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CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN BLACK ARTAND ARTISTS

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Johannesburg and by the African Painters and Sculptors from Johannesburg Exhibition held at the Piccadilly Gallery, London, in 1965. During 1966 he participated in the Republic Festival Art Exhibition. In 1967 and 1968 he staged two further one-man exhibitions in Johannesburg, exhibiting work done exclusively in oils. These oils, as indicated, showed a tendency towards abstraction and formal composition. In 1979 his work was included in the Contemporary African Art in South Africa Exhibition, works from the collection of the University of Fort Hare, that toured four major centres in the Republic. His work was included in the Black Art Today Exhibition held in Soweto in 1981; The Neglected Tradition Exhibition held at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 1988 and the Looking at Our Own: Africa in the Art of Southern Africa Exhibition held at the Pretoria Art Museum in 1990. His work was also selected for inclusion in the prestigious publication 150 South African Paintings: Past and Present (Alexander & Cohen 1990:141,142).

In 1958 Ngatane, together with others from Polly Street, completed some murals for St Mary's Church in Orlando, and in 1969 for the Mooki Memorial School, also in Orlando. Today his work is much sought after and regarded as essential for any representative collection of South African art. His canvasses consequently fetch high prices. From this point of view he is one of the most successful Black painters to have emerged from this country. His work is contained in all important private and public collections in South Africa and in many collections abroad. South African public collections that contain his work are the Johannesburg Art Gallery, the Pretoria Art Museum, the William Humphreys Gallery in Kimberley and several University collections, including that of Fort Hare and the Witwatersrand. His work is particularly well represented in the collection of the University of Fort Hare.

Durant Sihlali

Durant Basi Sihlali was born in Germiston, Transvaal, on 5 March 1935. He was greatly influenced and stimulated by his father who was talented in drawing and modelling. From a very young age Sihlali loved to copy his father's work. The cartoon illustrations that appeared in newspapers during World War II fascinated the young Sihlali and inspired him to draw on any paper he could find, including toilet rolls. In 1947 his family moved to Moroka, a township in what was then the slum area of Johannesburg. In 1950 he joined several art students working under Alphius Kubeka at the Moroka Chiawelo Centre. He remained with this group for four years, also attending classes at the Polly Street Art Centre under the guidance of Cecil Skotnes. Here he gained valuable experience. During 1955 he studied with Carlo Sdoya and still later between 1955 and 1958 with Sydney Goldblatt. Both these artists encouraged the young Sihlali. The year 1965 can be regarded as of particular importance to the career of Sihlali. During this year he studied under Ulrich Schwanecke and developed his watercolour technique in particular. In 1981 he undertook an overseas study tour and visited Athens in Greece and Palermo in Si

cily. He studied in France at the Villa Arson Art School in Nice from 1985 to 1986 on a French Government travel scholarship.

Sihlali has devoted much of his time to teaching art. From 1978 to 1983 he taught at various art centres in Soweto on a part-time basis. He successfully headed the Fine Arts Department of FUBA from 1983 until his resignation at the end of 1988.

Although mainly a painter, since 1981 Sihlali has also done figurative sculptures. Sihlali employs several pictorial media, including pencil, charcoal, pastels, oil paints and watercolours. He has also executed work in graphic media. It is, however, his watercolour paintings that have earned him most acclaim. He is a skilled watercolourist and has developed a sophisticated, mature and personal style, characterized by his sensitive use of this medium, his delicate, often calligraphic brush work and his preference for soft colours. Successful integration is achieved in most of his pictures and a certain measure of confidence can be seen in his work. He has also proved himself to be an accomplished draughtsman.

The subject matter of most of his early paintings related to township life. However, initially he did not use it in any overt critical or acrimonious way, but as source for the imagery of his pictures. He painted that which he knew best, township life, and this was responsible for the confidence radiating from these works. He recorded township life and scenes in great detail and with insight and sensitive attunement. His interest was primarily in recording these township scenes as faithfully as possible, yet giving them his own aesthetic interpretation and artistic rendering. As such he is one of the most successful painters of the township genre. Two themes recurred in this work. There was firstly his recording of the demolition phase of the older Black townships such as Old Pimville. These paintings are of great historical value since they recorded a part of South African social and economic history. Secondly, he also recorded on paper his people, the people of the townships, as they busied themselves with their daily tasks. Not only the people of the townships interested him, but also the physical environment and material com-

