



PEMBA George Mnyaluza Milwa

*"My only secret is that I never stop liking my work. Immediately when you feel you are tired of doing what you know best, then you are finished. And immediately when you think you are the best, you are on the way out."*

George Pemba, who has been described as the "grand old master of township art" was born in Korsten, Port Elizabeth, in 1912. At the age of eight, George knew that he had a special talent. In 1937 he completed short courses in art at Rhodes University and at the University of Fort Hare with the aid of a bursary. In 1947 he was awarded a scholarship by the Fort Hare African Trust. Later, with the aid of another bursary, he attended art classes in Cape Town. There he met Gerard Sekoto, under whose influence he started working in oils. In 1979 Fort Hare University granted him an honorary Master of Arts degree for his contribution to art and culture, and in 1986 he received a merit award at the Sol Plaatje Memorial Art Exhibition. Before becoming a professional artist in 1952, George was a teacher (1935-1939), a messenger of the court, a clerk at an attorneys' firm, an interpreter at the magistrates' court in Port Elizabeth and worked for the New Brighton Administration for twelve years. He now divides his time between his painting and his small business. George Pemba's work constitutes a unique instance of what may be termed "township realism". This does not mean though that it is exhaustively determined by its representationalist character. To be sure, on the one hand it is a documentation of township life over the last fifty years, but on the other hand it is a nuanced interpretation of the lives of his people, ranging from the everyday merriments captured in "Township dance" to the harsher reality of life under apartheid. As a critic has observed, however, the people that appear on George Pemba's canvases are never allowed to lose their dignity, even where they are portrayed as victims. It is especially after 1950 that his work entered a more overtly political phase. Although he first exhibited some works in the Feather Market Hall as early as 1928, and illustrated the book *Noliswa* (by Ndawo) in the early 1930s, George's first solo exhibition took place in Port Elizabeth in 1948. In 1987 and in 1989 he had two more solo exhibitions, the first at the African Arts Exhibition in Zululand, and the second at the Grahamstown Arts Festival. In 1989 he also took part in the Neglected Tradition Exhibition at the Johannesburg Art Gallery. The year 1991 was a momentous one in George's life, when the Everard Read Gallery exhibited more than 90 of his paintings, bought as part of a larger number of his works, in a Pemba solo exhibition. Since then he has had a full-time commission from Everard Read Gallery, which has enabled him to occupy a better studio in Motherwell. It took him almost eighty years to be appropriately and suitably "discovered".



THE DRAUGHTS PLAYERS 1980 Oil on board 43 x 55 cm Private Collection



PEMBA Lizo

*"Art is a philosophy because philosophy is the way you perceive the world around you. For that reason the artist's work should speak, not the artist."*

Lizo, the grandson of George Pemba, was born in Port Elizabeth where he also matriculated and was encouraged to do art by his teachers and by the school inspector, Mr Vingqi. Because of his commitment to the struggle against apartheid he left South Africa, and had the opportunity to do a course at the Mzilikazi Art and Craft Centre in Zimbabwe, in this way obtaining a Certificate of Attendance in 1992. At present he is a third year fine art student at the University of Fort Hare. Having been born into an artist's family, it is not surprising that Lizo's earliest introduction to art took the form of watching his grandfather painting. His first notable work was a church mural, completed under his grandfather's supervision. Encouraged by his family, Lizo started drawing people, for example people on buses. At the time when he decided to leave the country, he was working on banners. Instead of putting an end to his artistic opportunities (as Lizo expected), however, this step proved to open up an entirely new world of exploration to him. He was assigned to the department responsible for the design of posters, illustrations and other means of propagating the struggle against apartheid. This afforded him valuable opportunities to meet artists from other countries, including watercolourists, the latter enabling him to learn more about a medium in which he has a particular interest. His sojourn in the military camps in Angola also created the opportunity to do portraits of ANC leaders, including the Chancellor of the University of Fort Hare, and of Namibian president, Sam Nujoma, whose portrait by Lizo was presented to the SWAPO leadership. In addition to this Lizo put his talent to good use painting scenes such as "Goodbye Parade" at the time of their withdrawal, and drawing cartoons of his comrades to boost their morale. Before returning to South Africa, Lizo participated in various exhibitions in Angola, Zimbabwe, Russia and India. Since his return he has taken part in various group exhibitions in Port Elizabeth and Grahamstown, and in 1992 he held his first solo exhibition.



RED LOCATION 1994 Watercolour 36 x 55 cm Private Collection