Mukhuba Nelson

HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS

Six South African Rural Artists

ANITRA NETTLETON

The exhibition "Tributaries," mounted at the Museum-Afrika in Johannesburg in 1985, was the first in apartheid South Africa to include black artists from its rural areas alongside artists, both black and white, from its urban centers. Curated by Ricky Burnett, the show sent shock waves through the country's established art market, as it exposed a diversity of art practices whose existence had been masked by dichotomies present in the divide not only between black and white but also between art and craft, Africa and Europe, and the traditional and the modern.[1] Trained urban black artists had shown their work in many exhibitions in South Africa and abroad (e.g., Sydney Kumalo in the 1966 Venice and 1967 São Paolo biennials, Ezrom Legae in the 1979 Valparaiso biennial), but the idea that there were artists in the rural areas who might be considered "contemporary" or "modern" was then entirely novel. Other exhibitions in South Africa and abroad subsequently attempted the same mix, such as "Magiciens de la terre" in Paris in 1989 (Magnin 1989), "Art from South Africa," which toured Britain in 1990–91 (Elliott 1990), and "Siyawela" in Birmingham and Johannesburg in 1995.

However, these shows' inclusion of works from both rural and urban locales has papered over the inequalities and fundamental conceptual gulf between these two categories of artists. Originally lauded for attempting to create a specifically nonracial South African version of African identity,[2] such exhibitions have led to a glib acceptance of cultural unity (e.g., see Peffer-Engels 1997). Urban artists have, by and large, had access to formal art instruction ranging from that offered at tertiary institutions to training through community projects,[3] but their counterparts outside the cities have had little exposure to modern art-production methods and media. For the most part their training has occurred in the ambience of indigenous traditions of material culture production, largely centered on woodcarving, beadwork, and mural painting.

Most of these artists choose to remain in the rural areas, a choice governed as much by their wish to retain links with their own communities as by the economic imperatives of survival and the pressures placed on them by entrepreneurs wishing to maintain their image as unspoiled Africans in the "bush." Their exposure on, and access to, the art market has been controlled by agencies or individual entrepreneurs operating from the metropole. Many rural artists speak only rudimentary English or Afrikaans, and their access to theoretical debates about modernism, postmodernism, or conceptual art is extremely limited. Yet they are no strangers to images from the larger world, ranging from those found in the mass media, advertising billboards, school textbooks, and Bibles to those seen in galleries, postcards, and exhibition catalogues, and their reworking of these images is not, superficially at least, very different from the pluralist tendencies of many postmodernists.

One must therefore avoid relegating these artists to some imagined romantic realm of unspoiled *primitifs* isolated from the pollution of Western influence, even though this is the way they are often marketed. Not only has the modern world steadily impinged on people's lives in rural South Africa, but artists working there visit the cities and see their works in galleries and art publications; they are

JANET WILSON

Clockwise from top left:

1. Nelson Mukhuba (1925–87). Egyptian figure and female figure, ca. 1970–74. Tshakuma, Venda, South Africa, 1978. Photo: Anitra Nettleton.

The work of contemporary black artists from rural areas of South Africa has been viewed differently from that of their urban counterparts. Categorized as falling somewhere between tourist art and fine art, it is not expected to reflect experience in the larger world. Many of Mukhuba's wooden figures were inspired by images he saw reproduced on postcards and in books.

2. Nelson Mukhuba. *Nebuchadnezzar* (after the engraving by William Blake). 1974. Wood, enamel paint; length 148.5cm (58.5"). Johannesburg Art Gallery.

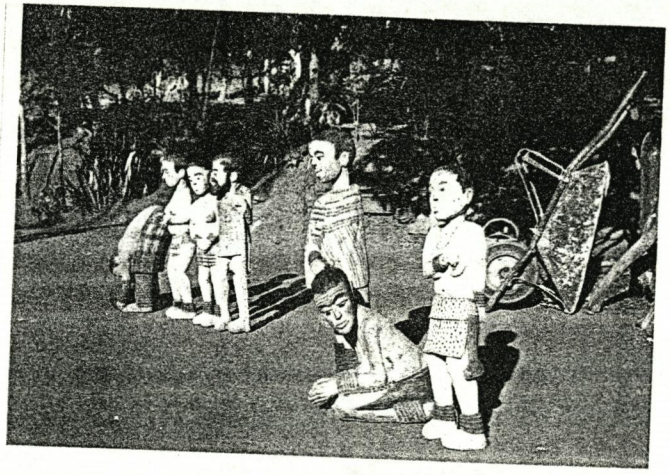
3. Nelson Mukhuba. *Ballet Dancer*. before 1978. Wood, enamel paint; 118.5cm (46.7"). University of the Witwatersrand Art Galleries, Johannesburg, UAG 86.12.C3.

strangers neither to the comforts of Western living standards nor to the fact that the income from their artistic production enables them to acquire some of these comforts and gives them status, albeit at times ambivalent, at home.

In this article I will explore how six of the better-known artists from the Northern Province have negotiated the spaces between their rural African "origins" and their metropolitan exposure. By telling their individual stories, I hope to expose the complexities of the processes through which they have succumbed to or resisted both lionization and cannibalization by the world of contemporary art.

Traditions of Woodcarving in the Northern Province

Most of the rural artists[4] who were included in "Tributaries" live and work in the Northern Province, and some have gone on to achieve international fame.[5] The Nationalist government had rigidly delineated ethnic divisions through forced removals to areas designated as "homelands," where underdevelopment was deliberately maintained. "Traditional" political structures and ethnic customs were entrenched through the codification of customary law and "authoritative" anthropological accounts of different African cultures, thus helping to maintain vested forms of political power.[6] Among these customs was the figurative woodcarving used in a variety of practices unique to the Northern Province, particularly among Venda-, Tsonga-, and Sotho-speakers (see Nettleton 1984, 1987, 1992; Becker & Nettleton 1989).



Given that the Western canon of art encompasses sculpture, painting, and graphics, entrepreneurs could exhibit woodcarvings in art exhibitions without challenging the boundaries of that canon (see Steiner 1996; Shiner 1994). Once included, artists in rural areas could cross over, without making major conceptual or stylistic leaps, from the production of objects for local consumption to the production of "sculptures" for an external art market.[7] Among Venda-, Tsonga- and Sotho-speakers of the Northern Province, carved wooden and clay figures were—and in some places still are—used in initiation ceremonies for men and women (Nettleton 1984, 1989a, 1992). Figurative carving is also used in contexts associated with divination and healing and with chiefship (Nettleton 1984, 1989b, 1996; Becker 1996). There is also a much larger tradition of making useful objects such as headrests, staffs, meat platters, bowls, and spoons; although acknowledged as "traditional art," these objects are not reflected in the range of works by contemporary rural artists that have appeared in "high" art exhibitions.

Among all these Northern Province groups, woodcarving was a skill learned by men through apprenticeship to an elder male relative, and many carvers produced both figurative and nonfigurative objects for their communities. Nelson Mukhuba and Johannes Maswanganyi received their training in this way. Other artists—Jackson Hlungwani and Johannes Segogela, for example—claim to be self-taught. Noria Mabasa, the sole woman in the group, transgressed the normal division of labor among the Venda men and women when she moved from clay to wood as a medium. In most cases, exposure to Western art markets has broadened these artists' approaches to their work and has led them to explore a variety of subjects, but they have remained within a fixed scheme in the production of sculpture, conceived as

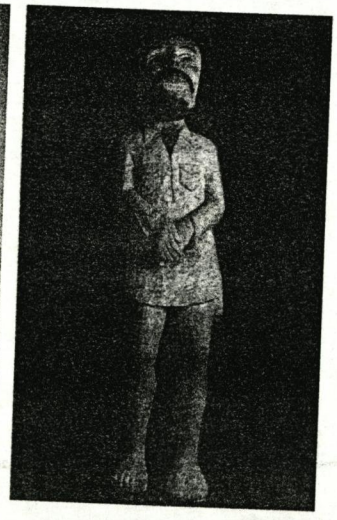
Top: 4. Nelson Mukhuba. Wooden figures *(matano)* for the *domba* initiation ceremony. Tshakuma, Venda, South Africa, 1978. Photo: Anitra Nettleton.

Mukhuba realized there was a market for work reflecting local life and customs. To achieve an accurate representation of traditional *matano*, he looked at illustrations in an early anthropological text.

Bottom left: 5. Nelson Mukhuba. *Three Sculptures in One*, 1984. Wood; 87cm (34.3"). UNISA Collection.

This work represents a departure in concept and approach from the artist's other figural sculptures.

Bottom right: 6. Nelson Mukhuba. *The Missionary*, 1974. Wood; 87cm (34.3"). Standard Bank Foundation of African Art, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. SBF 1986.12.02.



PETER MAGUBANE

Top: 7. Noria Mabasa (b. 1938). Enamel-painted clay figures of policemen, soldiers, and businessmen. From brochure for "Parade," an exhibition at Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa, 1986.

Mabasa produced numerous small figures for the art market, many of them nearly identical.

Bottom: 8. Noria Mabasa. *Carnage II*, 1987. Wood; length 218cm (85.8"). Johannesburg Art Gallery.

This large-scale work incorporates references to Venda historical tradition, local experience, and a 1987 flood in Natal that received widespread television coverage.

essentially figurative (see Rankin 1990b). They appear to have little grasp of the ways their work is being appropriated into theoretical debates centering on the pluralism inherent in postmodernist art production and criticism (see Richards 1990; Nettleton 1988).

These artists' ease of entry into the postmodern art world was, and still is, conditioned by the Western art market's longstanding fascination for things primitive and exotic.[8] The very opacity of the subject matter is part of the object's mystique or charm. Further, Westerners regard both the materials and the technical or stylistic simplicity of the works as evidence of the "unspoiled" quality of their producers' creativity rather than as indices of economic and educational underdevelopment resulting from apartheid.[9] They interpret the inclusion of elements of Western material culture or of media-inspired images not as part of the reality of artists' lives but as an intriguing measure of their simultaneous distance from and proximity to modern global culture, a reflection of technology transformed into myth, and a comment on the vagaries of Western cultural norms. Thus, artists working for this market from bases that are *artistically* relatively isolated have had to navigate between local traditions of production and use, the modern world as they experience it in rural South Africa, and the expectations and demands of the art market controlled from the metropole.

Marketing

In 1985 the agency Ditike was set up by the Venda Development Corporation to enable local artists with no previous exposure on the art market to exhibit in the urban centers and abroad.[16] In making their selections, Ditike officials guided artists, albeit implicitly, to the kinds of sculpture on which they should concentrate, particularly those perceived to sell well (Duncan 1994:69–87). In the local press, articles deploring the commercialism that had crept into the choice and marketing of these works (e.g., Arnold 1988; Richards 1987; Martin 1987) served to expose one of the major conceptual divides separating these rural artists from critics and artists in the urban areas. The former apparently saw commercial viability as one of the most important motivations for making sculpture, a viewpoint that often led them to produce multiple versions of the same subjects. In contrast, artists trained in the contemporary expectations of cutting-edge originality are more likely to disavow an interest in sales, even though many of them make series of works exploring a single theme.[17]

After Ditike collapsed in the early 1990s, commercial galleries in the urban centers took over the role of agent for some rural artists, and their selection criteria, based on notions of quality and salability, were more rigidly enforced. Johannes Maswanganyi, for example, fell afoul of Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg for producing multiples (Linda Givon, personal communication, April 2, 1998), and other artists such as Noria Mabasa, Paul Rikhotso, and Owen and Goldwin Ndou found it increasingly difficult to get their works shown, or, more important for them, sold (Duncan 1994:127). Trent Read of Read Contemporary, another Johannesburg gallery, bought a large number of their sculptures between 1993 and 1995. Many still have not been sold, as the market for these works in South Africa has more or less collapsed, and the majority of sales are made to foreigners. Once again this apparently wholesale acquisition was not indiscriminate, and Trent Read implicitly set the artists on particular courses through his choices (Warren Siebritz, personal communication, April 22, 1998).[18] Other artists such as Freddie Ramabulana simply opted out of the gallery system, producing works which were not necessarily primarily geared to the art market (Kendell Geers, personal communication, April 22, 1998), but which captured the eye of those in search of the maverick.

9. Noria Mabasa. *Ngoma Lungundu*, 1995. Wood; length 279.5cm (110"). Standard Bank Foundation of African Art, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, SBF 1996.07.

The *ngoma lungundu* is the large drum used in the women's initiation ceremony called *domba* (see Fig. 10). Mabasa has broken tradition by working in wood, an artistic medium usually reserved for men. One might interpret the submissive and spent poses of the female figures as suggesting the power of male domination.

Left: 10. "Python Dance," with *ngoma lungundu* drums at the center, performed at a *domba*. Ngudza, Venda, 1978. Photo: Anitra Nettleton.

Right: 11. *Nhunghuvana* (medicine gourd). Tsonga, South Africa. Gourd, glass beads, grass; 18cm (7.1"). Standard Bank Foundation of African Art, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, SBF 1991.09 (a–d).

Nelson Mukhuba

Nelson Mukhuba (1925–1987), the first of these artists to be exposed to the high art market, was born and grew up in the ambit of the Lutheran mission station at Tshakuma in Venda and later worked as a carpenter and electrician's hand in Johannesburg. On returning home around 1958, he started carving objects for local consumption, including wooden bowls, large four-handled drums (*ngoma*) for use in chief's courts, mortars for grinding maize, and wooden figures (*matano*) for use in tableaux in the *domba*, the last of three stages of women's initiation. At the same time he produced a number of works for sale to outsiders. While there was very little tourist or other development in the area until the opening in 1981 of the casino in Thoho ya Ndou, the newly created capital of the newly "independent" homeland of Venda, tourists traveling along the road to the Punda Milia gate of the Kruger National Park passed very close to Tshakuma. On this road Mukhuba set up a stall from which he sold his carvings. These included images of ethnic life, and also works with subject matter inspired by postcards and reproductions: centaurs, Egyptian figures (Fig. 1), a large Nebuchadnezzar after Blake's engraving (Fig. 2), and contemporary Western figures—boxers, football players, ballroom dancers, a ballet dancer (Fig. 3). Mukhuba does not appear to have sold many of these works through this outlet, as his storeroom was full of such items when I first visited him in 1978, and many of them remained there until his death in 1987.

In the mid-1970s Mukhuba's access to outside buyers was closed,[10] and he ceased producing "exotic" sculptures until a new demand arose after "Tributaries" in 1985. In the interim he made pieces both for local use and for sale to white officials of the South African government working in the Venda area. Those for the latter were largely commissioned. His subject matter concentrated on aspects of local custom (Fig. 4). Mukhuba derived details for these images from photographs published in one of the canonical anthropological texts on the Venda (Van Warmelo 1932), claiming that because photographs were old, they represented true "Venda" custom.[11] In interviews I conducted with the artist between 1978 and 1980, he seemed aware of the different demands made by the two markets which were potentially open to him, changing his subject matter according to his perceptions of these demands. Mukhuba's production was driven as much by economic factors as by a need to explore particular facets of his personal experience. Yet his work is clearly distinguished from that of some other Venda carvers like Samuel Nethengwe, who, in the 1970s and 1980s had a workshop with a number of assistants producing staffs, bowls, and small animal figures in large numbers for sale on the tourist market (interviews with Nethengwe, 1978–79).

Most of Mukhuba's figures were executed in a style of simplified naturalism evident in much of the sculpture produced for initiation ceremonies by unidentified artists. Some works, such as *Three Sculptures in One* (Fig. 5), reveal an interest in the qualities of found materials such as branches. Mukhuba allowed the wood to guide the form of the representation, so that these sculptures take on an almost mythical modernist quality of "truth to material," raising echoes of Calder. He claimed they were inspired by dreams, but he also said he had been guided by a missionary family at Tshakuma in determining what "art" was. Mukhuba was certainly concerned about notions of originality in the stylistic and iconographic aspects of these works, and he signed all his pieces, sometimes dating them as well. He even signed *matano* that he carved for the *domba*, though people do not acknowledge that these figures are manmade (Nettleton 1992) and generally do not remember their makers.

There does not appear to have been a Venda market for Mukhuba's modern works, although some, including *Nebuchadnezzar* (see Miles 1997:46), were displayed in pavilions set up by the "independent" Venda government at the Rand Easter Show in 1980 and 1981. These pavilions were intended to showcase the success of the independent ethnic homelands in the grand scheme of

apartheid, and Mukhuba, who was very concerned with his own identity as a Venda and with the maintenance of a Venda identity in general, was quite happy for his works to be exhibited in this context.[12]

Even though the artist did not take an overtly political stance against white domination, *The Missionary* (Fig. 6) and some of his other works seem to comment on social issues, a trend that became more apparent after the "Tributaries" exhibition in pieces like *The Drunken Boer*. The community at Tshakuma, however, regarded all these carved figures as *matano* and therefore as "secret," part of the *dzingoma*, or mysteries (see Nettleton 1992). Mukhuba was subjected to a degree of local disapprobation, including accusations of witchcraft, over the figures' exposure outside their "proper" context.[13]

Although some of his works were included in group shows put together by Ditike, Mukhuba initially refused to market his sculptures through that agency or any of the commercial galleries that approached him, apparently mistrusting their motives (David Rossouw, personal communication, April 23, 1998).[14] The artist eventually succumbed to the psychological pressures of attempting to straddle two cultural worlds: he committed suicide in 1987, one month after signing a contract with Ditike.[15]

Noria Mabasa

Noria Mabasa, one of the more successful of the rural artists to be considered here, started out from a base in local traditions: she makes clay figures derived from those used in the first and third stages of Venda women's initiation, *vhusha* and *domba* (Nettleton 1989a). Many of these early pieces appeared in local agricultural shows[19] or were made for the Venda Museum in Sibasa (Duncan 1994: figs. 1, 2). The department of health in Venda also commissioned Mabasa to make clay figures which could be used in instructing people in primary health care; they included images of women breastfeeding, warnings about hot pots on stoves, and the like (David Rossouw, personal communication, April 23, 1998). While these works might be seen as an extension of the traditions of didactic clay sculpture for initiations (see Nettleton 1992), they were not intended as installations or individual art objects.

After "Tributaries" Mabasa began to make smaller figures reflecting contemporary life, which were extremely popular among private and public collectors. In 1986 Goodman Gallery arranged in serried ranks a large number of Mabasa's nearly identically modeled policemen, soldiers, and businessmen for their brochure publicizing an exhibition called "Parade" (Fig. 7). The photograph was taken by Peter Magubane, a famous black photographer of the "resistance" in South Africa. In the context of the 1986 "state of emergency"—occasioned by upheavals in the townships, growing militant opposition to the police, and increased police brutality—a political meaning not originally entertained by Mabasa herself[20] was thus imparted to these works. The lack of a politically overt statement in these figures individually is sharply defined when one compares them with Johannes Chauke's *Pig Policeman* (Elliott 1990:47), whose satire is explicit. Equally apolitical are a subsequent set of curious but not critically charged figures in historical (European) costume (Younge 1988:39), commissioned by a Johannesburg entrepreneur, and, in 1989, almost identical images of conjoined twins, Mpho and Mphonyana (Elliott 1990:32), whose surgical separation made the news on national television.[21]

Mabasa had already turned to wood sculpture before "Tributaries," at first under the tutelage of Nelson Mukhuba, and she began to make unique works that were much larger than any she had made previously. *Carnage II* (Fig. 8), which appeared in the Vita Art Now competition in 1987, dealt with subject matter which Mabasa said had been inspired by television coverage of floods in Natal in 1987 (Dell 1989:48; Rossouw 1990:53). But the work includes images drawn from the Venda environment and historical traditions as well, as evidenced by the crocodile which appears to be attacking the swirl of people engulfed in a whirlpool of confusion. Crocodiles may indeed have appeared in the news footage. The reptile, however, also functions as a central metaphor in Venda cosmology, referring to both kingship and witches (Nettleton 1989b). It poses a threat to people in rural areas, particularly to women doing washing and children drawing water. Mabasa recalls having seen three people "being eaten by these reptiles" (Rossouw 1990:53).

Thus this sculpture, created with large pieces of driftwood which suggests the floodwaters and in an *art brut* style which conjures emotive responses, combines personal experience with media-inspired topicality. Mabasa has negotiated a space between her own Venda-centered view of a distant disaster and the metropolitan view of those in the art world, to whom both the Venda experience and the Natal floods are reducible to anonymous human tragedy at the primitive outskirts of modern civilization. The latter perspective is evident in the title, *Carnage II*.[22] Mabasa speaks very little English, so it is more than likely that the name was bestowed by her agents, in this case Ditike officials. It distorts the reality of the artist's response to both the Natal flood footage and the dangers lurking in her own environment. In most instances, galleries provide English titles for works by all the artists from the rural areas, often using terms the artists themselves may not understand.

In 1990 Mabasa started to work on commission for Trent Read, who provided access to the markets, originally through Read Contemporary, but later through commissions or consignment.[23] He seems to have encouraged Mabasa to produce individual works, although she was free to choose her own subject matter. She claims that much of it was inspired by dreams, said by Venda-speakers to be sent by the ancestors (Stayt 1931:241, 362). Her works reflect an exploration of Venda customs and images, drawing on historical traditions. The sculpture *Ngoma Lungundu* (Fig. 9) refers, at least through its title (in this case, her own), to the migration myth of the Singo group who ruled the Venda from 1700 onward. According to their myth, a sacred drum so large that it had to be carried by a number of people enabled the Singo to overcome adversaries by producing rain, hail, thunder, and lightning (Nettleton 1989b). Mabasa asserts that the sculpture merely "represents" the *domba*, with women dancing around the large drum that resembles the sacred drum, *ngoma lungundu* (Coulridge 1997:24–25). These large drums, the centerpiece of every *domba* initiation ceremony (Fig. 10), are played by women, although the burden of carrying them generally falls to the men.

Mabasa's title clearly refers to the myth, the driftwood itself evoking the power of the drum to bring rain. The way the artist has deployed the female figures, however, allows another interpre-

Clockwise from top left:

12. Johannes Maswanganyi (b. 1948). *Nyamisoro Figure*, ca. 1990. Wood, beads; 70cm (27.6"). Standard Bank Foundation of African Art, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, SBF 1993.22a, b.

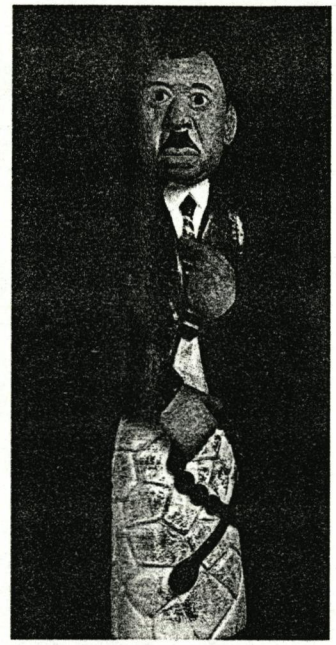
Maswanganyi, who is Tsonga rather than Venda, borrowed the form of the Tsonga *nhunghuvana* to make a *nyamisoro*, a representation of a female healer/diviner, or *sangoma*. It too has a carved head as a stopper, but the entire figure is made of wood rather than a gourd.

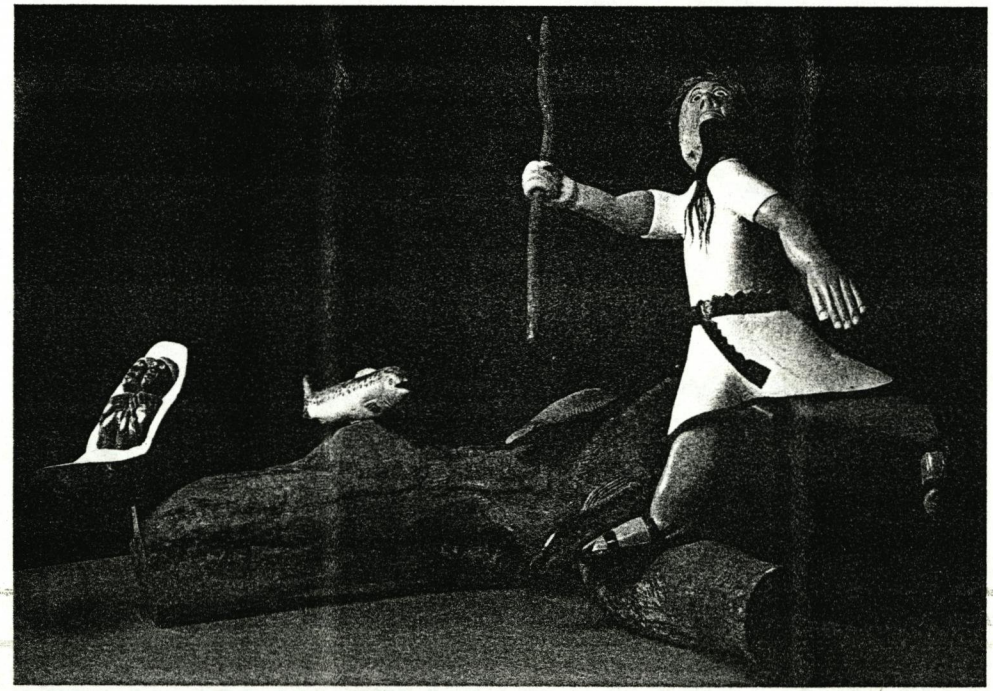
13. Johannes Maswanganyi. *Professor Hudson Ntsanwisi*, ca. 1987. Wood, enamel paint; 87cm (34.3"). Standard Bank Foundation of African Art, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, SBF 1987.69.02.

This rather irreverent portrait of the chief minister of the homeland of Gazankulu is an example of the artist's larger figures aimed at urban clients. The snake may be interpreted as either a Tsonga or a Christian symbol.

14. Johannes Maswanganyi. *Christ Walking on the Water*, 1996. Wood; 210cm (82.7"). Standard Bank Foundation of African Art, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, SBF 1995.01 (a–i).

Maswanganyi seemed aware of the appeal of Christian imagery to foreign buyers even before he joined the Assemblies of God. The spear and fish add African inflections to the biblical theme.





tive angle.[24] As opposed to her earlier clay works replicating the dance associated with the *domba* (Younge 1988:40), here the attitudes of the figures suggest submission and exhaustion, as if the women were being swept by intractable forces. The sculpture evokes the weight and power of the tradition of male control. Mabasa herself has "transgressed" by producing works in wood, a medium traditionally associated with men, but she continues to plunder the imagery of male traditional carving and Venda mythology to produce works that have a particular meaning for her and for those with some knowledge of Venda history. To outsiders these meanings become shrouded in a kind of undifferentiated African mystique, reliant also on a recourse to notions of a historical but unknown "tradition."

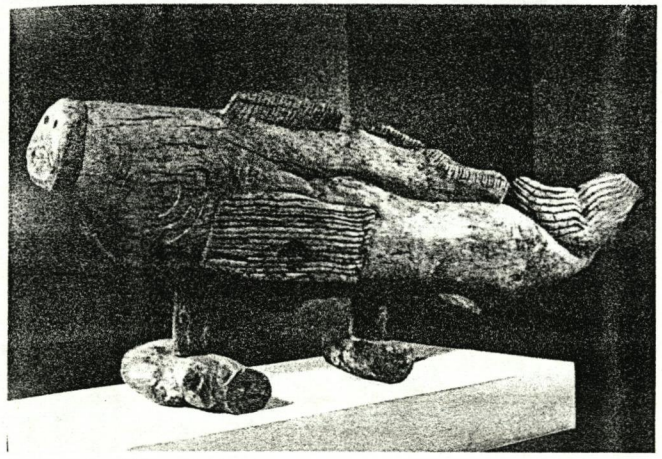
For Mabasa and some of the other artists from the Northern Province, making art has led to a change in lifestyle, one that is belied by her projected image. While she was still with Goodman Gallery, Mabasa was able to build a new house and buy a television set and many other modern luxuries and comforts. Yet, because she also perceives the advantages of cultivating her image as a rural African and her links with her community, she has retained her older compound as a place in which to receive outsiders seeking a more African experience (Fiona Rankin Smith and Rayda Becker, personal communication, 1998, based on interviews with the artist). There she sells work to visitors passing through Venda, a significant number of whom have been Europeans or North Americans (David Rossouw, personal communication, April 23, 1998).

Mabasa was flown to England while the "Siyawela" show was in Birmingham in 1995, but does not appear to have been invited to make her voice heard there (David Rossouw, personal communication, April 23, 1998).[25] Her silence encourages the perpetuation of a "primitive" African mystique in relation to her work.

Johannes Maswanganyi

Johannes Maswanganyi took a different route in attempting to make his works more accessible to an urban, largely European audience. Although promoted as a Venda, he is conscious of his Tsonga/Shangaan identity, and he lives and works near Giyani, the capital of the former Tsonga homeland of Gazankulu. Having learned his craft from his father, himself an accomplished carver, Maswanganyi started out producing works closely associated with the repertoire of objects used by local carvers and healers. In the early 1980s he produced "modern" versions of *tinghuvana* (sing. *nhunghuvana)*, initially for healers working in the urban areas (Dell 1989; Nettleton 1991). *Tinghuvana* (Fig. 11) were medicine containers made from gourds and had long-stemmed stoppers that were often topped with carved human heads or busts. The gourds themselves might be dressed with beads, suggesting the completion of the body. Modernizing these forms by carving the whole figure from wood, articulating the anatomy and the clothing, Maswanganyi turned them into *ngamisoro* (Fig. 12), images of a female *sangoma* (diviner/healer). Two of these works were included in "Tributaries" (Burnett 1985:52), and a number of similar figures went on sale soon afterward in Goodman Gallery's "Transitional" room. In contrast to the display in the main space, where works were placed singly on bases with special lighting, in this room they were disposed around the floor and on shelves, an arrangement itself indexical of the lesser status accorded to them by the market.

In 1985 Maswanganyi moved into the production of larger figures of city slickers, businessmen, and politicians. Their basic naturalism within somewhat attenuated forms calls to mind nineteenth-century figures made by Tsonga carvers



Opposite page:

15. Jackson Hlungwani (b. 1923). *Altar of God*, after 1980. Wood figures, rocks; "Cain" (center figure) 210cm (82.7"). Standard Bank Foundation of African Art, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, SBF 1990.15.10–12.

The altar came from a church founded by the artist on the site of a historical stone-walled settlement. Hlungwani then added his own idiosyncratic versions of biblical figures.

This page:

16. Jackson Hlungwani. *Fish*, 1986–87. Wood; length 233cm (91.7"). Standard Bank Foundation of African Art, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, SBF 1988.16.

Hlungwani carved a series of fish, an example of his move away from multiple-figure installations to more salable single works.

(Nettleton 1987; Becker & Nettleton 1989). All these images are invested with a wry humor, one that is possibly appreciated by his largely white audience and is most clearly seen in his portraits of apartheid politicians such as Hudson Ntsanwisi, chief minister of the former homeland of Gazankulu (Fig. 13), and Hendrik Verwoerd, the architect of apartheid. These works were incorporated into more canonical displays of the "high" art variety at Goodman Gallery and in other exhibitions (Hammond-Tooke & Nettleton 1989:79, fig. 55). However, as demand increased, Maswanganyi slipped into a degree of repetitiveness which did not measure up to the art market's demand for the unique. He then found it difficult to sell his works through the "serious" art vendors.[26] In a sense he was caught between the earlier message that "transitional" art sells and can thus be produced in quantity, and the subsequent message that high art sells at high prices, without understanding the proviso that each work had to be different.

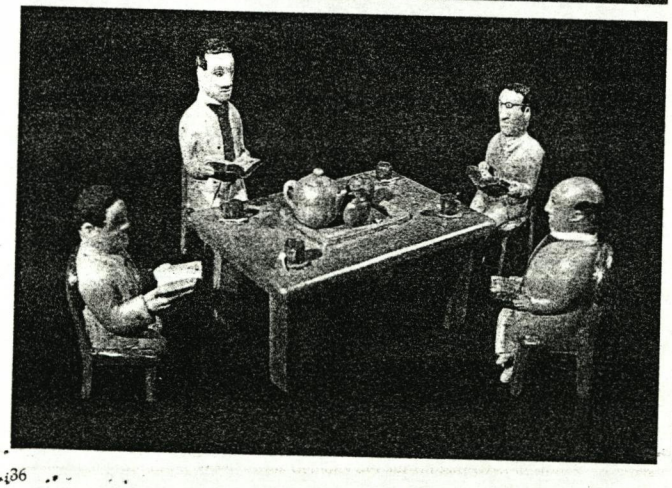
Rescued from this impasse by Trent Read and Read Contemporary, Maswanganyi explored issues related to his ancestral roots, as in the series of *Ancestor Trees* (Elliot 1990:66, ill. 3), as well as to wider-ranging indigenous African historical material like the *Shaka* series (Rayda Becker, personal communication, April 23, 1998). These life-size figures, their poses familiar from textbook illustrations of warrior-kings, portrayed a heroic version of African history, one based on Zulu rather than Tsonga traditions. In 1986 Maswanganyi began to explore themes from the Bible, as in *Christ Walking on the Water* (Fig. 14). The inclusion of "ethnic" touches give these works an "African" feel: in the *Shaka* images, the figure is dressed in actual skins, and in *Christ Walking on the Water* there is a separately carved spear. Such details would have resonated differently among local and foreign audiences. While the former would see, for example, the shield and spear as a reference to warrior status and to the fish as spirit-beings, these images would suggest different interpretations for those steeped in the Bible or in notions of the "primitive other."[27]

Maswanganyi's turn to Christian themes appears to have been motivated by strong religious conviction, occasioned by his joining the Assemblies of God (an Apostolic Faith sect) in the early 1980s, but the fact that it did not emerge in his works until 1995 suggests that he emulated other artists whose works center on Christian subject matter.[28] Maswanganyi's awareness of the international recognition afforded to Jackson Hlungwani and Johannes Segogela, for example, was assured through his own entrepreneurial activities in Johannesburg and Pretoria, where he acted not only as his own agent but also as a middleman for women producing beadwork and pottery in the rural areas of Gazankulu and Venda. This biblical iconography is perhaps more easily understood by the patrons of Read Contemporary, who form the bulk of the market for such works. At the same time, Maswanganyi also seems to know how to use local imagery to give his sculptures an African feel, unlike Hlungwani, whose references to ethnic traditions appear both deeply rooted and idiosyncratic.

Jackson Hlungwani

Jackson Hlungwani formed his own charismatic Christian church at a site he calls "new Jerusalem" at Mbokoto.[29] The site is carefully constructed using dry stone walling, and both the walling technique (see Rich 1989) and the layout of the shrine suggest that he simply colonized an old settlement of a type built by Venda-speakers across the Soutpansberg and Levubu River valley area as early as the fourteenth century (see Loubser 1991). These stone-walled settlements belong to a widespread Zimbabwe style, reflecting the mixing of Shona, Venda, and Sotho/Tswana cultural elements both north and south of the Limpopo. A Tsonga-speaker, Hlungwani ostensibly is not part of this historical culture, but he incorporated these forms nevertheless, calling on the authority provided by "traditional" precedents without being too concerned about such ethnic distinctions. Two large stone altars with wooden sculptures of idiosyncratically interpreted biblical personages appear in the shrine along with secular subjects such as football players (Burnett 1989).

"Discovered" as an artist by Ricky Burnett for the "Tributaries" show, Hlungwani was persuaded to part with much of the sculpture he made for this shrine, and the two main altars, called the *Altar of Christ* and the *Altar of God* (Fig. 15), are now in the collections of the Johannesburg Art Gallery and the University of the Witwatersrand Art Galleries. Subsequently Hlungwani started producing sculpture for sale on the urban market. He retained his *art brut*, emotive style and the religious subject matter—which might appeal to postmodernist sensibilities. In the series of sculptures of fish and another of the Crucifixion, which he produced over a number of years, the full range of iconographic elements is hidden behind Christian interpretations (Becker 1989). He also began to concentrate on large single figures rather than multiple-figure "instal-



lations" (Fig. 16), as individual carvings are easier to sell to individuals. His single-figure works are complex, direct, and emotive—sculptures rather than expressions of a cumulative exploration of the artist's own individually conceived Christian mythology. This move, however, dimmed the illusion that Hlungwani was in some sense in the avant-garde.

Hlungwani took a great interest in the way his works were set up in the gallery context, and he intervened personally in the installation of his altars at the Johannesburg Art Gallery and the University of the Witwatersrand Art Galleries. He also replaced missing figures and added extra ones for the *Altar of Christ* in Johannesburg Art Gallery (Diane Levy, personal communication, 1993). This monitoring appears to be motivated by the ritual and religious importance that Hlungwani attributes to these altars rather than by a theoretical stance on aesthetic or semiological issues. In 1996 he was flown to Japan to oversee the installation of his *Altar of God* in Osaka, but his appearance there might also be interpreted as a negotiated performance—the "African shaman" in the halls of Asian culture—like Esther Mahlangu's appearance, in full "tribal" dress, at the Musée de l'Homme or Noria Mabasa's at the Henry Moore Sculpture Park (Trent Read, letter, May 6, 1998).

Hlungwani's access to the art market has been closely guarded by middlemen.[30] He is the only one of these artists who has a written and binding contract with his dealer (Kendell Geers, personal communication, April 22, 1998), but even they have been unable to dissuade him from using apprentices to help him produce larger and more numerous sculptures in shorter time spans. It might appear that crass materialism has engulfed Hlungwani. However, he is responding to quite contradictory demands: on one hand, his community expects him to share the fruits of his success, and this can best be done by employing assistants and by producing variations on a single theme; on the other, the high art market expects inspired individual creativity and unique sculptures. In his attempt to satisfy both,

Top: 17. Johannes Segogela (b. 1936). *Sampson Killing the Lion*, ca. 1986. Wood, enamel paint; 21cm (8.3"). University of the Witwatersrand Art Galleries, Johannesburg, UAG 87.04.02.

Segogela's work centers around Christian narratives and morals. In the early 1980s he began making small figures like this one that were sold individually.

Bottom: 18. Johannes Segogela. *Table with Four Believers*, 1986–87. Wood, enamel paint; tallest figure 6.5cm (6.5"). University of the Witwatersrand Art Galleries, Johannesburg, UAG 87.04.04.

Scenes with multiple figures like this one have fostered the perception of Segogela's work as "fine" art rather than "transitional" art.

Top: 19. Johannes Segogela. *The End of the Devil's World*, 1994. Wood, enamel paint; 59.5cm (23.4"). Standard Bank Foundation of African Art, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, SBF 1995.09.02 (a–c).

The defeat of evil is videotaped by two angels.

Bottom: 20. Johannes Segogela. *The Wedding at Cana*, 1990. Wood, enamel paint; 43.5cm (17.1"). Pretoria Art Gallery, 1994.03.03.

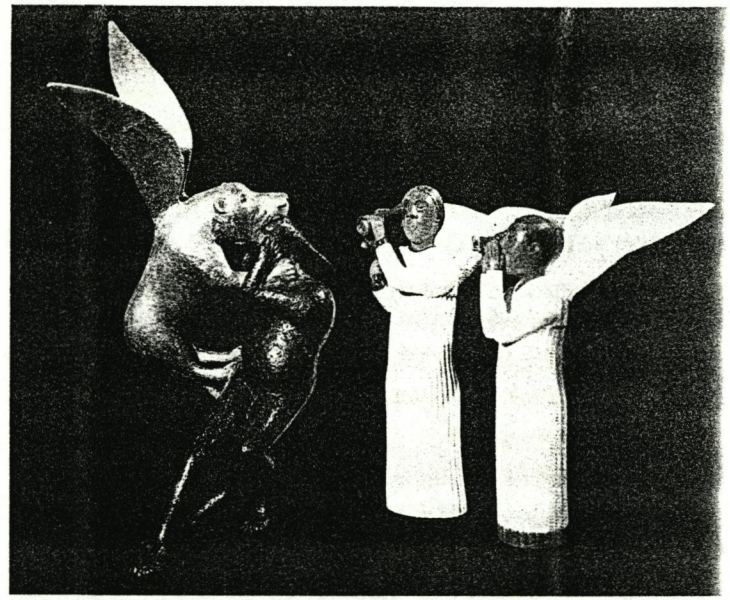
Because many tableaux are not fixed to a base, the individual figures can be manipulated into alternative configurations.

he has inevitably had to cross the line at various points.

Johannes Segogela

Johannes Segogela is one artist from the Northern Province who seems to be treading this fine line fairly successfully, but he has also seen a degree of curatorial manipulation of his works. Although his sculptures were not included in "Tributaries," by highlighting the potential of rural artists, the exhibition opened the way for the "discovery" of artists like Segogela, whom Givon first encountered selling his works on the street in Rosebank, one of Johannesburg's upmarket shopping centers (Givon, personal communication, April 2, 1998).[31] In 1986 the gallery began to show the single small-scale figures that he had started making around 1980. They were displayed in the space reserved for so-called transitional art (Fig. 17)—mostly forms which seemed to be stranded between "tourist art" and "fine art" categories[32]—along with works by Maswanganyi, Mabasa, and "Doctor" Phutuma Seoka. Following Givon's suggestion (Levinrad 1997:24–25), Segogela began to carve tableaux composed of numerous small figures, such as *Table with Four Believers* (Fig. 18). These subsequently appeared in one-man exhibitions held in Goodman's main galleries and in joint and solo exhibitions overseas (Givon 1995).

Segogela's works generally deal with moral themes based on biblical stories or, more broadly, on Christian values.They promote the notion of the brotherhood of man and focus on struggles between good and evil, as seen in his tableaux on apartheid. Segogela often uses elements drawn from contemporary life (including portraits of specific people, as in Givon 1995: fig. 21) to create apparently allegorical narratives. In *The Devil's Barbecue*, for example, devils spit-roast the damned on a barbecue fired by a gas cylinder, the flames formed by the red bristles of a factory-produced household broom. *The End of the Devil's World* (Fig. 19) shows two angels with videocameras aimed at a black demon being devoured by a golden, winged apocalyptic beast, and Satan and his demons devour human flesh in front



This page:

21. Johannes Segogela. *Judgement Day*, 1995. Wood, enamel paint; figures 38cm (15"). Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg.

In this work the artist has completely painted the figures and fixed them to the base, perhaps as a reaction against others' rearrangements of his sculptural compositions.

Opposite page:

22. Samson Mudzungu (b. 1930). *Coffin Drum*, 1995. Wood, metal; length 240cm (94.5"). Standard Bank Foundation of African Art, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. SBF 1996.04.01.01–03.

This artist draws on local practices for his work. The drum here is like the *ngoma lungunda* used in initiation, and other elements that allude to Venda cosmology are also incorporated.

of *Satan's Fresh Meat Market* (Givon 1995: fig. 3). The angels and demons appear to follow character types common in European Christian art, allowing for instant recognition by an audience versed in that tradition. Only the demons or dead human bodies are shown naked. Other figures wear either flowing, pleated liturgical robes or sheath robes which forcefully call to mind the Middle Eastern dress of Bible illustrations (Fig. 20). The artist employs dress to establish particular identities: medical personnel in white laboratory coats and politicians in suits.

Segogela evinces a strong faith in the existence of angels, but he is also aware that "angels don't really have cameras" (quoted by Levinrad 1997:1). Thus one must not see him as producing naive illustrations of imaginary situations: he deliberately uses metaphoric elements to construct allegorical images, even though, here, allegory is simply conceived. For Segogela the angel's camera is like a Doomsday book, recording everyone's actions for future reference (Segogela quoted in Givon 1995: n.p.), and other references to cameras and TV crews can be seen in the same light. Very few works suggest either overtly ethnic or "traditional" African subject matter. This fact sets Segogela apart from many of the other artists working in the rural areas and makes his works appear more contemporary.

Segogela's earlier small individual figures and many of the early tableaux retain the original finish of the wood; details of the figures or clothing are simply painted onto it. The later works, however, employ a full range of enamel paints that often entirely obscure the wood itself. This practice is found in much Venda sculpture made for the *domba* since the 1970s, and it is prevalent among Venda, Tsonga, and Sotho sculptors working for the urban art market. In Segogela's case the paint serves to augment the rather minimal sculptural exploration of form and detail and to make dramatic contrasts from one figure to another. The consistent use of black for demons and white for angels, and, less consistently, of red for priests implies that he sees some significance in these colors.

All of these elements indicate a semiotic control of the image and suggest that Segogela, more than the other artists discussed thus far, has a sophisticated understanding of the ways his works can communicate messages. Yet most of his tableaux have no fixed bases, enabling curators or owners to manipulate the arrangement of the figures and thus to create alternative meanings.[32] This choice to leave the placement of the figures indeterminate does not appear to have been theorized by Segogela himself as part of a postmodern intervention in masking the voice of the author, although he may have had some idea that this would encourage a sense of play. The simple sculptural forms and the didactic quality of the tableaux suggest that the artist was familiar with Christian Nativity scenes and children's Noah's Ark toys, most of which have no fixed bases. However, in some recent works he has become more insistent on particular arrangements, possibly as a reaction against this manipulation. Some have bases or stage sets—for example *Judgement Day* (Fig. 21) and *Satan's Fresh Meat Market* (Givon 1995: fig. 3). The figures in his tableaux have grown in number, but their scale remains intimate.

Although Segogela has achieved more recognition than most of the other South African rural artists (see Magnin & Soullieu 1996; Ross 1995), there are many anomalies in this reception. His small figures are bound by a simplified naturalism, and when seen individually, they are repetitive. But incorporated into tableaux which explore aspects of morality within secular life, they take on a different kind of identity, where repetition is submerged into complexity through the artist's wit and the novelty of his subject matter. Like Hlungwani's altars, Segogela's tableaux could be mistaken for installations, but they are not conceived in those terms. The artist intended them as allegories, comments on the vagaries of morality in contemporary South Africa. They are aimed at an art-buying audience that is still predominantly composed of members of an educated and largely white elite, living in the very metropole from which Segogela maintains a secure and critical distance. Segogela won the Standard Bank National Arts Festival Guest Artist Award for 1995, which helped establish his reputation within the art market as a member of a new generation of contemporary African artists, even though he is now 64 years old. His inclusion at this

level of competition, however, may be more a function of political correctness than a recognition of his stature within the avant-garde.[34]

Most of these artists can be characterized as living at "home," a home distanced from, but interlinked with, the modern metropole. Through a vision conditioned by both local experience and market expectations of the curiosity of the exotic, they negotiate spaces in which to articulate both their own identities as artists and their responses to demands from outside. The rural contemporary artists of South African straddle two worlds, but their rootedness in their rural communities and their almost exclusive use of wood as a medium in their reinvention of local traditions make it clear that for them, "Home is where the art is."

Sampson Mudzungu

This preference is most explicit in the work of Sampson Mudzungu, who started out making Venda initiation lookalike figures and selling them in Johannesburg.[35] However, he remained based in Venda, and in the early 1990s began making drums which were based on the *ngoma lungundu* form but included other figurative elements drawn from a broader understanding of Venda cosmology (Fig. 22). The final step in his exploration of the drum as an image connected to both the generation of life and its conclusion in death was to make a drum which was to act as his coffin. At an exhibition in Johannesburg, Mudzungu demonstrated how he would get into and lie down within the drum, and this was recorded on video for viewers of this piece in the "Siyawela" show in Birmingham and Johannesburg.

But the full potential of this idea only emerged when the artist made another drum, carved like a chief's drum, which he used in a full-scale performance to stake his claim to be headman of his area back home in Venda.[36] It was taken to Lake Fundudzi, said to be sacred to the spirits of both the Ngona and the Singo subgroups of the Venda.[37] There Mudzungu climbed into the coffin before an audience composed of a number of his followers (mostly women) who performed the *tshikona* reed dance, normally danced for chiefs by their own (male) *tshikona* players (Stayt 1931:320–23; Kirby 1968:155–64). He finally emerged from the drum "reborn" as a claimant to the headmanship.

Aware of the potential of videotape, the artist invited Oren Kaplan, an anthropology student, to record this event for future use. Thus the performance, conceived initially as a new ritual to establish a claim to political power, was also intended to be an art piece which could ultimately be marketed. Mudzungu had finally brought the avant-garde performance piece in line with local, albeit newly invented, practice. Here art was integral to ritual, and the drum form had come full circle, from ritual to art and back again. Yet it had both gained and lost its primacy as an art object at various points along that journey, a journey which situates art at the heart of "home." □

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export, is now housed at the Coimbra University in Portugal.

22. Wooden masks are commissioned from professional carvers at great cost. The fiber and resin, or soft, versions of masks may be constructed by any person who learns the skills in an initiation camp. They are therefore more common because they are relatively inexpensive, yet equally functional as forms that relate to ancestral representation.

23. In fact masquerades bring forth similarly important cosmological principles.

24. I do not mean to detract from White's immense contributions to the study of these related peoples in Zambia. The fact remains, however, that he, like other scholars, did not carefully consider the role of masks in the context of *mukanda* initiations.

25. The word "clown" or "clowns" relates to aspects of *akishi/makishi* performances that are highly entertaining. Nevertheless the performances are very complex, and the demeanor of these characters changes according to specific ritual requirements.

26. These masks also perform during political rallies, chiefs' investitures or confirmatory ceremonies, and on other occasions.

27. The Lwena/Luvale and Lunda (in Zambia) in particular have had very prominent female chiefs. Some, like Southern Lunda female chief Nyakulenga in northwestern Zambia, continue to rule today with political powers that are equal to those of other male chiefs.

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NETTLETON: *Notes, from page 39*

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1. Some of the debates provoked by the exhibition appeared in newspaper reviews and subsequently in catalogue articles (Powell 1985, 1986; Richards 1990; Dell 1989). The show later toured Germany.

2. See Richards (1990) and Powell (1989) for critiques of this search for an African identity. This was not a new phenomenon in South African art circles: the Amadlozi group put together by Egon Günther comprised artists (including one black artist, Sydney Kumalo) whose works were considered to display specifically "African" qualities. Most of them worked in very formal modernist styles. See Berman (1974:25–27) and Lissoos (1996:49–52) for brief outlines.

3. The unequal access to art training in South Africa has been frequently documented since Steven Sack's 1988 publication (see Rankin 1991), but most of this research has concentrated on urban or mission-based institutions. Most schools for blacks still do not provide any training in the visual arts, and even those black artists with a primary-school education have not had this most basic exposure to contemporary "Western" concepts of art.

4. The confusion over classifying rural artists is evident in Gavin Younge's *Art of the South African Townships* (1988), which includes many artists who live and work in rural areas and have limited contact with the townships.

5. The Northern Province, part of what was previously the Transvaal, includes the white farmlands from Louis Trichardt to Warmbaths and the homeland of Venda, and parts of the old homelands of Lebowa and Gazankulu, the rest of which are included in Mpumalanga Province. While the homelands were ethnically defined and often territorially fragmented, the new provinces are ostensibly not drawn on ethnic lines, although the recent struggles by residents of Acornhoek to be included in Mpumalanga have been suggested to be ethnically based.

6. See Nettleton (1992), Klopper (1992), Friedman (1992), and Schneider (1986) for a discussion of the ways in which "traditional" material culture was used as an element of identity formation and reinforcement in the ethnic separation of peoples in South Africa.

7. Here I disagree with Rankin's suggestion (1990b:38) that only some works by these artists should be placed in a category separate from those produced by black (or other?) artists working within the mainstream. The works by individual artists cannot be separated from each other, and the fact remains that none of these rural artists has much theoretical underpinning to their production of objects.

8. This much debated topic has generally concentrated on early-twentieth-century primitivism in Europe (Torgovnick 1990; Price 1989; Rubin 1985; Miller 1991; Shiner 1994), but it remains a trope firmly embedded not only in a contemporary global consciousness of Africa's supposed backwardness but also any search for a "roots" alternative to those of Western civilization. See, for example, Honour's discussion of European fascination with things Chinese (1961:5–29), which he traces back to Roman times.

9. See Nettleton (1989c) for a discussion of the attitude of the colonial powers in South Africa, both past and present, toward the development of artistic skills among black South Africans.

10. This, Mukhuba asserted, was done by "the government," but he refused to elaborate any further on the issue. Other members of the community interviewed at Tshakuma in 1979–80 claimed that there had been some complaints that Mukhuba was betraying local custom by selling these sculptures, something that remained an issue for him until his death.

11. His concern with notions of authenticity was further evidenced in his founding of a troupe which performed "traditional" dance and music; it was one of a few commissioned to play at the "Independence" celebrations of the then Venda homeland in 1981. He also formed a number of *Marabi* dance bands and recorded "seven-singles" for the local Venda market. His wife made "traditional" beadwork for band members to wear at performances.

12. In fieldwork conducted in the late 1970s to mid-1980s, I often found that older men in Venda and Gazankulu approved of the homelands in principle. They saw them as a means of safeguarding their cultures against the Sotho-speakers, who were numerically dominant in the region, and as a bastion against encroachment by Western cultures. This view, then, was not held only by chiefs and others with a vested interest in maintaining traditional political structures. Younger people, however—both men and women—were less sure of the value of such ethnic traditionalism, seeing it not only as enmeshed in a system which restricted their chances in life but increasingly as belonging to an imposed set of regulations in the apartheid state.

13. Venda-speakers tend to link conspicuous success with the use of nefarious methods, and one had to be careful not to challenge the authority or status of the nobility through an overly public display of wealth. Witchcraft accusations continue to surface in the Northern Province and have been the subject of much media coverage in recent years (Dell 1989:49).

14. David Rossouw worked for Ditike in Venda in 1986–89. He suggests that this mistrust was occasioned by Mukhuba's experience with a Johannesburg-based art dealer who took some of his works to exhibit in New York but did not pay him (personal communication, April 23, 1998).

15. He also killed his wife and one child and set light to the storeroom in which he kept most of his works. His elder son, Gazland, was away from home at the time. Now also a practicing sculptor, he has been selling his father's works singly to individuals and institutions, not through agents or galleries.

16. In fact, the officials of Ditike defied the ethnic parameters of the Venda Development Corporation and spread its net wider to include artists from other ethnic groups and homelands (Duncan 1994:72; David Rossouw, personal communication, April 23, 1998).

17. An example of this is seen in Kendell Geers's plea for subsidies or sponsorships for artists on the cutting edge of contemporary art but whose work is difficult to sell (personal communication, April 22, 1998). Geers, who wears the hats of both artist and art critic (for the *Sunday Times* in Johannesburg), might be situated in the avant-garde of contemporary South African art, and he is also a consultant for Gencor Gallery. He believes that the art market system in South Africa (and beyond) encourages artists to produce works which are repetitive, and he disallows any distinction between the ways rural artists and avant-garde urban artists are cannibalized by the market (personal communication, April 22, 1998). Elsewhere, however, he has suggested that "Venda" carvers' works should be returned to the "craft" or "folk art" category (Geers 1997); he does not regard them in the same light as works by artists such as Durant Sihlali or Robert Hodgins.

18. Siebritz, who worked for Trent Read in 1993–95, estimates that Read must have bought 200–300 individual works from artists in the area, the majority from Owen and Goldwin Ndou, Paul Tavhana, Freddie Ramabulana, Noria Mabasa, and Johannes Maswanganyi. Duncan (1994:82–86) discusses the intervention of Read Contemporary and Trent Read, but her version differs slightly from those offered by other actors on the scene. Among rural artists' works exported by Everard Read Gallery in 1995 were pieces by Mabasa and by Owen and Goldwin Ndou, in which two strains could be distinguished: large-scale pieces calling on indigenous traditions for their subject matter, and single figures with a heavily satirical bent, as in the pieces by the Ndous.

19. The practice of showing wood carving and clay modeling by local artists in agricultural shows has a long history in rural South Africa. A number of artists came to the attention of government officials through this forum (e.g., see the discussion of Asmon Mzila in Miles 1997:49).

20. Dell (1989:51) has discussed the difficulty of attributing to Mabasa any political imperative in producing these images. See Duncan (1994:43) for Linda Givon's explanation of the process of turning Mabasa's works into a political statement.

21. The Museum of Modern Art in Oxford bought four of these images. Given the problematic status of multiple copies (aside from the genre of printed graphics) in the Western art world, one response has been to acquire as many of the versions as possible and treat them as a single work. This was a tactic used by a number of those who bought Mabasa's policemen (Duncan 1994:43–44).

22. There is some confusion about the titles of these two works. They are listed as *Carnage I* and *Carnage II* by Sack (1988:54, fig. 45) and Rankin (1990a:120), but Duncan refers to *Carnage II* as *Natal Flood Disaster* (1994:20).

23. Trent Read was introduced to Mabasa through his wife, who had been dealing with the Northern Transvaal artists at the Sanderling Gallery since 1987, and he only became her "agent" in 1990 (Read, letter, May 6, 1998). Many people I have spoken to over the years have suggested that he paid Mabasa a stipend (see also Duncan 1994:84), a system used by the parent gallery, Everard Read, for a number of their artists. However, Warren Siebritz does not recollect this being done while he worked for Read Contemporary (personal communication, April 22, 1998). Read himself is silent on this issue, although he acknowledges he had a friendly relationship with Mabasa (letter, May 6, 1998).

24. I am aware that in the following reading I am apparently disregarding the voice of the author. The line that I follow, however, is suggested by the title of the work and the Venda tradition that it refers to, neither of which can have been lost on Mabasa herself.

25. When *Ngoma Lungundu* was included in "Siyawela" in 1995, a wall text enabled Birmingham viewers to access its "meanings" and, presumably, lift it out of an undifferentiated "primitiveness." Most of the pieces in this show, curated by Colin Richards, were accompanied by such texts. While many of the urban artists were invited to write their own, Richards wrote, and asked others to write, texts for works by the rural artists. (I did for those for Mabasa's, Segogela's, and Mukhuba's works.) Thus, in that case the mediation of meaning was shifted to the curator and his assistants.

This was not Mabasa's first trip overseas to an exhibition. Linda Givon remembers spending time with Mabasa and Helen Sebidi in the Netherlands in 1993 at the time of the "Southern Cross" exhibition (personal communication, April 2, 1998).

26. Linda Givon claims that Maswanganyi had been selling to other dealers without her knowledge (personal communication, April 2, 1998). This made it impossible to continue to market his work: its quality was uneven, and she could not guarantee its uniqueness.

27. Becker (1989:20) discusses the differences in interpretation with regard to Hlungwane's works. Maswanganyi, however, distinguished between his fish in *Christ Walking on the Water* and the *nzuzu*, a fish associated with the ancestors (*amadlozi)* and diviners (*isisangoma*). He has a large sculpture of a human-faced *nzuzu*, which he claims is the "traditional" form of this fish (interview, July 7, 1998).

28. Rossouw (1990:57) says Maswanganyi is "both a traditional and a western man and has been able to successfully span the gap between the two worlds," but he does not mention the artist's religious beliefs. Although Maswanganyi married two women according to traditional rites, it appears that the Assemblies of God sect to which he belongs condones this aspect of African custom. Certainly Maswanganyi is unconcerned by clashes between his Christian and his ethnic identities (interview, July 7, 1998).

29. The "Christian" character of Hlungwani's faith is discussed by Schneider (1989). His church is independent of other charismatic churches in South Africa, of which the largest is the Zion church at Moria.

30. Initially Peter Rich, a Johannesburg architect, controlled market access to Hlungwani's works, a role later taken over by Ricky Burnett.

31. Segogela was known to others involved in the art scene who had bought works from him prior to his being taken up by Goodman Gallery (Nessa Leibhammer, personal communication, June 1997).

32. The notion of a separate category of "transitional" art has been widely debated since its first usage in the South African context. See Nettleton (1988), Dell (1989), and Richards (1990).

33. The issues raised by this openness are evident in Goodman Gallery's photographs of these works. Many are arranged with dramatic lighting that creates an ambience reminiscent of *Batman* TV cartoons (slides in the History of Art Department Slide Library, University of the Witwatersrand).

34. A similar point could be raised about the inclusion of artists such as Mabasa and Mukhuba in the Vita Art Now competition, in which awards are made to eight artists exhibiting in South African galleries in a particular year. Neither Mukhuba's nor Mabasa's works are executed in relation to current debates and theoretical positions within the avant-garde. Segogela's work could be seen as paralleling that of Trevor Makhoba, whose paintings are also allegorical narratives executed in a realist mode, and who won the Standard Bank Young Artists award in 1996 (Sibisi 1996). However, Makhoba does not appear to be in any danger of being relegated to a folk art category such as that which Geers recently advocated for these artists (personal communication, April 22, 1998), as he works within a "Western" medium and has received some art training.

35. When these works were shown at the FUBA gallery in Johannesburg in 1989, they drew no critical attention, although the teachers at FUBA organized a seminar around them. In this exhibition they were juxtaposed with the ceramics of Thami Jali, who had trained at Rorke's Drift in Natal and was a resident potter at the Kim Sacks studio in Johannesburg. Exhibiting unknown rural artists with better-known and trained urban artists is a fairly common strategy, as it ensures that an audience will be attracted to the gallery.

36. This aspect of Mudzunga's recent performances has been researched by Oren Kaplan for his M.A. dissertation in the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand.

37. Originally Mudzungu was denied access to the lake by the chief, but he went ahead with the performance in defiance of this ruling. Lake Fundudzi is said to be "haunted" by the spirits of the Ngona, the autochthonous owners of the land, but inhabited by the spirits of the original leader of the ruling Singo group, Thoho ya Ndou. It is also said to be sacred to the creator god Raluvhimba (Nettleton 1984:219–21).

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1. Information about the history of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art is taken from Churchman & Erbes 1993.

2. Here Churchman and Erbes cite members of the staff of *The Kansas City Star* who wrote *William Rockhill Nelson: The Story of a Man, a Newspaper and a City* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1915, p. 27).

3. The trustees hired the museum's first director, Paul Gardner, only after the initial collection was intact.

4. Like most other American institutions, the museum initially collected Native American art rather than African art. Local interest in the former was fueled by the city's connection to Santa Fe via the railroad. In 1931 and 1932 the trustees

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