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Chickenman Mkize, looking like an affable
Sangoma seems relatively unmoved by the
clamour for his work from all over the country

hat } Manhattanâ\200\231 s Andy | Warhol did
for. â\200\230Campbellâ\200\231s soup cans in the early

Sixties, Pietermaritzburg's Chicken-Mkize is doing for provincial road signs in the late Eighties.

Well that's not quite true. Warhol was a skilful draftsman and illustrator, whereas Chickenman's creations could best be described as naive. Yet his amusingly simple renditions of such hackneyed symbols as street signs certainly smacks of Warhol at his best.

Lorna Ferguson, curator of Pietermaritzburg's Tatham Gallery, was one of the first to show an interest in this large Zulu's rural creations. As .

One could never credit him as an artist with great aesthetic merit, she said, but the naive quality of his work makes a change from the mass-produced slick ethnic art that is so popular today.

What isn't widely known is that Chickenman's unique creations are sought after in several private galleries throughout the country.

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His sculptures vary from rawhide dogs

on wheels to fantasy creatures with beady eyes, created from fun-fur, wire, zebra skin and porcupine quills. He also assembles people-puppets; that cavort when he pulls the strings with gay abandon to the rhythm of his ghetto-blasters.

Pedestrians stop and admire his skin and wire soft sculptures displayed in the

- gardens of the Old Supreme Court some

buy (his prices are very reasonable), others are bewildered, but none, not even Queen Victoria, as always aloof on her pedestal nearby, passes critical judgment. -

Well that's not quite true.

It was during his early-Picasso-like blue period that he came in for some criticism from none other than his mentor Lorna

ABOVE: One of Chickenman's signs of the

times side by side with one of his famous rawhide dog on wheels

Ferguson.

*Everything he made had dabs of blue paint on it and although I tried to point out that the blue paint was often out of place I couldn't make him change his ways. Luckily he eventually ran out of blue paint.

Beaming like a benevolent Sangoma, Chickenman, who speaks only Zulu, seems unimpressed by the popularity of his works. His capricious figures have not gone unnoticed by other artists, though.

The Head of the Fine Arts Department at Wits University, Mr Alan Crump, recently displayed a series of chicken drawings at the Linda Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg, and one of Chickenman's now famous 'doggone' is

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- Pietermaritzburg's Chickenman Mkize

has a Style that's all his own which is |

- making him hot news in art circles. There is an increasing demand from up-market galleries for his fantasy sculptures and people-puppets and now his latest inspiration is . . . road signs Seugnette Comber reports. Pictures by Barry ones Daas

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Can remaae carnior al the Teles Galery Pietermaritzburg, was one of the first to recognise the whimsical humour of Chickenman's creations

wheels appeared as a prop in a fabric advertisement.

The first thing I admired about him was his entrepreneurial drive,' said Lorna. He

- has a flair for attracting attention, but he is

never pushy. He has never abused the interest and support shown, but waits modestly for orders and requests from collectors and galleries.

Chickenman, who admits to being around thirtysomething, says he learns by looking, and reproduces what he sees every day. Road-

signs are the inspiration of his latest works â\200\224

tomorrow it could be ijuba cartons. @

_ A work of art in itself, this is probably one of the

signs that residents of â\200\231Maritzburg are most ~
familiar with â\200\224 perfectly reproduced by the

. paintbrush of our own Andy Warhol

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