

MSG -200 / -ccel\_soF

Pa eter Tae a or

doen wat andere, en dan met name blanke, kunstenaars ook altijd hebben kunnen doen: zeggen wat ze willen, met alle materialen die ze maar willen, in iedere maat, op iedere manier.

va ayssere toe

â\200\224 Hoe bent u zelf op het kunstenaarspad terecht gekomen?

â\200\234Zelf begon ik al toen ik nog maar heel klein was met tekenen. Ik zat op de lagere school en ik vond het leuk om doedels te maken. Ik leefde in een township, Alexandra, die ten noorden van Johannesburg lag, ongeveer twaalf mijl van de stad. Alles uit stripverhalen en films tekende ik en ik maakte altijd schetsen van mijn vrienden. Ik vond dat gewoon leuk om te doen, als entertainment, en het kwam nooit in me op om er mijn beroep van te maken. Dat laatste had te maken met de enorme hoeveelheden beperkingen waar je als zwarte rekening mee moest houden in de tijd dat ik opgroeide. Regeltjes, zoals het idee dat zwarte mensen geen bankrekening mochten openen, tenzij ze een bepaald niveau van opleiding hadden bereikt. Al die regeltjes maakten dat ik dacht dat zwarten ook niet zomaar kunstenaars

mochten zijn. Dat had weer te maken met het feit dat er geen voorbeelden waren waar je je mee kon identificeren binnen je eigen gemeenschap. Ik was in mijn leven nog nooit een professioneel zwart kunstenaar tegengekomen. Dankzij de kranten wist ik dat er kunstenaars waren, maar dat waren altijd blanken.

â\200\234Dus ik tekende gewoon, net als een vriendje van mij. We hadden een leraar die ons aanmoedigde om mee te doen aan een tekenwedstrijd en dat was de eerste keer dat ik me realiseerde dat het normaal was om je met kunst bezig te houden net als met sport of muziek. Mijn vader was kleermaker en mijn moeder was dienstmeisje in de huizen van de blanken. In mijn familie werd niet over kunst gesproken. Ik deed maar zoâ\200\231n beetje na

David Koloane met â\200\230Made in South Africa II (1992)

wat ik in de kranten zag, een beetje tekenen, en vaak schilderde ik voor medeleerlingen

opdrachten in schriften en in ruil daarvoor kreeg ik dan snoep.

- Kon u van de kunst leven?

â\200\234In feite begon ik pas laat met het maken van kunst, in 1974.

Ik volgde in die tijd privé-lessen bij die vriend van mij. Intussen werkte ik. Omdat mijn vader ziek en om mijn moeder te helpen ging ik van school af om mijn familie te kunnen onderhouden. Als tolk vond ik werk in de city van Johannesburg. In die tijd werd zoâ\200\231n baan beschouwd als een stevige positie, maar ik had mijn hart er niet bij. Ik tekende altijd als ik terugkwam van mijn werk. Ik was gefascineerd door onderwerpen als mu-

ziek. Er werd heel veel gemusiceerd, jazz, maar ook Afrikaanse muziek en er waren allerlei feesten waar ook werd gedanst. Die tekeningen liet ik dan aan mijn vriend zien. â\200\234Op een gegeven moment kwam ik in contact met Bill Ainsley, een blanke schilder die in de suburbs van Johannesburg woonde, waar ik eigenlijk niet mocht komen. Hij gaf Jes aan huis, in het geheim. Als er wel eens politie kwam controleren, moest ik onmiddellijk een heel goede smoes klaar hebben. Vaak werkten we buiten naar de natuur. Jongens en meisjes zaten door elkaar, maar de buurt kon ook zien dat ik er als zwarte tussenin zat en het is dan ook regelmatig gebeurd dat de politie werd gebeld en dat ze kwamen controleren. Ik deed me dan voor als tuinman. Het heeft heel lang geduurd eer

#### FOTO GEERT VAN KESTEREN

ik het onderdanige schuldgevoel dat ik mede daardoor heb gekregen, ben kwijtgeraakt. Ik herinner me nog dat ik naar New York ging en daar deelnam aan een workshop met studenten uit alle delen van de wereld. Een keer per week hadden we modeltekenen. Als ik in Zuid-Afrika was geweest, had ik gearresteerd kunnen worden alleen al vanwege het kijken naar een blote dame.

â\200\224 Wanneer ging u voor het eerst exposeren?  
â\200\234Mijn eerste tentoonstelling was in 1975, in een bank die een galerie had, de Ned Bank. Zij stelden hun ruimte gratis ter beschikking en vroegen geen commissie. Het was een groot verkoopsucces. Al snel daarna besloot ik dan ook om mijn baan op te geven.  
â\200\234Zwarte kunstenaars exposeerden wel in ga-

derwijs gegeven en ze hebben dan ook kunstenaars zoals Gerard Sekoto voortgebracht lang voordat het apartheidssysteem werd geïntroduceerd. Dit liberale systeem werd in 1953 omgevolgd met de Bantu Education Act - een wet ingesteld om de zwarten zo op te leiden dat ze net voldoende kennis hadden om in de mijnen te kunnen werken. Daarmee verdween ook het kunstonderwijs. In plaats daarvan kregen we crisis na crisis. We hebben altijd te lijden gehad onder gebrek aan onderwijs, gebrek aan materiaal. Daardoor werden we gedwongen te experimenteren met alle mogelijke waardeloze materialen. Ook in de toekomst zal er niet iemand van buitenaf zijn die ons zegt wat we moeten doen. We moeten onze eigen inspiratiebron zijn. Gelukkig voel ik nooit enige wanhoop. Ik ben er namelijk van overtuigd dat we alles hebben, alleen moeten we het in goede banen leiden.

Wat dat betreft is de tentoonstelling in Amsterdam belangrijk, omdat die, anders dan in de context van de Biennale in Venetië, een presentatie is geworden van de kunstenaars, en niet meer de presentatie van Zuid-Afrika zoals de regering het graag ziet.

#### COLOFON

ZUIDERKRUIS, 27 Zuidafrikaanse kunstenaars/ SOUTHERN CROSS, 27 South African Art.  
Kunstenaars/participating artists: Willie Bester, Andries Botha, Norman Catherine, Keith Dietrich, Kendell Geers, Jackson Hlungwane, Philippa Hobbs, Sfiso Ka Mkama, William Kentridge, David Koloane, Sandra Kriel, Noria Mabasa, Trevor Makhoba, Johannes Maswanganyi, Tommy Motswai, Karel Nel, Tony Nkotsi, Bonnie Ntshalintshali, Malcolm Payne, Joachim Schönfeldt, Helen Sebidi, Mashego Segogela, Penny Siopis, Pippa Skotnes, Willem Strydom, Sue Williamson, Tito Zungu.

De Stichting Thami Mnyele/ the Thami Mnyele Foundation:  
Secretariaat/secretariat: Elandsstraat 5 hs., 1016 RW Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Phone (20) 6200359 Fax (20) 6237335.

Inhoudelijke begeleiding/ artistic advice: Pauline Burmann en Moira Whyte.  
Productie en coördinatie/ production and coordination: Bert Holvast.

Met dank aan het Ministerie van WVC, het Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, de Gemeente Amsterdam, Museum Overholland, het Anjerfonds, dagblad Het Parool, Comité Zuidelijk Afrika en de Anti

Apartheids Beweging Nederland.

With thanks to the Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the City of Amsterdam, the Anjerfonds, the Museum Overholland, newspaper Het Parool, the Comité Zuidelijk Afrika and Anti Apartheid Movement in the Netherlands.

Deze uitgave wordt ook in Zuid-Afrika verspreid/This publication is also distributed in South Africa.

et fanret

David Koloane (56) is one of the seven artist who are in Amsterdam for the exhibition Southern Cross. His paintings are made in an abstract expressionistic tradition, however in the recent works more figurative elements are involved. Koloane is one of the important spokesman of the black and white art world in South Africa. He is hopeful about the future, but at the same time acknowledge that the fight is not over yet.

The first time I left South Africa, I went to New York. There were all those beautiful museums and galleries. I wanted to go to the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan. But once I was there I hesitated at the entrance: Will I be allowed in? My first reaction was the question of whether they'd let me in or not, and once I realized that I could go in I wanted to stay inside. Never come out again. It was an experience like landing in candyland and not knowing where to start eating. That confrontation made me realize all the more how abnormal society in South Africa had become.

I feel hopeful about the possibilities at the moment, certainly where the influence of the return of people who were exiled is concerned. Maybe they can give us something back that they wanted us to forget. It is important that people learn about the visual culture. The government has devalued that area to much. Today most of the universities do have a department of fine arts, and they are beginning to produce a generation of young people who are involved in the various aspects of art and art education.

A system of special academies where stu-

dents can work in total freedom, the way you can here, is for the time being still a dream for us. Fortunately the artists are becoming more and more impertinent, and they want to do what other artists, and the whites in particular, have always been able to do:

Huge contrasts and a

say what they want, with all the materials they could want, in any size in any way. I myself began to draw when I was still very small. I was in primary school and I liked making doodles. I lived in a township, Alexandra, north of Johannesburg, about twelve miles from the city. I drew everything I came across in comic books and films and always made sketches of my friends. It was like entertainment, and it never occurred to me to make a career of it. I think that had to do with the enormous number of restrictions that you had to take account of in the time that I was growing up. Rules, for example, like the idea of black people not being allowed to open a bank account, unless they had had a certain level of education.

All these rules meant that I thought that blacks were just not allowed to be artists. That again had to do with the fact that there were no examples with whom you could identify in your own community. I had never met a black artist in my life. I knew from the newspapers that there were artists, but they were always white.

Tailor

My father was a tailor and my mother was a maid in white people's houses. In my family, nobody talked about art. I copied out, in a way, what I saw in the newspapers, a bit of drawing, and I often painted assignments for the other children in their school notebooks in exchange for sweets. In high school we had occasional art classes, but that meant no more to me than free time. I began making art late, in 1974. At that time I was taking private lessons from a friend of mine. I was working in the meantime. Because my father was sick, as the oldest of the children, I had to leave school and to look for a job to help out my mother. The job I found was in an office where I had to interpret for people. At that time, a job like that was looked on as

a pretty solid position, but I didn't have my heart in it. Later I found the painter Bill Ainsley who lived in the white suburbs, where I wasn't in fact allowed to go, and who gave lessons in his house.

â\200\234We often worked outside from nature. Boys and girls were mixed, but the neighbourhood could also see that I was a black sitting in amongst them and it also frequently happened that the police would be telephoned and would come to check it out and I had to pretend I was the gardener. That feeling is one that stays with you. I can still remember that when I went to New York and took part in a workshop with students from all over the world. We had model drawing once a week. If I had been in South Africa I could have been arrested just for looking at a naked woman.

â\200\234There are things that keep coming back, and you are never sure whether you are really allowed to do this or that. It is a sort of guilt complex that youâ\200\231ve been given. It is simply there. They make you feel guilty. â\200\234My first exhibition was in 1975, in a bank that had a gallery, the Ned Bank. They offered the space free and didnâ\200\231t ask a commission. It was a big success where sales were concerned. Soon thereafter I decided to give up my job.

â\200\234Black artists did show in galleries, and we made trips to the galleries to see work by both black and white artists. Ironically enough, the work of black artists could be shown within the commercial circuit alongside that of white artists.

â\200\234Gerard Sekoto was the first one to show his work along with white artists and he was the first to get professional recognition. And that was still in the time that blacks were not allowed in the museums. So, huge contrasts and a lot of irony.

â\200\234The art market is still in the hands of the whites. There simply isnâ\200\231t any money in the black community to create such a market.

ot of irony

All those contrasting elements exist within that one system in South Africa.

Schools

â\200\234There were no official schools for artists. Polly Street Centre was in fact the only possibility of getting some practice, and that was a centre for creative activities, where people went in their free time for a bit of music, a bit of art, a bit of dancing, a bit of boxing. So it was by no means a serious training. The artists who went there developed themselves purely on their own strength. And they were simply happy that they had a place where they could meet and that they shared the same ideas. And that is how Polystreet became the first artschool.

â\200\234That lively exchange, I think, was not so much about politics, but was based on an important discovery, namely the insight that art potentially offered the possibility of earning a living. This was an inspiring discovery because coincidentally, at the time, the black artists were just beginning to come into contact with commercial galleries. â\200\234And the galleries were for their part interested in the black artists because their means of expression was so different from that of the white artists. Their art was bought by white collectors who saw for the first time how the blacks lived in the townships. And they were paid for it, too. Certainly they earned less than what the white artists were paid, but that was because they were only barely starting, since the 1950â\200\231s, to participate.

Miracle

â\200\234There are so many absurd things and there is so much still to be done. For me, the fact that there are black artists at all under the circumstances in which blacks have to live is a straight-out miracle, let alone that we indeed have artists who make work that can

completely measure up alongside that of the white artists.

â\200\234What is of great concern to me is the absolutely imperative change in the cultural infrastructure within our own communities. We must introduce them at the same time that we have to change the existing institutions.

â\200\234Originally, before the nationalist government came into power in 1949, education was in the hands of Roman Catholic or Methodist missionaries. At some of the mission schools, a reasonable training in art was given, and they also produced artists long before the apartheid system took hold. .... This system was wiped out in 1953 with the Bantu Education Act, only there for just enough education for the black people to work in the mines. Instead, we got crisis after crisis.

â\200\234We have always suffered from lack of education, lack of materials, but I have always had the feeling that it is very important for us to be as productive and fruitful as possible, to experiment with all the media, all formats, whatever. We ourselves have to generate the interest in work by the black artist. There is not going to be anybody from outside who is going to tell us what we have to do. We have to be our own source of inspiration. Fortunately, I never feel the slightest despair. I'm convinced, namely,

that we have everything. We only have to  
set it along the right track.

â\200\234Where that is concerned, the exhibition in  
Amsterdam is important, because, unlike in  
the context of the Biennial in Venice, it has  
become a presentation of the artists, and no  
longer a presentation of South Africa the  
way the government wants to see it.

PIETJE TEGENBOSCH en  
PAULINE BURMANN  
vertaling: MARI SHIELDS