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WHEN self-taught artist Trevor Makhoba of KwaZulu/Natal received this year's Standard Bank Young, Artist award for the visual arts, he was: Overwhelmed with joy. rast oy ms

â\200\234IU ngveri crossed my mind that I would one day-receive such recognition,â\200\235 the self-deprecating Makhoba told the predominantly white audience in Johannesburg. Â°

â\200\234T feel great, very great â\200\224 like Muhammad Ali!" .

Makhoba has now joined the growing list of African artists who, over the last few years, are at last being recognised by mainstream art institutions and organisations,

Previous winners of the award include artists like Sam Nhlengethwa, Helene Sebidi, Tommy Motswai and Bonnic Nishalintshali - with whom Makhoba shares a common, heritage and background,

Born and bred in the

whb.has sold most of his art works from door to door and â\200\230not through galleries - recognised at case in front of' an: audience representing the-mainstream art world, dominated by white dealers and patrons,

In order that they could understand them, he used English to ex-

Press his gratitude â\200\224
though he would have
been far. more at home in
his mother tongue.

This seemed to epitomise his struggle as an
artist torn between the

white art world and his
own inner voice, which in
his art speaks of the
trials and tribulations of
black people.

However, there is no
doubt that having won
the Standard Bank
Young Artist Award,
Makhoba's star is on the
rise.

He is no newcomer to
the arts scene,

He first came to public
attention when he
won the Natal Biennial
IV in 1991 with a work
which now hangs in the
collection of the National
Gallery in Cape Town;

â\200\234Although he has
proven his talent, he re-
mains largely unknown
outside KwaZulu/Natal,
where he has lived since
his birth in Cato Manor,

: But he is an artist who

| has long*accepted the

challenge:of. walkingâ\200\231 the
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lure of commercial
: }Makhoba's Can, jnk-"
ling to ofâ\200\230the,; many Job-
stacles he has to contend
with-when he â\200\230dedicated

the award to his wife and

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Makhoba liste

townships, Makhoba <

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three children â\200\224- who
have to suffer a lack of
+ privacy as he uses one of
Â© the bedrooms as a studio.

â\200\234Whenever I have to
work, I have to order the
children out of the room
so that I can use the little
space to do my job,â\200\235 said
Makhoba,

The audience broke
into an uneasy laugh -
aware of the harsh con-
ditions many black art-

SEITEN OT
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ists have to worker uns.
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Makhoba grew up in
Unilazi, .

Perhaps inspired by
the rich socio-political

* and religious milicu, as a

â\200\234child he started sketch-
ing with charcoal taken
from thÃ©â\200\231 fireplace.

He never*had any for-
mal art training - but his
teacher mother guided
him with her comments

about his use of light,
colour and media,â\200\231

â\200\234Edo not think that I
would have gotten where
I am if it were not for
my mother's encourage-
ment,â\200\235 said Makhoba, -

To make ends meet
and pay his rent, he has
dabbled with other jobs
~ but his soul has always
been in art. .

By 1989 Makhoba -

had had enough of being
an extension of a ma-
chine in a factory â\200\224 and
decided to pursue art full
time,

Thousands of people
in Umlazi recognise him
as the artist who hawks
his works from door to
door to feed his family.

This was how his tal-
ent first became known,

Today the chairman

of the National Arts Fes-, Â«

" tival, professor Alan
Crump, is in-the fore-
front of singitig Makho-

ny : Ce Fe
ns to hiÂ\$ inner
voice and to his community

baâ\200\231s praises,

â\200\234Makhoba is one of
the most brilliant young
visual artists in KwaZu-
lu," he said at the pres-
entation of the award,

â\200\234The inspiration for
his work comes from the
cavironment where he
lives, .

â\200\234No one doubts that it
is also inspired by the
history of blacks in this
country, â\200\230by the hard-
ships and all those things
that happened to him
and his people.â\200\235

The artistic community recognises Makhoba as a mouthpiece that articulates the experiences and aspirations of African people through his works,

Crump said there was an inextricable link between Makhoba's own, Personal experience and the oppression of his people

At one level he makes highly personal statements about his involvement with his community, at another he comments on the political liberation of his people, ~ _ pes

One of the most important aspects of his work is the use of African mythology which enables him to catch many

glimpses of myth and ritual :

usual in his depiction of township life," said Crump.

Makhoba has managed to make inroads into mainstream cultural centres and his works hang in a number of public collections, including collections in Johannesburg and Durban and in galleries such as the Tatham, The William Humphries Gallery, the Standard Bank Gallery and the Gencor Gallery,

Some of it can also be found in university art galleries at Wits, Unisa and Fort Hare,

However, in spite of

his growing success this dedicated artist is still not well off,

Tam still poor - but

hope winning this award will be the start of good things for me,

I want to be on top

of the world,"Â® said

â\200\230 Makhoba,

On his way to the top
he has also taken Partin
the Cape Town Tricnnial
in 1991 and the Venice
Biennale is 1993,

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Mleur du Cap Award for Young Directors and the IGI
National Vita Directors Award â\200\224 both presented in 1993,

Reacting to the news that she had won a Standard
Bank Young Artist Award, Foot Newton said: â\200\234Us nice to
be recognised as an artist â\200\224 I've always scen myself more
as an architect of ideas. I's also quite scary because peo-
ple have certain expectations of you".

Given the standards Lara Foot Newton sets for her-
self, its a safe bet that she will have no difficulty in meet
ing those expectations.

SELF-TAUGHT ARTIST
FROM KWAZULU-NATAL
TAKES TOP PRIZE

sclFtaught artist from KwaZulu-Natal,
Trevor Makhoha, first came to pub-
lic attention when he wou the Natal
Biennial IV in 199T with a work which
now hangs in the collection of the
National Gallery in Cape Town. He
remains, however, largely unknown
outside the province where he has lived
since his birth in Gato Manor.
When he was a child his family moved
to Umlazi where he is based to this day,
working in a small bedroom in a house
which he shares with his wife and three
children,
He credits his late mother, a school-
teacher who drew and painted, with
engendering in him love of art, Atan carly age he start-
ed sketching with charcoal taken from the fireplace and
his mother often guided him with her comments about
his use of light, colour and media,

After completing his schooling, he held a number of

jobs until 1989, when he decided to devote himself to art
on a full-time basis. Until then, he had painted in his
spare time, hawking his work from door to door.

â\200\234Trevor Makhoba is one of the most
brilliant young visual artists in
KwaZulu-Natal", says the chairman of
the Festival Committee, Professor Alan
Crump.

He works chiclly in oils and the
graphic media and says the inspiration
for his work comes from â\200\234the cnyiron-
ment where FE liveâ\200\235. Ttalso comes from
â\200\234the history of blacks in this country â\200\224
from the hardships anc all those things
that happened to me and to othersâ\200\235.

Observes Crump: â\200\234At one level he
makes highly personal statements
about his involvement with his commu-
nity, avanother he comments about the
political liberation of this country.
â\200\234His use of African: mythology is
another important aspect of his work.

One catches many glimpses of myth
VUKA SA FeeRUARY 1996

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and ritual in his depictions of township lifeâ\200\235.

Music is important to Makhoba. Onee again, he taught himself, mastering the keyboard and the saxophone. In the 1980s he formed a band, â\200\230Trevor Makhoba and The Persuaders, which attracted a strong local following with its blend of radiGonal and popular Alro-jazz.

The highlights of Makhgba's artistic career (apart from winning the Natal Biennial IV) include his participation inthe Cape Town Triennial in 199 Land the Venice Bicnniale in 1993, His works hang ina number of public

collections including those of the Johannesburg Art Gallery, the Durban Art Gallery, the â\200\230Tatham Art Gallery, the Williams Humphreys Art Gallery, the Standard Bank and Gencor collections, as well as in the art galleries of the universities of the Witwatersrand, Unisa and Fort Phare.

Trevor Makhoba says that it has not always been easy to lead the life of an artist. â\200\234Tam still poorâ\200\235, he says rucfully. He hopes, however, Chat winning a Standard Bank Youth Artist Award will be â\200\234the start of good things for me. I want lo be on top of the world!"

VINCENT MANTSOE
WINS MAJOR DANCE
AWARD

he award is the hitest acknowledgement of the exceptional talent of twenty-fourycarold dancer/choreographer Vincent Mantsoe who only started formal dance

Trevor Makhoba

(raining six years ago, re

orn in Diepklool, Soweto, Mantsoe belonged toa youth club where he and his friends formed the Joy Dancers. Inspired by Michael Jackson, they created their own strect dance style and entered competitions.

Vincent Mantsoe

His vivid images
come from quietness,
from the depths of

predcs \

his heart and mind ...

CHARLES MOLELE
meets Trevor
Makhoba, winner of
the 1996 Standard
Bank Young Artist
Award.

In the early 80s, Trevor Makhoba

painted a work he called Naked

Truth, which depicted the state of

black workers buffeted by the

winds of mischance and slave con-

ditions in factories under apartheid
oppression. A stunning, majestic painting,
it remained hidden in his studio for 10
years before he had the courage to show
it in public.

One reason for his hesitation was fear of
government reprisal, but Nicole Donald,
curator and co-director of the Gallery on
Tyrone in Parkview, Johannesburg, has
another theory: "I think it must have been
its artistic magnitude and images of pro-
found melancholy and despair that made
him hesitant about exhibiting it. Looking
into Makhoba's Naked Truth is like being
drawn into a chamber of a tortured and
anguished mind." - "The Standard Bank

The finely nuanced painting shows the
dexterity with which Makhoba handles his
art form and an ability that earned him a

signal honour at the end of last
year when he was chosen win-
ner of the 1996 Standard Bank
Young Artist Award for visual
art.

"I am happy," was the only
answer the affable Makhoba
had when asked how he felt
about winning the prestigious
award. It is worth R8 000 and,
more importantly, gives his work
a prominent place at this year's
Standard Bank National Arts
Festival, to be held in
Grahamstown from July 4 to 14.

Makhoba was born to be an artist.

Considered a lazy child, he would squat on the ground sketching unfathomable pictures with charcoal from the fire rather than join his frolicking peers at play.

Most of my inspiration comes from my childhood my mother, and Mkhumbane, in KwaZulu-Natal, where I was born. Its rolling hills, small rivers and bushes hold a sacred place in my heart. You can't tear them away from me," says the chain-smoking artist.

His late mother, Beatrice, a former schoolteacher and herself a brilliant artist, used to coach her son on the correct usage of light, colour and different media.

Makhoba is married to Gugu, and they have three children, Sindi, 15, Muzi, 10, and Mpume, seven. They live in Umlazi, Durban.

Since 1986, he has been painting full-time from his four-roomed house.

Makhoba began to earn his living by

trading

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hawking his own paintings as well as clothes and cosmetics door-to-door. It was not easy, and he was in a state of despair when, in 1991, he caught the attention of the art world when he was named the overall winner at the New Biennial with a work titled Azwesi.

The painting, which shows a herd of cattle driving on a tarred road, symbolises the repossession of the means of production by the peasantry and heralds a new era in South Africa. It now hangs in the National Gallery in Cape Town.

It came as a big surprise, but it gave me courage to continue. I have since taken painting seriously, and in future I would like to see African visual arts competing with the Western world," says Makhoba.

Having gained confidence and ready to face the challenges of his chosen career, Makhoba finally exhibited Naked Truth in Grahamstown in 1992. It left fellow artists and art critics breathless, and was bought by a collector for R7 000.

From his original frustration emerged works that were radiant with content, vivid

colours and mystery. Rewarding exhibitions were to follow, and a series of outstanding works that included The Great Mother (1992), Uhuru (1992), Ugqayinyanga (1992) and Nkosi Sikelelâ\200\231 i-Afrika (1994).

â\200\234| treat each painting with enormous sincerity. | give it enough time, no matter how small it may be,â\200\235 says Makhoba.

With no formal theory or practical training, Makhoba strives for perfection and brings an individualistic approach to his

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work. Oils are his basic medium, though he enjoys doing linocuts, etching, graphics and occasionally, sculpture and pastels.

His works, which have been said to reflect an air of foreboding and despair, are cerebral and incorporate aspects of surrealism, aestheticism and eroticism, blending rural and urban environments into a perfectly harmonious entity.

He makes personal statements about his community â\200\224 its mythology, rituals and rhythmic dances â\200\224 and comments bitterly on the political situation in South Africa.

Says Donaid: â\200\234igkhoba is remarkable in that he is an instinctive artist with no formal art training. But this so-called â\200\230lackâ\200\231 has not held him back.

â\200\234He concentrates on the narrative, combined with subtle surrealist elements that enrich the meaning of his works. He seduces through the visual sense and intrigues with the thought process. His understanding of how to paint, coupled with the rich meaning he invests in his paintings, make him a rare artist: his tal-

*T treat each
painting with
enormous
SICarity.

I give it enough
time, no matter
how small it
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ent is of genius status.â\200\235

If not painting or playing his favourite
musical instruments, the keyboard and
saxophone, Makhoba prefers to be alone
in quietness, brooding. Crowds of people
disturb his thoughts, he says.

The low status of visual artists in South
Africa irks him, and he points a finger at
business and government.

His preoccupations include violence in
KwaZulu-Natal, workersâ\200\231 rights, human
suffering, military rule in Africa, the
Government of National Unity, crime, and
the fear of violent death.

â\200\234The wounds of the past are still open. |
paint about hardships, unhappy situa-
tions,â\200\235 he says genily. a