is Mudzunga's intention to not only charge visitors for the performance but also for the right to enter the grave and view artifacts and memorabilia of his late mother. The grave is viewed as a living museum dedicated to the memory of his mother.

Given the very unique nature of this project and the breadth of the artists' vision, various colleagues will be involved in the documentation of the process, the performance, performers, the burial itself and the grave interior. Therefore the budget includes costs of photographic and video footage material, as well as estimated costs for the production of a small book and documentary film.

At this point Mudzunga has been in negotiation with various galleries in particular the Market Theatre Galleries who have agreed to host an exhibition and performance event where the book and documentary will be launched early 2000.

The images that are attached show Lake Fundudzi, Samson Mudzunga and Kathy Coates drinking from the lake as well as images of Mudzunga in process completing the airplane-like-drum, which he intends for the Johannesburg performance early 2000.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Ratshilumela Samson Mudzunga
Dopeni / Shanzha Villages
PO Box 518
Nzhelele
0993
Northern Province
Republic of South Africa

Samson Mudzunga, the man who lost his job, for his love of his art, is to have a one-man exhibition at Zona. Samson was born the day before Christmas in 1938, in Venda, began to carve and mould clay at an early age. Having completed standard five, Samson migrated from Johannesburg, where he found a job as a gardener. He stopped carving when he started working in 1956.

After eight years working for a large firm as a driver, Samson had a premonition that he might lose his job through the sanctions issue, so he decided to start his art again, after 32 years. The FUBA Gallery under the curatorship of David Koloane, gave Samson his first solo exhibition in 1988. His employers were very proud and Samson was featured on the front page of the company periodical. In 1989 Samson had his second solo exhibition, again at FUBA, this time apparently it caused his employers to sanction his dismissal.

Samson and his wife Dorkas have eight children and live at their family compound in the Nzhelele valley in the Northern Province.

Samson now works as a full time artist.

Project budget

**Re: A MAN WHO WILL BE THE FIRST IN THE WORLD TO BE BURIED ALIVE
Samson Mudzunga.**

	Rand
Building Materials for underground museum (builder, cement, bricks etc)	3505.00
Diggers for the grave / museum	750.00
Transport and hosting of performers for the burial	2000.00
Celebration costs for the event as payment in kind for performers	5800.00
Photographic expenses (photographer / film processing / printing)	3000.00
Film expenses (sound and camera /film /editing)	10000.00
Small book (production/ layout / printing b/w and colour / binding for example 200 books)	3500.00
TOTAL	<u>28555.00</u>

Text for Mudzunga *Performative.* by Colin Richards Wits University

What did you make of the image on the front of the brochure?:

It speaks of a singular cultural encounter in which time, time, space and materiality lie in interesting relation. On a research trip to the rural Northern Province for a show called Siyawela (an Ndebele word for 'crossing over')¹ two years ago I and two colleagues visited a number of artists. Included amongst the artists was Samson Mudzunga, perhaps best known for making drums. Drum-making is particularly strong tradition in this region of South Africa. Drums are still used for ceremonial or ritual purposes, some involving gender initiation, as well as that ritual we call commodification. Drums also figure in some primary myths from his region. One in particular, *Ngoma Lungundu*, is a narrative of the survival and redemption of the VaVenda people, especially their deliverance from the predations of colonisers, both black and white.²

When we arrived at Samson's self-made home, he was working on a very eccentric drum. It looked like an over-fertile figure, with a head and feet, and some 'written' inscriptions on the skin. One arm was the detachable drumstick. The drum was also on wheels. This very material *humanisation* (anthropocentrism) of an object, and this potential for *mobility*, were interesting enough. But perhaps more interesting, or perplexing, was a small door on the side of the drum. We asked Samson if this door could open, as we could see a keyhole. Smiling always, as if we were not to be taken entirely seriously, he showed us by taking a key out of his pocket and opening the door. It also, surprisingly, had a lock on the inside.

The inside of the drum was lovingly hand-smoothed and completely blackened by surface burning and the application of a layer of ash. The dark space the door opened onto seemed somehow more capacious than the drum that contained it. Its soft blackness seemed boundless as it absorbed the ambient light of the late afternoon.

"Its my coffin. I will get buried in it". He seemed serious, but smiling nonetheless. Samson then climbed into that darkness, which seemed to inflate as he began fitting himself to it. In a slightly foetal, but he insisted, comfortable position, he then locked the door from the inside. After a deathly silence, he began playing the drumskin from within. The sound was at once both loud and soft, a suffused rhythm, lost and regained as it played itself out.

Samson finally emerged, smiling. "Did you hear the sound?" We had. "Do you know what it means?" We did not. "I will be buried in this. Over there, where I have planted my trees. That sound is like the stories of the ancestors. My life and my death are not so different. The

ancestors are far way, sometimes difficult to hear, not like this". At which point he beat the drum from the outside, with the door open. The noise was raucous. "Not like this. This you hear, but makes you deaf. (Pause). They are there. If you listen, and talk with you hands. But you must be inside. Inside, in the darkness, you are free to do these things. You will be welcome".

We left Samson smiling, his shining head, his hands, his body and blue worker's overall, all marked by the ash and blackening from being inside the drum. How are we translate such a scene: a human body secreted in the drum, prematurely buried, escaping to hearken to something past - the voice of history, of myth? - whatever, a voice currently seemingly obscured, but critical for the present. And then the interred traveller reemerging into our time and space, into the light, vital, amused, serious.

In such a situation translation is stressed, vulnerable to vagrant meaning(s). The semiotic slipperiness of reading 'strangeness' is exquisitely articulated in J. M. Coetzee's (1980) Waiting for the Barbarians. Late in the story Colonel Joll charges that the inscriptions on the inner surfaces of the string-bound white poplarwood slips found in the wooden chest in the Magistrate's apartment contain possibly sinister 'messages' between the latter and "other parties" (110). While the Magistrate himself has "no idea what [these inscriptions] stand for" he nevertheless offers a number of readings (see 110-112) of what they say. Of one, he suggests;

there is only a single character. It is the barbarian character *war*, but it has other senses too. It can stand for *vengeance*, and, if you turn it upside down... it can be made to read *justice*. There is no knowing which sense is intended. That is part of barbarian cunning. It is the same with the rest of these slips [...] They can be read in many orders. Further, each single slip can be read in many ways. Together they can be read as a domestic journal, or they can be read as a plan of war, or they can be turned on their sides and read as a history of the last years of the Empire - the old Empire, I mean. There is no agreement among scholars about how to interpret these relics of the ancient barbarians (112).

Such relics, it seems, can be found everywhere, in space - burial grounds³ - and time - at night. Their significance is, however, oddly placeless, omnipresent, in the atmosphere, the air:

the air is full of sighs and cries. These are never lost: if you listen carefully, with a sympathetic ear, you can hear them echoing forever within the second sphere. The night is best: sometimes when you have difficulty in falling asleep it is because your ears have been reached by the cries of the dead, which, like their writings, are open to many interpretations. Thank you. I have finished translating

Notes

1. This exhibition, shown in Birmingham, England, in 1995 and in Johannesburg in 1996, was curated by myself and Pitika Ntuli. We selected works which seemed to make concrete deeply felt experiences of change in words and images before, during, and after our first democratic election. Ex-political prisoners, children, professional artists and the like participated. Works focused on decisive moments in the maker's lives - moments of intense danger, desire, anger, joy, pain, enchantment. Central to our project was the communicative, distinctively *human* quality of creative expression and makers told their own stories in texts which accompanied their works on the show. We wanted to show not only the durability of creativity in the bleakest of moments, but also the power of the imagination in making visible our anxieties, anger, wants and wishes.

2. Referring to artist Noria Mabasa's huge wood sculpture of the same name, Anitra Nettleton writes: "The name *Ngoma Lungundu* means, literally translated, 'drum of thunder' and invokes both the concept of chiefship and the most sacred symbols of Venda cosmology. The plural form of the word *ngoma*, *dzingoma*, not only refers to many drums, but 'mysteries', things secret and sacred, often having miraculous powers, possessed by Chiefs who trace their lineage back to the Venda founding heroes, Dyambeu and/or Thoho ya Ndou. According to the legend, a paternal ancestor of Dyambeu, Tshilume, was charged with the task of leading the Senzi out of Zimbabwe by the supreme *Mwari*. *Mwari* gave Tshilume a drum, *ngoma lungundu*, endowed with magical powers. When it was beaten by the chief it caused fog, hail, rain, thunder and lightning which beset the enemies of the Senzi on their long migration... Mabasa's sculpture... may... be read as a comment on the weight of traditional narratives of those situated within "traditional" power structures in South Africa. Each Venda chief ideally has a large drum, modelled on the "image" of the *ngoma lungundu*, which is central to much instruction and ritual in women's initiation through *Domba*. These drums are almost cosmograms of the Venda polity, with the power and position of the chief being reinforced through his relation to Thoho ya Ndou. The arrangement of the figures around and behind the drum also call to mind the dancers in the *Domba* "python" dance performed by women. Women are most affected by this exercise of patriarchal traditionalism, and in this sculptural rendering of the myth it is women who appear to be crushed by its weight in the form of the drum. Noria Mabasa has herself moved out of this positioning of women within the patriarchal framework, particularly in her production of figurative sculpture in wood, historically an exclusively male occupation. As a result she has suffered ostracism in her local community and has even been accused of witchcraft."

3. The first and second excised sections (marked [...]) both refer to allegory, which I have suggest elsewhere is a mode of both expression and reading which offers much in the interpretation of South African art (see Richards, Chicago, forthcoming). At any rate in this passage the first excision reads "I plunge my good hand into the chest and stir. 'They form an allegory' ", the second "Allegorical sets like this one can be found buried all over the desert. I found this one... in the ruins of a public building. Graveyards are another good place to look in, though it is not always easy to tell where the barbarian burial sites lie. It is recommended that you simply dig at random: perhaps the very spot where you stand you will come upon scraps, shards, reminders of the dead." Allegory figures in many of Coetzee's texts, significantly the ***Life & Times of Michael K***: "Your stay in the camp was merely an allegory, if you know that word. It was an allegory - speaking at the highest level- of how scandalously, how outrageously a meaning can take up residence in a system without becoming a term in it. Did you notice how, whenever I tried to pin you down, you slipped away? I noticed... [] Michaels... you are a great escape artist, one of the great escapees: I take my hat off to you!... The garden for which you are presently heading is nowhere and everywhere except in the camps. It is another name for the only place you belong, Michaels, where you do not feel homeless. It is off every map, no road leads to it that is merely a road, and only you know the way" (228). For a remarkable account of translation (as disruption and much else besides), allegory and the colonial context see Niranjwana (1992). The discourse of 'barbarity' is of course an ancient one. For one perspective see Sardar, Nandy and Davies (1993), and, for one closer to home (refracted through missionary texts and 'native' responses) see de Kock (1996). There is a short distance between barbarians and the so-called 'monstrous' races mentioned earlier.

