

Simon Mushapo



Simon Mushapo was born in 1956 in Louis Trichardt, Northern Transvaal. He is a sculptor and painter of figures and fantasy embedded in social-realistic, auto-biographical, and legendary African themes. Mr. Mushapo works in oil, watercolor, charcoal, pencil and wood.

Mr. Mushapo has studied technique in oil painting under Avhashoni Maingainye and in watercolor under Kenneth Thabo. As a sculptor, he is self-taught. He has participated in several group exhibitions in South Africa and Venda and is a member of the Venda Art Foundation. A number of Mr. Mushapo's works are currently represented in the UNISA Art Collection, University of South Africa, Pretoria.



Escape
charcoal on paper
40 × 27½ cm.
signed right center
1986

The Promised Land?
pencil on paper
52.5 × 74 cm.
Signed, lower right
1988

The Promised Land? reveals the plight of urban African families who have been subjected to one of the South African government's five categories of forced removal: expulsion from cities and relocation to rural reserves or "black national states." Pass laws served as the criteria by which the state decided upon who was to live in town and who was to be relocated elsewhere. On the grounds that they were not required as manpower for a particular urban economy, some black people were apprehended, loaded into government trucks and herded off to their "new home."

Mr. Mushapo portrays the bewilderment, sadness, despair and bitterness that "apartheid's dispossessed" experience as they come face to face with the stark and barren reality of the "Promised Land" given to them through the state's so-called betterment programs. A striking feature of Mushapo's drawing is the illuminating absence of adults in the picture; only children are featured. *The Promised Land?* is a vivid statement on the dismal prospects of black children in apartheid South Africa.



Mother's Love
oil on paper
55½ × 41 cm.
signed upper right
1988



So Where to?
oil on paper
60 × 47 cm.
signed, lower right
1987

So Where To? is a somber reflection on the social circumstances and political throes that have rendered meaningless tribal values and lifestyles, which for time immemorial have been the mode and condition of Black South Africans' self-realization. At first glance, the viewer is attracted to the painting's imposing, yet melancholic face of a man who is clearly lost in an inner world of sustained and reflective contemplation. The steady gaze of his eyes, the posture of his hand and the inclination of his head seem to invite the viewer into his thoughts, wherein the viewer is immediately caught up in a powerfully expressed elliptic movement that sweeps the viewer past historic events—events

that make for a dynamic revolution in the traditional symbols of Black South Africans' social reality. From the representations of the old world order of tribal life, wherein children do the work of children, old men do the work of old men, and cattle do the work of cattle, the viewer is led to the representation of the "Young Lions" who now are no longer content to be children and are in protest against an apartheid system.

The "Young Lions" radicalism, though directed toward the system, inadvertently destabilizes the old world order of their own tribal life (note that the "Young Lions" appear to be marching upon an integral part of their social reality). This destabilization is visually

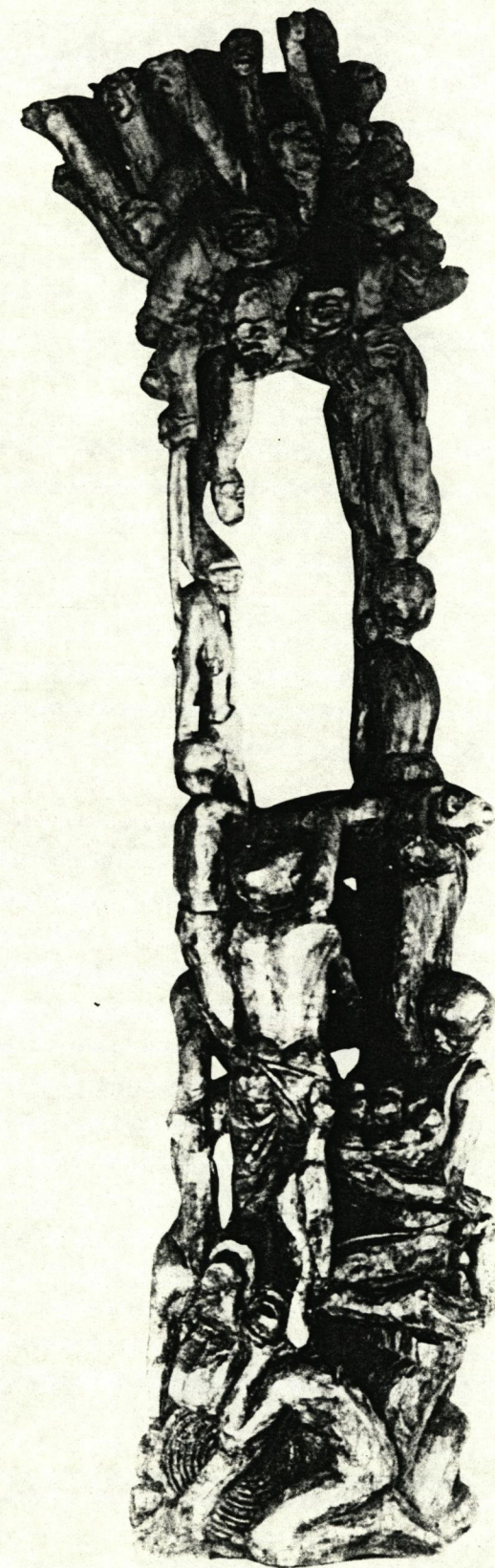
represented by the pronounced frustration of the woman above them. While giant-like in relation to the "Young Lions," the woman's physical size appears to have no affect upon their determined spirits.

All the depicted events, pulled and sealed together by the external fact and consequences of apartheid, leave the viewer wondering what the future holds for Black life and culture in South Africa; this is the question for the melancholic man lost in contemplation. No conclusion is suggested. The future is problematic. In the left hand corner the viewer can see a young man running—so where to?

Nyamalide
Tamboti wood
Height 35½ in. (89.5 cm.)
signed on base



How Far, How Long?
Tamboti wood
Height 35¼ in (89.5 cm.)
signed on base
1989



Revelation

Tamboti tree

Height 140 cm.

signed on bottom side of base
1990

Carved over a three year period *Revelation* is a composite of historical events that have occurred in Black people's struggle against apartheid South Africa. As Mushapo puts it, "I am trying to reveal some of the hidden things—events that were not broadcasted to the world—that happened to Black people in South Africa between 1987 and 1989." Imprisonment of children (Fig. 1), necklacing (Fig. 2), and domestic violence (Fig. 3) are but a few of the more than 100 various and complex social experiences that Mushapo has "recorded in wood." In Fig. 4 one can see an episode of a 1987 event that occurred in Soweto. A certain man was about to be killed by some people of Soweto for allegedly collaborating with the police. The man ran to Bishop Tutu (who is holding a Bible and dressed in clergy attire) and hid behind him. Note the face peeking from behind the Bishop's legs. Bishop Tutu intervened on his behalf, requesting that the assailants spare the man's life.

Mr. Mushapo carved a companion piece to *Revelation* that chronicles the events of the 1976 uprising and is on permanent exhibition in the UNISA Art Collection (University of South Africa, Pretoria).



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

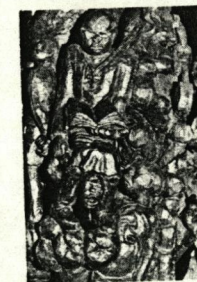


Fig. 4

