

INSTITUUT VIR EIETDSE GESKIEDENIS

Die Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat



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Artist torn between two loves

SAMUEL Ratlou is a young man torn between two creative forces — writing and painting.

This 23-year-old lad from Diepkloof, Soweto, has the best of both worlds but by his own admission, he can only exploit one at a time, but is also afraid to lose the other.

"I have to make sure that the one I pursue offers a

reward that will compliment the other," he said.

Ratlou started painting and drawing at an early age, long before he could use a pencil, let alone a brush. His early canvass was the shifting sand in the dusty streets of Soweto.

"I would draw anything that came to mind, pleasures of a young man like cars, ships, trees and human fig-

ures," he recalled.

When the days of lazing around were over and he had to go to school, little Samuel was forced to switch to doing cartoons because he could draw them quickly when the teacher was not looking.

At the age of ten, his cartoons had already captured the hearts of art-lovers in Soweto and it came as no surprise when strangers

dropped in at his home with gifts of brushes, paints and canvasses. The young artist had left the sand forever.

In 1985 he made his first big stride into the South African world of art by scooping the the "Pitco Tea Young Artists Award" from the nose of more than 200 other hopefuls.

The award landed him a

part-time job as a promoter for the competition for the duration of that year.

It was during that time that writing crept in. He started writing poems and short stories "just for the love of it" and manuscripts bulged his suitcase never to reach any publisher.

Thirty-six poems later, young Samuel started having bright ideas and he searched Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town for a publisher. He wanted to have his poems published. He was going to call the anthology of poems "African Vibrations".

But no one was prepared to risk investing on an unknown youth, and after many doors were closed in his face, he tried the overseas market. His manuscript impressed the board of directors of the New York-based Vintage Press.

The editors are busy with the final touches and printing will commence soon.

And Simon is busy on another manuscript, this time short-stories. He doesn't see the book being published for another year because he also has to paint.

He could do with people to assist him, but this is a luxury he can't afford because as much as he paints a lot, Samuel never went to the streets to sell his art. Instead, he is piling them in his bedroom untill such time that he will be able to arrange a solo exhibition.

Together with his under-study, Kedibone Tshukudu, Samuel is busy with illustrations for Christmas cards. I saw his collection of paintings recently and all the beauty and the blood of the township flared before me.

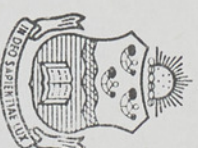
"I paint the township, it's one surrounding I have known all my life," he said.

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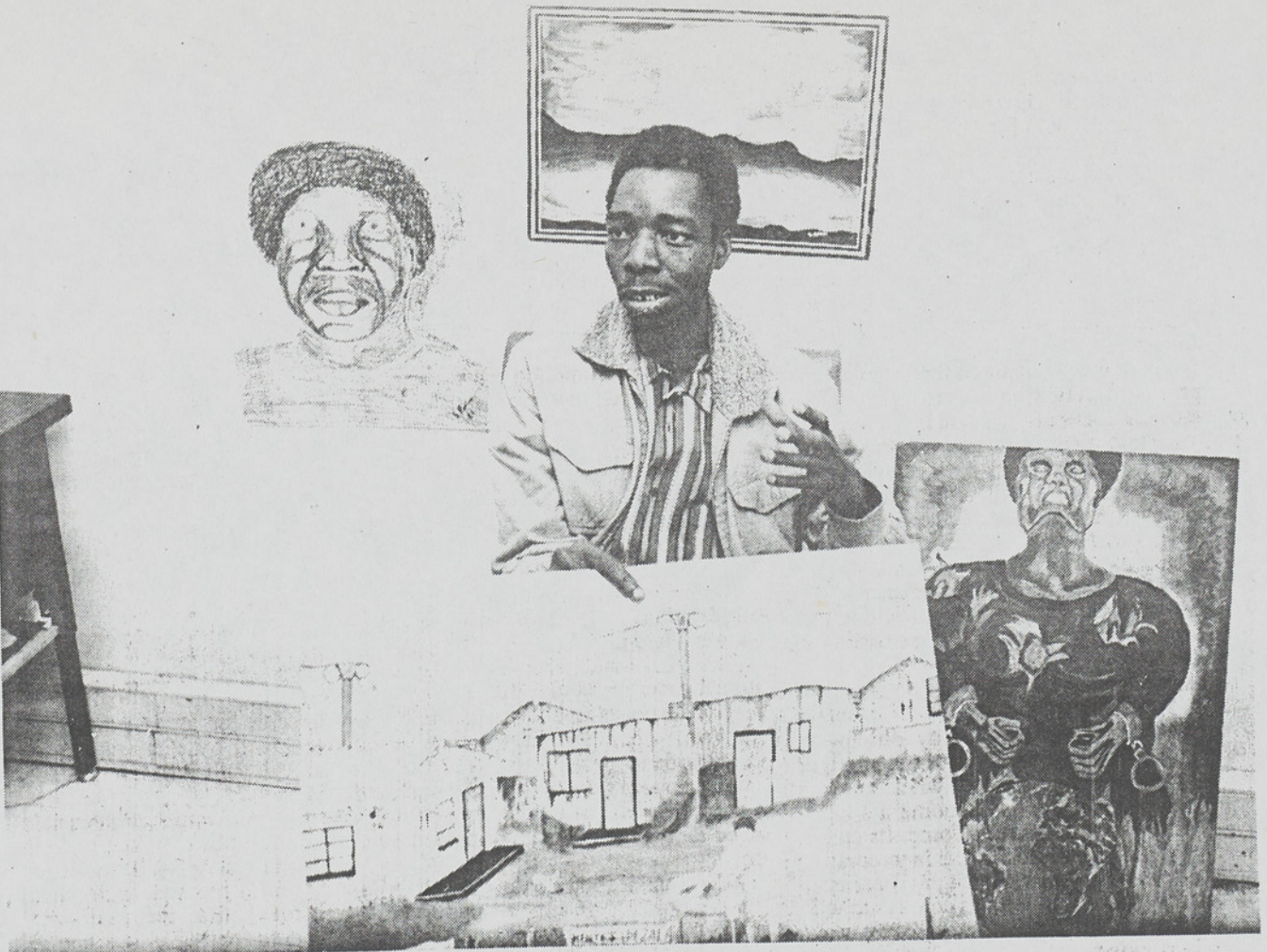
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Samuel Ratlou with some of his works of art.

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