

LUCAS MALEMANE

DÃ©sirÃ©e Pieters

Lucas Malemane was born on 14th June 1949, at Nel i Malis the eldest of five children. His father belongs to the ee ele tribe and his mother to that of North-Sotho. The Ndebele : es Me Bind Pohainens es different areas of the Transvaal: they Pretoria, Nylstroom, Pietersburg, Lydenburg ie sh oe of the Ndebele ih kent , entre where the trditional tribal life and the colourful Ndebele culture w iio dnd preston, ere to be practised and the Malemane family moved th i i si like ere. This family, however, like so ene of re Coe pole had meanwhile largely adopted the 0 tribe, among whom they had lived fo long. Lucas Malemane and his family speak Sepedi, the fahgiredede of the North-Sotho, and the ee customs of the Ndebele. y no longer adhere to the tribal life and

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eppee art received his education at several schools and has ae edin obtaining his Junior Certificate. He will be writing his a rication examination at the end of this year (1979) and i

tends studying for a Bachelor degree in Fine Arts. ioe

In 1973 Lucas Malemane married and now has two children. He

and his family live in Mabo i pane, a township nort i have adopted the Roman Catholic faith. eee as

Artistic background

oan had x" formal training in fine art. His artistic rst aroused when his father Nelspruit first-aid servi i Cen Ae ce, had to write an examinati could not write very well, h i ealon (6 aitime e t , he was given permission to submit hi answers in the form of drawin i Bseente f gs. He thus assiduously b practise drawing parts of the hum i hacks t an-anatomy in order to be able t =e Mg anny across. Lucas, then seven years old, Whiced his er and suddenly felt the urge to imitate him. He began to draw

and since then this impulse to i i creat part of his life. @ visual images has become

library of the University of South Africa (UNISA), Pretoria in 1974, while at the same time continuing part time studies for his Matriculation. This is how he came into contact with the members of the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University, to whom he showed some of his drawings. He was immediately transferred to: that department, where he is still working as a messenger, but is now obtaining help and advice and the most important where he has access to the etching press. In this he is extremely fortunate compared to some of his fellow-artists, to whom practice to improve their etching technique remains but a dream.

The art lecturers at Unisa are most careful not to impose aesthetic considerations on Lucas Malemane, as this could be detrimental to his creativity. They do not criticize his work, because they feel that criticism at this stage would merely confuse him. They only try to stimulate him (Interview with Miss Becker, Lecturer in Art at the University of South Africa). There is no doubt, however, that Lucas Malemane has something unique in his creative expression which must be saved at all costs. On the other hand, his technique

needs a great deal of formal training HER

While still working at the library, Malemane took advantage of this opportunity and engaged in self-study by scrutinizing art books. When he came across the book by E.J. de Jager entitled Contemporary african art in South Africa, 1973, he was immediately inspired and started to experiment with woodcut. As will be shown, his woodcuts are based on some of those in this work of De Jager's. Bea CO eee

After his transfer to the Fine Arts Department, Malemane's work was given a further impetus by the Department's collection of art

from Rorke's Drift, an arts and crafts centre in Natal, -

founded by the Lutheran Church in 1962. This influence will be discussed later. Malemane has never had any direct contact with the Rorke's Drift artists. He does have contact with other artists in his area however, but it seems as though the discussions with them do not satisfy this serious young man. He looks on their gatherings as being merely of a social nature, and there is definitely no influence in his work from the other artists of his acquaintance.

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Lucas Malemane began to exhibit at group exhibitions. He

was a member of the New Signatures Exhibitions Association of

the Association of Arts in Pretoria in 1974-1975. In 1974, in this latter year he also participated in the art season

at the gallery entitled Studio Des Indépendants at a private residence of Ridge, Pretoria. His first one-man exhibition was in 1979 in the Hoffer Art Gallery, Pretoria.

Themes in the work of Lucas Malemane

The artist draws his subjects from the traditional tribal life of the

that he no longer lives according to the traditional life

the age-old traditions

characteristic of traditional customs ;

he or Realizing that these traditions will soon be lost, he decided to immortalize them through his work : of Past,

drawn from these traditional tribal life of the Black people at work (Fig. 8), generally celebrating a special occasion. Subjects In which Malemane tends towards a township art. particularly:

Though strong in his expression, they still bear the experimental stage in which the artist finds himself, especially

themes, Malemane depicts the group or in scenes of township occasion, (Fig. 10). These are his experiments with colour. Their relation between surrealism and

Medium and style

The medium which Malemane

Malemane prefers : He also began working at the moment is woodcut.

He works in acrylic, oil and water colours, but no ex-

perience of colour is already the artist's skill is greatest.

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Moreover, he favours. this medium because the works can. be - reproduced and sold more easily than the paintings.

After his first encounter with the woodcuts from Rorkeâ\200\231s Drift, Malemane copied several of these works directly in order to test his ability in this medium. Taking over the composition but using his own subject, he managed to create an entirely different atmosphere. ; ; batted

As cutting surface Malemane uses masonite hardboard. The hardness of the material impedes his work and the surface of this hardboard, being without grain, cannot produce the effects obtainable. form the granular linesâ\200\231 of real wood. This is the reason why Malemaneâ\200\231s woodcuts create the same impression as linocuts. In addition, for his woodcut printing, the artist, not having a press at his disposal, uses a hand roller, as a result of which the prints are not always neat and at times the lines show signs of fading. The cutting itself, however, is very definite and clear. Malemane has a sound understanding of the Bee of woodcut:. simple linework, large planes, and dotting, fo create a grey effect. = Sai dam sieges. Sages + gies Ã© & eid hata tee a

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As regards the other media such as pastel and colour pencils,

Malemane is technically not yet very successful. He has an- undeniably strong sense of colour, no doubt a legacy of his colour-loving tribe. The Ndebele have a natural feeling for colour, especially for the primary colours which embellish their dwellings and feature in their bead-work. But Malemane is unfamiliar with the techniques. He will, for example, use pastel, a linear medium to obtain a smooth effect, by rubbing the â\200\230colour surface (Fig.11). With his colour pencil, on the other hand, he does succeed in adhering to the linearity of the medium, but on the whole his use of colour lacks subtlety. it is possible that the artist's contact with European art has marred his pure and spontaneous sense of colour. Some of Malemaneâ\200\231s later works, which could not be reproduced here, show that he has made great progress in his use of colour and has reverted to using the primary colours. Pp The â\200\234Godfatherâ\200\235, included. here, (Fig. 11) is a clear pointer to this later success. f

How does Malemane's present situation affect his creativity?

Through shortage of funds, the artist suffers from a chronic lack of sophisticated equipment, and materials, which has a decisive influence on his medium. He uses masonite because of its cheapness and for his prints can only afford Cartridge paper. Elaborate oil, acrylic and water colours are largely out of his reach, because of their exorbitant price. A further impediment is the lack of space. He has no studio and works in a tiny room in his home. This could account for the small format of his work.

The success of other artists with their graphic work must have played a part in Malemane's choice of medium. He began to experiment with colour under the influence of the environment of the Department of Fine Arts. He keenly watches the work of the students mostly executed in colour and feels that he will not be a real artist until he has successfully mastered the colour medium.

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Analysis and evaluation of works

The Wedding (Fig. 1)

This woodcut, divided into five picture planes of different size and form, depicts a traditional wedding in its different stages. At the bottom left the Lobola, a gift of several heads of cattle which the family of the groom has to present to the father of the bride as compensation for the loss of his daughter, is shown. Immediately above this scene, a swarm of peace doves is seen accompanying the cattle to their new destination. Alongside this, on the upper left of the picture, the negotiations between the two families are taking place. Intermediaries of the groom's family confer with the bearded father of the bride about the size of the lobola. The bride, bearing an extremely sad expression because of her impending departure from her family, sits next to the group. The pot of beer in the centre creates the impression of goodwill. In the background the lobola-cattle appear again. In the top right-hand corner the bride is seen to depart with her possession, her servants and her guardian, to the family of the groom. On the

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right-hand side, poraene

women are cooking
ding feat Above their heads the peace doves are in flight
left, are now roosting in the tree. -

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The fifth and largest is the triangular central panel, the main scene

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dance happily. i

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Fig. 1 Lucas Malemane
The Wedding, 1975 ..
Woodcut (50 x 37 cm)

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This was Malemane's first woodcut.. A comparison with ..7/

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Fig. 1 (a) C. Nxamalo
The Shembe Story

Linocut, (62 x 40,5 cm) Collection : Fort Hare University With kind
permission of C. Struik, Cape Town â\200\230 :

Malemaneâ\200\231s woodcut. Only the theme has changed. There is yet
another similarity however, with that of JohnMuata ngejoâ\200\231s

Malemaneâ\200\231s Wedding is a narrative sketch of a tribal traditional oc-
Currence. To portray the different aspects of the wedding
ceremony, each activity is isolated and shown on a separate panel.
The composition is symmetrical, with the wedding feast
dominating the centre. The chronology of the picture is logical and
easily comprehensible. The illustrations read from left to right.

In the panel on the left, depicting the driving of the lobola Cattle,
the artist shows a strong feeling for movement. The diagonal lines
of the sloping road coupled with the upward movement of the cat-
tle and the horizontal movement of the peace doves above, accen-
tuate the flow towards the right. This is further emphasized by the

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Fig. 1 (b) John Mufangejo, ee eae
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permission of C. Struik, Cape Townâ\200\231

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Umgidi (Fig. 2)... ..

A feast in honour of the new king who has just been elected, is portrayed here. Again the scene is divided into several picture planes: three at the top and three at the bottom, with a continuous panel in the centre. The top lefthand corner shows several

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women on their way to the feast, one of them bringing a jug of beer as a gift. The top centre panel displays a group of singing grain pounders, while that on the extreme right, a group of women bringing a young buck as their gift to the feast. at

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In the central panel the ox is being slaughtered to the accompani-

ment of singing and music by groups of people on either side. On the left and righthand bottom panels more cattle are seen arriving for the feast, while in the middle the head of a slaughtered ox is roasting in the cooking pot. A beer pot and flask containing the

drink stands alongside.

This extremely lively and well-conceived work is based on a linocut

by the artist Azaria Mbat ha, jue Invitation (Fig. 2 (a)),

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Fig. 2 (a) Azaria Mbatha
Invitation So gen eer eee a Se
Linocut, (48 x 28 cm) Collection : University of Fort Hare With kind
permission of C. Struik, Cape Townâ\200\231 â\200\224 Hayegpent Be

which Maleman

. African Art â\202¬ also found in De Jagerâ\200\231

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Fig. 3 Lucas Malemane

Duel, 7975

Woodcut, (36 x 25 cm)

Duel (Fig. 3)

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In the central for

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Ing a club in the one hand and a whip ee see each

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Fig. 3 (a) Mbatha

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Linocut, (29 x 23,5 cm) Collection : Department of Fine Arts,

UNISA eae Yee VaR so Fake Lig Re

flanked by a row of others awaiting their turn. The rest of the pic- _
ture is filled with spectators, two of them pointing to the next two
players. The youths in. the front row all carry clubs and wear -
knickers, and all the figures in the picture wear a special type of

cloth over their chests. â\200\234 be:

This work too has a stylistic predecessor, a linocut by the artist

Mbatha from Rokeâ\200\231s Drift (Fig. 3 (a)), belonging to the collection

of the Department of Fine Arts of UNISA..It shows a similar grouping with two dominant;figures in the foreground, but contrary to Mbathaâ\200\231s static Composition, Malemaneâ\200\231s figures are active and express a great deal of tension. Both compositions are symmetrical, but Malemaneâ\200\231s woodcut is more powerful due to the contrast between the passive background and the active

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foreground. Malem

: and once more succeeded in giving

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tent to a compositional structure on which he based his work

he creates a recurrent pattern effect which is cut off at the top

: The face almost military, horizontal line of faces. The negative

space in the foreground is like Mbatha's filled with dots. The vertical

line suggested by the spectators is broken by the circle formed

by the whips, which isolate the two fighting figures. The line

begins at the point of the whip held by the youth on the right then moves over to the left hand of the youth to the left, descends to his foot, thence to the feet of the righthand fighter, where it again meets the line of the whip, completing the circle. This circular composition creates the tension in the picture. The movement which Malemane depicts here shows that he is much more aware than Mbatha of the effects obtainable through contrast.

The Chosen One (Fig. 4) =

Five singing women fill the entire picture plane, which is without a background. The central figure, flanked by two women carrying beer pots, is the one chosen as wife to the king: The scarf which envelops her shoulders betokens her status as Chosen One, and she wears a more ornate apron than her sisters. All women are wearing rings around their legs: ~~~" ~~~~~

In this work the artist's individual style emerges. His linework is economical and simple, which conveys a strong and definite feeling. The artist's obsession with order and balance is clearly apparent in this work, with its strictly symmetry and the main figure dominating the centre. The rings around the women's legs form a horizontal band across the lower picture plane, counterbalanced by the line of the faces on the top, ~~~~~ similar to the central section of the work Umgidi (Fig. 2). The tension between the black and white picture planes is effective and considerably enlivens the work. pee BRAG s+ ee en

Isangoma (Fig. 5) i Se chcae j 5

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This is a sketch of a witch doctor with her magical snakes. Her figure features prominently in the centre of the work. Out of a symbolically ornamented pot of beer standing at her feet, a snake curls up and around her body, which is flanked by two further snakes emerging from the space outside the picture frame. Behind this witch doctor an imaginary animal with a snake-like tail is depicted which, according to the artist, is an image from his dreams. As in The Chosen One (Fig. 4), perspective is absent and depth is only suggested by the placing of different images one behind the other. A feeling of the supernatural is strongly conveyed by this work whose strength lies in its simplicity. >

Umshlabiso (Fig. 6) - | ~~~~~ vega

This work portrays the slaughtering of an ox in honour of a

Fig. 4 Lucas Malemane
The Chosen One, 1977
Woodcut, (17 x 20 cm)

member of the tribe who has performed a good deed. again the
work is divided into various panels; the top panel runs across the:
entire length of the work, while a central panel cuts across and

Fig. 5 Lucas Malemane
Isangoma, 1977
Woodcut, (20 x 13 cm)

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separates the middle and lower panels. All the people. are seen bringing food for the communal pot. In the top panel, beneath the friendly face of the sun, and watched by inquisitive birds in an enormous tree, the youths of the tribe arrive with the slaughtered ox fastened on a long stick which they carry on their shoulders. The old man who accompanies them is their supervisor who has to see that they do not pick the delicacies such as the liver from the Ox. Bat

In the central panel women are shown carrying pots of beer to the feast, while in the bottom panel they bring mealie meal. In the central panel which is superimposed above the two horizontal planes, the cooking pot in which the ox will be prepared is being supervised by two men.

The ox hanging immediately above their heads forms a link between the top and the central panel. :

This central composition is very strong and aesthetically pleasing. the two figures and the pot over

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Fig. 6 Lucas Malemane
Umshlabiso, 1978
Woodcut, (75 x 54 cm)

which they bend, form a unity accentuated by the curvilinear background, which forms a contrast between the black and grey picture planes. The arms and hands of the two figures merge with the shape of the pot. The fountain-like jets seemingly spurting from the pot, contribute to the strong sense of unity of this composition. The background texture of the central panel forms a further contrast with that of the others, with their interrupted

horizontal lines in the top and bottom panels, and vertical lines in the panel between them.

This work, with its variation between tension and calm, bears

witness to the individuality of the artist who has now completely emerged from his eclectic stage.

Healing Session (Fig. 7)

This scene depicts a ritual healing of a patient through the exorcism of evil spirits. Within three different picture planes a number of witchdoctors — all women — appear. Each of them is putting herself into a trance, helped by her respective aides. Each individual witchdoctor is characterized by a specific set of attributes. The one in the top lefthand corner is seen to possess an ox head and two drum sticks. The one on the right is depicted with a mask and two snakes, similar to the /sangoma (Fig. 5). For the Ndebele tribe the snake has a strong mythical connotation. The masked witchdoctor below appears accompanied by a group of singing

people and a drum, onto which a face bearing a frightened expression has been carved.

This work is divided into symmetrical panels. A diagonal line running from left to right creates the feeling of tension which permeates this woodcut. The vertical form of the figure in the bottom righthand corner is followed through and continued by the figure of the witchdoctor with the snakes in the panel above. There is no central figure or focal point so characteristic of the other works discussed. The different panels are joined by the pattern of the background texture. Malemane's strong sense of linear composition is illustrated in the figure with the snakes, which shows a rhythmic interplay of curved lines. In both top panels the artist brings the figures forward by contrasting them with a white band running diagonally from left to right.

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The picture conjures up a feeling of liveliness without losing

strong sense of decorativeness. The people transported by their fren-

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Fig. 7 Lucas Malemane
Healing Session, 1978
Woodcut, (26 x 31 cm)

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The Mineworkers (Fig. 8)

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Fig. 8 Lucas Malemane
The Mineworkers, 1978
Woodcut, (53 x 40 cm)

This is the first variation in theme in the work of Lucas Malemane.

wards the idiom of â\200\234township artâ\200\231 in
. Mineworkers with pick-axes are seen
middle of the picture they descend in
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man, and move in an orderly line one
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standing at their posts with pick-axes and
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The background texture
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by the Rorkeâ\200\231s Drift artist Mbath a
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 Fig. 8 (a) Mbatha

Untitled ee ee ee
 Linocut Collection : Dept of Fine ae ; pes

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Intombi (Fig. 9).

Three horizontal planes depict the vocal and musical Co ea
 the return of a girl to her tribe after having a Â° be lie
 education. The design is again of pattern-like simp ity ros
 have been inspired by the work of Mbat ha, bu mete ne
 its roots in the traditional art of the Ndebele tribe w

namental decoration of dwellings and tools.

The work is composed with a decided attempt et ce
 decorativity. The main figure is subtly accentuated. hee Poe
 sie he centre of the top panel and is marked by her nudity, bat
 a be her sisters with two.nude counterparts in the conte ne
 pene plane. Unlike the others, she: also wears papi a eae
 anes and holds a white branch in her hand, which ene ee.
 her nudity. The deocrative leaf pattern, cei ne sels pperite
 her feet down to the two bending nudes in the

accentuate her person.

ThÃ© vertical background texture in the top and bottom panels, alternated by horizontal line in the centre, are proof of the artist's rational approach. The subject takes a secondary place in the

work, the main emphasis falling on the ornamental design of the whole.

Fig. 9 Lucas Malemane
Intombi, 1978
Woodcut, (57 x 41 cm)

The Wedding (Fig. 10)

This is the portrayal of a township wedding. Four figures cover the central picture plane, leaving some space on all four sides. The bridal couple is standing in the middle between two figures, one on either side. In between the bride and groom the nebulous figure of a woman appears, merging into the figure of the bride. This is the spectre of the groom's earlier love. All are singing with all their might, and tears are streaming down the cheeks of the bride as a sign of her great happiness. The people are all dressed in European garb. To the European this scene appears strongly

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Fig. 10 Lucas Malemane

The Wedding, 1978
Colour pencil on paper, (56 x 40 cm)

hurmourous, which was apparently, however, not the intention of the artist.

Apart from this the work has an almost surrealistic undertone. The figures standing in front of some kind of fence, are joined by the fluid shape of the bridal veil which takes on the shape of the trousers of the groom, then curves round the shoulder of the figure on the left. From there it moves over, like a sash, to the figure on the right, and turns into trousers. In the background an eclipse of either sun or moon lends an eerie and sombre air to the whole.

It is not certain whether this somewhat muddy use of colour was intentional or stems from a lack of assuredness in the medium. The modelling of the figures is not yet successful. Although the figures do form a solid compositional unity, their form is marred because the artist did not attain the necessary contrast between foreground and background. The difference in tonality so strongly present in Malemane's graphic work is absent here. He still seems to be having difficulty in mastering the medium of colour. In his later works colour becomes a strong means of expression.

Despite all its technical flaws, the feeling conveyed by this work is powerful and bears witness to the young artist's talent.

The Godfather (Fig. 11)

This work portrays a dream which is responsible for its strong surrealistic quality. On the left we see a tree out of whose womb-like cavity a human figure emerges.

A tall, ghost-like figure stands beside it, and in front of it, a womb-shaped form containing an embryonic foetus with an umbilical cord, is visible. In front, and forming the very centre of the picture plane, stands a cow with only two legs. Her three large teats point in the direction of a bright red pot and a calabash underneath. To the right a ghost-like apparition appears behind a person singing, while standing in front of a large grain pot with a pounder. In the

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Fig. 11 Lucas Malemane
The godfather, 1977
Pastel on paper, (52 x 39 cm)

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foreground are two skulls and the gloved arm of a skeleton
Isangoma implement.

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The colour in this work is used with more effect than in Fig. 10. The foreground is held together by nuances of yellow, red and orange, and the background by the complementary hues of blue and green. The artist saves the work from disintegration by using a strongly confluent dark foreground balanced by a light background. :

According to the artist the ghost-like figure was brought in to balance the composition. The interaction between the different objects enlivens the scene. The eye is immediately drawn to the bright red pot, but then the bright yellow hand bones, which are very disturbing in their grimness, capture the attention. This is again counteracted by the dark womb-like cavities on the left.

The feeling of life and death permeates the entire scene.

Conclusion

Lucas Malemane is a talented young artist. His work, however, shows a lack of intensive formal training and experience. The fact that he is in full-time employment is detrimental to his artistic creativity and development, and is the reason why he has remained for so long at the experimental stage; nor has he as yet mastered the art as regards choice of subject or even medium.

His woodcuts show great improvement since he first began, but even here it seems slight, if we compare his works done during 1975 with those of 1978.

Malemane's work still tends towards the formalistic rather than the freely expressive, his degree of control still being too strong.

At the time of completion of this survey Malemane's monochrome work appeared to be of a higher standard than his experiments in colour, but presently the coloured works show great improvement.

From the evaluation of Malemane's work it is clear that given the opportunity to devote more time to his art and the advantage of formal training, he has the potential to become an artist of remarkable calibre.