

| *Negotiation I*, 2007, pencil on paper

A Revival

Images Goodman Gallery Johannesburg

Revival, the long awaited solo exhibition of David Koloane's work at the Goodman Gallery Johannesburg, honours Koloane's renewed sense of creativity, just in time to celebrate his 70th birthday. Lore Watterson catches up with the artist as he prepares for this important milestone.

Having known David Koloane for a long time, I suddenly realise that although we have shared many interesting times together, we have never spoken about him as an artist or about his art. We have somehow always met in the context of the many other roles that Koloane performs within the South African art world.

In addition to being an artist and mentor, Koloane is a curator, a facilitator and a sought-after judge of current art awards who is regularly invited to lecture students and to act as an external examiner at universities across the country. We have shared days immersed in 'think tank' discussions about the shape of new art awards and during these sessions I have come to value



The Goodman Gallery
Hentie Van Der Merwe
figuring
19th July - 9th August 2008

Illustration details: Messenger, 2007, polyurethane, 43 x 63cm

163 Jan Smuts Avenue, Parkwood 2193, P O Box 411137, Craighall 2024,

Tel: 011 788 1113, Email: 011 788 9887, Email: goodma@iafrica.com, Website: <http://www.goodman-gallery.com>





Koloane's quiet input, delivered with a deep knowledge of what fellow artists need and strive for.

As David Koloane notes in his CV, 'My concern in socio-political matters and contributions to the furtherance of disadvantaged black South African artists during and after the apartheid era is evident.' I have come to know Koloane particularly as a passionate fundraiser for the Fordsburg Artists' Studios at the Bag Factory in Mahlathini Street, Johannesburg. Fordsburg Artists' Studios, of which he is a founding member, was a natural move after the closure of Thupello (Sesotho for 'training by example'), an international artists' workshop in Broederstroom. Having returned from a workshop overseas in the late 80s, Koloane wanted to recreate the creative pulse of artists working together and sharing ideas.

Koloane believes strongly that many artists need 'intermediary spaces', like the Bag Factory, where they can feel comfortable and gain confidence. Here 15 artists rent studio space, with three studios available for residency artists from around the world. Artists have come from Russia, Mexico, Brazil, Switzerland, Canada, Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal to work and exhibit at these studios. Most of the local artists at the studio come from the city's townships, where they often simply do not have the

"When we receive his painting and drawings we are not merely looking, we are drawn into discoveries about the process and spaces of living. And it's endless mystery"
– Nadine Gordimer

space in their homes to set up a studio as a separate place for creativity. There are also, as yet, few galleries in the townships where grassroots talent can showcase and develop their work. As Koloane notes, 'to get access to mainstream galleries you have to be exceptional.'

It is here, at the Bag Factory right next to the Oriental Plaza in Fordsburg, that we meet. David Koloane tells me that the unusual name of the building derives from its prior use as, literally, a bag factory. Hessian bags were made here to be used at the Fresh Produce Market that operated across the street, where MuseumAfrica is now. When the artists first moved into the building there was still a strong smell of hessian as a lingering reminder.

David Koloane's workspace is appropriately busy, in testament to the artist's creative process. The studio walls are filled with drawings 'in progress', in charcoal and in pastel, of scenes of life that centre around his vibrant figures. Koloane is a quiet, gentle man who finds us all the time needed for the interview as he prepares for his upcoming exhibition at the Goodman Gallery. When I ask about the jazz that is playing in the background, soft yet crisply articulated, he laughs and tells me that he was born

in Alexandra – a township that claims its title as home to many South African jazz musicians – and that jazz music has always been an integral part of his surroundings.

Koloane explains that he has sketched since early childhood, but only started to paint after his old school friend, Louis Maqhubela, from Orlando High School in Soweto arranged for him to become a student of artist and teacher Bill Ainslie in the early 70s. Ainslie became a close friend of Koloane's and has contributed to Koloane's sense of responsibility in supporting young black artists. Ainslie was particularly involved with black art students during the difficult trials of apartheid, setting up a number of institutions for black artists, including the Funda Community College in Soweto, Fuba School of Arts and Music in Newtown and the Alexandra Art Centre.

Working in a city with many changing faces that reflect the changing times, Koloane shares with me a fascination with Johannesburg that inspires his work. He explains that it was difficult during the 70s for a black man to enter Parktown – the 'no-go white suburb' of Johannesburg – which stood out as a completely different world for him. Today he observes the changing faces of Johannesburg in his immediate surroundings at the Market Precinct where he has now worked for nearly 20 years. The Market Precinct symbolises for the artist the lives of the people in Johannesburg and, as such, has always been an important stimulant for his work.

Koloane studied at the University of London as a recipient of a British Council Scholarship and obtained a diploma in Museum Studies in 1985. The successful artist remembers working in England on a cold winter's day in his unheated studio wearing his overcoat and gloves out of necessity while a visiting fellow South African declared him quite mad. With these experiences behind him, he feels very strongly that an artist should travel and experience other cultures in order to, as he so wonderfully explains it, 'build up your own museum in your mind'.

Koloane has held solo exhibitions both internationally and locally, and his work can be found in most major collections, museums and galleries worldwide, including the Johannesburg Art Gallery; South African National Gallery, Cape Town; Botswana National Museum and Gallery Gaborone; Smithsonian Institute, USA; Daimler Chrysler, Germany; and Victoria and Albert Museum, UK. Nadine Gordimer, in a preface to a book on the artist published by David Krut Publishing, said of Koloane's work that 'When we receive his painting and drawings we are not merely looking, we are drawn into discoveries about the process and spaces of living. And it's endless mystery.'

In 1982 Koloane co-ordinated 'Art Towards Social Development' as part of an international conference that brought together artists living in South Africa and those in exile, before co-curating the *Art from South Africa* exhibition at the Oxford Museum of Modern Art. In 1995 Koloane curated the South African component of an international retrospective of African art, *Seven Stories About Modern Art In Africa*, which was staged at London's Whitechapel Art Gallery and later travelled on to the



| *Under the Bridge II*, 2007, acrylic on canvas

Guggenheim in New York in 1996. It was Koloane's selections for this show that affirmed his reputation as a curator with an uncompromising view of how South African history has influenced the country's artistic output.

Koloane shows me some of his latest work, which he is preparing for his upcoming exhibition. After a very difficult time during 2004 and 2005 when he was not well enough to work, he tells me, he has now found new energy and the strength to work. This revival has prompted a return to his creative roots from painting to drawing. Koloane is convinced that it is good for any artist to return at some stage to the roots of drawing, to rediscover the discipline of the art form. His renewed vitality means that he sees his 70th birthday this month as no reason at all for him to wind down. Quite the opposite! David Koloane feels that since there is still so much to be done, he has no time to slow down. This rediscovered energy, which we both agree is the keystone of creativity, is too important to waste.

When I ask what his future plans are and what he is planning to paint next, he smiles and tells me that he often surprises

himself when he sees what he is producing. Clearly treasuring this element of surprise as an important part of the creative process, Koloane believes that this is the secret behind some of his best work. Before I take my leave, I walk with Koloane through the studios to be introduced to some of the artists who are working there at the moment, where I witness myself how important a space such as this is.

I have to congratulate Koloane on his latest award: the Honorary Doctorate bestowed on him in March of this year by the Vaal University of Technology. When he shares with me the joy that this award has brought him, I am reminded of the 1998 citation to his Prince Claus Award and am pleased that nothing has changed: 'The painter David Koloane has an important voice both in the South African art world and in South African society. He devotes himself to fostering and encouraging the talents of young artists... His unwavering focus upon areas of life easily disregarded indicates that he has kept the humility of a survivor, while constantly developing his own outstanding talents as one of South Africa's leading painters.' **CF**

The Copenhagen Opera House



The 14-storey Copenhagen Opera House is one of the world's most modern opera houses. As the national opera house of Denmark, the building hosts many large-scale operas and ballets as well as more experimental works that attract music lovers from around the world. CLASSICFEEL travels to Copenhagen to find out more.

The Copenhagen Opera House was designed by one of Denmark's most celebrated architects, Henning Larsen. In 2000, Larsen was 'commissioned to investigate the possibilities of redeveloping the run-down Copenhagen harbour area,' according to Michael Hammond in the book *Performing Architecture*. The starting point was to be the opera house, the 'building that would change the face of Denmark's capital' and initiate a process of regeneration.

The state-of-the-art opera house opened in 2005 with a performance of *Aida* after just four years of construction, earning it a reputation as not only one of the most impressive opera houses in the world but also the fastest built. This unusually quick construction had much to do with Maersk Mc-Kinney Moller, the Danish shipping mogul who stepped in as the sole donor of the Copenhagen Opera House. Moller, then 92 years old, was determined to see the finished product in his lifetime, and so Larsen completed his design in just 14 days and the complex building plans were soon under way.

Larsen's sophisticated and statuesque design, which complements and enhances the surrounding harbour with the intention of establishing it as one of the city's attractions, matches the standards set by great opera houses around the world both aesthetically and acoustically. The musical director and chief conductor of the Royal Danish Orchestra, Michael Schonwandt, has described the Copenhagen Opera House as 'a world-class acoustic that is analytical, warm and round. Every subtlety, even the very quietest, reached out towards the rear seating rows with a clear and golden character.'

The Copenhagen Opera House has a total area of 41 000 square metres, with hundreds of rooms, an orchestra pit that seats 110 musicians, a large rehearsal room for the orchestra located under the auditorium and an experimental stage that seats as many as 200 people. The main auditorium has the capacity to seat 1 500 people and was designed 'to give optimal lines of sight, sound and seating comfort for spectators,' according to the city's website.