

CURRICULUM VITAE - TOMMY MOTSWAI

As compiled by Tommy

NAME

Thomas (Tommy) Trevor

SURNAME

Motswai

DATE OF BIRTH

27th May 1963

SCHOOL

Attended Kutlwanong School for the deaf 1968 - 1979 (11 years)

TRAINING

FUBA Gallery 1980, 1 year off and on, received tuition when money was available

WORK

Wynberg Pottery

Kurt Lossgott Sculptor Bronze 1982 - 1983

I am a teacher, teach the deaf art and sculpture, Kutlwanong school for the deaf

MY BIRTHDAY

27th May 1984 (21 years)

EXHIBITIONS

1. After school many times at Zoo Lake, Johannesburg
2. At his home in Rockville
3. Goodman Gallery
4. Santam child art R.A.U. JHB 1985
5. Sol Plaatjies Exhibition, Mafikeng Unibo
6. Bloemfontein National Symposium for the Disabled 1986
7. Rustenburg Little Gallery 1987
8. Volkskas Atelier Exhibition and travelling exhibition 1987
9. Grahamstown Festival and travelling exhibition 1987
10. Sol Plaatjies - Mafikeng Unibo 1987
11. SA National Council for the Deaf annual meeting

UNVEILING OF TOMBSTONE

Joyce Motswai 11 May 1986

AWARDS

1. Santam Child Art Bursary 1985
2. Monte Carlo - represents South Africa 1986
3. Volkskas Atelier Merit Prize 1987
4. Sol Plaatjies - Graphic Art Award 1987
5. Excelsior - 1987

GALLERIES

1. Goodman Gallery
2. Trust Bank
3. Market Gallery - Johannesburg
4. Rustenberg Little Gallery

HOBBIES & INTERESTS

1. Teaches Fellow Deaf Friends Art
2. Soccer Coach for deaf
3. Jogging
4. Church

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There is little on the urban scene that escapes the attention of this artist. We should follow him with equally close attention to savour the full message. The folks who move along one of Motswai's crowded Jo'burg streets are shown in all their individuality and eccentricity, plainly relished by the artist. He notes every detail of dress and accoutrement: the minis and shorts and T-shirts of the Wits cuties, matching outfits on a husband and wife, a suited and hatted business man complete with walking stick, a post-man, a startlingly short mini that turns a couple of heads, and Tommy's favourites, a pair of booted and spurred, so to speak, traffic cops. But it doesn't end there. Each and every piece of street furniture, the shop signs, the road markings and the different makes of cars, all are evoked with enthusiasm. The smiling faces and vivid colours and the general busyness of the scene suggest a bright and happy community, pulsing with life and joy.

For Motswai records only the sunny hours. His is a cheerful vision of life ... gloom resides outside the framework of his art. Even that arena of our contemporary nightmare, the urban freeway, is for this artist a stage for politeness and friendliness. In a drawing called "Thank You for Your Good Gesture" there's nothing but good behaviour: the visitor from the Cape acknowledges the politeness of the local driver, children and grannies smile and a party on a tractor-drawn truck, if windblown, are having a jolly time. So too when he shows a busy moment in township life, there's nothing but animation and fun. The smiling lion on the Simba chips poster is the presiding deity: while roses bloom the children play, aproned housewives gossip, kites are flown, dogs are walked, the retail trade flourishes and even the small person on crutches is in good spirits.

Dare one use, in this context, that famous word "life-enhancing", coined by Berenson? For Motswai is that rare being, a true optimist, and he would have us see the best and preferably the positive things we own, in a torn and desperate corner of the world. And the best, he shows, lies in the ordinary folk in whom he believes, whose busy public lives he celebrates.

DOCTOR RAYMUND VAN NIEKERK - Director of the South African National Gallery 1976-89



TOMMY MOTSWAI

Tommy Motswai's drawings are crammed with activity: people crowd the city pavements, cars and trucks rush along busy roads and streets, happy talk and laughter fill the rooms. Motswai hears none of this, for he has always been deaf. Yet the animation and joyous excitement that are present in his work testify to an uninhibited involvement and pleasure in the world around him.

Thomas Trevor Motswai was born in Johannesburg in 1963 and attended the Kutlwanong School for the Deaf from 1968 to 1979. He began to draw while at school and continued studying art at the Johannesburg Art Foundation and FUBA in the year after school. In the midst of the success by then already his, he decided to attend courses at the University of Bophuthatswana in 1988. He mentions the difficulties of a deaf-mute in the classroom situation but acknowledges the generous help of teachers and fellow-students. By 1985 he had won a bursary from Sanlam and had started exhibiting. In 1986 one of his drawings was shown at an international exhibition in Monte Carlo. 1987 saw Motswai's work receiving wide recognition: inclusion in the Volkskas Atelier Exhibition, where he won a Merit prize, and in the Standard Bank National Drawing Competition. His work was being acquired for major public and corporate collections and not long after was selected for the Cape Town Triennial. The recognition he is now accorded as recipient of this year's Standard Bank Young Artists Award will meet with general approval. A courageous and very talented artist has won through to success.

Motswai is back at Kutlwanong School for the Deaf where he teaches drawing and sculpture. He also coaches young deaf people in soccer and is active in church activities. The generosity of spirit that characterises his art is evidently present in all he does.

What marks his work most strongly is the remarkable attention to detail that contributes so much to his recording of life in contemporary Johannesburg. The humour that informs almost all the drawings is sustained and intensified by the myriad details that keep one looking for further telling clues in the particular situation he is describing. Motswai's observation of the minutiae of contemporary urban life is extraordinarily acute and a necessary ingredient of his humorous and good-natured account of how we live now. That careful observation is, however, part of a deliberate, conscious desire to record an historic moment: as he puts it, "I should like to draw incidents for future use, that ... the new generation should see (what) took place in the past." Not that he chooses to play down the humorous in the work; on the contrary, he notes his wish to capture the fantastic as he draws people, and talks frankly of drawing "jokes".

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The selection of Tommy Motswai as the Standard Bank Young Artist Award winner in Fine Arts marks the start of the second decade of these awards.

Broadly, the award is intended for an artist who, while not yet a national figure, has shown a professionalism and dedication to the discipline over several years and has produced work of exceptional merit.

Thomas (Tommy) Motswai is only 29 and is one of the youngest recipients. His work first came to public attention in the early 1980s and his paintings are now housed in major public and private collections. He has been the recipient of other major art awards and is well represented in several publications on South African art.

Over the years the Young Artist Award exhibitions have tried to encompass as many as possible of the techniques in the visual arts. This year's exhibition will for the first time include large-scale tapestries as well as pastel works on paper, the medium for which Motswai is most widely known.

The Festival Committee would like to congratulate Tommy Motswai, while thanking the Goodman Gallery for its help in assembling his exhibition. Our appreciation also goes to the ten public art museums which have agreed to host the show on its national circuit. We are well aware that the considerable successes which previous Young Artists have enjoyed as a consequence of receiving their award, owes much to the co-operation the sponsors have received from the art museums of South Africa.

Alan Crump
Chairman, Festival Committee

