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. iii. GEORGE MNYALUZA MILWE PEMBA (1912-) OP Te ee  
Pemba was born in 1912 at Hillâ\200\231s Kraal, Korsten village, outside  
Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape. At the age of eight Pemba  
began to paint, inspired by his older brother, Timothy, who  
reputedly enjoyed adorning the walls of the family house with  
pictures of wild animalsÂ®-. Timothy taught Pemba to model clay  
oxen and to carve wooden sticks, and his father encouraged his  
drawing, buying him crayons and paintsÂ®'- . Pembaâ\200\231s father, who  
worked for W.M.Cuthert and Company in Port Elizabeth, would take  
his sonâ\200\231s drawings to show to the staff, who in turn sent  
portrait photographs for Pemba to copy\*- . In 1928, when Pemba was  
sixteen years old, he won praise for two drawings copied from the

Eastern Province Herald , exhibited at the annual show in the

PGE -200\$-oe01-00).

Feather Market Hall, Port Elizabeth. Thereafter he won a Grey  
Scholarship enabling him to further his post-primary education at  
Paterson School, Port Elizabeth. His later education consisted a

teacher- training at Lovedale Training College, Lovedale.

In 1931, Pemba stayed at Fort Hare with Ethel Smyth sister of

Bishop SmythÃ who was warden of the menâ\200\231s hostels affiliated to  
the South Arican Native College. Pemba attended art classes with

Ethel Smyth and learnt the rudiments of water-colour painting\*-.

7) 2 During this time the South African painter | R.H.W. Shepherd ,

. (b.1909-) recommended Pemba design the cover of

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Nolishwa, by H.M.Ndawo published by Lovedale Printing Pres  
The foreward to the book emphasised the importance of the  
collaboration between black author, black artist and black press.  
Pemba acknowledged that Lovedale Press â\200\230turned his hobby into a

paying concernâ\200\231%3-. He worked at Lovedale Press for the following

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five years, during which time he completed a teacher-training

course, illustrated brochures for the South African Institute of

Race Relations and text books for the Johannesburg Bureau of Literature for Adult Education and pursued his own painting.

R.M. Agar Oâ\200\231Connellâ\200\231s book Iintsomi: Bantu Folk Stories, Lovedale Press>â\200\231-, (Plates 3.10, a & b ), and an African version of Bunyanâ\200\231s Pilgrimâ\200\231s Progress published in London, were both illustrated by

Pemba in the 1930â\200\231sÂ°8-.

In 1931, encouraged by Professor D.D.T. Jabavu (of whom he painted a portrait) an Professor de Jager Pemba went to Fort Hare University College where he studied painting for two weeks. In 1937 he received a Bantu Welfare Trust grant. enabling him to spend five months studying painting at Rhodes University under

Professor C. Winter-Moore??-.

Like most other black South African artists Pemba has had to paint in his spare time while supporting himself by doing other forms of work including teaching, commercial art, clerical work and shopkeeping. Black playwright H.I.E. Dhlomo, who met Pemba in 1944 , recalls how he complained of the time wasted on drudgery, â\200\230miscalled workâ\200\231Â°-. After several years of working as a clerk for the Native Administrative Department in Port Elizabeth, Pemba was persuaded by Sekoto and Mohl to freelance full-time as an

artistÂ°!-,

In 1944 Pemba was commissioned to paint scenes from black tribal life by the Bantu Welfare Trust, an organisation which was important in the 1940â\200\231s for promoting black South African art,

literature, and music as well as assisting blacks to study

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overseasÃ©' #-, While recording the indigenous culture of the Xhosa in water-colours, as part of the Bantu Welfare Trust project, Pemba confirmed to Dhlomo his paidar in tribal life as a worthy subject for great art. The Natal artist Barbara Tyrell (b. 1912) also developed an interest in illustrating tribal life and costume, particularly of black people in Natal in the 1940â\200\231s. Pemba was introduced to her water-colour illustrations in 1947

when, together with the three other Natal artists (Bhengu, Ntuli

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and (Muguni)), Pemba and Tyrell exhibitedÃ©\*- at a beadwork and

painting exhibition organized by Dr Killie CampbellÃ©-. In Pembaâ\200\231s water-colours (dated 1970â\200\231s) of indigenous Xhosa custom and tribal dress, now in the University of Zululand collection, it is possible to discern stylistic similarities to fTyrellâ\200\231s illustrations, which have been widely exhibited and reproduced in books on tribal black South African costume. Examples of Pembaâ\200\231s work such as A\_beaded girl on her way to a party (1974) (Plate 3.11 b (left)) and A Xhosa married woman (1973) (Plate 3.11 b({middle})), may be compared to Tyrellâ\200\231s Ndebele Bride (Plate 3.11

a) &-,

Pembaâ\200\231s work has largely been promoted by Prof. de Jager at the University of Fort Hare as well as by the University of Zululand. He has exhibited widely within South Africa and has sold his work to numerous overseas collectors. In 1979 he was awarded an honourary Masterâ\200\231s degree by the University of Fort HareÃ©-. Despite this, Pemba is relatively unknown in South Africa. Like Mohl and Bhengu, he is a pioneer in black South African painting, and is essentially self-taught, learning by trial and error and with

some guidance from other black artists. Pembaâ\200\231s meeting with

Sekoto led to a significant development in his painting, and a change to oil painting. contact in the 1940's with Sekoto and Dhlomo developed his artistic initiative and Dhlomo regarded

Pemba as one of the progressive black fine artists of his day.

As a painter of his people Pemba draws his subjects both from rural scenes and urban township life, making group studies or simple portraits of men, women and children. His own comments on his work are characterised by modesty and humility, "I am not looking for acknowledgement.. I am just painting for myself and my people", His painting, whether of urban subjects, rural landscapes or historical subjects (such as tribal chiefs like

Tshaka and Moshoeshoe) is influenced by his language and cultural

origins. However, he is clear that he paints not as a Xhosa only, but as an 'urban Black artist' and it is for his viewers to judge whether or not his art is representative of a wider South African context. Dhlomo wrote in 1944, that while Pemba saw his role clearly as a painter of his people, he nevertheless "... also believed that an artist must be well-versed in the political, social and economical problems of the contemporary African scene so that he can express the feelings, aspirations and will of the people". In this sense Pemba's work

refers to social life, rather than to politics.

De Jager remarks that Pemba's work is completely uninfluenced by modern artistic trends. Although the artist has developed a style unique to his use of oil paint, such a generalization is debatable. His work in fact reveals a tendency towards European

oil painting styles of the nineteenth century, particularly

Naturalism. Initially he was influenced by Sekoto's handling of oil paint, with a use of strong, broad brush marks, bright colours, and sharp tonal contrasts. This use of tonal contrast is possibly also a residue of water-colour technique, as for example in Xhosa Poet Mghayi (1939) (Plate 3.12 a). Characteristic water-colours, with strong tonal contrasts and a naturalistic style include Portrait of Older Woman Sitti (n/a) (Plate: 3.13 a), Old Man with Pipe (n/d) (Plate 3.13 b) and Portrait of xXhemu (n/d). Portrait of Older Woman Sitting depicts an old black woman, wearing simple Western-type clothing, with contrasts of

light and shade on her face, scarf and dress. Tonal contrasts and the painterly treatment of the face and hands is reminiscent of

Van Gogh's Potato Eaters (1885). Broad brush strokes with a minimum of colour, convey the subject with uncompromising honesty and simplicity. In water-colour and oil paint Pemba's creates a 'photographic' quality, reducing forms to simplified planes of

light and dark with few in-between tones.

Oil paintings of group figure studies such as Dancing Women, (n/d) (Plate 3.13 b), Nongase (n/d), Fruit Vendor" (1968) (Plate 3.14 a), Hospital Scene (1969) (Plate 3.14 b), At the Clinic (n/d), Gambling Youths (1975) (Plate 3.15 b) and the Newspaper Vendor (n/a), combine expressionist colour with naturalistic style.

While Pemba's treatment of his subjects excludes expressionistic distortions of form, his colour is non-representational, favouring bright reds, blues, greens, and yellow as well as warm browns. The mood of these paintings is conveyed through this use of colour. Fruit Vendor exemplifies Pemba's later use of intense

hues and rich pallet. A female fruit-vendor pushes her laden cart

down an ochre road, crossed with the long blue shadows of cypress trees, past red-roofed cottages set against yeilow wheat fields, on the outskirts of town. The colourful fruit on the cart, the venvorâ\200\231s blue head-scarf, red jersey and white apron, have Pembaâ\200\231s characteristic decorative colour and bright light, comparable with the landscapes and figures in Maggie Laubserâ\200\231s

paintings (1886-1973).

At the Clinic, Hospital Scene and Gambling Youths represent Pembaâ\200\231s scenes of city life, recording, for example, the social activities of black youths, wearing city fashions playing dice on a street pavement, or scenes at hospitals and clinics. At the Clinic depicts black patients seated on wooden benches in a bare waiting- room. A sympathetic note is added by a woman breast-teeding a baby and an old man smoking a pipe oblivious of a NO SMOKING notice on the wall. Portrayals such as these exemplify Pembaâ\200\231s compassion, and in the words of M.Tyala%- , his desire, "to plough back into the black community that which has made him head and shoulders above most black artists; that which has earned him a reputation as probably the most notable black painter south of the Orange River."

"In addition to sketches of primitive life, he is recording the urbanization of the African people with an intimacy and knowledge such as few Europeans could possess, Some of his pictures of African preachers in church or roadway, of African young men at factory doors, of 'gramophone dancesâ\200\231, of demure maidens come to town, and even of shebeens, are remarkable for their fidelity to life and artistic power." (Shepherd 1952:10) â\200\235%-

The only place blacks have of seeing Pemba's work is at his home and at occasional township exhibitions. He admits (like most

black South African artists) that he paints for a white market

which accordingly has both an appreciation of his work and the

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money with which to buy it. While Pemba is interested in

politics, he has chosen not to allow political issues to affect

his work. His political concerns incline towards the problem of education in black schools. He reaffirms the enormous wealth of talent wasted in the townships, mainly because children and adults fail to get the chance to develop artistically and advocates strongly that art education be offered in black schools. "It is only a solitary self-made man like myself who

gets on by trial and error who ever gets any recognition'.

Concern over artistic ignorance and the lack of art education facilities within the Port Elizabeth black community, has led Pemba to argue for the establishment of black cultural centres within the townships.

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Speaking further of the new concerns of young black artists' subject matter he states that:

"Some youngsters, however, are showing glimpses of creativity. But then their only speciality is revolutionary material. They are not drawn so much towards portraits and other aspects of painting. They are concentrating solely on works that depict the present political climate, works that reflect the current ideological struggle", 7.

Pemba lives and works in New Brighton township, Port Elizabeth, where he continues to paint scenes from life around him, as well as drawing on images from Xhosa history. More than ever, Pemba is aware of the importance of art in reflecting the past and present, and in shaping identities of black South African people.

(See Plates 3.10 - 3.15);